

The Children's Hour and Its Crossing

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Abstract

The Children's Hour written by Lillian Hellman displays the destructive effect of children's lies, which transforms the farce into tragedy. Ostensibly, the play manifests the issue of homosexuality and children's nature, which constitutes the keynote of the first and the second chapter, that is, cross-gender and cross-age. For one thing, Martha's lesbian inclination is entrenched by her unreliable narrative. According to Judith Butler's theory, gender is the civilized product rather than innate attribution. The concentration of Mary's lie is the two sisters' unhealthily intimate performance, which makes the mass believe their "abnormal relationship". For another, the playwright creates two disobedient children to highlight the resemblance between child and adult. Mary's trick is replete with malevolence and beyond the reach of her age as people would think. Her transcendence in cunning becomes the main driver of the whole tragedy. Furthermore, this assignment delves into the function of space-changing and distinguishes the non-present characters as well as their exchange of information, which plays an important role in plot knitting. The omission part of the judgement in court demonstrates that Mrs. Tilford's living room serves as the judicial apparatus. Mary takes advantage of her private place to consummate the lie, which not only results in the overturning of proper order as Bakhtin defines, but also pushes the two sisters into a condition of utter helplessness. With the former emphasis on duration and space, the last chapter illustrates the relationship among the script, the play performance and film adaptations from the perspective of the audience who witness the whole event.

Keywords

The Children's Hour, Cross-Gender, Cross-Age, Cross-Space, Cross-Media

1. Introduction

Lillian Florence Hellman (June 20, 1905-June 30, 1984) is an American playwright,

prose writer, memoirist and screenwriter known for her success on Broadway, as well as her communist sympathies and political activism. As a playwright, Hellman has many achievements on Broadway, including *Watch on the Rhine*, *The Autumn Garden*, *Toys in the Attic*, *Another Part of the Forest*, *The Children's Hour* and *The Little Foxes*. She once adapted her semi-autobiographical play *The Little Foxes* into a screenplay which Bette Davis starred in. Hellman became the first female screenwriter to receive an individual Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1941.

Hellman's play *The Children's Hour* was inspired by the 1810 true story of two Edinburgh school teachers, Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie, whose lives were destroyed when one of their students accused them of engaging in a sexual relationship, but in the Scottish case, they eventually won their suit, although that did not change the devastation wrought on their lives.

The research of *The Children's Hour* abroad can be classified into several aspects: writing techniques, gender studies (lesbianism), adaptations and the dramatic theme. However, there are few relevant studies conducted domestically, most of which conform to the western tendency concerning theme, image of child and adaptation history. Critics compare Hellman's work with other famous playwrights' scripts like Shakespeare's *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and concur with the similarity of its tragic structure as well as realistic style. In respect of the analysis of characters, recent studies always center on Mary Tilford who is criticized as the little monster or pure evilness. Apart from that, *The Children's Hour* has been adapted into two films but with totally different plots, which becomes the focus of scholars' study in the field of social and cultural history, especially the changes in production codes in the movie. As to the dramatic theme, the discussion of homosexuality and children's nature is heated and this assignment aims to continue the exploration from the perspective of cross-over to elucidate Martha's gender predicament and reexamine the relationship between child and adult. In terms of structure and content, this study will pay attention to the function of space-changing and distinguishes the non-present characters as well as their exchange of information, which plays an important role in plot knitting. With the former emphasis on duration and space, the paper will end up with an elaboration on cross-media and film adaptations since the circulation of encoding and decoding in the simple text's rewriting involves the effect of inter-mediationality as well as the intertextual feature inspired by the form of play.

2. Cross-Gender

Judith Butler has suggested that it is a mistake to assume that, as simplified essentialist explanations, there is a foundational, natural sex upon which gender identity is constructed and gender assigns sole or major significance to biological factors. Instead, the key tenet in her argument is that sex itself is socially constructed and can be performed, which means sex is a cultural product in a state of fluidity rather than fixed by genes. Thereupon, her theory, to some degree,

deconstructs the binary opposition on gender. Meanwhile, the ambiguity in sex and identity also emerges. Butler's (1999) *Gender Trouble* also responds to this critique: "*Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact.*"

2.1. Martha's Lesbian Inclination

Martha as one of the teachers is shaped with lesbian inclination who is always the core image concerning this contentious topic. From the description of the playwright's direction: "*She is a nervous, high-strung woman.*" (Hellman, 2013) Relative speaking, Martha is more endowed with masculine quality comparing with Karen, and she seems even volatile when talks about Karen's marriage. From her own words, though sometimes unreliable, especially at the moment of facing with Karen, for she doesn't want her to get married apparently:

"*Then we won't be taking our vacation together?*" (Hellman, 2013)

"*It's going to be hard going on alone afterward.*" (Hellman, 2013)

Yet, her sexual orientation is obscure, but Mrs. Mortar's words become the trigger of the whole tragedy because the quarrel is overheard:

"*Every time that man comes into this house, you have a fit.*" (Hellman, 2013)

"*It seems like you just can't stand the idea of them being together.*" (Hellman, 2013)

"*You're fonder of Karen, and I know that. And it's unnatural, just as unnatural as it can be. You don't like their being together. You were always like that even as a child. If you had a little girl friend, you always got mad when she liked anybody else. Well, you'd better get a beau of your own now—a woman of your age.*" (Hellman, 2013)

There are three pieces of information from Mary's allegation: first, Karen and Martha stay together late frequently (it is a truth acknowledged by themselves, for they would like to watch a movie after finish one day's hard work); second, there is some strange sound in the bedroom (a lie); third, they kiss each other (a lie, too). The "evidences" along with Rosalie's testimony make people believe in Mary and confirm two sisters' abnormal relationship. Their transgressive performance can be construed as the proof of lesbian which arouses a massive preoccupation. Thereupon, it is not important whether they are real lesbian or not, for their sexual practice constructed by hallucination derived from hearsay is in accordance with the dominant codes of homosexual behaviour and contravenes the nominative ordering. Parents are afraid of their perniciousness, regarded as sex perversion, might influence their children. The so-called immoral performance under inspection is attributed to their essence. Correspondingly, the predicament that sexual orientation as the personal affair is somewhat overt and subservient to culturally conventional correlates transpires.

2.2. Predicament in Gender

Because of the gossip around the town, suspicion has been planted in the rela-

tionship between Joe and Karen. Once he asks her whether rumours are true, Karen has realised the slant of his promise and their initial love is gone with the collapse of the school. Their departure means Joe needs to give up his existing achievement as a successful doctor once they are determined to move to another city, and now it is hard for Joe and Karen to maintain their romantic relationship. For another, Martha is tortured by her inner guilty and outer condemn:

“Martha. Take your hands down. (Leans over, pulls Karen’s hands away) You’ve got to know it. I can’t keep it any longer. I’ve got to tell you how guilty I am.

Karen (deliberately). You are guilty of nothing.

Martha. I’ve been telling myself that since the night we heard the child say it, I’ve been praying I could convince myself of it. I can’t. I can’t any longer. It’s there. I don’t know how, I don’t know why. But I did love you. I do love you. I resented your marriage, maybe because I wanted you, maybe I wanted you all along, maybe I couldn’t call it by a name, maybe it’s been there ever since I first knew you—

Karen (tensely). It’s a lie. You’re telling yourself a lie. We never thought of each other that way.” (Hellman, 2013)

Personally, she is not sure from beginning to the end whether she really craves affection from Karen after the long-term company. The school is their living accomplishment and commonly female community constructed by effort. Naturally, the fruit should be shared by themselves, while Joe as the intruder attempts to take Karen away and destroy the shelter. Besides, as is mentioned above, her real sexual orientation has dwindled into insignificance since the town as a miniature society has confirmed it without her permission. She has been convinced of and wordlessly consents with the consequence to some degree. Therefore, her mental vagrancy persuades her to express the distorted feelings and commits suicide as her final curtain, unravelling the knot as well, for she has lost the ability to struggle against the current predicament so that she resorts to self-laceration and dies at the centre of the doorway, just one step distance for the outside world. She is strangled to death spiritually before obtains the pardon and redemption by herself and never goes free from the shackle of heart.

3. Cross-Age

According to the conclusion in Professor Zhang Shengzhen’s (2022) paper named “Crossover-Fiction” published on *Foreign Literature*, “the crossover phenomenon is usually attributed to the fact that as children and adolescents become more and more sophisticated, children’s literature is in the acceleration of maturation correspondingly.” The crossover-fictions have indicated the increasingly closing cleavage between adults and children. Stepping into adolescence, teenagers gradually possess the features identical with adults. Different from genders which have two clear apices, the growth of life is always linear and nonreversible. It is hard to draw clear lines of demarcation between a child and an adult for each child is going to be an adult.

Thus, *The Children's Hour* proposes the issue about how to deal with children's misbehaviour in the foreground, which can be seen from the two sisters' unconscious repugnance, even fear for Mary:

Karen (laughs). We always talk about her as if she were a grown woman.

Martha. It's not so funny. There's something the matter with the kid. That's been true ever since the first day she came. She causes trouble here, she's bad for the other girls. I don't know what it is—it's a feeling I've got that it's wrong somewhere.” (Hellman, 2013)

Mary's behaviours have evolved into a kind of violence but in more insidious form-lies.

3.1. “The Children's Hour”

Hellman deliberately uses “The Children's Hour”, this confusing and misleading title to point out children's trick may not be so mild as what people thought and cannot be underestimated. Instead, they can wield the power by skewing reality to fulfill their urgent want. On the one hand, age demarcates children and adults which may be settled differently in every country though, and laws are special to juvenile aiming to protect and usher them in the right track. On the other hand, if the child's behaviour has brought about great calamity by design, it is a question whether he or she should be to blame, and to which extent that child is supposed to be responsible for the consequence. In that case, what is the disparity in essence between children and adults? Is it still reasonable to treat the person as a child whose malicious action goes beyond his or her age?

3.2. Two Disobedient Children

Children as the most active characters in this play voluntarily help knitting the knot. It's worth noticing that Hellman shapes two girls as the conspirators of the whole tragedy. Certainly, Rosalie is less conspicuous who is forced by Mary so that she is obliged to make up the lie. However, there is no denying that she steals Helen's bracelet at first. Therefore, her act of larceny is the prerequisite for further development. As to Mary, she has had the tendency to bully her classmates in order to satisfy her own need. Before returns home, she manages to rob Evelyn of money to take a taxi (she slaps her face in order to have the money) and ask Rosalie to move her things. Irrespective of any cost, she keeps threatening Rosalie to lie for her. She lacks sympathy and is resistant to schooling. Being absent from the class is Mary's debut in this play. Then she lies to Mrs. Mortar that her tardiness because of the wish that she picked some beautiful flower from a far place to please her, while the bunch actually was thrown into the trash bin after use. She also pretends to be sick with some symptom like heart attack so she faints all of the sudden in order to get away with the school's punishment. Cumulatively, there is an indication that Mary should be a potential fraud and a cheat and apparently her cunning, the master of duplicity is even identical with an adult. Edith Isaacs (1944) rigorously believes her “*the summation of falsity,*

depravity and cruelty". However, sometimes her words are also untenable and childish,

"*It wasn't her room, Grandma, it was the other room, I guess.*" (Hellman, 2013)

"*Everybody is yelling at me. I don't know what I'm saying with everybody mixing me all up. I did see it! I did see it!*" (Hellman, 2013)

"... *I just said it was me so I wouldn't have to tattle on Rosalie.*" (Hellman, 2013)

Manifestly, she straddles the realms of adult and child. The invisibility of her parents as supervisors and the deleterious overprotect from her grandmother accelerates her maturity unmatched with her age.

Mary as the child-liar and the main hint of the play, nonetheless, doesn't get severe punishment seemingly. Hellman leaves certain space for readers to imagine her tribulation caused by herself. Yet, it is acknowledged that her bitterness should be less heavier than those Karen and Martha have gone through, since the moral vilification for school teachers is lethal. With lies dilating, rumours have eroded their normal life and shattered the hope for dream, marriage and future. The ubiquitous disillusionment widespread until Martha kills herself, while Karen also loses the aspiration to move on and embrace new life, for all her important persons leave her one after another. So is the ending:

"*Karen smiles as Mrs. Tilford exits. She does not turn, but a minute later she raises her hand.*

Karen. Good-bye." (Hellman, 2013)

4. Cross-Space

The transgressive behavior accounts for a large proportion in the play, which echoes with Bakhtin's carnivalesque concept. Carnival initially is sort of the ancient ritual "*not (merely a) spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom.*" (Bakhtin, 1981) "Sacaia" is the traditional carnival in Babylon when the death of king emblems the zenith of the festival. The French king Louis XIV once wants to lavishly decorate the whole Paris with thousands of millions of candles so that the noble class can also enjoy the night time with parties rather than sleep early. Only people of high hierarchy can show up in such places who don't labor for earning a living and possess ample discretionary time to waste. In parties, the participants are asked to wear a masque so that they could play the part of the peasants for mocking or derisively act the episode of beheading the king. Naturally, the special occasion forms "*a world of excess where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled.*" (Stallybrass & White, 1986) It turns the world upside down. At carnival, kings become fools and fools become kings. What lies behind carnival is not just disorder, but a conception of an alternative order. The French feminist Julia Kristeva

(1986) writes that transgression of “*linguistic, logical and social codes within the carnivalesque only exists and succeeds... because it accepts another law.*”

4.1. An Overturning of the Proper Order of Things

Mary uses all her artifice to deceive the adults around her. Therefore, to some degree, she does subvert the adult’s hegemonic position as a child by relying on Mrs. Tilford’s authority whose predilection enables Mary to exonerate herself from punishment provisionally. Under this powerful dowager’s shelter, Mary can make up a series of rancorous lies and even force Rosalie involved into the “carnival”, spawning the maelstrom, a chaotic and ridiculous situation. Imperceptibly, the nature of the event also changes, that is, from a farce, a contingency in children’s education in other word, to a tragedy. Now that Hellman skips the process in court, Mrs. Tilford’s living room supersedes the court’s function correspondingly: Mrs. Tilford serves as the judge who residents in the upper position in society; Cardin is assumed to be the lawyer of the defendant; Karen and Martha are reduced to be the defendant; Mary is considered as the plaintiff who comes to litigation; so is Rosalie as the witness whose perjury forms the last drive of the trial.

4.2. Space Changing and Information Moving

As is mentioned before, it is worthwhile to perceive the implication of the title “The Children’s Hour.” For one thing, children taken granted as the vulnerable group are not frail under some circumstances and their offensive behaviour is not a single case in the play. For another, the duration of the melodrama, that is, the children’s hour, is prolonged and moved by space changing. According to Jean Baudrillard’s theory, the referent of sign or languages goes through the following four stages:

1 It is a reflection of a basic reality.

2 It masks and perverts a basic reality.

3 It masks the absence of a basic reality.

4 It bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.”

(Longhurst et al., 2008)

In Act one, Karen and Martha are in the power centre as the teachers and founders of the school. Important scenes are in the living room and the staircase where Evelyn and Peggy eavesdrop the squabble between Martha and Mrs. Mortar (their argument symbolises the first stage which shows Martha’s lesbian inclination). Since Mary is absent, she is unaware of what is happening during her faint. When the scene shifts in girls’ dormitory, two teachers decide to make Mary alone in recreation periods for fortnight as punishment, so they urge pupils to change their rooms in order to block out the ill interaction, now that Karen and Martha are afraid Mary would produce bad influence on other girls, while Evelyn and Peggy tell Mary the content they overheard, which becomes the basis and the material of that fictitious lie, that is, the second stage.

In Act two, Mrs. Tilford is in the power centre as the master of the house, which also indicates that in most cases, the punishment and discipline of children is curtailed merely at a private, familial level rather than the legal penalty to adults even if their behaviour has caused uncontrollable harm to others, as Mrs. Tilford says: “*No. I could never do that. Whatever she does, it must be to me and no one else.*” (Hellman, 2013)

In Mrs. Tilford house, there are also two important spots. One is the living room where the lie is finally consummated publically, the third stage when a basic reality is missing. The other is Mary’s bedroom as a private space more malleable to her wish where she threatens Rosalie to make up the lie. No matter how the place changes, the readers in omniscient perspective are always at present in each scene. However, Mrs. Tilford and Cardin as two outsiders who never go into the venue of the lie’s origin can be easily manipulated. Even, they are degraded into its adherents for Mrs. Tilford hastily informs all the parents whose children are taught by Karen and Martha of their abnormal relationship, which makes the lies rumours and magnifies its effect—the fourth stage. At last, Cardin also leaves Karen. Both non-presenters are refused to enter the school, for the former who wants to apologise for her mistake after Martha’s suicide at the end of the play is only permitted to stay at the doorway centre, and the latter is brusquely cast out by Karen. Therefore, resembling the Japanese writer Akutagawa’s short novel “In a Bamboo Grove”¹ that tells a homicide case from seven characters’ perspective whose depositions are contradictory with one another so that the truth becomes an enigma raised during the course of the narrative, this play is also constructed by a series of lies which form a hollow narrative structure so that rumour can invalidate truth, or rather, there is no point of truth. One of the differences of *The Children’s Hour* from “In a Bamboo Grove” lies on the viewpoint caused by space changing. Martha and Karen are always in the centre of lie and move altogether when its prime goes.

Bakhtin (1981) writes: “*space becomes more concrete and saturated with a time that is more substantial: space is filled with real, living meaning, and forms a crucial relationship with the hero and his fate.*” Whereupon, in Act three, the school becomes two sisters’ penitentiary, rather than the preceding female community. They are not teachers any more, but two lepers isolated from society. Their activities are severely circumscribed and any affiliation with them is unacceptable. Even, the food needs transporting by a grocery boy who shows viciousness by gazing upon them. Time is of imperceptibility:

“Martha. What time is it?”

Karen. I don’t know.

Martha. I was hoping it was time for my bath.

Karen. Take it early today.” (Hellman, 2013)

Their slough of despond is similar to *Waiting for Godot*.

¹“In a Bamboo Grove” is one of representative works written by Akutagawa Ryunosuke in 1921. Later on, the famous Japanese director Akira Kurosawa adapted it into film and named it as “Rashomon”, identified with the title of Akutagawa’s collection of short stories.

“ESTRAGON: *What’s wrong with you?*
 VLADIMIR: *Nothing.*
 ESTRAGON: *I m going.*
 VLADIMIR: *So am I.*
 ESTRAGON: *Was I long asleep?*
 VLADIMIR: *I don’t know. (Silence.)*
 ESTRAGON: *Where shall we go?*
 VLADIMIR: *Not far.*” (Wang et al., 2018)

5. Cross-Media

In 1936, *The Children’s Hour* was made into a film directed by William Wyler. However, because of the Production Code², the story was adapted into a heterosexual love triangle. The controversial name of the play was changed, and the movie was eventually released as *These Three*, while Hellman herself believes this version still retains the implied meaning same as what she wants to express and thus feels satisfied. With temporary acceptance changing, the Production Code correspondently lets loose abreast of the times. In 1961, with its intact lesbian theme, the play was again adapted into a film of the same name, also directed by Wyler and Audrey Hepburn, Shirley MacLaine as well as James Garner starring in.

As is mentioned in the third chapter, the theatre “*where audiences could hear and deliberate on dialogues and debates staged almost daily, and where they heard speeches in a form and forum very close to those of their ancient forebears,*” (Kastan, 2012) naturally offers the audience a panoramical view. Light dims and curtain rises, which not only ushers in the diegetic world, but emblems the beginning of the story.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing once remarked the different features among sceptre, painting and poetry in technique of expression in *Laocoön*:

“*But all bodies do not exist only in space, but also in time. They have continued duration, and in every moment of their duration may assume a different appearance and stand in a different relation... poetry also paints bodies, but only by way of indication, and through the means of actions... Painting, with regard to compositions in which the objects are coexistent, can only avail itself of one moment of action... And even thus poetry, in her progressive imitations, can only make use of one single property of bodies... From this is derived the rule of the unity of picturesque epithets, and of frugality in the description of bodily objects.*” (Zhang, 2000)

By analogy from Lessing’s opinion, the presentation of play performed through cross-media can be considered as the juxtaposition of content in duration and space. Lights effect and stage arts help create the spacial texture in

²The ban on homosexuality or on the use of specific curse words, were never directly mentioned, but were assumed to be understood without clear demarcation. Homosexuals were de facto included under the proscription of sex perversion, and the depiction of miscegenation (by 1934, defined only as sexual relationships between black and white races) was forbidden.

plays, while films without application of three-dimensional technology seem flat, for montage is the main structural method. The language of play is poetry, a type of linear narration, a combination of letters and sounds, the conformity of utterance and characteristics. Lines themselves are direct, spoken by the actors, yet the content otherwise, which might be rotative or retroflexed as well. Thereupon, each scene in play shows a dyadic composition of sounds and actions with three possible ramifications: the precedence that the story keeps weaving when characters are offstage without trailing after the plot; the postponement that characters repeat the past plot or the known information and the synchrony that characters' reaction is in tune with the present duration and space settled by the play. However, many post-modernism plays manage to break the continuity of time and space with split plots, which renders the hue of fragment and isolation.

The preponderance of visual display is to explain/recreate the "gaps" in the process of adaptations from one media to another. The notion "gaps" proposed by Wolfgang Iser means the blank or ambiguous space the author doesn't give clear interpretation requires readers' imagination to fill in. The circulation of encoding and decoding happens in the simple text's rewriting including at least two media's interference, in other words, intermediationality. Its core meaning refers to the interaction, or convergence, among all traditional print media like books and modern digital media with electronic images. (Wang & Liu, 2010)

In the second film version of *The Children's Hour* adapted in 1961, it interleaves a more specific explanation how Mrs. Tilford finds Mary is lying: Rosalie's mother finds Helen's bracelet first, and then she with Rosalie together visits Mrs. Tilford to tell her the truth, while the plot does not exist in the play. Since the film tries to display the whole process of this event integrally, the text of adaptation has more realistic features with singular interpretation and settled meaning than the ordinary script whose ending is more impetuous—Martha's harrowing suicide and Mrs. Tilford's overdue apology almost come together without pause, and Karen says farewell to Mrs. Tilford, to herself and to the public as the final curtain. Still, characters' future is not certain at all. In the film, the director procrastinates on the time's duration by adding a funeral ceremony for Martha and performing a full-length shot for Karen when she gradually leaves the school under the gaze from Mrs. Tilford, Cardin and those children's parents in anguish and regret. Besides, the film changes the way of Martha's suicide, from shooting to hanging, and the audience are led by Karen's point of view. When Karen opens the door, the lens only shows the shadow cast on the wall with sight wobble rather than the actress' imitation of shooting, which, to some degree, protects the audience as well.

6. Conclusion

The Children's Hour is the manifestation of multiple layers of crossing meaning. First, it introduces the lesbian theme in accordance with the real case which inspired the playwright's creation. According to Mary's lie, the two sisters' beha-

viour greatly violates the traditional value and social norms so that Martha's affection for Karen is confirmed by the public instead of by herself, which shows the dimension of cross-gender. Furthermore, children as the most active characters in this play join the plot knitting as well. Hellman has indicated the identical traits between teenagers and adults. Despite the fact that Mary's action has gone far beyond her age, she still gets away with punishment, while the sisters' life is totally ruined. After Martha's suicide, Karen lost her aspiration to move on. Besides, dating back to the whole process of the lie's origin, it is clear that space plays a significant role due to its closure, which causes information to be delayed and distorted. Space is also related to power and metaphorical meaning, for the school emblems the warm female community as well as the place for discipline. Mrs. Tilford's living room substantially functions as the court, which stands for the authority and where Mary manages to overturn the order by counting upon the senior's power. Apart from the changing scenes, readers are always at present and have a panoramic view offered by the special form of play, and its adaptations, the circulation of encoding and decoding in the simple text's re-writing involves the effect of intermediationality.

All in all, "cross-gender" and "cross-age" are the topics concerning the outstanding themes which the previous scholars have noticed, while "cross-space" and "cross-media" deal with the development of the twist, or rather, the process of how this chaotic situation forms.

In addition to the four aspects of crossing discussed in this paper, there is another point worthwhile to pay attention to, that is, the force of money, taking consideration of the settings, especially for its time and the author's intention of which the paper is lacking. Lots of descriptions concerning property appear and the capital often becomes the characters' motivation: Mary robs Evelyn of two dollars and twenty-five cents to take a taxi; Mrs. Mortar always wants to return to London and she complains about the low salary, so Martha gives her spare money and she leaves the school immediately. After she goes broke again, she returns to school, arriving too late to testify for the two sisters in court. Now that they lost the case, Martha and Karen are not able to keep running the school. Besides, Helen's bracelet can also be regarded as a sort of currency with exchange value since Mary uses it to threaten Rosalie to make a vow. *The Children's Hour* was first performed and published in 1934 when the Great Depression in America was just over. Hence, is there likely some relationship between the concept of money and the actual historical background? Look forward to more research on this interesting play.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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