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21L.703 Studies in Drama: Too Hot to Handle: Forbidden Plays in Modern America
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1) Most, if not all, of the characters in *The Children's Hour* commit some type of wrongdoing. If sins could be graded on a sliding scale, which character's transgression is the worst?

[note on the grading scale: a letter of A is the most vindictive, with sympathy being gained as the letter decreases]

The first character up for sentencing is Mary. Her initial lie concerning Karen and Martha goes on to ruin the two females' lives. This is horrible, to be sure, but we can't in good conscience place all of the blame squarely on Mary's young shoulders. Though the play hints that Mary has something intrinsically wrong with her that leads her to act so maliciously, her grandmother's coddling does nothing to relieve Mary's ailment. Additionally, it is not fair to presume that Mary was fully aware of the extent of the damage her lie would cause. For her age and ignorance, B+.

Initially complicit in Mary's scheme, and eventually becoming a vital component of its credibility is Rosalie. It originally appears that Rosalie is extremely less culpable than Mary, having not imagined the deceit itself and merely providing corroboration for Mary's story. Further, she did so reluctantly. Incidentally, it is this last part that scrapes away at Rosalie's apparent innocence. She agrees to tell a lie to keep herself from getting in trouble and, unlike Mary, she has a conscience and knows that what she's doing is wrong. For knowingly doing the wrong thing to save her own tail, B.

Mary and Rosalie were able to gain a fair amount of sympathy because of their youth. Mary's grandmother, Amelia, receives no such pardon. She is firstly at fault for raising a child with such a loose hand as to allow her to run amuck at school and face no repercussions. Added to this, she believes a fantastical assertion made by said child, even when there are mounds of evidence against its plausibility. This latter could be seen as a virtue, having such faith in a child as to love and believe her unconditionally, but even with that, Amelia has no excuse for reacting so harshly to the news. For gullibility and refusing to fact check, B.

Martha's Aunt, Lily Mortar, dealt perhaps the deadliest blow to Martha and Karen's court case by not showing up at the trial, only returning home when her acting career flops. She is also responsible for helping to "out" her in the first place. For being too self-involved to help a family member, C.

We might also consider society's role in all of this. Society is intolerant and allowed both the prosecution and persecution of Martha and Karen. Blaming society in this instance amounts to little more than nonsense because for every action (Mary and Amelia's joint venture), there is an equal and opposite reaction. For providing a hostile environment, C-.

Lastly is Karen's reaction when Martha admits that she did perhaps have stronger feelings for her. Karen's response, compared with the timid and fearful way in which Martha admits her feelings, is heartbreaking. Might Karen's disregard for the feelings of her lifelong friend be the greatest act of cruelty in the play? This seems possible if we view Karen's action not as an island unto itself, but considering the consequences as well. For failing to be a true friend in a time of need, B+.

2) How reasonable is it that this play was censored?

A few reasons spring to mind as to why this play could have been censored. This seems to be the first play we've discussed where the child is the "bad guy". Mary is so immoral and vindictive that she might as well be possessed. This is not the first play that deals with the topic of homosexuality, another reason that the play might have been censored.

Additionally, the topic of suicide could be taboo. But it should also be seen as a cautionary tale to society: look at all the havoc that was wreaked because of people being too quick to act and society being incredibly narrow-minded. Unfortunately, it appears that this was not the moral that was taken away from the play. Instead of using the play as a cautionary tale against intolerance, it was used as a cautionary tale against being too liberal. Where does Mary get the idea from in the first place? She has snuck a banned copy of Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, in which there are same-sex relationships. It almost advocates censorship, providing a prime example of the power of "evil" books.