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A Critical Analysis of Thornton Wilder's 'The Matchmaker'

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ABSTRACT: "The Matchmaker" is a comedy play written by Thornton Wilder. It tells the story of a wealthy widower named Horace Vandergelder, who seeks a wife with the help of a matchmaker named Dolly Levi. Set in the late 19th century, the play takes place in Yonkers, New York.

"The Matchmaker" explores themes of romance, human connection, and the pursuit of happiness. It combines humor, wit, and a touch of farce to entertain audiences while also providing insights into the complexities of relationships and the unpredictability of life. Overall, "The Matchmaker" is a delightful comedy that celebrates the power of love and the adventurous spirit of its characters as they navigate the challenges of finding their perfect match.

KEYWORDS: The Matchmaker, Thornton Wilder, Comedy, Humor, Wit

Thornton Wilder

American dramatist and author Thornton Niven Wilder lived from 17 April 1897, until 7 December 1975. Three Pulitzer Prizes were awarded to him: one for an American play and two each for the plays *The Skin of Our Teeth* and *Our Town* as well as the novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. *The Eighth Day* fetches him National Book Prize. Wilder was born in Madison, Wisconsin, the son of newspaper owner Amos Parker Wilder and later-retired American diplomat Isabella Thornton Niven. Wilder had four siblings and a twin who died in childbirth. All the Wilder children who are still alive spent a portion of their early years in China, while their father served as the American Consul General in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Amos Niven Wilder, Thornton's older brother, rose to the Hollis position as deity professor at Harvard Divinity School. He was a well-known poet who contributed to the growth of theopoetic. Isabel Wilder, their sister, was a talented writer. They had two further sisters: zoologist Janet Wilder Dakin and poet Charlotte Wilder.

I. INTRODUCTION

Act 1: In Horace Vandergelder's Yonkers, Act 1 is set, New York, residence that is located above its feed store. Horace, a sixty-year-old scrooge, gets his hair trimmed while debating with Ambrose Kemper. Ambrose, an artist, has a strong desire to marry Ermengarde; she is Horace's niece by chance. Ermengarde was going to be secretly sent somewhere by Horace, but unfortunately, his deaf housekeeper inadvertently disclosed the precise whereabouts of the hidden place. Ermengarde is travelling to New York to see Flora Van Huysen, a family friend. Ambrose gives the housekeeper a heartfelt kiss as he departs. Horace gets dressed in the morning for a parade and in the afternoon for courting. Although he thinks marriage is for fools, he admits to the audience that he still plans to get married. To find a new wife, he enlisted the aid of Dolly Levi, a friend of his departed wife.

Dolly hears Ambrose pleading with Ermengarde to immediately elope with him as she arrives to see Horace. Ermengarde, on the other hand, desires a "proper" nuptial, replete with her uncle's approval. Dolly assures Ambrose that she will make the decision to ensure Ermengarde is sent back to her room to get dressed so that the young couple may have a formal wedding ceremony. Dolly's primary concern is not about adhering to traditional decorum, but rather ensuring that her miserly uncle gives Ermengarde her just fortune. Dolly admits to Ambrose that she is involved in their business not just for her own benefit but also for the pure pleasure of seeing Horace's money being distributed. Dolly gives Ambrose the go-ahead to join them for dinner this evening at the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant in New York City since she has come up with a scheme to bring Ermengarde to her home rather than Flora's. Dolly patiently awaits Horace's arrival in the living room, fully attired for the parade, after Ambrose has departed. He says he'll ask Irene Molloy to marry him. Dolly makes a "Miss Simple" for Horace to meet first because, as the audience can tell, she is upset by this revelation. Dolly, speaking to the crowd, unveils her plan to alter the decor of the living room, providing further evidence to support the rumor of her desire to marry Horace. She currently receives \$25 from Horace as



payment for her matching efforts. Dolly and Horace had already planned a meet-up at Irene's Hat Shop in New York in the afternoon, followed by dinner with Miss Simple at the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant. Cornelius Hackl has been "promoted" by Horace Ambrose is promoted to the position of head clerk, assuming control of the shop during Horace's absence in New York. However, Cornelius finds this bogus promotion annoying and is fed up with working long hours for meagre remuneration. He makes the decision to travel to New York with the younger worker, Barnaby, for an evening of leisure and entertainment. They had no idea that Horace had employed Malachi as a third clerk and had already dispatched him to New York to make choices.

Act 2: The second act occurs at Irene Molloy and Minnie's hat shop in New York, where they both work, one of the shop assistants, in a collaborative effort. Irene uses the same term "fools" that Horace does. However, Irene plans to wed Horace since she is tired of working and being alone. She, however, yearns for adventure much like Cornelius does. To escape "Wolf-trap," Barnaby and Cornelius walk inside Irene's shop and talk about Horace, who is getting out of a taxi outside. Irene and Cornelius appear to be drawn to one another, and Cornelius gives the impression that he is a wealthy man. Barnaby hides behind a table as Horace and Dolly explore the hat shop, while Cornelius hides in a wardrobe. Irene gives the two employees the time they need to leave the store by escorting Dolly and Horace to her workroom. However, Cornelius has developed feelings for Irene and is hesitant to go upon returning to the space, Dolly notices the presence of the men but remains silent as Irene and Horace join them. Irene, recognizing Cornelius, initiates a conversation, suspecting that they must be familiar with each other from their past time residing in Yonkers. She does not think Cornelius is the same person she has met when Horace claims he is his clerk. Dolly makes the case that Cornelius is living two lives—one as a quiet clerk during the day and another as a flamboyant businessman at night. She counsels Horace to take Cornelius on as a partner in his business. Then, due to the dust and aroma in their hiding spots, the two clerks begin to sneeze. Even though he still does not know who they are, Horace is astonished and humiliated to discover two guys hiding in the room. Dolly skillfully feigns surprise, matching Horace's astonishment at Irene's perceived "impropriety," and smoothly guides him towards the idea of dining with "Miss Simple." She does, however, covertly urge Irene to seize this chance for some lightheartedness. Irene desires Dolly, under the false impression that Cornelius is wealthy, persuades him and Barnaby to take her and Minnie out for supper. Unaware that he barely has enough money to get back to Yonkers, the act comes to an end as the four head to the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant.

Act 3: The scene occurs on the terrace of the New York restaurant Harmonia Gardens in the late afternoon. Horace is present, busy making arrangements for his evening with Miss Simple, aided by Malachi, his recently appointed clerk. To get to the restaurant, Ambrose and Ermengarde use Dolly's chauffeured taxi. Malachi swiftly pulls Horace behind a folding screen to enable them to listen to the other three characters taunting him. However, the instant Dolly becomes aware of Horace's presence; she promptly transitions from insulting him to offering compliments and expressing sympathy towards him. She then leads the young ones upstairs for dinner. Horace tips Malachi and the waiting cab driver as the young couple departs the restaurant. Dolly persuades the characters to go with her under the promise that he will take them to Flora Van Huysen's location and hold them there until Horace comes. Malachi is told not to let anybody else use the terrace while Horace departs to get ready for supper. Malachi and the cab driver have a fun conversation about their respective employment before going to the kitchen to get some whisky to prepare for the purpose of orchestrating the abduction; Dolly convinces them to accompany her to Flora Van Huysen's address. Irene, Minnie, Cornelius, and Barnaby arrive, and the group sits onto the porch and proceeds to place an extravagant order for food and champagne. The ladies engage in dancing, with Irene even sharing a kiss with Barnaby. However, a confrontation ensues when Malachi returns and attempts to clear the area on behalf of his employer. Subsequently, when Horace finally arrives, he expresses his dissatisfaction with the presence of other individuals in the room, The dilemma is resolved by a waiter opening the screen separating the two tables, but he is still unaware of their names. While waiting for Dolly to arrive with "Miss Simple," Horace takes a seat, engrossed in reading a newspaper, while casually discarding his purse onto the ground. Malachi stumbles upon the abandoned purse and proceeds to "return" it to Cornelius, rescuing him from the humiliation of not having enough money to pay for the expensive dinner. Cornelius learns that Malachi's boss, Horace, who happens to be on the other side of the screen, remains unseen. Irene becomes aware of this information as she takes her seat. Dolly makes an unexpected appearance and reveals that Miss Simple has eloped with someone else. She further states that Horace had inquired about marrying her, but she declined the offer. As they depart from the restaurant, Cornelius and Barnaby try to pass by Horace disguised as women. However, Horace quickly notices them and dismisses both. Horace has fired his employees and misplaced his purse as the curtain draws. Ambrose dragged his niece out after she passed out. Dolly yells at Horace to follow her outside the restaurant, asking, "Will you marry me now?" after noticing that entire he has lost.



Act 4: According to how Wilder closes this play, a person will be more kind to others in terms of both money and judgement if their life also includes love and fun in addition to job and money. According to a well-known saying, "A fool and his money are soon parted." Dolly, on the other hand, has discovered—and imparts to Horace acknowledges that the universal human desires for love, amusement, and wealth are inescapable. He recognizes that one can either choose to be a fool in the company of others who share similar foolishness or remain a fool in solitude. Giving up control over money is a requirement for becoming a fool among fools. Due to the fact that, in Dolly's words, "the difference between a little money and no money at all is enormous...and the difference between a little money and an enormous amount of money is very slight," By embracing balance, one may let go of the demand for security and advance with assurance. In other words, having too much money will not make you happier; you need to have enough to be happy.

II. CHARACTERS

Dolly Levi: Dolly Levi is a middle-aged widow who has made the decision to start over in life. She is a woman who loves life and is a matchmaker, meddlesome, and opportunistic. She was married to Ephram Levi, who passes away before the story's events, and is from Yonkers, New York. She continually meddles in the lives of others and is obnoxious and brassy. Her hometown loves her because of these characteristics. She meets Horace Vandergelder, a wealthy who runs a business in Yonkers' downtown, while working as a matchmaker. She makes several attempts to win his affection throughout the novel, most of which are fruitless. She also frequently paraphrases a proverb that belonged to her late husband:

Money is like manure. It's no good unless you spread it around.

August: At the restaurant in Harmonia Gardens, August is the younger waiter. He experiences such extreme anxiety that at the slightest provocation, he starts crying.

Cook: The cook for Miss Van Huysen had been waiting for Ermengarde all day with her. When someone approaches the house, she keeps an eye out the window and alerts Miss Van Huysen.

Ermengarde, Vandergelder's niece, struggles when it comes to making independent decisions. Despite this, she finds herself deeply in love with Ambrose, a suitor her uncle strongly opposes.

Minnie fay: Minnie, a worker at Mrs. Molloy's hat business, is shocked beyond belief that the elderly woman would ever consider marrying a guy who is not truly her true love. Minnie, not being very educated, had to ask if the Harmonia Gardens Restaurant is "what they call a cafe."

Gertrude: Vandergelder's housekeeper is Gertrude. According to the description, she is "eighty; deaf; half blind; and very pleased with herself." Gertrude thwarts the plan by revealing the intended destination in front of Ambrose while preparations are being made to take Ermengarde overseas in order to prevent her from marrying Ambrose.

Ambrose Kemper: Ambrose is a painter who aspires to wed Ermengarde, Vandergelder's niece. Vandergelder is against the marriage because the man is an artist and does not have a promising financial future. Ermengarde finds the thought of an elopement with Ambrose scandalous, which forces Ambrose to seek Dolly Levi's assistance. He eventually proposes to Ermengarde.

Cornelius Hackl: Cornelius, one of Vandergelder's clerks who is underpaid, reaches a point where he believes it is necessary to break free from the monotonous routine of his life and embark on his own thrilling adventure.

Mrs. Irene Molloy: Mrs. Irene Molloy, a milliner hailing from New York City, has been arranged as a prospective wife for Vandergelder.

Rudolph: Despite the primary characters of the play's humorous antics, Rudolph, a seasoned server at Harmonia Gardens Restaurant, maintains a sense of dignity. He has a pronounced German accent and a certain air of snobbery.

Joe Scanlon: A barber

Malachi Stack: The most recent addition to Vandergelder's staff of clerks, Malachi is frequently jobless.

Barnaby Tucker: Barnaby Tucker, another employee of Vandergelder's, is slightly younger than Hackl but shares his quest for adventure, accompanying him on their journey in search of excitement.

Flora Van Huysen: Miss Flora Van Huysen, a dear companion of Vandergelder's deceased wife.

Horace Vandergelder: Horace Vandergelder, a middle-aged merchant hailing from Yonkers, New York, is notorious for his frugality and tightfisted nature. Despite his niece reaching the legal age of marriage, he staunchly opposes her union. To find himself a wife, he has, however.



III. THEMES

Love and Romance: The play's quest of love and passion is one of its major themes.

Social Class and Money: Another important theme in "The Matchmaker" is the influence of social class and money on relationships.

Self-Discovery and Transformation: Throughout the play, several characters undergo self-discovery and transformation.

The Power of Deception and Appearance: "The Matchmaker" explores the theme of deception and the impact of appearances. Characters often hide their true selves or manipulate situations to achieve their desired outcomes.

The Role of Fate and Coincidence: Wilder incorporates the theme of fate and coincidence in the play. Characters find themselves in unexpected situations and chance encounters, leading to surprising outcomes.

IV. STYLE

A soliloquy is a theatrical device where a character addresses the audience while either being alone on stage or disregarding the presence of other characters who are unaware of their speech. In *The Matchmaker*, Wilder has various characters who deliver soliloquies.

Subplot: If Horace Vandergelder and Dolly Levi's odd courting is the play's major plot, the other two romances must be viewed as supporting characters. Both might be eliminated without significantly altering the play.

Denouement: The French word "denouement" implies "the unravelling." It's a term used in literature to describe what follows following the story's climax. The last few chapters of *The Matchmaker* are obviously there to wrap things up. The play ends with Barnaby returning from the kitchen with news rather than with action.

V. CONCLUSION

Thornton Wilder's play "The Matchmaker" follows the traditional format of a farce, using well-known comedy methods such as characters concealing themselves in closets and beneath tables, males hiding as ladies in a complicated scheme to reconcile young lovers, and culminating in a joyful conclusion where three couples are united with plans for marriage. Since Wilder was the first to admit and name the sources from which he took inspiration, these traditional components of the play shouldn't come as a surprise.

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