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FISHER, ALBERT JAMES. A Production of And Miss Reardon  
Drinks a Little. (1975) Directed by: Miss Kathryn  
England. Pp. 107.

It was the purpose of this study to research, produce,  
and analyze the play And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little by  
Paul Zindel.

The research of the play involved tracing previous  
productions of the play, the author's background, and  
study of the play itself.

The production involved casting the play, assembling  
the crews and staging the play for performance on the  
mainstage of W. Raymond Taylor Theatre at the University  
of North Carolina at Greensboro.

The analysis involved evaluation of the finished  
performance in all areas of the production.

*Kathryn England*

APPROVAL PAGE

A PRODUCTION OF AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLE

This thesis has been approved by the following  
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

by

Albert James Fisher

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Committee Members

Greensboro  
1975

Approved by

April 20, 1975  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

Kathryn England  
Thesis Adviser

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This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the faculty of the Theatre Division of the Department of Drama and Speech, especially Miss Kathryn England, thesis advisor, Dr. David R. Batcheller and Dr. Andreas Nomikos for their warmth and support and always generous help; to an excellent cast and crews; to Bonnie Becker, a superlative stage manager; to my friends Lauren K. Woods and Erminie Leonardis for their encouragement; to my parents; and to Jill Didier for her warm friendship during the difficult production period.

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life has lived in New York State and England. There where he was Playwright-in-Residence at City Center's Off Broadway Theatre under a Ford Foundation grant.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Zindel is the author of The Effect of Ghosts Here on Earth in the West which garnered great critical acclaims off Broadway and won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Circle's Circle Award. It was subsequently made into a screen picture starring Faye Dunaway, an Academy Award nominee for her performance.<sup>2</sup>

Following And Now Perhaps Again a Little, Zindel penned The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild which opened at the Ambassador Theatre in New York on November 14, 1971, starring Marston Marshall.<sup>3</sup> It was not a success. Zindel also has written several novels and the plays Let Me Hear You Whisper and The Ladies Should Be in Bed and the

<sup>1</sup>Paul Zindel, Let Me Hear You Whisper (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Zindel, The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1973), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER I

ANALYSIS OF AND MISS REARDON DRINKS A LITTLEBackground of Playwright

Paul Zindel, author of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, was born on Staten Island, New York, and during his life has lived in New York State and Houston, Texas (where he was Playwright-in-Residence at Nina Vance's Alley Theatre under a Ford Foundation grant).<sup>1</sup> Mr. Zindel is the author of The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, which garnered great critical acclaim off-Broadway and won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award. It was subsequently made into a motion picture starring Joanne Woodward, an Academy Award nominee for her performance.<sup>2</sup>

Following And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, Zindel penned The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild which opened at the Ambassador Theatre in New York on November 14, 1972, starring Maureen Stapleton.<sup>3</sup> It was not a success. Zindel also has written several novels and the plays Let Me Hear You Whisper and The Ladies Should Be in Bed and the

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Zindel, Let Me Hear You Whisper (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Zindel, The Secret Affairs of Mildred Wild (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1973), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



screenplays of Up the Sandbox and the musical comedy Mame, starring Lucille Ball.<sup>4</sup>

Paul Zindel must certainly be considered one of the foremost young playwrights in America today. Life magazine has said, "Certain qualities possessed by the young dramatist are in acutely short supply right now in American playwriting. Along with his craft and discipline, Zindel has metaphysical juices in his writing that are life-restoring rather than life-reducing."<sup>5</sup>

#### Background of Play

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was Paul Zindel's first play to be produced on Broadway. It followed the very successful The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, an off-Broadway production which has won numerous awards.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little opened on February 25, 1971, at the Morosco Theatre in New York. It was produced through the combined efforts of James B. McKenzie, Spofford J. Beadle, Seth L. Schapiro, Kenneth Waissman, and Maxine Fox. The production was directed by Melvin Bernhardt with scenery by Fred Voelpel, lights by Martin Aronstein, and costumes by Sara Brook. The cast, which was to be the only consistently praised element of the production, included: Estelle

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<sup>4</sup>Zindel, Let Me Hear You Whisper, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Parsons as Catherine Reardon, Julie Harris as Anna Reardon, Nancy Marchand as Ceil Adams, Rae Allen as Fleur Stein (Miss Allen won an Antionette Perry ("Tony") Award as Best Supporting Actress for her performance), Bill Macy as Bob Stein, Virginia Payne as Mrs. Pentrano, and Paul Lieber as the Delivery Boy.<sup>6</sup> And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was discussed in The Best Plays of 1970-71 as follows:

Paul Zindel too was contemplating lost ladies in his And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, a study of three sisters, all school teachers, one married, one (not the drinker) more than a little neurotic, all somewhat alienated from reality, which finally invades their privacy in the form of the married couple downstairs. Zindel won the 1971 Pulitzer Prize for last season's off-Broadway The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds; in his second produced play of the season the passion is all there but the play not quite, though it enjoyed an extraordinarily capable ensemble of performances including those of Estelle Parsons (as the drinking Miss Reardon), Julie Harris as the neurotic and Nancy Marchand as the married one, the take charge type.<sup>7</sup>

#### Critical Reviews

The response of the critics in New York to the Broadway production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was very mixed. There was not a single complete rave of the play and the most highly praised feature of the production was the acting. As far as the play itself goes, the humorous aspects seemed to be most often lauded and otherwise, the play was regarded as flawed.

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<sup>6</sup>Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., The Best Plays of 1970-71 (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1971), p. 308.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

For example, Alfred L. Malabre, Jr. writing for the Wall Street Journal says:

But despite bright spots, the play remains frustratingly static. At one point near the end of the first act, after Anna has frightened Ceil by shooting off some blanks from an old pistol, Catherine comments: "That noise might have been just what we needed." Unfortunately, a good deal more is needed--a plot that moves along, character development, insights for the audience. One senses that even Mr. Zindel appreciated the problem when, as the final curtain begins to fall, Anna asks Catherine: "What in the world are you waiting for?" Catherine, commitment papers in hand, doesn't reply. What was Mr. Zindel waiting for? Altogether, it is a disappointing endeavor by a playwright who clearly possesses ability.<sup>8</sup>

Disappointment in the production was discussed by other critics, such as Richard Watts for the New York Post:

The second is the tough one for the new playwright. Paul Zindel's The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds was a brilliant play that marked its author as one of the oncoming men of the American theatre. But his new work, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, which opened last night at the Morosco, shows little of the notable talent that went into its predecessor and I must sadly report that it seemed to me a serious disappointment.<sup>9</sup>

The excellent use of humor in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was pointed out by Douglas Watt, critic for the New York Daily News:

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a steadily interesting, very funny and oddly unrealized piece of work. Zindel's approach to this is a little like Tennessee Williams on a laughing jag. He can't stop with the jokes, which is just as well since they make whatever evening there is, and he can't make up his mind where to place his sympathy.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Wall Street Journal, 1 March 1971.

<sup>9</sup>New York Post, 26 February 1971.

<sup>10</sup>New York Daily News, 26 February 1971.

Clive Barnes in the New York Times mentioned several of the flaws he noticed in the play:

This is the situation, and Mr. Zindel decides not to develop it but to describe it. The sisters at the end remain much as they were at the beginning, and despite dramatic relief from outside characters, there is no progress, no movement. Mr. Zindel places all on the characters of his sisters, and it is not enough. He is trying to write in a manner composed partly of Arthur Miller's style of post-Ibsenite skeletons in the domestic cupboard, and partly of Neil Simon's brittle and hurt wit. But here he is neither as interesting as Mr. Miller nor as invigorating as Mr. Simon. Too many jokes fall flat--who can be expected to laugh at a verbal mix-up between Lebanon and Lesbians?--and throughout the whole play there is a pervading air of unreality. It is difficult to believe in what these people say to one another. And at the end, Mr. Zindel can hardly conclude his play and the curtain falls with an unhealthy air of apology.<sup>11</sup>

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little did, however, receive some positive critical response. Jack Kroll, critic for Newsweek, seemed to like the production a great deal:

In Paul Zindel we seem to have that rarity--a playwright who can write intelligent, sensitive, entertaining plays for a wide public. After the off-Broadway success of his The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, he brings to Broadway And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, a deceptively simple but sharply observed play about three Irish-American sisters whose careers as schoolteachers can no longer mask the anguish of their lives. Zindel not only makes this touching, true and very funny with a real craftsman's hand, he also writes terrific parts for actresses, and Julie Harris, Estelle Parsons, Nancy Marchand, and Rae Allen take full advantage of this, especially Miss Parsons, tense and wry and lovely as the drinking Miss Reardon. If this play doesn't succeed Broadway is even sicker than anyone supposes.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>New York Times, 26 February 1971.

<sup>12</sup>Newsweek, 8 March 1971.

In Time magazine, T. E. Kalem made comparisons between Zindel and two of America's foremost playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller:

There are two main dramatic uses of the memory. One is retributive, and the other is alchemistic. In retributive memory, the playwright squares accounts with the past, attempting to wrest present justice from past injustice. Arthur Miller's The Price is a perfect example. In alchemistic drama, the goal is to transmute the heavy base metals of the past into present lyric gold, as Tennessee Williams did in The Glass Menagerie. Generally speaking, the main thrust of retributive drama is moral, and that of alchemistic drama is aesthetic. While Paul Zindel is not on a writing par with Miller or Williams, he and his characters have a joint account, both retributive and alchemistic, and draw most of their dramatic funds from the memory bank. In his new play, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, Zindel seems to be overdrawn at the memory bank. His wacky humor is present, along with his abrupt pathos, a way he has of pulling the rug out from under the heart, and his frequently well-honed dialogue. But under it all, the plot, point, and purpose and direction of the play seem to have been lost.<sup>13</sup>

#### Production Style

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a relatively short three-act comedy. This director feels tentative about applying the word comedy to this play because of the tragic nature of the characters and their problems. However, this director's initial response to the play was to note its similarity to the plays of Neil Simon in dialogue and characterization, although in the case of Neil Simon, the characters of his women are notoriously one-dimensional (with the exceptions of Corie in Barefoot in the Park and

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<sup>13</sup>Time, 8 March 1971.

Edna in The Prisoner on Second Avenue, who at best are two-dimensional). Not so with Zindel, his women are immensely complex, as will be discussed further on.

The major similarity between Simon and Zindel is in the type of humor they both employ. It is when the major characters are enduring great discomfort and pain that the plays of Simon and Zindel are the funniest. This is certainly as true of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little as it is of Simon's The Sunshine Boys and God's Favorite. Zindel goes a step further than Simon in that his humor is also a little sick. For example, in Act One of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, Anna says:

And last week, just before I became officially debilitated, we were discussing death in the 105 Honors class, the one with all the brains--and I had them write all the ways of dying they could think of on the blackboards--fire, diptheria, pythion constrictions, plane crashes, scruvy, decapitation--one kid remembered a little girl at Coney Island being run down by a miniature locomotive and getting a miniature death--and somebody else's uncle fell into a cement mixer in the Bronx and ended up as part of a bridge. By the end of the period we had the blackboards covered, crammed full of things--someone even thought of elephantiasis; we listed napalm and the bomb, and in the few seconds left to the class we all just sat back and wondered how the hell there were enough of us left to make up a class!<sup>14</sup>

Zindel also makes use of contemporary vulgarisms, such as "bullshit," for this comic effect.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little will be produced realistically with the consideration that realistic drama

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<sup>14</sup>Paul Zindel, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little (New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1971), p. 15.

usually proceeds from the idea that common experience and ordinary sensory perceptions reveal objective reality, and that objective reality is ultimate reality. In realism, the appearance of life supposedly represents what is most true about life.<sup>15</sup> And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a realistic comedy about real people in a real situation. Believability is somewhat strained in the play because of the characters and their problems being so strange. The introduction of the characters of Fleur and Bob Stein is purely for comic purposes (although they do act as catalysts for what later takes place among the sisters). Bob and Fleur reveal their strange relationship and, with the exception of Fleur's final speech, their scene is generally humorous. However, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little is a generally believable real-life situation.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little does not have a great story to tell, rather it is a play of character study, and as such, emphasis will be placed on character revelation and interaction. In this play there is a great deal of "gut-spilling"--the characters take over individually and tell their own side of things and their feelings. It is an exorcism of the mind.

This director feels that accentuation of the humor and detailed relationships among the characters will bring

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<sup>15</sup>Sam Smiley, Playwriting (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 213.

about the most successful production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, a flawed play. This director feels also that over-intellectualizing of the play would undoubtedly be fatal.

#### Character Analysis

A very important aspect of this play is the relationships of the characters, especially the three sisters; Ceil, Anna, and Catherine. The audience needs an awareness of the hostilities and affections they hold for each other, the mutual scars left on them from their mother (recently deceased), and their very funny, but at the same time sad, personal quirks.

It would be valuable to point out the relationship between Paul Zindel's The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds and And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. Tillie and Ruth, the sisters in The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, could easily be childhood counterparts of Ceil, Anna, and Catherine. This is seen most evidently in the characters of Tillie and Anna. Tillie is a shy, sensitive little girl interested in the wonders of science and Anna is a repressed, sensitive woman who is a science teacher. Also present in both plays is the influence of the domineering mother. Beatrice, the mother in The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, is the central character and her destructive influence on her daughters is clearly evident. "Mama" in And Miss



Reardon Drinks a Little, has just died, but her damage of her daughters is instantly apparent and her image pervades the atmosphere as the daughters remember Mama in their own way. The influence of "Mama" is a vital aspect to be considered by this director as well as the actresses portraying Ceil, Anna, and Catherine.

This director feels that And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little stresses character rather than plot and every attempt will be made to clearly define the characters.

#### Catherine Reardon

Catherine Reardon is the Miss Reardon who drinks a little. She is 44 years old and is the assistant principal of a local high school. Her job is revealed to have been "nepotistically endowed"--her sister, Ceil Adams, is the superintendent of schools. Catherine and the youngest of the Reardon sisters, Anna, live in an apartment that once belonged to their mother in which they grew up together. Catherine is very protective of Anna, but it seems her concern is more for her own loneliness rather than for Anna alone. She often uses large, officious words in her speech--her education and love of language are clearly evident. However, at times, she speaks in very vulgar terms. Bob Stein, the neighbor, at one point states, "Catherine, I never knew you had such a repulsive mouth."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Zindel, And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, p. 36.

In many ways Catherine is a typical spinster type. Although throughout the play she is seen almost always as a formidable and gutsy type, it is essential that her ladylike teacher image be projected. This director's feeling is that until the few months prior to when the play takes place, Catherine was a "closet-drinker." She could cope with her job responsibly and then quietly drink through the evening. However, in the months leading up to the evening of the play Catherine's drinking has begun to get out of control. It has become evident to her colleagues as Ceil points out when she says, "They say you've started to drink a little."<sup>17</sup>

There is a great conflict between Ceil and Catherine because Ceil married Catherine's boyfriend, Edward Adams, right out from under Catherine's nose. Throughout the play this is a continual source of friction between Ceil and Catherine. At one point Anna states the situation that is so much the cause of Catherine's problems:

ANNA. Ceil, does it ever gnaw at that cybernetic soul of yours that Catherine's turned into the old maid you should have been? Take a good look at her. Catherine, how can you sit at the same table with the bitch that stole the only man that ever even liked you?

CATHERINE. Don't say anymore, Anna . . .

ANNA. When she was still living here and Edward came to see you, couldn't you smell what she was doing? Her voice daintier than usual, an extra twinkle in her eye. She'd behave herself while you were in the room but if you went out she always had a witty remark ready--some

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

humoresque about her pension or salary--And you got him, didn't you, Ceil, dear? Even if he was a schnook!<sup>18</sup>

Eventually it is realized that Catherine, who attains much audience sympathy, is actually a cause of many of the problems. Toward the end of Act Three Ceil says, "What is it deep down in your gut you so detest about me? That I haven't gone mad or become an obscene nasty witness? That's what you are, Catherine."<sup>19</sup> Later on Anna adds, "You're worse than all of them. You never do anything to stop the destruction."<sup>20</sup>

#### Ceil Reardon Adams

Ceil is the oldest of the Reardon sisters, 45 years old, and the only married one. As superintendent of schools, she is a very successful career woman and seems to be regarded with some awe by teachers and co-workers. At one point Catherine says of her, "Know what the faculty has nick-named you this year? Well, it's 'Superman.' You have finally transcended womanhood entirely."<sup>21</sup>

Ceil has returned to the apartment for the first time in quite a while with the intention of having Anna committed for psychiatric care. She seems to project discomfort when around her sisters, although she at times reacts with genuine feeling for them. When she realizes Anna is really mentally disturbed there is a moment of real pity. Another time while looking at a photograph of her mother in

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

an album, she cries. However, most of the time she maintains her stern, nonsense exterior. At one point in the play Catherine relates Ceil to "Mama," "You know, Ceil--the way you said that--I mean, you're louder and crueller--but there's a part of you that's just like Mama. I think that's the part of you I've always despised."<sup>22</sup> Eventually Ceil washes her hands of the whole situation and leaves Catherine with everything. Anna and Catherine will not, as she says, ". . . drag me down. Not at this stage of the game, my sweet sisters. Not at this stage of the game."<sup>23</sup> But it becomes quite evident that Ceil, willingly or not, will have to eventually handle Anna's commitment. The final impression is that Catherine, because of her own loneliness, will never see the commitment through herself.

As for Ceil's personal appearance, she is a chic careerwoman and obviously well-to-do and efficient.

#### Anna Reardon

Anna is the youngest of the Reardon sisters, 38 years old. At the outset of the play she has not been working for several days. At first it seems that she is sick, but it is ultimately revealed that she is mentally disturbed, seriously so. Long before she makes her appearance onstage terms such as "frightened," "flipped," "isn't feeling good," "a little sick," "she's sedated," "she hasn't been the same,"

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

are used in reference to Anna. When she finally does enter the scene, her problems become clear. She behaves very erratically, tossing books about the room in search of a pistol she has in her own pocket. She has "caressed vegetarianism" since her breakdown and has an incredibly morbid fascination for death. And, at her core, she is in desperate need of love. An incident with a student is revealed by the neighbor, Fleur Stein, who states to Ceil, "You must feel absolutely dreadful your own sister being accused of doing something sexual with a young adult, but there is no disgrace to it, no disgrace."<sup>24</sup> This need for love has warped itself into a fanatical affection for animals and as Bob Stein puts it, "You've cut out a whole part of living. You might just as well have sliced off a piece of your body."<sup>25</sup> Anna's vulnerability is crucial in portraying the role as it seems essential for the audience to relate sympathetically to her despite her erratic behavior. She is a study in extremes--within a moment she may change from sweetness and tenderness into shrieking lunacy. A faded loveliness and femininity is also of major importance in creating this role.

#### Fleur Stein

Fleur Stein and her husband Bob are neighbors in the apartment building in which Anna and Catherine live. Fleur

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

is in her early forties and is a guidance teacher (unlicensed) in the same school Catherine and Anna work. Fleur appears in the second act supposedly to bring Anna a get-well present from her fellow teachers, but her real reason for coming is to meet Ceil and pressure Ceil for her license. It is revealed that Fleur has not been able to pass the oral part of her guidance exam. The reason for this is clearly evident--she has a thick New York-Jewish type accent, she is terribly obnoxious in manner, and is not too bright. She works hard--too hard--to impress Ceil until her husband Bob appears on the scene, easily twice as obnoxious as Fleur, and reveals that she has the interesting habit of stealing bathroom supplies from the school. Fleur's ultimate embarrassment leads to a tearful, pleading, demanding speech for her license before Catherine turns her off, by turning on the blender--loudly.

The marriage of Fleur and Bob is a strange one to say the least. At one point when Fleur leaves the room Bob says, "She's so sick it isn't funny. I mean, the Board of Ed is batty but at least they know enough not to give a bewildered schizo a license."<sup>26</sup> Also, their sex life is obviously not up to par as Bob points out, "There's something queer about teachers the way they can't turn it off even in bed."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

The impression is also given that Fleur is extremely tasteless. Her manner of dress is gauche as is her hair style and make-up.

#### Bob Stein

As pointed out earlier, Bob is easily twice as obnoxious as Fleur. He uses every opportunity to run her down in front of the sisters and eventually tries to force his opinion of what should be done with Anna on the Reardons. Bob is "all business" and does not seem to have a sensitive bone in his body. His age is also in the early to middle forties and is gauche in his manner of dress as his wife is. The playwright offers very little as far as character insight is concerned in the role of Bob, his main function being to serve as a foil for Fleur.

#### Mrs. Pentrano

Mrs. Pentrano, an Italian lady in her late fifties, is the landlady of the apartment building in which the Reardon sisters live. She comes to try to sell cosmetics to Catherine and her purpose in the play, aside from providing some humor, is to discuss Anna's problems and set up the entrance of Ceil. Mrs. Pentrano seems to be a giddy, thoughtless little woman and a source of annoyance to the Reardons.

### Delivery Boy

The Delivery Boy is about 16 or 17 years old. He is a student in the school the Reardon sisters teach at and was in one of Anna's classes, one she began to behave strangely in. The Delivery Boy is a typical smart aleck high school punk type and his purpose in the play is purely for humorous purposes and to get across how well known Anna's problem has become.

### Scenic Analysis

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little takes place in a small but comfortable New York City apartment. The apartment is in an old building and the Reardons have lived there for many years. The apartment greatly shows the influence of Mama and has a definite feminine touch. The furniture is old but well kept.

This production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little will be done in a three-sided arena staging. This director feels that this play is proscenium-oriented, but staging And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little in an arena set-up was not of this director's choosing. In spite of this, the floor-plan developed for this production is a very workable one. The stage area is divided into two halves (one is slightly larger), one representing a living room area, and one representing a dining room area (the living room is the larger section). The kitchen is also visible through louvered doors in the dining room section and in the living room



section there is a two-step rise leading to an archway which leads to the front door. The aisle leading into the living room area will be assumed to be the hallway to the bedroom and bathroom.

Lighting for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little will all be realistic lighting, no special cues or effects.

Costuming will be simple, appropriate modern dress, with the exception of Fleur and Bob who will be dressed in more garish, loud type clothing.

#### Justification of Script

This director feels that despite flaws in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little there are a great many good reasons for doing this play. The challenge of working with a script that is not the best and an awareness of the flaws offers an exciting opportunity to the director. The roles, particularly of the four female principals, are excellently drawn characters and will offer another challenge to both the director and the actresses playing the roles.

And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little has a lot to say about the fine line between sanity and insanity, man's cruelty to his fellow man, and the many foibles that make the human being so funny and also so very tragic. It is a play that has a point and therefore, this director feels that it is worth doing.

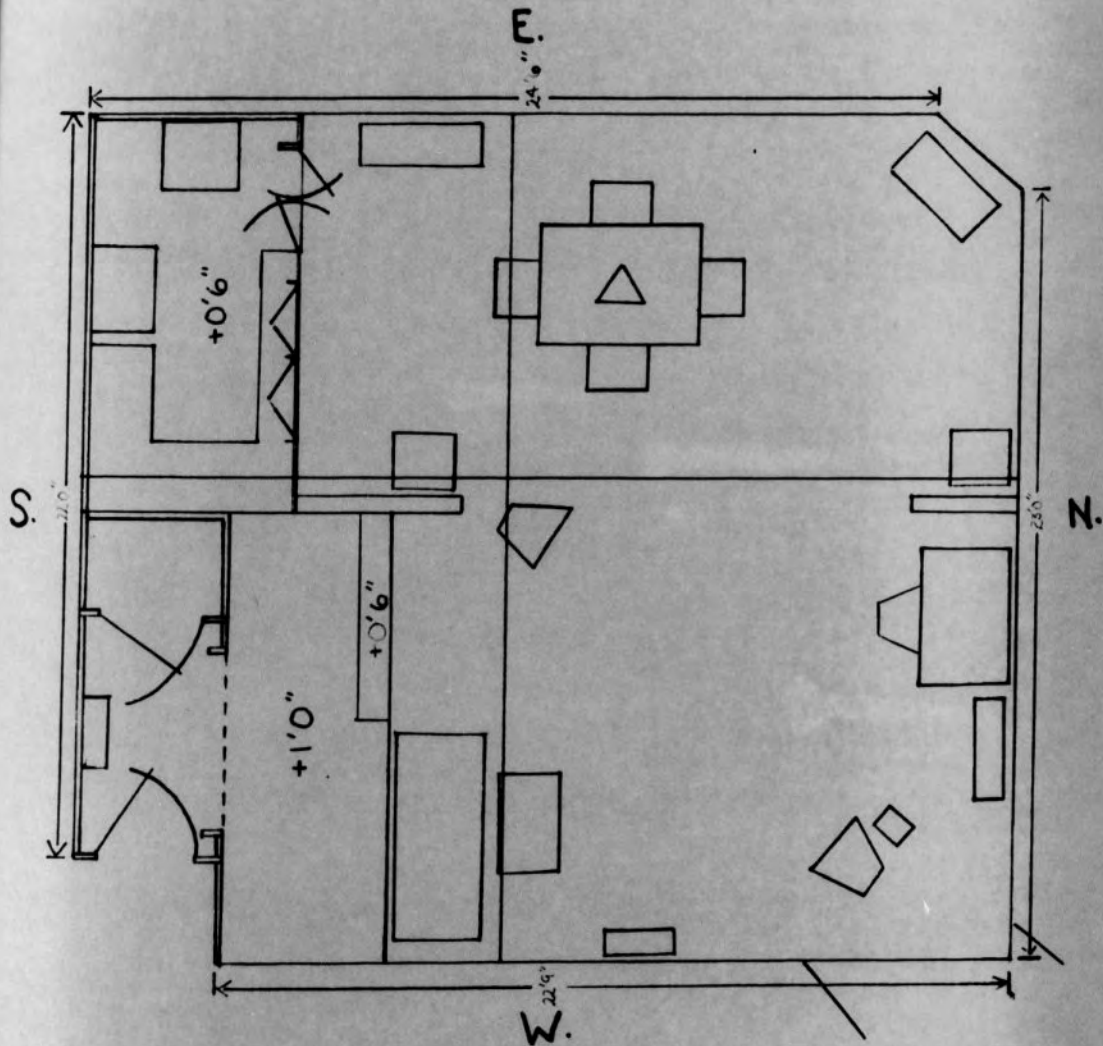


Figure 1

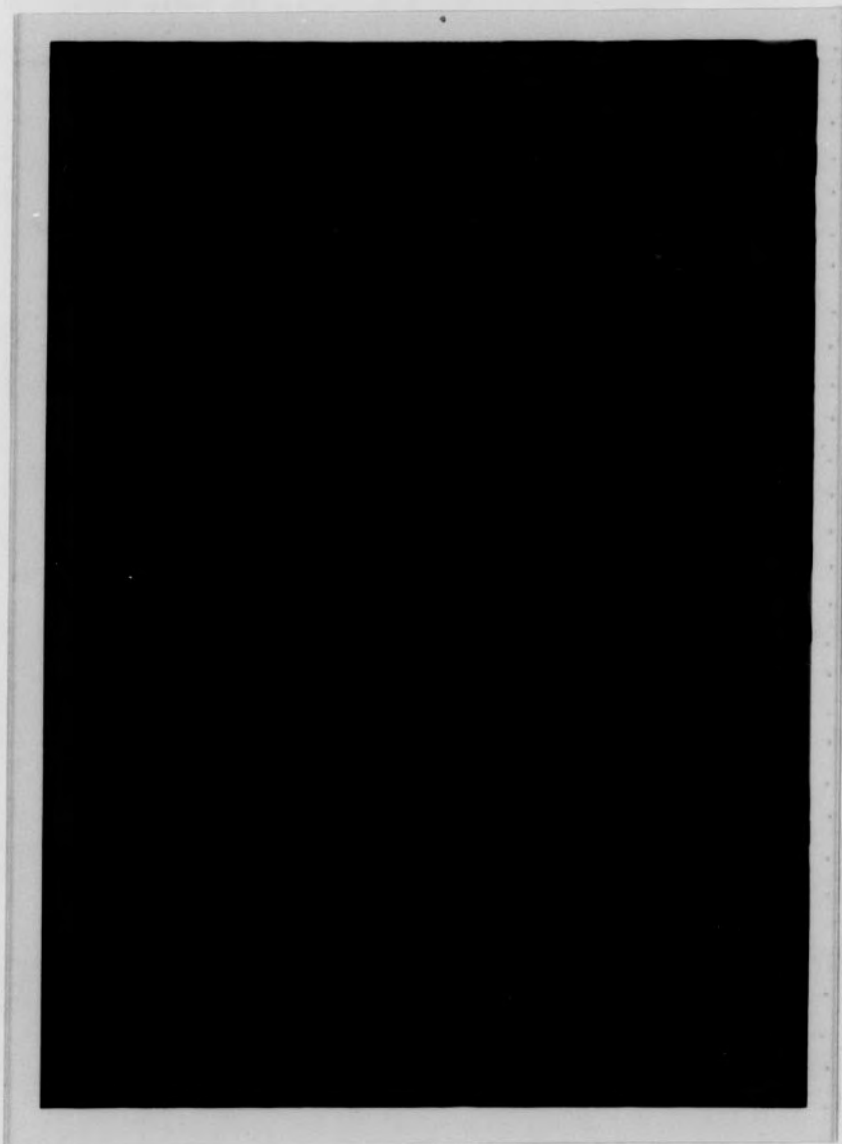


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

CHAPTER III  
CRITICAL EVALUATION

The audience response to And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and the brisk ticket sales after the opening night brought about the addition of an extra performance bringing the total number of performances to ten. The extended length of the run added an extra challenge to the cast in terms of maintaining a freshness in their performances in spite of the extraordinarily demanding nature of their roles. Throughout the rehearsal and performance periods the work of the cast and the technical crews was of high quality, although there were some exceptions which will be pointed out in this chapter.

The final part of this thesis analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the production as this director sees them. It places emphasis on audiences, technical challenges, acting achievements and the play itself.

Audience Response

The popularity and warm critical response to the production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little came as an enormous and pleasant surprise. Weaknesses of the script, the unpleasant nature of the story, and the uncomfortable seating on Taylor Stage was detrimental, but audience

response was so cordial that a curtain call was added at the third performance.

The critical response was equally warm. Joe Knox who reviewed the production for the Greensboro Daily News stated:

The last play of UNC-G's 52nd season, "And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little" by Paul Zindel, is a highly polished, beautifully performed jewel, at once uproariously funny, quietly amusing, touching, saddening and tragic.

I thought the opening performance Monday night was as fine as any I had ever seen in Taylor theatre. Produced by a drama department notable for excellence over the years, 'Miss Reardon' certainly ranks among the best.<sup>28</sup>

Doug Waller in his review for the Greensboro Record criticized the play itself but said:

Nevertheless, Zindel has provided us with some good theatre. His acerbic lines and sharp wit produce some excellent comedy which was played to its fullest Monday night under the direction of Jim Fisher.

Also, Katherine Cortez, Mary Faran Huey and Darian Harris--the three sisters--made their characters fascinating.<sup>29</sup>

#### Technical Areas

The set designer and lighting director for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little were both undergraduates. This was, at the same time, a strength and a weakness in the overall production design.

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<sup>28</sup>Greensboro Daily News, 9 April 1975.

<sup>29</sup>Greensboro Record, 8 April 1975.



The major strength was that the designers had great enthusiasm and drive in their work and a willingness to cooperate totally with the director. The major weakness was the lack of production experience of both the designers in terms of their expertise and professional maturity. This director, not totally at home in the technical aspects of a production (especially in the area of lighting) found it difficult at times to guide the less experienced designers in areas he was not particularly strong in himself. However, this director feels that any errors in judgment on the technical aspects of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little were minor and did not detract greatly from the final production.

#### The Setting

While selecting the bill of plays for UNC-G's fifty second season, the faculty decided that one play should be staged in arena style. This was assigned to the production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and not left to the director to decide. This posed several problems for this director and the set designer. The setting needed to indicate two rooms (living room and dining room) or one combined room. Much of the action of the play takes place around the dining room table and this director felt that because the production was to be done in three-quarter arena style that it was imperative to have a setting in

which the action could be pulled away from the dining room table as much as possible. This led to the decision to make two rooms connected by a large imaginary archway. The designer and director also felt that two rooms would give infinitely more variety and make a more interesting set. The dining room area with swinging doors into a partially visible kitchen was the more effective of the two rooms in this director's opinion. The living room was a little too large and some of the crosses seemed rather long. The foyer containing the front door worked well for several important but difficult entrances and exits.

The treatment of the walls of the set was most attractive in the dining room side where the designer made use of a white wallpaper pattern on a greenish-blue background with white woodwork. The appearance of the living room was less successful with walls that were a light blue color with maple woodwork. The walls were spattered with a darker shade of blue which was insufficient to dull the over-brightness of the basic light blue. Neither room had any indication of aging or wear. Considering that the Reardons had lived in this apartment for at least forty years, this was clearly a flaw in the set design. This director had wanted the set to give the appearance of a realistic setting for a contemporary comedy, but the rooms looked as though they had been painted recently, too clean and bright to be believable.

A Persian carpet in the living room and a light green carpet in the dining room were effective in color and looked well with the furnishings in both rooms.

Properties and accessories were especially well chosen for the production. The action of the play demanded a meal to be prepared, served and eaten and this was extremely well handled by the props crew and the actors. This director had hoped there would be more clutter throughout the set to indicate that the Reardons had been living there for a long time.

#### The Costumes

The costumes for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little generally worked quite well for the characters. The costume for Catherine was probably the most effective, a simple white blouse and plain navy blue skirt which gave her a rather prim look, perfectly opposite of what Catherine proves herself to be. A concession was made by this director concerning the pale, faded blue robe for Anna which was appropriate for the character but blended in with the background of the set. The costume designer had difficulty in finding a robe that suited the actress, the character, and met the need for a large pocket for concealing the pistol that Anna fires at Ceil, and later at Bob. Ceil's chic, sophisticated brown suit was very attractive and correct for the character, but could have been improved if the skirt

had not been made to look so baggy. The tasteless, overdressed look for Fleur and Bob worked well, but was, perhaps, a bit too extreme and too comic. Fleur's costume was the better of the two in the opinion of this director because it suited the actress and was more subtle than Bob's costume. Mrs. Pentrano's brightly colored tent dress and tattered grey sweater were perfect for the gushy landlady and the delivery boy's blue jean jacket and pants and butcher's apron were right.

#### Lighting

Probably the most effective thing about the lighting for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was that the acting area was well illuminated with a minimum of light spill on the audience. This director felt that this was quite important to give the audience some feeling of distance from the action of the play. A problem in other productions done in the arena style on Taylor stage has been excessive light spill on the first several rows of seating area, but the problem was greatly diminished in this production. Otherwise, this director felt that there were not enough changes in light levels throughout the course of the play. The light was bright and strong and generally stayed that way. More distinct changes in light levels could have helped to mold the mood of many scenes. What partially caused this problem was that the lighting equipment was inoperable during the technical rehearsals because most of

the dimmers were blown and some replacement equipment had to be borrowed at the last minute from another theatre.

The one major lighting effect, the final special on Catherine and Anna, worked well but this director wishes that the cue had not been faded in during Catherine's final cross to Anna. This director had hoped that Catherine could complete her cross, Anna could deliver the final line of the play, and then the special would appear. The lighting designer indicated that this change would be too abrupt and would then be distracting instead of effective. This director agreed and the special was faded in during Catherine's cross. The effect of this special was excellent in setting a final image of Catherine and Anna that was visually pleasing in setting a final image for the play.

#### The Acting

Joe Knox in his review of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little in the Greensboro Daily News said,

The five women and two men assembled for the difficult task of making "Miss Reardon" come alive, were talented, sensitive and understanding to an extraordinary degree of their respective roles.<sup>30</sup>

This director would agree with that statement generally although there were problems obvious and not so obvious to the audience. It was certainly true that the acting in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was one of the most highly praised

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<sup>30</sup>Greensboro Daily News, 9 April 1975.

aspects of the production. This was as it should be because of the nature of the play and this director's feeling that the play was basically one of character study. The rehearsal period was four weeks long and the cast worked very hard to achieve a high level of reality in hopes of making up for some of the play's obvious flaws. With one exception the cast worked with diligent professionalism and toward improvement of their individual acting skills and forming a strong ensemble for And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little.

The role of Catherine Reardon was, in this director's opinion, the most successful characterization in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. This director had worked with the actress playing Catherine twice prior to the production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and had been able to form a strong working relationship with her. The actress has a desire for perfection and an expertise that this director found a constant challenge as in previous productions. This actress had a tendency to overdo in emotional roles and the greatest hurdle to overcome in her performance was maintaining a control over her desire to "let it all go" emotionally. This director felt that the character of Catherine would be most effective if her emotions boiled under a surface of coolness until her gradual intoxication began releasing them slowly until the final torrent in the climactic scene with Ceil in the third act. One way of

achieving this was through the use of the typical spinster school-teacher image of primness in Catherine's appearance contrasting with her coarse actions which would become more evident during the play.

The first act, particularly the long expository scene with Ceil, was the most difficult for the actress playing Catherine because it was virtually a monologue containing many tongue-twisting phrases and speeches. The actress was performing it well early in the rehearsal period and had to work hard at maintaining a freshness and spontaneity with it.

During the third week of the rehearsal period an experiment was attempted to aid the actress portraying Catherine in playing the character's gradual intoxication. Real alcoholic beverage was used (Scotch whiskey at the first of these rehearsals, wine at the second) which the actress drank in the prescribed amounts that the character drank during the course of the play. The first rehearsal was not good. The actress drank too large quantities of the Scotch too quickly and became too intoxicated to be even coherent. The second such rehearsal was more successful, and although the actress again became intoxicated, this director was able to take careful notes on her reactions, movements, and speech which helped her at subsequent rehearsals and in her finished performance.

The role of Anna Reardon was also well-acted in the opinion of this director. The actress brought a highly emotional quality to the character of Anna which was at times a bit out of control, but more often fascinating to watch. Generally, having seen this actress in stiff, mechanical performances prior to And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little, this director was particularly pleased with her performance. Her extremely youthful appearance was a problem as was her graceful, dancer-like movement, but she was able to bring enough emotional believability to her character to compensate for these weaknesses. The actress was also able to form a strong working relationship with the actress playing Catherine and the interaction between these two characters was a high point of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little. The two were able to maintain a steady tension and bond even when they were not directly relating to each other in a scene, and when they were left alone together during the play's final moments, the full effectiveness of their relationship became quite clear. These two characters were certainly the most important in And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little and created the strongest performances in the production.

The third sister, Ceil, was less well-played by an experienced and quite competent actress who gave an inconsistent performance and proved to be difficult in her relationships with this director and the remainder of the cast.



She seemed determined to never play a scene the same way twice in a role that actually supports the action and she did entirely too much to try to take the focus of a scene at the wrong time. This director tried to make these points clear to the actress who chose to ignore the advice and do as she pleased which hurt the production and the feeling of ensemble that was achieved among the others in the cast. However, the actress' physical appearance was appropriate for Ceil. She also played many moments quite well, especially one scene with Anna in the first act when they discuss their deceased mother and Anna's nightmares. The weakest side of her performance was her "listening." Instead of paying attention to what was being said and reacting to it she constantly did distracting pieces of business (playing with stray threads, waving her napkin around, playing with her food, posing) which hurt emphasis of important moments in many scenes.

One experiment was attempted with the character of Ceil that helped a moment become more believable. Near the end of the first act Anna unexpectedly fires a blank gun directly at Ceil. This director staged the moment so that Ceil would jump up from her seat when fired at. In hopes of finding out if this was a realistic reaction, this director ordered that the gun be loaded with blanks and fired at the actress during a rehearsal when she did not

expect it. Instead of leaping from her seat, she sat stunned and then burst into tears. This is how that scene was subsequently played.

This director made a serious mistake in directing the actress playing Fleur and, to a lesser extent, the actor playing Bob. Both actually gave generally good performances although there was a lack of depth and a lesser degree of believability than achieved by the others in the cast. In part this was due to the characters themselves as written, and also to the fact that the actor and actress were cast very much against type, but mostly to the fact that this director coached them on a one-dimensional level. In coaching the actor and actress this director made them force their performances which contributed greatly to the weaknesses of their characterizations.

The actress portraying Fleur had an adequate degree of experience, but not much in the area of comedy, although she displayed a natural flair for it. This director was concerned with her lack of expertise in regard to playing the comic moments of her character and coached her extensively in comic technique with the result that most of her comic moments were forced. She played Fleur's more serious moments, especially her final tearful scene excellently.

The actor playing Bob generally did well with the coarseness and humor of his character, but was perhaps a

little too comic to be believed completely. However, many of his moments with Fleur and several with Ceil were strongly played.

A controversial aspect of the production was the use of a New York (Brooklynese) accent by the characters Fleur and Bob. The actress playing Fleur was able to master the accent quite well, although it was entirely too forced and pronounced. The actor playing Bob has less affinity for mastering the accent partially because of the natural slowness of his own speech. More success in this area might have been achieved had the two actors been able to both have the same consistency with the accent. This director felt that attempting the accent was right, but that the proper result was not reached.

The characters of Mrs. Pentrano, the landlady, and the delivery boy were well-played. The actress portraying Mrs. Pentrano was amusing and was able to make use of an annoying laugh for comic effect. The actor playing the delivery boy had just the right smart-aleck quality without being overdone. Both of these actors worked diligently on their roles even though they were both onstage briefly and this director was pleased with their performances.

#### Final Thoughts

The production of And Miss Reardon Drinks a Little was a very satisfying experience. Although this director initially had not liked the play and was not excited with

the idea of directing it in arena style, once rehearsals began the challenge was a valuable and enjoyable one. Because this director felt that the script was not a very good piece of dramatic literature, aside from some snappy dialogue and well-drawn characters, the challenge of making adjustments in the structure of the play became necessary and exciting. The most notable of these changes was also the most effective. This was the moment at the end of the third act when Catherine and Anna are left together, Catherine with Anna's committment papers in hand. Instead of leaving the audience undecided as to what will become of Anna, this director chose to make the decision clear through Catherine. She slowly and painfully tore up the committment papers which indicated that she did not intend to allow Anna to be committed to a mental institution and that the only way this would happen was if Ceil were to take charge again. This change was accepted well by the cast and the audience, even by those who knew how the play was written to end.

This director was pleased with the response to the production and felt that much was achieved in his development as a theatre artist and in the development of the cast and crews.

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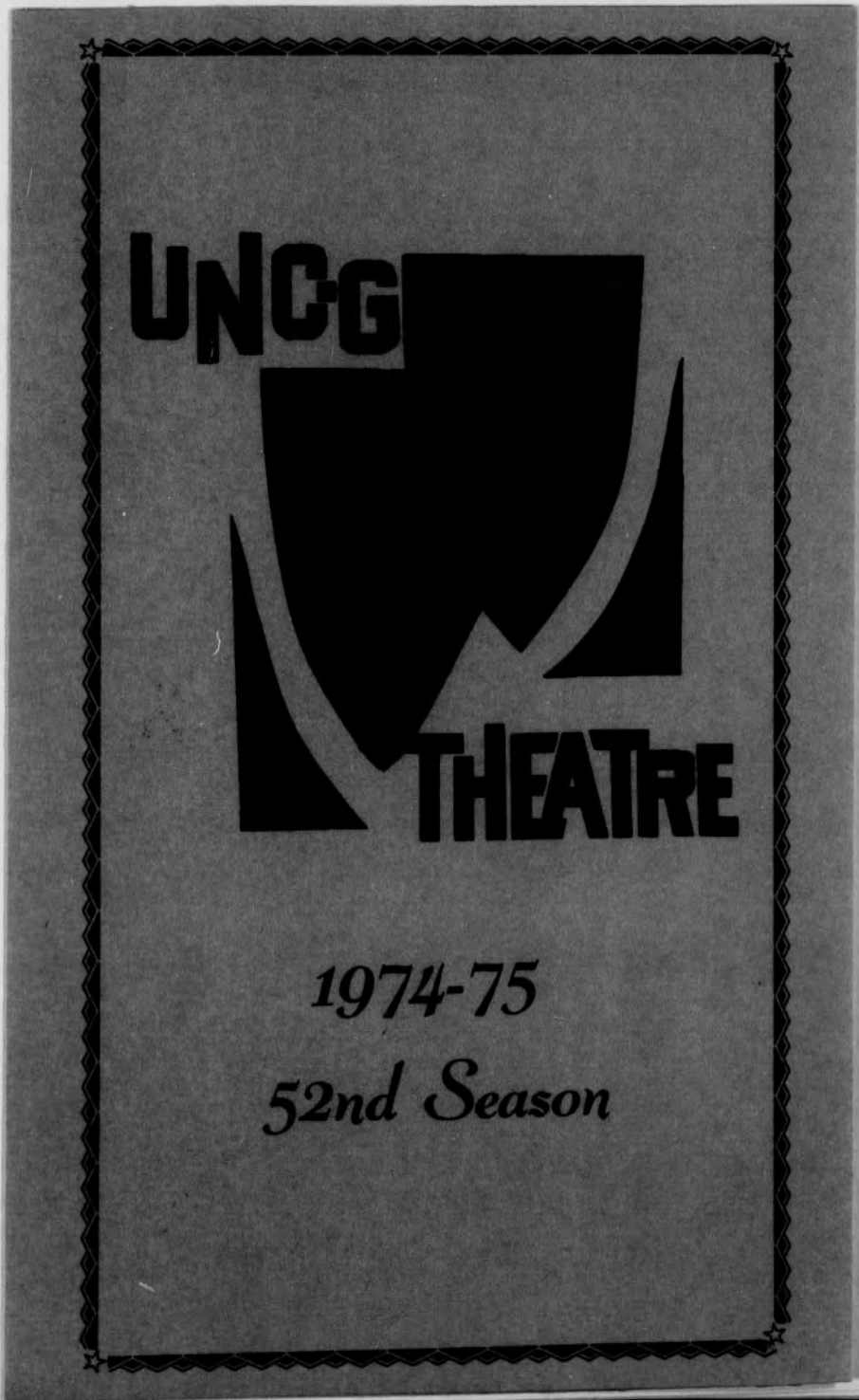
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APPENDIX A



**UNCG**



**THEATRE**

*1974-75*

*52nd Season*