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Elmer Rice: A Critical Evaluation of His Full-Length Published Essays

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by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PRINCIPLES, INFLUENCES, THEMES

Elmer Rice (1892— ) in a long and fruitful career as essayist, novelist, and playwright has figured prominently in the history of the American drama and theatre. His concern and love for the theatre have been made evident not only by his plays, whose critical reception has not always been favorable, but also in perhaps less obvious ways: his essays in the New York Times on the nature, condition, and obligations of the drama as an art form and a social force; his authorship of The Living Theatre which treats the history of the drama in general and the development of the American theatre, viewed from within by one who helped shape its history; his membership, often in a managerial position, in such organizations as The Author's League of America, The Theatre Guild, The Dramatists' Guild, The Playwrights' Company, The National Institute of Arts and Letters, and The Federal Theatre Project. These things coupled with his considerable success as a prolific playwright distinguish Elmer Rice as a potent force in the development and growth of the American theatre.

While the character and extent of his contribution to American theatre history may not be fully assessed until some distant future time when the definitive history can be written,
still some assessment can be made now since his most significant work is already a part of that history. Many of Rice's plays have been cited frequently in works dealing with the development of realism on the American stage. Rice has also been distin­guished in works dealing with the drama as a social phenomenon and a political weapon, most recently in Gerald Rabkins' Drama and Commitment where the author calls him un homme engagé in regard to his involvement with social and political ques­tions. But none of these works take sufficient note of the contributions Rice has made with regard to the form as well as to the content of American drama. This dissertation purposes, therefore, to use principles of formal criticism to evaluate the form and matter of Rice's full-length published plays. Hopefully this chronological study will illustrate the great variety of dramatic modes and themes used by the playwright throughout his career. In some cases it will also be possible, through the analysis of individual plays, to show how his influence was immediately felt; in other cases it will be possible only to demonstrate the impressive variety of tech­niques which became part of the creative milieu, which at least could make other playwrights aware of the numerous possibilities of the dramatic form.

Rice himself has frequently commented on the importance of dramatic form, on the techniques of plot, character, and

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dialogue which enable a playwright to communicate his creation to his audience. In The Living Theatre he explains the relationship between creation and communication thus: "In the main, the processes of creation and communication are wholly dissimilar. One is spontaneous and self-initiated activity of an individual, the other an organized industrial or technological process." The action of the artist, therefore, is compounded of sub-conscious and conscious activities. Moreover, never satisfied with facile craftsmanship, Rice several times has made his concern for technique emphatically explicit:

It seems to me that the importance of technique is too often ignored. I believe it to be not merely the framework of art, but almost its very essence. I know of no great artist who is not a superlative craftsman. For it is craftsmanship that channels the tumultuous flow of fantasy and gives body and form to the nebulous stuff that dreams are made on. And again in his recently published autobiography, Minority Report: "I have never lost my interest in technical innovation, partly to counteract the constricting effect that Ibsen has had upon the drama, partly because I enjoy setting myself puzzles." Rice's own concern for form, then, makes the analytical approach to his plays employed in the present study more compelling. Also, these and other statements by Rice, particularly in his

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historically oriented The Living Theatre, show that he has been not only a practitioner but also an avid student of the drama; and that he is not at all reluctant to cite and praise those who have influenced his thought and techniques most seriously.

Among the playwrights Rice lists as having influenced his playwriting are Shaw, Ibsen, Galsworthy, Chekhov, Stringberg, Bjornsen, Hauptmann, Sudermann, Brieux, Pinero, and Henry Arthur Jones. His primary interest in these writers is accounted for not only because of their common interest in "problem plays" but also because of the techniques which they were able to teach him. Of especial value for Rice's inclination to realism were Shaw, Ibsen, and Chekhov. His own talent for realistic techniques has often been noted by critics. Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, commends Rice's keen ear and shrewd eye: "No matter what milieu he chose to present in a play, one might be sure that its salient features would be recorded with an exactitude which both the camera and phonograph might envy." In this regard, it seems that Chekhov was most helpful to Rice who discusses, in The Living Theatre, Chekhov's influence on the development of realism in modern drama:

It is not reality, but the illusion of reality that the realistic dramatist attempts to depict; and the inspired use of a significant phrase may be more

\[5\] Ibid., p. 86.

revealing than pages of transcribed stenographic notes. This is clearly exemplified in the plays of Chekhov. The seemingly casual and rambling conversation of his characters has a cumulative effect, and in the end we are aware of a searching exploration of their minds, hearts and souls and of an understanding of their relationships to each other and to the world they live in.7

This "inspired use of a significant phrase," we shall see, contributes much to Rice's dynamic dialogue where such a phrase often characterizes a minor representational figure with more clarity, precision, and suggestiveness than is enjoyed by the major characters of many other playwrights.

Ibsen, another master of the modern realistic drama, is also lauded by Rice for his commitment to social issues. According to Rice, Ibsen helped to shape the problem play in which, for the first time, "man was shown as a social animal, and social forces, rather than gods or dynasts, as the masters of his fate."8 But by far the most important influence on Rice was that of George Bernard Shaw who, in greater degree than either Chekhov or Ibsen, affected his playwriting and his philosophy.

Rice describes his introduction to Shaw through Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant as "cataclysmic":

Doors and windows opened, bells rang, lights went on and horizons widened. It was the most revolutionary

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7 Rice, The Living Theatre, p. 108. See also Minority Report, p. 286 where Rice states, "Though I could not hope to emulate Chekhov, I was undoubtedly influenced by the delicate tapestry of his plays."

event to happen in my life, in an intellectual sense. I immediately went after everything I could lay my hands upon which Shaw had written. . . . All this was before World War I, and I can say without exaggeration that the total effect altered my life, my way of thinking, my whole mode of life—everything. For one thing, I became a socialist. I still am, I think, though perhaps with a few reservations! There was opened to me a whole new world and a whole new orientation in politics, in religion, in education, science, art and sex—in all these things completely new ideas, new ways of thinking, and new attitudes toward life, which have colored everything I have done and everything I have thought since."9

The number and enthusiasm of these remarks concerning Chekhov, Ibsen, and especially Shaw are certainly helpful in appreciating Rice's own work. While their influence in particular instances is difficult to estimate, generally they do help to clarify Rice's position on the nature and function of drama. For just as Rice shared Shaw's enthusiasm for a particular form of socialism in the political arena, so too he shared his conviction that drama should provide its audiences with education concerning pressing social issues: though he could not mount it with the piercing insight and fantastic wit of Shaw, Rice too would have the drama as his pulpit.

Underlying most of his serious themes, then, is Rice's form of socialism; it is neither Marxism nor Leninism, but a liberal socialism in which the individual is given ample opportunity for self-direction and self-development and where the fruits of industry "are employed primarily for the satisfaction of human needs, rather than for the enrichment and aggrandize-

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9Rice, Minority Report, p. 86.
ment of a few individuals."10 His familiarity with the works of Shaw led Rice to investigate other advocates of his liberal socialism: the Fabian Society, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Annie Besant, and Graham Wallas. He also found eloquent revelations of the corruptions, cruelties, and hypocrisies of the existing social orders in the novels of Charles Dickens, Charles Reade, Emile Zola, Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris, and H. G. Wells.11 For the most part, then, literature rather than economic theory led Rice to advocate socialism and to protest vehemently if not always eloquently particular inequities of the capitalistic system. His most impressive attack was on the evils of industrialism in the expressionistic plays, The Add­ing Machine and The Subway: the expressionistic mode makes the nightmare of dehumanization in these plays all the more vivid. More particular or topical but related problems were attacked in other plays: child labor in The House in Blind Alley; slum conditions in Street Scene; the cruel power of big business and the powerlessness of the working class without unionization in We, the People; the ignorance and unconcern of the moneyed classes in Between Two Worlds, Flight to the West, and A New Life.

But looming even larger as a recurrent theme in Rice's plays is the most important ingredient of his definition of liberal socialism: the freedom of the individual to strive for and to achieve self-determination and self-integration.

10 Ibid., p. 462. 11 Ibid., p. 137.
As a matter of fact, freedom of the individual is for Rice the surest and most appropriate means to social betterment. Speaking in his autobiography of his gradual realization of the importance of this concept, he says,

I believed, and still believe, that social evils are the accumulation of individual acts of aggression and malice, and that social betterment can be achieved only through individual affirmation and creativeness. Since to be creative one must be free, I was determined to speak out for freedom, both in my work and by whatever other means were available.12

Although Rice's ultimate concern here is obviously for the improvement of the social order with individual freedom a principal means to that end, that individual freedom is considered an end in itself also. Speaking of his unpublished novel, Papa Looks for Something, Rice comments, "It was a psychological parable of a man's struggle to liberate himself from servitude, conformity and his own inhibitions, a theme that has obsessed me all my life and that has recurred, in one way or another, in almost everything I have written."13 Later in his autobiography he reiterates, "Self-integration and freedom have always been the subject of almost everything I have written."14 In light of Rice's frequent outbursts on censorship and his ramifications of the principle in his plays, these statements may be judged forthright and sincere.

Whether Rice's plays concern the evils of industrialism, the excesses of an unrestricted capitalism, or the threat of

12 Ibid., p. 143. 13 Ibid., p. 226.
political extremism and tyranny, the theme of individual freedom always plays a large part and is reflected in both major and minor characters: Zero in *The Adding Machine*, Rose Maurrant in *Street Scene*, George Simon in *Counsellor-at-Law*, Allen Davis in *We, the People*, Connie Dale in *American Landscape*, and Charles Nathan in *Flight to the West*. The analyses that follow show that each of these characters faces an antagonistic force—sometimes a person, sometimes a social or political power—that threatens his self-direction and development as a free personality. At times the struggle ends in defeat as in the case of Zero and Allen Davis; in other cases, such as those of Rose Maurrant and Charles Nathan, the individual triumphs. The steady recurrence of this theme is compelling evidence of Rice's passionate conviction of its importance.

Inspired, then, by these convictions and his love for the theatre, and encouraged by his discovery of Ibsen and Shaw as sympathetic thinkers and excellent playwrights, Rice sought to give expression to his ideas in dramatic form. He saw his commitment to these convictions and his hope for the growth and development of the American drama as equally significant parts of his public role as a playwright. Thus, he never tired in efforts to disseminate these ideals and constantly sought new ways to expose them in his dramas. Although audiences and critics were not always receptive to particular points of view in Rice's philosophy, they had to admit that here was a playwright of undeniable stature, that here was a playwright of
imagination and power whose knowledge and management of dramatic techniques and the flexibility of his form were indeed impressive.

Rice's excellence as a technician was recognized at the very outset of his career. Critics hailed On Trial as "a triumph of dramatic construction," as "a play that has the impertinence to be a good play instead of a well-made play."  

And the plaudits continued for a major portion of Rice's career. Counsellor-at-Law was praised as "a sound piece of theatre craftsmanship, a play built up of a hundred pieces of closely observed character and detailed business, all fitted together into a closely knit whole."  

We, the People was cited as a superior propaganda play: "It is full of expert characterization, of clearly etched scenes with swift incisive action, of dialogue that, for the most part, has authentic tang and flavor."  

Flight to the West, one of the most exciting anti-Nazi plays of its decade, was also praised for its structure: "Even the discussions are so merged in the action that they never retard it. For the student of dramatic technique it is a lesson in skillful integration. Subjective and objective action

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15 Ibid., pp. 120-121.
16 Rosamond Gilder, "Broadway in Review," Theatre Arts, XXVII (1943), 16-17.
17 Richard Dana Skinner, "We, the People," Commonweal, XVII (1933), 411.
Rice has been praised not only for his general technical ability, but also for his inventiveness and ingenuity in using traditional forms. In the course of his career he has attempted species of tragedy, melodrama, sentimental comedy, farce, expressionism, naturalism, realism, and the propaganda play. Because of this impressive variety of forms, critics have been unable to categorize him; his versatility is as commendable as it is unique.

In light of the author's preoccupation with form and the general agreement of critics on his superior craftsmanship, therefore, it will be a part of our purpose in the course of this paper to demonstrate the impressive variety and technical faculty in this playwright's major works. An analysis of these plays, which will include a structural study of plot, representation, characters, and dialogue, and an evaluation of recurrent themes, should help, moreover, to assess the just and deserved place of Elmer Rice in the history of modern American drama.

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18 Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "Flight to the West," Catholic World, CLII (1941), 596.
Elmer Rice's first play, *On Trial*, was produced in 1914 and published in 1919. This courtroom melodrama gave Rice an opportunity to use his experience as a lawyer and to demonstrate his ability with the manipulation of incidents, particularly in the arrangement of flashback scenes. These were facilitated by the use of a jack-knife set in its first appearance on the American stage. Audiences and critics alike were impressed with the novelty of the technique, though Rice was ready to admit that it was a conscious "gimmick" and that the play, as Brander Matthews pointed out, broke no rules of dramatic technique.\(^1\) Each of the flashback scenes, which visualized the testimony of witnesses, carried the action of the present time forward.

The principal action of the plot concerns the trial of Robert Strickland for the murder of Gerald Trask, a business associate who, Strickland discovered, was having an affair with the latter's wife, May. The action of the play is neatly framed within a Prologue and Epilogue which respectively provide the exposition and resolution of the sensational actions contained in the intervening three acts where the significant testimony is given. In the Prologue the prosecuting attorney, convinced of

\(^1\)Rice, *Minority Report*, p. 121.
Strickland's guilt, presents the relevant details of the case: Strickland's repayment in cash of Trask's $10,000 loan; his knowledge of the safe's combination, which enabled his mysterious accomplice to empty the safe after Strickland shot Trask in the presence of the victim's wife; his immediate apprehension by Stanley Glover, Trask's secretary; Strickland's frank admission of guilt and his refusal to testify; and finally the mysterious absence of May Strickland since the day of the murder. This last detail prepares the audience for her sensational return in Act III when she wins sympathy from the audience and acquittal from the jury for her husband.

It is in the three acts following the Prologue that Rice shows his ability with the arrangement of incidents. At the end of the Prologue Mrs. Trask takes the stand, and the scene shifts to the Trask library on the day of the murder for the first scene of Act I. Mrs. Trask discusses with Glover the romantic escapades of her husband over the past fifteen years, the most recent the previous weekend at Long Branch, their summer home. They are interrupted by Trask who mentions that Strickland has just repaid the loan and that he gave him the new safe combination on a business card by mistake. Glover leaves as the Trasks argue about his love affairs, including one with a young Miss Deane thirteen years earlier, a detail that becomes significant in Act III. Trask, in contrast to Strickland, has never been a faithful husband. Trask manages to pacify his wife with a promise for reform as the telephone
rings with a call from May Strickland calling to warn Trask that Strickland is on his way to kill him. While he still has the receiver in his hand, Strickland enters and fires two shots at Trask, the second shot killing him. Glover rushes into the room, and in wresting the gun from him breaks Strickland's right arm---another significant detail that is employed skillfully in the Epilogue. The following scene returns to the courtroom where Joan Trask continues her testimony in the present time to tell the court of the disguised burglar who rifled the safe in the confusion. Glover takes the stand to confirm Mrs. Trask's testimony and adds that he took from Strickland the card with the safe's combination which, he says, Strickland attempted to destroy. Glover has a suspicious tendency to offer more than is asked for and is reprimanded by the judge and defense attorney. To this point the audience is still confused about Strickland's motive, which it is the business of Act II to clarify.

In the first scene the doctor who examined Trask's body is questioned first. Then, Doris, Strickland's nine-year-old daughter, takes the stand to tell what she remembers of the night of the murder. The second scene uses the flashback technique again to dramatize her testimony. In the Strickland library May is nervously calling the railway station to see if they have found a purse she lost at Long Branch. She neglects to mention the loss to Strickland who enters to her and Doris. Strickland, obviously an affectionate husband and father, has
just returned from Cleveland. Trask enters the Strickland home to receive the repayment of the loan. He and Strickland are very friendly, but May behaves awkwardly in his presence. After Trask leaves, a woman calls to return May's lost purse. Reluctant to accept it before her husband, May contends it is not hers until Strickland definitely recognizes it and in it finds a card with Trask's Long Branch address. When May hesitates to offer an explanation, Strickland realizes that she and Trask have had a rendezvous, takes his gun and rushes from the house. May, sobbing hysterically, telephones Trask as the curtain falls. This telephone incident serves to unify the testimony given in Acts I and II. The next scene returns to the courtroom as Doris describes hearing gunshots during her mother's call and May's quick departure immediately after. The incidents of the second act function not only to gain sympathy for Strickland's motive but also to arouse suspense about the circumstances of May's affair with Trask. The most significant testimony, then, is left for the third act.

The scene is the courtroom on the following day when it is discovered that May Strickland has returned. She identifies herself as May Deane Strickland, the young girl Trask had attempted to marry bigamously thirteen years before. The second scene returns to the scene of May and Trask's proposed wedding day in Great Neck. May's father arrives in time to inform the naively ignorant May that Trask is already married. The third scene returns to the courtroom after this sensational
revelation, and May tells how she had accidentally met Trask again when he called on her husband during the latter's absence in Cleveland. Recognizing May, he threatened villainously to reveal all to Strickland and, moreover, to ruin him in the business world if May did not join him for the weekend at Long Branch. May painfully insists that the whole affair was her fault.

Scene one of the Epilogue takes place in the jury room where eleven members have voted for acquittal, but one for conviction because of the theft involved. The jury asks that Glover's testimony be reviewed to see if the accusation is just. In the final scene of the play, the audience at a peak of suspense, Strickland takes the stand and denies the theft as well as attempting to destroy the card with the safe's combination. The examining physician also testifies that Strickland's broken arm would prevent his tearing the card as Glover had alleged. Glover is recalled, the doctor's testimony is read before him, and he confesses to the theft. Glover is led away as the jury delivers the acquittal, and the Stricklands are reconciled.

Although On Trial lacks the greater distinction of subsequent plays, it did show the promise of its apprentice author. The play enjoyed 365 performances in New York and was taken throughout the country by touring companies.² Certainly the sensationalism of the plot and the deft manipulation of

²Elmer Rice, "Author! Author! Or, How to Write a Smash Hit the First Time You Try," American Heritage, XVI (1965), 46-49, 84-86.
incidents as well as its use of the novel flashback device accounted for a great deal of its popularity. Barrett H. Clark discusses Rice's use of the technique to present the pertinent past and compares it unfavorably with Ibsen's technique in *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm*. In Ibsen's plays, "there is no visible return to the past: it is unfolded by means of dialogue and its results are made manifest in the present. 'On Trial' interests us only when the past is visibly returned to, with the result that it is made too vivid, and the proper perspective is lost. The past cannot be so vivid as the present." 3 Although Clark's distinction is pertinent, one must admire Rice's conscious but careful use of the device. In its three occurrences --the first two to present the proximate past, the third the remote past--Rice manages artfully to soften the distinction between past and present time within each act; thus in all three cases, transitions are established by the witnesses who continue their testimony in the subsequent scene in the present time of the courtroom. The audience, then, is constantly reminded of the relevance of the past to the present action.

In keeping with the melodramatic form, moreover, all incidents of the play, both past and present, are packed with violent action, emotion, and suspense. Rice was aware of the contrived nature of his play, and later admitted that reviewers were perhaps too enthusiastic over his talents as a craftsman:

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"But a good theatrical craftsman is not necessarily a worthy dramatist, a distinction that the reviewers had failed to make." Rice admitted also that the characters and dialogue of the play are without distinction. Having neither depth nor individuality, the characters exist merely for purposes of the plot; the dialogue carries the action forward but is, for the most part, colorless.

In spite of these reservations, *On Trial* is a good melodrama, and its importance for Rice's future work is considerable. Of special significance, and evident from the summary of the play's action, is Rice's handling of incidents, the primary component of melodrama. The swift succession of action-packed scenes, each contributing integrally to the exposition, complication, and resolution of the plot, reveals a logically coherent arrangement. No action is irrelevant; even so apparently insignificant a detail as the torn business card with the safe's combination is accurately placed and manipulated credibly. And even though the characters are two-dimensional, enough of their personalities is revealed to make their motivation adequate and plausible. *On Trial*, then, reveals Rice's ability with elementary but integral facets of the dramatic form; his subsequent plays would show that this talent would not lie fallow. While critics would debate the quality of certain scenes in individual plays, they would seldom question the relevance or function of

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5 Ibid., p. 112.
a scene in a play's structure.

Rice's second full-length play is less remarkable than On Trial in its plot structure, but especially significant because it is his first major attempt at a drama of social criticism. Rice's target in The Iron Cross is the ruthless and nonsensical brutality of war. Urging the play's composition in 1915 was Rice's belief that people overlooked the fact "that war itself is the most monstrous of atrocities, by its very nature bringing out the bestiality in men." 6 His recent success with On Trial as well as the timeliness of an anti-war play brought Rice the promise of a Broadway production. Unfortunately, however, financial problems with the leading lady caused an excessive delay and the producer's eventual loss of interest. The Iron Cross was finally performed by the Morningside Players on February 11 and 13 in 1917, concurrent with the breaking of diplomatic relations between the United States and Germany. 7

In four well-constructed acts Rice attempts "to debunk the male heroics of militarism in terms of the drama of a soldier's wife whose sole concern is in conserving the enduring emotional value of the home and the family." 8 The wholesale calamity that engulfs the nation at war is suggested at the

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6 Ibid., p. 135.
outset of the play set in agricultural East Prussia. Margaret Dreier, the heroine of the play, mourns the loss of her husband William's nineteen-year-old brother whose body is covered and flanked by candles in the Dreiers' living room. Margaret fails to be consoled by William's praise of his brother Paul's honorable death in the service of his fatherland. Adding to her distress is William's announcement that he too must go to the French front as a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery. Margaret is sad but brave at the news. At this point their neighbor and close family friend, Karl, arrives. He too has been drafted in spite of a weak back and chronic lameness. A clock-maker, Karl feels that his eyes may be useful to the army; he is, however, less enthusiastic about his conscription than William, and this early lack of enthusiasm for the military foreshadows Karl's later role as an outspoken critic of the war. Ironically, too, he will lose his sight as a result of his participation. While the two men are preparing to leave, the postman arrives with an official announcement of Paul's promotion and the awarding of the cherished Iron Cross. While Margaret is unmoved by the reward and Karl replies sarcastically that he would prefer Paul alive, William expresses his great pride in the honorable and conspicuous bravery of his late brother. When Paul's sweetheart Marie enters, William reprimands her for mourning. After the girl leaves in hysterics, Margaret tells him that Marie is pregnant with Paul's child.

The following two incidents intensify the dismal mood
of the play as Captain Halbe enters to place the Iron Cross on Paul's body. Karl retorts sarcastically again about the costliness of the award when a young child runs in to announce that Marie has just drowned herself. When they are left alone then, Karl and William dispute the justice of the war. While Karl reasonably wonders about the sincerity of men's desire for peace and wishes that all men would lay down their arms, William blindly contends that they are not to concern themselves with problems of justice and with thoughts that are traitorous. Their discussion is interrupted by the sudden arrival of Frieda, Margaret's sister who breathlessly relates that their sister Bertha was raped and brutally killed by Cossacks from whom she managed to escape with Bertha's young children. When Frieda faints, Margaret and William carry her to a bedroom, and Karl attempts to amuse one of the children by giving him Paul's Iron Cross to play with. The couple returns with William's oath to avenge the honor of his dead sister-in-law. Karl then takes his leave so that William is left to say good-bye to his wife. Emphasizing the supreme importance of their country's freedom and honor, William reminds Margaret of her duty as a loyal wife to take care of their home. His last gesture is to give her a gun so that, should she be attacked by Cossacks, she may kill herself rather than be dishonored. After William leaves, Margaret comforts her sister's child who has pricked his thumb on Paul's Iron Cross.

The second act brings to a climax the promise of
destruction given in Act I. Karl, blinded in the war, now stays with Margaret who cares generously for her friend. Added to Margaret's burden, already heavy because of the work she has been doing during the past six months for the neighboring villagers, is the arrival of Bertha's wounded husband, Heinrich, who lies incoherent on the couch. Frieda has stayed with Bertha's children at Margaret's farm too, and both women work tirelessly. Karl commends their work, pointing out the irony of their saving, healing, and rebuilding while men at war kill, burn, and destroy. The mail then brings a letter from William and a warning from the deliverer that Cossacks have been seen in the area. Unable to read, Margaret has one of the children read William's short letter which assures them he is well and which reminds Margaret again of the honor her husband expects of her. Captain Halbe then enters and warns that the Cossacks are approaching. Karl advises Margaret to flee with Frieda and the children, but there is no time. Margaret then finds the gun given her by William and prays for guidance. When Heinrich moans and she puts the gun down to help him, Frieda, now frantic with the remembrance of her sister's rape, seizes the gun and shoots herself as the Cossacks enter and attack Margaret.

The sensational ending of Act II is well counterpointed by the muted tone at the beginning of Act III, the most important incident of which is William's return at the end of the act and his foolish response to Margaret's long sacrifice. Two years later than the time of the preceding act and one month
after the end of the war, Heinrich reluctantly prepares to leave with his children. Heinrich shows his mean selfishness by complaining testily of the burden left to him by his wife. Concerned more for his own than his children's welfare, he is afraid no one will care for him. Expressing his intention first to Karl, who flatly accuses him of stupidity, Heinrich asks Margaret to marry him since it seems unlikely that William will return. Margaret is firm in her refusal to the preposterous proposal, and contends that William is sure to return. Rice includes this incident to present the crass ignorance of men like Heinrich whose greed and selfishness precipitate the causes of war. The following incident, which occurs after the sorrowful departure of Heinrich and his children, bears more immediately on Margaret's central problem. Rose, a young neighborhood girl, expresses her concern over the anticipated return of her fiancé from the war; she wonders whether her having unwillingly borne a Cossack's child will affect their relationship. Margaret assures her that he will recognize her bravery in thinking of her sickly mother and her fiancé's happiness above her own. Ironically, Margaret feels her similar good and unselfish intentions will be understood by William. Then, among the cheers of the villagers, William makes his appearance at the farm. Although he has lost an arm, he has many decorations, including the Iron Cross. After his happy reunion with Margaret and Karl, he is told of Frieda's suicide. Alone with Margaret, he is horrified to learn that
she allowed herself to be dishonored by the Cossacks; he refuses to accept her explanation that the care of their neighbors, friends, and relatives superseded thoughts of her own safety. Calling her a shameless coward, William leaves the house, confident that the Fatherland will provide for him.

Act IV brings the plot to a swift and satisfying conclusion. After three months of William's absence, Margaret expresses to Karl her confidence that God will take care of William. Because she has invoked God's will for events both good and bad throughout the play, Karl scoffs at her pious attitude. His objection is that this dependence on God encourages her to overlook the wickedness and stupidity of men who are largely responsible for their chaotic conditions. In the following incident, Rose enters; she has been living with Margaret since the death of her mother and is still hoping for the return of her fiancé. Alone with Karl she tells him how she often dreams of her beloved's return, when suddenly she perceives a uniformed figure approaching. To her disappointment, it is William who appears, pale, haggard, with a torn and dirty uniform and his feet wrapped in rags. William confesses to Karl that he received no help from the government—ironically, they were not even impressed by his medals. Although he has been forced to return home, William assures Karl that he still considers honor more important than life itself. Karl then berates William for the abuses he has heaped on Margaret whose sense of true honor has preserved William's home; his place,
Karl points out, is at Margaret's feet. William refuses to discuss the matter further when Margaret returns and is shocked by his appearance. Without speaking she prepares water to bathe William's bleeding feet. Deeply moved, he attempts to apologize to Margaret who assures him that everything is understood. In the last words of the play, William penitently utters: "Karl, you are right--my place is at her feet."

Although it lacks the clever structural devices of On Trial, The Iron Cross also adequately demonstrates the young playwright's careful attention to dramatic unity and coherence. Each incident contributes positively and simultaneously to Rice's bitter indictment of war in general and to the heroine's conflict with the concept of honor. Thus, action and idea in this melodrama are well coordinated to show not only the brutality, immorality, and senselessness of war but also how war causes a distortion of human values including the virtues of justice, honor, and love. The symbol of the Iron Cross is simply but carefully directed to these ideas: war places an unreasonable burden on man's shoulders; it injures the innocent (the child's pricking his thumb on the medal at the end of Act I); and after the period of crisis, its principles of honor are no longer recognized.

While action is still the predominant element in this melodrama, both characterization and dialogue show improvements over Rice's earlier play. Minor figures are credibly portrayed, and roles of Karl and Margaret especially are carefully
conceived. Margaret's role commands a genuine pathos that in spite of the play's generally dismal tone seldom falls to sentimentality. The dialogue of the play is also more solid than in *On Trial*: especially remarkable is Rice's careful handling of the verbal duels of Karl and William; for the most part, they express sentiments that are familiar without being hackneyed.

The *Iron Cross*, then, in spite of its too brief production, has considerable relevance for Rice's later work. First, he would use a dramatic symbol again and with greater imagination in *The Adding Machine* (1923). Second, the quick succession of melodramatic incidents to give an overwhelming sense of calamity piled on calamity he would employ again in such a play as *We, the People* (1933) which portrays the oppressive circumstances of the Depression. Finally, and certainly most important, *The Iron Cross* initiates Rice's concern with issues of contemporary social significance. The special problem of war is treated often in *Judgment Day* (1934), *American Landscape* (1938), *Flight to the West* (1940), and *Love Among the Ruins* (1950), but the concern with social problems generally would direct most of Rice's playwriting for the next three decades.

Rice's next full-length play gave him the opportunity to further his Shavian ideal of presenting urgent social problems to the public through the medium of drama. Written in 1916, but never produced because of production difficulties, and published in 1932, *The House in Blind Alley* presented the problem of child labor. Appalled by the working conditions he
had witnessed on a trip through North Carolina cotton mills, Rice sought to encourage corrective legislation in a three-act play which combined realism and fantasy in a melodramatic protest.

Realistic opening and closing scenes frame the allegorical core of the play's action. The first act begins in the library of John Furst, a kind and loving father reading "Mother Goose's Fairy Tales and Nursery Rhymes" to his young son Jack, who pretends he is Jack the Giant Killer. Their game is interrupted by the entrance of Uncle Jules, John's brother, who invites John to invest in a new coal company. John hesitates because of the poor working conditions the laborers endure, a matter that Jules contends is not the concern of investors. John promises to think the matter over, and Jules leaves as Grandmother leads in a little girl she found on the back porch. The girl, Ellar, is a typically ragged and barefooted product of industrial corruption. She has never been to school, and her life revolves about her job as an oyster-shucker at the wharf. Moved to compassion, the family agrees that she should be allowed to stay with them until morning when her father may be summoned. After the Grandmother leads the children out, John falls asleep in his easy chair; his dream is the subject of the following scenes in a fairy-tale setting.

The scene opens with John's young son in the role of the Giant Killer stopping by a rock in a country road. A Fairy Godmother (the Grandmother of the preceding scene) with her
gander approaches and tells Jack of two fierce giants, Janfirst and Julfirst (John and Jules) who have enslaved all of the country's children. She asks the Giant Killer to accompany her daughter, Cinderella (Ellar), to a ball in order to insure her safety. When the Giant Killer agrees, the Godmother gives him gifts that will help protect the couple: spectacles ("They will make you see things as they are rather than they seem to be"), a flashlight ("It will illuminate the darkest places and will reveal things that would otherwise be hidden from the eye"), and her gander. After the Godmother's exit, Jack falls asleep and so is unaware of the approach of Janfirst and Julfirst who gloat over their successful trickery of the people. Janfirst wakes Jack and assures him that he is a good giant, that he does not devour children, and that the Fairy Godmother is mad. As they talk, a procession of fairy-tale figures passes: Tommy Tucker as an oyster-shucker, Humpty Dumpty as a coal miner, the Little Girl with a Curl as a cigar-factory girl, and a host of others including Jack Horner, Peter Piper, Miss Muffet, and Little Boy Blue. All of the children wear chains and collars, emblems, says Janfirst, of the Giants' school. As each passes, the gander sings an appropriate verse:

Humpty Dumpty's labor is light:
He picks out slate from anthracite.
Though he chokes with coal-dust and aches with strain,
Do you think that should make Humpty Dumpty complain?10

10 Ibid., p. 38.
When Cinderella at last approaches, Janfirst, a very eloquent and persuasive rhetorician, tries to convince Jack that that she is the worst of the lot. When Jack is unconvinced, Janfirst struggles with him while Julfirst runs in to snatch Cinderella away. Jack recovers and with the gander follows in quick pursuit.

The second act opens at the door of the Giants' House in Blind Alley where Jack futilely demands that he be let in. Jack entreats passersby to help him gain entrance, but each offers some hollow excuse. As Rice had presented child laborers allegorically in the first act to illustrate their shocking condition, here he presents, allegorically too, various figures from society who refuse to admit any obligation to rectify conditions. Peter White, a blustering politician, is the first to pass and excuses himself on the grounds that he is a democrat. He is followed by Simon Grundy, a newspaper publisher, who offers Jack one hundred words on the sporting page as soon as the baseball season is over. They, in turn, are followed by a procession of other uninterested figures including a Fine Lady who is too busy to become involved; a lawyer who pleads "no precedent"; Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee who, as scientist and clergyman, are too busy arguing the Science vs Faith controversy; and finally the Miller of the Dee, a business man who rants,

I'm the backbone of the nation. The earth revolves about me. The newspapers, the stage, the government--they're all run to suit me. And
Still alone, Jack screams to be admitted, and Janfirst agrees to take him in if he is blindfolded. In the following scene, Jack enters the house and Janfirst removes the blindfold. A rosy light envelops the place so that Jack is unable to see the children in cages and hard at work. He is impressed at first until the gander gives him the magic spectacles and he sees things as they really are. A fight ensues in which Jack kills Julfirst, but is overcome by Janfirst and dumped into Cinderella's cage.

In the first scene of the third act the fairy-tale children of the first act are led in with a whip, and the members of the pageant in the second act are welcomed to a banquet by Janfirst. When they are informed of Julfirst's murder, they attack Jack, condemning him as "Agitator! Demagogue! Socialist! Sentimentalist! Nihilist! Anarchist! Muck-Raker! Sensationalist! Revolutionist!" In the background is a monstrous machine that carries the children on a conveyor to ovens where they are transformed into golden loaves of bread to be eaten by the guests. By the time Jack reveals the horrible structure to the guests by means of his magic flashlight, all of the children, including Cinderella, are consumed by the machine. Frantically they struggle to free the children; they succeed only to find that they have all been changed. Emerging aged and haggard,

11 Ibid., p. 62. 12 Ibid., 76.
Tommy Tucker appears as an alcoholic, Georgey Porgy as a gangster, the others too as representatives of every vice and degradation caused in great part by the corruption of industrialized society. Each of the guests, now conscience-stricken, offers to take care of the poor creatures: Rice seems to be saying that society is ironically more ready to rehabilitate or condemn the effects rather than to eliminate causes of the situation. At the end of the procession, Jack finally emerges from the machine, carrying the dead Cinderella. Overcome with grief, he dies at her side. The scene ends with the arrival of the Fairy Godmother who condemns the bystanders with,

You've done that. You've killed them. You've killed the twin spirits of childhood. You've killed the fairy princess that was in the heart of every girl and the Giant Killer that was in the heart of every boy.\(^{13}\)

The final scene returns to John Furst's library where he is awakened from his nightmare by Grandmother, who tells him that Ellar and his son are missing. Subsequently the children are led in by a man from the oyster cannery. Young Jack confesses that he went to the cannery to kill the giant. His father, now aware of the significance of his dream, promises that he too will help slay the giant.

Commendable again in this modern morality play is Rice's careful construction and arrangement of incidents. Even the long processions of characters in Acts I and II are saved from monotony by the variety of the figures themselves and also

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 87.}\)
by the author's use of varying degrees of satire in their dialogue. In the hands of a lesser playwright, these incidents might be weighed down with mere repetition; in Rice's hands they result in a useful parallelism or balance which culminates in the confrontation of victims and their unwitting persecutors in Act III.

Although Rice occasionally slips into sentimentality in the presentation of the fairy-tale children, they serve his allegorical purpose well in presenting a more than adequate cross section of the pitiable child-labor force. His characterizations of the predominantly ignorant but also hypocritical public from Peter White to the Miller of the Dee are far more successful. No one is spared from his sharp-edged criticism, not even those with whom one might think Rice would be more sympathetic such as the philosopher-poet, "The Man in the Moon." His is the case of the ivory-tower artist who shuns involvement with real issues. Rice satirizes his position in his dialogue:

I am the Universe! I am Infinity! I am Eternity! I am the Incarnation of the Illimitable II! I am the Apotheosis of the Unabashed, Unanalyzable Ego!

His only suggestion to Jack for saving Cinderella is, "Let her liberate her Ego." Rice's conception of the artist, therefore, includes his sincere commitment to vital human problems; anything less is narcissism.

Irony and satire are used by Rice not only in his characterizations but also in the presentation of his theme. The

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14 Ibid., p. 55.
central irony is, of course, the blindness of the public to glaring social corruptions in labor. Rice's satire is, for the greater part of the play, gentle but serious. In the third act, however, it becomes incisive and bitter. This is evident in his presentation of the confused dismay of the banquet guests at witnessing the malicious transformation of the fairy-tale children into criminals and other degraded types as they emerge from the hellish machine. Yes, they can act decisively; they are ready to insure penal institutions for some of the victims and rehabilitation for others. But they stupidly ignore the first causes of the whole situation, the correction of which could make ineffectual remedial measures less necessary.

The child labor situation was remedied shortly after Rice completed this play. Though his protest in this case was unpublicized, the experience in writing this kind of play was valuable. Due to its confining topical subject, however, the play is neither as universal nor eloquent as protests registered by Dickens or Shaw against similar corruptions. Nevertheless, the experience of working with satire, and a firm resolution on his part to be involved in the perfection of his society would be useful to Rice in his later social dramas. His willingness, also, to employ non-realistic techniques showed an imagination of promise, a promise that would soon be fulfilled through expressionism in The Adding Machine (1923).

During the successful production of On Trial on Broadway, Rice took up residence in Hollywood to work as a screen-
writer for Samuel Goldwyn. There he found the creative atmosphere stifling, and he yearned to return to Broadway. He was relieved, therefore, when Hatcher Hughes arrived to finish their collaborative effort, The Homecoming which was retitled Wake Up Jonathan. Rice admitted that Hughes, who was to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1924 for his local-color drama, Hell-Bent for Heaven, had done a workmanlike job in adapting the play to the talents of Mrs. Fiske. The play enjoyed relative success in 1921 with 105 performances, but satisfied Rice only insofar as it kept his name alive in the theatre. 15

The main plot of this three-act sentimental comedy involves the third-act conversion of Jonathan Blake, a successful industrial magnate, from his materialistic philosophy of worldly success to a realization of more precious human values, particularly those found in a family relationship. The most interesting aspect of the play's structure is the presence of a sub-plot which, at least in part, reflects aspects of the principal action and theme.

In the first act, the Blake children on Christmas Eve are awaiting the arrival of their father, Jonathan, who has been away for ten years becoming a financial success. While their mother, Marion, goes to the railroad station to meet their father, they are entertained by Randall, a young poet and school teacher who is also the suitor of Helen, eighteen and eldest of the Blake children. During the children's discussion with

15Rice, Minority Report, p. 181.
Randall on the reality of Santa Claus, Adam West arrives with his young companion, Jean. Adam, it seems, is a poet and a wanderer who immediately wins the affection of the Blake children with his warm and whimsical nature. Their comment on his shabby appearance leads Adam to discuss the merits of material wealth and to advise them to carry their pocketbooks on their right side and never on the left, "Because, if you do, your heart and your pocketbook may grow together—and when you think you are opening your heart you'll only be opening your pocketbook." This statement assumes functional importance later in the play when the children witness their father acting in precisely this way. Because they recognize his values as those fostered by their mother, the children are convinced that Adam is their father but plan to keep their discovery a secret. The sub-plot is then put in motion with the entrance of Helen and Brent, a budding civil engineer, ambitious, materialistic, egotistic, and also a suitor for Helen's hand. Brent is, as later events show, a carbon copy of Jonathan and a foil to Randall whom he readily identifies with Adam as a shiftless dreamer. After a brief and bitter confrontation between Brent and Randall, Adam and Helen discuss their relative merits. To help Helen choose between the two suitors Adam tells her a parable of two men and a woman in an identical situation. Later events again reveal that the characters in the parable are none

other than Jonathan, Adam, and Marion. When Marion returns from the station, without Jonathan, and sees Adam, their surprised recognition is interpreted by the children to mean that Adam is indeed their father.

The second act opens with a discussion scene between Adam and Marion who reminisce. Adam regrets losing Marion to "Jonathan the Conqueror," and Marion's story of the long separation from her husband evokes his sympathy. Marion faithfully contends that Jonathan still may change, but thanks Adam for his concern and for the values he taught her, values which she in turn taught her children. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Jonathan who fulfills all expectations of his egotistical pomposity. He is so busy expatiating about his one hundred million dollar success that he fails to see all that he has missed. His only reason for returning, he offers, is to see that his children continue the tradition he has begun; he sees them, then, only as extensions of himself. To Marion's comment that he has subordinated his family to his work he ironically replies, "I have and I don't regret it. Even you must see that if I had not taken the stand I did at the time it would have been impossible for me to become myself--to have accomplished what I have accomplished."17 Before Marion leaves to get the children, she introduces Randall as Helen's suitor to Jonathan who immediately offers him a lucrative job. When Randall refuses, Jonathan points to Adam (ironically his rival for

17 Ibid., p. 49.
Marion in the past and for the children in the present) as an embodiment of the failure for which Randall is heading. Immediately after Randall exits, Brent enters so that the similarities between his personality and philosophy and those of Jonathan are made explicit. In his first meeting with the children who are led in by Marion, Jonathan, rough, loud, and coarse, fails miserably. The children refuse to believe that he is their father and cling to Adam.

In the third act the sub-plot is resolved in the elopement of Helen and Randall; Helen, avoids, therefore, repeating her mother's mistake. Jonathan is pacified by thinking that at least Randall had the courage to know and take what he wanted; he then offers to console Brent with the offer of an $8,000 position. Brent is eager to be consoled by the proposition. Then, jealous of Adam's success with the children, Jonathan insists to Marion that he leave immediately. Marion, however, suggests that they allow the children to decide whom they would prefer for a father. After a series of awkward failures, including a $100 bribe to denounce their belief in Santa Claus, Jonathan is finally convinced of his mistake and in a short repentance speech concludes,

No you've got me beaten now. I admit it and I'm going to keep my bargain and clear out for the present. But I'm no quitter--I'm coming back in spite of the world's having rolled right past me. There's something in this father business. Those children are mine. I can feel it, and I know that the thing that I feel is a lot bigger and deeper
than this Adam West trumpery.  

Convinced of his sincerity and confident that complete conversion is imminent, Marion and the children accept Jonathan and bid a fond farewell to Adam.

The most interesting, albeit obvious, characteristic of the play's structure is the presence of a sub-plot. Here the relationship of Helen with Randall and Brent is almost a perfect parallel to the relationship of Marion with Adam and Jonathan twenty years earlier. The parallel is carefully executed through characterization also. Randall is very much like Adam, somewhat a dreamer but also a realist in appreciating beauty, the importance of people, and noble aspirations. Brent, on the other hand, is very much like Jonathan; both are crassly materialistic, egotistical, and over-bearing. Helen, too, is very much her mother's daughter: charming, warm, affectionate, and understanding. The theme, then, is given adequate representation in plot and character: a selfish vision of material success is actually no vision and no success but only a mirage and a failure if more lasting and significant human values are neglected, particularly the values of love, marriage, parenthood, and friendship. Joseph Wood Krutch praised the play in exactly this respect, that it attempted to give intellectual body to comedy.

In spite of the play's considerable theme and its coherently structured incidents, it has several distracting

\[18\] Ibid., p. 96.  \[19\] Krutch, p. 27.
faults. First, the dialogue, except for occasionally inspiring and often humorous sequences when Adam is addressing the children, is for the most part stilted and rather flat. Second, and more importantly, characterization is often weak. Marion and Adam are the most well-developed and interesting characters. In fact, Marion has some of the best dialogue in the play, which serves as a reminder that the piece was written primarily as a vehicle for the celebrated Mrs. Fiske. But the greatest weakness lies in the characterization of Jonathan. Until too late in the play he remains the incorrigible villain; very little indication of a possible conversion, other than Marion’s hope for it, makes his third-act recognition speech seem hollow and his conversion implausible. The misdirected focus on Marion instead of Jonathan, then, weakens the resolution of the main plot.

Although the theme of this play would certainly appeal to Rice in terms of his ideas on the detrimental effects of a capitalistic society, there is little else to recommend the play to a place in his canon. And it is not surprising that the play satisfied him little. The play’s weaknesses in dialogue, tone, and characterization lead one to conclude that in this case, as in Rice’s subsequent collaborative efforts, the play belongs less to Rice than to his collaborator.

Rice’s next work, *The Adding Machine*, performed only seventy-two times in its first production in 1923, proved to be one of his greatest literary successes and one of the most
significant plays in the history of American drama. Giving free play to his imaginative power in the expressionistic mode, Rice presented, in his own words, "the case history of one of the slave souls who are both the raw material and the product of a mechanized society." At the time, expressionism was a relatively new form on the continent as well as in the United States where it came to be represented by such plays as O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922), John Howard Lawson's *Roger Bloomer* (1923) and *Processional* (1925), Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928), and Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923) and *The Subway* (1929). In the vanguard of the movement and disavowing any dependence on either native or continental expressionists such as George Kaiser, Walter Hasenclever, and Ernst Toller, with whose works he later became familiar, Rice defined his idea of expressionism in an article written for the New York Times:

> The author attempts not so much to depict events faithfully as to convey to the spectator what seems to him to be their inner significance. To achieve this end the dramatist often finds it expedient to depart entirely from objective reality and to employ symbols, condensations, and a dozen devices which, to the conservative, must seem arbitrarily fantastic.

Rice was conscious, then, of the primary components of expressionism: subjectivity in representing on the stage what happens in a character's mind, and the representation of inner reality in concrete terms. The mind and inner reality he chose to represent were those of Zero who has been aptly described by

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Joseph Wood Krutch as a "typical human cipher rendered contemptible by his own spiritual nullity and then destroyed by a machine capable of performing his absurd little function better than he could perform it himself."^{22}

The plot of this typical human cipher's destruction begins in the first scene with his domestic situation. The details of the setting are dictated by Zero's personality in that the walls of his bedroom are covered with sheets of foolscap bearing columns of figures. As Zero lies in bed, his sloppy and shrewish wife scolds him bitterly for his failures, personal and well as occupational. In dialogue interwoven with mawkish self-pity for her own lot, Mrs. Zero complains of Zero's failure to be promoted after twenty-five years of faithful service as a bookkeeper. Zero listens passively as she compounds his faults by mentioning the enjoyment he derived from furtively watching Judy O'Grady, a girl across the court who has been arrested for indecent exposure. Throughout her bitter harangue she thinks only of what she has been denied because of Zero's shortcomings: her concern is only for her material comfort and is epitomized by her bemoaning her lack of money to see a movie downtown. The picture of Zero's home life depicts it as anything but harmonious; and the lack of harmony is made even more painfully obvious by Zero's complete silence throughout his wife's monologue. The lack of communication here between husband and wife typifies the lack of communication in the whole of

^{22}Krutch, p. 232.
society. This introductory scene further establishes the nightmare quality of the entire play: "The very monotonous insistence of its vulgarity hypnotizes the imagination and one passes easily into the world of half-insane fantasy where the main action takes place." 23

Aridity and vulgarity also characterize the following scene in Zero's office at the department store where he and his middle-aged co-worker, Daisy Diana Dorothea Devore, work on the store's accounts. While they work mechanically, each revels in his own thoughts, pausing from his exclusive reveries only to insult the other. Ironically, Rice points out, these ciphers are capable of communicating with one another only on the basest of terms. Most of the time, however, each talks to himself. Daisy grieves over Zero's shabby treatment of her and her general discontent with life. In her despair she considers various means of suicide which foreshadows her off-stage death later in scene seven. For the most part, Daisy conceives of it as a romantic event which would merit sensational headlines: "Girl Takes Mercury After All-Night Party" or "Woman in Ten-Story Death Leap." 24 In the meantime Zero's self-conscious thoughts are initiated by Daisy's ramblings. Zero thinks of his wife's anger about Judy O'Grady, whom Zero so much enjoyed watching

23 Ibid., p. 231.
until his wife stopped him. In practically the same breath, Zero condemns and admires the girl and curses his wife: "The dirty bum. Livin' in a house with respectable people. She'd be livin' there yet, if the wife hadn't o' got to me. Damn her!" In the depersonalized manner of newspaper headlines also, Zero imagines his wife's possible reaction to his wished-for affair with Judy: "Girl Slays Betrayer" or "Jealous Wife Slays Rival." 25 He even considers murdering his wife, but his motives for dismissing the thought are founded not in any morality but in concern for himself. He both desires and fears the freedom such an act would give him: "At that, I guess I'd get tired of bummin' around. A feller wants some place to hang his hat." 26 As the whistle blows, marking the end of the working day, Zero imagines the boss congratulating him for his twenty-five years of faithful service. His vision, however, becomes ironic with the entrance of the boss who cannot remember Zero's name but tells him he is being replaced by an adding machine. When Zero realizes that he is not being rewarded but fired, the setting begins to reflect his confusion of disappointment, fear, despair and rage. The sound of a distant merry-go-round grows louder as the stage begins to revolve. Additional sound effects of wind, waves, galloping horses, locomotive whistles, and automobile horns intensify the confusion of the moment which is culminated by a peal of thunder and a flash of red light; as Zero murders the boss, the scene is plunged into

25 Ibid., p. 103. 26 Ibid., 103.
blackness. The play reaches, then, its first climax.

In comparison to the violence of the preceding scene, the third scene seems almost mute in depicting Zero's alienation from society. Unaware as yet of her husband's crime, Mrs. Zero has invited the Ones, Twos, Threes, Fours, Fives, and Sixes for the evening. Before their arrival Mrs. Zero taunts her husband, asking him what great reward he received for his twenty-five years with the firm. Not waiting for an answer, she scolds him for the red ink on his collar. The guests arrive, all "ciphers" dressed alike except for the color of the women's dresses. The conversation that follows is characterized by short, choppy, and incomplete sentences as the men discuss the weather, politics, business, and strikes. The sterility of their talk is paralleled by the women's who speak of clothes, movies, their dirty men, and other topics for gossip in a humorous but revealing sequence. Again, each is aware only of himself and what he has to say, and their talk is punctuated with the mention of disease, the physical manifestation of their sick society:

Mrs. Six: My aunt has gall stones.
Mrs. Four: My sister expects next month.
Mrs. Three: My cousin's husband has erysipelas.
Mrs. Two: My niece has St. Vitus's dance.
Mrs. One: My boy has fits.27

The satire becomes even more bitter as the men and women join voices for an expression of universal hate and condemnation: "That's it! Damn foreigners! Damn dagoes! Damn Catholics!

27 Ibid., p. 107.
Damn sheenies! Damn niggers! Jail 'em! shoot 'em! hang 'em! lynch 'em! burn 'em!" The perverted litany ends with a chorus of "My Country 'tis of Thee." Here is a society, Rice is saying, that perversely nourishes itself on prejudice, hate, and distrust. Throughout the whole scene, Zero has remained silent. When a policeman arrives to arrest him, he announces in a matter-of-fact manner, "I killed the boss this afternoon." Ironically, the only statement that has real significance and concerns a moral human action, unlike the meaningless statements and actions of the scene, is the announcement of a murder in a dispassionate manner that would be appropriate to announcing the time of day.

Scene four occurs in a courtroom where the ciphers of the previous scene serve as jurors. To them, the bewildered and anxious Zero delivers his own defense. In a brilliantly modulated monologue Zero angrily admits killing the boss and reviews the incriminating evidence. His monologue is interlaced with his compulsion for numbers as he adds the names of the jurors and curses the numbers that fill his head. So complete is their domination of his consciousness that he even personifies them: "They're funny things, them figgers. They look like people sometimes. The eights, see? Two dots for the eyes and a dot for the nose." This pathetic revelation of fears, hates, unfulfilled desires, and other frustrations is

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28 Ibid., p. 108. 29 Ibid.
interrupted by the jurors who deliver a verdict of "Guilty" and file out, leaving Zero to continue his harangue to the empty jury box.

Scene five, omitted from the original production but replaced by Rice for the play's revival at the Phoenix Theatre in 1956, takes place in a jail cell. This scene is less functional than others in the play in terms of the plot, but it does give Rice the opportunity for social commentary as well as a deeper insight into Zero's character. As Zero sits in his cell, which is constructed on a raised platform as if for exhibition, a guided tour enters to examine the specimen of the "North American Murderer." The tour guide gives a bitter description of Zero: "He learns by imitation and has a language which is said by some eminent philologists to bear many striking resemblances to English. . . . He thrives and breeds freely in captivity."31 After their departure, Zero sits down to his last meal--by his own choice, eight courses of ham and eggs. Mrs. Zero enters in mourning dress, and the couple reminisce about the early days of their marriage. Zero seems almost warm and personable here, but the spell is soon broken by an argument over Zero's relationship to Miss Devore. They argue until Mrs. Zero becomes furious, smashes the dishes, and storms out. The "Fixer" from the Claim Department then enters and announces to Zero that his pardon has been refused and that he is to be executed. Zero complains bitterly of the injustice

31 Ibid., p. 111.
of being replaced by a machine to which the Fixer, obviously the voice of industrialized society, replies, "The machine is quicker, it never makes a mistake, it's always on time. It presents no problem of housing, traffic congestion, water supply, sanitation." Then, while the Fixer, indifferent to Zero's agony, reads a comic supplement and pares his nails, two guards carry the screaming Zero off to his execution.

Scene six takes place in a graveyard where Judy O'Grady and a young man are walking. Judy tells the young man about Zero's watching her and then reporting her to the police. When they leave, Zero rises out of his grave and is joined by another corpse, Shrdlu, another murderer condemned to death for matricide. Shrdlu contends that he loved his over-protective mother and killed her by accident while attempting to cut a leg of lamb at dinner. Overcome by guilt and fear of eternal flames, Shrdlu is an effective foil for Zero who feels no guilt at all and nervously denies the possibility of punishment.

In the following scene, Zero and Shrdlu find themselves in the beautiful Elysian Fields. Tents of brightly striped silks dot the scene of lush grass and flowers. Shrdlu is deeply disappointed by this breach of morality and justice; this is hardly the place of punishment he had anticipated. Miss Devore enters to Zero and tells him that she finally committed suicide. Zero is gladdened by her presence, and the two specters talk and embrace. Though they could never do so in life, ironically

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32 Ibid., p. 112.
they are able to communicate in death. In the course of their good time, Shrdlu interrupts to announce that they may stay as long as they like in the Elysian Fields. But when Zero learns that there are people there who are not married and that writers of "smutty stories" like Swift and Rabelais have been admitted, he is fired with foolish indignation. Protesting to Daisy, Zero argues, "Say, you don't mean you want to stay here, do you, with a lot of rummies an' loafers an' bums?" 33 Unable to persuade her to accompany him, Zero leaves alone. In terms of the hero's character and the structure of the plot, Zero's denial of celestial life provides the second and decisive climax of the play.

The eighth and final scene of the play occurs in a celestial repair shop or service station where Zero is seated at an adding machine and surrounded by tapes which cover the furniture and floors and choke the doorway. While Zero works mechanically, Lieutenant Charles and Joe, attendants in what Charles calls their "cosmic laundry," enter to tell Zero he must return to earth. Zero begs not to be turned out, but Charles insists because, "the mark of the slave was on you from the start." 34 After he reviews the ugly existence to which Zero is doomed, he delivers the final, relentless, and most bitter indictment on Zero:

You're a failure, Zero, a failure. A waste product. A slave to a contraption of steel and iron. The animal's instincts, but not his strength and skill.

33 Ibid., p. 124. 34 Ibid., p. 126.
The animal's appetites, but not his unashamed indulgence of them... Back you go—back to your sunless groove—the raw material of slums and wars—the ready prey of the first jingo or demagogue or political adventurer who takes the trouble to play upon your ignorance and credulity and provincialism.35

Zero is finally persuaded to return to his sunless groove when Charles presents him with the illusion of Hope in the form of a girl. And thus Zero returns to earth again to fulfill his role as a cipher, a function for which industrial society as well as his own choices, conditioned by that society, have prepared him.

The formal unity of the play, one of its most impressive characteristics, has often been commented on. Rice himself noted that "In The Adding Machine form and content are indissolubly wedded."36 Joseph Wood Krutch also praises the work's structural success, noting that "the formal unity and hence the artistic success of the piece depends upon the fact that the spell of the nightmare is never broken and no attempt is made to interpret it in fully rational terms."37 John Gassner adds that the spell of the nightmare is never broken for a very good reason, "since The Adding Machine is projected through the arid mind and diminished mentality of the commonplace bookkeeper Mr. Zero, which reflect the world that produces a Mr. and

35Ibid., p. 128.
37Krutch, p. 231.
A more enthusiastic response to the play's structure was registered by Ludwig Lewisohn soon after its production:

You cannot miss it; you cannot withdraw yourself from its coherence and completeness. Examine this play scene by scene, symbol by symbol. The structure stands. There are no holes in its roof. It gives you the pleasure of both poetry and science, the warm beauty of life and love, the icy delight of mathematics. . . . here is an American drama with no lose [sic] ends or ragged edges or silly last-act compromises, retractions, reconciliations. The work, on its own ground, in its own mood, is honest, finished, sound.39

The play does achieve formal unity through the means indicated by these critics: through the nightmare atmosphere that pervades the play; through the projection, appropriate to the mode of expressionism, of action through the sterile and confused sensibility of Zero; and through the careful management of incidents which reveal the main character and elucidate the theme. This latter method is readily appreciable by examining the function and placement of individual scenes. Scene three in the Zero dining room, scene five in the jail cell, and scene eight in the celestial repair shop, for example, give Rice the opportunity for a good deal of incisive social commentary on the modern wasteland and its inhabitants, the elements of an environment that produces a Zero. At the same time, however,

38 Gassner, p. x.

these scenes also function to reveal the protagonist's anxious predicament so that the audience never loses sight of his central position. His silence, for example, in scene three is a dramatic preface to his stark confession at the end of the scene and to his pathetic monologue in the following scene.

But by far the most significantly placed incidents are in scenes two and seven, the scenes of the murder and of the Elysian Fields respectively. Zero's murder of the boss in scene two, before we are fully aware of his personality, seems to be a gesture of protest; it might even suggest a near-tragic dignity. This tragic dignity, however, is denied to Zero by the second and decisive climax of the play in scene seven. In this fantastic picture of Heaven, Zero's primary fault becomes explicit. He is unable to accept the possibility that his murder of the boss might be, in its character as a gesture of protest, a salvific force. Instead of accepting the reality of the Elysian Fields where his salvation might be as congruous with truth as the ribald but nonetheless realistic tales of Swift and Rabelais, he prefers to remain a Yahoo; he prefers his alienated and isolated world where he mistakenly feels that he can dictate the terms of right and wrong, of what is acceptable and not acceptable, of what is moral and not moral. By his own choice, then, Zero prefers slavery to freedom. This decisive action serves to define the character Rice chose to portray: "one of the slave souls who are both the raw material and the product of mechanized society. . . . His fears and
frustrations make him reject an eternity of happiness and self-expression; he returns to earth to begin another treadmill existence, sustained only by the mirage of hope.\textsuperscript{40} The most important phrases in Rice's statement here are "raw material" and "product"; Zero's slave mentality and his fear of freedom enable him to collaborate with a world that "chokes with dust and ashes the very sources of human life" and that is "wedded to denial and has made a pact with death\textsuperscript{41} to bring about his own destruction and damnation.

Failure to note these structural elements caused Edmund Wilson in \textit{The Dial} to misconstrue the play's formal unity and theme. Although he admired the tragic satire of the first half of the play, its "energy," "intensity," and "sureness of stroke," he objected to the actions of Zero in scene seven. During the first half of the play, "Mr. Zero is made to burst from the living coffin of his life with an éclat which commands our sympathy and then, during the latter half of the evening, we are obliged to see him slowly nailed back into it."\textsuperscript{42} What Wilson failed to observe is that from the outset of the play Zero is the soulless nonentity that his name implies; his one decisive action in the murder of his boss in scene two and his

\textsuperscript{40}Rice, \textit{Minority Report}, pp. 190-191.

\textsuperscript{41}Lewisohn, p. 197.

monologue in scene four are sympathetic actions only until we realize that they are ironically but a small part of a complex personality that is dominated by passivity, the inability to satisfy desires, and the fear of freedom. Zero's denial of life and freedom in scene seven is the final stroke on the portrait of a being deprived of his definition as a man.

Zero, therefore, is an anti-hero who consents to slavery. True, the vision is bitter, relentless, but consistent and compelling in terms of the play. Zero is not sentimentalized, nor is he presented as an object of pity; he colludes with a society that accepts him as a willing victim of social and economic regimentation, of a system that kills the individual. Depressing too is the idea that in Zero's return to earth he perpetuates the condition of man's slavery; it is an eternal and vicious cycle as long as man cooperates with the diabolical system. Rice established himself in this play, according to his Shavian ideal, as a social dramatist whose eloquent protest, if not heeded, would at least be heard.

But besides establishing Rice as a social commentator, the play also contributed to his development as a talented playwright, particularly in his handling of characterization and dialogue. Zero is characterized both indirectly and directly by his own actions and dialogue and by other char-

acters' reactions to him. Mrs. Zero serves to demonstrate Zero's domestic failure, Daisy and Shrdlu his failure in personal relationships, the boss and Fixer his failure in the business world. Each of these representational characters is also given economical but adequate development in terms of the plot. Dialogue is especially important in their portraits. As one critic has recently pointed out, "To his principal characters--Zero, to Mrs. Zero, Daisy--the author gives the breath of life in a dialogue that is homely, sharp, at once American, and with an emotional dimension from which they emerge as human beings and not as abstractions." A section of Zero's painful monologue from scene four serves as an adequate example:

Sure I killed him. I ain't sayin' I didn't, am I? Sure I killed him. Them lawyers! They give me a good stiff pain, that's what they give me. Half the time I don't know what the hell they're talkin' about. Objection sustained. Objection overruled. What's the big idea anyhow? You ain't heard me do any objectin', have you? Sure not!45

Rice had traveled a considerable distance toward the inspired use of dialogue he so much admired in Chekhov.

That distance is even more appreciable when The Adding Machine is compared with The House in Blind Alley (1916), Rice's earlier social satire. In the older play, characters were manipulated to fit the plot; in The Adding Machine, it is


a credible being's actions which become the plot. Similarly, the theme of the earlier play appeared to be set on top of the contrived action, while in this play the theme is defined through character and action. In the earlier play also, the characters were wooden, frankly allegorical; in The Adding Machine they have vitality and color. Moreover, the conversational tone of the realistic dialogue which helps support the characterizations in the later play far outshines that of the earlier work. And finally, the irony and satire, which Rice had experimented with in the earlier play, become more poignant and functional in The Adding Machine: the satire is still occasionally light, occasionally bitter; but the irony of statement is enriched by the more dramatic irony of situation.

The Adding Machine, then, is undoubtedly one of the most significant dramas in the early twentieth century. In a recent book on contemporary allegory in American drama, Louis Broussard points out: "Combining as it did a theme of universal importance, expressed in a form new and important not only to drama but to all literature, with a character and scene both universally realistic and American, The Adding Machine became the country's first mature drama, possessing a structural sense, a power of characterization, and a handling of dialogue which Eugene O'Neill himself had not yet accomplished." Though Rice would retain for the greatest part of his career his structural sense, a certain power of characterization, and a

46 Broussard, p. 46.
forte for dynamic dialogue, he would soon lay aside the mode of expressionism for that of realism which attracted him more strongly. Even in his second and last expressionistic play, *The Subway*, his inclination for realism began to become evident.

*The Subway*, composed in 1924, was performed by the Actors' Theatre thirty-five times in 1929. Again Rice's subject is the "maladjustments of a mechanized society," this time symbolized by the subway train which assumes the demonic qualities of an apocalyptic beast. Its victim is Sophie Smith, a more sympathetic but less interesting character than Zero.

In the first of nine scenes, the setting is the filing office of the Subway Construction Company where Sophie is employed as a clerk. The confining room in which she works alone is artificially ventilated and illuminated. Boredom is the mood of the moment as George Clark, an office boy, enters to Sophie from whose imagination a rose-covered cottage is projected on the backdrop of filing cabinets. The vision fades quickly, however, when George tells Sophie of his plans to go to Detroit to become a "captain of industry." Deeply hurt by the departure of one who at least occasionally alleviated her loneliness, Sophie is distracted from thinking about it by the entrance of her boss, James Bradley, with a writer and an artist, Maxwell Hurst and Eugene Landray. Ignoring Sophie's presence, Bradley discourses proudly on the modern "quadruple" efficiency of his company and boasts, "The men who have made

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the Subway Construction Company what it is believe that the gods of commerce serve most generously those who make the best use of their finest tools."\(^{48}\) By ironic implication, the "tools" he speaks of include the people who serve in this temple of the subterranean god. Hurst and Landray ask to sketch and interview Sophie for "human interest." Sophie, a young and pretty girl of eighteen, feels that their lewd looks make her dress seem diaphanous, and is embarrassed. The loneliness and desolation of the room is intensified after the visitors' exit, and a distant clock sluggishly and solemnly sounds the hour.

In scene two Sophie rides the subway train on her way home, and the nightmarish horror of the experience is made explicit. She is mercilessly pushed and crushed by commuters who resemble animals--dogs, pigs, monkeys, wolves, and rats. Her terror is intensified by her own silence and the ear-piercing and cacophonous noise of wheels clattering over rails, screeching brakes, and the commanding shouts of the subway guard encouraging the crowd to move more quickly. This expressionistic and violent scene is well contrasted with the monotonous and drab domestic scene that follows.

The sterility and boredom of her job is paralleled by the situation in Sophie's home where "the broad vertical stripes of the wallpaper suggest the bars of a cage."\(^{49}\) In the fore-


\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 35.
ground are Sophie's father, mother, sister Annie, and brother Tom. The lack of communication characterizes this domestic scene as it did in Zero's case. Mrs. Smith irons and complains to herself of her children's ingratitude; Mr. Smith, a subway guard, is absorbed in his newspaper and takes a curious delight in reading statistics aloud; Annie sews and complains of her being left with her two children, deserted by her husband; and Tom, who pauses occasionally to cough and to light cigarette after cigarette, reads the sports news aloud. None of them pays attention to Sophie's presence with Landray who brought her home from the subway station where she fainted. Landray shows some sympathy for Sophie's plight, a gesture all the more ingratiating in comparison to her alienation from her own family. In this family portrait Rice points out that even the basic structure of a normal society is rotted by the destructive forces of industrialization. Sophie's isolation is punctuated by her gazing blankly through a translucent screen bearing the cage-like bars of the wallpaper as her father quotes one final statistic: "Subway, in Record Day, Carries Two Million Three Hundred and Ninety-seven Thousand, Four Hundred and Twelve."  

Scene four in Sophie's bedroom contains only her monologue, a prayer before going to bed. The boisterous noises of the city provide the background for her prayers in which she stumbles from anxiety to anxiety, begging for relief from her guilty feelings about Hurst and Landray, from her hatred for

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50 Ibid., p. 45.
the subway, her dislike for her parents, her fear of death, and from the pain of loneliness.

In scene five Sophie attends a movie with Landray. His advances are tempered by his conscience, and he reprimands himself by recalling that she is only a child. Sophie accepts his cautious advances at first and then refuses them; the possibility that here might be the cure for her loneliness and yet the conflicting fear that he might be taking advantage struggle within her as she attempts to distract herself by reading the titles of the film.

Apparently after some passage of time, in the following scene Landray awaits Sophie's arrival in his apartment. He is reproached again by his conscience, this time calling him "Liar! Liar!" for his deceiving Sophie into thinking that he really loves her. He has little difficulty stultifying his conscience; his incapacity for human love is another symptom of the modern disease that deprives mankind of human feeling. When Sophie enters, Landray tells her he loves her and that she has inspired him to write a book on modern civilization to be entitled "The Subway":

It's an epic . . . an epic of industrialism. . . .
It fills me . . . obsesses me . . . the city . . .
the city . . . steel and concrete . . . industrialism, rearing its towers arrogantly to the skies. . . . Higher and higher . . . deeper and deeper. . . . What did he say, that fellow Hurst? . . . 'Their foundations are bound into the chambered rock. Their pinnacles pierce the clouds.' . . . Up and up . . . fists of steel shaking defiance at the skies . . . still higher and higher. . . . All mankind joining
the mad mechanistic dance . . . bondsmen to the
monsters they have created . . . slaves to steel
and concrete.51

Rice, then, makes his theme explicit here much in the same way
as he had done in *The Adding Machine* through Charles. But here
the statement achieves a striking irony since Landray, by his
later desertion of Sophie for financial success, will show that
in spite of his insight he will become one of the bondsmen in
the mad mechanistic dance. Almost hypnotized by his vision,
Landray continues his description and explains the primary
symbol of his book as well as of the play:

A subway train . . . a monster of steel with
flaming eyes and gaping jaws . . . Moloch
devouring his worshippers . . . Juggernaut
crushing his tens of thousands . . . A subway
train . . . roaring . . . roaring . . . the
beast of the new Apocalypse . . . 'And no man
might buy or sell save he that had the mark of
the beast.'52

This, then, is the god of the new world who will receive the
sacrifice of Sophie's life in the last scene of the play.

In the next scene, Robert Anderson, a magazine pub-
lisher, serves as a catalyst to bring events to a climax. While
he and Sophie await Landray at the latter's apartment, Anderson
tells Sophie that he will not support Landray's book but instead
wants him to be art editor for a new sophisticated magazine.
When Landray arrives, Sophie sees that he is attracted by the
proposition which would necessitate his living in Europe. After
Anderson leaves, Sophie attempts to win Landray's affection

51 Ibid., pp. 94-95. 52 Ibid., p. 95.
by giving herself to him.

Scene eight returns to the setting of scene four, Sophie's bedroom. But now, instead of prayer there is nightmare as voices externalize Sophie's fears and anxieties. The voices are mainly condemnatory: Mrs. Smith condemns her ingratitude; Annie condemns her for loving Landray, one among all unfaithful men; Anderson condemns her for being a shop-girl; while Landray's voice, protesting the beauty of her soul, is obliterated by other voices condemning her for fornication. A "Gentle Voice" occasionally expresses Sophie's hope for forgiveness, but the chorus of undiscriminating executioners overcomes it. Finally, pointing fingers surround her so that, frightened to hysteria, Sophie leaps from the bed and rushes out.

In the ninth and final scene, barefooted and dressed only in her nightgown and a coat, Sophie rushes into the deserted subway station. While she stands there shivering, Maxwell Hurst in evening clothes enters, and recognizing her from the Subway Corporation, tries to seduce her. Sophie is on the point of leaving with him when she hears the approaching subway train. Driven to madness by her anxiety and loneliness, she is almost hypnotized by the onrushing train:

Look at the lights! Look at the lights shining on the tracks. All red. Like the moon on the water. Like the moon when it first comes up in the summertime. Listen to the sound of it. It's getting louder and louder like music. Like music.53

Then, as the train approaches and its red lights illumine the

53 Ibid., p. 152.
tracks, Sophie wrests herself from Hurst's hold and jumps into its path. Denied the freedom and love she desired so much, Sophie becomes the distracted victim of the apocalyptic beast.

The Subway, then, expounds a theme similar to that of The Adding Machine. Rice's argument is still that the industrialized modern world, deprived of love, of beauty, of the necessary ingredients for human fulfillment, has become a monster, the beast of the Apocalypse to whom all men, wittingly and unwittingly, give homage and are simultaneously destroyed. The effects of this diseased condition are given more breadth here than in the earlier play, particularly in the variety Rice displays among its victims. The Smiths, hardly deserving of a family name where the essence of the family relationship in love has been abrogated, submit passively and unwittingly to the world's corruption. George Clark, James Bradley, and Maxwell Hurst are all fascinated by the monster's power and cooperate with its destruction. But by far the greatest sinner is Landray, who sees more deeply than the others into the corrupt and perverted mechanism, and yet denies his insight to sacrifice love and personal happiness for commercial success; he becomes practically a highpriest in the temple of Moloch. But the beast, Rice points out, demands not only the service of such as these, but also the sacrifice of unwilling souls like Sophie who are basically innocent and who desire love and freedom but whose aspirations cannot be fulfilled in a world made only of steel and concrete. In light of the variety of
victims Rice presents, Sophie seems to be not so much the immediate victim of the machine as Zero was; the more debased victims in this play--Sophie's boss, her family, her lover--by denying her the opportunity for love, are instrumental in delivering her up as a sacrifice to the beast.

Rice presents his insight persuasively in the incidents of the play: every scene demonstrates the effects of modern industrialism, of the culture and state of mind it fosters, on her heroine and on other human beings. In terms of the arrangement of incidents, Rice's careful structural techniques are also evident. Scenes one and three offer an exposition of the boredom and sterility of Sophie's job and her home life. Her ultimate destruction is adequately and provocingly foreshadowed in the subway ride of scene two. Also, the contrast of scenes four and eight, where Sophie's prayer is transformed into a nightmare in which the figures of previous scenes participate, suggests a ritual preparation for the bloody sacrifice in the last scene.

Many aspects of Rice's characterization and dialogue are also commendable. While the lesser representational figures appear as types, Sophie and Landray are sufficiently individualized to warrant a sympathetic response. Young, innocent, generous, and sincere, Sophie readily invites an emotional rapport; while Landray, who willingly denies his insight in scene six and victimizes the desperate heroine in scene seven, invites indignation mixed with regret. The
dialogue of these two characters is also the most striking in the play. Sophie's prayer in scene four and especially Landray's description, in scene six, of the modern world of Moloch devouring his worshipers are outstanding examples of dialogue that is exciting, realistic, suggestive, and at times poetic.

These excellences, however, are not enough to make The Subway equal to The Adding Machine to which it is structurally inferior. Its primary weakness lies in the combination of expressionistic with realistic modes of presentation. In only four scenes out of nine (scenes one, two, three, and eight) does Rice use expressionistic technique; scenes four through seven and scene nine, except for the voice of his conscience that Landray hears in scene six, are completely realistic in presentation. The effect of this combination is not so much a weakness in unity of thought as a weakness in coherence of expression. Whereas in The Adding Machine, expressionism governs every action of the play to effect a perfect union of form and idea, here it seems to be used only as a mechanical device to present effects which could not be achieved through realism, particularly the externalization of Sophie's consciousness. A good part of The Adding Machine's formal excellence and artistic success depends, as Joseph Wood Krutch confirms, upon the fact that, "the spell of the nightmare is never broken and no attempt is made to interpret it in fully
rational terms."\textsuperscript{54} The realistic scenes of \textit{The Subway}, on the other hand, break the spell so that coherence is weakened.

A similar and related weakness resides in Rice's use of the subway as a symbol. In \textit{The Adding Machine}, the symbol of the machine is pervasive; even when Zero is removed from the office setting we are aware of his relationship to the mechanism, his complete subservience to it. The settings of his bedroom and dining room in scenes one and three, the fixation with numbers he demonstrates in his defensive monologue in scene four, his maniacal operation of the adding machine in the celestial repair shop of scene eight, remind us constantly that Zero is in the machine's power. The subway, on the other hand, serves as a functional symbol only at the beginning of the play in scene two and at the very end in scenes six and nine. In general, then, the subway remains too much in the background of the play; its effects on its victims are not as immediately evident as are the effects of the adding machine on Zero.

Finally, Sophie is a less satisfying protagonist than Zero. A far more sympathetic figure, she is, unfortunately less interesting. Throughout the play she is portrayed as kind, sensitive, innocent but naive and simple; she is purely and melodramatically the victim. Zero, on the other hand, although less sympathetic, is a more forceful character since we are made to feel that he is in part at least responsible for his downfall. He is clearly both the raw material and the

\textsuperscript{54}Krutch, p. 231.
product of the sterile society he inhabits. Not so with Sophie. While both characters meet a hopeless defeat and end, Zero has the advantage of complexity. His murder of the boss is at least a gesture of protest, however feeble; Sophie's suicide is only a gesture of despair and escape.

In spite of these weaknesses, however, *The Subway* is an effective drama; the dehumanization and destruction of the modern world is conveyed clearly and persuasively in character and action. Moreover, these structural weaknesses have an ironic aspect in relation to Rice's career. In this combination of modes, Rice demonstrated that his forte was for realism; and it is this mode that predominates in his most successful dramas to follow.

Besides containing one of his masterpieces in *The Adding Machine*, this period from 1914 to 1924 provides a capsule view of Rice's theatrical career. First, it shows his craftsmanlike attention to the elementary techniques of dramatic construction. Action is the most important element in these plays, and Rice is meticulous in arranging his incidents in a logically coherent and unified pattern. Here the neatness of his technique is obvious in such plays as *On Trial* and *The House in Blind Alley* where the main actions are framed within introductory and concluding scenes which provide exposition and resolution respectively. Moreover, characterization in these plays, with the exception of Zero in *The Adding Machine*, is adequate but unremarkable and distinctly subordinated to action, another
feature of Rice's playwriting to be demonstrated in his later plays.

More worthy of note in these early works are the variety of forms and modes demonstrating the playwright's search for a form congenial to his ideas. The melodrama of On Trial, The Iron Cross, The House in Blind Alley, and The Subway suggests that this will be an important medium for his work in the future. The sentimental comedy of Wake Up Jonathan also foreshadows Rice's later efforts with comedy in such plays as Black Sheep (1932), Two on an Island (1940), and Dream Girl (1945). As far as the modes of these plays are concerned, expressionism, at its best in The Adding Machine, has its last appearance in The Subway. Even in this play, expressionism is combined with realism which is the predominant mode for all of the plays of this period and remains so for the rest of Rice's career. The realism, however, is of an ordinary kind; Rice has yet to put his peculiar stamp on the mode in Street Scene (1929). In this same regard, Rice's rather free approach to dramatic form deserves comment; the flashback technique of On Trial, the combination of realism and fantasy in The House in Blind Alley, and the mixture of expressionism and realism in The Subway indicate a flexible as well as imaginative handling of the elements of drama that characterizes his later work.

The themes of these plays, moreover, suggest ideas that will occupy Rice's later interests. The purely romantic and popular subjects like those of On Trial and Wake Up Jonathan
occur intermittently, but greater attention is given to the serious social themes evidenced here in The Iron Cross, The House in Blind Alley, and The Adding Machine. Interest with immediate and topical subjects like the war and child-labor problems of the earlier plays and with the more universal issues of freedom and individuality in the later play capture Rice's time and talent for most of his dramas of the 1930's and 1940's.

In sum, these early plays serve to define the major developing characteristics of Rice's craft: his favorite form would be melodrama, his favorite mode realism, his favorite subjects issues of social significance. These, then, would be the features of Rice as a playwright, a man passionately devoted to the perfection of his craft for its ultimate end in the perfection of his society.
CHAPTER III

THE DISCOVERY OF REALISM: PLAYS, 1924-1929

The early part of Rice's career from 1914 to 1924 certainly gave promise of a remarkable talent. He had already proved himself a capable craftsman with the elements of drama, and the brilliance of The Adding Machine, in form and idea, were evidence of a more than average imaginative power. In the later twenties, however, from 1924 to 1929, Rice was to channel that power toward the prominent mode of realism. And since it is, for the most part, as realist that Rice would merit his place in the annals of American drama, the most significant production of this period was Street Scene which won him a well-merited Pulitzer Prize in 1929. During its composition and before its production, however, Rice occupied himself with two plays that served to keep his name alive in the theatre.

While working on The Subway, Rice also collaborated with Dorothy Parker to write a sentimental comedy, Close Harmony or The Lady Next Door, which was produced in 1924. This play was even less successful than his earlier collaborative effort with Hatcher Hughes for Wake Up Jonathan (1921), and enjoyed only twenty-four performances. In three acts, the action revolves about a domestic situation involving Ed Graham, his wife Harriet, their daughter "Sister," and Bert and Belle
Sheridan, their next-door neighbors. The discontent of Graham in his own home, a brush with infidelity, and the conversion of Graham into the master of his household provide the matter of the plot.

In the first act Graham's unhappy home situation is revealed. Harriet and their daughter, Sister, treat Graham as a household fixture to be endured rather than endeared. His attempts to be affectionate with both are rudely ignored, and his situation is only worsened by the arrival of Ada Townsley, Harriet's garrulous older sister, who encourages Harriet's dominion and Sister's disrespect. The situation is an uncomfortable one when Belle Sheridan, a former show girl enters to receive a call on the Graham's telephone. The call is from Bert Sheridan who tells his wife he will not be home for dinner. In the course of their conversation, we learn that the Sheridans are not the ideal couple either. After the call, Ed succeeds in comforting Belle who invites him to come over to her home. Since Ed plays the mandolin and Belle the piano, she suggests they might have an enjoyable evening. When Harriet enters to them, Ed begins to invite Belle to stay for dinner but hesitates for fear of Harriet's reaction.

Act II takes place at the Sheridan residence where the discord is even more bitter than at the Graham's. Their argument is interrupted by Ed who enters with Sister. The daughter, it seems, is going to play the piano at a children's party and needs to rehearse the piece with Mrs. Sheridan, her tutor. When
Ed leaves, the Sheridans argue again so that Bert finally leaves the house. Belle distracts herself from her own problems by attending to Sister who does miserably at the piano. Harriet and Ada arrive to pick up Sister, and after their departure Belle telephones Ed who consents to come over. When Ed does arrive at the Sheridan house, he is embarrassed by meeting a garage mechanic who knows him. The situation makes Ed feel awkward and uneasy; but when the garage mechanic leaves, he and Belle have a cordial time with drinks and their music. Ed feels very comfortable with Belle, and the drinks uninhibit him so that he dares to make an advance. Both are surprised, however, by the return of Bert Sheridan. Bert cares not at all about his wife's being with another man and only demands money from Belle. When Belle refuses, they argue and struggle, so that Ed overcomes Bert and throws him out. Ed feels attracted to Belle while comforting her, and Belle suggests they run away together to begin life anew. Ed enthusiastically agrees and goes home to pack.

Act III, however, brings about conditions which reverse Ed's decision. At his own home where he is about to pack, Harriet and Ada bring in Sister who has been kicked in the stomach by Gormley Carter, a young boy at the party. While the doctor is examining Sister upstairs, Ed is terribly worried that she may be seriously injured. When Belle arrives, she notices his apprehension. Ed confesses his anxiety about Sister and his fear of scandal. Belle assures him that she understands
and leaves alone, thanking Ed for his kindness to her. When Harriet and Ada enter to Ed, they find his disposition changed considerably. They are furious when he answers a telephone call from Gormley's father and tells him that no apology is necessary since Sister is not hurt. He then makes it clear to Ada to mind her own affairs, and informs the abashed Harriet that he intends to be master of his own house.

Rice admits that the play did not interest him much. He concentrated on plot development and scene construction, while Dorothy Parker did most of the writing. The structure of the play demonstrates Rice's usual care: the balance of domestic situations in Acts I and II; the well-timed arrival of Belle in Act I when Graham is at his rope's end with his own family; and Bert's struggle with Belle, which allows Graham to realize that he can be forceful, demonstrate Rice's attention to the importance of timing in the arrangement of incidents. A logical and coherent plot structure, however, does not compensate for weaknesses in the play. For the most part, characterization is weak, particularly in the case of Graham. His motivation for seeking Belle's comfort is well established, but not so for his decision that he is capable of being lord of his house. Neither his sudden burst of conscience over the possibility of scandal nor his renewed affection for his daughter, who is an obnoxious brat throughout the play, is convincing. Sister is, in fact, the most plausible character in the play;

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1Rice, Minority Report, pp. 203-204.
the others are mere types, and lifeless ones at that. There are also occasional flashes of wit in Sister's conversation with her father and in Belle's dialogue—one of the roles she prides herself on was as the Spirit of the Grape in a Big Temptation of All Nations number. But, for the most part, the dialogue is without distinction. Again Rice demonstrated that his collaborative efforts were not as successful as the plays he composed alone.

Rice's third collaborative work, however, met with more success. In 1927, Rice and Philip Barry, both seeking a commercial success, decided to compose a mystery melodrama. With one hundred performances, Cock Robin proved to be the financial success they had hoped for, and the play received favorable reviews. Joseph Wood Krutch, for example, cited the setting as novel, the unraveling of the mystery as ingenious, and the whole play as one of the best of the season.²

²Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, CXXVI (1928), 130.

The novel setting established in Act I is the rehearsal of a mystery drama set in the eighteenth century. Robinson, the leading actor of the amateur group, is the center of attraction as he argues with McAuliffe, a professional director, and his assistant, Maria Scott, about his fellow actors. Robinson objects to Lane's playing the murderer because of Lane's real rivalry with him for the affection of Carlotta Maxwell, another member of the cast. On Robinson's insistence, McAuliffe offers the part to Torrence who protests that he is not good enough for
the role and that he also despises Robinson. McAuliffe assures Torrence that any shortcoming he has will be overlooked by the audience, who are usually so gullible and inattentive that even a real murder could be committed before their eyes without their realizing it. McAuliffe's cynicism here is ironic in terms of the actual murder that soon follows.

While the others rehearse, Dr. Grace and Mrs. Maxwell, Carlotta's uncle and mother, express their concern over the young girl's relationship with Robinson who is much older and has a reputation as a cad and libertine. They are resolved to stop Carlotta's going away with Robinson at all costs, and Dr. Grace even suggests wounding the villain during the duel scene of the play in order to prevent their trip. Gradually, then, motives for murder are multiplied to complicate suspicion. Their discussion is interrupted by McAuliffe's address to the cast. Making a casual reference to his experience in the circus and vaudeville--another clue to become crucial in the play's resolution--he assures them that theirs will be a good show after all.

Act II takes place during the actual performance of the play. The action of the inner play progresses through the duel scene rehearsed in the previous act. But when Cleveland, Robinson's brother-in-law who plays the doctor's role, examines the body, he finds that Robinson is really dead. The performance is halted as the stunned cast attempts to discover the murderer. Since almost everyone, except apparently McAuliffe
and Maria Scott, had a motive for killing Robinson, everyone in turn is suspected and accused. First to be accused is Torrence whose motive could have been the swindle Robinson perpetrated on his father. Lane's position during the duel scene suggests that he too might have fired the fatal shots. When they are about to call the police, Dr. Grace confesses to loading one of the stage guns with real bullets in order to wound Robinson and thus prevent his affair with Carlotta. He explains how he had first planned to stab Robinson but felt this would be cowardly. Carlotta interjects sorrowfully that she had decided not to go away with Robinson after she had received a letter from a girl in Paris whom Robinson had deserted. Maria Scott, ever the careful observer, interrupts to suggest that even if Dr. Grace had loaded the gun, Torrence's poor eyesight would make his hitting Robinson unlikely. They decide to examine the body and discover, as a knife clatters to the floor, that Robinson was stabbed and not shot. In a sensational close, Dr. Grace again becomes the prime suspect.

In Act III the pace of the action quickens for the discovery of the real murderer. McAuliffe reviews the pertinent facts, establishing everyone's motives. He also implicates Carlotta by mentioning the letter she received from Robinson's last love, Mary Clinton. Cleveland recalls that Carlotta had not mentioned the girl's name, but McAuliffe insists that she did. The rest of the group recall that Mary Clinton was McAuliffe's former assistant. This is the first definitive clue
to implicate McAuliffe. After Maria calls the police, she sug-
gests they replay the scene under her direction to see if it
will clarify matters. In the course of the play, Maria and
McAuliffe argue about his position during the action and his
sudden lunge forward during the duel scene. Lane recalls then
that McAuliffe's experience in the circus and vaudeville
involved his talent as a knife-thrower. McAuliffe objects very
calmly that no one saw him throw the knife, and that no one will
be convicted. Cleveland suggests that Maria Scott's testimony
will convict him, but Maria, who is obviously fond of McAuliffe,
contends that she saw nothing. As the police enter, everyone
appears stunned, but McAuliffe laughs confidently.

Although the play is a standard mystery melodrama with
violent physical action, suspense, and an involved plot, the
whole plan is well-conceived. The establishment of motives for
most members of the cast is a clever device to enhance the sus-
pense. Also, once McAuliffe's guilt is established, clues
become evident which make many of the previous incidents ironic
and his guilt certain: McAuliffe's mention of his circus expe-
rience, his insistence on dim lighting during the duel scene,
his mention of the play as a perfect setting for a real murder,
and his revealing the writer of Carlotta's letter. Details
necessary to the resolution of the mystery, then, never become
cumbersome; moreover, they are ingeniously placed so as to pro-
vide the audience with just enough complexity to make the reso-
lution interesting and entertaining. This is certainly the kind
of plot that would intrigue Rice with his fondness for dramatic puzzles.

In a manner appropriate to the mode of melodrama, the characters are not striking but adequately and realistically developed for their function in the plot. Maria Scott's character is especially outstanding in her role as spinsterish assistant and amateur detective. One other amusing characterization is that of Mrs. Montgomery, whom Rice described as a "Helen Hokinson clubwoman," and who serves as mistress of ceremonies for the amateur players. Her address to the audience before the performance of the play in Act II is a comic highlight as she confusedly explains the change of roles by Lane and Torrence and embarrassingly begs pardon for a printer's error in the advertising.

Concerning Rice's contribution to the play, it seems likely that he is responsible primarily for the play's structure of incidents, while Barry worked on characterization and dialogue. According to Rice, Barry was the more enthusiastic about the play. Also, though the play did little for Rice's name except to sustain it, Barry's work in Cock Robin along with his Paris Bound and Holiday initiated his period of great popularity. In regard to Rice's development as a dramatist, however, the play gave little indication of the kind of serious drama with which he would establish his reputation.

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Rice's next drama, *Street Scene*, proved to be one of the best plays of the decade and, moreover, the most brilliant work of his career. Ironically, Rice had difficulty arousing any producer's interest; the play was considered sordid, depressing, clumsy, the cast of characters unmanageable.\(^5\) Depressed by these responses and recovering from a serious illness at the same time, Rice turned to writing a piece which he felt would provide mental and physical therapy. The result was a witty and extravagant farce, *See Naples and Die*, which was eventually produced simultaneously with *Street Scene* and played for sixty-two performances.

The plot of *See Naples and Die* concerns the reunion of Nan Dodge, a girl blackmailed into marriage with a Russian Prince, with her real lover, Charles Carroll. In the beginning of the first act, which is set at a resort hotel on the Bay of Naples, Carroll is laying plans to rescue his new love, Kunegunde Wandl, from her Rumanian abductor who is exiled in Naples and staying in the hotel across the street. When Carroll learns that Nan and her royal husband are about to arrive at the same hotel, he urges Kunie to pack immediately so that they can escape to Paris. When Kunie leaves, however, Nan makes her entrance. It is not long before the sharp-tongued American ingenue is engaged in a verbal duel with Carroll who refuses to listen to any explanation about her marriage to Ivan Ivanovitch Kosoff. At the end of the act, before Carroll and the audience

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 241.
can be informed of the details of Nan's predicament, Prince Kosoff arrives to claim his reluctant bride.

Act II begins with Nan's returning the Prince's affectionate advances with scorn and caustic wit. When Carroll enters to the pair, Nan takes the opportunity to explain her predicament. Kosoff, it seems, had had an affair with Nan's older sister Mitzi. After the affair, which exposed Kosoff as a degenerate adventurer, he had threatened to publish Mitzi's compromising letters if she failed to appease him with money. Since the amount demanded could be met in no other way, Nan agreed to marry Kosoff only so that he could obtain legal right to her father's money. A divorce was to be arranged as soon as the contract was legal, but Kosoff refused to comply. After Carroll delivers a firm right fist to Kosoff's jaw, he promises to help Nan out of her dilemma. Kunie, who has just been beaten by her Bavarian general, enters as Kosoff and Nan exit separately. Carroll assures Kunie that he will still run away with her after he helps Nan. In the final episode of the act, Kosoff and his cohort, Hugo von Klaus, overcome Nan and lock her in a room off the terrace. No sonner is she out of sight than Kosoff makes a successful advance on a secuctive servant girl at the hotel.

At the beginning of Act III Kosoff and von Klaus consider their plan to kidnap Nan. Von Klaus suggests they purchase the automobile owned by Kunie's abductor, the Rumanian general. As Kosoff goes off to buy the car, Mitzi arrives.
Kosoff attempts a lie, saying that Nan has gone off to visit monasteries with Carroll. But the lie's success is thwarted when Carroll enters to the surprised Mitzi. Kosoff runs off, and the servant girl reveals where Nan is hidden. Nan, hurt and angry, goes off pursued by Carroll. Mitzi is left alone on the scene then with two inconspicuous chess-players who have been silent fixtures on the stage since the opening of the play. As Kosoff and the Rumanian general appear in a window across the road, the two chess-players rise quickly, pull out revolvers, and shoot down both the general and Kosoff. To the shocked Mitzi one of the conspirators explains that they are Rumanian patriots assigned to execute the general; Kosoff had merely been in the line of fire. The conspirators make their hurried exit as the terrace fills with the hotel guests including Kunie, Carroll, and Nan. Kunie, satisfied with her freedom from the general, relinquishes all claims to Carroll so that he and Nan are reconciled.

With this play, Rice succeeded in meeting with relative success a form which he had not attempted before—farce comedy. The event is remarkable not only for this reason but also because the form is practically unique in Rice's work. And the play is certainly more amusing than his excursions into sentimental comedy with Wake Up Jonathan (1921) and Close Harmony (1924). Apropos to farce comedy, the emphasis is on extravagant characters and, as even Rice admitted, "an absurd compli-
Kosoff, as a melancholy ruler and philosopher but an obviously sanguine lover, is an excellent "humor" character. But especially successful are the minor or representational figures in the play—the "pageant" of characters who help sharpen the realistic background and circumstances of the main action. The strokes are ingenious for the characterization of Luisa, the alluring servant girl who is reputed to have been involved in "crimes of passion"; of Basil Rowlinson, a starched and chauvinistic Englishman, whose moral sense is offended by Luisa's seductive ways and even by the performance of Italian operas which involve love affairs; and finally of Mrs. Evans, a middle-aged American dowager with a propensity for overstatement and malapropisms. In these minor characterizations Rice demonstrates a brilliant talent for capturing the essence of a social personality with admirable economy and selectivity. This is, in light of the plays that follow, one of Rice's most successful and impressive techniques. In Street Scene (1929), Counsellor-at-Law (1931) and We, the People (1933) the pageant of characters, detailed with the minute precision of a portraitist, makes a major contribution to Rice's reputation as a genius with realism.

The "pageant of characters" contributes much to the richness of Rice's most successful play to this time, Street Scene. Despite the difficulties Rice experienced in having the play produced—difficulties which he describes at length in "The Biography of a Play" in his The Living Theatre (1959)—
Street Scene enjoyed 601 performances in its first run, was well received in foreign productions, and was successfully adapted to a musical version in 1947 by Kurt Weil and Langston Hughes. Also, besides The Adding Machine, no other play by Rice has been so vociferously praised and so frequently anthologized. Using a combination of realistic and naturalistic techniques, Rice produced in this play a powerful melodrama with tragic implications.

Born and raised in New York, Rice had an intimate knowledge of urban conditions, substandard conditions which he recognized could have a deleterious effect on the characters subjected to them. Rice joined this knowledge to his ardent belief in the importance of freedom for the individual to show persuasively that a person need not become a slave to his environment, that he need not conform to circumstances that stifle self-determination and integrity. Unlike Zero of The Adding Machine, who ignorantly and complacently accepts his slavery, and unlike Sophie of The Subway, who escapes her condition only through despair and suicide, Rose Maurant in Street Scene recognizes the problem of conformity and accepts the responsibility of freedom. By repeated references to this theme of individualism and by dramatic exposition of its definition, Rice avoids making his play into a mere social tract or into a clever piece of stage journalism. The theme is eloquently presented in the words and actions of both major and representational figures who inhabit the dilapidated brownstone
structure that is the setting for the three acts of the play.

The main plot of *Street Scene*, then, involves Rose's gradual realization—and a hard-learned lesson it is—of the importance of self-determination. A minor plot involving Anna and Frank Maurrant, Rose's parents, and Steve Sankey, Anna's lover, ends in the violent murder of Anna and Sankey by the enraged husband. This minor plot serves to demonstrate the effects brought about in part by the degenerating slum environment and in greater part by the failure of Anna and Frank to recognize the importance of individual freedom and personal integrity.

Influenced by the sensationalism of the minor plot and failing to distinguish the related importance of the two plots in the structure of the play, several critics have misinterpreted the total significance of this finely wrought piece. Alan Downer, for example, considers the plot hackneyed because it centers on a love triangle. Stark Young also considered the sensational murder plot as the major one and so accused Rice of tacking on his theme in Rose's dialogue in Act III. Young commented, "It must be a very elementary principle that the essential idea of a work of art goes through it, and that the themes and conceptions to be expressed must lie inherently in the substance of it, and that they are to be expressed in creation, not in superimposed sentiments." If Rose, however,

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is considered the central character of Street Scene, if her actions are considered as comprising the main plot, then the theme that she expresses in Act III can be demonstrated to have been "expressed in creation" throughout the play. Other critics have recognized Rose's central position, and Rice himself corroborates this view: "There is a central love story: a sort of Romeo and Juliet romance between the stagehand's daughter and a radical's son; and a main dramatic thread of murder, committed by the girl's father when he comes home unexpectedly and finds his wife with her lover." A survey of the major incidents of the play reveals this to be the case.

Expository materials for both plots are given gradually in Act I where more attention is given to the love triangle since this plot comes to a relatively early end and must be set in motion immediately. The main plot involving Rose, however, begins more slowly. In the opening of Act I representational characters serve several important functions: they give a realistic cross section of urban slum life; they give details that illumine the situation of the Maurrant family; and by reference to their own private problems, they allow the circumstances of the main action to develop gradually and suspensefully. These representational characters include Greta Fiorentino, a German immigrant, and her Italian husband Filippo who regret deeply their inability to have children; Olga and Carl Olsen, Norwegian immigrants who are proprietors of the

apartment building; Emma Jones, a highly prejudiced Irish-American whose pride in her family and readiness to criticize are ironically accented by the behavior of her degenerate children, Mae and Vincent; and the Kaplan family—the father, Abraham who sees everyone's problems in terms of the Marxian dialectic, Shirley, a lonely school teacher approaching middle age, and Sam, a sensitive young law student who loves Rose Maurrant. These characters provide, through their respective points of view, a choral commentary on the main actions of the play and also enable Rice to make indirect but incisive comments on the conditions of this deprived society.

In the first act, the gossip of Mrs. Fiorentino, Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Olsen about Anna Maurrant's affair with Sankey is interrupted by Anna's joining them on the apartment stoop. Her sincere expression of concern for her family and her regret at not being able to attend a free concert in the park suggest a sensitive and amiable personality. This impression is further heightened by the arrival of her gruff and insensitive husband, Frank, who is employed as a stagehand and who reproaches her harshly for what he interprets as negligence in her ignorance of the whereabouts of their children, Willie and Rose. As Frank goes into the building and Anna speaks of everyone's need to hear an occasional kind word, Sankey makes his timely appearance. The situation is an awkward and embarrassing one for all, but Sankey quickly excuses himself, pretending that he is going to buy something for his wife at the
drugstore. Anna, in turn pretending that she must look for her twelve-year-old son, Willie, goes off to join him. The gossip of the tenants is again interrupted by Frank who joins them on the stoop.

The ensuing conversation provides a representational scene in which Abraham Kaplan, the old Jewish radical, comments on the various social ills of a capitalistic society. The occasion is made ripe for his commentary by the arrival of an ill-tempered social worker who has come to arrange for the eviction of one of the tenants, Mrs. Hildebrand and her two young children, victims of their father's desertion. Kaplan's discourse is spiced with Marxian clichés so that the total effect is comic; although the ills he describes are real and serious, his manner is such that neither the other characters nor the audience can take his Marxian rant seriously.

It is a tribute to Rice's consciousness of dramatic structure, however, that even these representational episodes are functional in terms of the plot. In the latter case, for example, the tenants' suspicion that infidelity ruined the Hildebrand family foreshadows the ruin of the Maurrants. Also, Kaplan's insistence on the family as a mere economic unit causes Frank to react violently so that the audience is made aware of his hostility and rash impetuosity. In this and later representational actions, therefore, Rice shows that he is aware of the structural integrity of the play.

After his outburst against Kaplan, Frank enters the
building and Samuel Kaplan approaches to overhear the gossip of the tenants. His reasonable objections to their gossip are dismissed because of what the gossippers know of his relationship to Rose Maurrant. In the meantime Anna returns, and Lippo Fiorentino, the good-humored musician, offers to dance with her for the amusement of the spectators. Anna complies after Frank, watching from the window above, gives his reluctant approval. When Sankey approaches again, another awkward incident follows in which Anna explains to Frank that Sankey is only the friendly milk-collector. Frank is suspicious, however, and reproaches Anna again for not knowing where Willie and Rose are. No sooner does he finish his reprimand than Willie appears, crying and mussed after a street fight whose cause he refuses to reveal. His suspicious silence is interpreted by all to mean that someone had taunted the boy about his mother's clandestine activities, about which everyone but Frank seems to be aware. The tension is temporarily relieved by everyone's return to their apartments to retire for the night.

When the tenants have entered the building, Rose enters the scene with Harry Easter, her boss. Easter, though married, makes cautious advances to Rose. He suggests that she allow him to better her condition by getting her a job in the theatre. His advances and the implications of his suggestions are not at first fully comprehended by her, but Rose finally refuses. She thanks Easter for accompanying her home, but asks him to leave because of what her father might say if he saw them. Frank
notices Easter's departure and brutally and unjustly accuses Rose of bad behavior. Rose attempts to assure him that she has not behaved improperly, but her explanation is interrupted by Buchanan, another tenant in the building, rushing out to get a doctor for his wife who is about to have a baby. Rose offers to call the doctor for him so that he may stay with his wife, and Frank returns upstairs.

As these characters exit, the setting becomes occupied by two new characters, Mae Jones, Mrs. Jones's daughter, and her boyfriend Dick McGann. Drunk and noisy, they embrace on the stoop, and Mae agrees to go with Dick to a friend's apartment. Again, this brief representational scene is functional. First, it provides emotional relief after Frank's raging at Rose; second, it serves as an effective contrast to the innocent relationship of Samuel and Rose to follow; and finally, it provides an ironic commentary on Mrs. Jones's pride in the behavior of her children.

In the following scene, Rose returns and is met by Vincent Jones who rudely forces himself on her. Sam Kaplan tries to rescue her, but he is knocked down by Vincent who is then called in by his approving mother. Sam is angry and ashamed, but Rose warmly consoles him. In the course of their conversation, she reveals a partial understanding of her family's difficulty:

You see, my father means well enough, and all that, but he's always been sort of strict and--I don't know--sort of making you freeze up,
when you really wanted to be nice and loving. That's the whole trouble, I guess, my mother's never had anybody to really love her. She's sort of gay and happy--like--you know, she likes having a good time and all that. But my father is different.\textsuperscript{12}

Sam refuses to discuss her domestic situation, but expresses his own discouragement about life in general. His pessimism is relieved somewhat by Rose whose simplicity, sensitivity, and thoughtfulness foreshadow her capable insight later in the play. A revealing characteristic too is her appreciation of Whitman whom she asks Sam to quote for her; she especially admires Whitman's appreciation of nature and of the individual personality. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the doctor summoned for Mrs. Buchanan. Sam, deeply affected by Rose's warmth and sincerity, kisses her goodnight as the first act closes.

Gradually, through the first act and now continuing through the second, Rice manages to intensify his central situation; and through the rhythm of this tenement existence, the focus on the Maurrant family becomes more sharp. The second act begins on the following morning, and the scene comes gradually to life as the tenants begin moving about. Workmen arrive at the excavation next door, the doctor leaves after delivering the Buchanan baby, Mrs. Jones goes out to walk the dog, and Mae Jones returns from her night out and is given a farewell curse from her boyfriend. In the meantime Sam greets Rose from the

\textsuperscript{12}Elmer Rice, Street Scene in Seven Plays (New York: The Viking Press, 1950), p. 146.
stoop and is quickly reprimanded by his sister, Shirley, who objects to Rose's family. Buchanan then comes out and tells everyone that he has a new daughter and that Anna Maurrant was good enough to stay with his wife all night. A series of confrontation scenes follows between Rose and her parents. Rose suggests to her mother that they move to a better neighborhood; but Anna thinks it impossible, and Frank later rejects the proposition completely. When Frank begins to leave for his job in Stamford, and Anna asks when he will return, he replies harshly,

I don't know when I'll be back. Whenever I'm t'roo wit' me work--that's when. What are you so anxious to know for, huh? . . . Just in case somebody wants to come callin', is that it?13

Upset by this remark, Anna goes into the building. Rose tries to pacify her father and suggests he try to be more kind to Anna. But her efforts are met only with scorn, and Frank exits. Anna returns to Rose and tearfully complains that she has always tried to be a good wife, but that it never made any difference to Frank. When Rose suggests that it might be a good idea if Anna gave up Sankey, her mother asks her not to join the others in condemning her: "Every person in the world has to have somebody to talk to, You can't live without somebody to talk to. I'm not saying I can't talk to you Rose, but you're only a young girl and it's not the same thing."14 Rose recognizes, then, that her mother's problem is loneliness, that she feels

13 Ibid., p. 158. 14 Ibid., p. 162.
the need to depend on someone else to make her life bearable. When Shirley Kaplan then talks to Rose, the lesson is further amplified. Shirley at first asks Rose not to encourage Sam because he must finish his education before getting married. But then she revealing adds, "Only, he's all I've got in the world. What else have I got to live for?" She too, then, needs someone else to give meaning to her life. Both Anna and Shirley are examples for Rose of people who lack the integrity of individualism; such privation, Rose sees, leads only to an anxious over-dependence on others.

After Rose assures her that she will be careful with Sam's affection, Shirley leaves and Sam joins Rose. Rose asks Sam how to conduct herself at a Jewish funeral she is attending that morning. Talk of the funeral leads to talk of death and God, and Sam speaks pessimistically of both. Failing to be encouraged by Rose's belief in the value of faith--in oneself if not in God--Sam begs Rose to marry and go away with him. Rose gently refuses his offer, and Sam is left disconsolate as she goes off to the funeral with Easter who has called for her.

When Sam is left alone on the stoop, Sankey approaches and is beckoned upstairs by Mrs. Maurrant who then closes the window and draws the shades. Immediately following Sankey's entrance into the building, two officials enter to evict Mrs. Hildebrand. The activities of the other tenants--Mrs. Jones drying her hair in the window, a girl arriving to

receive a music lesson at Fiorentino's, Mrs. Olsen preparing to wash the vestibule--give an ironic normalcy to the setting. The quiet atmosphere, however, is short-lived as Frank Maurrant approaches the building. His movements are described by the stage directions as lithe and cat-like as he suddenly rushes past Sam and up the stairs. Sam attempts to warn Anna, but it is too late and two shots ring out. Then Frank and Sankey appear struggling in the window, and another shot is fired. An amazed crowd gathers as Frank darts through them and into the basement. The police arrive but are unable to find Frank. An ambulance is summoned, and Rose arrives in time to see her mother being carried out of the building on a stretcher. Sam attempts to console her as they follow into the ambulance. This violent episode, as the succeeding events show, is the climax of the play.

The events of the third act begin slowly again. The eviction officials continue to move the Hildebrand furniture into the street, a policeman leaves the building with blood-stained clothes, and two nursemaids wheel their carriages by to view the scene of the tragedy. Easter arrives to meet Rose who has just come from the hospital where her mother died. She gratefully refuses Easter's offer to help, and asks Olsen to help her hang the black crape she has bought. After Easter leaves, Buchanan announces to all that Frank has been captured. Policeman usher him in, and a pathetic confrontation between Rose and Frank follows. Admitting that he was drunk and driven
insanely jealous by gossip, he begs Rose's forgiveness. Rose, overcome by grief and pity for her father, embraces him before he is led away. Sam attempts to console her, and asks again that she go away with him. To Sam's "Do you think my life means anything to me without you?" she replies,

It's what you said just now—about people belonging to each other. I don't think people ought to belong to anybody but themselves. I was thinking that if my mother had really belonged to herself, and that if my father had really belonged to himself, it would never have happened. It was only because they were always depending on somebody else, for what they ought to have had inside themselves. Do you see what I mean, Sam? That's why I don't want to belong to anybody, and why I don't want anybody to belong to me.16

With these lines, Rose makes the theme of the play explicit. Rose refuses Sam's proposal because she realizes that his love for her depends only on his own need. He lacks individual integrity just as his sister who depends so anxiously on him to give meaning to her life. The same privation of individualism, the same crippling dependence on others for what one should have in himself has caused her parents' destruction. Rose assures Sam that they will remain friends, but as she goes off Sam rushes into the building sobbing. It is not long before the scene returns to its humdrum routine. A shabby, middle-aged couple approaches to read the "To Let" sign on the Maurrant apartment, and Mrs. Jones resumes her gossiping, assuring her willing listeners that Rose will probably follow in the footsteps of her mother.

16 Ibid., pp. 187-188.
The structure of *Street Scene* is one of its most outstanding and fascinating characteristics. The play begins slowly with a general view of the lives of both major and minor characters, these last so realistically portrayed that they seem major figures in little dramas of their own. Gradually, these figures and the monotony of their existence fades into the background, and the focus becomes narrower, sharper until the action builds in a crescendo to the culminating and sensational climax of the second act. Impressed by its intense power, critics have often commented on the excellent structure of the play, frequently noting its resemblance to a realistic painting or even to a symphony. Barrett H. Clark and George Freedley, for example, note that the play, "creates a mood as a painter would create it, or a composer."¹⁷ Alan Downer adds: "It is actually a kind of domestic symphony, taking the details of life, each as accurately rendered as possible, and arranging them within a frame (or perhaps better, against a background) that is itself a familiar commonplace, to yield an interpretation of what this crowded communal life means in terms of the individual and the group."¹⁸ Rice himself has encouraged such observations by admitting a musical influence:

I was helped by concert-going as well as by picture-gazing. No musician, I yet had some grasp of the structure of symphonic music: the statement, restatement and development of themes, the interplay of contrasting instruments. Unconsciously I utilized

¹⁷Clark and Freedley, p. 693. ¹⁸Downer, pp. 63-64.
my slight knowledge of the principles of orchestration.19

Relevant to this symphonic structure is Rice's use of representational characters and actions which are interlaced throughout the play. The coming and going at irregular intervals of this pageant of characters contributes immeasurably to the play's realism. In great part, their presence in the tenement suggests a microcosm of humanity: the Fiorentinos, a loving middle-aged couple whose happiness is spoiled only by their inability to have children; Miss Cushing, an old maid who devotes her life to caring for her aged mother; the Buchanans, a young married couple having their first child; Mrs. Jones, the typical gossiper who sets herself up as judge, jury, and prophet concerning the lives of others. With remarkable economy Rice manages to sketch these credible personalities. Their presence, moreover, has thematic significance. These characters, together with the procession of mere passersby, give to the scene "the vast, roaring loneliness of New York."20

The same condition is noted by W. L. Dusenbury who adds, "The impossibility of ever being alone or even of breathing fresh air which someone else has not already breathed creates tragedy in the life of the Maurrants and an enervating sense of loneli-

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ness in the lives of all." It is from this lonely crowd, the crowded tenement, the crowded neighborhood, the crowded city that Rose liberates herself.

The setting, too, contributes much to the total effect of the play. Rice had given considerable thought to the brownstone facade which provided the background for the entire play:

The house was conceived as the central fact of the play: a dominant structural element that unified the sprawling and diversified lives of the inhabitants. This concept was derived partly from the Greek drama, which is almost always set against the facade of a palace or a temple. But mainly I was influenced, I think, by the paintings of Claude Lorrain, a French artist of the seventeenth century. In his landscapes, which I had gazed at admiringly in the Louvre and other galleries, there is nearly always a group of figures in the foreground, which is composed and made significant by an impressive architectural pile of some sort in the background.

But this setting, brilliantly executed by Jo Mielziner for the New York production, becomes more than a backdrop in the course of the play. It becomes, as John Gassner has pointed out, "theatrically immediate" rather than "actual" reality; the dreary and ugly illusion takes on symbolic value to represent some malevolent beast that consumes the lives of those who inhabit it.

The structure, representational figures, and setting of


the play, then, are all directed toward the resolution of Rose's situation. Portrayed from the outset as a sensitive and perceptive girl, her ultimate realization is realistically and sympathetically presented. And because this realization is gradual and the evidence is laid bare for all to see, Rice's theme is persuasive indeed. Rose at first believes, as the events of Act I and of the beginning of Act II show, that matters would be greatly improved if she and her family could escape this destructive environment; she feels that the gossipping though often well-meaning neighbors are a part of the dreary and dirty urban surroundings that stifle their love and life as a family. She even momentarily considers her own escape when Harry Easter offers her a kind of freedom from her depressing circumstances. But it does not take long for her to see that this kind of freedom would be just another kind of bondage in which she would belong to him. This particular realization is even more strongly brought home after she has witnessed the destruction of her family.

Rose sees that more detrimental than their slum environment was her parents' lack of self-integrity. They were in constant need of others; they searched for others to whom they could belong. Frank Maurrant felt that his wife and children should give him love and respect regardless of his brutal behavior toward them; not being self-possessed, he strived to possess others in order to fill the vacuum within himself. Anna Maurrant, not finding fulfillment in herself or in her
family, sought to satisfy her need in an illicit relationship; so desperate was this need that she clung to this liaison in spite of what she knew could be disastrous consequences. Rose perceives the same problem in Shirley Kaplan who pleads with her not to take Sam since he is her only reason for living. And finally, perhaps the most difficult example for Rose to accept, is Sam's own pathetic need for her. She realizes at last that Sam's love is only his frantic need to find his fulfillment in someone who has the selfhood he lacks. The lesson is, indeed, a cruel one for Rose who feels so sympathetic toward all these characters. And, judging from the apparent commonness of the condition, the audience cannot but be sympathetic also. But sympathy should not weaken resolution, and it does not do so in Rose. Self-fulfillment, Rice is saying, must come from within the individual in spite of environmental conditions; Rose's recognition of this truth and her courageous determination to pursue it are what give special dignity to Rice's heroine.

The dignity Rose enjoys is especially appreciable when she is compared to Rice's previous near-tragic protagonists, Zero in The Adding Machine (1923) and Sophie Smith in The Subway (1924). Unlike Zero who at first protests and then submits, and unlike Sophie who is pure victim, Rose demonstrates the courage to resist the debilitating circumstances that

threaten to engulf her. Admittedly her obvious antagonist is not as immediately frightening as the industrial monsters against which Zero and Sophie are pitted, but the antagonists of all three plays are related by their kinship to modern society. The slum is a devastating by-product of the dehumanized society that deified the machine. Therefore, there is some criticism here of a society which, as Joseph Wood Krutch insists, "generates slums and compels human beings to live in them."\(^{25}\) But what makes Rose's characterization more impressive than that of the earlier protagonists is its psychological complexity. It is true that Zero also has this appreciable complexity, but then Rice had the tools of expressionism to develop it. Here, for the first time, Rice delves into the psychology of the individual within the bounds of a realistic mode of presentation. His character, then, is psychologically as well as dramatically convincing.

The excellence of *Street Scene* distinguishes it as Rice's most important contribution to the American theatre of the twenties. Due recognition was given to the play, moreover, when it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1929. The play is undoubtedly a dramatic triumph in brilliant realism, and it still remains as Rice's most impressive work. But in terms of his talent for realism and his dexterity as a playwright, and in terms of what he felt his obligations to be both to his art

\(^{25}\) Krutch, *The American Drama Since 1918*, p. 234.
and to his society, Rice had much more to say and to show to his public.

Rice's accomplishments in this period of his career from 1924 to 1929 are indeed impressive. First, to the already considerable variety of dramatic forms he had worked with before 1924 he now added another sentimental comedy, _Close Harmony_ (1924); a mystery melodrama, _Cock Robin_ (1927); a farce comedy, _See Naples and Die_ (1929); and finally the realistic melodrama, _Street Scene_ (1929). It is a tribute to his rich talent, too, that while he could handle fantasy and expressionism in plays like _The House in Blind Alley_ (1916) and _The Adding Machine_ (1923), he could also manage realism with the microscopic fidelity evident in _Street Scene_. Certainly the superb realistic technique of this last play is his most outstanding achievement to 1929, and since it serves to define his peculiar kind of realism, the work is of considerable importance to Rice's development as a playwright.

Rice's realism is defined in particular by his development and use of representational characters and actions. Again, these are characters and actions that may have proximate or remote relevance to the main action of a play, but that are not integral to the plot proper. Although the promise of this method might be discerned in his earlier play, _The House in Blind Alley_, _See Naples and Die_ and especially _Street Scene_ provide more poignant illustrations of this representational technique. In _See Naples and Die_, for instance, there are the
realistic caricatures of Lucy Evans, the middle-aged American matron who enjoys the mere externals of the cultural shock, and of Basil Rawlinson, the priggish English tourist who condemns everything that does not conform to the Victorian standards of Britannia. These characters contribute to the excellent realism and to the hilarity of the farcical action in the play. Even more impressive are the representational figures in Street Scene. The clever management of mere passersby and of the Maurrants' neighbors—the Fiorentinos, the Joneses, the Olsens, the Kaplans—sharpens the realistic setting and atmosphere of the play. But in this work, Rice gives thematic importance also to several representational characters: Agnes Cushing who too willingly devotes her life to caring for her aged mother; Shirley Kaplan who depends so exclusively on her brother Sam; and Laura Hildebrand who is a victim of marital infidelity—these are but a few of the characters mentioned in the analysis of the play who reflect aspects of Rose Maurrant's struggle to choose individual determination over crippling dependence on others.

Finally, and in terms of his work in the thirties, perhaps the most important characteristic of this period in his career is Rice's involvement with social and political questions on the national as well as on the international level. Here the playwright extends the earlier social criticism of The House in Blind Alley (1916), The Adding Machine (1923), and The Subway (1924) which attacked respectively the evils of
child-labor and the dehumanization of man resulting from the evolution of the machine age. Now on the international level, See Naples and Die presents his light lampoon of Mussolini, one of the tyrants Rice would condemn with far greater seriousness in Judgment Day (1934), Between Two Worlds (1935), and American Landscape (1938). It is not surprising that the subject of tyranny should arouse his vociferous anger even in the twenties since it represented a major threat to his convictions on the sanctity of freedom and the individual—an important theme, defined so well in Street Scene, that is to be further developed in the plays to follow. Moreover, in Street Scene also, Rice demonstrated his involvement with both international and national problems. Communism and Fascism were satirized in the cliché-ridden rant of Abraham Kaplan. Even in the midst of Kaplan's ludicrous support of Marxism, however, Rice managed to touch upon some very real problems on the domestic scene: the stifling and destructive atmosphere of the slum on the family as well as on the individual, the ignorance evident in national and religious prejudice, and the need for labor unions. These and other problems would be the objects of Rice's art and thought in the next decade when he would, even more ambitiously, use the drama as his pulpit.
CHAPTER IV

THE TRIUMPH OF REALISM: PLAYS, 1931-1932

Although the later thirties demonstrate Rice's most important work in the social drama and for him represent the most significant period of his career, the plays of the early thirties are not without merit and distinction. Here, however, particularly in The Left Bank (1931) and Counsellor-at-Law (1931), a primarily dramatic concern with realism is more important than an involvement with social issues. The influence of Street Scene (1929) looms large in these plays where settings, backgrounds, major incidents, and representational characters and actions teem with the same brilliant vitality that characterize Rice's prize-winning play. In the cultural and psychological studies Rice respectively presents in these two plays, his handling of environmental backgrounds as well as his management of the immediate problem of the plot demonstrates a talent for dramatic realism which distinguishes him as one of the most successful realists of the modern stage.

The Left Bank, written in 1930 and performed 242 times in its first production, is listed by Burns Mantle as one of the best plays of 1931. It was also, for Rice, one of the

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most satisfactory plays he had written to this time. The play, whose subject is a disillusionment with revolt, combines two of Rice's outstanding characteristics: his talent for realism and his recurrent occupation with the matters of freedom and the individual. The title of the play suggests that Rice might be advocating the revolt of individuals who sought refuge from the cultural sterility of America during this time. But his point of view is not so simple. It must be recalled that Rice's concept of freedom includes the notion of responsibility: an individual who breaks the chains of conformity must be motivated by ideals which include his self-determination as well as his responsibility toward his fellowmen, so that mere escape for its own sake is no virtue. Rice expressed the idea of the play thus: "Its thesis was that revolt against America's cultural sterility was likely to be symptomatic of an inability to adjust to the conditions of American life." These conditions of American life, then, might include cultural sterility, but they also called for a spirit of dedication on the part of intelligent citizens to repair that deficiency and to contribute to the general improvement of their own country.

The plot of the play concerns the decision of Claire Shelby to return to the country where she has roots instead of trying vainly and for the wrong reasons to be assimilated into an alien environment. All of the incidents which compose the plot take place in the hotel room of John and Claire Shelby on

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2 Rice, Minority Report, p. 266. 3 Ibid.
the Boulevard Montparnasse. Act I opens with John and Claire rising from their bed in the late morning after an all-night party on the left bank. John and Claire, we learn from their conversation, are free-lance writers who have been in Paris for a number of years. John is supposed to be working on a biography of Claire's famous brother, Robert Banks. He has procrastinated with the work, however, and they are forced to live hand-to-mouth with money John gets for articles in third-rate journals and that Claire earns as a translator. Claire is obviously disillusioned with their meager existence and complains to John about their young son, Teddy, whom they have deposited in a progressive school in England. John feels no affection for Teddy and so is deaf to Claire's request that they bring Teddy to live with them in Paris. This lack of parental responsibility in John prepares us for the total lack of any responsibility that he demonstrates later in the play. They are interrupted then by a telephone call from Waldo and Susie Lynde who are about to arrive in Paris from England where they have visited Teddy in the course of their tour of Europe. Susie is Claire's niece, the daughter of her late brother, who has come to Paris with her lawyer-husband not only for the holiday but also to settle her late father's estate with her mother who lives on the Riviera. John resents the arrival of these "tourists," and is only further angered by a telegram from Teddy's headmaster who has threatened to expel their son because of Waldo's intrusion at the avant-garde school.
While they make some attempt to get the place in order before the Lyndes’ arrival, they are visited by Alan Foster, a young and witty artist also "in exile" from the United States. Rice wastes no time again in introducing representational characters and actions that reflect John’s irresponsibility and provide a realistic cross section of this feckless expatriate society. When Alan leaves, Claire complains to John of his rude advances toward her, but John dismisses them lightly, more concerned about the stale croissants the hotel has served him for breakfast. An argument ensues with Claire pleading that they return to America and that they take Teddy with them. In the course of their heated discussion, John delivers a bitter indictment of his homeland:

A man can't create in a spiritual vacuum, in an atmosphere that's esthetically sterile. And that is precisely what America is: a spiritual vacuum, a cultural desert.4

Claire's argument that the period of their justifiable and youthful revolt is over and that they might be much happier at home goes unheeded as the Lyndes arrive and their discussion ends.

Susie is young and attractive, seductive but fatuous. Waldo, on the other hand, is sensitive and sensible and serves as Rice's raisonneur in the play. Rice uses the quick but convincing revelation of these characters to prepare for the later rapprochement between John and Susie and between Claire and Waldo, this gradual rearrangement supplying the primary action
of the plot. While Claire takes Susie out to show her the hotel's run-down facilities, which Susie thinks are romantic, Waldo and John discuss the Paris environment. When Waldo confesses he would prefer staying in the shop and theatre district rather than on the left bank, John accuses him of being a tourist—to which Waldo readily and frankly assents. Admitting that John's defense of the tradition of old Paris has merit, Waldo also contends that he is a modern:

But it seems to me that we've got to live with the things that are going on, now. I don't know, maybe it's just lack of imagination, but I think you've got to go whichever way the world is going, not where it came from.5

And when John retorts with his characteristic condemnation of America as "a nation unequalled, in all history, both for its material wealth and its spiritual poverty," Waldo contributes Rice's insistence on responsibility to the revealing discussion:

It's a stern indictment, but if all the rest of us are guilty, I'll have to plead guilty, too. I'd feel a little embarrassed having the only well-fed soul among a hundred and twenty million spiritual paupers.6

Compared to John's cliché-ridden and haughty disquisition, Waldo's frank and sincere statements are forceful and convincing. Their conversation is interrupted by the return of Claire and Susie. After their husbands exit, Claire and Susie have a brief discussion that parallels the preceding conversation of John and Waldo and that contributes much to the complication of the plot.

5Ibid., p. 58. 6Ibid., pp. 58-59.
While Susie is enamoured of the romance of Paris, Claire confesses her disillusionment with the city and her desire to return home and have Teddy with her. Susie thinks children a bore, but adds that Waldo loves them. For her part, however, she would prefer to stay in Europe to study modeling for a while, and asks Claire to help her to persuade Waldo. Claire leaves as Waldo enters so that Susie puts in her request immediately. When he objects that his law practice would prevent an extended stay, Susie suggests that she stay alone. Waldo is somewhat shocked by the suggestion, however, and refuses to discuss it further. When John enters, Waldo goes off with Claire to make a telephone call so that John and Susie are left alone. John finds Susie very attractive and makes cautious advances to which Susie coyly responds with an invitation to John to accompany them on their trip to see her mother. When Claire enters, John delicately asks her if he can accompany Susie since he could also get valuable information for his biography of her father during the trip. Susie diplomatically asks Claire to come along, but Claire declines, intimating that she is accustomed to John's escapades. To make the situation all the more obvious, John offers to help Susie with the legal affairs so that Waldo could be relieved of the burden. They agree to discuss the arrangement at dinner as the first act closes.

In a very compact and realistic first act, Rice has managed to set the ingredients of his plot into motion. The
amount of discussion even to this point in the play gives adequate indication that ideas rather than mere physical activity will dominate the remainder of the play. This impression is intensified by the opening of the second act which finds Waldo and Claire alone in the apartment discussing the July 14 celebration in the streets below.

Claire has sprained her ankle so that she is confined to the apartment with Waldo, while John and Susie have left to keep the appointment with Susie's mother. They enjoy the display of revelry in the streets and wonder why Americans lack the spontaneity and enjoyment of life that Parisians have. Claire believes Americans are inhibited by their traditional Puritan consciences which make them ashamed to have appetites and force them to be somewhat furtive about satisfying them. Waldo, voicing Rice's opinion, agrees but wonders if trying to thwart this conscience as so many do in Paris might not be a vain and childish effort to deny their real identity. They are distracted momentarily by the street celebration, and Waldo expresses his regret that Susie and John are not there to enjoy the occasion with them. He is surprised by Claire's somewhat nonchalant statement that Susie and John are probably happy to be away together. Claire apologizes for shocking him but admits that she has put up with John's erratic behavior for some time. She has managed, however, to come to some enlightening conclusions about the problem: "You see, Waldo, to me all this--this escapade of John's and Susie's--all this sex business and
the way we all talk and think and carry on, nowadays, is all part of a larger problem, a basic problem of adjustment and self-realization." Her statement serves as an appropriate corollary to John's earlier remarks on self-knowledge and identity. She recognizes too that all of John's carrying on and his pretense of seeking freedom is only his way of avoiding the responsibilities of adjustment and a realistic self-evaluation. Their talk is interrupted by the arrival of Lillian Garfield, John's older sister, who has come to Paris to demand that John remove Teddy from the outrageously progressive English school. Shocked by what she witnessed at the school, Lillian disparagingly compares it to the "proper up-bringing" which she gave to John. While Claire tries to calm Lillian's hysterics, Alan Foster and a wild group of celebrating friends barge in.

What follows is an excellent representational scene which serves to depict a cross section of the vacuous society that inhabits the left bank: Gustave Jensen, an American of Scandinavian birth copies Renoirs; Miriam Van Diesen, a cigar-smoking and ostentatious American in middle age, pursues rich widowers; Charlie Miller spouts passages from Horace, while his wife carouses with other men in their group. Charlie also harangues against America's privation of culture but in a manner similar to John's so that his statements are hollow. Their general behavior, dominated by free love and drink, is, ironically, uncivilized and coarse. The group finally leaves when

7Ibid., p. 112.
Claire's liquor supply is exhausted, but not before they have so shocked Lillian Garfield that she stomps out indignantly.

After their departure, Claire tells Waldo she suspects John married her largely to escape from Lillian's possessiveness. This fact, then, sheds further light not only on John's relationship with Claire but also on his arguments on culture and his withdrawal from responsibility. Rice's intimation, of course, is that more than cultural reasons might account for the behavior of most expatriates. In order to cure Claire's apprehensions about Teddy, Waldo offers to take charge of him for a year. Claire is impressed by this generous offer but doubts that John would approve. Waldo tries then to take Claire in his arms, but she avoids him. Feeling guilty about her attraction to Waldo, Claire asks him to leave. When he does reluctantly leave, Claire sinks sobbing into a chair. Waldo returns immediately, however, and the two embrace as the second act closes.

Act III opens on the same scene two days later as Claire is packing to go after Teddy. While she is out of the room, John and Susie return. Susie is apprehensive about seeing Waldo and Claire, but John assures her that Claire could not be interested in Waldo, nor Waldo in her. When John mentions that he has a "responsibility" to accompany Claire on the trip to England, Susie begs him not to leave her. John comforts her until they are interrupted by Lillian who has come to John to demand that he give Teddy to her. John is bitterly adamant in
his refusal to deliver his son into the same captivity he endured with Lillian. She is crushed by his remarks, but still offers to take care of John too if he complies with her request. Driven to rage by the suggestion, John blurts out:

So you want a whore to keep too, do you? Well, understand this: you can't make a prostitute of me. It was to escape your dull, sodden, complacent world that I came here. Go back and live on your husks? No thank you! I prefer to starve decently in freedom. That's a word you've never learned—freedom! Freedom and self-respect! Individuality!8

Unable to answer the charge, Lillian leaves in tears. Claire then enters and kisses John perfunctorily. John is furious when Claire tells him of Waldo's offer to take Teddy, and ironically retorts that he would prefer Lillian to have him. Claire refuses flatly, and the argument is broken off as Waldo enters and greets Susie. Susie shocks everyone by announcing abruptly that she is going to divorce Waldo. She contends that they are mismated, and with apologies to Claire suggests that Waldo would be happier with a woman like her. When Waldo objects, John accuses him of acting childishly. After Waldo and Susie depart into the next room, John and Claire argue about what he considers her "adolescent emotionalism." Claire resents the ironic accusation, and when John proffers a temporary separation she insists that she is going back to America with Teddy. To John's ridiculous charge that she is a chauvinist, Claire answers:

You know it's not because I believe that America is any better than France. It's simply that my

8Ibid., p. 197.
roots are there. I want to go and live in my own country, among my own people. I'm tired of being an exile; tired of drifting--of this aimless, wandering existence that we live here. 9

Freedom, Claire adds, is not a matter of geography. John refuses to see her point of view, however, and when Claire asks Waldo to take her to the station he blindly suggests that she is leaving him for Waldo. Denying the accusation, Claire attempts to embrace John, but he repulses her and she exits hurriedly. As John collapses into a chair, half-sobbing, Susie enters to comfort him. The curtain falls as Susie leads John to her room.

In respect to his theme, Rice argues his point eloquently and persuasively. Although Stark Young complained that the ideas expressed were true enough but lacked "living delight and contagion," 10 other reviewers noted Rice's achievement for giving his significant concepts the color of living speech and for avoiding the pitfalls of stage argument. 11 And it is true that the expression of these ideas is never uninteresting, never tedious. Rice also succeeds, as he had perhaps seen Ibsen succeed, in making his thesis compelling by expressing it in the dynamic dialogue of characters whose personalities are

9 Ibid., p. 217.
10 Stark Young, "Mr. Rice and Mr. Laughton," The New Republic, LXVIII (1931), 264.
appropriate to the beliefs they state.

John Shelby's indictment of America's sterility in cultural matters is, for the most part, alarmingly true. But it is his reaction to that condition that Rice questions. John sincerely believes that he is a rebel with a cause, but his own behavior belies his position. His procrastination on the biography of Claire's brother, his propensity for illicit love affairs, his irresponsible treatment of Claire and Teddy, all expose him as a fraud. In spite of his more than casual insights, he fails to see that his rebellion is mere escapism, a selfish retreat from mature commitment. His position is only further weakened by his reaction to his sister, Lillian; to her he confesses, though he ironically fails to see its implications, that his self-imposed exile is in great part the result of her possessiveness.

Claire and Waldo, on the other hand, argue the positive side of the case convincingly. Motivated both by her responsibility to her son and by the intelligent conviction that freedom is not a matter of geography, Claire recognizes that their rebellion is a futile attempt to adapt to an alien environment only to avoid the responsibilities that life imposes on all mature adults. Waldo, as Rice's obvious raisonneur, adds to this that responsibility does lie with Americans for what America's cultural level is. Although there are many problems to be tackled in raising the cultural level of their country, Americans are cowards if they desert the battleground and
selfishly bask in an established culture into which they can never be assimilated. In simple and clear language, then, Rice expresses an important corollary to his propositions on freedom and the individual: neither freedom nor self-determination are commodities to be had at a bargain; they can be had only by individuals who recognize their worth in terms of a commitment to responsibility that is a part of their context.

Besides its significant theme, The Left Bank is noteworthy for Rice's achievement with realism. The setting, for example, is handled with fine verisimilitude: the gaudy wallpaper, the bathroom two flights up and the telephone three flights down, the light that goes on over the bed when the ceiling fixture is turned off are, as Joseph Wood Krutch pointed out in his review, "nature herself." Even more impressive, however, is Rice's realistic manner of framing the discussions in the play: John's indictment of American culture is adequately prepared for by Claire's suggestion that Teddy might be happier there; Waldo and Claire's discussion of Americans' fear of legitimate pleasures is introduced by their comments on the Parisians' enjoyment of the Bastille Day celebration. Statements of thematic importance, therefore, are always firmly rooted in the structure of incidents in the plot.

Typical of Rice's technique also is his handling of representational characters. With his customary economy and

12 Joseph Wood Krutch, "Realism and Drama," The Nation, CXXXIII (1931), 441.
s sureness of stroke, he gives even these minor figures the breath of life. Most amusing among these is Claude, the obsequious male chambermaid who dusts the room with the careless grace of a ballet dancer. Alan Foster, too, with his disarming wit and playboy charm lends color to the scene. Finally, Lillian Garfield as the possessive and discontented sister, Susie as the dewy-eyed sentimentalist, and the party of Alan Foster's dissolute friends contribute to the vitality of the whole presentation.

In spite of these excellent features—the cogency of Rice's theme, its careful expression in terms of credible human beings, the realistic setting, and the vividness of minor figures—the play has one structural weakness that somewhat lessens its total effect. After the introduction and even brief exposition of the central figures in the course of Act I, all the following actions are too predictable. After John and Claire's initial argument, their incompatibility is too evenly paralleled by the mismatched Lyndes. The audience readily expects the exchange of partners, and the only interest left is in the general revelation of their respective motives. These motives, in turn, which are certainly interesting and vital to the central theme of the play, seem unnecessary to the resolution of the plot: obvious discrepancies in the personalities of the characters are enough to account for the outcome of the play without any reference to differences in their philosophies. The result of this weakness is that the theme, significant in
itself, is not united inextricably to the action of the play. Unfortunately, this is a weakness which threatens a good number of Rice's plays to follow: he is not always careful to secure the stage as a foundation for his pulpit. Luckily this weakness in The Left Bank does not ruin the validity of Rice's central idea, so that the play does contribute to a clarification of his definitions of freedom and individuality. Also, the outstanding realism of the play is a feature which occurs again and again in his subsequent work and one which becomes even more noteworthy in his next successful play.

Counsellor-at-Law, produced in 1931 for 412 performances and revived in 1942 for 248 performances, is one of Rice's outstanding accomplishments in the realistic mode. The realism of this play is, in fact, second only to that of Street Scene (1929), and here again the detail is managed with an "exactitude which both the camera and the phonograph might envy."¹³ Some reviewers, however, were so impressed with the detail that they felt it even distracted from the central interest of the play. Richard Dana Skinner, for example, complained that much of the realistic detail, particularly in minor characters, failed to converge on any one aspect of the story and contributed only to making up a "certain atmosphere of sordidness and general futility."¹⁴ John Hutchens in Theatre Arts Monthly commented

¹³Ibid., p. 440.
that the infinitude of detail was "atmospherically valuable but deadening after a certain point."15 Other critics, on the other hand, considered the detail to be organic to the whole play: "It emerges, after its rest in the wings, as a sound piece of theatre craftsmanship, a play built up of a hundred pieces of closely observed character and detailed business, all fitted together into a closely knit whole."16 Rice himself, moreover, considered the atmospheric touches and the large cast of characters as functional, all of them centering on the main character, George Simon, "an aggressive New York lawyer who had risen from poverty to glittering success."17 An analysis of the incidents of the play reveals this to be exactly the case: in spite of any special interest they might have in themselves, the great majority of these realistic details and the panorama of characters converge to illuminate Rice's careful character study of George Simon.

The first scene of Act I in this frankly melodramatic plot of character serves to establish the atmosphere of the New York law office where Simon exercises his lucrative profession with his partner, John Tedesco. The entire scene is an excellent representational device to prepare for the delayed


16 Rosamond Gilder, "Broadway in Review," Theatre Arts, XXVII (1943), 16-17.

17 Rice, Minority Report, p. 278.
entrance of Simon himself in scene two. Bessie, a young, simple, and fatuous switchboard operator, answers calls and converses with clients in the waiting room to give us expository information on Simon's success. According to the incoming calls, which Bessie promptly directs to Simon's efficient secretary, Regina Gordon, his clients include large corporations and prominent people, even a United States senator. Interestingly enough, even these representational devices are handled deftly so that no loose ends mar the surface of the play: for example, cases involving the Radio Corporation of America and International Metal Refineries, mentioned in the first act, are resolved through telephone conversations in the second act. Also, the United States Senator Wells, mentioned in the opening scene, figures in Simon's professional dilemma later in the play. The same may be said of most of the representational devices in the work; the fabric of Rice's play is carefully woven throughout. Other minor characters who inhabit the scene contribute to the atmosphere of the setting: Weinberg, an efficient Harvard-educated aide to Simon; Sandler, a witty law clerk; Goldie, a middle-aged stenographer; and Henry, the rather obtuse office boy who enjoys reading transcripts involving cases of rape. Most important among the representational characters of the first scene, however, is Zedora Chapman, a client whom Simon has successfully defended in a trial for the murder of her husband. It is through her conversation with Bessie that we learn of Simon's apparently successful marriage to Cora, the
daughter of the former governor of Connecticut. Simon had handled Cora's divorce from her first husband and won her custody of their two children, Richard and Dorothy. The first impression that we get of her from Bessie's replies to her on the telephone is not a favorable one and prepares us for the later appearance of the domineering and socially-conscious woman who threatens Simon's personal and professional life with her infidelity. The first impression of Regina Gordon, on the other hand, is an entirely favorable one; a foil to Cora, she is attractive, efficient, loyal, and apparently very fond of Simon. Introduced at this time also is Roy Darwin, a friend of Cora's, who comes to Simon to borrow money which Simon later and ironically learns he will use for a trip to Europe with Cora.

Scene two opens with Simon's declining an invitation to speak at a testimonial for the new ambassador to Austria. He strikes one immediately as shrewd, ambitious, and often generous. His generosity is best exemplified by his treatment of poor clients who have known him since childhood; in several instances in the play he takes their cases without a fee and often gives them monetary as well as legal help. But other cases he treats within this scene reveal that Simon sometimes practices within a questionable code of ethics. In defending a showgirl's paternity suit against a wealthy society playboy, he threatens the boy's father with the publication of embarrassing correspondence. Shortly after, he raises a rich client's fee
to compensate for money he has doled out to his poorer clients. This confused ethical code provides the most challenging ambiguity in Simon's characterization. Especially important in this scene also is his relationship with one of these poorer clients, Mrs. Becker, whose son has been beaten and arrested for delivering leftist propaganda speeches. Simon, who has known the poor newsstand operator since his childhood, greets her warmly and promises to post bail for her son as well as to defend him in court. His confrontation with Mrs. Becker serves several notable functions: it provides exposition of Simon's past; it places him in a favorable light as one who has not been totally spoiled by success; and it prepares for his more significant confrontation with the Becker boy himself in Act III.

Scene three of Act I brings Cora Simon into the action. Haughty and rude, she fulfills the expectations of Bessie's description in the first scene. Although she alienates most of those who approach her, she is on very friendly terms with Roy Darwin who re-enters the waiting room after making his successful loan from Simon. The two are suspiciously cordial and express their mutual concern for a friend involved in a lawsuit Simon is handling. Cora assures Darwin, after accepting his invitation for lunch, that she will persuade Simon to drop the case. After Cora's exit to Simon's office, Mrs. Lena Simon, his mother, enters the waiting room to be met by Charles McFadden, another old friend of the family to whom Simon has given a job. Again Rice manages to give this representational scene functional
importance: as in the case of Mrs. Becker, McFadden's expression of admiration for Simon reminds us of the protagonist's backgrounds and his generosity; but, more importantly, McFadden's admission to Mrs. Simon that he does occasional detective work for her son prepares for his involvement in the professional scandal that will threaten Simon later in the play.

In scene four, three successive confrontation scenes prepare for the climax of the play. Before these occur, however, Mrs. Simon meets with her son to ask that he help his younger brother who has written another bad check. Although Simon responds warmly to his mother, he expresses his violent contempt for his aimless and irresponsible brother. For his mother's sake he promises to save David, but for the last time. The first significant incident of the scene, however, is the meeting of Cora and Regina in Simon's office. While Regina maintains a polite but cool attitude toward her, Cora treats the secretary as a menial servant. Cora's reaction to Simon, in turn, differs little from her behavior with Regina. While Simon is affectionate, even adoring, Cora is aloof and reserved. There is a definite hint, too, that she partially regrets her marriage to Simon and feels uncomfortable about its unsavory circumstances in the divorce suit. Her prime concern with Simon now, though, is to ask that he drop the case against her society friend who would be ruined by the scandal involved. Simon is reluctant at first but, trying desperately to please Cora, agrees to drop the case. Cora's behavior is so obviously cold
that only Simon in his blind love for her fails to perceive it. For Simon, her ultimate defection in Act III will lead him to the brink of despair and suicide. A final confrontation is by far the most significant incident of the scene. Simon meets with Pete Malone, a political boss, who has come to warn him of the machinations of Francis Clark Baird, a rival lawyer, to have Simon disbarred. Seven years before, Simon had defended a young neighborhood friend, Johann Breitstein, in a case involving petty theft. Breitstein had bribed a witness to testify for him, and now the witness, himself in the penitentiary, was trying to win a parole by confessing the false testimony. Although the statute of limitations would prevent Breitstein's arrest, the scandal could mean disbarment for Simon. Terribly worried about his possible ruin, Simon resolves to stop Baird at all costs.

In this initial act Rice has managed with his customary skill to set his main action in motion and to provide a host of representational characters and incidents to enrich the fabric of his play. Without sacrificing suspense, he has illuminated his characters and situations so that just enough exposition and complication make the outcome of his play and his central character study believable and dramatically effective.

The first scene of Act II arouses suspense by increasing the complicating circumstances of the Breitstein case. The scene opens with Bessie, the switchboard operator, lying on the couch to recover from a fainting spell. The reason for her
distress, ostensibly, is her witnessing a man's suicidal jump from an office window. Again this representational incident is functional in foreshadowing Simon's attempted suicide in Act III. But the primary incident of the scene is Simon's confrontation with Breitstein. Simon warns him not to admit anything if he is questioned about his trial. Breitstein agrees, and reluctantly admits that there is conclusive evidence of his bribing the witness. Distraught with fear after Breitstein's departure, Simon reveals the situation to his sympathetic partner, Tedesco. He had helped Breitstein and admitted the false testimony only because the boy would have been given life imprisonment for his fourth petty offense. Baird, from whom Simon had won too many cases, is a member of the parole board to which Breitstein's witness confessed the perjury. Tedesco is appalled by the situation, but to demonstrate his loyalty to Simon suggests that he has underworld contacts who could eliminate Baird permanently. Simon gratefully declines the offer, but expresses his hope that Tedesco and his friends, and his loving Cora, will support him through this crisis.

In the following scene Cora arrives with her children after receiving Simon's urgent call. The children are intelligent but spoiled and rude to the office personnel. When Roy Darwin appears again, however, the children greet him cordially; but their behavior toward Simon later reflects their mother's aloof attitude. The relationship between Cora and Darwin
solidifies in the following scene in Simon's office. Expressing her disappointment that Simon's business threatens to cancel her trip to Europe, Cora confesses to Darwin that her marriage to Simon was perhaps a rash and now regrettable action. Darwin is, of course, sympathetic and expresses his regret that Cora will not be able to meet him in France where he plans to vacation—with the money borrowed from Simon. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Simon who, distracted by his present dilemma and naively certain of Cora's fidelity, fails to perceive the real significance of their relationship. Simon asks the children to come into his office and tries in vain to approach them affectionately. After Darwin takes the children out, Simon attempts to share his distress with Cora. Cora is hardly sympathetic; shocked by the whole Baird affair and worried by the prospects of a public scandal, she can only suggest that she go to Europe until the danger subsides. Simon reluctantly and disappointedly agrees.

Dejected after his wife's departure, Simon calls for McFadden and assigns him to follow Baird. McFadden's detective role, it may be recalled, was prepared for by his conversation with Simon's mother in scene three of Act I. And what McFadden discovers will be instrumental in saving Simon from professional ruin in the last act. Rice then proceeds to end the scene and the act with a sensational confrontation between Simon and the Becker boy whom he has promised to defend for publicly advocating Communism. Becker, however, vociferously refuses Simon's
offer and delivers the play's most bitter indictment against Simon. In spite of the many favorable characteristics given him in the course of the play thus far, there have been sufficient indications of Simon's questionable ethics to give Becker's accusations the ring of truth. In dialogue that vibrates with Rice's usual realistic vigor, Becker charges angrily and Simon reacts guiltily.

Becker (rising): Shut up, Simon. I'm going to do the talking here. How did you get where you are? I'll tell you. By betraying your own class, that's how. By climbing on the backs of the working class, that's how. Getting in right with crooked bourgeois politicians and pimping for corporations that feed on the blood and sweat of the workers.

Simon: That's enough, do you hear?
Becker: No, it's not enough. I'm going to tell you what you are, Counsellor Simon, sitting here in your Fifth Avenue office, with a bootblack at your feet and a lot of white-collar slaves running your errands for you. You're a cheap prostitute, that's what you are, you and your cars and your country estate and your kept parasite of a wife.

Becker spits venemously on the floor and rushes out, leaving Simon temporarily dazed by his harangue.

In Act III, which takes place one week later, events move quickly to a climax. Exhausted by worry over the outcome of the Baird affair, Simon informs Tedesco that the situation seems hopeless. He tries to persuade himself that retirement may not be so bad, but then admits, "All I know is work. Take work away from me and what the hell am I: a car without a

motor, a living corpse." Regina, who is painfully aware of Simon's distress but not of the details of the case, interrupts to tell him that the Becker boy has just died of a cerebral hemorrhage, the result of his fight with the police. With his customary generosity Simon orders Regina to pay for the funeral expenses and to send a compensatory check to the boy's mother. When Tedesco and Regina exit, McFadden enters with news that spells Simon's salvation. In what seems a long, elaborate narration for the sake of melodramatic climax, McFadden reveals that Baird has a mistress and an illegitimate child in Philadelphia. Simon is elated by the news, and makes plans to contact Baird immediately.

The final scene of the play opens with a representational incident which again demonstrates Rice's careful attention to the minutest details. Bessie, who has been complaining from the outset of the play about an upset stomach, confers quietly on the telephone with a friend. Her fainting spell in scene one of Act II, it seems, was not the result of witnessing the suicide but a symptom of pregnancy and she asks her friend for help in getting an abortion. In terms of the main plot, however, the following incident is more significant: Baird arrives to meet with Simon. Demonstrating admirable selectivity, Rice chooses to have their confrontation off-stage. Thus he avoids representing too vividly the distasteful circumstances of their meeting and insures a moderately sympathetic
response to his protagonist. The meeting is obviously successful as Simon emerges triumphantly from his office and politely dismisses Baird. His elation is short-lived, however, when he telephones Cora at the dock where she is about to board her ship for France. Cora considers any delay in her trip now an inconvenience, and Simon apologizes for his lack of consideration. Stunned momentarily with his disappointment, Simon recovers enough to call Darwin's hotel and learns that he too has left for Europe. Ironically, his victory in the Baird affair carried with it simultaneous defeat in his relationship with Cora; only too late does Simon realize that professional success and personal happiness do not necessarily go hand in hand. Alone with his depression, Simon slowly approaches the window, throws the sash open, and stands upright on the window sill. Regina enters abruptly and screams to prevent Simon's jump. Simon collapses on the sofa, while Regina cowers in a corner, sobbing. Suddenly the silence is broken by the switchboard's persistent buzz. Simon curtly orders Regina to answer the call but then wrests the receiver from her. The call is from an industrial magnate who begs Simon to defend his son for the murder of his wife. His spirits restored by the challenge of a new and possibly lucrative case, Simon asks Regina to help him. Regina beams with joy at Simon's recovery, and the two hurry out as the curtain falls.

"Expert," "efficient," "sharp" are adjectives that describe adequately Rice's plot of character in this three-act
melodrama. George Simon's portrait is the story of the poor boy who has fulfilled the early twentieth-century's ideal of vigorous ambition as the key to success. But Rice avoids the pitfalls of the simple success story by frankly admitting and exposing the detrimental costs and effects of material success for an essentially good man's character. And there is no doubt that Rice intends that we react sympathetically to his protagonist. His dedication to his work, his sincere but pathetic adoration of his selfish wife, his relationship to his employees, and his generous response to people from his old neighborhood generally preclude a serious condemnation of Simon.

Still there are facets within these traits that invite reservations. Simon confesses to Tedesco in scene one of Act III, "All I know is work," and it is this frankly admitted truth that betrays Simon as the victim of his own ambition. Simon regards his work and its material success as the definition of his being. In spite of his public and private protestations of love for his wife, then, it is at least implied that he neglects her for his practice; he mistakenly feels that his professional success will insure personal success also. Cora's desertion in Act III, therefore, seems as much an effect of Simon's neglect as of her own selfishness. Moreover, Simon's quick recovery over her defection in the final scene clearly reveals that a new case and a rich client are ready palliatives for his short-lived distress.

The dominance of work is also evident in Simon's
treatment of his poor clients. While he is certainly kind and magnanimous in helping them, he is also quick to compensate himself for any loss by taking advantage of richer clients. This conscious generosity, too, serves to compensate for the half-conscious feelings of guilt he endures after the young Becker boy's furious indictment at the end of Act II. Simon recognizes, at least in part, the validity of Becker's charge that he has colluded with bourgeois politicians, that he has prostituted himself with compromise, and that he has indirectly betrayed his own class. But the touch of remorse is quickly forgotten, and Simon's conscience is soothed by his offer to pay the boy's funeral expenses and to care for his aged mother.

Another detrimental effect of Simon's success is the deadening of his sensitivity to ethics. No means to an end is ignored if it is useful. Certainly his overcharging wealthy clients is indicative of this, but even more serious is Simon's readiness to employ questionable methods to win his cases. Thus he does not hesitate to use blackmail in defending the show-girl's paternity suit against the society playboy; and we are not, therefore, surprised to see him employ similar methods in intimidating Baird in order to relieve himself of the threat of disbarment.

In spite of these mitigating flaws, however, we are intended to respond sympathetically to Simon's character. Although Edmond Gagey contends that Rice merely reveals the
many-sided character of Simon and allows the spectator to make an individual judgment, the evidence in the play seems to tip the scales in Simon's favor. The impression we get is that Simon is basically good; his spontaneous congeniality and generosity are especially revealing in this regard. His flaws, on the other hand, incriminating though they may be, seem to be the tangential results of a success whose victim Simon has unwittingly become and whose disparaging effects he only partially realizes. The result is certainly an interesting personality, but his apparent victimization by material success robs Simon of greater stature and defines him as a melodramatic protagonist.

Remarkable also in this play is Rice's use of representational characters and action. Certainly a few contribute primarily to the excellent realistic detail of the law office such as Bessie, Weinberg, Sandler, and Harry. But for the most part, the panoramic pageant of minor characters, so exquisitely life-like, is functional in revealing the complex character of Simon. Again with dialogue that is vigorous and racy, Lillian Larue, the dissolute show-girl, and Zedora Chapman, the publicity-hungry widow, demonstrate the quality of some of Simon's clientele. Mrs. Lena Simon, the old Jewish mother; McFadden, the faithful Irish retainer; Tedesco, Simon's rather passive but loyal partner and foil; and Becker, the young

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radical all serve to elucidate personality features for and against Simon. But it is a regrettable paradox that while these excellent representational figures account for a great part of the play's success, they also contribute to the play's weakness.

Although they are functional in revealing aspects of Simon's character, too much time is spent on these figures and too little is expended on matters that are vital to the Baird incident for the main plot. It is not so much a case of total neglect in the development of the Baird affair, since it is interwoven throughout the three acts of the play; but Rice fails to develop Baird himself adequately as an antagonist to provide a significant conflict. For the greater part of the play he remains in the wings as some shadowy ogre; and when he does finally appear in scene one of Act III, he is no longer a threat to Simon. One would wish that he were at least as well developed as other minor characters to give more vigor to what is obviously the main conflict in the play. In a drama that is so justly constructed in other respects, it is unfortunate that Rice could not exercise more selectivity in this regard.

In spite of this defect, **Counsellor-at-Law** remains one of Rice's most significant achievements in realism. Besides being remarkable for Rice's lifelike representational characters and vivid dialogue, it is also the first instance of Rice's use of a plot of character in a serious drama. Rice would not concentrate on a single character again until his comedy **Dream**
Girl in 1945, but in that play the heroine lacks the complexity of George Simon. He is, with Zero of The Adding Machine (1923) one of the best conceived figures in Rice's cast of male characters.

Rice's last play in this period of the early thirties is Black Sheep (1932), a play which has neither the vital theme of The Left Bank nor the startling realism of Counsellor-at-Law. In great part the play returns to the spirit of Rice's sentimental comedies in the early twenties. At the time of its production for only four performances, Rice had just completed a tour of Russia; and his mind "was too much on the state of the world, particularly on the state of America."21 Because he cared too little about it to respond to the unfavorable reviews, he made no effort to revise the play. In a sense, then, the play might be considered a part of Rice's period of indolence, just preceding his great commitment to social drama.

A simple sentimental comedy in three acts, Black Sheep concerns the return of an apparently prodigal son to his New York, upper-middle-class family. In Act I, after seven years of silent exile, Buddy Porter arrives home at a very inopportune moment since his sister, Penelope, is about to contract a profitable marriage with a young and wealthy socialite, Milton Abercrombie. Although his doting and garrulous mother is happy about his return, the other members of the family hardly share her enthusiasm. And Buddy's appearance fulfills all expecta-

21 Rice, Minority Report, p. 326.
tions as he arrives with his mistress, Kitty Lloyd, borrows money from his disgruntled father to pay his taxi fare, and dips immediately into the family's liquor supply. The Porters are relieved when Buddy and Kitty retire to another part of the house before the arrival of Milton and his socially-conscious and refined mother. In the course of Mrs. Abercrombie's literate conversation with the Porters, she mentions the sensational writing of Tom Hatch, a new novelist whom the critics are comparing favorably with Conrad. Much to everyone's chagrin, Buddy barges in at that moment to retrieve the liquor tray and is immediately recognized by Mrs. Abercrombie as the famous Tom Hatch. Almost too stunned to respond, the Porters now react to Buddy with the warmest cordiality.

Acts II and III are occupied with Buddy's gradual acquiescence to his parents' comfortable milieu, and with Kitty's efforts to rescue him from his middle-class complacency for her sake and for the sake of his literary career. In Act II, everyone is quickly won over to Buddy, especially his brother Alfred's attractive fiancée, Dorothy Woods. Kitty, who takes a dim view of Buddy's frequent amorous adventures, tries to urge him to work, while she herself is harassed by the unwelcomed affection of Milton Abercrombie. Matters become even more complicated for Kitty and Buddy as Mrs. Abercrombie also casts her net for the young genius by promising to introduce him to influential people who may be instrumental in furthering his career.

Act III resolves these complications in two scenes.
Milton still pursues the annoyed Kitty, while Penelope is unaware of his infidelity. Kitty, aware that Buddy's relationship with Dorothy may work their mutual ruin, tries to convince the girl of Buddy's instability. Dorothy, however, now completely won over by Buddy's charm, confesses that in spite of her reservations about hurting the Porters and her own fiancé, Alfred, she and Buddy are planning to elope the following day. Still hoping that she has planted enough seeds of doubt in Dorothy's mind, Kitty allows her to leave and then warns Alfred of the plot to desert him. As Alfred rushes off to stop Dorothy, Kitty confronts Buddy who, unaware of her machinations, has finished the short story he has been working on sporadically. Kitty condemns it as sentimental tripe and informs him that she has taken steps to thwart his affair with Dorothy. Violent with rage, Buddy retorts sarcastically that he will still frustrate Kitty's plans by meeting with Mrs. Abercrombie. Kitty quickly devises another plan to resolve her problems. Pretending to respond to Milton's affection, she persuades him to purchase two steamship tickets for South America so that they may make their romantic escape. Milton is at first bewildered by the transformation in Kitty but then enthusiastically responds to her command.

In the last scene of the play, the marriage of Alfred and Dorothy is announced. But the news is quickly outshone by Buddy's proclamation that he and Mrs. Abercrombie will also marry. Kitty's response is a mixture of disappointment and
This is too touching. Chapter thirty-six. In which our hero, having contracted a noble alliance, bids a gracious farewell to his mistress.\textsuperscript{22}

Soon after, Milton meets with Kitty and gives her the tickets and money she has requested. Milton is somewhat dazed by the news of his mother's engagement to Buddy, but agrees to meet Kitty later for their escape. After Milton's departure, Kitty cleverly tells Buddy that she is off to South America, a place he has always wanted to experience for the sake of his writing. Buddy is unable to resist her glorious description of Rio, and Kitty is victorious in winning him back for herself and for his career.

While the plot of \textit{Black Sheep} is frankly specious, the play does have some winning features, especially its occasional humor. Kitty's elaborate and clever machinations are often entertaining, and her habit of expressing herself frankly, almost brazenly, contributes to some of the best moments of the play. Her first appearance in Act I, for example, is highlighted by her expression of relief after each of several drinks which she tosses down with "Thank God for that!"\textsuperscript{23} Mrs. Porter is also an entertaining character type: her awkward self-consciousness about meeting Helena Abercrombie; her possessive and unwelcomed solicitude for everyone, especially Buddy; her


\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 31
garrulity which she interprets as charm and wit; and her excitement at being interviewed by a columnist for a magazine series entitled "Mothers of Men Who Have Made Good" make her an appreciable comic figure. But besides these two characters there is little in the play to recommend it. Buddy is hardly convincing as a new Conrad, and the other characters involved in the contrived and barely plausible incidents are not remarkable. And except for occasional outbursts from Kitty, the dialogue, too, lacks Rice's usual vigor. With Counsellor-at-Law still playing and The Left Bank still fresh in their memories, most reviewers shared Creighton Peet's observation in Theatre Arts Monthly that the play was dull and lacked Rice's customary skill. 24

In comparison to The Left Bank and Counsellor-at-Law, whose themes and realistic technique set them in the front of Rice's canon, Black Sheep is a sadly inferior play. It does, however, bear some relationship to the two earlier plays in setting forth the two major characteristics of Rice's playwriting during these early thirties: his concern with the theme of individualism and his talent for realism.

In all three plays, Rice shows how individualism and freedom may be stifled by a combination of internal and external causes. In The Left Bank the playwright demonstrates that John Shelby's exile is motivated more by an immature attitude toward responsibility than by the cultural sterility of his native

land; ironically, Shelby's misunderstanding of individuality and freedom causes him to be exiled from himself as well as from America. In **Counsellor-at-Law**, George Simon's individuality is sacrificed to the sacred cow of ambition; his own lust for work as well as his society's unreasonable demands for material success contribute to his enslavement. Finally, in **Black Sheep**, an artistic sensibility is rescued from the stifling conformity required for popular success. It is regrettable that Rice could not give so important a theme better expression; this last play contributes little to a theme Rice argued eloquently and dramatically in the two earlier plays.

Second, **The Left Bank** and **Counsellor-at-Law** especially, demonstrate a realistic technique inherited from **Street Scene** (1929). In these plays, the backgrounds of the dingy apartment on the Boulevard Montparnasse and the New York law office are vivid in the minutest detail. More significant, however, are the representational characters in both plays. Alan Foster and the colorful group of expatriates vividly show the shallow lives of irresponsible rebels. More remarkable in **Counsellor-at-Law**, however, is the panoramic technique used in **Street Scene** to present a pageant of characters. For example, Bessie, the switchboard operator; Weinberg, the law clerk; McFadden, the amateur detective; and Becker, the outspoken radical serve not only to suggest the atmosphere of an actual law office but also to reflect the temper and personality of people in the early thirties. Moreover, they are functional in terms of the play's
plot: each of them contributes distinctively to the revelation of George Simon's character.

In theme and technique, these plays of the early thirties are clearly related to Rice's best work in the twenties; but they also serve as an appropriate prologue to his achievement in the later thirties. In great part, the realistic technique remains significant in the plays of social criticism. The theme of individualism, however, takes a new turn as Rice levels his sights on more imminent and timely dangers from the social and political spheres. It is in the plays that follow Black Sheep that Rice earns the epithet, un homme engagé.
CHAPTER V

REALISM AND THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE:
PLAYS, 1933–1938

The decade of the thirties, which brought the country the external threats of Fascism and Communism, and the internal threats of the Depression, was the period of Rice's most serious and intense involvement with social issues. From 1933 with We, the People to 1938 with American Landscape, Rice was engaged in voicing his robust protest against the tyranny of foreign demagogues, particularly Hitler, and the apparent complacency of the American people regarding this threat; and against the various evils of the Depression. Unemployment, unfair working practices controlled by big business, governmental disregard for veterans of World War I, unrelieved conditions of poverty for the many while a small rapacious crowd prospered—these are but a few of the disorders against which Rice raised his angry voice and pen. It is the nation's internal threat, then, that provides material for Rice's first drama of social criticism in the thirties, We, the People.

As the country's suffering from the Depression became more and more acute, Rice became more aware of the urgent need for social reform and more convinced of the power and obligation of the drama to contribute positively and forcefully to this
end. Just as he had been attuned to the dangers of mechanization and its dehumanizing effect on mankind in the twenties, now he perceived that the new villain was not the machine but the owners of the machine; man's predicament was the result not of the unavoidable forces of evolution but of his exploitation by a social class.¹ Rice saw that it was because of weaknesses in the capitalist system that the majority of men were hungry, unemployed, and generally destitute. Money which was necessary to providing for most men's basic necessities was sadly lacking, and Hoover with an apathetic Congress seemed to be doing little to alleviate the dire distress that enveloped the nation.

Rice has always been an advocate of socialism so that it is not surprising that in response to these conditions he supported the Communist Party's candidate, William Z. Foster, for the presidency in 1932. His brand of socialism, however, has never made him completely sympathetic with Communist ideals. He has frequently asserted that his socialism is of a Utopian variety; More's Utopia, Bacon's New Atlantis, Swift's Voyage to the Houyhnhms, Butler's Erewhon, and other utopian literature are the primary sources for his thought. Moreover, Rice has been concerned not with the support of any rigid system but with the establishment of a human community based on principles of truth and justice which would enable each man to become what he is capable of becoming.² His support of the Communist candidate

in 1932, therefore, is attributable to his belief at that time in the value of a big protest vote which might stir the new president and Congress into action for strong remedial measures. Rice was not content, however, to register his protest only by the vote and so composed *We, the People* which he completed just as Roosevelt defeated Hoover.

Although the play achieved a limited popular success with only forty-nine performances, it was cited by critics and intellectuals as one of the most significant dramas of the season. *New Theatre* hailed the play with enthusiasm, and congratulated Rice on his dramatic achievement in social propaganda.

Burns Mantle explained its inclusion among the best plays of 1932-1933 thus: "From whatever angle it is accepted or rejected, 'We, the People' remains a forcefully written, excessively timely and socially significant drama. It is, this editor is moved to think, too important a contribution to this particular theatre season to be denied a place among the important plays." Even his acting company was so impressed with Rice's dedication to an urgent cause that they agreed to take cuts in salary to keep the play in production. And after the production closed, they presented Rice with a testimonial which included the citation, "We consider it a splendid achievement in the modern theatre and we are proud and happy to have been

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associated with you in setting it before the public." Socially significant though it may be, the play has structural flaws which will become apparent in the following analysis. But it must also be admitted that in spite of these flaws, Rice manages in twenty finely-etched scenes to levy an eloquent attack on the various ills of a free-enterprise system gone wrong and attempts to urge both the public and government officials to decisive action.

Ostensibly, Rice constructs his vigorous indictment of society on the fortunes, or rather misfortunes, of a single family: William Davis, a foreman at the Applegate factory; his devoted wife; his daughter Helen, a dedicated school teacher; and his son Allen, a bright, young college student. The play is set primarily in a large industrial city, and the first scene opens with Helen Davis patriotically reprimanding a student and his immigrant father for their apparently anti-American sentiments. Tony and Louis Volterra explain, however, that they are critical not of the country but of its capitalistic bosses who thrive on the exploitation of the working classes. For Rice, and for his characters consequently; anti-capitalism is not tantamount to anti-Americanism. In the second scene Helen confesses her anxiety about the Volterra family to her parents and brother. Mr. Davis commends Helen for her patriotic stand, but Allen is more critical. In view of present conditions, he contends, the Volterras' complaint is perfectly

justifiable: the numbers of unemployed are staggering, one hundred of Davis' men have been laid off at the factory, and Helen has received no pay for five months. These facts are too obvious for them to dismiss Allen's objection. But the threat to the people's means of support is not the only evil effect of the Depression; their private lives and personal happiness are also affected, as the following scene shows. In scene three Helen meets her fiancé, Bert Collins, in a public park. Bert is employed as an accountant at the Applegate factory where his salary is so meager that it is barely enough to support him and his poor family. Because of this unfair financial deprivation, Bert and Helen are also being deprived of marriage. Very much in love with Helen and dejected by the remote possibility of their being married soon, Bert suggests they go to his room. But Helen believes that immorality is no answer to their predicament and asks Bert to wait.

Now that Rice has managed to involve us emotionally in the predicament of the Davis family, he turns the coin to reveal the type of capitalist that is in great part responsible for it. In scene four Bert's request for a raise is refused by Willard Drew, manager of the Applegate factory, who is more concerned with manipulating stocks, influencing senators, and cutting laborers' wages to meet preferred stock payments. The scene also gives Rice the opportunity to expose the wealth of the Drew family which is in stark contrast to the poverty of the Davis clan. Drew's daughter, Winifred, beams over her approach-
ing wedding in Westminster Abbey to an embassy official, and coyly persuades her father to donate five thousand dollars to the Unemployment Relief Fund for which she is soliciting. With ironic and apparent generosity, Drew signs the check while talking to his wife on the telephone about their purchase of a painting for a half million dollars. Such, Rice is saying, is the hypocrisy of the powers that be.

To elaborate the wide-spread effects of the Depression on all segments of the population, Rice then takes us to the farming community where Bert Collins' widowed mother lives. Sarah Collins is engaged in conversation with a platitudinous clergyman, Reverend Williamson, as Bert arrives. Williamson complains of the general apathy toward religion that has infected the community. Implicitly Rice reminds us that spiritual obligations cannot be fulfilled if material needs are not satisfied, that religious platitudes are hardly panaceas in such circumstances, and that organized religion may fail to provide adequate answers to social problems. The audience here might understandably recall a similar point of view expressed by Rice's idol, G. B. Shaw in Major Barbara. In the presence of Steve Clinton, an intelligent Negro hand who reads H. G. Wells, they also discuss the prevalent feeling that Negroes are depriving white men of jobs. In times such as these, Rice says, the blight of prejudice is aggravated. Also present in the scene are Bert's older brother Larry, his wife Stella, and their son Donald. Larry is a veteran, jobless,
belligerent, and an alcoholic after being gassed and shell-shocked in the war; governmental disregard of veterans was also an acute problem of the times. 7

After this depressing picture of distress on the agricultural scene, scene six occurs in Bert's hotel room where he and Helen have given in to their emotions. Talking of Winifred Drew's elaborate wedding and the impossibility of their own marriage, they only partially regret what they have done. Scene seven returns to the Davis home where Helen has received a three-month check for teaching and a letter from Allen who is doing well at the State University. But such good news is soon forgotten as Davis announces that he has received a ten-percent cut in pay and that it will be necessary to sell their car and to rent Allen's room in order to meet the mortgage payments on their house.

Scene eight then returns to the Collins home where Bert arrives to learn that Larry's wife has left him. The disintegration of the family is just another symptom of the diseased society. Larry, depressed by his wife's desertion and convinced that the world is through with him after his sacrifice in the war, goes out to get drunk. His young son Donald, also embittered by these events, announces that he has joined the Marines and is going to Haiti where Americans are protecting their interests against the encroachment of the Negro. Rice

obviously feels that a concern with colonialism distracts the government from domestic problems.

Scene nine finds the Davis family even poorer since they have lost their savings in the failure of the bank. Helen regretfully tells her parents, too, that Louis Volterra is being deported for his anti-capitalist beliefs. Newly arrived on the Davis scene now is their obnoxious boarder, Whipple, who makes distasteful remarks to Helen.

Scene ten finds Rice turning from the domestic scene to the campus of the University. It must be noted here that such a proliferation of scenes threatens the unity of the plot which has already received adequate exposition and complication in the preceding scenes. It is, however, a major part of Rice's purpose to give a panoramic view of the Depression's effects. In this scene at the University, Allen Davis and his new friend, Mary Klobutsko, argue with fellow students about compulsory military training at the University during peacetime. Allen and Mary are firm and outspoken in their anti-war sentiments, and the right to express their views is defended by Professor Sloane, a young and liberal faculty adviser. In Sloane's speech Rice shows how he has always been a sincere defender of freedom of speech and adamant in his beliefs on the dangers of censorship.

Scene eleven returns to the Davis home where Helen and Bert regret having to give up their rendezvous in Bert's room because of Whipple's embarrassing gibes. At this time also,
Mr. Davis has lost his job as foreman, and Allen has been forced to leave the University for lack of funds. Unable to find any kind of work, Allen expresses his contempt for the capitalists who are responsible for their plight. The validity of his charge is supported by the following scene.

In scene twelve at the home of Willard Drew, a meeting is held with Elbert Purdy, president of the University; Walter Applegate, the factory owner; Harry Gregg, United States Senator; Cleveland Thomas, a judge; and Arthur Meadows, who is preparing to assume an ambassadorial post in Haiti. The group demonstrates the collusion of capitalists who are, according to Rice, "tacitly united in an alliance for the preservation of the status quo." Their discussion reveals the primary interests of a corrupt capitalism: they condemn labor agitators, foreign loans, and generally everything that might threaten big business. To insure their belief that "When business prospers, everybody prospers," they decide to draft Purdy for the approaching presidential election.

Scene thirteen at the Davis home shows them subjected to even crueler deprivations. They are packing to leave their home which they have lost because of their failure to meet mortgage payments, when a group of workers from the factory arrives to plead with Davis to head their grievance committee.

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8 Rice, Minority Report, p. 328.

9 Elmer Rice, We, the People (New York: Coward McCann, 1933), p. 161.
He is reluctant at first, but when Allen is arrested by rough police for stealing coal, he agrees to be spokesman for the workers in a meeting with Applegate. The meeting never takes place, however, since in the sensational fourteenth scene Davis and others are shot by guards in the workers' attempt to gain entrance to the plant. Labor-management relations at the time were at a low ebb, and Rice remained an advocate of unionism and collective bargaining until the passing of the National Labor Relations Act only six months after the production of the play.

Scene fourteen is the first in a series of three scenes in the play where the exploited futilely attempt to achieve an understanding with the powers that could alleviate their suffering. In scene fifteen, University president Purdy fires a Professor Hirschbein who has publicly protested the mass murder at the Applegate factory. Hirshbein's protests, too, against the infringement of his academic freedom go unheeded by Purdy and the school's board of trustees that includes Applegate and Drew. Although the liberal Professor Sloane of scene ten, because he comes from a distinguished family, is only reprimanded by Purdy for his antagonistic behavior, he insists on resigning in protest.

The following scene takes place in the office of Senator Gregg where he discusses with Applegate the veterans' march on Washington\textsuperscript{10} and the lucrative profits to be gained for

\textsuperscript{10}Allen, pp. 83-85.
business by a pro-war policy. Their war-mongering is inter-
rupted, however, by the ironic arrival of the League for World
Peace, headed by Reverend Williamson, who appeared in scene
five, and Professor Hirschbein of the preceding scene. Their
request that Gregg support their movement for disarmament is
met only with vague promises. After they leave, Gregg is
visited by Bert and Helen who ask him to intercede with the
authorities for the release of Allen. Bert mentions here, too,
that his nephew Donald was killed while fighting in Haiti.
Here again Rice is careful to establish relationships among his
many characters and to complete representational action which
he had begun earlier in scene eight. In reference to Rice's
theme also, it is only an added irony that Donald should be
killed while protecting the capitalist interests which have con-
tributed to the ruin of his homeland.

As events approach a climax, Allen visits Mary Klobutsko
who has left the University because, "It is only a place for
hiding the truth from people, for making the students satisfied
with the present conditions." 11 Even education and educators,
Rice points out, can help to nourish corruption. Allen then
accepts Mary's invitation to stay with her and offers to assist
her in giving speeches to discontented workers. One of these
assemblies is held in the following scene where policemen
attempt to disperse the crowd. In the ensuing riot, several
gun shots are fired, and Allen is accused of murdering a

11Rice, We, the People, p. 230.
policeman.

In scene nineteen, Allen is tried and convicted despite his protestations of innocence. The prosecutor, in turn, implies that Allen is being tried also for his "subversive views," and the judge, Cleveland Thomas of scene twelve, condemns him to death.

In the final scene of the play Rice employs a device of the agit-prop drama by casting the theatre audience in the role of the audience at a mass meeting conducted by the play's characters. In terms of the play's action, Sloane, Hirschbein, Helen Davis, Mary Klobutsko, Reverend Williamson, and Bert Collins plead for help to free Allen. But their plea includes Rice's explicit demand for general reform:

We are the people, ladies and gentlemen,—we—you and I and everyone of us. It is our house: this America. Let us cleanse it and put it in order and make it a decent place for decent people to live in.12

In terms of genre, We, the People is obviously a propaganda play, since it provides information with a point of view intended to influence the thought and action of the audience.13 In twenty realistic, economical, and selective scenes Rice has presented an excellent genre picture of the early thirties. Surveying the discouraging scene panoramically, he includes almost every area of American life: the home, the

12 Ibid., p. 253.

factory, the farm, the school, all have been affected, or perhaps infected by the circumstances of the Depression. Gerald Rabkin provides a comprehensive list of the abuses Rice attacks in the play:

The plight of the workers dispossessed by unemployment; the tenuous economic position of the white-collar worker; the impoverishment of the farmer; the use of the Jew, Negro, and foreigner as economic scapegoats; the inability of young people to live a normal life because of lack of money; the relationship between war and economics; the failure of organized religion to provide adequate social answers; the impact of the failure of the banks; the denial of academic freedom to dissenters; the connivance between the police and the ruling classes; the shooting down of demonstrating workers; the conspicuous consumption of the rich while the poor starve. 14

There is no question, certainly, about the timeliness of Rice's subject matter. Only months after the production of We, the People, the Roosevelt administration began to correct some of the deformities Rice illustrated in his play. The National Labor Relations Act and the Social Security Act, for example, were among the prompt actions taken by New Deal legislation. Rice's prominently Marxist point of view in regard to these abuses was also timely and one he shared with other intellectuals of the period including Sherwood Anderson, Sidney Howard, John Dos Passos, Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Erskine Caldwell, Sidney Hook, and Langston Hughes. 15 It deserves to be reiterated, however, that Rice never subscribed wholly to the Marxian viewpoint—not even as much as his idol Shaw did.

14 Rabkin, pp. 249-250.

15 Rice, Minority Report, p. 327.
For the most part, Rice's ideology characterizes him as a liberal rather than a radical or "left-wing" advocate. 16

In spite of the timely and liberal point of view, the play suffers from a severe bias in several instances which weaken the attack. The treatment of the wealthy Drew family, for example, in their lavish wedding plans and their purchase of high-priced paintings, frankly borders on the sentimental. Sentimental, over-simplified, and melodramatic too is the general treatment of public officials and wealthy citizens in the play. Rice imputes conscious hypocrisy to these characters and presents them as cynically and hopelessly wicked, while all goodness belongs to the economically oppressed. 17 These and other structural weaknesses account for a good deal of the severe criticism the play has received.

Barclay McCarty in Theatre Arts Monthly, for example, complained that the outstanding flaw is the lack of a unifying dramatic idea running the length of the play; the plot concerning the misfortunes of the Davis family is never resolved in any way. 18 Similar reservations on the unity of the plot were registered by Joseph Wood Krutch and John Mason Brown who main-


17Richard Dana Skinner, "We, the People," The Commonweal, XVII (1933), 411.

18Barclay McCarty, "We, the People," Theatre Arts Monthly, XVII (1933), 259.
tained that Rice's use of the agit-prop device of the mass meeting in the final scene was tantamount to a frank admission of his failure to construct a unified and coherent plot. Although in his last scene Rice might be intimating that the resolution of his play would depend on the action taken by the audience outside the theatre, still his omission of an adequate conclusion to his story is clearly reprehensible. It is surprising that Rice should fail to remember the elementary components of plot with a beginning, middle, and end. Even in terms of the problem play--whose technique Rice observed in his favorite Ibsen's *Pillars of Society* and *A Doll's House*, for example--though a central problem may be left unresolved, the matter of the plot is always carefully finished.

From scene one to scene nine in *We, the People*, the development of the plot is coherent enough in the exposition of the Drew family's circumstances. Even the scenes at the Collins home could be considered integral to the plot since Bert's marriage to Helen is prevented in part by his having to help his poor family. Scene four, too, in Drew's office can be justified in terms of Bert's attempt to improve his financial situation in order to marry Helen; and the comfort of the Drew family also provides a striking contrast to the suffering of the Davis family. But with scene ten, which is set at the University, Rice's plot focus begins to blur. In that scene and those

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which follow—scene twelve depicting the collusion of capital­ist powers, scene fourteen at Purdy's office, and scene fifteen at Gregg's office, for example—the matter of the theme over­comes the matter of the plot. Paradoxically, his success in giving a panoramic view of the Depression conditions spells Rice's failure to provide an organic plot. One can only regret­fully remark that Rice was so distracted by his enthusiasm for a significant subject that he neglected a structural element of utmost importance to dramatic form; it is definitely incongruous with his usual attention to careful craftsmanship.

In spite of this major flaw, however, the play is still commendable in many respects. The panoramic scope of the play is impressive not only because of its breadth but also because of Rice's dexterity in the use of representational figures. His technique of providing a realistic pageant of characters, which he developed in Street Scene (1929) and Counsellor-at-Law (1931), is of special value for the largeness of the subject here. In each of the twenty scenes, these characters lend vigor and vitality to the subject matter of the play. Larry Collins as the disgruntled veteran, Sloane as the angry young professor, Steve Clinton as the intelligent and unjustly maligned Negro, for example, are drawn with such skillful econ­omy that even their brief appearances are enough to justify credibility and to insure sympathy. Although in many plays of this kind propaganda may outweigh characterization, Rice succeeds in avoiding this fault at least partially because of
his ability to characterize with short but suggestive and highly selective strokes. The dialogue too savors of Rice's realistic technique; it is appropriate to the characters and often powerfully charged with emotion.

In conclusion, there is much in *We, the People* to commend it and to cite it as an important development in Rice's career. Here was the initiation of a superior playwright into social realism, the dramatic mode which dominated the entire period of the thirties. Also, the play treated a subject of social significance and thus helped to introduce such timely materials into the mainstream of American drama. Rice's prominent concern in this play with labor, for example, would be reflected in the works of other playwrights including Paul Peters' and George Sklar's *Stevedore* (1934), Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), and John Howard Lawson's *Marching Song* (1937). Finally, as Richard Dana Skinner pointed out, *We, the People* is no ordinary propaganda play. 20 Expert characterization, finely constructed scenes full of swift action, authentic dialogue, and the magnitude of its urgent theme make it an effort worthy of its time and its author.

His commitment to a social purpose in his own writing made clear by the presentation of *We, the People*, Rice still felt that his ideals and those of his colleagues could better be fulfilled with the establishment of a theatre devoted primarily to serious plays dealing with social issues. And so, in October

20 Skinner, "We, the People," p. 411.
of the same year, he submitted his proposal for a "People's Art Theatre" in the New York Times. He explained its nature thus:

The People's Art Theatre would not be committed to any specific political or economic program, nor would it be animated by any doctrinaire philosophy. It would be an organ of propaganda only in so far as its general policy would favor the establishment of a new social order in which existing economic and social injustice is eliminated and the condition of the masses is vastly improved; it would be revolutionary in the sense that it would challenge abuses in the present social order and would be in the vanguard of the fight for freedom and equity.21

Rice's dream for his People's Art Theatre was never fulfilled, but it remains, nevertheless, another good indication of his serious dedication to a cause. He did participate, however, in other projects which tended to fulfill some of these ideals, such as the decidedly leftist Theatre Union founded in 1933,22 and in The Federal Theatre Project established in 1935.23 But his involvement in both projects was limited, and for the most part Rice strived to realize his ideals for a People's Art Theatre in his own work, particularly in We, the People and the plays which immediately followed.

After leasing the Belasco Theatre as a showcase for his


23The most comprehensive treatment of the Federal Theatre Project may be found in Hallie Flanagan, Arena (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1940).
dramas of social protest, Rice produced *Judgment Day* in 1934. Again this play illustrates Rice's involvement with the most pressing issues of his day; according to Gerald Rabkin, "the two conditions in the thirties which forced many individuals to commit themselves politically were the Depression and the rise of Fascism." Appropriately, therefore, Rice followed his play concerning social justice at home, *We, the People*, with a violent indictment of Nazism in *Judgment Day*. Rice wrote the play to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of *On Trial* (1914), and to dramatize the events of the notorious Reichstag fire trial. He also admitted that a few of the play's characters were thinly disguised versions of the actual participants: "Goering, its prime mover; Hitler, who appeared briefly in a crucial scene; Marinus van der Lubbe, the psychotic young Dutchman employed by Goering to set the fire; and George Dimitrov, the Bulgarian Communist whose bold resourcefulness had done much to discredit the proceedings." Goering is represented in the play by Rakovski, Minister of Culture and Enlightenment; Hitler by Gregori Vesnic, totalitarian ruler of the Southeast European country and head of the Nationalist Party; van der Lubbe by Kurt Schneider, Rakovski's tool for discrediting the opposition; and Dimitrov by George Khitov, courageous and outspoken member of the People's Party.

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24 Rabkin, p. 251.

The play itself is an exciting melodrama which capitalizes on an already sensational event. The sensationalism is, in fact, the most notable feature of the play, and one can readily accept Rice's own assertion that no other play involved him so emotionally. This characteristic was also noted by enthusiastic reviewers. Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt in The Catholic World, for example, commented:

> When the first curtain falls on the climax of an ordinary tragedy, you shake your head: What has he got left for Act II? But when Act II ends with a jolt that almost jerks you out of your chair, you begin to realize that an Elmer Rice melodrama has a mortgage on modern life!  

Skinner added in his somewhat less enthusiastic review in Commonweal that the "cumulative effect is almost overwhelming through sheer intensity." Finally, Edith Isaacs in Theatre Arts Monthly described the play as "exciting, convincing, snorting, rip-roaring, political melodrama." As an analysis of the play's incidents shows, Rice's structural craftsmanship is in great part responsible for the play's power.

With his usual talent for establishing a realistic setting, Rice begins his play in a courtroom where George Khitov, Lydia Kuman, and Kurt Schneider are being tried for their

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26 Rice, Minority Report, p. 372.
alleged attempt to assassinate Gregori Vesnic. Even the early moments of the play are sensational as Khitov shouts his protest to the five judges that the entire proceeding is a conspiracy against the People's Party. His harangue also provides necessary exposition of details of the plot as he identifies one of the judges, Tsankov, as a pawn of the Nationalist Party who unjustly condemned Lydia's husband, Alexander Kuman, head of the People's Party. Refusing to permit Khitov's bold display, the judges order his removal from the courtroom. Lydia then requests that her brother Conrad, an American lawyer, be allowed to handle their defense. Reluctantly overruling the objection of the fiery prosecutor, Bathory, Chief Judge Vlora permits his entry. Tsankov then takes the opportunity to pompously praise Vesnic's happy totalitarian rule to Conrad who is not much impressed. Khitov is allowed to re-enter as witnesses are about to be called to the stand.

The prosecutor then provides a summary of the case, accusing Lydia and Khitov of hiring Schneider to shoot Vesnic in his office. Parvan, Vesnic's secretary, confesses that he witnessed Lydia's entry with Schneider and that Lydia gave Schneider a signal to kill Vesnic. Lydia protests violently that she does not know Schneider and that Parvan propositioned her. Her declamation goes unheeded, however, and the gun is passed around and identified as belonging to Khitov who contends that it was stolen. Khitov and Lydia then deny the testimony of Bassaraba, a nervous waiter, who maintains that he saw the
couple with Schneider at the Café Danube on the day before the attempted assassination and that Khitov gave Schneider a pistol. Then Schneider, who has remained silent throughout the proceedings, takes the stand and answers the prosecutor's questions mechanically and with nervous hesitation. He identifies himself as a member of the People's Party, admits to shooting Vesnic according to Khitov's orders, and asserts that he is Lydia's lover. Conrad's objection that Schneider seems to have been drugged is overruled, and Lydia is called to the stand. She tells of her friendship with Khitov and admits meeting him at the Café Danube, but with her daughter and not with Schneider. She also denies the pistol exchange, and testifies that when she arrived at Vesnic's office to see him about the release of her husband, Schneider was already there and she assumed he was a guard or attendant. She also had nothing to do with Schneider's shooting Vesnic. The prosecutor interrupts Lydia's statement to read a document in which Alexander Kuman confessed that a plot to kill Vesnic did actually exist. When Lydia protests that the letter is a forgery and demands that her husband be brought in, the prosecutor announces that Kuman hanged himself that morning. Distraught with anguish at the news, Lydia attempts to shoot herself but is restrained as the scene ends.

In this first act, Rice manages with his customary economy to give the expository details relevant to the plot, to establish the main conflict, to direct our sympathies to his
protagonists, and to insure our suspenseful expectation of what is to come. Moreover, the emotional impact of even this first act is so powerful that one wonders if Rice can sustain it throughout the play. The events of the second act, however, prove that he can and that he does so competently.

In scene one of Act II the parade of witnesses continues. The first witness is a Madame Teodorova who nervously testifies that she too saw the defendants at the Café Danube. Then in an incident highly useful for its sentimental effect, Sonia, Lydia's fourteen-year-old daughter, is brought to the stand. After she corroborates her mother's testimony that they met only Khitov at the café and denies any illicit relationship between them, the prosecutor cruelly informs her of her father's death. Khitov, eloquent in his own defense, corroborates Lydia's statements and contends that Schneider is a tool of the Nationalist Party and a hireling of Rakovski, Minister of Culture and Enlightenment. During his speech a guard passes a note to Lydia who reads it excitedly and then swallows it to prevent detection. The court noticed the activity of Lydia and the guard, however, and after an explosion is heard from the judges' chamber the guard is apprehended in another sensational close.

In scene two the testimony continues as Lydia, pale, weak, and extremely tense, denies knowledge of the explosion and refuses to divulge the contents of the note she received. Conrad maintains that the explosion was a mere ruse to discred
the defendants and then calls Khitov to the stand. Khitov accuses Rakovski of faking the assassination plot in order to discredit the People's Party and contends that Vesnic was probably not even shot. Just as Khitov is concluding his boisterous accusations, Rakovski enters the court and insists that he be allowed to question Schneider. Schneider again answers Rakovski's questions as if in a stupor and denies knowing him. When Khitov attempts to question Rakovski, he is promptly hustled out of the room. The following witness is a Madame Crevelli who is introduced by Conrad as an Italian opera singer related by marriage to Il Duce. Again Rice's use of a representational figure is functional; not only does she provide a welcomed moment of comedy to the otherwise dismal situation, but she also contributes to the resolution of the plot by her inadvertent revelations about Rakovski. While she rages tempestuously at Rakovski because of his unfulfilled promise to get her the leading role in a production of Madame Butterfly, she incidentally reveals the frequent meetings of Schneider and Rakovski at her apartment. Outshouting Rakovski's denial, she adds that the two men even met on the day of the attempted assassination. As the scene closes, Rakovski, livid with anger, tries to quiet Schneider who has burst into insane laughter.

Since the judgment now rests with the judges, Rice focuses his attention on their difficult deliberations in the first scene of Act III. While they are all agreed on the guilt of Schneider, Vlora, the chief judge, and Slatarski, an aged
representative of the old aristocracy who gives lip service only to the new order, disagree on the situation of Khitov and Lydia. A third judge, Murusi, is hesitant also but finally agrees with the other two judges, Tsankov and Sturdza, that they deserve punishment on the grounds that, "the highest morality is the welfare of the state."\textsuperscript{30} The noble Slatarski is unmoved, however, by Tsankov's warning that on the following day their leader's proclamation will make membership in the People's Party punishable by death. Slatarski contends that in view of the evidence, it would be a breach of personal and national honor to condemn them. Rakovski hurries into their chamber and demands that they execute the defendants. The public, Rakovski warns, is becoming more favorable to the People's Party and a conviction is imperative to quell riots and to preserve confidence in the Nationalist Party. Moreover, Alexander Kuman, as the note to Lydia revealed, is not dead but has escaped and is planning an insurrection against the government. Slatarski is adamant in his refusal to condemn the innocent, but Vlora admits that he might be influenced by the testimony of Vesnic himself. Rakovski promises that Vesnic will appear and exits with the four judges, leaving Slatarski alone in the chamber.

In the final scene of the play Alexander Kuman, whose entrance has been prepared for by Rakovski in the previous scene, appears in the disguise of a priest and confers with the

guards on a plot to incite riot in the courtroom. They exit as the court begins to fill. In presenting his summation, Conrad reaffirms Lydia and Khitov's innocence and recalls to the judges the honor of their country. In his conclusion Conrad voices some of Rice's own sentiments on freedom and the central ideological conflict in the play:

To adjudge these defendants innocent is to proclaim to the world that we take our place among those nations who put justice and honor above political considerations; that in our land, truth and the right shall still prevail. To condemn them, to find them guilty, is to acknowledge that justice is dead, that liberty no longer exists; it is to invite the indignation and the opprobrium of the civilized world.31

Khitov proceeds to reiterate his indictment of Vesnic and his cohorts, charging them with cruel and ruthless tyranny. Before his tirade is finished, however, Parvan announces the arrival of Vesnic. Vesnic refuses to answer Khitov's accusations and instead demands the prisoners' execution for the welfare of the state. Then Alexander Kuman makes his appearance divested of his disguise. Vesnic angrily orders his arrest, but the guards do not move. Desperately, Parvan attempts to shoot Kuman but is restrained by a guard. Tsankov makes a similar attempt, but his gun is wrested from him by Slatarski who shoots Vesnic crying, "Down with tyranny! Long live the people!"32 Slatarski then turns the revolver on himself and fires as the curtain falls.

Surely the most notable feature of the play is its high

31 Ibid., p. 367. 32 Ibid., p. 371.
degree of sensationalism. And it is no surprise that most critics were highly impressed by the sheer violence of the action described by Joseph Wood Krutch as "frenetic to a degree hardly equalled before or since."  But more than violent action accounts for the success of Judgment Day as an effective melodrama. The careful structure of incidents, too, contributes to the play's forcefulness. Rice manages to arrange his incidents with his usual attention to a logical and coherent pattern to present exposition and complications in Acts I and II with the climax rather neatly placed at the close of Act II, and finally a satisfying resolution in Act III. But especially remarkable in this structure is the care he has taken to end each act with an action that insures the audience's suspense and excitement: Lydia's attempted suicide at the end of Act I, Rakovski's exposure amid the insane laughter of Schneider at the end of Act II, and finally the murder of Vesnic at the close of the play. Also notable in the structure of incidents in the play is the shift in focus that occurs in the first scene of Act III. To that time Rice has directed attention to the defendants, Khitov and Lydia, but then the judges assume primary importance for the sake of the play's propagandistic theme. The conflicting positions occupied by Khitov, Lydia, and Rakovski are taken up by Vlora, Slatarski, and the three judges loyal to the fanatical government. The transition allows Rice to elaborate the primary issues involved in the main conflict--freedom.

33 Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, pp. 249-250.
justice, personal and national honor—and to make his point more cogent. The vivid events of Acts I and II involve the audience less with the ideological issues at stake than with the precarious positions of Khitov and Lydia. The scene in the judges' chamber encourages the audience to add their intellectual assent to issues to which they have given emotional assent by their sympathetic response to the human conflict represented previously by Khitov and Lydia. To those that might object that the device smacks of artificiality, it must be pointed out that Rice carefully prepares for the important role played by the judges here through their revealing responses to the defendants in the earlier action of the play.

This structure of incidents, then, and the emphasis on violent action surely characterizes Judgment Day as a melodrama. In keeping with this dramatic form, too, as well as with the purpose of the propaganda play, characterization is subordinated to action and theme. Fundamentally, the characters in the play represent extreme types for the purpose of Rice's clear social protest. Lydia, Khitov, Kuman, Conrad, and Slatarski are on the side of right and justice, while most of the other relatively minor figures represent the villainous opposition; it is frankly a case of melodramatic exaggeration in white right versus black wrong. Nevertheless, the characters are credible, and their motivations and actions sound. Also, the nature of the play as a courtroom drama involving a number of witnesses enables Rice to capitalize on his gift for exhibiting a
realistic pageant of characters. Both major and representa-
tional figures are drawn with a fine precision: Khitov as the
bold patriot; Judge Slatarski as the aristocrat, noble by birth
but more so by his sense of honor; and Madame Crevelli as the
hilariously garrulous opera-singer and unwitting intimidator
of Rakovski are examples in point. Even Vesnic, in his brief
appearance in Act III, is a credible tyrant, and his entrance
in a wheel chair at least suggests that a physical infirmity is
perhaps a reflection of his diseased mentality that threatens
to infect a whole country.

The danger of this corruption spreading throughout the
world to infect all mankind is at the heart of Rice's extremely
timely theme. That totalitarianism represents a formidable
threat to personal and national freedom is his dramatized
proposition, and the issues in his argument are indeed challeng­
ing. The men at the helm are cursed in their lust for power
by deadened consciences. They callously exploit the weak:
Bassaraba and Madame Teodorova are compelled to lie for them;
Schneider is deprived of his mind and will through drugs. They
use any base means to eliminate the opposition: Kuman is unlaw­
fully imprisoned, Khitov is falsely charged with attempted
murder and conspiracy, and Lydia is accused of sexual immoral­
ity. Even judges and the court of law are reduced to mere
implements for the support of vicious lawlessness. In short,
truth, morality, justice, honor, and freedom are denied exist­
ence. These are the issues exposed and elaborated carefully
from the beginning of the play with Khitov's repeated and
cociferous indictments to the end of the play with Conrad's
telling summation speech.

Although Rice treated a timely and significant theme in
a powerful drama, Judgment Day achieved a limited popular success
in this country with only ninety-three performances. The Ameri-
can people were reluctant as yet to accept the reality of the
ominous threat represented by Nazism that Rice foresaw so
clearly. The play was, however, a resounding success in
London. Moreover, it proved to be an effective weapon against
Nazism. Productions planned for France and Holland were sup-
pressed by the Hitler government, and performances in Norway
were cancelled after rioting by Norwegian Nazis. If he failed
to provoke action among his own people, Rice at least succeeded
in arousing Fascist wrath.

Continuing his role as social propagandist, Rice pre-
sented his Between Two Worlds at the Belasco Theatre on
October 25, 1934. Here the main issue is an ideological con-
lict delineated in Margaret Bowen, the representative of a
well-to-do American leisure class and N. N. Kovolev, a Russian
film-director and spokesman for the developing Communist order.
According to Rice, the title "suggested the possibility of a
compromise between the apparently irreconcilable extremes

35 Rabkin, p. 252.
This possibility of reconciliation between Margaret and Kovolev, then, forms the matter of the plot in this play which, although lacking the fiery passion of Judgment Day, surpasses its predecessor in its intellectual subtlety and its avoidance of melodramatic extremes of right and wrong.

The action takes place on the S. S. Farragut, a transatlantic liner bound from New York to Europe; the setting thus suggests an appropriate place for reconciliation. The circumstances of the setting also provide Rice with ample opportunity to employ his panoramic talent for sketching minor figures. Among the motley group of passengers are Vivienne Sinclair, an attractive but silly Hollywood starlet who specializes in bedroom scenes; Rita and Fred Dodd, a vivacious, fun-loving, gregarious couple whose witticisms provide some of the best comedy in the play; Louberta Allenby, a middle-aged widow trying to recapture youth; Giuseppe Moretti, a naturalized American citizen going to the homeland to boast of his success in the liquor market during Prohibition; Henry Ferguson, an aging executive who seeks the approval of others by assuming somewhat pathetically the role of ship's jester; and Matilda Mason, a folk singer with dubious talent on an excursion to Dalmatia to gather new material for her performances in "authentic" costume. Besides Margaret and Kovolev, most important among the characters introduced in the initial scene are Edward Maynard,

36 Rice, Minority Report, p. 335.
Elena Golitzin, and Lloyd Arthur, Edward, a bright, young advertising executive disgruntled with the corrupt values of his capitalistic culture and partially sympathetic to Kovolev's political ideals, is the latter's rival for Margaret's affection and so figures in the main plot. Rice makes use of Elena, a Russian princess in exile, and Lloyd, a sensitive but unsuccessful American poet, to demonstrate in a sub-plot another but less favorable rapprochement possible between different cultures. The first brief scene of the play, then, serves merely to introduce both major and minor characters as they board the ship.

In scene two, amid much realistic representational action in which amiable relationships are established among the several minor characters, Rice prepares for significant confrontation scenes later in the play. As Margaret is conversing with Lloyd, a family friend, Kovolev passes by with the ship's doctor and merely glances at her. Lloyd and Margaret are joined by Edward who jokes with them about Vivienne Sinclair as the "infant phenomenon of the silver screen." Talk of Miss Sinclair leads naturally to Kovolev's brilliant career as a film-director. Significantly, Edward's judgment of Russian films as superior to the American product preferred by Lloyd gives us an early indication of his sympathy with Russian artistic ideals. Margaret, however, is less concerned with this matter than she is worried about a possible meeting between the Bolshevik and her friend Elena. The Russian princess then
approaches and is introduced to Lloyd by Margaret. The meeting sets the sub-plot in motion as Elena and Lloyd are left alone by Margaret and Edward who go off to play deck tennis. During their amiable conversation about their purposes in going to Europe, Kovolev again passes and this time stares silently at Elena. Though Elena only briefly expresses her fear of Kovolev, one is made immediately aware of a great tension between the two personalities. In this and the preceding scene the pace of the action seems disturbingly slow, and the amount of time spent on representational characters seems without purpose until one becomes aware that Rice is preparing carefully for two inevitable and climactic confrontations between Kovolev and Margaret and between Kovolev and Elena. As one reviewer pointed out, "Little of importance seems to happen and all of the little things that do happen seem hardly worth the record until quite suddenly you are aware that the ship is moving at top-speed towards an exciting story."37

At the beginning of scene three Margaret and Elena are seated on deck and unintentionally overhear Vivienne Sinclair's conversation with her male companion. While Vivienne boasts about her popularity, she casually mentions that Kovolev's reception in Hollywood was bad because of his demands for scripts with social significance. Here is an instance of Rice's care in making a representational incident function in respect

to both the major and minor plots of his play. Hatred and fear are Elena's emotions as she confesses her contempt for Kovolev to Margaret: "And he is one of those executioners who have destroyed my country." Not only does Elena's apprehension become explicit at this point, but it also serves to increase Margaret's distrust of Kovolev. When Elena leaves her, Margaret is joined by Edward who attempts to quiet her fears by suggesting that Kovolev could hardly have had anything to do with the execution of Elena's family. His comment becomes ironic, however, in light of Kovolev's later boast to Elena that he actually ordered their execution. Margaret objects to Edward's apparently egotistical self-confidence in dismissing the matter so lightly and is offended by his romantic advances. Edward retorts by accusing Margaret of allowing herself to be victimized by fear. She is afraid, he contends, to give vent to her personal feelings by responding to his advances; and she reacts to Kovolev with similar hostility because his political ideas threaten her complacency. Realizing that he has been too blunt, Edward apologizes, but his apology is interrupted by the well-timed appearance of Kovolev. Edward introduces him to Margaret who responds with cold politeness. Edward asks him about his work in Hollywood, and in the course of his answer Kovolev expresses his belief that "All art is political." Margaret accuses him of distorting the purpose of art to dehumanize men:

"To level everybody down, until we're nothing but a lot of machines." Margaret's heated comments are unevenly matched by Kovolev's cool and detached replies:

Kovolev: To level, but not down. To use machines to liberate the oppressed classes and to build a classless society.
Margaret: Yes, and I suppose it doesn't matter how many people you torture and kill while doing it.
Kovolev: It is all a question of which people you kill.
Margaret: There's no justification for cruelty and cold-blooded murder.
Kovolev: You call it murder. We call it class-justice. It depends altogether upon whether you are killing or being killed.
Margaret: Yes? Well, I think it's just brutal and sadistic, that's what I think about it. 39

With this Margaret rises abruptly and exits followed by Edward who reminds Kovolev that Elena is her friend. Kovolev's succinct reply: "Yes, naturally."

Now that Rice has introduced the terms of his conflict he wastes no time providing a second and climactic confrontation between his principals in the following scene. The scene opens with Rice's usual method of providing a representational frame as a preface to more significant action. Matilda Mason boasts of her folk-singing ability to one of the male passengers, while Kovolev talks with Vivienne Sinclair's Negro maid, Rose Henneford. Kovolev asks her about her persistent melancholy, and Rose reveals its causes. She is a librarian and her husband a doctor, but in spite of their education both are given no opportunity because of the race problem. Here Rice again shows

39 Ibid., pp. 203-204.
his awareness of social problems that scar the American image. But Kovolev's meeting with Rose exists for more than its social message; Kovolev's sympathetic response to her not only makes him a more favorable character but also prepares for his partial conversion to Margaret's point of view on human relations later in the play. As Rose exits, Margaret appears and Kovolev realizes that she has witnessed the scene. Margaret compliments Kovolev on his kindness to Rose, but he rationalizes it with "We are fellow-proletarians and so we have a united interest against the exploiting classes." Kovolev goes on to use Rose as an example of the capitalistic technique of using fear and prejudice to control the ideology of the people. When Kovolev suggests that Margaret's ideas have been so affected, she is resentful at first but then admits that much of what he has said is true. Reminded too of Edward's similar contention, she realizes that she has not been as productive and useful to her fellowmen as she might be. But when Margaret asks Kovolev what she should do, he suggests only that she help workers to organize and to overthrow their oppressors. Recognizing the impracticality of the suggestion, Margaret berates Kovolev for failing both to convince her of his ideals and to provide a realistic suggestion concerning the nature of her commitment. Edward's arrival and invitation to attend the ship's horse-races puts an end to the meeting that

40 See Rice's similarly sympathetic portrait of Negro Steve Clinton in *We, the People.*
has served to further define the terms of the main conflict.

Lloyd and Elena then take over the scene to develop the sub-plot. The terms of their rapprochement have a psychological rather than a political basis. Elena tells Lloyd of her plight in Russia during the Bolshevik revolution which resulted in her exile to America after she witnessed the brutal liquidation of her family. Suffering, however, has not destroyed Elena; it must have, she contends, a purpose in the Divine Mind. Lloyd is sympathetic to her situation and shares her confidence in God; Providence, too, must have designed that he be forced to assume a diplomatic post rather than pursue his writing career. The quiet interview is soon disrupted by the noisy arrival of Louberta who asks Elena for her autograph. Elena complies and then exits with Lloyd, leaving Louberta with Moretti. Her sympathy for Elena prompts Louberta to express her opinion of the Bolsheviks: "I've heard they're nothing but a lot of ignorant workingmen and people like that. And some of the things that go on there. I've been told that no decent woman is safe for a moment." This, Rice implies in this representational scene, is the distorted and ignorant viewpoint of most Americans who dismiss all thought on the subject of Communism and prefer the image of a bogey-man.

Scene five begins with representational action as Margaret and Edward converse with several of the ship's passengers at a cocktail party. Their talk turns gradually, and

41 Rice, Two Plays, pp. 222-223.
jokingly at first, to the possibility of a social revolution. Rita and Fred Dodd together with Lloyd represent the viewpoint, a common one according to Rice, that the possibility is too remote to be taken seriously. Edward, however, is very serious; a society with such weak foundations as they represent can only totter:

What good are we? What use are we in the world? We're not worth the powder to blow us to hell with. All we're good for is to sit around and make wise-cracks and drink cocktails. . . . Parasites that's what we are.42

His listeners are hardly moved by this self-incriminating indictment, but Margaret considers Edward's harangue rude and insulting. Edward attempts to convince her that his attack was not meant to be a personal insult, but Margaret refuses to listen and excuses herself. In following her out, Edward brushes against Kovolev but says nothing; the incident is ironic since Edward has just finished expounding the revolutionary's philosophy. Kovolev does not remain on the scene, however, and leaves before Margaret enters in search of Edward. Edward reappears, apologizes for his abrupt manner, and begs Margaret to believe that he really loves her. Together, he feels, they can do something constructive and useful in the world. Margaret, obviously moved, promises that she will consider his proposal.

Scene six brings both the major and minor plots to a climax. While representational characters enter and exit during a dance being held on deck, Kovolev dances with Margaret. When

42 Ibid., p. 233.
they are alone Kovolev attempts to embrace her, but Margaret cautiously objects and asks him to get her coat. When he leaves she tries to collect herself and to understand her feelings. Edward interrupts her pensive state and asks her to save a dance for him. Kovolev appears and they return to the dance. While the main plot is then suspended, Elena and Lloyd enter. Lloyd is very much affected by Elena's admission that she loves him, but embarrassingly confesses that he caused the failure of his first marriage because of his impotency. She is sympathetic, however, and suggests that they may be of real help to one another. The incident concludes Rice's attention to the sub-plot which serves as a contrast to the main plot: Elena and Lloyd's rapprochement is based only on selfish motives; they cling to one another to escape the responsibilities to self and society which will define Margaret's important conversion soon to follow. In part, their relationship which depends solely on their selfish needs recalls the crippling dependence of men on one another which Rice had criticized in Street Scene (1929).

This incident with its thematic implications is also an appropriate introduction to the return of Kovolev and Margaret. Margaret is tense and ill-at-ease in his presence, and Kovolev takes advantage of the situation to kiss her passionately. When Margaret begs him to stop, Kovolev only laughs at her fright but then boldly levels his accusation: "You are afraid of everything. Afraid to think, afraid to feel, afraid to love,
I'm afraid even to learn the truth about yourself." Realizing now the truth of his judgment and remembering Edward's similar indictment, Margaret painfully utters: "It isn't true. I won't be made out to be a complete nonentity, I won't." Gradually she responds to his embraces, and they exit together. Just after they have left, Edward enters to find only Margaret's cape lying on the rail and stands lost in thought.

The setting of scene seven is an after-dinner costume party on the following evening. Much representational action occupies the first half of the scene enabling Rice to sustain the audience's suspense about Kovolev and Margaret. Kovolev appears finally and Edward asks him about Margaret, but he awkwardly denies knowing where she is and quickly changes the subject. Margaret's mother joins them and informs Edward that Margaret has confined herself to her room because she does not feel well. Edward is made more nervous and distracted by the news and exits. Kovolev then joins Elena who is deep in thought and stares into the sea. Suddenly noticing Kovolev's presence she utters a suppressed cry of terror. Elena is very distressed as Kovolev reviews details of his family's subjection to her family. His chance for revenge came with the revolution, he narrates, when he was given command of the station where Elena's family was imprisoned; it was he who ordered their execution. Elena becomes hysterical at this and throws herself at Kovolev who strikes her across the mouth. When other passengers

43 Ibid., p. 259. 44 Ibid.
approach at hearing the struggle, Kovolev says cryptically, "The lady hurt herself."

Scene eight takes place the following morning as the ship approaches the port of Plymouth where the Dodds, Elena, and Lloyd are disembarking. Kovolev and Margaret have an awkward confrontation in which she contends that their affair of two nights before was a mere accident, and that she cares little for him now. She also castigates Kovolev for his rude behavior with Elena:

You think we're a lot of fools, we Americans, a lot of softies and sentimentalists. Well, maybe we are, but we understand a lot of things that you don't understand. We know how to be kind and affectionate, yes, and tolerant, too. And that's better than being cruel and merciless and trampling people down.45

Kovolev has little chance to reply before Elena suddenly appears and cries out on seeing him. As Elena exits hurriedly, Margaret calls out and follows her.

The last scene takes place on the same evening as the ship approaches Cherbourg where Margaret and Edward are getting off. Alone with her, Edward again confesses his love, but Margaret fails to respond. Cautiously he asks if she has fallen in love with Kovolev; Margaret curtly denies it. The Russian approaches the couple then, and Edward leaves after thanking him for the new ideas he has given him. Kovolev than apologizes to Margaret for his rude words and actions: "We say something or we do something that is really unkind or just

simply senseless, and then after we have done it, we ask ourselves why." 46 He is at a loss to give reasons for his behavior, demonstrating thereby that he has been as conditioned to his society's manners as Margaret has to hers. Margaret too apologizes for her brashness and admits that she has learned much from Kovolev: "You've made me look at a lot of things I've always accepted as a matter of course and I feel as though it's given me a different point of view, not only about myself but about everything." 47 Kovolev clasps her hand and says good-bye. Then, as Margaret starts to leave, he runs after her and kisses her. Half-amazed and half-frightened, Margaret hurries off. As Kovolev stands looking after her, Rose approaches him and thanks him for his kindness. Lost in thought, Kovolev says only, "We must not lose courage, must we?" The boat whistle sounds and the curtain falls.

The play's conclusion adequately demonstrates the realistic reconciliation of opposites which is Rice's primary purpose. Rice's point of view, moreover, is certainly mature insofar as he resists what might have been a melodramatic and facile confrontation between right and wrong. Both Margaret and Kovolev are mutually educated in the process of the play: she is taught by Kovolev that fear cannot be allowed to dominate one's life and that people, problems, and ideologies must be met with thought rather than with a conditioned response; Kovolev, in turn, learns from Margaret that not everything can

be approached with cold, impersonal rationality and that toler-
ance is an essential and undeniable human trait.

Rice succeeds in conveying his central idea economi-
cally, realistically, and convincingly in what may be called
his only "Chekovian" play. Although he did not feel the influ-
ence of Chekhov as immediately as that of Shaw and Ibsen, Rice
was especially impressed by Chekhov's contributions to modern
realistic drama: "The seemingly casual and rambling conversa-
tion of his characters has a cumulative effect, and in the end
we are aware of a searching exploration of their minds, hearts,
and souls and of an understanding of their relationships to
each other and to the world they live in."48 This is precisely
the kind of "cumulative effect" Rice achieves in Between Two
Worlds. For the most part the action is presented in a regular
but languid rhythm, and the tone is clear but muted. The
action of the play, then, like the education of its principals
is slow and studied. Rice carefully prepares for Margaret's
conversion first by her confrontation with Edward in scene
three in which Edward accuses her of being victimized by fear;
second by Margaret's witnessing Kovolev's kindness to Rose in
scene four; third by Margaret's guilty admission to Kovolev's
comments on her lack of a dedicated commitment to her own
society in the same scene; and fourth by her response to
Kovolev's accusation of fear again in scene six. Kovolev's
conversion is similarly engineered and does not become explicit

until the final scene of the play.

The development of the action of the sub-plot is also slow-paced. Elena and Lloyd gradually reveal their mutual weakness and need for one another. This kind of cultural reconciliation is not a valuable one either for man or for his society, according to Rice, since it at once defeats individual freedom and denies social responsibility.

Rice's use of a pageant of representational characters, too, supports his main plot and central idea. As in Counsellor-at-Law (1931) and We, the People (1933), the representational characters of Between Two Worlds provide excellent realistic detail as typical transatlantic voyagers. Moreover, as in Street Scene (1929), the representational characters here serve as the warp for the woof of Rice's ideas: they are a realistic cross section of Americans who in varying degrees prefer comfortable ignorance to challenging thought concerning political and ideological realities. For example, Louberta's bogey-man image of the Bolsheviks as barbarians and rapists in scene four, and the naive dismissal of the possibility of social revolution by Fred and Rita Dodd in scene five are, according to Rice, typically ignorant points of view. At bottom, fear underlies both points of view, and it is this fear that Margaret overcomes to arrive at her valuable realization of self and of her responsible role in the human community. Action and idea are, therefore, well integrated in the main plot, sub-plot, and representational action.
Rice's characterizations in the play, however, do not fare as well. Characteristically, the representational figures are remarkably vivid. Main characters, on the other hand, are flat and unconvincing. Among the principals, only Edward Maynard, actually Rice's raisonneur, is credibly portrayed. His disillusionment with his feckless life, his frank and agonizing admission of his parasitical existence, and his intelligent indictment of the debased values of his society provide some of the most compelling arguments in the play. Margaret and Kovolev, on the other hand, are not sufficiently individualized—a fault arising, perhaps, from Rice's too conscious use of them as representatives of opposing ideological poles. Rice does not achieve, therefore, the "searching exploration" of the minds, hearts, and souls of his characters which he so admired in Chekhov's work. It is a fault characteristic of most of Rice's propaganda plays: ideas define characters rather than emanating from them.

The ideas presented are, nevertheless, cogent and indicative of Rice's fervor for a social significance in his drama. Margaret becomes aware of the necessity for a sense of social purpose; Kovolev recognizes that tolerance and a regard for the integrity of the individual are necessary to any program of social reform. The opposing ideologies of Democracy and Communism can learn much from each other. Rice affirms, as Gerald Rabkin points out, the liberal position: "He wants a
new world, but not one built upon the ashes of the old."\(^{49}\)

The theme of *Between Two Worlds* may be related, moreover, to Rice's favorite themes of freedom and the individual. In Rice's terms, Margaret's realization of a social purpose is an integral aspect of her own self-realization; such responsible commitment to one's fellowmen is necessary for the total integrity of the individual. Kovolev, too, comprehends that failure to acknowledge the value of the individual menaces the effectiveness of any political and social movement. In the same vein, Rice illustrates through his characters two dangerous hazards to the freedom of the individual: fear and ignorance. As Edward and Kovolev both point out to Margaret, it is fear of exposure to new and challenging ideas that threatens her successful achievement of intellectual and emotional maturity. Ignorance, perhaps with an element of fear also, accounts for the naive and hostile responses of Louberta and the Dodds to the idea of Communism and to the possibility of social revolution. In *The Adding Machine* (1923) and *The Subway* (1929), Rice had shown how individuality was endangered by industrialization; in *Street Scene* (1929) by dependence on others and by environment; in *We, the People* (1933), by the Depression; in *Judgment Day* (1934), by Fascism. Here, in *Between Two Worlds*, he illustrates how fear and ignorance, internal rather than external factors, may intimidate freedom and the self-realization of the individual.

\(^{49}\)Rabkin, p. 255.
In spite of the play's significance in relation to Rice's development as a playwright and social commentator, it failed to achieve popular and critical recognition. Marxist and liberal critics were among the few who reacted favorably. The public, even less attuned to the reality and significance of Communism than they were to the imminent menace of Nazism portrayed in *Judgment Day*, failed to accept Rice's message, and *Between Two Worlds* closed after only thirty-two performances. Indignant at the critics' and public's refusal to permit success to plays of social significance, Rice promised to quit the theatre after the closing of *Between Two Worlds*. In a passionate but somewhat melodramatic article in the *New York Times*, he reiterated his ideals and castigated the childishness of the popular theatre:

I have always been, and still am, interested in the drama as an art form, a social force, and a medium for the expression of ideas. . . . It is reality and not artificiality that interests me, and the dear theatre of dear David Belasco and dear Charles Frohman and dear Clyde Fitch has always bored me to tears. I hate all the sham, and the trumpery and the make-believe, all the adolescent attitudinizing. That is the key to my whole disaffection: the theatre game as it is played on Broadway is so pitifully adolescent. In the main, it is a trivial pastime, devised by 'grown-up children' for the delectation of the mentally and emotionally immature.  

Not content to level his indictment on the contemporary and commercialized theatre only through the newspaper medium,

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50 Himelstein, p. 193.

51 Elmer Rice, "Elmer Rice Says Farewell to Broadway," *New York Times*, November 11, 1934, Section IX, pp. 1, 3.
Rice expressed it dramatically in *Not for Children* which was published with *Between Two Worlds* in 1935 and produced by the playwrights' Company in 1951. Again Rice ventured into a new form, this time Pirandellian illusionism in reworking an earlier play, *Life Is Real*. The work is a curious mixture of polemics and play-within-play which allows Rice to expatiate on the ideal and real state of the theatre.

The frame for the inner play is provided by Silverhammer, an announcer; Harris, the stage manager of the play; Professor Ambrose Atwater, a psychologist; and Mrs. Theodora Effington, "lecturer on literature and the drama." At the opening of Act I Silverhammer delivers an advertisement for Perspiro Menthol Powder, the alleged sponsor of the present play; Rice wastes no time in leveling his accusation of commercialism on the contemporary theatre. Harris explains that Ambrose and Theodora will explain the play to the audience, a necessary function since, according to Rice in his introduction to the published play, the serious dramatist especially "finds himself confronted with an audience, which is untutored, slow of apprehension and impatient of subtleties; an audience, which is eternally on an emotional and intellectual level that can only be described as adolescent." Ambrose and Theodora then begin the action with a few comments on the function of theatre. Ambrose is a cynic and somewhat a pedant whose caustic


53 Rice, *Two Plays*, p. xvii.
commentary throughout the play occasionally mirrors Rice's bitter viewpoint on the lamentable state of the theatre; Theodora, on the other hand, is the hopeless sentimentalist and, according to Rice, the typical drama critic. Her escapist approach is ironically revealed in her statements on the nature of theatre:

Reality is harsh, forbidding, painful, confused. But in the theatre all is neat, orderly, pre-arranged and, as you point out, readily apprehended by a bright child of eleven. How delightful that is. How pleasing to find that sense of soundness, that complete fulfillment, that is so sadly lacking in the world of reality. How restful, how satisfying, how reassuring.54

Following their brief discourse, the play-within-play begins. This play has its own plot and sub-plot respectively in the eventual reconciliation of playwright Irma Orth with her drama-critic husband, Clarence, and in the romance of their daughter Eva with a poet, Digby Walsh. The action of the inner play begins with the revelation that Irma is to have a play produced by Harris and that she will divorce Clarence. After some commentary by Ambrose and Theodora on the difficulties of dramatic characterizations, Harris intrudes and explains that such discussions may bore the audience. He suggests then that Prudence Dearborn, who plays the role of the Orths' maid in the inner play, sing a song. After the song, which satirizes the audience as a "psychological mob," Theodora enters the action of the inner play as "the other woman" in Clarence's life.

54 Ibid., p. 10.
After this brief interlude, Theodora and Ambrose discuss the dangers of impropriety in depicting adulterous relationships on stage. Their discussion is broken off when the curtain rises on Prudence and Hugh McHugh, her lover in this episode but a stage hand in the frame play. In their scene, in which Hugh slaps and kicks Prudence, Rice satirizes dramas that receive critical and popular approbation merely because they represent a form of revolt against dramatic traditions. Ambrose explains: "It's a revolt against the romanticism and sentimentality of the Victorians. Earthy people. Elemental passions. The narrative stripped to its bare essentials."^55 Angry now at these discussions, Harris insists that the play go on, and Eva and Digby perform a scene in which Eva refuses Digby's marriage proposal because of her desire for complete freedom. Eva also expresses her fears about her parents' approaching separation. The act closes with Silverhammer's advertisement for the play's commercial sponsor.

Act II begins backstage where the characters of the frame play and the inner play discuss the success of their dramatic efforts. "Harris" congratulates "Eva" on her performance and tries to be affectionate. Eva is much relieved when "Digby" enters and interrupts Harris' advances. The two young actors arrange for a date after the play. In another part of the stage, "Clarence" discusses the play's success with "Hugh" who feels it is a failure. Finally, "Ambrose" and "Theodora,"

^55Ibid., p. 48.
actually man and wife, consider in this backstage action whether the present episode will destroy the illusion for the audience. Ambrose contends that it will serve to heighten the illusion and is about to explain when Harris enters to them. Harris reminds them of the care they must exercise not to offend certain groups who might be represented in the audience: Catholics, Jews, Protestants, the Irish, the English, the French, the Swedes, the Poles, the British Royal Family, the Mussolini government, the American Legion, the A.M.A., and the Campfire Girls, among others. This is Rice's satiric comment on the senseless restrictions playwrights are forced to contend with in order to insure popular success.

Following this interlude, which represents the third distinct line of action in the play, the inner play continues with Harris playing the producer to whom Irma Orth takes her play. Harris agrees to do the play only if it is treated by a "play-doctor." After this incident Harris approaches Ambrose and Theodora to confess his confusion about what is going on in the entire play. They assure him that a resolution is imminent, and the inner play continues with a romantic confrontation between Irma and Digby who discuss Eva's mysterious disappearance. Theodora and Ambrose inform the audience that Eva has gone to search for God, and that the unifying principle in all of these actions is the characters' search for happiness in their love relationships. The act ends with Eva's soliloquy in which she discovers herself to be "the complement of God."
After her emotional harangue she sits down contentedly and eats chocolate candy: more than likely, this satiric scene is Rice's comment on the religious sensationalism enjoyed by escapist critics.

Act III begins with Silverhammer's introduction of Clarence as a drama critic who will criticize the present play. Although Clarence makes some general comments on Rice's indebtedness to Pirandello, Shaw, and other playwrights, for the most part he revels in pseudo-intellectualism; he is the type of critic who, according to Rice, is concerned more with illuminating his own erudition than with criticizing the work before him. Following this brief interlude, the production of Irma's play begins, obviously in its "doctored" version. All of the characters of the frame play and the inner play participate in the ridiculous mystery melodrama. After its performance Ambrose reviews for Theodora the many elements in the play which could spell its popular success: "Suspense, surprise, mystery, horror, crime and its detection, a touch of the supernatural and the exotic, mistaken identity, an aristocratic milieu, love: illicit and licit, epigrammatic wit, a dash of spice, an unexpected denouement and a neat and satisfactory distribution of rewards and punishments." Rice intends, by the combination of these elements in one play, to show how ridiculous standards of theatrical success are.

The play-within-play continues as Clarence delivers a

56 Ibid., p. 124.
paper on "The Decline of Tragedy." Digby, Theodora, and Ambrose then engage in a discussion with Clarence on the discrepancies between ancient idealistic codes and modern realistic conceptions.\textsuperscript{57} This problem is unresolved as Irma and Eva enter to bring about the resolution of the inner play: Eva succeeds in reconciling her parents to each other and herself to Digby. Ambrose and Theodora decide to marry also in order to keep their author's pattern consistent—"the fulfillment of the mating impulse." Prudence and Hugh follow with an incongruous reproduction of their naturalistic bedroom scene of Act I. Finally, Silverhammer ends the play with an expression of gratitude to the audience in behalf of the manufacturers of Perspiro Menthol Powder.

For the most part, the play is as unreadable in execution as it is unpromising in summation. Some semblance of order is achieved in the alternation of play-within-play and the frame of commentary. Also the entrance of frame characters into the play-within-play suggests successfully that the audience, like the commentators, can be participants in the stage illusion. But the structure of the play's incidents becomes needlessly and insignificantly complex as early as the middle of Act I with Prudence's song and her naturalistic bedroom scene with Hugh McHugh which is incongruously repeated in

\textsuperscript{57}Rice would treat the problem of Greek and Elizabethan dramatic conceptions of man and modern dramatic conceptions in Chapter X of \textit{The Living Theatre} (1959), pp. 100-111.
Act III. Act II contributes to the confusion of incidents also with a third line of action: the backstage antics of the players. Finally, Irma Orth's play in Act III provides a second play-within-play for a fourth line of action, making the whole construction very complex for no apparent reason.

The failure to integrate the various lines of action with reasonable coherence is matched by Rice's failure to merge ideas with action and characters. Because his themes on the function of drama and the state of the theatre are confined to the frame play, these ideas are given an expositive rather than dramatic presentation. Moreover, the characters of Theodora and Ambrose are too obviously contrived to carry on Rice's debate; they lack even the moderate vividness of his previous debaters, Kovolev and Margaret in *Between Two Worlds* (1935).

Finally, Rice's comments on the nature of the drama and the state of modern theatre lack depth and are at best conventional. Drama critics, censorship, debased public taste, and commercialism have been the perennial problems of the playwright's commercial success; just as questions of characterization, of illusion versus reality, and of the artist's dual obligation to his individual sensibility and to his role in society have been the enduring problems of his craft. Perhaps the play can be credited at least for recalling these important problems to the public and to the critics.

It is not surprising, then, that the play enjoyed only seven performances in 1951, nor that critics responded with a
mixture of surprise and indignation. George Jean Nathan described it as "undelicious" and "most irritating." Theatre Arts considered the humor juvenile, "three parts campus cutups to one part real satire." Finally, Walter Kerr lamented, "Rice is actually an adroit craftsman; what kind of masochism was this?" Generally, the play remains an esoteric tour de force for Rice; it is almost as if he felt the need to "vent his spleen," to experience a purgation of sorts through his bitter harangue on the public's adolescent refusal to accept plays of social significance. Notwithstanding its occasional flashes of satire and irony, it represents an anguished playwright's plea that people demand plays "not for children" and, simultaneously, the least satisfying work in his canon.

Despite his formal farewell to the theatre in the New York Times, the theatre was too much in Rice's blood for him to remain in complete retreat. From 1934 to 1938, Rice produced no plays of his own, but his activity was far from negligible. On April 8, 1935, Congress established the Works Progress Administration, a part of which was the Federal Theatre Project under the general direction of Hallie Flanagan. Rice

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60 Walter Kerr, "Not for Children," The Commonweal, LIII (1951), 542.

61 Elmer Rice, "Elmer Rice Says Farewell to Broadway," pp. 1, 3.
was appointed regional director of the New York City division and did a remarkable job until his resignation in 1936, in protest against governmental censorship of a play that criticized the Mussolini regime.\textsuperscript{62} Then, in 1937, he helped to establish the playwrights' Company with Sidney Howard, Maxwell Anderson, S. N. Behrman, and Robert E. Sherwood.\textsuperscript{63} Among other achievements, the group was responsible for the production of Sherwood's \textit{Abe Lincoln in Illinois} (1938), Anderson's \textit{Knickerbocker Holiday} (1938), and Rice's next play, \textit{American Landscape} (1938). With this last play Rice signaled the end of his self-designed and far from unproductive sabbatical.

Not totally discouraged by the public's refusal to accept his plays of social protest, Rice came forth with another propaganda play. \textit{American Landscape} repeats the anti-Nazi protest of \textit{Judgment Day} (1934), but instead of a negative approach defining a defensive, Rice here defines positively an offensive position based on traditional American ideals of freedom. Liberalism becomes tempered with patriotism as Rice exhorts his audience to combat enslavement of mind and body, to resist both the enemy's weapons of war and their more subtle weapons of fear, and to uphold, cherish, and preserve the priceless inheritance of freedom for themselves and for posterity.


\textsuperscript{63}Rice, \textit{The Living Theatre}, p. 144.
To express this patriotic theme Rice chose a curious formal combination of realism and fantasy. In part, the technique recalls that of The House in Blind Alley (1917). But unlike the earlier play, in which scenes of fantasy and realism were retained in distinct incidents and the realism served as a frame for the fantasy, here the two modes are mingled so that fantasy and realistic figures occupy the stage simultaneously. Moreover, unlike the fairy-tale characters of The House in Blind Alley, the fantasy figures here are the ghosts of the protagonist's ancestors whose appearance is accepted by all the characters as if their visitations were a regular event. The reactions of the critics to this innovation were mixed. Philip Hartung complained, "Ghosts are perfectly legitimate meat for a dramatist, but they must not be introduced into a purely realistic setting and among realistic people without some atmospheric preparation."64 Another critic responded, "The ghosts, who might be expected to prove a stumbling block in a purely realistic scene, are handled adroitly. The fiction of their presence is ingeniously established, but in the end it seems wasted effort, since their presence is never used to dramatic effect."65 This latter, as an analysis of the play's incidents shows, is precisely the case: the fantasy figures are representational characters used only to enhance the play's theme;

65Rosamond Gilder, "American Landscape," Theatre Arts, XXIII (1939), 89.
they are a part of the pageant or panoramic technique that Rice used for similar purposes in *We, the People* (1933).

The plot of *American Landscape* concerns Frank Dale's planned sale of the family homestead and shoe factory which have been a part of the Dale and Daleford heritage for two hundred years. Because of his age and health Dale decides to sell the factory to a large manufacturing concern and the family property to a German-American Bund. For reasons both personal and patriotic Dale's present family, his company of ancestors, and his employees try to discourage the sale. Their efforts are successful insofar as Dale dies before the transactions can be made and returns as a ghost at the end of the play to admit his near mistake. There are also two minor plots in the play that are only indirectly associated with the main plot. Fran Spinner, the older of Dale's granddaughters, resolves her marital difficulties with her screen-writer husband; and Connie, the other granddaughter, chooses to marry a stalwart factory-hand rather than the materialistic and selfish family lawyer. Despite their tenuous connection, Rice manages to develop all three plots simultaneously.

The play's action begins with the arrival of a ghost, Tony Dale, the son of the protagonist and a military casualty of World War I. He appears only momentarily to a family servant and then exits before the play's realistic characters enter. Carlotta, Tony's widow, enters with Fran and Gerald Spinner and Bill Fiske, the family lawyer. Captain Frank Dale joins
the group as the servant tells them of the strange soldier's appearance. After Frank, Spinner, and Fiske exit, Carlotta and Fran are stunned by the reappearance of Tony who explains that he has returned because of something that threatens the entire family. While the three characters become occupied outside, Joe Kutno, a factory foreman, enters and is met by Connie and Fiske. They overhear Frank talking on the telephone to Klaus Stillgebauer who is the prospective buyer of the Dale estate. When Frank returns he explains to Kutno that he is also selling the business to the Eastern Shoe Corporation. At this announcement, another ghost enters, Captain Samuel Dale, a cavalry officer in the American Revolutionary Army, who began the Dale shoe business. Frank explains to Samuel that his age and weak heart make the sale necessary. In the course of his explanation, Tony enters for a surprised and sentimental reunion with his father. Kutno expresses his astonishment at these appearances to Connie who explains, "Grandfather has often told me that they only come back when the whole family is really in serious trouble." When they are alone, Kutno explains to Connie that her grandfather is selling the factory because it has become unionized. The sale of the factory would mean unemployment for most of the town's citizens since the Eastern Shoe Corporation is interested only in closing the firm to eliminate competition. Connie is disturbed by the news but

66 Elmer Rice, American Landscape (New York: Coward McCann, 1939), p. 43.
cannot reply before Frank enters with Stillgebauer of the Deutsch-Amerikanische Kultur Gesellshaft. They are joined by Moll Flanders, another of Frank’s ancestors; Heinrich Klein­schmidt, Carlotta’s dead grandfather and a Union soldier in the Civil War; and, finally, Harriet Beecher Stowe, another Dale ancestor. All generations of the Dale family since the 1700’s, then, witness Frank’s announcement that the factory and homestead will be sold.

Act II brings the principals of the play into open conflict. Tony converses with his daughter Connie, and condemns Stillgebauer as a member of the "Napolean breed" that the First World War was supposed to eliminate. Kutno enters as Tony leaves and tells her a group of workers from the factory plans to dissuade her grandfather from selling the business. Connie promises him that she will do everything to help their cause and asks him about the possibility of all the workers investing in the factory to keep it open. He admits that the workers might be interested, and the two go off as Stillgebauer enters with Fran and Bill Fiske. Stillgebauer explains the purpose of the Bund for whom he is buying the Dale house: "This is an organization composed of German-Americans of pure Aryan blood, who believe that it is important to cultivate not only the mind but the body." 67 While Stillgebauer continues to describe the planned remodeling, Samuel and Heinrich enter to lambaste his pseudo-patriotic discourse. Insulted by their

67 Ibid., p. 80.
accusations, Stillgebauer hurries out, and Fran asks Bill what price the Bund has offered for the house. Their offer of seventy-five thousand dollars seems staggering, but she, nevertheless, pleads with her husband to help her raise the money to save the estate. Jerry refuses to commit himself, however, and leaves for his screen-writing job in Hollywood. At his exit, Carlotta enters with Harriet Beecher Stowe and Moll Flanders followed by Frank. Harriet, voicing the sentiments of most of the characters, and making the play's theme explicit, begs Frank to reconsider:

Cousin Frank, this is an old house. Many generations of our kinsmen have dwelt here. I have called it a hallowed place—and so it is: hallowed by the ideals of liberty and self-respecting labor and the sacredness and dignity of the individual soul. It has been shaped by those who have lived here, but in turn it has shaped them too.68

With this speech it becomes obvious that Rice is using the Dale home and factory as a symbol for the entire nation, and the fantasy figures as representatives of America's patriotic past pleading with the present generation to preserve a sacred heritage. Appropriately following this ancestral plea, the Kutno family with Patrick O'Brien, editor of "The Despatch," Abraham Cohen, a clothing-store owner, and Jasper Washington, a Negro minister enter to Frank to give the present generation's petition for the integrity of Dalesford. The total effect is that of a universal chorus protesting the threatened

68 Ibid., p. 100.
disintegration of their way of life. Rice is careful not to make Frank appear selfish and inconsiderate of these protests: Frank insists that his is the only practical way to prevent the business from bankruptcy and the homestead from auction, and promises that the factory workers will be kept on half pay until they can find other work. O'Brien's retort echoes the patriotic fervor of Harriet's earlier appeal:

It's bitter news to the likes of us, whose people have suffered centuries of persecution, to learn that this fine old property, its soil watered by the life fluid of those who fought, bled, and died for liberty, is to become the haven and the refuge of those to whom liberty is anathema, and who preach the diabolical doctrines of social and religious intolerance.69

As all of the characters voice their agreement with O'Brien, Frank collapses as the act ends.

Act III takes place ten days later, after Frank's funeral. Jerry enters to Fran and apologizes for his absence. Fran is indignant at his apology and his protestation of love until Jerry tells her he has quit his job to help her with the farm. All of the characters, both fantasy and realistic, enter to hear Bill Fiske's reading of Frank's will. Frank has designated the estate for Fran, and the factory for Connie with Joe Kutno and Bill Fiske as trustees. To Bill's suggestion that they continue with the sale, Fran and Connie reply that they are determined to preserve both the estate and the factory. Gradually the fantasy figures depart, and Tony delivers a final

69 Ibid., pp. 115-116.
warning to those who remain:

Hatred walks the world, and there is madness in high places. For God's sake, don't succumb to it! Beware of those who seek to enslave you and to force you and your children into uniform, whether of the body or of the mind. You have sharp brains and strong hands. Use them to create, to build, to make things grow—not to slaughter and destroy. And remember this: let no man, no creed, no panic fear make you forget to call your souls your own. 70

Finally, Rice allows Frank to regain stature by admitting his mistake and delivering the last invocation to his children. Affirming the importance of the inheritance Tony has outlined, Frank adds,

Cherish it! Cherish it! And be prepared to defend it. Do not let the specter of my defeat cast its shadow over you. The past exists only to serve the future, and the future is in your hands. 71

As Frank leaves with Tony, Samuel, and Heinrich, the new builders, Fran, Jerry, Connie, and Joe Kutno drink a toast to a dedicated future.

Although produced for only forty-three performances by the Playwrights' Company, American Landscape represents the most outspoken propaganda play in Rice's canon. Certainly the patriotic ideals encouraged by the play's theme evidence a noble purpose on Rice's part. Moreover, the theme was timely: the threat of Nazism, even more imminent than in 1934 when Rice lashed out against it in Judgment Day, called for the rededication of citizens to the fundamental principles of American democracy. Rice's attitude toward this threat had changed

70 Ibid., p. 141. 71 Ibid.
considerably since the early thirties. No longer did he seem to advocate, as he had in *We, the People* and *Judgment Day*, the extreme or radical action that had associated him with leftist movements and that had endeared him to Marxist critics. In this play he calls for action on traditional and distinctly democratic lines. According to Gerald Rabkin, Rice by this time had taken the position favored by most liberals of the day:

The wave of protest which in the early thirties had thrown many liberals into the radical camp had waned. The vogue of 'Americanism' had begun; the liberal had become somewhat disenchanted with communist intransigence (although the real disenchantment was still to come with the Nazi-Soviet pact), and affirmed a native liberalism born of America's tradition of freedom. 72

*American Landscape*, then, fulfills Rice's ideals concerning the social obligations of contemporary drama, but it also complies with his insistence on a high quality of dramatic craftsmanship. The play is well organized to express its patriotic theme. The arrangement of incidents in the three acts is neatly conceived: Act I introduces the major figures of the present Dale household, the fantasy figures of the Dale ancestors, and their mutual concern over the main problem of the Dale property; Act II introduces citizens of Dalesford who confirm the protest of the Dale ancestors and brings the plot to a climax in the confrontation of Frank with the inhabitants of his past and present; Act III brings the resolution of the problem in Frank's sincere confession of error and the preservation of the Dale heritage in a young, dedicated, and patriotic

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72 Rabkin, pp. 255-256.
generation. Perhaps the most notable feature of the play's structure, however, is the use of representational characters.

Here, as in his other plays in the thirties, notably *Counsellor-at-Law*, *We, the People*, and *Between Two Worlds*, Rice employs a panoramic technique to portray a pageant of characters in support of his theme. Note, for example, the distribution of the Dale ancestors: Samuel Dale of the American Revolutionary Army and Moll Flanders represent eighteenth-century America; Heinrich Kleinschmidt of the Civil War and Harriet Beecher Stowe, nineteenth-century America; and finally Tony Dale, Frank's son and a soldier in World War I, represents the early twentieth century. The representational figures of the past are well balanced with those of the present also: the Dalesford citizens who confront Frank in Act II represent segments of town, farm, and factory as well as native-born and immigrant elements of their society. Together these two groups join in a chorus of protest reaffirming the solidarity of American ideals for two hundred years from past to present.

In spite of its significant theme, unified construction, and representational characters, however, *American Landscape* was not well received by the critics. Stark Young accosted the play as banal and overexplicit. 73 Philip Hartung, while criticizing Rice's use of ghosts, objected that the playwright was a prosaic writer, "a realist of the realists," and should not

have attempted fantasy.\textsuperscript{74} Rosamond Gilder and Joseph Wood Krutch, however, came closest to explaining the play's main weakness: in Miss Gilder's words, "Mr. Rice's characters are drawn in chalk on a blackboard; they are symbols rather than people; and though his equations evoke interest, they never stir the imagination nor quicken the pulse with that sense of conflict and conquest which is the theatre's peculiar magic."\textsuperscript{75}

The defects of the play, therefore, are to be found neither in its theme nor in its structure of incidents but in its characterizations. Not only do the representational figures who give the theme breadth lack the precision and vividness of minor figures in Rice's earlier plays, but even major characters, including the protagonist, are flatly portrayed. Unfortunately, all of the characters of American Landscape become mere tools for the presentation of propaganda. Their dialogue, too, lacks Rice's usual vigor and sharpness, and in most cases the dialogue is indistinguishable as belonging to one character or another. This is most obvious in the patriotic speeches of Harriet and O'Brien in Act II, and particularly in those of Tony and Frank in Act III where their exhortations follow one another in too close succession. Until this time, Rice succeeds almost to combine doctrine with realistic and dramatic detail, but here he loses control and holds

\textsuperscript{74}Hartung, "American Landscape," p. 273.

\textsuperscript{75}Gilder, "American Landscape," p. 89. Also see Krutch, The American Drama Since 1918, pp. 262-263.
too fast to his pulpit. Again, instead of allowing action and idea to assert themselves through characters, Rice subordinates manner to matter and mounts the stage himself to become dogmatically explicit. The result damages both his drama and his theme: the dialogue is homiletic rather than dramatic; and the play, moreover, becomes a purely dogmatic though patriotic tract laid bare, its conflict one of principles but not of human beings.

American Landscape marks the close of Rice's dramatic efforts in the thirties, and the plays of this period present extensions, developments, and significant changes in the subject matter and dramatic techniques he had worked with during the twenties. On the one hand, Rice extended his involvement with social issues in confronting national and international problems. Moreover, the theme of freedom and individualism is treated more consciously and with greater variety and depth. On the other hand, Rice's studious and imaginative exploration of dramatic forms is not as pronounced in the thirties as it was in the former decade: the later period is characterized almost completely by realistic melodrama.

This is not to say that there is no continuity in regard to the techniques Rice employed in both periods. Except for the use of the flashback technique, Judgment Day (1934) employs the successful melodramatic devices of On Trial (1914). The fantasy of The House in Blind Alley (1917) is used to a minor extent in American Landscape (1938); the farcical elements of Not for
Children (1935) can be compared to their more extensive use in See Naples and Die (1930). Conspicuous by its absence in this period, of course, is the form of expressionism Rice used so brilliantly in The Adding Machine (1923) and with less success in The Subway (1924). But, for the most part, and overshadowing the elements that establish connections between the techniques of the two periods, is the predominance of realism in the later decade. From The Left Bank to American Landscape, it is this mode that is the major influence on Rice's artistic expression.

Rice's realism in this period seems inadequately defined by the usual terms as a faithful reproduction of characters and events as they really are. His peculiar brand of realism is defined best by the high fidelity of representation evidenced in the portrayal of minor characters such as those in Street Scene (1929). The same panoramic technique used there and in Counsellor-at-Law (1931) in presenting a pageant of characters who, in the fullest sense, vividly animate the action can be found in his dramas of the later thirties: the representational characters of We, the People (1933) and Between Two Worlds (1935) may serve as a few cases in point. In We, the People, representational characters such as Larry Collins, the disabled veteran; Allen Davis, the young radical, Willard Drew, the unscrupulous industrialist; Steve Clinton, the Negro maligned by his society; and Professor Sloane, the outspoken university adviser provide a vivid cross section of the people
affecting and affected by the extreme conditions of the Depression. In Between Two Worlds, Fred and Rita Dodd, Vivienne Sinclaire, and Matilda Mason not only represent the typical passengers of a transatlantic voyage, but also graphically reflect the apathy and ignorance of most Americans who prefer the comfort of clichés and passivity to the challenge of new political thought and dedicated social action. It is this invigorated use of representational characters and actions, therefore, that defines Rice's special brand of realism. It is paradoxical that Rice's successful realism, especially in this panoramic use of minor characters, should be accompanied by his failure to portray main characters as round and complex. But for George Simon in Counsellor-at-Law, the main characters of all of his plays in the thirties are flat and wooden. This is especially evident in Judgment Day, Between Two Worlds, and American Landscape where the main characters become almost lifeless fixtures to which Rice can attach ideas for the sake of his socially significant theme.

That the themes of social protest Rice chose to explore in the thirties were significant ones cannot be denied. Rice aimed his liberal pen at the most serious threats of his day: the Depression and Fascism. The domestic problem he faced most forwardly in We, the People, which argued for wide-sweeping reforms to better the conditions of the white-collar worker, the factory-worker, the farmer, and the educator. So angry and so vociferous were his demands that he merited the label of
"radical." But now that many of the inequalities he illustrated have been repaired, his protest can be viewed more justly as liberal rather than as extremist. It is true in great part that Rice fostered a brand of socialism in his proposals, but it must also be remembered that his socialism was intentionally of a utopian kind. It was not a rigid system that he proposed but simply the establishment of a human community which insured real and practical rather than ideal and theoretical equality.

Rice's protest against the international and external threat of Fascism was not less enthusiastic. In Judgment Day he presented the horrifying picture of tyrannical brutality that Nazism represented. In American Landscape, when the threat was all the closer, he presented his broad plan for defense: a meaningful restoration of and commitment to traditional ideals of freedom and democracy.

In confronting these significant national and international problems of his day with other liberal intellectuals, Rice at times seems obstreperous in his protest. His enthusiasm, however, seems less extreme, less of the table-thumping variety, if his insight into the condition of the American temperament of the thirties is considered. From The Left Bank and We, the People to Between Two Worlds and American Landscape, it is obvious that Rice considered the American character to be plagued by dangerous mediocrity and complacency. Like John Shelby of The Left Bank, many wished to escape the demands of
responsibility to America. Many, like Margaret Bowen of *Between Two Worlds*, preferred a comfortable passivity and were impervious to new and stimulating thought. Still others, like Frank Dale of *American Landscape*, pleaded practicality and security as excuses for a lack of action. In view of his consciousness of these alarming characteristics, it is not surprising that Rice addressed himself so vehemently to his audience. America could hardly withstand the pressures of international and national conflict if not a few but most Americans only stood and waited.

Underlying Rice's motives in pursuing themes of social significance is his firm belief in the importance of the individual. The theme of individualism, then, which he had introduced during the twenties in *The Adding Machine*, *The Subway*, and in *Street Scene*, was even further developed in the plays of the thirties and, moreover, serves to unify the entire period. For an explanation of the importance of the theme for these plays, Rice is his own spokesman:

What I have been trying to say is simply that there is nothing as important in life as freedom and that the dominant concern not only of every human being, but of all of us as we function as members of society should be with the attainment of freedom of the body and of the mind through liberation from political autocracy, economic slavery, religious superstition, hereditary prejudice and herd psychology and the attainment of freedom of the soul through liberation from fear, jealousy, hatred, possessiveness and self delusion. Now that I have stated it, I see that I was right in saying that everything I have ever written seriously
has had no other idea than that. 76

Continuing in the same New York Times article, which was published after the production of American Landscape, Rice traces the use of this theme in his plays of this decade.

'Counsellor-at-Law' touched upon the enslavement of a man of good will by careerism and sexual infatuation; 'The Left Bank' was a story about the expatriates, a study in the psychology of escapism and an affirmation of the belief that one can solve one's problems only by facing them. 'We, the People' was a panoramic presentation of the economic social situation in America, an exposé of the forces of reaction which stand in the way of a better life for the masses of the American people and a plea for a return to the principles enumerated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

'Judgment Day' was an attack upon Hitlerism, an almost literal transcription of the Reichstag fire trial, though it was generally renounced for its lurid exaggeration. It tried to show not only the bestial brutality of the Nazis but their brutalizing effects upon those over whom they have power. . . . 'Between Two Worlds' was a confrontation of an authoritarian Bolshevik with a selfish, anarchistic Junior League girl and an attempt to find a common livable ground upon which they could meet.

That brings me at last to 'American Landscape.' It is—for me, at least—a logical development of all the plays that have gone before it. It is, once more, a plea for tolerance, for freedom of the mind, of the spirit. It is an affirmation of the American tradition of liberty and the American way of life. It is a call to the colors, not in a military sense but in the sense that the principles of our democracy, now in grave danger, are something worth defending from enemies without and within. In form it is again an experiment, half realistic, half fanciful. It evokes the past and looks to the future. It is not a sermon or tract, but probably the most emotional play I have ever written or am ever likely to write. 77


77 Ibid.
In spite of the reservations one might make in terms of its success, the sincerity and validity of Rice's intention cannot be denied. Moreover, the plays of the period do demonstrate that individualism can be threatened by external tyranny such as that depicted in *Judgment Day*, as well as by fear, ignorance, and complacency, the internal dangers revealed in *Between Two Worlds* and *American Landscape*. In the next decade he would continue to develop the theme of the free individual especially in *Flight to the West* (1940) and *A New Life* (1943), but it is by no means an integrating principle as it is for the plays of the thirties. In this decade, more than any other in his career, Rice's involvement with the concepts of individual and universal freedom and with problems of national and international importance mark him a prominent chronicler of his times.
CHAPTER VI

REALISM AND THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE IN THE FORTIES:
PLAYS, 1940-1943

The early forties marks another transitional phase in Rice's career. Just as in the early thirties The Left Bank (1931) and Counsellor-at-Law (1931) had signaled an end to Rice's primary concern with the realistic techniques of Street Scene (1929) and introduced his period of intense social criticism, so do the plays of this period demonstrate a shift from plays of social criticism to the exclusively popular comedy and melodrama of the late forties and the fifties. These plays, from 1940 to 1943, demonstrate many of the characteristics of Rice's previous writing: realism is still the prominent mode, representational characters are still an important facet of this realism, the themes of freedom and the individual's right to self-determination are yet important, and Rice's firm dedication to a social purpose is still intact. Moreover, this period contains Rice's best propaganda and anti-Nazi play, Flight to the West which is far superior to its predecessors, Judgment Day (1934) and American Landscape (1938).

Rice's first play of the decade, however, marks a temporary retreat from social criticism. Apparently disillusioned by popular and critical responses to his efforts, he
decided to submit a sentimental comedy, Two on an Island, which followed the pattern of an earlier unpublished play, The Sidewalks of New York.\textsuperscript{1} The play enjoyed moderate success on Broadway with ninety-six performances in 1940. The cleverly constructed plot concerns the eventual meeting and marriage in New York of a young Iowan and a New Hampshire girl, both of whom aspire to a theatrical career as a writer and an actress respectively. With the same breadth but with less seriousness and intensity in point of view than in Street Scene, Rice manipulates his characters through the sights and sounds of New York and its theatrical world. The panoramic technique of managing actions and characters, therefore, provides considerable interest to the play.

In Act I, the first two of four scenes are given to presenting the atmosphere of New York, and the panoramic and realistic detail is as precise and vivid as Rice's best. In the first scene, John and Mary, the main characters, enter the taxicabs of Flynn and Brodsky. Flynn is brawny, thick-necked, unshaven, and sometimes crude in his dingy cab, while Brodsky is a small but wiry intellectual who listens to a lecture on ornithology in his bright and shiny cab. As the characters ride through New York, the drivers comment on the sights; Brodsky's point of view seems to be Rice's as he pithily

\textsuperscript{1}Rice, Minority Report, p. 389.
remarks, "Materialism! No time for poetry."\(^2\) The next scene offers more fine representational action as John and Mary separately board a sightseeing bus. The witty comments of the tour guide continue the descriptions begun by the cab drivers, and more minor characters are introduced: Mrs. Dora Levy, an elderly and lonely widow; Frederic Winthrop, a young oversensitive intellectual who reads *The Daily Worker*; Dixie Bushby, a sailor; and Clifton Ross, an artist. All of these characters interlace the play with their occasional entrances. As is usual with Rice, they are functional in at least two respects: they provide an interesting cross section of New York life; and they also, through their meetings with the main characters, illuminate the personalities of John and Mary. Appropriately, the tour ends in the theatre district and provides an introduction to scene three where the complication of the play begins in the office of Lawrence Ormont, a theatrical producer who will unwittingly bring the principles together.

John is the first to encounter Ormont with his play which the producer refuses with a wit and cynicism that are no match for John's simplicity, politeness, and idealism. After John's brief description of the play, Ormont badgers him with sarcastic accusations: "What? No social significance? What the hell are you, an escapist?"\(^3\) Rice is perhaps indulging in

\(^2\)Elmer Rice, *Two on an Island* (New York: Coward McCann, 1940), p. 9.

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 35.
a little self-mockery here, but for the most part Ormont's statements are directed to producers and critics who refuse to accept such plays. John's unhappy interview is followed by the entrance of two minor characters, Heinz Kaltbart, a destitute actor, and Dorothy Clark, a wealthy but frivolous socialite who is the star and financier of Ormont's latest play, *Long Island Honeymoon*. Ormont's reaction to Kaltbart is sympathetic and generous so that the impression of his character in the interview with John is considerably softened. After the meeting with Dorothy Clark, which includes more of the producer's enjoyable witticisms, Mary enters to ask for a job. Mary's response to Ormont is reminiscent of John's so that the audience is made dramatically aware of an approaching confrontation between the two characters.

The fourth scene of Act I, which occurs four months later on the subway, serves to indicate the progress John and Mary have made. Present again are the representational characters, Mrs. Levy, Winthrop, Dixie Bushby, Ormont, and Ross. While Winthrop explains his communist ideals to a fellow passenger, John complains to an old school acquaintance of his discouragement and loneliness in New York. Receiving no sympathetic response from his listener, John leaves the subway and brushes against Mary who is just entering. Mary's dialogue with Mrs. Levy reveals more of her warm and open personality and also informs us that Ormont gave her a part in his *Long Island Honeymoon* which closed after only two weeks. At least
she has been more successful than John.

Act II continues much of the same representational action of Act I in four scenes which depict more of John's gradual failure and Mary's moderate success in facing the harsh realities of New York life. In the first scene Mary models for Ross who is visited by John, now a struggling magazine salesman. His entrance is timely since it prevents Ross from taking advantage of Mary who hides while John complains to the artist of his failure and loneliness. In scene two, minor and major characters converge in a dingy coffee shop where John works as a waiter and where more complicating confrontations take place. Ormont and his wife argue about his cynicism and lack of feeling for others. Winthrop joins another rebel, Sonia Taranova, to discuss the organization of Five and Ten workers. Dorothy Clark and Ross also patronize the restaurant to gratify Dorothy's taste for "slumming." Mary is also present, but she does not recognize John as she talks with Winthrop.

In the following scene at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mary again meets the pathetic Mrs. Levy who suffers a heart attack during the guided tour. Her response to Mrs. Levy once more demonstrates that Mary has lost none of her simplicity and sincerity in the course of her New York adventure. Ormont is also present with his young daughter who is upset over the separation of her parents. John enters the scene only briefly, but once more he and Mary fail to meet. Finally, in the last scene of the act, which occurs in the street, John,
who has sold only two small stories, is reduced to a panhandler. Ormont passes by with Mary discussing a new play, but John does not approach them. Dorothy Clark also wanders by with her latest fad, a Hindu escort. John, more depressed than ever, meets a prostitute and suggests they live together in order to alleviate their mutual poverty and loneliness.

In the first two acts, then, Rice allows the paths of his two main characters to cross several times, keeping the audience in suspense about their confrontation. Through an intricate collection of carefully patterned actions and characters, he illuminates their personalities and circumstances as vividly as the cold, dispassionate, indifferent, lonely, but colorful environment in which they move.

Finally, in the first scene of Act III John and Mary meet at the top of the Statue of Liberty, two years after their arrival in New York. John recognizes her from the scene in Ormont's office, and the two are immediately friendly. Mary is sympathetic to John's dejection over his failure, but tries to encourage him not to give up. At this point in his career John is not easily heartened, but he expresses his happiness in finding someone he can talk to. The following scene takes place six months later in a one-room apartment where John and Mary have been living together. In John's absence, Ormont enters to offer Mary a role in a new play. Mary gratefully refuses the offer; but when Ormont becomes insistent, she confesses that she wants no part of the extra-curricular activities that
are a part of the job. Ormont, now divorced from his wife, offers to marry her, but Mary tells him she has found the man she loves. At that moment John makes his timely entrance much to the chagrin of Ormont who has just given him a job as play-reader that will enable the pair to marry. Admitting his regret, Ormont good-naturedly offers to celebrate the occasion with a champagne dinner. To John's invitation to be best man, Ormont wittily replies, "My boy, I always have been."

The final scene returns to the setting of Act I, scene one to neatly frame the action of the play. Kaltbart, the former actor, now occupies Flynn's taxicab, while Brodsky still has his own. Mary and John take Kaltbart's car to start their honeymoon trip to Niagara Falls, while Dorothy Clark and Winthrop, also newlyweds, enter Brodsky's for the same destination. Dorothy is as fatuous as ever; her marriage to the communist is obviously just another exciting adventure. The couples leave the cabs at the train station to the accompaniment of a Wedding March on the cars' radios. As they exit, a boy gets into Kaltbart's cab, a girl into Brodsky's, and supposedly the cycle begins again.

The action of this simple comedy provides the kind of puzzle the author found fascinating. The plot line is certainly thin as Rice maneuvers his couple in and out of experiences which they unwittingly share until their climactic meeting in Act III, scene one. One hardly objects to this kind of manipulation and dependence on coincidence, however, because of the
nature of the play as a comedy. Moreover, the representational actions which provide a vivid spectacle of New York life are so realistically done and interesting in themselves that one hardly protests the improbable delay in the meeting of the principals. In great part, Rice uses the same panoramic technique with these representational actions that he had used in *Street Scene* (1929), *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931), and *We, the People* (1933). As in this last play, which presented a genre picture of the Depression, *Two on an Island* presents a genre picture of New York as well as a simple love story. The complicated network of minor actions that encircles the simple plot reveals the city as a place not only of teeming life and excitement, but also of indifference, impersonality, coldness, materialism, and loneliness that are predominant parts of the concrete and steel jungle.

Like the plot, characterization is also thin in this sentimental comedy. Perhaps New York itself is the most vivid character, while the human actors are, as one reviewer commented, "cutouts." The one exception is Lawrence Ormont; witty and urbane but cynical and disillusioned, he is practically an epitome of the New York ethos. His frequent appearances throughout the play are well timed; and his dialogue, particularly in the interviews with John, Mary, and Dorothy Clark provides some of the brightest scenes of the play.

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4 Rosamond Gilder, "Two on an Island," *Theatre Arts*, XXIV (1940), 167.
Besides Ormont, several minor figures fill out Rice's genre picture of the city. The taxi drivers, Flynn and Brodsky, and the tour guide are good examples of Rice's ability to economically and precisely catch the spirit of these type figures. Appreciable too are his characterizations of Mrs. Levy, the pathetic and lonely widow; Dorothy Clark, the wealthy and flighty adventuress; and Frederic Winthrop, the communist crusader. It should be noted here that except for Winthrop's occasional speeches, the play is devoid of explicit social criticism; also, one accepts Winthrop's polemics in the same light spirit that he had accepted old Kaplan's ravings in *Street Scene* (1929).

The realistic background, the ingeniously contrived plot, and several representational characterizations, then, are the most appreciable features of Rice's sentimental comedy, a form he had not used since *See Naples and Die* (1929) and *Black Sheep* (1932).

With his next play Rice returned to the forum of political ideas with an anti-Nazi propaganda play. Although it recalls the conflicts in *Judgment Day* (1934) and *American Landscape* (1938), and the setting of the stage argument in *Between Two Worlds* (1935), *Flight to the West* (1940) is a far better play. First and foremost, Rice is less the debater and more the dramatist as his political ideas become fully the matter of the plot in which the conflict is between "irrational sanity" and the rational but insidious madness of Nazism. With
136 performances the play was his greatest success since *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931), and many critics were generous in their praise. Its timely subject matter and careful technique led some to hail it as an intensely provocative drama, and one which was worthy of the playwright's studious craftsmanship.³ Brooks Atkinson cited Rice's play as "the most absorbing American drama of the season" and felt that "'Flight to the West' ranks with 'Street Scene' as his best work."⁶

Rice begins his well constructed plot with an expository scene which introduces major and minor characters as they board a transatlantic clipper bound from Portugal to New York. First to enter are the Dickensens, a family escaping from war-ravaged Europe where Edmund Dickensen was blinded, his wife maimed, and their young son killed in an air attack. Clara Rosenthal, an embittered Jewish refugee, also represents the effects of Nazi cruelty. Louise Frayne, an aggressive, self-confident reporter, is a Dorothy Thompson-type columnist eager to find materials for an exciting story. Colonel Archibald Gage, a wealthy Texan, is a head-in-the-sand isolationist whom Rice pillories severely in the course of the play. The more suspicious passengers are Vronoff, a quiet Russian on his way to a professorship of

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³Euphemia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "Two on an Island," Catholic World, CLII (1941), 595-596.

Slavonic literature in California, and Dr. Hermann Walther, a German diplomat and spokesman for the Nazi philosophy. Last to board are those who with Walther provide the principals for the external conflict of the play: Howard Ingraham, an American intellectual and political scientist, and Hope and Charles Nathan, a young married couple. Charles Nathan is the hero of the piece whose conversion from pacifism to active resistance in regard to Nazi aggression represents the resolution of the play's internal conflict.

Complication begins immediately as Hope Nathan confides to Ingraham, an old friend, that she has seen the Russian Vronoff before but with a different name. Believing she might be mistaken, Hope changes the subject and expresses her relief to be leaving the turmoil of Europe for America where she and Nathan can live in peace with the child she's expecting. Hope has not told her husband yet, since she wants to surprise him. Hope leaves when Nathan enters and engages in a serious conversation with Ingraham over present world conditions. In their confrontation the terms of Nathan's internal conflict are briefly explained. Both characters express their consternation and bewilderment about the best means to face the reality of Nazism. Nathan confesses that he has been a confident pacifist until recent German aggression in Finland, Norway, Holland, and France have given him reason to re-examine his position and to consider joining the armed forces. Representational action then follows with the introduction of Marie Dickensen to the
Nathans and Ingraham. Marie relates her family's plight in Europe and her consequent bitterness towards the Germans. Louise Frayne notes her greater agitation when Walther is introduced to the group as one of Hitler's men at the German Embassy in Washington. At the end of this compact first scene, then, there is sufficient revelation of internal and external conflicts to insure the audience's interest in what is to follow.

In the second scene of Act I complication continues as Hope remarks to Nathan about the tension existing on the plane; she hoped they had left the "European mess" behind them. After Vronoff converses briefly with the Nathans about his professorship, Hope's suspicions are confirmed as she tells Nathan that she remembers meeting Vronoff at a reception at the French Consulate in Jerusalem. At that time he had a different name and was in trouble with the British authorities. Hope thinks her father might remember Vronoff's identity, and Louise Frayne goes off to cable him for confirmation. The suspicions of the audience are confirmed shortly thereafter when Vronoff quietly confides to Walther that he has forged his British passport. What follows is the first of two interesting arguments which define the ideological conflict of the play. Walther defends German imperialism as a movement for peace in a unified Europe: "It may, perhaps, seem unfortunate that this colossal task can be accomplished only by the use of force. But, after all, force is the fundamental law of nature. In the struggle for
existence, the strong must conquer the weak." The reactions of the listeners are varied. Louise Frayne calls Walther's philosophy "gangsterism"; Gage foolishly suggests that Hitler is not an evil man and should be persuaded to cooperate with America for mutual benefits. Ingraham retorts that Hitler must be resisted if democracy is to survive. Walther refuses to answer Nathan's angry question about Nazi tactics, but Ingraham continues the assault: "In all sincerity, Dr. Walther, I ask you what madness has driven your country to this frenzy of annihilation that threatens to wipe the earth clean of every vestige of intelligence and culture?" At hearing this, Marie Dickensen becomes enraged and, calling Walther a murderer and assassin, attempts to strangle him. Nathan and Ingraham separate them as the scene closes.

With his usual skill in plot construction, Rice brings his first act to a sensational and melodramatic close. The terms of the conflict have been exposed, and the emotional element cooperates to heighten the tension of the plot. Moreover, the sensational final action foreshadows the play's climax in scene two of Act III.

In the first scene of Act II, the purely melodramatic action of the plot is further complicated as Louise Frayne receives a telegram from Hope's father who has assured them

7Elmer Rice, Flight to the West (New York: Coward McCann, 1941), p. 53.
8Ibid., p. 61.
that Vronoff is an espionage agent. As she goes off to inform the captain, Vronoff and Walther discuss a code they will employ for gathering intelligence. Immediately after their interview, the captain asks the reporter for further confirmation from the British Intelligence Office about Vronoff's activities. The second scene of Act II brings the confirmation which Louise Frayne shows to the captain and to Nathan. The incident is significant since it helps Nathan to resolve his internal conflict within this scene. Then in a representational incident which serves to define Nazi brutality more fully, Frau Rosenthal tells Hope of the horrible persecution she suffered because she is a Jew. Since Nathan is also a Jew, she urges Hope not to have children so that they will not suffer similar tortures. As Hope responds that such persecution could not happen in America, Nathan enters and tells her that Vronoff is definitely a spy. This information, which also suggests the complicity of Vronoff and Walther, confirms Nathan's conversion from his pacifist attitude as he tells Hope he will join the armed forces. Hope's attempt to dissuade him by announcing her pregnancy is unsuccessful, and he insists that something must be done to counteract the "insidious invasion of the Walthers and the Vronoffs. And our own Colonel Gages, quite prepared in the interests of their pocketbooks, to do business with our enemies."9 Deeply offended by his decision, Hope fails to admire her husband's determination. Nathan's conversion is

9Ibid., p. 97.
certainly the most significant development in the second act which closes with the captain's informing Louise Frayne that the plane will make a non-scheduled stop in Bermuda where the British authorities will arrest Vronoff.

To this point in the play, the terms of the external conflict, Walther versus Nathan and Ingraham, have had only a single major confrontation, and Nathan's internal conflict has been only partially resolved in his changed point of view. It is the business of the third act to provide another confrontation to culminate in a climax which will simultaneously illuminate the theme and the resolution of both conflicts.

In the first scene of Act III, the plane lands in Bermuda, and Vronoff is arrested for his forged passport. The authorities reveal that his real name is Arenski and that he was expelled from Palestine in 1935 for selling military intelligence. Although he protests vehemently and insists on diplomatic immunity, Walther is also taken along for interrogation. While everyone else is occupied in witnessing the arrest, Marie Dickensen secretly retrieves the revolver Vronoff concealed before the passport inspection. In the following scene, the climax of the play, Louise Frayne, Hope, Nathan, Ingraham, and Gage discuss the arrest. Louise and Nathan are certain that Walther was collaborating with Vronoff. Gage scoffs at their suspicions and insists that Hitler would rather do business with America than wage a war. As Rice's raisonner, Ingraham, incensed at this inanity, replies:
Colonel Gage, do you really think that we can avoid this thing that threatens us by refusing to face it or by huddling under the umbrella of appeasement? Don't you see what we're dealing with is a poison of the mind, a corruption of the spirit, that no compromise, no gesture of conciliation can protect us from?  

Gage is not convinced, however, and goes off to bed as Walther returns. Then, distraught even more by what she has witnessed, Marie Dickensen reveals the retrieved gun and attempts to shoot Walther. Nathan, however, quickly lunges in front of Walther so that, in attempting to save the Nazi, he himself is wounded by the shot. The action is sensational, but even more importantly it signals the convergence of the internal and external conflicts of the play, and in dramatic terms presents the theme to be made explicit in the last scene.

In scene three of Act III, which occurs two hours later, Walther is informed by the captain that he will be detained by the Department of Justice in Washington. Then, to Ingraham's question about his reaction to Nathan's action, Walther replies that it was nonsensical and irrational. Hope and Ingraham, however, contend that Nathan has resolved their own doubts about a course of action in regard to the Nazi menace. In explaining Nathan's gesture and his own resolution, Ingraham makes Rice's theme explicit; he agrees that the action was irrational, that it went beyond reason and self-interest, but adds,

10 Ibid., p. 136.
It's just this: that rationality carried to its ruthless logical extreme becomes madness, because man is a living and growing organism and not a machine, and in all the important things of life, a sane man is irrational.  

In what John Gassner called a "finely ground piece of argument," Rice pits the irrational sanity of democracy against the rational madness of the Nazis. Rationality and logic carried to an extreme can lead only to ruthlessness, cruelty, and inhumanity; the sane response to this madness is portrayed in the irony of Charles Nathan's action as one that is beyond self-interest and that arises from the faith and instinctive actions of intelligent humanity.

Rice's response to the crisis here is as timely as were his replies to the Nazi threat in Judgment Day (1934) and American Landscape (1938). In idea and execution, however, Flight to the West is superior to both. No longer satisfied with stalwart but passive resistance, Rice here counsels an active response to the global conflict. The appeasement and isolationist theories of the Colonel Gages are inadequate to the immediate exigencies of war and peace. Tyranny must not only be resisted, it must be crushed. Moreover, the terms of the conflict, "rational madness" and "irrational sanity," are exposed, complicated, and resolved in a finely constructed plot. In his two earlier anti-Nazi plays, Rice had hung his

11 Ibid., p. 150.

propaganda on a melodramatic framework. Here the melodramatic action provides an external conflict which immediately affects the internal conflict of Charles Nathan; theme and melodramatic technique, then, are wholly organic. Both scenes of Act I provide exposition of the external and internal conflicts: freedom versus tyranny, and the liberal's dilemma in the face of world conflict. The first scene of Act II, the discovery of Vronoff's activities, contributes to the resolution of Nathan's dilemma in scene two. Finally, both conflicts are dramatically resolved in Nathan's rescue of Walther in the second scene of Act III.

Rice's keen talent for realism is also evident in the play. The captain and steward of the clipper contribute to the realistic setting, but more impressive are the representational characters who help define the conflict. Clara Rosenthal and Marie Dickensen serve to demonstrate by their interesting but shocking narratives the prejudice and cruelty of the Nazi regime. Colonel Gage, the head-in-the-sand isolationist is one of Rice's most brilliant minor characterizations; and the playwright, as one reviewer put it, "has pilloried him with skill and understatement."13 Of considerable interest too is Louise Frayne whose diligence uncovers the Vronoff scheme. Among the major figures, Walther and the intellectual Ingraham are

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convincing, but Charles Nathan is the best conceived. He presents his dilemma clearly, and his conversion and resolution are sincere, consistent, and well motivated. He is, with George Simon of *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931) one of Rice's best male protagonists. The realistic dialogue of these characters is also appreciable. In contrast to his previous propaganda plays, Rice here avoids conspicuously mounting his pulpit. Even the articulate speeches of Ingraham, obviously Rice's spokesman, are as appropriate to his character as are the highly emotional and provocative narratives of Clara Rosenthal and Marie Dickensen.

**Flight to the West** is representative of Rice's best work in the political drama. As in his earlier plays, he showed himself to be keenly aware of the form and pressure of his time. And it was not long before other playwrights joined in the anti-Nazi crusade. At about the same time or shortly after appeared Robert Sherwood's *There Shall Be No Night* (1940), Maxwell Anderson's *Candle in the Wind* (1941), John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down* (1942), and James Gow and Armand d'Usseau's *Tomorrow the World* (1943). The movement represented by these playwrights is well explained by Edmond Gagey:

> With the outbreak of war in Europe the dramatists had stepped up their efforts to denounce nazism abroad and at home, including the related perils of complacency or isolationism in America. While the plays were competent and often effective, few of them rose above the stage of black-and-white propaganda, nor were they able to compete with the dramatic sweep of actual events.14

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14 Gagey, p. 136.
Rice's play, however, takes its place with the finest of the type: Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* (1941) and Maxwell Anderson's *The Eve of St. Mark* (1942). The plaudit is well deserved for one of the best plays in Rice's canon.

In the third play of this period Rice turned again to sentimental comedy, but this time with a serious theme. Still concerned with the importance of freedom and individuality, Rice produced *A New Life* in 1943, which in two acts or nine scenes concerns the hope for a more promising future after the war is ended. Written for his wife, Betty Field, the play enjoyed only seventy performances. The new life, represented in the play by the infant son of Edith, a radio singer, and her aviator husband Robert, epitomizes Rice's theme. It is a question of the struggle for liberty: whether the child will be a member of the old selfish capitalistic order, represented by Robert's materialistic and short-sighted parents, or a figure for a future new order represented by Edith and her democratic, hard-working and self-respecting friends. The plot, then, concerns the struggle of opposing parties for the possession of the child and the determination of its future.

The first five scenes of the play, whose composition was praised by one reviewer as a sound and clever piece of

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theatrical craftsmanship, contain the exposition and complication of the plot. Amid representational action to supply realistic atmosphere, Edith enters the hospital with her friends, Olive Rapallo and Gus Jensen who is mistaken by the hospital staff for Edith's husband. After Edith is taken to the maternity ward, Olive and Gus are introduced to the Cleghornes, Edith's in-laws whom she has never met. The delayed meeting gives Rice the opportunity to provide necessary exposition. Edith was a night-club singer who married Robert Cleghorne after knowing him only two weeks. Even their brief introductory remarks show the Cleghornes to be haughty and domineering. The meeting between them and Edith in the following scene is forced and awkward. Their rudeness to the hospital staff causes Edith, after their exit, to express her fear of their power to Gus. In scene three a conversation between Olive and Gus reveal that the Cleghornes are Arizona steel capitalists who have enjoyed a crafty business with the government. Because Robert is presumed to have been killed in action, Olive begs Gus to marry Edith, to whom he was once engaged, in order to save her from the Cleghornes. After Olive leaves, the Cleghornes enter to Gus and Edith's father, a former vaudeville performer and a warm, gentle man. Edith's father is proud of his daughter whose independent spirit he has always admired;

this feature of her personality is, of course, integral to her attitude about her child and her in-laws and foreshadows her response to their domination later in the play. When the Cleghornes announce their plan to relieve Edith of all responsibilities for her child, even by lawsuit if necessary, Gus counters that Edith will never permit it. The characters then part angrily, thus establishing the sharp division between the principals of the play's conflict. At the end of the scene, Cleghornes receives a telephone call from Robert who is on his way to the hospital. The surprising news adds further suspense to the complication of the plot. Edith is taken to the delivery room, however, before she can be told that Robert is alive.

Scene four is a curious but imaginative addition to the structure of the play. In a dark delivery room, only Edith's head is illumined by a white light. Semi-delirious, Edith screams, moans in pain, and incoherently cries out against pain, suffering, and war in what seems a bitter indictment of the old and corrupt world as a new world is about to be born. This purely impressionistic scene seems incongruous with the realism of the rest of the play; in view of Rice's earlier mixture of modes in The Subway (1924) and American Landscape (1938), however, the intrusion of impressionism is not completely surprising. Despite the damage it might do to the play's external structure, the scene is integral to the theme and theatrically effective. At the close of the scene the thin cry of a baby is heard, and Edith is told that she has given birth to a son.
In the fifth scene, Rice returns to the realistic mode of presentation as Robert Cleghorne is reunited with his parents. He tells them briefly about his plane crashing in the Marshall Islands and his recovery in Hawaii. Until he returned to the United States he was unaware of Edith's pregnancy. Edith is amazed but happy after she is wheeled down the corridor and reunited with Robert. This scene marks the end of the play's exposition, and the remainder is devoted to complicating further the struggle for possession of Edith's child.

In scene six both sides of the conflict define their positions. The Cleghornes urge Edith to accept their offer of caring for her and the child at their estate in Arizona; an air-conditioned playhouse, a stable of ponies, and a swimming pool for the child are offered as incentives. Edith asks for time to consider the offer, but after the Cleghornes leave confides to Olive that she wants the child to develop a strong individual spirit rather than be pampered by the debilitating luxuries of "Arizona Sam and his squaw."17 Robert and Edith then enjoy their first private meeting which is cut short since he must leave to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor from Roosevelt. He has not made much of it to his parents because of their dislike for the President; Rice is probably pointing to the antipathy of big business towards Roosevelt's pro-labor policies. Robert leaves then, but not without telling Edith

17 Elmer Rice, A New Life (New York: Coward McCann, 1944), p. 177.
that he approves of his parents' plan.

In the following scene Robert returns to be confronted by his mother's complaint that Edith refuses to agree to their plans for the child's future. Edith enters to the family meeting and asks Robert if they can talk privately. The domineering Mrs. Cleghorne and the indomitable Edith then argue bitterly, and Robert's attempt to pacify them is unsuccessful. When Edith is taken back to her room by the nurse, Robert reproves his mother, but she meets his reprimand only with indignation and expresses her regret that Robert married a crude showgirl instead of the refined Millicent Prince who now works at the hospital.

In scene eight Edith angrily dismisses a private nurse hired by the Cleghornes, and complains to Gus of her predicament. He attempts to encourage her by remarking that the child should represent a new and enlightened generation with limitless potentiality for bettering the world and society; at any cost, the boy should live down the Cleghorne tradition rather than live up to it. At no other point in the play does the theme become so explicit. Encouraged by these remarks, Edith tries to convince Robert of her position, but he is not sympathetic. Instead he is enraged by her arguing with his parents and reduces the whole problem to a stupid and trivial question of where the child will live. Refusing to see her case, Robert blindly accuses her of infidelity with Gus and storms out of the room. Following this climax, the resolution of the plot is
very brief.

In scene nine, which occurs the following day, Robert returns to the hospital. Pale, haggard, and disheveled after he has been drinking, he regretfully tells his parents that Edith plans to divorce him. When Edith enters with Olive about to leave the hospital, he asks to talk to her alone. Apologizing for his rude behavior, Robert tells Edith that he has spoken with Gus and now agrees that she was right in demanding the child's independence. His unfavorable upbringing, he adds, contributed to his blindness, but he now sees the wisdom of her position. He too wants his son to be representative of a new life. The nurse brings the baby, and Edith and Robert, happily reconciled, exit together.

The theme of this simple sentimental comedy recalls, in great part, Rice's earlier statements on the importance of freedom and the individual's right to self-determination. Here the theme is naturally colored by the conditions of the times. In the throes of world war, the old world testifies to the inadequacy of its principles and values. The selfishness, bigotry, ruthless ambition, and confused ethics of the Cleghornes are symptoms of a sick social consciousness that is accompanied by a tottering political idea founded on the feeble bases of irresponsibility, isolationism, and complacency. A new life, though Rice refrains from mentioning specific goals, must or at least can be better and can develop human potentiality for good if it is saved from the deadening influence of
the old.

Significant though it is, the theme is not adequately supported by the structure of the play. In this regard, Rosamond Gilder, in her _Theatre Arts_ review, gave one of the critics' most just estimates of Rice's achievement. First she praises the playwright's concern with an important and timely theme:

The fact is in itself important, for Broadway has all too few playwrights concerned with anything but the fascinating process of damming the golden stream that flows down Broadway these days and deflecting some of its glittering ducats into ever-hungry box-offices. In the midst of the current carnival of musical shows and comedies Elmer Rice dares to talk of things that matter: the shape of things to come, the future of the new world which is being born from the death throes of the old. 18

Second, the weakness Miss Gilder points out is the most glaring fault of the play. What follows the baby's birth in scene four is a series of family squabbles between the overbearing in-laws and the independent-minded young wife which have little to do with the graver issues of the play. Rice never confronts Gus, the young liberal, with Robert; the latter's conversion also takes place off-stage. Similarly, Rice never presents a confrontation of Gus and the elder Cleghornes which would have illuminated and dramatized the issues involved. The playwright fails, then, to make his theme inherent in the action of the plot. Even without Gus's eloquent plea for the child's

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independence, without political idealism, Edith would have come to the same conclusion on purely common-sense grounds.

The successful realism of the play offers some compensation for the lapses in plot construction. As usual, Rice's representational characters and actions are vivid in presenting a backdrop for the action. The nursing personnel, the doctor (who in scene three suggests that the current baby boom is Nature's attempt to compensate for man's self-destructiveness), the proud young parents leaving with their newborn child, and an unhappy couple who have just lost their premature baby, make well-timed appearances to sustain the hospital atmosphere of the play. Most interesting of the minor characters is Miss Zuckerman, a spinster in the novelty business, who is visiting a friend in the maternity ward. Her appearances in scenes one and seven provide some of the most amusing incidents in the play. Unlike the representational characters in earlier plays, however, these exist solely for the realistic background and have no bearing on the central issue of the play.

The major figures, on the other hand, are not outstanding characterizations. The one exception is Edith, the role played by Rice's wife, Betty Field; she is vivacious, witty, articulate, an outspoken new woman. Olive Rapallo, Edith's friend, is perhaps another exception; but Gus, Robert, and the Cleghornes are merely disembodied principles.

*A New Life* combines with the other plays of this brief period to mark the end of Rice's serious work in the drama of
social criticism. Though its expression in dramatic form is rather weak, Rice's thoughts on the theme of freedom and individual development are as sound as his earlier treatments of the idea that began with The Adding Machine in 1923. Flight to the West also, while representing the best of the playwright's social dramas, demonstrates a related theme in Nathan's mature and responsible commitment to his fellowmen and to the freedom of the world.

Significant too in these plays is Rice's use of realism. In the two social dramas as well as in the sentimental comedy, Two on an Island, his panoramic technique of manipulating minor characters and actions is still the hallmark of the playwright's realistic craft. Lawrence Ormont and Dorothy Clark in this play; Marie Dickensen and Louise Frayne in Flight to the West; and, to a lesser extent, the minor figures of A New Life testify to the playwright's skill in this regard.

Although Rice's realistic technique to some measure is still in evidence in the plays that followed in the later forties and the fifties, it is no longer so brilliant. The swift, exact, and concise perception into the thoughts and feelings of vividly animated characters wanes considerably, and the conception becomes ordinary. The same may be said of the circumstances or settings of Rice's plays; no longer is his finger so steadily on the pulse of civilization and its various environments.

The decline in realism might be associated with Rice's
retreat from social criticism. No longer fired with indignation at the ills of his time, he turns instead to popular but relatively insignificant subjects. Except for incidental commentary, the plays succeeding are devoid of serious social purpose. It is significant, then, that his last play in this present period should be entitled *A New Life*; it does signal another "life" for the playwright, but one hardly as satisfactory as the old.
CHAPTER VII

THE DECLINE OF A TALENT: PLAYS, 1945-1958

From 1945 to 1958, Rice devoted his talents only sporadically to playwriting. Engaged for the most part in controversies over censorship, and distracted too by his wife's mental affliction and his own physical illness, his playwriting dwindled to the composition of a few comedies and melodramas. In retrospect, it is obvious that 1945 signaled the beginning of the end to Rice's theatrical career. This did not, of course, appear so clearly in 1945 when Rice produced one of his greatest popular successes, Dream Girl.\(^1\)

A comedy-fantasy in two acts, the play enjoyed 349 performances in its first production starring his wife, Betty Field, in the leading role. Dream Girl entranced both critics and audiences with its engaging story of a highly imaginative girl who is prone to daydreaming. The play alternates realistic with fantasy scenes which Rice admits, "employed all the clichés and stock situations of melodrama and treacly romance,"\(^2\) and the plot concerns Georgina Allerton's gradual

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\(^1\)Although Rice had little to do with its present form, the current Broadway musical, Skyscraper (1966), is based on Rice's Dream Girl. Letter from Elmer Rice to Edmund A. Napieralski, April 19, 1966.

\(^2\)Rice, Minority Report, p. 408.
rejection of her fantasy world for the real world represented in the play by Clark Redfield, a book reviewer who eventually marries the heroine.

The mood of comedy and fantasy is established at the outset of Act I when Georgina, awaking from sleep, indulges in her first fantasy of the day by carrying on an interview with a psychologist on the radio. Her monologue serves cleverly as an expository outline of the significant matters of the play: her propensity for daydreaming, her love for her sensitive but misunderstood brother-in-law, her relationship with George Hand, a mismarried bookjobber, and her recent attempt at writing a novel. Overriding these matters, however, is her concern that at twenty-four, "practically thirty," she has had little success in her personal and professional life. After breakfast and the morning mail, which brings a rejection slip from the publishers for whom her brother-in-law Jim is manuscript reader, Georgina dreams of bearing twins as Jim's wife. (This and other quick transitions from reality to dream in the play were ingeniously performed on stage with the use of small movable platforms, lighting effects, and few props.3) Georgina is brought out of her dream by her mother's announcement that Jim has been fired by the publishing company and that she has advised Georgina's sister to divorce him.

The second scene shifts then to a bookstore operated by Georgina and another girl whose complaints of poor business and

3Ibid.
the need for money encourage Georgina to dream that her mother has died and left her a large inheritance. The fantasy is interrupted by the timely entrance of Clark Redfield, charming and witty book reviewer, who characterizes Georgina's unpublished book as a "malodorous morsel." Unaware as yet of her attraction to Redfield, the heroine again indulges in a dream: on trial for Redfield's murder, she is acquitted after the eloquent defense of her lawyer, Jim. The third and final scene of Act I occurs in a restaurant where Georgina declines George Hand's proposal of marriage and a trip to Mexico, but dreams of a Mexican singing group whose leader resembles Redfield.

In a compact, fast-paced, and entertaining first act, Rice has introduced and complicated effectively the matter of his plot. Georgina's search for a lover is carried on both in her dream and in her real life. To this point, Jim, Hand, and Redfield are included in her fantasies with Redfield as the obvious antagonist--sure evidence in this comedy that he will eventually win her affection. The remainder of the play continues the alternation of dream and reality in portraying the gradual elimination of Jim and Hand with the emergence of Redfield as victor.

As Act II opens, Georgina has returned to the bookshop. Still thinking of Hand's proposal, she dreams of her possible ruin as a prostitute; again Jim is the hero and Redfield the villain who brings about the heroine's tragic end in suicide. Redfield has obviously exerted his influence on Georgina's real
life also, since she accepts his invitation to dinner and a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. Significant also at this crucial point in the act is Georgina's refusal of Jim's proposal that she join him in Reno. Gradually coming to terms with reality, she confesses to Jim,

> People daydream about all sorts of things. But when you're faced with actuality, you have to stop and think. If a man and woman are going to spend their lives together, they must have some plan, some way of living.

A call from Mrs. Allerton follows Jim's reluctant exit, and Georgina casually mentions her date with Redfield, "just a boorish conceited newspaperman in whom nobody could have the slightest interest." Mrs. Allerton knowledgeably replies, "Well, it certainly looks as though Mr. Right has come along at last." 5

In the next scene, the climax of the play follows Georgina's dream of herself as Portia delivering the "quality of mercy" speech. At a restaurant after the performance, Redfield surprises her with his singular knowledge of her love for Jim and her daydreaming: he accuses her of escapism in her novel and warns that these frequent excursions into a dream world could cause her reality to wither. He also muses on the impossibility of his marrying since no woman could be expected to endure his loquacity, bluntness, and egotism. The repartee


5Ibid., p. 500.
here, as Georgina interprets Redfield's faults as virtues, makes for one of the most amusing incidents in the play:

Clark: As for egotism—-that's my middle name.
Georgina: It's a quality a lot of creative people have.
Clark: I'm a hard guy to know.
Georgina: Complex people usually are.
Clark: I'm lacking in reverence.
Georgina: It could be that you're too penetrating to be taken in by sham.
Clark: It bores me to listen to other people's troubles.
Georgina: Perhaps you think they should stand on their own feet and solve their own problems.
Clark: The idea of supporting a wife irks me.
Georgina: A man who is independent himself might not respect an able-bodied woman who was willing to be a dependent.
Clark: I'm an unpredictable bastard. If I have a strong impulse, I'm likely as not to follow it.
Georgina: That could denote imagination and courage. 6

Then in the last fantasy sequence of the play Georgina imagines her rejection of Jim and her marriage to Redfield. Unlike the previous dreams, however, the heroine brings herself out of this fantasy by crying that she must stop trying to escape into dreams. The final realistic scene of the play finds Georgina married to Redfield, promising to subordinate her illusions to the reality of their life together.

The most remarkable feature of the structure of this simple comedy is the alternation of realistic and fantasy scenes. In great part, as John Gassner pointed out, Rice was able to give his expressionistic facility pleasant employment

6Ibid., p. 518.
in the dream sequences. The fantasies, as one reviewer commented, are also naturally ordered: "The dreams fit into the day so to speak; there are no figurations too alarming, interesting, or expensive for the size of the figures; all the shadows are owned." Moreover, to establish unity of action, Rice peoples the fantasies with figures from Georgina's real life: In Act I Mr. Allerton is the doctor, Mrs. Allerton the nurse in the heroine's second dream of the day; in the same act Jim plays her lawyer in her imagined murder trial; in Act II the Justice of the Peace who marries Georgina and Redfield in her last dream is again played by Mr. Allerton. The multiple roles of these characters, then, contribute to the coherent structure of the play as well as to the play's comic effect.

These minor characters, however, are only two-dimensional figures and so do not have the vigor and vividness of Rice's earlier representational characters. Even in his earlier comedies, See Naples and Die (1929) and Two on an Island (1940), the representational characters of Mrs. Evans and Basil Rowlinson in the earlier play and of Dorothy Clark and Frederic Winthrop in the later play made the sights and sounds of the backgrounds an important and appreciable feature of the play's realism. This particular facet of Rice's realism is unfortunately on the wane in Dream Girl. The major characters of

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Georgina and Redfield are adequate but not extraordinary. The heroine certainly fits the description given by her creator as "intellectually and socially sophisticated, but emotionally immature," while Redfield recalls the wit and urbanity but not the gusto of Lawrence Ormont in *Two on an Island*.

In regard to Rice's earlier comedies also, *Dream Girl* shares their fast-paced action and clever repartee. One is never at a loss for action in the quick changes from reality to fantasy, and the dialogue of Redfield especially is one of the most enjoyable features of the play. It is no wonder, then, that the play was a popular success, and to a considerable extent, a critical success as well.

*Dream Girl* is significant in regard to Rice's canon not so much because it is his last comedy but because it does signal a denouement in the playwright's craft. Although it would not be altogether fair to criticize the lack of intellectual content in this light comedy, one can justly lament the evident degeneration of realistic technique. With no social problem to confront, Rice seems to have withdrawn his finger from the pulse of his characters' backgrounds and environment. In the plays that follow the quality of the subject matter as well as realistic technique continues to decline.

Rice's next play is not usually included in his canon since it failed to receive a professional production. Written in 1950, *Love Among the Ruins* was first produced for only two

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performances by the Stagers at the University of Rochester in May of 1963. The title, obviously taken from the poem by Robert Browning, is appropriate to the subject matter of this romantic melodrama set in the Roman ruins at Baalbek in the Lebanese Republic. The plot involves the inner conflict of Suzanne Dewing who is forced to choose between two men she loves: Arthur Dewing, her present husband, a sixty-year-old but vigorous and generous archaeologist; and Neil Davis, her former husband, now returned after five years of an unsuccessful second marriage to ask her to remarry him. Somewhat slowly the conflict is resolved against a background of representational characters and actions that demonstrate that the ruins of the title signify not only those of Baalbek, but also the condition of modern civilization. Unfortunately, here lies the reason for the play's weakness: Rice's attempt to give a picture of modern civilization, while being the most interesting feature of the play, is too ambitious for the plot structure. The melodramatic framework is hardly adequate to the weight of the idea. Although he attempts to make action and idea converge in the climax of the play, the action seems contrived, artificial, and not worthy of the theme. A brief survey of the plot structure and thematic development readily reveals this weakness.

The first scene of Act I is taken up with exposition. Dewing, with his wife Suzanne, is on an archaeological expedition with a group of scholars in Baalbek. Although his
relationship with Suzanne is marred somewhat by their failure to have children, both appear to be reasonably happy in their marriage. While Suzanne is agitated over her husband's mention of their childlessness, Zakharatos, a Greek guide enters with a group of tourists who supply the representational figures of the play. The group is composed of Laura Hardwick, a spinsterish but affable schoolteacher; Bishop Paul Bicknell, an articulate and sensitive cleric with his wife and daughter Florence; and Clinton Grue, a boorish California oilman. Also in the group is Neil Davis, whose presence shocks Suzanne though she attempts to conceal it. Dewing accompanies the tourists, leaving Davis behind with Suzanne. Their first confrontation reveals that they were once married five years before and that Neil's hasty and second marriage has ended unhappily. The meeting is very brief as the tourists return, and Suzanne asks Davis not to reveal his identity to Dewing. After an amusing representational scene in which a Bedouin with his seventeen-year-old daughter tries to sell a dead eagle to the tourists, it is discovered that the tires of the tourists' automobile have been slashed. To the delight of the tourists but to the dismay of Suzanne, Dewing invites them to stay at their camp. When the group exits to get their baggage, Dewing apologizes to Suzanne for the inconvenience and tells her he has surmised that Davis is her ex-husband. Thus far in the play, the plot is well conceived, but as early as scene two of Act I the structure begins to weaken.
At the beginning of the scene the representational characters go off severally to explore the terrain, again leaving Suzanne and Davis alone. The confrontation does little but reveal her hostility to Davis whom she accuses of slashing the tires. Davis admits and apologizes for the act, but pleads with her to hear him out. The opportunity for the revelation of his purposes, however, is delayed again by the return of the tourists. This revelation does not occur then until the first scene of Act II, which is the second to last scene in the play. The delay is too obviously contrived and what intervenes are a series of representational actions which explain Rice's attitudes toward modern civilization but which have only a tenuous connection with the plot.

Following the confrontation of Suzanne and Davis, then, is a discussion scene in which the tourists question Dewing about his research. Grue, Rice's figure for the materialistic ugly American, admits that he sees no "practical" value in Dewing's work; progress in Grue's terms can be measured only by an increase in material prosperity and in the propagation of the American way of life throughout the world. To Dewing's comment that such was the dream of the decayed Roman civilization, Grue replies that the Romans' laudable ideals were destroyed by subversive foreigners like the "socialists" in the United States who threaten the success of free enterprise. When Grue adds that whoever gains control of the Middle East will dictate the future, Bicknell and Dewing lament this
ruthless struggle for power among world forces. Dewing, however, suggests that there are possibilities for improvement:

There's always hope, I suppose. It's always been touch and go between man's will to live and his death wish. Or to put it another way, between man's creativeness and man's destructiveness. ¹⁰

To Bicknell's assertion that man has progressed, Dewing replies that the most significant advances in art, government, law, and philosophy can be traced to ancient civilizations, while progress in modern times seems only a matter of more complexity, more gadgets, more speed. Davis then joins Dewing in voicing an optimistic opinion about the future that makes the play's theme explicit: "A shift from destructiveness to creativeness, a reliance upon imagination and courage, upon idealism and faith in mankind." ¹¹ While the group continues to decry force and aggression as means to progress, Grue stupidly accuses them of being cowardly and of impeding the progress of the American way of life: "It's pinks that talk like you, holding down key jobs, that are heading us for the skids. And it's about time the American people woke up and kicked them all in the teeth." ¹²

The dinner gong interrupts the discussion, and the scene ends with Davis telling Suzanne that he has come to ask her to remarry him. Shocked by the idea, she refuses to discuss it


¹¹Ibid., p. 40. ¹²Ibid., p. 41.
further. By now these delays of a serious and extended confrontation between these characters become too obviously artificial, too mechanically melodramatic.

The confrontation does finally take place, however, in the first scene of Act II. After a brief minor scene with Grue boorishly threatening to find and take advantage of the young Bedouin girl who appeared in the first scene of Act I, Suzanne and Davis are left alone. Suzanne is adamant at first in refusing to consider Davis's proposal, but is obviously moved by his explanation of his past mistakes. To her accusation that he has wasted his life, Davis candidly replies,

It's true and it's not true! It's a struggle I've had all my life, between discipline and lawlessness, between building up and tearing down. It's what we were talking about here before dinner: the creator and the destroyer that's in all of us.13

Thus, Rice attempts to insure coherence of plot and theme by this statement of motive by Davis. Though she responds to Davis's embrace, Suzanne still refuses his offer to remarry and insists that she must have time to think.

Following this conversation, three brief representational incidents with minor characters and a significant confrontation between Suzanne and Dewing occupy the remainder of the scene. These scenes give the minor characters an opportunity to reflect on individual failures by which they have participated, though perhaps in a small way, in the privations of

13Ibid., p. 49.
their civilization. First, to Mrs. Bicknell Laura Hardwich confides that she had spoiled her life by foolishly refusing love in her youth. Then in another private meeting, Paul Bicknell expresses to his wife the guilt feelings he suffers because of his limitations as a minister of God: "The ruined temples, the desecrated altars that scar the face of the earth are only outward evidences of the fallen temples within us, of the sacred fires that have died in our hearts." In the last of these subordinate scenes, Carl, Dewing's young assistant, listens as Florence Bicknell reviews the sordid ruins of her three unsuccessful marriages. This series of self-condemning confessions serves only to reflect the ideas of the previous discussion scene and have no relevance to the resolution of the plot. The final incident of the scene, however, returns to the plot to present a confrontation between Suzanne and Dewing who discuss Davis's proposal. In spite of Suzanne's assurances that she loves him and appreciates the peace and security he has given her, Dewing promises he will not stand in the way of her happiness if she should choose to return to Davis. Suzanne is more than ever torn by her conflict.

The last scene of the play quickly brings the climax and resolution of the plot with Rice's attempt to have the play's theme and action converge. As the group of tourists prepares to leave, Davis and Dewing discuss their relationship to Suzanne. Davis is impressed with Dewing's magnanimity as the latter

14 Ibid., p. 55.
promises not to impede Suzanne's decision. Again Dewing reminds his rival of the necessity of transcending their petty natures, for cultivating the kind of good will and understanding that are propaedeutic to the better world they discussed earlier. It is in the area of interpersonal relationships such as theirs that the improvement of man's condition and of his world must begin. Suzanne then joins the two men and announces her decision to remain with Dewing. There is no time for a response, however, before Grue, who had obviously visited the Bedouin girl, rushes in pursued by the girl's enraged father. When Dewing attempts to intervene, the Bedouin threatens him with a knife. A struggle ensues in which Davis is slightly wounded in his attempt to save Dewing by wresting the knife from the Bedouin. At the close of the play Dewing expresses his gratitude to Davis, and both men interpret the unselfish action as a victory of creativeness over blind destruction.

Fundamentally, Rice's comments here on the condition of the modern world and his sincere belief in the simultaneous perfectibility of the individual and his civilization are compatible with the optimism and ideals represented in his plays during the 1930's. Moreover, the theme of this play might be considered an underlying assumption of all of Rice's serious dramas. In *Street Scene* (1929), for example, Rose Maurrant's choice of responsibility over crippling dependence on others signals a victory over her slum environment and, therefore, the possibility of a more creative society; in *The
Left Bank (1931) Claire Shelby and Waldo Lynde insist on individual freedom which will not overlook their responsibilities for creating the culture of their native land; in Between Two Worlds (1935), Margaret Bowen realizes that her individual commitment to a social purpose is indispensable to a full realization of self; in Flight to the West (1940), too, where Nathan's rescue of Walther can be interpreted as a victory of creativeness over destructiveness, the unselfish dedication of the individual to the perfection of his society is also a major concern. This assumption, then, that the perfection of civilization must find its first roots in the creativeness of individuals, is what is made explicit in Love Among the Ruins.

The most obvious weakness of the play's structure is the tenuous connection between the action and theme of the play. Although it is conceivable that a love story could support the weight of such an idea, the triangle here is so sporadically developed that the convergence of action and idea is not convincing. Unfortunate too is the rather heavy-handed management of the play's melodramatic form. Confrontations between the major characters are artificially delayed, not so much for the sake of suspense but to allow the ideas of the representational discussion scenes to catch up with the action of the plot. The final incident of the play seems to wrench elements of the play together in a manner not characteristic of Rice's best work in the form of melodrama. One has only to compare this attempt with Rice's success in Flight to the West.
to note the radical differences in dramatic unity and coherence. Characterization in the play is also weak. The major figures of Suzanne and Davis are flat; for reasons mentioned earlier, their motivation is also unconvincing. Dewing is satisfactorily developed as Rice’s spokesman in the play, but he seems to exist solely for the ideal he represents. For the most part, minor characters are also unsatisfactory, and it is here that one of Rice’s best realistic techniques suffers. In earlier plays he could present these minor figures briefly but precisely with sure and selective strokes. Here he gives in to the temptation to develop them out of proportion to their importance to the play’s action. The belabored confessions of Laura Hardwick, Bicknell, and Florence Bicknell needlessly retard the action, and their revelations are barely tangential to the play’s theme. Even Grue, despicably coarse and stupid, is only a type-figure used to utter the banalities and clichés of the materialistic and shortsighted chauvinist. Zakharatos, the loquacious Greek guide, is the only figure who recalls Rice’s former brilliance with representational characterization. Because of its broad social theme, it is perhaps the most interesting play of this later period. But in realistic and melodramatic technique as well as in coherence of action and unity of idea, **Love Among the Ruins** represents a deterioration in Rice’s craftsmanship.

Rice’s next play, though it did receive professional production, also shows signs of his decline. Written and
produced for only eight performances in 1951, Grand Tour is a sentimental melodrama in two acts whose plot concerns the sacrifice of a young schoolteacher for a man with whom she becomes emotionally involved during a tour of Europe. Although the first act of the play is well constructed and includes an effectively impressionistic scene that demonstrates Rice's flexible approach to realism, the second act spoils the whole with matter Brooks Atkinson justly criticized as "tasteless as a pulp magazine thriller." In general, the first act promises more than the play is able to deliver.

The first scene of Act I capably presents realistic details of exposition. Nell Valentine, a Bridgeport schoolteacher who has just inherited her father's estate, arranges at a New York travel agency for a European tour. In sharply realistic dialogue the travel agent presents her with an eloquent review of places she must visit. Nell, though somewhat a spinster, is bright and charming and perhaps looking for more than a holiday. A minor detail such as her mention of a travel book by Henry James could suggest that Nell is going to experience more than a tour.

The following two scenes occur on the ship bound for France. In scene two, Nell meets Raymond Brinton. Bustling with enthusiasm over her approaching adventure, she tells him

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of her plans and of her recent inheritance, and asks his advice concerning the management of her money. Brinton is upset at her request and curtly tells her to be more careful in soliciting advice. The reason for his rude response is not made clear until Act II where he admits to embezzlement. Sensitive Nell is hurt at his rejection of her, and in the following scene gives her attention to Professor Coogan, a punning ornithologist who provides a comic interlude in the play. In their stroll about the deck, they interrupt Brinton's attempt to commit suicide which he nervously conceals. Then Brinton apologizes to Nell for his rudeness and explains that the cause of his obvious depression is his wife's plan to divorce him.

In the following scene, the last of Act I, it is obvious that Nell has given her sympathies completely to Brinton. Its impressionistic manner makes this the most interesting scene of the play. The effect is achieved more through the asides of Nell and Brinton as they tour Paris than by staging devices which Rice had employed for a similar end in *A New Life* (1943). Gradually the characters reveal their emotional involvement with one another as they both sensitively respond to the places they visit. Realistic and richly suggestive details in the dialogue animate the episode in which the most important sight is the Place de la Bastille. It is here that Nell recalls Sydney Carton's sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities* and thus foreshadows her own sacrifice in scene four of Act II. To this point in the play the audience might
still be prepared to witness the experience of a Strether or a Dodsworth; unfortunately, the expectation is not met as Act II follows with a dull collection of stereotyped and sentimental incidents.

In the first scene of Act II, during Nell and Brinton's visit to Chartres, Brinton recalls Henry Adams' statements on the cathedral and confesses his own loss of ideals. Taking advantage of her sympathy, he propositions Nell, but she declines, feeling that Brinton might only be using her to recall the happy memories of his last visit there with his wife. Discouraged by this incident, Nell goes off alone to Montreux in scene two where Brinton follows her to apologize. He then admits his embezzlement of sixty thousand dollars from his bank and his attempted suicide on the ship. Moved by his frank confession, Nell forgives him and they plan to marry when Brinton's divorce becomes final.

Scene three is set in Rome where Brinton's divorce decree arrives. Nell generously offers to give him money to free himself from the embezzlement charge, but Brinton flatly refuses. They are both surprised then at the arrival of Harvey Richman, the bank's attorney and an old family friend of Brinton. To Brinton alone Richman laments his friend's mistake in the divorce suit and in the crime but adds that charges might not be pressed if restitution is made. When Brinton leaves, Nell enters to Richman, whose conversation with Brinton she has overheard, and says that she will give him the money to
satisfy the bank. Richman is surprised by the offer, and cautiously adds that Brinton's wife is about to arrive. In the following scene, Nell and Adele Brinton meet, and Adele tearfully explains that she knew nothing of her husband's crime and that she has been partially responsible for his failure. Realizing that Brinton and his wife are still in love, Nell promises, much to Adele's surprise, to provide the money for the restitution. In her last, brief meeting with Brinton, Nell gives no hint of her plans and then leaves for home. In the final scene of the play, Nell returns to her classroom in Bridgeport where she shows slides of her trip to her students. Throughout her monologue she remains ironically silent about her inspiration and sacrifice in Europe.

It is readily obvious that the inspiration of Act I is almost completely lacking in Act II which is too encumbered by matters of seduction, divorce, and embezzlement to fulfill the promise of the play's beginning. Moreover, while the incidents are ordered logically and plausibly enough, the single line of action is given no help from representational scenes. The first scene of Act I does realistically initiate the action and the last scene of Act II brings it to an ironic close, but neither of these nor the representational scene between Nell and Professor Coogan is enough to save a dull play. The only remarkable feature of the play's construction is the impressionistic episode in scene four of Act I which again shows Rice's imaginative and flexible approach to plot structure and
dramatic realism.

Even in characterization, the work barely reflects Rice's former competence. While Brinton remains two-dimensional throughout the play, Nell is the only convincing and sympathetic character. Even she, however, is so consistently generous that her valiant sacrifice has little climactic effect. The representational figure of Coogan is a happy feature of the play, but his appearance is too brief to be of consequence. The dialogue of these characters is also inferior to Rice's former efforts. Only in scene four of Act I and in occasional remarks by Nell does the playwright achieve the dynamic and vital quality of real speech which had been his forte for so long. In great part, Rice speaks too much for his characters rather than through them. The result is a placid and confiding manner noted by Walter Kerr who added in his review of Grand Tour, "Somewhere he has assumed the role of benevolent grandfather, chatting with his audiences instead of trying to stimulate them, and this latter-day mood leaves his newest play seriously becalmed."\(^\text{16}\) Thus, while the play did enjoy repeated radio and television performances,\(^\text{17}\) it was a disappointment to audiences and to the critics.

Rice's decline as a playwright continued with The Winner, produced in 1954 for thirty performances. Although


\(^{17}\)Rice, Minority Report, p. 431.
some critics were conscious of Rice's skillful plotting of a moral dilemma, they also found the play's tone mystifying and its conclusion unsatisfactory. The melodramatic plot of character concerns the heroine's choice of personal dignity and moral righteousness over wealth and moral compromise.

In the first of four scenes, Eva Harold, a young and attractive divorcee returns from a date with Martin Carew, a shrewd and witty but disillusioned lawyer. In the course of their opening conversation, Eva explains her odd behavior in seeing other men while she is supposedly engaged to David Browning, another lawyer who is about to divorce his wife for Eva. Carew is impressed with Eva's faith in human nature and her instinctive morality which stand in bold contrast to his own disillusionment about himself and mankind in general. When Carew leaves, Browning enters to Eva and explains that he must accompany his wife on a trip to Richmond. Their conversation is interrupted by a telephone call from Arnold Mahler, an older man whom Eva sees often. Browning expresses his concern over Eva's friendship with Mahler, but she assures him that he is just a casual acquaintance and no rival for Browning. Shortly after Browning's exit, Mahler arrives, out of breath and obviously sick. Confiding to Eva that he has only a short time

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to live, he begs her to go away with him. Eva is stunned but refuses the offer just before Mahler collapses on her sofa. She summons a doctor, but before he can arrive, Mahler's wife rushes in with a photographer who takes a picture of Eva standing over Mahler's reclining figure on the sofa. The consequences of this sensational event make for the complication and climax which follow in the next two scenes.

In scene two, Eva is appalled at the tasteless story of the newspaper reporting the circumstances of Mahler's death. Another surprise follows immediately as Carew arrives and introduces himself as Irma Mahler's lawyer. He reports that Mahler has left all his money to Eva, but that his widow plans to contest the will on grounds that her husband was unduly influenced by Eva. Carew attempts to persuade Eva to accept Mrs. Mahler's offer of twenty-five thousand dollars to avoid a lawsuit. She refuses to reply so that Carew leaves a check for the amount and exits as Browning enters. When Eva explains the affair, Browning suggests she accept the check so that they could finally marry. Eva thinks, however, that if she were to accept the offer, she would have no opportunity to fight the smear on her reputation in the newspaper accounts. Accordingly then, she tears up Carew's check and asks Browning for his help in her defense.

The following scene in the chambers of Judge Samuel Addison is the best incident in the play. Rice's skill in courtroom drama is as adroit as it was in On Trial (1914) and
in _Judgment Day_ (1934). Before the hearing begins, Carew again offers Eva a generous settlement to avoid the litigation, but again she refuses. Then, as the hearing opens, Irma Mahler is the first to take the stand and testifies that Eva stole her husband. Browning is successful in damaging her testimony, however, by forcing her to admit her own infidelity to Mahler. Then Hilde Kranzbeck, Mahler's private secretary, testifies to her former employer's lovesickness over Eva and suggests that he became deranged over the affair. Again Browning succeeds in defeating her testimony by revealing the secretary's affair with Mahler and her present collusion with the dead man's wife. Eva is eloquent in her own defense and insists that she and Mahler were only friends, never lovers, and that her only interest is the restoration of her good name. Judge Addison, an intelligent and articulate Negro, calls for an adjournment before he will publish a decision on the case. Before the principals leave, however, he delivers what amounts to a homily on money as the root of all evil and the essential perfectibility of man. Eva sensitively responds that her motives in the suit are moral, not pecuniary. After Judge Addison exits, Carew once more offers Eva a settlement that she angrily refuses.

In the last scene of the play, Eva is apparently "the winner" as she and Browning celebrate the settlement in her favor. Eva's joy is soon dampened, however, when Browning explains that debts of the Mahler estate, inheritance taxes, and Irma Mahler's possible appeal to a higher court leave the
case really unfinished. Browning suggests they offer the widow a settlement, and Eva is amused at the obvious irony. Carew then arrives and discloses Mahler's tax manipulations: the cost of settling the estate may even exceed Mahler's assets. Eva's success now seems only a Pyrrhic victory. She reprimands Browning for not telling her earlier of Mahler's dishonesty, but he pleads that compromise will do them no harm. Ironically, he does not realize that his is precisely the kind of compromise Eva fought to avoid by going to court. Eva is very upset at the suggestion: first, she thinks any settlement would be immoral and criminal; second, she despises squabbling over money. When Browning leaves, Carew reminds Eva of what Judge Addison had called her in his decision: a woman of courage and integrity, of sound moral principles. Momentarily disillusioned, Eva speculates about the dishonesty of all money, and about a possible sacrifice of her scrupulous integrity for Browning's sake. Carew questions her rationalizations, however, and Eva acknowledges the truth of his contentions. As the play closes, Eva has apparently become sympathetic to Carew and has also emerged a more complete winner.

The structure of the play, then, is rather obvious and not remarkable: the simple and single line of action moves gracefully to its climax and conclusion in Eva Harold's victory over greed and materialism. As a plot dealing with a moral dilemma, however, the play has a considerable structural flaw: the dilemma does not become serious until the last scene of the
play. Here, and only momentarily in her dialogue with Carew, does Eva experience something of an inner struggle. Since for three scenes she has proven to be an upright, moral, and mature woman, her ultimate resolution is neither searching nor surprising.

Characterization in the play is also without distinction. Rice neatly succeeds in contrasting his noble heroine with the more or less immoral persons in the play: but for Eva, Judge Addison, and the late-converted Carew, all of the other characters are deprived of moral fiber. Of all the characters too, only Carew is moderately interesting: his conversion from selfishness and disillusionment through the salutary example of Eva is one of the play's saving graces. Rice fails to make his representational characters interesting also. Irma Mahler, Hilde Kranzbeck, David Browning, and even Judge Addison are dull type-figures who might inhabit a mediocre soap-opera.

It is interesting, and perhaps unfortunate, to note in regard to this play that in spite of its treating a significant and universal moral issue, Rice fails to become fired with his idea. In the turbulent thirties a problem that had such wide social implications would have made the playwright almost wildly indignant. Here, however, the mood is calm, almost as if Rice had become apathetic by leaving his pulpit. The result is the The Winner loses as a dull and lifeless drama.

Rice's last published play, Cue for Passion, was produced for thirty-nine performances in 1958. A psychological
melodrama in five scenes, the play is in part a conscious but not close imitation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from which the title of Rice's play is taken. Naturally, most critics noted the play's debt to Shakespeare; and some chose to criticize Rice's effort almost solely on this ground. Rice, however, denied any intention to "rewrite" *Hamlet*, but admitted that he was impressed by Ernest Jones's analysis of the play: "I merely took the central situation of *Hamlet* and tried to examine it in the light of modern psychology." Many critics, then, found Rice's effort a commendable one. Richard Watts commented that the play is no slavish or over-wrought imitation; "The basic situation is there, and so are various recognizable characters and incidents, but Mr. Rice has turned them to his own purposes, freely and creatively, to give us a play which stands on its own feet. . . . By using the 'Hamlet' parallel intelligently, Mr. Rice has written a striking play." Favorable in his review also, Brooks Atkinson concluded, "Call 'Cue for Passion' an exercise in testing a classical theme in terms of modern behavior. Since Mr. Rice is an old pro, whose first play was put on in 1914, and since he has a restless, inquiring mind, 'Cue for Passion' is one of his most interesting

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A good deal of the play's interest and success can be attributed to the careful plot construction. The five fast-paced scenes skillfully present the struggle and ultimate awareness of Tony Burgess, a sensitive young man, who returns to his California home to confront the problem of his father's death and, more importantly, his own mental illness.

The opening scene is given to exposition as Tony's mother, Grace, who has somewhat hastily remarried after her first husband's death, expresses her concern over her son's approaching return after his two-year absence. With Lucy Gessler, Tony's childhood sweetheart, she discusses her son's impending arrival and the strange gifts he has sent: to Grace a two-faced marionette; to Lucy a postcard picture of a medieval painting depicting the Crucifixion, over which Tony had scrawled, "Peace on earth, good will to men." Rice gives early intimations, then, of Tony's strange behavior and particularly his fixation with death which becomes more pronounced as the play proceeds. Carl Nicholson, an old family friend and Grace's new husband, then enters and is surprised by the news of Tony's arrival. Complaining that Tony has always been prankish and unpredictable, Nicholson tries to comfort his wife and kisses her as Tony enters with a black brassard on his sleeve. He resists Grace's attempt to kiss him, but complies

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when she asks him to remove the brassard. Tony wastes no time in asking, almost flippantly, to be informed of the circumstances of his father's death, but is deprived of the information by the maid who addresses Grace as Mrs. Nicholson. Ironically unaware of his mother's remarriage, Tony is stunned momentarily and then reacts hostilely:

Tony: You didn't let the widow's weeds grow under your feet did you?  
Grace: That's a very witty remark: sympathetic, graceful and penetrating.  
Tony: That's a very feeble comeback: phoney, theatrical and evasive.  

The maid's announcement of dinner prevents further argument, but not until Tony refuses to use his old room since it is next to the newly-weds'. Grace is disgusted by his coarseness which promises to become something more serious in the complicating scenes of the play that follow.

Scene two reveals Tony's further turmoil when the circumstances of his father's death are explained. One evening while his father was playing chess with Carl Nicholson, a minor earthquake shook the house and caused a bust to fall from the mantelpiece to fatally strike Tony's father on the head. Ironically, the bust, still there, is a likeness of Tony at twelve years of age and was sculpted by Nicholson. Since no one else was present at the time of the suspicious occurrence, Nicholson was the only witness. The "accident" amazes Tony,

and he goes off alone and perplexed. Grace and Nicholson express their concern for Tony's behavior as Lloyd Hilton, an old friend of Tony's and a psychologist, arrives in answer to their request for help. Tony returns to greet Lloyd cordially, and when they are left alone accuses his friend of coming only to psychoanalyze him. Lloyd futilely attempts to dispel Tony's suspicions about his father's possible murder. They are interrupted by the arrival of Lucy and her doting, garrulous father who dispassionately gives Tony a scrupulously detailed medical explanation of his father's death. In the final incident of the scene, Mattie, the family maid, confides to Lloyd that Tony's apparent melancholy is strange since he had always hated his father.

To this point in the play, Rice has confronted his protagonist with characters who stimulate his wit, sarcasm, and latent hostility as well as his suspicions about his father's death. The gradual exposition, too, of the macabre circumstances of the father's death and his relationship to his son allows for the successful building of suspense. The edge of tension becomes all the more finely honed in the succeeding scenes which depict Tony's swift degeneration as he attempts to confirm his suspicions.

In scene three, Tony, made all the more anxious by heavy drinking, is unnerved again by the news that his father's body was cremated. Angrily, he sweeps the chessmen off the board before the fireplace and in anguish cries,
I lost my queen, that's what's the matter!
I had the game won, made a careless move and
lost my queen.²⁴

There can be little doubt by now that Tony's problem is Oedipal. Disturbed by her son's behavior, Grace leaves the room with Nicholson, leaving Lloyd to talk with Tony. Lloyd's attempts to quiet him are unsuccessful, however, as Tony now even suspects that Nicholson is his real father. Tony is left alone then until the entrance of the maid. Wanting to review the occasion of his father's death, Tony asks Mattie to push the bust off the mantel. When she refuses his morbid request, Tony pushes it off himself and disgusts the maid with his distracted remarks about his father's funeral. She rebukes his ranting with an accusation of hypocrisy since he had run out on his father. Alone again, and even more stupified by liquor, Tony suffers a momentary but hallucinatory vision of his father before he falls asleep over the chess table.

The fourth scene of the play brings the plot to its climax. In his mysterious absence, all of the characters are now more than ever concerned with Tony's misbehavior: Lloyd and Mattie speculate about his committing suicide; Nicholson is afraid that Tony suspects him of murdering his father; Gessler suggests that Tony be institutionalized for psychiatric treatment. Tony finally arrives, disheveled but sober. After a brief talk with Lucy in which he spurns her affection, Tony confronts his mother with accusations of adultery. Grace

²⁴Ibid., p. 65.
denies his accusation and accuses him of jealousy. Recalling their close relationship during Tony's childhood, she tries to explain that his affection for her might be distorted. Suddenly, Tony seizes his mother and kisses her passionately. As Grace stands back in horror, Tony glimpses a silhouette in the terrace door. Believing it is Nicholson, Tony quickly draws a gun from his pocket and shoots the figure. But it is not Nicholson but Gessler who falls to the ground. Again Rice employs his favored technique of the sensational close.

The final scene presents the resolution of Tony's problem and a rather neat but not totally satisfying conclusion to the play. In the morning following Gessler's shooting, Nicholson and Grace discuss what should be done about Tony. Nicholson insists that Tony should be either institutionalized or arrested for assault; he has even acquired a gun for his self-protection. Grace is not so enthusiastic towards his proposals, however, and even Lucy considers such drastic action unnecessary since her father is only wounded and will not press charges against Tony. Nicholson, then, stands suspiciously alone with his vindictiveness. At this point Tony returns from an all-night walk and apologizes for his misbehavior to Grace and Lucy but not to Nicholson. Then, left alone with Lloyd, Tony answers his friend's penetrating questions to arrive at a realization and acceptance of his Oedipus complex. In a final confrontation with his mother, Tony apologizes again for the sorrow he has caused her. Grace is sympathetic to Tony's
confession and reluctantly admits that his suspicions about his father's murder are probably correct. Since retribution is impossible, however, she suggests that Tony go away. As Tony leaves his mother, he brushes against Nicholson who is entering to see her. Grace rejects Nicholson's affection, and is left pensively alone as the play ends.

The structure of *Cue for Passion* demonstrates Rice's usual carefulness. The linear development of the plot is skillfully handled for maximum concentration on the protagonist's mental aberration. Economically and coherently Rice succeeds in the gradual revelation of Tony's problem: in scene one his generally nervous behavior and his hostility towards his mother when he learns of her remarriage testify to his conflict; in scene two Mattie (Rice's own addition to the *Hamlet* scheme) informs Lloyd of Tony's habitual hatred for his father; in scene three Tony's drunken gesture in sweeping the chessmen off the board and his wailing over the loss of his queen give further evidence to his Oedipal condition; finally, Tony's passionate assault on his mother in scene four climaxes his emotional disorder. Simultaneous with this revelation is the gradual and suspenseful affirmation of Nicholson's guilt in the murder of Tony's father. Clearly, then, the plot structure is efficient and neat. Technical efficiency is not necessarily imaginative, however, and it is in this regard that the play's weakness becomes evident, particularly in scene five. In this last scene of the play, Tony's acceptance of his
problem is too easy to be credible. Dramatic plausibility is
smothered by psychological jargon which sounds as if it were
dictated by Ernest Jones himself. With this rather facile con-
clusion the play becomes too much a mere case study.

Naturally the implausibility of the concluding scene is
transmitted to the characterization also. Until scene five,
Tony's actions are well-motivated, interesting and convincing,
but his self-recognition comes too abruptly. After four scenes
in which he has struggled passionately with his external and
internal antagonists, his passive compliance with Lloyd's cold
scientific facts is hardly plausible. Of the other characters
in the play, only Grace is remarkable. Her gradual acceptance
of her son's illness, her sympathetic response to his con-
fession, and her difficult realization of her husband's guilt
are all convincingly portrayed. If anything even remotely
tragic is conveyed by the action, it is sensed through her
lonely but illumined figure at the end of the play. The other
characters are mere pawns in the psychological game. Even
Nicholson is rather flat, and his guilt-feelings are too
obvious. The other representational characters lack the vivid-
ness of Rice's earlier minor figures; Lloyd, Gessler, and Lucy
are mere shadows not equal to Rice's former realistic portraits.

The dialogue of the play is also far below Rice's
former standards for dramatic and vigorous language. A sample
of Tony's dialogue in scene four can serve as an adequate illus-
tration of the play's stilted diction. Caustically replying to
Lucy's advice, Tony exclaims:

Tony, go away. Do not continue to pollute our pastoral ambiance with your exotic ribaldry, your irreverent flippancies, your categorical whys and wherefores, your quips and cranks and wanton wiles. Desist from casting your bizarre shadow over our smiling acres, our arithmetical romances, our cherished virginities. You bother us; so take it on the lam, beat it, scram, vamoose, avaunt, begone.25

Regardless of Tony's intention to parody Lucy's advice, the dialogue here and throughout the play is less dramatic than literary. As John Chapman in his review claimed, "Rice has worked all this up into a verbosely literate script in which there is more grammar than passion."26

Cue for Passion, then, can be called a tour de force for Rice. His technical facility is there, but his total involvement is not. Certainly the play is theatrically effective, and the parallels with Hamlet excite some interest. But his former excellence with realism in characterization and dialogue is sadly lacking. At best he approaches the play as a dramatic exercise.

It is not difficult now to note that this last period of Rice's career is the weakest; the matter as well as the form of his plays is decidedly inferior to his earlier work. First, his subject matter is more various than in any other period. No longer so committed to didactic social criticism,

25 Ibid., p. 90.

he turns to subjects that lack seriousness of purpose. But for the incidental social criticism of *Love Among the Ruins* (1950), the subjects of these plays from *Dream Girl* (1945) to *Cue for Passion* (1958) are romantic and strictly popular. Drama seems to have become for Rice less of a passion and more of a game; ironically, he seems at least in part to fall prey to the theatre's commercialization that he had decried so vehemently throughout his career.

Second, the forms of Rice's dramas in this period lack the impressive variety and ingenuity of his earlier works. The fantasy scenes of *Dream Girl*, and the impressionistic fourth scene of Act I in *Grand Tour* seem to be the last brief sparks of his technical virtuosity. The predominant mode is realism, but an ordinary, uninspired realism. In this regard, both characterization and dialogue are indicative of the decline.

Representational figures particularly, who were once the hallmark of Rice's realistic method, are no longer vital and dynamic. Only the Greek guide Zakharatos in *Love Among the Ruins* and Professor Coogan of *Grand Tour* briefly reflect Rice's former skill in the characterization of minor figures who in a few words and actions effect the most vivid illusion for an audience. The waning of realistic method in dialogue is also unfortunate. Although Rice's language skills appear sporadically in these late plays, only in *Dream Girl's* clever repartee is his former dexterity with stage language in evidence. The dialogue of most of these late plays is flat or
merely rhetorical rather than dramatic, as in the prosaic homily of Judge Addison in *The Winner*. In *Cue for Passion* the language even becomes stilted, the result perhaps of a misdirected effort to imitate the stately diction of its model.

The period from 1945 to 1958, then, marks a close to the career of a brilliant playwright. 27 In view of Rice's inspired achievements in the twenties with expressionism and his appreciable success in the thirties with realism, his accomplishments in the late forties and the fifties are hardly as satisfying. And inasmuch as these are his last plays, Rice makes his gradual exit from the theatre with a rather awkward bow.

27 At this writing, Rice has completed two plays which have not been produced: *Slaves of the Lamp*, a comedy-fantasy and *Court of Last Resort*, a modern morality play. Letter from Elmer Rice to Edmund A. Napieralski, April 19, 1966 and Robert Goode Hogan, *The Independence of Elmer Rice* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: The Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), p. 151.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

Although they represent only a part of a creative endeavor that includes one-act plays and novels as well as social and dramatic criticism, the twenty-six plays discussed in this study represent the epitome of Elmer Rice's work. A fair assessment of his contribution to modern American drama and theatre, therefore, should consider both the form and the matter of these plays.

The great variety of forms in Rice's dramas makes any simple categorization impossible, except perhaps to distinguish between the serious plays or melodramas on the one hand and comedies on the other. Further distinctions, however, are necessary to appreciate Rice's imaginative diversity. Of the melodramas only five may be regarded as simply romantic: On Trial (1914), Cock Robin (1927), Grand Tour (1951), The Winner (1954), and Cue for Passion (1958). The others must in varying degrees be considered as melodramas of social criticism. In this category, however, one further division may be made to distinguish general social criticism from propaganda plays. In the first category seven plays may be included: The Iron Cross (1915), The Adding Machine (1923), The Subway (1924), Street Scene (1929), The Left Bank (1931), Counsellor-at-Law (1931),
and Love Among the Ruins (1950). The remaining seven serious works may be considered propaganda plays: The House in Blind Alley (1916), We, the People (1933), Judgment Day (1934), Between Two Worlds (1935), American Landscape (1938), Flight to the West (1940), and A New Life (1943). Although they demonstrate degrees of farce and sentimental comedy, Rice's remaining plays can be distinguished as comedies generally: Wake Up Jonathan (1921), Close Harmony (1924), See Naples and Die (1929), Black Sheep (1932), Not for Children (1935), Two on an Island (1940), and Dream Girl (1945).

Impressive as this variety of forms is, it is not a sufficient measure of Rice's technical virtuosity which is characterized even more by his use of dramatic modes. First, the expressionism of The Adding Machine (1923), and to a lesser extent that of The Subway (1924), distinguish Rice as an expert in the technique of projecting a character's thought to direct the setting and action of the plays. And The Adding Machine remains not only one of Rice's most imaginative works but also one of the most brilliant plays of our century. Second, and even more important in the evaluation of Rice's work, is the mode of realism. Undoubtedly, it is realism that predominates in his plays, and it is as a realist that he will be remembered in the annals of American drama.

Several features serve to define Rice's peculiar brand of realism. First and foremost is the playwright's conception of representational characters. Generally, these minor figures
perform at least two functions: they reflect the proximate and remote backgrounds of the play, and in the best instances they contribute immediately to the plot and theme of the particular work. For the first of these functions the representational characters of *See Naples and Die* (1929), *The Left Bank* (1931), *We, the People* (1933), *Judgment Day* (1934), and *Two on an Island* (1940) serve as adequate examples. In all of these plays, the representational figures elicit a panoramic effect; in *We, the People* especially the panorama succeeds in providing a vast and searching picture of the Depression.

The Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Street Scene* (1929) also demonstrates this panoramic effect, but the representational characters in this play have a more immediate relevance to plot and theme, thus fulfilling the second function of this realistic technique. The Kaplans, the Joneses, the Fiorentinos vividly represent the stifling environment from which Rose Maurrant frees herself to assert her freedom and individuality. Similar observations may be made about the representational figures of *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931) and *Between Two Worlds* (1935). In the earlier play, minor figures such as the Becker boy, McPadden, and Tedesco not only convey the realistic atmosphere of the law office but also serve to delineate George Simon's character: each helps to define Simon's backgrounds, his ambitions, his weaknesses, and his strengths. In the propagandistic *Between Two Worlds* also, the representational figures of Vivienne Sinclair and the Dodds, for example, portray the ignorance and
the apathy of American society in reference to the active social awareness and commitment of the play's principle figures, Margaret and Kovolev.

A second important feature of Rice's realism is his successful stage language. Rice seemed to develop this forte with *The Adding Machine* in 1923, especially in Zero's monologues. *Street Scene* (1929) gave him the opportunity to imitate dialects; in this respect, Kaplan's ludicrous diatribes against the capitalistic system are worthy of note. A significant number of Rice's other plays might be cited for exemplifying his successful imitation of speech that is generally vivid, sharp, idiomatic, and authentically American. These qualities are perhaps best distinguished in the quick exchanges between major characters in several plays such as that between Nan and Charles in *See Naples and Die* (1929), Claire and Waldo in *The Left Bank* (1931), Margaret and Kovolev in *Between Two Worlds* (1935), or between Georgina and Redfield in *Dream Girl* (1945).

Less remarkable but nonetheless theatrically effective features of Rice's realism are his attention to the sights and sounds of his setting and his careful management of even the most minute stage action. The depressing brownstone tenement and the noise of construction workers, automobile horns and police sirens in *Street Scene* (1929); the shabby interior of the apartment in *The Left Bank* (1931); and the flurry of activity in the hospital setting of *A New Life* (1943) testify to Rice's
shrewd eye and ear. The realistic effect is frequently heightening even more with exceptionally subtle strokes in his use of such apparently insignificant figures as the male chambermaid in *The Left Bank* or the pathetic alcoholic on deck for most of the action in *Between Two Worlds* (1935).

One final and perhaps the most interesting feature of Rice's technique is the flexibility of his realism. As early as *On Trial* (1914), Rice used the flashback device effectively. In *The House in Blind Alley* (1916) as well as in *American Landscape* (1938) and *Dream Girl* (1945), he attempted with reasonable success to temper realism with fantasy. And in *A New Life* (1943) and *Grand Tour* (1951) single impressionistic scenes modified realism for purposes of theatricality. This flexibility is sure evidence of Rice's considerable originality and his imaginative response to realism; in great part he proved with these experiments that realism need not impose restrictive chains on the playwright.

No less important than the form and modes of his plays for an evaluation of Rice's craft are the subject matter and themes of his dramas. Here again variety is met in the range of subjects from the relatively light to the intensely serious: on the one hand, the sensational murder mystery of *On Trial* (1914), the story of a morally ambiguous ambition in *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931), the escapist fantasies of *Dream Girl* (1945), and the morally significant struggle with materialistic values in *The Winner* (1954); on the other hand, the socially
and politically important themes of *The Adding Machine* (1923), *Street Scene* (1929), *We, the People* (1933), and *Flight to the West* (1940). Very clearly, these social and political themes are the most important in his work, and it is in this regard that the influence of Ibsen and Shaw becomes relevant in Rice's use of the drama as a pulpit.

In general, the social criticism of Rice's plays is aimed both at topical problems and at issues which affect man on a broader scale. *The House in Blind Alley* (1916) attacks the immediate problem of child-labor; *We, the People* (1933) the problems of a Depression; *Judgment Day* (1934) the imminent threat of Fascism. In contrast, *The Adding Machine* (1923), *The Subway* (1924), and *Street Scene* (1929) treat the dehumanization of man resulting from the ruthless development of industrialism, a problem more essential or fundamental to the human condition of modern man. Except for *The House in Blind Alley* (1916), therefore, a progression may be noted in the course of his career as Rice turns from general to particular problems and issues.

Underlying both the topical and universal issues, however, is, as Rice himself has often pointed out, the theme of freedom and individuality. Certainly the theme is present in the agonies of Zero in *The Adding Machine* (1923) and of Sophie in *The Subway* (1924) where both characters are destroyed by a mechanistic monster they can neither control nor even comprehend. Rice's definition of his theme, however, becomes
more precise in later plays. In Street Scene (1929) Rose Maurrant asserts her independence to overcome the debilitating effects of her slum environment and the all too common tendency to lean on others as a compensation for one's privations as an individual personality. In The Left Bank (1931) the theme is defined further in terms of the individual's commitment to his society as well as to himself; man's responsibility for his own development parallels his responsibility to contribute to the progress of his culture. We, the People (1933) treats the individual's confrontation with forces of a capitalistic system that turn the tools of free enterprise into weapons for exploiting the working classes. Forces from without may also threaten individual as well as national freedom; the menace of Fascism presented in Judgment Day (1934) is a case in point. Between Two Worlds (1935) conveys the important theme also, and emphasizes that fear within man himself can hamper individual fulfillment, and again that individual integrity cannot be had without a firm dedication to the improvement of the whole society.

In American Landscape (1938) freedom is viewed once more as a function of the individual and his society as he is confronted both by external threats, here Nazism, and by his own selfish pursuit of comfort and security. In Flight to the West (1940) militant action overcomes unreasonable passivity to assert personal and national liberty. A New Life (1943) urges that, once the war is over, the individual must not fall prey
to more threats to his own and society's development from new prosperity and complacency. Finally, in *Love Among the Ruins* (1950), Rice calls on man not to be deluded by apparent and superficial prosperity where progress is measured in terms of purely materialistic values, but to crush his destructiveness and to assert his natural powers of creativeness for his own enrichment and for the betterment of his world.

The reoccurrence of the theme of freedom and individuality in Rice's work is strong testimony for his passionate conviction of its importance. To be sure, the intensity of this conviction seemed at times to label Rice's brand of socialism as radical or at least extreme. Judging, however, from the outcome of the many crises which moved him to fierce indignation and protest, it becomes clear now that he has been liberal rather than radical in his political and social views. Rice's socialism is, on the whole, of a Utopian variety; he has labored diligently for the development of a society where free and noble men are able to fully develop their own potential and, concomitantly, that of their culture.

To be completely just in an assessment of Rice's craft, it is necessary to point out several faults that accompany these many virtues. On the whole, Rice's plots are well conceived, unified and coherent; exposition, complication, climax, and resolution are expertly handled for maximum dramatic effect. In this same regard, action is considered by Rice the most important element of drama, and his stage teems with activity.
In turn, the action is usually channeled into a single rather than complex plot, and lines of action are single rather than multiple. Thus, Rice seldom uses a sub-plot or minor plots: the romantic triangle of Randall, Brent, and Helen in *Wake Up Jonathan* (1921), the sensational plot of Anna Maurrant's affair with Sankey in *Street Scene* (1929), and the rapprochement of Elena and Lloyd in *Between Two Worlds* (1935) are the only important instances of Rice's use of a second line of action to complement the main plot. For the most part, then, action is concentrated on a single situation that is gradually complicated and resolved to elucidate the play's theme.

It is here, then, that Rice's technique falters. His effort is expended on action and idea at the expense of characterization. It is ironic that his expertness at conceiving brilliant representational characters should be lacking in his major characterizations. Zero of *The Adding Machine* (1923) and George Simon of *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931) remain Rice's only major complex figures. The remainder seem to exist for the sake of the ideas they represent. Unfortunately, his failure in this regard may be attributed to his sincere dedication as a social critic. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Rice is fond of casting some of his characters as raisonneurs: Waldo Lynde in *The Left Bank* (1931), Edward Maynard in *Between Two Worlds* (1935), Ingraham in *Flight to the West* (1940), and Dewing in *Love Among the Ruins* (1950) exist, for the most part, to voice the playwright's frank opinions. In other plays the
same role as raisonneur is shared by a number of characters: thus, in We, the People (1933), Judgment Day (1934), American Landscape (1938), and A New Life (1943), several figures serve to represent facets of Rice's main idea. Too often, therefore, action and idea do not emerge from the characters themselves as individual personalities: action and character are artificially and not essentially united.

Rice's realistic dialogue also suffers at times from his role as polemicist. In plays such as We, the People (1933), Judgment Day (1934), and American Landscape (1938), dialogue sinks to the level of prosaic homily. In the last play, for example, the several patriotic speeches that conclude the play are hardly distinguishable as belonging to one character or another. Too often in his social dramas, dialogue is rhetorically rather than dramatically oriented.

A final shortcoming must be considered in this evaluation, namely the quality of Rice's ideas. Certainly his themes are most often timely, interesting, and challenging. The main themes of individual and national freedom, moreover, place Rice in the mainstream of American literary and social thought. With the exception of The Adding Machine (1923) and Street Scene (1929), however, Rice's ideas are often too topical and too commonplace. The playwright's inquiry, especially in his plays of social criticism, is aimed at immediate causes and effects of a particular situation. Thus, in We, the People (1933) Rice alludes to man's destructive pride and greed; in Judgment Day
(1934) and in Flight to the West (1940) he deals with one aspect of totalitarian forces that threaten to possess man's soul; but he seldom searches deeply enough into these and other essential problems of the human condition that go beyond the scope of particular time and place. Rice's insights, therefore, are more analytic than synthetic; he is less a philosopher than a moralist; less an inquirer than a reporter.

In spite of these flaws and because of his many virtues as a practicing playwright for over fifty years, Elmer Rice holds a significant place in the history of American drama. And although it cannot be determined with certitude how much he directly influenced other playwrights, neither can it be denied that he reflected in every decade the major trends in both the form and content of American drama. During the twenties his work with expressionism in The Adding Machine (1923) and The Subway (1924) contributed brilliantly to the collection of expressionistic plays by Eugene O'Neill, John Howard Lawson, and Sophie Treadwell. In the content of his plays, too, he reflected the intellectuals' concern over the destructive effects of a mechanized society.

Similar observations may be made about Rice's work in the thirties and forties. In both decades Rice's predominant mode was realism, and as a realist he holds rank with Robert Sherwood, Maxwell Anderson, Lillian Hellman, Eugene O'Neill, George Kelly, Sidney Howard, Clifford Odets, and S. N. Behrman. In the content of his plays during the thirties he shared his
colleagues' disillusionment and anxiety with the developments of the Depression and the threat of Fascism from abroad. During the forties he became militant in his condemnation of Nazism and courageously outspoken in his desire to see all citizens actively in support of the American ideal of freedom. In this regard *Flight to the West* (1940) joins the distinguished company of Robert Sherwood's *There Shall Be No Night* (1940), Lillian Hellman's *Watch on the Rhine* (1941), and Maxwell Anderson's *Candle in the Wind* (1941) and *The Eve of St. Mark* (1942).

In conclusion, it is remarkable that in every decade of his career Rice reflects in both the form and matter of his plays the major trends in American drama and, simultaneously, contemporary concerns over national and international problems. If only a few plays are cited from each of his decades, the validity of this contention can be confirmed. The *Adding Machine* (1923) and *Street Scene* (1929), in expressionistic and realistic modes, demonstrate respectively the problems of industrialism and the effects of industrialized slum society. In the following decade *Counsellor-at-Law* (1931) reveals the complexities of the American ideals of ambition and success; *We, the People* (1933) uncovers the causes and effects of a diseased capitalistic society; *Judgment Day* (1934) indicts modern totalitarianism; *Between Two Worlds* (1935) condemns Americans' complacency in the face of a challenging ideology and an urgent need for active social commitment. In the forties
the same timeliness can be discerned in the playwright's call to active and individual responsibility during and after World War II in Flight to the West (1940) and A New Life (1943). Finally, in the fifties Rice again questions man's post-war comfort in Love Among the Ruins (1950) and criticizes modern materialistic values in Grand Tour (1951) and The Winner (1954).

In short, he is a playwright who has attempted to comprehend the urgent problems of his age.

The record of Elmer Rice, then, is indeed impressive. A prolific and imaginative playwright, an outspoken critic of his society, an artist dedicated to the development of an American drama and theatre worthy of distinction, Rice is one of the most important artists of the century. He does not pretend, of course, to merit the stature of Eugene O'Neill, but nevertheless his achievement cannot be overlooked in a complete appreciation of American drama. He is a distinctly minor but distinguished playwright and one to whom we look, as we do to the minor artists of any age, for an understanding of the nature of the times. In his plays, Elmer Rice has contributed significantly to the comprehension of our age, its form and pressure.
APPENDIX

The following questions were asked of Mr. Rice in a letter dated April 16, 1966. His reply of April 19, 1966 follows.

1. Did you attempt to get a professional production for Love Among the Ruins? Was this play written about the time you first copyrighted it in 1951?

2. Is Cue for Passion your most recent play, or have you completed any others since 1959? I am thinking in particular of the intention you expressed in Minority Report to produce another courtroom melodrama to commemorate the 50th anniversary of On Trial.

3. In your association with the Playwrights Company, did the collaboration among its members extend beyond matters of actual production; that is, was there any cooperation in the actual composition of plays?

4. Are there any playwrights whom you consider to have been influenced by your advice, either directly or indirectly through your plays?

5. Are you now involved in any theatrical activities? Did you have anything to do with the revision of Dream Girl for Skyscraper?
April 19, 1966.

Dear Mr. Napieralski:

Here are some answers to your questions:
1. Love Among the Ruins was written in 1950. It was on the production schedule of the Playwrights Company, but the company could not raise the requisite backing (about $100,000).
2. I have written two plays since Cue for Passion, but have not yet found producers for them. One has a legal setting, but could not be called a courtroom melodrama.
3. No, except for Kurt Weill's collaboration with Maxwell Anderson on Lost in the Stars, and with me on the musical version of Street Scene.
4. Well, influence! It's pretty hard to tell about that, especially when you are personally involved. I could name a few plays that I believe were suggested by plays of mine, but since I don't want to embarrass the authors, I'll refrain.
5. I'm not theatrically active at the moment. I did work on the Dream Girl musical for a while, but when the switch to Skyscraper was made, I bowed out, and have had nothing whatever to with the current production.

Have you seen a book called The Independence of Elmer Rice, by Professor Robert Hogan (University of California, Davis) recently published by the University of Southern Illinois Press? Professor Hogan has also just published The Iron Cross, an anti-war play, written by me in 1915. Also you might want to take a look at Freud on Broadway, by W. David Sievers, published by Heritage House, in 1955.

When you've completed your dissertation, I'd be interested in seeing it.

Very truly yours,

Elmer Rice
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APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Edmund Anthony Napieralski has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Feb. 7, 1967

Date

Paul A. Himmert
Signature of Adviser