

A READERS THEATRE ADAPTATION AND
PRODUCTION OF ARCHY AND MEHITABEL
FOR SPECIAL HIGH SCHOOL AUDIENCES

918

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Speech
Kansas State Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

by

James Harland Smith

August 1968

Thesis
1968
S

Charles R. Hill

Approved for the Major Department

Jeanette Boylan

Approved for the Graduate Council

272942⁴

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Problem	1
Importance and Justification of the Problem . .	2
Statement of the Purpose	5
Definition of Terms	5
Readers Theatre	6
Review of Literature	6
Method of Procedure	8
II. SELECTION AND ADAPTATION	9
Selecting the Script	9
Preliminary considerations	10
Search for literature	11
Necessary qualities	12
Possible choices	14
<u>Archy and Mehitabel</u>	15
Marquis and his work	15
Adaptation of the Literature	18
Major considerations	18
Time allotment	19
Available talent	19
Arrangement	20

CHAPTER

PAGE

Narration 20

III. THE ADAPTED SCRIPT 23

 The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel 23

 The Coming of Archy 24

 Pity the Poor Spiders 28

 Mehitabel's Extensive Past 29

 A Spider and a Fly 32

 Mehitabel has an Adventure 36

 The Robin and the Worm 38

 The Wail of Archy 41

 Mehitabel and Her Kittens 43

 Unjust 46

 The Old Trouper 50

 Freddy the Rat Perishes 53

 Mehitabel Meets an Affinity 55

 Archy Declares War 58

 Off with the Old Love 59

IV. THE PRODUCTION RECORD 64

 Casting 64

 Direction 66

 Rehearsals 66

 Interpretation 67

 Charterization 69

 Movement 70

CHAPTER	PAGE
Focus	71
Staging	72
Setting	72
Lighting	73
Costumes	73
Stage Properties	73
Performances	74
Director's Comments	75
Selection	75
Adaptation	75
Direction	77
Casting	77
Rehearsals	78
Staging	78
Performances	78
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	80
Summary	80
Conclusion	87
BIBLIOGRAPHY	91
APPENDIX A.	94
APPENDIX B.	96

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

In the fall of 1965 several unified school district superintendents in eastern Kansas met to discuss the possibility of applying for some of the federal programs sponsored under the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Public Law 89-10. Twelve school district superintendents decided to take advantage of this possibility and apply for a grant. An association was formed, entitled the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association; and as a result of this association, special audiences were created for dramatic activities. The superintendents began work on a set of articles, elected officers, and prepared a proposal for submission to the United States Office of Education under Title III of Public Law 89-10.

The geographic area served by the association included seven counties in eastern Kansas. The twelve member school districts had a combined total of 4,152 square miles within their boundaries. A total of 2,576 high school students were enrolled in the 27 high schools. No large cities were in the seven county area; the towns or community center in each of the districts ranged from less than 100 to 4,100 in population. The high schools ranged

in size from 16 to 351 students, with a mean enrollment of 95. Each school was within an approximate radius of 60 miles of Emporia, Kansas.

The Flint Hills Association's proposal was designed to provide a cultural enrichment program in music, art and drama. The cultural enrichment project was funded under a grant of \$330,000 to Unified School District #386, Madison, Kansas, for a 30 month period, beginning in February of 1966.¹

The specific objectives of the Drama Division of the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association were: (1) to provide opportunities for the students to observe good drama, and (2) to provide opportunities for the students to participate in as many varied areas of the theatre as possible.²

II. IMPORTANCE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

The Speech Department of the Kansas State Teachers College at Emporia, Kansas, served as the administrator of the Drama Division of the Flint Hills Association. The Drama Division's 1967-68 proposal to the Association

¹Federal Grant Application, November 9, 1965, Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association, Madison, Kansas (in the files of the Association), p. 17.

²Ibid., p. 14.

included: "oral interpretation assembly programs that would travel to different schools."³ This study was generally concerned with the oral interpretation assembly program. The specific objectives of this study were concerned with one phase of that program.

The Drama Division's proposal for the "Assembly programs in Oral Interpretation" read as follows:

Oral interpretation has provided a dynamic impact in understanding the vast and varied realms of literature. Areas such as Readers Theatre, Interpreters Theatre, and Choral Reading are rapidly growing in creative and cultural importance in colleges and universities across the nation. The cultural impact is especially suited to the high school students.

The high schools in the association will be offered several different programs of literary merit. There will be more than one program available so that each individual school may choose the program that is best suited to them. Each program will be of such a duration that it will be suitable for an assembly program or a class period. Each school will be entitled to at least one production of the program of their selection. The programs will be produced and toured by K.S.T.C. Through this method literature can come alive for many uninterested students as well as the interested ones. These programs can be of great value in any speech or English class.⁴

The Assembly Program proposal was accepted and went into effect in February of 1968. The statement issued from the Speech Department that "the programs will offer a wide variety of platform readings from various periods of

³The Drama Proposal for 1967-68 to the Association (in the files of the Association).

⁴Ibid., 1967-68.

4
literature, using Readers Theatre techniques, "resulted in four programs being offered to the schools in the Association.⁵

The first production, entitled "James Agee: The Man and His Work," was adapted and directed by Christine Kelly. The script was adapted from several works by Agee. The selections that were used in the script were: "Knoxville: Summer 1916"; Let Us Now Praise Famous Men; "Comedies Greatest Era"; Letters to Father Flye; and A Death in the Family. The script was adapted for three readers and called for very little movement. The readers either sat or stood behind their reading stands. Background music and choral reading were interspersed throughout the fifty minute production. The production had a total of nine performances. Four of the performances were held on the college campus, while the remaining five were scheduled for tour to high schools in the association.

The second production was adapted from the war novel The Wax Boom by George Mandel and was entitled "The Soldier and the Shadow." The fifty minute script, adapted and performed by James Daniels, was directed by William Mc Donnell. This solo recital had five performances on the college campus, and four performances on the high school tour.

⁵Ibid.

The third production, adapted and directed by Robert Bicker, was entitled "Salinger: Soldiers and Sympathizers." The thirty minute script featured two of J. D. Salinger's short stories; "To Ismene With Love and Squalor," and "A Good Day for Bananafish." The three readers, seated, reading from behind their stands enjoyed four performances at the college and seven performances on tour.

The fourth production, "The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel," was adapted from the works of Don Marquis and was directed by this writer. This study was specifically concerned with the fourth production and has recorded the activities of that production.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to (1) select, adapt, direct, and present a Readers Theatre script for the high school students of the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association, and (2) to record and to comment upon the activities of the production from its conception to its conclusion.

IV. DEFINITION OF TERMS

The theatre of oral interpretation has been alluded to by various names. Staged Reading, Chamber Theatre, Interpreters Theatre, and Readers Theatre are titles which

0

have been used to describe this style of presentation. The Educational Theatre Journal, in its index, classifies this particular form of theatre as Readers Theatre. Likewise, in this study, the theatre of oral interpretation shall be referred to as Readers Theatre.

Readers Theatre. Definitions for Readers Theatre, in some cases, vary as much as the persons that write them. For the purposes of this study Readers Theatre was defined, by this writer, as that medium in which two or more interpreters, with or without manuscripts, interpret a literary work in such a way as to stimulate the imagination of the listener and thereby enhance the listener's appreciation for the literature.

When Readers Theatre accomplishes its purpose and becomes a stimulant for the imagination of the listener, it should become, in Leslie Irene Coger's words, the "Theatre of the Mind."⁶

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature that pertained to this study, books, periodicals, and certain unpublished materials were consulted. Textbooks for Oral Interpretation and

⁶Leslie Irene Coger and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1968).

7

Readers Theatre written by leading authorities in their field were examined. The Speech Teacher, Educational Theatre Journal, Dramatics, and The Quarterly Journal of Speech were the major periodicals used in the study. Three Masters' theses with emphasis on adaptation for Readers Theatre were consulted. Certain unpublished documents, reports, and papers that explained the beginning and development of the Flint Hills Association were also used. Finally, certain books and periodicals that dealt with either Don Marquis or Archy and Mehitabel were investigated in this study.⁷

In reviewing the particular literature that pertained to Don Marquis and his work there was little evidence obtained that suggested Archy and Mehitabel had ever been done in the realm of Readers Theatre.

The Readers Theatre script "The Battle of the Sexes," read at a Speech Association of America Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, contained two selections by Don Marquis. Both of the selections dealt with Mehitabel and marriage. In the 1950's a musical version of Archy and Mehitabel was done in New York. It was publicized as a "poetic opera" featuring: Eddie Bracken as Archy, Carol Channing as Mehitabel, and David Wayne as the Narrator. The lyrics for the

⁷Don Marquis, Archy and Mehitabel (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1927).

production were adapted, not too closely, from Marquis' work. For the most part the lyrics were new, but were written in the same mode.

As a book, Archy and Mehitabel was first published in 1927 by Doubleday and Company and has since seen many reprintings. By 1962 it had sold over 350,000 copies and is still selling today.⁸

VI. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

The procedures that follow in the remainder of this thesis include: the selection and adaptation of a piece of literature; the adapted Readers Theatre script; the production record of the entire activities of that production from its beginning to its conclusion. This record includes the casting, directing, rehearsing, and performing of the selected literature. The director's comments on the production are also included. The final chapter consists of the summary and conclusions.

⁸Edward Anthony, O Rare Don Marquis (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1962), p. 557.

CHAPTER II

SELECTION AND ADAPTATION

The purpose of this chapter, as suggested above, is to provide an account of the criteria, the considerations, the techniques, and the procedures used in selecting and adapting the literature for the Readers Theatre script.

I. SELECTING THE SCRIPT

The most important element of any Readers Theatre production is the literature, for it is the literature itself that is brought to life for an audience through the medium of Readers Theatre. Without a worthy piece of literature it would be difficult to have a worthy production.

There are certain factors that a literary adapter must be aware of before he may select the literature. The adapter must be aware of these factors to insure the production's (1) acceptance by the audience, (2) appropriateness for the occasion, and (3) high standard of performance. First, he must know the nature of his prospective audience. He must know their approximate age and their possible interests. Next, he must know the nature of the occasion. The reasons for, and the location of the production must also be known. Finally, he must know the

available talent and the time allotment for the production. These facts being known, he may then begin his search for the literature.

All of these facts were considered when the opportunity to select, adapt, direct, and present a Readers Theatre script to the Flint Hills audiences was offered to and accepted by this writer. The prospective audience for whom the literature was to be selected was of prime importance. The audiences were special in terms of who and where they were. Each audience was to consist of high school students who were within the jurisdiction of the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association. This situation in itself suggested two major problems. First, was the obvious fact that the audiences would be teenagers. The second problem was that each prospective audience was reportedly culturally impoverished, hence, the rationale for the Flint Hills Association.

Based on the previous experience of this writer certain factors were considered. This writer had the experience of directing and touring two previous productions to these same prospective audiences while serving as the Drama Coordinator for the Flint Hills Association. This writer also had experience in teaching in the public high schools of Kansas. Because of these experiences, several factors were considered.

The first factor to be considered was that high school students are a difficult audience for whom to select and adapt. The students between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years old are neither children, nor are they adults, with a few exceptions at either end. Their reaction may be unpredictable. If they are bored they may become restless, on the other hand, if they are pleased they may become quite exulted. For them, certain actions or words might carry some sexual implication and thereby create an unwanted effect. The most difficult factor is that of comprehension. A piece of literature must be chosen that can be understood by all of the students involved. The literature must provide an interest for the senior, as well as the freshman student.

The second major problem, that of the audience being culturally impoverished, suggested several factors for consideration. The first, was that possibly the audience wouldnt be acquainted with Readers Theatre. As recent as four years ago at this college when one of the first Readers Theatre productions was produced, there were members of the college audience that had no idea what Readers Theatre was all about. The local reviewer for the college paper stated something to the effect that "The cast didn't even know their lines. Some of them even had to use their scripts." But a lot had happened in the past four years.

Two Readers Theatre productions had been on tour to some, but not all, of the prospective audiences in the past two years.

Not being acquainted with the cultural attributes of literature, except as something to study in English class, the high school students might have a negative response to poetry or prose because they would not think they would like it.

The last implication to be considered was the fact that the high school students would be a captive audience. They would probably have no choice about their attendance, unless they had the choice to either do their homework or "come and get cultured." In any case their attitude might not be receptive. All of these factors and their implications had to be considered before the literature could be selected.

Next, came the search for the right material with all of the necessary qualities. The necessary qualities, according to Leslie Irene Coger, are: "evocative power, compelling characters, action, enriched language, and wholeness."⁹

Precisely what is meant by these five qualities needs to be discussed. First, "evocative power" means that

⁹Coger, op. cit., p. 21.

the literature has the power to stir the imagination, the emotions, and the mind of the listner. "It evokes a definite response from the audience; it makes them shiver, makes them cry, makes them happy. It provides a memorable moment."¹⁰ "Compelling characters" are characters that the audience finds interesting, exciting, amusing, original, unique or pleasantly surprising. "Action" applies to both the physical and mental processes. Some degree of physical mobility should be present in order to help retain the attention of the high school audiences. This writer believed that the element of action, and plenty of it, must be present in the selected literature. Without action in previous productions, the audiences had a tendency to become very restless and inattentive. The term "enriched language" referred to by Coger, applies to the versatility of the literature. Language should be somewhat poetic, yet, it should also have variety if the literature is to be considered "enriched." "Wholeness" in the literature means that it must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The selection must provide a total experience for the audience. All of these qualities were considered before the search for the right piece of literature began.

The search for these qualifications yielded four

¹⁰Ibid., p. 22.

17

possible works of literature: John Brown's Body, the literature of Mark Twain, selected works of Carl Sandburg, and Archy and Mehitabel. All of these possible scripts were once again examined. First, the Sandburg idea was eliminated, primarily, because of its mood; it seemed too heavy for this particular audience. In this writer's opinion the audience was a little too familiar with Twain's works and therefore it was eliminated. That left two, both of which had all of the necessary qualifications. John Brown's Body, an epic poem of the Civil War by Stephen Vincent Benét, has long been intriguing, but too much work in Readers Theatre had already been done with it. This writer wanted a unique piece of literature that had never been adapted to Readers Theatre. The humorous, satirical pen of Don Marquis produced that piece of literature: Archy and Mehitabel. This writer had first become acquainted with the literature when he was in high school, and having also read it recently felt that it possessed more than the necessary ingredients. This piece had the ability to elicit both laughter and tears from the reader. The characters were delightful. Archy, the poetic cockroach with the mind of a man and the body of a cockroach, and Mehitabel, the lovable alley cat, who had once been Cleopatra, were both magnetic characters. The literature also possessed the possibility of an abundance of action. The language was most enriched as it was

a combination of prose, free verse poetry, and rhyming poetry. The final important factor was that the literature possessed rich, vivid, and oftentimes, hilarious humor. For these reasons Archy and Mehitabel was the literature selected.

The book, Archy and Mehitabel, is merely a collection of newspaper columns that Marquis had written when he was a columnist for the New York Evening Sun. This literature possessed the desired uniqueness. One of the motives for starting the "Oral Interpretation Assembly Program" was to encourage the participating high schools to start their own programs. One of the main contentions was that a wide variety of literature lent itself to the Readers Theatre medium. In support of the contention this writer believed that Marquis' literature presented a unique opportunity to demonstrate how even a newspaper could be adapted into a Readers Theatre script.

Typical of Marquis' humor is this example: "In 1931 Don Marquis' publisher suggested that he write his autobiography. He turned down the proposal in these words: 'I'm entitled to a better subject'."¹¹ His literature, like his humor, was both unique and original. Marquis attributed some of his originality to his birth. Writing about

¹¹Anthony, op. cit., p. 19.

himself, he states:

Marquis was born in a little town with muddy streets, called Walnut, in the northwestern part of Illinois; and his birth was on July 29, 1878, at three o'clock in the afternoon, during an eclipse of the sun. . . . Marquis has always been grateful to the gods for this spectacular advertisement of his notability. An eclipse is a good deal more important in every way than a caul; and M. is more than a little bit snobbish in his attitude toward persons who were not born during an eclipse.¹²

Marquis refused to refer to this work as his autobiography, he called it his egobiography. One of the undisguised points of this work was the satiric, humorous attack on the legitimacy of the autobiography. This artistic mixture of satire, philosophy, and humor was to become the Marquis trademark.

In 1916, while working as a columnist for the New York Evening Sun, Marquis first introduced the character of Archy the cockroach to the public. His column, "The Sun Dial", was already popular. Marquis liked his daily column but found it very time-consuming. As a result, the character of Archy, who wrote "letters to the boss," did not capitilize or punctuate. He also wrote most of his literature in free verse. This enabled Marquis to fill space rapidly without having to bother with the technicalities. Marquis allowed Archy to have many friends; the most notable was Mehitabel, the cat. "Through Archy and

¹²Ibid., p. 22.

Mehitabel, Marquis created a column that made buying a newspaper, in those days, something, quietly exciting."

The critical reviews of Archy and Mehitabel were encouraging for Marquis. The following comments were made by certain notable British reviewers:

Mehitabel is a divine creature Mehitabel is the only cat I ever loved It is inspired lunacy Don Marquis is a man of genius Archy rises to real greatness.¹³

Archy and Mehitabel is still being published in England today.

A reviewer for the New York Times wrote:

Archy has written one of the outstanding biographies of the year. It was not easy for him; as half the world knows, each word that this sapient cockroach types is accomplished only through gruelling labor as he butts his head against the keys of Don Marquis' typewriter. . . . Most of his chronicle of Mehitabel, the incorrigible cat, is presented as it used to appear in The Sun and The Tribune where Don Marquis as a columnist added considerably to the gayety of the nation.¹⁴

In an introduction to Marquis' work The Lives and Times of Archy and Mehitabel, primarily the same work but having additional selections, E. B. White wrote:

Among books of humor by American authors, there are only a handful that rest solidly on the shelf. This . . . is one of those books. It is funny, it is wise, it is tender, and it is tough. The sales do not astound me; only the author astounds me, for I think

¹³Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 556.

(or think I do) at what cost Don Marquis produced these gaudy and irreverent tales. He was the sort of poet who does not create easily; he was left unsatisfied and gloomy by what he produced; day and night he felt the juices squeezed out of him by the merciless demands of daily newspaper work; he was never quite certified by intellectuals and serious critics of belles lettres.¹⁵

Marquis is said to have been one of the most philosophic humorists of his time. Indeed, Archy and Mehitabel is full of philosophic humor. Possibly, this is the reason why, of all of Marquis' works, Archy and Mehitabel is the only one still being printed today.

II. ADAPTATION OF THE LITERATURE

In adapting Archy and Mehitabel into a Readers Theatre script the following factors had to be considered: the prospective audience, the nature of the occasion, the time allotment, the available talent, the arrangement of the literature, and narration.

The prospective audience and the nature of the occasion have already been discussed in the first part of this chapter. The time allotment was the next thing to be considered.

The assembly periods of the participating high schools were approximately fifty to sixty minutes in length

¹⁵Don Marquis, The Lives and Times of Archy and Mehitabel (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1933), with an introduction by E. B. White, p. XVII.

at a maximum and thirty minutes was usually the minimum. After careful examination of the selected literature this writer chose to adapt a fifty-five minute script. The literature was responsible for this selected length. In this amount of time the script could possess a beginning a middle, and an end, while at the same time, providing a great deal of variety.

The time selection was also dependent upon the number of characters in the script. This writer wanted the production to be small and intimate, therefore a three member cast was chosen to perform the script. Two men and one woman were needed. The character of Archy would be read entirely by one actor. Mehitabel would be read by one female. The final role in the script was an extremely difficult one. The actor was to serve as the narrator while also reading the remaining characters in the script. The script called for a talented cast. Because of the demanding characters in the script, this writer believed that the cast must be selected before the adaptation could progress. This problem shall be discussed in Chapter IV.

In the book Archy and Mehitabel there are forty-eight different selections. All of them had, at one time, been an individual newspaper column. For this reason, each selection was approximately three to four minutes in length. Of these selections, thirteen were used in the

adaptation.

The selections were chosen with three basic reasons in mind. First, they had to be interesting and dramatically exciting for a high school audience. Secondly, they had to be of such a nature as to be enhanced by the medium of Readers Theatre. Finally the selection had to show an insight to either, Archy, Mehitabel, or Don Marquis himself, for the purpose of threading the story together. All of the selections chosen were dependent upon the knowledge and opinions of the writer of this thesis.

Since there isn't any single story line in Archy and Mehitabel, it was imperative that narration be used in order to thread the pieces together. Some of the narration was obtained from E. B. White's introduction to The Lives and Times of Archy and Mehitabel. Other narration was invented to bridge one selection to the next in an attempt to give the script continuity. At all times the narration was added with the high school audience in mind; therefore, it was usually simple and explanatory.

The thirteen selections were arranged in such a way as to obtain the most effective dramatic progression as possible. Special consideration was given to the prospective audiences as the selections were being arranged. The last consideration in arrangement was that of focus. Focus refers to the placement of the audience's attention.

Selections were arranged so as to allow adequate flexibility in the shifting of focus from one character to the next. The arrangement was done in order to insure as much variety as possible, while at the same time retaining continuity.

To insure that the production not extend past the fifty-five minute time allotment, each selection chosen was read aloud and timed. The narration was also timed. Certain selections had to be edited in order to have a dramatic appeal for high school audiences. Some passages that were not absolutely necessary to a certain selection were omitted in order to keep the adaptation within the allotted time, and to keep the action at a flowing pace.

The last consideration, and possibly the most important one, was the element of humor. The presence of humor was the overriding factor many times in the choice of one selection over another. This writer believed that Marquis' humorous philosophy would be understood by more members of the high school audience than would his serious philosophy. For that reason the script was adapted to enhance its humor and, thereby, be more interesting as well as dramatically exciting for the Flint Hills high school audiences.

CHAPTER III

THE ADAPTED SCRIPT

The sole purpose of this chapter is to provide the production script that resulted from the literature being selected and adapted in Readers Theatre form. Most of the literature found in the script is not punctuated, nor is it capitalized. The reason for this is that Marguis did not capitalize or punctuate his columns when they were written by Archy.

Archy was unable to operate the mechanism that would allow him to use capitals, nor could he punctuate. Not only did Marguis refuse to take the time to punctuate or capitalize, he also wrote in free verse. By using the free verse form his lines could be short and thereby fill space rapidly, which helped him meet his daily deadline.

25

"THE UNDERWORLD OF ARCHY AND MEHITABEL"

AS ADAPTED FOR READERS THEATRE BY

James Harland Smith

(The actors take the stage. First the Narrator, then Mehitabel, and then Archy. The Narrator takes center stage, Mehitabel goes down left, and Archy goes down right. Both Archy and Mehitabel are seated. The Narrator places his script on his stand, opens it, and then addresses the audience in a pleasant, casual manner.)

NARRATOR:

Probably, everyone of you has at one time, experienced something, or done or seen something and had the odd feeling that you had done or seen the same thing before. At the same time, you were positive that you had never been in such a situation or had never been to that particular place before in your entire life.

For those of you that have experienced something like this, we ask you to exercise your imagination and to accept it as one of the many symptoms of reincarnation. We want your imagination today as we present THE UNDERWORLD OF ARCHY AND MEHITABEL.

I am Rick Jenkins, your narrator and will read the various animals and insects of the Underworld. On my right

is Larry Remmers, who will bring to life the character of..

ARCHY:

Archy, the cockroach; a free verse poet.

NARRATOR:

On my left is Pat Foltz, who will portray the lovable, immoral . . .

MEHITABEL:

Mehitabel the cat.

NARRATOR:

The circumstances of Archy's first appearance are narrated in the following extract from the "Sun Dial" column of the New York Evening Sun.

(Reads from script)

Dobbs Ferry possesses a rat which slips out of his lair at night and runs a typewriting machine in a garage. Unfortunately, he has always been interrupted by the watchman before he could produce a complete story.

It was at first thought that the power which made the typewriter run was a ghost, instead of a rat. It seems likely to us that it was both a ghost and a rat. Mme. Blavatsky's ego went into a white horse after she passed over, and someone's personality has undoubtedly gone into this rat. It is an era of belief in communications from the spirit land. (Abandons script)

And since this matter had been reported in the public

is Larry Remmers, who will bring to life the character of..

ARCHY:

Archy, the cockroach; a free verse poet.

NARRATOR:

On my left is Pat Foltz, who will portray the lovable, immoral . . .

MEHITABEL:

Mehitabel the cat.

NARRATOR:

The circumstances of Archy's first appearance are narrated in the following extract from the "Sun Dial" column of the New York Evening Sun.

(Reads from script)

Dobbs Ferry possesses a rat which slips out of his lair at night and runs a typewriting machine in a garage. Unfortunately, he has always been interrupted by the watchman before he could produce a complete story.

It was at first thought that the power which made the typewriter run was a ghost, instead of a rat. It seems likely to us that it was both a ghost and a rat. Mme. Blavatsky's ego went into a white horse after she passed over, and someone's personality has undoubtedly gone into this rat. It is an era of belief in communications from the spirit land. (Abandons script)

And since this matter had been reported in the public

expression is the need of my soul
 i was once a vers libre bard
 but i died and my soul went into the body of a cockroach
 it has given me a new outlook upon life

i see things from the under side now
 thank you for the apple peelings in the wastepaper basket
 but your paste is getting so stale i can t eat it
 there is a cat here called mehitabel i wish you would have
 removed she nearly ate me the other night why don t she
 catch rats that is what she is supposed to be fore
 there is a rat here she should get without delay

most of these rats here are just rats
 but this rat is like me he has a human soul in him
 he used to be a poet himself
 night after night i have written poetry for you
 on your typewriter
 and this big brute of a rat who used to be a poet
 comes out of his hole when it is done
 and reads it and sniffs at it
 he is jealous of my poetry
 he used to make fun of it when we were both human
 he was a punk poet himself
 and after he has read it he sneers
 and then he eats it

i wish you would have mehitabel kill that rat
 or get a cat that is onto her job
 and i will write you a series of poems showing how things
 look to a cockroach
 that rat s name is freddy
 the next time freddy dies i hope he won t be a rat
 but something smaller i hope i will be a rat
 in the next transmigration and freddy a cockroach
 i will teach him to sneer at my poetry then

don t you ever eat any sandwiches in your office
 i haven t had a crumb of bread for i don t know how long
 or a piece of ham or anything but apple parings
 and paste leave a piece of paper in your machine
 every night you can call me archy

NARRATOR: (Directly to the audience.)

And so began the most amazing career in newspaper
 history. Through Archy and his letters to the boss, Don
 Marquis had created a unique style in which to comment on

the actions and attitudes of his society. Marquis first introduced Archy to the public in 1916 while he was a columnist for the New York Sun. Like other columnists, he was faced with the problem of filling his column with something more than trash, which seems to be in vogue today in many of the papers. His answer was free verse. This was part inspiration, part desperation. It enabled Marquis to use short, sometimes very short lines, which fill space rapidly, and at the same time it allowed his spirit to soar while viewing things from the underside, insect fashion.

Marquis moved easily from one form of composition to another. In the following passages you will find prose in the guise of bad vers libre, poetry that is truly free verse and rhymed verse. Regardless of the form, Marquis created a column that made buying a newspaper, in those days, something quietly exciting.

Archy and Mehitabel, between the two of them, performed the invaluable service of enabling their boss to be profound without sounding self-important, or even self-conscious. Between them, they were capable of taking any theme the boss threw them, and handling it.

For instance, if Marquis wanted to comment on the lack of thoughtfulness of his society he would have Archy write a letter, such as "pity the poor spiders".

ARCHY:

i have just been reading
 an advertisement of a certain
 roach exterminator
 the human race little knows
 all the sadness it
 causes in the insect world
 i remember some weeks ago
 meeting a middle aged spider
 she was weeping
 what is the trouble i asked
 her

NARRATOR: (Rises, uses a southern accent.)

it is these cursed
 fly swatters she replied
 they kill off all the flies
 and my family and i are starving
 to death

ARCHY:

it struck me as
 so pathetic that i made
 a little song about it
 as follows to wit

twas an elderly mother spider
 grown gaunt and fierce and gray
 with her little ones crouched beside her
 who wept as she sang this lay

NARRATOR:

curses on these here swatters
 what kills off all the flies
 for me and my little daughters
 unless we eats we dies

swattin and swatting and swattin
 tis little else you here
 and we ll soon be dead and forgotten
 with the cost of living so dear

my husband he up and left me
 lured off by a centipede
 and he says as he bereft me
 this wrong but i ll get a feed
 and me a working and working

scouring the streets for food
faithful and never shirking
doing the best i could

curses on these here swatters
what kills off all the flies
me and my poor little daughters
unless we eats we dies

only a withered spider
feeble and worn and old
and this is what
you do when you swat
you swatters cruel and cold (Resumes his seat.)

ARCHY:

i will admit that some
of the insects do not lead
noble lives but is every
man s hand to be against them
yours for less justice
and more charity (Signing off) archy

NARRATOR:

Archy usually handled the serious problems or the
philosophy for Marquis and Mehitabel would handle the
lighter stuff, since she was always on the rebound but her
motto is always,

MEHITABEL: (To the audience)

Trojours Gai, Kid, Trojours Gai.

ARCHY:

mehitabel the cat claims that
she has a human soul
also and has transmigrated
from body to body and it
may be so boss you
remember i told you she accused
herself of being cleopatra once i
asked her about antony

MEHITABEL:

anthony who are
 you thinking of that
 song about rowley and gammon and
 spinach heigho for anthony rowley

ARCHY:

no i said mark antony the
 great roman the friend of
 caesar surely cleopatra you
 remember j ceasar

MEHITABEL:

listen archy she said i
 have been so many different
 people in my time and met
 so many prominent gentlemen i
 won t lie to you or stall i
 do get my dates mixed sometimes
 think of how much i have had a
 chance to forget and i have
 always made a point of not
 carrying grudges over
 from one life to the next archy

i have been
 used something fierce in my time but
 i am no bum sport archy
 i am a free spirit archy i
 look on myself as being
 quite a romantic character oh the
 queens i have been and the
 swell feeds i have ate
 a cockroach which you are
 and a poet which you used to be
 archy couldn t understand
 my feelings at having come
 down to this i have
 had bids to elegant feeds where poets
 and cockroaches would
 neither one be mentioned without a
 laugh archy i have had
 adventures but i
 have never been an adventuress

one life up and the next life
 down archy but always a lady
 through it all and a
 good mixer too always the

life of the party archy but never
 anything vulgar always free footed
 archy never tied down to
 a job or housework yes looking
 back on it all i can say is
 i had some romantic
 lives and some elegant times i
 have seen better days archy but
 what s the use of kicking kid it s
 all in the game like a gentleman
 friend of mine used to say
 toujours gai kid toujours gai he
 was an elegant cat he used
 to be a poet himself and he made up
 some elegant poetry about me and him

ARCHY:

let s hear it i said and
 mehitabel recited

MEHITABEL: (Rises and recites with dream-like movements)

pursian pussy from over the sea
 demure and lazy and smug and fat
 none of your ribbons and bells for me
 ours is the zest of the alley cat
 over the roofs from flat to flat
 we prance with capers carybantic
 what though a boot should break a slat
 mehitabel us for the life romantic

we would rather be rowdy and gaunt and free
 and dine on a diet of roach and rat

ARCHY:

roach i said what do you
 mean roach interrupting mehitabel

MEHITABEL:

yes roach she said that s the
 way my boy friend made it up

ARCHY:

i climbed in amongst the typewriter (hides behind his stand)
 keys for she had an excited
 look in her eyes go on mehitabel i

said feeling safer and she
resumed her elocution

MEHITABEL:

we would rather be rowdy and gaunt and free
and dine on a diet of roach and rat
than slaves to a tame society
ours is the zest of the alley cat

fish heads freedom a frozen sprat
dug from the gutter with digits frantic
is better than bores and a fireside mat
mehitabel us for the life romantic
when the pendant moon is the leafless tree
clings and sways like a golden bat
i sing its light and my love for thee
ours is the zest of the alley cat
missiles around us fall rat a tat tat
but our shadows leap in a ribald antic
as over the fences the world cries scat
mehitabel us for the life romantic

persian princess i don t care that
for your pedigree traced by scribes pedantic
ours is the zest of the alley cat
mehitabel us for the life romantic (X. to archy)

ain t that high brow stuff
archy i always remembered it
but he was an elegant gent
even if he was a highbrow and a
regular bohemian archy him and
me went aboard a canal boat
one day and he got his head into
a pitcher of cream and couldn t get
it out and fell overboard
he come up once before he
drowned toujours gai kid he
gurgled and then sank for ever them
was always his words archy toujours
gai kid toujours gai i
have known some swell gents
in my time dearie (X. D. R. and sits)

ARCHY:

i heard a spider
and a fly arguing
wait said the fly

do not eat me
 i serve a great purpose
 in the world

NARRATOR: (As if he were Dracula)

you will have to
 show me said the spider

ARCHY: (X. D.C. with Narrator)

i scurry around
 gutters and sewers
 and garbage cans
 said the fly and gather
 up the germs of
 typhoid influenza
 and pneumonia on my feet
 and wings
 then i carry these germs
 into the households of men,
 and give them diseases
 and all the people who
 have lived the right
 sort of life recover
 from the diseases
 and the old soaks who
 have weakened their systems
 with liquor and iniquity
 succumb it is my mission
 to help rid the world
 of these wicked persons
 i am a vessel of righteousness
 scattering seeds of justice
 and serving the noblest uses

NARRATOR:

it is true said the spider
 that you are more
 useful in a plodding
 material sort of way
 than i am but i do not
 serve the utilitarian deities
 i serve the gods of beauty
 look at the gossamer webs
 i weave they float in the sun
 like filaments of song
 if you get what i mean
 i do not work at anything

i play all the time
 i am busy with the stuff
 of enchantment and the materials
 of fairyland my works
 transcend utility
 i am the artist
 a creator and a demi god
 it is ridiculous to suppose
 that i should be denied
 the food i need in order
 to continue to create
 beauty i tell you
 plainly mister fly it is all
 damned nonsense for that food
 to rear up on its hind legs
 and say it should not be eaten

ARCHY:

you have convinced me
 said the fly say no more
 and shutting all his eyes
 he prepared himself for dinner
 and yet he said i could
 have made out a case
 for myself too if i had
 had a better line of talk (X. R.)

NARRATOR:

of course you could said the spider
 clutching a sirloin from him
 but the end would have been
 just the same if neither of
 us had spoken at all (Resumes his seat)

ARCHY:

boss i am afraid that what
 the spider said is true
 and it gives me to think
 furiously upon the futility
 of literature (Signing off) archy

NARRATOR:

Marquis was by temperament a city dweller, and both
 his little friends were of the city: the cockroach, most

common of city bugs; the cat, most indigenous of city mammals. According to Mehitabel . . .

MEHITABEL:

The difference between the city and the country is enormous. The city is much more vicious. It is a world of cat eat cat. Tuffyness is the key to survival in the city.

NARRATOR:

Mehitabel has an adventure.

MEHITABEL: (With some physical movement)

back to the city archy
and dam glad of it
there s something about the suburbs
that gets on a town lady s nerves
fat slick tabbies
sitting around those country clubs
and lapping up the cream
of existence
none of that for me
give me the alley archy
me for the mews and the roofs
of the city
an occasional fish head
and liberty is all i ask
freedom and the garbage can
romance archy romance is the word
maybe i do starve sometimes
but wotthe hell archy wotthe hell
i live my own life
i met a slick looking tom
out at one of these long island
spotless towns
he fell for me hard
he slipped me into the
pantry and just as we had got
the icebox door open and were
about to sample the cream
in comes his mistress
why fluffy she says to this slicker
the idea of you making

friends with a horrid creature like that
and what did fluffy do
stand up for me like a gentleman
make good on all the promises
with which he had lured me
into his house

not he the dirty slob
he pretended he did not know me
he turned upon me and attacked me
to make good with his boss
you mush faced bum i said
and clawed a piece out of his ear
i am a lady archy
always a lady
but an aristocrat will always
resent an insult
the woman picked up a mop and made
for me well well madam i said
it is unfortunate for you that
you have on sheer silk stockings
and i wrote my protest
on her shin it took reinforcements
in the shape of the cook
to reuss me archy and as i went
out the window i said to the fluffy person
you will hear from me later
he had promised me everything
that cat had
he had practically abducted me
and then the cheap crook threw me down
before his swell friends
no lady loves a scene archy
and i am always the lady no matter
what temporary disadvantages
i may struggle under
to hell with anything coarse or unrefined
has always been my motto
violence archy always does something
to my nerves
but an aristocrat must revenge
an insult i owe it to my family
to protect my good name
so i laid for that slob
for two days and nights and finally
i caught the boob in the shrubbery
pretty thing i said
it hurts me worse than it does you
to remove that left eye of yours

but i did it with one sweep of my claws
you call yourself a gentleman do you
i said as i took a strip out of his nose
you will think twice after this before
you offer an insult
to an unprotected young tabby
where is the little love nest you spoke
of i asked him
you go and lie down there i said
and maybe you can incubate another ear
because i am going to take one of
yours right off now
and with those words i made ribbons
out of it you are the guy
i said to him that was going to give
me an easy life sheltered from all
the rough ways of the world
fluffy dear you don t know what the
rough ways of the world are
and i am going to show you
i have got you out here
in the great open spaces
where cats are cats
and i m gonna make you understand
the affections of a lady ain t to be
trifled with by any slicker like you
where is that red ribbon with the
silver bells you promised me
the next time you betray the trust
of an innocent female
reflect on whether she may
carry a wallop little fiddle strings
this is just a mild lesson i am giving
you tonight i said as i took
the fur off his back and you oughta
be glad you didn t make me really
angry my sense of dignity is all that
saves you a lady little sweetness
never loses her poise and i thank god
i am always a lady even if i do
live my own life and with that i
picked him up by what was left of
his neck like a kitten and laid him
on the doormat slumber gently and
sweet dreams fluffy dear i said and
when you get well make it a rule of
your life never to trifle with another
girlish confidence i have been
abducted again and again by a dam

sight better cats than he ever was
 or will be
 well archy the world is full of ups
 and downs but toujours gai is my motto
 cheerio my deario (Resumes her seat)

NARRATOR: (Rises and comes forward, the worm has a
 Brooklyn accent.)

a robin said to an
 angleworm as he ate him
 i am sorry but a bird
 has to live somehow the
 worm being slow witted could
 not gather his
 dissent into a wise crack
 and retort he was
 effectually swallowed
 before he could turn
 a phrase
 by the time he had
 reflected long enough
 to say but why must a
 bird live
 he felt the beginnings
 of a gradual change
 invading him
 some new and disintegrating
 influence
 was stealing along him
 from his positive
 to his negative pole
 and he did not have
 the mental stamina
 of a jonah to resist the
 insidious
 process of assimilation
 which comes like a thief
 in the night
 demons and fishhooks
 he exclaimed
 i am losing my personal
 identity as a worm
 my individuality
 is melting away from me
 odds crow i am becoming
 part and parcel of
 this bloody robin
 so help me i am thinking

like a robin and not
 like a worm any
 longer yes yes i even
 find myself agreeing
 that a robin must live
 i still do not
 understand with my mentality
 why a robin must live
 and yet i swoon into a
 condition of belief
 yes yes by heck that is
 my dogma and i shout it a
 robin must live

amen said a beetle who had
 preceded him into the
 interior that is the way i
 feel myself is it not
 wonderful when one arrives
 at the place
 where he can give up his
 ambitions and resignedly
 nay even with gladness
 recognize that it is a far
 far better thing to be
 merged harmoniously
 in the cosmic all
 and this comfortable situation
 in his midst
 so affected the marauding
 robin that he perched
 upon a blooming twig
 and sang until the
 blossoms shook with ecstasy
 he sang
 i have a good digestion
 and there is a god after all
 which i was wicked
 enough to doubt
 yesterday when it rained
 breakfast breakfast
 i am full of breakfast
 and they are at breakfast
 in heaven
 they breakfast in heaven
 all s well with the world
 so intent was this pious and
 murderous robin
 on his own sweet song

that he did not notice
 mehitabel the cat
 sneaking toward him
 she pounced just as he
 had extended his larynx
 in a melodious burst of
 thanksgiving and
 he went the way of all
 flesh fish and good red herring

MEHITABEL:

a ha purred mehitabel
 licking the last
 feather from her whiskers
 was not that a beautiful
 song he was singing
 just before i took him to
 my bosom
 they breakfast in heaven
 all s well with the world
 how true that is
 and even yet his song
 echoes in the haunted
 woodland of my midriff
 peace and joy in the world
 and over all the
 provident skies
 how beautiful is the universe
 when something digestible meets
 with an eager digestion
 how sweet the embrace
 when atom rushes to the arms
 of waiting atom
 and they dance together
 skimming with fairy feet
 along a tide of gastric juices
 oh feline cosmos you were
 made for cats

ARCHY:

well well boss there is
 something to be said
 for the lyric and imperial
 attitude
 believe that everything is for
 you until you discover
 that you are for it

sing your faith in what you
 get to eat right up to the
 minute you are eaten
 for you are going
 to be eaten

NARRATOR:

Marquis had his share of emotional problems. He had
 the mind of a poet but the job of a newspaperman. He found
 the daily grind of the newspaper work a bore and beneath
 his true artistic talent. We see his true convictions in
 "the wail of archy".

ARCHY: (X. center)

damned be this transmigration
 doubledamned be the boob pythagoras
 the gink that went and invented it
 i hope that his soul for a thousand
 turns of the wheel of existence
 bides in the shell of a louse
 dodging a fine toothed comb

i once was a vers libre poet
 i died and my spirit migrated
 into the flesh of a cockroach
 gods how i yearn to be human
 neither a vers libre poet
 nor yet the inmate of a cockroach
 a six footed scurrying cockroach
 given to bastard hexameters
 longfellowish sprawling hexameters
 rather had i been a starfish
 to shoot a heroic pentameter

gods i am pent in a cockroach
 i with the soul of a dante
 am mate and companion of fleas
 i with the gift of a homer
 must smile when a mouse calls me pal
 tumble bugs are my familiars
 this is the punishment meted
 because i have written vers libre

here i abide in the twilight
 neither a man nor an insect
 and ghosts of the damned that await
 a word from the cure of the cosmos
 to pop into bodies grotesque
 are all the companions i have
 with intellect more than a bug s

ghosts of the damned under sentence
 to crawl into maggots and live there
 or work out a stretch as a rat
 cheerful companions to pal with

i with the brain of a milton
 fell into the mincemeat at christmas
 and was damned near baked in a pie
 i with the touch of a chaucer
 to be chivvied out of a sink
 float through a greasy drain pipe
 into the hell of a sewer

i with the tastes of a byron
 expected to live upon garbage
 gods what a charnel existence
 curses upon that pythagoras
 i hope that he dwells for a million
 turns of the wheel of life
 deep in an oyster crab s belly
 stewed in the soup of gehenna

i with the soul of a hamlet
 doomed always to wallow in farce

yesterday maddened with sorrow
 i leapt from the woolworth tower
 in an effort to dash out my brains
 gods what a wretched pathetic
 an anti climactic attempt
 i fluttered i floated i drifted
 i landed as light as a feather
 on the top of a bald man s head
 whose hat had blown off at the corner
 and all of the hooting hundreds
 laughed at the comic cockroach

not mine was the suicide s solace
 of a dull thud ending it all
 gods what a terrible tragedy
 not to make good with the tragic

gods what a heart breaking pathos
 to be always doomed to the comic
 o make me a cockroach entirely
 or make me a human once more
 give me the mind of a cockroach
 or give me the shape of a man

if i were to plan out a drama
 great as great shakespeare s othello
 it would be touched with the cockroach
 and people would say it was comic

wait till their loathsome embodiment
 wears into the stuff of the spirit
 and then let them laugh if they can

damned be the soul of pythagoras
 who first filled the fates with this notion
 of transmigration of spirits
 i hope he turns into a flea
 on the back of a hound of hell
 and is chased for a million years
 with a set of red hot teeth
 exclamation point (resumes his seat.)

NARRATOR:

It seems that Mehitabel has left the neighborhood
 and has found a home with a family who seems to love her.
 The only stipulation is that she goes at the first sound
 of a kitten.

ARCHY:

well boss
 mehitabel the cat
 has reappeared in her old
 haunts with a
 flock of kittens
 three of them this time

MEHITABEL:

archy
 the life of a female
 artist is continually

hampered what in hell
have i done to deserve
all these kittens

i look back on my life
and it seems to me to be
just one damned kitten
after another
i am a dancer archy
and my only prayer
is to be allowed
to give my best to my art
but just as i feel
that i am succeeding
in my life work
along comes another batch
of these damned kittens
it s not fair archy
that i am shy on mother love
god knows i care for
the sweet little things
curse them
but am i never to be allowed
to live my own life
i have purposely avoided
matrimony in the interests
of the higher life
but i might just
as well have been a domestic
slave for all the freedom
i have gained
i hope none of them
gets run over by
an automobile
my heart would bleed
if anything happened
to them and i found it out

but it isn t fair archy
it isn t fair
these damned tom cats have all
the fun and freedom
if i was like some of these
green eyed feline vamps i know
i would simply walk out on the
bunch of them and
let them shift for themselves
but i am not that kind
archy i am full of mother love

my kindness has always
been my curse
a tender heart is the cross i bear
self sacrifice always and forever
is my motto damn them
i will make a home
for the sweet innocent
little things
unless of course providence
in his wisdom should remove
them they are living
just now in an abandoned
garbage can just behind
a made over stable in greenwich
village and if it rained
into the can before i could
get back and rescue them
i am afraid the little
dears might drown
it makes me shudder just
to think of it
of course if i were a family cat
they would probably
be drowned anyhow
sometimes i think
the kinder thing would be
for me to carry the
sweet little things
over to the river
and drop them in myself
but a mother s love archy
is so unreasonable
something always prevents me
these terrible
conflicts are always
presenting themselves
to the artist
the eternal struggle
between art and life archy
is something fierce
yes something fierce
my what a dramatic
life i have lived
one moment up the next
moment down again
but always gay archy always gay
and always the lady too
in spite of hell

ARCHY:

well boss it will
 be interesting to note
 just how mehitabel
 works out her present problem
 a dark mystery still broods
 over the manner
 in which the former
 family of three kittens
 disappeared
 one day she was talking to me
 of the kittens
 and the next day when i asked
 her about them
 she said innocently

MEHITABEL:

what kittens

ARCHY:

and that was all
 i could ever get out
 of her on the subject
 we had a heavy rain
 right after she spoke to me
 but probably that garbage can
 leaks and so the kittens
 have not yet
 been drowned (Signing off) archy

ARCHY: (There is a pause, then Archy begins.)

poets are always asking
 where do the little roses go
 underneath the snow
 but no one ever thinks to say
 where do the little insects stay
 this is because
 as a general rule
 roses are more handsome
 than insects
 beauty gets the best of it
 in the world
 i have heard people
 say how wicked it was
 to kill our feathered

friends
in order to get
their plumage and pinions
for the hats of women
and all the while
these same people
might be eating duck
as they talked
the chances are
that it is just as discouraging
to a duck to have
her head amputated
in order to become
a stuffed roast fowl
and decorate a dining table
as it is for a bird
of gayer plumage
to be bumped
off the running board of existence
to furnish plumage
for a lady s hat
but the duck
does not get the sympathy
because the duck
is not beautiful
the only insect
that succeeds in getting
mourned is a moth
or butterfly
whereas every man s
heel is raised against
the spider
and it is getting harder
and harder for spiders
to make an honest living
at that since
human beings have invented
so many ways
of killing flies
humanity will shed poems
full of tears
over the demise of
a bounding doe
or a young gazelle
but the departure of a trusty
camel leaves the
vast majorities
stonely indifferent
perhaps the theory is

that god would not have made
the camel so ugly
if the camel were not wicked
alas exclamation point
the pathos of ugliness
is only perceived
by us cockroaches of the world
and personally
i am having to stand for a lot
i am getting in double
as you might say
before my soul (Rises, X. center)
migrated into the body
of a cockroach
it inhabited the carcass
of a vers libre poet
some vers libre poets are beautiful
but i was not
i had a little blond mustache
that every one thought was a mistake
and yet since i have died
i have thought of that
with regret
it hung over a mouth
that i found it difficult to keep closed
because the teeth within
were out of alignment
and were of odd sizes
this destroyed my acoustics
as you might say
my chin was nothing much
and knew it
and timidly shrank
into itself
receding from the battle of life
my eyes were all right
but my eyebrows
were scarcely noticeable
i suppose though that if
i had had noticeable eyebrows
they would have been wrong
somehow
well well not to pursue
this painful subject
to the uttermost and ultimate
wart and freckle
i was not handsome and it hampered
me when i was a human
it militated against me

as a poet
 more beautiful creatures could
 write verse worse than mine
 and get up and recite it
 with a triumphant air
 and get away with it
 but my sublimest ideas
 were thought to be a total
 loss when people saw
 where they came from
 i think it would have been
 only justice
 if i had been sent to inhabit
 a butterfly
 but there is very little
 justice in the universe
 what is the use
 of being the universe
 if you have to be just
 interrogation point
 and i suppose the universe
 had so much really important
 business on hand
 that it finds it impossible
 to look after the details
 it is rushed
 perhaps it has private
 knowledge to the effect
 that eternity is brief
 after all
 and it wants to get the big
 jobs finished in a hurry
 i find it possible to forgive
 the universe
 i meet it in a give and take spirit
 although i do wish
 that it would consult me at times (Resuming his seat)
 please forgive
 the profundity of these
 meditations
 whenever i have nothing
 particular to say
 i find myself
 always plunging into cosmic
 philosophy
 or something (Signing off) archy

NARRATOR:

Marquis was an avid patron of the theater. He wrote a play entitled The Old Soak which was a Broadway success and brought him a great deal of money. The money he lost on his next play about the Crucifixion. One of the things that Marquis despised most about the theater was the old actor, past his prime, lamenting the good old days of the theater. Even today the old actors think that the young actors just don't have the stuff anymore. For his comments on this topic it is only natural that Marquis had Mehitabel involved in a related situation.

ARCHY:

i ran onto mehitabel again
 last evening
 she is inhabiting
 a decayed trunk
 which lies in an ally
 in greenwich village
 in company with the
 most villaninous tom cat
 i have ever seen
 but there is nothing
 wrong about the association
 she told me
 it is merely a plutonic
 attachment
 and the thing can be
 believed for the tom
 looks like one of pluto s demons

MEHITABEL:

it is a theatre trunk
 archy
 and tom is an old theatre cat
 he has given his life
 to the theatre
 he claims that richard
 mansfield once

kicked him out of the way
 and then cried because
 he had done it and
 petted him
 and at another time
 he says in a case
 of emergency
 he played a bloodhound
 in a production of
 uncle tom s cabin

NARRATOR: (The voice of an old man.)

the stage is not what it
 used to be

MEHITABEL:

tom says
 he puts his front paw
 on his breast and says

NARRATOR: (Rises, movement and gesture.)

they don t have it any more
 they don t have it here
 the old troupers are gone
 there s nobody can troupe
 any more
 they are all amateurs nowadays
 they haven t got it
 here there are only
 five or six of us oldtime
 troupers left
 this generation does not know
 what stage presence is
 personality is what they lack
 personality
 where would they get
 the training my old friends
 got in the stock companies
 i knew mr booth very well
 says tom
 and a law should be passed
 preventing anybody else
 from ever playing
 in any play he ever
 played in
 there was a trouper for you

i used to sit on his knee
and purr when i was
a kitten he used to tell me
how much he valued my opinion
finish is what they lack
finish
and they haven t got it
here
and again he laid his paw
on his breast
i remember mr daly very
well too
i was with mr daly s company
for several years
there was art for you
there was team work
there was direction
they knew the theatre
and they all had it
here
for two years mr daly
would not ring up a curtain
unless i was in the
prompter s box
they are amateurs nowadays
rank amateurs all of them
for two seasons i played
the dog in joseph
jeffersons rip van winkle
it is true i never came
on the stage
but he knew i was just off
and it helped him
i would like to see
one of your modern
theatre cats
act a dog so well
that it would convince
a trouper like jo jefferson
but they haven t got it
nowadays
they haven t got it
here
jo jefferson had it he had it
here
i come of a long line
of theatre cats
my grandfather
was with forrest
he had it he was a real trouper

my grandfather said
 he had a voice
 that used to shake
 the ferryboats
 on the north river
 once he lost his beard
 and my grandfather
 dropped from the
 fly gallery and landed
 under his chin
 and played his beard
 for the rest of the act
 you don't see any theatre
 cats that could do that
 nowadays

they haven't got it they
 haven't got it
 here

once i played the owl
 in modjeska's production
 of macbeth
 i sat above the castle gate
 in the murder scene
 and made my yellow
 eyes shine through the dusk
 like an owl's eyes
 to modjeska's lady macbeth
 but they haven't got it nowadays
 they haven't got it
 here

mehitabel
 both our professions
 are being ruined
 by amateurs (Returns to his seat)

ARCHY:

listen to me there have been some
 doings here since last
 i wrote there has been a battle
 behind that rusty typewriter cover
 in the corner
 you remember freddy the rat well
 freddy is no more but
 he died game the other
 day a stranger with a lot of
 legs came into our
 little circle a tough looking kid

he was with a bad eye
 who are you said a thousand legs

NARRATOR: (In a spanish accent.)

if i bite you once
 said the stranger you won t ask
 again

ARCHY:

he he little poison tongue said
 the thousand legs who gave you hydrophobia

NARRATOR:

i got it by biting myself
 i m bad keep away
 from me where i step a weed dies
 if i was to walk on your forehead it would
 raise measles and if
 you give me any lip i ll do it

ARCHY:

they mixed it then
 and the thousand legs succumbed
 well we found out this fellow
 was a tarantula he had come up from
 south america in a bunch of bananas
 for days he bossed us life
 was not worth living he would stand in
 the middle of the floor and taunt us

NARRATOR:

ha ha he would say where i
 step a weed dies do
 you want any of my game i was
 raised on red pepper and blood i am
 so hot if you scratch me i will light
 like a match you better
 dodge me when i m feeling mean and
 i don t feel any other way i was nursed
 on a tabasco bottle if i was to slap
 your wrist in kindness you
 would boil over like job and heaven
 help you if i get angry give me
 room i feel a wicked spell coming on

ARCHY:

last night he made a break at freddy the rat

NARRATOR:

keep your distance
 little one said freddy i m not
 feeling well myself somebody poisoned some
 cheese for me i m as full of
 death as a drug store i
 feel that i am going to die anyhow
 come on little torpedo come on don t stop
 to visit and search

ARCHY:

then they
 went at it and both are no more please
 throw a late edition on the floor i want to
 keep up with china we dropped freddy
 off the fire escape into the alley with
 military honors (Signing off) archy

NARRATOR:

Marquis did quite a bit of traveling in his later
 days. Regardless of where he went he always took his two
 little friends with him. While in France, Mehitabel falls
 in love again.

ARCHY:

paris france
 mehitabel the cat
 has been passing her
 time in the dubious
 company of
 a ragged eared tom cat
 with one mean
 eye and the other
 eye missing whom
 she calls francy
 he has been the hero
 or the victim of
 many desperate encounters

him with respect
 he is like myself
 an example of the truth
 of the pythagorean idea
 you know that in my body
 which is that of a cat
 there is reincarnated
 the soul of cleopatra
 well this cat here
 was not always a cat either
 he has seen better days
 he tells me that once he was
 a bard and lived here in paris
 tell archy here
 something about yourself francy

ARCHY:

thus encouraged the
 murderous looking animal spoke
 and i append a
 rough translation of
 what he said

NARRATOR:

tame cats on a web of the persian woof
 may lick their coats and purr for cream
 but i am a tougher kind of goof
 scheming a freer kind of scheme
 daily i climb where the pigeons gleam
 over the gargoyles of notre dame
 robbing their nests to hear them scream
 for i am a cat of the devil i am

when the ribald moon leers over the roof
 and the mist reeks up from the chuckling stream
 i pad the quais on a silent hoof
 dreaming the vagabond s ancient dream
 where the piebald toms of the quartier teem
 and fight for a fish or a mouldy clam
 my rival i rip and his guts unseam
 for i am a cat of the devil i am

roach i could rattle you rhymes by the ream
 in proof of the fact that i m no spring lamb
 maybe the headsman will finish the theme
 for i am a cat of the devil i am

ARCHY:

your friend is nobody else
than francois villon
and he looks it too

ARCHY: (X. to center, Mehitabel X. to his stool D. R.)

i am going to start
a revolution
i saw a kitchen
worker killing
water bugs with poison
hunting pretty
little roaches
down to death
it set my blood to
boiling
i thought of all
the massacres and slaughter
of persecuted insects
and the hands of cruel humans
and i cried
aloud to heaven
and i knelt
on all six legs
and vowed a vow
of vengence
i shall organize the insects
i shall drill them
i shall lead them
i shall fling a billion
times a billion billion
risen insects in an army
at the throats
of all you humans
unless you sign the papers
for a damn site better treatment
volunteers volunteers
hearken to my calling
fifty million flies
are wanted may the first
to die in marmalade
come you tarantulas
with fury in your feet
bloodsuckers wriggle
out of the bayous
ticks cooties hornets
give up your pleasures
all your little trivial

sunday school picnics
 this is war
 in earnest
 rise
 strike for freedom
 curses on the species
 that invented roach poison
 curses on the stingy
 beings that evolved
 tight zinc covers
 that you can t crawl under
 for their garbage cans
 come like a sandstorm
 spewed from the mouth
 of a great apocalyptic
 desert making devil
 come like the spray
 sooty and fiery
 snorted from the nostrils
 of a sky eating ogre
 let us have a little
 direct action is the
 sincere wish of archy

ARCHY: (Seated, D. L.)

paris france
 i think
 mehitabel the cat and the
 outcast feline
 who calls himself francois
 villon are about to
 quarrel and separate
 mehitabel is getting tired
 of living in the catacombs
 she said to me
 last evening

MEHITABEL: (X. center, Narrator slinks D. R., makes occasional clawing gestures)

archy i sometimes wish
 that francy s gaiety
 did not so frequently take
 a necrological turn
 when francy is really happy
 he always breaks
 into a series of
 lyric epitaphs
 personally archy

i am a lady who can
 be gay outside of
 a mausoleum
 as for morgues
 and cemeteries i can
 take them or i can
 leave them alone
 just because some of my
 ancestors are now mummies
 i do not feel
 that i have to wait
 til i see a sarcophagus
 before i cheer up
 i can fall in love
 with a gentleman friend without
 speculating how he is going
 to look to the undertaker
 and when i want to sing
 a comic song
 i do not always feel
 impelled to hunt up a tombstone
 for a stage
 i am a lady of refinement
 archy i have had my ups
 and downs and i have made
 a few false steps in life
 but i am toujours la grande dame
 archy always the lady
 old kid to hell with anything
 coarse or unrefined
 that has always been my motto
 and the truth is that this
 francy person has a yellow
 streak of commonness
 running through his poetic nature
 i fell for him archy
 but i feel there is trouble
 coming we had words last
 night over something no real
 gentleman would have noticed
 and the slob said to me

NARRATOR:

mehitabel if you make eyes again
 at that tortoise shell
 cat over there i will slice
 your eyes out
 with a single sweep of my claws
 and toss them to the pigeons

MEHITABEL:

archy those are words
 that no gentleman would use
 or no lady would take
 you piebald fish thief
 i told him
 if i were not too refined
 i would rip you
 from the gullet to the midriff
 it is lucky for you
 you frog eating four flush
 that i always remember
 my breeding
 otherwise you would be
 a candidate for what they call
 civet stew in paris
 something i won t stand for in a
 gentleman friend
 is jealousy of every other
 person who may be attracted to me
 by my gaiety and
 aristocratic manner
 and if i hear another word
 out of you
 i will can you first
 and kill you afterwards
 and then i will ignore you
 archy a gentleman
 with any real spirit
 would have swung on me
 when i said that
 but this quitter let me
 get away with it
 i clawed him a little archy
 just to show him i could
 and the goof stood for it
 no cat can hold me archy
 that lets me claw him without
 a come back i am a strong free
 spirit and i live my own
 life and only a masterful
 cave cat can hold my affections
 he must be a gentleman
 but he must also make me feel
 that he could be a
 wild cat if he would (Narrator; big smile)
 this francy person is neither
 one nor the other
 ah me archy i am afraid

my little romance
 is drawing to a close
 and no meal ticket in sight
 either but what the hell archy
 a lady can always find friends
 it won't be the first time
 i have been alone in the world
 toujours gai archy
 that is my motto
 there's more than one dance
 in the old dame yet (Does a little soft shoe, then sits
 center)

NARRATOR: (Standing D. R.)

Here we must leave our story of Archy, and his racy
 pal Mehitabel.

To Marquis they were perfect transmigrations of an
 American soul, this dissolute feline who was a dancer and
 always the lady, toujours gai, and this troubled insect
 who was a poet; both seeking expression, both vainly try-
 ing to reconcile art and life, both finding always that
 one gets in the way of the other.

So from Archy:

ARCHY: (X. center)

insects have their
 own point
 of view about
 civilization a man
 thinks he amounts
 to a great deal
 but to a
 flea or a
 mosquito a
 human being is
 merely something
 good to eat.

NARRATOR:

And from Mehitabel:

MEHITABEL: (Joins archy)

It's cheerio my deario
lifes a vignette
it's cheerio my deario
theres a dance in the old dame yet (Soft shoe)

ARCHY & MEHITABEL: (To the narrator)

Cheerio my deario. (They exit)

NARRATOR: (Waves to Archy & Mehitabel. Pause, closes
script then to the audience, with a smile.)

Cheerio my deario's (Exit)

CHAPTER IV

THE PRODUCTION RECORD

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a record of production activities from the time "The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel" was cast, through rehearsals, to its final performance. Since this writer was also the director of this production he shall refer to himself, in this chapter, as the director.

I. CASTING

Since Readers Theatre should, first of all, appeal to the imagination of the listener, the main consideration in casting was vocal ability. This included: (1) variety and contrast among the voices of the people chosen, (2) specific vocal qualities, and (3) skill in the basic oral interpretation techniques.

The first procedure in casting was an examination of the available talent. Since the production date was February 28, a general tryout at K. S. T. C. was held in the middle of December. The week before had been second semester pre-enrollment. This timing implied that the available talent would know their second semester schedule. This knowledge of class schedules was an important factor since it was possible that the cast would be touring once in the

morning and once in the afternoon on selected days over a four week period.

The tryout produced, fifteen to eighteen people available for touring. Out of these people, two other shows were to be cast.

From the December tryout a cast of three (two men and one woman) was selected.

Larry Remmers, a senior speech major, was chosen to read the character of "Archy." He had considerable experience in both acting and oral interpretation. He also had some experience in Readers Theatre. He had a medium voice range and possessed a certain quality the director wanted for Archy.

Pat Foltz, a junior speech major was selected to read the character of "Mehitabel." She had a fairly wide vocal range and possessed the vocal quality that the director wanted for Mehitabel. Her experience was limited. She had some acting experience, a little oral interpretation experience, and no Readers Theatre experience. Her vocal projection was questionable but her enthusiasm and potential ability were more than sufficient. Her voice provided the wanted contrast with the other members of the cast.

Rick Jenkins, a senior speech major, was chosen to read the part of the "Narrator" and the remaining characters in the script. He had adequate experience in acting,

oral interpretation, and Readers Theatre. He possessed an extremely versatile voice and a splendid ability to do a variety of vocal accents. Rick, with his deep rich voice, provided an interesting vocal contrast with the other members of the cast.

Each member of the cast also possessed certain disagreeable vocal qualities that had to be corrected. Larry lacked a certain amount of vocal variety. Pat lacked vocal projection. Rick lacked the quality of vocal warmth. Each of these had to be corrected during rehearsals.

In spite of the few problems which were foreseen, the director believed that those people cast were highly satisfactory.

II. DIRECTION

Several items must be considered in a discussion of the direction of this production. They are: (1) rehearsals, (2) interpretation, (3) characterization, (4) movement, and (5) focus.

Rehearsals

The production was rehearsed a total of forty hours. Each rehearsal was at least sixty minutes in length. At the first rehearsal, the scripts were handed out, the roles were assigned, and a general reading of the script was held.

Afterward, a rehearsal schedule was decided upon. Because one member of the cast had previous evening commitments, most of the rehearsals were held during the day.

After examining the class schedules of the cast members an adequate rehearsal schedule was decided upon. Rehearsals were held during the week. No rehearsals were held on the weekends except for the last weekend before performance. Rehearsals were scheduled on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:30 A.M. and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at 3:30 P.M.. None of the rehearsals lasted for more than two hours in length.

In addition to the forty hours of rehearsal, each member of the cast spent at least two hours, privately, with the director, working with a tape recorder on their individual material. Since very little space was needed for the rehearsals, any available, unoccupied room was used.

Interpretation

Throughout the early part of the rehearsal period discussions were held about the interpretation of the literature. New line readings were often adopted by the cast in an effort to convey a more exact interpretation of the literature when the director felt more clarity was needed. New line readings were arrived at by the trial and error method or through suggestion by the director. When

explanatory suggestions by the director failed to produce the wanted effect, other members of the cast would occasionally give their interpretation of the line. Very seldom would the director ever attempt a line reading for the actor. The director believed that by doing so he would no longer be a listener but a performer, thereby limiting his own critical objectivity.

Many times, working with the tape recorder helped the cast member to hear and understand what he was doing wrong.

The director used several techniques in order to help him become a more objective and critical listener. Occasionally, he would motion for the reader to continue and then leave the room. Standing in the hall, he could still hear, but he found that being at some distance away, forced the interpretation to be considered totally from a listening viewpoint. He was also enabled to make a judgement as to how much imagination was being demanded from the audience by the reader. At other times, merely closing his eyes provided the director this same perspective. When the desired interpretation could not be conveyed by the voice alone, physical movement or gestures were added. Usually this produced the wanted effect.

Characterization

Frequently, the director would have discussions about characterization with the cast. The director wanted life to be breathed into each of the characters by the cast. The characters had to seem real for the audience, but at the same time the reader was not to become the character. For instance, when reading the part of Mehitabel, the reader should appear to be saying "Listen to her. This is what she said; this is what she felt." The reader should not appear to be saying "Listen to me. I am Mehitabel. This is what I say; this is what I feel." Herein lies one of the crucial differences between acting and oral interpretation.

After the cast was acquainted with the script, and knew what type of character was wanted by the director, they were relatively free to create their own characterizations.

The character of Archy, when fully developed, was a likeable one. He was excitable and happy at times while being forlorn and disillusioned at other times. Physically he was played to be somewhat weak and frail. His voice was the most energetic thing about him.

By the end of rehearsals Mehitabel had turned into a very funny, lovable character. She was played to appear forceful and domineering, while at the same time she had a heart of gold. She was continually being duped. She was a chronic storyteller, and forever living in the past. She

appeared to be Archy's best friend.

The narrator turned out to be the character that paced the show; as the narrator he was friendly and informative; as the other characters he was brilliant. His "Mother Spider" was played with a winning southern accent. His other "Spider" was wicked, and sounded like the character of Dracula. The "Robin" was played naturally and the "Worm" had a Brooklyn accent. The "Old Trouper" was old and feeble with a quivering voice. "Freddy the Rat" was done naturally. The "Tarantula" was villainous with a Spanish accent. The narrator's final character was the cat named "Francy". The narrator gave Francy a heavy French accent. He made him dangerously exciting, aloof, suave, and finally, a coward.

All of the characterizations were found by the director to be at least acceptable.

Movement

The director chose to incorporate a good deal of movement into the production. Movement was added to achieve different stage pictures and to shift the focus for the audience. The director believed that physical movement would create a greater sense of action for the high school audience. Most movement was a form of suggestive demonstration. For instance, if Mehitabel was supposed to dance,

the reader would merely present the audience with her interpretation of Mehitabel dancing. The interpretation would be mostly suggestion. The reader might do a few steps and then merely sway with the music of the poetry, the remainder relied upon the imagination of the listener.

The movement, or blocking, was added after the production had been rehearsed about twenty-five hours. At that point the director was able to decide whether or not the mere interpretation of the literature was lively enough for the high school audience. If not, movement was used, in an effort, to increase the interest for the audience.

Focus

Focus refers to the relationship and contact the readers have to one another, and to the audience during the performances. There are three different types of focus possible; onstage focus, offstage focus, and a combination of the two. When all action takes place on the stage the focus is also onstage. The characters react to each other. When the action is placed, by the reader, in the midst of the audience, and when no reaction is produced from the readers to things that are happening on the stage, the focus is offstage.

For this production the director used both onstage and offstage focus. The readers would either speak directly to each other, or directly to the audience or to focal

points in the direction of the audience. By using both onstage and offstage focus a great deal of variety was achieved. This method of focusing was used in an effort to encourage both the readers, and the audience to create the characters and the scenes with their imaginations.

III. STAGING

The staging of this production includes: the set, lighting, costuming, and stage properties.

Setting

The production required a very simple setting. The set included three black reading stands and three black stools. The director wanted the production to be as simple as possible, primarily, because it was going on tour. This particular touring situation demanded that the set be simple, because the production was scheduled to play in both classrooms and on stages. By using only three stands and three stools, the entire production, could tour in one automobile. The set was arranged in a basic right angle triangle that was seven to eight feet deep. (see floor plan in appendix A.) When the performance was held in a classroom the set was placed in a corner of the room. When a stage was used for the production the curtain was opened approximately twenty feet depending on the sight lines and the same blocking was used.

Lighting

The production did not need any special lighting. Normal classroom lighting was used when the production was performed in a classroom and overhead stage lighting was used when it was performed on the stage. The production was always performed by the available light at each location.

Costumes

The costumes for the production were basically black. Each reader wore one piece of clothing that added color to his costume. Archy wore a black turtleneck shirt with a burgandy V-neck sweater over it. Black pants, shoes, and socks completed his costume. The narrator wore the same black attire. Over it he wore a grey tweed sport coat. Mehitabel was costumed in black pants, boots, and sweater. Around her neck she wore an eight foot, white feather boa, that she would use occasionally for cat-like gestures.

Stage Properties

The only stage properties that were used were the black folders that bound the scripts. These folders were used primarily as symbols. The readers had their material completely memorized and the folders were either held, or referred to as a suggestion of reading.

IV. PERFORMANCES

The production had a total of fifteen performances.

Five performances were held on the college campus and ten were performed on the Flint Hills tour.

A maximum of ten performances were offered to the Association for scheduling. In a total of five days, a morning and afternoon performance was scheduled. The five days were each scheduled to fill each day of the school week only once. By doing this the cast only had to miss their two-hour classes, twice; and their three-hour classes three times. The five scheduled days also extended over a four week period. This caused one major problem: the cast sometimes had a week interval between performances. One week they might have a Tuesday performance and then not perform again until the Wednesday of the following week. To help alleviate potential problems caused by a recess, five performances were scheduled at the college, over a four week period preceding the tour. While this did help to prepare the cast for the tour, it caused a major problem in itself. The cast had to keep the show at performance level through a nine week period. This implied extra rehearsals through the period. This also suggested more of the cast's valuable time being consumed. The solutions to these problems are discussed later in this chapter.

Eight performances, of the scheduled ten were performed on the stage, while the remaining two were held in classrooms.

V. DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS

The director's comments include his evaluation of the selection, adaptation, direction and performances. All comments rely on the insights and knowledge gained by the director as a result of the total experience.

Selection

The literature that was selected proved to be excellent. Every audience appeared to enjoy the selection immensely. This implied that it was understood and appreciated by those concerned. The literature was able to remain fresh, enjoyable and challenging for the cast throughout the entire performance period. All response to the production pointed up the appropriateness of the literature for high school audiences.

Adaptation

The adaptation proved to work quite well for the high school audience. However, there were certain problems inherent in the script. These problems were due to several factors. The first factor was that of the literature itself. There were not enough selections within the literature to

justify one continuous story line and still have a fifty-five minute production. Because of this, a much more loosely connected story line was adapted. This resulted in the script becoming a series of vignettes, thereby, increasing the number of minor characters in the script. But, these facts only constituted a problem if the adaptation is to be judged by whether or not it has a continuous story line. Archy and Mehitabel both had their own plights and character progressions: both were told. As for the other characters, they were added for interesting fillers and to project a new thought in Marquis' philosophy.

Another problem was the narration. On occasion the narration did not adequately fulfill its purpose as an explanatory device. There were two selections, "Unjust", and "Off with the old Love", that should have had some type of introduction but did not. This was partly because of using a small cast, and partly because of the need for a fast pace.

The last problem with the adaptation was due to an error in judgement. The selection of "Archy declares war", and "The old trouper" were somewhat questionable. The former proved to be a repetition of a previous selection and added very little new insight to the production. The latter was about the theatre, and while the humor was hilarious to the director, it was over the heads of most of the

audiences. Strangely enough, the readers had difficulty with both of these selections from the first rehearsal to the last performance. All in all the adaptation proved to be more than acceptable, but not excellent.

Direction

The comments made by the director about the direction of the production include: casting, rehearsals, staging, and costuming.

Casting. The selected cast proved to be most worthy. They were talented and for the most part versatile. By the end of rehearsal the director could perceive no major problems. Miss Foltz had developed good vocal projection. Mr. Remmers had improved considerably on his vocal variety; and Mr. Jenkins had developed a fairly warm stage presence.

In production, Miss Foltz came across as very funny and lovable. Mr. Jenkins proved to be the pace-setter and because of his many voices he won the title of "The King of Variety". Mr. Remmers read the cockroach with a good deal of empathy and believability.

Finally, the cast maintained a high degree of enthusiasm throughout the thirteen weeks of rehearsals and performances. The performances turned in by each one of them more than justified them being cast.

Rehearsals. The rehearsal period provided the exact

amount of time needed. The cast had a polished show three days before opening performance. Because of the flexible rehearsal schedule the cast had sufficient time to do their studies. The rehearsals were always concentrated and productive. Once performances were under way a reading rehearsal was held, at a convenient time for the cast, on the day preceding each scheduled performance. At each of these rehearsals the reading of the literature acquired freshness. The recess between performances helped, instead of hindered the production. The cast was able to increase their own enjoyment for the literature as a result of the new perspective they gained from the delay between performances. All of the rehearsals were enjoyable, creative, and productive.

Staging. The simplicity of the staging techniques used in the production proved to be excellent. The staging was designed to, and did, work in all performing situations. The costumes proved to be satisfactory.

Performances. The entire fifteen performances never varied more than one minute in either direction of fifty-four minutes. A high degree of consistency was held during the performance period by all members of the cast.

The five performances held on the college campus were all well received. One of these performances was presented to a high school audience. From this particular performance

the cast and the director were able to correct certain weak points in the production. Because of these corrections the performances had better receptions during the high school tour.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I. SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this thesis project was to afford the opportunity for this writer to experience the creative endeavor of selecting, adapting, casting, directing and presenting a piece of literature in Readers Theatre form to high school audiences in the Flint Hills Association.

In fulfilling this purpose the writer selected Don Marquis' Archy and Mehitabel, and analyzed it in terms of its potential effectiveness, through the medium of Readers Theatre, for high school audiences. The selection was adapted, cast, rehearsed, and performed before high school audiences in the Flint Hills Association.

The first chapter of this thesis was concerned with the following items: background of the problem; importance and justification of the problem; statement of the problem; definitions of terms; and a review of the literature.

The background of the problem dealt with the origin of the Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association. The Association was formed in order to obtain certain culturally enriching activities in music,

art, and drama. As a result of the formation of the Flint Hills Association, special high school audiences were created for dramatic activities.

The importance and justification of the problem were concerned with certain proposals made by the Drama Division to the Flint Hills Association. The Department of Speech at the Kansas State Teachers College, served as the administrator of the Drama Division for the Association. The drama proposal for 1967-68, issued from the Department of Speech included "Assembly Programs in Oral Interpretation." These programs were to be performed through the medium of Readers Theatre.

Four programs were offered to the Flint Hills Association: "James Agee: The Man and His Work"; "The Soldier and the Shadow"; "Salinger: Soldiers and Sympathizers"; and "The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel." The fourth program is the concern of this thesis; it was selected, adapted, and directed by this writer.

Readers Theatre was defined as that medium in which two or more interpreters, with or without manuscripts, interpret a literary work in such a way as to stimulate the imagination of the listener and thereby enhance the listeners appreciation for the literature.

The literature that was reviewed for this study included books, and periodicals concerned with Readers

Theatre, and certain unpublished material that was concerned with the Flint Hills Association.

The major concern of chapter two was the selection and adaptation of the literature.

The literary adapter must be aware of certain preliminary considerations. Before the literature may be selected the adapter must know the nature of his prospective audience and also, the nature of the occasion. He must know the time allotted for the productions and, finally, he must be aware of the available talent.

The audience analysis was concerned with age. The fact that the audience would be teenagers presented a problem. This problem was discussed in terms of age, interest and intellect. The fact that the prospective audience was, reportedly, culturally impoverished was the second major problem that was discussed. The last major consideration was concerned with the high school students being a captive audience.

After the preliminary problems were considered, the search for the right literature began. The literature that lends itself to Readers Theatre should include several necessary ingredients. These ingredients, or qualifications included: evocative power, compelling characters, action, enriched language, and wholeness. Each of these qualities were explained and discussed.

As a result of the search for the right literature, possessing the necessary qualities, four possibilities were examined. Both the literature of Mark Twain and Carl Sandburg were contemplated, but rejected. Stephen Vincent Benét's John Brown's Body was seriously considered, but not selected because of its lack of humor. Finally, Don Marquis Archy and Mehitabel was selected because it possessed all of the needed qualities.

In adapting Archy and Mehitabel into a Readers Theatre script the following factors were considered: the prospective audience, the nature of the occasion, the time allotment, the available talent, the arrangement of the literature, and explanatory narration.

A fifty-five minute script was adapted for three readers. The selected time was of assembly period length.

Archy and Mehitabel is a series of forty-eight selections; thirteen of which were used in the script. Each selection was read orally and timed in order to stay within the selected length.

The selections were chosen with certain basic criteria in mind; (1) they needed to be interesting and dramatically exciting for a high school audience, (2) they had to be of such a nature as to be enhanced by the medium of Readers Theatre, and (3) they had to show an insight to either Archy, Mehitabel, or Don Marquis himself.

Narration was used to thread the selections together. The narration was written for the high school audience and was at all times simple and explanatory.

The thirteen selections were arranged so as to obtain the most effective dramatic progression. The arrangement was also done, not only to retain continuity, but to insure as much variety as possible.

The final factor that was considered in adapting the literature was the element of humor. The script was adapted to enhance the humor of the literature and, thereby, be more interesting as well as dramatically exciting for the Flint Hills high school audiences.

Chapter three provided the adapted production script for "The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel."

The fourth chapter of this thesis was concerned with recording the production activities of "The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel." Casting, direction, staging, performances, and the director's comments are all major divisions in the chapter.

In a search for available talent a tryout was held in December. From this tryout a cast of three was selected for the production. Larry Remmers was selected to read the character of "Archy." Pat Foltz was chosen to read the character of "Mehitabel," and Rick Jenkins was selected to read the "Narrator" and the minor characters for this

production. These readers had varying degrees of experience but all possessed sufficient ability. The cast was most eager and enthusiastic about the production.

Five major topics were discussed in relationship to the direction of the production: (1) rehearsals, (2) interpretation, (3) characterization, (4) movement, and (5) focus.

The production was rehearsed a total of forty hours. Each reader spent at least two hours, working with a tape recorder on his selections. The director was present at all rehearsals.

Throughout the early part of the rehearsal period discussions were held concerning the interpretation of the literature. For the most part the director's interpretation was projected through the reading of the literature.

After the cast was acquainted with the script, and knew what type of character was wanted by the director, they were relatively free to create their own characterization. All of the final characterizations were found to be acceptable by the director.

Movement was used in the production to reinforce action and increase interest. Most movement was subtle and merely suggested an action. Movement was also used to help shift the focus for the audience.

A combination of both onstage and offstage focus was

used in the production. By using both types of focus more variety and interest was offered to the high school audience.

The production required a very simple setting. Three reading stands and three stools were all that were necessary. There was not any special lighting for the production, therefore, normal classroom lighting was sufficient. The costumes were basic black, with one piece of colorful clothing. The only stage properties that were used in the production were the black folders which bound the scripts.

The production had a total of fifteen performances. Five were held on the college campus and ten were performed on the Flint Hills tour. Eight of the touring performances were presented from a stage, while the remaining two were performed in classrooms.

The director's comments concerned the total experience, beginning with the selection of the literature and progressing to the final performance.

The selected literature proved to be excellent. Each audience found the production to be exciting and entertaining. All response to the production pointed up the appropriateness of this literature for high school audiences.

The adaptation of the literature, for the most part, worked very well. On occasion the lack of narration presented problems. The director felt that with only two

exceptions the selections proved to be appropriate.

The cast for the production was excellent. Their performance level was high and consistent. The cast maintained a high degree of enthusiasm throughout the total experience.

The setting and costumes both proved to be appropriate.

The director found the intensive rehearsal periods, exciting, demanding, and productive.

Finally, each performance was well accepted by the audience and well performed by the cast.

II. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions which are drawn as a result of the total thesis project are discussed in terms of literature, the cast, the audience, and the writer.

Marquis' literature proved to be exceptional for three basic reasons. First, was the response that the audience had to the literature. Each audience appeared to enjoy the literature very much. The humor and insight, was as fresh for the audiences as if it had been written yesterday, instead of fifty years ago. The appeal of the literature was as great for adults and college students as it was for the high school audiences.

Secondly, the literature possessed an abundance of

humor characters that were greatly enhanced through the medium of Readers Theatre. The literature was full of interesting characters who took their stand before the audience and said what Marquis had them say. The audience appeared to identify with many of the characters while at the same time being amused by them. Each of the characters came to life for the audience through the medium of Readers Theatre.

Finally, the literature remained challenging for the cast throughout the rehearsal and performance periods.

The cast profited greatly from their endeavor. Their audiences were most challenging and gratifying. The cast was able to take a good deal of pride in their performance, individually and collectively. They knew they had a difficult script and never failed to do it justice. The morale of the cast was extremely high, which may be attributed to them being challenged and excited by the literature. They were always ready for another performance, except, when they had just done two, on succeeding days. The beautiful quality about the cast rested in the pride they took in the production.

As in any performing situation no two audiences were the same. While each performance received an affirmative response, the audience response was usually different. To predict how the next audience was going to react, and to

which selection, was often futile. One audience would respond more to a particular selection than did the last audience. The next audience might respond to something entirely different. This always provided an interesting discussion for the director and the cast. Through these discussions new insights in audience analysis were gained.

This writer has developed new insights concerning Readers Theatre techniques as a result of the total thesis project. Confidence was gained in the writer's ability to select, adapt, and direct for high school audiences. Appreciation for the literature of Don Marquis, especially Archy and Mehitabel, was cultivated. Great satisfaction is taken in the knowledge that the audiences enjoyed and genuinely appreciated the literature as well as the production.

As a result of the production some of the high school teachers expressed interest in producing their own production. They envisioned how, even with their limited facilities, they could take advantage of the beauty and simplicity of Readers Theatre. This in itself justified the total thesis project for this writer.

Much more work needs to be done with Readers Theatre in the high schools throughout the nation. The possibilities of Readers Theatre in high school are without limit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

- Anthony, Edward. O Rare Don Marquis. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1962.
- Armstrong, Chole, and Paul D. Brandes. The Oral Interpretation of Literature. New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963.
- Bacon, Wallace. The Art of Interpretation. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1966.
- Coger, Leslie Irene, and Melvin R. White. Readers Theatre Handbook. Glenview, Illinois: Scot, Foresman and Company, 1967.
- Grimes, Wilma H., and Alethea Smith Mattingly. Interpretation: Writer, Reader, Audience. San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1961.
- Lee, Charlotte I. Oral Interpretation, Third Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.
- Marquis, Don. Archy and Mehitabel. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1927.
- _____. The Lives and Times of Archy and Mehitabel. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1933.

B. PERIODICALS

- Brooks, Keith. "Readers Theatre: Some Questions and Answers" Dramatics, XXXIV, No. 3 (December 1962), 14,27.
- _____, Robert C. Henderhan, and Alan Billings. "A Philosophy on Readers Theatre," The Speech Teacher, XII, No. 3 (September 1963), 229-232.
- Coger, Leslie Irene. "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIX, No. 2 (April 1963), 157-164.

- _____. "Theatre for Oral Interpreters," The Speech Teacher, XII, No. 4 (November 1963), 304-307.
- Kleinau, Marion L., and Marvin D. Kleinau. "Scene Location in Readers Theatre: Static or Dynamic?," The Speech Teacher, XIV, No. 3 (September 1965), 193-199.
- Robertson, Roderick. "Interpreters Theatre," Letters to the Editor in the Forum, Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIX, No. 3 (October 1963), 321-322.
- _____. "Producing Playreadings," Educational Theatre Journal, XII, No. 1 (March 1960), 20-23.
- Stevens, Phillip B. "Acting and Interpretation: The Reader Faces the contest," The Speech Teacher, XIV, No. 2 (March 1965), 116-122.

C. UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

- Bradley, James Franklin, Jr.. "A Reading Theatre Adaptation of David Copperfield for High School Students.:" Unpublished master's thesis, Michigan State University, 1960.
- Jones, Robert Gray. "Readers Theatre Production: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," Unpublished master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1964.
- White, Vickie Sue. "A Readers Theatre Presentation of an Adaptation of Steven Vincent Benét's Western Star," Unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, 1964.
- Federal Grant Application. Madison, Kansas: The Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association (in the files of the Association), November 9, 1965.
- The Drama Proposal for 1967-68. Madison, Kansas: The Flint Hills Educational Research and Development Association (in the files of the Association).

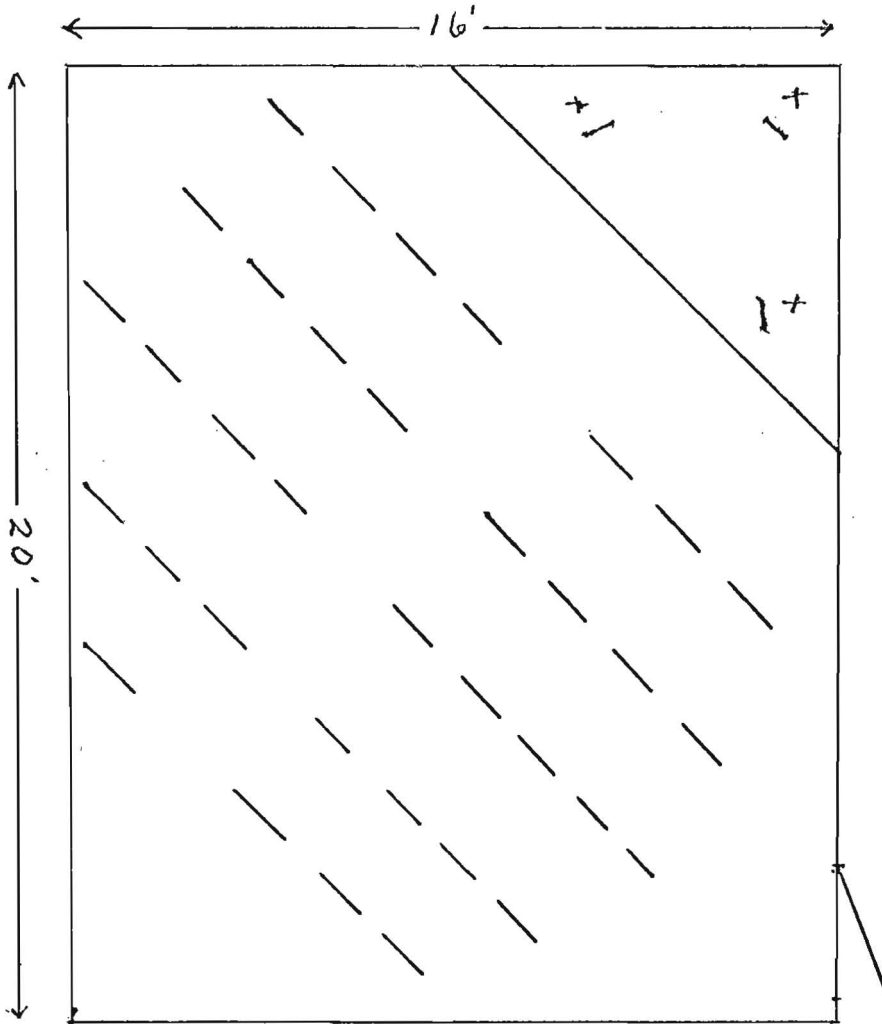
APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

FLOOR PLAN

Floor Plan:

"The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel"



Room 201

New Humanities

K. S. T. C.

Scale: $1/4'' = 1'0''$

APPENDIX B

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

"The Underworld of Archy and Mehitabel"

<u>PLACE</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>STATE</u>
K. S. T. C.	2-25-68	8:00 P.M.	Classroom
Roosevelt High School (on K.S.T.C. campus)	2-26-68	8:30 A.M.	Classroom
K. S. T. C.	3-1-68	4:00 P.M.	Classroom
K. S. T. C.	3-6-68	4:00 P.M.	Classroom
K. S. T. C.	3-8-68	4:00 P.M.	Classroom
Burlington High	3-11-68	11:00 A.M.	Classroom
Lebo High	3-11-68	1:30 P.M.	Stage
Hamilton High	3-19-68	12:30 P.M.	Stage
Hartford High	3-19-68	2:20 P.M.	Stage
Eureka High	3-20-68	10:00 A.M.	Stage
Council Grove High	3-20-68	1:40 P.M.	Stage
Esridge High	4-2-68	10:00 A.M.	Stage
Cottonwood Falls High	4-2-68	1:00 P.M.	Stage
Reading High	4-5-68	9:30 A.M.	Stage
Maple Hill High	4-5-68	1:30 P.M.	Stage