

A READERS THEATRE PRESENTATION OF AN ORIGINAL
ADAPTATION OF STEPHEN VINCENT BENET'S
WESTERN STAR

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

The art of interpretative reading is one of the oldest of the speech arts known to man.¹ Its origins can be seen in the festivals and contests of ancient Greece along with the beginnings of the arts of music, drama and the dance. According to Eugene Bahn, interpretative reading was begun by minstrels who wandered about the countryside entertaining their audiences with recitations of national epics:

There . . . arose in Greece . . . in the very earliest times . . . a recitative art. This was carried on by wandering minstrels known as "rhapsodes." The rhapsodes spoke in measured recitative portions of the national epics. Sometimes he read to the accompaniment of a lyre or other primitive musical instrument.²

In addition to wandering about the country, the rhapsodes

¹Eugene Bahn, "Interpretative Reading in Ancient Greece," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XVII (June, 1932), p. 432.

²Ibid., p. 434.

gathered at festivals to compete with each other and to entertain their listeners. The festival in Athens was probably the zenith of interpretation in ancient Greece.³

At this great event each of the rhapsodes was assigned a certain part of one of the epics. . . . In this way the entire poem was recited in logical order, one bard taking up the poem where the last had left off.

.
 . . . there was a form of dialogue carried on between two rhapsodes. One would read, in the first book of the Illiad, up to the quarrel of the princes; then a second reciter would step forward and declaim the speeches of Agamemnon while the other read the part of Achilles.⁴

It was at this point in Greek history that both interpretation and the drama sprang to life.

When these poems were read by one person, had more than one character in them, a type of activity which approaches the art of interpretative reading of plays was developed. When these two characters were read by two different individuals the drama began.⁵

Interpretative reading existed and flourished in ancient Greece not merely as a form of entertainment, but

³Ibid., p. 435.

⁴Ibid., pp. 435, 436.

⁵Ibid., p. 437.

more as an intellectual and educational activity. Bahn points out that "the very best speech of the time, the greatest thoughts, were uttered by readers."⁶

In our own day oral interpretation has passed through a number of phases. In style and emphasis it has progressed from an "evening of declamatory entertainment" by an elocutionist, to oral reading presented by a reader, to the presentation of a literary selection by an oral interpreter.⁷ So once again, as in ancient Greece, oral interpretation flourishes as a medium of intellectual and emotional enlightenment and enjoyment.

II. IMPORTANCE AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

It is not simply a "happy accident" that the art of oral interpretation has lived through the centuries; flourishing, declining, only to be revived again.

Although the written word is sufficient for the transmission of meaning in many cases, in others (such as in

⁶Ibid., p. 432.

⁷J. T. Marshman, "The Mystery of Oral Reading," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXIV (December, 1938), pp. 296, 297.

artistic literary creations), the faculty of the human voice is needed for the complete thought, feeling and beauty of a work to be communicated.

William B. McCoard, in an article entitled "An Interpretation of the Times, A Report of the Reading of W. H. Auden's Age of Anxiety," Quarterly Journal of Speech, states:

... the written word is but the barest skeletal symbol for the "living concept"; though many persons have been trained to read with silent skill, it is clear that the author's words rise to their most suggestive power when they are projected and creatively modified by artistic readers. Everyone realizes that, though one may enjoy reading a "play" silently, it rises to highest artistry under the creative power of the actor guided by an imaginative director. Also, it is clear that some musicians find pleasure in reading a "musical score" silently, yet the music rises to its highest expression when creatively presented to the ear. So does poetry reach highest communicative power when creatively interpreted by an artistic oral reader.⁸

The same basic idea is expressed by Henry James in his statement that a "reader's fullest experience" of pleasure is derived from hearing a selection interpreted orally.⁹

⁸W. B. McCoard, "An Interpretation of the Times, A Report of the Reading of W. H. Auden's Age of Anxiety," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXV (December, 1949), p. 489.

⁹Henry James, The Art of the Novel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), pp. 346, 347.

Such authorities as Armstrong and Brandes,¹⁰ Compere,¹¹ and McLean,¹² point out that oral interpretation offers man the opportunity to broaden his experiences in vicarious ways, and increases the intellectual and emotional enjoyment which the treasures of literature can furnish.

More specifically, McCoard suggests that oral interpretation can serve in this respect. ". . . through the use of the subtle communicative process of the added 'languages' of 'voice' and 'action' the oral interpreter is able to suggest quickly much that could be obtained from words alone only after considerable elaboration by the author and long study by the reader."¹³ Through oral interpretation the reader and listener alike may gain a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a piece of literature in a much

¹⁰Chloe Armstrong and Paul D. Brandes, The Oral Interpretation of Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), p. 4.

¹¹Moiree Compere, Living Literature For Oral Interpretation (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.), pp. 3,4.

¹²Margaret Pendergast McLean, Oral Interpretation of Forms of Literature (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1936), p. 7.

¹³McCoard, op. cit., p. 490.

shorter time than would be required for the same depth of knowledge, understanding and appreciation by virtue of silent reading.

McCoard also points out several other advantages of the use of oral interpretation.

First, by means of oral interpretation the essential matter and manner can be presented in an hour's time so that many listeners will be intrigued into making a purposeful and personal study of the material in its original form.¹⁴

Furthermore, in some instances oral interpretation can serve as an introduction and can give an understanding and appreciation for materials that might be neglected as "too difficult" by "all but the most serious scholars."¹⁵

Finally McCoard asserts that "the oral interpretative presentation can serve an important function in its own

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

right--that of bringing the interpretation of an important interpreter of our times . . . to many interested listeners."¹⁶

In essence, the old and well established art of oral interpretation can serve to broaden and enrich the experiences of many listeners, and can serve a number of important functions.

In addition to a growing emphasis on the oral interpretation of literature by a single reader, the past decade has been a period of experimentation and development in yet another phase of interpretation. This particular form of interpretation has acquired a number of names including: Concert Reading, Group Reading, Multiple Reading, Interpreters Theatre, and Readers Theatre.¹⁷ Essentially Readers Theatre is the oral interpretation of a literary selection which involves two or more readers. (This definition will be expanded, for purposes of this thesis, in the section dealing with definition of terms.) It is a

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Leslie I. Coger, "Interpreters Theatre: Theatre of the Mind," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIX (April, 1963), p. 163.

medium which takes varied forms. In some instances it may borrow elements from the realm of the theatrical, or, on the other hand, it may adhere strictly to the principles of oral interpretation.

Although the interest in and use of this form has intensified and increased steadily in the past fifteen years, the possibilities and potential of the medium have not been fully explored, nor have any rules or governing principles been firmly fixed. As Leslie Coger points out, "it [Interpreters Theatre] is free for experimentation, and open to the use of imaginative techniques for bringing literature to audiences."¹⁸

A bibliography compiled by a committee of the Interpretation Interest Group of the Speech Association of America in the Winter of 1961 lists materials presented in group readings from coast to coast. According to this survey two hundred sixteen plays by one hundred authors, thirty works of poetry by twenty authors, and eighty-eight prose selections by fifty-six authors had been presented in

¹⁸Ibid., p. 164.

group reading.¹⁹ With the increasing popularity of this medium in mind we can safely assume that the number of works presented in group reading has greatly increased in the three years following this study.

But besides pointing out the popularity of the medium, this bibliography also points up the number and variety of materials which are available for Readers Theatre. Indeed, this very treatment of materials which are not usually presented on stage constitutes one of the most valuable, and indeed a unique contribution of Readers Theatre.

It would also be safe to assume that no two of these productions were presented in the same manner. ". . . there is no single established form of presentation, . . . many different approaches are employed, and . . . experimentation is continuing."²⁰

¹⁹Clark S. Marlor, "Readers Theatre Bibliography," Central States Speech Journal, (Winter, 1961), pp. 134-137.

²⁰Coger, op. cit., p. 163.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The possibilities of Readers Theatre seem to justify further exploration of this particular method of exposing an audience to the riches of literature. There is still much which can and may be done in the area to aid in developing its full communicative potential.

The primary purpose of this thesis project is to afford the opportunity for this author to experience the creative endeavor of selection and adaptation of a piece of literature for Readers Theatre and the directing and presenting of this work in public performance. Secondary purposes would include: (1) research on a significant literary figure, (2) review of writings concerning the author and the selection, (3) evaluation of the success or failure of the endeavor in terms of fulfilling the purposes of Readers Theatre and of benefits derived by this writer.

It is the tertiary purpose of this thesis project to exemplify how simply, efficiently, economically, and yet effectively, a piece of literature can be presented to an audience through the medium of Readers Theatre.

IV. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

the . . . of the . . . read."²⁰ With the . . .

Oral interpretation. In almost every text and article dealing with the oral interpretation of literature, one will find a definition of the term, but as is to be expected, no two are alike. Donald E. Hargis defines oral interpretation as "an artistic venture which involves the converging of the faculties of three persons, [author, interpreter and auditor] upon an intellectual-emotional complex."²¹ In his book Oral Interpretation and Literary Study, Don Geiger describes oral interpretation as " . . . an unformulable amalgam of acting, public speaking, critical reaction and sympathetic sharing. . . . It presumes to be, like other kinds of literary interpretation, a critical illumination publicly offered in behalf of literature."²² Martin Cobin, author of Theory and Technique of Interpretation, states that "interpretation can be defined as the recreative reading of literature, either from

²¹Donald E. Hargis, "Interpretation as Oral Communication," Central States Speech Journal, XI (Spring, 1960), p. 168.

²²Don Geiger, Oral Interpretation and Literary Study (South San Francisco, 1958), p. 6.

manuscript or from memory, so as to excite an experience in the listener(s) of the material read."²³ With the thoughts of many authorities in mind this writer will define oral interpretation, for the purposes of this thesis, as being that process by which a reader recreates and projects orally the intellectual and emotional content of an author, without losing his own identity in that of the material presented, to an audience in a manner that is fluent, interesting, and communicative. Memorization and exhibitory behavior, physical or oral, are unnecessary and undesirable.

Readers Theatre. According to Leslie Coger, Readers Theatre "is a medium in which two or more oral interpreters through their oral reading cause an audience to experience the literature."²⁴ Keith Brooks defines Readers Theatre as "a group activity in which the best of literature is

²³Martin Cobin, Theory and Technique of Oral Interpretation (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), p. 6.

²⁴Coger, op. cit., p. 157.

communicated from manuscript to an audience through the oral interpretation approach of vocal and physical suggestion."²⁵ This writer shall consider Readers Theatre to be that medium through which two or more oral interpreters cause an audience to share in the experience of a literary work, and which follows the foregoing basic guidelines of oral interpretation and good taste in the use of any "staging" devices.

Interpreter. The oral interpreter is the medium through which the experiences of a piece of literature are communicated to an audience.

. . . the "raison d'entre" for the oral interpreter is to assist the author by uncovering, for example, the meaning of the symbols, their relative values, their relationships, and their emotional implications and to project them vocally so that the listeners may have a parallel experience of understanding-feeling.²⁶

Literature. "Literature . . . is an expression of human experience."²⁷ No attempt will be made to solve the

²⁵Keith Brooks, "Readers Theatre: Some Questions and Answers," Dramatics Magazine, XXXIV (December, 1962), p. 14.

²⁶Hargis, op. cit., p. 171.

²⁷Cobin, op. cit., p. 7.

age-old argument, what is "good" literature and what is "bad" literature, but let it be sufficient to assume that any work by a known author who has gained some favorable recognition in his field is acceptable as possible literature for oral interpretation and Readers Theatre. This does not mean to exclude the works of unrecognized authors from the realm of the possible, nor to suggest that any and all works by recognized authors are effective material for Readers Theatre, it merely indicates an area where one not trained in literary criticism may be fairly sure he is on "safe ground" in selecting a work that is generally considered to be "good" literature.

V. METHOD OF PROCEDURE

The procedures to be followed in this thesis include: the selection and adaptation of a piece of literature for Readers Theatre; the preparation of this work for presentation, including casting, staging, lighting, stage properties, makeup, costumes, music, publicity, and rehearsals; performance of the selected work; evaluation of the production by the members of the thesis committee

and the director; and a discussion of the problems encountered and the solutions employed.

VI. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature concerning Readers Theatre, it appears that the revival of interest in this medium began in approximately the late 1940's.

In 1948 William B. McCoard reported in the Quarterly Journal of Speech, the group reading of John Hershey's Hiroshima at the University of California,²⁸ and in the December 1949 issue of the Quarterly Journal of Speech McCoard describes the reading of W. H. Auden's Age of Anxiety, also at the University of California.²⁹

About this same time the 49ers, a group participating in the Interpretation Workshop at the University of Washington, conducted three experiments in oral interpretation. For these experiments they compiled materials and

²⁸W. B. McCoard, "Report on the Reading of Hiroshima," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXIV (April, 1948).

²⁹W. B. McCoard, "An Interpretation of the Times, A Report of the Oral Interpretation of W. H. Auden's Age of Anxiety," op. cit.

organized Readers Theatre presentations entitled, "American Journey," "7 and the Roads They Take," and "Northwest Kaleidoscope."³⁰

Since these early years of revival of interest in the medium of Readers Theatre the number and variety of materials presented have increased steadily. In the past two or three years Readers Theatre presentations at American colleges and universities have included: "Ebony Ghetto," presented by Southwest Missouri State College in "Imagination '62" at the University of Kansas;³¹ "Is There a Doctor in the House," presented by Southwest Missouri State College, in Interpreters Theatre Workshop at Southern Illinois University;³² To Kill a Mocking Bird, presented by Drury College;³³ Under Milk Wood, presented at The Kansas State Teachers College; and "The Beast in the Jungle," and Book I

³⁰Frederic W. Hile and Sholie R. Brown, "The 49ers and Three Experiments in Oral Interpretation," The Speech Teacher, II (March, 1953), pp. 105-108.

³¹Leslie I. Coger, "Theatre for Oral Interpreters," The Speech Teacher, XII (November, 1963), p. 326.

³²Ibid., p. 329.

³³Ibid.

of "John Brown's Body" presented at conventions of the Speech Association of America.³⁴

These are but a few of the works which have been presented as Readers Theatre in academic institutions. Referring again to the bibliography of group readings compiled by the Interpretation Interest Group of the Speech Association of America, we find that there was an approximate total of three hundred forty different works presented in group readings from coast to coast prior to 1961.³⁵

According to Leslie Coger, this form of oral interpretation is also finding a place in the secondary schools. The Fullerton, California, High School System is approaching the study of literature through oral interpretation, and Greenwood High School, the training school for Southwest Missouri State College, is "using it [Interpreters Theatre] to enrich the teaching of literature as well as a means for stimulating better speech habits. . . ." ³⁶

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Marlor, op. cit.

³⁶Coger, op. cit., p. 322.

The professional stage has not overlooked the possibilities of this medium, and it too has been involved in the experimentation going on in this area. Some of the works which have been adapted and presented by professional companies include: "Don Juan in Hell," John Brown's Body, "Pictures in the Hallway," "I Knock at the Door," "Drums Under the Windows," "Brecht on Brecht," "U.S.A.," "The Hollow Crown," Under Milk Wood, "Dear Liar: Chekhov's Stories," The Diary of Adam and The Diary of Eve, and "The World of Carl Sandburg."³⁷

In recent years the area of Readers Theatre has also been explored by writers of Master's theses and Doctoral dissertations. At least four of these Master's theses have involved the actual presentation of a literary selection.

In 1957, Sally Vaughn Hoffman presented a program of her own compilation at Pepperdine College;³⁸ The World We Live In was presented by Joyce Tally of the University of

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sally Vaughn Hoffman, "A Creative Study of the Presentational Technique for Especial Literary Selections Through Oral Interpretation" (unpublished Master's thesis, Pepperdine College, Los Angeles, 1957).

of Southern Mississippi, in 1962;³⁹ a dramatic recital of A Doll's House was presented by Clairenell Cowan at Pennsylvania State University in 1961;⁴⁰ and The Relapse was given at the University of Wisconsin in 1960, under the direction of Robert Heise.⁴¹

A number of theses and dissertations have been concerned with the adaptation of a piece of literature for oral interpretation or Readers Theatre and the analysis of a work of literature for purposes of Readers Theatre, and original works for Readers Theatre have served as thesis or dissertation projects for some graduate students.

The selection with which this paper deals, Stephen Vincent Benet's Western Star, has been presented as Readers Theatre, but it has not been the object of any graduate

³⁹Joyce Tally, "An Experimental Reading Production, The World We Live In" (unpublished Master's thesis, Mississippi Southern College, 1962).

⁴⁰Clairenell Cowan, "A Dramatic Recital of Ibsen's A Doll's House" (unpublished Master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1961).

⁴¹Robert C. Heise, "A Study of the Oral Interpretation of a Play as Exemplified by a Group Play Reading of The Relapse, by Sir John Van Brough" (unpublished Master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1961).

thesis or dissertation. According to available sources, this presentation of Western Star is the first time this work has been considered in any aspect by the writer of a graduate study.

The first chapter of this thesis has dealt with the background of the study, the importance of the study, the statement of the problem, the definition of terms, the methods and procedures to be employed, and the review of literature. Chapter II is devoted to an analysis of the author and selection, and Chapter III describes the preparation for performance in terms of the selection of material, adaptation of material, casting, staging, lighting, stage properties, makeup, costumes, music, and rehearsals. Chapter IV includes an evaluation of the performance by the members of the thesis committee and the director. Problems and solutions are also found in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER II

AUTHOR AND SELECTION

It is one of the primary functions of the interpreter to communicate the particular mood and meaning of a selection which the author of the work intended. It is not always possible to ascertain the exact meanings which an author intended, but an investigation of the life and the work of a man can provide significant insight into the thoughts, feelings and beliefs to which he subscribes.

The purpose of this chapter, as suggested above, is to provide an over-all view of the life of Stephen Vincent Benét, and to point out his place in the world of literature, in order to better understand the thoughts, beliefs and feelings which form the basis of his literary works, particularly of Western Star.

BIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW OF STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

Stephen Vincent Benet, noted American author, was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on July 22, 1898, to James Walker Benet and Frances Neill Benet.¹

Stephen Benet was the youngest son in a family of three children. His sister Laura, and his brother William Rose are also well known figures in the literary world.

The Benet children grew up in an atmosphere of literary appreciation. Their father, Colonel Benet, was an "enthusiastic connoisseur" of poetry, and he brought up his three children to know and write verse.²

Stephen began to write at the age of seven, in an attempt to make a good showing in the eyes of his brother and sister.³

¹The National Encyclopaedia of American Biography (New York: James T. White and Company, 1926), A, p. 215.

²"Stephen Benet, The Ultimate Objectives of Free Men Are to be Discovered in Their Arts and Letters," Life, IV (April 5, 1943), p. 22.

³Wilson Library Bulletin, XVII (May, 1943), p. 686.

Stephen Vincent Benét's preparatory education was received partially at Summerville Academy in Augusta, Georgia,⁴ and partially in other parts of the country. He received his A.B. from Yale in 1919, his M.A. in 1920, and his Doctor of Letters in 1937.

When Benét entered Yale at the age of seventeen, he had already published his first book of poems, Five Men and Pompey.⁵ He was still an undergraduate when the Yale University Press published his Young Adventure, and a third volume of poems serves as his Master's thesis.⁶

While attending Yale, Stephen Benét was the recipient of the first John Masefield Poetry Prize, the Albert Stanburrough Cook Poetry Prize, and the third Zen Byck prize. In addition he was class poet.⁷

⁴The National Encyclopaedia of American Biography, op. cit., p. 666.

⁵Wilson Library Bulletin, op. cit., p. 686.

⁶Amy Bonner, Melville Cane, Gwendolen Haste, Alfred Kreymborg, Leonora Speyer, A. M. Sullivan (eds.), The Poetry Society of America (New York: The Fine Editions Press, 1946), p. 250.

⁷National Encyclopaedia of American Biography, op. cit., p. 215.

In 1923 his King David was awarded "The Nation's" poetry prize for that year, and in 1925, Tiger Joy, containing "The Mountain Whippoorwill" and "The Ballad of William Sycamore," two vigorous and thoroughly American ballads, was published.⁸

As a Guggenheim Fellow, Benét spent 1926 and 1927 in Paris.⁹ While there he wrote his one hundred thousand word narrative poem John Brown's Body. His superb faculty for ballad-making "stood him in good stead" when he reconstructed the Civil War Period in this work, for "within a few months the book . . . reached more than one hundred thousand people, and Benét had proved that a long narrative poem if skillfully blended could hold attention as easily as a novel."¹⁰

This work, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1928 won for Stephen Vincent Benét, not only a prize, but a sound literary reputation. With this book Benét leaped almost instantly to popularity.

⁸Louis Untermeyer (ed.), Modern American Poetry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950), p. 538.

⁹Time, XLI (March 22, 1943), p. 44.

¹⁰Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 538.

Benét was not only a poet, but was also a deft fiction writer. His short stories appeared in numerous periodicals, including the Saturday Review of Literature, to which he contributed from 1925 until his death. His "Devil and Daniel Webster," which has been made into a play, an opera and a motion picture, "has become a classic in its own time."¹¹

During his lifetime Benét was co-editor with John Andrews and John C. Farrar of the Yale Book of Student Verse¹² (which now has been taken over by Archibald McLeish), was editor with Edgar Montillion of Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlane the Great," and also had a part in preparing the acting version of the same work.¹³

In 1933, Benét was awarded the Gold Medal by the Roosevelt Memorial Association and in 1938 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters.¹⁴

¹¹Ibid.

¹²The National Encyclopaedia of American Biography, op. cit., p. 215.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Wilson Library Bulletin, op. cit., p. 686.

Benét was descended from a long line of military men, and although he could not serve in the Armed Forces of the United States because of particularly poor eyesight, "three generations of fighting ancestors may look down with pride on the contributions which Stephen Benét made when his country needed him."¹⁵

Throughout the Second World War Benét was one of America's most valiant fighters; he pushed everything aside and devoted long hours of writing to the war-effort ventures. In spite of precarious health, he found many ways of bringing before the public his interpretation of his country's greatest war. ". . . he turned with all his passion for his country and with all his matured powers of expression to the molding of national opinion about the fundamentals involved. . . . To him his task was clear; he turned his genius for expression over to the immediate case of freedom."¹⁶ He wrote pamphlets, radio scripts, articles for the press, speeches, and a poetic narrative

¹⁵Frederic G. Melcher (ed.), Publishers Weekly, XIII (March 20, 1943), p. 1257.

¹⁶Ibid.

They Burned The Books. He wrote "Your Army" for This is War series, a Thanksgiving show, "A Time to Reap," and a "Prayer for United Nations" which President Roosevelt read on his Flag-Day broadcast.

One of the last things which Stephen Vincent Benet wrote was America. He wrote this book at the request of the Office of War Information, who wanted "a short interpretative history of the United States which could be translated into many languages and distributed abroad."¹⁷

When the United States entered World War II Stephen Vincent Benet was involved in the writing of another great epic poem in the John Brown's Body tradition. This was one of the things which he laid aside in order to devote his time and abilities to the war effort. Due to his untimely death on March 13, 1943, this work was never completed, but Book I, entitled Western Star was published posthumously. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1944.

¹⁷Hal Borland, "Review of America," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXVII (June 3, 1944), pp. 8, 9.

At the time of his death Stephen Benét was probably better known to a larger public than any other contemporary poet of serious literary pretensions. "It seems probable that no writer of poetry in English has ever been read by so many in his lifetime--not even Longfellow--as was Stephen Benét. And while he was popular, he never wrote down to his public. He gave them his best. . . ."18

Stephen Benét was a truly American poet, "all parts of America lived within him, in strange conflicting equality. He fought both sides of the Civil War. He worked on Manhattan but spoke for Kansas."19 He was the first of our American poets who knew the whole country and who used the poet's means for opening our eyes to all of it.20

Because of his father's military career, Benét spent his childhood in many different parts of the country, and he had a thorough knowledge of the history of his land. This knowledge of and feeling for the United States were

18 "Stephen Vincent Benét," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (March 27, 1943), p. 14.

19 Life, op. cit., p. 22.

20 "Stephen Vincent Benét," op. cit., p. 14.

were transmitted into his poetry. Thornton Wilder said of Benét: "He loved the United States singly and collectively, and his rich evocation of any portion of it differed from that of regional writers through the fact that the entire continent was always present to his mind."²¹

In a very literal sense Benét belonged to the United States, and the country that he loved absorbed him with a lasting affection.

At the time of his death the Saturday Review of Literature expressed these thoughts:

. . . Stephen Benét has taken his place among the bards of the great Idea of a democracy building a future upon the ideals of the past. He is, perhaps, the first of the poets prophesied by Whitman. It is significant of a spiritual relationship between these two spokesman for our country, that his unpublished epic poem to succeed John Brown's Body, "happily completed in part, is named from a poem by Whitman to that other spokesman for America, Abraham Lincoln. O Western Star is the title of the new poem. Whitman's line from which the words are taken expresses the feeling of many of us for Stephen Benét himself and the loss we have suffered:

'O powerful western fallen star!' ²²

²¹Ibid., p. 9.

²²Ibid., p. 14.

COMMENTARY ON WESTERN STAR

Western Star was one of the last works which Stephen Vincent Benét wrote, and it is only a fragment of the work in which he intended to dramatize the sweep of American colonization. He postponed the completion of it until after World War II, and consequently it was never finished. Western Star was published after Benét's death, and in 1944 it received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. It was a choice that few would have failed to predict, and none would begrudge. Concerning the selection of Western Star the Saturday Review of Literature stated, "In bestowing its award for poetry on the late Stephen Vincent Benét's Western Star the Committee has chosen the work which would have undoubtedly won the prize on a popular vote."²³

In reviewing Western Star for the Saturday Review of Literature, Leonard Bacon, friend and fellow poet said:

Everything that those who knew him loved and admired in Stephen Benét is in this book. No genius is required to see the notable development and enhancement of his great powers that grew evenpaced

²³"The New Pulitzer Awards," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVII (May 6, 1944, p. 26.

with his huge and beautiful subject. For the hand of the shaper became more deft as it accustomed itself to the strange marble of the epic. The verse is at once statlier and easier. And one feels that John Brown's Body was itself a mere prologue to what the great story, a notable part of which is before us, was to have been. . . . You can't review it any more than you can review a sunset. . . . Stephen Benet is in this book. . . . Its episodes are the very substance of freedom, the very affirmation and action of liberty in the mind. We may be proud, every one of us, that in our moment of trial and conflict such things were said among us. Western Star is itself a species of rigorous and beautiful proof that our beliefs are true and worth what our best and bravest seem willing enough to give for them.²⁵

Critics Charles Lee, Joseph I. Green and Benard

De Voto, said of Western Star, it is "a sweeping, golden poem . . . for all times and all Americans;"²⁶ "It is shot with the iron and beauty of the first enduring qualities of the American Spirit;"²⁷ and "it is the fruition of a lifetime of pondering what life means in America, what America means. It is a vision of America."²⁸

²⁵Leonard Bacon, "An American Epic by Stephen Vincent Benet," Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (July 10, 1943), p. 6.

²⁶Saturday Review of Literature, XXVI (July 24, 1943), p. 17.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

Stephen Vincent Benét wrote many excellent poems and stories, many of them dealing with America. It was America that Stephen Benét loved, and it was in writing about his country that he was at his best. Benét did not mean for Western Star to be his final testament, but if he had written a last testament it probably would have been very much like Western Star.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF PREPARATION FOR PRODUCTION

In preparing the production for this thesis project, all elements; the selecting and adapting of the material; casting; staging and stage properties, lighting, makeup, costuming, and music; and rehearsals, were planned with the third purpose of this thesis in mind, the demonstration of how simply, efficiently, economically and yet effectively Readers Theatre can be done.

SELECTION AND ADAPTATION OF MATERIAL FOR READERS THEATRE

In selecting a work of literature for this thesis project several criteria were taken into consideration. First of all, since one of the prime contributions of Readers Theatre is its ability to treat materials which are not generally presented on a stage for the benefit of an audience, it seemed logical to make a selection from non-dramatic literature.

Other criteria for the selection of a work of literature included: (1) that the work be enhanced by the oral rendition, (2) that it be appropriate for the audience and the occasion: primarily that it not be below the intellectual level of a rather select audience, (3) that it be potentially a valuable and rewarding experience for those readers selected to participate in the production, (4) that it offer this writer maximum creative and practical experience in the preparation and presentation of the work, (5) that it lend itself to cutting for a one hour presentation and still retain the thought, meaning and mood of the original, and (6) that it could be presented with a minimum of stage effects.

Stephen Vincent Benét's Western Star was selected for presentation because it met the requirements previously established.

Most poetry is written to be read aloud, and Benét's Western Star is no exception. Because of the beauty of the language itself, and the opportunity which it offered for variety and contrast in mood and character, Western Star would definitely be enhanced by oral rendition.

Western Star is truly an American work, capable of being understood and appreciated by Americans of all ages, and the thoughts, beliefs and ideas expressed in Western Star are not below the intellectual appreciation of a very select audience.

Poetry is generally considered to be the most difficult of all types of literature to present orally; Therefore, through the selection of a poetic work the director and the readers would be challenged. Also, since there are a number of characters in Western Star, the readers would be required to read more than one part and could thereby gain experience in developing different characterizations and in supplying sufficient differentiation.

Since Western Star is lengthy, it afforded this writer an opportunity for extensive cutting and adapting. But in spite of the length of the work, it could be cut to a one hour presentation and still retain the essential thought, mood and meaning of the original.

In adapting this work all but six characters were eliminated and narration was assigned to two narrators and chorus members. The chorus was composed of the same readers as those taking the various character parts.

The original Western Star follows the lives of many people from England to America, but the cutting made by this writer isolated the life of one man (and the lives of those directly related to him) and followed it throughout the course of events in Western Star. This made it possible to cut the work considerably and yet retain the essential meaning of the original.

Lastly, Western Star was selected because it could be presented with a minimum of stage effects and still be effective; not only could it be presented simply, but it seemed to demand such an approach. Although there is considerable action in this particular poem, it is action which can readily be imagined by the listener, and which does not require physical activity to communicate, nor to enhance it.

CASTING

In keeping with the thought that much of the effect of a Readers Theatre production is created in the minds of the audience, casting was undertaken with vocal ability rather than physical attributes foremost in mind. The main vocal considerations were: (1) variety and contrast among

the voices of the people chosen, (2) the ability of these voices to blend, for maximum enhancing of the choral sections, (3) pleasing vocal quality, and (4) skill in the basic oral interpretation techniques.

It was also a secondary purpose to cast people who had not had extensive experience in Readers Theatre, in order that the writer's directing ability could be more precisely evaluated.

Tryouts for Western Star were held on April 1st, 2nd and 3rd, 1964, and with these particular criteria in mind, six people (four men and two women), out of twenty who expressed interest in participating, were cast. These tryouts were conducted in individual rather than group auditions.

Sandra Martin, freshman speech major, was chosen to read "Mother Billington" and Sixth Reader. She had had some experience in oral interpretation in high school, and was currently enrolled in the basic interpretation class. She had had no previous experience in Readers Theatre. Her vocal pitch level is rather low, but is forceful, and her articulation is clear and precise.

Carolyn Taylor, senior speech and drama major, was selected to read the parts of "Rose," "Humility," and Fifth Reader. Carolyn also has a low pitch level, but her voice is substantially different than Sandra's, in that it has a softer quality. Carolyn had had considerable acting and interpretation experience and some Readers Theatre experience.

Keith Ford, a freshman speech major, was selected to read "Henry Shenton," "Elias Lanyard," and Fourth Reader. Keith's voice was higher than the other men in the cast, but could be classified as a medium voice. Keith had severe articulation problems which had to be overcome. He was currently enrolled in the basic oral interpretation class, and had had limited experience in Readers Theatre.

Mike Robertson, junior speech major, was chosen to read "Matthew Lanyard," and Third Reader. Mike, too, was currently enrolled in the basic interpretation class at Kansas State Teachers College. He had had no previous experience in Readers Theatre. His voice is low, with a pleasing, sensitive quality.

Fred Thompson, senior drama major, was selected to read the part of First Reader. Fred had had considerable

acting experience, but only limited experience in oral interpretation and Readers Theatre. Fred has a medium pitched, rich, forceful voice.

Charles Willard, freshman speech major, was selected to read Second Reader. Charles had participated extensively in high school and college speech and debate activities, but Western Star was his first exposure to either oral interpretation or Readers Theatre. Charles possesses a rich, deep, resonant voice.

In casting, this writer anticipated several problems but did not think them too difficult to be undertaken. It was evident that considerable time was going to be spent correcting articulation, diction and pronunciation inadequacies. Also, two of the cast members had had specialized training and experience in speech areas other than oral interpretation, and some vocal and physical characteristics which had been acquired as a result of this experience were not appropriate in the oral interpretation situation. This problem too, it was evident, would have to be overcome.

In spite of a few problems which were foreseen, this writer believed that those people cast were high satisfactory.

STAGING AND STAGE PROPERTIES

The staging for this production was kept as simple as possible for two reasons. First, it is one of the stated purposes of this thesis to demonstrate how simply, efficiently, economically and yet effectively Readers Theatre can be presented, and secondly, Western Star seemed to demand very little in the way of staging in order to enhance it.

The room in which Western Star was presented (Room 203 of the Student Union), provided a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere for the production. The room is forty feet by thirty-two feet, and will accommodate approximately one hundred fifty persons. The north wall of this second floor room has three large windows (four feet by five feet) which are covered with blue drapes. The south wall has four windows (of the same dimensions) which also have blue drapes. The walls of the room are painted a soft blue which blends with the deeper blue of the drapes.

The audience was seated on straight-backed folding chairs, which were arranged in rows in a slight arc.

(See Appendix A for floor plan.)

The major part of the presentation took place with cast members seated on four-legged, backless stools which were approximately thirty inches high. These stools were arranged in an arc with the narrators positioned at either end.

The only hand properties utilized were black-bound manuscripts which the readers kept in their possession at all times during the performance. (See Appendix B for photographs.)

The only stage business employed was a limited amount of movement. The opening and closing of the presentation was effected with the First Reader standing center stage in front of the other cast members. At several places within the presentation, when sufficiently motivated, individuals either stood or walked down stage and then returned to their original positions. (See Appendix E for manuscript.)

Lighting, Makeup, Costuming and Music

Since this production was to be kept as simple as possible the elements of lighting, makeup, costuming and music were utilized either not at all or only to a limited extent.

Since this writer wished to demonstrate that Readers Theatre could be effectively presented under conditions which prevent the use of any lighting effects, only normal room illumination (overhead florescent lighting), was used in this production of Western Star.

There was no attempt to makeup readers to appear as the characters they portrayed, and all age characteristics were effected through vocal characterization rather than through any visual appeal. Under normal room illumination, makeup, other than natural makeup for the women, was unnecessary.

With the purposes of the thesis and the philosophy which was carried out in the other production procedures in mind, costuming was deemed to be neither necessary nor desirable. The only attempt at costuming the readers was in keeping the colors of clothing subtle and the styles simple. The men were dressed in blue or grey suits, and the women wore dark skirts and white blouses. These considerations were believed to be appropriate and in accord with the mood and character of the selection.

The use of music might possibly have enhanced certain portions of this production, but had it been used it would have necessitated someone operating either a record player or a tape recorder in view of the audience. This it seemed would distract from, rather than enhance the total effect.

REHEARSALS

Rehearsals were planned so as to be as convenient as possible for all cast members and the director. Due to conflicts in night class schedules and work obligations it was necessary to arrange some rehearsals in the afternoon and some in the evening, and it was not possible to have all rehearsals the same length. (See Appendix C for rehearsal schedule.)

Rehearsals were also arranged so as to allow adequate time for familiarization, interpretation, work on basic interpretation techniques, and to provide a sufficient incubation period.

Rehearsals were extended over a three-week period, and they lasted an average of two hours. On one occasion a rehearsal lasted three hours. Rehearsals were never held on Saturday.

Every rehearsal was planned so that it included a complete run through of the script. The writer believed that this approach was necessary for the cast to obtain the necessary feeling of unity, continuity and movement of the script, and that it was a distinct advantage in terms of over-all understanding.

The rehearsal schedule seemed to be suitable. Cast members were adequately rehearsed by the date of performance, but not so over-rehearsed as to be tired of the selection.

All elements of the production of Western Star; the selecting and adapting of material; casting, staging and stage properties, lighting, makeup, costuming, and music; and rehearsals, were planned by this writer to contribute to the total effect of the production within the bounds of the purposes of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

EVALUATION OF PRODUCTION, PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

The one performance of this adaptation of Western Star was presented on Monday, April 17, 1964, at 8:00 P.M. in Room 203 of the Student Union of Kansas State Teachers College. The audience, of approximately fifty-five persons, was composed of members of the basic and advanced oral interpretation classes, members of upper division speech and theatre classes, and members of the faculty and staff of the Speech Department of The Kansas State Teachers College.

An oral evaluation of the performance was given by the three members of the thesis committee on Tuesday, April 28, 1964. It is the purpose of this chapter to report the results of the evaluation. The chapter also presents the problems encountered in production and the solutions employed.

I. EVALUATION BY THE THESIS COMMITTEE

The evaluation of the performance of Western Star given by the three members of the thesis committee is discussed under the general headings: selection of material; adaptation of material; direction, including casting, characterization, and staging; and the ability of the listener to fulfill the potential of the literary experience as suggested by the readers.

Selection of Material

All members of the committee concurred that Western Star was effective material for Readers Theatre, and that the writer had selected a work which was timely and appropriate for the particular audience and the medium.

Adaptation of Material

Although it was generally agreed by the committee that the adaptation of Western Star was effective, the members questioned several aspects of the script and suggested possible ways of strengthening it.

During the course of rehearsals several minor changes were made in the original adaptation. One of the committee

members was of the opinion that one of the changes, in particular, did not improve the over-all script. This member believed that the material on pages one and two of the manuscript, which was added to the original adaptation, was unnecessary, and that it actually destroyed some of the effectiveness of the script.

Although one member believed that the production lacked the surging, forceful quality of movement which the original Western Star possesses, the other two members believed that the sense of movement was inherent in the script, but that it was not fulfilled adequately by the readers' interpretation.

It was also suggested that more choral passages might have strengthened the feeling of surging movement.

Another member of the committee thought that the adaptation should have included a scene involving "Katharine," "Matthew's" second wife, as it would have aided in the development of the character of "Matthew," and it would also have satisfied the curiosity of the audience concerning "Katharine."

Further, one member believed that the scene between "Henry" and "Humility" contributed nothing toward furthering

the mood or the unity of the story. Another of the members believed that this particular scene did have meaning in terms of the total effect and that it did contribute to the over-all mood and continuity of the story.

Generally it was agreed that the adaptation of Western Star retained the style and taste of the language, and that it was representative of the author's work.

Direction

Casting. In general the thesis committee was well disposed toward the selection of students for the cast of Western Star, particularly in view of the fact that the program in oral interpretation at The Kansas State Teachers College is rather new and as yet does not have highly trained, experienced oral readers. The members believed that the assignment of particular people to particular parts was appropriate, and that there was an interesting contrast in vocal qualities and a good balance of voices. It was suggested by one member that the production might have been enhanced had the director reversed the casting of the First and Second Readers.

Characterization. For the most part the committee believed that the characterization was adequate. There was some thought that perhaps the readers were more inhibited than was necessary, and that the characterizations could have been carried a little further for a more effective performance.

One member believed that the character of "Mother Billington" was effective in the beginning scenes, but that her character deteriorated in the final scene because her caustic attitude was not portrayed. Although the particular member suggested that this might have been due to the inexperience of the reader, it is thought by the director that this was due to a difference in interpretation on the part of the director.

It was generally agreed that the First Reader failed to command his audience in the opening lines, and one member believed that this was because the reader did not make direct eye contact with his audience, but rather looked over the heads of the auditors. The writer believed that because the opening lines were part of the material which was added during the course of rehearsal, that the inadequacy

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of the reader in commanding the attention of his audience was due, in large part, to a lack of sufficient rehearsal.

Over-all, the readers were insufficient in their characterizations, and in too many instances left the characters too vague. More release was necessary for a more commanding performance.

Staging. There was little criticism of the staging which was used for Western Star, and all members were well disposed toward the manner in which the stage business was handled. The small amount of movement employed was in keeping with the principles of Readers Theatre, that is, it did not take the focus of the performance from the imagination of the listener.

The Ability of the Listener to Fulfill the Potential of the Literary Experience as Suggested by the Readers

The committee agreed that there was some difficulty in fulfilling the potential of the literary experience as suggested by the readers.

First, the inadequacy of characterization made it difficult for the auditors to actually share in the experience of the literature.

Secondly, the room was much too warm for comfort, and consequently constituted a distracting element.

Another problem which interfered with the over-all communicativeness was the abundance of mispronounced words. Such words as gifts ("giffs"), terror ("terror"), iron ("iern"), of ("uv"), news ("nooz"), and across ("acrosst"), were noted by one evaluator.

One committee member believed that the communicativeness of the readers was inconsistent, and as a result the performance alternately "dragged," and "picked up." This, it was believed, distracted the auditors and impaired their ability to fulfill the literary experience.

The members agreed that there was not enough highlight and shadow incorporated in the presentation. The opportunity for considerable contrast was inherent in the script, but the director did not take full advantage of these opportunities.

Some transitions suffered because the readers did not adequately point them up, and as a result part of the effectiveness of the performance was destroyed.

Two members were of the opinion that the director should have used focused lighting on the readers and

darkened the audience area. The third member of the committee believed that since it was one of the purposes of the thesis to demonstrate how simply Readers Theatre could be presented, that the use of normal room illumination was acceptable in that it did demonstrate that no special lighting was necessary. The member pointed out, however, that focused lighting probably would enhance any staged presentation, including this performance.

Finally, of the over-all production two members of the committee were of the opinion that the presentation of Western Star was a commendable performance, and was a worthwhile experience for all participants. It was their belief that the degree of difficulty involved in directing relatively inexperienced readers in the presentation of a demanding script, overbalanced the shortcomings of the performance. The third member believed that there were many serious flaws in direction and production, but that the effort was acceptable.

II. EVALUATION BY THE DIRECTOR

Evaluation of the performance by the director is discussed under the same general headings as the evaluation by members of the thesis committee.

Selection of Material

It is the opinion of this writer that the performance of Western Star demonstrated the basic effectiveness of this selection as material for Readers Theatre. The language is strong, bold, vivid, and rich in imagery, and the vocal rendition served to strengthen and beautify the language. The oral presentation also brought the vivid images of the selection to life in the imagination of the listener.

Adaptation of Material

In adapting such a lengthy poem for a one hour presentation much of the story must necessarily be deleted. Western Star depicts the lives of a large number of people who were a part of the great migration from England to America, all of whom are of nearly equal importance. Instead of attempting to include all of the people with

whom Benet is concerned it was decided by the writer that the interest of the story could best be retained by centering on a few of these people. Therefore, the life of one man was chosen, and it was followed throughout the entirety of the poem. Although this one character does not tell the whole story of Western Star, the writer believes that he does represent the mood, meaning, and feeling of the entire work. This writer, although realizing that there are improvements which could be incorporated in the adaptation, is of the opinion that the adaptation is a fair and accurate representation of the total meaning and mood of Stephen Vincent Benet's Western Star. The writer is also of the opinion that the oral presentation demonstrated that the adaptation is a complete and meaningful unit, as the audience had no trouble in following the story.

Direction

This thesis project was designed so that the writer might have the opportunity to learn through the actual experience of directing. In this capacity the project adequately served the purpose. Many of the misconceptions which the writer had concerning direction were brought to

light, and the mistakes which were made constitute a valuable lesson in terms of future directing efforts.

Casting. Of the twenty people who were available for casting, the six who most adequately met the requirements of the director were selected. The writer believes that these six people were well chosen.

The assignment of the various parts was completed on the first night of rehearsal, and these assignments were made in accordance with what seemed to most effectively enhance the material. As rehearsals progressed it became apparent to the director that some of the material given to the First Reader would have been more effective had it been assigned to the Second Reader, and that some of the material assigned to the Second Reader would have more impact had it been given to the First Reader.

Characterization. In attempting to keep the readers from identifying too closely with the material, the director went too far in the other direction, and although the readers developed adequate characterizations, they remained too vague for a dynamic presentation.

Interpretation of the various characters was left almost entirely to the individual reader, unless the interpretation differed too strikingly from the interpretation which the director had in mind. The interpretations which the readers rendered were, for the most part, satisfactory.

Staging. Although the movement incorporated could have been eliminated, this writer was of the opinion that it afforded some relief for the audience, in terms of providing variety. It also aided the readers in developing characterization.

The arrangement of the high stools on which the readers were seated seemed to be effective. The readers could be seen from almost every audience angle, and the arrangement of the stools was not offensive to the eye, as a straight line might have become.

Ability of the Listener to Fulfill the Potential of the Literary Experience as Suggested by the Readers

In spite of the fact that major directing flaws interfered with the total effectiveness of the presentation, the writer believes that a listener, willing to take a

good share of the responsibility in the sharing experience, was able to fulfill the potential of the literary experience. The flaws in direction made it much more difficult for the listener than was desirable, but still it was possible.

Pronunciation problems, articulation problems, lack of unison in the choral reading, and a stuffy room all took their toll of audience interest and participation, but on the whole, the production was adequate in the opinion of the director.

III. PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

In directing Stephen Vincent Benét's Western Star for presentation, there were several problems which this writer anticipated and which did pose as major obstacles in the communication situation.

The three problems which were present from the first rehearsal to the last, and which were never satisfactorily resolved, were articulation problems, pronunciation problems, and difficulty in the choral reading efforts.

Articulation problems, primarily problems with word endings, were alleviated to some extent by a constant

awareness on the part of the individual readers and the constant reminder of the director.

Pronunciation problems, words such as just, get, many, again, and men, were lessened in much the same manner. In a number of rehearsals readers were interrupted whenever a word was unclear, unfinished or mispronounced.

The choral speaking portions of the script provided the most difficult of the problems encountered. This problem was never adequately solved as the readers were not speaking in unison on the night of performance. The inconsistency in the reading of these portions from rehearsal to rehearsal was deceiving, and the director therefore did not take time to adequately rehearse these sections.

The rhythm of the poetry was a problem for some of the readers in the early rehearsals as they tended to stress the metrical pattern of the verse rather than communicate the meaning of the selection. The problem was resolved by thinking in terms of the meaning of the words rather than emphasizing the rhythm.

The script covers so much time and ground in a short period that pauses were essential for the audience to grasp

the meaning of certain passages and to orient themselves to others. In attempting to read with a sense of urgency there was a tendency on the part of the readers to rush from one thought to another without sufficient pause, and without adequate transition. This problem was alleviated to some extent by calling the attention of the readers to places where pauses were necessary, but the readers were inconsistent, and the problem was never completely solved.

Early in rehearsals there was a minor problem in differentiation between "Rose," the child "Humility," and the woman "Humility," but this problem disappeared as the reader experimented and found means for sufficient differentiation. The principle means by which this differentiation was accomplished was by the use of a softer vocal quality for "Rose," a higher pitch level for the child "Humility," and the normal voice for the woman "Humility."

Interpretation, interreaction, movement, handling of manuscripts, and vocal projection were never serious problems in the production.

The most enduring problem, as previously stated, was the articulation and pronunciation. But, the readers

actually improved in this respect more than was really expected. It takes more than three weeks to change the habits of a lifetime.

every patient in the hospital is a project

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

The primary purpose of this thesis project was to afford the opportunity for this writer to experience the creative endeavor of selecting and adapting a work of literature for Readers Theatre, the critical analysis of the work, and the directing and presenting of it in public performance.

In fulfilling this purpose the writer selected Stephen Vincent Benet's Western Star, analyzed it in terms of its potential as effective material for Readers Theatre, adapted it for a one hour presentation, cast, rehearsed and presented it in public performance.

The secondary purpose of the thesis included (1) research on a significant literary figure, (2) review of writings concerning the author and the selection, and (3) an evaluation of the success or failure of the endeavor in terms of fulfilling the purposes of Readers Theatre.

In complying with the secondary purposes, the writer investigated the life and works of Stephen Vincent Benet, and reviewed the writings concerning the selection, Western Star. An evaluation of the performance was performed by the director and the thesis committee.

In fulfilling the third purpose of the thesis, the demonstration of the effectiveness of Readers Theatre presented with only the bare essentials, the writer followed the basic guidelines of oral interpretation in the production of Western Star and deviated from them only when it seemed necessary to enhance the material presented.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions which are drawn as a result of the thesis project presentation of Stephen Vincent Benet's Western Star are discussed in terms of the writer, the readers, and the audience.

As a result of this experience the writer has gained immeasurable confidence in her own ability to adapt and direct, has gained a knowledge of some of the pitfalls to avoid in casting and assigning parts, has gained a knowledge

of the practical elements of production, has acquired a more objective attitude toward personal strengths and weaknesses, has learned how to overcome some of these weaknesses, has learned the beauty of poetry presented orally, has acquired an even greater appreciation of the works of Stephen Vincent Benet, and has developed an even stronger belief in the worth of Readers Theatre as a stimulating, rewarding experience for all concerned.

The readers involved in the presentation of Western Star were exposed to three weeks of rather intensive work on the basic oral interpretation techniques, were given the opportunity to experience the oral presentation of a difficult piece of narrative poetry, and were stimulated to use their own imaginative resources in the interpretation and characterization of their individual parts in Western Star.

For the audience, this production of Western Star was a first exposure to either the works of Stephen Vincent Benet or to a long narrative poem presented as Readers Theatre. It is assumed by the writer that this experience increased their appreciation of both the potential of

complex narrative poetry, and the works of Stephen Benet as material for Readers Theatre. It is also the hope of the writer that this experience increased the over-all appreciation of the medium of Readers Theatre.

The writer would encourage future graduate students in the field of speech to do further investigation into the medium of Readers Theatre. This particular phase of oral interpretation is an exciting, fruitful and rewarding experience for all concerned; and is wide-open for further experimentation and creative efforts.

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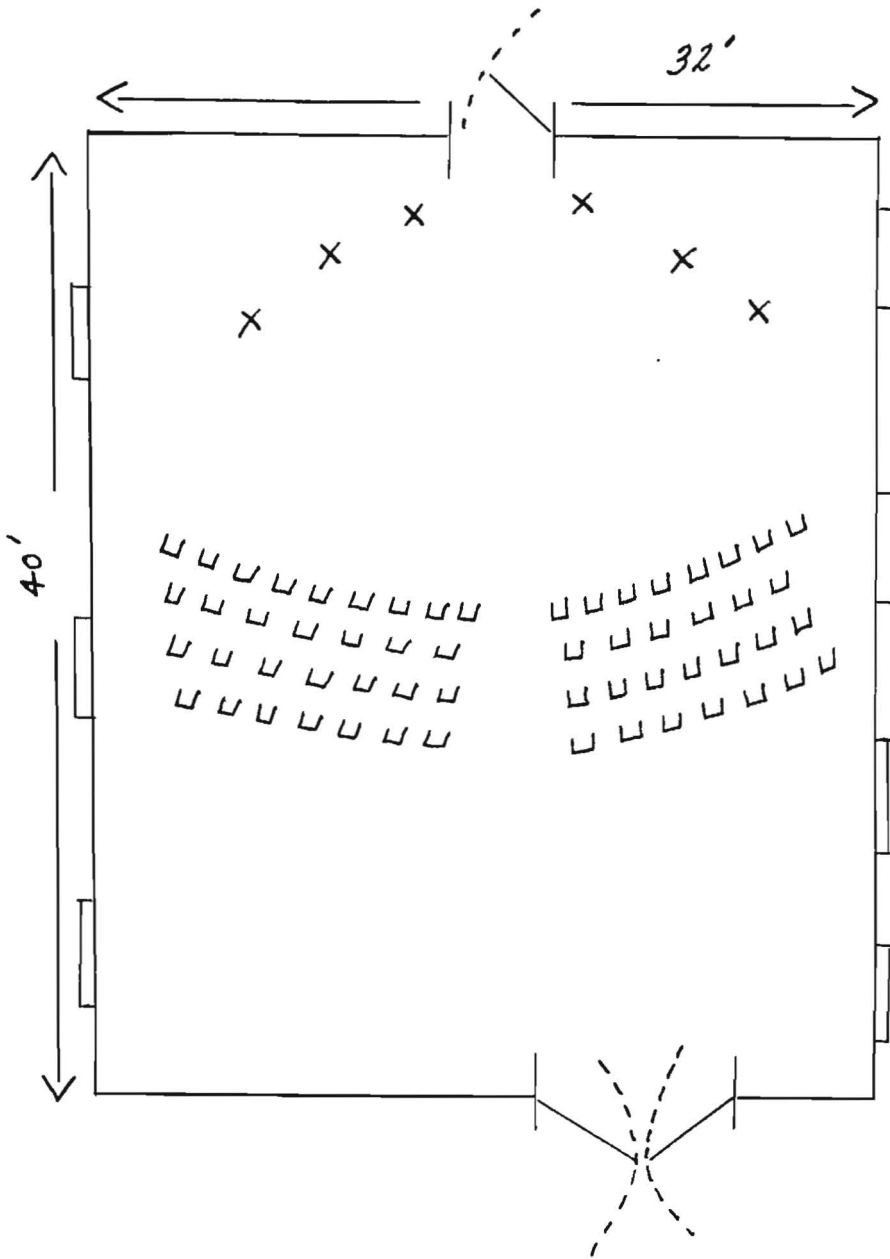
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James T. White and Company, 1926.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

FLOOR PLAN



Floor Plan: Western Star

Room 203,

Student Union,

Kansas State

Teachers College

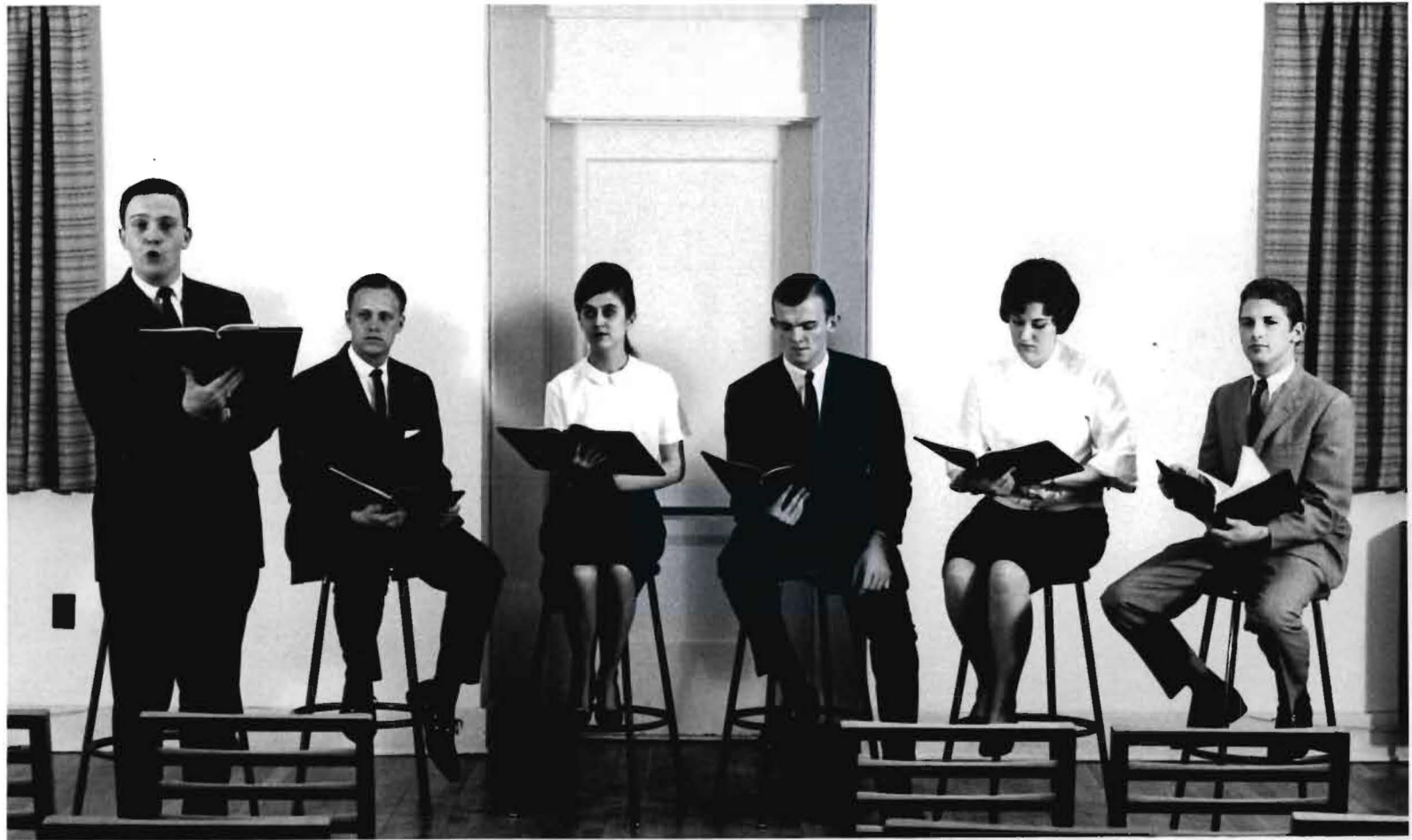
Scale: $1/8" = 1' 0"$



APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHS





APPENDIX C

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE**"WESTERN STAR"**

ADAPTED FOR READERS THEATRE BY

Vicki Sue White

Monday April 6	7:00 - 9:30	S.U. 203
Tuesday April 7	2:00 - 4:00	S.U. 207
Wednesday April 8	No Rehearsal	
Thursday April 9	1:30 - 3:30	Radio Studio
Friday April 10	12:30 - 1:30	Radio Studio
Saturday April 11	No Rehearsal	
Sunday April 12	2:00 - 4:00	S.U. 203
Monday April 13	7:00 - 9:30	Radio Studio
Tuesday April 14	2:00 - 4:00	S.U. 203
Wednesday April 15	7:00 - 9:30	S.U. 207
Thursday April 16	1:30 - 3:30	S.U. 203
Friday April 17	12:30 - 1:30	S.U. 203
Saturday April 18	No Rehearsal	
Sunday April 19	2:00 - 3:00	S.U. 203
Monday April 20	7:00 - 10:00	S.U. 203
Tuesday April 21	2:00 - 4:00	S.U. 203

Wednesday April 22	No Rehearsal	
Thursday April 23	1:30 - 3:30	S.U. 203
Friday April 24	12:30 - 1:30	S.U. 203
Saturday April 25	No Rehearsal	
Sunday April 26	No Rehearsal	
Monday April 27	Performance	S.U. 203

OF 2000

APPENDIX D

EVALUATION SHEET FOR THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

EVALUATION SHEET FOR THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

"WESTERN STAR"

ADAPTED FOR READERS THEATRE BY

Vicki Sue White

EVALUATE IN TERMS OF:

The ability of the listener to fulfill the potential of the literary experience as suggested by the readers.

Selection of Material

Adaptation of Material

Reader Sensitivity

Direction

Casting

Characterization

Staging

General Communicativeness

191 0704

191041

191041

First 3000
stage)

APPENDIX E

MANUSCRIPT

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET'S "WESTERN STAR"

AS ADAPTED FOR READERS THEATRE BY

Vicki Sue White

First Reader

(First Reader center stage)

Not for the great, not for the marvelous,
Not for the barren husbands of the gold;
Not for the arrowmakers of the soul,
Wasted with truth, the star-regarding wise;
Not even for the few
Who would not be the hunter nor the prey,
Who stood between the eater and the meat,
The wilderness saints, the guiltless, the absolved,
Born out of Time, the seekers of the balm
Where the green grass grows from the broken heart;
But for all these, the nameless, numberless
Seed of the field, the mortal wood and earth
Hewn for the clearing, trampled for the floor,
Uprooted and cast out upon the stone
From Jamestown to Benicia.
This is their song, this is their testament,
Carved to their likeness, speaking in their tongue
And branded with the iron of their star.

I say you shall remember them. I say
When night has fallen on your loneliness
And the deep wood beyond the ruined wall
Seems to step forward swiftly with the dusk,
You shall remember them. You shall not see
Water or wheat or axe-mark upon the tree
And not remember them.

You shall not win without remembering them,
For they won every shadow of the moon,
All the vast shadows, and you shall not lose
Without a dark remembrance of their loss
For they lost all and none remembered them.

Hear the wind
Blow through the buffalo-grass,
Blow over wild-grape and brier.
This was frontier, and this,
And this, your house, was frontier.
There were footprints upon the hill
And men lie buried under,
Tamers of earth and rivers.
They died at the end of labor,
Forgotten is the name.

Now, in full summer, by the Eastern shore,
 Between the seamount and the roads going West,
 I call two oceans to remember them, y going at
 I fill the hollow darkness with their names.

my children

(First Reader X to
 left stage stool)

Second Reader

Americans are always moving on.
 It's an old Spanish custom gone astray,
 A sort of English fever, I believe,
 Or just a mere desire to take French leave,
 I couldn't say. I couldn't really say.

Chorus

We don't know where we're going, but we're on our way!

Third Reader

I went downtown as I had done before.
 I took my girl to town
 To buy a calico gown,
 I traded in my pelts at Offut's store.
 And then, when I came back, the folks were gone,
 Warm ashes on the hearth, but nothing more.

Second Reader

If you ask me just what made them go,
 And what they thought they'd find by going there,
 Why, you can ask the horses, or the Ford,
 Hauling its gipsy children through the mud,
 With the wry klaxon croaking "Going on!"
 And the tame rooster on the running-board.
 But I don't know--I do not really know.
 I think it must be something in the blood.
 Perhaps it's only something in the air.

Chorus

Oh, paint your wagons with "Pike's Peak or Bust!"
 Pack up the fiddle, rosin up the bow,
 Vamoose, Skedaddle, mosey, hit the grit!
 (We pick our words, like nuggets, for the shine,
 And where they don't fit, we make them fit,
 Whittling a language out of birch and pine.)
 We're off for Californ-ia,
 We're off down the wild O-hi-o!
 And every girl on Natchez Bluff
 Will cry as we go by-o!
 So, when the gospel train pulls out

And God calls "All aboard!"

Will you be there with the Lord, brother,

Will you be there with the Lord?

Yes, I'll be there,

Oh, I'll be there,

I'll have crossed that rolling river in the morning!

First Reader

When you ask about Americans,

I cannot tell their motives or their plans

Or make a neat design of what they are.

I only see the fortune and the bane,

The fortune of the breakers of the earth,

The doom arisen with the western star.

Star in the West, fool's silver of the sky,

Desolate lamp above the mountain-pass

Where the trail falters and the oxen die,

Spiked planet on the prairie of wild grass,

Flower of frost, flower of rock and ice

Red flower over the blood sacrifice.

Out of your fever and your moving on,

Chorus

Americans, Americans, Americans

First Reader

Out of your unassuaged and restless hearts,

Out of your conquest, out of your despair,

I make my song.

Second Reader

There was a wind over England, and it blew.

Chorus

Have you heard the news of Virginia?

Second Reader

A west wind blowing, the wind of a western star,

To gather men's lives like pollen and cast them forth,

Blowing in hedge and highway and seaport town,

Whirling dead leaf and living, but always blowing,

A salt wind, a sea wind, a wind from the world's end,

From the coasts that have new wild names, from the huge

unknown.

Gather the dedicate of the Northwest Passage,

The seekers of the false loadstone, drowned in the dark,

Third Reader

It must be there. We know that it must be there.

We lost three ships out of four but it must be there.

Our admiral believed it unto the end.

Second Reader

There was a wind over England and it blew.

Fourth Reader

There is ice to the North and Spain has the golden mines,

But, in between, there are wonders. Have we not seen?

A fair, fresh land - yea, an earthly Paradise.

Third Reader

We touched at the shores. We gathered up sassafras.

And the savages came smiling with little gifts,

A gentle people and comely.

We saw the pearls,

There were baskets full of the pearls in every hut.

Fourth Reader

We saw the sand of the rivers bright with gold.

Yet, being few, we departed. But next year-

For we questioned their king, a sober and stately prince,

And he swears that beyond the mountains-

Second Reader

Gather them up

Gather them up, the sailors and adventurers

Gather the credulous

Who looked for nutmeg trees on the Kennebec

Bold-hearted children of the youth of England

And saw the Triton swimming in Casco Bay.

Chorus

Have you heard the news from Virginia, have you heard?

Third Reader

I have a small adventure with the Levant,

And that should profit-but this hath a nobler sound,

Nobler and worthier and more excellent.

Chorus

Have you heard the news?

Second Reader

Gather the gamblers, the hungry lords,

The splendid, casual peacocks of the court,

Greedy as cuckoos, bold as kingfishers,

The men with the little beards and the reckless eyes

Who shine and go to the Tower and shine again,

Or die on the headsman's block with their hands stretched out
And a last fine phrase in the mouth.

Chorus

Have you heard the news from Virginia? Have you heard?

Fifth Reader

The Earl hath a hand in the venture - God bring him shame!

Second Reader

Gather them up, the bright and drowning stars,
And with them gather, too,

Chorus

The clay, the iron, and the knotted rope,
The disinherited, the dispossessed,
The hinds of the midland, eaten by the squire's sheep,
The outcast yeomen, driven to tramp the roads,
The sturdy beggars, roving from town to town,
Workless, hopeless, harried by law and State,
The men who lived on nettles in Merry England,
The men of the blackened years:
When dog's meat was a dainty in Lincolnshire,

Chorus

Have you heard the news from Virginia?

Fifth Reader

The cast off soldiers, bitter as their own scars,
The younger sons without office or hope of land,

Chorus

Have you heard the news from Virginia? Have you heard?

Sixth Reader

Wat swears he'll go, for the gold lies heaped on the ground.

First Reader

Oh, spread the news,
The news of golden Virginia across the sea,
And let it sink into the hearts of the strange, plain men
Already at odds with Government and Church,
The men who read their Bibles late in the night,
Dissenter and nonconformist and Puritan,
Let it go to Scrooby and stop at the pesthouse there,
Let it go to the little meeting at Austerfield.

Sixth Reader

We must worship God as we choose!

Fifth Reader

We must worship God,
 Though King and Law and Bishop stand in the way.

Chorus

Have you heard the news of Virginia?
 Have you heard the news, the news of Virginia!

First Reader

Matthew Lanyard, journeyman, carpenter
 In the ward of Aldgate, stared at the newborn child
 Or what he could see of it for the swaddling clothes.
 'Twas a maid they said. He was glad for a little maid
 But, most of all, for his Rose, with her labor done. All
 Whity and peaked she looked, and her cheeks were thin,
 Though she'd be better of it. 'Twas woman's work
 But it frightened a man when it happened, na' the less.
 There was nought for a man to do and they made you know it,
 Though they were good, kind gossips, the neighbor women,
 Even lusty Mother Billington.

Mother Billington

Ducky, adear, adear.
 Oh the poor soul, how she shudders! Come, bear down, soul!

'Twill be worse ere it is better. Bear down, bear down!
 I'll warrant your none so choice of your Matthew now
 As you were when this imp was gotten - but tis all one -
 They bear us down - tch, and we bear for them,
 'Tis the way of the world in pear-time. Come shake the tree!

How pretty she cried poor lamb!

An I had my way,

'Twould be turn about with the bearing - eh, gossips, eh?

My Jack would screech like a goose, I'll warrant you,

With something in his belly besides his ale!

But, there it is - all honey they are, and cream -

Now there's a brave push!

First Reader

He hadn't heard all of her skimble-skamble stuff

But he had heard Rose's cries for the last hour

And the sweat still stood on his forehead.

Now, with the queer

Unaccountable way that women had,

They were making light of it all and cockering Rose,

Telling her that the maid was a bouncing bet

And next time she'd have a boy.

Matthew stood, big boned,
 With his wheatsheaf hair on end and his blue eyes dazed,
 Gawky with youth, a father at nineteen.
 He did not know that the gawkiness was touching
 But the women did - except for the girl in the bed
 Who had not known that her body could hold such pain.
 But it was fading now, and she was glad.
 She looked at him with eyes of love and trust.
 Was he not stronger and older and her husband?
 She wasn't little Rose Allen any more
 Who wept when the winter weather chapped her hands
 And the night wind blew in the chimney and Sister pinched.
 She was goodwife Lanyard and she had borne a child,
 Her child and Matthew's.

Rose

Nay, but the child is God's
 And must be taught so. It cannot be otherwise.
 For we are one in the new faith,
 The pure, strong faith, and we must show it before the world.
 The Lord has answered me,
 Yea, even in Mother Billington He has answered,

Mother Billington is gross but kind,

Perhaps I can reason with her . . . would ye no

When I feel better, and teach her more cleanly speech,

Yea, even bring her humbly into the sheepfold

Where Pastor Henderson preaches such goodly things.

First Reader

But Rose laughed a little, thinking of that.

Mother Billington was no sheep but a tough old ewe,

She could see her butting at good Pastor Henderson.

Mother Billington

Cocksbody! A puritan, I? Oh, go fish, go fish!

Nay, give me Easter at Paul's with all London there

And the great, proud organ bawling out like a boy

And a bishop to preach the sermon roundly forth.

Why, soul, 'tis as fine a sight as a Lord Mayor's Show!

As I'm a fertile woman, I'll hold by Church and State.

You'll get no little hymn-singers out of me!

Rose

Such thoughts are wicked, but I'm not good at

reasoning -

Only at loving -

Matthew, Why don't you take the baby!

Mother Billington man, the the grass

Tis only a man, my bird, and what would ye have?

My Jack was so mazed with his first, he was clean struck dumb.

Hoy, Master Lanyard, and weaver

D'ye know there's a new little Puritan in the world?

Matthew

Why, Rose -

Tis a likely maid - and it hath thy eyes, not mine -

Let us praise God

For thy safe deliverance.

Mother Billington

Adear,

There'll be less praising of God in a year or twain

When there's more noses to wipe.

Matthew bye

What shall we name the maid?

Rose

Humility

Second Reader

Meanwhile, in England, time and the world wagged on,

Ticking the intricate tune of the million lives,

The famous, the mean, the simple, the great, the cursed,
 The few that we know, the many we do not know,
 Whirring and turning, the wheels of the clock of time,
 That turns men's lives and spins them and weaves them out,
 Not to their expectations but to its will.

Chorus

Tick-tock,
 Tick-tock,
 Cross the seas or stay,
 Men will live and women bear
 And time will pass away.
 Tick-tock,
 Tick-tock,
 Plant the tree or die,
 We will hear the tale of it,
 Hear it bye and bye.
 Plant it if you can, then,
 Plant it with a will,
 Every root and every shoot
 Must be England's still
 Tick-tock.

First Reader

It has been a good year for England, a thriving year. . .

Second Reader

Yes, it's been a good year for most,

Though not for Matthew Lanyard, carpenter

In the Aldgate Ward. He stares at a dead girl's face.

She is white and small in the bed where they lay together

And his dead son lies in her arms.

Chorus

Tick-tock,

Tick-tock,

Carpenter and tailor,

Tick-tock,

Tick-tock,

Venturer and sailor,

Listen to the hours strike,

Listen to Bow Bells,

There are riches overseas,

Land and riches oversea,

Land and riches oversea,

And a witch is oversea

(Fifth Reader X to center stage)

Weaving Subtle spells.

Tick-tock, the clever

Tick-tock, he

Many men have died, fires at hand

Many men will die again, live

Try again, die again, log-hut

Yet the bold will vie again

For the witch's promises,

Promises, promises,

Gold and silver promises

Wrapped in adder's hide.

Tick-tock. (Fifth Reader X to stool)

First Reader

1609 - and Champlain is at Quebec,

The iron tiger who is to found New France,

He starves in a crude log hut with seven companions,

The rest died in the winter and the fierce cold.

Second Reader

1609 - and Hendrick Hudson sails

In his blunt Half Moon, for Dutch masters, to seek once more

The ever-fatal loadstone, the Northwest Passage,

And to find, instead, Hudson's River and Hudson's Bay.

First Reader

They are coming now, like bees to the clover-field,
 They are coming to starve, to freeze, not make
 To heap black curses on sit-by-the fires at home,
 To die without hope, to live;
 In the names of wide, strange waters and log-hut towns.

Second Reader

They are coming now and you will not stop them coming
 With the frozen ice or the roaring of the great waters,
 The blind white pestilence, walking abroad at noon,
 The arrow at midnight or the lightning-stroke.
 They are coming now, all death will not stop them coming.

Chorus

Subscribe-subscribe - 'tis a fortune you will get back!
 Subscribe - be rich in Virginia - put down your name.
 Subscribe, subscribe.

Second Reader

It comes to the ears of a carpenter, Matthew Lanyard,
 But he hardly hears. Such things are for gentlefolk
 Or idle runagates like the Billingtons,
 But he is under the wrath and afflictions of God.

Why else did Rose die,
 How else could she have died?
 And his child and Rose's child. He must make her safe.
 He cannot leave her to grow like the Billington brats,
 Screaming in gutters, dancing above hell fire.

Matthew

There is Katharine, Rose's sister,
 She is kind. She is not like Rose,
 Not like Rose, but her sister, and with the faith.

Must I lie with another woman, while my wife lies
 In the grave not one year dead, not one year cold,
 Must I hear another woman's breathing at night?

But it's for Rose,
 And Katharine's an older sister, after all,
 A good and fearful woman, modest and pure.
 Sharp-tongued, at times, and with something behind her eyes
 Smoky and self-consuming, a stifled flame.
 Yet her faith is trusty. She would burn
 For that faith, and stare at the flames with love.

- O window, opening into Jerusalem.

Receive the innocent, receive my Rose and her

And bring me to her when my toil is done,

For you are all the comfort that I have

You and the quiet of the little maid,

And yet I must devise to live awhile,

I, a sinful man.

For it is a great charge to be elect

And a great duty, and a piercing thing -

Second Reader

Mother Billington watched Matthew down the street

With the child's small hand in his.

Mother Billington

Adear, hush -

Who ever dreamt there'd be such a change in the man?

And a proper man 'tis too, and a rising workman,

Poor soul, poor soul - and now there's the tall puss-sister

And I smell another wedding in Aldgate Ward

But there'll be no jollity this time, nay, come up!

No stealing of bride's garters with Miss Precise

But sour beer and long prayers and a cold bed,

Well, it may serve,

And tis time, in truth, the little maid had a mother

But I'd as lief bed a hornet were I a man.

Second Reader

She sighed and turned to her own untidy brood.

Young Jacky had been married a fortnight now

And the girl was the breeding sort, if she knew the signs,

So soon enough there's be grandchildren to nurse.

Third Reader

We are humble men,

We English, living in peace in red-tiled Leyden,

In the quiet city that Alva could not take,

Printers, stocking-weavers and fustian-makers,

We are humble men.

First Reader

We are quiet men.

Our presence does not jangle the life of the city.

They stared a little, at first, but they have ceased staring.

We are used to its ways now, we try to be good neighbors,

We are quiet men.

Fifth Reader

All that we ask is quiet and God's guidance.

For that we left our England, wrenching our roots up,

The thick taproots, the slow roots of hind and yeoman,

For that we left

Seeking our own way.

Sixth Reader

And the days come and go and the bells of Bell Alley

Ring, the exile's bells of the foreign city.

But our day is God's not one city's or another's,

Our strength is in God and God is our great warden,

He will not fail us.

Fourth Reader

And yet, with each day, we know ourselves exiled

And our children are young but grow. Will they grow God's

Children?

Already the foreign tongue is so easy for them,

And we live in the country but we are not of the country,

We are strangers, still.

Fifth Reader

It is easy to melt and mix, to sink down, grow sleepy,

To be recalled "Yes, my grandmother was English.
 They came for their faith, I think - I have heard her stories.
 She was old and I do not quite remember."
 It is easy to fall from God.

First Reader

Each day we heave a stone, each day more difficult,
 Each day we live in peace but a peace that trembles,
 Each Sabbath we meet in Zion, and yet our Zion
 Is a green field granted by others, may be removed
 And is not steady.

Fourth Reader

We are quiet men,
 But God has tried us and stricken us and recovered us.
 He has shown us grace and terror and things inescapable
 And the long years are forging us iron heartstrings.
 We shall answer His will like iron when He proclaims it.
 We are waiting men.

First Reader

And we look back, and see how the thing was done
 And, looking back, think, "So, of course, it must be."

And are wrong by a million miles, and never see

The daily living and dying, under the sun.

For they did not know what would happen. No one knew.
 No one knew, though the men in England planned,
 Planned with cunning of brain and strength of hand,
 And their plans were deer-tracks, fading out in the dew.

They planned for gold and iron, for silk and wood,
 For towns and settled farming and steady things,
 And an Indian pipe puffed out its blue smoke rings,
 And, where they had made their plans, the tobacco stood.

And those who came were resolved to be Englishmen,
 Gone to the world's end, but English every one,
 And they are the white corn-kernels, parched in the sun,
 And they knew it not, but they'd not be English again.

For the country is where the life is, not elsewhere.
 The country is where the heart and the blood are given.
 They could swear to be English by every oath under heaven.
 It did not alter the country by a hair.

Second Reader

The ships

Go back and forth, with Middlesex, Surrey, Devon,
 A dozen English counties crowding aboard
 For the long voyage - and the constant, relentless death,
 Ever at heel - You can count the roll as you like
 But your chance of living was something like one in eight
 Through those first fifteen-odd years of the colony
 And something like seven thousand lives were paid,
 Paid, and line drawn under, and canceled out,
 That eleven hundred should live when those years were done.
 On the other hand, if you lived through your first year,
 You were likely to go on living and get your land.

Third Reader

Land! And my own!

Fourth Reader

And black earth, fertile as God!

Second Reader

And they came.

And they all came, and, as chance took them, they lived or
 died,

Fourth Reader

O God, the refuge of our fears, (Fourth Reader X to center stage)

Our buckler and our stay, (to left)

Within whose sight the rolling years

Are but a single day,

Behold us now, like Israel's band, (to right)

Cast forth upon the wave,

And may thy strong and awful hand

Be still outstretched to save!

(Fourth Reader X to stool)

First Reader

It was over now, the living in the Dutch towns,

The hard fare, the great labor, the quiet years,

The uneasy security, the exiled days,

They had seen themselves grow older and some grow broken,

And still with no sure future.

They had seen their children stunted by poverty

Beginning to change, to forget, as children will,

Boy (Fourth Reader)

Dirk Jans thinks it little sin to play at ball

Girl (Sixth Reader)

Annette Pieters wears ruffles of Mechlin lace - (to stool)

Girl (Fifth Reader)

Aye, father, I know. Aye, mother, I am obedient. But I
thought no harm of talking to Captain Kieft -

Boy (Fourth Reader)

The boys all say "Donder and Blitzen!" 'Tis just a saying.

Girl (Fifth Reader)

Mother, if Hendrick asks me, what may I say?

Second Reader

There never were children who did not say some such words -
But these were folk who believed in one thing so passionately
They would die ere they saw it broken.

Fifth Reader

With Gideon's sword and David's harp,
We march across the main
And though the blast blow keen and sharp
Our God shall yet sustain,
To work His burning judgments still,
His mercies to adore
And build the Zion of His will
Where none hath stood before.

(Fifth Reader X to stool)

Second Reader

With the humble, stupendous arrogance of men
 Who are quite sure God is with them,
 For God and land, they were going across the seas.

Humility

Are we going, father?

Matthew

Yes, Humility

I had thought, that you might stay
 With your mother's people - we could send later -

Humility

But you could not have thought so, father.

Not truly.

Matthew

No, not truly. No.

Humility

I can do such a lot of things,
 And I'm fourteen and the oldest.

Matthew

It is not that.

Humility

Oh, father, I know, but, is it a noble ship?

Where will we sleep and how will we say our prayers?

Second Reader

Katharine Lanyard came in with the boy, Elias.

The youngest, with his father's looks but thinner, slighter,

With dark devoted eyes.

Katharine looked her question.

Matthew

Aye. We will go.

Second Reader

They were going.

They knelt on the floor and prayed.

And Matthew saw Zion, built foursquare.

And down the street at the Billingtons

Mother Billington

Aye, souls,

When you see me next 'twill be with plumes on my head

And son Jacky rich as a prince.

The Aldgate Ward will be hard to leave,
 But I's dearly love to gaze at an Indian.
 Aye, they scrape you to death with clam shells, they do say.
 But, an they try it with me, they'll find me an armful.

First Reader

It was not till the sixteenth of September
 That the Mayflower sailed at last, after two false starts.
 Twice they's set out, and twice the Speedwell leaked.
 They had to give her up
 And with her some score or so of would-be Pilgrims
 Who, thinking it over decided,

Man (Third Reader)

Perhaps next time, God be with you, my friends,
 But we think we'll go back to London.

First Reader

And, when they got there,
 Felt, doubtless, that queer blend of relief and shame
 Which comes to those who make sensible decisions.

Man (Fourth Reader)

I'd risk myself - but there's my wife and the boy.

Man (Third Reader)

I'm a valuable man. I can do as much here.

First Reader

And yet one wonders,

What they thought, later.

Second Reader

And, for those aboard,

We think of them all of one stamp, which they were not.

There were a hundred and one of them all told,

But only thirty-five from the Leyden Church.

The rest were drawn from London and Southampton

And drawn sometimes, as needs must, from the sort of folk

Willing to stake their lives and seven years

Against a possible future and free land.

They did their best at the choosing, no doubt of that.

First Reader

But think of them through the sixty-five long days

Of tempest and fair weather, of calm and storm,

They were not yet Pilgrim Fathers in steeple-hats,

Each with an iron jaw and a musketoon,

They were not Pilgrim Mothers, sure of their fame.
 They were men and women and children, cramped in a ship,
 Bound for an unknown land and wondering.
 The godly prayed, the ungodly spat overside,
 The sailors jeered now and then at the pious speeches,
 The Billington boys behaved like limbs of Satan,
 And the three pregnant women walked the decks
 Or lay in their cabins, wondering at night
 What hour their pains would strike and what would be born.
 In fact, there were human beings aboard the Mayflower,
 Not merely ancestors.

Second Reader

At last, on the nineteenth of November,
 On a clear, crisp morning, at daybreak,
 With a slice of old moon still bright in the dawn-sky,
 They saw the long dim outline of Cape Cod.
 And the next day, they looked at the land, and it was good,
 A fair land, wooded to the brink of the seas,
 Washed with blue, biting air and brave in the sun,
 A land for God's plantation.

And suddenly

They were sick of the ship and the ship's smells and the sea.

They had come so far. They were within sight of land,

Not where they had planned - but land - and the look of it!

Earth after long waters, solid peace in the hand.

They were ready for harbor, now.

First Reader

And the sixty-seventh

Day out of England, they let go anchor at last,

In Provincetown Harbor, just inside Long Point,

And they sent a party ashore.

The staid husbands, the sober fathers of families,

Who had been woolcarders and printers, hosiers and tailors,

With sword and musket and corselet, warily treading,

The new wild shore, where there might be anything.

And, sure enough, they were hardly well on their way

When they saw five red men - or was it six?

They were not quite sure - but there were men and a dog -

They all ran away the moment they were seen,

Swift naked figures, their dog pelting after them,

And the English gave pursuit but could not catch up,

But they had seen Indians.

And a little later
They came to a flowering spring,

Man (Third Reader)

And we sat us down
And drank our first New England water
With as much delight as ever we drank drink.
Wonderful, to drink water in a new land!
To taste the bright, nipping air!

First Reader

They were bolder now. They went on. They would not be stayed.
They found where a house had been, found a ship's kettle,
Found a heap of sand, smoothed over by Somebody,
And dug in the sand, of course.
And there they found
A little old basket full of Indian corn,
Real grains of corn, you could hold them in your hands.
And that night it rained. But they camped by a great fire.
They were safe to be sure. They had set up a palisade.
They had their muskets.
When they got back to the ship and their wives greeted them,
Heard about all the things that they had to tell

And were shown the corn and the basket,
They had the pride of all hunters, from Nimrod on.

Second Reader

Humility Lanyard saw them, coming home,
The small black, distant figures, walking the beach,
And the women dropped their washing and counted quickly,
Counted with the quick dread.

Third Reader
But there were sixteen. It was well. God had spared them all.
They might all die, next day.

Woman (Fifth Reader)

The first of all the endless waitings and countings,
The long, sick waiting, the count of the frontiers,
When your eyes try so hard to see what is far and small
And you tell the children,
Yes - it's all right - it's Father.

Sixth Reader
But you do not look at the children, but at the far
Specks in the boat, by the forest's edge, on the hill,
Till at last you know by the look of the men's shoulders,
Even far away, whether it is good news or bad,
And you can make your face as it should be when they come,
For we must not show the fear. It is bad for them to
Have their women show fear.

Child (Fourth Reader)

I can see Father: Has he killed Indians?

Frankie Billington says his father will kill them all.

Humility

Father looks bigger,

He looks different, there with his musket. I don't know why.

First Reader

They might all die, every one.

Die and the Mayflower rot at her anchorage

And the sea-birds walk on her decks, and the crabs scuttle

And still, for many months, it would not be known,

That was what they faced. That was what they knew might be.

But,

Third Reader

There is no time to grieve now, there is no time.

There is only time for the labor in the cold,

As we build the city of Zion, in the cold.

As we cast the lots for the houses, plan the streets

On the hill's slope, where the Indian cornfield grew,

For there, God be thanked, is cleared ground.

Fifth Reader

And, a furlong away, of it

There is still the forest, there is the endless forest,

And we build, and as we build

We stand between forest and sea as between two paws.

Second Reader

They dug the grave for the child on the freezing hill,

The strong child, Martin, the likely, the one to live,

Sure to live. The clods rang under the spade.

He had lived through the worst and died within two days,

Died with the spring so near, died three years old.

And Matthew Lanyard saw that the grave was deep,

Deep and well-cut, and thought with weary pain,

Matthew

I have dug a grave for my son by the wall of Zion

And he sleeps there till the day of the meeting of friends.

Sleeps safe, sleeps sound, will cry no more with the cold.

I do not rebel, My God, though I loved the child.

Yet, O God, look down on our graves, for they are new.

Second Reader

And the boy Elias

Moaned in his sleep, for he was afraid to die

And so dreamt much of it.

Humility pass by and let the years pass

Hush, 'Lias - you'll wake the others, go back to sleep.

Elias reader

I was praying,

And the worms destroyed my body but not my soul.

You should not have waked me.

can't be so, for it is the first day

Humility

follows the ways and the ways of the sea

Hush, Elias,

the sea's fate.

We are all sad, now, but we will pray in the morning

And now you must sleep.

the sea's fate

Elias

The small eyes of the sea

The worms will destroy you.

the green tobacco

Second Reader

Write it on iron, the first,

Write it on iron and New England rock,

The story of those four months when they built the town,

For they built it upon the bones of fourteen women

Who had come for life, not death.

They built it upon the bones of the friends they knew.

First Reader

And the years pass by and are gone, the years pass by
And we may not tell of them all.

First Reader

If this song is

Crooked as rivers, rough as the mountain-range

And many-tongued and a wanderer to the end,

It must be so, for it follows the giant land,

It follows the ways and the roads and the wanderings,

Of one man's fate.

And the years pass, the priceless years,

With the small proud tale, the tale of harvest and drouth,

The small events that are mighty, the corn, the fish,

The green tobacco growing over Virginia,

The Indian stayed, the new folk coming across,

To plant here and there, to fail, to starve as the first,

Yet ever there are more.

Second Reader

Matthew Lanyard strode through the summer dusk,
 Knowing his God was with him and must just
 Though it had been a grim and heart-searching day,
 There was nothing strange to him now in land or skies.
 This was Zion. The first rude cabins were half forgot.
 There was meeting house and blockhouse and the long street.
 They had planted the corn for ten years and it was good corn.
 They had lasted out many things.

Matthew

(Matthew X to right stage)

And now they come, after long last,
 The new men, the new ships, and it is well.
 A thousand, they say a thousand in the ships,
 And we were but a hundred when we came
 And they'll bring goods and cattle - settle near -
 And I wish them well, good men, and yet a thousand!

'Tis hard to think of, for it seemed, at times,
 As there were not a thousand living men
 Left in the world, but only wolves and heathen,

And we, we banded few, who starved and bore,
 And yet have done the thing and there it stands,

A thousand. They must come. Of course they must.
They are our brothers.

Cometh John Endicott, a worthy man
But harsher than our folk, through full of God.
Come now these others, aye, and after them
How many and how many through the years?
A troop, a multitude, a swarming host,
And what will they be building?

O sons, remember we were small and few
And yet God carried us across the seas
And we were loving, and we built the town
And clenched each nail that's in it with our hearts.

Second Reader

Now he passed by the gallows-foot and the thing dangling
And something dark, beneath it, gave eldritch tongue.

Mother Billington

Good Master Lanyard, when will ye take him down?

Second Reader

He knew the voice, he could not forget the voice,
And his mind went back more years than he cared to count

To a room and the smell of birth and a newborn child
Held in the hands that now were old woman's claws.

Mother Billington

Good Master Lanyard,

D'ye know there's a new little Puritan in the world?

Matthew (Matthew turn slightly left stage)

Mother Billington, go back to your house.

Mother Billington

Aye, I had hearth and house

I had a son and ye've strung him up on a rope

And 'a dangles there like a mawkin-poor pretty Jack,

With his neck as long as a goose's neck, poor lad!

And yet, I'll keep him company, Master Lanyard.

Aye,

Tis Jack's old mother must keep him company.

You'll not change that with your praying, so pray away!

Matthew

Woman, your son was a murderer.

The blood was proved upon him in open court.

Mother Billington

Aye, sirs,

They tell us we'll all be rich and free in the land.

But they've hanged my Jacky.

Matthew

Mother Billington, go home to your house.

We will pray for you. We did not do this in haste.

We have no hardness against you in our hearts.

Mother Billington

Aye, but the crows will pyke at his eyes.

They'll be fine, fat bits for the crows, so I must bide.

Master Lanyard, when will ye cut him down?

Matthew

Tomorrow, woman.

Mother Billington

D'ye hear that, Jacky? Tomorrow you'll be cut down.

You'll be home tomorrow, lad, aye, be patient now.

For your old mother is waiting. She'll scare the crows.

She'll keep the crows from your face, poor Jacky boy,

And a pretty face it was

Adear, adear,

But that was in Merry England, long ago,

And merry England's gone, all spent and gone.

Matthew

And yet, I know we came in love.

(Matthew X to stool)

Second Reader

Humility sat and sewed by her husband's side.

Henry Shenton, came in the Paragon,

The butcher's lad with the white, impassioned face,

Older now but still with the mark on him

That shows the seeker, the man who is not content.

(Henry X to left stage)

Henry

Wife, when they come - the new colony -

And it seems they must -

Would it grieve you to leave this house?

Humility

Aye, husband,

Aye, it would grieve me somewhat, for the babes are young.

But if we must go, we must go.

Henry

They are good men, here,
 And yet it is laid upon me to seek new ways.
 I have kept my peace since we two were wed, Humility,
 And yet I am not content on some points of grace.
 Nor may the things in my heart be always hid.
 Have we fled England to live here under a rule,
 And a dry rule, too, a dead and formal staff?
 Nay, I'd speak of it to no other, but thou knowest,
 The spirit works upon me and I must go.

Humility

We will go, Now, am I not dutiful?

Henry

Did I ever tell thee?

(Henry X to stool)

Humility

The butcher's boy! Go tell!

Henry

But I have told it so often, wife.

Humility

Nay, tell.

Henry

Well, there was a butcher's boy, it seems,
And a profane swearer.

Humility

Was he?

Henry

Aye, I could tell
But I will not.

Humility

Oh, the horrible, cursing oaths!
Dost thou really know them?

... being small and so

Henry

Aye, and a dozen more
For then was I unregenerate and a child.

Humility

I can see thee unregenerate, yet go on.

Henry ... day ...

Well, this butcher's boy would bully the smaller lads,
For he had a great, strong fist like a sheep's quarter,
And there was one -

Humility

Aye, thou!

Henry

Who was unregenerate,

And yet had some small stirrings within his heart

For he loved his book, aye, even the books of stage-plays,

Humility

I can see thee, reading!

Henry

And it was this butcher's boy's

Particular concern to harry this lad,

Who being small and pale and a coward, fled.

Humility

Thou wert no coward!

Henry

Peace, who telleth the tale?

And, one day, caught him

In an alley way,

With a book in hand and a string of sausages

In t'other he must deliver or be well whipped.

So, seeing his foe, the small pale lad would have run.

Humility

Thou wouldst not.

Henry

Aye, but there was but the one way out

And the fellow struck the sausages to the ground,

Though, with much Christian goodwill, the lad prayed him nay.

But, when the fellow took the book from his hand

And tore its leaves, though it was a silly book

- The Tale of Robin Hood and yet I loved it -

The small lad burst into such tears of wrath

That he fell like David upon that butcher's boy

Yes, as David upon Goliath, thought with no stone -

And did so notably thump and pummel him

That the big boy went home squalling with two black eyes

And after that, molested the lads no more.

Humility

And what did the small pale lad - ?

Henry

Oh, he was whipped in here

For spoiling the sausages.

That was what was to happen

Humility

Like the boat and the bay

Cruel!

Henry

Nay, most just.

Yet, after that, he was not as he was before,

For he did not fear — and why dost thou like the story?

That was what was to happen in the fall.

Humility

Like the place that was

I like it. Thou wilt always fight butcher's boys.

Like the bright weather

Henry

I fear so wife.

That all began to

Humility

That all from the

And I love thee for it. So,

Since you wish, then we will go.

I would like content and we will not have content,

But it is best that we go, being what you are.

Butcher's boys would never how to the sausage.

Second Reader

She took his hand in hers and stared at the fire.
 She saw some sort of future in the fire
 But not what was to happen, for she could not.
 Salem and Boston and the harried life,
 The speaking out - the trials - the warning words -
 The face of Katharine Lanyard, bitter and grim,
 Drawing aside as Henry passed to the jail,
 The second trial, the second driving forth,
 The long and terrible journey through the winter woods
 And the safety in Rhode Island, in the fair,
 New-planted place that Roger Williams loved
 With its bright weather and its sweet-tongued rain,
 Good for all roses and all exiles always.
 The new place, where a man might speak his mind.
 But all began from the first again for a woman,
 Yes, all from the beginning, the naked ground.
 But if she had seen, she'd not have turned aside
 For she was Humility and her mother bore her.
 And he the seeker, sitting by her side,
 The butcher's son who would never bow to the strong,

The man with the fearful strength of the gentle in him,
 The man who would bear all whips and bonds for the truth,
 Dreamt of a world where none would be whipped or bound
 But all men live like brothers, though not yet.

First Reader

(First Reader X left stage)

End the song, end the song,
 For now the flood goes west, the rushing tide,
 The rushing flood of men,
 Hundred on hundred, crowding the narrow ships.
 Massachusetts begins, and Providence Plantations,
 Connecticut begins, Virginia spreads out.
 There are Swedes by the Delaware, Scotchmen after Dunbar,
 They whip the first Quaker bloodily through the street.
 Exile, rebel, men against fortune, all
 Who are driven forth, who seek new life and new hope
 As the wheel of England turns, they are coming now
 To the exile's country, the land beyond the star.
 Remember that till you die. Remember that.
 Remember the name of the outcast and the stranger.
 Remember that when you say

Fifth Reader

I will have none of this exile and this stranger
 For his face is not like my face and his speech is strange.

First Reader

You have denied America with that word
 Though your fathers were the first to settle the land.
 There was a wind over England and it blew.
 There was a wind through the nations, and it blew.
 Strong, resistless, the wind of the western star.
 The wind from the coasts of hope, from the barely-known,
 And, under its blowing, Plymouth and Jamestown sink
 To the small, old towns, the towns of the oldest graves,
 Notable, remembered, but not the same.
 This was where we planted, aye, but the corn has grown,
 And a trembling hand writes down,
 The old stock

Man (Fourth Reader)

This year thirty persons still living of the old stock.
 The names ring fainter, the names of the first, the bold.
 They looked to the west and searched with their eyes,

Man (Third Reader)

This year twelve persons still living of the old stock.

They have gotten their children, They sleep in Burial Hill.
 They sleep by the Jamestown Church. They sleep well and long.
 Though their seed be increased, they know their seed no more.

Chorus

Of the old stock . . . the old stock . . .

Man (Fourth Reader)

This last, this seventieth year,
 Two persons living that came in the first ships

Chorus

Of the old stock . . . the old stock . . .

Man (Third Reader)

There are two . . . there are none at last . . .

Chorus

Of the old stock . . . the old stock . . .

First Reader

(First Reader x to center
stage)

And the west wind blew in the faces of America's sons
 And they looked to the West and searched it with their eyes,
 And there was the endless forest and the sharp star.

There was a wind over England and it blew.

There was a wind through the nation and it blew.

Strong, resistless, the wind of the western star.