THE UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA

THE "PRESENTATIONAL PHASE" OF THORNTON WILDER (A STUDY OF THORNTON WILDER'S EXPERIMENTAL PLAYS: "THE LONG CHRISTMAS DINNER," "PULLMAN CAR HIAWATHA," AND "THE HAPPY JOURNEY TO TRENTON AND CAMDEN," AND THEIR CULMINATION IN OUR TOWN.)

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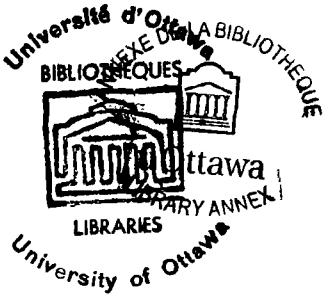

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE REDISCOVERY OF FORGOTTEN GOODS

The following thesis focuses upon a specific phase in the life of a diverse and prolific author.

Such is represented by four plays which fall between the years 1931 and 1938. The one-act plays, "The Long Christmas Dinner," "Pullman Car Hiawatha," and "The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden," contained in the volume entitled "The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays,"[1] published in 1931 serve as early experiments in the style of this period and the later 1938 three act drama, Our Town, a play which presents itself chiefly as a recombination of the elements present in the preceding one-act pieces, represents the last work. The four works are complemented by the 1941 publication of "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting," the essay written by Thornton Wilder to present his accumulated playwrighting theories of this specific phase in his career.

By commencing with the playwrighting theories ("Some Thoughts on Playwrighting") and then by analyzing each play within the 1931-1938 period, Wilder's particular style will be shown.

The manner in which all four works are written is a non-realistic, non-representational one, based upon the

ideas that theatre is theatre and that therefore no imitation of life can be made; and that a "non-illusory" form of theatre is more "realistic" than the imitative one. The term "presentational" has been selected to describe this style. The four plays written between 1931 and 1938 therefore belong to the "presentational phase."

The plays under consideration possess a unique combination of elements which compose a style not found in plays previous to or present after their publication. Repetition of themes may be found in part in other works by the author and isolated elements may be present in a variety of other writings but never is the combination of properties which gives the four plays their unique quality found again outside these specific four plays. Therefore, the short plays published in 1917 in the Yale Literary Magazine; the serial publication of The Trumpet Shall Sound, which began in 1919; the 1928 collection of plays in The Angel That Troubled The Waters; the early 1915 works in the Oberlin Literary Magazine; and the plays published after 1941; The Merchant of Yonkers; The Skin of Our Teeth; Our Century: A Play in Three Scenes, etc. do not conform to the "presentational" characteristics in the three early one-act pieces in the volume of plays or to the recombination of these plays presented for the first and last time in

Our Town.

In dealing with a specific style as presented through a limited number of works, the problem of influences and sources must be dealt with. It is not the intention of this thesis to list and discuss the numerable possible influences on the four plays. Wilder, whose early years were extremely nomadic, is an author well deserving the title of "a rediscoverer of forgotten goods," for he has come into contact with a wide variety of authors and playwrights. To illuminate and specify the exact influence which each former creator had on him would be almost impossible and in relation to this thesis, unnecessary.

The discussion in the succeeding pages is to deal with the "presentational" style as it is begun in the one-act pieces. However, the most prominent influences, especially those referred to in Wilder's personal correspondence and articles related to playwrighting, will be discussed in order to present an idea of the great variety of influences; to set the "presentational phase" briefly within the eclectic background; and to acknowledge that some influences have set a precedent for Wilder's own plays.

Wilder's earliest travels at the age of nine took him to Hong Kong where his father was stationed as American

consul. While there he attended a German school. His first stay was short and he did not return to the East until 1911 where he attended both German and English schools. At this young age Wilder had been introduced to both the German and Oriental cultures. It might be assumed that his knowledge of German authors began at this time and that both cultures worked towards influencing him in later life.

The diverse Chinese culture must have been quite impressive to a young child. It is known that Wilder never saw a Chinese dramatic presentation until Mei Lan Fang appeared in New York in 1930,[2] but what he had seen and experienced in the Orient certainly must have had an effect upon his artistic sensibility.

There are, too, certain factors in Chinese drama which are known to have impressed Wilder. For example, in Chinese drama, there is an extensive use of one action to convey a more complicated one, not easily accommodated by the stage area. Wilder writes of the use of symbolic gestures and actions, "A character by straddling a stick conveys to us that he is on horseback."[3]

One can assume perhaps that the performance of Mei Lan Fang did in some way influence Wilder's thoughts on drama. In an examination of the four plays this appears to hold true for they base themselves upon conventions

similar to those used in the highly intricate Chinese theatre. The Chinese drama, for example, is an art which bases itself upon music, speech,and dancing. The use of dance includes the complete range of the art form and presents gymnastics, gestures, pantomime, and dance movement. The accentuation of gesture is predominant and music is intermingled with action.

The use of scenic elements to signify something other than themselves is also apparent. In the Mei Lan Fang performance, a chair was used to imply another apartment while pantomime was used to suggest an imaginary door through which to pass. A whip could be used to signify a horse.[4]

Wilder's "Pullman Car Hiawatha," "The Long Christmas Dinner," Our Town and "The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden" rely strongly upon the use of pantomime. "Pullman Car Hiawatha" goes further, integrating the use of such with background music. As well, in the plays, the use of symbolic scenic elements, those which insinuate something other than themselves, is apparent.

There has been no direct statement by Wilder that he was influenced by the Chinese theatre but one can assume that such was possible from the similarities between the conventions of the Oriental drama and his own works.

The possibility of Far Eastern influences is further

strengthened by Wilder's own mention of the Japanese drama. In "A Platform and a Passion or Two" he states in his description of the Noh play, that when an actor makes a tour of the stage he is understood to be in the process of a journey.[5] Similar symbolic action takes place in the rocking motions of the passengers of the car and train in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" and "Pullman Car Hiawatha," respectively.

As well, the property man in Japanese drama, who arranges scenic elements in full view of the audience without interrupting the flow of the drama, might have served as the inspiration for Wilder's Stage Manager.

In addition, Wilder was in Rome in the twenties when the Expressionists were speaking up and he did read about them.[6] It is possible that he has applied what he learned from them to his own plays. For example, the use of the typed or non-individualized, functional character; the presentation of symbols; the importance of the message; and a form of Brecht's alienation, which proposed that emotional moments be interrupted by constant reminders to the audience that they were viewing an illusion of life[7] along with the use of commentary to prevent too close an identification of

the audience with the play,[8] are all present to some degree in the plays.

More direct references to German playwrights and their works is given by Wilder in his Playgoing Nights: Notes From a Travel Diary.[9] Remarks on the techniques and qualities of the plays seen in his travels present some idea of the thoughts which might have influenced his own plays.

Among the techniques of interest to Wilder was the idea of the black stage to give dramatic lighting effects. Wilder's impression of the arbitrary use of light and shade for emotional effect[10] used in a German play performance might have served as precedent for his own experimentation in the effects of lighting.

There is an interesting note in the article which might furnish some proof for Wilder's idea for "The Long Christmas Dinner." He states in his notes on Romeo and Juliet, November 11, that the setting provided by the German playwright would be useful for a Christmas pantomime.[11]

The German theatre, as Wilder explains, was a breeding ground for a variety of production methods and technical details in the late twenties. In the following excerpt of ideas taken from his writings in Playgoing Nights, the impact of the German stage can be seen:

> November 12: Der Biberpelz, Gerhart Hauptmann: Stage small and close to the audience.[12]
>
> November 13: Hokuspokus, Curt Goetz: Prologue and epilogue showed the play being read aloud to a theatrical manager, his actors and staff.[13]
>
> November 15: Die Weber, Gerhart Hauptmann: A competent play and production start one thinking about the place of the audience in the theatre; to have or not to have proscenium arches; is there an easy way out in a new theatre?[14]

Playgoing Nights furnishes proof that Wilder was continuously thinking about stagecraft and new dramatic methods of production. The idea for the reinterpretation of old ideas in a new setting might have come from Leon Feuchtwanger's Kalkutta. Wilder remarks, "Subject matter was historically 1775 but the treatment by the author was for modern audiences: hence modern interpretation and stagecraft.[15]

Wilder again witnessed pantomime in the production of The Mirror;[16] was impressed by the use of gesture and quick glances in The Living Corpse;[17] and was inspired by the devices contributed by Alfons Pape and designers Linneback and Horsteiner in the production of American playwright Elmer Rice's Life is Real. Such included the implantation of a dozen or more actors in the audience to ridicule, provoke, or acclaim the characters on stage.[18]

Perhaps one of the most important comments upon the stage comes from Wilder's critique of Franz Wedekind's Lulu. His preoccupation with the illusive can be seen in his remark:

> By making the details picturesque, bright, odd, the mind is relieved of the ordeal of believing in all these atrocities. Played with understatement (i.e. supplied by the onlooker) one could not last out. Nevertheless a great production, with a kind of concentration and theatre-going religion, that outside of Germany, is far to seek .... N.B. many sets, some good, some bad on the small stage, but never did scenery matter so little.[19]

A more direct and extremely significant influence upon Wilder came from the Chicago meeting with American author Gertrude Stein. The theories of narration which she propounded in her own works and her thoughts on America were most stirring for Wilder who wrote prefaces to several of her published books.

Stein's Geographical History of America,[20] a book which discusses the great masterpieces of literature and their relationship to the problems of identity and time through the idea of Human Nature (identity) and Human Mind (no identity; gazing at pure existence) had a marked influence upon Wilder's thoughts, for in a letter to Stein

he states:

> What a book! I mean what a book! I've been living for a month with an ever increasing intensity on the conceptions of human nature and human mind, and on the relation of masterpieces to their apparent subject matter. Those things and yes, identity, have become cell and marrow to me and now at last I have more about them.[21]

Her preoccupation with the collaboration of the audience and her ideas on repetition as emphasis for the progression of ideas and for the spirit of the play are found in the same volume. Wilder is seen to preoccupy himself with these same things in his one-act experimental pieces.

Narration: Four Lectures, another work prefaced by Wilder, continues Stein's idea of repetition and further leads into discussions on narration as maintaining a spontaneous quality which is to arise from daily life and common knowledge. Her thoughts on the relationship between artist and audience, that is, the belief that the audience must be at one with the writing, that they are present for the purpose of "recognition," holds great importance in the volume. Wilder preoccupies himself with these ideas in his own plays and presents his theories on the audience in "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting."

Stein has even more obviously influenced Wilder on

the subject of America. In a letter to her he states: "I'm crazy about America and I want to go back. I'm crazy about America and you did that to me, too."[22] All four plays use America as background.

As for the American, Stein states that the American:

> not living every minute of every day in a daily way does not make what he has to say to be soothing; he wants what he has to say to be exciting and to move as everything moves, not to move as emotion is moving but to move as anything that really moves.[23]

Her belief in a narrative style uniquely suited to America's people may well have excited Wilder to consider a style suitable to them.

The counterpart to the Greek chorus can perhaps be seen in The Stage Manager of "Pullman Car Hiawatha," "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," and Our Town.

The transience of the Elizabethan stage is directly cited by Wilder in "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting" and the similar unharnessing quality present in the four dramas shows a possible link between the two theatrical times.

As an American, Wilder would also be influenced by the motifs found in American drama. For example, he makes use of the centrality of the common man as hero; uses the

idea of distance as a solution to the problems and difficulties of everyday life; he views existence as a linear progression towards oblivion; and identifies the good life with a closeness to nature.[24]

Several events in his life had a profound impact upon his thoughts and certainly must have served to influence him. For instance, his excavation of an Etruscan street buried for centuries, which clarified and confirmed for him that there was no past, present, or future to be considered separately and that geographical barriers laid bare by an American shovel[25] could not be taken seriously.

Echoes of Joyce's Portrait of the Artist As A Young Man and Finnegan's Wake (Our Town;) Dante's Purgatorio (Our Town, Act 3, Emily's return from the dead); his own Woman of Andros (Our Town);and the Odyssey (catalogue of Emily's appreciation of life);[26] Moliere (a platform and a passion or two);[27] Wager (every great work was written this morning);[28] and Pirandello (use of stage managers as narrators and actors and the presentation of illusion upon bare stages);[29] can all be found in the four plays.

In the life of a prolific author with a background which physically reaches three continents, and philosophically touches an overwhelming range of literature, the subject of influences poses a problem. It has been the intent

of this chapter to set the plays within this condition. Wilder confirms this idea as he states in one of his own writings that:

> The training for literature must be acquired through the passionate assimilation of a few masterpieces written from a spirit somewhat like his own, and from a few masterpieces written from a spirit not at all like his own.[30]

In a time when Wilder was looking away from the trend of American literature set by the Lost Generation writers and the form of theatre established by the evasive and "soothing" drama of the twenties,[31] all that had been read and experienced by him, worked towards the formation of his own dramatic style.

Wilder is not an innovator but is rather one who rediscovers forgotten goods, and he states:

> You may well call me "eclectic." I pick out and combine. It is for you to decide whether these borrowings are assimilated into a new, coherent, self-constituted creation or not ....[32]

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

[1]Thornton Wilder, The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931).

[2]Stark Young, "Mei Lan Fang," New Republic, LXII (March 5, 1930), p. 74. In a personal letter Ms. Isabel Wilder confirms that Wilder's first contact with the Chinese theatre was at this performance. Personal Letter dated July 10, 1972. See Appendix "A".

[3]Thornton Wilder, "A Platform and a Passion or Two," Harper's, CCXV (October, 1957), 48-51. Reprinted in G. Oppenheimer, ed. Passionate Playgoer (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 235.

[4]Young, "Mei Lan Fang," p. 74.

[5]Wilder, "A Platform and a Passion," p. 235.

[6]Isabel Wilder to Barbara Etcovitch, 10 July, 1972. Reprinted in Appendix "A".

[7]M.C. Kuner, Thornton Wilder: The Bright Side and the Dark (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1972), p. 164.

[8]Herbert L. Smith, "The Presentational Theatre and Drama" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1953), p. 155.

[9]Thornton Wilder, "Playgoing Nights: Notes From A Travel Diary," Theatre Arts, XIII (June 1929), pp. 411-419.

[10]Ibid., p. 411.

[11]Ibid., p. 412.

[12]Ibid., p. 413.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid., p. 415.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid., p. 416.

[17]Ibid., p. 418.

[18]Ibid., p. 417.

[19]Ibid., p. 419.

[20]Gertrude Stein, The Geographical History of America and The Relation of Human Nature To The Human Mind (New York: Random House, 1936), introduction by Wilder.

[21]Donald Gallup, The Flowers of Friendship (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), p. 305.

[22]Gertrude Stein, Narration: Four Lectures (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), introduction pp. v-vlll.

[23]Ibid., p. 6.

[24]T.E. Porter, Myth and Modern American Drama (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 224.

[25]Kuner, p. 5.

[26]J. Modic, "The Eclectic Mr. Wilder," Ball State Teachers Colleges Forum 1 (1961), p. 59.

[27]Wilder, "Platform and a Passion," p. 236.

[28]Kuner, p. 4.

[29]Modic, p. 59.

[30]Thornton Wilder, The Angel That Troubled The Waters and Other Plays (New York: Coward-McCann Inc., 1928), p. XIV.

[31]Wilder, "Platform and a Passion," p. 232.

[32]Modic, p. 60.

CHAPTER II

IN RETROSPECT, "THE WORLD OF THE LONG CHRISTMAS DINNER," "PULLMAN CAR HIAWATHA," "THE HAPPY JOURNEY TO TRENTON AND CAMDEN," AND OUR TOWN

The three one-act plays and Our Town are created in what appears to be a technically, thematically, and stylistically, simplistic, almost barren, and most spontaneous theatrical world. The fact that these apparently negative conditions achieve a successful and interesting production poses the question of how and why this is so. With scanty scenic material and simplistic substance these plays possess a new vitality and life and appeal to a great variety of spectators.

The answer to this question lies in the search for the positive characteristics of the apparently negative conditions under which the plays are produced. A new kind of dramatic language is evoked. The results are positive, more fulfilling, and convincing.

Character, which in any production necessarily constitutes a major part, is altered upon the Wilder stage. In this simplicity an extensive development of character seems to be lacking. It is difficult to discover the

embodiment of form and meaning within them.[1] Instead, in part, they superficially carry the author's intentions as they become abstract personifications of events and qualities. They appear alive, vibrant, believable, and not in need of further development. The speeches of characters are short in most instances and are frequently interjected upon. The technique allows for the production of a spontaneous feeling not created by long-winded dialogue.

Dramatic meaning or moral illustration becomes half imbedded within characterization and half conveyed through the spontaneity of the undeveloped archetypal character. One is conveyed through an altered "slice-of-life" technique and the other through the production of abstractions.

The barrenness of Wilder's sceneryless stage allows for a production which is capable of release from time and place. Subject matter which deals with the mundane, everyday experiences of life in repetitive and detailed tone and dialogue transcends to embrace all times and all places.

The spontaneity of Wilder's plays, too, permits events to occur in controlled freedom. Communication of ideas from one mind to another is achieved through calculated illustration. The intent of the drama is conveyed through the illustration of events rather than through the dogmatic assertion of ideas. Meaning becomes an inevitable deduction

and the stage becomes not a lecture arena but a platform upon which "imaginative narration"[2] transfers ideas from one mind to another.

Upon such a stage imagination becomes paramount. What is begun within the mind of the author and transferred through the mental processes of the actor is completed within another mind. In Wilder's form of production this "mind" is that of the "group mind,"[3] the spectators of the audience. Through a process of empathy and imaginative recreation within the mind of the spectator the dramatic intent becomes a deductive and self-evident truth. The presentation is completed by process of the imagination.

Wilder's four plays experiment with two important ideas in playwrighting technique. They can be categorized under the topics of "pretense" and "collaboration." The two function interdependently and work simultaneously with Wilder's belief in a "platform and a passion or two."[4] The image of the "platform" reflects the undecorated, simplistic stage; the "passion or two," a common human feeling and the subsequent communion and collaboration of imaginations.

Thornton Wilder's theatre is "presentational" representing a reaction to a form of theatre which is based upon illusion. In Wilder's four plays there is no

approximation of real life. There is no attempt to repaint or to accurately and completely imitate life as it is outside the theatre. In some manner, there is always a constant reminder that what the audience is viewing is in fact not real. The drama becomes founded upon the "permitted lie."[5] It is a combination of falsehoods which are allowed for the sake of producing a non-illusory drama. Wilder's preoccupation is not with "verisimilitude" but rather with his own type of "reality,"[6] based upon the "permitted lie" and its reception and recreation in the imagination of the collaborator. Wilder's theatre becomes symbolic.

The actual barrenness of Wilder's stage is due to the lack of scenic elements used in the sense of reproducing actual life. They are present and only at the barest minimum to function as symbols and support non-illusory atmosphere. A chair might serve for a car of a locomotive or a table stand for a normal table set for a Christmas meal while at the same time further insinuating the passing of ninety Christmas Dinners.

Given the basic idea of the "presentational" or a "theatre of pretense," it is not difficult to understand the abolition of most of the scenery and in some cases, the curtain. In the three one-act plays and in Our Town the barrenness becomes a positive and helpful element. A well-equipped

stage would only serve to destroy the sense of truthfulness which exists in the mind and which is only maintained through the destruction of an extended approximation or reproduction of life outside the theatre.

Wilder's theatre is not only based upon a single pretense but also upon the "multiplication of additional pretenses."[7] The stage becomes a fertile area for the continued production of falsehoods. One builds upon another until a network of "permitted lies" forms a play. In order to successfully achieve this state the theatre must call upon its collaborators who fulfill one of the conventions upon which the "theatre of pretense" bases itself.[8] With the build up of falsehoods the drama correspondingly moves away from the "slice-of-life" realism.

A need arises for more than symbolic properties. The addition of "pretenses" call for the use of symbolic actions. These obviously do not arise on their own and thus the personnages responsible for them are of great importance.

The main collaborators in the theatre are the author, actor, director, producer, and audience. Wilder stresses two of these important elements in his plays, the actor and the audience. His actual dramatic presentations show an awareness of the importance of the other personnages.

Certain of his characters, for example, The Stage Manager, in two of the one-act pieces and in Our Town, portray several roles. The Stage Manager becomes, as his title suggests, manager of the stage. He is the narrator, author, actor and director. The production largely rests in his hands. His presence is of great importance and is to be dealt with at its proper time. Here it is only necessary to acknowledge Wilder's awareness of theatrical collaborators within the combined character. For this reason, the actor portraying the character becomes of great importance and is seen as the "chief" collaborator in Wilder's theatre.[9]

The actor in Wilder's scheme is poorly provided for in terms of scenic material and elaborate plot, action, and dialogue. These seemingly negative factors though again prove to enhance the drama, for the actor becomes stimulated to draw upon his own resources. He is given greater opportunity to function as an individual and to display his own unique qualities and talents. The imaginative actions and the quality of spontaneity which he is called upon to produce, creates a startling and refreshing drama. The actor upon Wilder's "presentational" stage is provided with leeway in which to work and he must be versatile enough to cope with it. When faced with few lines and little support from scenery he must improvise. There is, therefore, a good

deal of pantomime within each of the four plays. The actor may be called upon to grow from youth to old age within one drama such as is the case in "The Long Christmas Dinner." In the more demanding one-act plays and in Our Town an actor is also required to portray more than one character in the same play. He must be able to do so according to the intention of the author even if in his attempt he must strive for little or no appropriate characterization as in the role of The Stage Manager in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden." The "chief" collaborator must be versatile, spontaneous, agile and creative.

The actor must be manipulated by the author in such a way as to provide for the successful presentations of his original intentions. Wilder has chosen to do so by recognizing and utilizing the unique talents of the actor and allowing him both the stimulation and freedom as well as the demanding atmosphere of a simplistic stage.

As the actor on stage becomes the chief internal collaborator, the audience becomes the chief external participator. The spectator is a necessary collaborative factor for several reasons. Firstly he supports and encourages the actor to perform successfully and for his (audience) benefit, for there is a psychological dependency of the actor upon a crowd. Also, Wilder's theatre although its

method is "presentational," utilizes the subject matter of life. This matter which binds audience to actor naturally cannot exclude the "throng." Such celebration of common subjects creates what Wilder calls a "festive spirit" and the bond between audience and actor becomes fused in the spirit of the performance. As well, the audience's absence would constitute an absurdity.[10] A play which is presented solely for the sake of being performed reflects an art for art's sake doctrine and goes against the aesthetic but humanly centered theatre of Thornton Wilder. It counteracts a communal feeling and universal quality which art presents through its reception by the viewer. In Wilder's idea of the theatre there must be those whose function it is to receive and believe a work of the imagination. The play is not completed until it is acted upon by the imagination of the spectator. The truth for Wilder exists in the mind of the group and for this reason his drama must be addressed to the spectator or to the "group-mind."[11]

Theatre is an experience. It is the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another human being the "sense of what it means to be human."[12] The absence of the spectator or the "group-mind," throws all that the theatre strives towards, into chaos. The performance becomes futile. A network of attitudes and feelings present

in both the author and audience forms a bridge of communication between the two. The creation which passes through the internal collaborator must be completed by reception and interpretation within the external participator.

With the demand for the group mind comes the necessity of choosing a subject matter which is understandable by a large majority.[13] Failure to do so renders the audience incapable of understanding and communication between author and spectator is lost. The theatre, in its address, must take into account a wide range of interests and plan its subject matter accordingly.

The action supported by the atmosphere of the "presentational" stage when received by another mind, in a manner, departs from the stage and absolves itself of temporal location. It becomes no longer specific in the sense that it was particular to an allotted area and was presented in a specific amount of time, in a unique performance of an actor. It becomes subject to a more general and mental time scheme.

> If the audience is participant then audience time and play time are identical, not in the "realistic" sense that one minute of stage time equals one minute of audience time, but in the sense that both times become one "moment of experience.[14]

Time is transcended.

There is a transcendency of subject matter and emotion as well. Every emotion and every thought expressed upon the stage in a definite time and place must be realized as being in a transient state. "Every action which has ever taken place, every thought, every emotion -- has taken place only once, at one moment in time and place." "I love you," "I rejoice," "I suffer," have been said and felt millions of times, and never twice the same."[15] Yet, these "successions of unique occasions"[16] form repetitive patterns. The unique moments on stage, though brought to life upon a particular platform, are transferred to and received in a general time. It is Wilder's belief that with the increased awareness of an individual experience comes the realization that disparate moments are common to the multitude. Wilder deals with ritualized actions. Emotions, thoughts, and responses become a part of all times and all places. The stage becomes the "vehicle of the generalized occasion."[17] The action on stage is raised from specific to general.[18]

A play visibly represents "pure existing,"[19] the time on stage is always "Now." A play is "what takes place." Time upon the stage is in the "perpetual present."[20] "Ritual drama creates its own present which annuls duration, a 'Now' that encompasses and so transcends time's continuum."[21]

Wilder's ideas of America are also important.

America is a country which has always identified with world destiny. Her people, in their detachment from time and place, provide a good source of evidence for universality. The American represents the first "Planetary Mind," he holds the realization of the "multiplicity of human beings and their geographical extension."[22]

Disconnected, insubmissive, lonely, and nomadic, in the boundlessness of America, the American becomes abstract and accordingly not related to any one specific time or place. He grasps instead at the vastness of all time and all place.[23]

The American was brought up to believe in boundlessness. America's very geography is an "invitation to wander."[24] He relates to "the all, the everywhere, and the always."[25]

The people of America live the possibility of not only one existence but of numerable existences. In doing so they live a perpetual presence. Their lives constitute a perpetually creative process. They continually create their existence. There is no time slot or set place in which they are to function. Place and time for them are negative until they act upon them, until they bring them into being.[26] The dramas therefore, choose America for their setting.

Concepts of America; of collaboration; pretense; the specific and the general; as well as the techniques of

narration and character, have their foundation in the four works to be discussed. In the following chapters, the exploration of "The Long Christmas Dinner," "Pullman Car Hiawatha," "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," and Our Town, as experiments and rediscovered ideas in drama, will present the build-up of the basic playwrighting principles as discussed in this chapter.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter II

[1]Francis Fergusson, "Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot," The Sewanee Review, LXIV (Fall, 1956), 544-73. Reprinted in Fergusson's The Human Image in Dramatic Literature (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), p. 59.

[2]Thornton Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting," in Augusto Centeno, ed. The Intent of The Artist (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 97.

[3]Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting," p. 90.

[4]Thornton Wilder, "A Platform and A Passion or Two," Harpers, CCXV (October, 1957), 48-51. Reprinted in G. Oppenheimer, ed. Passionate Playgoer (New York: Viking Press, 1958), pp. 231-238.

[5]Wilder, Some Thoughts on Playwrighting, p. 93.

[6]Wilder, A Platform and A Passion or Two, p. 235.

[7]Wilder, Some Thoughts on Playwrighting, p. 94.

[8]Ibid., p. 95.

[9]Wilder, Some Thoughts on Playwrighting, p. 87.

[10]Ibid., p. 90.

[11]Ibid., p. 83.

[12]Richard Goldstone, "The Paris Review Interviews: Thornton Wilder," The Paris Review Interviews, XV (Winter, 1957), 37-57. Reprinted in Malcolm Cowley, ed. Writers At Work (New York: Viking Press, 1958), p. 109-110.

[13]Wilder, Some Thoughts on Playwrighting, p. 92.

[14]Porter, p. 206-207.

[15]Wilder, "A Passion and A Platform or Two," p. 234.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., p. 235.

[18]Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting," p. 95.

[19]Ibid., p. 96.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Porter, p. 206-207.

[22]"An Obliging Man," Time, (January 12, 1953), p. 47.

[23]Thornton Wilder, "Towards An American Language," The Atlantic, CXC (July, 1952), p. 33.

[24]"An Obliging Man," p. 46.

[25]Wilder, "Towards An American Language," p. 37.

[26]Ibid., p. 32.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCTION TO THE ONE-ACT PLAYS

"The Long Christmas Dinner," "Pullman Car Hiawatha," and "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" were published in a 1931 volume of plays entitled The Long Christmas Dinner And Other Plays in One Act. It is unfortunately not possible to ascertain the chronological sequence of the plays. It is difficult to establish the sequential perfection basing the decision upon the themes and techniques used in each, for each play possesses unique characteristics, represents a different type of experiment in drama, and contributes its own share to the "presentational" theatre.

In the 1931 edition, "The Long Christmas Dinner" is placed first among six plays, and "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" closes the volume. The original chronology of the plays might follow this same pattern.

"The Long Christmas Dinner" experiments with repetition and time. "Pullman Car Hiawatha" and "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" are exercises in narration and direction, and characterization and mood,respectively. Both bring in the character of "The Stage Manager" who prepares the way for his counterpart in the three act play, Our Town.

The plays as dramatic experiments represent the steps in the formulation of the 1941 playwrighting theories. Together they combine to produce the substance of Our Town, the purest representation of the "presentational" theatre.

The main concern in the study of the one-act plays will be to reveal 1) the attempted experiments or foci of each play; 2) the similarities or differences between plays; 3) the works as representatives of the "presentational phase," according to the terms previously established in Chapter Two; 4) the preparations which the three one-act plays make for the 1938 Our Town.

The stage might first "be set" by denoting the general scenic and technical similarities and differences of each one-act piece.

All plays to begin with do away with elaborate scenery. The differences in each play are ones of degree.

"The Long Christmas Dinner" contains a dining room table set for a Christmas meal. Included is a cardboard turkey upon a carver's plate and most obviously excluded is tableware. The right and left sides of the stage are also set with two portals, symbolically denoting birth and death. The first is trimmed with garlands of fruits and flowers, the latter with black velvet. The actors are also provided

with a limited number of properties -- a wig, to aid the denotation of old age; shawls for the same purpose; a wheel chair, and a baby carriage. Aside from the portals a table remains a table, a chair a chair, a wig a wig, etc. The symbolic portals are less obvious. Black is associated with death, and fruits and flowers with life, birth and re-birth.

Colour symbolism also has its place. With the introduction of the infant's carriage through the portal of life comes a colourful ribbon to signify a male, female, twin, or dead child.

As far as the abolition of scenery and properties is concerned, of the three plays, "The Long Christmas Dinner" detaches itself least from the more illusory, scenic stage.

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" represents a different approach to the escape from the conventional "realistic" stage and requires a greater degree of imagination on the part of each spectator. The characters enter with chairs which they use as improvisational aids. Contrary to the chairs of "The Long Christmas Dinner" these do not stand for the objects themselves and thus do not constitute the scenery. They are rather those elements which are manipulated by the actors to represent the cars of a pullman called "Hiawatha."

At the rear of the stage is a balcony or bridge from

which descends two flights of stairs. The two props signify something other than what they appear to be.

The imaginary car is bound by chalk lines upon the floor as created by The Stage Manager.

In addition, one witnesses the introduction of symbolic sounds, for example, planetary music, and a thinking "hum."

In this play more than in any other one-act drama, the characters themselves become scenic elements. There are actors who symbolically represent or personify the Roman Numerals of time and become the planetary bodies.

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" reaches more towards the use of symbolic properties than does "The Long Christmas Dinner" as it, at times, transforms characters into elements personifying time and place.

"The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" requires even less support from scenic material for the stage is provided solely with an optional backdrop with "dusty flats" painted on. Aside from this, there are four chairs, a low platform, and other minor properties which are scattered on the sides of the stage for The Stage Manager to manipulate during the course of the drama. The bed upon which "Ma" and "Beulah" sit is such an example.

The lack of scenic elements and the simplicity of

the properties is compensated for by the use of pantomime. This play reflects the pantomime begun in the characters' imaginary eating gestures of "The Long Christmas Dinner" and followed through in the pantomimic actions of the characters on the train journey in "Pullman Car Hiawatha." Here the typical family outing by car is pantomimed as the actors proceed on their journey to Camden.

A typescript is also introduced in this play which, as a property, maintains an important function as a narrative and character device.

Of the three plays this short piece requires the greatest degree of audience imagination and thus group participation. Pantomime is most widely used and costumed, "live" scenic elements as those found in "Pullman Car Hiawatha" do not exist.

The three one-act plays also hold similarities in general subject matter. Each deals with ritual mundane incidents -- a Christmas dinner, a train trip, or a family visit by car. The events which take place during the course of the play are normal, typical, and representative of the American majority.

Each play too, in turn, creates a greater truth and conveys a message. Thus each of the one-act pieces attempts to convey an allegory.

A further discussion of the one-act plays is more appropriately carried out through examination of the individual dramas. "The Long Christmas Dinner" will be used to begin.

CHAPTER IV

SPECIFIC TO GENERAL: A STUDY OF "THE LONG CHRISTMAS DINNER"

Although "The Long Christmas Dinner" scenically places itself farthest away from the other two one-act pieces, it does present an attempt at a new type of drama.

Part of this attempt is shown by the play's abolition of curtain. This step provides for a new type of scenic division as the curtain is replaced by the effects of lighting. The audience upon entering the theatre is confronted by a stage which is dimly lit. Such use of lighting is important for it offers strong support to the "presentational" form of the drama.

Upon the stage in half light is a detailed Christmas table. Immediately the idea of a "slice-of-life," imitative drama is evoked for the attention paid to details is prominent. It is, however, unfair and misleading to at this point judge "The Long Christmas Dinner" as an illusory style play for there is a definite attempt at a Wilder "realistic," non-illusory drama.

In "The Long Christmas Dinner" it is this very concern with detail that becomes the focal point for a new

experiment in theatre.

"The Long Christmas Dinner" is an examination of repetition and detail in a new light. It is an exercise, too, in time and ritual which stems from the attention given the minute details of life. Repetition underscores the cycle of life. The manipulation of detail is an important factor in each play and in their combination into Our Town. It is an element imperative to the successful functioning of Wilder's theatre.

Wilder's focus upon detail is a test of its manipulation. The chief obstacle in Wilder's attempt is the indigenous harnassing quality imbedded within the use of the specific. His goal becomes the discovery of the method by which to transcend detail without losing its imperative function of providing the drama with form and substance.

The play commences with the entrance of characters who assume definite places at the Christmas table. The characters appear robot-like, reacting to a set and rigid esoteric control system. Their fate is to perform the mundane details of the ritual Christmas meal and to utter and repeat the familiar, spontaneous sounds of everyday life in simple language. They live and die, suffer and rejoice, through three generations which span ninety calendar years and transcend to encompass all families, all life everywhere,

and all time.

In "The Long Christmas Dinner" one is introduced to details through the use of repetition. A verbal pattern is set up. Generation after generation is to utter similar sounds.

The successful use of repetition rests upon the artful use of common ideas such as birth and death, simple family hopes and desires, discussions of weather, sicknesses, etc. It, too, depends upon the repeated use of names in successive generations, upon the positions assumed at the fixed Christmas table, and upon the use of phrases used by various characters throughout the play.

The latter idea includes the variations and repetitions in dialogue. For example:

> What a wonderful day for our first Christmas dinner: a beautiful sunny morning, a splendid sermon ....[1]
>
> Every least twig is wrapped around with ice. You almost never see that....[2]
>
> It's too bad its such a cold, dark day today. We almost need the lamps ....[3]
>
> Pity it's such an overcast day today. And no snow.[4]
>
> a fine bright one too ....[5]
>
> It's a great blowy morning, Mother ....[6]

> It's glorious. Every least twig is wrapped around with ice. You almost never see that ....[7]
>
> It's really a splendid Christmas day today ....[8]
>
> Every least twig is encircled with ice. You never see that ....[9]
>
> It certainly is a keen cold morning. I used to go skating with Father on mornings like this ....[10]

Each generation expresses the common sound in a slightly varied manner. There is a rhythmic pattern set up throughout the play by these slight variations. A mood is established.

The rhythmic mood remains constant allowing for the interjection now and then, of an emotional outburst which temporarily disturbs the lyric quality. These outbursts are important for they serve as thematic expressions. For example:

> Genevieve: (shaking her head wildly) I never told her how wonderful she was. We all treated her as though she were just a friend in the house. I thought she'd be here forever.[11]
>
> Genevieve: I can't stand it. I can't stand it anymore. I'm going abroad. It's not only the soot that comes through the walls of this house; it's the thoughts, and it's the thought of what has been and

> might be here. And the feeling about this house of the years grinding away. My mother died yesterday - not twenty-five years ago.[12]

Life passes as though it were one long and happy Christmas dinner. Throughout the slicing of either white or dark meat (the preference seems to vary from person to person and generation to generation) by essentially undeveloped and diverse characters, children are born -- boys, girls and twins; children die; sons are lost in war; and daughters leave the house to raise their own little participants of a Christmas meal. As well, characters superficially age and pass away and friends and relatives of varying nationalities and religious affiliations are spoken of. Stories are told of a variety of sufferings from illnesses -- sciatica, neuritis, and rheumatism, and the evils of alcohol are preached through statistical references. "Statistics show that we steady moderate drinkers ...."[13]

The family situation is encircled by the explicit meteorological discussions. The weather is in constant flux. There are days of sun and those of fog and rain. Yet in its varying cycle it becomes repetitive. "Every twig is wrapped around with ice" each winter for ninety years and then for eternity.

The ancestry in the play is stated as dating back

to the time "when there were still Indians on this very ground"[14] but regresses even further in time through the names of characters which stem either directly from the Bible, for example, "Samuel"[15] or indirectly by the attention brought to their absence from the Bible, for example, "There are no Charles in the Bible."[16]

The complete history of the Christmas dinner family is contained "in a book somewhere upstairs."[17] It is never seen for it is the oldest book in time, an earthly volume in a cosmic library.

One sees three "Mother Bayards;" two "Rodericks;" two "Lucias;" and two "Samuels" (one real and one suggested); two spinsters; and a quantity of manservants and maidservants which change most frequently throughout the course of the play as the years progress. The characters are devices for the presentation of concepts and one is never given intense material through which to probe their inner personalities.

There is the <u>pattern</u> of the rebellious child set up by Roderick the second, and that of the ritual, sentimental characters such as the first Lucia, Leonora and Genevieve, who emotionally express the continuing failure to realize the brevity and fleetingness of life. There will always be the Mother Bayard <u>type</u>; a rebellious Roderick child; or a Roderick adult who drinks himself to death. The deviation

from the normal and adaptable only accentuates Wilder's idea of normalcy and the common bond between human beings.

There is a continuity, a "holding of hands" from one generation to another although the characters and events vary slightly.

Time will pass too quickly when the occasions are joyous and will always seem to pass too slowly when the family is grieved. The pattern is set.

There is the apparent tension between the fixed and the mutable. On a scenic level, the fixed portals and table, and the positioning of characters at that table, contrasts to the movement of life and death through the portals, and the assumption and forfeiting of places at the table. There is also a temporal tension created between the flowing story time, the ninety years which present the "slice-of-life" scenes, and the stage time. Both are contrasted to the transcendent and eternal time which comes with Wilder's successful manipulation of mundane details of life.

The repetition of mundane details, while retaining the quality of the specific, is able to release itself to a larger truth through the very quality of its repetitiveness. Similarities in the details of each generation show that disparate moments hold common factors, form a repetitive pattern, and become ritualized.

The specific quality of detail which holds an indigenous harnessing quality is shown to be unbound by Wilder to attain a transcendent state while still remaining based in the specific.

The play's ability to be both specific and general, to be both a tale of three generations of family dinners and a description of all family dinners and then of all life, shows itself to also be an experiment in the temporal and a simultaneous exercise in the a-temporal and eternal.

The play as representative of Wilder's taste for the "presentational" is somewhat obvious. Most prominent of course, is its raising of action from specific to general.

The attempt functions within the initial idea of a "theatre of pretense," one which evokes the "collaborative activity of the spectator's imagination."[18] A supporting example for this principle is seen in Wilder's successful conveyance of time attained through the use of the audience or group mind. The audience,in its reflection,becomes a theatrical collaborator.

In "The Long Christmas Dinner" life is imitated and raised to a higher power, ritualized, typed, and generalized. The play makes use of age old traditions in order to convey its meaning. It reinforces a belief in the person and family and illustrates the position of all families and of

life within the greater and continuous cyclic scheme of birth, death, and rebirth.

All thoughts expressed are imbedded in illustration, in a simplistic story. The audience becomes awakened to the author's intentions through "recollection," the sudden realization that they always knew without being fully aware that things were as the author has suggested them to be.[19] One, through the process of a simplistic story of a series of family dinners, is brought to realize the continuity of the family and thus of human existence and is made aware of human life's value which often goes unnoticed.

The play requires spontaneous, skillful, and versatile actors who are able to evolve from youth to old age with only the minimum support from scenic effects and properties. Upon the stage of "The Long Christmas Dinner" the true actor's ability is put to the test. He must successfully be able to manipulate the elements provided for him.

The background against which the play functions is also in accordance with the theories of playwrighting. America furnishes the setting for the ninety years of Christmas dinners. The characters share an American heritage. Mother Bayard's statement early in the drama supports this:

> My dear Lucia, I can remember when there were Indians on this very ground .... I can remember when we

> had to cross the Mississippi on a new made raft. I can remember when St. Louis and Kansas City were full of Indians.[20]

Mother Bayard's ancestors were of American heritage. Mother Bayard, the former Genevieve Wainwright, was the daughter of Faith Morrison whose father was a New Hampshire farmer. The ancestry, as previously suggested goes as far back as the Bible and stretches to encompass all time, yet the immediate background stems from America.

The use of America as a setting for drama which is to deal with the timeless and transcendent brings to light the identification of America and her people with the timeless, boundless, and transcendent states of existence.

"The Long Christmas Dinner" is an interesting and enlightening drama in itself. It is an important dramatic experiment in time and detail. It contains several techniques found in the full length drama as well as much thematic material present in the later play. The following points represent both a recapitulation of the main ideas of this chapter and an evaluation of the play as a vital part of the three one-act plays which later combine into Our Town.

1. The one-act play abolishes the curtain and substitutes the effects of lighting.

2. It begins the use of gesture. Pantomimic actions such as the eating of imaginary food, the propulsion towards death, visual aging; and the adoption of wigs and shawls represent earlier, less subtle forms of pantomime which become refined in their use in Our Town.

3. The play maintains a cyclical theme.

4. The one-act piece deals with mundane incidents.

5. The beginnings of the use of symbolic properties is apparent in "The Long Christmas Dinner" with the introduction of the two portals.

6. "The Long Christmas Dinner" begins a musical and repetitious quality which is carried forth into the mood of Our Town.

7. The one-act play adopts America as its background.

8. It is the precursor to Our Town in theme. From Genevieve's outbursts in "The Long Christmas Dinner" come the sentimental words of love and the belated realization of life. Her words parallel those of Emily in Our Town as she, too, realizes the dearness of life at too late a point.

9. "The Long Christmas Dinner" conveys meaning through the use of characters which become typed, and events which are seen in general terms. Rather than working with a character whose personality is completely developed and defined, Wilder chooses the typed character to convey an abstract quality or concept. This play represents the life, death, and rebirth cycle which is illustrated through the presentation of archetypal characters. A similar pattern is set up in Our Town. The play attempts the presentation of allegory, showing the failure of human beings to understand the mundane, fleeting moments and actions of life.

"The Long Christmas Dinner" lacks one definite characteristic found in the later one-act pieces and the 1938 play. The following point represents the negative development of the play in relation to the other three works:

1. It appears to adhere to the separate actor, director, producer syndrome which is definitely absent in the three act play. The play thus possesses the organizational quality of the more traditional theatre because of its covert assignment of roles. One can sense the presence of an off-stage director and producer. This, too, greatly alters the concept of narration which is formed in both remaining one-act plays and in Our Town.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter IV

[1]Thornton Wilder, "The Long Christmas Dinner," in Thornton Wilder, The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), p. 5.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 7.

[4]Ibid., p. 9.

[5]Ibid., p. 11.

[6]Ibid., p. 12.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 15.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid., p. 28.

[11]Ibid., p. 18.

[12]Ibid., p. 27.

[13]Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

[14]Ibid., p. 4.

[15]Ibid., pp. 9, 19.

[16]Ibid., p. 8.

[17]Ibid., p. 5.

[18]Wilder, Some Thoughts on Playwrighting, p. 95.

[19]Wilder, A Platform and A Passion or Two, p. 232.

[20]Wilder, The Long Christmas Dinner, pp. 4, 5.

CHAPTER V

THE ILLUSTRATION OF EVENTS: A STUDY OF "PULLMAN CAR HIAWATHA"

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" preoccupies itself with the subject of direction. Contrary to "The Long Christmas Dinner," it does not stress a cyclical theme (which becomes assumed) but rather focuses upon a directional path towards a harmonious whole.

Concerning itself with an imaginary pullman car called "Hiawatha" on route to its destination, it immediately also makes apparent its priority of the spatial treatment over that of the temporal. The play certainly includes the latter, yet the stress lies within place first and then within time.

Simultaneously with the establishment of a directional focus comes an experiment in narrative technique. The story line, too, must maintain a direction and Wilder exercises an interesting approach to narration which exhibits his concern with dramatic direction and unity as well as his preoccupation with the presentation of a "message" through imaginative narration.

The means through which this exercise is to be

expressed is found to be contained in the use of the combined character. In "Pullman Car Hiawatha," as in "The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden" and Our Town, he is called "The Stage Manager."

This personnage becomes more than a mere actor portraying one character, for his chief role in "Pullman Car Hiawatha" becomes that of narration. He is thus rendered more a device than a character.

As his title suggests, The Stage Manager is manager of the stage. He can perhaps be seen as both actor and deuteragonist. He is the conductor of the imaginary train; the director of action and actor; the controller of a personified chain of being; and an on-stage embodiment of the play's author.

The Stage Manager who fulfills these functions becomes as an omnipotent God on stage. In his roles as actor, director, prompter, and conductor, he instructs the unfolding of a colourful pageant. He, too, is representative of Wilder's attempt at a break from the actor-director-author syndrome apparent in "The Long Christmas Dinner."

In "Pullman Car Hiawatha" his use as narrative device is at its purest and is exploited to the fullest extent. The unrestrained use of this element though, renders the play slightly incredible. The device does however, supply

Wilder with two necessary conditions -- obscurity and participation. In using this approach to narration he is able to maintain close narrative control while still keeping the distance required for the uninterrupted flow of the narrative. He is able to simultaneously control the dramatic action while functioning within it.

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" is literally an illustration of events. It is an exercise in visual narration. The actors within the drama become living properties, personifying the geographical, meteorological, astronomical, and theological. Verbal conveyance throughout seems more an accompaniment for the visual narration.

The production does not fall into a loosely related series of illustrations, for there is an ever present and omniscient control system supervising, unifying, and relating events and actions on stage.

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" remains true to the ideas of pretense and collaboration. The "presentational" strain of the play is clear. Scenically, the play adheres to the principles of this style. The one-act piece is a wild, almost "hammy" pageant. The visual personification of place and time immediately releases it from any type of realism found outside of the theatre. In the play, the Heavens appear on Earth and Time becomes a costumed actor.

The child-like quality of rhymed speech of the characters or devices also supports the agreed upon falsehoods, the lies permitted.

In the fashion of "The Long Christmas Dinner" it utilizes the mundane to present its ideas. With its cross section of names and nationalities, differing personal habits, and references to diverse philosophies, and prominent earthly figures, the short train trip is seen to emcompass all time and all place.

Each typed passenger with his specific role takes his place in a scheme of ideas which represents all life.

The train has destination. En route it relates the life of the mind to the life of the universe.[1] The path is a portrayal of universal harmony. "Pullman Car Hiawatha" becomes an illustration of the harmonious movement towards a destination.

The idea of a harmonious path is important. In order to convey the idea of universal harmony, the play weighs heavily upon the use of a musical motif. Here the directional "tone" is set up through the presentation of life as part of a cosmic keyboard, the mere note in an orchestral scheme. "Pullman Car Hiawatha," being as it is, a visual production, personifies a rhythmic movement rather than presenting a repetitive mood as was found in "The Long

Christmas Dinner."

The play does not likewise rely upon the use of repetition to convey the notion of the typed and generalized. These are all established as the play begins. In the drama one is confronted by a middle aged doctor, a maiden lady, an insane woman, a trained nurse, a stout amiable woman of fifty, an engineer, a young wife, etc. The actors are never called by name but are rather referred to by "Compartment" or "Berth," their patterned placement within a greater scheme.

The type of presentation necessarily demands the cooperation of the audience who must imaginatively interpret the performance on stage. They thus become the necessary external participators furnishing the requirement of "collaboration" in the Wilder theatre.

The first "movement"[2] of the symphonic structure of "Pullman Car Hiawatha" begins with the rise of the curtain and the entrance of The Stage Manager who immediately establishes the direction within an imaginary setting.

He specifies place as he draws chalk lines upon the floor to signify a pullman car called "Hiawatha." In doing so he does not harness the action, for this is merely a departure point and the train is stated to be in progress as the play commences. "Pullman Car Hiawatha" "leaves its

tracks" as it points itself in an upward direction in the chain of life. The train begins by proceeding on its path from New York to Chicago at nine-thirty on the night of December twenty-first.

The Stage Manager starts his illustration of events as he commands the characters in the Berths of the train to begin the pageant. The characters perform their common, well known actions of getting ready for the long night upon the train. Their language is colloquial (American), suitable for the type of character they are respectfully portraying. They issue their series of complaints and aches and harrass the uneducated, kindly, train's "Porter." The Stage Manager does his part as he substitutes for a women in the Upper Berth who cannot be technically accommodated by the set.

Lower Seven: How the hell do you turn on this other light?

Porter: I'm afraid it's out of order, sah. You'll have to use the other end.[3]

Lower Seven: Which one d'y'a want?[4]

The Stage Manager: May I ask if someone in this car would be kind enough to lend me some aspirin?[5]

Lower Five: Never in all my born days.[6]

The focus upon the Berths is an external one. We are given only a superficial idea of the manner in which the nameless, typed characters function. The study remains for the most part on a physical level, supplemented only briefly by dialogue dealing with common, mundane problems. They have been concerned so far with the trivia of life. The scene though, does not provide an adequate study of the passengers upon the train and so The Stage Manager shifts attention to a more concentrated study of life in the Berths.

> The Stage Manager: All right, that's enough of that. Now I want you to hear them thinking.[7]

A musical murmuring which represents the sum total of active thought of the occupants is heard in the background. Each section breaks away from the total sound in order to personify the thoughts of the mind. Again, the matters deal with the mundane. Lower Nine aptly personifies the Capitalistic propaganda of America.

> .... What business had I got to fool with contracts with the god-darned Soviets! .... I don't know if the Company will ever take me back. I'm green that's all. I just don't grow up ....[8]

One is taken through the concerns for love, money,

and health as each plays out his inner self before the audience. Each character has his function in life.

The Stage Manager once again changes the focus. This time to explore the inhabitants of the Compartments. The suggestion in this section is one of entrapment. As the term suggests, the people described therein are in some way enclosed. This proves true as "Harriet" is shown to be one entrapped by failing health. She suffers from a heart ailment. "The Insane Woman" likewise is bound by the irrationalities of her own mind. The intensity of this suffering seems to counteract the idea of direction already begun. This can be seen to hold the same purpose as did the deaths and deviations in "The Long Christmas Dinner." Such suffering is an inherent condition of life and although it apparently seems aimless and unexplainable it is a necessary condition. It, too, serves to highlight the other events which proceed more smoothly towards a destination. There is also a certain wisdom in the insanity of an insane woman and a greater insight into life of a woman close to death.

The description of the inside of the pullman car "Hiawatha," or of the immediate conditions of human life are set aside for the relation of earthly life to a larger whole. The second movement begins.[9]

Pullman car "Hiawatha" is placed within a geographical, meteorological, astronomical, and theological scheme. The scale of events is carefully dealt with. Each has its appropriate time of appearance in order that each can be clearly placed within a harmonious universal idea.

The Stage Manager takes on the roles of director and prompter as the geographical section is introduced.

Grover's Corners, Ohio, a location selected in part for Our Town is introduced by a "living property." "The Field," with its specified number of rodents and insects; "The Workman;" "The Tramp;" "Parkersburg, Ohio;" and "The Worker" all make their appearances in turn. The Workman represents the European (German) - American heritage of the United States and serves as one example of Wilder's attempt at the presentation of various nationalities within a universal scheme. The effect of the scene is totally visual. Each personification offers the audience a short, clichéd speech, set in simple logic, mild propaganda, and suggestive of an American background. For example:

> Grover's Corners: ... I represent Grover's Corners, Ohio. Eight hundred and twenty-one souls. There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it ill behoves any of us to criticize the rest of us. Robert Louis Stevenson. Thank you.[10]

The location of the train moves through the meteorological, into the temporal where minutes, hours, and years become visible on stage. The hours are beautiful girls dressed like "Elihu Vedder's Pleiades."[11] The idea of wisdom through age is presented as the minutes are associated with gossip, the hours with philosophy, and the years with theology. The past becomes alive in the present and the present unfolds to the future. The play maintains a perpetual presence and the time of the play takes place in the "Now" as past, present and future simultaneously act out their roles on present stage.

Each character personifying time fades into a musical murmur and once again the harmonious background prepares the way for further illustrations.

As each new element in the Universe is illustrated, the one previous to it recedes into the"Chain of Being."

The idea of harmony reaches its most visual peak as the"Planets"take their positions on stage. The balcony and steps of the stage provide an appropriate backdrop for their placement. They appear as notes on a musical scale as they assume their positions. They are not provided with dialogue but each has its own sound - a "zing" or a "thrum."[12]

Earth,too, as part of the astronomical scheme,has its sound and one is immediately reminded that the illustrations of the microcosm which were visually presented at

the earlier point of the one-act drama, all fit into this greater scheme.

One has been driven from the murmurs of the mind into the vibrations of the spheres through a patterned and controlled process.

The final movement begins on a previously begun "note" of suffering, as The Insane Woman and Harriet re-appear to prepare the way for a thematic declaration and the theological tempo of the movement.

As in "The Long Christmas Dinner" a statement of the essential theme is given by a woman. It first appears as the idea of the soul worthy of Heaven. As the archangels appear, dressed in blue serge suits, to claim Harriet for the Heavens she states:

> I'm ashamed to come with you. I haven't done anything with my life. Worse than that! Worse than that, I was angry and sullen. I never realized anything. Oh! I don't dare go and step in such a place.
>
> .... I don't want to be forgiven so easily. I want to be punished for it all ....
>
> Oh, I'm so ashamed. I'm just stupid and you know it.[13]

The latter half of the speech is of greatest importance. She, as her female counterparts of Leonora in "The Long Christmas Dinner" and Emily in Our Town, bids a dramatic

farewell to the world, expressing in the departure the belated realization of the preciousness of human life and more subtly, the sensation that life on Earth has not been lived to its fullest potential.

As she ascends the steps of Heaven she utters the final words of wisdom too late acquired:

> I see now, I see now, I understand everything now. I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou shouldst lead me on; and, spite of fears, Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.[14]

The ascent which is framed by the orchestral music of the humanly personified solar system, consolidates these themes with the ideas of direction and universal harmony.

Suffering appears less aimless as Harriet in her end finds direction, purpose, and place. The Insane Woman, instructed and pacified by these thoughts and by The Stage Manager, too, will find her position in the harmonious scheme when the appropriate time arises.

The visual illustration of events comes to a close as The Stage Manager releases himself from his role as conductor of the musical background supplied for the ascent to Heaven and once again returns the spectator to the inside of the pullman car "Hiawatha." The train's

destination has been reached.

The inhabitants of the Berths assume their normal, daily complaints in ignorance of the death of the evening's journey.

The passengers leave the train as the cleaning women enter with mops and pails to clean up the car and to erase the events which have taken place within. The play ends on this ironic note for nothing can actually be erased. As Wilder has suggested, the train will repeatedly journey, as it functions within"the all, the everywhere, and the always." "Hiawatha" is the pullman car of life. There are direction and eternal destination.

The manner in which this one-act play conforms to the principles of playwrighting has been given throughout. Ideas of "pretense" and "collaboration" remain much the same as they were in "The Long Christmas Dinner." They are however, further strengthened by a stated platonic awareness in the play which serves as emphasis for the "theatre of pretense." In a brief speech allotted to the character personifying the hour of ten o'clock, the idea becomes visible:

> Are you not rather convinced that he who sees beauty as only it can be seen will be specially favored? And since he is in contact not with images but with realities ....[15]

The experiment in narrative technique, the result of which is the successful presentation of allegory, also supports one of the imperative principles of "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting."

> .... the idea for a born story teller can only be expressed imbedded, in its circumstantial illustration. The myth, the parable, the fable, are the fountain-head of all fiction and in them is seen most clearly the didactic, moralizing, employment of a story.[16]

The narrative device of the combined character has allowed Wilder both the freedom and restraint necessary for his ideas.

Within the story, too, has come the picture of America and her people. Presentation of language and events within the everyday lives of the American people, references to American authors, and the attempt at American propaganda, all support the basic love for America. Most obvious is the support afforded America by the title of the play, "Hiawatha," a prominent figure in the country's early history.

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" presents many imperative points which are later found in Our Town. These main points are recapitulated as follows:

1. "Pullman Car Hiawatha" conforms to the aesthetic principles upon which the three one-act plays and Our Town base themselves.

2. The play deals with the mundane.

3. The play utilizes symbolic properties.

4. It begins, to a greater extent than did "The Long Christmas Dinner," the use of colloquial language and presents the introduction of thinking out loud passages later found in Our Town.

5. The play utilizes the art of pantomime as the characters perform in the absence of scenery.

6. It pre-supposes the cyclical.

7. The play functions within an American background and introduces Grover's Corners, America.

8. Presents tone on a visual level.

9. The play does not develop character but retains the typed character as used in "The Long Christmas Dinner."

10. Deals with life in geographical, meteorological, astronomical, and theological terms in an overly elaborate manner. These ideas are condensed within Our Town.

11. Introduces the use of The Stage Manager as narrative device. He is retained in Our Town although his function is somewhat expanded.

12. Establishes a directional focus.

13. Retains the idea of the all, the everywhere, and the always.

14. Maintains the theme of the belated recognition of the dearness of life.

15. Presents Harriet's farewell speech similar to speeches to be found in Our Town.

16. Deals with suffering.

17. Presents an attempt at allegory, describing earthly life as part of a greater scheme.

"Pullman Car Hiawatha" also alters certain points which are present in the other one-act plays and in Our Town.

1. The play reverses the use of curtain, opening with one and closing without one.
2. Does not specifically use any one family.
3. Does not stress the use of repetition.

The above are the most important positive and negative points of "Pullman Car Hiawatha" which respectively, do or do not appear in Our Town in combination with the points of the other one-act plays.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter V

[1]Rex Burbank, Thornton Wilder (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), p. 71.

[2]Ibid., pp. 69-71.

[3]Thornton Wilder, "Pullman Car Hiawatha," in The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), p. 56.

[4]Ibid., p. 57.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., p. 58.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Burbank, p. 70.

[10]Wilder, "Pullman Car Hiawatha," p. 65.

[11]Ibid., p. 68.

[12]Ibid., p. 69.

[13]Ibid., p. 73.

[14]Ibid., p. 75.

[15]Ibid., p. 68.

[16]Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting," p. 87.

CHAPTER VI

HALF-WAY ABSTRACTIONS IN ALLEGORY: THE STUDY OF "THE HAPPY JOURNEY TO TRENTON AND CAMDEN"

The stage directions at the outset of "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" give insight into the dramatic experiment upon which Wilder is to focus in this play.

A first hint is given by specific references to"The Stage Manager"whose role is not only that of property master and narrative device aid but also that of member of the cast. He is for the first time referred to as a character. His function is thus somewhat altered from that in "Pullman Car Hiawatha."

As a character he is provided with the characteristic pose (one retained in Our Town) of leaning against the proscenium pillar smoking a pipe.

Since he is more strongly concerned with the portrayal of character, he retracts from his omniscient, godlike role of controller seen in "Pullman Car Hiawatha."

Further references to character and characterization are to follow. Wilder gives instructions as to the portrayal of minor characters who are to be conveyed through The Stage Manager. They are to be only lightly characterized and

their origin is to stem from a typescript.

With the experiment in character the play also presents a display of many moods. It finally proves itself to also be a study of the characters' place in allegory.

"The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" returns to the use of the family within a mundane situation. It subtly attacks the subject of the specific and the general from the viewpoint of characters.

In the play,"Arthur,"the young boy is exactly as a young boy is often found to be. He plays marbles, asks exasperating questions, and succeeds in antagonizing every member of the family with little effort. The mother of the family, referred to as just"Ma,"preoccupies herself with the moral, healthy upbringing of her children while"Pa"remains the silent, tolerant, strong backbone of the group. "Caroline," the sister, is the common, good-natured young girl, easily embarrassed by the questions of her brother. She is always willing to forgive or tolerate quietly, the often disturbing events of the day.

The family,as it embarks upon the ritual family visit, an activity commonly found in most small towns of America, passes the well-known road signs, responds to the common questions of a day trip, stops for the traditional American hotdog, passes the inevitable funeral, and pulls

into the necessary service station to chat with the typically friendly service attendant.

All events are a well-known part of the American consciousness. Nothing out of the ordinary happens along the journey.

The characterization of the play goes beyond that of "The Long Christmas Dinner" in that it attempts a more convincing and perhaps greater development of character. The reason for this might stem from the number of characters involved. Here one is presented with four major characters who remain for the full course of the drama. "The Long Christmas Dinner" with its repetitious cycle involved a greater number of characters within a less indepth study.

The play also attempts, in the manner of the two other one-act plays, the portrayal of types.

Through the study of character from two related viewpoints, 1) the "presentationally" portrayed "slice-of-life" side; and 2) the abstract, Wilder's theories on the use of character will be presented.

Wilder's view of characters as "half-way abstractions in allegory"[1] suggests that the characters possess characteristics of two distinct worlds. The half-way state reminds that they first belong to the realm that defines

them as characters, that is, the "slice-of-life" state which presents the details of their existence, and then to the conditions which convey them as abstractions in allegory, the conceptual state.

The typed characters in the one-act pieces and Our Town are seen as conveyers of concepts but they are first created through a number of details. There is no realistic approximation of life, however, for these details are always provided through the "presentational" style.

In "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," the details of each character's existence are brought to life by Wilder's sharp shifts of mood. A perfect example is provided by the short clash between Ma and Arthur which thrusts the mood of the journey from one of gaiety to one of upset and sadness.

> Ma: No, Sir. No son of mine is going to get up at four-thirty and miss the sleep God meant him to have.
>
> Arthur: (sullenly): H'm! Ma's always talkin' about God. I guess she got a letter from him this morning.
>
> Ma: Elmer, stop that automobile this minute. I don't go another step with anybody that says things like that. Arthur, get out of this car. Elmer, you give him another dollar. He can go back to Newark by himself. I don't want him.[2]

"The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" exhibits its moods of light-heartedness, instant moods of nostalgia, moments filled with sad thoughts of the future, states of childlike excitement, and the final extremely sharp shift to a mood of thankfulness and love as the family becomes a harmonious unit once again.

The characters always function within mundane situations which utilize details because their conceptual side must have a concrete base.

As a representative of a "presentational" style, the play abolishes scenery and relies heavily upon pantomime. For example, the passengers of the four chairs which signify the automobile for the journey, jingle throughout the trip, shift imaginary gears, pantomime the entrance and exit from the car, glance at the imaginary roadsigns, control the process of time through their either short or lengthy dwellings upon roadside phenomena,[3] munch upon the non-existent hotdog, pantomime the playing of marbles, put on an imaginary hat in an imaginary mirror, converse with imaginary neighbours, and function within the many other occasions which require the use of this art.

The "imitative" details of each character are always counter-acted by the "presentational" stage. For example, while the small town, American, eastern coast dialect

defines the characters in true terms, this existence is backed by a sceneryless, inventive platform.

Wilder's concern with exact, colloquial language is apparent within the following speeches:

> Ma: There, there. We all say wicked things at times. I know you didn't mean it like it sounded. Why now, I forgive you Arthur, and tonight before you go to bed, you .... (she whispers). You're a good boy at heart, Arthur, we all know it. Sakes alive, it's too nice a day for us all to be cryin'. Come on now, get in. You go up in front with your father, Caroline. Ma wants to sit with her beau. I never saw such children. All your hotdogs are getting wet. Now chew them fine everybody ....[4]

> Beulah: .... Go straight along, pa, you can't miss it. It just stares at y'. Crazy old pa, goin' buyin' things! It's me that oughta be buyin' things for you, pa.[5]

The Stage Manager exemplifies Wilder's methods of counteracting the details of character when he attempts to replace the minor characters, including the females. This is often done without noted characterization, since he, at times, reads their lines directly and plainly from a typescript. In doing so, he strongly supports characterization within a "presentational" framework, reminding that the characters are functioning within a play based upon "pretense."

The one-act piece does not deal with psychological characterization other than brief and superficial explorations into the inner self of a character. Therefore, for example, Ma is seen as an understanding, moralistic, sympathetic individual with an evangelical fervour who greatly cares for her family. "Elmer" too, is shown to be the silent but understanding father. The children are likewise two normal, innocent, sometimes blasphemous, but chiefly well-brought up children with their briefly individualized problems and annoyances. The characterization goes no deeper. It touches upon the psychological which is needed for the credibility of the "slice-of-life" presentation only to the necessary degree. From this point, psychological characterization is given over to the conveyance of abstract concepts.

In accordance with the principles of the "presentational" theatre, these characters are dependent upon imagination. The condition well suits Wilder's belief that a character is more real when he is imagined. This type of presentation makes it possible for the audience, through their imaginations, to become a collaborative factor in the theatre.

The characters as abstractions are equally as important. Wilder alters the full presentation of psychological

characterization by forming his story more along the lines of an artificial arrangement, an arbitrary presentation of events. Characters become created as conveyers of ideas.[6] They are persons with definite functions to perform in life and thus they convey concepts.

The moral in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" stems from the concern with the importance of family love and understanding through the appreciation of the small, normal, and brief moments of life. The love of the family is a quality or concept common to all human beings. When at the end of the play "Beulah" asks, "are you glad I'm still alive, pa?"[7] she evokes three basic emotions of mankind. They are 1) the desire for love; 2) the fear of rejection; and 3) the fear of death.[8] All these themes work towards the play's message. This work, in the manner of the other plays, strives to capture the fleeting, fragmentary, and imperfectly preserved moments of our lives.[9]

The basic substance needed to support the characters as abstractions is provided in the play. Firstly, there is an attempt to place the play within an historical perspective. Caroline declares, on the approach to Camden, that:

> .... it was near here that George Washington crossed the Delaware. It was near Trenton, mama. He was first in <u>war</u> and first in <u>peace</u>, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.[10]

The reference to George Washington places the play in a rather specific time in the American history and in doing so, reinforces the American background of the play.

Ma states that she has cooked three meals a day for the last twenty-five years;[11] and Pa says that the farm upon which his "folks" lived was sold and replaced by a factory.[12] Both references set the play within a larger time scheme.

There are, too, throughout the play, references to past authors such as Shakespeare and Longfellow which take into account a variety of historical periods within varied locations.

As well, there are other references which show that spatial location is also functioning. The towns of Elizabeth, New Jersey, Trenton, and Newark are referred to. The New Brunswick Bridge is sighted and Camden is finally reached. The progress of the family upon their journey thus possesses definite direction.

At one point in the play, The Stage Manager, acting as service attendant states, "you'll be in Trenton in a few minutes," thus marking both time and place.

The specifics of the spatial journey are contrasted to a larger scheme with the reference to the Ohio license plate, a Greek restaurant, and the city of Philadelphia. There is thus an attempt to fit the spatial journey of the family into a larger dimension.

The idea of a common humanity and the corresponding movement from the specific to general are again attacked in the following instance:

> Arthur: Ma, what a lotta people there are in the world, ma. There must be thousands and thousands in the United States. Ma, how many are there?
>
> Ma: I don't know, ask your father.
>
> Arthur: Pa, how many are there?
>
> Elmer: There are a hundred and twenty-six million, Kate.
>
> Ma: And they all like to drive out in the evening with their children beside'm.[13]

The story of one family upon a journey is related to the families in the United States along a similar journey, at a variety of times, and in numerous places. More vaguely, the passage suggests that all families in the world partake of similar action. These references which serve to strengthen the idea of a common humanity and attempt the typing of characters in the play adequately suggest the idea of the archetypal, the idea of all mothers, all children, and all fathers.

References to birth and death can also be found. For example, Wilder provides Beulah's miscarriage and the scene in which the characters react to the passing funeral.

> Caroline: Oh pa, do we have to wait until the whole funeral goes by?
>
> Ma: Don't speak that way of such things. Take off your hat, Arthur. Look at your father. Why .... Elmer, I do believe that's a lodge brother of yours. See the banner? I suppose this is the Elizabeth branch. Well, we haven't forgotten the one that we went on, have we? We haven't forgotten our good old Harold. He gave his life for his country. We mustn't forget that. we'll all hold up traffic for a few minutes some day.[14]

The identification of man with man is evoked through the reference to the lodge brother and the common bond of death serves as a vehicle of transcendence.

The passage represents Wilder's attempt to release the "Happy Journey" family to the universal and eternal.

The characters as natives of both the "slice-of-life" world and the realm of abstraction are rightly termed "half-way abstractions in allegory."

The play furnishes the requirements of the "presentational" theatre in the same way as did the two previously discussed works. The summary points of "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" will then only list the new experimental ideas and the steps taken towards the eclectic Our Town.

1. The Stage Manager's narrative role is increased from that of "Pullman Car Hiawatha" for he takes

on the responsibility of creating character. His given pose is retained in Our Town.

2. The play provides an exercise in mood as support for the characters as individuals.

3. The final sequence of the play resembles the homey family scenes of Our Town.

4. The play presents a more indepth study of character.

5. It introduces the use of the invisible neighbours found in the three act play.

In the negative light of the other plays, "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden":

1. Does not seem to concern itself with repetition.

2. Does not as strongly stress the movement towards a harmonious whole as successfully as did "Pullman Car Hiawatha" and as does Our Town.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VI

[1]Thornton Wilder, "From Stage To Screen," Theatre Arts, XXIV (November, 1940), p. 824.

[2]Wilder, "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," p. 122.

[3]Malcolm Goldstein, The Art of Thornton Wilder (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 77.

[4]Thornton Wilder, "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," in The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931), p. 127.

[5]Ibid., p. 132.

[6]Donald Haberman, The Plays of Thornton Wilder: A Critical Study (Middletown: Weslyan University Press, 1967), p. 74.

[7]Wilder, "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," p. 132.

[8]Goldstein, The Art of Thornton Wilder, p. 82.

[9]Joseph Golden, The Death of Tinker Bell: The American Theatre in the Twentieth Century (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1967), p. 118.

[10]Wilder, "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," p. 127.

[11]Ibid., p. 121.

[12]Ibid., p. 124.

[13]Ibid., p. 128.

[14]Ibid., p. 119.

CHAPTER VII

OUR TOWN: THE LIFE OF THE VILLAGE AND THE LIFE OF THE STARS

The three one-act plays represent the foundations for the structure of Our Town. They hold similarities to each other in that they all deal with the progression of human life - birth, growth, maturity, and death, and with a ritual. Our Town utilizes the same material.

Likewise, the tensions dealt with in the three one-act pieces are found in the full length play. There is the constant pull between the mundane and the abstract or universal. There, too, is a constant movement towards the eternal. While each one-act play itself reached this state, the method of achievement differed from play to play. "The Long Christmas Dinner" approached the goal through repetition within a cyclic scheme which typed its characters and conveyed a ritual state. "Pullman Car Hiawatha" did the same by assuming typed characters at its commencement and then presenting a directional movement towards a structured, controlled, harmonious whole. The process was analogous to the "Chain of Being" structure. "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" attempted a good linear presentation of a family upon a

ritual journey, concentrating on the two related "worlds" inhabited by the characters, attempting at the same time a universalization of their experiences and actions.

The main tensionsin all one-act plays stemmed from the opposition of the specific and the general. These underlying tensions are carried over into Our Town and the movement from specific to general is achieved through the combining of the methods explored in the earlier pieces.

From "Pullman Car Hiawatha" the 1938 play inherits a linear, directional,and spatial approach, from "The Long Christmas Dinner" a cyclic, repetitive method.

Aside from this basic tension, Our Town maintains the opposition between the individual and the archetype in a manner similar to that of the one-acts, as well as through another important combination. This is the meshing of the elements present in"The Stage Manager"of both "Pullman Car Hiawatha" and "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden." Our Town maintains and combines the use of The Stage Manager as character in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" with the omnipotent, god-like controller of the action in the other piece.

Since Our Town relies upon the substance and techniques of the early pieces, it can be seen as a recombination of the one-act plays.

In Our Town, Wilder has sought to set the tiny village against the largest dimensions of time and space, creating what he calls "the life of the village against the life of the stars."[1]

The "village" can be associated with linear movement concerning itself with daily life. The steadfast "stars," with their universal, generalized, and abstract connotations (their constant renewal from day to day), draw towards the cyclic because the idea of the repetitive can be associated with the eternal.

It might be noted at this point, that each play derives a cyclic movement from the linear progression, when supported by typed and repetitive persons and actions.

The "village" is the story of the specific family, the "stars" the tale of all mankind. The "village" possesses The Stage Manager as character, while the "stars" hold him as omnipotent, narrator-controller. While the "village" adheres to time, the "stars" possess an a-temporal "Now." Both are woven within a "presentational" background.

Our Town uses the familiar chairs and tables of the three one-acts for its scenery and thus the play immediately, if one remembers the results of the earlier experiments, becomes portrayed as boundless, uninhibited by the "realism" of a perfected, life-like set.

The chairs become the counters of the drug store, the tables in the kitchen scenes, the pews in the church, and the graves in the cemetery.

It was Wilder's desire to "restore significance to the small details of life by removing scenery."[2] The principle of the external participation is relied upon. The lack of properties used, in the traditional sense of approximating life supports, the attempt at the generalization of the action on stage.

There are the barest signs of conventional theatrical aids, however, "for those who think they have to have scenery."[3] The stage in Act One possesses two arched trellises with fruits and flowers, and the audience hears a whistle blow, a rooster crow, a school bell ring, a clock strike, and the clinking of milk bottles.

Wilder has stated that he wished to record a village's life "with realism and with generality."[4] The methods explored in the previous one-act plays serve as the means to achieve this end. Improvisational aids which add "dimension" to "imagined realism," effects of lighting, pantomime, all function as they previously did. The superiority of Our Town lies in the recombination of the experimental plays' technique.

"The life of the village" and "the life of the stars"

are almost impossible to separate for they are so consistently interrelated. The attempt at such in the earlier pieces was possible for they lacked the complication and sophistication, and an all-controlling figure, in two instances. They also represented actually only one third of the material found in Our Town. In the full length drama the intertwining of material and the length of the play make a similar approach difficult and demands that the play be explored act by act. This is most efficiently done through the link between the "village" and the "stars," i.e., The Stage Manager.

Since he is portrayed as the strong, all-controlling figure almost identical to his counterpart in "Pullman Car Hiawatha," Our Town can be likened to the elaborate pageant structure of the one-act play. Much of the exposition of Our Town is affected by The Stage Manager. The entire play might be seen as a monologue which is illustrated by actors summoned at his will.

The Stage Manager is in control of all levels of the play. He both directs the linear and creates the cyclic. For example, the repetition in the play is largely relayed through his monologues and he is also responsible for setting the rhythm of the seasons and presenting the simultaneity of time. He likewise directs the everyday events of the town. He acts within the two sides of the play's action.

He is able to combine both easily and he coordinates them in order to convey the moral of the story. He possesses absolute control over each, dismissing one and summoning the other at will.

The Stage Manager controls the myth and the rite, the respective verbal and active "expressions of the interpretation that a community puts upon archetypal experiences" like birth, maturity and growth, the forms of ceremony or initiation, and death.[5] He presents these to the audience and is also capable of bringing the audience to them. He is the liaison between audience and action.

He also functions as the interpreter of the action and the commentator on events. In all his functions he can be seen to replace the author on stage. He becomes the on-stage embodiment of Thornton Wilder.

Upon entering the first act of the drama, The Stage Manager prepares the audience for the first of a three part structure. He begins with a description of the drama and types it as a play which could be performed and presented by <u>anyone</u> and <u>everyone</u>. He offers a description of the life of the village as he places the town of Grover's Corners within the specifics of latitude, longitude, season, date, and time of day, (May 17, 1901), in much the same manner as did his counterpart in "Pullman Car Hiawatha."

He volunteers geographical information; presents the cross-section of religions; provides the necessary social and functional buildings found in the town - the post office, schools, town hall, jail, and grocery; and proceeds to describe in detail the houses of the two main families of the town, the "Gibbs" and the "Webbs."

The linear direction of the first act commences with daybreak and all the events within this section can be seen as related episodes called upon by The Stage Manager.

The present time of the action, though, immediately becomes involved with the past as the historical background of Grover's Corners is spoken of. The town is set within a larger historical context with the reference to "Bryan."[6] The past of the town's residents is indicated by the mention of the "earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain,"[7] (1670-1680). The Stage Manager's reference to the mountain or to "our mountain" as with his reference to the stars over the town, will serve as a major element in the repetitive cycle of the play.

The Stage Manager ventures further into the repetitive as he slips in early mention of the routine 5:45 train to Boston, "Joe Junior's" daily paper route, and offers the words -- "so -- another day's begun."[8]

He, at this early point in the first act, also

evokes the sense of a simultaneous past, present, and future, as he tells of the death (future) of the families which have not yet appeared to play out their lives before the audience. He meshes all times on stage, suggesting from the very beginning, Our Town as a play which exists in the "Now." This is not to say that he erases any sense of the temporal for he can command the mundane events to flow towards their end, at will. What he does do, however, is present himself as the controller of both the temporal and the a-temporal. The play will be repeatedly thrust back and forth between the two until it is realized that the mundane and linear give way to the cyclic and eternal a-temporal. While the "life of the village" opposes that of "the stars," it also produces it.

Throughout Act One, The Stage Manager commands the portrayal of routine, daily life. The audience is introduced to the normal events of the town's people. "Doc Gibbs" returns from an early morning call and he is seen to walk down the street carrying an imaginary black bag. The dawn sees "Joe Cromwell" pantomiming the delivery of the morning papers and "Howie Newsome" bringing the morning milk in his invisible horse and cart. Grover's Corners appears as both an imaginary and an authentic town of the first decade of the twentieth century. An interruption by The Stage Manager to

state the future death of Joe, temporarily breaks the progression of the linear.

The scene is rapidly switched to the houses of the town. The entrance of Doc Gibbs and the descent of the children of both families shifts the action to the daily life of the town's residents. The dialogue and actions centre themselves upon the simple concerns of this life. "Wally" studies at the breakfast table under the protests of his mother and "Rebecca" and "George" have the normal brother-sister disagreements. The process of having the first meal of the day is broken only by The Stage Manager, who, once again, volunteers information about the town's background.

The events of the morning continue as the children leave for school and the mothers of the two houses chat with each other. The identity of the adults of Our Town is primarily established by their parenthood. When the children become parents themselves their actions and lives will mirror that of their parents.

Enough detail of family life in Grover's Corners has been given to establish the normal events of a family day and so the controller dismisses the two women and alters the time scheme in order to establish the town, in the manner of "Pullman Car Hiawatha," within a geological, historical, more generalized scheme. "Prof. Willard" is summoned:

> Grover's Corners lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Appalachian range. I may say some of the oldest land in the world .... Some highly interesting fossils have been found ....[9]

The Professor continues with a generalization of the weather, the history of man, and adds a note on the present population of the town.

> Early Amerindian stock. Cotatchee tribes .... no evidence before the tenth of this era ... hm ... now entirely disappeared .... possible traces in three families.[10]
>
> The population at this moment is 2,642 .... Mortality and birth-rates constant ....[11]

With the comparison of the daily village to the historical, meteorological, and geological, the tiny town is immediately thrust into a different perspective. The mundane is seen to be a part of a larger whole, giving way to and then functioning within a realm of "stars." With each interruption by The Stage Manager and the succeeding commentary by him or the summoning of another character to provide information, the daily events of Grover's Corners are in some way, related to the universe.

"Editor Webb's"appearance returns the audience to the details of the town as he presents its political, moral, and

cultural background through his responses to the implanted actors in the audience. The details are so typical, however, that the statistics can be seen as generalized and timeless.

The play has so far held a structure quite similar to that of "Pullman Car Hiawatha" which attempted a spatial movement towards a whole, commanded by an omniscient Stage Manager. The specifics of human ancestry, geography, history, and culture begun at this point are functioning to place the town in a chain of being.

Time is once again altered to the afternoon. A buzzing sound comparable to the "thinking hum" of "Pullman Car Hiawatha" is heard from the area of the stage representing the children's school.

Action is returned to the daily events of the family. The following discussion between "Emily" and her mother is indicative of the natural relationships between a mother and daughter and is only one of the many conversations which represent the normal interrelationships of the members of the two families. Emily's self-conscious questioning about her appearance also prepares the way for her later love and marriage.

As The Stage Manager creates the darkness of the town, he temporarily discontinues the linear movement of

the play to place Grover's Corners within a clearly cyclic perspective. As he discusses the problem of what to put in the cornerstone of the new bank to be erected, he shifts the play into the future with the statement that what is to be placed there, is to be something representative of the town, for people (general) will be likely to dig it up in a thousand years.

> We're putting in a Bible .... and the Constitution of the United States--- and a copy of William Shakespeare's play ....[12]

Time is next taken from what will be dug up, to what was previously found of ancient civilizations from the works they left behind. There is an identification of these ancient families with the present families of Our Town, in the manner of "The Long Christmas Dinner" (repetition) through the following reference:

> 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 sale 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 in the chimney, -- same as here.[13]

The identification of peoples of all ages is based

upon the simple, primary functions of human life -- eating, working, enjoying.

The past, present, and future, and the embodiment of all time within this play are supported by The Stage Manager's intentions to include a copy of Our Town in the cornerstone:

> .... the people a thousand years from now will know a few simple facts about us ....[14]
>
> .... this is the way we were in our growing up and in our marrying and in our doctoring and in our living and in our dying ....[15]

The idea that the mundane situations of life form the basis for all that is universal and eternal is presented in this speech. The choir, at this point, singing "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds," strengthens the notion that it is the routine everyday events of ordinary people that become ritualized and form the ties that bind man to man throughout time. Ordinary events are seen as archetypal. The idea which functioned in all one-act plays relates the life of the "village" to the life of the "stars."

The family scenes once again commence under the light of the constant (eternal) moon figure and the encounter between George and Emily and the choir practice scene are simultaneously played out. The simultaneity of action

further supports the "presentational" atmosphere and combines two linear time schemes, creating a fusion of present times.

Both scenes end and the inhabitants of the town return to their respective homes. The night continues with petty, harmless gossip (the discussion of "Simon Stimson," the town drunk, reminiscent of Roderick in "The Long Christmas Dinner"); and normal family banter. The day's activities end with the establishment of the time as 9:30 P.M.

Act One, however, does not terminate without the reinforcement of the directional movement towards a harmonious whole.

In a brief speech by Rebecca, the placement of Grover's Corners within an eternal scheme, is presented in the manner of "Pullman Car Hiawatha."

> .... He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: 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 .... and the postman brought it just the same.[16]

This positioning and the recognition that the town is a vital part of the "Chain of Being" (the postman brought it just the same) sums up the directional movement of the first act and places the town within the timeless, eternal

realm, the mind of God.

In summation, Act One, which emphasizes place under the control of The Stage Manager, begins to present both the routine life of the "village" and the typified life of the "stars." The act introduces the main characters of the play and presents just enough detail to make them believable as individuals and concrete substance for their use as conveyers of concepts, a method explored in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden." It establishes The Stage Manager as omniscient while at the same time characterizing him as the homey, friendly, pipe-smoking man of the earlier play. It formulates a linear time and existence scheme and places the town within a larger perspective. It presents the first seasonal references and subtly reveals the constant symbol of the mountain and stars which remain for the play's duration. It begins the suggestion of typing, identifying men of one age with men of another, giving the cross-sections of life, society, and religion. It presents the idea of the cyclic, dealing with routines. The act typifies the family through the demonstration of common concerns which must effect all men at some time. Also, it establishes America as the play's background through the use of a small New England town and the references to American landmarks and history. It makes the necessary preparations for the

second act through the mother-daughters discussion.

Our Town does in one act what all three short plays in their entirety explored. The play increases in complication as the acts progress and this material can be seen as a form of repetition which strengthens the final outcome of the drama.

Act Two moves to the emphasis of the ritual. The repetition connected with this becomes the chief factor of importance in the act. The concern with the ritual, in this case, marriage, is reminiscient of "The Long Christmas Dinner," though here The Stage Manager remains as the main figure and allows the other characters on stage, solely for the purpose of illustrating his points. The emphasis on repetition comes mostly through his direct speech and thus the method of presentation of ritual actions is somewhat altered from that of the one-act play.

Act Two continues the overall linear scheme of the entire play. It deals with the next, natural progression of life as it moves from the concerns of the basic families and their children to the creation of a new family through the marriage of offsprings.

The act commences with the words of The Stage Manager who sets the act in the repetitive cycle of nature.

> Yes the sun's come up over a thousand times. Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt.[17]

The reference to the perpetual motion of fixed phenomena continually suggests that the daily occurrences yield repetitive cycles. The sunshine which presided over the daily events of Act One have since come and gone over a period of a thousand days. The action is continuous.

The references to nature present both a linear and a larger cyclic movement. Mountains erode, water flows through the mill, and man as part of nature follows this same action.

Times have changed in these three years. Everyone and everything has aged. The deaths of the elderly have made way for the newborn.

> Nature's been pushin and contriving in other ways too; a number of young people fell in love and got married.[18]

> Almost everybody in the world gets married, -- you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions. Most everybody in the world climbs into their graves married.[19]

In the time that has elapsed since Act One, the children have grown to the marrying age and as a natural

part of nature's process, marry. Marriage is seen as an initiation into a phase of life which all men must pass. It is a ceremony common to all, a ritual part of life. Therefore, while Our Town deals with the progression of human life in daily terms, it at the same time, through the use of a ceremonial action, becomes part of an eternal process. Our Town is everyone's town. For the individual, marriage takes place but once. Seen as a generalized, archetypal experience, it takes place again and again.

In dealing with an experience, i.e. marriage, that is recognizable by the community, part of the complex of attitudes that exist in the group-mind, as their ideal, Wilder creates a ritual state. This state is dependent upon the consistency of the action with these attitudes. The play must take in the interests common to the majority. It cannot be denied that Our Town does so. Audience time becomes one with play time in that both are seen as the same moment of experience. The group mind is able to recognize its ideal in the play. All times then become equal; all space is universal. Action occurs in the "Now," the universal is the "everywhere." Our Town in the manner of the previous plays, achieves "the all, the everywhere, and the always."

The substance of the play is provided by the fundamental experiences of life and is backed by the rhythm of

natural occurrences-- the rhythm of the seasons, the progress of the days, etc.

Act Two moves from the spring of Act One to summertime. The variation in season is representative of "The Long Christmas Dinner" where the weather and the seasons played a prominent part in the repetitive cycle. The year is 1904; the date is the morning of a rainy July 27th. The routine 5:45 is on route.

"Mrs. Webb"and"Mrs. Gibbs" come down to start the routine breakfast "just as if it were an ordinary day." The two women have cooked three meals a day, one of them for twenty years, an action similar to that of Ma in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden." The mundane act shows both a temporal progression and a routine function which becomes repetitive.

The main concern of the family in this act is the marriage of Emily Webb to George Gibbs. The apprehension of the children and the fears felt by the mothers over losing their offspring are experiences felt by every child and mother. The everyday actions become generalized. The parents support this common experience through their reminiscences of the feelings they had on their wedding days. The common superstition of not seeing the bride on her wedding day is upheld through another generation. The father and future-son-in-law have the plans-for-the-future chat, and

the father-daughter, mother-son relationships are played out.

The day is temporarily interrupted by a flashback scene in which Emily's and George's intention to marry is portrayed.

The movement in this aside is from afternoon to evening and thus one witnesses in present morning time the reliving of a past afternoon and evening. Times become fused.

At this point The Stage Manager enters the role of another character assuming the traits of Mr. Morgan behind the soda fountain. Throughout this episode The Stage Manager relies upon the audience to supply the universality through the remembrance of their romantic days.

Emily's and George's one-in-a-lifetime decision, although seen as private to these individuals, has its counterpart in the decisions made by the numerable members of the community.

The actual wedding takes up the remainder of the act. The Stage Manager, with a clap of hands, commands the forward movement of present time. He takes on the role of minister, but his role as omniscient controller cannot be forgotten. The two hundred couples that he states as having married, appear, because of his godly function, to be substantially increased. It seems that all people have married under his

guidance.

The witnesses of the bridal scene encompass far more than the spectators of the village for they include:

> .... the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two by two also. Millions of them.[20]

The marriage includes all life and all times.

> .... M .... marries N .... millions of them. The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grand-children, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will,- Once in a thousand times its interesting.[21]

That once in a thousand times is the time of this wedding, because it represents the ideal. It is the union of two people who represent in their typing the members of male and female society.

The proceedings of the wedding are typical. "Mrs. Soames," uttering comments similar to those spoken at any wedding, represents the voice of both actor and community. The life to be shared by the newlyweds is symbolic of the life to be shared by all newly married people. The process which life is to follow from the wedding day on is the normal and natural course of events that all humans experience. There will be illness, births and deaths, and the

creation of new families. The ritual, like that of "The Long Christmas Dinner," presents the cycle of human life.

"Blessed Be The Tie That Binds" is once again played in the background. This tie is not only the union of two people then, but the union of all people within the Mind of God.

The use of this musical piece might also be likened to the use of music in "Pullman Car Hiawatha," where each component of the universe was assigned a specific tune, -- a hum, zing, thrum, etc. In both instances music is used to indicate unity.

For all the concentration which the act places on young people being married, this scene does not put as much value on it as it does on the continuance of nature and its perfection, " .... every child born into the world is nature's attempt to make a perfect human being."[22] The two people are created as symbols to convey this notion and to show marriage as an integral part of the process which makes new life possible.

The act explores both the direction set out in "Pullman Car Hiawatha" and the cyclic found in "The Long Christmas Dinner." With the presentation of the characters as both individuals and abstractions ("The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden"), Act Two combines the techniques and

experiments of all three one-act plays.

Our Town culminates with the next logical and natural progression in season, time, and human existence. The act deals with death; the main action takes place in the eternal.

Act Three makes clear the combination of both the linear and the cyclic and shows the functioning of the mundane within the universal from an eternal viewpoint.

The mundane events of the day in 1913 are concerned with the funeral of Emily Webb, who has died in childbirth at the age of twenty-six. The fusion of temporal and atemporal is immediately presented by the discussion of the mountain which has pervaded the scene since Act One.

The idea of the mountain as a physical part of Grover's Corners as well as its presentation as a fixed and eternal symbol of nature shows that a physical, mundane element harbours an eternal one. The earthly mountain is seen to be the home of the ethereal, eternal, dead.

A progression in season stands as background for the act. The flashback movement to winter completes the cycle of seasons which commenced with the spring of Act One. The weather and time function accordingly. Act Three evolves into snow time and the time of day moves from afternoon to

night.

The action is located upon the mountain. The preoccupation with the eternal is first stated by The Stage Manager:

> We all know 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 knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.[23]

The eternal part is what the people of Grover's Corners represent. They are abstractions, types; repeated in every generation ("The Long Christmas Dinner"); born out of the fundamental experiences of human life.

The shifting of the scene to the funeral sees the dead reminiscing over the quality of their past lives, a sometimes "awful," sometimes "wonderful," fluctuating experience. The discussions of the dead always in some way refer to the daily life which defines them as individuals, supporting the ideas previously presented in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden" -- that the characters as abstractions are based in the mundane.

Emily, who is the closest link between the dead and the living because of her recent move from one world to

another dominates the action and expresses the final outcome of Our Town. She represents both the individual character (especially through the flashback scene) as well as the abstraction, the concept of all young mothers and girls, and their emotions, which together rest in eternity.

Emily's request to return to the earth is perhaps one of the most important actions to take place in the play. Through her return she binds all times together,for according to The Stage Manager:

> You not only live it (life); but you watch yourself living it.
>
> As you watch it you see the things that they - down there - never know. You see the future. You know what's going to happen afterwards.[24]

Emily's return to February 11, 1899, her twelfth birthday, is the time of her emergence from childhood to adulthood. The movement parallels the change from the blind innocence of temporal life to the sudden realization of what life really is, gained through the knowledge that comes with the distance of death.

As she relives and watches herself reliving the mundane incidents of her former existence, she realizes that it is these very mundane moments and experiences that hold

the highest value in life and that these moments go unnoticed by human beings.

The emphasis on the importance of the fleeting, fragmentary, moments of everyday life is revealed by her as she states: "Oh earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you."[25]

With this knowledge she bids farewell to the seemingly unimportant things that make up life.

> .... Good-bye to ticking clocks .... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new ironed dresses and hot baths .... and sleeping and waking.[26]

The play's concern with the mundane events of the people of Grover's Corners and its constant attempt to fit these everyday actions into a larger scheme is shown to exist for a purpose. These very details are in fact LIFE.

Emily has been born, has lived, loved, married, and died. After death, she has in a sense been reborn, firstly, through her first child, who will become an individual also representing a type; secondly, through her return to earth, which might be seen as a pseudo-rebirth, for she cannot remain among the living; and thirdly, most important of all, by the new knowledge of what life was and is. With this new learning she follows a different "life" in eternity:

> .... When you've been here longer you'll see that our life here is to forget all that, and think only of what's ahead, and be ready for what's ahead. When you've been here longer, you'll understand.[27]

All the knowledge that she brings to the eternal is to increase from here. The idea that the eternal holds a progression, that "you have to think of what's ahead" strengthens the impact of the action of daily living with its mundane progression. The directional pull towards a whole is reinforced.

What Emily has represented as an individual has become generalized through the commonness of her actions. She therefore represents a type; conveys the concept involved with that type;and carries with this the basic experiences that are the substance of the typing.

The composition of the eternal by the mundane is once again represented by the eternal symbols of the stars "doing their old, old crisscross journey in the sky," for beneath them lies the tiny microcosm of Grover's Corners. The town can be seen as a "permanent" landmark in the "movement" of the eternal. From whichever viewpoint the "village" and the "stars" are approached, it is clear that they are both interrelated.

The village is set against the life of the stars,

but the reverse also holds true. One is dependent upon the other. The linear and the cyclic are related. Likewise, the individual and archetype; time and the a-temporal; the family and all families, are related.

Throughout all of this, the simple story conveys a larger truth. The act illustrates that it is the daily actions and events of life which are of chief importance and which comprise the eternal as they exist in the "Mind of God." This, and the failure of human beings to delight in the beauty of ordinary experience is the sad moral of Our Town.

The play illustrates the way in which Wilder's "presentational" stage works. It presents a myth which puts:

> .... specific characters, actions, and themes, into a microcosmic relationship with the universal forces that act upon and form within men; it draws together past and present; and it provides an analogy by which deep-felt needs, desires, aspirations, and fears of the individual become an expression of those of all men. The little New Hampshire town is Wilder's microcosm. His hero is human life itself; the universal forces acting upon it are Time, Nature, and Death; the forces acting from within it are Instinct, Love, Despair, and Apathy. Its scene of daily life, love, marriage, and burial of the dead are the cyclical life-rituals of men in all times and places.[28]

The action of Act Three can be compared to the one-act plays in many ways. Firstly, as earlier suggested, it makes use of a ritual. It presents a study of the combination of individual character and archetype, this time through Emily, as well as the Stage Manager, in the fashion of "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden;" and makes clear that this archetype which rests in eternity is established in the temporal by daily, mundane actions expressing hope, fear, love, etc., as did all previous one-act plays. It continues the suggestion of the movement towards a harmonious whole, with its brief reference to "what's ahead in eternity." This progression can be likened to the movement of "Pullman Car Hiawatha." It maintains and completes a life-death-rebirth cycle previously found in "The Long Christmas Dinner."

In terms of the previous acts, it continues the thematic, seasonal, temporal and spatial progressions to their final positions.

Emily's farewell speech can be compared to that of Harriet in "Pullman Car Hiawatha." The birth of her child and her death can be seen as comparable to the natal event in "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," where Beulah survived the childbirth but lost the baby. The (first) son

who survives Emily indicates the continuity of the family in much the same line of "The Long Christmas Dinner."

Our Town similarily functions within the terms of "pretense" and "collaboration" in the manner of the one-act plays. In addressing itself to the "group-mind" through a visual representation of what the mind holds as common and ideal ("recollection"), it functions in accordance with the principles involved in the address of the theatre to the "group-mind." In successfully presenting both a temporal progression and an a-temporal scheme and concurrently showing past, present, and future on stage, the play maintains a "perpetual presence." All time is encompassed here. The placement of Our Town within an American background lastly confirms its similarities to the one-act pieces.

Therefore, by maintaining the tensions, and the thematic, technical, and narrative elements which were explored in the three plays of The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays in One Act, Our Town identifies itself as part of the "presentational phase."

FOOTNOTES

Chapter VII

[1]Thornton Wilder, "A Preface For *Our Town*," *New York Times*, (Section 10), p. 1.

[2]*Ibid*.

[3]Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1938), p. 11.

[4]*New York Times*, "Preface," p. 1.

[5]T.E. Porter, *Myth and Modern American Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), p. 201.

[6]*Our Town*, p. 10.

[7]*Ibid*., p. 12.

[8]*Ibid*.

[9]*Ibid*., p. 27.

[10]*Ibid*.

[11]*Ibid*., p. 28.

[12]*Ibid*., p. 40.

[13]*Ibid*.

[14]*Ibid*.

[15]*Ibid*., p. 41.

[16]*Ibid*., p. 54.

[17]*Ibid*., p. 56.

[18]*Ibid*., p. 56.

[19]*Ibid*., p. 57.

[20]Ibid., p. 89.

[21]Ibid., p. 96.

[22]Ibid., p. 89.

[23]Ibid., p. 101.

[24]Ibid., p. 114.

[25]Ibid., p. 124.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p. 114.

[28]Burbank, p. 94.

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APPENDIX "A"

Isabel Wilder to Barbara Etcovitch No. 1.

July 10, 1972

Miss Barbara Etcovitch
5831 Notre Dame de Grace Avenue
Montreal 261, P.Q.
Canada.

Dear Miss Etcovitch:

This is to acknowledge your letter to my brother, Mr. Thornton Wilder. For the last few years because of impaired health and failing eyesight he has been living in almost complete retirement in order to slowly continue - when possible - his own long delayed writing projects. So it is that the larger part of his mail comes to me to be answered. But since he is due back here soon after an absense of several months in seclusion, I am holding your letter to read to him and have him give me some definite notes in reply to your questions.

What you ask is often asked of him. But I want you to have the satisfaction of having a few words of his own.

From what you write I can assure you that you have dug far and wide and found most of the answers to your own questions. The facts of the early theatre and the techniques of the Far East are well-known; and Thornton Wilder was a student in Rome when the German Expressionists were speaking up. He read about them. As a child in the Orient he never saw a Chinese play until Mei Lan Fang came to New York in the thirties, I think it was; nor saw a Noh play until very recently in New Haven, Conn.... But alert minds pick up facts and not only ideas out of the air. But who isn't influenced unwittingly by what they see, hear, feel?

It will be kindergarten stuff to you but I enclose the material I send by the hundreds to the lower-level students and readers who write for information.

I do not even list the essay on Thornton Wilder by a Miss Gould in a volume on American playwrights. I never saw

the work until it had been published. The errors are flagrant, - that Thornton Wilder pleaded with the director of Our Town to take away the scenery and properties after the failure of the Boston opening. It was, as you know, written without scenery.

His two essays on dating the plays of Lope de Vega were published in the PMLA, I think. They are not pertinent themselves to your quest.

I had to write someone else fairly recently that Thornton Wilder has no record of the order in which the three one-acts you name were written. He does not keep things; a work is done and it is done. I have not been alert enough. Some day in going back over old letters I may find that I can trace these dates.

So, you will hear from me again. This is just to explain the silence.

Sincerely,

(Miss) Isabel Wilder.

Isabel Wilder to Barbara Etcovitch No. 2.

August 5, 1972

Miss Barbara Etcovitch
5831 Notre Dame de Grace Avenue
Montreal 261, P.Q.
Canada

Dear Miss Etcovitch:

I am afraid I led you into thinking I would have a great deal more to offer after reading your letter to my brother; but I wanted to present it to him so he would know of you and your work and given problem. I also read him my reply to you, trying to cover your definite points.

He sends you his appreciation of the interest you show in his work. Although my brother has taught and is learned in a number of subjects, he does not consider himself a scholar. When he has the opportunity he always tries to discourage students from "working" on him. He says, "pick a dead author," as he did when he lectured at the University of Chicago on Dante, Cervantes, the Greek dramatists, etc.

He is even a little embarrassed that you are working so hard on him. Not being a scholar (except his Lope de Vega studies and then he was only an "amateur") and being the author under scrutiny he feels you have gone very far indeed in finding the background for his one-acts and Our Town. He says he has nothing to add to my comments of the influences you list of the many forms of drama. He, the creative writer wrote those short plays and Our Town out of his acquired background of knowledge of the theatre of the past and his passionate enthusiasm and belief in the dramatic form. If you have read his preface to The Angel That Troubled The Waters, you learn a good deal about this writer. A later light is thrown on his work and life in the theatre by the brief but trenchant Preface to the volume of Three Plays, published by Harper and Row and available in paperback or in any library. But I'm sure you know of these and of his essay in the volume edited by Centeno, published at Princeton University and entitled The Intent of The Artist. It contains an essay by Thornton Wilder, "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting."

He begs you not to go searching for him, that is, in Schiller and Goethe. He says you will find nothing there. He admires both enormously but he feels that they had no artistic influence of any nature on the plays. And his Lope studies came after and bear no relationship to his work. He can offer no further source than you name.

Your second question in regard to the dates of the one-acts, I answered. I was wrong about the publication of the Lope material. You do not need it for your work but I must correct my error: one is in testimonial to the scholar, S. Griswold Morely, Berkeley, Calif. 1953, reprinted from Romance Philology, vol. VII, no. 1, August 1953, printed in the U.S.A. Title of his contribution: Lope, Pinedo, Some Child Actors and A Lion (by) Thornton Wilder. The other article was in German Festschrift.

Thornton Wilder sends his greetings, don't work too hard, please and good wishes for many successes to come.

I add my wishes to his.

Sincerely,

Isabel Wilder.

"APPENDIX B"

ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses upon four plays which compose what is termed "The Presentational Phase of Thornton Wilder."

This phase is based upon the idea of the representational or non-realistic drama, recognizing that theatre is theatre and that therefore no imitation of actual life can be made.

Three 1931 one-act plays, "The Long Christmas Dinner," "Pullman Car Hiawatha," "The Happy Journey To Trenton and Camden," and one 1938 full length drama, Our Town, are the works which represent the principles and elements involved in this specific period in the life of a diverse and prolific author.

The three one-act pieces stand as experiments in the "presentational" style and are shown to be the substance from which Our Town is composed.

The intentions of this thesis are:

1. to define the "presentational phase" by presenting the principles and elements involved in it; and to show how these were formulated in the three early plays and in Our Town;

2. to study each one-act play separately in order to:

   a) determine the exact experiment of each play;

b) show that each one-act play qualifies itself as part of the "presentational phase;"

c) present the elements which each one-act drama transfers to Our Town;

3. to present an act by act study of Our Town in order to ascertain that it is a combination and culmination of the three one-act pieces.

The thesis commences by briefly setting this specific phase within the eclectic background of Thornton Wilder, in order to present an idea of the influences upon him; and to acknowledge that these have set a precedent for his own works. It then deals with the 1941 publication of "Some Thoughts on Playwrighting," the essay written by Wilder to present his accumulated theories on drama.

Succeeding chapters deal with the one-act plays and Our Town, respectively. Each chapter on the one-act pieces terminates with a series of points which stand as a summary of and conclusion for each work. The discussion of Our Town presents its summations act by act and then briefly offers its conclusions at the end of the third act.

Since each of the chapters on the four plays contain their own conclusions, no general concluding chapter has been added to the thesis.

Through this play by play study, the three one-act plays can be seen as early steps in the formulation of a unique "presentational" style which culminates in Our Town.