Both Your Houses Study Guide

Both Your Houses by Maxwell Anderson

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Introduction

Maxwell Anderson's *Both Your Houses* is a political satire that is as relevant today as it was when it was first performed in 1933. The title comes from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet,* in which Mercutio calls in his dying speech for "a plague on both your houses," referring to two warring families, the Montagues and the Capulets. In Anderson's play, the title refers to the two houses of Congress, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The play takes place during the Great Depression and concerns an idealistic young congressman who takes the surprising position of opposing a bill that provides money for a huge construction project in his district. Alan McClean has found out since his election that the price being charged to the taxpayers for construction of the dam in his state is much more than it needs to be; in addition, there are hundreds of other, unrelated expenditures that have been added to the dam project to buy the support of congressmen from other states. Though his fight will probably cost him future support from his peers, from his constituents, and from the woman in whom he is interested (the daughter of the Appropriations Committee chairman), McClean struggles to gather opposition to a bill he knows is wrong. Throughout the play, Anderson keeps audiences balanced between the young man's idealism and the accepted way of doing business. He questions the assumption that bribes and compromise are the only way to get anything achieved in the political arena.

Author Biography

From high school on, it was clear that Maxwell Anderson was destined to work with words. What was not yet clear was that he would end up being one of the most prolific and respected playwrights of his generation. He was born in Atlantic, Pennsylvania, on December 15, 1888. Because his father was a Baptist preacher with no established congregation, the Anderson family moved frequently when Maxwell was young, and his education was often interrupted; still, he maintained a passion for reading and writing. He attended the University of North Dakota, graduating in 1911.

Anderson taught high school English in San Francisco for two years after graduating from college. During that time, a prestigious national magazine, the *New Republic,* published several of his poems, and Anderson earned a graduate degree from Stanford University, which helped him become the head of the English department at Whittier College in 1917. He only held that position for a little more than a year, however. His views against war made him unpopular at a time when the United States was fighting in World War I, and they cost him his job. The *New Republic* gave him a job on its editorial staff, and for years he supported himself writing for it and for several newspapers. To make money, Anderson taught himself how to write dramas. His first play, the war drama *What Price Glory*? (1924), was a success. Co-written with World War I veteran Laurence Stallings, it ran for 299 performances and gave Anderson the financial security to quit journalism and devote his attention entirely to playwrighting. He went on to have thirty of his works produced, winning the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Both Your Houses* in 1933, and the New York Critics' Circle Award for *Winterset* in 1935 and for *High Tor* in 1937. He is well remembered for his work in .lm, having written screenplays for such classics as *Key Largo* (1948), and the 1932 .lm adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's *Rain*, as well as lyrics for the popular Broadway song "September Song" and the musical *Lost in the Stars*.

As a playwright, Anderson is best remembered for the range of his style and the compassion of his worldview. He was able to satirize the complexity of American politics in *Both Your Houses* and to explore historical drama in plays about Queen Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn, and Mary, Queen of Scots. He adapted works by Lytton Strachey and Alan Paton for the stage. He was one of the few writers who could draw significant audiences to see plays written in verse as well as in the common language. Anderson's personal life was happy but uneven. He married his first wife, Margaret Haskett, in 1911. She died of a stroke in 1931. In 1933, he married his second wife, Gertrude Maynard; she committed suicide after twenty years of marriage, in 1953. He married Gilda Oakleaf in 1954, and she was with him until his 1959 death from a stroke in Stamford, Connecticut.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Both Your Houses takes place in the House Office Building in Washington, D.C. The first scene is set in the office of the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. Marjorie Gray, the daughter of the chairman and also his secretary, is talking on the phone to Alan McClean, a young congressman from Nevada. She is joined by an older secretary known as Bus. Bus announces that she has been fired by her boss, Eddie Wister, who has hired a pretty, inexperienced secretary provided for him by a steel company.

Throughout the scene, various persons pass through the office discussing the upcoming vote on H. R. 2007, an appropriations bill that designates millions of dollars for a new dam in Nevada. Many congressmen have been trying to get their special interests attached to the project, either to support their own investments or to appease their voters. Marjorie's father, Simeon Gray, is struggling to keep the size of the bill reasonable without losing the votes that he will need to pass it.

Alan McClean arrives too late for an appointment with Gray. He explains that he wanted to tell Gray that he opposes the bill, even though his district would benefit from it; the contractors' estimates for building the dam are much too high, and all of the other expenditures that have been added to it make it a huge, unnecessary cost to the taxpayers. In the second scene, in the room where the committee is meeting, Simeon Gray is rejecting one amendment to H. R. 2007 after another. His colleagues are disappointed when their pet projects are cut from the package, but they are willing to go along with their leader. One measure is explained to be necessary to keep the support of the Non-Partisan League and the Farmer-Labor contingent, but Gray strikes it from the bill as being too costly. Alan enters and explains his opposition to the bill, adding that he has found out through private investigators that some of the politicians will benefit personally from these appropriations, a statement that causes general amusement. After the meeting breaks up, Alan tells Gray that he found out from some papers mistakenly given to him by his investigators that a penitentiary to be paid for by the bill is in Gray's district. Even though Gray says he was not aware of this, he admits that his support of the bill would look like graft.

Alan explains his frustration with the committee to Bus. She tells him that his own secretary has been spying on him for other politicians, so he fires his secretary and hires her.

Act 2

Scene 1 of the second act takes place three days later. Sol Fitzmaurice enters and tells Marjorie that, with Alan's leadership, the independent factions that had their projects

removed from H. R. 2007 are close to having enough votes to stop the bill. Congressmen Eddie Wister, Levering, and Wingblatt enter, discussing their efforts to gather support for the bill and Alan's successes with the Non-Partisan League. They ask Gray to add more money to the bill for special projects that will make the dissenters happy, but he tells them that that will only make the president more likely to veto the whole bill. When they're alone together, Eddie asks Gray for fifteen million dollars to be added for decommissioning two battleships, a move that will benefit his supporters in the steel industry. He hints that he knows about Gray's interest in a bank that will be saved from failure by the penitentiary the bill provides for his district, revealing that the information Alan got by mistake was requested by a steel company chairman. Gray is blackmailed into supporting the extra appropriation.

Alan and Bus discuss the concessions that he has had to make in order to gain opposition to H. R. 2007. He tells her he had to "pledge myself to an increased tariff on lumber and an increased tariff on wheat, a new system of landbanks, an embargo on circus animals - including Siamese cats!" He decides that it would be more direct to approach Sol, who earlier made a speech about having been an idealist in his youth, and try to get his support. Sol acts sympathetic but resists Alan. Their conversation gives Alan an idea, though; he decides to load the bill with so many special requests that the other congressmen will be embarrassed to ask for so much tax money.

The second scene of act 2 takes place in the committee room. Some representatives are complaining that special projects they favored were cut from the bill, while other projects, such as Eddie's expensive battleship appropriation, were spared. When Alan enters the room, he has a list of all of the appropriations that have been proposed for the bill throughout its history, and he recommends that they all be added, raising its cost from 40 million dollars to 475 million. The committee members each see the chance to get the appropriations they wanted, even though Gray can see that such a bloated bill will only gain them public ridicule and will be vetoed by the president.

After the meeting, Gray talks to Alan about the bank in his district, explaining that, while he does stand to profit personally, the more important thing is that the people he represents need the proposed penitentiary project to ease their poverty. After Alan leaves, Gray explains to Marjorie an even more pressing interest: the bank has lied to its auditors, and if it closes this lie will be found out. Gray, as a member of the board of directors, could go to jail.

Act 3

Scene 1 of the third act takes place three days after the previous scene. The committee members, including Wingblatt, Peebles, and Dell, discuss the work they have done to have H. R. 2007 approved by the entire House of Representatives. Joe Ebner, one of the people who is enthusiastically opposing the bill, tells them that the opposition will stand behind Alan. Sol manages to talk some members into changing their votes so that the bill has the majority that it needs to pass; however, the president has promised to veto the bill, so it needs support from at least two-thirds of the representatives. Sol talks

to Alan about the way the government is run, telling him that defeating the bill will ruin his effectiveness in Congress and make it impossible for him to help anyone ever again, but Alan stands by his principles. Marjorie tells Alan about the threat her father faces if the bill fails. He considers what she says, not wanting to harm Gray, whom he admires greatly, but in the end he decides that a matter of principle is more important than any one man, and he must therefore vote against wasting the country's money.

The second scene takes place after the vote has been taken. H. R. 2007 has passed the House with more than a two-thirds majority. Passage in the Senate, after such a strong showing in the House of Representatives, is certain. Instead of stopping a forty-million-dollar expenditure, Alan has assured a waste of tax dollars that is more than ten times greater. The committee members are ebullient, singing and planning a large dinner celebration, and they thank Alan for creating a bill that serves them all. Allen is outraged. Even in defeat, he stands by his principles and threatens to go to the press with the story of how much the various congressmen stand to gain from this huge appropriation. The old established politicians do not worry, certain that the public outrage will blow over.

Characters

Bus

Bus is an older, established secretary who has worked for nine congressmen. When the play begins, she has just been .red by her boss, Eddie Wister, so that he can hire another secretary sent to him by the steel industry. As she is saying goodbye to Marjorie, she hears Alan McClean talking about his attempts to stop the Appropriations Committee from passing H. R. 2007, and she offers to help him with her experience about how the system works. Bus is sometimes hopeful that something can be done about the corrupt system, but she is usually fatalistic. It is Bus who has the last line of the play; when Sol brags that he will never be stopped, she says, "Maybe," showing that she is still open to the possibility of a world without graft.

Dell

Dell is one of the members of the House Appropriations Committee and a supporter of Gray. Dell makes deals with congressmen from other states in order to get H. R. 2007 passed.

Joe Ebner

Ebner is one of the political independents in Congress who does not have the power to force the projects he supports into H. R. 2007, until McClean shows up as a leader. With McClean's guidance, he is enthusiastic about defeating the bill and creating a new system of order in American politics.

Farnum

A congressman from California, one of Farnum's pet projects is a national park at the home of Joaquin Miller, although he does not know who Miller is.

Solomon Fitzmaurice

Solomon Fitzmaurice, Sol for short, is a representative of all that is wrong with the political system. He is intelligent, but he hides his shrewdness by whining about not making much money. He is friendly to all, and pretends to empathize with both sides in a disagreement. He is more interested in drinking liquor than in working for his constituents. And his main concern is to pass legislation that will lead directly to his own financial gain. In particular, Sol is interested in getting the Atlantic Fleet to dock for the winter at Rocky Point, Long Island, so that sailors on leave will spend money at a housing project he owns. When Alan McClean decides to oppose the established

politicians on the appropriations bill, he seeks out Sol as an accomplice, remembering that Sol once said he himself was an idealist when he came to Congress. Sol tells him an inspiring story but tries to persuade McClean to change his mind, offering him a particularly cynical view of politics: "The sole business of government is graft, special privilege, and corruption□with a by-product of order." Sol is fiercely dedicated to Gray and is defensive of the chairman's reputation, though he is willing to make fun of all other congresspersons, including himself.

Marjorie Gray

Marjorie is the daughter of Congressman Simeon Gray and is also his secretary. In addition, she has a budding personal relationship with Alan McClean; when Bus suggests that he seems to look at her with adoration, Marjorie answers, "I wouldn't really mind!" Her affection for the two men puts Marjorie in an awkward position. At first, she seems to be grooming McClean so that he will turn out to be as smart and principled in the business of politics as her father. When she finds out that he has information he intends to use against Gray if the bill is passed, Marjorie's sympathies are solidly with her father. When she becomes suspicious about whether her father's involvement with a potentially lucrative deal is as innocent as he has told her, he explains that losing the deal could make him susceptible to punishment, even imprisonment; and so Marjorie begs McClean to drop his opposition.

Simeon Gray

Also referred to as Sime, Gray is the most powerful politician in the play. He is the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. One of his duties is to make sure the president will approve of all of the provisions in a bill before Congress sends it to him formally. Gray is considered one of the most honest men in the Congress□the one who is most effective in holding waste and corruption to a minimum. Alan finds out that Gray has a secret reason for wanting H. R. 2007 to pass: one of its provisions would greatly help the bank in Gray's home district, and he holds a substantial interest in the bank. Gray explains that his financial concern is secondary and that he is really looking out for the economic welfare of his constituents, but privately he explains to Marjorie that he, as a member of the board of directors, could face a jail sentence if the bank were to fail. When the bill passes the committee with a ridiculously large budget, Gray uses all of his influence to make sure that the House passes it.

Levering

An influential congressman, Levering is "the presidential mouthpiece□the official whipper-in of the administration." He has a long talk with Alan, trying gently but firmly to persuade him to vote for the legislation. Some of the other congressmen call him Dizzy or Disraeli, after Benjamin Disraeli, a nineteenth-century British prime minister known for great foreign and domestic achievements.

Mark

The clerk who delivers the mail, Mark is the voice of common people in the play. Regarding the activities going on around the House offices, he asks, "What good's all this□that's what I want to know?"

Allan McClean

McClean is the central character in this drama, a young congressman who is willing to fight to change the system. He was elected to Congress on a platform of getting a dam built so that farmers in his home state, Nevada, could irrigate their land. At first, it is assumed that McClean will naturally support H. R. 2007 because it provides money for the dam, but he withdraws support when he finds out that the dam is costing many times more than it should and that his own election was financed by construction groups who would benefit from building the dam. McClean's father was a newspaper publisher who took a stand against political corruption, and McClean is so honest that he hires a private investigative firm to examine his own campaign. He opposes the bill's passage because it will waste taxpayer money. Even when Marjorie, the woman he is interested in, begs him to stop his opposition to the bill, he feels that the interests of the majority come before his own interests.

Many experienced politicians see Alan as naïve in his idealism, but he is clever enough to change his tactics: when it appears that his campaign to kill the bill will not work, he supports it but loads it with so much obvious waste that the public cannot fail to see it. He is shrewd enough to think that politicians will shy away from the bad publicity that such waste would cause, but he underestimates their greed; most of them are so enthusiastic about voting in a huge appropriations bill that they cannot see the inevitable consequence of having to face the voters. Alan ends up still willing to fight against government waste on the behalf of the American taxpayers even though no one else believes he will be successful.

Miss Bess McMutry

McMurtry is a congresswoman on the Appropriations Committee who supports money used to increase the number of maternity nurses, and to distribute birth control information and contraceptives.

Merton

Alan McClean's secretary at the start of the play, Merton is .red at the end of act 1 when Alan finds out that he has been keeping an eye on the young congressman's activities for other, established politicians and reporting to them on a regular basis.

Greta Nillson

See Bus

Peebles

A congressman from the South, Peebles has a defeatist attitude about appropriations, telling others who have had their pet projects cut that the South was left for decades after the Civil War with little financial support from the United States government.

Sneden

One of the congressmen who supports the bill, Sneden worries that the time spent attending to government matters is keeping him away from the golf course.

Trumper

Trumper is a congressman who does not appear on stage but is talked about. He is one of the "swing votes," willing to vote against the appropriations bill for concessions that are ridiculous, such as free seeds and free silver. (The free silver issue involves a suspicion by the common people that rich people were trying to control the government by keeping silver out of circulation.) Alan is astonished that Trumper thinks of himself as a logical candidate for the presidency.

Wingblatt

One of the members of the Appropriations Committee, Wingblatt is dedicated to seeing that the bill that is negotiated will have enough support to pass both houses of Congress.

Eddy Wister

Eddie is a deal-maker who has held up the committee's business at the beginning of the play because he has been in New York making deals with the steel industry. Bus is .red as his secretary so that he can hire Miss Corey, a pretty blonde with no experience who has been the secretary for Col. Sprague of Appalachian Steel. He supports an appropriation on behalf of The Committee of 48 on National Defense, which, despite its political-sounding name, is a group of steel companies. It later comes up that Eddie has had private detectives examine Simeon Gray in order to get information with which to blackmail him.

Themes

Absurdity

Anderson presents the legislative branch of the government as an absurd place, where a bill about a dam can only pass if it has money for battleships and tariffs against circus animals. It is shown to be a place where politicians agree about the social good of a proposal like McMurtry's call for nurses and birth control, but then vote to appropriate money for making the navy dock its ships in a port where one of the congressmen owns real estate and speakeasies. The problem that Alan McClean encounters is that he enters this situation thinking that it will bow to the rules of logic. He makes the common sense suggestion that wasteful spending should be stopped because the taxpayers cannot afford extravagant spending, particularly not in the middle of an economic crisis like the Depression. He even fails to see the sense of supporting the people who paid for his own election, if this support will mean wasting the taxpayers' money.

This leads to the ultimate form of legislative absurdity. Attempting to draw public attention to just how bloated H. R. 2007 really is, Alan adds hundreds of irrelevant measures with the assumption that the congressmen could not vote for such a senseless bill. Instead, absurdity wins the day. The bill does in fact attract massive support. The representatives care very little about what the public will think, knowing that the whole absurd process is so complex that there is little chance of public outrage. Alan's attempt to save the taxpayer 40 million dollars ends up costing them 475 million.

Cynicism

The political system in this play is fueled by cynicism. When Alan arrives and points out the obvious about corrupt congressmen and the unfair ways in which the committee decides what to finance, he is laughed at and pitied. The established members of the committee do not dislike what he has to say, nor do they disagree with it. Instead, they feel that they have heard it all before, have faced similar matters of conscience, and have come to the conclusion that they cannot change the system. This is shown in Sol's speech, in which he explains that what constituents expect of their congressional representative is that "he gets what they want out of the Treasury, and fixes the Tariff for 'em, and sees that they don't get gypped out of their share of the plunder." Cynicism is also seen in the way in which an overwhelming majority of the House turns away from the ordinary practices that shape a bill and stampede to pass H. R. 2007 because each is focused only on what small benefit it offers him. Simeon Gray is an example of virtue among these cynical politicians because he has maintained a small degree of selflessness. Unlike Alan, Gray has been in Congress long enough to have had his ideals destroyed, but he still maintains enough integrity to act for the common good; Marjorie, Sol, and the others who know him do not believe that his penitentiary deal is for his own enrichment but that it is, at worst, a mistake. However, the author seems to take a more cynical view of Gray than even the cynical political operatives in the play.

While they all look up to Gray's small degree of honesty, the play emphasizes the dishonesty that his job requires. Except for Alan, none of the characters in the play seem to realize how awful it is that Congress must do so many bad things and waste so much money on corrupt and useless projects in order to do even the slightest bit of good.

Progress

The reason that Alan thinks he can change the system that has corrupted so many other hopeful politicians is that he believes in progress. The other, experienced members try to convince him that he will face the same pressures they did and that he will either conform to the way things are or go back home when his term is over without having made any difference to the world. They all have stories like this; those who do not explain their personal sense of defeat at the hand of the system show it by following along with the corrupt practices unquestioningly. But Alan, who is an educated man interested in the larger scope of things, has faith that the system that crushed the spirits of the other politicians will eventually be overcome. At the moment when he has been defeated, when he is most likely to admit that there is nothing one man can do except go along and hope to do some occasional good, Alan is defiant in his optimism:

It takes about a hundred years to tire this country of trickery□and we're fifty years overdue right now. That's my warning. And I'd feel pretty damn pitiful and lonely saying it to you, if I didn't believe there are a hundred million people who are with me, a hundred million people who are disgusted enough to turn from you to something else.

Alan's faith in progress is, of course, not shared by the other politicians, who have based their careers on the premise that the future will be like the past. Their success in passing a ridiculously bloated bill like H. R. 2007, along with their lack of concern over Alan's threat to expose them all as crooked, seem to imply that Anderson does not believe Alan to be very astute. Still, the play ends with the faintest hint that progress is possible; when Sol, the old-time politician, brags that he does not expect the system to change in his lifetime, Bus, who is also a voice of experience, states flatly, "Maybe." This is nothing like the hopeful speeches Alan makes, but it is Anderson's way of showing that Alan is not necessarily deluded in his optimism.

Style

Irony

Although the word "irony" is used often in ordinary conversation, it is not always used correctly. Irony is a literary technique in which an author uses language in such a way that it conveys the opposite of its literal meaning. Several times during *Both Your Houses*, Anderson has Sol Fitzmaurice give ironic speeches. Audiences know that Sol is corrupt; from his very first scene, he is drinking in the office and taking enjoyment from .outing the rules. His behavior is particularly corrupt in light of the fact that he is a lawmaker during Prohibition, the time in American history when drinking alcohol was illegal. "On my soul, I haven't touched liquor since before breakfast," Sol says, in a sentence that is formulated as if he were taking a pledge of virtue. When he is concerned about his thinly disguised bid for public money, he expresses his concern like a naughty boy pouting: "Everyone in Washington has tacked something onto the bill except yours truly," he whines, "and I'm the one man that deserves it." The item he wants "tacked on" is the diversion of the navy so that its ships dock at the town where he owns real estate and speakeasies, because this will raise the value of his investments.

When Sol talks to Alan, his words are especially convincing. Taken out of context, his explanations of how the system made him corrupt could seem almost remorseful, provided that audiences fail to remember who is talking and the character traits that Sol has presented previously. Similarly, when he tells Alan that he has to be involved with dirty politics because "you can't compete . . . without being a viper," his speech is almost believable if one ignores the corruption in which Sol has already been involved. Anderson does not give stage directions that tell the actor who plays Sol whether the character is being insincere when he speaks dejectedly and humbly about his own part in political corruption, but he does indicate Sol's insincerity by making his words contradict his behavior.

Verisimilitude

Verisimilitude is a literary technique in which an author creates situations that are so lifelike that the audience believes they are factual. Anderson achieves verisimilitude by peppering his dialogue with political jargon that one might hear in a congressional office. In addition, he keeps the pace of the drama moving briskly, imitating the pandemonium that might go on around the Appropriations Committee before a major bill is brought to a vote. He also convinces his audience of the reality of the situation by including unexpected touches of realism. For instance, when Eddie enlists Marjorie to help his new secretary, he offers her anything she wants, and her response is that she will do it for a cigarette. While women smoking tobacco was not unheard of in 1933, still many audience members would have been unprepared to see the modern office woman being so casual about a traditionally male vice. This would lead them to feel that the play was

teaching them about the way the world really works. The same effect holds true for Miss McMurty's request for an appropriation for birth control and contraceptives, a controversial issue that was not discussed as publicly in 1933 as it is today. At the time, federal obscenity laws were used to prosecute physicians who prescribed birth control, although strong opposition from women's health advocates served to change the law by the end of the decade. Audiences may have been aware of the issues, but those familiar with the debate about birth control would probably not have thought that their elected representatives would dismiss the matter so lightly.

Didactic

Didactic works are produced to teach some moral, spiritual, or practical lesson. While all works have a moral perspective, didactic ones put teaching a lesson to the front, making it the main goal. This is often done at the expense of artistry, which is why the word "didactic" is usually applied negatively. Such works can be unsuccessful because audiences tune out their messages once they realize that the writer is preaching to them.

The charge of didacticism could be leveled against *Both Your Houses*. Maxwell Anderson clearly has a political agenda that he wants audiences to agree with. The question of whether the play is merely a way to broadcast his political views depends on whether he has broken rules of reality in order to control his audience's thoughts. For instance: *Could* Congress start out with a forty-million- dollar appropriations bill and end up with one more than ten times that? *Could* a major economic force like the steel industry have the Appropriations Committee chairman investigated and use what it learns to have a senseless, fifteen-million dollar appropriation added to the budget? If audiences feel that Anderson is stretching reality too far in order to make them agree with his position, then he is guilty of didacticism. On the other hand, if such things are possible, however unlikely, then the play is simply exercising creative license with its material. The basic issue is one of fairness: it would be unfair for a writer to win audiences to his point of view by warning them about a situation that does not actually exist.

Historical Context

America experienced a time of great economic prosperity in the 1920s; World War I, from 1914 to 1918, decimated European manufacturing facilities and reorganized much of the Western world in such a way that America was in a position of unusual stability when it was over. Throughout the twenties, unemployment and inflation were both low, which meant that people had money, lived comfortably, and were able to invest. Many invested in speculative ventures, which continued to raise profits through sales to other investors even when they were not connected to any actual products. The phrase "Roaring Twenties" was coined to capture the sense of excitement and fun that characterized the decade. The fun stopped on October 29, 1929, one of the most significant dates in American history. This was the date of the stock market crash. In that one day, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which had been slowly losing its momentum, dropped sharply, creating a rush to sell off stocks quickly, at a loss. By the end of the year, the United States economy had lost fifteen billion dollars, a number that eventually rose to fifty billion - about the entire cost of World War I.

People who had started the year with secure investment portfolios ended it looking for any low-wage jobs that became available. The sudden loss of investment capital had a rippling effect throughout the economy. People could not repay loans, and banks closed; companies could not borrow from banks and went out of business; when businesses closed, they left their workers without any incomes, and when workers could not pay the mortgages on their houses, it hurt the banks that had survived the first wave of the Depression.

The president at the time was Herbert Hoover, who had come into office in April of 1929, when the economy was strong. After the crash, he resisted calls to use federal funds to ease unemployment, insisting that the situation would correct itself. He eventually used money to aid endangered banks, but his refusal to create new jobs made him immensely unpopular. In 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt took over the presidency. His economic program, dubbed the "New Deal," included billions of dollars to provide jobs for Americans through such agencies as the Tennessee Valley Authority, responsible for, among other things, building and managing Wilson Dam; the Civilian Conservation Corps, which employed about three million young men to tend the nation's resources; and the Works Progress Administration, which employed unskilled laborers as well as talented artists. Unemployed Americans who did not pay taxes - that is, the vast majority - appreciated Roosevelt's efforts and did not mind the huge expenditures from the treasury. Roosevelt was the only American president to be elected to four terms.

Critical Overview

As time has passed, Maxwell Anderson has been best remembered for the plays he wrote in verse, which attempted to revive a lost art. When he was writing, he was generally associated with the social focus of his plays, although his reputation as a social critic has not held up as well as the reputations of other playwrights. At one time, for example, Anderson was considered almost an equal of Eugene O'Neill, who also satirized the modern social order and drew from theater's rich history; now, O'Neill's works are performed much more often than Anderson's. Because political issues change, *Both Your Houses* could be expected to lose relevance as time goes by, but critics still consider it fondly, even though they do not write about it as one of Anderson's major works.

When it was first performed, the play was considered timely, ground-breaking material. In 1933, Barrett H. Clark gave this assessment of its importance: "*Both Your Houses* is perhaps more important for the direction that it takes than as an actual achievement: it is, I believe, the first American play concerned exclusively and seriously with federal political intrigue." Whether or not Clark was right, satire of the complex government system was rare enough at that time that it deserved mention□a concept that might seem quaint to modern readers who are used to seeing the government ridiculed. Since literary critics concentrated on Anderson's historical plays and his experiments with verse, *Both Your Houses* was generally neglected. Because Anderson was an important writer, long studies of his career were eventually published, and these usually included a few notes about the play, although they did not examine it in depth as they did works like *High Tor* and *Winterset*. Mabel Driscoll Bailey wrote in her 1957 book *Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright As Prophet* that it is an "important" play: "[For] all its serious implications, the play is highly entertaining, not only in the cynical dialogue, but even in the central action in which the hero defeats his own ends by trying to beat his adversaries at their own game of clever manipulation." The importance of *Both Your Houses* is the aspect that most critics have attached themselves to, although many let its serious subject matter distract them from appreciating its entertainment value. Finally, some critics have charged that the play does not actually deal with the social issues that it raises because Alan McClean does not, for all of his disgust at the system, have any better alternative to offer. Alfred S. Shivers dismissed the concerns of such critics as unfairly expecting too much of both the playwright and his character, since Anderson could not be expected to have figured out on short notice what has eluded for centuries the most eminent philosophers, social scientists, and statesmen. Anyway, no playwright is or should be required to offer a solution to the social problems he presents: it is quite enough to lay forth the problem in an entertaining manner. It is, in fact, the very insolubility of the situation presented in *Both Your Houses* that makes the issues outlined in the play relevant to this day.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Kelly teaches creative writing and literature at Oakton Community College in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly explains why Anderson was right to keep Alan McClean's relationships with Congressman Gray and his daughter in the background of the play, while another writer might have made them the focus of the story.

In the earliest versions of his satirical drama *Both Your Houses*, Maxwell Anderson left his protagonist, Alan McClean, the high-minded outsider bent on reorganizing the political structure of the House of Representatives, incapable of taking any definitive action. Alan sees his deepest beliefs violated by those around him, and he knows that he can impose some measure of honesty, but he also knows that doing so will endanger Simeon Gray's career. The play was more centered around human relations in those early drafts than it is in the final, published version. McClean's bond with Gray and Gray's daughter, Marjorie, dictated his behavior then, and the complex political maneuvering that goes on before a bill is passed was used as colorful background. The earlier versions told a more traditional story, one that audiences would feel comfortable with, framing the issues with familiar dynamics. It relied on the human tendency to care that the boy loves the girl; that the young man finds out that his hero is .awed; that the youth must surpass his father-figure and replace him; and that the youth defends his vulnerable old mentor.

These are elements that appear in the version of *Both Your Houses* that was eventually published in 1933, but by the time the play had been refined and rewritten they were pushed into the background, functioning as mere plot complications rather than as crucial elements that drive the action. In many ways, this de-emphasis of the human aspect weakens the play, leaving it to hold audiences' interest solely with its depiction of bureaucratic procedures. In the broader scope, though, it was wise of Anderson to give up the traditional emphasis on interpersonal relationships. Pushing them out of the way in order to show just what actually goes on in the legislature is a move that takes some nerve, but it pays off in the end, and makes the play a more unique, unpredictable work. Anderson seems to have found what is at the heart of this situation; it is not a play about love or respect, although it does have room to include those two elements, briefly. The play's impact is gained from its disregard of human emotions; this enables it to show the inhumanity of government policies that affect the lives of all citizens.

The relationship between McClean and Marjorie is presented as being so faint and uneven that it is barely discernible. Viewers seated late, or readers who have trouble discerning who is who in the play's turbulent first pages, might understandably fail to realize that there is a relationship between them. When Bus, the older and more experienced secretary, notes that there are clear signs of interest from McClean, Marjorie hopes that Bus is right. The matter is never discussed after that. Marjorie and McClean have lunch dates, and she does hesitate before asking him to give up his crusade to defeat the appropriations bill, but aside from that the only sign of affection between them is her continuous use of his first name. Readers can sense some bond of affection between them, and audiences can have even more of a sense of this

depending on how the characters are played on stage, but there is nothing in the script that indicates a love affair that is torrid or deep.

In fact, the relationship between Marjorie and McClean shows itself to be exactly what it is: the shadow of a plot device important in an earlier version but not really needed here. Marjorie worries about McClean when she is talking to the old gang around the committee room, but she is in no position to offer him any aid or comfort. She is too much a product of the political machine to be drawn in to his idealistic plan to change the way the federal government is run. The effect of her actions on the plot is practically nonexistent, but what she does not do speaks volumes about the hypnotic control of political power. One gets the impression that the sort of person who would allow this relationship with McClean to wither on the vine before it had a chance to bloom into a full-.edged romance would be content to live a life in emotional isolation, true to no one except her father.

In most respects, McClean's relationship with Bus, the wisecracking older secretary, is more interesting than the one he shares with Marjorie. The romance between McClean and Marjorie is described and referred to but never really acted upon, while the relationship between Bus and McClean grows right before audience's eyes. She is a better foil for him: cynical when he is overly idealistic, but then surprisingly idealistic just as he is losing faith in his crusade. By contrast, Marjorie is written as a party insider, but she is not exactly corrupt enough to serve as a lesson in the seductive nature of power. Bus is used to bring out more aspects of Alan McClean, while Marjorie is used to complicate his motives.

Congressman Simeon Gray could also be a more significant figure in McClean's attempt to right the wrongs of congressional appropriations, but making him a stronger presence in *Both Your Houses* would dilute Anderson's message about the unbelievable horror of the political system. Gray functions in the final version of the play as a touchstone, as the one person who is seen the same way by people on both sides of the debate. He is considered by all of the characters, though not necessarily by the author, to be an honest man who has gotten himself into a vulnerable position by trusting his co-workers and by working so hard that he fails to keep track of his own relationship to the bill he is working on. No one in the play□ not McClean or even the jaded old politico Sol Fitzmaurice□doubts Gray's claim that the provision in the bill for construction of a penitentiary in his district appeared there before he even noticed it. Also, there is no debate about whether this penitentiary is needed for the common good, unlike measures requested by the other congressmen, which clearly have no purpose but to siphon cash out of the federal coffers. Still, audiences cannot accept Gray's innocence as blindly as his friends and acquaintances do.

It is unlikely that an appropriation for a large construction project in his district would have appeared in the bill without his notice, especially when it seems to be the answer to his personal financial dilemma. An argument could be made that Col. Sprague, the steel tycoon who dug up the information about Gray's failing bank, could have manipulated the situation by having some other congressperson plant the penitentiary in the bill, tempting Gray subtly to cross the line into corruption. There is, after all, a hint

that Sprague arranged for the crusading young McClean to find out about the penitentiary, and that the "mix-up" at the detection agency was no mix-up after all. Anderson arranges this situation so that the truth could be either that Gray was cunning or that he was duped; the author leaves the matter open to interpretation.

If McClean were more closely involved with Gray or with his daughter, there would be less room for interpretation; Gray would have to be rendered more clearly, and the answer to whether he is as innocent as he claims to be would have to come into sharper dentition. Such clarity would actually defeat one of the play's main points, that of the uncertainty of trust. It is crucial to the play, and to the view of American politics Anderson presents through it, that McClean not find any strong, dependable ally in Washington. Morality is so vague in Congress that McClean asks for help in his crusade from Sol, who is painted as the most unabashedly corrupt politician of them all. *Both Your Houses* would be less confusing if Simeon Gray were clearly virtuous or corrupt, but it would not be as true to the complexity that Anderson does succeed in capturing.

One can easily see why Anderson would have originally conceived *Both Your Houses* as a story of initiation or loss of innocence; an idealistic young man finding out that the woman he loves and the man he admires are as compromised as the worst of the political hacks he is struggling against is an eternal theme. It is often repeated throughout literature because it works, holding audience's interest while presenting the opposing sides of a conflict. It takes a skillful writer to know that he does not have to frame the issue so clearly, that the situation he presents does not have to boil down to an eternal theme in order for audiences to follow it. Another story might feature McClean's relationships with Marjorie and Simeon Gray, but for this one, revealing less gives the situation more mystery, and makes the young congressman's journey into the dark corridors of the government that much more frightening.

Critical Essay #2

O'Sullivan writes for both film and stage. In this essay, O'Sullivan examines the tension between message and method in Maxwell Anderson's >Both Your Houses.

Maxwell Anderson's play *Both Your Houses*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1933, is a hard-biting indictment of political corruption in the houses of congress. Leavening indignation with acerbic humor, it reveals the disillusionment of a high-minded but politically naive freshman congressman who arrives in Washington determined to clean things up. Although written more than seventy years ago, the play retains a certain currency; graft and pork barrel spending are as present today as they were then, and the reformist impulse seems to be renewed during each election cycle.

Prior to beginning his long career as a playwright, Anderson worked as a teacher and journalist. He was no doubt well acquainted, through his journalism, with the culture of corruption in our nation's capital. It is easy to imagine him identifying with the idealistic protagonist of his play and sharing his dismay at what appears to be an intractable problem. The play itself is an exercise in muckraking, exposing the back room dealings and nest-feathering of a congressional committee. The intent is, no doubt, to inspire indignation and a call for reforms. In this it resembles a number of other plays, written during the 1930s, that forwarded strong social messages. There was a marked leftward tilt among a number of the leading playwrights as well as a move towards experimentation in theatrical form. The results varied from kitchen sink social realism to Wellsian spectacle. The impulse behind many of these productions was to radically transform society, sometimes through outright instruction, more often through appeal to the emotions. Anderson, although a liberal, was neither didactic nor formally inventive in his writing. In fact, *Both Your Houses* is structured along traditional lines, closely observing action, time, and place.

The journalist-turned-playwright took a scientific approach to his plays. After an initial string of dramatic failures, Anderson revisited the classics and analyzed popular contemporary plays to see what made them tick. He also returned to Aristotle's *Poetics* and developed a theory of dramatic principles that, not surprisingly, closely resembled Aristotle's. Anderson even found a way to incorporate Aristotle's notion of the "recognition scene." This is a scene wherein a character's disguise or assumed identity is uncovered and the true identity is revealed. The Greeks and Elizabethans often used this device of discovery, but the demands of realism made it increasingly difficult for modern audiences to accept. Anderson solved this dilemma by turning it into self-recognition; the hero discovers something about himself or his place in the world around him of which he was previously unaware. This is the moment in which the veil is lifted and the truth is revealed. In his book of essays, *Off Broadway*, Anderson wrote:

When I had once begun to make discoveries of this sort they came thick and fast. And they applied not, as is natural to suppose, to extraordinary plays only - to Shakespeare and Jonson and the Greeks - but to all plays, and to those in our modern repertory as much as any others.

While Anderson did not codify his views until after he had written *Both Your Houses*, it hews, quite closely, to the basic contours of tragedy (or drama), as first mapped by Aristotle and modified by Anderson. But one can also detect the influence of his previous profession; the dialogue has a no-nonsense, reportorial sound that is, nonetheless, stylized. More notable is the voice of the writer of liberal editorials, apparent in the character of the protagonist Alan McClean. There is, in fact, a tension between Anderson the editorial writer and Anderson the careful playwright, which makes this work of special interest.

The play is divided into three acts and takes place over the course of three days. Set in the House Office Building, Washington, D.C., it employs two locations: the office of the chairman of the appropriations committee and the committee room itself.

The drama, or conflict, is centered on the contest over a spending bill, with the two opposing sides struggling to line up their votes. This compression both helps to unify the play and creates a dramatic tension: there is a deadline, the clock is, in effect, ticking, the gavel ready to fall.

The hero, or protagonist, Alan McClean is an ideal type, representative of decent middle-class American values, hostile to superfluous spending. Newly elected to congress, he is determined to root out wasteful spending. This is a place where the congressmen feather their nests - the world of the backroom deal. It is a place where the congressmen do not pay their taxes. Not a revolutionary but a reformer, McClean has impulses the same as those that will inspire the taxpayer revolts of the 1970s and '80s. He is fed up with the corruption he sees among the political classes and is determined to clean things up (hence his name).

To drive home the point of McClean's lily-white character, Anderson has him investigate his own election campaign for improprieties. McClean refuses to support a bill that contains provisions beneficial to his own constituents on the grounds that the bill is loaded with pork. He has obviously set high standards for himself; that he is willing to go against his own political interests, on principle, shows that he is serious about his efforts. His intransigence sets in motion the events that ultimately lead to his defeat. What is shown in McClean, in other words, is someone very close to a tragic hero. McClean finds as his antagonist a character that one would assume to be a natural ally; the chairman of the appropriations committee, Simeon Gray, is known to be personally honest. The chairman occupies a gray area between idealism and realism; accepting compromise of one's ideals as a necessary condition of doing business. One might imagine that this is terrain that even the most high-minded politician must travel. It is made explicit in the play that compromises must be made to get anything done. It is, in effect, the nature of a democracy where many voices clamor to be heard and each voice must be taken into account. Anderson himself does not necessarily disagree with this but seems to find the manner in which it is done distasteful, and the way in which particular or selfish interests are served immoral.

The chairman's daughter, Marjorie, supplies the love interest. She is being wooed by the freshman congressman, which causes complications late in the play. She is one of three

women in the play, the other two being a cynical, straight-talking secretary named Bus and a congresswoman named Miss McMurtry. All three are very close to being mere types; the ingenue, the "gal," and the spinster. Together, they form a feminine principle, something that is lacking from the congressmen who dominate the play. They represent a humane element, lacking in the guile, duplicity, and self-righteousness that characterizes the male characters.

Bus, who joins forces with McClean in an unsuccessful coup, is motivated not by abstract principle but by concrete experience. McMurtry, who in McClean's eyes is complicit in the pork barrel he is intent on trimming, accepts her slice of the pie to fund a maternity ward. Marjorie, who dotes on her father, is there to remind readers of the potential human costs in pursuing an ideal. Her first loyalty is to her family. These characterizations are consistent with what Anderson believed an audience wanted to see (and no doubt reflect his own bias). As Charles Meister, in his book *Dramatic Criticism,* has pointed out, Anderson believed that "theatergoers admire strong conviction in the male characters and passionate faith in the female."

To add levity to the proceedings, there is a comedic character, Solomon Fitzmaurice - a dipsomaniac congressman and former idealist who aims to dock the Atlantic Fleet in his congressional district. He is almost a stock character, who functions like a clown or jester, but there is a Falstaflan quality to his fecklessness, which gives him weight. Much comedy is made in the contradiction between his words and his behavior. He, like a clown in Shakespeare, is able to say things that no one else can. As crooked as any of his cronies, he speaks the truth about their venality.

The first act begins just before an important vote on the appropriations bill. Chairman Gray is scrupulously trying to remove the excess fat, trimming the bill to a size acceptable to the president. His is a dignified presence and he stands above his colleagues. They accept that he is honest and he accepts that a degree of graft must be tolerated. A sort of moral equilibrium has been reached until it is upset by the arrival of McClean. Principle soon clashes with pragmatism.

The paternal aspects of Gray's character are brought out, and it is shown that he is not entirely unsympathetic to the young congressman; yet McClean's determination to kill a bill that Gray has worked hard to see pass, pits the two men against one another. It is a contest that McClean cannot hope to win, but the long odds increase his determination. By the end of the first act, with the seasoned Bus on his side to mentor him through the ways of congressional politicking, McClean is ready to go head to head.

As McClean tries to gather enough supporters to kill the bill, his opponents dole out more favors to garner the crucial votes. Fat, once carefully trimmed, is added back onto the bill, ensuring its passage. Recognizing his pending defeat, McClean decides that the high road is inadequate to reach his goal. He engages in some duplicity, tricking Fitzmaurice, and decides that the best way to kill the bill is to load it with so much pork barrel spending that the president will be forced to veto it.

This act represents growth in McClean's character; new to the system, he has matched wits with - and apparently bettered - his superiors. Bus has mentored him too well. The pupil has now surpassed the teacher. At the close of act 2, scene 1, she says: "I resign, Alan. I abdicate. Take my hand and lead me. I'm a little child!" Yet, this statement represents a moral compromise of which McClean seems insufficiently aware. He is so convinced of the righteousness of his cause that he does not properly weigh the implications of his design. The question is never raised as to whether the ends justify the means. This is the fateful decision, the one that sets in motion a chain of events that threaten to undermine the protagonist's integrity. The contest between Gray and McClean intensifies. There will be an unintended consequence if the bill is ultimately defeated; Chairman Gray will be implicated in an impropriety for which he is only partly culpable. The gray in his character proves a shade darker, yet he remains sympathetic. The two antagonists, who, up until then, have shared a mutual respect, now square off. McClean continues to fight for a principle. Gray fights for survival. Sympathy falls to the threatened chairman, despite his impropriety. His involvement in a potential bank scandal also occupies a gray area: he is neither wholly guilty, nor wholly innocent. His relationship with his doting daughter, and his concern for his constituents, humanize him. McClean's unwavering principles seem cold, inhumane. For a principle, people are forgotten.

McClean's strategy works well; the bill is fattened with pork, and a presidential veto seems inevitable. McClean seems to have won. Gray's only hope is to have an overwhelming majority that can override a presidential veto. Fitzmaurice appeals to McClean to release a bloc of voters he controls in order to save Gray. Marjorie tells McClean that his victory will send her father to prison. His crusade has brought about some unintended consequences. Simeon Gray appears to be collateral damage. And so, apparently, is McClean's relationship with Marjorie. He refuses to help. As he says to Marjorie, "I'm not fighting you or your father. I'm fighting this machine!"

This is the recognition scene, where McClean realizes the human cost of what he has brought about and is either unable or unwilling to stop it. He denies Marjorie's request. "Don't ask it of me and don't tell me what I've lost!" he says. "I know what I've lost from all of you. And it's not my choice to lose it - but I'm in a fight that's got to be won - and you're asking for something I've no right to give!" In the end, McClean's stratagem proves self-defeating. The bill passes with a large majority, which makes it veto-proof. Through his efforts to correct an ill, he has only magnified it. Yet sympathy shifts towards McClean as the victors indulge in a celebration of their venality. The shift is from tragedy to satire with a biting edge. Fitzmaurice articulates the mood: "Graft, gigantic graft brought us our prosperity in the past and will lift us out of the present depths of parsimony and despair." Gray's words are more to the point: "Our system is every man for himself - and the nation be damned." Embittered, McClean announces his intention to resign from office and continue his fight from the outside, warning that the tide will turn against the old guard: "Anything else but this." In this scene, Anderson seems to be speaking through McClean; it is the voice of the liberal editorial writer. The tension between Anderson the journalist and Anderson the playwright is not so much resolved as exhausted in this scene. The message, which may have been buried by the high drama of the penultimate scene, stands out amidst the clamor of the victory

celebration. If the scene seems inconsistent with the overall tone of the piece, it is nevertheless consistent with the author's intention; *Both Your Houses* is, in essence, a political editorial in dramatic form.

Source: Kevin O'Sullivan, Critical Essay on *Both Your Houses,* in *Drama for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Shivers surveys the political terrain in Both Your Houses *and Anderson's technique in rendering it.*

Both Your Houses (note the Shakespearean echo) exists in two complete versions - the 1933 published one which we shall look at first, and the 1939 unpublished one. These two versions illustrate Anderson's changing attitude toward democracy and the possibilities of individual fulfillment. Barrett Clark and George Freedley praise. *Both Your Houses* as "the first play of any moment written by an American that dealt exclusively or largely with political crookedness in the federal government"; but its main predecessor seems to have been Harrison G. Rhodes and Thomas A. Wise's *A Gentleman from Mississippi* (1908) which was also concerned with the loading of a Congressional appropriation bill with graft.

Both Your Houses reached the stage of the Royale Theatre on March 6, 1933; but, if it had arrived when Anderson first wanted it to and if a producer had not kept delaying its presentation until the Hoover administration, the original target of the satire, was out of office, the point would have been sharper and the stage run perhaps longer than one hundred and twenty nights. There is the consolation, however, that the Pulitzer Prize committee recognized with its award for the 1932-33 season that the work had certain values which were presumably not completely dependent upon "timeliness." However belated in its production, the play was not altogether useless as social criticism: it made a valuable appeal to the new federal administration, containing one hundred and twenty-seven new members, that was readying to assemble in Washington at the crisis of the Depression and correct the wrongs of the Hoover era. But whether any such politicians attended or read the play is a matter about which I have no information.

The narrative illustrates once more Anderson's stance of despair. An idealistic freshman congressman, Alan McClean, whose surname is an apt characteronym for his sterling makeup, learns that an omnibus House appropriation bill is laden with "pork barrel" as well as graft which will cost the already over-taxed public many millions of dollars. One of the congressmen, Sol Fitzmaurice, has even tagged on a measure that will anchor the Atlantic fleet off his private resort area rather than Hampton Roads. Alan opposes the bill despite its inclusion of funds for a dam project in his own district, for he has recently learned about the dishonest bidding for the contract, a bidding engineered by his backer and campaign manager.

Meanwhile, most of McClean's fellow congressmen have no scruples whatever in using skulduggery; in fact, dishonesty is so routine that they are surprised that Alan raises any objections. Sol, a somehow likeable old rascal and the most individualized figure in the play, candidly asserts that the processes of government absolutely depend upon graft and that this very nation was built by brigands who looted the treasury and the national resources. In Alan's research about the tainted appropriation bill, he encounters a moral dilemma: he learns that the committee chairman, Gray, an essentially honest man and the father of the girl he is courting, has innocently compromised himself by owning stock

in an insolvent bank which the money in the bill would probably save. But Alan chooses to follow his conscience and try to defeat the bill, even at the risk of ruining the man he admires. Unable to block the legislation in committee, he loads onto it such flagrantly colossal riders that the whole thing will, he hopes, fail when it comes to a vote in Congress. Astonishingly, it passes anyway.

Of the various technical excellences in Anderson's construction of this play, a critic would have to concede the advantage of subordinating the love relationship to the drama of ideas: at the end, there is no forced or sentimental reconciliation between Alan and Marjorie, at least on stage; indeed, no more than two lines are devoted to the whole business. Moreover, Alan is also not portrayed as a knight in shining armor (he exposes his own campaign), otherwise he would differentiate the forces of good and evil either too neatly or too obviously. Still, he is clearly and believably a heroic figure, even though, like many of the Shaw and the Ibsen male creations, he lacks well-roundedness. John H. Lawson has sharply criticized the conception of McClean because he is not made to ask himself. "How can I live and achieve integrity under these conditions [?]"; because he has no rational solution for the dilemma of government in which he finds himself; because he admittedly has no conviction as to what the best type of government is; because, therefore, he has no specific proposal for reform; and because "the very condition against which McClean is fighting is brought about by the apathy or uncertainty of people as to 'the best kind of government.'"

In countering Lawson's first point, I contend that McClean has had, at least for the time being, his bridges burned behind him: if he stayed in, as Lawson seems to suggest, and publicly denounced his colleagues as dishonest, this legislator who had won his office under a cloud of suspicion would cut a sorry figure! But, it seems to me that Alan McClean might become more successful at winning sympathy and support for his exposure of the others as the voluntarily resigned congressman that Anderson plans him to be - providing he could write a book or afford a lecture tour. As the novice legislator that we find him to be at the end of the story, he realizes that he has already cost the country a vast amount of unnecessary money in trying to outwit the crooks; for him, then, it seems wise to choose a field of combat in which the public will not have to pay through the nose for his inexperience.

As for McClean's supposed fault of not having any rational solution to the dilemma of government. I believe that Lawson is simply unfair in asking such a newcomer, already a disastrous failure in politics, to have figured out on short notice what has eluded for centuries the most eminent philosophers, social scientists, and statesmen. Anyway, no playwright is or should be required to offer a solution to the social problems he presents; it is quite enough to lay forth the problem in an entertaining manner. Apropos Lawson's last objection, the hero in this play does *not,* I maintain, act apathetically or uncertainly about what he wants done, which is clearly a public exposure leading to reform. It would be grossly unfair to equate Alan McClean's patriotic state of mind with that of the general electorate who tolerate Sol Fitzmaurice and his hoggish breed. At worst, McClean is an idealist who is unwilling to accommodate himself to working out in the hurly-burly of "dirty politics" the kinds of rewards that Congressman Gray finds and is satisfied with. Though mainly a drama of ideas in which there is scant physical action,

the narrative nevertheless grips the attention from the moment Alan enters in Act I to his angry exit in Act III. Unquestionably, the amusing secondary characters go far to sustain this interest; and these include Alan's fast-talking but honest secretary, Bus, and the eloquent old tippler and jovial antagonist, Sol Fitzmaurice. The dialogue is crisp throughout, and Maxwell Anderson illustrates in this dialogue his special and much-overlooked gift for lifelike vernacular in plays with contemporary settings.

Both Your Houses (1933), notwithstanding its gloom, is a shade lighter on the scale of optimism than is typical of Anderson's plays of the 1930s wherein the ideal is impossible of attainment in social institutions and human affairs. The pessimism of this published version was, incidentally, still more intense in the three preliminary drafts that now survive. These drafts start near the close of Act II to emphasize McClean's moral struggle about whether to save Gray or to remain true to the national interest; but the published version emphasizes throughout the external struggle between McClean and the sponsors of the bill. In the early drafts, McClean is unable to stay true to the national interest because, upon learning of Gray's predicament with the bank, he is so conscience-stricken about the possibility of ruining the honest Gray that he decides to endorse the bill to protect this man even at the loss of his own professional ideals. At the end, after McClean's realization that the prestigious United States House of Representatives does not by any latitude of thinking embrace the good of the nation, he resigns his post to return to teaching.

The upshot is that, as an idealist trying to make the actual world over into his own image, he had no choice but to fail one way or the other. Consequently, the preparatory drains of *Both Your Houses* are stained with that very spirit of hopelessness which permeates other early Anderson dramaturgy. But late in rehearsals significant changes were introduced - most likely at the suggestion of other theater people engaged in the production - which sharpened the satirical point considerably. These changes allowed at least the possibility of public altruism and constructive reform despite the consuming self-interest that allegedly motivates leaders in government. As such, the published version of *Both Your Houses* is evidently a compromise, scarcely to be regretted on our part, between what Anderson felt in his heart about government and what the production staff felt was expedient in order to secure a viable drama. Fortunately, however, the slightly revised *Both Your Houses* that Anderson prepared for a staging at the Pasadena Community Playhouse, Pasadena, California, during July of 1939, has never seen print. The new writing consists of two new speeches for McClean that are, sad to relate, inconsistent with the tone of what had gone before; but they do reflect the author's latest convictions at that time to defend democracy from the threat that Hitler's Germany was making to the free peoples of the earth. And so, after staring at the totalitarianism that was spreading like cancer over the body of Europe, Anderson now viewed our imperfect democracy as a relatively healthy system that was well worth saving.

Source: Alfred S. Shivers, "Of Sceptred and Elected Races," in *Maxwell Anderson,* Twayne, 1976, pp. 101-31.

Topics for Further Study

View Frank Capra's 1939 movie, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, about an idealistic man of the people who finds corruption and dishonesty in Congress. Compare how the movie handles this subject to how Anderson handles it in the play.

Search the Internet for stories about legal and illegal ways in which corporations have given favors to politicians. Make a chart classifying the types of graft into different categories.

Find out the names and addresses of your congressional representatives. Write to them, asking how they handle improper offers from wealthy individuals and organizations that want to impudence their votes in Congress through donations or favors.

Compare and Contrast

1933: The workings of Congress take place behind closed doors. Newspapers cover important stories when they can get information from members.

Today: There are cable television stations devoted to covering Congress. Although some meetings still occur in secret, there are many more educated reporters examining the fine details of bills as well as many more congressional staffers and lobbyists willing to provide background information.

1933: America is in the midst of the Great Depression. The year that Both Your Houses is first performed, the Roosevelt administration passes the Federal Emergency Relief Act, granting $500 million to the states in order to help ease unemployment.

Today: The economy is fine-tuned, to a degree, by the Federal Reserve Board, which uses its power to raise and lower interest rates to try to keep the economy growing and stable.

1933: Steel is one of America's most powerful industries, and people are concerned that the steel companies have unfair influence with the government.

Today: Many of government influence.

1933: There have only been two women in the Senate and four in the House of Representatives, three of whom have taken office within the past year.

Today: Thirty-one women have served in the Senate, with thirteen of these serving currently. One hundred and eighty-four women have served in the House of Representatives.

What Do I Read Next?

This play is often referred to as an example of Depression-era political thought, pointing out how the rich feed off the labor of the poor. Perhaps the purest example of the pro-labor movement in the 1930s is Clifford Odets's 1935 play *Waiting for Lefty,* in which taxi drivers in a union hall discuss life and their place in it. It is available in the paperback *Waiting for Lefty and Other Plays,* published by Grove Press in 1993.

Anderson was often said to be the artistic successor of Eugene O'Neill, who also wrote about sweeping historical subjects. Many people consider O'Neill's 1939 drama *The Iceman Cometh,* about an assortment of lower-class people in a run-down bar, to be his best work. It has been published by Vintage Books in a 1999 edition.

Anderson is remembered for his experiments writing dramas in blank verse. Readers will find his best examples of this style, written between 1929 and 1939, in *Eleven Verse Plays,* published in 1968 by Harcourt, Brace and World. Included are the favorites *Winterset, Valley Forge,* and *Key Largo.*

Anderson's daughter, Hesper, is an accomplished screenwriter. She recently published her memoir of what it was like growing up with a famous writer and associating with the greatest literary figures of the thirties and forties. *South Mountain Road: A Daughter's Journey of Discovery,* by Hesper Anderson, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2000.

Readers can gain a sense of what Anderson was thinking when he wrote this play and of his long and varied career from *Dramatists in America: Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912-1958.* It was published by University of North Carolina Press in 1977.

One of the more recent biographies of Anderson is Nancy J. Doran Hazelton's *Maxwell Anderson and the New York Stage,* published in 1991 by Library Research Associates. As the title suggests, the focus is not on Anderson's entire life but on a vibrant time in Broadway theater, the 1930s through the 1950s.

In 1947, at the height of Anderson's career, da Capra Press compiled some of his major pieces about show business in *Off Broadway: Essays about Theater.*

This play is just one mentioned in *Political Stage: American Drama and Theater of the Great Depression,* by Malcolm Goldstein. It was published by Oxford University Press in 1974.

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Clawson, Dan, Alan Neustadtl, and Denise Scott, *Money Talks: Corporate PACs and Political Influence,* Basic Books, 1992.

This book outlines the structure and political influence of Political Action Committees.

Gassner, John, "Introduction," in *20 Best Plays of the Modern American Theatre, 1930-1939,* Crown Publishers, 1939, pp. vii-xxii.

Gassner was a respected theater scholar who headed the Theater Guild's play department at the height of its glory. His summary of this decade in theater gives modern readers a fair sense of the excitement of New York theater in the thirties.

Lewis, Charles, and the Center for Public Integrity, *The Buying of Congress: How Special Interests Have Stolen Your Right to Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness,* Avon Books, 1998.

Lewis and his investigative team take a cynical look at the political process, writing with a sense of moral outrage that Maxwell Anderson would have appreciated.

Smith, Hedrick, "The Coalition Game: The Heart of Governing," in *The Power Game: How Washington Works,* Random House, 1988, pp. 451-508.

Smith, who at that time had been reporting on Washington throughout six Presidential administrations, shows that the basic rules of behavior Anderson attributed to his characters still dominate the American government.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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