

PART IV

APPENDIX I

(Excerpts from a personal interview with the author of A Clearing in the Woods, Arthur Laurents, held on January 2, 1970.)

LAURENTS: The play has to be played very fast.

KOPF: Would it fare well in the round?

LAURENTS: It's very good in the round.

KOPF: Virginia is not as crazy as some of the reviewers thought she was. Wouldn't you say?

LAURENTS: In the beginning of the play she is rather humorous. If she starts at too high a pitch you have nowhere to go, and all you have is a neurotic frantic woman. This woman does not know what she is running away from. She finds this place the clearing and she thinks, "Wow, here I'm safe." So she starts out feeling good. No matter how disturbed she may be, "I'm here." It really is a melodramatic love story. She learns to love herself. Before you can love anybody else you have to love yourself. And when, at the end of the play, she has all those things she giggles. It's funny. It's almost as though she's "high". But when you direct the play, I beg you not to play for psychological meaning. Play the story. When she has that "thing" with George she says, "You could be a lot of men." Now, he is a lot of men. But that's the kind of remark a woman makes in flirting anyway.

You have to play it on that level.

KOPF: Did you like the original set for A Clearing in the Woods?

LAURENTS: No.

KOPF: Why?

LAURENTS: It was too literal, and yet "airy-fairy". I don't think you need a set for the play, by the way. I always thought it should be done with lights: as theatrically as possible. Since everything happens, in a sense, at the whim of the author, you have complete freedom to put lights on and off when you want.

KOPF: The play seems to progress by virtue of accidents.

LAURENTS: There are a bunch of accidents in the play. It all happens that way. Like a kaleidoscope. You shake it one way and it comes out one thing. Play absolutely the moment. But the audience should always be ahead.

KOPF: And the girls...how should they be dealt with?

LAURENTS: They should be played, not as alter-egos, but "you're going to be sorry if you don't let me stay with you." That is their motivation, not any mystic thing or in the head or like that. They want to have her take care of them and they say so. "Never mind your own problems, you deal with ours." They don't believe she doesn't know who they are. They think she is faking. They think she doesn't want any part of them, which is perfectly true in a psychological sense. But in the immediacy of the play she doesn't want any part of them; she wants to be alone and peace.

Outside her (not in her mind) she's been through hell and she wants to be alone and have no strange girls coming around. That's what I mean by playing literally right on the story-line.

KOPF: People seemed to have been confused by the original production.

LAURENTS: People will accept if you use music much more than they will if you do not. You have to have an Ionesco fantasy where they say, "O.K., we know it is not real." But if you give them something that has the semblance of reality, but really is fantasy, they are lost. And yet the minute you start with that "full of meaning stuff" [the psychological level] the audience thinks, "Oh, God, we're in for it." They [the original production] played the father rejecting Virginia scene as incest. I think the Freudian stuff is so over-exaggerated. It's such simplistic thinking and I don't believe it when it's generalized to every boy and girl. [In this scene] it is very hard for Virginia to ask for help, so she has to play it cool instead of just saying it. When she is rejected, she sort of tosses it off, not with cries of "you never understood me!" The worst thing that happens with the father is at the end: when she really wants to make peace and he really does reject her. And then she realizes it is his fault, not hers. You cannot change that generation. I don't care what generation it is. Your parents reach a certain point and that's it. And the mistake to make is fighting it, because it hurts them. They

know they failed. Your husband or your wife is the one to get angry with -- not your father or your mother -- it's too late.

KOPF: It is fine to make Virginia an "Everywoman", but a clearing is not specific and shouldn't her clearing be a particular place and not an "everywhere"?

LAURENTS: I don't see why a woods cannot be specific, if they [the girls] had playthings, etc., things they'd make themselves -- a cart or wagon. This place, since she left it, is untouched. It's nobody else's, ever!

KOPF: What did you mean when you said the original production was too liberal?

LAURENTS: Well, her costume. I called it a filmy negligée. My point was that she had tried to commit suicide in her bathroom. The costume was too literal. She doesn't have to wear that negligée at all. As far as her relationship to the other girls, she has met herself in three different times in her life and they are all there -- simple as that. She thinks of herself as having no connections with them. Everything is in "I", - "I had one like that," - "don't leave me," - "Go away from me."

KOPF: Which text should I use?

LAURENTS: The Random House script is the most authoritative.