

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

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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

SOCIAL CRITIQUES IN THREE PROSE PLAYS BY MAXWELL ANDERSON:
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presented by Fonzie D. Geary II,

a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Cheryl Black

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Professor Steven Watts

For my dearest Laura, who endured so many nights alone, yet never wavered in her devotion, support, and love. May we cherish each other forever and always.

For my son, Fonzie III, born during this process, may he recognize the possibilities of his intellect and eternally seek the betterment of himself for the sake of others.

Not the least, I pay my gratitude to God and Jesus Christ. My time in Missouri has reaped such extraordinary blessings. In the absence of faith, I can achieve nothing.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The United States of America witnessed enormous social upheaval throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. Age-old traditions related to religion, marriage, gender roles, and sexual mores as well as American political and economic institutions were being simultaneously challenged by “progressive” and defended by “conservative” scholars, critics, and citizens. An influx of immigration introduced new political and economic philosophies often embraced by the intelligentsia, among the most important of which were Anarchism and Marxism. American culture seemed caught in an identity crisis, which was exacerbated by the cataclysmic economic disaster of the 1930s. Iconic pictures of breadlines, apple sellers, migrant mothers, bank failures, labor strikes, unemployment, destitution, and hardship pervade the consciousness of the era.

Theatre was thought by many as a meaningful expression by which to examine and perhaps redefine America's identity, and playwrights of the 1920s and 1930s regularly addressed a wide range of social issues. Sidney Howard challenged the mores of sex and marriage with his Pulitzer Prize-winning play *They Knew What They Wanted* (1925). Clifford Odets took up the cause of labor in *Waiting for Lefty* (1935). Similarly, John Howard Lawson challenged capitalism in such plays as *Success Story* (1932) and *Marching Song* (1937). George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind lampooned the American government and won the Pulitzer Prize for their efforts in *Of Thee I Sing* (1931). Rachel Crothers pursued feminist themes in plays such as *Susan and God* (1937) and *As Husbands Go* (1931). Paul Green tackled racism with *In Abraham's Bosom*

(1927) as did John Wexley with *They Shall Not Die* (1934). Robert E. Sherwood treated the issue of war in *Road to Rome* (1927) as did Irwin Shaw with *Bury the Dead* (1935). This sampling illuminates the wide-ranging concern demonstrated by dramatists during this era. As historian Gerald Rabkin has noted, although, statistically, social drama did not dominate the period, when one examines "significant drama" of the era, drama that has endured and received the most "critical attention," one finds "an overwhelming preoccupation with social issues."¹

One of the era's most prolific and successful dramatists, Maxwell Anderson, must be counted as among the most socially conscious playwrights of this period. Although today Anderson is primarily known for his classically-inspired verse dramas, as early as 1933 Carl Carmer noted the playwright's proclivity to "attack...things he believes to be unjust."² Indeed, Anderson found many aspects of society unjust throughout his long career. In collaboration with Laurence Stallings, Anderson satirized war in the hit play *What Price Glory?* (1924). A few years later, working with Harold Hickerson, Anderson dramatized the infamous Sacco-Vanzetti trial (in which two Italian immigrant anarchists were convicted of murder under dubious circumstances) in the docudrama *Gods of the Lightning* (1928). He would revisit the Sacco-Vanzetti story with much greater success in *Winterset* (1935), generally regarded as Anderson's masterwork, his most successful integration of a contemporary subject in verse form. Anderson satirized the American government in *Both Your Houses* (1933), a play that earned him the Pulitzer Prize, and

¹ Gerald Rabkin, *Drama and Commitment: Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 28.

² Carl Carmer, "Maxwell Anderson: Poet and Champion." *Theatre Arts Monthly* 17 (June 1933): 438.

Knickerbocker Holiday (1938). He treated issues related to American imperialism in *Night over Taos* (1932), republicanism in *Valley Forge* (1934), racism in *The Wingless Victory* (1936), and capitalism in, among other plays, *High Tor* (1936). As Mabel Bailey notes, “each of [Anderson’s] plays reflects something of the thinking and a good deal of the mood of the time of its production.”³

Anderson’s concern for social issues led to evaluations of his political and social philosophies, and these evaluations have resulted in pegging him as either an individualist or, sometimes, an anarchist. Vincent Wall employed both terms interchangeably in his 1941 survey of the playwright’s career⁴ and at least two of Anderson’s associates concurred with the anarchist moniker. Bruce Bliven, who worked with the future playwright when both were journalists in the 1920s, identified him as “a philosophical anarchist.”⁵ Harold Clurman agreed, but chose a different adjective, labeling Anderson “a quiescent anarchist.”⁶ In a 1942 interview with the dramatist, Robert Rice more hesitantly projected his own opinion that, “Politically, Anderson is probably an anarchist at heart.”⁷ In 1945, Homer Woodbridge avoids charges of anarchism, choosing instead to categorize Anderson “a sturdy old-fashioned American individualist.”⁸ Dale Riepe similarly commented in 1956 that, “Anderson is much more concerned with the individual and personal than with the social ethics, for he believes

³ Mabel Driscoll Bailey, *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957), 13.

⁴ Vincent Wall, “Maxwell Anderson: The Last Anarchist.” *Sewanee Review* 49 (1941): 339-69.

⁵ Bruce Bliven, *Five Million Words Later: An Autobiography* (New York: John Day, 1970), 120.

⁶ Harold Clurman, *Lies Like Truth* (New York: Grove, 1960), 34.

⁷ Robert Rice, Interview with Maxwell Anderson for *PM’s Sunday Picture News*, (29 November, 1942): 26.

⁸ Homer E. Woodbridge, “Maxwell Anderson.” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 44 (January 1945): 66.

social ethics to be merely the sum of individual ethics.”⁹ While many others have commented upon Anderson’s concern for the individual, only Wall makes a concentrated early effort to push the term “anarchist” upon the playwright. In the late 1960s, Joseph Bourque attempted to rebut the anarchist tag, pointing out that Anderson never advocates the absence or destruction of government in his plays.¹⁰ But more recently, Russell DiNapoli has attempted to perpetuate the anarchist label. In his unpublished dissertation in 2002, DiNapoli theorizes that Anderson’s career faded when he sold out his anarchistic roots by writing war propaganda in the 1940s and that, in part because of this drastic change in his philosophy, his body of work became more irrelevant after his death.¹¹ DiNapoli continues this argument in an article published in 2002, which represents an extraction from his dissertation.¹²

Despite the attention given to his sociopolitical worldview (in both poetic and prose forms) Anderson is perhaps best known as a champion of a particular dramatic form (verse) rather than as a champion for any particular political or social action. Of the twelve plays he wrote during the Depression decade, nine were written in verse. Among the most notable are *Elizabeth the Queen* (1930) and *Mary of Scotland* (1933). *Winterset* (1935), recently identified by Brenda Murphy as “a classic of the American theatre,”¹³ would garner Anderson the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. He would win the

⁹ Dale Riepe, “The Philosophy of Maxwell Anderson.” *North Dakota Quarterly* 24 (1956): 47.

¹⁰ Joseph Bourque, “Maxwell Anderson’s Political Philosophy: A Reevaluation” (Master’s Thesis, Washington State University, 1968), 14.

¹¹ Russell DiNapoli, “The Elusive Prominence of Maxwell Anderson’s Works in the American Theatre” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Valencia in Spain, 2002).

¹² Russell DiNapoli, “Fragile Currency of the Last Anarchist: The Plays of Maxwell Anderson.” *New Theatre Quarterly* 18 (2002): 276-83.

¹³ Brenda Murphy, “Plays and Playwrights: 1915-1945,” in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume II*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). 332.

award again the following year with *High Tor* (1936), a contemporary verse fantasy about an eccentric defending his land against destruction from a trap-rock company. Though Anderson would eventually abandon verse drama in the 1940s, a survey of scholarly literature confirms that his achievements in this genre are regarded as his most significant contribution to the American stage.¹⁴ Bernard Dukore has concluded that, “Anderson’s most notable effort...was to create a renaissance in poetic drama.”¹⁵ Anne Fletcher similarly confirms that Anderson's legacy stems mainly from his verse plays, particularly those concerning Tudor monarchs, and notes that only *Elizabeth the Queen* and *Mary of Scotland* are frequently revived today.¹⁶

Often overlooked in the confluence of critical focus upon Anderson’s dramatic verse is the contribution his prose works render to American cultural philosophy during a critical time in American history. Scholars who have recognized social criticism as an aspect in Anderson’s work include Gerald Rabkin, who has noted a pervasive concern for social issues in Anderson’s work, arguing that the dramatist often addresses the problem of “how much social evil resides in transformable institutions”¹⁷ and Malcolm Goldstein, who has detected in Anderson’s plays “a call to stiffen the public’s resistance to those social and political forces that he regarded as malign.”¹⁸ However, Rabkin’s and Goldstein’s analyses of Anderson were integrated into broad, wide-ranging studies that

¹⁴ For a sample of such criticism see John Gassner, *Dramatic Soundings*. (New York: Crown, 1968). Malcolm Goldstein, *The Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression*. (New York: Oxford, 1974), Arthur M. Sampley, "Theory and Practice in Maxwell Anderson's Poetic Tragedies." *College English* 5 (1944): 412-18, and Harold H. Watts, "Maxwell Anderson: The Tragedy of Attrition." *College English* 4 (1943): 220-30.

¹⁵ Bernard Dukore. *American Dramatists 1918-1945* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 89-90.

¹⁶ Anne Fletcher, "Reading Across the 1930s." In *A Companion to Twentieth Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 120.

¹⁷ Rabkin, 265.

¹⁸ Goldstein, 392.

precluded close reading of the plays. Furthermore, some have found that Anderson's social critiques were notably impaired by his use of verse, his tendency toward romanticization, or both. Bernard Dukore, for example, asserted that Anderson frequently "trivializes social themes by a romantic story."¹⁹ Even scholars who have addressed social issues in his plays have typically centered upon such issues in Anderson's verse dramas.

In part as a consequence of the playwright's reputation as a verse tragedian, the three prose satires *Saturday's Children* (1927), *Both Your Houses* (1933), and *The Star-Wagon* (1937) are among the most neglected plays in Anderson scholarship. This neglect occurred despite the fact that all three plays enjoyed considerable critical and commercial success, and even though they all contain some of Anderson's most cogent criticisms of the nation's long-established cultural institutions, including capitalism, marriage, Protestant Christianity, gender ideology, American republicanism, and the political system. These three plays encompass a full decade of Anderson's career, written when he was at the height of his popularity, and stand apart from his other work from this period in three distinct ways. First, with the exception of short sections of *The Star-Wagon*, all three plays are written in prose. Second, these plays are mostly unburdened by the excessive weighty intellectualism that was often a target for critics and scholars in assessing his historical and contemporary verse tragedies. Third, these plays deal with settings and characters that are domestic or political and would, presumably, appeal more to the common person, unlike the verse plays that tackle the lives of kings and queens or otherwise create distance by the form of verse itself. These plays open windows into

¹⁹ Dukore, 83.

ideas and philosophies associated with American thought such as the republicanism of America's Founding Fathers, Transcendentalism, and frontier individualism. Despite what these plays can teach us regarding Anderson in particular and American cultural history in general, no studies have examined any of these three dramas within this context in an in-depth, concentrated way. This study, therefore, examines Anderson's critique of American ideology and cultural institutions within these three plays in relation to their historical context. The central purpose of this study is to offer a fuller understanding of the social critique manifested in these three plays through close readings of the texts. Questions that guide this study include: How do Maxwell Anderson's social critiques of American institutions in these three plays contribute to and extend ideas and philosophies associated with American thought? What were the prevailing attitudes toward these institutions at the time the plays were written? In what ways does Anderson reflect the status quo in each play? In what ways does he subvert or challenge the status quo? How do these plays contribute to our understanding of the era? How does Anderson's treatment of these institutions compare to contemporaries who wrote plays on similar themes?

The justification for this study is threefold. First, this research may help revive interest in Anderson as an important figure in American drama. That Anderson was regarded as among the elite playwrights of his day is evinced by the acclaim bestowed upon him by critics and scholars alike. In 1933, Brooks Atkinson hailed Anderson as "one of our ablest playwrights" and further asserted that he possessed "one of the richest

minds in the theatre."²⁰ In 1947 Barrett H. Clark similarly identified Anderson as "one of the most important contemporary writers."²¹ Eleanor Flexner proclaimed that "next to [Eugene] O'Neill," who is generally regarded as the leading playwright of the age, Anderson was "the most talented writer of his generation."²² Analyzing the playwright's work in the mid-1940s, scholar Allan G. Halline contended that Anderson was superior to O'Neill in the writing of traditional tragedy.²³ Theatre historians Jordan Y. Miller and Winifred L. Frazer underscore these assertions in stating that Anderson was the only American playwright comparable to O'Neill in this era.²⁴

Despite Anderson's standing as a playwright in his time, his reputation quickly fell out of favor. In 1962, just three years after the playwright's death, Gerald Weales asserted: "I doubt if there is anyone around these days who wants to defend Maxwell Anderson as a major playwright."²⁵ Weales elaborates that Anderson's reputation suffered because of altering aesthetic tastes during the post-Depression years.²⁶ David Savran asserts that changes in artistic palates triggered by the emergence of the post-war avant-garde motivated scholars to comb the 1920s and 1930s for predecessors. As a consequence, playwrights of radical aesthetics, such as John Howard Lawson and Thornton Wilder, have garnered greater attention "than the conservative modernism

²⁰ Brooks Atkinson, "Sins of Both Your Houses," *New York Times*, 12 March 1933.

²¹ Barrett H. Clark, "The United States." In *A History of Modern American Drama*, eds. Barrett H. Clark and George Freedley (New York: D. Appelton-Century Company, 1947), 721.

²² Eleanor Flexner, *American Playwrights 1918-1938* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938), 228.

²³ Allan G. Halline, "Maxwell Anderson's Dramatic Theory." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 16 (1944): 65.

²⁴ Jordan Y. Miller and Winifred L. Frazer, *American Drama Between the Wars: A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 122.

²⁵ Gerald Weales, *American Drama Since World War II* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1962), 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

of...Maxwell Anderson."²⁷ DiNapoli has argued that the demise of Anderson's stature as a major playwright resulted from his forsaking anarchism in the 1940s and lashing out at critics whom, Anderson felt, abused his work.²⁸ Regardless of the reasons for his neglect, Maxwell Anderson was recognized in his time as a leading playwright speaking for an age of rapid and, for many, overwhelming social change. No history of American drama during the Great Depression is complete without him and in this sense his voice merits reclaiming. It is my hope that this study contributes to that reclamation.

The second aspect in justifying this study is that these particular plays, despite their contemporary impact, have received little or no serious scholarly attention. For example, in a book-length critical survey of Anderson's career, Alfred S. Shivers completely ignores *Saturday's Children*.²⁹ Likewise, Mabel Bailey, the earliest scholar to publish a book-length study of Anderson's work, provides only cursory coverage of these three plays, choosing to devote the bulk of her attention to the verse dramas.³⁰ This dearth of scholarship resulted despite the fact that this triad of plays all achieved certain measures of commercial and/or critical success. *Saturday's Children* was the third longest running Broadway show of Anderson's career; he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1933 for *Both Your Houses*; and *The Star-Wagon* was his second longest running production of the 1930s, with nearly as many performances in New York as the more well-known *Mary of Scotland*. That these plays achieved such critical and commercial plaudits indicates that

²⁷ David Savran, *Highbrow/Lowdown: Theatre, Jazz, and the Making of the New Middle Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 218.

²⁸ DiNapoli, "Elusive Prominence," 10.

²⁹ Alfred S. Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

³⁰ Mabel Driscoll Bailey, *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957).

they reached a broad audience and therefore bear significance in terms of the cultural messages they conveyed.

Third, this study broadens conceptions of Anderson's contributions to American drama. As aforementioned, most studies have focused on Anderson as a proponent of dramatic verse. For example, three studies published in the 1940s by Arthur M. Sampley,³¹ Allan G. Halline,³² and Harold H. Watts³³ all center on the dramatic structure of his poetic plays. Other articles examine various thematic abstractions in Anderson's work such as how faith,³⁴ love,³⁵ and justice³⁶ are manifest in his dramas. Except for *What Price Glory*, most of the emphasis falls upon the verse plays while glossing over or simply ignoring the others. In contrast to the bulk of Anderson scholarship, which focuses on dramatic construction or stylistic form, this study examines these three plays for the significance of their social and cultural content, and how each play reflects an extension or redefinition of American philosophical traditions. Previous scholarship provides various clues or fleeting references to the playwright's potential philosophical antecedents, but often fails in specificity. For example, both Wall and DiNapoli label Anderson as an anarchist, but neither one defines anarchism, nor do they relate any particular anarchistic philosopher that the playwright's work reflects. Both simply take

³¹ Arthur M. Sampley, "Theory and Practice in Maxwell Anderson's Poetic Tragedies." *College English* 5 (1944): 412-18.

³² Allan G. Halline, "Maxwell Anderson's Dramatic Theory," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 16 (1944): 63-81.

³³ Harold H. Watts, "Maxwell Anderson: The Tragedy of Attrition," *College English* 4 (1943): 220-230.

³⁴ Howard D. Pearce, "Job in Anderson's *Winterset*." *Modern Drama* 6 (1963): 32-41.

³⁵ Lawrence G. Avery, "Maxwell Anderson: A Changing Attitude Toward Love," *Modern Drama* 10 (1967): 241-248.

³⁶ Arthur T. Tees, "Legal and Poetic Justice in Maxwell Anderson's Plays," *North Dakota Quarterly* 38 (1970): 25-31.

for granted that anarchism is understood. The concept of “individualism” has been similarly, vaguely applied. Anderson himself once identified Ralph Waldo Emerson as a potential influence: “Emerson, of course, I grew up on, but how much of his stuff stuck to me I don’t know. Maybe a lot.”³⁷ His only biographer, Alfred S. Shivers, for example, notes that Anderson was familiar with Thoreau through reading³⁸ and asserts that *The Star-Wagon* contains “strikingly Emersonian ideas.”³⁹ Shivers does not, however, explain what those ideas may be; nor does he explore the significance of such connections. These fleeting references suggest how fruitful further investigation of these influences may be and this study, therefore, attempts a more thorough and in-depth analysis of philosophical and intellectual traditions manifested in these plays with special attention to direct connections between the playwright’s work and the ideas of American Transcendentalism espoused by Emerson and Thoreau.

Similar hints from previous scholarship point to the frontierism of historian Frederick Jackson Turner as influential. First proposed in 1893, Turner’s frontier thesis posits that the unique individualist qualities of the American character resulted from both a literal and metaphorical move away from European traditions.⁴⁰ Wall makes a tacit connection between the dramatist and Turner when he writes, “In an age of collectivism [Anderson’s] voice could be heard praising individualism, independence, and the frontier spirit.”⁴¹ Shivers strengthens this connection somewhat by relating that Anderson took history courses under Professor Orin G. Libby, a well-known proponent of Turner’s

³⁷ Quoted in Halline, 70.

³⁸ Alfred S. Shivers, *The Life of Maxwell Anderson* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), 26.

³⁹ Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson*, 124.

⁴⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1967), 1-38.

⁴¹ Vincent Wall, “Maxwell Anderson: The Last Anarchist,” *Sewanee Review* 49 (1941): 339.

ideas,⁴² while attending the University of North Dakota.⁴³ Though Wall and Shivers suggest the influence of frontierism, they do not pursue the relationship in any depth.

Finally, this study examines how Anderson's plays reflect the conflicting ideologies of America's Founding Fathers. Shivers notes that Anderson invested significant time researching George Washington's correspondence and papers in writing his play *Valley Forge* in 1934.⁴⁴ This exposure to primary materials may have endowed Anderson with a deeper understanding of America's founding principles prior to writing *The Star-Wagon* in 1937. Evidence as to the depth of the playwright's understanding of American Revolutionary history prior to 1934 is lacking, but Anderson invokes the founders in a later essay.⁴⁵ Moreover, one can presume that, as an educated man, he would have possessed some knowledge of America's founding.

As Anderson wrote more than thirty plays for Broadway over the course of his career and nearly all of them treat social issues, it is necessary to further clarify my selection of these three plays. First, these plays allow me to focus on a narrow time frame unique in that it begins just before one massive social upheaval (the Great Depression) and ends while heading toward another (World War II). Second, all three of these plays were singular works, not collaborations. This point justifies the elimination of other socially relevant Anderson plays during this era such as the popular *What Price Glory* and the radical *Gods of the Lightning* (1928). Third, as aforementioned, these plays stand

⁴² James D. Bennett, *Frederick Jackson Turner* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 33.

⁴³ Shivers, *Life*, 39-40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁵ Maxwell Anderson, *Off Broadway: Essays about the Theatre* (New York: William Sloane, 1947), 81-86.

out among Anderson's canon as prose works that emphasize content over form, which eliminates the verse plays of the 1930s.

The method of this study is historical and critical with Jonathan Chambers's *Messiah of the New Technique: John Howard Lawson, Communism, and American Theatre, 1923-1937* providing a useful model. Chambers constructs a social and cultural history with "the complex and dynamic interplay and interconnectivity of text, author, and consumers" in mind.⁴⁶ Chambers's attention to Lawson offers further justification for devoting attention to Anderson when most recent scholars have ignored him. He recalls an experience he had at a conference wherein he was asked why he dedicated himself to the life of a "failed playwright." Chambers responds that such terms are "totalizing" and "shortsighted," arguing that applying such terms as "failed" and "propagandistic" not only reduces Lawson's career to isolated pejoratives, but it undermines theatre history as a whole by advancing "totalizing narratives." Chambers's effort was to broaden understanding of Lawson in the context of the cultural moment.⁴⁷ My goals with Anderson's work are similar. Though Anderson would not be considered a "failed playwright," the scholarly consensus seems to be that his traditional or old-fashioned forms render him unworthy of current attention. Though DiNapoli's recent dissertation and article attempts to explicate the reasons for the decline in Anderson's stature, his research does little to justify reclamation. According to DiNapoli, "Anderson once had a poetic and anarchistic dream. In the end, human frailty made him lose it. The dream,

⁴⁶ Jonathan Chambers, *Messiah of the New Technique: John Howard Lawson, Communism, and American Theatre, 1923-1937* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 12-13.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 204-5.

however, remains valid."⁴⁸ The dream remains valid, but what of Anderson's work? DiNapoli ends his study with this statement and does not critically consider how Anderson's supposed "poetic and anarchistic dream" fits into the American cultural and philosophical traditions. Although DiNapoli's interest in Anderson, after a long dry spell, may be viewed as an encouraging sign for one who desires to reclaim the playwright as a significant voice in American drama, DiNapoli's categorization of poet and anarchist casts Anderson in the same narrow box from which his career has yet to recover. I challenge these prevailing scholarly attitudes as totalizing narratives that fail to fully consider the richness and texture of Anderson's impact as an American social and cultural critic.

Primary sources for this study include substantial published material, particularly the plays. In addition to the plays, Anderson's published volume *Off Broadway: Essays about the Theatre* provides insight into Anderson's philosophy. Laurence G. Avery's edited collection *Dramatist in America: Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912-1958* proves useful not only for the playwright's correspondence, but also for the memoir transcribed from a tape-recorded interview Anderson gave in 1956 as part of Columbia University's Oral History Collection.

Several memoirs of theatre personalities and Anderson friends and associates are particularly useful. These memoirs include Bruce Bliven's *Five Million Words Later: An Autobiography*, George Abbott's *Mister Abbott*, Elmer Rice's *Minority Report: An Autobiography*, John F. Wharton's *Life among the Playwrights*, and Arthur Hopkins's *To a Lonely Boy*. All of these authors knew Anderson intimately and developed a personal

⁴⁸ DiNapoli, "Elusive Prominence," 112.

working relationship with him. Their comments upon his life and career provide important insight into how he viewed the cultural forces surrounding him.

Among important secondary sources are three volumes from Alfred S. Shivers. Shivers was a professor at Stephen F. Austin University who spent more than a decade devoted to Anderson's life and career. His first book, *Maxwell Anderson* (1976), was published as part of the Twayne series of American authors and represents a brief, but important critical study of many of Anderson's plays. Though he ignores *Saturday's Children*, he gives significant attention to *Both Your Houses* and *The Star-Wagon*. *The Life of Maxwell Anderson* (1983) stands as the only full-length biography of the playwright published to date. Shivers offers a thorough survey of the playwright's life including insights into Anderson's political attitudes and personal relationships. In addition, Shivers also published *Maxwell Anderson: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (1985). This impressive volume offers a comprehensive survey of everything Anderson wrote and everything written about him and his work up until the mid-1980s. The volume as a whole contains 3,276 individual citations of primary and secondary sources, including reviews, articles, dissertations, and theses. This collection is an invaluable tool for locating a wealth of sources pertaining to Anderson's career. Barbara Horn's *Maxwell Anderson: A Research and Production Sourcebook*, while not nearly as comprehensive, does extend into the mid-1990s and proved of some use as well.

In addition to Shivers's works, two early efforts at analyzing Anderson's work are important to note. Barrett H. Clark was the first person to devote a volume, albeit a razor

thin volume, solely to Anderson's career. Though the effort, *Maxwell Anderson: The Man and His Plays*, consists of less than forty pages, Clark offers insightful contemporary criticism of *Saturday's Children* and *Both Your Houses*. Mabel Driscoll Bailey's pioneering *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet* represents the first book-length study of Anderson's work. Bailey's conception of Anderson as a "prophet" is related to the playwright's own conception of theatre as a religious institution and the artist as an oracle of what the human race aspires to become.⁴⁹ However, she references him as a prophet very rarely and only in passing. Moreover, she defines her purpose in the first chapter thus: "I have tested the validity of Maxwell Anderson's creative principles by a critical examination of the plays he has produced in accordance with those principles."⁵⁰ Though she offers important insights into the three plays under consideration here, my study deviates from Bailey's work in that it emphasizes content over form.

Of the significant sources pertaining to American theatre during Anderson's time, especially political aspects of theatre, three were of particular importance. Morgan Y. Himmelstein's *Drama Was a Weapon* provides a broad overview of the communist influence in American drama of the 1920s and 1930s. Himmelstein's book was a pioneering effort at explicating the rationale for didacticism in theatre as promoted by the communists and resisted by liberals. Gerald Rabkin's *Drama and Commitment* devotes a chapter to Anderson. As the title implies, Rabkin examines Anderson's work for

⁴⁹ Bailey, 18-19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

evidence of a specific political commitment, which he argues is anarchism.⁵¹ However, Rabkin does not explore Anderson's connections to specific traditional American philosophies nor does he specifically define "anarchism." He also centers much of his attention upon the verse plays. Finally, *The Political Stage* by Malcolm Goldstein may be the seminal work on the era. Rather than focusing on a single movement (e.g. communism) or a single theatrical element (e.g. the playwright) Goldstein offers a broad view of 1930s American theatre within the context of socially significant forces.

For potential philosophical influences upon the content of the plays, I focused on sources related to the Founding Fathers, Transcendentalism, and Turner's frontierism. Select numbers of the *Federalist Papers* were consulted to explicate America's founding political philosophy. Several of Emerson's essays from *Emerson: Political Writings* were consulted as were Thoreau's seminal works "Walden" and "Civil Disobedience." Philip F. Gura's *American Transcendentalism: A History* is arguably the most comprehensive source of its kind. Turner's published collection of essays, *The Frontier in American History*, was employed to connect frontier concepts to ideas presented in the plays. In examining anarchist ideology, essays by Emma Goldman collected in *Red Emma Speaks* were consulted. Also consulted from the Goldman volume were essays pertaining to feminism, marriage, and capitalism. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels's *Communist Manifesto* was the main source for explicating Marxism.

As I am interested in Anderson as a cultural critic and in his works for their cultural commentary, I consulted numerous sources pertaining to the cultural history of the era. Warren Susman's *Culture as History* provides a series of essays that deal with

⁵¹ Rabkin, 265.

how people living in the Depression era experienced their world on a mass culture level. Richard H. Pells's *Radical Visions and American Dreams* focuses on the wide range of cultural thought among the intellectual class. Nancy F. Cott's *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* represents perhaps the seminal work on the early feminist movement, which plays a key role in the analysis of *Saturday's Children* and *The Star-Wagon*. Cultural historians such as Susman, Pells, Gorman, and Cott aided in contextualizing Anderson's place in the cultural moment as well as how the playwright contributed to the social energy of the time. In addition, articles published in magazines such as the *Nation*, *New Republic*, *Harpers*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Commonweal* from the mid-1920s through the late 1930s served to offer insight into the intellectual thought of the times.

Chapter two includes an overview of Anderson's life as well as a survey of prevailing American cultural attitudes regarding marriage, gender roles, religion, sexuality, government, and capitalism in order to orient the reader to the historical, political, and cultural context in relation to his life. The biographical overview helps put into context the events that bore influence upon Anderson's thinking in order to establish a keener understanding of his work and its relevance. The survey of the historical climate covers not only prevailing cultural thought, but also provides a sampling of theorists and movements that challenged these attitudes.

The next three chapters address each play in chronological order. Each chapter begins with the cultural and historical context in which the plays were written and produced. From there I conduct a close reading of each play in terms of the intellectual

traditions manifested in the plays and the relationship between the plays and their cultural contexts, with special attention to how Anderson sustains or challenges prevailing attitudes relevant to the given play. This strategy is similar to Chambers's study of John Howard Lawson. Chambers provides a synopsis of each of Lawson's plays and then closely analyzes how the text relates to the moment as well as how each play represents a link in Lawson's evolution from playwright to political activist. I follow much the same pattern. For example, chapter three will begin with a brief history of the time of 1927. I then provide a brief synopsis of the play before conducting an analysis of Anderson's social critique as manifested in the play. This strategy holds for chapters four and five as well.

Though few critical studies have addressed in depth any of the three plays under consideration, there are a few important commentators of *Saturday's Children*. Contemporary reviewers such as Brooks Atkinson, Joseph Wood Krutch, and R. Dana Skinner are examined. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt offers interesting moral objections to the play, and Barrett H. Clark provides a sarcastic rebuttal to the moral objectors. Donald J. Boughton's unpublished dissertation "The Broadway Plays of Maxwell Anderson" offers important insights into conceptions of the conflict in *Saturday's Children*. Boughton was among the first to associate the play's theme with gender inequality rather than financial hardship. Likewise, Perry Luckett's dissertation advances the notion that the play is not about financial security, but rather about institutional marriage's oppression of women. Luckett examines the play in the context

of "the tension between individual autonomy and love for others."⁵² However, both Boughton and Lockett were engaging in comprehensive studies of Anderson's career that precluded close readings of the play. Moreover, unlike Lockett, my focus lies in how *Saturday's Children* represents American thought and tradition. My study attempts to fill the gap, complementing and extending Boughton's and Lockett's analyses. Eleanor Flexner gives criticism from the Marxist perspective in *American Playwrights 1918-1938*. My analysis also extends, and in some cases challenges, Flexner's analysis.

Like *Saturday's Children*, *Both Your Houses* has received minimal attention. Laurence G. Avery's "Maxwell Anderson and *Both Your Houses*," published in 1970, provides one of the few scholarly analyses of Anderson's Pulitzer-winning play. Avery, however, centers his attention upon the evolution of Anderson's political philosophy between the original 1933 version of the play and the altered 1939 version, arguing that the onset of World War II triggered an abrupt change. My interest in *Both Your Houses* is not concerned with the playwright's altered frame of mind in the war years, but rather with how he reflects American culture during the Great Depression. Avery offers insight into how Anderson was thinking in 1933, and my analysis extends Avery's work by connecting the playwright's political philosophy to specific American traditions.

Although Thomas Adler connects *Both Your Houses* with the political ideas of Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Adams, his broad scope precludes an in depth analysis; he examines Anderson's play in juxtaposition with later political plays such as

⁵² Perry Lockett, "The Mind and Matter of Maxwell Anderson" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1979), 202.

Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse's *State of the Union* and Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* and does not consider Anderson's play in its own time.⁵³

The Star-Wagon has received the least amount of critical attention. In addition to critical reviews, Alfred S. Shivers offers important insight in connecting the philosophy represented in the play to the ideas of Emerson. Shivers, however, makes this connection only tacitly without further discussion. My study expands the Emersonian connection in addition to examining the play for its significant reflections of marriage, Victorian sexuality and gender ideology within a specific socio-economic system.

The final chapter serves as a summation regarding the nature and significance of Maxwell Anderson's critiques of American cultural institutions within these three works as well as his place in America's theatrical history. This study challenges the notion that Anderson should be remembered primarily as an advocate for an antiquated dramatic form. Much more important than any aesthetic bent, Anderson was an inheritor of an American philosophical tradition. His critiques represent a link in the ideological chain from the Founding Fathers to American Transcendentalism to Turner's frontierism to anarchism. His connections to these philosophical ideals have often been hinted at, but they have never been adequately explored. Moreover, his connections to anarchism have never been fully defined and, consequently, have been misunderstood.

It is my hope that this study begins a re-evaluation of Maxwell Anderson's place in American theatre history. He is a playwright who should be remembered not only for his successful aesthetic experimentations in poetic form, but also for his contributions as a

⁵³ Thomas P. Adler, "The Messianic Figure in American Political Drama: Anderson and After," in *Maxwell Anderson and the New York Stage*, ed. Nancy J. Doran Hazelton and Kenneth Krauss (Monroe: Library Research Associates, 1991), 41-58.

critical and passionate observer of American society, whose social satires help us understand how our culture has been defined and is continuously re-defined within the spirit of its philosophical heritage.

Chapter 2

The Back Story

In analyzing Anderson's work in terms of its commentary on American ideology and cultural institutions it is necessary to begin with a brief survey of his life in order to better understand the conditions under which he lived. Following a brief overview of the playwright's life, this chapter will transition into an exploration of the cultural background of the United States during this era in terms of 1) what the prevailing ideas were and 2) what influences and movements served to challenge those prevailing ideas.

By most accounts, Maxwell Anderson was a difficult man to know. Friend and business associate John F. Wharton labeled the playwright as "mercurial" due to his brooding, mysterious personality.⁵⁴ Anderson often manifested a marked reticence for sharing personal information. He wrote to Burns Mantle in the late 1920s: "When a man starts peddling personal stuff about himself...they should send a squad of strong-arm worms after him, because he's dead."⁵⁵ Barrett H. Clark experienced this attitude as an obstacle in the 1930s, when researching a book on Anderson's life, he sent a request to the playwright for information. Anderson's reply reveals his reclusive nature as well as a certain level of hostility toward open personal reflection:

I hope you won't think me discourteous if I am niggardly of information about myself. This modern craze for biographical information leaves me cold for many reasons. For one thing it's always inaccurate, for another it's so bound up with publicity and other varieties of idiocy that it gags a person of any sensibility. For

⁵⁴ John F. Wharton, *Life Among the Playwrights: Being Mostly the Story of the Playwrights Producing Company* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), 27.

⁵⁵ Burns Mantle, *American Playwrights of Today* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1929), 71.

another, to be heralded is to become a candidate for the newest list of 'the busted geniuses of yesteryear,' of whom I hope never to be one.⁵⁶

Anderson was not only reluctant to share information with critics and friends, but even with close family members. In the mid-1950s one of his sisters solicited the playwright for help in constructing a family history. Anderson pleaded a “fallible” memory:

When it comes to adding to the recollections and giving them a sort of editorial scrutiny I come up against a strange quirk in my own psyche—I have always fought shy of writing down anything about myself. Not from reluctance to reveal what happened, but because autobiography is not the kind of work that interests me, yet it does take time. If I sat down to make a list of my memories that were worth recalling it would be a major effort.....⁵⁷

These anecdotes suggest the daunting challenges scholars have faced in researching Anderson. These examples are also indicative of a retiring man who shunned the spotlight despite his Broadway success. Shunning the spotlight, however, apparently did not prevent Anderson from enjoying the fruits of success. Friend and fellow dramatist Elmer Rice described Anderson as “[a]n indulgent husband and father” who “maintained a staff of servants and several cars. His large earnings did not keep pace with his ever-increasing expenses.”⁵⁸ This contradictory attitude toward success and its rewards paints a picture of a man who was very much a product of the Calvinist Victorian era.

James Maxwell Anderson was the second child of eight born to an itinerant Protestant minister on 15 December 1888 in the tiny hamlet of Atlantic, Pennsylvania. His father, William Lincoln Anderson (known as Linc) developed a reputation as a

⁵⁶ Barrett H. Clark, *Maxwell Anderson: The Man and His Plays* (New York: Samuel French, 1933), 3-4

⁵⁷ Anderson to Lela Chambers, 26 March 1956, in *Dramatist in America: The Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912-1958*, ed. Laurence G. Avery (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 277.

⁵⁸ Elmer Rice, *Minority Report: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 391.

dynamic orator of the fire and brimstone variety.⁵⁹ Growing up with such a father endowed Anderson with a heavy dose of America's dominant religion. As the playwright would recall, "Church was a pretty constant factor, and we got to know the Bible well by just listening."⁶⁰ However, from an early age Anderson developed a mistrust of religion, which derived from the abrupt difference in his father's demeanor at home versus at the pulpit as well as the preacher's apparent zeal. The playwright said of his father that, "I think his eloquence oppressed us a little, because he wasn't so eloquent at home, and perhaps we rather resented the salesmanship that went into his evangelism."⁶¹ His biographer, Alfred S. Shivers, relates that at the age of eight, Anderson refused to be baptized, and this early disavowal of his father's religion foreshadowed a life of free thought and opposition to traditional realms of authority.⁶²

The nature of Linc's employment kept the Anderson family on the move. From 1888 to 1908 the future playwright lived in thirteen different locations across Pennsylvania, Iowa, Ohio, and North Dakota.⁶³ The expectations of representing a minister's family limited social relations. Shivers tells us that the families of Protestant ministers at the time often found it difficult to cultivate friendships "outside the family circle because any partiality shown toward someone" not acknowledged as a believer was frowned upon. In one town, for example, Linc removed one of his daughters from an exclusive school because members of the congregation complained of her making friends

⁵⁹ Alfred S. Shivers, *The Life of Maxwell Anderson* (New York: Stein & Day, 1983), 1-5.

⁶⁰ Anderson Memoir, in *Dramatist in America*, 304.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁶² Shivers, *Life*, 7.

⁶³ Robert Rice, Interview with Maxwell Anderson for *PM's Sunday Picture News* (29 November 1942): 23.

with “outsiders.”⁶⁴ Perhaps in effort to mitigate his family's limited social contact, Linc often purchased used books for the children. Anderson became a voracious reader, a habit that endured throughout his life. He expressed fondness for Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, and James Fenimore Cooper and also cultivated a love of poetry, especially Shakespeare.⁶⁵ His incessant reading paid off when he entered the University of North Dakota in 1908 for he was able to pass a considerable portion of his coursework through examination, graduating after only three years with a bachelor's degree in English.⁶⁶ Soon after graduation, he married his college sweetheart, Margaret Haskett. The young couple set up house in the rural community of Minnewaukan, North Dakota. Their first child was born in 1912, and Anderson settled into a teaching position at the local high school.⁶⁷

Anderson proved himself in step with the times of 1912. The year that saw radical socialist Eugene V. Debs gather over a million votes for president also brought the future playwright's first, and perhaps only, written avowal of socialism. In a letter to a former professor dated 15 September 1912, Anderson proclaimed that he and his wife had become Socialists and that they intended to raise their son in accordance with that doctrine. Anderson also recalls giving a report on Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*,⁶⁸ a significant and influential work on socialist conceptions of society. Shivers tells us that the Anderson home became a Mecca “for local intelligentsia

⁶⁴ Shivers, *Life*, 19.

⁶⁵ Anderson Memoir, in *Dramatist in America*, 304.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 304-5.

⁶⁷ Shivers, *Life*, 45-46.

⁶⁸ Anderson to John M. Gillette, 15 September 1912, in *Dramatist in America*, 3.

discussing such things as art and socialism.”⁶⁹ The small farming community of Minnewaukan was hardly a socialist hotbed, however, and this identification made the Andersons unpopular. The couple moved to California in 1913 for Anderson to pursue graduate study at Stanford University.⁷⁰

Shortly after completing his master’s degree in English, Anderson found himself embroiled in controversy as the United States debated whether or not to involve itself in a global war. Anderson was teaching at Whittier College, a small Quaker school in California, in 1917 when he came to the defense of a student who had been jailed for refusing the draft. The student, Arthur Camp, had attempted to publish a letter in the campus newspaper outlining his reasons for refusal, but the campus editors refused to publish it. Despite barely knowing the young man, Anderson sent his own letter to the campus newspaper that provides valuable insight into his view of the world in 1917. Anderson does not attempt to argue that the young man is morally right, only that he has a right not to suffer oppression for his opinion. The letter foreshadows the future playwright’s critique of American institutions in its challenge to governmental authority and its defense of an individual’s right to free thought:

I have talked with Arthur Camp very little, but in doing so have formed a high opinion of his ability and his motives. It takes a brave and high-spirited man to take the stand which he has taken. He deserves to be heard on the subject which seems important enough to him so that he is willing to sacrifice reputation, friends, and future to uphold his views. And where can he be heard more naturally, where should he be more welcome, than in the columns of the paper in his college? If there is criticism of the government in this college it should be represented in the paper. It is a weak and shaky government that cannot stand criticism, and it is a weak and shaky intellect that never has any criticism to offer. If our very colleges are to stifle thought, where is the thinking to be done?...There

⁶⁹ Shivers, *Life*, 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

is always something to run from if you are coward enough to run. Whatever may be thought of the opinions of Camp, he has proved himself no coward.⁷¹

This letter not only failed to exonerate Camp, it created trouble for Anderson. When the dean sought mediation, Anderson refused to back down and resigned from the college in April 1918.⁷²

Rather than seek another teaching position, Anderson next turned to journalism. But his free-thinking led to more controversy. He wrote an editorial for the *San Francisco Evening Bulletin* criticizing the Allies for imposing an impossible war debt on Germany. The editors rejected the story and suggested that Anderson find other employment.⁷³ At the beckoning of Alvin Johnson, co-editor of the *New Republic*, Anderson moved to New York. Johnson was searching for "a man of my kind of liberalism" and believed he found a kindred spirit, describing the future playwright as "an uncompromising Western liberal."⁷⁴ However, Anderson did not work well with Johnson's conservative partner, Herbert Croly. Johnson recalls that "the edges of his [Anderson's] liberalism had not weathered off like mine and were often lacerating to Croly's fingers."⁷⁵ Though the nature of the dispute is unclear, Anderson reported to Upton Sinclair that he had grown "too Bolshevistic" for the *New Republic* and had since moved on to the *Globe*.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Shivers, *Life*, 55-56.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 53-56.

⁷³ Robert Rice, Anderson interview, 24.

⁷⁴ Alvin Johnson, *Pioneer's Progress: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking Press, 1952), 272.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁷⁶ Anderson to Upton Sinclair, June 1919, in *Dramatist in America*, 13.

Anderson's tenure on the staff of the *Globe* would be similarly brief. One of his colleagues, Bruce Bliven, describes Anderson as "something of a problem."⁷⁷ Bliven elaborates that Anderson was a "philosophical anarchist, with utter pessimism about reforms and reformers."⁷⁸ This observation reflects the continuance of Anderson's rebellious nature, which dates back at least to the point of his refusing the baptismal sacrament offered by his father. The future playwright valued his independence and refused to serve up stories to suit the bosses. As Bliven recalls, the editors on the *Globe* "soon learned that it was not safe to ask him to write on any subject when optimism was in order."⁷⁹ However, Bliven was puzzled by his fellow journalist's demeanor, wondering if Anderson's argumentativeness really sprung from conviction or if it was simply in his nature to disagree.⁸⁰ Bliven's observations reflect the complex, often enigmatic nature of Anderson's character. As with other positions of employment, Anderson did not stay long, leaving the *Globe* behind when he was offered more money to work at the rival *World*.

It was around this time, in the early 1920s, that a chance encounter would alter the trajectory of Anderson's life. The Andersons were invited one evening to hear a reading of *Roger Bloomer*, a play written by neighbor John Howard Lawson, who had just sold the work for five hundred dollars.⁸¹ Anderson was unimpressed by the play, but he was impressed by the money. He felt that if such a play could be sold, then he could write one himself, admitting that he was initially drawn into playwriting, in part, by pecuniary

⁷⁷ Bruce Bliven, *Five Million Words Later: An Autobiography* (New York: John Day, 1970), 120.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁹ Bliven, 120.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸¹ Shivers, *Life*, 79.

motives.⁸² It was not uncommon at the time for journalists to venture into the dramatic arts. Theatre producer Arthur Hopkins noted the connection between the two fields, asserting that a good journalist "is a natural dramatist" because journalists view life and write about it in "playing terms."⁸³ Hopkins himself had worked as a journalist and several playwrights of the era, including Anderson, Lawson, and Robert E. Sherwood, crossed over from careers in journalism.

Anderson's career as a playwright did not get off to an auspicious start. His debut play on Broadway, *White Desert* (1923), was a modern verse tragedy set in North Dakota in the 1800s. Anderson was spurred by the idea of reviving dramatic verse because he believed it the pinnacle of artistic achievement. He confessed that, "I wrote it [*White Desert*] in verse because I was weary of plays in prose that never lifted from the ground."⁸⁴ Despite good intentions and high ideals, *White Desert* closed after only twelve performances; the play, however, marked a watershed moment for the fledgling dramatist. George Abbott, who worked as an actor in the production, noted that although the play failed it nevertheless "raised Maxwell Anderson's standing as a writer."⁸⁵ The failure of *White Desert* did not dissuade Anderson. From this point on, Abbott recalls, he "could only think of the time when he would give up newspaper work for playwriting."⁸⁶ Abbott's comment casts doubt on Anderson's own admission, later in life, that he was drawn to playwriting strictly out of the potential for monetary gain.

⁸² Maxwell Anderson, "A Confession," *New York Times*, 5 December 1954.

⁸³ Arthur Hopkins, *To a Lonely Boy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1937), 243.

⁸⁴ Maxwell Anderson, *Off Broadway: Essays about the Theatre* (New York: William Sloane, 1947), 53.

⁸⁵ George Abbott, *Mister Abbott* (New York: Random House, 1963), 104.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

In the year following the failure of *White Desert*, Anderson struck theatrical gold, collaborating with fellow journalist Laurence Stallings to pen the satiric war drama *What Price Glory* (1924). Stallings, a marine veteran of World War I who had lost a leg in the conflict, often regaled his newspaper colleagues with combat stories during lunches. Anderson was drawn to the anecdotes and approached the old marine about collaborating on a play. *What Price Glory*, written in prose, satirized the futility of war, portrayed marines using obscene language (obscene as defined by the conservative standards of the 1920s), and attempted to de-romanticize warfare with realistic depictions of marines. *What Price Glory* achieved immediate critical and commercial success, running for 433 performances in New York. Emboldened by this windfall, Anderson wasted no time in dispensing with his journalistic career. He quit his job at the *World* the day after opening night and devoted himself to playwriting for the remainder of his life.⁸⁷

What Price Glory was more than a mere success; it made Anderson a pioneer of cultural expression. Several critics and scholars have noted the significance of the play to the history of American theatre. Critic Burns Mantle commented that *What Price Glory* "stood as an epoch in the play producing history" of New York, debunking the "prettily patriotic war play," and that its employment of profanity ushered in an era of more liberal expression on stage.⁸⁸ Later scholar William E. Taylor added to Mantle's assessment, calling the play "one of the most significant breakthroughs of realism in American

⁸⁷ Shivers, *Life*, 97.

⁸⁸ Mantle, *American Playwrights*, 66.

theatrical history" because it was among the first to de-glorify war.⁸⁹ Felicia Hardison Londré confirms that *What Price Glory* "stands as a watershed play for its recreation of the crudeness and profanity of soldiers' speech to match the violence of their war experience."⁹⁰

Despite his success Anderson remained in a state of transition throughout the 1920s. Though *White Desert* fueled his enthusiasm for drama and *What Price Glory* offered a measure of financial security, his two later collaborations with Stallings, *First Flight* (1925) and *The Buccaneer* (1925), both failed. A solo attempt, *Outside Looking In* (1925), achieved a solid run of 113 performances, but was an adaptation and thus not an original creative expression. *Saturday's Children* (1927) marked his first significant success as a solo writer, but this was followed by two more disappointing efforts, *Gods of the Lightning* (1928) and *Gypsy* (1929). He had made a name for himself with *What Price Glory*, but had yet to establish his independence as an artist.

Anderson discovered his niche in the 1930s by hearkening back to his greatest passion. Having failed to generate interest with a modern verse tragedy in 1923, Anderson had an epiphany that would reawaken his devotion to dramatic poetry: "I had discovered that poetic tragedy had never been successfully written about its own place and time. There is not one tragedy by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Corneille, or Racine which did not have a setting either far away or long ago."⁹¹ With this

⁸⁹ William E. Taylor, "Maxwell Anderson: Traditionalist in a Theatre of Change," in *Modern American Drama: Essays in Criticism*, edited by William E. Taylor (Deland, FL: Everett/Edwards, 1968), 47.

⁹⁰ Felicia Hardison Londré, "Many-Faceted Mirror: Drama as Reflection of Uneasy Modernity in the 1920s," in *A Companion to Twentieth Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 86.

⁹¹ Anderson, *Off Broadway*, 53-54.

thought in mind, Anderson turned to the Elizabethan era for inspiration. *Elizabeth the Queen* (1930) ran for 147 performances, receiving both critical praise and commercial success. *Mary of Scotland* (1933) was an even bigger hit, playing 248 performances. Having established these successes, he would revisit contemporary verse tragedy with better results in the mid-1930s. *Winterset* (1935), a poetic reconstruction of the Sacco-Vanzetti affair, was the first play to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. He would win this same award the following year, achieving success with the contemporary verse fantasy, *High Tor* (1936), a play John Gassner described as containing "some of the best poetic fantasy in the [English] language since *The Tempest*."⁹²

In contrast to the plight of so many Americans at the time, Anderson was at the height of his success and popularity in the 1930s. The level of his success may be judged, in part, by the number of performances his plays ran on Broadway. Theatre scholar Malcolm Goldstein reports that, by the standards of the time, any production reaching the 100 performance plateau was generally considered successful.⁹³ Goldstein's assertion is supported by performance statistics. Anne Fletcher notes that throughout the 1930s Broadway saw over 1,500 plays produced. Fewer than 300 of those plays reached a hundred performances.⁹⁴ Over the span of the decade, Anderson wrote twelve plays for the New York stage. Nine of these plays hit the century mark. His commercial success was augmented by a Pulitzer Prize and two New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards. Maxwell Anderson was among the most consistently successful playwrights of the era,

⁹² John Gassner, *Dramatic Soundings* (New York: Crown, 1968), 309.

⁹³ Malcolm Goldstein, *The Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 391.

⁹⁴ Anne Fletcher, "Reading Across the 1930s" in *A Companion to Twentieth Century American Drama*, ed. David Krasner (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 106.

both critically and commercially. *What Price Glory* made him famous in the 1920s, but it was during the decade of the Great Depression that he established a solid position as one of the foremost dramatists in American theatre.

By the close of the 1930s, however, Anderson's reputation as a dramatist was waning. With the onset of the Spanish Revolution and, later, World War II, he took up the cause of democracy by writing flag-waving war dramas designed to impress his audience with the nobility of American involvement in Europe. His longest running success of the 1940s, *The Eve of St. Mark* (1942), was just such a play; sentimental war propaganda popular with audiences, but dismissed by many critics as an artistic failure. Even the audience appeal of *The Eve of St. Mark* was an exception. His other war propaganda offerings during the 1940s such as the religious allegory *Journey to Jerusalem* (1940) as well as *Candle in the Wind* (1941) and *Storm Operation* (1944) generally failed to interest audiences. The postwar years brought some successes, but Anderson never again attained the heights he did in the Great Depression era. Pessimistic about his place in theatre history and plagued by personal and financial problems, Anderson died in 1959.

Throughout his life and career, Anderson advocated distrusting any person or institution that represented absolute authority. He was often defiant in his defense of individual integrity. We see his rebellious nature in his refusal of baptism, his defense of Arthur Camp, and his difficulty in accommodating himself to a teaching or journalism career. From 1927 to 1937 we find him in the prime of his creativity when his social critiques are sharpest and most penetrating. Anderson was born in the late nineteenth

century amidst an era of rapid transition. To better grasp the nature of his social critiques, we must explore the history and culture of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America.

To begin any discussion of the prevailing cultural attitudes of Americans in the nineteenth century one might begin with religion. As Warren Susman has noted, the United States "was from the start...a Protestant nation in which the role of religious ideology in the shaping of other ideological positions is key."⁹⁵ Many nineteenth century Americans were inheritors of the religious tradition brought over from Great Britain on the *Mayflower*. Because of the connection with Protestantism and the nation's English roots, nineteenth century culture is often characterized by historians as "Protestant" and "Victorian." However, the prevailing culture was descended from the Puritans, who represented a particular branch of the Protestant faith, that of Calvinism. Calvinism holds that God chose members of an elect for salvation. Unlike Catholicism, Calvinism rejects the notion of good works as penance to attain salvation. As sin is pervasive and unavoidable, no amount of personal virtue could earn one's way into heaven. Good works were not worthless, however. Performing good works manifested the Holy Spirit working from within, thus identifying the individual as a member of the elect.

American society in the late 1800s blended religious values with an economic system. Historian John F. Kasson describes the importance placed by Protestant Victorians upon the ideas of work ethic and self-mastery: "Hard work improved the individual as well as society, curbing men's animal passions, which if left unchecked

⁹⁵ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 56.

would bring about social collapse."⁹⁶ Social utility was, therefore, a by-product of self-improvement. Idleness was the object of disdain; pleasure of any kind was suspect. However, contrary to biblical strictures against the accumulation of wealth, success in life was measured, in large part, by economic success. This connection between the sacred and secular was influenced by eighteenth century British philosopher Adam Smith, whose ideas were employed to shape the American economic system. Smith advocated a free economy wherein each individual received, in theory, precisely the amount of success they earned.

America's governmental and economic philosophies received significant shaping from two of the nation's founders: Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. Jefferson favored an idealized populace of farmers plowing their fields mostly unaware of the presence of any centralized authority. By contrast, Hamilton advocated for a visibly strong federal power that would subordinate the interests of individual citizens and individual states to the interests of the nation as a whole. These competing philosophies underscored the anxiety existing in the struggle to balance the rights of individual citizens with the push for collective federal power. These philosophies also reveal the tension among those supporting Protestant values. Though the Protestant ideal was often associated with the Jeffersonian concept of small, non-intrusive government, the fact remains that representatives from both sides espoused Protestantism. Hamilton himself once proclaimed, "I have examined carefully the evidence of the Christian religion...and

⁹⁶ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 7.

if I was sitting as a juror upon its authenticity, I should rather abruptly give my verdict in its favor."⁹⁷ Likewise, Jeffersonians typically identified as Protestants.⁹⁸

Nineteenth century representatives of Protestant culture responded to their world by seeking to control virtually every aspect of it. It was a culture obsessed with attempting to define what was and was not acceptable in both public and private life. Americans in the 1800s were inundated with etiquette books that provided advice on proper clothing, posture, gait, language, and a host of other social behaviors. Rules existed for almost every occasion. Those who ran against the grain were subject to judgment by their peers and potential ostracism from decent society.⁹⁹ Social roles were of the utmost importance, particularly as they pertained to the sexes. Men and women existed in different spheres strictly defined by cultural standards. Feminist historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg observes that in nineteenth century culture "man represented the mind, woman the body, man the creative principle, woman the reproductive impulse" and that "man was the creator and representative of culture, woman of nature."¹⁰⁰ Gail Bederman notes this distinction in her observation of the White City, an exhibit at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 designed to trumpet the progress of society. The Woman's Building, displaying female contributions to civilization, was placed next to the Midway and outside the main exhibit of the White City, thus isolating it from the dominant male culture. Furthermore, the exhibit concentrated on women in the domestic sphere, ignoring feminine contributions to arts and sciences over the centuries. Bederman argues that the

⁹⁷ Quoted in Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 660.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 391.

⁹⁹ John F. Kasson, *Rudeness & Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century Urban America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990).

¹⁰⁰ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 258.

placement of the exhibit was a symbolic, physical delineation of the Protestant Victorian social structure.¹⁰¹ Women were severed from male culture; their perceived worth restricted to domestic responsibility. Within the home, women were expected to foster a "noncompetitive and nurturing environment," which contrasted with the competitive nature of male business.¹⁰² The cultural role of women in the domestic sphere related, in part, to the cultural perception that women, as the nurturers of children, were morally superior to men, who were, by nature, more vulnerable to animal passions.

The strict stance of Protestant Victorian culture toward sexuality is well-documented and the prevailing attitudes regarding sexuality were given credence by what passed for science in the 1800s. Many doctors of the time subscribed to the nerve energy theory, which postulated that the human body consisted of a finite energy diffuse across bodily organs.¹⁰³ It was believed that the female body's energy was dominated by the reproductive system. By exercising her brain, she would throw off her balance, depriving her other organs (specifically the ovaries) of vital energy. Her ovaries would atrophy and she would become sterile or possibly develop cancer. By contrast, it was posited that men carried their energy in the brain. Engaging in such activities as masturbation or excessive sexual intercourse would cause insanity by depriving the brain of its life force.¹⁰⁴ We see also reflected in this "science" the need to avoid pleasure and focus on work. One needed to harness one's energy and direct it into the proper sphere not merely for spiritual health, but for the sake of physical well-being as well. Sex served social utility when engaged in

¹⁰¹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 34.

¹⁰² Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 7.

¹⁰³ Bederman, 83.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

for procreation. Sex for mere pleasure was thought destructive to the individual and society.

As sexual pleasure equated to idleness and self-indulgence it was viewed as a moral failing. Open discussion of sexuality was usually unthinkable. Director/producer George Abbott recalled his own experience growing up in the late nineteenth century: "In those days sex was sin and something you didn't talk about."¹⁰⁵ The release of sexual urges was often cast in terms of depravity. A study conducted by Max J. Exner of 948 college males born in the 1890s found that most in the sample experienced shame and ambivalence connected to their sexual expression. The young men frequently employed terms such as "vicious," "evil," "vulgar," and "degrading" to describe what they had learned about sex as well as the sexual habits they had developed. Historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman note that most in Exner's study "viewed their sexual behavior as a problem, as a sign of moral weakness and a failure of manly self-control."¹⁰⁶ These young men may have viewed their sexual liaisons as repeated failures to uphold the decent upbringing wrought by their morally superior mothers. As Bederman writes, nineteenth century middle-class parents emphasized building manhood "as they would build a muscle, through repetitive exercises of self-control over impulse."¹⁰⁷

Other tactics for control of sexual impulse included fashion and the glare of public scrutiny. Playwright Elmer Rice notes of the 1910s: "dresses were ankle-long and

¹⁰⁵ Abbott, 12.

¹⁰⁶ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 180.

¹⁰⁷ Bederman, 11.

neck-high.... Necking, petting, and pitching woo may have been indulged in by some, but were certainly not generally practiced."¹⁰⁸ Writing his autobiography in the early 1960s, Rice offers a telling observation: "I am not suggesting that human desires or impulses were different; it is the mores that have changed."¹⁰⁹ As Rice suggests, Protestant Victorians were not naturally prudish by any means; their social philosophy possessed firm ideas for what was morally right and wrong; for what was necessary to uphold an ordered, civilized society. Control was the hallmark of this culture. While social and individual control was fostered by such things as etiquette books, fashion, and scientific theories, control was also achieved by virtue of various institutions supported by Protestant tradition.

Marriage was among the most significant institutions that supported the overall social structure, particularly the idea of separate gendered spheres. Men operated in the business world and provided financial sustenance for their families. Women were expected to maintain the home, children, and servants (if applicable). This separation was thought to maintain societal balance, but sometimes led to unhappy unions. Historian E. Anthony Rotundo surveyed nineteenth century correspondence from numerous married couples and often detected emotional disconnects between husbands and wives. Rotundo speculates that while spouses may have been dedicated to one another there was often "little warmth and scant affection" manifested in these relationships.¹¹⁰ This observation paints a picture of spouses playing the roles dictated by society, as if the world really

¹⁰⁸ Elmer Rice, *Minority Report: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 102.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹¹⁰ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 141.

were but a stage and the men and women in it but players. Public scrutiny remained a threat for those who failed to fit within Protestant Victorian standards. Journalist Henry Canby wrote of the 1890s in his memoirs: "The woman who could not make a home...like the man who could not support one, was condemned, and not tacitly."¹¹¹ Canby's recollection provides a clear sense of the pressure placed upon the individual to fulfill whatever role society deemed proper for them to hold.

Outside of the domestic dwellings, American political institutions further served the interests of the prevailing Protestant culture. Most Protestants identified with the Republican Party, whose platform espoused the creation of a virtuous society (at least as defined by the dominant culture). Such issues as temperance, mandatory observance of the Sabbath, and blue laws were among the critical issues.¹¹² The power of Protestant influence may be gauged by the presence of Republicans in the White House during this era. Of the sixteen presidents who served between 1860 and 1932, twelve were Republicans. Of the four Democrats, Andrew Johnson was not elected and Woodrow Wilson won election in 1912, arguably, by virtue of a Republican split between William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. Wilson managed to hold on to the Oval Office in 1916, but had to endure one of the closest presidential elections in history in the process. Moreover, one of the most ringing endorsements of Protestant American culture's religious and socioeconomic alliance came from the White House in the 1920s when

¹¹¹ Quoted in Erenberg, *Steppin' Out*, 7.

¹¹² John Whiteclay Chambers II, *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1900-1917* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), 29.

President Calvin Coolidge stated that, "The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there, worships there."¹¹³

As Protestant Victorians discouraged sex, liquor, and other forms of pleasurable decadence, so art was another subject of suspicion. Leisure time, like the rest of life, was not to be spent idly, "but in edifying activities" and art was only good if it supported "moral and social utility."¹¹⁴ Theatre producer Arthur Hopkins admitted that theatre was of no influence in his early life because he had grown up Protestant. The Hopkins family "had little regard for manufactured diversion. Those were the idle hands that the devil used."¹¹⁵ Guthrie McClintic, who directed both *Saturday's Children* and *The Star-Wagon*, also encountered considerable resistance at home when he decided to pursue a career in drama because of the shameful lack of utility implied in artistic pursuits.¹¹⁶ Likewise, Maxwell Anderson described the writing of poetry thus: "It was committed to paper in secret, like a crime."¹¹⁷ Like the young men in Exner's study who described their sexual pleasure in terms of moral failing, Anderson conceptualizes his love of poetry in criminal terms. Of course he may have reached for sarcasm with this comment, but the fact that this son of a Protestant minister characterized his passion for an artistic form in criminal terms reflects the restrictiveness of the prevailing culture toward art at the time.

Nineteenth century theatricals conformed to Protestant Victorian norms by focusing on monetary gain and providing entertainment that served the culture. These emphases led to popular forms of entertainment described by Tice Miller: "Melodrama

¹¹³ Quoted in Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), 31.

¹¹⁴ Kasson, *Amusing the Million*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Arthur Hopkins, *To a Lonely Boy* (Garden City, NY: 1937), 97.

¹¹⁶ Guthrie McClintic, *Me and Kit* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955), 35-37.

¹¹⁷ Maxwell Anderson, "Preface" in *Four Verse Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), vii.

dominated American drama in the post-Civil War period as managers sought to attract a large popular audience by offering spectacle, sensational plots, and topical subjects. Success was measured by the box office."¹¹⁸ Theatrically, this was the era of ultimate showmanship. The major draws of the late 1800s were such high spectacle acts as P.T. Barnum, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Buffalo Bill's *Wild West Show*. These entertainments, while aiming at the box office, often reinforced Protestant America by mythologizing the prevailing culture at the expense of other cultures, such as those of African-Americans and Native Americans.

Although nineteenth century American culture was infused with Protestant sentiments and traditions, the nineteenth century was also an era of intense social, political, and cultural upheaval that would stretch well into the twentieth century, re-shaping American life. Beginning as early as the mid-1800s an infusion of new ideas and attitudes attempted to challenge the prevailing Protestant Victorian culture.

Traditional Protestant values received a significant challenge in the nineteenth century with the advent of American Transcendentalism. At its peak in the 1830s and 1840s, Transcendentalism has been labeled by scholar Lawrence Buell as "the first intellectual movement in the history of the still-new nation to achieve a lasting impact on American thought and writing."¹¹⁹ One of the defining characteristics of Transcendentalist thinkers was a break away from accepted Protestant ideology regarding biblical teachings. Historian Philip F. Gura notes that most Transcendentalists were

¹¹⁸ Tice L. Miller, "Plays and Playwrights: Civil War to 1896" in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume II 1870-1945*, eds. Don Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 233.

¹¹⁹ Lawrence Buell, "Introduction" in *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, ed. Lawrence Buell (New York: Modern Library, 2006), xi.

"associated with Unitarianism and thus were considered 'liberal Christians'" because they disavowed the Calvinist version of Protestantism.¹²⁰ As a result of their Unitarian roots, Transcendentalists rejected the Trinitarian doctrine and thus held that Jesus Christ was not divine, but rather "simply the supreme model for humanity, God's gift to show that to which all good Christians should aspire."¹²¹ The evolution of Transcendentalism reflects a move away from the Puritanical origins of the earliest European settlers, who were mostly British Calvinists. Transcendentalists rejected the "British Empiricism" associated with John Locke, who held that each person represented a *tabula rasa* shaped by environmental circumstances, in favor of the "German Idealism" of Immanuel Kant, who extolled the abilities of the individual mind to act upon the environment.¹²² Though recognized as an intellectual movement, Transcendentalism represented a loose collection of thinkers, eventually fracturing into two factions. First, there were those philosophers led by Orestes Brownson and George Ripley who focused on community building in the spirit of European socialist ideas. The second group, most associated with Ralph Waldo Emerson, rejected collectivism in favor of individual action and fulfillment. Following the Civil War, the branch of Transcendentalist philosophy represented by Emerson became dominant as society moved toward promoting "individual rights and market capitalism."¹²³ Transcendentalism also holds the rare distinction of being an intellectual movement that included female participants. Stalwarts such as Margaret Fuller embraced Transcendentalism as a way of advancing women's rights in the nineteenth century.

¹²⁰ Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 5-6.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

The Women's Movement was among the most significant social upheavals of the late 1800s. The movement initially centered upon a single issue: enfranchisement. Many women activists felt that gaining the vote would open the door for women to exert political influence, thereby generating change across a broad spectrum of issues. In their pursuit of the vote the first generation of female activists discovered weapons within the very same Protestant culture that oppressed their rights. Progressive women latched on to the Protestant idea of female moral superiority in order to pursue their ends. If women were indeed morally superior to men, then society would benefit from their wisdom and influence. By giving women the right to vote, they could exercise their rectitude to support legislation that would serve the betterment of society.¹²⁴ In effect, progressive women were turning Protestant culture against itself not only by speaking to female morality, but also by using that morality as a means of advancing social utility, which, as we have seen, was an integral facet of Protestant American ideology.

The Women's Movement altered course in the 1910s as the next generation of activists emerged. Unlike their forbears, these women for the most part rejected Christian tenets and abandoned the concept of feminine moral superiority as a means to an end.¹²⁵ This generation of feminists made sexual freedom and the abolition of sexual double-standards core issues. Traditional marriage was rejected in favor of sexual experimentation without strings of attachment or the newly egalitarian model of “companionate marriage.”¹²⁶ By the 1920s a “new sexual order” had descended, which

¹²⁴ Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 17, 29.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 156-57.

derived from "the redefinition of womanhood to include eroticism, and the decline of public reticence about sex."¹²⁷ In the late 1930s psychologist Lewis Terman interviewed more than 700 college women and found that while 74% of those "born between 1890 and 1900 had been virgins at the time of marriage," only 31% born after 1913 had been so.¹²⁸ With the onset of the 1920s "the separate spheres, so critical in the construction of nineteenth-century middle-class sexual mores, had collapsed."¹²⁹ Cott notes that the generation of female activists in the early twentieth century often embraced socialism due to its similar goal of equal justice for all.¹³⁰

European socialist philosophy would represent another threat to the dominant Protestant culture because, in part, it was often associated with immigration. The mass immigration that occurred in the first decades of the twentieth century brought with it tremendous contention between the purveyors of Protestant culture and the new residents pouring in from Ellis Island. Anglo-American xenophobia pre-dates the American Revolution. In 1753 Benjamin Franklin voiced opposition to an increase of German immigrants, fearing "that Pennsylvania would be unable to preserve its language and that even its government would become precarious."¹³¹ The progress of immigration as well as American xenophobia would increase over time. As many as fifteen million immigrants would enter the United States between 1900 and 1915, accounting for one

¹²⁷ D'Emilio and Freedman, 233.

¹²⁸ Lary May, *Screening out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 203.

¹²⁹ D'Emilio and Freedman, 233.

¹³⁰ Cott, 35.

¹³¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, 1967), 109.

third of the overall population growth.¹³² Most of these new residents were Eastern European and brought with them new socialist ideologies many felt anathema to traditional Americanism. Nineteenth century philosophers Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were among the most influential. Marx and Engels sum up societal discord thus: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."¹³³ The solution offered in *Communist Manifesto* was class revolution, which would require, initially, "despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production."¹³⁴ Americans, by contrast, had long adhered to the ideas of seventeenth century philosopher John Locke, who defined political power as the right to make laws "for the regulating and preserving of property."¹³⁵ The clarion for despotic means to end property rights represented an intolerable threat to a social system ingrained in the Lockean tradition.

Another significant threat brought by immigrants that was regarded, perhaps, as an even more dangerous scourge than Marxism was Anarchism. In addition to seeking an end to property ownership, anarchists advocated the removal of all forms of institutional authority. The Russian-born Emma Goldman, among the most notable anarchists in the country, defined three great elements in "the stronghold of man's enslavement," which were property, religion, and the government.¹³⁶ By striking at these three institutions, anarchism was, in effect, leveling war against America's most cherished cultural forms. Not all immigrants were anarchists, of course, but they were often identified by

¹³² John Whiteclay Chambers, 75.

¹³³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 1998), 34.

¹³⁴ Marx and Engels, 60.

¹³⁵ John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Government* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 2.

¹³⁶ Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For" in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* edited by Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 66.

association as suspected anarchists and, by implication, potential revolutionaries. This association often led to extreme reactions. Working as a journalist in 1901, Arthur Hopkins discovered a group of immigrants he presumed were anarchists celebrating the assassination of President William McKinley. Hopkins notified the police, and the entire group was arrested.¹³⁷

Despite negative connotations applied by traditionalists, the Socialist Party in the United States attracted many prominent intellectuals into its fold. The party crested in 1912 when its longtime standard-bearer, Eugene V. Debs, gathered six percent of the popular vote for president. Though Debs was soundly defeated, the party's appeal was reflected in gaining two seats in Congress as well as in electing fifty-six mayors, thirty-three state legislators across seventeen states, and close to a thousand city council members.¹³⁸ That Socialism garnered such support, unusual for a third party in American politics, speaks to the disgust many felt toward the status quo. However, even among some radicals, elements of Protestant culture remained. Debs, for example, believed that Christianity was indicative of socialist tenets in action.¹³⁹ As with the first generation of women activists who attempted to turn Protestant culture on itself by using the concept of female moral superiority to their advantage, so Debs attempted to adapt the dominant Protestant culture to his needs. Such contradictions are emblematic of the plasticity of Protestantism in the ongoing struggle to define what is or is not representative American character.

¹³⁷ Hopkins, 73.

¹³⁸ John Whiteclay Chambers, 66.

¹³⁹ Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick, "Introduction" in *1915, The Cultural Moment: The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art, and the New Theatre in America*, ed. by Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 4.

American xenophobia grew more overt throughout the 1920s with the reality that some of the immigrants were indeed anarchists willing to employ violence against representatives of the social system. A series of bombs sent by anarchists to the homes of prominent politicians, including his own, provoked Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer to order raids against foreign radical leaders, resulting in brutal arrests and numerous deportations. Immigrant hysteria reached its zenith in 1920 when professed anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were arrested in connection with the murder of a paymaster in Massachusetts. The Sacco-Vanzetti trial ignited the nation and became symbolic of American attitudes toward immigrants. Both men had pronounced Italian accents and radical ties, which was enough for many to convict them of the crime. The evidence against them was dubious; the conduct of their trial even more so. Many American intellectuals such as John Dos Passos, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Sinclair Lewis contributed to their defense monetarily and by speaking out in condemnation of the unfairness of the trial. The incident eventually garnered international attention. Despite pleas from around the globe and virulent protest, mostly by the intellectual class, inside the United States, Sacco and Vanzetti were executed in 1927.¹⁴⁰ The Sacco-Vanzetti affair (twice dramatized by Anderson) was a cultural watershed manifesting, in the extreme, just how threatening foreign influence was to those defenders of traditional culture.

While radical anarchists challenged the political culture of the United States, Protestant Americans would witness a direct challenge to their religious values in the

¹⁴⁰ Bruce Watson, *Sacco & Vanzetti: The Men, the Murders, and the Judgment of Mankind* (New York: Viking, 2007).

1920s. In 1925 John Scopes was arrested for teaching Darwinian theory to Tennessee school children. The Scopes Trial pitted science against Christian fundamentalism. Darwin first challenged the prevailing Protestant culture in the nineteenth century by proposing that humankind evolved from the gradual progression from a common primate ancestor over the course of millions of years. This idea struck at the heart of Protestant notions of humankind created out of dust by the hand of God and reduced the individual human to the level of an animal. Though Scopes was found guilty, the cross-examination of fundamentalist stalwart William Jennings Bryan by famed attorney Clarence Darrow pounded away at Protestant assumptions about the place of humanity in the world. Aside from the revolutionary features of Darwin's theory, the Scopes Trial illustrated another important change to American life. It was the first legal trial broadcast on radio across the nation. Mass technology was becoming an evermore present feature in American homes.

The influx of technological advancements from the late 1800s onward challenged the Protestant ethic by dehumanizing the individual. Many found the pace of the advance staggering. Elmer Rice asserted that the nineteenth century was "probably the most revolutionizing in history" not because of the sociopolitical upheavals, but because of industrialism.¹⁴¹ The marked industrialization that Rice found so influential may have originated in the 1800s, but it really caught fire in the twentieth century. By the 1920s Henry Ford's assembly line spurred the ever-growing consumer culture by dramatically increasing productivity, while radios brought the voice of the President of the United States and the events of the Scopes trial into living rooms. Many felt, however, that the innovations of industry were more than a little detrimental. Marx and Engels made

¹⁴¹ Elmer Rice, 142.

industrialization among the centerpieces of their attack on capitalism, arguing that laborers were degraded rather than raised by the development of industry.¹⁴² With the increased production of Ford's assembly line, for example, came the reduced need for skilled labor.

Protestant culture would adapt in response to the various challenges posed by advances in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Harry Emerson Fosdick, an ordained minister, stressed that Christians should shift their focus away from "otherworldly faith" and place their faith instead in the growth of human potential.¹⁴³ Fosdick represented the movement toward liberal Protestantism. Like Transcendentalists, liberal Protestants rejected traditional Calvinism, holding that the Bible should not be interpreted literally and that God is not separated from humankind, but rather existed everywhere and within all people. Fosdick even founded nondenominational churches, which made him unpopular with fundamentalists.¹⁴⁴ He brought Jesus down to earth, portraying the Christian Messiah as a man of "physical vitality" who held "confidence in human potential."¹⁴⁵ In the same vein, advertising guru Bruce Barton (not a minister, but the son of one) also identified Christ as a modernist who extolled human personality and would fit right in with the burgeoning American consumer culture. Barton gave less emphasis to hard work, stating that success was 85 percent personality.¹⁴⁶ The

¹⁴² Marx and Engels, 49.

¹⁴³ T.J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930" in *The Culture of Consumption*, eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 14.

¹⁴⁴ Dumenil, 191.

¹⁴⁵ Lears, 14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

assumption that individual character and personality mattered so much in life must have appealed to a society overwhelmed with dehumanizing technology as well as philosophical threats to their way of life. But Fosdick's belief in human potential, Barton's emphasis on personality, and Coolidge's factory temples to democracy would come crashing down at the end of the 1920s.

Precipitated by the Stock Market crash of 1929, the Great Depression represented perhaps the greatest assault upon Protestant American ideology as a whole. The Depression became more than a nationwide disaster; it became a personal disaster for many. Historian Lawrence W. Levine notes how personal the economic calamity became for many Americans. Levine writes that among the most devastating elements of the Depression's effect on culture was "the tendency to internalize the responsibility for one's position which often led to feelings of shame."¹⁴⁷ Levine's assertions are supported by a study conducted in the 1930s by sociologist Mirra Komarovsky. Komarovsky recorded the reactions of one man who said, "A man is not a man without work."¹⁴⁸ A woman, part of the same study, declared, "When a husband cannot provide for the family and makes you worry so, you lose your love for him."¹⁴⁹ Here we see two elements related directly to Protestant American notions of character. The man identified himself with work and in the absence of work, his identity as a man suffers; his humanity loses its meaning and he becomes something less than a man. The woman, on the other hand, expresses her reliance on and her expectation of the man as a provider. If he cannot

¹⁴⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 213.

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theatre* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 96.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

provide, it nullifies his usefulness and abates her attachment. The inextricable link of work with self-sufficiency and social betterment (at least in terms of the family unit as a micro-society) as well as reinforcement of separate gendered spheres are evident in these anecdotes. Adding to these examples, journalist Lorena Hickok, on her travels around the country as an agent of the Roosevelt administration, discovered numerous examples of men who had lost faith in themselves as individuals, who shunned federal aid as an abject humiliation, and demanded work to maintain their self-respect. On the same token, Hickok made note of various women who indicated a loss of respect and love for their husbands because of their failure to provide.¹⁵⁰ These stories suggest that the Great Depression represented for many Americans not a system failure, but a deep, personal, moral failure.

For those who did see the Depression as a system failure, many were less than sorry to see it fail. For some intellectuals, the economic collapse signaled the need for an overhaul of the American system. Edmund Wilson was among those advocating a Marxist conversion.¹⁵¹ Many in the intellectual class looked to socialism not only because they felt it more socially just, but also because they felt it less wasteful and more efficient than capitalism.¹⁵² However, historian Terry Cooney argues, "Judging joblessness and need as moral failings helped to maintain particular value constructions and to avoid doubts about the economic system."¹⁵³ The Great Depression challenged traditional

¹⁵⁰ Lorena Hickok, *One Third of a Nation*, eds. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

¹⁵¹ Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 58-59.

¹⁵² Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 159.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2.

American culture by reinforcing the idea that the individual could not stand alone against a disaster.¹⁵⁴ As a consequence, intellectuals espousing Marxist solutions frequently attacked individualism as "the chief symbolic villain...a trait to be suppressed rather than used as a stimulant in transforming American life."¹⁵⁵

With the onset of the Great Depression, traditional Calvinist American culture found itself in a major identity crisis. Women had gained the right to vote; Darwin received nationwide recognition in the Scopes Trial; the Sacco-Vanzetti affair brought American constitutional justice under worldwide scrutiny; Ford's assembly line had melded the human and the machine; and most of all, the economic collapse brought into question the viability of the American way of life (again, as defined by the prevailing Calvinist culture). Theatre artists were coming of age, leaving nineteenth century melodrama behind in favor of radical experimentation designed to reinforce, reinterpret, or redefine American cultural institutions. Though he would arrive somewhat late to the game, Maxwell Anderson would emerge as a major figure among those critiquing these institutions and the ideas that sustained them.

¹⁵⁴ Pells, 114-15.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

Chapter 3

Love and...Marriage?: Anderson's Advice to 'Saturday's Children'

The prevailing attitudes regarding gender roles in the United States during the 1920s had their roots in the Victorian era, which relegated men and women to separate spheres. Men were granted intellectual and physical superiority while they made their way in the public world of business. However, despite their supposed superiorities, men were also acknowledged to have a great weakness. Base desire (i.e. sex) was viewed as an unsavory yet inevitable element in male character. Men were expected to hold their physical passions in check, but release of said passion through brothels, while frowned upon, was not entirely unacceptable. By contrast, women were confined to the spheres of domesticity and maternity. The members of the supposed "weaker sex" were prized for their sexual purity, innocence, and inherent moral superiority. As Protestant Victorians valued social utility in all aspects of life and discouraged anything resembling mere pleasure, sex was held to serve the purpose of procreation rather than enjoyment. Perhaps no institution served to shape, define, and reinforce these narrow gender roles more than marriage. Marriage was prescribed as a means of curbing the natural instincts of men by placing them into the civilizing hands of women. Men provided monetary support for their families; women were expected to facilitate a noncompetitive, tranquil environment within the home.¹⁵⁶ Even progressive intellectuals such as Ralph Waldo Emerson valued

¹⁵⁶ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

women as "the civilizers of mankind."¹⁵⁷

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries several new theories regarding sexuality and male/female relations emerged to challenge traditional conceptions of gender. Four of the most influential critics were Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis, Ellen Key, and Emma Goldman. These four all sought to modify societal norms by proposing alternative conceptions of sexuality and marriage. Freud argued that marriage led to unsatisfactory sexual relations due to the fact that prevailing mores limited intercourse to procreation, which typically took place within the first few years of the union. This sexual restriction, Freud asserted, led to ill-health particularly for women because they were held to a stricter moral code than men.¹⁵⁸ Like Freud, Ellis de-romanticized matrimony: "Marriage in the biological sense, and even to some extent in the social sense, is a sexual relationship entered into with the intention of making it permanent."¹⁵⁹ Arguing that viewing marriage as a "sacred duty" was "antiquated,"¹⁶⁰ Ellis advocated trial marriage before full commitment in order to better achieve mutual satisfaction, which he regarded as crucial to the union.¹⁶¹ Ellen Key added to this debate and rankled religious conceptions by linking sex to physical and spiritual growth rather than sin. Key also advocated for the right of women to end a marriage that failed to produce sexual fulfillment,¹⁶² yet another radical assertion for this era. Emma Goldman

¹⁵⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Woman," in *Emerson: Political Writings*, ed. Kenneth Sacks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 159.

¹⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 31-33.

¹⁵⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Psychology of Sex* (New York: Ray Long, 1933), 256.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁶¹ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 224.

¹⁶² Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 46.

took aim at the cultural legacy of American Puritanism: “Puritanism, with its perversion of the significance and functions of the human body, especially in regard to woman, has condemned her to celibacy.”¹⁶³ Goldman attributed female sexual repression largely to Puritanism’s “intrenchment (*sic*) behind the State and the law.”¹⁶⁴ For a devout anarchist like Goldman, women could only discover emancipation through the complete elimination of all institutional forms, marriage representing only one. As a result of the intellectual doors opened by Freud, Ellis, Key, and Goldman, sexuality and marriage were among the most controversial topics for discussion in this era.

New theories of sexuality as well as greater educational and professional opportunities for women precipitated the “New Woman Movement” in the late nineteenth century. This initial push toward women’s social and sexual liberation constitutes one of the most significant social developments in the history of the United States. Historian Paul R. Gorman describes New Women as “dissatisfied with the nineteenth century’s version of domestic virtue” and traditional sex roles.¹⁶⁵ These challenges often centered on sexuality and, by extension, institutional marriage. According to Nancy F. Cott, New Women and even newer “feminists” (a term coined in the early twentieth century) viewed “Victorian marriage as hierarchal and emotionally barren, based on dominance and submission.”¹⁶⁶ By the 1920s, the state of marriage was believed by many to be in a full-blown crisis. Psychiatrist Beatrice Hinkle noted in 1925 that, “Among the many subjects agitating the minds of the people of the United States to-day none compares in its

¹⁶³ Emma Goldman, “The Hypocrisy of Puritanism,” in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, edited by Alix Kates Shulman (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1998), 153.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁶⁵ Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 14.

¹⁶⁶ Cott, 157.

insistence and acuteness with the question of the future of the institution of marriage in America."¹⁶⁷ Sociologist Ernest R. Groves agreed and blamed the advent of birth control as well as modern society's move in the 1920s toward "a pleasure philosophy of life" for the decline of the marital institution.¹⁶⁸ Hinkle seemed to concur with Groves regarding the hedonism of the Jazz Age, writing that, "The most striking characteristic among the younger generation is the utter absence of any sense of responsibility or regard for anything except what affects their personal feelings. Obligations to society or custom, even duty to children, when they conflict with the individual's own wishes, scarcely exist."¹⁶⁹ Such an opinion ran contrary to radical feminists such as Goldman, who argued for the rights of the individual to decide her own fate irrespective of any societal tradition or expectation.

American theatre was at the forefront of the cultural debate over marriage in the 1920s. The title of the first Pulitzer Prize for drama, Jesse Lynch Williams's *Why Marry?* (1918), seems symbolic in light of the plethora of marriage plays that followed. Most of these plays either defended or otherwise affirmed the status quo. Frank Craven's *The First Year* (1920), one of the most popular hits of the decade, centered on a young couple, Grace and Tommy, struggling to adjust to their initial year of married life. Passion fades after the wedding bells, and the relationship degenerates into daily squabbles over bills and other mundane aspects of domestic life. Matters come to a head when Grace leaves her husband, but in the final confrontation all is made well with the

¹⁶⁷ Beatrice M. Hinkle, "The Chaos of Modern Marriage," *Harpers* 152 (1925), 1.

¹⁶⁸ Ernest R. Groves, *The Marriage Crisis* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1928), 32, 42-43.

¹⁶⁹ Hinkle, 1-2.

announcement of her pregnancy.¹⁷⁰ In this case, the wife was cleansed not by marriage per se, but by that other sainted tradition of womanhood: maternity. That disputes over the position of marriage and, particularly women, was a hot topic is perhaps best exemplified by the events surrounding Zona Gale's *Miss Lulu Bett* (1921), which required an alternate ending to satisfy audiences. In the original version, Lulu rejects domesticity after her husband deserts her. In the revision, her husband returns and "happily ever after" ensues as Lulu accepts traditional marriage.¹⁷¹ In *Anna Christie* (1922), Eugene O'Neill relates the story of a former prostitute who finds redemption in marriage after first having been rejected by her father and lover.¹⁷² Owen Davis's *Icebound* (1923) depicts a wayward man reformed by the civilizing force of a woman who he agrees to marry in the end.¹⁷³ Sidney Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted* (1925) portrays a woman surrendering to adulterous temptation, but gaining forgiveness from her husband, which deepens her devotion to him.¹⁷⁴ In 1926, George Kelly achieved fame with *Craig's Wife*. Mrs. Craig is a woman who views marriage as a means to an end. She seeks security in her husband and employs incessant manipulation over him and everyone else in the play to insure her position. In the end, her scheming ways are discovered, and her husband abandons her to the desolation of the house.¹⁷⁵ All of the plays aforementioned, with the exception of *The First Year*, were Pulitzer Prize winners.

¹⁷⁰ Frank Craven, *The First Year* (New York: Samuel French, 1921).

¹⁷¹ Zona Gale, *Miss Lulu Bett* (New York: D. Appleton, 1921).

¹⁷² Eugene O'Neill, *Anna Christie in The Hairy Ape and Other Plays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1923).

¹⁷³ Owen Davis, *Icebound* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1923).

¹⁷⁴ Sidney Howard, *They Knew What They Wanted* (New York: Doubleday, 1925).

¹⁷⁵ George Kelly, *Craig's Wife* (New York: Samuel French, 1925).

That all of the plays garnered varying degrees of critical and popular success speaks to the importance of marriage as a subject in theatre at the time.

The preponderance of marriage-related themes in realistic plays during the 1920s indicates that Maxwell Anderson was very much in step with aesthetic and cultural trends when he brought *Saturday's Children* to audiences in 1927. The play centers on a young woman, Bobby Halevy, in love with a co-worker, Rims O'Neil. Bobby receives contradictory relationship advice from her sister, Florrie, and her father, Mr. Halevy, throughout the play. Florrie persuades her to set a trap for Rims that will bait him into marrying her. Like Grace in Craven's *The First Year*, Bobby soon finds traditional married life miserable, as she and Rims squabble over money and petty jealousies. She escapes to a boarding house, but neither divorces nor returns to Rims. Rather, she convinces him that all they both really wanted was a love affair all along. The play ends with the two preparing for a clandestine sexual encounter in Bobby's room. Opening at the Booth Theatre on 26 January 1927, *Saturday's Children* was among some 260 productions to hit the boards during that Broadway season. Around seventy percent of these productions would fail "to attract sufficient financial support to keep body and box office alive."¹⁷⁶ *Saturday's Children*, however, ran for 310 performances. Though it failed to win the Pulitzer Prize, the Pulitzer Board secretary John Hohenberg recalled *Saturday's Children* as among "the wealth of glittering, professional material" on Broadway that season.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Burns Mantle, *The Best Plays of 1926-27* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927), 3.

¹⁷⁷ John Hohenberg, *The Pulitzer Prizes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 100.

Saturday's Children appeared in New York at the height of the cultural debate over the institution of marriage, which included discussions of sexuality and gender roles. As most plays of this era depicting marriage ultimately support traditional mores, *Saturday's Children* represents a pioneering effort at dramatizing the clash between traditional Protestant culture and the social revolutions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter analyzes Anderson's portrayal of marriage and gender relations with special attention to the relationship between his depiction and the social context in which it was created. *Saturday's Children* depicts three marital unions: that of Bobby's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Halevy; her sister Florrie and her husband Willy; and the central relationship between Bobby and Rims. In each of these unions, Anderson offers a distinct point of view on the institution of marriage as well as gender roles and relations.

The given circumstances provide little specific information regarding the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Halevy. All indications are that Anderson set the play in the present (1927). The couple has two daughters, the youngest of which, Bobby, is twenty-three years old. From this information we can speculate that the Halevys were married sometime around the turn of the century, the cusp of the Victorian age. As to their relative ages at the time of marriage, Anderson provides contradictory clues. Mrs. Halevy says they waited to get married. Mr. Halevy laments that he married young. This inconsistency perhaps represents an interesting gendered perspective on the appropriate age for marriage. We know nothing of either one's business or work experience, but there is no mention of Mrs. Halevy ever having worked outside the home or possessing interests beyond the domestic sphere. She offers no observations regarding politics,

suffrage, or the women's movement. We learn that Mr. Halevy built his own radio, so we can glean from this certain aptitudes, and though the play does not confirm what employment he has held, we do learn that he supports his family.

Mr. and Mrs. Halevy have all of one interaction in the entire play, which occurs approximately midway through the first act when Mr. Halevy, in a fit of anger, disturbs the peace by destroying the radio he had built. What little information the play offers on the Halevy marriage offers a bleak example of traditional marriage. The couple demonstrates the separate gendered spheres common in the Victorian era. Mr. Halevy's building a radio shows him as the creative quantity in the union. Susman has noted that Americans of this era often characterized inventors, such as Edison, as wizards,¹⁷⁸ and Mr. Halevy's first name, "Merlin," evokes the famous mythological wizard. By contrast, Mrs. Halevy remains meek and accepting of whatever happens around her. When she and Florrie are interrupted by the ruckus offstage, followed by the appearance of her husband, Mrs. Halevy makes her strongest move in the play: "Good heavens! Merlin, what did you do to it?" Mr. Halevy's response dismisses her rather tame concern: "Nothing." When Florrie attempts to interject, her father seizes the moment to assert his dominance, cuts her off, and describes how he has destroyed "the infernal machine that has wrecked our peace." In destroying the radio, Mr. Halevy demonstrates the animalistic fervor supposedly prevalent in the male. His wife, by contrast, demonstrates the accustomed civilized demeanor of the woman, metaphorically throwing up her hands: "I don't know

¹⁷⁸ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xxvii.

what's come over you, Merlin. You're so sudden lately."¹⁷⁹ Mr. Halevy once again asserts his authority as man of the house, thus emblemizing traditional cultural values:

Yeah! Toward the end of his life the human male, having learned there is nothing to be gained by gentleness and compromise begins to assert himself. You didn't want me to build a radio and I built it anyway. After I got it built I didn't like it so I smashed it. If you tell me to get another one I won't. If you tell me not to get another one I will.¹⁸⁰

When Florrie suggests that, "It's best not to tell him anything," Mrs. Halevy again reinforces the gender stereotype of the passive woman: "Goodness knows I never tried to tell him anything."¹⁸¹ This brief exchange concludes the singular marital interaction between the Halevys. They remain in the room together for the next seven pages, but they never speak to each other again. Mrs. Halevy exits before the end of the first act and never returns.

With the Halevy marriage Anderson also manifests the emotional barrenness often associated with the consequence of separate gendered spheres. The couple never exchange any terms of endearment. The script never indicates that they ever kiss, hold hands, or even touch. Midway through Act I, the couple is supposed to head to a band concert, but they do not leave together. Mr. Halevy sends his wife on ahead with Willy while he hangs back to talk to Bobby. In Act III, when Mr. Halevy explains to Bobby how marriage kills a love affair by imposing responsibility, Bobby asks "then why didn't mother lose you?" Mr. Halevy's reply reveals the distance created from years in a conventional union: "Well, maybe she did. And maybe I lost her. Of course we stayed

¹⁷⁹ Maxwell Anderson, *Saturday's Children* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1927), 31-32.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

around. We had children."¹⁸² In Victorian times, children were often romanticized by couples as symbols incarnate of their love for one another.¹⁸³ Anderson subverts this Victorian idea by offering a decidedly unsentimental view of offspring: "you start one baby, just as a kind of experiment, and then you find it's a life sentence."¹⁸⁴

One final point to make about Anderson's depiction of the Halevy marriage regards Anderson's use of the wife as symbolic of the position of women in America. At several points in Act I, Mrs. Halevy attempts to inject herself into the conversation, but is generally ignored or overlooked. Her only mention in Act II comes when Mr. Halevy reports that Mrs. Halevy was too tired to visit Bobby and therefore remained at home to rest, a report which reveals her frailty and further imprisons her in the domestic sphere. Moreover, she is not even given a first name, which limits her identity as an individual. Being shunted in conversation, particularly with her daughters, exemplifies the powerlessness of the traditional wife and may represent a changing of the guard, indicating that the conventional woman will not stand up long against the youth culture. In disappearing from the play entirely, Mrs. Halevy emblemizes the notion that her brand of womanhood will not survive for long in the evolving cultural atmosphere of the United States.

In *Florrye*, Anderson portrays a hybrid figure embodying concepts of both modern and traditional womanhood. Although Florrye worked as her husband, Willy's, stenographer prior to their marriage, she quit her job to marry at twenty-three, and

¹⁸² Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 109.

¹⁸³ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 158.

¹⁸⁴ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 110.

became a mother soon after. This depiction reflects some of the common conditions of young American women in the 1920s. Forty-four percent of employed women in the 1920s worked in clerical positions.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, Florrie's decision to forgo work outside the home following matrimony was much in keeping with societal conventions at the time. Women were only expected to work in between high school and their inevitable marriage.¹⁸⁶ The 1920 census reports that 42.3% of women ages 18 and 19 were gainfully employed. That figure drops to 38.1% for women 20 to 24 and it decreases to 22.4% for women 25 to 44.¹⁸⁷ The marked decline in employment with age seems to support the notion of women working only until they married. According to historian Lynn Dumenil, during the 1920s only 10% of all married women in the United States were employed.¹⁸⁸ The median age of first marriage for a woman in the 1920s was 21.3,¹⁸⁹ which places Florrie only slightly above the middle range. Moreover, that she found her husband in the work place represents yet another way in which the culture of the 1920s was breaking away from that of the Victorian era. As historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman explain:

The novelty of young women working outside the home threw men and women together in a variety of ways. On downtown sidewalks and streetcars, in offices, department stores, restaurants, and factories, and in

¹⁸⁵ Cott, 131.

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth Ammons, "The New Woman as Cultural Symbol and Social Reality," in *1915, The Cultural Moment*, eds. Adele Heller and Lois Rudnick (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 83.

¹⁸⁷ *Statistical Abstracts of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931), 51.

¹⁸⁸ Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995), 113.

¹⁸⁹ *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 19.

parks at lunch hour, young men and women mingled easily, flirted with one another, made dates, and stole time together.¹⁹⁰

It was now possible and socially acceptable for men and women to meet outside the home in the absence of parental chaperoning. Thus Anderson establishes Florrie very much as a woman of her time with regard to her work and marriage experience.

By contrast with the Halevy marriage, Anderson gives us a much more complex look at gender ideology in the union of Willy and Florrie. On the surface, the marriage appears to manifest traditional values. They have a child together, and Florrie surrendered her job to devote herself to domesticity. Willy holds a job as a real estate agent and therefore earns all the money. When the play opens, Florrie stands in a seemingly submissive position, taking dictation as her husband rattles off advertisements from the newspaper. Florrie's first line and Willy's reaction to it, however, clues the audience to the complexity of their dynamic:

FLORRIE. Wait a minute! Read slower!
WILLY. Oh, all right.¹⁹¹

Willy does not assert himself as does Mr. Halevy. Rather, he acquiesces to his wife's demand. As the play progresses, we find Florrie operating as something of a petty tyrant, even pulling his hair during an argument. One can not fathom Mr. Halevy accepting such abuse or Mrs. Halevy inflicting it. Florrie seems aware of the powerlessness around her and challenges it in petty ways. Willy fails to exert masculine dominance, allowing Florrie to browbeat him:

¹⁹⁰ John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 194.

¹⁹¹ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 3-4.

FLORRIE. [*Loosening her hold*] And is it a good little secretary?

WILLY. Sure thing.

FLORRIE. The best in the world?

WILLY. Best in the world.

FLORRIE. Because it's very vain of its stenography, you see, and it thinks a perfectly good little secretary is being perfectly thrown away being wife and mother to such a horrid beast! It does think so.

WILLY. Don't I know it?

FLORRIE. Don't you know what?

WILLY. Don't I know it thinks so?

FLORRIE. [*With a ferocious yank*] And doesn't Willy think so?

WILLY. [*Climaxing with yell*] Sure I do. She's a love and a darling and hellcat and she can take two hundred to the minute and there ain't nobody like her! Now leggo.¹⁹²

Though Willy seems cowed, Florrie's domestic tyranny does not endow her with any real power, illustrating Emma Goldman's assertion that, as an institution of coercion, marriage creates an attitude of petty resistance in women:

Marriage guarantees woman a home only by the grace of her husband. There she moves about in *his* home...until her aspect of life... becomes as flat, narrow, and drab as her surroundings. Small wonder if she becomes a nag, petty, quarrelsome, gossipy, unbearable, thus driving the man from the house. She could not go, if she wanted to; there is no place to go.¹⁹³

Florrie remains financially dependent upon Willy, which provokes a childish kind of rebellion in order to subdue him. In other words, her despotism stems more from fear than strength because if Willy ever took a mind to leave, she would be the one facing destitution.

As with the Halevy marriage, Anderson demonstrates a persistent lack of emotional warmth between Florrie and Willy, but with a different method. Unlike the Halevys, Florrie and Willy interact frequently. However, their interactions in the first act reinforce a view of marriage as destructive to passionate love:

¹⁹² Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 8-9.

¹⁹³ Goldman, "Marriage and Love," in *Red Emma Speaks*, 209.

FLORRIE. Will he give his secretary a kiss?—Just like he used to when she really was his secretary and there weren't any babies or ice-men?

WILLY. Come on, get it over with. [*He lets her kiss him.*]

FLORRIE. And will he take her over to the band concert, just the way he used to?¹⁹⁴

This exchange indicates that Willy used to take greater interest in her, but after marriage, he now submits to a kiss rather than seeking it. It is important to remember too that Willy and Florrie have a small child. Therefore, Willy's resignation to being a husband and father epitomizes Mr. Halevy's later assertion that having children puts both parties of the marriage in a *de facto* prison.

Florrie plays a significant role in furthering Anderson's anti-sentimental view of parenthood. In Act II, when Bobby confesses her fear of losing Rims, Florrie offers what she feels is a guaranteed remedy: "I think it's time for you to begin having a baby."¹⁹⁵ Whereas Mr. Halevy characterized children as a "life sentence," Florrie sees them as weapons in the game. Children, Florrie assures her sister, mean security for women in marriage: "So long as you don't have a baby Rims is really free, you see—and he might get tired of you—but just you tie him down with two or three good fat ones—and he'll stay. Willy used to get rebellious, but not anymore. Not since the baby."¹⁹⁶ This comment accentuates Willy's sense of resignation to the marriage. The comment also reflects the desperate measures some women resorted to in order to survive, an attitude that did not go unnoticed by the critics. Brooks Atkinson observed that Florrie "represents what is cynically known as the practical point of view; she is as hard as Craig's malevolent

¹⁹⁴ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

wife."¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Florrie bears some similarity to Mrs. Craig. Both are calculating in their designs and both seek pliable husbands they can control in order to procure a stable existence. However, the contexts of the two plays are quite different. In *Craig's Wife*, George Kelly renders Mrs. Craig unsympathetic. Mr. Craig leaves his wife with the house and possessions, thereby giving her everything she has driven herself throughout the play to attain—and she ends up alone and miserable. Kelly's critique seems more focused on the detriments of excessive materialism. Anderson, by contrast, focuses upon gender relations within institutional matrimony.

Economic security is an issue in both Florrie and Bobby's marriage, and Anderson relates it to gender ideology. Florrie comments that she and Willy “just barely” get by after “saving on his lunch” and “eking out the eggs and butter,”¹⁹⁸ a domestic living situation that would have sounded familiar to his audience. Despite the decade's historical reputation for unprecedented economic prosperity, historian Richard H. Pells reports that ordinary Americans did well to survive in the late 1920s, with little money left after paying the bills.¹⁹⁹ The economic boom for which the decade is so famous centered on an explosion of corporate profits. These immense profits, however, “were never adequately rechanneled into private investment, higher wages, or fuller employment” with the end result being that most Americans lacked “purchasing power.”²⁰⁰ Moreover, despite the advances of women by the 1920s, the traditional roles of male breadwinner and female domestic remained prevalent. In 1924, Elsie Crews Parsons noted that “where income

¹⁹⁷ Atkinson, *New York Times*, 27 January 1927.

¹⁹⁸ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 4.

¹⁹⁹ Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 12.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

permits, the wife continues to be the consumer, the husband the producer.”²⁰¹ Anderson, however, depicts the persistence of this traditional dynamic dictated by gender ideology whether income permitted or not.

Florrie upholds the institution of marriage, despite the struggle to get by on one income, as security for women. In Act II, when Bobby expresses doubts about wanting to be married, Florrie blatantly rejects the Women's Movement in favor of tradition: "Of course you want to be married, my dear. We all want to be married. We want somebody to take care of us. Women can talk all they want about living their own lives—I don't believe it. It's all sour grapes."²⁰² Florrie's dedication to convention is accentuated by her driving obsession to locate a husband for Bobby at the beginning of the play not for love, but for economic security. In her survey of potential beaux, Florrie cares not whether any of these men are romantic, adventurous, sexy, or otherwise desirable. She cares only about whether or not they make or possess money:

FLORRIE. Did she turn Fred down, really? I mean, was it final?

MRS. HALEVY. Oh yes; but you couldn't blame her for that—he was—well, he was over thirty—and bald—

FLORRIE. I know. He wasn't a very romantic figure. Neither is old Helmcke, but he has got a lot of money. Is he ever here anymore?

MRS. HALEVY. Yes, he's here, but he's deaf, and after all he's a widower. She's just sorry for him and doesn't want to hurt his feelings. You know he's getting so deaf you have to write out what you want to say to him.

FLORRIE. But he's got a lot of money.—And who else is there?²⁰³

Both men mentioned are older than Bobby, which highlights Florrie's perception of women as helpless and needing a man to protect them.

²⁰¹ Elsie Crews Parsons, "Changes in Sex Relations," *Nation*, May 1924, 552.

²⁰² Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 93.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14.

Though Florrie worries over the monetary prospects of Bobby's suitors, she does not confine herself entirely to this issue. Protecting Bobby's reputation becomes just as important. When Rims, a young co-worker, is introduced as a possibility, Florrie again illuminates her concern for financial security and her assumption that Bobby will quit her job for marriage: "Oh well, they couldn't live on his \$40 a week."²⁰⁴ However, moments later, when Rims telephones, she sets up a date between him and her sister, which seems a blatant contradiction. Though she has just indicated that Rims cannot support a wife on his income, she fears that if Bobby loves him, she will "just drift along waiting for somebody like him and the first thing we know she'll be an old maid and a public charge."²⁰⁵ Even in 1927 Florrie cannot imagine Bobby can support herself without a husband. Consequently, in her mind, a husband with an inadequate income is better than no husband at all. Her attitude echoes Emerson's declaration that, "I am ashamed to think how easily we capitulate to...large societies and dead institutions."²⁰⁶

From the outset, Anderson paints Bobby, the younger Halevy daughter, as a woman conflicted over her life. Unlike Florrie, she resists the idea of finding a husband, initially rebuffing her sister's proposal of tempting Rims through jealousy: "If I cared enough about anybody to want to keep him—I'd care too much to want to keep him that way."²⁰⁷ Her situation becomes complicated, however, by two factors. First, she truly desires Rims sexually. Second, Rims recently received a promotion to embark on a new job in South America. If Rims leaves for another continent, he may never return. Her

²⁰⁴ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 15.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰⁶ Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 56.

²⁰⁷ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 26.

desire for Rims and her fear of losing him ultimately pressure Bobby to manipulate him into marriage against her better judgment. Again, Bobby's actions call to mind Emerson's admonition about how easily individuals fall into line with society by accepting conventional institutions.

As with the two other married couples in the play, Bobby and Rims experience the emotional sterility of institutionalized love, and in this case Anderson emphasizes the speed at which the institution works to destroy passion. Only a few months have elapsed between the first two acts. While Act I ends with a passionate embrace between the two lovers as they commit themselves to matrimony, Act II opens with Rims bellowing at his wife offstage while Bobby clears the dinner dishes. Whereas one might assume with the Halevys, and even with Florrie and Willy, that the emotional disconnect occurred gradually over the course of some years, Anderson renders the emotional gulf as evident almost from the words "I do." Once lovers, Bobby and Rims are now just married people:

BOBBY. [*Looking up at him*] Darling, you do love me, don't you?

RIMS. Honest, kid, nobody ever loved anybody the way I love you. I'm just silly about you. I think about you all day long. And then I come home at night and--[*He turns away*] we get into some goddam mess--and it just shoots the works--

BOBBY. I know. It's just the same with me. I think all day how marvelous it's going to be when you come home--and then you get here--and I don't know--it isn't marvelous at all--It's just a house and we're just married people--and--sometimes I hate it--everything's getting spoiled--²⁰⁸

Florrie reassures Bobby that it is only natural not to remain "madly in love" after marriage because "you get to know him so well and he knows you so well. You can be

²⁰⁸ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 78-79.

sort of in love with your husband but not madly in love with him."²⁰⁹ This sentiment reflects opinions voiced in 1924 by writer Floyd Dell, who argued that "conventions are...inevitably a shackle upon the free motions of the soul, being imposed by fear."²¹⁰ In a later critique of the play Perry Lockett similarly argued that Florrie "represents marriage as a social requirement and a tyranny."²¹¹

Anderson integrates financial strain with gender inequality early in the second act. Bobby realizes through the painful reality of mathematics that they cannot make their bills. To remedy the predicament, Bobby suggests returning to work, but Rims refuses:

BOBBY. I wish I hadn't quit my job.

RIMS. Well, we both couldn't work in the same office after we got married. It doesn't go somehow.

BOBBY. It would have been embarrassing, but—it wouldn't really matter.

RIMS. Well, I'd mind if you didn't. It would make it look as if I weren't man enough to—to support my wife.

BOBBY. How I hate that word.

RIMS. What word?

BOBBY. Wife! I won't be a *wife*! It sounds so fat and stupid! I wish we hadn't *got* married! I wish you'd gone to South America.²¹²

While Rims may not appear sympathetic from a feminist point of view, Anderson's critique reveals that Rims, too, finds his individuality suppressed by the prevailing culture. The pressure society imposes demands that he and he alone take on the financial responsibility for the household. Men and women have capitulated to the culture at large in strict adherence to marital conventions. However, in having Bobby boldly reject the title of "wife," Anderson demonstrates a burgeoning revolutionary spirit in the young

²⁰⁹ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 94.

²¹⁰ Floyd Dell, "Can Men and Women Be Friends?" *Nation* 118 (1924): 605.

²¹¹ Perry Lockett, "The Mind and Matter of Maxwell Anderson" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1979), 204.

²¹² Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 77.

woman. For no matter what disadvantages Rims may endure under the title of “husband,” Bobby seems to suffer more under the title of “wife.”

Bobby's desire to work gets a boost from a seemingly unlikely source. Mr. Halevy, whom several critics identified as the *raisonneur*, serves up perhaps the most radical commentary in the play. Finding his daughter in such distress, he challenges tradition: "Why should he support you? You're his economic equal.... Yes, and if you had gone on working and he didn't support you, why take his name and label yourself? I don't see it."²¹³ By placing overtly feminist rhetoric in the mouth of an older man, Anderson runs against the grain of convention. In 1925, Ruth Miller complained that American men were lost in the nineteenth century regarding their attitudes about marriage.²¹⁴ However, Mr. Halevy, born in the nineteenth century (presumably around 1880) and reaching maturity under the auspices of solid Victorian mores, speaks in favor of the rights of a young woman to seek financial independence rather than marriage. Luckett argued against the notion of Mr. Halevy as the *raisonneur*, suggesting instead that he merely offers a more attractive alternative to a woman's place in society than does Florrie.²¹⁵ Mr. Halevy's function, however, seems more complex. In a sense, Mr. Halevy represents both society in transition and the power the prevailing culture continues to wield. He chose the Victorian mode for himself, but, perhaps regretting that choice, he welcomes the radical social evolution of the early twentieth century.

²¹³ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 108-9.

²¹⁴ Ruth Scott Miller, "Masterless Wives and Divorce," *Ladies Home Journal* 42 (January 1925): 20.

²¹⁵ Luckett, 204.

At the conclusion of the second act, Anderson reinforces the notion of institutional marriage creating “a life sentence” in a de facto prison for both sexes:

RIMS. Listen, kid—I think we’re going to have a showdown right here and now! A fellow gives up a lot when he gets married. As long as he’s single, he owns the earth, but when he’s married his money’s not his own, his time’s not his own, he’s got to keep on working whether he wants to or not, and there’s hell to pay if he spends an extra dime. Whenever I tired of my job I used to quit—if I didn’t like one town I tried another—and now I can’t—

BOBBY. Why not?

RIMS. Because I’ve got a wife—because I’ve got a family?

BOBBY. Good God—Am I a family? I won’t be a wife—I won’t be a family! I’m just me!

RIMS. All right, be yourself!

BOBBY. All right, I’ll be myself—and if you think a man gives up a lot when he gets married, a girl gives up something when she gets married, and don’t you forget it! I spend the whole day here taking care of this damned house for you and cooking your meals and doing your dishes and never going anywhere because we can’t afford it—and every time I get a dime for myself I have to ask for it! It’s degrading!

RIMS. It’s your own home.

BOBBY. It’s not mine. It’s all yours. You earn the money so it’s all yours! I tell you it’s despicable! Asking!²¹⁶

Although Rims resents having to support Bobby on his own, he still does not challenge the system by letting Bobby go back to work, even though they would earn enough collectively to live fairly well. For her part, Bobby bristles under a system of degrading dependency. The inequality of this element of marriage was recognized even by conservative commentator William Johnston, who wrote of wives in general that, “So long as the husband pays for food, clothing, and shelter for her, assumes payment of all the bills she contracts, she can go through all the years of her married life without getting a dollar in cash from him, and there is nothing legally to be done about it.”²¹⁷ Johnston’s observation reveals the growing awareness of the injustice of the system toward women.

²¹⁶ Anderson, *Saturday’s Children*, 124-25.

²¹⁷ William Johnston, “Should Wives be Paid Wages?” *Good Housekeeping* 80 (March 1925): 30.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that Bobby's indignation at having to ask her husband for money was not uncommon at the time. Nancy Cott reports that even those women in the 1920s who preferred marriage and domestic duties to an independent life outside of the home still resented being "provided for."²¹⁸

Previous critical and scholarly comments have often focused upon the financial aspects as the crucial issue in the play. Arguing from a Marxist perspective in the 1930s, Eleanor Flexner insisted that Anderson evaded "the fundamental cause of the trouble, which is an inadequate standard of living." She questioned the value of the play because "neither Rims nor Bobby ever questions the society which places them in such an impasse, and neither, apparently, does the playwright."²¹⁹ Critic Milton Waldman agreed that "*Saturday's Children* is the story of two people who marry on an inadequate salary and see their romance threatened because of the intrusion of household budgets."²²⁰ Mabel Bailey similarly asserted that *Saturday's Children* represents "one of the many literary embodiments of the idea that marriage, particularly the financial aspect of the partnership, is practically fatal to the love affair."²²¹ However, all three have overlooked the significance of the gender system. Flexner's error becomes evident when she writes, "Anderson makes it quite clear that the nagging, scrimping, and worrying incident to living on two tiny salaries is at the bottom of their quarreling."²²² But Rims and Bobby are not living on "two tiny salaries." They are living on one. If they *were* living on two

²¹⁸ Cott, 188-9.

²¹⁹ Eleanor Flexner, *American Playwrights: 1918-1938* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1938), 83.

²²⁰ Milton Waldman, *London Mercury* 17 (1927): 93.

²²¹ Mabel Driscoll Bailey, *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957), 126.

²²² Flexner, 83.

salaries, they would be relatively comfortable. Randall J. Buchanan disagrees with those who focused on financial hardship as the crux of the play. According to Buchanan, “in the final quarrel, money is not the overriding question but merely the obvious one. The main problem is that both she [Bobby] and Rims are having great difficulties in adjusting to the lack of the complete independence they both desire.”²²³ Buchanan hits upon the issue of independence, or rather the lack thereof, as a significant hindrance, but stops short of specifying gender equality as an issue. In his unpublished dissertation, Donald J. Boughton introduces equality into the discussion: “More important [than economic stress] is the lack of independence and equality in their marriage,”²²⁴ and Perry Lockett succinctly identified the theme of *Saturday's Children* as “a concern with the freedom of women under the restrictive institutions of society.”²²⁵ As these scholars have suggested, Anderson's critique centers less upon capitalism and more upon marriage and gender roles within marriage; the connection between the two, however, is discernible. Moreover, both Boughton and Lockett overlook the fact that the play's critique reflects both the woman's and the man's struggle against institutional conventions.

In addition to gender inequality related to the work place, Anderson also addresses inequalities related to sexual desire. Many critics in the 1920s upheld the Victorian standard of the patient, sexually innocent wife. In an advice column for wives, Clara Littledale warned that marriages often suffer because women mistakenly seek

²²³ Randall J. Buchanan, “A Playwright's Progress,” *North Dakota Quarterly* 38 (1970): 64.

²²⁴ Donald J. Boughton, “The Broadway Plays of Maxwell Anderson” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1975), 84.

²²⁵ Lockett, 203.

"perpetual lovers" as opposed to "husbands."²²⁶ Mr. Halevy offers up the most blatant challenge to such conservative attitudes regarding sexual mores. He suggests to Bobby that he perhaps married too young and that in his old age he wonders if "Don Juan and Casanova chose the better part."²²⁷ Bobby's response, "Yes, I suppose that's true if you're a man, but I'm not,"²²⁸ leads Mr. Halevy to a radical questioning of sexual double standards:

MR. HALEVY. Well, they think—when they think about it—here I have two good-looking virtuous girls, and I'm putting in my whole life raising them up, feeding them, sending them to school—and for what? All for the service and delight of two unknown and probably disagreeable young men. So I used to wish I had sons, because they could have a good time at any rate. And then it occurred to me there was no reason why girls shouldn't have a good time.

BOBBY. How do you mean?

MR. HALEVY. Fall in love—have your affair—and when it's over—get out!

BOBBY. Oh!²²⁹

Mr. Halevy's advice, encouraging his own daughter to engage in sex for its own sake, may have been the most shocking opinion expressed in the entire play (it even shocks Bobby). Indeed, the more conservative critics registered their indignation. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt complained that Anderson treated marriage as nothing more than "the legalizing of youthful passion."²³⁰ R. Dana Skinner may have had Mr. Halevy's advice about sex in mind when he criticized the play for "moments of brutal and quite unnecessary frankness in the dialogue."²³¹ Critic David Carb, though he enjoyed the play on the whole, objected that Mr. Halevy's advice "belongs in a different kind of play, if

²²⁶ Clara Savage Littledale, "So This is Marriage!" *Good Housekeeping* 80 (January 1925): 115.

²²⁷ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 105.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

²²⁹ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 106-108.

²³⁰ Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, *Catholic World* 125 (1927): 94.

²³¹ R. Dana Skinner, *Commonweal* 5 (1927): 382.

anywhere."²³² Barrett H. Clark, on the other hand, refuted the conservative criticism by describing Mr. Halevy's "words of wisdom" as "both just and delightful," recognizing that they were "wholly subversive of public morality."²³³ This sampling of the critical reaction reveals that *Saturday's Children* was, at least to some extent, recognized as flying in the face of propriety at the time it appeared. That Clark, a man, applauded subversion while Wyatt, a woman, condemned it, reflects the topsy-turvy nature of the cultural moment Anderson was observing. Then again, one could argue that Clark and Wyatt both support the status quo; Clark delights in the baser male instincts while Wyatt defends feminine purity.

When Bobby asks why someone cannot have a love affair with marriage, Mr. Halevy reiterates his decidedly unsentimental view of the institution:

Marriage is no love affair, my dear. It's little old last year's love affair. It's a house and bills and dishpans and family quarrels. That's the way the system beats you. They bait the wedding with the romance and they hang a three-hundred-pound landlord around your neck and drown you in grocery bills.²³⁴

Mr. Halevy argues the most overtly political point in the play referring to the "system" and "they." Anderson portrays the "system" and "they" as an invisible, conspiratorial, and omniscient force that drives young couples into accepting the prevailing cultural doctrines. His characterization of the system mirrors Henry David Thoreau's lament that, "wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate odd-fellow society."²³⁵ Joseph Wood

²³² David Carb, *Vogue* 69 (1927): 132.

²³³ Barrett H. Clark, *Drama* 17 (1927): 200.

²³⁴ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 107-108.

²³⁵ Henry David Thoreau, "Walden" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2003), 137.

Krutch seemed to recognize this idea when he wrote that Anderson “has envisaged frankly the fact that marriage and children and the humdrum life of the family is not what most lovers’ want, and no mere facile sentiment is enough to reconcile them to the fact that the stability of society requires that is what they shall get.”²³⁶ The playwright, through his *raisonneur*, identifies “the stability of society” as the problem.

Bobby finally asserts her sexual independence in Act III after leaving her marriage, renting an apartment, and returning to her old job. She rebuffs Rims' repeated overtures to resume married life. Taking her father’s advice to heart, Bobby renders her defense of sexual equality:

BOBBY. No.... You see—Oh, I wonder if I can tell you—What we wanted was a love affair, wasn't it? Just to be together and let the rest go hang—and what we got was a house and bills and general hell. Do you know what I think a love affair is, Rims? It's when the whole world is trying to keep two people apart and they insist on being together. And when they get married the whole world pushes them together so they just naturally fly apart. I want my love affair back. I want hurried kisses and clandestine meetings, and a secret lover. I don't want a house. I don't want a husband. I want a lover.

RIMS. So that let's me out.

BOBBY. Does it, dear?²³⁷

Anderson thus shows the next generation evolving. Although Mr. Halevy proclaimed radical ideas, he did not put them into practice in his life. Bobby has inherited her father’s radicalism and finds herself maturing in a world more conducive to acting on it. Though Rims interprets Bobby's attitude as a personal rejection, she has not rejected him personally; she has rejected traditional marriage as a means of sexual fulfillment. The play ends with Rims sneaking back into her apartment through the window. When Bobby spots him, she is thrilled and the play ends with the presumption that their love affair will

²³⁶ Joseph Wood Krutch, *Nation* 124 (1927): 194.

²³⁷ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 157-58.

continue. Given the portrayal of all three marital relationships in the play, it is difficult to see how Brooks Atkinson thought that Anderson was "sympathetic towards marriage."²³⁸

Though Bobby is no longer a "wife" in the Victorian sense the conclusion is hardly a glorious victory for feminism. Rather, Anderson attempts to reflect the reality of single working women in 1920s America. Bobby has limited resources, barely making enough money to survive. She charms her boss, Mengle, into taking her to dinner on occasion as a means of support. Her living options are limited because, as she points out to her father, "they won't take girls many places."²³⁹ To complicate matters, the landlady, Mrs. Gorlik, is an indefatigable moral guardian of the single women in her establishment. When Mr. Halevy questions why she feels such a need to watch after the women, Mrs. Gorlik reveals the implication leveled against single working women at the time: "Why, my dear Mr.—Well—if you knew the kind of goings on, and what was thought of girls that close their doors with gentlemen callers—well, you wouldn't want it said about your daughter."²⁴⁰ Though Bobby has achieved independence of a kind, she does so at the price of decent material living and of her reputation. Yet she does not back down, accepting these conditions (at least for the present), unpleasant and oppressive though they are, which reinforces the importance the playwright places upon individual over collective mores.

For all of the radicalism in the play, Anderson does support Victorian traditions in at least one more important facet. Bobby, in a manner of speaking, maintains her sexual virtue. After leaving Rims, she does have dinner with her boss, Mengle. She even invites

²³⁸ Atkinson, *New York Times*, 27 January 1927.

²³⁹ Anderson, *Saturday's Children*, 144.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 142.

him to her room, and he sends her a bolt for her door. However, there is no indication that the two are having an affair. Bobby, in fact, refutes this idea in all three acts of the play. In Act III of the original draft, Mengle makes an appearance to confirm for Rims that Bobby has in no way engaged in any improprieties, but Anderson must have felt this point was clear without an overt denial and thus, omitted Mengle's appearance from the final version.²⁴¹ Bobby desires Rims sexually and, as far as we know, only Rims. She remains faithful to him romantically, if not domestically. This aspect of her character echoes Anderson's own opinion, which he published in his later years, that audiences possess a particular disdain for female characters that manifest "an inclination toward the Cressid"²⁴² (referring to the mythological woman who abandoned her lover in favor of his rival). Anderson further argued that, "The moral atmosphere of a play must be healthy."²⁴³ A healthy moral atmosphere, presumably, could not include a promiscuous heroine. Arthur Tees asserted that while Bobby's arrangement with Rims at the end of the play "is unorthodox, it is strictly moral."²⁴⁴ Anderson's morality regarding feminine sexual virtue reflects the dominant Christian ideology.

Given its subversive content and the moral rebukes it inspired from critics such as Wyatt and Skinner, it seems a bit surprising that *Saturday's Children* had a popular run.

Contrary to the assertion by Miller and Frazer that the play was a failure,²⁴⁵ Shivers

²⁴¹ Manuscript of *Saturday's Children*, *Maxwell Anderson Papers*, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, 97.

²⁴² Anderson, *Off Broadway*, 26.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴⁴ Arthur T. Tees, "Maxwell Anderson: An Attitude Toward Man" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1967), 175.

²⁴⁵ Jordan Y. Miller and Winifred L. Frazer, *American Drama Between the Wars: A Critical History* (Boston: Twayne, 1991), 125.

confirms that after *Saturday's Children* was produced Anderson “was the talk of the town and earning big money again.”²⁴⁶ In addition to the length of the play’s run, the public seems to have reacted favorably. Wyatt reported, with apparent indignation, that audiences applauded at the end of the show. Moreover, there does not appear to have been a significant public outcry against the play’s moral stance. While Barrett H. Clark noted that a few Broadway plays in 1927 were shut down by police for failing to conform to moral standards,²⁴⁷ there is no indication that *Saturday's Children* was ever threatened with such action. Yet Robert Benchley asserted that the end of the play represented “an almost startlingly new story”²⁴⁸ and Clark commented that the play undermined cultural mores. Indeed, *Saturday's Children* seems like an innovative work that challenged the traditional thinking of the era. The question remains why it did not draw more moral criticism than it did. Flexner offered an important clue when she complained that Anderson escaped into romanticism at the end. This speculation may shed light on the production’s reception. Though Anderson does not end with a reconciled marriage, the ambiguity of the conclusion allowed the audience to reconcile the marriage for themselves. This ambiguity may explain how Atkinson could view Anderson’s treatment as sympathetic toward marriage. Lois Tidwell supports this notion, as she imagined a happy ending when reading the play:

At the last though one is made to understand the natural longing and loneliness that each feels and to know that, in spite of all the problems and all the sacrifices

²⁴⁶ Alfred S. Shivers, *The Life of Maxwell Anderson* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), 107.

²⁴⁷ Clark, *Drama*, 199-200.

²⁴⁸ Robert Benchley, *Life*, 17 February 1927.

demanded of them as husband and wife, they will continue their desperate struggle to live together and make ends meet.²⁴⁹

Given Bobby's resolve at the end, Tidwell's observation seems suspect. Yet Atkinson and Tidwell offer credence to Flexner's criticism. Many who observed the play may have been inclined to romanticize the ambiguous ending, imagining that Rims and Bobby would ultimately get back together in the traditional sense despite the radical narrative to the contrary. If so, this misconception demonstrates the power of institutional marriage in the United States at the time. That most apparently did not recognize the "new story" that Benchley did may speak to the fact that sentimental notions of love and marriage remained prevalent in the popular imagination.

Though several critics made connections between *Saturday's Children* and Craven's *The First Year*, the two plays bear little resemblance beyond the fundamental plot scenario. The couple in Craven's play is almost over the top in their childlike attitudes. Their sniping is ended with the announcement of pregnancy, which upholds tradition, placing the woman in a happy state of traditional motherhood complete with a working husband. By contrast, Anderson allows no easy out for Bobby, portrays marriage as a burden for both husband and wife, and offers a vision of children that de-romanticizes motherhood. Krutch, one of the reviewers who mentioned *The First Year* in his *Saturday's Children* notice, recognized the distinction: "Here is no mere question of a lovers' quarrel to be made up over a crib."²⁵⁰ George Jean Nathan similarly found *Saturday's Children* "not so theatrically amusing a play as...*The First Year*," but it was a

²⁴⁹ Lois G. Tidwell, "Theme of Social Justice in the Dramas of Maxwell Anderson" (Master's Thesis, Texas College of Arts and Industries, 1952), 15.

²⁵⁰ Joseph Wood Krutch, *Nation* 124 (1927), 194.

“more honest and better written one. It is no more real in theme. But it is more real in execution.”²⁵¹ Nathan adds that Anderson’s play “is no more directly out of life” than *The First Year*, “but I have a feeling that its characters are. And in the fact lies the reason, perhaps, why it may not be, for the mob, so good a show.”²⁵² Nathan may have hit upon the reason why *The First Year*, which ran for over seven hundred performances, was more popular than *Saturday’s Children*. Edmond Gagey confirmed that, “*The First Year* lacked the intellectual implications of *Saturday’s Children*.”²⁵³ Craven gave the audience what they wanted: a clear, happy ending in reconciled marriage. Anderson’s ambiguity may have precluded *Saturday’s Children* from achieving an even longer run, but skillfully fended off enough moral criticism to prevent its being threatened with closure.

In 1920, a significant event occurred in Anderson's life that may have informed his creation of *Saturday's Children* seven years later. By this point he had been married for eight years and had two children. Whatever the reason, Anderson began a brief love affair with the poet Josephine Herbst. Though the affair fizzled after only a few months, it had the unfortunate result of Herbst becoming pregnant with Anderson's child. Herbst wanted to have the baby, but Anderson insisted on an abortion and, in the end, succeeded in convincing his former lover to terminate the pregnancy.²⁵⁴ Shortly after the affair ended, Anderson published an article in the *Freeman* wherein he lambasted present society's adherence to institutional marriage:

²⁵¹ George Jean Nathan, *American Mercury* 10 (1927): 503.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 503.

²⁵³ Edmond M. Gagey, *Revolution in American Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 182.

²⁵⁴ Elinor Langor, *Josephine Herbst* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), 55-56, 60.

Without the shadow of a doubt marriage and children, as we know them at present, constitute the most effective breaks on progress toward generally recognized ideals, the most immovable barriers in the way of individual and industrial justice. If we were all celibates the present system would not last a fortnight. Our shares, large and small, in the good things of existing civilization, are necessary to us because we have dependents, and to keep those shares we must faithfully conform to the ideals of life as it is being lived about us. A workman with only his own living to make is practically impregnable beside the father of a family. Most of us have given hostages, not alone to fortune, but more particularly to the powers that be, and those powers are themselves no less committed to the schemes we all uphold.²⁵⁵

The sentiments expressed in this passage seem to prefigure Anderson's critique of marriage in *Saturday's Children*. The marriage crisis pervading the broader culture of the 1920s was something Anderson experienced not only intellectually and aesthetically, but also personally, which may have led to deeper expressions of the cultural conflict.

The question remains as to the relevance of *Saturday's Children* in American theatre history. Several critics and scholars have argued that the play was strictly a product of its era. Krutch doubted that it held any "enduring value,"²⁵⁶ and Bailey agreed, "Nothing Mr. Anderson has written belongs more exclusively to the time for which it was produced than...*Saturday's Children*."²⁵⁷ However, *Saturday's Children* extends our knowledge of the cultural debate surrounding traditional marriage and gender ideology in the 1920s. Furthermore, the institution of marriage remains a force in twenty-first century America, and a number of seemingly old-fashioned notions regarding gender roles within marriage remain. Evidence of this can be found in popular magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* and *Ladies Home Journal*. Aimed toward a female readership, a

²⁵⁵ Maxwell Anderson, "An Age of Hired Men," *Freeman* 2 (1920): 31. Note: Though the article is unsigned, Alfred S. Shivers confirms that it was, in fact, written by Anderson. See Shivers, *Life of Maxwell Anderson*, 104.

²⁵⁶ Krutch, 194.

²⁵⁷ Bailey, 126.

survey of any issue of either periodical reveals innumerable columns and articles offering advice about parenting, cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundry, and other traditionally female domestic chores as well as methods for reinvigorating the sex life within marriage. The fact that both of these magazines, which initiated publication in the 1800s, remain prevalent while continuing to speak to feminine domesticity manifests just how strong traditional roles and mores remain in twenty-first century American society. A play such as *Saturday's Children*, therefore, not only illuminates understanding of our cultural history, it also asks difficult questions of contemporary society in terms of where we came from and where we may go in the future.

Chapter 4

A Plague on Both Your Houses—Mr. Anderson Goes to Washington

The American political tradition was established as a result of compromises made between warring factions after the Revolution. The debate often centered on how much power the federal government should have over the lives of individuals. Alexander Hamilton emerged as the leader in the movement to extend federal power whereas Thomas Jefferson and James Madison sought to limit governmental authority. Hamilton argued with fierce conviction in favor of an energetic government. Taxation represented a significant source of federal power. In “Federalist 31” Hamilton asserted: “A government ought to contain in itself every power requisite to the full accomplishment of the objects committed to its care, and to the complete execution of the trusts for which it is responsible.”²⁵⁸ Despite his plea for centralized authority through taxation, Hamilton recognized the dangers of said power, stipulating that the government’s authority to tax should be “free from every other control, but a regard to the public good and to the sense of the people.”²⁵⁹

By contrast with Hamilton, Jefferson advocated a nearly invisible government that the common person would barely be able to detect in their everyday lives. In his first inaugural address Jefferson summarized “a wise and frugal government” as one “which shall restrain men from injuring one another, which shall leave them free to regulate their pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the

²⁵⁸ Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist 31,” in *The Federalist Papers* ed. Garry Wills (New York: Bantam, 1982), 149.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

bread it has earned."²⁶⁰ Along with the desire for limited government, Jefferson articulated an agrarian ideal. In his *Notes on Virginia*, Jefferson extolled the stature of the American farmer: "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit of genuine virtue."²⁶¹ Though his idealization of a strict agrarian nation altered later in his life as technology improved, he did not relinquish agrarianism. Rather he insisted that industry must work in concert with agriculture. However, he cautioned that the economic system of England, wherein "the economy was dominated by merchants, bankers, and industrialists should be avoided at all costs."²⁶²

James Madison shared his fellow Virginian's ideas on small government. In "Federalist 51," Madison articulated the challenges faced in proposing a representative political system with a capitalist economy:

But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither internal nor external controuls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to controul the governed; and in the next place, oblige it to controul itself.²⁶³

The writings of Jefferson and Madison depict an inherent concern for the individual. Jefferson's agrarian ideal along with the importance placed by both he and Madison upon limiting the government's scale was aimed at protecting the individual citizen against tyranny. The principal threat to individual freedom that concerned the founding

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 183.

²⁶¹ Quoted in Ellis, 137.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 258.

²⁶³ James Madison, "Federalist 51," in *The Federalist Papers* ed. Garry Wills (New York: Bantam, 1982), 262.

generation most was the threat of monarchical despotism, which the American founders replaced with a republic.

The agrarian ideal as well as the veneration of the individual extended into the nineteenth century through the Transcendentalist movement. Some Transcendentalists, led by such intellectuals as Orestes Brownson, George Ripley, and Margaret Fuller, advocated the collectivist ideas of European socialist philosophers such as Fourier. However, the group that emerged dominant within the movement, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson and later Henry David Thoreau, rejected European socialism.²⁶⁴ Emerson's writings are often associated with small government and individual freedom. Echoing Jefferson, Emerson asserted that "the less government we have, the better."²⁶⁵ Emerson also extolled the virtue of the natural world in one of his most famous essays (entitled *Nature*), thus complementing Jefferson's agrarian ideal. A protégé of Emerson, Thoreau became most famous, perhaps, for two distinct achievements. First, his extended stay at Walden Pond, living the life of an agrarian in nature. Second, his arrest for refusing to pay taxes, which triggered his writing of *Civil Disobedience*, one of the most significant treatises on individual rights versus central authority ever written by an American. It was in this treatise that Thoreau famously declared: "That government is best which governs least."²⁶⁶

Near the end of the nineteenth century, historian Frederick Jackson Turner presented one of the most significant conceptions of Americanism at the time, delivering

²⁶⁴ Philip F. Gura, *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), xiv.

²⁶⁵ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Politics," in *Emerson: Political Writings*, ed. Kenneth Sacks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 123.

²⁶⁶ Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 265.

his “frontier thesis” in 1893 as part of the Columbian Exposition. Turner’s thesis held that the American character developed as a result of the advancing frontier. Western expansion led to a gradual evolution away from European tradition as settlers grew more dependent upon self-government the further west they migrated. Turner writes that “the frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control.”²⁶⁷ Turner therefore emphasizes limited government and a tendency away from the European tradition of central monarchical control, both of which resulted from necessary adaptations to nature, as endemic to the American character.

With monarchical authority subdued, communism represented, perhaps, the most significant challenge to the American political institution. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels defined oppression strictly in terms of class, arguing that society was slowly dividing into two classes: the bourgeois and the proletariat. The goal of communism, as asserted by Marx and Engels, was to topple the middle-class and raise the proletariat to power. Once in power, the proletariat must “centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state.”²⁶⁸ Although this goal stands antithetical to the Jeffersonian ideal of small government, communism gained traction during World War I, resulting in the Bolshevik Revolution. In the spirit of Marx and Engels’s conception of a proletariat uprising, American journalist John Reed, who witnessed the Russian Revolution firsthand, writes with dramatic fervor of women and children joining soldiers in

²⁶⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1967), 30.

²⁶⁸ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Verso, 1998), 60.

spontaneous union “with rifles, picks, spades, rolls of wire, cartridge-belts over their working clothes.”²⁶⁹ The idea of communism continued to spread after World War I. In the United States, the Communist Party gained some support in the 1930s, especially among the intellectual class as evinced in 1932 when fifty-two prominent intellectuals signed an open letter endorsing Communist Party candidate William Foster for president.²⁷⁰

When Maxwell Anderson put *Both Your Houses* on stage in March 1933, the United States was languishing in the depths of the Great Depression. The year following the Stock Market crash witnessed the failure of over 26,000 businesses.²⁷¹ Massive unemployment soon followed. U.S. Steel, for example, saw its number of employees plunge from just fewer than 225,000 in 1929 to less than 19,000 in 1932. By April 1933, United States Steel did not employ a single full time worker.²⁷² Throughout the nation 25% of workers were unemployed,²⁷³ a figure representing some 13 to 16 million people.²⁷⁴ Swelling unemployment often led to homelessness. Property foreclosures became rampant in 1930 with over 150,000 people losing their homes. Another 200,000 people lost their property in 1931 and another 250,000 were rendered homeless in 1932.²⁷⁵ Moreover, 1933 witnessed the failure of over 4,000 banks.²⁷⁶ By contrast, bank

²⁶⁹ John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (New York: Modern Library, 1935), 181.

²⁷⁰ Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 77.

²⁷¹ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58.

²⁷² Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 265-266.

²⁷³ Terry A. Cooney, *Balancing Acts: American Thought and Culture in the 1930s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 3.

²⁷⁴ Levine, 265.

²⁷⁵ Kennedy, 163.

²⁷⁶ Cooney, 37.

failures in the previous decade had peaked at 956 in 1926.²⁷⁷ From 1929 to 1932 suicides increased by 24%, births decreased by 10%, and marriages decreased by 20%.²⁷⁸ The year 1933 generated such hardship that one commentator lamented: “Time heals many scars, but it cannot erase, in the memories of those who look back at the 1933 crisis, the poignant sense of insecurity and the haunting fears then endured by so large a part of the nation.”²⁷⁹ This catastrophic turn prompted another critic to assert that “we are witnessing the collapse of not merely one but of several political philosophies. We are beholding as well the breakdown of an entire social system.”²⁸⁰ Edmund Wilson agreed that the social system was indeed imperiled, asserting, “Capitalism has run its course, and we shall have to look for other ideals than the ones that capitalism has encouraged.”²⁸¹ Reinhold Niebuhr was not as quick to blame capitalism *per se*. Niebuhr argued that the real problem was the political machinery, proclaiming, “A written constitution, conceived in a non-industrial age, could hardly be expected to provide for the exigencies which our technological society faces in the twentieth century.”²⁸²

During the calamitous years of the Great Depression, many American playwrights endeavored to generate cultural responses to the devastating social realities around them. Themes often centered on the oppressive nature of the capitalist system. Claire and Paul Sifton’s *1931*— (1931), for example, concerned the plight of workers denied employment through unsavory business practices. Similarly, in *We, the People* (1933) Elmer Rice portrayed the moral corruption capitalism imposed upon the lives of middle class

²⁷⁷ J.G. Curtis, “What’s Wrong with the Banks?” *Nation* 131 (1930): 675.

²⁷⁸ Cooney, 5.

²⁷⁹ Oliver McKee, Jr. “The New Deal and the Banks,” *Commonweal* 19 (1933): 63.

²⁸⁰ Oswald Garrison Villard, “The Tragedy of Herbert Hoover,” *Nation* 132 (1931): 671.

²⁸¹ Edmund Wilson, “What I Believe,” *Nation* 134 (1932): 97.

²⁸² Reinhold Niebuhr, “Catastrophe or Social Control?” *Harpers* 165 (1932): 117.

American families. George O'Neil's *American Dream* (1933) dramatized the legacy of a family from colonial times until the 1930s while critiquing the interconnectivity of religion with the capitalist ideal. Other playwrights such as John Howard Lawson, John Wexley, Robert E. Sherwood, and S.N. Behrman offered critiques of one kind or another of the capitalist economic system. However, dramatic observations of American political institutions as direct contributors to capitalist oppression are notably absent from the backdrops of many of these plays. In his study of leftist drama, Morgan Himelstein notes that "few playwrights treated the theme of government, particularly whether democracy was a suitable political system for critical times."²⁸³ When it came to portraying the federal government, depictions were typically confined to good-natured musical comedy satires,²⁸⁴ such as George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind's *Of Thee I Sing* (1932). Most playwrights, for whatever reason, chose not to offer direct serious investigations of the American political institution despite the harrowing economic conditions. It was perhaps this disparity that led critic Barrett H. Clark to hail Anderson's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Both Your Houses* (1933) as "the first American play concerned exclusively and seriously with Federal political intrigue."²⁸⁵

In *Both Your Houses*, Anderson explores the effect of unchecked human greed upon the American republic by dramatizing the conflict between large and small government within the inner-workings of the American democratic system. However, unlike many playwrights of the era, he does not reject American forms in favor of a

²⁸³ Morgan Y. Himelstein, *Drama Was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York 1929-1941* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 225.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

²⁸⁵ Barrett H. Clark, *Maxwell Anderson: The Man and His Plays* (New York: Samuel French, 1933), 24.

collectivist alternative. Quite the contrary, Anderson expresses ideas linked to American founders and transcendentalist philosophers, thereby criticizing the political status quo while upholding traditional American sociopolitical values. Among the major ideals evident in the play are conceptions of centralized government, agrarianism, religion, capitalism, and the broader theme of individualism. This chapter examines how *Both Your Houses* illuminates the interaction between capitalism and republicanism. *Both Your Houses* represents a cogent critique not only of the American political machine, but also of the core values working, often in conflict, behind that machine.

Both Your Houses centers on political intrigue in Congress, specifically the House of Representatives, with the action focused on the fight over a graft-inflated appropriations bill. Anderson presents three main characters, each representing different points of view on the American system: Alan McClean, Simeon Gray, and Solomon Fitzmaurice. Each of these characters is endowed by Anderson with a distinct philosophy, functioning to some degree as allegorical figures within the playwright's debate over the American political institution.

The plot of *Both Your Houses* is, for the most part, a straightforward affair. The idealistic protagonist and newly elected congressman, Alan McClean, receives an appointment to the appropriations committee because the members expect his support for a bill designed to allocate funds for the completion of a dam in his home state. Intended as a \$40 million appropriation, the bill is inflated with pork barrel requests until it reaches \$475 million. Simeon Gray, the committee chair, struggles to cut expenses to \$200 million to avoid a presidential veto. He has already cut it to \$275 million, but time runs

short, and the bill must soon come to a vote. McClean is appalled at the blatant dishonesty of the representatives. Lobbyists' interests are tangled up everywhere in the bill, private graft abounds, and the members must jockey for votes through compromise and backroom deals in order to pass a bill to their advantage or block one to their disadvantage. McClean tries to reason with the representatives, but this achieves nothing. With the help of a disgruntled secretary, Bus, he attempts to defeat the bill. When this initiative fails he changes tactics. Learning that Simeon needs the bill to pass in order to save the last bank in his district from failing, he goads the members into asking for whatever they want. Avarice overcomes them, and they load the bill back up to \$475 million. Alan reasons that the bill now represents such an overloaded monstrosity no one will have the face to support it. The plan backfires, however, as the bill passes anyway with enough votes to override a presidential veto. Defeated, Alan vows to resign from Congress and take his case to the voters.

Maxwell Anderson focuses upon the interaction of the American political institution with the capitalist system. Anderson scholar Laurence G. Avery provides one of the few extensive critical examinations of the play, providing an apt summary for how the appropriations bill is conceived:

Everyone in the play agrees on two points about the bill: 1) that each item in it represents the personal interest of individual legislators; and 2) that it is only these personal considerations, not consideration for the nation's welfare, which lead to passage of the bill. In these two respects the bill is taken as typical of all legislation. Self-interest, therefore, is offered by the play as the motive force in the legislative process.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ Laurence G. Avery, "Maxwell Anderson and *Both Your Houses*," *North Dakota Quarterly* 38 (1970): 8. Avery focuses on Anderson's political transformation. Anderson rewrote the ending to *Both Your Houses* to affirm American democracy in 1939, which Avery argues was in response to world events.

Though Hamilton cautioned that the government should execute its broad taxation powers only for the public good, Anderson indicates such altruism is almost impossible when profit becomes available. The play reflects Thoreau's assertion that "absolutely speaking, the more money, the less virtue."²⁸⁷ In Anderson's Congress, as Avery noted, each member fixates on his or her own private scheme to bilk the treasury for personal gain. Moreover, the requests for allotments are often tied to lobbyist influence, a condition that Jefferson had warned the future against in the early nineteenth century. In the spirit of satire (for *Both Your Houses* is a satire) Anderson runs the requests for graft into the absurd. For example, one member seeks a provision to defend the northwestern territory from Japanese beetles invading from Canada despite the fact that these insects are not indigenous to the northern region. Another member wants money to ford a river that goes dry every summer. Still another wants to develop a national park around the home of a local writer that no one, even the representative of that district, has ever heard of. Solomon Fitzmaurice (referred to as "Sol" in the play) proposes one of the most outrageous requests. He demands a provision to have the Atlantic Fleet spend the summer in a harbor near his district because he owns a string of speakeasies and hopes to profit from naval patronage.

Solomon Fitzmaurice represents the status quo politician in the play. His first line establishes the depravity of his character. Entering in Act I amongst a pair of female secretaries, he quips, "More wenches!" After a short interjection, he continues: "Hell on fire! You can't turn a corner without skirts blowing in your eye!"²⁸⁸ Though Anderson is

²⁸⁷ Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 276.

²⁸⁸ Maxwell Anderson, *Both Your Houses* (New York: Samuel French, 1933), 9.

seldom specific regarding the localities of the representatives in the play, he does reveal that Sol represents Long Island. Sol curses, keeps liquor in his office, drinks before noon, and complains incessantly about how things were better in the past: “In the old days, when government was government, a couple of men could sit down over a jug of whiskey and decide something—.”²⁸⁹ Having held his seat in the House for thirty years connects Sol to an established brand of corruption. In identifying him with New York, Anderson conjures up images of Tammany Hall in the nineteenth century as well as that most emblematic of New York politicians at the time, the charismatic Governor Al Smith. Interestingly, Sol was, perhaps, the most popular character in the play. His portrayal by Walter C. Kelly, a veteran vaudevillian, received high praise from critics. Brooks Atkinson declared, “Sol is the most engaging character in the play. His bland cynicism, his captivating dishonesty, his fulsome roguery result in comedy of the most enjoyable brand.”²⁹⁰ Stark Young agreed that Sol was “the only character in the play where the writing was notable.”²⁹¹ Another critic concluded that Fitzmaurice was “one of the saltiest and most enjoyable parts ever written.”²⁹² That the corrupt old scamp would elicit such praise may speak to the excellence of Kelly’s portrayal; that combined with the comedy his character injects may have led critics to sympathize more with Sol.

Whereas most of the other members of Anderson’s Congress at the very least pretend to work with clear consciences, Sol does not. In fact, he makes no bones about how the American political institution works: “the sole business of government is graft,

²⁸⁹ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 10.

²⁹⁰ Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*, 12 March 1933.

²⁹¹ Stark Young, “Both Your Houses,” *New Republic* 74 (29 March 1933): 188.

²⁹² Cy Caldwell, “To See or Not to See,” *New Outlook* 161 (1933): 46.

special privilege, and corruption—with a by-product of order. They have to keep order or they can't make collections.”²⁹³ This statement reflects a government of size and power anathema to the Jeffersonian ideal and a corruption of Hamilton's centralized authority. However, Anderson suggests that such a government may have been inevitable considering the diversity of the American landscape, which he portrays through Sol's mastery of the backroom deal: “I'm the contact man for the whole kit and caboodle in this dirty House—I spend my days soft-soaping the middle-westerners and my nights drinking with the Southern colonels and my mornings eating apple pie with leather-bellies from New England.”²⁹⁴ Through Sol, Anderson illustrates the need for unsavory compromises in American democracy. Moreover, he links the need for such compromises to American individualism. Soft-soaping, whiskey, and apple pie are required negotiation tactics in dealing with the egos of individuals from culturally different regions of the country, each of whom harbors his or her personal demands. Without such negotiations, nothing would ever get done. As Sol tells McClean: “You never get anywhere by taking things away from people, Alan. You've got to give them something.”²⁹⁵ Anderson thus presents the viewer with a great paradox that reflects Madison's dilemma. The government must have power enough to keep diverse individuals together, but in possessing such power the individual suffers oppression. Money, or rather capitalism, becomes the ultimate source of power that leads paradoxically to both union and destruction. This moment also mirrors Turner's argument regarding the dangers of individualism when taken to extremes. Writing in the nineteenth century, Turner

²⁹³ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 103.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

contended, “Individualism in America has allowed a laxity in regard to governmental affairs which has rendered possible the spoils system and all the manifest evils that follow from the lack of a highly developed civic spirit.”²⁹⁶

Sol does not view his indulgence in corruption as antithetical to American ideology. Quite the contrary, when Simeon Gray proclaims that the American political mantra is “every man for himself—and the nation be damned,”²⁹⁷ Sol applauds the individualistic character of the establishment:

It works when you give it a chance. Do you want me to point you the road to prosperity? Loot the treasury, loot the national resources, hang fortunes on the Wall Street Christmas tree! Graft, gigantic graft brought us our prosperity in the past and will lift us out of the present depths of parsimony and despair!...Brigands built up this nation from the beginning, brigands of a gigantic Silurian breed that don't grow in a piddling age like ours! They stole billions and gutted whole states and empires, but they dug our oil-wells, built our railroads, built everything we've got and invented prosperity as they went along! Let'em go back to work! We can't have an honest government, so let'em steal plenty and get us started again. Let the behemoths plunder so the rest of us can eat!²⁹⁸

Sol alludes to the nineteenth century robber barons, namely John D. Rockefeller (oil wells) and Cornelius Vanderbilt (railroads), crediting their personal efforts with making America strong. He views their brigandage as a means to an end. Sol, in effect, argues in favor of individual competition in a free market society, which evokes the fundamentals of Hamilton's big government capitalism. Honest government is not only impossible, but irrelevant. If America allows, capitalism will repair itself. Niebuhr observed this attitude in 1932 when he argued that “culturally, Americans are still children of the nineteenth century” in that they still believe in “competitive individualism.” Niebuhr, however, also

²⁹⁶ Turner, 32.

²⁹⁷ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 176.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

recognized something foolhardy about this way of thinking. He points out the contradiction of how Americans remained steadfast in believing that competition can balance the economy even though “power and privilege are centralized in the hands of a few more consistently in our economy than anywhere else in the world.”²⁹⁹ Anderson mirrors Niebuhr’s thoughts on capitalism in this respect. On the one hand, many people suffer. On the other, the prosperity wrought by corporate heads represents one of the hallmarks of American economic power. Sol stands unashamed in his defense of this system. George Jean Nathan described Sol as “completely privy to himself and wholly devoid of hypocrisy.”³⁰⁰ Indeed, Sol is a Machiavellian pragmatist and perhaps the most frank and realistically-minded character in the play.

Sol serves one more important function in Anderson’s critique of capitalist greed within the American government. He articulates just how the nature of the political machine turns an honest, well-meaning citizen into a corrupt politician. Sol’s depiction of innocent, well-meaning people turned corrupt by the establishment echoes Emerson’s assertion that “the fairest names in this country in literature, in law, have gone into Congress and come out dishonored.”³⁰¹ He attempts to disabuse McClean by explaining, in purely practical terms, just how the American political institution functions in 1933:

Everybody wants something, everybody’s trying to put something over for his voters, or his friends, or the folks he’s working for. So they all get together, and they put all those things in bills, and everybody votes for’em. All except the opposition. They don’t vote for’em because they don’t get anything. That’s all there is to it. That’s the whole government. Is that crooked?³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Niebuhr, "Catastrophe," 114-15.

³⁰⁰ George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre," *Vanity Fair* 40 (1933): 60.

³⁰¹ Emerson, "Woman," in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 166.

³⁰² Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 54.

When McClean answers in the affirmative, Fitzmaurice, the most notorious of all the rogues, shocks his hearers by agreeing with the young idealist:

That's what I say. I've been saying it for years. (*The committee laughs.*) What are you laughing at? You all came up to this Congress fighting mad, full of juice and high purpose—just like him. Well, look what happened to you. You run into people making deals! Money changers in the temple of public righteousness!... Yes, and it happened to me too, and I was shocked and I started making radical remarks. Why, before I knew where I was I was an outsider. I couldn't get anything for my district, I couldn't get recognized to make a speech—I couldn't even get into a poker game. My constituents complained and I wasn't going to be re-elected. So I began to play ball, just to pacify the folks back home. And it worked. They've been re-electing me ever since.³⁰³

Whereas President Coolidge analogized factories as holy temples of worship in the 1920s, Anderson identifies holiness with the tradition of the American republic. Now that the money changers have assumed control of the temple, the religion of democracy has become a polluted doctrine. But the wickedness derives from the money changers, not the temple or the doctrine. Democracy fails when it falls under the influence of avarice. Again, the playwright points to a paradox in the system. The members need to insure re-election to do their work, but re-election means securing graft, which ultimately hurts the entire country. Anyone who comes to the temple seeking change will meet with the money changers and either compromise or find themselves ostracized, thus neutralizing their influence altogether. As Thoreau argued, the wealthy members of society are “always sold to the institution which makes [them] rich.”³⁰⁴ Once the members become corrupt and render themselves cogs in the capitalist machine, they can no longer break the cycle of graft that brought about their financial comfort. Solomon Fitzmaurice makes the case that no one, no matter how honest, could ever inject integrity

³⁰³ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 54-55.

³⁰⁴ Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 276.

into the government because the system has been so rotten for so long that it engulfs honesty like a charybis. As Emerson lamented, "Public and private avarice make the air we breathe thick and fat."³⁰⁵

Sol elaborates upon his own personal corruption in Act II. As McClean tries to win him over to his cause, Fitzmaurice rebuffs him:

You're counting on me! I'd better tell you about myself, boy, before you say any more! Long ago when I was slim and eagle-eyed, I had a good angel. You wouldn't believe it to look at me now, but old Sol had a good angel by his side back there in the morning of time. And when a question like this came up this angel of light would come shouldering round him, arguing for righteousness, arguing against evil courses and the selling of his soul. If I was going to do wrong I had a wrestle with that angel. Like Jacob of old I wrestled with him in the night, and like Jacob of old I often came out ahead. It got so that the angel didn't have a chance with me, Alan, and after a while he got tired. Temptation would come upon me and I'd look around for this here spirit to wrestle with, and he wouldn't be there. He ought to be here wrestling with me now, Alan, but he's quit me. He don't even brush his wings by me, let alone give me a struggle.³⁰⁶

Here again Anderson employs religious imagery to make his point. Sol's struggle with his integrity had been an individual struggle. Joseph Wood Krutch applauded this monologue as "very nearly a great speech, because of the subtle, very human mingling of real sincerity."³⁰⁷ Anderson humanizes the corrupt old congressman so that he reflects the detriment of the capitalist system upon the individual character. Although Mary Patrice Lewis speculated that Sol's "audience appeal" weakened Anderson's argument in the play,³⁰⁸ Sol represents an integral part of the playwright's message. Fitzmaurice demonstrates that the marriage of capitalism with the government institution not only

³⁰⁵ Emerson, "The American Scholar," in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 26.

³⁰⁶ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 102-3.

³⁰⁷ Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Minutes Stand Approved," *Nation* 136 (1933): 355.

³⁰⁸ Mary Patrice Lewis, "The Free Spirit: Some Aspects of the Concept of Man in Maxwell Anderson" (Master's Thesis, University of San Diego, 1963), 105.

threatens the existence of the individual citizen, but leads to corruption of the human spirit. Anderson may have reached for allegory in naming the old rogue “Solomon,” the biblical king noted for great practical wisdom.

Simeon Gray represents, perhaps, the most conflicted character in the play. The script indicates Culver as his district, but does not specify the state he hails from. Gray has served as chairman of the appropriations committee for fifteen years. His reputation stands among the highest in the House in terms of moral integrity. Sol refers to him as “the watch-dog of the Treasury.”³⁰⁹ Indeed, when McClean seeks honest advice, he turns to Simeon as the one man to trust. However, Simeon's integrity has been unwittingly compromised. He owns stock in and serves on the board of directors of the last functioning bank in his district. The bank stands to benefit from the completion of a penitentiary included in the appropriations bill. Moreover, his position becomes complicated by the fact that the bank falsely invested in government securities, which are in reality nothing more than reams of blank paper in the vault. Therefore, the bank's failure would result in a scandal and prison time for Simeon.

Simeon's reputation for honesty inspires fervent loyalty from those around him. Marjorie, his daughter and secretary, rejects McClean as a love interest once she discovers he intends to drag her father's name through the mud:

And it's not that he's my father, but he's the one person who's really on your side! He's fought all his life to cut down appropriations and maintain a standard of honesty! And he's never got anything out of it....But the first step you take in your campaign is to turn on him! Threatening to expose an innocent coincidence that would make it impossible for him to go on with his work! Don't you know every form of corruption in the country would take on new life if he were crowded off the committee? Don't you know every lobbyist in the city's waiting

³⁰⁹ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 41.

for just such a chance?³¹⁰

At first glance, Simeon appears as another politician succumbing to the temptations of corruption that Sol described. However, Anderson exonerates Simeon by placing the situation beyond his control. The deals were made while Simeon was away, and the penitentiary is connected with so many other projects that removing it from the bill would be impossible. Therefore, he has become a victim of the political institution run amok. His character further illustrates how the political system destroys honest people with good intentions.

Simeon contributes a significant element to Anderson's agrarian theme. With the committee squabbling over who gets what pieces of graft, Simeon moves to strike the proposal to fund the Japanese beetle patrol. This request is as dishonest as any other, of course, but it was put forth by non-partisans and farm-labor unions in order to create jobs for farmers. Gray determines that he has enough votes to pass the bill without their support and cuts the allocation.³¹¹ Anderson makes two points here. First, that major corporations have trounced the traditional farmer. Second, that anyone attempting to remain non-partisan has little chance of achieving anything in a Congress of individuals dedicated to the graft system. In graft, as in most other matters, the farmers and non-partisans are the biggest losers. The agrarians and individualists exulted by Jefferson and later by Emerson and Thoreau cannot find a place at the table even when they turn avaricious themselves.

³¹⁰ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 63.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

In the conflict between Gray and McClean, Anderson emphasizes the struggle incumbent upon the American political institution between the needs of individual districts versus the needs of the nation as a whole. After McClean jams the bill full of graft, Simeon confronts his adversary:

GRAY. ...I grew up in Culver and I know the people there—the storekeepers and the professional men and the people in the street. I know them by their first names—and I know what they’ve been through. They’ve lost nearly everything they had. Business is gone and two banks have failed. The third one’s mine, and people think it’s sound, and what money is left is in it. But the bank isn’t sound; and if the bill’s defeated and the penitentiary doesn’t go to Culver, the bank will fail, and a lot of people will lose their life savings and their jobs.

ALAN. But, Mr. Gray, isn’t it a little unfair to support Culver by taxing other places which are just as badly off?

GRAY. Yes, it is unfair! But I’m here to represent a certain district, McClean, and they need what I can do for them as they’ve never needed it before.³¹²

Like Sol, Simeon Gray is a pragmatist. However, Anderson portrays Simeon as a conflicted pragmatist. Whereas Sol makes no apologies and, indeed, recommends indulgence in the American tradition of *laissez-faire* capitalism, Simeon recognizes the complications. Earlier in the play when McClean suggests that the penitentiary is “such a simple thing to eliminate,” Gray replies: “Sometimes it’s not so simple, McClean.”³¹³ Simeon possesses a mature comprehension of how American democracy functions. One must walk a tightrope between honesty and dishonesty or else run the risk of achieving nothing.

Of all the veteran members of Congress, Simeon shows himself the most in doubt over the American political institution. He, more than any other character, tries to find a way to balance selfish interest with republican values. Gray's challenge lies in the fact

³¹² Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 134-35.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

that American culture places an extreme value on individual liberty. Turner argued that American democracy was “strong in selfishness” and that it pushed “individual liberty beyond its proper bounds.”³¹⁴ While Turner valued individualism, he also held that too much individual power poses a significant threat to the political institution. Gray recognizes this threat, informing McClean at the end of the play: “I respect what you’re trying to do.... Tell me what you’d like to see here, Alan. If you know of anything better, I wouldn’t mind working toward it myself. I don’t care for this system any more than you do.”³¹⁵ Reading the play as an allegory, one might suggest that Simeon represents the “gray” area, the middle ground between the two extremes of Fitzmaurice and McClean. In her pioneering 1957 study of Anderson’s work, Mabel Bailey found *Both Your Houses* effective drama, in part, because of Anderson’s “refusal to see black and white.”³¹⁶ Bailey’s assessment emphasizes the ambiguity of Anderson’s communication. This ambiguity is important in distinguishing him from his contemporaries as well as appreciating the complexity of the play’s message.

In contrast to the unapologetic corruption of Solomon Fitzmaurice and the conflicted pragmatism of Simeon Gray, Anderson establishes his protagonist, Alan McClean, as an idealistic agrarian. Before he ever arrives on stage, the other members foreshadow the trouble he will cause. A congressional busybody sent to spy on him describes McClean thus: “He’s straight. It never enters that head not to be straight.”³¹⁷ McClean’s honesty is further alluded to by his last name. The cleanliness of his character

³¹⁴ Turner, 32.

³¹⁵ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 175.

³¹⁶ Mabel Driscoll Bailey, *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957), 60.

³¹⁷ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 21.

soon makes him the bane of corrupt politicians. He hails from Nevada and was elected to Congress after exposing fiscal corruption at the agricultural college where he taught. He has invested his first three months in Washington entrenched in the congressional library studying the works of Jefferson. In addition, he has invested his own money to have his election investigated after discovering that he was unknowingly supported by contractors who expect him to push for the dam. These circumstances throw Sol into a fit: “Comes from Nevada, intellectual, reads Jefferson, having his own election investigated. Simeon, call your meeting to order and for God’s sake muzzle him. This is William Jennings Bryan!”³¹⁸ Representing a western state connects Alan to Turner’s idea of the rugged frontiersman with an inherently independent spirit. Identifying McClean with Bryan strengthens his connection to western morality. Bryan, who hailed from Nebraska, was known as the Great Commoner and trumpeted a platform to protect workers from the oppression of wealthy industry. Alan’s connection to an agricultural college places him in concert with the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal.

When McClean finally does appear, Anderson continues developing him as an American Everyman. Levering, the party whip, has been desperate to meet with Alan in order to coach him. Alan, however, rebuffs Levering’s advice and complains to Marjorie that “I could bring myself to dislike him. I don’t like taking orders and I don’t like his face.”³¹⁹ This assertion is reminiscent of Emerson’s contention, “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.”³²⁰ Similarly, Turner theorized that the frontier individualist

³¹⁸ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 22.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³²⁰ Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 55.

possessed a natural “antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control.”³²¹ Alan goes where he pleases and does what he pleases, rejecting counsel from anyone he does not deem fit. However, he does not espouse anarchistic or anti-American ideology. When Marjorie asks McClean if he is “a wild radical,” he replies: “No, just a farmer.”³²² A farmer revolt in December 1932, just three months prior to the opening of *Both Your Houses*, had served to associate agrarians with radicalism. At that time, over two hundred farmers representing twenty-six states responded to rampant property foreclosures with an organized protest in Washington. Dorothy Day notes, however, that these agrarians were not socialist radicals, but rather patriots who identified their cause with the American revolutionary spirit.³²³ Anthony Rosenberg, who chaired the protest, declared: “We aim to avoid bloodshed.... We come here to seek emergency legislation. But if nothing is done for us we will act on the conviction that the rights of the individual are above all man-made laws.”³²⁴ Rosenberg’s comments do, indeed, evoke Jefferson’s rhetoric in the Declaration of Independence as well as Turner’s notion of the independent frontiersman. In that exchange of dialogue, Anderson specifically places farmers within this same context. Like Jefferson, the playwright venerates the farmer as the inheritor of the American tradition. Moreover, McClean’s studious avidity for books and learning connects him with the intelligentsia. This connection echoes Thoreau’s contention that a farmer “can work alone in the field and woods all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel lonesome, because he is employed” and that the student can do the same with books in

³²¹ Turner, 30.

³²² Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 35.

³²³ Dorothy Day, “Real Revolutionists.” *Commonweal* 17 (1933): 293.

³²⁴ Quoted in Day, “Real Revolutionists,” 294.

the house.³²⁵ McClean represents both student and farmer; a reader and a tiller. In combining these elements in his protagonist, Anderson deepens his identification with Jefferson, an intellectual and, at least nominally, a planter, and distances him from Hamilton, an intellectual and a lawyer.

McClean soon finds himself at an impasse regarding his position on the bill. He has studied carefully and explains his dilemma to Levering. While Fitzmaurice and Gray have already shown that the system functions by virtue of individual members wrangling among one another to benefit their districts, for an idealistic character like McClean, the American political institution creates a complex predicament:

ALAN. I've discovered that some of the people who backed me for office were the contractors who have handled the work on the whole project.

LEVERING. Can you be sure of that?

ALAN. Oh yes. I've looked it up and they don't really need forty millions to finish it. There's a lot of water in this business besides what's to be used for irrigation.

LEVERING. If you're sure of that, we ought to go over it. We certainly should. And I want to do it.

ALAN. But I didn't want to go over it with anyone, Mr. Levering. And I felt almost certain that if I went over it with you, it would lead to a compromise.

LEVERING. You amaze me, McClean. There could be no question of compromise in such a case. This comes of your working alone and taking no advice.

ALAN. It puts me in a sort of hyphenated position, because I realize I owe it to the people who elected me to put the dam through. But I also ran on an economy platform, and that concerns the whole country. I've been thinking about it a good deal and the two things just don't go together. But I guess I'll just have to decide that for myself.

LEVERING. The dam must go through, of course.³²⁶

McClean's comment that "the two things just don't go together" embraces the conflict between the individual person, district, or state versus the entirety of the nation, which

³²⁵ Thoreau, "Walden" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 109.

³²⁶ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 31-32.

mirrors the struggle between Jeffersonian and Hamiltonian notions of American governmental character. Anderson recognizes the importance of this tantalizing deadlock by not producing a categorical response.

McClellan appears to reconcile his position by the time he arrives in the committee meeting. He astonishes everyone by suggesting that the entire appropriation bill should be dropped. He argues that spending no money is better than draining the country of revenue to support unnecessary projects. McClellan appears to choose the greater good in seeking to reduce taxes. However, he identifies the need for tax reduction with the needs of his district and the needs of his district with the needs of the nation as a whole. By prioritizing tax relief as paramount for his district, he reconciles himself to voting against the bill.

I come from an agricultural district, Mr. Chairman, where the farmers haven't got any money, and they're taxed beyond what they can stand already. Not only that but in the town I come from there used to be thirty-eight stores on the main street. There are now fifteen—because people have no money to buy. When stores get judgments against the farmers and put up their cattle and machinery at auction, nothing is sold. And the whole country's like that. Nobody can buy anything, at any price. Now, I was elected and sent here because I told my people I'd do what I could to reduce taxes and cut down even necessary expenditures. And there's nothing in this bill that can't be done without. So I'm against it.³²⁷

McClellan's initiative fails, however, because the individual members cannot overcome their personal selfishness. As Sol advised, no one can achieve anything in Congress by taking things away.

As Sol prophesied, McClellan soon finds his idealism tested by the system. With the assistance of his savvy secretary, he initiates a campaign to defeat the bill. He finds, however, that in order to secure votes he must engage in the same brand of deal-making

³²⁷ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 48-49.

and compromising that he so despises. After a dreadful meeting with Representative Trumper, an aptly named blow-hard who fancies himself the next candidate for president, McClean rails against a system that will not allow for honest negotiation:

ALAN. I don't know, but I've got to think of someone else.

BUS. Why? Trumper's ideal—he's a jelly fish!

ALAN. But there's nothing ideal about the way you want me to get him. You've been swell, Bus—I couldn't have got started at all without you, but our methods turn my stomach over. They're just like everyone else's, and I'm calling a halt right now.

BUS. There is no other method in this place, Alan.

ALAN. God, what happens to people here?³²⁸

Alan's question at the end reflects the theme of the play. No honest person can survive Congress with their integrity intact. In an effort to get the votes he requires he has had to commit to such special interests as “an increased tariff on lumber and an increased tariff on wheat, a new system of landbanks, an embargo on circus animals—including Siamese cats!”³²⁹ Bus tries to reassure him: “What we want is to defeat this bill. You don't need to worry about those promises, because you'll never be called on to deliver.”³³⁰ These methods, wherein promises mean nothing, prove unpalatable to an agrarian idealist.

Adding to the religious underpinning, Anderson characterizes McClean as something of a messiah. Like Christ, McClean is, in effect, launching a one man crusade against the established order. His efforts even lead one representative to refer to him as “Jesus McClean.”³³¹ He prophesies impending judgment when he attempts to prevail upon the representatives for lower taxes: “I think maybe you've all been misled for a long time—you think there's still money to spend—but there isn't, and you're going to

³²⁸ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 96.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

find it out!”³³² McClean also preaches to the unfaithful in hope of steering them back toward the path of American righteousness, for example, in Act II when he tries to convert the heretical Fitzmaurice to his cause:

SOL. There’s a simple formula for deciding what’s right and wrong in politics, lad. It comes down to one rule! God’s always in the money. He don’t lose.

ALAN. But suppose God’s changed sides! The thing you’d better start worrying about is that you’re going to wake up some morning and find yourself an old man—and not only old, but out—down and out.

SOL. Why boy, you’re eloquent! Only isn’t it kind of a last resort to come to old Sol and try to win him over?

ALAN. You know this gang isn’t going to last. They’re afraid—Gray’s afraid and the President’s afraid. They feel something’s happened and something has—something’s snapped!

SOL. God, boy—you make me wonder. You shake me, Alan, and I haven’t been shaken for a long time. You think the people are changing—waking up?

ALAN. I know they are.

SOL. Now it’s been my firm conviction, fortified by thirty years’ experience, that the people don’t change—and they seldom or never wake up. In fact, I have found no word in the English language and no simile or figure of speech that would express the complete and illimitable ignorance and incompetence of the voting population. But maybe I don’t go back far enough. Maybe it’s a longer cycle than I take in.

ALAN. They’re awake now—and they’re going to throw you all out—all of you.³³³

Sol’s correlation of God with money reflects the immense governmental power advocated by Hamilton, who wrote that, “Money is with propriety considered as the vital principle of the body politic.”³³⁴ By contrast, McClean’s effort to convert the old money changer represents an attempt to create a new order, a “new testament” of sorts. His appeal to Sol also demonstrates Harriett Thomas’s assertion that McClean’s sole hope is

³³² Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 57.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

³³⁴ Alexander Hamilton, “Federalist 30” in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Garry Wills (New York: Bantam, 1982), 143.

"that one individual will be strong enough to fight against the crowd."³³⁵ McClean symbolizes the messenger, the messiah that will turn the hearts of sinners, cleanse the “temple of public righteousness,” and restore the supremacy of Jeffersonian purity over Hamiltonian corruption.

Anderson intensifies his protagonist’s connection to agrarianism in Act III as McClean struggles to defeat the overloaded bill. His key supporters in this fight are mainly the farmer representatives in Congress. The result of the vote illustrates the fading agrarian ideal in the face of capitalistic enterprise. In addition, Anderson again reflects the detriments of lobbyist influence that Jefferson had warned against over a century before. At the end of the play, Sol reveals that the farmers in Alan’s camp “stuck together. But they weren’t enough—not near enough! [to defeat the pork-laden bill].... It was a landslide! Maybe fifteen or twenty stood out against it!”³³⁶ The greed of corporate industry crushes the individualist agrarians. The most noble of Americans, the people Jefferson characterized as “the chosen people of God” and that Thoreau venerated for the nature of their work, cannot survive in the face of a Congress rife with avarice.

McClean’s tactic of overloading the bill with graft achieves his martyrdom. In defeat, he once again becomes the prophet. The problem in *Both Your Houses* has become a lack of balance of selfish interests spurred by the marriage of representative government with the capitalist economy. Madison identified this balance of selfish interests as the key issue in establishing a government run by people to govern over people. McClean expresses faith in the populace:

³³⁵ Harriett Thomas, "Maxwell Anderson's Concept of Man" (Master's Thesis, Baylor University, 1955), 52.

³³⁶ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 169.

More people are open-minded nowadays than you'd believe. A lot of them aren't so sure we found the final answer a hundred and fifty years ago. Who knows what's the best kind of government? Maybe they all get rotten after a while and have to be replaced. It doesn't matter about you or me. We had a little set-to here over a minor matter, and you've won, but I want to tell you that I'm not even a premonition of what you're going to hear crashing around you if the voters who elect you ever find out what you're like and what you do to them. The best I can do is just to help them find out.³³⁷

Although McClean condemns the status quo, he does not offer a solution to the problem of governance. His warning to the representatives of the restlessness of the people echoes Emerson's assertion that Americans vote for "designing men" only out of kindness, but that this pattern does not endure because Americans "inevitably prefer wit and probity."³³⁸ Similarly, Turner argued that selecting competent government officials was vital to insuring the effectiveness of "the rule of the people."³³⁹ Moments later, McClean follows this diatribe with another:

I'm not the person to give you a warning. I'm not a politician. I'm a Nevada school-teacher. I don't know your tricks--you showed me that tonight, and I won't forget it. But I didn't lose because I was wrong. I lost because I tried to beat you at your own game—and you can always win at that. You think you're good and secure in this charlatan's sanctuary you've built for yourselves. You think the sacred and senseless legend poured into the people of this country from childhood will protect you. It won't. It takes about a hundred years to tire this country of trickery--and we're fifty years overdue right now. That's my warning. And I'd feel pretty damn pitiful and lonely saying it to you if I didn't believe there are a hundred million people who are with me, a hundred million people who are disgusted enough to turn from you to something else. Anything else but this.³⁴⁰

Brooks Atkinson described this speech as "militant" and noted that it "aroused a burst of applause in the audience."³⁴¹ However, the speech is less radical than Atkinson seemed to

³³⁷ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 177-78.

³³⁸ Emerson, "Man the Reformer" in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 113.

³³⁹ Turner, 357.

³⁴⁰ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 178-79.

³⁴¹ Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*, 7 March 1933.

realize. When McClean says that the people may turn to “anything else but this,” he serves a warning of what may come rather than an outright call for revolution. But McClean does not abandon American ideals. Accused of communism, he replies: “I’m not a red! I don’t like communism or fascism or any other political patent medicine!”³⁴² The absence of a Marxist solution failed to satisfy Marxist critics. In fact, Himelstein notes that “the Communist press ignored the production.”³⁴³ Anita Block, one of the few Marxist scholars to offer comment, devoted a single line to *Both Your Houses*, calling it “a glib, shallow, muck-raking play about political intrigue and corruption in Congress.”³⁴⁴ Block’s comment oversimplifies Anderson’s achievement. Anderson’s failure to advocate a specific alternative to “this” illustrates the complexity of the American political system. It is not Anderson’s goal to espouse a new system. Rather, *Both Your Houses* condemns the moral failings that have corrupted a potentially venerable system. Himelstein argued that the reason *Both Your Houses* could not content the communist reviewers was because of the playwright’s supposed “anarchistic point of view,”³⁴⁵ which seems to support Atkinson’s “militant” description. However, McClean spends the entire play hoping to inject some semblance of honesty among the members and pleading with them that the people of America are changing. He wanted the American system to work. McClean does not lose his idealism nor does he make the leap to anarchism or communism. On the contrary, he places his ultimate faith in the voting population, thus upholding one of America’s most sacred traditions.

³⁴² Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 175.

³⁴³ Himelstein, 130.

³⁴⁴ Anita Block, *The Changing World in Plays and Theatre* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1939), 240.

³⁴⁵ Himelstein, 225.

Critic John Mason Brown commented on the playwright's devotion to American ideals in the play. Two important features stand out in Brown's review. First, that Anderson was not condemning the traditional American system. Second, that his lack of a specific remedy not only sets him apart from his contemporaries, but was actually an asset to the message of the play:

Although it is a propaganda play, it gains immensely by turning its back on all the traditional hysterics of its kind. Unlike his fellow castigators, Mr. Anderson refuses to see red. He says devastating things and he says them bluntly. But he keeps his sense of humor. He is arguing for no special cause. He is not against this system nor does he favor that one. He is interested only in what can be done to salvage this Government of ours and to make it really representative of the best interests of its people.³⁴⁶

Like Thoreau, who once declared, "I ask for, not at once no government, but at once a better government,"³⁴⁷ McClean wants to improve the current system. In this vein, one scholar defined *Both Your Houses* as a "reformist play."³⁴⁸

Anderson employs monarchial imagery that separates European from American ideas. Bus equates Congressional members with old style tyranny, advising McClean that "you're up against a gang of professional empire wreckers. If you added up the conquerors of all time, from Alexander to Napoleon, the lump of what they got wouldn't touch what's dragged down annually by this gang out of our treasury."³⁴⁹ Likewise, when McClean suggests re-introducing every piece of graft back into the bill, one congressman expresses his admiration: "Christ! That's Napoleonic!"³⁵⁰ Anderson makes a similar allusion in Act III when a congressional radical supporting McClean's attempt to defeat

³⁴⁶ John Mason Brown, *Two on the Aisle* (New York: Norton, 1938), 210.

³⁴⁷ Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 266.

³⁴⁸ Edmond M. Gagey, *Revolution in American Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 155.

³⁴⁹ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 68-69.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

the bill exclaims: "This is the day the Old Guard meets its Waterloo!"³⁵¹ In the days before the world appreciated the full scope of Hitler's despotism, Anderson compares the American Congress to the most famous despot in recent history at the time and connects this oppression to capitalist greed, echoing Emerson's view of Napoleon as representative of a class that seeks wealth and material gain above all other matters.³⁵² Anderson's portrait associates elitism and tyranny with European forms that are, perhaps, corrupting American democracy.

Though not a central focus, *Both Your Houses* does offer a fleeting critique of gender ideology. For example, two of the only women in the play are secretaries, which reinforces the status quo as far as female employment. However, Anderson did create one female congressional member: Bess McMurtry. McMurtry's pet cause in committee is the funding for nurses to assist in the "dissemination of birth control information and contraceptives."³⁵³ She argues this measure is necessary because men bound to the home by unemployment with women who "don't know how to protect themselves" exacerbates the nation's poverty by creating "even more mouths to feed."³⁵⁴ When one of her male colleagues quips that "that angle never occurred to me before," McMurtry retorts, "There are a lot of things that never occur to men, but women know that during periods of unemployment the men have nothing else to do and no other outlet for their energy."³⁵⁵ McMurtry is arguably the least corrupted member aside from McClean. Her provision for nurses stands as the only altruistic offering mentioned in committee. Moreover, her stand

³⁵¹ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 162.

³⁵² Emerson, "Napoleon; or, The Man of the World" in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 170.

³⁵³ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 38.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

upon the need for birth control is an especially gendered social issue. Her character reflects support for women and feminine causes as part of the government. However, that she is the only female congressional member and a minor character reflects how women were often lost in a male dominated world. The only time anyone addresses her by her first name occurs in Act III, after the bill is passed, when one of her colleagues offers her a celebratory drink. She accepts with the qualification, "Well, I don't as a rule."³⁵⁶ This line further reflects the separate gendered spheres, wherein alcohol consumption was unacceptable for women. By supporting the corrupt bill, she receives at least tacit acceptance in this moment as "one of the boys." The play thus challenges the Victorian notion of female moral superiority. McMurtry shows herself willing to compromise the nation for the sake of her own, albeit noble, cause.

Maxwell Anderson produced several essays that illuminate his personal political conceptions. In 1920 he lamented that, "The essence of what we have found out is that all governments are rotten and that we are helpless."³⁵⁷ While Anderson never totally lost his cynicism, he did find some level of moderation in the traditional American ideals. In a later essay, he invoked the early days of the American republic, confirming his conviction regarding the necessity of government. However, he also recognizes the selfishness inherent in both government and people, which echoes Madison's concern in "Federalist 51":

It was believed then, as I believe now, that a civilization is a balance of selfish interests, and that a government is necessary as an arbiter among these interests, but that the government must never be trusted, must be constantly watched, and must be drastically limited in its scope, because it, too, is a selfish interest and

³⁵⁶ Anderson, *Both Your Houses*, 171.

³⁵⁷ Maxwell Anderson, "How Will It Be Done Again?" *Freeman* 2 (1920): 9.

will automatically become a monopoly in crime and devour the civilization over which it presides unless there are definite and positive checks on its activities.³⁵⁸

Like Jefferson, and later Emerson and Thoreau, Anderson contended that government is best when it governs least. This attitude pervades *Both Your Houses*. Therefore, Anderson's critique of the American political institution in *Both Your Houses* reinforces his identity as an inheritor of a long American philosophical tradition.

Because the play premiered on 6 March 1933, just two days after Franklin Roosevelt's inauguration, several critics claimed that the critique in *Both Your Houses* came too late. It was a time when many Americans were beginning to recover their optimism and the critical response reflects the almost euphoric expectations. Percy Hammond, for example, was hopeful that Anderson "was thinking of past Congresses when he composed his protest, not the patriots now preparing to assemble in Washington, there to right our wrongs."³⁵⁹ Similarly, another reviewer claimed that Anderson "had a good play for the Hoover era, but March 4 finally did roll around, and now *Both Your Houses* is as definitely dated as a can of 1932 coffee.... Mr. Anderson and his play now belong to history."³⁶⁰ The anonymous reviewer for *Newsweek* agreed, speculating that the play might have had a more profound effect had it appeared "two months ago."³⁶¹ Brooks Atkinson wondered if "the voter rebellion, with which Mr. Anderson threatens his politicians in the last act, began last November, and that now the pot is warming up where the kettle used to simmer."³⁶² Stark Young was among the few critics who

³⁵⁸ Maxwell Anderson, *Off Broadway: Essays about the Theatre* (New York: William Sloane, 1947), 82.

³⁵⁹ Percy Hammond, *New York Herald Tribune*, 7 March 1933.

³⁶⁰ Caldwell, 46.

³⁶¹ Unsigned Review, *Newsweek* 1 (18 March 1933): 29.

³⁶² Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*, 12 March 1933.

recognized the relevance of the play, asserting that *Both Your Houses* was “perennially apropos in the case of our government.”³⁶³ Nevertheless, Anderson complained years later that producer Jed Harris held the play too long and so “though it was written as a satire on the Hoover administration it didn’t come out till Roosevelt was in the White House. By that time the play seemed quite pointless.”³⁶⁴

Anderson’s assessment of the play, as well as that of many critics, seems shortsighted. Governmental corruption provoked by capitalist greed did not cease to exist upon the ascension of Franklin Roosevelt or with the advent of the New Deal. Moreover, public suspicion of the federal government, fed by modern mass communication, seems more prevalent now than it was in 1933. Questions over big or small government remain matters of concern for many Americans. Issues such as abortion, gun control, health care, education, euthanasia, and taxes all relate to individual rights clashing with governmental authority. People from across the political spectrum argue over these and other issues as America strives for a proper balance between centralized power and the liberation of the individual citizen. These are arguments Anderson would have appreciated, but it is unfair to speculate what he would think about the United States in the twenty-first century. *Both Your Houses* poses difficult questions about the American political institution, but does so in the spirit of American philosophical tradition. Anderson struggles with the balance between mass governance, individual freedom, and selfish interests within the inherent limitations of the capitalist economy. These concerns are similar to those addressed by Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, and the rest of the founding generation. As

³⁶³ Young, 188.

³⁶⁴ Anderson to Samuel J. Silverman, 9 June 1949, in *Dramatist in America: Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912-1958*, ed. Laurence G. Avery (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 239.

Americans continue this struggle, *Both Your Houses* adds insight to the debate as relevant for the twenty-first century as it was in 1933.

Chapter 5

Sex and Greed: Anderson Confronts Marriage and Capitalism in 'The Star-Wagon'

In the late 1930s the Great Depression remained a significant presence on the American landscape. The ascension of Franklin Roosevelt, whose promise of a “new deal” generated such optimism in 1933, had done little to stem the tide of economic fallout across the nation. In 1938, despite the most energetic response to an economic crisis by the federal government in American history, more than 10 million workers remained unemployed.³⁶⁵ Moreover, results were deceptive in areas where employment did rise because work often did not translate to a livable wage. Touring America in the mid 1930s on behalf of the Roosevelt administration, Lorena Hickok reported that many areas suffered from underemployment, meaning that even though the number of working people increased, wages continued to decline, thus defeating the purpose.³⁶⁶ Though many Americans rallied around the president, Roosevelt’s plethora of initiatives had failed to produce an adequate solution. His 1939 State of the Union address was the first in which the president did not offer any new social or economic programs. As historian David M. Kennedy writes, “Not with a bang, but a whimper, the New Deal petered out in 1938.”³⁶⁷ Americans would endure the Depression into the early 1940s when World War II created jobs by spurring demand for industrial production and siphoning off men to fight.

³⁶⁵ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 362.

³⁶⁶ Lorena Hickok letter to Harry Hopkins, 1 January 1935, quoted in *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*, edited by Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 363.

³⁶⁷ Kennedy, 363.

Prior to World War II, while facing continued economic calamity, many had speculated, and some even hoped, that the United States stood poised on the verge of a revolution that would throw off the chains of capitalism. Many intellectuals such as Mike Gold and John Reed viewed the Russian Revolution in 1917 as a happy sign of things to come. However, despite the agitation of the intellectual class, most everyday Americans showed little proclivity toward revolution. Reinhold Niebuhr noted that, while disillusionment was rampant regarding "the efficacy and relevance" of the Constitution, America had failed to degenerate into a "dangerous political rebellion."³⁶⁸ Edmund Wilson agreed that, despite the hopes of Marxists, America had not yet developed a genuine class conflict necessary for revolutionary action.³⁶⁹ Emma Goldman attributed this passivity to stark cultural differences between the United States and Russia.³⁷⁰ According to Goldman, Marxists placed too great an emphasis on mass industrialization inevitably leading to social class conflict. She contended that social revolt took place in Russia because the populace was "nurtured by a century of revolutionary agitation among all classes of society."³⁷¹ "The necessary social consciousness," Goldman asserted, "the required mass psychology is missing in such countries as the United States."³⁷² Lack of revolutionary spirit in America was evident in 1932 when William Foster, the communist party candidate for president, garnered less than 100,000 votes despite open support from

³⁶⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, "Catastrophe or Social Control?" *Harpers* 165 (1932): 115.

³⁶⁹ Edmund Wilson, "What I Believe" *Nation* 134 (1932): 96.

³⁷⁰ Emma Goldman, "Afterword to 'My Disillusionment in Russia'" in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* edited by Alix Kates Shulman (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), 383-384.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 385.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 384.

the intelligentsia.³⁷³ However, some intellectuals may have supported Foster more out of disgust for the status quo than for ideological beliefs in Communism. Elmer Rice claimed to be one such supporter who felt a strong protest would “galvanize” the government into action and asserted, “I had no respect for the Communist Party. If I had believed it could win, I would have opposed it.”³⁷⁴ Most Americans remained entrenched in the traditional political system. Hickok offers numerous first-hand accounts of the people’s plight and observed little in the way of revolutionary fervor. In fact, she described many workers as “terrifyingly patient.” “Protest groups,” she added, “have made little headway.”³⁷⁵ Historian Richard H. Pells concluded that Americans were too concerned with surviving to think of revolting.³⁷⁶

Rather than turning toward an alternative political system, many Americans sought solace in the past as a means of validating traditional values. As Lawrence Levine argues: “In the culture of the 1930s, the calamities of the past could become didactic mechanisms for illustrating the ways in which people might triumph over adversity.”³⁷⁷ Nostalgia became a national pastime. Mark Fearnow notes that America’s fascination with its history often focused on Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War era.³⁷⁸ One can see this trend in popular theatre and literature of the era. E.P. Conkle achieved success on Broadway in 1938 with *Prologue to Glory*, a play chronicling the life of young Lincoln.

³⁷³ Gerald Rabkin, *Drama and Commitment: Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 25.

³⁷⁴ Elmer Rice, *Minority Report: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 327.

³⁷⁵ Lorena Hickok letter to Harry Hopkins, 1 January 1935, quoted in *One Third of a Nation*, 363.

³⁷⁶ Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 88.

³⁷⁷ Levine, 218.

³⁷⁸ Mark Fearnow, *The American Stage and the Great Depression: A Cultural History of the Grottesque* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.

That same year Robert E. Sherwood attained even greater success, winning his second Pulitzer Prize with *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, a play that also portrayed the early years of the sixteenth president. Carl Sandburg achieved acclaim in the mid-1930s for a multi-volume biography of Lincoln. The Civil War proved a popular interest in the fiction genre as attested by the success of such novels as Stark Young's *So Red the Rose* and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. *Gone with the Wind* became the decade's biggest best-seller and was later adapted into one of the most successful films of the era. The fresh interest in the American crisis of the 1860s seems connected to the American ideal of the individual against adversity as well as the nation triumphing over calamity. Levine reasons, for example, that the appeal of Scarlett O'Hara lay in her indomitable individualism so distinctly American in flavor; she refused to allow defeat and in the end, she survives.³⁷⁹ Nostalgia was not limited to the Civil War period. The turn of the twentieth century was often the setting for sentimental recollections on the Broadway stage as evinced by such popular plays as Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* (1938) and Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933).

In addition to the economic crisis, traditional American values were further challenged by the ever burgeoning advent of technology. Technology represented a complex presence for Americans in this decade. On the one hand, many were intrigued by the possibilities of technological innovations. Moving pictures (first silent, then "talkies"), radios, airplanes, and automobiles titillated the imagination. For everyday Americans, these inventions and the people who created them represented something mystical. Historian Warren Susman characterized this era as one fascinated by fairy tales

³⁷⁹ Levine, 218.

and magic, noting that Thomas Edison was often portrayed as a "wizard" rather than a scientist or inventor.³⁸⁰ On the other hand, technology was also viewed as threatening individual identities and American values. Automobiles, for example, were blamed for the deterioration of families because they took the center of recreation outside of the home.³⁸¹ Assembly lines and factories eliminated much of the need for individual artisans crafting materials by hand. Some believed that technology had progressed to an intolerable level in the twentieth century. Mark Fearnow reports that several cultural observers found the technological benefits of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were morphing into monstrous realities in the 1930s, resulting in "the dehumanization of culture."³⁸² This dehumanization played out both on Broadway and in movie houses in the 1920s in such expressionistic plays as Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) and films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). A 1939 Gallup poll reported that, fascinated though they were by technological inventions, most Americans blamed technology as the culprit that perpetrated the Great Depression.³⁸³

As many feared, technological innovations of war would soon command the attention of the world. In March 1935 Adolf Hitler, having consolidated power in Germany, announced his rejection of the Versailles Treaty and the rearmament of the German nation.³⁸⁴ Hitler's rearmament centered upon mechanization, which allowed for the rapidity associated with the new tactic of *blitzkrieg*. Hitler was able to move with

³⁸⁰ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), xxvi-xxvii.

³⁸¹ Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 89.

³⁸² Fearnow, 36.

³⁸³ Susman, 268.

³⁸⁴ Kennedy, 384.

speed heretofore unknown, sweeping through Poland in September 1939 and conquering the nation in less than a month. With almost no mechanization available in their arsenal, the Polish army attempted to answer the invasion with mounted cavalry assaults; men on horseback wielding swords and lances against German armored tanks.³⁸⁵ This vain defense by an antiquated military is emblematic of the conflict between former times and the burgeoning technological advancements of the twentieth century.

Though America officially remained neutral until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the anxiety produced by the combination of economic disaster and impending global conflict led people to seek escapist activities. These activities often involved games of chance such as *Monopoly*, Bridge, and pinball machines. Susman views the attraction toward games of chance as emblematic of a society overwhelmed by a lack of control over their lives.³⁸⁶ These propensities sometimes played out on the Broadway stage. William Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* (1939), symbolic of the Great Depression with its collection of down-on-their-luck characters brimming with optimism, portrays a young man obsessed with conquering a pinball machine.³⁸⁷ Such a depiction must have resonated with many who were struggling against crushing economic forces that they may not have understood.

Within this environment of anxiety triggered by economic hardship, technological advancement, and impending war, Maxwell Anderson brought *The Star-Wagon* (1937) to New York audiences. In contrast to many who were seeking escape through sentimental

³⁸⁵ Donald L. Miller, *The Story of World War II: Revised, Expanded and Updated from the Original Text by Henry Steele Commager* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 25-26.

³⁸⁶ Susman, 197-98.

³⁸⁷ William Saroyan, *The Time of Your Life* (New York: Samuel French, 1939).

representations of the past that affirmed traditional values, Anderson challenges American mores at the turn of the twentieth century as well as values contemporary to his time. Through the convention of time travel, the playwright endows his protagonist, an industrious inventor with an unsatisfied wife, with the power to change his past and, by extension, his future. The play highlights the pitfalls of capitalist greed and the double standard of male/female relations, at times confronting and at other times affirming long-established American values. *The Star-Wagon* examines how the complex connection between capitalism and marriage can stifle individual freedom and yet facilitate a sense of comforting stability.

Anderson presents the audience with three distinct realities in the play. Act I takes place in 1937. The location, according to the stage directions, is "somewhere in the suburbs of a manufacturing town in eastern Ohio,"³⁸⁸ which establishes a connection to technology and Middle America. In Act II, the playwright takes the audience back in time to the same Ohio town in 1902. Act III is split between an alternate version of 1937 and the original 1937. The plot centers the adventures of an eccentric inventor, Stephen Minch, and his even more eccentric sidekick, Hanus. Stephen has spent a life of contentment, creating various brilliant contraptions for the mere sake of creation, which connects him to the culture of technology. However, unlike the capitalist achiever, he is happy in the fact that he earns little money for his work, preferring to serve society without benefit to himself. His last name may be a play on the Yiddish word *mensch*, which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a popular expression referring to "a

³⁸⁸ Maxwell Anderson, *The Star-Wagon* (Washington: Anderson House, 1937), 3.

person of integrity or rectitude; one who is morally just, honest, or honorable.”³⁸⁹

Stephen’s lack of earnings combined with his lack of desire for advancement in the company he works for has grated on his wife, Martha, for more than thirty years. In order to appease his long-suffering wife, Stephen employs his latest invention, the star-wagon, to travel back in time so that he and Martha may marry more successful spouses. This adventure leads to an alternate reality more miserable than the first. Stephen and Hanus eventually decide to switch everything back to the way it was and Martha, who possesses only vague, dreamlike memories of the switch, finds herself happy in a marriage to an unambitious inventor.

Anderson reveals the conflict in Stephen and Martha's marriage very soon after the play opens. He depicts the couple existing in a traditional marital relationship. Stephen is the breadwinner and the creator. Martha centers her existence upon domestic duties. Anderson underscores the uneasy relationship between capitalism and marriage by demonstrating the hindrance created by acquisitive expectations and the power differential between the husband who works in the world and the wife who does not. He represents Martha as a woman who has suffered long with little reward. She bristles at her husband’s devotion to Hanus, but her real frustration stems from Stephen’s lack of initiative toward monetary advancement:

Look, Stephen—we’ve been married thirty-five years—and every year you've told me you had to have Hanus with you to help with inventions. And every year I've hoped and waited, till my hope's worn thin, and I'm worn thin. Every year you invent something, and every year I think maybe it's going to mean something to you and me. Maybe we'll be able to have an apartment in town, and a servant, and I won't have to cook and wash and make my own garden. And every time an invention comes along what happens? It belongs to the company. And do you

³⁸⁹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Volume 9 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 608.

get a raise in salary, so we could live a little better, and I could have some clothes and play bridge in the afternoons, or even go to a concert? No, the company makes the money, and you're still in the laboratory at \$27.50 a week, and a barnacle called Hanus star-boarding with us.³⁹⁰

Money translates to power, and as Martha does not earn money for her work, she possesses no real power in a capitalist society.

It is noteworthy that many of Martha's complaints relate to her lack of ability to consume goods or participate in leisure activities such as playing bridge and attending concerts. In the late 1800s, Thorstein Veblen theorized that wives came to express their own worth by becoming "the ceremonial consumer of goods" produced by their husbands.³⁹¹ Martha's presumed reward for years of hard work in domestic service would manifest in her husband's monetary success. Stephen's lack of income leads to a lack of ability to consume goods, which causes Martha to feel herself a failure. Martha's frustration is exacerbated by the fact that his lack of monetary success does not stem from laziness or lack of ability, but rather from a lack of ambition and assertiveness:

Can't you get angry? If you got angry with me just once it might mean there was some hope of your getting mad enough to stand up for your rights at the factory! Twenty-seven fifty a week, a man of your ability, a man with your record! You invented one of the first automobiles, and sold it, and it's made so many millions they don't know what to do with the money! You invented a washing-machine that everybody else in the world can afford except me. You built a piano action, but I haven't any piano. The best-selling vacuum-cleaner in the world is the one you put together to clean Hanus up after the near-beer exploded! I don't know anything you haven't invented except a way to make money! And everybody makes money out of you, and takes the credit away from you, and steals the patents—and nobody's ever seen you angry—nobody's ever heard you complain—or ask for a raise!³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 9.

³⁹¹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Viking Press, 1943), 83.

³⁹² Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 9-10.

Martha's disdain indicates the unacceptability of Stephen's quiet, happy existence. The playwright's commentary here reflects the corrosive effect of capitalist competition by indicating that attaining wealth requires anger and selfishness.

Anderson projects American transcendentalist ideas as well as the persona of one of America's most celebrated founders through Stephen's industrious character. In so doing, he challenges notions of capitalist acquisitiveness endemic in American culture and identifies himself as an extension of an American philosophical tradition. Stephen's finding more joy in creation than in turning a profit echoes Henry David Thoreau's notion that scholars, like farmers, attain happiness through the mere act of employment.³⁹³ Moreover, Minch's character is also reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin, who refused to patent any of his inventions because he insisted on altruistic creation. As an inventor, Stephen exemplifies these Thoreauvian and Franklin-esque aspects of the American character:

It's that—just working at it, just trying to find it—is better than the money. Sometimes I think they can have the money—because I have the best part.—They can have all the money, if they'll let me work there at things and find them.— That's the best part--it's so good if they knew I had it they'd take it away from me.³⁹⁴

Despite Stephen's idyllic intentions regarding work for work's sake, Anderson emphasizes that the joy of creation is often a one-sided affair determined strictly by one's gender. Anderson depicts the gender binary continuing into the twentieth century. Stephen can take pleasure in his work because he creates useful inventions. Martha, by contrast, works as a servant to her husband's domestic needs. Her work not only fails to

³⁹³ Henry David Thoreau, "Walden" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2003), 109.

³⁹⁴ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 12.

generate income, but it creates nothing tangible to hold up to the world. Martha's response to Stephen when he asks if she understands what he means about the joy of creation underscores the gender dichotomy:

No. I'm an old woman and I've never had anything. And now I'll never have anything. If people are crazy enough, like you two, they can imagine they have something, but I'm not crazy enough. I've never had a car, I've never had a house, I've never had pretty clothes, nothing but the satisfaction of doing my own work—and it's no satisfaction, not anymore.³⁹⁵

Her perception of cooking meals and doing laundry is mere drudgery. Moreover, as she and Stephen have no children, she was thus denied the traditional creative outlet for a woman.

Stephen takes the romantic route in response to Martha's complaints. In a conflict between the idealistic and the practical, Anderson challenges his audience with the question of priorities in life. Stephen asks his disgruntled wife: "Aren't we still in love with each other, Martha?" Unfazed, Martha retorts: "Are we? Being in love doesn't last forever on \$27.50 a week."³⁹⁶ For Stephen, love, in the abstract, bears greater weight than any dollar amount. When his wife laments that they are both old and possess nothing, Stephen tries to placate her: "Just each other. Because we were in love."³⁹⁷ Martha, however, takes the more practical view: "Yes. People fall in love when they're young, and they think that's all there is, and they'll never want anything else. But that wears out after a while—the living on nothing and worshipping each other—that wears out. And then the rest's work."³⁹⁸ She suggests that they both should have married other people in

³⁹⁵ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 13.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

1902. Stephen had sold his patent for a car engine to the father of Hallie Arlington in order to marry Martha, surrendering his technological innovation for love rather than capitalistic advancement. Had he invested his money in Mr. Arlington's company and married Hallie, Martha reasons, he would have been successful. Likewise, Martha regrets not marrying Paul Reiger, who ended up owning a steel company, standing as a symbol of both capitalist and technological power. Had these alternate marriages taken place, Martha concludes, "We'd both be rich now."³⁹⁹ For Martha, the sentimental romanticism of youth has withered in the face of material want.

Though Anderson depicts Stephen Minch as a sympathetic inventor made guilt-ridden by his greedy wife, he does not leave the husband entirely inculpable. Martha reveals that Stephen's inattention exacerbates her unhappiness. When her husband says that he thought they were still in love, Martha replies: "You haven't thought about it. You haven't thought about me for so many years I can't believe it ever happened. You think about inventions, and Hanus, and the company, and the rights of man, and the war in Spain, but not about me."⁴⁰⁰ Though Stephen claims to love Martha, Anderson depicts him in this moment as a neglectful husband in a ways that reflects the separate gendered spheres of the Victorian era. One scholar described Stephen as "a type Mr. Anderson loves: the impractical dreamer, quaint, humorous, slightly pestiferous, so egotistical as to be quite incapable of understanding the wife who cannot share his absorbing pursuit but must bear the brunt of its deprivations."⁴⁰¹ Stephen has allowed his work, his inventions,

³⁹⁹ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 11.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰¹ Mabel Driscoll Bailey, *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957), 150.

and his ego to become obstacles to his love, which echoes Thoreau's warning, "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things."⁴⁰²

With Stephen consumed with work and Martha confined to domestic duties, Anderson thus shows the combined effects the traditional institution of marriage within a capitalistic culture bear upon the bond of love between two people.

When the action shifts to the factory, Anderson satirizes the marriage between capitalist greed and technological production. Stephen has lately invested himself in developing various new rubber formulae for automobile tires. With his inherent honesty, he naturally assumed the boss, Mr. Duffy, wanted the best product he could muster. The nature of the capitalist system, however, is antithetical to producing one's best work because the goal is not the work, but rather the profit. Duffy demands a redesign of the tire:

STEPHEN. Was there something wrong with it?

DUFFY. Wrong with it? We can't wear it out, you dumb cluck! We've worn out two cars on one set of those tires! And they've gone a hundred and thirty thousand miles on the proving track, and we can't wear the tread off the rear wheels!

STEPHEN. But—you asked me to increase the mileage.

DUFFY. I asked you to increase the mileage by about five thousand miles! I asked you for a twenty-two thousand mile tire! I didn't ask you for a hundred and thirty thousand mile tire! Do you want to wreck the tire business—all over the United States?

STEPHEN. I should think the better the tire was—the more miles you could get—would be fine—⁴⁰³

Duffy goes on to complain that if they produce a tire that will never wear out the company would lose seven million dollars a year. Moreover, Duffy has "pledged to the

⁴⁰² Thoreau, "Walden" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 44.

⁴⁰³ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 26-27.

Rubber Association not to make a tire that'll do better than thirty thousand miles!"⁴⁰⁴ The playwright thus shows that capitalism limits technological progress and discourages individual effort.

Anderson depicts how the profit motive renders capitalist-minded tycoons blind to creative innovations. While Stephen seems mesmerized by the wonder of the star-wagon, Duffy can only think in terms of its marketability. Duffy shows a thorough lack of imagination in responding to Stephen's impassioned attempt at explaining the marvel of the machine:

STEPHEN. I can't even tell you the principle of it, because I don't really know what it is. I just know it acts the way it does. It's like a radio that way—nobody knows why the waves work the way they do; they just know how they work. Marconi didn't know why the wireless worked. He said he didn't. But it worked just the same. This is a machine that picks up waves too—only it picks them up anywhere—a year ago or two years ago—

DUFFY. You mean it picks up old programs? That's not much good.⁴⁰⁵

Learning that Stephen and Hanus have invested years and the company's materials to build this machine, Duffy fires them both (even though Hanus is not an official employee) and orders the machine destroyed. This reaction further emphasizes the industrial magnate as devoid of imagination and dedicated only to the production of profit for his own benefit rather than products for society's benefit.

In the final scene of Act I, Anderson draws parallels between capitalists and criminals. Desperate to save his invention, Stephen enlists Hanus and two thugs to break into the factory and recover the machine. Much like Duffy, the thugs are only concerned with profit. Thinking the machine a safe, they obsess over its contents. This

⁴⁰⁴ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 27.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

preoccupation with potential profit shows that they, like Duffy, possess little imagination of their own. They are also content to take advantage of the labor of others to gain their profit. Paid to help move the machine, they instead bully Stephen and Hanus into doing all the work.⁴⁰⁶ Anderson thus relates thugs to capitalist tycoons: neither group is interested in anything more than the superficial rewards found in money; neither group possesses any vision for the greater rewards discovered in hard work and creation, and both groups seek to profit from the labor of other people. When one of the thugs threatens them with a gun, Stephen and Hanus jump on the star-wagon and escape the scene via time travel.

In the second act, set in 1902, Anderson focuses primarily upon late Victorian mores. Examinations of the capitalist system, however, remain evident. Stephen has chosen 1902 because it was the year of his marriage. Though he and Hanus have reverted back to their younger ages, they possess a dual consciousness of events from both 1902 and 1937. Stephen intends to manipulate his past so that he can marry Hallie and Martha can marry Paul, thus insuring a secure financial future for both of them. However, the greater interest in this act is Anderson's effort to de-romanticize the past and challenge traditional conventions with regard to gender relations and sexuality.

Anderson portrays 1902 America as a culture in transition. Stephen and Hanus wind up back at the bicycle shop they ran in their youth. Within the shop stands the automobile Stephen invented. Anderson thus depicts the standard of nineteenth century transportation colliding with the wave of twentieth century innovation. Hanus comments that the machine has a "whip socket" and Stephen explains: "Sure. That's so if the engine

⁴⁰⁶ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 34-47.

stops and you have to use a horse you'll have a whip to drive with."⁴⁰⁷ In 1902, the automobile was accommodated to the horse. Soon this coexistence would prove untenable as technological advancement took precedence.

In concert with changes in modes of transportation, Anderson illustrates how femininity and sexual standards were evolving in this era. Soon after Stephen and Hanus arrive, Martha wheels a bicycle into the shop. Stephen is taken aback at the sight of her wearing bloomers. In the nineteenth century, women typically wore dresses, which was fine for traveling in a carriage or riding side-saddle on a horse. However, one cannot ride side-saddle on a bicycle. Progress in technology demanded changes in women's fashion. Anderson connects transportation technology as a direct cause of altering gender conventions. When Stephen comments that "they don't leave much to the imagination," a defiant Martha replies, "They're just to ride a bicycle in.... And if people want to look, they can just look."⁴⁰⁸ Moments later, when Hallie arrives with her father, she exclaims, "Why, Martha—I didn't even know you in that outlandish—why, it isn't even a skirt!"⁴⁰⁹ After Martha exits, Hallie ponders the propriety of such attire with her father:

HALLIE. But isn't that—almost immoral—? I mean, aren't there laws—?

ARLINGTON. As a matter of fact, there are. It's illegal for a girl to wear pantaloons.

HALLIE. [*Hopeful*] Will she be arrested?

ARLINGTON. She ought to be.

HALLIE. The sheriff might see her going up the street.

ARLINGTON. Hank? Yes, he might.

HANUS. [*Muttering*] Probably Hank likes a pair of legs as much as anybody in town. You don't lose your taste for legs by being sheriff.

HALLIE. What did you say?

⁴⁰⁷ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 52-53.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

HANUS. Ma'am? I wasn't saying anything.⁴¹⁰

While Hallie and her father defend the conservative standards of the status quo, Hanus's remarks underscore their absurdity. Hanus functions as the *raisonneur* of the play, satirizing social mores. Anderson depicts Hanus as an eccentric character outside of societal rules and expectations. Everyone in the play, except Stephen, finds Hanus annoying. In Act I Martha refers to his "half-wit tricks"⁴¹¹ and in Act II the prudish choir director, Mrs. Rutledge, labels him "a veritable gargoyle."⁴¹² Hanus lacks proper manners and perversely prefers rainy to sunny days: "Why can't a man like rain? Everybody else likes what he likes."⁴¹³ Malcolm Goldstein identified Hanus with a long tradition of American Yankee characters dating back to Jonathan from Royall Tyler's eighteenth century play, *The Contrast*.⁴¹⁴ Tyler's Jonathan, an archetype of American masculine identity, is plain-spoken, uncouth, and provincial, eschewing aristocratic pomp and formality.⁴¹⁵ Thoreau references the Jonathan identity in deploring the nineteenth century drive toward luxury items "invented for the ladies of the harem...which Jonathan should be ashamed to know the names of."⁴¹⁶ Like "Jonathan," Hanus rejects luxury, reflecting the traditional American values of simple living and individual identity evident in the Jeffersonian agrarian ideal as well as the transcendentalist philosophies of Emerson and Thoreau, all of which are antithetical to capitalist acquisitiveness. Hanus reveals his lack of greed to Mr. Arlington while Stephen gives Hallie a ride in the automobile:

⁴¹⁰ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 57.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴¹⁴ Malcolm Goldstein, *The Political Stage: American Drama and Theatre of the Great Depression* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), 392.

⁴¹⁵ Royall Tyler, *The Contrast* (New York: Franklin, 1970).

⁴¹⁶ Thoreau, "Walden" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 33.

ARLINGTON. How'd you like a little job over in the carriage factory?
HANUS. Me? Maybe I'm better off here.
ARLINGTON. He can't pay you much.
HANUS. I like it here.
ARLINGTON. I see.⁴¹⁷

Anderson further satirizes Victorian sexual mores by introducing the character of the stuffy church choir director, Mrs. Rutledge, who first appears in the second scene of Act II. The scene opens with Martha playing the organ as Hanus pumps the instrument with the pump room door open. One historian has noted that in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America female sexuality was conceived as "potentially anarchic and dangerous" because women were thought of as sexually innocent and, therefore, wholly incapable of controlling their sexual impulses.⁴¹⁸ Mrs. Rutledge's reaction to Martha's execution of "deep pedal notes" satirizes Victorian attitudes about sex as her long, roundabout explanation ends with sputtering discomfort:

MRS. RUTLEDGE. That's excellent, Martha. I have no criticism of your playing. I might only suggest that it would be as well to omit some of the deep pedal notes which require a rather unlady-like extension of the lower limbs.

MARTHA. I love the low notes on the pedals.

MRS. RUTLEDGE. I know, dear. But one occasionally sacrifices art to what one might call the decencies. I've hesitated to speak of this, but there are men in every congregation who might be distracted from their devotions by the vision of feminine proportions in more or less athletic attitudes. The playing of the pipe organ requires the use of the feet, but a woman of refinement will instinctively confine herself to the middle register, easily accessible without—without—uh—without—

HANUS. She means without spreading the legs apart.

MRS. RUTLEDGE. You may close your door, Hanus.

HANUS. Yes ma'am. [*He does so, concealing himself*]

MRS. RUTLEDGE. Easily accessible, as I say, without extravagant

⁴¹⁷ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 60.

⁴¹⁸ Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 86.

motion under the skirt.⁴¹⁹

Hanus's frankness again highlights the absurdity of social standards, which offends the puritanical choir director and accentuates Anderson's satire.

In contrast to satirical depictions of sexuality, Anderson indulges in an affirmation of sentimentalized romantic love; a love that exists in purity, unsullied by mere physical desire. Having just finished his singing solo as Martha played the organ, Stephen reaches for her, but she balks. Martha fears physical contact with Stephen because she desires something more. Her reaction reflects not only a belief in idealized love, but a genuine need for it:

MARTHA. Don't touch me. It makes me feel as if you're like the others.

STEPHEN. Maybe I am.

MARTHA. I guess so. I guess we both are. Only I like to think, just tonight—that there's something we can have—that's like the music—nobler than we are—⁴²⁰

While this exchange reveals the romantic side of Anderson, it also reveals a hint of criticism of sexual mores. When Stephen suggests that he perhaps is "like the others" and Martha agrees that "we both are," Anderson seems to indicate a commonality between men and women with regard to sexual impulses. However, the exchange ends with a longing for something purer and better, which represents a move toward romanticism. Through Hanus and Mrs. Rutledge, Anderson has attempted to de-romanticize the past. However, with Martha and Stephen he provides an affirmation of romantic love common in the nineteenth century.

⁴¹⁹ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 65-66.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

Along with his critique of the sexual double standards of the era, Anderson challenges the dominant religion in American culture. He connects Martha's plight, and by extension the plight of all women, to the biblical Eve. Following up her earlier hint that men and women both share the same impulses, Martha argues for equality in a world where people are recognized as individuals rather than gender categories. Her comments represent, perhaps, the most overtly radical critique of the status quo in the play:

MARTHA. Oh, I can't bear it—and I won't! Why should I care whether you like me or not? Why does a girl have to care whether anybody likes her or not? It's disgusting—to care. It's a curse—and we carry it with us everywhere—just like the curse of Eve! There shouldn't be men and women! There should be just—people.

STEVE. Why, Martha. I never heard you talk that way.

MARTHA. You're a man. You wouldn't understand.⁴²¹

Moments later, Anderson reflects the restrictions of sexual standards regarding marriage. Contrary to Victorian dictates, Martha possesses an active sexual desire, but for a woman sex is a high-stakes gamble. Submission to desire amounts to submission to slavery within the bonds of institutional marriage:

MARTHA. It's sweet—but it's terrible—and tragic, too.

STEVE. Is it?

MARTHA. Because we're alone here—in this world—and so many things could happen—but when I let you kiss me then only one thing can happen—and it's frightening—because if you make a mistake—there's never any way out—

STEVE. It wouldn't be a mistake, Martha.

MARTHA. Men are always so sure. It's like a man to be sure. But a girl. She sees so many things that could happen—and she has just this one life—and when she's tired and lonely and hungry for something—maybe she lets the wrong person kiss her—and then she's a slave—to what he wants to do. All her life long.⁴²²

⁴²¹ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 83.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, 89.

When Martha says that a kiss means "only one thing can happen," she suggests just how limited a woman's options so often were. Marriage was the only outlet, the singular answer to passionate feelings. Given the inequalities inherent within this institution, a mistake in this regard could be catastrophic for a woman. Martha's sentiments in this moment are prophetic of the old Martha from Act I, who did in fact wind up a slave to her husband's whimsical nature.

In contrast to the virginal purity of Martha, Hallie serves to satirize Victorian mores through her nymphomaniacal hedonism. In the third scene of Act II when the adolescent church choir group attends the Fourth of July picnic, Hallie suggests going swimming, which is understood by her shocked companions to mean skinny dipping. When the others protest, Hallie boasts, "It's oceans of fun to go swimming."⁴²³ While Hallie was indignant at Martha for wearing bloomers in the earlier scene, she shows no compunction about stripping down in front of young men and teasing them with her sexuality. Anderson de-romanticizes American history by pointing out the hypocrisy of the Victorian era's prudery. That he does so with the Fourth of July as a backdrop symbolizes revolution and independence, but also a certain irreverence, sullyng America's holiest secular holiday with lasciviousness.

Anderson seems to employ swimming as a metaphor for sex. Hallie's claim that swimming is "oceans of fun" may have latent meaning considering the potential sexual implications of swimming nude. Later in the play, Martha, as a virtuous young woman, at first declines to go swimming and points out that, "Boys have the most fun, don't

⁴²³ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 79.

they?...they can swim and everything.”⁴²⁴ Her statement seems to stretch beyond aquatics. Martha feels compelled to guard her virtue, but her attitude shifts when she realizes that Stephen really loves her. Whereas Victorians emphasized marriage as a validation for desire, Anderson emphasizes idealized love as greater than any institutional commitment. Love renders swimming naked together (or engaging in sex?) permissible. Martha declares: “I know people said I was a prude and a blue-stockings—but now—now it’s decided—I could even go swimming with you.—I wouldn’t care if you saw me. I’d be proud.”⁴²⁵

Whereas for Martha, love was enough, Hallie and Mrs. Rutledge reflect the Victorian attitude that the institution of marriage was a necessity. Despite his efforts, Stephen has fallen in love with Martha all over again. In order to change the past, he instructs Hanus to return to the machine and manipulate the dials to stop the past from repeating itself. This manipulation allows Stephen to end up swimming nude with Hallie instead, provoking an angry response from the choir director. Her fury instantly vanishes, however, when she learns the two have agreed to marry: “But that makes it all so different!”⁴²⁶ Anderson depicts, once more, the absurdity of Victorian sexual mores.

Stephen’s manipulation of events has the desired effect. The first scene of Act III represents the results of his rewriting of history. Anderson shifts his focus to an examination of the relationship between capitalism and marriage. The scene shows the principal characters (Stephen, Hanus, and Martha) all married, financially successful, and utterly miserable. Stephen married Hallie as planned. Hanus ended up married to Mrs.

⁴²⁴ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 81.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 105-6.

Rutledge, which was not planned, but a consequence of the altered circumstances.⁴²⁷

Martha married Paul Reiger as her older self in the original 1937 had wished. Anderson makes two points throughout this scene. First, he emphasizes the destruction wrought by capitalist forces upon the individual character. Second, he shows that having more control over one's destiny does not inexorably lead to a happier existence.

Though Hanus has succumbed to marriage and the financial comforts of capitalism he chaffs under both conditions and fights to assert his individuality. Entering at the top of the scene wearing "a stiff collar," he sets the tone for Anderson's overall message that neither money nor marriage guarantees happiness. He also, however, upholds the sexist visions of gender in identifying women as tamers of men:

I don't know what the women do to a man to get him into one of them monkey-suits. Dress'em up like so many movie ushers and drive'em past a grand-stand full of butlers—in formation—every woman holding the reins of her own gelding. I couldn't stand it, so I left home. Not much home to leave, with that anthem-croaking old prissie hiding my tobacco behind the toilet-seat, but what there was of it I left. Looks difficult before you do it, but after you do it you wouldn't go back for money.⁴²⁸

Stephen has tried to help him learn to "play the game,"⁴²⁹ but Hanus refuses to adhere to the manners and deportment expected of a wealthy man. In lamenting American acquisitiveness, Thoreau asserted that most people would rather have fine clothes than "a sound conscience."⁴³⁰ Unlike those around him, Hanus struggles to maintain his conscience. He resists the trappings of wealth with all the vigor one would expect from

⁴²⁷ Mrs. Rutledge's marriage to Hanus stemmed, in part, from her loneliness as a widow. This aspect of the play is alluded to in a brief moment of Act II.

⁴²⁸ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 111.

⁴²⁹ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 113.

⁴³⁰ Thoreau, "Walden" in *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, 21.

the rugged individualist famously characterized by historian Frederick Jackson Turner or the Jonathan Yankee originated by Royall Tyler.

Wealth may have improved the quality of Stephen's physical surroundings, but this material gain has ruined his sense of self-worth. He finds himself in a loveless marriage to Hallie, who openly philanders with his business partner. Moreover, his previous sense of integrity hinged upon an unselfish devotion to creating inventions for the benefit of others with little to no gain for himself. His sense of industry in this new reality has been relinquished and in surrendering this identity he has sacrificed his personal rectitude. Money feeds the obsession to obtain more money. Stephen emphasizes these points when he complains: "I haven't been in the laboratory for ten years! I've done nothing but sit in an office figuring out how to out-smart somebody out of his money!"⁴³¹ Like Duffy and the two thugs from Act II, Stephen has become an opportunist who takes advantage of others' labor while producing nothing of his own.

Just how far Stephen's integrity has fallen becomes clear later in the scene. Duffy and Reiger previously placed stock in Hanus' name in order to avoid income tax. Now they want him to vote the stock in favor of a reorganization that will place all the money in their hands. When Hanus refuses, they threaten to have him declared mentally incompetent. Stephen at first defends his friend, but when he finds himself threatened as well, he too turns against Hanus. When Hanus remains steadfast in his refusal, Stephen demonstrates the full effect capitalism has taken upon his character:

Then you can go sit in a padded cell for a while! I wash my hands of you!
Maybe you think you're a little tin Jesus being crucified—all right, be a tin
Jesus and get yourself crucified!—What difference does it make? The world's

⁴³¹ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 113.

made up of crooks and thieves, and if you want to do business and eat regular meals you have to be one of them!⁴³²

Stephen's imagery of Pilate seems ironic in that the latter washed his hands out of innocence, whereas Stephen does so out of bitter disillusionment. If Hanus represents the sacrificial lamb, then Stephen's behavior is less Pilate and more Judas. Martha emphasizes his degeneration: "You're changed, Stephen. You're like the others, bitter and cruel. You've never done anything like this before.... I can remember a time when you'd have lost everything, and never given it a thought, before you'd betray Hanus."⁴³³ Anderson's depiction reflects Emerson's assertion, "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind."⁴³⁴ Once an industrious, self-reliant, affable inventor, Stephen is now little more than a thug in a stiff collar, devoid of any sense of individual integrity.

As Reiger and Duffy are about to force Hanus to sign the papers, Anderson portrays affluent capitalists as having a lack of culture despite their material wealth. Much like Duffy in Act II, Reiger demonstrates little imagination beyond the singular objective of profit. Moreover, Anderson adds lust to the consequences of extraordinary wealth. When Duffy complains that they are going to be late to dinner with a man who owns "a collection of Titians, whatever that is," Reiger shows both his ignorance and his lasciviousness in responding, "Blondes, probably."⁴³⁵ Reiger evinces the shallowness of his mind again when Martha attempts to appeal to his sensibilities by reciting a John

⁴³² Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 121.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴³⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in *Emerson: Political Writings* edited by Kenneth Sacks (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55-56.

⁴³⁵ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 121.

Dryden poem. Asked if he has ever read Dryden, Reiger can only say that he "heard of him in school." In response to Martha's recitation, her successful capitalist husband only remarks: "It rhymes."⁴³⁶ The beauty of poetry, art, and cultural expression are lost upon Reiger because greed and lust have overwhelmed all other senses.

Regretting the betrayal of his best friend, Stephen determines to return his world to its former state. He and Hanus agree to dust off the star-wagon one more time. The final scene of the play shows the two friends returning to their original reality twenty-four hours from when they first left, unsure of what, if anything, Martha will recall. To their surprise, Martha has vague recollections of the alternate reality, recalling it as a dream she had the night before. Her demeanor is much changed from the embittered old woman who appeared in the first act. She manifests genuine concern for Stephen and a new appreciation for Hanus.

Just how much Martha has changed becomes evident when Duffy puts in an unexpected visit. Having discovered Stephen's value in devising rubber formulae, he offers to make him a partner in the business. When her husband asks if he must accept, Martha replies straight to Duffy: "No. He doesn't want a partnership."⁴³⁷ Stephen does, however, accept a new position as a "consulting engineer" with a salary of 200 dollars a week for himself and 50 dollars a week for Hanus and, most importantly, with the understanding that "nobody gives me orders."⁴³⁸ Alfred S. Shivers argues that Stephen's acceptance of a significant raise after knowing that he was once "corrupted by wealth"

⁴³⁶ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 122.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 133-34.

represents a contradiction to the play's overall theme.⁴³⁹ However, Anderson affirms his protagonist's integrity as an individual because Stephen's financial windfall comes on his own terms. He receives a large pay increase, but he maintains his autonomy in the factory. Moreover, Anderson implies that the amount of profit makes a difference. Stephen was corrupted in an alternate reality of palatial mansions, servants, and tuxedos. His wealth eliminated his work in the laboratory and rendered him subservient to the machinations of his business partners and his philandering wife. A raise to two hundred dollars a week will not elevate him to robber-baron status, but merely make him comfortable and secure in his living. Capitalism, Anderson seems to say, is fine in moderation.

Martha's jubilant confirmation of love for her husband manifests the more conservative side of the playwright. Despite her argument for better treatment in Act I and for equality in Act II, she ends the play in blissful acceptance of her continued role as Stephen's domestic helpmate. She will benefit from his monetary raise, but does so only because he seeks it. Stephen's ideas about love, expressed in the first act, prevail in the third act. Arthur Tees notes that Anderson often portrayed women as philosophically inferior to men.⁴⁴⁰ Indeed, throughout the play, Anderson depicts Stephen as the teacher to his wife. Stephen's final speech ponders about the meaning of existence as Martha patiently listens, content in her now unwavering love. Though he exposes the injustice and absurdity of Victorian sexual mores and highlights the inequality of gender relations in marriage, Anderson affirms the status quo with regard to traditional matrimony. This

⁴³⁹ Alfred S. Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 124.

⁴⁴⁰ Arthur T. Tees, "Maxwell Anderson's Liberated Women," *North Dakota Quarterly* 41 (1974): 59.

affirmation supports Laurence Avery's assertion that "on the subject of love Anderson was sometimes sentimental."⁴⁴¹ George Abbott observed this propensity in the playwright firsthand: "On the surface Maxwell was a stolid, scholarly man, but inside he was all romance."⁴⁴² In the end, Stephen and Martha exemplify Anderson's sentimentalized bent toward idealized love, which reinforces traditional gender roles.

Anderson makes pointed observations at the end of the play regarding the American hunger for both nostalgic representations of the past and technological advancements of the future. For Depression era Americans, characterized by Susman as interminably concerned about the lack of control over their lives, Anderson argues that greater control over one's life may not be desirable. Happiness and contentment exist neither in returning to the past nor in investing oneself in the technological comforts of modern life. This philosophy manifests when Martha suggests that Stephen pursue the idea of the star-wagon further:

MARTHA. But suppose you build more of these so people can go anywhere—back and forth—and it changes the whole world?

STEPHEN. That's another thing I found out, Martha. It wouldn't change the world. Nothing changes it. Every new thing we find just makes it more mysterious. And maybe more terrible.

MARTHA. But the people would change.

STEPHEN. Do you think so? I don't. They'd just take it for granted after a while, and they'd be the same. All these new inventions come along, and we think the whole world will be different, but pretty soon they're on the market for a dollar down and two dollars a week, and people go on living as usual. And the inventors aren't any wiser than the others.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ Laurence G. Avery, "Maxwell Anderson: A Changing Attitude Toward Love," *Modern Drama* 10 (1967): 241.

⁴⁴² George Abbott, *Mister Abbott* (New York: Random House, 1963), 104.

⁴⁴³ Anderson, *Star-Wagon*, 136-37.

Brooks Atkinson interpreted Anderson's meaning at the end of the play thus: "There is no such thing as good and bad fortune...if we follow our natural instincts we are doing as well by ourselves as we can."⁴⁴⁴ Shivers agreed, asserting that Anderson was asking his audience "to believe that good and bad fortune do not exist and that everything is for the best."⁴⁴⁵ Shivers identifies this moment in the play as representative of "strikingly Emersonian ideas."⁴⁴⁶ However, Shivers fails to elaborate as to what he means by this assertion. Anderson's message at the conclusion of the play seems to echo Emerson's idea about humankind's failure to live in the present: "But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time."⁴⁴⁷ Anderson emphasizes felicity in the here and now, encouraging the idea that contentment is not found in losing oneself in nostalgia or in relying on technological marvels to usher in the future.

Despite Anderson's rebuttal of the nostalgia obsession, the fact that part of the play takes place in the past stirred the idea that it was, indeed, nostalgic and this aspect seems to have been *The Star Wagon's* greatest appeal. Gilbert Gabriel attested that the finest moments of the play occurred during the choir loft scene and the scene of the picnic the following day, both set in 1902. According to Gabriel, "these two scenes" evoked "absolute felicity" and were, by themselves, enough to render *The Star-Wagon* a

⁴⁴⁴ Brooks Atkinson, *New York Times*, 30 September 1937.

⁴⁴⁵ Alfred S. Shivers, *Maxwell Anderson* (Boston: Twayne, 1976), 124.

⁴⁴⁶ Shivers, 124.

⁴⁴⁷ Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in *Emerson: Political Writings*, 63.

hit play.⁴⁴⁸ Richard Watts, though finding the play “top-heavy with a pompous pseudo-intellectuality,”⁴⁴⁹ also acknowledged “much pleasant nostalgic sentiment of the horseless-carriage era.”⁴⁵⁰ Homer Woodbridge agreed that the play “owes much of its appeal to its recreation of the life and manners of a definite past.”⁴⁵¹ Grenville Vernon confirmed, “The best parts of the play are the scenes in the bicycle shop and at the choir rehearsal.”⁴⁵² This sampling of the critical reaction demonstrates the strong appeal of nostalgic depictions pervasive in America during the 1930s as well as the failure of many Americans to recognize the blatant inequalities associated with the Victorian era.

Several critics noted similarities in theme and convention between *The Star-Wagon* and other recent Broadway plays. Among the most often mentioned was Eugene O’Neill’s *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933), a play concerning young love and identity in America at the turn of the twentieth century. George Jean Nathan, a zealous defender and patron of O’Neill, suggested that Anderson was trying to “wrench O’Neill’s present standing as the foremost American dramatist away from him and lift the laurel from O’Neill’s brow to his own.”⁴⁵³ As Nathan suggested, Anderson’s standing among playwrights in the 1930s was often viewed in the same light as O’Neill’s. Thus it seems reasonable if not inevitable that critics would make comparisons between *Ah, Wilderness!* and *The Star-Wagon*. Both plays involve reflections of the past. Both have settings during the Fourth of July near the turn of the twentieth century. Both also depict the mores attached to intimate relationships between men and women. Unlike Anderson, however, O’Neill

⁴⁴⁸ Gilbert W. Gabriel, “Time and Time Again,” *Stage* 15 (1937): 55.

⁴⁴⁹ Richard Watts, Jr., *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 September 1937.

⁴⁵⁰ Richard Watts, Jr., *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 October 1937.

⁴⁵¹ Homer Woodbridge, “Maxwell Anderson,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 44 (1945): 65.

⁴⁵² Grenville Vernon, *Commonweal* 26 (1937): 580.

⁴⁵³ George Jean Nathan, *Scribner’s* 102 (1937): 53.

does not delve into the metaphysical. Rather, he keeps the entire action of his play in 1906. The principal conflict centers on the adolescent Richard Miller's struggle between the idealized love he feels for Muriel and the reality of a society still steeped in Victorian prudery. O'Neill contrasts idealized love with mere carnal pleasure through Richard's encounter with a prostitute. The young man ultimately rejects lustful temptation in favor of the idealized virgin, Muriel.⁴⁵⁴

The choice Richard must make between Muriel and the prostitute is similar to the choice Stephen Minch must make between the virginal Martha and the lascivious Hallie. Like O'Neill, Anderson defends the ideal and thus the status quo. However, O'Neill's commentary on American institutions is limited by the fact that the audience never learns what becomes of Richard and Muriel. The play ends with them both young and in love. The relationship between Richard's parents represents a traditional patriarchal union, so perhaps O'Neill expects the audience to view his two young lovers in this light. Furthermore, the connection between marriage and capitalism seems nonexistent in *Ah, Wilderness!* Richard is the son of a newspaper editor and is about to head off to Yale where his brother also attended school. Thus, Richard represents a higher class and money would seem to pose little impediment to marrying Muriel. By contrast, Anderson connects marriage with capitalism to portray the detriment each institution has upon the other and depicts the results of young love when it grows old.

One of the more interesting facets of critical and scholarly reactions to *The Star-Wagon* is the absence of attention given to Anderson's social critiques. Most critics who reviewed the play in 1937 focused on the metaphysical devices and what they viewed as

⁴⁵⁴ Eugene O'Neill, *Ah, Wilderness!* (New York: Random House, 1933).

sentimentalized depictions of the past. Likewise, scholars have tended to write the play off as anomalous to Anderson's work or as being too superficial for serious attention. By 1937, Anderson had solidified his reputation with dramatic verse to such a degree that this prosaic time travel fantasy prompted John Mason Brown to comment that Anderson's "name was on the program, but he was missing in his play."⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, some critics found the play difficult to categorize. Edith J.R. Isaacs noted that *The Star-Wagon* "does not fit easily into any of the ordinary categories." It is not really a "prose comedy" because it bears "a poet's approach" and although it contains "the gayest material...yet the idea behind it is serious."⁴⁵⁶ Despite Isaacs' allusion to seriousness, most scholars failed to recognize the social critiques within the play. Scholar Allan G. Halline, for example, summed up the drama's theme of trying to improve life by living it over again as merely "an expression of our chronic dissatisfaction."⁴⁵⁷ Even Anderson's own assessment of the play was dismissive. Years later he referred to his 1937 hit as just "another potboiler."⁴⁵⁸

In *The Star-Wagon*, Anderson places before the audience an investigation of American institutions. He uses the present, the past, and an alternate reality in order to pose complex questions regarding the relationships between men and women within the capitalist system. He de-romanticizes the past by challenging sexual mores, yet supports traditional roles of idealized love. He portrays the oppressed position of women, yet affirms the status quo regarding marriage. He assails capitalist greed, yet allows his

⁴⁵⁵ John Mason Brown, *Two on the Aisle* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1938), 155.

⁴⁵⁶ Edith J.R. Isaacs, "Giants Win, Cubs Lose: Broadway in Review," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 21 (1937): 838-839.

⁴⁵⁷ Allan G. Halline, "Maxwell Anderson's Dramatic Theory," *American Literature* 16 (1944): 76.

⁴⁵⁸ Maxwell Anderson, "A Confession," *New York Times*, 5 December 1954.

protagonist a more comfortable salary in the end. As with many Anderson plays, answers do not come easy and issues are often fraught with complexity. His ideas about life as depicted in *The Star-Wagon* are an extension of the transcendental philosophies of Emerson and Thoreau in that the individual takes precedence over, but remains in conflict with institutionalized mores and clever technological innovations. Twenty-first century Americans continue to be inundated with advances in computer and information technology while still grappling with old traditions such as marriage and capitalist competition. *The Star-Wagon* offers significant commentary that deepens our understanding not merely of American culture in 1937, but of intellectual and philosophical traditions that have pervaded the cultural heritage of the United States for over two hundred years.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

These three plays portray a culture struggling with its identity. In 1927, Americans were hotly debating the “marriage crisis;” the matrimonial institution and the prevailing Protestant culture that supported it were both under fire. By 1933, the fervor over marriage receded as the United States plunged into an economic cataclysm. By 1937, the economic calamity remained a potent force and that combined with the threat of war sent many Americans scurrying after sentimental depictions of the past. Within the vortex of so much social upheaval, America seemed trapped between a reaffirmation of its cultural values and threats of a complete reconstruction of some of its key institutions. Close readings of these three dramas reveal how they contributed to these cultural debates, challenging, reshaping and extending the ideas and philosophies associated with American institutions, particularly those related to gender ideology and marriage, capitalism and republicanism, and religion.

The plays offer three distinct critiques of gender ideology, each of which reflects the cultural moment of the time the play was produced. *Saturday’s Children* de-sentimentalizes marriage by revealing the tyranny imposed by the institution, particularly the notion of the woman submitting to domestic duties while the man pursues a career. The play also de-romanticizes motherhood and paternity as well as exposing the emotional isolation fostered by an adherence to the Victorian standard of separate gendered spheres. *Saturday’s Children* was written near the height of the marriage debate

of the 1920s. The sheer number of popular plays appearing at the time reflects the significance of the conflict. However, unlike such offerings as *The First Year*, *Anna Christie*, and *They Knew What They Wanted*, *Saturday's Children* does not attempt to placate the status quo with a traditional happy ending. This aspect renders the play not only subversive for its time, but also perhaps more relevant to the twenty-first century than its contemporaries. As Americans continue the dialogue over marriage and how it is to be defined, *Saturday's Children* offers us a glimpse into the evolution of this American institution, which may offer insight into current discourses on the subject of matrimony.

While *Both Your Houses* offers little in regard to portrayals of marriage, the very absence of portrayals of matrimony suggests the temper of the cultural moment. By 1933, Americans were perhaps more concerned with survival than the nuances of defining a love relationship. However, the play does offer interesting glimpses of gender ideology at the time. Because *Both Your Houses* addresses concerns at the national rather than the domestic level, the subordination of the few women that are present in the play suggests the continued male dominance at the seat of political power. The play depicts male dominance as corrupt and incompetent, but defends Victorian convention in portraying the one female congressional member as morally superior to most of her male colleagues. However, the play also subverts the status quo by showing a woman in a politically powerful position. Like *Saturday's Children*, *Both Your Houses* offers a glimpse of evolution, in this case, of the American political institution. Though men continue to dominate the political spectrum, the presence of women has grown

markedly from what it was in 1933. Though limited in scope, *Both Your Houses* may be instructive in evaluating the nature of the power dynamic between men and women in the United States.

The Star-Wagon provides a depiction of marriage and gender ideology decidedly different from *Saturday's Children* and, in this way, reflects the transitory nature of American culture. By 1937, Americans had endured eight years of the Great Depression with no end in sight and were beginning to witness the possibility of another global war. *The Star-Wagon* played into the public's desire for nostalgia, but unlike other nostalgic offerings of the era, such as *Ah, Wilderness!* and *Our Town*, Anderson's play attempts to de-sentimentalize the past, presenting critiques of Victorian mores and gender ideology. Young Martha's argument for feminine equality in Act II echoes Bobby's desire for independence in *Saturday's Children*. Likewise, Hanus's satirizing of sexuality seems as iconoclastic as Mr. Halevy's advising his daughter to have her affair and get out. *The Star-Wagon* loses its radical potential, however, in its treatment of marriage. Old Martha's complaints of mistreatment in Act I mimic Bobby's frustrations with married life. But Martha's affirmation of her former life in the end, and the play's romantic vision of traditional marriage stand in stark contrast to the message in *Saturday's Children*. *The Star-Wagon* reflects a cultural moment when Americans, perhaps, needed solidarity and this solidarity was often sought in confirming the value of traditional institutions in spite of their restrictions. The play also offers insight into how Americans have, historically, responded to crises that strike at the national character and how that process may have evolved into the twenty-first century.

The nature of the critiques of capitalism is, unlike those of gender ideology, more consistent throughout each play. Though *Saturday's Children* is, arguably, more about the inequalities supported by gender ideology and marriage, the capitalist system intermingles with these institutions to solidify said inequalities. Emma Goldman, for example, argued, "Marriage is primarily an economic arrangement," and that the woman "pays for it with her name, her privacy, her self-respect, her very life," while the husband suffers less personally, but "feels his chains more in an economic sense."⁴⁵⁹ *Saturday's Children* accurately reflects Goldman's conception of the interaction of capitalism and marriage. Rims is expected to support Bobby, but the cost of living combined with an inadequate income renders such an idea impossible. Bobby, for her part, wants to work, but her desire is inhibited by a male dominated capitalist workforce that frowns upon married women holding jobs. Here again, *Saturday's Children* demonstrates a step in the evolution of women, this time of the working woman. Twenty-first century women still contend with career limitations, such as the proverbial glass-ceiling, that are perpetuated by male supremacy in the capitalist system.

Both Your Houses presents diverse opinions on capitalism and republican government. The play's critique is couched in terms of the debate over Hamiltonian centralized power versus the Jeffersonian ideal of limited governmental influence, reflecting the Founding Fathers' concern over balancing individual and governmental interests. This balance is a delicate one, demanding compromise across a diverse population of congressional representatives. Sol makes the case for *laissez-faire*

⁴⁵⁹ Emma Goldman, "Marriage and Love," in *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader*, edited by Alix Kates Shulman (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1998), 205.

capitalist competition, but the play as a whole illuminates the dangers involved in such a philosophy. In the end, McClean presents not a call for destruction, but a warning that destruction will come if the members fail to right the ship. *Both Your Houses* subverts the economic and moral status quo, but not American political tradition. McClean's promise to appeal to the voters speaks to his belief in the process. Gray's work at compromising reflects the effort of the American founders, who had to compromise throughout the American Revolution and beyond in order to bring the republic into being. The play seems more in line with Jefferson's limited government than Hamilton's centralized control, but the end is left for the audience member/voter to determine which they will accept. Though several critics and even Anderson himself felt the play was delayed to the point of irrelevance, the perpetuation of government corruption since 1933 as well as the perennial debate over lobbyist influence in Washington, D.C. provides evidence for the continued relevance of *Both Your Houses*.

Whereas *Saturday's Children* reveals the interconnection between capitalism and gender ideology and *Both Your Houses* mixes republicanism into the critique, *The Star-Wagon* renders some of the most pointed, singular criticisms of America's capitalist culture. In this play, industrial tycoons are shallow-minded, immoral, money-grubbing tyrants who bear striking mental similarities to common thieves. *The Star-Wagon* demonstrates the exploitation of workers by bosses, giving it, perhaps, a slightly Marxist tint. However, the play affirms capitalism in the end with Stephen accepting a significant raise, but only after he refuses a partnership and guarantees his autonomy in the laboratory.

Capitalism is merely a system. This system can work for good or ill depending on the initiative of the individual. In a sense, *The Star-Wagon* defends capitalism because it allows the individual to decide his or her own success.

Critiques of the prevailing Protestant religion occur much more subtly in the plays. There are a few specific references in *Both Your Houses* and *The Star-Wagon*. However, the significant evaluations of religion occur with little reference to religious imagery. These evaluations pertain to the moral compass present in each play. That Bobby winds up impoverished and, at least in the eyes of the prevailing culture, somewhat disgraced could be read as a critique of unreasonable punishment for “sin.” Likewise, in *The Star-Wagon*, Martha’s anxiety over allowing Stephen to touch or kiss her comments upon the restrictiveness of the religious moral code that dominated at the time. In *Both Your Houses*, Sol likens Congress to a temple and suggests those who have succumbed to greed have corrupted that temple. Moreover, each play contains its messiah, a character who, similar to Jesus Christ, stands up to the institutional conventions and suffers consequences as a result. That Bobby holds her ground despite her reduced material circumstances and loneliness renders her a feminist messiah of sorts. McClean’s conviction to restore the doctrine of democracy only to find himself thoroughly defeated by the “money changers” echoes the messianic ideal. Stephen Minch represents a slight departure from the other two. Minch achieves change only to discover himself closer to hell than heaven. In response, he resurrects himself (in a manner of speaking) and returns to his former life with fortified conviction in his former values.

The insistent theme throughout each play is reform, and in this theme lies the core of the American self. Each play introduces problems, confronts unpleasant realities, and leaves the audience/reader with the conviction that some change is desirable. As Warren Susman has asserted, “The American is most characteristically a reformer and his history a series of reforms.”⁴⁶⁰ Reform is witnessed throughout American history, yet Americans often seem wary about straying too far from convention too quickly. The American Revolution was triggered by a fervent desire to break away from the tradition of monarchial despotism, but resulted in a government markedly similar in many ways to the British system before it. In the nineteenth century, the Emersonian branch of American Transcendentalism challenged traditional Protestant thinking in effort to promote the integrity of the individual, but retained key aspects of religious thinking. Anderson’s incorporation of religious concepts in these three plays reflects a similar evolution. The playwright, though himself an atheist, would later defend Christianity as a desirable moral system in alliance with a social system of individual liberty.⁴⁶¹ Similar to the evolution of religious influence, Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis conceptualized the development of the American self as a series of reforms as the frontier settler moved slowly away from European influenced and became, by necessity, slowly Americanized. It is worth noting that Turner counted Emerson as among his strongest influences.⁴⁶² What we find in these events and philosophies is a pervasive desire to move forward and create better values out of existing values. As historians and

⁴⁶⁰ Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 86.

⁴⁶¹ Maxwell Anderson, Preface to *Journey to Jerusalem* (Washington: Anderson House, 1940), vii.

⁴⁶² Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 10.

disgruntled revolutionaries have long noted, with rare exceptions, the American self tends to seek slow evolution rather than violent revolution. These three plays represent a manifestation of the incessant American quest for betterment toward a more perfect society.

All three of these plays represent a link in the chain of the American self during a critical time in its evolution from Victorian to modern American society. *Saturday's Children* exposes the folly of strict adherence to marital traditions in ways that may inspire more meaningful love relationships, both within and without marriage. *Both Your Houses* reminds Americans of the imperfections of their political and economic systems, but declines to replace those systems, instead exposing uncomfortable realities in an effort to encourage action in the spirit of republicanism rather than in spite of it. *The Star-Wagon* rejects sentimental notions of the past by recognizing the inequalities of the early twentieth century and emphasizes that going backward is rarely an acceptable answer to personal or social complaints. Americans, as inherent and dogged reformers, move forward, perhaps slowly, but forward all the same. While these three plays demonstrate important points as to how American culture was changing in 1927, 1933, and 1937, they also demonstrate to twenty-first century Americans where they came from.

This study suggests that these plays, especially *Saturday's Children* and *The Star-Wagon*, may prove fruitful subjects for further feminist analysis. *Saturday's Children* extends the idea of the American individualist to a woman, breaking with the traditional conception of the rugged individualist man. While their female protagonists do not themselves adopt radical solutions to gender inequities both plays contribute to the

cultural debate at the time over a woman's place in society and might be usefully considered in relation to better known "new woman" plays of the era by writers like Susan Glaspell and Rachel Crothers. Likewise, *Both Your Houses* merits further attention for what it offers in its connection to America's founding principles as well as to the ongoing debate over American political conceptions and conduct.

Further research into Anderson's plays need not be limited to these three plays. Many of the playwright's dramas tackle American social institutions, yet have received minimal attention for their cultural critiques. *The Wingless Victory*, for example, grapples with issues such as miscegenation, racism, gender inequality, marriage, capitalism, and the prevailing Protestant culture, yet has not gained a great deal of scholarship exploring these institutions. Similarly, *Valley Forge* expresses ideas of republicanism and American political thought. Verse dramas like *High Tor*, which Donald Boughton identified as "a belated contribution to American Transcendentalism,"⁴⁶³ fell outside the parameters of this study, but still suggest that Anderson's contribution to the incessant reformation of the American self has not been fully appreciated or explored.

Maxwell Anderson was American theatre's version of the gadfly. Buzzing around, prodding, stinging, and then whisking away, leaving the reader/audience member to ponder the significance of their intellectual wounds. But Anderson's plays seldom wound culture with intent to kill it or denigrate it beyond reason. Rather, the venom in his plays provokes enough discomfort for his audience to stop and consider the sting. In

⁴⁶³ Donald J. Boughton, "The Broadway Plays of Maxwell Anderson" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1975), 166.

this sense, Anderson stands apart from his contemporaries who typically responded to the cultural crises surrounding them by either promoting radical solutions to or direct affirmations of the status quo. As the future playwright proclaimed in his defense of the Whittier College student imprisoned for conscientiously objecting to service in World War I: “It is a weak and shaky government that cannot stand criticism, and it is a weak and shaky intellect that never has any criticism to offer.”⁴⁶⁴ The criticism in these three plays fortify the intellect and spur the continued reform of the American self.

⁴⁶⁴ Quoted in Alfred S. Shivers, *The Life of Maxwell Anderson* (New York: Stein and Day, 1983), 56.

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VITA

Fonzie D. Geary II was born on 26 May 1977 in Louisville, Kentucky. His first exposure to theatre came at age ten, playing the role of Linus in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. After some years of theatrical dormancy, his sophomore year of high school found him in the English class of Robert Crabtree, who required his students at the end of the year to form groups to write and perform their own short plays. Fonzie was voted Best Actor by his peers, an award formally known as the *Wilbur*. This moment ignited a theatrical fire that never died. Fonzie performed in school productions the next two years. After graduating from Pleasure Ridge Park High School in Louisville in 1995, he attended Eastern Kentucky University, where he majored in psychology. While not intending to make theatre a career, he nonetheless auditioned for shows and garnered the part of Rosencrantz in *Hamlet* his first semester. He continued auditioning and working, which culminated in his adding a second major in theatre arts. He graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Science in 2000. He continued on at Eastern Kentucky, earning a Master of Science in clinical psychology in 2002. Fonzie performed in ten productions during his time at ECU, including his graduate years in psychology. Among the most significant turning points in his life was playing the role of William Reach in Lee Blessing's *Down the Road* at ECU in 2000, which planted the seeds of desire to make theatre a real career. After a brief interval as a psychotherapist followed by a period of soul-searching, Fonzie determined to return to academia to pursue graduate study in theatre arts. He was accepted at the University of Kentucky in 2004 and earned a Master of Arts two years later. It was while at UK that he first developed an interest in

Anderson's work, having read *What Price Glory* for a seminar course on plays of war. Not his favorite playwright by any means, Fonzie took up Anderson more out of curiosity. His master's thesis, "Maxwell Anderson's Changing Protagonists," centered on *Both Your Houses* and the evolution of the playwright's political thinking. Following his stint at UK, Fonzie moved to Columbia to begin his doctoral study. Near the end of his first semester at the University of Missouri, he discovered that the love of his life, Laura Noel Heldermon, was living right next door. They were engaged on 2 December 2007 and Miss Heldermon became Mrs. Geary on 8 August 2009. While Fonzie was directing a production of Anderson's *Saturday's Children* for MU's main stage the following year, the couple learned they would soon have an addition. Fonzie Delbert Geary III was born on 29 November 2010. To date, Fonzie has performed in thirty productions and directed three others. He also directed a concert reading of Romulus Linney's *Childe Byron* in 2008, working personally with Mr. Linney, who was in residence at the University of Missouri. As a playwright, he has written several ten-minute, one act, and full length plays and screenplays. He was twice a regional finalist in the ten-minute play competition at the Region V Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KC/ACTF) and once a KC/ACTF Ten-Minute Play National Semi-Finalist. As a scholar, he has presented his research on Anderson at, among other locales, the 2005 *Art, Faith, and Social Justice Conference* at Marquette University and the 2010 *International Conference on American Drama* at Kean University. Upon the completion of his doctorate, Fonzie planned to pursue a career as a teacher, an artist, and, perhaps, a scholar.