DARK EDGES IN AMERICAN SOCIAL COMEDIES OF THE 1930S

By

Mollie Smith Waters

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Auburn University at Montgomery

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Liberal Arts

Montgomery, Alabama

18 June 2009

APPROVED

Thesis Director

Second Reader

Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

When people think of theatrical comedy, they usually conjure up images of light fun and frequent laughter. However, stage comedy is never complete without some form of conflict; after all, conflict drives the action of a drama. Conflict often brings with it serious issues that tend to be glossed over, and when looking at dramas from the 1930s, one quickly realizes that through the conflict some somber subject matter can be introduced. Considering that the time period had more than its fair share of real-life conflict, what "with the stock market crash, the Great Depression, the concern for Fascism, the problems in Europe, the dissatisfaction with the 'New Deal,' and the approach of World War II," it is amazing that playwrights dared to write comedies that contained any conflict at all (Meserve 283). Yet write comedies they did, and the darker issues they dramatized through their plays explored the concerns that carried the day.

While the plays *Biography* (1932), *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933), *End of Summer* (1936), *The Women* (1936), *You Can't Take It with You* (1936), and "*Having Wonderful Time*" (1937) are all considered comedies, they are not always funny, for they often probe into the shadier side of society's concerns. When readers delve deeper into the works, they realize that the scripts address social and moral wrongs that could harm a person during the 1930s. In fact, many dark topics find their way into the abovementioned works through mere undertones while other somber issues are addressed more openly. Three such themes that can be found throughout the plays listed earlier include the marginalization of women, the displacement of immigrants, and the greed for money (Fearnow 28, 92; Meserve 281).

Perhaps the darkest theme included in most of the plays is the marginalization of

women. That male/female relationship conflicts are present in these dramas is not surprising; after all, they constitute a tried and proven element in literature. Typically, the problems between men and women make for great theatrical fun, and that is the case in these works as well. However, when the audience members take a breath between laughs, they may realize that not everything the playwright exposes about male/female relationships is truly humorous. Indeed, an observant audience member may notice the disparity, or double-standard, the playwright portrays between the two sexes.

This idea should not come as a shocker even in a comedy. Throughout history, women have often been treated as second-class citizens, and until the mid-1900s, American women in particular remained largely dependent on the men in their lives to provide for them as well as their families. However, women's rights in the United States began changing in 1920 when the 19th Amendment was ratified, giving females the right to vote. One might think the right to vote also meant more equality in women's plights in America, yet too often that was not the case. Rather, the decades following the ratification of the 19th Amendment saw little alteration in females' circumstances. Most women continued to experience inequality on a regular basis, for they were caught in a world that largely consigned them to the kitchen. In his article "1930s, America—Feminist Void?," Mickey Moran writes of this problem:

> But after the initial surge of support for women's rights with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, feminist fervor diminished throughout the latter '20s and all but disappeared during the Depression. And with that reduced support for women's rights came a renewed promotion of the traditional belief that women belonged in the home.

With that said, what was a woman during this time supposed to do, other than accept her place as an inferior person and try to make the best of her station in life?

For sure, American women in the 1930s had only three choices available to them: "celibacy, matrimony or unchastity" (Masters 1208). Women could remain single (celibate) and work their lives away in low-paying, unappreciative jobs; they could get married (matrimony) and hope to attain the ideal of domestic bliss; or they could become loose women (unchaste) who essentially sold their bodies to the highest bidder. While all three choices may sound grim and hard to conceive for a modern reader, they were practically the only routes available to females at that time.

With this in mind, exploring the marginalization of women reflects the three choices for women of the 1930s. Three chapters will depict the happiness of the ideal woman, the plight of the single woman, and the repercussions for the loose woman.

What society deemed appropriate, or ideal, for women of the time will be reviewed in the chapter "The Ideal Woman." The play that best reflects society's perfect woman of the era is *Ah, Wilderness!*

In the case of "good," single women, who were expected to remain virtuous until a proper husband could be found, the issue of retaining one's good name became paramount. Girls struggling to keep their reputations intact while warding off temptations and propositions will be explored in the chapter "Sex and the Decent Girl." The plays that address this issue with the most clarity are *Ah, Wilderness!* and *"Having Wonderful Time."*

Lastly, how society viewed and treated unchaste women, including those who are involved in pre-marital sex, are otherwise openly sexual, or are divorcees, is discussed in

the chapter "Loose Women." This subject is the fodder of *Ah, Wilderness!, Biography, End of Summer*, and *The Women.*

Another dark theme that often creeps into these comedies is how society dealt with its downtrodden, or lower-class, citizens. In particular, displaced characters, especially the formerly rich and wealthy European or Slavic nobility and their constituents, became a popular source for comic relief in these dramas. However, when readers consider the dilemma of such individuals, they oftentimes cannot help but feel sorry for their plight, especially considering that most of these people are merely strangers in a land that has no place for them.

Many displaced individuals who came to America during the 1930s were Russians who were escaping near-certain death circumstances in their homeland. Although the Bolshevik Revolution took place in the 1910s, many Russians were still fleeing to America in the following two decades because of the decline and precariousness of their former social status. Following the executions of the last Russian Czar Nicholas II, his immediate family, and the extended family of the Romanovs in 1918, there can be little wonder as to why the remaining nobles fled. Fearing for their lives, many Romanov relatives left Russia for Europe and North America. In addition, following the ravages of World War I, many formerly wealthy citizens of other countries, such as Italy, France, Poland, and Germany, where the war wreaked the most havoc, were financially ruined and came to America in the hopes of starting over.

One would think that America, a country that has always seemingly welcomed the multitudes in need of a safe haven, would have accepted these refugees with open arms. Instead, because most Americans were having financial difficulties of their own,

newcomers were frequently viewed as competition to cash-strapped citizens; hence, they were not warmly received. Rather, they were largely ignored and left to fend for themselves. Indeed, until 1938, when the Russian Nobility Association of America (RNA) and other culture-specific assisting organizations were formed, the expatriate nobility who arrived in the United States had to survive through their connections if they had any or through hard labor if they did not (Geacintov).

A chapter entitled "Displaced Immigrants" is devoted to the examination of how American society in the 1930s looked at these displaced characters. *You Can't Take It with You*, *The Women*, *End of Summer,* and *Biography*, despite their light-hearted, comedic style, all expose the desperate plight of such people.

The final sobering theme being discussed is materialism and its ills. The two plays that best demonstrate what is lost when money becomes the only desire in life are *Biography* and *You Can't Take It with You.* Despite the fact that they were written almost a decade apart, their theme is the same: "The good life consists of doing what you want rather than what is considered normal or reasonable" (Krutch 147). In both works, the greedy businessman is juxtaposed with someone who wants more out of life than mere material success.

Money has always been a driving force in the United States, and the ills of money in a materialistic society inspired a multitude of plays that explore this theme. However, the evils of money are typically reserved for plays that fall under the more serious genres of theatrical drama and tragedy. To find money woes in such a genre as comedy, while not unusual, still shows one that it was an ever-present aspect of daily life that could not be ignored, which explains why the plays here address its ills but only do so in a light-

hearted way to teach a lesson. The chapter "The Evils of Excessive Wealth" will explore how money is considered the root of most of the problems in two dramatic works.

Although the difficulties of women, the concern of immigrants, and the harsh reality of money are the only themes being explored here, they are not the only dark themes of American comedies from the 1930s. Other issues such as child abuse through substandard working conditions as well as how society treated those with physical and mental needs also make an appearance in the plays. However, the examples for those themes are often harder to find in comedies; typically, they are reserved for the tragedies. One thing is for sure, though: America in the 1930s was a less-than-ideal place to live, and the concerns of the day carried over into the theater of the time.

CHAPTER II: THE IDEAL WOMAN

During the 1930s, the highest position a woman could aspire to was that of wife. A woman's primary goal was to find a good husband who could provide her with a comfortable household. In *Major Themes in Prize-Winning American Drama*, Jane Bonin highlights this concept when she states that only women who could accept their "proper role as a wife and a homemaker" and "who accepted her role as subordinate to her husband" would be able to find any happiness (1). Society expected a woman to marry, tend to her home, make her husband happy, and care for her children. While modern readers might have a difficult time grasping this ideal, according to the 1930s' mindset these were the standards that a woman should aspire to fulfill, for working was frowned upon for women of this period because jobs were scarce; therefore, "society viewed working women as un-American money grubbers, stealing jobs from men who needed them to support their families" (Moran). Safety and security for a woman of the 1930s was found in marriage. A good woman was one who had established a successful marriage arrangement, and in the selected plays, nowhere is the caricature of the ideal woman more clearly drawn than in *Ah, Wilderness!*

Eugene O'Neill's 1933 play *Ah, Wilderness!* is his only comedy (Brustein 27). Although set in 1906, *Ah, Wilderness!* reflects the year it was written more so than the year in which O'Neill placed it. In the play, O'Neill presents the character of Essie Miller, the embodiment of what every woman of the 1930s should strive to be and to have. The light-hearted drama revolves around Essie and Nat Miller's youngest son Richard and his struggle with the fine line between boyhood and manhood. Richard is in love, but sometimes love is complicated when parents get in the way. In the end, Richard

and his beloved Muriel patch up their differences, and everyone will seemingly live happily ever after.

Although the play is primarily about Richard, the comedy provides a good character study of Essie, who successfully maneuvers within the life society demands of her. She exemplifies a woman who has achieved all the necessary goals in order to be content. The way Essie personifies the ideal woman of her society's time is through her roles as wife and mother. She is a loving and doting mother to her children, a good and dutiful wife, and the matriarch of her household. Her job is keeping her home in order, and she does so with ease.

From the first act in the play, Essie qualifies as a very attentive parent. After Richard has suffered his first serious rebuke from Muriel, he attempts to hide his depression from the family. However, being an observant mother, Essie notices Richard's gloominess almost immediately. In order to care for her ailing son, she wants to forgo her holiday riding trip with the rest of the family so that she may be at home with Richard should he need her. Essie has been looking forward to the ride for a while, but she puts aside her own desires so that she may tend to her child. Her concern for her son is apparent. The scene plays out in the following manner:

> MRS. MILLER (immediately sensing something "down" in his manner—going to him worriedly): Why, whatever's the matter with you, Richard? You sound as if you'd lost your last friend! What is it?
>
> RICHARD (desperately): I— I don't feel so well—my stomach's sick.
>
> MRS. MILLER (immediately all sympathy—smoothing his hair back from his forehead): You poor boy! What a shame—on the Fourth, too, of

> all days! (Turning to the others) Maybe, I better stay home with him, if he's sick. (295)

Essie wants to go on the drive, but being a dutiful mother, she feels the need to stay at home with her son during his time of illness. In the period during which the play is set, this type of behavior was expected of a mother. One would go so far as to say that the same holds true even today, but now either parent might stay at home instead of the responsibility falling solely on the female.

Richard's well-being continues to be an issue for Mrs. Miller in the second half of the play as well. After Richard comes home drunk on the night of the Fourth of July, his parents decide to punish him by making him stay in bed all day, and he is to have no meals. Although he has misbehaved and the punishment has been decided, Essie shows concern about Richard being fed properly, which is not unusual considering that women were usually the ones who handled the daily care of their children. She goes against the punishment she and Nat have previously decided on by supplying food to Richard. She reveals what she has done quite by accident:

> MRS. MILLER: Richard must be feeling better. He ate all the dinner I sent up, Norah says.
>
> MILLER: I thought you weren't going to give him any dinner—to punish him.
>
> MRS. MILLER (guiltily): Well—in his weakened condition—I thought it best—(Then defensively) But you needn't think I haven't punished him. I've given him pieces of my mind he won't forget in a hurry. And I've kept reminding him his real punishment was still to come—that you were

> coming home to dinner on purpose—and then he'd learn that you could be terrible stern when he did such awful things.
>
> MILLER (stirs uncomfortably): Hmm!
>
> MRS. MILLER: And that's just what it's your duty to do—punish him good and hard! The idea of him daring—(Then hastily) But you be careful how you go about it, Nat. Remember he's like you inside—too sensitive for his own good. (333)

Clearly, Mrs. Miller feels that Richard should be punished after a night of debauchery. Yet, even though he has done wrong, he is still her son, and as such, she must also make sure that his basic needs are being met. To begin with, she decides to punish him by not allowing him any food for the day, but when her mothering instincts win out, she relents and sends food to his room. The ideal mother of Essie's day would never have allowed her child to be punished by denying him or her of the most basic need of nourishment. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that she relents about her order not to feed him.

However, while she is relieved that his appetite is still healthy, she still insists that he must receive punishment for his behavior. She feels that Richard must be punished "good and hard," only she does not want to be the one to do it. In this respect, a reader might think that she is showing a little bit of weakness by passing on the responsibility of discipline to her husband; however, being the man of the household, Nat Miller must dole out punishment. A mother's role was to make sure the children were taken care of, which Essie does, but the father was still the authority figure in the picture. Hence, Essie is not trying to sidestep responsibility; instead, she is being a dutiful wife and merely looking to Nat to perform his duties as society deemed fit.

Interestingly, in this same vein, Essie does not want Nat to punish Richard too severely because of Richard's sensitive nature. She knows her children, and of all of them she recognizes that Richard is the most easily affected by remonstration. He is tenderhearted, which is not a fault in Essie's eyes, because in that regard Richard is like his father. Essie simply cautions Nat to be mindful in the punishment he hands down because of the lasting implications it may have on Richard's emotional well-being. While Mrs. Miller's desire for punishment and her need for sensitivity in handling it may make her appear to be contradictory in nature, she is being consistent in her concern and love for Richard. No matter what he does wrong, he will always be her son, and a good mother cares for her children.

Later in the play, Mrs. Miller again shows her motherly devotion, but this time toward her youngest son Tommy. Tommy is young and energetic, so his appetite can be expected to be healthy. However, when he constantly complains of being hungry, his mother tells him, "I know. You always are. You've got a tapeworm, that's what I think" (302). While Essie's remark is one that most any mother would make, it cannot be dismissed as her just being playful with Tommy. Though tapeworms were not necessarily a serious problem even in the 1930s setting of the play, they were still an issue for children, especially during the summer months when children had a tendency to go barefoot. Essie's remark is most likely meant to garner a laugh, but at the same time, it is her duty as a good mother to consider the health and welfare of all her children, which is exactly what she is doing in that scene.

Essie also cares about the wellbeing of her only daughter, Mildred. In Act III, Scene 2, Mildred practices her handwriting while her parents wait on Richard to return home:

> MILDRED (finally surveys the two words she has been writing and is satisfied with them): There. (She takes the paper over to her mother) Look, Ma. I've been practising [sic] a new way of writing my name. Don't look at the others, only the last one. Don't you think it's the real goods?
>
> MRS. MILLER (pulled out of her preoccupation): Don't talk that horrible slang. It's bad enough for boys, but for a young girl supposed to have manners—my goodness, when I was your age, if my mother'd ever heard me—(323)

Mildred has done nothing seriously wrong, but Essie wants Mildred to speak like a proper young lady should. She disapproves of Mildred's manner of speech because the usage of slang is typically associated with an uneducated person. Essie does not want Mildred to appear ignorant, and the attempt to correct Mildred shows Essie's concern regarding how others might perceive her children. In addition, as the only daughter, Mildred faces the scrutiny of her society more severely than her brothers, which is something Essie realizes. Of all her children, Mildred's behavior will be more closely watched and commented on by her peers. While Richard may be able to get away with a night of frolicking without doing any harm to his good name, a girl behaving the same way would be frowned upon. Essie knows this double standard exists, so she reprimands Mildred because she is a girl who is supposed to have proper manners.

Not only does Mrs. Miller protect and care for her young, but her mothering instincts also extend to other members of her family as well. In particular, Essie treats her own brother Sid in much the same way as she does her children. When Sid and Nat return home from the picnic they have attended that day, they are both a little drunk. Nat does not normally drink, so Essie does not reproach him too much because he can still function. Sid, on the other hand, drinks often and excessively. In fact, his drinking was the reason Lily, Nat's sister, broke off their engagement years before (297). When Sid comes in, Essie at first reproaches the behavior, but she quickly stops and attempts to nurture Sid instead:

> (Mildred runs in through the back parlor. She is laughing to herself a bit shamefacedly. She rushes to her mother.)
>
> MILDRED: Ma, Uncle Sid's—(She whispers in her ear.)
>
> MRS. MILLER: Never mind! You shouldn't notice such things—at your age! And don't you encourage him by laughing at his foolishness, you hear!
>
> TOMMY: You needn't whisper, Mid. Think I don't know? Uncle Sid's soused again.
>
> MRS. MILLER (shakes him by the arm indignantly): You be quiet! Did I ever! You're getting too smart! (Gives him a push) Go to your place and sit right down and not another word out of you!
>
> TOMMY (aggrieved—rubbing his arm as he goes to his place): Aw, Ma!
>
> MRS. MILLER: And you sit down, Richard and Mildred. You better, too, Lily. We'll get him right in here and get some food in him. He'll be all

> right then....You come right in here! Don't stop to wash up or anything. Dinner's coming right on the table. (303)

Essie's anger is immediately noticeable. Upset by Sid's behavior, she tries to maintain the decorum, or illusion, of a normal family gathering. She chastises her children for their even noticing Sid's drunkenness, though it would be impossible for them not to notice, and her disapproval in regards to both Mildred and Tommy's remarks is more to relieve her tension than to scold them for what they have said. She wanted a happy holiday celebration with all of her loved ones present, and while Sid's drinking could have ruined the evening for them all, she instead allows it to pass without too much being said.

Even when she is clearly angry at Sid, she simply loves him too much to scold him. She would probably like nothing more than to call Sid out on his latest exploit; instead, she remains calm because she just wants to get him sober enough to continue their evening in peace. Her answer to the problem is to fill him full of soup. She knows he needs nourishment to dull the effects of the alcohol, so she tries to meet his physical requirements. As with her children, Essie plays the role of dutiful mother through her attempts to keep her brother's behavior in check, but like the cases with her children, her softer side wins out, and she becomes more of the adoring maternal female than the authoritative figure.

Another way that Essie Miller personifies the ideal woman of her time is through her role as matriarch of the home, which is most interestingly shown in the manner that she handles her hired help, Norah. The first time these two women interact is in the opening of Act II. In the stage directions for the opening sequence of this act, O'Neill paints a homely picture of middle-class domesticity. He describes the Miller home as

both comfortable and typical of its time. The Millers believe in maintaining a household that is comparable to that of their friends and neighbors, and Essie's daily troubles are eased because they have enough money to hire a maid. However, the Millers are not rich, so the maid they are able to employ is not exactly the most efficient domestic in the world.

Essie tries to make Norah a more adept worker by attempting to train her in the ways she should prepare items in the home. For example, as the two are setting the table for the evening's meal, Essie reminds Norah, "But there's one thing—(Norah turns apprehensively) No, two things—things I've told you over and over but you always forget. Don't pass the plates on the wrong side at dinner tonight, and do be careful not to let that pantry door slam behind you. Now you will try to remember, won't you?" (296). Even though Essie's patience seems to be wearing thin, as is implicated by Norah's apprehension and Essie's repetition of her request, Essie still tries, without getting too angry in Norah's presence, to instruct Norah about the proper behavior and expectations of a maid. She retains control of the situation, and Norah recognizes Essie as the boss. However, while she does not belittle Norah directly, Essie still feels the need to allow her anger an outlet, so she waits until Norah is out of earshot to complain to someone of her own class status about the girl's inability; in this case, it is Lily who has to listen to Essie discuss the ineptitude of her employee. Essie explains to Lily:

> MRS. MILLER (exasperatedly): Oh, that girl! Don't talk about her! She'll be the death of me! She's that thick, you honestly wouldn't believe it possible.
>
> LILY (smiling): Why, what did she do now?

MRS. MILLER: Oh, nothing. She means all right.

LILY: Anything else I can do, Essie?

MRS. MILLER: Well, she's got the table all wrong. We'll have to reset it. (297)

As is indicated by Lily's knowing smile, this occasion is not the first that Essie has complained about Norah. Still, Essie retains her as an employee. Perhaps she does so because she cannot afford anyone else, but more likely Essie keeps her because Norah takes instructions without rebuttal. Essie is the matriarch of her home, so it and all within it fall under her domestic jurisdiction. Hence, an unruly subject would be dismissed quickly, whereas one who takes orders will more likely be kept as an employee for the long haul.

Finally, how others in her family respond to her also shows that Essie Miller commands the respect and adoration of those around her. For example, after Sid has nearly ruined the evening because of his drinking, an interesting supper scene ensues between Essie and Nat:

MILLER (beamingly): Now, Essie don't be critical. Don't be carpingly critical. Good news can stand repeating, can't it? 'Course it can! (He slaps her jovially on her fat buttocks. Tommy and Mildred roar with glee. And Norah, who has just entered from the pantry with a huge tureen of soup in her hands, almost drops it as she explodes in a merry guffaw.)

MRS. MILLER (scandalized): Nat! Aren't you ashamed!

MILLER: Couldn't resist it! Just simply couldn't resist it! (Norah, still standing with the soup tureen held out stiffly in front of her, again

guffaws.) (304)

Although Essie has been trying to maintain respectability at the dinner table, Nat has nearly destroyed it. Nat is certainly more playful and relaxed than Essie, but as the husband he should be the one to set the tone of the meal. However, due to his slightly incapacitated state, he is more flamboyant than usual. His smack on Essie's behind sends her into a tizzy, and from this point on, she becomes fussy, criticizing everyone and everything. Yet, Nat lets it blow over with a continued smile. He knows that Essie is not really mad; her behavior is more for show because she is expected to act this way. Public displays of affection were typically not deemed appropriate for husbands and wives, so it comes as no surprise that Essie feels scandalized.

To cover her embarrassment, Essie immediately turns on everyone at the table in an effort to draw the attention away from her. The first person who feels her outrage is, of course, Norah, who has made the most noise because of the incident. Norah might also be the initial target of Essie's indignation because she is the hired help, and as such, she should know her place in polite company. Essie chastises her:

> MRS. MILLER (turns on her with outraged indignation): Norah! Bring that soup here this minute! (She stalks with stiff dignity toward her place at the foot of the table, right.)
>
> NORAH (guiltily): Yes, Mum. (She brings the soup around the head of the table, passing Miller.) (304)

Norah's guilt also seems to indicate that she realizes she has overstepped her boundaries with Essie. Her response is to be given "guiltily" to show that she knows that her "guffaws" have been inappropriate. Once Norah has been subdued, Essie turns on the

children. Even though the Millers are in their home, and not many people witness the event, Essie still does not want her children to think their father's actions are proper, so she does everything in her power to distract them from it. In fact, she criticizes each of her children in turn in order to make them pay more attention to their own actions than those of their father.

> MRS. MILLER: Tommy! Stop spinning your napkin ring! How often have I got to tell you? Mildred! Sit up straight in your chair! Do you want to grow up a humpback? Richard! Take your elbows off the table! (304)

Having successfully gotten things back to order, Essie is, at this point, ready to relax. However, her rest must wait a few moments longer, for Nat begins to stir up trouble yet again when he makes the pronouncement in front of Norah about how happy he is to be at home with his family.

> MILLER (coming to his place at the head of the table, rubbing his hands together genially): Well, well, well. Well, well, well. It's good to be home again. (Norah exits into the pantry and lets the door slam with a bang behind her.)
>
> MRS. MILLER (jumps): Oh! (Then exasperatedly) Nat, I do wish you wouldn't encourage that stupid girl by talking to her, when I'm doing my best to train—
>
> MILLER (beamingly): All right, Essie. Your word is law! (304)

Even though Nat does not mean any harm, he has managed to overexcite Essie yet again. Her exasperations with Norah are only exacerbated at this point because Nat has not followed proper decorum with Norah. He has spoken to her while the girl is attempting to

serve the table, and he has addressed her in a friendly manner; both of these behaviors, as Essie points out, do not adhere to the approved etiquette of the day. Even if Norah is unaware of proper behavior, which from the amount of training Essie has had to do with her it would be no surprise if she did not know, Nat should know better.

When Norah allows the pantry door to slam again after the debacle, Essie has reached her boiling point with this entire situation. She still waits until Norah is not present to call her a "stupid girl," but Essie lets Nat know that she does not appreciate his undermining her dinner, her training, or her position. Before allowing her to go too far with her complaints, Nat rallies to assure her that her word is "law" (304). While Nat might be saying this just to pacify Essie, he is also demonstrating that the household is Essie's domain. Her word here is typically the one that goes, and although he is the man of the house, he wants his wife to be happy as well. He might realize that running a household cannot be easy, and when someone challenges the prescribed rules of the home such as he has done this evening, the best thing might be for him to apologize in a manner that shows their children that Essie's rules must be followed as well. If he does not back Essie on what she is trying to do, then she might lose face in front of her children and Norah. Losing power in front of those under her rule could be disastrous, for then Essie could become little more than a doormat on which the others would simply wipe their feet. However, Nat backs Essie's play because he loves her and is genuinely concerned about her feelings, and by doing so, he allows her to retain the respectability she deserves.

O'Neill addresses Nat's regards for Essie's feelings in one other scene of the play. In the description of Nat's playful, and perhaps flirtatious, smack on Essie's behind,

O'Neill uses the term "fat buttocks." While Nat might not object to the size of Essie's rump, O'Neill's words are not necessarily positive. This reference is not the only one made to Essie's size, and while the first one might not result in anything hurtful because it is not verbalized, the second reference to her size is more direct. In the final scene of the play, when Nat and Essie are discussing Richard's possible future with Muriel, Nat remarks that while Muriel is beautiful now, it may not always be the case. He implies that looks and physique should be considered when it comes to matrimony:

> MRS. MILLER (going on as if he had not spoken): And Muriel's real cute-looking, I have to admit that. Takes after her mother. Alice Briggs was the prettiest girl before she married.
>
> MILLER: Yes, and Muriel will get big as a house after she's married, the same as her mother did. That's the trouble. A man never can tell what he's letting himself in for—(He stops, feeling his wife's eyes fixed on him with indignant suspicion.)
>
> MRS. MILLER (sharply): I'm not too fat and don't you say it!
>
> MILLER: Who was talking about you?
>
> MRS. MILLER: And I'd rather have some flesh on my bones than be built like a string bean and bore a hole in a chair every time I sat down—like some people!
>
> MILLER (ignoring the insult—flatteringly): Why, no one'd ever call you fat, Essie. You're only plump, like a good figure ought to be. (351)

Whereas Nat seems to be talking about Muriel and her mother, the remark is more general than specific. Nat means that a man should look to a girl's mother before

marrying because, most likely, the daughter will resemble her mother over time. While Nat may or may not be directly addressing Essie's physique, he is clearly addressing an issue of concern for men of his day. The woman of the house was its major adornment, and a man wanted a wife of whom he could be proud ("Social Realism"). A man who had an attractive wife who did not have to work was considered the height of success by 1930s standards. How the husband looked did not seem to matter, even though Essie does imply that Nat is rather skinny, to society as much as the woman's looks did. Hence, the double standard between society's expectations of men and women during this time period is clearly drawn.

As one can see, Essie Miller is the ideal woman of her time. Through her care and concern for her children, she shows herself to be an excellent mother. In her interactions with Nat, she proves to be a dutiful wife. With careful practice and through many examples, she maintains the presence of mind to be a good employer to Norah. It is true that she is somewhat fussy and certainly overcritical at times, but she is still a gentle soul trying to command her post as she sees fit. When Eugene O'Neill created Essie Miller, a woman so opposite to his own mother, he may have been attempting to personify the ideal woman of the day. Whatever his intentions, he certainly created a character whom other women of the time could look to as a faultless example of female perfection.

CHAPTER III: SEX AND THE DECENT GIRL

Being happily married to a man with a good income, having pleasant and dutiful children, and running one's household were fulfillments seen as the height of a woman's success in the 1930s, but women were not born into that position. No, most women faced the problem of navigating the dating world in order to find Mr. Right. While dating may have been enjoyable, it also came with many hazards because young girls had to retain their respectability throughout their quest to find an acceptable match. For females, virginity had a high value, and a proper young lady was expected to remain chaste until her wedding night, for many men of the period regarded women as property and, therefore expected their wives to enter their marriages as undamaged (Yates 167). Men were not held to the same standards, and while society did not always approve of a man having multiple sexual conquests, a male's sexual peccadilloes could be overlooked providing the young man still fit the bill of acceptability in other ways, such as having good prospects and coming from a respectable family.

Hence the daunting task of finding a good husband while retaining one's chastity was often problematic for young ladies, and because it was so common an issue, the theme of the plight of decent girls is explored in many works of the 1930s. In Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* and Arthur Kober's *"Having Wonderful Time,"* the way society views decent girls is addressed repeatedly.

In *Ah, Wilderness!*, Richard's relationship with Muriel illustrates some of society's thoughts on decent girls. Throughout the drama, Richard and Muriel's love has been thwarted. In the opening of the play, Muriel's father, McComber, has confiscated some letters Richard has written to Muriel. While the letters at first seem innocent

enough, they contain passages that are rather inflamed with New Age ideals and romantic images. When McComber confronts Richard's father, Nat, with the letters, Nat believes that his son is merely being rebellious. He sees no harm in Richard's readings and writings, but he begins to wonder whether or not Richard might actually be using the letters to lure young and innocent Muriel into a more jaded situation. After reading excerpts from Richard's letters, Nat is amused, but his thoughts turn darker when he considers some other possibilities. Discussing his fears with Sid, his brother-in-law, Nat ponders what Richard may be doing with Muriel:

> MILLER (Then a trace of shocked reproof showing in his voice): But it's no joking matter. That stuff is warm—too damned warm, if you ask me! I don't like this a damned bit, Sid. That's no kind of thing to be sending a decent girl. (More worriedly) I thought he was really stuck on her—as one gets stuck on a decent girl at his age—all moonshine and holding hands and a kiss now and again. But this looks—I wonder if he is hanging around her to see what he can get? (Angrily) By God, if that's true, he deserves that licking McComber says it's my duty to give him! I've got to draw the line somewhere!
>
> SID: Yes, it won't do to have him getting any decent girl in trouble. (293)

Nat is quick to defend his son in front of McComber, yet he also seems to realize that Richard is still a young man who is obviously becoming increasingly interested in females. He understands that Richard may be genuinely infatuated with Muriel, but he hopes that their relationship is still innocent. Even Nat's portrayal of what a young man should do with a decent girl does not involve anything risqué. Instead, he paints an image

of what is often called "puppy love." It is all "moonshine and holding hands and a kiss now and again" (293). Nat does not believe his son capable of trying anything more heavy-handed with Muriel than a simple kiss. He thinks his son knows better than to try to corrupt a good girl. However, at the same time, he also is afraid that his son may be pushing the limits of respectability with Muriel. Nat even goes as far to say that if Richard is out to "see what he can get" from someone as respected as Muriel, then Richard should be punished severely (293). Richard would be violating the unwritten but understood decorum of their generation, which, as Sid points out, is not to get "any decent girl in trouble" (293).

When Nat confronts Richard with the possibility of Richard's having less than honorable intentions with Muriel, Richard quickly sets his father straight as to the true nature of their relationship. Their discussion unfolds in the following scene:

> MILLER: Have you been trying to have something to do with Muriel—something you shouldn't—you know what I mean.
>
> RICHARD (stares at him for a moment, as if he couldn't comprehend—then, as he does, a look of shocked indignation comes over his face): No! What do you think I am, Pa? I never would! She's not that kind! Why, I—I love her! I'm going to marry her—after I get out of college! She's said she would! We're engaged! (293-94)

Nat fears that Richard has been trying "to have something to do" with what he deems a decent girl; even though he will not directly say what that something is, it is not hard to read between the lines to know that he means sexual intercourse. Nat is rather bashful in discussing the possibilities of his teenage son having sexual intercourse at all, let alone

with a "good" girl. The fact that he and his son have never discussed sex heretofore is not surprising either, for unlike today's time when parents are encouraged to talk openly with their children about sex as well as other issues such as drugs, these issues were often considered taboo for parent-children conversations during the 1930s. Even when the conversations did take place, euphemisms such as "having something to do" replaced the word "sex" itself, which reinforces the notion that sex was not a welcomed topic, nor was it considered proper for discussion.

In addition, Richard himself understands the implications of his father's queries. At first Richard does not comprehend what his father is asking him because Nat refers to Muriel, a young woman whom Richard highly esteems. When he does realize what his father is indicating, he is outraged at his father's suggestion, for his indignation hints that he has never even considered the possibility of having premarital sex with Muriel. Also, he tells his father quite simply, "She's not that kind!" (293). Richard obviously knows what kind his father means: a loose woman who has sex before marriage. Richard wants his father to understand that he does not view Muriel that way. Instead, as he says, he loves her, and because of his love for Muriel, he will not risk her name being marred in any way. If they were to become sexually involved before marriage, Richard understands that it would cast a shadow on their future, even if that future did result in their marriage. He obviously does not want any possibility of their life together to become fodder for the rumor mill.

Later in the same encounter with his father, Richard explains that his relationship with Muriel is even more innocent than his father imagined. In fact, Richard has never even kissed her because she is too afraid of what her father would do or say should he

find out. Richard discusses these problems when he highlights why he sent her the poems in the first place:

> RICHARD (embarrassedly): Aw, I only did it because I liked them—and I wanted her to face life as it is. She's so darned afraid of life—afraid of her Old Man—afraid of people saying this or that about her—afraid of being in love—afraid of everything. She's even afraid to let me kiss her. I thought, maybe, reading those things—they're beautiful, aren't they, Pa?—I thought they would give her the spunk to lead her own life, and not be—always thinking of being afraid.
>
> MILLER: I see. Well, I'm afraid she's still afraid. (He takes the letter from the table) Here's a letter from her he said to give you. (Richard takes the letter uncertainly, his expression changing to one of apprehension. Miller adds with a kindly smile) You better be prepared for a bit of a blow. But never mind. There's lots of other fish in the sea. (294)

When Richard explains Muriel's fears to Nat, he reveals some of the typical attitudes of the society of his time. First, Richard explains that Muriel has many fears, and her fears are the concerns of most decent girls. For one, she is afraid of her father. Muriel has been taught to respect her father and her father's commands. If he has told her not to read inappropriate literature and if he has told her not to engage in premarital sex but believes that she and Richard's relationship has crossed the accepted boundaries he finds appropriate, then McComber would see Muriel as a disobedient child. As her father, he has a right to punish her as he sees fit, and while physical retribution was more readily accepted in the 1930s than it is now, other forms of punishment for a daughter who

misbehaved were also available, such as the one McComber tries to enforce: having Muriel breakup with Richard and keeping her locked away for a while (344). As the reader finds out in later scenes, McComber forced Muriel to write the letter that Nat gives Richard, and for a while, McComber's punishment succeeds in keeping his daughter away from a boy whom he thinks has less than honorable intentions.

Not only is Muriel afraid of her father, though, she is also afraid of what other people will think and say about her. As a female, Muriel has much more to contend with than Richard does. She has to live up to her parents' expectations, and she also has to deal with how people in her community see her as well. She does not want anyone to be able to say anything that even hints at inappropriate behavior when it comes to her reputation. Muriel realizes the importance of maintaining her good name, and while it is possible that Richard may understand this as well, he does not appear to be as troubled by this imposition as Muriel is. He has less to worry about because of the double standard when it came to males and females during the 1930s. Richard does not seem to be able to relate completely to Muriel's concerns about what people say or think about her; instead, he is a little miffed that she worries so much about how others perceive her. Richard cannot understand what Muriel faces, for as a man, society holds him to a different set of standards altogether. Her fears are realistic, and even though her father may not have experienced them firsthand, he still understands how important it is for Muriel to retain her good name, which is why he elects to have her break off all communication with Richard. McComber and Nat alike know that, as a female, Muriel has a reputation as a decent girl, which is the most important asset she has, and if she loses that, their society

will not allow her to forget it, which is why Muriel worries so much about how people view her.

One other interesting point in this discussion between Richard and Nat is what Nat says to cheer up Richard. Knowing the contents of the letter McComber has had Muriel write to Richard, Nat tries to make his son feel a little better about the situation. He knows that Richard will feel hurt, so as a good father, he tries to soften the blow. He tells Richard not to worry too much about losing Muriel because "there's lots of other fish in the sea" (294). Although he has just lectured Richard on appropriate behavior with decent girls, Nat also seems to imply that if one woman cannot be had, then another may be more obtainable. While Nat may mean that Richard could possibly have less difficulty with other decent girls because their fathers may not be as overbearing as McComber is, he indicates that some girls have less discerning fathers who may not object as much to the type of ideals with which Richard may try to imbue their daughters. Nat may appear a little unfeeling considering his son has just told him how much he loves Muriel, but at the same time, Nat does not seem to object to the idea that Richard refrain from getting himself tied down immediately to one girl without exploring other options first.

Maybe more telling about how society viewed premarital relationships for decent girls than the conversations between Richard and his father are the interactions between Richard and Muriel themselves. Later in the play, as Richard is waiting for Muriel to arrive for a secret rendezvous, he muses what their future together will be like. In particular, sex crosses his mind, as it most likely does for all males his age, but when he begins to think about what it will be like with Muriel, he practically chides himself for even thinking about it.

> RICHARD: Muriel and I will go upstairs...when we're married...but that will be beautiful...but I oughtn't even to think of that yet...it's not right...I'd never—now...and she'd never...she's a decent girl...I couldn't love her if she wasn't...but after we're married...(He gives a little shiver of passionate longing—then resolutely turns his mind away from these improper, almost desecrating thoughts.) (341)

Richard claims to love Muriel, and he obviously wants her in a sexual manner; however, he respects her too much even to attempt making a sexual advance toward her. In fact, when he considers the idea of their sexual liaisons once they are married, he chides himself because their marriage will not be any time soon. As such, he says that he should not even be having such impure thoughts about Muriel because they go against the standards of his day. He states that it simply is not appropriate. One cannot truly know whether Richard genuinely believes that it is wrong to think about Muriel in this manner or if this is what he has been taught to believe by his family and the society of his time. Either way, it is ingrained in his mind that premarital sex with Muriel, whom he calls a "decent girl" throughout the drama, is not something he should be pondering. Even the stage directions O'Neill includes decry Richard's thoughts as being "improper" and "desecrating," again forcing the reader to realize how much sexual improprieties were condemned in the 1930s.

More interesting than Richard's impure thoughts about Muriel is how he might feel about her were she not a "decent girl." When he considers the idea of being with Muriel, he considers her virtue. If her virtue were not intact, Richard says that he could not love her. This statement reinforces the idea that men expected their wives to come to

them as virgins because their virginity was one of the gifts a woman was able to give her husband on their wedding night, which is why decent girls had so much at stake with their reputations. Possibly, even if Richard were the one to take Muriel's virginity, he still would not have her as his wife because she had been spoiled. Despite the fact that this may not make much sense to a reader of today's time, the double standard of the period in which this play was written did not allow for young girls to lose their respectability under any circumstances. This concept has been repeated throughout the play, and it is merely reinforced by Richard's own musings about the girl he loves. He simply cannot endure the idea of her being anything less than virtuous.

After Muriel arrives, she and Richard are not exactly sure how to receive one another considering the difficulties both have faced in the last few days. Although Richard is angry that Muriel wrote him the letter in which she vowed to discontinue their relationship, he still wants to see her. Once they begin talking, they quickly make amends. Interestingly, this is the first time that these two have ever been alone in the dark unsupervised, which opens up the possibility for their romance to blossom. Instead, their exchange is much more innocent:

> RICHARD: Can't I—won't you let me kiss you—now? Please! (He bends his face toward hers.)
>
> MURIEL (ducking her head away—timidly): No. You mustn't. Don't—
>
> RICHARD: Aw, why can't I?
>
> MURIEL. Because—I'm afraid.
>
> RICHARD (discomfited—taking his arm from around her—a bit sulky

and impatient with her): Aw, that's what you always say! You're always so afraid! Aren't you ever going to let me?

MURIEL: I will—sometime.

RICHARD: When?

MURIEL: Soon, maybe.

RICHARD: Tonight, will you?

MURIEL (coyly): I'll see.

RICHARD: Promise?

MURIEL: I promise—maybe.

RICHARD: All right. You remember you've promised. (Then coaxingly) Aw, don't let's stand here. Come on out and we can sit down in the boat.

MURIEL (hesitantly): It's so bright out there.

RICHARD: No one'll see. You know there's never anyone around here at night. (343)

Richard wants to kiss Muriel. It is his heart's desire, and his intentions do not seem to go beyond the innocence of that first kiss. However, while Richard's purpose may appear to lack any serious repercussions, Muriel may not see it that way. She will not allow Richard to kiss her because she is too afraid of what may happen. Possibly, Muriel is not so much afraid of the kiss itself, because O'Neill indicates that her response to Richard's repeated request is to sound flirtatious. Instead, she may be more concerned about the problems that would follow their kiss should anyone find out that she had been alone with Richard at this time of night without any adult supervision. Surely, considering the circumstances, she has a right to be afraid. If her father or other people in their

community were made aware of her midnight rendezvous with Richard, tongues would certainly begin to wag. She worries so much about someone seeing her and Richard together that she does not even want to step out of the bushes because the night is so clear that anyone could see them there.

Regardless of Muriel's fears, her evening with Richard ends with their first kisses and with their standing together holding hands in the moonlight, a perfect picture of Nat's earlier verbal description of how young men should behave with decent girls. The two lovebirds even exchange their first "I love yous!" and begin to make plans for where they will go on their honeymoon. Clearly, Richard and Muriel will have many more trials as they continue to battle McComber, but one suspects that their relationship will have a happy ending. Having that happy ending is what all decent girls of the 1930s dreamed of achieving, and when that dream became threatened, serious consequences could result, which is the scenario that almost happens to Arthur Kober's heroine Teddy Stern in his drama *"Having Wonderful Time."*

Of these two plays, *"Having Wonderful Time"* (1930) highlights the plight of single women more so than O'Neill's work does. In Kober's work, Teddy is a single female who goes to Camp Kare-Free, a summer camp in the Berkshires, in order to get away from the daily toil of her job as well as to forget about her recent engagement that has gone awry. While there though, she almost losses her good girl status due to a series of bad decisions; however, by the play's end, Teddy has not only managed to keep her name out of the mud, but she has also succeeded in obtaining the one thing that matters most to young women of her day: a future husband.

From the onset of the play, Teddy establishes herself as a very typical, very

proper female of her time. Because she has yet to marry, she still lives at home with her parents, and she remains concerned about what they think or say. She also has old-fashioned notions about proper behaviors between young men and women. For example, when the audience first meets Teddy, she is exasperated because of the forwardness of a young man, Chick, who works at the camp. On her ride to the camp, she is sitting alone on the bus when he addresses her. She reports the incident to her friend Fay as such: "He speaks to me, a complete stranger—out of a clear sky!" She also indicates that "he said some very fresh things to me" (684). Teddy is dismayed because young men were not supposed to address young ladies without a proper introduction; at least, this seems to be what Teddy believes because her outright indignation at Chick for talking to her without knowing her is clear.

Another example of her old-fashioned mindset comes later in the play when all of the campers are at a dance. She and Henrietta, one of her bunk mates, do not have partners for the dance, but Henrietta explains that the staff are supposed to dance with them if they ask. Taken aback by this revelation, she tells Henrietta, "Of, I couldn't go up to a stranger and ask him for a dance. I just couldn't. It would be different if somebody came to me. But this way—" (704). Again, the idea that one cannot talk to a member of the opposite sex without a proper introduction is an important issue to Teddy. Obviously, she adheres to the social dictates of her society; really, as a decent girl, she has no other choice, but still one quickly notices that Teddy fits the bill of her society's standards as to how a decent young lady should behave in mixed company.

Even though Teddy behaves as she should, she has yet to achieve her primary goal, based on the standards of her day, which is to get married. Where this matter is

concerned, Teddy seems to have had some bad luck. As stated earlier, she comes to Camp Kare-Free to forget about her recent broken engagement with Sam Rappaport. Although it is unclear how old Teddy is, one can assume, based upon her actions and what others say about her, that she is not older than twenty-five. However, in the 1930s, a woman who was still single above this age would often be considered an "old maid," which is a point that is reinforced when Teddy tells Fay about her mother's response to her breaking off her engagement with Sam:

> TEDDY: Oh, I'm not even thinking about it, and besides I don't wanna be reminded. That's all my family's been talking about for weeks. Oh, God, it'll be a relief not to have mama nagging at me. "Tessie, you're gonna be an old maid! Tessie, it's gonna serve you right!" Tessie this, and Tessie that, till I could almost bust.
>
> FAY: Gee, you'd think Sam Rappaport was the oney [sic] man left in the world. (688)

Clearly, while Teddy is annoyed because of the incident, her mother seems even more exasperated than Teddy is. As a mother, one always desires what is best for her children. For a daughter, however, in this period of time, what is thought to be best is for her to be married to a proper man who can give her a comfortable home. Teddy's mother seems worried that Teddy may be throwing away her chance of such a future. Of course, as Fay points out, Sam is not the only man in the world, but apparently Teddy's mom does not see it this way. Young ladies did not go around throwing away perfectly acceptable marriage proposals from eligible men, and as the audience quickly learns, Sam seems to

be quite the catch in Teddy's mother's eyes. Teddy and Fay discuss this point as their conversation continues:

> FAY: Listen, if a person thinks more of setting up their brother in business insteada taking that money and making a nice home fa their intended, I say the hell with him!
>
> TEDDY (getting to her feet): O.K. O.K., already! (Bitterly after a slight pause) Another whole year he wanted me to wait till he got his investment back. Three years' waiting wasn't enough!
>
> FAY: You never really liked him. Old Man of the Mountains!
>
> TEDDY: He's only forty-two.
>
> FAY: Forty-two! Then let him find somebody his own age. A young girl like you! It's like—like marrying your own father. (Guilty of a social lapse) Excuse the expression.
>
> TEDDY (musingly): My brother, Charlie, is married. My sisters are all married. Mama was so afraid I'd be the only single one. "A man in his forties is just right," she'd say. "He doesn't run around. He's settled already." Sam certainly was settled all right. He wouldn't budge at night. He didn't like concerts; he didn't like dances; he didn't like this; he didn't like that. Only one thing he liked—the radio. God, how Sam adored the radio! (689)

In this interchange between Teddy and Fay, the reason Teddy's mother likes Sam so much becomes quite clear. Sam is older, and he is more financially secure. He is not a rich man, but he has a lot of business sense. He has asked Teddy to wait on their marriage

until he can get his investment back from the loan he has made to his brother. Obviously, Sam wants to be able to provide a safe and financially stable home for Teddy. Teddy's mom seems to understand this as well. Although Teddy is tired of waiting for Sam—after all, it has been three years already—the implication is that Teddy's mom seems to think waiting another year for such a good catch will not do any harm because she sees the relationship as a done deal. It may take a little longer to happen, but in the end, the marriage will take place. Because Teddy has such a certain future ahead of her, Teddy's mother cannot understand why Teddy breaks off their engagement, which leads her into telling Teddy that she deserves to be an old maid. She seems to think that Teddy just needs to be patient; however, Teddy's patience has reached its limit where Sam is concerned.

Another point of interest that is revealed in Teddy and Fay's conversation is that Teddy did not really like Sam all that much in the first place. Fay is the one who points this out, but Teddy does not contradict her. Instead, she reinforces the point when she discusses the problem of Sam's being too settled for her taste. This disclosure shows that Teddy is not marrying Sam out of love; indeed, the motive here is quite simply for her future financial security, which goes to show that Teddy has been taught well that a woman needs to place more value on a man's prospects instead of whether or not she has an emotional attachment to him.

A problem that Fay points out is that while Sam may be able to offer Teddy security, he may not be able to offer happiness because the two are so vastly different in age, which does not always bode well for a happy union. Fay says he is almost old enough to be Teddy's father, which in Fay's mind, seems to be a distasteful idea.

However, Teddy's mother tells Teddy that Sam is the right age because he is through running around with other women. The only things, then, that Teddy should be concerned about are whether or not Sam will be a good provider for her and whether or not he will cheat. If he is an adequate provider and does not cheat, then, by her mother's standards, he will be an ideal husband. With Sam, Teddy will have the security she needs. Without him, she will have to continue working at job she hates, living at home with her parents, and worrying about another proposal coming her away.

Even though Teddy is a decent girl, one problem with her is that she is somewhat naïve, which is shown multiple times during the drama; in fact, it is her naiveté that almost leads her into ruining her good name. The first place her innocence shines through is when she talks about her future. She reveals to the reader that she does not have a true concept of what marriage is really like. As she tells Fay, she thinks having her own house with her own husband and kids will be "fun" (689). Teddy seems not to understand that marriages are difficult and, like a job, they require much hard work. Instead, Teddy thinks that by being married she will have time to explore life's leisures. She reveals, "There's so much I could do if I had the time—books I wanna read, places I'd like to go to" (712). Teddy has been taught that getting married should be her main objective in life; however, she has never really been told what to expect in the "happily ever after" portion.

Teddy's innocence shows again in Act II of the play when she and Chick have made amends; indeed, they have become a commodity, but Chick endangers their relationship yet again when he pushes the issue of sex a little too far. During their conversation, they begin to talk about the difficulties of their future together:

CHICK: There's something rotten about the whole set-up. We're licked.

We're up against a brick wall, all of us.

TEDDY: Well, I still have my job, thank goodness—

CHICK: And you hate it worse than poison! For three years you've been dreaming of giving it up, of having a home—your own home that you and Sam what's-his-name were gonna share. Where is it?

TEDDY (turning her head away): It's none of your business.

CHICK: You haven't got it. His brother was licked, so in the neck you got it.

TEDDY: Please! I don't wanna hear—

CHICK: I know you thoroughly, Teddy. You want a decent home, a husband and some kids. But husbands don't grow on trees these days. What're you gonna do while you're waiting?

TEDDY: I'll—I'll wait, that's all.

CHICK (getting to his feet): God, if things only weren't so bitched up. (Quickly) Excuse me.

TEDDY: Wadde you mean by that remark?

CHICK: Once in a blue moon I meet a girl who hits me so hard she leaves me winded. I start doing some serious thinking about how I'd like to settle down. But how can I—without a job and no prospects? (714)

At first, Chick and Teddy's conversation appears innocent enough. Chick makes a point that he has never seriously considered marriage, but now that he has met Teddy, he seems to have changed his mind about matrimony. The problem for the young couple, though, is that they do not have financial stability. Unlike Sam Rappaport, Chick is still very young,

and he has yet to make his way in the world. Chick is not without prospects, however; he has a law degree, but he knows it will take time for his work to bring him the security necessary to support a household. As he tells Teddy, they are up against a "brick wall," and they do not seem to have any options. Teddy recommends two possible solutions for their woes, but both are distasteful to Chick. He claims that he does not want her to have to wait for them to get married because he says Sam has made her wait long enough, and he says he does not want her to work to support him because he knows she hates her job. In Chick's way of explaining things, this leaves them without an option to marry for now; yet, according to him, they have another choice available to them, and that choice will assuage the longings he has for Teddy. When Chick brings up the possibility of the two of them going against social norms by having sex, Teddy's innocence is on the point of being compromised.

He introduces the idea of pre-marital sex to Teddy by telling her that they should still be able to enjoy themselves while they are young, and he goes on to say that if they have sex now, they will be able to say to a society that would not approve: "We fooled you! We're not licked! Look—we're laughing" (715). Being somewhat rebellious, Chick likes the idea of their engaging in sexual relations before marriage; after all, he does not have to worry about what such behavior will do to his reputation. Teddy, on the other hand, must consider her good name. As a female, Teddy lives by a different set of standards; she knows this, and she tries to explain it to Chick when she tells him that her family would not approve of such actions (715). After Chick tells her that what her family thinks should not matter to them, Teddy tries a different tactic, with unpleasant results:

TEDDY: No, Chick! No!

CHICK (shouting): Why not, for God's sake?

TEDDY (tearfully): I'll thank you not to shout at me!

CHICK: I—I'm sorry. Excuse me. (Calmly) Why not, Teddy?

TEDDY: Honestly, Chick, I can't understand a sweet and clean-cut boy like you asking me to behave like some cheap, ordinary thing—

CHICK: Cheap, ordinary thing. You call—? (Eyes her coldly) Come on. Let's get out of here.

TEDDY: Look, Chick. A girl isn't at all like a fella. She's got her family to think of— (Righteously) This would be a fine world if every girl—

CHICK: Shut up! Shut up, you damn fool! (716)

Teddy's appeal to rationality falls on deaf ears. Chick, as is evidenced by his work ethic at Camp Kare-Free, is not in the habit of following anyone's rules. Instead, he often makes it a point to ignore the written rules of his boss and the unwritten rules of his society. Chick does not see a problem with the two of them "thumbing their noses" at society by engaging in a social taboo. Teddy, on the other hand, worries about what will be said and thought about her should she do what Chick suggests.

In an effort to make Chick understand, Teddy tells him that "a girl isn't at all like a fella" (716). Teddy knows society's expectations of a decent girl. She has to keep her reputation clean, and where a man has liberties to "fool around," a girl simply does not. Chick understands these things, for as Teddy points out, Chick is a "sweet, clean-cut boy" (716). The problem with Chick is not his failure to know the difference between what is socially right and wrong; rather, Chick's problem is that he does not like the way

things are. If he cannot marry, then he should not have sex with a decent girl, and that leaves him with the sole choice of engaging in relations with prostitutes to relieve his sexual frustrations. That is, of course, unless he wants to mark Teddy as promiscuous as well by having sex with her, for society might see her as little more than a woman of ill repute should she do what Chick wants.

Another item of interest in the preceding conversation between Teddy and Chick is the remark she makes before he tells her to be quiet. Teddy says, "This would be a fine world if every girl—" (716). Even though Chick cuts her, Teddy's remark should be understood to mean that it would be a dangerous world if every girl did what Chick suggests. Should every girl engage in pre-marital sex, Teddy seems to imply, what would be a man's motivation to want to marry at all? The gift that a woman of this period was supposed to be able to give to her husband on their wedding night was her virginity. If every girl starts having sex without requiring a wedding ring, then, as Teddy appears to indicate, men would no longer marry a woman in order to have sex. If that becomes the case, she ponders what women will have to offer men to entice them to the altar. Will a man ever be able to want a woman for reasons other than sex? Teddy does not get to say these things, of course, but the thoughts are there.

At this point in the play, Teddy and Chick are no longer on speaking terms, but that does not mean that their feelings for one another have diminished. In order to make the other feel bad about what has transpired, Chick and Teddy go to the same party with dates. Chick brings the camp flirt Gussie with him to the party, and he attempts to make Teddy very jealous. Likewise, while at the party Teddy begins a flirtation with Pinkie in order to make Chick think she is over him. Their plans, of course, backfire on both of

them, but in Teddy's case, the repercussions are far more serious and potentially damaging.

To get away from Chick and Gussie, Teddy accompanies Pinkie back to his cabin. Of course, Chick follows her, and the two have another verbal battle that ends with increasing anger on both sides. Once Chick leaves, Teddy's anger begins to subside, and she is getting ready to depart when Mr. G., another of the Camp Kare-Free guests, comes to Pinkie's room. Teddy does not want Mr. G. to see her, for as she says, "My God, what'll he think—me in my pajamas!" (728). Teddy does not care if Chick knows where she is or not because she is angry with him, and knowing how much Chick dislikes Pinkie, she uses the opportunity to make Chick jealous. However, Mr. G.'s knowing she is in Pinkie's room with only her pajamas on is a different matter altogether. Mr. G. is a respectable man, but he is a gossip, and if he discovers where Teddy is, he may inadvertently blurt it to the whole camp, which is eventually what happens.

Because she is worried that Mr. G. may see her going back to her own cabin and due to the terrible weather that is raging outside, Teddy waits in Pinkie's room until she can find a break in the storm to go back to her room. Unfortunately, she falls asleep, as does Pinkie, and while nothing of a sexual nature happens between them, Teddy is mortified the next morning when she awakes on the men's side of the camp. To avoid scandal, Teddy does not even rouse Pinkie to let him know she is going to attempt to sneak back to her room without being noticed. Instead, she swims half-way around the camp to keep everyone from seeing her. Like everything else she has done since the previous evening, this too ends with near-disastrous results.

When Pinkie wakes up, he realizes that Teddy is no longer there, so he goes to her

bunk to make sure she has made it back safely. At this point, however, Teddy has not returned, and Pinkie inadvertently makes Fay think that Teddy may have drowned. Fay, in an effort to find her friend, informs Chick that Teddy is missing, and she tells him that it is his fault because of the way he and Teddy behaved the night before. She says,

> FAY: There's no sign of anybody on the lake. Pinkie, we've got to do something. We've got to see Mr. Tobias and tell him Teddy's drowned—
>
> CHICK: Teddy's what? What're you talking about?
>
> FAY (furiously): You're the real cause of this! If Teddy's drowned it's because she hadda swim all the way back fomm [sic] Pinkie's bunk so that you wouldn't know where she spent the night! (737)

Moments later, Teddy walks into the room dripping wet from her swim, but she is also relieved because she thinks she has managed to salvage her reputation. Her relief is short lived, though, because now Chick knows where Teddy has been, and he is furious with her. Pinkie tries to reassure Chick that Teddy is still "pure," but Chick storms out of the room without listening. To make matters worse for Teddy, it is at this very moment that her ex-fiancée Sam Rappaport arrives at the camp.

Sam is waiting for Teddy in the dining room where, unfortunately, Mr. G. is holding court reporting the scandal he has witnessed between Pinkie and Teddy. At first, Mr. G. does not say Teddy's name, but he accidently lets her name slip loudly enough for Sam and all the other campers to hear:

> MR. G.: I'm saying something fomm [sic] the girl? I'm telling her name? I'm just saying was a young lady coming from Pinkie's place, and she was

there a whole night. That's all. (He rises. Mrs. G. also pushes chair back and gets to her feet.)

SCHMUTZ: Why dincha say something to her?

MR. G.: I said something to her. I gave out a scrimm [sic], "Teddy!" (There is a violent reaction from Mrs. G.) But she din hear. (Sam slowly lowers his saturated roll.)

MRS. G.: Mr. Dope! You're not saying the name, hah?

MR. G.: It—it slipt out by me.

MRS. G.: Why you don't advettice it in noocepapers? (Exits slowly left followed out by Mr. G.) Why you don't make a spitch bime radio should the whole woild know Teddy Stern was in Pinkie's bungalow a whole night? (Sam freezes, unable to dig into his roll. Schmutz, marveling at the news, turns to him.)

SCHMUTZ: Gee, does that Pinkie knock 'em over! You don't know this dame, but to look at her you'd think she was sweet Miss Innocence herself. Still, you never can tell! (740-41)

Based on the waiter Schmutz's reaction to Mr. G.'s announcement, Pinkie's reputation will not suffer because of this tryst. Instead, Schmutz has the deepest admiration for Pinkie's skills with the ladies, and Schmutz's words indicate Teddy is hardly the first woman Pinkie allegedly has had. However, Schmutz's remarks show no admiration for Teddy. Rather, his opinion, and likely everyone else's too, is that she is no longer innocent. She is a hussy, and once that name is associated with a woman, her reputation has gone down the drain. To complicate matters for Teddy, not only does the camp know

she has spent an entire evening alone with a man, but Sam Rappaport also knows. While the matter might have died away at the camp and have become just another sordid affair, Sam's knowledge of the ordeal may make her situation back home difficult as well. He may tell her family, her friends, and everyone else he knows; by doing so, he would ruin Teddy where it matters most—in her own society.

When Teddy enters the dining room to see Sam, he does not hesitate to report what he has overheard from Mr. G. At first, Sam tells her that he is shocked by the news, but then he says something even worse that shows exactly how men of his day felt about scandalized women:

> SAM (brooding, his head on hand): I felt you acted kinda hasty about that engagement proposition, Tessie, so I went and had a long talk with your mama. I promised her I'd drive up here and stay a week. Maybe you and me, we still could get together on our deal—(Charlie and Chick can be heard in an argument. Teddy stands at kitchen door listening) our engagement. But I dunno. (The determined Sam now rises) I'm a business man, Tessie. With me my merchandise must be in A-1 condition or else no sale.
>
> TEDDY: That's fine.
>
> SAM: The same is true with this marriage business. So what happens? I come here, and this elderly party tells me my goods ain't like in the invoice! (742)

Sam is appalled at the idea that Teddy may no longer be a virgin, and he reinforces the point when he tells her that he expects his "merchandise" to be in mint condition or,

otherwise, he will not take her. Sam demeans Teddy by putting her on the same level as manufactured possessions. He calls her his "goods," and if he suspects that his property, in this case her, has been spoiled, then he will not have her. Based on what Sam has said, single women of this period were seen by many as little more than property. A woman's value lay in what she could give her husband, which was especially her virginity, and if she did not have it or if there was a question as to her purity, then a man might refuse her on that value alone.

Although things look dire for Teddy at this point, Sam reluctantly states that he will "forget what I heard" about Teddy's supposed affair with Pinkie (742). He tells Teddy that they are leaving, and while he goes to get the car, Teddy comes face-to-face with Chick again. As is typical of the two, an argument ensues. Yet this time, it is Teddy who has the last word. Tired of the accusations and wanting to set Chick straight, she tells him in front of everyone in the dining room,

> TEDDY: I've stood just about enough of your insults. Now I'm going to tell you something. Nothing happened between me and that Pinkie—not one single, solitary thing. I couldn't leave his bunk because it was pouring, and he wouldn't even give me his coat to put over my pajamas. But I'll tell you this how much money means to me! I was in that bunk, thinking and thinking, and I kept wishing I could get away and see you, and talk to you, and tell you how sorry I was because I behaved so silly on Eagle Rock. I was going to ask you to marry me, money or no money, 'cause I had a job, and I'd be willing to go on working just to support you. But I wasn't willing to wait a whole year for Sam—and he earns a very nice living.

> And the reason I wouldn't wait, in spite of my mother's begging me and begging me, was that way down deep in my heart I didn't love Sam. (Her voice breaking) But for you, I'd work my fingers to the bone. So that's how much money means to me, Chick Kessler! (Tearfully) And now, please do me a favor, and go to hell! (744)

Naturally, Teddy does not really wish for Chick to go to hell, but she is outraged by Chick's treatment, and she has stood all she can. At this moment, she makes it clear to all listening that she has not done anything to ruin her name, and she also demonstrates how much Chick means to her. Chick loves Teddy as well, but he could choose to ignore what she has said considering that Teddy has spent the night with Pinkie. Teddy's future is uncertain at best. Should Chick refuse to believe Teddy, then she will retain the label of hussy. However, if he considers all that she has said and decides to forgive her, then her honor and dignity will be restored. Taking into account that the play is a comedy, the audience should not be surprised when the playwright gives Teddy a reprieve and something more: a husband.

After Teddy's declamation, Chick comes to Teddy's side, forgives her, and asks for forgiveness himself:

> CHICK: Aw, Teddy—Teddy, baby. I can't stand it when you cry. (She checks her tears) I didn't mean it, darling. I swear I didn't mean it. I was so jealous, I didn't know what I was saying.
>
> SCHMUTZ (again crossing the stage): Well, there goes the bus!
>
> TEDDY: Honestly, Chick, nothing happened. I just didn't wanna catch pneumonia, that's all.

> CHICK: I know, baby. I could tear my tongue out for saying such mean things.
>
> TEDDY: I didn't mean them either—all except our getting married. Oh, I meant that all right. (744-45)

Teddy and Chick continue to patch up their relationship, and the audience is left knowing that the two will eventually get married. Hence, for Teddy, their ending is the material of fairy tales where they will "live happily ever after."

While things worked out for Teddy in Kober's *"Having Wonderful Time"* and for Muriel in *Ah, Wilderness!*, episodes occur when things are dangerously close to disaster for both girls. Instead, Teddy and Muriel get their men, and the question of whether or not they will get married is resolved in the affirmative. Their futures are guaranteed, and while both may have minor difficulties such as financial issues, they do not have to worry about people in their society disapproving of them because they have achieved the one thing most important to women of their day: marital status. Of course, not all women of this period were as fortunate as Teddy and Muriel, and the challenges women faced when on the wrong side of society's approval were sometimes dire. The way society treats women who are not successful in obtaining marital bliss, and who have the looseness of morals to become sexually promiscuous, is the subject for the next chapter entitled "Loose Women."

CHAPTER IV: LOOSE WOMEN

Although keeping their reputation socially intact was the goal of most young women in the 1930s, not all women were able to do so. Because of different life circumstances or because of the nature of the woman herself, some women became sexually active before their marriages. People in society had an extremely negative view in regards to these women, and once achieving a notorious status for their sexual innuendos, most saw little hope of a return to polite society. Why did premarital sex bring such devastating results to the women of the 1930s when the women of the 1920s, many of whom had become notorious for living fast and loose, saw little repercussion for their antics? In *Virtue under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes*, author John Costello suggests the overindulgence of the previous decade may have been why the 1930s saw a backlash in social expectations. He says:

> Britain's postwar prosperity lasted only long enough to effect a mild moral thaw before the rigors of Depression restored some of the frigidity of the Victorian social climate....On neither side of the Atlantic was sex education considered a suitable subject to be taught in school. The Depression...ensured that the thirties were a decade of moral, as well as economic, retrenchment....Prudery was still considered a public virtue. (4-5)

Because moral uprightness reemerged, women engaging in sexual promiscuity after the debauchery of the Roaring Twenties felt the sting of society's fortitude, which is why the issue of "loose" women is featured in many of the plays of the 1930s. S. N. Behrman's two works *Biography* and *End of Summer* as well as Clare Boothe's *The Women*

highlight the subject, but the one play which explores this topic more fully than the others is Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!* Through the character of Belle, O'Neill shows society's general opinion of a woman who has fallen from grace.

In the play, Richard is first introduced to the idea of becoming involved with Belle through his older brother Arthur's college friend Wint. Home for the Fourth of July holiday, Wint has decided to spend a night of debauchery with two "swift babes" he knows. The only problem is that because there are two girls, he needs a friend to take along with him in order to entertain one of them. Arthur is busy visiting with his girlfriend and her family, so Wint turns to a young, naïve, and recently heartbroken Richard to assist him. Wint introduces the idea to Richard in Act II of the play:

> WINT: Want to come along with me? (Then quickly) I'm not trying to lead you astray, understand. But it'll be a help if you would just sit around with Belle and feed her a few drinks while I'm off with Edith. (He winks) See what I mean? You don't have to do anything, not even take a glass of beer—unless you want to.
>
> RICHARD (boastfully): Aw, what do you think I am—a rube?
>
> WINT: You mean you're game for anything that's doing?
>
> RICHARD: Sure I am!
>
> WINT: Ever been out with any girls—I mean, real swift ones that there's something doing with, not these dead Janes around here? (301-302)

Although Richard answers Wint's question with an affirmative response, he has never been involved with any woman. His heart has always been set on his sweetheart Muriel, a decent girl who has never even allowed him to kiss her, but events earlier in the day seem

to have destroyed any possibility of him ever seeing Muriel again. Due to his emotional distress, Richard quickly agrees to go along with Wint. While Richard may be playing along in an effort to distract his broken heart, he does not have a realistic understanding of the type of women to whom Wint is referring.

Wint is fairly explicit in his meaning, though. When he tells Richard that he wants him to entertain Belle while he is "off with Edith," Richard should understand that Wint's intentions toward Edith are purely sexual. Wint also hints that Richard does not have to do anything unless he wants to do it, which could include anything from drinking a beer to having sex with Belle. In addition, Richard should understand Wint's implications towards the girls when he dubs Belle and Edith "swift babes," for he means that the girls are fast or sexually promiscuous. The fact that Wint is able to go out and have sex with girls like Edith illustrates the double-standard between sexually promiscuous men and women. Regardless of his faults and fancies, Wint's status as a man allows him to do as he pleases, and no one will think the less of him. In *A History of Women in America*, Carol Hymowitz and Michaele Weissman reinforce this duality in the way men and women were held accountable for their sex lives.

> Women were victimized by archaic notions of sexuality. The society defined women almost exclusively by their sexual roles. A man who visited a prostitute...was quite acceptable; a woman who was a prostitute was a criminal. A man who had sexual affairs was tolerated and even admired; a woman who had affairs was liable to social ignominy. (287)

Hence, Wint and Richard will not experience the ostracism Belle or Edith may encounter because of these unwritten but socially accepted rules. In the 1930s men were expected to

be "bolder, less pure, less refined" than their female counterparts (Lynd and Lynd 177). Because of the sexual license allowed them, many men thought nothing of buying the services of a prostitute, and finding one certainly became easier during the Depression when multitudes of women took to the streets in order to survive (163).

The scene continues with Wint explaining the situation to Richard by telling him that the girls they will be meeting are not "dead Janes" like the girls Richard is accustomed to being around. In other words, Richard should not expect Belle to be like Muriel, and this is certainly what he figures out when he meets Belle for the first time.

The portrait O'Neill paints of Belle in the opening of Act III, Scene 1, of the play is anything but positive. O'Neill rattles off her description as thus: "Belle is twenty, a rather pretty peroxide blonde, a typical college 'tart' of the period, and of the cheaper variety, dressed with tawdry flashiness. But she is a fairly recent recruit to the ranks, and is still a bit remorseful behind her make-up and defiantly careless manner" (313). In his description, O'Neill calls Belle a "tart," which was a slang term for prostitute in the 1930s (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Not only does the author describe her in such a manner as to make her sluttish inclinations apparent, he goes so far as to insult her even further when he says that she is of the "cheaper variety." O'Neill pushes her down the social scale as far as he can by making her appear to be extremely cheap and flashy. Also, the fact that Belle dyes her hair "peroxide blonde" and wears make-up indicates that her character is less than reputable. At least, this is the implication O'Neill seems to make through his detailed description of Belle.

When Belle and Richard begin to interact, she does several things that, if the reader were in doubt of her profession, would no longer make one wonder what she is

about. First, she begins singing along to the song "Bedelia," and the line she directs toward Richard is "Bedelia, I'd like to feel yer" (314). Once she has finished the line, she turns to Richard and inquires suggestively if he has ever heard the song or that line before. While Richard says he has, what is truly telling is his reaction to hearing a woman singing such a bawdy tune. O'Neill describes Richard as being "shocked at hearing a girl say them [the lines]," and it is instantly clear that Richard has never had any type of dealings with a woman like Belle before this adventure (314).

Not only does Belle sing racy songs, she also smokes. After trying to coax him into liking her, she gets Richard to buy her another drink, and when he tips the bartender more than what is necessary, she scolds Richard by telling him that the tip is too much and will spoil the barman. Richard makes a remark that is appropriate in Belle's eyes, but what ensues after the remark is a shock to Richard:

> RICHARD: Ah, that's all right. I'm no tightwad.
>
> BELLE: That's the talk I like to hear. (With a quick look toward the bar, she stealthily pulls up her dress—to Richard's shocked fascination—and takes a package of cheap cigarettes from her stocking) Keep an eye out for that bartender, Kid, and tell me if you see him coming. Girls are only allowed to smoke upstairs in the rooms, he said. (315)

In this short interaction between the two characters, the reader realizes that, based on Richard's astonished reaction, most girls of Richard's generation still did not smoke; at least, the decent ones with whom he is acquainted did not smoke. He even tries to explain to Belle that smoking is "awful bad for girls" (316). Richard's statement, though true about smoking in general, perhaps signals more precisely that smoking and a bad

reputation seem to go hand in hand for a woman. While the smoking may be a surprise to Richard, Belle's hiding place for her cigarettes appears to be even more of a novelty to him. She keeps her smokes hidden within her stockings, and Richard has probably never seen a female close to his age behave so provocatively in public.

Likewise, what Belle says about the bartender's requirement that girls are only allowed to smoke upstairs in the rooms goes to show what type of establishment he and Belle are patronizing and how familiar Belle is with its values. The "upstairs" is obviously the area where couples engage in sexual activities, and it is only there that females are allowed to behave against social norms. The fact that the bartender has mentioned this to Belle seems to imply that he knows Belle's profession. Of course, the bartender should recognize Belle for a prostitute; in his line of work, he probably sees girls just like her almost every night.

After Richard and Belle finish their drinks, Belle begins to reveal her nature more fully to him. The unsuspecting Richard has tried to ignore most everything Belle has said pertaining to sex up until this point; however, his nervousness is obvious. The tension starts to mount when Belle begins to pour on her charm less discreetly. She sits in his lap and kisses him very passionately on the lips. Unaccustomed to this type of behavior, Richard nearly unseats her as he struggles against her violent hold. Clearly, Richard is in over his head with a vixen like Belle, and while he has not managed to get himself into any serious trouble at this juncture, it is only a matter of a few lines before Belle attempts to push Richard into crossing into indecency.

Belle makes everything explicit when she brings up the issue of the rooms again.

She tells Richard about their true purpose, and she makes it no secret what she wants Richard to do at this point:

> BELLE (kissing him again): Just think of the wonderful time Edith and your friend, Wint, are having upstairs—while we sit down here like two dead ones. A room only costs two dollars. And, seeing I like you so much, I'd only take five dollars—from you. I'd do it for nothing—for you—only I've got to live and I owe rent in New Haven—and you know how it is. I get ten dollars from everyone else. Honest! (She kisses him again, then gets up from his lap briskly) Come on. Go out and tell the bartender you want a room. And hurry. Honest, I'm so strong for you I can hardly wait to get you upstairs! (317)

Belle makes it completely evident to Richard that her goal for the evening is for them to have sex and for him to pay her for it. Belle is thus a prostitute, since she straightforwardly asks for money for sex. She tries to make Richard think that she truly likes him, which may make her overtures appear a little more acceptable to him, but the truth of the matter is that she will say whatever it takes to get him to take her upstairs. In addition, she tries to soften the situation by telling Richard that she will only charge him five dollars instead of her normal fee of ten because she likes him so much. Then she endeavors to make her actions seem less objectionable by explaining that the only reason she is doing this is because she needs the money for her rent.

One might almost be tempted to feel sorry for Belle, for she seems to be in a financial and social position over which she has very little control. The audience is never told how Belle has come to be in this situation, but O'Neill may have left out this

information on purpose, knowing that it should not matter to the audience. Instead, the audience is to focus on the behavior itself, and because the behavior condemns the woman, nothing else, even her circumstances, is supposed to matter to the viewer. In other words, Belle is not a sympathetic character; she is a prostitute plain and simple. O'Neill does not intend for decent people to feel anything towards Belle except disgust, and for that reason, her circumstances remain unknown. She has gotten herself into this mess, and now society will only allow her to typecast it. She will never again be deemed as acceptable by polite society.

At the same time, O'Neill does make it harder for the audience to like Belle because of her next actions. When Richard refuses to get the room, Belle turns on him and calls him names. In particular, she insults him by calling him a "cheap skate" and a "piker" (317). She removes the lie of her supposedly liking him by making the money the sole focus of her interest. She tells Richard:

> BELLE: Keep me around here all night fooling with you when I might be out with some real live ones—if there is such a thing in this burg!—and now you quit on me! Don't be such a piker! You've got five dollars! I seen it when you paid for the drinks, so don't hand me any lies!
>
> RICHARD: I—Who said I hadn't? And I'm not a piker. If you need the five dollars so bad—for your room rent—you can have it without—I mean, I'll be glad to give—(He has been fumbling in his pocket and pulls out his nine-dollar roll and holds out the five to her).
>
> BELLE (hardly able to believe her eyes, almost snatches it from his hand—then laughs and immediately becomes sentimentally grateful):

> Thanks, Kid. Gee—oh thanks—Gee forgive me for losing my temper and bawling you out, will you? You're the nicest kid I've ever met! (317)

In the opening of this scene, Belle is indignant that she is wasting her efforts on Richard. She needs someone who will pay her for her time, and once she realizes Richard is not going to take her up on the offer to go upstairs, she concludes that her chances of making any money for the evening are almost certainly gone. With the ruse up, her true side begins to show, and her anger at losing out on a financial opportunity dispels the lie of her liking him. She is there solely for the money, and her anger increases because she knows that Richard has the money to pay her. What Belle does not understand is that Richard is not being a cheap skate, but, rather she is battling his moral principles.

When Richard willingly gives Belle the money without requiring sex, Belle, as O'Neill makes plain, can hardly believe her good fortune. She is going to get paid without having to do anything, certainly an unexpected turn of events for her. Belle yet again verges on being a sympathetic character, for one realizes through her enthusiasm that she is in desperate need of the money. For a moment, she seems almost jovial and innocent; however, O'Neill does not allow this illusion to last for long. He immediately turns around and shows her still trying to capitalize on the situation.

Knowing that she has most certainly gotten all that she can get from Richard, she looks around for other opportunities, which she spots almost immediately. While she and Richard have been engaged in conversation, a man has entered the bar and started eyeing her. O'Neill paints their acknowledgement of one another as thus:

> The BARTENDER nods toward BELLE, giving the SALESMAN a wink. The SALESMAN grins and comes into the room, carrying his highball in

> his hand. He is a stout, jowly-faced man in his late thirties, with the professional breeziness and jocular, kid-'em-along manner of his kind. BELLE looks up as he enters and he and she exchange a glance of complete recognition. She knows his type by heart and he knows hers. (319)

After blowing off Richard, she makes her intentions to the salesman quite clear. Their understanding of one another shows the reader that Belle is good at her business, for she can recognize a financial opportunity when she sees one. Not willing to let the chance to make more money pass her by, Belle engages the salesman's attention, and at this point, it becomes even clearer to the audience that if all she needed was money to pay her rent, then what she got freely from Richard should have been enough to keep her from having to employ her services for the night. Instead, O'Neill shows Belle for what she truly is, a money-hungry, loose woman.

What Belle does not take into account in this scene, however, is that Richard is more of a gentleman than what she bargained for. To be with the salesman, she has to make Richard disappear, so she tells him that the salesman is "an old friend" of hers, but Richard does not believe it (319). He tells the salesman that he knows they do not know one another, and he has figured out their intentions. He even claims that he will protect Belle from the salesman. Instead of being touched by his chivalry, Belle mocks him for it; he is standing in her way of earning more money, and she will not allow him to keep her from capitalizing on this chance for further income.

In the interaction that follows, the jig is finally up for Belle. When the salesman and the bartender realize that Richard is the son of the town's most influential

newspaperman, they change their attitude, and to alleviate their own feelings about the situation, they attack Belle's character. They blame her for getting Richard drunk and leading him down what is generally known as "the wrong path." The salesman calls her a "lowbrow" (320). Meanwhile, the bartender refers to her as a "lousy tramp'; next, he threatens to call the police on her for "streetwalking" (321). Even Richard himself lands a blow on her character by telling her that she should reform her ways (316).

Belle cannot prevail in this situation. Because Richard is an upstanding young man of decent society and because Belle is a member of the debauched class, she finds herself in a winless circumstance. Only a few moments earlier, the bartender and the salesman were willing to help Belle give Richard a hard time. Yet when the tables turn, Belle finds herself on the wrong end of the condition. She is a nobody, a woman of ill-repute, a "tart." As such, she cannot expect people who are manifestly like her, in this case the bartender and the salesman, to be on her side when there is any risk to them, and clearly, as the salesman points out, they do run a risk because Richard's father could print the facts of the evening in his paper if he selected to do so and ruin them both. With their names and business ventures at stake, the two men turn on Belle and leave her standing alone on the wrong side of this moral dilemma.

Belle, however, does not take their behaviors lightly. She tries to get revenge on the bartender for kicking her out by leaving a note for Nat, Richard's father, at the newspaper office. In the note, she tells him how and where Richard got drunk; of course, she neglects to tell her part in the sordid affair, yet she does take the time to call the bartender a "bastard" (334). Instead of being angry at the bartender for his part, Nat and Sid, who has been listening to Nat read the note, spend more time examining Belle's

character than thinking about how to avenge themselves on the bartender. Nat says that the boy who took the note from Belle described her as a "tart," and Sid says, "She's one of the babies, all right—judging from her elegant language" (334). Again, she is referred to as a tramp, and Sid says the place where she was with Richard is nothing but a "bed house,"' which means a house of ill-repute (334). Instead of concerning themselves with the bartender or his establishment, both Nat and Sid are worried about the type of girl Richard has been around. They recognize the complications of Richard hanging out with prostitutes, and, consequently, they decide to have a real discussion with him on the dangers of loose women.

The long awaited talk comes at the end of the play. Nat finally sits Richard down for a heart-to-heart discussion about dangerous women such as Belle. The conversation between them is very difficult, for Nat finds it hard and almost humiliating to discuss sex and the seedier side of life with his son. However, once he begins, Nat makes it clear to Richard that girls like Belle are nothing to be trifled with. Nat tells Richard:

> MILLER: Richard, you have now come to the age when—Well, you're a fully developed man, in a way, and it's only natural for you to have certain desires of the flesh, to put it that way—I mean, pertaining to the opposite sex—certain natural feelings and temptations—that'll want to be gratified—and you'll want to gratify them. Hmm—well, human society being organized the way it is there's only one outlet for—unless you're a scoundrel and go around ruining decent girls—which you're not, of course. Well, there are a certain class of women—always have been always will be as long as human nature is what it is—It's wrong, maybe,

> but what can you do about it? I mean, girls like that one—girls there's something doing with—and lots of 'em are pretty, and it's human nature if you—But that doesn't mean to ever get mixed up with them seriously! You just have what you want and pay 'em and forget it. (354)

Nat's instructions to Richard leave no guess work as to how he should handle women like Belle. To begin with, Nat recognizes that, as an adolescent, Richard will have sexual desires. Nat hopes Richard will try to subdue his desires; however, being realistic, he does not even address this hope to Richard. Instead, he tells Richard that it is natural for him to engage in sex, but he cautions that Richard should only do so with prostitutes and without getting emotionally attached to them.

What is interesting in Nat's warning to Richard is how far his words dehumanize prostitutes. From what Nat says, prostitutes cannot be seen as real women with actual emotions. Instead, Nat says Richard should view any interaction with them as a business transaction and nothing more. He tells Richard to sleep with them, pay them their fee, and forget about them. However, he does not want Richard falling in love with loose women, for they are so lowly that they do not matter enough in the general scheme of things to warrant a respectable man's affections. Furthermore, Nat seems to imply that it does not matter how Richard treats women like Belle because they do not have feelings anyhow.

In his defense, however, Nat does not place the sole blame for prostitutes' conditions on the prostitutes themselves. Instead, Nat implies that society has helped cause the problem. He says that because society is arranged as it is, a young man can only gratify his sexual cravings with a prostitute. To explain this further, Nat tells Richard that he should not "go around ruining decent girls," by which he means a girl who comes

from a socially accepted family. As has been explained in the previous chapter in reference to "decent" girls, a good girl knows better than to engage in pre-marital sex because of the damage it can do to her reputation, and if her reputation is lost, then so is she. Therefore, a socially accepted young lady is not going to have sex before she marries, which leaves, for young men like Richard, no alternative except to explore other venues for their sexual desires. Prostitutes do not generally hail from good families; rather, they are often thrown into the business because they are from poor families or because of other difficult life circumstances that force them into this line of work. They typically do not have any other alternatives. Yet, though the fault may not be entirely the prostitute's own, society in general, and people like Nat and his family in particular, blames the woman for what she is doing. The general belief is that she deserves to be looked down upon because a decent girl would have found a way around such dire circumstances. Nat acknowledges society's contribution to the condition of women like Belle; however, he remains unsympathetic, for he says it is neither right nor wrong, simply just the way it is.

To round out this momentous interchange between Nat and Richard, one other thing that the audience should notice is how the double standard continues to show itself. Again, Nat does not blame Richard for being involved with Belle; instead, it is more important to Nat that Richard simply not become emotionally attached to her. The fact that Richard may have had sex or even that he may do so in the near future is not that much of a concern for Nat because Richard's reputation will not suffer for it. Society holds Richard and all men to a different set of standards than to what it holds women. Richard can have sex with as many prostitutes as he wants without any real danger being

done to his name, but when a woman engages in the same behavior, she must reap society's disapproval. She will wallow in her mistakes for the rest of her life because that is all society lets her do. For women like Belle, regardless of how they got in their situations, one thing for them is usually the same—most of them are likely stay in that condition for the rest of their lives.

Whereas Belle is a prostitute who sells her body for money, not all women who were considered morally loose were condemned to her fate. Other types of loose women existed who had nothing to do with prostitution; some women engaged in promiscuous behavior, but they did not charge for sex. Instead, many of these women used sex as a tool to ameliorate their social standings, and some even engaged in sex with multiple partners basically because they enjoyed it. The latter of those two types of women describes Marion Froude, the main character of S. N. Behrman's 1932 drama entitled *Biography*. In this play, Marion does as she pleases with whom she pleases when she pleases, yet the end result for her is not one of complete disaster. Although Marion does earn herself a bad reputation, the difference with her is that, unlike Belle, she does not care what other people think and her erratic but adequate income protects her from the consequences.

Marion is a semi-successful artist, but more so because of her notoriety than for her skill. She has painted some of the most famous people of her day, the majority of whom have been men in very powerful positions. For example, she has painted Lenin, Mussolini, and Shaw. Because her way of life has been full of travel as well as adventure, she has gained a reputation as a "bohemian," which Marion takes in stride. In fact, she does not see herself as doing anything wrong; as she explains to Leander Nolan, one of

her old flames, "You know perfectly well I'm not evil. Causal—maybe—but not evil" (223).

Although people in society at that time liked nothing more than to condemn an unmarried woman for enjoying herself, Marion is not the type of woman to feel the brunt of anyone's disapproval. Her attitude and spirit are too carefree, and she is too lighthearted to be encumbered by anyone's criticisms. However, this does not prevent her from feeling some of the repercussions of her behavior. Times occur when she borders on being penniless, which is due to a lack of commissions from those who cannot pay; and it is the ones who cannot pay who hold her in disapproval. In fact, when the play opens, Marion is on the verge of destitution; yet, even with this fear imminent, Marion does not seem to worry about her prospects. Rather, she holds to the belief that something will turn up for her eventually, and she is right: two financial opportunities present themselves.

The first financial venture comes in the form of Leander Nolan. While Leander does not visit Marion with the intention of engaging her in a commission, it is the end result of their visitation. While the commission solves the problem of Marion's financial woes at present, that is not why Nolan visits. Instead, he has come to talk to Marion about their past liaisons.

Nolan, or Bunny as Marion calls him, was one of Marion's earliest boyfriends. Back home in Tennessee, the two had made love shortly before Marion departed for her career. Nolan believes that it is because of him, and their actions together, that Marion has become a fallen woman. He is almost beside himself with the shame of it, for he feels that had he not had pre-marital sex with her, perhaps Marion would not have become

what she is. While a man might regret being the cause of a woman's fall from grace, his visit is unusual because he has come to her after fifteen years to discuss it. Obviously, Marion meant a lot to him when they were younger, but the opposite may have been true for her. In fact, in their initial encounter, Marion does not even recognize Nolan:

> NOLAN: How are you, Marion?
>
> MARION (delicately): Er—do I know you?
>
> NOLAN: Yes. You know me.
>
> MARION: Oh yes—of course!
>
> NOLAN: About time!
>
> MARION (brightly insecure): Lady Winchester's garden party at Ascot—two summers ago....
>
> NOLAN: Guess again!
>
> MARION: No—I know you perfectly well—it's just that—no, don't tell me....(She covers her eyes with her hand, trying to conjure him out of the past).
>
> NOLAN: This is astonishing. If someone had said to me that I could walk into a room in front of Marion Froude and she not know me I'd have told 'em they were crazy...!
>
> MARION (desperately): I do know you. I know you perfectly well—it's just that...
>
> NOLAN: You'll be awful sore at yourself—I warn you...
>
> MARION: I can't forgive myself now—I know!
>
> NOLAN: I don't believe it!

MARION: The American Embassy dinner in Rome on the Fourth of July—last year—you sat on my right!

NOLAN: I did not!

MARION (miserably): Well, you sat somewhere. Where did you sit?

NOLAN: I wasn't there.

MARION: Well, I think it is very unkind of you to keep me in suspense like this. I can't bear another second.

NOLAN: I wouldn't have believed it! (216-217)

While this interchange between the two might not at first appear to be significant, it does two things. First, it establishes how much Marion has traveled and shows the cultural diversity and social status of the people with whom she has interacted. The second thing the interchange shows is that Marion must have been with quite a few men in order to have forgotten the man who, as Nolan believes, took her virginity. The relationship meant a great deal to Nolan, and Marion may have been his first sexual partner; to validate that idea, the author signifies that Nolan has not forgotten her in all these years. On the other hand, Marion does not recall him. Nolan has to drop several hints before she finally realizes who he is, which leads one to believe that the relationship was much less significant to her than it was to him.

Later in this same scene, Nolan comes to the point about his true reason for visiting Marion: he believes it is his fault that she has become a woman of dubious reputation. At first, he seems unsure how to approach the topic delicately, for although he considers Marion a loose woman, she is still a woman he knows, and at one time

respected. He begins by letting her know that he has kept up with her exploits by discussing her relationships with foreigners:

> NOLAN: You've been a lot with foreigners, haven't you?
>
> MARION: A good deal...
>
> NOLAN: Funny, I don't understand that.
>
> MARION: Foreigners are people, you know, Bunny. Some of 'em are rather nice. (219)

Although not said outright, accusation resounds in Nolan's voice. He does not understand Marion or her need to be involved with so many people, especially foreigners. Nolan appears to think that people from other countries are not respectable individuals with whom Marion should engage herself, which does not mean that he believes that Marion would be comporting herself any better if she had selected multitudes of Americans with whom to have sex. He simply implies that foreigners are much worse.

As the conversation proceeds, Nolan's disapproval of Marion's behavior becomes clearer. Although he would rather use euphemisms to cover the baldness of her behaviors, Marion simply will not let him. In her direct way, she acknowledges to Nolan that her reputation has been "racy," yet she does not apologize for it (220). Her attitude confounds Nolan, and rather than continuing to skirt around the problem, he attacks her conduct more openly:

> NOLAN: You didn't even know me!
>
> MARION: Complete surprise! After all I've been to New York many times during these years and never once—never once have you come near

me. You've dropped me all these years. (With a sigh) I'm afraid, Bunny, your career has been too much with you.

NOLAN (grimly): So has yours!

MARION: I detect an overtone—faint but unmistakable—of moral censure.

NOLAN (same tone): Well, I suppose it's impossible to live one's life in art without being sexually promiscuous! (He looks at her accusingly.)

MARION: Oh, dear me, Bunny! What shall I do? Shall I blush? Shall I hang my head in shame? What shall I do? How does one react in the face of an appalling accusation of this sort? I didn't know the news had got around so widely...

NOLAN: Well, so many of your lovers have been famous men...

MARION: Well, you were obscure...But you're famous now, aren't you? I seem to be stimulating if nothing else.... (220-221)

Nolan has passed judgment on Marion's behaviors. He says she has been "sexually promiscuous," and the tone of his voice implies his disapproval. He seems to be trying to wound her with his knowledge of her actions. Perhaps another woman in that era would feel ashamed of her behaviors, but Marion is not that woman. She does not allow herself to be bothered by what he says. Even though her reply might sound like she seriously ponders how she should react to his accusations, she does not blush or act ashamed. Rather, Marion appears to be proud of what she has done and with whom she has done it. While some might believe Marion's flippancy is her coping mechanism or defense against his onslaught, such is not the case. Marion truly does not care what anyone thinks

about her, and for that reason, she has lived her life as she has wanted without too much fear of the drawbacks of such an existence.

Nolan, though, has evidently worried about her reputation. In an effort to make her see reason, he points out to her that everyone knows of her scandalous liaisons because most of the men she has been with have been famous. She responds by pointing out that Nolan himself was not famous when she had sex with him, and she goes further to imply that, perhaps, the demise of his relationship with her may have helped catapult him into working harder to attain a higher status. Indeed, just a few lines later, he tells her that he believes his lack of status caused her to run away from him in the first place. He says, "If I had then some of the fame I have now you probably wouldn't have walked out on me at the last minute the way you did" (221). Nolan wrongly believes that Marion seeks out prominent and powerful men for escapades, and because he was neither, he thinks this is why she left him. Yet as she explains to him, she left him for his own good:

> MARION: In justice to myself—I must tell you this—the reason I walked out on you in the summary way I did was not, as you've suggested, because I doubted your future—it was obvious to me, even then, that you were destined for mighty things—but the reason was that I felt a disparity in our characters not conducive to matrimonial contentment. You see how right I was. I suspected in myself a—a tendency to explore, a spiritual and physical wanderlust—that I knew would horrify you once you found it out. It horrifies you now when we are no longer anything to each other. (221-222)

While Marion has not minded that her own name has been besmirched by her casualness,

she did not want anyone else to suffer because of her inconstant nature. She also suspected that she would have either cheated on Nolan or otherwise embarrassed him had they married. In her mind, she did the honorable thing by running away from him. His view of her response, however, is more romantic. He believes that if they had stayed together, they could have done all she wanted to do jointly. She makes it clear to him, though, that this would have never been the case. Her nature, as she points out, would not have allowed it. She tries to disillusion him into accepting the reality of their differences.

> MARION: I wouldn't have stood for a fiancée [sic], Bunny dear—not even I am as promiscuous as that...
>
> NOLAN: Don't use that word!
>
> MARION: But, Leander! It's your own!
>
> NOLAN: Do you think it hasn't been on my conscience ever since, do you think it hasn't tortured me...!
>
> MARION: What, dear?
>
> NOLAN: That thought!
>
> MARION: Which thought?
>
> NOLAN: Every time I heard about you—all the notoriety that's attended you in the American papers...painting pictures of Communist statesmen, running around California with movie comedians!
>
> MARION: I have to practice my profession, Bunny. One must live, you know. Besides, I've done Capitalist statesmen too. And at Geneva...
>
> NOLAN (darkly): You know what I mean...!

> MARION: You mean...(She whispers through her cupped hand) you mean promiscuous? (222)

By conventional society's standards, Marion has had many sordid affairs, and she would have felt terrible had she dishonored him. By not marrying him, she has allowed herself the freedom to follow her own rules. Had she married him, all of the rules would have been Nolan's, and being the way she is, Marion would have broken them. Instead, she left him, and in her mind, did what was right. Still, this is of no comfort to Nolan. He is mortified by what she has become. In his mind, she represents all that is dark and wrong in his society, and he blames himself for her crassness because he believes he introduced her to sexual promiscuity in the first place. Marion will not let him take this responsibility. She tells him, instead, that he was not her first:

> NOLAN (quite literally, with sincere and disarming simplicity): I should be forced, as an honest man, to stand before the multitude and say: In condemning this woman you are condemning me who am asking your suffrages [sic] to represent you. For it was I with whom this woman first sinned before God. As an honorable man that is what I should have to do.
>
> MARION: And has this worried you—actually...!
>
> NOLAN: It's tortured me...!

A few lines later, Nolan goes on to tell her:

> NOLAN (Gloomily contemplating her): I can't forget that it was I who...
>
> MARION: Did you think you were the first, Bunny? Was I so unscrupulously coquettish as to lead you to believe that I—oh, I couldn't have been. It's not like me. (She crosses to right of model stand.)

NOLAN (fiercely): Don't lie to me!

MARION (sitting on stand): Bunny, you frighten me!

NOLAN (stands over her almost threateningly): You're lying to me to salve my conscience but I won't have it! I know my guilt and I'm going to bear it!

MARION: Well, I don't want to deprive you of your little pleasures.... (222-223)

In the first section where Nolan exclaims that he should be held responsible for what Marion has become, Nolan calls their actions a "sin before God" (222). Nolan knows only too well that God would forgive them their sins; all they would have to do would be to ask for forgiveness. However, God is not the one to whom Nolan is confessing. Instead, he says that he should have to stand before the multitudes—a jury of his peers, or more particularly, society. Nolan knows that Marion is not forever condemned in God's eyes, so it is not to God that he is making this mock proclamation. Rather, it is implied that Nolan is more concerned about the opinions of society, and even if he begged the multitudes for Marion's forgiveness, she will never be redeemed of being a loose woman. Nolan himself, however, is not held to the same set of standards to which Marion is chained. As a man, even should he go before the masses and tell of his sexual experiences with Marion, the end result for Nolan would be that of understanding and a reestablishment of his honor. Although the play does not allude to Nolan's having been particularly promiscuous himself, being male Nolan is almost expected to engage in nefarious ways, and society will look the other way. Yet, for the woman with whom he exercised his carnal pleasure, her reputation is soiled forever.

Also interesting in this interchange between Marion and Nolan is his reaction to her announcement that Nolan had not been the one to take her virginity. Because he thinks he is the one who led her down the path to ruination, he has felt guilty for how she has behaved. One would think, therefore, that he would be relieved to know that he was not Marion's first. Instead, he almost explodes with anger, and he goes so far as to threaten Marion, who admits to being frightened by his outburst. The point here is one of vanity. While Nolan regrets Marion's choices, at the same time he will not allow her to rob him of his claim of being the one who deflowered her. He has resigned himself to what Marion has become following their time together, but he cannot accept that she was that way even before he slept with her. He must retain that claim; for him, it is a matter of shame that she is sluttish, but it is also a matter of pride that he took her virginity. He will not let her disillusion him, and after listening to Marion, a reader is hard pressed not to find her brutally honest. Whether he likes it or not, Nolan might realize that Marion may be telling him the truth. In the end, she knows it is pointless to try to convince him otherwise, so she sarcastically gives up the attempt and leaves him with his "little pleasures" (223).

The scene between the two comes to an end with their agreeing on Marion painting a portrait of Nolan. Most likely, the commission will be the only thing they will ever agree upon, for the discussion between them in regards to her character is completely hopeless. Nolan knows what she is, but even when he knows it is pointless, he continues to defend her honor. For example, when her second business venture presents itself, Nolan is still present in Marion's studio. The young man Mr. Kurt, who is there to see her in regards to writing her life story, is rude to her initially, and Kurt's vulgarity

disgusts Nolan. Nolan tells him, "In my day if a boy came in and behaved like this before a lady he'd be horsewhipped" (225). Even though Nolan has distanced himself from Marion over the years, the fact that she was his first love will never change, and neither will his need to defend her, regardless of how futile the cause may be.

After Nolan takes his leave, Kurt tells Marion his offer to make her a rich woman. He wants to write her biography through a ghostwriter for the magazine he edits. His plan is for her to write weekly installments until the work is complete. Marion does not understand why people would want to read about her, for as she points out, her talent as an artist has been dubious at best. Yet, Kurt insists that it is not her art talent with which people will be concerned:

> MARION: But look here, why should you want this story from me—why should anybody be interested?—I'm not a first-rate artist you know—not by far—I'm just clever...
>
> KURT (bluntly): It's not you—it's the celebrity of your subjects....
>
> MARION (amused): You're a brutal young man—I rather like you....
>
> KURT: Well, you've been courageous. You've been forthright. For an American woman you've had a rather extraordinary career—you've done pretty well what you wanted....
>
> MARION: The-Woman-Who-Dared sort of thing.... (228-229)

Kurt is forthright with Marion. People will want to read her biography because of her scandalous affairs with so many famous men. Although her behavior has been shameful to the masses, it is also intriguing to them. Society in that era would never allow her to see herself as anything except a fallen woman, and the desire for her biography is proof

enough of that. However, while people may look down their noses at her, they still find her story deliciously inviting so a work by her would sell. Kurt understands the principle of supply and demand. He knows Marion is a marketable subject, and why should Marion not take an opportunity to make money off those who see her as "The Woman of a Hundred Affairs, The Last of the Great Adventuresses, The Magda Who Wouldn't Go Home"? (230). She would have the last laugh at a society that will never view her as anything more than a notorious slut.

Marion's situation certainly differs from that of Belle's from the play *Ah, Wilderness!*, and one might conclude, therefore, that Marion may be the exception to the idea that all loose women lose their prospects along with their good reputations. While Marion retains the status of being a fallen woman, her career and her finances have not suffered all that much. Marion, though, is not the only ill-behaved woman who maintains this semblance of life's normality. In fact, she is not the only female character whom S. N. Behrman, author of *Biography*, creates. In his 1936 work *End of Summer*, Behrman gives the world Leonie Frothingham. While her background differs from Marion's and although she certainly lacks some of Marion's spunk, Leonie's reputation with men gives the society of her day something to talk about as well.

Before the audience even meets Leonie, the characterization of her as someone who is rather flamboyant with the opposite sex begins to emerge. Leonie's daughter Paula, who is almost twenty, discusses Leonie's ability to attract most men. Paula addresses this notion with her boyfriend Will, who has clearly come under the spell of Leonie himself. She tells him:

PAULA (she turns back): What's on your mind?

> WILL: Wanted to speak to you about something...
>
> PAULA: What?
>
> WILL (embarrassed slightly): Er—your mother....
>
> PAULA: What's Mother gone and done now? Out with it. Or is it you? My boyfriends are always in love with Mother. I've had to contend with that all my life. So if it's that you needn't even mention it...come on. (103)

Paula seems to understand that most men find Leonie alluring. Instead of being upset or even seeing her mother as competition for the males who surround them, Paula has come to terms with her mother's magnetism with men. She understands that Leonie radiates sexual charm, and men respond to it. Even the playwright himself seems to have an affection for Leonie, for when she first appears on the stage, he describes her in great detail:

> Leonie Frothingham, as she has a daughter of nearly twenty, must be herself forty, but, at this moment, she might be sixteen. She is slim, girlish, in a young and quivering ecstasy of living and anticipation....There is something, for all her gaiety, heartbreaking about Leonie, something childish and childlike—an acceptance of people instantly and uncritically at the best of their own valuation. She is impulsive and warm-hearted and generous to a fault. Her own fragile and exquisite loveliness she offers to the world half shyly, tentatively, bearing it like a cup containing a precious liquid of which not a drop must be

> spilled....she is the loveliest fabrication of Nature, happy in the summer sun and loving all the world. (107)

Behrman never spent this much detail on his other vamp, Marion Froude, and his description here implies that Leonie is one of the most captivating creatures on earth. As such, one can hardly be amazed that men lavish attention upon her. With so many men surrounding her, she would be hard pressed indeed not to fall victim to their praise and her own appeal. Hence, Leonie's blessings are also her vices, for the audience quickly learns that Leonie has always had too many men in her life, both in the past and in the present.

For example, one of the most important men in Leonie's life is her husband, Sam. Initially, the revelation that Leonie is married might lead a reader to believe that she cannot really be a loose woman if she has a husband, but that is far from the case. In fact, in the eyes of many people in the society of her time, Leonie would be considered even worse than a character like Belle, who is a true prostitute, because Leonie is married but has multiple affairs. That Leonie and Sam have been living their lives separately for years would not matter to the general public. What would matter is that Leonie has had multiple liaisons while still legally being Sam's wife.

Though many people with conventional attitudes might be irate that Leonie has cheated on her husband, neither she nor Sam has been bothered by it because he too has moved on with his life. Indeed, Sam visits Leonie in order to inform her that he wants a divorce so he can marry the woman he has been living with for several years. Whereas social norms might condemn Leonie for her behavior and ignore Sam's because he is a

man, Sam himself places no blame on Leonie for being indiscreet. He explains this to Paula:

> SAM: We decided very soon after you were born, Leonie and I, that our marriage could only continue on this sort of basis. For your sake we've kept it up. I thought I was content to be an—appendage—to Leonie's entourage. But I'm not—do you know what Selena—being with Selena and planning with Selena for ourselves has made me see—that I've never had a home. Does that sound mawkish?
>
> PAULA: I thought you loved Bay Cottage.
>
> SAM: Of our various ménages this is my favorite—it's the simplest. And I've had fun here with you—watching you grow up. But very soon after I married Leonie I found this out—that when you marry a very rich woman it's always her house you live in. (118)

Sam recognizes that his marriage to Leonie has been a sham. In fact, based on what he says here, he and Leonie agreed to continue their pretense of a marriage only for Paula's sake. Shortly after Paula was born, both of them realized that they could not live together, but instead of ending their marriage formally, they retained the title of husband and wife while living their lives separately.

Their arrangement has not prevented them from pursuing others, and Leonie has seemingly paraded a multitude of men in front of Paula throughout the years. Psychologically, Paula may have been affected by her mother's choices, for even Sam acknowledges that Leonie's behaviors are not the type Paula should see firsthand. He tells Leonie to her face that she is "vain," and he adds, "You've made a career of

flirtation" (132-133). While Sam may not care that Leonie has cheated on him with many men, he does worry about what impact her actions have had on Paula. Yet, Paula appears stable enough, for she herself has not engaged in the erratic behavior she has witnessed in her mother. Indeed, at one point in the play, even Paula chides Leonie for her behavior. Leonie repeats Paula's condemnation to Dr. Kenneth Rice, "She [Paula] said I threw myself at men instead of reversing the process" (161). Even though much younger than her mother, Paula often plays the role of the one who is more mature and sensible.

Of course, one does wonder how many men Leonie has been involved with, and although the audience cannot be certain of this answer, she entangles herself with at least three men during the course of the play. The first man with whom she is involved is Count Boris Mirsky, who is actually living in her home year round. One does not have to wonder whether or not they are lovers, for Paula reveals the answer to this dilemma when Will asks her the question:

> WILL (changing subject—a bit sensitive about having yielded so flagrantly to Leonie): This Russian—
>
> PAULA: What about him?
>
> WILL (gauche): Platonic, do you suppose?
>
> PAULA: Don't be naïve! (116)

Will wonders if Leonie's relationship with Boris is one of mere friendship, but Paula quickly dispels this idea. She tells Will not to be "naïve," thereby implying that he should know well enough that the relationship is sexual.

The second man with whom Leonie involves herself is Dr. Kenneth Rice. After her divorce from Sam becomes finalized, Leonie may remarry whenever she wants. Boris

attempts to pressure her into marrying him, but Leonie eventually dismisses him. Before Boris even has a chance to pack his bags and leave the house, though, the audience witnesses Leonie proposing to Kenneth:

> LEONIE: You are such a comfort. Really it's too much now to expect me to do without you. Kenneth?
>
> KENNETH: Yes...Leonie.
>
> LEONIE: Will you be a darling—and marry me?
>
> KENNETH: Leonie?
>
> LEONIE (returning his gaze): Yes, Kenneth.
>
> KENNETH: Have you thought this over?
>
> LEONIE: It's the first time—the very first time—that I've ever been sure.
>
> KENNETH: You are so impulsive, Leonie.
>
> LEONIE: Kenneth, don't you think we'd have a chance—you and I—don't you think? (162)

Here, Leonie demonstrates in two ways just how forward she is. One, a woman of her day was expected to wait on a man to propose to her; in fact, even today, this method is the accepted standard on marriage proposals. However, Leonie rarely does what is considered appropriate, so she asks Kenneth instead of waiting on him to ask her, which he could hardly be expected to do considering her previous lover still has accommodations in her home. The second way she demonstrates that she is forward refers to the fact that Boris is still there. She has, only moments before this interaction with Kenneth, discharged Boris. Seemingly, she cannot live without a man in her life, and she chooses Kenneth in part because he is simply there and in part, as she tells him,

because he will be her "last indiscretion" (174). Perhaps Leonie feels tired of the type of life she has lived and may be ready to settle down into a real marriage without qualifications, or perhaps she simply feels like she cannot do without a man in her life.

The marriage to Kenneth, however, does not come to fruition. Although he initially accepts Leonie's proposal, Kenneth falls in love with Paula, who has to break her mother's heart by exposing Kenneth as the diabolic opportunist that he really is. One would think Leonie might learn a lesson from this experience, but instead she still seems unable to operate without a man. At the end of the play, Leonie finds herself all alone in her big house when Will's friend Dennis, who is half Leonie's age, returns to collect something he has left behind. Leonie convinces Dennis to stay by telling him, "I shall be lonely, Dennis. I can't bear to be alone" (196). Dennis gives in, and although the play ends before the audience knows for sure whether or not the two will become romantically involved, given Leonie's track record, they almost certainly will, thus adding another man to her long list of lovers.

Because of her wealth, Leonie does not feel the social backlash a woman of lesser financial security would feel if she engaged in the same behaviors. In fact, an example of a woman who acts very similarly to Leonie is Crystal Allen in Clare Boothe's work *The Women*, which was written in 1936. This play has often been criticized for its depiction of crass women; as Joseph Krutch states in his work *The American Drama since 1918*, *The Women* is "a sort of comedy of humors, [and the play] exposes the vanity, vulgarity, and meanness of a group of smart but singularly depraved females" (159). Crystal Allen certainly fits the bill of Krutch's description. Like Leonie, Crystal seems to have a natural appetite for men, and she is alluring enough to have her pick. Like Marion Froude from

Biography, though, Crystal must work for her living, so her reputation suffers in the same vein as Marion's does because of her actions. However, unlike Belle from *Ah, Wilderness!*, Crystal does not sink to the deepest point possible for a woman of loose behavior; in other words, she is hardly a prostitute. Yet, her sexual innuendos earn her the title of a fallen woman.

Crystal Allen works as a perfume salesgirl at Saks in New York City. Through her work, she often meets men who come in to purchase gifts for their wives, which is how she meets Stephen Haines. Using her feminine wiles, Crystal begins an affair with Stephen. Through his generosity and out of his need for secrecy, Stephen acquires better living accommodations for Crystal, who also uses Stephen's financial status to obtain her own lines of credit in various department stores around the city. By using Stephen—and it becomes increasingly clear throughout the play that she only wants him for his money—Crystal manages to do quite well for herself; before he came into the picture, she had to rely solely on her own meager income on which to get by. Now that she is a "kept woman," however, she has financial security, something she has perhaps never had before this point in her life.

The problem for Crystal in the beginning, though, is Stephen's wife, Mary. Because Crystal is the "other woman," her reputation suffers when it becomes common knowledge that she and Stephen are an item. Everyone, including one of her closest friends Olga, talks poorly about her. Olga calls Crystal a "man-trap" (615); she also advises Mary to get Stephen away from Crystal as quickly as possible. She tells Mary, "Crystal's a terrible girl—I mean, she's terribly clever. And she's terribly pretty, Mrs. Haines—I mean, if I was you I wouldn't waste no time getting Mr. Haines away from

her" (616). Even Sylvia, initially one of Mary's friends and later one of Crystal's, twice calls Crystal a "blonde floosie" (608, 675).

One may notice from Olga's remarks as well as Sylvia's that Crystal's bad image may not be unwarranted. In Crystal's defense, she basically uses her attractiveness to guarantee her security, a concern for all women of the day. At the same time, Crystal has no sympathy for Mary, who eventually loses Stephen to her. In an effort to move herself up in the world, Crystal casts Mary into a downward spiral of insecurity. Of course, Mary has the advantage of a nice monetary allotment because of the divorce decree, but without that money, she could have lost her financial safety as well.

Although one could justify Crystal's behavior as part of her necessity to survive, one quickly realizes that Crystal's actions show her to be deeply evil. She flaunts her success with Stephen in front of Mary during their initial confrontation, and her words mark her as a distinctly unsympathetic character.

> MARY: I've known about you from the beginning.
>
> CRYSTAL: Well, that's news.
>
> MARY: I kept still.
>
> CRYSTAL: Very smart of you....
>
> MARY: No, not smart. I wanted to spare Stephen. But you've gone a little too far—You've been seeing my children. I won't have you touching my children!
>
> CRYSTAL: For God's sake, don't get hysterical. What do I care about your children? I'm sick of hearing about them.

MARY: You won't have to hear about them anymore. When Stephen realizes how humiliating all this has been to me, he'll give you up instantly.

CRYSTAL: Says who? The dog in the manger?

MARY: That's all I have to say.

CRYSTAL: That's plenty.

MARY (more calmly): Stephen would have grown tired of you anyway.

CRYSTAL (nastily): Speaking from your own experience? Well, he's not tired of me yet, Mrs. Haines.

MARY (contemptuous): Stephen is just amusing himself with you.

CRYSTAL: And he's amusing himself plenty.

MARY: You're very hard.

CRYSTAL: I can be soft—on the right occasions...You're just an old habit with him. It's just those brats he's afraid of losing. If he weren't such a sentimental fool about those kids, he'd have walked out on you years ago. (629-630)

Crystal's remarks wound Mary to the core, and the crude statements inflict as much anguish for Mary as is possible. Crystal has no sympathy for Mary, nor does she care for Stephen's children. To her, they interrupt what would otherwise be a surefire way to get Stephen away from his wife. In addition, Crystal does not concern herself too much with Stephen's feelings, either. While not the prostitute Belle from *Ah, Wilderness!* is, Crystal may be worse because she hurts everyone who crosses her path if she views them as standing in the way of her own security and happiness.

Even when Crystal has comfortably usurped Mary and asserted herself as Mrs. Stephen Haines, she does not stop her cheating ways. In Act III of the play, two years have passed since Crystal has married Stephen, and the audience finds her once again engaged in an adulterous affair with a married man (658). Unlike the first time, Crystal's reasons for seducing another woman's husband cannot be credited to her need for refuge. Instead, Crystal cheats to satisfy her sluttish tendencies. By the play's end, however, Mary exposes all of Crystal's misbehaviors, and Crystal loses everything: her marital status, her financial security, and her lover. Not only will she walk away empty handed, but she has lost her reputation as well, which will most likely mean that finding reputable employment such as she had before may become impossible. Crystal may even find herself on the streets as a prostitute after all the damage she has caused.

Looking at Belle, Marion, Leonie, and Crystal, one recognizes the difficulties faced by women who engaged in prostitution, pre-marital sex, and affairs. Once engaging in these types of actions, these women found themselves labeled as "loose women." They were a stain on society's conscience, but as Nat explains to Richard in *Ah, Wilderness!*, they served their purpose as well, which was for a man to release his sexual frustrations without ruining a good girl's reputation (354). Some of these women become resentful, such as Belle and Crystal, while others never really cared much about their reputations to begin with, including Marion and Leonie. Regardless of their own feelings about their state of affairs, people in society frowned upon their behaviors, and once they had fallen, these same individuals often made sure that these women stayed that way. Simply put, no long-term redemption was available to the woman of loose morals.

CHAPTER V: DISPLACED IMMIGRANTS

Following World War I, America saw an increase in its number of immigrants, and while the United States has always been viewed by many as a beacon of light to the rest of the world, the job opportunities available for newcomers during the Great Depression were slim. In fact, even natural-born citizens had a hard time finding and maintaining employment, and those without citizenship experienced even worse conditions. Newly arrived immigrants often had to find menial employment where their wages were lower than the wages of their American peers. Because of this situation, many immigrants found themselves in deplorable circumstances, and those who had formerly been prosperous in their homelands were reduced to poverty. Although that was not the case for all formerly rich refugees, most saw a decline in their standard of living. To prevent this change from happening, some immigrants turned to lies and deception to make their way in the world while others simply went to work at whatever job they could find. The former of these two situations describes what happens to two characters in the works of S. N. Behrman. These two displaced newcomers find that it is better to lie and cheat in order to make their way in the world. The latter of the two aforementioned situations depicts what becomes of three characters from plays by Moss Hart and George Kaufman as well as in a play by Clare Boothe.

Two Depression-era plays utilizing the theme of displaced characters are *Biography* and *End of Summer*. Playwright S. N. Behrman, the author of both plays, has often been described as a thoroughly serious comedic writer whose works "are relentlessly hard and intellectual; they consistently avoid the sentimental closure that would leave a popular audience feeling that all was right with the world" (Fearnow 83).

Other critics have characterized Behrman's style as "high comedy" that "presented his view on some of the social issues of the day" (Meserve 268). Behrman certainly appears not to have wanted his audiences to exit his performances with smiles on their faces, for his comedies truly bring social awareness to their viewers. For example, in both of his aforementioned plays, Behrman presents displaced European characters who encounter difficulties in America.

In *Biography*, Melchior Feydak, a Viennese composer, is the unfortunate character who has fallen on hard times in his homeland and who has come to America to regain his fortune. During World War I, Austria was one of the countries where many battles took place, and its redevelopment was both slow and difficult, thus making financial woes a real concern for all who lived there. Feydak's family enjoyed a respectable amount of success and wealth before the war, but in a struggling country the arts are usually the first area from which money and support are withdrawn. Even twenty years after World War I, Feydak feels the brunt of his country's economic decline, and his family has spent more than they can afford. At the point when the audience meets him, he is virtually penniless. In an effort to obtain some money, he travels to America under the pretense of engaging his skills as a composer for an American movie company.

While waiting for his old friend Marion Froude at her studio apartment, Feydak encounters Mr. Kurt, a young man who is also there to see Marion, but on business. The two engage in a conversation during which Feydak reveals his identity, his purpose, and his discomfort. Yet, because he must live, he must do something:

FEYDAK: Certainly. My name is Feydak.

KURT: The composer?

FEYDAK (drily): Yes....

KURT: I thought he was dead....

FEYDAK: That is true. But I hope you won't tell anyone—for I am his ghost....

KURT (putting this down for Continental humor and genuinely contrite): Forgive me....

FEYDAK: But why?

KURT: If you really are Feydak the composer—I have the most enormous admiration for you. I worship music above everything.

FEYDAK (slightly bored): Go on....

KURT: I read in the paper—you're on your way to Hollywood....

FEYDAK: Yes. I am on my way to Hollywood....

KURT: In the new state men like you won't have to prostitute themselves in Hollywood....

FEYDAK: Ah! A Utopian!

KURT: Yes. You use the word as a term of contempt. Why? Every artist is a Utopian. You must be very tired or you wouldn't be so contemptuous of Utopians.

FEYDAK (with a charming smile): I am rather tired. Old-world, you would call it. (210)

Feydak's name is a famous one. Even Kurt, who lives in America, knows the name well, and he is quite fond of what he assumes is Feydak's work. Feydak, on the other hand, does not appear to be as pleased by the recognition. When Kurt says it is too bad that

Feydak is prostituting, in this case meaning to sell his talents as a composer to Hollywood instead of creating works of genius, Feydak is rather contemptuous of Kurt's praise. One reason for Feydak's contempt might be Kurt's derogatory use of the term "prostituting." By using such a debasing word, Kurt shows that Feydak has fallen from his prior status as a musical genius. Now, Feydak sells himself and his talents to the highest bidder not unlike how a common prostitute would sell her body on a street corner. Hence, in Kurt's mind, Feydak has been reduced from a place of honor to a place of shame.

Another interesting point in this conversation occurs when Feydak calls Kurt a "Utopian," or idealist, and although Kurt does not deny the charge, Feydak's tone implies that it is not a compliment, nor does Kurt take it as such. When Kurt asks Feydak about his indifference, Feydak explains that he is "tired" and "old-world" (210). The remark does not simply mean that he is exhausted or has old notions; rather, his circumstances have forced him into a difficult position, thus leaving him artistically spent. Feydak resents his condition, which has resulted in his jaded outlook on the possibility of there ever being a "Utopia," or "Utopians" to live in it. He has been unable to see beyond the next meal for months, and in that situation, idealism, which is what "Utopia" represents, seems ridiculous to Feydak.

Also, Kurt takes Feydak's response of being his own ghost as "Continental humor," which is not the case. As Feydak reveals, he has come to Hollywood to work, but it is under false pretenses. He is not the man Hollywood thinks him to be, which he clarifies in the following discourse:

> FEYDAK: I must explain to you—you are under a misapprehension....
>
> KURT: It was done here, wasn't it?

> FEYDAK: Not about the operetta. You are under a misapprehension—about me. I am a composer—but I didn't write "Danubia." That was my brother, Victor Feydak. You are right. He is dead. You are the first person I have met in New York who even suspected it.
>
> KURT: I'm sorry.
>
> FEYDAK: Not at all. I am flattered. At home our identities were never confused. (210-211).

Melchior Feydak is not who Hollywood thinks he is. The people in the movie industry suppose they have bought the services of Melchior's more famous and more successful younger brother named Victor. However, Victor is dead. Melchior is also a composer, but in his own country Melchior never attained the prominence Victor did. Instead of telling the movie producer the truth, though, he has made the decision to lie about his identity. He has fallen on hard times, so he must take whatever offers he can find in order to support his family's needs. He is lying to the world about his identity, but his desperation forces him to do so. Later, he repeats this conversation to Marion who, instead of finding it disgraceful, finds it appropriate that he should capitalize when and where he can. He goes so far to explain that he has also had to use the inheritance money that Victor left Marion for his own family's needs. Instead of being angry, she tells him this is as it should be. Yet, even with that money, his family's situation has been dire. He relates to Marion:

> FEYDAK: Things have been going from bad to worse in Vienna—you haven't been there since '25 so you don't know. The theatre's pretty well dead—even the first-rate fellows had a hard time making their way. I

managed to get several scores to do—but they were not—except that they were failures—up to my usual standard....

MARION (laughing, reproachful): Oh, Feydie...!

FEDYAK: If it weren't for the money Vicki left me—and you!—I don't know how we should have got through at all these six years. About a month ago we reached the end of our rope—we were hopelessly in debt—no means of getting out—when the miracle happened....

(MARION is excited, touches his knee with her hand.)

MARION (murmuring): I can't bear it....

FEYDAK: It was my dramatic agent on the phone. A great American film magnate was in town and wanted to see me. Ausgerechnet me and no other. Even my agent couldn't keep the surprise out of his voice. Why me? I asked. God knows, said the agent. Well, we went around to the Bristol to see the magnate. And, as we talked to him, it gradually became apparent. He thought I was Vicki. He didn't know Vicki was dead! He thought I had written "Danubia."

MARION: Did he say so?

FEYDAK: No—not at all. But as we shook hands at the end he said to me: "Any man that can write a tune like this is the kind of man we want." And he whistled, so out of tune that I could hardly recognize it myself the waltz from "Danubia".... He was so innocent, so affable that I had an impulse to say to him: "Look here, old fellow, you don't want me, you want my brother and, in order to get him, you'll have to resurrect him!" But noble

> impulses are luxury impulses. You have to be well off to gratify them. I kept quiet. (213-214)

During Feydak and Marion's conversation, the reader recognizes the internal struggle through which Feydak has gone. Although Feydak is most likely an honest man, his poverty has usurped his ability to be honest. As he has told Marion, the situation in his country is horribly bad. All of the first-rate artisans are unemployed, and Feydak is not first-rate; therefore, his circumstances have been worse than those of his peers. He and his family have extinguished all of their financial resources, including some resources that were not theirs to spend, such as Marion's portion of the inheritance money. At the moment that the movie producer offers Feydak the work contract, Feydak is as poor as he has ever been. He may not wish to lie, but he must do something to keep his family from starving. Therefore, he has to pretend to be his dead brother Victor.

While Feydak's situation is less than pleasant, most newly arrived immigrants in America would have gladly exchanged places with him. Although he has achieved his current position dishonestly, at least he is able to make his way in a country that normally discriminated against foreigners. Even Kurt shows contempt for Feydak until he believes him to be someone famous, and sometimes even the famous foreigners, such as the Russian nobles in *You Can't Take It with You*, had trouble adjusting to their new statuses in America. Feydak is making a way for himself by lying and cheating, and while it is because of his circumstances that he is in this situation, as a foreigner his conditions would be even worse if he did not lie or cheat in order to survive.

Like *Biography*, Behrman's other play also presents a displaced foreigner who has been stripped of all he had and has now come to America in the hopes of reclaiming

some of his former glory. *End of Summer* offers Boris, whose Russian nobility title is Count Mirsky. Neither Feydie (as Marion lovingly calls Feydak) nor Boris is used for comedic purposes; rather Behrman presents them both with the sole intention of their bringing a healthy and necessary dose of reality to the plays. Some critics even believe that Behrman felt "a dynamic responsibility of art toward society and truth," which is to say that he wanted his audiences to be aware of social problems in the hopes of fixing them (Meserve 214).

In the play *End of Summer*, Boris lives in the summer home of Leonie Frothingham. Like so many others who swarm around Leonie, Boris sees this wealthy American woman as his meal ticket to a life of leisure and luxury. Allegedly, he is writing his famous father's memoirs. As the son of the great Count Mirsky, Boris would appear to be the ideal person to accomplish this task; however, considering the difficult times he has faced since the Bolshevik revolution, his desperate financial situation motivates his writing instead of his expertise on his father's life (113). Without Leonie's patronage, though, Boris would not be able to spend his time writing; instead, he would have to be out searching for employment like others in his situation.

Yet, Boris has not been spending his idle time writing. In fact, he has been doing nothing at all except mooching off Leonie's kindness. He has not written a single word, and although this idleness should enrage Leonie, who has clearly been taken advantage of, her indulgent nature does not even recognize that Boris has been using her for her money. His actions are revealed during a conversation he and Leonie have with Dr. Kenneth Rice:

BORIS: You might as well know it then. There isn't any book. There never will be. Not by me.

LEONIE: But I don't understand—every day—in your room working—all these months!

BORIS (facing her): One wants privacy! Possibly you can't realize that. You who always have to have a house full of people.

LEONIE (goes back to flowers at table): Boris!

KENNETH (rising): Why don't you write the book anyway, Count Mirsky? There is a vogue these days for vituperative biography.

BORIS: I am not interested in the vogue. (139-140)

Indeed, Boris is not concerned with what is fashionable. Rather, his interests include regaining the lavish style of living he had when he owned the fortune that accompanied his title. Now, however, Boris must survive off other people in order to live the type of life to which he is accustomed. In addition, he cannot return to his homeland, for as Leonie tells Will early on in the play, the Bolsheviks did not like Boris's father, and she implies that they do not particularly care for Boris, either (113). Hence, his situation is precarious, and he must do what he can to survive. Fortunately for him, he has somehow found his way to Leonie, who willingly supports him. Yet, Boris is no fool, and he worries about long-term support. He aspires ultimately to marry Leonie, and by doing so guaranteeing himself a lifetime of ease.

Although marriage may have assuaged the problem of survival for many displaced immigrants, most of them were not as wealthy as Boris had previously been, and therefore did not sink as far down. Most men in America were expected to support

their wives once they married, but Boris has no skills to obtain a job; therefore, he must find a wife who can provide for him, which is why he has aligned himself with Leonie. As Dr. Kenneth Rice explains to Paula and Will later on in the play, Boris feels that his title alone is enough, and that Leonie should be pleased to marry a nobleman, regardless of his financial situation:

> KENNETH: We were discussing the European and American points of view toward money marriages—There's a great difference. The European fortune hunter, once he has landed the bag, has no more twinge of conscience than a big-game hunter when he has made his kill. The American—?
>
> WILL: Is that what you think I am, Doctor?
>
> KENNETH (to Paula amiably): You see. He resents the mere phrase. But, my dear boy, that is no disgrace. We are all fortune hunters—
>
> PAULA (pointedly): Not all, Kenneth—!
>
> KENNETH: But I see no difference at all between the man who makes a profession out of being charming to rich ladies—or any other—specialist. The former is more arduous. (167-168)

Dr. Kenneth Rice attempts to show the difference between the way Europeans and Americans view money marriages. Based on his remarks, Europeans have no conscience in marrying for money prospects alone, which, he implies, differs from the way Americans behave, although here he falls short, because he remains unclear about how Americans view the subject. What is evident, though, is that Europeans have no qualms in seeking wealth and security as their primary motives for matrimony. Kenneth proceeds

to tell the two young people that the Europeans view wooing rich women as a type of profession, and Boris has certainly been attentive in his attempt to win Leonie.

In the end, however, Boris's efforts prove to be in vain, for Leonie decides against marrying him. One should not worry for him, though; he has successfully lived off Leonie for at least a year, and being resourceful, he secures himself an alternative method of survival. He reveals to Leonie before he leaves her, "Don't worry about me. A magazine syndicate has offered me a great deal for sentimental reminiscences of my father. Imagine that, sentimental! They have offered me—charming Americanism—a ghost writer. It will be quaint—one ghost collaborating with another ghost" (160). Boris will now have to work for himself, and while it may be distasteful to him, Boris will survive. His livelihood may mean that he actually has to work, but at least he has found work that requires little effort on his part.

Not all displaced Europeans were as fortunate as Feydak and Boris, though. Many others found menial work that kept them impoverished for the rest of their lives. A perfect example of this predicament can be found in Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman's 1936 collaborative and Pulitzer Prize-winning work *You Can't Take It with You*, an extremely funny comedy. How could it not be funny with an eccentric family such as the Vanderhofs as the central characters? Yet, regardless of how many basements Paul and Mr. DePinna blow up or how many plays Penney starts to write but never finishes, Hart and Kaufman's play often ceases to be funny because of grim issues that rise to the surface.

The two dislocated European characters in *You Can't Take It with You* are Boris

Kolenkhov and Olga Katrina. Mr. Kolenkhov is Essie's Russian ballet teacher who fled his Bolshevik homeland for the safety of America. To demonstrate just how bad conditions in Russia were when he left it, Kolenkhov tells Grandpa Vanderhof about one of his friends who has recently escaped the persecution of the Russian government:

> GRANDPA: 'Tis, huh?...What's new in Russia? Any more letters from your friend in Moscow?
>
> KOLENKHOV: I have just heard from him. I saved for you the stamp. (He hands it over)
>
> GRANDPA (receiving it with delight): Thanks, Kolenkhov.
>
> KOLENKHOV: They have sent to him Siberia.
>
> GRANDPA: That so? How's he like it?
>
> KOLENKHOV: He has escaped and gone back to Moscow. He will get them yet, if they do not get him. The Soviet Government! I could take the whole Soviet Government and—grrah! (He crushes Stalin and all in one great paw). (163)

One of the punishments for people in Russia who went against the rule of the government was to exile them to Siberia, Russia's coldest region. Survival in that area would be very difficult even in the best of conditions, but Kolenkhov's friend would not have been in the best of accommodations. He would have been a worker in a labor camp, so his chance of enduring there would be miniscule. Hence, Kolenkhov's friend has defied the authorities yet again by escaping Siberia and returning to Moscow. Should he be caught, he will most likely be put to death, even though Kolenkhov ascertains that his friend is as likely to crush a few revolutionaries as he is to be crushed himself. The point remains,

however, that things in Russia are dire, and anyone caught rebelling may be killed. Therefore, it is better either to keep one's mouth shut or to escape the situation altogether by leaving the country, which is the path Kolenkhov selected.

Kolenkhov gives a second example of how desperate circumstances in Russia were before he left when he tells Grandpa about the food situation there. When one of Grandpa's employees complains about having to wait in line to get anything done, the Russian retorts:

> KOLENKHOV: He should have been in Russia when the Revolution came. Then he would have stood in line—a bread line. (He turns to Grandpa) Ah, Grandpa, what they have done to Russia. Think of it! The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina, a cousin of the Czar, she is a waitress in Childs' restaurant! I ordered baked beans from her only yesterday. It broke my heart. A crazy world, Grandpa. (164)

Because the Russian people were so impoverished after the fall of the Romanov family, they became dependent on the government, now controlled by the Bolsheviks, for sustenance. People all over the country had to wait in long lines for the most basic of necessities, such as bread, and often not enough resources were available to go around or to meet the needs of the people. For this reason, among others, many citizens defected from their homeland of Russia, and while a good many of them came to America to begin their lives anew, they frequently found conditions in the United States difficult as well. Kolenkhov does not appear to be as bad off as some; for example, he mentions that a former Russian duchess, a relation to the last czar, has been reduced to the status of a

waitress. At least Kolenkhov is still able to maintain employment in his original line of work instead of having to become a cook or dishwasher in a restaurant.

Examining Kolenkhov's work also reveals how he, too, must be deceptive in order to survive. While living in Russia, Kolenkhov taught at the premier ballet school. His pupils were the most studious, the most serious, and quite simply, the best. Competition to get into his school was fierce, and Kolenkhov had his choice of whom he admitted. Following the revolution in his country, Kolenkhov escaped to America, where his situation changed drastically. Instead of teaching the crème de la crème, he had to teach whomever could pay, which is how he becomes involved with the Vanderhof family.

On a whim, like so many of her whims, Essie decides to take ballet lessons with Kolenkhov. After eight years of study, Essie should be a professional, but she is not. However, because Kolenkhov cannot afford to lose Essie as a student, he keeps giving her lessons, and boosts her ego by telling her that she excels as a ballerina. As Essie declares to Penny, "Mr. Kolenkhov says I'm his most promising pupil" (126). Of course, he tells her this because he wants to continue coming to her home and giving her lessons. For when he is there, the family treats him respectfully enough, and he gets to eat with them for free. Being a foreigner at the mercy of others, a free meal is nothing to scoff at (144). The truth of the matter is, though, that Essie dances very badly. Kolenkhov reveals this fact to Grandpa:

> GRANDPA: Essie making any progress, Kolenkhov?
>
> KOLENKHOV (first making elaborately sure that Essie is done): Confidentially, she stinks.

GRANDPA: Well, as long as she's having fun.... (163).

Grandpa is the one paying the bill for Essie's lessons, and while most people might become upset that she still has not achieved any success after eight years, Grandpa does not see it as money wasted. As long as Essie is happy, Grandpa is happy, and as long as Grandpa does not mind throwing away his money for what has been shown as money wasted, Kolenkhov will continue to have a job and security, which is the man's primary concern.

Later on in the play, Kolenkhov brings the Grand Duchess Olga Katrina, the cousin of the last Russian czar whom he mentioned earlier as living in deplorable conditions, with him to dinner at the Vanderhofs. Things for her have been absolutely terrible, for as Kolenkhov himself points out, "The Grand Duchess Olga Katrina has not had a good meal since before the Revolution" (194). In Kolenkhov's mind, spending an evening with the Vanderhof family will be a rare treat for Olga Katrina, and while these commoners are not people she would have even acknowledged in her homeland, her circumstances have forced her to feel grateful wherever she is invited for a free meal.

After Kolenkhov introduces her to the family, Olga Katrina reveals that not only has she been reduced to servitude, but her entire royal family is in the same dilemma. As she converses with the Vanderhofs, she explains just how bad things have been for her and her relations:

DE PINNA: You know, Highness, I think you waited on me in Childs' once. The Seventy-Second Street place?

THE GRAND DUCHESS: No, no. That was my sister.

KOLENKHOV: The Grand Duchess Natasha.

THE GRAND DUCHESS: I work in Columbus Circle.

GRANDPA: Quite a lot of your family are living over here now, aren't they?

THE GRAND DUCHESS: Oh, yes—many. My uncle, the Grand Duke Sergei—he is an elevator man at Macy's. A very nice man. Then there is my cousin, Prince Alexis. He will not speak to the rest of us because he works at Hattie Carnegie's. He has cards printed—Prince Alexis of Hattie Carnegie. Bah!

KOLENKHOV: When he was selling Eskimo Pies at Luna Park he was willing to talk to you.

THE GRAND DUCHESS: Ah, Kolenkhov, our time is coming. My sister Natasha is studying to be a manicure. Uncle Seregi they have promised to make floor-walker, and next month I get transferred to the Fifth Avenue Childs'. From there it is only a step to Schraffts', and then we will see what Prince Alexis says!

GRANDPA (nodding): I think you've got him.

THE GRAND DUCHESS: You are telling me? (She laughs a triumphant Russian laugh, in which Kolenkhov joins)

PENNY: Your Highness—did you know the Czar? Personally, I mean.

THE GRAND DUCHESS: Of course—he was my cousin. It was terrible, what happened, but perhaps it was for the best. Where could he get a job now? (195-196)

In this conversation, Olga Katrina illustrates how desperate her conditions and those of her family have become. Once Russian nobles, now they work as waitresses, elevator operators, and food vendors in New York City. Instead of being served by commoners, they have been reduced to servitude themselves, and they do not have much promise for better futures. Olga Katrina thinks that it will be quite an accomplishment for her sister to become a manicurist, for her uncle to become a floor salesperson, and for she herself to become a waitress at the Fifth Avenue restaurant instead of the one at Columbia Circle. Obtaining these positions is the height of their ambition, but the fact remains that they will be in the service industry to people who in their homeland would not have even garnered a second glance from them. They have fallen almost as far as they can, but the triumph in Olga Katrina's declamation demonstrates that she is not without hope or some pride.

At the same time, she is realistic. When Penny asks her if she knew the last czar, Olga Katrina answers in the affirmative, but her next remark highlights the fact that she believes that the czar's execution was far more merciful for him than if he had lived and merely been exiled. She does not believe that the former leader of a country could have stooped as low as she has had to in order to survive. In other words, while she demeans herself willingly by becoming a servant to the masses, she acknowledges that Nicolas II would have never done so. There simply would have been no place for him in the world, and the Bolsheviks might have done him a favor by ending his life quickly instead of his dying slowly and agonizingly through poverty. Hence, she believes Nicholas II and his immediate family are better off dead than living the way she must live now.

Later in the play, Hart and Kaufman reduce the grand duchess even further, for they use Olga's presence to garner a few laughs. Quickly after her introduction, she decides to help prepare the dinner to which she was invited in order to expedite the process. Her reason for doing this, as explained earlier, is because she has to go to work as soon as the dinner is finished. Later, when Mr. Kirby, who has not gotten over his outrage from his previous encounter with the Vanderhofs, comes to collect his son, the audience gets a laugh at Olga Katrina's expense because Kirby realizes who she is and equates her presence at the Vanderhofs with their being more refined than he first surmised. Of course, what makes this scene so funny is that, in actuality, she is destitute; otherwise, a Russian noblewoman would not be serving blintzes to commoners (203). Indeed, while the situation is laughable, it also presents a grave topic: dispossessed Russian nobility. In Mark Fearnow's *The American Stage and the Great Depression*, the author explains just how dire Kolenkhov's and Olga Katrina's situations are. He writes, "In any period of radical transition, people and institutions from the past survive into a present in which they have no apparent place" (25). Kolenkhov and Olga Katrina's lives as Russian nobles fell apart during the Russian upheaval, which is a perfect example of a time of radical transition. Yet, they have managed to carve out a place for themselves in a world that really does not want them or need them in it.

Though just a fictional character, Olga Katrina symbolizes the struggle of the Russian nobles in America during the time before they had any type of organized assistance. At least she escaped and made it to New York City, despite finding that aristocrats had no value there. However, she perseveres by creating a new, if menial,

place for herself by becoming a waitress, little more than a servant, to American commoners.

Hart and Kaufman are not the only playwrights who address the plight of former wealthy, or displaced, Slavic nobles having to learn how to survive through servitude in America. In Clare Boothe's play *The Women*, Boothe addresses the same issue through her use of the character Princess Tamara. The princess appears only in one scene, Act I, Scene 4, when the two main female characters, Mary and Crystal, meet for the first time and confront one another. Tamara's one scene stands to show the trend of how far some displaced immigrants have fallen from their former places of respectability.

The princess, who is described as "Russian, regal, soignée," works as a model in an upper-middle class New York City dressmaker's shop, and she shows Mary an evening gown (Boothe 626). Princess Tamara adds to the comedy of the play when one of the other shoppers, Sylvia, accuses her of not knowing how to model correctly. Sylvia also accuses Tamara of flirting with her husband, but Tamara denies the claim and makes snide remarks regarding Sylvia's lack of fashion sense:

> SYLVIA: Tamara, you wear it wrong. I saw it in *Vogue*. (Jerks) Off here, and down there.
>
> TAMARA (slapping Sylvia's hand down): Stop mauling me!
>
> FIRST SALESWOMAN: Princess!
>
> TAMARA: What do you know how to wear clothes?
>
> SYLVIA: I am not a model, Tamara, but no one disputes how I wear clothes!
>
> TAMARA: No one has mistaken you for Mrs. Harrison Williams yet!

FIRST SALESWOMAN: Princess Tamara, you'd better apologize.

MARY (to Saleswoman): It's just professional jealousy. They're really good friends!

SYLVIA (maliciously): You mean Tamara and Howard are good friends.

TAMARA (disgusted at the thought): Do you accuse me of flirting with your husband?

SYLVIA (pleasantly): Go as far as you can, Tamara! If I know Howard, you're wasting valuable time.

TAMARA (very angry): Perhaps I am. But perhaps somebody else is not! (The saleswoman gives her an angry shove) You are riding for a fall-off, Sylvia dear! (Exit Tamara angrily, followed by Saleswoman). (626)

As evidence of how much the princess has fallen from grace, one of the saleswomen chides her for her bad behavior and her rude comments towards a paying customer. The saleswoman even tells the princess that she must apologize to Sylvia, though Tamara does retain some of her dignity by failing to comply with the demand. While the argument, the jealousy, and the pettiness are presented as typical behaviors of females of the time and provide the audience with a plausible laugh, the princess's situation is no laughing matter. She must desperately need work to be a model, for the nobility would have considered public labor as being beneath them. Her willingness to work in such an industry indicates her need to support herself just like anyone else, whether of noble or common birth. Also, as a model, Tamara subjects herself to the criticism and behaviors of others, for not only does Sylvia assault Tamara verbally, but she manhandles her as well. The touching of a royal entity could have invoked the death of the offender in Tamara's

homeland, but although she maintains her title of "princess," she no longer retains the prestige or status she once enjoyed. In this case, she is at the mercy of everyone, including rude women such as Sylvia. Still, she must survive, and in order to do so, she lowers her standards and takes employment in the service industry. Without this job, her plight could be much worse.

The works of the playwrights S. N. Behrman, Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, and Clare Boothe give the world four comedic dramas. Through the five characters of Feydak, Boris, Kolenkhov, Olga Katrina, and Tamara, the playwrights also bring an awareness of the plight of displaced immigrants. By doing so, they interject a salubrious dose of the seedier side of life for those who have fallen on hard times. They present a darker side of light comedy and leave their audiences with the knowledge that not everything that is passively seen as humorous is in actuality all that funny.

CHAPTER VI: THE EVILS OF EXCESSIVE WEALTH

In the play *End of Summer*, the character Dennis reminds his friends of a famous quotation uttered by playwright George Bernard Shaw: "There is no money but the devil's money. It is all tainted and it might as well be used in the service of God" (Behrman 180). Like Shaw, many people regard money as an evil because it often sparks truly wicked behaviors in otherwise reasonable individuals. Certainly, money has always been a driving force in the world, and those who have it are able to relax and enjoy life's leisures while those without it are often driven to desperate measures in order to obtain enough even to live. Money may be viewed as an evil tool, but the fact remains that people must have it. A line can be drawn, however, between the degree of malevolence exhibited by those who pursue money in order to survive and those who demand more when they already have plenty.

As evidenced in some of the preceding chapters, several characters in the plays that have been explored find themselves so impoverished that day-to-day existence proves challenging. These characters engage in nefarious actions for money. For example, Belle from *Ah, Wilderness!* works as a prostitute; she tries to coerce Richard into sleeping with her, and when he will not, she browbeats him into giving her money, which he does out of guilt (O'Neill 317). Meanwhile, Crystal Allen from *The Women* exploits her sexuality to guarantee her financial security. She involves herself in an affair with a married man, whom she eventually seduces away from his wife. She marries the man, and by doing so, she can stop worrying about money issues (Boothe 658). Meanwhile, in the plays *End of Summer* and *Biography*, two displaced immigrants act dishonestly in order to get enough money to continue living. Boris in *End of Summer* lies

to Leonie about writing a book when, in truth, he has not written a single word. His novel has been a ruse in order to live for free at Leonie's expense (Behrman 139). By comparison, Feydie from *Biography* lies to a movie producer about his identity in order to keep his family from poverty. Feydie pretends to be his famous and successful dead brother, and although Feydie is a composer as well, he is not the man the producer really wants (Behrman 214).

What all four characters have in common is that they have reached the end of their financial ropes. All on the point of destitution, they find themselves involved in despicable acts in order to obtain enough money to stay alive. Greed for money is not their motivation; instead, survival drives their choices. Their behaviors, while disturbing, are at the same time at least justified to a certain degree. In contrast, the actions of those who engage in dubious measures to acquire more money than they need remain unjustifiable. A period such as the Great Depression, when there simply were not enough funds to go around, magnifies the attitudes and actions of characters such as Dr. Kenneth Rice in *End of Summer* and Mr. Anthony Kirby in *You Can't Take It with You*. They behave the way they do out of greed, which makes their love for wealth appear evil.

In *End of Summer*, Dr. Kenneth Rice works as a successful psychoanalyst in New York City; at least, he presents himself as a renowned doctor, for academic critics of the play have suggested his certifications are fraudulent (Meserve 269). Nonetheless, his reputation as a brilliant doctor propels Leonie into hiring him for Count Boris Mirsky, whom Leonie believes is depressed. After arriving at Leonie's summer home, Kenneth finds himself the pivotal point in a love triangle. Leonie wants to be with Kenneth, and he helps convince her to remove Boris from her home. He tells Leonie:

KENNETH: Leonie—you are the last woman on earth Count Mirsky should marry. He would only transfer his hatred of his father to you.

LEONIE: I don't think I understand you, Kenneth—really, I don't—and I do so want to understand things.

KENNETH: Well—your charm, your gaiety, your position, your wealth, your beauty—these would oppress him. Again, he cannot be himself.—Or, if he is himself, it is to reveal his nonentity, his inferiority—again the secondary role—Leonie Frothingham's husband—the son of Count Mirsky—the husband of Leonie Frothingham. Again the shadow—again, eternally and always—non-existence. Poor fellow. (142)

By exposing Count Mirsky's incompatibility with Leonie, Kenneth heightens his own companionability with her. Leonie does not need a weak man like Boris, who will only resent her for her money in the end. She needs a man who is strong enough to live with her wealth instead of being oppressed by it, and Kenneth implies that he is such a man.

Leonie does not require much convincing because she already thinks very highly of Kenneth. Indeed, she admires not only his intelligence but his strength as a person as well. In an effort to keep Kenneth with her, Leonie offers the man something he has always wanted but never has had the financial resources to build: a sanatorium.

LEONIE: I want to express my gratitude—in some tangible form. I've been thinking of nothing else lately. I can't sleep for thinking of it.

KENNETH: Well, if it gives you insomnia, you'd better tell me about it.

LEONIE: I want to make it possible for you to realize your ambition.

KENNETH: Ambition? What ambition?....Which of my dreams was I so reckless as to reveal to you?

LEONIE: To have a sanatorium of your own one day—so you can carry out your own ideas of curing patients.

KENNETH: Oh, that! Out of the question.

LEONIE: Why?

KENNETH: To do it on the scale I visualize, would cost more than I'm ever likely to save out of my practice.

LEONIE: I'll give you the sanatorium. I've never given anyone anything like that before. What fun! (144-45)

At first, Kenneth appears to deny Leonie's request to give him a sanatorium. Truthfully, Leonie has plenty of money, and she would probably never miss the amount it would take Kenneth to build one, even on the scale he envisions. However, as a psychiatrist, Kenneth knows that Leonie really does not understand the magnitude of her offer. Kenneth's position, though, allows him not only special insight into Leonie's reasoning, but also places him in an advisory role for her. As such, he can take full advantage of her good intentions as well as her wealth. He may seem unselfish to begin with by declining Leonie's offer, but later not only does he accept the gift of the sanatorium, he also accepts her proposal of marriage.

Of course, one would not disapprove of Kenneth's marrying Leonie if he did it out of love, but that is not the case. He wants to marry her for her money, which he proves during his encounter with Leonie's daughter Paula. Kenneth reveals that he comes from obscure beginnings; in fact, he was reared in an orphanage for children, so he

refuses to be poor for the rest of his life. As a doctor, his future financial successes should be guaranteed, but his greed for more does not allow him to be content even with a doctor's salary. He wants more, and marrying Leonie guarantees him more of everything. However, Kenneth's deviousness runs very deep, for in truth, he wants Paula, not Leonie, which further indicates he only wishes to marry Leonie for her wealth. Paula despises him for his deceit, and her detestation grows when she realizes how far Kenneth will go to deceive Leonie. To expose his crassness, Paula convinces Kenneth that she will marry him only when he reveals his true feelings for her to Leonie.

> PAULA (shrewd against him—against herself): I keep thinking—what you want now—what you're after now?
>
> KENNETH (moving toward her): You don't believe then—that I love you?
>
> PAULA (leaning back in chair—not looking at him): You are a very strange man.
>
> KENNETH: I am simple really. I want everything. That's all.
>
> PAULA: And you don't care how you get it....(A pause. During these half-spellbound instants a thought has been forming slowly in Paula's mind that crystallizes now. This man is the enemy. This man is infinitely cunning, infinitely resourceful. Perhaps—just the possibility—he really feels this passion for her. If so, why not use this weakness in an antagonist so ruthless? She will try.)...I shouldn't listen to you.
>
> (A moment. He senses her cunning. He looks at her.)
>
> KENNETH: You don't trust me?

PAULA: Have I reason to trust you?

KENNETH: What reason would you like? What proof would you like?

PAULA: Aren't you going to marry Mother?

KENNETH: Only as an alternative.

PAULA: Will you—tell her so? Will you give up the alternative?

KENNETH: And if I do?

PAULA: What shall I promise you?

KENNETH: Yourself.

PAULA (looks at him—speaks): And if I do?

KENNETH: Then...

PAULA (taking fire): You say you love me! If you feel it—really feel it—You haven't been very adventurous for all your talk. Taking in Mother and Sam! Give up those conquests. Tell her! Tell Mother! Then perhaps I will believe you.

KENNETH: And then?

PAULA: Take your chances!

KENNETH (quietly): Very well. (185-186)

Paula makes one penetrating remark when she tells Kenneth that he will stop at nothing to get what he wants. She understands Kenneth's ruthlessness and that his design is to use Leonie for her wealth. Kenneth confirms Paula's suspicions when he states that marrying Leonie is his alternative plan should he be unsuccessful with Paula. At this point, the author makes it very clear to both Paula and the audience that Kenneth's greed motivates his actions. Unlike characters in other plays whose money cravings are based on

necessity, Kenneth already has plenty of money. As a famous physician, he should have enough to satisfy his every whim; instead, he wants more, and his desire for more results in his appalling behaviors with both Leonie and Paula.

Kenneth's deviousness does not go unpunished. When he reveals his passion for Paula to Leonie, he ruins his chances with both women. Paula would never have accepted him, but even in the end when he tries to explain away his remarks to Leonie in order to get back into her good graces, Leonie is no longer fooled either. Dismissed from the Frothingham estate, Kenneth finds himself back where he started, which is not without financial security, but without the ease of Leonie's money. Kenneth will survive, but he does not prevail in the situation. He may go on to engage in similar exploits in the future; however, the audience will never know, for his role in the play ends with his dismissal. The satisfaction that Kenneth is at least thwarted this time should be enough to assuage the audience's intense dislike for a man so conniving and greedy.

Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman give the world another money-hungry character in the form of Mr. Kirby from their 1937 drama *You Can't Take It with You.* Unlike Behrman's drama, in which the viewer only gets a few laughs, Hart and Kaufman's work is funny from start to finish. In fact, the play is so hilarious that a viewer might actually miss the serious points the authors make about greed. Indeed, critics have said that because of Kaufman's happy-go-lucky style, he is often overlooked as a serious playwright altogether (Meserve 286).

In *You Can't Take It with You*, Mr. Kirby, a greedy businessman, is juxtaposed against the carefree spirit Grandpa Vanderhof (Mersand 41). Grandpa was once just like Mr. Kirby, though; he was a successful New York broker. One day Grandpa had an

epiphany, for he realized that he simply did not care to work any longer. He wanted to enjoy life. Now he has sympathy for those like Kirby who cannot see beyond the power of the almighty dollar. Driven to extremes by his money lust, Kirby has allowed his own health to suffer. When the audience first meets the Kirbys in Act II of the play, Mr. Kirby reveals that he has severe indigestion (171). Although indigestion may not sound very serious, it can be debilitating. His doctor has placed him on a strict diet, so he cannot indulge in simple things such as candy (178). Later in the play, Grandpa hypothesizes that Mr. Kirby suffers from indigestion because he works all the time, even when he already has enough money and does not have to work at all (199). Kirby allows his greed for money to harm his physical well-being. He does not need the money, for as one of the most successful businessmen on Wall Street, he already has plenty, but he still wants more. The authors do not make it clear why Kirby feels that he must have more; perhaps, though, the reason lies with his own father's determination that Kirby succeed, which in Kirby's mind may be measured in the amount of money a man has. However, the playwrights are adamant that, slowly but surely, Kirby's passion for wealth is destroying him.

Also, Kirby allows his work and his yearning for money to creep into moments of his life when he engages in other activities. Mrs. Kirby reveals his single-mindedness for wealth during a game the Kirbys play with the Vanderhofs. Penny has the group write down the first thing that pops into their minds when she calls out a word. The game begins innocently enough, but when Penny uses "sex" as one of the words in the game, Mrs. Kirby's response surprises everybody, but no one so much as Mr. Kirby:

> PENNY (brightly, having taken a look ahead): This one's all right, Mr.

> Kirby. "Sex—Wall Street."
>
> KIRBY: Wall Street? What do you mean by that, Miriam?
>
> MRS. KIRBY (nervously): I don't know what I meant, Anthony. Nothing.
>
> KIRBY: But you must have meant something, Miriam, or you wouldn't have put it down.
>
> MRS. KIRBY: It was just the first thing that came into my head, that's all.
>
> KIRBY: But what does it mean? Sex—Wall Street.
>
> MRS. KIRBY (annoyed): Oh, I don't know what it means, Anthony. It's just that you're always talking about Wall Street, even when—(She catches herself) I don't know what I meant....(182)

Mrs. Kirby implies that Mr. Kirby always talks about Wall Street, even when they are having sex. Mr. Kirby most likely does not even realize he does so, but the revelation only heightens the audience's awareness of how much Kirby's job and his lust for money drives his every action. Preoccupied to the point of obsession with wealth, Kirby forgets to enjoy any other pleasures in life. Money retains his attention, and his hunger for it detracts his interest from everything else.

In Act III of the play, Kirby's lust for excessive wealth rears its ugly head yet again when he reveals what Grandpa considers Kirby's greatest crime of all: the fact that Kirby plans on turning his son Tony into a duplicate of himself. From the start, Grandpa understands that Tony does not want Mr. Kirby's fortune or the headache that accompanies it. Instead, Tony wants to be happy and to enjoy life, something which his father has never done and cannot comprehend. Perhaps Tony feels this way because his father's success has made it unnecessary for him to work while Kirby did not have the

same advantages of a wealthy father off whom he could live. Either way, Grandpa implores Kirby to consider Tony's wishes, for while Grandpa normally displays tremendous passiveness, he voices his opinion this time. Knowing that Kirby plans on turning Tony into the same type of man he is, Grandpa tries to explain to Kirby the folly of this approach.

> GRANDPA: Well, what I feel is that Tony's too nice a boy to wake up twenty years from now with nothing in his life but stocks and bonds.
>
> KIRBY: How's that?
>
> GRANDPA (turning to Mr. Kirby): Yes. Mixed up and unhappy, the way you are.
>
> KIRBY (outraged): I beg your pardon, Mr. Vanderhof, I am a very happy man.
>
> GRANDPA: Are you?
>
> KIRBY: Certainly I am.
>
> GRANDPA: I don't think so. What do you think you get your indigestion from? Happiness? No, sir. You get it because most of your time is spent in doing things you don't want to do.
>
> KIRBY: I don't do anything I don't want to do.
>
> GRANDPA: Yes, you do. You said last night that at the end of a week in Wall Street you're pretty near crazy. Why do you keep on doing it?
>
> KIRBY: Why do I keep on—why, that's my business. A man can't give up his business.
>
> GRANDPA: Why not? You've got all the money you need. You can't

take it with you.

KIRBY: That's a very easy thing to say, Mr. Vanderhof. But I have spent my entire life building up my business.

GRANPA: And what's it got you? Same kind of mail every morning, same kind of deals, same kind of meetings, same dinners at night, same indigestion. Where does the fun come in? Don't you think there ought to be something more, Mr. Kirby? You must have wanted more than that when you started out. We haven't got too much time, you know—any of us. (199-200)

Grandpa explains to Kirby his philosophy about learning to live life so that one does not have any regrets at the end of it in an attempt to wake him up to the fact that Kirby is miserable. He has been working so hard that he has failed to see his own misery. Once Grandpa had been as successful and as greedy as Kirby is now, but Grandpa realized that none of it was making him happy. To make money just for the sake of making money does not bring happiness; at least, it does not in Grandpa's opinion. Kirby cannot seem to grasp this concept; he has always worked obsessively. In his mind, work is what a man is supposed to do. Yet, as Grandpa points out, Kirby has enough, and his need for more wealth is making him both physically and mentally ill. That kind of greed in a person is destructive.

Unlike Dr. Rice, however, Mr. Kirby begins to understand how his wealth has not brought him joy, and by the play's end, the audience can begin to hope that Mr. Kirby will change his greedy ways. Perhaps it is the lesson of what greed for money can do to people that the playwrights are trying to teach. Maybe they wish the audience to see that

the excessive and exclusive desire for money is evil. If so, the lesson from these two plays is simple: life is too short to squander it by working all of the time. The authors' implication is those who have too much money are just greedy, and during a time when money was hard to come by, many theatergoers of the day would have probably agreed. The lesson, though mixed with humor, is serious: greed is undesirable, and people should indulge in life instead of endlessly pursuing money.

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

As evidenced in the works *Biography* (1932), *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933), *End of Summer* (1936), *The Women* (1936), *You Can't Take It with You* (1936), and "*Having Wonderful Time*" (1937), plays that are considered comedies can be fraught with darker undertones. Yet, why write a comedy if only to fill it with such serious issues? Perhaps playwrights S. N. Behrman, Eugene O'Neill, Clare Boothe, Moss Hart, George S. Kaufman, and Arthur Kober felt it their responsibility to bring cultural dilemmas to the stage (Mersand 83). After all, if people cannot examine the problems of their day, or if they simply are not aware of the issues that are considered taboo, how can they rectify them? In his book *An Outline History of American Drama*, Walter Meserve suggests that the reason these playwrights chose to write about social conditions was because the "dramatist sees some possibility of adjustment" (272). In other words, the authors never meant for their works to be just for laughs; all along they had it in their minds to improve the problems around them. If that was their intent, then their works go a long way in accomplishing that goal.

Whatever their initial desire in writing these six plays, the playwrights certainly bring about awareness, for one, regarding the way women were viewed. Through their combined efforts, the authors highlight the three main choices available to women of their day: matrimony, chastity, or vulgarity. Women could get married and be respected; they could remain single and be pitied; or they could have sex and be despised. Others of these authors chose to alert the audience to the plight of displaced immigrants. Showing these people as real human beings with the same basic desires and needs as the citizens of America may have moved many an audience member to become more sympathetic to

people who had only ever been seen as moochers off an already overburdened country. A few authors even tackled the topic of greediness for money. At a time when there simply was not enough to go around, being wealthy was highly desired. Several of the playwrights seemed to think otherwise, which is why they show what can happen to a person who becomes too caught up in trying to have it all.

Valuable lessons are infused throughout these dramas, whether or not the audience took note of them. Time has certainly shown a change in the viewing of these issues. Women no longer find themselves restricted to the home or to the role of dutiful mother; many women in today's society are the breadwinners instead of the bread bakers. Also, even though the double standard still exists in regards to sexual looseness in men and women, women's reputations do not remain forever ruined. For proof, the instances of pre-marital sex and the number of out-of-wedlock babies continues to rise in America, but now this trend is verging on being seen as the rule instead of the exception to it. Likewise, more immigrants live in America than ever before. The sheer volume of illegal aliens in the United States is staggering. As for money, the demand for more remains the same, except now even the average man has an opportunity to make a fortune whereas in the past those privileges seemed available only to a select few.

Certainly, times have changed, but playwrights still dare to discuss social issues in their works in an effort to educate their audiences with the hope that awareness will bring that change. For example, instead of male/female relationships being the status quo ideal, now dramas like *Angels in America* (1990) and *The Laramie Project* (2002) focus on homosexual relationships in the hopes of reducing hate crimes in America. The latter of

these two plays brought about attempts to amend hate crime laws in the United States, which indicates just how much impact the theater can have on the world.

If the theater is to continue to be used as a vehicle for change, then one should realize that those changes often come about slowly, but through the continual and persistent efforts of playwrights like the ones included here aided by other types of writers and commentators, change can and will happen. If an issue is important to authors and if they dare to address those issues in their works, they just may find themselves as trailblazers into subjects that have yet to be presented on the stage. As such, they may go down as visionaries, much like the Depression era playwrights have come to be viewed.

Overall, the theatrical comedies of the Great Depression era are funny, but they are not simply one guffaw followed closely by another. Instead, the plays *Biography* (1932), *Ah, Wilderness!* (1933), *End of Summer* (1936), *The Women* (1936), *You Can't Take It with You* (1936), and "*Having Wonderful Time*" (1937) have serious sides to them as well. Within the utilization of themes about ruined social reputations, displaced characters, and greedy businessmen, the six plays' serious issues vary greatly. They also represent what has become a growing tendency in American theater since the time in which they were written: injecting a darker side into light comedies. Though their darker themes may now seem quaintly outdated, in the context of their time period they were appropriate, and they continue to be enjoyed decades later as American masterpieces of drama.

Works Cited

Books

Behrman, S. N. Biography. 1932. Sixteen Famous American Plays. 203-273.

- - -. End of Summer. 1936. Famous American Plays of the 1930s. New York: Laurel, 1959. Rep. in 1988. 95-197.

Bonin, Jane F. Major Themes in Prize-Winning American Drama. Metchuen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1975.

Boothe, Clare. The Women. 1936. Sixteen Famous American Plays. 603-676.

Cerf, Bennett, and Van H. Carmell, eds. Sixteen Famous American Plays. New York: The Modern Library (Random House), 1941.

Costello, John. Virtue under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1985. 4-5.

Fearnow, Mark. The American Stage and the Great Depression. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.

Hart, Moss, and George S Kaufman. You Can't Take It with You. 1936. Three Plays by Kaufman and Hart. New York: Grove Press, 1980. 119-206.

Hymowitz, Carol, and Michaele Weissman. A History of Women in America. New York: Bantam Books, 1978. 287.

Kober, Arthur. "Having Wonderful Time." 1937. Sixteen Famous American Plays. 677-746.

Krutch, Joseph. The American Drama Since 1918. New York: Braziller, 1957. 57-58.

Lynd, Robert S., and Helen Merrell Lynd. Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1937. 163-178.

Masters, Edgar Lee. "Margaret Fuller Slack." The Norton Anthology of American Literature. 7th ed. Vol. D. Ed. Nina Baym. New York: Norton, 2007. 1208. 5 vols. 1208.

Mersand, Joseph. The American Drama Since 1930: Essays on Playwrights and Plays. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1949.

Meserve, Walter. An Outline History of American Drama. Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, & Co., 1965.

O'Neill, Eugene. Ah, Wilderness! 1933. Sixteen Famous American Plays. 279-356.

Films

"Social Realism." American Passages: A Literary Survey. Vol. 9. Annenberg/CPB. 2003. 16 vols.

Internet Sources

Geacintov, Cyril. "Russian Nobility Association in America Homepage." Russian Nobility Association in America, Inc. 2004. 4 Apr. 2008 <http://www.russiannobility.org/>.

Journal Articles

Brustein, Robert. "The Two O'Neills." New Republic 218.17 (27 Apr. 1998): 27-28. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Auburn University Montgomery Library, Montgomery, AL. 14 Apr. 2008 <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=460405&site=ehost-live>.

Moran, Mickey. "1930s, America—Feminist Void?: The Status of the Equal Rights

Movement During the Great Depression." Student Historical Journal 1988-89. Department of History Outstanding Paper, 1988-1989. U of Loyal New Orleans. 3 Apr. 2008 <http://www.loyno.edu/history/journal/1988-9/moran.htm>.

"Tart, v. 2." Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online. Oxford UP. 15 Sept. 2008 <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50247322?query_type=word&queryword=tart&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&result_place=5&search_id=Bh1s-ehjaVG-11249&hilite=50247322>.

Yates, Sybille. "An Investigation of the Psychological Factors in Virginity and Ritual Defloration." The International Journal of Psychoanalysis 11 (1930): 167-184. Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing. 2008. 11 July 2008 <http://www.pepweb.org/document.php?id=ijp.011.0167a>.

Works Consulted

Abramson, Doris. Negro Playwrights in the American Theatre, 1925-1959. New York: Columbia UP, 1969.

Brown, John M. Upstage: The American Theatre in Performance. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 1969.

Chinoy, Helen, and Linda Jenkins. Women in American Theatre. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006.

Duffy, Susan. American Labor on Stage: Dramatic Interpretations of the Steele and Textile Industries in the 1930s. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1966.

Eddleman, Floyd Eugene. American Drama Criticism: Interpretations 1890-1977. 2nd ed. Hamden, CT: Shoe String, 1979.

Gewirtz, Arthur, and James Kolb, eds. Art, Glitter, and Glitz: Mainstream Playwrights and Popular Theatre in 1920s America. Westport, CT: Praegar, 2004.

- - -. Experimenters, Rebels, and Disparate Voices: The Theatre of the 1920s Celebrates American Diversity. Westport, CT: Praegar, 2003.

Golden, Joseph. The Death of Tinker Bell: The American Theater in the 20th Century. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1967.

Scharine, Richard. From Class to Caste in American Drama: Political and Social Themes Since the 1930s. New York: Greenwood, 1991.

Wakefield, Thaddeus. The Family in Twentieth-Century American Drama. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

Journal Articles

Bennett, Robert. "Time for Comedy." The English Journal 53.4 (Apr. 1964): 248-255. JSTOR. Auburn University Montgomery. 10 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.

Bryer, Jackson, and Ruth Alvarez. "American Drama, 1918-1940: A Survey of Research and Criticism." American Quarterly 30.3 (1978): 298-330. JSTOR. Auburn University Montgomery. 10 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.

Cadden, Michael. "Rewriting Literary History." American Quarterly 41.1 (Mar. 1989): 133-137. JSTOR. Auburn University Montgomery. 10 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.

Clark, Barrett. "Our Most American Drama: Recent Developments, 1930-1939." The English Journal 28.5 (May 1939): 333-342. JSTOR. Auburn University Montgomery. 10 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.

Weales, Gerald. "Popular Theatre of the Thirties." The Tulane Drama Review 11.4 (Summer 1967): 51-69. JSTOR. Auburn U Montgomery. 10 Nov. 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.