CHAPTER – IV

INTERLOCKING & INTERACTIVE DEVISER OF THEMES
The plot of every work of art revolves around a family and society. In depicting the life of people in families in society, the author introduces innumerable characters. These characters belong to different sections of the society. The background of a family is the first major thing that influences the characters. In showing the family relationships the authors have the tendency to introduce the relationships between siblings, mother and child, father and child, husband and wife and also about the extended family.

Family is the first place where one can learn to live and make adjustments by means of identifying with models, accepting values, developing affection and eventually distinguishing one’s own values and goals. It is within the family group that everyone’s behaviour, ideas, thoughts, emotions, feelings and fantasies affect the lives of those with whom they live with. The family serves as the socialisation agent, provider of care and model for invitation and identification.

In projecting the familial relationships the writers generally pinpoint the necessity of understanding and harmony among the family members and their adherents to religion or caste and following of culture, regardless of
whether it is a joint family or a nucleus. In every family the members have to share their joys, sorrows and anxieties of their family life. When there is unity among the members of the family, it builds up strong relationship, sustains family relationship and heals all the bitter experiences through sense of love, devotion and loyalty. The power of family love leads to reunion and healthy atmosphere in a family.

Wilder’s major themes may be roughly classified into two interlocking and interacting groups. Both sets of themes run throughout his works, yet some development is evident. In the first group of themes, Wilder attempts to define the problem of faith. Belief in something outside oneself is necessary, as Wilder sees it, for man’s enjoyment of, and proper participation in, living. Life as it must be lived is a mixture of good and evil, ugliness and beauty, bright and dark, and these opposites overlap and interweave to the extent that one is not able to understand or define them.

Furthermore, good often comes from that which is not good, and evil may arise from the best intentions. Human beings are at the mercy of paradox and contradiction, and in order to derive the fullest enjoyment from life they must be able to recognize and accept the confusion inherent in the nature of life. Only as one learns to live with paradox may he come to understand the overall beauty and joy of living. In order, however, to be able to struggle with the contradictory problems present in life, Wilder feels that man needs to have some assurance that the effort is worth making. Reasoning in terms of the temporal and the eternal, Wilder visualizes mortal life as being a very small part of a vast whole which is, in some way, undying. The world has meaning only as it is a part of a Mystery; only as it fulfills its function in a larger whole
can life be made aware of the existence of an Unknown through the fact that all
men are temporal creatures.

Wilder feels there is a definite relation between chance and destiny, although man is not able to determine it. Moreover, some parts of people are indestructible, such as the great ideas of man which do not die but which permeate the atmosphere. Also there is something present within the individual which is eternal even in his temporal state. In fact, the trivial and the divine are inextricably mixed until after death, when, through a purgation of some sort, man loses his earthly, temporal parts and merges with the eternal. Faith in something beyond himself, then, is necessary for man to feel that the constant struggle with the paradoxes of life is worth-while. Those who best know how to live, according to Wilder, are those who are aware of the strange mixture of joy and sorrow and yet are able to find living a fascinating experience.

As the temporal is to the eternal, so, on a smaller scale, the individual is to humanity. The second group of themes which Wilder employs around relation of man to man, both at the individual level and at the level of one man to the larger whole of mankind. The underlying and ever-present stress in Wilder’s concept of the proper relation of man to man is placed upon the necessity for forgetting self. Selfishness narrows the individual’s vision so much that he is unable to perceive the manifestations of the eternal, and life becomes a maze of confusion and misery. In Wilder’s estimation, the miser is selfish and thus is unhappy and afraid. Likewise the person who hates, the person, that is, who is unable to transcend himself for the good of others, is a lonely, inverted individual frustrated by living. Furthermore, selfishness often leads to the perverse belief that liberty means the right to do as one pleases;
Wilder is careful to show that liberty really involves an overwhelming amount of responsibility on the parts of the individual. The answer to selfishness as Wilder sees it is a love of other people which exists only because it is good in itself rather than from a need to obtain love in return. Such transcending love is one important way in which the eternal is manifested in man’s temporal life, and may exist at the individual level or may be involved in the individual’s acceptance of all of mankind. Some of the selfish qualities which cloud love for individuals are, according to Wilder, lust, pride, and self-pity; once all limitations of self are conquered, however, love has the power to erase mistakes and forgive sins. In the earlier works, Wilder deals primarily with love at the individual level. In the later works, however, particularly in the plays, Wilder is most concerned with the individual’s recognition of his place in the whole of mankind, in somewhat of an extension of the selfless love man should feel for individuals. Acceptance of mankind involves a recognition of the individual’s unimportance, and such a recognition is not readily made by a person whose primary concern is with self.

Wilder stresses his belief that the individual should be aware of a vital connection to humanity by censuring persons who have attempted to withdraw in some way from the human race. In an effort to avoid significant contact with people, the individual avoids significant contact with life and therefore misses the importance of living. Those who seek to withdraw from the mainstream of humanity attach too much value to themselves as individuals; they do not realize that they are inescapably bound to mankind by problems and joys which are the common property of all. Because they deny their connection with life, they cannot be aware of the aspects of the eternal
which appear in curious conjunction with the temporal. Wilder emphasizes the
ing importance of history particularly in his later works, repeatedly reminding his
readers that they, as individuals, are a part of the larger whole of humanity, and
that today is not essentially different from any other age of human history.

Wilder’s concept of the proper relation between man and man,
whether on the individual level or on the broader level of mankind, is a type of
love which transcends self, existing only because it is good in itself and not
from any expectation of return. Furthermore, to Wilder this type of love
between human beings is one of the ways the eternal is manifested in temporal
surroundings. This selfless love, then, is one way people are made aware of an
existence far vaster than their own, and thus the two commandments of Wilder
work interchangeably and inextricably together.

Love is one way for one to know the eternal within himself, and it is
the most important element in the relationship of man to man, linking man not
only to others who are contemporary with him but also to all ages and all times.

Love to Wilder must be rid of all taint of selfishness and personal
gain. The characters in Wilder’s works who come to realize the meaning of
love must of necessity possess a kind of magnanimity. Certain lesser types of
love are too narrow to admit the necessary self-sacrifice without demanding
some benefit in return. One of the most selfish kinds of love to Wilder is love
as passion, that is, love which is built solely on a physical foundation.

It must be remembered that to Wilder, love as passion is an
expression of self-interest which needs to undergo servitude, a hatred of itself,
and other forms of purgation before it becomes really worthy love.
Lust and pride, then, are two specific forms of self-interest by which Wilder negatively illustrates his theory of selfless love. Self-pity stemming from overwhelming love is another form, and that this has no place in the highest kind of love.

One further example of love at first stunted by self-pity but later growing into the richness of loving for its own sake is found in the one-act play *Love and How to Cure It*. In this case, contrary to Esteban, the protagonist plans suicide largely as a means of self-dramatization, as an attention-getting device. A college student loves a fifteen-year-old girl who refuses to respond to him at all. She is certain he plans to kill her for rejecting him, and when he comes to the theatre in which she is practicing her dancing, Linda and her aunt and a comedian friend are ready for him. In the course of the evening, the comedian, Joey, suffixes a lengthy discussion about his dead wife with these words: “I read in the papers about people who shoot the persons they love… what is it but that they want to be 'noticed', noticed even if they must shoot to get noticed? It’s themselves, it’s themselves they love.” (*The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act* 85-86).

In a few minutes, the student tells Linda: What he said is true. I want to be noticed… I wish I could prove to you that I’d do anything for you… I’ve been waiting at that corner for hours…

And I’d planned, Linda, to prove that I couldn’t live without you… and if you were going to be cold and… didn’t like me, Linda, I was going to short myself right
Loving, should be done for its own sake, and not selfishly with a desire to benefit from it. Expressions of self-interest have no place in the type of love he considers to be worthiest. Such love is so intense that it is felt to contain an element of divinity, to be a revelation of eternity. In this way love is very closely akin to faith, therefore, and, in fact, for some of Wilder’s characters, it becomes the whole meaning of their lives, such as in the life of the Abbess.

The concept of love and the concept of faith for Wilder are two aspects of a unified philosophy of life, the one pertaining more explicitly to relations between men and the other to the relation of men to something beyond themselves; both aspects, however, overlap and contain many of the same elements. An illustration of this close kinship is found in Wilder’s belief that love has power to erase mistakes and forgive sins.

In the one-act play *Pullman Car Hiawatha* Harriet expresses the basic concept of love. She has just died, and two angels have come for her. She does not wish to go, and the angels whisper to her. She replies:

I’m ashamed to come with you... I haven’t done any thing with my life. Worse than that: I was angry and sullen. I never realized anything. I don’t dare go a step in such a place.

"They whisper to her again". But it’s not possible to forgive such things. I don’t want to be
forgiven so easily. I want to be punished for it all... I want to be freed of all that – by punishment. I want to be new.

"They whisper to her". "She puts her feet slowly on the ground". But no one else could be punished for me… I don’t Ask anyone to be punished for me... (*The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act* 66-67).

To one familiar with the Christian tradition, it is obvious that in this case divine love was the motive for sparing her the consequences of her own mistakes; in the two previous illustrations, however, it was not exclusively divine love, but rather the mixture of the human and divine elements which constitutes the type of love Wilder proclaims.

Selfishness is the cancer of human love, preventing it from attaining the quality of greatness necessary to allow its participants some bit of insight into the realm of divinity. Extreme selfishness will often result in hatred, which Wilder sees as a perverse love. For example, when Henry Antrobus returns from the war, he tells Sabina that no one cares about him. She replies that if he would be lovable, people would love him. Henry assures her that he does not want anyone’s love:

SAB: “Then stop talking about it all the time.”

HEN: “I never talk about it. The last thing I want is anybody to pay any attention to me.”
SAB: “I can hear it behind every word you say.”

HEN: “I want everybody to hate me.”

SAB: “Yes, you’ve decided that’s second best, but it’s still the same thing.” (*Three Plays*, P.127).

Another type of person Wilder deals with is the man who hates in that he, too, is more interested in self than in others. Thus the miser is selfish and selfishness is guaranteed to destroy man’s recognition that the temporal is significant only through its connection with the eternal; selfishness tends to make men see themselves as all-important. In a soliloquy by Mrs. Levi, indirect reference is made to the miser Vandergelder:

Yes, we’re all fools and we’re all in danger of destroying the world with our folly. But the surest way to keep us out of harm is to give us the four or five human pleasures that are our right in the world, --- and that takes a little money!

Money, I’ve always felt, money --- pardon my expression - is like manure; it’s not worth a thing unless it’s spread about encouraging young things to grow. (*Three Plays* 221-222).
One who hoards money is selfish, and because he is selfish, he is unhappy. For the miser, the rich man, is afraid of the future, as well as of the world around him.

Living, in fear is not conducive to finding life beautiful, and therefore it is destructive, for wilder’s philosophy demands that man recognize the goodness inherent in living.

To Wilder the race for wealth is a sign of fear and mistrust. One who accumulates money is selfish in the sense that he is afraid, and being afraid, is more concerned with himself than with the condition of others. Greed is a form of selfishness along with lust, pride, self-despair, and hate.

Another form of selfishness is the refusal to recognize the rights of others. Wilder handles this problem through a consideration of personal liberty. Individual liberty is not a free-for-all. It involves, for one thing, a recognition of personal responsibility for the rights of others. Antrobus is aware of this when he tells Henry:

How can you make a world for people to live in, unless you’ve first put order in yourself? Mark my words: I shall continue fighting you until my last breath as long as you mix up your idea of liberty with your idea of hogging everything for yourself… You and I want the same thing; but until you think of it as something that everyone has a right to, you are my deadly enemy and I will destroy you. (*Three Plays* 131).
Carrying this point one step further, the refusal to recognize responsibility in general is a form of selfishness. A sense of individual responsibility will produce order in the individual, and an ordered society can be had only through responsible individuals. Wilder illustrates the need for order in the individual when he includes a passage from Plato at the end of *The Skin of Our Teeth*:

“Then tell me, O Critias, how will a man choose the ruler that shall rule over him? Will he not choose a man who has first established order in himself, knowing that any decision that has its spring from anger or pride or vanity can be multiplied a thousand fold in its effects upon the citizens? (*Three Plays* 136).

Anger, pride, and vanity are obvious forms of selfishness; the passage would seem to imply that order in the individual demands the control of selfish impulses.

Man struggles with selfish impulses and must overcome them as much as possible. An acceptance of responsibility for oneself is another step in the direction of the selflessness necessary for an understanding of life. By his concept of personal liberty, Wilder does not imply that there should be disorder or greediness; always he stresses the unselfish recognition of a need for order in the individual and thus in society.

If each person were on an island to himself, the question of selfishness would perhaps not be so pertinent. But because Wilder visualizes the individual as belonging to mankind, the sense of selfness must be sacrificed
to the larger sense of membership in a group called humanity. Part of the struggle of living arises from the individuals' frustration when his desires clash with those of another person. People are one thing that have to be faced; one cannot withdraw from humanity. Although to the alert individual such an observation is commonplace, some types of people do attempt to withdraw. Wilder severely criticizes this attempt, for in his eyes it is an act of selfishness. In Wilder’s philosophy, it is not merely expedient that men learn to live among others; it is their duty to accept the responsibility of being human and thereby coping with life. The paradox in Wilder is always present: it is only through being submerged in the temporal that one may catch glimpses of the eternal, and faith in something beyond the glimpses of the eternal, and faith in something beyond the temporal is necessary for one to find any meaning in the mass of interwoven opposites which is life. One is not allowed to seek refuge from life.

The desire to escape arises from a multiplicity of attitudes, but it is being selfish to feel that one’s troubles are more complex than other people’s. Escape to Wilder is the epitome of cowardice; people have a duty as human beings to accept and recognize their humanity, thereby subordinating their individual drives to the greater group, mankind. Mrs. Levi expounds on the folly of isolation:

Vandergelder’s never tired of saying most of the people in the world are fools, and in a way he’s right, isn’t he?... But there comes a moment in everybody’s life when he must decide whether he’ll live
among human beings or not-a fool among fools or a fool alone.

As for me, I’ve decided to live among them. I wasn’t always so. After my husband’s death I retired into myself. Yes, in the evenings, I’d put out the cat, and I’d lock the door, and I’d make myself a little run toddy; and before I went to bed I’d say a little prayer, thanking God that I was independent—that no one else’s life was mixed up with mine. And when ten o’clock sounded from Trinity Church tower, I fell off to sleep and I was a perfectly contented woman. And one night, after two years of this, an oak leaf fell out of my Bible. I had placed it there on the day my husband asked me to marry him; a perfectly good oak leaf—but without color and without life. And suddenly I realized that for a long time I had not shed one tear; nor had I been filled with the wonderful hope that something or other would turn out well. I saw that I was like that oak leaf, and on that night I decided to rejoin the human race. (Three Plays, P.221).

There is a tendency in Wilder’s early works to deal with the problem of love between individuals; such love must be selfless, transcending the individual and thereby participating in the eternal. In his later works, it is not love between individuals which concerns Wilder primarily, but love between the individual and historical mankind. This, too, requires selflessness. Even
more than does love between individuals, an acceptance of and love for men of all times demands that love be for its own sake instead of for reciprocation. For the individual to subject his sense of his own importance enough to consider himself merely another sentence in the history of mankind requires a stamina which only magnanimity can give. *Our Town* is a one-act play written during what might be considered as Wilder’s “middle period and it tells about the subordination of man to mankind.

Wilder sees history as repetitive; to him, mankind has always been basically the same, and in that way, forms one big family. Such a concept brings the whole race of men into one’s comprehension and makes it easier for Wilder to persuade the reader that surrender of self to others includes an acceptance of history. The Stage Manager of *Our Town* elaborates on this concept of repetition in history when he talks about putting various representative books in a cornerstone so that when people dig it up in a thousand years, they will have some idea of what the twentieth century was like.

Of course, they’ve put in a copy of the New York Times and a copy of Mr. Webb’s Sentinel…

We’re putting in a Bible… and the constitution of the United States-and a copy of William Shakespeare's plays… Y’ know-Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'em' is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts… and the sales of slaves. Yes, every night all
those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney,--same as here. And even in Greece and Rome, all we know about the real life of the people is what we can piece together out of the joking poems and the comedies they wrote for the theatre back then.

So I’m going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now’ll know a few simple facts about us-more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight. *(Our Town* 39-40).

This speech in an example of Wilder’s feeling that the everyday events, and not the catastrophic, are the nucleus of history. It emphasizes, also, the similarity of the actual lives of people, the repetition of history as far as basic human nature is concerned. Furthermore the speech is an example of Wilder’s inclusion of the future in the cycle of history.

The purpose of Wilder’s use of the hours as philosophers was to show that great ideas are present in the air around even after the people who held them are dead. The people who held them, however, and the ideas themselves in fact, are part of history. Their presence in the air is another indication that history is alive today and is a vital part of existence now and in the future. The first use of this device is not in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, but in the one-act play *Pullman Car Hiawatha*. Characters representing various hours of the night also
represent certain great philosophers and theologians, creating basically the same effect given by the Keats episode in *The Cabala*.

Another example of Wilder’s use of history as a theme is found in *Our Town*. This play contain moments in which the audience is simultaneously aware of the past and the present and the future. As the stage Manager describes Grover’s Corners, he says that the “first automobile’s going to come along in about five years—belonged to Banker Cartwright, our richest citizen.” (10-11). And again, “There’s Doc Gibbs coming down Main street now… Doc Gibbs died in 1930. The new hospital’s name after him.” (12). Near the end of the play, when Emily returns to earth, she and the audience realize a complexity of time construction. There is the present which is her death, the past which is her childhood, and as she relives a few moments in her childhood, and as she relives a few moments in her childhood, she is aware of the future. Other instances occur in the play in which Wilder reminds the viewer of the role of history in his life. At the wedding, the Stage Manager cautions one not to forget “the other witnesses at this wedding, --- the ancestors. Millions of them.” (89). And a little later, in reference to the catcalls of George’s baseball team, he says: “There used to be an awful lot of that kind of thing at weddings in the old days, --- Rome, and later. We’re more civilized now, --- so they say.” (91).

But it is *The Skin of Our Teeth* which is the last word in Wilder’s treatment of history. Based on *Finnegan’s Wake*, it takes its circular form from Joyce’s work. (Joseph Campbell, and Robinson, Henry Morton 3). The whole purpose seems to be to show the cycles of history and the fact that mankind keeps going despite catastrophes such as Ice Ages, floods, and wars. To cite all
of the examples from this play which illustrate Wilder’s attempt to impress effect, to quote the play verbatim. A few passages, however, are outstanding, and should serve as ample illustration. The first act is aptly described by Sabina when she says, “The author hasn’t made up his silly mind as to whether we’re all living back in caves or in New Jersey today…” (Three Plays 73). The second act advances in history from the Ice Age to the Flood, but the present day continues in the form of a convention in Atlantic City. The third act telescopes all the past, present, and future wars together, Isolated examples of history focused within the wording of the play are numerous. In Act I, a slide of a modest suburban home is shown:

The home of Mr. George Antrobus, the inventor of the wheel. The discovery of the wheel…has centered the attention of the country on Mr. Antrobus of this attractive residence district. This is his home, a commodious seven-room house, conveniently situated near a public school, a Methodist church, and a fire-house; it is right handy to an A. and P. (Three Plays 70).

There are allusions to the Garden of Eden, also. A wedding ring was found and the information broadcast over the morning news. It was inscribed “To Eva from Adam. Genesis II: 18.” (Three Plays 70). Antrobus is said to have worked his way up in the world: “It is reported that he was once a gardener, but left that situation under circumstances that have been variously reported.” (Three Plays 70). Furthermore, Henry is an alias for Cain, and that makes Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus the parents of the world. (Three Plays 80). Another reminder of actual history is given when Homer and Moses speak in
their original tongues. (*Three Plays* 88). And not only the history of mankind per se is emphasized, but the history of mankind back to the early stages of evolution. At the convention in Atlantic City Antrobus is scheduled to broadcast to “the collected assemblies of the whole natural world.” (*Three Plays* 95). In one speech he tells the assembly of mammals:

> The charge was made that at various points in my career I leaned toward joining some of the rival orders, --- that’s a lie. As I told reporters of the Atlantic City Herald, I do not deny that a few months before my birth I hesitated between… uh… between pinfeathers and gill-breathing, --- and so did many of us here, --- but for the last million years I have been viviparous, hairy, and disphragmatic. (*Three Plays* 96).

And in Act III, Mrs. Antrobus is aware that history supports the present when she says: “Well, just to have known this house is to have seen the idea of what we can do someday if we keep our wits about us. Too many people have suffered and died for my children for us to start reneging now.” (*Three Plays* 129).

This comment of Mrs. Antrobus’s is probably the best single example of Wilder’s belief in the importance of an awareness of the history of mankind to people as individuals. In order for one to give up his sense of self, he must have faith in others; he must realize that he is not as different as he sometimes would like to think, but that to be belongs to the entire human race. Wilder’s idea of cyclic history, therefore, fits in neatly with his belief that the temporal is
significant only because the eternal lends it importance. By the loss of the sense of self, one may sometimes glimpse eternity, and through these brief moments, one is aware of something beyond which makes the struggle of life worthwhile. Selfishness builds a strong barrier about people, isolates them from humanity, and therefore makes life unbearable with frustration. Only when a person views himself as sharing problems with all mankind may he acquire the magnanimity necessary to resolve frustration and find beauty in life. In other words, as long as one lives on an island of selfishness, he is cut off from an awareness of the Mystery which he must believe in in order to accept life. Therefore, it is through one’s very humanity that the eternal is revealed. At this point, the Stage Manager’s comment should be appreciated:

It’s like what one of those Middle West poets said: You’ve got to love life to have life, and you’ve got to have life to love life… It’s what they call a vicious circle. (Three Plays 31).

All of Wilder’s major works deal with the problem of faith. It is Wilder’s opinion that there is something beyond man which gives value to him and meaning to the world in which he lives. The world by itself is not worth the effort of living.

To Wilder, the world in itself is not enough. It needs to have a meaning attached which stems from faith; people must believe that there is something beyond themselves which is a mystery. Repeatedly, Wilder illustrates this need for acknowledgement of mystery. In almost all of his major published works, a long succession of characters who believe in nothing but the
evident and obvious form a questioning chain of misery and malcontent. These people are of two types: those who have had faith and have lost it, momentarily or for longer periods of time; and those who have never had it. To both groups, life is meaningless; there is no joy in it.

Some of Wilder’s characters undergo lapses of faith in which the appreciation of life they customarily enjoy is gone. Except the character of Caesar, all of the characters mentioned so far who somehow lost contact with the reason for their lives, have been connected, at least in name, with some form of the Christian religion. There is one other of wilder’s major characters who loses his faith in the significance of life and is not connected exclusively with any religion, much less the Christian one. On two occasions, George Antrobus in *The Skin of Our Teeth* decides life is not worth the struggle mankind makes to endure it, and on both occasions the customary delight in living, which is somehow the essence of his being, departs. The first time is during the Ice Age. Antrobus is the person most interested in seeing that mankind pulls through. But when he is faced with the problem of evil incarnate in his son, he loses this interest: “Put out the fire! Put out all the fires. No wonder the sun grows cold.” (*Three Plays*, 90). Mrs. Antrobus asks, “George, have you lost your mind?” (*Three Plays* 90) and the replies in disgust, “There is no mind. We’ll no try to live. Give it up. Give up trying.” (*Three Plays* 90). After the war, he again loses what he terms “the most important thing of all: The desire to begin again, to start building.” (*Three Plays* 133).

I’ve lost it. This minute I feel like all those people dancing around the bonfire—just relief. Just the desire to settle down; to slip into the old grooves and
keep the neighbors from walking over my lawn…. But during the war… I’d have moments… when I saw the things that we could do when it was over. When you’re at war you think about a more comfortable one. I’ve lost it. I feel sick and tired. (*Three Plays*, PP.133-134).

In this speech are echoes of the ordinary people of *The Woman of Andros* and the Cardinal’s need to fight for his faith. Mrs. Antrobus reminds him of his duty:

George, while Gladys and I were living here… the Only thought we clung to was that you were going to Bring something good out of this suffering. In the Night, in the dark, we’d whisper about it, starving And sick…. What else kept us alive all these Years? Even now, it’s not comfort we want. We can Suffer whatever’s necessary; only give us back that Promise. (*Three Plays* 134).

Antrobus, like Pamphilus, is responsible to others because of the faith he has in life.

These, then, are the major characters in which the human need for a belief in the value of life is illustrated By lapses of faith creating unhappiness where once there was joy. Another way Wilder depicts the need for faith is through characters who have never had it and who are uneasy with living.
Simon Stimson, the drunk organist of *Our Town*, is another rather prominent character who does not have faith in life. His bitterness is so strong that it carries over into the grave. In the scene among the dead he tells Emily:

Yes, now you know. Now you know!
That’s what it was to be Alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down Trampling on the feelings of those…of those about you. To spend And waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know—that’s the happy existence you wanted to go back and see... ignorance and blindness. (*Our Town* 125-126).

The final touch to this speech, however, comes from Mrs. Gibbs who says, in a spirited fashion, “Simon Stimson, that isn't the whole truth and you know it.” (*Our Town*, 126). But it was all the truth he was able to see during his lifetime.

Wilder considers that faith to be essential to the fulfillment of life. It should also be apparent that the kind of faith needed varies according to the type of individual; it is not in all cases limited to a belief in Christianity. Wilder’s solution to the problem of living is, and always has been, to enjoy life. But an enjoyment of life is dependent upon a belief that living is not in vain, that here is some purpose, some mind behind the universe. In the works, particularly *Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *The Ides of March*, the God
is there, the cosmos is there, but the image of Christ is not there. That is not to say, however, that the influence of Christianity is not present. But it is almost as though Wilder realized that, in spite of his efforts, Christianity was not a universal religion, and he accordingly expanded his concept to include all people and all ages by withdrawing the spotlighted figure of Christ.

The reason Wilder’s characters need to pay close attention to matters of faith will be evident when one understands the requirements Wilder sets forth for living. Living is not just going through life the best way possible, doing good deeds and laying up treasures in Heaven. The type of life Wilder demands is a constant struggle here and now; there is nothing easy about it. Life is ultimately beautiful, but people must face and accept suffering in order to be worthy of life’s beauty. Life is full of paradoxes and one is not allowed to take only the better parts; one must take all of it in order to fulfill his role as a human being.

The people, according to wilder, who have a key to the meaning of life and who are best able to live themselves, are repeatedly described as being saints or poets, as having something of the priest in them, or as possessing some secret of the gods. Living in the fullest sense of the word is to drain life of everything it has to offer, to reconcile somehow the various paradoxes within it and arrive at an awareness of the beauty it contains. Few people can accomplish so great a feat of intensity. Emily asks, “Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? - every, every minute?” (Our Town 124). The stage Manager is forced to reply, “No. The saints and poets, maybe - they do some.” (Our Town 124).
In the playlet *Nascuntur Poetae* it is the boy chosen to be a poet who comprehends the quality of life. He is given gifts of pride and joy by The woman in the chlamys; The woman in Deep Rod says: “Those gifts are vain without these…I bring the dark and necessary gifts…since only tears can give sight to the eyes.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 21).

The woman in Deep Red tells the young poet that “the life of man awaits you, the light laughter and the misery in the same day, in the selfsame hour the trivial and the divine.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 23).

Wilder’s belief that there are hidden laws operating in the universe is the reason for his repeated consideration of the relation of destiny to chance. In two instances, he simply illustrates the problem without making any comment. The gift of a spoon to George Brush, as has been mentioned before, came at the one moment when it could do the most good; it restored his faith. Certainly the elements of chance and destiny are both present; Wilder leaves the reader curious about the weight borne by each. A similar situation occurs in the playlet *The Message and Johanne*. Charles of Benicet is a worker in metals who made two rings, one for his lady and one for the Lady Jehanne who was betrothed to a German baron. Inside the ring for Jacquenetta Charles inscribed: “As the hermit his twilight, the countryman his holiday, the worshiper his peace, so do I love thee.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 71). In the other ring, he wrote “the traditional legend, *fidelitas carior vita*.” (70). The messenger boy mixed the rings, and the result was that the Lady Jehanne left the baron, whom she was marrying only to benefit her family, and went to Padua to join an English student whom she loved. Again, one wonders about the ratio of chance to destiny.
It is evident that Wilder feels there is some relationship between destiny and chance, but it is also evident that he further feels human beings will never be able to discover the details of it.

The eternal within man is stressed not only by a consideration of people as tools of destiny; there are certain parts of man which are indestructible. Wilder approaches transcendentalism when he insists that great ideas float around in the atmosphere even after the people who held them are dead. In the rehearsal scene of *The Skin of Our Teeth*, one of the understudies explains what the author meant by saying that each of the hours of the night is a philosopher, or a great thinker:

… the author meant that—just like the hours and stars go by over our heads at night, in the same way the ideas and thoughts of the great men are in the air around us all the time and they’re working on us, even when we don’t know it. (*The Plays* 121-122).

Again, in the playlet *Centaurs*, Shelley is trying to prove that Ibsen’s play *The Master Builder* is actually a poem of Shelley’s which he did not live to write. Ibsen claims authorship: “The poem hung for a while above the Mediterranean, and then drifted up toward the Tyrol and I caught it and wrote it down.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 86). Shelley admits:

well, it is not a strange idea, or a new one, that the stuff of which masterpieces are made drifts about the world waiting to be clothed with words…
Let you remember this when you regret the work that has been lost through this war that has been laid upon your treasurable young men. The work they might have done is still with you, and will yet find its way into your lives and into your children's lives. (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 86-87).

In another playlet, *Leviathan*, a prince dies under the eyes of a mermaid who was envious of his soul. She notices that at death something vital is gone from him, something “that lay about his eyes, that troubled his mouth. The soul, perhaps.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 95-96). She donates his body to a sea-monster because “there is no longer anything precious in this man.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 96) Then she muses: “Perhaps it is better, although your body has passed to Leviathan, still to have another part of you somewhere about the world.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 96).

The fact that this soul remains around the world would make it seem to be of the same substance as the great ideas, illustrating that something in people is indestructible. The Stage Manager sums it up in the third act of *Our Town*:

I don’t care what they say with their mouth—everybody knows that 'something' is eternal. And it ain’t houses and it ain’t names, and it ain’t earth, and it ain’t even the stars... everybody known in their bones that 'something' is essential, and that some-thing has to do with human beings... There’s something way down deep that’s eternal about every human being. (*Our Town* 101).
This something which is eternal in people is the valuable part of them, but it is never free in this world; only after death can it be released. The Stage Manager explains Wilder’s theory of purgation:

You know as well as I do that the dead don’t stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they lose hold of the earth… and the ambitions they had…and the pleasures they had…and the things they suffered…and the people the loved. They get weaned away from earth—that’s the way I put it, -- weaned away.

Yes, they stay here while the earth part of ‘em burns away, burns out; and all that time they slowly get indifferent to what’s goin’ on in Grover’s Corners. They’re waitin’. They’re waitin’ for something that they feel is comin’. Something important, and great aren’t they waitin’ for the eternal part in them to come out clear? … that’s the way it is: mother’n daughter… husband’n wife…enemy’n enemy… money’n miser… all these terribly important things kind of grow pale around here. And what’s left? what’s left when memory’s gone, and your identity, Mrs. Smith?

(Our Town. 101-102).
This speech was foreshadowed in Wilder’s early playlet *And the Sea Shall Give Up Its Dead*. Various characters are rising from the sea on the Day of Judgement. The Empress asks one rising beside her: “Have you too been swinging in mid-ocean, tangled in a cocoon of seaweed, slowly liberating your mind from the prides and prejudices and trivialities of a life-time?” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 100). Later she remarks:

I was afraid that when I had shed away my royalty and beauty and my administrative talent and my pure descent and my astonishing memory for names, I was afraid that there would be nothing left. But fortunately, underneath all this litter I have found a tiny morsel... but dare we say the Name?

(*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 101).

The whole point of this playlet is to show that after death all of the earthly burns out of people, even their identities. It is difficult for these characters to surrender their identities. They ask God not to take away that which, in each one, makes them peculiarly individual. The last stage direction shows the outcome of their prayers:

The three panic-stricken souls reach the surface of the sea. The extensive business of Domesday is over in a twinkling and the souls divested of all identification have tumbled, like falling stars, into the blaze of unicity. Soon nothing exists in space but the great unwinking eye,
meditating a new creation. (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* 103).

This concept of the final unity of all souls, and the idea that great ideas drift about waiting for someone to catch them and use them are somehow reminiscent of nineteenth century transcendentalism and the doctrine of the over-soul. But even though temporal matters are ultimately unimportant, even though all will lose their identities to return again to the mind which gave them birth, Wilder will not allow anyone to slide by life. It is living in the fullest sense of the word which is all-important in this world.

Furthermore, human beings feel that something within them is eternal, that in some way they are linked to this unknowable. In *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Wilder inserts a passage from Aristotle which illustrates this theory:

“This good estate of the mind possessing its object in energy we call divine. This we mortals have occasionally and it is this energy which is pleasantest and best. But God has it always. It is wonderful I us; but in Him how much more wonderful.” (*Three Plays* 123).

It is, in fact, because of one’s recognition through himself and life of a mystery, an unknowable, that the struggle of living has meaning despite the fact that he will never, on earth, understand its purpose. It is enough to struggle; as far as one knows, the only reward he will ever have for living is in the living itself.
In plainer language, Ma, in *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*, expresses the same idea when she tries to comfort her daughter on the loss of a child; “God thought best, dear. God thought best. We don’t understand why. We just go on, honey, doing our business.” (*The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act* P.121). Even Sabina has something to say on the subject: “We’ve rattled along, hot and cold, for some time now-and my advice to you is not to inquire into why or whither, but just enjoy your ice cream while it’s on your plate, --- that’s my philosophy.” (*Three Plays* 72). Apparently, Wilder thinks Sabina has a very substantial philosophy.

Perhaps *Our Town* contains the best single illustration of Wilder’s concept of the relation of the temporal to the eternal, of man to God. The worth of the individual is evident from the address on a letter to Jane Crofut: “Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover’s Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; … Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God.” (*Our Town* 54). This address links not only Jane Crofut with the unknowable; it symbolically includes everyone, and also it lends a tremendous importance to the everyday, small things of life. People’s lives are enmeshed with trivia and everyday affairs, and it is because of this that life often ceases to become beautiful for people who, like Simo, find the present to be a “succession of small domestic vexations.” But through faith that there is a Mystery, even the everyday is invested with an almost overwhelming importance. It then becomes one’s business to cope with the frustration and despair of life until, through suffering, one is able to realize its beauty. When that point is reached, one must maintain his status and absorb all of life that he can, being careful not to pass
judgement; good can arise even from evil and ugliness. This is one’s business as a human being; this is why the way one engages in the process of living is the most important problem he has to face. In the preface to *The Angel That Troubled the Waters*, Wilder defines an artist as being “one who knows how life should be lived at its best and is always aware of how badly he is doing it.” (*The Angel That Troubled the Waters* xi).

"Faith" is for Wilder the only way to endure the jumble which is life; at the same time it is this something beyond oneself which makes worth-while the struggle of living. The world is valuable in relation to that which is beyond the world; the temporal is important only in relation to the eternal. It is Mrs. Antrobus, the earth-mother, who has the last word:

> Now listen to me: I could live for seventy years in a cellar and make soup out of grass and bark, without ever doubting that this world has a work to do and will do it. (*Three Plays* 129).

The meaning of *Our Town* is two-fold: it is both universal and vastly general, as also at the same time, most intrinsically particular. There is a quest for transcending the realms of the limited and imperfect into the areas of the Eternal and the Perfect. The play seeking to underplay life’s utmost priorities in achieving at least a measure of perfection lays down the important concerns. According to the Stage Manager, "something" is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. However, in this quest to reach the realms of bliss and solitude, there is a grim negation of the human endeavour. Thus, there is this dilemma and dichotomy of vision between the living and the dead. The
question of living realization of life’s priorities is recurrent and all-pervasive in Wilder's fictional and theatrical imagination, alike. Emily’s question appears with a recurrent emphasis and almost with a monotonous regularity in his world: Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? - every, every minute?

*Our Town* is laid on the particular geo-graphical and temporal locale. Its name is Grover’s Comers in New Hampshire. It is just across Massachusetts line. It is situated in Latitude 42 degrees and 40 minutes and the temporal locale is May 7, 1901 and it is just before dawn. But, more than this intensely drawn temporal and spatial locale, its quintessential connection is with history. It is "some of the oldest land in the world". It has "early Ameridian stock and Cothatchee tribes". Yet, within these universal and almost limitless concerns, each "existential" moment of people of the Grover’s Corners is of great "value". Time is intuitive. It is not only a chronometer for their struggle and anguish, but becomes a vital aspect of their consciousness. It is as ever conceived as eternal medium and belongs to the world of the dead. A man from the dead exclaims at the world of bliss of a transcendental world elsewhere:

> And my boy, Joe, who knew the stars-he used to say it took millions of years for that spark of light to get to the earth. Don’t seem like a body could believe it, but that’s what he used to say millions of years. (*Our Town* 102).

Within this linear time of the universal, and particular intuitive and subjective world, Time is variously retrieved from the past and recreated.
Chronologically, the play begins on May 7, 1901 and proceeds to 1914, that is graphically dramatizing the life and development of Emily, the chief deliverer of the meaning of the drama. During this period, the first part occupies three years, from 1901 to 1903. This period is called daily life; the second period occupies eleven years, 1903-1914 which dramatizes the marriage and the subsequent death of Emily. However, Time is variously reversed and continued. This is because of Emily’s desire to return to life. She becomes aware of the imperatives of Time. She can not transcend time into the past except by an intuitive perception and imaginative realization of it in her memory. The Third Act singularly dramatizes the Time consciousness of the play. It balances itself, however sensitively, between the two temporal poles of the living and the dead. She comes back into the realms of the "living for a moment." This atleast imaginative return to the living is one more futile attempt to live afresh a new life of happiness. But Mrs. Gibbs advises Emily to choose the least important day for such a retrieval to life. For time’s actions are always unpredictable. Her return is to even prior to the beginning of the play, February 11, 1989, to her childhood. Thus, thematically, Time values shift in their human significance. Emily lives a full day of February 11, 1899.

In this imaginative recreation, a single day is dramatized with all its casual elegance and imperfect and yet, routine and apparent disorder in the world. In any case, Emily’s is a human failure. For her, life is a failure because she cannot look "at everything hard enough to achieve success in this world." Thus, her inevitable return to the realms of the dead is even more urgent. She returns to the world of the dead with greater agony.
Structurally, Wilder uses this transcendental quest for the Perfect and the Absolute, in the medium of Time. Time operates at many levels: Time as the "moment" and also as universal Time; Time as simple chronological development of events; and Time as intuitive perception. In its intrinsic reality, *Our Town* operates with the qualities of vast generality of Space and Time, against the millennia of human existence as also in its most intimate detail as a magnificent and the most endearing American prototype.

As Alcestis in *The Alcestaid*, Simon Stimson here considers life as moving “in a cloud of ignorance always at the mercy of one’s self-centred passion”. In this dichotomy of the living and the dead, as uncompromising areas of experience, as between darkness and enlightenment, a possible compromise is sought to be imbued by taking an enlightened view of life’s priorities. The strategy is to participate in life, and yet view it with a positive detachment. This is the same strategy enunciated by Chrysis to Pamphilus. In *Our Town*, the Stage Manager tells Emily not only to live but also watch it while living. In this unresolved dichotomy and antagonism between the living with the denial of all its enlightenment and delight and joy of fulfillment of the quest, and the dead always as memory and longing of an impossible dream, the resolution is sought to be in the realms of a continuous quest into an eternal and transcendental spiritual order.

The most fundamental question asked by Emily, that is, “Do any human being ever realize life while they live it?” is adequately answered by the Stage Manager, "the saints and poets may-they do some". The drama, thus, seeking to transcend the finite limitations of the living and the dead reaches out, in its ultimate suggestion, a world of bliss and enlightenment:
There are the stars doing their old, old
crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven’t
settled the matter yet but they seem to think there
are no living beings up there. (Our Town 103).

The other aspect of the drama, that is, the casual and re-current aspect
of life, once again makes the play forget its grim travesties of human failure by
a comic acceptance of life.

Thus, The play is realized in the twilight zone of memory and
fantasy. Stage Manager's recurrent retrieval into the past is a measure with
more than sentimental poignancy. It is a recurrent device for explaining and re-
explaining the pastness of the past appearing in the continuous present. Wilder
pitchforks, however sensitively, between the realms of the human mind and
human nature, as explained by Gertrude Stein. Human mind, according to
Gertrude Stein, is unchangeable and eternal where as the human nature is
transitory and rooted in ephemeral causes. Wilder seeks a temporal drama
between the eternal and the transitory between the changeable and the universal
in the play.

*The Skin of Our Teeth*, like *The Eighth Day* and in some respects like
*The Ides of March*, dramatizes Time as an archetypal pattern in human life. If
in *Our Town*, Time acts as a vast, universal backdrop for the people of
Grover’s Corners, in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, it operates with a grim primordial
urgency. Here, Time’s values are profoundly implicit, as in *The Ides of March*.
The temporal backdrop is on a colossal scale. The threat to disaster and the
optimistic retrieval, even at the precipice are realized in a vast and general
Time scale and Space. The retrieval is at three levels: at the universal level, at the domestic level, and the most important, the play is itself saved from collapse by the heroic efforts of the Stage Manager.

Though topically the Second World War and the consequences of the first ever nuclear war become the original pointers for realizing the domestic catastrophe and individual destiny therein, the play carries a vastly different and far-reaching suggestion, elsewhere. Thus, there are two kinds of Time orders: one, the primordial Time as ever unchanging, and universal, and the other, the second World War and the domestic catastrophes in the American society, in it.

Mr. Antrobus, the archetypal perfect man, the original Adam, and the harbinger of the New World after the nuclear holocaust in the Second World War lays down the vast temporal backdrop of the play. He traces, hopefully though, the origins of this "planet, the spark of life of ten billion years ago". The play is stretched to its farthest extremes in its vast Time and Space. Individual human destiny is amazingly realized against a vast human race. The play does not end, as Antrobus and Mrs Antrobus are only the archetypal Man and Woman. Their 'motif' of love (or promise as Mrs. Antrobus so emphatically lays down as the ground rule for their existence as wife and husband in their marriage) is the basis of domestic thereby the social and national life forever. In any case, according to Sabina, though the play apparently ends, at least for the time being, it must "go on for ages and ages yet" and more important, the human race survives by the skin of its teeth. She thus announces the supposed culmination of the play: "The end of this play isn’t written yet".
Structurally, the accumulated agony and grim struggle for survival, more as a biological instinct, rather than as a spiritual outcome for understanding life’s profundity, is realized in an existential and domestic order along three axis: it is a highly charged drama of the wreckage and subsequent 'retrieval' of the American family, with all its personal and inter-personal problems, between Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus, between Antrobus and Henry and Antrobus and Sabina.

Sabina is the archetypal damsel seducing and weaning Antrobus from his settled domestic ardour. Antrobus is truly charmed by her beauty and enterprising nature. He even announces his separation from Mrs. Antrobus. Mrs. Antrobus’ reaction is typical of the play itself consisting of stoical optimism. She married Antrobus not because she loved him, but only because he made her a promise. However, as the play alternates between the rather mundane trials and tribulations of life and grim catastrophe for the human race and creation itself, Sabina underplays the original incident of her love for Mr. Antrobus. She tells Mr. Antrobus not to be overtly mindful of all these trivialities of life. After all, in life, "it does not matter what” ultimately.

The play in its thematic and structural detail converges on the domestic catastrophe of the Antrobus with the threat of a colossal disaster of the human race in the background. As the crescendo of the passions of the domestic disorder and wreckage rises, it acquires the universal proportion, at another level.

The love-hate relationship between Mr. Antrobus and Henry becomes the most poignant aspect of the broken American domestic order. The epicentre
for the wreckage of domestic order lies in its significant aspect of the father-son relationship. As in The Eighth Day, when George is guilty of particide, Henry is known as Cain, both in the school and at home. Antrobus-Henry relationship is in constant threat of being severed any moment. Their peculiarly “natural” enmity appears to reach its violent end. Henry’s killer instinct is quite morbid. As he has "some big emptiness" inside him, he wants to "strike and fight and kill". This morbidity of mind and situation is instrumental for hating his father, the archetypal villain for him, who takes away all his freedom. His problems aggregate with his feeling of being unrelated to anybody and anything. This fearful emotional and spiritual vacuum makes him a lone survivor of his own inner struggles and anguish. He is like George, in The Eighth Day, bereft of any lofty idealism and his emotional and spiritual vacuum make him question the domestic order. There is a gravely misplaced notion of heroism in him.

As a climax, Mr. Antrobus plays out the role of Noah. He retrieves all the humanity and all aspects of the universe into his raft and begins to launch a new world after the first ever nuclear holocaust in the Second World War. Mr. Antrobus launches out in newer directions to discover knowledge with a scientific spirit. He has already deciphered the Alphabet. He wants "to build a new world" by his innate creativity and purpose of life. However, the need for his own settled domestic order precedes any such move to "rebuild" the world at large. Fortunately though, Mrs. Antrobus announces such a settled domestic order. She tells him that they should "start reneging now", their supposedly dislocated domestic order. In this new world of retrieval from the precipice of disaster, at many levels, domestically and universally, Sabina is intensely
cynical in her apprehension that "the whole earth's going to have more wars and more walls of ice and floods and earth quakes". In another part of the domestic detail, Henry’s motives are still unsettled. His vacant quest for the myth of total freedom, indeed stifles his growth. He is yet to discover his world "that is fit for a man to live in". However, his retrieval, that is, the retrieval of the family as a whole, becomes possible with the all important confession of Mr. Antrobus that he himself is devoid of any emotional fulfillment in the domestic order. This confession of Mr. Antrobus realizes Henry as a fullfledged member of the family in his own right.

This is the exact locus for the complete retrieval of the Antrobus family, that is the universe itself, in its primordial significance. Mrs. Antrobus announces, thus, the newly felt spirit of optimism:

Some lights are coming on, the first in seven years. People are walking up and down looking at them. Over in Hawkins’ open lot they're built a bonfire to celebrate the peace. They’re dancing around it like scarecrows. (The Skin of Our Teeth 241).

This act of retrieval is realized in the medium of "Ideas". Mr. Antrobus the harbinger of the New World, in his role as Noah, expresses "the desire to begin, again, to start building". His struggle is symbolic of the struggle of the human race itself for greater civilization and endless refinement. He is our archetypal crusader for renewed life and newer vistas of security and happiness. He realizes, more than any body else in the play, that "every good
and excellent thing in the world stands moment by moment on the razor edge of danger and must be fought for whether it’s a field, or a home or country”. However, this act of redemption is in the medium of Ideas. The utterances of Bailey in taking a philosophical attitude to life, in its failures and successes is truly akin to the philosophy of Chyrsis in *The Woman of Andros* and Caesar in *The Ides of March*. The emphasis of Ivy as a world of pure thinking is in the manner of Virgil intellectually solemnizing the narrative ending of *Cabala*. The emphasis in this play, quite rightly though, is on “the good estate of mind” of man himself. It is significant that Wilder’s resolution to the impending catastrophe of the world, due to the nuclear holocaust is sought to be in the realms of enlightened humanistic order, based on knowledge, awareness of the profundities of life.

Structurally, the play continues as the human quest continues to provide greater security for humanity against both natural and human catastrophes. Sabina announces the crusading zeal of Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus. They are "full of plans".

Thus, in its ultimate meaning, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, is at various levels a grand retrieval from the precipice of many complex domestic, personal, or even inter-personal and cosmic problems. It is a play, whose canvas is vastly laid in Time and Space in colossal proportion.

In its thematic and structural detail and purposes, the plays recreate the same aspects of Thornton Wilder’s temporal imagination. However, in his plays, unlike in his fiction, the structural use of Time is more apparent and becomes a clearly discernible coordinate for the experiences of his characters.
The atmosphere in his plays is far more homely and brims with welcome intimacy unlike his fictional ventures, which appear to be far away throwbacks into history and farther places. Though there is a basic centrality of vision and unity of an invincible purpose, to realize a temporal drama of his person-ages, his plays appear to be more all at one place, that is, the American microcosm, than his far away ventures into larger places and all times in his fiction. In any case, his fictional and theatrical ventures show a recurrent continuity in their thematic and structural imagination of Time.

*The Matchmaker* is a slightly modified version of an earlier play *The Merchant of Yonkers* written by Thornton Wilder in 1939. Set in Yonkers and New York, it is altogether different in style from his earlier play *Our Town*. Employing “the sparkle of Comedy of Manners along with the rough house of farce,” (David Castronovo 93-94). it offers a brilliant assessment of life and manners in a capitalist society.

In the Preface to *Our Town and Other Plays* Thornton Wilder states that his play is about the “aspirations of the young (and not only of the young) for a fuller, freer participation in life.” (13). Thus the predominant theme of the play is adventure -- the idea of the unlived life-- a desire for unencumbered pleasure. The desire for adventure arises from an all powerful, overwhelming, suppression and desperation. The themes of exploitation and manipulation convey their power of altering forever the ethics and dynamics of individuals in society. Their influence reduces humanity into being a mere “collection of nervous and tired ants” (*The Matchmaker in Our Town and Other Plays* 199) working and hoarding constantly. The theme of emotional generosity - a release from psychological imprisonment - suggests a plausible alternative to
emotional miserliness. Together the themes of the play present a kaleidoscopic glimpse of the present-day scenario.

The contemporaneity of these themes accounts for their intensity and appeal. The issues with which they deal are the ones that plague the present times as well. Their relevance manifests large strands of grey areas along with dollops of understandable passions and human frailties and thus accounts for their success. There is no situation in the play which is foreign to the man of the street. As each character of the play yearns to spice up his otherwise bland life, the themes are propelled centre stage.

The play tells the story of Horace Vandergelder, a sixty-year-old self-righteous, self-complimentary, miserly businessman and his comic ‘nemesis’ Dolly Levi, the widow of a Viennese, lover of life and pleasure, is the representative spirit of fun, frolic and laughter. She focuses the floodlight on the theme of a fuller, freer participation in life when she astutely remarks: "Vandergelder’s never tired of saying’ most of the people in the world are fools, and in a way he’s right, isn’t he?...But there comes a moment in everybody’s life when he must decide whether he’ll live among human beings or not-a fool among fools or a fool alone." (277).

Horace Vandergelder, after having led a life of caution and hard work, decides to live amongst the so-called fools. He thinks of marrying. He embarks on a cautious search for a wife-employee, someone to fulfill his dream of exploitation mixed with a little risk and adventure. Justifying his intentions he says, “I’ve just turned sixty, and I’ve just laid side by side the last dollar of my first half million. So if I should lose my head a little, I still have enough
money to buy it back. After many years’ caution and hard work, I have a right to a little risk and adventure, and I’m thinking of getting married. Yes, like all you other fools, I’m willing to risk a little security for a certain amount of adventure.” (195).

Convinced that “Marriage is a bribe to make a housekeeper think she’s a householder,” (194) he goes for help to Dolly Levi (his late wife’s friend), little dreaming that she has singled herself out for the job. Dolly plans to marry Vandergelder because she too feels suffocated in her solitary existence. She wishes to join the human race to lend colour and meaning to her otherwise dried-up life. Her checkmating Vandergelder’s adventure in its very first move reflects her anticipation of an adventure for her own self. She sets up her trap for him as she manipulates him to go to New York to dine with the woman of his dreams.

Dolly Levi believes strongly that Vandergelder and his types have upset the order of this world and hence she sets upon herself the task of marrying and transforming Vandergelder, “Nature is never completely satisfactory and must be corrected is her philosophy. She commits herself to Vandergelder’s cause, determined to push open a door that will lead him to an entire new vista of feeling and experience. She is Vandergelder’s opposite in every way. “He is stingy: she is extravagant. He is closed in emotionally; she is outgoing, exuberant. He is preternaturally solemn; she sees laughter in everything. He shouts; she wheedles. He worries about the future; she cares only for the present. He regards himself as a cunning, ruthless man of the world; he is putty in her hands.” (M.C. Kuner 140-41). These two, are thus
propelled towards one another by their yearning for a fuller, freer participation in life.

The theme of emotional miserliness also dominates the panorama of the play. Castronovo rightly observes that “the play is a nineteenth century protest against grasping materialism. But the play’s date, and the actions of its central character, Vandergelder, should remind audiences that Wilder is working through the issues of the American Depression. This is also done as he comically explores the way the capitalistic ethos blights lives, and makes the office and the home, places of confinement rather than of pleasure and fulfillment.” (David Castronovo 94).

Vandergelder, the sour protagonist, considers love, marriage, affection and all such similar emotions to be nothing but nonsense. Such emotions have no place in his heart and mind. He decides to turn the nonsense of love and marriage into a practical deal. His comment on wives manifests his contempt of life-sustaining emotions. Commenting on wives, he says, “Did you ever watch an ant carry a burden twice its size? What excitement! What patience! What will! Well, that’s what I think of when I see a woman running a house. What giant passions in those little bodies—what fury at discovering a moth in the cupboard! Believe me!—if women could harness their natures to something bigger than a house and a baby carriage—tck!tck!—they’d change the world.” (194-95). This statement with its wisecracks convinces adequately that the self-righteous, self-complacent attitude of Vandergelder will haunt him constantly. Hanging about his neck, like the Ancient Mariner’s albatross, his attitude will be the chief impediment in the way of his happiness.
It is this theme of emotional miserliness which puts forth, Wilder’s message, that man’s self-complacent, self-righteous attitude is the chief cause of his sorrow. It is this attitude which has led to a fragmented, discontented mankind, at odds with its own self. This theme of emotional imprisonment portrays the world today. He feels that this world, torn by alienation and on the verge of a spiritual holocaust, can be set right through emotional generosity.

Vandergelder is a miser not only because he hoards all his money but also because he keeps under lock and key all human feelings. Wilder manages to show that Vandergelder and his types can never appreciate the wonder and glory of life because they spend all their time in exploitation and manipulation. They are misers not only in financial matters but also in their relationships with people and in their household affairs. Vandergelder’s punishment, in his marriage to Dolly Levi, is justified, for Dolly is determined to teach him what happiness is, by putting to good use all his money. Vandergelder’s righteousness and complacency prompt him to equate profession with person, thereby making him the chief obstacle in his niece’s happiness. He thwarts her marriage to Ambrose, a young artist who, according to Vandergelder, follows the lowest of occupations and is incapable of supporting his niece. Very contemptuously he tells Ambrose, “A living is made, Mr. Kemper, by selling something that everybody needs at least once a year. Yes, sir! And a million is made by producing something that everybody needs every day. You artists produce something that nobody needs at any time. You may sell a picture once in a while, but you’ll make no living.” (186).

Dolly predicts the future of such persons convincingly. She foretells, that a man who is friendless, living with a house-keeper who can prepare his
meals for a dollar a day, shall spend his “last days listening at keyholes” (259) frightened and worrying constantly that someone is cheating him.

Dolly marries Vandergelder to save him from his greed-his money. Dolly Levi understands perfectly that the real test of a full and rich life, is action, thought and feelings which do not centre around the self. She also knows very well how easy it is to sink into a life of inaction; how easy it is for one to isolate one’s self, from society and fellow human beings. But she also understands how nerve-racking and shattering this experience is. Her impressive speech in this context, hammers the thought into the mind. She says, “After my husband’s death I retired into myself...I was a perfectly contented woman. And one night, alter two years of this, an oak leaf fell out of my Bible. I had placed it there on the day my husband asked me to marry him; a perfectly good oak leaf-but without colour and without life. And suddenly I realized that for a long time I had not shed one tear; nor had I been filled with the wonderful hope that something or other would turn out well. I saw that I was like that oak leaf, and on that night I decided to rejoin the human race.” (277). In Dolly’s decision to rejoin the human community lies Wilder’s valuable hint. Her wise imagination propels the other characters also to participate in life. “She is concerned, of course, only with what is usually regarded as ordinary in life: living itself. What she arranges is banal, really-marriage. But it is marriage that brings two people together, brings them to life.” (Donald Haberman, The Plays of Thornton Wilder: A Critical Study. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1967. 20). Dolly Levi, in marrying Vandergelder is actually attempting to save him from his money and helping him in rejoining the human race as a friendly, compassionate living being.
The individual lives of the characters of the play are all propelled towards one another, by the theme of emotional imprisonment, being reflected in the theme of the ‘unlived life.’ Malachi Stack, a minor character in the play, very brilliantly remarks, “Everybody is always talking about people breaking into houses, ma’am; but there are more people in the world who want to break out of houses, that’s what I always say.” (267).

Hence, the theme of emotional imprisonment is a potent image which focuses on the plight of human beings. It is also a telling commentary on the socio-psychological conditions of Man.

The other themes of the play, like the theme of manipulation and exploitation experiment with the struggles of the individual at the psychological level. By providing perspective on the prevailing conditions they represent the barriers and prejudices which separate man from men. It is this thematic diversity, which adds a special flavour to the play.

Set against the background of a capitalistic society, the play portrays convincingly how the attack on humanity is manifold. Capitalistic greed is like a cancer within, and the capitalistic ethos is the killer rival, armed with money, glamour and power. These themes show how sturdy stalwarts like Vanderghelder and his types thwart the struggles of saplings like Cornelius and Barnaby to grow till Dolly Levi rescues them all.

Interestingly, if we were to reverse the narrative and tell the story from the perspective of Cornelius and Barnaby Tucker we would understand how claustrophobic the spirit of materialistic greed is, Cornelius and Barnaby’s determination to have their “pudding” is a determination to break out of the
chains and clasps of exploitation and manipulation. Capitalistic greed leads to the suppression and denial of vital possibilities thereby leading to neurosis, desperation and depression. Today’s drug-abused, decaying society is undoubtedly a result of the ‘Grab as much as you can’ ethos.

Dolly’s manipulation, however, is of a totally, different kind. In keeping with the spirit of farce, it is she who lends gaiety and sense to the play. Whereas Vandergelder is unscrupulous about what he wants and wants to hoard all the money, Dolly like a generous spirit, abhors the idea of money lying useless in piles. She dislikes, most thoroughly, money that is “idle and frozen.” Her argument expresses her belief that money is a resource for people rather than a mechanism for asserting power. She says, “Money! Money!-it’s like the sun we walk under; it can kill or cure...Money, I’ve always felt, money-pardon my expression-is like manure; it’s not worth a thing unless it’s spread about encouraging young things to grow.” (277-78).

Thus one can see how the various themes of the play intensify the idea of living and not merely existing. Dealing with the true way of living, they lend intellectual and emotional coherence to Wilder’s expression of ideas. His is, indeed quite an ingenious way of saying that Vandergelder and his types are “moral rather than social problems and a vigorous, robust spirit of humanism is the answer to materialism.” (Rex Burbank, Thornton Wilder. 1961; rpt. New York: Twayne, 1962. 100). The play suggests that moral reform is just as essential as social legislation. Wilder definitely does not hold anyone upto ridicule. Very softly he presents the absurdities of Vandergeldarian types and their theories and suggests their worthlessness.