

Public Abstract

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Title:SOCIAL CRITIQUES IN THREE PROSE PLAYS BY MAXWELL ANDERSON: SATURDAY'S CHILDREN, BOTH YOUR HOUSE, AND THE STAR-WAGON

Maxwell Anderson was a playwright known during his time for his artistic experiments with dramatic verse in the manner of Shakespeare. Consequently, most scholars have tended to focus on the artistry of several of his verse plays as his main contribution to American theatre. The justification for this study was to examine three of Anderson's prose plays for their social content rather than their artistic form. This research takes a cultural-historical approach and evaluates how these three plays, produced during a decade of massive social upheaval (1927-1937), either subverted or affirmed the status quo in the time they were written. After providing historical context for the period as well as an overview of Anderson's life, the dissertation proceeds with a close examination of each play. The conclusion connects the philosophy presented in the plays as an extension of an American tradition rooted in the Founding Fathers and continuing through philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and historian Frederick Jackson Turner. Anderson was one of America's foremost playwrights of the time, but his reputation has suffered since his death and little recent scholarship has been done on his work beyond his verse dramas. This dissertation attempts to broaden the scope of examination into the playwright's work and suggests avenues for future evaluations.