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Le Roy Robinson

John Howard Lawson began to write *Roger Bloomer* in France in the fall of 1917, when he was about 23 years old. The play was produced in New York in the spring of 1923, when Lawson was not quite 29 years old. This production brought Lawson to the attention of the New York theatre world. Probably still unrecognized as such, *Roger Bloomer* is a classic of the modern American theatre—classic in its universality: sixty years later, what the play says in whole and in part, and how it says it, are directly relevant to middle-class American life today.

The purpose of the present article is to provide historians of American drama the first published description of the second act of an early version of *Roger Bloomer* completed sometime in 1920, when Lawson was about 26 years old. The rest of the 1920 version is in general very similar to the 1923 version, but this second act is almost entirely different, and three of its main characters do not appear in Lawson's stage version.¹)

** Act II of the 1920 version of *Roger Bloomer*, like Act II of the 1923 version, begins with a scene in which young poet Roger, alone in New York, is accosted by his Fat Landlady, whose sexual advances he rejects and from which he, somewhat frightened, runs away.

Next, the auditorium fills with the rich silvery light of New York streets on a late afternoon in summer. Roger enters, relieved to be in free air.

The curtain divides.

There is a billboard advertisement of a bedroom farce, garish, giving the impression it contains the broadest beds and the nearest thing to rape that ever happened in pink

¹) The present description is based on a manuscript on microfilm made available to me by the Curator of the Lawson Papers, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.
pajamas.\(^2\) Next to this, another advertisement of a cure for constipation: "Have a look at your inside. What's wrong with your bowels? How about your kidneys?" Next to this, the plate glass window of an elegant shop, a fashionable woman's store off Fifth Avenue in the 40s. Behind the plate glass window, a beautiful opera cloak of pale purple and silver (with stockings and shoes to match) trailed in a graceful design with brightly colored necklaces against a salmon-pink background. (The window is not yet lighted, so this display is seen only vaguely.)

Roger goes upstage to read the play advertisement.

A Ragged Man enters, collarless, torn hat, and in a professional slouch approaches Roger for a dime for a sandwich. The Ragged Man complains:

Nobody in this town got any money. It looks fine but it's a big fat fake. Them guys goin' by in limousines ain't got the price of a glass of milk. To Hell with New York. No women in New York. All the dames is too thin. Bones! Nothin' to hold on to. Where the hell is all the fat women, eh?\(^3\) This city is on the bum. I could croak of laughin'.

An immensely heavy woman walks by. The Ragged Man strides after her discreetly, his eyes fixed on her ankles.

Roger trembles in contempt and anger: "I can't stand it." He breaks down and sobs.\(^4\) Just then, the plate glass window lights up brilliantly and an offstage throaty hand organ carols out a tinpan tune. Roger, attracted by the brilliant display, stands looking at it with concentrated attention.

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2) The theme of rape appears in several Lawson plays, e.g., in *Servant-Master-Lover* it is suggested, but in *Processional* it is made clear that Dynamite Jim forces sexual relations upon Sadie Cohen, as Jed Merton perhaps does on Abigail in *Parlor Magic*.

3) This may be a private joke of Lawson's, whose first wife was a woman of large proportions.

4) In the first act of the 1920 version Roger openly refers to himself as neurasthenic; in the stage version the directions call him the healthiest character in the play.
Ferguson, a well-dressed man about 35, enters. 5)

Ferguson passes, swinging a cane with a certain languor. He has a small ragged moustache. He has sharp and sad eyes. His mouth is badly disillusioned. His way of speaking is brisk and charming. He notices Roger is passionately intent on the elegant display and joins him: “Very pretty. Matter of taste.” He looks at Roger, taps his cane against his hand, moves off, lights a cigarette, returns.

Roger says the display is one of the few things in New York that don’t make him feel unpleasant. Ferguson considers New York a rotten place. He’s lived there all his life. He doesn’t know why. But he can’t get out.

Roger says he is not looking at the display but through it “at all the things it hides, closed doors behind which women dance, queenly women eating ices, ghostly women gliding to gilded chairs.” Ferguson says: “I’ll be damned. Ever go to the opera?” Roger says no, sir. Ferguson says: “Pig women with snouts. Lizard women with green scales.” Ferguson invites Roger, who is hungry, to have something to eat with him, and they exit.

Soon, Roger and Ferguson re-enter in front of the curtain. Roger says food in your stomach gives you a hunk of courage. Ferguson tells Roger to trust him. He’s quite ready to be of service. But Roger is not looking for charity. He does need advice from Ferguson (who is a stockbroker and a poet): Roger wants to know how he can get something out of life. Roger means living. To be free and alone is not enough. He’s helpless, wanting to make good.

New York whirls around me. I’m out of it, staring like a fool. I see the yellow lights and purple shadows. Soft skirts. Jazz bands rattling their pots and kettles. The air is full of gasoline and perfume. Life spins like a top. It plunges and wings like a kite. It wriggles like a worm.

5) Ferguson, who does not appear in 1923, is similar to Gaston Brown in The Spice of Life (1916, 1919).
Roger is out of it, alone with his mysterious thoughts. Dead, he wants to be one of the live ones. He wants to be part of the show.

Ferguson responds to this “mystically”:

Week follows week. Today treads on the heels of tomorrow. Your brain goes tick-tock and your heart goes quack-quack, and your blood curdles like milk. Month follows month. Year follows year. And the food in your mouth is like sand and your dreams go pop like firecrackers. That’s being alive.

Ferguson’s advice is: “Suicide.”

Ferguson says there are two ways of avoiding suicide—laughter and a woman. He will take Roger to see a woman who has twice prevented him from committing suicide. Women are stupid. Women are alive!

Roger explains he came to New York because of a girl on the road in the sunset who for a strange moment was the sum of life to him. Then she was gone. She’s way behind him now—a silhouette, stiff and black. Ferguson says: “Another woman, another religion!” Roger doesn’t understand. Ferguson laughs: “No one does.” They pull the curtain aside center, and they exit.

The outer curtain (grey, blotched with great masses of black houses, geometrical and perpendicular, tumbled magnificently) divides.

There is revealed a ten-feet square curtain of burnt orange. A chair. A square stool of ordinary wood. On the floor, a few brilliant cushions. A lamp, throwing an upward light. A large easel. On an olive green divan, lies Janet, staring up. She wears a tunic of gold cloth. She is an intensely emotional woman, too vivid to be beautiful. She has a few affectations.  

6) Janet, who does not appear in 1923, seems the prototype of Janet Gold in A New England Fantasy (1924, unpublished) who is too intense to be beautiful, and of Janet Galt in Nirvana.
A little, fat, moon-faced blond man enters. Phillip wants Janet to stroke his head, so puts her cool white hand on his own forehead: "I’ve got a fever and I’m sick in my soul."  

Janet pulls her hand away: "Stop your aesthetic stupidity and be human." Half-human, anyway. Philip claims he is all too human: He is dangerously over-sexed. His body contains so much sex he can’t contain it without being vulgar. Janet says a little boisterous vulgarity would do Phillip a world of good. Phillip says for him sex is a lotus of forgetfulness, for Janet an orchid of beauty.

Ferguson enters with Roger, who is asked to sit on the stool. Ferguson repeats that Janet will keep Roger from committing suicide. Phillips says: "Oh, go on commit suicide. Suicide is the only sensation you can only have once." Roger, frightened, squirms. Why deny the inevitable, Phillip asks. He himself had once tried to commit suicide, but what he thought was bichloride was only a laxative.

Ferguson explains Roger's running away from Iowa to "perilous seas and fairylands for lmn." (Janet says factory smoke has spilled black on fairyland.) Ferguson says Roger was seeking a little of the spice of freedom. Janet replies: "We are free people! Aren’t we ridiculous?" They, the intelligent ones, who despise life, call themselves artists.

Through the following dialogue, Roger sits white and silent,

7) Phillip does not appear in 1923.
8) This is also said of Bill Weed in Nirvana.
9) Janet asks: "Why not a lily for purity?" (In Standards a cabaret singer sings "Little Laughing Lily." In the 1920 draft of Processional the lily is associated with purity and the female sexual organ as well.)
10) In The Spice of Life (1916, 1919, unpublished) playboy Gaston Brown discusses committing suicide by taking bichloride. In 1923 it is Roger Bloomer who tries to commit suicide by taking bichloride but takes medicine that gives him only a stomach ache.
11) At this, Phillip says: "Free! They gave me 30 days for being in Washington Square in my BVDs."
his hands clenched, like an intruder at a Walpurgis night.

Janet wants to paint Roger. Ferguson: “No art in a woman...” Phillip agrees: “A woman is just an impulse and a man is a thinking being. There can never be anything between men and women except a free-for-all fight. Sex is a battle.” In that battle, Janet wants a worthy enemy. Ferguson thinks this idea of Janet’s rot, for she is a quiet little housewife with a mistaken taste for the fine arts; no more poetry in her than in a cookbook. Ferguson tells Phillip not to behave as if Janet were the latter’s mistress. Janet: “Why on earth not? Why not anybody’s mistress? Aren’t we women the machines of the impulse? Everybody’s mistress. Phillip, for a starter—the hors d’oeuvre.” Ferguson thinks women were not made for morals but Janet ought to have better taste. Janet asks: “Why mix up the simple business of child bearing with all those complicated affections?” Phillip, who hates children, is strong for the—er, er—more mature affections. Ferguson thinks Phillip confuses affections with affectations.

Janet turns to the white and silent Roger.

You see, she says, how horribly conventional they are, they who pretend to be free, slaves to their petty jealousies, stiff as mummies, as solemn as saints. She wants a man free of the prejudices of the cave: “Oh, if an elemental storm could sweep jealousy and morality off the face of the world.” But they cling to their fetishes. Janet tells them all to go away to desert islands: “Go and talk to the mocking sea till you sink knee deep in quicksand.”

Ferguson prefers to sit in easy chair and laugh through a plate glass window. Janet predicts people will come along, singing, and break his plate glass window, and she will be out in the crowds, singing with blood on her hands and flowers in her hair.
Phillip says Janet is a lively woman but a bad painter ("rough, no subtlety of composition"). As an artist himself, he is developing a new form, an ovoid form. "Everything develops from the egg. Composition should follow the lines of the egg." This is not a trick. "It is the perfection of the curve." Janet answers: "Technique. Technique. What about the wind on far mountains?" As a painter, she tries for human beings—flesh—bodies in beautiful muscular torment. In Roger, she'd paint the wistfulness she thought was forever dead.

Phillip calls Janet a virgin woman. He does not wish to insult her, but virgin women throw all their sex into art and make an awful mess of it. Art is sex refined, refined away.

Roger, nervous, wipes his fevered brow: He doesn't understand their way of talking. As he escapes precipitously, Janet tells him she and he are going to be the best of enemies. Phillip cackles. Ferguson calls him a complete fool. Janet asks: "Another cup of tea?"

The curtain separates left on a Western Union office.

Behind the counter a youth ticks a telegraph instrument monotonously. On a yellow blank Roger nervously writes a collect telegram. He sucks the pencil, crosses out a word, writes again, and hands the paper across the counter. The clerk, infinitely bored, reads: "Send money care YMCA. Want come home." Roger cries: "No, not want, won't. Won't come home. Never!"

The next scene is in Janet's apartment.

Wearing a loose morning wrap that makes her look feminine, Janet leans across her olive green divan to pull back her orange curtain to reveal a studio window that silhouettes her against the bright blue light. She stands up, stretches her hands high, yawns, falls flat on the pillows, bouncing
At this acrobatic moment, there is a knocking, and she bounds to her feet. She admits Roger.

Janet tells Roger she is out of breath because she was trying to stand on her head so as to see the world upside down.

Roger, who'd been swearing he would never see her again but whose feet led him to her (Janet asks: "Am I hypnotizing you?"), is also out of breath from running to get to her place before he lost the nerve to tell her the truth. Janet says she is 28 and nobody has ever told her the truth; she's waited patiently for a word of truth. "Truth. The feet of it touch lightly on the tops of mountains, but there are only lies here--so do sit down and lie to me." She wants Roger to sit at her feet. Roger is bitter that she makes fun of him.

Janet knows Roger is broke, but she can arrange a soft job for him on the stock exchange. "It takes a woman to get anything done in modern business." Roger says he's received money from home\(^\text{12}\), so he's free to think for a bit, to face the music and plan. Janet laughs. Roger doesn't understand what her laughing means, but it hurts him like a knife. Janet says she can't help him: "There are too many lies between us, generations of lies." That's why it's better to talk mildly joking. Roger asks: "Will it always be that--mild frivolity?"

Roger wants the truth, but between him and Janet there's a plate glass window. Janet says if he broke the plate glass window with his bare hands, he'd find in payment for his torn hands and pain a wax mannequin. Janet imitates the gestures of a wax figure rigidly: "Didn't you notice when we jabbered about Art and Sex that you'd strayed among the waxworks?"

In that jabbering a few nights before, Janet noticed Roger's face set white as a death mask. Roger replies that conversation meant more to him than any he'd ever heard in his life. His

\(^{12}\) In his autobiography Lawson admits that in the 1920s he often borrowed money from his father.
face was white because such burning impressions eat his mind. Janet says they jabbered about Art and Sex as if there were such things. But what Janet calls jabbering Roger calls new vistas of beauty and freedom. Yes. Sex, too—part of the new, awful mystery, as if he, wandering, caught glimpses of a strange garden. 13)

"So," Janet says, "You came back to me, thinking I have the key to those ghostly gardens where beauty moves whitely among the orchids."

Roger thought Janet would change his whole life. Janet assures him she doesn't dispense salvation.

She can tell him what she knows. There's no key to the mystery of living. The quiet garden toward which Roger's face is set is a garden of lies. There's no quietness in life. There are walled places of content. Sophisticated people talk a great deal to conceal their fear of life. Perhaps Roger can conquer his fear. 14)

The two men he listened to—Fergusor and Phillip—are two who have failed in every dream because their fear was too much for them, so they gave their fear a name and called it Beauty. 15) Oh, no, Beauty is out on the dusty roads. Beauty is grimy in the coal pits. Beauty is in tired muscles and careless appetites. Beauty eats raw onions and cabbage Beauty snores.

13) In The Mad Moon's second version the audience catches glimpses of a strange (Japanese) garden.
14) In Film in the Battle of Ideas Lawson quotes Dreiser on the "forces of change, the constantly moving and shattering and rejoining of the universe." Change is life and as life there need be no fear of it. Lawson adds the artist who fears life is lost.
15) Lawson may here be recalling his meeting in 1916 with playwright Edward Sheldon and actor John Barrymore. In his autobiography Lawson says: "Each was in his way an artist and each had cried out in anger 'the theatre kills every artist'." Lawson says he caught a glimpse of the two men as they really were.
As for Sex, the elaborate mystical monstrosity—isn’t Sex just a dream of diseased imagination? Sex turns us pale with fear. It makes us mad. Yet there’s no such thing. “Oh, there’s the healthy urge of bodies made brown and ripe under the sun. There’s the passion of bodies.” But Sex the mystery, the religion, the dragon with paper scales...

Roger feels Sex is a beast with claws pursuing him and he can’t escape. Janet calls Sex the funny dragon painted green spitting out artificial fires. Roger sometimes feels the dragon’s breath hot on his neck. Janet says if he turns around he’ll find the dragon is only a cow. Not the first cow that’s been made a religion. They’ve veiled the old cow with seven veils to make it do a Salome dance. 16)

“Are you going to cover your eyes and pray before that ridiculous image?” Janet asks. “Or are you going to stand up and shake the roof of the world with laughing while all the worshippers wonder?” Janet herself does not do the second, because as one of the waxworks she sits in the attitude of defiance, but the delivering laugh is not on her lips. 17)

Roger doesn’t know which are the lies and which are the truth but all around him in the shadows he can see the myriad faces of life grinning. Janet asks if one of the mocking grinning faces is hers—the lie with the face of a woman. 18)

16) This foretells “ Fantasia.” Certain aspects of Lawson’s imagination pertinent to popular culture need to be examined.

17) Lawson’s notion of the delivering laugh predates O’Neill’s similar idea in Larus Laughed by several years.

18) Roger says: “They told me you and I were enemies.” Janet: “What else? Your friends are just the people you don’t dislike. Your enemies you pick with care. You cherish them with a beautiful hatred.”
Janet says an awful thing has happened: They’ve told each other the truth, so there can be only bitterness between them, only to destroy the old generations of lies between them, till at last they stand face to face—a long fight, that’s the ugly work of the haters of lies. In the heart, battle follows battle. Perhaps in a greater fight, Roger will find his enemy—her—at his side.

Roger thinks Janet more of a lie than the others. “That’s what makes it so exciting.” He accepts her as an enemy and he’ll take care not to believe anything she says.

Janet says: “Let’s forget ghosts—get to facts.” Why doesn’t Roger take a job as a bootblack or as a farmhand? (Roger says she’s joking.) She says he asked her for salvation, but that’s in his own hands: “Use them, make them dirty with work that callouses the hands.” Roger says if he did that all his life would be turned inside out. Janet says if he’s afraid he can run away.

Janet points outside the window: “Look! See the black mass of people down there in the street, like arts. All day long they pass, thousands, the ordinary people, the cowards in stiff collars, the slaves in straw hats. Go down and be one of the thousands. Seek a safe corner among secluded lives. Go and forget I told you the truth for a mad moment.”

Janet explains that by work callousing the hands she means to make something. A poem. Or a chair. Something that lives rising from his hands, with her it’s painting. She loves paint. She loves to touch paint. “Did you ever feel the furious fun of creating something? It’s rare. When everything is wrong and rotten, the anger takes you and you splash canvas, making something out of nothing. Maliciously creative!”

19) Lawson’s attitude here should be compared with the similar one expressed by George Orwell some years later.
Does Janet forget herself in painting? She laughs sadly: "The Bacchic zeal. But where are the vine leaves in my hair?" One can't forget oneself. The sterile years are too strong. One can't get away from oneself. 20)

Wherever he is, Roger also feels the same sickness of himself—neurasthenia. 21) Janet laughs provocatively, hurting Roger, whom she consoles: "When I feel neurasthenic, I stand on my head and all the imaginings drip out of my ears." What a mess the art of living is. If one could take a brush and squish paint on people's souls, a line here, a line there, to the perfect picture.

Roger with a flash of insight says that's what Janet's trying to do with him. Janet gets excited. "Oh, that's an art. That's greater than any painting." Wait. She must paint him as he is. Young. He may be old tomorrow, but today he's young. She must sketch him funnily scared among cushions.

Roger thinks Janet's making fun of him, and, as she goes to get her painting equipment, he sneaks out.

Janet stumbles back in, waving her arms to find the flapping sleeves of the dirty painting smock covering her head. "Help me with this damn thing." But she finds Roger gone, and gives a little cry of despair: "That shows how much I know." Janet grabs a big brush and splashes a few blotches of bright paint on a canvas—then goes at it with her bare hands, smearing them with colors, getting paint on her face. She laughs vividly: "To paint a picture on someone's living soul!" She waves a brush in the air carelessly: "A weapon against the demons!"

20) In Processional the flippant journalist travels to many different places, always to be his same self. In Loud Speaker the journalist and the politician's daughter discover that even in a gaily lanterned Chinese junk they are still their frustrated selves. In Parlor Magic Abigail finds in parties in Europe no escape from her problems.

21) In the first act of this 1920 draft Roger refers to himself as neurasthenic. In 1923, however, the stage directions describe Roger as the healthiest character in the play.
She stabs with the brush as if it were a sword. Maliciously creative.

Abruptly there is revealed a sort of mantelpiece that “grows” in cheap flats. Under it, gas logs, lighted. Over it, a mirror. Seated near it, Roger, hat in hand, watches Miss Burns, a sweet old lady with white hair, setting a small supper table with a soiled cloth. On the table, two meager glasses of milk.

As Miss Burns putters about, Roger jumps up uneasily. In a gentle querulous voice Miss Burn notes how Roger frets: “Nothing comes but with waiting.” Roger is waiting for his friend Louise; he has come to see her to fulfill a promise he made to her in Iowa.

Miss Burns is pleased Roger talks like a decent clean young boy. But there’s dangers in New York for young girls and young boys. Where is modesty? Beware, for there are pitfalls in the highway. “If you love your mother you’re safe at the ends of the earth.” When Roger says his mother is a long way off, Miss Burns says “Dead!” It doesn’t matter, especially if you carry a bit of her hair tied in a knot. “A strand of hair loose for the girl you love. A strand of hair tied for your mother above.” When Roger says his mother is not dead, Miss Burns, unperturbed, says: “I s’pose she’s got white hair and wrinkles.” When Roger says she looks something like his mother, she says that makes her being a maiden lady worth-while. Miss Burns adds: “All my life I’ve been waiting for things that haven’t happened and I thank God in the end he’s had the commonsense to refuse what I’ve prayed for.” When Roger says he’s not as resigned as that, she says he must be: “Things happen so neat-like if you leave them to God’s will in the fullness of time.”

Louise comes home from work. She and Roger face each other. She gradually smiles: “Springtime in Iows and the apple blossoms were like snow.” Louise and Roger recall the afternoon

22) In *The Mad Moon* puritanical Mrs Sheffield also stresses the need to leave things to the Will of God.
they said goodbye: "The sun setting and the portent of disaster." But, Roger says, no catastrophe happened. Louise thinks nothing ever happens. Still, Roger says, it's good to walk along the streets without knowing what's around the next corner. Louise walks only to the subway and back. She is now a file clerk in the private office of a big broker on Wall Street. Her boss treats her well. She gets free lunch. She gets free medical examinations. Her job is elegant. But she'd rather be dead than go on working with the tiredness in her bones.

Roger reminds Louise of that afternoon when they talked about the future, hoping a dim hope. Louise says it almost seemed they were up against it together. Roger asks: "Aren't we still together, looking in the face of despair?"

Roger calls despair the demon with the face of a cow. He wonders if despair isn't a big fat fake, a mask to frighten those for whose tired eyes the radiance of hope is too strong. Louise asks what that "big talk" gets Roger. She says he needs common sense.

Louise suggests she try to get Roger a job in her office: "Them that's seen despair together must stand each by each." Roger says: "Lives separate. Lives come together. No one knows why."

Roger admits being lonely; he says it's different with Louise, who's got a home with her aunt.

Louise hates her aunt, who's old and sweet, whose head is full of musty dusty things. What are those things to Louise? Her aunt is against her. Her aunt hates her. Her aunt is sentimental. Louise could kill her. Her aunt lives off Louise. She's superstitious, thinks there's angels and demons over her head at night. (Roger says maybe there are.) Louise would like to catch an angel snooping

23) Louise says her boss is "white all right."
around her bed! Her aunt dreams and figures her dreams out this way, that way, for days. "That's not healthy in these hard times." Louise hates old soft people. Her aunt's head is full of proverbs and deaths. "Am I to be dragged to my grave by her memories?" In a soft low voice Louise says she hates everyone. "I hate my own mother that's dead." Roger guesses New York is full of hate hidden behind smirking faces. He says: "Someday we'll kill one another."

Louise violently says: "Only thing matters in New York—money." If you have money, you eat, you sleep. The others work on the cold winter mornings. Roger says: "So that's the hope that lives in the desert of despair."

Louise says if she were a man she'd go after money. She'd be after it tooth and nail. Then she could like in the soft places. To laugh at the world. Roger adds: "To throw dollars in everyone's face." To give, give, give. Louise advises him not to give money away. Save it. Pile it up and laugh louder. Roger wonders what would happen if he tried to do that systematically, earnestly. What luck would he have? Louise says: "What luck!"

Miss Burns enters carrying baked beans and one boiled potato apiece. She hastily sets another place for Roger, whom she asks to share their humble meal. Miss Burns stands and prays:

"Our Holy Father and Lord Jesus, bless the bread which we are about to break in humbleness. Bless this young woman and this young man humbly content with thy inscrutable ways, asking no impossible favors, unworthily craving Thy grace. May Thy word prosper! Amen."

24) In The Mad Moon Tommy Weed tries to give money away and his family considers him insane and wishes to place him in an asylum.
In the next scene Roger and Ferguson walk up and down before the outer curtain. Roger went to see Ferguson, for if Ferguson hadn’t met him when he did, where would Roger be now? Roger wants to go to work; he hopes to be a regular New York business man. Ferguson laughs: How bored Roger’ll be.

Roger is vehement: “Do you think it’s easy to throw away my dreams like so many old clothes? I came to New York to be a poet. And in agony I’ve found out I’m not different from other people. I’m like the others. Stupid, fat, like cows pasturing. I must live like the others. Work without worry. Sleep without dreaming. I want to make money and spend it.”

Ferguson says look at him—he’s no artist, he’s a successful businessman. Can money buy wisdom? Can money buy sleep? Does Roger want to end where Ferguson is now, at the door of suicide? Roger thinks it’s better to end there than begin there.

Ferguson then says he offered Roger a miracle—Janet—and it failed to work. Funny. But Roger doesn’t want miracles, he wants life. Ferguson tells him not to be so serious, to laugh a bit. Roger says Ferguson and Janet and Phillip all laugh at him. Ferguson says they all also laughed at themselves. That’s the miracle.

Roger says Ferguson brought him to a subtle, beautiful woman. Ferguson calls Janet the epic woman and notes Roger ran away. Roger says Janet’s laugh was murderous. Ferguson says: “Epic. Her laugh is loose inside you now! The time will come when that hidden laugh will burst out of you like a free song.” Roger doesn’t feel safe among clever, beautiful people. Ferguson says: “Oh, Lord, what a joke everything is.” Roger says Ferguson says that because he has it easy and he’s bored. “But to people whose minds are in torment, seeking, seeking, it’s no joke.”
Ferguson says “Righto!” He must be off on a pleasant walk. Shake. Luck. But, alone, Ferguson repeats: Minds in torment, seeking.

The next scene takes place at Janet’s. Through big windows, rich warm sunlight. Janet, Ferguson, and Phillip are drinking tea. All are mildly bored. They raise their cups to lips with a single motion.

Phillip asks why the silence: “Why nurse the little old muse of tragedy?” Janet says it’s old age. Phillip yawns she looks hardly seventeen. Janet says: “Fool’s consolation.” She doesn’t want admiration. Ferguson oracularly says she wants affection. But Janet’s laughed at affection so long, does Ferguson think it would come to her if she called it?

Phillip says she might try having a baby, but that’s deuced ugly. Janet thinks childless women supremely ridiculous; nature meant women to have children. Ferguson gloomy rightos. Phillip waves his tea cup: “Nature be damned.” Neither Ferguson nor Phillip is brown and robust enough to father a man-child, so Phillip suggests the proverbial iceman.

Phillip thinks Janet’s going to get religion. Janet says if God were there she’d ask him a few questions. Phillip calls God the great four-flusher—the guy that’s always somewhere else. Ferguson thinks this blasphemy only vulgar. Phillip retorts: “Not half so vulgar as solemnities over teacups.”

When they are alone, Ferguson tells Janet about Roger’s going to be a businessman—an office, a salary, a grind, a life insurance policy. Janet can’t get her mind off Roger. Roger has something they lack—a soul. Ferguson knows Janet smells romance, a hero. Every woman dreams to be the mother of heroes—by proxy. Ferguson admires women’s trying to keep alive the ridiculous strain of
romance in a society where it has ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{25)}

Janet looks out of the window sadly: “See them passing, the crowds all alike. The penny-chasers who have killed their thoughts. The cowards afraid of their shadows. Roger’s one of them now. So the machine takes them into the grinding wheels, the young, the eagereyed, and the steel teeth crunch on the young flesh of dreamers, grinding them into a pattern, turning them into the grey millions, into the nameless passionless millions that pass tragically through the dusk to their graves.

Ferguson too looks out the window grimly: “How about a bomb to frighten their security?” Janet does not wish to be made fun of. She could cry like a baby. Ferguson says that would do her good. Janet sustains her nerves with effort: “Never.” Ferguson recalls: “Those whose minds are in torment, seeking.”

The next scene takes place in the Wall Street office of broker Mr Rumsey, to whom Louise introduces Roger. Three gum-chewing typists, one with red hair, one with black hair, one with blonde hair, pound vigorously on typewriters whose methodical syncopated hum punctuates the interview between Rumsey and Roger.

Rumsey says he usually pays no attention to recommendations made by any of his employees, for he prefers to employ people who don’t know each other: “Don’t want cliques in this office.” References are always lies, anyway. Rumsey quickly decides to take Roger on.\textsuperscript{26)} Roger says thanks. Rumsey abruptly replies: “No place for thanks.”

Doing business here. Courteously, but business. He will pay Roger $18 a week. What he’s worth. If he’s worth more, he’ll get it. But Roger mustn’t expect advancement.

\textsuperscript{25)} In “The Oriental Drama” (\textit{Williams Literary Monthly}, February 1914) Lawson suggested that Romance be permitted to survie.

\textsuperscript{26)} In 1923 Roger is not hired, and all of Rumsey’s speech is omitted.
That's rather unlikely. "Do what you're doing very well. Never take ten minutes to do what requires five." Rumsey believes in the personal touch. He will tell Roger what's expected of him. Then Roger can do it or get out.

Be respectful. Not to Rumsey, but to the business for which he stands. This is one of the solidest houses on the street, it represents tremendous amount of money and responsibility. He sacrifices himself to it. "Do the same!"

Cooperation and faithfulness are keystones. Mind your own business. Never talk to anybody unless you're talked to. One word more: morality, the strictest morality. Rumsey practices it. He means this to include everything. Roger must not smoke or drink either in the office or out of it. "Your private life is just as important to us as your office work." Roger's appearance is bad, careless. Dress neatly in plain colors. Shave every day. Look lively. Go to bed early. Save 10% of your salary. Put another 10% in life insurance.

Now Roger knows the code. Failure to do any of these things will result in his dismissal. Will Roger try to do his best? More important, do what you're told. Seems like the Army, doesn't it? That's it: Soldiers of Money.

The next scene takes place at Janet's at evening time. Janet sits on her divan in shadow and speaks with Ferguson.

Ferguson is not suggesting marriage. Life is a rotten disappointment, and he is wisely bitter. He merely suggests they lump their bitterness together. Janet has tried that before. She won't be tied. Homelife is not a crime, but it's a bore. Ferguson asks: "Can't you get it through your stupid head I'm in love with you?" Janet says if he weren't in love with her, she'd give herself to him gladly. Ferguson wants just an unconventional frank home. Janet says men are so damned domestic. If they were content to be led around on silver chains and combed like dogs, it would be charming; but they insist on their sentiments.
Ferguson does not want to bind her by marriage, she says, then he wants to bind her by affections and then by children. But Janet won't be a breeding animal. Not for him. Slavery. She hasn't any affections, she says, but her voice has a hint of hysteria.

Ferguson says he is hurt terribly, and he leaves.

In front of the curtain, Ferguson meets Roger hurrying to see Janet. Strange our comings and goings, eh? Ferguson explains he's not committing suicide, but he's just ended his only disturbing emotion. He is now free to laugh. Passion's a rotten thing. It Kills. Without passion, a man can go far. He is now free of passion—but his freedom comes too late. Roger says he will always be the servant of his emotions, leading him he doesn't know where.

Next, Roger stands before Janet. She is not herself and speaks tensely with uncertainty. She's desperately glad Roger's come. Roger says he was a fool to run away. Janet says: "At least, you face it. You're eager to see it through." (Roger sits on the stool, his knees hunched up.) Janet says Ferguson doesn't care for her at all. Her words come huskily, and she breaks into violent broken sobbing. Roger, who has never seen a woman cry like this, sits hunching his knees closer to his chin. Then he rises and touches her hair and draws away as if shocked.

Roger says there's electricity in Janet's hair. She wishes there were dynamite in it. She's crying because she found a grey hair that morning and has been hysterical all day; there's a line on her forehead. She's old, and she's passionately miserable. (To Roger, she looks beautiful.)

Janet says Roger's changed. He's learned the proper thing to say. And the truth is no longer in him. A job—and zip!—"Youth spills like a bubble." Why can't Roger be a poet? Ferguson failed to be a poet because he lacked courage. Courage is the only thing that matters. (Roger says he is a coward.) Janet wonders where are Roger's hopes of yesterday. All the beautiful square
things are dreams till they happen. "Be young, for the love of life, be young!"

Roger now understands what Ferguson meant by saying Janet prevents suicide. "One loves life so in you that one couldn't die." When he first came there, death was in his heart, but he's stronger now. Janet tells him to stick to life. Do anything. Come and live with her. She'll support him. Roger laughs suspiciously, and she says: "I forget you're a man of the world now, which means a cad."

Roger admits he's tired of thinking and asks what he is to do. Janet tells him: Get a bootblack stand and polish leather singing under the sun. Roger says an American can't do that. Janet says an American wears a stiff collar. An American is afraid of himself and calls it prudence. An American is afraid of his neighbors and calls it patriotism. An American is a noisy coward.

"You and the other young men, money-grubbing, prematurely old, who forget the rich tradition, the vigorous, laughing American. You ought to know better, you who come from the Middle West, built out of the sweat of the swaggering careless pioneers. If a poet hasn't got in him blood and courage, I'd have his head off."

Janet says Roger is suffering the torment of the unfruitful. She says his new job will ruin him. She urges him to quit it.

Roger can't run, neither from the job, nor from her, to whom he has come humbly, asking. Janet says softly: "Anything I have to give." Roger says: "Help me to stick it out in its entirety." Roger wants courage.

Janet. If you'd trust me, believe in me.
Roger. You who are brilliant and startling.

...Why should women be clever. My mother wasn't clever.
Janet. Do you think if I were clever I'd stay in this vicious circle?

To get out—that would be clever.
Roger. I guess all of us just pass through a succession of servitudes.
Janet. Mine is as heavy as yours. Trust me.
Roger. I'm sort of fond of you.
Janet. And sorry for me. (Roger nods shamefacedly. She gives him her hand.) I'm miserable. I feel old enough to be your mother. Then it's settled. Our relation is fixed. Such as it is. Those are the uses of tragedy. If I hadn't been so miserable, I couldn't have done it.
Roger. I shall write a poem.

Roger leaves. Janet sits quite still, her hands clasped. One hardly expects her to be praying, the stage directions say, but perhaps she is. Praying to be worthy.27)

The next scene takes place back in Iowa in the dining room of the Bloomers, who have no gusto for their food and stare at each other in tragic contemplation. Mr Bloomer decides to go to New York, where Roger may be coming to harm. Mrs Bloomer's hands go up in the air, and she collapses on the table.

In the next scene, in Rumsey's business office, Rumsey compliments Roger on his accurate work.28) He raises Roger's salary. If Roger's got brains, Rumsey can him in a more confidential capacity. Rumsey says: "If you've got a businessman's head, let's have a look at the inside of it. Is it a vacuum or a money-making brain?" Rumsey then questions Roger about a transaction in "Silver Forks Railroad, Common and Preferred."

Roger says this stock is worthless. It's supposed to be an A-1 security but the data are fixed. Rumsey appreciates Roger's detection of the artificial boosting of a worthless stock; he thinks Roger will do, because of his powers of observation. Roger has observed Rumsey recommends Silver Forks to his clients. Rumsey thinks it better his clients lose than he. Roger says Rumsey's interest in

27) This may end Act II, but the division between Acts II and III is not clearly defined.
28) In 1923 all of the ensuing scene is omitted.
raising the market price of this stock is illegal. Rumsey is pained: "Perfectly honest..." Especially when the gain is big.

Roger estimates Rumsey's gain at $100,000. Roger doesn't want any of it: "How do I know how many people are starving?" because of Rumsey's manipulations. Rumsey likes Roger's strict principles, but certain people gain, others lose—. Roger wants to resign. He's not made for this business. It seems like cheating. Wall Street is a big walled lie shutting out the light. "I've got to get out in the light!" Rumsey says: "Self-control, please. We don't want any emotion here!" Rumsey thinks Roger one of those in whom too much thinking weakens the whole moral fibre. "You're wasting your energies in the pursuit of ideas. We don't waste here. We turn everything to the main purpose, the big end, Business." But Rumsey's offer to make Roger his confidential assistant still stands. Roger's the first young man he's had in the office that's dared to open his mouth. The only question is can he keep it closed? Let's turn a little of Roger's energy into money. "Feed the machine!" Rumsey says he understands Roger better than Roger thinks. Rumsey says Roger is on trial, for both of them. Roger says he will stay. But, alone in the semi-darkness, Roger says: "What doom will come on this place?"

The next scene is at Janet's during the evening. Janet and Roger sit together on her olive green divan before the orange curtain. Roger says things are not what one expects, odd, and he reads Janet a poem he has written.29)

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I sought love holy-eyed
By poets prophesied,
I sought for love in vain—
I buried my despair
In mist of a woman's hair
Falling about me like rain.
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29) In 1923 this poem was omitted.
I kissed the firm soft breast
Thinking that I possessed
Love's self in my embrace,
Blinded and passion-dazed,
Till surfeited I raised
My eyes to Know her face.
Eyes salmon-pink and mean
Slantwise and small with spleen,\(^{30}\)
Bitter and traitor-eyed—
And the image of my love
That had borne the grace of a dove
Became a lizard and died.
Knowing the poisoned ways
Of sinful ancient days
In the rage to drown despair
Bitter and sick of shame
I called my love by her name
Dying in her strangling hair!
Answered me from their graves—
Laughing, the ghosts of slaves,
Martyrs and saints of lust,
For man shall seek his mate
Never through love but hate,
And dust shall eat of dust.

Janet doesn't think much of this poem—too many rhymes—and she wonders what woman so marked Roger with sin. She wonders if Roger thinks she is a sort of Hell-hound chasing men. Roger says sullenly she's worse, more dangerous; he says bitterly there's a hatred of women in him. Janet says hate and desire are very close together. Roger says his desire has turned bitter in his mouth.\(^{21}\) Roger says women are no use "except to break on a

\(^{30}\) Lawson had read Baudelaire at Williams College.

\(^{31}\) In the summer of 1913 Lawson fell in love with and became engaged to a young woman who then married her childhood sweetheart.
wheel!" He hasn't tried that yet, but he will. Janet says: "You haven't taken long to learn the whole catechism. Aspiration ends in love, love ends in lust, lust ends in death."

In the next scene, Roger, fascinated, secretly watches the image of the puritanical Louise privately expressing repressed passion in front of a mirror.

Louise's hair, longer and richer than Roger supposed, is down. As she combs it, she studies it in the mirror. She runs her hot, trembling fingers through it. She looks at herself intently, passionately. She caresses her cheek. She moves her hands delicately over the curve of her breasts. She kisses her reflection in the mirror. Her body trembles. She controls her hysteria. She utters little laughing cries.

Roger slowly says to himself: "So he approached the devil-woman looking in a mirror lest he be turned into stone." Roger laughs: "Springtime. A girl with her soul's wings aflutter, revealed in twilit intimacy. What else can she show me? What new thing?"

Next, before the outer curtain in the light of fading afternoon, Louise tells Roger she has stolen negotiable bonds from Rumsey's office. She is peeved at Roger's moralism, calls him a smug hypocrite and a coward. But Roger says money's a lie that warped, bitter people worship, and he convinces her to return the bonds.

Next, while Louise is in the office returning the bonds, Rumsey proposes marriage to her on a business basis. Louise refuses. Rumsey, who is subject to "attacks," has a fit. He asks Louise to keep this interview a secret.

Next, Roger and Louise stand before outer curtain in the dim
rich evening glow. Roger says: "There's the end of business."

Louise has an impulse to laugh, terribly, shaking the houses. She sees Roger and her standing among the ruins, for a moment stronger than the forces of desolation. That night she was a thief and ceased to be a thief. She was a slave and a queen. Millions were offered her. Alone in the dark with Roger she is stronger than those millions. Her laugh can bring death to the safe rich in their offices. She's learned that Roger and she and the millionaire and the drunk are all fighting the same unspoken battles.

Roger says Louise is now ready to meet Janet, who is poised, secure and strong, and can help her.

The next scene is at Janet's.

Janet says Roger and Louise have a false idea of her. Louise made an awful effort for goodness, but Janet has been fighting the nightmare of good and evil. All her life Louise has fought for bread, but all her life Janet has fought her Puritan ancestors—"Their bony fingers heavy on our shoulders, pointing the way, the ruthless path of the old, the fear mongers." Janet's mother was a Daughter of the American Revolution, but Janet wants to be the mother of a new revolution, but the old thoughts trap you, and the revolt dies. Those who go down to defeat are the forrunners of the young that shall come marching, singing a new song, shouting that love lives.33)

Phillip cautions moderation. He's an American raised on the difference between liberty and license. Janet calls that a dead

33) This idea returns at the end of the 1923 version when onstage the young can be heard marching and singing a new song (but not shouting that love lives). At the end of this 1920 draft Janet, who does not appear in 1923, speaks most of the lines spoken in 1923 by the spirit of the dead Louise.
formula. License is energy fulfilling itself. “Let’s be licentious because without it life dies.” Louise describes work. “Work in stuffy rooms that tires your head, tires your hands, makes you sick to your stomach.” Louise is soiled with that kind of work, soiled with cramped desires, bad food, calloused hands. She’s in the mud... the masses.

Alone, Janet looks for something to touch but finds nothing. She sobs: “Can one be so lonely and live?”

Thus ends the Second Act of the 1920 version of Roger Bloomer.