

SYNOPSIS OF *THE PORTRAITIST*

(a full-length one act; running time 90 minutes)

TIME: The present summer and summers past

PLACE: Dark Harbor, Maine; in a house by the sea. A single unit set of an art studio with two easels, several stools, and chairs.

CHARACTERS: 5 Women

FAY LOCKE: the portraitist; age 14 through 17, and 32

FRANCINE AMBLER: Fay's niece and apprentice; age 15

MURIEL DAUBLER: Fay's tutor; age 30 through 33, and 48

PHYLLIS GREEN: Fay's commissioned poser; age 40

LUCY GREEN: Phyllis's daughter; age 14

PLOT SYNOPSIS: The mystery at the heart of the creative process is explored through the story of a young portraitist in transition -- from being a mere copyist to becoming an original artist. While teaching her niece, Francine, to paint, Fay Locke recalls the lessons of her own tutor, Muriel, who professed that to know one's subjects fully one must know them passionately. After Muriel's seduction and subsequent departure, Fay has settled for a life of dreary isolation, dispassionately pleasing her subjects in a dated style of portraiture. The arrival of Francine is a catalyst for Fay's development; in her young niece, Fay sees herself as she was, and experiences anew the freedom and optimism of an uninhibited child. In the past, as Fay's artistic prowess grew, she began to resemble Muriel, adopting her myths and anecdotes in order to explain the power of color and form to evoke strong emotions. Like Muriel, Fay attempts to pass her knowledge to her niece, to create Francine in her own image as Muriel created Fay in hers. During the course of their summer together, Fay is also challenged by the amorous devotion of a woman she's been commissioned to paint and tries desperately to resist. Fay expresses her resistance in a portrait unlike any she has ever created, thereby releasing new passions with an energy she has long ago suppressed. The final painting and reactions it provokes bring Fay to a new appreciation of her talent and potential.

THEMES: *The Portraitist* explores the loss of innocence through the crossing of personal and sexual boundaries between a teacher and her student; the damaging intensity of thwarted adolescent passions; and the power of art to express rapture.

