The Matchmaker
By Thornton Wilder
Directed by Irene Lewis
The Pearlstone Theater
Sept 10–Oct 12, 2008

Next Stage Resource Guide
On the wall outside the office of Artistic Director Irene Lewis is a 3’x5’ blow-up of the devastating reviews given Henrik Ibsen’s dramatic masterpiece, Ghosts. A remnant of a long-forgotten lobby display for the show’s 1994 CENTERSTAGE production, the poster serves as a daily reminder of the folly of any artist living or dying by critical response—and informs Lewis’s steadfast insistence on keeping a healthy sense of perspective about her work.

“I give my total concentration to each production I direct. I don’t care if it’s a musical or Shakespeare, each one is special to me; each one gets the same amount of care, preparation, attention to casting, and use of my imagination. And I’ve found that, for each show, there’s someone who will say it’s my best and someone who says it’s my worst. I ignore both comments and don’t read the reviews.” Of course, not every artist feels the same way. “Some organizations blow up the good reviews and put them in the lobby. My feeling: if you believe the good, you believe the bad.”

This doesn’t mean Lewis is unconcerned about her audience’s reaction to CENTERSTAGE’s work. On the contrary, it’s her way of protecting it. “I don’t think we should be telling our patrons what someone else thought of a play—that circumvents their own power to decide for themselves. Let people have their own experience, make up their own minds. We have a smart, intellectually curious audience—they don’t need to be told what to think.” In fact, patron reaction to a bad review is often the most passionate. “I can’t tell you the number of times someone has stopped me after one of our productions has been hit over the head in the press. They have to make sure I know how much the show meant to them and marvel that anyone could have felt differently. Of course, I have to take the praise as skeptically as I take the criticism. But I enjoy their passion about expressing a different view.”

Still, doesn’t it sting just a little to have a labor of love criticized in such a public way? “A director works with many artists on each show and—as a collective group—we do our own analyzing, judging, and speculating about the piece. Sometimes hindsight makes us wonder what changes we’d make if we were to do it again. So in actuality, we do our own internal ‘reviews’.

“Ultimately though, predicting the reaction to a work of art—if created with integrity and brought to life with passion and vigor—can’t be your primary consideration as an artist. And quite frankly, after all these years, I find it impossible to predict anything!”

——Barbara Watson, Director of Audience Development

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Next Stage: The Matchmaker
The Matchmaker
By Thornton Wilder
The Pearlstone Theater
Sept 10–Oct 12, 2008

The CAST (in alphabetical order)
Craig Bockhorn*  Joe/Cabman
Michael Braun*  Cornelius Hackl
Edward Gero*  Horace Vandergelder
Celia Howard*  Gertrude/Cook
Peter Mark Kendall  August
Garrett Neergaard*  Barnaby Tucker
Caitlin O’Connell*  Dolly Levi
Laurence O’Dwyer*  Malachi Stack
Pamela Payton-Wright*  Flora Van Huysen
Jake Riggs  Rudolph
Lee Aaron Rosen*  Ambrose Kemper
Keri Setaro*  Minnie Fay
Kate Turnbull*  Irene Molloy
Zoë Winters*  Ermengarde
Mike Schleifer*  Stage Manager
Jason Linett*  Assistant Stage Manager

*I Member of Actors’ Equity Association

Irene Lewis  Director
Riccardo Hernández  Scenic Designer
Candice Donnelly  Costume Designer
Pat Collins  Lighting Designer
John Gromada  Music Composition/Sound Designer
J. Allen Suddeth  Fight Director
Kenneth L. Roberson  Choreographer
James Magruder  Production Dramaturg
Larry Cione  Music Director
Janet Foster  Casting Director
Laura Hackman  Local Casting Consultant

SETTING:
Various locations in Yonkers and lower Manhattan, the early 1890s

There will be one 15-minute intermission

PLEASE TURN OFF OR SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES.

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KPMG  DLA Piper
The Romans called it *contaminatio*. Later ages referred to it as “borrowing.” Film buffs speak of “homages.” Entertainment lawyers craft terms like “From an idea by...” or “Co-conceived by...” so as to avoid, in our exceedingly litigious day and age, actionable charges of “Plagiarized by...” or “Ripped off from...”

Thornton Wilder, theatrical omnivore, knew better than most that—when it comes to comic plots, characters, and ideas—there is really very little new under the sun. In the 1957 Preface to his edition of *Three Plays*, he wrote: “Literature has always more resembled a torch race than a furious dispute among heirs.” All this to say that there are a lot of torches behind the enduring success of *The Matchmaker*.

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**1835** John Oxenford, noted man of letters and future drama critic of the *London Times*, writes *A Day Well Spent*, an unassuming one-act farce. The plot revolves around the mischievous duo of Bolt and Mizzle, clerks to a country merchant, who have a spree in London. Their journey survives a hundred years later in the shape of Cornelius and Barnaby’s adventures in Manhattan. Unlike Wilder’s retracing of the elemental city mouse-country mouse story, *A Day Well Spent* contains not one ounce of philosophy, unusual coming from a man who translated Goethe and championed Schopenhauer.

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**1842** Johann Nepomuk Nestroy, the “Aristophanes of Vienna,” adapts *A Day Well Spent* into the full-length folk satire, *Einen Jux will er sich machen* (loosely, *He Wants to Have A Good Time*). Oxenford’s country boss becomes Zangler, a suburban spice merchant desperate to keep his niece out of the hands of August Sonders, a headstrong young lover. Working for Zangler is a cast of servants that includes the hard-of-hearing Gertrude and the itinerant Melchior, an unheeded font of wisdom. Abetting the dénouement is Zangler’s sister-in-law, Fräulein von Blumenblatt, whose parlor serves as the set in the final act. Sprinkled throughout the play are satiric songs and soliloquies that paint capitalism and bourgeois society in a critical light.

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Johann Nestroy (on the left) performing in *The Slovenly Threesome*, his first popular success from 1833.
1938 After the opening of *Our Town*, Wilder repairs to Tucson, Arizona to finish work on *The Merchant of Yonkers*, his new version of *Einen Jux*... Oxenford’s clerks-on-a-spree and Nestroy’s Herr Zangler are joined by Wilder’s pivotal addition to the cast: Dolly Gallagher Levi, a Jill-of-all-trades matchmaker who is herself a descendent of Molière’s Frosine from *The Miser*. After a tryout in Boston, *Merchant* opens on Broadway in late December to poor notices. Sluggish direction (by Max Reinhardt, a German genius-in-exile and boyhood hero of Wilder), a miscast Dolly, and a critical public perhaps unprepared for an optimistic romantic farce after the somber *Our Town* help close the play after a mere 39 performances.

1951 Actress Ruth Gordon, casting about for a vehicle with which to re-conquer London theater, suggests to her dear friend “Thornie” that he rewrite and revive *The Merchant of Yonkers*—with her playing Dolly, a role she had turned down in 1938.

1954 Rehearsals for the newly titled *The Matchmaker* begin in the summer, yet during the process, most of Wilder’s rewrites are rejected in favor of the original *Merchant* text. Tyrone Guthrie’s fleet-footed, tongue-in-cheek staging and Gordon’s eccentric comic turn make *The Matchmaker* a grand success in Newcastle-on-Tyne, Edinburgh, and then London’s West End, where it opens in November.

1955 Gordon and most of the London cast take *The Matchmaker* to New York, where it again triumphs and runs for 486 performances, Wilder’s longest Broadway run.

1958 Shirley Booth, Shirley MacLaine, and Anthony Perkins star in the Joseph Anthony film adaptation of *The Matchmaker*. Every now and then, the actors directly address the camera. Not a good idea. Not a rental.

1960 Legendary theatrical producer David Merrick (aka “The Abominable Showman”), recognizing the life force in Dolly Levi and her vehicle, options the rights to turn *The Matchmaker* into a musical comedy.

1964 After a troubled tryout period, the Jerry Herman/Michael Stewart musical *A Damned Exasperating Woman* morphs into *Hello, Dolly!* and re-conquers New York, running for seven years with a series of stars in the title role. Its phenomenal success is kind to Wilder’s bank balance but casts an enduring shadow over its less rowdy and more philosophical source material.

1968 Barbra Streisand and Walter Matthau play Dolly and Horace in the even louder and noisier film version of *Hello, Dolly!*

1981 British playwright Tom Stoppard, whose intellect and theatrical savvy are at least the equal of Thornton Wilder’s, revisits Nestroy and creates *On the Razzle*, his own version of *Einen Jux*... which retains the Viennese setting and opens at the National Theatre in London. It has, at this writing, yet to be made into a musical, film, film musical, or reality show.
Born in Wisconsin in 1897, American writer Thornton Wilder enjoyed a long, protean, and wonderfully peripatetic life. His bookish boyhood was spent partly in China, where his father Amos served as Consul General, and partly in Berkeley, California, where he attended progressive schools and enjoyed a steady diet of stock melodramas, thrillers, and farces at Ye Liberty Theatre in Oakland, as well as the occasional serious play produced at the Greek Theatre at U.C. Berkeley.

For most of his literary career, he tended to alternate between fiction and drama. As a teenager, he began with three-minute plays. After graduating from Yale College in 1920 with a B.A. in English, he spent a year in Rome at the American Academy, where he acquired Italian as well as the material for his first novel, The Cabal. After publishing two more novels, including The Bridge of San Luis Rey (1928), which earned him the first of his three Pulitzer Prizes, he returned to the dramatic form. Influenced by the consciously theatrical works of Pirandello and the German Expressionists, he wrote a series of longer one-acts, among them The Long Christmas Dinner and Pullman Car Hiawatha, which were produced at CENTERSTAGE in the 2000–01 season.

Wilder traveled frequently throughout Europe and the Americas, where he seemed to meet everyone worth knowing. His friendships with Gertrude Stein and James Joyce influenced the composition of his two Pulitzer Prize plays, Our Town (1938) and The Skin of Our Teeth (1942). After publishing the novel The Ides of March in the late Forties, Wilder reworked his failed romantic farce, The Merchant of Yonkers (1938), into the highly successful The Matchmaker (1954) and completed a final full-length play, The Alcestiad (1955).

A brilliant lecturer, he taught at the Lawrenceville School, the University of Chicago, and in 1950–51 he was the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard. He proudly served in the Air Force Intelligence Unit in World War II and, in addition to many awards and honorary degrees, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963. He died at home in Hamden, Connecticut in December of 1975.

Farce is a genre that gets a bad rap, and you can see why. Its scenes are a crazy quilt of slamming doors, men hiding in closets, and constant cross-dressing. To a disapproving eye, the form is shallow; to a puritanical one, it’s positively pornographic. And yet, for the dramatic frame of *The Merchant of Yonkers*—written mere months after *Our Town* premiered on Broadway—Thornton Wilder rejected the famously unadorned stage that had surprised and charmed audiences in his previous triumph, choosing instead to play within the sandbox of this gleefully lowbrow, vigorously knockabout genre. Why would Wilder forsake the poetic heights of *Our Town*’s final act, a graveyard scene that brilliantly distills the eternity of the cosmos, for the quotidian bluster of farce? And in Yonkers, of all places!

Farce’s low reputation may also stem from its plainspoken ability to appeal throughout the ages to audiences of all kinds—precisely the qualities that Wilder admired and sought to recreate. Its golden ages tend to accompany eras in which the little man attained a sense of self, and its artistic homes have traditionally been of the low-rent variety. Never was this truer than in the 19th and early 20th Centuries—the period from which Wilder draws the sources and setting of *The Merchant of Yonkers*, which would become *The Matchmaker*.

In the Paris of Feydeau and Labiche, the Vienna of Raimund and Nestroy, or the flickering silent films of Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, the little man occupied the center of the frame, in the midst of a relentlessly moving, stimulatingly chaotic world. It was an increasingly industrial age, and the form consequently became mechanized. A good farce began to resemble a dramaturgical dynamo—an energy generator of reversals in action that hurtles ever faster toward a pleasingly inevitable catastrophe.

In *The Matchmaker*, Thornton Wilder preserves farce’s social reach and inherent vigor, but he was wary of its mechanical imperative. As he writes in an illuminating essay, *Noting the Nature of Farce*, the genre’s twin drives toward “logic and objectivity” leave no room for the human. “A ‘pure’ farce would be all pattern and would admit no mixture,” and it would “dare not lean too far toward the exposition of character.” Uninterested in building robots, Wilder characteristically retains the unpretentious style of *Our Town*, and its cast of ordinary Americans, and revs up the comic engine. As a result, *The Matchmaker*, for all its brazen swagger, contains emotional truths just as rich and resonant as those in his previous work. Everyone recognizes Cornelius’s youthful elation when he describes the fascinating woman he’s just met, or can empathize with older characters who still yearn for some sensation with their sensibility. “My play is about the aspirations of the young (and not only the young) for a fuller, freer participation in life,” Wilder wrote of *The Matchmaker* in the 1956 preface to his *Three Plays*, concluding with an extended comparison between his creation and Johann Nestroy’s original text:

> Imagine an Austrian pharmacist going to the shelf to draw from a bottle which he knows to contain a stinging corrosive liquid, guaranteed to remove warts and wens; and imagine his surprise when he discovers that it has been filled overnight with very American birch-bark beer.

Wilder’s treatment is an altogether different chemical composition—modeled on its forebear but infused with the vitality of the New World, as sweet as it is sharp.
by James Magruder, Production Dramaturg

In Book Two of Democracy in America (1840), under the heading Some Observations on the Drama amongst Democratic Nations, Alexis de Toqueville opines:

There are no dramatic subjects in a country which has witnessed no great political catastrophes and in which love invariably leads by a straight and easy road to matrimony. People who spend every day in the week in making money, and the Sunday in going to church, have nothing to invite the Muse of Comedy.

As befits a biased French aristocrat, de Toqueville’s tone is snobby, but as any poli-sci student will tell you, he remains, after almost 170 years, distressingly current about too many aspects of the American scene. Here, on the subject of theater, he’s wrong for once. Although he can be excused the jape about ‘no great political catastrophes,’ as the Civil War is twenty years in the future, he clearly doesn’t realize that “people who spend every day in the week in making money” are practically begging Thalia to throw a banana peel under their wingtips. De Toqueville must not have met on his travels through the young republic the ancestors of George Kelly’s Aubrey Piper or David Mamet’s Richard Roma or, more to the point, Thornton Wilder’s Horace Vandergelder, the eponymous Merchant of Yonkers.

In a 1936 letter to actress Ruth Gordon, whose Dolly Levi would eventually filch the play’s title away from Horace, Wilder writes, à propos of the Merchant-in-vitro: “I’ve been reading all the great ‘formal’ comedies in every language: Molière and Goldoni, and Lessing—just to make sure that I’ve expunged every lurking vestige of what Sam Behrman and George Kaufman think comedy is.”

S.N. Behrman wrote mild comedies of manners and Kaufman traded in satire. Wilder, typically, is looking far beyond the drawing room and the topical headlines that fueled the work of these commercially successful playwrights in order to drink from the deepest possible dramatic well. (That he could read the three authors he mentions in their original French, Italian, and German is already wildly un-American.) He knew that money—its getting and spending—has been one of the three comic motivators since the Greeks. (Food and sex round out the triumvirate.) To craft his “formal” farce, Wilder hews Horace out of classical bedrock, borrows features from his dramatic sources Oxenford and Nestroy, then finishes the surface with the vernacular and values of 19th-century American thrift.

The very first line in the play is a deliberate nod to ancient comic laws:

HORACE: (loudly) “I tell you for the hundredth time you will never marry my niece.”

Horaces always say that, but then the laws of comedy and human nature take over and prove them wrong at the end of one crazy day in the Roman Forum or, in this case, the
lower tip of Manhattan in 1890. An obstacle to love and freedom, blind to his effect on others, fond of saying that the world is getting crazier every minute, Horace is every fiscal conservative who’s trod the boards since Euclio in Plautus’ *Pot of Gold* circa 200 B.C.

Wilder shrewdly keeps Horace in the middle of the socioeconomic scale: a merchant is a more imposing Yankee than a shopkeeper, but he’s less than a tycoon. Vandergelder remains in daily physical contact with the source of his livelihood, and he still keeps the books. In America, whose limitless resources and less straitlaced society made it the Land of Get Rich Quick practically from its discovery, Vandergelder got rich slow. His fortune is the reward of getting up at five in the morning six days a week and shutting the store at ten at night. His is a voice of cautious spleen, and given the national rate of individual savings in 2008, he can even make sense (see below.)

But something is different the morning the play opens. Vandergelder has put aside “the last dollar of his first half million” and is looking for a second wife, both to run the business with them. I don’t keep accounts with functional brain cells. Though Dolly is a realist who knows that two and two make four, life has endowed her with a suspicious counter-wisdom and the post-marital project of letting Horace’s wealth flow like “rain water amongst the dressmakers and restaurants and cabmen,” with herself as spigot.

Enter Dolly Gallagher Levi: matchmaker, Horace’s old friend, and a near-relation to Wilder’s other brilliant Stage Managers in *Pullman Car Hiawatha, The Happy Journey From Trenton to Camden,* and *Our Town.* She too bears classical lineage. In tragedy, she’s the *nutrix* or nurse figure who tends to give catastrophically bad advice to her mistress. (“Why not tell your stepson, Phaedra, that you’re in love with him?” is a shining example.) In *commedia dell’arte* and its scripted descendents, she is the wily Colombina, who abets young lovers and thwarts their tyrannical fathers. Moreover, Colombina is often the only one onstage with functional brain cells.

Putatively engaged in finding a suitable wife for Horace, Dolly decides to save him for his own good, and more important, for his own good. When Wilder began writing the play in the mid-1930s, the world was slowly emerging from the Great Depression. Western societies had been flouting—and their literatures flouting more seriously still—with the socialist economic alternative. Though Dolly is a realist who knows that two and two make four, life has endowed her with a suspicious counter-wisdom and the post-marital project of letting Horace’s wealth flow like “rain water amongst the dressmakers and restaurants and cabmen,” with herself as spigot.

Dolly as radical socialist would be the stuff of satire à la Kaufman and Hart. Her challenge, to redeem Horace and return him to the human race, generates a lot of laughter—money is funny after all—but Wilder doesn’t soothe his bourgeois audience with the stage bromides that so fatigued his spirit and intellect as a young man. *The Matchmaker* does not say that money won’t buy happiness. Or that you can live on love. Ambrose and Ermengarde, and the suddenly smitten Cornelius and Irene might think so, but Dolly knows better:

> Yes, we’re all fools and we’re all in danger of destroying the world with our folly. But the surest way to keep up out of harm is to give us the four or five human pleasures that are our right in the world—and that takes a little money!

While conceding Horace’s point about human folly, Dolly’s knowledge of the pleasure principle and the money it takes to enjoy it is powerful counterweight to his dour life of Dutch-American industry and thrift. Her campaign to save him over a chicken dinner at the Harmonia Gardens—served with farcical stage business, reverse psychology, and the telling of some hard truths—is the emotional linchpin of the play and a high spot in American comedy. Can Horace be made to dance again? Can he move his feet to the tune of something larger than himself?

*Mederan agan* reads one of the legends carved on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. It means “nothing in excess” and is one of the touchstones of Greek civilization. The ancient authors decreed that the function of comedy is to correct, through painstaking observation, the excesses of behavior in the average man. Molière’s Harpagon, Terence’s Euclio, and all the Pantalones in *commedia dell’arte* stand corrected but unchanged at the fall of their curtains. That Horace Vandergelder loses his purse and gains a heart is Wilder’s chief deviation from classical dramaticurgy, and a fitting one for America, de Toqueville’s bootstraps democracy built on the promise of personal transformation.

*Mederan agan.* Just enough money. Just enough change. And just, as Barnaby says at play’s end, the right amount of adventure. That Dolly and Horace are able to come together as human partners is the longest and happiest adventure in the play, whether it’s called *The Merchant of Yonkers* or *The Matchmaker.* It merits both titles.

**WOLF-TRAP’S WISDOM**

*Unlike current baby-boomers, Horace Vandergelder clearly won’t be caught short at retirement time.*

*1* A living is made, Mr. Kemper, by selling something that everybody needs at least once a year. Yes, sir! And a million is made by producing something that everybody needs every day. You artists produce something that nobody needs at any time.

*2* Expectations! We merchants don’t do business with them. I don’t keep accounts with people who promise somehow to pay something someday, and I don’t allow my niece to marry such people.

*3* A man’s not worth a cent until he’s forty. We just pay ‘em wages to make mistakes—don’t we, Joe?

*4* In order to run a house well, a woman must have the feeling that she owns it. Marriage is a bribe to make a housekeeper think she’s a householder.

*5* You pay those girls of yours too much. You pay them as much as men. Girls like that enjoy their work. Wages, Mrs. Molloy, are paid to make people do work they don’t want to do.

Next Stage: *The Matchmaker*
The Gilded Age & The Empire City

by Drew Lichtenberg, Associate Dramaturg

One of Dolly Levi’s wishes in *The Matchmaker* is that New York cease to be a city of “tired, nervous ants” and metamorphose into a happy city like her beloved Ephraim’s Vienna—a place of beauty and culture. It’s a trickier negotiation than she might care to admit. She knows it takes money; but, because this is farce, she doesn’t add that New York’s cultural growth, then as now, depends upon turning a blind eye to political corruption, ethnic hatred, and brutal extremes of wealth. Commonly known as the Gilded Age, the period between 1873 and 1893 was a kind one to Gotham City, which during these years began to emerge as the global metropolis it remains today. It was an era in which a confluence of factors—exponential population growth, massive waves of immigration, rapidly increasing industry—gave rise to visible landmarks and tangible conflicts.
The Gilded Age & The Empire City
by Drew Lichtenberg, Associate Dramaturg

and Catholic

The Tammany Hall Tweed, ruler of city's Orange riots,

1871 Cornelius “The Commodore” Vanderbilt designs and builds Grand Central Depot at 42nd Street and Park Avenue in order to compete with his archrival, the Pennsylvania Railroad. Vanderbilt would die in 1877, worth over 100 million dollars—at the time, the richest man in American history.

1871 Police open fire on an angry mob of Irish Catholics and Protestants in the city’s Orange riots, killing 51. Boss Tweed, ruler of the Tammany Hall political machine and Catholic sympathizer, is busted for graft by the New York Times as a direct result of the public outcry.

1872 The New York Elevated Railway Company is formed, expanding from a stretch on Greenwich Street and Ninth Avenue up to 30th Street. By 1876, elevated railways extend from the Battery to 61st Street. Horse-drawn carriages, as a result, are increasingly used by only the wealthy.

1873 Central Park, designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, is completed in midtown Manhattan. Olmsted sought to emulate the idyllic landscapes and civic parks he saw on a trip to Europe in 1850. The park was conceived as a new, democratic kind of public space—a man-made nature where New Yorkers of every class could seek a respite from urban overcrowding.

1876 To mark the American Centennial of 1876, France presents the United States with a gift: the Statue of Liberty.

1882 Working with the Central Labor Union of New York, carpenter Peter J. McGuire and machinist Matthew Maguire organized the country’s first Labor Day parade—10,000 people take to the streets on September 5th. By 1887, President Cleveland officially supports the holiday, perhaps wishing to divert attention from Chicago’s bloody Haymarket Riot of the year before.

1883 Alva and William Vanderbilt celebrate their new mansion on Fifth Avenue by spending a quarter of a million dollars on the most elaborate costume ball the city has yet seen. Sister-in-law Alice Vanderbilt comes dressed as “Electric Light” in a blinding white gown embroidered with diamonds, while her hostess Alva dresses as a Venetian princess, surrounded by a fluttering flock of real doves; Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor’s eventual appearance signifies that the upstart Vanderbilt clan has finally crashed the most tightly guarded social circle in the city.

1883 After 13 years of construction, the Brooklyn Bridge opens on May 24th, to reported traffic of 1,800 vehicles and 150,300 people. The largest suspension bridge in the world at the time, it also establishes an unprecedented means of pedestrian travel between Manhattan and Brooklyn.

1886 New York garment workers win the right to unionize July 25th, after a seven-month strike, securing agreements for a closed shop and the firing of all scabs.

1890 Garment workers win the right to unionize July 25th, after a seven-month strike, securing agreements for a closed shop and the firing of all scabs.

1892 The Ellis Island federal immigration station opens on New Year’s Day. Today, over 40 percent of America’s population can trace their ancestry through the small island.

1896 Captain Paul Boynton’s Sea Lion Park, the first amusement park at Coney Island, opens its doors, sparking a chain reaction of similar entertainments. A round-trip trolley ticket over the Brooklyn Bridge costs only 10 to 15 cents, making outer-borough travel possible for the masses.

1898 The modern city of New York is formed, with Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island, the Bronx, and Queens uniting as the Five Boroughs.

1902 The modern city of New York is formed, with Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island, the Bronx, and Queens uniting as the Five Boroughs.

1904 The modern city of New York is formed, with Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island, the Bronx, and Queens uniting as the Five Boroughs.
They got here before the English, but didn’t put up much of a fight when it came time to leave. What have the Dutch done for America anyway?

A. tulips & ice-skating
B. Droste cocoa
C. the mercantile underpinnings of New York City
D. a tradition of cultural pluralism and religious tolerance
E. smoky study-abroad semesters in Amsterdam
F. Kathryn Van Winkle
G. all of the above

The answer is G! All of the above owe their place in American life to the 17th-century Dutch colonists of “New Netherland.”

In 1626, the Dutch West India Company “purchased” Manhattan from the local Lenape tribe for 60 guilders (famously a steal even then), adding the land to the nascent New Amsterdam colony. The choice of name was an apt one, as the Dutch colonial mission—focused on profit instead of religious conversion—matched the status of Amsterdam as a center of world finance. By the late 19th Century, New York was on its way to usurping its former namesake’s place as a center of international commerce. The Matchmaker, like its setting, readily offers up traces of New York’s Dutch legacy. >>>
1. It’s no accident that the Dutch names Vandergelder and Van Huyse roughly translate to “of the guilder” and “of the house.” Wilder writes Horace Vandergelder as a Dutch-American Pantalone, or Mr. Moneybags, while Flora Van Huyse’s house on 8 Jackson Street, in today’s Lower East Side, looms large throughout the play: first as a threat of exile, finally as a space of protection and fulfillment. Her home could conceivably have been inhabited by her New Amsterdam ancestors as early as the 1640s.

2. Wilder’s characters journey from Yonkers but never leave old New Netherland. The land on which modern-day Yonkers stands dates back to New York City’s pre-English colonial past. In 1646, Adriaen Van der Donck acquired the land, which soon came to be called “De Jonkheers”—meaning the estate of the young lord—which in turn eventually became Yonkers.

3. The Battery’s name derives from the artillery batteries first stationed at the southern tip of the island of Manhattan in 1683. In the 19th Century, the street was a popular promenade with a spectacular view of the busy harbor. Wall Street, on the other hand, took its name from the literal wall that marked the northern boundary of the original Dutch settlement.

4. The Dutch didn’t neglect the other boroughs: Brooklyn began as Breuckelen, a town chartered by the Dutch West India Company. Jonas Bronck, a Dutch sea captain, acquired 500 acres on the mainland between the Harlem and the Aquahung Rivers. The latter came to be called “Bronck’s River,” or...The Bronx.

5. Harlem, Coney Island, and the Bowery, like countless other nearby place names, hark back to old Holland. The Dutch city Haarlem lost an ‘a’ in the Atlantic Ocean; Conyne Eylandt was once overrun with rabbits (whose Dutch name conyne also yields “coney” in English slang); and the pear tree Peter Stuyvesant brought from Holland in 1647 and planted on his farm—or bouwerij—bore fruit until 1867.

6. Cornelius Vanderbilt, real-life contemporary of Horace Vandergelder and fellow self-made man, was a railroad and shipping magnate. Beginning life as the great-great-great-grandson of an indentured servant from the Dutch village De Bilt, by the 1880s Vanderbilt had become the second-wealthiest American ever. Vandergelder, who enjoys a privileged status as the “first citizen of Yonkers,” is a small-town version of Vanderbilt and other Dutch-Anglo pillars of the community, such as the Stuyvesants, Roosevelts, Van Rensselaers, Van Burens, and Van Cortlandts.

7. Ice skates were designed by the Dutch. This winter exercise famously endures at the outdoor skating rink at Rockefeller Center in Midtown Manhattan.

8. The New York Knicks are named for Father Knickerbocker, a comic Washington Irving pen-name and character, the Dutch founder of New York’s first prominent family. Like the New York Mets, the Knicks’ orange, blue, and white uniforms are the official colors of New York City—and of the United Netherlands in the year 1625.


10. Does Vandergelder remind you of your own boss? Even if you don’t have it as bad as Cornelius and Barnaby, you’ve got the Manhattan Dutch to thank (or blame) for the term, which derives from baas (overseer).
Vandergelder’s niece Ermengarde has led a sheltered life, safely tucked away in Yonkers under her uncle’s guardianship, but dangers to her chastity and reputation lurk everywhere. Lest she stray, plenty of etiquette manuals and popular novels offered lurid examples and stern warnings about the “good girl’s” fall from grace. Even a respectable widow like Irene Molloy has to worry about attending a restaurant or the opera without jeopardizing her good name.

“But, Ambrose, a girl can’t go on a train with a man. I can see you don’t know anything about girls.”

—Ermengarde

“According to the rules of etiquette a young lady cannot travel alone with the young man to whom she is engaged, nor stay at the same hotel with him, nor go to theaters, concerts and parties alone with him.”

—Social Customs, 1911

“We don’t care what Uncle’d say—we’re eloping.”

—Ambrose Kemper

“Never do any thing that is disapproved by your parents or guardians. They desire your happiness, and will not deprive you of any enjoyment, unless they see good reason for it. They look beyond the present, to see what influence these things will have on your character and happiness hereafter.”

—How to be a Lady: a Book for Girls, 1850

“‘Ambrose Kemper! How can you use such an awful word!’
Ermengarde

“A lady should never seem to understand an indelicate expression, much less use one.”

—The Lady’s Guide to Perfect Gentility, 1856

“Oh, Ambrose! I see you don’t understand anything about weddings. Ambrose, don’t you respect me?”

—Ermengarde

“When a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse. Of an intermediate balance, under the circumstances, there is no possibility.”

—Theodore Dreiser’s Sister Carrie, set in 1900

“Either I marry Horace Vandergelder, or I break out of this place like a fire engine. I’ll go to every theater and ball and opera in New York City.”—Irene Molloy

“The theater will never be reformed. The truly refined despise it, the wise and the good abhor it. It must find its support among the thoughtless, the ignorant, and the vicious. It must be indecent or die.”

—Popular Amusements, 1869

“Now, Ermengarde, dear, there’s nothing wicked about eating in a restaurant. There’s nothing wicked, even, about being in New York.”—Dolly Levi

“Reject such amusements as are generally associated with evil. If the influences which surround any practice are bad, you may justly conclude that it is unsafe, without stopping to inquire into the nature of the practice itself. Dancing is associated with balls, with late hours, high and unnatural excitement, and dissipation; it is therefore unsafe. You may know the character of any amusement by the company in which it is found.”

—How to be a Lady: a Book for Girls, 1850

Happy Homes
And the Hearts That Make Them
A three-block street on the lower East Side of Manhattan between Delancey St. and the East River, Jackson Street could conceivably have been inhabited by Flora Van Huysen’s Dutch ancestors in the New Amsterdam of the 1640s.

A Day Well Spent
John Oxenford’s 1835 one-act farce, upon which Nestroy’s A Day Well Spent centers on two servants, Bolt and Mizzle, who would mutate eventually into Cornelius and Barnaby. In all three examples—A Day Well Spent, Einen Jux will er sich machen, and The Matchmaker—the illicit thrill of servants running around in ladies’ garment shops is retained.

A chicken wouldn’t hurt
For the overwhelming extent of its history, America has been a beef-eating country. In fact, Americans would not consume more more chicken per capita than beef until 1990. This is partially due to cultural inheritance (the English diet revolves similarly around the cow), but mostly owing to the convenience of raising and slaughtering cows in pre- and early-industrial America. Before 1930, chicken meat in the United States was largely generated through the results of local egg production on small farms spread throughout the country, slaughterhouses were located in the places of consumption, and New York comprised the sole retail market in the country. Chicken populations were thus unstable, subject to the whims of small farm life. “Broilers,” or young, undersized chickens, were considered a seasonal delicacy, byproducts of the “spring hatch.” In the late 19th century, chicken was a delicacy for the rich. Accompanied by a bottle of wine in an urban setting, it would have been seen as distinctly continental and cosmopolitan in contrast to the staid traditional American dinner of beef and beer at the homestead.

A girl can’t go on a train with a man
Women who traveled on trains in the late 19th century found themselves in a strange world somewhere between the public and private. Many railroads made efforts to accommodate female passengers by creating separate cars exclusively for ladies and children, providing them with a public space where “decent” women could escape exposure to male passengers. This gender deference was essentially a form of segregation, not dissimilar to the Jim Crow laws segregating blacks and whites in post-Reconstruction America. The proliferation of Pullman sleeping cars after the 1870s, complete with middle-class décor in the interiors, created semi-domesticated spaces in which “respectable” men and women could travel alongside each other. Still, trains remained uncomfortable places in which the public and private spheres intersected ambiguously.

A woman in business
From 1880 to 1930, the number of women in the workforce increased from 2.6 million to 10.8 million, and the number of women employed grew almost twice as fast as the female population. As independent widows, free from the constraints of family and sexual roles expected of the majority of Victorian women, Irene Molloy and Dolly embody the changing times. They have freedoms previously unfathomable, yet they are likewise forced into work to support themselves.

All millineresses are suspected of being wicked women
Milliners were originally sellers and manufacturers of female wares, accessories, and apparel. The word is a bastardization of Milaner or Milener, as such items were associated with the expensive dressmakers in the city of Milan. Over time the term came to mean a person who designs, makes, and sells women’s hats. The association of milliners with prostitutes or “fallen women” in English literature of the period was a longstanding cliché: Charles Dickens’s 1839 novel, Nicholas Nickleby, uses the term as a direct euphemism, and Friedrich Engels’s Condition of the Working Class in England (1844) paints a desolate picture of economically dependent seamstresses as a factor for the rise of the proletariat. In many ways, this depiction arose because of the occupation’s ambiguous social standing. Milliners were not only highly visible symbols of the rising middle-class, a subject sure to make the upper classes uneasy, but they also dealt in eroticized female commerce. And unlike their fellow female workers in industrial factories, milliners retained an aura of domesticity and femininity that was troubling to many when translated into the public sphere of work. Finally and perhaps most importantly, milliners possessed the means to clothe themselves as “decent,” upper-class women; the idea that a working-class woman could raise her status in society by merely adopting the disguise of an elegant dress and hat was seen as threatening to the very idea of the social fabric. To the frightened Victorian mind, a seamstress was to be either a potential revolutionary or, worse, a prostitute, though Irene Molloy is notably neither.

Ambrose
An English herb, usually used as a synonym for Wood Sage (Teucrium Scorodonia). Ambrose shares a common root with the mythical Ambrosia plant, which was alternately the food, fruit, drink, or oil of the Greek gods, deriving from the ancient Greek for “pertaining to the immortals.”
...arranging it. I am helping him find a suitable bride.

Matchmaking and arranged marriages appeared in America with the waves of 19th-century immigrants from Europe, who continued their Old World customs. European Jews used matchmakers from the 12th Century on, and they had high standing within the shetl community (the most famous dramatic iteration is Yente from Fiddler on the Roof); Ireland had a longstanding rural matchmaking tradition, dating back to the early 19th century, and the parents of Italian families often arranged marriages for their daughters. Because of their proximity to sexuality and material wealth, however, matchmakers were also shadowy figures, dogged by unsavory rumors. In the most popular urban myth, the greedy and immoral matchmaker married an unwitting provincial merchant to a prostitute from the urban slums.

Canned tomatoes
John Landis Mason invented the screw-top glass canning jar in 1858, an invention which was augmented by a top seal in 1869, and the Ball jar hit the market in 1884. Home canning increased in popularity during the winter months, as vegetables and fruits were canned and preserved in a wider variety than ever before.

Central Hotel on Water Street
Water Street, like many of the New York place names spoken in the play, is located in the original Dutch quarter of New York below Wall Street. True to its name, Water Street overlooks the port, stretching from Corlear’s Hook Park on the East River, along the present-day South Street Seaport, and down to the southern tip of Manhattan on the Battery. It still exists today, though it is interrupted by support structures for the Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges.

Chief clerk...apprentice
Numerous hired men and migrant farm workers labored for a weekly or monthly wage throughout the 19th century. Before the Civil War, these hired hands were considered fledgling yeomen, apprenticed on the land as they supposedly made their way upward to become farm owners. Usually American-born, the antebellum hired man was often kin to or at least known to his employer. He worked beside his boss, ate at the same table, often slept under the same roof, and came to be considered family. In Victorian America, however, a hired man was more likely to be a German or Irish immigrant, and was now seen as a transient, a worker who was not related and foreign. Farmers and merchants often segregated their workers in this era in workers’ barracks outside (or, in this case, underneath) the family residence.

Dressed as an “artist”
Ambrose, who paints “sunsets on the Hudson,” was a member of the so-called “Hudson River School,” a strain of early 19th century American painting inspired by the native Romantic literary tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, as well as the paintings of J.W. Turner. Emphasizing dramatic pastoral landscapes, especially those found in the Hudson River Valley and surrounding areas, Hudson River artists depicted man in harmony with an engulfing (and frequently melodramatic) nature, which was seen as the manifestation of God on earth. With the rise of Impressionism in the last third of the 19th century, as well as an international art market that increasingly looked to French and European models, the school fell into stark disfavor among elite American art critics (particularly New York Tribune art critic Clarence Cook, who coined the nickname as an indictment), and the works came to be regarded as kitsch, an opinion that survives in art world circles today.

Einen Jux will es sich Machen
Nestroy’s play, leaving the character of Dolly aside, is almost shockingly similar to The Matchmaker in incident and theme. Of most interest is Nestroy’s acute consciousness to issues of class: the true heroes of his plays are the clever servants on the bottom of the social ladder. This social criticism survives in The Matchmaker, in gentler and more democratic form, in the exchanges between his middle-class characters and servants: Malachi and the Cabman, Cornelius and Irene Molloy, Vandersgelder and Joe, and especially in Dolly’s ruminations on money.

Ermengard
Ermine, referring to the white coat of an animal in the weasel family, became associated with purity by the early Middle Ages, perhaps because of its use as a heraldic emblem in the robes of judges and in the state robes of royal peers; gard, an alternate spelling of guard, originated with the sense of keeping guardianship, custody, or warding before evolving into the more common meaning of defense or protection. The terms are both archaic and European in derivation, suggesting a whiff of the play’s Old World models. Indeed, the stock elements of the young lovers and the miserly ward have ancient roots, from early modern commedia dell’arte all the way back to the ancient Plautine New Comedy of the Roman Republic.

Every theater and ball and opera in New York City
The number of theaters in New York City almost doubled in the late 19th Century, growing from 24 in 1879 to 45 in 1900. Theaters in the late 19th Century were dangerous places, prone to fire (they were constructed mainly of wood and lit by gaslight) as well as riots. Given the unstable and ever-changing circumstances of the times, few examples of 19th-century theater architecture survive. Most of the theaters in the 1870s laid in what we now consider downtown: Union Square, near Broadway and 14th Street, was the heart of the era’s theater district. By the 1880s, the theater district had moved ten blocks north to Madison Square. By the turn of the century, the theater district had migrated northwards on Broadway to its modern-day home on 42nd Street and Times Square. This shift was augured by the opening of the Metropolitan Opera House in October of 1883 on Broadway and 39th Street, replacing 14th Street’s Academy of Music as the home of Italian opera and acquiring its attendant pseudo-aristocratic audience.
Fifth Avenue Hotel
The Fifth Avenue Hotel, at Madison Square (the intersection of Broadway and Fifth Avenue at 23rd Street), stood at the center of New York City’s cultural life in the latter half of the 19th century. Built by architect Amos Eno, the massive luxury hotel was initially known as “Eno’s Folly,” since it lay far uptown of Manhattan’s initial hotel district. It was also known as “the vertical railroad” for its size: it was the first hotel in New York City with elevators, (originally steam-operated), every room had a fireplace and bathroom, and public ballrooms hosted many high-society events. Holding up to 800 guests, the Fifth Avenue Hotel was at least partially responsible for the development of northern Manhattan, joined in the area by the Brunswick, the Victoria, the Hoffman House, the Madison Square Theater, and many private clubs. Perhaps most importantly, the Fifth Avenue Hotel was the face of nouveau riche America in the 1870s, “the temporary abode of the ‘petroleum’ and ‘shoddy’ aristocracy – rough, illiterate, vulgar creatures for the most part, who claim preeminence on the score of their money bags.” The Flatiron Building (1908) and Met-Life Tower (1909), monuments of the skyscraper era shortly to come, still stand nearby.

Fifty cents
The average annual wage for manufacturing workers in 1900 was only $435, or $8.37 a week. Unskilled workers were paid ten cents an hour on the average, about $5.50 a week. Fifty cents was an astronomical price for a haircut, the equivalent of four hours of work, or around 40 dollars in current estimation. A much more common unit of currency was the nickel, which could purchase a meal, a streetcar ticket, or an amusement park ride.

Gallagher
Deriving from the Gaelic Ó Gallchobhair (meaning Foreign Help or Foreign Helper). According to the 2000 U.S. Census, it was the 574th most common name out of over 80,000. Gallagher and Levi would have been two of the most common surnames for all Irish and Jewish immigrants coming to America in the period.

Great restaurants
By the late 1870s, the most notable restaurants in New York City lay near Madison Square, uptown of Manhattan’s colonial origins on the Battery. Preeminent was Delmonico’s, on Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and 26th Street, comparable to the best restaurants in Paris; the Hotel Brunswick’s restaurant, also on Madison Square, was a close second. All of the notable restaurants in New York from the period served elegant French cuisine, as the newly wealthy American elite sought in part to erase their humble working-class origins through an emulation of aristocratic manners. The era of the Madison Square restaurants effectively ended with the opening of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, at 34th Street and Fifth Avenue, in 1897. High society moved to midtown, at the foot of Central Park, and Delmonico’s migrated along with them.

Have the buggy brought round
Buggies (the word, an Americanism, was officially accepted into the English language in Webster’s 1913 Dictionary) were the popular form of horse-drawn carriages invented in Concord, New Hampshire in the 1860s. At the time, automobiles were considered expensive and dangerous luxury items, and were not available in mass production until Henry Ford’s introduction of the “Model T,” at an affordable price of $850 dollars, in 1908. For intermediate travel in the period between 1865 and 1910, shorter than a train ride and longer than a bike ride, horse carriages were still the primary mode of transportation. Unlike their two-wheeled counterparts in England, American buggies were commonly built with four wheels, a practice which continues to this day.

Hay, feed, provision and hardware business
In many respects, Vandergelder’s shop belongs to a bygone era. It caters to the business needs of nearby farmers in a pastoral Yonkers, not the industrial boomtown it was swiftly becoming (see entry on Yonkers). Vandergelder even keeps his own books the old-fashioned way, by hand at an accountant’s desk. His method of management is a far cry from the mechanized Scientific Management system of mass production (i.e. the assembly line) pioneered in the next twenty years by Frederick Taylor (also known as “Taylorism”) and implemented by Henry Ford at the turn of the century.

I don’t dye no hair
The first commercial synthetic hair dye was produced in 1907 by French chemist Eugene Schueller. Naming his hair colorant Auréale, Schueller went on to found the L’Oreal company in 1909. Before the introduction of synthetic products, hair was dyed in a homemade procedure which involved washing the hair with a mixture of metallic salts or oxides that often included silver, mercury, and lead. Unsurprisingly, instances of lead and mercury poisoning were common, and hair dying was regarded with a mixture of suspicion and fear.

I’ll own half of Staten Island
Named Staaten Eylandt by the Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam, Staten Island today constitutes Richmond county, the southernmost of the counties in the state of New York. It has been a primarily residential community since its settlement by the English in the 1660s up to the present day. From 1890 to 1911, its population grew from 51,693 to 85,969. In 1898 it was incorporated into the City of New York as the borough of Richmond.

Is this what they call a “café”? 
Originally a strictly French term, introduced into the lexicon with the introduction of coffee in the late 18th Century. In the late 19th century it was incorporated into English as a term for a specific type of fashionable restaurant, associated with nightlife, singing, and entertainment. Often, the term denoted an establishment that sold alcohol and in which social decorum was relaxed. Many cafés are still identifiable by their enclosed or outdoor sections spilling out onto the sidewalk.
Glossary

“Les Patineurs” waltz
“Les Patineurs” or “The Skaters,” is a waltz by Emile Waldteufel, composed in 1882 and inspired by the Cercle des Patineurs at the Bois de Boulogne, a large park on the western side of Paris.

Kemper
From the German kämpf, or struggle: one who kempt or strives for victory. Ambrose’s surname thus continues the sylvan, back-to-nature metaphor that suits his character’s Romantic temperament.

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Levi
Hebrew for “joining,” the common surname Levi (or Levy) comes from the Old Testament patriarch Levi, the great-grandson of Moses and founder of the Levite tribe. Ephraim Levi, Dolly’s first husband, is identified in the text as a Viennese Jew, making him a contemporary of fellow Austrian Jews Sigmund Freud and playwright Arthur Schnitzler. While Schnitzler was a satirist in the Nestroy mold, Freud was an Viennese Jew, making him a contemporary of fellow Austrian Jews Sigmund Freud and playwright Arthur Schnitzler. While Schnitzler was a satirist in the Nestroy mold, Freud was an avowed fan, often quoting him in personal correspondence, and referring to him as “our Nestroy.” In 1935, Wilder met Freud in Vienna, after seeing Gertrude Stein in Paris; he would return from the trip with the outlines of Our Town and the first two acts of The Merchant of Yonkers, perhaps inspired by his meeting with the great psychologist.

Lochinvars
Scots Gaelic for “Loch on the hilltop,” Lochinvar is both a lake in Scotland and the name for Sir Walter Scott’s Romantic British hero “Young Lochinvar,” who appears in the “Ballad of Young Lochinvar,” a stand-alone episode in his epic poem Marmion (1808). Like Scott’s 1819 hero Ivanhoe, Young Lochinvar is a quintessential Romantic hero of the British type.

Lodge parade
Though the precise nature of Vandergelder’s lodge is unclear in the text, it is likely a fraternal organization such as the Freemasons. Arising from obscure roots in the late 16th century, the Masonic lodges or temples developed a set of complex rituals in which members moved from Apprentice to Master of Masonry (mirroring Vandergelder’s model for the promotion of apprentices within his store).

Jenny Lind’s carriage
One of the first media celebrities, Jenny Lind (1820–1887) was known as “The Swedish Nightingale.” Her American career began with a national singing tour in 1850, financed by P.T. Barnum, who paid her $1,000-a-night contract at great financial risk, and marketed the then-unknown singer so as to make her a popular sensation. Her first American performance was at the Castle Gardens, when it was still used for high society balls and receptions (similar events would move later to the Academy of Music in 1854, and then to the Metropolitan Opera House in 1883). In 1852 Lind returned to Europe with her newly-married pianist husband, Otto Goldschmidt, and retired from her professional career.

Malachi
The title of a book in the Old Testament; it is unclear whether it refers to the name of the book’s prophetic author, since the name also means “God’s messenger” or “God’s angel” in Hebrew.

Malachi... Fifty... Changed my place, Mr. Vandergelder?
At the age of 50, Malachi is at least 20–30 years past the age at which he should be starting an apprenticeship. Given the prejudices during the era against transient workers (see clerks and apprentices), as well as Malachi’s travels up and down the Hudson River Valley, Vandergelder’s suspicions are justified if somewhat uncharitable.

Money... is like manure
Dolly’s seemingly random connection between money and excrement recalls, in another textual parallel with fin-de-siècle Vienna, the writings of Sigmund Freud. Freud first noticed the connection between neurotic money problems and the anal stage of psychosexual development in an 1897 letter to Wilhelm Fleiss, citing folklore, “The gold the devil gives his victims regularly turns into excrement.” He later wrote, “I can scarcely detail for you all the things that resolve themselves into... excrement for me (a new Midas!). It fits in completely with the theory of internal stinking. Above all, money itself. I believe this proceeds via the word ‘dirty’ for ‘miserly.’” In his later writings, Freud identified three principal character traits that can be tied to people in the anal stage of development: orderliness, parsimony, and obstinacy. Notably, all three traits pertain to Vandergelder, as well as his dramatic ancestors: Shakespeare’s Shylock, Nestroy’s Zangler, and Molière’s Harpagon, all of whom harken back to the commedia dell’arte stock figure, Il Pantalone.

Moselle? Chablis? Vouvray?
European wines of a similar cosmopolitan nature: Moselle wine is an ancient white variety that hails from the Moselle river, which flows through the northeastern Lorraine section of France, as well as Germany and Luxembourg; Chablis comes from the northern, Burgundy section of France, and is a white renown for its dry refined taste; Vouvray, a commune to the east of Tours, is noted for its long wine-making history (dating back to the Fifth century CE), and for its vintages’ complex range of flavors, some of them aged for decades.

Mrs. Molloy’s hat store
Unlike many American cities in this age of rampant industrialization New York was not characterized by huge, mechanized factories. The city’s high rental costs, cheap immigrant labor supply, and lack of a good energy source led to a myriad of small, highly specialized shops. Instead of serving as “mill girls” or factory hands, the majority of women workers in Gilded Age New York were domestic servants, needlewomen, and laundresses, or worked other employments seemingly marginal to an industrial economy. Over one-fifth of female workers in 1880 were concentrated in the needle trades, working as dressmakers, tailors, and milliners.
Presbyterian
Presbyterianism is a form of Calvinist Protestantism that originally comes from Great Britain (particularly Scotland and Ireland) that sought to replace the episcopal system of state-appointed bishops with a group of church elders appointed by the people, or a presbytery. Culturally, it has been characterized traditionally by a rigid asceticism, and fundamentalist or evangelical offshoots continue to be popular. In America, the Presbyterian church traces its roots back to the 17th century New England Puritans, who merged with Scots, Welsh, and Irish-founded churches from Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania in 1706 Presbytery of Philadelphia. The Church grew throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, largely aided by the influx of Scottish, Irish, and Welsh immigrants. As Wilder noted in a 1956 interview, his own upbringing in Wisconsin was overseen by “a very strict Calvinistic father,” and he attended Oberlin College in Ohio “when the classrooms and student life carried a good deal of the pious didacticism that would now be called narrow Protestantism.”

Tenting tonight; tenting tonight; tenting on the old camp ground
“Tenting on the Old Camp Ground” is a popular song written in 1863 by Walter Kittredge. Traditionally sung by enlisted men in the Union army, it is unusual for its time due to its melancholy tone and its explicitly articulated desire for peace and an end to war. Though popular in the South, it was never published below the Mason-Dixon line.

Raritan Canal
A canal in central New Jersey, built in the 1830s to connect the Delaware and Raritan Rivers, the Raritan Canal was an important means of transporting freight (especially coal) from eastern Pennsylvania to New York City, especially in the era before the railroads. Cornelius Hackl is being positioned as nouveau riche American aristocracy, a 19th-century industrialist in the mold of Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, or William Randolph Hearst.

The early ’80s
Commonly known as the Gilded Age, the period from 1877 to 1893 was one marked by extreme wealth, population expansion, and a general feeling of national resurgence following the Civil War era (1861–65) and Reconstruction. A number of New York City landmarks built during the era persist to this day as symbols of the era’s sense of monumentalism and optimism:

• Grand Central Station (opened in 1871)
• Central Park (completed in 1873)
• the Brooklyn Bridge (finished in 1883)
• the Statue of Liberty (given to New York City in 1886 by France as a commemoration of the 1876 Centennial),
• the Ellis Island Immigration Station (opened in 1892).

The next phase in New York City’s growth as a city would come in 1898, when the five boroughs of Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island were unified as one city, and Robert Anderson Van Wyck was elected New York City’s first Mayor. The New York City subway system would open in 1904, and New York would pass London as the most populous city in the world in 1925.

The Harmonia Gardens Restaurant on the Battery
The Battery, located on the southern tip of the island of Manhattan, is the strategic geographical point, at the head of the Hudson River and New York’s harbor, at which the history of New York begins. The Dutch colonists began the settlement of New Amsterdam here in 1625, the northernmost wall of the small outpost eventually becoming modern-day Wall Street. The Battery’s name derives from the artillery batteries which have been stationed there since the Dutch built one around 1683. Though this area of the city is now a financial center filled with skyscrapers, in the nineteenth century it was a popular promenade with a spectacular view of the harbor, at the time among the busiest in the world, and many wealthy merchants lived downtown in order to be close to their holdings. Castle Clinton, the circular fort built 200 feet offshore of Battery Park by the English between 1808 and 1811, served as New York’s federal immigration center from 1855 to 1890, until the opening of Ellis Island. No restaurant by the name of Harmonia Gardens can be found in the historical record, and the title instead appears to be Wilder’s allegorical invention. The title suggests the romantic symmetry characterizing the play’s latter half (Harmonia), as well as the archetypal comic Arcadia in which class and status inversions are possible (Gardens).

The Merchant of Yonkers
The Merchant of Yonkers was completed in the months after Our Town premiered on Broadway (February–March of 1938), and has lingered ever since in the shadow of its revered predecessor. The initial production premiered on Broadway on December 23, 1938 under the direction of Max Reinhardt, the commercial genius of interwar German theater (and also Wilder’s boyhood hero). It would close after a mere 39 performances, the worst failure of Wilder’s professional career. Rewritten in 1954 and retitled The Matchmaker, the subsequent production, directed by Tyrone Guthrie and starring Ruth Gordon as Dolly Gallagher Levi, would run for 486 performances from 1955–56, by far the most successful run of Wilder’s career. The different receptions of the two works (essentially the same play) appears to have been decided by Guthrie’s sympathetic staging of the text, energetic where Reinhardt’s was temperately paced, idiomatically American rather than Teutonically ostentatious. Wilder, however, dedicated the 1939 publication of The Merchant of Yonkers and the 1955 published version of The Matchmaker to Reinhardt, “with deep admiration and indebtedness.”

The Sidewalks of New York
Also known as “East Side, West Side” from the song’s first verse, The Sidewalks of New York is a popular song about New York City life written by lyricist James W. Blake and vaudeville actor Charles B. Lawlor in 1894. Now a jazz standard, the song is
perhaps most famous for coining the phrase, “tripped the light fantastic,” in its first verse.

**Trinity Church Tower**
Trinity Church is a large Neo-Gothic church located at the intersection of Wall Street and Broadway in lower Manhattan. Designed by Richard Upjohn and consecrated on Ascension Day, May 1, 1846, it was the tallest point in the Manhattan skyline until 1890, when the New York World Building was finished at the behest of the newspaper’s chief editor Joseph Pulitzer. The oldest Episcopal church in New York City, Trinity Church has stood in the same location in some form since 1698. At the time of the play, the towers would have been ornamented with eight bells, constructed to ring out in the English style. Today, it stands just blocks away from Ground Zero.

**Twenty cents to see the whale**
The publication of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, or, *The Whale* in 1851 and his vivid description of the title figure, a totemic white whale in the cold waters of the northern Atlantic Ocean, set off a popular obsession with this exotic mammal. Entertainment entrepreneur Phineas Taylor Barnum embarked on an Ahab-like pursuit of white whales to be exhibited live in his American Museum (which opened in 1843). Shipped by train in boxes of seaweed and exhibited in an unnatural freshwater habitat, most of the white Beluga whales that Barnum procured died within a matter of days. When Barnum’s American Museum caught fire in 1865, the whales on exhibition burned to death in their tanks. More unrelated fires in 1865 and 1868 eventually ended Barnum’s run, and he retired from the “freakshow” business to embark on a career in the circus. There would not be another whale exhibited live in the United States until the first New York Aquarium opened in 1896, at the former federal immigration center, Castle Garden on Battery Park.

**Van Huysen**
Flora’s surname literally means “from Huizen,” a small Dutch fishing village on the Zuyder Zee (an inlet of the North Sea to the northwest of the country). Huizen also is Dutch for “houses,” as the town is believed to be named for the stone houses that appeared there before anywhere else in the country. The Dutch were the first European peoples to conceive of homes in the modern sense of the word: as permanent shelters in which families and friends were expected to join together and relax.

**Vandergelder**
The Dutch form of currency is the guilder, or gold coin, deriving from the German word for gold (*Geld*). Vandergelder, an anglicized form of Van der guilder, thus literally means “of the guilder,” or, more abstractly, “comes from money.” The surname of real-life contemporary Cornelius Vanderbilt’s ancestors, who emigrated to America from the Dutch town of De Bilt, underwent a similar anglicization.

**Workroom door**
Though women laborers in the workrooms of millineries were fortunate compared to their contemporaries in industrial factories, they still worked gueling hours for small wages in sweatshops and tenements. Hours of fifteen to eighteen hours a day were common, though it seems that under an enlightened boss like Irene Molloy ten to 12 hour days are in this instance the norm. The task-oriented rhythm and isolated nature of the work left little time for a separate sphere of social life, and periods of sociability and amusement were often, as in this scene, integrated within the natural rhythms of the working life. The milliner’s workroom was a horrifying locale in the popular imagination, and is used in a number of period novels, from Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853) to Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), to signify a steep fall from privilege into an underworld of hard manual labor.

**Yonkers**
The land on which modern day Yonkers stands dates back to New York City’s pre-English colonial past and the earliest days of Dutch inhabitance in the area. The Dutch East India Company (a privately-owned corporation that hired English explorer Henry Hudson to find a trade route to India) bought the land from the native Lenape tribe in 1639, and in 1646 the land was sold to Adriaen Van der Donck, the colony of New Netherland’s first lawyer and author of *A Description of the New Netherlands* (1656). The whole settlement soon came to be called “De Jonkheer’s Land” or “De Jonkees”—meaning the estate of the young lord, as Van der Donck was called by his tenants—and afterwards Yonkers. According to the census, population grew over the span of 1880 to 1900 from 18,189 to 47,931, owing to the northward migration of immigrants and freed slaves in search of jobs. The period between 1850 and 1900 was an industrial boomtime for the growing city, and a number of industrial landmarks date to this era:

- The Waring Hat Factory, founded in Yonkers in 1842, eventually became the largest manufacturer of hats in the world.
- Otis Elevator Company, the first elevator factory in the world and instrumental in the skyscraper boom of the 1900s and 1910s, was founded in Yonkers in 1853.
- Alexander Smith Carpet Mills, a working home to the massive numbers of Scottish and English immigrants in the region, was founded in 1865.
- Scottish immigrant John Reid founded the first American golf course, St. Andrew’s, in Yonkers in 1888.

Yonkers borders the Bronx on its south, and is 2 miles from Manhattan at the two cities’ respective closest points.
You pay those girls of yours too much.
You pay them as much as men
According to the Aldrich Report, skilled laborers in 1880 were paid an average of $1.32 for a day’s work, and about 13 cents an hour. Most women were paid 40-60% of their male equivalents’ wages, while children’s payscales were in the 30-40% range. Less fortunate female laborers from the period worked up to 12 or 15 hours a day, with short breaks of about twenty minutes for meals.

Your niece is of age
Though books of the period suggest 14 and 16 as proper ages to begin courtship and suggest a limit of 30, the average age of a woman who married for the first time in the 1890s was 22, as opposed to 27 in the 1790s. Working-class men and women were a notable exception, often working for a number of years before marrying and not establishing their own households until their early thirties. The transition from youth to adolescence in female during the Victorian era was marked by a stark shift in clothing, especially in the coiffure and the corset. At the onset of puberty, girls were expected to pin up their hair in the “womanly” fashion (previously it had been worn down) and exchange children’s underwear for the more confining whaleboned or steel-sprunged variety.
Play sources & Textual History


—In a characteristically cultured bit of homage, Wilder adapts a scene from Molière’s 1668 Neoclassical comedy between his miserly Harpagon and matchmaking Froso into an exchange between *The Matchmaker*’s Horace Vandergelder and Dolly Gallagher Levi. Two of Wilder’s most inimitable creations are born as a result of the transatlantic, millennia-crossing conversation.


—Nestroy’s comedy, set in the Beidermeier-era Vienna of the 1840s, that would eventually inspire Wilder. Though a classic in the European canon, the work remains unavailable in English translation, perhaps because of the near-impossibility of rendering Nestroy’s distinctive Viennese dialect and expressions into common English prose.


—The one-act, clerks-in-London farce that started it all.


—Tom Stoppard’s adaptation of Nestroy’s *Einen Jux will er sich machen* retains the 1840s Viennese setting and character names.


—Wilder’s initial 1939 draft of the play that would eventually be retitled *The Matchmaker*. Though *The Merchant of Yonkers* has a bit more local color and an alternate final speech for Dolly, it is almost line for line the same play that would be Wilder’s greatest commercial success over a decade later.


—The latest printing of this definitive edition of Wilder’s three great long-form works for the stage. It includes an illuminating essay by Wilder explicating each play, and detailed notes on the production histories of *Our Town*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *The Matchmaker*, all furnished lovingly by the Wilder estate’s literary executor and nephew, Tappan, who happens to live nearby in Chevy Chase.

Dutch-New York History


—Irving, a noted humorist, critic, and all-around man-of-letters, wrote this humorous account of New York’s history in 1809, attributing it to a fictional historian named Father Knickerbocker who came to symbolize New York’s jolly old Dutch roots. Irving also bestowed the nickname of “Gotham” on New York and was the first to dramatize the legend of that mythic Hudson valley resident, Rip Van Winkle of Sleepy Hollow.


—The largest and most recent popular anthology of New York history. Jackson and Dunbar’s decision to draw from literary sources (such as famous New Yorkers Walt Whitman and Edith Wharton) gives the otherwise sociological proceedings a vivid first-person flair.


—A history of the Dutch in New York that doesn’t stop at 1667, the year the English took control of the colony, but traces their presence in New York state politics for two hundred years of the country’s history. Kenney pays special attention to the contradictions in Dutch culture—a culture that allowed for the emergence of robber baron tycoons who exploited the labor of millions while also protecting the rights of the individual.
—Penni, who must have been an extraordinarily dedicated writer, churned out this 500+ page treatise on women in the workforce (an alternate title was “How Women Can Make Money”) in the first spring of women’s lib. (The Seneca Falls Convention took place in 1848, but Ibsen’s Dollhouse would not be written for almost ten years.) Penny’s book provides a valuable glimpse at the real lives of many working women in the late 19th century, such as the millineress Irene Molloy and the matchmaker Dolly Gallagher Levi in *The Matchmaker*. (The full text of *The Employments of Women* is available for free at www.books.google.com).

—An accessible historical account, told as an adventure narrative, of the early Dutch days in New Amsterdam. Shorto makes the case that Dutch Enlightenment ideals—mercantilism and absolute faith in the free market, ethnic diversity and tolerance of other cultures—continue to be felt in New York, specifically on the rambunctious island of Manhattan.

—Still, a distinguished mid-century urban historian and archivist, synthesizes first-person historical accounts from New York history with precisely written overviews of periods in the city’s history, all presented in short, chapter-size chunks. Ideal to give actors both a broad sense of their period (in this case, the Gilded Age 1880s and ‘90s in which the modern city began to emerge) as well as street-level detail.

—One of the founding historical documents of the colonial period, originally published in the 1660s by Van der Donck, the first European citizen of Yonkers and the only practicing lawyer in the nascent New Amsterdam. The book includes, alongside a litany of the New World’s alluring landscapes and wealth of raw materials, a brief one-act play titled *An Encounter Between a Patriot and a Netherlander* that serves as propaganda for the colonization of the New World.

**Criticism & Theory**

—Groundbreaking essay by noted American modernist critic, defending farce in particular and popular entertainments of the industrial era in a broader sense. Bentley brings such odd couples as Sigmund Freud and Charlie Chaplin, or Adolf Hitler and Eugene Scribe into his provocative discussion of the form’s purgative potential. Here included as the preface to French farces by Labiche, Feydeau and other exemplars of the genre.

—Bergson’s famous essay on comedy functions as a modern-day Poetics of the form, much in the way that Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* (written in 1872) does so for the tragic drama. To Bergson, comedy hinges on the humanist binaries of empathy and indifference; his argument is well-wrought, intricate, and one that provides grounding principles when approaching the genre for practice or pleasure, even if it’s been read once or twice before.

—in this lucid, brief essay, Wilder demonstrates his impressive erudition and professorial grasp of world-historical dramatic literature, surveying farcical comedy from its Roman roots to the present day. According to Wilder, farce has an abstract, logical drive that is corrosive to the interest in character and human emotion that grounds most drama. Similar to Bergson’s theory of comedy, Wilder notes that successful examples of the form keep the mechanistic and the humanistic in a pleasing equilibrium, synthesizing the two extremes into an organic whole.