CHAPTER - II

THE ADAPTER OF STYLES & ASSUMER OF DISGUISES
Literature is a social art and style is the echo, the reverberation, of the writer’s or speaker’s personality, and its success is to be measured by the fullness of response it evokes in the reader or hearer. The style is the man because it is ultimately, a reflection of the ‘vision within’ - it is something organic, something that has the breath of life, and this has been breathed into it by the personality of the man. “Style is the skin”, said Carlyle, “and not the mere coat”; it is the man himself, what is unique in man. Whether one is engaged in the recordation of fact or of the imaginative sense of fact, ‘Personality’ somehow intervenes; and colours and tempers the writing.

The quality of a particular style is evident in the architectonics of a work of literature, i.e., in the combinations in which different means of expression are used. In its functional role within a stylistic system architectonics can be described as the purposeful and efficient organization of narrative or dramatic space and time in the light of the basic aesthetic principles to which the writer adheres to. Like intonation and the depiction of character, the architectonics of a work encompasses both content and the way in which this content is expressed.
While working out his compositional construction the writer is interested first and foremost in the relationships between the characters and the part played by each one in the development of the plot or the dramatic action. It is the dynamic combination of characters which builds the works, as it were, from within. The writer’s first ideas of characters and composition are usually realized incompletely or very differently from the way in which he first imagined them. The artistic consciousness of the writer is constantly occupied with selecting the characters and seeing that they ‘emerge’ correctly and with determining the changing relationships between them and the different ways in which they might be combined.

Architectonics alone, i.e., the way in which it is constructed, is enough to occupy the whole of the author’s mind. He has to think through the part each character has to play in the whole, the relationships between them, and the presentation and development of events with unflagging control and a critical eye on what seem to be excesses, if their faults are real or not, and so on. The laws of literature demand that there can be nothing superfluous in a work (from the point of view of its artistic conception), nothing accidental and nothing unnecessary. There is a definite relationship between the scope of the artistic generalizations contained in a work and the narrative space and time devoted to them.

Since the architectonics of a work of literature reflects not only the relationship between the characters but also their dynamics, the composition is closely connected with the formation of the plot. In an interesting work *The Raw Material of Life and the Artistic Plot*, E. Dobin writes that “Plot is a conception of reality.” Like the work of an art, as a whole, the plot is a
combination of the objective reflection of the real life around him and the artists’ own perception of this reality. It is perfectly true that plot, like the other components of style, reflects both the realities of life and the artist’s own view of it, but this doesn’t mean that every element of style including plot is of itself a ‘conception of reality’. A work of art is a complex combination of interacting component parts that are also interdependent, not simply a combination of uniform elements, all fulfilling an identical function.

The study of the language used by an author serves two purposes. It can lead the way to a better understanding of the author’s meaning and a fuller appreciation of his literary skill, and it can provide material for the study of the history of the language. The two approaches to a literary work are closely intertwined and one helps the other. The use which any author makes of a language is a part of the history of that language, and, if the author’s works are widely read, his linguistic habits are likely to exert an important influence on others who use the language. On the other hand, a knowledge of the state of the language at the time when the author wrote is of the utmost importance in understanding what the author meant. Without that knowledge we are in danger of attributing to his words modern senses which he did not intend them to bear and of seeking special significance in turns of phrase, unusual to us, which were the normal way of expressing ideas at the time when the author wrote.

Time and style are two important devices to the writer to adapt a technique which ever would be suitable for his work.

Thornton Wilder is a classicist in his commitment to art and life. His imagination and innate drive as a writer and also as a man strives for seeking
security and a sense of continuity of the existing institutions. He is an aesthete to the core, who revels in “instructing” the world of the greater morals and ethics. His idea of “morality” is not based on the sense of being right or wrong. For him “morality” means seeking to find an inner harmony and impeccable “order” in the lives of the individuals and things in this world. Thus, his art is a consummate expression of the sense of beauty in ceaselessly discovering this harmony and balance of mind and things in Nature. A classical restraint incites the abundant enthusiasm and ceaseless activity to innovate in his art and imagination. A deep sense of tragic failure and negation and cynical wit underlies his apparently gentle and suave human nature. The sadness and melancholy are born out of an inevitable commitment to the Absolute and the Perfect. However, this tragic sense of life is successfully integrated into his aesthetic imagination by striking a posture of comic self-awareness and acceptance of this world. As Alexander Cowie observes, "he is always "between comedy and sadness". ("The Bridge of Thornton Wilder" 307-28).

'Time' becomes the imaginative medium for resolving his creative strategies. If his creative aesthetic is instructed by the themes of love, morality and religion, Time outreaches all these thematic preoccupations and provides the imaginative medium for seeking transcendence for his characters. It begins in inadequacy, and in the second stage, the characters become aware of these inadequacies and in the third stage, as they seek to perfect their selves, they are destroyed. In all these cases, there is a distinctly and even consciously drawn temporal design. To this extent, Time initiates the quest for perfection and also becomes the medium for transcendence. Wilder’s commitment to Time borders on various levels of perfection of this world, both in humanism and
conventional religion. If the suffering of his characters belongs to this world of humanist crisis, the quest for transcendence symbolizes another world of grace. In such a quest for perfection, Time acts as the imaginative coordinate in the trials of his men and women.

    The concept of morality primarily instructs the theme of love and self-fulfillment in his creative world. Malcolm Cowley distinguishes between manners and morals. Manners are "the standards of conduct in a group", if only morals are "the standards that determine the relations of the individuals with others". To this extent, the characters in his fictional world are studied and represented in their “personal” states of mind. The individuals make a quest in fulfilling their social, moral and spiritual destinies in their relationship with others.

    The concept of "pure existing" centrally defines his inner compulsions and drives as a writer. The important quality of seeking a measure of "pure existing" is the acceptance of the fundamental absurdity and futility of human existence. The "pure existing" is centrally dramatized in his theatrical world. Alcestis explains the futility of human existence. For her life is a "passionate nonsense". Simon Stimson realizes the fundamental absurdity of human existence by its "ignorance and blindness". For Sabina, life is nothing but "boredom, foolishness" and "life’s nau-se-at-ing". Chrysis, the Woman of Andros bemoans the utility of the human intelligence in failing to comprehend the values of existence. The theme of morality is grounded in the humanist ethos. The quest for "pure existing", in any case, is negated at its final moments of enlightenment and fulfillment. Death is the inevitable destroyer of the gains of "pure existing".
To this extent, Wilder's religious imagination is tempered with the humanistic ethos of the age. The destinies of all his characters are shown to be fatalistic failures in the face of the cosmic injustice, perpetrated by an inscrutable destiny. Brother Juniper saw the death of the five characters as the flinging of "five gesticulating ants". For Caesar, "this life has no color and it gives no sign". The humanist crisis of Chrysis is due to the lack of a centre of continuous grace and benediction in human life. She tells us that we must "drag ourselves through life as best as we can". The imaginative tension between a static, orthodoxical religious order and a dynamic and enlightened humanist ethos majorly controls his religious imagination. Antrobus announces the unfailing optimism in Wilder's vision in finding a “meaning” beyond the broken continuities of existence. He seeks to build “new worlds”. As in any typical Wilder character, he is always optimistic. The destiny of Wilder's religious feeling is spiritual fulfillment and immense moral perfection in a humanist order, as in the case of John Ashley, the man of the Eighth Day. Perhaps, he fully dramatizes and resolves to a greater degree, the tension in Wilder’s aesthetic imagination, by prophetically projecting the dawn of new era of hope and regeneration of man in this twentieth century. He represents the evolution of the consciousness of the entire community in this century.

'Time' provides the tension and medium for resolving the strategies in his creative perception. He shows a greater range and complexity in his perception of Time. There is, at various levels, a philosophical and mystical felicity in his use of Time. Isabella Wilder adequately describes his temporal imagination thus:
He dared to play with chronological time, historic time, and literary time, plucking events from history, people from pedestal and picture frames, and characters from hallowed printed pages. He gave voice to the angels, pagan gods, and animals. (Thornton Wilder xx).

Wilder's temporal aesthetic is variously shaped by his early experiences in China. A vast sense of Time and Space appealed to his innate mind of perceiving the general and universal quality of all the human experiences. He confronted "a sense of timelessness in all things of nature". A sense of tradition, with himself being a representative of that tradition, establishes his creative focus. He always considers every individual and his priceless life "as part of an ageless continuum" at all times and all places. His temporal aesthetic progresses by an apparent tension between the universal and the particular; but in its ultimate meaning, the ceaseless quest is to relate this finite and intensely particular, romanticized "Sub Species Eternities" to the larger realms of universal Time else-where. Wilder's creative aesthetic is thus realized, in its ultimate meaning, as the drama between the finite and the infinite realms of his temporal imagination.

The conception of 'Time' as a repetitive entity in human life is stimulated by his experiences in China. The dramatic structure of The Long Christmas Dinner is realized on the basis of this cognition of Time. In this play, one can see the repetitive occurrence of the same personae, and nearly the same events, but each event has its own "uniqueness" and "value". The universal quality of Time, which is the most essential motive in his creative
aesthetic, is reinforced by his Rome experiences in 1920. Here he perceived that there is an unending vastness of life, and each individual and his experience is only "a part" of this vast and endless progression of life. His commitment to the universal values of Time is reinforced by Gertrude Stein's theories of human nature and human mind. According to Gertrude Stein, human mind is unchangeable and eternal, where as human nature is transitory and rooted in the ephemeral causes. In his vision, Wilder seeks a temporal drama between the eternal and the transitory, between the unchangeable and the universal. (C.T. Couser 804).

Wilder's temporal imagination is also conditioned by his commitment to the American psyche. For him, the American imagination is an endless possibility for ceaseless innovation and recreation of life in newer directions and visions. His innately universal mind finds itself adequate to express the vast, ceaseless and unsettled character of the American mind. His imagination is akin to the American sensibility in seeking the universal and eternal by continuously striving through the values of the particular and the immediate. Every American seeks "to fix a value on every existing thing in relation to a totality, to the All, to the Every-where, to the Always".

However, the cognition and transcendence of the temporal medium is possible only through a fuller comprehension. and experiencing of each single moment of this world. Wilder's creative drama is centrally realized by this aesthetic of relating and experiencing the eternal and unchangeable through the medium of a single, unified and transitory moment. He explains his creative strategy of Our Town, and the same principle controls his aesthetic imagination in its essential nature and purpose : …the central theme of the play: "what is
the relation between the countless ‘unimportant’ details of our daily life, on the one hand, and the great perspectives of time, social history and recurrent religious ideas on the other."

Wilder's vision of the universal meanings and purposes is influenced by his understanding of the Goethian qualities of a great writer. Goethe makes us aware of "all the diversity of life on the entire planet over a vast extent of time". *The Sub Specie Aeternatis* is a supremely romanticized and idealized "moment" in Wilder's vision. It is an imaginative and fatalistic connection between the past and the future, the grace and the denial, and hope and despair. However, this singular "moment" is only a means for reaching the universality and grace, where it becomes hollow without any meaning and spirit of its own. For him, temporal imagination operates through the existence and survival of each individual being. However, each individual is at the same time unique. Thus, his temporal imagination is a symbolic "moment" of the "individual" as well of the universe. He achieves such a creative purpose by means of certain imaginative devices. As Alexander Cowie explains, "Wilder employs distance, time and recurrence or repetition for dramatizing this imaginative continuity between the individual and his universal self. In such a temporal vision, his creative world is instructed by a deep tragic purpose. Death is not the fulfillment of the already completed sensations and reformation of the mind and spirit but the denial of it. The creative aesthetic of Wilder is primarily laid upon this fatalistic tension between the potential and the denial". ("The Bridge of Thornton Wilder" 307-28). As Robert W. Corrigan rightly describes the essential tragic vision of Wilder, "the tragedy of life can best be seen in the drama of the every day—in life’s smallest events." ("Thornton Wilder and the
Tragic Sense of Life" 167-73). Though failure is inevitable, the quest and ceaseless striving do not lose their validity and meaning, as they essentially represent the humanistic ethos and secular belief of our age. What is lost is not to the human spirit of renewal and ceaseless quest, but to the fatalistic order of dispensation of justice by a higher Time Order.

Wilder's creative world is replete with the ceaseless curiosity "to learn" how to live, and he as a writer seeks with an immeasurable amount of pleasure and a rare passion and commitment "to instruct" the world of the values and graces of existence thereby making the world seek a measure of spiritual fulfillment, here and now. The direction of the fulfillment of his creative world is richly humanistic. He is firmly rooted and inspired by the humanistic order of the "pink decade" of the 1920’s.

In Wilder's use of Time, there is the apparent tension between the subjective self of his characters and their groping after higher levels of grace and benediction. Their subjective self is most consciously instructed by the world of love, morality and religious purpose. Their quest in all these areas is defined by "pure existing". In Wilder's world, "pure existing" is a nearly autonomous subjective self. It is one ontological whole, as it is the imaginative connection between this relatively imperfect subjective self and the world of endless grace, elsewhere. To this extent, eternity means an imaginative release from the realms of temporality into a world of timelessness. In Wilder's world, in its ultimate meaning, it becomes nearly a mystical world. Mystical world seeks to liberate itself from the temporal vicissitudes of this subjective self in reaching a state of union with some other order of experience, as Godhead, the Bliss and Beatitude. In Wilder's world, in any case, the intended transcendental
goal is not "strictly" religious in all its manifestations. Wilder is "religious" in its "essential" qualities of enlightened humanism, such as sacrifice and loss of vanity, and secular in its ritualistic practice.

'Time' has a complex function in his imagination, both at the level of human striving in this world and as possible medium for grace and benediction elsewhere. Within this imaginative perception of the world of eternity, death performs is a negative function. It is one negative and even fatalistic action of Time. It is the inevitable follower of progress and achievement thus making a quest for progress and refinement in human self transitory and futile. In Wilder's world, death is one symbolic act of the vicissitudes of Time. What is earlier a highly romanticized "moment" of hope and nearly realized world of joy and fulfillment, ultimately becomes a moment of death and destruction. Thus, in Wilder, "specious present" performs dual though opposite function: on the one hand, if it is a moment of hope, on the other hand, it is also a moment of death. In his creative world, 'Time' is used with a refreshing boldness. For, Wilder's precious concern is with 'Time' in his imagination, both in its thematic and structural aspects. His concern is with the priceless value of life, in all its myriad manifestations, both human and natural, and biological and vegetative. He is always faced with the problem of the priceless value of existence, that is, in its ultimate meaning, its transitory nature. His world is metaphysical in its assumption of sanctioning grace to this suffering humanity. As such, as transcendence is impossible in human terms, he seeks an imaginative continuity with higher realms of metaphysical sanction elsewhere. To this extent, he shares the consciousness of Time in eighteenth century. A sense of interior temporality and intensity of sensation define the temporal
imagination of the eighteenth century. Wilder also finds his relationship with some of the creative writers and philosophers in his temporal imagination. The direction and fulfillment for such a "moment" is transcendence of these mortal realms through the medium of death. Whitman’s concept of Time includes a vastly varied and singularly unrelated moments and places. A simultaneous multitude defines his temporal imagination. The vision is universal and philosophical and objective. A sense of repetitive cyclicity defines T.S. Eliot’s temporal world. All the varied moments and significations are but numerous foci along the cyclical process of Time.

Thornton Wilder's characters seek and at least for a nebulous "moment" even live in that present time. It is a time of "pure sensation" and the ability to live beyond the apparent absurdities of life, as if such contrarieties do not exist at all, It is the ability to live with a rare creative and pregnant "stasis" always radiant with hope. If any, it is certainly a "moment" of transcendence from the mundane world of Georges patricide and Perichole's hypocrisy and Marquesa's vanity. It is a pure world of delight with living itself. It is pure being, almost God-like in its intimations and presence.

For Wilder, as for his characters, life, that is, life of the "present" is of great value and significance for its own sake. The boundless spirit of curiosity "to know" the different forms and modes of living under varied settings of time and places from Rome to New Hampshire defines his creative imagination. Sometimes, his temporal and spatial confines move with an easy fluidity even into such primordial areas as the realms of Creation in The Skin of our Teeth and recurrent mythical past as in Theophilus North.
In any case, "life" is always defined by its "process of living" itself-curious, delightful, pleasurable and vain and vacant and disgusting-that defines the essential interest and appeal to his imagination. In such a vision, Wilder looks at life, almost with a child-like sense of wonder. He does not denounce anything nor does he praise anything for its own sake.

In his world-view, there is no sin, but only various levels of inadequacy of personality. As any great artist, he is also constantly puzzled by the infinite variety of "choices" made by men and women in this world. Be it a Marquesa, John Ashley or even a near stoic like the Chrysis, all of them are called upon to make a "choice" apparently born out of their own commitment to "improve" upon their earlier lives and as a result, this world. This is an "individual" moral choice and finally when it becomes a tragedy, as it always happens in his world, they start wondering "what" and "why" such a consciously made "choice" has become a "disaster" in their lives. To this extent, "choice" is a curious aesthetic phenomenon in his vision. But, this question of "choice" or even moral dilemma is realized in his world in the larger and full gaze of some impersonal universal forces-for example, "the fall" of the bridge, and the catastrophe of the impending doom in The Skin. Thus, this "individual" moral choice is in fact realized as a metaphysical dilemma, thus raising the ultimate question of a metaphysical sanction elsewhere.

Thus, Thornton Wilder's world-view is realized in a criss-cross zone of human choice and a metaphysical sanction. It is as much a "moment" of intense and consciously decided moral choice, as a glimpse of the metaphysical reality elsewhere. It is noteworthy that all his characters have a relatively settled pattern: their individual choice and "angst" of apparent "failure" are
always realized in a setting of infinitesimal stars and planetary and earthly dislocations and cosmic disturbances. As this well-intended moral choice fails in the face of an "accident", which is the manifestation of another kind of reality elsewhere, his religious mooring are sought to be realized in this twilight zone of negation and fuller grace. In the process, his characters seek to translate all the religious virtues with a singleness of mind and purpose in the real life experiences. John Ashley is a typical example. He is the one character truly religious in all respects in this world. Perhaps, what Wilder is attempting is to faithfully translate the world of religion and supernatural sanction of a higher order to this world of survival, and improve this world.

Thus, Wilder's world is at its most crucial stages of the resolution of its narrative plots are replete with miracles that is "accidents" as in the case of The Bridge. The fall of the bridge, is an "accident" where as the escape of John Ashley is a miracle; as again, Antrobus Ombudsman's role in retrieving this world from the precipice of extinction is one single moment where there is no supposed disjunction between "accident" and "miracle."

In all such ventures, Wilder uses "Time" with a mystical felicity. Time is an imaginative coordinate for the realization of the destinies of his characters in their choice and ultimate "accident" or "miracle". Time thus has wide-ranging implications. It is subjective in these trials and tribulations of the characters as it ultimately realizes at an impersonal level as metaphysical sanction as miracle or otherwise. In any case, Time is not cyclical. It never sanctions fuller grace to the nearly perfect men and women of his world. Perhaps, Wilder, as any other Twentieth century writer, indulges in creative skepticism, leaving his narrative structures fruitfully unresolved, though his
theatrical imagination appears to be more in the realms of sanctioned grace, but this disjunction, if any, is more a matter of degree, than of kind. Thus, each "moment" is a fulfilled moment, autonomous in itself and self-effective. It has moral and spiritual autonomy. It is a world of joy and profound maturity and balance of mind for their own sake. It is a world of "Sthithaprajnathva" - where a Caesar also lives and suffers and yet praises this life for its "brightness and darkness".

The success of *Our Town* lies in the fact that Wilder made the ordinary, interesting and convincing without falling into sentimentality. The notion that the play lacks suspense arising out of complications, conflicts and disturbances, can best be understood through Rex Burbank’s observation: “Lacking the suspense that goes with a carefully plotted conflict between characters, the play admittedly draws heavily upon theatricalist novelty for fresh treatment of its materials; and much of its effect is owing to its appeal to audience nostalgia. But the material and the technical devices conceived for the benefit of the ‘group mind’ have within them the seeds of a larger meaning; and this promise of a larger meaning gives suspense to the action.” (*Thornton Wilder* 91). So, one can see in Wilder’s play, a classic and convincing portrayal of the goings-on in the corridors of life. Wilder had set about his job with subtle planning. The technical devices of the play direct their effect towards the visual faculty. Hence the censure on the forced intrusion of loud theatrical paraphernalia.

The stage and the literary techniques of the play are the foundations of the edifice that is *Our Town*. The deceptively bare stage; the seemingly bare plot; characters which are symbols; the use of pantomime; the role of the Stage
Manager; the narrative technique; the ordinary everyday dialogue; the startling expressionistic device of juxtaposing time segments all foreground the haphazard pattern of life as experienced by all of us. The cathartic effect on the audience in the end rams into the heart and mind with an idiomatic sledgehammer, the message that life is wonderful.

The audience that arrived at the theatre on the first performance of Our Town found themselves facing a curtainless, bare, empty stage in half light. This bare stage had an immediate impact on the minds of the spectators, conditioning them from the very beginning that they would be witnessing a portrayal of eternal human experience, being presented through a couple of family albums. They understood very well, that whatever was happening on stage would be an expression, in very general terms, of whatever happened on the terrains of life.

A decorated stage with all the trimmings would have seriously damaged Wilder’s objective of presenting life on stage. Just as life is bare, except, for the various experiences and events which fill in the gaps so also, Wilder’s bare stage. It speaks eloquently in an aesthetically gratifying way. The deliberate laying bare of the stage is a technique in itself.

This technique is similar to Hemingway’s dexterous building of design from simple details. In such a technique the emphasis is not so much on the objects themselves as on the sensations conveyed by their perception. In this context, Wilder’s comment deserves attention. In the Preface to Our Town and Other Plays, Wilder clarified the motives behind his technique. He said:
I have set the village against the largest dimensions of time and place. The recurrent words in this play (few have noticed it) are ‘hundreds,’ ‘thousands’ and ‘millions.’ Emily’s joys and griefs, her algebra lessons and the birthday presents—what are they when we consider all the billions of girls who have lived, who are living and who will live? Each individual’s assertion to an absolute reality can only be inner, very inner. And here the method of staging finds its justification—in the first two acts there are at least a few chairs and tables; but when she revisits the earth and the kitchen to which she descended on her twelfth birthday the very chairs and table are gone. Our claim, our hope, our despair are in the mind—not in things, not in ‘scenery’ (12).

A bare stage without any equipment succeeded admirably in portraying the unadorned, unsung music of existence.

Another very, important, and brilliant stage technique of Wilder is the role of the Stage Manager. The scorn of verisimilitude prompted Wilder to entrust the responsibility of the smooth movement of the play to the Stage Manager. The role of the Stage Manager is multi-dimensional and multifaceted.
At the very beginning of the play, he immediately names the author, director and chief actors of the play, making it clear that the play is fiction and not reality. He says: “This play is called *Our Town*. It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced and directed by A… (or: produced by A. . . ; directed by B . . . ). In it you will see Miss C . . . ; Miss D . . .; and many others.” (21).

His role is vital. Much depends on how he' delivers his lines. If he delivers his lines as in a lecture, the play will fail miserably. Wilder’s stage Manager wins over the trust and confidence of the spectators through friendly discussions and informal chats. He becomes a friend and feels one with the audience and his talk conditions the audience to feel one with him. Then all move together on the journey through life. The role of the Stage Manager is very much similar to that of the ‘Sutradhar’ in the Indian theatre.

The ‘Sutradhar’ not only performs technical functions like commenting in detail on the various characters and scenes, or, selecting and presenting the scenes with the purpose of demonstrating the ideas behind them, but he also embodies the essence and spirit of the protagonists. So also the stage Manager of *Our Town* directs our attention to the main protagonist -- the town. His description gives a detailed account of how people grew up, lived, married and died there. He intends to preserve the information for future. He says:

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.

See what I mean?

So—people a thousand years from now—this is the way we were in the provinces North of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century—This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying. (41).

The Stage Manager’s statement that a copy of the play will be put in a cornerstone will serve the purpose of informing the people a thousand years from then about the real life of Our Town.

As the play draws to its close, it is the Stage Manager who affectionately bids good night to the audience, He notes that it is getting lute and almost everyone is asleep in Grover’s Corners as the stars “do their old, old criss coss journeys in the sky.” Winding up his watch he calls out the time in Grover’s Corners, which is also the time in the theatre. “Hm...Eleven O’Clock in Grover’s Corners - You get a good rest, too, Good Night.” (91).

Thus, one can see that the role of the Stage Manager is all-important. He is the pivot who facilitates the smooth movement of the entire story. In him, the variegated themes blend to form a cohesive whole. He not only comments on the action but like the chorus in Greek theatre, participates in it himself and at certain points, answers questions asked by actors planted amongst the
audience. From time to time he comments on the weather and the state of the world, and also interprets the actions of the characters for us. The Stage Manager creates the world of the play with authority and grace. A lot depends on how he renders his speeches. He can make the briefest expressions appear to be significant.

The technique of characterization in the play is also very important. In *Some Thoughts on Playwriting* Wilder states that there is a marked difference between characterization in a play and characterization in a novel. Whereas in a novel the same takes the form of ‘dogmatic assertion,’ in a play it is like a ‘blank cheque.’ The signature of the playwright is there but the rest of the details have to be filled up by the actor. This opinion of Wilder gains significance, when one can consider the impact the speech of an actor has on the mind of the spectators. Since Wilder’s theatre dissuades the audience from passive participation, the responsibility of the success of the play rests on the shoulders of the characters. They have to individually and collectively, appeal to the audience by being well understood. This they can do successfully only when they win the trust and confidence of the spectators. “Whereas O’Neill and Williams, give resonance to their characters by exploring hidden motivations and desires Wilder directs us to the bright surface and the overall pattern of his people’s existence.” (David Castronovo 86).

Wilder’s characters in *Our Town* are not sophisticated shamners who pretend intelligence at the cost of human values. On the other hand in direct juxtaposition to the pseudo-intellectuals, they portray Wilder’s primary concern, that the importance of life is how we live it at a time and not, what we think and plan about it.
The characters of Emily and George symbolize the simplicity and the fresh innocence of youth. They are representations of small town life, rather than individuals. They represent the characters, as they must have been when the event first occurred in the beginning.

Dr. Gibbs’ exasperation with George after his talk with hint on the latter’s wedding day is a brilliant expression of the awkward adolescent parent relationship. Dr. Gibbs exclaims: “I tell you Julia, there’s nothing so terrifying in the world as a son. The relation of father and son is the darndest, awjwardest” (55).

The technique of juxtaposing time segments, expresses Wilder’s expressionistic intentions. Since Wilder was portraying life on stage this technique freed him from the clutches of time limitations. This was indeed a very difficult technique and in an unskillful effort would have run the inevitable risk of miscomprehension. That the play has not done so, is proof of Wilder’s talent. A train whistle from backstage, reminds one of the train from Boston which is due to arrive at 5 O’clock. Time segments are telescoped while referring to Doctor Gibbs. The audience learns of the Doctor’s death in 1930 though the time when this is announced is 1902.

Time is not only telescoped but is also presented as the chief factor in the understanding of reality. What Wilder wishes to convey is that certain time segments get firmly rooted in an individual’s mind, on account of their particular time of occurring. He puts forward his idea of time as an invisible, integral element ingrained in the human consciousness. The point emphasized here is that such particular time segments do not belong to ordinary time, but to
special time. There are moments of heightened existence in individual lives, and therefore are special. The following example best illustrates this point. The solemn occasion of marriage, when considered in very general terms, is a very typical, archetypal experience. But, when we consider this experience in particular terms, then it becomes a moment of heightened existence, because it is a very special occasion in the lives of two people i.e. the couple that is marrying. Each couple has the feeling, that their particular experience is special. But when we consider the fact, that millions marry every day, and the experience of this event is very typical and similar when considered out of time, we note the point to which Wilder wishes to draw our attention.

Hence, one can see that Wilder’s violating the unity of time, by employing a haphazard, zigzag time sequence is in absolute harmony with his idea of presenting life on stage. With the help of this technique Wilder portrays the prominent experiences, experienced by each one of us and he succeeds admirably in demolishing the monolith of verisimilitude.

The technique of pantomime, emerges as the most exciting, thought provoking technique, which ensures the active participation of the audience in the theatre. Wilder fulfils the potentialities of the theatre by employing this technique successfully. As this technique urges the audience to think independently it creates an atmosphere of involvement. The paperboy throwing imaginary newspapers into imaginary doorways; the milkman walking besides an invisible horse and wagon, and, carrying and delivering imaginary milk bottles; Mrs. Biggs lighting an imaginary stove, and then preparing breakfast; Mrs. Webbs pushing a lawn-mower to and fro besides her house; Emily picking imaginary flowers by the gate of her house; Emily and George
enjoying ice-cream soda; the Emily-George wedding at Church; the dead in their graves in the cemetery; all these represent our day-to-day existence.

Such theatre traditions enrich the art of the artist. The facial expressions and body language of the characters make clear strident statements about the times in which we live. The myth that words cannot be replaced by gestures stands exploded when Wilder’s characters clamber on to the stage and with their miming successfully regale the audience. Their actions' convey Wilder’s intentions explicitly.

The opinions and acclaims of critics establish Wilder’s protean genius. If critics like Mary McCarthy feel ashamed of the fact that Our Town moved them to tears then John Brown affirms that the play is about that particular area of struggle which is our day-to-day existence. If young people fail to identify with the characters of the play then critics consider this as their inability to comprehend the trivial realities of life. If some realists wave off the play as unreal on account of its lack of violence and front page scandals then John Mason Brown immediately asserts that “anyone who hears only the milk bottles clink when morning has come has not heard what Wilder wants them to hear. These milk bottles are the spokesmen of the time, they are the symbols of the bigness of little things.” (Dramatis Personae: A Retrospective Show 84). If, on the one hand, critics feel that Wilder’s play would appeal to the audience who is “sickened by dominance and brutality” they also feel that “Wilder’s interlocking world of feelings and interests is a version of life in a democratic culture' to which we are becoming so unused that it may soon become remarkable.” (David Castronovo 93).
The play is the presentation of a ‘cosmic drama’ which makes use of abstractions to portray the timeless value of simple pleasures like mama’s flowers, food, coffee, sleeping and hopeful waking up.

Winifield Townley has appropriately pointed out that as *Our town* begins “Wilder sets in motion the little wheel of daily doings .... With it he also sets in counter motion the big wheel: and as' the little one spins the little doings, the big one begins slowly, slowly for this is time itself, weighted with birth and marriage and death, with aging and with change. This is the great thing *Our Town* accomplishes. Simultaneously we are aware of what is momentary and what is eternal.” (“*Our Town* and the Golden Veil” 109).

Thornton Wilder's play *The Skin of Our Teeth* sketches the history of civilization from the beginning to the present day. Its main theme is that Man with his courage, optimism and determination, shall always be victorious in the battle for survival. He shall somehow manage to overcome chaos to start afresh.

While the sky is no limit for Wilder’s flights of imagination, the parameters of this ‘testament of faith’ are ground realities. The premiere production notes of the play specify that the play is about the Antrobuses who have survived a “thousand calamities by the skin of their teeth and Mr. Wilder’s play is a tribute to their indestructibility.” (Paul Cubeta 579).

The theme of continuity, in spite of all odds, dominates the storyline of the play. The theme of human obligations is a stirring social comment as it involves an in-depth examination of moral priorities. Man’s responsibilities towards the self, family and society are studied in context. The idea
propounded is that a healthy society is an essential requisite for the brightness and longevity of the flame of civilization. The themes of evil and loneliness confirm the concerns of the dramatist in their representation of that phenomenon which marks the onset of abstract threats in the individual’s life.

The technique of the play anticipates the active participation of the audience. It exerts some pressure on their minds to exercise their imagination. Its apparent simplicity contains deep layers of complexity. Simple words and simple syntax combine with the other stage-devices to add to its richness. The expressionist intent of the artist is manifest in his endeavour to go beyond mere representation to facilitate interpretation. The emphasis in Wilder’s depiction is not so much on events themselves' as on their inner significance. The keynote of the expressionist theory of theatre was struck by Strindbergh when he wrote in the Preface to The Dream Play that, in a play, “Anything may happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On an insignificant background of reality, imagination designs and embroiders novel patterns, a medley of memories, experiences, free fantasies, absurdities and improvisations.” (Qtd. in Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama 118). Thus, the expressionist mode helps Wilder in providing a wider and satisfying perspective wherein his themes are suitably expressed.

The expressionist vision sets the themes in motion. The dramatis personae of the play consists of Mr. and Mrs. ‘Antrobus’ representing man and his mate respectively. ‘Antrobus’ derived from the Greek word ‘Antro’ means ‘Man’; he has the general weaknesses and virtues of all humanity. He does not change much from year to year and his problems also remain much the same throughout. He is almost often on the brink of disaster caused either by natural
forces from outside or by inner conflicts, but he manages to survive by the skin of his teeth. His wife Mrs. Antrobus is the eternal mother. Acting from instinct she guards her family like a tigress. She is both mysterious and simple-minded. The two Antrobus children, Gladys and Henry, symbolize man’s quest for perfection and the possibility that this quest will never be fully realized. Gladys, the daughter, represents the life force whereas Henry, the son, represents evil. They may also be interpreted as the concepts of sex and violence. Gladys has difficulty in keeping her dress down and Henry can hit anything if he has a stone in his hand. Besides these four the Antrobus family also has amongst them a friend-Sabina. Sometimes a maid, sometimes a beauty contest winner, she represents the seekers of a life of luxuries. As Miss Fairweather she represents the spirit of functioning best when there are no problems. She has all the weaknesses of her kind-prudishness, self-righteousness, lack of conviction, lack of courage in adversity, vanity and ignorance of everything above the level of appetite.

The use of 'time' also confirms this view. As the play proceeds the audience understands that Wilder is using two kinds of time simultaneously. The Antrobus household belongs to the pre-historic time and the present time as well. Throughout the play Wilder moves back and forth in time, sometimes going into the past and then abruptly coming to the present with a few comments on the future. He makes use of a large historical sweep to present generalizations about Man’s courage and his invincibility.

The play opens by making fun of old-fashioned playwriting. On the conventional box type stage there is a typical scene of a maid dusting a living room. Suddenly, a portion of the wall above the door flaps, buckles and flies
off into the air. Sabina, the maid, is struck dumb with surprise. Her amazement draws the attention of the audience to this remarkable incident which symbolizes the disintegration of the conventional stage. It is also a telling commentary on the shakiness of the human condition.

Sabina thus begins the play by convincingly voicing the theme of survival only through the will to do so. She says: “The whole world is at sixes and sevens and why the house hasn’t fallen down about our ears long ago is a miracle to me.” (*The Skin of Our Teeth*, in *Our Town and Other Plays* 99). This miracle has been made possible through the efforts of Mrs. Antrobus who has concentrated all her endeavours on the well being of her family.

When the ice threatens to destroy everything Mr. Antrobus, who is busy in his inventions, is held up outside his house. He sends home a telegram via smoke signals, instructing Mrs. Antrobus to fight the cold by burning everything except the plays of Shakespeare. This advice is indignantly brushed aside by Mrs. Antrobus who is willing to burn ten Shakespeare’s works to prevent a child of hers from getting a cold in the head. The threat of destruction forces a Dinosaur, a Mammoth, and other neighbours like Judge Moses, Homer and Nine Muses to knock at the Antrobus door for shelter. Mrs. Antrobus wants to refuse, her first instinct being the protection of her own family but Mr. Antrobus, the source of all knowledge, language and learning takes in Judge Moses, Homer and the three Muses thereby saving both religion and literature. The SOS is extended to the audience as well who are requested to pass up their chairs from the auditorium to keep the fire of civilization burning. The audience also thus contributes its mite in saving the human race from extinction.
Parodying the naturalistic theatre that Wilder had known in his youth the play extends the reality of the theatre beyond the stage to include the audience in the action. Actors planted amongst the audience enact a scene successfully. Thus in the battle for survival no efforts are spared and man’s Herculean efforts ultimately achieve victory.

In the Second act Antrobus is lured by the charms of Miss Fairweather, who is now not the maid Sabina, but a beauty contest winner. He contemplates substituting her for his wife. Moral transgression immediately provokes divine retribution and humanity finds itself once again on the razor edge of danger. This time the great Flood threatens to destroy everything. In the intense conflict between man’s duties and desires man oscillates, but his instincts pull him back ultimately from the all-destructive path of uncontrolled lust and once again he survives by the skin of his teeth.

Macabre annihilation threatens mankind a third time. This time it assumes the form of a war. Antrobus driven to despair is not very eager to save the world a third time; his energy has been drained out during his efforts in the ‘Ice Age’ and the ‘Flood.’ Having had several setbacks, he knows that he will have to try, and keep on trying. He tells his wife, “Oh, I’ve never forgotten for long at a time that living is struggle. I know 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 a country.” (176) He hopes that his past experiences, his learning, and his books will guide him in his efforts to overcome chaos. This is the knowledge which stimulates his yearning for progress as he sets out to rebuild once again.
The theme of courage in the face of adversity serves as a beacon light and reinforces the will to rebuild for a bright future, irrespective of the dark happenings of the past; it shows man’s resilient power to survive against many odds. While dealing with the theme of human obligations Wilder seems to wonder whether man’s primary responsibilities are towards his self and his family or towards society. As events unfold, it becomes apparent that man’s responsibility towards society is of paramount importance as only a healthy balanced society is capable of continuing and safeguarding itself from the threats of decay and destruction.

When Antrobus succumbs to the charms of Miss Fairweather, he sets a bad precedent, the repercussions of which are horrifying and paralyzing in their intensity. Antrobus’ unchecked lust boomerangs on him when his daughter Gladys, finding attraction in sin, appears wearing red stockings symbolizing the Fall. This whiplash leaves Antrobus numb with horror. Supernatural intervention seems to be the only way to check his fond passion. Before-it assumes threatening proportions, Antrobus renounces Miss Fairweather with immediate effect and awakens to his obligation to protect his family, society and civilization from annihilation.

Mrs. Antrobus and Miss Fairweather understand each other perfectly. If Miss Fairweather Sabina boasts that she has inspired Antrobus to invent the alphabet, Mrs. Antrobus’s confidence is not shaken. Mrs. Antrobus knows perfectly well that it is she who keeps the home fires burning. Sabina and her types can be bought for the simplest luxuries and hence they can never build stable foundations for any man.
Thus, one can see that Man's responsibility towards his family and society on the one hand is pitched against his responsibility towards his own self on the other. As the threats of destruction move from the external to the internal level, signs of disaster appear, but in the ultimate struggle man’s victory symbolizes the establishment of a healthy moral order which can ensure continuity and prosperity.

When Mr. Antrobus suddenly tells his wife that he is leaving her, she makes a very intelligent remark on human obligations. She says, “I didn’t marry you because you were perfect. I didn’t even marry you because I loved you. I married you because you gave me a promise (She takes off her ring and looks at it). That promise made up for your faults. And the promise I gave you made up for mine. Two imperfect people got married and it was the promise that made the marriage.” (150). This promise involves the protection of family at all costs. Its breaking will have shattering consequences. This is the theme of human obligations which maintains the moral code of conduct, establishing simultaneously Wilder’s unflinching faith in the eternal human values.

Although the play conveys the message that humanity will triumph over catastrophe, Wilder examines in depth the nature of evil itself. He muses about its origin and causes. He feels that evil will always be present, whatever form it may take, and will always continue to choke and thwart advancement. But then it is all in man’s hands, whether to succumb and surrender to it thereby bringing about total destruction, or to control its power.

Act III propounds the concept of evil very clearly. Henry who has a red mark on his forehead is the representative figure of evil. He may be
interpreted as Cain of the Bible as he is armed with a sling shot and can hit anything if he has a stone in his hand. He represents the forces of anarchy that were rampaging across the world causing destruction and disintegration. His intentions come close to those of the Nazis and the Fascists, when he exclaims bitterly, “The first thing to do is to burn up those old books; it’s the ideas he gets out of those old books that . . makes the whole world so you can’t live in it.” (165).

His evil instincts and destructive mentality reject love. In a way Peace and Love are anathema to him as he screams, “Tear everything down. I don’t care what you smash...You don’t have to think I’m any relation of yours. I haven’t got any father or any mother, or brothers or sisters. And I don’t want any....I’m alone, and that’s all I want to be: alone.” (169).

The skeleton in Henry’s cupboard is the murder of his brother which Mrs. Antrobus perpetually strives to hide. Perpetually at odds with the rest of the Antrobus family Henry exposes his loneliness as that of a mind that has segregated itself from the human race. His is not the loneliness of a sensitive being who comprehends the difficulty of communication. His is the all-consuming hatred of apathy. He confuses the concept of freedom with that of selfish desires and self-ornamentation hereby upsetting the order of the world. He succeeds in creating forces which bring about nothing but destruction. Man’s struggle with him is the most formidable and gnawing. Sabina, though not actually wicked like Henry, is greedy and conniving. Engendering nothing except bitterness and deprivation she is content in her easy track to nowhere, as she pedals furiously and passionately in place.
The play acknowledges the existence of these phenomena, and in a textbook contrast in opposites, recommends the exercise of human franchise in the right direction. The evil forces exacting their ‘pound of flesh’ in their time can nonetheless be overcome, is Wilder’s message. Along with all the weaknesses are also the religious and moral values which save the day for man.

The play employs a variety of devices which have their desired impact. The expressionist mode, the use of the episodic structure, and the slapstick form with its wit, humour and irony make Wilder’s play interesting. The use of slides, placards and the exposure of production problems to the audience indicate Wilder’s innovative skills. The handling of characterization with characters dropping their roles frequently and speaking directly to the audience, sometimes providing subtle comments on the situations and actions and sometimes merging their identities totally with the roles that they are playing reveal Wilder’s penchant for experimentation. His desire for the same is also reflected in his inclusion of the audience as dramatis personae and the introduction of the role of the Stage Manager. The stage and literary techniques thus set the tone of the play. The themes and techniques taken together present a unified picture of an erring, yet noble mankind surviving not only because of, but in spite of itself.

Act I begins with a projection screen in the middle of the curtain. The first lantern slide announces the name of the theatre and after that the words ‘News Events of the World’ appear. Slides are also used subsequently to depict the rising sun, the front door of the theatre and the three cleaning women with their pots, pans and pails.
All these succeed in conveying to the audience the idea that they are watching a presentation of events in a theatre. Whenever a scene tends to get tricky, Wilder immediately provides dramatic relief by breaking the illusion and reminding the audience that they are watching a scene in a theatre. Thus, through the use of these devices and the episodic plot structure Wilder succeeds in breaking the flow of the narrative, drawing the attention of the audience to the series of broken scenes as technical and theatrical devices.

As the characters of the play represent human civilization, Wilder takes special care to endow them with human qualities as well. To emphasize their human nature he allows them to drop their stage roles frequently and talk to the audience directly, as individuals employed to work in a play called *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Frequently Sabina drops her role and expresses her exasperation to the audience. Playing her role perfectly as Sabina the maid, in the Antrobus home, she says her lines, “Don’t forget that a few years ago we came through the depression by the skin of our teeth! One more tight squeeze like that and where will we be?” (101).

This is a cue line and she waits for the next actor to pick up his cue and respond. When he fails to do so she repeats the line again; ultimately flustered, she flings the make-believe pretence to the winds and coming downstage expresses her indignation to the audience. She says,

I can’t invent any words for this play, and
I’m glad I can’t. I hate this play and every word in it.
Besides the author hasn’t made up his silly mind as to whether we’re all living back in caves or in New Jersey today, and that’s the way it is all the way through.

Oh-why can’t we have plays like we used to have-Peg o’ My Heart, and Smilin’ Thru, and The Baz; good entertainment with a message you can take home with you?

I took this hateful job because I had to.

(101).

In direct juxtaposition to this scene there are moments in the play where the actors become so involved in the reality of what they are doing that they forget their identities totally-letting the same merge with their roles. This device is most apparent in the scene between Henry and Antrobus in Act III. Henry emerges here as unreconciled evil. The anger between the two builds up and tends to get dangerously out of hand as the two scream and hurl abuses at each other.

Henry: Try what? Living here?-~Speaking polite downtown to all the old men like you? Standing like a sheep at the street corner until the red light turns to green? Being a good boy and a good sheep, like all the stinking ideas you get out of your books? Oh, no. I’ll make a world, and I’ll show you.
Antrobus: [hard] 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 must behave yourself. Do you hear me?

Henry: [Wildly] What is this? Must behave yourself? Don’t you say must to me...Nobody can say must to me. All my life everybody’s been crossing me—everybody, everything, all of you. I’m going to be free, even if I have to kill half the world for it. Right now, too. Let me get my hands on his throat. I’ll show him. (170).

He advances menacingly towards Antrobus with full intention of strangling him. But Sabina drops her role and begs them, in her own person, to stop: “Stop! Stop! Don’t play this scene. You know what happened last night... You almost strangled him. You became a regular savage. Stop it!” (171).

The actor playing the role of Henry soon realizes his folly and apologizes immediately for the loss of his self-control. He acknowledges that something comes over him while doing that scene. Although he respects Antrobus and has nothing against him personally, he feels that somehow everytime he acts out this scene he forgets himself totally. He says, “It’s like I
become fifteen years old again. I ... I ... listen: my own father used to whip me and lock me up every Saturday night. I never had enough to eat .... They tried to prevent my living at all I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” (171).

Mrs. Antrobus encourages him to say everything he wants to say. Talking about the emptiness of being disliked and shunned at every turn of life, he says, “And the emptiness fills up with the one thought that you have to strike and fight and kill. Listen, it’s as though you have to kill somebody else so as not to end up killing yourself.” (172).

The actor playing the role of Mr. Antrobus also understands that there must be something in him which reminds the actor playing Henry of his unhappy childhood. Henry is grateful to Antrobus for his understanding as he promises not to forget himself too much in his roles in future. Thus we see that this device is skillfully handled by Wilder as it succeeds in conveying the desired effect on the audience.

Frequently, the actors make candid remarks which explain the scene and situation to the audience. Their expressions help in the interpretation of some words and lines, and sometimes they show as if the audience’s involvement in the play is helping them to understand the situation better. In the beginning of Act I Sabina frequently exclaims, “don’t like it! I don’t like it,” but later she confesses that as the audience reception is warm, she is beginning to understand the play better. On Sabina’s shoulder rests the responsibility of breaking the action on stage and reminding the audience of its illusory quality.
The stage management of the play exposes to the audience the difficult and laborious process of the production of a play. The emphasis on the disorderliness backstage and the rebellious outbursts of characters are all deliberate. Herein lies the influence of Pirandello. Just as Pirandello’s characters add their own opinion frequently thereby reshaping the dimensions of a play, similarly Wilder’s characters express several feelings of their real life situations whenever an occasion arises. It is this open-ended quality which constitutes its appeal. In his stage management, characterization and generalization Wilder shares several similarities with Bertolt Brecht’s experiments of the 1930s.

In spite of the fact that the play is an integrated blend of several techniques, presenting the serious theme of the hairline escapes of man, yet it never falls into becoming an emotional tear jerker. The episodic structure of the play gives it a ‘breezy’ form. The clownish gestures and subtle humour provide a slapstick form which widens its perspective.

The role of the Stage Manager ensures the swift movement of the play. Wilder portrays hours and planets with the help of the Stage Manager. Towards the close of the play Antrobus, convinced that the profound thoughts contained in his books shall guide him in rebuilding after war, sits down to draw inspiration from them. As he reads, actors carrying placards bearing numbers on them, begin to move from left to right on the stage. Nine O’clock is Spinoza and he passes by flashing his wisdom, “After experience had taught me that the common occurrences of daily life are vain and futile; and I saw that all the objects of my desire and fear were in themselves nothing good nor bad
save insofar as the mind was affected by them; I at length determined to search out whether there was something truly good and communicable to man.” (177).

Next in sequence are presented Plato and Aristotle with their philosophy. As the Hours voice their profound thoughts, the planets also continue their activities in the cosmic order. They appear on stage making humming sounds. Mankind also continues its struggle in its day-to-day routine life oblivious of the happenings in the universe around it. Ultimately Sabina brings us back to the point from where we had started.

Oh, Oh, Oh. Six o’clock and the master not home yet. Pray God nothing serious has happened to him crossing the Hudson River. But I wouldn’t be surprised. The whole world’s at sixes and sevens and why the house hasn’t fallen down about our ears long ago is a miracle to me. we have to go on for ages and ages yet.

You go home.

The end of the play isn’t written yet.

Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus! Their heads are full of plans and they’re as confident as the first day they began-and they told me to tell you: good night. (178).
This can hardly be called an ending of a play. It is the beginning and so it shall be, again and again. What the end of it all will be is still very much an open question but the philosophy of enjoying the ice-cream while it’s on your plate seems interesting enough. It is a gigantic affirmation of man’s potential and energies of creativity and a fitting reply to the pessimistic prophets of doom.

The technique of *The Matchmaker* parodies the conventional, well made, stock company plays that Wilder had seen in his youth. He felt that “one way to shake-off the nonsense of nineteenth-century staging is to make fun of it.” (13). So, in this play Wilder makes use of the essentials of a conventionally well made play by changing them into farce. Explaining his endeavour Wilder wrote: “Farce would seem to be intended for childlike minds still touched with grossness; but the history of the theatre shows us that the opposite is true. Farce has always flourished in ages of refinement and great cultural activity. And the reason lies where one would least expect it; farce is based on logic and objectivity.” (Malcolm Goldstein 110).

Thus, the technique of farce sets the atmosphere of the play, simultaneously enabling Wilder to provide matter for serious thinking. Consisting of typical characteristics-like people hiding in cupboards, under tables and behind screens; screens folding and collapsing at wrong moments; strange coincidences; narrowly escaped encounters, mistaken identities; clever manipulations, trap layings; and boys dressed as girls-the play abounds in bustle, bounce and activity. At the same time, it also provides serious, social comment. The following observation of Dukore explains Wilder’s intentions coherently: “Although Wilder wrote the play during the Depression, the
underlying rebellion it urges . . . is wider than worker against capitalist: it is the rebellion against all constraints that thwart a rich, full life.” (American Dramatists 126).

Thus one can see that the literary techniques of the play along with the other techniques of the farcical tradition combine to make the play a hilarious farce. The play in its earlier version entitled The Merchant of Yonkers had not been very successful. One of the chief causes of its failure was the direction. The Matchmaker was directed by Tyrone Guthrie, who kept the action moving at the rapid pace it requires.