

INTRODUCTION

Thornton Wilder as a Playwright

Firstly renowned as an acclaimed novelist of twentieth century American literary zone with the publication of his successful novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) equally achieved tremendous success as a playwright. Both his plays and novels proved immensely popular and he had become the only writer to win Pulitzer Prize in both fiction and drama. His distinguished essays and profound translations, further made him highly esteemed more to the abroad than to the United States. His plays have been widely performed and become universally successful.

Born in April 17, 1897 in Madison, Thornton Wilder lived in China as a teenager where his father Amos Wilder was a United States Consul - General in Hong Kong. Though he attended the English China Inland Mission School at Cheefoo, he returned to California in 1912. Graduating in 1915, Wilder attended Oberlin College before transferring to Yale University in 1917. After that time Wilder began to involve in literary career writing series of stories and plays. Some of his novels became quite successful. He established his reputation as a novelist with *The Cabala* (1926) and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* that provided him the Pulitzer Prize of 1928.

Wilder's career in the theatre started inauspiciously with a four – act – play, *The Trumpet Shall Sound* which was unsuccessfully produced in Off- Broadway in 1926. Then, Wilder brought out two collections of one act plays – *The Angel That Troubled the Water* and *The Long Christmas Dinner* (1931) which soared his dramatic reputation. Theatre became his passion and he spent his hours in reading about the European theatres, thinking of different possibilities and writing plays one after the other engaging his interest in everyday events of simple life and of his fondness for non-realistic styles of play's construction.

Wilder's plays which are much better known than his novels, engage the audience in make-believe by having the actors address the spectators directly, by discarding props and scenery and by treating time in an unrealistic manner through such devices as making the same characters appear in different historical periods, and using deliberate anachronisms. Although he produced successful translations and one act plays, Wilder "did not achieve critical recognition as a playwright until the production of *Our Town* (1938) perhaps the most familiar and most frequently produced of all American plays that relates a panoramic story of unexceptional people in Grover's Corners"(Bogard 292).

Wilder's creative and imaginative vision was very sharp and abrupt. He has employed innovative, non realistic theatrical techniques like scrambled time sequence, minimalist sets, bare stage, omniscient narrator, and the like. His plays, for this extraordinary profundity, have been directed and performed by dozens of theatrical luminaries worldwide. His plays, like his novels maintain that true meaning and beauty are found in ordinary experiences of life and death. Wilder's another Pulitzer Prize winning play *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) charged that Wilder had plagiarized some of the plays' ideas from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* that led to 355 performances. This play daringly uses non-realistic allegory of human race from the Ice Age to a seven year war. The play was boldly an experimental work in which all of human history, from the Ice Age to Modern Suburbia, occurs simultaneously and characters break the dramatic illusion to comment on the action and on their roles. Though the play aroused critical controversy, its message of human endurance in the face of catastrophe struck a chord with audiences during the dark days of World War II.

Wilder's plays tend to be more theatrical than dramatic and they use minimum of confrontation, conflict, and shock. His methods are exceptionally evocative and

his treatments of time space, art and life, and life and death are highly experimental. His plays are non-representative, non-illusionist and after all anti-Aristotelian in nature. In his innovative plays he attempts to rupture the hierarchy between actor and audience, stage and auditorium, performance and experience and even between life and death. For him, though the realistic theatre claimed to present the contemporary society on the stage through elaborate setting, and prosaic language, it in fact distances the art from life by its proscenium arch and the imaginary "Fourth Wall". So, Wilder found the realistic theatre neither creative nor imaginative. For him, theatre is theatre itself not a place to present the illusion of life. And to show this, he uses no scenery, no curtain, few props and a chorus like narrator who breaks the imaginary "Fourth Wall" and brings down the audience to the stage with a consecutive awareness that they are in fact watching a drama. So, the universal thematic materials – like birth, love, marriage, and death – are staged in a radical style that made Wilder's play unique and exciting.

Critical Responses to *Our Town*

First produced in New York at the Henry Miller Theatre, on February 4, 1938, Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* later on proved to be one of the most famous and most frequently produced plays in the history of American drama – that alone ran for 336 performances in its debut production. Wilder dispensed with realistic stage conventions and created "Grover's Corners, N.H." with some furniture, ladders, and the narration of a Stage Manager who addresses the audience directly. The play chronicles the daily lives of the residents of a community in the years prior to World War I, and its simplicity created a vivid impression on both audience and critics.

Critics of this play consider that it is an enigmatic masterpiece in comparison to Wilder's earlier works. From the time of its publication in 1938 to present *Our Town* has remained at the centre of critical interest and has received much critical

appraisals. Champions of *Our Town* celebrate the focus on universal themes through allegorical theatrical techniques depicting archetypal characters and events. They see the plays structures to be the remarkable break from those of conventional stilted theatrical practices. While the detractors of the play criticize its bland sentimentality, undeveloped characters, and failure to challenge the audience's received values. These two different perspectives on *Our Town* are partly function of the degree to which a particular production or critic emphasizes its darker concerns with mortality and the fleeting nature of life or its lighter life- affirming elements. In the subsequent years, *Our Town* has been revived in thousands of professional and amateur productions. It was performed, for instance, by American soldiers in Italy during World War II by countless high school and "Community Theatre" and in a television musical adaptation with Frank Sinatra. Different recent critics have discussed the question of whether or not *Our Town* addresses themes still relevant to modern life, and the style still working to differentiate the theatre practice from the conventional one.

Many critics view that *Our Town* celebrates the miracles of birth and death, and of continuity of human experiences. This view reinforces the idea that the fundamental things of human life does not vary with time. Certainly, Wilder has described the changing phenomena of life with the references to earthly things that do not change. Few characters are individualized, mostly the type. Girls and boys become mother and father and they presently die and their places are occupied by their children. Hence, the general phenomena of life and death of human kind are telescoped in this play with the playwright's commonsense. In this respect Winsfield Townley Scott writes:

As *Our Town* literally begins, Wilder sets in motion the little wheel of daily doings. This is the only wheel there is in most plays and fictions;

it turns upon the events presented. So here it spins with normal activities the comings and goings and the conversations weaving a special era and place and a particular people; and on through a gentle afternoon to the great moonlighted night of that May 7 and the ladies strolling chattering home from choir practice. (Scott 148)

On Scott's view, *Our Town* is the celebration of simple pleasures of daily doings. It deals with the human beings' day to day recurring aspects – birth, love, marriage, and death. The play is charmingly effective to incorporate those aspects that have enduring affirmation in human life. The unsatisfying nature of human life for their dreams and desires is clearly represented by now dead Emily who is desperate to reexperience her most joyous moment in her life. Mrs. Gibbs complains to her husband about the untrusting behaviors of her son, George in her household affairs, and Mrs. Webb blatantly believes in superstitions.

Our Town is often placed in the tradition of American folk literature that focuses on small town life. Grover's Corners is a typical American small town and its inhabitants are average, ordinary people who lead prosaic lives. The spare sets reinforce the unexceptional quality of the setting, plot and characters. This minimalism renders the characters allegorical rather than individualized and the setting common place rather than specific. In this way, the ordinary and mundane are invested with a timeless quality, and into events of the plot are transformed into universal experiences. The primary theme of *Our Town* is humanity's failure to appreciate every precious moment of life. This is stated most clearly by Emily as she returns to her grave, asking the Stage Manager, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute?" (*Our Town* 108). Emily's early death and nostalgia for her childhood further expresses themes of the precarious nature of life and the inevitability of death. *Our Town*, thus addresses age-old question of the

human condition and the meaning of life. The play is ultimately life – affirming in its urging the audience to appreciate ordinary everyday life in the face of mortality.

Malcolm Goldstein appreciates such universal quality of *Our Town* in his writing *The Art of Thornton Wilder*:

Wilder is suggesting that the simple, kindly folk of Grover's Corners might indeed be moving along a life of hope for a destiny of mankind, this speaks to the years ahead, well, a people of thousand years from now, that is the way in our living and dying. (Goldstein 165-66)

Goldstein asserts that the universal appeal of *Our Town* may be attributed in part to the common everyday setting, characters and events depicted in the play. For Goldstein, Wilder likes every present expression to hark back to the entirety of beloved accumulated literature, and constantly shows and suggests that every current thought is based on someone's thinking. Everyday of our lives is rooted in old time. What one recognizes beneath Wilder's genial exterior, with in the essential being of the man and his work is the impulse to evoke and celebrate the meditative, the serene, the reverential sense of life.

Our Town is also described as an idealized representation of a lost America. There could not be a play that more appropriately reflects "traditional family values" than *Our Town*. In the homogeneous community of Grover's Corners, certain aspects of complex modern life are unmistakably absent. In Grover's Corners there are no people of color, no homosexuals, no Jews, no drugs; the biggest problem in town is the town drunk whom, as Mrs. Gibbs recommends, should simply be ignored. In this play the children – who would not dream of sassing their parents – marry straight out of high school, mothers stay at home tending to the family's needs and fathers bring home, the bacon, and help enforce discipline in the family. The characters are presented as gentle life – affirming that "none of them changes from good to bad,

from gentle and kind to hard – bitten and selfish" (Austell 94). They are considered to be the paean to everyday living who are searching value, above all price for the smallest events of our life. Mary Mc Carthy sees the play demonstrating the common experience of life on the limited space on stage with time bounded episodes:

Mr. Wilder's play, *Our Town* is purely and simply an act of awareness, a demonstration of the fact that in a work of art at least experience can be arrested, imprisoned and preserved. The perspective of death which Wilder has chosen, gives an extra poignancy and intensity to the small town life whose essence he is trying to urgently communicate. . . . The perspective is to be sure, hazardous, it invites bathos and sentiuousness. (Carthy 59-60)

Mc Carthy has emphasized the artistic aspect of Wilder's treatment of life and death episodes. As George and Emily maneuver through life from childhood to dating to a wedding, the Stage Manager rushes us to end the life of one. The play questions what comes after love? More love or no love? *Our Town* is all about sequence, but it illuminates sequences by asking us to imagine all life and death jumbled up on to of one another as though everything were happening at the same time. Wilder shows a kindred interest on the ongoing happenings in daily life and he creates "magic out of mundane".

The above mentioned ideas and responses from different critics are concerned only to analyze the general thematic content of the play and none of them expresses their opinions towards the technical embroideries. The followings are some critical responses that view the play "experimental" in various senses. For them, the play's thematic content is less remarkable in comparison to its narration, characterization, setting, plot structure, and the stage design. For these critics Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* provides the audience with an informal, intimate and compelling human drama. Wilder was "dissatisfied with the unimaginative, stilted theatrical productions

of his time in which tragic had no heat; the comic had no bits, and the social criticism failed to indict us with responsibility"(Welker 234). Though set during the early twentieth century, *Grover's Corners* is any place and all places, any times and all times. A constantly shifting verb tense throughout the play reveals that something strange is happening here with time. Pantomime and conversation simultaneously enact continuum of time and place.

Many critics see the play equipped with experimental theatrical techniques. They see the play different from those of conventional realistic plays and it does not aim to present the mirror of life but has become the symbol for reality. For these critics, the play is not, in any traditional sense a drama at all. It has neither plot nor conflict, neither complication nor climax. The playwright has presented ordinary events of daily doings in a very extraordinary manner because of which the contemporary audiences are puzzled. The world Wilder creates is seen never existed and the lives his characters living are never lived. He creates a different type of relationship between space and time, stage and spectators, love and marriage, and life and death.

This all is because of Wilder's use of experimental theatrical techniques to explore the traditional, universal human values of religion, community, family, and other simple pleasures of life. The play is not realistic in that it uses techniques other than realism. Hagopian and Wells view this play purely non-realistic in its setting, plot, scenery and props, and characterization:

Our Town is not in any traditional sense a drama at all; it has neither plot nor conflict, neither complication nor climax. By its abandonment of setting and by its use of the Stage Manager as intermediary between the play and its audience, it gives the appearance of belonging to the

experimental theatre movement; yet, within the experimental theatre it is a completely anomalous production. (Hagopian 155)

The play therefore embodies the experimental stage machineries like the bare stage, minimalist sets, omniscient narrator, and the characters who speak from grave. The script of this play examines a small town for the "something way down deep that's eternal about every human being" (Cambridge Encyclopedia of American Literature 1231). Christian morality, community, the family appreciation of everyday pleasures is central traditional values of the play. Yet, Wilder's methods of presenting these values on the stage are anything than the conventional. No scenery, few props, mimed actions, and dramatic persona who fluidly travel both in and out of the action of the play – all these make the play radically innovative. This was certainly a risk at a time when theatre productions were known for their lavish costumes and scenery. However, these experimental techniques allow the audience to focus on the characters themselves rather than on their location and how they related to object that surround them. While studying the theatrical craftsmanship of Wilder, Francis Ferguson clearly associates the production of *Our Town* with that of epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht, from whom Wilder was strongly influenced:

They both (Wilder and Brecht) reject the tradition of modern realism, perhaps because little remains to be done with direct reflection of contemporary life: the pathos of the lost individuality or the decaying suburbs has been done to death since Chekhov. They do not seek some form of theatre – poetry based on folk forms of myths or rituals but go on into the new territory of exploration of possible techniques in theatre. (Ferguson 61)

The episodic nature of the plot and predominance of narrative function strongly relate this play towards the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. The omniscient

role attributed to Stage Manager to narrate and even to control the events and characters gives equally the echoes of classical Sanskrit and Greek drama: the Stage Manager as Sutradhara and Chorus and the three act structure as trilogy. So Wilder's range is spanned from the works of the ancient Greeks to modern dramatist, particularly Brecht, Pirandello, Joyce, and Stein. By drawing his attention from the past unto the contemporary time, Wilder experiments both to the subject matter and the technical fascination.

The reviews of literature show that Thornton Wilder has successfully transmuted the simple events of human life into universal reveries by giving profound, strong, inwardly significance. This play celebrates the miracles of birth and death and the continuity of human experiences. Some critics have pointed out his thematic profundity more remarkable while some others probe deeper into his technical capability that catapulted Wilder into the forefront of experimental tendency in Western theatre. Different new techniques are exploited to give extra ordinariness and reveries of dramatic possibility. The new technicalities push Wilder closer to the major twentieth century experimentalists like Brecht and Pirandello. In his plays like *Our Town* there is strong combination of different techniques as Doland Haberman states "Characterization and narration in Thornton Wilder's theatre are inextricably bound" (60).

However, in the view of this present researcher, *Our Town* should not be seen simply as the paragon of non-realism. Wilder's attempt is not limited in the violation of former methods and adaptation of new theatrical techniques to see the same thing differently. Overall effect of this tendency of Wilder help extend the scope of theatre art in general by accommodating the elements both of realism and non-realism, and able to establish a new type of relationship between stage and auditorium, art and life.

THEATRICAL DISCOURSE

Heritage of Experimental Theatre of the West

The large masses of lower middle class patrons who thronged the theatre yards in Renaissance times disappeared in the eighteenth century when theatre-going became a fashion in high society. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the pendulum was beginning to swing back again, even in the theatres of the great capitals. Contemporary witnesses tell that the bulk of the audience at the Theatre Francais consisted of soldiers, artisans and clerks. This new public wanted to hear everyday problems treated in the theatre, and to see heroes drawn from their own ranks. They wanted more action on the stage than discussion. To meet this demand, different playwrights attempted to produce exciting plots in their plays by combining both tragedy and comedy with domestic setting. Such new forms of plays, written according to the interest of impressive spectators, became popular in their many forms.

With the introduction of different theatrical methods and technical innovation, the plays of the nineteenth century naturalistically inclined to support and encourage the taste of sets to support and encourage the taste of spectators. Such directors were added, too by the rapid improvements in both the quantity and control of new electric illumination. "London's Dorset Garden Theatre was the first such theatres that utilized the instruments of innovation but the idea soon seized upon in Germany and to almost every land, with the complex back-stage engineering" (Williams, 23). In the beginning, this means of lighting had been crude. In fact, that it was partly responsible for revealing to men's eyes the patent artificiality of wings, black cloths, and borders. Soon, however, the instruments available for theatrical use got materially increased. The will towards realism and spectacularism got dominant in the playhouse, and so as often has happened in human affairs, inventions were

forthcoming to translate the desire into actuality. Theatre historian and critic Allardyce Nicoll writes that:

New improvements in lighting and the substitution of largely three dimensional for prevailingly two dimensional sets combined to introduce a fresh problem on the stage. The passion for realism and the theatres designed to bring this aim to achievements were clearly forced to put particular stress on the proscenium arch. If the director is to have a chance of making his scenes lifelike, he must have this frame, sharply separating the stage picture from the spectators from their darkened seats, and to enjoy a peep-show view of the solidly set and naturalistically illuminated situation put before them. (Nicoll, 201)

During early years, the proscenium arch was a familiar part of all playhouses, but its function was not very serious. Curtains rarely descended to conceal scene-changes. The auditorium was as brightly illuminated as the stage. Entrance doors and stage boxes served at once to destroy the effect of a frame. And it keeps the acting part of the house in touch with that reserved for the audience.

Technical Innovation

It is said that the nineteenth century playwrights moved from classicism to romanticism and to realism, some few moved towards the poetic and to a hint of the expressionistic. The theatre increased in numbers. "Acting advanced from bravura display of star talents to well-rehearsed ensemble and to natural style of acting that suited the realistic plays". (Macgowan, 326). Nineteenth century is the most productive period for theatre as far as its stagecraft is concerned. With the introduction of gaslight onstage, it was possible to dim or raise the light in the house partially and gradually according to necessity. Such selective lighting contributed to

the emotional effect of plays and allowed actors to move deeper into the stage instead of playing important scenes on the apron. When limelight was added to gas, the result was bright, intense lighting onstage. In the last decades of the century electric light heralded a new era in lighting design.

Good lighting generally demanded detailed and authentic scenery for realistic presentation. The elaborate description and presentation of setting elements on the stage presented the "illusion of reality" inside the "imaginary Fourth Wall". The playwrights and directors attempted to present historically accurate scenery in the plays of Shakespeare. This added a revolutionary novelty to a picturesque and highly accented interpretation.

In the 1840s, historically accurate costumes began to be the norm for historical plays. The costume designers were researching historical periods and producing costumes that aimed at historical accuracy. The directors diminished the imaginary and unbelievable aspects of the plays so that whatever the spectators watching would think to be the real one. The situations are made lifelike.

In addition to offering lifelike scenery, lighting and costumes, "the theatres of 19th century also featured plays whose circumstances and language were recognizable contemporary and believable" (Jacobus, 434). Even the sentimental melodramas seemed more realistic plays that were still popular. The works of Scribe, including his historical plays relatively used prosaic language that is spoken in everyday life. The situations may not seem absolutely lifelike to our eyes, but in their day they prepared the way for realism.

Realism avoided mechanical "clockwork" plots with their artificiality contrived conclusions. The realistic plays of Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg present the details of setting, costuming and circumstances of the action which were so fully realized as to convince audiences that they were listening in on life itself.

Such plays present the photographic presentation of contemporary society at its best. Their focus is more on characters rather than on the plot. One could see characters suffering from several social, economic, cultural, political diseases like injustice, poverty, biasness, domination and exploitation and dehumanization. Avoiding the use of dramatic conventions such as asides and soliloquies, realistic plays started to depict ordinary people in ordinary situations. In these plays, "things seem to happen to people on the stage as naturally, plausibly, and inevitably as they might in real life" (Lamm, XI). Realism has two difficult tasks. One is to reach an elevation of spirit and expression and the other is to achieve an exciting dramatic effect without violating a feeling of naturalness. The characters are speaking with the colloquial prose, the day to day used language.

Along with the important developments in costuming, scenic design, setting and language, there came a change in auditoriums in the nineteenth century Europe. In London, the ground had no seats or even benches until after the Restoration of 1660. For two centuries then, "there were no aisles in the English pit, and the audiences sit on the long benches without backs" (Macgowan, 337). But by the time 1850s, the theatre managers filled more and more of the ground floor with orchestra stalls, which still exist in many theatres. Next there came a change in the four or five rows of large boxes on the sidewalls and the rear wall of the patent theatres. In spite of the objections of the actors, the side doors to the apron between the footlights and the curtain slowly disappeared.

Realistic Acting Techniques: The Stanislavskian System

Creating a believable character is an important part of any acting where the characters resemble recognizable human beings. But the realistic approach became more important than ever at the close of the nineteenth century when drama began to

depict characters and situation close to everyday life. This placed great demands on actors and actresses to avoid any hint of fakery or superficiality.

A confounder of the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia and the director of Chekhov's most plays, Konstantin Stanislavski was an actor as well as director. For Wilson:

By closely observing the performances of great actors of his day and by drawing on his own experience of acting Stanislavski compiled and then codified a series of principles and techniques which are regarded as fundamental to the training and performance of the performer.

Wilson, 229)

He was keenly aware of the problems the actors have to face while performing their assigned roles. He went about the "reeducation" to get rid of mechanical external acting and to put in its place naturalness and truth. In his own words, "The actor must first of all believe in everything that takes place onstage, and most of all, he must believe what he himself is doing. And one can only believe in the truth" (quoted Stanislavski, Wilson 229). To give substance to his ideas, Stanislavski studied how people acted in everyday life and how they communicated feelings and emotions and then he found ways to accomplish the same thing on stage. The followings are some of his techniques for the actors.

To make the outward activities of the performer-gesture, the voice the rhythm of movements - natural convincing and lifelike. The performers seemed to be in a complete state of freedom and relaxation allowing the behavior of characters to come through effortlessly. They must have enlarged concentration and observation of real life in to its depth.

To have the actor or actress convey the inner truth of a part, Stanislavski emphasized the "inner realism" by having the actor become the characters even in the

situation off stage by developing improvisational experiences to let the actors to explore the character institutions other than those within the play. This method helped the actor become the part rather than just play the part.

As a director of *The Cherry Orchard* by Chekhov, Stanislavski led his actors to the realism of inner truth of the subjective world of character. This play has less to do with external action and what the characters say than with what they are feeling and thinking which they often do not verbalize.

Naturalism Becomes Realism in France: Zola

There were men before Ibsen – French men among them – who attempted to give drama the sense of important truth that had been lacking. In 1873, "before Ibsen turned from romantic and poetic drama, Emile Zola followed his polemics of naturalism by dramatizing his novel *Therese Raquin*" (Macgawan, 359) in a very different manner. What Zola wanted was a type of drama which should, without twisting facts in order to prove a thesis, be absolutely true to existence. Zola wanted complete objectivity, the depiction of the real with almost photographic exactitude.

Zola sees his characters as case studies, he wishes the drama to follow the methods of science by studying men dispassionately. He attacks the old romantic theatre but at the same time has no desire to revive the classic. "There should no longer be any school", he cries, "no more formulas, no standards of any sort: there is only life itself, an immense field where each may study and created as he likes" (quoted Zola, Lamm, 54). He rejects the recipe of the well-made plays. In writing *Therese Raquin*, he attempts to present his characters against the background of their environment as to make them not play but rather live, before the audience.

Instead of Salon dramas, Zola wanted to produce such plays on the stage that were more corresponding with the naturalistic novel. It would resemble this in having as its foundation the principles of heredity and environment and the positivism of the

novel, and above all in adhering ruthlessly to realism and objectivity in every representation. For him, the object of drama should be a complete and unflattering reflection of reality. "In the world which Zola depicts there are only crude bestial desires, barely concealed by a veneer of civilization and continually struggling against traditional morals. His characters are not carefully analyzed individuals; they are not persons but temperaments" (Lamm, 55-56). Zola is less concerned with the detailed psychological motives behind their actions, and more with bringing out the elemental force of their instinct, and with showing how their psychological structure is linked with environment. He wants his characters to live not to act on the stage.

Zola really foreshadows the modern dramatic technique of indirect allusion. In earlier dramatic dialogues, characters tend to display a frankness and eagerness to say everything that is in their hearts, which is highly improbable and theatrical. But Zola experimented in new and unfamiliar techniques and in subjects unexplored by contemporary playwrights, than in its intrinsic value as a work of art. Its brutal and elemental force held a promise for the future of drama.

So, Zola preached the doctrine of naturalism demanding that drama avoid the artificiality of convoluted plot and urging a drama of natural life like action. His dramas are based on his view that the work of art (play) must help to change social conditions. "There are no twists surprises or even much suspense in his plays Zola's subjects seem to have been uniformly grim, and naturalism became associated with the darker side of life" (Jacobus,434).

To Zola, writing a play is simply a business of observing and recording facts. A play is a scientific document presenting a "slice of life" without any artistic twisting and exaggeration. People and their actions are to be reported as truth not organized as art. His view of experimental play is the reaction against the excesses of Romanticism and philosophical idealism which had held the stage for many years. He

has replaced the metaphysical man by the physiological man. Thus, what Zola called naturalism hundred years before as a product of scientific theories of heredity and evolution has become realism in France and in other European theatre.

Ibsen and Realistic Theatre

Though in the beginning, Ibsen was largely influenced by the romantic and nationalistic movement in Norwegian theatre and wrote blank verse plays on subjects drawn from Norwegian myth and history, with the production of *The League of youth*, (1869). Ibsen began to write realistic prose plays about the social moral problems of his time. He included the every day life incidents as the materials for stage. He also began to discuss the subjects that had been ignored the social "taboos" on stage for the first time like economic crisis, unhappy marriage, incest, and sexual double standards. According to Ibsen, the social- moral problems should be discussed openly on the stage.

Ibsen's best known plays like *The Pillars of society* (1877), *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghost* (1881) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890) are called the problem plays in the sense that he has openly discussed the social problems in relation with individuals and the human relationship. These plays deal with problems that were generally discussed by people in debating and on street corners. These plays also deal the problems of individuals struggling against the demands of society. It looks as if it was expected that the people (audience) come out of the theatre after witnessing a performance of a play by Ibsen, with their minds occupied with serious issues. The issues which stand forth in these four plays, according to Raymond Williams are:

Do the means justify the end in politics? Does a woman have the right to leave her husband and children? Can incest, under certain circumstances be justified? In other words, Ibsen in these plays appears as the dramatist of ideas. People had never before come out of

the theatre with such big question-marks in their minds. (Williams, 53)

The main problem of Nora in *A Doll's House* is the Helmer's attitude to Nora who regards her simply a consumed property, only a woman, an empty-headed ornament in a house designed to keep his life functioning smoothly. As the play develops, Nora gets awakening after which "the kind of life Torvald imagines for her is death to Nora". (Jacobus,443). Torvald cannot see how his self-absorbed concern and fear for his own social standing reveals his limitations and selfishness. Nora sees immediately the limits of his concern, and her only choice is to leave him so that she can grow morally and spiritually.

Ibsen broke down the previous social barrier regarding the production of great plays. He is the first man to show that high tragedy can be written about ordinary people and in ordinary everybody prose and the importance of that seemingly simple achievement can hardly be exaggerated. Before Ibsen, tragedy had concerned itself with kings and queens lords and ladies princes and princesses. But he showed that "high" tragedy did take place at least as frequently in the back parlors as in castles and palaces.

Ibsen's next great technical contribution was to throw out the old fashioned artificialities of plot which were usually associated with well-made plays traditional of Eugene Scribe. There are no mistaken identities, overheard conversations, intercepted letters, and the like in his plays. Whatever we learn from his plays, we learn at firsthand, from the characters themselves. Ibsen does not believe in guise, follies, mask and other artificial elements but to the real life living by the characters with full naturalness amidst the pains and pleasures faced by them.

Ibsen is equally remarkable on the stage for his art of developing the prose dialogue to a degree of refinement which has never been surpassed; not only the different language have they used under differing circumstances.

His dialogue is sparking and the characters are remarkably lifelike.

With the help of dialogue, Ibsen is able to create characters as the most complex characters of Flaubert or Henry James without the aid of explanatory narration or monologues. (Lall, 22)

This tendency opened the new way for acting analytical, penetrating, self effacing, and sensitive. These all technicalities helped Ibsen to be the giant in theatrical production in the late nineteenth century, the realistic playwright in par excellence.

Not only did Ibsen introduce controversial subjects, everyday heroes and modern language he resurrected and modernized the "retrospective" plot which had been popular with the ancient Greek playwrights. In a retrospective play like *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, the major events take place before the curtain goes up. The play concerns the way the characters deal with these past events.

Thus, the contribution of Ibsen to bring the theatre from the bourgeoisie drawing room down into the cottage yard and common place life with their pains and pleasures discussing openly, is highly memorable and majestic in the history of western theatre. George Bernard Shaw, who takes Ibsen as the source of his inspiration for his dramatic career, respects Ibsen more to Shakespeare in his book *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*: "Shakespeare had put our selves on the stage but not our situations. . . Ibsen gives us not only ourselves but our situations" (quoted Shaw, Williams, 42).

Shakespeare never questioned the established tenets and beliefs of his time as Ibsen did. There were more social abuses in Shakespeare's England than in Ibsen's

Norway. Shakespeare never challenged any of them. Nobody ever came out of the theatre, after the performance of Shakespeare's play, feeling compelled to reconsider his basic concepts of life. Yet that was the effect of Ibsen's social plays on his contemporaries. Ibsen's superior quality was moreover, his understanding of the human mind and his ability to portray its depth. Important as he was and is as a social reformer, it is that which makes him even more important as an artist. Society changes quickly, the mind hardly at all. It is that which makes his work permanent.

Strindberg and New Form

Scandinavia contributed a great giant to the modern theatre – Swede August Strindberg who began writing historical plays, then took realism and finally turned to a form called a symbolic interpretation of actuality and that was a forerunner of expressionism. His famous plays like *Miss Julie* (1888), *A Dream play* (1902) and *Ghost Sonata* (1907) are largely expressionistic plays. Expressionism that became as a major literary movement after some decades disregarded the strict demand of naturalism to present "a slice of life" without artistic shaping of plot and resolution. Instead, these plays use materials that resembled dream, fantasy – and even nightmares – and focus on symbolic actions and a subjective interpretation of the world.

Strindberg has personified and intensified Ibsenian realism and concentrated on individuality like the war between sexes, conflict within the characters. His characters are subject to anxiety and neurosis. He is different, and even greater than Ibsen, because he brought the realistic aspects closer to naturalism and to expressionism by trying to show his characters in multidimensional aspects.

Zola's naturalistic play *Therese Raquin* "inspired Strindberg to move further to his own interpretation of naturalism which is perhaps most evident in *Miss Julie*" (Jacobus, 482). Strindberg is more subjective in his approach to naturalism, less

scientific and deterministic, than Zola. Whereas Zola's approach might be described as "photographic" realism, Strindberg is more selective and impressionistic but no less honest and true. He sees his characters operating out of a whole series of deeply buried motives. They are not necessarily the product of their biology, or their social circumstances, as naturalists of Zola's stripe sometimes implied. Yet Strindberg sees clearly that class distinction help determine the behavior of many people. He seemed to accept the view that people are not crated by their class but rather belong to their class because of the kind of people they are.

Strindberg probes deeply into the psychology of his characters, whose emotional lives rather than outward social qualities determine their actions. In the play *Miss Julie*, the title character is the last member of an old family whose blood has run thin. In the preface to this play, Strindberg tries to convince the reader that her fall serves a purpose. She is a relic of the old order of fighting nobility who must make way for Jean, the creator of the new emerging social order. And it is all to be good that the royal park should be cleared of the dark, overgrown trees which have stood in the way of others. Strindberg was only theoretically satisfied by the mixture of Darwin, and Nietzsche which his best pupil, O'Neill inherited from him. *Miss Julie* is a psychological play that challenges social complacency based on class and social differences. This is the play marked by a struggle between two different classes for dominance and control.

Apart from the realistic elements, there are so many symbolic stagecraft in this play, including the setting itself (on mid summer's eve), the killing of cannery, boot glove, which Jean used to wear, ringing bell as warning for old feudal system, etc. These all help Strindberg to handle the episodes from the realm of realism to more expressionism and symbolism by accommodating the dream and fantasy. He wants social reformation by denouncing the elite aristocracy and empowering Jean like

characters from their submissive deprived situation. So, the sexual liaison between Julie and Jean has strong symbolic significance.

However, Strindberg is an amass of contradiction and complexities not only his beliefs and behaviors to women – a misogynist - but more powerfully in his attitude towards dramatic techniques and styles. He both supports and rejects the naturalistic tradition of Zola and Ibsenian theatrical techniques. He wants more experiment on the realism of Ibsen by penetrating into the depth of characterization and complexity of plot. Even in his realistic period, he wrote with a greater intensity and violence and he analyzed and sublimated the materials of his life as neither of his rivals never did. Sean O'Casey, the author of *Juno and the Paycock* writes, "Strindberg Strindberg, Strindberg, the greatest of all . . . , Strindberg shakes flame from the living planets and the fixed stars Ibsen cannot sit serenely in his *A Doll's House*, while Strindberg is battling with heaven and hell" (Macgowan, 413-414).

Similarly, O'Neill called Strindberg "the precursor of all modernity in our present theatre" (Macgowan, 414). And commenting on Strindberg, Ibsen said to a visitor "there is one who will be greater than I".

Chekhov's Dramatic Innovation

Like Ibsen's successful plays- *A Doll's House*, *Ghost*; and the "*Master Builder*" –Anton Chekhov's plays *Three Sisters*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Seagull*, and *The Cherry Orchard* are realistic, but they are also patient examinations of character rather than primarily problem plays. He has dramatically described the social intellectual conflict of transitional Russia, especially the changes that revealed a hitherto repressed class of peasants evolving into landowners and merchants. *The Cherry Orchard* is suffused with an overpowering sense of inevitability through which Chekhov "depicts the conflict between the necessity for change and nostalgia for the past" (Jacobus, 11).

Chekhov writes not about the solitary life of man at once with nature and the birds of the air, but about everyday encounters of modern civilized man pursuing an urban existence, living in a flat or sub-urban dacha. His sense of unity with mankind glows in the understanding which he brings to every character and in the wry pity which he feels for the victims of social decay. Chekhov's favorite characters are ordinary Russian men and women, to whom Chekhov dedicated his life and work, depicted with such truths and sympathy and perception that we see in them some of the absolute and universal qualities of human nature. They are not presented just as individuals but with entire background, slices of life. So, one critic states that Chekhov is "the first and last Russian author to have no heroes" (Yermilov, 144). Even the servants blossom into place because he understands how the process of time diminishes even the most Napoleonic of egos. His main character is the reality itself, the life of his country of which his characters are particles. They are, according to John Allen:

Frustrated, disappointed out of step with time and circumstances, they do not seek to realize some great ideal as Ibsen's do; they do not tear each other asunder like Strindberg's neurotic protagonists. He does not show us men and women in the grip of an overwhelming passion in the romantic manner or the victims of fate in the classical fashion. (Allen, 154)

He has revolted against dramatic theatre. Instead of stereotypes, we are given three dimensional characters and instead of "plot" we are given action that is also indirect, which comes only from characters and their interactions. In this respect, recording the sale of *The Cherry Orchard* is the most important example of indirect action. Although, the audience does not see the sale, the entire play moves around this unseen action. So, an important dramatic event takes place offstage and is felt or

seen through the reaction of the characters on stage. The reactions are recorded by means of inner dialogue, facial expression. This is another character revealing technique.

Chekhov's best plays like this provide ample evidence of his grave concern for the changes taking place in Russia. He states that in a society where 'happiness' is found on the suffering and oppression of millions, one has no right to think of personal happiness. Happiness for him is found not in love but in truth. His famous play *Uncle Vanya* (1899) presents the life of a little man with its hidden, suffering and self-effacing toil for the happiness of others. For him Truth and Work are the foundations, the ever flowing source of beauty. His *The Seagull* (1895) presents a new kind of dramatic art in deeply thought out "symbol of shattered illusions and its fate is woven into the real plot" (Lamm, 201). Chekhov opines that things should be just as complex and at the same time as simple on the stage as they are in life. The endeavor to blend the comic and the satirical with dramatic and tragic themes in a single artistic whole becomes a principle with Chekhov.

Thus, Chekhov has both perfected the nature of realistic theatre of Ibsen and Strindberg at its best and has given a 'multidimensional perspective to look at the things. His style is so simple, effective and perfect that everyone enjoys his plays by reddened as well as seeing on stage. He produces galleries of characters corresponding to various social strata of the contemporary society. Chekhov has become a norm, icon, the role model followed by world wide theatre practitioners. So, Raymond William writes:

Chekhov's representation of living action is impressive. The structure is more finely and more delicately constructed than that of any contemporaries. He had all virtues and its talents, in a measure,

indeed, amounting to genius. . . Chekhov highly placed among the questionable deities. (Williams, 130-37)

Eugene O'Neill and the Extension of Realistic Stage

Influenced primarily by the established tradition of realism of Ibsen and Strindberg, Eugene O'Neill introduced Americans to the techniques of the great European realists and made a real entry of American plays into the world theatre. O'Neill's major contribution was to heal the American drama that was suffering from the over use of romance, sentimentality, and the melodramatic fervor. Though, he began as a realist, he moved wider space by doing several experiments on realistic theatre and helped widening the theatre art.

Up to O'Neill it was believed that the great tragedy in the past has been most effective by the characters who speak in fluent, sensitive and "intellectual" language. But O'Neill, in his desire to be realistic, uses the everyday speech patterns of American life. This entirely inhibits the "conventional fluent, poetic- prose dialogue, and his great tragic figures are borne on the wings of water front, laboring class or sub- urban bourgeoisie speech" (Jacobus, 642). O'Neill uses various dialects and accents to evoke a greater realistic effect like the characters of *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) who use vernacular American words like "God Purty", "Maw", "Mebbe".

The themes, settings, the characters and language of his early plays are all realistic. There is the realistic representation of the sea-life and sea-characters. The situations are concrete and the characters palpable and well defined. They have been realistically described and even their intonation, speech style, their peculiar ways of expressing themselves can be heard and distinguished.

But gradually O'Neill achieved purer and higher realism which is called psychological realism. He began to use expressionistic technique to lay bare the soul of his protagonists. There is deeper and deeper probing into the subconscious and the

psyche of his characters, the inner springs of action are revealed. In *The Emperor Jones* (1921), expressionistic technique has been used for the externalization of fears and terrors of Bronte Jones. In this play, the psychology of fear and this disintegrating effect have even realistically, convincingly, and forcefully presented. Bronte Jones is "not an individual negro but psychology and symbolism merged so well in his character that he becomes a study of the basic impulses and attitudes common both to the black and the white" (Tilak, 21).

O'Neill, in his later plays, fused realism with symbolic and suggestive modes. In order to communicate "inner reality" of characters he used expressionistic techniques like asides, masks, soliloquy, etc. His asides are much longer than Shakespeare and more frequently used. In his play *Strange Interlude*, he develops nine acts, during the dialogue; the characters psychoanalyze themselves for the audience while others are conveniently deaf. His interest in the masked play is based on his belief that everyman "masks" himself against his fellowman and also "masks" himself from his inner self. The psychological studies of man based on Jung and Freud might be considered to be a process of unmasking and further unmasking until the individual can see himself for what he is.

With the use of various dramatic techniques, the emphasis of O'Neill's play shifts from the external to the inner reality. The proper use of symbol extends the scope and meaning of the play beyond the limited boundary of straight forward realism. The use of symbols enables him to suggest the deeper reality and the profound significance of the themes. It imparts depth and richness of texture to his plays. Through its use, the playwright universalizes its theme and extends the scope and meaning of the play.

O'Neill was equally influenced by Greek tragedies and he produced poetic forms of realism in his plays. In *Desire under the Elms*, he "explores the myth of

Phaedra centering on her incestuous love for her husband's son –but sets in rural New England on a rocky-hard farm" (Jacobus, 635). The setting of this play has a strong symbolic significance. The atmosphere of the farm life and farm house has been evoked by reference to the overhanging drooping elms. "The two enormous elms on two sides of the house are like exhausted women resting their sagging breast and hands and hair on its roof, and when it rains their tears tackle down monotonously and rot on the shingles" (Tilak, 62). Just as fate animates a Greek tragedy, the emotional forces of jealousy, resentment, lust, and incestuous love animate *Desire Under the Elms*. This woman imagery in the setting adds up the dramatic effect for symbolic interpretation. O'Neill's view of women was largely influenced from Strindberg.

In this way, O'Neill contributed a lot to extend the realistic theatre by moving from mere realism, symbolic and ultimately expressionist playwright in par excellence. His use of realistic themes, symbolic settings, poetic-prosaic dialogue and other techniques help a lot the theatre art to make it more wide and more creative that accommodate the "entire life".

Emergence of Experimental Theatre Practice

As there were realistic playwrights before there was a realistic theatre, similarly there were many experimental theatre practitioners before the high experimental decade of 1920s, 30s and 1940s. The first experimenters from the Goncourts and Zola to Ibsen and Strindberg, were few, by rejecting the traditional styles of presenting the characters and situations, brought a new systems in theatre art. There began the signs of dissatisfaction even in the midst of firmly established set of condition. Diverse in their plans for reforming the playhouse, and frequently clashing with each other, different playwrights, actors and directors "found a sense of common purpose in their detestation of realism and in their desire for an entirely fresh approach to stage productions" (Nicoll, 202).

Before 1905 in Europe and 1915 in America, the stage still made exteriors out of wings, borders, and painted drops; they were an unillusive sham compared with the solid and convincing box sets that might be seen in the same production. The glare of footlights and borders lights spoiled both kinds of settings. In the 1880s, Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz write:

Zola attacked wings, backdrops, and footlights. About the time that Antoine played a few senses lit only by natural sources and lights from above, Strindberg wrote against footlights because they make the faces of the actors look flatter, also they tend to wipe out the subtler lineaments in the lower parts of the face. (Macgowan, 434)

So, there came one after another theatrical revolt in the designing, and lighting scenery. Different dramatist and directors attempted to strengthen the dramatic action "from early nineteenth century through setting, lighting, costuming props, etc. The Swiss playwright and director Adolphe Appia, the prophet of the new stagecraft, intended to make the setting that had a kind of solid reality as well as various levels

for the actors to work upon, in the early twentieth century. He wanted a 'plastic' or three dimensional set because the actor, had the quality, and because the actor's movements could have meaning in relation to obstacles and points of support offered it by the ground and by natural objects. "He used draperies instead of walls in many of his drawings for projected productions" (Macgowan, 435). He managed to solve the obvious conflict between a living actor and a dead setting by the use of 'living light' on stage that throws the action of the play into a sharper relief and create a mood quality by illuminating and stimulating the actors into natural phenomena.

Gordon Craig was more a man of the theatre than Appia who practiced the art of acting before he practiced the art design. He never exalted the artist above the theatre. To him, the stage was not a place that offered its backdrop as the hugest canvas any painter ever had. The theatre, he wrote, "should not be a place in which to exhibit scenery . . . it should be a place in which the entire beauty of life can be unfolded . . . the inner beauty and the meaning of life" (Macgowan, 437). He recognized that the theatre is a synthesis of many arts and many skills. It is not only the play or acting scenery, lights, music, movement or dance. He saw 'symbolic gesture' revived the masks, and used a kind of puppet – marionette, infinitely graceful and flexible. The essence of Craig's artistic endeavor, after all is to be found in a revolt against the falsity of realistic methods and substituting by more symbolic forms.

Craig so uses curtains on occasion, but in his work the preventing element is three-dimensional form. He attacks the realistic theatre but he also attacks the painted theatre. There's virtually no decoration in his design: his effects are created wholly by the employment of simple mass-forms. (Nicoll, 203)

Craig dreamed of a modern theatre which should once more have taken on the spiritual atmosphere of a temple. Many people were dissatisfied with the "peep-show theatre that lost its soul far more than it had gained in body" (204). The penchant separation between the actors and audience by the introduction of proscenium arch in the name of presenting reality, many people felt the limitation of that theatre which could produce only the illusion of reality.

The theatre was slowly getting into the entrance of new stagecraft by accommodating the new equipments to address and widen the maximum possibility of theatre art by facing several obstacles. Perhaps the most serious problem that the new stagecraft faced in 1900 was how to curb the footlights and obtain "sculpturesque" lighting. "Incandescent bulbs were too weak and arcs were too hard to manage" (Macgowan, 442-443). Lights began to appear on the ceiling beams in the auditorium about 1910 and on the front balconies in 1912.

An interesting by-product of the new stagecraft was the use of 'broken color'. The artist gave up flat tones as well as painted shadows, and he dotted, mottled, and streaked the surface of his sets in a number of hues. Under proper lighting, this disguised the canvas and gave walls a quality that was more life-like as well as more beautiful. (443)

A perfect revolutionary Austrian-American playwright, director, manager, actor and inventor Max Reinhardt not only freed the world theatre from the nineteenth century thralldom, and made it over in the image of Appia, but he also met the challenge of Craig by combining the widest possible range of theatre talents. He "threw out the dry conventions of the theatrical past and he used on of a number of vivid and imaginative styles entirely fresh to the stage" (Macgowan, 445). Reinhardt opened theatres one after the other moving various European and American major towns by doing several experiments on the part of acting, directing, designing the

setting props, scenery, pantomime dance music, lighting and other various elements of productions. He built up the international repertory that spread through all the German and Austrian theatres of his time. What he did to reanimate Shakespeare on the German stage is remarkable.

The new stagecraft attracted the attention of Americans by the year 1912 when Barker showed Broadway for the first time a setting by a native American designer workings in the fashion set by Appia and Craig Barker's simple gray and black setting for the Anatole France's farce *The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife*, and the brilliant costumes that he paraded before it in the plays of William Shakespeare stamped him as a leading stage designer of America. Early as 1912, the new stage craft found an opening in the "little theatre" opened by amateur groups to give audience a way from Broadway. Other designers equally attempted to create and use the Elizabethan stage in America by doing continuous experiments, using expressionistic stage pieces.

The hope of the people after the end of First World War as finding the world peaceful, comfort, rest and prosperous was shattered by the horrible war effects followed by economic crisis and the fear of totalitarianism. That social unrest equally influenced and impacted the theatre art which became restless and turbulent chaos and crisis. In such period, different movements in art and literature emerged as expressionism, imagism, surrealism, Dadaism, and Futurism all against the prevailing tradition of realism. From the time of Anton Chekhov in 1903 to Samuel Beckett in the 1950s drama exploited the possibilities of realism antirealism and the poetic expansion of expressionism. Eugene O'Neill in America began to compose his plays by using expressionistic dramatic techniques followed by Tennessee Williams, Thornton Wilder, and Arthur Miller. Luigi Pirandello, in Italy began to use anti realistic stage machinery and Bertolt Brecht introduced epic theatre as opposed to

dramatic theatre in Germany whose combined effect is clearly seen in the plays of Thornton Wilder like the *Our Town* (1938), and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942).

Expressionism came as a major literary experimental movement in western theatre during early and mid twentieth century. The playwrights of this movement like O'Neill present strange distorted or unearthly figures through symbolic expression to give concrete form to the abstract, to make unseen visible. According to Lee A.

Jacobus:

Expressionism disregarded the strict demands of naturalism to present a 'slice of life' without artistic shaping of plot and resolutions. Instead, expressionist drama used materials that resembled dreams – or nightmares – and focused on symbolic actions and subjective interpretations of the world. (Jacobus, 481)

These plays' construction is apt to be episodic, while the dialogue ranges from lyric to the telegraphic. The characters are usually type rather than the round human beings. The focus is more on symbol than scenery and the stage design is flat angular distorted, and the signs are projected on a setting to express a subjective idea.

Influenced by Strindberg, O'Neill experimented with realism, first by presenting stark, powerful plays that disturbed audience. He experimented with more poetic forms of realism in his famous play *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) where he used a composite setting of the exterior and four rooms of a farmhouse. Without its understanding of myth, the play would be sordid, but the myth helps us to see that fate operates even today, not in the forms of message from God but rather in terms of message from our hearts and bodies: lust is a force in a nature that drives and destroys.

Theatre was equally influenced by other various modernist movements in the world of art Cubism and Constructivism of painting and sculpture helped to move away theatre from representationalism and essentialism. Influenced primarily by the

psychology of Freud and the poetry of Charles Boudelaire, the Surrealists in the 1920s viewed that the illogical and uncontrolled thoughts and associations of mind better represented objective truth and reality than the ideas controlled by convention and imposed rationality. This was a sharper shock to the realistic theatre practitioner and the playwrights like the Italian master Luigi Pirandello supplanted realism by distorting its reality for emotional purpose. His plays are examination of the realities we take for granted in drama. Thornton Wilder escapes from realistic tendency by employing experimental theatrical techniques like minimalist stage sets an omniscient Stage Manager who narrates and controls the action and the characters who speak from grave. We can clearly see the meta theatrical tendency in Pirandello, Brecht and Wilder.

Luigi Pirandello: Experimentalist Par Excellence

Primarily a short story writer and a novelist, Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) has become one of the most outstanding dramatists of the twentieth century Italy whose plays examine the impossibility of knowing reality. His influence in modern theatre resulted from his experimentation with the concept of realism that dominated drama from the time of Strindberg and Ibsen. The concept of the imaginary "Fourth Wall" of the stage, through which the audience observed the action of characters in their living rooms, had become the norm in theatre. Pirandello however "questioned all thought of norms by bringing the very idea of reality under philosophical scrutiny. His questioning helped playwrights around the world expand their approaches to theatre in the early part of the twentieth century" (Jacobus, 644).

Pirandello is widely famous for his best experimental play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). This play has a distinctly absurd quality, since it expects us to accept the notion that the characters on the stage are waiting for an author to put them into play. "Pirandello plays with our senses of illusion and of expectation and

realism to such an extent that he forces us to reexamine our concepts of reality" (Jacobus, 11). He turns the world of expectation in drama upside down. He reminds us that what we assume to be real is always questionable. We cannot be sure of anything. We must presume that things are true and in some cases we must take them on faith. There is objective truth to know in that everybody maintains his/her subjective and relative truth of his/her own. This very idea is at the centre of high modernism in Western Europe and America.

Pirandello's plays were produced during 1920s when Italian culture was uncertain, frightened, and still reeling in shock from the destruction of world war First. In this depressed time, Pirandello's audience saw in his plays a reflection of their own dispirited, fearful selves. His plays are equipped with non- realistic machinery that give shock to the conventional audiences who were habituated of watching play inside the imaginary fourth wall. The "Fourth Wall presents a problem . . . your actors are after all only actors pretending to be something they are not" (Nicoll, 203). In naturalistic inclination, Pirandello does not use everyday things but he chooses unusual and preferably eccentric cases. His naturalism could find expression in such a fantastic play as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* due to a belief which Pirandello frequently expresses, namely that we live two lives, one in reality and one in a world of illusion, and that in us there are two persons, the one we really are and the one we think we are, or seem to be. But, there is not the relation with 'life likeness' because Pirandello with the quick and subtle mind of Southern Italy, and the light and airy imagination, is made of quite different stuff from Ibsen.

His plays sound like improvisation and so they are. He founded a national theatre in Rome in 1925 with the intension of developing a technique of acting. Many people found his plays obscure and intellectual. His logic is more devastating than Shaw's and sometimes leads to conclusions which seem even more hair raising to

conventional morality. It was his gift that in an inimitable personal way he could give dramatic form to his ancient thought. His plays are showing a tendency to disappear from the theatres but from time to time we find new dramatists who are working with his tools as the American playwright Thornton Wilder.

Having discovered a subject that proved to be highly suitable for dramatization, namely the nature of reality, he plays with it like a juggler who can keep a large number of clubs in the air at once. Yet he is "not a glib or superficial dramatist but a highly professional technician who took the trouble to construct his plays firmly to create living characters, and to develop his materials in an individual and entertaining manner" (Allen, 159).

Pirandello made a powerful and significant departure from realism by dramatizing which does not have to do with social, political or economic relation but between art and life. By doing experiments on theatre, he is bringing theatre closer to life by breaking the imaginary "Fourth Wall" of realistic theatre. His characters are living with meta theatrical consciousness and the fictional time equals with performance time. His characters are more intellectual, argumentative, and imaginary and more philosophical while the actors are dull, crude, confusing, banal, and parasitic and joker who are living always with illusion. The actors represent the average actors and audience of 1920s, whose words and expressions come from the domain of conventional comedy. The following dialogues are remarkable in this context.

Manager: And where is the book?

Father: It is in us. The drama is in us, and we are the drama. We are impatient to play it . . .

Step daughter: Believe me, we are really six most interesting characters sir, sidetracked however.

Father: The man the writer, the instrument of the creation will die, but his creation does not die.

Manager: Let's come to the fact.

Father: Very good sir! But a fact is like a sack which won't stand up when it is empty. (Jacobus, 648-54)

After all, Pirandello's attempt is to expand the scope of theatre art by including both realistic and non-realistic stage scenes. The theatre should be more imaginative and creative as well as to encompass the life itself which has multidimensional aspects. If theatres are the places to show life, Pirandello assures, they must go on changing and widening their scopes as life is so diverse and existing in multiple forms. The conventional fixed pattern of theatre cannot represent life as such.

Bertolt Brecht and Epic Theatre

Bertolt Brecht (1896-1956) is one of the most inventive and influential experimental German dramatist whose work helped to change the whole dramatic convention in a very exciting manner. He has left a legacy of important plays and theories about how these plays should be produced. Throughout his career he was of the view that drama should inform and awaken sensibilities not just entertain or emotionally hypnotize the audience.

In the course of 1920s, Brecht gained wide experience in the various aspect of theatre art. He held the post of "Dramaturgy" in the Munich Kammerspiele Theatre in 1920, and later worked with Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscater, two of the great German producers of the period. Brecht's most important plays include *Galileo* (1938-39), *Mother Courage* (1941), *The Good Women of Setzuan Race* (1945) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1948). But these are only few.

Brecht had developed a number of theatrical theories by doing several experiments on the prevailing dramatic theatre. By "rejecting the theatre of his day

which valued the realistic 'well made plays', in which all parts fit perfectly together and function like a machine" Brecht has offered "a genuine alternative to realistic drama" (Jacabus, 638) which he calls the Epic Theatre. He has employed several dramaturgical techniques like prologues, epilogues, choruses and songs, asides and the exposures of theatrical machinery to the audience systematically so that a form of theatre could appear in which the epic element is not just conceived as an occasional effect but determined the actual structure of the performance. These epic elements have anti-illusionist function which is intended to counter any identification or empathy on the part of audience with figures and situations with in the internal communication system, there by encouraging a posture of critical distance. His epic theatre is anti-Aristotelian, anti-illusionist that uses non-realistic stage equipments to convey a sense that the audiences are watching a play itself, not the illusion of life.

The first full statement of Brecht's theatrical theories regarding the 'Epic Theatre' is found in *Notes on the Opera* with the collaboration of Weill in a table of contrary features showing certain changes of emphasis as between 'Dramatic' and 'Epic' forms of theatre.

Dramatic Theatre

Plot as soul of theatre
 Involves spectators in an action
 Consumes his capacity to act
 Allows him to have feelings
 Experience
 Spectator is drawn into something.
 Suggestion
 Feelings are preserved
 Man assumed to be known

Epic Theatre

Narrative plays a greater role.
 Makes the spectator an observer
 Awakens his capacity to act.
 Demands decision from him.
 View of the world.
 He is confronted with something
 Argument
 Feelings becomes realization
 Man is an object of investigation

Man unalterable	Man alterable and altering
The scene exists for another	Each scene for itself.
Growth	Montage
Linear progress	In curve
Evolutionary inevitability	Sudden leaps
Man as fixed	Man as a process
Thoughts determine being	Social being determines thought.
Feelings	Reason

(Table 1)

Source: Ronald, Gray. *Brecht* Oliver and Boyd Limited, Tweeddale Court Edinburgh.

Brecht rejected that the contemporary German drama invited the audience to empathize with the emotional destiny of its central individual characters. Spectators were encouraged to surrender to the suspense and consolation of the "well made play" tradition of Eugene Scribe that was faithful to the unity of time and place in their realistic depiction. Brecht has associated these conventions with the categories of "Mimesis" of imitation and catharsis of emotions. He has developed his epic theatrical tradition by combining the popular realism with the avant-garde stylized techniques like "dialectical", "verfrendungs effekt" (alienation effect), "defamiliarization", "naivete", "historification", "anti-hero", "literization" and so on. According to a critic Lee A. Jacobus:

In epic theatre the sense of dramatic illusion is constantly voided by reminders from the stage that one is watching a play. Stark, harsh lighting, blank stages, placards announcing changes of scenes, bands playing musing on stage and long, discomfoting pauses make it

impossible for an audience to become totally immersed in a realistic illusion. (Jacobus, 638)

Brecht has felt that realistic plays are too mechanical like a "clock work mouse", which helps maintain the social status quo that they portray by reinforcing, rather than challenging their realities. He wants the audience to analyze the plays thematic content intellectually rather than to sit back and be emotionally hypnotized. He wants a critically detached audience.

Epic theatre is characterized by an "episodic structure" in which the individual scenes are sharply contrasted with one another and creates alienation. The emphasis on the "process oriented" suspense in its remarkable contrasting feature from the hitherto generally accepted dramatic norm of "result-oriented" suspense belonged to the Dramatic Theatre. As far as the aesthetics of reception is concerned the primary function of "Epic Theatre" is to undermine the suspense to the extent that the audiences are able to distance themselves critically from the action, thus leaving them free to reflect compare and evaluate. The detail presentation of events and episodes divert the attention of audience into many directions emotionally but they are alerted intellectually.

So Brecht's plays are epic in scope and episodic in nature. By violating the Aristotelian concept of simple single plot he has introduced complicated plot having several episodes to depict every aspect of social reality. There are more than thirteen scenes in his play *Galileo* (1938-39) and more than forty characters. One scene may convey a realistic situation while another may symbolize it and the other scene takes the form of debate or narration. Episodes are combined with narrative and lyrical passages. There are parallel plots or subplots and juxtaposition and contrast in the construction of *Galileo* which violates the Unities. So, the story does not move in linear fashion but the action alternates between elements.

Brecht believes that theatre should create an intellectual climate for social reformation. He has equally rejected the traditional "hero" who was to be "larger than life" and introduced the concept of "anti-hero", hero with limitation rather than fulfills the optimum expectation of the audience. His "hero" tells lies, recants and surrenders in front of the authority in *Galileo* (1938-9). He is not firm in decision. Whenever he is right, traitor is at the end. He is presented as a hedonist, coward who lacks the courage. So Galileo is no more heroic than ordinary common people. This play is showing a conflict between authority and knowledge, faith and reason, religion and science.

Brecht defamiliarises the ordinary subject matter by different techniques so that the audience are always alert and informed about the social happenings. They are always alienated from the flow of action and are urged to question why those disparities are presented on the stage? Brecht coined the term "Verfremdungseffekt" by which the illusion of stage reality is destroyed:

The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's A-effect attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible into something, peculiar, striking unexpected. (Brecht, 143)

The actor in Brechtian drama also undergoes a major transformation. He does not identify with his part and lose himself in it, but he places himself at a distance both from character he portrays and the situation in which he is involved. Brecht and Helene Weigel conducted workshops to train actors in the skills of distancing themselves from the characters they played. Moreover, Brecht has violated the unity of place and time in his play *Galileo*. In this play, the fictional time is not limited to twenty four hours but expands more than twenty eight years of protagonist's life and the scenes go on shifting from Venice to Florence, to Rome and so on.

After all, Brechtian theatre is anti-illusionist, anti-Aristotelian that uses non realistic stage equipments. There is meta theatrical consciousness in which the fictional evidence on the stage corresponds to the real audience. The auditorium and the fictional authors, actors and directors correspond to their real life counter parts in the production of the text. Brecht uses the methods of historification while focusing social happenings. He brings past episodes through narration so that the audience can compare this with that. His theatre invites more arguments and it presents individuals as a socially conditioned being. Brecht prevents empathy in his 'scientific theatre,' wants his audience dialectical relationship, observe critically and he wants not harmony but confrontation between stage and audience. To achieve this goal, epic theatre uses lights not to heighten the theme but to show contradiction, lights shown in empty corners of the stage. Different visual images, musical notes, and screen legends flashed into the stage to make the direction more elaborate and exceptionally evocative. The actors become rather as commentator of the characters they are imitating – anti-Stanislavskian method.

Wilderian Intervention

Thornton Wilder, the only writer to win Pulitzer Prize in both fiction and drama, enjoyed a rare success in straddling the world of literary sophistication and popular entertainment. In a career spanning nearly five decades, Wilder achieved tremendous acclaim for such modern classics as *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) but also endured significant set backs and reversals, including vicious critical attacks and the occasional critical failure at the box office. He was simultaneously an innovator and experimenter who set the highest value on the smallest events in our daily life, an optimist who presented a bleak vision of the after life and an admirer of the fragmented narratives of modernism.

Wilder's plays tend to be more theatrical than dramatic. They use a minimum of confrontation, conflict and shock. They have movement but not 'action', and the 'storyline' often dissolves in myth. Wilder deals with pageant and process and his people are parable people. Nobody is surprised to learn that he came to scorn Belasco bric – a – brac and the box set for the dimensions of thought he is working in call for almost limited use of time and space. They can be a bit scary at times but that is all right with the audience. If his plays do not end with a bang neither do they end with a whimper. The end sought is the reconciliation. Mildred Kuner is basically concerned with Wilder's technique and she points out frequently that:

He (Wilder) is not a realist, that he almost prefers type characters (he has seldom drawn memorable individuals) and that he habitually uses familiar stage conventions. Moreover, he strives always to establish relation between audience and narrative, sometimes by employing a stage manager or an omniscient narrator, sometimes by deliberately setting his tales in remote places (Greece, Peru, and Imperial Rome).

(Kuner, 226)

Wilder's dramatic reputation soared with *Our Town* (1938). Written for a bare stage guided throughout by a narrator his script examines a small town for the "something way down deep that is external about every human being" (Encyclopedia of World Biography, 632). His intermingled style and forms even more daringly in *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) in which Wilder describes the human race as flawed but worth preserving. Inspired by James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, this play boldly an experimental work, in which all of human history, from the Ice Age to modern suburbia, occurs simultaneously and characters break dramatic illusion to comment on the action and on their own roles, struggling through flood, famine, ice and war only to begin again.

In Wilder's plays we find the clear-cut influence and identification not only with Joyce but more powerfully to Italian dramatist Luigi Pirandello, his contemporary German playwright Bertolt Brecht and his epic theatre, Gertrude Stein, Theodore Dreiser, Jean Paul Satre, and the contemporary experimental French theatre. There follows a discussion of Wilder's playing fast and loose with "historical time", a diversion in which one of his tutors was Gertrude Stein. "Stein it was also who put ideas into his head regarding the treatment of character and episode" (Haberman, 162).

While Wilder was visiting different major towns of Europe, he came to attend one of the first performances of Pirandello's experimental play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), which placed a greater influence in Wilder's dramatic career ahead. It is presumably by the influence of Pirandello's experimentation on realistic theatre. Wilder employs non-realistic stage equipments like minimalist stage sets – no curtain, no scenery, half light mostly the empty stage part, - an omniscient manager or narrator who controls and narrates the action, several pauses, and the characters who speak from grave.

Fed up with the unimaginative stilted theatrical production of his time, Wilder moves ahead and reexamines the traditional universal human values of religion, community, family, and other simple pleasures of daily doings by the use of experimental theatre techniques. His style of the stagecraft is non representational and non-illusionist in the sense that the audience are always thwarted out from the realistic illusion. He treats theatre frankly as a theatre not as a means of creating an illusion of reality.

Wilder breaks down the convention of the imaginary "Fourth Wall" and the audience realize they are in fact watching a play. His actors and characters tear down the curtain and come closer to the audience, talk with them, share their ideas,

emotions, feelings, and problems. Usually a mediator is employed like the omniscient stage manager in *Our Town* who travels inside and outside the action assuming various roles.

So, Wilder has affinity with Pirandello, Brecht, and experimenters who tries to reveal out the limitations, falsities, and illusionary vices of realistic theatre. In this thesis research, I am studying Wilder's most famous Pulitzer Prize winning play, *Our Town* (1938) through experimental perspective and techniques mentioned above. Though it has now become normal play to the present twentieth century audience who has seen many radical experiments, the style of the play's performance was quite new experience to those contemporary 1930s and 1940s audience who were only habituated to see the "well made" realistic plays. I am here trying to see how the playwright is demonstrating, the common experiences of life on a limited space on the stage with the time bounded episodes. There is meta theatrical consciousness in this play and there is new type of relationship established between space and time, stage and audience, love and marriage, and after all life and death. The whole research is an attempt to excavate those hidden illusionary images and to prove Wilder to be a master American experimentalist who creates 'magic out of mundane'.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Dramatic Structure of *Our Town*

A playwright may develop basically either of the two predominant dramatic structures - climatic structure or episodic structure – and sometimes a certain combination of both in his/her plays. The dramatic form adopted by the Greeks and used frequently since then is the climatic structure. The hallmark of climatic drama is that the plot begins quite late in the story. Its construction is carefully tightened because it covers a limited space of time. The number of characters is severely limited and the plot develops in linear fashion according to cause and effect chain. This type of dramatic structure as propounded by Greeks, then followed by Romans, seventeenth century French playwrights like Moliere and Racine, nineteenth century French like Scribe and Sardou, and the late nineteenth and twentieth century European and American playwrights like Ibsen, Strindberg, O'Neill, Williams, and Miller.

Another contrasting dramatic structure best illustrated in the plays of William Shakespeare and more vehemently adopted by 1920s and 1930s experimental playwrights is called episodic dramatic structure. Episodic drama begins relatively early in the story and does not compress the action but expands it. The typical episodic play covers an extensive period of time and ranges over a number of locations. Unlike climatic drama, episodic plays do not necessarily follow a close cause - and – effect development. The forces here are centrifugal rather than centripetal, moving out to embrace additional elements. There are relatively large number of characters, diverse events, and the juxtaposition between the parallel plots or sub plots. Bertolt Brecht is famous for developing such type of structure – as clarified in his epic theatre – that has direct influence to his contemporary playwrights like Thornton Wilder, Jean Genet, and others.

Edwin Wilson clarifies these two types of dramatic forms by contrasting their major characteristics:

Climatic Form

- i. Plot begins late in the story, towards the very end or climax.
- ii. Covers a short space of time, perhaps a few hours, or at most a few days.
- iii. Contains a few solid, extended scenes, sometimes such as three acts with each act comprising one long scene.
- iv. Occurs in a restricted locale, one room or one house.
- v. Number of characters severely limited, several usually no more than six or eight.
- vi. Plot is linear and moves in a single line with few subplots or counterplots.
- vii. Line of action proceeds in a cause - and - effect chain. The characters and events are closely linked in a sequence of logical, almost inevitable development.

Episodic Form

- Plot begins relatively early in the story and moves through series of episodes.
- Covers a longer period of time: weeks, months, and sometimes many years.
- Many short, fragmented scenes; an alteration of short and long scene.
- Many ranges over an entire city or even several countries.
- Profusion of characters, sometimes dozens.
- Frequently marked by several threads of action, such as two parallel plots or scenes of comic relief in a serious play.
- Scenes are juxtaposed to one another. An event may result from several causes or no apparent cause but arises in a network or web of circumstance.

(Table 2)

Source: Edwin Wilson. *The Theatre Experience*. 3rd ed. New York: The City University, 1985.

It is clear that the climatic and episodic forms differ from each other in their fundamental approaches. The one emphasizes constriction and compression on all fronts; the other takes a far broader view and aims at a cumulative effect, piling up people, place and events.

However many modern playwrights have developed their dramatic structure by combining the elements of both forms to a certain extent. There are plays which fall primarily into one category but incorporate features of the other. As the Chorus elements functioned the role of reporting off stage scenery in Greek dramas, similarly the narrator functions in the modern plays to supply the narrative elements and helps to make plays more episodic in dramatic effect but not less climatic at the same time.

In the modern play *Our Town*, the American playwright Thornton Wilder used the Stage Manager to comment on the actions and characters. Wilder set up a counterpoint between the episodes of the play – most of them mundane, everyday events – and the more general, universal observations of the Stage Manager. By setting one element next to the other he gives broader meaning to specific episodes and, at the same time, a concrete down – to – earth reality, a philosophical observations. As an example, at the opening of the play, Joe Crowell, Jr., While delivering the morning paper, sees Doc Gibbs, and talks to him about such things as the marriage of Joe's schoolteacher and his trick knee – perfectly ordinary topics of conversation. But later in the play, the Stage Manager, gives a broader perspective to Joe's life when he tells us that after graduating from high school with honors, Joe won a scholarship to MIT, only to die shortly thereafter in France fighting in World War I. As the Stage Manager observes "all that education for nothing" (*Our Town*, 9).

Plot Structure of *Our Town*

Though the thematic content of the play is quite the same to most of the earlier plays as it also follows the progression of universal experiences of human-kind that includes birth and growth as well as marriage and death, the method of treatment of subject matter is innovative. Wilder has employed the experimental theatre techniques in this play *Our Town* that gives the extraordinary effect in the theatre. The plot structure of this play is both linear and cyclical. It is linear for the individual and cyclical for the community. The events like birth, growth, marriage and death occur once in the life of an individual and for the community these are general phenomena that come frequently and continue like the wheel of a cart. For the community, the cycle of human life is regular phenomena only the human face changes. Such kind of cyclical implication can be found in the rhythm of day, hour, as well as seasons of the year.

Traditionally, the play has been divided into three Acts and no scenes. The play begins with a Stage Manager who speaks while pointing to different parts of the stage. "Up here is Main street . . . Here is Town Hall and post office . . ." (*Our Town*, 2). The first sentence that announces the play's name and further gives it into detail is remarkable. Stage Manager says:

This play is called "*Our Town*". It was written by Thornton Wilder, produced and directed by A . . . (or produced by A . . . ; directed by B . . .). In it you will see Miss C. . . ; Miss D. . . ; Miss E . . . ; and many others. The name of town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire . . . (1-2)

This beginning structurally is quite experimental to those theatre goers who were habituated in the conventional dramatic set up. The First Act is called "Daily Life" where the daily doings of two families is spot-lighted. This act follows the

families from morning to evening on an ordinary day 1901. The mothers cook breakfast and supper, the fathers go to work and come back home, the children go to school and return. Family members interact, the milk and newspaper are delivered, the weather is discussed, the town drunk is pitied, and choir practice is going on in the evening. Everything is shown as going ok and smoothly.

But suddenly the Stage Manager goes ahead to 1930 and declares the death of Doc Gibbs. This incident puzzles the audience and they are curious as well as suspicious to his nature and power. This is one and the major sign of experimental attitude towards the subject matter and its development.

The Manager after giving thanks to the characters for their successive roles invites "Professor Williard of our State University" (21) who further presents information about geographical locale, weather condition, anthropological data, and population, mortality rate, of the town according to the questions both of Stage Manager and of audience from auditorium. More information is discriminated by the Editor Webb regarding social, cultural, religious, educational, political situation of the town. The Manger openly invites and welcomes questions from audience- "Now is there anyone in the audience who would like to ask Editor Webb anything about Town?" (24).

Wilder makes everything transparent in the design of theatre. No illusion of any sort is delivered to audience. Frank sense of treatment is seen in this act during afternoon scene. The characters are growing both physically and psychologically. Emily asks to her mother, "Mama, am I good looking? . . . Am I pretty?" (31).

As the plot is developing, the Stage Manager time and again intervenes the action which is required here to dissect the emotional attachment of the audience from the action and characters. The evening episode is introduced with the mother returning from the choir practice, father giving suggestion to his son (George), Emily

and George talking algebra problem, Simon Stimson crawling by over drink who says "music is only good when it is loud" (34). There are some funny elements in the words of Rebeca.

With the announcement of Stage Manager "That's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke" (46), the First Act is ended. The change of Act by such announcement on the stage is Wilder's innovation in American theatre.

The same kind of structure is noticeable in the Second Act but the emphasis shifts from the routine activity to the unique event. The title of this act is "Love and Marriage" and the time is 1903, 7 July. This Act gives the implication of the fertility in the life of George and Emily. Both the elements of dramatic and epic theatre regarding the sense of time are interwoven inextricably that the audience are both illusion as well as made aware about the actions moving ahead. There we see the violation of Aristotelian unity of time in the sense that the gap between two Acts only is three years fictional time which is multiplied by three in between Second and the Third Act.

The same routine is flashed in this Act with the fresh structuring of episodes to give an extraordinary effect. The morning of wedding day begins with breakfast and coffee and the groom coming downstairs. The action is ranged with the reminiscence of the parents and the parents in laws who recall their wedding morning.

Dr. Gibbs: I was remembering my wedding morning, Julia.

Mrs. Gibbs: Now don't start that, Frank Gibbs.

Dr. Gibbs: I was the scariest young fella in . . . And when I saw you coming down that aisle I thought you were the prettiest girl I'd ever seen. There I was in the congregational church marryin' a total stranger. (53)

This is the flash back episode of this play which reminds the parents of George to realize their own marriage, their youth and experience of their first love. When the Stage Manager is describing the episodes of daily doings and simple pleasures of life he brings the reference of a middle west poet who said "You have got to love life to have life, and you have got to have life to love life . . . It's what they call a vicious circle" (49).

Such movement of here and there, inside and outside the action, the Stage Manager is presenting a kind of contrast between the systems of presenting dramatic episodes on the stage and inviting the audience to judge, analyze and evaluate this non-realistic presentation. When George comes downstairs and is about to leave for a visit with Emily, his mother, reminds him to put on his overseas. But Emily's mother, though she invites George into her kitchen, won't let him see her daughter. She still believes in tradition "the groom can't see his bride on his wedding day not until he sees her in church" and when George attacks to those tradition, she further says that "you don't want to be the first to fly in the face of custom" (57). This attack of George is the attack of Wilder to that prevailing tendency of theatre which was still trying to be dominant, in spite of Wilder's like new methods were emerging.

The patriarchal ideology is also seen functioning inside the female psyche that they are still accepting male's supremacy and female's inferiority by their consent. Emily realizes her own weakness in front of the males:

Emily: Well, you might as well know right now that I'm not perfect. It's not as easy for a girl to be perfect as a man, because we girls are more – more – nervous. Now I'm sorry. I said all that about you. I don't know what made me say it. (66)

We can find some ironical implication in this act especially in the words of Emily. She feels alone even in the day of wedding while her beloved George is

accompanying. She loves him but she hates the marriage, the legal union between the two for their future. She says, "But papa, I don't want to get married" (79). Mrs. Soames interrupts the wedding as "perfectly lovely wedding! Loveliest wed I ever saw" (81) that brings a contrast in the Third Act when Emily dies in childbirth. The Stage Manager comes and hurries to declare the end of this Second Act. This Act culminates in a moving wedding scene containing all the elements of potential sorrow and abundant happiness.

The Third Act, entitled "Death" begins non realistically. When the Stage Manager declared the end of Second Act by granting "Ten minutes intermission" (83) to the audience, this ten minute interval is equaled to nine years fictional time.

The audience have been surprised to hear that most of the characters, performing ten minutes before, have died already and only their dead bodies are presented on the stage:

This here is the new part of the cemetery. Here's your friend, Mrs. Gibbs. N let me see - here's Mr. Stimson, organist at the congregational church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the wedding so – you remember? Oh, and a lot of others. (87)

The effect of dramatic power leaps into height when there begins the gossip between the dead and "some living people" (88) regarding the condition of the life of dead and major changes in town. The characters from grave – Mrs. Soames and Mrs. Gibbs – who were died many years ago, in fiction but in play just playing the role, talk about the recent death of Emily who has died in childbirth. Emily timidly approaches the assembly! Glancing wistfully back towards the life she has just departed. "She smiles faintly and walks slowly to the vacant chair beside Mrs. Gibbs and sits down" (94). Gradually recognizing the "spirits" before her, Emily suddenly realizes that none of these people truly understood and appreciated the greatness of

being alive! There had been no appreciation of life's little fleeting moments, no ability to stop and absorb life's essence, no comprehension of the deep human value of the moment.

Emily's strong desire to relive her life back is of course natural in that she has lost her life as a young mother. But in ordinary case, it is impossible to renew our life as it was. But when she begs permission from the Omniscient Manager, she is given the choice to return to earth and relive a day in her life - the happiest day, her twelfth birthday. This flash back episode captures the whole attention in the play and it is also the climax of the play. The time is backed to 1899, fourteen years earlier and the audiences are puzzled to hear Emily's mother speaking fourteen years ago and Emily fourteen years later. There we see the juxtaposition of past and present, living and dead, sorrow and happiness. Emily clarifies to her mother that she is dead and just return to life to that particular day to reenjoy it.

Emily: Oh, mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead. You're a grandmother mama. Wally's dead too. Mama, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway, we felt just terrible about it – don't you remember? But just for a moment now we are all together. Mama, just for a moment we are happy. Let's look at one another. (107)

The mother is seen as really celebrating her daughter's birthday but Emily is just trying to realize the situation as an apparition. Though she is excited for some moment, her whole enthusiasm, turns into disillusionment. She feels no joy to live the day wasted with trivial occupations. When the suicidal Simon Stimson appears and offers a poignant yet bitter comment, "life is a time of supreme ignorance, folly and blindness" (109), Emily is unable to endure this vision and hurries back to her body's resting place where she finds George, her husband weeping by her grave. Here

the hierarchy between the lives and death is frankly ruptured. She looks towards the manager and asks abruptly through her tears:

Emily: . . . Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?

Every, every minute?

Stage Manager: No.

Pause

The saints and poets may be – they do some . . .

Mrs. Gibbs: Were you happy?

Emily: No. . . . I should have listened to you. That's all human beings are! Just blind people. (108-109)

Here lies the most important idea of Wilder who, through this, seems to suggest us to appreciate the precious moment of life while living. Knowing the future is the most terrible to live. So, Emily returns to grave by saying good bye to all.

Thus, the plot of *Our Town* is structured by combining some of the elements both from climatic and episodic drama. The action most of the time, begins normally according to fundamental experiences- the rhythm of seasons, the progress of day. But suddenly the episode releases the memory of happiest day of characters like George's parents and most importantly Emily who has died in youth. We find the cross combination of episodic structure in this play which in fact helped a lot for the extension of theatre art and it leads him closer to Brecht's epic theatre.

Setting: Stage Design

The setting of this play is openly theatrical and the actions and ideas take place on the bare stage. The performance of actions and ideas on the stage is remarkably effective, and reveals author's genius and skill as an innovator of non illusionist theater. Wilder makes little use of stage, setting or scenery. The stage is openly theatrical and less symbolic. As a result of this openness the imagination of the

audience supplies many of the detail, which is not actual on the stage. Such kind of creative participation with the audience on the theatre is a feature of the Chinese theatrical tradition. It frees the playwright from the restrictions on space and moments in time. S/he can depict continuous moments from place to place as in cinema. As Allardyce Nicoll associated such play with the Chinese production:

The charm of the theater of China lies not so much in the dramatic style as in the total effect of the entire production . . . Those (Chinese) productions have taught men that it is not necessary, in order to capture the minds of audiences, to depend wholly upon the naturalistic conventions of the Fourth Wall stage; they have indicated that it is possible to find in those other conventions of the Oriental theatre different methods for the setting forth of situation, character, and emotional concept. (Nicoll, 643)

Nicoll views that the style of Chinese presentation greatly influenced "in the development of a non realistic theatre in the west" (643). Wilder, as we know, lived in Hong Kong in his early years was surely interested those plays and we see some of the indication of his affection to Chinese stage- craft. His style of the stage- craft of *Our Town* is non-illusionist presentation. The stage is stripped with fragmentation.

The play begins on the bare stage with lights and chairs plus a few flats to insist visually that the stage is just stage which has replaced the trappings of ordinary theatrical illusions. Here for the first time in Wilder's work, the Stage Manager is brought before the audience to arrange the furnishings, to describe the effect the setting is supposed to have and to sustain in his own person the concept of non illusionary drama, which permits the actors to describe their journeys. What led Wilder to develop these devices is less to the purpose than the consequences of such innovations.

The bare stage of *Our Town* with its chairs, tables, and ladders together with the Stage Manager's bold exposition are all that he uses to create the town. Wilder uses no scenery, no costumes, and no act curtain. The play begins with an announcement by the Omniscient Manager, the all wise narrator and ends in his wish. This is the most dominant technique. The time, place, and action everything is frankly told by the Manager who moves inside and outside the action time and again. This Wilderian innovation has strong dramatic impetus from both Oriental Chinese production as well as the epic convention of Brecht. The realistic theatre, in the name of providing the 'photocopy of contemporary society' on the stage used to give a detailed elaborate description of the things and people, even the minute events. For example in *A Doll's House*, Ibsen is not content simply to tell us that the play takes place in the living room of Torvald Helmer's house. He gives us rather an elaborate description of that room and all of its furnishings:

A comfortably and tastefully but not expensively furnished room.

Back stage right a door leads out to the hall; backstage left, another door to Helmer's study. Between these two doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left hand wall is a door, with a window downstage of it. Near the window a round table with armchairs and a small sofa . . .

Between the stove and the side door is a small table. Engraving on the wall. A what not with China and other bric – a – brac; carpet on the floor; a fire in the stove. A winter day. (Klaus, 1029)

That description is so complete that it asks us even to visualize a fire burning in the stove. The realistic playwrights like Ibsen believed that stage is a station that gives the peepshow of entire life encompassing from the trivial events to the bulky philosophy of life. But Wilder has frankly violated that kind of stage structure in his play *Our Town*. Instead, a Stage Manager is appointed who vomits the entire town life

from the distant past of 1670 to the future of America. Wilder has experimented on the setting design through his influence of Pirandello, and Brecht and prepares theatre frankly as theatre, not a place to show the illusion of reality inside the imaginary "Fourth Wall".

The Stage Manager, the persona of Wilder himself is aware of the conventional realistic stage craft and gives a certain space to those audiences who want illusion in theatre. He says "There is some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery" (5). The Manager is clearly introduced in front of the audience simply a supervisor, the stage designer who has become a medium between the stage and the auditorium. His style of talking to the characters and to the audience is different. He is realistic to the characters and non realistic to the spectators.

The fictional time in *Our Town* is not limited with the 'single revolution of the sun' but ranges from birth to death of many characters – more than fourteen years. The First Act takes place in 7th may 1901, a full day from dawn to dark. The characters are seen busy in their routine chores. Suddenly, the Manager leaps over thirty years to come and anticipates that the present character "Dr. Gibbs died in 1930. The new hospital is named after him" (*Our Town*, 7). This sudden jumping of Manager destroys the illusion of time and Wilder achieves the effect of any time, all time, and each time. The audiences are dispersed from the possible empathy to the characters and situations.

The interval between the First Act and the Second Act is more perplexing to the audience. As the manager ended the first act "that's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now those who smoke" (46) but the Second Act begins "Three years have gone by, yes, the sun's come up over a thousand times" (47). The smoking time of probably ten minute is equaled with the three years fictional time inside the play story. Such formal announcement about the time change and even

his control over the time is first time introduced by Wilder in the theatre. Such kind of telescoping of time is worth- noticing more in between the Second and the Third Act. The stage is darkened when the Manager declares the end of Second Act "That's all the Second Act, folks. Ten minutes intermission" (83). This ten minute interval is equalized to the nine years time inside the play as the Third Act begins with the description of heavy changes in the Grover's Corners.

Stage Manager: This time nine years have gone by, friends – summer 1913.

Gradual changes in Grover's Corners.

Horses are getting rarer.

Farmers coming into town in fords.

Everybody locks their house doors now at night. Ain't been any burglars in town yet, but everybody's heard about them

You'd be surprised, though – on the whole, things don't change much around here. (85-86)

Such sudden gallopment of time inside the theatre gives the audience a conscious awareness to the audience that they are in fact inside the hall and are watching a "drama" not any illusion of life as such. The time, in the Third Act is backed to 1899 when Emily is permitted to relive and reexperience a day in her past life. This flash back presents the nostalgic vision of life felt not only by Emily but us all. This also presents the climax of the play.

The place here is nowhere but America itself – the Grover's Corners that is moving ahead in the shining path of advancement. We see Manager pointing different places inside the stage – the metaphor of entire America. The "Town Hall", "Jail", "Post Office", "Congregational Church", "Public High Schools", "Grocery Store", "Morgan's' Drugstore", "Automobiles", "Train Sound", and so on coming

through Manager's mouth suggests that such place can be any town or every town of the earth. So, this indicates the Universality of Place that is "any place, each place, and all places". The events of daily doings are occurring everywhere in the world's town – milk and newspapers being delivered, preparing break fast, going school and offices.

Thus, the stage design, intended time, indicated place all come together when we see the theatrical design of this play on the stage. Everything is seen under the control and wish of the narrator. The audiences are brought back and forth from the ongoing time and place. When he says it is Grover's Corners and it is Grover's Corners. The scene is said to be changed into congregation choir, Morgan's Drugstore, and finally to a cemetery where both living and dead are interacting in front of the Stage Manager. He is here also a bridge between life and death! Wilder here ruptures the hierarchy between life and death, present and past, and pain pleasure by giving speech to those persons who are declared as dead by the Manager. The stage is draped with light which clearly presents those deaths with voice, still desire and dream of life to renew and reexperience the by gone days as Emily is sent back to her twelfth birthday in her maternal house. With no fall and rise of curtain the scene is said to change back to fourteen years. But in fact no such change. So, no scenery, few props, mimed actions, and dramatic persona who fluidly travel both in and out of the action of the play make for a radically innovative way of presenting a drama. This was certainly a risk at a time when theater productions were known for their lavish costume and scenery. However, these "experimental techniques" allow the audience to focus on the characters themselves rather than on their location and how they related to objects that surround them.

Narration: Non Realistic Tendency

Our Town is non representational play because it doesn't try to represent on the stage but rather to create a view of life. It is non realistic as well as non – illusionist presentational play. The principle actor is the Stage Manager who sets up his demonstration, calling for skeletal or fragmentary stage setting to help audience visualize a particular situation. The Stage Manager makes the mythical use of time and space, the identification of the actor and audience, the existence of the world of play inside a single mind. He sets the actions and ideas on the stage calling to the characters and asks them to do their performance. He is the narrator, character, philosopher, commentator as well as friend to the audience.

In the first instance, the Stage Manager functions as regisseur, he has complete control over the world of play. The play begins when he announces from a bare stage, the title and author and names of the principle actors as well as the geographical information of the town.

Stage Manager: The name of the town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire – just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes. The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before the dawn. (4)

He is the Omniscient narrator, the all wise manager who narrates and controls the whole action and the entire world of characters. He has the complete, more than enough, knowledge of each and every aspect of town's life. He opens and closes the episodes according to his wish by calling the actors on the stage and thanking them when the scene is finished. He also provides the motivations for the scenes simply by asserting his role. His control of the action on the stage is absolutely clear. He comments like the Chorus of classical Greek drama on the action. His commentary is

Omniscient and wide- lensed though his manner suggests the cracker-barrel philosopher. The range of knowledge displayed is much broader than might be expected from any authentic country sage, the local color touch disguises without altogether displacing, the god figure. For instance, he has the entire biographical knowledge, even of future of a character Joe Crowell:

Stage Manager: Want to tell you something about that boy Joe Crowell there. Joe was awful bright – graduated from high school here, head of his class. So he got a scholarship to Massachusetts Tech. Graduated head of his class there, too. But the war broke out and he died in France – All that education for nothing. (9)

The Manager is presented himself as the Master controller of everyone's life. As a leader of the play, actor as well as the commentator he performs several functions. He plays the part of philosophical druggists, who has many occasions to observe the town's characters and also acts as host or master of ceremonies, commentator, philosopher, stage designer, joker sometimes to the audience and what not. He takes them into confidence and proceeds to communicate with them his knowledge of the little town of Grover's Corners and its people along with his thoughts about living and dying.

With the predominance of narrative part in the play rather than of the action or plot, Wilder associates this play with that of epic theatre of Brecht. Of course, there is plot but that part is guided and is under the control of narrative domain. The Manager presents the ritual action to the audience while at the same time representing the audience in the ritual. He is the bridge between the group mind and the action. For instance, at the beginning of Act II, he notices of significant change and remarks:

Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt. Some babies that were

not born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought they were right young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like, they used to without their heart fluttering a little. (47)

The Stage Manager in this play exercises not simply the power of a narrator, he also manipulates time at his will, he can move the action along when he sees it is necessary. He has the power to metamorphose into other personae and step into actions. He disguises himself as Mr. Morgan in the drugstore and wise fully understands the problems of his 'costumers'. No character knows his false identity. But when George and Emily move away from the store, he "turns to the audience, removing his spectacles" (73). Anyway he is true to audience that everything, every guise is made clear in front of the audience.

The ideas and events presented by the narrator are frankly theatrical. However, his general identity lies on the supervisor of the play. In the courtship scene, he plays the drugstore proprietor and in the wedding the Minister. While retaining his identity as regisseur and commentator, he can momentarily assume a persona that he does retain his basic role is clear from his commentary as Minister in which both roles are combined. This mobility welds episodes with comment and produces an onstage continuum that is symbolized by his multiple functions.

The Stage Manager easily enters and exits from the action as he wishes. His inside and outside movement both associate him with actors as well as to the audiences. He is friend of actors inside and outside to the audience. We can see neither view nor any commentary about the Manager made by the characters. The ideas are presented one sided. The Manager is in fact controlling all the voices or we can say colonizing the characters. He is beyond commentary. The audience make

personal opinion about him in that no view given in the play. When he thanks the characters for their performance, he is closer to audience that helps analyze the audience about the false illusion inside the theatre. He excavates the hidden imageries of the stage openly. As a superior spectator, he can elaborate the meaning of every episode. He excuses the characters during intermission and dismisses them at the conclusion. By acknowledging their presence, by assimilating their point of view, by controlling their universe, the Stage Manager establishes an identity with the audience. Thus, he occupies both worlds, links the audience to the stage and unites them in a single dimension.

The Omniscient power bestowed to the Stage Manager clarifies the Wilderian perspective of presenting a play. The Stage Manager is so powerful that he can read out the thoughts and feelings not only of living characters but equally of the dead ones as he himself says – "You know as well as I do that the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long" (88). He equally can go to back 1899 as well as to future 1930. Such an Omniscient, all powerful narrator of Wilder designs the entire plot – structure according to his intension. Instead of props and scenery, the voice of the Manager gives the concept of the stage design. There we find fragmentation in narration, confusion in characters about their life, and semblance in the world of actors and that of audience. Such narrative help the spectators not to totally immerse in the flow of action but to remain intellectually alert and they can make a comparison between different episodes narrated in the play. The Manager controls the time and the audience have to take time as the Manager explains or takes to the stage:

Stage Manager: Now we'll go back to the town. It's early afternoon.

All 2, 642 have had their dinner and all the dishes have been washed.

There is an early afternoon calm in our town: a buzzin and a humming from the school building . . . (26-27)

When he says it's nine thirty, all the lights are out and an inspector is seen searching Simon Stimson, the choir practitioner but now fully drunk and "rollin around a little" (44).

Meta Theatrical Consciousness: Meta Characters

Thornton Wilder explores the theatrical use not only of the setting design and narrative but also the character. The characters are showing their performance under the guidance or control of strong stage hand - the Omniscient Manager and – they are given thanks for their successful performance. When the Manager calls them, they come to stage and vanish after he bids them. Their identity is simply as characters not the imagined being existed in real society. The manager gives more time to narrate about the characters but not less to the audience to whom he regards frankly as friends and folks.

Wilder's characters maintain daily, pious rounds of activity, keeping place within set limits. The result is that they are not called upon to press passion of any violent kind nor are they permitted to cry out in pain. Wilder removes from his stage even scenes of sickness, although instances are reported in passing. Without important action of will, curiosity or awareness, his characters are brought to a condition of emotional gentleness.

In the same way, Wilder does not attempt to convince none of his ideas by insisting that what he presents is reality itself. If this story of Grover's Corners had been developed realistically, carefully plotted, decorated so as to attempt to convince the audience that it was seeing living human beings, much of its truth would have drained from the play. And all of it would have seemed sentimental and unconvincing. But Wilder avoids this and describes all these ideas in non-realistic mode. He insists that the actors in the play are only pretending to be characters,

imitating their life. The characters are stage managed. The actors are on the stage to do rehearsal and performance.

We see in Wilder the strong influence of Pirandello's structure of dramatic characters in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). Pirandello openly exposes out the imbedded illusion between characters and actors. It was believed in European realism that the characters are existed 'only in book' and it is the actor who plays the role of character. But Pirandello's characters come to stage demanding to play their role by themselves. Similarly, Wilder's Stage Manager in *Our Town* invites the characters on the stage one after the other to play their parts. They interact each other and share their ideas and emotions to the audience, who after that turn into actors. In a way Pirandello's was an initial attempt to bring characters themselves to stage by rupturing the hierarchy with actors, Wilder revitalized that experimental attempt.

After a detail narration about characters, the Stage Manager welcomes them for specific role and thanks for their role and moves the play ahead:

Stage Manager: Thank you. Thank you! That'll do. We'll have to interrupt again here. Thank you, Mrs. Webb; thank you Emily.

There are some more things we want to explore about this town.

I think this is a good time to tell you that. . . building a new bank in Grover's Corners. (32)

The result is that Wilder's characters become emblems of reality not reality itself. They are on the stage to remind the audience of familiar things in whose recognition there is pleasure and security. The characters are deliberate artifices they escape the merely sentimental.

Wilder's dramatic characters are given a theatrical consciousness which has to realize them as characters in the theatre. So, they live with meta theatrical

consciousness. They are living by commenting their life, comparing and contrasting their now and then experiences. They are therefore meta characters. The characters have consciousness about the play that in fact they are on stage called by grand character for their roles. The Manager, the grand character has full awareness that he is frankly directing a play of Wilder in front of a large mass of audience. So, time and again he talks about the play:

Stage Manager: So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the corner stone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us - more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight . . . This is the way we were in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying. (33)

The Manager comments both of characters and of the play. So, it is a meta play. He also comments the entire human, American civilization from the very beginning. He modifies the mood of the play according to his interest. He says "for a while now, the play gets pretty serious" (74). As he disguises himself in several bodies that only audience know, by directly addressing to friends he establishes the mood and tone in the play. Those who were habituated to watch the 'realistic play' will feel difficulty in grasping the power of dramatic effect. He makes heroes and heroines in the play. "The real hero of this scene isn't on the stage at all, and you know who that is" (75).

The world Wilder creates is never existed and the characters living are never lived before. The growing curiosity of the conventional audience about the structure of this play finds a shocking rest when in the Third Act the "dead' characters are given speeches. Emily is conscious that she is dead in childbirth, without fulfilling her aspirations of life. So, she is revived back simply because the Stage Manager knows it is a play. Wilder insists that theatre is a theatre itself, not life and he is in the process

of testing each aspects of its own illusion. Such meta theatrical aspects in the play unlocks the illusion, not only of theatre but of life itself, revealing its in authenticity and absurdity. Meta theatre establishes a special relation between the illusion of theatre and the illusion of real life.

Stage – Auditorium Relationship

The audience and the performers, the two basic elements in the theatre equations and they both are essential. Any play is written not merely to be read by the play readers but to be staged by performers before an assembled body of spectators. Theatre is a cumulative experience - a shared, indivisible event that includes both those who perform and those who observe. Throughout the twentieth century, theatre had to face a series of unprecedented challenges. With the introduction and development of successful mechanical and electronic devices one after the other like silent movies, radio, talking picture, and television; theatre had to face several challenges that it had never faced before. But despite these grave challenges, theater did not disappear. But rather it developed and emerged in some ways stronger than ever mainly because of the special nature of the actor audience relationship. Edwin Wilson writes that, "The actor – audience relationship is a "live" relationship: each is in the other's presence, in the same place at the same time. It is the exchange between the two which gives theatre its unique quality"(Wilson 23).

Of course, theatre shares many features with television and movies but it has unique existence due to its live relationship between stage and auditorium. The experience of being in the presence of the performers is more important to theatre than anything else. Theatre presents not the image but the person itself in flesh - and – blood reality. The audience is face to face with the performers. At a stage performance the actors can hear the laughter, can sense the silence, and can feel the

tension in the audience. Similarly, the audience is aware about the thoughts and feelings of actors presented through their performances.

In the realistic peep-show theater, the audience is only the observer of the action taking place on stage. In a sense, they take part inwardly – psychologically – that they are emotionally charged and show full sympathy and empathy to the characters. They have a sense of "pity and fear", "joys and excitement". But physically – outwardly – they are out of the action separated by the imaginary "Fourth Wall". So, many dramatist and theatre designers broke that illusionary wall by the beginning of twentieth century, especially in 1920s and 1930s. With the new consciousness in theatre art, several attempts were made to bring audience more closer to the stage. Slowly, the barrier between the stage and auditorium was discarded. There emerged different alternatives of proscenium arch like Arena Stage, Thrust Stage, created or found space etc. There began cooperation and sharing between the imaginary world of actors and the real lived world of spectators.

In this transitory phase of theatre art, American playwright Thornton Wilder came with his successful plays like *Our Town*, and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942). Wilder openly challenged the continental theatre practice that was practiced in Ibsen and Strindberg. Wilder's spectators go on to be part of the action; and the performers come into auditorium to engage in repartee with the audience, provide information, and share their ideas and emotions. In this way, Wilder breaks the hierarchy between actor and audience, stage and auditorium. His characters become audience and the vice versa. So, his play becomes more like a public hearing or a street drama where different figures, the actors are invited into the stage to satisfy the queries of the audience sitting in different directions.

Our Town is not, as some critics are inclined to think, a play written in a manner designed merely to excite by reason of its novelty. When Wilder takes a story

of character belonging to a small New England town and sets forth without the slightest Vestige of scenery, 'he is not playing any tricks', nor is he playing trick when "he causes these characters to be introduced by a Stage Manager, who standing at the very edge of the proscenium addresses the audience directly" (Nicoll, 807). The Stage Manager frankly welcomes the audience to participate in the action. In the course of providing information about our town, that is everybody's town, he invites an Editor Mr. Webb to give more information regarding the town's political, religious, social, educational issues. He turns to the audience:

Stage Manager: Now is there anyone, in the audience who would like to ask Editor Webb anything about the town?

Women in the Balcony: Is there much drinking in Grover's Corners?

Mr. Webb: Well Ma'am, I . . . (24-25)

Here, we see the direct interaction between the Stage Manager and the audience, and between actors and the audience in the auditorium. The Stage Manager, the Omniscient narrator, is sharing his ideas and exercising his power both to the imagined figures and the real people in the balcony. He gives chance to both his actors and "my audience" (49) to participate in the flow of action through reactions, questioning, and responding. Several issues and episodes are introduced and discussed because what Wilder wishes to do is to present, not merely a particular story of Grover's Corners but a typical picture of New England and the whole world life. He desires his public, not to sit back and objectively observe the action, but to be drawn over the footlights among the actors. The Stage Manager also throws out the actors from the stage and orders to go to the field – "Go out (George) and play in the field, young man. You got no business playing baseball on Main Street" (28).

The Stage Manager as we know that he is a bridge between actors and audience, his attempts are seen to establish a close relationship between art and life as a whole that were insurmountably separated by realistic theatre in the name of showing reality! The more the realistic theatrical personalities attempt to present "life itself on theatre" through the proscenium arch, the more they are separating art from life. But Wilder's Stage Manager enters into the world of audience through direct addressing. "I don't have to point out to the women in my audience that . . ." (49). At the same time he reaches to the action itself and interacts with the actors on the stage on certain episodes. The Manager, the director and the designer, who is supposed to remain behind the curtain and direct the actors, comes out to the stage as there is no curtain in the play. He becomes not only the actor but also audience at the same time by observing the performance of the actors. So again the binary oppositions are challenged. The Manager becomes actors and audience, audience take part in action, and the actors interact with audience.

From this we see the close, intimate, essential relationship between the actors of the play and the audience who throng to watch and enjoy it. Wilder by making the audience participate in the action; Manager in front of the screen to control and narrate the episodes; and the actors speaking both from earth and from cemetery even revived back; is rupturing the hierarchy between the actors and audience, stage and auditorium performance and experience art and life, space and time, and even life and death. His attempts are remarkable that frees the theatre art from the strict domination of conventional realistic tendency and to extend its scope far wide.

CONCLUSION

Extension of Theatre Art

The present thesis is concerned with the close study and the detail discussion of Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* and attempts have been made to prove that the play's technical embroideries are far more remarkable to its thematic content that has traced a tremendous and extensive effect to the overall dramatic practices of Western theatre. As the play was written in the transitional period, 1938, it shares some of the characteristics both of modern theatre and the post modern and post colonial discourse on art. It is a modern play in the sense that it has quality of experimentation and innovation with new styles of plays construction and performance contrasting to a lost order and harmony that had been based on the region and myth of cultural past.

In the play, there is a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of the theatre practice but also the way of looking at art in general. When the catastrophe of the war, depression, and totalitarian threat had shaken faith in the moral basis, coherence, and durability of western civilization, there emerged doubts and skepticism about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the restless troubled world. So, the play contains fragmented dialogues, incoherent plots, and unrealistic time sketch to come out from the accepted conventional mode of presenting as well as understanding a play.

New techniques are required to address new problems and the novelty of dramatic structures. The play has made a conscious violation of the already existed norms and styles to present a drama in front of an assembled body of spectators. Wilder alienates *Our Town* from the established order and convention against which he asserts his own autonomy. His prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional audience and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois theatrical practice.

The setting of the play is openly theatrical. Nothing is employed to give any sort of illusion to the audience. Everything is made transparent by the avoidance of act curtain, and the minimization of costume and props. To give a sense that the play is not a "realistic" depiction of any sort, Wilder has appointed an Omniscient manager. The conventional audiences are shocked by such presentation which contrasts to their assumption of theatre activity but Wilder enjoys by doing so.

The characters in his plays are meta – characters and they are constantly talking and sharing their ideas and emotions to both manager and the audience in the balcony. The manager journeys both inside and outside the action as a bridge between stage and auditorium, art and life and life and death. This is what critics call the non – realistic theatre practices, the presentation of hyper – reality that is the direct anti – thesis to the realistic ritual plays of Ibsen and his followers.

Wilder sees the limitation of realistic theatre that had "dissociated" art from life despite its attempt to associate the two. The development of proscenium arch and the construction of imaginary "Fourth Wall" separate world of audience and of the actors. For Wilder, there is no importance of the detailed elaborate setting that gives only the "illusion of reality". In *Our Town*, Wilder attempts to establish a "live" relationship between art and life. Wilder conveys the message that life is full of tension haphazard and exists in multidimensional forms. Life has no single, unified, absolute reality. The illusion turns into reality and the vice versa. In such situation one cannot find happiness and pleasure in the limited established way of living. Everything goes on changing and facing various challenges. Human life is dynamic and the experienced emotions, feelings and ideas change minute by minute. Then the question arises if it is to reflect the life, why not the theater practice? Theatre as an art should not only be confined into conventional narrow form and practices of "realism". Wilder views if the theatre is a place to show life, it must go on changing and

widening its scope as life pattern goes on changing by facing several challenges. So theatre art must not be limited into the peep-show of realism. When life has the turbulent incomprehensible style then why should we use already established conventional mode of representation? So, the play asks us to take alternative way of presentation so that there will be the unity between form and content. Wilder, like Pirandello, deliberately deviates and boycotts the established mode of representation that lead only to the already known destination. Wilder uses his characters and their situations to comment on the life of the theatre of 1920s and 1930s, and he also uses them to begin a series of speculations on the relationship of a public to the actors they see in the play.

This type of dramatic technique applied by Wilder has traced an everlasting artistic impact in the Western theatrical practice and the modes of discourse. His attempt to free the art from the conventional narrow domain of realism has become an inciting guideline to many theatre practitioners in the 1940s and 1950s. And even his stagecraft has a strong significance till now. The avant – garde artist by violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of theatre art but of social discourse, set out to create ever new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected and sometimes forbidden subject matter.

Wilder's plays are equally relevant to the post modern, post colonial thinking due to their features of breaking the canonical norms. As post colonial discourse is identified as the rejection of the master narrative of Western imperialism and its replacement by a counter narrative, so is the case seen in Wilder's *Our Town* that cannot be judged by the standards already formed and practiced. The plot structure he artifices is not climatic of the continental dramatic items. There is a certain degree of combination of both climatic and of episodic dramatic structure in *Our Town*. The play challenges and ruptures the hierarchies between space and time, actors and

audience, art and life, and life and death. The characters return to their life from grave and the manager has a Omniscient role to grant them the life. The Omniscient Manager becomes audience and spectators turn into actors. The Fourth Wall is broken and the audience is brought down into the stage to share their questions and ideas. This sort of hyper real presentation is the prominent feature of postmodernism and *Our Town* consists that proto - postmodern feature. The grand narrative here becomes inadequate and is rather made weak. The major agenda is to disestablish the Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values and to expand the literary canon to include so many aspects and influences from the worldwide theatrical habits from the Oriental Chinese theatre culture to the native American of the West as post modern discourse is doing in several intellectual social domains.

Thus, Wilder has a strong theatrical significance even today's modes of dramatic practices. So, one should not limit the approach to Wilder's plays as the successful transmutation of the simple events of human life into universal reveries by giving his thematic content a profound significance. Nor he is merely to be judged as an innovator of different dramatic techniques and tools employed in the plays subject matter. In the view of this present researcher, *Our Town* should not be seen simply as the paragon of non realism. Wilder's play has a far broader significance. The overall effect of Wilderian intervention helps extend the scope of theatre art in general by accommodating the necessary elements both of realism and non realism. His subject matter is seen as "real" while the treatment is other than the realistic. In a sense, there is thematic continuation and technical innovation. There is a moderate balance in the two seemingly opposite theatre practices. This balanced structure provides the theatre a new way to look at the art and Wilder after all is able to establish a live relationship between space and time, stage and auditorium, illusion and reality, and art and life.

So, by challenging those stilted values of theater, Wilder takes us to the artistic domain of dynamism and expansive reveries of worldwide theatre experience.

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