

THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN THE TELEVISION
ADAPTATION OF
KATHERINE ANNE PORTER'S NOON WINE

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
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Gary Gumpert
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By

Gary Cumpert

A THESIS

Submitted to the College of Communication Arts of Michigan
State University of Agriculture and Applied Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Roger M. Burfield, Jr.

Major Professor

ABSTRACT

The problem of this study was to write a television adaptation of Katherine Anne Porter's short story "Noon Wine" and discuss the problems involved therein. Prior to writing the play, all the prose fiction of Katherine Anne Porter was surveyed and "Noon Wine" was chosen because of its dramatic potentiality. Criteria and limitations were also established for the dramatic television play and these criteria and limitations were applied throughout the process of writing the television adaptation.

The gradual increase of dramatic shows on television has resulted in a greater demand for scripts. This demand has not been satiated because the peculiar techniques of the television medium have not been understood by the television playwright.

Television writing does not differ from the dramatic technique of the various theatrical media; its differences are inherent in the demands and limitations of television itself. The selectivity, intimacy and subtlety of the television medium, together with the basic time limitation, result in a drama based on moments of insight into the life of an individual. Television is unable to present broad and panoramic action drama.

Once the criteria and limitations of the television medium are grasped by the playwright, the adaptation of the short story, especially those written by Katherine Anne Porter, can be considered as one solution to the shortage of dramatic television scripts.

The adaptation of the short stories by Katherine Anne Porter is possible because the intimacy of the television medium can capture the intimacy of the short story. The conflict in Miss Porter's stories is also based upon the introspective clash of an individual's personality and not upon panoramic action. The tragic quality of Miss Porter's "Noon Wine" indicated that the television adaptation of this short story would result in an empathic response and identification between the viewer and the drama.

With the criteria and limitations established for the dramatic television play, a story line was abstracted, a scenario was developed and the television adaptation written.

It was found necessary to show dramatically what Miss Porter had said through her own narration, the character's thoughts and in dialogue and action. The dramatic technique arrived at was the concept of illustrative action. The causal relationship of the flashback technique gave the television play the required unity of action.

The television adaptation of "Noon Wine" cannot be considered successful until it has been produced, but this study seems to indicate that the short stories of Katherine Anne Porter are only a small part of a vast storehouse of material available which should be a definite source for the solving of television's script shortage.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Marian Gallaway defines playwriting "as the art of transferring feelings about a human situation from the mind of a playwright to the mind of an assembled audience."¹

The process of transference of a writer's idea from its initial conception to its ultimate execution goes beyond the mere writing function and incorporates the abilities of a large number of people. It is, at this point, that the director of producer serves his greatest function, acting as the unifying agent between disunited parts, giving them coherence and continuity. As Sidney Lumet says:

This is our [director's] function. We take the actor's abilities, we take the producer's desire; we take the writer's intention; we take the crew supervisor's knowledge; we take the cameraman's imagination; and weld them all into something which points to the same objective.²

The starting point is naturally the playwright, but the success of a production is largely dependent upon the execution of the playwright's concept. To minimize the difficulties between conception and execution the director-producer should first understand the playwriting

¹ Marian Gallaway, Constructing a Play (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1950), p. xiii.

² Sidney Lumet, "Creating a Point of View," How to Direct for Television, ed. by William I. Kaufman (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1955), p. 27.

process. This study is an attempt to provide a partial understanding of one phase of that process, the adaptation of fiction to the television medium.

Statement of Problem

A gradual increase in the number of dramatic shows on television has resulted in a greater demand for scripts.³ The fact that script editors find it hard to discover more than one usable script in every three hundred or so submitted emphasizes the problem of a script shortage.⁴

What is the reason for this lack of quality television scripts? Perhaps playwrights are not familiar with the unique requirements of this new medium. The television writer must know and understand the scope and limitations of the medium. Robert S. Green says:

For the writer in television, it is not enough to provide a good story. The script must be written with the full knowledge of the limitations of television and must take into full consideration every technical device in television production by which dramatic and comedic elements are enhanced. The writer must keep in the front of his mind not only the limitations of the medium but also its possibilities. He must be aware of the mobility factors and limitations of actors, cameras, and sets, and his script must tie these elements together in a workable television play.⁵

³S. P. Shanley, "Scripts, Limited," New York Times (New York: January 15, 1956), p. 11.

⁴Eugene Burr, "Writing on Air," How to Write for Television, ed. by William I. Kaufman (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1955), p. 31.

⁵Robert S. Green, Television Writing (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), p. vii.

The adaptation of prose fiction is a possible solution for the shortage of dramatic television material. Plays for television and adaptations from other literary forms have been written, but the television industry is continually concerned with finding material which takes into consideration the scope and limitations of the medium.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to consider the criteria and limitations of the dramatic television play and with these factors in mind adapt one of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories for television. The problems involved in writing the adaptation will then be analyzed.

The term adaptation implies that the purpose of the playwright may supersede that of the author. Although a story usually does not lend itself to literal transference, an adaptation is somewhat faithful to the original material, but the playwright may take greater liberties with plot, character, and theme in terms of dramatic feasibility.⁶

The choice of Katherine Anne Porter's "Noon Wine" was because of its dramatic potentiality. All of Miss Porter's works, however, were considered. There has been only one study made on the fiction of Katherine Anne Porter. Edward Schwartz's The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter⁷ is an over-all analysis but does not concentrate on all of

⁶Roger M. Busfield, Dramatization and Adaptation (An unpublished paper, Michigan State University, April 1, 1956), pp. 3-4.

⁷Edward Schwartz, The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter Doctoral Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1953).

Miss Porter's short stories. Schwartz also published A Critical Bibliography on Katherine Anne Porter,⁸ which proved very valuable in finding critical evaluations of Miss Porter's work.

The first television adaptation of a Porter work, Pale Horse, Pale Rider, was produced March 22, 1956, by the Columbia Broadcasting System.

The adaptation was critically successful. John Crosby said:

Miss Porter's dialogue has the constant joy of the unexpected. The flavor of the period reminded me strongly of "Farewell to Arms," though in a very minor and rather feminine key. What interested me is that this fragile story could still be so fresh and appealing and so singularly⁹ free of any trace of the maudlin on contemporary television.

Procedure of Study

The procedure of this study will be to first analyze the limitations and criteria for the dramatic television play. With the limitations and criteria established, the next step will be the analysis of "Moon Wine." A story line will be abstracted from the original story and from this a scenario will be developed. The scenario will be the basis for the television adaptation, correlating the criteria and limitations of dramatic television with the analysis of "Moon Wine." The adaptation for television of "Moon Wine" will then be presented and the problems of the play will be discussed.

⁸Edward Schwartz, Katherine Anne Porter, A Critical Bibliography (New York: The New York Public Library, 1953).

⁹John Crosby, "Television and Radio," The State Journal (Lansing, Michigan, April 1, 1956), p. 31.

CHAPTER II

CRITERIA AND LIMITATIONS OF THE TELEVISION MEDIUM

There has been a great deal of comparison made between the various theatrical media and television. There are basic differences, however, which make writing for television a distinct technique. Television writing does not differ in dramatic technique but in the demands and limitations of the medium itself.¹ It is therefore necessary that the scope and limitations of the television medium be considered when analyzing material for television.

The Television Stage

The playwright, in writing for the stage, is conditioned to think in terms of the entire stage and in terms of permanent scenes.² Except for arena staging, the theatre still relies largely upon the proscenium arch or the framed picture type of staging. It would be a mistake to compare proscenium arch staging with television staging because of the resemblance to the rectangular frame of the television picture to the proscenium arch. Television has been even mistakenly called a little theatre in the home.³

¹Margaret R. Weiss, The TV Writer's Guide (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1952), p. 13.

²Eugene Burr, "Writing on Air," How to Write for Television, ed. by William I. Kaufman (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1955), p. 28.

³Worthington Miner, "Producing for Television," Producing the Play, ed. by John Gassner (New York: The Dryden Press, 1953), p. 439.

The stage in the television studio is different from the theatre stage. The television stage takes the form of a cone. Rudy Bretz describes the television stage in the following way:

It is a long, cone-shaped area, wide at the back and tapering to a point at the camera lens. If a director conceives of this area as his stage, he will stage action in depth, making his important entrances and exits either near the camera or at the far back. He will also remember that every time he cuts to another camera he is creating a new stage.⁴

Television Selectivity

"Television drama is conceived in terms of what the camera can see, since television is essentially a photographic medium."⁵ Because a new stage is created every time the director cuts from one camera to another, the writer can achieve the selectivity which so differentiates television writing from the other forms of playwriting. The writer does not sit with pen and paper, but with pen, paper and camera. The playwright writing for the legitimate stage must also visualize what he is writing, but he does not create a new stage every time there is a change of action or emphasis.

Immediacy, Spontaneity and Intimacy

One authority on the television medium has said, "Television's uniqueness is based on immediacy, spontaneity, and intimacy."⁶

⁴ Rudy Bretz, Techniques of Television Production (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1953), p. 29.

⁵ Edward Stasheff and Rudy Bretz, The Television Program (New York: A. A. Wyn, Inc., 1951), p. 21.

⁶ Ibid., p. 22.

Spontaneity implies a type of naturalness and this quality is closely related to the quality of immediacy. Edward Stasheff says that the immediacy of television is its ability to "transport the audience to the site of events taking place at the same moment."⁷

Edward Barry Roberts defines immediacy as "intensity." Roberts says that the characteristic of television is "immediacy of impact, intensity of impact on the viewer."⁸ Roberts further states that the "fourth wall" of the stage has been eliminated in television. By the term "fourth wall" is meant "the imaginary side of the room toward the audience which has theoretically been removed so that the spectators may look in."⁹ It should be mentioned that the "fourth wall" has also been eliminated in arena theatre.

There has been some controversy over the term "immediacy" in relation to live television drama. There are some people who feel that a live television drama carries with it the feeling of "live theatre" or "first night" excitement, but there are others who feel that the television audience should "lose themselves completely in the illusion of the story."¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸ Edward Barry Roberts, Television Writing and Selling (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1954), p. 2.

⁹ Alexander Dean, Fundamentals of Play Directing (New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1952), p. 396.

¹⁰ Stasheff & Bretz, op. cit., p. 22.

Television is an intimate medium because it broadcasts to the viewer in his home where he is not subject to the mass reaction which influences him in the theatre and the motion picture house. In an essay called "Good Theatre in Television," Paddy Chayefsky says,

The camera allows us a degree of intimacy that can never be achieved on the stage. On the stage, the element of projecting out to a large, organized audience precludes the use of delicate scenes. The scene must be sharp, clear, and the emotions examined must be profound and deeply disturbed ones.¹¹

The relative closeness of the television viewer to the performer on the screen must also be considered as a factor influencing the intimacy of television.

The Subtle Quality of Television

In reading the plays of Paddy Chayefsky it is apparent that his dramas are essentially character studies. Chayefsky says, "In television, there is practically nothing to subtle or delicate that you cannot examine it with your camera."¹²

Because television has this intimate and subtle quality the audience is quick to pick up the insincere, the false, and the distortion of reason. Television has the characteristic of "revealing character in quick, intense touches."¹³ The characterization which is accepted in

¹¹Paddy Chayefsky, "Good Theatre in Television," How to Write for Television, ed. by William I. Kaufman (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1955), p. 45.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Roberts, op. cit., p. 3.

the theatre will seem gross on television, because the television close-up magnifies emotion.

Structure and Time

The methodology changes with the subject matter in television writing and Chayefsky feel that powerful story lines and strong climaxes are not as important in television. He advocates stories built on a moment of insight into the life of a typical person.¹⁴

The hour-long television play is similar to the stage play in structure. Both are similar in that they follow the three-act form. Paddy Chayefsky says that he uses Act I to establish the situation, Act II for the subplot and foreshadowing, and Act III for the climax and resolution.¹⁵

John Crosby, in his syndicated newspaper column, quotes Walter Kerr who, at first glance, seems to disagree with Chayefsky. Kerr's thesis is that where the stage drama starts out slowly and builds to a third act climax, television starts out at a very intense pitch and then shrinks at the climax.¹⁶ This thesis is not a contradiction of what Chayefsky has to say, since, in this writer's opinion, Kerr seems to be concerned with the time element of television rather than with its

¹⁴Chayefsky, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁵Chayefsky, Television Plays (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 86.

¹⁶John Crosby, "Radio and Television," New York Herald Tribune (June 26, 1955), p. 33.

actual structure. The time limitation of television requires the playwright to start his play at a more intense pitch; he has to get into the action faster. The time limitation presents a difficulty to the writer. The half hour play calls for approximately 23 minutes of playing time, the hour show is roughly 50 minutes.¹⁷ Considering the restriction of television playing time, any adaptation will usually require condensation. In the adaptation of fiction, "the yardstick of selection should not, however, be its [fiction's] popularity, but the simplicity of its essential story."¹⁸

Economy and Exposition

Adherence to time limitations is an essential part of television writing. The writing must be economical. Every character trait must serve a definite plot purpose. Roberts says time cannot be wasted on a scene which does not advance the plot; time is too precious.¹⁹ Roberts also says the time limitation of television has resulted in one good method of exposition.

The sooner the principal characters come on camera and carry the burden of their own exposition--in action, through illustrative incidents which set the situation, start the plot going, and characterize the people--the better the television play.²⁰

¹⁷ Rod Serling, "The Happy Medium," How to Write for Television, ed. by William I. Kaufman (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1955), p. 70.

¹⁸ Worthington Miner, "Producing for Television," Producing the Play, ed. by John Gassner (New York: The Dryden Press, 1953), p. 495.

¹⁹ Roberts, op. cit., p. 9.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

The Growth of Conflict

If the nature of television is to be subtle it can be deduced that live television cannot present the panoramic or spectacular scenes, so inherent in the motion pictures, with any degree of realism. Ann Howard Bailey, who has written many plays for television, says that most of the conflicts for television drama will grow out of dialogue between people rather than from their actions.²¹

The "Out of Sight" Principle

Wide territory scenes should be avoided on live television.²² Filmed television shows do cover a wider scope, but even here Roberts applies the "out of sight" principle. This principle takes into account the fact that most viewing screens of home television receivers still are small. Because of the size of home receivers "everything is in proportion, i.e. people in relation to their settings, the vaster your setting in view, the smaller your people."²³ Roberts states that even the motion picture camera must work closer to action when it is filming a show for television.²⁴

²¹Anne Howard Bailey, "You can Write for TV - if -!", How to Write for Television, ed. by William I. Kaufman (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1955), p. 20.

²²Burr, op. cit., p. 29.

²³Roberts, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁴Ibid.

Controlling Factors of Live Television

Many filmed television shows cannot be produced as live television. According to Roberts, "The controlling factors of Time (transitions), Make-up and Costume Changes, and Scene Changes determine whether or not a 'motion picture' play can be produced 'live'."²⁵ The playwright writing for television must make sure that his characters have time to move from one set to the next in consecutive scenes. Make-up and costume changes require some time and thus it is necessary for the playwright to dramatically compensate for any of these variable factors.

The Budget and Identification

The National Broadcasting Company states in its interdepartmental correspondence to all writers doing originals and adaptations for NBC Matinee Theatre:

We are limited to 10 full parts and this is a budget requirement which we are sure you will all understand. This can mean seven full parts and six 5-line parts. (Two 5-line parts equal one full part) The ratio of full parts to 5-line parts is up to you. If your cast is small, we'll have more money to go after better actors. If necessary, we can use extras, but try to limit it to as few as possible.²⁶

There is another reason, aside from budget, for limiting the number of characters in a television play. Little identification can take place when a relatively short dramatic show has a large cast. It is

²⁵Ibid., p. 225.

²⁶National Broadcasting Company, Interdepartment Correspondence (New York: August 22, 1955), p. 1.

true that the theatre has to consider the same limitation, but television has even less time to develop characterization.

General Criteria

Certain limitations of the television medium have been considered. The cone of the television stage, the selectivity of the camera and director and the immediacy, spontaneity and intimacy of the medium all effect the writing technique of the playwright. The relationship of structure and time, economy and exposition, and the "Out of Sight" principle all, in some way, must be considered by the television playwright.

In addition to these limitations, the practical criteria imposed by commercial television should also be considered. Thomas H. Calhoun of the N. W. Ayer & Sons Advertising Agency states:

Every dramatic program series has, to begin with, an editorial premise, dictated by such things as the type of person (in terms of age, income, cultural background, etc.) you are trying to attract as a composite viewer, the type of environment into which the commercial message will fit best, and often the public relations objective of the sponsor.²⁷

The line separating limitation from criteria is an interrelated line and, in effect, a limitation is also a criteria. Several large advertising agencies which produce dramatic television shows list their general criteria for a program of this type. The following is a compendium of what these agencies state as their criteria for the dramatic television show.

²⁷Letter from Thomas H. Calhoun, Program Manager, N. W. Ayer & Son Advertising Agency (New York: November 22, 1955).

I. Any dramatic script, and this does not depend on the length of the script, should have "unity of action, time and place."

It is important to note here that the only dramatic unity Aristotle recognized is "Unity of Action."²⁸ "Unity of Action" is shown in two ways. First, all the forces in the play should have a causal relationship, and second, the forces should be directed toward a single end.²⁹

Edward Barry Roberts also mentions the unities of Aristotle:

They simply mean that you should choose, preferably a story with a tightly-knit plot, which takes place in not too many settings, and in as short a period of time as possible.³⁰

II. There is no preference in regard to subject matter, except that it should be of an historical or timely nature.

III. The playwright should not write above the heads of the composite audience, but he should also not give the feeling of writing down to an audience.

IV. Because of the heterogeneous composition of the audience, the playwright must choose his subject matter from a variety of mass appeal subject matter and present this material in a quick and attention getting manner. He must be sure that his material is in taste with American moral and ethical standards.

²⁸S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1923), p. 203.

²⁹Ibid., p. 204.

³⁰Edward Barry Roberts, Television Writing and Selling (Boston: The Writer, Inc., Publishers, 1954), p. 9.

In regard to subject matter, the playwright must adhere to the acceptability standards of program material as set forth by the Federal Communications Commission and the code of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters. Both organizations have a rather obvious list of television taboos. For example, the following are forbidden: profanity, obscenity, attacks on religion and sex crimes.³¹

V. From the point of view of a commercial dramatic show, the writer must be aware of the dangers of writing about highly controversial subject matter.

The production manager of a large New York advertising agency expressed the problem this way:

As we are a commercial organization basically serving the interests of our clients, and at the same time wanting to provide good entertainment in the home, we find it necessary to avoid any highly controversial subject matter which may or may not offend minority groups whose resultant ill will could be reflected upon our client's products.³²

VI. All the communications media have a similarity in that they should avoid situations and dialogue which could be called hackneyed or trite.

Many authorities point out similar points which the writer must consider in creating his original or adapted play. Although there is some overlapping, these additional criteria are indicated.

³¹National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters, The Television Code of Radio and Television Broadcasters, (Washington, D. C., March 1, 1952).

³²Letter from Roland F. Howe, Jr., Production Manager, Ruthrauff & Ryan Inc., Advertising (New York: November 21, 1955).

VII. The story should be such that the viewer identifies himself with a person or situation in the play.

VIII. Honesty and good taste are important factors in the television play.

IX. Phillip L. McHugh of the Campbell-Ewald Advertising Company points out that the story should be emotionally satisfying. He also stresses that the story should be uplifting in its implications.³³

It is according to these limitations and criteria established for dramatic television that the playwright should mold his play. It does not matter whether he is writing an original play or an adaptation. The important thing is that the playwright can achieve greater success if he understands and works with his medium.

³³Letter from Philip L. McHugh, Vice-President, Campbell-Ewald Company (Detroit: November 25, 1955).

CHAPTER III

THE ANALYSIS OF NOON WINE

The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter

Katherine Anne Porter's first volume of short fiction, Flowering Judas, was published in 1930.¹ Three more volumes of short fiction have appeared, Pale Horse, Pale Rider in 1939,² The Old Order³ and The Leaning Tower in 1944.⁴ In 1952, The Days Before, a personal record of Miss Porter's non-fiction writing, was published.⁵ Miss Porter is currently working on a novel called No Safe Harbor.

Although there were several of Miss Porter's short stories from which to choose, "Noon Wine" was selected because of its dramatic potentiality. The following short stories were also considered: "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," "The Jilting of Granny Weatherall," "The Cracked Looking-glass," "A Day's Work," "The Downward Path to Wisdom," "The Leaning Tower," "Rope," and "Theft."

¹Katherine Anne Porter, Flowering Judas (New York: The Modern Library, 1935).

²Katherine Anne Porter, Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York: The Modern Library, 1939).

³Katherine Anne Porter, The Old Order (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944).

⁴Katherine Anne Porter, The Leaning Tower (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1944).

⁵Katherine Anne Porter, The Days Before (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952).

Some of Miss Porter's writing was not considered suitable for television adaptation for several reasons. Nine of her short stories deal with moral or racial problems. Miss Porter's treatment of these stories was considered an integral part of the theme and the adaptation of these stories might offend various groups in the television audience. The stories considered in this category were: "Maria Concepcion," "Magic," "Flowering Judas," "The Source," "The Witness," "The Circus," "The Old Order," "The Last Leaf," and "The Grave."

Four of her short stories were considered so amorphous in nature that they would not fit a dramatic form. They were either too abstract or too vague in the dramatic unities or it was felt that they would not fit the basic physical limitations of the medium. The stories considered in this category were: "He," "That Tree," "Hacienda," and "Old Mortality."

Traditionalism versus Naturalism

Katherine Anne Porter is one of the southern traditionalist writers. The traditionalists covered a wider range of attitudes and interests than the group of writers known as "The Lost Generation." "The Lost Generation" was that group of writers which was disgusted and disillusioned by the post-World-War-I America. This disgust was reflected by the style and methodology of these writers.⁶ Gertrude Stein addressed

⁶ Malcolm Cowley, Exile's Return (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), pp. 6-7.

Ernest Hemingway as, "You are all the lost generation" and this phrase became the inscription to Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises."⁷

Most of the members of "The Lost Generation" were members of the naturalistic school of writing. Some of the members of this school were William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Dos Passos.⁸ The writers belonging to "The Lost Generation" fled America and located themselves in Paris. They actually fled New York because they felt like aliens in their own country. They were more at home in Montparnasse than in Greenwich Village. It is no wonder that Gertrude Stein referred to them as "the lost generation." Some of the writers remained in Paris while others returned to Connecticut farm-houses and tried to write.⁹ Malcolm Cowley states why this generation was lost:

It was lost because it tried to live in exile. It was lost because it accepted no older guides to conduct and because it had formed a false picture of society and the writer's place in it...They were seceding from the old and yet could adhere to nothing new; they groped there way toward another scheme of life, as yet undefined; in the midst of their doubts and uneasy gesture of defiance they felt homesick for the certainties of childhood.¹⁰

The Naturalistic writer conceived of man as a victim of his passions, his social and economic environment. This type of a man was devoid of

⁷Ibid.

⁸James D. Hart, The Oxford Companion to American Literature (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 517.

⁹Cowley, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

¹⁰Ibid.

free will. The naturalistic writer did not make any moral judgments, but rather painted a pessimistic picture of modern man.¹¹

Out of this generation of writers arose the traditionalist writer, whose aim was also to examine the morality of his time, but with the additional motive of perfecting his method of craftsmanship.¹² Whereas the naturalistic writer took a rather materialistic view of life, the traditionalist writer accepted this view but would not reject the past and its effect upon life.

Through this latter view a type of ambiguity was created and particular problems had many levels of consideration and explanation. A great deal of the literature created by the traditionalists reflects the ambiguity of life. Ray B. West describes the traditionalist writer in the following manner:

What distinguishes these writers as a group, however, is not merely the manner in which they differed from their predecessors but also the means by which they profited from the long line of literary tradition, applying the lessons of the past to a form which has up to this time scarcely achieved definition. From the past they recovered the concept of man as a heroic and tragic figure, thus substituting skepticism and irony for the wishful optimism of the nineteenth century.¹³

The southern traditionalist writer grew out of this group of traditionalist authors. In the South there is a society which has fallen from a point of social greatness and still relives its past moments of glory.

¹¹James D. Hart, op. cit., p. 517.

¹²Ray B. West, The Short Story in America (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 59.

¹³Ibid., pp. 59-60.

Thus a rather incongruous situation has been created, since the writer must examine a ruined society still living in the past, while examining it in terms of the present.¹⁴

It is interesting to compare the Southern traditionalist writer with a member of "The Lost Generation" of writers. Ernest Hemingway is considered a naturalistic writer and a member of "The Lost Generation." Edwin Berry Burgum has this to say about Hemingway:

Hemingway's admiration was perforce for the past; and one wonders for a time which horn of the dilemma a writer of so much esthetic insight would choose; whether he would align himself with the past, choosing the perfect at the price of its having become illusion, or accept the reality of present with its apparent imperfections.¹⁵

It is the opinion of this writer that Hemingway chose to accept the "reality of the present," whereas Katherine Anne Porter chose to examine the past in terms of the present and recognize the illusion.

Tragedy and Katherine Anne Porter

The Aristotelian concept of tragedy includes the thought that the tragic hero should fall from a position of elevation and eminence. This Southern society has done. Another Aristotelian idea is that fear and pity of the situation facing the tragic hero are essential for the drama.¹⁶ If the television play contains points such as pity and fear

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 71-72.

¹⁵ Edwin Berry Burgum, The Novel and the World's Dilemma (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 194.

¹⁶ S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1923), pp. 260-271.

a certain amount of empathy between screen and viewer is created. Butcher, in his interpretation of Aristotle's Poetics says, "So much human nature must there be in the tragic hero that we are able in some sense to identify ourselves with him, to make his misfortunes our own."¹⁷ In the opinion of the writer, an empathic response and identification between the viewer and action result in a more successful television drama.

Katherine Anne Porter's writing has been contrasted and compared with some of the poetry of Robert Frost. There is a startling similarity in theme and poetic quality between "Noon Wine" by Miss Porter and "The Death of the Hired Man" by Frost.

The tragic quality of Miss Porter's writing is shown by the two propositions around which her work revolves: "the necessity for moral definition, and the difficulty of moral definition."¹⁸ The two propositions are actually dilemmas. Miss Porter's characters must make a choice and the choice often leads to an exposure of the "tragic flaw." The flaw results in the destruction of the characters. Miss Porter's characters do not, however, have the moral elevation and dignity which the true tragic hero possesses.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction to Katherine Anne Porter, A Critical Bibliography," Katherine Anne Porter, A Critical Bibliography (New York: The New York Public Library, 1953), p. 9.

¹⁹ Butcher, op. cit., p. 260-271.

Miss Porter's characters are symbols, but they are also isolated. They are isolated in the sense that they possess their own peculiar personalities. "So much human nature must there be in him that we are able in some sense to identify ourselves with him, to make his misfortunes out own."²⁰ If this thought can be applied to the fiction of Katherine Anne Porter, her writing cannot be considered tragedy, although her writing has a tragic quality.

Miss Porter writes with the goal of preserving the continuity of an individual's life by relating the past to the present. Miss Porter expressed her philosophy when she wrote:

Perhaps in time I shall learn to live more deeply and consistently in the undistracted center of being where the will does not intrude, and the sense of time passing is lost, or has no power over imagination. Of the three dimensions of time, only the past is 'real' in the absolute sense that it has occurred, the future is only a concept, and the present is that fateful split second in which all action takes place.²¹

The Story of "Noon Wine"

"Noon Wine" is the story of a poor Texas dairy farmer who has a false sense of pride and dignity. He feels that he is too good to do certain types of farm work, which he feels are women's jobs. Mr. Royal Earle Thompson recovers some of his self-respect, or the illusion of self-respect, when he hires a Swedish farm-hand who causes the farm and

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Katherine Anne Porter, "Notes on Writing," The Creative Process, ed. by Brewster Chiselin (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1955), p. 200.

family to prosper. Claf Helton, the farm-hand, continually plays the theme, "Noon Wine," on his harmonica and the song is one level of theme for this short story.

The family grows and prospers for nine years until one day Mr. Thompson meets Homer T. Hatch who is an amateur detective and wishes to return Mr. Helton to the asylum from which he is supposed to have escaped. Mr. Thompson thinks that Hatch has plunged a knife into Helton when the farm-hand rushes out of the back yard and so Mr. Thompson kills Hatch with an axe. Thompson then sees Helton flee.

Mr. Thompson's life falls to pieces when Helton is captured and there is not a knife wound on him, although Helton has been killed by his captors. Thompson is exonerated by the court, but he still tries to recapture the respect and trust of his neighbors. The neighbors, however, do not believe him and so Thompson drags his sickly wife along to the neighbors' homes trying pitifully to free himself of his feeling of guilt. This drive to capture his former easy peace of mind continues until even his wife and two sons lose faith in him. He then seeks the only way out--suicide.

The Intimacy of "Noon Wine"

Gertrude Buckman, in a review of the volume which contains "Noon Wine," says:

She [Miss Porter] has written stories which at first glance seem to be little more than self-indulgent puffs of nostalgia, she holds so fast to reality, there is so much heart in her

accuracy, that the stories spread out beyond the bare meaning of the words and the incidents related, to become authoritative and substantial images of an entire society.²²

A television adaptation of "Noon Wine" would be possible since the basis of conflict is not in the spectacular or the unusual. It is related to the "intimate" meaning of a detailed study, through internal analysis, of a small moment of life.

Robert Penn Warren notes that in "Noon Wine" Miss Porter is similar to Frost, Chekhov, and Ibsen in that she has the technique of isolating common things and through simplicity and contrast achieves a type of sensitivity and eloquence.²³ There seems to be some relationship between intimacy and the simplicity of isolation. Here is an example of this technique of isolation:

The two grubby small boys with the two-colored hair who were digging among the ragweed in the front yard sat back on their heels and said, 'hello,' when the tall bony man with straw-colored hair turned in at their gate. He did not pause at the gate; it had swung back, conveniently half open, long ago, and was now sunk so firmly on its broken hinges no one thought of trying to close it. He did not even glance at the small boys, much less give them good-day. He just clumped down his big square dusty shoes one after the other steadily, like a man following a plow, as if he knew the place well and knew where he was going and what he would find there.²⁴

This flowing style is typical of Katherine Anne Porter and points up the simplicity and continuity of the prose narration. This is not

²²Gertrude Buckman, "Miss Porter's New Stories," Partisan Review, XII (Winter, 1945), p. 134.

²³Robert Penn Warren, "Introduction," Katherine Anne Porter, A Critical Bibliography, ed. by Edward Schwartz (New York: The New York Public Library, 1953), p. 8.

²⁴Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine," Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York: Random House Publishers, 1939), p. 93.

the pseudo-intellectual jargon of the sophisticated society writer. It is understandable to a wide and heterogeneous audience. The dialogue and descriptive passages have a poetic quality which has a cumulative effect resulting in the mood and tense atmosphere of "Noon Wine."

Characterization and Adaptation

For the television adaptation the descriptive passages can very easily be translated into camera shots and stage directions. Miss Porter's writing is a disciplined type of writing and there is neither waste nor artificiality in her style.²⁵ One of the problems involved in adapting "Noon Wine" to television is brought about by the different ways in which Miss Porter creates characterization in her short stories. All of the characterization in a television play, as in a stage play, is produced through action, dialogue, movement, stage business, and mood effects. In Miss Porter's story characterization is produced by revealing the actual thoughts of the characters and through the author's description of the character's actions. The playwright, in adapting this story, will have to translate this descriptive characterization into explicit and observable action.

The story is told through the narration of the third person. Miss Porter achieves a rather paradoxical situation in the fact that when most writers use this omniscient viewpoint an attitude of detachment

²⁵Warren, op. cit., p. 7.

is developed,²⁶ whereas Miss Porter creates a type of freedom of characterization and a certain inwardness of character through her use of selectivity and simplicity.²⁷ Here again the playwright must apply dramatic writing techniques to transfer the simplicity and selectivity of this short story to the adaptation for the television medium.

The Theme of "Noon Wine"

The theme of "Noon Wine" is that the inherent goodness of man is often mistaken for evil. This theme represents the ambiguity and irony of life. This ambiguity is present on an over-all level, but is also present in the individual lives of the characters involved. It is, however, expressed in different ways by each character.

The Analysis of Royal Earle Thompson

In Royal Earle Thompson, Miss Porter has created a man who is very disillusioned about life, but who does not recognize his own disillusionment. He feels a loss of dignity when he has to milk cows, churn butter, or any other kind of farm work; work which he feels is women's work. In Thompson's mind is the constant thought that he needs to appear, in the eyes of his fellow men, as someone worth-while.

All his carefully limited fields of activity were related somehow to Mr. Thompson's feeling for the appearance of things,

²⁶ Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1948), p. 393.

²⁷ Warren, op. cit.

his own appearance in the sight of God and man. 'It don't look right,' was his final reason for not doing anything he did not wish to do.²³

Earle Thompson is "a tough weather-beaten man with stiff black hair." He usually needs a shave. He thinks he is bigger than he really is. He is a small man who carries himself like a large man. There is a false sense of gruffness about him which is a covering for his deep sensitivity.

Thompson is a failure and, of course, he does not and will not recognize this fact. It is interesting to see that there is a certain amount of warm unity in the family and it is important to note that Thompson is essentially a good man. Thompson's striving for pride and dignity is ambiguous, because his conception of these terms are not realistically understood.

Thompson, in his relationship with other men, shows that he is self-conscious and has to put up a blustering front as a means for appearing with dignity. But Royal Earle Thompson is not a stupid man, for he shows insight into Helton and especially Mr. Hatch.

"His joviality made Mr. Thompson nervous, because the expression in the man's eyes didn't match the sounds he was making."²⁹

Although Thompson probably has selfish motives in his subconscious mind, he does not kill Hatch with premeditation. The court's verdict is based on the lack of premeditation and after he is acquitted by

²³Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine," Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York: Random House, 1939), p. 113.

²⁹Ibid., p. 131.

the court, Thompson still has the feeling of frustration and self-guilt. In the end he is completely shattered by his family's loss of faith in him. Very methodically he takes a shotgun and commits suicide.

He was trembling and his head was drumming until he was deaf and blind, but he lay down flat on the earth on his side, draw the barrel under his chin and fumbled for the trigger with his great toe. That way he could work it.³⁰

Thompson is a man who lived according to a code and a tradition which he has set up as a criteria for himself. The code, however, is not a consistent one.

Head erect, a prompt payer of taxes, yearly subscriber to the preacher's salary, land owner and father of a family, employer, and a hearty good fellow among men.³¹

Here is the idealized picture in which Thompson frames himself, but there is also an interwoven realistic picture of him. The man procrastinates and saves necessary work for the time when his sons will have grown-up. He rationalizes his wife's sickness until her sickness is no longer a hinderance, but an item of which he is proud and can depend on. His private code says: "It doesn't pay to be friendly with strangers from another part of the country. They're always up to something, or they'd stay at home where they belong."³² He is inconsistent in that he trusts Helton although Helton is as much a stranger to him as Hatch.

³⁰Ibid., p. 176.

³¹Ibid., p. 114.

³²Ibid., pp. 113-114.

Hatch: The Personification of Evil

One of the causes of conflict in "Noon Wine" is the clash of personality between Hatch and Thompson. What has been created is a duel between good and evil. Before he kills Hatch, Thompson seems justified in his dislike of the mercenary detective. The detective is more than a ruthless money-hungry individual, he is a personification of evil.

While they were talking, Mr. Thompson kept glancing at the face near him. He certainly did remind Mr. Thompson of somebody, or maybe he really had seen the man somewhere. He couldn't just place the features. Mr. Thompson decided that all rabbit-teethed men looked alike.³³

What Thompson really sees is the reflection of the evil of mankind in Hatch. Glenway Wescott, in his review of "Noon Wine," comments that Hatch not only hunts men, but represents all of mankind as an immortal manhunter. Wescott continues and says, "He is not only a busybody, he is the great American busybody...she...Miss Porter...means Hatch to be a personification as well as a person."³⁴

Most of the characters in "Noon Wine" seem to have physically paradoxical qualities, as if they had gone through some type of metamorphosis. Hatch is one of these characters who shows signs of physical or mental change.

³³ Ibid., pp. 132-133.

³⁴ Glenway Wescott, "Praise," Southern Review (1939), pp. 161-173.

He wasn't exactly a fat man. He was more like a man who had been fat recently. His skin was baggy and his clothes were too big for him, and he somehow looked like a man who should be fat, ordinarily, but who might have just got over a spell of sickness.³⁵

Hatch's free manner and false laughter are a means to an end. His object is to twist everything said or done until it becomes advantageous to himself. He turns his mood on and off according to the existing conditions and makes the most of his opportunities. Hatch is society's parasite and like a cancerous growth, he taints every living thing he touches.

The Tragedy of Royal Earle Thompson

Throughout his discussion with Hatch, Thompson is on the defensive, seeking to recover his lost dignity and straighten out the twisting of his words by Mr. Hatch. The irony of the story is that the Thompson family is not brought to destruction by any fault or mistake of their own. Their downfall is caused by their striving, especially Thompson's, to be good and decent in the eyes of their fellow men.

The act of murder which Thompson commits is rather ambivalent in its nature. In one way he has committed a grave sin, on the other hand, he has somehow seen the evil in Hatch and has performed a worthy act by destroying this evil. Thompson could be considered a tragic figure had he known what he did, but the paradox is that he does not know the importance of his action.

³⁵ Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine," Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York: Random House Publishers, 1939), p. 130.

Katherine Anne Porter has always been interested in this type of a tragic figure. Edward Schwartz says:

...she [Miss Porter] believes that before a man can accept his human responsibility he must lose his childhood innocence and understand the fact of evil and death in human life. Such an awareness, Miss Porter recognizes, may lead to negation and death, but the road to salvation, to a sense of individual isolation and a consequent compassion and return to human community, is arduous and the unwary may not escape from its Scylla or Charybdis. And so Miss Porter's irony is inseparable from a complex attitude that is basically tragic: she senses a tragic flaw in the human faculty; man creates his own evil, plots his own destruction.³⁶

The Analysis of Olaf Helton

Olaf Helton is the catalyst of "Noon Wine" in that he brings about positive change by causing the family and farm to prosper. But he also brings negative change when he indirectly causes Thompson to kill Hatch. Thompson defends Helton and this defense is the motivating factor for Thompson's act of murder.

Miss Porter does not characterize Helton as she does the other figures in the story. Helton seems to be a symbol rather than a character. By character is meant, "The sum of the traits and devices that serve to individualize and personalize an agent in the story."³⁷ This absence of characterization by Miss Porter is because Helton is a personification of what he stands for; the victim of the persecution of man.

³⁶Edward Schwartz, The Fiction of Katherine Anne Porter. (Doctoral Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1953), p. 231.

³⁷Hubert C. Hefner, Samuel Selden & Hunter D. Sellman, Modern Theatre Practice (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, 1946), p. 28.

The tune Helton continually plays on his harmonica symbolizes the theme and is related to the tragedy of man.

'One of the Scandahoovians told me what it meant, that's how I come to know, said Mr. Hatch, 'Especially that part about getting so gay you jus' go ahead and drink up all the likker you got on hand before noon.'³⁸

Man has his noon wine in paradise, but with nothing left disintegration of paradise results. The song and title "Noon Wine" take on an almost amorphous quality and what results is a poetic and lyrical atmosphere and mood interwoven throughout the story.

Mr. Helton is a tall and skinny man with legs too long for his body. He has faded straw-colored hair and a "long gaunt face with blue eyes and white eyebrows."

He is similar to Mrs. Thompson in that they both lack vitality. Helton could also be considered faded out, but in a different manner from Mrs. Thompson. Helton is a washed-out person, not an individual, but one who has been tamed by the forces of life and has lost all instincts of spirit and passion. Helton does not talk or look at people, he just talks and looks through people.

He never had looked at Mr. Thompson, but there wasn't anything sneaking in his eye, either. He didn't seem to be looking anywhere else. His eyes sat in his head and let things pass them. They didn't seem to be expecting to see anything worth looking at.³⁹

Even in Helton there seems to be some hidden strength. He is like an automaton who is motivated by some mysterious force and when the

³⁸Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine," Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York: Random House Publishers, 1939), p. 146.

³⁹Ibid., p. 95.

automaton breaks down the source of failure is usually a worn out tube or a stripped gear. Helton is an automaton with a schizophrenic condition. He has a split personality to such an extent that maniacal tendencies are aroused when someone touches his precious harmonicas.

Why is Helton a Swede? One possible answer is that the Swedish people have been stereotyped as being diligent and virtuous. Helton must be characterized in such a way that his passive mood is a contrast to the extreme passion he exhibits when his harmonicas are touched. Actually Helton could have been of any other nationality, but the term "Swede" has a connotation which is economical in his characterization.

The Analysis of Mrs. Thompson

The rest of the family consists of Mrs. Thompson and her two sons, Arthur and Herbert. The two boys are eight and six years old in the early part of the story and seventeen and fifteen years old at the end.

Mrs. Ellie Thompson is a physically weak person and yet she needs her sickness. To a certain extent, her early loss of faith in her husband has resulted in a dependence on her sickness. She can be considered a hypochondriac. She shows constant signs of marked anxiety as to her own health and, perhaps, even thinks up imaginary ailments.

Mrs. Thompson is a little woman with brown hair. She has "a suffering patient mouth and diseased eyes" and these features are pointed up by a few remaining signs of girlish beauty. She has faded and very little vitality remains within her. She is so faded that she clings to the shade because the sunlight hurts her eyes.

Mrs. Thompson is an educated woman and has insight into her husband and children. She takes pride in her two sons and treats them with tenderness. She has a certain amount of strength in her weakness. This weakness has made her oversensitive to emotion and cruelty.

Both the wife and the sons are sign-posts to show how the family relationship has disintegrated. In the end, the fear by Mrs. Thompson, that perhaps her husband can kill again, causes Thompson to lose his remaining dignity or self respect and he goes to his death.

CHAPTER IV

SCENARIO FOR NOON WINE

ACT I

It is a lonely night. Royal Earle Thompson is sitting on a log. He stares straight ahead and he is leaning on a shotgun with both of his hands. He slowly, as if in a daze, puts down the shotgun. Then he slowly unties his right shoe, takes it off, takes off his sock and puts it back into his shoe. He sits a moment and picks up the shotgun again. He sets the butt of the shotgun on the ground, leans his chin against the gun mouth. Thompson slowly puts his toe against the trigger. He sits gathering courage. Beads of sweat begin to cover his face, tears form in his eyes and he begins to cry. He lifts his head, lowers it again. He sobs and breaks down, lowering the gun.

FLASHBACK

It is early in the morning and two small boys sit in front of their farm home. The yard is surrounded by a broken-down old fence and gate. The house is a wooden-one-story house. It is weatherbeaten and in need of a good painting. Three sides of the house are surrounded by a porch.

A tall bony man with faded overalls and shirt walks through the gate. He passes the boys, who say hello, but the man doesn't answer.

He walks right up on the porch, as if he knew exactly where he was going, and walks around to the side porch where Mr. Thompson is sitting daydreaming as he churns butter.

The man, Olaf Helton, tells Thompson that he is looking for work. Thompson says that he is in need of some help and the two men introduce each other. There is some discussion about where Helton has worked before and Helton comes right to the point and says that he is used to getting a dollar a day. Thompson is taken by surprise and explains why he cannot pay that much money. As he is explaining this, Helton never changes his expression and stares straight ahead. Helton takes out a harmonica and plays a rather sad song.

Thompson offers Helton seven dollars a month plus room and board. The Swede takes the offer and is told to keep the harmonica out of reach of the children. The farm-hand reacts by pressing the harmonica close to his body and then puts it in his shirt pocket, as if hiding it. Thompson tells the Swede what he has to do and tells him to continue the churning. The farmer gets up and walks around to the front of the house and into the living room. A small frail woman is working in the kitchen. The kitchen has two large windows from which Helton can be seen churning the butter and also a shack can be seen about thirty feet away. This is the hired man's shack. Thompson comes in and tells his wife how good a bargain he made and how he got it. Thompson tells Ellie that he is going to go into town for groceries. She warns him not to go to the saloon, but he walks out laughing. Ellie works a bit and then lies down.

Ellie wakes up to hear the sound of a harmonica. It is the same tune Helton played earlier and is the "Noon Wine" theme. She lies still when suddenly the music stops. Ellie gets up and walks over to the kitchen window where she sees Helton furiously shaking first one boy and then the other. Helton lets them go and the boys run silently towards the porch. Mrs. Thompson walks through the living room and opens the screen door. She has forgotten her sunglasses, so she shades her eyes and walks out on the porch where the two boys sit very quietly. She asks them what they were doing and they answer, "Nothing." She tells them to help her in the house and they scamper into the house, followed by Ellie.

TIME TRANSITION

The screen door opens and Mr. Thompson enters. He straightens himself up and walks toward Ellie and pinches her cheek. "No more meat on you than a rabbit, Now I like 'em cornfed."

Mrs. Thompson answers, "Why, Mr. Thompson, sometimes I think you're the evilest-minded man that ever lived." She tells her husband that he has been drinking. He shrugs off the fact and he tells her how Helton's already cleaned up the shack and has the butter and eggs ready. He is very proud of himself and tells Ellie what a businessman her husband is. "Yes Sir, I know a good thing when I see one."

Mrs. Thompson's mood changes and she tells her husband that the hired man has shaken the boys for some reason. She tells him to find

out what was wrong. He goes out to talk with Helton and Ellie goes to the window and calls the boys. The boys come in playing and imitating the Swede. "Gude not," imitating his speech. Ellie tells them to wash up for supper and they go to a pan of water in the sink, splash water on their hands and faces. They both wipe their hands on their pants, still playing the game; "Gude not, Gude not." Thompson enters, not noticing the boys, tells his wife what happened. The boys had sneaked into Helton's shack and had got his harmonica dirty. Thompson notices the boys and tells Ellie how bad they really are and how he is going to whip them. He says that they will wind up in a penitentiary. Herbert says, "I'm going to get sent to the 'formatory when I'm old enough." The father asks who said that and Herbert says that the Sunday school teacher told him that. The father gets mad and the boys sense that he means business.

Ellie tells her husband that the boys are very little and she persuades her husband that she ought to take care of the punishment. She tells the boys to call Helton and to be nice about it. The boys go out to the door and Thompson says, "Them boys!" All of a sudden the boys yell, "Say, Helton, you big Swede! Supper's ready!" Thompson hears this and says, "Them boys 'ill be the ruin of me yet."

Mrs. Thompson says that the boys are good boys and that if anyone is going to be the ruin of Mr. Thompson, it could just as well be any stranger, even the man outside. Thompson looks at his wife.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

It is nine years later. The boys and Helton have just left the table. Thompson relaxes and comments that the preacher has asked him to become a member of the church council. Ellie complains that in nine years Helton has not gone to church and that he does not eat right. The sound of the harmonica can be heard in the background. Thompson tells her not to worry about Helton since everything has improved and they are even making a little money; in fact he has given Helton several raises. Ellie wonders what the hired man does with his pay, since he seldom goes into town. Arthur and Herbert enter and ask their father whether they can go into town to get some wood for the new corn crib. The father says all right and tells them to take care of a few other matters in town. The boys exit and Ellie comments on how the boys have grown up and Thompson explains it is because they were brought up the right way. Thompson thinks about resting a while on the front porch and so he goes out. He stands there looking out for a minute and sits down. The sound of a team and wagon is heard coming to a stop in front of the yard. A man wearing rather baggy clothes, as if he once fit them, comes through the gate and walks up to the steps. He introduces himself as Homer T. Hatch. He says that he has come to buy a horse. Thompson explains that he does not have a horse for sale and that he usually tacks up a little sign when he does. Hatch roars with unnatural laughter and explains that this is an old joke of his because he has noticed that nobody gets suspicious when he says that he has come to buy something. Thompson answers that he is never suspicious of anyone

and the stranger says that he is really come to talk to him about a "little matter." Thompson suggests that they go around to the other side of the house where it is a bit more shady. This is the side away from the kitchen and the hired man's shack. The men sit down on two stumps near the woodpile and Thompson first takes an axe, buried in one of the stumps, and lays it down on the ground. There is some conversation about where each of the men came from originally and finally Hatch discloses he's looking for a man named Olaf Helton. Thompson finds himself on the defensive and says that Helton is a steady man. Hatch replies that the Swede must have mended his ways. "Now when I knew Helton he was pretty wild." He continues and says that it will be nice to see his old friend again, especially since he has settled down. Thompson says that everyone is young once and offers to get the hired man. Hatch replies that there is no hurry. The sound of the harmonica theme is heard. Thompson says, "There he is, now's your time. I know that tune like I know the palm of my own hand, but I never heard Mr. Helton say what it was."

Hatch explains that the song has something to do with drinking all you have in the morning. Thompson says that Helton has not touched a drop in nine years. Hatch says he once played "Little Brown Jug" on the fiddle, but Helton used to sing his own little song when he was in the asylum. Thompson is bewildered and the discussion continues, being centered about Helton and Thompson. Hatch twists Thompson's words and the farmer finds himself defending himself.

Thompson takes out a plug of tobacco and cuts himself a chew and offers Hatch some, but Hatch takes out his own plug and cuts himself a chew. The knives used are pointed up. The men discover that they differ in the taste of tobacco and Thompson finding himself losing the argument gets back to Helton. He mentions the fact that with conditions as they are, its a wonder more men don't wind up in straight-jackets. Hatch twists his words by saying that Thompson is right and that there isn't every man in a straight-jacket that ought to be there.

Thompson is baffled and just sits there. He looks around, his eyes hitting the ground and noticing the axe.

Hatch says that there are some people who would even hire a lunatic in their house. Thompson asks what Helton did. Hatch tells of how the Swede shoved a pitchfork through his own brother when he borrowed his harmonica to court a girl and lost it. His brother would not buy him a new harmonica and so Helton killed him.

Thompson replies that something might have driven Helton to do such a thing and that Helton really thinks a lot of his harmonicas.

Hatch says that, "You'd get pretty sick of hearin' the same tune year in, year out." Thompson starts to stare at Hatch, never taking his eyes off him, and says that it would help if Helton would play a new tune, but that the old tune is a pretty good tune.

Hatch discloses the fact that he makes a living by capturing escaped lunatics and collecting the rewards. Helton has kept him from having a hundred percent record. He also mentions that the law is behind him. He tells how Helton had sent his old mother a check for

eight hundred and fifty dollars and the old woman was so happy hearing from her lost son that she told everyone. Hatch heard about this and offered to find out, on his own expense, how her son was. The mother gave him a lot of presents to give to her son, which he sort of lost on the way.

Thompson is stunned by this speech and tells Hatch that he thinks Hatch is pretty generous. He asks the detective what he is going to do now and Hatch takes out a pair of hand-cuffs. "But I don't want no violence if I can help it...I figured the two of us could overpower him."

Thompson begins to lose control of himself and tells Hatch to get out. The detective lets Thompson know that he can always get the sheriff and that he counted on him being a respectable man. He also says it won't look good to the neighbors to be harboring a lunatic.

Thompson stands up and moves toward Hatch saying that Helton's been harmless for nine years. Hatch also stands and advances toward Thompson even as the latter man is talking. Thompson completely loses control of himself and shouts that the crazy man is Hatch, not Helton. It is Thompson who is advancing now and they stand face to face. "You're on my land! Get off or I'll knock you off!"

Suddenly Helton comes running and Hatch whirls around. Helton stops short and Thompson sees Hatch plunge a knife into Helton's stomach. Thompson picks up the nearby axe and brings it down on Hatch.

Thompson calls, "Ellie! Ellie!" Ellie runs around to this side of the porch and Thompson yells "He killed Mr. Helton, I had to

knock him out." Ellie says that Helton is running away. She comes down from the porch, looks at the scene and faints. Thompson is shown holding the axe in his hands.

TRANSITION

Thompson is sitting in a jail cell. A long bed consists of the furniture in the cell. There are no windows. Several other cells are on each side of this one. Thompson is holding his head in his hands, staring down at the floor. Two sets of foot steps are heard, but Thompson doesn't look up. Mr. Burleigh opens up the cell with a set of keys and Ellie introduces the lawyer. Burleigh is very abrupt and business-like and tells Thompson that the case is open and shut. The lawyer tells Thompson that he will plead 'not guilty' on the grounds of self-defense and trespassing. Thompson tries to tell the lawyer that he was defending someone else and Burleigh says Thompson's case is not unusual and tells of all the men who, for some reason or other, have been forced to kill someone else.

"But Hatch made a pass at Mr. Helton with a knife." The lawyer tells Thompson that Helton is dead. Thompson jumps up and says that is why it is not self defense. "I tried to save his life." The lawyer never lets him finish and says that Helton had no knife wound on him and that he died of wounds suffered in his capture by the sheriff. Thompson sinks down on his bed. He does not know what to say next. Finally he says that Ellie saw everything. Ellie is confused for a second and finally says that she did see everything. Burleigh sees

through this lie and tells Ellie to just sit in court. He tells Thompson that he should keep calm and he will do the rest. "Let me do the convincing and I'll have you off before you know it."

Thompson repeats that he tried to save Helton's life, but the lawyer just agrees and says goodbye. He asks Ellie if she is leaving. Ellie says she would like to stay awhile. The lawyer walks out, closes the cell and Thompson runs to the edge of the cell and shouts that he did not try to kill anyone. "He tried to kill Mr. Helton. I'm not a murderer." Ellie puts her hand on her husband's shoulder as if to quiet him down, but Thompson ignores her. He turns around, head down, and sits on the bed.

TRANSITION

The scene is the office of the lawyer. It is a one-room office with scattered books and papers. Burleigh is sitting on a swivel chair, his back to the office. His feet are on the window sill. There is a knock at the door, Burleigh turns around yelling, "Just a second." Thompson walks in and the lawyer's face changes from eager expectation to impatience. He asks Thompson why he is here again. Thompson tries to explain, but the lawyer says that he has been acquitted and asks what he wants donw now. Thompson says that he thought he could talk with him for awhile, since there were things he forgot to tell the lawyer. The lawyer says he is very busy, but Thompson pleads for a chance to talk and the lawyer sits back and half listens.

Thompson tells the lawyer that he forgot to tell him that Hatch was such a bad person and exactly how Helton had run out to Hatch. The lawyer interrupts that he has been acquitted and Thompson shouts that he is not a murderer. Burleigh answers that he does not care what Thompson is: "I've done my job and that was to get you off the hook." He tells the farmer that he is a busy man. The lawyer turns his back on Thompson, who is about to say something, but instead walks very slowly and dejectedly out of the office.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

The scene is the living room of the Thompson home. Mr. and Mrs. Thompson are putting on their coats. Arthur comes in from the porch and asks his father why he has to go see the neighbors, since the eggs have to be brought into town. Thompson loses his temper and tells the boy that someone has to keep up the good name of the family and that the eggs can wait. Thompson is very nervous and shouts at the shell of the woman who is his wife. He tells her to hurry up and asks her what is taking all the time. Ellie hurries and finally she is ready. The couple leave.

TIME TRANSITION

The scene is the front of a broken down old farm house. A rather dirty boy is sitting on the front steps. The sound of a horse and carriage is heard coming to a halt before the house. The boy looks up. Mr. and Mrs. Thompson walk up the over-grown path. The boy sees them and yells, "Hey Pa, here's the man that hilled that Hatch fella!" Thompson stops and then starts again. A sloppy-looking couple come out of the house and walk down the steps. The family stares at Thompson. Thompson shuffles his feet and explains he has come because he had some trouble lately and he did not want the neighbors to misunderstand. The neighboring couple look at each other with a smile crossing the farmer's face. The farmer says that he does not need to be convinced of anything. It is not his business whether Thompson has killed anyone.

Thompson explains that Ellie saw everything. Ellie stiffens and agrees. The farmer says that he does not see any reason why he should get mixed up in "murder business." Thompson says that he didn't want anyone to have the wrong ideas and starts to tell the whole story, but he is interrupted by the farmer, who says it was nice of Thompson to take the trouble of straightening out the whole story since they had heard a lot of rumors. Thompson does not pay any attention to what has been said and continues, but the farmer and his wife turn their backs on him and Ellie and go into their home. Only the boy is left and Thompson turns to him and continues saying that he is no murderer. The boy just stares back. Thompson says, "You see, I'm no murderer." Thompson begins to lose control of himself and Ellie stope her husband. Thompson walks back to the wagon muttering to himself.

TRANSITION

The scene is the bedroom of the Thompson's. It is late at night. Ellie is sleeping. Thompson is still dressed and is gazing out of the window. The wood-pile is silhouetted in the moonlight. Thompson stares at the scene. He lowers his head, turns around and looks at Ellie sleeping. He looks outside again and hears the harmonica tune that Helton used to play and then he sees Helton sitting on one of the stumps playing his harmonica. Thompson begins to mutter to himself and addresses some of his comments to Helton. He lowers his head and looks out again to see no one outside except that the axe is sitting on one of the stumps. Thompson begins to sweat. He looks out again and sees Hatch sitting out on the woodpile. Hatch keeps saying that no respectable person would let a lunatic in his home and laughs. Thompson once again mutters and talks. He is beginning to lose his self control. He is spellbound by what he sees. A nervous twitch crosses his face and he sees Hatch disappear and lawyer Burleigh appears sitting on the porch. The lawyer mentions that there was not a knife wound on Helton and tells Thompson that he is a reasonable man. Thompson then sees the dirty son of the farming couple walking around yelling, "Hey Pa, here comes the man that killed that Hatch fella!" Thompson begins to sob and looks outside to hear and see Helton playing his tune, Hatch laughing uncontrollably, the lawyer talking, and the neighbors yelling "Murderer! murderer!" The whole group slowly advances toward the porch and Thompson tries verbally to defend himself.

He shouts that they are all crazy. He shouts for everything to stop. "I'm not a murderer, stop! stop!" He smashes the window with his hand. Ellie screams. Thompson whirls around to find Ellie hysterical. He rushes over to her bed and comforts her, but she continues to sob hysterically. He calls for Arthur and Herbert, who rush in. Arthur puts a lamp on the table and comforts his mother. He comments that she looks scared to death. Arthur stands up, doubles his fist up and tells his father, "Don't ever touch her again." Thompson tries to say something, but no words come out. The boys look after the mother and Thompson says that he is going to get the doctor and that the boys should look after the mother. He walks out of the room muttering that he never tried to harm Ellie in all his life. The boys watch him go out. Thompson goes into the living room and sits down with a pencil and paper and writes a note. He looks back into the bedroom and walks out, taking the shotgun from its rack in the kitchen.

TRANSITION

Thompson is sitting outside. His right shoe and sock are off and the shotgun lies on the ground. He picks up the shotgun. He looks toward the house. He slowly places his big toe to the trigger.

TRANSITION

The boys are still looking after their mother. Ellie is much better now. Arthur tells Herbert to make some coffee. Herbert walks through the living room, he has the lamp in his hands. He notices the

note and calls Arthur in alarm. Arthur rushes in, picks up the note and reads it aloud. As he reads the note, Ellie has stood up and is framed in the doorway. "It was Mr. Homer T. Hatch who came to do wrong to a harmless man. He caused all this trouble and he deserved to die, but I am sorry it was me who had to kill him."

As Ellie hears this letter, she rushes to the door, but before she gets there the sound of a shotgun is heard. Ellie leans against the door and crumbles to the floor.

END OF ACT III

CHAPTER V

NOON WINE

A Play for Television by Gary Gumpert

Adapted from the short story by
Katherine Anne Porter

CAST

Olaf Eric Helton
Royal Earle Thompson
Ellie Thompson
Arthur Thompson
Herbert Thompson
Homer T. Hatch
Mr. Burleigh
The neighbor's boy
The neighboring couple

NCCN WINEACT I

(IT IS A LONELY SUMMER NIGHT IN SOUTH TEXAS. THE ACTION TAKES PLACE AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. ROYAL EARLE THOMPSON IS SITTING ON A LOG IN A RATHER BARREN FIELD. THOMPSON IS NOT A BIG MAN, ALTHOUGH HE GIVES THE APPEARANCE OF BEING BIG. HE IS A PROUD MAN AND USUALLY NEEDS A SHAVE. HE STARES STRAIGHT AHEAD, ALTHOUGH HE ISN'T LOOKING AT ANYTHING. THOMPSON IS LEANING ON A SHOTGUN; BOTH OF HIS HANDS CLENCHING THE BARRELS OF THE GUN. HE SLOWLY, AS IF IN A DAZE, PUTS DOWN THE SHOTGUN: AS IF SOMETHING WERE DRIVING HIM, HE SLOWLY UNTIES HIS RIGHT SHOE, TAKES IT OFF, TAKES OFF HIS SOCK AND PUTS THE SOCK BACK INTO THE SHOE. HE SITS A MOMENT AND THEN PICKS UP THE SHOTGUN AGAIN. HE SETS THE BUTT OF THE SHOTGUN ON THE GROUND, PLACES HIS TOE AGAINST THE TRIGGER. HE LEANS HIS CHIN AGAINST THE GUN MOUTH. THOMPSON SITS FOR A WHILE GATHERING COURAGE; BEADS OF SWEAT BEGIN TO COVER HIS FACE, TEARS FORCE THEIR WAY INTO HIS EYES AND HE BEGINS TO CRY. HE LIFTS HIS HEAD AND LOWERS IT AGAIN. THOMPSON'S BODY HEAVES WITH HIS SOBBING AND HE BREAKS DOWN, LOWERING THE GUN.)

FADE OUT:

FLASHBACK

(IT IS EARLY IN THE MORNING AND TWO SMALL BOYS SIT IN FRONT OF THEIR FARM HOME. THE YARD IS SURROUNDED BY A BROKEN-DOWN-OLD FENCE AND GATE. THE HOUSE IS A WOODEN ONE-STORY HOUSE. IT IS WEATHER BEATEN AND IN NEED OF PAINTING. THREE SIDES OF THE HOUSE ARE SURROUNDED BY A PORCH. THE BOYS ARE THROWING STONES AT EACH OTHER. A TALL BONY MAN WITH FADED OVERALLS AND SHIRT WALKS THROUGH THE GATE. HE PASSES THE BOYS, WHO SAY HELLO, BUT THE MAN DOESN'T ANSWER. HE WALKS RIGHT UP ON THE PORCH, AS IF HE KNEW EXACTLY WHERE HE WAS GOING, AND WALKS AROUND TO THE SIDE PORCH WHERE MR. THOMPSON IS SITTING ON THE STEPS, DAYDREAMING, AS HE CHURNS BUTTER. THOMPSON IS CHEWING TOBACCO. THE MAN TALKS WITH A SLIGHT SWEDISH ACCENT.)

HELTON

I need work.

THOMPSON

What?

HELTON

You need a man here?

THOMPSON

Well, I reckon I do...yeh...what kind of work do ye do?

HELTON

Any kind

THOMPSON

Guess I could..lost a couple of men a little ways
back....fight...no good to me.

(HELTON DOESN'T SEEM TO FOCUS ON THOMPSON)

Well, now you just sit down...

(HELTON SITS DOWN ON THE BOTTOM STEP)

Strain my neck this way...No sir! Mr. Thompson
never's goin' to strain his neck talking to any
man. Isn't that right? Where you from?

HELTON

North Dakota

THOMPSON

North Dakota...you need work, huh?....Seems to
me that's kinda' far off.

HELTON

I'm a good worker....I will work cheap.

THOMPSON

(SPRINGING INTO ACTION)

Name's Thompson...Mr. Royal Earle Thompson

HELTON

Olaf Helton

THOMPSON

Well, Helton, how much you fixin' to gouge outa me?

(HELTON IS LOOKING AS IF RIGHT THROUGH THOMPSON)

HELTON

I do good work. Get dollar a day.

THOMPSON

You fixin' to make a poor man out of me?

You ain't goin' to make money like that round
here.....What kinda work pays ye that?

HELTON

Wheatfields.....North Dakota

THOMPSON

This ain't Dakota...we got a dairy farm here.

Wife likes cows and calves. She's sorta sickly...
so I humored her...Means I sorta have to do things
all by myself...with no hired hands.

(AS THOMPSON IS TALKING, HELTON TAKES OUT A
HARMONICA FROM HIS SHIRT POCKET AND PLAYS A
RATHER SAD SONG. THIS IS THE "NOON WINE" THEME.
THOMPSON STOPS A SECOND AND THEN CONTINUES.)

Got two boys...still too young to help...got to
wait some. No! can't pay you that....cause I
don't make that.....Wife's sorta sick today...
we plant a little feed, corn, got some pigs and
chicken...mostly cows...you like cows?....

(HELTON DOESN'T ANSWER)

I don't....now just speaking as one man to

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

another, there ain't money in it....No, Sir, can't pay you that kind of money....Tell you what I'll do...got your own shed over there.

(HE POINTS TO THE SHED ACROSS THE YARD, BUT HELTON DOESN'T LOOK. HE JUST KEEPS PLAYING THE SAME TUNE ON THE HARMONICA)

So I'll give you seven dollars a month and you get to eat on the same table with us folks.... Pretty good deal if I got to say so myself.

HELTON

I take it.

THOMPSON

You take it?.....Most folks don't seem to get much music out of a harmonica...You do all right.... That's a deal then.....Better not let them boys of mine git their hands on that harmonica...They might git it sorta dirty.

(THERE IS AN IMMEDIATE REACTION ON THE PART OF HELTON. HE PRESSES THE HARMONICA CLOSE TO HIS BODY AND QUICKLY PLACES IT IN HIS SHIRT POCKET. HE BUTTONS THE FLAP)

You can't have nothin' on the place without them little devils gettin' their dirty hands on it.

(HELTON IS LOOKING STRAIGHT AT THOMPSON NOW)

Arthur's....Arthur's eight and Herbert's five or six...

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

But you gotta watch out for the older one...

Now, how about you takin' the churn for a while?

You know how to take care of butter?

HELTON

I know the butter business.

THOMPSON

I'm goin' into town. Couldn't of before...No,

Sir...couldn't leave the place all week.

(THOMPSON WALKS UNTO THE PORCH AND STARTS TOWARD
THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE. HELTON TAKES OVER THE
CHURNING.)

Where'd you say you worked last?

HELTON

North Dakota

THOMPSON

I guess you'll git used to it here.

(THOMPSON STARTS AGAIN, BUT STOPS SHORT)

You're a forriner, ain't ye?

HELTON

I am Swedish.

THOMPSON

Now, how about that!...You don't get to see many
Swedes around here.

HELTON

That's all right.

THOMPSON

Seems to me, you're practically the first Swede
I ever laid eyes on.

HELTON

(HE LOOKS STRAIGHT AT THOMPSON)

That's all right.

(THE FARMER HURRIEDLY WALKS AROUND TO THE FRONT OF
THE HOUSE; OPENS THE DOOR AND ENTERS THE LIVING
ROOM. MRS. THOMPSON IS WORKING IN THE KITCHEN.
SHE IS A SMALL, FRAIL WOMAN AND IS VERY SENSITIVE.
THE KITCHEN HAS TWO LARGE WINDOWS FROM WHICH HELTON
CAN BE SEEN CHURNING THE BUTTER. THE HIRED MAN'S
SHACK CAN ALSO BE SEEN ACROSS THE YARD. ONE OF THE
WINDOWS IS OPEN. THOMPSON RUSHES TO HIS WIFE AND
DRAGS HER GENTLY BY THE ARM INTO THE LIVING ROOM.)

THOMPSON

Ellie, I just hired a new man...Swede.....

(ELLIE SITS DOWN ON THE COUCH SHOWING NO GREAT
REACTION)

.....Ellie, he says he knows how to make butter.

ELLIE

That's good....I hope he can.....I wish my head
would stop aching so.

THOMPSON

Real good deal....only seven dollars a month...
but he eats with us...Yes, Sir, you're husband's
a real businessman.

ELLIE

Guess...so...have to set another place at dinner
table though...If only my head...

THOMPSON

Now you just stop frettin'. I'm goin' into town
to fetch us an order of groceries.

ELLIE

(KNOWING WHY HE IS GOING TO TOWN)

For what?

THOMPSON

For groceries.

ELLIE

Now, you don't mean for somethin' to drink?

THOMPSON

Now a couple of drinks never hurt anybody...

Besides I gotta see the town people now and then.

(HE WALKS OUT AS MRS. THOMPSON YELLS AFTER HIM.)

ELLIE

Don't you linger, now,

(THE DOOR SLAMS)

Mr. Thompson!

THOMPSON

Can't say I do.

HATCH

Used to have a cousin who settle down around here.

THOMPSON

Don't know the Hatches.

HATCH

Guess you know everybody around.

THOMPSON

Guess I do...My Grampap immigrated here way back in 1836.

HATCH

From Ireland, I reckon?

THOMPSON

Pennsylvania...What makes you think we come from Ireland?

HATCH

Well, I come from Georgia myself, but what I always say is, a feller's got to come from somewhere, ain't he?..

THOMPSON

Guess so...

(THOMPSON STANDS UP)

...I don't want to hurry you, but if you've come to see me on business maybe we'd better get down to it.

(ELLIE GOES BACK INTO THE KITCHEN STRAIGHTENING UP A FEW THINGS. SHE PUTS AWAY SOME POTS AND PANS AND GENERALLY TIDIES UP. SHE COMES BACK INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND LAYS DOWN ON THE COUCH. AFTER A SHORT TIME SHE FALLS ASLEEP.)

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

(ELLIE WAKES UP TO HEAR THE SOUND OF A HARMONICA. IT IS THE "NOON WINE" THEME. SHE LIES THERE WHEN SUDDENLY THE MUSIC STOPS. ELLIE GETS UP AND WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN; LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOWS AND SEES HELTON FURIOUSLY SHAKING FIRST ARTHUR AND THEN HERBERT. HELTON LETS THEM GO AND THE BOYS RUN SILENTLY TOWARDS THE PORCH. MRS. THOMPSON HESITATES A MOMENT AND OPENS THE DOOR. SHE IS BLINDED A SECOND, SINCE SHE HAS FORGOTTEN HER SUNGLASSES. SHE SHADES HER EYES AND WALKS OUT ON THE PORCH WHERE THE TWO BOYS SIT STRANGELY QUIET.)

ELLIE

What are you boys up to now?....Now you answer your mamma when she asks you somethin'...What have you boys been up to?

HERBERT

Nothin'

ELLIE

Arthur?...Stop pickin' your nose!

ARTHUR

We ain't done nothin'

ELLIE

Nothin', huh...we'll soon fix that...you boys
better do somethin' right away.

(SHE MOVES TOWARD THE DOOR, GESTURING FOR THE BOYS
TO GO IN AHEAD OF HER)

Come on...Herbert...'..Arthur! Guess I'll have to
put you to work.

(THE BOYS SCAMPER INTO THE HOUSE, FOLLOWED BY ELLIE.)

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

(THE DOOR OPENS AND MR. THOMPSON ENTERS THE LIVING
ROOM.)

ELLIE

It's about time, Mr. Thompson.

(THOMPSON STRAIGHTENS HIMSELF UP AND WALKS UP TO
ELLIE AND PINCHES HER CREEK)

THOMPSON

No more meat on ye than a rabbit...Now I like 'em
cornfed.

ELLIE

You know, sometimes I think you're the evilest-

ELLIE (CONT'D)

minded man that ever lived.....how many of them
evil drinks did you have?

THOMPSON

Now Ellie, you just stop it...had a couple of
drinks with the citizens....Gotta let 'em know
we're a kickin'.

(ELLIE SUDDENLY TURNS HER BACK TO HER HUSBAND AND
LOOKS OUT OF THE KITCHEN WINDOW)

ELLIE

Mr. Thompson?

THOMPSON

What the matter now?...Your head hurtin' again?

ELLIE

No...I...Well, I want you to find out what was the
matter this afternoon.

THOMPSON

How's that?

ELLIE

The new man and the boys....Think they had a sort
of a run-in today...He was shakin' 'em, and shakin'
and shakin'...You just better see what the matter is.

THOMPSON

It's probably them boys.

ELLIE

You get out there and find out...

THOMPSON

Them boys are born in trouble...

(HE STARTS OUT)

...Think we were raising' a bunch of heathens!

(THOMPSON EXITS AND ELLIE WALKS OVER TO THE KITCHEN
WINDOWS, OPENS ONE OF THEM AND CALLS THE BOYS.)

ELLIE

Arthur!!...Herbert!! ...Get in here!!

(SHE STARTS SETTING THE TABLE AND THE BOYS COME
RUNNING INTO THE HOUSE.)

HERBERT

C-u-d-e d-a-a

ARTHUR

D-o-o-t-t-s- g-u-d

(THEY LAUGH IN DELIGHT AT THEIR NEW GAME)

ELLIE

Stop that silly game and let's wash up for supper.

(THE BOYS RUN TO A PAN OF WATER IN THE SINK. THEY
SPLASH WATER ON THEIR HANDS AND FACES, BUT THEY
STILL PLAY THEIR GAME.)

HERBERT

Arthur's a S-w-e-e-d-e, Arthur's a S-w-e-e-d-e

(HERBERT CHANTS THIS AS ARTHUR ALSO CHANTS)

ARTHUR

G-u-d-e-d-a-a...G-u-d-e-d-a-a

ELLIE

Get those ears clean too...And stop that singin'
...it ain't nice....Stop it!

(THE BOYS STOP PLAYING AND WIPE THEIR HANDS ON
THEIR PANTS)

ELLIE

Use that towel!...And don't dirty it all up.

(MR. THOMPSON WALKS IN, HE DOESN'T NOTICE THE BOYS
RIGHT AWAY. ELLIE WALKS INTO THE LIVING ROOM.
THE BOYS ARE VERY QUIET.)

THOMPSON

He says them boys been foolin' with his harmonicas..
You know what them boys did, Ellie?...Them boys
snuck into Mr. Helton's shack and blowed into his
harmonicas...They got 'em dirty and all full of
spit.

ELLIE

Did he say all that?

THOMPSON

That's what he meant, anyhow...He was kinda worked
up about it.

ELLIE

We've just got to tell 'em to stay out of that
man's shack.

(THOMPSON NOTICES THE BOYS HUDDLED IN THE KITCHEN)

THOMPSON

Yes, Sir...I'll tan their hides for them.

(HE WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN...THE BOYS TRY TO BACK UP, BUT FIND THEMSELVES AGAINST THE WALL.)

Just plain ignoramuses...You're both goin' to get sent to school next year...How will you like that?

HERBERT

I'm goin' to git sent to the 'formatory when I'm old 'nough.

THOMPSON

Who tells you that?!

HERBERT

The Sunday School Teacher.

THOMPSON

Ellie! get me the calf rope...I'll break every bone in 'em.

ELLIE

I think you better leave the whippin' to me...

You haven't got a light enough hand for children.

THOMPSON

Love taps aren't goin' to help them. My dad... he'd hit me with anythin' around...Just depends on what's the nearest.

ELLIE

They're good boys...You just wait and see...

They're good boys...You can depend on 'em.

THOMPSON

They better stop being so bull-headed and mind you.

ELLIE

Now, boys, I want you to call Mr. Helton for

supper and you be gentlemen about it.

(THE BOYS RUN OUT TO THE PORCH)

THOMPSON

(MUTTERING)

Them boys!...I don't know!

ARTHUR AND HERBERT

(OFF FRAME)

Say, Mr. Helton, you big Swede!!...Supper's ready!

Supper's ready!

THOMPSON

Them boys 'ill be the ruin of me yet!!

ELLIE

They won't ruin anyone...Now stop that kind of talk!

No, Mr. Thompson, if anyone's goin' to ruin you,

it might be some stranger...it might be that evil

drinkin'...it's not them boys. I know that!...

might even be that man outside.

(THOMPSON LOOKS AT HIS WIFE)

FADE OUT

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(IT IS NINE YEARS LATER. THIS IS SUPERIMPOSED ON SCREEN. THE FAMILY HAS JUST FINISHED LUNCH. THE BOYS AND HELTON HAVE LEFT THE DINNER TABLE AND ELLIE HAS BEGUN TO CLEAR THE TABLE. MR. THOMPSON RELAXES IN HIS CHAIR.)

THOMPSON

Those boys are growing up...

ELLIE

We're growing old.

THOMPSON

Guess everybody does....You know, we're doin' all right.

(THE SOUND OF THE HARMONICA THEME IS HEARD)

The farm's lookin' better everyday...You see, Ellie, your husband's done all right for himself...Yes, Sir!

ELLIE

(ALMOST TO HERSELF)

Nine years..

THOMPSON

What's that?

ELLIE

Just thinkin'

THOMPSON

About what?

ELLIE

You know its nine years since Mr. Helton came to us...Nine years!

THOMPSON

Seems to me that's a long time...A real long time... Boys are grown...Lots of change....Ellie, I bet you couldn't recognize the farm. I've done pretty well. Your husband's an important man. Why only the other day the preacher asked me to become a member of the council...Imagine that!

ELLIE

You can't be on that council.

THOMPSON

What?!

ELLIE

How will it look when Mr. Helton don't attend church. I asked him once and he was just downright uncivil.

THOMPSON

You should have let him alone. The way I look at it, his religion is his own business...Why bother about his business? He's done good work on the farm...More milk, bigger hogs..You know we're savin' some money...Why..Ellie that man's worth his weight in gold.

ELLIE

I know, but he just can't seem to behave like other people.

THOMPSON

Some people are funny in their ways.

ELLIE

You'd think he had a grudge against the whole world ...I don't know what to make of it...Mr. Thompson... Did you ever think about the money you pay him?... What's he do with it?

THOMPSON

It don't matter.

ELLIE

I just wonder..I don't hold nothin' against him... Hardly ever gets to town, except for marketing... What's he doin' with all that money he's made?

THOMPSON

I don't know, I don't care...Why don't you ask Mr. Helton yourself?

ELLIE

Ash him?...Mr. Thompson, I'm not denying he's a good worker...but as for talking...just plain social life...well, he's just not human.

THOMPSON

Hush now, Ellie...You're always talking.

(ARTHUR AND HERBERT RUSH INTO THE ROOM)

HERBERT

Hey Pop, can we take the rig into town?

THOMPSON

What for?

HERBERT

Need some more wood for the new corn crib.

THOMPSON

Well, I don't know...

ARTHUR

Mr. Helton wants some more feed.

THOMPSON

Well, I guess it'll be all right then.

(THE BOYS RUSH OUT AND ELLIE SHOUTS AFTER THEM)

ELLIE

You boys be careful now...Don't get into any kind of trouble!

(SHE TURNS AWAY FROM THE DOOR AND LOOKS AT HER HUSBAND)

ELLIE (CONT'D)

We're gettin' old....Them boys are really helpin' you out now, ain't they?

THOMPSON

We've got a couple of good boys....Seems to me, they must have been born that way.

(A SMILE CROSSES ELLIE'S FACE AS SHE WALKS INTO THE KITCHEN)

I'll be sittin' on the porch.

(THOMPSON WALKS OUT ON THE PORCH AND STANDS LOOKING OUT. HE SITS DOWN ON HIS ROCKING CHAIR. THE SOUND OF A TEAM AND WAGON IS HEARD IN THE DISTANCE.

THOMPSON LOOKS OUT TO SEE WHO IT IS. THE WAGON COMES TO A HALT IN FRONT OF THE YARD. A MAN COMES THROUGH THE GATE AND WALKS THROUGH THE GATE AND WALKS UP TO THE PORCH STEPS. HIS CLOTHES DO NOT FIT HIM AND HE GIVES THE APPEARANCE OF HAVING ONCE BEEN FAT. HE TAKES OFF HIS HAT, TAKES OUT A DIRTY BANDANA TO WIPE HIS FACE.)

HATCH

Thompson? Royal Earle Thompson?

THOMPSON

That's me...What can I do for ye?

HATCH

It's what I'm gonna do for you...Yeah, I'm goin' to buy that horse of yours.

THOMPSON

I reckon you're in the wrong place...Don't have a horse for sale.

HATCH

Now that's too bad.

THOMPSON

Usually if I've got anythin' for sale I tell the neighbors and tack up a little sign on the gate.

HATCH

(UNNATURAL LAUGH)

Ha...Ha...Ha...

THOMPSON

I don't see anythin' funny.

HATCH

Old joke of mine..ha...ha...

(STILL LAUGHING)

...I've noticed that when a feller says he's come to buy somethin' nobody takes him for a suspicious character.

THOMPSON

I'm never suspicious of any man..Seems to me that any man's the same, as long as he don't do anythin' funny.

HATCH

That what I always say, when a man's actin' funny...

HATCH (CONT'D)

Better watch out...He ain't up to no good.

(HATCH'S MOOD BECOMES SERIOUS)

I ain't came to bargain about anythin'...Got somethin' to talk to you about...It won't cost you a cent.

THOMPSON

I guess that's cheap enough

(HE GETS UP)

Let's go 'round to the shade...

(THIS IS THE SIDE AWAY FROM THE KITCHEN AND THE HIRED MAN'S SHACK)

It's kind of hot out in the sun.

(BOTH MEN WALK TO THE SIDE OF THE HOUSE, NEAR THE WOOD PILE. NEAR THE WOOD PILE ARE TWO LARGE STUMPS. THOMPSON PULLS OUT AN AXE BURIED IN ONE OF THE STUMPS AND LAYS IT DOWN ON THE GROUND.)

THOMPSON

Might as well sit down here.

(THOMPSON MOTIONS HATCH TO SIT DOWN, BUT INSTEAD THOMPSON FINDS HIMSELF SITTING AND HATCH PACES UP AND DOWN TALKING.)

HATCH

Name's Homer T. Hatch...America's my country...

I guess you know the name.

HATCH

Now, I'm lookin' for a man named Helton,
Mr. Olaf Eric Helton...Comes from North Dakota...
(THOMPSON SITS DOWN)

I was told up around the country a ways that I
might find him here...

THOMPSON

He's...

HATCH

(INTERRUPTING)

I wouldn't mind, havin' a little talk with him...
No, Siree, I wouldn't mind, if it's all the same
to you.

THOMPSON

(RELUCTANT)

Didn't know his middle name...Mr. Helton's been
here for nine years, but he's a mighty steady man,
and you can tell anybody I said so.

HATCH

I'm glad to hear that...Like to hear of a feller
mendin' his ways and settlin' down.

THOMPSON

Mendin' what ways?

HATCH

Now when I knew Helton he was pretty wild, yes, sir,

HATCH (CONT'D)

wild he was, he didn't know his own mind at all... Well, now, it's goin' to be a great pleasure to meet up with an old friend and find him all settled down and doing well by hisself.

THOMPSON

If you want to speak to Mr. Helton, I'll go and round him up.

HATCH

There ain't no special hurry...I've been waitin' a long time...A couple of minutes ain't gonna make much difference.

THOMPSON

Well, he's the kind of man who don't dawdle... Likes to get any business over with right quick like. (THE SOUND OF THE HARMONICA THEME IS HEARD) That's him now.

(HATCH LISTENS A MOMENT)

HATCH

Know that tune like I know the palm of my own hand.

THOMPSON

I never heard Mr. Helton say what it was.

HATCH

That's a kind of Scandahoovian song. Where I come from they sing it a lot...In North Dakota. It says

HATCH (CONT'D)

somethin' about startin' out in the morning
feeling so good you can't hardly stand it, so you
drink up all your likker before noon. All the
likker, y' understand, that you was savin' for
the noon lay-off. The words ain't much, but it's
a pretty tune. It's kind of a drinkin' song.

THOMPSON

(SEEMING ON THE DEFENSIVE)

He ain't touched a drop since he's been on the
place, and that's nine years this comin' September.
Yes, sir, nine years...So far as I know, he ain't
wetted his whistle once. And that's more than
I can say for myself.

HATCH

A drink's good for a man, now and then.

(HARMONICA THEME INCREASES)

THOMPSON

He's been playin' it off and on for nine years
right here on the place...

HATCH

And he was certainly singin' it well, fifteen
years before that, in North Dakota when he was in
the asylum...

THOMPSON

What you say?...What asylum?

HATCH

Shucks, I didn't mean to tell you...Shucks, that just happened to slip out.

THOMPSON

You mean he was--

HATCH

Funny, now I'd made up my mind I wouldn't say a word, because it would just make a lot of excitement, and what I say is, if a man has lived harmless and quiet for nine years it don't matter if he is loony. Does it? So long's he keeps quiet and don't do nobody harm

THOMPSON

Did they have him in a straitjacket?...In the lunatic asylum?

HATCH

They sure did. That's right where they had him, from time to time.

THOMPSON

They put my Aunt Ida in one of them things in the state asylum.

HATCH

I just don't like to hear about crazy people.

THOMPSON

She got vi'lent, and they put her in one of these jackets with long sleeves and Aunt Ida got so wild she broke a blood vessel and when they went to look after her she was dead.

HATCH

Now that's too bad.

THOMPSON

I'd think one of them things was dangerous.

HATCH

Mr. Helton used to sing his drinkin' song when he was in a straitjacket...Nothin' ever bothered him, except if you tried to make him talk. That bothered him and he'd get vi'lent, and they'd put him in the jacket. They'd put him in the jacket and go off and leave him, and he's lay there singin' his song. Then one night he disappeared. Nobody ever saw hide or hair of him again...And then I come along and find him here, all settled down and playin' the same song.

THOMPSON

He never acted crazy to me...

HATCH

Can't ever tell about those people.

THOMPSON

He always acted like a sensible man, to me. He never got married, for one thing, and he works like a horse. And I bet he's got the first cent I paid him when he landed here, and he don't drink, and he never says a word, much less swear, and he don't waste time runnin' around Saturday nights, and if he's crazy, why, I think I'll go crazy myself for a change.

HATCH,

Haw, ha...heh, he, that's good! Ha...heh, he, I hadn't thought of it jes' like that. Yeah, that's right! Let's all go crazy and get rid of our wives and save our money, hey?

THOMPSON

(ANNOYED)

My wife's a mighty reasonable woman, but I wouldn't answer for what she'd say or do if she found out we'd had a lunatic on the place all this time.

HATCH

Yer' wife sounds like a purty reasonable woman...

(THOMPSON SILENTLY TAKES OUT A PLUG OF TOBACCO
AND CUTS HIMSELF A CHEW WITH HIS POCKET KNIFE)

THOMPSON

You want a chew?

(HATCH TAKES A LOOK AT THOMPSON'S PLUG)

HATCH

Naw, I like my leaf dry...Don't go for any of that sweet stuff.

(HATCH TAKES OUT HIS OWN TOBACCO AND CUTS HIMSELF A PLUG WITH A LARGE BOWIE KNIFE. POSSIBLE CLOSE-UP ON KNIFE)

THOMPSON

A little sweetenin' don't do no harm, so far I'm concerned, but its got to be might little.

HATCH

Not for me.

THOMPSON

But with me, now, I want a strong leaf...I want it heavy-cured.

HATCH

Well, I always say, one man's meat is another man's poison...Now you see, such a chew would simply gag me...I couldn't begin to put it in my mouth.

THOMPSON

When I say heavy-cured, I don't mean too much.

HATCH

I like a dry natural chew without any artificial flavorin' of any kind.

THOMPSON

Guess each man got his...

HATCH

Artificial flavorin' is jes' put in to cover up a cheap leaf and make a man think he's gettin' more than he gettin'...You can mark my words.

THOMPSON

Always paid a fair price for my plug...I'm not a rich man and I don't go round settin' myself up for one, but I'll say this, when it comes to such things as tobacco, I buy the best on the market.

HATCH

Sweetenin' even a little is a sign of...

THOMPSON

(IMPATIENT)

About this Mr. Helton now...

(THOMPSON STANDS UP, AS IF TO GAIN STRENGTH)

I don't see no reason to hold it against a man because he went loony once or twice in his lifetime...

HATCH

You're perfectly right, there.

THOMPSON

So I don't expect to take no step about it. Not a step. I've got nothin' against the man, he's always treated me fair. You know, there's things and people 'nough to drive any man loony. The wonder

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

to me is, more men don't wind up in straitjackets, the way things are goin' these days.

HATCH

That's right, you took the words right out of my mouth...I always say there ain't every man in a straitjacket that ought to be there...Haw, ha... ha...You're right, all right...I know you got the idea.

(THOMPSON IS BAFLED AND JUST SIT THERE. HE LOOKS AROUND, HIS EYES HITTING THE GROUND AND NOTICING THE AXE.)

HATCH

And they's some people, would jus' as soon have a loonatic around the house as not, they can't see no difference between them and anybody else.

I always say, if that's the way a man feels, don't care who he associates with, why...why that's his business, not mine. I don't wantta have a thing to do with it. Now back home in North Dakota, we don't feel that way. I'd like to a seen anybody hiring a loonatic there, especially after what he done.

THOMPSON

Ain't Georgia your home?

HATCH

Got a married sister in North Dakota...Married a Swede, but a pretty good man...Got into a little business up around there.

THOMPSON

What did he do?

HATCH

Who?

THOMPSON

Mr. Helton!

HATCH

Oh, nothin' to speak of...

THOMPSON

I'm askin' ye...What he do?

HATCH

'Jus' went loony one day in the hayfield and shoved a pitchfork right square through his brother.

THOMPSON

His brother?!!

HATCH

They was goin' to execute him, but they found out he had went crazy with the heat, so they put him in the asylum. That's all he done. Nothin' to get lathered up about, haw...ha..ha.

(HATCH CUTS HIMSELF ANOTHER PLUG OF TOBACCO)

THOMPSON

I didn't know he did that.

HATCH

Right square through his brother.

THOMPSON

Somethin' must have drove him to it...Seems to me
some men make you feel like givin' 'em a good
killin' just by lookin' at 'em...I'll tell you...
His brother must have been a mean ornery cuss.

HATCH

Brother was goin' to get married...used to go
courtin' his girl nights, so he borrowed Mr. Helton's
harmonica to give her a serenade one evenin' and
lost it....Brand new harmonica.

THOMPSON

He thinks a heap of his harmonicas...Only money
he ever spends is to buy new ones.

HATCH

Brother wouldn't buy him a new one so Helton just
ups, as I says, and runs his pitchfork through his
brother. Now you know he musta been crazy to get
all worked up over a little thing like that.

THOMPSON

Soundslike it.

(SOUND OF THE HARMONICA THEME INCREASES)

HATCH

Seems to me you'd get pretty sick of hearin' the same tune year in, year out.

THOMPSON

Well, sometimes I think it wouldn't do no harm if he learned a new one, but he don't. It's a pretty good tune, though...

HATCH

Now, this Mr. Helton here, like I tell you, he's a dangerous escaped loonatic. Now, fact is, in the last twelve years or so I musta rounded up twenty-odd escaped loonatics, besides a couple of escaped convicts that I just run into by accident.

THOMPSON

That's your business?

HATCH

I don't make a business of it, but if there's a reward and there usually is, I get it.

(HATCH CATCHES HIMSELF)

Fact is, I'm for law and order, I don't like to see lawbreakers and loonatics at large. It just ain't the place for them. Now I reckon you're bound to agree with me on that, ain't that right?

THOMPSON

Now, what I know of Mr. Helton, he ain't dangerous...
As I told you...

HATCH

(MOVES MENACINGLY CLOSE)

The law is solidly behind me...Now this Mr. Helton he's been one of my toughest cases. Why I'll tell you, he's kept my record from being practically one hundred percent.

THOMPSON

How come you come here to look?

HATCH

Well, sir, he was gone slick as a whistle, for all we know the man was as good as dead long while ago, but d'you know what he did?

(NO ANSWER)

Well, sir, about two weeks ago his old mother gets a letter from him, and what do you reckon she found?

THOMPSON

Don't know.

HATCH

Check for eight hundred and fifty dollars; the letter wasn't nothin' much, just said he was sendin' her a few little savings. She might need somethin' ...Name, postmark, date, everythin'...Mr. Helton said he was gettin' along all right, and for her not to tell anybody.

THOMPSON

Guess she did.

HATCH

Well, natchally, she couldn't keep it to herself, with that check to cash and everythin'. So that's how I come to know...You coulda knocked me down with a feather.

(HATCH CHUCKLES TO HIMSELF. THOMPSON TRIES TO CONTROL HIMSELF)

THOMPSON

Must of been a surprise all right.

HATCH

Well, siree, the more I got to thinkin' about it, the more I just come to the conclusion that I'd better look into the matter a little, and so I talked to the old woman. She's pretty near dead now, half blind and all, but she was all for takin' the first train out and goin' to see her son. I put it up to her square--how she was too feeble for the trip, and all. So, just as a favor to her, I told her for my expenses I'd come down and see Mr. Helton and bring her back all the news about him. She gave me a new shirt she made herself by hand, and a big Swedish kind of cake to bring to him, but I musta mislaid them along the road

HATCH (CONT'D)

somewhere. It don't reely matter, though, he prob'ly ain't in any state of mind to appreciate 'em.

(THOMPSON IS SHOCKED)

THOMPSON

What are you aimin' to do?

(HATCH FEELS THE BACK OF HIS PANTS POCKET)

HATCH

Well, I come all prepared for a little scuffle...
I got handcuffs...

THOMPSON

Handcuffs?!!

HATCH

But I don't want no violence if I can help it...
You can see, I didn't want to say nothin' around the countryside, makin' an uproar...I figured the two of us could overpower him.

(HATCH TAKES OUT THE HANDCUFFS)

THOMPSON

(SLOWLY LOOSING HIS TIEPER)

I think you've got a might sorry job on hand, you sure must be hard up for something' to do.

(HE STANDS UP)

Now, seems to me, I should give a little piece of advice.

HATCH

I don't need--

THOMPSON

You just drop the idea that you're goin' to come here and make trouble for Mr. Helton, and the quicker you drive that rig away from my front gate the better I'll be satisfied.

(HATCH PUTS ONE HANDCUFF IN HIS OUTSIDE POCKET.
THE OTHER DANGLES OUT AND HE SITS DOWN CALMLY.)

HATCH

Now listen just a minute, it ain't reasonable to suppose that a man like yourself is goin' to stand in the way of gettin' an escaped loonatic back to the asylum where he belongs.

THOMPSON

He don't belong in no loonatic asylum!!

HATCH

Now I know it's enough to throw you off, comin' sudden like this, but fact is I counted on your being a respectable man and helpin' me out to see that justice is done.

THOMPSON

I don't see no justice!!

HATCH

Now a course, if you won't help, I'll have to look

HATCH (CONT'D)

around for help somewheres else. It won't look very good to your neighbors that you was harborin' an escaped loonatic, who killed his own brother, and then you refused to give 'im up...Yes, sir, it'll look might funny.

THOMPSON

But I've been tryin' to tell you all along that the man ain't loony now. He's been perfectly harmless for nine years. He's...Why....He's been like one of the family.

(THOMPSON MOVES TOWARD HATCH, BUT HATCH STANDS AND THOMPSON FINDS HIMSELF RETREATING)

THOMPSON

You're crazy! You're the crazy one round here!...
You're crazier than he ever was!

(STILL RETREATING)

You get off this place or I'll turn you over to the law!...Get out of here before I knock you down!!
(HATCH STEPS BACK)

HATCH

Try it, try it..go 'head!!

(HATCH PULLS OUT HIS BOWIE KNIFE. ALL OF A SUDDEN HELTON COMES AROUND THE CORNER ON THE RUN. HELTON COMES IN BETWEEN THE TWO MEN, HIS FISTS DOUBLED-UP.

HELTON STOPS SHORT AND THEN HATCH DRIVES AT HIM,
KNIFE IN HAND, HANDCUFF IN THE OTHER. HATCH
PLUNGES THE KNIFE AT HELTON'S STOMACH.)

THOMPSON

No!!

(THOMPSON SEIZES THE NEARBY AXE AND BRINGS IT DOWN
ON HATCH'S HEAD. THOMPSON SEES HATCH CRUMBLE TO
THE GROUND AND HE TURNS AWAY FROM THE BODY. HE
STARES AT THE AXE WHICH HE STILL HAS IN HIS HANDS.
HELTON IS NOT SEEN.)

THOMPSON

Ellie!!...Ellie!!

(THOMPSON STARES AT THE BODY AS ELLIE RUNS AROUND
THE SIDE OF THE PORCH)

THOMPSON

He killed Mr. Helton!...I had to knock him out!..
I had to knock him out!
(ELLIE LOOKS OUT AND SEES HELTON RUNNING AWAY)

ELLIE

That's Helton runnin' in the field!
(THOMPSON STARES TOWARD THE FIELD IN AMAZEMENT.
ELLIE RUNS DOWN FROM THE PORCH, LOOKS AT THE BODY
OF HATCH AND FAINTS. THOMPSON STANDS LIKE AN AUTOMATON
AND STILL HOLDS THE AXE IN HIS HANDS.)

FADE OUT

END OF ACT II

ACT III

(THE SCENE IS THE OFFICE OF THE LAWYER. THE OFFICE IS ONE ROOM WITH A DESK. BOOKS AND PAPERS ARE SCATTERED ALL OVER THE DESK. BURLEIGH IS SITTING ON A SWIVEL CHAIR, HIS BACK TO THE OFFICE. HE IS LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW. HIS FEET ARE ON THE WINDOW SILL. THERE IS A KNOCK AT THE DOOR. BURLEIGH TURNS AROUND.)

BURLEIGH

Just a second!

(HE FIXES HIS TIE AND STRAIGHTENS UP HIS DESK. THERE IS ANOTHER KNOCK ON THE DOOR.)

BURLEIGH

Come in!

(THOMPSON WALKS IN AND THE LAWYER'S FACE CHANGES FROM EAGER EXPECTATION TO IMPATIENCE. THE LAWYER HAS STOOD UP, BUT SITS DOWN WHEN HE SEES WHO IT IS.)

THOMPSON

Mr. Burleigh, I just wanted...

BURLEIGH

Mr. Thompson, I'm a busy man...Now why don't you just come some other time.

THOMPSON

I thought you might give me a couple of minutes.

BURLEIGH

Now, Mr. Thompson, you're a reasonable man--

THOMPSON

I hate botherin' you again, but it seems to me there's a couple of things I should of told you.

BURLEIGH

No, you've said everything...Now you just take it easy for a while...seeing that You're acquitted now. You relax. Stop back and see me in a couple of weeks.

THOMPSON

Can't do that...I got to see you now...Got to let you know some things.

BURLEIGH

What do you want me to do now?

THOMPSON

Nothin'...I just want you to listen. You're a gentleman.. A man's got the right to discuss matters with another man. Now you gotta know all these things.

BURLEIGH

All right, Thompson, but make it short. I'm expecting a client.

THOMPSON

Now this Hatch fella...I forgot to tell you what

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

a bad person he was...If I've seen an eviler man...
I would have noticed. Ellie's always sayin' how
I can judge people...Can tell you right away, he
was mean. He don't look you right square in the
face. You know why?

BURLEIGH

Thompson--

THOMPSON

Cause he had the devil in 'im. I know right away
he wasn't up to no good...Why should of seen 'im,
walkin' sneaky-eyed and pretending he was gonna
buy a horse...Playin' round with that knife...I tell
you Mr. Helton didn't have a chance...not a chance...
all that blood an' everthin',...Hatch made a pass
at Mr. Helton with the knife...I saw the knife
plunge unto...

BURLEIGH

(INTERRUPTING)

Hatch didn't kill Helton!

THOMPSON

(SHOUTING)

He did!...He did!

BURLEIGH

There wasn't a knife wound on him.

THOMPSON

Helton's dead!!

BURLEIGH

(IRRITATED)

Yes, he's dead!, but Hatch didn't do it...Your man, Helton, died of wounds suffered in his capture by the sheriff....Thompson, once and for all, get this straight; there wasn't a knife wound on him.

THOMPSON

I tried to help..tried to save Mr. Helton...didn't have a chance...I always say, you can tell by a man's eyes what he's plannin' to do.. Like I tell you I'm a pretty good judge of people...Like I knew right away you was all right...jus' seein' you walk. Yes, sir...Hatch was bad, real bad...

BURLEIGH

All right, Hatch was bad. Are you finished? What do you want? It was an open and shut case if I ever had one...self defense and trespassing... You're acquitted, free, you're--

THOMPSON

(INTERRUPTING)

It ain't trespassin'!!...It ain't self defense!... I was trying to save Mr. Helton. He shouldn't have done that to Mr. Helton, Mr. Helton didn't

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

have a chance....Didn't do nobody harm. Why you
should have seen that man work...Let me tell you....--

BURLEIGH

Thompson!

THOMPSON

...He worked real...--

BURLEIGH

Thompson!!

THOMPSON

...He was a good.....

(THOMPSON STOPS)

BURLEIGH

You're acquitted!...you hear?...You're acquitted!

....I can't do any more!...Now you can see I'm a
busy man...Goodday, Mr. Thompson!

(BURLEIGH SITS DOWN AND STARTS SIFTING THROUGH
SOME PAPERS)

THOMPSON

Why didn't you let me talk?...Why didn't you let
me say what I had to say?

BURLEIGH

(NOT LOOKING UP)

You're not in jail.

THOMPSON

I could just as well be...I don't want people
lookin' at me with their eyes sayin', you're a
killer, you're a murderer...I didn't mean anybody
harm...I tried to help...

BURLEIGH

(NOT LOOKING UP)

You've killed a man...You've been acquitted...

Goodday, Thompson.

THOMPSON

You don't believe me, do you?

BURLEIGH

(LOOKING UP)

Good day, Thompson!

(BURLEIGH SWINGS AROUND ON HIS SWIVEL CHAIR, TURNS
HIS BACK TO THOMPSON.)

THOMPSON

You're not...

(THOMPSON TURNS AND VERY SLOWLY AND DEJECTEDLY WALKS
OUT OF THE OFFICE. HE DOESN'T BOTHER TO CLOSE THE
DOOR BEHIND HIM.)

FADE OUT

FADE IN

(THE SCENE IS THE FRONT OF A BROKEN DOWN OLD FARM
HOUSE. THE YARD IS DIRTY, STREWN WITH GARBAGE AND

WEEDS. A LITTLE BOY, RATHER DIRTY AND BAREFOOTED, LEANS AGAINST THE FENCE. HE IS PLAYING A GAME BY RUNNING ALONG THE FENCE AND BANGING A STICK AGAINST THE POSTS. THE SOUND OF A HORSE AND CARRIAGE IS HEARD AND ATTRACTS THE BOY'S ATTENTION. THE CARRIAGE COMES TO A HALT BEFORE THE HOUSE. MR. AND MRS. THOMPSON WALK UP TOWARDS THE GATE. THE BOY RECOGNIZES THEM AND TURNS RUNNING TOWARD THE HOUSE.)

BOY

Mommer, Popper, come out hyah. That man that kilt Mr. Hatch has come ter see yer!

(BY THIS TIME THE THOMPSONS ARE WALKING UP THE OVER-GROWN PATH AND THOMPSON STIFFENS, STOPS SUDDENLY AND THEN STARTS AGAIN.)

THOMPSON

Like to see yer folks, boy.

(A SLOPPY-LOOKING COUPLE COME OUT OF THE HOUSE. THE MAN WALKS DOWN THE STEPS AND THE WOMAN LEANS AGAINST THE DOOR. SHE STARES AT MRS. THOMPSON. THE BOY SITS DOWN ON THE BOTTOM OF THE STEPS.)

FARMER

Folks been talkin' as you've been visitin'...
Sort of been expectin' ye.

(THOMPSON SHUFFLES HIS FEET, LOOKS DOWN AT THE GROUND)

THOMPSON

Well, as I reckon you happen to know, I've had some strange troubles lately, and, as the feller says, it's not the kind of trouble that happens to a man everyday in the year, and there's some-things I don't want no misunderstandin' about in the neighbor's mind, so.. Well I ...

(THOMPSON DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY NEXT. THE COUPLE JUST STARE AT THOMPSON AND A SLIGHT SMILE CROSSES THE FARMERS EYES AS HE LOOKS AT HIS WIFE. SHE RETURNS THE GLANCE. THOMPSON SEES WHAT HAS PASSED.)

My wife will tell you...

(THOMPSON GLANCES AT HIS WIFE. SHE SLOWLY SHUFFLES TOWARD THOMPSON.)

Ask my wife, she won't lie...She won't lie...

Tell 'em Ellie.

ELLIE

It's true, I saw it...

FARMER

Well, now, that's too bad. Well, now, I cain't see what we've got to do with all this here, however. I can't see no good reason for us to git mixed up in these murder matters, I shore cain't. Which ever way you look at it, it ain't none of my business.

THOMPSON

I wanted to tell...

FARMER

However, it's might nice of you-all to come around
and give us the straight of it, fur we've heerd
some might queer yarns about it, mighty queer.
You couldn't hardly make head ner tail of it.

(THE FARMER'S WIFE COMES DOWN A STEP AND SHOUTS IN
A SHRILL VOICE.)

WIFE

Evvybody goin' round shootin' they heads off...
Now we don't hold with killin'; the bible says--

FARMER

Shet yer trap and keep it shet'r I'll shet it
fer yer!!

(THE WIFE GETS BACK AGAINST THE DOORWAY)

Now it shore looks like to me...--

THOMPSON

Now I didn't want you to get the wrong ideas,
cause you gotta see what happened...It wasn't my
fault...This Hatch feller, he comes--

FARMER

Say, Thorpson, seein' as you'll probably get to
the next farm soon, I was wonderin' whether you
could ask McClellan whether he could spare a bit

FARMER (CONT'D)

more of that fertilizer...I mean, seein' as you're headed that way....

THOMPSON

(IRRITATED)

I ain't headed no way...Where did ye get that idea?

FARMER

We sortta figgered--

THOMPSON

I come to see ye' for a man-to-man chat, that's all...neighbors gotta get together.

FARMER

(ABRUPT)

We're kindda busy right now.

THOMPSON

I only wanted to explain...Helton was a good man. I always said, Swedes are good people...see, Helton was a Swede. Now, I didn't hold that against him. No, sir, he was the best hired man we ever had...

(THE FARMER TURNS HIS BACK ON THOMPSON AND WALKS UP THE STEPS AND PUSHES HIS WIFE INTO THE HOUSE. THOMPSON MOTIONS AS IF TO FOLLOW, BUT HIS WIFE HOLDS HIM BACK. THOMPSON NOTICES THE BOY AND CONTINUES SPEAKING, BUT NOW TO THE BOY.)

THOMPSON (CONT'D)

A man's got to stand up in front of his neighbor
and look 'im right square in the face...Now that
makes sense don't it...You gotta have trust, You
gotta have respect...--

(THE SOUND OF LAUGHTER IS HEARD FROM WITHIN THE
HOUSE.)

Just look at me...see, I'm no murderer...

(MORE LAUGHTER IS FROM WITHIN AND THE BOY JUST
STARES AT THOMPSON.)

Look at my face...You can see...I ain't no killer!!
I didn't mean it!!!

(ELLIE PUTS HER HAND ON THOMPSON'S ARM AND STARTS
TO LEAD HIM AWAY.)

ELLIE

(GENTLY)

Don't you worry, Mr. Thompson.

(THE SOUND OF LAUGHTER IS HEARD ONCE MORE.)

Don't you worry....

(THOMPSON WALKS TO THE CARRIAGE STILL MUTTERING
AND LED BY ELLIE.)

FADE OUT

FADE IN

(THE SCENE IS THE BEDROOM OF THE THOMPSONS. IT IS
LATE AT NIGHT. THE ROOM IS DARK AND ELLIE IS

SLEEPING. THOMPSON IS STILL DRESSED, SITS ON A ROCKING CHAIR AND GAZES OUT OF THE WINDOW. THE WOOD-PILE IS SILHOUETTED IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THOMPSON IS STARING AT THE SCENE. HE LOWERS HIS HEAD, TURNS AROUND AND LOOKS AT ELLIE SLEEPING.

ALL OF A SUDDEN THE "MOON WINE" HARMONICA THEME IS HEARD AND THOMPSON SEES HELTON SITTING ON ONE OF THE TREE STUMPS PLAYING HIS HARMONICA. THOMPSON MUTTERS IN UNBELIEF.)

HELTON (ON FILTER)

I'm a good worker...I work cheap.

(THE HARMONICA CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THE SCENE)

THOMPSON

Helton!.I tried to help...Tell 'em...They don't believe me.

HELTON (ON FILTER)

Wheatfield...North Dakota

THOMPSON

He had a knife in his hands....I saw it...You know.

(HELTON DISAPPEARS, BUT THE HARMONICA THEME CONTINUES.)

Helton!!

(THOMPSON LOOKS AROUND, GRIPPING THE ARMS OF HIS CHAIR TIGHTLY. HE LOOKS OUTSIDE AGAIN. THERE IS NO ONE OUTSIDE EXCEPT THAT AN AXE IS BURIED IN ONE

OF THE STUMPS. THOMPSON BEGINS TO SWEAT. HE WIPES HIS BROW AND NOW HE SEES HATCH SITTING OUT ON ONE OF THE STUMPS. HATCH HAS A LARGE AND EXAGGERATED BOWIE KNIFE IN HIS HANDS. HE IS CUTTING HIMSELF A CHEW OF TOBACCO. HATCH IS LAUGHING UNCONTROLLABLY.)

HATCH (ON FILTER)

ha....ha...ha...ha....ha....you know that no respectable person would let a loonatic in his home...ha...ha...ha...ha....Just don't like to hear about crazy people....ha...ha...ha...ha...ha... Loonatic...Loonatic...Loonatic.

(THOMPSON IS ALMOST SPELLBOUND BY WHAT HE SEES. A NERVOUS TWITCH CROSSES HIS FACE AND HE BITES HIS LIP EVERY NOW AND THEN. HATCH DISAPPEARS AND LAWYER BURLEIGH APPEARS SITTING ON THE PORCH RAILING.)

BURLEIGH (ON FILTER)

There wasn't a knife wound on him...Now you're a reasonable man, Thompson.

(BURLEIGH DISAPPEARS AND THOMPSON RUBS HIS FACE WITH HIS HANDS. ALL OF A SUDDEN HE HEARS THE FARM BOY YELLING. HE LOOKS OUT.)

FARM BOY (ON FILTER)

Hey Mommer, Popper, come out hyah. That man that

FARM BOY (CONT'D ON FILTER)

kilt Mr. Hatch has come ter see yer!....He kilt

'im!...He kilt 'im...Kilt!!!!...Kilt!!!

(THE FARM COUPLE ARE NOW ALSO OUTSIDE)

FARM COUPLE (ON FILTER)

Ha...ha...ha...ha..

(THOMPSON BEGINS TO SOB AS THE VOICES GET LOUDER.

THE HARMONICA THEME ALSO GRADUALLY INCREASES IN

VOLUME. THOMPSON LOOKS OUTSIDE AGAIN AND SEES

HELTON PLAYING HIS HARMONICA AS HE SITS ON ONE

OF THE STUMPS. HATCH IS STANDING IN FRONT OF THE

PORCH LAUGHING UNCONTROLLABLY. THE LAWYER IS

SITTING ON THE PORCH RAILING. THE FARM BOY IS

RUNNING UP AND DOWN THE YARD AND THE FARM COUPLE

STAND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE YARD.)

BURLEIGH (ON FILTER)

You're a reasonable man....

(THE ENTIRE GROUP SHOUTS AT THOMPSON. THE GROUP

SLOWLY ADVANCES TOWARD THE PORCH. THE HARMONICA

THEME AND THE BABBLE OF THE ENTIRE GROUP IS RISING

TO A CRESCENDO.)

ENTIRE GROUP (ON FILTER)

Murderer!!...Kilt!!...

(HATCH'S LAUGHTER AND THE HARMONICA THEME CONTINUE.)

You're a reasonable man!!...Murderer!!...

1. The first part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the office to which the person has been appointed.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the office to which the person has been appointed.

3. The third part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the office to which the person has been appointed.

4. The fourth part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the office to which the person has been appointed.

5. The fifth part of the document is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the city government. The names are listed in alphabetical order, and each name is followed by the office to which the person has been appointed.

THOMPSON

Stop.....Stop.....

(THE GROUP ADVANCES)

You're crazy!!...Crazy!!...I'm not a murderer!!...

I'm not!...Not!!!

(THOMPSON PICKS UP A FLOWER POT FROM THE WINDOW SILL AND HURLS IT THROUGH THE WINDOW. AS THE GLASS SMASHES A SCREAM IS HEARD AND UTTER SILENCE FOLLOWS FOR A SECOND. THE FIGURES HAVE DISAPPEARED. THEN THE SOUND OF SOBBING IS HEARD. THOMPSON WHIRLS AROUND TO FIND ELLIE SOBBING HYSTERICALLY. THOMPSON STANDS UNABLE TO MOVE. THE SOUND OF NOISE IN THE NEXT ROOM IS HEARD AND ARTHUR AND HERBERT RUSH IN WITH A LAMP.)

THOMPSON

Your mother!!

(THE BOYS RUSH OVER TO THEIR MOTHER)

HERBERT

Mamma, mamma...

ARTHUR

She's scared...She scared to death...

(HE RUNS IN A RAGE OVER TO HIS FATHER)

What did you do to her? You touch her again and

I'll kill you!

HERBERT

Mamma...Mamma, don't die.

ARTHUR

(TO THOMPSON)

Get out!!

(ELLIE IS MUCH QUIETER NOW)

THOMPSON

I'll go for the doctor.

(HE STARTS TO EXIT)

Don't you get any notions in your head. I never
did your mother any harm in my life, on purpose.

....You'll know how to look after her.

(THOMPSON WALKS INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND LIGHTS
THE LAMP AFTER A FEW UNSUCCESSFUL TRIES. HE TAKES
A PENCIL AND A SCRAP OF PAPER FROM A SIDE SHELF.
HE SITS DOWN AND WRITES A NOTE. THROUGH THE
DOORWAY THE BOYS CAN BE SEEN ATTENDING THEIR MOTHER.
POSSIBLE CUTTING BETWEEN ROOMS. THOMPSON FINISHES
HIS NOTES AND WALKS OUT TO THE KITCHEN WHERE HE
OPENS UP A CUPBOARD AND TAKES OUT ONE OF A FEW
SHOTGUNS. HE WALKS BACK INTO THE LIVING ROOM,
HESITATES A MOMENT. HE PEERS INTO THE BEDROOM AND
THEN WALKS OUT ONTO THE PORCH.)

FADE OUT

FADE IN

(THOMPSON IS SITTING IN THE FIELD AS IN THE OPENING SCENE. HIS RIGHT SHOE AND SOCK ARE OFF AND THE SHOTGUN LIES ON THE GROUND. THOMPSON HAS COVERED HIS FACE WITH HIS HANDS, BUT NOW RAISES HIS HEAD, PICKS UP THE GUN AND LOOKS TOWARD THE HOUSE. HE PLACES HIS BIG TOE ON THE TRIGGER.

CUT TO THE BEDROOM WHERE THE BOYS ARE STILL LOOKING AFTER THEIR MOTHER. HERBERT IS RUBBING HIS MOTHER'S HANDS.)

ELLIE

(WEAKLY)

I'm all right.

ARTHUR

You get some of tha ammonia in the kitchen.

(HERBERT WALKS THROUGH THE LIVING ROOM. AS HE PASSES THE TABLE HE NOTICES THE NOTE AND READS SOME OF IT.)

HERBERT

Arthur!!

(ARTHUR PUSHES IN, TAKES THE NOTE AND READS IT.)

ARTHUR

Before Almighty God, the great judge of all before who I am about to appear. I do hereby solemnly

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

swear that I did not take the life of Mr. Homer
T. Hatch on purpose.

(ELLIE HAS MADE HER WAY TO THE BEDROOM DOORWAY.
THE BOYS HAVE NOT NOTICED HER.)

This is the only way I can prove I am not a cold
blooded murderer like everybody seems to think...
Royal Earl--

ELLIE

(SCREAMING)

Mr. Thompson!!!

(SHE RUSHES TO THE DOOR, BUT BEFORE SHE REACHES
IT THE SOUND OF A SHOTGUN IS HEARD. SHE LEANS
AGAINST THE DOOR AND CRUMBLES TO THE FLOOR.)

FADE OUT

END OF ACT III

CHAPTER VI

THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN WRITING THE ADAPTATION

The task of turning "Noon Wine" from a work of fiction into a television play required the translation, rather than the changing, of the theme, plot, and characterization of this short story.

A Multi-level Play

The writing of the play had to be considered on two levels: the communication of theme and the communication of illustrative action. It would have been possible to write two separate plays called Noon Wine. The first play could have been a dramatization of the story line of "Noon Wine" and would have resulted in an episodic action play. The second play might have been based upon the thematic treatment of the problem Miss Porter discusses in her short story. The play finally written is a compromise between the two extremes of treatment. The television play Noon Wine is a synthesis of story line and theme understandable on both levels. There is also a third level of understanding and this could be called the symbolic level. The first level deals with the story of a man who kills with the intention of saving another man. The second level suggests the theme that the inherent goodness of man is often mistaken for evil. The symbolic meaning of the play deals with a combat between good and evil and the resultant banishment of man from "paradise."

Time and Condensation

In writing the hour television adaptation of "Moon Wine" the problem of condensation was anticipated. The plot derived in the scenario does not, however, seem to be a condensation. Since plot is the arrangement and amplification of story suitable to the dramatic intentions of the playwright,¹ the scenario to Noon Wine is more of an arrangement, even expansion, than a condensation. Examples of this expansion are the amplification of certain of Miss Porter's scenes in the play. Lawyer Burleigh and the neighboring farm family receive more emphasis in the play than they do in the short story.

The Flashback Technique

The hour television play requires economy of exposition and thus it was necessary to suggest through illustrative action emotions and situations rather than literally dramatizing Miss Porter's short story. Not only was it necessary to adapt a short story, but it was also necessary to adapt a literary technique to a dramatic medium. An example of this is the comparison of the way Miss Porter shows Mr. Thompson's striving to be believed by his neighbors and the method used for the television play. Miss Porter has created a series of literary montages where either through the author's description, the character's thoughts, or small dialogue scenes, she tells or shows

¹Marian Gallaway, Constructing A Play (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1950), p. 122.

Mr. Thompson visiting the various neighbors. In one stance Miss Porter uses dialogue:

'I guess you saw the Mannings then,' said Herbert. 'Yes and the Allbrights, and that new family McClellan.'²

Miss Porter then uses the technique of a literary flashback to illustrate some of the scenes.

The last straw had been laid on today, Mr. Thompson decided. Tom Allbright, an old beau of Ellie's.....He had looked past them with an embarrassed frown on his face, telling them his wife's sister was there with a raft of young ones, and the house was pretty full and everything upset, or he'd ask them to come in.³

In the television play Mr. Thompson only visits one farm house, which is but briefly mentioned by Miss Porter but which is expanded in the play. It was therefore necessary that this scene not only illustrate a situation and emotion, but become symbolic of all the other neighbors the Thompsons visited.

Since one of the criteria for the television play is economy of exposition due to the limitation of time, it was found necessary to capture as much of the intensity of the story in the first act as possible. The use of the flashback technique was decided upon for several reasons. One of the reasons was that it was felt that the scene of Thompson contemplating suicide would act as a frame of reference if the play would flashback from this point. This scene would also quickly capture the interest of the television viewer.

²Katherine Anne Porter, "Noon Wine," Pale Horse, Pale Rider (New York: Random House Publishers, 1939), p. 156.

³Ibid., p. 165.

There seems to be a definite relationship between the flashback technique used in the television play and the story written by Miss Porter. She also uses the flashback technique, but only after Thompson has killed Hatch. The reflective quality of Miss Porter's writing, her strong interest and concern for the past, makes good use of the flashback technique. Here is another illustration of the literary flashback.

Mr. Thompson, turned on his bed, figured that he had done all he could, he'd just try to let the matter rest from now on. His lawyer, Mr. Burleigh, had told him right at the beginning, 'Now you keep calm and collected'...⁴

Thompson then continues to think in terms of the past of what has happened. This technique provides a causal relationship for every facet of the story. Literal transference of this technique was, however, considered unacceptable for the play because the various flashback scenes would not fit the controlling factors of live television. Although the causal relationship was considered important, the controlling factors of time, make-up and costume changes, and scene changes present their problems.

Through the technique of the flashback Miss Porter uses consecutive scenes which would have been very difficult to do on live television. For example, here is a series of consecutive scenes from the short story which would be difficult to do on television.

1. Mr. Thompson thinking in bed.
2. Lawyer Burleigh talking to Thompson.

⁴Ibid., p. 160.

3. Mr. Hatch's body being covered and Thompson getting the sheriff.
4. The trial.
5. Thompson's visit to the lawyer's office.
6. The visit to the neighbors.
7. A supper scene.
8. A nightmare scene.

It would have been quite impossible to produce a play using these consecutive scenes in terms of flashbacks and flashbacks within flashbacks. Not only was it impossible because of the controlling factor of live television, but it was also impossible in terms of unity of dramatic action. The solution arrived at was to frame the entire play within a flashback, thus creating a clearly progressive unit of action which would still preserve the causal relationship and motivation within the play.

Structure

The scenario was divided into three acts. The first act was used to establish the situation and to provide the necessary exposition. The second act provided the necessary foreshadowing, complication and major crises. The third act provides the major climax and resolution of the play.

The Scenario and Play

There are differences between the scenario and the play. Except for minor differences Act One has not been changed. Acts Two and Three

received certain changes. Act Two in the scenario begins after a span of nine years and the family having just finished lunch. Thompson kills Hatch at the end of the first scene and the second scene is a jail scene where Thompson meets Lawyer Burleigh. The third scene of Act Two consists of Thompson visiting the lawyer after Thompson's acquittal.

The scenario for Act Three included a short first scene to point up the disintegration of the family and Thompson's visits to his neighbors. Scene two consisted of one of these visits and scene three includes the nightmare scene. This scene brings the play out of the flashback, into the present, and ends with Thompson's suicide.

For the television play scene two of Act Three was incorporated into scene three and thus Thompson's murder of Hatch became the end of Act Two. Hatch's murder provides a major crisis and minor climax upon which to end this act. The double function of crisis and climax is possible because by definition,

Crisis differs from climax in that crisis always implies something unfinished, while climax is the satisfaction accompanying something finished, settled, restored to equilibrium and harmony.⁵

The end of this act is a minor climax. There is a release of emotional tension when Hatch is killed by Thompson. It is also a crisis because it is the high point of tension and the critical point in the fate of Royal Earle Thompson.

Act Three then begins with Thompson entering the lawyer's office and shows the viewer that Thompson has been acquitted, but that he is

⁵Marian Gallaway, Constructing a Play (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1950), p. 212.

not satisfied with the situation. A type of suspense is, therefore, created by bringing Thompson's freedom from guilt almost within reach.

The scenario's second scene of Act Two was cut out because its function was incorporated into the first scene of the third act. The lawyer scene took on the function by foreshadowing and reinforcing the futility of Thompson's striving and desire for a clear conscience. Scene Two of the television play's third act then became the Thompsons' visit to the neighbors and scene three remained the nightmare scene.

The Growth of Conflict

The play Moon Wine has a conflict based on ideas rather than action. All the action within the play is motivated by the clash of ideas rather than by physical action. The murder which Thompson commits is based upon the clash between good and evil. The nightmare scene is motivated by the frustration and self guilt which Thompson possesses. It was, however, necessary to demonstrate ideas and emotions through illustrative action. What is illustrative action? It is the demonstration of emotion and idea. The question should then be asked, what is the relationship of illustrative action to dramatic action?

The first is the essence of the second. A dramatic episode presents an individual or group of individuals so moved as to stir an audience to responsive emotion. Illustrative action by each person in the group or by the group as a whole is basal.⁶

⁶George Pierce Baker, Dramatic Technique (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), p. 66.

The Translation of Fiction

In Miss Porter's short story illustrative action is sometimes based upon the author's own narration, the character's thoughts and in dialogue and action. It was, therefore, necessary to show dramatically what Miss Porter has said through thought and narration. For example, Miss Porter says, "Mr. Helton was the hope and prop of the family."⁷ Since the idea was an important one, it was necessary to translate this thought into dramatic form. Thompson's trust and dependence on Helton is shown in the following excerpt from Act Three, scene one of the play.

(ARTHUR AND HERBERT RUSH INTO THE ROOM)

HERBERT

Hey Pop, can we take the rig into town?

THOMPSON

What for?

HERBERT

Need some more wood for the new corn crib.

THOMPSON

Well, I don't know...

ARTHUR

Mr. Helton wants some more feed.

THOMPSON

Well, I guess it'll be all right then.

(THE BOYS RUSH OUT)

⁷Katherine Anne Porter, op. cit., p. 127.

The Intimacy of Noon Wine

Noon Wine is an intimate play since it is based upon particular ideas of the lives of average people. The emotions examined are microscopic except that they have been magnified. The play may be broad in significance, but it is not panoramic in scope. It is hoped that Noon Wine can be considered as an enlarged slice of life rather than a spectacle.

Identification

The time limitation of television required the playwright to have the principal characters set the situation as soon as possible. The situation was visually set by the scene of Thompson contemplating suicide. This opening scene should result in an empathic response by the viewer. The relatively small cast made it possible to give each character identifiable traits which should aid in creating empathy.

In molding the character of the individuals in the play it was felt necessary that each person's character would have two facets; an individualistic personality trait and a generally symbolic trait.

Royal Earle Thompson

Mr. Thompson's most important personality trait is his false sense of pride and dignity, supplemented by his basic goodness. He symbolizes the inherent frustration of man in his search for understanding.

Ellie Thompson

Mrs. Thompson's main characteristic is her essential sensitivity in her weakness. She symbolizes woman's paradoxical combination of strength and weakness.

Olaf Eric Helton

Helton's personality consists of a lack of personality. He is devoid of all passion and temperament except when his harmonicas are touched. Symbolically he represents the victim of the persecution of man.

Homer T. Hatch

Hatch is a prejudice and ruthless money-hungry individual. As a symbol he is the personification of evil.

Lawyer Burleigh

Burleigh is a man without a heart. He is insensitive to the problems of his clients and his only concern is his correct and successful legal function as a lawyer. Burleigh represents the status quo of society.

The rest of the characters serve the function of demonstrating the disintegration of Thompson.

The personality traits of the characters should readily be communicated to the viewer, but understanding of the symbolic traits can only result through an emphatic response on the part of the viewer.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The nature of this thesis required the following of certain procedural steps. First it was recognized that television was in need of dramatic material. Next, the criteria and limitations of the television medium were sought. With these standards once established, one of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories, "Noon Wine," was chosen and analyzed for possible television adaptation. A story line was abstracted and a scenario for a television play was developed. The play was written and the writing problems discussed.

Conclusions

This study attempted to discover the answers to the following specific questions regarding the adaptation of a short story to television.

1. What are the criteria and limitations for the television play?
2. Is the television adaptation of Katherine Anne Porter's "Noon Wine" dramatically feasible?

3. Is the television adaptation of "Noon Wine" possible from the standpoint of fitting the criteria and limitations of the television medium?

4. What were the problems peculiar to writing this adaptation?

It is recognized that television is in the constant need of dramatic material. The number of acceptable television scripts is negligible when compared to the many submitted scripts which are rejected by the story editor. One reason for this situation was thought to be the playwright's lack of understanding concerning the requirements of the television medium. Television is not a small theatre or motion picture screen in a glass box, nor is it a modification of radio. Television has synthesized and abstracted points from the theatre, the motion picture and the radio industry and it is maturing into a medium with its own special techniques. The criteria and limitations of the television play have arisen from the peculiar effects of the television camera and the borrowed principles from other forms of entertainment.

The television stage does not resemble the theatre's proscenium arch or arena stage, but takes the form of a cone-shaped playing area, wide at the back and tapering to a point at the camera lens. Television is also a medium of camera selectivity. The spectator of a theatrical presentation views the presentation from one point in the theatre. The spectator of a television production is transported to a different position every time the director switches from camera to camera.

Television is an intimate medium capable of great subtleties. The relationship between performer and audience is both physically and

aesthetically close. The performer need not project emotion with the force necessary from a stage, nor does he depend on broad gestures and physical movement. Television has the capability of revealing character in quick, yet intense, brush-like touches.

The time limitation of the medium can be considered a limitation, but it can also be an asset to the playwright who understands the medium with which he is working. For example, time can be considered a limitation because adaptation often requires condensation. Time also influences the number of characters in the play with whom the viewer can identify himself. The time limitation becomes an asset when the playwright is compelled to limit himself to only the material which serves a dramatic function in the play.

Structurally the television play is similar to the three-act form of the theatre, but due to the time limitation the television play must quickly capture interest and therefore begins at a much more intense pace.

Television cannot present panoramic scenes with any great success, since the television screen is relatively small and objects appear smaller on the screen as the view of the set becomes more vast.

There are other general criteria which apply to television as well as the other media.

1. The dramatic script should have unity of action.
2. The theme should be timely.
3. The playwright must be careful in the handling of controversial material.

4. Trite or hackneyed situations should be avoided.
5. The drama should strive to produce an empathic response on the part of the viewer.
6. The story should be morally uplifting in its implications.

The adaptation of some of Katherine Anne Porter's short stories is dramatically feasible. These stories are intimate and television is the natural dramatic medium to convey this intimacy. The conflict in Miss Porter's stories is not in spectacular action, but in detailed, sometimes introspective, moments in a person's life.

The short story is an acceptable source for dramatic television material since the adaptation of a short story does not necessarily require condensation. The simplicity of the short story, especially those of Miss Porter, simplifies the process of adaptation. The time limitation of television makes it rather difficult to include the many subplots of a novel, but the short story usually avoids the use of subplots.

A survey of the literature written by Katherine Anne Porter was necessary for this study. This survey disclosed that of the twenty remaining short stories at least seven of these could be adapted for television. One of her short stories, "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," was recently produced on television.

The television adaptation of "Noon Wine" cannot be evaluated as being successful until it has been produced. Drama is written to be performed, rather than to be read. The only measurements for the possible success of the unproduced television play are, therefore, its

dramatic structure and the use of the television medium which the playwright makes in the script.

The adaptation of "Noon Wine" was written for live television production. The adapter conceived his stage as a television stage, not as the stage of the theatre. The controlling factors of time, make-up and costume changes, and scene changes were considered and dramatic compensation was allowed for any scene where any of the above factors would interfere with the continuous movement of the play.

The problems involved in writing the television adaptation are related to the dramatic structure of the play. Consistent dramatic structure implies the principle of unity of action. Unity of action requires a strong causal relationship of every point in the play. The flashback device was used for this purpose, because it created a frame of reference within the play and unity was achieved through the use of progressive units of action.

Noon Wine is a multi-level play. Story, thematic and symbolic levels of meaning were all involved in the adaptation of the short story. One basic difference between Miss Porter's story and the television play is that Miss Porter utilized third person narration and the revelation of the characters' thoughts, in addition to dialogue and action. The television playwright must discover a common denominator as a substitute for the various tools of prose fiction. This denominator is the concept of illustrative action or the dramatic demonstration of emotion and idea.

The television adaptation of "Noon Wine" is a compromise between an episodic play and a play based solely on the theme of Miss Porter's short story. It was therefore necessary to give each character an individualistic personality trait and a generally symbolic trait. The only way, however, that these traits could be understood was through the use of illustrative or observable action.

As has been said before, the playwright should consider criteria and limitations in writing his television adaptation, but he can never really be sure of success until the play has been produced. Therefore, a useful survey study could be made on critical evaluations of produced television adaptations. A second study would involve a survey of critical opinions on the success of original authors of fiction and plays in writing television adaptations of their own works.

As long as the playwright does not understand the problems of the medium, there will always be a shortage of acceptable dramatic television material. Once the medium is understood there will not only be more acceptable original scripts, there will also be more and better adaptations. The adaptation of prose fiction is a relatively untapped area in terms of the vast storehouse of material available and should be a definite source for the solving of television's script shortage. The short stories of Katherine Anne Porter are only a small part of that vast storehouse.

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APPENDIX

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by

Joan Pierce

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