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An Analysis of the Comic Elements in a Production of Joe Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane

Mary Beth J. Barder

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMIC ELEMENTS
IN A PRODUCTION OF JOE ORTON'S
ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE

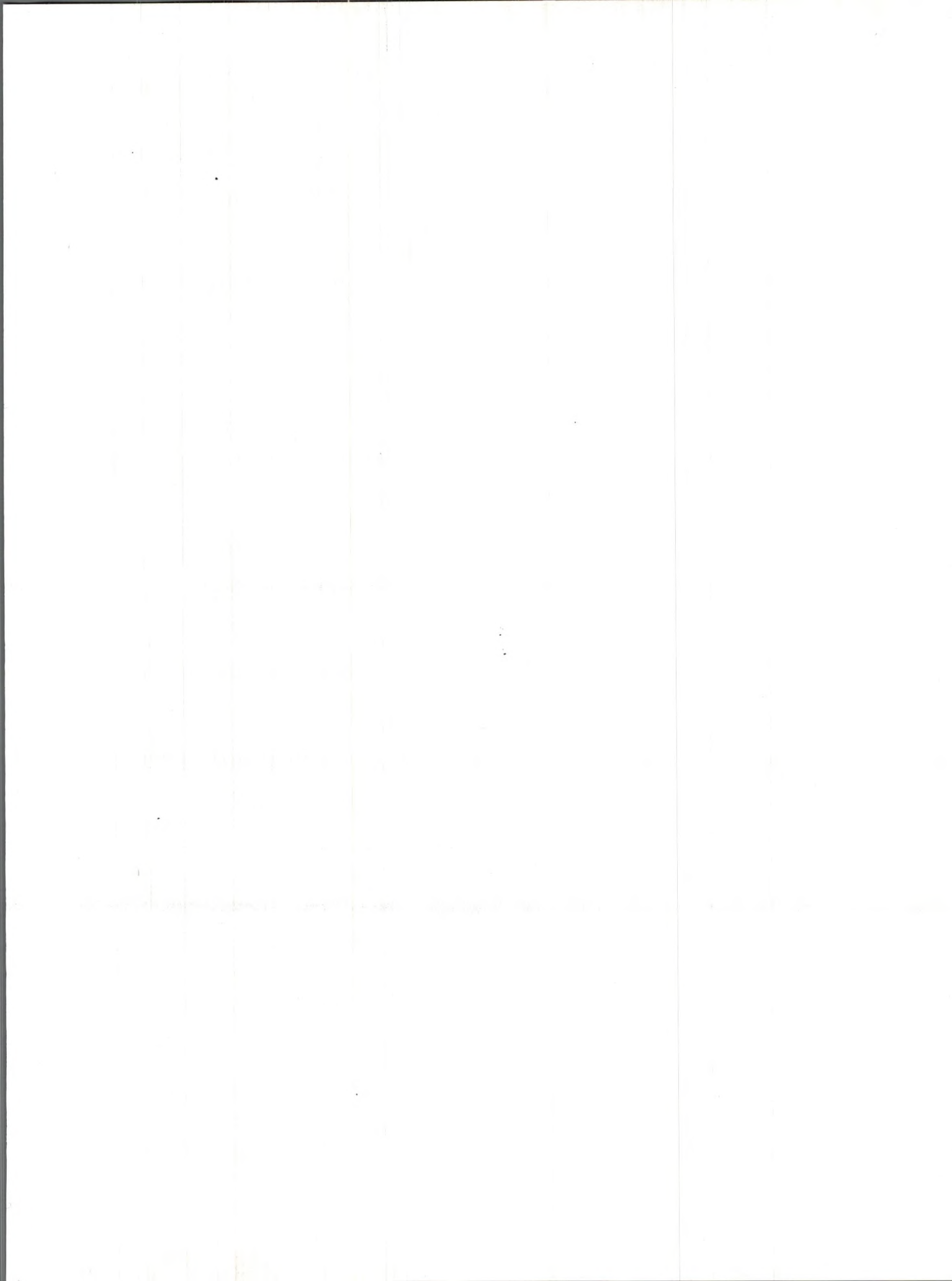
by
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Bachelor of Science, Bemidji State University, 1983

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
1986



T1986
B235

This Thesis submitted by Mary Beth J. Barder in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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This Thesis meets the standards for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

A. William Johnson 4/30/86
Dean of the Graduate School

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Orton's Entertaining Mr. Sloane

Department Theatre Arts

Degree Master of Arts

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For the constant support and encouragement, this project is dedicated to Mark.

ABSTRACT

This analysis addresses the classification of a production of Joe Orton's play Entertaining Mr. Sloane as a comedy. Its intent is to question the classification by considering several factors.

The thesis begins with an introduction, contained in Chapter I. Chapter II applies several concepts of comic theory as conceived by Susanne K. Langer, to the play. The third chapter offers the background of the playwright and the play's past reception by theatre critics. Chapter IV deals with the directing of a production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, presented at the University of North Dakota in November, 1985. It includes a pre-production analysis of the script, the directorial concept, and a capsulation of the rehearsal process. Chapter V focuses on the evaluation of the production in two parts. First, responses from a select panel on several questions concerning the play are considered. The second part includes the author/director's personal evaluation. A conclusion is offered in Chapter VI.

This thesis contains in the appendices: production log, rehearsal schedule, program, photographs, floor plan, and lighting plot, all pertaining to the University's production of the play.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Joe Orton was a British playwright who achieved success in 1964 with the production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane. But his good fortune was short-lived, for he died three years later at the age of thirty-four. Thematically, his works concentrated on the corruption and decadence of society, and he presented them under a guise of humor that appealed to an audience. Entertaining Mr. Sloane is considered a comedy by several critics and the author himself. The focus of this thesis is to analyze the comic elements in a production of the play in order to determine whether the specific production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane can be classified as a comedy.

A production of Sloane was presented November 1 and 2, 1985, in the Burtness studio theatre at the University of North Dakota. By directing the show, I established a basis for my subsequent analysis.

Several of the concepts on comic theory as developed by Susanne K. Langer have been used as a tool to analyze Entertaining Mr. Sloane. Langer's specific comments on the re-establishment of a protagonist's equilibrium is of particular concern. The application of these concepts is the focus of Chapter II.

Chapter III analyzes the past critical reception of Entertaining Mr. Sloane and offers representative comments from several reviews. This chapter also includes a brief look at the playwright, Joe Orton, whose plays bear some striking resemblances to his personal life.

The actual directing of the play Entertaining Mr. Sloane is addressed in Chapter IV. There is a three-part breakdown of the chapter: (1) a pre-production analysis of the script, (2) the directorial concept, and (3) the rehearsal process.

An evaluation of the production is provided in Chapter V by analyzing the responses of external evaluators selected to provide written responses to a set of questions given to them along with a set of criteria addressing issues concerning comedy as presented by Langer. This is followed by the director's self-evaluation of the production.

Documentation of the production is provided in the appendices, including the visual and technical aspects of the production. A production log in the form of a diary is also included as documentation of the rehearsal process and the director's directorial decisions concerning various aspects of the production as they relate to the issue of comedy and humor in the overall style of the production.

The aim of this thesis is to offer insight into a production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, which approached the play as one which is not a comedy, but a play which is complex in theme, mood, structure, and character development and does not conform to classification as a comedy

as presented in Susanne K. Langer's model of comic theory. The play does contain an abundance of humor, however, and in this production that humor was emphasized. The intent of directorial focus was to enhance the humor inherent in the script, but to avoid the ambiguities involved in attempting to classify the play as a comedy. This thesis examines the production from its initial inception through the directorial process, documents the production, and provides an external as well as self-evaluation of the final aesthetic product.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF COMIC ELEMENTS IN PLAYSRIPT

There are different models of thought concerning the particular elements found in comedy. Traditionally, the purpose of comedy is to expose "foibles and vices" (Langer p. 326), but this is not a component of the actual genre. It does not define the genre, but affects its presentation through artistic form. Susanne K. Langer's model of comic theory has been chosen as the tool used to analyze the comic elements in Entertaining Mr. Sloane. The application of several of Langer's concepts is the focus of this chapter. Her model is referred to throughout, and all quoted material is excerpted from the eighteenth chapter of her book, Feeling and Form, which is entitled: "The Great Dramatic Forms: The Comic Rhythm."

The basic definition of comedy, as suggested by Langer, includes the re-establishment of equilibrium of a protagonist who has been confronted with various forces that would disrupt or destroy this balance. However, the character fights these forces and triumphs over such threatening factors. "An organism tends to keep its equilibrium and the bombardment of aimless forces that beset it, to regain equilibrium

when it has been disturbed, and to pursue a sequence of actions dictated by the need of keeping all its interdependent parts constantly renewed, their structure intact" (p. 328). Sloane is a perfect illustration of this description. He enters a situation which presents obstacles that threaten his sense of balance and control. The manner in which he deals with these problems serves to expose his true nature. Although that nature is corrupt and amoral, it is beneficial in maintaining the sense of self-preservation which is present in all living things. Langer suggests, ". . . the impulse to survive is not spent only in defense and accommodation; it appears also in the varying power of organisms to seize on opportunities" (p. 328). And further, "All creatures live by opportunities, in a world fraught with disasters. That is the biological pattern in most general terms" (p. 329). When a situation arises that is deemed advantageous or beneficial by the organism, its adaption takes place. Sloane takes advantage of his new situation by accommodating Kath's lust and by feigning interest in Ed. But obstacles begin to surface. When it is evident that Kemp is privy to the facts surrounding Sloane's past, Sloane reacts by attempting to bully him into silence and submission. But Kemp does not concede, and the threat remains until Sloane murders him, which ends one threat, but introduces another: the possibility of being turned in to the authorities. This cloud hangs over him, leading to the result that Sloane's equilibrium is never re-established. He does succeed in avoiding the legal, punitive consequences of his act, but he loses

control of his life, which is of utmost importance to him. Sloane needs to be his own master. The thought of having to be submissive horrifies him, yet this is precisely what happens. Kath and Ed become the superior forces, at least as far as the script makes known. Speculation could include that Sloane's past record makes an escape from his situation quite probable, yet we should confine ourselves to the script as much as possible.

Sloane is not the only character who takes advantage of circumstances. Sloane's presence creates new possibilities for both Kath and Ed, which they seize with great delight. Kath takes Sloane, a total stranger, home with her from the library. Her attempts at flirtation once she gets him there are nothing short of uproariously funny. Likewise, when Ed gets his first look at Sloane, he decides to seduce him. His interest is obvious as Sloane moves into view. The stereotypical nature of Ed's response provides another humorous sequence of action.

When an organism is faced with obstacles which will not allow it to continue its progression, it will either attempt to overcome the obstacles or adapt itself to the situation by attempting to find an alternate course of progression which will lead to a re-establishment of equilibrium (p. 328). This is a part of innate self-preservation. In Sloane's case, when it is no longer safe for him to remain in Kath's house, he prepares to move into Ed's. If he stayed, he would run the risk of being found out by the authorities who will soon arrive. Thus, he

begins his alternate route, but the progression of events does not lead to an equilibrium. An organism must attempt to deal with each obstacle in such a way as to maintain its present condition as completely as possible. Lifeless objects are devoid of such a need, that of returning to a specific condition or state of being. Organisms, however, need to maintain certain states of existence so that their development can continue. Separation from these states only results in the drive to return to them (p. 328). Although Sloane does not return to his previous state of control, the conclusion of the play shows that such desire is evident. For Kath, the possibility that Sloane could be taken from her causes her to grasp at any measures that will ensure the stability of their relationship. Her opportunity arises when she realizes that her knowledge can be used to blackmail Sloane.

Langer states:

. . . it [an organism] struggles to retrieve its original dynamic form by overcoming and removing the obstacle, or if this proves impossible, it develops a slight variation of its typical form and activity and carries on life with a new balance of functions--in other words, it adapts itself to the situation. (p. 328)

Sloane does not succeed in overcoming the obstacles created by Kath and Ed at the conclusion of the play. Instead he is forced into

subservience. This adaptation does not please him; nonetheless it is necessary for his safety.

According to Langer, one of the primary factors that separate humans from the rest of the animal world is the ability to be tied emotionally to people who are not a part of the tangible environment (pp. 330-331). An absent or deceased person can continue to have a strong effect on someone. Such memories are included in an extension of a present reality. Likewise, an "awareness of events" occurring far away or long ago helps to shape this same reality (p. 331). Sloane's shady past has an effect on his present behavior. His recollection of life in a boys' home not only serves to suggest where he might have learned his skills of manipulation and deception but also colors him in an audience's eyes. The stereotypes and assumptions that accompany the idea of a boys' home alternately darken an image of him as an insensitive, untrustworthy troublemaker and produce a feeling of sympathy for him. Kath's lust for Sloane goes past the instinctive response and is tied to the memories of Tommy and her first child. She wants a replacement for what was taken from her. The void can be filled by Sloane and she seizes on that opportunity.

We are all subject to the emotions that distinguish us as human. "There is no biological truth that feeling does not reflect . . ." (p. 349). This includes the feelings resulting from the physical urges of passion. Among the obstacles humans must face in their constant attempts to

maintain balance are those arising from passion. The manifestations of such intensity of emotion range from anger to ecstasy. This is illustrative of our tie to animal existence, but we go beyond responding to the present which provides impetus for passion in animals, for our consciousness extends itself in memory and future. With this distinctive feature comes the entire range of feelings known to mankind. Comedy focuses on these feelings, presenting them as reactions used to cope with an inevitable future filled with obstacles and conflicts. Langer calls this future "Fortune." "Destiny," says Langer, "in the guise of Fortune is the fabric of comedy; it is developed by comic action, which is the upset and recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium, his contest with the world and his triumph by wit, luck, personal power, or even humorous, or ironical, or philosophical acceptance of mischance" (p. 331). In the case of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, there is difficulty in applying this concept to Sloane himself. He neither triumphs at the end of the play, nor does he willingly accept his new situation. He has been cast out of his role as manipulator and is subject to the whims of Kath and Ed. He has become the "manipulatee." Sloane is diminished in stature, a fact which provides further argument against labelling this play a comedy. Sloane is not the comic hero, who "plays against obstacles presented either by nature . . . or by society; that is, his fight with obstacles and enemies, which his strength, wisdom, virtue, or other assets let him overcome" (p. 335), for he does not succeed in overcoming them. Instead, these

same obstacles, which include Kath's pregnancy and Kemp's death, serve to confound him, resulting in his loss of balance.

Undeniably, there is humor in Sloane. We laugh at the events and characters that are unveiled for our critical observation, but this alone does not constitute a comedy. Also, humor is not always the cause of laughter (p. 339). Laughter springs from other sources as well. As Langer points out, it can be the result of hysteria or tickling which is not always pleasant. Neither is it confined to comedy. Langer makes this clear when she compares comedy and tragedy, careful to include that the difference between the two is ". . . not one of opposites--the two forms are perfectly capable of various combinations, incorporating elements of one in the other. The matrix of the work is always either tragic or comic, but within its frame the two often interplay" (p. 334). Yet humor is most often contained in comedy. And laughter is a normal response to Sloane. The reason may be found by considering what such a response implies. Langer, although not in complete agreement, refers to Marcel Pagnol's belief that "Laughter always--without exception--betokens a sudden sense of superiority" (p. 339). We laugh at Kath for demonstrating blindness to her own pathetic condition, at Ed for his gullibility and coarse stalking of Sloane, at Kemp for his pathetic condition that renders him defenseless and vulnerable. Rarely, if ever, does Sloane give cause for laughter, however. We may laugh because we see another character or situation through his eyes, but otherwise he is a clever and cunning

character, offering little reason for ridicule. This feeling of superiority, on the part of the audience, does not necessarily transfer to actual life as Langer goes on to explain: ". . . the 'lift' may occur without self-flattery, too; we need not be making fun of anyone" (p. 340). She uses the example of a baby who laughs at such games as peek-a-boo. "The baby laughs because his wish is gratified; not because he believes the doll obeyed his wishing, but simply because the suspense is broken, and his energies are released" (p. 340). This type of response could explain the audience's reaction to the production of Sloane. In particular scenes, the intensity is broken by a humorous line or stage business. For example, the scene between Sloane and Kath at the beginning of Act II is quite tense as Kath attempts to find out what Sloane did the previous night. His treatment of her is cold, almost rough. He tells her he feels smothered, which is true in part. Subtextually, he relates his discomfort with her inquiry. He feels she has no business prying into his personal affairs as long as he satisfies her sexual desires. The atmosphere is tense; Sloane is obviously in control. This mood is broken by Kemp's entrance. He overhears Kath speaking to Sloane and responds to her comments without realizing they are not intended for him. The audience can laugh at this interruption which serves as a tension release.

Additional causes of laughter include "self-assertion," joy, acknowledgement, and so on (p. 341). In the theatre, laughter can be a response of superiority. We may see ourselves as better, more

intelligent, above involvement in such situations in which a particular character in a play is involved. Or laughter may result from an audience's delight that societal conditions are triumphed over by particular characters.

Langer states:

Real comedy sets up in the audience a sense of general exhilaration, because it presents the very image of "livingness" and the perception of it is exciting. Whatever the story may be, it takes the form of a temporary triumph over the surrounding world, complicated, and thus stretched out, by an involved succession of coincidences. (p. 348)

A "sense of general exhilaration" is not what is experienced at the end of Sloane. Disgust and discomfiture are more probable choices.

Neither is the society as illustrated within the play triumphed over by the protagonist, Sloane. He is unable to manipulate it or avoid its obstacles in such a way that could make him victorious. Instead, he is entangled in its corrupt web, a victim of the sensual, self-serving philosophy he has advocated so freely in his own actions.

In addition to textual evidence for genre classification, drama enjoys the distinguishing characteristic of having the interpretation of a particular work molded by a director when the work is produced. Unless grossly miscalculated in such a way as to damage the integrity of a

script, there is really no correct way to interpret or direct a show.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane is the type of play whose classification in terms of genre could be dependent upon the director's interpretation to the same extent that the reading of the play is exceptionally dependent on the reader's senses of justice, humor, and resolution. Although critics have classified it as a comedy, strong evidence, as presented in this chapter and in my production of Sloane, exists against such a label.

On the basis of my understanding of Susanne K. Langer's work, in part, this production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane is not a comedy. There is no re-establishment of Sloane's equilibrium by the close of the play. He is under Kath and Ed's control, usurped of his dominant position. Also, the presence of humor is not the sole factor in determining a play as a comedy. Perhaps the term "black comedy" is a possible label. The problem is that black comedy is not a genre but rather a division of one, comedy. This implies that there is a similarity to comedy, but that it contains elements that defy strict adherence to pure comedy's requirements. Black comedy is an off-shoot or by-product of comedy. In his attempt to define "black humor," Max F. Schulz asserts that it is difficult to apply the term to a particular work because it lacks distinction.

For as a term Black Humor is vague. It fails to distinguish among the genres. It fails to differentiate the contemporary movement from the many instances in the past of similar literary reactions to human

experience. It fails to focus the means (plot, character, thought, and diction) and the end (effect on reader: laughter, tears, etc.) of literary expression (Schulz p. 4)

Schulz comments on the difference between comedy and black comedy by referring to Northrop Frye:

Divergence from traditional comedy and satire further characterizes Black Humor. New Comedy, according to Northrop Frye's "The Argument of Comedy," always worked toward a reconciliation of the individual with society. Either the normal individual was freed from the bonds of an arbitrary humor society, or a normal society was rescued from the whims imposed by humor individuals. As might be suspected, Frye finds lurking beneath this realignment of social forces the yearly triumph of spring over winter. He sees the victory of normality over abnormality as a formalized celebration of the archetypal pattern of death and resurrection. In the marriage of the young hero, in his triumph over the old lecher (senex), in the freeing of the slave, New Comedy rehearsed the victory of life over death.

Black Humor stops short of any such victory. It enacts no individual release or social reconciliation;

it often moves toward, but ordinarily fails to reach, that goal. . . . Black Humor condemns man to a dying world; it never envisions . . . the possibilities of human escape from an aberrant environment. . . .

(Schulz p. 8)

This definition of Black Humor may well apply to Sloane, but it is not a genre. Additionally, according to my understanding of Langer's model of tragic theory, the play is probably not a tragedy. However, to address this new issue in depth would digress from the focus of this thesis. In any event, according to my interpretation of sections of Langer's model of comic theory, this production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane is not a comedy.

CHAPTER III

CRITICAL RECEPTION AND PRODUCTION HISTORY

Looking at reviews of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, it becomes apparent that (1) the play became more attractive to critics as time went on, and (2) compared to the stage productions, the film received more favorable reviews. My selection of reviews was based on critics' comments that dealt with issues included in my thesis. There was no attempt to select a cross section representative of the years between the initial production through later, major revivals.

When first produced in London in May 1964, Sloane was attacked as an insult to its audience, a pointless display of perversity and malice that only served to disgust theatre-goers. Critic Howard Taubman led the attack in the October 13, 1965, issue of The New York Times, when the show was first produced in New York in 1965:

Whether it is in earnest or not, Entertaining Mr. Sloane is a singularly unattractive play. If it means to be drama, it is forced and incredible. If it seeks to be comedy, it is too broad. If it aims to be caricature, it succeeds only too well. (p. 41)

Others, with Taubman, agreed that the characters were too extreme to be believable and that the play was too dark to be comedy. Some disagreed, however. After seeing the London production, B. A. Young wrote in The New York Times, June 30, 1964:

This is black material indeed for comedy; but the author, Joe Orton, has used it so stylishly that outrage is smothered in laughter. It is not a play with a message; no one is supposed to come away with a heightened awareness of the difficulties of maladjusted people's lives. It is pure comedy, with a beautiful cold-blooded artificiality both about the treatment of the plot and the use of dialogue. (p. 21)

The classification of Sloane seems to be a matter of interpretation. The first critic is unable to see the play as a comedy while the second calls it "pure comedy." It is of interest to note Young's opinion that the play is without a message. If comedy's purpose is to expose man's faults and follies and suggest change, how can a play be a comedy and yet contain no message? A comment on the film version of Sloane, released in London in 1970, was included in the April 2, 1970, issue of Variety: ". . . though Orton's must have been a sad, strange world, his prose, pungent and corrosive, has a ring of truth which supposedly kicks hypocrisy in the teeth."

There is a point when what is purported to be humorous ceases to be funny, lapsing into distasteful exploitation. Precisely when this saturation level is reached is a highly individualized matter. One person can find the antics of Bugs Bunny very amusing while another is alarmed at the violence contained in this simple cartoon. The review of Sloane in New Yorker magazine, October 23, 1965, reflected this view:

On the whole, though, this is a most unsavory business, and little in the way of jollification is contributed by the central figure, Sloane, who . . . is not only mindless but also so violent that in one of the climactic scenes he kicks the Dada . . . to death after the old man has threatened to identify him as a murderer. This, I think, is carrying macabre humor too far (p. 94)

This statement suggests that Orton's humor alienates his audience. Ceasing to be funny, the action becomes repugnant.

The basic disagreement among critics, then, is whether the action in Sloane is too repulsive to be appreciated by an audience. Some believe the characters are too exaggerated to be considered true representatives of society. Others insist that it is not the characters, but the qualities they represent, such as lust, cruelty, and so on, that offer a lesson. Yet some say there is no lesson, only a comedy designed specifically for laughter. Howard Taubman, after writing a review and

reflecting upon his initial reactions to Sloane, wrote a second article for The New York Times, entitled, "Aiming at Easy Targets," October 24, 1965. He first acknowledges Orton's ambitious intentions, but then questions Orton's manner in carrying out his plan:

Like so many other young playwrights, Joe Orton is outraged by the corruption and hypocrisy he finds all around him. He is prepared to cry out mercilessly that protestations of honor and virtue are an obscene sham. In the best tradition of black comedy he wants to roar with great gusts of rude, shaming laughter at the blatant disparity between what man professes and pretends to be and what he really is But how does Mr. Orton go about it? Like so many of his modish tribe, he chooses the easy, supercilious, repellent way. He uses characters so lost in honor and decency, so sunk in dirt and degradation, that his point is vitiated almost before he has begun to make it.

(Sec. II, p. 1)

It is interesting that the film reviews of Sloane, as well as productions staged after 1970, are more favorable. Perhaps society in general had relaxed to a point of greater awareness of its imperfections and decadence and was, therefore, able to see Sloane as a possible product of itself.

Orton's peculiar bond to his characters in Sloane is questioned in Newsweek's review on October 25, 1965. His intentions for the characters are judged superficial, his own relationship to them distant.

. . . Never once is there the slightest indication that Orton has any attitude at all toward his characters, not contempt, pity, amusement, alarm, not even-- what would at least be human--a voyeur's interest. He is a simple exploiter, the shrewd, plausible, soul-less manager of a freak show. (p. 102)

This reflects a belief that because of the playwright's self-imposed distance, characters have few realistic qualities. Instead they are "freaks" or caricatures, engaged in abnormal behavior and activities that have no resemblance to reality. If Orton seems unattached to his characters, how can an audience empathize with them? Although this is an interesting idea, I believe that the characters do evoke some strong emotional responses in an audience. For example, the manner in which Kemp is roughly treated by all the other characters and then brutally murdered causes sympathy. A review by Time in its October 22, 1965, issue makes a similar statement concerning Orton's treatment of his characters: "In this unsavory fun house of horrors, Playwright Orton tries to retract the face of evil from the distorting mirrors of the humanly grotesque, but his talents run more to seamy documentation than satirical savagery" (p. 103A).

It is tempting to dismiss Sloane as a "black comedy," but, as stated in the previous chapter, such a type is not a genre in itself, only a subdivision. In the November 18, 1965, issue of Reporter, Erik Wensberg maintained that the label black comedy found acceptance in Britain, but that it confuses the issue of genre classification:

I suggest that we boldly tell the British that there is no such thing as "black comedy" and see what happens. (What ought to happen is that our side will be told that there is no such thing as "the theatre of the absurd"-- another blanket to smother distinctions and to blur meanings.) Apparently the common denominator of what are called "black comedies" is that events like murder, rape, physical disablement, and unorthodox sexual behavior are treated with indifference, impoliteness, or laughter by the playwright and the actors: a flimsy sort of description for a style of school of dramaturgy. The curious verdict on Entertaining Mr. Sloane turned out to be that it was a very unpleasant black comedy, and that it wasn't awfully funny. (p. 48)

Not only does the critic discredit the application of the label "black comedy," but goes on to include his opinion that Sloane was even more "unpleasant" than the dubious label suggests, and that it was not very humorous. Nowhere in his review does Wensberg refer to the play as

pure comedy which I believe is intentional. Sloane simply does not meet the requirements.

The Saturday Review of October 30, 1965, contains a provocative review on Sloane by Henry Hewes, who, incidentally, refers to the play as a "black comedy" in his first sentence. First, he describes the characters as "neo-Neanderthal inhabitants [who] are immediately transparent" (p. 74). He discusses each one individually, ending with Kemp, of whom he has interesting thematic comments: "Finally, there is Kath's senile old father, ignominiously called 'the Dadda,' who represents the wrecked old order that, instead of manipulating principles, found itself senselessly stuck with them" (p. 74). Kemp symbolizes the existence of morality and value, the "old order" which, through him, is shown as old, decrepit, and purblind. When confronted by Sloane, who epitomizes the lack of a value system and amorality, Kemp falls victim. After commenting on the actors' performances, Hewes concludes: "Entertaining Mr. Sloane doesn't make its macabre mixture of comedy and vileness funny enough or significant enough to succeed consistently on either level" (p. 74).

Joe Orton's life-style was in many respects reflective of the realism in his plays. Many of his personal experiences found their way into his works, qualifying them as credible. Orton, says John Lahr, his official biographer, lived for the sensual, hedonistic qualities of life. He thought society was essentially stupid for not admitting to its gamut

of desires and emotions, instead of working to sublimate them. But such denial does not nullify. The same qualities emerged in Orton's characters as well as society. He was disgusted with society's facade of bourgeois principles and mannerisms, and he wanted to shock by exposing perversions, cruelty, and corruption inherent in man's nature. He believed in accepting the bestial roots of man, living for pleasure, accepting any opportunities that might add to his sense of vitality and aggressive approach to life. He would spare no audience from observing these qualities of man in the characters he created (Lahr p. vii-xxiv).

Born John Kingsley Orton on January 1, 1933, in Leicester, he was the eldest of four children. His childhood was far from exceptional. The family struggled to remain lower-middle class, a task not easy for his gardener father and machinist mother. They were not close, a fact that perhaps contributed to Orton's sense of detachment in his plays. His reactions to his mother's sudden death were characteristic of this quality. Arriving in his hometown the day before the funeral, he "had a bit of quick sex in a derelict house" before going home (Lahr p. xxii). His diary records no affection or fond recollections of his mother, instead he was more concerned where he should have to sleep if the corpse was being kept in the house. Most of his comments dwell on the idiocy of the entire ordeal, from the mortician's gracious acceptance of the nightgown his mother died in, on behalf of some future recipient, to his aunt's dismay that strict protocol was not observed during the funeral procession

to the cemetery. Going through his mother's belongings with his sister, he discovered her false teeth and took them to show the cast of Loot.

Three days later, back in Islington working on What the Butler Saw,

. . . Peter Willes . . . rang . . . I told him about the funeral. And the frenzied way my family behave. He seemed shocked. But then he thinks my plays are fantasies. He suddenly caught a glimpse of the fact that I write the truth (Lahr p. xxiii-xxiv)

And the next day:

. . . I'd taken my mother's false teeth down to the theatre. I said to Kenneth Cranham [who played Hal], "Here, I thought you'd like the originals." He said, "What." "Teeth," I said. "Whose?" he said. "My mum's," I said. He looked very sick. "You see," I said, "It's obvious that you're not thinking of the events of the play in terms of reality if a thing affects you like that." (Lahr p. xxiv)

Orton's characters were based on his perceptions of real-life people, those he knew intimately and those he merely observed from a distance.

"People think I write fantasy, but I don't; some things may be exaggerated or distorted in the same way that painters distort and alter things, but they're realistic figures. They're perfectly recognisable" (Lahr p. ix).

Orton's style is marked by his use of contemporary language, a quality that makes his characters more believable. Careful to adhere to a realistic quality, his plays contained the colloquialisms, idiom, and slang popular at that time. An elevated style of language, he believed, would damage the credibility, creating a false world (Lahr p. ix).

One of Orton's major themes dealt with sexual stereotypes and societal tensions in his works. They shocked the British audience, whose polished sense of humor is generally considered quite liberal and appreciably complex. In fact, Orton had relatively little success as a playwright until Entertaining Mr. Sloane was first produced in May 1964. It was met with both praise and condemnation by the London audiences, but it was clear that Orton's sense of language and "its careful construction" (Lahr p. xv) earned him a place in the contemporary theatre.

It has been ten years since Orton first began writing at the suggestion of Kenneth Halliwell, his friend and lover whom he met in 1953 and lived with for the rest of his life. During that ten year period, he had written Head to Toe, a novel published posthumously. The Ruffian on the Stair, and several collaborations with Halliwell that were never published. Frustrated over his inability to be recognized as an exciting new playwright, he (and Halliwell) spent six months in prison for defacing 83 books and removing 1,653 plates from others (Lahr p. xiv). He removed pictures and pasted them over illustrations in other books, wrote false

descriptions and attached them to inside book flaps, generally altering them for comic effect. Orton explained his behavior:

The thing that put me in a rage about libraries was that when I went to quite a big library in Islington and asked for Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire they told me they hadn't got a copy of it. They could get it for me, but they hadn't one on their shelves. This didn't start it off, but it was symptomatic of the whole thing. I was enraged that there were so many rubbishy novels and rubbishy books. (Lahr p. xiv)

That he had had little success as a playwright while other authors were being paid for "rubbishy" material infuriated Orton. He channelled his anger into ruining the books. Prison, however, was not a completely bad experience. New insights, new ideas began to form in his mind. It was shortly after his release from prison that Orton started Entertaining Mr. Sloane.

Orton's interest in theatre began while he was at Clark's College, a secretarial school his mother sent him to after he had failed in public school (Lahr p. xi). She believed that she was sending him to a liberal arts school, which unfortunately was not true. He was remembered by his teachers as unable to speak or write well. He hated the school and joined a small theatre group as a means of escape from his depressing

environment. Appreciating the freedom that theatre offered, Orton decided to make it his career before he had ever stepped onstage (Lahr p. xii). Another more practical reason, in his opinion, was to pursue theatre so that he would not have to work at a conventional job. He went through jobs on a regular basis during his late teen years. At that point, he was accepted at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) where he met fellow-student Halliwell.

Life with Halliwell started well, with Halliwell posing as tutor and teaching Orton about classical literature and music. Also a writer, Halliwell was doomed to live in the shadow of his pupil who was destined for success. An intense jealousy was harbored by Halliwell, forcing them into a love-hate relationship that would one day consume them both. That day came on August 10, 1967, when Halliwell bludgeoned Orton to death in his sleep with a hammer, then swallowed twenty-two sleeping pills to kill himself (Lahr p. xxvii).

Orton left seven plays, a novel published posthumously, and several efforts of collaboration with Halliwell. His style and comic sense have left their mark on the theatre. Roger Greenspun, writing a review of Sloane for The New York Times, July 28, 1970, gave him a well-deserved distinction: "Since his murder three years ago . . . Orton has gathered considerable intellectual fashion as a new lost hope of the English stage . . ." (p. 194). On the occasion of Orton's death, Time,

September 15, 1967, ran a short article which included the words to an ode written and delivered by actor Donald Pleasence at Orton's funeral:

Some met together when he died,
Not in the name of any God,
But in his name--
Whom they lost to the coffin.
The box which caused his endless mirth,
His lesson, which he could not read again.
Hilarity in death. (p. 49)

CHAPTER IV

DIRECTING THE PLAY ENTERTAINING MR. SLOANE

Directing this play was a challenge that I am glad I attempted. Not only did the experience allow an in-depth analysis of the comic elements of a particular play, but it also taught me that the terms "comedy" and "humor" have a very distinctive difference. They are not interchangeable nor does the existence of one necessarily include the other.

When I first read Entertaining Mr. Sloane, I was struck by the incongruity or irony of it. The combination of humor and such decadent, destructive behavior displayed by the characters, particularly Sloane, made me feel uncomfortable when I had completed my reading of it, yet I remembered I had felt oddly amused while reading it. Perhaps the discomfort was attributed to the fact that I did enjoy it but felt odd for doing so. Next, I looked at reviews of past productions and was surprised to learn that the critics had referred to it as a comedy. I read the play again but did not feel the term "comedy" was an appropriate choice. I was careful to read the stage directions for any additional information that might help me see it as a comedy. Perhaps the language was misleading in a way that the action as suggested by the author's

directions could clarify. I found some directions that were dependent on a director's decision, such as Sloane's final exit. But most were quite neutral, which did not help me see the play in a different light. I resolved that this play is dependent on production to illustrate its humor. I decided to direct a production of the play, being careful to retain the comic flavor, or humor, which is inherent in the language, but not directing it as a comedy. It would be fairly easy to direct this play as a serious, totally pathetic treatment of deviant behavior and its unfortunate influence on hapless victims. But I believe that would damage the integrity of the script. Orton's use of language in Sloane is undeniably humorous in many sections. It would be difficult to justify the delivery of particular lines in any tone other than with humor. It is within the nature of the characters to do so, especially Kath.

Kath is probably the most "laughable" character in the show. Determined to act as a cultured woman of the world, she succeeds only in demonstrating how unlike that image she actually is. All of her relationships are abnormal. She is the mother-figure to Kemp, ordering him about as his superior and reprimanding him as a parent would a child. Physically and mentally unable to resist her treatment of him, he must accept his situation. This, in part, illustrates Kath's maternal desires. She treats Kemp as a little child, yet confers the title on Sloane. "Mama's little boy" is a phrase she uses on several occasions when referring to him. Her treatment of him as such is not as fully accepted

by Sloane as compared to Kemp. Sloane allows her to coo and fuss over him to a degree, but when she becomes meddlesome to the point of interfering in his life in any way, he puts an end to it with an abrupt word or demonstration as to how he genuinely feels about her. When confronted by him, Kath quickly pulls back, eager to please him so that she will not lose him. This is precisely what happens at the beginning of Act II. Although she wants to know what had happened the previous night, she is careful not to anger or upset him. She stops her questioning when he threatens to leave her.

To the degree that she succeeds in playing the role of Sloane's surrogate mother, she succeeds in playing the role of the seducer. Act I ends with a pathetic attempt on her part to seduce Sloane. Although their new relationship is consummated, it is because Sloane takes advantage of a situation that could prove beneficial to him, not because she offers any physical attraction to him. Instead, he is repulsed by her, but accepts her willingness as a victim. This new liaison introduces the idea of incest. Although Sloane is not related to her (although some have questioned whether he may be the son she bore years ago) the fact that she refers to herself as his mother and to him as her "little boy" presents the feeling of something uncomfortably deviant. Even though there is no actual physical incest, Kath seems to harbor the psychological desire.

The relationship between Kath and her brother, Ed, is very different from the others. He is obviously her superior and does not allow her to

act independently of him. The fact that years before he took the child she bore and presumably placed it for adoption against her wishes exemplifies their relationship. In his presence, she is cautious and eager in her attempts to stay in his favor, although not always successfully. When she uses her knowledge concerning the true circumstances of Kemp's death as means to prevent Sloane from leaving her to live with Ed, it is most likely the first time she has ever been able to manipulate her brother to any degree. She does not win completely, however, but a compromise is struck that she believes will satisfy her.

Kath is desperate for love. Neither her brother nor her father are capable of satisfying this need. True love, to her, is accomplished only through the physical act itself, and Sloane offers the only hope for this. He also offers steady companionship. Indeed, he holds the key for any happiness in her life. But the reasons he stays with Kath are completely selfish. His basic needs are met, he has access to Ed who will give him added luxuries, and he is basically free to do anything he wishes. Kath is of no real significance to him. Rather, it is for Ed that he feels a need to maintain a clean image.

Kath's life is not the only one dependent on Sloane for fulfillment. Sloane is an extremely intelligent character. He is a master of manipulation, which is obvious in his encounters with all of the other characters. He has lived in some type of home for boys and this has hardened him to the point that nothing is beneath his consideration. His disregard for

others' lives is apparent both in the events of the play and from what we know of his past. He has killed a man, a photographer, by whom Kemp was once employed. Kemp finally realizes who Sloane is, but in his attempts to make Sloane's guilt known, he is murdered by him. Sloane feels no guilt or remorse. His only concern is to convince Ed he is innocent, if for no other reason, in his opinion, than for bringing an end to a meaningless life, thereby doing Kemp a favor. Handsome and young, Sloane has already learned the tricks that allow him to live as he chooses. When this situation changes, however, we see a desperation in his nature not otherwise apparent. He is as dependent on securing victims as they are on him.

Ed is physically attracted to Sloane, who uses the situation to his advantage. He leads Ed to believe that a relationship might be developing between them, which encourages Ed to accept anything that Sloane does or else abandon any hope of furthering their relationship. Ed is correct in his unspoken belief that Sloane is interested in the fringe benefits that a relationship would offer. He responds by giving him money, clothes, and promises a car. By acknowledging Sloane's interest, Ed is able to put himself in a position of superiority over Sloane at the play's conclusion. He holds the key to Sloane's freedom, a position that Sloane does not take lightly.

At times, Ed appears quite intelligent, as when he deals with his sister. However, this image is almost erased when he is taken

advantage of by Sloane over and over again. He appears foolish, incapable of comprehending the degree of Sloane's lies and deceit. Ed's actual occupation is never revealed, but he has enough money to give Sloane a job as his personal chauffeur. Part of his money undoubtedly comes from his father who is forced to sign papers, presumably giving Ed control over his finances. Kemp has no say in his own affairs; instead he is at the mercy of his children for the bare necessities of life. Ed's feelings toward him are remarkably devoid of love or affection, as are Kath's. Ed treats Kemp harshly throughout the first two acts, and his father's death causes no grief, but only presents a minor obstacle that must be cleared in order for Sloane to remain with him.

Kemp's death serves a dual purpose. First, it creates the sense of injustice, a factor which, I believe, prevents consideration of the play as comedy. The only character whose sense of morals are not deviant or compromised is Kemp, and he is murdered, which suggests that within the play only the good are punished. Second, it allows the selfish concerns of the other characters to surface. Their reactions to his death are far from sympathetic. Kath's main concern is that she will no longer have access to Kemp's pension money. Sloane is concerned with exonerating himself. Ed begins to set up Sloane's defense.

Kemp is another pathetic character whose pleas for love and understanding go unheard. He is virtually alone in the world, reduced to the

status of a household pest. His children are unkind, his house is opened to a stranger against his wishes, and he dies painfully and cruelly.

Together, the characters present a sense of coldness and abrasiveness that prevents the "all is well" feeling that comedy normally produces. As the relationships between the characters are revealed, it becomes more apparent that there is no genuine concern for each other beyond what will personally benefit themselves.

Orton's decision to divide the play into three acts is somewhat mysterious to me. The first act has an obvious conclusion which is the seduction scene, but I fail to understand why he divided the second and third acts as he did. The second act ends with Kemp's death and Sloane's calling for Ed. The third act opens with Ed responding by entering the room. There is no obvious rationale to make a complete break between these acts, so I chose to have none.

The first act introduces all of the characters, the relationships that exist and the ones that will develop, and a hint at the conflict between Kemp and Sloane when Sloane reacts too knowingly when Kemp discusses the murder of his boss. The second act strengthens the conflict between Kemp and Sloane, leading to the show-down between them, which Sloane will win. However, Kemp's murder presents a new conflict that is resolved in Act III. The action is complicated further when Kath initially refuses to go along with Ed's plan to protect Sloane.

But a bargain is struck, though on uncertain terms. It is doubtful that Ed will honor his part of the agreement.

The humor of the play can be developed if special attention is paid to the individual moments occurring in the play. Care must be taken to look at each scene, not as part of a natural progression that will lead to the play's conclusion, but as a unit unique in itself. Although the separate moments prepare the audience to believe in the possibility of the ending to the play, they must be looked at closely to discover any humor within them. Too easily these moments could be passed over, resulting in a production oblivious to the element of humor inherent in the script. Comic business and interesting deliveries of lines are necessary to create the laughter. Without the laughter, the incongruity of humor combined with corruption and cruelty would not surface. The play depends on such a superimposed image in order to shock and discomfort the audience.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane has the potential of being directed as a comedy, depending on the director's concept of the play. Orton lent his own twisted, perverse sense of humor to the script and, in that regard, there are certainly many moments that are extremely humorous. But the number of such incidents should not simply be added up to produce a sum which will determine whether or not a play is a comedy. In the case of Sloane, as a director, I do not believe that it is a comedy. If the protagonist is Sloane, and I believe it is, he does not reach a level of

equilibrium at the conclusion of the play which, according to several points in Langer's model of comic theory, is necessary in a comedy. Sloane leaves the house, knowing that his future is in the hands of Kath and Ed, the two people who are in positions of power at this point. Up to this time, Sloane has been the one in charge. He has acted as manipulator. Now, however, the opposite becomes true. He loses control to people for whom he has no respect, only contempt. Although the concept of a protagonist's equilibrium contributes to my argument, one must also consider the other characters and their apparent destinies.

Kemp, the most coherent character in many respects, is killed. His painful death ends a miserable existence without dignity. To add to this, Sloane is not punished for his heinous crime. Although for the time being his life appears destined to be manipulated by Kath and Ed, there is no legal punishment impending. He feels no remorse for his act; instead he seeks to justify it with excuses including, "What kind of life is it at his age? . . . I did him a service in a manner of speaking." The lack of a sense of justice does not contribute to the true sense of comedy. Instead, it is retained in the audience's mind as a major source of discomfort.

Kath is now several months pregnant with Sloane's child. We know that a similar incident, occurring years ago, resulted in Ed's taking of the child and placing it for adoption. There is no evidence to suggest a false hope that this situation will end any differently than the previous

one. Kath's joy in the thought of motherhood will ultimately be destroyed. Ed's reason for taking her first child was probably twofold. First, it is extremely questionable that Kath could be a good mother. Given the type of care she gives to Kemp, to herself, and to the house, the child's environment and care would be bizarre, if not destructive. The idea of incest is introduced by Kath's referral to Sloane as "Mama's little boy." Kath's transfer of these feelings onto her child is a distinct probability, as is an unstable home-life. Second, Ed's homosexuality surely played a major part in his decision. The thought of his friend Tommy's liaison with Kath was unbearable to Ed. The product of such an alliance had to be taken away as much for his own sense of jealousy as Kath's influence on the child. The situation with Sloane is not much different. And Ed's desire for Sloane prevents any notions that Kath's offspring would be any more welcome this time. Kath's future is bleak. Although she is privy to the knowledge concerning the true circumstances of Kemp's death, Sloane and Ed have more power than she possesses. She appears doomed to live a life of loneliness, without a child, inevitably without Sloane, even deprived of Kemp's company. It is certainly questionable whether Ed will be faithful to his promise of sharing Sloane with Kath. His cleverness is superior to hers, therefore we cannot exclude the possibility that he will come up with an idea to prevent Sloane from living with her at all.

Ed's future includes the assumption that Sloane will remain with him forever, or "just a few years" at the very least. He imagines he is in a dominant position, believing that because he has saved Sloane from the legal consequences of killing Kemp, he will be able to control Sloane with the knowledge. However, from what we know of Sloane's history and personality, it is more probable to surmise that Sloane will find a way out of his present entanglement, thus leaving both Ed and Kath emptyhanded. I do not think this is an unreasonable assumption. He has succeeded in moving in with total strangers, taking complete advantage of the situation by impregnating Kath, harassing Kemp, and teasing Ed into believing a relationship is developing between them. We also know that he has killed a man previously without being caught. With this sort of track-record, there is a strong indication that Sloane will extract himself from the present situation without so much as incurring a scratch.

Although the incidents within the play are pathetic, attention must be paid to the comic elements within the script, making certain their effect is not lost. My concept in directing this play was to emphasize this comic flavor by capitalizing on the humor inherent in this script while maintaining feelings of pathos, injustice, general indignation and shock.

One of the major points I dealt with as director was to decide how Sloane leaves the house at the conclusion of the play. If he left quietly,

perhaps with a wicked grin hardly concealed, the audience would be led to believe that either Sloane has already developed an idea that assured his escape from the situation, or is confident that he will think of one soon. This ending could be interpreted as the re-establishment of his equilibrium as suggested by Langer, thus offering evidence for the play to be labelled a comedy. I disagree with the appropriateness of such an ending. Instead, I made the decision that his exit should be one of anger. His life is now being controlled by Kath and Ed. How could he leave except in disgust, revulsion, and a degree of fear? This is how the scene was played: Sloane told Ed that if he could get him out of the disaster he had created, he would be "eternally" grateful. Ed responded with, "Not eternally, boy. Just a few years." It is at this point that Sloane exits the house. I instructed the actor portraying him to look at Ed with blatant hatred as Ed delivered his final line, then to exit quickly, slamming the door behind him. These were simple instructions; yet I believe they were sufficient to convey to the audience the sense of Sloane's entrapment and thus loss of equilibrium.

Ed and Kath are guilty not only of covering up a crime and therefore obstructing justice, but worse, they feel no grief over the death of their father, a character who has received the audience's sympathy. The coldness of their response adds to the element of cruelty in the play. They are both self-centered and greedy. They are also very vulnerable and therefore in a position to be taken advantage of by someone like

Sloane. Both are past their prime, and they attach themselves like leeches to Sloane's youth. The time of life has arrived for them when the realization of where they are in life causes panic. They are alone and lonely, scrambling to get a firm hold on Sloane and what he offers them in terms of making them feel wanted and beautiful.

Sloane is a callous, cruel young man. As an adult, he has continued exhibiting childish, selfish behavior that most likely developed in him as a child. The only difference is that his crimes have achieved greater magnitude, and his developed intelligence and accumulated knowledge of people have allowed him to manipulate more fully and completely. He is physically attractive in a unique sort of way. His gaze is direct and his charisma is extremely powerful. His techniques in dealing with people are well-tuned and practiced. It is difficult for anyone to resist them, and those who do pay for it with their lives.

Kemp is an old man whose hearing, sight, and locomotion are affected. Although he is stubborn in his resolve to turn Sloane over to the authorities, he fails. His fatal error occurs when he takes his own son into his confidence about Sloane's history. Ed immediately tells Sloane what Kemp said and the final confrontation takes place. Kemp is the only character who displays any normal set of values and his reward is opposite of what one would expect in a comedy.

Basically, the audience must be made to feel uncomfortable with the sound of their own laughter. They must be challenged as to the nature

of that laughter and question what the play contained that made it humorous. And ideally, they will wish the play had ended differently.

The rehearsal period for Sloane was approximately five and one-half weeks long, beginning the third week of September and extending to the last week of October. Each session varied, but generally lasted two and one-half hours. The period was divided into sections which had a particular focus. Some were dedicated to rehearsing as a group, others were reserved for working on duo-scenes.

The first phase of the rehearsal process was dedicated to working with individual objectives as the actors began character-exploration. I attempted to give the actors ample time to try different attitudes, character-types, and movement patterns, without the pressure of making immediate decisions; although I admit to succumbing to temptation and fine-tuning certain elements early in the rehearsal process. Giving them specific objectives actually continued throughout the entire rehearsal period but was focused on most during this first phase.

I found that after the actors had sufficiently memorized their roles, the comic flavor of the play had been lost. The next phase, then, concentrated on isolating the comic sections and focused the actors' attention on revitalizing them. Comic bits of business were incorporated into the action and different, more extreme, character-objectives were assigned to the actors in order to keep the play fresh and developing. For instance, playing a particular sequence as the stereotypical male

homosexual helped the actor playing Ed to discover some of the overt mannerisms that could be incorporated into his characterization with more subtlety. I believe this phase of the rehearsal process was one of great enrichment. At the end of the period, however, the actor playing Kath had to relinquish her role due to medical problems. Unfortunately, the replacement did not have sufficient time to explore fully the character in terms of playing with various objectives, and so on. Since the previous actor had captured Kath's personality quite well, I asked her to come in for a part of a rehearsal to allow the new actor to observe what she had been doing with the character. I would not have done this under ordinary circumstances, but the element of time was an important factor. Unfortunately, I had not been able to communicate effectively to the new actor what was needed in playing Kath. Allowing her to see what had transpired in the previous rehearsal sessions proved very successful. Not only did she match the previous characterization, but she used the remaining rehearsal time to embellish and mature it into a polished product.

It was necessary for all of us working during rehearsals to focus on the humor of the play. If too much attention were paid to the sadistic and cruel elements, the play dragged and lacked energy and interest. Only the combination of humor and cruelty could work, and since the cruelty was already present in the play's action, the main task was to capture the humor.

The third phase of rehearsal focused on establishing relationships between the characters. Because of the unusual quality of these relationships, a considerable amount of time was needed. Each character demonstrated a different aspect of her/his personality depending on the person with whom he/she is with. For example, the sexual electricity emitted from Ed when he is with Sloane is completely absent when he speaks to either Kath or Kemp. Likewise, the somewhat reserved manner he exhibits when attempting to speak to his father changes to more forceful, sometimes threatening behavior toward Kath. The majority of work during this phase was accomplished by working with two actors on the moments they shared within specific scenes.

The fourth phase concentrated on solidifying characterizations and movement. Final decisions were made and scenes were polished. The least amount of time was spent on this phase, approximately five days.

I was pleased with the caliber of actors involved in the production. Lines were memorized fairly soon, and a relatively small amount of resistance was displayed when an extreme character objective or idea was suggested. Their interest and commitment to developing a successful production were always present. I owe them my thanks for concretizing my ideas and testing my theories.

CHAPTER V

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE PRODUCTION

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, I chose to ask five individuals to see the production and respond in writing to two questions given to them beforehand. They included Kathleen Hulley and Robert Lewis, both professors in the English department; Lawrence Hill, associate professor, and Barbara O'Neill, assistant professor, in the Theatre Arts department; and Randy Lee, professor in the Law School.

The questions assigned were: (1) Who, in your opinion, is the protagonist? Antagonist? and (2) On the basis of Langer's statements, does Entertaining Mr. Sloane adhere to comedy's requirement that the resolution must re-establish a protagonist's equilibrium and offer a "happily ever after" life? This final question was preceded by three quotations taken from chapter eighteen of Susanne K. Langer's Feeling and Form, which is entitled "The Great Dramatic Forms: The Comic Rhythm":

. . . comic action, which is the upset and recovery of the protagonist's equilibrium, his

contest with the world and his triumph by wit, luck, personal power, or even humorous, or ironical, or philosophical acceptance of mischance. (p. 331)

Yet comedy may be serious; there is heroic drama, romantic drama, political drama, all in the comic pattern, yet entirely serious; the "history" is usually exalted comedy. It presents an incident in the undying life of a society that meets good and evil fortunes on countless occasions but never concludes its quest. After the story comes more life, more destiny prepared by the world and the race. So far as the story goes, the protagonists "live happily ever after"--on earth or in heaven. That fairy-tale formula is tacitly understood at the close of a comedy. (p. 334)

Real comedy sets up in the audience a sense of general exhilaration, because it presents the very image of "livingness" and the perception of it is exciting. Whatever the story may be, it takes the form of a temporary triumph over the surrounding world, complicated, and thus stretched out, by an involved succession of coincidences. (p. 348)

The written responses were very helpful in illustrating how the concept of comedy was interpreted in different ways even though they were given identical information concerning the requirements of comedy as conceived by one theorist.

First, the question of who is the protagonist raised some interesting issues. Sloane, Kath, and Kemp were all chosen as candidates.

The protagonist "has to be Sloane, if it is a PERSON." This view, held by Lee, introduces some interesting considerations. This same issue is addressed by Hulley, who wrote, ". . . is it perhaps something outside the play but alluded to as a class and sexual system which masks its own violence and moral corruption under the guise of rectitude?" Not only does this introduce the possibility of an aspect of society serving as the play's focus, but it can also be extended to include Sloane as the representative of such societal decay. Hulley goes on to suggest that if protagonist is defined as the "emotional center," Sloane is the obvious choice. "As such he is the protagonist because he, in a sense, represents every man. Our new moral center, he who can manipulate reality to his own needs. (The Renaissance overreacher at his most democratic?) Lee Iacocca, Dale Carnegie unmasked and eroticized." He is compared to the old moral center, symbolized by Kemp, who is blind, weak, and old.

O'Neill suggested that the initial empathic response of the audience toward Sloane is an important factor.

. . . the extremely wacky behavior of Kath at the opening of the play produces immediate empathy with Mr. Sloane, even if this feeling is somewhat undermined by his subsequent actions. He is attacked, seemingly without cause, by the eccentric, but enfeebled Kemp, and since he has so far done nothing to provoke this attack, our sympathies are further given over to him.

Although the play does dispel such sympathies, he is the first character with whom the audience identifies. Sloane is my choice for protagonist. My justification, simply stated, is that without him there is no play. He must enter the lives of the other three characters in order for action, including a conflict and resolution, to occur. The lives of the other characters revolve around his, and the effects of their relationships form the basis of the play.

The case for Kemp as protagonist is much more limited and depends on the definition of protagonist as "moral center" as suggested by Hulley. He is the only character whose sense of morality and justice appears uncorrupted by society, yet this same system is the one that is ultimately defeated. He is pushed aside as the new order comes to power, the self-oriented, infected and infectious one that Sloane represents. These two characters are polar opposites in this regard. If

either is considered the protagonist, it is logical that the other may serve the antagonistic function.

There was no explanation for the choice of Kath as protagonist, as suggested by Lewis. But it is interesting to note that his selection for antagonist included all of the other characters, particularly Ed.

For the sake of having a point of reference, I will designate Sloane as protagonist in considering his opposition. If, as Hulley suggested, Sloane is seen as the embodiment of a moral structure, or lack of one, his opposition may be found in Kemp. However, a different perspective is proposed by Lee.

The true antagonist . . . seems to me to be human-kind at large, and its measly, simpering, limp weakness, the lousiness of the basic human condition. All of the characters are flawed people. And the most flawed of all, Sloane, uses his superior flaw, the amorality which pervades his entire being, to control the rest of them; thus, their largest flaw in terms of establishing their own independence turns out to be that they are not as perfectly flawed as Sloane.

Thus, Sloane's strength of character, no matter how corrupt, is constantly at war with the apathetic, miserable quality of life, which attempts to

drown him in the same "measly, simpering" pool that has claimed the other characters, particularly Ed and Kath.

Responses to the second question, which is concerned with the re-establishment of equilibrium, are as varied as the first. Lee chose two different theories. The first, which is shared by O'Neill, requires that we look past the conclusion of the play into the future. If we assume that Sloane will somehow free himself from the clutches of Ed and Kath, then it is reasonable to assume that Sloane's equilibrium will be re-established. Both O'Neill and Lee predict that Kath and Ed will meet the same fate as their father. ". . . It can be readily predicted that when Sloane tires of the attentions of Kath and Ed, he will eliminate them in a similarly inept manner . . ." (O'Neill). "Either Ed or Kath will be the next victim . . ." (Lee). Although I do not disagree with such a probability, I would rather limit the discussion to remain within the boundaries of the script, since anything past that point is pure speculation. Lee's second theory points to the human condition as protagonist whose equilibrium has been disrupted/corrupted before the play begins. It is not re-established at the end, instead corruption and avarice are victorious. "This, of course, is why the thing isn't comedy at all, really, and why one is sick at every laugh one gets from the pictures painted by the dramatist. . . ."

As Lee presents the case for refuting the play as a comedy, O'Neill offers an argument for such a designation.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane presents the audience with a ribald, irreverent look at the fortune of a character to whom we must feel superior, if only morally. His audacious actions tickle our sense of decorum and causes our delight and ridicule in finally resolving Sloane's criminal action through pure poetic justice. On the basis of Langer's comments in Feeling and Form, the play is certainly a comedy.

There are two major areas that distinguish O'Neill's response from Lee's. First, she considers Sloane to be a comic hero insofar as he captures the "rhythm of life," the "general exhilaration" that Langer discusses. Second, O'Neill holds the opinion that the audience laughs at him from a sense of superiority. Others, particularly Lee and Hulley, disagree with this. Instead, they see Sloane as a reflection of contemporary society, or ourselves, and this is what causes the discomfort at the play's conclusion.

More than ever, I am convinced that the question of whether or not Sloane is a comedy depends on individual interpretation. Within the limits of the play itself, I do not see Sloane's equilibrium re-established. He does not leave the play in the same superior position as when he entered it. Instead, he is knocked off-balance, controlled by the two characters he was so successful in manipulating during the course of the play.

Entertaining Mr. Sloane was, in my estimation, successful in demonstrating the ambiguities that accompany a classification of comedy. The audiences, although variable from performance to performance, reacted much as I had anticipated. During each performance, I sat in the audience in order to observe responses. They responded to the comic moments with laughter and to the more intense, serious moments with a concentrated silence. There were some vocal responses in the form of "tsks" and whispers to the threatening nature of Sloane in certain scenes, such as when, at the end of Act I, he tells Kemp his version of his involvement in a past murder. Other responses of disgust and hilarity occurred at such moments as Kath's attempts at seducing Sloane. It is possible that some of the laughter throughout the play was an expression of sadistic pleasure. But within this laughter was an echo of discomfort and shock.

Since the production, I have been asked several times why I chose to direct this particular play. The questions are phrased in a way that addresses the nature of the play. "How could you direct something like that?" "What made you choose that type of play?" And so on. When asked what they mean by that and type, the normal responses include that the play is "sick," disgusting, immoral. It surprised me that many of the people who spoke to me were very uncomfortable with the types of sexuality within the play, even though they were not graphically portrayed. It reminded me how odd it is that people are so unnerved to

see such issues dramatized. We are a sensual people, whose inability to accept this facet of our human condition continues. When authors such as Orton choose to focus on these undeniably inherent aspects of life, the audience member responds by stiffening his back, clasping her hands, pressing his knees together, trying to look disgusted, appalled, and above suspicion. I am not suggesting that the nature of sexuality as depicted in Sloane is not corrupt, but that sensuality in general is an uncomfortable issue for many.

I believe that the actors were quite successful in capturing the flavor of the play. The relationships, in most cases, were clearly defined, as were the individual characterizations. As members of a society that shies away when confronted with displays of debased sexuality or generally erotic behavior, the actors allowed themselves to participate fully in creating a believably sensual feeling. If they had not, a crucial aspect of the play would have been lost.

Considering that the running time for the show was just under two hours, I am glad I decided to have only one intermission, in between Acts I and II. It would have been pointless and possibly destructive to the effectiveness of the show if the rhythm had been broken between Acts II and III.

The Burtness studio theatre was a logical site to present the play. Although I did not have the option of presenting it on mainstage, I would not have chosen it anyway. The intimacy of the "pit" made subtle acting

choices possible which contributed to a feeling of reality. It also produced a feeling of entrapment. The set was placed at an angle in the corner of the room to further the sense of being off-center, non-symmetrical, unbalanced. Likewise, the furnishings within the house were mismatched, devoid of pattern. I wanted the audience to feel that something was wrong, incomplete, uncomfortable, even before the actors made their entrances.

Short films featuring The Three Stooges were presented for thirty minutes prior to each performance. More audience members actually watched the films than I had anticipated. I chose these particular films because they demonstrate the fact that people will laugh at violence and cruelty if it is under the guise of humor. It seemed an appropriate prelude to a play of Sloane's nature.

I am still resolute in my belief that Entertaining Mr. Sloane is not a comedy and that my directorial concept and the resulting production reflected this. The question of what constitutes a comedy is addressed. On the basis of the panel's responses, I believe this was accomplished. With that, I am satisfied. I did not expect everyone to agree with my opinion and likewise desperately hoped that not everyone would disagree. There are different reactions to the question and the production was provocative enough to allow consideration for both sides of the issue.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In analyzing Entertaining Mr. Sloane, I made certain decisions concerning the concept of the play. I chose to direct it in such a fashion that Sloane falls victim to the same manipulation and sense of amorality that is his own trademark and loses his balance, at least for the immediate future. In my decision to end the play in this fashion, the protagonist is unable to re-establish his equilibrium. By applying my analysis of the play to several of the concepts of comic theory as developed by Susanne K. Langer, I have come to the conclusion that the play cannot be called a comedy. At the same time, there are many humorous elements in the play and these were emphasized.

"Comedy is an art form that arises naturally wherever people are gathered to celebrate life" (p. 331). Langer's statement would have pleased Joe Orton perhaps, whose manner of celebrating life was to take advantage of all the sensual, self-gratifying desires the human condition has to offer. Entertaining Mr. Sloane illustrated such an approach to life. Rather than a celebration, I perceive the play as a humorous treatment of human qualities that are anything but humorous. The blackness

of the play's premise is uncomfortable and discouraging. The characters, though off-beat, are three-dimensional. The humor in the script must be tempered in such a way that these individuals do not become farcical caricatures. The action of the play must not become so ludicrous that its believability is destroyed.

In my preceding analysis of Entertaining Mr. Sloane, I have attempted to give the reader an insight into my directorial decisions. I have done this by including my analysis of the play, the application of sections of Langer's model of comic theory, external critical evaluation, and my personal evaluation. Documentation of the production has also been included. It is hoped that all of these aspects combined serve to illustrate the ambiguities and problems which arise in directing Entertaining Mr. Sloane as a comedy.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: A
PRODUCTION LOG

This log is essentially a diary. A rehearsal to rehearsal account of what was worked on that day, my feelings about the play, my relationships with the actors, frustrations, fears, hopes and victories. It is to be read only as an indication of my personal process as director. After each rehearsal, I immediately recorded my reactions on tape. I chose to do it that way rather than writing it down, because I find my vocal responses are more truthful and genuine. There is no time lapse between what is going on in my mind and verbalizing it, like there is when I must get my thoughts through a pen onto paper. At a later date, I transferred my tapes to paper, careful not to "correct" my thoughts, but leaving them as true to their original form as possible. Much of it is stream-of-consciousness, thus the disregard for grammar, syntax, and sometimes coherence. There were good days and not so good days. My feelings are reflected accordingly. I would like to emphasize that I have the greatest regard for the cast members and others involved in this production. Certainly there were days when tempers flared or communication failed. Although these times are also recorded, memories of bad times fade and the fact that the actors remain my friends serves as testimony.

Keep in mind that this log records a progress. Although initial entries might seem contrary to my belief that this production of Entertaining Mr. Sloane is not a comedy, it all led to that result.

Tuesday, October 1

Sherri and I had a really good talk today. Our first real talk about the show. I am concerned because I checked some books out of the library, actually I looked over some reviews from The New York Times again, and two of them were very pessimistic about the script itself. And the other one was superficially positive, supported the script somewhat, but not much more. One of the more negative is called, "Aiming at Easy Targets." I could sum that one up by quoting it: "Poor Kath, Ed, and Sloane are nothing but impoverished symbols of vogueish disillusion. Isn't it time for less facile symbols and for a farewell to clownish stereotyped manipulation?" The second one can be summarized: "Entertaining Mr. Sloane, according to the program, won the London Drama Critic's Award as the best new British play in 1964. If it was the best, the London stage is in worse shape than ours."

What really boggles my mind is that everywhere I looked this play is referred to as a comedy. I see so much seriousness, and I've been running myself into a psychological analysis of "need-fulfillment." Why are these people, Kath and Ed, taking this violent, less-than-kind treatment from Sloane? Why are they doing that? Of course, the reason has to be that he is obviously fulfilling their sexual desires, and they feel that unless they accept the other parts of his behavior (his treatment of them, which includes the violence, particularly in Kath's case), he will pull away completely and then they will lose everything, including that

sexual fulfillment. They are caught in a web. They have to accept everything. I have a real problem with seeing that as comic. I see it as very sad. And comedy--some quotes from John Lahr's introduction in my text: "Comedy always acts out unconscious wishes suppressed in daily life. And Orton seized this liberation with gusto." "Orton's laughter was offensive, elegant, cruel, shocking, monstrous, hilarious, and smart." I can see there are moments of humor within the script, but overall I just do not see it as being that funny. "Survival and identity are at stake. Characters state their needs, but in the panic of events, their words are abused or unheard [like Kemp's]. The body and mind are pulverized in their pursuit of order. Unheeding and frantic, characters rebound off one another, groping for safety. Orton's plays aimed at evolving a form which celebrated the joy and terror of this disenchantment." More quotes: After the death of Orton's mother, a friend of his is shocked to hear about the details of the funeral, which are indicative of Orton's home-life. Orton replies, "But then he thinks my plays are fantasies. He suddenly caught a glimpse of the fact that I write the truth." I agree that truth can sometimes be funny, and there can be humor in violent or serious situations, such as any Three Stooges film or Bugs Bunny, or Road Runner cartoon. We laugh at pain, we laugh at violence. We think it is funny when Moe hits Curly. We laugh. We laugh at pain. But I do not know how we can laugh at Sloane, how we laugh at Kath and Ed. I feel pity for Kath. Another: "'Farce originally

was very close to tragedy and differed only in the treatment of its themes. Themes like rape, bastardy, prostitution.' What the Butler Saw put these subjects back on stage with a robust delight in human animality." Also, Lahr talks about Sloane as a comedy of manners. How can it be considered a comedy of manners? The way I understand it, a comedy of manners ridicules the way that society acts. And I think that these actions are normal, or ordinary to the particular society portrayed. Not a deviation. So, in true comedy of manners we are laughing at ourselves as much as at the characters. No, if he calls Sloane a comedy of manners, it would stand to reason that we have to find something within the characters in Sloane that we can identify with ourselves, and I think we are looking at characters with aberrant behavior. Abnormal. Even if we could find something to directly identify with, I do not think that automatically makes it a comedy. I do not think it is laughable.

"Sloane was the first play to dramatize the psychopathic style of the sixties, that ruthless, restless, single-minded pursuit of satisfaction, transformed by drugs and rock-music into myth." "'In Germany . . . Eddie was the central pivot of the play. His stalking of the boy's arse was as funny and wildly alarming as Kath's stalking of his cock. Unless this is so, you're in trouble.' In following the rapaciousness of his characters' needs, their ignorance and their unwitting violence, Orton was not being heartless, merely accurate. Sloane feels no guilt, and his refusal to experience shame is what disturbs and amuses

audiences. Sloane is a survivor whose egotism is rewarded, not punished." I am not sure that the ending implies a reward or victory. Rather, he is under others' control.

I have got to find the comic touches in this thing. The way I have blocked it is that at one point when Eddie is talking to Kath about her covering up for Sloane because he took Eddie's car, she is covering up for him and Ed goes over and begins to play with her hair. There is a fear that he is suddenly going to pull it and tear her hair out or at least cause substantial pain. Is that funny? Yet I must find humor, lightness. Maybe I am taking the story too seriously. I am going to study those psychology books, though, to see what I can find about "need-fulfillment" and go from there. I do not want to make this play ludicrous. I think there is a point. In some of the reviews it says there is no point, that one should not look too deeply, but merely laugh. Maybe it is my own lack of desire to see the humor. Maybe I want to see more. Maybe I think there is a message hidden. Maybe I am looking for an element of didacticism which does not exist. That is something I have to explore.

Thursday, October 3

I think it is very interesting that Sloane is never given a first name. And he is never asked, which makes it even more intriguing. Rather, the endearments, the other characters' perceptions of what they

want him to be, suffice in their own referrals to him. They do not want to know any more about him. It might corrupt their image of him.

Considering characterization in the rehearsal process, a couple of people are rather frustrated, confused about using opposite characterizations in the process. I asked Steve to first play the dumb-jock and then the John Wayne-type. I was looking for body alteration. A difference. He is self-conscious of how he appears onstage, and I want him to get rid of that. I want Phred to be more weighty. We put padding in his shirt for a beer-belly effect, and we made him wear ankle weights. He will continue to wear these throughout the next few weeks. I gave him descriptions of a man 60 pounds overweight, looking for a center of gravity. Phred is constantly bending at the waist, elbows exploded from his sides. He is much too graceful, much too young, especially his movements.

I told Kemp to be a persnickety old woman and to use the upper register of his voice. He is very much in control of himself. Consonants are very precise. The cadence of his lines is predictable. I have to give him some other ideas. Mary Ann is really the only one, so far, who has used the extreme characterizations I have given her, such as Georgette on the Mary Tyler Moore show, shyness, innocence. Clumsy, Marlene Deitrich. I gave her the word "sultry" to see what she would do with it. It was very interesting. She found some interesting things I think we might be able to incorporate. My thought on opposite characterizations

is that no one, no one in the world, is only one trait. No one is all good. All bad. The kindest person can erupt into a volcano of anger. I think that unless opposite characterizations are used, a character onstage will not flesh out. She/He will be one thing. He/She will be much too predictable. One will always know that is going to be happening with that character. I want them to flesh out, to try some different things, and to see that maybe their characters are capable of doing precisely the opposite of what is expected. It might add humor. It will add dimension, depth to the characters. That is what I am looking for. I do not think I'm off with that philosophy. I just do not know how to incorporate it. They just cannot see right now the connection between what they are doing as an exercise and how that might be able to be incorporated into their true characterization. Again, I need to flesh it out. There is no one that is just one thing. Their characters at this point are very flat. They need to do some interesting things, and I want them to be able to develop them.

Monday, October 7

Today we ran through Act I. We had limited time because Mary Ann had to leave early, at 5:45, to get ready for You Can't Take It With You. We ran through it and tried some different characterizations. It was really rough. Blocking was very confusing.

Tuesday, October 8

Tonight we ran Act II. It went a little smoother than last night. The blocking was a little bit cleaner. We dealt more with humor. We went through it and then went again from page 110 to the end of the act. I told the men to play it completely for laughs. We had a marvelous time. It was really very funny. A lot of it did not fit, of course, but a great deal of it did. There was a lot more lightheartedness. They all agreed they had made some new realizations, that there were new choices to be made. Some gestures, some fun business. One, Steve working with the lipstick, took the cover off, playing with it quite suggestively. Another, Ed/Phred slapped Sloane on the butt. There were some non-verbals that were nice. They were playing with some things. The jokingness really helped. You could see that underneath the surface there was a certain element of intensity. They were playing it seriously, listening very conscientiously to what each other was saying, but on the surface it was very light and effective.

Other notes: Sloane can take advantage of opportunities to grimace toward the audience when Kath or Ed have said something particularly stupid and have their backs turned toward him. Or when he has a chance to turn away from them. Also, I think that on page 115, Ed can get rather puffed up with his achievements and feeling of self-importance. A personal testimonial. More non-verbals for everyone are necessary.

I would like to go back to last night's Act I notes. First of all, a definite chemistry must develop at the beginning between Sloane and Kath. There is also more movement potential for Kath. For instance, tonight I told her to take shorter steps but continue the rapid pace. And she must fool around with her body more. She must believe that she is constantly observed by Sloane and this must be evident in her delivery and movement. Sloane should play with individual words, using different levels, pausing, just playing with them. Again, Kemp's enunciation needs altering. Kath probably uses different vocal qualities when she speaks to Kemp, as compared to Sloane, as compared to Ed. Kemp's body must be different when he has to hurry. For instance after he stabs Sloane and calls Kath. There must be an aged quality to it, yet he has to hurry a bit more. Also, Kemp is not always soft-spoken, particularly when he's talking directly to Kath. "I'm dying Kath. . . ."

My first committee meeting was today. It was interesting, provocative. We went over my outline and made quite a few changes. I feel good about them. The committee voiced a lot of concerns. For instance, whose particular model of theory of comedy am I going to use. I am leaning toward Fergusson and Meredith. There was more brought up about the idea of black humor. Dr. Graves, I felt, made an excellent point. Black humor is not a genre in itself, it is a by-product of comedy. He was also very insistent on suggesting that I know when I should use the term "comedy" or "comic," and when to use the term "humor" when I

am talking about the playscript itself. Are there comic elements? Is it comedy? Or is there just humor in it? I tend toward the idea that there is humor in it, but that it is not a true comedy.

I went to the library tonight and got two film reviews and also a review--more recent, 1970 I believe--of a revival of Entertaining Mr. Sloane. I think that will be of use to me. Tomorrow we go through Act III. I am excited about Thursday and Friday. We will do some individual character work and incorporate humor into characterizations and relationships with each other.

Wednesday, October 9

Tonight we went through Act III. Kemp left early because he has such a small part in that act. Concerning the others, we did some pretty interesting work. We worked on timing for the slap, when Sloane attacks Kath and tells her she must support the alibi. We also worked on cleaning up the physicality of moving Kemp from his position on the floor when he is wounded and getting him up the stairs. I told Kath she will have to help also, because Kemp was just assuming too much of his own weight. He must remember that he has been mortally wounded. Phred did a lot of nice things tonight. He lightened up some areas that needed it, and he was generally a lot more fun to watch. He was connecting with the action more. At one point, when Steve made physical contact with him by putting both hands on the sides of his neck,

he started to lean back. But when I said, "Don't Phred, don't move back, move in, move in," he did and retained that close feeling. I did jump on him for moving about tonight. He was really into the swinging, swaying bit and told me it comes naturally. I told him that I knew that, but that he has to begin to assume a sense of weightedness to his movement. Steve did well tonight. We worked more on characterization. Basically, after everything else, we worked on his two monologues. First, the one where he talks to Kemp about the night he murdered the photographer, and the second where he tells Ed about the man he had met during one "magical night," that this man had offered him a job and that he had refused him. But how he would appreciate and accept any advances that might come his way again, particularly any that Ed might propose. We did a lot of work with that. Making Sloane more of an effusive character, being more comfortable in his own right, being comfortable with his body, particularly the upper arm area. Working with different levels of space--carving space--and being able to make sharp contrasts. For instance, during the longer speech, he is doing some pacing, and I would like to have him do sharp contrasts, like turning quickly to emphasize a certain line or phrase. Surprising Kemp and surprising the audience with his movements and vocal qualities. Keeping that variety in his character. And he talked about some things he had discovered about his character. Such as, Sloane is very comfortable in this house. It is almost his playground. He seems more

comfortable there than perhaps the actual inhabitants. He takes over. The way he might sit on the furniture is not so much a sign of insolence as it is the degree of his familiarity. Being there, being comfortable with himself. He made a lot of strides in that area. We worked with more vocal things, how to add variety, how to tell a story. There are still some things I would like to suggest to him concerning his monologues, but he is well on the way at this point. He is very uncomfortable with upper arm movement, and he is worried about mugging. I reminded him that going past the point of seeming silly is usually the time when it only begins to read to an audience. He accepted that and said that it was something he needed to work on. All in all, I thought that it was a really productive rehearsal. It went three hours. We got a good chunk of work accomplished. We went two hours with the act itself and then over an hour on Steve's monologues--I guess close to an hour and 20 minutes, something like that. It was good quality time and I think that we picked up on a lot.

There was more of a light-hearted exchange between characters. I had Kath explore some things. When she first realized Dada is dead, she is in shock, panicked. Ed leads her to the chair to sit down. I asked her to assume more of a shocked physical presence and vocal quality, changing it to a direct focus on Ed and a vocal change on the line, "Will we have to send his pension book in?" Another change on "I can't fit into my black, it's been so long since mama's funeral" or

whatever that line is. Telling her to do some focal changes from directness to looking away as if she is thinking to herself. Looking at her hands and other parts of her body will help suggest a sense of knowing precisely what the other person is saying, being very aware of how to formulate what she is going to say next. We also talked about the point that I think that she, Kath, is very intelligent in a different sort of way. She knows when to play dumb, and she knows when she wants to be direct, as in the line, "I was never subtle, Mr. Sloane," or when Sloane says to her, "You've deceived yourself," to which she replies, "Perhaps," with a knowing air. I think that these lines show a strength not immediately evident in Kath. Mary Ann was leaning more toward a caricature of the dumb blond. But when she plays with people's emotions in a childlike way, she is very aware of it and she cannot get lost in too much of an airhead-type portrayal. She is going to play with that more. I am excited to see her process. She is doing some nice vocal work. So is Ed. He tends to still bring the cadence of his sentences down, down, down. But we will work on that. I think that tomorrow night will be an excellent time because we begin working with more characterization and relationships. I think that will go well.

The humor is starting to emerge naturally as the actors feel more comfortable with the script and more comfortable with taking risks. It is odd. They keep asking me, "Is it okay if I pick this up?" or "Is it all right if I move here a step, sooner?" I say, "Of course," not knowing

that I must give the appearance of being strict about movement and gestures. I have to let them know that they can take the liberties, that I have only given them boundaries. That they are free to experiment within those and do whatever they feel might work.

Thursday, October 10

This afternoon we worked in room 107, because it was the opening night of You Can't Take It With You. We set up a small set for ourselves. I worked only with Steve and Phred on four sections that they have together. I think it was a productive session. I hope so. Phred needed to have points spotted out for him where he has to suggest a sexual desire for Sloane. That was difficult for him, but I suggested how he had to connect, and how he had to cover that desire with a facade of machismo. Pretending that he was not implying what he actually was. How to keep that hidden. He did well with some of it. He got some intensity and some closeness. I asked Steve to be a little more like James Dean at certain times. A little more macho. Standing so still and looking directly at a person for as long as he sometimes does looks frightening. Too threatening. I wanted him to lighten that up a bit, to produce another image that Ed would enjoy looking at--enjoy making a connection with. There were some other points where we found opportunity for humor, such as, "I like to vacation where the girls have rings through their noses," with a buddy-buddy laugh. "They always have a

headache or backache," or "Mum told 'em never to when there's an 'R' in the month." Those lines and other, were worked on for humor.

We also worked on contrast and climax. For instance, when Sloane comes down and begins packing and Ed questions, "Where are you going," and Sloane replies, "With you." Ed says, "No, you're not," and they continue on about the murder. I think that is very intense and serious. It needs to reach a crescendo to allow Ed to break that mood. "Well, we're going to make a change. How would you like to live with me?" We worked on how to deliver it so everything is not so deadly, heavy, weighty in the show, in their scenes particularly. There is a lot of sexuality, sensuality, but I think they can have fun with that also. I think it went well. I hope so. I told them afterwards to please not set what we had done. Do not cast it in iron. I was just trying to put them on a path. They should experiment within those boundaries. They are working. They need to make some further discoveries and decisions for themselves.

Phred was physically a lot freer than he ever has been. Touching himself, playing with furniture, just carving space, basically. It was nice to see. I enjoyed it, watching him start his process. I got after him again about wandering around, and he said that once his lines are better, he would be able to calm that down. I hope he is right.

Friday, October 11

Today we spent about two and one-half hours going through pages 110-127. Only the three men are involved in that section. They were required to be off book, as Ed and Sloane were for yesterday's rehearsal. We had to run sequences several times just for memorization purposes rather than working them. We did work somewhat, however. I guess all I can say is that, basically, we tried to work on contrast. Trying to find the times of intensity and seriousness. Trying to find the contrast of that with humor and a general energizing. They are not extreme enough right now. They are not playing. They are not working with extremes. They are caught in a very obvious rut of certain characterizations. I am getting really frustrated. After rehearsal, I asked Sherri what she thought. She felt that they were not working enough on extremes and suggested that I should give them even more character objectives and extremes to play with, because it is becoming very static. There is a total lack of energy, and it is reading. It is turning into such a serious show. I am going to have to re-direct them somehow. I think that Sherri is right. They are certainly getting into a rut. I will have to work more with extremes. The next rehearsal I plan on telling them that we need simply to energize. That they should work things to the extreme, taking them further than they would ordinarily go. Then they can read to an audience. They are not at this point. Their changes are very subtle and need more contrast. This play might be realistic in some sense, but

not in another. These people are caricatures of real life. Their personalities are absurdly extreme, and that is why we can laugh at them. If they were too subtle, it would be too frightening for us to watch. We need to do more work on that. I sense some resistance. Perhaps that is because they were being asked to give more and more and more while working on characterization tonight than they have in the past. And that is always difficult.

Saturday, October 12

Today we had the first full run-through of the show. We started at 10:00, actually about 20 minutes after by the time everybody got settled, and went until 2:00. It was good. I was happily surprised to see that most of the lines were down. Only for more difficult sequences did they have to pick up their books. I was really excited about that. At the beginning, it was a bit disconcerting because it seemed like it had been a long time since we had done Act I. Which is true, it has been a long time. Five days, or something like that. So a lot of what I had asked them to do in terms of characterization had been lost. That is to be expected. They are still very worried about experimenting with blocking. They keep asking me if they can make minor adjustments, and I try to reassure them to go ahead. If there is a problem I will let them know, but otherwise they can assume some authority over their own blocking, which really brightens it up. They were a little more lively. The fact

that Mary Ann was there seemed to help a great deal. With her vocal energy she tended to hype up everyone else. That part was absolutely fantastic. We really needed that. It is of concern to me that it is lacking in energy. They are bogging themselves down in specific characterizations. Experimentation is not where it should be. Hopefully that will come with time, especially as they put their scripts down more often. It will free them up. Make them feel differently. It seems that adjectives as objectives are working the best. I have given Steve "macho." I keep working with Phred on his age and times of security versus insecurity, in terms of his feeling towards Sloane. I have tried to help Bob find when he focuses on people, talking directly to them, when he is talking to Kath particularly: "I'm sick. I'm dying." As compared to talking to himself, knowing that he will not be heard. His focus is then elsewhere. A lot of muttering. That sort of thing. We worked on some of the physicalization of age for him. Leaning on a cane, getting into and out of a chair properly. For Steve, we worked on the physicalization of how he is going to jump on the chair and brandish the cane. I think it is going to be all right. Hopefully, they will keep experimenting. Cathy Hurst will be seeing it a week from tonight, a run-through. I want to have something concrete to show her. I am just going to have to press on--that things are funny, finding the humor, experimenting with character extremes. They need to finish memorizing their lines.

Monday, October 14

At 7:00 we met for a run-through. We went through Acts I and II, deleting Act III because Mary Ann was very low on energy. Actually everyone was. We were upstairs in room 107, and it did not lend itself to much of an energetic rehearsal process. Everything regressed. I cannot say much good about it. Steve made a couple of discoveries about using the cane--that sort of thing went all right. I cut it after Act II, told everyone to go home, get rest, particularly Mary Ann. Found out she was ill. Took her to the emergency room tonight. I am holding my breath.

Tuesday, October 15

Mary Ann is still in the hospital, so from 5:15 to about 6:15 I worked with the men. We started Act III between Sloane and Ed, then when Kemp arrived we stopped. We were doing some character work from pages 83-88. We cut off and back-tracked. Then we did pages 110-127, giving them a character rehearsal. Things were off tonight. There were some strides made in terms of choices. I really got down on Phred for pacing. Asked him to perhaps insert a sense of sentimentality, to be more the jilted lover when he finds out about Kath's pregnancy and Sloane's obvious involvement. Other notes I gave them included: Sloane should be more sugary sweet when he is talking about Doolan, that sequence. And that his hands are in his pockets too much. Also, Ed

found some new physical contact, particularly the way he and Sloane sit together on the level. He put his elbow on Sloane's knee and contacted more. It was nice. I asked Sloane, when they are down-center, to keep mirroring Ed as he is being reprimanded and about to ask forgiveness. I told Kemp to be more self-righteous. He needs to slow his speech down. He needs to be totally drawn in by Sloane's story-- the whole business of open-mouthed, head forward, direct focus on Sloane. Truly caught up in the story. Also, he tries to play detective when he is trying to put two and two together about the crime. "What was my motive?" Sloane asks. It suddenly dawns on Kemp, "The equipment!"

That is about it for tonight. Mary Ann is still not here. I am going to see her tonight and ask her whether she feels she can remain in the show.

Wednesday, October 16

Kath has been re-cast. Cathy Hurst is going to be performing the role. It was Mary Ann's decision, and I think a wise one. We went from 5:00 until 6:45. All we did was go over blocking for Acts I and II for Kath, for Cathy to get the blocking down. The one notable character item that happened tonight was when I told Bob to play extreme age. He just was not aging enough. To pretend he is 300 years old. To play it further than he thought was necessary. He did so and it was a major

break-through. I affirmed his choices and made sure that he knew that he was on the right track. His vocal choices were so much more focused and "on." He said that he thinks it is a product of learning lines--he has got his lines better under control and that has made a difference. Whatever it is, it really helped.

Thursday, October 17

We continued the blocking for Cathy's benefit, blocking Act III. After that I worked some character items with Sloane and Kemp, then Sloane and Ed. For Sloane and Kemp we reviewed pages 70-75 and 123-127. Some good things happened tonight with Kemp and his aging. We worked on the fact that he is trying to convince himself, or Sloane, that he knows what is going on and that he has all of the clues fit together like a jig-saw puzzle. Actually he does not. He is reacting to them as they are dawning on him. Then he makes his accusations, based on assumptions, to Sloane. Just the growing anger, the growing accusations that he must have, also the panic, the fear, keeping his mouth dropped open when he is watching Sloane's monologue, leaning forward in his chair, his neck extended when he is focusing on Sloane. More of a squint. Shaking his cane at him more often. For Sloane, worked on more giggling. He is doing some nice things with the cane--a lunge, when he begins his monologue, which is a nice touch. Working on contrasts for him. Steve is still uptight about his movement. I don't

know how to approach the problem right now. I am at a loss. We worked with Sloane and Ed on pages 83-88 and 132-135. Phred worked on lightening things up. The first scene is where Ed and Sloane first meet, and I want that to lighten up. They are playing it with a deep intensity. The second scene is when they discuss Sloane's involvement in Kemp's murder. They also use the same kind of intensity there. I am trying to point out to them that because that content of the scenes is so different, it only makes sense that the scenes themselves would be played differently. There would be a different relationship between them. There is more of a need in the second scene where there is not in the first scene.

Friday, October 18

Tonight we worked on Kath's characterization. First we worked with her and Sloane, pages 65-69 and 93-99. I had Sloane put on a slippery shirt and told him to concentrate on his posture. He said that draws his attention to it, making it worse for him. I disagree with his reasoning. I think the shirt will be a beneficial, constant reminder. I had to throw out a lot of different characterizations for Kath in the course of the entire evening. Being an intelligent woman. She is not retarded, she is not stupid. She is flirtatious when she is with Sloane. Very, very effusive. She is effusive throughout. When she is with Eddie, it is immediately apparent that he is the older brother, and that she is the

younger sister. He holds all cards. She still tries to stand up to him in her own way, but she is afraid of the physical threat of violence, which we feel whenever he makes physical contact with her. There is so much thrown on Cathy's lap right now. We are going to be doing some work on line readings. Just interpretation.

Ed was corrected on several blocking things that he has changed and which affect future action. When to light his cigarette, and so on. Stalking and sauntering rather than making direct crosses as he should, to make them solid and meaningful.

Saturday, October 19

Today we went over Acts II and III from 11:00 until about 2:00. We ran them straight through, or close to it. Cathy has not had a chance to really go through the entire show until now. For her sake, we did it that way, although I did work more with the men. The energy was lacking terribly today. I think they are starting to feel that they have time to slack off because Cathy has to catch up to them. It was draggy. We did not get started until about 11:30. It was very slow. Basically, I talked about energy and the fact that we are losing the humor again. The intensity is getting much too strong much too quickly. I need to curb that.

Sunday, October 20

Today we spent a couple of hours on Act I only. It was the first day we had the sideboard and a carpet down. Cathy is very frustrated at this point, understandably so. Mary Ann came back today just to walk through it and to let Cathy see what had been done with the character that she could perhaps incorporate back into Kath. Cathy said it was helpful. With the others, I worked again with opposite characterizations, because we simply must break that intensity. As Sherri pointed out, they are getting back into that rut both vocally and movement-wise. It is so predictable and so low in energy. So, first of all, we played it for laughs again. We went through Act II. I had them re-do some sequences, just trying to pick up the pace between the men. For Act III, I had them do some pace work also. When we went back to do some sequences with Cathy, I had the men play it for laughs: Then I began to give our specific characteristics for the men. Ed: slow-moving, unintelligent, and believing he is quite attractive. Following that we tried Captain Kangaroo, Pee-Wee Herman, coward, shy and spineless, happy and jolly. Tomorrow, at Cathy's suggestion, he will be asked to behave like a little boy, in order to bring his voice up from that low register that he has when he is trying to sound mature. It is not working right now.

Kemp: I did not do much today because he kept spacing out his lines. He needs to work on age anyway, and I do not want to give him

anything to confuse him. Sherri suggested he try Henry Fonda a la On Golden Pond. We're going to try that tomorrow.

Sloane: Rough, threatening, and tactless. That seemed to give him some new ideas.

Other notes included: Some changes for Kath--we are going to have her do a little turn-about in the candlelight. The last photo she will begin to put down the front of her dress. Otherwise, it was pacing, reactions, changing pitches and raising the volume, cutting down the intensity and finding the humor once again. The humor is what we are going to have to go back to. When we did it a couple of weeks ago, they were wild and crazy. But it was not like that this time at all. We will have to see what happens when we go through it tomorrow, which is a run-through. We have run-throughs pretty much from now on.

Monday, October 21

Tonight went really well. I was excited about Kath's character. Notes included: Kath needs a few more smiles, Sloane needs to slow his speech down, Kath needs to add more brightness, more freshness to her character and to find the humor in some of her lines, such as "We don't charge," as an obvious joke. She is concerned about appearing too dippy, too unintelligent. It is not reading that way, so I am trying to convince her that we need that effervescence in her character. Some fun, playful things are going on now between characters, and I think

Kath's playfulness is lending energy to the rest of the cast members. We worked some moments, such as Kath and Sloane's opening scene. Ed-- when he lights a cigarette and when he does not. More non-verbals for him and also some more smiles. What we need for Eddie now, as it was pointed out to me, is more of a connection, a chemistry between Sloane and himself. It is dropping off. He is talking at him and not connecting with his character. More of that is needed from Ed. Tonight Kemp used his cane more often to emphasize certain lines which was nice. He is realizing that Kemp has grown so accustomed to it, that it is like an extension of his own body. Two corrections on words were Bournemouth and hic jacets. It went really well tonight. I was really excited. So some characters, such as Kath, need to be a little more fidgety. Aside from those individual notes, I thought there was more of a vitality that we have not seen for quite some time. Kath was not off book for most of the second act and most of the third, and there was a definite dip. But the fact that the first act was energetic leads me to believe that the second and third acts will come along like that also. I really cannot believe how quickly Cathy is memorizing her lines. I talked to her about differing emotions after she finds out that Kemp is dead. She is upset about Dada's death--she is concerned about the pension book--she does not know if she will be able to fit in her black--she needs to protect Sloane. There were individual moments that we worked on, basically. But all in all, I feel better tonight than I have in a long time. It was a

nice feeling and I hope that they felt it too. I let them know it went WELL.

Tuesday, October 22

Another good night. Cathy was off book even more except for Act III. Act II had just as much energy and vitality as Act I. Now Ed is having problems with that chemistry between Sloane and himself. There can be an intensity, a chemistry, but it does not have to be impassioned. It can be humorous, fun. We talked more about that quality.

Some really nice things were set tonight. Kath is tying a bow on Sloane's leg when she gives him the bandage. Playing "This Little Piggy Went to Market" on his toes. Playing with the black fish-net stockings. Some really nice things came tonight and it kept them going. Also, we had a couple of people watching, people that are on props. I think it helped the cast to have someone to play for. We have only got a few days and I am considering giving us all Friday off if it goes as well tomorrow. I will be timing it also to see how long this pup takes.

Wednesday, October 23

We went through the entire show tonight. I took a timing on it and with intermission it was precisely two hours long. I thought it was much longer than that, I am thankful it is not. If it did, it would mean that the show is dragging. The first act was 45 minutes and the second part was 65 minutes. It went well. It was the first night they had lights, and

although the lights were not focused, it threw them a bit. They also had to work with some costuming they were not accustomed to, so the concentration was low. Considering all the distractions, they did well. I talked to Phred about making the connections and he did make several tonight. I tried to affirm that and told him to keep searching for even more opportunities. The volume was low. A lot of lines had to be fed for everyone. I think it was a night to adjust, and I think everyone needs a break, but I think I will wait to see how tomorrow's rehearsal goes.

All in all, it was a good session. It was the first time through without being able to stop and rework things. I thought it went well. I also talked to Sloane tonight about the fact that his ending, the way that he leaves the room, carries the crux of my entire thesis. If he leaves as victor, the play is a comedy. If he leaves as victim, it is not. If he leaves angry and feeling manipulated, rather than as manipulator of others, that is going to offset his balance. That he never regains the equilibrium that he establishes at the beginning of the show. I actually shook when I talked to him about it. I want him to know that it is a crucial point in the show, but I do not want him to feel the true weight of his performance at that point as I do. I do not want him to know how dependent I am on that five-second sequence. No actor needs that kind of pressure.

Thursday, October 24

Tonight we went through the entire play beginning with Act III. It went all right. The energy was low. We worked on some individual moments, such as getting Kemp up the stairway after he has been wounded. He cannot look so in control of himself. He needs to show that he has been severely hurt. We had to rework a couple of things due to sight-line problems, such as the ending of Act I, getting it moved towards the center. Low in energy. I think people are just tired. We decided to take tomorrow night off before we begin our final week of heavy rehearsal.

Some nice things happened tonight. For the first time, Phred made some discoveries as to how he can make physical contact with Sloane that worked well. Bob did some better focus things, such as looking downstage when he was at the fireplace. I think everyone needs a rest.

Saturday, October 26

We went through the show today, our first technical run. We had to hold on some things while the lighting people worked with their specials, focus, etc. We did not get too much done in terms of working on the play. Just a few little reminders when to enter a room, that sort of thing. I think last night's break did a lot of good. After it was over, we did work Act III again. Worked basically on more magnetism between Ed and Sloane. Such as Sloane's line, "It's a mystery, it certainly is,

how such a father could have such a son," and Ed's reaction to that line. Also, reacting to Sloane's touch. Working on Kath's panic when she finds out that Dada is dead. We worked on a physical tug-of-war at the end of Act III. Kath and Ed are fighting over who gets to keep Sloane. The second time we went through Act III was a lot better, and I felt pretty good about it. Our second tech will be tomorrow.

Sunday, October 27

Today we had a run-through, our second tech. It went fairly well. Dr. Engle was there for the first act which moved a bit slowly. The second and third acts, though, picked up energy and were very nice, especially the harming of Kath by Sloane. That scene, that whole sequence went very well, the best it ever has. Sloane's exit was also very nice. There were a few things that had to be pointed out in terms of use of props, exits, entrances. They made some good progress today. We have been rehearsing for three and one-half hours. I am sure that has a lot to do with it. They are just wearing down. Tomorrow will be the first night with make-up and hopefully full props.

Monday, October 28

Tonight we had a run-through with make-up and costume. Make-up needed help. All of them looked too young, except Kath who looked too painted up, like an over-the-hill starlet. We had to re-do that.

The show ran one hour and 50 minutes which is a considerable cut. But some lines were dropped. The most interesting thing tonight was that Tim, a friend of Cathy's, came to watch. Afterwards we went out and talked about the show. He had some interesting ideas that I might incorporate. Some of them not, some of them yes. Such as working with Kemp's glasses. Taking them off when he is trying to see more clearly. Also, Sloane's sharper turns, and possibly his taking something in the first act and putting it in his pocket. Otherwise, we disagreed vehemently on whether or not Sloane is a comedy. I chose to maintain my present opinion, adding that this particular production was not a comedy.

I thought that the run-through was good. Things ran smoothly, except for props. Hopefully all will be taken care of by tomorrow.

I kept no account of the next five days. The first three were dress rehearsals. General notes were given, but my work as director had essentially ended. The last two days, November 1 and 2, were the performance dates. I was surprised by the good attendance at all three performances. And thrilled with the actors' product.

APPENDIX I: B

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Material and Characters Involved</u>	<u>Place</u>
M. 30	5:00-7:00	Block Act II.	pit
T. 1	5:00-6:30	Finish blocking Act II and run.	pit
W. 2	5:00-7:00	Block Act III.	pit
R. 3	5:30-6:30	Finish blocking Act III and run.	pit
M. 7	5:00-6:30	Run Act I.	pit
T. 8	5:00	Run Act II.	pit
W. 9	5:00-6:30	Run Act III.	pit
R. 10	5:30-7:30	Ed and Sloane, pp. 83-88, 132-135, 118-123, 110-115.	107
F. 11	3:00-6:00	Ed, Sloane and Kemp, pp. 110-127.	107
S. 12	10:00	Complete run-through.	pit
M. 14	7:00	Run-through.	TBA
T. 15	5:00-6:30	Act III.	TBA
W. 16	7:00-8:30	Kath and Sloane, pp. 65-69, 93-99.	107
	8:30	Ed and Kath, pp. 81-83, 105-109.	107
R. 17	4:00-5:30	Sloane and Kemp, pp. 70-75, 123-127.	TBA
	5:30-7:00	Sloane and Ed, pp. 83-88, 132-135.	TBA
F. 18	3:00	Material TBA.	TBA
S. 19	11:00	Acts II and III.	pit
S. 20	1:00-3:00	Act I.	pit
M. 21	7:00	Run-through.	pit
T. 22	7:00	Material TBA.	pit
W. 23	7:00	Run-through.	pit
R. 24	7:00	Run-through.	pit
F. 25	7:00	Run-through.	pit

KEEP THE WEEKEND OF OCT. 26 AND 27 OPEN FOR TECH. REHEARSALS.

M. 28	7:00	Run-through.	pit
T. 29	8:00	Dress rehearsal w/make-up.	pit
W. 30	7:00	Dress rehearsal. Make-up problems only.	pit
R. 31	8:00	Final Dress Rehearsal.	pit
F. 1	call	PERFORMANCE	pit
S. 2	call	PERFORMANCE	pit

*This is a copy of the schedule received by the actors after the first read-through and blocking of Act I. Times and material were altered somewhat when one role had to be re-cast.

APPENDIX II

PHOTOGRAPHS



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APPENDIX III

FLOOR PLAN

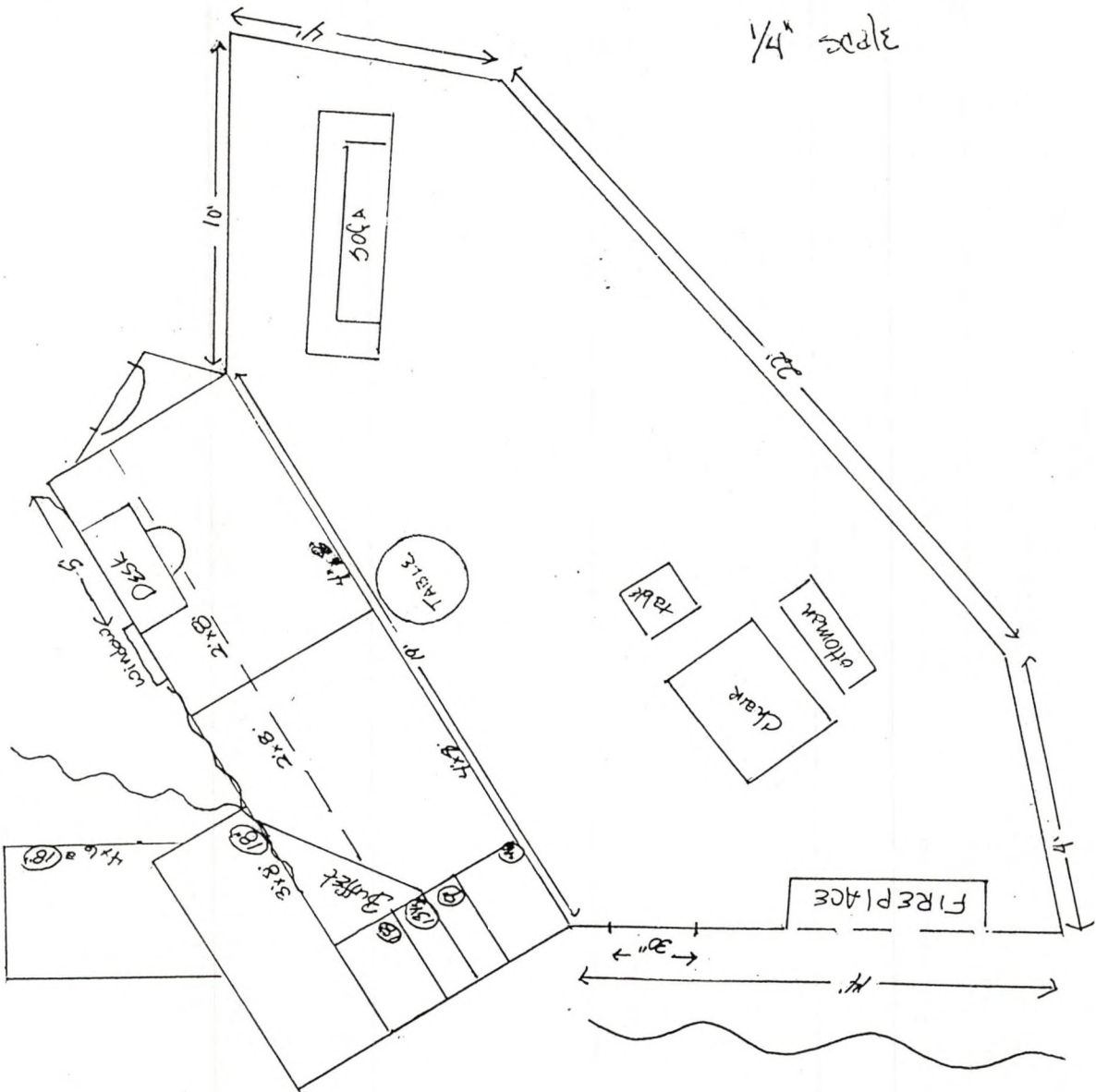
Floor plan
Entertaining MR Sloane

Nov 1-2 1985

Studio Theatre (Burtness)

Bob Rittgers

1/4" scale



APPENDIX IV

PROGRAM

Please see the enclosed program in the pocket attached to the
inside of the back cover.

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