PLAY OWNERSHIP AND THE STRUGGLE FOR CREATIVE CONTROL IN THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS

by

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The realm of play ownership includes more than legal ownership of a dramatic literary work; it also encompasses the struggle for creative control of a production by the playwright, director, designers, actors, boards of directors, critics, and audience members. While all of these individuals may attempt to control any given production, most often it is the playwright and the director who come head-to-head over choices that must be made in staging a production. It is this relationship and creative struggle that demands attention.

In the early history of theatre the playwright owned his scripts. He frequently interpreted his work and served as a director, even though this latter position did not become a standard necessity of production until the late nineteenth century. At times, the playwright would sell his ideas outright to companies and would then become a servant who modified the script according to the companies' desires. Only since the 1880s, when audiences first saw the results of lengthier rehearsals and increased technical developments in theatre, has the director emerged as a strong, creative and necessary position in theatrical productions.
The legal aspects of play ownership were then formalized, and clashes between playwright and director emerged.

Copyright laws, both those of the United States and those internationally recognized, have made it legally clear that the playwright owns the play. The script is the property of the playwright. It has been difficult, however, to define what happens to that work when the printed words are transferred from the written page to a live theatrical experience with actors, sets, costumes, lighting, special effects, and multiple interpretations. The attempt to define ownership through legal terms is successful in paying royalties, securing rights, and publishing; but these laws sometimes complicate production when the director attempts to interpret what the playwright meant or never meant.

Playwrights have an apparent emotional attachment to their plays, and they often feel that their work must be presented in a very specific manner. Even established professional playwrights sometimes feel the need to direct their own plays so that the production will resemble what occurred in their minds when the idea was first conceived and written. Some playwrights feel that any reversal or juxtaposing of times, places, or selection of actors for individual roles can disfigure their script and cause it to become something not intended.
This emotional attachment to the script often creates tension between the director and the playwright. Even if the playwright is no longer living, tension is sometimes created between the director and those who stand faithfully by playwrights' perceived intentions.

The director has the onerous task of taking the text of the play and bringing it to life and real action through the efforts of the actors, the technicians, and the visual artists, all of whom share different ideas about what the playwright intended. When playwrights performed this task, any conflict remained within their control. With the emergence of directors, interpretations have become more extrinsic; consequently the interpretations have become the subject of confrontations over creative control. These conflicts sometimes even occur long after the playwright has died. There are many who support alternate, non-traditional stagings of Shakespeare's plays, and similarly, there are "purists" who see anything other than slight cuttings to be a "bastardization." By his nature, the director makes choices and find new ways to say things that may be all too familiar to the audience. It is a director's function and responsibility to interpret and re-discover meanings not always obvious or previously considered.

The struggle for creative control and play ownership goes well beyond the playwright and director. As Jimmy
Durante once said, "Everyone wants to get into the act!" Critics, boards of directors, actors and audience members have all attempted "to seize the play." American theatre is full of instances of play censorship and control from many different directions. Attempts at play ownership by boards of directors or producers of professional, amateur and educational theatres have often ended in theatrical disasters, or at least in theatre that falls short of its true potential. When control is given away—or taken--by a group of people untrained in theatre direction, theatre as art seldom survives.

Critics have long been known to control the fate of a production. People like Frank Rich, New York Times critic, have had a tremendous influence in making or breaking a production and, thus, should be included in the arena of play ownership. It matters little who owns a play from a legal or even directorial consideration, when a critic can own it by keeping the doors opened or closed simply by expressing his opinion in print.

In a different light, a recent summer tour which was Broadway bound concluded with the two leading actresses being at odds. Their individual struggles for play ownership finally ended with the closing of the tour, subsequently causing the show not to transfer to a Broadway stage. Actors can assume control over a play's destiny
through their struggle to control the creative direction of a production.

How these situations arise, how they are resolved, and why they are not always solved is important to all who seek to produce good theatre. Ownership of a theatrical experience can be sought, gained, shared, and lost by all theatrical personnel. It is on this basis that this research is centered. The definition of play ownership and that definition in reality often determines just how successful a play production will be. It is possible that some system to define the extent of directing interpretation should be considered for each play currently made available by publishers. The best of creative intentions can be tossed out like an unneeded prop or stage piece because of misunderstandings about who is in control and why he or she is in control. Perhaps a clearer understanding of what the playwright expects could be made available to directors by publishers.

Through observation, discussion, and lengthy study, a clear picture of who owns a play can emerge, creating a greater possibility for perfect moments to occur. A closer look at true play ownership can provide all dramatists with an opportunity to see this relationship more clearly.
CHAPTER I
THE HISTORICAL AND LEGAL ASPECTS OF
PLAY OWNERSHIP

The contemporary stage is littered with the remains of productions that should have enjoyed an opening night, if not an extended run. The playwright's creative germ is often left sterile by the hands of an insensitive director who makes warped translations of it that are even unrecognizable to the playwright himself. On the other side, playwrights have often firmly refused to authorize the changing of a single word, blocking direction, or setting in their works. Both of these viewpoints are unhealthy for contemporary theatre.

An example of this dilemma deserves consideration. In the fall of 1988, playwright Pat Pfeiffer was to enjoy the opening of her new play, A Question of Identity, at Texas A & M University (Masters, 1988). Pfeiffer, a California playwright, was shocked to discover during the last dress rehearsal that director Charles Gordone, a Pulitzer Prize winner for playwrighting, had re-written much of the play and dropped several characters from the script. The director had prohibited the playwright from attending the last two weeks of rehearsals, even though she was in Texas at the university's request to help her new work take form
When Pfeiffer realized the rewritten work was going to play to a sold-out opening night audience and that the play was not really hers anymore, she considered the possibility of pulling the university's right to production upon advice from attorneys at The Dramatists' Guild in New York City. Instead, the university, on its own, cancelled the production the night before it was to open to avoid a possible legal confrontation. The unauthorized, "adapted" play closed before it opened.

How did such a situation develop? How can a major university invite a new playwright from across the country to sit in on production rehearsals and allow a director to re-write without permission? This event was not resolved to anyone's satisfaction, including that of the playwright, the director, the Theater Department, the university or the hundreds of patrons who were expecting a new work. To examine this problem, which has become typical in contemporary theatre, it is important first to explore play ownership from an historical perspective.

In Greek theatre, the Greek word for poet can be used for the functions of both playwright and the director. (Staub, 1973) Aeschylus, for example, was the triumphant man of the theatre whom even ancient critics cited for "brilliant mounting of his plays" (Cole, 1953). With only a few exceptions, the playwright directed his own works
and was in charge of the production. Until the time of Sophocles the playwright acted in his own plays as well (Brockett, 1974). It is also known, however, that Kallistrates and Philonides produced Aristophanes' play Lysistrata, The Babylonians and The Birds (Staub, 1973). Information contained in the prologues of Terence's plays points to Ambivius Turpio as his director and producer. In most cases, however, it was the playwright who directed the play.

As Greek playwrights often served as the directors of their own work, they had a good understanding of what could and would work on the stage. Often the playwright was trained in dance, as well as in rhetoric and composition. This level of training points to contrast with the contemporary theatre where many playwrights have never directed and directors who do not understand the procedure of writing and developing plays on paper.

In French medieval theatre the title maître du jeu, or "master of the play," is found. This position, in the massive pagentry of French theatre, was highly respected and desired. The master of the play would impose heavy fines on amateur players to obtain his will. Medieval drama that originated in Christian ritual developed its elaborate and complex civic productions of Biblical stories from Creation to the Judgment Day (Cole, 1953). The ability to put together such an event required "direction" from a
particular focus. With many scenes and lasting for several days, the direction had to emerge from one individual. In 1508, Jean Bouchet assumed such great and successful control over the ownership of the production that his ideas were widely sought.

The *Livre de conduite du regisseur* of the Mons Passion Play embodied the work of two specialists, Guillaume and Jehan Delechiere (Cole, 1953). These two technicians were able to manipulate machines and other special effects gadgets in such a way that ownership of their plays was secured through their special stamp of spectacle. Often half of a year was spent in planning the festive productions for only a week's run of performances.

In the Elizabethan age—the highest realization of English drama—the dramatist was an employee of the acting company. The relationship could take various forms, but it was always the acting company that the dramatist had to please first. The acting company eventually paid him, and, under normal circumstances, the acting company controlled "the copyright" of the play (Bentley, 1971). The playwright was expected to supervise the original production of his own works, although subsequent rehearsals were conducted by the bookholder, who combined the functions of prompter and stage manager (Brockett, 1964). Most actors were expected to know their craft, and the playwright most likely limited his influence to explaining his intentions.
Philip Henslowe, a businessman associated with the Admiral's Men, acted as a kind of agent between the author and the actors. By his extensive system of loans, Henslowe kept both playwrights and actors in constant dependence. With the sale of his play the playwright entirely gave up his right to the possession of it, and it belonged forever to the company [Mantzius, 1970]. This fact gave the actors creative control over the work and provided them the freedom to alter it if they found that the play no longer suited their needs. As such, the playwright could not have the script printed or performed without the consent of the company.

While the company normally controlled production of the script, there were exceptions. Ben Jonson is the most notable and familiar example—so familiar, in fact, that his highly exceptional conduct and reputation are all too often taken to be normal [Bentley, 1971]. Jonson attacked other playwrights for failing to understand the purposes and techniques of drama. He was quick to point out flaws in other playwrights' scripts, including those of William Shakespeare. Jonson described the poet (or director) in the "tiring house" as prompting the actors aloud, stamping at the book holder, swearing for the properties, cursing the poor tireman, railing that the music was out of tune and swearing over every venial trespass the actors committed [Cole, 1953].
Shakespeare and Jonson were the exceptions instead of
the rule during this period. A "director's" voice can be
heard in Hamlet's advice to the players. In each of his
plays there has been found a Reiebucb, a producer's plan.
The plan suggests that Shakespeare had creative control over
his productions. Shakespeare had the privilege of acting,
directing managing, as well as writing his own work. It is
easily understood that he was the primary creative owner of
his work, both the script and its production.

During the Restoration and French Neo-Classic periods
the writer continued to have control over the production.
According to his record keeper, La Grange, Moliere's special
perfection lay in his handling of le_jeu_des_acteurs: "A
glance of the eye, a step, a gesture, these things were
observed with an exactitude that was unknown until then in
the theatres of Paris" (Cole, 1953).

Although most theatre historians trace the formal
estabishment of the director as creative owner of the play
to Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, there were hints of an
emerging director years before. For instance, in Dialogues
on Stage Affairs, De Sommi (1550s) suggested that good
actors are more essential than a good play and that good
actors must be willing to follow instructions. It was not,
however, until the nineteenth century that the obvious
benefits of having an individual directing the total stage
production was finally recognized.
With the popularization of realism in the late nineteenth century, the establishment of the director as a necessary and vital part of play production emerged. Careful rehearsals and better coordination of all of the theatrical elements became a necessity as true realism developed. The audience began to demand more from productions, and the need for a director was formally established.

As stated previously, the modern director is usually traced from Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914), the ruler of a small German state, whose troupe came to public attention through a series of tours between 1874 and 1890 (Brockett, 1974). Saxe-Meiningen's troupe gave electrifying performances that overshadowed other major theatres. His plays stimulated the audiences because his complete control over all areas of play production brought to theatre a focus on details. His rehearsals were long and tedious, and he demanded total commitment to the ensemble.

Siegward Friedmann recalls arriving to play a role in the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's production of *Julius Caesar*:

On March 30 [1870], we arrived in Meninger; the performance was set for Monday, April 3. It came as an unpleasant shock to us to learn that we were expected to attend four general rehearsals. What did this little Meininger think to teach Königliches Hoftheater actors? An old piece that we were well "up on"--two scene rehearsals were plenty! And now we were expected to spend our time in four endless rehearsals. We went to the first rehearsal. The brilliant Dessoir, who
was always in a happy mood, now looking as if he had drunk vinegar, peered tiredly around. The duke sat in the auditorium and made his remarks in a loud, energetic voice. With earnest and happy devotion the individuals as well as the crowds followed his instructions. And the duke was as untiring in his critical remarks as the artists who tried to carry out the intentions of the princely director. Each of his directions astonished us and earned our admiration. We had never heard of any such well-thought-out instructions given to the actor on any stage. And all this was for a play that had been given countless rehearsals three years earlier and since had been a standing piece in the repertoire. We kept our mouths shut and were more and more astonished. After the first act, we looked at each other and shook our heads. We couldn't get one word out. It was just as if we had been seeing a piece of Lessing dramaturgy practiced. "Well, now, that's what I call direction," Dessoir finally cried. "To me it's just as if we had come out of some backwater to the finest court theatre." We could hardly wait for the next rehearsal; and we were really sorry that after four rehearsals we had to depart from such incomparable direction (Koller, 1984).

For more than one hundred years the director has remained the most influential and powerful member of the production team, setting up possible confrontations with the creative genius of the playwright. The two areas in which this confrontation is most often seen are: (1) new play development, and (2) avant-garde theatre, where directors often take extensive interpretive liberties with a script. Conflicts in both of these areas traditionally must follow the legal boundaries of ownership.
Legal Criteria for Play Ownership

In English speaking countries, according to an ancient legend, copyright was first enforced in 567 A.D. (Wincor, 1980). During that year, a student made a copy of a psalter that belonged to his teacher. A disagreement ensued, and the squabble was heard in court with favor held for the teacher. The phrase, "To every cow her calf," was coined, and from that time literary ownership, as a property, has been recognized.

In the sixteenth century, copyright emerged more as censorship in Great Britain than true copyright. Royal patents were required for publication and, by its nature, were used to keep track of heretical writers. In 1709, the Statute of Anne was established that provided ownership of literary works for a period of fourteen years.

In 1774, Sir John Dalrymple argued that publication destroys the rights of common law. He stated, "Now an ogle is a ladies' own whilst private, but if she ogles publicly, they are everyone's property" (Wincor, 1980). In this case, Donaldson v. Becket, the judges' vote held that literary property was recognized as common law, but when the author published, he was protected only for the fourteen years accorded in the Statue of Anne.
"Public benefit" is the basis of copyright laws in the United States. Public benefit is the concept that it is against the public interest for a masterpiece to be controlled perpetually by the author. Current copyright laws take away an author's perpetual rights after he publishes but grants him a new set of rights for a period of time to encourage him through rewarding self-interest, according to Wincor.

An example of public benefit is reflected in the 1909 Copyright Act which states, "Not primarily for the benefit of the author, but primarily for the benefit of the public, such rights are given" (Wincor, 1980). The words have continued in current copyright laws, the last version of which was passed by Congress in 1976.

"Public domain" is that area where no one owns the work, and all are free to use it as they please. Most of the world's greatest literary masterpieces are in the public domain. Ideas, themes, format, plot setting and probably characters' titles are in the public domain. Wincor states that only the specific treatment is all the law protects. In some cases, where a character is well-defined, genuine, human and artistically portrayed, then copyright may provide ownership by the author.
The Copyright Act of 1976 provides for a term of statutory copyright, beginning at the moment the work is created and extending fifty years after the death of the author. This applies to all works created after 1 January 1978. The owner of the copyright is given the exclusive right to produce, to prepare derivative works, to distribute copies, and to perform publicly his work (Wincor, 1980).

The exclusive right to perform is the playwright's legal control over how plays may be cast, sets and costumes designed, and directorial decisions vetoed. It is the exclusive right to produce that allowed Arthur Miller to cancel a Wooster Group production containing lines from The Crucible, a case that Chapter II and III explore. The playwright's exclusive right to produce is the center of conflicts concerning interpretation between playwrights and directors, which are the main focus for this research.

David Savran, academic scholar and historian of Wooster Group productions, relates the conflict between Miller and the group as follows:

When the Wooster Group began working on Arthur Miller's play The Crucible in November 1982, it immediately wrote to Dramatists Play Service to secure performance rights. The reply read, 'I regret to inform you that The Crucible is not available for production in New York City and so we cannot grant you permission to perform.' In February 1983, the Group opened rehearsals to the public of the new work-in-progress entitled L.S.D.: a 45 minute version of The Crucible.
He (Miller) came to the show and afterwards, he went upstairs to talk with the performers and compliment them on their work. A week later he instructed ICM to write The Wooster Group, saying that he would not grant them permission to use excerpts from *The Crucible*. Between 30 November 1983 and 22 October 1984, Elizabeth LeCompte sent three letters to Miller and/or his agent. On invitation of Peter Sellars, then artistic director of the Boston Shakespeare Company, the Group took *L.S.D.* to Boston, where it was opened to the critics, who reviewed it favorably. The Group opened the piece (in New York) to the press at the end of October. Mel Gussow panned the piece in the *New York Times* and ten days later a 'cease and desist' order from Miller's attorneys threatened to 'recommend to Mr. Miller that he take any and all legal measures against you (the Wooster Group), including the instituting of court proceedings.' On November 15, LeCompte reworked Part II so that *The Crucible* section would be performed in gibberish. During December, the Wooster Group reworked Part II of *L.S.D.* When a performer 'accidentally' spoke a line of *The Crucible* or made a reference to one of Miller's characters, he or she was silenced by a buzzer. It re-opened on January 4, 1985 for an eight performance run. John A. Siberman, Miller's lawyer, wrote the members of the Wooster Group to inform them that one of the attorneys in his office had attended a performance on January 5. He told the Group that its current version constituted an infringement of Miller's copyright and demanded it 'cease and desist.' He said that 'blatant and continuing violations of Mr. Miller's rights must not be allowed to continue' (Savran, 1985).

In the 10 January 1985 issue of *The New York Times*, it was reported that the final performance of *L.S.D.* was held on 8 January. Since that time, because of the legal complications, the Wooster Group has produced the play only in Europe, replacing all Miller excerpts with gibberish. Now, the play has become a statement about the conflict of play ownership.
In addition to the well known Miller/Wooster Group dispute, two other celebrated conflicts over play ownership emerged during the 1980s. The first centered around a 1984 production of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*, directed by JoAnne Akalaitis. The production was staged at the American Repertory Theatre in Connecticut. The *Endgame* dispute arose when Barney Rossett, Beckett's theatrical agent and president of Grove Press, heard that director Akalaitis had set the play in an underground subway station instead of the bare room specified by Beckett's stage directions (Bloom, 1985). In addition to the setting change, the director also cast two black actors, included an overture by Philip Glass, and changed the number of ashcans on stage. Martin Garbus, attorney for Grove Press, successfully sought to have a personal letter from Beckett inserted in the program denouncing the production. Because of the dispute, a special licensing agreement is now required for two of Beckett's plays licensed by Dramatists Play Service. (see appendix) The agreement states that setting, blocking, and lines may not be changed in any production. Actually, according to David Levine, Executive Director and an attorney for Dramatists Play Service, the agreement duplicates the restriction and rights information contained in the front of every script and simply serves as an "explanation point" for directors. Levine sums up directors who take unauthorized liberties with scripts as renters who
would re-paint the outside of their rented homes purple without the permission of the home owner.

The other dispute of play ownership to receive considerable public attention was Ann Bogart's production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *South Pacific*. In the winter of 1984, this undergraduate directing project by instructor Bogart set the musical in a high tech hospital for the rehabilitation of Americans psychically damaged in the Vietnam War. It was staged as a musical within a play, through which the injured vets relearned living in the American culture. The play/musical ran for a scheduled three weeks and a request for an extension was made to the Rodgers and Hammerstein Library. The request was denied.

The following is an interview with director Bogart.

Theodore Chapin, Executive Director of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Foundation which administers the licensing of the musical responds to his views of the conflict following the Bogart interview.

**STAFFORD:** When you decided to produce your interpretation of *South Pacific* did you apply for the rights in a normal manner? Did you accompany the request with information describing your plans?

**BOGART:** I think we just applied for the rights in a normal way. We looked at the contract every day to make sure we didn't break any rules, which we didn't. We did it in order, had all the characters, so I don't think we broke any rules.

**STAFFORD:** How did the Rodgers and Hammerstein people react to what you finally came up with?
BOGART: They liked certain aspects of the performance but overall they didn't approve of setting it in the institution. So they didn't extend the request to perform.

STAFFORD: Did they send you any kind of legal instrument denying your request?

BOGART: Yes, they sent a letter stating that we could not extend the play past the prearranged closing date.

STAFFORD: How do you feel about playwrights or their agents who say you can not change any blocking, lines, setting or lines in their plays?

BOGART: I think it is a shame. When a play is originally written, one has an obligation to set it exactly where the author intends. But after that, a play begins to have its own history. For instance, I can't do Streetcar and have an actor pretend that Marlon Brando never played Stanley. There is this baggage that comes along with a play, its own history, and as an artist I am not interested in pretending as though it never happened. I am interested in incorporating the whole history of the play into a production. We are in a post modern world.

STAFFORD: In the seven years since your staging of South Pacific, are you still producing in a non-traditional mode?

BOGART: You have to put yourself in my shoes. I don't see what I do as non-traditional. I don't see it as experimental and I don't see it as avant garde. I see what I do as being as true to the original spirit as possible. When I did South Pacific I wanted a country just coming out of a war. A lot of the musical seems like a Pepsodent ad. In order to get to the original energy of a play you sometimes have to go through the back door. So what ever that is, it is not an approach. I wouldn't set Hamlet in some other period just to do it. I try to find out how to get to the original energy of the play and be true to it.

STAFFORD: In a recent production of yours would I see something I am familiar with?

BOGART: Probably. What you would want to hear
about is my production of *On The Town* which was set on an aircraft carrier.

**STAFFORD:** Did you encounter any legal problems similar to those with *South Pacific*?

**BOGART:** Well, there is somebody out there who is really out to get me because when I did *On The Town* a very nasty note was received from someone saying I had destroyed the play. However, I had had numerous conversations on the phone with the playwrights about how I was interpreting the play and they gave us their blessings. Same thing happened with my production of *Once in a Lifetime*. That turned out fine, also.

**STAFFORD:** Do you always seek permission before you start production that may not be following the letter?

**BOGART:** With *On The Town* we did. With *Once in a Lifetime* there wasn't enough time because the complaint got there so fast.

**STAFFORD:** Are playwrights overly sensitive about ownership and interpretation of their works?

**BOGART:** I really feel for playwrights. A playwright churns it out of their imagination and then must go through the pain of watching somebody else embody their imagination and no matter what you do it is never going to be what they saw. When I do a new play, I do nothing but serve the playwright.

**STAFFORD:** But you know, many new play productions end in disaster over director-playwright interpretations.

**BOGART:** You change things only to serve the artist. The responsibility is to help the playwright realize their vision. A director should be able to enter into the person of the playwright and not work against him.

**STAFFORD:** Should there be some kind of instrument or understanding between the playwright and director before a new play goes into production?
BOGART: It should certainly be talked about. What I am trying to do in my work is to talk about values. We all have an obligation to talk about that.

STAFFORD: So you feel that with new plays it is the responsibility of the director to search out what the playwright meant but with older, established plays it is up to the director to find a new way to interpret it?

BOGART: Yes, but still being true to the play.

STAFFORD: Gimmicks really bother you.

BOGART: It really irks me. Bob Brustein wrote a wonderful article, and he said there are two ways to reinterpret a play. One is the gimmick method and the other is reanimating a play and how you do that (Bogart, 1991).

Ann Bogart provides a strong argument for the playwright by suggesting the need to be faithful to the script and to avoid gimmicks for the sake of gimmicks. There were standing room only performances at New York University when she staged South Pacific, and many requests for extensions. The media conveyed the excitement produced by the play, and it was a success. Even legal representatives of the Rodgers and Hammerstein Foundation acknowledge redeeming values in the production. Theodore Chapin explains the position of the publisher:

STAFFORD: The production license was not granted beyond the original ending date. Why was it not renewed?

CHAPIN: It was awkward. It really was. I had a visit from the producers, and they said we haven't changed a word, but it is different. They said it was not set where it was originally set. They told me it was set in a rehabilitation ward
for soldiers coming back from the Vietnam War. And the whole show was their rehabilitation. I thought it sounded kind of strange. I went to see it and it was fascinating. I would be lying if I said anything other than that. It was disturbing and brought up a lot of questions which I think were not easy to grab a hold of. It is absolutely true that there were things that she did that had nothing to do with South Pacific. There were four actors playing one character. They delivered the lines sort of round-robin in a way. One woman sat in a corner, in a strait jacket saying, "I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love." It was stark white! Some things had nothing to do with South Pacific. Now I am not an author. Here I am, an agent, trying to determine if this was dangerous and decide what our policy should be. Other than that kind of stuff, I don't think she made that many changes. She didn't really change the text. There were applications on top of it. The words were all there, and I think it was certainly a reading of South Pacific. There were some fascinating things. For example, when the sailors came in singing, "There is Nothing Like a Dame," there were these bright lights and they all came marching in from the back. The woman who played Mary was much younger and hip, not trying to be an older lady. It was intriguing and it brought up the whole question about shows like Rodgers and Hammerstein's which are very specific about how they are to be staged. It caused me to ask myself, "Is it time to rethink these shows so that you can do this much or is there some middle ground?" It may have been too far to the other extreme.

STAFFORD: A.J. Antoon told me he staged South Pacific and wanted to change several things but first sought permission. Legally, I suppose this is the way you prefer?

CHAPIN: He made a fair number of changes, and, unlike Ann, he asked scrupulously about everything he wanted to change. The weird thing about it was that his productions didn't have any where near the life that Ann Bogarts did. Because I saw it and it was awful. It had no life.

STAFFORD: Here we have a person whose job it is to protect the works, and we almost have you defending Ann Bogart for her choices.
CHAPIN: I think my job is also to encourage performances of the work and to make sure these things are alive.

STAFFORD: So how cautious are you about changes?

CHAPIN: It is a case-by-case situation. More often than not, though, it is seldom that numerous changes result in a positive production. They are incredibly well constructed, and if you start messing around with them, you discover that you pay for it.

STAFFORD: Other than Bogart's production, can you think of any production you agreed to that strayed far from the text?

CHAPIN: There was a production of Carousel at the Kennedy Center, directed by James Hammerstein, himself, that did not work. There are times when a director can stage a play in a different manner and provide illumination that was not previously presented.

STAFFORD: What about the Wooster Group?

CHAPIN: I don't know that many of their shows but the ones I have seen have always seemed sort of at odds with what the piece was. It is almost as if they decide to do it differently only for the sake of doing it differently. Ann Bogart had a very clear notion of what she was doing, and she followed through on that notion. That's why I respected it. The reason we did not extend it was because it was a little bit of an embarrassment. It became quite a talk of the town. Not all of us here felt the same, and we just decided not to renew the license.

STAFFORD: Should there be a written agreement between the playwright and director when new plays go into production, stating each other's rights and responsibilities?

CHAPIN: Perhaps. Have you spoken with Stephen Schwartz? Because Schwartz wrote Pippin in college and he tried to get it produced after Godspell, Stewart Austin took it on and hired Bob Fosse. Stephen Schwartz hated what Fosse did, and, in fact, there was this arbitration about
whether the show, when it was done in Australia
would be in the "Fosse style." Schwartz
prevailed. He said, "No, I am the author and I do
not like what he did to my piece and I am going to
do it the way I want to do it." And it is an
interesting thing, because I am not sure it was
ever as successful as it was when Fossee did it
(Chapin, 1991).

Theodore Chapin presents a surprising viewpoint about
Bogart's South Pacific. His acceptance of it rests on the
fact that he found something honest and not previously
discovered in productions. No doubt he respects the
interpretation. Chapin, like most everyone, however, agrees
that gimmicks, for gimmicks sake, are weak reasons to change
a script. The problem encountered is that no one admits his
interpretations to be gimmicks.

To explore the problem further, it is necessary to
understand the position of the playwright in the
controversy. The following chapter explores the issue from
that standpoint through the detailed comments of two of
America's leading playwrights.
CHAPTER II
THE PLAYWRIGHT'S ATTACHMENT TO THE SCRIPT
AND SENSE OF PLAY OWNERSHIP

Dating back to the first time the first play script was written down, playwrights have assumed ownership of their work. Even when the script has been sold to an acting company or publisher, the playwright has sought to influence how the play should be staged. Some playwrights have exercised tremendous control over productions of their scripts, while others have been happy to have them produced with few strings attached. Two contemporary playwrights that have well-defined ideas about how their plays are to be produced are Edward Albee and Arthur Miller.

There are playwrights, such as Samuel Beckett, who provide little, if any, leeway in production choices. Beckett's plays require the director to sign an additional production agreement (see appendix) binding him to stage the play exactly as written, including blocking, line delivery, and casting. While Albee and Miller do not require this agreement, they both have halted productions of their scripts that stray too far from what they conceive as being appropriate. With that consideration, this chapter will focus on interviews with both playwrights concentrating on
why the playwright seeks to control stagings of his productions.

In 1976, during a discussion on the campus of University of Michigan, Miller was asked: "How often do you get directly involved in the production of your plays and how much final say do you have in how things are done?"

Miller responded:

Well, I would love it if they would take it and do it beautifully and I wouldn't even know about it until opening night. But that's not the way it is. I'm there all the time and I either cast it myself with the director and the producer, or else a lot of the time I don't know the actors around so they bring them in. But I have to okay them. Every playwright has the final approval in casting, legally; we have a contract. A number of playwrights feel for one reason or another that they don't know enough—or are not certain enough--of their own opinion to do it (Martin, 1976).

Miller has long made it clear that playwrights should control their productions. The following interview with Miller appears in detail in order to provide an explanation of why the playwright wishes his productions produced in an approved manner. He has occasionally answered questions concerning his strong feelings about play ownership; however, this interview is the first in-depth discussion on the topic by Mr. Miller.

STAFFORD: You are adamant about how you want your plays treated . . . so why do playwrights feel so personally attached to the script and feel a need to control the production?
MILLER: Well, it seems so obvious that it's hard to answer. I don't write plays at random. They are not paint that's thrown up against the wall to see whether it sticks. I believe that I know the best way that this thing is going to work. I make an infinite number of revisions in the course of writing a play and I run down many blind alleys. I come finally to a structure which I believe is the structure that bears the vision that I wish to open up to the world/audience. And if somebody sticks his finger in it and starts fooling around and in my opinion doesn't know what he is doing, I would object to it. A novel writer certainly doesn't expect somebody to pull fifteen pages out of his book here and ten pages there and nine pages some place else and write new lines in or rearrange the course of events. Why should a playwright?

STAFFORD: There are instances where a new play has been produced by an organization and then problems occur between the playwright and the director. This happens frequently and often productions are cancelled or so drastically changed that you would never recognize the play from its original version. This recently happened at a major university in Texas between a new playwright and nationally known playwright serving as the director. How do we determine the boundaries of play ownership in the production of new works?

MILLER: First, the play exists on its own, normally. I realize there are productions that consist of a collaboration to begin with, whereby the playwright merely has the concept and then uses the director to expand the concept and make it palatable. That's one way I am sure some productions evolve. But I think most would start with a script. Now, the director who is interested in directing that script has an obligation, it seems to me, to tell the author that he likes the play to a point and that also there are things that he doesn't. If the director doesn't see how he can profitably do what is called for in the script and that he will have to make some changes that he, in all good faith, believes would help the script, then he must discuss it with the playwright. If the playwright, at that point, thinks this is wrong he
shouldn't get into the situation with the
director. The problems usually occur because
the director doesn't foresee that is going to
happen. You know? When the director is in the
dark himself and puts actors up on the stage and
the scenes don't seem to work. He may want to put
in changes, or does without the playwright's
knowledge. That has been going on a long time.
The only argument, seems to me, is that the
director does not have the (legal) right to
enforce changes on the script without the
agreement of the writer.

STAFFORD: Have you had to face this problem?

MILLER: Not really, because I think my plays
are, generally speaking, in a more advanced state
when they go into production. I have had one,
though, which was far more experimental. The
American Clock, which indeed involved fooling
around with scenes because it was a very
unstructured work to begin with. It had a lot of
scenes that took place in a lot of different
characters and indeed you could arbitrarily move
them here and there to see what would happen.
This happens frequently with musicals,
incidentally which are not always deeply
structured. So, I would say that the only real
problem we have is the playwright having the right
NOT to have his work done, even if it would
benefit the work. I think that directors, very
often, are correct in saying that the work would
be better if certain changes were made.

STAFFORD: David Levine, Executive Director
for the Dramatist Guild, told me that the setting
of one of your plays was changed to a Spanish
setting.

MILLER: That was out in California. Using the
Spanish setting was perfectly all right in that
kind of an adaptation. They weren't changing the
structure of it. They wanted, if I recall, to
change simply the nationality of the people and
this required some name changing, I think, but
very little.

STAFFORD: Did they seek your approval?

MILLER: Yes. Yes.
STAFFORD: I recently spoke with A.J. Antoon, director for many of the Shakespeare in the Park productions in New York City. Of course, he does some rather unusual things with his productions. How do you react to directors who take a script and make drastic changes to the costumes, time period, setting, etc.?

MILLER: It's a slightly differently thing. I think, first of all, the original Shakespeare play exists and nothing is going to destroy that. In the case of a new play it may not exist.

STAFFORD: How is that?

MILLER: Well, it has no existence until it proves itself on the stage, in accordance with the playwright's vision. Then, it either proves itself or it fails and the playwright takes his lumps or he gets the credit for the play. But when you muck around with it you are de-creating something. Nobody is going to mistake a Hamlet set on the moon. It is the same as a Hamlet set in Denmark in the 16th century.

STAFFORD: So you are saying that is acceptable?

MILLER: Yes, because it does not, in any way, impinge upon the existence of the work as written.

STAFFORD: Some would say Arthur Miller's work is every bit as good as Shakespeare's. If you feel it is okay for drastic changes to be made to his classic works, what about yours?

MILLER: Well...

STAFFORD: What about directors making drastic changes to Arthur Miller's works?

MILLER: The only really big shift I ever saw in a play of mine was with the Wooster Group, downtown. There may have been others that I was not aware of.

STAFFORD: How did you feel about that?

MILLER: I objected to what they were doing because it seemed to me they had completely disemboweled the play. Now, there is a lot of disagreement about that. A lot of people thought it was enormously effective and they were outraged.
that I objected to it. I probably made more enemies than I had before, which is not difficult. But I just felt that the structure as given by me [was not there]. Now there is a production of *The Crucible* right now in Los Angeles in the L.A. Theatre Circle (?) with a woman playing Reverend Hale. It is in modern dress with judges wearing some kind of long judicial gowns such as our judges wear now but it gives a flavor of the past and as far as I know, from the reviewers, no change was made in the plays themselves. And the setting, of course, was accordingly changed. They were not in the 17th century New England village somewhere else God knows where. There are limits to it. I'll give you another example. A guy called me up on the telephone about six months ago, from the Flemish part of Belgium. He is a well known avant garde director. He was in rehearsal, and I guess someone warned him that he might get into trouble. He said he was doing one *Death of a Salesman* and that he had Willie up there in it and he is already dead and his wife is leaning over the coffin and she is doing the last speeches of her part. In addition, he said he was eliminating three or four roles. Then his production has a flashback, and Willie gets up out of the coffin and the play begins. Of course, he has eliminated two or three scenes at the beginning. I ask, "What are you to accomplish with this?" He said, "Well, it has been done the same way for so many years that I thought I would do it different."

**STAFFORD:** How did you respond?

**MILLER:** I say something like, "Well, I'll tell you what you're going to end up with. What you've got is a radio play. And it's going to take you sixteen times longer and more laboriously to do it the way you're talking about." It turned out, after much argument, I forbade the whole thing. I told my agent to get on his back, and he called me about six times and finally relented and did it the way it's written. But I tried to explain to him that what he intended was a far less efficient machine for accomplishing what the play was already able to accomplish. He would have to explain things by virtue of new dialogue and new narration which were already implicit in the play.
STAFFORD: And you would object to that anyway, right?

MILLER: Of course. But I object to it not only because somebody else is writing my play but because it's stupid. It would be a little bit like building a motor car with three wheels and you're going to have some kind of apparatus to keep it from tilting over. Whereas, if you made it with four wheels it would never tilt over. Hear me?

STAFFORD: I see.

MILLER: If the thing works, why fix it? The reason they fix it, I'm afraid, is because they can't penetrate the internal life of the play. But they muck about with the external, which is easy to do, and then it's a question of, well I'm afraid, the democratization of directing. Everybody becomes a director. Whereas, before you had to have some insight and some capacity for penetrating complex material.

STAFFORD: Obviously, your own ideas contain hidden meanings. For example, we all understand that The Crucible plays off the McCarthy Era, as well as the corruption of government in general. Some think that directors can find meanings in plays that maybe even the playwright didn't realize.

MILLER: There is no question about it. I am a witness to it. Sure.

STAFFORD: So that's possible?

MILLER: I feel directors should penetrate the play.

STAFFORD: Right!

MILLER: If they do that, my hat's off. Thank God for them. I've seen it time and time again. I found out not only directors, but readers, too. I received a letter the other day from an Englishman who had seen After the Fall in its present production at the National Theatre in London. I know this man as a literary person, as well as a political figure. He said it struck him, as he was watching the play, that Byron had
written the play or poem in which the line, "after the fall" appears. Well, I didn't know from where the poem came, and he sent me the verse which is marvelous exposition of the theme of, After the Fall. Now, that guy, had he been a director and directed the play and used that information and that insight it might have done something wonderful in the play. See what I mean?

STAFFORD: Do you still see your plays produced?

MILLER: I don't, mostly. However, I did see The Crucible last year.

STAFFORD: Does seeing your productions still create excitement for you?

MILLER: Well, I am only anxious that they can't cast them well enough. You see, that's 90% of the problem in these resident theatre or any production for that matter. You are writing complicated music and if you don't have actors who are up to it, you are going to get a simplified version.

STAFFORD: Have you in the past five years seen any of your work that still causes you to take a look and say, "Now, that's exactly what I meant when I wrote that"?

MILLER: I am afraid that it's happened more in England than here.

STAFFORD: You think so?

MILLER: But, I've seen a few things here, a few performances, now and then, that I felt very good about. But, for example, they did A View From the Bridge which is a very local kind of a play if you want to look at it that way, but it's got a good kind of dialect. In England, there is a director who is the last man I would suspect able to direct it and it was a fabulous performance, directed by Michael Cameron. The language was wrong and the accent was wrong. But they invented a new accent which was perfect for their audience. The insight from the acting and the underpinning of the thing was breathtaking.

STAFFORD: I recently read an interview you
Arthur Miller's view on play ownership is typical of most professional and established playwrights. While Miller has often been regarded as unyielding in his dealings with some directors, he has obviously allowed some flexibility in the staging of his productions. He has perhaps been judged frequently by his conflict with the Wooster Group over the use of lines from *The Crucible* in the production of *L.S.D.*
Just the High Points. He apparently allows some manipulation of his plays, but he draws the line at juxtapositioning text and cutting roles. His willingness to allow the updated version of *The Crucible* in California clearly suggests flexibility in some productions. A closer interpretation of Miller's comments may be found in Chapter V.

Edward Albee is another professional playwright who has definite ideas concerning the ownership of his works. The following interview occurred in July, 1990. It provides a clear insight into his thoughts concerning play ownership:

**STAFFORD:** Who owns the play?

**ALBEE:** In screen writing the screen writer is an employee and can be fired from his own work. It is owned by the producer. We playwrights copyright our work and retain ownership under all circumstances, as long as the copyright survives. In production, we lease the rights to produce the play. There is a fundamental difference here. Playwrights are not employees. It is one reason we cannot be a union which is why we are a guild. When we lease the rights to produce the play, we retain certain things. We retain control of the text. It says that no changes can be made in the text without our permission. And if we permit changes, additions, subtractions, alterations of any sort in our the play, whatever changes are made or who they are made by, we own them. We also retain the right to approve the cast, director and similar things. The stronger we are, the more control we have. But the fundamental one is that we own every word and no one can change it.

**STAFFORD:** Aren't you speaking primarily about first class productions?

**ALBEE:** Well, they are called first class productions but should not because they seldom
are. Everything else is other than first class productions. Regional theatre is a separate contract; off-Broadway is a separate contract. Of course, it used to be that a producer would produce a play on Broadway first and obtain a whole set of subsidiary rights as a result of having produced the play on Broadway. But fewer plays are being produced on Broadway directly, now, especially if they are by Americans. The result is that off-Broadway and regional theatres are now the initiating producers. Mind you, no production of a play, or alteration of a play, is permitted without the author's permission, anywhere, high school included.

STAFFORD: Have you ever intervened?

ALBEE: I have heard about productions of plays of mine where they were not happy about some language and they wanted to take it out or change and I've told them they could not do the play. There was some fool critic that suggested Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf was not written about two heterosexual couples but two gay couples, which was nonsense. There is a difference, and I know the difference.

STAFFORD: Wasn't there a group who wanted to stage the play with that concept?

ALBEE: Yes, and I closed them down. It was in Ft. Worth. But the play makes no sense done by four men.

STAFFORD: I recently re-read the play and tried to think about the play in that respect.

ALBEE: What do you do about the historical prejudice? And even more ridiculous, I can't think of a single New England college in which the college president would permit his son to be in a twenty-one year relationship with a professor in the history department on campus. I can't think of it. It is nonsense, so I close down productions of that sort. Women have tried to do Zoo Story, two women in Zoo Story, and they are well intentioned, but men and women are different and I'd have to re-write the play. They say, "Well we could change it a little," but I say, "No way!"
STAFFORD: Are you aware of any group that changed the scope of your plays and not been caught until after the fact?

ALBEE: I'm sure some people have gotten away with things because the policing can't be absolute. But what happens if Samuel French hears about anything like that, they don't lease anything to those organizations anymore and so they can't do anymore plays.

STAFFORD: Where does the corruption come from?

ALBEE: It comes differently. It comes from beginning authors who are intimidated and pressured and who are told if they don't bend the rules, they won't get their play produced.

STAFFORD: You made the comment almost thirty years ago that, "We are breeding playwrights who think of themselves as only craftsmen rather than artists, and bad artists at that...who consider themselves as small cogs in the wheel." Are our playwrights without backbones?

ALBEE: Sure, but it is not only without backbones, but it is the fact that producers are enormously powerful. It is hard to get a play produced. David Levine (Dramatist Guild) will tell you of occasions, over and over again, where the producer has tried to impinge on the playwrights authority and rights. Producers say, "We know you wrote the play for a hero of some thirty-five year old guy, but we have some bimbo from Hollywood who is between pictures and she is twenty-six and why don't you re-write it for her?" Now, a lot of people do this, because first, they don't know any better and they haven't been paying attention to David Levine and the rest of us at the Dramatist Guild, or because they get scared and they want their play produced. They say okay, and change it. Also, there are a lot of them that are unsure of themselves, and they think a lot of people know better than they do. And that the director probably has a better idea of what the play ought to be about. They may also think that the actors ideas about the text are better than their own. Occasionally, this is true. But, none the less, it should not be a foregone conclusion that the playwright has to put up with.
STAFFORD: You direct a lot of your own work. Why?

ALBEE: Well, I direct other plays, too. I will be directing Beckett in Texas in the spring of 1991. I enjoy directing, and I learn more about my craft as a playwright by directing, and I also learn about my craft as a director. Also, I get to see a production that is close to what I intended. It is also nice to receive two salaries.

STAFFORD: Do you ever find yourself, as the director of your own works, asking, "Why did I write it that way?"

ALBEE: The only thing I will permit myself to do as a director is to cut.

STAFFORD: You don't add?

ALBEE: And if I observe, as the director, that I, as the playwright, wrote a scene that is too long, then I will ask myself if I can cut it. But I don't believe in tampering with work.

STAFFORD: In the summer of 1990, A.J. Antoon directed Taming of the Shrew in New York's Central Park, with a Southwest flair. How do you feel about this type of adaptation?

ALBEE: Oh, I think we should start doing Death of a Salesman in Sparta. I think we should take Streetcar and set it in the French Court of the 17th century.

STAFFORD: It really bothers you?

ALBEE: It bothers me because it more often than not is gimmick. But then, I do not want to attack a play I have not seen.

STAFFORD: Antoon says it is not gimmick. He says he really attempts to see what is really going on and attempts to make plays more accessible.

ALBEE: I mean, leave the Shakespeare alone. He is dead. Do it the way he wrote it. If it is going to be done, it has to be so correct to the play that you cannot criticize it. I have my own idea of Macbeth set in New England that I would
like to direct. I see it taking place on the sea
shore in the summer because I think it is about
upwardly mobile yuppies. However, I do not think
what I will do will be a gimmick. I think it will
be integral an part of the play. If someone can
change the play and convince me that this is in no
way distorts and diminishes the play, then I have
no problem with it.

STAFFORD: What about Peter Brooks' A Mid­
summer Night's Dream?

ALBEE: Well, I saw it. That was such an
abstracted production. They didn't try to move it
to a filling station in Nevada. I had no problem
with it. Who is to say the film of A Midsummer
Night's Dream, which was done by Reinhardt, was
THE way for it to be done. There is a distinction
to be made between something organic and something
gimmick. It is organic if you forget fairly
quickly and are absorbed in the play. It is
gimmick if it keeps sticking out.

STAFFORD: You mentioned Beckett earlier. His
plays require the director/producer to sign a
separate addendum stating no change will be made
in any detail of his work. Why the special rider?
Doesn't it say that in front of the play book
anyway?

ALBEE: Nobody, in my recollection, has ever
been so specific in his stage directions and
timings and his oral and visual sense as Sam was.
Following it is a pretty good idea.

STAFFORD: You feel it is precise work?

ALBEE: Yes, playwriting is very precise. It is
just as precise as Beethoven writing the C-Sharp
Minor String Quartet. He puts all the notes in
the right place, with all the proper notations.

STAFFORD: You feel it is in the production
and performance that things become distorted?

ALBEE: Sure, you can have lousy musicians. You
can get selfish directors or bad actors. You can
get a distorted performance in the C-Sharp Minor
String Quartet and you can get a distorted
performance of the play. Anybody who wants to
screw around, can, you know. It is easy enough to
do. What bothers me is that no one goes around playing different notes than the ones that Beethoven wrote or cuts his piece they just play it strangely. But a lot of directors and actors have no qualms about changing a playwright's text, as if it wasn't sacrosanct. Now, with a lousy play let them do whatever. It may need the help. But if you are doing a production of *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov doesn't need your help. You better do it the way he wrote it.

STAFFORD: What about some of the Wooster Group's productions?

ALBEE: I have seen many Wooster Group productions. I remember a twelve minute version of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, to the accompaniment of Berlioz's, "Roman Carnival Overture." It was one of the best productions of *Journey* I have ever seen. It was wonderful. It was funny and marvelous and to the point. I saw *Route 1 & 9*. It was not a desecration of *Our Town*. They did not do the whole play. It was a very, very interesting counterpoint to everything else that was going on.

STAFFORD: Do you think the production was misunderstood?

ALBEE: Yes, I think they were knee-jerked.

STAFFORD: Elizabeth LeCompte told me she never intended racial slurs.

ALBEE: I saw it. It wasn't racial at all. I have been a member of the NAACP since I was eighteen years old. Some of the press wasn't thinking, maybe the white liberal audience. It was knee jerk. Not thinking. It was a great shame, because she and Spalding (Gray) were both doing a great job, and it was real interesting.

STAFFORD: You are sixty-two years old, and you won't always be here...

ALBEE: Really?

STAFFORD: Oh yeah, and so what about creative control of your work after you are no longer living? What if someone does an all male version of *Virginia Woolf*?
ALBEE: My contracts say specifically that not a word is to be changed and that they must be performed by the actors of the same sex indicated in the script. I imagine there will be some control there. I imagine they will be setting them in Sparta, though!

STAFFORD: William Ball in San Francisco attempted to produce your play Tiny Alice several years back. What was the controversy?

ALBEE: It was very complicated. Bill Ball, in his creative wisdom, re-wrote a lot of plays. He re-wrote Shakespeare. He even added speeches that were not there, which gives you some idea of the guy's mind. He took Tiny Alice, a fairly operatic play and decided it wasn't operatic enough. He added a lot of staging which I thought was pretty silly. He rearranged some scenes and then added some lines to explain what was going on. I was a little offended by it. I did everything I could to close it. I was traveling at the time and called a press conference to say the play was a corruption of my intention. I found out later that they never received the rights to do the play in the first place. We didn't have a contract, so I couldn't close it. It was a Catch 22 situation. The run of the show was almost complete after my trip, and so we required them to sign a contract and we took double royalties. The next time Ball did Tiny Alice, it was in New York. I went to a rehearsal and discovered he was doing the same thing. So I insisted he put the play back, word for word, as I wrote it, which he did.

STAFFORD: A musician may record a hit song. The song may then be re-released by variety of other artists from different music genres. Some songs have highly different interpretations. Musicians seem to enjoy this event. Are playwrights more sensitive about their work? Are they more personally attached to their work?

ALBEE: You are getting into an area of pop culture as opposed to serious culture.

STAFFORD: Do you mean high art as opposed to low art?
ALBEE: I don't want to use those terms. A serious play by Beckett, Chekhov, Tennessee Williams is closer, in the analogy, to a Beethoven string quartet than to anything else. There are similarities there. A popular song is not even as close to an art song by Schubert or Debussy, as it is to, God knows what. We aren't talking about popular culture here with plays. I think the composer or lyricist of a popular song, if they are specific, that it must be done note for note, they don't say in writing that it must, or must not, be done with a country twang. They don't indicate the kind of orchestration required. There is not as much to violate. I am not talking about quality, here. It is just that there are few notes as compared to a full symphony.

STAFFORD: Do you think playwrights are more sensitive than song writers?

ALBEE: No, I don't think so. Look at Irving Berlin the way he carried on and protected his work. Look what happened to Jerry Herman when he had to settle a big law suit on Hello Dolly. He had to pay a million dollars. You see, the big question is, why does everyone feel that a playwright's copyright is worth less than other people's?

STAFFORD: Ok, why do they think that?

ALBEE: Because they have been encouraged to think that by reckless directors and egotistical actors and greedy producers. Sometimes, by ill advised, cowardly playwrights.

STAFFORD: You think they butcher just to get on the front page or make a buck?

ALBEE: No, No, No. What they try to do is take something off, or change the complexity. I'm not talking about trying to make a bad play work. I'm talking about what happens to good plays. If it is complex, they try to simplify it. If it is too unpleasant, they try to pleasant-it-up a bit so it will get a larger audience. If it makes people think too much, take some thought out of it. The bottom line is the dollar.

STAFFORD: A final question, what about young playwrights who are asked to compromise in order to get produced?
ALBEE: Often they are asked to compromise. If everyone would hold the line, it wouldn't happen. We ask young playwrights to become members of the Dramatists Guild, which is the only protection playwrights have. If we did that, producers would back down (Albee, 1990).

In a separate interview from 1971, Edward Albee was asked the question, "What do you mean, 'Theatre is a collaborative effort at best?'" He responded by claiming that often the modern director corrupts the play and that playwrights fail to understand their relationship to play production:

The best play in the world will never get its best performance, because the best play in the world has its best performance in the ear and eye of the man who wrote it. But the most disturbing thing is the encouragement that has been given to directors and actors—mostly directors, I suspect—in the United States in the past fifteen years, to consider themselves coauthors of a work. The corruption has gone so far that many playwrights compose their plays on the assumption that the director and actor will do their work for them. The playwriting craft is enormously imprecise since it has to be filtered through other people. It seems to me that it is the playwright's responsibility to be so precise that any sentence that comes in the middle of a play can be spoken only in one way and understood only in one way. We have been breeding playwrights in this country who think of themselves only as craftsmen rather than artists, and bad craftsmen at that, who consider themselves small cogs in the wheel (McCrindle, 1971).

Albee sees the distortion of plays being caused by selfish directors, bad actors, and/or greedy producers. He feels that the play will never be produced as accurately as it was first produced in the playwright's mind when the idea
was conceived and written down. Perhaps the problem is that playwrights are constantly looking for that "perfect moment" that they once captured in their creative mind. That possibility, along with additional observations concerning Albee's contradiction, appear in Chapter Five.

Edward Albee and Arthur Miller express the need for total control over the script. Each playwright has expressed the idea that modern playwrights have abdicated their responsibility of play ownership. Miller explains that the playwright should control from a legal viewpoint, since ownership is through the copyright. The playwrights' option to select director, cast, and designers provides the playwright the legal opportunity to make those decisions. Albee sees that the point of ownership comes at the time of writing the play, making it so precise that no mistake can be made by what the author meant. Finally, both playwrights feel that writers need to exercise their duty to own their play and, if they desire, disallow directors, producers and actors from tampering with their scripts under the disguise of interpretation.

The interviews provide an insight into the playwright's sense of ownership of a work. Problems arise, however, when others, particularly the director, assume ownership by providing their interpretation of what the playwright meant. The following chapter explores that side of the issue of play ownership.
CHAPTER III

THE DIRECTOR'S FUNCTION: THE NEED TO CREATE AND INTERPRET

The single most dominant force in contemporary theatre is the director. It is a distinguishing feature of the so-called directors' theatre that the director claims the authorial function, even though he has not written the original play (Bradby, 1988). Even the modern stage term "scenic writer," bespeaks the authority of contemporary theatre directors.

It is an understood and accepted assumption that script interpretation is the director's primary responsibility, and primarily because every other directorial decision is a result of predetermined interpretations of the script. The director's interpretation is a set of ideas, images, and feelings that express what the director wants his play to communicate to the audience (Cohen, 1974). The difficulty arises when what the script means to the director does not parallel what the script meant to the playwright.

Robert Cohen describes what is called "right" versus "vital" interpretation. He suggests that no director can "see" a play exactly as the author intended. He relates the Hindu story of eight blind men who examine an elephant and
then describe what they felt. What emerges are eight different interpretations, one saying that it felt like a rope and another arguing that it felt like a wall. To be "right," an interpretation must attempt to reproduce the script as the playwright intended. To be "vital," the director must stage theatre as people, attitudes and culture change. Because the classics have flexibility, they tend to last centuries and are easily re-interpretated.

One question seems to be, "Aren't some of the non-classic, contemporary plays worthy of reinterpretation?" Often, modern playwrights feel any alternative interpretation of their script is unjustified. As Edward Albee relates in Chapter II, one of the best performances of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* was only 12 minutes in length. Contemporary directors have a thirst for finding new ways to present old texts. With this understanding, interviews with A.J. Antoon, Director for New York's Shakespeare in the Park series, and Elizabeth LeCompte, director for The Wooster Group, may be helpful in analyzing the need to interpret and re-create.

The following interview with Elizabeth Lecompte took place in her office in The Performance Garage in SoHo of New York City in June, 1990:

   STAFFORD: Other than legally speaking, who owns your plays?
LeCOMPTE: Our plays are copyrighted, except of course when we use material from other peoples' plays when we don't have permission. We have actually stopped doing any of those plays because it is so difficult, even if we were doing small versions of them.

STAFFORD: Do you produce them in Europe?

LeCOMPTE: Yes. Yes, we could avoid it (problems here) but we don't need to because I have made enough work now. The way I do it now is I don't work with American play material unless it is written for us, which is too bad. We have several writers who work with us in collaboration and they are very flexible in a way that we are used to being. They watch us work, they watch us improvise. They write from what they see, and we work from their material. It seems to work very well. I'd love to use American play material, written by American authors, but it has been very difficult.

STAFFORD: Do you think there are any American playwrights who possess the quality you need for your work and also possess an open mind about script interpretation?

LeCOMPTE: If you mean writers, we have been working with our own.

STAFFORD: What about traditional American playwrights?

LeCOMPTE: No. No, because they are writing from a different tradition. Most of the writers that I read now are working from a literary tradition. We are not working from a literary tradition. We are working from a theatre tradition. But it is much more. It is not that it is anti-literary. It is that the literary comes out of the theatre situation. It is not an a priori situation where you have a literary work and then you interpret it. We make it all together and the writer is one of the primary collaborators. The writer does not go off in a room and then bring it to us. Often, they will, as with Jim ? Straser, write a segment, say a hundred words, and then we will use them. If the playwright is there in our space, he knows what we need. He then will bring back to us his writing, and we will use what he develops. It is a much closer situation, that allows give and take.
STAFFORD: Since you no longer use traditional works from playwrights, what about using material from the classics?

LeCOMPTE: Well, I am. Rights now I am working with Chekhov. Three Sisters. I am just trying to stay in the public domain, which means there are not too many American scripts I can use. I think that is a loss for us. Europeans understand the theatre tradition and that way of working so much better than Americans. So, I worked with Flaubert two years ago and now Chekhov. And of course with our current writers, sometimes two or three in a piece. Same as with music, I will use more than one composer.

STAFFORD: Then when it comes to play ownership as it relates to the Wooster Group, we are talking about "the group" owning the work, both creatively and legally?

LeCOMPTE: It seems to be a very fluid situation. For instance, North Atlantic. The play is copyrighted by one of our writers because all the words are his. He wrote it with us. And something like Judith Point, he wrote two-thirds of the script so he owns his part and has copyrighted his part, but we own the rest. His part could be performed separately. I'd like to say when we work with outside artists, they own their parts and are welcome to use their work elsewhere. One writer on L.S.D., Just the High Points took her writings and used them in a book, and that was wonderful. That seems to be the best way. They own it and we also own it. That way, if we make profits maybe we can share.

STAFFORD: You've been working as a director since Richard Schechner left in 1979. After fifteen years, do you still consider yourself avant garde?

LeCOMPTE: (laugh) Well, I think we are very traditional theatre. I don't know why people want to take on a particular identity. But I have always felt I was part of a very traditional theatre. That is the tradition of the company in light of our work in collaboration. It is European. Companies of directors, writers and actors working in ensemble, creating pieces for the ensemble. And so I go back to Shakespeare and Moliere. It is a classical structure for theatre.
It seems American theatre has gone away from that concept.

STAFFORD: What is your opinion of taking classic works and turning them upside down by changing the setting, costumes, time period?

LeCOMPTE: It is interesting. However, I don't care for it personally. It is fine for some people. To really interpret it right you must search from the inside out. The tendency is, with some of these people, is to take a concept from the outside and lay ONTO it—ideas. Often it is too many languages. The performers, directors and writer's language all clash when you do this and all you have is mud. I think to really interpret a play, or do an adaptation, you can't think schematically. You have to go back into the play in terms of your own world and life. That can't be done separately by a director. It has to be done by a director working with a company.

STAFFORD: You have been labeled a director who works from a deconstruction standpoint. You mentioned you don't see why people desire to put labels on others, but what about that title you have been given?

LeCOMPTE: Yes there is a way to talk about it as deconstruction. But what we really are is a culturalist, fragmented deconstruction. What we are doing is trying to talk in the language of our times and that may appear to be a certain kind of "ism." The title comes afterward. So, for me, labels are interesting for historical analysis but for the working process, no, I don't think about deconstruction. I think about trying to speak clearly and simply. Now, in order to speak clearly and simply, to the audience, I may have to use methods that may later appear to be deconstructionist.

STAFFORD: Do you feel Rt. 1 and 9 was received the way you intended?

LeCOMPTE: Oh boy, this is really difficult every time I approach it. I think with Rt. 1 & 9 that we ran up against a certain taboo, and a taboo is something you cannot touch, for whatever reason.

STAFFORD: You really think so?
LeCOMPTE: Yes. It cost. I don't think people understood the context. Because many people never saw the piece. To have the piece explained to them was like Lenny Bruce when he went into the courtroom for obscenity. The arresting officer did Lenny's routine for the judge, and yes, the Bruce piece did seem obscene when the officer did it for the judge. It had the frame work and the context to be understood by the audience, but only if they saw it at the time it was performed by Lenny. The same thing has happened recently with 2 Live Crew in Florida. The white majority in Florida cannot understand what cultural context that comes out of and so, to them, it is obscene. There is no way to explain to any white person, that is dealing with it, that the language and way of talking happens to be ironic and is saying something about society. I think the same thing happened to Route 1 and 9. I don't think people were able to see clearly what was happening, because it was taboo. It was just too painful for some people. When I say some people, I mean white people. The blacks who came to see the play understood the context. The people who did not understand the piece were literary people and white liberals who were worried about what they thought it might mean.

STAFFORD: Did you ever get back your NEA funding?

LeCOMPTE: No. We tried to warn people at that time by saying, "Look, yes it is very difficult material, and, yes, it is going to offend, because you cannot always understand the context." We have many different signifiers and sometimes the signifiers are going to get lost. But we have to be able to say, "Alright, everyone is not always going to get it all the time". You have to be able to say that. No one listened to us, especially fellow writers.

STAFFORD: Did it surprise you?

LeCOMPTE: Yes, a little. I was surprised that people who should have known better, especially the press at the New York State Council level, did not understand the implication of what they were saying.
STAFFORD: If you examine Route 1 and 9, and other Wooster Group productions, you can find some causes. What is your current cause?

LeCOMPTE: My cause is to make a great theatre company. To make great theatre and to do it in a humane way.

STAFFORD: What about making a political statement with a play that may have never been meant to say that?

LeCOMPTE: I think it is wonderful if someone can explore a political situation by using theatre but I'm not sure that I can do that. I don't like to open too much too soon.

STAFFORD: Would you ever revive any of the plays that been controversial?

LeCOMPTE: Sure. We are doing L.S.D. in Austria, and we are doing L.S.D. and St. Anthony's in Glasgow.

STAFFORD: Is the Crucible sequence played in "gibberish" in Europe?

LeCOMPTE: Yes, that is what the play is about now.

STAFFORD: What is the current relationship between the Wooster Group and Elizabeth LeCompte?

LeCOMPTE: I'm a pivot person, not necessarily the leader. It is not a hierarchic thing. I think in terms of a shifting center. At certain times each of us directs. The process pivots around some point in the center.

STAFFORD: David Savin's book, Breaking the Rules. The Wooster Group, is flattering to your organization. How do you react to the title of the book? Are you rule breakers?

LeCOMPTE: I think it is good. When I start out, I ask what is it that rules here and I try to think of the opposite of it. I try to understand why the dominant rule exists, and then do the opposite.

STAFFORD: Why are songwriters so eager to hear different interpretations of their writings and
yet playwrights tend to want their work interpreted in a fairly narrow manner?

LeCOMPTÉ: First of all, songwriters make so much more money. Probably, theatrical playwrights don't make as much money so they aren't motivated by it. It also goes back to our tradition of the literary. Somehow, a song is not considered a high art. Theatre is a high art.

STAFFORD: Would the Wooster Group want to have headlines at all costs?

LeCOMPTÉ: Well, I don't know. 2 Live Crew will have trouble making money because there are limits on how, or to whom, they can sell or perform.

STAFFORD: What about the future?

LeCOMPTÉ: We are working on a new work which may have a preview in early 1991. We do extensive European tours. Europe understands our work. [LeCompte, 1990]

Elizabeth Lecompte presents a surprising mixture of self-revealing ideas. The Wooster Group seemed, at one time, to represent the extreme in director's theatre. Past productions include the use of Our Town scenes in Rt. 1 & 9 and Crucible dialogue in L.S.D. Just the High Points. The group's very purpose and existence seemed connected to the idea of interpreting classic American scripts in unusual and unique ways, or to use a label, "deconstruction theatre."

LeCompte, however, seems to have softened over the years and not necessarily due to the group's difficult times with Arthur Miller's denial of use of lines from The Crucible. As she states, "That is what the play is about, now."
Instead, LeCompte confides that enough of their own writing and plays have been produced to make it unnecessary to use traditional American plays for their adaptations. In addition, she explains that "creative ownership" of Wooster Group productions actually belongs to the whole group and that the focus of who is actually creating continually changes. This viewpoint seems to be more reflective of the pre-director days of theatre when the ensemble may have had a greater role in determining the final outcome of the production.

Another contemporary director, A.J. Antoon, provides a more clearly defined role in the director's responsibility to interpret. Antoon is currently a director for Shakespeare in the Park in New York City. For several years, his productions have tossed Shakespeare around "like a ball of fresh, wet clay." The following interview was completed a few weeks after the preceding interview with LeCompte. Antoon seems more clearly a director in contemporary terms, but his productions are sometimes beyond what some may consider acceptable.

STAFFORD: I suppose contemporary directors have two choices: to direct a script in a traditional way or non-traditional way?

ANTOON: I don't have a desire to do a play in a traditional manner. I wouldn't begin a project. It just doesn't make sense to me.

STAFFORD: How did you direct your first "classic" play?
ANTOON: Non-traditional. In 1971, I directed A Child's Nightmare. It was quite weird. People expect it of me now. I had the armies made up as giant walruses, toads, and birds, eighteen feet tall. It was non-traditional. I modeled it after Where the Wild Things Are.

STAFFORD: Why do you do this?

ANTOON: I try to make the play accessible to the American contemporary audience.

STAFFORD: Yes, but there are those who would say the audience needs to strive for the meaning and not be spoon fed.

ANTOON: I think they are wrong. I'm not spoon feeding anyone. The language of the plays, Shakespeare, is difficult enough, and I can't tell you how many parents have come up to me and told me how grateful they are that their children saw my production as their first Shakespeare. The children are excited by it and not turned off by it as their parents were. Instead, they learned from it.

STAFFORD: An analogy has been made that particular songs are recorded by a variety of artists in different music genres. Songwriters seem to like this, but many dramatists feel that little, or nothing, in the script should be changed. Beckett for instance. Why are playwrights so sensitive?

ANTOON: I don't know who or what he is trying to protect. Even Samuel Beckett. I think that a Picasso shouldn't be touched. I don't think you should go around putting red paint on a black and white painting. But this is a dead piece of work. It is not performed by live performers. In theatre, it is written to be performed live, in front of a live audience. To present The Taming of the Shrew, with the exact text that Shakespeare wrote, is not only a waste of time, but I, as the director, am bringing nothing to the production. Why do it? In fact, there are often lines that don't seem to fit into what is happening at a given moment. Lines seem to have been assigned to characters mistakenly.
STAFFORD: What would Shakespeare say if he wandered into Central Park during opening night of Taming of the Shrew?

ANTOON: I honestly think he would be quite delighted. After all, he was doing it for an audience. They are screaming and laughing, and the enjoyment is actually a healing process in this play. The production is very unusual.

STAFFORD: Did you see the "Moonlighting" episode of the play?

ANTOON: No, I didn't. People have told me about it. Maybe I should.

STAFFORD: What about the Wooster Group who took a segment of Arthur Millers' The Crucible for use in their production of L.S.D. Just the High Points?

ANTOON: I am not too familiar with that, but I think people should uphold the law.

STAFFORD: What about taking Our Town, which is about a white middle class American community, and changing it to a black face deconstruction play?

ANTOON: Sounds great idea to me. Did you ever read Zora Neil Hurston's, The Eyes are Watching God?

STAFFORD: No.

ANTOON: It is a black novel and takes place at the turn of the century in the South. It is in an all black town, and they are lighting the first street light. It was a big event. Sounds like a great idea. I think it would be wonderful. It is a great idea, I may steal it! If you see a black production of Our Town, I'll give you credit for it.

STAFFORD: If the playwright is alive and says, "do what you want," then you should do what you want?

ANTOON: Right, but if he says don't change a word, you better respect that.

STAFFORD: How about an all male version of
Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, if Edward Albee says no?

ANTOON: Of course. To me, you have to have a good reason. Why bother with that one? I don't think you do it for a gimmick. I never have done plays the way I do them simply for a gimmick.

STAFFORD: What about after the playwright dies? Would you push the issue with whoever controlled the work?

ANTOON: What right do they have to do that? I mean, they would probably get sued. I did a version of South Pacific where I changed some of the tone in the second act. I didn't think it should be patriotic. In fact, I felt it should be dangerous. I came to them with some very specific changes where I used the bass line from another part of the play and used it to create danger as the men go off to war. They agreed to it.

STAFFORD: What about ensemble work? Directors are a fairly new creature when you consider the history of theatre. Do you ever use ensemble generated ideas?

ANTOON: Yes, I am very interested in ideas that come from the group. My style is non-paranoid, and there is terrific sense of collaboration. I am not a dictator. I don't take ideas that don't work, but I am always open to their suggestions. We will try to make them work.

STAFFORD: What about Taming of the Shrew?

ANTOON: The audience is going to have a great time. It is set in the American Southwest, in 1890. However, there are no program notes to tell you this. It is meant to be a small western town, just beginning to boom. I have filled it with atypical characters.

STAFFORD: Are they in chaps?

ANTOON: Yes, but a little more refined. There are only three women in this production. The macho male character works well in this era. We even use the Southwest accent.
STAFFORD: Have you changed the text by adding the Southwestern accent?

ANTOON: Only in a place or two. For instance, maybe "grammacies" changed to "much obliged." Or another character may say "madre mia" because he is Hispanic.

STAFFORD: What about New York critics?

ANTOON: They usually hate me.

STAFFORD: That doesn't hurt park productions?

ANTOON: Well.

STAFFORD: What about Peter Brook and his Midsummer Night's Dream? Did it influence you?

ANTOON: Sure. Sure I was crazy about it. And I think it was the first professional Shakespeare I saw. Did you hear about my Midsummer?

STAFFORD: Tell me about it.

ANTOON: The play was set in Brazil at the turn of the century. All the fairies were religious members of a cult in the jungle. Lavumba, but in this case white voodoo magic. The critics really went for it.

STAFFORD: Do you ever involve the audience other than just as observers?

ANTOON: No, not so far.

STAFFORD: What about electronic technology, video, slides?

ANTOON: I would like to but have not had the chance, yet.

STAFFORD: Are you using incidental music with a western theme with Shrew?

ANTOON: Yes, similar to Aaron Copeland or jazz like, "Canyon." Some people expect more country/western. It is not a hoot-n-nanny. It is not a parody. I really don't like parody.

STAFFORD: As the creative owner of your work,
what would you like to be doing with plays in the future?

ANTOON: Not sure. I would like to do something more high tech. I really like music in my productions. It is music beginning to end. I would like to do movies on the stage (Antoon, 1990)

Antoon admits that he would not stage a production if he were forced to present it in a traditional manner. He strongly feels that presenting his New York productions in non-traditional settings and themes helps make the work more accessible to the audience members, particularly young people.

He readily states that the director must follow what is legal. He feels directors need to respect playwrights' desires and to follow their directions, even to the last word if need be. Antoon claims that his work is not gimmickry and that it is merely a different way to interpret the work. He says theatre is a "live experience," unlike visual art such as paintings, and that it gives the director an opportunity to reinterpret the work each time it is presented.

Antoon differs, obviously, from the Elizabeth LeCompte of earlier years, who had no qualms about ignoring copyright laws. They appear, however, to be on nearly the same wave length at this time. A major difference would be that LeCompte is creating new work, and Antoon is interpreting
established classics. They both see the value of using ideas and concepts from the ensemble. A further discussion of their ideas follows in Chapter V.
CHAPTER IV
THE WIDER ARENA OF PLAY OWNERSHIP:
CRITICS, THE BOARD AND ACTORS
SEIZE THE PLAY

While attention has been given mainly to directors and playwrights who struggle for creative control of the play, there are others who have, from time to time, attempted to steer the direction of a play, or otherwise claim ownership in a manner by causing the play to succeed or fail.

Among these are critics (public and those published in the media), boards of directors, and actors. Each of these groups is necessary in contemporary theatre. Critics, whether they be published or simply local theatre goers, provide vital, and sometimes not so vital, information about productions. In addition, most theatrical organizations must rely on a board of directors for existence. This fact is true for non-profit, profit, educational, professional, and community theatres, alike. Obviously, productions don't exist without actors, but, they too, have attempted to exert ownership of productions at times. This chapter will examine how these three entities have influenced play productions and seemingly controlled plays.
Critics and Play Ownership

Theatrical critics have long had an influence on the success of play productions. While their function is to inform readers of their personal opinion concerning any given production, often their critiques carry more weight than mere opinion. Indeed, there have been periods during which critics have unethically slanted opinion to influence the success of productions. In the 1940s and 1950s, some critics even accepted money to write glowing comments about a given production.

Currently, many people in the theatre feel that critics are honest and have escaped corruption. They normally do not associate with others in the theatre business and are simply writers who reflect their opinion of the quality and merits of a production. Even so, critics can influence the success of a play, particularly when Broadway ticket prices have climbed beyond fifty dollars a ticket. Many people want to know how a critic feels about the show before they spend over one-hundred dollars for a two hour performance. Given these factors, theatrical critics have become more and more powerful in terms of their ability to "own" the production. Perhaps one of the most discussed is Frank Rich, principal theatrical critic for the New York Times. He has been ridiculed by many readers of the Times who feel that he has tremendous influence on how well plays succeed in New York
and elsewhere. There are also those who see him as the ultimate authority, whose very comments can help their show succeed or fail.

The following interview with Frank Rich took place in February, 1991:

STAFFORD: Many people agree that it is okay to produce Shakespeare in non-traditional ways, but they become more uncertain when plays are produced, in non-traditional methods, while the playwright is still living. Why?

RICH: Well, I think there is a hypocrisy. I think you are on to something there. I, frankly, have not made up my mind about it at all. I do think it depends on the individual artist and production. Productions like Jo Anne Akalaitis' Endgame or Ann Bogarts' version of South Pacific were certainly examples of non-traditional plays. I feel whatever rule applies to Shakespeare applies to Beckett; there can't be a double standard. My own feeling as a critic is to take these things on a case-by-case basis. If it is a revival of a familiar work, and done by sophisticated theatre artists, I have often felt that the work will speak for itself and the sophisticated audience will know the distinction between Jo Anne Akalaitis' reading of Shakespeare versus one by the book, which may be more boring and done in Stratford, Connecticut. With more recent plays, I am always interested in seeing other radical interpretations. But, I have sympathy for the writer who is alive, who is upset by it. There are a lot of bad productions that obey the letter of the thing, but I, as a critic, go with an open mind and am open to anything. I am willing to see an unorthodox production of a contemporary play and I am willing to go with it if it is intelligent and is good and exciting and so on.

STAFFORD: How do you feel about A. J. Antoons' Taming of the Shrew in Central Park last summer?

RICH: I thought it was fine. It was not really radical. It had a Southwest flair. You know even
the Royal Shakespeare company has, for years, taken these kinds of liberties. Much more, though, maybe put the scenes in a different order, took huge cuts and set it on the moon. You know what I mean? You have to go on a case-by-case basis. As a child, I was really impressed with Peter Brooks production of *A Mid-summer Night's Dream*. Jan Kott had a tremendous influence, as a critic, on the production of Shakespeare. I have seen many productions that take many liberties and are badly acted and are trash. What I don't understand is that how so many people, even critics, take one extreme position or the other. They either feel that any kind of experimentation is terrible or that it is ALL great. The *Strange Interlude* production, which came to New York from London with Glenda Jackson a few years ago took all sorts of liberties with O'Neill and yet it is the most interesting production of that play I have ever seen. On the other hand, do we want to see *Death of a Salesman* performed on a trampoline? We would just have to see who is acting in it and directing it.

STAFFORD: What about a critic's influence and sense of ownership on a production?

RICH: Well, I think a critic like Jan Kott has had enormous influence on how Shakespeare is done. The period right after Brook's *King Lear* or *Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, if you did Shakespeare according to Kottian principals you were "in," and if you didn't you were "out." As Gary Taylor has made clear in his recent book, critics can exert an incredible amount of influence on setting whole styles in the approaches of doing Shakespeare.

STAFFORD: What about your role as a critic, whereby you have the opportunity to determine the fate of a production?

RICH: I don't really believe that. Well, yes, if it were not for critics, some playwrights who were not known to the public would not have become well known. They say critics made O'Neill and Williams. But take someone like Miller. He has prospered in spite of the fact that he was brought to attention by some newspaper critics, but basically he is one of the most produced American playwrights of the world in spite of the fact that most major intellectual critics have been against him his entire career. Bob Brustein, Richard
Gillman, John Simon have no use for Miller. Miller went above their heads to the public, anyway. Same is true of Neil Simon. People who are popular writers are going to make it in spite of critics' opinion, at least for a while. I feel critics play a journalistic role in that they have defiantly called attention to people like Williams, O'Neill, or, in more recent times, Pinter, Sam Shepard and other writers that people would have never known about had it not been for the critics. I'm not sure I have answered your question?

STAFFORD: Let's say a critic attends a non-traditional staging of a contemporary play and then writes about it in a review, either good or bad.

RICH: One of the most important things a critic can do is to help further work by helping to explain it by understanding the terms. Without critics doing that, art, or any field would remain the same. Because without it you are just upholding the status quo and saying that the exact same Moscow Art Production of The Cherry Orchard must be done in perpetuity, and this one is close to the mark or off the mark then art is just going to die. Experimentation does come along that is worthwhile. Some of it may take the form of deconstruction of a familiar text, some of it, as you know, has nothing to do with text. Martha Clark doing Vienna Woosthouse. I think it is important for the critic to play the role of explaining how this stuff works. What makes it tick and helping open the audiences eyes to it, which is not the same thing as saying that a critic should endorse every experiment that comes along and give carte blanche to charlatans as well as genuine artists. There will always be a mixture of genuine artists and charlatans on the frontier of discovery. As a critic I feel the most exciting thing is to describe and explain new work that is on the cutting edge, if it be Brook's Cherry Orchard or something more commercial, such as Sunday in the Park With George.

STAFFORD: With theatre tickets at fifty to sixty dollars a piece, isn't it a fairly big responsibility for a critic to suggest what we should see?
RICH: Sure it is. And critics in New York take it very, very seriously. We feel very much that we have to serve the reader who is investing time, money going to the theatre. Now, in reality, every critic has his own tastes, and there is nothing that can be done about that. What you hope is that anyone who is making decisions about whether to go or not is going to read an entire review to change the opinion against their own. There is no right or wrong about these things.

STAFFORD: But don't producers want you to say the right things?

RICH: But I feel our responsibility is not to producers at all, or the theatre, it is to the readers, so we try to do the most honest job we can. In my case it takes the form of trying to write the most articulate piece I can so people can see where I am coming from. You certainly can't expect that every one in the world would have my taste.

STAFFORD: You more than any other critic, at least as far as I am aware of, have quite a following who hate or love you a great deal. How do feel about that?

RICH: Well, I would much rather have people talk about what I write than not talk about it. I feel I say what I think in print, and I am willing to stand behind my views. I certainly have strong views and I expect people to have reactions to them in one way or the other. In my point of view all of that is immaterial, because I am who I am. I have my views; I am not going to change them; I am not a politician. I am not going to change my views just to be popular or to be unpopular. I can only be true to myself.

STAFFORD: Critics are certainly in a position to help or hurt a production, deliberately. Do you think it ever happens in New York?

RICH: You mean be dishonest?

STAFFORD: Yes.

RICH: No, I don't think that happens. I really
don't. I think there have been times in the New York theatre, not recently, when that had been the case. I have been working on the history of New York theatre from roughly 1945 to 1965, and in that period, particularly the first half of that period, there are examples of critics who tried to curry favor with producers or who possibly may have even been on the take. But even then, not for major first rate publications. Now, I don't see any evidence of that kind of corruption. I really don't. There was a critic in the recent past, however, that did submit his own play script to a director and then turned right around and wrote rave reviews for the play the director was producing, in hopes of having his own script produced. This is such a small community that it was discovered in a minute. For me, I simply do not associate with theatre people. I don't go to the Tonys and what people I knew from a previous life, I don't review their work. It's that simple. (Rich, 1991)

There is no doubt that a critic like Frank Rich has a tremendous influence on a production. His acceptance of new, non-traditional stagings of classic and contemporary plays seems to give support that there should be more leeway given directors who wish to produce outside the status quo. He has little tolerance for those on extreme ends of the issue and finds strange that there are those who can only see one way to present a production. At the same time, he has little respect for those who stage plays only for the gimmick and fail to be genuine and intelligent artists seeking a new way to say an old thing. While Rich has often been criticized for his writings, he makes it clear that he writes only to the reader and that he writes only as an expression of his own personal tastes.
Anyone who has ever directed in a small community knows well the potential power held by community members who talk up, or down, a production. More often than not, excessive praise is heaped upon productions that truthfully fall short of the mark. Great credit should be given to community theatre groups for effort and a positive desire to learn and enjoy theatre. Often, however, when theatre groups are asked to write their own reviews for a small local paper, the result is merely a pat on the back and not an objective review of the work. There could be value, however, in taking a close look at what the weaknesses and strengths really are in a given production.

On the other hand, there have probably been occasions--because of who played a particular role or who directed the show--when the community refused to support the production. A community can face this problem of black balling and assuming ownership simply by talking down a production. Inside the production group, however, even more formal struggles for play ownership may take place.

The Board of Directors and Play Ownership

Production groups may have little control over what a critic says, but they often find themselves faced with internal struggles for creative control of a work. Boards of directors, it is assumed, hire artistic directors to
handle the interpretation of plays for the organization.

Sometimes, however, interpretations can lead to collisions between the two. Adrian Hall has faced this situation several times. Best known for his establishment of Trinity Repertory Theatre in Rhode Island and his tenure there as Artistic Director of Dallas Theatre Center, Hall currently is directing at Yale Repertory Theatre in Connecticut. The following interview took place during the winter of 1991:

STAFFORD: You have had several conflicts over play ownership with your Board of Directors in various regional theatres. How did you see these conflicts develop?

HALL: Categorically, I have had Boards of Directors put me on the line about specific productions. When institutional theatres were organized about thirty years ago, they were set up wrong. They are going to have to change in order to survive. Organizations like the Ford Foundation really wanted to tie the artist to the community and make him part of the community. They set up a situation where the real estate and indeed the responsibility for the audience coming and participating belonged to the responsible people in the community—the money faction of doctors, lawyers and merchants. They made those people trustees in the truest sense. Where it breaks down is when a non-professional tries to make policy for a very specific and sophisticated craft that is also very old. It just never works out. It is like a group of lawyers trying to run a hospital. It is apples and oranges. From time to time the artist will run into direct confrontation with differences over very simple matters.

STAFFORD: What about specific productions where a board member tried to control your production?

HALL: In Dallas, when I first arrived, I produced the play, *Passion Play*, by Peter Nichols. It was, in my opinion, brilliantly done with fine actors and designers. It was about
middle-aged men and their wanton ways. It dealt specifically with a long term married couple and a young girl. There was a very popular board member who asked to come to a rehearsal. It happened to be a day we were discussing how much nudity would be in the play. Well, we just did what we do at rehearsal. He sat in and watched the process. Afterwards, he said he believed he would come back the next day, if I didn't mind. I said fine. Meanwhile, reporters or someone had talked with him and he apparently said that he would not allow his wife to see that play. You know, you think it is okay for yourself but not your wife. The gentleman was very suspicious of me for a long time afterwards. One thing I really enjoy is mixing different members of the community into the audience. When people come who have never been in an environment like that, there is created a sort of excitement kind of like carnival, circus, ritual and church-like; it embraces all of those things. Well, there was this board members who was concerned about the new Arts District Theatre near downtown Dallas. It is a metal barn-like structure. One of the things, right off, after it was built, the board member was concerned that there was no place for the Board of Directors to segregate themselves at intermission. You can see why I wasn't very popular there. It is my feeling had I another fifteen or twenty years to commit to that situation I would have stayed in Dallas and tried to bring the theatre into the twentieth century.

STAFFORD: So what are we to do? How are we to take the people with the funds in a community, mix them with the professional artist, and sanely produce theatre?

HALL: Boy, you really asked the questions. If you can answer that, you are going to have a lot of readers for your dissertation. There are people in the regional theatres who have money and power who are really concerned about theatre and do not want to control it. There are those who are committed and want to see people grow. Margaret McDermott, in Dallas, who worked on the board with Margo Jones when this whole concept started is a great example of someone who works for the best interest of the theatre and the community it serves. In Providence, Rhode Island there are those like Dr. Stanley and Marion Simon
who have literally supported quality theatre for thirty years. There are people in high places who care. You just wish there were more of those kinds of board members.

STAFFORD: Should there be an agreement between the artistic director and board members in regional theatres which define responsibilities and rights of each?

HALL: I don't really know. It would be nice if there could be. Jackie Onassis, supposedly, did work out an agreement that specified how many times her husband could visit her bed during a period of time. It is not exactly the same thing, but in many ways, the problems are the same. Unless there is an acceptance for why they are being brought onto the board say, their financial or political clout, which are usually the reason people are chosen to be on a board, we may continue to have problems. I think what you are saying is not a bad idea. You don't want to make the art form an elitist one. In truth, for thousands of years it has been the most vital and common means of communication when great numbers of people are involved. The idea that it is only for the rich or intellectual just has no historical basis.

STAFFORD: Have your contracts ever specified your creative rights?

HALL: No, I have never had that in a contract. A lot of directors do, however. Designers frequently have that spelled out, particularly lighting designers. I have never done that. Directors have only recently begun to assert their power. Formerly, it was the actor manager who controlled the play. Even the director's union, the Society for Stage Directors and Choreographers, is a very new and weak union. Interestingly, when I write screenplays, I feel very protected by the Dramatist's Guild. I get along very well with writers and seldom have ego problems with them.

STAFFORD: Seven years ago Jo Anne Akalaitis directed her interpretation of Samuel Beckett's Endgame at American Repertory Theatre. Beckett required the production to carry his personal
letter denouncing choices made by Akalaitis. How do you see that problem?

HALL: Samuel Beckett I admire almost more than anybody in the world. Somehow in his contribution as a writer, less has become more. He said things in such an extraordinary way with such few words. He was an Irishman who wrote in French. His anger at A.R.T. was that blacks were cast in white roles. Well, this is America and those are circumstances that get set up. We don't accept the fact that it is not possible for you to play a king if you really are a peasant. That may be accepted in other parts of the world. The religious and ethnic differences are very specific. When in Rome, you should do as Romans do. If I had been producing the piece that Jo Anne was doing I would have handled it the same way that Bob Brustein did. Samuel Beckett should not have allowed his plays to be done in this country if segregated casts were necessary for him (Hall, 1991).

Adrian Hall brings sanity to the problem involving Samuel Beckett and Jo Anne Akalaitis. One of Beckett's objections was the use of black actors for roles he felt should be played by white actors. Hall's response that Beckett simply should not have allowed the play to be produced in the United States, if he felt the play must use only white actors, seems appropriate. Taking that suggestion a step further, publishers should perhaps agree not to publish works by playwrights who refuse to allow some flexibility in casting, particularly that based on race. A question arises here concerning what might have happened had A.R.T. sued Beckett for racial prejudice.
Hall also suggests that a written agreement might help alleviate some problems between boards of directors and artistic directors. Personally, he prefers to have a trusting verbal contractual relationship with boards of directors when it comes to artistic interpretations and decisions. When, however, one considers the conflicts surrounding Hall, a written agreement, spelling out his rights and responsibilities, might be useful to him.

Finally, Hall says that the whole system of having wealthy and influential patrons in positions of control of regional theatres was incorrect from the beginning. He feels that setting up a situation like this only encourages problems and does little to promote excellence in theatre. Hall might well suggest that, until there is some reorganization in the decision-making process in regional theatres, the problem will persist.

Critics and boards of directors cannot be dispensed with in the production of theatre. Struggles between directors and the two groups will certainly continue. A final source of conflict over play ownership in this chapter occurred when actors attempt to own the production.

**Actors and Play Ownership**

On 9 January 1986, James Kirkwood's play *Legends* opened in Dallas. The play, starring Mary Martin and Carol Channing, was the center of much attention concerning
discontent between the actresses, playwright and director.

Kirkwood wrote the following statement in his journal during preproduction of the play:

Steve Meyer phoned from Rancho Mirage to give me (Kirkwood) cuts or suggestions for changes from Mary (Martin). I told him I hoped there would be a minimum of this because it tended to undermine the authority of the director when stars kept coming to the author for changes. Steve agreed but said Mary was adamant about learning her lines before rehearsal, so as many as possible of the changes and cuts that had to be made, should be made now (Kirkwood, 1989).

Interestingly, it was Mary Martin's inability to remember lines that caused major problems for the production. Channing was asked why Martin did not attend a party given in honor of the two women by the City of Dallas. Channing responded, "She is in her hotel room learning her lines." The response publicly reinforced concern for Martin's already uncertain memory of sequences in the play. The quote was reported in the papers and stayed with the production until it closed short of its planned New York opening.

Following Dallas, and near the end of the Los Angelos run, Kirkwood relates the following situation just before curtain:

As soon as I arrived backstage, I was led to the chorus dressing room, where I was told by Clifford (Williams, the director) that the ladies didn't want to do the ending we'd rehearsed the day before with the entire company. They'd decided they really want to sing the song together alone
on the stage. Could I please go into another dressing room and write a scene that would incorporate this? [Kirkwood, 1989]

Perhaps no other theatrical event defines play ownership by actors better than the production of Legends. One has to imagine what might have happened had different women been chosen to play the leading roles in this production that centers on two feuding stars. Actors have the ability to own every word of a play, and success of the production often is determined by the attitudes of the actors.

In his interview for this dissertation, Adrian Hall relates a problem surrounding the casting of Jason Robards in the role of King Lear. The following exchange took place:

STAFFORD: What about play ownership as it relates to actors or designers? How do you handle that?

HALL: Shortly, I will be going to the American Repertory Theatre to direct King Lear for Bob Brustein. At first it was announced that Jason Robards was going to play Lear. I really liked the idea. But Robards said, "I hope Cornelia is small because I can not lift her in that last scene." You know with his prestige, one says we'll cast a midget Cornelia, because it is more important having him. He has since decided not to do the part. I try to convince everyone that the circumstances are best when everyone is able to realize their full potential in the play. Certainly there are militant directors who say, "This set is to be six feet wide and twenty-five feet high and must be painted red. Then there are directors who say to the designer, "What do you think the front of the church should look like? And, what do you think it should feel like? And, why don't you bring me something we could start talking from?" Ultimately, a designer, when
it is working best, really does make a very strong contribution to the ownership of the play. I could tell you of times when a designer made all the difference. The whole pot is to be stirred into something called theatrical art which really is not only the written word or text. Under the best circumstances, everyone should put in as much as they can. When you get to controlling, such as an actor saying, "I will leave this speech in this place," the playwright might say, "I would rather cut the whole speech." Then the director has to become some kind of an arbitrator, to settle the conflicts. It is about compromise and finding new ways to solve old problems. Most of all, it is about allowing the full energy of all the artists to flow into the pot, so that it will eventually get stirred and you will hopefully take the very best way. (Hall, 1991)

It is difficult to write or direct at any level of theatre, from children's to professional, and not have had a problem with some actors seizing control of the play. Hall's observation that full participation is necessary for the "pot to get stirred" is a great one for ensemble theatre or for those who know how to limit discussion and get on with decisions that must be made. Unfortunately, it may be difficult to have that kind of openness when you have stars the calibre of Carol Channing, Mary Martin and Jason Robards.

Critics, boards of directors and actors have the potential to make productions work--and work exceedingly well. Theatre is, at its best, a collaborative effort. Ownership can belong to all, as long as ownership does not belong to just one, whether it be the writer of a review, someone who funds a new lighting system or those people who actually make it all happen--the actors.
CHAPTER V
REMAINING FAITHFUL/UNFAITHFUL: THE NEED FOR 
TRUTH IN INTERPRETING THE SCRIPT

Conflicts surrounding play ownership can be placed in one of three categories: 1) new play confrontations between the playwright and director; 2) interpretations of classic, public domain scripts; and 3) conflicts centering around creative control of contemporary scripts. The problems and solutions to the conflicts in each of these areas are unique to their respective areas. Using an analytical approach, this chapter will bring together these problems and present ideas on how the problems may best be resolved. The solutions may not be the best or even appropriate. Each suggestion, however, is presented as a starting point in finding workable answers to the problem.

New Play Conflicts

As discussed in Chapter One, confusion over how a new play is to emerge on stage has often caused a problem for the playwright and director. First, there is the playwright's own struggle to realize his mental concept on stage using actors and a director who were unable to enter his mind and understand the original concept. Often, the playwright's new script is merely a guide to help tack down that original idea. It may continually change with the
initial and subsequent stagings. Further, the director attempts to take the script and re-create the playwright's idea from the information provided. Since that information may not be in a final, completed piece, conflicts are apt to develop over decisions that will need to be made. Finally, the actors, through the director and sometimes with help from the playwright, must create in concrete form that original idea which will be, it is hoped, to the satisfaction of the playwright, director, audience members and themselves. Considering all of the filters and levels of interpretation, it is a wonder that any new play is ever produced with the playwright's blessing and approval.

Whether a playwright views his play by reading it, by consulting some expert, by hearing actors read it, or a combination of these methods, he must ultimately discern for himself the needed changes (Smiley, 1971). Even though it is the playwright's right and responsibility to make script changes, the script may benefit from the atmosphere in which director and actors struggle to bring life to the text. (As chairman of the Texas Educational Theatre Association playwriting committee, I have observed several playwrights who felt that the working script for their first production was somehow cast in concrete. Often, some playwrights refuse to change any portion of the play, demanding that what they have written is be the final word.
There is a need for playwrights, particularly young ones, to understand that their initial work is normally an emerging process. Smiley suggests eight initial steps before the script is ever presented for submission. I think difficulties arise when playwrights cut off all possible ideas and demand that the script be produced as is. The pre-rehearsal period is one of reactions to and decisions about specific items, as well as possible changes in the script. The director will be thinking theatrically, and the playwright can probably sharpen the play's theatrical qualities by heeding the director, if the latter is a good one (Smiley, 1971). Smiley makes it clear that the playwright should not interfere with the work of the company. He explains that it is his job to attune himself to the company and to try to discover how he can help most and thus improve his play. This concept is further explained by suggesting that the playwright become more sensitive to the company's needs than to his own. It is hoped that this relationship will broaden and deepen the scope of the play and give it greater actuality.

It should be understood that this concept is different from the situation which developed at Texas A & M University between director Charles Gordone and playwright Pat Pfeiffer. In this situation, the director dropped characters, changed text, and forbade the playwright from attending rehearsals, even after she was invited by the
University. Smiley suggests that each change during rehearsal of a new play should be mutually acceptable to playwright and director.

Perhaps what would help new play production would be a device to be called the New Play Production Agreement. Agreement of this type might specifically determine the rights and responsibilities of both director and playwright. It would be signed, making both parties responsible for adhering to the contract. This contract would become standard for even smaller groups, such as community theatres. Indeed, it would be useful to university and college organizations where so often new plays are developed.

Second, problems arise when the director assumes his responsibility as the "interpreter" for the script. It is, after all, the director's job to take that with which he has been entrusted, and to lift the text off the page and on to the stage. If playwrights are offended by the responsibility of the director, perhaps they should either direct the play themselves or select a director with whom they can feel more comfortable. The artistic director of the production has the right to interpret his play as he chooses, even if the playwright screams, the actors curse, the producer cuts the budget, and the critics yelp like mad dogs (Cohen, 1974). The director should be neither a
"technician" who simply tells everyone where to stand, enter, and exit, nor a tyrant who arbitrarily hacks a play to pieces in an attempt to create his own work.

Directors should certainly serve their role as a leader of the production who also demands that attention be paid to all who bring the play to fruition, making the whole process a collaborative effort. Some director-author combinations have produced dynamic fusions of talent, such as the long-lasting partnerships of Tennessee Williams and Elia Kazan, Jean Giraudoux and Louis Jouvet, Paul Claudel and Jean-Louis Barrault, and Anton Chekhov and Konstantin Stanislavski (Cohen, 1974).

While there exist many successful combinations of playwrights and directors who work through the creative process to develop new works, there currently seems to be an abundance of failed productions because of a lack of mutual trust and understanding. The development of the New Play Production Agreement could provide a better understanding of how the director and playwright understand their relationship to the successful production of new plays.

Classic Productions

Much discussion and has centered on non-traditional stagings of classic plays existing in the public domain. For almost thirty years Jan Kott has created discussion with his Shakespeare, Our Contemporary. Kott was
asked by Charles Marowitz, "Is it necessary for directors mounting Shakespeare to take account of the plays' historicity?" Kott responded:

There are no rules. It's really a free-for-all. It has a lot to do with the number of Shakespearean productions. If you have only one production of Hamlet a year, then for the sake of the schools, the colleges, the young people, it has to be what you might call a "regular" Hamlet. But when you have twenty in a year, even if it were possible to produce a "traditional" Hamlet, there would be no point in producing twenty identical Hamlets (Marowitz, 1988).

In all of the interviews completed for this dissertation, most persons agree that the classics are "fair game" for a director's non-traditional approach to staging the productions. Albee answered sarcastically, "Oh, I think we should set Death of a Salesman in Sparta." Further into his interview, however, he stated that he had his own plans for directing Macbeth set on the New England coast because he felt it was about upwardly mobile yuppies. His answer sounded sincere.

Marowitz provides a clear picture of how directors should treat adaptations of classic plays:

A classic will accommodate almost any invention that still acknowledges its sovereign authority, but once a director denies that authority, once he loses radio contact with the original work, he is, in the most treacherous sense of the phrase, on his own (Marowitz, 1988).
Marowitz continues this insight with the following:

An original interpretation of an established work is predicated on certain insights that one man brings to the work of another. If he arbitrarily imposes ideas that have no bearing on the original and do not spring from seeds contained therein, he draws attention to himself in a very special way. He is inviting the audience to appreciate his opinions and insights at the expense of the work in question (Marowitz, 1988).

Marowitz, probably more than any other theatre scholar except Kott, has a keen insight into directorial choices that lead to a sense of play ownership. He suggests that even the most faithful Shakespeare traditionalists are obligated to filter the playwright's meaning through their own understanding. Each of us is, in fact, an interpreter and the only voice for Shakespeare when we produce his work.

In his book, The Director at Work, Robert Benedetti suggests:

The value of a play lies in the way it lives relative to the present moment, and that a successful production results when the essential spirit of the play, transmitted by but not entirely bound in the text, is happily married to the specifics of a given cast, theatre and audience, even if this requires some adjustment in the play's form such as changes in period, language, or even structure (Benedetti, 1985).

This comment appears in a section of the text that deals primarily with classic play production. Benedetti states that it is acceptable to make major changes in the script. He bases this suggestion on the argument that a play must be matched to the cast, theatre, and audience and that the
essential spirit of the play must be presented to the audience. With Benedetti, even changing the structure is acceptable, as long as the spirit of the play remains.

As early as thirty years ago, Tyrone Guthrie was suggesting that Shakespeare's plays are so enduring because the playwright understood that the script could be produced in a thousand different contexts. Guthrie suggests that the fewer the stage directions, the better. Paragraphs of stage directions, not related directly to the plot, only inhibit the imaginations of people who have to interpret the play. Guthrie states:

If the play's any good, it's going to be performed all over the world by countless different people, by countless different directors throwing in their two cents-worth. And if you're a playwright of any ambition at all, you hope that your play is going to go on long after you're dead—when theatrical fashions change, because theatrical fashions change just as often as dress fashions (Wills, 1976).

This outlook on adaptations of plays seems to be a logical one. The professional playwright wants his plays produced. Not to want a play produced would seem strange. A playwright who attempts to control every bit of blocking, every casting decision, and every directorial choice would prohibit the kind of success Guthrie discusses. It is to be expected that placing one's work in publication means that he/she is also risking the hundreds, even thousands, of different interpretations over the years to come. A playwright who has a healthy self-concept and appreciates
the discovery of messages which he never realized, provides opportunities for the same eternal quality found in Shakespeare's scripts. If we look upon his works as being masterpieces, because they are universal, then playwrights such as Beckett should understand that the same may hold true for their work. Unfortunately, since Beckett has not allowed tampering with his scripts still protected by the special production agreement, audiences will never have the opportunity to see what marvellous interpretations may have been born with his plays. Beckett has intentionally cut-off any possibility that his plays may enjoy the same universal appeal as the work of Shakespeare.

Another aspect of liberal interpretations of classic dramas is the development of more and more technical equipment available for theatrical production. Four hundred years ago, the Elizabethan theatre did not have an opportunity to incorporate video, electronic sound and other such devices into production. Jan Kott says that technical developments have rekindled interest in the classics:

If one approaches this play *The Tempest* traditionally, seeing Prospero as a kind of old magus or enchanted Santa Claus figure, it's of course ridiculous. If we try to make this island merely a kind of enchanted Disneyland, it's just childish. But with the new technology, with lasers and other "special effects," *The Tempest* becomes ripe for a whole range of new theatrical possibilities (Marowitz, 1988).
Being faithful to the spirit of the play and providing an audience a truthful rendition of the idea would probably be more acceptable to all our classic authors than merely presenting a version that respects each word of the script but lacks a fresh, alternative approach to the play. It is probably a good bet that any playwright, from centuries past, would be delighted to discover that his/her plays were written in such a manner that they allowed multiple and universal concepts of staging. Audiences have grown accustomed to unusual settings, costumes, and language changes in the classics; however, contemporary theatre offers a different dilemma.

Contemporary Productions

Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions is completely unacceptable to me. My play requires an empty room and two small windows. The American Repertory Theatre production which dismisses my directions is a complete parody of the play as conceived by me. Anybody who cares for the work couldn't fail to be disgusted by this.

--Samuel Beckett
(Brustein, 1990)

This statement appeared in the playbill on opening night of the A.R.T. production of *Endgame* directed by Jo Anne Akalaitis in 1984. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the production was almost stopped because of
the setting—a subway station—and because of such other alterations as the incorrect number of ash cans on the set. Beckett, according to some, also objected to the use of two black actors in the play for roles which he assumed were white.

Beckett apparently allowed changes in the setting of his plays, but only if he were directing them. In the Lincoln Center production of *Godot*, he even allowed Mike Nichols to turn Macon into Napa Valley (Brustein, 1990). In addition, Beckett also allowed an assortment of damaged automobile parts and Georgia O'Keeffe steer skulls which shifted the play's abstract setting to a more concrete, modern California. The important question remains, "Why do successful contemporary playwrights demand little be changed in their scripts?"

Playwrights struggle to create on paper what they envision in their minds. They then struggle as a director and actors attempt to bring what is on paper to the stage. Playwrights spend years hoping to see on stage what they saw in their mind's eye at the moment of creation. Obviously, that is going to be a very difficult moment to recreate. To complicate things, directors and actors, also see images the moment they read the script for the first time. That image continues to change, or be changed, as work on the play continues. It may be molded by a wide variety of forces,
including previous productions, character analysis, comments from the director, and their own self searching for parallels in their life.

To deny that one cannot, or does not, want to recreate what the playwright first saw is not an affront to the author. It is, in fact, a compliment. To have suggested an idea so universal that hundreds of actors can find paralleling occurrences in their own lives is incredible. It is important here for playwrights to understand better what is happening in the process of re-creating a script. At some point, the "apron strings" need to be cut by playwrights. The playwright's emotional attachment to a play only inhibits the possibility that the work may withstand the passage of time. Differing interpretations—even exaggerated ones—do not destroy a script; they strengthen it. The genius lies in the elasticity of the script, not in its rigidity.

Richard Foreman has suggested that finding the truth lies in finding something relevant in the playwright's text:

Each text (if it is good) has multiple meanings, many of which escaped its author. A director chooses his meanings, again vis-à-vis the characteristics of his performers. But since I [the director] am an author and have my own "message," I try to find where the author has said something out of his various meanings which I find relevant to my own concerns! I am true to him in that he "allows" me to be true to my self (Benedetti, 1985)!
As it is, playwrights often do not allow this discovery to take place. Either they forbid it, as Beckett has done with the special production agreement, or they effectively prevent it by writing a play which is not quality work, thus not allowing the director an opportunity to find its relevancy.

The author does not know everything about his script or that the script itself is merely the raw material upon which a group of collaborators are to work; it is not the finished article (Wills, 1976). In his interview, Edward Albee referred to a twelve-minute version of *Long Day's Journey into Night*. He said it was one of the best productions of the play he had ever seen, even though it was only twelve minutes in length. Because the production was shortened to just a few minutes, would Eugene O'Neill have dismissed the concept as a disgrace? Probably not. As Guthrie has said, "there are a million wrong ways, and some of them are 'wronger' than others, but there is no right way." Playwrights must be willing to accept the fact that there are no specific "right" ways to perform their scripts.

It would seem that a method needs to be established, whereby living contemporary playwrights and directors more clearly understand what is expected of each. Perhaps the publishing companies should develop a system that communicates to the director what limitations may exist for
a given production. For instance, can characters be deleted or added, as needed? Can actors of either sex or of any race play each role in the script? Can the play be set in some other location or time? A system of this type, communicated by the publisher, would go a long way to help playwrights and directors better understand the boundaries of artistic freedom.

Where would the arts be if every pound of wet clay thrown on a potter's wheel had to be a vase ten inches in height, three inches round, and painted green? "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" can be played by one hundred tubas, without vocals, or sung by a small child in a quiet candle lit room. It could also be belted out by Rosanne Barr in a football stadium. Undefined boundaries only serve to lock in, they do not serve the art form by providing a clear understanding of a script's true potential.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

There is no confusion over the legality of play ownership. The playwright is the ultimate controller of the play and has veto power of every facet of production. The problem lies in the fact that some playwrights take advantage of their ownership, and others are willing to see what happens as directors search for different ways to say something familiar. There is little a director can do if a playwright objects to his particular choices in staging a production. In the end, legally, the director must play the cards according to the playwright. The attempt to allow greater flexibility in interpreting a play should in no way "rob" the playwright of anything. Royalties, billing credit, or even reputation should not be injured. At times, is the playwright acting out a paranoia concerning what might happen to a script? Playwrights need to understand that radical interpretations do not hurt their work; they demonstrate the flexibility of their art.

Obviously, it is difficult to police the legal ownership of plays by playwrights. It would almost be impossible for a publisher to send out "inspectors" to check out each and every production to see that lines, blocking, and casting are all performed in an appropriate manner.
For most productions, policing is done by the directors by asking themselves if they have kept the spirit of the play. In addition, policing is also done by directors' peers. Those in regional, university and college settings have a way of talking around misrepresentations of playwrights' ideas. The focus should ultimately be on following the spirit of the play while allowing leeway in directorial choices.

Arthur Miller suggested that he had made a lot of enemies by closing down L.S.D. While one could not hear it in his words, there was an underlying tone that maybe he should have considered letting The Wooster Group continue their production. He fails to mention his conflict in his extensive autobiography, *Timebends*, which suggests either he did not feel it important enough of an event or he was not happy with the final outcome, that of closing down a radical interpretation. Since he allowed an unusual production of *The Crucible* recently in California, it suggests that he was not entirely satisfied with his decision to stop production. The same holds true for Samuel Beckett, who allowed himself to change some major aspects of one of his productions in his later years. He never could come to the point of allowing others to make those changes, and because of the special production agreement, that practice will continue for some time.
This dissertation does not suggest that directors take "hodgepodge" opportunities with any script. It does, however, encourage directors to solicit proper approval for any script produced, no matter what style of production they may follow, if any.

The research also suggests that directors encourage playwrights to consider alternate stagings as a customary procedure of theatrical production. It encourages the playwright to consider the possibilities of discovering new facets on a stone thought already to have been cut, polished and mounted. Marowitz has stated:

Through the medium of contemporary theatrical interpretation, a director is able to revive a classic in such a way that "the past's awareness of itself" not only can be shown but can be made to enter into a dialogue with the present, thereby shedding new light on both present and past (Marowitz, 1986).

All things considered, it really does not matter whether a script is in the public domain or just completed. What really matters, in the struggle for play ownership and creative control, is how well the playwright and director communicate. The New Play Agreement, open communications, better information from publishers, and a desire to see fascinating interpretations of any script, provide opportunities for making theatre rich in presentation and truthful to the author's concept. It takes directors and playwrights who are willing to take risks, make choices, and bring a renaissance to the written text.
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**DISSERTATIONS**

APPENDIX
To:

Re: Waiting For Godot and Not I, by Samuel Beckett

All groups producing either of the above-named plays by Samuel Beckett must agree to the specific conditions of release stated herewith:

"There shall be no additions, omissions, or alterations of any kind or nature in the manuscript or presentation of the play as indicated in the acting edition supplied hereunder: without limiting the foregoing: all stage directions indicated therein should be followed without any such additions, omissions or alterations. No music, special effects, or other supplements shall be added to the presentation of the play without prior written consent."

"The license granted hereunder shall be effective only upon the receipt by us of a fully executed copy of this letter agreement."

PLEASE CONFIRM YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF THIS AGREEMENT BY SIGNING ONE COPY AND RETURNING IT TO THE PLAY SERVICE. PERMISSION TO PRESENT EITHER OF THE ABOVE-NAMED PLAYS BY SAMUEL BECKETT WILL NOT BE GRANTED UNTIL A SIGNED COPY OF THIS AGREEMENT HAS BEEN RECEIVED BY THE PLAY SERVICE.

Agreed to and accepted:

By ____________________________

Producing Group __________________

Date ____________________________
May 29, 1990

Mr. Edward Albee
14 Harrison St.
New York, NY 10013

Dear Mr. Albee:

I am currently completing my dissertation in theatre from Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas. My topic is play ownership. As a part of the dissertation, I am interviewing playwrights who have strong feelings about the ownership of their plays.

This is an important issue for all playwrights, especially at a time when many directors take great liberties with our works. I feel it would be of value to explore academically the legal and ethical aspects of who owns the play and how the playwright's intentions should be preserved.

With this in mind, I would like to spend about one hour with you in the near future to discuss this contemporary issue. Since I am sure you receive many requests for your time I am committed to just the one hour. Your help will provide me, and those who may read my dissertation, an insight into this issue. I will be in New York in June and July if this is a time when you might be available. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dick Stafford
Assistant Professor of Theatre

F.O. Box 8
Demorest, GA 30535

404/778-2753
404/778-2215 ext. 49

NOTE: Original letter is coming via mail. I will be in New York with two other interviews on Thursday, June 14 through Monday, June 18.
Mr. Arthur Miller  
c/o ICM  
40 W. 57 St.  
New York, NY 10019  

Dear Mr. Miller:

I wanted to write back in regard to your letter of April 29 concerning an opportunity to discuss the topic of play ownership with you. In your letter to me, you mentioned that we could talk in July, by phone if necessary. I wrote June 12 to provide you with my phone numbers, but have not heard from you. I am hoping there was a mix up in our communication or that you were unable to reach me because I really feel your comments are vital to this topic.

In my research since April, I have discovered many instances where playwrights and directors have come head-to-head over productions, particularly new play productions. Often these conflicts end with canceled performances or performances that fall short of all concerned. This topic seems to be one that is frequently on the minds of professional and educational dramatists but has apparently received little, if any, academic attention. I feel my attention to the subject may be helpful, for those who read it, to young playwrights and directors who take on the responsibility of developing new scripts. I have talked with Edward Albee, David Levine and others who are connected to this subject and your thoughts would lend a credibility that can not be obtained anywhere else.

If there is anything I can do to help our visiting come about I would be willing to cooperate. I am directing Death of a Salesman at Piedmont College in April and directed All My Sons a few years ago in Texas and have a deep commitment to what you expect of directors. I would be willing to meet with you at any time, by phone or in person.

Sincerely,

Dick Stafford  
Assistant Professor of Theatre  
404/778-2215 ext. 49  
404/776-2753 (late evenings)
October 5/90

Dear Professor Stafford:

I've finished a play that had been taking all my time and could talk to you if you call me, 203-

Sincerely,

[Signature]

I'm looking forward to your cooperation. I left this earlier in the morning.
Mr. Arthur Miller  
c/o ICM  
40 W 57 St.  
New York, NY 10019  

Dear Mr. Miller:

You asked me to write back in June and set up a time when we might talk about "Play Ownership", the topic of my dissertation through Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas.

I will be in New York around July 13-July 17 to talk with David Levine at the Dramatist Guild. I would be happy to meet with you in Connecticut or where ever you feel comfortable. I will be in Texas between July 1st and July 13th. However, your thoughts on this subject are so important that I will be happy to meet any time you have available in July or August. I realize you have many demands on your time and I only want to take an hour for the interview.

Playwrights need to feel their work is being presented as intended and since there seems to be little in the area of academia on this subject your thoughts will be helpful to all who may read the dissertation. I appreciate your help and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dick Stafford  
P.O. Box 8  
Demorest, GA 30535  
404/776-2753  
214/849-6290 (Texas phone in early July)

P.O. Box 8  
c/o Don Copeland  
Chandler, Texas 75758

June 12, 1990
April 29/90

Dear Mr. Stafford;

I don't know that I can add to what I have often said about ownership of plays—I think quite simply that they belong to the playwright. But as Jimmie Durante said, everybody wants to get into the act. I shall be away most of June but you can write again and perhaps we can talk in July—if necessary on the phone.

Sincerely,

Arthur Miller
Dear Mr. Miller:

First, I would like to tell you how much I enjoyed your autobiography, *Timebends*. I have learned many things about theatre and the nature of humanity by directing your plays. Now your autobiography has provided even further understanding about your life.

Second, I am completing my dissertation on the topic of play ownership. I see this as an important topic for playwrights, especially at a time when directors seem to take great liberty with our works. I feel it would be of value to explore academically the legal and ethical aspects of who owns the play and how the playwright's intentions should be preserved.

To help me with my dissertation I would like to spend an hour talking with you about this subject. I have some of your thoughts from a question and answer session you gave some time ago on a college campus, but would like to include more extensive thoughts from you on this subject. My dissertation is through Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas and I hope to finish the project by the end of this year. I will be in New York in June and July and could meet with you any time then, or for that matter, any time you have available. Since I am sure you receive many requests, I am committed to taking only the one hour of your time. Your help will provide me, and those who may read my dissertation, an insight into this contemporary issue. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dick Stafford

F.O. Box 8
Demorest, GA 30535

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