

THE REUNION by JOHN TARRANT

CAST

PUPILS:

DARREN
TRACEY
JASMINE
JEREMY
CHRIS [F]
ANNA
PHILLIS
PHILIP

STAFF:

MISS JENKINS
MS SMYTHE

The play is written for a mixed cast of three boys and seven girls, though it would be possible for Chris, for instance, to be a boy rather than a girl, if desired. Miss Jenkins could also be Mr Jenkins if preferred, so there is some flexibility.

The play lasts approx half an hour to forty minutes.

This would make a good GCSE exam piece. All roles are of an examinable length.

EXTRACT ONE

He takes his time to peer into various bags which have been left by other pupils. He's obviously looking for something to nick.

DARREN *calling out to his girlfriend, outside in the corridor*

Oi! Trace! *[Pause.]* Oi! Trace!

TRACEY *running in*

Yeh, what is it, Daz?

DARREN

You got me fags?

TRACEY

Yeh, they're in me bag. I left it in the bogs.

DARREN

God, don't be stupid; someone'll nick 'em.

TRACEY

Alright, Daz, I'll get 'em.

Exit Tracey. Darren starts looking in a bag on a desk. Enter Jeremy.

JEREMY

Er ... Darren; that's my bag.

DARREN

Yeah.

JEREMY

Well, can I have it back, please?

Others start to drift in.

DARREN *throwing bag at Jeremy*

Yeah.

JASMINE

That's no way to treat another person's property.

DARREN

Yeah.

JASMINE *correcting*

Yes. And if you have no respect for other people's property, what you are basically saying is that you have no respect for yourself.

DARREN

Yeah.

JASMINE *correcting*

Yes.

JEREMY

I don't need you to defend me.

JASMINE

Yes, you do.

Pause.

CHRIS

Has anyone seen Jenkins? The bell went ages ago.

PHILIP

I'm pretty confident I saw her car on the way to school. I couldn't be exactly sure about the number plate, but it certainly was the same colour Golf. And kept as clean as she always keeps her car, so it might ...

DARREN

Shut up, Philip. I 'ope she's away again. Any luck, they'll forget to send a cover teacher over. I 'eard she's had enough of all this. She's gonna retire early 'cos she can't stick us no more.

JASMINE *correcting*

Can't stick you.

DARREN

Me!! It ain't me! It's Jeremy. I 'eard Jeremy 'ere does so much work that Jenkins is up all night, every night, marking the stuff. Never gets a wink of sleep.

JEREMY

Don't be stupid.

DARREN

Oooh! And who are you calling stupid, Mr I've-Got-The-Biggest-Brain-In-The-World?

JASMINE

Leave him alone.

JEREMY

I don't need you to defend me.

JASMINE

Yes, you do.

PHILIP

I'm sure Miss is fine. She would only take time off school if she was seriously ill.

PHILLIS

I heard there was a teacher had a nervous breakdown at this school about twenty years ago. She used to keep a bottle of gin in her store cupboard, just so as she could get through the day. She passed out in the middle of a lesson and she never came back after that. They found about a hundred empty gin bottles in her cupboard. Now the head checks all the cupboards every week.

DARREN

Don't be stupid.

JASMINE

Why is everyone apart from you 'stupid', Darren?

PHILIP

She's coming!

Enter Miss Jenkins.

MISS JENKINS

Right, sorry I'm late. Sit down. Shut up and get your books out. Where's Tracey?

Enter Tracey.

TRACEY

I've got 'em, Daz.

MISS JENKINS

Why are you late, Tracey? And what is it that you have got?

TRACEY

Er, nothing, Miss.

MISS JENKINS

Well, would you like to give that which you call 'nothing' to me?

TRACEY

They ain't mine.

MISS JENKINS

First it was 'nothing', now it is 'they', and if they are not yours, then whose 'nothing' or 'they' are they?

TRACEY

They ain't mine, Miss.

MISS JENKINS

That I do not dispute - the question was angled more at ascertaining to whom they do belong.

TRACEY

Eh?

DARREN

They're Jeremy's, Miss.

MISS JENKINS

What?

PHILIP

Can I put the date on the board, Miss?

MISS JENKINS

What? No, sit down.

PHILLIS

Does the headmaster check your cupboards, Miss?

MISS JENKINS

What?

PHILLIS

See, Darren, he does.

MISS JENKINS

Darren, what is it that belongs to Jeremy?

TRACEY

The fags.

MISS JENKINS

What 'fags', Tracey?

DARREN

Stupid cow.

MISS JENKINS

Darren, Tracey, see me at the end of the lesson. And the rest of you - sit down.

PHILIP

Miss, can I ...

MISS JENKINS

No! Just shut up and sit down. NOW! [*There is a pause while she tries to regain calm.*]

Right, now as I told you ... [*Starts looking through some papers.*]

JASMINE

Yesterday, Miss.

MISS JENKINS

Yes, er, as I told you yesterday, we are starting a new topic in careers today and the first thing we're going to look at are our ambitions. So ... can anyone tell me what ambitions are? Yes, Philip.

PHILIP

Can I give out the books, Miss?

MISS JENKINS

There are no books for this, Philip. This has to all come from you. Anyone ... what are ambitions? [*Pause.*] Anyone ... please? Anna? No? Anyone?

JASMINE

They're something that we dream of doing or becoming.

MISS JENKINS

Exactly. Yes, exactly. Your ambitions are the things you dream of doing or becoming.

Yes, Chris.

CHRIS

Can I go for my guitar lesson, Miss?

MISS JENKINS

Yes. Yes, now look. Chris is perhaps already on the road to her ambition to become a famous guitar player. Yes, Chris, of course you can, off you go. We don't want to stand in the way of your ambitions.

CHRIS

It ain't today, Miss. I was asking you for tomorrow.

MISS JENKINS

Oh, well - others of you probably have ambitions as well. There might be someone here who wants to be Prime Minister, or ...

DARREN

What's your ambition, Miss?

MISS JENKINS

Mine? Well, er, it's not really my place to have ambitions - I mean, I'm a lot older than you and ...

DARREN

So you want to be a teacher for the rest of your life?

MISS JENKINS *increasingly angry and frustrated*

Look, this isn't about me. It's about you and I want you to write down clearly and neatly in your books, what your ambitions are - and don't forget to underline today's date.

The lights fade and come back up on the interview room. Anna is standing away from the desk.

MS SMYTHE

That's right, dear, come in and sit down. Yes, over here, dear, on the chair.

Anna moves very slowly to the chair and sits down.

MS SMYTHE

That's better, dear. I can see you properly now. Let's see, it's Lucy isn't it?

ANNA *almost inaudibly*

Anna.

MS SMYTHE

What's that, dear? You'll need to speak up a little - my hearing's not what it was.

ANNA *still very quietly*

Anna.

MS SMYTHE

I still can't hear you, dear.
ANNA *still very quietly*
Anna.

MS SMYTHE

Oh, Gemma, is it? I'm so sorry, dear. Now your papers are here somewhere; I really must sort out my desk. [*Finds a paper.*] That's right. Gemma. Oh, I remember - you want to be an actress. [*Pauses and looks at Anna.*] Well, that's a lovely idea, but perhaps a little ambitious, dear. Have you thought about computers? They're wonderful things, you know. Look, take this book away with you and read all about them and fill in this form by next week. Thankyou, dear.

Lights dip and when they come back up Tracey is sitting at the desk.

TRACEY *aggressively*

What you sayin' then? You sayin' I ain't beautiful?

MS SMYTHE

No, not at all, dear; I didn't mean that at all. I think you're very pretty indeed.

TRACEY

Well, why are you sayin' I can't be a model then?

MS SMYTHE

I wasn't saying you can't be a model. I was just saying that you might like to think of other options, dear, that's all - other options.

TRACEY

Well, my Darren says I'm the best lookin' girl in the school and 'e should know - 'e's been out with most of 'em. And I know that men like to look at me 'cos I sees them all the time, tryin' to cop an eyeful when I'm walkin' to school.

MS SMYTHE

Oh, I'm sure they don't, dear! Look, just take this away and fill it in for me by next week and just come back and see me if you change your mind. Thankyou, dear.

Lights dip and up on Jasmine standing by the desk of the interview room in full flow - she has obviously been speaking for some time. Ms Smythe is looking on in amazement.

JASMINE

And what is more, it will only be through the direct action of people like me that governments will be forced to change their policies on the environment and start seeing the world as a global force of nature and not an infinite resource which they can simply exploit to satisfy their insatiable lust for power. Without direct intervention at policy making levels, environmental pressure groups will continue to be little more than toothless dogs barking in the night.

MS SMYTHE

That's lovely, dear.

JASMINE

What's lovely about it?

MS SMYTHE

The bit about 'toothless dogs barking in the night.' That's very poetic. Have you thought about becoming a writer?

Blackout. The lights come back up on the classroom ...

EXTRACT TWO

... MISS JENKINS *suddenly enthusiastic*

No, look - this is a really good idea. Why don't you all agree that in ten years time you'll come back and meet here and see what's happened to each of you?

JASMINE

O.K. I'll do it. How about the rest of you?

DARREN

Yeah. Trace?

TRACEY

Yeah Daz?

DARREN

Will you?

TRACEY

Will I what, Daz?

JEREMY

I will.

PHILIP

Me too, Miss. I think it's a great idea. Will you still be here, Miss?

MISS JENKINS

Well er, I ... I ...

CHRIS

It's a cool idea.

PHILLIS

Well I'll only come if it won't be a threat to national security.

MISS JENKINS

Excellent. Well, that's all of you, then. Oh no, sorry, Anna, I forgot you. Will you come back in ten year's time, Anna?

ANNA

Um, if you think it's a good ...

JASMINE

Of course she will. That's settled then. Ten years time, on this day, at this place at ...

let's say, eight o'clock p.m. ...

MISS JENKINS

Good. Right, those of you who aren't seeing me at the end of the lesson - you can pack up your things and get ready to go.

The characters walk slowly into smoke and light effect at the back and sides of the stage. Lights and sound continue, with smoke, to indicate the passing of time. Gradually the effects slow down and the lights fade and return to normal, not as bright, to indicate nighttime. It is ten years later. All the characters need to have changed and become adult versions of what they were in the classroom. Darren and Tracey enter the stage.

TRACEY

You made us late again, Darren. It's those dodgy 'His and Her' watches you bought in the pub.

DARREN

Look, don't start.

TRACEY

I ain't starting.

DARREN

Where is everyone then?

TRACEY

Wait for me, Daz, I can't 'ardly walk in these shoes. Oh, it ain't changed a bit, 'as it?

DARREN

'Ow would you know? You were 'ardly ever 'ere.

TRACEY

I was too. I was 'ere enough to get your attention.

DARREN *gloomily*

Yeah.

TRACEY

Not that you care. 'Ave you got a fag on you?

DARREN

You and your bloody fags. You can't smoke in school - what are you thinkin' of?

TRACEY

It never stopped you, did it?

DARREN

That were different, then - weren't it?

TRACEY

I hope it doesn't go on too late. The sitter can only stay till eight. I had to pay her double as it is. She must 'ave 'eard about what 'appened to the last one. Such a shame - the kids really liked her. I wonder what 'appened to 'er?

DARREN

She's still in hospital. Look out - 'ere's one.

Enter Philip.

PHILIP

Oh, hello! You must be Darren and you must be Tracey.

TRACEY

It's Philip! Ooh, you 'aven't changed a bit, 'ave you?

PHILIP

Thankyou. Have you seen anybody else?

TRACEY

Nah. Not yet. We thought we was late.

PHILIP

Oh look - there's our Year photograph on the wall. Look, and there's Miss Jenkins.

Enter Phillis and Jasmine.

PHILIP

Oh, look - it's Jasmine and - oh, that must be Phillis! How exciting!

DARREN *very sarcastic.*

Yeah, rivetin'!

TRACEY

Darren!

DARREN

Look, don't you start!

TRACEY

I ain't startin'.

JASMINE

Hello Darren - Tracey. And you must be Philip. You haven't changed a bit, have you?...

EXTRACT THREE

...JEREMY

Hello, Miss Jenkins. [*Shakes her hand.*] How are you?

MISS JENKINS

Well, I'm ...

DARREN *inserting quickly*

Still here, Miss!

MISS JENKINS

Yes, yes, I suppose I am. And you must be Chris.

CHRIS

Got it in one, Miss. How you doin'?

MISS JENKINS

Very well, thankyou. And how about you?

CHRIS

Yeah, I'm cool. [*From this point on, Chris is furiously writing down what everyone says.*]

Anna enters. She is dressed glamorously, sexily, and walks with a swagger of

confidence and display to her chair. She sits quietly and is completely oblivious to all the eyes which are upon her. Her entrance causes a considerable stir.

MISS JENKINS

Good. And, er, I'm sorry - I don't remember your name. You must be ...

ANNA

Anna.

EVERYONE

ANNA!!!

JASMINE

But, Anna, you look so ...

DARREN *appreciatively*

Yeah!

TRACEY *nudging him sharply*

Daz!

DARREN

Look, don't you start.

TRACEY

I ain't starting.

JASMINE

What's happened to you, Anna?

ANNA

What do you mean, what's happened to me?

JASMINE

Well, you've changed.

ANNA

Actually, I think it's more remarkable that you haven't. None of you have, really.

DARREN

You've changed all right.

ANNA

Some of us probably decided that's part of what growing up was about.

DARREN

Eh?

ANNA

Think it over - it'll come to you.

PHILIP

It's unbelievable, Anna. I mean, none of us recognised you. What are you - I mean, what do you, erm, what kind of work ... ?

ANNA

Surely not. No, you don't want to talk about me - let's start with someone else. I'm the one you forgot, remember? Little Anna, sitting all quiet in the corner ...

MISS JENKINS

Come on, everybody - let's try to make this as pleasant as we can. After all ...

DARREN

Hey, it's just like it used to be, isn't it, Miss? - you trying to control us ...

MISS JENKINS

Well, um, it's true - time seems to roll back. Nothing changes much here either.

JASMINE

Why don't we each in turn tell the rest of the group what we've achieved over the last ten years. That is why we're here, isn't it?

PHILIP

Miss, you can start. Tell us what you've done.

MISS JENKINS

That's very nice of you to think of me, but this is your reunion. I've just been teaching here all this time. It's you who've been out in the world, following your dreams.

DARREN

Nightmares, more like.

TRACEY

Daz! Daz! - What do you mean by that?

DARREN

Look, don't start, right?

TRACEY

I ain't starting.

JASMINE

Phillis, how about you first. As I remember, you were going to become the female equivalent of James Bond. How did that go?

PHILLIS

Oh, well, there's been a few ups and downs you know. The path to success and all that, never did run smooth.

CHRIS

That's the path of true love, Phillis.

PHILLIS

What?

CHRIS

The path of true love ... the path of true love never did run smooth.

PHILLIS

Well, I don't know too much about that, but things have been up and down a little, as they are, and what with one thing and another ...

JASMINE

Very good, but what is it exactly that you do now?

PHILLIS

Well, it's not as straightforward as that, you see. I mean there are a few things and it's a little difficult to explain. But, you know ... this and that and ... it'll all come together, like it does...

JASMINE

Right. Jeremy?

TRACEY *whispering behind her hand to Darren*

I seen Phillis behind the counter at Costcutters - you know, next to the garage ...

DARREN

Sssh! I wanna 'ear what that prune, Jeremy, 'as to say for 'isself.

JEREMY

I'm an accountant.

DARREN

There's a surprise!

JEREMY

And I no longer have to take that sort of thing from the likes of you.

DARREN

Oh, yeah - and what's that supposed to mean?

TRACEY

Daz!

DARREN

Don't you start!

TRACEY

I ain't startin'. It's just ...

ANNA

You used to bully Jeremy. You used to bully me too for that matter.

DARREN

I never

JEREMY

If you'd be so kind ... I was asked a question and I'd like to answer it now. I'm doing rather well, as it happens...

PRODUCTION NOTES + TECHNICAL CUES, ETC.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES - THE PLAY'S INTENTION

The writer himself calls the characters in the play stereotypes, but I think he underestimates the play's potential. Certainly, there is a certain amount of stereotyping - but the characterisation can - and should, in my opinion - be taken further than the cardboard cut-outs suggested by the word stereotype.

The play takes a group of youngsters of around fifteen or sixteen and shows what their aspirations for the future are. They range from Phillis, who wants to be a spy and Tracey, who wants to be a model - both of them clearly aiming at unrealistic goals - to Jeremy - wanting to be an accountant - and Darren, who wants to follow his father into the second-hand motor-trade. In between are Chris, who aspires to be a songwriter, Jasmine who wants to enter the political arena and fight for environmental causes and Philip who wants to be a teacher. Anna is a 'don't know.' As such, they mirror fairly accurately the range of ideas that any average class of students of this age might have.

The group decide to meet up in ten years' time to see what has happened to them. The results are mainly predictable: Phillis is one of the career guidance system's failures, without any real job or ambition any more and Tracey married young and has had two children. Jeremy, Darren and Jasmine have all fulfilled their ambitions - though they have not necessarily made themselves happy doing so. Philip had gone into teaching for the wrong reasons - out of hero worship for Miss Jenkins - but should have been made to see this at the career advisory stage rather than having to cope with failure. Chris is indeed a writer - though not of songs. And Anna - turns out to have been a stripper since her school days and of the lot of them is the most balanced and confident.

The play does not labour any particular themes. The dottiness of the careers teacher, Ms Smythe, and her obvious total ineptitude could be played as a theme - especially since Phillis and Philip clearly needed real help in this area and end up as casualties. But the main themes come from Anna herself in the last scene: not to be quick to judge others, to be realistic and balance the life of the emotions with working life [which Jasmine and Jeremy are failing to do.] She gives the upnote to the play, which might otherwise be fairly downbeat in its message - as we see character after character disappointed both through fulfilling their dreams and through failing to do so. Even Miss Jenkins has a monologue in which she reveals the pressures of teaching - something she fails to communicate to the idolising Philip. Anna, in contrast, despite her sleazy job is very much 'her own person.' She is the only one who has truly grown-up - shown by the fact she is the sole member of the class ten-years on who calls Miss Jenkins Elizabeth, as invited - showing that she feels she is on an equal level with her, a co-member of the adult world.

I have underlined the serious side of the play, but there are plenty of laughs along the way. Darren and Tracey with their constant bickering and their predictable marriage are comic characters and lift each scene. Ms Smythe is a caricature of a fluffy, silly old bat - farmed out into careers probably because she is an inept teacher. Sadly, her mismanagement of the careers area has serious consequences - but her scenes are humorous and should be played for the laughs. Phillis's nosiness and Philip's hero-worship are also played up for laughs.

CHARACTERS

DARREN 15/16 years old at beginning. Described by the author as the 'dominant male' type, he is loud, arrogant, chauvinist, street-wise and working-class. He seems at first to be the rebel - anti- school, education and authority but actually he is a conformist of the

highest order and, on leaving school he quickly reverts to type. He follows his father into the second-hand car-trade. Like 'Del-boy', he is always on the look-out for a sharp deal. But he is not a criminal - in fact, he is quick to point out that he probably works harder than anyone else there to keep his mortgage paid and his wife and children fed and in relative comfort. His values are therefore quite conservative. Wife, Tracey, does not have to work - Darren would probably feel less of a man if she did have to and would not consider that a woman's place in any case. Part for the course is the marital gibing, the complaints about how expensive she is, all this is part of the pattern which Darren has so completely slotted into. Pleasures are the pub and nights out with the lads - a life-style predicted by Jasmine which turns out to be true.

He is possessive with Tracey, dominating her and advertising her as 'his' girl with a casual arm round her shoulder, a pat of the bottom, etc. He verges on the bully with Jeremy, who gets up his nose - getting too close to him, and so on, seeking to stare him out. He is shifty with Jasmine, not making eye contact, etc. - she scares him a little perhaps.

The actor should develop a strong regional accent to play this part - East End springs to mind and is suggested by the script, but any strong city accent would do. Movements should be sharp and strong. He could have mannerisms such as leaning back and swinging on his chair, flicking his hand, combing his hair back with a comb in the top pocket - that kind of thing. His walk is loose and confident, shoulders a little hunched - the street-wise 'dude.'

TRACEY 15/16 years old at beginning. Over made-up - even as a school-girl - wearing the school uniform and later her own clothes as if they are fashion statements - but the look is tarty as a schoolgirl and brassy as an adult. She is loud, confident up to a point - with the approval of men - as a schoolgirl, under the thumb of Darren, running to his every beck and call, though there are signs that the adult Tracey is fighting back, becoming more assertive. She is disappointed with her life, never having been able to fulfil herself - not having tried and probably failed to be a model, she will always hanker after this dream and as the years go by, convince herself that, but for the unlucky chance of her pregnancies, this is a career she could have excelled in. So the adult Tracey needs to be played as more petulant and dissatisfied.

Once again, the actress needs to play her with an accent one can cut with a knife, plenty of facial grimaces, sneers and the like - perhaps a mannerism of turning her mouth down at the corners, fiddling with her hair, crossing and uncrossing her legs - nothing done to excess of course, but that is the kind of portrait to aim for. She has no particular relationship with the rest of the class, her entire focus of attention being on Darren. Contrast this with the adult Tracey who wants to stay and talk to everyone: she is growing out of Darren and is genuinely interested in the rest of her classmates at last.

JASMINE 15/16 years old at beginning. The strongest and most independently minded of the class, she has opinions about everything. She seems unshakeable in her confidence and her defence of environmental issues and human rights, which include largely unwanted defences of Jeremy, who she perceives as bullied by Darren. Darren is in fact the main butt of her anger. She cannot stand anything about him and has dismissed him present and future as a selfish low-life. In fact, both of them are arguably similar - strong, with a tendency to bully, though Jasmine would certainly not see her assertive behaviour as bullying.

Ten years on, Jasmine's essential vulnerability is exposed. She is still fiercely fighting her corner but the lack of a personal and emotional life is undermining her. Her fondness for Jeremy, which shows itself in the school scenes and which has never been followed up, has left her emotionally stunted. As usual, she takes control of the rest of the class in the reunion scene. But Anna throws her off-centre and it is unclear quite why. Is it because Anna is easily as confident and at home with herself as she has professed to be? She senses a rival - and one who is genuinely on top of her life. Does this expose the gaps in her own? Is it because Jasmine cannot be wrong and when proved to be so cannot cope? It is probably a mixture of all these, but the actress

playing Jasmine will need to make her own mind up and play the character sensitively, showing a lead-up to her disintegration in the final moments.

Jasmine should be better-spoken, voice clear and definite - perhaps rather hectoring and preacherish. Gestures and mannerisms are assertive - way of standing strong, head thrown back. Not afraid of eye-contact, this could be a way of showing the change in her towards the end - dropping the head and eyes.

JEREMY 15/16 years old at the beginning. A nicely spoken, quietly confident young man who shows from the beginning that he is focused on what he wants and that he'll achieve his ambitions. Though Darren is constantly sniping at him, Jeremy does not seem particularly rattled by this and resents Jasmine's protection of him. Jeremy's way of coping with the Darrens of this world is to ignore them completely and he has the strong concentration that allows him to do this.

In the reunion section, he has not developed much except that he has become more confident and certain of the choices he has made. He has sacrificed all to his ambition, though he probably does not realise it himself. Working late - he is off to a meeting after the reunion - he is on a high road to an early heart attack or similar. Anna can see this and Jasmine, perhaps seeing his contained energy and self-sufficiency realises her lack through seeing his.

The key to playing this character is contained energy. No one who is as focused as Jeremy is throughout can be relaxed or loose in his walk or stance; rather, he must hold himself stiff and tense. Little hand movements and gestures held close to his body will betray an inner tension and concealed energy. Tight smiles, face rather still but alert, all will help the portrait. Voice should be clipped and upper-class - clipping the words will also help reveal the inner tension of the character.

CHRIS 15/16 years old at the beginning. Chris becomes the writer and has aspirations of being a song-writer. He/she [the character can be played by either sex - though I shall refer to him/her from now on as female, as featured in the text] plays the guitar and seems to have a concentration problem as a student. In her own world, Chris will often be irritating to a teacher, as she scribbles and doodles through lessons - and throughout the reunion. She has elected to be on the outside of society, commenting on it. Early 'poems/songs' as featured in the script are immature and influenced by the rock culture she is presumably interested in - heavy metal or similar. She seems an unlikely candidate to have made it in the real world as a writer, but perhaps she has got more focused as she has aged.

It is hard to know whether Chris really has written as extensively as she says she has at the reunion. Perhaps she is still not in the real world. It doesn't really matter - though I feel the actor playing her should have decided. For the purposes of the play, her glee in the conflicts and undercurrents revealed in the reunion is completely genuine. As usual, she is apart and does not really interact with any of the cast. Only at the end does Miss Jenkins force her to face up to Jasmine's real pain and the lack of wisdom of openly portraying 'real' people as if they were characters in a fiction. It is not clear how much of this Chris really accepts, however, and she should leave the scene with many wistful backward glances at her torn-up notes.

The body-language of the dreamer is not difficult. She should be sloppy in her movements - not slack-muscled so much as careless. Rumpling her hair with her hand and unaware of her image - uncaring of it, really. There are moments of animation, when reading her poem for instance, when voice should go up a pitch and body should straighten. Otherwise, the script indicates that her voice is lazy, drawling, with a fairly strong accent.

ANNA 15/16 years old at the beginning. The main problem for the actress playing this part is to retain audience awareness of her throughout the beginning part of the play. Of course, her transformation in the end is supposed to be a surprise, but the surprise must be believable and subtly led up to. Anna should have a composure and stillness as well as an alertness from the beginning. She says very little, but if a character's body is very still, yet clearly 'alive', through muscle tension, face still but eyes animated and

clearly watching others with close attention, then the actress will attract an audience's eyes to her and keep an awareness of her going throughout. This is crucial, I feel.

When Anna returns, cool, confident and knowledgeable, she refers to the fact that she watched everyone in the classroom. She talks about not judging others, yet clearly this is precisely what she has done herself - judged but not condemned. She has a wisdom - from participating fully in life - way beyond the others, as shown by the way she treats Miss Jenkins as an equal, whilst the others cannot. She sees into the heart of Jasmine, which is perhaps what Jasmine likes least.

I have talked a little about how she should be played in the first half - that is the difficult part. Cool, sophisticated Anna isn't difficult. Mainly she should come over as an adult. Her sexiness comes from self-confidence and shouldn't be played up for its own sake - she is not giving her classmates the come-on. She walks and sits fluidly - long strides - upright but not stiff body-posture. Voice is clear but not strident - as Jasmine's can be. She should be unhurried and cool in everything she does.

PHILLIS 15/16 years old at the beginning. The author describes Phillis as an attention-seeker. Certainly, this could be one of the reasons for her addiction to spys, the Secret Service, and all that. Actually, I find her a rather sad character. I have already said that she is a victim of the system - the not-very-bright girl with big and totally unrealistic dreams, who should have been carefully advised and supported by the careers advisor and staff. Her attention-seeking comes in her attempts to attract the class' and teacher's interest to her with stories of the past gin-swilling teacher and such scandals.

The contrast of the second half is that Phillis can no longer think of anything to make her interesting. In fact, her life is obviously dull and mundane. She is rather pathetic in this second-half.

The actress playing her should be far more bouncy and confident in the first half. She is childish and immature, but the others have let her be and put up with her. Voice should be bright and gossipy - chirpy. Movements a little melodramatic, to attract attention to herself. In the second half, the facial expression should be lost - at times rather panicky, such as when she is put on the spot to talk about herself. Hands wringing or fiddling with her clothes and other signs of tension such as foot shifting, eyes swivelling and ducked down at times - all these should be emphasised to show the change in her. The voice here is stammering and uncertain.

PHILIP 15/16 years old at the beginning. Philip is that irritating creature that every teacher knows - the wannabe teacher's pet. To play him, the actor would need to make him a more sympathetic character by exploring his reasons for his hero-worship of Miss Jenkins. Young Philip does not really listen to what his teacher is saying, being more concerned about attracting attention to himself with spurious offers to hand out books or clean the board. Clearly he is a young man with an enormous need to be loved, perhaps because he isn't at home.

His loyalty to Miss Jenkins, who has obviously inspired him with a real affection, carries through into the reunion itself, where at last Philip has had the courage to face up to his inadequacies. Having failed as a teacher, he has become a librarian, which is obviously more suited to his rather quiet and fussy character. He still feels guilty though for 'letting Miss Jenkins down.' What he really means by this is that he has let himself - or his false image of himself - down, since Miss Jenkins really doesn't care at all.

Playing style should focus on a certain fussiness - perhaps rather a high voice, perhaps a slight impediment such as a [not overdone] lisp. Gestures and body language should not be large and confident, but small, rather tight and unfocused. We need some sympathy with him in the second half, so his irritating qualities should be underplayed - and seen for what they are - a desire for self esteem.

MISS JENKINS - age up to the actor's choice. Easier if played around thirty, which will mean that the change to forty won't be significant, and therefore not a problem. She is a quiet individual on the whole, even though her first entrance shows a brusque side to her

character and a sternness which is rarely again evident. More often she seems diffident - allowing Jasmine to prompt her and even to come up with ideas, which she then endorses. It is clear from her monologue that she is not very happy as a teacher, but she lacks the energy and impetus to move on.

Since she is obviously very popular with the class and able to inspire such as Philip with adoration, care should be taken to make more of her than the script suggests. There is a danger of making her too bland. Perhaps play her as enthusiastic - she certainly embraces the idea of the reunion with enthusiasm. Playing her this way would make all the 'er's and 'um's written into her speech as endearing - she flaps her hands, her brain moving fast, so that her words just can't get out fast enough - rather than shy and diffident, which it might otherwise become. The enthusiast would be something that children would latch onto, especially coupled with a certain gentleness.

In a way I have already stated the playing style as above. Movements could then be more energetic, too - and speech - except for the monologue - might be high, girlish even, but with a warmth that must be appealing.

MS SMYTHE ought to be played around her fifties in age. She is vague and dappy to a point where one wants to shake her. She is obviously completely useless both as a teacher and a careers guidance officer. She muddles every name and, worse, does not listen to a word the children say. Completely thrown by any evidence of creativity or competence, these areas give her the most effective comedy. She is a gentle soul and certainly has no harm in her, but she is, and should be, irritating.

Playing style -needs to emphasise her uselessness. Have her desk covered with teetering piles of files and papers which she is constantly trying to sort through. Perhaps she could wear glasses that she constantly takes off and on - as if she can see the paperwork without them but not the student sitting in front of her desk - or vice versa. This would add another set of vague and fussy movements. Voice should be soft and deliberately motherly, even when correcting others as to her name. The 'Ms Smythe' and her insistence on it suggests that she is perhaps divorced or separated or just simply making a bid for modern feminine equality, though it is a feeble one. However, there could be hidden depths to her personality that an actress can explore!

SETTING.

The scene jumps between Ms Smythe's career office and the classroom, with occasional moments in the corridor. It would be best, for the sake of the flow of the piece, to make sure that the set is a composite one allowing easy transition between the scenes....