

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: To Inherit the Wind:  
Margo Jones as Director

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Margo Jones was an important force in the American theatre. Noted as theatrical producer, nurturer of new playwrights, initiator of professional arena staging, and founder of the regional theatre movement, Jones directed over a hundred plays in Houston, Dallas, and on Broadway. Yet no study has examined her directing methods and their implications.

Margo Jones' directorial relationship to the script, actors, designers, stage, and critics was examined and evaluated using correspondence, promptbooks, interviews, reviews, and published works.

Directing provided Margo Jones with the link to accomplish two essential goals she set for herself: to decentralize the American theatre and to promote new plays and playwrights.

The playwright was central in Margo Jones' theatre. She directed only "originals" and "classics," espousing the playwright's cause by directing over fifty new scripts during her eight-year tenure in Dallas. For Jones, the

actor was the primary communicator of the playwright's text and the focus of the staged play. Jones preferred simple scenic design, using light and sound to stimulate the audience's imagination and relying on the actors and text to do the rest. For Jones, the production was a collaboration between director and actors, exploring characters creatively and developing blocking organically from the words and ideas the playwright provided.

Margo Jones' reputation as director was forged with her innovative development of a language and method for directing in-the-round. Her work on Broadway's proscenium stages, however, was beset by difficulties with playwrights, actors, and critics.

Jones decried the commercial theatre and its reliance on critics and long runs for success. The Broadway model was anathema to this director who enjoyed the theatrical process so much so that she directed a play every two weeks during her seasons in Dallas.

Margo's work as director offers two fertile areas for further research: First, her directorial methods appear similar to recently identified female-specific strategies of communication and the directing techniques of contemporary female directors. Secondly, her innovative methods pointed directions to be taken during the theatrical renaissance of the 1960s and 1970s.

To Inherit the Wind:  
Margo Jones as Director

by  
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DEDICATION

To the memory of my mother,  
Katherine Fricker

"And I will raise you up  
on eagles' wings . . ."

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No work of this nature is produced in a vacuum. Numerous archivists, colleagues, friends, and family members contributed to the writing of this study through their guidance and support.

Fine Arts Librarian Robert Eason and Archivist Cindy Smolovik of the Dallas Public Library were instrumental in locating Margo's promptbooks for me and making this study possible. Cathy Henderson at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center guided me through several collections that aided my research. Dr. Ronald Davis and Tom Culpepper at Southern Methodist University cheerfully shared with me their important work in the Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, a most helpful and worthwhile area of research. Finally, Bea and Richard Jones, along with their daughter, Judy, opened their home to me so that I could examine Margo's letters, notebooks, and other memorabilia. The Jones' hospitality to a total stranger was far more than expected and warmly appreciated.

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this journey not only productive, but also enjoyable. To her and the other members of my Examination Committee, heartfelt thanks.

My own entrance into the field of directing was precipitated by Reginald Bain of the University of Notre Dame, who, himself, was motivated by Margo's Theatre-in-the-Round. To him, sincere appreciation for steering me toward this field of endeavor.

To my many friends and family members who encouraged, supported, and never lost faith in my ability to accomplish this task, much thanks. To my parents, Katherine and Frank Fricker, who allowed me to pursue my goals, often against their better judgment, loving appreciation. Finally, to my husband, Steve, and my children, Meghan and Matthew, love and eternal gratitude for making my dream theirs and inspiring me to inherit the wind.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Everyone agreed on one thing about Margo Jones. She was a dynamo. She was a vivid woman. She energized everyone and everything she came in contact with.

- Brooks Atkinson

Margo Jones was an important force in the American theatre. During the 1940s and 1950s, she was noted as a producer, a nurturer of new playwrights, the initiator of professional arena staging, and the founder of the regional theatre movement.

Margo (as she preferred to be called and as I shall also call her) produced over seventy-five plays at her theatre in Dallas, including the world premieres of William Inge's Farther Off From Heaven (later The Dark at the Top of the Stairs), Tennessee Williams' Summer and Smoke, and Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee's Inherit the Wind. Her producing career also carried her to New York, where she recreated her productions of Summer and Smoke and Inherit the Wind, among others, on Broadway.

In conjunction with her role as producer, Margo encouraged new playwrights by offering them productions in

her theatre. Her work with such aspiring playwrights as Inge, Williams, and Lawrence and Lee is well documented; less well known is her introduction of over fifty new scripts during her eight-year tenure in Dallas. Her sponsorship of these plays, as well as classics, made her theatre a vital force in the cultural life of the Southwest, combining the best of the traditional with the novelty of the untried.

In 1939, Margo was introduced to theatre-in-the-round at a conference of the Confederacy of American Community Theatres held in Washington, D.C. Intrigued by circular staging, she adopted it for her Houston Community Players during the summer months. Eight years later, Margo decided that, in the interests of time and money, her theatre in Dallas could be adapted to arena staging. So it was that the first professional theatre-in-the-round in this country was established in 1947. Margo's innovative lead in selecting circular staging for her theatre was quickly followed by others, most notably Nina Vance in Houston (Alley Theatre) and Zelda Fichandler in Washington, D.C. (Arena Stage).

Margo's best known contribution to American theatre, however, was her vision of a regional theatre network spread across the country.

My dream for the future is a theatre which is a part of everybody's life, . . . a theatre in every town providing entertainment and enlight-

enment for the audience and a decent livelihood along with high artistic ideals for the theatre worker.<sup>1</sup>

Margo's dream of beginning such a theatre, professional in nature and devoted to encouraging new playwrights, achieved fulfillment when, in 1944, she received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to begin such a project in Dallas. Three years later, Theatre '47 opened its doors, the first acknowledged regional theatre in America. For the next eight years, Margo's theatre led the way in the regional repertory movement and "Margo served as high priestess . . . and a measure for all others [to follow]."<sup>2</sup> Her work as the movement's pioneer culminated in the posthumous establishment of the Margo Jones Award in 1961. This national award, presented annually by a trust honoring her memory, is still given to the person in the regional theatres of America or Canada who best exemplifies Margo's ideal of offering professional theatre to audiences outside the commercial mainstream of Broadway.

Margo Jones died suddenly in 1955 of carbon tetrachloride poisoning; her theatre survived her by barely four years, closing its doors in 1959. It seems that the dynamism and genius of its founder had been its primary

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<sup>1</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 201.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Wesley Zeigler, "Margo Jones: Legacy and Legend" in Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 17.

support. With Margo's death and the subsequent failure of her theatre, interest in her life and work faded, so much so that by the 1990s, little more than a passing reference to her could be found in any work dealing with twentieth-century American theatre. Why should such an important person in the history of our theatre have been so ignored? Judy Chicago, in The Dinner Party, suggests a possible explanation: "In my research I realized over and over again that women's achievements had been left out of history and the records of their lives had apparently disappeared."<sup>3</sup> Could Margo's gender have contributed to her relegation to the back pages of theatre history books?

To be sure, Margo's life and career have been the subject of some studies, though not as many as her numerous accomplishments would seem to warrant. Two major biographies of Margo appeared during the 1980s. Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones, by Helen Sheehy, is the most comprehensive examination of Margo's life to date.<sup>4</sup> With a warmth and candor worthy of Margo herself, Sheehy presented her subject's life and career with no attempt to gloss over either Margo's strengths or weaknesses. Sheehy gave a picture of a very human woman, pos-

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<sup>3</sup>Judy Chicago, The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1979), 11.

<sup>4</sup>Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989).



sessed with inordinate amounts of enthusiasm, charisma, business-savvy, and stamina, a woman who devoted herself totally to the theatre. Sheehy also revealed the hidden side of the Margo that not everyone knew: the loneliness, depression, and alcohol-dependency that plagued her later years.<sup>5</sup> Sheehy's book abounds with anecdotes about Margo's encounters with playwrights, actors, and other notable theatrical artists and offers insightful and long-awaited commentary on Margo's life and career.

By comparison, June B. Larsen's doctoral dissertation, "Margo Jones: A Life in the Theatre," falls short of the mark. Larsen stated that her purpose was

. . . to explore how Margo Jones was able to accomplish what she did; what forces, events, traumas, and personalities from her early life proved vital influences on her professional success. How was a young woman in the nineteen-twenties and thirties . . . able to combine her strengths and weaknesses to win a national reputation in the theatre?<sup>6</sup>

Larsen failed to accomplish her purpose. Although the biographical information seems accurate, Larsen never made

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<sup>5</sup>Sheehy, 213-245. While episodes of depression and hard-drinking occurred throughout Margo's life (and are so illustrated in this book), Sheehy's chapter "Is It Worth It?" presented Margo's hidden side particularly well. Following Margo through her last year, Sheehy portrayed a woman tormented by doubts, yet never relinquishing her hold on a dream that, though apparently realized, continued to demand total devotion. Although never diagnosed as an alcoholic, Margo had drinking problems that are well documented throughout Sheehy's book.

<sup>6</sup>June B. Larsen, "Margo Jones: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 1.

connections between Margo's early years and her subsequent successful career. In fact, Larsen expended so much effort documenting Margo's early life that she slighted the accomplishments and failures of Margo's mature years. Larsen's focus resulted in a limited examination of Margo's life that provided few insights into either Margo's motivations or their results.

Two other major works focus on Margo Jones and her career: Don Wilmeth's doctoral dissertation on the history of the Margo Jones Theatre and Amanda Sue Rudisill's doctoral examination of Margo's contribution to the repertory theatre movement in America.<sup>7</sup> Wilmeth's study gives a comprehensive record of the establishment and growth of Margo's theatre and includes a fairly detailed biography of her later years. Rudisill's study emphasizes Margo's influence on the regional theatre movement in conjunction with the efforts of Eva Le Gallienne, Margaret Webster, and Joan Littlewood.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964); Amanda Sue Rudisill, "The Contributions of Eva Le Gallienne, Margaret Webster, Margo Jones, and Joan Littlewood to the Establishment of Repertory Theatre in the United States and Great Britain" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1972).

<sup>8</sup>Other studies examining aspects of Margo's career include: Nita Fay Scheble, "Margo Jones's Realization of a Professional Repertory Theatre in Dallas" (M.A. thesis, Texas Christian University, 1961); Jack H. Yocum, "History of Theatre in Houston, Texas, from 1836 to 1954" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1954).

Published articles on Margo Jones date from the 1940s and 1950s and examine the establishment of her theatre and the novelty of theatre-in-the-round. Most of these works, which appear in such diverse periodicals as Holiday Magazine, Theatre Arts, and Southwest Review, report Margo's accomplishments from an informative, rather than an analytical, stance.<sup>9</sup>

Margo herself wrote quite extensively during the latter years of her life. Her book, Theatre-in-the-Round, combined personal manifesto with theatrical handbook. She summarized the events leading to the founding of her theatre and exhorted others to start similar ventures across the country.<sup>10</sup> The book's most valuable contribution is a synopsis of her theatre's first four seasons, including a delineation of specific problems (usually scenic) that resulted from staging in-the-round. Margo's other writ-

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<sup>9</sup>John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things in the Round: Margo Jones of Dallas Experiments with New Kind of Stage and Audience Relationship," Saturday Review of Literature, 3 April 1948, 24-25; Vinton Freedley, "Broadway to Dallas," Theatre Arts (March 1949): 63-64; George Sessions Perry: "Darndest Thing You've Seen," Saturday Evening Post, 1 March 1952, 36-37, 112, 114, 117; "Margo Jones Makes Theatrical History," Cue Magazine, 10 July 1948, 12-13; John Rosenfield: "After Seven Years a Tenth Season," Southwest Review (Winter 1955): viii, x, 80-82; "Dallas Theatre '48 Proves a Point," New York Times, 22 February 1948; "Margo Jones '55," Theatre Arts (July 1955): 78-79, 94-95; Murray Schumach, "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway," New York Times Sunday Magazine, 17 October 1947, pp. 19, 59, 60; James Street, "Dazzling Dallas," Holiday Magazine, March 1953, 102-112, 114-119.

<sup>10</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 3-7.

ings complemented the themes within her book, emphasizing the need for regional theatres and the accessibility of central staging.<sup>11</sup>

Oddly, however, published material about Margo Jones contains little or no information about her work as director. In fact, no study, to date, has addressed this important issue: of the works cited so far, most sidestep the subject of Margo's directorial methods altogether.

Margo Jones' directing career spanned twenty years, beginning when she was twenty-two, with a community theatre job in Ojai, California, and ending, when she died at forty-three, with Inherit the Wind in Dallas. Margo directed plays at the Pasadena Playhouse, the Cleveland Playhouse, the University of Texas, and her own theatre in Dallas. Her directing career also took her to Broadway with productions of The Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke, and Joan of Lorraine, to name but three. During her twenty-year directing career, Margo developed a directorial theory and method that could be applied to both the amateur and professional actor, please both the provincial

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<sup>11</sup>Margo Jones: "Doing What Comes Naturally," Theatre Arts (June 1949): 55-56; "For Those With Courage: The Theatre," The Zontian, (March/April 1951): 3-4; "Four Sides to Everything," Theatre Arts, (July 1952): 78-79; "Shakespeare-in-the-Round," World Theatre 3 (1954): 29-32; "Theatre for the Future," Southwest Review (Spring 1951): 130-135; "Theatre '45," New York Times, 15 July 1945; "Theatre in the Round," Players Magazine (December 1948); "Theatre-in-the-Round Over America," World Theatre 1 (1951): 21-24.

and Broadway audience, and serve for both the proscenium and the arena stages.

Yet even Sheehy, who detailed the events of Margo's directing career, never looked below the surface to touch the essence of Margo Jones, the director. The major criticism leveled at Sheehy's book addressed this point:

. . . [T]he book offers little in the way of objective evaluation of her [Margo's] directorial skill. Sheehy writes of Margo's early efforts that she "had a gift for selecting plays, inspiring actors, and casting just the right person for a role, and she had a natural ability for promotion and publicity." Missing are critical assessments of her mature work as a director. We learn which productions were successful at the box office, but we get little in-depth, objective reporting on the level of artistry of her productions.<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, both Larsen and Wilmeth showed interest in Margo's directing strictly from a historical standpoint, that is, where and when, rather than a critical one, how and why.

Even Margo herself, in her numerous writings, rarely addressed the differences between directing for proscenium and arena stages, and when she did, it was in vague generalities. Margo revealed more about her own philosophy of directing and how she approached the problems of circular staging in her book, although much of this information was

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<sup>12</sup>Felicia Hardison Londre, review of Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones, by Helen Sheehy, In Theatre Survey 31 (November 1990): 243.

couched in advisory terms for those wishing to found their own arena theatres.

But it is clear that directing played an important role in the reputation and accomplishments of Margo Jones. As a result, this study will examine Margo Jones as a director. Such a study is justified for at least four reasons.

First, although several studies address Margo's life, her theatre, her contribution to the regional theatre movement, and her sponsorship of new playwrights, no work examines how she worked as a director and to what effect.

Second, links need to be established among Margo Jones, director, Margo Jones, regional theatre advocate, and Margo Jones, nurturer of new playwrights. What role did Margo's directing play in the success of her theatre-in-the-round? Would either Dallas or New York have given her the rare opportunity to direct commercial vehicles if she was a mediocre or poor director? Likewise, had she not been a director, would her interest in the plays of Williams, Inge, and others have resulted in productions for these playwrights? Was her initial direction of such original scripts as The Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke, and Inherit the Wind compelling enough to guarantee these plays a place in theatrical history?

Third, Margo Jones' career provides us with an uncommonly useful opportunity to view how one director worked



in two different physical plants, the arena and the proscenium stage. A study of Margo Jones as director can illuminate the different directing techniques she employed when working in-the-round or in-the-flat, affording a rare opportunity to the theatrical researcher: a comparative study of Margo's productions in the arena and the proscenium should reveal what directing techniques she thought were necessary for each space; these revelations may prove helpful in understanding the process involved for either arrangement.

Fourth, and finally, few women have worked successfully as directors in the professional theatre. Margo Jones was an exception. She succeeded in what, during the 1940s and 1950s, was almost exclusively a male profession. The study of Margo's directing theories and methods fills not only a void in American theatrical history, it also contributes to the increasingly important field of women's studies. By examining Margo's career as a director, I hope to restore some of women's lost history (as so powerfully evoked by Judy Chicago earlier) and provide information on how one woman approached the art of directing.

Several studies dealing with women in theatre provide a context in which to place Margo Jones, director. Most significant of these is Shirlee Hennigan's excellent

examination of contemporary female directors.<sup>13</sup> Hennigan explored the history of female directors in this country, delineating the backgrounds, numbers, and successes of these professional women since the turn of the century. Through extensive interviews, she gathered valuable data regarding the "theories, ideas, and techniques being used by professional women directors."<sup>14</sup> Hennigan also attempted to define the differences that characterize the work of female directors from that of male directors, and, based on those differences, to "explore the concept of a 'feminist' approach to directing."<sup>15</sup> Finally, Hennigan raised the issue of the small number of female directors working professionally in the theatre, questioned how and why this situation exists, and posited recommendations for improving the status of and employment opportunities for female directors.<sup>16</sup>

Other recent studies of woman's role in the theatrical milieu aid in understanding how Margo Jones fits into the tradition of women in theatre. Although few of these works specifically deal with female directors, they all

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<sup>13</sup>Shirlee Hennigan, "The Woman Director in the Contemporary, Professional Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1983).

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 88-94.



detail the past and present difficulties encountered by women seeking careers in the theatre.<sup>17</sup>

My method for this study is two-fold. First, I will attempt to place Margo Jones, director, within the context of other directors, both male and female, thus providing a framework in which her directing methods can be assessed. Second, I will examine Margo's directing techniques from several viewpoints: first, her intentions as stated in her personal writings; second, her decisions about specific production alternatives as gleaned from her prompt-books; third, her working relationship with other theatrical artists as revealed through interviews; and fourth, the critical reaction to her directing methods as expressed through reviews of her productions. With the information gained from these four sources, I will analyze Margo's directorial methods, describing her techniques and examining their implications.

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<sup>17</sup>Helen Krich Chinoy, "Art vs. Business: The Role of Women in American Theatre," The Drama Review 24 (June 1980): 3-10; Susan Todd, Women and Theatre: Calling the Shots (London: Faber and Faber, 1984); Clare Venables, "The Woman Director in the Theatre," Theatre Quarterly 10 (Summer 1980): 3-7; Michelene Wandor, Carry On, Under-studies: Theatre and Sexual Politics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986); and my own unpublished study, "The Woman Director's Odyssey: The Broadway Experience, 1901-1985," March 1988.

I propose to take a cue from Francis Hodge's Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style<sup>18</sup> and view the directing process through the metaphor of communication: communication between director and script (playwright), between director and actor, between director and designers, between director and stage (time and space), and between director and audience (critical reaction). My analysis of Margo's directing techniques, therefore, will depend on gathering evidence in each of these areas to determine her working methods in relationship to the written text, the living artist, the open space, and the critic. In this way, I will define the process through which Margo's directing developed and matured. In all cases, my inquiry will encompass Margo's directing for both proscenium and arena and will note any significant techniques used exclusively for one or the other.

Having established the importance of Margo Jones and cited the failure of several studies to explain one of her major contributions, this study now turns its attention to placing Margo within an historical context. Chapter Two presents a brief biographical sketch of Margo's life, outlines the prevailing directorial theories of her time, introduces Margo's contemporaries in the directing field,

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<sup>18</sup>Francis Hodge, Play Directing: Analysis, Communication, and Style (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1982).

and explores the legacy of professional female directors of which she is a part. Chapter Three examines Margo's relationship to the written text; Chapter Four her interaction with playwrights; Chapter Five her relationship to the actor; Chapter Six her collaboration with scenic, lighting, and costume designers; and Chapters Seven and Eight her staging techniques for proscenium and arena stages. Chapter Nine presents the critical reaction to her productions, and Chapter Ten summarizes my findings and presents conclusions regarding Margo Jones as director.

## CHAPTER 2

### IN HER OWN TIME AND PLACE

Everything in life is theatre, she said, for it was her passion, her driving obsession. She had a rare and powerful gift, the ability to make art happen. Some called her a visionary and a prophet. She thought of herself in homelier terms, as a farmer or a gardener clearing the land, tilling the soil, sowing some seeds, and helping them grow.

- Helen Sheehy

Before turning to an examination of Margo Jones' directing theories and methods, it is important to understand the events of her life, how these events relate to her career as a director, and how she fit into the historical context of American director and female director. This chapter addresses these issues.

Margaret Virginia Jones was born on December 12, 1911, in Livingston, a small town in East Texas. Daughter of a lawyer and an artistically-minded teacher, Margo's early influences centered around her father's courtroom, which was to define the concept of "drama" in her mind,

and her mother's piano, which was to teach her that beauty existed in all things.<sup>1</sup>

I used to sit in the courtroom and watch my father make speeches. I was in the presence of drama, but it took me some time to realize that. Then one day it occurred to me that the reason I enjoyed the courtroom sessions was that they were so much like plays . . . at eleven I knew what I wanted to do—to put on plays—and up went the sheet in the barn . . . my first producing-directing venture.<sup>2</sup>

Margo was a precocious and bright youngster and, by age fifteen, was off to college at the College of Industrial Arts (now Texas Woman's University) in Denton, Texas. Majoring in speech and minoring in education (there was no theatre department), Margo soon found herself the lone director surrounded by aspiring collegiate actors. Thus began her directing career. In 1932, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree and, a year later, her Master's degree in Philosophy and Education. Her thesis, "The Abnormal Ways out of Emotional Conflict as Reflected in the Dramas of Henrik Ibsen," combined her interest in theatre and psychology.

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<sup>1</sup>June Larsen concluded that the "exposures in her [Margo's] father's law office provided early influences that were to benefit Margaret throughout her life. Practical business experience gained by working with her father, and being cultivated in the arts by her mother, Margaret Virginia matured with an ability to converse with a wide variety of people on an equally wide variety of subjects." June B. Larsen, "Margo: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 23.

<sup>2</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 40.

The next few years found Margo working at the Southwestern School of the Theatre in Dallas, studying directing with Gilmore Brown at the Pasadena Playhouse Summer School, directing at the Ojai (California) Community Playhouse (her first real directing job), and traveling around the world. Eventually, she settled in Houston as assistant director of the short-lived Houston Federal Theater. The Federal Theater Program (FTP) was a theatrical project sponsored from 1935 to 1939 by the U.S. government as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to aid unemployed actors and technicians during the Depression. Although fairly successful in certain parts of the country, the FTP lacked support in others, such as Houston. After her stint with the FTP, Margo was off again to Europe, this time to the Moscow Art Theatre Festival, which she covered for the Houston Chronicle. Upon her return, she accepted a job with the Houston Recreation Department, a job which eventually developed into a full-time position as director of the Houston Community Players.

During her six-year tenure with the group, she and her Players grew "from nine actors in 1936 to some six hundred participants in the early 'forties. . . . [who] produced over sixty plays and . . . acquired fifteen

thousand dollars' worth of equipment."<sup>3</sup> In 1939, based on her work with the Players, Margo was named one of twelve outstanding little-theatre directors in the country—the only woman to be so selected.

"It was during the years of the Community Players that Margo found and introduced what was to become her special stamp—the arena stage form."<sup>4</sup> From 1939 to 1942, Margo's Community Players staged summer seasons in-the-round in local hotel ballrooms, reverting to proscenium staging during the regular season. Margo's presentation of several world premieres, as well as her innovative use of arena staging, brought national exposure to her and her Players. In 1939, she was appointed Director of the South for the Confederacy of American Community Theatres. She was also elected to the Executive Council of the National Theatre Conference, "an organization of directors of community and university theatres formed to serve the noncommercial theatre."<sup>5</sup>

Margo left the Houston Community Players in 1942 because, as she explained,

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Wesley Zeigler, "Margo Jones: Legacy and Legend" in Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 18.

<sup>5</sup>Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 40-41.



I began to see the great necessity of rehearsing eight hours a day for at least a three-week period in order to be able to get a play on and feel thoroughly satisfied with the production. . . . Since in a community theatre it is only possible to work evenings, these requirements were an impossibility. I came to the conclusion that . . . the ideal working situation would have to be a permanent professional theatre.<sup>6</sup>

But a war was on, so Margo put her plans for a professional theatre on hold and accepted a job teaching at the University of Texas in Austin.

There I directed three new plays and worked on several theatre-in-the-round productions. I also took a leave of absence . . . to stage You Touched Me!, a play by Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham, first at the Cleveland Playhouse . . . and then at [the] Pasadena [Playhouse].<sup>7</sup>

By 1944, Margo was impatient to found her own theatre. Through the influence of John Rosenfield, drama editor and critic for the Dallas Morning News, she selected Dallas as the site for her new venture. A Rockefeller grant, awarded in 1944, provided the funds for Margo to study options for developing her prospective theatre organization. In the midst of her research, however, she was called "to work on a national level . . . to co-direct Tennessee Williams's The Glass Menagerie in 1944 and later

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<sup>6</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 50.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 51.



to stage Maxwell Anderson's Joan of Lorraine, starring Ingrid Bergman, on Broadway."<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, her quest for a theatre in Dallas continued. Financial support from wealthy Dallas citizens soon made her dream feasible. At this time she summarized her own philosophy of theatre and made it clear to her Dallas supporters that if the new theatre was to be a "theatre of the past, striving to exist on box office hits, she did not want to participate in it."<sup>9</sup> She proclaimed her emphasis on "good showmanship and its power to awaken interest in something not vogue on Broadway."<sup>10</sup> For the next two years, Margo searched for an adequate facility to house her theatre. Another stint on Broadway, this time to direct On Whitman Avenue, again interrupted her project. Yet she returned to Dallas more determined than ever to find a home for her theatre.

"When there is no theatre available," I asked myself, "and yet you must start a theatre, what do you do?" I had found the answer once before, when I wanted to produce plays in the summer in Houston. Why not the same answer now? . . . had I been talking about a building or about an

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<sup>8</sup>Zeigler, 19. Actually Margo interrupted her work in Dallas three times to tackle Broadway: The Glass Menagerie, 1944-45; On Whitman Avenue, 1946; and Joan of Lorraine, 1946.

<sup>9</sup>Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964), 36.

<sup>10</sup>John Rosenfield, "Community Theater Project Here Has No Resemblance to Little Theatre of the Past," Dallas Morning News, 13 February 1945.

idea? And couldn't the idea be applied just as well in theatre-in-the-round? It could. When one runs out of solutions, the unusual solution will save the day.<sup>11</sup>

A building was found and converted to central staging: it opened its doors on June 3, 1947. At age thirty-five, Margo had her theatre, a professional repertory theatre dedicated to showcasing the works of new playwrights. Theatre '47 (the name was borrowed from a theatre in Prague) opened with the premiere production of William Inge's Farther Off From Heaven (later The Dark at the Top of the Stairs). Included in that opening season was a play Margo was destined to produce and direct on Broadway, Tennessee Williams' Summer and Smoke.

Each consecutive year after 1947 found Margo's theatre, under a new name (e.g., Theatre '48, Theatre '49, etc.), enjoying financial and popular success. Focusing exclusively on original and classical works, Margo's theatre became nationally known for its central staging, its high-quality productions, and its charismatic leader. "Eleven of the plays premiered at Margo Jones' theatre were later produced on Broadway," including Southern Exposure, produced and directed by Margo herself in 1950.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 60.

<sup>12</sup>Larsen, 184.

The realization of her dream in Dallas was not enough for the "Texas Tornado," however.<sup>13</sup> Margo wanted every major American city to enjoy the same type of theatre so successful in Dallas. In 1951, she wrote her personal manifesto and handbook, Theatre-in-the-Round, exhorting others to follow her lead. A decentralized theatre was Margo's goal and, while acknowledging the contributions of Broadway, she worked diligently to bring quality theatre to those for whom New York was inaccessible.

The highlight of Margo's years in Dallas came toward the end of her life. In 1955, Margo received a script with a note saying, "I double-dog dare you to do it."<sup>14</sup> That script was to become the biggest hit of Margo's eight-year tenure in Dallas—that script was Inherit the Wind.

Inherit the Wind exploded into life the night of January 10, 1955. The theater<sup>15</sup> rocked. We all went back to Margo's apartment . . . and waited for the reviews . . . incredibly enthusiastic notices. And then she [Margo] kicked off

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<sup>13</sup>According to Larsen, this appellation for Margo was penned by Hubert Roussel, drama critic for the Houston Post; 84. Helen Sheehy attributed the source of this nickname to Tennessee Williams; 2-3. Whatever its derivation, the name stuck.

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Tad Adoue, 12 January 1980; quoted in Larsen, 197. Adoue was a script reader in New York who often recommended plays for Margo's consideration.

<sup>15</sup>Throughout this study, the -re ending for "theatre" will be used. The alternative -er ending will appear only when so spelled in quoted material.

her shoes and danced and sang in the center of the floor with tears running down her cheeks.<sup>16</sup>

Margo subsequently produced Inherit the Wind on Broadway with Herman Shumlin directing. It was an immediate success and ran for several years. Ironically, Shumlin brought suit against Margo and her theatre shortly after the play's New York opening. Shumlin contended that Margo's plans to run Inherit the Wind in repertory as the finale to Theatre '55's season threatened his New York production. Margo countered that "every contract for plays presented at her theatre specified unlimited use of the work in repertory within the season."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Margo rejected the idea that her production in Dallas could offer serious competition to the play in New York. The judge agreed with her and found in favor of Margo Jones and Theatre '55. With the legal victory assuring her repertory season's continuance and the publicity from the case bringing in record crowds, Margo's career seemed at its height. But all was to collapse tragically just two months later.

For years, Margo had made a practice of reading scripts before retiring for the night. Her favorite spot

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<sup>16</sup>Jerome Lawrence, Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1974), 318.

<sup>17</sup>John Rosenfield, "Trial to be Tried at 9 a.m. Tuesday," Dallas Morning News, 31 May 1955, sec. 2, p. 8; quoted in Larsen, 199.

for this pastime was on the living room floor. In July 1955, shortly after the court case, Margo hosted a party during which she demonstrated her newly acquired hobby of oil painting. Some paints spilled on the carpet and sofa and, the next day, Margo requested that the hotel management clean the spattered paints. They did so, using carbon tetrachloride as the cleaning solvent. On the evening of July 14, 1955, Margo retired to her evening ritual of playreading on the floor, a floor soaked with a toxic substance in an unventilated room. She fell asleep on that floor and awoke the next morning feeling ill. That night Margo was admitted to St. Paul's Hospital in Dallas. Surprisingly, no one realized the severity of her illness, least of all Margo herself. By the time an adequate diagnosis was made and treatment prescribed, it was too late. On July 24, 1955, ten days after her initial exposure to carbon tetrachloride, Margo lapsed into a coma and died. She was forty-three years old.

Her premature death shocked the theatrical community. Condolences and testimonials poured into Dallas, attesting to her far-reaching influence and popularity. Theatre '55's Board of Directors unanimously voted to rename the theatre after her. But the vital link was gone. Despite well-intentioned efforts by many of her faithful followers, the Margo Jones Theatre closed its doors in 1959.

Tributes to Margo continued to appear in the years following her death. A memorial cantata honoring her memory was composed and presented by the Dallas Lyric Theatre in 1955. The Margo Jones Theatre at Southern Methodist University was established. Texas Woman's University, her alma mater, began a playwriting competition in her name and dedicated another Margo Jones Theatre on its campus. In 1961, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee established the Margo Jones Award, "given annually to the producing manager whose policy of presenting new works continues 'most faithfully the tradition and vision of Margo Jones.'"<sup>18</sup>

She did not live to see the results of her pioneering work, but slowly and persistently, . . . the ideas she had fostered in her book, her lectures, and the example she had set inspired other theatre leaders. Today, over three hundred resident nonprofit theatres in almost every state of the union, America's national theatre, supported by a loyal subscription audience, bring the classics of world literature, the best work by foreign playwrights, and new plays by contemporary dramatists to full performing life.<sup>19</sup>

And so Margo's legacy lives on. Perhaps Margo would not be too surprised if she saw how successful her dream had become. After all, for Margo, theatre was life and,

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<sup>18</sup>Interview with Jerome Lawrence; quoted in Sheehy, 267.

<sup>19</sup>Sheehy, 268.

as she herself often said, "But darlin's, we're doing what we love!"<sup>20</sup>

That a small-town girl from Texas should choose a career in theatre may be surprising; that she should select directing is absolutely amazing. At the time of Margo's birth in 1911, directing was still a fledgling art in the theatre, having become an accepted element in theatrical production only since the mid- to late nineteenth century.

. . . [P]rior to the thrilling ensemble effects woven in the late nineteenth century by Duke Georg of Saxe-Meiningen[,] the plays of Shakespeare and Moliere . . . managed to premiere memorably without a director . . . in sight.<sup>21</sup>

Traditional theatrical scholarship has placed the emergence of the director in Germany during the mid-nineteenth century. Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (1826-1914) set as his goal the total integration of all aspects of theatrical production, seeking "to create the illusion of reality with accurate spectacle and lifelike acting."<sup>22</sup> Saxe-Meiningen was not the only nineteenth-

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<sup>20</sup>Paraphrased from interview with Louise Latham by Carole Cohen, 19 March 1974, interview #34, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>21</sup>Rodney Harold Eatman, "In Search of Directorial Style: A Study of the Productions of William Ball at the American Conservatory Theatre, San Francisco, 1965-1976" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983), 2.

<sup>22</sup>Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1968), 421.

century producer to advocate the cause of unity in theatrical productions, however. Fellow German, Richard Wagner (1813-1883), was also noted for his theories and practice regarding unified works of art. Wagner's insistence on the idea of a master artist creating a master artwork influenced "much of modern theory about the need for a strong director and a unified production."<sup>23</sup> Of the two, Saxe-Meiningen's influence may have been more widespread, however. His troupe toured western Europe and Russia for sixteen years (1874-1890), influencing future theatrical practitioners, such as Konstantin Stanislavsky, and laying the groundwork for realistic staging practices. As a result, many historians consider him the father of modern directing.<sup>24</sup>

The emergence of the director occurred simultaneously with the advent of realism as both an ideological and practical approach to dramatic writing and production.

The rise of realism coincided with and seemed to encourage the development of the new art of directing. Realistic plays called for a realistic exchange of dialogue, realistic movement of

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 418.

<sup>24</sup>"It is generally agreed that stage direction was not accorded recognition as an independent theatrical art until the 1870s, when George II [sic], the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen . . . showed Europe what could be done when a play was completely realized in performance through the application of a single, unified directorial vision"; Samuel L. Leiter, From Belasco to Brook: Representative Directors of the English-Speaking Stage (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991), xi.



character, greater depth of character development, and therefore, more rehearsal time. . . . These demands required a master coordinator who could oversee rehearsals as well as the various aspects of staging and performance.<sup>25</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the director was an accepted, though not wholly incorporated, member of the theatrical community. Some theatre companies continued to resist using directors as part of the production, a resistance reflected on Broadway, as elsewhere, in the number of plays that credit no director. For example, of the seventy-four plays that opened in New York in 1901, only thirty-two (43 percent) credited a director with staging the play.<sup>26</sup> This percentage, however, exceeded the previous year in which only thirty-six percent of New York plays acknowledged a director. These percentages increased yearly until the 1930s, when the

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<sup>25</sup>Shirlee Hennigan, "The Woman Director in the Contemporary, Professional Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1983), 12.

<sup>26</sup>Burns Mantle, ed., The Best Plays of 1899-1909 (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc., 1944). All data upon which statistical or numerical equations are based come from this series. The Burns Mantle Year Books, under the editorships of Burns Mantle from 1899-1947, John Chapman, 1947-1953, Louis Kronenberger, 1953-1961, Henry Hewes, 1962-1965, and Otis L. Guernsey, 1965-present, list all New York productions, the playwright, actors, producers, designers, and director. Information on length of run and a short synopsis of each play are also included. This series of books comprises the most complete listing of such information and is published yearly.

percentage of non-directed shows became negligible; by the 1950s, such shows were non-existent.<sup>27</sup>

When Margo decided at the age of eleven to become a director, therefore, she was choosing a profession that was barely three-quarters of a century old. Though basically in its infancy, the directorial art was pursued by several influential and gifted theorists and practitioners. In addition to Saxe-Meiningen and Wagner, Andre Antoine (1858-1943), Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), Otto Brahm (1856-1912), and Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), to name but a few, were instrumental in defining and developing the director's function within the process of production. Perhaps most influential on twentieth-century American directing was Stanislavsky.

. . . [T]he play itself was never Stanislavsky's full source of inspiration. . . . the play was only the starting point for directorial elaboration. . . . Increasingly the production plan and the rehearsal were becoming the basic implements of the director's craft, because through them the director could most effectively impose his [sic] interpretation of a play.<sup>28</sup>

As European directors developed various theories and styles of directing, American theatre's first significant

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<sup>27</sup>From the 1950s on, only a few (2-4) productions a year have no director credited. These plays are usually one-man or one-woman shows with the actor most likely staging the play him- or herself.

<sup>28</sup>Helen Krich Chinoy, "The Emergence of the Director," in Directors on Directing, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1963), 31, 33.

directors emerged: Augustin Daly (1836-1899), Steele MacKaye (1842-1894), and David Belasco (1859-1931). As in the case of Saxe-Meiningen,

Daly helped to establish the director as the major force in the theatre. He retained absolute control over every element of his productions. . . . Daly assumed the right to coach his actors in interpretation, stage business, and blocking.<sup>29</sup>

Daly's contemporary, Steele MacKaye, also embraced the new role of director and the emphasis on realistic productions, concentrating his directorial efforts on "making acting more natural by analyzing human behavior meticulously and reproducing it 'scientifically.'"<sup>30</sup> His assistant, David Belasco, was to follow MacKaye's lead. Belasco's forte was "carefully organized, unified productions."<sup>31</sup> As drama critic George Jean Nathan noted:

He [Belasco] brought to the theater a standard of tidiness in production and maturation of manuscript, a standard that has discouraged to no little extent that [American] theater's erstwhile not-uncommon frowzy hustle and slipshod manner of presentation.<sup>32</sup>

Belasco's concern for detail appeared to have set the tone for subsequent American directors.

American directors . . . have been essentially pragmatic. . . . They have elaborated the "know-

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<sup>29</sup>Brockett, 503.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 505.

<sup>31</sup>Chinoy, 38.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

how" absorbed from indigenous craftsmen such as Augustin Daly, Steele MacKaye, and David Belasco and from the European innovators to give Broadway a very high technical standard of production. Their local brand of theatrical synthesis, however, has all too often turned out purely synthetic concoctions, . . . Missing . . . has been any consistent solicitude for the artistic expression of meaningful, contemporary ideas and experiences.<sup>33</sup>

In the early 1900s, technical brilliance and unified productions dominated the methods of American stage directors. Later, the Federal Theater of the thirties added both a social and political context to play production. In New York, the Group Theatre, comprised of some of the American theatre's most talented artists, also dedicated itself to presenting a more socially relevant drama. The Group Theatre's directors (Harold Clurman (1901-1980), Lee Strasberg (1901-1982), and Cheryl Crawford (1902-1986)), "wanted to 'say something' with their plays and wanted their productions to be informed by a consistent theatrical technique."<sup>34</sup> These three were to become influential forces in American directing during the mid-twentieth century. Later, their colleague, Elia Kazan (1909-), was to achieve, by far, the greatest distinction as a twentieth-century American director: "There is only one trend

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 74.

on Broadway, and its name is Kazan."<sup>35</sup> "His intense, almost violent style, in which realistic 'method' acting is combined with theatricalist staging, has practically become the American idiom."<sup>36</sup>

During these same years, directing as an academic discipline was gaining vogue.<sup>37</sup> Numerous texts were written instructing the fledgling director in the mechanics of his or her craft. Most of the emphasis in these early directing texts was on the practical aspects of directing, including play selection, cast selection, and rehearsal procedures, rather than on the artistic ones. By 1935, however, a gradual trend away from pragmatism and towards artistry began to emerge. This emergence was heralded by Gilmor Brown's and Alice Garwood's General Principles of Play Direction.<sup>38</sup> Brown and Garwood suggested that the director's role be that of interpretive artist. More importantly, they redefined the relationship between the

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<sup>35</sup>Kenneth Tynan, Curtains (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 372.

<sup>36</sup>Chinoy, 76.

<sup>37</sup>I am indebted to Johanna Ezell for much of the material contained in this section. Her unpublished study, "The Training of the American Theatre Director, 1916-1941," proved most helpful in supplying information about the history and content of directing textbooks in this country.

<sup>38</sup>Gilmor Brown and Alice Garwood, General Principles of Play Direction (New York: Samuel French, 1936).

actor and director from that of puppet and puppeteer to that of fellow artists:

. . . [T]he sensitive director, working with a fine actor, will often receive as much inspiration from the actor as the actor receives from the director. . . . The director's medium is human beings.<sup>39</sup>

It was Alexander Dean's Fundamentals of Play Directing, written in 1941, that became one of the most influential texts on this subject, however.<sup>40</sup> Dean followed Brown and Garwood's lead, becoming one of the first academic authors to declare that theatre was art (not just craft) and the director, therefore, an interpretive artist (not just a technician). That artistic interpretation, for Dean, manifested itself in the creation of stage pictures that told the play's story in evocative visual images. Dean's protege and collaborator in supporting this approach to directing was Lawrence Carra, Margo's future employer at the University of Texas.

This, then, was the world of the American director that Margo Jones aspired to join when she started her directing career in the mid-1930s. Out of an initial impulse to unify all aspects of production the director

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 7. The earlier concept of the actor as a super puppet (Uebermarionette) in the hands of the director (master artist) was posited by Edward Gordon Craig in his seminal work, The Art of the Theatre (London: T.N. Foulis, 1905).

<sup>40</sup>Alexander Dean, Fundamentals of Play Directing (New York: Rinehart, 1941).

emerged. From that early impulse, directorial trends towards play interpretation, both visual and textual, developed. Also from that early start came schools of thought that advocated the necessity for productions to proffer political and social statements, statements often imposed upon the production by the director independent of the text.<sup>41</sup> By the time Margo began directing, the role of director was defined as that "single creative force . . . necessary for 'theater in its truest form.'"<sup>42</sup>

Margo Jones was not just an early twentieth-century American director, however. She was also a woman who directed. In addition to the fraternity of professional male directors who dominated the scene during her lifetime, Margo belonged to a tiny sisterhood of professional female directors dating back to the turn of the century. Margo followed in the footsteps of a select few women who

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<sup>41</sup>The most notable proponent of this view, perhaps, was Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) who "believed that the director is the major creative force in the theatre and that a script is simply material to be molded and reworked as the director wishes"; Oscar G. Brockett, History of the Theatre, 6th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 503-504. In this country, the Mercury Theatre founded by Orson Welles (1915-1988) and John Houseman (1902-1989) ". . . sought to redevelop a repertory of classical plays having some relevance to contemporary issues . . . [in which] the text [of a play] was cut, rearranged, and changed in various ways to accommodate the contemporary implications"; Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay, Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since the late Nineteenth Century, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 291.

<sup>42</sup>Chinoy, 77.

blazed a trail for her and others. How, then, did Margo fit into the tradition of the professional female director on Broadway, and how did she manage to defy the odds and direct several plays on the "Great White Way"?

Like most other disciplines, the theatre did not readily accept women into its ranks.<sup>43</sup> For much of its twenty-five hundred year history, theatre was basically a male institution, with women participating in theatrical events only as spectators.<sup>44</sup> Only two notable exceptions appeared before the seventeenth century: mimes and nuns. During the Roman and Byzantine empires, women participated in short improvised theatrical entertainments as mimes.<sup>45</sup> In the Middle Ages, we find female playwrights cloistered in convents and abbeys.<sup>46</sup> By the late 1600s, women were

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<sup>43</sup>I am deeply indebted to Patti P. Gillespie for much of the information contained herein on the history of women in theatre. Gillespie graciously allowed me to examine several of her articles and speeches on this subject to supplement my own research.

<sup>44</sup>Our knowledge of women spectators during ancient times comes from an anonymous commentator who reported that the sight of the Furies on stage "so terrified the crowd that . . . women suffered miscarriage"; A.M. Nagler, A Source Book in Theatrical History (New York: Dover Press, 1952), 5.

<sup>45</sup>These women performers offer our first record of professional female actors; see Rosamond Gilder, Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre (New York: Theatre Arts, 1959), 1-17.

<sup>46</sup>Three such women have been identified through historical records—Hroswitha of Gandersheim (tenth century), Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century), and Katherine of Sutton (fourteenth century). For more information on



acting in France and England professionally.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, although women were now accepted in the theatre, their position in society was precarious as a result of that acceptance. Furthermore, that acceptance was confined to the role of female actor; women were not encouraged to pursue other artistic careers within the theatrical institution.

Indeed, theatre affirmed the generally held bias against women as artists, preferring the label "craftsmen" [sic] instead. Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, in Old Mistresses, clarify this point: ". . . [T]he sex of the maker was as important a factor in the development of the hierarchy of the arts as the division between art and craft on the basis of function, material, intellectual content[,] and class."<sup>48</sup> If the products of women's artistic effort were not considered art, the importance of their accomplishments could also be denied. This denial

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Hroswitha and Hildegard, see Peter Dronke, Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); on Katherine, see Nancy Cotton, "Katherine of Sutton: The First English Woman Playwright," Theatre Journal 4 (1978): 475-481.

<sup>47</sup>Female actors appeared in the popular commedia dell'arte companies that traveled Europe during the Renaissance; see Gilder, 59-60. By the seventeenth century, female actors could be seen on the professional stages of France and, later, England; see Richard Findlater, The Player Queens (New York: Taplinger, 1976), 7-18.

<sup>48</sup>Roszika Parker and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 51.

then could become the basis for refusing to grant women's art any credibility in the historical record. One could not be an artist and a woman; the two terms were mutually exclusive.

"Artist" became increasingly associated with everything that was anti-domestic, outsidership, anti-social behavior, isolation from other men, disorder and the sublime forces of untamed nature. As femininity was to be lived out in the fulfillment of socially ordained domestic and reproductive roles, a profound contradiction was established between the identities of artist and of woman.<sup>49</sup>

This same reasoning considerably hindered those women aspiring to the art of directing.

A few female directors were able to break through this deep-seated bias against women, however, and succeed on the professional Broadway stage, the yardstick by which success in the American theatre is measured.<sup>50</sup> But from where did these female directors come?

In England and the United States, the director, male and female, developed from the tradition of the actor-manager. In the nineteenth century, some female actors

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 99. This section developed from my unpublished study, "Margo Jones, The Forgotten Woman: The Role of the Woman Director in History," 1987. This work examined the role that erasure played in the historical record, especially as it pertained to Margo Jones, the theatrical director, and the female director.

<sup>50</sup>A brief chronology of twentieth-century female directors on Broadway can be found in Hennigan, Appendix C: A Chronology of Woman Directors of the Twentieth Century, 219-233.

headed their own acting companies and staged some of the vehicles in which they appeared.<sup>51</sup> This practice of the female actor-manager continued into the twentieth century, until the actor-manager gave way to the director, now the creative center of any theatrical production. Given this history, it is not surprising that, at the turn of this century in this country, except for female actors, few women directed for the stage.<sup>52</sup> By the 1910s, female playwrights had joined the ranks, usually directing plays they themselves had written.<sup>53</sup> Not until later did women who were primarily directors emerge; these women were dedicated to the art of staging the play rather than acting or writing for the theatre.<sup>54</sup>

In the early 1900s, usually no more than three women a year directed a Broadway production; these women ac-

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<sup>51</sup>Among them: Madame Vestris (1797-1856), Minnie Maddern Fiske (1865-1932), and Mrs. Patrick Campbell (1865-1940). See Gilder, 258-291; Hennigan, 14-15.

<sup>52</sup>Among them: Marie Dressler (1869-1934), Josephine Hull (1886-1957), Margaret Webster (1905-1972), and Eva Le Gallienne (1899-1991). For a more detailed list, see Hennigan, Appendix C.

<sup>53</sup>Including Rachel Crothers (c. 1878-1958), Edith Ellis (1861-1916), Anita Loos (1893-1981), Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970), Lillian Hellman (1905-1984), Megan Terry (1932-), and Elaine May (1932-). See Hennigan, Appendix C.

<sup>54</sup>Although Agnes Morgan (1880?-1970?) is considered the pioneer of this group, it was not until the 1930s that women who solely directed began to emerge on Broadway with any frequency. See Hennigan, Appendix C.

counted for less than three percent of the directors working on Broadway during these years. In almost every case, these female directors also played the leading female role. By the 1910s, this number had risen to as many as five female directors a year, or approximately five percent of Broadway directors, with the majority of these women having also written the play they directed. The 1920s and 1930s saw a significant increase in the number of women directing on Broadway. Although female actors and playwrights were still directing, more women who were exclusively directors began to enter the profession. For example, in the 1931-1932 Broadway season, sixteen women directed twenty Broadway plays. Of these, two also played the leading female role and another five also wrote the play—nine women were exclusively directors.<sup>55</sup> During that same season, 106 men accounted for 155 productions. As a result, female directors comprised thirteen percent of directors on Broadway that season and directed twelve percent of the plays.<sup>56</sup> During the 1940s, female

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 225. Hennigan, unfortunately, does not provide data regarding the number of men directing on Broadway.

<sup>56</sup>Helen M. Housley, "The Woman Director's Odyssey: The Broadway Experience, 1901-1985," (1988), 6, unpublished. This study provides a statistically comparative analysis of male and female directors on Broadway during the twentieth century.

actors and playwrights rarely appeared among the women directing on Broadway.

Although there is no doubt that more men than women were directing on Broadway between 1920 and 1950, the number of women who directed in New York during the first half of this century is significant if only in terms of what happened to female directors on Broadway during the 1950s and later. The 1950 season saw ten women directing ten plays, while fifty-two men directed sixty-two plays. Five years later there was not a single Broadway production directed by a woman. That trend has continued through the 1990s, with most Broadway seasons averaging only two or three female-directed productions, approximately six percent of all directed plays on Broadway.<sup>57</sup>

Why this decline of female directors on Broadway after 1950? What happened during the 1940s to cause such a startling closure of a field in which women were steadily gaining ground during the first half of the century? Why don't women continue to gain? And, more importantly, how was Margo Jones able to defy this alarming trend? Scholars have offered several possible explanations:

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 7. Hennigan reports similar data in her study, 231-233. This percentage may seem high in light of the discussion. It should be remembered, however, that the total number of plays being produced on Broadway since the 1980s declined sharply. Therefore, the percentage of female directors may register a slight increase, while the actual numbers of women directing are still quite low.

(1) the "back-to-the-home" movement that followed World War II, (2) a re-emphasis on the Victorian stereotype of women's emotional make-up, (3) the identification of the role of director with the status of power, (4) the high cost of Broadway productions, and (5) the declining number of Broadway productions.<sup>58</sup>

As Caroline Bird suggested in Enterprising Women, one reason for the sharp decline in women's opportunities during the 1950s may have been the post-war effort to get women back into the home. Women had entered the work force during the so-called manpower crisis of World War II and had well performed jobs previously closed to them. Many of these jobs, however, were destined for returning servicemen. Something had to be done with the current jobholders—women.

A subtle campaign in the press [controlled by men] portrayed women as eager to start the families they had deferred so long. Rosie [the Riveter] went home and the women's magazines [often with male editors] did their best to make her like it.<sup>59</sup>

Rochelle Gatlin elaborated upon this country-wide effort to put woman back in her place. Gatlin theorized that the technological era, which continued to replace

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<sup>58</sup>Hennigan, 69-72. Although credit is to be given Hennigan for naming these factors, common sense and a working knowledge of women's history would arrive at the same conclusions.

<sup>59</sup>Caroline Bird, Enterprising Women (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1976), 204.

manpower with machinery, together with the loss of new frontiers to explore and conquer, caused men to feel threatened by their inability to assert their masculinity. No doubt part of this threat emanated from women's having successfully occupied previously male positions in the work force, as well as from women's declaring their desire to have a career and continue working outside the home.

. . . [T]he feminine mystique was also a response to a mid-century masculinity crisis, as men became concerned about the decline of individual endeavor, self-employment[,] and the absence of a Western frontier in which to test their ruggedness. . . . Men turned to sports and revived the Wild West in fiction, film[,] and television searching for the pure models of competition, aggressiveness[,] and skill absent in the bureaucratic world of corporations and professions. When they looked for tangible results of their achievements, they found them only in the suburban homes and consumer goods they could purchase.<sup>60</sup>

In numerous subtle ways, such as the depictions of women on television and in the movies, the message was sent out that woman's role in society was to provide a happy, clean, comfortable home for the man in her life.

Perhaps female directors such as Jessie Bonstelle (1871-1932) emerged as early as World War I to replace men gone to the war, although evidence to support this view is lacking. This "back-to-the-home" movement could have affected their status in professional theatre, either

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<sup>60</sup>Rochelle Gatlin, American Women Since 1945 (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), 8-9.



directly—they chose to give up their careers to start families—or indirectly—producers (mostly men) agreed that women's place was in the home and so ceased hiring them.

The movement to get women out of the workplace and back into the home had its roots not only in the post-war economy and male angst, but also in nineteenth-century thinking about women's emotional make-up. The Victorian stereotype of woman as fragile, sensitive, and vulnerable was still accepted in the mid-twentieth century by many men and women as the core of woman's nature and as such provided further justification for why she belonged at home (where it was safe) rather than in the business world (where it was not).

The absence of female directors on Broadway may have direct links to this Victorian stereotyping; reasons given for their exclusion are "that women are too emotional in rehearsals, too intuitive, can't bring the show in on time, [and] don't organize well."<sup>61</sup> The demands of a heavy production schedule, this reasoning goes, could overburden woman's weak emotional structure, causing collapse and disaster for the venture undertaken.

An even more damaging argument against female directors, however, centers on the issues of power and money.

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<sup>61</sup>Interview with Zelda Fichandler; quoted in Hennigan, 106.



In society at large a clear pattern exists: the greater the dollars, prestige, and power associated with a position, the fewer the women found in proximity to that position.

If the job is lowly, the organization experimental or community-oriented, or the artistic skill new, women are likely to be found doing the work. Once the job becomes an executive or top administrative one or the organization successful or nationally important, or the skill formalized into a profession, women's role seems to diminish . . .<sup>62</sup>

In show business as in other businesses and professions, women have not easily or regularly come into positions of importance or power in the major institutions. They have been restricted by the blatant prejudice against letting women have any say where big money and decision-making have been involved as well as by their socialization into a passive but emotional self-image.<sup>63</sup>

The actual power-base on Broadway is the producer, the person who finances the production and hires the director. Almost all producers are men and, in producing organizations such as the Shubert Organization, few, if any, women are found even in lower management posi-

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<sup>62</sup>Helen Krich Chinoy, "If Not An Actress, What . . .?," in Women in American Theatre, ed. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Crown, 1981), 191. Although its coverage of directing is weaker than its coverage of other theatrical careers occupied by women, this book is still considered a landmark for the subject matter it explores.

<sup>63</sup>Helen Krich Chinoy, "Art vs. Business: The Role of Women in American Theatre," in Chinoy and Jenkins, 2-3.

tions.<sup>64</sup> It is difficult to promote the cause of the female director when so few women occupy positions of power in the theatre. While in-roads are slowly being made in other professions, the Broadway theatre, at least on the administrative level, has never opened its doors willingly to women.

The producer is not the only "power" figure associated with the theatre, however.

The twentieth century has witnessed the evolution of the modern stage director, rising to a position of unparalleled [sic] importance and power in the history of the theatre . . . the modern director, next to the producer, is the most influential person in the theatre hierarchy.<sup>65</sup>

This factor has been noted by female historians, who have speculated that, to a great degree, the negligible percentage of female directors involved in the commercial theatre may relate to the perception of the director as a figure of power.

The overall division of labour [sic] in theatre . . . has another dimension in the way some jobs are considered the prerogative of men, others of women. The interaction between the way the social and sexual division of labour operates provides insights into the prejudices which stand in the way of a fuller participation in

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<sup>64</sup>Hennigan, 71-72.

<sup>65</sup>Donald B. Wilmeth, "A Director's Theatre," Intellect 106 (February 1978): 342.

theatre by women, especially where matters of power and authority are at stake.<sup>66</sup>

The role of director, as modelled by men, is highly individualistic. The "great directors" are the extraordinary individuals who have tenaciously pursued their own vision—extraordinary autocrats, good at finding power and using it.<sup>67</sup>

The role of director, ultimate wielder of authority during the production process, therefore, falls within the perceived male sphere of influence. With suspicions already existing regarding their emotional stability, female directors have found it difficult to break through the barrier. Furthermore, if they should do so and fail, a possibility that is equally likely for male directors, that failure, nevertheless, only reinforces the preconception that women are ill-suited for directing.

Part of the reluctance to integrate women into the hierarchical structure of Broadway productions probably relates to economics as well as power. Broadway ventures involve millions of dollars. Any Broadway production can be a hit or flop; commercial success or failure depends on many factors, including the competency of the director.

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<sup>66</sup>Micheline Wandor, Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 108. Wandor's book focuses on female directors in England. The problems facing female directors, as described by Wandor, also appear in this country, however, and apparently world-wide.

<sup>67</sup>Clare Venables, "The Woman Director in the Theatre," Theatre Quarterly 10 (Summer 1980): 4.

Many producers may hesitate to entrust a woman with such a task—and such a hefty bank account. Female directors interviewed on this subject concurred: ". . . [M]en control the money, so men hire people that can protect the money, which means mostly other men. . . . It's a kind of typecasting that men handle money better than women."<sup>68</sup>

It is perhaps significant that Broadway's emphasis on money accelerated after World War II, the period that coincides with the decline of female directors. The reasons for the increased emphasis on finances are well documented by Jack Poggi:

. . . [I]n the 1920s a run of a hundred performances—about three months—was considered sufficient [to recoup investments]; a recent [1966] estimate places the time at eight months for a successful nonmusical and at ten to eleven months (with capacity business) for musicals.<sup>69</sup>

Poggi goes on to explain that the "three factors responsible for the economic decline of the commercial theatre—growing cost, growing risk, and growing competition from

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<sup>68</sup>Fichandler interview; quoted in Hennigan, 106. The late Geraldine Fitzgerald also referred to this distrust of women handling huge sums of money (Hennigan interview).

<sup>69</sup>Jack Poggi, Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 95-96. Although somewhat dated, Poggi's book remains one of the few works dealing with the economic side of the Broadway theatre. His analysis of how the commercial theatre fell into such financial straits is excellent. Also, given the escalation of production costs over the last twenty years, Poggi's estimates for recovering financial outlay appear now extremely understated.

films"—first appeared in the boom years of the 1930s.<sup>70</sup> The full weight of these factors did not catch up with Broadway until the post-war years, when, further threatened by the advent of competition from television, the commercial theatre faced the prospect of its own decline and producers turned only to those directors, playwrights, and actors who they thought could ensure financial success and profit. For almost all male producers, women did not fit in this category, for, by stereotype, they were poor organizers, emotionally unstable, unable to balance a checkbook, and better off at home.

As a result of the bleak financial picture since 1950, the number of Broadway producers has, itself, been declining, a decline linked to the economics of the theatrical business. The decades of the 1970s and 1980s saw the closing of several Broadway theatres. With the high cost of productions, fewer producers have been willing to put up capital on such high-risk ventures. Therefore, fewer opportunities existed for male and female directors alike—and the few jobs that were available became highly competitive, with male directors more likely to come out the winners.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 84-96.

<sup>71</sup>Cary Purloff, Artistic Director, Classic Stage Company of New York, telephone interview by author, 10 November 1987.

While these explanations point out the specific obstacles faced by female directors on Broadway since 1950, they obviously are closely interrelated. The Broadway theatre's high cost has directly resulted in the declining number of produced plays; the unwillingness to vest women with directorial power is inexorably linked with conceptions of women as emotionally unstable and financially incompetent.

Broadway is by no means the only professional theatre operating in this country. Off-Broadway and regional theatres also might offer opportunities for female directors, and, indeed, Hennigan reports that ratios of female to male directors are considerably better in these two theatrical venues.<sup>72</sup> "Better," however, is not "equitable," and the number of jobs given female directors still falls far below those awarded to their male contemporaries.

Given these arguments against female directors, Margo Jones' ability to overcome the biases, both artistic and economic, that plagued women, in general, and female directors, in particular, is tantalizing. Her success as a producer has been well documented, but her work as a

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<sup>72</sup>Hennigan, 72-80. Hennigan presents some statistical data regarding the number of women directing Off-Broadway and in the regional theatre and offers some explanations as to why more women are present in these professional theatres than on Broadway.

director—a female director—has not. This study can now turn its attention to the specific theories and methods that Margo employed while directing.

### CHAPTER 3

#### IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD:

#### MARGO AND THE PLAYSRIPT

Our theatre can never be stronger than the quality of its plays.

- Margo Jones

The introduction of each play is always through the written word. The method of communication to the public by the author must always be the written word. Through words in black and white a production in the mind of a director . . . is first conceived.

- Margo Jones

For Margo Jones, the decision to direct a play was akin to falling in love. "She approached each script with 'wonderment'. . . . either she fell in love or she didn't."<sup>1</sup> In searching for a script, Margo looked for specific attributes that appealed primarily to her own sense of what she called "a sound theatre attitude." This attitude included a great desire to do the play, overwhelming enthusiasm for the script, and the confidence

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<sup>1</sup>Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 69-70.



that a fine production could be given it.<sup>2</sup> Margo's "sound theatre attitude" was not haphazard.<sup>3</sup> She developed a definite set of criteria for evaluating plays, despite her apparently emotional first reaction to them.

For a play to be a good one it must have either one or a combination of the following: (1) A story that in itself is so interesting that nothing else matters; (2) Characterizations that are so fascinating, different, individual, fun, sad or tragic that the characterizations alone hold interest; (3) Create a mood that can be so projected into an audience that the mood itself can hold a sort of fascination; (4) Dialogue that is either so witty, intellectual, gaggy [sic], poetic that the very stringing together of the words holds an audience with the style. Now any of these things can carry a play; but of course if you combine two or all, then I think you have something.<sup>4</sup>

By the time she wrote her book, Theatre-in-the-Round, in 1951, Margo had crystallized her ideas about play selection into specific elements "you looked for automatically."

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<sup>2</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 23-24. Margo considered this attitude to be the single most important factor in play selection and, indeed, production. Later in her book, she stated that "each play must be like a friend to the director" and that the director "must establish an absolute rule for himself [sic]: that he will not do a play he does not want to direct" (117-118).

<sup>3</sup>Helen Sheehy might disagree with me on this point. In her book, she stated that Margo "chose plays intuitively, and often couldn't explain her choices intellectually except to say that a play had moved her" (222).

<sup>4</sup>Margo Jones to Manning Gurian, 13 March 1947, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

Are the story and characters believable? Does the play have a unifying idea or theme or impact? Is this unifying element dramatized in the action of the play? Is it universal enough; that is, does it make you care? Does it have a sufficiently powerful or exciting conflict? Is there consistent and logical character motivation? Does the play have an inner organization of its own so that it will be intelligible to the audience and mean something to them?<sup>5</sup>

These comments indicate that Margo was acutely aware of the values of play analysis and knew exactly what she was seeking in a script. She even defined the process through which a director arrived at his or her directorial concept.

Once the director has chosen the play, he [sic] must plan to spend enough time with it to understand it thoroughly, to know exactly what the author intended to do in each scene, in each act. This means . . . that the director must confer with the author and reach an agreement about the interpretation of the play . . .<sup>6</sup>

Whether she was able to define for others what elements attracted her to a specific work is unknown, but the general belief that her play selection was entirely intuitive or emotional appears incorrect although widespread.<sup>7</sup> Margo based her selection of plays on sound,

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<sup>5</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 118.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Unfortunately, Margo did not explain how this conference with the author occurred when one was directing a classic, although she did state that it was "possible for a director to find new values and a richer texture in a script every time it . . . [was] approached anew" (44).

<sup>7</sup>See n. 3 above. Also Sheehy, 69-70; Frank Harting, Interview by Carole Cohen, 13 March 1974, interview #24, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History

though sometimes unexplainable, dramatic criteria. The qualities that most appealed to her were intangibles—poetry, mood, atmosphere.<sup>8</sup>

Some who knew her disagreed with this assessment of her play selection. Drama critic John Rosenfield, though generally favorably disposed towards Margo's efforts, often lost patience with the theatrical fare she brought to Dallas.

. . . [N]ot even her most ardent admirer attributes perfect taste or infallible judgment to her play selection. There appears to be a congenital allergy to intellectual content, which sometimes makes an inferior play worth doing. There is evidence that she relies on sordid sex situations with the vulgar faith of a peep show operator or an independent Hollywood producer. She has been heard to utter the nonsense that "the

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Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Harting was the business manager of the Southwestern School of the Theatre and Margo's mentor after graduate school. Although not a director himself, Harting had considerable insights into and expertise with theatrical productions. A former press agent and drama critic in both Dallas and New York, Harting had served as business manager for the now defunct Dallas Little Theatre.

<sup>8</sup>Margo often described her plays using these terms: "Leaf and Bough . . . [has] touches of poetic imagery and a strong feeling of nostalgia"; Skaal "has moments of rare beauty. It's all mood. It's . . . 'a heart and soul play'" and Skaal "depends largely on mood and atmosphere"; An Old Beat-Up Woman contained "theatrical poetry in the . . . language." Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 160, 168, 176; Margo Jones to Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Atkinson, 22 January 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.



public wants comedy or murder mystery" and then offer Ibsen.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, Rosenfield conceded that Margo's track record in selecting suitable plays was impressive.

A review of the theater since its start yields the picture of sixty-six productions with twenty-nine or nearly 50 per cent as plays of substance and well worth doing. This is an extraordinary average and answers some strictures on Margo's judgment.<sup>10</sup>

Rosenfield subsequently lamented Margo's aversion to intellectually stimulating or poetically expressive plays. Yet a quick scan of the plays she directed, especially in Dallas, questions Rosenfield's opinions.<sup>11</sup>

Working with any script provided the essential joy Margo experienced in the theatre. Working with the playwright in production proved the icing on the cake. "The emphasis in [her] theatre . . . was on the playwright

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<sup>9</sup>John Rosenfield, "After Seven Years a Tenth Season," Southwest Review 40 (Winter 1955): 80. I am at a loss to explain what Rosenfield meant by "sordid sex situations." My research uncovered no plays that were particularly risqué by mid-twentieth century standards. Evidence presented later in this chapter testifies to Margo's avoidance of this type of play or scene.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 82. Rosenfield continued: "One can still lament Margo's indifference to intellectuality, to poetic expressivity, and, as a consequence, her addiction to the superficial and the obvious. . . . She will deny, despite abundant evidence to the contrary, that she is anesthetic [sic] to the intellectual play. She says there are only two kinds of plays, good plays and bad plays, with or without cerebrations. This leaves unanswered, though, what she thinks is a good play."

. . . because Margo considered his [sic] talent the most creative."<sup>12</sup> Time and again, Margo heralded the cause of the new playwright, demanding that new scripts be given top priority.

I believe that the best way to [encourage playwrights] . . . is to give them opportunities to see their plays presented in a first-class theatre. Shakespeare developed alongside his theatre. Perhaps it is an academic question to ask whether he would have been a great playwright had he not been associated with a performing company. . . . Moliere, too, was an actor. Goethe had a theatre to work in. So did Ibsen, Strindberg, and O'Neill. Chekhov regained confidence with the Moscow Art Theatre . . .<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis constituted the second part of her "sound theatre attitude": "the attitude towards the new playwright. The decision to do a new script is mutually beneficent for the theatre and the dramatist . . .".<sup>14</sup> Although Margo enjoyed working with new playwrights, her pleasure derived not from having them available to rework their plays during production, but rather from having them involved in the process of bringing their words to life.

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<sup>12</sup>Martha Bumpas Gaylord, Interview by Carole Cohen, 11 April 1974, interview #35, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Bumpas Gaylord was an actor in Margo's Dallas theatre.

<sup>13</sup>Margo Jones, "Theatre '50: A Dream Come True," in Ten Talents in the American Theatre, ed. David H. Stevens (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 109.

<sup>14</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 24.

In her view, the script was central, and it was not her place to meddle with a playwright's creative muse.

I am not a re-write director; nor do I [sic] often, until in production, make suggestions to authors, for I feel my job is to interpret what the author says. . . . There are directors . . . who approach a script another way—find something that they like in a script, many things they don't like, and then start tearing the script up, telling the author what to do. I am sure at times this can be very valuable but I just don't happen to be that kind of director. I either like it or I don't.<sup>15</sup>

Despite her aversion to interfering with the playwright's muse, Margo held strong opinions about the proper length of a play. As a result, she sometimes cut or counseled her authors to cut dialogue before rehearsals began in order to bring the play within her time limits.

I have not timed the reading of your script [Dorothy Parker's and Ross Evan's The Coast of Illyria] but I feel reasonably sure that it is extremely long. My greatest aim in the theater is to interpret what an author has written. I have never been the kind of . . . director who tries to cut scripts to pieces. . . . However, I am convinced that any play that runs much over two hours and ten minutes hurts itself in the long run. I would so much prefer you two to go through the script and see if you feel that there are places that you could cut it down. My bet . . . is that it is thirty pages longer than the regular playing time usually is . . .<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Margo Jones to William Inge, 20 December 1946, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>16</sup>Margo Jones to Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans, 9 February 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. A letter from Margo to the authors dated a week later, 18 February 1949, addressed their response to her concerns, a response in



Unfortunately, data on the running times of Margo's productions are unavailable. In stipulating such a time constraint, however, Margo showed an uncommon awareness of and sensitivity to the audience's attention span and endurance.

Margo's relationship to the playwright and the script shifted with the type of play she chose to direct. In fact, classics (which she defined as any play over fifty years old) and new plays (originals) were the only plays she deemed worthy of direction.

. . . [I]t is important to realize that her [Margo's] passion was for new plays as a genre, not for any particular form of play or for any theme or philosophy.<sup>17</sup>

As if to reiterate that important point, Margo returned to it several times:

I think that audiences deserve to participate in the discovery of new talent. I think that the only way a theatre can be progressive is to do new plays. At the same time, I do think that it should present the classics, because they have been proved through the ages to be literary and

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addressed their response to her concerns, a response in which they apparently offered suggestions for rewrites. Margo's difficulty with the length of this particular play seemed obsessive. In three separate letters, two to her family (30 March 1949 and 2 April 1949) and one to playwright Bill Goyen (2 July 1949, long after the play's production), she wrote of the tediousness involved in getting the play into proper shape, primarily through extensive cutting.

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Wesley Zeigler, "Margo Jones: Legacy and Legend" in Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 21.

dramatic masterpieces. They must be kept alive for our audiences of today.<sup>18</sup>

. . . [T]o create a vigorous theater you must not only acquaint audiences with the masterpieces of the past but allow them to participate in the discovery of new playwrights. There is no point in doing the same plays over and over again.<sup>19</sup>

. . . [I]t is important to keep alive the masterpieces of the past and to let these serve the audience as a standard of excellence by which to judge the new play.<sup>20</sup>

Margo was not interested in revivals of Broadway hits that had not yet withstood the test of time: "The re-doing of mediocre successes of the commercial theatre . . . will not give us the kind of theatre our audiences are waiting for and we in the theatre need."<sup>21</sup> "The classics have proved their value throughout the history of the theatre."<sup>22</sup> Margo practiced what she preached—during her eight years in Dallas, she produced twenty-five classics and fifty-seven new plays; of these, she directed seventeen classics and thirty-three originals.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Jones, "Theatre '50: A Dream Come True," 109.

<sup>19</sup>Margo Jones, "For Those with Courage: The Theater," The Zontian (March/April 1951): 4.

<sup>20</sup>Margo Jones, "Theatre-in-the-Round Over America," World Theatre 1 (1951): 22.

<sup>21</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 190.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>23</sup>In addition, Margo directed several original plays for the commercial theatre: You Touched Me!, Cleveland Playhouse and Pasadena Playhouse; The Glass Menagerie, On Whitman Avenue, and Joan of Lorraine, Broadway. She also



Margo's approach to the two categories of plays she directed necessarily differed. When directing classics, she dealt solely with the text; with original plays, she dealt with both the text and the playwright. Our attention now turns to Margo and her relationship with the classical playscript.

For Margo, the director's job was "to interpret what the author says,"<sup>24</sup>

because . . . a director must be able to translate a play into action on the stage . . . This demands an understanding of the script itself, the actors, . . . the stage setting, lighting, costumes, properties—every detail of stage production.<sup>25</sup>

Margo believed that a primary role for any director was to bring to the production a unifying concept—an interpretation—through which the actors and designers could coalesce. By defining the meaning of a script, the director suggested to his or her collaborators the common element that coordinated their efforts. Furthermore, this interpretation needed to be translated into tangible visual elements on the stage—sets, lights, costumes.

According to some of her contemporaries, Margo proved incapable of this most important task.

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re-directed three of her Dallas plays for New York: Summer and Smoke, An Old Beat-Up Woman, and Southern Exposure. Only the first and last made it to Broadway.

<sup>24</sup>Jones to Inge, 20 December 1946; Jones to Parker and Evans, 9 February 1949.

<sup>25</sup>Jones, "For Those with Courage . . .," 4.

Margo was not . . . well educated in the theater; in terms of critique, knowledge of the theater, she was not. There were great gaps in her information about theater, about style, about the history of theater. . . . being the fanatic she was, she didn't try to find out anything more than she knew . . . It was all intuitive.<sup>26</sup>

This recurring assessment of Margo's work as intuitive might be overstating the case.

The impression that Margo was unknowledgeable about theatre or incapable of textual analysis and, as a result, directed instinctively could easily arise from the time constraints under which she worked. Margo's schedule was filled to bursting—she often chose her season and cast her company only a month or so before opening night<sup>27</sup>—"not

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<sup>26</sup>Claire Rosenfield, Interview by Carole Cohen, 30 April 1974, interview #69, Part I, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Rosenfield was married to John Rosenfield, drama critic for the Dallas Morning News and staunch supporter of Margo Jones and her theatre. Rosenfield's views on Margo's directing abilities are quite candid and offer opinions about her direction that vary significantly from most contemporary accounts.

<sup>27</sup>Sheehy, 129, 148. For her opening season, Margo "had two months to remodel the building's auditorium for theatre-in-the-round, install lighting equipment, platforms, and seats, make final decisions on five plays . . . [and] hire an acting company and staff . . ." (emphasis mine). "Rehearsals [for her second season] would begin October 7 [1947], allowing Margo only a month to option new scripts and hire a company of actors" (emphasis mine). This trend continued throughout her years in Dallas. Margo's hectic schedule in her first seasons may have set the tone for later evaluations of her interpretive skills: "With barely two weeks' rehearsal for each play, it is remarkable that the theatre's productions had any polish at all. While one play was running for fourteen days, another was in rehearsal, but matinees during the two-week period eliminated four days of rehearsal time and the

enough time to do a play any where [sic] near right."<sup>28</sup>

Such a tight schedule could easily explain Margo's lack of communication with outsiders regarding her interpretive assessments of plays.

That she did not communicate ideas does not prove that she was incapable of formulating them. For example, Margo's writings indicated that she clearly understood and evaluated the contexts of the classical plays she directed. In her book, Margo presented the following analysis of Moliere's

The Learned Ladies:

In this play . . . the great comic [Moliere] returned to his earlier satirical attack on the "blue-stocking" or "precieuse" trend. Although there is a sentimental note in the resolution of the plot, I feel that it is a fuller play than Les Precieuses Ridicules and a brilliant comedy of character. Few writers of comedy have succeeded as well as Moliere in provoking a genuinely thoughtful laughter, always derived from the author's way of looking at life: intellectual rather than emotional.<sup>29</sup>

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actors had one day off every two weeks . . . thus leaving just nine days for rehearsal" (159).

<sup>28</sup>Margo Jones to Joanna Albus, n.d., Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Margo's ambitious schedule for her long-delayed repertory theatre conflicted sharply with her earlier desires for a full-time theatrical company that would allow a leisurely rehearsal period (see Ch. 2, p. 20). However, a professional acting company did allow eight-hour rehearsals, which she deemed necessary for any theatrical venture. Margo eventually resolved her scheduling problems. By her third season in Dallas, she had extended her season so that each play received a three-week rehearsal period, which she considered adequate for directing any play. See Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 50.

<sup>29</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 163.

It might be argued that Margo, writing in 1950 with the express intention of describing her productions, had done her homework for the benefit of her book. Yet in a letter written during the production, she offered the same, though more briefly stated, analysis:

It's [The Learned Ladies] really a take-off on the pseudo-intellectual ladies in France. Mr. Moliere has such real wit and understanding that it is fascinating to discover the great similarity of minds in 1672 with those of 1948.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the care with which she selected translations of the foreign plays she directed belied the claim that her theatrical expertise was all intuitive.

The Stark Young texts [of Chekhov's plays] make Chekhov comprehensible and not at all remote for an American audience, and they preserve the original of Chekhov. . . . In Mr. Young's text [of The Sea Gull] Chekhov's wonderful gift for combining tragedy and comedy comes clearly to the fore . . . This is a factor of vital importance for any production of The Sea Gull; the pathos of the characters' lives must never become so gloomy that the audience will find it laughable. The proportions are in the Stark Young translation, and it is up to the director to follow its indications.<sup>31</sup>

Margo's dedication to classic playwrights found greatest expression in the works of Shakespeare, five of whose plays she directed.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Margo Jones to Parents, 27 October 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>31</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 171.

<sup>32</sup>A breakdown of classical playwrights directed by Margo Jones reveals the following: Shakespeare (5), Ibsen (3), Wilde (2), Shaw (2), Moliere (1), Chekhov (1), Gold-



As a Director, I am personally obsessed with the continual wonderment of the re-discovery of the classics . . . most of all [by] the challenge Shakespeare offers.<sup>33</sup>

I believe that Shakespeare is the greatest playwright of all times, but I do not approach his work with awe. The insight into human nature and the great poetry are a stimulus to any director . . . but there is a danger in worshipping Shakespeare too much and treating him as pure literature. The Shakespearean plays were written for a popular audience and when presented today they should be clear and interesting to the spectator, for I do not believe there are many people who come to the theatre merely "to hear the great words." The reason Shakespeare's plays have survived and will continue to survive is that he is the most universal author who ever wrote for the theatre.<sup>34</sup>

Margo's theatre produced eight Shakespearean plays in ten seasons: six comedies and two tragedies. Interestingly, Margo chose to direct the comic romances.<sup>35</sup> For some reason, the romantic plays appealed to her: "The Taming of the Shrew . . . is a lively farce-comedy about the battle of the sexes with the resulting triumph of the male" and

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smith (1), O'Casey (1), and Giraudoux (1). The latter two, while not technically classics by Margo's definition, are included in this list because, as foreign plays, Margo dealt with their texts and not their authors.

<sup>33</sup>Margo Jones, "Shakespeare in the Round," World Theatre 3 (1954): 30.

<sup>34</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 154.

<sup>35</sup>In Dallas, Margo directed The Taming of the Shrew, Twelfth Night, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and As You Like It. In addition, she produced, but did not direct, Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and The Merry Wives of Windsor. While in Houston, Margo had directed three comedies and one tragedy: The Taming of the Shrew, As You Like It, A Comedy of Errors, and Macbeth.

"Twelfth Night is a romantic comedy which includes broad humor and satire as well as romance . . .".<sup>36</sup>

Although Shakespeare held Margo's allegiance as the greatest playwright, Henrik Ibsen's plays probably intrigued her the most. Ibsen's heroines had been the subject of her Master's thesis, and her loyalty to the Norwegian playwright never wavered. She directed Hedda Gabler three times,<sup>37</sup> the most-directed play in her repertoire. Margo's analysis of this play provided the most-detailed insights available for any of her productions.

Hedda has a passionate desire to find great beauty in life but she is destroyed by her fear of scandal, her concern with other people's opinion and, above all, by her lack of interest in anything her environment can provide. The source of her downfall is her background—wealthy, arrogant, selfish and snobbish. There is a potential of stature in Hedda, but she does not know how to cope with life.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 154, 166.

<sup>37</sup>At Ojai Community Playhouse, with the Houston Community Players, and in Dallas.

<sup>38</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 140. Margo continued: "There are many avenues to explore. Hedda has married George Tesman on the spur of the moment, possibly because he bought a house she casually mentioned to make conversation, and now she is afraid that marriage and ensuing motherhood may deprive her of her individuality. She is disgusted with her husband's affection; intimacy with him seems hateful to her. But she once had an interest—Eilert Lovberg, . . . Here is her opportunity to mold a human destiny, the one thing that will elevate her above her fellow men. . . . She pursues her objective relentlessly until she places one of her father's pistols in Lovberg's hands and tells him to do it 'beautifully'" (140-141).

Despite her admiration for Ibsen and his work, Margo realized that his plays did not appeal to everyone. Of The Master Builder, which received mixed critical reviews, Margo wrote: ". . . [T]his play indicates more of a tendency on Ibsen's part to fill his play with symbols and to add mysticism to the realistic drama"<sup>39</sup>—qualities that appealed to her but evidently not the critics.<sup>40</sup> And in attempting to explain the lack of public response to her production of Ghosts, Margo theorized that

The theme of the play is still valid today (conventions can and frequently do imprison the individual, impeding his [sic] progress and denying him both integrity and happiness), but the dramatic illustrations seem somewhat dated . . .<sup>41</sup>

It is evident that Margo was drawn to realism, from both the majority of plays she selected for production and the manner in which she staged them, but she was also fascinated with symbolism and other non-realistic dramatic forms. Thus was her attraction to such Tennessee Williams' works as The Glass Menagerie, Summer and Smoke, and The Purification

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 147.

<sup>40</sup>Such phrases as "complicated apparatus of symbolism," "merely . . . a symbolical struggle," and "most tortuous vocabulary of symbolism" represent examples of the reviewers' comments. John Rosenfield, "Ibsen Drama on Free Spirit Opens Season," Dallas Morning News, 4 November 1947, sec. 2, p. 4; Frank Chappell, "Actress Scores as Ibsen 'Conscience,'" Daily Times Herald, 4 November 1947; John Rosenfield, "Are Artists People? . . . Mr. Ibsen's Play Still Best Discussion on It," Dallas Morning News, 7 November 1947.

<sup>41</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 182.

reconciled with her choice of such realistic dramas as Farther Off From Heaven and Inherit the Wind. Furthermore, Margo's fascination with symbolic drama was spotted years earlier while she worked in Austin:

. . . [Margo] stuck a thumb in every available non-realistic pie with an energetic attempt to pull out as many imaginative plums as expressionistic drama will consume.<sup>42</sup>

Margo Jones, despite her dedication to the playwright's words, did make cuts in classical plays. Production promptbooks from nine classical playscripts allow us to analyze Margo's reasons for altering existing texts.<sup>43</sup> As with her analysis of scripts, she made cuts based on her ideas of what best served her specific productions.

I do feel it is important . . . to work from the originals and arrive at your own cuttings rather than use one of the many acting versions which may contain derivations from [the text] . . . which you would not choose to take.<sup>44</sup>

For example, in Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew, the story of Katharina and Petruchio is set within the framework of a play within a play. Margo eliminated the induction (introduction) to the main story, because, as she said,

. . . I saw no reason for a framework in an intimate theatre. There is no need for a Christopher

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<sup>42</sup>Untitled article, The Daily Texan [University of Texas], 12 April 1944.

<sup>43</sup>See Appendix A: Promptbooks Consulted. Any references to promptbooks in this study are taken from these sources.

<sup>44</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 155.



Sly in a theatre where 198 people are on the stage with the actors . . .<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, "not much more of the script was cut. . . . Shrew is probably the best plotted [Shakespearean comedy] and the one in which the characterizations are best realized."<sup>46</sup>

Margo's acting company in Dallas was small. When directing plays with large casts, she often cut or combined characters in order to accommodate the script to her company. In Lady Windermere's Fan, for example, she cut the characters of Lady Jedburgh, Lady Stutfield, Mrs. Cowper-Cowper, and Rosalie, the maid. In most cases, these characters' lines were deleted. In others, their lines and actions were assumed by other characters. For example, Rosalie's lines were assigned to Parker, the butler, with no effect on the action of the play.<sup>47</sup> Margo also added a character, albeit an offstage one, to this play, to facilitate pacing and overcrowded conditions on the stage.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>47</sup>Lady Windermere's Fan, beginning of Act IV, pp. 199-200.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., end of Act I, p. 156; beginning of Act II, p. 160; and beginning of Act IV, pp. 199-200. Margo turned the male butler, Parker, into a female housekeeper, probably for reasons of personnel. She then added the character of Mason, the butler, whose sole function was to announce, from offstage, the arrival of guests at the Windermere's party (Act II). Margo thus eliminated one character from an already crowded scene, while still

Likewise, lines for such nominal roles as "First Lord" and "Forester" in Shakespeare's As You Like It were either eliminated or, more often, reassigned to more important characters.<sup>49</sup> Again, these changes did little to alter the basic action of the play.

Margo occasionally changed words or phrases in a text to conform to her actors' physical characteristics or the limitations of her arena staging. For example, she changed "black" to "light" when referring to hair color<sup>50</sup> or eliminated all references to the age of a certain character.<sup>51</sup>

Cuts of this kind can also give us clues about how certain scenes were staged. For example, in The Merchant of Venice, Portia alludes to the curtains behind which the three caskets reside. Yet Margo's promptbook either omitted "curtains" or changed it to "covers," indicating that the caskets were hidden, not behind draperies, but under cloths

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preserving the integrity of an upper-class British household.

<sup>49</sup>As You Like It, Act II, scene i, pp. 110-112; Act IV, scene ii, p. 126; Act V, scene iii, pp. 151, 163.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, Act III, scene v, pp. 143-145—references to Phebe's hair; Heartbreak House, middle Act II, p. 584—reference to Hesione's hair.

<sup>51</sup>Heartbreak House, mid-Act I, pp. 514-516, mid-Act II, pp. 543, 550. Shaw's character, Mangan, is about fifty years old. A much younger man apparently played the role and all references to Mangan's age were cut as a result. Because Mangan plays the male love interest in the play, this change could have eliminated some of the inherent humor or contrast in a December-May relationship.

—an expedient change necessitated by the staging limitations of theatre-in-the-round.<sup>52</sup>

Margo also occasionally cut lines she thought unnecessary to the plot. For example, in The Learned Ladies, large sections of dialogue that simply elaborated a point already made were extracted.<sup>53</sup>

Some cuts seem problematic, however, because arguments can be made for keeping the original wording. Such cases occur several times within the promptbooks.

In As You Like It, for example, Margo cut dialogue between Duke Senior and the First Lord that introduced, in detail, the melancholic Jaques.<sup>54</sup> Her reasoning behind this deletion was probably to eliminate the First Lord while, at the same time, moving the action forward more quickly. But through the cut, the audience lost its initial introduction to Jaques. The passage was also quite humorous, describing Jaques' pathos over the death of a deer, and it allowed the audience to form an impression of Jaques

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<sup>52</sup>The Merchant of Venice, Act II, scene vii, lines 1-2, 78; Act II, scene ix, lines 1, 84.

<sup>53</sup>The Learned Ladies, end of Act III, scene ii, pp. 38-39—beginning with Armande's line "I long to see our meetings opened . . ."; end of Act IV, scene ii, p. 51—excerpts from Armande's and Clitandre's speeches; end of Act IV, scene iii, pp. 55-56—beginning with Tissotin's line "We see the kind of taste it forms . . ."; the last line of the scene was retained.

<sup>54</sup>As You Like It, Act II, scene i, p. 111.

before he ever appeared on stage, thus preparing it for his particular idiosyncrasies.

Another cut made, apparently for purposes of pacing, was in Phebe's letter to Rosalind.<sup>55</sup> Margo kept the first two lines of the letter, then cut the remaining sixteen. She retained the subsequent dialogue, which seems somewhat extravagant given the brevity of Phebe's missive. This scene loses its continuity without the rest of Phebe's letter, which sings the praises (and cruelty) of the "man" (Rosalind) she loves.

At the end of the play (Act V, scene iv), Margo cut much of Hymen's dialogue and the Wedding Song; neither contributed to plot nor character development and both delayed a swift conclusion to the play. However, immediately following these cuts, Margo eliminated Jaques de Boys' speech which neatly resolved the subplot concerning Duke Frederick's and Duke Senior's conflict. Instead, the audience was informed that "If I [Jaques] heard you [?—Jaques de Boys in original] rightly,/The Duke [Frederick] hath put on a religious life/And thrown into neglect the pompous court?"<sup>56</sup> By this cut, Margo disrupted the logic of the scene, because the audience had no idea from whom Jaques received this startling revelation. The implication was

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., Act IV, scene iii, p. 153.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., Act V, scene iv, pp. 168-169.

that Duke Senior, who should have been the happy recipient of this news, was, instead, the bearer of these tidings. Perhaps Margo became impatient with the play's length and began cutting in order to bring the play within her sense of a reasonable time. Rosalind's epilogue may have been cut for similar reasons; no stage notations indicate that it was performed.<sup>57</sup>

Another play that presented examples of problematic cuts was The Merchant of Venice. Margo's deletions are puzzling, because the material cut does not appear extraneous. For example, Margo extracted the first two scenes of Act II—eight pages of dialogue.<sup>58</sup> These scenes introduced Portia's first serious suitor, the Prince of Morocco (scene i), and Launcelot Gobbo (scene ii). Although an argument might be made that the Prince of Morocco's scene is not necessary, the deletion of Act II, scene ii, proves more troublesome. This scene opens with the humorous confrontation between Launcelot and his father, Old Gobbo. Here we are introduced to the comic elements of the play: Shakespeare's delightful clowns and their play on words, puns, and double entendre. We also learn Launcelot's function in the play, as Shylock's former—and Bassanio's current—servant and, thus, aider and abettor of Bassanio's plot to

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Epilogue, p. 170.

<sup>58</sup>The Merchant of Venice, Act II, scenes i, ii, pp. 19-26.

elope with Jessica. This scene sets up the subsequent one (Act II, scene iii) in which Jessica bemoans Launcelot's departure from her father's service.

Several explanations present themselves for Margo's extraction of this scene, though at second glance some seem less valid than others. Both Launcelot and Old Gobbo are pivotal to this scene; perhaps Margo was unable to cast the older character's part—her cast list indicates, however, that an actor was selected for the role. Maybe this same actor proved unsatisfactory or became ill. No evidence supports this theory. A more likely explanation is that the play simply ran too long. The promptbook shows that Scene II was blocked and technical directions (lights, sound) were inserted, implying an extraction fairly late in the rehearsal process.

Similarly, Act III, scene v, was cut.<sup>59</sup> Launcelot Gobbo again has a prominent role in this scene: he and Jessica discuss her conversion to Christianity (in a roundabout way), Lorenzo accuses him of impregnating "the Moor" (a servant), and Lorenzo and Jessica sing Portia's praises. This scene might have been cut because of its possibly controversial discussions of conversion from Judaism to Christianity and impregnation. Notations in the promptbook indicate, however, that this scene, too, was cut after

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., Act III, scene v, pp. 60-62.

rehearsals began, although no technical directions occur within the text, suggesting an earlier extraction from the production than Act II, scene ii.

The end result of these two major deletions is that Launcelot Gobbo, one of Shakespeare's more endearing fools, becomes a non-entity in the play. And this fact poses yet another possibility for these deletions: perhaps the actor playing Launcelot was ineffective in the role. Or else Margo wished to place the entire focus of the play on Shylock and thus relegated the play's comic relief to the sidelines. No evidence could be found to support or refute either of these theories, but it does provoke some interesting questions.

Finally, Margo sometimes cut controversial or suggestive dialogue, dialogue that might potentially offend or disrupt the audience. She was apparently quite sensitive to such material and fairly consistently omitted it from her plays. For example, Margo made only four changes in The Importance of Being Earnest. Of these changes, only Gwendolen's line,

And certainly once a man begins to neglect his domestic duties he becomes painfully effeminate, does he not? And I don't like that. It makes men so very attractive.<sup>60</sup>

is cut, for no more apparent reason than its use of the word "effeminate" and the suggestion that this quality is desir-

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<sup>60</sup>The Importance of Being Earnest, mid-Act II, p. 99.

able in men. The context, however, renders the statement harmless. In Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, Margo deleted all references to the Knights of St. Columbanus, a religious organization of dubious merit to which the two main characters belong.<sup>61</sup> These references may have been cut because of the audience's unfamiliarity with the organization or, and this is quite possible, Margo thought the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic men's group devoted to charitable works, might take offense.

Margo often cut dialogue referring to "horns" and "cuckolds," such as Touchstone's speech, "As horns are odious," in As You Like It.<sup>62</sup> In a similar vein, Margo cut Shylock's speech in which he graphically describes the Biblical story of Jacob's pairing of ewes and rams to illustrate the history of interest lending.<sup>63</sup>

While these examples are but a few of the cuts that the promptbooks reveal Margo made in her productions, they are a fair sample of the types of deletions she used. They also lend credibility to the proposition that Margo was less worshipful of the classical playwright than of the contemporary one. Finally, they certainly lay to rest the myth that

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<sup>61</sup>Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, Scene I, pp. 11, 13, 14; Scene II, pp. 65, 66; and Scene III, p. 89.

<sup>62</sup>As You Like It, Act III, scene iii, pp. 138-139.

<sup>63</sup>The Merchant of Venice, Act I, scene iii, lines 78-98.



Margo never changed "a syllable, a line, a word . . . unless the playwright was present."<sup>64</sup>

We can conclude, then, that Margo altered classical texts for several reasons: (1) she deleted unnecessary characters for reasons of either pacing or personnel; (2) she reworded dialogue to conform to differing physical characteristics, either human or scenic; (3) she cut to increase the pace, reduce the play's length, or both; or (4) she censored. Sometimes her changes accomplished more than one purpose. Interestingly, Margo apparently took greater liberties with Shakespearean scripts than with others.

Her censorship of suggestive dialogue at first glance proves puzzling inasmuch as Margo's own choice of a single life, devoted to the theatre, suggests that she was not inhibited by society's conventional views.<sup>65</sup> Her outgoing lifestyle, which often included alcoholic beverages, occasionally shocked the more conservative elements of soci-

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<sup>64</sup>Rosenfield interview, 30 April 1974.

<sup>65</sup>Margo's choice of career over family obviously set her apart from the majority of American women of her time. As Sheehy succinctly put it, even in this area, Margo was a pioneer: "In the early 1950s most women did not struggle with Margo's dilemma [career or family], for they had accepted the traditionally female role of wife and mother. But just as Margo had served as a pioneering theatre leader, clearing the way for others to follow, in her personal life too she [was] . . . ahead of her time in undiscovered country" (225).

ety.<sup>66</sup> She also seemed not to be prudish in matters of sexual preference or intimate relationships outside marriage: Margo was a close friend of Tennessee Williams and "had an earthy understanding of Tennessee's sexual preferences."<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, she carried on a long-term affair with Manning Gurian, her theatre's business manager and part-time playwright.<sup>68</sup> From these facts, we can deduce that Margo's censorship of texts was probably not the result of any deep-seated aversion to sexually suggestive or explicit material. More likely, Margo's tendency to cut such dialogue stemmed from her understanding of her audience's sensibilities.

The proscenium arch, footlights and distance of the conventional theatre reduce considerably the violence of raw passions and make even the gamiest scenes palatable for the sensitive soul. In intimate theatre-in-the-round, [however,] when a man screams viciously at his wife, [audience member]

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<sup>66</sup>Margo's drinking apparently never affected her work, nor would it have caused undue concern among her colleagues since drinking was considered a social activity and a large part of Margo's job was to socialize. On occasion, however, her alcohol consumption caused a stir. Dakin Williams, Tennessee's brother, related this incident to Sheehy in an interview: When Margo met Cornelius Williams, Tennessee's father, the elder Williams feared his son might get involved with the "drinking and dancing" Margo—"he told his son that the Williams family had 'never had a sober man or a drunken woman' in it, and he warned him against marrying the wanton Margo" (61).

<sup>67</sup>Sheehy, 61.

<sup>68</sup>Interview with Manning Gurian; cited in Sheehy, 112. Margo's personal letters to Gurian also supply information on this relationship; Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

Mrs. Smith is right in that room with them and her embarrassment can become almost intolerable.<sup>69</sup>

Margo recognized the value of not shocking or offending her audience<sup>70</sup>—an audience upon whom her theatre relied for its very existence. "Figure," she once said, "that I'm 51 per cent creator and 49 per cent promoter"<sup>71</sup>—and promoting her theatre might take precedence over preserving the playwright's words.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>George Mitchell, "Actor-in-the-Round," New York Times, 28 March 1948, sec. 2, p. 2. Mitchell knew whereof he spoke—he was a featured actor in Margo's Dallas company.

<sup>70</sup>John William Rogers recorded a similar sensitivity in an undated pamphlet, "Unique Theatre Supported in Dallas," published by the Daily Times Herald: "Margo has . . . learned from experience that properly directed . . . [theatre-in-the-round] can serve equally well any type of play. There is one exception not in kind but in content. This medium of theatre is so intimate that where a play offers a scene of intense suffering or horror [or sexuality?], it becomes so overpowering it affects the audience unpleasantly."

<sup>71</sup>Murray Schumach, "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway," New York Times Sunday Magazine, 17 October 1948, p. 59.

<sup>72</sup>Two additional episodes occurred that help support this viewpoint. William Inge must certainly have been aware of Margo's hesitancy to display highly sexual material before her audiences. After Inge finished Come Back, Little Sheba, Margo considered directing it in Dallas. Inge wrote Margo, "What would a struggling young . . . playwright do without you?" He expressed concern, however, with a scene in the play that he felt might not suit Margo's purposes because "it is sexy but the sexual element is relieved by humor. Still, it might not do for you"; William Inge to Margo Jones, 5 January 1949, William Inge Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Inge apparently reconsidered this position, for a week later he wrote Margo, apologizing for his "squeamish" letter and informing her that Turk's javelin scene was not "too obviously phallic

Margo Jones, then, although often accused of only selecting those plays that appealed to her emotionally, did have specific criteria which she applied to her play selection. Plays with strong plots, characters, or themes were usually chosen, especially if the more intangible qualities of poetry, mood, and atmosphere were also present. Most important in play selection, however, were Margo's self-proscribed limitations regarding the play's authorship. She directed only plays that were originals or classics because she firmly believed that the future of American theatre lay in such scripts. Her reverence for the playwright's words often guided her approach to the script, although she took liberties with classical texts. These liberties took the form of line deletions, character deletions, rewordings, and

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for Dallas audiences"; William Inge to Margo Jones, 13 January 1949, William Inge Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Margo's production of The Last Island provides evidence contrary to this theory, however. "The newspapers received letters from several patrons who said the play was coarse and risque because of two uses of profanity and a scene in which the dancer undressed partially before her dancing partner and then quickly donned a modest costume"; Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964), 154. In response to this complaint, John Rosenfield of the Dallas Morning News replied, "We can't avoid the thought that a person getting extraordinary sex motivation from 'The Last Island' must have a low boiling point and should pitter-patter down to his or her psychiatrist for a sedation." Rosenfield implied that the production was less stimulating than the patron described; John Rosenfield, "How to Feel Unclean in a Theater," Dallas Morning News, 23 January 1953, sec. 2, p. 14.

censorship for numerous reasons, among them pacing, personnel, and audience sensitivity. However, in her interpretations of both classical and original playscripts, Margo's guiding concern was that she be as true to the author's intent as humanly possible.

## CHAPTER 4

### IN SEARCH OF . . . ANOTHER SHAKESPEARE:

#### MARGO AND THE PLAYWRIGHT

I believe in a playwright's theatre. I am a director, and I have wanted to be a director since I was eleven years old, but I think that theatre begins with the playwright. . . . The theatre is a co-operative venture in which the author, the actor, the director, the designer, and the technician collaborate. But they cannot begin to collaborate until the playwright has set down his [sic] basic idea, his story, his characters, his mood, and his words. This is the starting point.

- Margo Jones

Opening a new script is a challenge; you may be able to discover a great play or a great playwright in the making. . . . but it also involves a responsibility if you are in a position to give that play life in a theatre. I can think of no greater excitement than finding a good play and knowing that I can put it on, that the words on paper will become words and action on a stage.

- Margo Jones

She would not change a syllable, a line, a word in any play unless the playwright was present and made the judgment themselves [sic]. . . . The play went on as the playwright wrote it. She worshipped the playwright.

- Claire Rosenfield

Margo's dedication to the new playwright manifested itself in numerous ways. For example, her reasons for altering classical scripts did not carry over to original

texts. She apparently refused to change or delete dialogue without the playwright's permission. This penchant for preserving the dialogue as written occasionally came under sharp criticism. Drama critic John Rosenfield would, on occasion, lambast Margo for not insisting on rewrites,<sup>1</sup> reporting that

Although the theater is, in some respects, a tryout for new plays she [Margo] exercises precious little editorial control. Script after script goes on without correction of the most obvious faults.<sup>2</sup>

Playwright Manning Gurian believed that "a director has to go beyond the play. She didn't try to improve the play or change it."<sup>3</sup> Plays sometimes suffered artistically as well because of her refusal to demand changes. Her pro-

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<sup>1</sup>John Rosenfield, "Theater '52 at the Final Week," Dallas Morning News, 23 May 1952, sec. 1, p. 8. In the same article he criticized her for favoring "specious theatricality, sex situations and melodramatic corn above challenging ideas." I am again confused by Rosenfield's reference to "sex situations." In my research, I found no explicitly sexual or offensive material in any of the plays Margo directed. This issue is discussed more fully in Ch. 3, pp. 79-80.

<sup>2</sup>John Rosenfield, "After Seven Years a Tenth Season," Southwest Review 40 (Winter 1955): 80-81.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Manning Gurian; quoted in Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 196. Both of these men were in position to comment on Margo's unwillingness to alter scripts. Rosenfield reviewed every one of her Dallas productions and was a close personal friend. Gurian, in addition to being her business manager and lover, also had his play, Lemple's Old Man, directed by Margo, and co-produced An Old Beat-Up Woman's ill-fated bid for Broadway.



duction of Harry Granick's The Guilty probably failed simply because she did not request cuts or rewrites, something that Granick rectified after the play's Dallas premiere.<sup>4</sup>

Margo was even known occasionally to block the playwright's own decision to rewrite the script: "Margo doesn't want much changes in the script [You Touched Me!] and is pretty stubborn against any new ideas."<sup>5</sup> Margo's justification for not tampering with new plays may have come from her idealistic view of the playwright: "When I pick up a [new] script, I say to myself, 'It could be Shakespeare.'"<sup>6</sup> But this justification may also signal her own lack of confidence in her ability to label, or alter for the better, problems within scripts.

Despite her apparent aversion to cutting original plays, Margo did, on occasion, do so. For example, during

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Harry Granick; cited in Sheehy, 241-242. Interestingly, Granick was quite pleased with the production process itself and Margo's rehearsal decisions, so much so that he wrote a newspaper article praising Margo's insights in solving the play's staging difficulties; Harry Granick, "Staging Problems Solved in Arena," Dallas Morning News, [24 November 1953].

<sup>5</sup>Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 8 November 1943; quoted in Donald Windham, ed., Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, 1940-1965 (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 117. The letter refers to Margo's Cleveland production of You Touched Me!, co-authored by Williams and Windham.

<sup>6</sup>John Beaufort, "Theater in the Round in Dallas Style," Christian Science Monitor, 29 May 1954.



a summer residency at the Pasadena Playhouse in 1943, Margo cut the last scene of Ted Apstein's The Velvet Tower, a particularly curious extraction since the play was a murder mystery and the resolution was contained in the deleted scene. Margo's reasoning, according to a letter to Apstein, was that the last scene did not work. She thought it more interesting for the audience to "figure out the mystery's solution on their own."<sup>7</sup> This incident occurred fairly early in her career and evidence suggests that she did not generally follow this course of action, a conclusion bolstered by her later remarks:

I abhorre [sic] directors . . . who tell playwrights how to write a play. For many years I felt so violently on this subject that I did not feel it within my province to make any suggestions. Within the last few years I have slightly changed my mind . . .<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps experiences like those with Parker and Evans (authors of The Coast of Illyria)<sup>9</sup> had eroded Margo's faith in the perfection of the playwright's words and caused her

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<sup>7</sup>Sheehy, 57. Apstein was a graduate student at the University of Texas while Margo was teaching there. He was the only serious playwright she met at the university, and she subsequently directed three of his plays while at Texas.

<sup>8</sup>Margo Jones to Edwin Justus Mayer, 5 May 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Margo had directed the world premiere of Mayer's Sunrise in My Pocket while in Houston.

<sup>9</sup>See Ch. 3, p. 58, for a more detailed report of this episode.

to believe that occasional, judicious interference might be necessary.

Margo's allegiance to the playwright still remained her greatest asset, however, when soliciting new plays or being considered for directing jobs outside Dallas. This perception of Margo as a playwright's director sprang from her work on The Glass Menagerie, a perception that was both verified and validated by her subsequent work. Initially hired as co-director because Eddie Dowling, the director, also played the leading male role, Margo's job soon took on another dimension—that of defender of the play. She was called upon frequently to champion Williams' script against the interference of Dowling, co-producer Louis J. Singer, and critic George Jean Nathan.<sup>10</sup> At one point, Singer demanded that Williams write a happy ending for the play. Margo, totally opposed to such a desecration, told Williams, "Tennessee, don't you change that ending. It's perfect." She then warned Singer, "Mr. Singer . . . if you make Tennessee change the play the way you want it, so help me I'll go around to every critic in town and tell them about the kind of wire-pulling that's going on here."<sup>11</sup> At another point during

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<sup>10</sup>Nathan's involvement with the production was of a personal nature. He was subsequently to marry Julie Haydon, the production's "Laura."

<sup>11</sup>Murray Schumach, "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway," New York Times Sunday Magazine, 17 October 1948, p. 59.

rehearsals, Dowling requested a drunk scene for his character, Tom. Again, Margo and Williams opposed the idea. In fact, Dowling and Nathan had already written such a scene and Margo, angered by their interference, effectively argued that Williams, and Williams alone, would make such a decision.<sup>12</sup> (As it turned out, Williams did add a drunk scene.)

Margo and Tennessee were to collaborate several times over the years; he would be the only new playwright she directed more than once: You Touched Me! (Cleveland and Pasadena), The Glass Menagerie (New York), The Purification (Pasadena and Dallas), The Last of My Solid Gold Watches, This Property Is Condemned, Portrait of a Madonna (Dallas), and Summer and Smoke (Dallas, New York, and road company).

The relationship between this director and playwright developed out of mutual admiration. That Margo would put the good of a play before the good of herself must have appealed to Tennessee immensely<sup>13</sup> and may even have

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<sup>12</sup>Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1972), 82; also Donald Windham to Sandy Campbell, 13 December 1944; quoted in Windham, 154.

<sup>13</sup>Margo's selflessness when it came to Williams' plays became apparent early in their relationship. In referring to a possible production in New York for You Touched Me!, Williams wrote: "Margo will not be crushed over being left out of a possible Broadway production. . . . There is a core of real unselfish interest in the woman. Naturally she wants her bone to chew on, but far more than most of us she is capable of an impersonal

prompted Williams to write in 1943, after seeing her productions in Pasadena, that "her direction is better than anything in New York, except possibly Mary Hunter's."<sup>14</sup> While Tennessee found Hunter the more intelligent of the two, Margo had "the energy of Niagara Falls and an enthusiasm which [was] . . . either irresistible or overwhelming."<sup>15</sup>

Margo was attracted to the poetry and imaginative quality in Williams' works. Of The Glass Menagerie, she wrote that she "first fell in love with the typewritten words . . . and at first reading the play took the form of a production in the imagination."<sup>16</sup> She continued that train of thought, revealing not only her reverence for Williams' words, but also her worshipful attitude towards any play's text:

There are two types of theatre and drama audiences. One type sits in a theatre and sees actors, director, designer and technicians in-

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devotion to something and evidently this play is really in her heart more than her ambition"; Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 3 November 1943; quoted in Windham, 114. As it turned out, Margo, although having directed the play twice, was not selected to direct its short-lived Broadway appearance.

<sup>14</sup>Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 27 August 1943; quoted in Windham, 101.

<sup>15</sup>Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 1 July 1943; quoted in Windham, 84.

<sup>16</sup>This quotation (undated) was found among Margo's papers at the home of her brother, Richard Jones, Houston, TX.

interpret the author's play. The second type reads a play and produces it in the imagination. When a play can have meaning and beauty both to the theatre audience and the reading audience then it is doing a double duty. The longest life a play can have is on the printed page. In this form it can live from one generation to another. In this form it is available to an audience that may not have the opportunity of seeing the play in production.<sup>17</sup>

And for Margo Jones, Tennessee Williams wrote plays, filled with meaning and beauty, for the imagination.

The collaboration between the two hit rocky ground, however, with Summer and Smoke. Margo first directed the play during her inaugural season in Dallas. She had become obsessed with the play in its earlier form as A Chart of Anatomy.<sup>18</sup> Tennessee did not share her enthusiasm for the script, thinking that "its romantic qualities expressed Margo more than they did him."<sup>19</sup> Margo's premiere of Summer and Smoke was a resounding critical and popular success. At the time, Tennessee "assured Margo that she had given his play a brilliant production,"<sup>20</sup> but years later in his Memoirs, embittered by years of critical failure and drug and alcohol dependency, Williams wrote:

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Sheehy, 123.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 143.

I attributed the Dallas production's remarkable absence of artistry to the fact that the play was, in my opinion at the time, not a good one and the leading roles had been unhappily cast. . . . Mr. Brooks Atkinson caught the Dallas production and, for some reason still unfathomable to me, he found the play enchanting.<sup>21</sup>

When Margo decided to direct the play on Broadway, she met resistance from both Williams and his agent, Audrey Wood.<sup>22</sup>

. . . [Wood] was not at all certain she [Margo] was capable of both producing and directing this sensitive and lovely play. Even though she'd done it well in Dallas, that city was replete with her friends and local fans [emphasis mine].<sup>23</sup>

Getting wind of this attitude, Margo wrote Wood a stirring letter, pleading her cause:

I feel there is no reason why I should not make an excellent director-producer. . . . the combination of Tennessee and myself . . . might be a really miraculous combination. I feel so sure in my own heart I could do two things [for the production] that no one else could do, (1) as a producer, protect Tennessee more than some producers would and, (2) as a director I know that

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<sup>21</sup>Williams, 152. Of this production, Williams also wrote, "I thought the production was awful but I loved Margo and I pretended to like it" (92).

<sup>22</sup>Audrey Wood became Margo's agent during The Glass Menagerie in 1944, negotiating contracts, arranging speaking engagements, and so on. It is surprising that no one ever openly accused Wood of a conflict of interest during the Summer and Smoke debacle, inasmuch as she was obviously supporting the interests of one client over those of another.

<sup>23</sup>Audrey Wood, Represented by Audrey Wood (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1981), 157.



I understand Tennessee's scripts better than anyone in America with the exception of you.<sup>24</sup>

The issue was complicated by the fact that Williams wanted to direct the play as well. Tennessee had opened the immensely popular and critically acclaimed A Streetcar Named Desire on Broadway a year earlier, under the direction of Elia Kazan. Williams and Kazan had worked well together and Tennessee was extraordinarily enthusiastic about their collaboration: "Kazan," he said, "has always given me confidence and always brought out the best of me."<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Tennessee believed that Kazan's ruthless attitude in doing right by his productions incorporated "the dynamism my work needs."<sup>26</sup> Margo, while being dynamic, was hardly ruthless. In fact, she wrote Jo Mielziner, Summer and Smoke's scenic and lighting designer, that she hoped "to prove that it is possible to get on a big New York show with understanding, fineness, honesty

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<sup>24</sup>Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, 18 May 1947, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Tennessee Williams on David Susskind's MetroMedia network program Open End, 13 November 1960; quoted in Donald Spoto, The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 153-154.

<sup>26</sup>Windham, 328; cited in Sheehy, 168. Tennessee also wrote that Margo's directing was "not inspired, not vital, as Kazan would have been and as the play so dreadfully needed. . . . I regret that it was not . . . the exciting theatre that the best direction could have made it"; Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 19 October 1948; quoted in Windham, 225.



[sic], integrity, creativeness and pure joy—to say nothing of hoped for success."<sup>27</sup> Such sentiments must have seriously disturbed Williams, who was already uneasy about the play.

Tennessee tried to talk Margo out of directing the play, but failed. So he began "doing what I can to improve the script."<sup>28</sup> Frank Harting blamed much of Summer and Smoke's subsequent failure on this factor:

. . . [H]e [Williams] wrote one major scene  
. . . that was not in the original production.  
. . . So there was a lot of writing and rewriting,  
and messing around with the script after it  
was produced in Dallas.<sup>29</sup>

Geraldine Page, who was to star in Summer and Smoke's successful revival off-Broadway in 1952, agreed with Harting's assessment. She believed that "cuts in the script were partly to blame [for the play's failure] . . . the prologue and one of the scenes in the first act were eliminated, and the rest of the play . . . was rushed."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Margo Jones to Jo Mielziner, 21 February 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>28</sup>Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 20 February 1948; quoted in Windham, 208.

<sup>29</sup>Frank Harting, Interview by Carole Cohen, 13 March 1974, interview #24, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Geraldine Page; cited in Stuart W. Little, Off-Broadway: The Prophetic Theater (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972), 19.

Whatever the reason for the play's failure, Williams' anxiety caused several run-ins during its production. Margo "firmly believed that the head of a theatre must of necessity be an autocrat"<sup>31</sup> and she would brook no challenge to her authority during rehearsals from Williams or anyone else.<sup>32</sup> Although on the one hand, Margo supported the collaborative process upon which theatre is based, on the other, she also believed that each theatrical artist had his or her place in the rehearsal process, and, as such, should not interfere with other spheres of influence. The playwright's influence, as far as Margo was concerned, extended only as far as the director's ear.

From time to time, Margo encountered playwright's who took exception to her directing methods during rehearsals. For example, during an earlier Broadway production, Joan

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<sup>31</sup>June B. Larsen, "Margo: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 123. This viewpoint was corroborated by Dallas critic John Rosenfield who noted that Margo ran her theatre "somewhat more autocratically than Catherine of Russia"; John Rosenfield, "Margo Jones '55," Theatre Arts 29 (July 1955): 79.

<sup>32</sup>In at least one letter, Margo wrote about her position as director in the rehearsal process: "I really have to be a slave driver to be able to get the show in shape to be worked on"; Margo Jones to Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans, 18 February 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. This perception of the director's autocracy may have developed early in her career, after her trip to Russia. She observed at that time that "The theatre [in Russia] is the director [emphasis mine]"; Margaret V. Jones, "Russian Theatre's Vigor Credited to Fact Actors Work for Art, Not Money," Houston Chronicle, 11 October 1936, p. 6.

of Lorraine, Margo met such resistance from the playwright.

In July 1946, Margo was asked to direct Maxwell Anderson's new play, Joan of Lorraine, starring Ingrid Bergman, on Broadway. According to Anderson's diary, Margo was not his first choice; instead she was listed after Elia Kazan, Garson Kanin, and Orson Welles,<sup>33</sup> all of whom apparently proved unavailable for the assignment. Anderson's decision to hire Margo must have resulted as well from her reputation for championing the playwright's cause. "Anderson needed the persuasive Margo as his advocate to help control the star, Ingrid Bergman, who had already urged him to refocus and rewrite his script."<sup>34</sup>

In her role as playwright's advocate, Margo met with Bergman and discussed the play with her at length, making copious notes of Bergman's suggestions for additions and deletions to the script.<sup>35</sup> Margo subsequently wrote Berg-

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<sup>33</sup>These names were listed in an undated entry in Anderson's 1946 diary; Maxwell Anderson Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Margo's friend and colleague, Jo Mielziner, had initially given her Anderson's script and very possibly recommended her to Anderson as well; Sheehy, 111.

<sup>34</sup>Sheehy, 113. According to Sheehy, Bergman was only interested in the character of Joan and she opposed Anderson's insertion of Joan of Arc into the framework of a play-within-a-play, which required Bergman to play actress Mary Grey as well as Joan of Arc.

<sup>35</sup>These handwritten notes can be found in the Joan of Lorraine folder in the Margo Jones Collection at the Dallas Public Library. Unfortunately, the pages are not

man about Anderson's reaction to these amendments to his text, a letter significant more for its revelation of Margo's philosophy of theatre than any information it gives about Joan of Lorraine.

As an artist, Max has created a play from within his own mind and spirit, and creation to him, as I believe it is to everyone, is the individual vivifying of ideas, in terms of the particular artist's mind and talent. . . . The medium of the theatre is so definitely a medium of idea and words (though it is a visual medium also) that an author must say a thing the way he [sic] feels it. I am positive that if there is anything in the script, from a director's point of view, that can be made more vivid through Max's seeing a production problem through my eyes, and as long as its [sic] keeping true to what he is writing, he will be glad to adjust it. . . . As the director [in the script], Masters, and the actress, Mary Gray [sic], discuss their playwright, so Max feels that in real life what we believe and what we give to it is important, but the final decision must be that of the playwright . . . [emphasis mine].<sup>36</sup>

Margo's staunch defense of Anderson and his script must have proved difficult, however. Before her meeting with Bergman, Margo received a letter about the play from her mentor, Frank Harting. She apparently had asked him to read the play and comment on it. Harting's response

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numbered and the corresponding script from which the women worked is not in the file. Therefore, while the notations are available, their context is not, making analysis difficult.

<sup>36</sup>Margo Jones to Ingrid Bergman, 29 September 1946, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

was less than favorable.<sup>37</sup> That Margo took Harting's

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<sup>37</sup>Frank Harting to Margo Jones, 18 September 1946, Confidential memo, Typed, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Harting's criticism of the play was sharp and to the point: ". . . I cannot believe that the writing is a play from the standpoints of construction, plot, argument, action, etc. While it doubtless may prove to be an acceptable vehicle for Miss Bergman, I doubt that either the critics or the public will regard it as Maxwell Anderson at his best, even his second best. . . . I constantly expected the play to develop and build strong, dramatic contrasts in argument between Masters and Mary Gray [sic]. I wanted to be deeply moved and swayed from one side to the other—but I wasn't. The dialogue between the two seemed to be faltering, elementary, and at times even petty.

Each time the play-within-the-play was halted and the troubles of the world . . . was [sic] dragged in, I wanted to shout, "Yes, yes—you're so right. . . . but let's get on with the show!" I think it's going to be a strain on the audience to adjust their ears, minds, and emotions to the endless shiftings from bickerings of the director, star and cast in the reality scenes [to the beauty of the 'Joan' scenes]. We know from experience that it is a very tricky and fragile business to establish and hold the mood of a play and to get the audience attuned to what is happening on the stage. Time after time as I got my mood established, it was punctured—and I had to start all over again. If this happens in production, then it will make for a nervous production. . . . I found myself fairly aching to see "Joan" get on, without interruption from the star or the director. I kept wishing that I were going to see Bergman in a great production of "Joan" with all the sets, costumes, lights and fanfare of a sensational play.

I was astounded and dissatisfied [sic] when—with no warning whatsoever—Mary stops in the middle of a speech and says (in effect), "Oh, now I see—You were right . . . Joan wouldn't compromise." In that brief moment everything is cleared up for Mary and the play races to a happy ending. I couldn't believe that this actually was going to clear up the whole situation, but it did! I ask you now, WHERE had Mary Gray's mind been during the three week's rehearsals that she hadn't read and interpreted this very simple part of the script from the very start? It makes her out a very stupid person to have her disrupt the production, the director and the cast as she does, and then suddenly with child-like discovery, burst forth with the exclamation that she's been wrong all along. For me, the situation was never built up with sufficient drama and

criticisms to heart is reflected in her own comments to Bergman, which echo Harting's own words:

Mary is not a girl who has spent anywhere near the time on the entire philosophy of Joan that you have. Otherwise, she would have known at the beginning of the play exactly what Masters and the play within the play is [sic] driving at; but she does learn it during the process of the play.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Margo went into this production as the playwright's fourth choice, with a leading lady who had serious problems with the script, and with a respected colleague's criticism of the play ringing in her ears. Yet, by some accounts, the rehearsals were "very peaceful, with no crises."<sup>39</sup> In fact, Margo herself felt that everything was going quite smoothly:

I wish I could tell you [Theatre '46 volunteer, Ross Lawther] the real joy that I'm having with this production. I have never felt, as a worker in the theatre, that I was hitting so on all eight [cylinders]. . . . Practically every member of the cast has an extremely high intelligence and sensitivity and ability. The result

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argument for me to care very much whether she stayed in the play or not . . .

You will say perhaps that my reaction and comments are too flippant for the import of the message with which Anderson is dealing. . . . The vehicle of "Joan" for the parallel is perfect and certainly should afford a perfect device for getting the message across. It is the faltering and makeshift manner in which Anderson makes use of the opportunity with which I quarrel."

<sup>38</sup>Jones to Bergman, 29 September 1946. These lines reiterate Harting's comments about character Mary Grey's inability to interpret the script.

<sup>39</sup>Interview with Alan Anderson, production stage manager and the playwright's son; quoted in Sheehy, 117.



is that directing is so exciting that I can hardly stand it.<sup>40</sup>

On October 29, 1946, the play opened in Washington, D.C., for its pre-Broadway try-out. The notices were good and by the end of the first week, Anderson wrote that he "thought the performance excellent."<sup>41</sup> However, two days after making this observation, he fired Margo.<sup>42</sup> Ander-

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<sup>40</sup>Margo Jones to Ross Lawther, 19 October 1946, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

<sup>41</sup>Maxwell Anderson personal diary, 7 November 1946 entry, handwritten, Maxwell Anderson Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>42</sup>The exact sequence of events was noted in Anderson's diary:

November 8 - Sam Wanamaker [actor playing Masters] came to the hotel. We decided—after Sam left—to do something about the direction.

November 9 - Talked to Ingrid and Joe (Schule) about direction. They agreed. Talked to Margo in cab and in her room. Told her I'd have to call in a relief pitcher. She was broken up but accepted it.

November 10 - Whole cast assembled. Talked to the cast, told them Margot [sic] had been called away by an illness in the family. Sam went to work. Re-directed 1st 3 Joan scenes.

November 13 - Afterward, Alan, Sam, and Victor came . . . to discuss the direction. Which has changed for the better.

Ingrid Bergman gave a slightly different account of these events: ". . . [T]here was a knock on the door. . . . It was Max . . . and their son Allan [sic], who was the stage manager, and they said, '. . . we've just sacked the director.'

'Sacked the director! But why? Surely Margo Jones has been doing a very good job? . . .'

'No, we were not pleased at all with her. She will be getting the production credit in New York, but we were not pleased at all.'



son's reasoning has never been fully understood or documented. The most likely explanation arises from Anderson's increasing nervousness over the script itself and his self-induced pressure that the play must succeed.<sup>43</sup> A fired director would account for a failed play, and perhaps this thinking was the ultimate motivation behind Anderson's action. Furthermore, Anderson probably identified with his fictional director, Masters—a strong-willed, stubborn, masculine character—and perhaps expected his real director to be similar in nature.<sup>44</sup> That

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. . . Margo left at once. . . . Sam Wanamaker took over . . . 'I can see what's wrong [he said] . . . and a lot's wrong.' . . . But the play . . . had got rather static . . . and Sam put life back into it and vitality." Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess, Ingrid Bergman: My Story (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980), 163-164. Bergman's account differs most significantly from Anderson's in her claim that she was not involved in the decision to remove Margo. However, her memory of events thirty-four years earlier might be erroneous. It is highly unlikely that Anderson would have made such a significant move without Bergman's approval.

<sup>43</sup>Anderson's recent plays had been critical and popular failures. As a result, Joan of Lorraine may have been his attempt to vindicate himself and salvage his career, a career based primarily on successes in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>44</sup>That Margo was decidedly not masculine can be attested to by numerous eyewitness accounts. For example, Lilian Bayless described Margo in these terms: ". . . [S]he was not terribly feminine looking, but she was terribly feminine . . . in her speech, and even her enthusiasm and her exuberance was [sic] a feminine type of exuberance"; Lilian Bayless, Interview by Carole Cohen, 12 March 1974, interview #32, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

Margo should fall short of Anderson's ideal is not surprising—she herself had difficulties making the distinction between her own work and Masters': "I have found it difficult to separate myself from the character of Masters but, at last, I see him as an imaginary director that I think is consistently drawn."<sup>45</sup> Many of her difficulties with the character lay in her disagreement with Masters' dictatorial directing style which contrasted sharply with her more collaborative approach to directing. The difference in directing philosophies between the playwright and his director is perhaps described by Sheehy's observation that "[Anderson's] view of the theatre was Apollonian and intellectual, while Margo believed that theatre should be a Dionysian celebration."<sup>46</sup>

Despite the apparently unwarranted dismissal, Margo acted true to form, putting the good of the play (and the playwright) ahead of her own personal feelings. In a draft letter to Anderson, Margo tried to express her thoughts on her removal:

I believe this move is very wrong for the play.  
To take a less experienced director and a member  
of the cast seems very unwise to me for the good

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<sup>45</sup>Jones to Bergman, 29 September 1946.

<sup>46</sup>Sheehy, 113. For a discussion of the differences between the Apollonian and Dionysian views of theatre, see Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Francis Golffing (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1956).

of the play. I hope it works out and I will be standing by if there is anything [I can do].<sup>47</sup>

Joan of Lorraine opened on Broadway nine days after Margo was fired. The irony of this whole episode was that, as far as the participants could tell, few changes were made in the play after Margo's departure: ". . . Lee Simonson told me [Jo Mielziner] that in his opinion what few things were done after you left were so infinitesimal as to make it difficult for him to identify them."<sup>48</sup>

Although Margo encountered difficulties with some of her playwrights in New York, relationships generally worked more smoothly in Dallas. There, of course, Margo was not only the director and producer, but often the first person to recognize a particular script's potential. As a result, the playwrights she directed in Dallas tended to be more cooperative: "There seemed to be no problems

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<sup>47</sup>Margo Jones to Maxwell Anderson, n.d., draft letter, handwritten, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX. In the actual letter sent to Anderson, dated 11 November 1946, Margo wrote, ". . . what you consider is for the good of the play I will do and will follow your suggestions of procedure"; Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

<sup>48</sup>Jo Mielziner to Margo Jones, 19 February 1947, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX. Interviews with Alan Anderson and Joanna Albus (cast member) revealed that "nothing about the production changed . . . Only her [Margo's] personality was absent. Her work had been perceived as too gentle, too womanly, not tough enough to shepherd Anderson's play to Broadway . . ."; cited in Sheehy, 120-121.

[Margo] couldn't solve, no knots she couldn't untangle."<sup>49</sup> For Eugene Raskin, writer of The Last Island, working with Margo was a dream: ". . . [S]he considered the words written by a playwright to be sacred. That came first, everything else was secondary. . . . to her a play was a work of art."<sup>50</sup> For Joseph Hayes, author of Leaf and Bough, "the work was collaborative, quiet and friendly, with no tensions in the company. . . . If I could have worked with more directors like Margo, I would have written more plays."<sup>51</sup> Harry Granick admitted that he felt "lucky . . . to have such a gay, perceptive, resourceful director as the glamorous Margo Jones."<sup>52</sup> William Inge agreed:

I probably loved Margo. She was always so willing to give of herself to the writers she be-

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<sup>49</sup>Interview with Sheldon Harnick; quoted in Sheehy, 242. Harnick authored Horatio and, according to Sheehy, "spent most of his time in Dallas writing and rewriting [Horatio]."

<sup>50</sup>Interview with Eugene Raskin; quoted in Sheehy, 234.

<sup>51</sup>Interview with Joseph Hayes; quoted in Sheehy, 160. Interestingly, Leaf and Bough went on to Broadway under the direction of Rouben Mamoulian, where it closed after nine performances. Hayes reported to Sheehy the difference between working with Mamoulian and Margo: "Mamoulian had a heavy touch and he didn't get any of the emotion out of it that Margo got. On Broadway the play was overburdened by sets and furniture. In Dallas we got more reality by just the suggestion of sets on that bare stage" (161).

<sup>52</sup>Granick, "Staging Problems Solved . . .," Dallas Morning News, [24 November 1953].

lieved in. She could always find time to encourage me, to help him [sic] believe in himself again.<sup>53</sup>

All was not smooth sailing in Dallas, however. On occasion Margo was unable to motivate her playwrights into giving the results she wanted. During rehearsals of How Now, Hecate, playwright Martyn Coleman rewrote and revised his play numerous times. Despite his efforts—and her own—Margo was not totally satisfied with the results:

. . . Martyn's play has gone very well but with just a little more work on my part—with him here—I could do so much better. . . . The script got a lot of good sound work—the natural wonderful kind that happens in rehearsal but it still needs some work that time could easily cure. I feel . . . there are far too many scenes . . . too many gadgets—too many things to drink . . . The end of the play needs to be built up. . . . Martyn and I have talked about all the things [in the play that need work]—They can be cured easily . . .<sup>54</sup>

Most telling about this letter is Margo's assertion that she is the one responsible for improving the production—and the script. Margo obviously believed that she, in conjunction with the playwright, held the key to any play's success. If the script was not up to snuff, Margo apparently believed that she was accountable—her job was

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<sup>53</sup>William Inge to Don Burton Wilmeth, 9 January 1964; quoted in Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964), 8.

<sup>54</sup>Margo Jones to Sherman and Marjorie Ewing, 21 June 1947, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. The Ewings were Broadway producers.

to motivate the playwright into writing the best play possible. If the writer failed to do so, the fault lay with her—she had not done her job.

Margo's concern about the playability of the scripts she directed carried over into their content. Always aware of her audience's sensibilities, Margo guarded against objectionable language or action in her plays, especially during her early years in Dallas. As a result, she counselled her playwrights to rewrite suggestive scenes, thus making them more acceptable to her patrons. Nowhere was this more evident than when she directed William Inge's Farther Off From Heaven, her first play in Dallas. A letter to Inge, dated June 1947, went into "minute detail about whether the mother character (Sarah) should use the word whore twice in the play."<sup>55</sup> Inge replied:

Once is probably enough, inasmuch as it's a word she couldn't use very easily. The first time she uses it, I feel, is right. The second time, hussy could easily be substituted. After all, it's a pretty hard word for an audience to take, and I don't want it to seem that Sarah is having a good time using it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Margo Jones to William Inge, June 1947; cited in Ralph F. Voss, A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 92.

<sup>56</sup>William Inge to Margo Jones, June 1947, William Inge Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

Margo encountered problems other than language suitability with her playwrights. When directing The Coast of Illyria, for example, Margo faced difficulties with the play's length and cast size. Not only did she request extensive cuts, but she also battled Parker and Evans on other elements they wanted included in the script. The authors hoped to add a prologue to the play:

We wish so much that we could talk to you about "The Coast of Illyria." We know that it requires work, but naturally we don't want to do anything until we know how and what you feel about it. We have had several ideas that seemed to us important—one, in particular, that we do a brief prologue showing the actual murder [of Mary Lamb's mother]. The scene would be some ten years earlier, in a little room in the place where the Lamb family then lived. There would be in it, Mary, her mother, her father . . . and two sewing girls. The scene would be extremely brief, but we feel it would lend enormously to Mary later, when we see her sweet and strong. We would be so glad if you would think about this.<sup>57</sup>

Margo objected to this move:

Your idea about the prologue might be a wonderful one but from a casting point of view I beg you not to plan it because I am using every available Equity actor in my company and still will have to cast a couple of the small parts outside of my company. . . . [and] I feel that the quality slips [when I do so]. Therefore, to

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<sup>57</sup>Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans to Margo Jones, 4 February 1949; quoted by Arthur F. Kinney, "Introduction" in The Coast of Illyria, Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), 55.



add any new people to the cast would be a really serious problem with me [emphasis mine].<sup>58</sup>

Margo continued to have problems in cutting the cast down to reasonable proportions—a problem she faced and handled more easily when directing classical plays where the playwright was not present to oppose her—and finally suggested a revision herself:

I do have one suggestion to make in relation to a very serious casting problem I have. Would there be any way, without hurting your play, to have [C]Harles finally read the letter from Wilberforce and not have to bring Wilberforce in? Could his happiness at seeing Fanny so outweigh his feeling for the contents of the letter that he would not be afraid to open it? The reason I suggest this is not because I do not like the scene. I do. But I honestly will have one hell of a time casting the character of Wilberforce. . . . Does this idea strike you as plausible? [emphasis mine]<sup>59</sup>

Despite the difficulties Margo seemed to have with this script and its authors, she consistently humored the playwrights, often phrasing her complaints in such a way that she implied she would defer to their desires. And this

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<sup>58</sup>Margo Jones to Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans, 9 February 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>59</sup>Margo Jones to Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans, 18 February 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

self-effacing approach apparently succeeded for "the authors . . . got the script in playable condition."<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps Margo's greatest challenge in Dallas came when she directed Sari Scott's An Old Beat-Up Woman. This three-character play intrigued Margo so much so that she attempted to take it to Broadway, an attempt that failed. With Scott, Margo obtained the perfect circumstances for directing with the playwright present.

The author was with us [in Dallas] for six weeks prior to the opening . . . and I wish it were always possible to have the playwright around for that length of time; then there is real opportunity to discuss the story, the ideas, the characters and the small details of interpretation and technique.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the six-week preparation for Scott's play, Margo still encountered obstacles in getting the script into the shape she wanted.

. . . I am working . . . on some additional material for clarification of An Old Beat-Up Woman. Every word in [the play] . . . as played is excellent. The second scene of the second act needs clarification, which has now been added, and we will play it for the first time tonight with the new material. The first act . . . is much too short. Otherwise the play is an excellent play, far superior to the production we gave it. . . . we know that the casting was way off. . . . The only thing that needs to be done now is to add fifteen minutes to the first act. Sari is working on it and she is a

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<sup>60</sup>Margo Jones to William Goyen, 2 July 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>61</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1951), 176.

wonderful writer to work with [emphasis mine].<sup>62</sup>

Once again we find Margo putting the quality of the script ahead of the quality of her production. When her pre-Broadway try-out failed, Margo blamed herself rather than finding fault with either the playwright or her writing.

My planned New York production of An Old Beat-Up Woman did not go well. . . . I am not unhappy about it, as the play simply did not come over in the same way that I felt it. . . . I simply felt that the essence of what made the play beautiful to me did not project.<sup>63</sup>

The play that you [Scott] wrote and the play that I fell in love with is not the play that we saw on the stage. The fault may be completely mine. . . . One can never be sure.<sup>64</sup>

Thus does our discussion of Margo and the playwright come full circle. Not once does Margo suggest that this play's lack of success resulted from its own weaknesses. By Margo's definition, the failure of any play she directed rested squarely on her shoulders: she was unable to

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<sup>62</sup>Margo Jones to Spencer James, 1 December 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. James had appeared in Summer and Smoke on Broadway and was eventually to become Margo's assistant director in Dallas. Almost the same information was given to Henry Brandon in a letter from Margo written the same day; Margo Jones to Henry Brandon, 1 December 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>63</sup>Margo Jones to Bill Goyen, 2 February 1950, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>64</sup>Margo Jones to Sari Scott, 4 February 1950, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

bring out its qualities; she was unable to translate its essence onto the stage; she was unable to communicate its beauty to the audience.<sup>65</sup>

For Margo, the theatre centered around the playwright. As a director, when she did her job correctly, the play succeeded; when she did not, the play failed. Perhaps most interesting in this formula is the fact that the play's critical, popular, or financial success had little to do with her own terms of evaluation. For her, a play's success was measured by her own belief that she had given the play the best production possible, despite the demands of the commercial theatre, the insecurities of the playwright, or the insensitivity of the audience. Even her most significant failure, the one that dealt her reputation on Broadway and her friendship with Tennessee Williams such a stunning blow, was a success by her definition:

To the very best of my ability I did not compromise. . . . Perhaps the strongest thing that came out of the production [Summer and Smoke]

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<sup>65</sup>That Margo believed this to be the case is supported by a letter she sent to William Inge after Picnic opened on Broadway. Having seen the play, she wrote, "I preferred it when the beautiful girl did not follow the boy [as occurred in your original ending]." But she reaffirmed her loyalty to Inge by making the additional statement that Joshua Logan, the play's director, was a truly fine director because "to me he brought out what you wrote" [emphasis mine]; Margo Jones to William Inge, 26 March 1953, Typed carbon copy, William Inge Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

for me personally was to re-affirm beliefs that I have always had regarding the essentials of our theatre here.<sup>66</sup>

And for Margo Jones, preserving the playwright's words and ideas was essential.

For Margo, the playwright was central to the theatrical art. The text was paramount to the theatrical process and Margo took great care to hold the text in reverence, especially in the case of fledgling playwrights who needed nurturing and support. She did not see herself as one who could interfere with their creative muse, but rather as one who should motivate that muse to even greater heights. Nevertheless, she straightforwardly cut classical scripts, although she was reticent to do the same to original plays without the author's consent. She believed her job as director was to bring the playwright's words to life, not to put words in the playwright's mouth. Occasionally, this task she set for herself proved difficult, but even so she usually tempered her needs as director with those of the playwright. Sometimes, the playwright's needs conflicted with what she considered to be best for the production, as in the cases of Summer and Smoke and Joan of Lorraine. And sometimes her refusal to demand textual changes invited criticism for her lack of

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<sup>66</sup>Margo Jones to June and Jim Moll, 14 November 1948, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX. The Molls worked at Margo's Dallas theatre.

control over her scripts. Nevertheless, for Margo, short of direct interference in the rehearsal process, the playwright reigned supreme.

Margo loved the collaborative process of creation she shared with her playwrights. Their input through correspondence, in private discussions, and during rehearsals provided her with the vital link between the written word on the page and the spoken word on the stage. And it was toward that link that Margo's creative energies were most often directed.

## CHAPTER 5

"ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE . . .":

### MARGO AND THE ACTOR

The director must . . . be able to understand the actor and his [sic] problems and give the actor the opportunity to express himself. It is wonderful if the director can make his [sic] company fall in love with the play . . .; strong enthusiasm is contagious, and the director should not hesitate to communicate to the actors his convictions about a script.

- Margo Jones

As an actress, I personally liked what Margo did for me . . . [she] freed me as a performer . . .

- Louise Latham

Margo could instill in the actors a confidence—she could convince actors that they were the greatest actors that ever lived.

- Ray Walston

Although Margo Jones fervently believed that the playwright was the central player in the theatrical process, she nevertheless understood that the actor was the primary communicator of the playwright's words. Her early attitudes towards acting were formed during her college years and her apprenticeship at the Southwestern School of the Theatre.



. . . [F]rom Louis Quince [co-director of the school] she learned what was the start of method acting in this country . . . So that was soaked up by Margo. . . she didn't aspire to be an actress, and she was not talented.<sup>1</sup>

Her experience with Quince was reinforced by her visit to the Moscow Art Theatre Festival in 1936 where she observed firsthand the implementation of many of Konstantin Stanislavsky's teachings. She was also impressed by Vsevolod Meyerhold's techniques when dealing with his actors during rehearsals, most likely misinterpreting his direction when she noted that he "was able on a moment's notice to suggest to his actors the exact moment to portray their respective characters."<sup>2</sup>

These early experiences most likely set the tone for Margo's subsequent work with actors. From Stanislavsky's methods, Margo developed an approach to actors based on

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<sup>1</sup>Frank Harting, Interview by Carole Cohen, 13 March 1974, interview #24, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Quince had been trained at the Boleslavsky-Ouspenskaya School in New York. He later appeared in several of Margo's Dallas productions.

<sup>2</sup>Margaret V. Jones, "Houston Girl Finds Russian Theatre is Vital and Colorful," Houston Chronicle, 4 October 1936, p. 14. The language barrier may have caused Margo to misinterpret Meyerhold's work with actors. It is well documented that Meyerhold rejected the Stanislavskian method of "bas[ing] stage behavior on internal psychological motivations," and preferred biomechanics, whereby actors "arouse[d] within themselves or the audience a desired emotional response" by "enact[ing] . . . appropriate kinetic pattern[s]"; Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay, Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since the Late Nineteenth Century (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 180.

internal or emotional commitment to the character; his sometimes misunderstood directive to "feel" the part also apparently influenced this aspect of her direction. From her possibly mistaken interpretation of Meyerhold's interactions with his actors, Margo probably began to comprehend the need for precise communications with actors. From her own experience, Margo learned the theatrical process from the actor's point of view by casting herself in the leading role in Design for Living while with the Houston Players. By turning to acting, she may have hoped to become a more effective director.<sup>3</sup>

Casting herself in a leading role seems out of character for Margo because she was not a talented actress.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, she always took special care in her casting: "[F]or the most part . . . [she did] not cast a play until it . . . [was] about to go into rehearsal, although she may have distributed certain parts in . . . [her] mind."<sup>5</sup> Usually "the [theatre] season [in Dallas] was very well balanced . . . in terms of the actors' abilities."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>June B. Larsen arrived at a similar conclusion in her study, "Margo: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 89.

<sup>4</sup>Harting interview, 13 March 1974.

<sup>5</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 120.

<sup>6</sup>Martha Bumpas Gaylord, Interview by Carole Cohen, 11 April 1974, interview #35, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing

She wanted actors and actresses who could, in a short time[, ] put a play together . . . she would go to New York, and she would pick a leading lady, a leading man, and maybe one, two, or three character people . . . she filled in [extra roles] with local actors and actresses.<sup>7</sup>

. . . [T]here were only eight members in the resident company . . . the character man; character woman; then the one who could play character or leads, woman and man; then the leading lady and . . . man, the ingenue and juvenile.<sup>8</sup>

We can infer from these two lists of acting requirements that Margo chose actors for a repertory ensemble, not for specific roles. During her first year in Dallas, she specified that there would be no "star-billing" among her actors.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, she stressed that she did not

use guest stars in my productions because we play in repertory and because I firmly believe in ensemble work. I find casting all shows within my company the best, healthiest and most exciting method.<sup>10</sup>

Margo deliberately chose a repertory format for her theatre with her actors in mind. "From the standpoint of the

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Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>7</sup>Lilian Bayless, Interview by Carole Cohen, 12 March 1974, interview #32, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Bayless was one of Margo's students at the University of Texas and later joined her acting company in Dallas.

<sup>8</sup>Bumpas Gaylord interview, 11 April 1974.

<sup>9</sup>"Theater '47 to Go Into Rehearsal This Week," Dallas Morning News, 11 May 1947, sec. 2, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup>Margo Jones to Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans, 9 February 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

actor as well as of the audience, repertory playing seems to have great advantages. The long run wears actors out."<sup>11</sup>

Despite her search for general acting types when casting, Margo's choices were rarely haphazard. She had a knack for casting well and, often, inspirationally.

. . . [I]n the beginning Charlie Braswell . . . had just a walk-on. . . . she saw talent there so she kept training him and working with him until one season he was her leading man.<sup>12</sup>

In another example of inspired casting,

. . . practically everybody was cast against type [in Inherit the Wind]. . . . We [the playwrights] argued with Margo about it. We said he [Harry Bergman who played Bertram Cates] was all wrong [for the part] . . . But he was brilliant in it.<sup>13</sup>

Yet again,

Miss Jones, in an inspired moment, selected Margaret Phillips for the leading role [of Alma in Summer and Smoke]. . . . Under the sensitive

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<sup>11</sup>Margo Jones, "Theatre '45," New York Times, 15 July 1945, sec. 2, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974. Margo considered Braswell "one of the few actors she more or less brought up"; Margo Jones to Cheryl Crawford, 7 April 1954, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. For his part, Braswell felt that the "Margo Jones Theatre [was] the finest theatre he [had] . . . ever worked in"; Charles Braswell to Don Burton Wilmeth, 28 January 1964; quoted in Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964), 125.

<sup>13</sup>Jerome Lawrence, Interview by Carole Cohen, 6 January 1975, interview #173, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

direction of Miss Jones, Miss Phillips' performance increases in stature as the evening progresses.<sup>14</sup>

That Margo took her casting seriously is most strikingly apparent in two letters written before her New York production of Summer and Smoke. She held definite ideas about the kind of actors—and characters—for whom she was looking:

I do feel very strongly that I do not want a big name in either case [for the leading roles of Alma and John]. I believe both of these parts can be cast beautifully without using a large name.<sup>15</sup>

Margo's insistence on the relative obscurity of her leading actors no doubt stemmed from her earlier experience with Ingrid Bergman in Joan of Lorraine. With less well-known actors, the famous Margo personality would have a greater effect and more likely create the harmonious working atmosphere she coveted. In a later letter, Margo provided an in-depth analysis of Williams' characters and the ideal kind of actors she wanted to play them.

. . . Alma and John as children will depend very much on Alma and John as grownups. But certainly little John should be a tough all-boy youngster and obviously a good actor with a little sensitive strain but essentially all body [boy, sic]. Little Alma should be an almost symbol of soul. The same qualities . . . go for Alma and

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Coleman, "'Summer and Smoke' Has a Searching Elegance," New York Daily Mirror, 7 October 1948.

<sup>15</sup>Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, 28 February 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.



John when grown up. Those problems of Alma and John . . . are so special that I really think I better wait until I get there [to New York] to discuss those two parts. John's father . . . needs . . . real maturity—fifty or more—and graciousness and dignity with still a little bit of the real folksy charm . . . it is essential that the Doctor be a guy whose job means everything to him. . . . the quality of his integrity in medicine must be gotten across his complete understanding of human nature. Rev. Winemiller . . . should be between 45 and 55 and give the feeling that he has bourne [sic] "The Cross." . . . I think [Raymond] Van Sickle is worth thinking of. Mrs. Winemiller must be a terrific actress . . . 45 or over. Certainly her neurosis must come over. Marga Ann Deighton did a good job of her here [in Dallas] but she is too much the real character and is such a problem woman that I really have not thought seriously about her. . . . I consider the part of Nellie Ewell extremely important. . . . she should be 100% youth, the quality of her vitality and youthfulness, even with her coarse background, should be so vivid and warm that it would be clearly understood why the relationship between John and Nellie occurs. Mrs. Bassett has one of the best comedy scenes . . . it is extremely important, . . . [the role was] played very successfully here by Betty Greene Little, who is almost a genius at a certain kind of slightly corny appeal. . . . The part of Doremus was written to be played by a very small, ineffectual mother-complexed character. . . . [I] used a rather large . . . mamma's boy type [in Dallas] and there was a certain virtue in this approach. There was a clumsiness and awkwardness about him that was effective. . . . Mr. Kramer . . . is . . . next to Nellie, Alma and John, the one we should use the most care in selecting. . . . he should have real appeal in a small town way.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Margo Jones to Ethel Wald, 23 March 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Wald was a casting agent at the Liebling-Wood Agency, owned by Jones' and Williams' agent, Audrey Wood. Margo's suggestions were heeded in most cases with Margaret Phillips cast as Alma, Tod Andrews as John, Raymond Van Sickle as Rev. Winemiller, Marga Ann Deighton as Mrs. Winemiller,

This letter reveals how painstaking Margo's character analysis was. Every role is pinpointed, both in its physical and emotional requirements, by the exact qualities she was seeking. In most cases, she got what she wanted, though at least one role was cast against her wishes—that of Mrs. Winemiller.

Despite Margo's satisfaction with the results of the cast she assembled, problems ensued during rehearsals. She fired the actor playing Rosemary (Ellen James) and replaced her with Leslie Paul. Williams, who had cast approval, disagreed with this move, insisting that James be reinstated. Margo defended her decision in a telegram she sent to Audrey Wood:

Ellen hired on strength of understudying Alma.  
Which we all now know she cannot possibly do.  
Leslie Paul was original choice to play Rosemary  
and understudy Alma on [basis] of excellent  
reading and just capable understudying of Margaret  
[Phillips]. Retaining Ellen under circum-

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Ann Jackson as Nellie, Betty Greene Little as Mrs. Bassett, Ray Walston as Kramer, and Spencer James as Vernon. Andrews, Van Sickle, Deighton, and Little had all originated their roles in the Dallas premiere of the play. Walston was a colleague from Margo's days in Houston and James was to become her assistant director in Dallas within a few short years. As can be seen, many of Margo's acting preferences were selected for the Broadway production.

Margo's comments regarding the character of Nellie are interesting in light of a letter Williams wrote her in which he stated that he was "particularly anxious that the part of Nellie should be well-played as she has to sustain some of the weaker scenes in the play." Tennessee Williams to Margo Jones, n.d., Typed, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.



stances extravagant and impractical. Would like a little understanding faith and trust from my favorite author.<sup>17</sup>

Why Margo fired James is unknown. However, the problem must have been quite serious because Margo adamantly opposed dismissing actors without significant cause. A case in point occurred during her last production, Whisper To Me. Margo cast an actor who was unable to learn her lines and dropped out of the production only a few days before the opening. Louise Latham remembered that the actor "just fell apart [during rehearsals]. I never heard Margo say a word."<sup>18</sup> Despite her inability to find a replacement, Margo insisted that the play open on time, eventually turning to her business manager, Mary Dolan, to play the part.<sup>19</sup>

When Margo wanted a particular actor for a specific role, she was not above resorting to subterfuge or using flattery to get her way. For instance, Margo's early

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<sup>17</sup>Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, 19 October 1948, Handwritten, sent Western Union, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Ellen James was, in all likelihood, the wife of Spencer James who was also in the cast. The decision to cast her may have initially been influenced by Margo's friendship with James.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Louise Latham; quoted in Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 260.

<sup>19</sup>Dolan did a credible job, but the time constraints were too formidable—she carried the script during the third act.

choice for the leading role of Masters in Joan of Lorraine was Sam Wanamaker. Maxwell Anderson objected to Wanamaker, citing his youthful appearance as being wrong for the character. Margo eventually won the part for the young actor, through persistence and the suggestion that he grow a mustache.

Margo also had a hand in casting Anthony Ross in the role of the gentleman caller in The Glass Menagerie. In much the same way that she was later to arrange Wanamaker's casting in Joan of Lorraine, Margo persuaded Eddie Dowling, the producer and her co-director, to use Ross:

"I've just found a man who reads the gentleman caller out of heaven. It's such a pity we can't use him."

"Why not?" Dowling asked.

"Well, he's so old," Margo said shrewdly, knowing full well that Anthony "Tony" Ross . . . was just thirty-eight years old—if anything too young to play a contemporary of Eddie Dowling's. Flattered by her comments, Dowling approved her choice.<sup>20</sup>

Margo believed that the actor contributed significantly to the production. She also believed that the first step in working with actors was to make them believe in themselves and in the play:<sup>21</sup> "Margo could instill in the actors a confidence—she could convince actors that

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<sup>20</sup>Interview with Randy Echols; quoted in Sheehy, 75-76. Echols stage managed The Glass Menagerie.

<sup>21</sup>Sheehy, 38. Sheehy's comment specifically referred to Margo's work with amateur actors. I think that it can be extended to Margo's work with professionals as well.

they were the greatest actors that ever lived."<sup>22</sup> For example,

. . . when confronted with a young actor who was awkward with his hands, she instilled confidence in him by asking him if he had learned to use his hands in ballet.<sup>23</sup>

Equally important was generating enthusiasm for the script—for it was "wonderful if the director can make his [sic] company fall in love with the play . . .".<sup>24</sup>

I felt that the most exciting time in building a production with Margo was that first reading, when she brought the cast together and presented [the play] . . . she would set the tone by explaining why she was so excited about this wonderful script. Then she would describe the background of the script and the feeling of the play, and a little bit about the purpose of the play, the objective, and what she hoped to do with it . . . that was really the magic time as far as Margo [was concerned] . . .

. . . [S]he did it even with classics to this extent. She would say, "Now we are going to approach Shakespeare . . ." or "This is a different way [of doing this play]," or "We're going to do Moliere this way, and this is the new thing about a Moliere comedy that I would like to emphasize or a new and different way of doing this." Or "This play has never been done in the round before . . ." And it still seemed fresh and in many instances it was, because even

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<sup>22</sup>Interview with Ray Walston; quoted in Sheehy, 37. Walston was referring to his experience with Margo while with the Houston Community Players.

<sup>23</sup>Murray Schumach, "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway," New York Times Sunday Magazine, 17 October 1948, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 119-120.

though most of us had a background in theater,  
not all of us had been in every classic.<sup>25</sup>

Margo wrote that "strong enthusiasm is contagious, and the director should not hesitate to communicate to the actors his [sic] convictions about a script."<sup>26</sup> That she did so, and often, was demonstrated throughout her life.

During Summer and Smoke, for example,

She told her cast that without a doubt Tennessee Williams was the most important playwright of our times, Summer and Smoke was the best play he'd ever written, the play simply had to succeed here in New York, it was up to them to give a performance worthy of the work and she went on and on with her pep talk.<sup>27</sup>

But this enthusiasm needed to be translated into more than mere eagerness. "True excitement in the theatre stems from hard work. Anyone who decides to . . . participate in its [theatre's] production must take his [sic] job seriously . . .".<sup>28</sup>

Not only was Margo looking for hard workers, she held other criteria for the actors she cast and hired.

. . . [I]t is very important to find actors with the right qualities. They must have talent . . . but their talent must be matched by character. An extremely gifted actor whose tempera-

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<sup>25</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974. Louise Latham expressed similar views about the first reading; Latham interview, 19 March 1974.

<sup>26</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 119-120.

<sup>27</sup>Audrey Wood, Represented by Audrey Wood (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1981), 157.

<sup>28</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 24.

ment will cause continual friction . . . can ruin a whole season. . . . The ideal is to have extraordinarily talented people of fine character.<sup>29</sup>

Margo dreaded the friction that so often occurred during rehearsals. Of utmost concern to her was creating a harmonious atmosphere that generated the desire and hard work that resulted in fine theatrical productions. She encouraged her actors with pep talks designed to "search for a more communal feeling with the actors."<sup>30</sup> "She talked about love and togetherness [among company members]," recalled actor Clinton Anderson.<sup>31</sup> To have this atmosphere disrupted was a crime. Therefore, her work with actors in Dallas and elsewhere was constantly focused on avoiding unpleasantness both onstage and off.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Perry Wilson; quoted in Sheehy, 106. Sheehy's interview with Wilson provided valuable information otherwise unavailable about Margo's direction of On Whitman Avenue.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with Clinton Anderson; quoted in Sheehy, 180. Anderson was a member of the Theatre '48 company.

<sup>32</sup>Although Margo accomplished this feat for the most part, on occasion she was unable to establish this camaraderie. Her first season in Dallas found Margo hiring "a group of temperamental actors who complained continually about . . . their roles, and their billing, their complaints taxing her formidable patience. Many of them were not used to working in a company, and a three-week rehearsal period was certainly not enough time to foster a unified feeling"; Sheehy, 135. Lilian Bayless also commented on Margo's solution to such problems: ". . . I remember some of the older actors and actresses from New York, from time to time disagreed . . . And if they disagreed [continually,] they weren't there [in Dallas] very

Although I feel that the primary consideration of all is what the spectator sees and hears when the lights go up, I do not believe you can give your audience exciting productions unless everybody in the cast and those backstage are happy working together.<sup>33</sup>

Her techniques for maintaining this harmonious atmosphere were described in the following manner:

She remains aloof from the clash of personalities, stepping in to placate with promises and soothe with flattery. This flair for conciliation has maintained a high degree of cooperation in performance.<sup>34</sup>

Margo's first priorities, therefore, when dealing with actors were to establish self-confidence, instill enthusiasm for the script, and create a harmonious working atmosphere. These elements served as the foundation for the actor's real work—the work of creating the play's characters.

Her approach to this task followed specific guidelines which she set for herself. Margo firmly believed that the actor should create any role for him- or herself. She was most likely influenced in this belief by Gilmor Brown many years earlier in Pasadena. Brown, in his textbook General Principles of Play Direction, had advo-

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long"; Bayless interview, 12 March 1974. Bayless's comment revealed that Margo's autocratic tendencies in terms of control of her productions sometimes carried over into her relationship with her actors: if they did not tow the line, they were dismissed.

<sup>33</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 80.

<sup>34</sup>Schumach, 60.



cated a creative collaboration between director and actor and had emphasized the actor's creative independence.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps as a result, Margo allowed her actors the freedom to explore their own emotions and she encouraged them to think their way through the problems they encountered in creating their characters.

I think that a director can obtain the best results from any actor if he [sic] pulls them out of the actor himself [sic]. Any method which will work is acceptable, but I do not believe it is creative to show an actor how to deliver a line or perform a piece of business, unless the director finds that this is the only way to make the actor aware of the truth. There is no magic in the theatre if every actor is imitating the director. Actors must be taught to love the process of thinking. They, too, have imagination, and it is up to the director to make them use it.<sup>36</sup>

For the gifted actor, therefore, Margo's direction proved effective and inspirational.

. . . [I]f she saw that the actor had some inventive qualities about him [sic] and some creative qualities . . . she encouraged it. So it gave the actor a great deal of freedom working

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<sup>35</sup>Gilmor Brown and Alice Garwood, General Principles of Play Direction (New York: Samuel French, 1936), 7. It is unknown whether Margo read this book. However, it is highly unlikely that Brown would have radically altered his theories of direction in the two years that passed between Margo's enrollment in his summer school and the book's publication. Her subsequent directorial work at Gilmor's Pasadena Playhouse during the summers of 1943 and 1944 most likely further influenced her belief in the techniques Gilmor advocated.

<sup>36</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 120-121.

for her. He could assume things on his own and grow.<sup>37</sup>

Louise Latham, who studied with Margo as a student in Austin and later worked with her as a professional in Dallas, stated that

As an actress, I personally liked what Margo did for me. And I think sometimes this is a great talent that some directors have, and that is you [the director] free each actor to do his [sic] best. That worked for me as a performer. . . . Margo freed me as a performer which I liked very much.<sup>38</sup>

Latham went on to say that Margo would not interpret characters or text for the actor, rather "she would let you do what you had to do with the part,"<sup>39</sup> leaving the job of characterization entirely in the hands of the actor. For Lilian Bayless, Margo "let the actors improvise," although she was "perceptive in what you [the actor] were feeling . . . she could see the way you wished to do it. . . . And then [she] let you go through [with] it."<sup>40</sup> Charles Braswell recalled that she "always gave

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<sup>37</sup>Ray Walston, Interview by Ronald L. Davis, 11 August 1988, interview #426, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Walston's own experience working with Margo was quite positive. In the same interview he stated, ". . . [I]f I can find a director like that, such as Margo was [who gave actors a free rein], I can function much better than I can with a director who is on my back a great deal."

<sup>38</sup>Latham interview, 19 March 1974.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

the actor a chance to be as creative as possible" within the framework of the script and her interpretation of it.<sup>41</sup>

Margo's greatest strength in dealing with actors was to inspire and encourage their creativity during the taxing process of production, creating an atmosphere of "high energy, high involvement, high concentration."<sup>42</sup> She depended on "expository precision and endlessly repeated trial and error for perfection" in character interpretation.<sup>43</sup> Her patience was legendary: colleagues spoke of her "refusal to become angry at actors even when they indulge[d] in childish tantrums . . .".<sup>44</sup> She employed several techniques, some fairly unorthodox and perhaps obscure, to create an environment in which her actors could freely explore and perfect their characterizations.

Watching Miss Jones direct is, according to one of her own pupils, worse than giving a mickey to someone with the dt's [sic] . . . With change of pace, she commands, cajoles, yea, even cusses, and when she thinks the boys and girls are at the breaking point, she tempers all evil with a sweet "Let's all have some cofeee [sic] now and break up this g\_\_ d\_\_\_\_\_d business."

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<sup>41</sup>Charles Braswell to Don Burton Wilmeth, 28 January 1964; quoted in Wilmeth, 8.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Olivia Lockhart Glahos; quoted in Sheehy, 49. Glahos acted for Margo during her years with the Houston Community Players.

<sup>43</sup>Schumach, 60.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

Her cast . . . swear[s] by her—and at her some-  
times. She drives them at times, but none has  
ever complained that she doesn't do her  
share.<sup>45</sup>

One actor recalled that Margo "could utilize [her] . . .  
talent [for getting people to do what she wanted] as a  
director . . . which was a very legitimate plus [in the  
theatre] . . .".<sup>46</sup> Another stated that she (the actor)  
worked diligently "just because I admired her [Margo] so  
much and I wanted so much to please her as an actress."<sup>47</sup>  
Yet another avowed that "Margo activated one's best enthu-  
siasm and imagination."<sup>48</sup> She was sensitive to her ac-  
tors needs, both emotional and physical: ". . . [T]he  
older character actors . . . were frequently tired and  
worn out [from the demanding schedule] and she gave them  
something, she revitalized whatever their dedication  
was."<sup>49</sup> One writer described the devotion many actors  
accorded her in this way:

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<sup>45</sup>This untitled, undated, and unsigned article was  
found in the Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX. Based on  
the context, it most likely refers to Margo's work with  
the Houston Community Players, although the reference to  
"pupils" may refer to her work at the University of Texas.  
My own opinion is that the article deals with Margo's work  
in Houston.

<sup>46</sup>Bumpas Gaylord interview, 11 April 1974.

<sup>47</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

<sup>48</sup>Latham interview, 19 March 1974.

<sup>49</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

. . . [H]er [Margo's] admirers are of many kinds, with varying reasons for their admiration. By some, she is appraised with evangelical fervor. One cohort calls her "St. Joan of the Theatre." This acolyte branch . . . dotes on her patience, idealism, tirelessness[,] and consideration. From them comes the story of how, upon seeing an actor tired, she summoned a cab and ordered him home for a day's rest.<sup>50</sup>

Playwright Jerome Lawrence recalled one early morning rehearsal of Inherit the Wind during which no one was motivated to work, including Margo.

But she woke herself up and all the rest of us—by waving her arms like a gospel singer, leading the whole cast in singing "Morning is the Nicest Time of Day," to convince herself and everybody else [that this was indeed the case], [and thus] energized the entire day.<sup>51</sup>

At another point during rehearsals for Inherit the Wind, Margo and the playwrights

felt that the actors weren't getting actually what they needed [from Margo and the authors] . . . we spent one whole day [during which] . . . Margo had each actor come in . . . [and she] and I [Lawrence] discussed each character with each actor.<sup>52</sup>

During her work on The Glass Menagerie, Margo's motivational ingenuity was often challenged by Laurette Taylor and Eddie Dowling. Both were respected actors with

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<sup>50</sup>Schumach, 19.

<sup>51</sup>Speech by Jerome Lawrence at Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX, 16 April 1982; quoted in Sheehy, 254.

<sup>52</sup>Jerome Lawrence, Interview by Carole Cohen, 6 January 1975, interview #173, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

years of experience while she was just starting her professional career. However, Margo's qualities of quiet encouragement and persuasion worked wonders with the aging Taylor.

. . . [S]he gave Laurette Taylor the courage to do what she [Margo] saw that she [Taylor] could do . . . And the confidence that Margo had in herself to do this [is amazing] . . . I don't know how she did it, but she was a lady you couldn't say no to, . . . she had such high expectations [of herself and others].<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the most striking example of Margo's motivational techniques with actors is revealed in a letter to her parents:

We are all so conscious so continuously of the problem of [lack of] time that I am afraid I drive them a bit hard. So I decided night before last that the best way to make them feel better was to really let them know how much I appreciated them rather than to criticize them for any . . . things that they may be doing wrong. . . . So yesterday morning . . . I had coffee and doughnuts for them instead of lamming right into rehearsal. I gave them each a long letter I had written them the night before. . . . I wrote to each one . . . and told them [sic] how much I appreciated the various parts they had played and let them know what their creative work had meant to me.<sup>54</sup>

Margo's penchant for creating rituals and personalizing rehearsals for her casts, and thereby making rehearsals and performances intimate, sociable, and productive,

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<sup>53</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

<sup>54</sup>Margo Jones to Parents, 22 January 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.



was legendary. For example, at the opening night performance of Chekhov's Uncle Vanya in Houston, Margo, holding a bottle of vodka and "a lot of little bitty glasses," assembled her cast. "Everybody just follow me," she commanded. The actors obediently followed her to the back of the theatre where, "with a dramatic flourish, she poured the vodka and the actors dutifully gulped it down."<sup>55</sup> Likewise, during the Summer and Smoke performances in New York, Margo built a wishing well backstage so that she could send her cast "daily good wishes for a successful performance."<sup>56</sup> It is no wonder that she endeared herself to so many of those acting for her.

Learning to know members of your case [cast, sic] and understanding them is a fascinating job. I guess I treat them like children; and just as the temperaments of one's children are often different, so the temperaments of each member of the company are a new and challenging experience.<sup>57</sup>

Margo's sensitivity to her actors' needs also resulted in her insistence that rehearsals be closed to outsiders.

No one can be admitted to a rehearsal. . . . The presence of one outsider frequently forces the actor to attempt a performance (for which he [sic] is not ready) and ruins the rehearsal.

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<sup>55</sup>Interview with Ray Walston; quoted in Sheehy, 38.

<sup>56</sup>Sheehy, 181.

<sup>57</sup>Margo Jones to Parents, 27 October 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

Fear of criticism and desire for commendation inevitably appear if a stranger is in the house.<sup>58</sup>

Actors appreciated Margo's closed rehearsals for it supported the impression that "she did respect an actor's working needs."<sup>59</sup> Margo's desire for private rehearsals was founded not only on her knowledge of the working actor's psyche, but also the working director's:

Actors in the process of rehearsing are extremely shy, sensitive[,] and self-conscious people. When any outsider is watching [a] rehearsal, it actually hurts the work trying to be done. The actor . . . feels instinctively he [sic] should give a performance. This is not only true of actors but a director is extremely aware of guests and is apt to find that he [sic] does not work with his actors the same way as he would when they are all alone.<sup>60</sup>

Coinciding with her desire for closed rehearsals was Margo's strong objection to others interfering with the actors. Margo required that her actors trust only her during rehearsals and listen to no one else—whether they be playwright, stage manager, or fellow actor—about their performances. During Summer and Smoke, for example,

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<sup>58</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 122. In a letter to Janice Brunson, 18 December 1950, Margo wrote, "Normally, I am against anyone being present during rehearsals because it does take away the tension [for creative concentration] of the actors"; Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>59</sup>Bumpas Gaylord interview, 11 April 1974.

<sup>60</sup>Margo Jones to James B. Cashell, Jr., 5 May 1952, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

Tennessee Williams jumped onto the stage and began showing Ray Walston how to play the part of the traveling salesman. Margo immediately interrupted his coaching, shouting from the house, "No, Tennessee, I am the director of this play. You get yourself off that stage right this minute. I am the director and you better know that."<sup>61</sup> This incident may well have precipitated the end of the trust that existed between Margo and Tennessee. He had broken one of her cardinal rules: the playwright and director never discussed the production in front of the actors.

When the author and the director feel the need to discuss the play during the rehearsal period, they should do so outside the theatre and in the absence of the actors. Actors may frequently have valuable suggestions for the improvement of the script, but they should make them to the director, who . . . will pass them on to the author. In the same way, any criticism the playwright has of the actors should be given to the director.<sup>62</sup>

Margo encountered another example of interference during the run of On Whitman Avenue in New York. After

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<sup>61</sup>Interview with Ray Walston; quoted in Sheehy, 168. In another interview, Walston recalled: "Tennessee Williams came up on the stage and began telling me how to play this part and began walking it. Margo came up and told him to get out of the theater, that she was the director of the play, and that he should understand that right then and there . . ."; Walston interview, 11 August 1988. Tennessee's presumptuous interference may have stemmed from his earlier experience with Elia Kazan during A Streetcar Named Desire: "Once in a while he [Kazan] would call me up on stage to demonstrate how I felt a certain bit should be played"; Tennessee Williams, Memoirs (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1972), 135.

<sup>62</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 119.

directing and opening the play in May 1946, Margo returned to Dallas. The playwright, Maxine Wood, kept her informed of the Broadway production's progress in a series of letters.<sup>63</sup> In July, Margo learned that her stage manager had fired one of her actors—a move that outraged her.

I . . . was horrified to hear that Harry [Altner] fired Monty Miller. Surely when a person hires a director and a director chooses and [an, sic] actor and spends weeks training that actor with the aid of the author and the producers, it's pretty foolish for a stage manager to have a right to fire that actor and put some one [sic] in who has not been directed or O.K. [sic] by [the] author or director.<sup>64</sup>

Margo, despite her outrage and because of her distance from New York, was powerless to reverse the stage manager's action. But even when matters were taken out of her hands, as in this situation where her stage manager second guessed her casting, she readily plunged in to rectify matters.

. . . [I]t was too late to do anything about Monty Miller, who I consider a real loss to the cast. Donald Hastings [Miller's replacement] is a good little actor and is working out all right but he doesn't have the quality that Monty had and there is nothing on God's green earth that can give it to him. I did try to help him and know he will be all right. The guy cast for Lund is what I would call just so-so. I worked

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<sup>63</sup>Maxine Wood to Margo Jones, 27 June 1946, 20 July 1946, Typed, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>64</sup>Margo Jones to Maxine Wood, 25 July 1946, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

on him very hard and I think he is giving an adequate performance.<sup>65</sup>

Margo also objected to actors independently changing interpretations or stage business without her consent once the play had opened. During the New York run of Summer and Smoke, Margo addressed her stage manager's concern about the actors' tampering with their performances:

I will have another very careful discussion and explanation to the cast about why actors must not change anything during performance. . . . I am anxious for performances to keep their quality and I am always interested in bettering a performance if it is done in a proper manner, which must be done during rehearsal with me present and deciding if any new interpretation works into the entire picture. . . . I will tell them all that they may accumulate ideas, write them down and when I come in [to New York] we will always have a rehearsal and if any development in characterization that they have thought of seems wise, I shall be glad to rehearse them and see if it works.<sup>66</sup>

Obviously, matters in Dallas rarely got this far because of Margo's daily proximity to the actors and their performances. The dangers of actors changing their characterization and blocking were more likely to occur in her New York and road productions.

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<sup>65</sup>Margo Jones to Maxine Wood, 19 August 1946, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>66</sup>Margo Jones to Henri Caubisens, 30 October 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Caubisens stage managed Summer and Smoke's Broadway run.

The crux of Margo's objection to outside interference or internal tampering with her actors was two-fold:

(1) she wanted to protect her actors from external distractions and conflicting instructions, and (2) she desired to control the rehearsal process. Thus she believed she could create the optimum working conditions for her actors to apply their creative energies.

Ideal as Margo's techniques were in fostering a creative, trusting atmosphere in which her actors could freely explore their characters, in practice this very freedom sometimes inhibited them. Although her clear and open sensitivity to actors' needs and her strong encouragement of their efforts achieved the desired results with many of the actors she directed, with others her methods were less successful. According to those who worked with her, Margo was unable or unwilling to cross that line she drew for herself—she rarely came to the actor's aid by providing specific line readings, actions, or interpretations.

Margo was not the type of director who could build a character for an actor and tell the actor how to accomplish it. Margo was one of those directors who (although I don't think she knew this) had to have a good actor in from the beginning. If she had been fortunate enough to cast a good actor . . . [she] really [didn't] . . . have to lead them by the hand.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Walston interview, 11 August 1988.



Those actors who needed guidance often found themselves floundering during rehearsals, with little help from Margo. She was unable to adapt her approach to those actors who needed detailed direction and this inability proved to be one of her weaknesses when dealing with actors. In fact, for some it proved restricting. Martha Bumpas Gaylord recalled that she "never felt quite free to experiment, quite free to be awful . . ." as a result.<sup>68</sup>

During her direction of On Whitman Avenue, Margo encountered this problem with some of her cast. Perry Wilson, an actor in the company, reported that the "actress playing Mrs. Tilden needed help in bringing some long speeches alive, and Margo had great difficulty in helping her with specific readings."<sup>69</sup> Margo, as always, fell back on encouragement and positive reinforcement. She exhorted the actors to find the truth within their characters, to search for emotional honesty.

This inability to provide specific instruction was not an uncommon problem with Margo. Although she recognized when characterizations were on target, she rarely could tell her actors how to achieve them: "She frequent-

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<sup>68</sup>Bumpas Gaylord interview, 11 April 1974.

<sup>69</sup>Interview with Perry Wilson; cited in Sheehy, 105.

ly would say, 'I don't know, do it and I'll tell you if it's right,' when she was in doubt about something."<sup>70</sup>

Vague instructions to actors requiring detailed suggestions also caused problems during Summer and Smoke and affected Tennessee Williams' confidence in the production—and in Margo. Williams recalled that during the first weeks of rehearsal

An actor or actress would approach the ecstatic Margo with a question such as "How do you want me to play this bit, Miss Jones?"

"Play it? Honey, don't play it, just feel it."

Naturally the performer would go away from Margo as perplexed as when he [sic] approached her . . .

[After the play opened,] the performers were not feeling it nor were they performing it very well, either. Of course, Miss [Margaret] Phillips [who played the lead] was as effective as she could be with the kind of direction she had been given.<sup>71</sup>

Perhaps the best known example of Margo's failure to guide some actors effectively occurred during Joan of Lorraine. Margo's problems with some of the actors, most notably Ingrid Bergman, stemmed from their requirements for detailed direction, which Margo was unwilling to provide, as well as possible inadequacies within the

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<sup>70</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

<sup>71</sup>Williams, Memoirs, 153. Williams went on to say that in his opinion "Margo Jones should have confined herself to a regional theatre, preferably in the executive and fund-raising departments. But I think it was there her genius lay, not in the direction of actors or of delicate plays" (153).

script itself, for which Margo may have been blamed. Furthermore, Margo's gender may also have contributed to her difficulties during this production.

In 1946, Ingrid Bergman was one of the most popular film stars in this country. She was appearing on stage after an absence of several years and, as such, was apprehensive. Accustomed to male film directors who "mold and shape screen performances and tell actors everything they must do,"<sup>72</sup> Bergman was unsure of Margo's methods and her confidence in Margo was shaken when she was unable to get specific instructions from her. During rehearsals, Bergman would ask Margo how to play a scene and Margo would reply, "Don't play it, feel it."<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, this was not the kind of answer Bergman wanted or needed. "Bergman wanted a director who made hard and fast decisions. . . . Margo was the kind of director who allowed actors to blossom as they felt in rehearsal under her

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<sup>72</sup>Larsen, 168-169. Larsen's source for this opinion is unclear. However, Bergman's autobiography indicated that she was, indeed, directed by strong-willed male directors, especially early in her film career in Sweden; Ingrid Bergman and Alan Burgess, Ingrid Bergman: My Story (New York: Delacorte Press, 1980).

<sup>73</sup>Interview with Joanna Albus; quoted in Larsen, 169. Albus, in addition to being a close friend of Margo's and an employee of Theatre '46, was also cast in Joan of Lorraine. Her recollections of such episodes would be fairly accurate, as a result. A similar incident was reported to Sheehy during an interview with Sam Wanamaker, another actor in the cast (119).

guidance."<sup>74</sup> According to the stage manager, Alan Anderson, Margo "didn't push actors around. . . . [she] was careful, quiet and subtle."<sup>75</sup>

Several actors in the production, however, favored Margo's directorial approach. Margo wrote her family that Romney Brent, an actor in the Lorraine company and a director himself, "took her aside and told her he liked her directing methods."<sup>76</sup> Joanna Albus, another actor in the company and a close friend of Margo's, said that "It was a beautiful experience, but a lousy play [emphasis mine],"<sup>77</sup> implying that Margo's difficulties may have originated with problems within the text and not her direction of it. Actor Ray Walston remembered the attempt to oust Margo as being more deliberate, however:

. . . [T]hey [the actors] began to do what most actors do [when they are nervous about a production], they began to start looking for problems, start looking for someone to pick on. Usually the director is the fall guy, and so it was. There was an underground movement against Margo, and finally they accomplished it.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Interview with Sam Wanamaker; quoted in Sheehy, 119.

<sup>75</sup>Interview with Alan Anderson; quoted in Sheehy, 120. Anderson's father was playwright Maxwell Anderson.

<sup>76</sup>Margo Jones to Parents, 10 October 1946; cited in Larsen, 169.

<sup>77</sup>Interview with Joanna Albus; quoted in Larsen, 169.

<sup>78</sup>Walston interview, 11 August 1988. How Walston came to this conclusion is unknown. He was not connected with the Joan of Lorraine production, but as an actor



Although Margo's firing most likely followed Bergman's loss of confidence in her,<sup>79</sup> another explanation can be posited. Jerry Adler, Broadway stage manager and director, was once quoted as saying that "Bergman never liked strong women."<sup>80</sup> If this statement is true, then Bergman's inability to work with Margo may have resulted from her uneasiness with a woman in a position of authority. Despite Margo's "quiet and subtle" approach, evidence indicates that she did not compromise her principles nor did she allow others to dictate to her.

. . . [N]o one said no to Margo Jones. . . . by example she taught her company the extraordinary discipline demanded by the theatre. . . . "If Margo said we were going to work seven days a week until three in the morning, nobody bitched; and if they bitched they weren't welcome in our group."<sup>81</sup>

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regularly appearing on Broadway during the late 1940s, it is not unlikely that he may have heard or sought out gossip or rumors about recent Broadway shows. As a long-time advocate of Margo and her work, dating back to her years in Houston, and as a member of her Summer and Smoke cast, he may have paid particular attention to information about those productions in which she was involved.

<sup>79</sup>See Ch. 4, pp. 93-101, for additional explanations of Margo's dismissal.

<sup>80</sup>Interview with Jerry Adler; quoted in Larsen, 169.

<sup>81</sup>Interview with Maxine Mesinger, 8 November 1980; quoted in Larsen, 69. Mesinger was a high school student active with the Houston Community Players during Margo's tenure with the group. Although Margo certainly must have refined her disciplinary approach by the time she worked on Broadway, the basic traits that Mesinger described were probably still intact, though perhaps less obvious. After all, Margo ran her theatre "somewhat more autocratically than Catherine of Russia"; John Rosenfield, "Margo Jones

Moreover, as a fervent advocate of Anderson's text, Margo obviously stood in the way of Bergman's desire to revamp the play.<sup>82</sup> Margo's three-page letter to Bergman, defending the play and carefully shunting aside Bergman's suggestions for revisions, revealed how vehemently Margo felt on this issue:

As to some of the long speeches which seemed at times repetitious [and to which Bergman obviously objected], I feel strongly that the very style and the repetition is necessary in the legitimate theatre and that the result is beautiful and clear. Again, I think [we] will discover this in rehearsal.<sup>83</sup>

This difference of opinion regarding the text never erupted into open animosity between Margo and Bergman, although the disagreement on this issue may well have continued into production (and no evidence suggests that it did not). It is possible that, subconsciously, Bergman resisted Margo's soft touch (and strong will), perhaps never

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'55," Theatre Arts 29 (July 1955): 79. Larsen also referred to Jones' belief in directorial autocracy (123).

<sup>82</sup>Margo had met with Bergman in September 1946 to discuss the script. Margo made copious notes of these conversations, including Bergman's suggestions for textual changes. These handwritten notes can be found in the Joan of Lorraine folder in the Margo Jones Collection at the Dallas Public Library. Unfortunately, the pages are not numbered and the corresponding script from which the women worked is not in the file. Therefore, while the notations are available, their context is not, making analysis difficult.

<sup>83</sup>Margo Jones to Ingrid Bergman, 29 September 1946, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.



realizing herself that this may have been the source of her inability to follow Margo's direction.

Margo also encountered difficulties with Bergman's co-star, Sam Wanamaker. Wanamaker's dissatisfaction with the production most likely grew less out of personal inability to work with Margo and more in response to the tensions surrounding him.<sup>84</sup> Bergman increasingly relied on him during rehearsals, perhaps drawn to the character he played, "the tough, decisive director in the play within the play."<sup>85</sup> Maxwell Anderson's diary implies that Wanamaker initiated the move to dismiss Margo: "Sam Wanamaker came to the hotel. We decided—after Sam left—to do something about the direction."<sup>86</sup> The next day Margo was fired. In an ironic twist, Wanamaker was named Margo's successor and the young actor, with no directing experience whatsoever, took over the show. Wanamaker recently stated that the move to fire Margo

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<sup>84</sup>These tensions emanated not only from Bergman but from the playwright as well. For a discussion of Anderson's anxieties surrounding the production, see Ch. 4, pp. 93-101.

<sup>85</sup>Sheehy, 120.

<sup>86</sup>Maxwell Anderson personal diary, 8 November 1946 entry, handwritten, Maxwell Anderson Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

surprised him.<sup>87</sup> He said he called Margo and asked if his taking over the show would offend her. "What's the difference?" she answered. "They've fired me. I think it's wonderful that you should do it."<sup>88</sup> Significantly, the rest of the cast was never told the truth about Margo's ouster. Anderson "talked to the cast, told them Margot [sic] had been called away by an illness in the family."<sup>89</sup>

Although Margo's inability to communicate characterization to actors was most fully documented in the Joan of Lorraine case, other examples existed. During the production of The Last Island, for instance, playwright Eugene Raskin recalled an incident in which an actor had difficulty conveying jealousy on the stage.

Margo asked, "Haven't you ever been jealous?"

"No," he [the actor] said.

He happened to be married to an actress who was also in the company. "You mean to tell me," Margo said, "that you haven't ever been jealous of that pretty wife of yours?"

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<sup>87</sup>Interview with Sam Wanamaker; cited in Sheehy, 120. Bergman, in her autobiography, also expressed surprise at Margo's dismissal; see Ch. 4, n. 42. However, both actors' memory of events some forty years earlier may be unreliable and colored by Margo's premature death.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid. Wanamaker went on to become a respected actor and stage and film director. His experience with Joan of Lorraine was pivotal in establishing his subsequent directing career.

<sup>89</sup>Anderson diary, 10 November 1946 entry. Anderson often misspelled Margo's name in his diary.

"No, never," he replied. . . . Margo decided to give him a linereading. Then Raskin tried. They both failed.<sup>90</sup>

Significantly, Raskin's impression of Margo was that "when she watched a play she did as many performances as there were actors in the play . . .".<sup>91</sup> Just as she produced plays in her imagination, she acted roles there also. Unfortunately for some of the actors on the stage, these idealistic characterizations were inaccessible.

Margo's techniques for fostering a creative environment for actors to explore their characters imaginatively were not clear to some of her actors. For them, Margo appeared to do little more than offer encouragement during rehearsals. This assessment contrasted sharply with her own belief that she worked very hard to obtain decent performances from her casts. Margo prided herself on being able to get results out of actors who were less than right for the part. If she ever considered herself to be the cause of some actors' inability to "feel" the part, she never let on.

I have no Solness [in The Master Builder] that is right—finally had to cast Wilson Brooks and

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<sup>90</sup>Interview with Eugene Raskin; quoted in Sheehy, 234-235.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

am killing myself trying to inject the [right] qualities into him.<sup>92</sup>

I had to cast him [Wilson Brooks] but believe me, if I ever did a job of making a guy play a part, I did this time. And, I am glad to report that it worked out and I don't believe you'd recognize him.<sup>93</sup>

During The Glass Menagerie, Margo encountered problems with her two leading actors—problems that she worked hard to erase. Laurette Taylor's false Southern accent caused Margo numerous headaches during rehearsals. Her production notes were rife with comments about Taylor's voice: "Still too much southern accent" and "she needs to lighten up—voice lighter—sometimes a little shrill—certainly dainty."<sup>94</sup> Taylor also had a tendency, along with Eddie Dowling, to ad-lib much of the dialogue. Margo apparently put a stop to this, proudly writing that "Eddie

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<sup>92</sup>Margo Jones to Joanna Albus, n.d., Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>93</sup>Margo Jones to Joanna Albus, 10 November 1947, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>94</sup>These handwritten production notes were found in an undated stenographer's notebook and on index cards in the Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. These notes were obviously written during a runthrough of the play since technical comments about sound and lights were contained within them. Very little commentary was made about characterization; most notes dealt with blocking and technical problems.

is playing the show 100% better now as the result of my insisting on not so much hoak . . .".<sup>95</sup>

Margo's work with actors was consistent and supportive. Many of her techniques were designed to foster the actor's own creativity and, as a result, were rarely apparent to the actors themselves. Furthermore, as far as the evidence indicates, she did not deviate in her methods from one space to the other. She did, however, believe that theatre-in-the-round afforded some advantages to the actor that proscenium staging did not.

To the actor, theatre-in-the-round offers excellent training in honesty and concentration, for here no faking is possible; but I believe that a good actor on the proscenium stage is a good actor in any medium, and all he [sic] needs to do is adapt himself to a few different requirements.<sup>96</sup>

Circular staging required the actor to act with the whole body, not just the front. Margo believed that "an actor's back can be as effective and dramatic as his [sic] face" and insisted that "good actors are well aware of that on

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<sup>95</sup>Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, 2 January 1945, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

<sup>96</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 127. John Beaufort disagreed with Margo on this point. In his article on her theatre, he stated that "more than ordinary demands . . . are made on the actors [in theatre-in-the-round], since it is the performance [of the actors]—without the aid of the usual elaborate scenery— which must fire the spectator's imagination"; "Theater in the Round in Dallas Style," Christian Science Monitor, 29 May 1954.

the proscenium stage, too."<sup>97</sup> She emphasized this point with an example from her production of The Importance of Being Earnest: "Lady Bracknell's reaction to Jack Worthing was expressed by a false smile; since only a portion of the audience witnessed this smile, the actress accompanied it with a bounce of her bustle . . .".<sup>98</sup>

For Margo, the actor was the most important element in arena staging after the playwright because a major virtue of central staging lay in the intimacy that sprang up between actor and audience. However, she cautioned that the director

must remind actors . . . that they must not tone down their performances merely because this is an intimate theatre. They must project their voices because there is always a portion of the audience to whom their back is turned, and yet they must not be too loud for those whom they are facing.<sup>99</sup>

Nevertheless, Margo believed that "intimacy does not take the theatrics out of the theatre."<sup>100</sup> Instead, it created a bond between actor and audience that resulted in such magical moments as critic George Freedley experienced while sitting in her theatre:

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Margo Jones, "Theatre-in-the-Round Over America," World Theatre 1 (1951): 23.

<sup>100</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 127.



I saw an actor's cigarette lighter fail to work and a member of the audience in the first row unthinkingly put up his own lighter for the cigarette. The actor murmured "Thank you," and proceeded with the play. No one thought anything of it, [neither] actor nor audience. When such contact is established we have achieved the kind of theatre for which we all search.<sup>101</sup>

Theatre-in-the-round's benefits for the actor were best summed up for Margo in an article by one of her actors, George Mitchell, which she quoted extensively in her book:

. . . [T]here is a great freedom of movement [for the actor], a complete and final break from the classic face-front technique; you learn to act with your back, your sides, your obliques. You can neither upstage nor be upstaged. And far better try lying to your own mother than attempt to give a false performance before the searching eyes of such a proximate audience. . . . And the actor, as though seeing himself [sic] under a microscope, improves his technique with many refinements.<sup>102</sup>

To Margo, the actor was the conduit through which she communicated the playwright's words and ideas to the audience. As such, she took great care in choosing her actors so that they worked well together as an ensemble. The atmosphere she strived to create during rehearsals consisted of a three-fold effort to instill self-confidence in their abilities, enthusiasm for the script, and a willingness to work hard toward the common goal. She

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<sup>101</sup>George Freedley, "Central Staging," Theatre Arts (March 1949): 61.

<sup>102</sup>George Mitchell, "Actor-in-the-Round," New York Times, 28 March 1948, sec. 2, p. 2; quoted in Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 128-129.

fundamentally believed that such an atmosphere would allow her actors the freedom to create their characters to the best of their abilities. She enhanced this freedom to explore and create with encouragement, rituals, and closed rehearsals.

But her methods did not work for all actors. Margo's refusal to provide detailed line readings and characterizations often impeded some actors' progress and resulted in misunderstandings and confused acting. Nevertheless, she firmly stood by her insistence that acting was the actor's job, not the director's.

For Margo, theatre-in-the-round constituted the ideal venue for the actor. Its intimacy forced the actor to act honestly and allowed the greatest interaction with the audience. Although her methods did not alter from one medium to the other, there can be little doubt that Margo's stage of choice, especially for the actor, was the circular stage.

## CHAPTER 6

### A PICTURE'S WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS:

#### MARGO AND THE DESIGNERS

I have a great deal of reverence for visual beauty, and I believe that theatre-in-the-round offers a new territory for the imagination of our designers, not in terms of actual scenery, but of color, design, ornament. The theatre consists of the script, plus the visual element, and this does not mean that the latter has to be overburdened with great structures.

- Margo Jones

We now turn our attention to the more technical aspects of Margo's directing. A well-documented promptbook provides the only accurate record of a production's visual presentation. Determining the meaning of that promptbook's often cryptic annotations proves difficult, however. Nevertheless, patterns often establish themselves through careful, methodical examination: patterns of lighting, sound, property placement; patterns of movement, entrances, exits. Although one can never be sure that any given interpretation of a promptbook is correct, the attempt to describe and define a director's methods must encompass some aspect of promptbook research, if for no other reason than to conclude that no patterns exist.

Promptbooks have been helpful in determining some of the design techniques employed by Margo and her designers.<sup>1</sup> These promptbooks have been equally helpful in defining blocking strategies. However, their usefulness has been hampered by several problems.

First, very few production promptbooks exist in accessible archives,<sup>2</sup> and, disappointingly, promptbooks from some of Margo's more important productions were unavailable. Therefore, although enough promptbooks were studied to draw certain conclusions about Margo's directing techniques, the examination was by no means comprehensive.

Second, in some cases it was difficult to determine exactly whose promptbooks were housed in the archives. And not knowing whose records were being examined complicated the evaluation of staging techniques, characterization notes, technical cues, and so on contained within. For example, three promptbooks were discovered for Margo's production of You Touched Me! in Cleveland. One of these was most likely an actor's copy. The other two, however,

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<sup>1</sup>For a complete listing of promptbooks examined, please see Appendix A. Any references to promptbooks in this study are taken from these sources.

<sup>2</sup>Most prominently: the Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX; the Margo Jones Collection, Tennessee Williams Collection, William Inge Collection, and Maxwell Anderson Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin; and the Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

were fully annotated, although the blocking and technical notes did not agree. It is possible that one promptbook was prepared while Margo was directing the play and the other after Frederick McConnell took over the production from her. Alternatively, both promptbooks may have reflected her direction at different stages of the rehearsal process. Or possibly an altogether different explanation exists. There is no way to determine which theory is correct. In another example, two promptbooks were located for Summer and Smoke's production in New York. The first contained only lighting and sound cues; the second was the official production promptbook as prepared by the stage manager and also contained lighting and sound cues, but not necessarily the same ones.

Moreover, Margo's Dallas promptbooks clearly indicated the work of at least three different stage managers, with varying levels of detail. Stage Manager #1 was obviously the most diligent and concise; his promptbooks were clearly annotated and complete. Stage Manager #2 was also fairly comprehensive, although not nearly as fastidious in his notations. Stage Manager #3's promptbooks contained few technical or blocking notes; whether their

rarity indicated few cues in the production or merely the stage manager's failure to record details was unclear.<sup>3</sup>

Only three promptbooks obviously appeared to be Margo's personal working scripts.<sup>4</sup> These three contained notes in her handwriting suggesting dialogue changes, textual questions, character motivations, possible lighting and sound cues, and possible movement patterns. What role, if any, Margo's promptbooks played in her final productions is unknown because, in all three cases, production promptbooks could not be located.

Third, and perhaps most difficult of all, the arena and proscenium promptbooks for the nine productions Margo directed in both venues were unavailable.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>3</sup>The stage managers in question most likely were Freddie Hoskins (Stage Manager #1, 1951/1952 - Margo's death), Robert Scott (Stage Manager #2, 1950/1951), and Jonathan Seymour (Stage Manager #3, 1947/1948 - 1949/1950). The years listed signify their tenures as stage manager at Margo's theatre. I have not named them in this study because I cannot verify that these three men actually prepared the promptbooks I examined.

<sup>4</sup>On Whitman Avenue, Joan of Lorraine, and An Old Beat-Up Woman.

<sup>5</sup>Margo directed each of these plays at least twice, once in-the-round and once in-the-flat either in Houston and Dallas, or Dallas and New York: Hedda Gabler, The Importance of Being Earnest, The Learned Ladies, The Taming of the Shrew, As You Like It, The Purification, Summer and Smoke, An Old Beat-Up Woman, and Southern Exposure. For further information about these productions, see Appendix C for a detailed chronology of Margo's directing career.

opportunity to compare her work in one space directly with that in the other was lost.

Although these problems hindered the investigation of Margo's directing techniques, the available promptbooks did aid the understanding of Margo's methods of direction. For example, promptbooks from both arena and proscenium productions were available and so allowed some comparison of Margo's directing methods in the two theatrical spaces. Also, promptbooks from both early and late in her career provided a basis for comparing changes in her directing techniques that occurred during her twenty years as a director. Promptbooks from both New York and Dallas productions allowed a study of any differences that existed between her commercial and repertory productions. Finally, promptbooks from both classical and original productions allowed comparative examination of her treatment of these two types of scripts.

Having summarized the importance of the promptbooks to a study of this sort and stated their advantages and disadvantages, let us now turn our attention to the information gleaned from these sources, as well as others, in determining Margo's theories and techniques in the area of design.

Margo Jones recognized the necessity of the mise en scene within the production scheme. As a result, she followed the tenets of most basic directing texts, repeat-



ing the standard steps a director follows in consulting designers before a production:

Before rehearsals start, the director confers with the technical director and the costume designer about the production scheme, which includes the floor plan, the lighting, sound and musical effects, furniture, costumes and props.<sup>6</sup>

In Margo's theatre-in-the-round, the technical director was also the lighting designer and

work[ed] with the director and costume director on the over-all visual production, which include[d] obtaining furniture and building or supervising the building of anything needed in the way of scenery.<sup>7</sup>

By inference, one concludes that little in the way of actual scenery was designed. Instead, Margo's concern centered around the selection and placement of furniture and properties in order to use most economically the floor space available to her.

In arranging the floor plan [in theatre-in-the-round] for each play, the director distributes the furniture so that there will be as many playing areas as possible. The most obvious way to do this is to have an area in each of the four corners. . . . It is important to plan very carefully the direction in which each piece of furniture is going to face and obtain a maximum of variety.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 121.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 110.

That Margo's priorities did not lie in the areas of design is vividly illustrated by an incident involving Jim Pringle, a designer who worked with her.<sup>9</sup> Pringle learned, through experience, to "pare down his design ideas."<sup>10</sup> For one production, he placed fake flowers in boxes separating the acting area from the audience. He discovered Margo removing them. Upset that his floral display was being destroyed, Pringle challenged her decision to remove the flowers. "Look, angel," she replied, "I'm interested in the script and the actors, I don't want to see anything else."<sup>11</sup> This remark provides the essence of Margo's relationship to the area of design.

She [Margo] found that many staging problems could be solved by simplifying the settings, and that if the dialogue or the actor could suggest a piece of scenery or property, the audience would believe it was there. She felt that the lack of theatrical illusion was compensated for by the intensified audience participation and the demand on the imagination created by the intimacy of the theatre.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Pringle, originally hired as an assistant designer, was promoted to technical director for the Theatre '52 season and remained in that position until Margo's death.

<sup>10</sup>Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 253.

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Jim Pringle; quoted in Sheehy, 253-254.

<sup>12</sup>Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964), 268.

Because Margo's priorities lay with the "script and the actors," she generally allowed her designers a free rein. Designer Jed Mace reported that "Margo rarely gave specific instructions or particular concepts that she wanted him to achieve. Instead she trusted Mace's ability and rarely disputed his design decisions."<sup>13</sup> This attitude often proved frustrating for Mace, who "sometimes wanted to talk aesthetics with her, but Margo had little time for theory."<sup>14</sup>

That Margo allowed her designers to act with limited guidance was also clearly demonstrated during Summer and Smoke's New York production. In clear contrast to her Dallas premiere, where the settings were "suggested with a minimum of furniture, and the action shifted from one area to another with the use of light and music,"<sup>15</sup> the Broad-

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<sup>13</sup>Interview with Jed Mace; cited in Sheehy, 150.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 144-145. Margo wrote that she believed that Summer and Smoke's production in Dallas "contains more light, sound, and music cues than any play I know of, and we found it possible to handle them all . . ." (145). The Broadway promptbook for Summer and Smoke verifies this assessment with fifty-six light cues and eighty-two music and sound cues; Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke (#2) (Rome version, March 1948), production promptbook, typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Assuming her Dallas production at least equalled her Broadway production in this area, this high number of technical cues exceeds those of the sixteen other promptbooks examined.

Another promptbook for the Broadway production contains only lighting and sound cues. This book documents

way set was "so dazzling—with cloud effects and star effects and sky effects and fountains splashing—that you found yourself concentrating on the set more than on what . . . the actors were saying or doing."<sup>16</sup>

The visual image that most distinctly defined the difference between the physical settings of the two productions, however, was the fountain's angel. In Dallas, the angel was small and low to the ground; in New York, the angel dominated the set, towering over scenery and actors alike.<sup>17</sup> In an article describing the Dallas production, Brooks Atkinson, in a prescient moment, warned,

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the specific sound effects, recorded music, and original music used in the production; Tennessee Williams, Summer and Smoke #1 (Rome Version, n.d.), production promptbook, typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>16</sup>Frank Harting, Interview by Carole Cohen, 13 March 1974, interview #24, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Harting's assessment of the special effects was accurate. Typewritten production notes found with Summer and Smoke's promptbook #1 detailed how these effects were achieved: "The skyrocket effect, at the end of Scene 1, Act 1, . . . was done with six motor-driven stereopticons with objector lens . . . using assorted colored discs. Six star effect lamps, with objective lens, projected on sky cyclorama . . . for star effect. Three cloud effect lamps, with cut-outs, projected on sky cyclorama . . . for cloud effect." See Appendix A for detailed information about this promptbook.

<sup>17</sup>George Freedley's review of the New York production noted that Mielziner's "figure of the angel, Eternity, always dominates the setting"; "Tennessee Williams at His Best in 'Summer and Smoke,'" The Morning Telegraph, 8 October 1948.

. . . [T]here's a calculated risk [in giving Summer and Smoke spectacular settings] . . . Its buoyant loveliness might disappear into the fly loft. For the magic of the informal setting [in Dallas] . . . has completely unpacked the heart of Williams' poignant narrative. The Broadway style is seldom that sensitive.<sup>18</sup>

Although designer Jo Mielziner's stated objective for the Broadway production was "to aid and abet the actors,"<sup>19</sup> he clearly failed.

Mielziner's setting and lighting are again so expert, constructive and effective that it has struck some it might be a lot more auspicious if he wrote Williams' plays for him and let Williams take a chance with the lights and scenery.<sup>20</sup>

When reading Tennessee Williams' description of the ideal set for this play and then looking at Mielziner's renderings, one clearly sees that Mielziner followed Williams' directions to the letter.<sup>21</sup> And by so doing created a spectacular set that, in some people's opinion, overshadowed this sensitive play so much so that it

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<sup>18</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Times Critic Hails 'Summer and Smoke,'" Daily Times Herald, 10 August 1947, pp. 1, 3. This same article appeared in the New York Times, 10 August 1947.

<sup>19</sup>Jo Mielziner; quoted in Sheehy, 174.

<sup>20</sup>George Jean Nathan, "The Menagerie Still Rides on the Streetcar," New York Journal-American, 18 October 1948.

<sup>21</sup>Tennessee Williams, "Author's Production Notes to Summer and Smoke" in Tennessee Williams: Four Plays (New York: New American Library, 1976), 9-10. Mielziner's original renderings and blueprints for the Summer and Smoke set in New York can be found in the Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

"forced the action toward the wings and failed to center the heroine on the stage."<sup>22</sup> Geraldine Page saw the original Broadway production of Summer and Smoke and agreed that

In Jo Mielziner's setting, which followed the playwright's [Tennessee Williams'] explicit instructions, the stone statue of the angel, which lends symbolism to the opening and closing of the play, took on too obtrusive a presence [emphasis mine].<sup>23</sup>

Mielziner's tendency towards overdesign should have been tempered by Margo's tendency towards simplification.<sup>24</sup> She should have recognized the pitfalls of cluttering the stage with giant angels and brilliant lighting effects.<sup>25</sup> That she did not, and so allowed her designer and playwright to dictate the play's visual accoutrements to the detriment of story and character alike, illustrates her hesitancy to interfere with conceptual design decisions.

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<sup>22</sup>John Gassner, Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1967), 53.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with Geraldine Page; cited in Stuart W. Little, Off-Broadway: The Prophetic Theater (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972), 19.

<sup>24</sup>See pp. 158, 167-168, 171-172, and 181-182 for discussions of Margo's preference for simple, rather than elaborate, scenic techniques.

<sup>25</sup>The spectacular fireworks scene that emblazoned the Broadway production "was managed effectively [in Dallas] . . . simply by using pop sounds over the loudspeaker system and lighting the actors' faces, as they looked up, with intermittent red lights"; Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 145.



Margo should have followed the lead of Lee Simonson who had designed Joan of Lorraine with such simplicity two years earlier in which the play, "bereft of the illusory quality of elaborate investiture and costuming, . . . [became] exclusively one for the ear and the mind rather than the eye."<sup>26</sup> She should also have heeded the words of Brooks Atkinson who, at that same time, had praised the simple set she had employed in Joan of Lorraine:

. . . [S]incere and earnest plays which do not depend upon the physical illusion of scenery and costumes can be remarkably exhilarating. When the occasion is sufficiently genuine, theatre as make-believe is infinitely more evocative than theatre as realism. Shakespeare . . . did not imprison [his audiences'] . . . minds within gaudy walls of scenery. Since his time the mechanical versatility of the modern world . . . has developed the technique of stage illusion to the point where the scene designer usually does a better job than the playwright.<sup>27</sup>

Despite Margo's reluctance to involve herself in the development of design concepts for any given play, she knew a good designer from a poor one. An early experience at the University of Texas emphasized the importance of surrounding herself with designers upon whom she could depend for artistically sound decisions.

In this experience [directing Noah] I've been forced to work with a complete washout of a designer who's hired as our technical man—Every

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<sup>26</sup>Nelson Bell, "Mr. Anderson Affords a Thoughtful Evening," Washington Post, 30 October 1946, sec. B, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Bergman of Lorraine," New York Times, 24 November 1946, sec. 2, p. 1.

body [sic] knows that he just can't design, costume or light a stage. . . . The show is one of the best directing jobs I've ever done—the sets were simply horrible—the costumes I got someone else to do and they were o.k. and I had to take over the lighting because said man didn't know a spot frame from a flood or a beam from a cyc [sic] light so I nearly killed myself . . . getting a really fine light job done on it.<sup>28</sup>

Although Margo spent little time in actual conference with her designers and apparently delegated design decisions to these colleagues, she nonetheless held definite ideas about what should appear on her stage, and she demanded perfection and authenticity in these areas.

. . . [T]he furniture must be [a]esthetically effective as well as functional. The actual beauty of a piece is of considerable importance, and so is its semblance to reality. . . . Authenticity of furniture and props is observed according to the requirements of each play.<sup>29</sup>

The costume must be beautifully designed and perfectly executed. It has to be thoroughly authentic as to style, materials and the minutest detail because the proximity of the spec-

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<sup>28</sup>Margo Jones to Tennessee Williams, n.d. [c. April 1944], Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. This letter is also significant for its indication that Margo possessed some technical knowledge of lighting design and instrumentation.

<sup>29</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 111-112. How strongly Margo enforced this point was indicated by her description of the set for The Coast of Illyria: "The Lambs' flat, furnished in the Empire period, was probably the most naturalistic setting we have ever had in our theatre. Our intention was to make the audience feel at once that this was a room in which Charles and Mary lived, studied, read, wrote[, ] and had gatherings with the outstanding intellects of their time. Low bookcases lined the imaginary walls, and every book, pen stand and figurine was authentic" (174).

tators enables them to examine it very closely. . . . In a play calling for richness and a lush quality . . . the exuberance of the costume is as important as the performance of the actor. The costume reflects the emotional impact of the play as well as its locale and its time.<sup>30</sup>

. . . [T]he use of make-up is very limited in theatre-in-the-round. . . . the make-up design and application have to be much more subtle than they are in the picture-frame theatre.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, Margo often used the authenticity required by theatre-in-the-round as a defense against the charge that this type of staging was economical or "cheap."

I don't think you should do theater-in-the-round because it's the cheap thing to do. . . . As far as furniture and costumes are concerned, you have to be fifty times more careful than in proscenium stage production.<sup>32</sup>

Even though Margo's involvement in the design process seemed minimal, the results were almost always gratify-

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 115. In another discussion about make-up's use in arena staging, Margo wrote: "Very little make-up can be utilized, and the motto is that the audience must never be aware of it. If an actor has to be aged, it is possible to do it, but the make-up has to be very subtly designed and applied"; Margo Jones, "Theatre-in-the-Round Over America," World Theatre 1 (1951): 24. In fact, much of Margo's make-up design was confined to hair style or color rather than facial make-up: "The passing of twenty-eight years [in The Golden Porcupine] . . . requires changes in make-up. Subtle changes in facial make-up were effected, but the emphasis was placed on modifying the women's hair-dos; when the change had to be made between scenes, mock [hair] pieces were added or eliminated"; Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 184.

<sup>32</sup>John Beaufort, "Theater in the Round in Dallas Style," Christian Science Monitor, 29 May 1954.

ing—for she unerringly chose the right people to design for her.

The choice of Mace as designer was a shrewd . . . artistic decision. . . . With the imaginative and talented Mace as designer, the productions would have a finished, polished look, essential in intimate theatre-in-the-round where the closeness of the audience demands subtlety, precision, and authenticity . . .<sup>33</sup>

Mace's forte, and one of which Margo apparently approved, was a total coordination of all scenic and costume elements with what was occurring on stage.

The set, the costumes, and the action all were stylized together . . . Coordinated might be a better word, in that the wallpaper on a screen here would be the pattern of the [men's] pants . . . ; the upholstery on the chais longue [sic] would appear yet again in the material of the blouse . . . the ingenue had on.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Sheehy, 149. Sheehy's opinion is reinforced by John Rosenfield's commentary on Margo's designers: "From 1947 to 1949 [Jed Mace's tenure as scenic and costume designer] Margo made effort to create atmosphere with costumes and settings for her arena stage. Then she went thrifty and for years both the properties and costumes were commonplace. Since 1953 she has given more attention to decor with improved results, although she never has regained the imaginative level of her first seasons"; John Rosenfield, "After Seven Years a Tenth Season," Southwest Review 40 (Winter 1955): 81.

<sup>34</sup>Betty Winn, Interview by Carole Cohen, 23 March 1974, interview #33, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX. Winn was a prominent civic leader in Dallas during Margo's years there and eventually was elected secretary of the Dallas Civic Theatre, the Board of Trustees selected to oversee Margo's theatre. As a Board member, Winn actively supported Margo's efforts and attended most of her productions.

Her production of The Learned Ladies employed this design approach to stunning effect. "The color scheme revolved around pinks, blues and other soft pastel shades in the costumes, while the furniture . . . was upholstered in white quilted chintz."<sup>35</sup> In that same production,

To unify the set we hung a papier-mache balloon in the center of the acting area and from it a basket full of flowers . . .; this was an added colorful touch which rounded out the physical production and helped to recreate the period of the play.<sup>36</sup>

Another production that illustrated this unified approach to sets, costumes, and action was Margo's Twelfth Night in which she and Mace

. . . used a minimum of furniture and emphasized the color and wit of the costumes. In searching for a style in costuming, we arrived at a design resembling a spirit of Mardi Gras, which went beautifully with the comic action of the play.<sup>37</sup>

Because of the difficulties inherent in designing for the arena stage and Margo's preference for simplified set designs, her productions frequently used a design technique she called camouflage. When scenic requirements called for a total change of setting, rather than move an entire roomful of furniture off and onto the stage, Margo and her designers covered certain set pieces with appro-

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<sup>35</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 164.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 167.



priate fabrics and thus transformed one location into another. For example, in Throng O'Scarlet

Both scenes of the first act take place in the drawing room, which was done with complete realism and struck during the intermission. For the first scene of the second act the stage was set for the pub: two tables, with four chairs around each, and a low bar. . . . To turn this pub into the saddle room for the second scene . . . we struck the bar, placed several saddles in the room for atmosphere, and covered the tables with tablecloths since the room was to be used for a picnic. . . . the next change . . . took us to the slaughterhouse. We used our "camouflage" method and covered every piece of furniture with burlap, struck the saddles, set a cot near the center of the area and hit this center with a spotlight, leaving the rest of the stage in semidarkness.<sup>38</sup>

Another production in which burlap played a primary scenic role was Skaal, in which "the clearing was suggested by camouflaging the kitchen set with burlap . . . The mill-house was also created with camouflage plus the introduction of a few characteristic pieces . . .".<sup>39</sup> Velvet and burlap were similarly used in The Golden Porcupine:

The furniture in the royal study was covered with velvet [fabric] . . . In order to shift to the prison cell [from the royal study], a few pieces were struck and the others were covered with burlap instead of velvet . . .<sup>40</sup>

Margo and her designers sometimes used the architectural attributes of her theatre to solve problems of

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 168.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 183.



design ingeniously. When requiring a jail cell for Malvolio in Twelfth Night, for example, the production staff seized upon the idea of using the lighting booth above the audience's heads. Thus Malvolio was elevated, most of the audience could see him, the rest could hear him, and Feste, on stage, could provide a clearly visible visual reaction to Malvolio's plight.<sup>41</sup>

Malvolio's cell or prison, when Feste torments him, created a problem of locating a suitable place to give a realistic effect that he was locked away. In our theatre . . . there is a walled off control booth . . . [with] windows . . . One of these became a tiny prison window for the scene, as Malvolio stuck his head out the window to plead with Feste, who called back to him from the stage below . . . On stage Feste kept the scene from becoming static by his antics all over the central playing area, hopping over benches and by also running up and down [the aisle] steps.<sup>42</sup>

In another production, the control booth represented the protagonist's house in Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, and when the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 167. Margo's ability to find creative solutions to scenic problems developed early in her career, as did her penchant for realism. While in Houston, she talked Judge Allen B. Hannay into allowing her to stage her production of Judgment Day in his 113th District courtroom, thus creating a totally realistic atmosphere for her play and causing a sensation with playgoers and media alike; June B. Larsen, "Margo Jones: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 65-66.

<sup>42</sup>Margo Jones, "Shakespeare in the Round," World Theatre 3 (1954): 32.

house was supposed to shake in the play, Margo and her technicians "shook the entire control booth."<sup>43</sup>

The design elements that figured most centrally in her production concepts were lights and sound. (Costumes played an important role primarily in classical or historical dramas.) Margo recognized that on the basically bare stages that she requested and her designers gave her, the lighting would establish the mood, pinpoint the locations, and focus the audience's attention on the action. "[T]he audience . . . finds the idea of being in the same room with the actors one of the chief attractions of the medium [theatre-in-the-round], and the only separation [sic] needed can be created with lighting."<sup>44</sup>

Lighting is important in any theatre, but it has several added functions in arena staging. It becomes the curtain which opens and closes a scene; it helps [to] suggest the physical setting of the play and to create the mood; it highlights [sic] and emphasizes the playing area as a focus.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 181-182.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 103. Theatre '47 board member Betty Winn described Margo's use of lighting in almost the same terms: "She did it [separated the scenes] mainly . . . by lighting. . . . she handled it mainly by blocking out [darkening] three-fourths [of the stage area] and having a spot settle down . . . Then the light would focus there and the action would take place"; Winn interview, 23 March 1974.

The major use to which Margo put light was in separating scenes; that is, she used lighting in the same way a curtain might be used in a proscenium theatre.

A perusal of seventeen production promptbooks revealed that the majority of lighting cues in Margo's productions occurred during scene or act breaks.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, with the exception of Summer and Smoke (Broadway), Whisper to Me, and You Touched Me! (Cleveland), lighting changes were confined to scene breaks. Margo rarely depended on blackouts to define these scene changes, but rather on a subtle shifting of light and color from one area of the stage to another. Surprisingly, however, the evidence suggests that, other than those exceptions already noted, few lighting changes actually occurred within scenes.

Margo also relied heavily on the lighting design to define the playing areas for the actors and the audience, thereby establishing the various locales required by the script.

I have found that simplification of a problem is always the best way out and sometimes it becomes both creative and beautiful. . . . If a play asks for simultaneous sets, the different playing areas can be established with lighting, perhaps even better than on a proscenium stage. . . . It doesn't matter how many scene changes the play needs. . . . For a change within an

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<sup>46</sup>Promptbooks consulted can be found in Appendix A. All references to technical notations are taken from these sources.

act, more rapidity and ingeniousness are required, but the illusion need not be broken.<sup>47</sup>

As if to emphasize this point, Margo described the use of this lighting technique in a letter to her family:

. . . [W]e have figured out a rather cute idea of how to manage these two scenes [in The Day's Mischief] without the long stage wait it would take to change the complete set. What we do is to have half of the set [on one side of the stage] . . . and the other half [on the other] . . . and only light the portion where the action is taking place.<sup>48</sup>

However, the use of light to separate scenes was not entirely successful, at least for some members of her audience.

One of the discoveries that Margo has made is that more than one scene cannot be set on the stage simultaneously unless the playwright has deliberately conceived his [sic] piece in terms of a multiple set. The reason is that the whole stage area so picks up light, even when the lighting is concentrated on one spot, that the setting not in use insists perversely upon intruding into the other scene.<sup>49</sup>

Margo and her designers also recognized the innovative use of lighting projection as a scenic device in her theatre, although here, too, reality often fell short of the ideal. "We have tried to use projections in order to

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<sup>47</sup>Margo Jones, "Central Staging," New York Times, 16 July 1950, sec. 2, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Margo Jones to Mother, Charles, and Aunt Stella, 28 March 1953, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>49</sup>John William Rogers, "Unique Theatre Supported in Dallas," Daily Times Herald, undated pamphlet.

suggest atmosphere or an offstage locale, but have found that it only detracts from the focus."<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, on at least two occasions, Margo approved projected images to solve design problems:

Now and then . . . the script calls for some very unusual object which the audience must look at because it is related to the plot. Such an instance came in . . . "Summer and Smoke" [the Dallas production] when the hero points to an anatomy chart . . . A small chart might have been left on the table, but Margo felt that the full effect of the speech could only be achieved if the actor pointed in plain view of the audience to the various parts of the chart as he spoke his lines. Should a large transparent chart be hung up so the audience on both sides could see it? Margo finally decided a less strained device would be to project a chart from a side by one of the exits. This could be made to stand out sharply . . . and could be dimmed . . . when attention was needed for other things. If everyone in the theatre could not face the chart directly, as many people could see it as frequently is the case with objects on a picture-frame stage.<sup>51</sup>

Another use of projection occurred in This Property Is Condemned:

We are doing Property on a completely blank stage with a strange shadow of an old water tank cast on the wall near exit 3. [There is] Another shadow of a house with a sign "This property is condemned" on the wall near exit 1.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 126.

<sup>51</sup>Rogers, "Unique Theatre . . .".

<sup>52</sup>Margo Jones to Joanna Albus, 10 November 1947, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

Even so, Margo believed that the full potential of lighting as a design element in theatre-in-the-round had not yet been fully explored. She envisioned a time when lighting would be so sophisticated as to "show the audience nothing but the face . . . and . . . hand, . . . the restless tapping of . . . [a] foot and the . . . expression on . . . [a] face."<sup>53</sup>

As with her set designers, Margo rarely interfered with her lighting designer's decisions once she had approved their designs. One exception occurred during Joan of Lorraine. Designer Lee Simonson's lighting plan did not accomplish its original purpose of distinguishing between the two levels of reality ("rehearsal" scenes and "Joan" scenes) that occurred during the play. Of this problem, Margo said,

Lee Simonson has done an extraordinary job of painting the production in lights. He has dressed the "Joan" scenes in soft, warm tones and the "between scenes" discussions in the cold, hard glares of brilliant white. It was thought that the contrast would sufficiently emphasize the change of moods, but that was not quite enough. Now . . . we black out completely, give the house a moment of relaxation—which I am happy to say they devote largely to applause—and then resume in the modern mood and tempo with greatly enhanced effect.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 126.

<sup>54</sup>Nelson Bell, "Margo Shoots at Miracles—Paying Ones," Washington Post, 10 November 1946, sec. 6, p. 1.



A further problem ensued when the illumination of the leading lady in certain scenes seemed inadequate. Simonson's solution squarely placed the responsibility on the staging of the scene, rather than on his lighting.

. . . I hope even if the entrance [lighting] . . . is muted . . . that there will be no dim with Ingrid in a single spot[light]. The lighting that we have now struck me as some of the best in the show, also the subtlest. There is enough light now for Ingrid by shifting her position a bit to get into the centre [sic] of several spots. . . . The tone and mood of the lighting strikes me as right. Having just played the saint scene in a concentrated spot—an effect which is motivated—I'm afraid anything like it [in the next scene] will seem repetitive, unmotiv[at]ed, mechanical, and an obvious curtain effect—perhaps the least bit phoney.<sup>55</sup>

Simonson also wished to change some of the lighting effects for the New York opening. He wrote Margo that he

planned to add [more] lamps . . . [and] By keeping these in a warmer color and focusing them on the important spots in the discussion scenes, I expect to give these [scenes] enough added warmth without upsetting the color contrast of the general scheme of lighting.<sup>56</sup>

Margo's reply was brief and to the point: "No changes are necessary. The lighting is beautiful."<sup>57</sup> Her response may indicate either a disinclination to fix that which is

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<sup>55</sup>Lee Simonson to Margo Jones, 3 November 1946, handwritten, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

<sup>56</sup>Lee Simonson to Margo Jones, 8 November 1946, handwritten, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

<sup>57</sup>Margo Jones to Lee Simonson, n.d., handwritten, Western Union Telegram, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

not broken or an inability to understand the reasoning behind Simonson's changes. The result, however, demonstrated her unwillingness to discuss his ideas, and her ability to dismiss them with a salve to his ego.

In conjunction with lighting, Margo used music and sound extensively in her productions. Her thoughts on this subject were best expressed in a long letter she wrote defending the use of music in her Broadway production of Summer and Smoke:

As a professional director of plays I resort to the use of many media to obtain and sustain a theatrical mood. Music belongs in the legitimate theatre and it should be encouraged to remain there.<sup>58</sup>

Margo strongly believed that music served a multitude of purposes, some utilitarian, others aesthetic. Almost all of her productions contained some musical elements. In fact, integrating sound and light in creative ways came

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<sup>58</sup>Margo Jones to Leo Cleusmann, 30 November 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Cleusmann was the Secretary of the American Federation of Musicians. Margo's letter responded to Local 802's ruling that Summer and Smoke's music was an "integral part" of the play and, therefore, was subject to the fees for a "drama with music." Margo argued that, while the music contributed to the drama, it was incidental at best and, as a result, Summer and Smoke should be reclassified as a "straight dramatic play." Margo's argument was supported by her assertion that A Streetcar Named Desire underwent a similar misclassification and the union reversed its decision (even though Streetcar contained more music than Summer and Smoke). Margo's motivation for writing this four-page, single-spaced letter was most likely economic, however: the "drama with music" classification required a higher pay scale for the musicians.

to be one of the trademarks of her theatre, one that she justified by looking to the past—

Shakespeare wrote plays with multiple scenes but never intended that there should be stage waits or frequent intermissions for change of scenery . . . A theatre-in-the-round production can achieve a similar flow with ease. . . . lights and music tie the scene[s] together in an extremely effective way.<sup>59</sup>

—and to the present—"Theatre-in-the-round . . . calls for all the experimentation the director can give it. This applies to lighting, sound and music as well as to directorial approaches."<sup>60</sup>

In . . . our productions the lights go up and down at the beginning and end of a scene with the accompaniment of music. The actual coordination of the two elements depends largely upon the play . . . Music can also be played during a scene for atmospheric effect if the tone of the play permits it. The movies have been aware of the emotional power of music in the background, and there is no reason why the theatre cannot use it too.<sup>61</sup>

Some examples of musical accompaniment that Margo chose for her productions include "Symphonie Fantastique" for The Apollo of Bellac, "Young People's Guide to the Orchestra," "Scherzo a La Russe," and "Greensleeves" for The Merchant of Venice, and "Dancing Nites [sic] Waltz," "London Bridge March," "Cinderella Ballet," and "Kiss Me

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<sup>59</sup>Jones, "Shakespeare in the Round," 30.

<sup>60</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 122.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 126-127.

Again" for Lady Windermere's Fan, to name but a few.<sup>62</sup>

That Margo believed these elements were used effectively is supported by numerous descriptions of her productions in her book:

In order to avoid long waits from one area to another [in Leaf and Bough], we used mood music which would begin playing before the end of a scene. As the music started, the players appearing in the following scene made their entrance very quietly into a dimly lit area . . . and took their positions. The lights went down on the first scene and up on the next scene with the mood music continuing and gradually fading out as the scene got underway.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, Margo sometimes relied on live music to smooth the transitions from scene to scene—or even to open the play:

The fluidity of the production [Twelfth Night] was achieved in the same way as in Shrew, and again a great deal of music was played. We opened . . . with Feste singing as he does at the conclusion. A small spot lighted him as he started singing; then the light spread and Feste continued his song, moving around and addressing it directly to the audience.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>See Appendix B for a listing of musical accompaniments employed by Margo in her productions.

<sup>63</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 161. This play proved particularly challenging to Margo and her designers since the scenes needed to be "knit . . . together without throwing the audience out of the mood." This was accomplished by "making our stage completely fluid with the aid of light and music. It was such a complicated production that it led a play agent . . . to say that, if theatre-in-the-round could put [it] on . . . it had no limitations whatsoever" (161-162).

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

In Summer and Smoke's production in Dallas, Margo covered a scene change very simply—with an actor whistling:

For the fourth set—the Casino scene—we . . . lighted this empty spot. As the lights went up, a waiter appeared whistling as he carried a small table onto the stage. In a second he returned with a couple of chairs and walked off again, still whistling.<sup>65</sup>

Along with lights and sound, costumes constituted the major visual design element in Margo's theatre; she believed that "costumes . . . take on an added importance in-the-round."<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Margo insisted on lavish costuming, especially for her period pieces.<sup>67</sup> Sometimes the costuming defined the play's historical period.

The costuming [for The Golden Porcupine] was largely responsible for creating the physical atmosphere of the play. We preserved period authenticity and used a great deal of variety . . .<sup>68</sup>

Occasionally, the costume design determined the historical period in which the play would be set:

The period of the play [The Learned Ladies] is approximately when it was written (1672), . . .

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 144-145. Live, as well as recorded, music was also used during her Broadway production of Summer and Smoke; see n. 58.

<sup>66</sup>Jones, "Shakespeare in the Round," 31.

<sup>67</sup>Betty Winn described Margo's costumes as follows: "The costuming was absolutely superb . . . It had to be completely and totally realistic, because we were too close, we were so close that it had to be absolutely accurate"; Winn interview, 23 March 1974.

<sup>68</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 183. The Golden Porcupine was set at the court of Louis XI of France.

but we felt that we could achieve a higher degree of stylization, especially in our costumes, if we moved the time to 1780. It was around this period that a pastoral craze came over the wealthy classes of France and induced them to dress as shepherds and shepherdesses. Our costume designer delved into history and discovered that while brocades and damasks were typical of the late eighteenth century, wealthy French families preferred fine cotton fabrics which were imported and therefore more attractive to them. The costumes for our production were made of glazed chintz, organdie and net.<sup>69</sup>

Costumes were even used to illustrate changes in geographical location:

. . . A Midsummer Night's Dream is most often thought of as a spectacle . . . We decided to create the feeling of change from Palace to forest through costumes alone. Oberon, Titania, and all the fairies, had leaves, birds and even bits of trees as part of their costumes. This attire immediately set the feeling and mood of the forest.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to requiring accuracy and authenticity in the costuming, Margo also demanded that the costumes be acceptable to the actors wearing them—she was sensitive to the effects the costumes had on her actors. For example, Margo's instructions regarding Ingrid Bergman's battle armor in Joan of Lorraine were quite specific in this regard:

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 163-164. In a letter to her parents, Margo elaborated slightly, revealing that "the costumes of the 17th century are very large hoop skirts. . . . We are having them made out of very colorful chintz and organdy [sic]"; Margo Jones to Parents, 27 October 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>70</sup>Jones, "Shakespeare in the Round," 32.



The important thing is that Ingrid feel comfortable in it [body armor] and that she will find it easy to play in, and that she will be happy about the way it looks.<sup>71</sup>

During this same production, Margo had objected to designer Lee Simonson's choice of dress for Bergman to wear in the play. Simonson's reply justified his choice and, in essence, nullified Margo's objections.

As to another dress for Ingrid to replace the present red one . . . the color of the present one is good, it makes her a singing dominant color note in the early scenes against the dark back [drop] and connotes the red dress to which she later refers. Also its lack of obvious style sophistication, its unpretentiousness keeps her in character. This would . . . be lost, by something obviously smart and up to minute. In any case the color should be similar. Blue or grey which I heard mentioned would lose the emphasis that I found so good . . .<sup>72</sup>

To conclude, unifying the elements of theatre into one visually pleasing whole was central to Margo's design philosophy. She surrounded herself with adept artists and artisans who could produce acceptable sets, costumes, and lights. Although she herself apparently contributed little to the aesthetic concepts upon which the designs were based, she nevertheless actively participated in their implementation.

Because of Margo's emphasis on authenticity in costuming and stage furnishings, coupled with her straight-

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<sup>71</sup>Margo Jones to Joseph H. Steele, 23 September 1946, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.

<sup>72</sup>Simonson to Jones, 3 November 1946.

forward or non-conceptual approach to design problems, we can safely conclude that she was a realist. Since true scenic realism was impossible in an arena setting, she, of necessity, opted for minimal or no sets. Thus were two of her primary theatrical philosophies served: her belief that text was central to theatre and that simplicity in certain design elements best served the text. Lighting, sound, costumes, and properties enhanced the playwright's words; the settings she left up to the audience's imagination: ". . . [T]he director must make use of the audience's imagination when he [sic] is working in theatre-in-the-round. . . . it is up to the director to stimulate . . . [their imagination]." <sup>73</sup> And a bare stage illuminated by a pool of light within which stood an actor, handsomely costumed, speaking beautiful words was all she required to accomplish this goal.

Perhaps her attitude towards design is best summed up in a letter she wrote to Tennessee Williams in the early 1940s. Again, Margo's priorities are clearly stated:

. . . [Y]ou feel as I do that a beautiful play must be given the best of imagi[na]tive minds. I certainly agree that it [the script] should be done simply but it must have heart and soul design, direction and acting. <sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 116-117.

<sup>74</sup>Jones to Williams, n.d.

## CHAPTER 7

### "TREAT THE STAGE AS A CIRCLE":

#### MARGO AND THE STAGING PROCESS

Theatre is theatre, whether it has three walls or four or none, and a good play well done looks wonderful from all directions.

- Margo Jones

I have found in going from one medium to the other—and I have done this—that the basic principles and problems are the same: the approach to the play, the relationship to the actors[,] and even the actual staging.

- Margo Jones

Margo started her directing career as a proscenium director in Houston and worked in that venue quite successfully for several years. Houston was also the site of Margo's first arena productions. She directed plays in-the-round there during the summers as a means of keeping the Houston Community Players a year-round venture. However, Margo never seriously considered abandoning the Players' proscenium playhouse during the regular theatrical season for the air-conditioned comfort of the hotel ballrooms' circular stages.

During these years with the Houston Community Players, Margo's directing methods differed significantly from

those she was to employ later during her Dallas years. For example, "she often stayed up all night . . . moving tiny toy figures across a diagram of the set. Or sometimes she would . . . block the actors' movements with the [kitchen] matches."<sup>1</sup> Virginia King Mayo, one of Margo's actors in Houston, recalled that this pre-arranged blocking "of course . . . would all be changed" once the play went into rehearsals.<sup>2</sup> She also reported that Margo often "procrastinated" in blocking the plays "until the cast insisted that she direct their movements. Then she would give them basic movements and tell them to do whatever they were comfortable doing."<sup>3</sup>

The implication of these actions is that Margo did not enjoy blocking the plays she directed. Whether she felt uncomfortable with this aspect of directing or simply found it boring cannot be known. However, one can deduce from this behavior that Margo apparently was, even at this early stage, torn between two methods of operation: blocking her plays in advance, using the technique described by most theatrical texts of the day (the way she

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Virginia King Mayo; cited in Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 37. King Mayo was an actor with the Houston Community Players during Margo's tenure there.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

was most likely trained); and relying on her own instinctual sense that the movement should develop out of the script's internal rhythm and the actors' creativity. Ray Walston recalled that, during this period, "she didn't have any particular style or knack or one way of directing,"<sup>4</sup> a comment that might indicate that Margo was indeed searching for the directing techniques that would best serve her ideal of what theatre should be.

This tension between her desire to block in advance, on the one hand, and her inclination to let the movement develop organically, on the other, continued well into her career. For example, Margo's inability—or refusal—to direct by the book caused friction between her and the acting chair of the drama department, Lawrence Carra, during her employment at the University of Texas. Carra, protege of the Alexander Dean who wrote Fundamentals of Play Directing, advocated Dean's theory that directing's purpose was primarily to create stage pictures that told the play's story. To accomplish these stage pictures, the director consistently employed strong or weak movements, emphasized more or less important areas on the stage, and used certain positions for romantic or confrontational scenes. Caught up in this directing philosophy to which he rigidly adhered, Carra saw directing as a series of

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Ray Walston; quoted in Sheehy, 37.

"rules, diagrams, and fundamental principles" from which the true director did not deviate.<sup>5</sup> As a result, when Carra

attended Margo's rehearsals and observed her talking to actors, listening to their suggestions, and at times relying on trial and error to plan a scene . . . he often interrupted her . . . saying, "This isn't staged right."<sup>6</sup>

Margo, a far more experienced and successful director than Carra, was at a loss to understand his objections.

Margo's directing style, based on a developing belief that director and actors must explore the inner workings of the play creatively and, perhaps, instinctively, and thus arrive at movement patterns and characterizations organic to the script, also came under attack when she was directing You Touched Me! at the Cleveland Playhouse. There, as at Texas, Margo again found herself in fundamental disagreement with the person employing her. Playhouse Director Frederick McConnell

was appalled at her loose directorial style. . . . Finally, at the end of the second week of rehearsals, after continuous arguments with Margo over cuts . . . , an upset McConnell said, "I can't stand this any longer, Miss Jones. . . . I'm taking this play over." Worried about . . . Margo's seeming failure to move the actors around the stage in snappy patterns, McConnell

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<sup>5</sup>Sheehy, 50.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Ted Apstein; cited in Sheehy, 50. Apstein was a graduate student at the University of Texas.



took charge . . . , telling the actors where, when, and how to move.<sup>7</sup>

That Margo should have back-to-back confrontations about her directing techniques proves significant and signals a possible transition in her own directing philosophy.

Both episodes occurred while she was teaching at Texas, the latter during a leave of absence she took to direct in Cleveland and Pasadena. It would seem, therefore, that by the time Margo reached Austin, she had begun developing her own approach to staging the play, an approach very different from that which she employed during her early years in Houston. Evidently Margo was concerned originally with creating pictures on the stage, hence her preoccupation with toy figures and matchsticks. But through the years, she seems to have realized that blocking her productions in advance of rehearsals proved fruitless in terms of the collaborative process she desired among director, script, and actor. As a result, when confronted with the rigid directorial theories of Carra and McConnell, Margo was either unable—or unwilling—to adapt her developing techniques to their expectations. Whether this conflict between the planned and the intuitive process of stage direction followed her throughout

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<sup>7</sup>Interview with Anne Pitoniak; cited in Sheehy, 60. Pitoniak was an actor in the You Touched Me! cast.

her career cannot be documented, although promptbook evidence suggests that it did. That the intuitive process of directing served Margo's ideas of theatre more fully cannot be disputed.

An analysis of two promptbooks graphically illustrates the difference in approach that Margo employed before and after her own theatre was founded. Her personal script of On Whitman Avenue (1946) revealed numerous notations by Margo commenting on characterization, lighting, properties, and movement.<sup>8</sup> The script contained no formal blocking or technical cues, suggesting its use as a preparatory tool within which Margo jotted down her ideas about the play and its production. The text was filled with such notations as "start up steps," "Toni at gates," "up to stoop," "Kate plants herself and stares," and "Johnny X [cross] out porch."<sup>9</sup> Because this script also contained subtextual interpretations of lines, it seems clear that Margo used this promptbook to prepare for rehearsals and, consequently, blocked the play in advance. Since the actual record of this production, the promptbook prepared by the stage manager, could not be located, it is impossible to determine whether Margo's planned blocking was actually implemented.

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<sup>8</sup>See Appendix A. Any references to this script are taken from this source.

<sup>9</sup>On Whitman Avenue, pp. 1-29, 1-31, 2-1-2.

A similar promptbook was located for An Old Beat-Up Woman (1949).<sup>10</sup> Like On Whitman Avenue, this script was obviously Margo's personal copy, but unlike the previous one, Margo's notations consisted of comments to the author, Sari Scott, and characterization notes. For example, Margo frequently addressed questions to Scott or suggested line or character interpretations: "Sari—good chance—of why she [Utah (main female character)] went and why she came back"; "Sari explain—what she learned in Denver—Actually—she decided she couldn't live without him and she gives it one more try . . .".<sup>11</sup> Perhaps more significant about this script was the lack of notations for movement contained within it. A likely conclusion is that Margo apparently blocked in advance of rehearsal as late as her 1946 production of On Whitman Avenue, but by the time she started her own theatre in 1947, she no longer did so, preferring to use her preparation time in developing her interpretation of the text.<sup>12</sup>

A single piece of evidence disputes this claim, however. One of the Dallas newspapers printed a work

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<sup>10</sup>See Appendix A for promptbook reference. Any references to this script are taken from this source.

<sup>11</sup>An Old Beat-Up Woman, pp. I-6, I-7.

<sup>12</sup>An argument can be made here that Margo blocked only her proscenium (or Broadway) productions in advance. Indeed, she might have taken more care in preparation for her commercial ventures; surely her time constraints were less severe when she worked in New York.

sheet from Margo's production of She Stoops to Conquer (1949).<sup>13</sup> The work sheet displayed diagrams of the play's set on the left side of the page, with blocking notations inserted to illustrate the actors' movements. On the right side of the sheet appeared the corresponding dialogue. The illustration indicated an enormous amount of work on someone's part since the set diagram was redrawn for every movement that occurred in the play. Furthermore, the script was retyped to accommodate the diagrams. The caption under the work sheet suggested that this diagrammatic script was prepared in advance of production. However, given the time constraints under which Margo and her company worked, it appears unlikely that such care would be given to work sheets while the same diligence was not taken with her production promptbooks.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>This picture was found in the She Stoops to Conquer file, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. However, the publication from which it was taken is unknown, although it most likely appeared in either the Dallas Morning News or the Daily Times Herald.

<sup>14</sup>A thorough examination of the numerous files in the Margo Jones Collection in Dallas turned up no such work sheets. Nor did any promptbooks that were located contain such detailed documentation. Although it is possible that these work sheets were destroyed or retained by a staff member after Margo's death, I think this is highly unlikely. I find it suspect that not one such work sheet was found during my research in Dallas, Austin, or Houston. Furthermore, no reference to such work sheets was made in either Margo's writings or anyone else's. My own conclusion is that Margo prepared, or had her staff prepare, a few work sheets to graphically illustrate her production

By the time she wrote her book in 1951, Margo's theories of production were clearly defined. Although she firmly believed that directors should understand the play thoroughly and provide a definite interpretation for the production,

everything cannot be taken care of in advance planning. There is a need for more experimentation in directing if we are to get away from the obvious, and the preparation of a detailed blueprint has a tendency to enslave you with its limitations. A director has to remain flexible, so that if the script acquires new aspects when put on its feet, he [sic] can take advantage of them and even investigate them further.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, Margo was pragmatic and in her formative years as a director learned that common sense often solved many of her directing problems. She discovered a similar pragmatic approach to directing in George Bernard Shaw's The Art of Rehearsal.<sup>16</sup> Essentially a handbook on

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methods and used these illustrations as a means of publicizing her work and theatre.

Further evidence to support this conclusion appears in the production promptbook of She Stoops to Conquer held by the Dallas Public Library. This promptbook contains few blocking notations beyond Goldsmith's third act (Margo's second). However, the dialogue in question does appear in the section of the promptbook that is blocked and no similarity exists between the promptbook and the work sheet except the following handwritten blocking note: "Servants running as if frightened—different ways" which is almost identical to the work sheet's "Exeunt SERVANTS, running about as if frightened, different ways."

<sup>15</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 122.

<sup>16</sup>George Bernard Shaw, The Art of Rehearsal (New York: Samuel French, 1928).

the mechanics of staging plays, it offers little information about the theoretical or artistic aspects of directing. However, Margo considered this tome, which she had discovered while still in college, to be "no doubt . . . a great, practical help . . .".<sup>17</sup>

Every director should know all these rules [of directing] set down by Mr. Shaw, whether he [sic] uses them or not. They are practical rules and they are based on time saving methods. If a director's aim is to get a play on as quickly and smoothly as possible, they are a good set of rules. If a director is concerned with the theatre as a fine art, then some of the comments in this article cannot be accepted, such as "In selecting the cast, no regard should be given to whether the actor understands the play or not." Certainly all of the remarks concerning the necessity on the part of the director for tact, judgment, "infinite patience, intense vigilance [sic], consideration for others and imperturbably good manners" should be affirmatively underlined many times.<sup>18</sup>

Margo's usual process of production began with a readthrough during which she and the cast familiarized themselves with the script and her interpretation of it. She wrote that "certain scripts should be read by the actors a number of times before being blocked out; others should be placed on their feet as soon as humanly possible."<sup>19</sup> Lillian Bayless recalled that "usually you had

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<sup>17</sup>Margo Jones to Lillian Masters, n.d., Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 121.



maybe three readings before she started blocking,"<sup>20</sup> while for Harry Granick's The Guilty, "the actors, . . . Margo and I [Granick] spent a day reading and discussing the play together."<sup>21</sup> Louise Latham remembered the first reading as a time when the actors "got a general outline of the style [of the play], the direction of it[,] and the thought behind it."<sup>22</sup>

Once the play was introduced and the interpretation explained to the cast, Margo generally began blocking the play very rapidly. She believed that "with a short rehearsal schedule, it is wise to start blocking the play early, memorizing the lines and working out fine points of characterization and stage business later."<sup>23</sup> Both Bayless and Latham agreed that Margo's technique for setting the movement patterns for the play was quickly accomplished—perhaps too quickly for the production to find its own sense of rhythm within the movement:

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<sup>20</sup>Lilian Bayless, Interview by Carole Cohen, 12 March 1974, interview #32, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>21</sup>Harry Granick, "Staging Problems Solved in Arena," Dallas Morning News, [24 November 1953].

<sup>22</sup>Louise Latham, Interview by Carole Cohen, 19 March 1974, interview #34, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>23</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 121.

. . . [W]e always blocked very quickly, got it on its feet quickly . . . I wonder if maybe she saw it [the production] from too many points of view . . . the playwright's view, . . . herself, . . . the actor's [and thus perhaps tried to accomplish too many things at once].<sup>24</sup>

Margo tended not to dictate the flow of movement; instead she suggested that the actors discover the blocking for themselves. She facilitated their own instinctual sense of where and when to move by working "improvisationally with the actors to find staging patterns that pleased her":<sup>25</sup>

Margo didn't direct that way [by explicitly saying, "on this line go right, turn, sit," etc.]. She would say . . . "Try it down center and turn, no, no, no don't do it that way," . . . and you would almost do it with her. It was almost as though you were one. It really was wonderful . . . in working with Margo, I would almost intuit what she was thinking. Now I don't know whether she had ESP or the actors did, but I mean . . . it [the blocking] was more of an intuiting.<sup>26</sup>

This tendency on Margo's part to remain open to the ideas both the script and her actors might inspire during rehearsal—and her consequent refusal to block her productions in advance—resulted in her direction often being labeled "intuitive."

. . . [Directing] was almost an intuitive thing with her. And you [the actor] would feel it [the characterization and movement] and she

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<sup>24</sup>Latham interview, 19 March 1974.

<sup>25</sup>Sheehy, 141.

<sup>26</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

would say "That's right." But I really don't think she had it prepared that much in her mind's eye when she came to rehearsals.<sup>27</sup>

Louise Latham recognized that Margo's decision not to blueprint her productions in advance may have been the source for such accusations.

. . . [T]he important thing in directing is the individual point of view and style, and you [the director] impose that [on the production], . . . but it [this imposition of style] takes a more powerful successful kind of directing [than Margo employed], . . . that might account for some of that fragmented kind of direction, which . . . people have faulted her for.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Margo's refusal to plan every detail of the production found favor with at least one of the playwrights with whom she worked.

Ordinarily, a director comes to the first rehearsal with a working draft of how the actors should move from point to point of space and time. It is complete witness to her artistic honesty that Margo did not attempt to apply this method . . . The result of Margo's shrewdness in seeking the style of the play in the playing itself rather than imposing on it a preconceived pattern, is that it [the play] has grown from its true roots upward; it is organic, material, [its] form and style are amazingly indivisible [emphasis mine].<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Margo never escaped the charge that she directed intuitively and the resulting implication that her directing suffered as a result.

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Latham interview, 19 March 1974.

<sup>29</sup>Granick, "Staging Problems Solved . . .".

Although Margo encouraged her actors to discover the movement patterns organic to the play's action, she seldom advocated any kind of move or gesture that was not totally in keeping with the script, characterization, or mood of the play. She stated that "emphatic focus can be given to an actor by putting him [sic] on his feet, but such movement must have its proper motivation in the action of the play."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore,

Actors should never be moved merely to vary their position in relation to the audience. A movement has to have as much motivation [in arena staging] as it does in any other type of theatre. On the other hand, it is good to know that theatre-in-the-round can take more movement than the picture-frame style because it does not detract from the focus, which is your entire playing area. . . . The audience must never feel that an actor is moving around for their benefit, or the believability of the performance is destroyed.<sup>31</sup>

Motivated movement played a basic role in Margo's directing creed. She firmly believed that the director should not fall into the trap of movement for movement's sake.

If two people [actors] are seated and have a long conversation scene, it is handled [in-the-round] in the same way as on the proscenium stage except that every section of the house is getting a different view. The director must never feel that it is imperative to break up the scene, for the focus is divided between the actor who is talking and the actor who is reacting to the words; and a portion of the audience,

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<sup>30</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 125.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 124.

which sees the profiles of both actors, will receive an added impact from the scene.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, despite Margo's claim that she directed only movement motivated by the script, frequency of movement in her productions very obviously hinged on the type of play she was directing. For example, promptbooks revealed that post-nineteenth-century plays (original or classical) contained less movement than pre-nineteenth-century ones.<sup>33</sup> For example, the promptbook for George Bernard Shaw's Heartbreak House averaged approximately five character moves per page of dialogue, with many pages containing three or fewer moves. Sean O'Casey's Cock-a-Doodle Dandy, although hardly realistic, nevertheless averaged fewer than four character movements per page. Conversely, Shakespearean plays such as The Merchant of Venice and As You Like It contained between eight and fourteen moves per page of dialogue, a substantial increase. Likewise, Moliere's The Learned Ladies averaged about ten character moves per page.

Such evidence suggests that Margo sought more movement in plays that were presentational than in plays that

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>33</sup>For a list of promptbooks examined, please see Appendix A. These findings were based on an examination of seventeen promptbooks and, although not conclusive, are highly suggestive that such patterns existed within Margo's blocking. Any references to promptbooks in this study are taken from these sources.

were representational. Such patterns also indicate that Margo moved characters more frequently in plays where the language was less accessible, such as in plays by Shakespeare or Moliere. She also appeared more tolerant of less movement during long exchanges of dialogue in realistic dramas than in classical ones.

Another complaint leveled at Margo's staging practices revolved around her perceived emphasis during rehearsals on the first act of any play she was directing.<sup>34</sup> Martha Bumpas Gaylord recalled hearing Margo state "that she [Margo] felt that the impetus of the first act sometimes would carry [a play] . . . through [the entire performance]." <sup>35</sup> Bumpas Gaylord elaborated:

I wasn't absolutely comfortable working with Margo. . . . She was confusing to me. . . . Margo had a theory that if you put a great deal of effort into the first act, and . . . [some] effort into the second act, that the third act would take care of itself. And we would find ourselves in the third act sometimes unblocked

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<sup>34</sup>Although the promptbooks examined reveal no indication that Margo left her third acts unblocked, there is no way of definitely establishing when third act notations were placed in the script. At least two promptbooks, She Stoops to Conquer and Heartbreak House reveal fewer blocking notations in the final acts than in earlier ones. This evidence might imply, although it does not conclusively prove, that Margo did not block the final acts until the last minute before opening.

<sup>35</sup>Martha Bumpas Gaylord, Interview by Carole Cohen, 11 April 1974, interview #35, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.



till two days before opening, and that constantly concerned me.<sup>36</sup>

If Margo indeed tended to leave the last act to the last minute, it might explain her increasing tension as opening night approached.

Another thing that bothered me about Margo as a director, is that . . . she was a keyed-up person, she was very vital, very nervous, and sometimes I would feel as if a great volcano with a cap on it would explode at any moment. . . . I would sometimes feel a little hampered by the tense quality she had.<sup>37</sup>

Playwright Jerome Lawrence agreed that "Margo was very emotional and sometimes disorganized [in her rehearsals]," but that she nevertheless "brought a great deal to a play."<sup>38</sup> Lilian Bayless remembered that

. . . about midway [through rehearsals] she [Margo] would say, "Do you think I did the right thing [with the blocking]? Do you think . . . this is really a good show[?] I think it's going fine, don't you?" And yet you always had the feeling, "Oh, goodness, maybe it's not as great as we all thought . . .".<sup>39</sup>

A different perspective on Margo's increasing tension, however, was posited by playwright Joseph Hayes. Recalling the production of his play, Leaf and Bough, Hayes

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Jerome Lawrence, Interview by Carole Cohen, 6 January 1975, interview #173, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>39</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

remembered that, "as we got closer to opening, . . . [Margo's] direction tightened down and her instructions became more and more specific,"<sup>40</sup> implying that Margo's concentration and effort focused in on the production's deficiencies as the opening approached. Hayes' view seems to be a minority opinion, however.

Margo's increasing concern about the progress of her plays during rehearsals only occasionally resulted in last minute second-guessing. On one such recorded occasion, Margo allowed her anxieties to affect the production—the night before the opening.<sup>41</sup>

She [Margo] had been rehearsing a new script [Harry Granick's The Guilty] . . . for ten days. . . . This particular Sunday night they did the run-through part of the opening schedule . . . and when it came time to get notes . . . she said, "Children, we have done our playwright a disservice, I have interpreted this play wrong; we're going to stay up all night and reblock and get some new ideas on this." And the actors were just stunned and exhausted, and she said, "But children, this is this man's life work, we must help him. Do you want to betray this man's talent?" . . . About 7 hours later . . . the leading actress simply laid down on her back and closed her eyes and said "I cannot get up." And Margo knelt beside her and said, "But darling, we are doing what we love."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Interview with Joseph Hayes; quoted in Sheehy, 160.

<sup>41</sup>According to Sheehy, 241. Sheehy is most likely correct in her time sequence. Although no direct evidence could be found to confirm Sheehy's dates, The Guilty did open on a Monday. Thus Latham's report of the Sunday-night restaging could imply that this event occurred the night before the play's opening.

<sup>42</sup>Latham interview, 19 March 1974.

This was the same production about which playwright Harry Granick wrote that, on the second day of rehearsal,

beginning at a spot where Margo experimentally set them [the actors] off, they began to find the first act for us. It was a day of revelation to us all. We discovered that the form of the play had such immediacy, such directness and force of reality, such power of audience involvement . . . But most important, we learned that the play had a rhythm of inner movement, almost a choreography of movement, as the actors went in and out and into scenes . . .<sup>43</sup>

Apparently Margo lost her vision of the play during the course of rehearsals. Granick's optimistic report on the play's production was most likely written before the all-night restaging of the play. What proved worrisome, however, was his glowing report of Margo's ability to discover the play's "rhythm of inner movement." His perception of the play's progress obviously did not coincide with Margo's, who, at the last minute, decided she and her cast had done the playwright a great "disservice." Unfortunately, her last minute efforts may have been for naught; at least one critic reported that the play was "too often staged . . . as if it were an experimental classroom project."<sup>44</sup>

That Margo's concerns about a production would cause her to attempt a total restaging of a play, giving her

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<sup>43</sup>Granick, "Staging Problems Solved . . .".

<sup>44</sup>Virgil Miers, "'The Guilty' Given a World Premiere," Daily Times Herald, 24 November 1953.

cast less than a day to adjust to the new blocking, appears out of character, especially given the confidence with which Margo wrote about her techniques and their results. Yet it apparently was not unusual for Margo to voice dire misgivings about her work. Referring to her production of A Sting in the Tail, she wrote:

I was simply ill because I felt the play looked so bad and simply was not in condition [to be performed] . . . It still looked to me like it could never open properly [properly, sic] without a week's more rehearsal. You would think that I would get hardened and not take the opening of a play so seriously, but I am afraid I get worse instead of better.<sup>45</sup>

Margo's protest against time constraints was a common one. There can be little doubt that the nervousness and anxiety she evinced as rehearsals progressed was linked to her lack of adequate rehearsal time. Her production schedule permitted less than three weeks rehearsal per play—and sometimes not even that.

The one complaint I've had about this season is time—Even running the shows two weeks does not give half enough time for rehearsals . . .<sup>46</sup>

Ideally, Margo would have liked a four-week rehearsal schedule with

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<sup>45</sup>Margo Jones to June and Jim Moll, 19 February 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>46</sup>Margo Jones to Joanna Albus, n.d., Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.



one week of rehearsals in full costume and with all props, especially in the case of a period play in which the actors need time to become accustomed to the costume and to learn to use it functionally and gracefully.<sup>47</sup>

Why Margo, the producer, placed such a burden on Margo, the director, has never been fully explored. The most likely explanation is that the producer needed people in the theatre to meet expenses and a new show every two or three weeks filled that need. Yet this reasoning cannot wholly account for the lack of rehearsal time. After the first few seasons, Margo's theatre was firmly established. An extra week of rehearsals could easily have been managed by extending the run of each show by one week.<sup>48</sup> But Margo chose not to take this course. Instead, she inaugurated a summer season of plays in addition to the regular season, thereby compounding her scheduling problems by limiting the free time of both herself and her company.

What compulsion drove her to such a demanding schedule can never be known. That she may have thrived on such a hectic timetable is a distinct possibility. Ever intrigued by the process of creation she undertook with each

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<sup>47</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 121-122.

<sup>48</sup>An extra week of performances was indeed added after the third season; the run was extended to three weeks. However, since all plays were run in repertory at the end of the season—and played to full houses—the obvious excuse that there would be no audience for a fourth week of performances seems groundless.

play she directed, Margo may have felt compelled to renew that creative process as often as possible. She hinted at this driving force in her life in a letter to Tennessee Williams:

I would give my soul if I could express [the] beauty I feel—I think I do in my direction—and that is good—perhaps its fleeting quality lends it enchantment—but surely its only permanence is in the mind of the audience.<sup>49</sup>

For Margo, the expression of beauty was central to her being—and for her, that expression existed only in the process of creating fine theatre.

In summary, Margo's early efforts as a director encompassed both proscenium and arena staging. In both venues, she encountered the problem faced by many directors: whether to block her productions in advance or not. Initially, she did so, but evidently her sense of theatre compelled her to find a more organic process for staging her plays, a process that developed the play's movement patterns through exploration of the text by the actors rather than by using stage pictures preconceived by the director. This tendency on Margo's part often brought her into conflict with those who preferred the approach to staging that advocated planning actors' movements in advance.

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<sup>49</sup>Margo Jones to Tennessee Williams, January 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.



Margo's rehearsals usually began with a readthrough during which she explained her interpretation of the script and its style of production. She began blocking quickly thereafter, usually by encouraging the actors to discover the movement patterns for themselves. Some evidence suggests, however, that these rapid attempts at blocking were intended to get her through this phase of production as quickly as possible and enter the more creative phase of exploring and developing the characters with her actors. At times, she even refused to block some scenes until the last minute, suggesting perhaps that she somehow found this particular task loathsome or boring. Nevertheless, Margo believed that any movement on stage must be motivated by the action. She would not allow her actors to move for movement's sake, although she apparently did employ more movement in her classical plays than in her original ones.

Margo became more tense and nervous as opening night approached. Much of this anxiety seemed to be caused by the constraining timetable to which she forced herself to adhere, a timetable that also encouraged regular renewal of the creative process upon which she thrived. This tension sometimes manifested itself in her second-guessing herself or doubting the validity of the work she had produced. However, no matter how uncertain she might be about the results of any one of her productions, she never

lost sight of the vision that motivated her work—the realization that she was doing what she loved.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE SCULPTOR:

#### MARGO AND HER TWO STAGES

I believe that ideally we should have flexible theatres, and I have as much love and admiration for the proscenium stage as for the open-air theatre or theatre-in-the-round.

- Margo Jones

In the proscenium theatre the audience sees the play from one direction only; the play is observed as a picture.

- Margo Jones

Every detail of expression and bodily movement is significant in theatre-in-the-round. The flicker of an eyelash, the removal of a glove, the slightest motion of a foot produce as strong an effect as a bigger movement.

- Margo Jones

Techniques for staging plays in-the-flat necessarily differ in some respects from those employed when working in-the-round. This chapter examines those differences in terms of Margo and her directing methods.

Margo's years in Houston, as well as those in Austin, found her working in both proscenium and arena settings. She apparently moved back and forth between the two stages easily, working in the latter more from expediency than

from any strong desire for experimentation or innovation.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, she viewed these two theatrical spaces as very similar. Margo believed that "a good director in a picture-frame theatre is also a good director in theatre-in-the-round . . . any director with experience and common sense can adjust to a different type of staging . . .".<sup>2</sup> Whenever discussing her staging techniques for both proscenium and arena, Margo enjoyed quoting Arthur Hopkins' work, Reference Point, in which he wrote, "Treat the stage as a circle, not as a parallelogram. A well-staged play will look as convincing from the backstage wall as from the orchestra pit."<sup>3</sup> Even though Margo discerned no difference between the two spaces within which she worked, she nevertheless succeeded in one and not the other.

Margo's long-time advocacy of arena staging overshadowed her work on the proscenium stage. Her choice of an arena setting for her own theatre implies that she preferred theatre-in-the-round to theatre-in-the-flat. As a result, little has been written about Margo's proscenium productions, other than to note that her efforts in this medium after The Glass Menagerie were less successful than

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<sup>1</sup>This point is explained more fully later in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup>Margo Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1951), 116.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Hopkins, Reference Point (New York: Samuel French, 1948); quoted in Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 116.

her arena productions. Perhaps these failures were the result of Margo's direction, but poor script choice, inappropriate set design, and audience insensitivity may have contributed as well.

Margo's proscenium productions in Houston were generally received well and her staging often was singled out for praise. Her directorial approach to The Importance of Being Earnest, for example, was described by one reviewer's comments: "For each smart saying of Wilde's, the actors have a smart stage movement; for each epigram they have hilarious gestures."<sup>4</sup> Hubert Roussel, drama critic for the Houston Post, wrote that Margo's direction of Eugene Justus Mayer's world premiere, Sunrise in My Pocket, was distinctive, especially since she was constrained by "a stage arrangement that limit[ed] action severely."<sup>5</sup>

Margo's initial foray into professional proscenium staging occurred when she was hired to direct Tennessee Williams' and Donald Windham's You Touched Me! at the Cleveland Playhouse. She was relieved of her duties as director after she refused to make cuts in the script as

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<sup>4</sup>"Clever Staging Given Comedy," undated article; quoted in June B. Larsen, "Margo Jones: The Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 64.

<sup>5</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Players Treat 'Sunrise' to Neat Premiere," Houston Post, October 1941; quoted in Larsen, 88. Roussel was alluding to the small stage with limited wing space upon which the Players performed.

requested by Playhouse Manager Frederick McConnell. McConnell also disapproved of Margo's "loose directorial style."<sup>6</sup> An examination of Margo's promptbook for this play, however, provided no indication of any looseness in staging practices.<sup>7</sup> Instead, we find a very detailed blocking scheme in which the characters frequently move from set piece to set piece around the stage.<sup>8</sup> The movement patterns seem fairly straightforward but, without benefit of a ground plan, somewhat difficult to follow. However, the general tendency appears to have been one of moving the characters to a seating location, seating them, and then, when appropriate, having them rise and move again. For example, in a two-page sequence in Act 3, scene 2, Margo has two female characters sitting and

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<sup>6</sup>Interview with Anne Pitoniak; cited in Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 60.

<sup>7</sup>See Appendix A for promptbook references. Actually, three promptbooks were examined for this production, but it appears that You Touched Me! #2, which contains sound and lighting cues as well as blocking notations, was the production promptbook. You Touched Me! #1 was labeled "playwright's copy with complete cuts and rewrites," and You Touched Me! #3 apparently was the "Captain's" copy. Any references to You Touched Me! in this chapter are to promptbook #2 unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup>This study assumes that the blocking notations found in the promptbooks were Margo's since she obviously kept these scripts. There is, however, a slight chance that these promptbooks reflect McConnell's blocking after he took over the production.



standing a combined total of eight times.<sup>9</sup> In addition, in light of Margo's limited use of movement in realistic plays, this production seems consistent with earlier findings, averaging about five character movements per page. The theory that Margo believed that proscenium stages offered less opportunity for movement is not disputed by evidence from this production.

Margo's first national exposure on the proscenium stage proved to be her most successful. When asked to co-direct The Glass Menagerie, Margo was still an unknown in the commercial theatre and, therefore, a surprising choice for such a major undertaking. Her friendship with Tennessee Williams certainly gained her the position and, perhaps, proved a disservice to her by implying that her function during rehearsals was solely to protect his play. Although Eddie Dowling, Margo's co-director as well as producer and leading man in the venture, is usually given the directing credit, the theatrical world of the time, by and large, acknowledged Margo's contribution to the production. "Eddie didn't give a damn [about the production] except about his own performance. Everybody on the street knew that he hadn't directed."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>You Touched Me! #2, pp. 81-82.

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Randy Echols; quoted in Sheehy, 83. Echols stage managed The Glass Menagerie.

Initially, Dowling and Margo split the rehearsals, with Margo staging the gentleman caller scene . . . while Dowling rehearsed his scenes with Laurette Taylor. Margo was also responsible for most of the blocking, . . . it was her idea to play much of the gentleman-caller scene on the floor.<sup>11</sup>

Margo's co-direction did not stop after the play opened in Chicago for its pre-New York try-out. "She stayed with The Glass Menagerie in Chicago for three weeks after it opened, 'working on it everyday.'"<sup>12</sup> She found herself even more involved in the production now that Dowling was occupied fully in the role of Tom.

I have worked every day since the show opened. . . . I've spent hours with the notes taken during the show ironing out light cues, music cues, prop changes, costume changes, checking interpretations . . . Eddie can't do a thing about knowing how it's going out front as long as he's playing it. . . . [The production needs] some one to mother it until it gets on in New York.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Interview with Willie Gould; cited in Sheehy, 76. Gould was assistant stage manager for the production. That Margo was primarily responsible for the gentleman caller scene was suggested as well by a letter from Donald Windham to Sandy Campbell, 13 December 1944, in which Windham wrote that "Margo Jones worked with Anthony Ross and Julie Haydon ["Jim" and "Laura"] in my Madison Avenue apartment"; Donald Windham, ed., Tennessee Williams' Letters to Donald Windham, 1940-1965 (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 154.

<sup>12</sup>Margo Jones to David Gregory, n.d. [1945], Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX; quoted in Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1964), 25.

<sup>13</sup>Margo Jones to Audrey Wood, 2 January 1945, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Most

This short statement, although self-serving, nonetheless illustrates Margo's perception of herself as a hands-on director.<sup>14</sup>

That she immersed herself in all aspects of the production is corroborated by her own rehearsal notes, kept during Menagerie's trial period in Chicago: "Fix a hand for Eddie on curtain," "Too much organ in tango," "Don't lit [sic] bombardments," "Eddie try growing more [intense] over the first [conversation]," "Let's cut last [love bit]," "Candle light much too soon," "Start down on 'That's something your father had plenty of,'" and so on.<sup>15</sup> Margo commented on the lighting and music, characterization, and blocking problems, indicating that she took her role as co-director quite seriously and was, indeed, instrumental in providing critical feedback on the production. To imply that Margo's role as co-director for The Glass Menagerie merely served to protect Tennessee Williams' interests appears naive. In fact, Williams, in

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interesting in this letter, given Margo's choice of career over family, is Margo's perception of herself as a maternal figure for the production. Such an allusion gives further credence to the observation that she regarded those artists involved in her productions as her "family."

<sup>14</sup>Margo hoped this letter would convince Audrey Wood to retain (and pay) Margo as co-director until the play opened in New York.

<sup>15</sup>These handwritten production notes were found in an undated stenographer's notebook and on index cards in the Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

some ways, considered her to be the mainstay of the production: "Margo is like the scoutmaster of some very jolly but wayward troops."<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, her contribution did not go unnoticed:

The direction by Eddie Dowling and Margo Jones—another product of the "little theatres"—is a smooth collaborative effort that fuses all the elements of a stagecraft into an almost perfect symphonic interpretation of the author's original conception.<sup>17</sup>

Margo's work on Menagerie brought her national recognition, and she soon found herself directing another Broadway play, On Whitman Avenue. This play, a forerunner to A Raisin in the Sun, exposed the racist attitudes present when a black family moves into a white neighborhood. Produced by Canada Lee, a black actor who also starred in it, the play had a short-lived run in New York. Nevertheless, Margo undertook the challenge despite the fact that she was a white Southerner.

. . . [T]he cast was surprised that Margo, a southerner, would choose to direct the play, . . . Margo was shocked by the racist attitudes exposed in it.<sup>18</sup>

Margo's direction of this play is difficult to assess. The play was controversial for its day, and this

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<sup>16</sup>Tennessee Williams to Donald Windham, 18 December 1944; Windham, 155-156.

<sup>17</sup>Wilella Waldorf, "'The Glass Menagerie' High Point of the Season So Far," New York Post, 2 April 1945.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Perry Wilson; cited in Sheehy, 104. Wilson acted in the production.

controversy may have played a role in its failure, but the direction may have contributed to its problems as well. Martyn Coleman, a playwright who was soon to be produced in Margo's Theatre '47, wrote his critique of the production:

. . . I thought it dragged in the first act and seemed rather lacking in situation. . . . I felt there could have been more of a shock when Kate discovered the coloured [sic] tenants. The fault seemed to be in the writing. . . . The second act, and the third were exciting but I see what you meant about melodrama . . . either [in] the writing or the playing . . . it was too pompous for me. . . . I didn't really care for Canada Lee at all . . . he seemed to be always a maltreated intellectual rather than a maltreated young man.<sup>19</sup>

Assuming the accuracy of Coleman's reaction, we can infer several problems with the production. Coleman implied that the writing in some instances was flawed, resulting in a weak first act that seemed poorly paced. If this was the case, we might conclude that Margo either could not or would not persuade Maxine Wood, the playwright, to tighten the writing, a conclusion that seems reasonable given Margo's propensity to honor the playwright's words. Coleman also suggested that the acting, especially in the last two acts, was overdone, particularly in the case of the leading man. Again, if true, Margo certainly should have recognized this problem (and Coleman

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<sup>19</sup>Martyn Coleman to Margo Jones, n.d. [1946], Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

implies that she did) and done something about it. That this overacting involved the leading man (and her boss) hints at a side of Margo as director that we have rarely encountered. She may have been intimidated by Lee's importance or awed by his experience and artistry and, as a result, may have been unwilling to interfere with his characterization, although the script may clearly have demanded such interference. Furthermore, Margo, a white female director, might have been hesitant about criticizing Lee, a black male actor, and thereby inviting accusations of racism—a situation ironically similar to the play's subject. Whatever the reason, Lee's performance apparently proceeded unchecked.

Elgin Williams, a critic with Dallas' Daily Times Herald and a hometown advocate of Margo's work, disagreed with Coleman's assessment of the acting, stating that he thought the cast "acted without preaching, and . . . called Miss Jones' direction 'smart' and 'careful.'"<sup>20</sup> Lewis Nichols of the New York Times held the dissenting view, however, writing that Margo had been unable "to weld 'On Whitman Avenue' into a natural shape." He further stated that, although the play's ideals were honest and

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<sup>20</sup>Elgin Williams, "Margo Jones Morality Play is Good Theater," Daily Times Herald, 9 May 1946; cited in Wilmeth, 47.



sincere, "the effect grew increasingly disappointing,"<sup>21</sup> perhaps echoing Coleman's dissatisfaction with Lee's performance. Louis Kronenberger also agreed with Coleman's appraisal of Lee: "Miss Jones has provided shaky direction, and so good an actor as Canada Lee is guilty of bad overacting."<sup>22</sup>

Another aspect of Margo's direction of this play was described by Vernon Rice:

She [Maxine Wood] has been more than ably assisted [in presenting the play's subject] by Margo Jones, the director, who has done a masterful job of keeping the play under control and in giving shape to its substance. The director's picturizations and stage groupings in the neighborhood meeting scene was [sic] particularly effective.<sup>23</sup>

Rice's commendation of Margo's stage pictures calls into question the earlier criticism that she was incapable of producing effective visual images on stage, an opinion promoted by Lawrence Carra and Frederick McConnell. Certainly Margo's direction had not changed so much in three short years, yet here a Broadway critic was lauding her ability to create visually appealing stage groupings. More likely, had Carra and McConnell not interfered with

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<sup>21</sup>Lewis Nichols, "On Whitman Avenue," New York Times, 9 May 1946, p. 28.

<sup>22</sup>Louis Kronenberger, "A Vital Theme Is Ill Handled," PM, 10 May 1946.

<sup>23</sup>Vernon Rice, "'On Whitman Avenue' Boldly Faces the Negro Problem," New York Post, 9 May 1946.

her direction, similarly effective pictures may have been produced, for it was with her methods they disagreed, not necessarily her results.

Although Margo's next venture on the proscenium stage, Joan of Lorraine, brought her difficulties with both playwright and actors (see Chapters 4 and 5), her direction was eventually vindicated by at least one reviewer:

Under Margo Jones's direction, the performance makes fascinating use of the form of the play—the tone varying from casual to portentous and grand, the transition being artfully accomplished.<sup>24</sup>

Another reviewer, noting Margo's dismissal as director of the production, gave her (and her direction) a somewhat backhanded compliment, reporting that "the staging of the two acts has been adroit, whether accomplished by Margo Jones, or [Sam] Wanamaker who took over for her."<sup>25</sup> Brooks Atkinson wrote that Margo shrewdly used "a minimum of scenery and costumes, which was not carried to an extreme but seemed to be just right."<sup>26</sup> Margo appeared

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<sup>24</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "The Play in Review—Joan of Lorraine," New York Times, 19 November 1946, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup>Howard Barnes, "Joan of Lorraine," New York Herald-Tribune, 19 November 1946. Louis Kronenberger also mentioned Wanamaker's contribution to the production: "The show has been well staged by Margo Jones (with an assist to Mr. Wanamaker) . . ."; "Bergman Returns to Broadway As a Glowing Joan of Arc," PM, 20 November 1946.

<sup>26</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Bergman of Lorraine," New York Times, 24 November 1946, sec. II, p. 1.

to be favoring a limited use of scenic devices for her plays, although she was still a year away from opening her arena theatre. Howard Barnes wrote that "there is excitement about the rehearsals of the play [within a play] which is conjured up more by the movement of the players than the things they have to do."<sup>27</sup>

Margo's greatest challenge with Joan of Lorraine lay in the transitions between the "rehearsal" scenes and the "Joan" scenes.

There is inspiration and challenge to director and players alike in a work that combines the idealism of the story of Joan of Arc with the stark realism of "the stage" at work with its sleeves rolled up. On opening night [in Washington, D.C.], the transition from the one to the other was a little too abrupt for [the] immediate audience [to] grasp.<sup>28</sup>

The production relied on little more than changes in the colored lighting to indicate the different realities within the play. This device proved ineffective. Margo and designer Lee Simonson then decided to black out the stage in order to define the transitions between the "rehearsal" scenes and the "Joan" scenes.

Margo directed this play intimately; that is, she took care to re-create on stage the harmonious atmosphere she herself hoped to achieve during rehearsals. Her stage

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<sup>27</sup>Barnes, "Joan of Lorraine."

<sup>28</sup>Nelson Bell, "Margo Shoots at Miracles—Paying Ones," Washington Post, 10 November 1946, sec. 6, p. 1.

plan revealed limited movement within the "rehearsal" scenes and what little movement did exist consisted of crosses to the few set pieces on stage.<sup>29</sup> The "Joan" scenes, however, contained substantially more moves, with crosses between characters being the primary movement patterns. The difference between the two staging plans highlighted the basic problem with the play as a whole. The "Joan" scenes were much more interesting, both visually and textually,<sup>30</sup> while the "rehearsal" scenes were static in both movement and content, and, to some viewers, almost insulting.

Played on a bare stage large enough for a touch football game, the drama simply was lost. . . . Another charge it will have to answer is that while its performers seem to be having quite a time for themselves, the audience is largely excluded. The effect Anderson obviously sought was the clubby one of making people feel they were being let in on how the theater works. The one achieved is snobbishness, however unwitting on everyone's part.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>For Joan of Lorraine promptbook information, see Appendix A. Any references to this script are contained in this source.

<sup>30</sup>Margo's direction was commended, "particularly the out-of-play scenes," by Ward Morehouse, "Bergman Brilliant in 'Joan of Lorraine,' Anderson's Drama of Maid of Orleans," New York Sun, 19 November 1946.

<sup>31</sup>Jay Carmody, "Miss Bergman's 'Joan' Is Born Amid Plethora of Handicaps," Washington Star, 30 October 1946, sec. A, p. 20.



Nevertheless, the overall effect as far as Margo's contribution was concerned was favorable: ". . . Margo Jones . . . has infused it [the play] with a fine vitality."<sup>32</sup>

While Margo was directing The Glass Menagerie, On Whitman Avenue, and Joan of Lorraine, plans for her theatre in Dallas were also progressing smoothly. The only obstacle that lay in her path was the lack of an adequate facility. During the two years between the founding of her theatre organization and the opening night performance, Margo searched for a building that would accommodate a proscenium theatre. Old movie houses, vacant businesses, even a replica of Shakespeare's Globe, were considered and rejected. Finally, out of frustration at the delay, Margo settled on the idea of circular staging as a possible solution to her dilemma, finding almost immediately a facility that could be quickly adapted to a theatre-in-the-round.

. . . [A]t a certain point in the search [for a theatre] I knew that it was not essential to have a proscenium arch in order to do fine plays. . . . I knew that this type of theatre [arena] would not restrict my imagination; on the contrary, it would put greater demands on it. I knew that if I could create exciting drama on a proscenium stage, I could do it in an

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<sup>32</sup>John Chapman, "Miss Bergman and Mr. Anderson Score Hits in 'Joan of Lorraine,'" New York Daily News, 19 November 1946.

arena with the audience surrounding the action.<sup>33</sup>

By the time Margo again directed for a picture-frame stage, she had successfully completed two seasons in-the-round. The play she took to a proscenium house on Broadway, Summer and Smoke, had proved an unequivocal success in Dallas' arena theatre. The idea of taking this play to New York, however, engendered unenthusiastic support from the playwright, Tennessee Williams. Nevertheless, Margo forged ahead—to unspectacular results.

. . . [W]hen I saw Summer and Smoke in New York, I felt, "oh, it's so long," . . . It seemed to just be so slow, and it seemed to be dragging. And I don't remember having that feeling in Dallas. . . . I think that [the] aesthetic distance that the proscenium arch gives, took away from Summer and Smoke. In some instances it enhances the illusion[, but not in this case].<sup>34</sup>

Geraldine Page, who was to play Summer and Smoke's leading lady in its successful 1952 revival, also thought that "except when Anne Jackson was on stage as the young girl, the Broadway production had seemed ponderous."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Margo Jones, "Theatre '50: A Dream Come True" in Ten Talents in the American Theatre, ed. David H. Stevens (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 117.

<sup>34</sup>Lilian Bayless, Interview by Carole Cohen, 12 March 1974, interview #32, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>35</sup>Interview with Geraldine Page; cited in Stuart W. Little, Off-Broadway: The Prophetic Theater (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972), 19. It should be noted that Jose Quintero's successful revival of Summer and Smoke was



There can be little doubt that the play's failure in New York most likely occurred because of the impersonal nature of the proscenium theatre and the production's inability to keep its major characters within the central focus of the audience. As John Gassner astutely observed,

Not written especially for central staging, the work was nevertheless brought into final shape at Margo Jones's arena theatre in Dallas, where it proved immensely successful and aroused great expectations for a successful translation to Broadway. But the Broadway production in the fall of 1948 at a typical Broadway playhouse . . . was a failure, although the play, again staged by Margo Jones, had an excellent cast which performed at the top of its bent . . . Somehow this particular play was, or had become in the course of revision, an ideal arena-theatre play. . . . A circle, as in Dallas . . . "contained" this novelistic play with its heroine's history of failure and deprivation, whereas the Broadway production forced the action toward the wings and failed to center the heroine on the stage except in the prologue and the epilogue [both of which occurred in front of the centrally located angel fountain].<sup>36</sup>

Gassner also pinpointed a major failure in Margo's blocking. Commenting on the central location of the angel fountain and the steps leading up to it, Gassner noted that "the steps in the center were serviceable as playing levels, but they were not used as a major production

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performed in a small, intimate, three-quarters-round theatre.

<sup>36</sup>John Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Drama (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956), 53.

element."<sup>37</sup> The production promptbook confirms Gassner's assessment.<sup>38</sup> Of the twelve scenes and a prologue that comprised the play, only the prologue, the first scene in Act I, the short fourth scene in Act II, and the final scene used the central steps. All other scenes were played either on the stage left or stage right settings, except for Act I, scene 6, which was located down center, but did not use the steps. By having the locations of the Winemiller's house and the Doctor's house specifically defined on stage, Margo lost the ability to use the entire stage for any one scene. As a result, she was forced to minimize her movement patterns and concentrate them into comparatively small stage areas.

To complicate her staging schematic, however, Margo did not remain consistent with her usual practice of limiting character movement in realistic plays. Instead, she increased the movement, even though more moves were occurring in less space. For example, in Act I, scene 2 (the Winemiller's home), as many as sixteen separate crosses, seatings, and risings occurred during one page of dialogue.<sup>39</sup> In the next scene, again at the Winemiller

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 195a (comment printed under illustration of Summer and Smoke's set).

<sup>38</sup>See Appendix A. Any references to the Summer and Smoke promptbook are taken from Summer and Smoke #2.

<sup>39</sup>Summer and Smoke #2, p. 2-28.

home, fourteen moves were recorded.<sup>40</sup> Such frequent moves were consistently noted throughout the promptbook. There can be little doubt that Margo hoped to achieve the same fluidity (and frequency) of movement in this Broadway production that she had achieved in her Dallas one. Unfortunately, she apparently did not take into account the totally different stage setting upon which she was working and the limited options such a setting dictated. Whereas frequent moves among furniture and characters might work in the open arena space, or even on a large proscenium stage, the same pattern of movement in a confined area would most likely prove repetitious and, as a result, uninteresting. Yet more than half of the play took place in one of two confining stage settings. Margo did not account in her direction for this major difference.

Furthermore, Margo's blocking patterns in this play were repeated frequently. In both the Winemiller's home and the Doctor's office, the movement patterns were triangular in nature, with the apex of the triangle always occurring upstage, the weakest area on stage. Even though each character moved within his or her own unique triangular patterns, the regularity of such movements, especially

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 3-40.

in a limited stage space, could prove predictable and monotonous.

Margo's failure to achieve the same fluidity of movement for this New York production that she had achieved in Dallas caused Howard Barnes of the Herald-Tribune to write that she had "not helped matters perceptibly with her staging, which is generally on a plane of inertia."<sup>41</sup> Another critic, Gilbert W. Gabriel of The Nation, also blamed the production's failure on "stiff staging."<sup>42</sup> However,

Those who had seen both the Dallas and the New York productions agreed that the play lost a great deal in New York by moving into a conventional proscenium theatre. Miss Jones was forced to eliminate the fine detail and rapid movement that enhanced the arena production and kept it from becoming static.<sup>43</sup>

Although Margo's staging was often cited as the reason for the production's failure, at least one critic excused Margo's shortcomings as the play's director "because of the manifest affection with which Miss Jones

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<sup>41</sup>Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald-Tribune, 7 October 1948.

<sup>42</sup>Gilbert W. Gabriel, "Summer and Smoke," The Nation 168 (23 October 1948): 473-474.

<sup>43</sup>Jed Mace, "New Version of 'Summer and Smoke' on Broadway," Dallas Morning News, 18 October 1948. Mace had designed the original production in Dallas and, therefore, was in a position to comment knowledgeably on the differences between the two productions.



directed it . . .".<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, William Inge blamed the play's rejection not on Margo's direction but on the fact that "it had followed A Streetcar Named Desire. All of Summer and Smoke's 'sensitive sheen' and 'silky beauty' were unobserved because the play was not what people expected."<sup>45</sup>

Within the theatrical community, however, the perception was beginning to form that Margo, although adept at directing in the sculptured style of the arena theatre, was having difficulties adapting that style to the proscenium stage. Of her last four productions on the picture-frame stage, only the first, The Glass Menagerie, had been successful (and this a co-directorial effort). After Summer and Smoke, she was to attempt directing for the proscenium stage only two more times, both dismal failures.

The first occurred when Margo tried to move An Old Beat-Up Woman from Dallas to New York. Little information exists about this production other than that it never reached its destination, failing in its pre-Broadway try-outs in New Haven and Boston.

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<sup>44</sup>John Mason Brown, "People Versus Characters," Saturday Review of Literature 31 (30 October 1948): 31-33.

<sup>45</sup>William Inge, "Concerning Labels," New York Times, 23 July 1950, sec. 2, p. 1; cited in Ralph F. Voss, A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 119.

Her final attempt, Southern Exposure, reached Broadway but remained open for only a few performances. A major cause of its failure, according to John Rosenfield, was that Margo made a grave error in her interpretation of this play.

In Dallas and New York the two [romantic] leads were played in the same manner [as juvenile delinquents, rather than bright and sophisticated young people]. As a result, an attempt was made to shift the emphasis to the two comic old maids in the play who should have been only atmosphere and not motivating forces.<sup>46</sup>

From Margo's perspective, the only changes needed for the transition from Dallas to New York were in the blocking:

When we open the Broadway production . . . I must take in[to] consideration that the play is being done on a larger stage, is being seen by a smaller audience, and is being seen from only one side of the stage. So my only problem in directing it for New York audiences is to adjust [the] movement of the characters in the play.<sup>47</sup>

In this assessment, Margo badly miscalculated. The play, so successful in Dallas, was a regional spoof, appealing to her Dallas audiences simply because they could so readily identify with its characters and situations. The sophisticated New York theatre-goer, having little time

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<sup>46</sup>Interview with John Rosenfield, 23 January 1964; cited in Wilmeth, 131, n. 226.

<sup>47</sup>"Only Problem on Plays Is Approach, Director Says," Associated Press, n.d., Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX. A similar article appeared in the Beaumont [TX] Enterprise, 20 August 1950: "Margo Jones Finds Producing Play on Broadway a Cinch."



for or interest in such regional humor, dismissed this play as pure melodrama: "Dallas saw something in it that escapes the damyankees [sic] here. . . . for 'Southern Exposure' is a regional joke that loses savor the further it travels from home."<sup>48</sup>

In addition to noting the play's inappropriateness for New York audiences, critics also severely criticized Margo for her interpretation and direction. She staged the play as a broad, comic romp, a ploy that had been amazingly successful in the intimate arena setting. But on the picture-frame stage, this approach backfired.

Margo Jones staged this play as if she thought it were funny, allowing the roles to be outrageously caricatured. . . . It is strange that she should jeopardize . . . [her] reputation by presenting such a hackneyed, unfunny theatrical piece.<sup>49</sup>

Her blocking, referred to by one critic as "lean[ing] heavily on making the actors get out of chairs and sit down again,"<sup>50</sup> was more sarcastically described by another reviewer as deriving from

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<sup>48</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Owen Crump's 'Southern Exposure' Transplanted From Dallas to a Broadway Playhouse," New York Times, 27 September 1950.

<sup>49</sup>"Southern Exposure," n.d. [September 1950]. This article was found in the Southern Exposure file in the Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. No author credit is given nor is a publication named. The layout of the article indicates, however, that it appeared in a magazine rather than a newspaper.

<sup>50</sup>Jack Harrison, "'Southern Exposure' Proves Pure Corn," Star Ledger, 28 September 1950.

the track-meet technique of George Abbott. In addition to the standard events, such as the low hurdles, slamming the bedroom door, answering the telephone on a curved track, crawling on all fours for time and distance, and descending three stairs without bending the knees . . . [the production contained] a special event for old ladies, a sprint from a standing start with a decanter of port in one hand, somewhat similar to potato racing.<sup>51</sup>

Margo's staging seemed designed more to generate laughs than to illuminate the plot or characters; her own sense of what would appear funny to the audience rather than the play's rhythmic structure motivated the blocking. Thus did she violate one of her own precepts about directing: that no actor should be moved on the stage without the proper motivation. These issues, noted in the reviews, were ignored by Margo in a letter she wrote shortly after the play opened:

Twenty minutes were cut from the first act and the whole play was much more tightly packed than when you saw it. . . . but the most important thing is that I had plenty of time and complete cooperation from every direction [in making these changes].<sup>52</sup>

Again we see that, for Margo, the process of creating theatre and the collaboration needed to effect it were more important than the finished product, a philosophy that may have worked in the insulated world of her Dallas

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<sup>51</sup>"By Slow Stages to a Sandbar," The New Yorker, 7 October 1950.

<sup>52</sup>Margo Jones to Joanna Albus, 5 October 1950, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

theatre but failed time and time again on the picture-frame stages of New York.

Despite these setbacks, Margo never abandoned the idea that one day she would run a proscenium theatre in Dallas.

[After she had been in Dallas a few years,] Margo wanted a new theater, and she wanted a theater with a proscenium arch, [a theater] where she could do both [arena and proscenium productions]. [But] She felt that the public wouldn't let her give up the round.<sup>53</sup>

Even Margo's own writings reflect her unwillingness to forsake the proscenium arch totally for that staging style that had gained for her the label "theatrical innovator":

Ideally a theatre building should be able to adapt itself to the special qualities of each play. A flexible theatre is the answer. . . . which will make it possible to do some plays in the round, others with a proscenium, still others with a proscenium and long apron, or in any other form the script may need.<sup>54</sup>

Although Margo believed that all theatrical architectures were required for truly exciting theatre, it was the circular stage to which she owed her prominence in Ameri-

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<sup>53</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

<sup>54</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 188-189. John Rosenfield reported a similar conviction: "Margo now says that she will never again occupy a theater in which arena staging is not possible, although she may like to use a picture-frame stage, too"; "Villain Still Pursues Her," Southwest Review 34 (Autumn 1949): 396.

can theatre. And, as Lillian Bayless so astutely observed, "the public wouldn't let her give up the round."<sup>55</sup>

Margo's first practical experience with theatre-in-the-round occurred in Houston during her tenure with the Houston Community Players. She staged plays in-the-round in hotel ballrooms during the summer months for several years. She continued occasionally directing in-the-round (which was both innovative and cost-effective in a war-time economy) while she served on the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin. Thus did arena staging develop from "an exigency . . . into a very well developed theory of production."<sup>56</sup>

. . . [I]n the experimental theater, they [University of Texas] just provided her with a big sort of ballroom type room, and she used furniture and props, but no scenery. Because this [type of staging] was expedient, not because . . . she [necessarily] preferred it. So she made a reputation this way. She learned the directing technique [for central staging] which, of course, is entirely different from a proscenium arch situation, because the actor [in-the-round] is being watched from all sides. And having done this so much out of necessity, she became a real expert at moving people in the arena theater.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.

<sup>56</sup>Claire Rosenfield, Interview by Carole Cohen, 30 April 1974, interview #69, Part I, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>57</sup>Bayless interview, 12 March 1974.



Margo believed that "a play on an arena stage has to look good from all directions."<sup>58</sup> To accomplish this basic requirement, Margo decided that

The best way to plan the composition [of an arena production was] . . . to take a bird's eye view, to imagine yourself looking at the production from the ceiling or the dome.<sup>59</sup>

She regarded her work in staging a play in-the-round similar to that of the sculptor—an artist whose creation is viewed from all sides.

The play becomes more like a sculpture in theatre-in-the-round; in other words, it acquires new dimensions. It means that the necessities are fourfold. It also means that the potentialities of exciting design are greater.<sup>60</sup>

Margo realized that circular staging required a different type of awareness on the director's part. She stressed that, while directing the play,

Sightlines from every portion of the house have to be borne constantly in mind, although this becomes an automatic process for a director who has worked any length of time in this medium. You can move from one section . . . to another during a rehearsal, but . . . you will find that this is only a checking system because the solving of sightline problems has become a part of your production scheme.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 123.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

To accommodate arena's sightline requirements, Margo formed definite opinions and techniques for blocking in-the-round. Her experience in this medium resulted in a system for developing the actors' movements from which she rarely deviated.

. . . Margo has found that with the audience sitting on all sides, there are no "strong" or "weak" spots on the playing area. Every spot has potentially the same value for emphasis. Successful expression . . . demands its special techniques . . . and she has found that if she visualizes the movement of the play as though she were looking down on it from above and lets the physical action flow in patterns that are satisfying as to balance and composition from that angle, a satisfactory performance is achieved.<sup>62</sup>

She accomplished this task by "directing from the four points of the compass—simplified by numbering the exits in the corners of the theatre . . . and having the actors move toward or away from these [corners]."<sup>63</sup> Her promptbooks for these productions indicated that, in addition to numbering the three aisleways leading to the stage (and the fourth corner), she also assigned letters to the four sides of the stage: a, b, c, and d.<sup>64</sup> Thus, she would direct an actor to enter through "1" and cross to center

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<sup>62</sup>John William Rogers, "Unique Theatre Supported in Dallas," Daily Times Herald, undated pamphlet.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>See Appendix A for a listing of arena promptbooks. All references to promptbooks in this study are taken from these sources.



"b." In this way, actors, director, and crew alike kept their bearings during rehearsals.

Margo avoided the pitfall common to most arena directors: that of "cluster[ing] . . . the furniture in the central area" and "forc[ing] the action into the circular patterns too often seen in the arena."<sup>65</sup> Instead, Margo tended to block in triangular patterns, although the pattern of movement sometimes developed into diamonds. In this way, she avoided the other mistake often seen in circular staging:

The shape of the arena lends itself to a radial line pattern of movement; movement from the center to the edges and then back again, and constant repetition of this pattern must be avoided . . .<sup>66</sup>

Whether the movements were triangular or diamond-shaped depended on the location of the set pieces. Whenever Margo placed set pieces on the four sides (a, b, c, and d) of the stage, her movement patterns were diamond-shaped with occasional diagonal crosses bisecting the diamond,

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<sup>65</sup>Thomas Patterson Cooke, "Directing in Three Dimensions: Principles for Staging in Open Space Using Three-Dimensional Form as Demonstrated by Theatre-in-the-Round" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1971), 100.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

thus creating triangles. However, in such cases, she fairly consistently kept the movement to the outer edges of the diamond. Rarely were arcing moves noted, although the specificity of any move may have incorporated such arcs without being noted in the promptbooks. Only once was a specifically circular move noted.<sup>67</sup> A variation on this movement pattern occurred whenever set pieces were placed at two of the four corners of the stage (1 and 3, or 2 and 4). Then the blocking patterns resembled large triangles between the set pieces and one of the exits.

Margo recognized that her most difficult assignment in staging plays in-the-round would be to direct the audience's attention onto specific actors or areas of the stage. She discovered, however, that even with the audience surrounding the action, the focal moments were readily accessible.

Focus is obtained very easily in theatre-in-the-round since the whole playing area is so close to the audience. The focal point is different for the various sections of the audience, but the emotional effect is the same for everybody. In fact, it is impossible not to get focus in central staging if the mood and the tempo of the play are correct.<sup>68</sup>

Another reason why focus is no problem in this medium is that there are no weak playing areas, no up- or downstage. The aisleways and the

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<sup>67</sup>The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I. In this instance, Algernon moved around the sofa in semicircular arcs.

<sup>68</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 124-125.

corners are the only relatively weak spots because one fourth of the audience usually have to crane their necks to see them. The proximity of the spectator keeps from rendering them totally weak, but these areas should be used only when the play calls for a piece of scenery or a prop which cannot possibly be placed in the central space.<sup>69</sup>

Interestingly, Margo rarely placed her actors stage center, usually considered the strongest area on stage, but rather preferred keeping them at the corners of the diamonds and triangles her blocking patterns created.

Margo was also aware that, at any given moment, some percentage of her audience saw only the back of an actor and heard only those actors facing them.

There is an auditory as well as visual focus in theatre-in-the-round. Hearing the actor whose face is turned away can create a focal point in itself, although in most cases the audience hears one person and sees another's face simultaneously.<sup>70</sup>

Margo recognized that the audience's proximity to the action not only eased her job of placing focus onto specific actors but also served as "one of the great virtues of this type of staging . . . intimacy."<sup>71</sup> Jerome Lawrence recalled how effectively Margo used both staging functions (focus and intimacy) while directing Inherit the Wind:

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 99.



I'll never forget how Margo whooped up the prayer-meeting. Because she was a theatre evangelist. The minister was dead center—and all the participants were in the sloping aisles, so suddenly during a performance, if you were sitting in the audience, an actor right alongside you would leap to his [sic] feet and join in the fervor, so that the entire audience got caught up in it.<sup>72</sup>

George Sessions Perry related a similar anecdote:

An actor looked at the floor and, with a horrified expression, cried, "Can't somebody do something about those rats?" Right there, a lady in the front row lifted her . . . skirts and kicked her feet in the air. . . . in theatre-in-the-round, where the audience is so close to and so is a part of the play, [such things do happen] . . .<sup>73</sup>

As one of the earliest directors to consistently work in an arena setting, Margo developed a language specifically for blocking in-the-round.

I have coined the term "making the rounds" as applied to an actor showing his [sic] face to all sections of the house while he remains in the same area. For instance, if he has a long telephone conversation on stage, he can find motivation to turn in all directions during the scene. . . . A maximum of variations can be found without resorting to any artificial movements.<sup>74</sup>

While staging The Taming of the Shrew, Margo put this technique to excellent use:

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<sup>72</sup>Speech by Jerome Lawrence at Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX, 16 April 1982; quoted in Sheehy, 254.

<sup>73</sup>George Sessions Perry, "Darnedest Thing You've Seen," Saturday Evening Post 224 (1 March 1952): 37.

<sup>74</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 124.

In the last scene of the play, . . . she [Katharina] circled around the banquet table, addressing the other characters over their shoulders or to their face[s] . . . an example of "making the rounds" in this medium with perfect motivation.<sup>75</sup>

At other times she told her actors to "pull down the girdle," which meant that if a certain facial expression was getting laughs, they were to add comic body movements so that the audience sitting behind them would also be moved to laughter.<sup>76</sup>

Among the challenges Margo faced in central staging was the problem of entrances and exits at the scene and act breaks. Actors could not simply slip on or off the stage—the nature of the space demanded that they come and go through the audience. As a result, "getting actors on and off stage has to be thoroughly rehearsed since this will take place in the darkness at the beginning and end of scenes . . .".<sup>77</sup> The additional problem of timing actors' entrances with lighting cues was solved ingenious-

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>76</sup>John William Rogers, The Lusty Texans of Dallas (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1951), 219. See also Rogers, "Unique Theatre . . .": ". . . [W]hen an actor gets a laugh by direct facial expression he [sic] can do what Margo terms 'pull down the girdle.' At the same time one set of spectators are amused by his face, he makes a little comic movement with his body which suggest[s] humor to those behind him. A variation of this is to make a funny face and then deftly turn around and make it a second time so that the laugh simply spreads around the theatre."

<sup>77</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 125.

ly: Margo simply incorporated into the action at the beginning of a scene a sound cue to notify the lighting crew that the actors were in place.

When the actors are on the dark stage, they give the stage manager a signal so that he [sic] can bring the lights up. This signal must be given by the last actor to appear on the stage, which means that the sequence in which the actors take their places has to be carefully arranged. It is better to make the signal a part of the play. For instance, there is a tap on the table, the lights go up, there is another tap as the audience sees that the character is in a tavern and calling for a waitress. Or a play opens with a woman who is angrily beating her newspaper against a chair; if she starts this action a second before the lights go up, it will serve as a signal. Once we used a sneeze as a signal . . . but this is dangerous because a member of the audience might sneeze, too, and give the stage manager the wrong cue.<sup>78</sup>

Sometimes even the best planned entrances and exits went awry, however. One rather humorous example occurred during Margo's second arena production in Dallas, How Now, Hecate. In the play, one of the characters is turned into a cat:

. . . [I]t is possible to use animals in theatre-in-the-round, but they will drive you insane. The first cat we engaged got her notice before long because she was a bit too temperamental; the second one . . . was a pretty good trouper. But while the cat had rehearsed the play, she had never heard applause at the end of a scene; and so, on opening night, as the lights went down and the audience clapped, Hecate [the cat] became very frightened and clawed the actress who was holding her. This made the actress lose her way in the dark, and she [the

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 129-130.



actress?] landed in the lap of a gentleman on the front row . . .<sup>79</sup>

Just as she incorporated lighting cues into the action of the play, Margo also made scene changes a part of the action. For example, in The Taming of the Shrew,

Setting the stage for the banquet was made part of the action of the play . . . The short scenes in a Shakespearean play have to acquire a fluidity so that there are no long waits and, if possible, none at all. By designing movement for the servants with musical accompaniment it is possible to give the play a flow from scene to scene comparable to the fade-out and fade-in and dissolve of a movie.<sup>80</sup>

Margo envisioned an almost cinematic effect in her scene changes. "Envious of the continuous, unbroken quality of motion pictures, she sought to achieve a similar effect with her staging, eliminating waits and shortening pauses between scenes."<sup>81</sup> She staged Tennessee Williams' Summer and Smoke in Dallas to achieve such an effect, following his own suggestion that "everything possible should be done to give an unbroken fluid quality to the sequence of scenes."<sup>82</sup>

Margo also utilized highly stylized or choreographic movement in her arena direction, especially for her period pieces. In The Learned Ladies, for example, "the movement

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>81</sup>Sheehy, 142.

<sup>82</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 144.

was handled very much like dance, for these people in their very frivolous pastoral costumes were like graceful marionettes in a ballroom environment."<sup>83</sup> Likewise, for The Importance of Being Earnest, the production "was highly stylized. Color ran rampant in the costuming, and the movement was almost like the choreography for a ballet."<sup>84</sup> In another example of classical comedy, She Stoops to Conquer was directed "in a very broad romp manner . . . the overall procedure of direction was fast and funny." Margo believed that this production had "a good deal of style—but even so it was not half as good as . . . [she] could have done."<sup>85</sup> In fact, Margo discovered that "dancing scenes or choreographic movement in a stylized production have proved so effective" in arena staging that she dreamed of directing a "dance-drama-in-the-round."<sup>86</sup> Her opportunity might have presented itself with an opening ballet she had envisioned for Tennessee Williams' The Purification, a play she directed twice,

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>85</sup>Margo Jones to Tennessee Williams, 16 April 1949, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Margo used similar wording in her book to describe this same production: "To counteract the implausibility of the basic situation of this farce, I felt that it should be treated as a big romp, played very rapidly and very broadly" (171).

<sup>86</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 127.

once for proscenium, once for arena.<sup>87</sup> Why she chose not to stage this ballet for her Dallas production is unknown.

Although Margo appeared to manage directing in-the-round effortlessly and quite comfortably, problems cropped up occasionally. One minor problem she encountered occurred whenever large groups of people were needed on her small arena stage. During Southern Exposure, for example, Margo discovered that

crowds could be well managed even in a small theatre-in-the-round provided they were not left standing in one place. They moved around the

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<sup>87</sup>Margo Jones to Tennessee Williams, 18 February 1944, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin. Margo had initially devised this balletic prologue when she hoped to direct The Purification at the University of Texas: "I've dreamed up a ballet to open [the play] . . . Large blank stage, beautiful back-drop of desert, mountain and cactus—tom-toms and Indian dance praying for rain—from the distance—sad plantif [sic] songs of weary cowboys, . . . tinkle of the guitar and Spanish castanets [sic], then Rosalio comes through—the cowboys, ranchers, Indians, Mexicans gossip and fall back in their little groups—Elena comes through and there is the dance of her running away from the Rancher—she dances off the stage and he pursues her and we see then the shadow of the naked dance of the brother and sister and the shadow of the Rancher with the ax as he kills her. On the stage, there is frenzy as the Indians, Mexicans, and Cowboys, Ranchers gossip about what they've heard. The old Judge quiets them—the Curtain falls to rise on the interior of a bare room with huge arches and then the play begins."

A month later, Margo wrote Theresa Helburn of the Theatre Guild a similar, but more detailed, scenario for the opening of The Purification; Margo Jones to Theresa Helburn, 28 March 1944, Typed carbon copy, Jones Family Archives, Houston, TX.



playing area . . . but the focus remained on [the main character] throughout.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, Margo's apparent mastery of central staging was noted and commended throughout the theatrical community.<sup>89</sup>

In summary, Margo's career as a proscenium director began with a bang and ended with a whimper. From the early days of success in Houston, where she apparently set out as a textbook director, to the bright lights of Broadway where, after an initial success, she was to gain little critical or popular acclaim, Margo maintained her loyalty to an architectural form that she could no longer master. The methods for proscenium direction that she developed during her formative years, while more conducive to her own philosophy of theatre, also set her apart from the prevailing practices of the day. Perhaps the ease with which she adapted these methods to the innovative, sculptured style of the circular stage spoiled her ability to create with the photographer's eye. Or, more likely, the excitement of the ever-changing stage pictures generated by central staging overshadowed the more static patterns demanded by the picture-frame. No doubt the

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<sup>88</sup>Jones, Theatre-in-the-Round, 185.

<sup>89</sup>Regular visits to Dallas by such well-known New York critics as Brooks Atkinson, George Freedley, and John Mason Brown, and their subsequently favorable reviews, attested to Margo's staging abilities.

intimacy of the circular stage favored her strengths as a director, whereas the proscenium's more impersonal nature exploited her weaknesses. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that Margo's later years were clouded by her failures on the proscenium stage, with the result that, when opportunity once again knocked in the form of Inherit the Wind, her most popular and critically-acclaimed arena production, Margo declined to direct the play in New York. Perhaps she realized that the intimacy she so craved from her arena productions would be lost on the cavernous proscenium stages of Broadway. And in many ways she was correct.

There was . . . a loss of the sense of audience participation [in the Broadway production of Inherit the Wind]. Some of the feeling of a cockpit, natural to the Dallas production because of the small arena [was lost], . . . [even though Herman] Shumlin [recaptured some of this feeling with his] adroit use of the crowd. On the whole, however, the authors believed their play was at its best in arena.<sup>90</sup>

Margo Jones emerged as one of the first legitimate directors in-the-round. Through the process of directing for the arena stage, she gained the experience and knowledge not only to create a new body of language for the director but also to experiment with staging techniques that proved effective in her new venue. Perhaps she best

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<sup>90</sup>James Lawrence and Robert E. Lee to Don Burton Wilmeth, 23 December 1963; cited in Wilmeth, 175.

summed up the main advantages of circular over proscenium staging when she wrote:

The uniqueness of arena playing immediately intrigues audiences. The intimacy makes audiences feel much more participation [in the production]. This same intimacy demands honesty in acting. Sight lines and hearing are perfect from any seat. The smallest flicker of an eye lash can be seen by an audience [member], thus making it possible for an actor to get over a meaning in a much more realistic way than is possible on a large stage. Imagination is put to use much more, since there are no four walls.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Margo Jones to Thomas Quinn Curtiss, 3 February 1948, Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.



## CHAPTER 9

" . . . BUT WORDS WILL NEVER HURT ME":

### MARGO AND THE CRITICS

[Margo] looked at the critic as another kind of talent in theatre work.

- Virgil Miers

She [Margo] is a good director and occasionally an inspired one, especially with Shakespeare, of all playwrights.

- John Rosenfield

Examining the critical reactions to a director's work as a means of studying that director's methods may seem a questionable undertaking. But these reviews contain eyewitness reports of Margo's productions, reports usually written within hours of the play's performance. As a result, even though these reviews reflect only the reviewer's viewpoint, they do provide valuable information about what occurred on Margo's stages. By looking at Margo's direction through the eyes of critics, moreover, we can identify certain trends in her directing and, indeed, reactions to her play direction that may, in some way, have influenced how she worked. For these reasons, critics' responses probably do offer some additional data on

Margo's directing methods and how those methods developed, changed, and matured during her career.

Examination of the numerous articles written about Margo's productions reveals certain patterns of response towards Margo and her work. Nowhere are such patterns clearer than in the reviews of her productions with the Houston Community Players. The Houston critics always took into consideration that Margo was working with amateurs and always seemed disposed to react favorably to what she and her crew displayed for their inspection. Headlines such as "First Production by Community Players Applauded," "Community Players Give Excellent Performance . . .," "Community Players Do Selves Proud . . .," and "Community Players Chalk Up Success . . ." <sup>1</sup> were typical of the reception that greeted Margo every morning after one of her plays opened.

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<sup>1</sup>Pat McNeely Barnes, "First Production by Community Players Applauded," newspaper unknown, 4 December 1936; Cora McRae "Community Players Open Season With Creditable Staging of Satire Play," newspaper unknown, [12 October 1937]; Cora McRae, "Community Players Give Excellent Performance in 'Nude With Pineapple'," newspaper unknown, [28 December 1937]; Paul Hochuli, "Community Players Do Selves Proud in 'The Learned Ladies'," newspaper unknown, 15 March 1938. All reviews of Margo's productions in Houston were found in several scrapbooks, dated 1936 through 1941, which are held by the Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. These scrapbooks contain numerous articles and reviews, the majority of which are undated and do not provide the name of the publication in which they appeared, although many of these reviews most likely were printed in either the Houston Chronicle or the Houston Press.

The critics' reaction to Margo's direction was also favorable in almost every instance. One reviewer wrote that Margo's production of Merrily We Roll Along "revealed . . . a young director with force and originality."<sup>2</sup> Hubert Roussel of the Houston Post stated that "the play [Nude With Pineapple] has been staged in the best manner by Margo Jones, whose clever direction is the mainstay of the amateur organization . . .".<sup>3</sup> Another Houston critic declared that "once more a cast of Director Margo Jones demonstrated that, in acting excellence and clever staging, the Community players are second to no amateur group in Houston."<sup>4</sup>

From these early reviews, we can also trace the roots of some of Margo's design, lighting, and staging strategies, as well as her theories of play selection. Herein, too, reside the beginnings of subsequent difficulties and anxieties she occasionally encountered while directing.

The Houston critics provide us with strong evidence for Margo's early interest in lighting as a design tool, a tool she used throughout her directing career. Margo's preference for simple scenic devices, which would re-

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<sup>2</sup>McRae, "Community Players Open Season With Creditable Staging . . .".

<sup>3</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Lively Comedy at Community Playhouse," Houston Post, 28 December 1937.

<sup>4</sup>J.R., "Moliere Satire Given Smooth Production," newspaper unknown, 15 March 1938.

emerge ten years later in her Dallas theatre, was also reported in these reviews. We discover Margo's reliance on imagination rather than money to supply sets for her productions, another pattern that repeated itself continually in her plays.

Margo's proscenium stage in Houston was small, with little wing or backstage space. Her reliance on lighting and simple scenery, based on necessity, was applauded time and time again by the critics: "The success of the first night's performance [of Bury the Dead] may be attributed in a large measure to the lighting effects, devised and executed by Margo Jones . . . and her assistants . . .".<sup>5</sup>

Hubert Roussel commented on Margo's approach to scene design:

Staged by the clever Margo Jones with little more than the use of packing cases, some black cotton to drape them, a few ordinary lights and a valiant collection of union suits, the show [Macbeth] comes off with surprisingly dramatic effect. . . . the Maurice Evans system of organ music has been adopted to link up the swift

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<sup>5</sup>John W. Yeats, "Actor-Reviewer Says Plays, Like Peanuts, Depend on Customers," newspaper unknown, [16 November 1937]. As a forerunner to her scenic technique in Dallas, this production foreshadowed Margo's work in Dallas: "No curtain falls to denote the passage of time in 'Bury the Dead,' . . . The play runs uninterruptedly for 80 minutes. The changes of time and scene are achieved by spotlighting events of the play. . . . These events . . . are brought out by throwing strong lights on portions of the set, with the remainder of the scene in darkness"; "Community Play To Show Novel Use of Lights," newspaper unknown, [15 November 1937].

changes of scene—seldom more than the moving of a packing case.<sup>6</sup>

In describing Margo's production of Moliere's The Learned Ladies, one critic was impressed that the "stage effects were of professional excellence. And it was all done, of necessity, with several years of cloth, a number of apple boxes, and a bag of tenpenny nails."<sup>7</sup> From these descriptions we discover that Margo, very early in her career, was already using camouflage as a scenic device and music as a transitional element, techniques she employed successfully in later years in Dallas.

Margo's ability to nurture amateur actors was not ignored by Houston's critics, who were continually amazed at her ability to produce something out of nothing.

The bestowal of credit [for The Front Page] might well begin with a bay wreath for Director Margo Jones . . . , who took a largely inexperienced cast and in a month's time whipped it into a surprising state of proficiency.<sup>8</sup>

As one who recently returned to the boards for the first time since college days under Miss Jones' tutelage, this reviewer would be the

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<sup>6</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Community Players Show Brave Spirit in Shakespeare," Houston Post, 15 February 1938.

<sup>7</sup>J.R., "Moliere Satire Given Smooth Production."

<sup>8</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Guild's 'Front Page,' Hairy and Hilarious. Called Best Amateur Effort of Year," Houston Post, 30 March 1938. For this production, Margo cast members of the Newspaper Guild—professional journalists who, for the most part, had never appeared in a stage play before.



first to testify that she [Margo] gets more out of her material than there is to start with.<sup>9</sup>

Again these critics provide us with evidence that Margo, at the beginning of her directorial career, worked extremely well with actors and evoked commendable performances from even the most inexperienced among her cast. These opinions counter the later viewpoint that she was ineffectual when directing actors.

At least one critic, commenting on her selection of plays, observed that Margo, constrained by budgetary considerations, was forced "to deal only with low-royalty plays." He conceded, however, that she was "a clever enough young lady to get something out of practically any script,"<sup>10</sup> an assessment that reoccurred numerous times in Dallas.

Even in these early days, however, Margo displayed certain tendencies that were to affect her work both on Broadway and in Dallas, tendencies that the Houston reviewers could not let pass their notice.

Here [in Hedda Gabler], there is need for . . . a perfect realization of mood and tempo, else you have stretches of almost anaesthetic talk. These happened at times last night, especially during the first act of the play, and in conse-

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<sup>9</sup>Margaret Davis, "Community Players Chalk Up Success in Modern Tragedy," newspaper unknown, 26 April 1938, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Community Players Turn Out Neat Psychological Murder," Houston Post, 26 April 1938.



quence it seemed longer than necessary [emphasis mine].<sup>11</sup>

This criticism was to become a recurring theme in reviewing Margo's work, echoed in Houston with comments such as "the opening scene [of Merrily We Roll Along] dragged considerably"<sup>12</sup> and "the whole play [Candle Light] would be improved with a little speeding up."<sup>13</sup> Margo's subsequent emphasis on the first and second acts during rehearsals may have resulted from these early judgments of her work. However, her slow starts may also indicate a deliberate purposefulness in her direction. Unsuccessful directors begin their plays extremely quickly and at a high level of intensity, allowing the production little room to grow to a climax. Margo's slowly paced openings might have been planned as a means of allowing the play's action to build to its moment of highest tension. However, whether deliberate or not, such pacing problems regularly invited criticism.

Margo's pragmatic attitude towards classical playwrights was already in evidence during these early years. Describing her production of Macbeth, Hubert Roussel wrote that "numerous cuts have been made in the dialogue, but

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<sup>11</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Norwegian Night: Community Players Give 'Hedda Gabler,'" Houston Post, [17 March 1937].

<sup>12</sup>McRae, "Community Players Open Season . . .".

<sup>13</sup>Cora McRae, "Comedy Given by Community Players Here," newspaper unknown, 31 May 1938.

enough remains to get over the idea nicely . . .".<sup>14</sup> The pattern she subsequently followed regarding the adaptation of classical scripts to her theatre's needs was already established in her formative years as director.

Reaction to her staging abilities was generally favorable, although Roussel's comments on Margo's blocking for Candle Light eerily foreshadowed Jack Harrison's criticism of Southern Exposure some twelve years later:<sup>15</sup>

This reviewer's only objection to the able direction of Margo Jones is a tendency to keep her cast constantly sitting down and getting up, as though the cushions were hot.<sup>16</sup>

The approval of Margo's direction by the Houston critics might be attributed to her status as a "favorite daughter," for to be sure a similar reception awaited when she opened her theatre in Dallas. According to many of the Dallas critics, she could do no wrong. As in Houston, Dallas reviewers felt compelled to give Margo good reviews. Such behavior by the critics was recognized by others as well:

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<sup>14</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Community Players Show Brave Spirit."

<sup>15</sup>Jack Harrison, "'Southern Exposure' Proves Pure Corn," Star Ledger, 28 September 1950. Harrison stated that Margo's blocking "lean[ed] heavily on making the actors get out of chairs and sit down again." For further discussion of Margo's staging of this play, see Ch. 8, pp. 228-230.

<sup>16</sup>Hubert Roussel, "Community Players End Season in Light Comedy," Houston Post, 31 May 1938.

Her [Margo's] pioneering efforts [in starting a theatre] were perhaps treated gently by Dallas patrons and critics because they all had a healthy interest in making Dallas a cultural center so as to counter its rather boistrous image.<sup>17</sup>

Margo's work in Dallas was applauded nationally as well. She was called the "supernatural chatelaine of Theatre '49,"<sup>18</sup> the "wily wizard of State Fair Park,"<sup>19</sup> the "high priestess of Thespi in Dallas,"<sup>20</sup> and the "well known Southwestern impresaria."<sup>21</sup> Her direction was described as "singularly gifted,"<sup>22</sup> "imaginative and resourceful,"<sup>23</sup> and "unfailingly sure and inventive."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ralph F. Voss, A Life of William Inge: The Strains of Triumph (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 93.

<sup>18</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Our Wandering Critic Reports on 'Coast of Illyria' in Dallas and the State of Theatre '49," New York Times, 13 April 1949, p. 39.

<sup>19</sup>Rual Askew, "'Horatio' A Frisky Winner," Dallas Morning News, 9 March 1954, sec. 1, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>Howard Barnes, "Southern Exposure," New York Herald Tribune, 27 September 1950.

<sup>21</sup>Gilbert W. Gabriel, "Southern Exposure," Cue Magazine, 7 October 1950.

<sup>22</sup>John Rosenfield, "Margo Jones Reveals Her Final Production of Summer Seson," Dallas Morning News, 23 July 1947, sec. 1, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup>John Rosenfield, "Gift for Theater '48 A Sharp Blue Pencil," Dallas Morning News, 1 February 1948.

<sup>24</sup>John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things In the Round: Margo Jones of Dallas Experiments with New Kind of Stage and Audience Relationship," Saturday Review of Literature 31 (3 April 1948): 24-25.



The critics showered her work in Dallas with superlatives and, in some cases, inanities: "Seemingly, the wonderful Margo Jones could make the reading of a dictionary good drama."<sup>25</sup> These plaudits continued throughout her ten seasons in Dallas. Even her last production, Whisper To Me, which opened less than a month before she died, was cited for her direction: "Margo Jones . . . lavished on it some beautiful staging tricks and treats with all the heart she would have given to those heroes of her theater, Williams and Inge."<sup>26</sup> And this praise despite the fact that the leading lady dropped out two days before the opening and her replacement performed the third act with script in hand.

But the Dallas critics, unlike their Houston counterparts, were not reticent about bluntly criticizing Margo's direction when she failed to provide the excellence they expected (and demanded) of her. John Rosenfield of the Dallas Morning News proved to be not only her staunchest supporter but also her most critical patron. In one review, for example, he called her the "heroine" of the

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<sup>25</sup>Virgil Miers, "Margo Jones Offers Digestible Corn," Daily Times Herald, 10 February 1948, sec. 1, p. 12.

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production as its director,<sup>27</sup> but in another, he criticized her The Master Builder for "lack[ing] firmness of directorial control" insofar as the acting, costuming, and lighting were concerned."<sup>28</sup> But as was to happen so often with Margo and the critics in Dallas, even though Rosenfield found fault with her work, he bent over backwards to assure his readers that Margo would correct her errors, given enough time. In excusing Margo's lack of control over The Master Builder, he wrote:

As we learned, however, a few months ago, the doughty Miss Jones can be depended on to tune up her organization in a jiffy and nobody is disposed to disallow her a breaking-in period.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>John Rosenfield, "Gay Costume Soiree Is 'Twelfth Night' at Theater '48," Dallas Morning News, 21 December 1948, sec. 2, p. 4. He went on to say that "this is one of Margo Jones's best-imagined, more clearly charted, better-charted and more consistently manipulated productions."

<sup>28</sup>John Rosenfield, "Ibsen Drama on Free Spirit Opens Season," Dallas Morning News, 4 November 1947, sec. 2, p. 4. Rosenfield specifically stated that there was no "uniformity of acting texture. . . ." and that the "costumes varied from the last century to the present probably to make the period indefinite. The style was not uniform, however, and the contrasts were disconcerting. Nor was the lighting handled with the finesse of last summer."

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. Rosenfield made similar comments about other productions: "Margo Jones and Company were generally successful with a production [of The Taming of the Shrew] of some serrated unevenness but one that was very good much oftener than it was very bad" [emphasis mine]; John Rosenfield, "'Shrew' a Romp at Theater '47," Dallas Morning News, 16 December 1947, sec. 2, p. 4. For Whisper To Me, he wrote: "Let it be admitted early that the performance . . . did less than justice to some of the most literary pages Theater '55 has ever had to animate. But, also, let us not blame the ground plan of Margo Jones' direction, only the miscues that let it happen" [emphasis mine]; Rosenfield,



Margo apparently read these notices and acted upon them: "The discipline missing from Theater '47's first production[,] Ibsen's 'Master Builder'[,] was reasserted by Miss Jones for this production [Tennessee Williams' one-act play trilogy]." <sup>30</sup>

Despite the critics' propensity to excuse Margo her miscues, several criticisms appeared with alarming frequency. Margo's difficulties with slowly paced first acts occurred regularly in Dallas. Whether a deliberate directorial technique (the frequency of occurrence suggests that it might have been) or not, it was faulted by the critics. Comments such as "Monday night's frolicsome performance . . . began a trifle sedately. This slow getaway was more than overcome as Margo Jones' troupe gradually meshed gears . . ." were indicative of this trend. <sup>31</sup> Rosenfield wrote that Margo's production of The Footpath Way was well-paced "except for a creeping 'seat-the-latecomers' opening." <sup>32</sup> Regarding her production of The Day's Mischief, one reviewer wrote:

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"Widder Women . . .," 28 June 1955. The miscue Rosenfield referred to was the loss of the leading lady only a few days before the play opened.

<sup>30</sup>John Rosenfield, "Tennessee Williams and the One-Act Play," Dallas Morning News, 23 November 1947, sec. 4, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Clay Bailey, "'Twelfth Night' Off To Brilliant Start," Daily Times Herald, 21 December 1948, sec. 2, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup>John Rosenfield, "Opening of Margo's Season," Dallas Morning News, 3 November 1953, sec. 1. p. 10.

Margo Jones' direction of the play is open to debate. We thought she let the first two acts drag too much but she may have been deliberately building to a climax. She did have her actors living their parts by the third act. Still, we felt the production could have been handled more competently.<sup>33</sup>

And, in a more ironic vein, Clay Bailey of the Daily Times Herald noted that "by nature . . . [The Sea Gull] is somewhat slow-paced and Margo Jones' group let nature take its course too often."<sup>34</sup>

The critics also reacted against Margo's tendency to allow overstylized acting. They questioned her tolerance of overdone gestures and movements. Rosenfield wrote that The Learned Ladies was "annoying only now and then with its mannerisms":

Directed like the rest of the cast for certain choreographic sweeps of hands and arms, he [Harold Webster] alone lost control. His gestures were wild, continual[,] and pointless.<sup>35</sup>

In a similar vein, while commenting on The Coast of Illyria, Rosenfield noted that

the play needs . . . considerable application of nuance, which probably was beyond the range of the rehearsal period. The jug-heads and dope-fiends . . . behaved in the raw and simple style

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<sup>33</sup>Burt Lieberstein, "Suspense Aplenty in 'Day's Mischief,'" Daily Times Herald, 31 March 1953, sec. 4, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>Clay Bailey, "Chekhov's Characters Fight Losing Battle," Daily Times Herald, 22 February 1949, sec. 2, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup>John Rosenfield, "Much Beauty, Some Humor, Modicum of Style in Theater '48's Moliere," Dallas Morning News, 9 November 1948, sec. 2, p. 4.

of "Ten Nights in a Bar Room." It was difficult to tell them drunk from sober.<sup>36</sup>

Even her technique of "pulling down the girdle" was beyond the comprehension of a least one critic when he wrote: "Just why Miss Jones let the actor give the joke away with a double set of gestures was not clear to this spectator."<sup>37</sup>

Margo's inclination towards excessively stylized costuming also came under attack:

In one respect Miss Jones went a bit too far [in The Importance of Being Earnest]. The absurd jacket and cap . . . in the second act and the equally preposterous dressing gown . . . were over-stylization. The stylization was legitimate and it was hard, no doubt, to tell where it should end. Our guess is that it should have ended a shade nearer conventionalization as did the furnishings, which had style but didn't shriek it.<sup>38</sup>

The costumes for A Midsummer Night's Dream also garnered some criticism: "The costumes set a gaudy pace, and in the earlier episodes are far too detailed for such close viewing."<sup>39</sup> The reviewer obviously thought that the

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<sup>36</sup>John Rosenfield, "Parker-Evans Play About the Lambs Best New Script of Year for Margo," Dallas Morning News, 5 April 1949, sec. 1, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup>John Rosenfield, "Maybe Thar's Gold in MacLane Diggin's," Dallas Morning News, 10 February 1948, sec. 2, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup>John Rosenfield, "Oscar Wilde and Vivian Connell in Repertory," Dallas Morning News, 9 March 1948, sec. 2, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup>Fairfax Nisbet, "Bard's 'Dream' a Fortunate Choice for Holiday Season," Dallas Morning News, 2 December 1951.

costumes, replete with the flora and fauna of Shakespeare's fanciful forest, took focus away from the action as the audience tried to examine all the fine detail contained on them.

Interestingly, where some critics occasionally demanded less in costuming, others often requested more in scenery. Regarding The Golden Porcupine, for example, set during Louis XI's reign in France, one reviewer noted that

. . . Porcupine might gain by performance on a full-size stage, where the illusion of regal splendor can be better captured. Margo Jones' living-room-sized arena brings an audience close enough to the actors to make the fillings in the king's teeth plainly visible and this does not make for royal stature.<sup>40</sup>

Margo's A Midsummer Night's Dream, having already been cited for too much costuming, was also criticized for too little scenery:

Fashioning the "Dream" for arena staging takes a bit of doing as the audience must bring every bit of imagination at hand to fill in [the scenery] . . . And Tony Herds' settings give no help. You're strictly on your own. . . . There's not a sprig of foliage or a massive throne chair to clutter the imagination or detract from the flow of Shakespearean rhetoric. If the audience is on its own, so is the cast which has the task of setting the mood and atmosphere by sheer projection.<sup>41</sup>

Although the critics generally agreed that the simplified staging Margo employed in her theatre suited her produc-

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<sup>40</sup>Thad Ricks, "The Golden Porcupine," The Billboard, 1 April 1950, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup>Nisbet, "Bard's 'Dream' a Fortunate Choice . . .".

tions well, they occasionally yearned for "more detailed and imaginative settings"<sup>42</sup> and "creative illusion."<sup>43</sup> Sometimes the critics even lost patience with Margo's demands upon the audience's imagination.

An audience is asked to imagine places and costumes, and to the author's and Director Margo Jones' credit, there is practically no confusion as action moves from this place to that. It is handled as neatly as "Our Town." . . . Miss Jones has had success in the past with all kinds of imaginary items from windows and portraits to the railroad track of . . . "This Property Is Condemned." But here [in The Guilty], a dress not only has to be thought up, but the orchid that goes on it as well. Long live economy and theatrical experimentation, but it is not exactly what the long-rewarding Miss Jone[s] has trained her audience to expect.<sup>44</sup>

The technical aspects of Margo's productions, that is, the lighting, properties, and scene changes, were usually singled out for praise. Rarely did the critics have problems with the execution of the more practical side of production. On only one occasion was Margo's command of her backstage crew questioned and, in the process of the questioning, commended. On opening night of Lady Windermere's Fan,

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<sup>42</sup>John Rosenfield, "Characters That Are Characters Paraded in New Comedy by Gurian," Dallas Morning News, 30 December 1947, sec. 2, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup>Clay Bailey, "Hayes Drama Scans Sordid Rural Life," Daily Times Herald, 27 January 1948, sec. 2, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup>Virgil Miers, "'The Guilty' Given a World Premiere," Daily Times Herald, 24 November 1953, sec. 4, p. 4.

which Margo and Company struggled to make glib and precise, [the production] ran almost into the disaster of the century. For all too long during the first act it was "Lady Windermere's Fan" without the fan.

A good theater is organized not for routine but for catastrophe. Margo's is a good theater. The directrix made a hasty exit from her perch on the stairs and darted backstage.

In the midst of the now confused colloquy between Lady Windermere and Lord Darlington the maid entered . . . "This just came for you, milady," she said, bearing the fan. "Place it on the table," . . . Thereafter, by quick thinking and rearrangement of lines, the play proceeded as Wilde wrote it.

. . . Wilde never lets his audience forget Lady Windermere's fan for a moment. It is surprising that Margo's prop department could have forgotten.<sup>45</sup>

Only rarely did the reviewers find fault with Margo's interpretation of a given script. However, when they disagreed with her concept, they quickly let her know. Rosenfield, in writing about Southern Exposure, stated his disagreement with Margo's interpretation of the play.

We had the idea that "Southern Exposure," despite its popularity in Dallas, was misdirected by Margo. She placed tasteless reliance on a sexy episode between her romantic leads and next on the atmospheric comedy of two aged Daughters of the Confederacy.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>John Rosenfield, "Her Ladyship's Fan As an Article of Utmost Importance," Dallas Morning News, 12 November 1950.

<sup>46</sup>John Rosenfield, "Broadway's Snatch of Best Dallas Play," Dallas Morning News, 29 January 1955, sec. 1, p. 6. This article concerned Inherit the Wind's imminent opening in New York.



Brooks Atkinson voiced similar misgivings about Margo's direction of The Heel.

[If the part of the Heel were cast and played correctly,] "The Heel" might have a certain sinister plausibility and look like a sharp comment on the life of our times, in which heels are quite successful. But the performance Miss Jones staged is elementary farce without subtleties in inflection—all noise and attitudes on the surface, and nothing inside.<sup>47</sup>

Rosenfield echoed Atkinson's statements, writing that

The production [and, therefore, Margo] . . . does not quite make up its mind whether it is high farce, low comedy[,] or a sour domestic problem. . . . The big disclosure scene, which [is drenched] . . . with tears of goodness and self-sacrifice, patently calls for mockery, not sorrow. We wish Margo . . . would try it this way just for one matinee and invite us.<sup>48</sup>

The single greatest criticism directed at Margo, however, centered around her unwillingness to demand scriptural changes from her playwrights. Brooks Atkinson noted that "Miss Jones' devotion to new scripts is an enterprising one, with some overtones of missionary zeal."<sup>49</sup> Rosenfield was not as diplomatic when he charged Margo with misplacing her "blue pencil."

The most useful time for the critical attitude is not during a first night but during the weeks of rehearsal. From either lack of time or excessive deference to authors, this application

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<sup>47</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Margo Jones Presents Week of Repertory," New York Times, 27 May 1954.

<sup>48</sup>John Rosenfield, "Portrait of a Blackguard," Dallas Morning News, 26 January 1955, sec. 1, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup>Atkinson, "Margo Jones Presents Week of Repertory."

of tough criticism is missing when Theater '48 prepares its new plays or its old.

Margo Jones' direction [of Leaf and Bough] is imaginative and resourceful. But, as usual, she had mislaid her blue pencil.

We stipulated at the head of this treatise that Margo may not have the time to give a custom-fit to a new play. We must argue that the time must be found or, in default of time, the swift stroke of enterprise must be applied. If Theater '48 cherishes the notion that it should present plays as freshly minted to discover their faults and foibles, it should cease and desist. No audience anywhere is exactly a dog on whom something should be tried.

Theater '48 derives its sustenance from the patronage of a public that wants the best dramatic entertainment circumstances afford and have [sic] been taught by Margo to find entertainment in plays that never before have seen the light of a baby spot. The shaping of these plays for the immediate favor of the Dallas audience would be the short end toward shaping them for success anywhere.

That Margo's policy of new plays and classical revivals has intrigued an adequate public also can be proved. That this policy . . . demands more thorough and more knowing revision of new scripts in advance of production, is now equally apparent [emphasis mine].<sup>50</sup>

That Rosenfield recognized Margo's primary loyalty in theatrical production rested with the playwright rather than with the audience proved insightful. That he lambasted her for this focus so forcefully (and barely a year into her tenure in Dallas) indicated that Leaf and Bough was not her first transgression in this area. Margo

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<sup>50</sup>Rosenfield, "Gift for Theater '48 . . .".

apparently did not heed Rosenfield's warning for three years later he was still writing the same commentary.

The purpose of repertory, as we construe it, is to tinker and tighten script and performance for optimum results. But, somehow, a play at Theater '51 never changes significantly after opening night.<sup>51</sup>

This comment is revealing for it clearly suggests that, once a play opened, Margo was finished with it. Rather than fine-tuning the piece, she let it stand on its own merits. Such behavior implies that she preferred to go on to her next project, beginning the creative process anew, rather than spend time with the current production.<sup>52</sup>

Critics had difficulty determining whether any particular play's problems were script- or director-related. The consensus appeared to be both. But in almost every case, the conclusion reached was that the playwright

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<sup>51</sup>John Rosenfield, "'Beloved Rogues' Need Virtuosity Not Virtuousness," Dallas Morning News, 11 November 1951.

<sup>52</sup>This tendency on Margo's part may appear contradictory in light of her work on The Glass Menagerie, on which she lavished much attention after its Chicago opening. However, Menagerie was scheduled to open in New York and, as such, demanded further fine-tuning. Menagerie occurred early in her professional career as a director and was also her first Broadway venture, thus possibly requiring a more conscientious attitude on her part. Furthermore, her continuing improvement of the production justified her employment to the producers. Finally, Margo had no pressing theatrical activities awaiting her. It seems highly probable, therefore, that, while Margo was willing to polish productions earlier in her career, by the time she was directing in Dallas, such attention after opening the play no longer seemed necessary.

should have been encouraged to cut, rewrite, and revise  
—and that that encouragement should have come from Margo.

. . . Evelyn Bettis overcame creditably a role handicapped either by direction or by the author. . . . Had Mr. Nash resorted more to sound editing and less on arch funning, he would have come up with a tighter product and much better theater.<sup>53</sup>

In another case of critical helpfulness, Clifford Sage of the Daily Times Herald presented

some asides for the playwright and the director that we trust are constructive. First, we suggest that the Act 1, and Act 3 curtains could do with a bit of legitimate, unhokumized strengthening.<sup>54</sup>

Of Margo's The Coast of Illyria, Rosenfield wrote that, "with authors and director still laboring over the script, the first act moved hectically and in too many directions."<sup>55</sup> Margo, responding to similar comments by Brooks Atkinson, wrote:

I agree with you that there was much lacking in the ILLYRIA production and script and your comments were terrifically constructive to me.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Rual Askew, "Lively Performances Keep New Script Under Control," Dallas Morning News, 6 November 1951.

<sup>54</sup>Clifford M. Sage, "'One Bright Day' Has Bright Future," Daily Times Herald, 20 February 1951, sec. 4, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup>John Rosenfield, "'Coast of Illyria' Offered in Dallas," New York Times, 6 April 1949.

<sup>56</sup>Margo Jones to Brooks Atkinson, 7 May 1949; response to Atkinson review, New York Times, 13 April 1949; quoted in Arthur F. Kinney, "Introduction" to The Coast of Illyria, Dorothy Parker and Ross Evans (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), 64.

Likewise, the critics believed that Lemple's Old Man "seemed hastily assembled and needed several more drafts and some 'hard-boiled editing.'"<sup>57</sup> What these critics, and others, continually emphasized and encouraged in their reviews was an honest evaluation of a script's stage-worthiness. The critics begged, suggested, even demanded that Margo amend her loyalty to the playwright's words in favor of a more objective approach to the script. In only one recorded instance did she take that advice. Commenting on the audience's indifferent reaction to I Am Laughing, Clifford Sage revealed that

as the play stood eight nights ago (and we learn through the grapevine that it has been cut 28 minutes) no one we have talked to who attended it, felt either happy or sad [about anything that happened on stage] [emphasis mine].<sup>58</sup>

Overall, however, the Dallas critics were very protective of their theatre and its director. They were understandably upset when plays that had been favorably received by Dallas audiences were rejected by New York critics. As a result, whenever Margo proposed sending a production to New York, the Dallas critics became apprehensive. This attitude was best exemplified by Rosenfield's unwarranted anxiety over Inherit the Wind's impending opening in New York.

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<sup>57</sup>Rosenfield, "Characters That Are Characters . . .".

<sup>58</sup>Clifford M. Sage, "Still No Laughing Matter," Daily Times Herald, 7 April 1952.

Our reservation [about taking the play to New York], and we simply must have one, is that "Inherit the Wind" gains from its compression in the tiny local arena stage and may suffer behind footlights.

A moment of overwhelming impact here [in Dallas] is the country prayer-meeting, staged in the midst of Margo's surrounding audience. The spectator . . . is unavoidably in the middle of it and subject to the contagion of mob fervor. Margo has handled this shrewdly, making it less a spectacle than an experience—as if you had found a Holy Roller meeting somewhere.

As "Inherit the Wind" moves to a framed stage, these rare moments will become something only to see [and not experience]. . . . Similarly, during the trial . . . [the] audience sits as courtroom spectators and not as a theater audience.<sup>59</sup>

The Dallas critics had learned the lessons of Summer and Smoke and Southern Exposure well. They feared the effects the impersonal picture-frame stage would have upon their intimate circular dramas. Even more so, they dreaded the damage the New York critics would inflict upon one of their own.

These fears were, for the most part, justified. Margo's reception by the New York critics, though sometimes favorable, was more often dismissive. That Margo was affected by the New York critics' opinion of her work on Broadway was clearly voiced in an interview she gave the New York Times after Summer and Smoke's opening:

. . . Miss Jones has felt a special responsibility to show Broadway skeptics she is better than

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<sup>59</sup>Rosenfield, "Broadway's Snatch . . .".



her record here, which—before "Summer and Smoke"—had not been too impressive. She came to town as assistant director to Eddie Dowling in "Glass Menagerie," as director of "On Whitman Avenue," a flop, and as director of "Joan of Lorraine," where she was replaced before the opening. A great deal more than the success of the single play hung on the reception of "Summer and Smoke." A failure at this point would have meant ammunition for those New Yorkers who sneer at enthusiasm in any form without a Broadway label. It would give them a cue to repeat their contention that Miss Jones is strictly for the backwoods.<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, these East Coast critics were more tolerant of Margo's work on her home ground. As Murray Schumach reported, ". . . [L]eading New York critics have gone to Texas with cynicism and returned with admiration."<sup>61</sup> This reaction most likely occurred simply because her Dallas productions contained at least two elements that her New York productions did not: (1) an intimate, novel facility, and (2) Margo's total control over all aspects of production. As a result, when several critics journeyed to Dallas to observe her innovative theatre, they were pleasantly surprised by her success and the quality of her productions. Brooks Atkinson, in particular, traveled to Dallas regularly and reported on the state of theatre in the hinterlands.

The ideal of acting has always been "a plank and a passion." But until you have seen a play well

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<sup>60</sup>Murray Schumach, "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway," New York Times Sunday Magazine, 17 October 1948, p. 19.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

produced without scenery and frankly as make-believe, you can hardly realize that acting is as normal as any other social expression . . . Since there is no sense to throwing out the baby with the bath, Broadway need not start dismantling its theatres nor retiring its scene designers to the farm. But "theatre-in-the-round" . . . has one very practical advantage. It makes silly plays more bearable in the theatre.<sup>62</sup>

Atkinson's conclusion that poor plays worked better in the intimate arena setting than on the distant proscenium stage may have had greater validity during the 1940s and 1950s when circular stages were still fairly novel. Atkinson's opinion, nevertheless, provides a significant clue to Margo's success in Dallas. Even the worst production still established a link with its audience through its proximity to them; no audience could dismiss its connection to the actors moving within an arm's length of it. As a result, the Dallas audiences may have been more likely to accept what Margo presented to them. That personal connection with the actors, no matter how effectively portrayed, was lost on the picture-frame stages of New York unless the play itself was also compelling enough to establish that link. On Broadway, poor plays and productions had little chance for survival.

Atkinson also recognized, perhaps before she herself did, that Margo's venture into circular staging was the product of expediency rather than preference and that her

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<sup>62</sup>Atkinson, "Theatre in Dallas."

needs could more readily be met with a flexible theatrical facility.

Some day Dallas will probably have to build Miss Jones a normal theatre with a conventional stage. . . . But it would be a pity if "theatre-in-the-round" . . . were ever abandoned completely. For it is much less cumbersome and complicated than the conventional stage, which is a negative virtue.<sup>63</sup>

He also commended Margo's selection of plays, stating that "the fare Miss Jones serves in Dallas is no insipid imitation of Broadway but original, nourishing[, ] and uncommonly well-balanced."<sup>64</sup> But occasionally she miscalculated, and when she brought a "silly," "insipid" play to Broadway, Atkinson was one of the first to condemn her production.

"Southern Exposure" looks like a stock job . . . none too expertly put on the stage. In her stage direction, the cyclonic Margo has conspired with [author Owen Crump] . . . to make "Southern Exposure" look like a stock company work. The performance is frantically humorous in all styles . . . Nearly everyone in the cast . . . is constantly breathless from excitement or confusion . . .<sup>65</sup>

The tenor of Atkinson's remarks about Southern Exposure was echoed by other New York critics when they reviewed the plays Margo directed on Broadway. Much of

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Atkinson, "Our Wandering Critic . . .".

<sup>65</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Owen Crump's 'Southern Exposure' Transplanted from Dallas to a Broadway Playhouse," New York Times, 27 September 1950.

their criticism was aimed at the playwrights, although Margo was often caught in the backlash of these comments. For example, Howard Barnes wrote in his review of On Whitman Avenue that "Margo Jones has afforded adequate direction when the script is moving somewhere, little of any when it bogs down."<sup>66</sup> In a similar vein, Irving Hoffman wrote of Joan of Lorraine that the play was "lopsided, undramatic, haphazardly directed, [and] lacking in thorough character study."<sup>67</sup> But the critical comments focusing on Margo's productions in New York reveal a singular uniformity of opinion regarding her pacing, staging, and interpretive abilities.

Margo's nemesis, the slow-moving pace of the productions, became a frequent target of the New York reviewers. During pre-Broadway try-outs of Summer and Smoke, Rollin Palmer wrote that

In spite of all this loving care bestowed upon it [by Margo in her direction], there were indications that many of its first night audience were beginning to think that [the] symbolic statue [Eternity] had come to be a reality before the final curtain descended.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Howard Barnes, "On Whitman Avenue," New York Herald-Tribune, 9 May 1946.

<sup>67</sup>Irving Hoffman, "Joan of Arch [sic]," The Hollywood Reporter, 19 November 1946, p. 3.

<sup>68</sup>Rollin Palmer, "Summer and Smoke Opens Run at Erlanger Theater," [Buffalo ?], [September 1948].

Margo apparently did not heed Palmer's subtle hint to pick up the pace. When the play arrived in New York, John Chapman remarked that

The scenic offering is about the only credit I can extend to Miss Jones, who also directed; except for scattered instants in which a couple of actors would get interested and get going, last evening's performance sounded like the work of a class in elocution.<sup>69</sup>

Another critic implied that the dialogue and its delivery caused the sedentary pace of the production: ". . . [A]s it is performed the conversation is stilted, repetitious[,] and without eloquence. Much of the dialogue is deliberately forced and contrived to express embarrassment."<sup>70</sup> He went on to say that "it seems fair to complain that the direction does little to distinguish the people as individuals."<sup>71</sup> Mary Nash thought that

The drama needs tightening, intensification[,] and emphasis in spots, a little speeding-up and perhaps cutting some of Alma's long speeches.<sup>72</sup>

At least one critic, however, suggested an explanation for the obscure motivations behind Margo's pacing of the play.

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<sup>69</sup>John Chapman, "'Summer and Smoke' a Talkative, Muddled, Drama of Repressed Sex," [New York] Daily News, 7 October 1948, p. 81.

<sup>70</sup>William Hawkins, "Tennessee 'Smoke' Smothers Its Fire," New York World-Telegraph, 7 October 1948.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Mary Nash, "Tennessee Williams' 'Summer and Smoke' Is Exciting Drama," Buffalo Evening Register, [September 1948].



Margo Jones has directed the play less for dramatic tempo than for the inner and subtler qualities of Tennessee Williams' script. She admirably brings out the tenderness of the drama and its tremulous and haunting nature.<sup>73</sup>

Unfortunately for Margo, although her attempts to emphasize the "subtler qualities" of Williams' play might have worked in the intimate arena setting, she failed to recognize that the distanced proscenium audience would lose patience with such subtlety.

Critics also found fault with pacing problems in Southern Exposure, one reviewer noting that "the romance . . . seems endless on the stage."<sup>74</sup>

Margo's staging techniques also drew sharp criticism from the New York critics. In most cases, it was a matter of too little or too much movement. Regarding Summer and Smoke, for example, George Jean Nathan wrote:

Miss Jones' direction . . . challenges the script sorely by, among other things, often seating the leading characters, the heroine in particular, downstage and having them fixedly address the audience, which gives the play the static flavor of a series of lectures.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Thomas R. Dash, "Summer and Smoke," Women's Wear Daily, 7 October 1948.

<sup>74</sup>"Southern Exposure," Time, 9 October 1950, pp. 86-88.

<sup>75</sup>George Jean Nathan, "The Menagerie Still Rides on the Streetcar," New York Journal-American, 18 October 1948, p. 12. Nathan's opinion in this instance may be suspect. It is to be remembered that Nathan was the critic, along with producer Louis J. Singer, who had challenged Margo's defense of Tennessee Williams' script, The Glass Menagerie, during the play's initial rehearsal period in Chicago; see Ch. 4, pp. 86-87.



Howard Barnes described Margo's staging as existing on a "plane of inertia."<sup>76</sup> Such commentary gives us our clearest indication that Margo, so able to create fluid movement patterns on her arena stage, was unable to simulate those patterns in her proscenium productions.

Inertia was not the problem with Southern Exposure, however, as the New York critics readily pointed out. "Margo Jones has staged it as if she cared about its being no better than [a B picture] . . ., reaching for the easy laugh, which does not turn out to be very easy after all."<sup>77</sup> Howard Barnes, obviously not caring for the play or Margo's interpretation of it, was more scathing in his comments:

Margo Jones . . . has brought the play from her arena theater . . . and has staged it after a fashion. She has postured the gay old Mississippi . . . against a pretty enough setting . . . She has had the Northern hero crawl frantically out of view of tourists, the heroine paint her toenails[,] and the Negro serving girl burst into a "hallelujah" or two. The action approximates pandemonium in the climax, but it makes for very little entertainment. Direction and acting have a way of emphasizing the lack of laughter in "Southern Exposure."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Howard Barnes, "The Theaters," New York Herald Tribune, 7 October 1948.

<sup>77</sup>Arthur Pollock, "'Southern Exposure' Resurrects Old Plots," Compass, 27 September 1950, p. 18.

<sup>78</sup>Barnes, "Southern Exposure."

Even more blunt was Gilbert Gabriel's assessment of the production: "The whole thing seemed to have been staged with a leaking spraygun. Give it back to Texas."<sup>79</sup>

Giving the play back to Texas pretty much comprised the opinion of most of the New York critics and constituted another fault they found with Margo. She seemed singularly unable to gauge the interest level of the New York audiences. As a result, Thomas Dash called Southern Exposure "just small town stuff."<sup>80</sup> Newsweek claimed that the "story . . . is an essentially parochial plot-pourri that isn't made any less so by Miss Jones's frantic direction."<sup>81</sup> Even earlier, Margo misjudged the Eastern temperament when she tried to bring An Old Beat-Up Woman to New York: "Originally done in arena-style at Dallas, 'Woman' may have had special appeal on its home ground, plus the novelty of experimental presentation in that unorthodox medium of expression."<sup>82</sup> This statement suggests that the play's "special appeal" did not extend to the East Coast and the proscenium stage.

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<sup>79</sup>Gabriel, "Southern Exposure."

<sup>80</sup>Thomas R. Dash, "Southern Exposure," Women's Wear Daily, 27 September 1950.

<sup>81</sup>"Southern Exposure," Newsweek, 9 October 1950, p. 84.

<sup>82</sup>"An Old Beat-Up Woman," Variety, 25 January 1950, p. 66. This review was written for the play's pre-Broadway try-out in New Haven.

Although the New York critics generally disapproved of Margo's work on Broadway, occasionally a few reviewers found her direction commendable. W. Ward Marsh, writing about Summer and Smoke's pre-Broadway trial in Cleveland, provided an interesting clue to the play's subsequent failure in New York when he wrote that

Margo Jones' direction is brilliant. I do not think that she always has the best [script? actors?] with which to work, but in the main her players have responded accurately and their interpretations of the characters . . . are strong.<sup>83</sup>

Commenting on the same production in Cleveland, another reviewer stated that

Margo Jones has directed the large cast . . . through Mr. Mielziner's handsome maze with a nice eye for the dangers of its traffic problems, has cued offstage music to heighten the mood and, I suspect, exacted all there was to be had from her favorite playwright's script and characters.<sup>84</sup>

Why should these critics come to such a radically different conclusion about a production that was generally condemned when it opened in New York a week later? One explanation certainly rested in the location of the reviewers—a Midwestern city only occasionally treated to professional theatrical fare. Adjunct to this reason lay

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<sup>83</sup>W. Ward Marsh, "'Summer and Smoke' Rated Most Unusual," Cleveland Plain Dealer, 28 September 1948, p. 18.

<sup>84</sup>Arthur Spaeth, "Show Time: Purity and Sin Battle to Draw at Hanna—Each is Winner in Latest Williams' Play," Cleveland News, 28 September 1948.

the fact that these reviewers had little with which to compare this production; in other words, there existed a small base of comparison with other professional theatrical ventures. Finally, there can be little doubt that the Cleveland critics were just more disposed to look upon this production kindly than their New York counterparts. In fact, only two New York critics generally agreed with the Ohioans' assessment: Brooks Atkinson and George Freedley, both of whom were regular visitors to Dallas and enthusiastic supporters of Margo's work there. Furthermore, Freedley's review of Summer and Smoke veered so far afield from the general New York consensus of the play as to appear blatantly biased in Margo's favor.

Though there are moments when the producer-director, Margo Jones, holds her scenes a shade too long for complete comfort, it is an expertly staged piece. She has arranged her scenes superbly so as to give the play every pictorial possibility without ever sacrificing character or disturbing the seeming reality of the play. It is the most assured piece of direction which Margo Jones has yet shown to Broadway audiences. This is mature work. The theater has every reason to be proud of Tennessee Williams and Margo Jones. God bless them! [emphasis mine]<sup>85</sup>

Margo's lack of success with the New York critics can be attributed to many factors—poor script choice, inappropriate set design, audience insensitivity, and ill-advised interpretation and staging, to name a few. Howev-

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<sup>85</sup>George Freedley, "Tennessee Williams at His Best in 'Summer and Smoke,'" The Morning Telegraph, 8 October 1948.

er, one important factor regarding Margo's failures in New York has not yet been taken into consideration—Margo's attitude towards the commercial theatre. As one outside the New York mainstream, Margo had breached the walls of Broadway's fortress with little comprehension of or sympathy for the commercial aspects of this theatrical institution and its refusal to foster change.

. . . Miss Jones has become slightly contemptuous of what she considers the archaic character of Broadway theatres. She points to the ancient architecture of the theatres; the failure to use new [lighting] control boards . . .; the neglect of plastics [in scenery]. She thinks the theatre owners . . . are just as much to blame as stultifying union regulations.<sup>86</sup>

As early as 1936, during her trip to the Moscow Art Theatre Festival, Margo had written that "there is . . . one great lesson that we should learn from the theatres of Russia and that is the deadening effect of commercialism on the theatre . . .".<sup>87</sup> While she was directing On Whitman Avenue, she expanded on this theme, using extremely strong and vivid language to describe her disgust with the Broadway theatre:

. . . [I]t's [Broadway's] a phoney business—once in the stream a lot of things can happen but the stream is muddy and stupid—true there are little undercurrents of beauty and even clear pools here and there but the water is

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<sup>86</sup>Schumach, 60.

<sup>87</sup>Margaret V. Jones, "Russian Theatre's Vigor Credited to Fact Actors Work for Art, Not Money," Houston Chronicle, 11 October 1936, p. 6.



tainted water—how could it be otherwise with the cesspools of commercialism pouring into it each day.<sup>88</sup>

Margo's antagonism towards the commercial theatre never diminished. The commercial theatre's demands for glitz and visual enhancements warred with her own preference for simplicity in production style. The intimacy between performer and audience that she valued so highly was diminished by the proscenium theatre's invisible fourth wall. She would easily have agreed with Brooks Atkinson's assessment of Broadway:

. . . [I]t is possible that dramas of a more poetic stature would be written if there were a single stage on Broadway free enough for poetic acting; . . . All stages on Broadway are built on the assumption that playwrights have limited imaginations and actors are cultivated ladies and gentlemen with good manners and no force of character. Our stages are perfect for dramas of low vitality.<sup>89</sup>

The profitability factor that motivated all commercial ventures directly contradicted Margo's belief that theatrical art was a necessary part of life, not just a business. Her desire for experimentation in theatrical production was devalued by New York's status quo. Her antipathy against the commercial theatre could have been summed up in these words:

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<sup>88</sup>Margo Jones to June Moll, n.d. [1946], Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX.

<sup>89</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Encircled Actors," New York Times, 10 June 1951, sec. 2, p. 1.



Commercial effort usually whittles itself down to a formula and of formula the public soon tires. The inspirational voltage of doing what one wants to do in the theater often brings a sincerity that captures patronage and makes its own formula.<sup>90</sup>

The tension created within herself with each Broadway venture must have been enormous. On the one hand, she compromised her ideals by participating in an institution that she despised and blamed for ruining the theatre in this country. On the other, she was provided with abundant resources to create the kind of art she believed essential to society. Margo knew well enough that a Broadway success could catapult playwrights, actors, designers, and directors to instant success, artistic credibility, and financial security—all of which would ensure future exciting forays into the world of theatre. As a result, Margo's fundamental disagreement with the commercial theatre and all that it stood for may have affected her work and subconsciously subverted her productions—whether it ever did so cannot be known.

In summary, Margo enjoyed critical support in her home arena. In Houston and Dallas, the critics supported her work, even when they disagreed with the results. They had a vested interest in her theatre's success and viability: if Margo's theatre produced plays regularly, if it

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<sup>90</sup>John Rosenfield, "Villain Still Pursues Her," Southwest Review 34 (Autumn 1949): 396.

continued to draw audiences, then they were served with a steady diet of plays to review. In Houston and Dallas, Margo and the critics were mutually supportive. There can be little doubt that, no matter how poor Margo's productions might be, the hometown reviewers would temper their criticism with some favorable commentary.

In New York, Margo was just one director among many —no critic's career depended on her success. As a result, she rarely attained the acceptance and approbation of those who judged her work. Viewed as a provincial, her errors of judgment in play selection and her inability to translate the script into acceptable stage pictures on the proscenium stage resulted in unfavorable, sometimes even cruel, reactions from the New York critics. Despite her failures in New York, Margo never considered changing her basic beliefs regarding her profession: For the Broadway critics, theatre was business; for Margo Jones, theatre was art.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION:

#### TO INHERIT THE WIND

There are two kinds of theatre, good and bad. Much as I should like to see theatre in America, I would rather have no theatre than bad theatre. What we must strive for is perfection and come as close to it as is humanly possible.

- Margo Jones

I believe that to create great theatre you must be an idealist and you must be able to convert your ideals into realities—practical realities—and you must never be content until your ideals have all come true.

- Margo Jones

I truthfully believe that putting on wise and true plays lifts the spirit and makes understanding among mankind. . . . I believe that fine theatre express[es] the spiritual qualities of the creative people in this world; and I believe that the creative people have a perception about life that makes it good to try to import to others.

- Margo Jones

Why, "To Inherit the Wind"? In part because the title captures the arc of Margo's career as director: from Hedda Gabler in Ojai, California, to Inherit the Wind in Dallas, but not on Broadway. But the title suggests, too, the fleeting nature of the director's—Margo's—art



and the manifest difficulty of passing it along as heritage.

That heritage dates back to the very first formal theatrical productions. From the time of the ancient Greeks, when playwrights helped choreograph the movements of the choruses they hired, to the Middle Ages, when the pageant master guided laypeople through the religious cycle plays, to the Renaissance, when actor-playwrights supervised productions of their own works, to the Romantic era, when actor-managers superintended the financial and artistic aspects of their companies, to the Industrial Age, when the director we know today emerged—the director's art has been present. And though an audience can never know how much of the actor's, designer's, or playwright's art reflects the director's contribution and vision, a director's hand has nevertheless guided the production to its fleeting moments of life. A long tradition—and one to which Margo Jones aspired. She elected to embrace the legacy of the director's art—she elected to inherit the wind.

Margaret Virginia Jones was a small-town girl with big-town ambitions who never took "No" for an answer. Her mission in life was clear to her from the age of eleven, and she never wavered from her course. From the backyard productions she directed as a child to the bright lights of Broadway, Margo, with single-minded purpose, pursued

her objective of bringing quality theatre to the people of America.

Since I was 11 I have been a confirmed disciple of the theater. I feel its present deficiencies and needs so keenly that I can think of no more fruitful field of effort than to contribute to the renaissance of a professional theater of true distinction on a national scale.<sup>1</sup>

She set for herself three major goals: (1) to direct, (2) to present good plays, especially original ones, and (3) to decentralize the American theatre. She sought to accomplish these goals by establishing first a community theatre in Houston and then a professional repertory company in Dallas, and by directing plays in New York.

Having examined at length what Margo did to fulfill what she considered her mission in life, what exactly have we discovered about Margo Jones, director?

First, Margo was a director for whom the play and the playwright were the motivating forces in any theatre. She believed so fervently in the importance of good plays that she refused to direct plays other than those that were "classical" or "original." In this way she proposed to acquaint her audiences and, indeed, her nation with her vision of a strong, vital, innovative theatre that offered the best plays of the past and present alike. She was committed to nurturing living playwrights. She felt so

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<sup>1</sup>Nelson Bell, "Margo Shoots at Miracles—Paying Ones," Washington Post, 10 November 1946, sec. 6, p. 1.

strongly on this issue that she consistently refused to interfere with the playwright's muse, thus occasionally permitting unpolished works to appear on her stages. But to Margo, this possible disservice to her audiences was secondary to the service she rendered her playwrights.

Second, Margo was a director who recognized that the actors were central to communicating the playwright's words, actions, and ideas and, as such, were the messengers of the playwright's vision as she interpreted it. Through enthusiastic support of and confidence in their abilities, she motivated actors to explore their own art and create believable characterizations for her productions. She did not allow herself as director to interfere with their creative freedom and for this refusal she was sometimes criticized.

Third, Margo was a director for whom the visual aspects of production were never of primary importance. As a result, she tended not to involve herself with design decisions, preferring to leave this aspect of production to her colleagues. She favored simple scene designs over grandiose ones and often selected lighting and sound as her primary design elements. Lights and music were used extensively to create the mood of the piece she was directing. She also favored elaborate costuming whenever appropriate. In this way, the physical presence of the actors gained emphasis, and neither the actors' portrayals



nor the playwright's words were overshadowed by spectacular visual effects.

Fourth, as director, Margo came to prefer letting the movement patterns of the play develop organically out of the script and the actors' reactions to it. Although she initially followed the regiebuch tradition, blocking her plays in advance, she discovered that by doing so she somehow stifled the creative energies of actor and director alike. By the early 1940s, she had therefore abandoned the regiebuch in favor of a more organic approach.<sup>2</sup>

Fifth, Margo started her career as a proscenium director, but expediency thrust upon her the innovative role of arena director, a role from which she never escaped—nor wished to. Though she always considered herself competent in either space, her directing record strongly suggests that, as time went on, her proficiency in circular staging increased as her ability to direct in-the-flat waned. Whether she became so accustomed to the sculptured style of arena staging that she failed to adapt that style to, or even recognize its unsuitability for, proscenium productions cannot be known. Nevertheless,

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<sup>2</sup>Vestiges of this regiebuch tradition appeared in Margo's early work on Broadway, however. Margo's promptbook for On Whitman Avenue (1946) suggested that she was still, even at this date, blocking in advance, although the promptbook does not indicate how much of this blocking actually was used in the production.

Margo's final years were beset by several significant failures on the picture-frame stage.

Sixth, Margo was a director for whom the critical reception of her work reflected in many ways her success, or failure, on the various stages on which she worked. Houston and Dallas critics praised her efforts, even when they were disappointing. New York critics found little to commend in her New York (proscenium) productions, even though these critics, too, favored her efforts in Texas.

Having described Margo's directing methods and attitudes, what can we conclude about the relationship between her directing and her position within the American theatre of her time?

First, Margo was a director who despised the commercial theatre, and this factor may help explain her regional successes and commercial failures. In New York, the weight of critical opinion was indisputable. The economics of the Broadway stage dictated that reviews be favorable in order for productions to be successful, and that profits were contingent upon a long run, most often achieved by means of critical approval. Margo's theatrical vision, however, held no room for a theatre that discouraged playwrights, actors, designers, and directors alike merely because one person's opinion was unfavorable. Likewise, she found something debilitating in the long-run, believing it to be a system that discouraged experi-

mentation and creative change. For Margo Jones, "Everything in life is theatre,"<sup>3</sup> and the New York theatre provided a fairly stagnant form of life.

Margo's direction was at its best when she presented the script and the actors with simplicity and honesty. When she chose a more ostentatious style of production—the style that defines the commercial Broadway theatre—she almost always failed. Her philosophy of theatre did not account for the glitz and glamour usually associated with the commercial theatre. Whenever she attempted to evoke that image, either through scenery, action, or characterization, she was unsuccessful.<sup>4</sup> As a result, she almost always chose the simplest designs possible, relying on lighting and music to create the atmosphere for her productions and the audience's imagination to supply the rest. She once wrote the following about directing plays in-the-round, but I suggest it applied to every play she ever directed and constituted, in essence, her theory of directing:

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<sup>3</sup>"One Aim in Life—Theatre: An Appreciation," New York Times, 26 July 1955. This article was written as an appreciation of Margo's life the day after she died.

<sup>4</sup>There can be little doubt that Summer and Smoke's failure on Broadway was directly connected to Margo's failure to limit Jo Mielziner's spectacular design for the set and lighting. Similarly, in her New York production of Southern Exposure, Margo chose a broadly farcical method of stage action for a simple romantic comedy, a method that failed to achieve its goal and, instead, degenerated into poor slapstick comedy.



When you begin directing plays in the round, just try to hang on to two principles . . .

One. Every audience has a rich and powerful imagination with which it can solve most of your problems. . . . In this lies the answer to almost every problem of staging. The audience's imagination, stimulated by creative acting, and controlled by flexible and intelligent lighting . . . can do anything!

Two. Remember that nothing takes the place of good acting.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, Margo's very approach to directing was anathema to Broadway's model. For her, the script and the actor were central to the theatre. She strove for a style of production that emphasized the action and downplayed the technical enhancements. This tendency, appearing in her earliest productions in Houston, continued throughout her career.

Second, Margo Jones was a woman who almost succeeded in a man's world, an "exceptional woman," one of the "top girls." She believed that women enjoyed equal opportunity in pursuing theatrical careers.

Fortunately there is no discrimination against women [in theatre]. Obviously they are needed as actresses, but there are also women playwrights, producers, directors, technicians, agents, play readers, business managers, theatrical secretaries, and production assistants. In most of these fields the demand for women is as great as for men, and the person with the greatest aptitude and preparation gets the job regardless of sex.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Margo Jones, "Theatre-in-the-Round," Players Magazine (December 1948): 53.

<sup>6</sup>Margo Jones, "For Those With Courage: The Theater," The Zontian (March/April 1951): 5.

I am in complete agreement with Mr. [George Bernard] Shaw when he says "Women directors are at no disadvantage in comparison with men."<sup>7</sup>

Although Margo never believed that her gender was the source of either her firings or her poor reviews, the statistics on female directors presented earlier in this study call her optimism into question.

Moreover, Margo's own writings—her book, letters, articles—reveal a subconscious acceptance of the assumption that the role of director falls within the male sphere of influence. For example, she consistently used male pronouns whenever discussing the director, testifying to her (and her culture's) ingrained belief that the male generic could denote all people. This belief was so ingrained as to be invisible and, thus, acceptable. Recent research, however, has shown that male—so-called generic—pronouns are not universal and that their use does, in fact, comprise a subtle form of discrimination.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Margo Jones to Lillian Masters, n.d., Typed carbon copy, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX. Shaw was, of course, writing about women's ability, not their opportunity, to direct. Margo was quoting from Shaw's book, The Art of Rehearsal (New York: Samuel French, 1928).

<sup>8</sup>Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," American Historical Review 91 (December 1986): 1053-1075; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Hearing Women's Words: A Feminist Reconstruction of History" in Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 11-52; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Writing History: Language, Class, and Gender" in Feminist Studies, Critical Studies, ed. Teresa de Laurentis (Bloomington: Indiana University

Margo Jones did, however, successfully pursue a career in the male-dominated profession of directing. How and why she surmounted established attitudes against female directors, particularly on Broadway, may offer special insights into her career as director. There is now ample evidence that women in general—and women in directing—tend to be located in the margins, where there is less power, less visibility, and less money.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore not surprising that female directors appeared infrequently on Broadway, the center of the American theatre. Five reasons commonly given for the exclusion of female directors from Broadway after World War II are (1) the "back-to-the-home" movement, (2) a re-emphasis on the Victorian stereotype of women's emotional make-up, (3) the identification of the role of director with the status of power, (4) the high cost of Broadway productions, and (5) the declining number of Broadway productions.<sup>10</sup> By examining Margo's relationship to each of these factors, we may gain clues to her apparent exception from them.

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Press, 1986), 31-54; Casey Miller and Kate Swift, Words and Women (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976).

<sup>9</sup>R.M. Kanter, Men and Women of the Corporation (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Bell Hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup>See Ch. 2, pp. 41-49, of this study for further explanation of these reasons.



Although Margo directed five plays on Broadway between 1945 and 1950 (with at least one other planned for a Broadway opening that did not materialize), her professional directing career was primarily a provincial one. Margo's reputation as director was established before she ever staged a show on Broadway. Furthermore, her first venture in New York found her co-directing a play with a male director. "Eighty-seven productions opened in the 1944-45 Broadway season; only four were directed by women."<sup>11</sup> Margo's co-director also played the male lead, however, and "all evidence points to the belief that Margo Jones assumed the greater proportion of directing the play."<sup>12</sup> Whatever her contribution, Margo had joined the ranks of Broadway directors—from the margins and through the agency of a male co-worker.

Once on Broadway, Margo was not an easy candidate to go "back-to-the-home." As a single woman, she had chosen a career over a family. She was not depriving children of a mother's love nor sacrificing a husband's devotion for

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<sup>11</sup>Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989), 73. Margo, as co-director of The Glass Menagerie, was considered one of those women.

<sup>12</sup>June B. Larsen, "Margo Jones: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982), 133-134. Larsen's evidence on this point is weak. However, most works dealing with this subject tend to concur. See Sheehy, 73-78; Donald Spoto, The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 121.

personal fulfillment. Furthermore, the theatre never was an employer of great masses—nor was it during Margo's lifetime. The idea that she might be depriving an honest man of his livelihood seemed absurd. And so, while married female directors might have felt the post-war pressure to return home and make babies, Margo probably was exempt from that pressure.

Too, Margo Jones' personality diverged extravagantly from the female stereotype of her time.

. . . [Margo was] characterized by Thornton Wilder as "fighter, builder, explorer, and mixer of truth and magic," and christened by Tennessee Williams the "Texas Tornado" and a "combination of Joan of Arc and Gene Autry—and nitroglycerine."<sup>13</sup>

Far from being the shy, retiring woman created by male Victorian minds, Margo was "outgoing, gregarious," able "to meet people with great ease."<sup>14</sup> Of Margo, Lilian Bayless said,

She was a man, I mean a woman of amazing energy.  
. . . I guess the reason I did that Freudian slip . . . and said a man, was because she . . .

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<sup>13</sup>Thornton Wilder to Margo Jones, 18 February 1950, Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin (Donald Wilmeth reported that this letter, dated 19 February 1950, was held by the Dallas Public Library); Interview with David Greggory; Tennessee Williams to Margo Jones, n.d., Margo Jones Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin; all sources quoted in Sheehy, 2-3.

<sup>14</sup>Larsen, 27.

did have the kind of vitality that a really high-pressured businessman might have.<sup>15</sup>

Murray Schumach reported that

In her approach to life, Margo Jones has an earthy quality that is almost masculine. This may be merely the result of a robust constitution and a childhood spent largely outdoors . . . Her speech, apart from her command of profanity, is partial to such expressions as "You gotta put up or shut up."<sup>16</sup>

However, in terms of her personality,

Jones' charm, her ability to communicate, and her extraordinary vitality were her greatest assets. She was sincere, sensitive, and she had innocence. . . . Fortunately, she was also intelligent. Add to this an aura of invulnerability and fixed vision of what she wanted to accomplish, and you have "the Margo mystique."<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore,

Jones had ambition and drive that is [sic] usually associated with the male sex, yet Jones was in no way a masculine woman. She was quite feminine in manner as well as dress. It is doubtful that Margo Jones would, could, have secured the cooperation of the businessmen of Dallas . . . had she not been a gentle woman.<sup>18</sup>

Given these attributes, little wonder that Margo was not accused of being emotionally weak and unable to hold her own with the big boys. Anyone nicknamed "tornado" could

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<sup>15</sup>Lilian Bayless, Interview by Carole Cohen, 12 March 1974, interview #32, transcript, Southern Methodist University Oral History Program on the Performing Arts, Dallas, TX.

<sup>16</sup>Murray Schumach, "A Texas Tornado Hits Broadway," New York Times Sunday Magazine, 17 October 1948, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>Larsen, 44.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 147.



easily explode any lingering images of the stereotypically helpless female.

Issues of money, and the power that it brings, Margo sidestepped by becoming her own producer in Dallas and, in New York, for Summer and Smoke (1948) and Southern Exposure (1950). For these plays, Margo went straight to the top of the hierarchichal structure on Broadway, raising the funds and hiring herself as director. In so doing, Margo was following the leads of Minnie Maddern Fiske, Eva Le Gallienne, and Margaret Webster, who founded their own companies as a means of guaranteeing directing careers in New York. In fact, Margo's desire to start her own theatre may have had its very roots in her desire to direct. Such was certainly the case later with Zelda Fichandler, who explained: "Producing was an enabling means of my directing . . . I started wanting to have a theatre in order to fulfill my directing impulse."<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Margo's base in Dallas, home to wealthy oil producers and cattle ranchers, provided much of the funding for her New York ventures, and it allowed her to bypass the more critical, wary, and possibly biased New York backers. By producing the shows she directed, Margo was taking the offensive, declaring that in New York, as

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<sup>19</sup>Interview with Zelda Fichandler; quoted in Shirlee Hennigan, "The Woman Director in the Contemporary, Professional Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1983), 105.

well as in Dallas, she would be her own boss. Her decision to produce as well as direct on Broadway most likely developed after her dismissal from Joan of Lorraine.

Significantly, following her firing from Joan of Lorraine, [Margo] . . . would work only for herself. In the future she would be in control, as much as possible, and not at the mercy of a capricious producer or a volatile star.<sup>20</sup>

From co-director to producer-director in less than five years was a remarkable accomplishment. Yet Margo's directing career on Broadway ended abruptly. After 1950 she was not to direct in New York again. Significantly, when she produced her biggest hit on Broadway, Inherit the Wind, she chose not to direct it.

The last success Margo had on Broadway was her first New York play, The Glass Menagerie. Her subsequent Broadway experiences had not been happy ones: she had been fired from Joan of Lorraine and disappointed by Summer and Smoke's New York reception and the failures of Southern Exposure and An Old Beat-Up Woman. Several factors influenced her decision not to direct Inherit the Wind in New York. To begin with, her directing record in the commercial theatre was not one that would inspire confidence in prospective investors. Also, the memory of the overwhelming success of the Dallas production of Summer and Smoke followed by the play's Broadway failure probably influenced her decision not to risk staging Inherit the Wind in New York. She knew the enormous energy required to direct a large play there, and with the year-round responsibility of her theatre in Dallas, it was energy she simply did not have. . . . Besides, directing plays in the commercial theatre had never been Margo's primary goal.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Sheehy, 123.

<sup>21</sup>Sheehy, 255-256.



Despite her tarnished reputation on Broadway, Margo had accomplished what relatively few women had done: she was—and would always be—a Broadway director.

But Margo was a Broadway director who was also a woman. And one who apparently shared traits, identified by recent research, with contemporary female directors. Shirlee Hennigan, for example, has isolated four characteristics that distinguish female directors from their male counterparts: (1) the ability to communicate, (2) the capacity for collaboration, (3) the sensitivity to the complexities of human relationships, and (4) the faculty for coordination and synthesis.<sup>22</sup>

Although such research cannot be applied retroactively to Margo's directing techniques, and because no similar research was being conducted during Margo's lifetime, any similarities encountered here between Margo and contemporary female directors can do no more than raise provocative questions about Margo's methods as a female director. Nevertheless, such questions can provide fertile ground for future study about Margo Jones in particular and female directors in general.

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<sup>22</sup>Hennigan, 41. Hennigan's third chapter (41-58) analyzed these characteristics which were based on her numerous interviews and surveys of female directors. The universality of most female directors' methods and experience struck Hennigan as significant.



When Hennigan noted that female directors communicated feelings more effectively, anticipated needs and problems more readily, suppressed their egos for the common good more willingly, provided intimate modes of communication more often, and pursued their goals more persistently than did male directors, she was foreshadowing much of the current research in communication differences between women and men.<sup>23</sup>

Because the directing process incorporates many of the skills needed in small group, interpersonal, and organizational communication, by pinpointing traits that are gender-related in these three areas, we may come to identify directing methods that are gender-influenced. By so doing, we may better understand Margo Jones' strategies for directing.

Studies of the differences between male and female communication indicate that men and women "come to understand the world in ways that are distinct."<sup>24</sup> As a

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 42-47. See also Barbara Westbrook Eakins and R. Gene Eakins, Sex Differences in Human Communication (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1978).

<sup>24</sup>Marlene G. Fine, "New Voices in Organizational Communication: A Feminist Commentary and Critique," in Transforming Visions: Feminist Critiques in Speech Communication, ed. Sheryl Perlmutter Bowen and Nancy Wyatt (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co., in press). Also see Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self,

result, their methods of communication differ significantly, with males' "influence strategies . . . [being] assertive and direct" and females' being "indirect, submissive, and people-oriented . . .".<sup>25</sup> Women's communicative strategies are geared less towards achieving goals and more towards achieving cooperation.<sup>26</sup> Such differing communicative strategies may imply that men speak in a language of self-interest, whereas women speak in a language of "showing care."<sup>27</sup>

This conclusion can be taken one step further in exploring how men and women—and, perhaps by extension, male and female directors—view power and its use. Since men tend to communicate from a stance of self-interest, they "equate power with a personal style characterized by aggressiveness towards others," resulting in competitive

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Voice, and Mind (New York: Basic Books, 1986); and E.F. Keller, Reflections on Gender and Science (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>25</sup>G.T. Fairhurst, "Male-Female Communications on the Job: Literature Review and Commentary" in Communication Yearbook, ed. M.L. McLaughlin (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1986), 103.

<sup>26</sup>C.S. Stoll and P.T. McFarlane, "Sex Differences in Game Strategy" in Sexism: Scientific Debates, ed. C.S. Stoll (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1973), 622-657; E.J. Aries, "Interaction Patterns and Themes of Male, Female, and Mixed Groups," Small Group Behavior 7 (1976): 7-18.

<sup>27</sup>Gilligan; Julia T. Wood, "Different Voices in Relationship Crises: An Extension of Gilligan's Theory," American Behavioral Scientists 29 (1986): 273-301.



relationships.<sup>28</sup> Women, on the other hand, tend to see power as the ability to bring about a "fair outcome" through "collaboration toward mutual goals and with a win-win orientation."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, women in leadership roles are more likely to make decisions by "seeking to minimize harm" to those within their sphere of influence.<sup>30</sup>

"The true representation of power . . . is not of a big man beating a smaller man or woman. Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter." In this definition of the concept, power is not a uni-directional force exerted by an agent on others, but a dynamic relationship among group members implying both a willingness to share one's ideas and an openness to consider the ideas of others.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Fine, 16. See also Marlene G. Fine, F.L. Johnson, K.A. Foss, "Student Perceptions of Gender in Managerial Communication," Women's Studies in Communication 14 (in press); Stoll and McFarlane, "Sex Differences in Game Strategy" in Sexism: Scientific Debates, 622-657; Deborah Tannen, You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), 23-73.

<sup>29</sup>Nancy Wyatt, "Organizing and Relating: Feminist Critique of Small Group Communication" in Transforming Visions, 29. See also J.E. Baird, Jr., "Sex Differences in Group Communication: A Review of Relevant Research," Quarterly Journal of Speech 62 (1976): 179-192; Julia T. Wood, "Feminist Scholarship in Communication: Consensus, Diversity, and Conversation Among Researchers," Women's Studies in Communication 11 (1988): 22-27; C. Kramerae, M. Schultz, and W.M. O'Barr, eds., Language and Power (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984); Tannen, 23-73.

<sup>30</sup>Wyatt, 12. See also Gilligan.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid, 16. Quoted material is from Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Writing a Woman's Life (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 18.

Another implication of these differing communicative strategies is that in goal-oriented endeavors, "we would expect [that, for women,] maintaining a connection [among the participants] to be a more primary goal than achieving a positive balance sheet."<sup>32</sup> Studies have indicated that males' interests lay in task performance, whereas females' priorities reside in group maintenance.<sup>33</sup>

Women's communication has been described as focusing on maintenance of relationships, avoiding overt conflict, and promoting social unity and cohesion. . . . "connected learning" [has been described] as a style of learning and knowing preferred by women. Connected knowing is a process of empathy or an attempt to "share the experience that has led the person to form the idea."<sup>34</sup>

Using the conclusions formulated by these studies, we may now return to Margo's directing methods and explore whether her techniques, especially with actors and playwrights, centered around strategies of communication currently identified as female-related. If so, future re-

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<sup>32</sup>Julia T. Wood, "Enlarging Conceptual Boundaries: A Critique in Interpersonal Communication" in Transforming Visions, 7.

<sup>33</sup>B.A. Fisher, "Content and Relationship Dimensions of Communication in Decision-Making Groups," Communication Quarterly 27 (1979): 3-11; B.A. Fisher, Small-Group Decision-Making: Communication and the Group Process (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973); L.B. Rosenfeld, Human Interaction in the Small Group Setting (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1973); R. Napier and M.K. Gershenfeld, Groups: Theory and Experiences (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

<sup>34</sup>Wyatt, 13-14. Quoted material from Belenky, et al., 113.

searchers might wish to examine the implications of such findings.

Margo's relationship to her actors was intimate and friendly; she worked at creating a rehearsal atmosphere that nurtured and encouraged their talent. Her emphasis on nurturing playwrights, being sensitive to actors' needs, and creating rituals to personalize the rehearsal process contributed to the sense of "family" she hoped to achieve with each company she hired, each cast she directed. This emphasis often resulted in creative ways of forestalling problems related to fatigue, frustration, and personality conflicts before they erupted into full-scale disruptions.<sup>35</sup> Such behavior may be closely aligned to aspects of group maintenance identified with female communication.

For Margo, the production came before all else, including her own personal needs, another trait suggestive of patterns of interpersonal communication currently associated with women. Her correspondence, her conversations, her actions repeatedly demonstrated a selfless-

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid. For a discussion on the use of rituals and nonverbal cues as an effective communication strategy for women, see M. Presnell, "Narrative Gender Differences: Orality and Literacy" in Doing Research on Women's Communication: Perspectives on Theory and Method, ed. K. Carter and C. Spitzack (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co., 1989), 118-136; D.J. Jones, "Gossip: Notes on Women's Oral Culture," Women's Studies International Quarterly 3 (1980): 193-198.



ness both admirable and foolhardy. Even in her most humiliating moment—her dismissal from Joan of Lorraine—she placed the good of the play before the good of her reputation and ego.<sup>36</sup>

Margo's "intuitive" directing style, so often criticized, is also suggestive of characteristics found in recent research on female interpersonal communication.<sup>37</sup> Actors believed that Margo often anticipated or intuited their actions and movements during rehearsals. She was also readily able to determine when a move or line-reading was "right," although she rarely could point the actor toward that same move or line-reading.

Clearly, Margo's directing methods share some of the communicative skills that researchers now attribute to women and that Hennigan, in 1983, ascribed to female

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<sup>36</sup>See Ch. 4, pp. 100-101. I. Diamond and N. Hartsock have developed a theory in which they "reject concepts of interests [as a motivational force in women] . . . and propose needs as a concept more appropriate to women's ways of experiencing and acting within interpersonal relationships"; I. Diamond and N. Hartsock, "Beyond Interests in Politics: A Comment on Virginia Sapiro's 'When Are Interests Interesting?'" American Political Science Review 75 (1981): 717-723. Diamond and Hartsock are proposing that women are motivated to act, not on behalf of their own personal interests, but rather of the behalf of that which they perceive to have the greatest need.

<sup>37</sup>In her article, Marlene Fine reveals that "one of the most acknowledged ways of knowing for women is through subjective knowledge," a type of knowledge usually considered [by male scientists] as "non-scientific" and, as a result, invalid as a way of knowing. Most men discount decision-making based on "woman's intuition" as a legitimate operational mode (7-8).



directors. Furthermore, the capacity for collaboration that Hennigan identified as a female directorial trait is probably an extension of these same communicative strategies employed by women—and one which Margo also shared.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, we find only one factor that Hennigan attributed to female directors absent from Margo's work: sensitivity to the need for developing relationships among characters during rehearsals. No evidence suggests that Margo placed any particular emphasis on relational development during her rehearsals.

Hennigan's fourth characteristic, the female director's ability to coordinate and synthesize the parts of a theatrical production into a whole, is specious.<sup>39</sup> It was the desire for coordination and synthesis that led such innovators as Saxe-Meiningen and Wagner, among others, to voice the need for a director in the theatre. Coordination and synthesis comprise, by definition, the modern director's role in the theatrical process and,

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<sup>38</sup>See Belenky, et al.; D. Hall and K. Langellier, "Storytelling Strategies in Mother-Daughter Communication" in Women Communicating: Studies of Women's Talk, ed. Barbara Bates and Anita Taylor (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co., 1988), 107-126; M. Nelson, "Women's Ways: Interactive Patterns in Predominantly Female Research Teams" in Bates and Taylor, 199-232.

<sup>39</sup>Hennigan, 52-55. Much of Hennigan's thinking on this subject was based on Betty Edwards' book, Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, Inc., 1979).

therefore, must be abilities evident in both male and female directors.

Although many of Margo's directing techniques clearly parallel those identified by current scholarship as typical communicative strategies for women, and by Hennigan as representative of contemporary female directors, no firm conclusions are yet possible. Further research into the social and gender issues of Margo's own society is required before connections, if any, can be made among Margo's directing methods, those of other directors of the time, both male and female, and communication strategies that are gender-specific.

Finally, it must be reiterated that Margo never perceived herself to be a "female" director nor a "feminist" one. From her point of view, the theatrical world, even though it was a primarily male one, held no bias. Clearly, Margo's view was colored by her own singularity within that theatrical world, a singularity that rarely extended to female directors in general.

But Margo was more than a woman in a man's world; she was an experimental director in a conservative theatre. Evidence suggests that Margo was a director ahead of her times. Born out of the impulses that motivated the art theatre movement of the 1890s and early 1900s and that influenced the Little Theatre movement of the 1920s and 1930s, Margo's directorial methods foreshadowed the non-

traditional production methods of the 1960s. Her bare-bones style of production was evocative of the open stages prevalent during the height of America's Avant-garde—the late 1950s and the 1960s. By concentrating the focus of the production on the actor and away from scenic enhancements, Margo anticipated the work of Jerzy Grotowski (1933-) and Joseph Chaikin (1935-), among others.<sup>40</sup> Grotowski de-emphasized scenery in order to create a "spectator-actor relationship appropriate to each production."<sup>41</sup> Chaikin founded the Open Theatre in 1963, expressly to "explore ensemble acting without the pressures involved in a commercial theatre."<sup>42</sup>

Similarly, Margo's emphasis on discovering new playwrights and presenting their works in a public forum found later expression in the off-off-Broadway movement of the 1960s. Producers such as Ellen Stewart (1931-) of Cafe LaMama encouraged a "playwright's theatre where talent was nourished"<sup>43</sup> by presenting original works in accessible

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<sup>40</sup>Jerzy Grotowski, Towards a Poor Theatre (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968); Joseph Chaikin, The Presence of the Actor; Notes on the Open Theater, Disguises, Acting, and Repression (New York: Antheneum, 1972).

<sup>41</sup>Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay, Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since the Late Nineteenth Century, 2d ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 396.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 393.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 375.



settings. By so doing, such producers provided an environment in which aspiring playwrights could experiment and develop their talent in a comparatively risk-free environment.

Margo's efforts to decentralize the American theatre bore fruit during her lifetime and continued to do so after her death. Succeeding decades witnessed a truly remarkable growth of professional regional theatres across this country: Washington's Arena Stage, New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre, Louisville's Actor's Theatre, Los Angeles' Mark Taper Forum, Minneapolis' Guthrie Theatre, and Seattle's Repertory Theatre, to name a few.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, a plethora of intimate, non-commercial theatres devoted to reforming or reorganizing conventional theatrical theories and methods through experimental techniques or to challenging the status quo through provocative political repertoires sprang up in the 1960s and 1970s. Groups such as the Living Theatre and the Open Theatre sought alternative forms for theatrical expression. Others, such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, El Teatro Campesino, and the Bread and Puppet Theater, hoped

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<sup>44</sup>For a more complete listing of American regional theatres, see Joseph Wesley Zeigler, Regional Theatre: The Revolutionary Stage (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973).

to effect social change through their theatrical performances.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Margo's decision to present professional theatre in a non-traditional setting, the arena, foreshadowed the emergence of numerous alternative spaces during the 1950s and 1960s. Theatres like the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., the Alley Theatre in Houston, Circle-in-the-Square in New York, and the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, with their flexible or non-proscenium stages, have encouraged creative and innovative approaches to staging.

Such examples clearly illustrate that much of what Margo did as a director pointed directions that would be taken by other theatrical practitioners during the short-lived theatrical renaissance of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

Perhaps because so many of her methods anticipated future theatrical trends, those same methods were sometimes misunderstood during her own time. Her direction was constantly accused of being intuitive, implying that what she did as a director was accidental. But this study demonstrates that Margo's directorial techniques were far from accidental. Her directing methods encompassed a willingness to take risks, to experiment with new ways of

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<sup>45</sup>For a more thorough discussion of experimental and political theatres, see Theodore Shank, American Alternative Theater (New York: Grove Press, 1982).

doing things, even though such methods often confused co-workers and audiences alike. Nevertheless, there was method to her perceived methodlessness.

This evaluation leads to another conclusion about Margo's directing: Margo's view of theatre was focused on the process of creation, not on its product. Despite her crusade to bring fine theatre to all audiences, Margo seemed to view the finished product as secondary to the creative impulse. She enjoyed the collaboration that theatre demanded of its artists; it was this experience that she sought with each new production and that, indeed, may have been the basis for her decision to start a repertory theatre in which new plays were constantly being produced.

Margo's focus as a director was to expose audiences to the experience of theatre, rather than to present a particularly well polished example of it. This emphasis was constantly reiterated throughout her career by herself and others.

Although [Skaal] . . . was the least popular [play] of the season, . . . Miss Jones considered it a vivid example of why a theatre like hers had to exist. She felt that in a season of eight plays, the theatre should be able to produce at least one script that appealed to the actors or the director, even though the public popularity might be limited [emphasis mine].<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Margo Jones to George Freedley, 12 January 1949, Margo Jones Collection, Dallas Public Library; cited in Don Burton Wilmeth, "A History of the Margo Jones Theatre"



That Margo wanted people to come to the theatre for the value of the experience rather than to see a specific production is reinforced by an incident involving Margo, witnessed by director Adrian Hall:

Margo would not be put down [by displeased audience members]. An audience member would say in the lobby, "Margo, that was a terrible show, just terrible!"—and Margo would say, "Oh, baby, you'll enjoy next week's lots more. I'm glad you're coming next week, 'cause you're gonna love that!"<sup>47</sup>

Margo's desire to direct new plays and her mission to expose audiences to them developed deliberately. She believed that audiences needed to be trained in the fine art of theatre-going and that they should be exposed to as many different kinds of theatrical experiences as possible. Furthermore, that these experiences be pleasurable was not one of Margo's requirements:

Theatre '54 . . . is an institution. . . . They [season ticket-holders] and thousands of others go regularly [to Margo's theatre,] even saying, "I have seats Thursday night, I hear it's lousy." Of late they have been awakened to the experimental nature of their recreation and have been solicited to send their opinion on the new scripts to the management. As often as not they disagree sharply with the newspaper reviews.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Taped answers to questionnaire by Adrian Hall, June 1972; quoted in Zeigler, 21. Hall, who was to become a prominent director in his own right, was trained by Margo in Dallas.

<sup>48</sup>John Rosenfield, "After Seven Years a Tenth Season," Southwest Review 40 (Winter 1955): 82.

Joseph Zeigler reported that "Margo had an uncanny ability to reconcile her insistence on new plays with her audience's reluctance [to see them]." <sup>49</sup> That she accomplished her purpose appears evident from John Rosenfield's comments that "Margo's public is somewhat trained to accept the experimental quality of her repertoire and to patronize a failure as well as a success if it be not intolerable." <sup>50</sup>

Like all regular attendants at her [Margo's] theater this writer [Rosenfield] has had moments when he would like to tweak the managing director's pretty blobby nose for inflicting the evening's entertainment. He and others have held forth indignantly in living rooms on the subject. But going through the whole play list since the start we, for one, can find but eight out of the sixty-six [original plays produced and directed by Margo] that shouldn't have happened. Six of these, significantly, were in the seasons of the greatest insincerity, when sights were set on Broadway curtains and Texas sucker money. This leaves but two others that represent censurable taste on Margo's part. <sup>51</sup>

And this factor ultimately spelled the difference between Margo's success as a director in Dallas and her failure as same in New York. Her Dallas audiences were willing to "patronize a failure" for they could always "come again

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<sup>49</sup>Zeigler, 21.

<sup>50</sup>John Rosenfield, "Common Sense in 'Blind Spot' Leaves Only Piece of Play," Dallas Morning News, [c. 12 February 1952].

<sup>51</sup>Rosenfield, "After Seven Years . . .," 81.

next week" and perhaps see a success. New York could not, and would not, afford Margo that same luxury.

Finally we come to the question "How good a director was Margo Jones?" It seems clear that Margo was a competent director. There is little doubt that she understood the requirements of her position and executed them within the framework of that understanding. There is also little doubt that Margo's directing was very straightforward in nature. Margo did not direct conceptually; she approached scripts head-on, attempting to provide the playwright's words and ideas a clear and direct presentation. Towards this end, she used mood and atmosphere as her textural elements. As a result, on some occasions, her direction was brilliant and inspired; on others, it was mediocre. That the results of her directing were inconsistent cannot be disputed—but inconsistency is not incompetency, a charge sometimes leveled at her by her critics.

But I suggest that the more pertinent question is "How important was directing to Margo?" I believe that directing was central to Margo Jones, the woman who founded the regional theatre movement in this country. We know that, in her mature years as a director, she had little patience for her productions once they were staged; she vehemently opposed long runs because they denied her the opportunity to begin the creative process anew. Her impossible timetable in Dallas also reinforces this con-



clusion: there was no reason for her to require of herself and her company such a debilitating schedule, except that she thrived on immersing herself in the production process. Margo, herself, confirmed this conclusion: "A day without rehearsals," she would tell her casts, "is a day wasted."<sup>52</sup>

Ultimately, I believe, it was this compulsive attitude towards the process of production that guided her every move as a director. Coupled with her devotion to the playwright, this compulsion manifested itself in a directing method that intensified the creative process. Her penchant for long rehearsals, organic blocking, exploratory characterizations, simple scenic designs, and unaltered scripts indicate a desire to prolong the process of production. She extended the act of theatrical creation, uncluttered by technical distractions, to its utmost. Her motivation for such single-minded endeavor was two-fold. The first reason was altruistic:

One successful repertory house anywhere out in the hinterlands would sow the seeds of countless others. The first thing we'd know the theater would be itself again, on Main St. as well as on Broadway.<sup>53</sup>

The second was selfish:

The theatre has given me a chance not only to live my own life but a million others. In every

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<sup>52</sup>Schumach, 19.

<sup>53</sup>Bell, "Margo Shoots at Miracles . . .," 1.

play [I direct] there is a chance for one great moment, experience[, ] or understanding.<sup>54</sup>

Directing was more than a means to an end for Margo Jones. Although she publicly emphasized the theatre's importance in people's lives, it was only through bringing plays to life that Margo truly lived. Through directing, Margo found self-fulfillment. Through directing, Margo found her identity as an important, successful human being. Through directing, Margo influenced others, theatre workers and audiences alike. Through directing, Margo overcame her small-town background and became a prominent national figure. Through directing, Margo became an "exceptional" woman.

Margo was not content just to manage a theatre and produce plays. She insisted, instead, on placing her personal mark on the plays she produced. Directing provided Margo with the means to accomplish the other two essential goals she had set for herself: to decentralize theatre in America and to promote new plays and playwrights. Both of these goals required a director willing to risk failure and criticism in the theatrical backwaters of this country. By accomplishing her goals, not only theoretically but practically as well, Margo proved to herself and others that she was more than a talker—she was a doer.

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<sup>54</sup>"One Aim in Life—Theatre," 26 July 1955.

And it was through the doing—the directing—that she  
persuaded others to join her cause—to inherit the wind.



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## APPENDIX A

### PROMPTBOOKS CONSULTED

Listed below are annotated descriptions of the promptbooks consulted for this study. As much information as possible is presented regarding each promptbook, including the types of notation contained therein, who prepared the promptbook (if known), and the type of stage for which the production was designed.

#### A Dash of Bitters

(Adapted from "The Perfectionist," a story by Margaret St. Clair)

Playwright:	Reginald Denham and Conrad Sutton Smith
Classification:	Original
Date Opened:	7/20/54
Theatre:	Theatre '54 (arena)
Prepared by:	Stage Manager #1 (Freddie Hoskins)
Type of script:	Typed carbon copy

This promptbook contains neatly numbered blocking notations on the facing pages, lighting and sound warnings and cues. A few handwritten line changes appear, especially in Act 2, scene 3. Also contained are a Cast of Characters, Synopsis, Description of Setting, and Prop List.

#### An Old Beat-Up Woman

Playwright:	Sari Scott
Classification:	Original
Date Opened:	11/28/49
Theatre:	Theatre '49 (arena)
Prepared by:	Margo Jones
Type of script:	Typed carbon copy

This promptbook probably was Margo's working script during rehearsals. It contains scrawled notes in Margo's handwriting on facing pages and within the text. These notes

usually are questions, suggestions, or comments addressed to the author. New lines of dialogue are inserted frequently. There are some blocking notations and comments on (clarification of) character motivation as well. Act One is much more heavily annotated than the other two acts. Acts Two and Three contain partial lighting and sound warnings and cues. The promptbook also includes a handwritten Light Plot, a Character list, and a sketched floor plan.

### The Apollo of Bellac

Playwright: Jean Giraudoux (trans. March Antonio  
Masotti and Arthur Hildon Nations)  
Classification: Classic (foreign)  
Date Opened: 3/29/54 (first professional  
performance)  
Theatre: Theatre '54 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #1 (Freddie Hoskins)  
Type of Script: Typed carbon copy

Neatly numbered blocking notations appear throughout on facing pages. Lighting and sound warnings and cues also appear on facing pages. Contains Cast of Characters with handwritten names of actors and sketched ground plan.

### As You Like It

Playwright: William Shakespeare  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 11/29/54  
Theatre: Theatre '54 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #1 or #2 (Freddie  
Hoskins or Robert Scott)  
Type of Script: Typeset

Numbered blocking notations appear randomly on facing pages, but body of script is characterized by detailed blocking notes written within the text. The numbered notations are indicative of Stage Manager #1's work, but the rest of the insertions more closely resemble the promptbooks of Stage Manager #2. Numerous cuts are made in the dialogue. A puzzling feature of this promptbook is several series of sequential numbers inserted throughout the text. Each act contains two sets of numbers, one set preceded by the word cue, the other the number alone. It is possible that one set (the "cue" set) refers to sound cues, while the other (which is considerably larger) refers to lighting cues. Nothing within the text suggests

that this is the case, although the second set always appears at scene breaks as well as within scenes. Also contains typed List of Characters with names of actors handwritten next to the character.

### The Coast of Illyria

Playwright: Dorothy Parker & Ross Evans  
Classification: Original  
Date Opened: 4/4/49  
Theatre: Theatre '49 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #3 (Jonathan Seymour)  
Type of Script: Typed carbon copy

"Margo's copy" appears on title page as does the name "[Jonathan] Seymour" (stage manager). While this promptbook is identified as Margo's, the handwriting is not hers. Scrawled blocking notations are inserted in dialogue throughout. Sound warnings and cues are also inserted; no lighting warnings or cues appear, however.

### Cock-A-Doodle-Dandy

Playwright: Sean O'Casey  
Classification: Classic (foreign)  
Date Opened: 1/30/50 (first American performance)  
Theatre: Theatre '50 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #3 (Jonathan Seymour)  
Type of Script: Typeset

Often unintelligible blocking notations are interspersed in text. Minimal blocking is noted, with occasional 2-3 page sequences containing no blocking. Lighting specials and sound warnings and cues appear; no regular light warnings or cues are inserted.

### Heartbreak House

Playwright: George Bernard Shaw  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 11/7/49  
Theatre: Theatre '49 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #3 (Jonathan Seymour)  
Type of Script: Typeset



Scrawled blocking notations are consistently inserted throughout text. Lighting and sound warnings and cues appear in Act II and III. Sketched ground plan for Act III set appears on facing page.

### The Importance of Being Earnest

Playwright: Oscar Wilde  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 1/12/48  
Theatre: Theatre '48 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #3 (Jonathan Seymour)  
Type of Script: Typeset

Scrawled blocking notations are consistently inserted throughout text. Some sound warnings and cues contained within; no lighting cues appear other than a "House Down" cue at beginning of play. Ground plans for all three acts are also included.

### Joan of Lorraine

Playwright: Maxwell Anderson  
Classification: Original  
Date Opened: 11/18/46  
Theatre: Alvin Theatre, New York (proscenium)  
Prepared by: Alan Anderson?/Margo Jones?  
Type of Script: Typed carbon copy

This partial promptbook contains detailed blocking notation for Act I and nothing after the eighteenth page of Act II. Margo's handwriting appears sparingly on the facing pages, usually noting lighting and costuming changes. Also sketched on facing pages are two ground plans, one for the Interlude scene: "A Poet at the Court of the Dauphin" (p. 1-31) and the other for Interlude III (p. 1-40). Within this second ground plan, Margo has penciled in the positions of the characters. No lighting or sound cues appear in this text. On the facing page of the Prologue, someone (not Margo's handwriting) has written all the character's names and their opening positions on stage. Also included are a Cast of Characters with handwritten actors' names, a Rehearsal Schedule (rehearsals began October 3 for a November 17 opening), and three roughly sketched ground plans.



### Lady Windermere's Fan

Playwright: Oscar Wilde  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 11/6/50  
Theatre: Theatre '50 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #2 (Robert Scott)  
Type of Script: Typeset

This promptbook contains detailed handwritten blocking notations inserted into the text. Lighting and sound warnings and cues as well as added dialogue also appear. Mini-ground plans are sketched at the beginning of each act. Also contains Cast list with actors' names, sketched Set Plots (ground plans) for each act, a staff list, a handwritten Light Plot, sketched (Light) Focusing Plots for each act, two lists (one handwritten, one typed) describing the stage crew's duties at each intermission, and a Property Plot.

### The Learned Ladies

Playwright: Moliere  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 11/8/48  
Theatre: Theatre '48 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #1 (Jonathan Seymour)  
Type of Script: Typed carbon copy

Inscribed "Copy for Jonathan Seymour." Handwritten blocking notations inserted in text; lighting and sound warnings and cues appear throughout. Cuts are made in the text. Sketched ground plan appears on facing page of Act I. Contains Character List with phonetic rendering of French names written in a different hand.

### The Merchant of Venice

Playwright: William Shakespeare  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 12/18/50  
Theatre: Theatre '50 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #2 (Robert Scott)  
Type of Script: Typeset

Detailed handwritten blocking notations and complete lighting and sound warnings and cues contained herein. One sketched mini-ground plan also inserted. Numerous

cuts made in text. Also contains "Dramatic Personae" with handwritten actors' names and phone numbers.

On Whitman Avenue

Playwright: Maxine Wood  
Classification: Original  
Date Opened: 5/8/46  
Theatre: Cort Theatre (proscenium)  
Prepared by: Margo Jones  
Type of Script: Typed carbon copy

On the facing pages of this script, Margo wrote blocking notes, character motivations, lighting and sound suggestions, and questions for Wood. The script is heavily annotated from beginning to end in this manner. Prompt-book also includes Cast list with actors' names, addresses, and telephone numbers; staff list with same; a Costume Plot, broken down by scene, detailing what each character wears; and a Property Plot, also broken down by scene.

She Stoops to Conquer

Playwright: Oliver Goldsmith  
Classification: Classic  
Date Opened: 3/14/49  
Theatre: Theatre '49 (arena)  
Prepared by: Stage Manager #3 (Jonathan Seynour)  
Type of Script: Typeset

Handwritten blocking notations scattered through first two acts; no blocking noted after Act III. No lighting or sound cues noted. Curtain warnings inserted for Acts I and II. Bracketted dialogue throughout: text is believed to indicate cuts

Summer And Smoke #1 and #2

Playwright: Tennessee Williams  
Classification: Original  
Date Opened: 10/6/48  
Theatre: Music Box Theatre, New York  
(proscenium)  
Prepared by: Henri Caubisens  
Type of Script: Typed carbon copy

Promptbook #1

Detailed technical promptbook with lighting, sound, and live music cues; handwritten.

Promptbook #2

Inscribed "For Miss Margo Jones." This promptbook is the official record of this production. Caubisens typed in all the blocking, lighting, and sound cues that appeared in the New York production. In addition, he included a set diagram, prop plot, and production notes detailing how the special lighting effects were achieved.

Whisper To Me

(Taken from William Goyen's story, "The Letter in the Cedarchest.")

Playwright:	Greer Johnson
Classification:	Original
Date Opened:	6/27/55
Theatre:	Theatre '55 (arena)
Prepared by:	Stage Manager #1 (Freddie Hoskins)
Type of Script:	Typed carbon copy

Neatly numbered blocking notations appear on facing pages as do lighting and sound warnings and cues. Sketched ground plans are also inserted on facing pages for Acts I and II.

You Touched Me! #1, #2, and #3

Playwright:	Tennessee Williams and Donald Windham
Classification:	Original
Date Opened:	10/?/43
Theatre:	Cleveland Playhouse (proscenium)
Prepared by:	Unknown
Type of Script:	See below

Promptbook #1

This typed carbon manuscript was inscribed "Margo Jones - playwright's copy with complete cuts and rewrites." It contains only detailed blocking notations. A handwritten note by Margo was found with this script; on it she wrote comments about character motivations.

### Promptbook #2

This typed original is the only promptbook that contains the timing of the acts and scenes; the play's duration was marked at 2 hours and 50 minutes. This script also contains detailed blocking notes as well as lighting and sound warnings and cues. However, the blocking is more detailed than in #1 and it does not correspond to #1's movement patterns.

### Promptbook #3

This typed carbon manuscript contains only blocking notations for the "Captain," leading to the conclusion that this was an actor's script.



## APPENDIX B

### REPRESENTATIVE MUSICAL SELECTIONS

#### USED IN MARGO JONES' PRODUCTIONS

The following is a sampling of the kinds of musical selections Margo used in her productions. This sampling is taken from the seventeen promptbooks examined, although the majority of the promptbooks identified no specific musical selections. In all cases, unless otherwise noted, music was played only at the beginnings and endings of acts, and through scene changes. Act and scene designations concur with Margo's act and scene breaks and are not necessarily those of the playwright.

#### The Apollo of Bellac

"Symphonie Fantastique"      Beginning and ending of play

#### Lady Windermere's Fan

"Dancing Nights Waltz"      Beginning of Act I  
"King Bridge March"      End of Act I  
"Southern Roses"      These four selections  
"Kiss Me Again"      were played consecutively  
"Voices of Spring"      during Act II's ball  
"Sweethearts"      scene.  
"Cinderella"      End of Act II and end of  
                                 play  
"When You're Away"      Beginning of Act III  
"London Bridge March"      End of Act III  
"Footlights Waltz"      Beginning of Act IV

#### The Learned Ladies

"Presto"      Pre-show  
"Guige"      Beginning of Act I  
"Passapied"      End of Scene 1  
"Courante"      End of Act I  
"Andante #1"      Intermission  
"Romance"      End of Act II, end of  
                                 Act III, Scene 1



"Minuet"

Beginning and Ending of  
Act III

The Merchant of Venice  
"The Birds"

"Sebastian Ballet Suite"

"Young People's Guide to  
to the Orchestra"

"Greensleeves"

"Le Rossignol en Amour"

"Scherzo a la Russe"

"Dance Concertinas"

"The Woody Cock"

Beginning of Act I, First  
and second inter-  
missions,  
End of play  
End of Act I, scene i, iv,  
and Act II, scene viii  
Beginning Act I, scene iii,  
End of Act I, scene iii, v,  
and Act I; End of  
Act II, scene vii,  
ix, and Act II;  
Beginning of Act  
III

End of Act II, scene viii,  
and Act II, scene x  
During Act II, scene xi  
End of Act III, scene i  
End of Act III, scene ii  
End of Act III, scene iii

Summer and Smoke

The music for Margo's New York production  
consisted of music composed specifically for  
this production integrated into the action as  
background music, as well as selections from  
popular music, listed below.

"Santiago Waltz"

"La Golondrina"

"Railroad Man"

"Yellow Dog"

"My Isle of Golden Dreams"

"Flamenco music"

"Drink to Me Only With  
Thine Eyes"

"El Capitan"

During Prologue  
During Scene 1, Scene  
Scene 12  
Beginning Scene 7  
During Scene 7  
During Scene 7  
Beginning and through  
Scene 8

During Scene 9  
Beginning and through  
Scene 10

# APPENDIX C

## CHRONOLOGY OF PLAYS DIRECTED BY MARGO JONES

To the best of my ability I have reconstructed the chronology of plays Margo Jones directed. In some cases, I knew that she had directed a play and approximately when, but I could not locate a title for the play. In other instances, I located the name, but not the dates. On occasion, sources were contradictory and a decision was made regarding the most likely sequence of events.

### Key:

- \* - First performance anywhere
- \*\* - First professional production
- \*\*\* - First performance in the United States

- HCP - Houston Community Players
- MJT - Margo Jones Theatre (Dallas)
- UTX - University of Texas at Austin

PS - Proscenium Stage

TITR - Theatre-in-the-Round

TITLE	AUTHOR	DATE	THEATRE/LOCATION	TYPE OF STAGE
<u>Hedda Gabler</u>	Henrik Ibsen	Fall 1934	Ojai Community Players <sup>1</sup>	PS
<u>1936/1937</u>				
<u>The Importance of Being Earnest</u>	Oscar Wilde	12/03/36	HCP	PS
<u>Judgment Day</u>	Elmer Rice	2/10/37	HCP	PS
<u>Hedda Gabler</u>	Henrik Ibsen	3/16/37	HCP	PS

<u>Squaring the Circle</u>	Valentine Karayev	5/05/37	HCP	PS
<u>The Lay Figure<sup>2</sup></u>	Ethel Ven Der Veer	8/ /37	HCP	PS
<u>1937/1938</u>				
<u>Merrily We Roll Along</u>	George Kaufmann/ Moss Hart	10/11/37	HCP	PS
<u>Bury the Dead</u>	Irwin Shaw	11/14/37	HCP	PS
<u>The Long Christmas Dinner</u>	Thornton Wilder	12/20/37	HCP	PS
<u>Nude With Pineapple</u>	Fulton Oursler/ Aubrey Kennedy	12/27/37	HCP	PS
<u>Macbeth</u>	William Shakespeare	2/14/38	HCP	PS
<u>The Learned Ladies</u>	Moliere	3/14/38	HCP	PS
<u>The Front Page</u>	Charles Macarthur/ Ben Hecht	3/29/38	Houston Newspaper Guild	PS
<u>Blind Alley</u>	James Warwick	4/25/38	HCP	PS
<u>Candle Light</u>	P.G. Wodehouse	5/30/38	HCP	PS
<u>1938/1939<sup>3</sup></u>				
<u>High Tor</u>	Maxwell Anderson	1938/1939	HCP	PS
<u>The Taming of the Shrew</u>	William Shakespeare	1938/1939	HCP	PS

<u>Uncle Vanya</u>	Anton Chekhov	1938/1939	HCP	PS
<u>Our Town</u>	Thornton Wilder	1938/1939	HCP	PS
<u>As You Like It</u>	William Shakespeare	1938/1939	HCP	PS
<u>Special Edition</u>	Harold Young	12/ /1938	HCP	PS
<u>Johnny Johnson</u>	Unknown	1938/1939	HCP	PS
 <u>Summer 1939</u>				
<u>Louder Please</u>	Norman Krasna	6/ /39 <sup>4</sup>	HCP/Lamar Hotel	TITR
<u>There's Always Juliet</u>	John Van Druten	6/ /39	HCP/Lamar Hotel	TITR
<u>The Second Man</u>	S.N. Behrman	7/ /39	HCP/Lamar Hotel	TITR
<u>The Circle</u>	Somerset Maugham	7/ /39	HCP/Lamar Hotel	TITR
<u>Springtime for Henry</u>	Ben Levy	7/ /39	HCP/Lamar Hotel	TITR
<u>Room Service</u>	Murray and Bretz	8/ /39	HCP/Lamar Hotel	TITR
 <u>1939/1940</u> <sup>5</sup>				
<u>A Comedy of Errors</u>	William Shakespeare	1939/1940	HCP	PS
<u>Family Portrait</u>	Unknown	1939/1940	HCP	PS
 <u>Summer 1940</u> <sup>6</sup>				

1940/1941<sup>7</sup>

<u>Howdy, Stranger*</u>	Richard Shannon/ Cy Howard	5/ /41	HCP	PS
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Summer 1941<sup>8</sup>

1941/1942<sup>9</sup>

<u>Sunrise in My Pocket*</u>	Edwin Justus Mayer	10/ /41	HCP	PS
<u>Going Up*</u>	Cy Howard/ Richard Shannon	3/ /42	HCP	PS
<u>Rope's End</u>	Patrick Hamilton	4/ /42	HCP	PS
<u>Design for Living</u>	Noel Coward	5/ /42	HCP	PS

Summer 1942<sup>10</sup>

<u>Candida</u>	George Bernard Shaw	Summer 1942	HCP/Rice Hotel	TITR
<u>The Shining Hour</u>	Unknown	Summer 1942	HCP/Rice Hotel	TITR
<u>A Quiet Wedding</u> <sup>11</sup>	Unknown	Summer 1942	Rollins Studio School, New York	PS

1942/1943

<u>The Eve of St. Mark</u>	Maxwell Anderson	11/09/42	UTX/Experimental Theatre	?
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<u>Personal Appearance</u>	Lawrence Riley	2/ /43	Austin Little Theatre	PS
<u>Sporting Pink*</u>	Ted Apstein	Spring 1943	UTX/Laboratory Theatre	TITR
<u>A Choice of Weapons*</u> <sup>12</sup>	Ted Apstein	1943/1944	UTX	?
<u>Summer 1943</u>				
<u>Sporting Pink</u>	Ted Apstein	Summer 1943	Pasadena Playhouse <sup>13</sup>	PS
<u>The Velvet Tower</u>	Ted Apstein	Summer 1943	Pasadena Playhouse	PS
<u>1943/1944</u>				
<u>You Touched Me!</u> <sup>14</sup>	Tennessee Williams/ Donald Windham	10/ /43	Cleveland Playhouse	PS
<u>You Touched Me!</u>	Tennessee Williams/ Donald Windham	11/29/43	Pasadena Playhouse	PS
<u>Ten Nights in a Barroom</u>	William W. Pratt	Fall 1943	Austin Little Theatre	PS
<u>Martha</u> (opera)	Von Flotow	Winter 1943	UTX/Hogg Auditorium	PS
<u>Is Life Worth Living?</u>	Lennox Robinson	1/ /44	UTX & Austin Little Theatre	TITR

<u>Noah</u>	Andre Obey	4/ /44	UTX/Hogg Auditorium	PS
<u>Summer 1944</u> <sup>15</sup>				
<u>The Purification</u>	Tennessee Williams	7/27/44	Pasadena Playhouse	PS
<u>Women in Service*</u>	Living Newspaper	Summer 1944	Pasadena Playhouse	PS
<u>1944/1945/1946</u>				
<u>The Glass Menagerie*</u>	Tennessee Williams	12/26/44	Chicago/Broadway	PS
<u>On Whitman Avenue*</u>	Maxine Wood	5/08/46	Broadway	PS
<u>Joan of Lorraine</u> <sup>*16</sup>	Maxwell Anderson	11/18/46	Broadway	PS
<u>Summer 1947</u>				
<u>Farther Off From Heaven</u> <sup>*17</sup>	William Inge	6/03/47	MJT	TITR
<u>How Now, Hecate*</u>	Martyn Coleman	6/10/47	MJT	TITR
<u>Hedda Gabler</u>	Henrik Ibsen	6/24/47	MJT	TITR
<u>Summer and Smoke*</u>	Tennessee Williams	7/08/47	MJT	TITR
<u>Third Cousin*</u>	Vera Matthews	7/22/47	MJT	TITR

1947/1948

<u>The Master Builder</u>	Henrik Ibsen	11/03/47	MJT	TITR
<u>This Property Is Condemned/The Last of My Solid Gold Watches/ Portrait of a Madonna</u>	Tennessee Williams	11/17/47	MJT	TITR
<u>Throng O'Scarlet*</u>	Vivian Connell	12/01/47	MJT	TITR
<u>The Taming of the Shrew</u>	William Shakespeare	12/15/47	MJT	TITR
<u>Lempe's Old Man*</u>	Manning Gurian	12/29/47	MJT	TITR
<u>The Importance of Being Earnest</u>	Oscar Wilde	1/12/48	MJT	TITR
<u>Leaf and Bough*</u>	John Hayes	1/26/48	MJT	TITR
<u>Black John*</u>	Barton MacLane	2/09/48	MJT	TITR
<u>Summer and Smoke</u>	Tennessee Williams	10/06/48	Broadway	PS

1948/1949

<u>The Learned Ladies</u>	Moliere	11/08/48	MJT	TITR
<u>Here's To Us*</u>	Shirland Quin	11/29/48	MJT	TITR
<u>Twelfth Night</u>	William Shakespeare	12/20/48	MJT	TITR
<u>Skaal*</u>	Vivian Johannes	1/10/49	MJT	TITR

<u>Sting in the Tail*</u>	Tom Purefoy	1/31/49	MJT	TITR
<u>The Sea Gull</u>	Anton Chekhov	2/21/49	MJT	TITR
<u>She Stoops to Conquer</u>	Oliver Goldsmith	3/14/49	MJT	TITR
<u>The Coast of Illyria*</u>	Dorothy Parker/ Ross Evans	4/04/49	MJT	TITR
<u>Summer and Smoke</u>	Tennessee Williams	August 1949	Road Tour	PS
<u>1949/1950</u>				
<u>Heartbreak House</u>	George Bernard Shaw	11/07/49	MJT	TITR
<u>An Old Beat-Up Woman*</u>	Sari Scott	11/28/49	MJT	TITR
<u>My Granny Van*</u>	George Sessions Perry	1/09/50	MJT	TITR
<u>Cock-a-Doodle Dandy***</u>	Sean O'Casey	1/30/50	MJT	TITR
<u>Ghosts</u>	Henrik Ibsen	2/20/50	MJT	TITR
<u>The Golden Porcupine*</u>	Muriel Roy Bolton	3/13/50	MJT	TITR
<u>Southern Exposure*</u>	Owen Crump	4/03/50	MJT	TITR
<u>An Old Beat-Up Woman</u>	Sari Scott	1/19/50	Pre-Broadway	PS
<u>Southern Exposure</u>	Owen Crump	4/03/50	Broadway	PS

1950/1951

<u>Lady Windermere's Fan</u>	Oscar Wilde	11/06/50	MJT	TITR
<u>The Merchant of Venice</u>	William Shakespeare	12/18/50	MJT	TITR
<u>The Willow Tree*</u>	A.B. Shiffrin	1/08/51	MJT	TITR
<u>One Bright Day*</u>	Sigmund Miller	2/19/51	MJT	TITR
<u>Candida</u>	George Bernard Shaw	3/12/51	MJT	TITR
<u>Walls Rise Up*</u>	Frank Duane/ Richard Shannon	4/02/51	MJT	TITR

1951/1952

<u>The Sainted Sisters*</u>	Alden Nash	11/05/51	MJT	TITR
<u>A Midsummer Night's Dream</u>	William Shakespeare	12/18/51	MJT	TITR
<u>The Blind Spot*</u>	Edward Caulfield	2/11/52	MJT	TITR
<u>I Am Laughing*</u>	Eddie Mayer	3/31/52	MJT	TITR

1952/1953<sup>18</sup>

<u>The Last Island*</u>	Eugene Raskin	1/12/53	MJT	TITR
<u>The Day's Mischief*</u>	Leslie Storm	3/30/53	MJT	TITR



<u>Walls Rise Up</u>	Frank Duane/ Richard Shannon	Summer 1953	Round-Up Theatre <sup>19</sup>	TITR
<u>1953/1954</u>				
<u>The Footpath Way*</u>	Burgess Drake	11/02/53	MJT	TITR
<u>The Guilty*</u>	Harry Granick	11/23/53	MJT	TITR
<u>The Heel*</u>	Samson Raphaelson	1/25/54	MJT	TITR
<u>The Purification/</u>	Tennessee Williams/	3/29/54	MJT	TITR
<u>The Apollo of Bellac**</u>	Jean Giraudoux			
<u>Summer 1954</u>				
<u>A Dash of Bitters*</u>	Reginald Dunham/ Conrad Sutton Smith	7/20/54	MJT	TITR
<u>The Lost Child's Fireflies*</u> <sup>20</sup>	William Saroyan	Summer 1954	Round-Up Theatre	TITR
<u>1954/1955</u> <sup>21</sup>				
<u>As You Like It</u>	William Shakespeare	11/29/54	MJT	TITR
<u>Inherit the Wind*</u>	Jerome Lawrence/ Robert E. Lee	1/10/55	MJT	TITR

Summer 1955

Whisper to Me\* Greer Johnson 6/27/55 MJT TTR

NOTES

1. Margo directed an entire season of plays at Ojai. However, the names and dates of her other productions could not be determined.
2. This one-act play was Houston's entry in Texas' one-act play contest. The production won first prize and was the first of three successive first place awards Margo's Houston players were to win. The other two prize-winning plays could not be determined.
3. It is unknown exactly when Margo directed these plays in Houston. However, based on the absence of any other plays dated to this season, my best estimate is that she directed them during this time. Some of these plays may have been produced in either the 1939/1940 or 1941/1942 seasons, however.
4. The exact dates for these productions could not pinpointed, but the order of presentation is correct.
5. Only these two plays were located for Margo's fourth regular season. It is most likely that she directed at least four or five other plays as well.
6. Margo directed a season of six plays in-the-round at the Texas State Hotel. The names of these plays could not be located.
7. Other play titles for this season were unavailable although Margo probably directed at least five or six additional plays.
8. Margo directed a season of six plays in-the-round at the Rice Hotel. The names of these plays were unavailable.

9. Margo probably directed two or three additional plays this season.
10. Dates for these productions are unknown. Margo directed four additional plays in-the-round during this season.
11. According to June Larsen, Margo finished her season of plays in Houston and, while vacationing in New York, directed this play on Long Island. June Larsen, "Margo Jones: A Life in the Theatre" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1982).
12. The dates and staging arrangement for this play were not available.
13. It could not be determined how many plays Margo directed during her summer residency in Pasadena.
14. Margo was replaced as director before the play opened.
15. It is unknown how many plays Margo directed during this summer residency in Pasadena.
16. Margo was replaced as director before the play opened.
17. Later, The Dark at the Top of the Stairs.
18. Margo directed only two plays this season because she was working on opening a second theatre-in-the-round in San Francisco. In addition, she spent a good portion of the season in New York attempting to develop a television format that would use her arena staging concepts; Helen Sheehy, Margo: The Life and Theatre of Margo Jones (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1989).
19. Margo founded the Round-Up Theatre at John Rosenfield's suggestion. The Round-Up was an amateur theatre using black artists, designers, and technicians from the Dallas community. Margo lent this group her theatre and staff whenever she was not producing plays herself. Walls Rise Up was the group's first production.
20. Larsen stated that Margo commissioned this play from Saroyan for the Round-Up Theatre and that she subsequently directed it; Sheehy stated only that Margo attended the performance. I was unable to determine whose version was correct.

21. Margo directed only two plays this season because, after Inherit the Wind's phenomenal success, she was busy arranging for its production in New York.