

SPS Proposal 18F

Title: *The Children's Hour*

Author: Lillian Hellman

Characters: 9W, 1M – (with double casting)

Production Category: SPS
Dates: November 9-11
Budget: \$750
Bentley Theater

Director: Kelleen Moriarty '19

Faculty Advisor: Jamie Horton

Drama Coursework and Production Experience:

Thea 30 – Acting I
Thea 54 - Directing I
Theater 42 – Scenic Design
Thea 15, 16, 17
Thea 65
Thea 40
Thea 60 & 61 (LAMDA), 62

Co-Scenic Designer – *Baltimore Waltz* (15F)
Spot Light Operator – *Chicago* (16W)
Co-Director – *OPAL's Vagina Monologues* (16W)
Assistant Stage Manager – *For Colored Girls* (16S)
Stage Manager – *Circle Mirror Transformation* (16F)
Director – *Trifles* (17W), *Medea* (17F), *Talk To Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen* (18S)
Asst. Director – *1984* (18W) *Noises Off* (NS 18S)

Plot Summary:

Martha and Karen are best friends who run a schoolhouse in 1930s small town America. Karen is engaged to be married to the town doctor, Joe, and Martha is beginning to question the platonic nature of her love for her best friend. When they threaten one of their trouble-making students, Mary Tillford (who also happens to be Joe's cousin), with expulsion, Mary runs away from school. In retaliation, she tells her grandmother and

caretaker that she ran away because she saw her teachers Martha and Karen kissing one another and she felt uncomfortable. When Martha and Karen confront Mary and her grandmother about this lie, consequences spin out of control. The play culminates in the disintegration of the relationships between Karen and Joe and Karen and Martha, and Martha's tragic belief that the world that they live in cannot function with her in it.

Why this show:

When I was talking with Jamie about my plan for my last year in the department, he suggested that I propose a play to direct this fall if "there is another show that [I am] burning to direct." This is that play. This is a play that has resonated with me since it first came into my life at the beginning of high school. As a queer student at an all-girls school, this play seemed to reflect a lot of my own lived reality – be it (thankfully) heightened dramatically.

The themes at the center of this play are startlingly relevant today. This is a play about fear-mongering, learned hatred, and intergenerational tension. These are realities we are dealing with throughout America and the world around race, gender, religion, sexuality, ability, and immigration. These concepts are central to current conversations about identity and difference and I believe that this magnifies the importance of staging this play right now.

Central to this story is three generations of women: Lily Mortar and Amelia Tillford, Karen and Martha, and Mary and her peers. Throughout the play, these women's generational divides impede their abilities to connect with one another. However, there are moments of transcendence. I am really intrigued by these relationships, particularly as such generational divides cause tension in our world today – within feminism and other social movements and within the greater political and social spheres. My production of this play would highlight these divides through multiple devices. One of these is double casting. I would use double casting across the generations to illustrate the complexity of role models (which are particularly important in the queer community), the future of identity, and memory, as well as familial influence and respect. For example, I would cast the same actress to play Martha and one of the schoolgirls who do not appear onstage simultaneously. Another device to explore these intergenerational relationships would be design-based. I would work with designers to distinguish each generation of women from one another using costuming, illustrating the depths the intergenerational divides. A third device would be staging-based – I imagine staging this play in an alley configuration, which is a staging that I have never worked in before and has begun to intrigue me, particularly as a mode of exploring linear and translinear stories and relationships.

I want to direct a play about women, but most especially a play about the relationships between women. Many of the relationships in this play are fraught with lies, learned hatred, and fear. However, many of them are very beautiful. The friendship between Karen and Martha, for example, displays great strength and love. It is only after it is corrupted by outside hatred and fear that it fractures. However, this intense love of

female friendship is still present. I believe this kind of platonic love between women is enduring and sustaining, and is not given requisite time and respect, particularly on stage. This is the kind of love that we need in times of tragedy, trauma, and anxiety as we live in now.

This is a controversial play. It depicts the tragedy of queer womanhood that, since this play was written in the 30s, has been replicated over and over in mass media. This is a queer play written by a supposedly straight playwright. However, as a queer woman theatre maker, I believe that this play is at the roots of the tradition I hope to enter into. It is a play about queer issues and, in claiming it as my own story and filtering it through my own experience and the experience of other queer collaborators, I believe that I would be able to “queer” the play, finding beauty, joy, and purpose in its tragedy that, though cliché and problematic now, does reflect a true and all-too common experience of pain and hatred. It is important for Dartmouth’s stage to tell queer stories, and for these stories to be told by queer artists.

Why I want to direct:

I am applying for this opportunity to direct because I would like to continue to expand my portfolio and grow as an artist. As an aspiring director, having the opportunity to direct another project in the department would be invaluable to me. I have spent the last two terms off campus, working first in a professional theatre (Northern Stage), and then abroad seeing over 3 professional performances a week. I have learned so much from working with Peter and watching him work, both on *1984* and on *Noises Off*. In London, my understanding of what is possible with theatre was pushed way beyond my previous limited imagination. With all of these experiences, plus my time spent at LAMDA training as an actor, I feel inspired to take on a new directing project and apply everything I have learned.

I am additionally applying to pursue an honors thesis in directing (Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*). I believe that working on *The Children’s Hour* will help me to prepare for this project, were it to go forward. I believe that any opportunity for me to work as a director will help me to grow into a more skilled, specific, thoughtful, and communicative collaborator and artist. The directing experience I would gain by working on *The Children’s Hour* would directly prepare me to take on the directing challenges of *The Glass Menagerie*. In addition to the practical skills I would strengthen, this play specifically would lend me practice in dealing with the challenging issues in *The Glass Menagerie* including the queer realities for both characters and playwrights in the early half of the 20th century. More specifically, this play, like *The Glass Menagerie*, offers controversial and problematic challenges that must be overcome with reframing, reinterpretation, and attentive dramaturgy. This is work that I am really excited about doing for both plays, as it is a big part of what I am looking forward to exploring professionally and dramaturgically in the theatre. However, working on *The Children’s Hour* would provide me with tools and processes that I would later apply to my thesis work.

Expectations for design and technical needs:

As noted above, I conceive of staging this play in an alley configuration. I propose it to be fully produced in the Bentley Theater, with full lighting, sound, costuming, and scenic design. I believe the project will be heavily stylized, pushing against the realism of the script. As mentioned above, I believe this would particularly take the form of costuming in differentiating the generations of women, but I also believe lighting and sound are necessary in achieving this heightened style.

Costume Designer – TBD

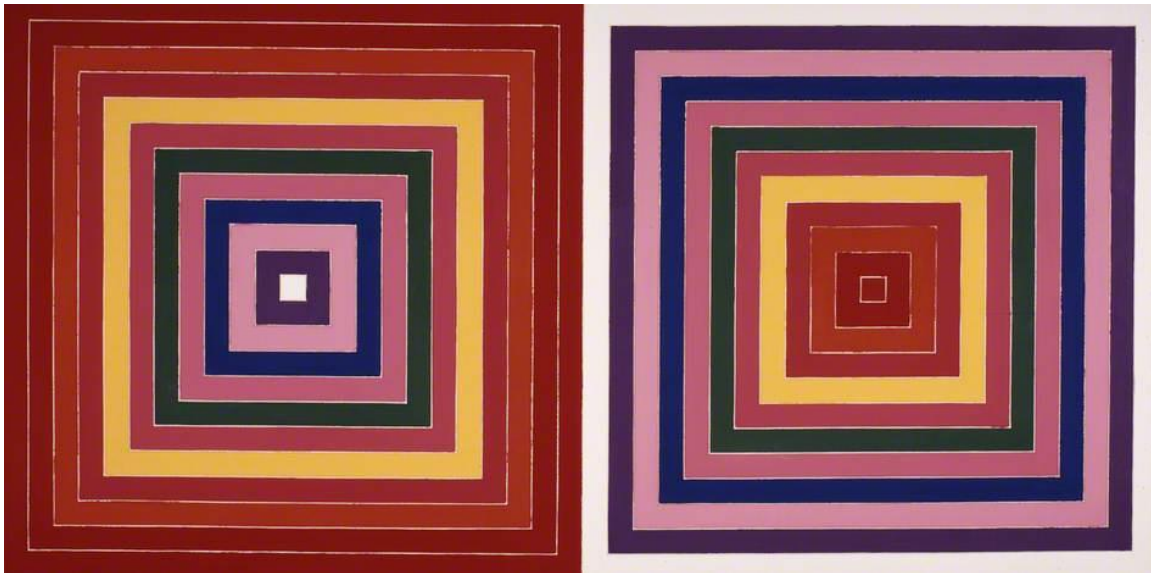
Scenic Designer – TBD

Lighting Designer – TBD

Sound Designer – Will Maresco '19

Stage Manager – Annie Furman '19

Appendix 1



Red Scramble, Frank Stella, 1936, Brighton Museum

This is an image I keep being drawn to as I think about this play and the color, dimension, and interconnectedness of identity.