THE APPRENTICESHIP OF ROBERT ANDERSON

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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PREFACE

For over fifteen years, Robert Anderson has been recognized as a major American playwright, but no full-length critical consideration of his work has been undertaken. This first comprehensive treatment of his career developed as an outgrowth of the American Playwrights Theatre program. As Executive Director of the APT project for the past six years, my association with Mr. Anderson in connection with fifty nationwide APT productions of his play, The Days Between, resulted in some of the most rewarding and stimulating experiences of my life. Inspired initially by admiration for the man and his work, the present study grew out of the realization that a wealth of material has accumulated over the period of this association in the form of letters, tape-recorded broadcasts, various revisions of The Days Between, the author's notes on interpretation, etc., which could serve as valuable sources of information for future biographers, critics, historians, and play directors. The purpose of the dissertation is twofold: to present a professional biography of Robert Anderson and to provide explication of his major plays through an examination of his development as a playwright and by the inclusion of Mr. Anderson's comments and reflections on his life and career.
Surely no doctoral candidate has ever enjoyed such warm-hearted and extensive cooperation from a distinguished author as that given by Robert Anderson to this study. For the enormous amount of time he has expended in answering questions, searching for materials, checking for accuracy of dates and details in the following chapters, for entrusting me with information of the most personal nature and for allowing me to examine his earliest dramaturgic efforts which he intends never to make available for general study, I am profoundly grateful.

Largely because of future inaccessibility of the unpublished plays, I chose to focus on the early phase of Anderson's personal and artistic development, attempting to discover relationships and experiences which influenced his life and work and to indicate various thematic and developmental trends which culminated in his first professional plays. Since *Tea and Sympathy* represents the point of convergence of many of these trends and the turning point of his career, this play has been given a position of central importance and an entire chapter has been devoted to its evolution. The plays subsequent to *Tea and Sympathy* have been considered primarily from the standpoint of the apprenticeship and are discussed in relation to the themes and techniques originating in the earlier works.
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CHAPTER I

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Early Influences

Robert Woodruff Anderson was born at 90 Morningside Drive\(^1\) in New York City on April 28, 1917, the younger son of James H. and Myra Grigg Anderson. He grew up just "forty-five minutes from Broadway" in the suburb of New Rochelle,\(^2\) "a quiet town, with elms and chestnut trees, lawns and old sprawling houses with a certain nondescript elegance," the dramatist recalls in his most specifically autobiographical play, I Never Sang For My Father.\(^3\)

Unlike most of Anderson's characters, the mother and father in this play are drawn directly from the playwright's memory.\(^4\) James Anderson did not become Mayor of his town as did Tom Garrison in the play, but he ran for that office and was actively involved in the civic problems of New Rochelle. His "miserable childhood" and "the story of his life" from slum boy to successful business executive were almost exactly as described in the play. Margaret Garrison, the


mother in *I Never Sang For My Father*, is a charming true-to-life portrait of the playwright's own devoted mother. The eulogy for Margaret Garrison found in the earlier film version of the play would have served well at the funeral of Myra Anderson:

Margaret Garrison was a loving wife and a kind and generous mother, and a public spirited member of the community. The hundreds of people who were touched by her goodness can attest to the pleasure and joy she brought them through her love of life and her power to communicate this love to others . . . Hundreds and hundreds of children, now grown, will remember her annual Christmas Eve story-telling parties . . . In her family she was the spirit of loving kindness.5

Although the parents in this play are presented in old age, it is easy to visualize James and Myra Anderson in earlier life as an eminently attractive and intelligent couple, socially and financially successful. From the viewpoint of the younger son, however, their disparate interests and the lack of warmth and affection in their marriage were matters of deep and lasting concern. "What a shame that children can't see their parents when they're young and courting and in love," Margaret Garrison says to her son, "all they see them being is tolerant, sympathetic, forbearing and devoted. All the qualities that are so unimportant to passionate young people."6 This early view of marriage greatly influenced the emotional and artistic development of the dramatist, and helped to determine the choice of theme and subject matter for much of his work.

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Another revealing picture of his parent's relationship is presented in *Love Among Friends*, an unpublished play written in 1956. Although this dramatic essay on marriage differs widely from the specifics of Anderson's life, it contains a fictional scene between a father and son, highly illuminative of early family influences. In this scene, Alan Hamilton, a successful playwright, intimates that he does not want a marriage like his father's. The father admits that he and his wife have had difficult periods, but says that his son seems to remember only the unhappy times. "I've searched my memory over and over again for the happy ones," the son replies, "I start to remember one, and then suddenly I hear a cross word, or see a sharp look, or mother running upstairs crying."

Mr. Hamilton

For you, of course, your mother could do no wrong.

Alan

Let's not go into a list of your grievances against her.

Mr. Hamilton

You'll only hear hers against me.

Alan

Not one. You won't believe this, but not one. Only 'Your father is having a hard time just now. . . . Things are not easy for your father. . . . Your father is a remarkable man . . . . Look how straight he walks. . . .' In all the thousands of long, long talks, not one word.

Mr. Hamilton

There were many thousands of long, long talks between you and your mother.
Alan

Yes.

Mr. Hamilton

She worships you.

Alan

Too much. I know.

Mr. Hamilton

You've made her life worth-while for her.

Alan

(just admitting a fact)
She says that all the time to me. Yes.

Mr. Hamilton

(quite simply after a moment)
She never said it to me.

Alan

(genuinely touched . . . trying to explain)
When you went away, she turned to me.

Mr. Hamilton

Long before that . . . I often wondered why she married me.

Alan

I've read her letters to you and yours to her . . . long before you were married.

Mr. Hamilton

Of course. They're conventional. One writes those things no matter what--

Alan

--Dad! Don't spoil that time in your lives just because it didn't turn out right.
(realizes his son is right . . . is a little ashamed for having slipped into it . . .) Am I in your new play? This play you're rehearsing?

Alan

Bits and pieces.

Mr. Hamilton

One day, preferably before I die, I wish you'd make me a nice character in one of your plays instead of a villain.

Alan

I try not to have villains, Dad, just people. I don't always succeed.

Mr. Hamilton

It might be interesting to look at the Oedipus theme from the point of view of the husband and father. What does such a relationship between a mother and son do to the husband-father?

Alan

Or how does the attitude of the husband-father towards the wife-mother create the climate for the Oedipus situation? There was no Oedipus situation in our family, Dad, although I was a mother's boy. I love my mother as I love you . . . Yes, I do. But I don't thank you for letting me be a mother's boy.7

Robert Anderson's feelings about his role as "mother's boy" are perhaps most clearly stated in Gene's lines to his sister in

I Never Sang For My Father when he says,

A son is not supposed to make his mother's life . . . Oh, I loved Mother. You know that. But to be depended on to make her life . . . Dad says, he boasts, he never knew the meaning of the word 'quit.' Well, he quit on her all right. And I . . . I was just there. (ALICE looks at this sudden revelation of his

feeling, his resentment that he was left to save his mother from loneliness and unhappiness.  

A stage direction in this play indicates that Margaret Garrison "is devoted to her son, but she is not the possessive and smothering mother." Emphasizing this point about his own mother, Anderson has said,

... she was always shoving me out into the world, to parties, outings, etc. She never implied that she would be lonely or miserable if I was away from her. As a matter of fact, I led a very full social life... I was continually in love with one girl after another... (school and dancing school) and my Mother was delighted with this state of affairs. As a matter of fact, she used to try to get me to go out with a lot of girls when I was 'desperately' in love with one. If I loved one, I wouldn't go out with another. My Mother used to say, 'Oh, come on now, you don't have to be in love with a girl to take her out.' But I would wait till Muriel or Dorothy or whoever it was at the moment, was available.

Although the character of Don, the older brother in All Summer Long and in the novel from which the play was adapted, bears little relation to the playwright's brother, Donald Grigg Anderson, a certain parallel does exist between the fictional and real life brotherhood relationships. Donald Anderson, four years older than Robert, has been described as "the firebrand of the family" in boyhood. "I was the peacemaker," the dramatist has stated,

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8Anderson, I Never Sang For My Father, II.78.
9Ibid., I. 7.
10Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.
My father and brother had some terrifying scenes that made me wince. This may be an important influence in my writing. My geiger counter as far as conflict is concerned is tuned to register a very low murmur as a shout. I feel some of the conflicts in my plays as very large. Often critics have felt they are quite small.

Not all of Robert Anderson's scenes of conflict are low-keyed, of course. The final confrontation between Tom, the father, and Gene, the son, in *I Never Sang For My Father* exemplifies the emotional power of which Anderson is capable. This portion of the scene helps to illuminate the basis of the troubled father-son relationship so influential in the playwright's life and work:

**Tom**

... From tonight on, you can consider me dead. *(Turns on him in a rage of resentment)* I gave you everything. Since I was a snot-nosed kid I've worked my fingers to the bone. You've had everything and I had nothing. I put a roof over your head, clothes on your back--

**Gene**

Food on the table.

**Tom**

--things I never had.

**Gene**

I know!

**Tom**

You ungrateful bastard!

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12 The unspaced periods within sections of Anderson's writing are not to be considered omissions by this writer but are in the original and are peculiar to Anderson's style. Throughout this dissertation, the punctuation of the original will be maintained.

(Seizes him, almost as though he would hit him) What do you want for gratitude? Nothing, nothing would be enough. You have resented everything. I'm sorry as hell about your miserable childhood. When I was a kid, and you told me those stories, I used to go up to my room at night and cry. But there is nothing I can do about it ... and it does not excuse everything. ... I am grateful to you. I also admire you and respect you, and stand in awe of what you have done with your life. I will never be able to touch it. (TOM looks at him with contempt) But it does not make me love you. And I wanted to love you. (TOM snorts his disbelief) You hated your father. I saw what it did to you. I did not want to hate you.

Tom

I don't care what you feel about me.

Gene

I do! (He moves away from his father) I came so close to loving you tonight. ... I'd never felt so open to you. You don't know what it cost me to ask you to come with me. ... when I have never been able to sit in a room alone with you. ... Did you really think your door was always open to me?

Tom

It was not my fault if you never came in.\textsuperscript{14}

In \textit{Love Among Friends}, the playwright, Alan Hamilton, holds his father's perfectionism to be responsible for much of his own loneliness and guilt. "Why didn't you tell me that everyone makes mistakes," he asks, "why did you have to be held up as the perfect god?" The sense of perfection acquired from his father, he says, makes it impossible "to accept adult compromises."\textsuperscript{15} This bit of self-analysis is particularly interesting in relation to an observation

\textsuperscript{14} Anderson, \textit{I Never Sang For My Father}, II.110-11.

\textsuperscript{15} Anderson, \textit{Love Among Friends}, I. 11.
by Joan Rubin in her Playbill magazine article after the opening of You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running in which she describes Robert Anderson as a "man at war with the inevitable."17

From the following dialogue in Love Among Friends, and from indications in other works, Anderson's war with inevitability appears to stem partially from his father's perfectionist attitudes and the strictures of the playwright's early training. "I'm a late-blooming rebel against most of the things you taught me, Dad," Alan Hamilton says. His father replies,

You were brought up to believe in the straight and narrow path.

Alan

I know. But I found that as soon as it leads away from the nursery, it turns into quicksand. I just hate the dogmatism of your way.

Mr. Hamilton

Mathematicians are dogmatic about two and two making four, because it is a fact.

Alan

I want the right to question even that until I have proved it true to myself.

Mr. Hamilton

I believe basically in the Ten Commandments.


Alan

I wish so many of them didn't begin with 'Thou shalt not.' It makes virtue seem so negative.

Mr. Hamilton

A great deal of virtue is giving up.

Alan

But I can't understand that. I can't see why it should be right to say, 'here I am, a miserable and unfulfilled man, but I am a good man.' I believe we were sent to earth to be more than people not doing this, not doing that. At that rate, the best way to be good is to stay in bed...alone, of course.

Mr. Hamilton

Didn't your mother and I teach you any of the things you should do?

Alan

I'm sure you did. Do your lessons, wash behind your ears, pick up your room. But nobody told me 'go out and enjoy your youth.' Caution was the watchword. Be careful. Wait. Your time is coming.

Mr. Hamilton

Well, I didn't want you to have the kind of youth mine was. A misspent youth.

Alan

Mine was unspent. You should have put a label on youth... 'Perishable. Use at once.'...18

In view of Robert Anderson's continuing concern for adolescent development and intimate relationships, the following account of Alan Hamilton's sex education may reveal another important influence:

Mr. Hamilton

The rules you were taught at your mother's knee will see you through anything.

Alan

Story-book rules, Dad. Looking back now, I can only wonder with what cynicism she told me the lovely dream of life. Not the facts, the dreams. I was learning the facts down in the neighbor's cellar.

Mr. Hamilton

Well...

Alan

In the cellar facts and sensations without meaning...At my mother's knee romanticized meaning without facts.

Mr. Hamilton

You were told whatever it was right for you to know at each age.

Alan

You sent me to the doctor for the facts of life. He summed them all up in two neat words. 'Don't masturbate!' Surely a shining motto to carry one through the golden gates of adolescence. The next thing I heard on the subject were several mumbled prefatory remarks a week before I was to be married.

Mr. Hamilton

(embarrassed)
Well...

Alan

I'm sorry. How did we get on this?

Mr. Hamilton

Your mother told me that she had answered all your questions. That you knew all it was right for you to know at each age.
Alan

Well, I'm a big boy now, Dad. What is it right for me to know at this age? Or should I ask Mother? All over the country there are men and women standing in telephone booths waiting to ask Mom, 'What do I do now?'. . . only they can't seem to get a connection, or the line is busy. 19

Myra Anderson gave her son an abundance of love and understanding and fostered in him many of the interests she was unable to share with her husband. Music was one of these. "You liked to sing and I played the piano, . . . "20 the mother recalls in I Never Sang For My Father, "and we'd listen to the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts."21 Her love of gardening was another shared interest. Robert Anderson's knowledge and use of flowers for symbolic purposes is apparent in almost every play he has written, and gardening continues to be one of his favorite hobbies.22

Perhaps most important was Myra Anderson's love for the theatre which she transmitted to her son by early exposure to plays and opera. Some of the first theatre productions they saw together were those of the Clare Tree Major Players, which toured through New Rochelle; Eva Le Gallienne's Peter Pan; and performances by the Walter Hampton Repertory Company, including Cyrano De Bergerac and

20Anderson, Father, I.36.
21 Ibid., I.33.
22Candee, ed., Current Biography, p. 23. A brief discussion of flowers for symbolic purposes is given in Chapter II.
Another early and important influence toward a theatre career was the private grammar school which Robert Anderson attended, the Thornton Donovan School in New Rochelle, notable for its stress on self-expression. Here, the future playwright became editor of his school paper and acquired his first acting experience. While they were quite young, the students at Thornton Donovan were taught improvisation acting, recitation and singing. By the time they reached the seventh and eighth grades, the children were performing Shakespeare. Performances lasting an hour and a half were customarily given at the school every Friday morning. These consisted of Shakespearean scenes by the older students and dramatizations of children's stories by the younger children. Following each performance, the seventh and eighth grade boys presented a burlesque of the plays which had been done by the younger children. "The younger kids loved this sort of take-off," the dramatist recalls,

having their older brothers, as it were, mimic and make fun of the play they'd just finished. . . . We were all primed to get up and make fools of ourselves and enjoy the pleasure of acting. It was a marvelous school.24

23 Robert Anderson responded by audio tape to two lists of questions from the writer. The first taped response, approximately four hours in length, was received October 26, 1968. The second tape, containing approximately one hour of Anderson's comments, was received on January 16, 1969. Future references to these taped responses will be indicated as Anderson Tape No. 1 and No. 2. The information to which this footnote refers is found in Anderson Tape No. 1.

24 Ibid.
Acting did not become a serious career consideration for Anderson until several years later. Throughout his boyhood, he wanted to be a poet, an artist and a singer. From grammar school through adolescence, he was "an incorrigible versifier" sending his poems to magazine after magazine but they were never published. He loved to paint and draw and one summer, during his grammar school years, attended an art school in New Rochelle. Another summer, to please his father, he took a Jimmy De Forest course in boxing. "My father was always very proud of anybody who could box and one of the first things he bought my brother and myself was boxing gloves," the playwright stated.

He used to make us put them on. He was always full of stories of how, when he went to school, he had boxing and how he was a good boxer so we always wanted to be good boxers. My brother turned out to be a championship boxer. I didn't manage.

As a boy, Anderson "lived by the radio," listening to singers for the most part, to the popular vocalists of the day and

\[25\text{Ibid.}\]

\[26\text{Anderson, Love Among Friends, I. 2.}\]

\[27\text{Anderson Tape No. 1.}\]

\[28\text{Ibid.}\]


\[30\text{Anderson Tape No. 1.}\]
later to opera. By the time he graduated from the eighth grade and entered Phillips Exeter Academy, he had decided upon a career in opera, an ambition which his father could never understand and one which tended to set him apart from the other boys at prep school.

The years at Exeter, 1931-1934, have been depicted by the playwright as an unhappy and lonely period, but he feels that he was probably no more lonely than many boys that age. While his social life at school was meager, "it really was nobody's fault but my own," he recalls.

I was in love with a girl back home, and I used to see her constantly on vacations, but I just wasn't aggressive enough to manage to get her up to the Term dances. These weren't much fun anyway. I have always enjoyed being alone with a girl or woman much more than being with her in a large group.

The only dance he attended at Exeter was one given by the Music Club when, as a committee member, he was responsible, like Tom Lee in *Tea and Sympathy*, for escorting one of the faculty wives to the dance.

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31 Ibid.


34 Ibid.

35 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.

36 Ibid.

Actually, young Anderson was one of the established men on the Exeter campus. A fraternity man, and one of ten members of the Senior Council, he was also a letterman in basketball and played on the All-Class team in track and tennis. He was vice-president of the Music Club and soloist in the Glee Club and the Choir. He performed in a number of school plays and in Gilbert and Sullivan Teas, "pocket-sized" editions of the operettas presented by students and faculty.38

In the financial crash of 1929, James Anderson lost his position with the United Verde Copper Company where he had worked for many years,39 and also lost the greater part of his investments, but from his remaining holdings, he supported his sons at Exeter and at Harvard. Robert had a small scholarship at Exeter and during his junior and senior years, he worked, for one year, as a waiter and for another as proctor in a dormitory.40 When he earned his letter for athletics, the playwright recalls that he was not able to afford a sweater to display the award. His father sent some money and "a long letter about how this was an exception and how I could go out and buy my letter sweater. My father always said that neither of his boys asked for more money. We didn't.41

38Anderson Tape No. 1.
40By the time the dramatist entered Harvard, however, it was not necessary for him to work because his father had, by that time, become a successful insurance salesman. Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.
41Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 405.
Anderson read a great many plays at Exeter,\(^2\) saw plays during vacations, and acted in school productions, but his predominant interest at this time was music.\(^3\) In fact, the first one-act play he wrote was an adaptation of a now-forgotten opera libretto which received "the amazing mark of A plus," the only "A" he received at Exeter.\(^4\)

To his great disappointment, he developed a severe sinus condition in his third year at Exeter and was forced to stop singing for a while. Although he experimented with "every quack cure tried by man," including a diet in which meat and starch were not eaten at the same meal,\(^5\) the sinus trouble persisted and became a contributing factor in the eventual curtailment of his ambition to become an opera singer.\(^6\)

Graduating from Exeter and entering Harvard in 1935, he was still primarily interested in a musical career either as a singer or a composer, but continued to explore his other creative interests as well, writing poetry, painting and acting in the Freshman Harvard Dramatic Club play. Then, at the beginning of his sophomore year, his interests suddenly crystallized around the theatre when he met

\(^{42}\)Anderson Tape No. 1.
\(^{43}\)Ibid.
\(^{44}\)Ibid.
\(^{45}\)Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p.405.
\(^{46}\)Anderson Tape No. 1
Phyllis Stohl and began acting under her direction at the Erskine School in Boston. As a freshman he had been invited by a fellow student in music class to try out for a musical at this small junior college for women, but being unavailable on the night of try-outs, he recalls, "I missed meeting Phyllis and Erskine School and my future by a year." The following fall, he was again asked to audition for a play at the school. The production was not a musical, but Victor Hugo's *Angelo*, and Anderson was selected for the role of Anifesto. For the next three years, Erskine School became his clubhouse. The camaraderie of the theatre and the presence of the girls provided a refreshing change from the lonely all-male existence at Exeter and Harvard where he had known "practically no one."  

The school presented three plays a year and he acted or sang in almost all of these, rehearsing six or eight weeks for each production. Among the plays he did were *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (the role of Fenton), *The Winter's Tale*, and Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. The role of Orestes in Robert Turney's play, *Daughters of Atreus*, is remembered as one of the "great moments." He sang the leading roles in Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*, (the American premiere of the play), in Noel Coward's *Bittersweet* and *Conversation Piece* and in various other operettas including his own adaptation of *Giroflé-Girofla*, the comic opera by Le Coq.  

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\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
Robert Anderson fell in love not only with the theatre but with his director, Phyllis Stohl, who was later to become his wife. It was a "fascinating" and a "magic" experience, he says, "to be in love, really desperately in love for the first time with both your career and your girl." His academic record had always been good, but after meeting Phyllis, his grades began to soar along with his spirits and he graduated from Harvard magna cum laude.49

When they met, Robert Anderson was nineteen years old and Phyllis was twenty-nine. As head of the Drama Department she directed all of the plays for the Erskine School and was also in charge of drama at Radcliffe.50 Born in Brigham City, Utah, and reared in Salt Lake City, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Utah. From 1930 to 1933 she attended the Yale School of Drama where she was graduated with the degree, Master of Fine Arts. Her theatre background included a summer's observation at the Moscow Art Theatre, attendance at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and directing plays for the Harvard and Wellesley Dramatic Clubs.51

Phyllis was a professional woman and a career woman of "the

49Ibid.
51Anderson Tape No. 1
highest possible standards." Most of her productions for the Erskine School were presented at the Repertory Theatre, then a first-class theatre in Boston. Production costs for her plays were approximately five or six thousand dollars, an immense amount of money for a junior college production at that time. Donald Oenslager's assistant designed her sets, and the late Jean Rosenthal, who became one of the foremost lighting experts in the country, did her lighting. Costumes were expertly done. "Phyllis never did anything unless it was first-class," Robert Anderson says.

She would buy a beautiful suit which cost a lot of money and wear it for ever and ever. Nothing could be cheap for Phyllis in her standards or her life or her point of view or her attitudes. It was always 'the best'... and this, I think, was very influential in my life.52

A perfectionist and a tireless and meticulous worker, Phyllis Stohl had "great flair and great personal style as a director." Years later as co-producer with the Theatre Guild of William Inge's Come Back Little Sheba, she had the opportunity to direct the play on Broadway but elected to stand aside and have Daniel Mann direct because she felt that having done the play in summer theatre, he could do it best in New York. That she never directed on Broadway, Robert Anderson feels, is one of the "real sadnesses" of her tragically short life. Her dedication to the theatre, her intense sense of perfection and professionalism were enormously important in his development.53

Working with Phyllis in the Erskine School productions

52Ibid.
53Ibid.
he learned a great deal about personal discipline, and acquired from her many of the high professional standards he has since followed.

While his primary ambition in the sophomore and junior years was to become an actor, he tried to learn about all areas of theatre, taking courses in criticism, writing musical sketches for college shows, and working as an apprentice in summer theatres. Since Harvard had no classes in dramatic writing, he took courses with the instructor who was most interested in the theatre. This was the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Robert Hillyer, who had never written a play but had great appreciation for playwriting and for theatre in general.

Robert Hillyer read Anderson's plays aloud in class and encouraged him to send his work to producers and to other people in the New York theatre. Especially enthusiastic about his student's comedies, Hillyer urged him to do more writing in this vein. In Hillyer's class, Robert Anderson also wrote criticism, which helped prepare him for a later position as theatre critic for the Harvard Advocate. The playwright has often cited Robert Hillyer as one of the most influential people in his choice of career.54

The person who figured most importantly, however, in his decision to become a dramatist was Phyllis Stohl. Having read his poetry and early plays and directed his adaptation of Giroflè-Girofla, she felt that his talents lay more in writing than in acting. A woman with a strong sense of dignity, she felt also that

54 Ibid.
acting was not only very difficult and unstable, but, unless the actor was extremely successful, an unrewarding and somewhat undignified profession. "With good humor and kindness," she convinced him to concentrate on the more certain and satisfying career of playwriting.

Sitting in the cheapest seats in the second balcony or standing at the back of theatres, the couple saw almost every play in Boston during those years, and after their marriage, often attended the famous Old Howard burlesque theatre together. Robert Anderson remembers the significant moment of his decision to pursue a writing career as occurring in the spring of 1937 when he and Phyllis were sitting in the top balcony of the Colonial Theatre talking about his career and waiting for the movie, The Good Earth, to begin.

College Plays

His first works produced at Harvard were musical comedies fashioned to some extent on the comedy at the Old Howard. The college musicals, one entitled Hour Town and another called Not On Your Life, were Christmas shows presented at Dunster House,

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55 "Phyllis and I used to go because it was great comedy," Anderson remembers, "of course very pretty girls too, but very great gutsy, lusty comedy which I loved." Anderson Tape No. 1

56 Ibid.


58 Anderson Tape No. 1.
for which Anderson wrote the book, lyrics and music as well as directed and performed in the productions. Unfortunately, neither the scripts nor the music for the Dunster House shows have been retained by the playwright and all but four of approximately twenty one-act plays written in college have been lost or discarded. The one-acts he elected to save are Dream Dust, Death Do Us Part, Midnight Dialogue, and The Gate.

Dream Dust, his first one-act since Exeter, was awarded an honorable mention in a one-act play contest held by the Berkeley Playmakers in California. Its story takes place in a lower class boarding house in New York City where Mrs. Garfield, a sensitive, crippled old lady sits dreaming of a better world and knitting a sweater for Joseph Youngman, another boarder, who is the imagined son of her dream world. She is berated for her dreaming by the obdurately realistic Irish landlady, Mrs. Calahan, but presents such a moving description and defense of her imagined world that the landlady is nearly convinced of its value. Mrs. Calahan is not convinced, however, by the old lady's attempt to vindicate her companion dreamer, the unemployed poet and artist, Joseph Youngman, who owes a month's back rent.

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60 Anderson Tape No. 1.


Continuing to talk about the dreams she shares with Joseph, Mrs. Garfield wonders idly if the dream which one is dreaming at the time of death goes on forever. Joseph enters and gives the old lady a bouquet of flowers he found in the street. He is anxious to know whether the mailman has come; and, after the landlady leaves, confides to Mrs. Garfield that he is desperately waiting for a letter containing money he needs to repay an unlawful debt. Mrs. Garfield suggests that they try to forget their troubles "by thinking somewhere else" but Joseph says he has dreamed too much and that dreaming has made him a misfit. "Perhaps I don't think the same as others do," he says, "but you don't want a world where everyone thinks the same." Later in the conversation he says,

I never had anything to be proud of, so I had to make it up. I've been making things up all my life to fill in the spaces. Other kids boasted about their fathers. Mine was a drunk. But I had to make something up about him to boast of, and then he'd give me a beating for lying.63

Mrs. Garfield agrees that certain people "get beaten every time for trying to make up the difference between what is and what should be," but insists that dreaming is the best solution. If she had the courage, she tells him, she would die during her dream and find eternal happiness. Joseph asks her to talk to him about this "other world."

Mrs. Garfield

(As though she were reading to a baby to put him to sleep. She little realizes the effect she is having on Joseph, but seems to be half seeing what she is talking about.)

63Anderson, Dream Dust, p. 16.
Out of the dullness of this into that place where we look, is but a step, a motion, a quaver, over the threshold into peace, rest and love. Home for the peaceful, the dreamers, the lovers. A heavy scent of flowers makes you drowsy, but you don't dream; you are your dream. Lights playing on the darkness of your troubled soul soothe it, and you find peace. . . . 64

As she goes on, Joseph falls under the spell of the dream and finally moves out of the room. The postman arrives with a registered letter, and since Mrs. Garfield appears to be napping, he summons the landlady who calls upstairs to tell Joseph to come down and sign for the letter. "Oh, that," he says, and a shot is heard. Mrs. Garfield, startled out of her dream, slowly begins to unravel the sweater she has been knitting. 65

The author's extreme youthfulness is obvious, but as a first script, by a twenty-year-old student, it is quite a creditable effort. The language is poetic, yet natural. The characters and their relationships are interestingly drawn and the story is told with some ironic effect. Of special interest in this beginning work are hints of motifs later developed into important themes. Joseph Youngman, the misfit, and his desire for a world where people are free to be different, anticipates Tom Lee, the "off-horse" of Tea and Sympathy. 66 The persecution of the "off-horse," a prominent theme of the later play, is found as early as Dream Dust. Another interesting parallel is the use of two lonely people in isolation.

64 Ibid., pp. 18-20.
65 Ibid., p. 21.
at the core of both works. Mrs. Garfield's comment on the disparity
between the real and ideal world presages the theme, mentioned
earlier in this chapter, which pervades much of Anderson's later
writing--"man at war with the inevitable."

Of incidental interest in this first one-act are the giving
of flowers, a preoccupation with suicide and the possible influence
of the playwright's father whose stories of poverty and parental
drunkenness are suggested in the background of Joseph Youngman.
The motif of suicide, of only incidental importance in _Dream Dust_,
will figure with greater force in Anderson's later plays.

In view of Robert Anderson's later handling of love, it is
curious that his first love story in one-act form is a tale of murder
and duplicity. _Death Do Us Part_ examines the relationship of Bell
Watkins, a sensuous woman of forty, and her younger lover, Jeremy
Cotton, who, at Bell's insistence, has killed her husband. After
the murder, Jeremy discovers incriminating letters from Bell's former
lovers and realizes that she has merely used him to free herself
from her husband. Meeting on a footbridge, the couple discuss their
future. Hating each other now because of their treachery and guilt
and unable to trust one another with the knowledge of the crime,
they are doomed to carry out their original plan to marry. "And
I'll watch you and you'll watch me," Jeremy says, "and we'll grow
old in fear and hate . . . . and there'll be no love, till death

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67 Robert Anderson, _Death Do Us Part_, unpublished one-act
playscript, pp. 1-16.
do us part."68 As a student exercise in dialogue, characterization and suspense, the play has merit.

Midnight Dialogue,69 the only comedy among the extant college one-acts, is a humorously flippant dispute between an actor-husband and his actress-wife touring through a small midwestern town in a second-rate road company production of Camille. Returning to their cheap boarding-house room after a performance, they argue satirically about everything from their curtain calls to their sex life. A farmer who is trying to get to sleep after a tiring evening in the theatre, comes into their room to ask for quiet. Not recognizing the performers, he criticizes their acting. When he leaves, the quarrel resumes more playfully and the wife entices her husband into bed.

A remarkably entertaining play for a student effort, Midnight Dialogue provides early evidence of Anderson's extraordinary gift for comedy and foretells the success of You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running. The satirical wit and superficial characters of the early play show the obvious influence of Noel Coward, one of the playwrights whom Robert Anderson most admired and tried to emulate in college. As several critics have pointed out, Coward's dialogue is very difficult to imitate. The English dramatist is

68Ibid., p. 16.

credited with beginning a "vogue for brief speeches, almost none more than a line long." One critic has written, "Noel Coward has been very influential in the matter of dialogue which in its naturalness is particularly convincing. . . ." Anderson's speeches in *Midnight Dialogue* are similarly very brief, crisp and bright—a close approximation of Coward's style in this respect.

Other dramatists held in high esteem during his Harvard years were S. N. Behrman, John van Druten, Robert Sherwood ("for the way he handled love between men and women"), Phillip Barry, Sir James M. Barrie and, above all the rest, Maxwell Anderson. Still very much under the influence of Maxwell Anderson at the time he graduated, Robert Anderson wrote his honors thesis on *The Necessity for Poetic Drama*.

The concern of the young dramatist for poetry in the theatre is also seen in his one-act verse play, mentioned earlier, *The Gate*, which takes its title from its setting, "Suicide Gate, a place that lies in between the will to die and Death."

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73 Anderson Tape No. 1.


The central character is Tom Scalvel, a rough, bullying scoundrel, who has murdered a woman and tried to commit suicide in order to avoid trial and execution. Playing poker with two other men outside the gate, he grumbles noisily at the injustice of having to wait to get through the gates while others who have arrived later than he are admitted. To enter, one must take a number and wait for the number to be flashed on the wall before the gate opens. An old man arrives and receives a lower number than Tom's. Asked why he came, the old man replies:

I came because I found all hope was gone.

Scalvel

All hope of what?

Old Man

Just hope. You wouldn't know.
Since you are still a young man with tomorrows.
But there's a time when every thread of hope
Snaps with a twang and leaves the view quite clear
For one to see the dismal end ahead.
When the rising sun means nothing more to you
Than just a proof of scientific fact
That the earth moves 'round the sun and night turns day,
And when you know that nothing possibly
Can happen in that day to quicken your pulse,
Or make your heart beat faster, then you know
There is no longer hope; all hope is gone.

Scalvel

Why, then, you're scared,
Like all the rest of them are scared to Hell.
Now, I'm not scared, not me; I'm tough as nails.
The only reason that I'm coming here
Is just to keep their dirty hands off me.
But you're all scared and yellow right straight through.
Old Man

You're very wrong, young man, to think I'm scared.
The truth is that I'm tired, very tired.
My life has been a very happy one;
I just don't want to mar the pleasant picture,
By clouding it with absence of all hope.76

When the old man's number is flashed, Tom tries unsuccessfully to bribe him into exchanging numbers with him so that he can take the old man's place. The gates open and Tom tries to dash through them after the old man but they slam in his face. Soon a ten-year-old boy comes in. Seeing the gate, he becomes frightened and changes his mind about entering but Tom grabs him, takes his number and attempts to enter at the boy's turn. Again, the gates close before he can get through. The men who have been waiting with Tom attempt to convince him to let the boy go. One says he knows that he is guilty of a ruined life but wants to redeem himself. When he says this, his number is shown and he is allowed to enter. The gates open for the second man when he admits that he is also guilty:

Scalvel

And now, kid, just us two. Don't shake like that. There's nothing to be scared of now, so stop.
You got to get me through, so don't be scared.
You got to stand right up and knock them down.
What's frightening you? What's got you, eh?

Boy

The gate.

76 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
Scalvel

That gate? Why it's just like the rest of them. If you don't like it there, you can come out.

Boy

I don't believe that.

Scalvel

Don't you now? Then why?

Boy

I've been taught you can't come back from Death.

Scalvel

That's bosh. You can; you just say, 'let me out', And then those gates fly open wide for you.

Boy

But my father went and never came again.

Scalvel

He didn't know the trick. You got to shout.

Boy

You mean I could go home and tell the gang I ordered Death to let me out?

Scalvel

That's right.77

The boy calls feebly for the gates to open but when they do, he becomes more frightened and tries again to escape. Tom forces him through at knife point but the gates close too swiftly for Tom to follow. Realizing that he is alone and powerless, he

77Ibid., pp. 23-24.
flings himself against the gates in terror and then sinks slowly
to the floor sobbing, "guilty, guilty, open, please open." Slowly
they do. 78

According to its author, The Gate was written under the
influence not only of Maxwell Anderson, but "of all the people who
were writing verse drama in those days" including Auden, Isherwood,
and Stephen Spender. 79 The verse dialogue of the play is remarkably
indebted to Maxwell Anderson's practice of placing poetic speech
in the mouths of common people. The form and structure of the
verse is closer to the style of this particular older dramatist
than it is to that of Auden, Isherwood or Spender. Likewise, the
play is reminiscent of Maxwell Anderson's work in characterization:
The anti-hero is a man of action, a man of emotion and his speech
flows from his "guts." Most important, it is written as drama first,
not poetry with action superimposed.

Robert Anderson's first full-length play, Anthony Babington, 80
appears to have been based solely on the pattern of Maxwell Anderson's
historical drama. Its Elizabethan background, language (alternating
between prose and blank verse), structure, and final scene are strik­
ingly reminiscent of Elizabeth the Queen. The source for Anthony
Babington is Stefan Zweig's account of the famous Walsingham plot.

79 Anderson Tape No. 1.
80 Robert Anderson, Anthony Babington, unpublished three-act
playscript, pp. 1-72.
"one of the most incredible though documentarily attested acts of perfidy known to history . . . the so-called Babington Conspiracy, which was in reality, a Walsingham conspiracy."81 This romantic story of the spirited, noble and foolhardy Babington naturally appealed to a young playwright of Robert Anderson's sensibilities. These comments by Zweig probably helped to inspire the writing of the play:

. . . Mary's sufferings during the last months of her life, tragic though they were, were slight in comparison with the abominable tortures inflicted upon the unhappy young men who had ventured all on behalf of the prisoned queen. For the most part historians are affected by class bias, describing at great length, and often enough exclusively, the distresses of those who sit in the seats of the mighty . . . They ignore the deeds of cruelty done in dark places, the torments inflicted upon sufferers of little note—as if persons of high rank felt more acutely than their 'inferiors.' Babington and a number of his confederates (who mentions their names today, although the name and the sad destinies of Queen Mary have been immortalized on countless stages and in numberless books?) endured in three hours of hideous torture more than Mary Stuart had to endure in the twenty years of her misfortune.82

As a first full-length work, Anthony Babington is an impressive accomplishment despite its relative immaturity and a certain youthful pretentiousness. In presenting Babington's story, the playwright kept relatively close to the facts of history but invented two scenes which are historically questionable, a romantic farewell for Babington and his wife and a final encounter between Babington and Walsingham in which Walsingham offers to spare


82Ibid., pp. 320-21.
Babington's life in exchange for information about his fellow conspirators. This passage from the final and most effective scene is indicative of the play's theatrical strengths and youthful imperfections:

Walsingham

I offer you your life if you will tell me the names of those who started this infamous accusation against Her Majesty.

Babington

You have been leading me about on a string, Mr. Secretary, and yet it seems that you have not looked carefully at the man whom you have been leading. Look at me. (he stands) Look, I say. There is your answer. When I go from here to Tyburn, dragged on the wheels, I will shout your infamy to the multitude. Then hide in shame.

Walsingham

I foresaw your rashness, Babington. You are to be executed in the Tower courtyard. Your shouts will fall on deaf ears, --I had expected to find a man who loved his life more dearly.

Babington

I love my life so dearly that I would not sully it by trafficking with you. Get out. Get out. (He starts for Walsingham who quickly goes to the door and out.) (Anthony goes to the table and sits down. He puts his hands around the candle in a cup form.) And so the circle closes round my life, Not quite snuffed out, but of no use. A life which loved each sweet sensation, Each simple thing which was sincere. To-night there will be stars, To-night the firmament shall show its wonders, And I shall be no more. Tomorrow the sun will rise, The sun in which we glory when we live But whose appearance o'er the night's dark rim Spells death. Today, this minute, this present In which all men exist, and no man lives, Looms large before me-- Each flicker of the candle, each murmur of the earth, Each breath is as a pearl, the whole making up A string which shall be scattered on the ground,
And there the grass will cover them.  
Beneath the ground there lies a man,  
But Spring shall pass unheeded.  
To-night there will be stars,  
But I shall not see them.  

The doors of the cell then burst open. A deputy enters and reads the death sentence. As he finishes the decree, Anthony snuffs out the candle and strides to the gallows through a shaft of sunlight and a roll of drums.  

Anderson was not entirely successful in individualizing the seventeen characters in Anthony Babington, most of whom were taken from the historical record. Among the conspirators and other minor characters there is very little differentiation; a speech of one could as well be transferred to another. With the major characters, however, he was more successful. Elizabeth's speech has a cold staccato quality:

Elizabeth

(In a thoughtful tone) No, Walsingham, I cannot order her execution; Mary Stuart has done me no wrong, no harm. Would she had, for then I could pluck this Scottish thorn from out my heart.  

Mary's language is softer, more romantic in tone:

Mary

Does she think that I want to roam the fields of Scotland, to see the mountains and the heather, and have my heart say, you were queen of all this, Mary, but Elizabeth was too strong for you. And yet--

Of particular merit, as well, is Anderson's treatment of the male

83Anderson, Anthony Babington, II. iii. 71-72.  
84Ibid., I. i. 1.  
85Ibid., II. ii. 50.
leads. The sly and calculating Walsingham, for example, changes his manner with each situation, and the quality of Babington's speech alternates with his emotion and his vacillating will.

Indecision is the flaw in Babington's character and this is one of the inherent defects of the play. His indecisive nature, corroborated by the historical facts, weakens the play by denying its hero a strongly volitional line of action and thus, a good deal of audience sympathy. Regardless of these faults the playwright succeeded admirably in presenting a large and complicated story intelligently, poetically, and, in a few instances, with strong dramatic impact.

Graduate School Plays

After graduating magna cum laude as class poet of 1939, Robert Anderson entered Harvard Graduate School as an assistant in the Department of English. His decision to prepare for a teaching career was influenced in part by his father. "He used to say," the playwright recalls,

at the age of fifty if they don't like the color of your tie they can fire you, but if you're a professional man, you can take your profession to another part of the city or the world . . . so my brother became a doctor and I was going to become a teacher."87

The fact that Anderson wanted to get married soon was another important

86. The professors he assisted at Harvard were the late Theodore Spencer (History of the Theatre), Hyder Rollins (nineteenth century) and Harry Levin (Shakespeare). Most of his work for these men consisted of grading papers. Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.

87. Anderson Tape No. 1.
element in this career choice. His marriage to Phyllis Stohl took place in June, 1940, when he completed the Master's degree and began work on the Ph.D. To supplement his income from the graduate assistantship, he took various jobs such as reviewing books for *Atlantic Monthly*, and later teaching at girls' schools in Boston. Although this heavy schedule left little time for writing, he managed to complete a full-length play during each of his three years of graduate study.

The first of these was *Straw In The Wind*, an experiment in comedy of manners based on the models of Noel Coward and Phillip Barry. Written in the year before his wedding, the play reflects the young author's personal concerns about marriage and his uncertainty about the future. "I'm one big question mark," the obviously autobiographical hero, Phillip Stevenson, says, "I imagine I will go through life asking questions to which nobody knows the answers." Having "avoided those studies which would help one earn a living after graduation," Phillip applies for the position of butler with


89 Between 1940 and 1942, Robert Anderson taught a general literature course at Miss Child's School, playwriting at the Erskine School and at Chamberlayne, he shared a course in history of the theatre with Professor Theodore Spencer. Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.


an aristocratic family but is hired instead as tutor for the younger son and intellectual companion for the mistress of the house. Through the character of Phillip Stevenson, Robert Anderson exam­ines a deteriorated marriage and its effects on the lives and marital potentialities of grown children. In this family, the parents' unhappy relationship, resulting from differences in inter­ests and values, is repeated in the marriage of the elder son. The personality development of both the son and an adopted daughter have been damaged by the absence of affection in the home. The boy, sent away to school at thirteen and "brought up by proxy" grew into a pompous and selfish young man. The daughter, forced into the mold of the dead child she was adopted to replace, suffers from indecision and confusion to an even greater extent than Phillip whom she sees as a symbol of escape, "a straw to be grabbed at." While auto­biographic characteristics are seen most clearly in the character of Phillip, they are apparent also in the brother and sister. Of further biographical interest is the characterization of the strong, unusual, intelligent, conscientious and loving girl with whom Phillip falls in love. These adjectives have been used by Anderson and others in describing Phyllis Stohl.

Influences of both Barry and Coward are discernible in the tone of the play (described by its hero as "really comic and just a little sad"), as well as in the psychoanalytic treatment of

\[93\text{Ibid.}, \text{III. ii. 23.}\]
\[94\text{Ibid.}, \]
its upper class characters and in the absence of open conflict. As
a comedy of manners, the play more closely resembles the style of
Coward than that of Barry. In story and theme, Straw in the Wind
bears a remarkable resemblance to Coward's satirical study of a
middle-aged actress and her family in The Vortex. Throughout both
plays, the concentration is upon wasted talent and misdirected
energies in a life given over to the petty concerns of socially
prominent characters.

In Anderson's play, Phillip provides a parallel to Helen,
the raisonneur of The Vortex, pointing out various truths to the
family members. Acting as the voice of the author, he tends to
be a mere intellectual paper doll. As in Anthony Babington, the
irresolute nature of the central character weakens the dramatic
potential. None of the characters are truly credible or very
interesting. In his apparent attempt to capture the detached spirit
of Noel Coward, the young dramatist succeeded in simply creating an
atmosphere of indifference.

Straw in the Wind is the first of Anderson's plays to make
use of a day of celebration as the focal point for the play's action.
In this case, the story focuses around the thirtieth wedding anni-
versary party of the parents and includes, among several occurrences,
the reading of a love letter written by the husband and signed by
both parents on the night of their marriage. The letter incident
is significant in that Anderson used a similar episode more than
fifteen years later in All Summer Long and in that it is the first of
many examples of his tendency to reuse material from earlier works.
In his second year of graduate school and his first year of marriage, Robert Anderson wrote Undiscovered Country, a fantasy based on the Orpheus-Eurydice legend. Vaguely reminiscent of Phillip Barry’s psychological fantasies, In A Garden and Hotel Universe, this play represents a courageous but abortive effort to write in the Barry manner. A strangely prophetic play, Undiscovered Country tells of the death of a young playwright’s wife and his attempt to bring her back from the underworld. In its mood of self-recrimination and concern over the wife’s sacrifice for her husband’s career, the play suggests the probability of some difficult adjustments during the first year of marriage. It also attests to the couple’s exhaustive striving toward their mutual dream of theatrical success, a dream which included Phyllis’ direction of her husband’s plays and jointly directed schools of theatre.

While they were conducting an apprentice group at the North Shore Players in Marblehead, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1941, Anderson completed his next long play, The Sisters. An amusing incident about his submission of this play to the Theatre Guild has been recounted by the playwright:

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95 Anderson Tape No. 1.


97 Anderson Tape No. 1.


The Slaters was a deep, dark tragedy, and I remember getting a letter back from John Gassner, who was later to be one of my closest friends, saying there was a great comic idea in this play. And I was convinced that they never read the plays... and I wanted to write a blasting letter back to them and the gentle hand of my wife suggested that I not... 100

Quoted in a Theatre Arts article ten years later, Anderson recalled the period of this play as the "lowest point" in his career, 101 an opinion readily confirmed by an examination of the script. In its 1890 setting, The Sisters is reminiscent of the melodramatic tragedies of that period. Its dour story tells of the triumph of incredible evil over the purest virtue through the characters of two stepsisters of opposite temperament. Showing no development in the playwright's artistic sensibilities, the play, on the contrary, demonstrates excesses of sentimentality, symbolism and characterization in which he never again indulged. The play is interesting solely in its portrait of a wicked farmer and in its author's melancholy view of life.

Contributing to Anderson's gloomy outlook at this time was his dissatisfaction with graduate work and the frustration of spending endless hours in the library when he wanted to be writing plays. Although he continued to receive excellent grades throughout graduate school, he was not interested in the advanced courses he was taking (such as Old French, High German, Norse and Chaucer in the original). After completing his course work and language

100 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 189.
requirements, he passed his oral examinations for the Ph.D. on the night before he entered the Navy, but never went back to complete the dissertation. "Sometimes I'm sorry," he says, "except that Harvard had me working along some very dusty lines for my thesis and I'd just about had it in the stacks."\textsuperscript{102} The war, in a sense, rescued Robert Anderson from an unhappy academic existence. In the Navy he found the time he needed to write plays.

\textsuperscript{102}Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 19, 1965.
CHAPTER II

THE NAVY PLAYS

Anderson entered the Navy as an Ensign in 1942 and after a brief time in Boston working as an editor for Naval Intelligence, he was successively sent to Cornell for Indoctrination School, to Naval Intelligence School in Washington, D.C., back to Boston for further Intelligence training, and then to Communications School at Harvard. Next, he was assigned as Ship's Secretary on the Alaska and spent the first few weeks in Newport, Rhode Island, and the next several months in Camden, New Jersey, where the large cruiser was fitted out. Later, the Alaska went on a shakedown cruise into the South Atlantic and finally into the Pacific. When he reached Pearl Harbor, Anderson was transferred to the Texas as Flag Secretary and Personal Aide to the Commander of Battleship Division Five. At the end of the war, after seeing action at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, he was attached to Admiral Nimitz' staff in Pearl Harbor.¹

While the Alaska was in Camden, the Andersons lived in Philadelphia.² Then, when Robert left the country, Phyllis returned to Boston to teach. Later she lived with her husband's parents in

¹Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.
²Ibid.
New Rochelle while looking for work in New York City. In May, 1945, she obtained a position as radio script editor with the American Broadcasting Corporation and shortly before Robert's return to the States the following November, she joined the play department of the Theatre Guild, where she later became head of the department and an associate producer.

Come Marching Home

On board the Alaska, first at Camden with the noise of riveters all around and later in the South Pacific, Anderson wrote *Come Marching Home* which he submitted to the National Theatre Conference Play Contest of 1944. Several months later at Iwo Jima, Lieutenant Anderson received word that *Come Marching Home* had been awarded a $100 prize by NTC as the best play written by an American serviceman overseas. The award included a production of the play at the State University of Iowa and travel expenses for the playwright to attend rehearsals. When the production took place in the summer of 1945, its author was aboard the Texas at Okinawa so Phyllis Anderson was

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5Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.


invited in his place. Phyllis went to Iowa City with Hallie Flanagan Davis, chairman of the NTC New Playwrights Project and former head of the Federal Theatre Project. When E. C. Mabie, who was directing the play, became ill during rehearsal, Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Davis took over the direction. Professor Mabie and Hallie Flanagan Davis sent word to Robert Anderson that if he could add to the body of his work before he returned, he might be eligible for a $2,000 NTC-Rockefeller Scholarship in playwriting. Thereupon, in Leyte Gulf, in temperatures ranging in the hundreds, he hastily wrote two more plays, *The Tailored Heart* and *Boy Grown Tall*, the latter a play begun at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. These scripts were submitted along with *Come Marching Home* and the scholarship was subsequently awarded.

While still in the South Pacific, Robert Anderson became associated with Audrey Wood, the play agent who has represented him ever since. Originally, another now famous agent, Monica McCall, had agreed to handle *Come Marching Home*, but unable to obtain a Broadway production for the play, Miss McCall informed Anderson that it had become necessary to drop him as a client. At the time, a professional New York production seemed a reasonable hope particularly since another NTC prize play, *The Wind is Ninety*,

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8Anderson Tape No. 1.

9Examination Before Trial of Robert Anderson, p. 191.

10Ibid., p. 213.

11Ibid., pp. 190-91.
by Ralph Nelson was presented on Broadway in the summer of 1945. One of the deterrent factors in acquiring a Broadway producer for *Come Marching Home*, however, was its analogy in terms of story and theme to *State Of The Union* which opened on Broadway in November, 1945. The protagonist in each play wishes to gain political office and still to maintain his integrity. Grant Mathews, the hero of *State of the Union* by Lindsay and Crouse, wants to be president of the United States. His mutually incompatible desires, political office and integrity, are represented by his mistress on the side of politics and his wife on the side of conscience.

Although *Come Marching Home* did not reach Broadway, it was presented in 1946 at the Pasadena Playhouse in California and by the Blackfriars Guild in New York where it played twenty-three performances and brought the playwright his first New York reviews.

The *New York Times* said of the play:

> Nowhere in Times Square will one find more honesty of purpose than was revealed . . . at the Blackfriars Theatre on West 57th Street by all engaged in the presentation of Robert Anderson's *Come Marching Home*. . . . The play . . . contains the most

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13 Anderson Tape No. 1.


15 Examination Before Trial of Robert Anderson, p. 182.

16 The other New York reviews were generally more favorable than these by Louis Calta and George Jean Nathan.
honorable of hopes but unfortunately falls short of the intended mark. For while Mr. Anderson's drama about a returned Navy Officer's conflict with dishonest political elements in a small eastern city is marked by occasional passages of good writing, it somehow fails to attain the theatrical forcefulness that one might expect from its provocative theme. There are speeches that should strike fire but do not.\(^{17}\)

Critic, George Jean Nathan, noted that the story of *Come Marching Home* was "broadly reminiscent of *State of the Union,*" and quoted from a letter Robert Anderson had written him before the opening. At the time of writing, "I thought I was being most daring to write a postwar play," Anderson stated, "but I should have known that a nation which buys its morning papers the night before and its Monday magazines the preceding Thursday would be tired of the postwar theme before the war was over."\(^{18}\) Mr. Nathan agreed that this was so but felt that

The play, while hot with honest conviction, misses by virtue of its rabble-rouser writing and its author's inability to make its theme proceed naturally from his characters. It is the author rather than the latter who seems to occupy the stage. The net result is consequently much less drama than a forum harangue.\(^{19}\)

Despite this rather harsh but partially justified criticism, *Come Marching Home* represents a substantial dramaturgic advancement over Anderson's earlier plays and achieves a degree of professionalism far beyond any of the college works. The extraordinary technical com-

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.
competence evidenced by the play undoubtedly resulted to a considerable extent from the extra time and work expended, for *Come Marching Home* took nearly two years to complete, but the play also demonstrates a remarkable maturation in style which must be attributed to the playwright's own personal development. Perhaps because he was no longer trying to imitate dialogue patterns of other dramatists, Anderson here attains a naturalness of language surpassing all his previous efforts. A more significant development, however, lies in the characterization of the protagonist, John Bosworth, a consistently credible, attractive and strongly volitional character.

With the exception of *The Gate*, the quality of volition is lacking in all the early one-acts, and indecisiveness is a predominant characteristic of the heroes in *Anthony Babington* and *Straw in the Wind*. Tom Scalvel in *The Gate* has a driving need for his objective, but the man and his goal are wholly unattractive. Likewise, the young playwright in *Undiscovered Country* has a strong and impetuous desire to bring his wife back from the other world, but his attractiveness is diminished by his conflicting and overpowering desire for fame and recognition. John Bosworth in *Come Marching Home* is Anderson's first truly volitional hero with a fundamental objective which is attractive to the audience.

Structurally, *Come Marching Home* follows the modern adaptation of the well-made-play pattern. In the opening scene, the portrait of protagonist John Bosworth is sketched and exposition adroitly presented by the Bosworth maid and newspaperman Hughes. They are soon joined by Professor Cunningham, Bosworth's former university
employer and by Mrs. Comstock, a wealthy and mildly eccentric friend of the family. Professor Cunningham and Mrs. Comstock have each brought gifts of champagne for the homecoming celebration of Navy hero Bosworth and his wife, Toni. Hughs, an instrument of the corrupt political machinery of the state, is there to do a story on Lieutenant Bosworth and to verify a suspicion that Professor Cunningham, chairman of the opposing party, may try to persuade Bosworth to run for State Senator—the former candidate having recently been killed in an accident. Hughs drops ominous hints of an undisclosed act of indiscretion by John Bosworth when the two were together in London. Before Bosworth's appearance, Anderson manages to characterize him as a war hero, an intelligent, serious and sincere young man dedicated to the principles of clean government. When the Bosworth car is heard, Mrs. Comstock insists they all leave so the couple can be alone, but before they can do so, Toni Bosworth enters. Hurrying off, Professor Cunningham asks Toni to tell her husband he should not make plans until seeing Cunningham, and Hughs asks her to tell John to remember London. The remainder of the scene is devoted to additional character delineation of John and Toni and to the portrayal of their harmonious marriage.

Toni's charm, humor and intelligence prefigure similar qualities of Anderson's later idealized female characters including Laura in *Tea and Sympathy*, but unlike most of the later women, Toni functions in this play as an auxiliary character. Through her loving support she enhances the attractiveness of her husband's character and tempers his seriousness with her good humor. A
well-drawn and well motivated character herself, she provides a primary motivation for her husband, for, through the entire first act, John wants only to enjoy his marriage and his home. As the first scene ends, he proposes a champagne toast to their "private world."

The second scene of Act I, takes place later in the evening of the homecoming with John and Toni discussing their future and the war. John explains the mysterious incident in London: having met at a party, he and Hughs got intoxicated and John subsequently was briefly unfaithful to his wife, although no serious infidelity is suggested. Toni is glad to have the story from John and agrees that the episode is of no importance but that in the hands of a gossip like Hughs, it could be damaging. As they prepare to retire, Professor Cunningham returns and urges John to accept his committee's invitation to run for the Senate, explaining the deplorable political conditions and the desperate need for a strong leader. John refuses, stating that he wants time to rest and to be with his wife. "Secondly," he says:

I saw a little bit of politics in my father's day, and I didn't like what I saw. I've seen how they operate around here, and that's worse. My father was an honest man who wanted to serve the community. He ran for public office. To put it mildly he was humiliated by the muckrakers. He lost. No, politics is a very unattractive part of American life. I don't want any part of it.20

After further argument, Professor Cunningham says:

20Anderson, *Come Marching Home*, I. ii. 34.
We haven't forgotten what you did at the University as a young instructor—jeopardizing your own position to speak out against injustice—spokesman for the teachers' union—defending Hobson's right to teach the truth as he saw it. Your editorials while you were in college—the whole picture is consistent, bold, honest.

If I'm not mistaken, you're more keen than ever—if you'd admit it.

John

Supposing I were—is that enough? Is a sharp sense of resentment against the betrayal of American ideals enough? I'm young, but I'm old-fashioned—I was brought up to be old-fashioned in my political thinking. I was brought up on the great ideals of our democracy—not on their somewhat less noble manifestations. My platform? It would be laughable—good government—fair representation of all men to the best of my ability—no promises, no assurances—it's fantastic. I'd be a sort of Don Quixote tilting with windmills.  

The collision factor is then introduced in the form of an anonymous phone call threatening John should he accept the nomination. Such calls are "commonplace" and "sometimes effective," Cunningham says. When the professor is gone, John answers a second phone call with, "You can go to bed, Mister. I've accepted the nomination."  

At the beginning of Act II the campaign is under way. Toni is writing speeches exposing the rampant corruption and John is uncovering additional information including the fact that votes are sold to the highest bidder and that there are political skeletons

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21Ibid., I. ii. 36.

22Marian Gallaway, Constructing a Play (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1950), p. 68: "The factor which reveals a breakdown in the internal or external harmony of the individual and a need for readjustment is the collision factor, the factor which starts the play."

23Anderson, Come Marching Home, I. ii. 39.
in closets of some of his closest friends, including Mrs. Comstock. Joe Zaccanino, a droll yet forceful gardener who controls the votes on Fifth Avenue because each of his eight sons votes at least twice in every election, arrives with a basket of vegetables. Zaccanino compliments John on the honesty and straightforward manner of his speeches and offers to bring vegetables weekly in exchange for patronage appointments for his sons. Zaccanino's inability to understand John's refusal of the bribe points up the tremendous need for political re-education. The situation is then complicated by a newspaper story falsely accusing John of extreme radical tendencies in college and of financial dishonesty. John's mother reminds him that these were the tactics used to destroy his father, and she begs him to give up the campaign warning that when the newspapers are through with John, they will again attack his father. She reveals that John's father had lost the election because he was being blackmailed. John then receives a visit from Chet Powell, a hometown friend whose life he once saved in the Navy. Chet offers the veterans' vote in exchange for support of a larger soldier's bonus and various veteran's bills. John refuses to make any promises except to do his best for all the people. Unable to convince John of the impracticality of this idealistic course, Chet leaves, "hating to think" what will happen.

Two weeks later, in Scene II, Toni tells Professor Cunningham that John has come to distrust the people and is angry and appalled at their "gross stupidity and indifference in the face of truth." Cunningham warns her that because of John's impartial attacks on
committee members, some of his committee are thinking of shifting their support to the independent candidate and of asking for John's resignation.

The major climax begins with John's entrance in this scene. Returning home from a political dinner where he has spoken out against the people, calling them criminally stupid and unworthy Americans, John is attacked and called a Fascist. Disturbed by this label more than by the beating, he begins to question his convictions and wonders if he should give up the campaign. Hughs appears and threatens that unless he withdraws from the race, a story of John's father's infidelity and unscrupulous business dealing will be published. When John orders him out, Hughs includes in his threat exposure of the London incident. John is at the point of killing Hughs, when Toni enters and slaps her husband out of his rage. Hughs runs for the door as Toni goes to John. Holding him she says, "Let it all come out, John. Let it all come out," as the curtain falls.

At the opening of Act III, the newspaper arrives fulfilling all that Hughs had threatened. Mrs. Comstock decides, without John's knowledge, to buy the votes he needs to win, but this plan becomes impractical with Cunningham's announcement that the committee has asked for John's resignation. The committee wants John to appear at a special rally that evening to disavow his attacks and to publicly withdraw from candidacy. Agreeing to appear at the rally if he can be assured of being heard, John sets about to write a speech.
The final scene finds him working on the speech. Joe Zaccanino returns. Angered at the newspaper attack, Joe volunteers his support. John asks him to bring his sons to the rally because there may be a fight. Because Toni is not feeling well, and may not be able to attend the rally, John gives her a preview of his speech. Between three and four minutes in length, the speech constitutes the obligatory scene. In it, John states that his party has summoned him to announce the withdrawal of their support and their endorsement of the former independent candidate. "But the issue of the election is not in doubt," he says.

Tomorrow you will go to the polls, those of you who take the trouble, and exercising the dearly won right of a free American people, will elect to the State Senate a man who has not only been found guilty of appropriating state funds, but who is also presently under indictment for fraud. And having fulfilled your obligation, you will go home and sleep with nothing on your conscience. You will sleep and rise the next morning with no thought of those who sleep better than you, - and longer.

Oh, it's popular to play on the conscience of the people by telling them that the men died for this or that cause. Men don't die for anything out there. They don't fall dead cheering or grabbing flags. They die cursing and swearing if they have the strength. It is the responsibility of us who live on to find a course sufficiently great to justify such sacrifice.

There is such a cause. You all know it. Government of the people, by the people, and for the people. Forgive me for being obvious when I say that any such government can be no better than the people. If our elected representatives jeopardize the national welfare and security for the sake of a few votes, we can't look elsewhere to place the blame. It is our fault, our responsibility, we, the people, into whose hands such a terrifying trust has been placed.

You're going to build a memorial for the men who died in this war. It will be handsome and cost thousands of dollars. But the men didn't die for a block of marble in the city square. You know the only real memorial they'd want. It's not as easy
as giving ten dollars for a statue. No, it will take your whole life, - but I think they rate it.

And so I turn over my backers to Mr. Parker, but at the same time, I take over his position as independent candidate. And though I shall be defeated, I shall be back, year after year, to remind you of my friends who thought there was something here worth the trouble, the trouble to die. I shall not be ashamed to be a patriot out of season.24

Toni, deeply moved, believes the speech will give the independent candidate a good chance of winning the election. "Then we'll crawl back and start to live again," John says, but not in "our private world" for he has learned that "there is no such thing."25

The use of the long political speech as the focal scene, and its placement at the end of the play, is, of course, not uncommon in dramatic practice, and is reminiscent of the final farewell speech in Robert Sherwood's Abe Lincoln in Illinois. 26 Although Sherwood's effect on Come Marching Home is certainly negligible, it is interesting to note this one similarity, in view of Anderson's acknowledgment of the early Sherwood influence.

An influence of Phillip Barry may also be remotely discerned in this play. In his later work, Robert Anderson, like Barry, was criticized for not being concerned with social issues. Barry's answers to the world's problems were found within the individual, "... who, with his free will was the source of all the evil in

24 Ibid., III. ii. 17-18.
25 Ibid., III. ii. 19.
the world and the potential force to conquer the evil." Anderson's protagonist concludes that a private world is nonexistent and that public responsibility is absolutely essential, but since *Come Marching Home* the author has consistently written of private matters, and John Bosworth, his single political hero, relinquished his privacy with great reluctance. In relation to Barry's philosophy, this passage from Act I, is worthy of note:

John

In our own small world we'll fashion something pretty perfect. That ought to be an important contribution to a happy world.

Toni

Maybe a little selfish.

John

Do you think so? I think if everyone made his own small part of the world as fine as possible, the world would be perfect. Frankly, I'm tired of trying to work with crowds of people in gigantic efforts.28

The most striking similarity between *Come Marching Home* and the works of playwrights whom Anderson has credited as influential, is the resemblance of John Bosworth to Alan McClean in *Both Your Houses*.29 Maxwell Anderson's hero has these characteristics in common with Bosworth: both characters are former teachers; both are political idealists, men of truth and integrity who refuse all

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forms of compromise (Bosworth is self-described as a Don Quixote, McClean is called Don Quixote by another politician); both are involved in a fight against political machinery and the apathy and indifference of the American people; and both lose. In Maxwell Anderson's account of political graft on the national level, Congressman McClean tries to reduce to absurdity an extravagant and useless bill by insisting on the addition of ridiculous trailers. Shocked and disgusted when the bill passes with all its trailers, McClean concludes that honesty in government is not possible, and warns that a popular revolution will soon destroy the rotten system. Without revealing his personal intention in the matter, he simply walks out leaving the impression that nothing can be done to save the country from revolution.

As John Howard Lawson points out in his *Theory and Technique of Playwriting*, which Robert Anderson had not read at the time he wrote *Come Marching Home*, "the burning indictment of American political methods in *Both Your Houses* . . . lies in the dialogue, and not in the action; the movement of the play consists in the repetition of human relationships and points of view which are fully presented at the beginning." As Lawson demonstrates, "the dramatic construction is illustrative and not functional," and McClean's point of view after his defeat "is simply an intensified repetition of the problem stated in the first act." McClean has not decided at the close of the play on any future course of action, and *Both Your Houses* ends on an incomplete question. "If we consider McClean carefully," Lawson
says, "we find that we do not know him as a person . . . ."30

Come Marching Home does not attain the professional polish or the theatrical effectiveness of Both Your Houses, but Robert Anderson created in John Bosworth a more credible, more human and more dynamic character than Alan McClean. Having been emotionally affected by his environment and forced to adjust to definite needs of society, Bosworth speaks and acts in terms of Lawson's "social reality." Through progressive and developmental action, he becomes the power behind the election and his decision at the end of the play to devote his future to the task of securing understanding and responsible action among the people, brings about a conclusive and affirmative ending.31

John Bosworth, twenty-seven-year-old naval officer, former teacher and writer whose background includes a father defeated in politics, is clearly an autobiographic hero.32 Incidental details of biography are scattered throughout the play. For example, attention is given to John's illegible handwriting. Toni had difficulty


31In view of the fact that Maxwell Anderson was one of Robert Anderson's idols in college, and that these plays contain numerous similarities, including the same number of scenes and scene divisions, it is interesting to note that Robert Anderson has never read Both Your Houses.

32The material in this play relating to politics and campaigns derives from its author's experiences watching his father campaign for mayor of New Rochelle. "He was righteous, even self-righteous and would make no deals," Robert Anderson has stated. Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.
reading his love letters while he was away and she is the only one who can decipher the notes for his speeches.\textsuperscript{33} Mrs. Bosworth, senior, remarks that when John was a boy, she tried to make him a perfect penman.\textsuperscript{34} At Exeter, Robert Anderson "wrote the nicest hand,\textsuperscript{35} but his handwriting now is exceedingly small and difficult to read. Another example is the mention of an autobiographical brother relationship which Anderson was to develop later in \textit{All Summer Long}. Noticing a photograph of his brother, John Bosworth says:

\begin{quote}
A wonderful brother. He always knew when to tell me off and when to back me up. Mother, I think was a little jealous of him. She wanted to be the one to tell me what to do and when. I think he sometimes thought he was my father too.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

In \textit{Come Marching Home}, the author's mother is the obvious prototype for the senior Mrs. Bosworth. "Maybe I grew up so darned opinionated in revolt against her consistent charm,"\textsuperscript{37} John speculates. Along with other indications, Mrs. Bosworth's tendency to be querulous and meddlesome suggests the combined attributes of both parents in the creation of her character.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33}Anderson, \textit{Come Marching Home}, II. i. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}, II. i. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{35}Examination Before Trial of Robert Anderson, p. 536.
\item \textsuperscript{36}Anderson, \textit{Come Marching Home}, I. i. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ibid.}, II. i. 9.
\item \textsuperscript{38}"In manner but not in facts," the model for the character of Mrs. Comstock was Mrs. Percival Lowell, in whose house Phyllis Stohl lived when Robert Anderson was courting her. "I've always
In many ways, of course, John Bosworth is quite different from the author, and the situations in the play are all invented, but the idealistic, totally uncompromising posture of the protagonist reflects the naive and purist attitudes of the young playwright. Anderson recalls John Bosworth as "myself at my most prissy and pure where everything had to be uncompromisingly right with no adult compromises or acceptance of life as it is." Since *Come Marching Home*, politics have not interested him, so apparently Robert Anderson resolved, through this play, his political concern.

**Boy Grown Tall**

In *Boy Grown Tall* the conflict shifts from the inevitability of politics, the unavoidable deals and promises required to gain office, to the inevitabilities of marriage, the adjustments and accommodations necessary to an ideal marital relationship. Because of its nature, the struggle here is less militant but no less sincere, and the hero of the play is almost as inflexible in his idealism as his counterpart in *Come Marching Home*.

been fascinated by old people," he has stated, "They seem to reach an age when they can tell the world to go to Hell...and they become very lively. The social veneer is cast aside and they become much more fascinating characters." Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, March 29, 1969.

39Anderson Tape No. 1.

40Ibid.

41Robert Anderson, *Boy Grown Tall*, unpublished three-act play-script. The title is taken from an anonymous ballad: "Men are only boys grown tall; Hearts don't change much after all."
Marine Captain John Marston, the "boy grown tall," is a more rough-and-ready type than Navy Lieutenant Bosworth. More romantic and impetuous, he is also a more arresting figure.

The background of the characters is essentially the same: both are writers and former college teachers. Marston aspires to become a full-time author and as such there is much he wants to say, but not "about the world, or the war, or the peace. So many people will say all there is to say about those and much better than I can," he feels.

I didn't learn anything about world politics out there. Frankly, though I know it's important, I wasn't interested. I wanted to win the war and get home to my wife, my friends, my little personal ambitions. But I find by and large the people at home aren't interested in those things. They're all world thinkers, which is good, but it divides us. I used to be a world thinker, carry the torch of international friendship when few others believed in it; student exchange trips into Europe, speeches, conferences. And then suddenly all this friendship fell through. And now I've turned to another ideal, a selfish one. I see my duty as a personal duty of having a perfect, happy home. Enjoying life in its simplicity, not its complexity . . . . That's what the war taught me—the great beauty and comfort to be found in the simple things, -- a home, three meals a day -- at a table, a full night's sleep, a wife, a doting wife ---.42

Marston is as desirous of attaining a simple, perfect marriage as Bosworth is of attaining his goals, but where Bosworth follows a consistent plan of action, Marston is more willful than volitional and his plan of action is impulsive and erratic.

Before he was induced to run for office, John Bosworth expressed the same desires as Marston, but for Bosworth the perfect marriage objective would have afforded no dramatic conflict because

42 Ibid., I. ii. 47.
Toni, his ideal wife, would have cooperated fully. John Marston's wife, Kit, a lovely, complex, strong-willed woman has a separate and dynamic goal of her own. During the war, Kit returned to her "first love, the theatre," and in John's absence became a famous and successful play director. Striving to sustain her success in order to give John the time and money he needs to become a writer, Kit directs the course of the action and provides the obstacle that impedes the achievement of John's desire.

Boy Grown Tall takes place in Kit's beautifully appointed Greenwich Village apartment, a room on two levels closely resembling the early American living room in Come Marching Home. Furnished in excellent taste and warm, rich colors, both sets help to reveal and enhance the character of their owners and to emphasize the private worlds in which they live. Like the Bosworth living room, the Marston apartment has a fireplace. "John loves a wood fire," Kit explains to her maid in the opening exposition. "For some reason or other, perhaps because he's lived in small dormitory rooms most of his life, he likes the sense of a small, cozy room." 43

The play begins the morning after the homecoming of John and Kit following their weekend reunion at the inn where they had spent their honeymoon. John had wanted to stay longer at the inn, but Kit had to return to her rehearsals of Internationale, a play by Tony Hutchins about various international problems of which John, seems "totally unconscious." After Kit has instructed her maid in

43Ibid., I. i. 25.
the care and handling of John, he wakes and calls to Kit to come back to bed. Foreshadowing the idea of male nakedness on stage (in The Shock of Recognition), Kit warns that her husband is likely to come out of the bedroom stark naked. When the maid exits to the kitchen, John appears, "wearing only his shorts," and tries to entice Kit to return to bed. She reminds him that she must go to work and suggests that he go back to sleep "like a good boy" to which John retorts: "And if I'm good do I get a cocktail before dinner?" This is the first of several remarks suggesting John's concern that he is not treated as fully mature. Kit is too busy to see him during the day but arranges to meet him for dinner. Tony Hutchins arrives to take Kit to rehearsal and John learns that Tony will be with them at dinner when playwright and director regularly talk over the play.

The next scene introduces Peggy and Luigi, whose characteristics are similar to Toni Bosworth and Joe Zaccanino in Come Marching Home. Luigi, like Zaccanino, is an amusing and colorful character and the father of eight children. As the apartment house janitor, he functions as an architectonic character bringing needed props (firewood and flowers), interrupting an action to delay a major crisis, "covering" an entrance which would otherwise seem too "pat" and providing a degree of comic relief. The Italian accents of Luigi and Joe Zaccanino (as well as the Irish accents of landladies Calahan and Mahoney in Dream Dust and Undiscovered Country) demonstrate Anderson's competency in writing foreign dialects and in utilizing rather standard "type"

44Ibid., I.i.28.
characters. Since Boy Grown Tall, however, he has created no additional foreign characters.

Peggy, whose sense of humor and sense of understanding are strongly suggestive of Toni Bosworth, is a lovely young graduate student and a part-time stenographer whom Kit hired to take dictation from John until his wounded hand becomes stronger. As a native of New Hampshire, Peggy reminds John of a girl he knew at Exeter, a very nice girl, "but my opportunities were limited," John says in this short passage which presages one of the playwright's pervading preoccupations:

John

Best school, but somehow they don't seem to take one's love life into consideration.

Peggy

Maybe one isn't supposed to have a love life at that age.

John

That is one of the greatest mistakes in ----. Oh, but you're not here to talk about that are you?45

The incorporation of a visit from a wartime buddy in the next scene is also reminiscent of Come Marching Home, but instead of providing a further complication, this visit serves to contrast the simple beauties of the friend's marriage with John's more complex relationship. It provides additional exposition, as well. The friend and his wife are retreating into the country for a second honeymoon and the kind of life John has dreamed about.

45Anderson, Boy Grown Tall, I. ii. 41.
Recalling their war experience, the friend reveals that despite many temptations, John remained faithful to Kit. The discussion further discloses an intensification of John's disappointment over Kit's inattention, his loneliness and his growing fondness for Peggy. John's dream of an ideal post-war life and marriage and his disenchantment in returning to reality rather than the ideal existence he pictured during the war prefigures Chuck's disillusionment, which is the motivation for playing the song, "I'll Be Home for Christmas," in You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running. 46

Learning that John and Peggy are working on a love story, the friend recalls the saying that to talk about love to a woman is to make love. Later in the scene, Kit questions John about his writing and urges him to allow her to show it to a publisher friend. John expresses his dissatisfaction over her continued absence and wonders if they "are married or in business." Kit replies that they are in business so that they can "get rich quick" and live happily the rest of their lives. 47 John then questions her about a letter from the Dean of the college, which was planted in the early exposition. The Dean has called to ask for John's decision about returning to his former college post. When John leaves the room, Kit takes the letter from her purse and burns it in the fireplace.

46 Cf. Robert Anderson's taped commentary on I'll Be Home For Christmas in Chapter V.

47 Anderson, Boy Grown Tall, II. i. 22-3.
The next scene begins on Valentine's eve, Kit's birthday. In the hope of recapturing the spirit of their early marriage, John is preparing a surprise celebration complete with dinner, flowers, gift, and a traditional Cupid which he gave Kit on their first Valentine's night party. In the past Kit prepared the dinner, but John plans to surprise her by cooking an elaborate meal by himself. Kit arrives with her designer, dance director, and the playwright, but with only a half-hour for dinner, she is unable to dine with him and goes out for a sandwich with her associates. When they leave, John smashes the Cupid.

Later in the evening, John and Peggy sit by the fire philosophizing. The subject turns to Peggy's future and John asks how she plans to achieve a happy marriage. "Well, if I married someone like you," she says,

if I married someone like you, someone who's never quite grown up--I mean that as a compliment, - someone who still believes in Santa Claus, who'd bring me flowers on sentimental occasions, remember songs together, do a lot of foolish things that most men consider adolescent, who'd make love to me on my fiftieth birthday, appropriately, of course, I think such a man would be all I wanted.48

John advises Peggy not to work after she is married and goes on to talk about his own marriage in much the same way that the hero of Silent Night, Lonely Night later depicts his efforts to sustain an ideal marriage relationship.49

48Ibid., II. iii. 47.

49Cf. John Sparrow's description of his marriage in Chapter V.
John

When a man marries a woman, he wants to be near her, to protect her, yes to have her dependent upon him, to plan and to build something together that the world can't break down.

It sounds funny, but it takes two to build a man's castle. I suppose I was brought up in King Arthur romances, happily ever after. And when I got married, I tried to make it just that, and she seemed to like it. I used to figure out little ways to amuse her. (He smiles in reminiscing) Tried to keep it romantic and amusing. It was fun . . . And though we were broke most of the time, we knew we were better than anyone else, and I was the most promising young writer in America—It's easy to be promising and very deceptive.

Peggy

That was 1941.

John

Yeah, but the war didn't make any difference, that is to me, as a matter of fact it only made me feel more deeply that 'two against the world' feeling. It may be narrow but there's strength in that feeling. . . . when you see yourself getting lost in that organized chaos which is war, you try to hang on to something, and our love being the greatest thing that had ever happened to me in my life, I hung on to that till it got to be like a rod of steel through my spine holding me up when nothing else could have. Every guy had to have something to hang on to--It wasn't the Four Freedoms; they don't do you any good out there. It had to be something warm and personal. . . . And for almost everyone it was a woman. Every cruel, hard, grimy, kind or gentle guy in the world had a woman somewhere, a woman who's his strength against everything mean and ugly and terrifying. 50

John then recites the last stanza of Mathew Arnold's *Dover Beach* and creates the major crisis by impulsively kissing Peggy. Understanding his emotional state and her position as surrogate wife, Peggy handles the situation tactfully and skillfully by not allowing him to say he loves her. By the time Kit returns and Peggy leaves,

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50Anderson, *Boy Grown Tall*, II. iii. 50.
John is too upset to talk with his wife, and while she is out of the room, he picks up his hat and coat and leaves the apartment. Kit finds the box of flowers John had ordered, reads the accompanying card and quickly dashes out.

The next morning, Kit comes in from an all-night search for John and tells Tony Hutchins, who is waiting to take her to rehearsal, that she has decided to give up the play. Peggy arrives to tell Kit that John came to her apartment but that she would not let him in, and explains John's loneliness and unhappiness. Kit says she sensed the discord, but felt that her plan was John's only chance of succeeding as a writer and that now she has decided to give up her career. After Peggy's departure, John returns and apologizes for his childish behavior. During his all-night walk he came to realize his selfishness and immaturity:

I thought of my father who used to go away and sulk when my mother failed to appreciate his true worth, and I thought of my brother who became rebellious when not fully appreciated, and I suddenly realized in the dawn's early light that I was my father's child and I'd better get over it damned fast or I'd lose what I loved most in the world.51

Kit tells him of her decision to leave the play and explains why she was determined to be a success:

What I was doing was still for you. You didn't believe it, I know. When you were teaching, you were never really happy at it. We were happy together, of course, because we were fresh in love and we knew we could beat the world, given a chance. I remember when you used to come home at night all tired out, and you spent the evenings studying, correcting papers, and then you tried to write starting at midnight. Of course it was no go, and I said to myself if ever I get the

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51Ibid., III. 25.
chance I'm going to make it so you can spend all your time doing what you wanted so to do . . . .

But I know now I was wrong. I know that although I meant the best things in the world, I was killing your love for me and killing your work too.

How could two people who loved each other so get in such a mess?

John

Oh, lots of ways, I guess the main trouble was we each had a plan separately arrived at nine thousand miles away from each other. You wanted me to be a great success, and I just wanted you.

That's what comes from sleeping in separate beds. You dream separate dreams.52

John feels that Kit should complete this play and then they will retire to a farm where he will write. "And if at the end of a respectable time, I'm no good," he says, "I'll go back to be a schoolmaster."53 Their plan for the future includes starting the family they have delayed because of career considerations. In its original version, Come Marching Home also dealt with the wish for children and contained a sub-plot of the couple's efforts to have a child. At the end of the play, Toni found that she was pregnant, "But this seemed like too much of a good thing," Robert Anderson stated, "and I cut it in the re-writes."54

52Ibid., III. 27. 53Ibid., III. 29.

54Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.
Boy Grown Tall obviously contains much that is biographical. The conflict of the two careers, and John's overly sensitive concern about being considered immature, surely reflect some of the frictions and problems of the aspiring playwright and his already successful wife. Kit's sudden change of heart and the idyllic resolution of the conflict suggest wish-fulfillment and an unrealistic attitude on the part of the young dramatist.

The play is significant, however, not in terms of biography but as an important developmental step in the complexity of Anderson's dramaturgy. Even more significantly, it represents the point at which Anderson's thematic interests crystallized around the intimate life of the individual. Like John Marston whose ideals shifted from a public to a private world, Robert Anderson seems to have decided in this play to leave world issues to other writers, and to concentrate exclusively on the more personal relationships of life.

The characters in Boy Grown Tall have an emotional as well as an intellectual existence and are therefore more complex in their behavior and reactions than Anderson's earlier characters. Sexual need and the intimacy that goes with it emerge as a powerful motivation providing, as in much of the later work, the predominant elements of the subtext. For instance, John and Peggy discuss various topics but their underlying thoughts and feelings are more important than what is actually being said. After planting the idea that to talk about love is to make love, this is what they do. The technique makes its first appearance in this play.

The use of dual protagonists in Boy Grown Tall is another
first for the playwright. As in several of the following plays, emphasis is almost equally divided between two central characters. Kit Marston's birthday on St. Valentine's Day is an additional innovation in the trend toward more complex composition. This double holiday precedes Tom's birthday and the anniversary of Laura's first marriage in *Tea and Sympathy* and the two wedding anniversaries in *The Days Between*.

Anderson had used flowers for symbolic purposes in *The Sisters*, but in *Boy Grown Tall* the symbolism is more subtle and more complicated. Properties other than flowers are utilized as symbols and the symbols become an integral part of the action. John's destruction of the Valentine Cupid (earlier established as a symbol of first love) serves to externalize his loss and hurt. Kit's burning of the letter illustrates the strength of her determination. When he orders flowers for Kit's Valentine-birthday, John also sends flowers to Peggy, a subtle suggestion of the bifurcation of his affection. Before he can give the flowers to Kit, she comes in wearing a corsage from Tony who represents her "first love, the theatre." Kit's discovery of John's flowers and his card brings about her realization of his love and need, and precipitates her final action.

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56 Flower symbolism figures prominently in *The Eden Rose, Tea and Sympathy, Love Among Friends*, and *The Days Between*. In *Silent Night, Lonely Night*, the symbolism is handled with the greatest subtlety by the use of individual vases of holly which John Sparrow combines into one bouquet (suggesting the
Exemplified in this ending is Anderson's inclination to avoid strong climaxes and scenes of violent confrontation. A perfect opportunity for an emotional confrontation is created when John, unbearably upset after kissing Peggy, finds himself alone with his wife. Instead of bringing the problem into the open, he walks out. Thus a high emotional scene is evaded. The climax, delayed until the final act when the characters are exhausted from sleeplessness, is a pallid one. On this point, Anderson tells an amusing story:

I remember in Gassner's class, there was a young Jewish student who said something interesting . . . . 'In my background, if my mother gets a rotten apple in a dozen, she goes down and throws it through the grocer's window. . . . In your background, your sister has to be raped in Times Square before you do something like that.57

Anderson's restraint in dealing with emotional climaxes may be due in part to the influence of the polite and reserved playwrights Barry, Van Druten, and Behrman, but, he says, "I don't think it's only my cultural background . . . I think it's also something personal."58 Possibly Anderson's own sense of truth is involved. As George paraphrases Nietzsche in Footsteps of Doves, (one of the playlets in You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running), "the big crises in our lives do not come with the sound of thunder growing intimacy of the couple), and with the expression of John's wish that he could give flowers (love) to Katherine.

57Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, May 3, 1968.

58Ibid.
and lightning, but softly like the footsteps of doves."

Written nearly twenty years after Boy Grown Tall, Footsteps of Doves embodies the same fundamental theme—the need for communication and closeness in marriage. (Surprisingly, John Marston's maxim about the dangers of sleeping in separate beds provides the basic premise for this playlet.) The treatment of theme in Boy Grown Tall is a further example of the growing complexity in Anderson's composition. Anticipating the multiplicity of themes in Tea and Sympathy, this early piece embraces a number of motifs. Incidental observations on such topics as the loneliness of the writer, man's need to support his wife by his own work and the readjustment of returning servicemen are interwoven with themes which recur throughout the later works in more interesting and more fully developed form.

For example, there is the hero's expectation of the perfect relationship, here associated with an unreal and rather adolescent attitude toward marriage and with the idea of the dramatist's war with inevitability. The pursuit of maturity, a pervading theme in many of the following plays is foreshadowed by John Marston's apprehensiveness about being considered immature. The necessity for sacrifice and commitment in marriage, anticipates a similar concern in all the marriage plays, and the idea of sacrifice becomes a significant element in the thematic structure of Tea and Sympathy.

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Woman's power to comfort and heal, another recurring theme which reaches its highest point of development in *Tea and Sympathy*, is introduced by Marston along with the idea of the solace which marriage brings, the escape into a "twosome" where husband and wife become everything to one another. Also included are the desire for children, the importance of keeping romance alive in marriage, and numerous other related and subordinate subjects.

*Boy Grown Tall* is, in fact, overcrowded with thematic content. Had it been produced or had Anderson taken more time in the original writing, a considerable amount of cutting would undoubtedly have been done. Although this play lacks some of the refinements of *Come Marching Home*, in its complicated texture and its focus on personal relationships, *Boy Grown Tall* represents a far more important developmental milestone.60

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60 *The Tailored Heart*, Anderson's third play written in the Pacific was unavailable for this study, but according to the author it shows little in the way of his development as a playwright. As he remembers the play, "It was really a very flimsy thing, mostly 'smart' give and take . . . a conversation piece. The battle of the sexes. It really doesn't seem to be in the line of any of my other work . . . It was, as I remember, about a man and a woman each looking for an apartment...the woman was turned in and 'afraid' of love and men...and the man was out to change her point of view...because he found her attractive. It was based, I'm afraid, on that old movie cliché...of the hero and heroine striking aggressive sparks when they first meet...but underneath there is passion...I don't remember any real theme to the piece...I think it was just slick romantic stuff. . . The tailored woman...the tailored heart...Very subtle." Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, January 20, 1969.
Between the time of his separation from the Navy in November, 1945, and the end of his terminal leave the following February, Anderson began writing his first post-war play, *The Eden Rose*. Dissatisfied with the first draft and with a "considerable feeling of desperation," and "a terrific conscientiousness" to justify the confidence and support of the National Theatre Conference, he quickly wrote another play called, *Sublet*, based on the problems of finding housing in New York City.\(^1\) The Andersons moved from New Rochelle to the city in the summer of 1946.\(^2\) Before moving to the 11th Avenue basement apartment of the Lawrence Langner home in the Village, where they lived until 1954, they had great difficulty in finding a suitable place to live. The play, *Sublet*, as the name suggests, resulted from an experience in subletting. This "terrible" script was never submitted to anyone except Anderson's agent.\(^3\)

Another play from this period which was not submitted beyond his agent was a collaboration with the English actress, Leonora

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\(^1\)Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 193.
\(^2\)Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, March 29, 1969.
\(^3\)Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 193.
Corbett, _Comfort Me With Apples._ In 1947, the playwright wrote three short stories, "Katherine and Pity and Love and I," "Everything Would Be the Same," and "It Gets Late So Quickly," which were circulated to publishers but not purchased. During the same year, he wrote his only novel, _Birthright,_ also rejected by the publishers. In 1948, a play called _Tea and Sympathy_ was completed and submitted to producers against the advice of his agent, who felt it was not ready to be circulated. The reactions of the producers were "not enthusiastic" so the play was withdrawn. Putting the script aside, the dramatist determined that he would one day return to it.

While writing the first draft of _The Eden Rose,_ Anderson received the $2,000 fellowship from NTC and began taking courses from John Gassner at the dramatic workshop of the New School of Social Research. "And once John's student, always John's student ... and his friend," Robert Anderson has said:

A playwright supposedly writes for himself. But I believe he also writes hoping to please certain people whose respect he values. For me, John was one of those people. He always had regard and enthusiasm for the effort, and he gave his judgment as to the value of the results without contempt.

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7This 1948 version of _Tea and Sympathy,_ the novel, _Birthright,_ and the short story, "Katherine and Pity and Love and I," will be discussed in the section on the evolution of _Tea and Sympathy_ in Chapter IV. The works mentioned in this paragraph are all unpublished manuscripts.
8Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 178.
Anderson, the student, became a teacher soon again when, in the spring of 1946, he was asked to inaugurate a playwriting course at the newly formed American Theatre Wing. To supplement his own lectures on technique, he invited other playwrights and directors in for craft discussions and had plays read aloud by professional and near-professional actors. Theatre Wing students were also provided with free admission to Broadway plays.

Later, the playwright assisted in the establishment of the New Dramatists Committee which utilizes some of the same teaching techniques employed at the Theatre Wing. Although he was among the first group of New Dramatists who were elected to membership on March 27, 1951, Anderson has pointed out that he wasn't really one of the Founders, as is sometimes said. A young playwright by the name of Michaela O'Harrar, who had had a play on Broadway, felt that there should be some such facility available for all young playwrights, not just veterans of World War II, which was the case with the Theatre Wing... She worked long and hard... She got together a small group of youngish playwrights, Theodore Apstein, Philo Higley, and others, including myself, and we conferred loud and long about it. She needed a pro to plead her cause, and I told her that Howard Lindsay had always been the most generous in his interest and in giving time at the Theatre Wing. A small group of us approached him, and he took us all on... and the ND's got started. The idea was basically Michaela O'Harrar's. She gave many years after the founding of the group to supervising it. She deserves much more credit than she is usually given.

Robert Anderson was later president of the New Dramatists Committee.

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11 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, July 7, 1969.

12 Ibid.
from May, 1959, until October, 1960. \(^1^3\) He has served on various boards for the organization and has participated as a craft lecturer. \(^1^4\)

His classes at the Theatre Wing, which included as many as fifty students at a time, were taught four nights a week from eight until eleven. This schedule, which he maintained until 1950, allowed the Andersons little time together. Phyllis went to work at the Theatre Guild at 9:00 a.m. and returned home at seven, only a half-hour before her husband had to leave for his classes. Often her work at the Guild kept her away in the evenings as well. As the two careers moved rapidly ahead, the logistic problems of the marriage intensified. When he began to write for radio and television, Robert's schedule consisted of writing plays in the morning, radio and television scripts in the afternoon and teaching at night. Phyllis' involvement in Guild productions and her later work as a play agent kept her away from home a great deal and sometimes took her out of the city. Only on weekends and in the summers did the couple find much time to be together. This is probably one of the reasons that Phyllis took Robert's playwriting course for a semester. One of the mementos he treasures is "her little blue notebook with her fantastically beautiful handwriting of the lecture notes . . ." \(^1^5\) In 1950, the couple managed to buy a small house in the middle of six

\(^1^3\) Letter, Letha Nims, Executive Director, The New Dramatists Committee, to Howard Burman, Department of Theatre, The Ohio State University, July 10, 1969.

\(^1^4\) Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, July 7, 1969.

\(^1^5\) Anderson Tape No. 1.
acres of land in Roxbury, Connecticut, where they retreated as often as possible on weekends and summer vacations.¹⁶

The press reports of this period in their lives tend to imply that the Anderson marriage was rather a one-sided arrangement, that Phyllis being older than her husband and a successful theatre woman when they met, taught him playwriting, guided his career and provided the financial support for his apprenticeship. Actually, although he made considerably less money than she when he was a graduate assistant, Anderson's officer's salary during the Navy years, the $2,000 fellowship and his combined income from teaching and radio and television writing, in all probability, amounted to as much if not more than Phyllis' earnings. That she taught her husband a great deal about the theatre in the early days of their relationship is unquestionable, but his contribution to his wife's career is little known.

In addition to reading many of the plays she was given at the Guild, and helping to write her reports, he assisted in her work with playwrights, among them, William Inge. The many notes he wrote on Come Back Little Sheba prompted Inge to ask Anderson to collaborate on Man in Boots, the early version of the Pulitzer prize-winning Picnic. Anderson declined Inge's invitation because he felt their writing styles were too different.¹⁷

The misconceptions concerning Phyllis Anderson's contribution


¹⁷Anderson Tape No. 2.
to her husband’s career were partially fostered by the dramatist himself, for in almost every interview, speech and article following Phyllis’ first operation for cancer in the summer of 1951 until her death in 1956 Robert Anderson gave special emphasis to his wife’s support and encouragement and credited her with assisting in his professional development. When he dedicated *Tea and Sympathy* to her with the inscription, "This is for Phyllis whose spirit is everywhere in this play and in my life," he created a near legend of their marriage.

Phyllis was never told that she had cancer. After a slow and difficult recovery from the first operation, she was able to return to the Theatre Guild, but in February, 1952, she took a position as literary agent for MCA Management where she worked mainly in developing young playwrights and directors. Following the success of *Tea and Sympathy*, Joseph Heller (later the author of *Catch 22*) and Robert Mason, authors for whom Phyllis had briefly acted as agent, initiated a breach of fiduciary trust suit against the Andersons and MCA Management, charging that Phyllis Anderson had shown their

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18 Robert Anderson, personal notebook, p. 61.


20 Anderson Tape No. 1.

21 Robert Anderson, personal notebook, p. 61.

22 *Examination Before Trial of Phyllis Anderson*, p. 13.
scenario, "A Time for Trial," to her husband and had then delayed the sale of this work for a matter of a few weeks while Robert Anderson stole an idea from their material and wrote *Tea and Sympathy*. This charge was spurned by many reputable copyright lawyers but was finally taken on by the late Rudolph Halley of the Kefauver Investigation fame, who put great weight on the playwright's public expression of gratitude for his wife's assistance. During the pre-trial examination, the dramatist explained in off-the-record testimony, which he insisted that his wife never see, that part of his reason for constantly crediting Phyllis was that she was dying, that his success was very important to her and that he wanted to give her every satisfaction he could.

The subpoena for court appearance was issued October 27, 1954, (a month after the opening of *All Summer Long*), and the pre-trial examination took place from November 30 through December 8. "It was a grim and most unpleasant time," Robert Anderson recalls, because Phyllis was in terrible shape, and since there was never a more honorable woman in the world. . . . To have this happen while she was sick and worsening and marked for death, was a ghastly thing. . . .

Joseph Heller later told Anderson that he withdrew his charge as soon as he glanced at the version of *Tea and Sympathy* written in

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23Ibid., pp. 4-134.
24Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 17, 1968.
27Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, September 30, 1968.
1948, but Rudolph Hailey went on remorselessly. "They made my lawyers

and then, about a week before the trial was to take place, Hailey
g called and asked if I wouldn't give the boys 'something' and

and then, about a week before the trial was to take place, Hailey
called and asked if I wouldn't give the boys 'something' and

and then, about a week before the trial was to take place, Hailey
called and asked if I wouldn't give the boys 'something' and

settle out of court. My lawyer said it would be a rough case

settle out of court. My lawyer said it would be a rough case

settle out of court. My lawyer said it would be a rough case

because Phyllis was sick and would be a poor witness, that juries

because Phyllis was sick and would be a poor witness, that juries

because Phyllis was sick and would be a poor witness, that juries

had a hard time understanding these cases, etc. I told him

had a hard time understanding these cases, etc. I told him

had a hard time understanding these cases, etc. I told him

that there were only two people who really knew we were innocent,

that there were only two people who really knew we were innocent,

that there were only two people who really knew we were innocent,

Phyllis and I, and if I gave them a penny, I could never write

Phyllis and I, and if I gave them a penny, I could never write

Phyllis and I, and if I gave them a penny, I could never write

again. So he called back and said we'd go to trial. A half-hour

again. So he called back and said we'd go to trial. A half-hour

again. So he called back and said we'd go to trial. A half-hour

later Halley called and withdrew the case. . . . An interesting

later Halley called and withdrew the case. . . . An interesting

later Halley called and withdrew the case. . . . An interesting

note . . . After the first session of Halley's grilling me, he

note . . . After the first session of Halley's grilling me, he

note . . . After the first session of Halley's grilling me, he

asked me to go to lunch with him; said he had admired the play
greatly, and wanted to discuss some of the themes with me . . .

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greatly, and wanted to discuss some of the themes with me . . .

asked me to go to lunch with him; said he had admired the play
greatly, and wanted to discuss some of the themes with me . . .

I told him he'd just spent the morning trying to say I had stolen

I told him he'd just spent the morning trying to say I had stolen

I told him he'd just spent the morning trying to say I had stolen

the play, and he said, 'Oh, that's something different . . .

the play, and he said, 'Oh, that's something different . . .

the play, and he said, 'Oh, that's something different . . .

that's business.' I couldn't believe it. I told him it wasn't

that's business.' I couldn't believe it. I told him it wasn't

that's business.' I couldn't believe it. I told him it wasn't

business to me, and went out and ate with someone else.

business to me, and went out and ate with someone else.

business to me, and went out and ate with someone else.

The whole thing depressed me for months. 

The whole thing depressed me for months. 

The whole thing depressed me for months. 

The following excerpts from this senseless and grueling pre-
trial examination serve to clarify some of the mistaken impressions
about the professional relationship of Phyllis and Robert Anderson
and help to provide additional insights into the nature of their
mutually benefiting marriage. 

Asked by Halley if she felt that she
had taught her husband anything about writing Phyllis Anderson replied,

No. You know, Mr. Halley, Robert after all had been a teacher
of writing. He learned his playwriting. If he came down to the
specifics of a play, about how it should be plotted or what should
be done, he is better than I am by a hell of a long shot.

Halley: Do you think he was just being very gentlemanly when
he said in an interview with the New York Times, 'No
one will ever know how much she has helped me'?

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28Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 17, 1968.

29Except for the excerpts quoted here, Robert Anderson has never read the pre-trial testimony.
Phyllis: I think gentlemanly, I hope it is gentlemanly, and I hope he always means that.

Hailey: How did you help him?

Phyllis: Well I try to be a good wife.

Hailey: Why would he have said, 'And she taught me discipline about writing'? Was he just being nice when he said you taught him discipline about writing?

Phyllis: Well, I think he was being nice. If he had given me a finished play to read and I didn't like it, I would tell him. In the case of 'The Eden Rose,' which is a specific example, when he finished that play, this was right after the war, I said I didn't like it, and he went back and completely rewrote it, and after he rewrote it that play was optioned many times. They could never cast it because the central character was a 39 year old woman, and by the time an actress will admit she is 39 usually she is about 90, and would not be right for the play, although now there is someone who wants to do it, but it is a young play and it is on the shelf. It was written when he was younger, and he is a better writer now. It is still a good play.

Hailey: What did he mean, if you know, when he said you taught him discipline about writing?

Phyllis: Well, Mr. Hailey, all writers are human and they finish something and read it, someone reads it, and everyone likes to hear that it is right. Well, if it isn't, I will tell him, if I don't think it is.

Hailey: Then you did in that sense, at least, work with him and help him?

Phyllis: In that sense I would tell him, after he had finished it, but in his actual writing, what he wrote about, and what he wanted to do, never.

Hailey: Did you attempt to advise him as you attempted to advise other authors?

Phyllis: . . . Not in the same say. Mr. Hailey, when you are a wife, it is quite a different capacity working with your own husband. . . .than working with other writers. Because
there are all kinds of things involved. You have a complete emotional relationship, too, and it is much easier to step on toes, or don't you follow me?

Halley: I follow you, but I have great difficulty in squaring it, and I ask you, can you square what you just said with what your husband said about having taught him discipline about writing?

Phyllis: Well, I think he gives me great credit there. I am very touched by it, pleased, but I don't think I taught him all that much.

Halley: Do you feel you don't deserve the credit he gave you?

Phyllis: I think I deserve it in another way.

Halley: Would you tell us about the other way?

Phyllis: Well, because I think that I have given him moral support, tried to keep things moving to the best of my ability, that is all.30

... ........................................

Halley: How was she of help to you?

Robert: She was of help to me, not so much in my work but as a wife, as a person helping me grow as a writer. Many times when we were first married, for example, when I was earning a very meager living, could not earn enough to support us both, she was working. . . . She was continually a help as a wife and a person who encouraged me in the theatre. She urged me to do my best and to work at my best. She read my plays when I was finished with them. I must say that the relationship between husband and wife here made it very difficult for her to be as valuable a critic to me as other people have been, simply because this relationship is such a personal one that it is very difficult for a wife to criticize her husband's work . . .

... ........................................

As a matter of fact, she recognized this and sort of pushed me off for . . . criticism on to Mollie Kazan, Elia Kazan's wife. They have been friends for many, many years. They

went to school together; and even as far back as when I was in the Navy and I was writing these plays that I referred to ..., she would say, 'I am very proud of you for having written this play in such a short time under such adverse conditions,' and would say that she had given it to Mollie Kazan and that Mollie Kazan would write me about the play.

I don't know if it is difficult or easy for people to understand this relationship. But her moral support, for the fact that she has always let me go on being a writer when possibly the easiest thing for her to have said would have been to quit. I have some friends who are trying to be writers, and they have been unsuccessful for the normal period of time, and their wives—they have told me that their wives have said, 'Why don't you face it? If after this time you have not produced a play, why don't you quit?' My wife never said that. My most discouraging moments, when plays which we thought were good were not getting produced, she would still say go on, write some more, keep it up.

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Halley: Did she help you develop as a playwright?

Robert: Only as I have said, only as I have indicated here, in that she was always having me go on to do more work, being highly critical if I did anything but the best. I remember an interesting story about 'Tea and Sympathy,' when we were in Washington and we were already a big hit, she called Kazan and she said, 'Make sure Bob keeps on doing his best; make sure he doesn't leave a line that he could do better on, or a page he could do better on.' And Kazan laughed and said, 'Here it is Thursday before we open and he has just brought me five single-spaced pages of suggestions and ideas that we should do. Why don't you leave him alone?' She was always very eager that I should do my best and never let anything mediocre go.

In a 1955 article on the craft of playwriting, Robert Anderson listed character as an important quality in a playwright. "The playwright's wife has to have character too," he wrote,

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Mine does. It is the kind of character that will not be shattered by disappointments, cruelty, lack of attention, the success of the apparently spurious in contrast to the failure of one's own creations of magnificence; the kind of character that can withstand the arid periods of self-doubt, the moments of black despair.32

Although Phyllis Anderson was employed at the Theatre Guild, she had nothing to do with her husband's assignment to write for the Theatre Guild on the Air. Anderson acquired his initial Guild commission in 1948 through William Fitelson, one of the firm's lawyers.33 Robert Sherwood's The Petrified Forest was the first of approximately 40 radio adaptations he wrote for the Theatre Guild on the Air series between 1948 and 1953, when he stopped writing for radio and television.34 Later radio adaptations included The Glass Menagerie, with Helen Hayes, Montgomery Clift and Karl Malden;35 The Sea Gull Cry, with Richard Widmark and Viveca Lindfors; Come Back Little Sheba, with Shirley Booth and Gary Cooper; The Scarlet Pimpernel, with Rex Harrison and Lili Palmer; The Old Lady Shows Her Medals,36 with the Lunts; and David Copperfield, which featured such names as Richard Burton, Cyril Ritchard, Basil Rathbone, Boris Karloff and Flora Robson. Anderson was usually assigned the love stories. One of


34Anderson Tape No. 1.

35In a subsequent production, Shirley Booth and Karl Malden starred.

36Robert Anderson later did an adaptation of James M. Barrie's The Old Lady Shows Her Medals for television. The first TV version
these, Hemingway's *A Farewell To Arms* is remembered as being representative of the special problem of preserving the sound of original dialogue while rewriting it extensively to advance the story.\(^{38}\)

It was during rehearsals of Anderson's adaptation of *Remember The Day* that he met Deborah Kerr for the first time. "At that point I thought she was so marvelous," he recalls, "and one day hoped to work with her in the theatre and I said so."\(^{39}\) But Miss Kerr was then under contract to Metro Goldwyn Mayer and felt that she would not be available for many years. Anderson's first meeting with his future wife, Teresa Wright, also took place during a *Theatre Guild on the Air* production when she and Rex Harrison played in his adaptation of *Trilby*. The meeting was brief, however, and only vaguely remembered when they met again in 1957.\(^{40}\)

"The *Theatre Guild on the Air* was a great experience for me," the playwright states,

It was like having a stock company to work with and of course what a stock company: Humphrey Bogart, Gary Cooper, Shirley Booth, Helen Hayes, the Lunts; all up and down the line, great actors and actresses. They'd read the lines and I'd have to measure up. . . . It was exciting in that you had to become professional. You had to have a script ready and then you heard starred the Lunts. Subsequently, it was presented with Helen Hayes, and again with Gracie Fields. These stars all received Emmy Awards for their performances. Anderson Tape No. 1.

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\(^{37}\)Humphrey Bogart starred in this adaptation.

\(^{38}\)Anderson Tape No. 1.

\(^{39}\)Ibid.

\(^{40}\)Ibid.
it at the first run through and then you had about two days or 
a day-and-a-half to rewrite it; stay up all night, rewrite the 
script and have another full rehearsal and then that marvelous 
rehearsal on Sunday when suddenly you'd find you were ten min-
utes too long. And in Radio of course that was fatal. Then 
you had to sit down and try to cut without really cutting. 
You learned economy. It was a great experience. 41

The playwright has never kept track of the number of his radio 
or television dramas, but in one year he turned out twenty-five adapta-
tions for TV alone. 42 Some of the television series for which he wrote 
are: Theatre Guild on the Air, Studio One, Cosmopolitan Theatre, Star-
light Theatre, The Schlitz Playhouse, and the Prudential Show. Among 
the TV plays he remembers with pride are: Biography, in which Gertrude 
Lawrence made one of her first television appearances, Brief Encounter 
with Margaret Sullivan and Wendell Corey, and No Time for Comedy with 
Sarah Churchill and Jean Pierre Aumont. "I think the best thing I ever 
did for television," Anderson recalls, "was Rise Up and Walk, by Turnley 
Walker, about a man with polio, brilliantly done by Lloyd Bridges." 43

For programs like Suspense, Climax, and Cavalcade of America, 
Anderson sometimes wrote plays based on actual events rather than on 
literary works. At least two of the radio dramas and one television 
play were completely original works, but the vast majority of his broad-
cast dramas were adaptations of famous plays, novels, and movies. 44

41 Ibid.
42 Gilroy, "Fame Taps a Playwright," p. 3.
43 Anderson Tape No. 1.
44 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, 
pp. 209-11.
He looks back on this period of almost total adaptation with a certain sense of waste, but feels that he was well paid and that he learned an enormous amount working with plays by the great playwrights.\(^4\)\(^5\)

Concerning the values of teaching and of writing for radio and television, Anderson once said, "...if you really want to learn something, try teaching it. That's how I learned to write plays. As for the radio and TV scripts, it was doing them that made a professional writer of me.\(^4\)\(^6\)

At the time of the actual teaching and writing, however, this work was no substitute for the theatre but only a means to earn a living through what he termed "the heartbreak period,"\(^4\)\(^7\) those years of professional maturation and of waiting with desperate optimism for a Broadway production. Looking back on this era after the success of *Tea and Sympathy*, Anderson advised young dramatists that

The potential playwright will make things much easier for himself and those who are trying to help him if he realizes that he is going to be at it for some time before he is given the privilege of going through that private hell reserved for playwrights, a Broadway opening night.

This does not, of course, mean that he will not become a professional dramatic writer before that time. If he is good, he will. He will find himself doing good and interesting work on radio and television, having plays done in summer theatres and in off-Broadway theatres, and sweating out options ... options that do not develop into productions. (The young playwright should remember that many are optioned and few produced.) But the discouraging dropped options are part of the process of growing into playwriting maturity. Whenever a young playwright friend

\(^4\)\(^5\)Anderson Tape No. 1.

\(^4\)\(^6\)Gilroy, "Fame Taps a Playwright," p. 3.

of mine gets his first option, I want to toast his success in champagne and then take him out behind the nearest barn and tell him the facts of theatrical life; that an option does not mean a production, and his heart must not be broken if the option is dropped in two months.48

The Eden Rose

Robert Anderson's advice to aspiring playwrights derives from his own experiences and reflects particularly the heartbreaking history of The Eden Rose.49 By all rights, this play should have introduced him to the Broadway theatre, for it is an eminently professional and theatrically viable piece. The playwright worked consistently on this script from December, 1945, until its completion in 1947. "It seems incredible that there could have been so many drafts,"50 he once stated, although at least one of his later works, The Days Between, was to require an even greater number of revisions. The Eden Rose received a reading by professional actors in 1947 under the sponsorship of Theatre, Incorporated, to which Anderson belonged, an organization designed to assist young dramatists in getting their works seen by producers. On the strength of that reading, Robert Woods and Penelope Sack, two members of the Board of Theatre, Incorporated, took an option on the play for production. Gertrude Lawrence indicated that she might like to play in it and


Sir Cedric Hardwicke agreed to direct. The following summer, Anderson made several trips to Dennis, Massachusetts, to discuss the play with Miss Lawrence, but she finally decided against doing it for the ostensible reason that the author would not lower the age of her son's role in the play to 17. The Eden Rose was subsequently submitted to a number of leading actresses who were interested in the play, among them Greer Garson, Celia Johnson, Diana Winyard, Edna Best, Dorothy Stickney and Francine Larrimore, but for one reason or another a Broadway production did not materialize. Finally, after two years and numerous dropped options, the play was presented in the summer of 1949 at the Theatre Workshop of Ridgefield, Connecticut.  

Anderson states that The Eden Rose was very much influenced by S. N. Behrman, "one of my favorite playwrights." The Behrman influence is perceptible in the grace and sophistication of the dialogue, in the restrained climax, and in the characterization of the central character, a charming and fascinating woman. Nan Hilton in The Eden Rose is the first female character in Anderson's work to assume the position of the play's pivotal character. The Behrman heroine she most closely resembles is Marion Froud in Biography. Nan and Marion are beautiful and mature women in love with younger

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51 Ibid., pp. 193-7.
52 Anderson Tape No. 1.
men with whom they attempt to break off their relationships. Both women are portrait painters of mediocre talent. The action of each play takes place in its heroine's studio apartment. "Though not conventionally beautiful," Anderson describes the thirty-nine-year-old Nan Hilton as "appealing and attractive--definitely a man's woman--warm, human, unaffected, understanding and tender." Possibly influenced by the techniques of radio, the playwright begins his love story with the romantic music of street musicians who play for money outside Nan's window on Friday and Saturday nights. The music not only establishes the romantic mood of the play, but characterizes Nan as a woman of sentiment and generosity. Later, in Tea and Sympathy, the dramatist again utilized the device of establishing mood and character with an opening love song.

Nan and Oliver Saxton, a forty-nine-year-old professor of English, talk of their plan to marry. Having proposed to her for the first time three months after her Naval officer husband's death a year ago, and having been accepted many times since only to have Nan change her mind at the last minute, Oliver is cynically and amusingly skeptical. Nan, however, seems definite and anxious to settle the matter. She has placed a long-distance call to her son at college which she feels will make the decision final. Revealing Nan's psychology, Anderson has her ask how she can further prove that she is ready to marry; Oliver replies, "Possibly by saying I want to marry you instead of I'm ready."

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Nan

You catch me up on words.

Oliver

Which unconsciously give away your secret thoughts.

Nan

Then I want to marry you. I want the wonderful companionship, the contentment, the call it what you will, which we have always enjoyed... first with Tom, and then just the two of us. I'm ready for that. Oh, damn that word.55

Oliver wants Nan to be absolutely sure. When he courted his first wife, he "practically demanded" that she marry him. Prefiguring a theme of domination which the playwright was to treat more fully in *I Never Sang For My Father*, Oliver goes on to say, "I continued to demand after we were married."

From watching my father I thought it was the thing to do. I learned. I learned the most important lesson of my life, that a person gives you only so much of their time, their interest, their love, as they want to. To demand more by entreaty or through obligation is to spoil everything.56

Early in the act, Anderson deftly plants the expected arrival of Ted, Nan's husband's best friend in the Navy for whom Nan has prepared a birthday dinner. The exposition also establishes two symbolic properties: a sensuous book of poems which Nan bought for her husband but decided not to send because of her fear of embarrassing him and a charm bracelet given to her by Oliver when he first proposed marriage. Oliver has added a new charm each time she has decided not to marry him.

When Nan's long distance call is put through, she is unable to talk with her son because he is out with a girl about whom Nan has never heard. The following conversation (although quite different in tone) preshadows a similar situation in which a mother handles the sex education of her children in *I'll Be Home For Christmas* from *You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running*. As in the later work, Anderson here stresses the value of secrecy in sexual development, and the importance of the right kind of sex education:

Nan

There have never been secrets between Roger and me.

Oliver

Maybe he's decided it's time there were.

Nan

But why?

Oliver

It makes life interesting. You won't object, will you?

Nan

Of course not.

Oliver

Just because you happened to be the one who explained the facts of life to him, don't expect him to report back to you how inadequate your explanation was.

Nan

It was not inadequate. It was quite detailed... I tried to make it something beautiful... I think it's important.
As one who has learned quite differently, I assure you it is.57

Ted arrives and Nan is surprised to learn that instead of returning to college teaching, now that he is separated from the Navy, he is on his way to Paris to represent an American business firm. "I didn't finish my degree," he says, "I got tired of rummaging through worm-eaten manuscripts tracing the history of the comma."58 Nan suggests that Oliver put her guest up at his club, but Oliver reminds her that she has several empty rooms, so she is forced to invite Ted to spend the night in her apartment. After Oliver leaves, Ted gives Nan a token he took from her husband's effects when he packed them and sent them to her. It is a soap carving of a bosomless Venus de Milo which Nan did at the age of twelve or thirteen when she was "a little embarrassed about bosoms— and things."59 Nan tells him to keep it and compare it with the original when he gets to Paris. This touching and amusing moment demonstrates Anderson's sensitivity in the selection and use of a theatrical symbol serving more than one purpose. Ted's initial taking of the carving, along with the sexual connotation of the nude figure, symbolizes his feelings for Nan. The token hints at her unawakened sexuality, provides background knowledge of her adolescence, and suggests, secondarily, the extreme sensitivity to sex in adolescent development.

Ted and Nan light the candles on his birthday cake, drink

champagne and talk of old times and Nan’s husband. Recalling a humorous incident from their honeymoon in Paris when her husband inadvertently found himself in a house of prostitution, Nan indicates that he was easily embarrassed.

Ted

Yes, I remember on the ship, I had a book of poetry, a rather earthy book of love poems; the kind I would have liked to have sent to someone I loved. And I took it to Tom and suggested he send it to you.

Nan

And of course he wouldn’t.

Ted

That’s right. It puzzled me because whenever you and I had been out, we talked, well, you know. Anyway, he wouldn’t so I’ve still got it, . . .

Through the symbolic device of the book (the same one Nan bought for her husband but decided not to send him), Anderson reveals the constraint of Nan’s relationship with her husband and her latent sensual affinity to Ted. Nan tells Ted that he may someday understand such reticence in marriage and that much will depend on his attitudes.

Ted

Yes, a lot of my mother’s coldness was my father’s fault. I never saw him touch her gently or kiss her, except an occasional peck on the cheek.

Reflected in Ted’s answer is the saddening diminishment of ardor in

60 Ibid., I. 30.
61 Ibid., I. 31.
marriage, a theme later developed more fully in *All Summer Long* and *Silent Night, Lonely Night*.

Ted, a perfectionist, hopes for a perfect marriage but feels he has nothing yet to offer. Anticipating a sentiment of Laura's in *Tea and Sympathy*, Nan replies that a man's loneliness is a thing of value.

> It gives a woman a feeling she's needed. It's not much fun to be married to a self-sufficient man. (She checks herself and looks at Ted, but too late. She tries to rescue the situation by a —) I imagine.

Ted

> If all a woman wants is a lonely man, she won't have to look far. She'll find a lot of them among the married men too..."I did not know in those days, Chekov's 'Any man who is afraid of loneliness should not get married,'" Robert Anderson has stated. This idea was to become one of his continuing thematic concerns.

After further discussion on the importance of communication in marriage, Ted says, "I shouldn't be talking like this anyway... Someone once said that to talk about love is to make love." He then shifts the topic of conversation to the view from Nan's window, a lonely girl typing in the apartment across the way. Nan tells him that this girl now has a lover. "That last night in Frisco before we sailed, I wish I could have pulled the curtain on every pair of lovers I saw," he says. Ted's following speech is another example

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63 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.

of the playwright's repetition of material from earlier work, but it is the only instance in which he transfers a long speech in such identical form. With only slight modification, the speech reappears in *Silent Night, Lonely Night*.

**Ted**

You and Tom were saying goodbye. But I wanted to say goodbye to someone. You remember the girl you got for me for a couple of double dates with you and Tom? Ellen something or other? Mrs. Ellen something or other with a husband in the Pacific. She was the only girl I knew. She was nice, and she was human and warm. But she had to stay home and take care of her baby. So I loaded up with flowers, and things for the baby and some whiskey and took one of those wild street cars out to her place. I thought I'd go crazy if I couldn't say goodbye to someone. We sat on the couch and she played records - Jerome Kern - and we drank, and I looked at the pictures of her husband's ship. She hadn't seen him in over a year, and we were both lonesome and kind of sick inside. I could tell from the way she looked at me we both wanted to help the other one over a tough spot. And she asked me if I'd like to dance. But I knew I couldn't because if I ever held her in my arms, just in dancing, I wouldn't stop, and after all, we were decent and her husband was in the Pacific and her baby in the next room. We were both sort of bursting inside when we said good night; she standing in the corner there by the door, and me wanting to hold her and feel her warmth and give and take whatever comfort we had for each other. But we didn't. We shook hands, and I left.65

Soon, the street musicians begin to play and Ted asks Nan to dance. She hesitates and starts to tell him of her decision to marry Oliver but stops herself. The dance leads them into a passionate embrace as the act ends.

The next morning Nan's son Roger comes home perplexed to find the room in disorder. The birthday cake has been left untouched and on the floor before the fireplace are champagne glasses, pillows and the book of love poems. Oliver, who arrived earlier, tells Roger

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that he and Nan had been celebrating. Roger has come to talk with his mother about his decision not to go on to law school but to get married as soon as he graduates. He is twenty and the girl is twenty-eight.

Later in the act, Ted counsels Nan to give Roger her blessing, "You can know at 20," he says, at 29, and perhaps best at 39. It's nice if it comes at 20, but still something quite special at any age. You see, he's found someone who loves him as much as he loves her. That's a wonderful and rare equilibrium in an unbalanced world. Someone to count on, to plan for . . . 66

When Ted learns that Nan was planning to marry Oliver, he asks, "How can anyone who is loved as you are stand this marriage by mutual toleration?" Echoing a familiar Anderson theme, and stating one of the principal ideas of this play, he goes on to say,

Something disappears when you settle down into that dull pattern of acceptance, routine. I've seen it. A man and a woman know that marriage should be more than that, and she turns into a nagger, and he, into a resentful boor.67

When Nan talks with Roger, later, and learns that he fell in love with his girl just after his father's death, she begins to understand the reason for his love better. On the problem of age difference, Roger tells her that he and his girl have discussed the matter.

Roger

But we're very much in love now, and we can't see why we should pass up this that we have now because of what might happen in

66 Ibid., II. 21.
67 Ibid., II. 24.
the future. . . . It's just that she's insisted that if I ever stop loving her, really loving her, that we call it off. . . . I tell her that day will never come. She says it will, it's bound to. She talks on about beauty, and I tell her it's not that important, and she keeps saying it will be. So that's our arrangement.68

Nan, troubled by this arrangement, suggests that it may be unfair to the girl, but she does not attempt to change his mind. As he goes off to buy an engagement ring, she asks him to stop back in the evening. When Ted phones to say he is cancelling his passage to Europe, she asks him to come back to her studio at nine o'clock, a half-hour later than her appointment with Roger.

Act III begins with Roger's return that evening. He is surprised to be invited into his mother's bedroom which has always been a restricted area. Nan, at her dressing table removing her make-up, confides that she is deeply in love with Ted.

Roger

(After turning the thing over in his mind and seeing many of the implications of what is happening)

What do you want me to say, Mother?

Nan

Whatever you feel like saying. That's why I asked.

Roger

If you love each other. . .

Nan

We do now. But I've been lonely so many times in my life, Roger, I couldn't stand being lonely again.

68Ibid., II. 34.
Roger

How would you be lonely?

Nan

I can't say for sure, who can? But five years from now, or less, he might look at me one day with a sudden awareness, and it would be over.

Roger

(Automatically)
But, Mother, you're such a ... a beautiful woman.

Nan

(Smiling a bit ruefully)
Thank you, Roger. And when that day comes, he'll not only stop loving me, he might come to hate me. He'd say I'm the one who should have known.

Roger

Ted's hardly like that.

Nan

All men are the same when it comes to feeling cheated. We'd separate, and it would be worse if we didn't. But he said we would.

Roger

He said it?

Nan

Well, he feels the same way you do about love and marriage. Adored or abandoned were his words.

Roger

Oh. I said the wrong things then this afternoon.

Nan

You said what you meant. ... It's good at his age, at your age, to expect a continuous display of fireworks or nothing. ... But when the nothing came, I would be completely alone again.
Roger

Not completely.

Nan

That's right, you might be home again by that time and we could sit around the fire and tell sad tales about the death of love.

Roger

I meant Oliver.

Nan

No, not all that time. . . . But the worst thing is that Ted would come to hate himself if he left me, because he'd realize he left me alone. Sensitive people like Ted and you have a great conscience that way. He'd be miserable, trying to track down how and why it had all fallen to pieces, and perhaps ashamed of himself for not having known it would happen.69

By this time, Nan has removed all her make-up and has wound her hair up in a scarf. Roger is visibly shocked at her appearance though he is careful not to appear to notice. By the end of their talk, he assumes that she has decided not to marry Ted and he is sympathetic because he knows how difficult it will be to break off the relationship, but he feels that the break can be made more easily by a woman than by a man. Nan suggests that perhaps it takes more skill on the man's part, and she tells him a story of a man her mother once loved who simply left a goodbye card at her door.

Roger

She must have hated him for that.

Nan

No, she loved him the rest of her life.

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69 Ibid., III.6-8.
Roger

Loved him?

Nan

It's sometimes like that. 70

Nan asks him to send Ted in as he leaves. Amazed that his mother would allow herself to be seen without makeup, he goes out, leaving the engagement ring behind.

When Ted appears, Nan comes out of her bedroom in an old flannel robe and turns up the lights so that she can be better seen. Instead of registering embarrassment at her appearance as Roger had done, Ted takes her in his arms and tells her she is more beautiful than before. "I didn't fall in love with your eyes, your skin. I fell in love with you," he says. 71

Nan explains that this is her way of showing him what she could not make him believe in any other way, that their marriage would have a time limit. Comparing their love with the Eden rose, she quotes the poem:

There is never a daughter on earth but once
ere the tale of her days is done,
She will know the scent of the Eden rose,
just once beneath the sun.

And whatever else she may win or lose,
endure, or do, or dare,
She will never forget the enchantment
it gave to the common air. 72

Ted points out that there is nothing in the poem about the enchantment not lasting, but she is firm in her decision. Finally, he becomes

70 Ibid., III.9. 71 Ibid., III.14. 72 Ibid., III.19.
angry, "If I should leave you," he says, "it will not be because you are 39 and I am 29. It will be because one of us stopped trying." The following speech in which his anger rises to its highest pitch, is illustrative of the sensitivity of Anderson's "geiger counter":

Ted

(Piling on)
The odds are that we'd be damned happy since we've had to overcome so many odds to get together at all, so many conventions, so much logic . . . But you won't give us a chance. All right, go ahead and sit out the rest of the dance with Oliver. I . . . (He stops, sorry that he has let himself go)

I'm sorry I ran on like that . . . if I've ruined everything for you. At least you got a couple of minutes of what it would be like with me. A little rough.

Ted rushes out past Oliver who has been waiting at the door and has overheard some of the shouting. "Crack me over the knuckles," Oliver says, "if I ever sound off like that. You know, it's years really since I've cared for anything or anyone sufficiently to get that worked up over it." Oliver has returned because Roger stopped by to congratulate him on his marriage to Nan, and to tell him that he, Roger, has decided against marrying. With tongue-in-cheek, Oliver smilingly pictures his and Nan's future together, sitting in rocking chairs on the porch of a summer hotel through the "long

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73 Ibid., III. 23.
74 See Chapter I, p. 7.
76 Ibid., III. 25.
autumn years" of their marriage. He has brought another charm for her bracelet.

Oliver

... the most beautiful and the last. It is shaped like a rosebud, and around the bottom of the cup is engraved in very small letters the obvious quotation about rosebuds. Robert Herrick, 17th century.

And now I'm going to call Ted and tell him that you are ready to fling yourself into the reckless mazurka of life. Ted!

When Ted appears, Nan raises her arms to dance with him as the curtain falls.

Here again, as in Boy Grown Tall, Anderson's conception of marriage is a highly romantic one: When both partners are truly in love and emotionally mature, any obstacle, including age difference, can be overcome if they will work together to keep their marriage alive. True love is a rare and beautiful happening to be joyfully grasped and diligently nurtured through constant attention and intimate communication. Thematically, The Eden Rose is another example of Anderson's war with the inevitable. The play is a protest against conventional attitudes toward age difference in marriage, the death of love, and the inevitability of growing old.

Oliver's imagery of the rocking chairs which Ted had called forth earlier, saying, "I promise you no happily ever after, or rocking away your life on the veranda of a summer hotel..." recurs as the stage picture of I'm Herbert, the final playlet in You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running. It is interesting to speculate on the possibility of an early visual impression from life that may have inspired the verbal image in The Eden Rose and the setting and situation for a play twenty years later.

The young man in love with an older woman is, of course, a relationship based on the playwright's life, but the specifics of the story are clearly fictitious. With the exception of Ted, whose background and romantic attitudes correspond to Anderson's earlier autobiographic figures, the characterizations in *The Eden Rose* are unrecognizable, and the play seems to veer further from biography than either *Come Marching Home* or *Boy Grown Tall*. Compared with John Marston in the latter play, Ted is an even more dynamic and attractive hero. With equal vitality he pursues Marston's objective of a perfect marriage, but Ted's superior emotional maturity and more consistent course of action create a higher degree of empathic response. The character of Oliver, self-described as "exciting as a cup of tea"\(^79\) provides an effective contrast to Ted's intensity. While his restrained manner tends to leave an impression of weakness, Oliver's actions are indeed volitional and relevant to his real goal, Nan's happiness. His selfless love and urbane sense of humor contribute to an appealing characterization.

In Anderson's portrayal of Nan Hilton, his intuitive understanding of female psychology and sensitivity to feminine emotion becomes apparent as a very special talent. Nan is the most captivating female character of his apprenticeship. Romantic, warm and understanding, she seems to have evolved primarily from the idealized models of Toni and Peggy in the Navy plays, but the playwright has given her deeper dimensions of emotional need and response which

\(^{79}\text{Ibid.}, \text{III. 27.}\)
make for a more human and complex character. Particularly in her complicated emotional makeup, she is a precursor of Laura in *Tea and Sympathy*. A certain childlike vulnerability in the characterization anticipates a similar quality of Katherine in *Silent Night*, *Lonely Night* and of Barbara in *The Days Between*. Like Laura, Katherine and Barbara, Nan is a desperately lonely woman with unfulfilled emotional needs, and like these later women, her underlying motivation is intrinsically sexual. In much the same way that Anderson made John Marston a more human and vigorous character than John Bosworth by the addition of animal vitality and sexual drive, he humanizes Nan Hilton by giving her an emotional life and vital human instincts.

Whereas in *Boy Grown Tall*, a sexual attraction existed between Marston and his secretary, the drive itself originated in Marston alone and was deflected to and held in check by Peggy, a subsidiary character. By endowing the central male and female characters both with an equal degree of sexuality, the playwright doubles the intensity of the emotional undercurrents and the excitement of the later play.

Because it represents the evolution of sex and love as the wellspring of the story and the introduction of the younger-older love theme, *The Eden Rose* is one of the most significant works of Anderson's apprenticeship. The play is developmentally important also in that it shows a marked advancement in the use of economy. No minor characters appear in this play and even the maid who is needed to supply food and other properties is dispensed with by the incorporation of a dumb waiter which brings the necessities
up from below. In contrast to the Navy plays, each covering a time span of approximately three weeks and requiring six scenes to accommodate the stories, the action of The Eden Rose transpires in less than twenty-four hours with no scene divisions within the three-act structure. The treatment of theme shows a similar refinement and selection. Although Anderson continues to deal with multiple concepts, his themes are more skillfully blended and somewhat more closely related to the central question of the nature and meaning of marriage.

The playwright's preoccupation with adolescent development, specifically the importance of sex indoctrination in adolescence, which figures more prominently in All Summer Long and Tea and Sympathy, is here incorporated as background for characterization. By providing information on the early sexual training of his characters, he brings a fuller understanding of their marital attitudes. As in the later works, Anderson's subject is examined in considerable depth and from various viewpoints. For example, the question of age difference is considered on three levels. Oliver is ten years older than Nan, Ted is ten years younger, and the son is eight years younger than his girl. In the boy's case, the unconventional age relationship is found to be an insurmountable problem because of the immaturity of his love.

The theme of loneliness, two lonely people bringing comfort to each other, reflects the "two against the world" feeling expressed by John Marston in Boy Grown Tall and points the way to the lonely and isolated characters who find solace together in Tea and Sympathy.
and Silent Night, Lonely Night. The related theme of woman as comfort and woman's love as a healing power is also evident here. The desire for intensity of love and the sadness of the inevitable dwindling away of intensity is again reflected in the romantic young man's observations on middle-aged marriages. This theme persists through much of the later work.

In its setting too, The Eden Rose represents a transition in the direction of later plays. While this set is reminiscent of the two-level rooms with fireplaces in the Navy plays, Nan's top floor studio, with a balcony and alcove bedroom behind, leads directly into the multi-level design of Tea and Sympathy. In relation to this later work, however, The Eden Rose is most significant in terms of the younger-older love story and in its utilization of sex and love as the underlying character motivation, the fountainhead of the story.

The Lunts Are The Lunts Are The Lunts

Anderson's first work to appear on Broadway was a short sketch in Dwight Deere Wiman's 1950 musical revue, Dance Me a Song. Although the revue was well received on the road, it ran for only 35 performances in New York. In his New York Times review, Brooks Atkinson praised the performances of stars Joan McCracken and Wally Cox and complimented Jo Mielziner's setting, but with the exception of two comic monologues, he found the sketches "undistinguished."80

Anderson's seven-page skit entitled, *The Lunts Are The Lunts Are The Lunts* is too short to have warranted Atkinson's individual attention, but it is an amusing theatre piece.

The sketch opens with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne on a couch looking through a stack of scripts from the Theatre Guild. Nothing is suitable for next season, but Alfred assures her that something will show up. "Maybe for you, darling," she replies. "Worse come to worse, you can always play the father in Arthur Miller's new play.

**Alfred**

How do you know there's going to be a father in Arthur Miller's new play?

**Lynn**

There's always a father in Arthur Miller's new play. Among the scripts is a copy of the telephone book. Lynn feels complimented for she remembers someone saying they could draw an audience merely by reading from the phone book. Since they are desperate for a script, she thinks an adaptation is an idea worth pursuing. They will get Sam to adapt the phone book. "Sam can make almost anything gay and literate." With so little plot, they will need Kazan to direct. "In the weak spots he'll give it such pace that no one will know or care what's being said. ..." The scene fades

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82 Ibid.

83 Ibid. 84 Ibid.
to black as they lay their plans. When the lights come up, Lynn and Alfred begin to play "a typical Lunt love scene . . . He, the stalking, pleading exasperated, hurt male . . . She the teasing, coy, flirting, female." Their script is composed entirely of names, addresses, phone numbers and telephone jargon to which "they give meaning to every word and number." The final portion of the skit is included here to illustrate its comic tone and sexual implications.

Alfred

(Threws himself at her)

Lynn

(Warding him off)
The dial tone means number please. The steady hum is your 'go ahead' signal. Please wait for it.

Alfred

(Offering her unspeakable pleasures)
Ace Novelty Company . . . 317 West 35th Street . . . Longacre 3-4060

Lynn

(Holding him off)
Marriage License Bureau . . . Municipal Building . . . Worth 4-0330

Alfred

(Draws back a bit and protests)
Diaper Service of Brooklyn . . . 1395 Bedford Avenue . . . Nevada 8-8305

85Ibid. 86Ibid.
Lynn

(Whispering)
Whelan's Drug Store . . Madison and 59th . . Plaza 3-0522

Alfred

(Transported . . throws himself at her and buries his head in her lap . . .)

Lynn

For better service, speak directly and clearly into the telephone mouthpiece.

Alfred

(Coming close to her face)
Acme Bedding and Mattress Company . . 370 Tenth Avenue . . Pennsylvania 6-7299.
(He kisses her)

Lynn

(Coming out of it finally)
I want to report a fire.

BLACKOUT\textsuperscript{87}

This sketch is another early indication of Robert Anderson's talent for comedy, which was to become apparent in \textit{You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running}. The satirical nature of the skit, its comic spirit and farcical tone make it particularly relevant to \textit{The Shock of Recognition}, but in its preoccupation with sexuality, \textit{The Lunts Are The Lunts Are The Lunts} bears a relationship to all the one-acts in the later work.

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., pp. 6-7.
Love Revisited

Another frustration during the "heartbreak stretch" of Robert Anderson's career was his inability to acquire a Broadway production for *Love Revisited*. Begun in 1949 and completed in 1950, this comedy interested a number of producers, but the extraordinary set of circumstances leading to a Broadway production never came about; the play was finally presented at the Westport, Connecticut, Country Playhouse in the summer of 1951.

In *Love Revisited*, Charles Webster, a successful radio soap opera writer makes up for "the deficiencies of civilized life and lazy husbands" by giving his housewife listeners excitement, sentiment, thrills and love, but he is oblivious to these wants in his own lovely wife, Liz. To refresh her marriage, Liz, on the eve on their fifteenth wedding anniversary, feigns amnesia and insists she has no memory of their relationship, but only remembers her life with Nick, an artist with whom she was living when Charles met her. Charles scoffs at her amnesia and refuses to play her courting game, so Liz invites Nick to the anniversary party. In the meantime, Charles' old Aunt Emily has devised another plan to enliven the marriage. She has hired a piano-player friend, Jack Barnstable, to come to the party and make love to Liz. Aunt Emily

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89 Anderson Tape No. 1.

plays the harmonica and has a studio next door to Jack. Her social
calendar is the obituary page and her regular pastime is attending
funerals. To liven things up at dinner she often tells a dirty
story. Jack lives at his studio and bathes at the YMCA so he is
pleased to be invited to the Webster home for a bath and dinner
before the party. As a Yale man and a member of Young Liberals for
Action, he is eager to meet Charles, a former president of that
organization and a legendary rebel at Yale. Charles is distressed
at the possibility of having his radical past disclosed to his
guests, particularly to the sponsor of his program.

The remainder of the action occurs at the anniversary party
that evening. Nick arrives and begins to woo Liz. In the fifteen
years since she has seen him, this dashing young artist has become
plump and bald. A former painter and sculptor of nudes, Nick now
designs mail boxes and lamp posts for the city. His feelings for
Liz have not changed, however, and he asks her to go away with him.
Liz agrees to meet him at midnight and suggests that he mingle with
the guests and sing his I.W.W. songs so that no one will become
suspicious. Jack Barnstable, learning of Liz's amnesia game, decides
to play along and pretends to be her lover. Liz is drawn to Jack
because he reminds her of Charles in his younger romantic days,
and she agrees to meet him at midnight to hear a song he has written
for her.

When midnight comes, Nick has a cab waiting but Liz finds
reasons to delay their departure. Nick, sensing that she is really
in love with her husband and stalling in the hope that Charles will intercede, is understanding and helpful. When Charles arrives, Nick challenges him to win her back. Charles bases his appeal on his past faithfulness, to which Nick replies,

I ask you to win over your wife, and you say, 'I have been faithful to you.' You don't tell her how much you love her, what she means to you, how you need her, etc. ... etc.... But just, 'I haven't gone to bed with another woman.' That's a negative compliment if I ever heard one. ... Now if you were to tell her, I've been with four other women this week, but none compares to you, that, I should think would flatter a woman. ... And the highest compliment Liz could pay you would be to come home with me tonight, and then come back to you tomorrow and tell you that compared to you, I'm nothing. That would be flattery. That would be love ... And, incidentally, a damn lie.

Charles

That's a very dangerous doctrine you're preaching.

Nick

Unconventional, perhaps. But wouldn't it make for a happier world? Think how hard husbands and wives would have to work to keep their spouses loving them if the law didn't guarantee them what passes for love.

Charles

What would happen to peace of mind ... security?

Nick

They would go out the window, and with them would go all the loveless marriages, slovenly, careless husbands, nagging wives ... 91

Nick leaves so that Liz and Charles can have a sensible talk, and at this point, the tone of the play gradually grows more
serious. Liz has found a letter written by Charles on the night he proposed. If he will read it, she may regain her memory, but Charles is angry now. When Jack Barnstable arrives for his rendezvous with Liz, Charles goes off to make himself more ridiculous by trying to seduce his young secretary. Jack falls in love in earnest. Liz becomes gravely concerned about her marriage. Charles loses his job, not because his sponsor learned of his former rebelliousness, but because his writing has grown sluggish along with his marriage. His spirit crushed, Charles returns to tell Liz he loves her and to explain his feelings about the deterioration of their marriage. He is more jealous of Jack than of Nick, he says, for he sees in Jack, the boy he was and always wanted to be.

Free, rebellious, a buccaneer. We all want to be buccaneers, Liz. All small boys, all grown men. But we learn how to be sensible and respectable. . . . It's a funny thing . . . You women marry us because you love something wild and adventurous in us. And then sometimes the very act of marrying kills what you love in us. . . . Soon love is not enough to bring a woman. There must be something more substantial. And it takes time and energy to get that something more substantial, and pretty soon. . . .

Liz

And soon the young rebel in you begins to resent the pride in you, and resents the conformity this pride demands. . . . and then in a short while the woman herself. . . .

Charles finally reads the letter in which he once resolved to keep his marriage different, "to keep it a growing thing, and not let it dwindle into stale familiarity." Although his resolution

92 Ibid., III. 24-5.
has been long broken, he makes it again, and Liz is satisfied.

In *Love Revisited*, Anderson again reverted to the farcical model of Noel Coward and the play harks back to *Straw in the Wind*. As in this early work, the action centers around an anniversary party, the reading of a love letter, and a midnight meeting of lovers in a triangular relationship. The character of Aunt Emily is reminiscent of a wise-cracking aunt in the early play who stood outside the action and made witty comments, but Aunt Emily is a much funnier character and more in keeping with the play's lighthearted farcical tone. Unfortunately, she has little to do in the latter part of the play when its mood turns serious.

This change in tone, which is the major flaw in an otherwise delightful comedy, illustrates the playwright's difficulty in sustaining a full-length farce. The problem seems to arise largely from the intrusion of more sentiment than farce allows and from the essential seriousness of the author where marriage themes are concerned. The problem also relates, however, to Anderson's inclination to become involved with his characters beyond the level of farce. On this point, the playwright has said that until *The Shock of Recognition* and *I'm Herbert in You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running*, he had always found it difficult to stand outside his characters and write in a totally objective style. His tendency to become emotionally involved with farcical characters is

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*Anderson Tape No. 2.*
clearly apparent in *Love Revisited*. Seventeen years later in his next farce, this proclivity can still be seen, but in *The Shock of Recognition*, the author's involvement with his characters enhances rather than detracts from the comedy. Interestingly, the rebellious playwright of this later piece is given the name of Jack Barnstable.

**All Summer Long**

Robert Anderson was suggested as a possible adapter of Donald Wetzel's novel, *A Wreath and a Curse*, by the novelist's agent, Jay Sanford. Deeply moved by the book, the playwright began his adaptation in the early spring of 1951 and completed the first draft by early summer. The script, which originally bore the title of the novel, was subsequently circulated to New York producers who found it "a nice play but not commercial." The following January, director Alan Schneider took an option on the script for production at the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and arranged an Equity reading by Kim Hunter and others at Actors Studio. Hearing the play read, the dramatist was dissatisfied with the second act and so began a revision while simultaneously working on a new play entitled *Tea and Sympathy*. Alan Schneider could not afford to renew his option but Anderson allowed him to continue his efforts.

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95 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 633.
to secure a Washington production. Among the working notes for Tea and Sympathy, is a handwritten notation, "Going on Ten," one of several titles considered for the adaptation before the playwright decided to call it All Summer Long.

When the play finally opened at Washington's Arena Stage in January, 1953, it was an immediate success. Under Alan Schneider's direction, and with the then unknown actor, George Grizzard, in the role of the older son, All Summer Long played to capacity audiences for five weeks and closed only because another play was scheduled to move into the theatre. Brooks Atkinson's New York Times review of the production, though commendatory, was one of the least favorable notices. "All Summer Long," he wrote,

... is the sort of small, inquiring play that glows in the intimate atmosphere of arena staging... Mr. Anderson's talent for characterization is fresh and discerning. But the play, written in nine scenes with no regional location is diffuse and seems always in a hurry. It never has time to come to grips with most of the ideas it races through.

And Alan Schneider has underscored the sketchiness in the writing by directing a performance that is too taut and shrill, too indifferent to a sense of introspection and too lacking in mood. It compounds the weakness of the script by being always in a hurry, as if getting to the end were the most important factor in a production...

96 Ibid.


98 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 637.

On the basis of the Arena Stage production, a number of New York producers bid for the play.\textsuperscript{100} The producing firm of Alexander Cohen and Robert Alswang bought the New York option, but after further rewrites suggested by the producers, "we could never agree that the way they wanted it was the right way," the playwright stated, "and they dropped the option by mutual consent."\textsuperscript{101}

After the success of \textit{Tea and Sympathy}, Anderson again revised \textit{All Summer Long} for the Playwrights Company production which opened on Broadway in September, 1954.\textsuperscript{102} Clay Hall, the child actor from Washington, repeated the leading role on Broadway and Alan Schneider again directed. This time, Brooks Atkinson described the production as "a work of art," and called attention to the "sensitive" direction:

\begin{quote}
\ldots Mr. Schneider has staged a soft, pulsing performance that speaks the truth consistently all evening. It is good to be reminded so quietly that people of the theatre can do such shining work.
\end{quote}

Of the play, he wrote,

\begin{quote}
Taken on its own terms as character study, 'All Summer Long' is a poignant and beautiful play \ldots the first piece of art this year. \ldots Mr. Anderson believes in writing for actors. \ldots Since the characterizations are penetrating, the acting is superb. \ldots As a series of characterizations that are interwoven and act on each other, 'All Summer Long' is a remarkable piece of work. \ldots Mr. Anderson pins his characters on the screen of his play with pitiless accuracy. His actors portray them with skill and understanding. There is something lacking in the scope of 'All Summer Long'. But the quality is admirable.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{100}\textit{Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson}, p. 636.
\textsuperscript{101}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 637. \textsuperscript{102}\textit{Ibid.}
Several other New York critics gave their highest praise to the play and the production. Confirming Mr. Atkinson's observation on the excellence of Anderson's characterizations, the reviewers, without exception lauded the acting, but *All Summer Long* closed in November after 60 performances.\(^{104}\)

In his preface to the *Theatre Arts* edition of the play, Anderson wrote, "I heard it said that people didn't want to come to see *All Summer Long* because they heard it was about a loveless family, and the thought of this depressed them.\(^{105}\) Other deterrents to audience acceptance have been suggested by John Gassner and Washington critic Richard Coe. Comparing the pre-Broadway production to the Arena Stage presentation, Mr. Coe felt that "the intimacy, so great a charm in the arena style, is missed..." and that the broader and more explicit staging required in proscenium theatre made the audience "impatient with the slight reiterations of plot, which, through their very gentleness"\(^{106}\) moved the audience in the earlier production. Coe found the proscenium setting, More Mielziner than Anderson, its muted coloring and ghostly aspect being at odds with the positive, youthful vigor of the words, suggesting if you will a sort of 'Death of a Country

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John Gassner has attributed the commercial failure of the Broadway production partially to the fact that

The play was brought into one of those large Broadway houses in which moods are likely to drift away like smoke, in which attitudes tend to be translated into blatant statement or attitudinizing, and in which error, like success, is so blown up that a miss is as good as a mile.108

Drawing parallels between Anderson's play and the works of Chekhov in terms of character, nuance, atmosphere and story, Gassner noted that Chekhovian artistry has had a difficult time in American theatre. He went on to say, however,

that the extravagant world of Chekhov, . . . offers a richer supply of attractive, amusing and moving failures than the world of Robert Anderson's All Summer Long. The characters of the book were drab and commonplace, unstimulating and unamusing representatives of lower middle-class life.109

On their own merits, the characters in the novel were not particularly engrossing, and the story of a small boy's pathetic struggle to build a wall of stones against a river would seem unlikely material for the stage. Mr. Wetzel's novel is an allegory of man's apathy and stupidity in the face of certain disaster, told in the first person by the boy's older brother, Don. Crippled in a dormitory fire, and deprived of a normal future, Don watches his

107 Ibid.


109 Ibid., p. 290.
family drift toward catastrophe while only his 10-year-old brother Willie strives to save the home. The novel ends in despair and tragedy; the house sinks into the river, Willie drowns, and the older sister, Ruth, miscarry as she falls down the stairs in an attempt to save her dresses.

As Henry Hewes pointed out in his review of the play,

Certainly the struggle between man and the river--the book's most dramatic element--is difficult to present on stage. What can be shown is the less dramatic comparison between the sensitivities of the older members of the family and young Willie. But Robert Anderson... found a great deal of himself in the novel and courageously adapted it... Choosing the path of interior drama, he made it the story of an older boy who begins a summer of teaching his younger brother, and ends up learning from him. What he learns is that instead of criticizing others he should have swallowed his pride, taken a mechanical job, and put his salary towards the building of a cement wall. This is an alternative not offered to Don in the novel. Mr. Anderson has softened the tragic ending to permit Willie and Ruth to come through the flood unscathed. He has rounded the characters by giving each a claim for sympathy absent in the book. Moreover, Mr. Anderson has strengthened the wider implications of the play for a civilization preoccupying itself with a number of insignificant things while the threat of total destruction comes closer.110

With these exceptions and other minor differences, Robert Anderson worked within the framework of Donald Wetzel's story and, in many cases, utilized the best of the novel's language. Ruth's attack on Willie for watching the birth of the puppies and Don's confrontation with Ruth contain much of the same dialogue. The following comparison shows how narrative material is effectively transferred into speech. In this example, an early passage from the novel, in

condensed form, serves as the climax of a heated argument between Don and his family:

From the novel:

... I knew and Willie knew and possibly Mother knew that the day would come when the river would have to be reckoned with, when it would not be low and quiet and easily ignored, but risen and swift, loudly demanding our attention, making the earth beneath us tremble—so that even if our backs were turned upon it, even if we tried in our various ways to ignore it, to concentrate on books or chickens or Gods or motors or just being beautiful, we still would feel the trembling of the earth beneath us and be afraid.111

From the play:

Don

But you remember, that no matter how we try in our different ways to ignore it, to bury our heads in books, or chickens, or Gods or motors, or just being beautiful, when the time comes and the river rises, we will feel the ground tremble beneath us and we will be afraid.112

Although Mr. Hewes indicated that Robert Anderson found much of himself in the novel, the playwright brought far more of himself to the play than he found in the book. In *A Wreath and a Curse*, there exists no obvious lack of affection between the mother and the father. No letter from the courtship is read to comfort Willie with the knowledge that his parents were once in love. Neither a loveless marriage nor its effect on children is at issue and the importance of adolescence in personality development is not stressed. While there is closeness in the relationship of the brothers in the novel, the depth of their affection is not so great as in the play


and the older brother does not fulfill the younger boy's need for a father.

The playwright has stated that during his years from eight to twelve he was very fond of his older brother. At Exeter, he remembers, Donald Anderson "came up from Harvard and took me on many long walks and sort of set me straight and helped make it a bit easier." The brotherhood relationship from life is surely mirrored to some extent in All Summer Long, as are the boyhood roles of "firebrand" and "peacemaker" which Donald and Robert played in relation to their father.

In his novel, Wetzel suggests a certain warmth between Dad and his sons. Anderson's harsher treatment of the father probably results from the necessity for personal conflict in the play, but reflected in the father's characterization there seems to be a considerable amount of the playwright's own filial feeling, the same ambivalence found in the characterization of Tom Garrison in I Never Sang For My Father. Don's crippling accident in the novel was the result of a defective system, a dormitory fire. His crippled condition in the play has been caused by an automobile accident directly related to his father's negligence. The father's resentment of Willie, his irritability toward and insensitivity to the feelings

113 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, May 3, 1968.
114 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 536.
115 See Chapter I, p. 6.
of his wife and family are additions of the playwright. Along with these negative aspects, however, Anderson infuses the characterization with a certain innate dignity, some pathos and considerable humor. Utilizing the scene from the novel in which the electric fence fails to kill the chickens and the family breaks into laughter at the father's frustration, the dramatist supplements the humor of the character with his own inventions. One of the most effective scenes in the play is the amusing incident in which the father decides to test his children's affection by putting aside his newspaper and trying to be communicative. The mother's discovery of him kicking the house, and the father calling his son just to get an answer are other excellent comic moments of the playwright's creation.

Humor of a more touching sort is brought to the play through the characterization of Willie, who, when his mother reminds him to remember the fallen sparrow, asks, "Will God take care of chickens?" and whose naivety provides many tenderly funny moments. In the play, Anderson raises Willie's age from ten to twelve and focuses the action of the second act around his birthday. While underscoring the larger theme of the novel through the boy's courageous struggle against adult apathy and indifference, the dramatization introduces the more central and personal theme of the importance of adolescence in personality maturation. The playwright's argument,

116Anderson, All Summer Long, I. 38.
as Wolcott Gibbs observed in his New Yorker review,

is that this is a peculiarly significant age. Social criticism is born, and for the first time the child is aware of cruelty, vulgarity, and futility, and, of course, their opposites, as actual qualities in those around him. It is a time when models for future behavior are chosen, when the first genuine moral decisions are made, and especially, when sex can turn into a wonder or a horror overnight.\(^{117}\)

As in The Eden Rose, a soap carving of the Venus de Milo with no bosom signifies the young adolescent's sexual shyness. "Willie's a little self-conscious about bosoms just now,"\(^{118}\) Don explains to the father who is annoyed at finding soap in his newspaper. In relation to Robert Anderson's earlier references to sex education being handled by the mother, it is interesting to note that Willie's father has refused to tell his son about the facts of life and has left this task to the mother who, in turn, is relieved to learn that the information has been provided by the older brother. With Don's help, and through his explorations with the sexually precocious ten-year-old Teresa, and by watching his dog give birth to her pups, Willie learns the facts of life. Overhearing his father and mother talking in their bedroom, he discovers the most sorrowful fact, that he is an unwanted child.

The idea for this discovery appears among the working notes for Tea and Sympathy\(^{119}\) but it was used instead in All Summer Long.

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\(^{118}\) Anderson, All Summer Long, I. 10.

Since the dramatist worked simultaneously on the plays, revising the earlier script while writing *Tea and Sympathy*, it is not surprising to find inner correspondences between the two works. As several reviewers pointed out, each play is concerned with a boy growing up and becoming a man, and there are obvious correlations in the Willie-Don and Tom-Laura relationships.

From the apprentice plays, a number of themes recur in *All Summer Long*: the significance of adolescence and sexual indoctrination in youth, the destructive effect of a loveless marriage, the loss of communication which leads to the death of marital love, the concept of two lonely people in a hostile world, and the protest against apathy and stupidity which was found in *Come Marching Home*. Looking forward to Anderson's subsequent plays, the introduction of the well-meaning but obtuse father should be noted. Discounting the incredibly wicked father from *The Sisters* of the graduate school period, Dad, in *All Summer Long*, is the first of Anderson's father characters to appear on stage. However, fathers with Dad's characteristics and his attitudes toward marriage were discussed by the heroes in *Boy Grown Tall* and *The Eden Rose*.

Glimmerings of at least three future plays can be perceived in *All Summer Long*. Willie's sadness over never having seen his parents kiss, a motif briefly introduced by Ted in *The Eden Rose*, is reechoed by Chuck in *I'll Be Home For Christmas*, when he tells his wife they should be "necking on the couch" for the children's benefit. "All these years we've been married, and you never really
listen to me,"120 Willie's mother says to his father. This theme is repeated by the married couples in three of the playlets in You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running. The germ of that title is also suggested in a line from the novel and in the following speeches from the play:

Dad

You know he can't hear with the motors.

Harry

I can't hear you when the machine is running. You know that.121 These touching lines by Willie's mother provide a gentle intimation of another future title and theme:

Your father sometimes says some cruel things. I know he doesn't mean them, but he says them. Last night, like, when we were getting to bed—he said we oughtn't to have had Willie—And I wondered about it, and then I heard Willie start to sing in the next room, very softly and nicely—and I knew your father was wrong. We must ask Willie to sing for us someday.122

Rudiments of The Days Between can be seen in the following comparison of speeches between mothers and sons:

Don

... I don't know how you've stood it. I suppose I shouldn't talk like that, but—

Roger

How can you love him?

Barbara

You have no business asking that question, but I'll tell you ... Because it wasn't always this way ...

Mother

No, you shouldn't. I've stood it because it hasn't always been

120Anderson, All Summer Long, I. 24.
121Ibid., I. 21.
122Ibid., I. 51-2.
The technique of establishing mood and characters at the opening of
the play by bringing lights up separately on principal figures in
different locations on the set is a device Anderson used for the
first time in *All Summer Long* and repeated with equally fine effect
in *The Days Between*.

In his introduction to the *Theatre Arts* publication of *All
Summer Long*, the dramatist stated that the adaptation had been "hard
work all the way."

There being little plot or story to carry the play along, every
moment had to carry its own reward. There being little story,
there had to be pattern. I had hoped that an audience would
enjoy watching the patterns develop, just a thread here and a
thread there in the beginning, but finally a working together
of the whole.125

The cohesive and fluid construction of the play, built around the
development and interaction of sensitive and absorbing characteri-
zations, shows the work of a skilled craftsman. Although this play
is still considered a Broadway failure, it has been successfully
performed throughout the world, and in its *Goodyear Playhouse* and
*Play of the Week* television productions, has been enjoyed by millions
of Americans. In its superb craftsmanship, *All Summer Long* marks

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123 Ibid., II. 95.

124 Anderson, *The Days Between* (New York: Samuel French,

the end of Robert Anderson's apprenticeship and in its artistry, the first of his masterworks.
CHAPTER IV

TEA AND SYMPATHY

"Katherine and Pity and Love and I"

Discussing the evolution of his first original masterwork, Robert Anderson has said:

Any play, I believe, arrives not full blown. It arrives as a hint, as a suggestion, as a cross of theme or character. Tea and Sympathy started as a short story called "Katherine and Pity and Love and I," which nobody would publish.1

"Katherine and Pity and Love and I,"2 one of three short stories written in 1947 after the completion of The Eden Rose, was suggested by an incident from the author's adolescence.3 Told in the first person by a sixteen-year-old boy, the story deals with the marriage of an athletic man and the lovely wife he married in his fortieth year. Returning from the honeymoon, the man immediately resumes his involvement in sports and continues to surround himself with young athletes. The wife looks forward to their first summer alone together but soon after they go to their summer lodge, the husband

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3Anderson Tape No. 1.
begins to invite the boys for visits. The boy who tells the story feels a great affinity for the wife and tries to show her all the attentions he can by bringing her flowers, helping with the dishes, etc. On his visit to the lodge, he suddenly realizes that he is in love with her. The night before he is to return home, he accompanies the wife and husband and another boy to a dance across the river where the man is to receive an athletic award. Feeling sorry for the woman because no one dances with her, the boy works up his courage and asks her himself; then while dancing, he experiences various and conflicting emotions. Later, the prize having been awarded, they return to the lodge by motor boat. The other boy asks to steer, leaving the amorous boy and the woman sitting together in the rear of the boat with the husband up front. Shyly, the boy takes her hand, and they ride back through the night holding hands. The next morning when they are about to leave the lodge, the husband sends the boy to his bedroom to get his car keys. In the bedroom, the boy sees the double bed with the imprint of the couple's bodies close together, and realizes that he has been a fool to have imagined that this was an unhappy marriage. As he is about to go, the wife is standing in the doorway:

We looked at each other in silence for a moment, and then I blushed and told her I'd come for the keys. As I tried to slip past her without looking at her again, she took my hand. When she saw that I wasn't going to look up at her, she said very softly, 'Thank you for everything.' Suddenly I felt I was a little boy she was speaking to. Last night I had been a lover, a man rescuing her from a loveless marriage, but now I was just a growing kid with lots to learn about everything. My hand was still in hers, but it didn't mean anything
anymore. I drew it away slowly, muttered 'Goodbye,' and left.\(^4\)

This tender and charming story inspired by a youthful experience, contains germs of several ideas found in the final version of *Tea and Sympathy*.\(^5\) In its treatment of the older-younger love relationship, the story represents a transition from the adult attachments in *The Eden Rose* to the adolescent's love for a mature woman which appears in both the 1948 and 1952 versions of *Tea and Sympathy*.\(^6\) The wife in the short story is the same sort of person as Laura, a quiet, lovely, compassionate and gentle woman who shows similar kindness and understanding for the boy's love. The boy, a potential musician and tennis player, like Tom Lee in the 1952 drama, senses the wife's loneliness, and expresses his deep affection by bringing her flowers and presents. His anxiety to tell her of his love, his inability to speak the words, his emotional discomfiture when dancing with her, and his antagonism toward the boorish husband, are all reflected in the later work. The "he-man" athletic husband, constantly associating with boys and paying little attention to his wife, and the wife wanting to be alone with her husband, is another relationship derived from "Katherine and Pity and Love and I."
The next work to figure directly in the evolution of *Tea and Sympathy* is the novel, *Birthright*, written during the first half of 1947. An earlier entry in the playwright's notebook indicated that he hoped one day to write a novel in which sex would be "the wellspring of the book, not just the fancy trimmings and lurid attractions," and this is the substance of *Birthright*. Its hero, David Coates, a twenty-nine-year-old writer, learns that he is sterile and develops a psychic impotency with his wife which leads to divorce. Obsessed with his impotence, he tries to overcome it by picking up a girl in a dance hall but fails, and is humiliated by her taunts and derision. He then meets Peggy, a lovely and sensitive young actress who has been hurt in marriage by a narcissistic and unfaithful husband whom she has divorced. Through her kindness and love, Peggy learns of his problem and by giving herself to him, she manages to overcome his psychic block and reestablishes his manhood.

David's unsuccessful attempt to gain assurance of his virility with a prostitute and the final restoration of his manhood through the understanding of a kind and gracious woman, are obvious threads of story found in *Tea and Sympathy*. From the standpoint of this and other plays, it is interesting to note that in his novel

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8 *Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson*, p. 266.
too, Anderson used a birthday as the focal point of the story. A birthday letter from David's former wife, informs him of her forthcoming marriage, and helps to precipitate the climax.

In reference to the other works, the following excerpts are also noteworthy: In the doctor's office where David's sterility is verified,

... his mind jumped involuntarily back into the years of his childhood and another doctor's office... a doctor with cold, hard eyes who told him nothing of what he wanted to know, but only warned him and warned him about all the things he mustn't do... and it was before he knew anything in himself and it had frightened him, and it had been brutal, and he had left the office afraid of something he knew nothing about, afraid to grow up.9

Later in the story,

... he remembered how in a writing course at college one of the men had written a story in which the central problem was one of love and sex... and one of the social conscious boys had protested that love and sex were not important things to write about... they existed, yes, but only on the fringes of a person's life. The core was his relation to society and the economic forces of his time. David smiled. It would be almost poetic justice for that young know-it-all to find himself like this, sterile and psychologically impotent. He might change his tune. He might learn the truth.10

The Version of 1948

Robert Anderson first heard the phrase, "tea and sympathy" in the winter of 1945-46 when walking down Sixth Avenue with his wife and one of her former students, who happened to mention that

9Anderson, Birthright, p. 15.
10Ibid., p. 43.
in the theatrical boarding house in which she lived, the landlady had the girls down for tea and sympathy. By the time the play was presented, the student had forgotten the phrase, but the playwright "vividly remembered the time and place and the instantaneous impression it made" on him. Soon after this incident, Tea and Sympathy was entered in his notebook as an idea and possible title for a play.

The dramatist has also recalled a significant visit to Exeter at about this time:

And I remember the dormitory where I had been a miserable first-year boy, and I walked into it and suddenly it was converted. It was no longer a miserable cell of a place, but what had been the master's quarters or a common room, had been opened up for the students, and the widow of one of the masters presided over it. It was a very warm room with a fire glowing in it, and chintz curtains and comfortable home-like surroundings. I remember she told me, I had no idea how many tears were shed in this room by the boys. And it struck me and moved me, . . .

In the winter of 1947 when he began to think about his next play, the recollection of the Exeter visit was still with him, along with the idea behind his recently completed novel, and the title, Tea and Sympathy. Among "hundreds of odds and ends of notes," which were written for this play, the playwright selected a sampling

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12 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 149.

13 Ibid., p. 224.

14 Ibid., p. 225.
from 1947, 1950, and 1952 for inclusion in an article for the 1954 anniversary edition of Exeter's bi-weekly publication, The Exonian. The following notes from 1947 give some additional insights into the initial conception of the play.

... Is all we can give each other tea and sympathy?

It must have a warmth and a glow around it.

It was so good to walk into anything resembling a home ... with nice lighting and comfortable, tasteful furniture ... and a woman presiding.

The awful loneliness of the late fall evenings and Sunday afternoons.

Mr. Scott: Prep school is where young men come to learn the facts of life from other young men ... all ignorant as babes.

The whole problem of a boy's breaking away from home ... the difficult adjustment of growing up mentally and socially and sexually ... and all alone.

She is a woman, who in giving sympathy also gives love. Sympathy and love are very close together.

This is a heartbreaking age, 13 - 18. Knowing so much and so little.

Somewhere Balzac said something like, 'A man's first love affair is likely to be a woman's last.'

When the curtain goes up, she is there, bathed in a wonderful soft glow, dressed in warm colors, with her sparkling tea service with the one red carnation, listening to one of the boys singing the plaintive song, 'The Joys of Love.'

It is a play about the loneliness of the individual. We are all lonely. Within ourselves we carry our deadly secrets ...
the sources of our motivations . . . the resulting actions. No one understands.16

In the first version of *Tea and Sympathy*, completed in 1948, the heroine is Katherine Morrison, and the boy's name is Tom Lawson. Katherine is a kind and beautiful woman of twenty-nine, the daughter of a former master at an eastern boys' school. Since her father's death, she has stayed on at the school serving as housemother to the boys who roomed in her father's home. Tom Lawson is sixteen or seventeen years old, a sensitive boy with a club foot, who, like Tom Lee in the later version, plays the guitar and is heard singing "The Joys of Love" at the opening of the play. Also like Tom Lee, he comes from a broken home and was brought into the world in the hope of holding his parents together. Tom is in love with Katherine and spends a great deal of time with her. As in the later play, the action centers around a spring dance. Katherine, who has taught Tom to dance and wants him to attend, asks the girl next door to tea in order to give him the opportunity to invite her. Tom is humiliated by the unkindness of the girl's refusal to dance with him and runs from the room. In the scene that follows, the girl says that Katherine has nothing to lose because she is not really involved. "What if it were someone older like him . . . someone who wanted to love you and kiss you?" 18 she asks. Katherine is

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17 *I.e.*, the 1948 version (see Footnote 6).

struck by the truth of the girl's statement much as Laura in the final version is touched by the similar defense of Tom's roommate, Al, when he says, "... it's easy for you to talk the way you have --you're not involved." In this first version of the play also, Tom's roommate is an athlete who decides to move to another house.

Interwoven in this story is the arrival of Paul Bennett, a young master and a returning veteran who has been assigned to live in the other side of Katherine's double house. She remembers Paul as an essentially lonely and pleasant person, but discovers that he has become a hard and bitter man and that he is indoctrinating the boys with his hardness. She, on the other hand, has been teaching them kindness and gentleness; so although the man and woman are drawn to one another, a conflict arises between them.

Tom, hurt by the neighbor girl's cruelty and feeling that no girl can ever love him, begins to show the influence of the new master's doctrine and starts to avoid Katherine. Paul has lectured the boy on the necessity of learning to live alone with his deformity and on the idea that love is purely physical and selfish. In Katherine's attempt to make the boy understand the true meaning of love, two familiar themes are implied—the importance of the nature of sexual initiation in adolescence, and the healing power of love:

19Anderson, Tea and Sympathy, II.i.48.
Katherine
You've said so many times that you hate your mother, and I've protested. But I'll believe it now, and I'll assume, therefore, that you were never close to her . . . that consequently you never asked her questions, she never answered them.

Tom
If you mean the facts of life . . . I was sent to a doctor for those.

Katherine
And were you satisfied?

Tom
It was most scientific.

Katherine
I'm sure.

Tom
I've picked up a good deal here.

Katherine
From other boys who know less than you do. . . . Don't worry. I'm not going into it. But you've gotten it all, maybe so right, but yet, so wrong. I had it quite differently. And long before I knew all the scientific details, I knew that love was something that was integral to life, rich and comforting and . . . Tom, love is something different for each person, depending on his background, his needs . . . It is not just a sentimentalization of a biological urge... There are people for whom love is a conquering process . . . others seek shelter. In all of us is the need to be understood, buoyed up, to share. If we are to be alone, we are cut off from humanity, isolated. But in love with one person, we are in touch through him, with the rest of the world. . . . 20

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Attempting to uncover the reasons for Paul's cynicism, Katherine confides to him that she was once married to a boy who was killed in the war. The fact of her marriage has been kept secret to avoid pity and curiosity. Paul, who despises pity, refuses to reveal the secret of his mysteriously annulled marriage, which is apparently associated with the change in his personality.

On the night of the dance, Katherine has Tom down for a private evening in her room. They begin to dance and, as in the final version of the play, he kisses her. As she tries to reassure and comfort him, Katherine echoes one of Anderson's marriage themes from *The Eden Rose*:

> . . . Tom, don't misunderstand me, but you offer a great need.
> . . . You will love your girl more than other men will love theirs, because you need her. And she in turn will love you.
> . . . The thing I would like most in the world is to be needed... to be loved by someone special . . . someone who really needed me. Not just someone who loved me for my looks...the way I smile..the way I dance... .21

Late that night, Katherine learns Paul's secret. Coming back to the house slightly drunk, he confesses his love for her and explains, in a story much like David's in *Birthright*, why he cannot ask her to marry him. A war wound has left him sterile and for this reason, his wife annulled the marriage. At the end of Paul's story, Katherine goes to the door, which is always left open for the boys, closes it and bolts it. Then, very like Laura's final action in the later play, she moves to the couch where Paul is lying and offers herself to him.

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In the last scene, Tom has come back to Katherine's way of thinking and is determined to find a girl to love. Paul and Katherine have decided to marry, and the play ends as it began with Tom singing "The Joys of Love" while Katherine serves tea and sympathy.

The Final Version

In its general setting, its basic story pattern, themes and characters, the early version of *Tea and Sympathy* contains a vast number of similarities to the final version. The most striking parallels are to be found in the characterizations of Katherine and Laura, Tom Lawson and Tom Lee, and the love relationship that exists between the boy and the woman in each play. Katherine and Laura, both previously married to lonely young men killed in the war, are described by the playwright in terms almost exactly the same, as lovely and compassionate. Identical concern is expressed by the women for the problems of boys growing up without feminine associations. In Katherine's argument with Paul, she talks of kindness and consideration as attributes in a boy's development. These remarks are clearly reflected in Laura's definition of manliness. In both plays, the women are to be chaperones at the school dance, but elect to spend the evening with the lonely boy who needs them. Each boy expresses his love by bringing flowers and by singing "The Joys of Love." When dancing, each is overcome by his feelings and kisses the heroine.

In both cases, the boy recognizes that he is somehow different from his fellows and fears that the woman's affection is inspired by
pity. Tom, in the early version, is a physical cripple; whereas in the later play, his injury is psychological, and both boys are set apart from their schoolmates by their love of music, their loneliness and their sensitivity. The healing power of the woman brings peace of mind to each boy, and in both plays, the heroine learns that she must give more than tea and sympathy.

The plays also present a parallel story of a man and a boy, each with a hurt inside him. Tom, an actual cripple in the first play, becomes inwardly crippled in the final version; the men (Paul in the early play and Bill in the latter) try to hide their secret injury and pretend to hate all forms of weakness. In the end, each man is shown to have an impairment in his personality. Paul's injury is his sterility, and Bill's his latent homosexuality.

Between the 1948 and 1952 versions of *Tea and Sympathy*, Robert Anderson wrote *Love Revisited*, *All Summer Long* and a host of radio and television adaptations. Each time he began to write a play, he toyed with the idea of returning to *Tea and Sympathy*, and throughout this period, made notes for a possible revision. A 1949 entry in his notebook of play ideas states, "*Tea and Sympathy*, still the idea of graciousness and kindness." In another such notebook he wrote in 1950, "How about *Katherine and Pity and Love* and *I* as a play set in a boy's school . . . . Still think that this adolescent love is a strong story business and one of the most tender . . . .

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Maybe *Tea and Sympathy.*" From the six pages of notes which follow and develop this idea, these excerpts are most pertinent to the final evolution of the play:

She is all tied up in the boys, and so is the husband. She is sick of the boys until there is one boy who is kind to her. The wife may try to interest him in a young girl . . . but the girl lacks the warmth and kindness the wife has . . . . 'My father wanted me to be an athlete.' In summer he's been sent to boys' camps. In winters at school he never gets a chance to see girls . . . Perhaps once when the husband is going to take a band of boys off on a trip, she refuses to go . . . and stays in the house alone with the boy. Husband never should have married, and he realizes it now. But he's too conventional to want to break it up. Possibly in the end she leaves the husband. But to go alone, not with the young man. 'I won't even tell you where I'm going.' To her husband: 'You were a lonely man in Italy. I have a natural weakness for sad and lonely men. No doubt it is something neurotic in me. Pity is strong in me. Perhaps I want to hurt myself by getting attached to the wrong man.'

In the summer of 1951, the playwright made another trip to Exeter, this time with Mr. and Mrs. Elia Kazan who were considering the school for their son. Again, the visit "awakened the spark," he said. Why I came back to the play in 1952, I can't state specifically, except I knew I always did want to write it and I looked through my notebooks. . . This is a dreary process which you have to go through every time you write a play. You look through your notes and your past life and your past works, and this [1950 notebook entry] is the thing that appealed to me at that particular moment.

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23Robert Anderson, Personal notebook of handwritten ideas and impressions, p. 23.


26Ibid., pp. 666-67.
The first draft of the new version was begun in February, 1952, and finished the following July. The actual dialogue writing, however, took place within the last three months of this period and the final act was written in less than two days.27 "But this proves nothing," Anderson once pointed out for the benefit of young dramatists, "there had been months of work getting ready for that writing. Not necessarily work on paper, but hours and weeks of musing, arranging, probing."28 There had, in fact, been years of preparation as evidenced by the various trends of earlier work which appear in the play dating back to The Eden Rose, "Katherine and Pity and Love and I," Birthright, and the 1948 version.

From a biographical standpoint, the play draws from sources throughout the author's previous life. For example, the poem which serves as comic relief in the tensely serious scene between Tom and Laura in Act II, scene 2, is quoted verbatim from a poem the playwright wrote for his own seventh grade teacher, and her description, including the polo coat she wore, is a true recollection.29 The characterizations of at least two of the boys are based on real life counterparts from Exeter,30 and the character of Al is derived from two former roommates, one in the Navy and the other a football

27Ibid., pp. 175-177.
29Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, pp. 599-600.
30Ibid., pp. 557-59.
captain with whom Anderson roomed at Harvard. The idea for Laura's previous marriage came from an actual case in which an acquaintance, whose husband had been killed in the war, had kept her marriage secret to avoid the pity of her friends.

The famous "walking scene" in which the roommate tries to teach Tom to walk in a more manly fashion, actually happened to the playwright in reverse. Describing the real-life incident, in a television interview, Anderson said,

In many scenes in Tea and Sympathy, you might say I am the young boy, but in this particular instance, a boy came to my room one night and said that the boys were saying things about him which were untrue and asked, 'What the heck's the matter,' etc. And I said, in a very naive way . . . 'Gee, maybe it's the way you walk . . .' I am sometimes chagrined at the memory of it, but it made a good scene.

Robert Anderson was never accused of being a homosexual, nor was he ever in love with his housemaster's wife. Although he was strongly attracted to another teacher's wife at Exeter, he has said, "It was just a sort of puppy love from afar. The kind of life these ladies suggested at the time was very appealing." Because the dramatist's friends know that he writes very personally, they have sometimes been amazed at the degree to which facts and characters are transformed through his imagination and invention. Several years after Tea and Sympathy was produced, Anderson sent a new script to Elia Kazan which contained a situation with which the director was

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31 Ibid., p. 490.  
32 Ibid., p. 544.  
33 Anderson, "Portrait in Playwriting."  
34 Anderson, Tape No. 1.
familiar. When Kazan was critical of the play because it departed so widely from the actual circumstances on which it was based, the dramatist replied that he was glad Kazan had not been around when he was writing Tea and Sympathy, "because the play that emerged was not by any manner of means the way it happened."35

As in The Eden Rose, the older-younger love story derives primarily from the relationship with Phyllis, and here again, the characters themselves are based primarily on other people than the Andersons. Once asked about drawing characters from life, Robert Anderson gave this example:

When I used to paint, I would start looking at my model, and then after a half-hour, I would be much more fascinated with what I had created than with what God had created...and I would rarely look back at the model...The drawing had taken on a life of its own...I think this is true in my writing too.36

The 1950 notebook entry which suggests the crossing of "Katherine and Pity and Love and I" with the 1948 play, implies that the husband and wife in the final work are patterned on the same archetypes, and this fact has been confirmed by the dramatist. "My models for both stories were the same couple," he has said.

I am not intimately associated with their private lives. In both instances I was dealing with superficialities of which I was conscious. For story purposes, in one instance I wanted to have them happily married, ... and in the play, ... I clearly wanted this woman to give herself to this boy.37

35Anderson, Tape No. 2.
36Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
As an illustration of his technique of drawing from multiple personality sources in the creation of a single character, it is interesting to note that while the original conception of the husband and wife in *Tea and Sympathy* resulted from observations of one couple, the character of the husband was based on another model, a master at Exeter, described by the playwright as "a burly athletic type, with no homosexual problems." 38

The father-son relationship in *Tea and Sympathy* contains a number of autobiographic elements, including the father's disapproval of the boy's ambition to become a singer and his comments on his son's tennis playing, which though not directed at his own son, were made by James Anderson with the same disappointment and in approximately the same words about another boy who won a golf tournament but was not a "regular guy." 39  James Anderson, like Herb Lee, once helped finance the schooling of a needy student. 40  Like the father in the play, he was also concerned about appearances and once became terribly upset when he discovered his young son in a woman's costume to be worn in a play. 41  "In some way or other," the dramatist has said, "I had the feeling, so far as my father was concerned, that I was an off-horse." 42  Included in Anderson's extensive notes for

the 1952 version is the "different drummer" quotation, an idea which penetrates the play.43

The "off-horse" theme suggested in the 1948 Tea and Sympathy by the boy's differences from his fellows, is strengthened in the final version by the addition of homosexuality as a false charge against the boy and as a subconscious motivation for the husband. The treatment of homosexuality has no precedent in any earlier work. Although the idea first appeared in the playwright's notes for the 1948 play, the homosexual element did not find its way into the early version.44 In view of Anderson's repetition of themes and subject matter, it is notable that neither the motif on the non-conformist nor the subject of homosexuality has reappeared in later plays, but as several critics have pointed out and as the author has consistently asserted, Tea and Sympathy is not about homosexuality. "It's about a charge of homosexuality," he reiterates,

I could just as easily have charged the boy with something else. People forget that this play was written in the McCarthy era, a time of guilt by association, a time when people were being blacklisted, etc., and this theme was very important to me.45

With the passing of this era and the brutality of public


44 The element of homosexuality first appeared in the playwright's notes for the 1948 play but did not find its way into the early version. In these notes, Anderson considered the idea of having a perverted older student invite Tom down to the dunes for a swim, as the instructor does in the later work.

45 Anderson, "Portrait in Playwriting."
opinion which it spawned, the playwright apparently found no further need to deal with the theme of guilt by association or so specifically with the related ideas of the rights and worth of the non-conformist. As the public tends to forget the temper of the McCarthy years, theatre writers are now inclined to disregard the political implications of the play and to ignore the boldness of its author in treating the topic of homosexuality at that time. In recent years, Howard Taubman is one of the few critics to recall that *Tea and Sympathy*, "in its use of homosexuality as a dramatic catalyst, was one of the pieces that set the new style of invoking this theme openly."46

While homosexuality cannot be considered a fundamental theme, the question of what constitutes manliness is one of the basic elements in the play's complex thematic structure. Summarizing these elements, Laura says, "I'm talking about love and honor and manliness, and tenderness and persecution."47 The playwright, however, is talking also about loneliness and isolation, adolescent development, marital communication, the salutary effect of woman's love and the value she places on man's need. Nearly all of the recurring themes from the apprenticeship are, in fact, touched upon. By dexterous interweaving of familiar motifs with the newly introduced theme of guilt by association, Anderson achieved in this play a


complexity surpassing all his previous works.

As in *All Summer Long*, the unifying theme, personified through the action of the pivotal character, has to do with individual responsibility. As Willie symbolizes the need for personal involvement by his commitment to build the wall against the river, Laura, through her realization of Tom's need and her decision to become involved at great risk to herself, embodies the idea of responsibility toward the rights and protection of the non-conformist and the moral necessity for commitment to the point of personal involvement.

In both plays, a very personal story provides the framework for this larger theme; but in *Tea and Sympathy*, the plot structure is far more intricate. As in the 1948 version, two stories are working together, but here the interaction is so complete that they appear to converge naturally into a complex pattern of triangular relationships. The Tom-Katherine and Paul-Katherine stories of the early version merge into the Tom-Laura-husband triangle in the final play; but there are still two distinct, though closely integrated, lines of action—Laura's gradually deepening involvement and Tom's attempt to vindicate himself.

With the exception of *All Summer Long*, Anderson had, up to this point, worked consistently within the format of the well-made play, and *Tea and Sympathy* demonstrates his ultimate mastery of this form. The play is tightly structured in an Ibsen-like progression consisting, as John Gassner has noted,
of one theatrical reversal after another. We arrive at one high point when the wife pins the charge of homosexuality on the manly teacher and at another indeed distinctly sensational point, when the woman offers herself to the adolescent.48

While the action is highly compressed, the structural framework is never visible because of the complexity of theme and story and the depth and credibility of the characterizations resulting from the playwright's superior craftsmanship and expertise with this dramatic formula. Here, his former difficulties with climaxes and scenes of confrontation are nowhere evident. In the scene where Laura makes her countercharge of homosexuality against her husband, Anderson achieved one of the most powerful confrontations in recent dramatic literature.

Eric Bentley, despite his aversion to realist escape drama, spoke of Anderson's "near perfection . . . in manipulating, organizing, and balancing the impulses that make up the perfect day-dream,"49 and in How Not To Write a Play,50 Walter Kerr selected Tea and Sympathy to exemplify the modern version of the well-made play. Although Kerr misstates the facts of characterization in order to make his point that "well-made play plotting takes a certain toll of honesty, accuracy and unfettered observation,"51 the structural


51 Ibid., p. 111.
comparison he makes between the play and the formula is basically sound. His conjecture that the plot had been built backward from the final scene with circumstances arranged to pave the way for this highest moment is, in fact, borne out by the playwright's working notes. While Kerr concludes that "coincidence is as surely at work here as in Scribe," he acknowledges that the groundplan of the play is non-transparent. "Mr. Anderson makes use of a casual diction that is close to us," he observes, and "introduces his immaculate balances in so easy and plausible and unsensational a manner as to make it difficult for us to recognize them as balances or calculations."

Augmenting the plausibility of the action is the multi-level set which allows characters to appear simultaneously in various parts of the house and provides for a variety of naturally motivated exits and entrances. The skillful arrangement of levels and entrances into other rooms and to the outside of the house accommodates maximum fluidity and credibility of stage movement. While the final setting was designed by Jo Mielziner, the original concept came from the playwright and represents the culmination of his trend toward increasing complexity in realistic staging from the simple early sets through the two-level rooms in the Navy plays, the more complicated arrangement in The Eden Rose, and into this most functional

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52 Ibid., p. 110. 53 Ibid., p. 111.

54 The handwritten draft of July 22, 1952, describes this basic arrangement of rooms, levels and entrances.
multi-level design.

As the setting contributes to characterization and mood, it shows another aspect of technical perfection. While writing the play, Anderson stated in his introduction to the *Theatre Arts* edition, "I kept thinking of it as a love story which I hoped would be tender and touching and a little ironic;" and throughout his working notes, he returned continually to this idea, inserting constant reminders such as "full of sweetness and tenderness," "those afternoons in a little New England town in early spring... a very soft, unreal time... a low fire in the fireplace to take the chill off," "gentle, delicate lighting, pools of light, music," etc. With the help of Jo Mielziner's lighting and decor, the playwright's intentions were brilliantly realized. As Maurice Zolotow noted in his *Theatre Arts* review, the setting not only provides a flow of movement on various levels but also reflects the character of the occupants of the separate rooms: The warm and fire-lit living room which suggests Laura is contrasted with Tom's gray and cramped quarters with but one window, which once a day provides a view of a forbidden scene in a neighboring house.

In the play's final moments when Laura comes to Tom, Mielziner dramatically and symbolically suffuses the boy's room with the warmth and glow with which he formerly lit Laura's room; but this time the radiance is not from the fireplace but from the sun.


The consummation of technical skill is further demonstrated by his expert and imaginative use of symbolic devices such as the single flower Tom gives Laura. In contrast to the garish corsages the other boys select for chaperones, Tom's choice of a special flower she once mentioned underlines his keen sensitivity and affection. The raincoat is a stage property which functions in the plotting as well as revealing emotion. In his notes for the final version, Anderson originally intended to have the husband find the raincoat which Tom leaves behind when he rushes off to Ellie after kissing Laura, but decided to make use of it in other ways. "When Laura reaches up to take Tom's coat," the playwright has explained, we show the boy's attraction for her. He can't stand the touch of her hands on his shoulder, and the actual slipping off of the raincoat becomes a very delicate, touching thing, the way Deborah does it. . . . People have asked me many times if she went up to the room to be with the boy. My answer is that she went up to return his raincoat and say, 'good-by.' It is only when she saw him in the desperate condition he was in that she made her desperate decision. . . . She takes the logical order; she first tries to talk him out of it. Failing that, realizing there is no other solution, she gives herself to him; but the raincoat plays an important part because it gets her from one room into the next, purely technical but quite important.59

Another important property which helps tell the story is the costume that Laura makes for Tom. The fitting brings the boy and the woman together for their scene, establishes her kindness, lends credibility to her background as an actress, and depicts the boy's non-conformity in a way that obliquely insinuates plausibility for

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the later suspicions of homosexuality. The father's subsequent
discovery of the costume in Tom's room advances the plot, emphasizes
the gulf between the boy and his father, and provides a means of
getting them from Tom's room to the study.

The teapot, given to Laura by the Headmaster's wife with
the advice to remain a bystander and offer only tea and sympathy,
is perhaps the most effective stage property Anderson has ever de­
vised. When Tom runs upstairs in despair at the end of Act I,
Laura's impulse, according to the stage direction, is to follow him
and comfort him; but instead she checks herself and returns to her
chair where she sits and reaches out to touch the teapot, "as
though she were half-unconsciously rubbing out a spot." This
telling action illustrates most graphically her emotional and mental
state, for the audience senses as she sits and looks toward the
boy's room that she has controlled her inclination to comfort him
and has decided, for the time being, to follow the rules of the game
and limit her involvement to tea and sympathy.

The tendency to present information visually rather than
verbally represents a notable development in the direction of
subtlety and understatement. As Walter Kerr has observed, "This
is the sort of play in which more is thought than ever is spoken.
The language, as a result, is low in key." In his second review

60 Anderson, Tea and Sympathy, I.42.
61 Walter Kerr, "Tea and Sympathy" New York Herald Tribune,
October 1, 1953, New York Theatre Critics Reviews (New York: Critics
of the Broadway production when Joan Fontaine and Anthony Perkins replaced the original stars, Brooks Atkinson found some of the writing "bare and undistinguished," a weakness not mentioned in his first wholly enthusiastic review and one which he apparently discounted when he later described the play as "a fully wrought drama that can stand on its own feet as literature and theatre." Because of the fullness of the play, its multiplicity of theme and complicated story, the function of the language is primarily utilitarian; but, as some critics have noted, there are touches of poetry in the writing and manifest evidence of the playwright's unusual gift for colloquial dialogue.

The development toward greater subtlety and understatement reflected in the language is, along with the playwright's general trend toward an increasing complexity, most apparent in the characterizations. As Walter Kerr noted, the characters think much more than they speak, and their expressions of non-verbalized thoughts and feelings convey a wealth of meanings that lie below the surface of the dialogue. "As a portrait of people, it is an extraordinarily illuminating piece of work," Brooks Atkinson wrote,

Mr. Anderson keeps changing his colors as the play moves along and new facets of character are constantly rising to the surface. . . Miss Kerr and Mr. Kerr create performances out of

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lights and shadows, out of nuances and out of unspoken ideas.\textsuperscript{64}

A remarkable talent for characterization is unquestionably Anderson's greatest dramaturgic strength, and in no other work is this ability more consistently perceptible. Every character is drawn with sensitive and penetrating skill and with absolute economy. As Eric Bentley noted with a phrase which Anderson was to use in a later title, "each minor role is what a minor role should be and rarely is: a type, but alive and concrete enough to come at you with the shock of recognition."\textsuperscript{65}

Perhaps the greatest single pleasure of this evening of many pleasures was to enjoy so much observation of American life in such minor roles as our hero's roommate . . . and our hero's father.\textsuperscript{66}

In the play, the dramatist broadly examines the central problem of persecution by giving each character a different point of view. The character of the roommate, Al, is particularly interesting as he embodies the viewpoint of the audience. As the playwright has pointed out, Al is

\begin{itemize}
  \item a nice, normal human being, caught in a tough situation. . . .
  \item He tries at first to defend the boy; he tries to make him change, tries to do all the decent things, but finally gives up
\end{itemize}


\textsuperscript{65}I.e., \textit{The Shock of Recognition}, one of the four one-acts in \textit{You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running}.

\textsuperscript{66}Bentley, \textit{The Dramatic Event}, p. 152.
and, in a sense, runs with the pack. Whereas you might say Laura is prejudiced in favor of the off-horse . . . because of her background, and you might say Bill, because of his makeup, is prejudiced against him, the roommate represents the middle ground, the normal audience reaction.  

This method of examining a question in depth through the presentation of various attitudes toward it was employed to considerable extent in the earlier plays, but in Tea and Sympathy, the technique reaches its highest point of development.

The father's attitude personifies a point of view which serves to underscore the theme of guilt by association. To him, the important thing is not what the boy does or feels but what other people will think. Narrow-minded and unable to understand or help his son, the father is so skillfully drawn that he appears not as a villain, but as a pathetic and lonely man trying to act in the right, as he sees it.

The husband, Bill is also pictured as pathetic rather than villainous. Like the father, he acts from what, to him, are righteous motivations. Bill wants Tom dismissed from school, not out of viciousness, but because he feels that dismissal is best for the boy and best for the school. "You will notice that Bill actually does nothing to the boy," Anderson has pointed out.

He has no scene with the boy until the very end and then the scene is complicated somewhat by jealousy because, at this point, he realizes his wife is moved and touched by the boy, but he actually doesn't persecute the boy at all. He talks about the boy to his wife and to the father, but he takes no steps against him, and it is the steps your character takes

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that determine his character. . . . He is fighting within himself a fear of his own masculinity and he knows that he is an off-horse, too. . . . At times he is unsympathetic . . . because he wants Laura's attention paid to himself. His need is as great as the boy's need, and it saddens him, and yet being a man, he can't cry out. . . . Now it is true that the scene in Tom's bedroom may be directed against the lines, but I have heard Kazan say many times to Lief Erickson, 'When you come into this room, you must not come in to browbeat that boy. There has been too much hate. You are simply coming in to find out the facts,' and this is the way I intended it to be played.68

The playwright brings understanding and sympathy to this character by drawing a parallel between the husband and the boy in these lines to Laura:

When I was a kid in school, I had my problems, too. There's a place up by the golf course where I used to go off alone Sunday afternoons and cry my eyes out. I used to lie on my bed just the way Tom does, listening to phonograph records hour after hour.69

A visual analogue is presented in a brief stage direction for Bill's entrance in the first scene of Act II, which indicates that, as Bill opens the door and hears the music from upstairs, he stands listening for a moment before entering. This visual connection, not obvious in reading the play, is made clear in these remarks by the author:

If you will notice after the walking scene, when Tom turns on the victrola and stands there listening to it, we have a very important scene. Bill comes in and listens to the boy playing the music. What we meant there . . . is a tie-in with the earlier reference to his loneliness.70

68 Ibid., pp. 483-84.
69 Anderson, Tea and Sympathy, I.28.
70 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 482.
When Atkinson reviewed the play for the second time, he wrote of the husband's role, "In some respects this is the best resolved character in the play."71

The complexity of this character is typical of all three major roles. Together with their deepening coloration and texture, the characterizations in *Tea and Sympathy* show also an intensification of intimacy exceeding those in previous works. Anderson made the theme of persecution "almost unbearably intimate," Brooks Atkinson noted, by the revelation of "inner truths that lie deep inside his characters, and the anguish is private."72 As in *The Eden Rose* and the novel, *Birthright*, sex and love serve as the wellspring of the story and an underlying motivational force for the principal characters; but to a greater extent than ever before, the playwright uses this same wellspring as the focal point for audience involvement.

The play opens with a song of love and the fourth line of dialogue introduces the subject of sex, when Lilly, the flirtatious faculty wife, asks Laura if she knows what Tom is thinking of, "what all the boys in this school are thinking about. Not only now in the spring, but all the time—Sex!"73 Although her remark is not quite fitting in the case of Tom whose thoughts and impulses stem both from affection and sexuality, her conviction is generally

72Ibid.
applicable to the rest of the boys who call each other "horny bastard" and whose talk implies a preoccupation with sex. As Tom's opening song, "The Joys of Love," sets the mood of tenderness and longing, Lilly, in her amusingly frank and inquisitive talk of sex, sets the atmosphere of gossip in preparation for the impending story of persecution.

Humor, together with sex, is utilized more fully and effectively than in any former play to evoke and sustain interest through the exposition and to bring momentary relief to the mounting tension, as in the comic scene of the boys' voyeurism and Lilly's second act entrance where she chatters on about the corsage that is more appropriate for a war monument than for her dress and about the effect her low-cut gown will have on the boys. Along with capturing audience interest, the sex and humor of the exposition establish Laura's tolerance, and more importantly, demonstrate her charming sense of humor, a dimension of character never before so fully realized in the playwright's female creations. This brief expository scene with Lilly also shows Laura as an essentially private and lonely person. When Lilly attempts to pry into her marriage, Laura maintains her privacy with grace and tact and quiet strength; but the revelation of her desire to get away with her husband for the summer, the dinner-for-two she has impulsively planned for the evening, and the souvenir she wears from the night Bill proposed suggest her need for marital closeness.

In her first scene with Tom, Laura shows her concern for his personal comfort by asking if his room is warm enough and by
giving him cookies. In initiating conversation, the questions she raises about his mother, the girl he might bring to the dance, his love song and love experiences are all on a level of intimacy. Flattered by the fact that the boy "is always trying in thinly veiled ways to tell her he loves her,"74 she holds him at bay; but at the same time, her warm and personal manner and her intimate questions tend to encourage his advances.

In almost everything Tom says in this first scene, his undermeaning is quite different from its surface connotation. Trying not only to tell her he loves her but that he is sorry she married the wrong man, he reminds her that Bill will be away on the night of the dance; and hoping that she will allow him to comfort her in her loneliness, he says of the husband's trips with the boys, "He's out of town a lot on that kind of thing, isn't he?"75 When Laura ignores this probing, he asks, in effect, if she is glad to be going to the dance with him: "I hope you're not sorry that I'm to be your escort."76 After finding out the color of the dress she will wear, he says, pointing up his consideration and special talent, "The boy who's in charge of getting the flowers thinks a corsage should be something like a funeral decoration. So I'm taking personal charge of getting yours."77 Asking about her former admirers, he disguises the real meaning with, "You must have gotten

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74 Ibid., stage direction, I.II.
75 Ibid., I.I3.  76 Ibid.  77 Ibid.
lots of flowers when you were acting in the theatre." When Laura brushes aside this question, he returns to the subject of her marriage; and again, Laura is evasive, but warm and gentle:

Tom

I can't understand how a person would give up the theatre to come and live in a school—I'm sorry. I mean, I'm glad you did, but, well--

Laura

If you knew the statistics on unemployed actors, you might understand. Anyway, I was never any great shakes at it.

Tom

I can't believe that.

Laura

Then take my word for it.

Tom

(After a moment—looking into the fire pretending to be casual, but actually touching on his love for Laura.) Did you ever do any of Shaw's plays? . . . We got an assignment to read any Shaw play we wanted. I picked *Candida*.

Laura

Because it was the shortest?

Tom

(Laughs.) No—because it sounded like the one I'd like the best—-one I could understand. Did you ever play Candida?

Laura

In stock—a very small stock company, way up in Northern Vermont.

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78 ibid.
Tom

Do you think she did right to send Marchbanks away?

Laura

Well, Shaw made it seem right. Don't you think?

Tom

(Really talking about himself.)
That Marchbanks sure sounded off a lot. I could never sound off like that, even if I loved a woman the way he did. She could have made him seem awfully small if she'd wanted to.

Laura

Well, I guess she wasn't that kind of woman...

Laura is, of course, the same sort of woman as Candida; and by drawing this parallel with the Shaw play, Anderson underscores the true meaning of Tom's words.

Closer to the surface are the undermeanings of Laura's lines to Bill as she desperately attempts to bring about understanding and a renewal of intimacy. "We so rarely touch any more," she says, trying to embrace him, "I keep feeling I'm losing contact with you. Don't you feel that?" Getting no response, she states the problem even more explicitly:

It's a silly way of putting it, but you seem to hold yourself aloof from me. A tension seems to grow between us--and then when we do touch--it's a violent thing--almost a compulsive thing.

(Bill is uncomfortable at this accurate description of their relationship. He sits troubled.)
(Puts her arms around his neck and embraces him...)

79 Ibid., I.13-14. 80 Ibid., II.i.35.
You don't feel it? You don't feel yourself holding away from me until it becomes overpowering? There's no growing together anymore--no quiet times just holding hands, the feeling of closeness, like it was in Italy. Now it's long separations and then this almost brutal coming together. . .

Because her emotional needs are denied by Bill's rejection, and because she has begun to accept the futility of her marriage and recognize her responsibility to the persecuted boy, Laura turns unconsciously to Tom. As she later explains to her husband,

It was not just pity. My heart in its loneliness--Yes, I've been lonely here, miserably lonely--and my heart in its loneliness cried out for this boy--cried out for the comfort he could give me, too.81

The culmination of Anderson's technique of treating love and sex below the surface of the language is demonstrated in the delicately written scene in which Laura tries to keep Tom from his appointment with the prostitute. Throughout this scene, love is being made while the lovers talk of past loves and other matters; but here, the playwright has learned to trust his skill and the sensitivity of his audience and so finds it unnecessary to call attention to the underlying meanings by a line of dialogue as he did in Boy Grown Tall and The Eden Rose. The incorporation of the double-holiday idea in this scene illustrates a consummate intricacy of technique. Whereas in Boy Grown Tall the birthday on St. Valentine's Day merely heightened the sense of occasion, Laura's disclosure of the secret anniversary of her first marriage, motivated by her desire to detain the boy, creates a striking parallel

81Ibid.  82Ibid., III.82.
between Tom and her first husband, a parallel which lends credibility and moral sanction to her final act and foreshadows the boy's attempted suicide. Learning that Tom will be eighteen years old the next day, Laura says, "He was just your age then. It doesn't seem possible now, looking at you."

Tom

Why, do I look like such a child? . . . Men are married at my age.

Laura

Of course, they are. He was. Maybe a few months older. Such a lonely boy, away from home for the first time--and--going off to war.

(Tom looks up inquiringly.)

Yes, he was killed.

Tom

I'm sorry--but I'm glad to hear about him.

Laura

Glad?

Tom

Yes, I don't know--He sounds like someone you should have been married to--(Stops.) I'm sorry if I--(Stops.)

Laura

(After a moment.) He was killed being conspicuously brave. He had to be conspicuously brave, you see, because something had happened in training camp--I don't know what--and he was afraid the others thought him a coward. He showed them he wasn't.

Tom

He had that satisfaction.

Laura

What was it worth if it killed him?
Tom

I don't know. But I can understand.

Laura

Of course you can. You're very like him... He was kind and gentle, and lonely. (Tom turns away in embarrassment at hearing himself described.) We knew it wouldn't last.--We sensed it.--But he always said, 'Why must the test of everything be its durability?'

Tom

I'm sorry he was killed.

Laura

Yes, so am I. I'm sorry he was killed the way he was killed--trying to prove how brave he was. In trying to prove he was a man, he died a boy.

Tom

Still he must have died happy.

Laura

Because he proved his courage?

Tom

That--and because he was married to you. 83

Laura's recollection of her first husband's statement about the transience of love and a later remark about "bitter-sweet memories," 84 in response to Tom's humorous and touching account of his love for the seventh-grade teacher, serve as subtle preparation for her last line in the play which is so carefully devised to indicate the impermanence of the relationship. When Tom kisses Laura

83 Ibid., II.ii.65-66.  84 Ibid., II.ii.68.
and runs from the room, she starts after him, but is stopped by Bill's return. Longing to comfort the boy, she is faced instead with the painfully ironic and theatrically moving prospect of serving the sexual needs of his antagonist. As Bill settles down into the chair intended for Tom and reaches out his hand to Laura as the lights fade, the audience understands intuitively the meaning of this gesture.

As the sexual undercurrents surge upward in the last act to the explosive scene of confrontation and character revelation and come to the point of resolution in the final tender encounter, the playwright's finesse in treating intimate relationships is strikingly apparent. In its artistic handling of love and sexuality, the play represents the culmination of the trend initiated in Boy Grown Tall when the dramatist first began to deal seriously with sexual motivations.

In some respects, the dual protagonists of that early play figure as prototypes for Tom Lee and Laura Reynolds, for Tom is a biographical self-portrait of the young Anderson and Laura a woman of warmth and strength with a background in theatre. Relating most closely, however, to archetypes in The Eden Rose, particularly in the corresponding emotional needs of the heroine and the age difference between the lovers, Tom and Laura are far more fully realized and eminently more interesting characters than any of the former models. Along with the additional dimension of humor, the playwright has endowed this heroine with a more penetrating
intelligence and even more sensitivity, gentleness and compassion than he gave earlier idealized feminine characters. Laura is made most affecting by her growing sense of responsibility and by the nobility of her decision to involve herself completely in the boy's problems. Through her involvement, she embodies the play's major theme.

Perhaps because Tom Lee was written with the distance of time, he is the most poignant and appealing autobiographical character the playwright has yet created. Speaking of the problems of autobiographic characters, Anderson has said,

I've written in my notebooks many times, 'never again.' Next time, use somebody else. I do try, quite consciously when I start to write a play to have an image of a person other than myself even though I might be writing about a situation that actually happened to me, so as to get away from the rather colorless aspect of autobiography. We don't feel free to write the absolute truth about ourselves, whereas we do feel free to write truth that we invent about another person.85

Lonely and instinctively passionate, Tom Lee most closely resembles his counterpart in The Eden Rose; but these qualities in the younger boy appear more fitting and credible. As in the case of Laura, Tom's characterization is considerably enhanced by the inclusion of an acute sense of humor which, for the most part, was lacking in his predecessors. The injustice of Tom's persecution, the very qualities for which he is suspect, and the courage he displays in trying to vindicate himself combine to intensify his attractiveness.

85 Anderson Tape No. 2.
Two lonely people in a triangular love relationship can be traced back through *Love Revisited*, "Katherine and Pity and Love and I," and *The Eden Rose* to the point of origination in *Boy Grown Tall*. Themes originating in this Navy play and coming to fruition in *Tea and Sympathy* have to do with the maturation process in adolescence, the necessity for sacrifice, and the curative effect of woman's love. As noted earlier in this chapter, the more personal themes from all the early plays find their way into this one; but here, as in *All Summer Long*, these recurring motifs emerge and blend into the larger theme of human responsibility. This blending of minor related themes into a major theme of wider importance represents a significant development which also began with the interweaving of multiple ideas in *Boy Grown Tall*.

The culmination of other trends emanating from this work can be seen in the complicated use of visual symbols, the constantly deepening complexity of characterization in which thoughts and feelings are increasingly portrayed within the subtext of the language, and the exceptional handling of intimate relationships. The dramatist's facility for revealing the inner lives of his characters and for treating the most intimate character relationships with intensity and restraint, so effectively demonstrated in *Tea and Sympathy*, has become one of the most distinctive features of his later works.
The Production

When he finished the final handwritten draft of *Tea and Sympathy* on July 22, 1952, the playwright, as is his custom, typed the script himself before giving it to Audrey Wood, who had the play re-typed and submitted it to the New York producers. Following an established practice which he still maintains, he sent copies to a few of his closest friends, among them Jo Mielziner and Molly Kazan, both of whom were highly enthusiastic; and Mrs. Kazan asked to take the script with her to Munich where her husband, Elia, was directing a film. Anderson then waited several months while one producer after another rejected the play. "In those days we had six copies typed," he remembers,

... Audrey Wood does not have the record card she keeps on all play submissions, but the refusals had reached the point where she had me in and gave me back five of the copies, which were tattered and dog-eared, and told me she would send the sixth along when it returned. Well, that one was at the Playwrights Company, and it didn't return.

Recalling this frustrating time for the comfort of young writers undergoing similar disappointments, he wrote,

I reached my lowest depths just before *Tea and Sympathy* was taken for production. It had been turned down by more than a dozen producers, my bank account was dwindling ... and I used to sit in my study and stare at the wall and wonder if another trait of character shouldn't be a certain flexibility which would permit you to give up when you knew you didn't have it in you. And as I stared, my eyes focused on a sign which I

86 Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson, p. 201.
88 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
had put over my desk during a former period of desperation, 'No one asked you to be a playwright.'

In January, 1953, Elia Kazan read the script his wife had brought to Germany and immediately resolved to direct it, "regardless of the difficulties of the subject matter." At about this same time, Roger Stevens and Robert Sherwood of the Playwrights Company decided they wanted to produce it, and by February plans were underway for a Broadway opening the following fall. Jo Mielziner was commissioned to design the sets and lighting and the decision was made to bill the play as "the Elia Kazan production."

Although Robert Anderson has never written for specific actors or actresses, he knew when he met Deborah Kerr during the writing of the final version of *Tea and Sympathy* that he wanted her to play Laura; and when the play was finished, he sent her a copy. At the time of their meeting at the Theatre Guild on the Air production of Anderson's adaptation of *Remember the Day*, Miss Kerr was on her way to Hollywood for the first time. Because of her movie commitments, she said she could not do the role; but the playwright was persistent and, over the objections of Elia Kazan, who had not met Deborah Kerr but who was strongly opposed to casting a movie star, he continued to prevail on her to do the part and to try to

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91 Ibid.
convince his director that she was the best actress for the role. "It was a strange experience," Anderson recalls, "for a writer with his first play, to try to persuade a director to use an actress who didn't want to do the play." Finally, after refusing three more times, Miss Kerr agreed to make her first Broadway appearance in *Tea and Sympathy.* In a recent interview, she was quoted as having been "terrified of doing that play," and of feeling that on paper, Laura seemed to her like another goody-goody lady, so sort of pie. It took Gadge Kazan the persuader of all time, to show me that she was a symbol of so many things that I myself believe in—compassion and tenderness, and the idea that a man need not conform to a schoolboy image of masculinity to be a man. God, I loved doing that play . . .

After acquiring the services of Elia Kazan, Deborah Kerr and Mielziner, "we still couldn't raise the forty-thousand necessary to do the play," Robert Anderson remembers, "and it was at this point that Mary K. Frank was invited as co-producer." Consultations with the director and the designer began in the early winter of 1953, and the three men went up to Exeter to visit the house where Anderson had lived as a student. The final setting was based largely on the sketches Mielziner made at that time, and

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92 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
93 Anderson Tape No. 1.
95 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.
the fireplace he used was an exact reproduction. Through the winter and spring, the dramatist reworked the script by tightening and polishing so that, when rehearsals began in the summer, few additional changes were necessary.

Although Molly Kazan had been a close friend for many years, her husband and the playwright had not known each other well before working together on *Tea and Sympathy*, and Anderson experienced some uneasiness at first. Early in the rehearsal period he has recalled,

I stayed away for two days and when I came back I said, 'Oh, oh, now I'm going to hear Kazan's version of the play.' And I was deeply touched when he came up to me and said, 'Deborah and I would like to change a line and we wanted to ask your permission before we changed it,' . . . And it turned out they wanted to change one word, something like 'will' to 'shall.' This is how scrupulously Cadge Kazan observed the script.

The close friendship that developed between Elia Kazan and Robert Anderson has been a lasting one. Writing of his admiration and gratitude, Anderson stated several months after the opening,

Gadge is in a sense a playwright's director. His point of reference is the playwright and the playwright's intention. Most plays do not come from an 'idea' or a gimmick but rather grow out of the essence of the writer, what he is, feels, thinks, believes, and experiences. So that he may interpret the writer's

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96 *Examination Before Trial of Robert Woodruff Anderson*, p. 468.


98 Phyllis Anderson and Molly Kazan became friends while attending the Yale School of Drama.

play, Cadge sets about discovering for himself this essence. It is not enough that he know the play. He wants to know the person who wrote the play, wants to know the quality in him which made him write this kind of play. And he gets to know you, perhaps better than you know yourself. . . . I never realized quite how much he had learned about me until I overheard him interpreting me to the cast, . . . I won't repeat what he said, but I'd be delighted to have it for my epitaph. . . . Once having convinced himself that the playwright's drama is a good one, he protects it, even protects it from the playwright himself. When I have toyed with the idea of an unwise change, he has said, 'No. This is the way you saw it when you were working quietly and alone.' . . . He has jealously guarded what he feels he has in this play, working always for simplicity and honesty, hoping to realize the play in its own terms. His faith and belief in the peculiar quality of this play have made me very proud of it.100

A few days before the try-out opening in New Haven, Robert Anderson became a member of the Playwrights Company, the partnership which included Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, Elmer Rice, John Wharton, and Roger Stevens, the partnership which was also to produce his next two Broadway plays. The reviews of the try-out performances both in New Haven and in Washington were exceedingly favorable; and as writer Arthur Cavanaugh later reported,

It was a hit, a tremendous, unqualified, across-the-boards hit. Before it opened it was a hit. The out-of-town reviews in New Haven and Boston, the rave notice in Variety, the excited word-of-mouth praise which preceded it into New York took care of that. The day that the seats went on sale at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, the line at the box office stretched out to the sidewalk . . . Even the signs jutting up from the Ethel Barrymore marquee . . . had an extra gloss and sheen, as if proclaiming a long run and sold-out houses.101


With the exception of Robert Coleman of the Daily Mirror, who somehow "anticipated more,"102 the newspaper critics wrote in glowing terms of the play and the production when it opened on Broadway on September 30, 1953, and their praise was echoed by the majority of critics in the weekly and monthly magazines. Reviewers for the Catholic publications, however, dissented strongly and unanimously. Typical of their reaction is a statement by Theophilus Lewis who concluded his review in America by stating, "there are moral ways to straighten out a mixed-up boy."103 The following year Mr. Lewis stated, "The best that can be said for All Summer Long is that it is not as insidiously immoral as his contribution to the preceding season;"104 and of Silent Night, Lonely Night he wrote, "It is regrettable that so much first-rate talent has been spent on a trashy play."105 While the controversy which arose between the playwright and the Catholic Legion of Decency is beyond the scope of this study, a certain relaxation of doctrinaire attitudes in theatrical criticism over recent years is noteworthy. Fourteen years after Tea and Sympathy, the Catholic reviews, while not


unanimously enthusiastic, were generally favorable in the case of Anderson's most sexually frank, *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*. This time, the reviewer for *America* found "no leaning toward prurience," and called *I'll Be Home For Christmas* "as exciting as a sword fight."106

Problems of censorship brought infinite frustrations to Robert Anderson in his film adaptation of *Tea and Sympathy*. The additions and changes he was forced to make by the Motion Picture Code included, as the critic for *Saturday Review* noted, "some heavyhanded moralizing, remorse, and retribution that were not originally part of the author's intent . . ."107 Although the theme of homosexuality was suggested by calling Tom a "sister-boy" and intimating that he was too girlish to associate with the other boys at the school, the husband's fear of his own latent homosexuality was omitted, "at great cost to the dramatic motivation," this same critic lamented. "The movie demonstrates once more the old-hat nature of the Code," he went on to say,

The subject has been treated, with no increase in delicacy, and such changes as occur seem silly and hardly calculated to encourage stricter sexual morality. Thus the older woman offers herself to the boy in the moonlit-wood rather than in the privacy of his bedroom; she does not indicate an opening of her blouse, but instead takes his hand and looks meaningfully into his eyes. And years later, the boy grown to a man--a writer, no less--reads a letter she has left for him. This makes clear the terrible consequences of her act: her husband


has become a broken, haunted effigy of himself; she has become an emotional wanderer, with no happiness to be found anywhere; and the boy has obviously turned into a gloomy sort himself. While the entire movie can't and should not be judged by this code, it is nevertheless obvious that the pall of remorse and retribution has turned it into a more spiritless undertaking than it needed to be.108

In the film, Laura's adultery with the boy became the cause of the destruction of her marriage. "What they made me do for the movies," Anderson has said,

was more immoral than what happened in my play. It is far more immoral that a woman who had not broken with her husband should sleep with this youth than if she had already broken with her husband. Always we seemed to be quibbling. I had to cut too many corners. They persuade you to give in on so many things by saying: 'We'll let you keep the core of the story.' You become convinced you're saving the story. But you're not. I will never again give in as I did on Tea and Sympathy.109

In London, Tea and Sympathy again encountered censorship difficulties and was banned from "public" performance by the Lord Chamberlain, but opened as a "club" production on April 25, 1957, at the Comedy Theatre in the West End to enthusiastic notices and good business. The Paris production, which opened December 8, 1956, and played for two seasons, starred Ingrid Bergman; and the play has since been performed in every major city of the world.

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108 Ibid.
110 Anderson Tape No. 1.
Tea and Sympathy won Variety's Drama Critics' Poll,\textsuperscript{111} ran for two years on Broadway and for two years on the road. First published by Random House and offered as a Fireside Theatre Book Club choice in 1954\textsuperscript{112} the play was selected for inclusion in The Best Plays of 1953-1954\textsuperscript{113} and in John Gassner's Best American Plays series.\textsuperscript{114} Published also by Samuel French in the acting edition and included in various anthologies and translations, Tea and Sympathy has attained a distinguished and what may well prove to be a permanent place in the dramatic literature of America and the world.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{111}The award was for the best "first play." Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
\bibitem{114}Gassner, ed., \textit{Best American Plays, Fourth Series}, pp. 279-313.
\end{thebibliography}
A year after *Tea and Sympathy* opened on Broadway, the Andersons purchased a duplex apartment in a brownstone house on East 65th Street, with "light airy rooms, spacious and high-ceilinged, a dining room overlooking a garden, stairs curving up to a second floor and a workroom for Bob."\(^1\) Here also was a big bedroom with a fireplace and a marble mantel, where Phyllis became increasingly confined by her illness until, by 1956, she was completely bedridden.\(^2\) Even from her sickbed, Phyllis Anderson continued to serve her writers and on the night before her death, on November 28, 1956, she called in Audrey Wood and Kay Brown and went over her entire list of some forty or fifty playwrights whom she was handing on to these agents, reviewing the personal and professional needs of each writer.\(^3\)

Attest ing to her marvelous dedication and to her signal talent for encouraging and developing young dramatists are the many plays and books which have been dedicated to her, among them, John

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\(^1\) Cavanaugh, *My Own Back Yard*, p. 175.

\(^2\) Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, March 29, 1969.

\(^3\) Anderson Tape No. 1.
Gassner's *Best American Plays, Fourth Series*, William Inge's *Come Back Little Sheba*, Arnold Schulman's *Hole in the Head*, James Leo Herlihy and William Noble's *Blue Denim*, and *Tea and Sympathy*. A theatre in New York City has been named for her; a playwriting fellowship at Yale and a Drama Prize at Harvard have been established in her memory. Of the numerous tributes from those "she inspired to give their best to the theatre," a eulogy delivered at her funeral by Elia Kazan and included in a memorial article in *Theatre Arts* perhaps best exemplifies her special gift for directing other artists in their search for self-realization. Mr. Kazan's tribute reads, in part,

Phyllis helped people realize themselves. People exceeded themselves to match the vision of them that Phyllis had. She knew that talent comes from the core of a person, and above all, the core has to be sustained and nurtured. She knew that defeat and disappointment were a part of the process. After a particularly bitter defeat, she would say, 'Nothing is lost.' And then—in the rhythm of nature—she'd wait and see that the wound healed and new energies gathered and the person started again. Many can point to a time, a week or a year or a moment, when her unswerving faith and devotion made the difference. She was a creator. Living parts of many of us are her creation.

From 1954 to 1956, Robert Anderson's time was devoted almost exclusively to caring for his wife. As Arthur Cavanaugh has reported in his touching though somewhat inaccurate account of Phyllis' dying years,

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Morning and night, Robert stayed with her. He helped feed, dress and bathe her. He read to her, took his meals in her room, fought to reassure her.\(^6\)

To keep busy, Anderson wrote the filmscript of *Until They Sail*, based on a long short story from James Michener's *Return to Paradise*. In 1955, he did the movie adaptation of *Tea and Sympathy*, started the Playwrights Group at Actor's Studio which he conducted for a year, and wrote *Love Among Friends*, his only play during this period.\(^7\)

The week after Phyllis' funeral, he flew to Paris to attend final rehearsals and the opening of *Tea and Sympathy*, returning early in 1957 to begin writing *The Nun's Story* for which he was subsequently nominated for an Academy Award. Having finished this movie script in Rome, the following year, he went on to London to spend the winter of 1958 in Berkley Square writing *Silent Night, Lonely Night*. When he returned home in the spring, he was beset by the usual problems of availabilities of stars and directors, and so accepted a film assignment to adapt *Lady L* for Audrey Hepburn and Gerard Philippe whom the producers hoped to get for the parts. This filmscript, written during the summer and fall of 1958, was not used, however, because the leading roles were later played by Sophia Loren and Paul Newman, and this casting change required a different stylistic treatment.\(^8\)


\(^{7}\)Anderson Tape No. 1.

\(^{8}\)Ibid.
A year and a half after its completion, Silent Night, Lonely Night opened in New York on December 3, 1959. On December 11, Robert Anderson married actress Teresa Wright. Although they had met briefly about eight years earlier when she had done his radio adaptation of Trilby for Theatre Guild on the Air, it was not until 1957 that they became well acquainted. With this marriage, the playwright acquired a young son and daughter, the children of Miss Wright's first marriage to author Niven Busch.

In the summer of 1960, Anderson went to Laos to do a film on Tom Dooley, staying a month with Dr. Dooley in his hospital and completing the script in the winter and spring of 1961. This picture, however, was never made. He then began writing The Days Between, which he finished in December, 1961. Since the Playwrights Company was by then about to disband, The Days Between was offered to other producers and taken under option first by Leland Hayward and later by Alfred de Liagre, Jr. In the case of both producers, the problems of casting were, the playwright has stated,

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11Anderson Tape No. 1.


13Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
"overwhelming and discouraging (as usual)." As an example of the frustrations he encountered, Anderson has cited this experience from 1962, during the period of Leland Hayward's option:

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\begin{align*}
\ldots & \text{we had an excellent director. We submitted the play to a brilliant actress who liked the play very much and expressed her almost-willingness to do it, but she wouldn't do the play with the director we had. Because I think directors should choose actors, I stayed with my director. Two months later, the director departed. This was just the beginning.} \\
\end{align*}
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By this time, he was "momentarily fed up with the theatre," and while waiting for further word on casting, decided to write his first original movie. This filmscript, entitled, The Tiger, was finished in the summer of 1962 and rewritten for the stage in 1965. Because of the intervening play by Murray Schisgal called The Tiger, Anderson changed the title of his stage version to I Never Sang For My Father.

In 1962, he also wrote A Small Part of a Long Story, another


\[^{16}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[^{17}\text{Robert Anderson, The Tiger, unpublished filmscript.}\]


\[^{19}\text{Robert Anderson, A Small Part of a Long Story, unpublished filmscript.}\]
original filmplay. This tenderly funny comedy, dealing with a couple's attempt to have a child, was at first considered too shocking by the film makers because of its candid, though tasteful, treatment of the subject, but nearly six years later, the script was finally purchased and is soon to be produced.20 In 1963, he wrote, with Richard Adler, a musical version of Roman Holiday on commission for Leland Hayward. This was not produced, and in that same year he did the film adaptation of Richard McKenna's The Sand Pebbles on which he had worked intermittently for two years. His third original movie, a touching story about the legend of a writer's marriage and the death of his wife, which is still unsold and yet untitled, was written in the spring of 1964.21 During the following fall and winter, he worked on a film adaptation of The Night of the Generals for Sam Spiegel and Anatole Litvak, but this movie was later rewritten by another screen writer.22 The next September, he directed Teresa Wright in a production of Tea and Sympathy at the Pheasant Run Theatre, a small dinner-theatre outside of Chicago.23

When the American Playwrights Theatre project was established in December, 1963, Robert Anderson agreed to serve on its Board of Governors and has since devoted countless hours to the development of this national program. At the second annual Board meeting, when

20Anderson Tape No. 1.
21Robert Anderson, untitled filmscript.
22Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
it appeared that the APT organization would have no play for the coming season and that the future of the project might well be in doubt, the APT Board asked Mr. Anderson to consider the submission of his play, *The Days Between*. Because of the intimate nature of its subject matter and because it required mature acting in the central roles, the author felt that this play was inappropriate for college and community theatre production, but out of a sense of commitment and also because he was tired of waiting for a Broadway production, he obtained a release from Alfred de Liagre, Jr., and offered the play to the APT experiment. Within two months after the script was circulated in December, 1964, forty theatres agreed to produce it and during the 1965-66 season, the play received over three hundred performances by fifty theatres in every part of the country.

The first production of *The Days Between* which opened at the Dallas Theatre Center on May 19, 1965, drew enthusiastic reviews from both the local and national critics, and throughout the succeeding year extensive nation-wide attention was directed to the play, its author and American Playwrights Theatre. The *New York Times*, *Saturday Review*, *Christian Science Monitor* and other national publications sent their critics and reporters across the country to cover a number of the productions.²⁴

reviewed the Baltimore production in the *New York World Telegram* and *Sun*, and Tom Prideaux traveled from coast to coast to report on productions in Massachusetts and California on consecutive nights. Concluding his article in *Life*, he wrote:

> It is preposterous that Broadway should be the only yardstick for success. Praise be to A.P.T., *The Days Between* is now getting the big and thoughtful audiences it deserves. If things go on like this, all America may become off-Broadway, and Broadway may be recognized at last as off-America.26

Recalling the APT experience in an article for *The Dramatists Guild Quarterly* which was later reprinted in *Best Plays of 1966-1967*, Robert Anderson said,

> ... I was in touch with many of the theatres which did the play, and I attended 12 productions, sometimes arriving just in time for the opening, other times coming for a few days or a week of rehearsals.

> Naturally, the critical reactions to the play varied widely. But the important point is, no matter what the various critics and audiences felt about *The Days Between*, they all seemed to welcome the excitement as well as the risk of producing a new play... In addition, the event brought to some theatres more local attention than they had ever had before.

> How did I, as a kind of guinea pig playwright, feel about the project? Enthusiastic. I enjoyed the kind of picnic spirit which prevailed-- 'I'll bring the play and you bring the cast.' In New York we rightly spend months and months trying to cast just the 'right' person for each part. It is an exhausting and frustrating experience. It is also a disturbing experience, of course, to go to some APT theatres and meet casts which you think at first glance are not quite right for your play. But you quickly realize that your thinking is conditioned by casting in New York; you realize that the local audience comes together with the understanding of the degree of experience of the actors, and more often than not, the show 'works.'

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Of course, some plays work better than others under these circumstances. In the case of my play, I think a number of 19-year-old college girls found it quite a challenge to act a 37-year-old wife whose marriage was going on the rocks for complex reasons. . . . Certain 'under-written' plays require actors of great personal dynamism and inventiveness to give the silences and pauses the meaning and overtones the playwright intended. I hasten to add that I saw many effective and moving productions of my play in both the college and community theatres, and I was enriched by my contact with so many eager young people for whom theatre was still total excitement and promise.27

The enrichment brought by Robert Anderson to the many people with whom he worked that year and to the thousands who saw the play, is inestimable. His directorial assistance and many letters in answer to producers' questions were enormously helpful and his presence at the various theatres, his numerous press interviews, articles, program notes and opening night telegrams to directors and casts, helped create a sense of occasion at each production and lasting good will for American Playwrights Theatre. As an ambassador for the project, he has also been instrumental in gaining the understanding and cooperation of the Dramatists Guild and the participation of its members. Through his guidance and untiring efforts and by his willingness to risk his new play to this yet untried program, Robert Anderson has perhaps contributed more to the success of American Playwrights Theatre than any other single person.

In the winter of 1965-66, Anderson visited a number of APT productions and made further revisions in The Days Between but he

also found time to write two new plays, *I Never Sang For My Father*, completed in December,\(^{28}\) and *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, which was begun in late January and finished in March.\(^{29}\) "As for the one-acts," he wrote in an April letter, "Kazan and Schneider are delighted with them . . . But other people are shocked and stunned and find them in poor taste . . . to which Kazan says, 'Nuts.'"\(^{30}\) In mid-May he wrote,

> I have had five turn-downs already on my Father play . . . 'Lovely, but who wants to pay $8.80 for it!' . . . I am almost reconciled to making my money in the movies and writing my plays for my own delight. . . . The one-acts are being turned down too as 'shocking' . . . However, got a great letter from Walter Matthau who calls them all 'Gems' . . . But he's staying in Hollywood for two years . . . and who can blame him?\(^{31}\)

Both plays were rejected by every producer who read them, Anderson recounts in his *Introduction to I Never Sang For My Father* in *The Best Plays of 1967-1968*.

> We felt we had exhausted the list of producers who might be interested in either play; and needless to say, I was very depressed. Then my agent, Audrey Wood, sent *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running* to a television producer who had never produced on Broadway, Jack Farren. He liked the one-acts, and he and his partner, Gilbert Cates, took them on for production.

> When *You Know I Can't Hear You* was successful, Gilbert Cates decided he wanted to produce *I Never Sang For My Father*. Alan Schneider, who directed the one-act plays, said he would like to direct it. I was delighted. . . .\(^{32}\)

\(^{28}\)Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, December 13, 1965.

\(^{29}\)Anderson Tape No. 1.

\(^{30}\)Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 4, 1966.

\(^{31}\)Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, May 17, 1966.

In this introduction, the author gives an account of the bizarre history of *The Tiger*, the movie script from which the *Father* play was adapted, recounting its several near-misses in acquiring a production, and his difficulties in getting the stage version produced. At the conclusion of his article, he states:

> When young playwrights say to me, 'Oh, but you have it easy. You can always get your plays produced,' I tell them this story. It seems to comfort them. It does not comfort me. Just retelling it here makes me wonder about the wisdom of starting a new play.\(^{33}\)

*You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, which opened on Broadway March 13, 1967, played for nearly two years in New York\(^{34}\) and for eleven months on the road.\(^{35}\) Although the London production ran for only a month,\(^{36}\) the play has been extremely successful in Rome,\(^{37}\) Prague, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Dusseldorf, Oslo, and other foreign cities as well as in its current American "stock" productions.\(^{38}\) Early in its run the movie rights were purchased,\(^{39}\) and a film version is soon to be produced. Published by Random

\(^{33}\)Ibid., p. 280.

\(^{34}\)"You Know I Can't," *Variety*, January 1, 1969, p. 52.


\(^{36}\)Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, July 19, 1968.


\(^{38}\)Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, July 7, 1969.

\(^{39}\)"H'wood Discovers Old Legit Shows As New Material For the Screen," *Variety*, November 27, 1968, p. 67.
House, the play was also selected as one of the ten best works in *The Best Plays of 1966-1967.*

With the opening of *I Never Sang For My Father* on January 25, 1968, Robert Anderson was again represented on Broadway by two plays as he had been fourteen years earlier when *Tea and Sympathy* and *All Summer Long* ran simultaneously. As the *New York Times* reported, "'I Never Sang For My Father' ... brought a chorus of praise from eight of the nine critics," but the *Times'* own reviewer, Clive Barnes, attacked it as "a soap opera," and this very powerful review was instrumental in the play's closing after 124 performances. *I Never Sang For My Father* has also been published by Random House and is included in *The Best Plays of 1967-1968.* After it closed, Robert Anderson readapted the script into another movie version, currently being filmed under the tentative title of *Strangers* with Melvin Douglas as the father, a role he declined to play on Broadway.

In the stage production, Teresa Wright played the part of the sister, and during the run of the play, the Andersons moved back into New York. They have since returned to their lovely old

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43 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, June 5, 1969.
farm house in Connecticut where they have lived since 1966. Here, Robert Anderson is presently at work on his next play.

Love Among Friends

The script of Love Among Friends, completed in January, 1956, was shown to only a few people and never offered for production because the author was not satisfied with the work. Although the play contains several dramatically effective moments, a final scene which is deeply moving and a number of penetrating insights into the nature and meaning of marriage, it is lacking in dramatic conflict and tends toward verbosity and sentimentality.

As noted in Chapter I of this study, Love Among Friends is of biographical interest in its portrait of the father and in its reflection of the playwright's early training. As a treatise on marriage, it represents a transition from the dramatist's overly romantic attitudes in Boy Grown Tall and from the somewhat extravagant concept of marriage in The Eden Rose toward a more mature and realistic conception and appreciation of the various complexities of marital relationships which later appear in Silent Night, Lonely Night and in The Days Between.

Like John Marston in the Navy play and Ted in The Eden Rose, Alan Hamilton, the playwright hero of Love Among Friends, searches for meaning in the intimacy of marriage and is desperately frustrated with the inevitable waning of love's intensity. "Right now," he says, "I'm standing in the middle of my life, and I'm yelling, 'I want to
be in love with someone, to save my life from meaninglessness, ...

Later in the play when asked if he could not settle for less than the intensity of first love, he answers,

I never could. I'm cursed with that. It's Hell on everybody. I'm so slow in coming to accept the compromises of the world, the compensations . . . the sedatives.

By the end of the play, however, he does come to accept the inevitabilities and responsibilities of marriage through understanding gained from the lovely and virtuous wife of another man and through his realization of this woman's sacrifices for her marriage and her need for his friendship rather than his love. Although no infidelity takes place, the subject of faithfulness in marriage is a basic theme, and several related ideas from this play recur in the dramatist's next work, Silent Night, Lonely Night. The possibility that an affair could send a husband back to his wife more loving, the uniqueness of each man-woman relationship, "the beautiful complexity" of marriage and "the Eleventh Commandment--don't get caught," are but a few examples of ideas from Love Among Friends which find their way into the later play.

Silent Night, Lonely Night

John Sparrow in Silent Night, Lonely Night, exhibits from the outset of the play an emotional and intellectual maturity, an acceptance of life as it is, which Alan Hamilton acquires only at

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the end of *Love Among Friends*. This maturity, along with the addition of humor, makes Sparrow a far more attractive hero than the persistently serious Alan. Sparrow's muted expression of a more acute loneliness brings, instead of mere fervor, an eloquence which contributes significantly to one of the most poignant autobiographical characterizations in the Anderson repertoire.

Katherine, the lovely, warm and needful woman with whom he passes a tender and comforting Christmas Eve, is a literary descendant of idealized feminine characters dating back to Toni, the perfect wife in *Come Marching Home* and the understanding Peggy in *Boy Grown Tall*. "A certain unguarded nakedness of feeling," which the dramatist ascribes to her characterization is reminiscent of Nan Hilton in *The Eden Rose*; and with Laura in *Tea and Sympathy*, Katherine shares a sense of humor, compassion, loneliness and physical longing. However, she is also an individualized character in her own right with a background different from the earlier women and with a distinctive element of wistfulness. As a poetess, she is, to a slight degree, more keenly sensitive than any of her antecedents, and perhaps also because she is given more lines in this predominantly two-character play, Katherine is the most eloquent of Anderson's heroines. Her style of speech reflects a graceful manner and a flair for poetry. This verbal acuity is especially apparent in her longer passages, as in this one from Act I:

*John*

And your father gave you the Eye of God, which has always said 'No.'
Katherine

Yes. It always said 'No.' (She smiles) That was the other time . . . I started to write poetry some years after I was married. I had been class poet at college . . . it was the only talent I had . . . and the house wasn't enough any more . . . We'd promised to love, honor and succeed . . . and he'd succeeded . . . So I wrote poetry . . . which I could never have published, because it turned out to be too personal. But I did send it to a young poet whose work I admired, and we corresponded . . . and one day he came to San Francisco to give a reading of his poetry. And he wanted to meet me. We had drinks after the reading. I don't know what he expected to find. I don't know what I expected to find . . . He was staying overnight in a hotel, and my husband was away on one of his trips. My God, no one stays home any more, do they? . . . And it was quite obvious what was happening over the drinks. We were talking about verse forms, but we knew each other very intimately through our poetry . . . and we were falling in love. . . . At which point I opened my purse to get a cigarette, and nestled in the bottom with the lipstick and aspirin and Kleenex . . . the eye of God looked up at me.46

The newlywed couple, introduced for variety, contrast and humor, function also to heighten the sexual tone of the play. As John Sparrow jokingly observes, "Newlyweds do something to a place. They fill it with a sort of infectious sensuality."47 In this play as in The Eden Rose, Tea and Sympathy, Love Among Friends, and the later The Days Between, the dynamics of the plot generate from the loneliness and accompanying sexual need of the two central characters. Since Silent Night, Lonely Night contains less external action than any of Anderson's other major works, the actors' portrayal of an underlying physical hunger as the fundamental activating force of the play is especially crucial. Although Barbara

46Anderson, Silent Night, Lonely Night, I.i.ii.39.
47Ibid., I.i.21.
Bel Geddes and Henry Fonda were highly praised by the Broadway critics for their magnetic and credible performances as Katherine and John, it is difficult to imagine this actor and actress bringing to their characterizations the full potential of sexuality implicit in the roles.

A few days before the New York opening on December 3, 1959, Henry Fonda sustained a neck injury and on the night the play was reviewed, he was still under medication for the pain which may, in part, have contributed to the play's static quality of which the majority of reviewers complained. This idea has never been suggested by the playwright who has always been most complimentary to the stars and the director, Peter Glenville. However, the last sentence of his introduction to the Theatre Arts edition seems to imply that the sexuality in the play was not fully realized:

Obviously, the gathering together of Henry Fonda, Barbara Bel Geddes and Peter Glenville was worth the effort. But the play did not work on Broadway, though it found some enthusiastic supporters. I cannot tell you why it didn't work. Somehow it seemed to many a static play in which two people sat around talking about their lives; whereas I meant it as a fairly dynamic play in which the 'lives' were only important insofar as they bore on the immediate developing situation between the two people on stage. It is a very subtle difference, but it makes all the difference.49

Because of its delicate and reflective nature, Silent Night, Lonely Night, like All Summer Long, would undoubtedly have profited


from the intimacy of arena staging, but its lack of action and heavy thematic content make it an extremely difficult work. As Henry Hewes and John Gassner have noted, *Silent Night, Lonely Night* might have been more effective as a long one-act. Despite generally adverse reviews, several critics have noted the intelligence, grace and poetry in the writing, and John Gassner so admired the play that he selected it for inclusion in his *Best American Plays of 1957-1963*. In his introduction to the play, Mr. Gassner wrote:

> It is distinctly to the credit rather than discredit of the author that explanations of *Silent Night, Lonely Night* would be absurdly superfluous. This is the work of a mature and responsible writer who let his heart and sympathetic intelligence talk out for him under the quiet control of taste and normal tact, without effort to overheat the emotions or to artificially activate the plot for the purpose of providing excitement for the Broadway public. It is this quality of authenticity and artistic balance, which adverse criticism tended to describe variously as detachment, verbosity, and lack of 'action' or 'movement', that is the treasurable quality of the play. From it derive dramatic experience and insight within the author's self-imposed limits. Our theatre and our society are not favorable to the emergence of writers like Robert Anderson who don't emerge into the limelight with acid in the soul, poison on their tongue, and dynamite in their pockets. He is by natural inclination definitely a gentleman in the age of literary assassins.

The treasurable quality of authenticity noted by Gassner is related to the "tone of elegy" which Brooks Atkinson and others have noted in the play. Harold Clurman called it "something like

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an epithalamium,\textsuperscript{52} and \textit{Time} described it as an "Elegy in a Country Bedroom."\textsuperscript{53} As Mr. Atkinson has stated,

The spirit of 'Silent Night, Lonely Night' represents a deeper sense of personal involvement than most plays. Although it is not autobiography and the details of the story are not to be taken literally, the death of Mr. Anderson's gallant wife, Phyllis, in 1956, plunged him into a state of mind like that of the writer in his new play.\textsuperscript{54}

The play is, in many ways, a memorial to the dramatist's wife and to his marriage. Except for the fiction of the wife's madness and the child's death, most of John Sparrow's reminiscences appear to be but thinly disguised memories of personal experience. One need only to consider the following passage to recognize the autobiographical nature of the character of John:

\textbf{John}

\ldots To really fall in love for the first time at eighteen, and suddenly to have your whole life fall into focus. It's a miracle, isn't it? That only happens once. You don't ask, 'Am I in love? Is this real? Will it last?' It suddenly just pours over you like sunshine \ldots and you breathe deeply as though for the first time. And you're wide open. You confess your sins, and she confesses hers. My God, what little sins \ldots and you forgive each other and fall into each other's arms.

\textbf{Katherine}

Did you really have it like that?


John

Yes, so help me God. It seemed to be four years of spring. She lived with her family in Boston, but they were always away, around the world, or abroad, and so we were like children playing house on Beacon Hill. I'd been a very mediocre student, and suddenly, nothing but A's. At first the college thought I was cheating... but I was only in love. And there seemed to be time for everything in those days. We sailed at Marblehead, we skied in New Hampshire, and we lay in each other's arms for hours and hours just filled with the wonder of it. All we could say was, 'It's wonderful, isn't it?'... 'Aren't we lucky?'... Went to the theatre, up in the second balcony... once a month Sunday lunches at the Ritz and a walk up the Charles River, and then the long afternoon in front of the fire in her living room... Every summer I went to summer school to be near her. My parents marveled at my thirst for knowledge... 55

Here, as in Tea and Sympathy, Robert Anderson is concerned with the relationship between love and pity. More specifically, however, the playwright seems to be protesting the absolutes of public morality, showing that adultery is not always absolutely wrong, but in some cases even constructive. In this way, Silent Night, Lonely Night again illustrates the dramatist's war with inevitability that pervades, in varying degrees, all his major works. "So much morality is just lack of opportunity, or lack of courage, or lack of appetite," his hero insists, and people go to bed together for "a lot of other reasons besides love... Reassurance, courage, loneliness, comfort... for protection against the horrors of the night." 56 As Henry Hewes noted in his review, Anderson's reconciling of traditional sinfulness with decency has considerable

55 Anderson, Silent Night, Lonely Night, II.i.54.
56 Ibid., I.ii.37.
pertinence and universality for modern audiences:

In his new play, 'Silent Night, Lonely Night,' Robert Anderson is tenderly probing the loneliness of marriage and the ethics of adultery in this speeded-up impersonal world of ours. While the play's patience, soft-heartedness and sense of honor tend to make the evening slow and unexplosive, they also give it verisimilitude. For in life decent men and women are committing adultery and managing to emerge from their affairs with honor and spirit intact. While most of Mr. Anderson's play is concerned with the Christmas Eve courtship of one lonely woman by one lonely man, he is suggesting more interesting notions about the function of marriage. Does a person who has been married a long time and who is bored and lonely need--more than does someone having premarital affairs--a romantic interlude with a nice stranger who is similarly lonely? And if the stranger is also married, can't this interlude refresh both marriages? For moderns, Mr. Anderson coins an 'Eleventh Commandment'. It is, 'Don't get caught.'

Anderson's conception of marriage conveyed in Silent Night, Lonely Night is markedly more realistic and adult than in his earlier marriage plays and shows an appreciable development in maturity beyond Love Among Friends in which the protagonist reluctantly accepts the realities of married life. By this time, the hero has come to value the sadness as well as the intensity of marital love and although he passes an ecstatic and comforting night with a warm and needful woman, he finds greater meaning in the complex relationship with his insane wife of many years whom he has hurt, loved, hated and adored. John Sparrow, like his predecessor in Love Among Friends, appreciates the unique and complicated nature of each relationship between a husband and wife, but Sparrow has arrived at a much deeper understanding of the subtleties and nuances of marriage, such as

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the importance of a shared past and an anticipated future, and the unavoidable guilt which every couple knows. "How can I make her see that now she is my life," he asks.

She is the condition of my life. How can I make her see that the more I tried to destroy the meaning of marriage, the closer I came to its true meaning? . . . Maybe it's guilt that binds me. I think it's love.58

The persistent search for meaning suggested in Anderson's earliest one-act plays and evident, to some degree, throughout his work, is reflected in John Sparrow's lines:

I was the one who always was trying to find one great simple guiding truth on the head of a pin . . . I always thought, if I had just a little more experience I'd finally know it. . . . But all I found was a rage of contradictions . . . a saddening but somehow beautiful complexity. . . .59

Another continuing theme is the sadness of the inevitable lessening of ardor in marriage with which the dramatist was concerned in The Eden Rose and in several other works including All Summer Long, to which these comments on the significance of demonstrated affection between parents are especially relevant:

One should commit one's love to paper. Like photographs, love letters grow in importance. . . . Friends of mine had movies taken of their garden wedding. When they showed the film to their children fifteen years later, the oldest said, 'My, Daddy loved Mommy then, didn't he?'60

Sparrow has made every possible effort to maintain the spirit of early love in his marriage by keeping up a constant line of

58Anderson, Silent Night, Lonely Night, II.1.61.

59Ibid., I.11.32-33.

60Ibid., II.1.55.
conversation with his wife so that the picture of middle-aged marriage which he and other Anderson heroes have feared and detested will not become a likeness of his own. His recollection of the attempt to sustain communication and intimacy is interesting both from a thematic and an autobiographical standpoint:

John

I always treated my wife so that people wouldn't know we were married. I think early in my life I was frightened by a middle-aged couple at a summer resort. They sat just opposite me in the dining room, and they never talked. I've seen couples in Paris and Rome, on the long-saved-for holiday together, staring at their plates, and wondering why they'd come. I often thought they should have swapped wives for the trip.

Katherine

But you chattered.

John

Yes, like a magpie. Or I'd just smile at her. Or I'd tease her. Anything to keep contact. I wanted to prove against all the evidence around me that it could work. On a rainy afternoon for no reason I'd send her some spring flowers . . . There were hundreds of anniversaries to remember . . . 61

The idea of total commitment to marriage is repeated in Katherine's revelation of her marital history and despite her sense of dedication, she too has been hurt and has caused pain to the person she most loves. Loneliness and hurt are inevitable in marriage, the playwright seems to be saying, but the comfort which a married couple can bring to each other makes the loneliness endurable, and their shared solace is part of the sadness and pleasure of life's most meaningful relationship. The final acceptance of

61Ibid., II.1.56.
loneliness and pain as valued constituents in the subtle and complicated texture of marriage, represents a notable development in maturity beyond the earlier treatments of love and marriage.

With fewer characters and less conventional plot, Anderson was able to give more emphasis to language, which is perhaps one of the reasons that *Silent Night, Lonely Night* is one of his most consistently poetic works. In eloquence as well as perception it demonstrates a significant maturation beyond the apprentice plays, and in the delicate poetry of its writing it surpasses much of his other work.

*Silent Night, Lonely Night* played only 120 performances on Broadway, but has since been performed throughout the world and is soon to be made into a two-hour film for television. Asked to write the movie adaptation, Robert Anderson declined because, he said, "This is out of my life now and nothing I want to go over again." 

**The Days Between**

Before the opening of the APT "pilot" production of *The Days Between* at the Dallas Theatre Center, Robert Anderson spent ten days with director Paul Baker and his cast, cutting and reworking the script, and during the year of APT presentation, he continued to

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62 Rigdon, ed., *The Biographical Encyclopaedia*, p. 44.
64Anderson Tape No. 1.
make changes in the play which were forwarded to the producers for inclusion in the remaining productions. Consequently, the Random House edition, brought out in time for the Dallas opening, varies considerably from the final acting version published by Samuel French. The original writing of The Days Between took nearly two years and the script used at Dallas was the "fifth or sixth draft . . ." 

I now feel that I spent far too much of my life on that play," the author has stated.

I don't know why I used to go so voluminously into notes, but The Days Between had an infinite number, pages and pages, books of notes. I think it's the play I rewrote most of any play I've ever written.  

As he once explained in a television interview, one of the ideas behind the inception of the play was his desire to examine, from a wife's viewpoint, the difficult years of a man's life when he realizes that it is too late to begin again:

You know, it's a very peculiar American dream. Maybe because we came to a new country . . . and then kept moving west, . . . we could always move to another place and start all over again. But suddenly, I think around forty or forty-five, most men, if they grow up, realize that it's too late to start over (not that some haven't, of course), but this is, what I call in the play, a desperate period for a man. And I was fascinated, not to consider it from the man's point of view, but from the viewpoint of the woman who is married to such a man . . . What does it do to her life, to their life, to the children's lives when he suddenly finds himself in a rut, not doing what he wanted to do . . . wanting to live only days of glory and not the days between . . .

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66 Anderson Tape No. 1
Very frankly, at a more personal level, I wanted to write a play for my wife, Teresa Wright . . . but it very soon stopped being that. For example, I once asked Sidney Kingsley how a play of his was going in New Haven and he said, 'Well, I'm finished with it,' and I asked why, and he said, 'I've finally cut out the line that started me writing the play,' which is very often what happens. You start out writing about one thing but in the end you don't really finish the play until you eliminate the entire first motivation . . . 67

The Days Between was also inspired to some degree by the author's interest in writing for the then newly formed Lincoln Center. Along with other playwrights, he had been shown the model of the theatre by Elia Kazan and Jo Mielziner who were trying to encourage American dramatists to write for the new open stage.

"This play was written with the Lincoln Center Theatre in mind, and I have never written for that kind of stage before," he explained in another broadcast interview:

There has been some criticism that there are too many climaxes in the play piled one on top of the other. One person in Dallas said there is more tension in the second act than I care to endure (but he said it in a very complimentary way, I must say). I had the feeling, writing for this type of theatre with the thrust stage and nothing in the way of realistic sets, that there was a certain obligation to move from climax to climax. You had no excuse for a lot of exposition and a lot of teacups. If you could move to the next exciting moment, you should do so. Maybe it's too much. Sometimes it isn't; sometimes it is, but that's what I'd say is the major problem in the construction of the play. 68

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Although the time span encompassed by *Silent Night, Lonely Night* and *Love Among Friends* is a few hours shorter, the far more abundant action of *The Days Between* transpires in less than eighteen hours. From the opening moment, the action evolves with suddenness and intensity, and builds in a straight line with very little comic relief. In keeping with the starkness of the style, the language is sparse, and the minor characters are drawn with a few swift strokes. In language, in characterization, and especially in construction, *The Days Between* represents the highest point in the author's development toward economy, and several critics have felt that the condensation of action and compression of climaxes resulted in too much intensity. As Henry Hewes wrote in his review of the Dallas production,

> At first exposure, this interesting new work seems to manufacture climaxes and explanations somewhat too unrelievedly. But on smaller stages and with some revision, future productions may find more room for joy in the places between the many tense confrontations. . . .

Interestingly, however, on smaller and sometimes crowded APT stages, the problem of too many high moments in too little space was accentuated, and the play was generally more effective when presented in the openness of arena staging and on open stages like the one for which it was written.

While the playwright's interest in the Lincoln Center type of stage motivated him to utilize his first non-realistic setting,

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the use of multiple levels in this play represents the culmination of a trend noted earlier in the discussion of Tea and Sympathy. With its six rooms, hallway, stairs and garden, The Days Between provides an even greater variety of levels and entrances, allowing the play's succession of intimate scenes to flow naturally and without interruption from place to place, thereby preserving, to an even greater extent than in Tea and Sympathy, the sense of simultaneous currents of activity.

In comparison with Tea and Sympathy, the sexuality in The Days Between is highly intensified. A more powerful force in the subtext, it is also much more explicit in the dialogue as illustrated in this passage which shows, in addition, the starkness of the play's style:

David

... Are you crying because there'll be no more fights? Are you crying because you'll miss my coming home drunk at night and raping you?

Barbara

Don't!

David

Why not? It's the truth.

Barbara

No!

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70 See Chapter IV, pp. 154-55.
That's what it's been. Don't lie to yourself. Rape!

It has not been.

It has. I come home torn with tensions and anxieties and needs. But I am so full of bitterness and resentment for you ... a resentment and bitterness I am ashamed of, but they are there ... and I can't come near you until I am drunk. And then it is rape. And I am tired of raping my wife.

How can you say that?

Because it's the truth. And I want you to know what it is we have here ... When is the last time you wanted me? Who can remember?

That's not true.

Barbara, darling. I have not been deceived by your pretended joys ... your sweet, generous little cries of joy ... They have only made me despise myself more.

Oh, David, I have loved just holding you in my arms. It doesn't have to be--

Oh, Barbara, don't.

I can want you. But you came to me drunk ... I knew you had to come to me drunk, and I didn't think you wanted me ... unless you were drunk, and I ... Oh, David ...
You cried this afternoon at my letter. And I knew why. Not because that man was coming, but because I wanted to sweep you off to one of our masquerade nights when we used to be able to make everything right with the world by one night in bed... and you couldn't. And I can't either any more, without the bottle, because I become impotent with failure and resentment.71

The impotence of which the husband speaks is reminiscent of David in Birthright, Paul in the 1948 version of Tea and Sympathy, and Tom Lee in the final version—all of whom became impotent through self-doubts about their manhood. The impotence of David Ives, the writer-teacher-husband in The Days Between, derives not from sexual sterility, as in the case of David and Paul in the former works, but from the loss of his creative talent. Boyish and impetuous, David Ives is also reminiscent of John Marston in Boy Crown Tall and like that romantic and immature hero, he is a man at war with reality. Having once tasted glory and fame as a novelist and war hero, David is unwilling to settle for the mundane life of a college teacher and unable to enjoy his role as a husband and father. In desperate pursuit of his dream of success, he brutalizes his wife, antagonizes his son and despises himself.

Since the turmoil of the play stems from him, and because the story is written from the wife's point of view, this character is potentially unsympathetic. Robert Anderson, therefore, in his notes to the APT directors, made this recommendation:

In the casting it is important that the man who plays David be an attractive personality . . . that he have a kind of physical quality about him . . . that he be capable of these swings from ardent love and passion, to ardent rages . . . poetic rages. When he says 'If I eat, it will be because I am a writer . . .' we must feel the dedication in him as well as the desperation. He must be a man with a certain 'blackness' in him, if you see what I mean . . . If he is a bland man, he becomes petulant, unattractive, and dangerous. Vitality, energy, seriousness . . . yet someone who could sweep a girl away and make her forget all the meanness in one night . . . for one night. Forgive me for mentioning names, but it is often the easiest short-cut . . . A Richard Burton . . . John Garfield . . . Brando . . . He is described as a boy from the streets . . . there must be this off-beat attractiveness and drive about him.  

The university and community theatres were often unable to supply an actor with these qualities, and throughout his revisions, Anderson attempted to make David Ives a more sympathetic character. In the new scene he wrote for David and his former student early in Act I, he succeeded admirably in bringing sympathy and understanding to the characterization while at the same time underscoring the theme of the special loneliness of the writer and varying the tone and intensity of the play. This speech of David's from the new scene is an example:

David

. . . But it's been rough on everyone in that house. Because, George . . . it's an awful thing to say, but sometimes I hate them . . . Sometimes I'd like to be far away, and never have heard of them . . . This bunch of flowers the kid's getting is to go with a letter I've written, of apology . . . and hope . . . and an invitation to celebrate a little . . . to fly a little . . . (He hasn't been looking at George, at the end, he goes on, almost as though explaining, justifying himself, but no petulance.) Nobody but a writer understands the conditions.

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under which you have to work . . . the ruthless self-discipline . . . the freedom you need . . . They measure out their days in the small things of life. . . . They don't, they can't realize that any day a writer hasn't written something good is a lost day . . . that makes the next day that much more desperate. And when the days become weeks and the weeks, months and years. . . . Nobody can understand the . . . the fear, the panic, that you might never write another line . . . Never earn another dollar. So you become stingy, and every expense becomes a threat. But there are expenses to living, and one part of you knows that . . . the part that is loving and needful. The family part. The other part. The artist resents it, resents the family man and his softness. Yells at him. 'You're no artist. You're a miserable compromiser, and that's what you'll end up. Drowned in anonymous crud like everyone else.' And you hope he'll go away, this voice, and leave you alone. But he won't, if you're an artist. And don't expect anyone to understand. . . . Less than understand. Your wife will be jealous of your art, and who can blame her? She will set traps, gentle, loving traps. Oh, so gentle . . . for the husband . . . the lover in you. . . . You are Ulysses and she is Circe . . . and her song and her loveliness are beguiling. . . . To relax, to say, 'Yes, yes, that's all I want. Just to live like everyone else.' . . . But the other voice is there, and lashes you to the mast. . . . The difference is, Ulysses passed the island once. . . . The artist never passes it, never is rid of it. . . . He keeps going round and around it all his life . . . hearing the voice of the siren. . . . And he wants to give up, over and over. . . . But he can never give up. What the hell would he be if he gave up? Nothing! (He says the last in loathing. Suddenly he realizes he has been carried away.)

George, I can't give you any advice. You'll do what you'll have to do. . . . You ask a middle-aged man for advice, you're likely to get a lot of sour resentment. (He turns away, and sees Roger coming in.) Any violets, Roger?

The many facets of David's character, his passionate and mercurial nature, and his agonizing reversal in the final scene, make him the most complex and engrossing autobiographical character Anderson has yet created. From his notes to the APT directors on the casting of David, it is apparent that the author's image of

this character was quite different from his own personality, but in spirit, David undoubtedly reflects some of the dramatist's own frustration during his teaching days in graduate school and his heartbreaking period in New York as a teacher and adapter of other men's work.

The understanding and compassionate Ted Sears, a successful writer and recent widower, is more obviously an autobiographical figure. His dignity and poise provide an effective dramatic contrast to David's immaturity. While he is wholly likeable, Ted is one of the playwright's least colorful creations, however, suggesting, as in the case of Tom Lee, that a distance of time is necessary for vivid autobiographical characterization.

Early in her marriage, when she supported David so that he could spend full time at his writing, Barbara Ives worked as a receptionist. This background information and the fact that she cannot spell correctly and that she fears she could not support herself, suggest a more limited education than the earlier Anderson heroines; but, like these other warmly sensitive and intelligent women, she is remarkably articulate. With qualities typical of the other heroines, Barbara most closely resembles Katherine in Silent Night, Lonely Night and shares with her a certain child-like bewilderment, the childhood background of a broken home and a total commitment to her marriage. "She is a kind of girl-woman," Anderson explained in his notes to the APT directors,

... She is, after all, a woman who fears being left alone ... who half-believes her mother's warnings. She has tried to be
that hardest of all things . . . a good wife, and she has been nearly driven crazy in the process.\textsuperscript{74}

The author has described the story of the play as "a kind of Walpurgis Night in a marriage . . . one of those terrible nights when all the resentments and hates and troubles come raging out."\textsuperscript{75}

In many ways it is also a story of death, for throughout the play the theme of dying is constantly repeated in the picture of the moribund marriage, the death of Ted's wife, David's destruction of his book (a symbolic act of self-destruction and murder paralleling Barbara's decision to abort her child), and the threat of suicide. The possibility that both David and Barbara may commit suicide is suggested in the opening dialogue with Barbara's line, "I have wanted to die rather than face this summer,"\textsuperscript{76} and in her mother's conviction that David will kill himself if he does not complete his novel. The motif of suicide in conjunction with loneliness was one of the playwright's earliest dramatic concerns and this preoccupation reappears with Tom's attempted suicide in Tea and Sympathy and also in Silent Night, Lonely Night, but in its pervading gloom, The Days Between, more than any other major play, reflects the morbid spirit of the early college work.

The unique loneliness of the writer and the enigma of creation, which first appeared as a motif in Boy Grown Tall and which

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Anderson, "Notes to APT Producers," p. 1.}
\footnote{Ibid., p. 3.}
\footnote{Anderson, The Days Between, Samuel French edition, I.7.}
\end{footnotes}
recurs as one of the themes in *Love Among Friends*, receives its strongest thematic emphasis in *The Days Between*, as exemplified in David's dilemma, his self-justification in the scene with the student, and in Barbara's confrontation when she says,

... Go to your god damned freedom... But I won't come to see if you've killed yourself... because I'll know... without coming, I'll know that you have killed yourself... Because you will... when you have nothing but time and freedom and nobody to blame... What are you going to write about? What?... Tell me. You don't know anything about life. You hate life... this life, this ugly but only life... And you cannot write from hate, only from love. 77

Another theme originating in the Navy plays and recurring in *The Days Between*, is the desire for children. This unfulfilled wish of Ted and his wife provides a sad and ironic contrast to the unborn child sacrificed for Barbara's marriage. Although it is a subsidiary theme in this play and in *Boy Grown Tall*, the desire for children becomes the central issue in the novel, *Birthright*, and in the original screenplay, *A Small Part of a Long Story*.

In his exploration of the depths and complexities of marriage in *The Days Between*, Anderson again uses the device of contrasting one marriage with another as he had done in *Silent Night, Lonely Night*; but in keeping with the play's intensity, he heightens the contrast by juxtaposing Ted's seemingly perfect marriage with the corrosive relationship of David and Barbara. Then, near the end of the play, he strips away the illusion of perfection with Ted's revelation of the true nature of a good marriage:

Eight, nine years ago, Meg and I stood at opposite ends of a room and screamed at each other, yelled at each other our misery, our disillusion... cried like children for our lost world. But for us... there was no meddling visitor out over the barn... and in time, thank God, we managed to... to crawl to each other. What you saw was not our marriage, but a kind of re-marriage out of the ashes of our illusions... 'I take you for what you are. I will cherish you for what you are, your complexity... excluding nothing this time, ugliness, meanness, hate.'... We could even say, when she knew she was going to die... she could even say, 'I hate you because you are going on living,'... and I could say, 'I hate you because you are dying and leaving me alone.'

This commentary on the myth of the eternally ecstatic marriage, and the idea that the best marriages usually evolve through a ceremony of remarriage when all illusions fall away, shows an attitude on the part of the playwright of final and total acceptance and a profound maturity of understanding and appreciation for the complicated realities of married life.

In his description of The Days Between, Howard Taubman noted, "It looks honestly at love and loss and the struggle to achieve maturity and understanding." The struggle for maturity is still another theme that originated in Boy Grown Tall and one which reappears with varying degrees of emphasis in all the succeeding works. In The Days Between, however, it reaches its highest point of development and is treated in much the same way as is the general theme of responsibility in Tea and Sympathy. As Laura, through her action,

78 Ibid., II.60.

embodies that idea, David Ives personifies the theme of maturation by finally relinquishing his dream of success and accepting the inevitabilities of his life in the final scene, one of the most poignant in any of the playwright's work:

David

... I've known I'm no writer. I've known it for years. But I needed to be a success. I have to be somebody or I am nobody ... and this was the only way.

Barbara

You were a writer.

David

I'd write two sentences ... and then terrified that the rest wouldn't turn out to be the masterpiece I wanted ... I needed ... I'd lie on the cot up there ... (He goes on with difficulty, but with determination to say it all.) I have all the airs ... the divine discontent ... the longing for freedom. I don't know what to do with freedom! ... I have been terrified of this summer ... I somehow knew that I would come to the final truth ... the final disaster ... And I always thought if I ever accepted this truth ... that I would never be anything ... I thought I would kill myself. Because I find this life intolerable without that dream ... I still do. That is not changed. ... And when the papers were all destroyed, I lay down to die ... in self-contempt and despair ... But I couldn't die. (Barbara just stands and listens.) I don't understand why this dream of success is necessary to me. ... Other men measure out their lives in the trivia of daily tasks. ... Why for me does it have to be only days of glory? ... Why do I find it so impossible to live the days between?

Barbara

I don't know.

David

I am going to try. I am going to try to live now ... I don't know how. But I am going to try. They say I am a good teacher. I will try to think of that as something to be valued.
Barbara
Yes.

David
(Bewildered.) I used to find such pleasure and excitement in everything . . . as a boy. Why is it all now so flat?

Barbara
I don't know. Is it all flat for you?

David
Yes. . . . I wonder if I can rediscover the wonder of the world like a child. . . . They say the thumb is a miracle. (He stares at his lifeless open hand.) Why is it so beautiful to be a man . . . a husband . . . a father? I know it must be, but I don't know why . . . (With simplicity.) I only know that I am wrong . . . and I cannot die . . . so I must learn . . . I just wanted you to know that.80

In its many non-professional presentations by college and community theatres, The Days Between naturally received some productions that were less than adequate, and when the values and subtleties of the play were unrealized, the critics tended to regard it as "soap opera". The extreme economy and high intensity of the play also contributed to this charge, for when audiences and critics were unconvinced and unmoved by the acting, they found the emotion excessive and became overly aware of the plot structure. As Tom Prideaux remarked after outlining the plot of the play in his review in Life, "all this could easily skid into soap opera, if Anderson did not handle it so firmly," and he noted also that the author had "steered clear of any glib moralizing about the hollowness of

On the subject of soap opera, Robert Anderson was once quoted as saying:

A lot of people call me sentimental and soap operaish. And that has always hurt, but I know why they do it. It is because I am writing about marriage and that is what soap operas are written about. It's easier, I think, to dramatize a bizarre situation that has no relationship to life than to come into an area which has been used so freely and try to make something meaningful out of it. I know I've set this problem for myself.  

Across the country, the critical reaction to The Days Between was, by and large, extremely favorable and many critics pointed to the play's universality. For example, a reviewer in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, stated, "Anderson who has always had a deep compassion for human shortcoming, has given a universality to David Ives that could make the play a classic." and Norman Nadel, complimenting Douglas Seale, the director of the Center Stage production in Baltimore wrote,

He recognizes the universality of what the play has to say, but knows that a 'Gotterdammerung' treatment would reduce the real to the ridiculous. So it remains at all times an intimate and domestic drama. Its magnitude lies in the brightness of its truth.

One of the most incisive reviews of The Days Between was

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82 Rubin, "Why Does Anybody Stay Married?", pp. 16-17.


written by the critic of the *Times Union* in Rochester, New York, which reads, in part,

Anderson writes with deep compassion for human shortcomings but he also probes deeply under the surface. He examines, lays bare failures as well as triumphs. And when he writes of marriage, the joy of a happy one and the hurt of an unhappy one; when he limns the acids which corrode love into hate; when he talks of the utter despair of loneliness and the fright of those who face it, he has no peer in the theatre today. Some of his lines are excruciatingly touching. . . .

The Rochester production of *The Days Between* is illustrative of an unfortunate experience which a few APT theatres had with Saturday night audiences, an experience which, to some degree perhaps, determined the form of the playwright's next work. At the opening, which drew excellent reviews from both Rochester critics, the audience was attentive and obviously touched by the play, but in its second performance, the Saturday night audience found some of the scenes quite funny. "My plays, even *Tea and Sympathy*, are not Saturday night shows, . . ." Anderson wrote after learning of the response of this Saturday night audience, "People want something festive and funny . . . Deborah used to hate to play *Tea* on Saturdays." In his notes to the APT directors, he had included this warning:

. . . there are booby traps . . . There have been in every play I've written. Kazan explained to Deborah in *Tea and Sympathy*,

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86 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, January 16, 1966.
'You're bound to get snickers and laughs . . . you're talking about things on stage that many people don't even talk about in their bedrooms.'

You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running

Following the Rochester production, the author gave a lecture in mid-January, 1966, at Baltimore's Center Stage in which he spoke of the reception his plays sometimes receive on Saturday nights and jokingly said that perhaps ladies "don't want to go out with a gentleman on Saturday night." His next work, he said, would be a play for Saturday night audiences where the hero would come on stage "stark naked with a toothbrush in his hand, saying, 'You know I can't hear you when the water's running.'" During the next two months, Anderson wrote an evening of one-acts which he called, "Four Plays for Saturday Night," a title he reluctantly changed to You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running. While trying to find a new title, he wrote,

An author should never consent to changing a title . . . it's a very personal thing. And if he does put it up for 'committee approval' he's doomed, because there has never yet been any agreement about titles. A play should come with a title, and that's that. Everyone tried to get me to change Tea and Sympathy, but I wouldn't. Now it's considered a great title! Oh, well . . .

Anderson's impulse in writing You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, of course, did not stem from a desire to be

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87 Anderson, "Notes to APT Producers," p. 3.
88 Anderson Tape No. 1.
89 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, January 16, 1966.
ungentlemanly but, he has said,

Suddenly I felt I wanted to write a man's play. . . . Most of my plays have been written, not for women, necessarily, but women seemed to enjoy them more than men. . . . I was really rather tired of this image of myself as a sensitive person, sensitive man, sensitive writer. 90

Having just completed I Never Sang For My Father, he felt that after "this rather slow type of work," he would like "to write something a little more lively," which would not need such painstaking planning and plotting. 91 Part of the inspiration also came from having directed his wife in Tea and Sympathy the preceding summer at the Chicago dinner theatre where he had enjoyed the intimacy of the small stage jutting out into the restaurant. More recently, he had seen a production of Cole Porter sketches in New York, and had been impressed by the informality of their presentation and by the small off-Broadway theatre in which they were done. "Somehow or other, this Cole Porter show made me come away feeling that I'd like to write something a little more spontaneous and immediate," Anderson has recalled,

where, in each instance, the play started on the third line, or something of that sort, where we were off and running—no slow development—where the characters were clear and easily visualized. . . . I had written this kind of play before, of course, the musicals and the sketches at Harvard and many re-vue sketches in the Navy. . . . Someone once called Water's Running a literary burlesque and I think one of the greatest influences on Water was my love of burlesque shows. 92

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90 Anderson Tape No. 1.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
All four plays in *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running* are built on an argument, one of the standard formats of burlesque. *The Shock of Recognition* begins with a quarrel between a playwright and his producer about nudity on stage; in *The Footsteps of Doves*, the argument centers on the merits of a double bed versus twin beds; sex education provides the basis for the disagreement between the husband and wife in *I'll Be Home For Christmas*, and in *I'm Herbert*, a senile couple wrangles over the identity of former lovers.

*The Shock of Recognition*, the first play in the series and the first to be written, came about partially from dinner party repartee about the trend toward complete nudity in the theatre, the idea that eventually actors might appear naked and might even make love on stage. Also, in the back of Anderson's mind was the jocose statement he had made in Baltimore about a naked man in his next play. "There had been a trick, something I had read a long time ago," he stated in his audio-taped commentary for this study, . . . that you might not be able to write the play you wanted to write, but you could step back and write about a playwright who wanted to write that kind of play. . . . So I said, 'Why don't I write about a playwright who feels that his next play is going to start with a man coming on naked, and that's what I did. I started out the play with all the arguments (with a straight face, of course, knowing full well, I thought at the time, why it couldn't be. Subsequently it's proved wrong, of course.) I listed all the arguments why: the books have it, the movies have it, art has it, why can't we have it, etc. And then, . . . the thing that really made the play, was the entrance of the actor into that dead set situation. . . . The idea of the actor sprang from all the years of casting that I've done, finding understudies and replacements and of how really quite pathetic and touching is the life of an actor. I remember when we were casting Deborah Kerr's understudy.
replacement, all the girls came in with their hair dyed red and wearing pink blouses (this being, of course, what Deborah wore in the last scene) . . . I had a great feeling for the actor. Your heart breaks for them when they come in for these auditions. As a matter of fact, it was odd that even when actors came to audition for replacements in this play, they would still say lines exactly out of the play, with a straight face, saying . . . my hair is long, or I haven't got my elevator shoes on, or I'm wearing a beard for a certain part, etc. 93

The last of the one-acts to be written was Footsteps of Doves which became the second play on the bill. Recalling the origin of this work (on audio-tape), Anderson has said that it resulted largely from

the number of trips I've made to bedding stores. There used to be a store called Norman Dine's Sleep Shop in New York City which had a basement where all the beds and mattresses were displayed. . . . I had the feeling after I'd been there a couple of times that, really, people could reveal an entire marriage in terms of how they picked their beds. . . . This is the play which I think is the weakest of the four but it seems to appeal to married people most. In any case, I get most letters about it (and about the third one). With this play, whenever I meet people at parties they say . . . 'You must have been eavesdropping in our bedroom ten years ago, or five years ago,' or whatever. . . . But, I think it's really just a device to reveal a marriage as most situations in drama are used to bring out the truth about any relationship. 94

The third play of the evening, I'll Be Homo For Christmas, was written shortly after The Shock of Recognition. Concerning its evolution, Anderson has said (also on tape),

I'll Be Homo For Christmas, again, is a conglomeration of things from my notebooks. I had heard the story once of a man who wouldn't get up one morning, just simply wouldn't get up. I think one of his sons had gone away, or quit his job, or decided not to follow on in his father's footsteps, . . . and

93 Ibid.

94 Anderson Tape No. 2.
suddenly, the man felt his life was pointless, so he just stayed in bed. It took a great deal of pleading on the part of the rest of the family to get him to realize there was something to get up for, etc. This, of course, all finally finds its way into the play in the letter from the son to his father. Now, I tried to write a whole play on this once and I have a notebook on it somewhere, the working out of this idea, how various people come in and try to get him to get up, etc. But anyway, it never worked out for me. I never seemed to be able to find the way to say it in a full-length play. I couldn't quite figure how to come in on it as a one-act, at first, whether or not to write it as straight drama. Very often it's played straight and that's unfortunate. It has to be played with a certain amount of exaggeration and grotesqueness; otherwise it doesn't hold. It becomes too much like Strindberg or some other serious naturalistic play. The woman has to be played larger than life, just as Eileen Heckart played it, which is rather prattling, a chattering insensitive woman. They talk at each other (she talks at him, at least). Once they start talking to each other and arguing in a reasonable way, the play really becomes something else again. I wanted to write about this man and again about trying to keep some meaning going in life, particularly in the sex life, and the sadness of it. Then, too, I have a feeling about young people—as Chuck says, 'I read but that doesn't mean I know what's going on in real life,'—but I do think within the very limited range of my knowledge of young people, that they are not so different from what we were. We all read different books; we talk differently. We all see more nakedness, more sex, but when it comes to the one-to-one relationship of a boy and a girl or a man and a woman, that hasn't changed very much. I wanted to point out that this girl (and that's why her entrance is really very important at the end, not just to read that letter), this girl comes on a fresh, lovely young thing, really quite sensitive and obviously concerned about the meaning of her sex life and obviously very much a girl of whom her father would approve regardless of whether or not she's a virgin and that was part of the story too. Very few people have ever known why it's called I'll Be Home For Christmas, which is the whole idea that when we were away at war, we played these war songs and dreamed of coming home, dreamed of the lovely perfect life that had been created by the letters we had written back and forth, the husbands and wives, and we all dreamed that this was the kind of world it was going to be. Of course, when we came home, we found the usual struggles and strife and good days and bad days so that's why he plays the music. It harks back to the time when he was leading an
idealized picture of marriage . . . and the reality of it, of course, was much more complex, much more difficult.95

In passing, it is interesting to note that Henry Hewes, who once suggested that Silent Night, Lonely Night would have been more effective in one-act form, felt that in I'll Be Home For Christmas, Anderson has opened up an area large enough for a whole play and we are left intrigued but somewhat unsatisfied with an outline that only suggests what should be explored.96

Curiously, of the many reviewers who praised You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, Mr. Hewes is the only critic to register surprise at the disclosure of Robert Anderson's gift for comedy. "One is delightfully surprised to discover," he wrote, "that the sober author of Tea and Sympathy and a number of other anguished plays, has a flair for comedy."97

I'm Herbert, the last play on the bill and the one most closely resembling a revue sketch, was written in a single draft. The idea for this work, however, had been conceived and developed in the dramatist's mind long before the actual writing. In his taped remarks, Anderson recalled that

The play was written in one afternoon when I didn't feel much like writing and I sat down and just wrote the darned thing. I was thinking to myself, 'I haven't written and I want to write so let's see what happens,' and I started out with the first two lines and never got up until it was finished. The next

95Anderson Tape No. 1.


97Ibid.
morning I looked back to try to rewrite it, and I could never touch it. The only thing we added was the bird call business in the beginning, because we had to give Eileen Heckart a chance to change her costume while George Grizzard was on stage. During rehearsal when we found that we had this technical problem, I put in the bird watching bit. Other than that, it was never changed.98

Although Robert Anderson has never mentioned the derivation of names for the old couple in this play, "Herbert" sounds remarkably like "Robert" and "Muriel," the name of the wife, happens to be the first name of Muriel Teresa Wright.99 Having been quoted many times on the autobiographical basis for the play, Anderson said (again on tape),

The last play, as you know, is the story about Teresa and myself. Although I've lived with old people, it's mostly the story you've heard a number of times about how I called her Phyllis for a few months and she occasionally still calls me by her first husband's name, and the famous trip, which she denies now, of course, . . . Anyway, one day when we were going west, she said, 'Why don't we drive via Denver where we had that good time,' and I said I'd never been to Denver and we started having an argument and at that moment it occurred to me—not just to tell a funny story about two people who couldn't remember each other's names, where they'd been and with whom—but a much more important aspect of it was that if you live long enough and if you've had enough women or men in your life, that they all fused into one at the end, and you accepted the role of all the other husbands or men that the wife had ever had and she accepted the role of all the other wives or women that you'd ever had and you drift off together. It all synthesizes into one person in each case, which I felt was rather a nice thought, and actually was greeted with considerable response from audiences of appreciation and understanding.100

98Anderson Tape No. 1.
100Anderson Tape No. 1.
The theme of remembered sex in this final play which rounds out the dramatist's study of sexuality from puberty to senility, and his shrewd comments in The Shock of Recognition on "the foolishness of our nothing-barred, everything bared trends in entertainment," are ideas newly introduced in this work. The several themes on love and marriage found in You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, however, are familiar Anderson motifs stated somewhat more boldly and clearly than in his serious plays on marriage and with the same maturity of attitude evident in Silent Night, Lonely Night and The Days Between. For example, one of the themes in The Footsteps of Doves is a repetition of an idea found in The Days Between concerning the impossibility of a perpetually happy marriage. Regarding this play and this theme, Anderson was once quoted as saying,

I think one of the things I'm constantly exploring in my plays is that you don't get married and live happily ever after. In You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, George says to Harriet, 'I want a divorce.' And she answers, 'You have a right to say I want a divorce three times a day and I have a right not to take you seriously.' Well, I think that's the way it should be. . . .

I believe that most people would be happier if they entered the married state knowing that it is one hell of a relationship . . . that it is torture and torment and wonder and beauty and almost everything else.102

Footsteps of Doves also deals with loneliness and the lack of communication in marital relationships. George, a man at war

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102 Rubin, "Why Does Anybody Stay Married?", p. 20.
with the inevitable fading of intensity and intimacy in his marriage, says to his wife, "You hear me, but you're not listening." Absence of communication and the inevitability of growing old are points at issue in I'm Herbert; and in I'll Be Home For Christmas, the idea of impaired communion is extended to include the relationship between father and son, as exemplified in the boy's letter stating that he has never been able to talk to his father and in this final line of the letter which reflects the original idea for the play: "Sometimes I don't know how you have the courage to get up in the morning." The playwright's comments on the overemphasis of sensation and sensuality in the theatre found in The Shock of Recognition are given more universal explication in I'll Be Home For Christmas where the wife's obsession with the technical aspects of sex education leave out the complicated and significant emotional meanings of human sexuality. As Chuck tries to make his wife understand,  

... Life is not, dear Edith, a desperate struggle for straining for the technically perfect orgasm. ... It's a laugh now and then. ... I think sex is beautiful ... one of the great blessings of mankind ... in all its forms ... as long as it involves no coercion, or injury or pain ... to anyone. ... However, he later insists, "There are other instincts ... of tenderness and affection. They're not good copy ... but they are there.  

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103 Anderson, You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, p. 41.  
104 Ibid., p. 77.  
105 Ibid., pp. 61-62.  
106 Ibid., p. 66.
In her attempt to find out what is bothering Chuck at the beginning of the play, Edith, in the phone call to her friend, states three recurrent themes—the search for meaning in marriage, the loss of communication, and the war with inevitability:

Edith

... Probably just one of his moods ... (She mimics broadly) 'What ever happened?' ... 'Where did it all go?' ... He used to scare the bejesus out of me when he started wondering about the meaning of it all ... I just don't listen any more ... because I know that when he starts saying 'What happened?' ... he's really meaning 'You happened.' As though I were personally responsible for the high cost of living and the menopause. I tell you kiddo, never marry a man at war with the inevitable. ...

Elaborating on this speech and on the characterization of Edith, Anderson has suggested that she may have been driven to her practical "push button" attitudes towards sex by Chuck's overly romantic concern for meaning. Somewhere in their marriage, they went their separate ways, and the playwright feels that Edith was not solely to blame. As Walter Kerr noted in his Sunday review in the New York Times,

Mr. Anderson doesn't say whose side he's on, because, unless I am mistaken, he doesn't know whose side he's on ... Most playwrights try to be answering-services. Mr. Anderson is content to be a line of communication. Maybe if we both pick up the phone at the same time we'll hear something. In any case, he hasn't called his work finished. He's still hovering, a bit apprehensive, resigned to the humor of it all, ready to relay the next tiny, tormenting, but unmistakably preposterous message, whatever it may be.

107 Ibid., p. 56. 108 Anderson Tape No. 1.

One of this play's central themes is the special sensitivity of the adolescent, his need for sexual privacy and the importance of sympathetic sex education and proper models for sexual behavior.

"Sex to them is full of spring and beauty and something old people like you and me don't experience," Chuck insists,

. . . They should feel something unique about love and sex . . . they should feel they're experiencing something unique and personal. . . . They shouldn't be checking off their reactions on some grand universal checklist. 'You know, Mom, that sensation you said I'd get? Well, I got it.' . . . And Ma, what do I do now? I pushed all the right buttons, and nothing happened.'

As in the case of the marriage themes, the recurring motif of adolescent sexual development is treated with considerably more directness than in Anderson's previous works, and nowhere in American dramatic literature is the subject handled with more candor and sensitivity.

Critic Tom Prideaux wrote of I'll Be Home For Christmas, "In 28 minutes, more gets said about the comic confusion and very real torments of an American family than many playwrights say in a whole evening," and of the four works, he said,

On the surface it might appear that Mr. Anderson is kowtowing to two Broadway fads: packages of short plays and brazen sex shows. But his short plays are more than random snacks from the icebox; they are unified in theme and point of view. And his bold discourses on sex are illuminating.

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110Anderson, You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, p. 65.

"Boldness" is a term critics have used also to describe

*I Never Sang For My Father*, as in Elliot Norton's review of this play's pre-Broadway opening in Boston:

...It is a courageous play, bold as it is honest and bold because of its honesty. It faces up bluntly to problems like old age and death, and dodges none of the hazards and none of the implications.

It is a play of memory: of a young man looking back on the last years of his mother and father, trying desperately to understand why he loved his father and hated him too, and never did succeed in breaking down the barriers of bitterness between them.

It is a richly mature play that seeks no easy answers and finds none, though it develops in the end to a positive action that is, in its way, heroic. It is good-humored, never pompous, often amusing. It is a drama of love and affection, but it avoids sentimentality.112

This review, which further describes the play as "a new American drama of dignity and distinction, ... a simple, quiet, modest, reminiscent, wise, mature and provocative"113 work, is representative of the tremendous enthusiasm of all the Boston critics and audiences in Boston and New York who shouted "bravos" and gave the play standing ovations.114

The tenor of the Boston reviews was reflected in the majority of opening night notices in New York, but the caustic charge of "soap opera" by Clive Barnes and later complaints of "old-fashioned" writing and lack of conflict in the superficial and self-conscious


113 Ibid.

reviews of *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Life*, discouraged audience attendance, forcing the play to close within four months, even though it became a controversial issue for a time.

Among the many letters to the editor of the *New York Times* in defense of the play, was one by author Rex Reed, who wrote,

Robert Anderson's 'I Never Sang For My Father' is a play which on its own brave level, attempts to say something to an audience about itself. It is, of course, so personal in its reflection of life, as Mr. Anderson sees it, that it becomes almost embarrassing to watch. But it is only embarrassing because it is also a re-enactment of life as many of us have also experienced it.

In my own life I have experienced the same lack of communication between father and son that Mr. Anderson's father and son have known. I have also known the same longings, the same frustrations, the same futility in the loss of a parent, the same self-doubts about where loyalty to flesh and blood should end and where self-obligation should begin. I sat in the theatre and I saw the truth as I have lived it. In the audience around me, people were moved to tears. Why shouldn't we cry in the theatre? Tears born of self-recognition are a lot healthier than guffaws born of vulgarity. . . .

In a long and thoughtful article in the Sunday *Times*, entitled "Why Can't I Feel Anything?", Walter Kerr examined the complex question of why people were either deeply moved or felt a strong antipathy toward the play. One of the problems, Kerr felt, was that as soon as the hero, Gene, (played by Hal Holbrook), came forward to tell the audience that he has always wanted to love his father (played by Alan Webb),

The focus of the evening shifts firmly to Alan Webb, crusty, filled with false heartiness, demanding, commanding and sealed off on his own mountain top. Mr. Anderson has written the part, and Mr. Webb plays it, with a kind of spiky reserve, never

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115 Rex Reed, "To The Editor:" *New York Times*, March 10, 1968.
cheating, never sentimentalizing, always stopping just short of making an intensely present man likeable. He is there, in all his contrary colors; we are not expected to hug him. The detail—in its fustian and in its frosty detachment—is beautifully worked out. . . . He is a prickly bastion, a fortress flying a deceptive flag of friendliness, fending off in his contrary variety all efforts at penetration—astringent in the writing, superbly armored in the playing. You believe in the firmness with which Mr. Webb puts his arms halfway about Mr. Holbrook's shoulders, and also in the decisive withdrawal that says halfway is quite enough. You believe, too, in Mr. Holbrook's interior desperation as he turns to mother Lillian Gish and sister Teresa Wright for help. . . .

Barriers to feeling, then are the meat of the play. They are also the method of the play. We are not to be let in where Mr. Holbrook is left out. But this whole matter of feeling and not feeling has certain curious effects upon the way the play works in the theatre and, apparently, the way it makes audiences respond. For one thing, the evening is inevitably a sustained standstill. Mr. Holbrook does not wish to do anything. He only wishes to feel something. That means that we are simply to stay with him while he tries, futilely, to stir a kind of response in himself that the object of his aborted affection is drawn not to invite. We cannot move; we can only examine impregnable aspects of character. We are going to repeat without advancing, end in stalemate. This difficulty on the whole is very nicely taken care of by Mr. Anderson's ability to sustain on the stage prodding confrontations between two people and by the strict discipline of the performing. . . .

Yet there is a further difficulty. What, and how much are we to feel? We are not to feel for Mr. Webb what Mr. Holbrook cannot feel; that would make an ass of Mr. Holbrook, or at the very least keep us from understanding him. I found myself fascinated by Mr. Webb, even developing a grudging respect for his cock-of-the-walk energies; but I didn't exactly like him, nor was I meant to. (Such a double play is undoubtedly possible, but it would require an ampler vision, a kind of poetic umbrella, that Mr. Anderson's spare speech and tethered characterization do not aim at.) Are we to feel for Mr. Holbrook's absence of feeling, then? Tricky.

Still, it was probably the last invitation that seemed to split the theatre down the middle on opening night. Around me I could see various members of the audience dabbing at their eyes; I could also see a great many who weren't, as I wasn't. No doubt those of us who sat interested but unmoved felt thoroughly guilty about it. . . .

There is some truth in Mr. Kerr's argument. Gene Garrison, one of the less colorful and more solemn of Anderson's autobiographical heroes, is greatly overshadowed by one of his most absorbing characters, the lively, eccentric and redoubtable father, and this brings about a certain division in dramatic focus. However, Kerr's statements that the hero "does not wish to do anything," but only to "feel something," and that "his suffering is gratuitous, self-generating" and selfish, are not borne out by the facts of the play. Gene is a sensitive and compassionate son who recognizes his father's need for love and understanding. He tells his sister, Alice, "... the 'old man' in me feels something very deep, wants to extend some kind of mercy to that old man. ... Maybe he's right. Maybe it is time we found each other." Gene also understands and fears the crippling effect of filial hatred, so that although his desire to love his father may be "more for himself" as Kerr suggests, it is certainly a salutary wish. The debilitating result of the absence of paternal affection is theatrically demonstrated by Alice in this touching speech:

I've always been grateful to him for what he did. He taught me a marvelous lesson, and has made me able to face a lot. And there has been a lot to face, and I'm grateful as hell to him. Because if I couldn't get the understanding and compassion from a father, who could I expect it from in the world? Who in the world, if not from a father? So I learned, and didn't expect it, and I've found very little, and so I'm grateful to him. I'm grateful as hell to him. (The growing intensity ends in tears and she turns her head.)

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117 Anderson, I Never Sang For My Father, p. 96.
118 Ibid., p. 98.
"... I wanted to love you," Gene says despairingly in his final confrontation. "You hated your father. I saw what it did to you. I did not want to hate you." By the end of the scene, however, he learns that paternal selfishness and hostility are inevitable.

Mr. Kerr's suspicion that "those who cry in the theatre have brought some of their tears with them . . . out of past guilt," is undoubtedly true, but this is surely a valid and valuable theatrical experience. "I think one of the reasons we go to the theatre is to feel less alone," Robert Anderson has said, and this idea has been expressed by many critics, including Martin Esslin, who once stated,

If art can relieve guilt feeling, . . . this, in my opinion, is wholly to the good. For that, after all, is what art is about: to make us aware of the common humanity which unites us all, to establish genuine communication between human beings at the deepest level, that of shared emotion.

In a letter to the Times editor, playwright Edmund Morris called Walter Kerr's remark about people crying out of past guilt, "most revelatory," and went on to say,

This statement stirred my memory. I went to my files and found Mr. Kerr's review of my play, 'The Wooden Dish,' also a drama about an aged father and his children. In that review Mr. Kerr wrote: 'There was one dry eye in the house and that was mine.' He implied I had moved the opening night audience to tears, but that he himself was above such vulgar display of emotions in a theatre.

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119 Ibid., p. 111. 120 Anderson Tape No. 1.
Since Mr. Kerr was averse to allowing himself to become emotionally involved with the hero, he naturally found "something excessive, something uncomonsensical," in the play, as did a few other critics, but the tone of the Kerr article reflects a considerable respect for the work and suggests a prickling of conscience over his inability to respond to it.

Harold Clurman is another critic who professed to be "not deeply affected," but admitted that he "was affected," and that he found it "a play of decent sentiment" and one with universal appeal:

... while it is not marked by the original articulation of an experience, it does represent an experience, a sincere setting down of what the author has lived through. That is always to be respected; it always touches off some intimate emotion in the spectator. It is not that he recognizes the equivalent personal situation in his own family but that he is reminded of the drama which in one way or another always exists between sons and fathers, be it one of love, of mutual resistance, of love's absence, or of a feeling akin to hatred. Something which has stirred the author awakens shadowy recollection of things which have stirred us. Whatever one thinks of Anderson's play as theatre or writing, it was written because of something actually felt by him and I always find this honorable.123

As indicated in the first chapter of this study, I Never Sang For My Father is Robert Anderson's most authentically autobiographical work to date. Except for the character of the sister, whom the author has described as "really the other side of Gene, an externalization of his inner conflicts,"124 and with the further exception of the final confrontation between Gene and his father,

124Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, March 29, 1969.
the circumstances as well as the characterizations in this play are essentially drawn from life. "We never had that final confrontation scene . . ." Robert Anderson has stated, "but there were enough almost similar scenes in the household to allow me to write that one without stretching things too far." 125

In a 1949 notebook of play ideas, the dramatist included this notation: "A serious play about my father, what he wanted in life and what he got out of it," 126 and scattered through his notes from 1949 to 1955 are numerous perceptions and impressions of his father's conduct and notations on his personal phraseology and idiosyncrasies. 127 In 1954, Anderson indicated that he had compiled a whole series of such notes for a work he had planned to write about his father, but felt that he did not then have sufficient objectivity. 128 A few of James Anderson's personal phrases are used by Tom Lee's father in Tea and Sympathy and certain aspects of his behavior and his relationship with his sons are recognizable in both Tea and Sympathy and All Summer Long. The father in Love Among Friends appears to have been drawn somewhat closer to the life model, but it was not until 1962 when he wrote the filmplay, The Tiger, 125

Ibid.


that Robert Anderson apparently felt ready to deal objectively with his feelings and to create a full dramatic portrait of his father.

The final confrontation scene does not appear in the original film script which ends with the father's death on the evening of the mother's funeral. In actuality, Anderson's mother died in the spring of 1959 and his father lived on until 1966. His last years were spent in Rochester, New York, in the hospital where his son, Donald, was director and dean of the medical school. By 1965, when *The Tiger* was adapted for the stage, James Anderson had, as the son-narrator says in his final speech, "drifted into complete and speechless senility."  

Aside from its different ending, the deletion of a few characters and scenes, and the addition of narration, *I Never Sang For My Father* adheres closely to the original film play and retains its episodic structure. Twenty separate scenes and locales flow together and overlap with cinematic freedom. "There are no sets," the author indicates in his opening stage directions, "Lighting is the chief means for setting the stage."  

In the Broadway production, the minimal properties and furniture were brought on stage by twin turntables which several reviewers found cumbersome and distracting. Although the Mielziner set was often described as ingenious, a number of critics felt that

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129 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, March 29, 1969.

it was too drably lit and too monumental and overpowering in feeling for the intimate nature of the play. It was Henry Hewes' opinion that the set was "most effective in the scene where, instead of coffins, projected rectangles of light are used to create the remembered image of a funeral parlor." Mr. Hewes went on to say, 

... that the whole play would have benefitted had it stayed more consistently within the mysterious world of memory as did The Glass Menagerie. For the best parts of I Never Sang For My Father are those that treat its important and unusual subject least literally and least logically... 

This comparison with The Glass Menagerie, which appears rather consistently throughout the reviews, derives from the use of the character-narrator who steps out of the action to elucidate the events and the themes of the play. Without the device of the narrator, the original filmscript was a straightforward chronicling of the story and the inter-relationships of the family characters, but with the introduction of narration, the play takes on an aura of remembrance. Although the narrative device tends to create a mood of nostalgia and allows for additional illumination of themes and personal feelings, it functions primarily as an effective expedient for setting the scene, bridging distances of time and place and supplying background information on characters and story. In keeping with these more practical objectives, and the verisimilitude of the dialogue, the poetry in the narration is carefully restrained. The tone is


132 Ibid.
matter-of-fact, and bears little resemblance to the narrative passages in *The Glass Menagerie*, as illustrated in these excerpts from the opening and closing, and from one of the narrations in the middle of the play:

**Gene**

. . . Death ends a life, but it does not end a relationship, which struggles on in the survivor's mind toward some final resolution, some clear meaning, which it perhaps never finds.

. . . Pennsylvania Station, New York, a few years ago. My mother and father were returning from Florida. They were both bored in Florida, but they had been going each winter for a number of years. . . . My mother read a great deal, liked to play bridge and chatter and laugh gaily with 'the girls' . . . make her eyes sparkle in a way she had and pretend that she had not had two operations for cancer, three heart attacks and painful arthritis. . . . She used to say, 'Old age takes courage.' She had it. My father, though he had never been in the service, had the air of a retired brigadier general. He read the newspapers, all editions, presumably to help him make decisions about his investments. He watched Westerns on television and told anyone who would listen the story of his life. I loved my mother . . . I wanted to love my father . . .

**Tom**

Drive carefully. I noticed you were inclined to push it up there a little. (Gene burns) Make a full stop going out the driveway, then turn right.

**Gene**

(Angry, moves further down) Yes, Dad.

**Tom**

(Calling after him) Traffic is terrible out there now. Used to be a quiet little street. Take your first left, and your second right.

Gene

(He has driven this route for many years) Yes.

Tom

Then left under the bridge. It's a little tricky down there.
(When he gets no response, he calls) Gene?

Gene

(In a sudden outburst) I've driven this road for twenty years, for Christ's sake!

Tom

Just trying to be helpful. (The lights fade on Tom as he goes back into the house. Gene is now downstage)

Gene

Take your first left and your second right. Then turn left under the bridge. But do not go as far as California, because it would kill your mother. . . . I hated him for that, for sending up warning flares that if I left, it would not be with his blessing, but with a curse . . . as he had banished my sister Alice years ago for marrying a Jew . . . and the scene so terrified me at fourteen, I was sick. . . . He knew his man . . . that part of me, at least . . . a gentleman who gave way at intersections. . . . And yet, when I looked at those two old people, almost totally dependent on me for their happiness. . . . This is the way the world ends, all right. . . .

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Tom

(Shouting) I don't want anyone to come in! I can take care of myself! Who needs you? Out! . . . I have lived each day of my life so that I could look any man in the eye and tell him to go to hell!

(This last, wildly at Gene. The lights dim out quickly, except for a lingering light on Gene)

134Ibid., I.41-43.
(After a few moments) That night I left my father's house forever... I took the first right and the second left... and this time I went as far as California... Peggy and I visited him once or twice... and then he came to California to visit us, and had a fever and swollen ankles, and we put him in a hospital, and he never left... The reason we gave, and which he could accept, for not leaving... the swollen ankles. But the real reason... the arteries were hardening, and he gradually over several years slipped into complete and speechless senility... with all his life centered in his burning eyes. (A Nurse wheels in Tom, dressed in a heavy, warm bathrobe, and wearing a white linen golf cap to protect his head from drafts. The Nurse withdraws into the shadows) When I would visit him, and we would sit and look at each other, his eyes would mist over and his nostrils would pinch with emotion... But I never could learn what the emotion was... anger... or love... or regret... One day, sitting in his wheelchair and staring without comprehension at television... he died... alone... without even an orange in his hand. (The light fades on Tom) Death ends a life... but it does not end a relationship, which struggles on in the survivor's mind... toward some resolution, which it never finds. Alice said I would not accept the sadness of the world... What did it matter if I never loved him, or if he never loved me... Perhaps she was right... But, still, when I hear the word 'father'... (He cannot express it... there is still the longing, the emotion. He looks around... out... as though he would finally be able to express it, but he can only say...) It matters.

(He turns and walks slowly away, into the shadows... as the lights dim)

Curtain

I Never Sang For My Father represents still another search for meaning in an intense and complex personal relationship and takes the form of another elegy. The general theme of responsibility, inherent in the marriage plays, is here given broader significance as in Tea and Sympathy and All Summer Long. Again, the hero becomes

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135 Ibid., II.112-13.
wholly committed to a moral obligation, but his actions are inef-fectual, partly because of a larger unresolved social problem, as noted by critic Alan Bunce in *The Christian Science Monitor*:

The play greatly increases its impact by raising a broad social question in powerful personal terms. Time and again as the son struggles to know how much of his life should be devoted to this difficult elder, one faces the disturbing picture of senility in a society that has no room for it. The question is more than how this man will resolve his own ambivalence. When he argues with his sister against leaving the father, he says he can't stand to see 'a man who was distinguished, remarkable, just become a nuisance.' His revulsion at the idea of conveniently discarding his father has a grounding in a legitimate social concern that has not yet been solved by our present society.

But this is only half the issue. Mr. Anderson links these broad social issues with Gene's own ulterior motives, moral uncertainties, and troubled relations with the man. Thus it is with some justice that the sister claims Gene simply can't face the father now any more than he could as a boy, that he is still being a good son instead of a man.136

The struggle for maturity, therefore, is another recurrent and important motif embodied in this work. By his eventual acceptance of the adjustment which every man must make to his father, the hero achieves a conclusive but saddening maturity. In Gene's final realization of the hopelessness of perfect love and understanding between father and son, and particularly in the line, "Alice said I would not accept the sadness of the world," the playwright is again seen to be coming to terms with inevitability.

In the first chapter of this study, it was suggested that Robert Anderson's war with inevitability, his instinctive hatred

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for absolutes, rules and musts, may have resulted to a considerable extent from the influence of his father's perfectionism and the lack of paternal warmth and understanding. "But don't forget," the playwright recently stated.

My Dad came from the generation of men who, more or less, left the wife to bring up the children. Also, he never had a home, so he didn't know how to be a complete Father. (Who does?) He was a Dead End Kid, and I dare say he turned out just about 100 percent better than any other Dead End Kid. He had courage and determination and 'a will of iron'. We suffered from all this, but we also benefitted. He gave us fine educations, a substantial home, and love, as he understood it. He was a 'good' man. He just was never very relaxed or accessible. And he was a disciplinarian, always expecting more than the best . . .137

While the degree of parental influence in the shaping of a life or a career is always indeterminable, it should be noted that Robert Anderson's sense of perfection, acquired initially from his father, has contributed substantially to his success as a dramatist. Demanding "more than the best" from himself has become a principle of his teaching, as indicated in these remarks to aspiring playwrights:

It may sound terribly pompous, but I don't think the writer has any business thinking about success or failure. I think he should only think about doing his best. Success is a by-product of doing your best . . . sometimes.138

137Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, March 29, 1969.

The Apprenticeship

In a poll once conducted by the Dramatists Guild among established playwrights, the Guild found that it was approximately ten years between the time a person wrote his first play and the time he "arrived" on Broadway. Had the Broadway option on The Eden Rose materialized in a production, Robert Anderson's career would have fit this statistical pattern almost exactly because The Eden Rose was completed in 1947, just ten years after he began writing plays. While Anderson attained success as a radio dramatist in 1949, his debut on Broadway with Tea and Sympathy did not take place until four years later. The period of his apprenticeship, therefore, was longer than that of many professional playwrights and the body of his apprentice work is appreciably larger. It includes approximately twenty one-acts, thirteen full-length plays and scores of radio and television dramas.

Because of the inaccessibility of the plays for radio and television and the fact that almost all were adaptations, these have been excluded from this study. However, the broadcast dramas, written between 1949 and 1953, represent a significant segment of the apprentice work and one of the most important phases in Anderson's maturation as a dramatist. As he has stated, it was through the writing of the radio and television scripts that he became a professional. In his adaptations of great plays and novels, it was

often necessary to eliminate much of the original material and to create entirely new scenes based on the first author's characters. An examination of the broadcast works may, in the future, provide additional insights into the final stage of the apprenticeship. A study of these adaptations might, in fact, reveal considerably more in the way of development than do the early theatre pieces.

As learning exercises, the plays Robert Anderson wrote in college show little in the way of dramaturgic growth and are important mainly as evidence of talent and as indications of themes he has continued to explore throughout his writing career. From the standpoint of talent, it is notable that *Dream Dust*, his first one-act play, won honorable mention in a national playwriting contest and that even in his most youthfully awkward works, a sense of theatricality prevails along with a perceptible aptitude for characterization and a facility with language seldom found in beginning plays by young writers. Energy and verve in dialogue and an awareness of that which is dramatic are qualities especially apparent in his verse plays and in *Midnight Dialogue*, which provides the earliest evidence of his gift for comedy.

Among the thematic concerns which appear in the college plays and which were to obsess the playwright in later works, are the sadness and heartbreak of marriage, the crippling effect of a loveless parental relationship, loneliness, guilt, and suicide. The idea of the misfit, subsequently developed more deeply and interestingly in *Tea and Sympathy*, is a motif found in the first one-act and in
The Gate and Straw in the Wind. The latter play also contains the germ of one of Anderson's larger themes, the search for meaning. With the exception of Midnight Dialogue, all the college plays contain elements of protest and a rejection of compromise which suggest another major and pervading theme, the war with inevitability. Robert Anderson's continuing preoccupation with these early motifs and with ideas introduced in the Navy plays and in The Eden Rose has given the present body of work a noticeable sense of unity.

Another interesting aspect of the apprentice plays is the fact that they were based on a variety of models. Through college Maxwell Anderson was the playwright whom Robert Anderson most admired and the influence of this older dramatist is strikingly apparent in the early verse plays. Although Robert Anderson has never read Both Your Houses, the similarities between this work and Come Marching Home are intriguing. The Noel Coward influence, especially evident in Midnight Dialogue and Straw in the Wind, provides a curious contrast with that of Maxwell Anderson. As Robert Anderson has noted, these two dramatists "made interesting poles of attraction."\(^{140}\)

While Come Marching Home is an obvious attempt to write in the well-made-play form of Ibsen, and though the majority of Anderson's works for the stage follow this structural pattern, the playwright feels that Ibsen was less influential in relation to his development

\(^{140}\)Anderson, Tape No. 1.
than were some other dramatists. "For many years," he has stated,
people used to think Ibsen was the great influence on me. He wasn't necessarily although I admired him enormously and
studied him greatly from the point of view of playwriting. I used him in my lectures on playwriting, but I think the
mood, for better or worse . . . derives from the softer people . . . the Behrman's and the Barry's and even Sir James Barrie,
and Van Druten . . .141

Among his favorite playwrights were Robert Sherwood and
Clifford Odets,142 but the style of neither of these men is readily
observable in any of Anderson's plays. Oddly enough, he was not
drawn to the work of two of the most popular dramatists of the day,
O'Neill or Shaw, "except for Candida," he has stated, "... I was
a very romantic young man . . . always in love . . . and since my
girl was older than I was . . . Candida appealed."143 In reaction
to John Gassner's definition of All Summer Long as a Chekhovian
play, the author has said, "I don't think I was very much influenced
by Chekhov. Better if I had been."144

Considering the thematic and structural parallels that
exist between the plays of Robert Anderson and Phillip Barry, it
would seem that Barry was one of the most influential playwrights
whom Anderson attempted to emulate in his early writing. The simi­
larities are particularly apparent in the plays about marriage, in
which both authors are deeply concerned with the problem of what
constitutes a good marital relationship. Barry, like Anderson,

141Ibid. 142Ibid. 143Ibid. 144Ibid.
"attempts to look at all sides of a problem, to see the problem whole." Critic Joseph Roppolo has noted in his book, Phillip Barry.

In *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, for example, Eve Redman, after an act of adultery, finds fulfillment in her conventional marriage; in *The Animal Kingdom*, Tom Collier, after a conventional marriage, finds his fulfillment in possible adultery. In neither play is Barry condoning or recommending adultery, nor is he upholding conventional attitudes toward marriage in one play and tearing them down in the other. Instead he is concerned in both with the problem of individual fulfillment and with his firm conviction that marriage is a spiritual union with claims that supersede in every instance the demands of flesh alone.

In the depth of their examination of marital problems and in their unconventional attitudes toward adultery, Anderson and Barry share notable likenesses. One of the thematic concerns in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* is the desire for children, a recurrent motif in Anderson's plays. As Mr. Roppolo has observed, "Barry's highly personal view of the world is expressed in this play through a remarkable blending of themes." The technique of interweaving numerous themes in a single work, which Anderson began to utilize in *Boy Grown Tall* and which became a standard practice in his succeeding works, probably derives more from the Barry model than from any of the other apprentice archetypes. In his study of Phillip Barry, Roppolo concluded that the theme of responsibility unites all of Barry's work.

This theme, introduced by Anderson in *Come Marching Home* and expanded

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in his following plays to embrace responsibility to marriage and family as well as to society, may likewise have emanated from the dramatist's affinity for Barry's plays.

The works of both authors reveal structural similarities in their lack of violence and in their dependence on subtle nuances rather than on overt action and high climaxes. John Gassner has described Phillip Barry as "a master of plot,"\textsuperscript{149} and Robert Anderson as "a master-builder."\textsuperscript{150} Gassner's description of Anderson as "a gentleman in the age of literary assassins,"\textsuperscript{151} is reminiscent of his depiction of Barry as "one of nature's gentlemen," and as a writer with a "fundamental grace in his personality and art."\textsuperscript{152}

Gracefulness of style has often been noted by critics in the plays of both authors and there seem to be a number of similarities between their two temperaments. Roppolo points out that Barry was a perfectionist, "a prodigious taker of notes," who worked with material from life and that (also like Anderson) he was an essentially serious writer even in his comedies.\textsuperscript{153} Echoing Montrose


\textsuperscript{152} John Gassner, "Phillip Barry, a Civilized Dramatist," \textit{Theatre Arts}, December 1951, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{153} Roppolo, \textit{Phillip Barry}, pp. 116-125.
Moses' description of Barry as "a lovable playwright," Roppolo goes on to say that "as a craftsman, Barry won the admiration of all who worked with the theatre in any capacity. . . . they recognized too his 'tremendous capacity for love' and his determination to offer the public the best and truest that was in him." These comments could as well be used to characterize Robert Anderson who has inspired similar admiration and affection among his fellow workers in both the professional and the non-commercial theatre.

As noted earlier, Straw in the Wind was fashioned on the writing styles of both Phillip Barry and Noel Coward and Anderson's second graduate school play, Undiscovered Country, vaguely resembles Barry's fantasies, In a Garden and Hotel Universe. The Barry influence, however, is more apparent in the Navy works, particularly Boy Grown Tall, in which the author began to combine a variety of personal themes and in which his thematic interests seem to have synthesized conclusively around the intimate relationships of life.

"Some critics have said that I'm almost the only playwright working who keeps mousing around in the man-woman relationship as it concerns most people," Robert Anderson has stated.

I have often been criticized for hanging around the family themes...for not seeking larger areas...politics, war...etc... But in the end you're stuck with your own strengths, interests and limitations.


155 Roppolo, Phillip Barry, p. 64.

156 Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 20, 1968.
Recalling an experience at the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies, in the summer of 1968, where he discussed American theatre with a group of some forty European students, Anderson said,

... so many of my students couldn't understand why I and other American playwrights weren't more interested in politics. I perhaps have withdrawn too much into the personal sphere...but I feel that's what I know about. I wrote a very ringing speech at the end of *Sand Pebbles*: 'Damn your flag! Damn all flags! It's too late in the world for flags.'

... I've been called a Communist and various other names for this. I just don't feel I know enough about politics to write authoritatively about it. And I don't believe generally in just... doing a reporting job... It limits me, I know. Maybe I'll get some confidence in that direction one day.157

Anderson believes that family matters are still a valid area for the dramatist and that when these themes are deeply explored they can become significant throughout the world. Remembering a story he heard just after the war about a counselor having been sent to Europe to discuss problems of marriage, he has remarked,

... it seemed rather incongruous at the time when they had other things to think about, and it struck me in much the same way as when that girl used the phrase, 'tea and sympathy', on a night many many years ago. It struck me that even in war-torn Europe, marriage was still an enormous problem, still one of the causes of our greatest blessings and our greatest woes. And I'm sure politicians and presidential candidates and vice presidents, etc., etc., are just as involved with the core of their life, which is marriage... as is anyone else.158

Since *Boy Grown Tall*, the core of a man's life, his family, his marriage, love and sex, has persisted as Anderson's thematic concern. In the final plays of his apprenticeship, *The Eden Rose*,

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157Letter, Robert Anderson to David Ayers, April 2, 1969.

158Anderson, Tape No. 1.
the 1948 version of *Tea and Sympathy*, and *Love Revisited*, the evolution of sex and love as the wellspring of story and character motivation has been observed in conjunction with simultaneous developments toward both economy and complexity in all phases of dramaturgy. Throughout his master works, beginning with *All Summer Long*, intimate family stories have provided the framework for larger themes having to do with responsibility, inevitability, the search for maturity and for meaning, all related to the core of life as Anderson perceives it.

The Measure of the Man

In a 1958 article in *Theatre Arts* entitled "The Playwright: Man and Mission," Robert Anderson wrote:

> The mission of the playwright . . . is to look in his heart and write: to write whatever concerns him at the moment; to write with passion and conviction. Of course the measure of the man will be the measure of his plays.¹⁵⁹

At mid-point in his career, with only a portion of the data in, Anderson's literary and theatrical contributions are naturally immeasurable, and his work cannot yet be placed in historical perspective. In relation to the developmental nature of this study, however, two trends within the current body of master works are particularly notable. The first is a tendency toward greater freedom and theatricality in dramatic expression which began with the

playwright's interest in the thrust stage and which follows the directional course of modern drama. This development in Anderson's work can be observed in the contrast between the restrained and reticent use of theatrical elements in *All Summer Long* and *Silent Night, Lonely Night* and the frankly theatrical staging techniques and episodic structure of *I Never Sang For My Father* and *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*.

A second major trend is the previously noted maturation of attitudes, the gradual acceptance of life's inevitable imperfections and the growing appreciation for the complexities of human relationships as exemplified in *Silent Night, Lonely Night* and to an even greater extent in *The Days Between*. This mellowing process is reflected somewhat grudgingly but amusingly in an article Anderson wrote for *The Dramatists Guild Quarterly* which contains an often quoted phrase he once coined to the effect that a playwright should be able to make a living and not just a killing in the theatre. In the early part of this essay entitled "The Theatre Is Such an Impossible Place, Maybe It's Meant Only for Miracles," he stated,

> At this point I should say that this is the eighth draft of this piece I have written. In the first seven I came off looking so grumpy that I couldn't stand myself. So I have rewritten myself into a mood of affirmative resignation . . . acceptance of things as they are and probably always have been and always will be.160

"The mood of affirmative resignation" is strikingly apparent in

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You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running, the play which also shows most decidedly a reduction in intensity of the romantic commitment since the early plays on love and marriage.

Speaking of the personal quality of his writing, Anderson has often discussed the "nakedness" of the creative artist. In a television interview he once stated,

The closer I come to a certain nakedness, the better I write. I'm always surprised when I have written something that I consider very naked, always surprised to see that it hits other people. I think one of the reasons we go to the theatre is to feel less alone and I think when I say how I feel very personally and very privately, others sometimes find they feel that way too and leave the theatre a little less alone.161

Walter Kerr has attributed the current trend in physical nakedness in the theatre to Anderson's sensing of the future wave of nudity and "giving it the one gentle push it apparently needed."

In a recent New York Times Magazine article, he wrote,

I wonder if Robert Anderson ever wants to take it all back. It was Robert Anderson, really, who got us into this whole thing. He was the very first person to suggest, however whimsically, that a theatrical producer just might want to send an actor out on stage in the nude, and what is more, he hinted that when producers and playwrights did become brave enough to do plays in the buff, they would have no difficulty finding actors braver than they... Mr. Anderson dropped his curtain before the actor could drop everything, no doubt in the belief that that was the real end of the joke and that no one would, honest to God, go any further... Scarcely before Mr. Anderson had made his joke, the old solidities on which we thought the world—and comedy— rested had vanished. Somebody hadn't thought the notion was far out at all. Somebody had stopped laughing, or never laughed

161Anderson, "Portrait in Playwriting."
in the first place, and simply taken up the dare. Come on naked? What an interesting, original, provocative, courageous, serious idea...

In his taped comments for this study, Anderson recalled Stephen Spender's phrase "nakedness is all" which he used repeatedly in the past to describe the sense of personal nakedness the writer needs in order to communicate effectively. "The other day," he said in his taped commentary,

I saw a play called Geese in which two young men strip naked in the first ten minutes of the play and go to bed together and make love, etc. etc., and I suddenly thought, I'd like to say about the modern theatre in that connection, nakedness is not all—that it isn't enough that people be physically naked on stage. It isn't enough that this is presumably so ground breaking and so revolutionary. It really leaves us knowing less about human beings than we knew before we went into the theatre. We know what they look like. I think this other kind of nakedness that Spender talks about, the nakedness of emotion, personality, psyche, etc., is far more important than physical nakedness...

In conjunction with nakedness of expression, Anderson has consistently written out of personal concerns which have also been universal concerns. In terms of that which is meaningful, he has been a bolder and more ground-breaking playwright than those currently considered revolutionary for their use of nudity and illustrated sexuality. Speaking gently, carefully and candidly about the most private areas of experience, he has communicated with audiences and touched them more deeply than any of the current breed of "literary assassins."


163 Anderson, Tape No. 2.
Robert Anderson has served the American theatre not only as a dramatist but as a dedicated teacher and as a leader and administrator in important theatrical organizations. One of the prime movers in the establishment of The New Dramatists Committee and a former president of the group, he also became a partner in the illustrious Playwrights Company and presently serves as a member of the Council of The Dramatists Guild and as a Governor of American Playwrights Theatre.

Four of his five Broadway plays have been selected as best plays of the year. His original movie, *A Small Part of a Long Story*, is soon to be produced as are the film versions of *Silent Night, Lonely Night* and *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*. A fourth new movie is *The Strangers*, adapted by the author from *I Never Sang For My Father*.

Having recently completed a long one-act which he describes as "quite a departure for me . . . funny-sad, way out, called *The Last Act is a Solo*," the playwright is now at work on a companion piece. With two plays on Broadway in the last three years and with the probability of a New York production of the new one-act plays in the 1969-70 season, Anderson appears to have entered the most prolific phase of his theatre career. Whatever his future output, when the measure of the man is taken, his work to date will assure him of a position of stature in the drama of the twentieth century.

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Tape No. 1 and No. 2. Mr. Anderson responded by audio-tape to two lists of questions from the writer. The first taped response, approximately four hours in length, was received October 26, 1968. The second tape, containing approximately one hour of commentary, was received on January 16, 1969. References to these taped responses are indicated in the body of the work as Anderson Tape No. 1 and No. 2.

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