



1942

An essay on character portrayal, style, and technique of writing in Maxwell Anderson's biographical plays in verse

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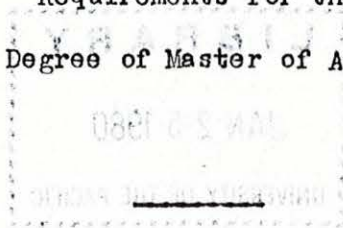
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A Thesis
Submitted to the Department of English
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In partial fulfillment
of the
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Degree of Master of Arts



APPROVED *Clair C. Olson.* Chairman of the Thesis Committee

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An Essay on Character Portrayal,
" "
Style, and Technique of Writing
in Maxwell Anderson's Biographical

Plays in Verse

<u>Elizabeth the Queen,</u>	November, 1930
<u>Mary of Scotland,</u>	November, 1933
<u>Valley Forge,</u>	December, 1934
<u>Winterset,</u>	September, 1935
<u>The Masque of Kings,</u>	February, 1937
<u>Knickerbocker Holiday,</u>	October, 1938
<u>Journey to Jerusalem,</u>	October, 1940

By

Henry E. Hobson

Stockton, California

1942

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with the general scope and trend of Maxwell Anderson's work in order to give a more complete conspectus for the discussion of his plays. By so doing a foundation will be laid for a more intelligible discussion of the specific aspects of the seven plays concerned in the thesis proper, the title of which is, "An Essay on Character Portrayal, Style, and Technique of Writing in Maxwell Anderson's Biographical Plays in Verse."

I. Realism and Plays Written in Prose

Fundamentally Anderson has been an experimenter with enough audacity and pluck to attempt techniques and media different from those of other contemporary playwrights. At no time is he at a loss to convert material to his purposes whether he treats his subject realistically or romantically. In either medium he has been consistently successful; of course, he has had failures, but in proportion to the number of plays he has written, his failures are negligible. When Anderson first entered the play-writing realm, he was extremely realistic and caustic in his style of writing. His first play, White Desert, which contained dialogue in verse, was a failure because "the public found it far stronger than it could stomach".¹ The next play, What Price Glory?,

¹ Carl Carmer, Theatre Arts Monthly, June, 1933, p. 59.

was written in collaboration with Stallings, and its success immediately brought recognition to Anderson as a potentially great dramatist. What Price Glory? endeavored to depict in uninhibited language war-time Army and Navy life as it really was. It created a furor because of the acid language used, and because of the complete lack of conventionality in speech and action. The virility and honesty of the approach to the subject by the authors quickened the interest of the public in the American theatre. Even today we have serials on the radio and in the motion pictures with the two famous characters, Captain Flagg and Sergeant Quirt, which were created in What Price Glory?. The freedom of action and expression, and the psychological lack of inhibitions make these characters live vividly in the memories of those who have become acquainted with them. Alexander Woolcott has said of it that "no war play written in the English language since the German guns boomed under the walls of Liege, ten years ago, has been so true, so alive, so salty and so richly satisfying as the piece called What Price Glory?".¹

A play which presented life from almost a naturalistic viewpoint was Outside Looking In, a social drama written in prose and based upon Tully's novel, Beggars of Life. One of the purposes for writing this play was to depict the lives of vagrants in unflinching determination to reveal them as they actually existed. The style and technique were not appropriate to the plot because the plot contained melodramatic incidents resulting in scenes of violent action which were not convincingly realistic. Oklahoma, the central

¹ The American Theatre, 1752-1934, p. 245.

character, typified the reckless daring of some types of hobos. Language and locale gave an accurate atmosphere. Here Anderson was straining at creating mood and local color, yet attempting to draw extremely sharp characterization.

Saturday's Children followed Outside Looking In, and served as a good contrast in treatment of material and choice of subject. Written in unpretentious prose, Saturday's Children is a charming comedy dealing with the problems of young post-war marriage. Although it reveals the domestic problem of the effect of unrestful times and adjustment to change in the post-war economic situation upon the morals and actions of young married people, the play is treated with delicate grace in language and wit. Gods of Lightning, written with H. Hickerson, a play in prose based upon the Sacco-Venzetti murder case (later revamped into Winterset), was a daring attempt to seek the fundamental truths of character and of beauty, to probe the motives beneath the surface of event and character. The vivid, cruel, sensational verve of the dialogue gave this play an element not common in modern American drama. Gods of Lightning treated justice as a class privilege reserved for the wealthy; it questioned the strong-armed authority of the law to crush free thought in the laboring class in America. This play is probably one of Anderson's most vigorous efforts at drama written to expose social injustice. The characters in Gods of Lightning lacked depth because theme and plot consumed the entire interest of the playwright.

Still maintaining the predominantly realistic attitude, Anderson next produced Gypsy, a morbid, psychopathic play in so far as plot is concerned. The plot is centered around an unhealthy sexual situation of a married couple. The play is uninspired because it lacks character motivation in accordance with universal inclinations. That is, the action is so melodramatic and torrentially passionate that it exaggerates and misrepresents true causes for action. Gypsy is uneven, abortive in concept, and in general a failure, although one redeeming aspect is the strong and fluent diction.

In 1933 Anderson produced a Pulitzer prize winner in Both Your Houses, which is a vitriolic exposé of governmental graft and corruption in a democracy. It is one of the best arguments in modern drama against the belief that propaganda should be excluded from art. Anderson wrote Both Your Houses expressly to air his thoughts about corrupt governmental machinery. The loss of integrity in governmental activity is almost an obsession with Anderson. This may be illustrated by his use of the theme in The Masque of Kings, Knickerbocker Holiday, Gods of Lightning, and Valley Forge. Here, again, although theme predominated, the characters served as instruments to reveal the problem to the audience. The characters were not well rounded figures. It is ironic that so realistic a play should win the Pulitzer prize, when Anderson's mettle is best revealed in poetic dramas and historical plays, which are his forte.

Candle in the Wind, a prose play written in 1941, contains a war theme centering around the Fall of Dunkerque and German control in France. It uses a simpler theme and a more conventional formula than Key Largo, Elizabeth the Queen, or Mary of Scotland; it is told

quietly, almost wearily, to create a mood of despair and futility. Out of this crushed state of affairs, Anderson builds up the idea that all is not lost, that the pride and unconquerable spirit of France will rise and beat down the oppression that restricts its freedom. Candle in the Wind was uninspired; it lacked structure and firm delineation of character.

II. Romantic Historical Plays

While writing the realistic plays already discussed, Anderson was experimenting with romantic historical drama. First Flight (written in collaboration with Stallings), a play based upon the early life of Andrew Jackson, was amusing, anecdotal, but vividly drawn, showing much imagination in character portrayal and in creating the atmosphere of early, vigorous America. Just as in Outside Looking In, Anderson creates in First Flight an excellent representation of the times and spirit of early American life in North Carolina. The burly, brusque backwoods characters talk in rustic Carolinian dialect and act in a naive fashion. Yet Anderson has his Jackson filled with a dash of bravado and romantic allure. The Buccaneer, also written with Stallings' aid, had no other motive than to present a colorful character in a dramatic, carefree time. Biographical in form, as is First Flight, The Buccaneer tells in glowing terms the escapades of Sir Henry Morgan in the City of Panama. The romantic element involved is his meeting a young noble lady who proves her mettle as an equal to his character.

In 1926 the Sea Wife was written but was never given professionally, nor was it ever published. Its premiere performance was given by an

amateur group at the University of Minnesota in 1932. This play is significant as a precursor of Anderson's development in style of writing, creating characters, and importance of theme, and of his ardent desire to attack fundamental human problems as a solid basis for action in his dramas. Poetic in language, romantic in atmosphere, its locale an island near the coast of Maine, the time set in the last century, it is a weird tale of superstition and cruelty among the people of a small fishing village. The story was handled as an historical phase of New England life veiled in the mystery of the hidden past. The mystical part of the story is derived from Matthew Arnold's poem, The Forsaken Merman.

John K. Sherman says that "the result is a strange and frequently strained amalgam of realism and tortured fantasy".¹ This is true of many of Anderson's plays when he desires to weld two elements almost diametrically opposed. There is a strongly pervading sense of inevitable doom throughout the tragedy, the same headlong impulse toward a tragic end, the same dark brooding over man's place and purpose in life which appear incomprehensible that are found in Winterset. In Sea Wife, Margaret returns to Dan because only with him can she find warmth and goodness. She says:

So is all this world.
Bitter and desperate and desolate
Save for the hearth fires of one small earth here
where men have leagued together against death,
praying always to Gods they never see
At truce with one another, one even in their wars
sometimes they can be kind.²

¹ Minneapolis Star, December 7, 1932.

² Sea Wife, Manuscript, p. 7.

The poet presents thought-provoking ideas about life with humility because of his inability to solve the great problems and intricacies connected with life. "Maxwell Anderson asks the age-old, ultimate questions about the nature of being of man's destiny which--with one other exception, Eugene O'Neill--the American playwright has largely chosen to ignore."¹

III. Plays Interpreting the American Scene

In 1932, Anderson used as his subject a little known phase of history from which to develop his theme and play. The last manifestations of the clash of American and Spanish civilization at Taos, New Mexico serve as the theme for Night Over Taos. Feudalism is on its way out, but it puts up a stiff resistance. Federico admits ultimate defeat early in the play:

Too late because
we are out of fashion! Our guns are out of fashion,
also our speech and our customs and our blood.
They're the new race with the new weapons.²

The surge of the American pioneers vanquishes this old western culture. Symbolic in presentation but confused in thought, Night Over Taos has been deemed by most critics as just a better than average Anderson play.³ Many critics believed that Night Over Taos contained a noble idea, and were grateful to have an aspect of American history so little known brought before the public. It was a concept which brought significance to the theme of the changing order, but the idea was not

¹ George Beiswanger, "Of Thee I Sing", Theatre Arts Monthly, November, 1941, p. 827.

² Night Over Taos, p. 53.

³ George Jean Nathan, Vanity Fair, 38 (May, 1932), p. 76.
J. W. Krutch, The Nation, 134 (March 30, 1932), p. 378.

executed well. Anderson's thinking was confused, and he was undecided whether to stress mainly character or theme or both.

The character, Montoya, the rebelling leader who arouses the natives to revolt against American aggression, symbolizes the ideal in feudalism. He is a tragic figure in his useless attempt, but heroic in his endeavor. Anderson makes him a colorful figure. With modern implications, the playwright, when he has Montoya admit the defeat of feudalism, more than hinted that the old order must make room for the new:

The Spanish blood runs thin. Spain has gone down,
And Taos, a little island of things that were,
Sinks among things that are. The North will win.
Taos is dead. You told me this before,
but I wouldn't believe it. I believe it now
Yes, and it's right. It's right
because what wins is right. I won't win forever.¹

Night Over Taos was criticized for being too intellectual, garbled in execution, over-elaborate in dialogue and lacking in emotional warmth.² The dialogue is said to be neat and incisive, but bloodless and full of empty sound. The theme was conclusively stated and the action was developed commensurately with it in the first act. After the first act the action was pointless.³ On the other hand, the play was lauded for telling history with force and candor and in impressive language.⁴ Between these extremes of opinion lies a true estimate of the play. Night Over Taos is uneven in character depiction and power of language; and it is confused in execution so that dramatic effect is decidedly dulled.

¹ Night Over Taos, p. 199.

² John Hutchins, Theatre Arts Monthly, 16 (May, 1932), p. 360.

³ New York Evening Post, March 10, 1932.

⁴ New York Times, March 10, 1932.

Another play with a modern implication and bearing a strong social significance, which was present in Euripedes' Medea and is still pertinent, is Wingless Victory. When Anderson was sure of his position as an historical verse playwright, he moved into the contemporary field to interpret the American scene in his own poetic right. Liberal and exceedingly positive in his democratic position, he excoriated political corruption, breathed anathema upon race prejudice and bigotry and bias in religion, spoke eloquently against social corruption, but yet maintained a consistent distrust of government interference and an antipathy to revolutionary action. Wingless Victory belongs to his dramas concerning the American scene, as do Star Wagon, High Tor, and Key Largo; but these last three have a decided change of treatment and attitude which will be discussed later.

A story of miscegenation is Wingless Victory, a tragedy of intolerance. The theme of racial prejudice and religious bigotry was old when Medea, the Greek tragedy, was played at Athens, but it is universal in human attitudes at Salem, New England in 1850 or today. There is a profound penetration into the finer manifestations of emotionality and spiritual aspects of life in this play. The quest for mental peace and the need for consolation are consistently brought to the attention of the audience to heighten the searing agony and pain of Oparre, the heroic Malay princess, who is most unwanted in Nathaniel McQuestion's home at Salem. A gloom and a pulse-deadening defeatism pervade the play, resulting from uncertainty and perturbation in mind and soul, lack of mutual humane ideals and moral conduct. But at the end one feels the nobility of Anderson's thought, his hope for mankind.

In his essay, The Essence of Tragedy, he writes:

He [the playwright] must so arrange his story that it will prove to the audience that men pass through suffering purified, that, animal though we are, there is in us all some divine, incalculable fire that urges us to be better than we are.¹

Many attacks have been made upon Anderson for his defeatism.

Richard Watts, Jr. comments:

With the growing certainty of Anderson's poetic muse, there seems to arise an increasing defeatism of mind and emotion. He has come to despair of justice and tolerance and mutual understanding... But such romantic melancholy scenes seem suited to a tragic dramatic poet, and despite its bitterness, his play has heroism of spirit.²

Watts writes in another article, after critical reflection:

Yet The Wingless Victory, for all its despair, does possess a heroic quality which suggests that the author's defeatism fails to go as deep as one had begun to fear. Mr. Anderson still finds a certain quality of grandeur in the human soul.³

The play was received coldly, but later critics revised their opinions, and the play was given the Critics' Prize. This altered attitude is not uncommon in connection with Anderson's plays. His idiom and media are foreign to the average mentality of critics concerned with a world of prose, and it isn't until time has played its part upon critics' minds that the impact of thought and poetic grandeur are fully realized.

¹ Page 13.

² New York Herald-Tribune, December 24, 1936.

³ Ibid., January 3, 1937.

Doubtless the play has many faults; it is uneven in execution and in style, but it must be considered as one of the author's best plays. Criticisms on technique are plentiful: he has over-burdened his drama with words.¹ Another critic writes:

It is a play that remains undramatized; a script which is smothered by its language; a text in which the words and action are divorced.²

Eloquent diction saves the play even though it is the thing which critics berate:

There are phrases of subtle beauty and tenderness and passages of magnificent anger touched with an exact and soaring pen.³

The singing beauty of poetic speech and dignity of feeling which arises, at its best, to nobility are brought to the theatre in Maxwell Anderson's The Wingless Victory.⁴

Probably one of contemporary drama's most remembered characters will be Oparre, a Malay princess with a noble soul drawn by a great imaginative artist. Her defeat, persecution, and defenselessness convey a cringing horror at human brutality and arrogance. She cries out:

I have been misled
a long time by your Christ and his beggar's doctrine,
written for beggars. Your beseeching, pitiful Christ!
The old Gods are best, the Gods of blood and bronze,
and the arrows dipped in venom.⁵

In the final scene aboard ship, Oparre prays again to her old god, saying:

- ¹ Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, January 3, 1937.
- ² John Mason Brown, New York Evening Post, January 3, 1937.
- ³ John Anderson, New York Evening Journal, December 24, 1936.
- ⁴ Richard Lockridge, New York Sun, December 24, 1935.
- ⁵ The Wingless Victory, p. 109.

The earth rolls toward the dark,
 and men begin to sleep. God of the children,
 God of the lesser children of the earth,
 the black, the unclean, the vengeful, you are mine
 now as when I was a child. He came too soon,
 this Christ of Peace. Men are not ready yet.
 Another hundred thousand years they must
 drink your potion of tears and blood.¹

With the world in its present plight in the year 1942, war-torn man killing man, creeds forgotten, morals disregarded, how prophetic are Oparre's words, and how great is the need for the universal concept of the brotherhood of man.

IV. Plays of Fantasy and Comedy

Ranging into the realm of fantasy, which is a poetic right of any imaginative playwright, Maxwell Anderson presented High Tor to the New York public in 1937. As a poetic comedy, it was very favorably received and is considered by many critics to be one of his best plays.

High Tor is certainly as fine a poetic comedy as our time has produced.²

Again the author is able, through the poetic idiom, to couple intangibles so that they are harmonious in an incongruous situation such as exists in High Tor. Then, too, with potent force, he questions the ethics of our present-day business, which surely must, and ought to be, questioned in a brusque, realistic fashion. But Anderson is too clever an artist to preach in a direct fashion. In all of his plays except Winterset he cloaks his theme behind historical trappings. High Tor is a tale about land speculators and about a plucky lad who refused to be devoured by the leviathan of our industrial civilization.

¹ The Wingless Victory, pp. 125-6.

² Fred B. Millett, Contemporary American Authors, p. 3.

High Tor is an effort to combine the Rip Van Winkle legend with the creatures of today's world, an attempt to brew from a kind of modern Catskill Midsummer Night's Dream, a contrast between the ghost of yesterday and the flesh of today and to distil out of it the philosophy that reality suffers no escape and that the impossibility of escape is not without its compensating reward, however evanescent.¹

Nothing could be more poetic than the love of Lise and Van Van Dorn, which reminds one of the love between Helen Pettigrew and Peter Standish in Berkeley Square. Love to these couples lives in time itself through the ages, and their love cannot fade when physical life ceases. The relativity of time seems all important to Anderson, and he enjoys using psychological and spiritual aspects of life in relation to time, fate, and destiny. The destiny of man is bound up in time, and time is a pliable essence of life. Van speaks about the Dutch ghosts who symbolize time:

I know--but these were ghosts or I'm a ghost
and all of us. God knows where we leave off
and where ghosts begin. God knows where ghosts leave off
And we begin.²

Anderson seems to find it so in Star-Wagon, another fantasy, as well as in High Tor. Van Van Dorn retreats to his Parnassus, the mountain, High Tor, to dwell in the nebula of fancy and of ethereal love while all around him exists the crass commercialism which he abhors. Judith, his mortal lover, brings him back to reality, showing that woman is a practical creature.

Anderson, in his High Tor, gives a vivid example of this platitude. Van Dorn lives in the clouds, literally and figuratively. His sweetheart works in a hotel below. She wants him to sell High Tor, to marry and settle down, to pull him down to earth.³

¹ George Jean Nathan, The Morning After the First Night, Ch. IV, p. 111.

² High Tor, p. 111.

³ Joseph Mersand, The American Drama, 1930-40, p. 163.

The realistic elements are extremely humorous; the shadowy figures of the Dutch explorers serve for good comedy; while in contrast romantic atmosphere pervades in Van Dorn's idealism and phantom-love. The imagination and poetic charm of this entire situation are extremely effective. The poetry used in High Tor is of a high order to suit the delicate atmosphere, and the idealism existing in the play. The prose used in the realistic scenes is most earthy.

Maxwell Anderson, more consciously than the others perhaps, chooses the means of expression of each play on the level at which he conceives its idea--prose, rhythmic prose or poetry.¹

Characterization in High Tor is of a fine imaginative nature.

Lise, Van Dorn, and Judith are particularly memorable. When Lise fades into an evanescent spirit, and mortal Judith asserts her claim to his love, Van Dorn is fretful to see his dream pass, but he rallies to the thought that reality and the objectivity of life are not so unpalatable as he imagined.

Anderson's philosophy about escapism is found in Lise's lines:

...The earth you have
seems now so hard and firm, with all its colors
sharp for the eye, as a taste's sharp to the tongue,
you'll hardly credit how its outlines blur
and wear out as you wear. Play now with fire
while fire will burn, bend down the bough and eat
before the fruit falls. For there comes a time
when the great sun-lit pattern of the earth
shakes like an image under water, darkens,
dims, and the clearest voices that we knew
are sunken bells, dead sullen under sea
receding.²

¹ George Beiswanger, "Of Thee I Sing", Theatre Arts Monthly, November, 1941, p. 827.

² High Tor, p. 81.

From his flights into the realm of fantasy, Anderson returns to the thought that there is no greater sensation of joy and happiness than in living life in pulsating, warm reality.

Star-Wagon, written almost entirely in prose and rhythmical prose, is closely allied with High Tor in being a fantasy and in delving into the aspects of relativity of time. As an escape mechanism, Stephen Minok wants to relive life so that this time life will be a success and extremely happy. This theme is carried out to show that we wouldn't want our life other than the way it is now and as we have lived it. This, too, reiterates what Anderson positively concluded about reality and life in High Tor. Except for the unique treatment of time, and for the fantastic idea of a time machine, the play is not of extreme merit. The theme, in other words, carries the play. The characters are not so sharply drawn nor so imaginative as Anderson's previous creations. Ideas seem to be more important in this play. The great desirability of living a peaceful, secure life is opposed to the onslaught of the reckless, precipitous life in the machine age with its emphasis upon material prosperity. This play is one of his lesser works but still definitely of the Andersonian calibre.

V. Poetic Plays - Introduction to Anderson's Biographical Plays in Verse.

Key Largo is almost distinctly in a category of its own in that it is a soul-searching, turbulent quest for peace of mind by its characters. It definitely is an attempt to depict the modern American scene by exposing the political graft and corruption in high places

as well as the pernicious vices in Florida. It shows the futility of war and the utter waste of human life in feeding the war gods. An utter gloom pervades this play. It fits the time, the muddle in which the world has placed itself. "As in Winterset, it seeks to explore the deepest significance underlying a contemporary situation."¹ As a play, it is extremely uneven, but has such a great message it cannot be considered lightly. Most critics condemn it for its prolixity, for its muddled intentions, and for its confusion of philosophy.

There is no exact way to describe this baffling exercise of Mr. Anderson's muse. We hear some emotion on its way to expression; we are convinced that something is about to be born in a poetic body. Certainly the under-current of feeling and intention has a very genuine, and suggests a very high, seriousness. Now and then the result is excellent. Very often its special failure eludes analysis. We have only its sense of some fixed resolve to be metrical--metre, in sum, becomes an 'ism', the main intention being set upon it. To this is added a determination to be figurative, a poetical figure, creative or flat, will finish the line or bust, and we are left with a feeling of restiveness in ourselves and evaporation on stage.²

But Joseph Wood Krutch is more optimistic:

For all its shortcomings--and there are shortcomings, characteristic and persistent in Mr. Anderson's work--Key Largo does not fail. It chooses a great theme, and makes something out of that theme.³

¹ Joseph Wood Krutch, The Nation, December 9, 1939, pp. 656-8.

² Stark Young, "Full of the Moon", The New Republic, December 13, 1939, p. 230.

³ The Nation, December 9, 1939, pp. 656-7.

King McCloud is the central character in theme and plot. He acts as his own protagonist and antagonist. There is a struggle in his soul, and it leads to tragedy. King McCloud must choose between common sense and heroic self-sacrifice. Is living worth any ideal? Is it justifiable to forsake principle and resort to cowardice so that one may live? King thinks that man is not capable of noble thoughts, that all life is on a mercenary basis. Why should he risk his life to save another ignoble soul? There is a strong negativistic attitude, a great disbelief in the worth of man as King sees it. He finally realizes, through the faith Alegre displays, that the only way to gain back his prestige and noble selfhood is to vindicate his position by a valorous deed regardless of the personal risk. He displays great courage and risks death when he refuses to admit to the demands of Murillo, a gun-toting gangster, who has designs upon Alegre. A gun battle follows in which Murillo is killed and King is mortally wounded. King meets death valorously with the realization that in dying for a cause he will gain his integrity of spirit. Through all his pessimism King McCloud realizes that the institutions of life are worth preserving with the hope of improving the ways of man.

The message of tragedy is simply that men are better than they think they are, and this message needs to be said over and over again in every tongue lest the race lose faith in itself entirely. It is in this mood that Key Largo is fashioned.¹

¹ The Essence of Tragedy, p. 8.

King conforms to Anderson's philosophy as expressed in his The Essence of Tragedy.

A hero must pass through an experience which opens his eyes to an error of his own. He must learn through suffering. In a tragedy he suffers death itself as a consequence of his fault or his attempt to correct it, but before he dies he has become a nobler person because of his recognition of his fault and the consequent alteration of his course of action.¹

The play is told in long passages of blank verse and Anderson's own idiom. Most critics assailed it as not being of his best calibre.

Mr. Anderson is a poet, though he has written more eloquently than in Key Largo, and the reason is perhaps that confusion of mind makes a confusion in his words.²

Time's reviewer states:

The verse of Key Largo will not stand comparison with such contemporary dramatic poetry as T. S. Elliot's or Archibald MacLeish's.³

Rosamond Gilder of the Theatre Arts Monthly states:

Mr. Anderson can write amazingly lucid and exciting dialogue on occasion, but he can also become bogged down in weighty metaphor, he can be ponderous and repetitive, and he can, as in the present instance fail to turn his arguments into characters.⁴

Regardless of the drubbing the critics gave this play, much of it remains great in concept, character definition, and poetry. There exists here a great imaginative spirit, fiery, humane, and noble.

¹ Page 9.

² Grenville Vernon, The Commonwealth, December 8, 1939, p. 163.

³ Time, December 11, 1939, p. 49.

⁴ Theatre Arts Monthly, February, 1940, pp. 850-3.

The chief characteristics of Anderson's writing are seen clearly when his work is subjected to analysis. Characteristics such as his great versatility in using varied material, characters, language, and technique are immediately recognizable when the range of his work is studied. Beginning with a realistic and journalistic attitude toward his material in early plays such as What Price Glory? and Gods of Lightning, Anderson gradually turned to a more definite, romantic attitude in Gypsy, Sea Wife and Night Over Taos. His interest in history deepened as his proficiency in playwriting increased, although early plays such as First Flight and The Buccaneers showed a lively interest in historical material and characters. This early training made his work easier when he attempted the difficult task of handling historical material, and recreating historical personages and atmosphere in Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland and The Masque of Kings. Never are phases or tendencies of writing definite and completely isolated, but they run concurrently and are intertwined and interdependent. Along with interest in history, Anderson's interest in politics and the interpretation of modern life as well as American history specifically broadened and deepened until he is considered a minor prophet and a philosopher of the American Scene. Plays such as High Tor, Saturday's Children, and Both Your Houses are illustrations of his political interest and his interpretation of modern American life. Characters such as Andrew Jackson in First Flight, Sir Henry Morgan in The Buccaneers, Oklahoma in Outside Looking In, and Margaret in Sea Wife show his power to portray character early in his career. His use of language always lends a decided point of interest and power

to his plays, and critics have constantly written of this ability from the time he wrote What Price Glory? to the time he produced his last play, Candle In The Wind.

Preparatory in its nature, the foregoing material was presented to emphasize the specific elements which are to be discussed in the main body of the thesis.

The aspects of Anderson's technique in character development and style will be perused closely in studying his biographical plays. It is in his biographical plays in verse that Anderson shows his great ability to create character, to write lofty poetry, and to tell a tale in vivid, romantic tones, atmosphere and color. The essence of his great contribution to modern American drama will be analyzed in the following chapters.

In our age of prose and biographical novels, it would seem to follow that drama would remain entirely clear from the biographical influence or adopt it wholeheartedly. Usually drama pursues a course parallel to prose, or takes a divergent path. One medium usually influences the other when the predominating form is sufficiently strong and entrenched in the literature of the period. Biographical drama, however, did not assume importance until the success of Elizabeth the Queen and Mary of Scotland illustrated that the theatre is as excellent a medium to depict the lives of interesting people as the novel proved to be. Not only did Anderson draw attention to personal histories as dramatic possibilities, but he wrote in a medium which was thought taboo for contemporary drama. Stephen

Vincent Benét says with regard to Anderson's revival of poetic dramas in blank verse:

He has brought verse and the form of verse back to the American stage - not as an experiment, not as an oddity, but as an essential of the later plays he has written... And because of it, he has opened a shut door.¹

Anderson, without doubt, is pre-eminent in the field of romantic historical drama, and many critics believe that his historical and biographical plays comprise his greatest contribution to the American theatre.² He has definitely built his whole philosophy and theory of dramaturgy consistent with the poetic in character and form.

Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, Valley Forge, The Masque of Kings, Winterset, Knickerbocker Holiday, and Journey to Jerusalem are in plot structure close-knitted and of high merit in verse, character and technique as well as in lofty thought because of this fundamental conception. Anderson believes that the poetic concept cannot be separated from the poetic form. That is why his verse never seems stilted jargon laboring on mediocre material. Anderson has an accurate perception of the correct medium in relation to content. For example, he uses prose dialogue in expository scenes, and excellent blank verse in the dramatic and emotional scenes in most of his plays. In his The Essence of Tragedy he states:

The best prose in the world is inferior on the stage to the best poetry. It is the fashion, I know, to say that poetry is a matter of content and emotion, not of form, but this is said in an age of prose by prose

¹ "New Grandeur of the Theatre", The Stage, 14 (January, 1937), p. 42.

² Ibid., 11 (January, 1934), p. 12.

Rives Mathews, Outlook, 156 (November 4, 1930), p. 472.

Arthur Hobson Quinn, Representative Plays, p. 1104.

writers who have not studied the effect of form on content or who wish to believe there is no limit to the scope of the form they have mastered. To me it is inescapable that prose is the language of information and poetry the language of emotion.¹

Whether we accept Anderson's view that a dichotomy between poetic form and content is a bastard concept of this age of prose is not extremely pertinent. The thing which matters is for us to recognize that he has made his philosophy work so excellently that critics believe him to be the greatest poetic dramatist of our time.²

It must be remembered that before Anderson was a dramatist he was a poet.³ In his first play, White Desert, he used poetic dialogue with a modern subject. This combination of form and content also occurred in Sea Wife. Also, early in his play writing, his interest in historical characters and incidents was manifest in First Flight and The Buccaneer. When the two aspects of his writing merged, as in Elizabeth the Queen, he was sure of his status. Anderson has served his apprenticeship in the theatre. Failing in his first poetic drama, White Desert, Anderson came to realize that all poetically treated subjects were based upon facts of history. The Greek dramatists, Shakespeare, and the French neo-classicists all wrote in poetic form about the subjects which had been proved by the test of time, and were generally familiar to the public. Anderson returned to the poetic medium following the prescribed pattern set down by the masters of the past.

¹ Page 34.

² Op. Cit., See note 2 on page 21 of Introduction.

³ From the time he graduated from college in 1911, and while he was teaching and doing editorial work for newspapers, Anderson wrote poetry for journals and newspapers. His poetry was later compiled and edited in one volume under the title You Who Have Dreams.

Chapter II

ELIZABETH THE QUEEN

In the year 1930 when Elizabeth the Queen was presented on Broadway, it marked the beginning of a decade of dramatic, poetic writing by Anderson for a very receptive and appreciative theatre. Previous to this time his writing may be placed in the journalistic trend, even though he had tried his talents in the poetic medium in White Desert and Sea Wife. His journalistic writings include What Price Glory?, Gods of Lightning, and Both Your Houses. During these last ten years Anderson has used history and biography for his story, for depiction of characters, and for atmosphere; and in the use of history and biography he has been extremely successful.

Elizabeth the Queen as a play was a frank excursion into the techniques of Elizabethan playwriting as well as into the life of Queen Elizabeth herself. The character of the court fool, the scenes with series of puns, the use of the play within a play (the part of Henry IV) used in the final act, all of these do more than suggest accidental coincidences with Shakespearean drama. Like many Elizabethan playwrights, Anderson turned to the lives of important historical personages for his plot. More important, many parts of the play, especially all the strongly emotional scenes, were written in blank verse.

Anderson's drama was written when there was a considerable biographical and literary interest in the Virgin Queen. There was consequently much discussion as to the authenticity of the events of the play. Although it was readily admitted that the incidents of the story did not coincide with known actual facts, this was held to be no

sound criticism. In the Aristotelian sense, the plot was considered probable, and even, granted the nature of the characters as conceived by the playwright, inevitable. There were many critical comments of this nature, in defense of the poet's right to rearrange the generally accepted dicta of history.¹ Anderson adjusted the gossip of history cunningly to the purposes of drama, for the sake of more dramatic story telling and romance. Stark Young thinks Anderson is correct in using history as he did. "So far as history goes, the play walks freely, as by all precedent in drama and principle in art it has every right to do."² Clark writes with the same opinion: "Mr. Anderson is a playwright, looking upon human beings as material for drama, and caring little or nothing for the accident of mere fact."³ The privilege of dramatic license, whatever critics said, was used effectively to recreate a love story, a passionate, heady affair between two dominant characters who thought of personal aggrandizement before they considered their love relationship. Tragedy resulted in death for one and misery and old age for the other.

Elizabeth the Queen is a study in character, especially two characters, Elizabeth and Essex, who act as the mainspring of the play. Without these two full-rounded creations, the play would be an exhibition of blank verse and mere shadows for characters. The fiery, human struggle between Elizabeth and Essex is challenging to any person's interest. The understandable emotions of love and jealousy and ambition strive for pre-

¹ New York Sun, November 4, 1930.

Percy Hammond, New York Tribune, November 4, 1930.

² The New Republic, 65 (November 19, 1930), p. 17.

³ Barrett H. Clark, Drama Magazine, 21 (December, 1930), p. 12.

cedence while the reader waits in anxiety and tense interest to see the culmination of these drives. But in the struggle it seems evident that the practical will win, and it does, in this case leading to tragedy.

Of the characters which surround the court of Elizabeth, the most lovable and well-defined are those of the Fool and Penelope. Both have grace and human warmth which make them very sympathetic and firm creations. Other characters which are associated with the court are not extremely well defined. They are used to create atmosphere and give the outward show and trappings of Elizabethan times, but they remain stiff, unpliant ghosts that spout intrigue against Essex to gain favor with the hard-hearted queen who had a piercing intellect which penetrated the small minds of her scheming ministers.¹ Cecil, the blackguard councilor, who would stoop to any chicanery to gain his ends, is fairly well depicted. Burghly and Bacon, as historical personages, are characters in the play but do not have the propelling interest or motive of character to make them real, to make them alive on the pages of Anderson's play. They serve as tools to whom Elizabeth could hurl her invectives, or pour her heart out in lament and feminine softness.

Elizabeth, the virgin Queen of England, was not young when her interest in Essex blossomed into love. Her red hair had lost its soft, shining glow; her eyes, however, still glistened and sparkled. She was becoming haggard and hard, but remained queenly, regal, and proud. In Essex she saw the last vestige of her youthful life, her last chance to really live, her only hope to keep aglow the feminine charm with which she so proudly flirted and enticed men.

¹ Francis Fergusson, The Bookman, February, 1931, p. 86.

She knew that, when he was gone, she must be a stern task master, a queen in business only, a virgin queen who must grow old gracefully, but alone. As Anderson presents her she is capable of great wit and jest, able to laugh and make merry so long as the jest is not at her expense. She had not lost her sense of humor, but she did have a sharp tongue which could lash out at enemies with a vigor which would terrorize the very strongest mentally and physically. She had a brilliant mind with which she could match with with any, even Bacon, and come out of the verbal joust unscathed. Her temperament was very unstable and inclined definitely toward pessimism. Her temper led her into violent scenes of intemperate action and anger. Outspoken, direct, and realistic in her viewpoint, she left no chance for misconstruing her intent when she spoke. She talked in the poetic blank verse which the imaginative Anderson permitted her to speak. She spoke with a majesty and a surging grace which places her speeches, as well as those of Essex, in the realm of purple passages and lofty, mellifluous poetry.

Essex is a strong character who has been able to get what he wanted once he set his mind to it. But he more than met his equal when he encountered Elizabeth. He and Bothwell have much in common. Each is a military man; each is a man of action, not of words. Both men woo for love and for a kingdom; they lose both. Essex is more literary, more studied than Bothwell. He has a greater emotional depth, a more fiery passion. Bothwell is more tender, faithful, and considerate. Essex is a young man with many years of fighting ahead; Bothwell is older, yet vigorous, and would be more stable and settled in marriage than would Essex. When the personalities of Elizabeth and Essex come together, both high spirited, proud and intellectual--then conflict, passion,

tenderness and hate come clashing into their speech and action. Both see in the other traits which they admire, aspects which they wish to cherish, yet they have ambition and are jealous of the other's power or potential power. These traits of character make their lives incompatible and lead to the death of Essex and to the loneliness and misery of old age for Elizabeth.

Elizabeth wants deeply to share her life with someone, to dispel a void from her life. But she is alone, would always be alone, in the realm of her power and ability as a woman. Few men could equal her merits. When the right one came, he was too desirous of relieving her of her cherished possession, her kingdom. When she is frantic at not hearing from Essex, who is fighting the Scots on the boggy heaths and lowlands of Scotland, she summons Bacon to her chamber to ask if Essex has written to him. When he answers "yes" to her question, she accuses him of stealing her letters to Essex and his replies. She retracts her insinuation, but goes on to say:

I'm gone mad
 pacing my room, pacing the room of my mind.
 They say a woman's mind is an airless room,
 sunless, airless, where she must walk alone
 saying he loves me, loves me, loves me not,
 and has never loved me. The world goes by, all shadows,
 and there are voices, all echoes till he speaks...
 and there's no light till his presence makes a light
 there in that room. But I am a Queen. Where I walk
 is a hall of torture, where the curious gods bring all
 their racks and gyves, and stretch me there to writhe
 Till I cry out. They watch me with eyes of iron
 waiting to hear what I cry! I am crying now...
 Listen you gods of iron. He never loved me...
 He wanted my kingdom only...
 Loose me and let me go! I am yet a queen...
 that I have! That he will not take from me.
 I shall be queen, and walk his room no more.
 He thought to break me down by not answering...
 Break me until I'd say, I'm all yours... That I am

and have, all yours! That I will never, never,
never say. I'm not broken yet.¹

Truly she is not broken, and the breach between them widens,
making reconciliation impossible. Two great lovers were lost to
history forever.

Still she gives in to Essex to the point of returning his love.
She wants to crush his indomitable spirit so that she may rule, yet
glory in her love for him. Prophetically she says:

Be gracious with each other, sway a little
to right or left if we must to stay together--
Never distrust each other--nay distrust
all others, when they whisper. Let us make this our pact.
Now, for the fates are desperate to part us
and the very gods envy this happiness
we pluck out of loss and death.

While she says this, outside the castle walls is Essex' army
ready to storm the castle and take Elizabeth prisoner. Tragedy and
sorrow inevitably resulted from this unfortunate love affair. At the
end of the play Essex has been called to her, after she has pleaded
to have him send her the ring which would save his life, but he refused.
Standing before her in the last scene, resolute and proud, not willing
to forfeit the ring which would mean life, he says:

If we'd met some other how we might have been happy
But there's been an empire between us! I am to die...
Let us say that... Let us begin with that...
For then I can tell you that if there'd been no empire
we could have been great lovers. If even now
you were not queen and I were not pretender,
that God who searches heaven and earth and hell
for two who are perfect lovers, could end his search

¹ Elizabeth the Queen, p. 67.

² Ibid., p. 99.

with you and me. Remember... I am to die...
 and so I can tell you, truly, out of all the earth
 that I'm to leave, there's nothing I'm very loath
 to leave save you. Yet if I live I'll be
 Your death or you'll be mine.¹

He goes to his death as Elizabeth's words ring after him: "Take my kingdom, It is yours!"² Essex sums up in this last speech the whole phase of their life which led to unhappiness. Anderson wrote his lines in eloquent grace, firmness, and high sounding words. He made his characters act with a strong passion in the most fundamental and human way, so that the struggle for supremacy was an intense and inspired one.

Since Elizabeth the Queen was the first historical play in verse which Anderson wrote, the public was very critical in its appraisal. In the final analysis the critics deemed it one of his greatest plays.³ It was called "a fine poetic tragedy, ringing clear", "a measured and glowing tragedy". It was melodramatic, penetrating into human motives, and heart-breaking emotionally. Rives Mathews says:

Elizabeth the Queen is a great and beautiful play. It is a play which leads us against our will into the dangerous realms of superlative. Nevertheless, at present writing, one is more than safe in saying that it is the greatest play on Broadway.⁴

This paragraph summarizes the general trend of criticism on Elizabeth the Queen.

Anderson has developed a sort of poetic dialogue which is his own in rhythm and style. He is not imitative, and he sincerely wishes to develop a style which is typical of himself alone. Certainly Elizabeth

¹ Elizabeth the Queen, p. 129.

² Ibid., p. 130.

³ Alexander Woolloott, Collier's, 87 (February 7, 1931), p. 10.
 Percy Hammond, New York Tribune, November 4, 1930.

Chatfield Taylor, Outlook, 156 (November 4, 1930), p. 472.

⁴ The Billboard, 42 (November 15, 1930), p. 32.

the Queen contains great dramatic poetry in its surging speech, beautiful cadence, and eloquent diction. His style is just archaic enough to set the atmosphere for Elizabethan times. Some critics found little in his work to merit calling it great poetry, but they did give him credit for being a good writer and story-teller.¹ Fault may be found with Anderson's straining, self-conscious attempts to recreate the atmosphere of the sixteenth century and the playwriting techniques of the same period. The introduction of several great men of whom little dramatic use is made constitutes a glaring fault. Certainly Burbage, Bacon, and Hemming serve only to give the flavor of the times in which the play was placed.

Elizabeth the Queen is a success as an historical drama. Little doubt is left about that, even though disputes arise as to the harmony of form and subject.² But in the handling of the story, in the poetic style of the dialogue, in the firmness of the characterization, in stage effectiveness, the play is thought worthy of high praise. Anderson began playwriting with a firm belief in poetry's place in the theatre. In Elizabeth the Queen he united his faith in dramatic poetry and his previously demonstrated interest in historical themes to produce a play of serious intent and high purpose. Despite some possible errors in execution, Elizabeth the Queen fulfilled the aims of its author.

¹ George Jean Nathan, Stage, November, 1930, p. 42.

Stark Young, The New Republic, 65 (November 19, 1930), p. 17.

² Mark Van Doren, The Nation, 131 (November 19, 1930), p. 562.

Chapter III

MARY OF SCOTLAND

Mary of Scotland, Maxwell Anderson's version of the recurrently popular tale of the ill-fated young Queen of Scotland, was presented to the public not many months after the astounding success of Elizabeth the Queen. Mary of Scotland is not so much a companion piece to Elizabeth the Queen as a reverse of the medal. The two women of these plays stand sharply in relief by vivid characterization. Elizabeth, dynamic, strong, displaying a passion for the dramatic in life, contrasts definitely with the lyric, poetic, and amiable Mary. Each play sets a definite mood to suit the traits of the title character. Mary of Scotland does not lose by comparison or contrast with Elizabeth the Queen.

The private and public life of Mary has inspired poets to portray her career in many conflicting ways. She had talent, attractions of personality, accomplishments of no mean degree, but she lacked character traits to go with a pleasing personality. Most poets try to twist her personal life into a more respectable array of biographical facts. Anderson is no exception. He is interested in Mary's personal charm and spiritual traits. The enigma of how so genial and gifted a person could muddle her life into such reckless and tragic situations tantalizes the imagination. Anderson was entranced to the point where he, too, attempted to justify Mary Stuart's actions in life.

As early as 1690, the life of Mary, Queen of Scots, was the subject of a drama, La Maria Stuarde, by Giovanni Savaro. Since then, Mary has been the subject of numerous poems and dramas, including Schiller's Maria Stuart, three tragedies by Swinburne, and, more recently, John Drinkwater's

Mary Stuart. Mary's character and conduct have long been the cause of much biographical and literary interest. Anderson sets the plot in relief by accenting the conflict between Mary and Queen Elizabeth. For the purposes of his drama, he puts Mary in the right and Elizabeth in the wrong. The Play, Mary of Scotland, takes liberties with the generally accepted facts about the events and characters of the time. The Queen Mary of history was probably more resourceful and clever, more calculating than the Mary of the play. Anderson's Mary is kind, sincere, guiltless, trusting. Bothwell, too, is given a more sterling character than that generally accorded him. And the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary in the final scene is the invention of the playwright; the two queens are said never to have met.

These departures from historical facts accepted as accurate are important so far as the total impression is concerned. Anderson used the privilege of dramatic license with discreet candor so that little offense could result; in fact, his strong sense of dramatic effect is so reliable that his Mary, Queen of Scots, is a remarkably sympathetic, tragic, and heroic figure. As in the case of Elizabeth the Queen, the playwright had the ability and courage to arrange his story according to the demands of drama, not of history. The demands of drama upon the use of history include the condensing of material, imaginative use of incident, starting the play at a climactic point, elimination of unessential characters or facts, use of fictitious incidents, changes in sequence of time, and the license to change character traits to fit the needs of the theme. Reducing the procedure of taking liberties with history to essentials, it is perfectly permissible to use history as a means, to use it as a tool within judicious limits to fit the needs of the playwright

in creating his impression and building character. Anderson has not been callous in his misrepresentation of history.

Mary of Scotland is a play of character; its main motives are directed toward exposing causes which led the characters to act as they did. In many of Anderson's plays the main interest is centered in political opinions of the author, and in emphasis of theme.¹ But in Mary of Scotland, the interest has definitely shifted from political moralizing and theme importance. The emphasis upon character in this play focuses attention on the manner in which characters speak. The way passionate scenes are played, the manner in which characters turn a thought, or grace ideas with nuances of expression demand study. By careful, studied diction, and by the onward sweep of beautiful words, Anderson adorned the play with as fine dramatic poetry as has ever been written in verse plays in America.

In the opening scene an anxious state of unrest is created by the talk which passes between the guards and the old man, John Knox. Tension and resistance await the debarkation of Mary. Amid this grumbling comes Mary, who immediately shows that she has a facile tongue and a nimble brain to cope with the intellect of John Knox. This first impression is very important because the playwright also builds the idea that she is trusting, honest, noble, and honorable in her grace and demeanor. She parries Knox's fury and accusations with poise and equanimity. Mary Stuart can handle her affairs with her supple wit, but she is easy game

¹ See Knickerbocker Holiday, Chapter VII, p. 77.
The Masque of Kings, Chapter VI, p. 69.
Both Your Houses, Chapter I, p. 4.

at the table of political intrigue and diplomatic chicanery. The shrewd mind of Elizabeth is too much for Mary's noble mind to meet, for Elizabeth is seasoned in the trickeries which make statesmen and courtiers cringe in fear at the pettifoggery which she permits herself for the sake of her kingdom. Mary faithfully commands and expects results and submission, accepts the lip service of clever liars who perpetrate her downfall, and believes in them. She is a dupe in the hands of straight-faced prevaricators; she is a poor reader of character, a woman who has a royal temperament, but forgets to act in a hard, queenly manner. That glacial patriot, England's great "Bess", retains all of her most forbidding virtues which she displayed in Elizabeth the Queen, and she is now a bilious villainess, jealousy incarnate. Definitely she is an unsympathetic character. Early in the play she is plotting in a cunning, crafty method to bring about the downfall of a threatening adversary, an adversary who would mean Elizabeth's downfall if she didn't take steps to pave the way for that of her enemy. Elizabeth sensed in Mary an enemy with strong ambitions seeking to rule not only Scotland, but eventually England. Elizabeth plotted to insure her safety and that of her kingdom from possible counter-plots by a weak Stuart. Elizabeth knew character, she knew human nature; she had vision, she was hard and practical. Pity the poor Mary who must thrust herself upon an unwelcome nation which hated her for her Catholicism before she came; pity the Mary whose mind never stooped to devious methods to gain her ends, as Elizabeth did. Pity the Mary who had to meet barriers set up by the long diplomatic workings of the silent, waiting, relentless Elizabeth, who would not cease her diabolical schemes until she had Mary defenselessly imprisoned in Carlisle Castle in England.

Early in the second act Elizabeth is revealed talking to her councilors. Already she is baiting the trap for the unassuming Mary. She cunningly says:

She is a woman, remember, and open
to attack as a woman. We shall set
tongues wagging about her. And since
it may be true that she is not of a
keen and noble mind, let us take
care of that too. Let us marry her
to a weakling and a fool. A woman's
mind and spirit are no better
than those of the man she lies
under in the night.¹

With no pretense at honorable action, Elizabeth sets in motion a plan which eventually has a devastating effect upon the life of Mary Stuart. When her councilors ask her whether it would not be wise to have Mary for a friend, she replies in anger:

I do not wish for an ally! Have you not
understood? I wish for a Catholic
and an enemy, that I may see her blood
run at my feet!²

Elizabeth then has Darnley, a weak drunkard, slyly jockeyed into a position where Mary would think it strategic to marry him. Regardless of the true and great love which she has for Bothwell, Mary risks her marital happiness to make an alliance with Darnley, to spite Elizabeth's political desires. Later Mary regretted this unwise action for it set the stage for her downfall.

The reader or audience is constantly aware of the intrigue and awaits as an expectant, anxious bystander eager to see the human response in this tragic character, Mary Stuart. The close-knit plot structure intensifies

¹ Mary of Scotland, p. 21.
² Ibid., p. 36.

interest to a fervid degree. The audience wishes to warn, to set Mary right, to keep her from her own short-sightedness, but the inevitable sweep of action can spell only tragedy for her. Bothwell, the one man whom she could trust, the one man who had the abilities, the strength and character to offset her inadequacies, she rejects because she knows that, if she were his consort, he would attempt to rule her with an iron hand. She says to him when he proclaims that he is the only man in Scotland who could unify Scotland for her:

Yes, you are man enough.
 It's dangerous to be honest with you, my Bothwell
 But honest, I'll be. Since I've been woman grown
 there's been no man save you but I could take
 his hand steadily in mind, and look in his eyes
 Steadily, too, and feel in myself more power
 than I felt in him. All but yourself. There is aching
 fire between us, fire that could take deep hold
 and burn down all the marches of the west
 and make us great or slay us. Yet it's not to be trusted.
 Our minds are not the same. If I gave my hand
 to you, I should be pledged to rule by wrath
 and violence, to take without denials,
 and mount on other's ruin. That's your way
 and it's not mine.¹

Mary is too noble to rule in such ruthless realistic times. She becomes a weak pawn, a defenseless woman against a band of villains. When Bothwell warns her, she pays no attention to the admonition. He states that Moray, her brother, is plotting to kill her. Such ideas are unbelievable to her.

Mary: Nay--
 You mistrust too--and even if this were true
 a sovereign lives always with death before and after,
 and many have tried to murder their way to safety--
 But there's no safety there. For each enemy
 you kill you make ten thousand, for each one
 you spare, you make one friend.

¹ Mary of Scotland, p. 36.

Bothwell: Friends? Friends? Oh, lass,
 thou'lt nurse these adders and they'll fang thee--
 thou'rt
 too tender and too just. My heart ories for thee--
 take my help, take my hands!

Mary: I would I could take both.
 God knows how I wish it. But as I am Queen
 my heart shall not betray me, what I believe
 and my faith. This is my faith, dear my lord, that
 all men
 Love better good than evil, cling rather to truth
 than falseness, answer fair dealing with fair return;
 and this too; those thrones will fall that are built
 on blood
 and craft, that as you'd rule long, you must rule well--
 this has been true, and is true.¹

Evidently Mary is not schooled in the practical art of ruling. Gentle tactics such as these never made an unruly group of Scots lay down their dirks and hail Mary of Scots!

The characters in Mary of Scotland are consistent and distinctly individual and varied. Bothwell is a strong, intrepid, capable man of action, faithful to his word. He is a rugged Scot who has a keen mind for leadership. Moray is a sneaking, sly person who represents evil and subterfuge. The fine characterizations of Rizzio, Darnley, Knox, Beaton, and Fleming indicate clearly the author's sensitivity to traits and qualities of individuals. Almost all critics agree that Mary of Scotland probably contains the clearest and best conceived character delineation of all Anderson's character works.²

¹ Mary of Scotland, p. 37.

² J. W. Krutch, The Nation, 137 (December 13, 1933), p. 688.

Richard Skinner, The Commonwealth, 19 (December, 1933), p. 189.

William Rose Benet, Saturday Review of Literature, 10 (February 17, 1934), p. 496.

The plot of Mary of Scotland is well contrived. The action is sharply defined. There are more than ordinary excitement and culminating suspense in the effects of Elizabeth's machinations on Mary. The handling of the plot has been called by critics excellent craftsmanship.¹ Anderson carved a swiftly moving and vigorous drama out of the life of Mary Stuart. An inevitability throughout the play drives the inexorable action to dark tragedy. Anderson, in this play at least, forgot to substitute words for action; his vigorous treatment of the plot and character is very convincing and dramatic. Gilbert Gabriel has made a good observation about Anderson's dramatic technique when he states that the play is built on large, human dimensions, that it has the sturdiness of shrewd building.² From a literary standpoint, Mary of Scotland reveals Anderson at the peak of his poetic style, in beauty, strength, clarity, and dramatic quality. The long speeches are filled with truth and beauty; the dialogue is fresh and moving.

John Mason Brown says, "In both his verse and his prose he has found an approximation of the word selection of the Elizabethans which proves as vigorous and as natural as it is unstilted."³ Stark Young⁴ compares Anderson's use of Elizabethan history and Shakespeare's use of Roman history. Both playwrights used history as they desired to fit it to their dramatic needs. Young also says that the diction is far from that

- ¹ William Rose Benet, Saturday Review of Literature, 10 (February 17, 1934), p. 496.
- Edwin Schulbert, Los Angeles Times, September 11, 1934.
- E. Van Rensselaer Wyatt, The Catholic World, 138 (January, 1934), p. 474.
- Newsweek, 2 (December 9, 1933), p. 32.
- ² New York American, November 28, 1933.
- ³ New York Evening Post, February 17, 1934.
- ⁴ The New Republic, December 13, 1933, pp. 130-2.

of Mary Stuart's day, but that this difference is not important. Shakespeare did not use the diction of the Roman era, but that of his own time. Anderson could take this liberty, too.

Anderson's poetry is reflective, lyrical, and powerful, reaching to epic proportions. Not one critic has questioned the suitability of poetic language as a medium for dramatic purposes in Mary of Scotland.¹ Certainly its rhythmic quality is supple and the entire diction very flexible. Such an achievement is seldom attained in American drama. Brooks Atkinson² makes an interesting speculation about Anderson's use of verse. He wonders whether a tale of modern people could be told in poetic diction, or whether blank verse is restricted to kings and queens in remote periods of history. Anderson answered this question when he wrote Winterset, successfully proving that blank verse is suitable for a modern theme.

Mary of Scotland is regarded today as one of Anderson's finest plays. Critics were extravagant in praising the luminous characterizations, the flooding beauty of language, the warmth, humor, pathos, and the rich illusion produced by the chain of events.³ An unsigned criticism in Stage sums up the value of the play in this fashion: "There is little doubt in our mind that Maxwell Anderson has, in Mary of Scotland, written the finest poetic drama of his generation; that he has restored language to its high estate in the theatre."⁴

¹ See Bibliography on Mary of Scotland at the end of this thesis.

² "Ordered Tumult", New York Times, December 3, 1933.

³ Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, December 3, 1933.

Edith J. R. Isaacs, Theatre Arts Monthly, January, 1934, p. 14.

Richard Dana Skinner, The Commonwealth, 19 (December, 1933), p. 189.

John Anderson, New York Evening Journal, November 28, 1933.

⁴ Stage, 11 (January, 1934), p. 12.

Such commendation illustrates that Anderson has written a drama that was hailed as great when it was produced, and the esteem which it was given then has diminished little, if any, at the present time. Here Anderson has developed a play which has blended into its structure a delicate synthesis of character, plot, dialogue and historical fact. Told in poetic blank verse, the play develops a moving and poignant story, a story of heroic characters who fought for kingdoms, risking all and giving no quarter. The human struggle for supremacy intensely interests the reader, for the desire to conquer and succeed, the desire to play a hard-fought game, risking all, is a universal and fundamental drive in the human being. Two gigantic personages, Mary and Elizabeth, live through the play of Anderson, and their creation will live in the future by such a fine restatement of their traits, desires, and motives to action.

Chapter IV

VALLEY FORGE

Anderson believes that dramatic poetry is the highest form of writing for the theatre. He is also interested in giving dramatic form to his critical interpretations of modern life. But, since audiences are wary of verse forms in modern drama, he reconciles his two desires by writing historical plays in verse on themes for which modern parallels are readily recognizable. Valley Forge is one of this type. It is a dramatization of the most dismal period of the Revolutionary War, with Washington the principal character. Its themes are governmental inefficiency and corruption, the danger of selfishness in constituted authority, the causes and conduct of the war, and the precious quality of freedom and liberty. It is a pertinent reminder that the tree of liberty is a precious plant nourished by the blood and dreams of the American people.

Valley Forge is an historical play based upon the incidents which happened during the winter of 1778 at Valley Forge, the year in which the fortunes of the Revolutionary cause were at their lowest. The known events of history are revised freely, either to make the play more effective, or to give point to the political philosophies involved. The play is biographical since the central figure and hero of the play is, of course, George Washington. The background of the play has a basis in historical events: the failure of the Commissary to supply food and clothing, the suffering of the soldiers, the impotent meddling of Congress, and "Conway's Cabal" to supersede Washington by General Gates. These things, and the unquenchable spirit and desire for freedom which overcome

despair, gave Anderson occasion for frequent commentary on such subjects as the inefficiency and selfishness of those who compose governments, the causes and conduct of war, and the ideals of freedom for which Washington and his men fought. Anderson intended to emphasize the parallel between the political life of those times and the political set-up of today.

The play opens in a bunkhouse of the Continental Army at Valley Forge, on a cold winter day. We find the men discouraged, tired, without food. There has been little assistance from Congress, and the Commissary has sent no supplies. Washington, though revealed as a courageous leader, is almost as disheartened as the men. Deprivation, desertion, a bad location for military strategy, discontent over rotten food, lack of clothes, and wives and children at home starving with no respite in sight are serious aspects of the condition at Valley Forge. A gloomy and dismal future stared the men and Washington in the face. We find, too, that there was some dissatisfaction with Washington's leadership. This is the atmosphere which pervades the entire play--a grumbling, rebelling voice which has ominous sounds of revolt. Such a setting, in which criticism is rampant, lends itself to the purpose for which Anderson used it. He could excoriate the corrupt practice, the delay, and inefficiency of government to whatever degree he wished. The play makes no pretense at romance except for the Mary Phillipse episode, which came off poorly. It is earthy realism, comparable to the naturalism of What Price Glory?, in which no regard is paid to decorum in speech or action, a complete display of lack of inhibitions. Combined with this strong realistic touch is a muscular verse surging with a beat which has the spirit of patriotism in it. This unpretentious realism gives force and freshness to the play. The best scenes are those in which the men, the

common soldiers, take part. These scenes have drive, a robust feeling of unrestraint. For example:

This army? If God was to damn and blast
this army every working day for a full year, He
couldn't do anything to it that hasn't been done.
We've got everything from the itch to the purple fever,
nothing to eat, nothing to wear, and the coldest
son-of-a-bitch of a winter since the lake of Galilee
froze over and Jesus walked on the water.¹

It gives one a sense of satisfaction to have a character convey his thoughts in words which are so rich and expressive that no doubt remains about his intention. Tench, one of Washington's aides, to display his contempt for an inadequate Congress which reveals the author's similar attitude, utters the same type of earthy speech:

Who gives
a simple curse for congress, or theories,
when his toes fall off from freezing? I tell you now
a man could fight as hard for the porpoise turds
that float the Chesapeake, full of hot air, with reason
quite as good, as for these fastidious wind-bags
that make our laws in session, and draw their pay,
and leave us to die here.²

It is speeches such as these which would arouse the rebelliousness of Brom in Knickerbocker Holiday. It is speeches of this kind which enliven the dialogue of the whole script of Valley Forge.

It is these same earthy men who change the tide of events in Valley Forge. Washington has gone to General Howe to talk peace terms, when by coincidence, a band of Washington's men on a sneak forage tour happen to be in the loft of the barn which serves as the meeting place for the two generals. Learning of Washington's intentions, they beg him not to submit, because they have found enough food to carry on for

¹ Valley Forge, p. 10.

² Ibid., p. 62.

a few days more. At the same time, Washington learns from Mary Phillipse about the French alliance. Washington says to his men:

The forge was cold
that smelted these fellows into steel--but steel
they are. I know them now. And now I change
my answer! Let one ragged thousand of them
pledge them to this with me, and we'll see it
through.¹

Then, turning to General Howe, he continues:

I am servant
of these men in the rags of homespun. They've heard
from me this proposition of the king's, and they
refuse it flatly. This war, to your brief misfortune,
is not mine to end, but theirs. I have my order
and I'm in your debt for a very fruitless errand
over wild water.²

And, at the end, Washington speaks in resounding speech of the men who have died on this day of despair and hope:

They paid
for our three days. You know best who will pay
for days to come. We must bury them here. They died
here and earned their ground.
This liberty will look easy³ by and by
when nobody dies to get it.

Only too well today do we realize that we must continually fight to preserve the principles which these men died to gain. It is the loyalty to a cause, the undying faith in the principle for which they fought, which gives the uplifting, buoyant feeling to Valley Forge.

The character of Washington is one which needs to be handled with utmost care lest some ideals or ideas about the almost legendary figure be shattered. It takes a craftsman who knows his art to create a character which will conform to the facts known about him. Certainly Anderson, after depicting the life of such complex people as Mary of

¹ Valley Forge, p. 161.

² Ibid., p. 162.

³ Ibid., p. 166.

Scotland and Elizabeth of England, could do it as well as, if not better than, any other contemporary dramatist. Even so, after the many garbled attempts to depict Washington by lesser playwrights, Anderson undertook a herculean task on which he received favorable professional criticism. Critics said that his Washington is a truly dramatic figure, not a fountain spouting early American platitudes; that he shows Washington in terms of honest heroism and independence of thought; that he is portrayed in manly terms keeping a balance between austerity and humanity.¹ John Anderson writes: "It is a portrait that is full of warmth and poise; full-bodied and noble. It has none of the ordinary stage-dullness of such qualities."² The thing which made Washington acceptable and veritable was the fact that Anderson put human words into his speeches, and made him a man of the world who could feel the pangs of defeat gnawing on his stubborn resistance. He was put on the level with the fighting men, a general who knew what hardship and deprivation meant. Washington, too, was skeptical at times about the cause for which he was fighting. But he did have hopes for the future. He says:

So far our government's as rotten as the sow-belly it sends us.

I hope and pray it will get better. But whether it gets better or worse it's your own, by God, and you can do what you please with it, and what you fight for is your right to do what you please with your government and with yourselves without benefit of kings.³

¹ Gilbert Gabriel, New York American, December 11, 1934.

Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, December 23, 1934.

² New York Evening Journal, December 11, 1934.

³ Valley Forge, p. 24.

Later in the play, Howe tries to convince Washington that war is futile, that it is never fought for a just cause. The true purpose of war is cloaked behind high sounding phrases, but war is really fought for financial gain, territorial acquisition, and trade rights. Realizing that there is still corruption in government and selfishness in those who run that government, Washington staunchly abides in his faith for his cause. He gives his final answer to General Howe when his men reaffirm their determination to fight on:

If this war
were for trade advantage, it would end tonight
It was made over subsidies, or some such matter,
but it's been taken over. Let the merchants submit
if that's any good to you, then come out and find
my hunters and backwoodsmen, and beat us down
into the land we fight for. When you've done that
the king may call us subject. For myself, I'd have died
within if I'd surrendered. The spirit of earth
moves over earth like flame and finds fresh home
when the old's burned out. It stands over this my country
in this dark year, and stands like a pillar of fire
to show us an uncouth clan, unread, harsh-spoken,
but followers of a dream, a dream that men
shall bear no burdens save of their own choosing,
shall walk upright, masterless, doff a hat to none,
and choose their gods! It's destined to win, this dream,
weak though we are. Even if we should fail,
it's destined to win.¹

This ringing speech is a document of the faith which Anderson really has in the principles of democracy. And by putting these potent words in the mouth of Washington, he makes them seem doubly significant.

As in Both Your Houses Anderson viciously attacked the methods some congressmen used for graft and corruption, he again lashes out at them throughout Valley Forge. One of his main purposes is to expose the shabby treatment which soldiers were subjected back in the youthful

¹ Valley Forge, pp. 163-4.

days of our nation. Congress is represented as a group of selfish, venal grafters, faithful to nothing save their own perfidy.¹ Anderson draws a sharp parallel between the beginnings of our government and our government today. The emphasis which he places upon the evasive action and attitude of Congress seems warranted. Many critics and the average American will admit many defects in our system of government. Certainly these inefficiencies should be constantly retold to the public so that the people will not let the government go to ruin. This idea is part of Anderson's intention.

Several critics commented on the rough nobility and strong faith which must have guided Washington and his soldiers through the winter at Valley Forge, and they expressed their appreciation to Anderson for recreating a desolate scene, for treating realistically a trying time.² So vividly realistic a recreation is truly the product of a fertile and imaginative brain. Euphemia Van Ronsseelaar Wyatt writes: "Mr. Anderson's Valley Forge is not only the study of a great man but of American ideals--ideals so real that men went naked and hungry for them."³

Other characters in the play are well drawn but are not sharply demarcated as are Washington and his band of men, Alcock, Teague, and Tench. General Howe and Mary Phillipse are mere shadows placed in the play to carry the theme and round out the plot. Much can be said as to the inadvisability of the Mary Phillipse episode, for it is not

¹ Literary Digest, 118 (December 12, 1934), p. 22.

Percy Hammond, New York Herald-Tribune, December 11, 1934.

² Arthur T. Gabriel, New York American, December 11, 1934.

Richard Lockridge, New York Sun, December 15, 1934.

John Anderson, New York Evening Journal, December 11, 1934.

³ The Catholic World, 140 (February, 1935), p. 596.

dramatically appropriate in any essentially masculine play. It is interpolated for dramatic relief, but does not accomplish the purpose; in fact, the play would be better without the feminine interest. The second scene of the first act, when a sudden shift is made to the ballroom in General Howe's headquarters at Philadelphia, also seems definitely out of keeping with the general atmosphere of the play. There the sumptuous gaiety and grandiose manner of the British serve as sharp contrast to the impoverished state of Washington's headquarters. The conversation among Howe, Mary Phillipse, Andre and others seems stiff and out of keeping with the strong realism in the rest of the play. Critics spoke of these two episodes as "pointless", as "pretty episodes".¹

Anderson's technique was criticized severely. It was called uninspiring, trite, school boyish.² Percy Hammond did not write enthusiastically, finding Valley Forge quite ordinary. He says:

His new play follows the familiar formula of stage histories except that its language is gracefully unusual--and it proceeds with tick-tock regularity to mark the characters and the events recorded.³

Others, however, found it extremely effective in an obvious, straight-forward manner.⁴ They felt that the story is told with poetic strength and depth of feeling, in swift and living episodes which give the play a sweeping, propelling movement, especially in scenes with the

¹ Richard Lockridge, New York Sun, December 15, 1934.

Grenville Vernon, The Commonwealth, 21 (December 23, 1934), p. 264.

² J. W. Krutch, The Nation, 139 (December 26, 1934), p. 750.

³ New York Herald-Tribune, December 11, 1934.

⁴ Arthur Ruhl, New York Herald-Tribune, December 16, 1934.

John Anderson, New York Evening Journal, December 11, 1934.

soldiers. At other times, when Washington and Conway,¹ Washington and Teague,² Mary Phillipso, Howe and Andre³ speak, the movement and interest drops to tedious plodding caused by overwriting of dialogue.

Much of the script, while contributing to a realistic atmosphere, is written in blank verse which lends itself well to the surging feeling, the emotional tension of a noble cause. The poetry is of a fine dramatic calibre showing a power of expression and fluency of words. Arthur Pollock sums up the general attitude of most critics about the style of writing when he calls Anderson, "a playwright with a golden tongue, too, though venomous," and says, "I think he makes the wording of Valley Forge more beautiful than usual with a purpose, so that he can wrap up in poetry his deadly sting. Surely it is lovely."⁴ Surprisingly enough, Anderson was not accused of verbosity. The play does tend, however, to be static and slow moving in spots because of the incorporated theme of governmental mismanagement and corruption. Washington tends to be too politically minded, and all the characters lash out at Congress to such an extent that one sees the author pulling the strings too obviously.⁵

As a play it was not one of Anderson's greatest successes in the theatre, but it is considered by most critics to be among his best plays.⁶

¹ Valley Forge, pp. 111-4.

² Ibid., pp. 23-5.

³ Ibid., pp. 46-50.

⁴ Brooklyn Daily Eagle, December 11, 1934.

⁵ Op. cit., pp. 116-123.

⁶ See footnotes 1 and 2 on page 45 of this chapter.

As a biographical study of a great man in trying times it is noteworthy. As a recreation of a situation it is an imaginative masterpiece. It rings with authenticity. The humorous, human, and spirited group of men whom Anderson made live again in the pages of Valley Forge is also a commendable contribution to the drama of our period.

Chapter V

WINTERSSET

I have a strong, chronic hope that the theatre of this country will outgrace the phase of journalistic social comment and reach occasionally into the upper air of poetic tragedy. I believe with Goethe that dramatic poetry is man's greatest achievement on this earth so far.¹

Maxwell Anderson is a conscientious believer in his own aspirations, and his sincerity is more than respected by those who are considered judicious. Never is he at a loss to describe his intention or to philosophize on the initiation and outcome of his work or the place of poetry in the theatre. He wishes, and believes that audiences desire, that the theatre should take up again "the consideration of man's place and destiny in prophetic rather than prosaic terms".² This can be done by returning to the poetic, emotional tradition of the theatre. "The poet to be the prophet, dreamer and interpreter of the racial dream."³

Wintersset is an experiment in poetic drama with social significance. It attempts to establish a new convention by presenting contemporary affairs in terms of tragic poetry. To Anderson it is monumental in its entirety because it represents the complete, full-grown conception of dramatic principle, technique, and synthesis of form and content as contained in his philosophy of life and dramaturgy. One could quote the entire text of The Essence of Tragedy, a series of discussions by Anderson about the philosophy and theory of drama, and have every word pertain to some phase of the play, Wintersset. It aimed at something beyond the

¹ The Essence of Tragedy, p. 32.

² Ibid., p. 36.

³ Ibid.

practical in dramaturgy, and the critics and audience found it pleasing and effective drama. As an experiment it was a success. Mersand calls it:

"The first play of social significance in the metre of Shakespearian dramas," and says, "that it is perhaps the first play in which the hero is one long dead, but living in the search for vengeance of the son. As a biographical drama it is unique."¹

Anderson did not happen to fall upon this union of form and content by pure fancy. He attempted this combination in White Desert and Sea Wife to a certain degree, but he found his power as a poet and dramatist still needed exercise and arduous practice. Gradually by starting with themes and characters and plots from the remote past, he built up the public to the point of accepting contemporary thought and subject in a poetic medium unlike the idiom of the day. Such a gradation was psychologically pertinent, for even the masters, as he himself states, were reluctant to use subjects contemporary with their time, but were content to rework familiar themes and to pour into them the genius of their dramatic power. Shakespeare's Hamlet, to which Winterset is sometimes compared, is a reworking of a story many hundreds of years old. Actually in light of the trepidations that the masters felt about using new material in verse form, viewing what Anderson essayed boldly, he is a smart-alec upstart who doesn't know his own limitations.

Winterset was early awarded deserved acclaim when it received the "Drama Critics Circle Award", offered by a newly formed body of seventeen reviewers who award a prize for the best play of each season. The first award given by this body went to Winterset. The following paragraph

¹ Joseph Mersand, The American Drama 1930-40, p. 3.

accompanied the award:

The author accomplished the notably difficult task of interpreting a valid and challenging contemporary theme dealing with the pursuit of human justice in terms of unusual poetic force, realizing a drama of rich meaning and combining high literary distinction with compelling theatrical effects.¹

Fourteen of the seventeen critics voted for Winterset against a highly competitive field of dramas. However, this almost unanimous choice is not indicative of the trend of criticism which Winterset received. Like most criticism of any experimental work of Anderson, it was divided into two camps, that which extolled and that which jeered. As one critic puts it: "To one man it is a great experience and to the next--a bore."²

This sharp dichotomy of opinion is caused by the personal reactions of realists and romanticists who unknowingly call themselves critics. The realist charges Anderson with vague verbiage, evading the issue of his thesis, writing closet drama and forgetting "useful", socially potent drama. The romanticist avoids pointing out errors, but speaks in fervent terms of what Anderson attempted in verse, content, character development, and philosophy. Favorable criticism went to extremes:

Winterset is without doubt... one of the finest plays which any American has ever written.³

Edith J. R. Isaacs writes:

How it happens is told in one of the most exciting gangster melodramas, one of the noblest poetic plays, one of the hardest hitting, straight-fighting, crusading dramas against the fruits of injustice ever presented on the American stage.⁴

¹ Rosamond Gilder, Theatre Arts Monthly, World and Theatre Review, May, 1936, p. 326.

² E. Van Rensselaer Wyatt, The Catholic World, 142 (November 11, 1935), pp. 211-2.

³ Gilbert Gabriel, New York American, Reprint in Literary Digest, October 5, 1935, p. 20.

⁴ Theatre Arts Monthly, "Two Ways Meet Winterset", November, 1930, pp. 816-7.

Stark Young usually treats Anderson's work with harsh opinion of the realist, but of Winterset he wrote:

Winterset contributes, often splendidly, one of the most needed elements in our present American drama: it combines metrical writing with matter that ordinarily is seen in prose. Indeed, the rich, high flight of verse and bright words serve here the purpose of a kind of gangster drama.¹

J. M. Brown says:

As a poet (i. e., the poetic dramatist) he may bring back to the stage the full flooding beauties of English as Mr. Anderson has done in his historical dramas and in (his) Winterset.²

Sagacious J. W. Krutch writes:

The measure of his success is just the fact that the impressiveness of the drama is nowhere diminished by any sense on the spectator's part that the matter and manner are radically incongruous.³

Adverse criticism hits hard at supposed faults in Winterset:

Winterset fails because it attempts the impossible...

He intended his figures to be realistic in life, but poetic in thought and speech...

Is it permissible for an author to put poetic dialogue into mouths of slum dwellers, criminals and flotsam and jetsam of the modern Anderson city?... I feel that it is not; in fact, that it is artistically false.⁴

Anita Block, who is a decided socialist and realist in thought, writes:

The play vaporizes over an unreal theme instead of coming to grips with a real one and remains a fable for audiences, who do not get even a glimmer of its awful, factual basis.⁵

¹ The New Republic, "Warward Glamour", October 16, 1935, p. 274.

² The Art of Play Going. New York: Norton & Co., 1936, p. 163.

³ The Nation, April 15, 1936, pp. 484-5.

⁴ Grenville Vernon, The Commonwealth, October 11, 1935, p. 585.

⁵ The Changing World in Plays and Theatre, 1939, p. 182.

This gives the trend of general criticism pro and con on the total effect of Winterset. Specific criticism will be discussed later.

Winterset is a melodrama, poetic in form, pointing out an old sore in the American body--the perversion of justice by class prejudice. It is "a play into the verse of which he has poured fury, pity, compassion, contempt and a curious philosophy which winds up with the moral that it is best to live by compromise and, if one doesn't, it is much better to be dead."¹ In its most general aspects the play might be described as an attempt to treat some of the material of contemporary life in a manner more richly imaginative than the methods of realism permit.

The verse of Winterset is generally conceded to be at Anderson's best and equals that of Mary of Scotland. But it did not escape criticism either. Most critics praised the verse in the love scenes, the philosophic tangents which Gaunt and Esdras took, the brooding verse of Mio. Gilbert Gabriel writes:

Blank verse? Yes, in large part blank verse--and yet never a dry contrivance, or a bumptious one. Blank but fiercely living verse, cramming its classic form with phrases of extraordinary color and high temperature, with an imagery boldly modern, a wording often reeking with raciness and street corner contemptuousness, just as often such pure, bright lyricism as only the most celebrated lovers use on stage.²

This comment is true of a good deal of Anderson's poetry.

The diction of Winterset follows content closely. When Anderson thought the content was purely mundane he resorted to prose dialogue, but in the surge of expression or the intensity of emotion, or when dramatic motives to action became predominant, he reverted to flowing,

¹ Literary Digest, October 5, 1935, p. 20.

² Theatre Arts Monthly, Reprint from New York American, June, 1936, p.465.

beautiful blank verse. Such verse as this may be compared to the verse in Macbeth or Hamlet. Mio, realizing that he is trapped in Esdras' house, speaks:

Now all you silent powers
that make the sleet and dark, and never yet
have spoken, gave us a sign, let the throw be ours
this once, on this longest night, when the winter sets
his foot on the threshold leading up to spring
and enters with remembered cold--let fall
some mercy with the rain. We are two lovers
here in your night, and we wish to live.¹

The dramatic surge to his fluent verse carries poetic grace.

At the end of the second act Mio is caught between his duty of revenge and his love for a girl, Miriamne. He says:

The bright, ironical gods!
What fun they have in heaven! When a man prays hard
for any gift, they give it, and then one more
to boot that makes it useless.

...

All my life long
I've wanted only one thing, to say to the world
and prove it: The man you killed was clean and true
and full of love as the twelve-year-old that stood
and fought in the temple. I can say that now
and give my proofs--and now you stick a girl's face
between me and the rites I've sworn the deed
shall have to me.²

The force and power of these words give a dramatic impact heretofore not realized in contemporary subjects. Winterset substantiates Anderson's theory that form and content are inseparable from the aesthetic and critical standpoint.

Stark Young writes in complete accord with Anderson's favorite theory:

A poet-playwright will, naturally, insofar as he is successful, use only such poetic forms as express his content. But much of any content belongs to centuries, not decades. And recognized lyric forms do not necessarily imply archaic mannerisms.

¹ Winterset, p. 129.

² Ibid., p. 110.

In spite of its defects, and in spite of the threats in the last act to do so, Winterset does not harm the cause of the poetic drama. In its best moments we are aware of the poetic medium only as a matter of heightened respiration on our part. The lines hint of intensified feeling and thought, and of words with all the emphasis of passionate life repeated. At its worst we have only verses that are sucking a sugar-teat in the Muse's nursery.¹

What Young has said is very pertinent not only to this specific play but to poetic drama generally.

Winterset has been accused of being hollow, and containing vestiges of false Shakespearianism.² It has followed the structure of Hamlet, but many artists have followed the techniques of masters. Racine was a great artist. His Phadre is definitely imitative, but it is great literature. Rostrand's Cyrano de Bergerac has many elements of Shakespeareanism, but it is considered great literature. Whether or not Winterset is great because its form is similar to that of Hamlet is not the question. The point is that Anderson may use the right to follow the techniques of Shakespeare and still achieve success and acclaim according to his ability to use his material after the fashion which Shakespeare set down, and not be called an "animated adaptor" for doing so.

Yet it is interesting to note some parallel elements. Mio is definitely sworn to avenge his father's death, and right a dastardly wrong, which was also Hamlet's purpose. Each is beset by obstacles of character; Mio is cynical, yet poetic, a lover; Hamlet is melancholic, a procrastinator. Both have women to contend with, attempting to divert them from the business they have at heart. Both die an untimely death. Both are set upon by evil forces which seek to destroy them.

¹ The New Republic, "Poetic Chances", November 6, 1935, p. 365.

² O. Ferguson, The New Republic, January 13, 1937, p. 328.

The structure of the play follows that of Hamlet fairly closely. The opening is slow, gloomy, foreboding of evil. Mio has travelled a long distance from school, as Hamlet travelled from Wittenberg. The coincidences of character are similar--Ophelia to Miriamne, Garth to Laertes, Polonius to Esdras, Gaunt's madness to Ophelia's madness, Trook and Shadow to Rosencrantz and Shadow to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Centralization of movement, uniformity of mood and tempo, and the inevitable aspects of tragedy pervade both plays.

Methods and techniques are not new to Anderson only. He definitely borrows techniques and devices from the masters, as did Shakespeare from dramatists before him. Anderson certainly doesn't build his plays out of thin air. He is a scholar and has a foundation for his experiments for which he must be justly praised. It would be irrational to step out into the unknown by presenting completely unorthodox methods and material. After all, one must realize that one great mind builds the framework upon which the next creative spirit climbs.

Mio realizes the heavy burden which rests upon his shoulders, a burden self-imposed because he is an idealist in the logical application of justice and seeks to right a moral wrong. He says:

This thing didn't happen to you.
they've left you your name
and what ever place you can take. For my heritage
they've left me one thing only, and that's to be
my father's voice crying up out of the earth
and quick lime where they stuck him.¹

Mio, Gaunt, Esdras, Miriamne--all of the characters are distinctly drawn. Several characters are types such as the gangsters and policemen;

¹ Winterset, p. 29.

in fact, they are so clearly defined one might say that they represent elements of American life. Stark Young criticises the people in the play favorably, especially the way they are drawn in a tremendous and genuinely created perspective.¹

No other character is drawn with such depth and imagination as is Judge Gaunt. This seems to be the opinion of all reviewers.² It may be explained by the fact that the judge's torment, anguish of soul, and mental perturbation are so intense that the audience recognizes a universal feeling and psychological phase common to all man. Then again, the intellectual quality of his lines and his noble character falling from a place of high esteem make for dramatic, tragic consequences.

Anderson puts in his mouth the basis of his theme. The judge harbors the philosophy that justice must be meted out on a class basis regardless of the guilt or the deed. This is the thing which Anderson berates. The judge says in finality, after being quizzed by Mio:

...Justice once rendered
in a clear burst of anger, righteously,
upon a very common laborer,
confessed an anarchist, the verdict found
and the precise machinery of law
invoked to know him guilty--think what furor
would rock the state if the court then flatly said:
all this was lies--must be reversed? It's better,
as any judge can tell you, in such cases,
holding the common good to be worth more
than small injustice, to let the record stand,
let one man die. For justice, in the main,
is governed by opinion. Communities
will have what they will have, and it's quite as well,

¹ The New Republic, "Poetic Chances", November 6, 1935, p. 365.

² Loo. Cit., footnote 1, this page.

Grenville Vernon, The Commonwealth, October 11, 1935, p. 585.

after all, to be rid of anarchists. Our rights
as citizens can be maintained as rights
only while we are held to be the peers
of those who love about us.¹

Such opinion is extremely practical and the path of least resistance.

It is a phase of government which Anderson detests, and it is the true basis of this tragedy--how justice brought about death and misery beyond the immediate limits of one single judgment.

The old Jew, Esdras, is a splendid character creation. He is the prototype of the learned Jew who knows life and how best to meet its most complex problems by a passive resistance. In the last scene, and, more or less, the epilogue, which is equivalent to the Fortinbras scene in Hamlet, Esdras expresses the idea, a favorite of Anderson's, that man is greater than he realizes, and must be reminded of it constantly. Esdras says:

...On this star
in this hard star-adventure, knowing not
what the fires mean to right and left, nor whether
a meaning was intended or presumed,
man can stand up, and look out blind, and say:
in all these turning lights I find no clue,
only a masterless night, and in my blood
no certain answer, yet is my mind my own,
yet is my heart a cry toward something dim
in distance, which is higher than I am
and makes me emperor of the endless dark
even in seeking!²

What pessimism and defeatism remain in the play this idea neutralizes so that Anderson's outlook on life can still be called a groping optimism. He writes about the soul and its problems; he writes of the essence of life, treats it and philosophizes on it, but

¹ Winterset, p. 99.

² Ibid., p. 133.

ultimately he comes to the conclusion that life is an inestimable something which cannot be explained, which has no rhyme nor reason, which happens, but happens for the eventual good of humanity.

Structurally Winterset is sound without waste movement or vacillation. Stark Young¹ thinks that the second act is a marvelous concoction of melodrama, passion, crime play, lyricism, and type characters. Not much comment was made about the structure, and not many critics can make adverse criticism, because one of Anderson's greatest merits as a dramatist is his keen sense of dramatic import and dramatic emphasis and sequence.

Winterset is hailed by some to be Anderson's masterpiece.² Others think that it is a horrible failure.³ Some critics honestly believe that Mary of Scotland or Elizabeth the Queen far outshines Winterset. But the fact remains the play has elements of greatness, and that it was successful in treating a "socially significant" theme in a genuinely dramatic and genuinely poetic fashion. Once again Anderson was able to weld two incongruous elements into a conceived whole. He was able to treat contemporary realism in a romantic fashion, and to manage a social problem in a poetic medium. It seems that genius or near genius knows no limitations.

¹ The New Republic, October 16, 1935, p. 224.

² J. M. Brown, The Art of Playgoing, p. 163.

³ E. Van Rensselaer Wyatt, The Catholic World, pp. 211-2.
Eleanor Flexner, American Playwrights, p. 110.

Chapter VI

THE MASQUE OF KINGS

One winter day early in 1889, the bodies of Crown Prince Rudolph, only son of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary, and of the Baroness Vetsera were found in a royal hunting lodge at Mayerling. Since then, much has been written about the death of the prince and his lover. Left still to the imagination is whether they committed suicide by agreement, whether one died by suicide and the other by accident, or whether they were both killed by order of the emperor. The Masque of Kings is Maxwell Anderson's dramatic interpretation of the events leading up to the death of these tragic lovers. In Mary of Scotland he portrays Mary as a noble, firm woman who has faith in others but who is betrayed by scheming compatriots. His presentation of Mary is poetic and free from fact, giving his impression of her as he thought she was. So in The Masque of Kings he portrays Rudolph as an idealist, bound by royal precepts to follow the pattern of the kingly, the practical emperor-ruler, an idea which he abhorred. Entirely sympathetic to the character, Anderson made him die not only for the love of a woman, but because he saw the utter futility of ruling by force and bloodshed for a cause not worthy of the effort.

Some of the people in the play, of course, are historical characters. Much of the action, although it does follow the broad outline of history, has little basis in known facts. The period of the play is almost contemporary with our own but is far enough removed in time and setting for the story to be treated as an historical romance. The romantic atmosphere which encompasses kings and courts of Central Europe makes a non-realistic

method readily acceptable, as many sentimental plays and light operas based upon nineteenth-century European court life and intrigue can prove. But though there is much of the typical gold-braid and homespun sort of ill-fated romance between prince and commoner in the play, Anderson makes more of it than that. Political intrigue furnishes the main events of the plot; observations on the moral costs of power supply the underlying theme. It is historical drama for its own sake, devoid of implications for our own time. The play stresses the futility of revolution which can only right one wrong with another wrong and substitute new tyrants for old. Rudolph realizes this only too clearly, so he takes a quick way out.

The characters in The Masque of Kings are probably as consistently well-defined and imaginatively dramatic as any group of characters in any modern American play. They have depth, character traits, and motives for their action, and are well integrated. Rudolph is vividly drawn, a sensitive, powerful minded man who wants action, but like Hamlet he is too intellectual and pauses at the brink of doing, for he sees too well the many conflicting entanglements which may bar the execution of his ideals. Then there is Franz Joseph, his father, a weary old man, a dictator, ruling harshly, so distrustful of others that he has weighed himself down beyond his capacity with responsibilities of state. He impresses one as being a kingly, honest, direct, hard-working, conscientious emperor who has the wishes of his people at heart. Mary Vetsera, Rudolph's lover, lithe, graceful, witty, and beautiful, is a well-depicted character who may best be described by her own words:

...For I was moulded in the womb
after a slighter pattern. Made for dancing
or for light loves. And now you look on me
and see it. What was yours you take away

and what you leave of me will dance again
because that's all it knows, but not be happy
because it loved you once.¹

She is the type that is led by opportunity, thinking little where it will lead her. Elizabeth, the queen and mother of Rudolph, has bitter resentment for her husband and seeks refuge in the maternal love she bears Rudolph. She is disillusioned by life and by the environment in which she has lived. Only too aware of the fate which awaits Rudolph, now thirty years of age, she is attempting to save him from the degenerate inertness which eventually becomes part of royalty, the cynicism, and disillusionment with which she, herself, is only too well acquainted. Elizabeth is a mother, a crushed woman crying out, clutching at air to save what she cherishes in life, her son, from her fate. Koinoff is another character clearly drawn who is faithful to a cause, militaristic, diplomatic in the Machiavellian sense, and symbolic of the subterfuge and intrigue which went on in the small kingdoms of Europe during the late nineteenth century. Such minor characters as Soeps, Hayos, Taefe, and Archduke John have a distinctness of character which makes them individuals, not puppets used to round out the plot for expository purposes.

Rudolph, in his thirty years, has never had an opportunity to show his calibre or mettle as a potential ruler. His life has been spent in a dizzy round of court entertainment, indulgences in vice and vicious court intrigue. He was forced to marry royalty, which was distasteful to him. Now as he fast fades into a state of degenerate ineptitude, he makes one grand effort to seize power and use his abilities to a purpose. He represents a noble mind and spirit warped and wrecked by inactivity.

¹ The Masque of Kings, p. 125.

He finds refuge and understanding in the tenderness of Baroness Mary Vetsera; and he wishes to relieve the people of his country from the harsh rule, as he thinks it, of his father. When he seizes his father in a miscalculated coup d'etat he realizes that the power which he is overthrowing is the same as that which he represents, that he is beginning his rule as his father did, by force, by tyranny, by merciless cruelty, not by wise reform or by judicious executive power. He, himself, is the thing he hates, for his actions represent the show of brutal force and merciless desire to use dictatorial measures on a defenseless, ignorant people. He hates the futility of revolution. He relinquishes his usurped power, and retires to Mayerling. At Mayerling he accuses Mary Vetsera of her disloyalty. She protests her faithful love for him, goes into another room, and kills herself.

Life, already empty and meaningless to Rudolph, is more so now that Mary is dead. He says:

But I've learned
from the little peddler's daughter, the Vetsera,
how to keep faith with the little faith I have
quite beyond time or change.¹

He then puts a gun to his temple as his father and mother plead with him to return with them to the capitol. The times were out of joint for Rudolph. He was a man who had ideas long before they could be used in his kingdom. He was a modernist, a democratically-minded prince who tried to think unselfishly. When he realized that his reforms could be brought about only by force, he reneged. True freedom, not a rule of oppression to maintain the new government, was his aim. He says:

¹ The Masque of Kings, p. 136.

I will tell you I've looked beyond you
and caught a vision of what a man might do.
I've set myself to make myself a man
and unlearn kingliness, shed it like the rag
it is, till a king stands up a man, but a man
with power to make men free.¹

This aspiration was violated when he was forced into a revolution against his will. Franz Joseph, when he has been put in the custody of Rudolph, points out that there is no way to power except through violence, and that power can be kept only in the same way. Franz Joseph says:

You'll try reforms, and then you'll learn
that all reforms are counters in the game
of government, played to get you what you want;
and found it useful.²

Rudolph realizes that he is just recapitulating the career of his father's harsh rule. He cries out:

I am the thing I hate...
I see in one blinding light
that he who thinks of justice cannot reach
or hold power over man, that he who thinks
of power must whip his justice and his mercy
close to heel...
Now as we stand here, robbing those who have
of what they robbed from others, tell me what rule,
what guide, what standards, human or divine,
can possibly direct a man or king
toward justice? Is it just that man shall keep
what they already have? It was not gained justly.
The titles to possession all run back
to brigandage and murder. What men own
is theirs because they have it, remains theirs
while they can keep it. There's no other proof
of any man's deserving. I set up
my title now on murder, as my father
set his up long ago. And I take over
an old concern, maintained by fraud and force
for traffic on corruption. The rest is perfume.
A government's business is to guard the trough
for those whose feet are in it.³

¹ The Masque of Kings, p. 44.

² Ibid., p. 110.

³ Ibid., p. 111.

There is a harsh and biting indiotment of men who manage governments, an indiotment repeated in many of Anderson's plays. At the end, disillusioned and determined to die, Rudolph says:

To the young men
of Europe I leave the eternal sweet delight
of heaping up their bones in these same piles
over which their rulers grin. To the old and dying
I leave their dying kingdoms to be plowed
by the new sowers of death--fools like myself
who rush themselves to power by killing men,
as time was, as time will be, time out of mind
unto this last, forever.¹

This comment on the ways of rulers, or those who replace rulers, is surely as significant today as at the time when Anderson supposes it to have been said by Rudolph of Austria-Hungary. Rudolph was too sensitive, too true to principles and human ideals to be a ruler. If he could have gained power by methods other than force, he might have ruled benevolently and wisely, but he was not of the stuff which makes for ruthless oppression.

Throughout the play the philosophical attitude of defeatism is reflected in Rudolph, Elizabeth, and Mary Vetsera. The plight in which they as characters are engulfed seems beyond their abilities to surmount, so they submit to the negative, defeatist attitude of futility, of inertia, and morbid reflection upon their state. Anderson's tendency toward defeatism has been noted in other plays.² Although Anderson has avowed his belief in the aspiring spirit of man, it is certainly true that the men of noble spirit in The Masque of Kings are crushed by the evil forces of power, and that little hope is held for the future. In such plays as The Wingless Victory and Valley Forge, death and sacrifice attend the struggle

¹ The Masque of Kings, p. 138.

² Eleanor Flexner, American Playwrights, 1918-1938, pp. 78, 92, 110, 116, 120. The Literary Digest, 123 (February 20, 1937), p. 23.

of man for freedom and brotherly love, but these deaths are not held to have been entirely in vain; they have served to bring men closer to enlightenment. In The Masque of Kings, the truth which Rudolph sees is that justice will always lose. He dies in despair, not in serving a cause for which there may still be hope. In this one play, the charge of defeatism seems justified. But this attitude is what Anderson read into the happenings surrounding Rudolph's life. If tragedy results from despair, from the inability to face the complexities of life, which certainly does happen, why evade the issue of truthful presentation, the poetic interpretation of life? Surely such a tendency cannot brand a person as a misanthrope, a poet with concepts of life based on naturalism and cynicism. Anderson only presented a story as he believed it to have happened, as he wanted it presented for dramatic purposes before the Anderson audience.

The Masque of Kings has been called a masterpiece, the best of Anderson's plays, containing a wealth of philosophy, and written in the best blank verse since Mary of Scotland.¹ It is compact and inevitable in its impending tragedy. It has loft thought and sustained beauty of line, and is as fine poetry as any in American drama. Certainly it delves deep into the spiritual aspects of character. The unrest, the qualms of conscience, the impetus to action, the motives and the causes for thought are analysed and expressed in strong, decisive poetry that has a surety of effect. Many of Rudolph's speeches and those of Franz Joseph are purple passages which will serve as models in dramatic poetry.

¹Grenville Vernon, The Commonweal, 26 (June 18, 1936), p. 216.
 Ruth W. Sedgwick, Stage, 14 (March, 1937), p. 10.
 Gilbert Gabriel, New York American, February 9, 1937.
 J. W. Krutch, The Nation, 144 (February 20, 1937), p. 221.
 Robert Cole, New York Daily Mirror, February 9, 1937.

The plot is not novel, but it is told in a high seriousness and cloaked in political philosophy which gives it a firm and significant structure. The political intrigue and the love of royalty for a commoner are typical formulae in this type of play, but Anderson brought the play to a tremendous tragic culmination by the interplay of sharply delineated characterizations. There are perhaps too many lengthy discussions on the divine rights of kings and the neglected rights of an oppressed people. Rudolph's tirades about the corruption and restrictions of courts are obvious, and become excessive. Critics were quick to realize that some of the action of the play was impeded by garrulity and verbosity on the part of the author.¹ The text of The Masque of Kings is very long but well sustained in thought, action, and interest.

The Masque of Kings is written almost entirely in blank verse. Only nineteen out of one hundred and thirty-nine pages of the script are in prose, an unusually small number as compared to other Anderson plays. Most critics praise the poetry highly, but accuse Anderson of being "long-winded".² The many redundant speeches in the play justify this criticism. The climax of the play is in the last twenty pages of the second act, when the revolution is begun. Here, it seems, the action should be paramount. Yet there are twenty-five speeches of more than eight lines, and many more than fifteen lines long. These long speeches comprise 264 out of the 270 lines in the twenty pages. In the final scene of the double suicide, 287 lines out of 690 are in speeches of

¹ Richard Watts, Jr., New York Herald-Tribune, February 9, 1937.

Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, February 9, 1937.

² Edith J. R. Isaacs, Theatre Arts Monthly, 21 (April, 1937), p. 260.

Burns Mantle, New York Daily News, February 9, 1937.

Willela Woldorf, New York Post, February 9, 1937.

nine lines or more, and there are several speeches of more than forty lines. Rudolph announces his intention to kill himself in a poetic speech of thirty-five lines. Here, indeed, Anderson might have been more economical in his dialogue.

Although The Masque of Kings was given only a fair amount of professional praise, it is considered one of Anderson's best plays, admitting even its most obvious faults. As a biographical play it is authentic in part, but is imaginative and penetrating in character portrayal and in the death sequence; poetically the play has great merit. The expression of ideas about corruption in European courts and the stupidity of the divine right of kings was not revelatory or startling.

The plot structure is not original but follows the typical play of intrigue quite faithfully. The dialogue, because of its verbosity, fails to "prick the sides of action's intent", so that the play appears diffuse and undramatic. Anderson's writing in The Masque of Kings may be compared to Racine's Phadre in his penetration of character, but he has the same failing as does Racine in leaving a character drowned in the torrents of surging wordiness. Anderson's message in The Masque of Kings is that even those who fight for good in life must at some time use methods of evil and of force to bring about their aims. Where one revolution leaves off, another begins, and nothing is gained by them, so why attempt change? Anderson makes some bitter observations on war, government, and the inevitable ruthlessness of power. The Masque of Kings is a serious and sincere study on the apparent futility of some of man's highest aspirations and idealistic desires for true justice, equality, and peace.

Chapter VII

KNICKERBOCKER HOLIDAY

In October, 1938 Anderson collaborated with Kurt Weill on the musical comedy, Knickerbocker Holiday. Kurt Weill set to music the lyrics written by Anderson. It was another attempt on the part of Anderson to experiment with a new medium, one in which he could poke fun at the government and satirize its present-day practices without calling down on himself the wrath of the political bigwigs.

Knickerbocker Holiday employs the familiar musical comedy devices of story, song, and dance. It is light, raucy, and filled with low-brow comedy deliberately aimed at pleasing an audience bent upon an evening of entertainment filled with laughs. The setting is New Amsterdam in the year 1647, and the main character is Pieter Stuyvesant. It can hardly be called historical, since the events are imaginary. The historical device gives the play a pleasant frame, but it is not a documented historical study. Rather it must be termed a modern satirical comedy set to music, for the characters talk in modern terms even though they wear old-fashioned pantaloons. The plot and songs are concerned with matters of present-day interest. It is actually a vehicle for the expression of some of Anderson's political philosophies and opinions.¹

Pieter Stuyvesant, as he appears in the play, is not an historically true character, but a product of the imagination, except that Anderson's characterization does follow the barest outline of events connected with the life of Pieter Stuyvesant of early American history. Anderson did

¹ Knickerbocker Holiday, preface "The politics in Knickerbocker Holiday".

not attempt to make him authentic, but uses him for dramatic purposes to express his own theme and his political opinions. Strictly speaking, since the play concerns the events of Stuyvesant's term as governor in New Amsterdam, it is biographical. But the general intent is so strongly bent to satirize the present Roosevelt regime that the historical aspects are quite forgotten, except to lend atmosphere and to remove the scene from the present so that the sting of criticism will not be too severe.

As in all musical comedies the plot is a device, a means, or an excuse for dialogue and song, but Anderson does supply a better integrated plot than is common to the genre, and so raises Knickerbocker Holiday above the weak, meaningless musical comedy which is usually presented to an audience. The play opens with a soliloquy by Washington Irving, who is the imaginary author of the story about to be enacted. Irving acts as an interpreter and interlocutor, and is heard from several times during the play, interrupting the action and conversing with the characters. As a character he is extremely likeable, and speaks in flowing verse with the omniscient attitude of the playwright manipulating his puppet characters. This device is cleverly used and makes for amusing comedy.

The councilmen are an exceedingly amusing take-off on the United States Senate in that they are presented as political grafters who use much circumlocution in argument, and fear action and the voice of the people. In this council is a man named Roosevelt who is very timid and never voices his opinion, a "yes" man. The council lines its pockets for private use by shaking down leaders of corruption so that it receives a percentage of the profit.

Brom Broeck, another character, is a carefree youth who typifies the free spirit of America. He hates to be commanded to do anything, but will gladly do it if asked politely. He loves independence and desires to live his personal life as he pleases. If someone commands him he loses his temper, and a brawl usually ensues.

Brom also speaks for the author. Any restrictive government is distasteful to the typical American. Brom sees in himself the "first American". He says to Irving:

Brom: and it occurred to me--don't laugh at this--
that maybe I was the first American.

Irving: The first American?

Brom: Yes, the beginning of a national type.
The kind of person that grows naturally
on this soil. A person with a really fantastic
aversion to taking orders, coupled with a complete
abhorrence of governmental corruption, and an utter
incapacity for doing anything about it.

Irving: That's the picture of an American, certainly
and by thunder it fits you, too! Brom, I believe
you've hit on something. You've put your finger
on the one outstanding national trait. An American
is a fellow who resents being ordered around.¹

This typical American might even agree with Stuyvesant when he says that "government is a group of men organized to sell protection to the inhabitants of a limited area--at monopolistic prices".² After Brom has been thrown in jail for refusing to think according to the dictates of Stuyvesant, he reflects and decides to stick by democracy. He says:

I guess all governments are crooked, I guess
they're all vicious and corrupt, but a democracy

¹ Knickerbocker Holiday, p. 30.
Ibid., p. 46.

has the immense advantage of being incompetent in villainy and clumsy in corruption. Now, your tyranny's another matter... It's efficiently vicious and efficiently corrupt. They're both bad. But since we've got to have one or the other let's throw out this professional and go back to the rotation of amateurs.¹

Many critics regard this last speech as the key speech of the play.² They attacked Anderson's audacity in suggesting that our government is run by a group of amateurs, that it is grossly inefficient, that it is corrupt and deplorable, and the lesser of two evils. These critics are so intent upon jumping at the grab-bag of faults to write a glowing article that they never saw the satire, the playful joking, the "tongue in the cheek" witticisms which Anderson employed throughout the play to drive home his point. Anderson realizes that democracy is not perfect, he realizes that government is made up of people who are human and selfish, and he warns the people to remember that corruption and dictatorial measures may creep into a democracy over night unless the voice and the opinion of independent Americans keep ringing in the ears of the statesmen to preserve the liberties of democracy. However serious Anderson may have been in his political intent, he definitely used comedy and broad farce to balance the seriousness of the piece. The cheerful liveliness and the swing of the music gave the play a gay and buoyant atmosphere. It is too bad that critics will not let Anderson take a literary holiday to enjoy a bit of foolery and satire without taking him in complete seriousness.

Brom's character is not deep, nor is he more than a type of rebellious American youth with a strong love for individual freedom.

¹ Knickerbocker Holiday, pp. 100-1.

² Richard Watts, Jr., New York Herald-Tribune, October 20, 1938.
Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 20, 1938.
Time, 32 (October 31, 1938), p. 54.

He has pluck and wit and loves plenty of action. He outwits the councilmen when he tells them that hanging him by his midsection is a more painful means of death than hanging by the neck. He demonstrates his bravery when he drives out the drunken Indians from the town almost single handed. Stuyvesant has to admit that Brom is his equal in the art of warfare. The typical American is a great fighter for his rights, and has a deep respect for womanhood. Brom loves Tina, whose parents refuse to let her see him. To keep her love for Brom, Tina rebels against parental commands and refuses to acquiesce to the demands that she marry Stuyvesant. Tina is no more than a typical American young woman in love with a man.

Pieter Stuyvesant, however, is a colorful character. He storms and bellows, scaring the quavering councilmen into submitting to his dictatorial inclinations until he has the town under his totalitarian regime. He hurls invectives, he dances to a swashbuckling tune, sings, rants, and fights the Indians. He is a politician and a grafter with a smooth tongue and an iron hand for governing tyrannically. He is so outspoken and direct that he becomes fascinating, and an entertaining character. He is quick to discern bravery and power in others and he admits it. Like Brom, he cannot take orders, so he deduces that he, too, is a good American.

When Stuyvesant takes over the town on Windy Friday, he promises that he will save the citizens from the corrupt council. He says:

From this date forth the council has no functions except the voting of those wise and just laws which you and I find that we need. From this date forth all taxes are abolished... except

for those at present in effect and a very few others which you and I may find necessary for the accomplishment of desired reforms. From this day forth every man shall be guaranteed enough to live... unless it be my personal opinion he is not worthy to live. The entire freedom of the city shall be granted to every man, woman and child in return for the mere formality of registering name, place of residence,

amount of income and total wealth. And lastly, there shall be no coercion used by the government toward any man, woman or child--except on my personal order or the order of officers delegated by myself. In other words, citizens, you may safely put yourself in my hands.¹

Thus by his smooth talk, Stuyvesant sets up his dictatorship under the guise of freeing the citizens from their own government. Anderson shows how easy it is to lose one's rights to a form of government which shackles the basis of freedom. This middle-aged warrior, clumsy and unromantic, tries through coercion and other means to win Tina and marry her. But he is prevented by the spirited Brom, who claims his love for her and maintains it. Pieter Stuyvesant is a lovable character despite his political convictions. Another character imaginatively well drawn is Ten Pin, a vagrant character who is Brom's companion. Clownish, gay, and fun making, he trips his way through the play fighting by Brom's side. On the whole the characters in Knickerbocker Holiday are of a lesser calibre than the usual Anderson characters. He didn't want them to be completely rounded depictions, but wanted them to fit the medium, to be types, to be light and frolicsome.

Although Anderson has written in jest and satirical verse about the inefficiency of democracy, about the constant distrust one must have for government, there is no evidence beneath his levity that he

¹ Knickerbocker Holiday, p. 41.

feels any less deeply than before about our liberties. Anderson pays a price for having been considered a serious playwright, for having written bitterly about social justice in Winterset and Gods of Lightning, about freedom in Valley Forge, about the evil power of dictatorship in The Masque of Kings. Critics found it hard to accept him as the author of a musical comedy.¹ Arthur Pollock grants him the privilege of writing amusingly. He says: "One expects of Mr. Anderson something a little more weighty, but there is really no reason why he should not be allowed to play when he is in the mood."² Most critics were not favorable in their criticism of the entire play, its technique, or its structure. Brooks Atkinson thinks that Anderson's touch is heavy, and says that, "Mr. Anderson's style of writing leans toward the pedantic in a brisk musical setting. He cannot trip it quite gayly enough for the company he is keeping."³

It seems that an intellectual approach to the dialogue with its subtle witticisms and not quite so obvious an approach to farce is not appreciated by some people. Because Knickerbocker Holiday contained the serious element of political satire, and because Anderson was not quite adept in attaining that lightness of touch common to the typical musical comedy, critics labelled the script as being dull, heavy-handed,

¹ J. W. Krutch, The Nation, 147 (November 5, 1938), p. 488.

Richard Lockridge, New York Sun, December 17, 1938.

² Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 20, 1938.

J. M. Brown, New York Post, October 20, 1938.

Richard Lockridge, New York Sun, October 20, 1938.

³ New York Times, October 20, 1938.

pedantic, stiff, and ponderous.¹ Kurt Weill's music, however, was praised as being most melodious, modern and fitting to the theme. Some critics thought the combination of libretto and music resembled the technique and subtle grace which distinguishes the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan.²

As far as the plot is concerned, many critics attacked it as lacking unity, and being very slow, plodding, and stubbornly conventional.³ "A very thin plot overdue in developing" writes one critic.⁴ It was widely believed by the adverse critics just cited that Anderson still has much to learn if he is to write as brilliantly in the form of musical comedy as he has in other kinds of drama. Critics, it seems, are averse to letting a person attempt a new field or medium for expression. On the other hand a critic for Variety, who represents the favorable criticisms, thinks Anderson has done well. He writes:

Anderson's book is more substantial than most musical plots, and his lyrics are a far cry from the "June Moon" days, because they are literate and assist in developing plot and characters. They are for that reason one of the brightest elements in a distinctive pattern that lifts Knickerbocker Holiday well above the prosaic plane.⁵

Knickerbocker Holiday contains much grace and wit; it has many clever devices for song. The device of the interlocutor, by which the author speaks to the characters, is adroitly handled. The chorus is expertly

- 1 Stark Young, The New Republic, 97 (November 9, 1938), p. 18.
John Anderson, New York Journal-American, October 20, 1938.
Richard Watts, Jr., New York Herald-Tribune, October 20, 1938.
- 2 Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 20, 1938.
Christian Science Monitor, October 11, 1938.
- 3 Op. cit., See footnote 1 of this page.
- 4 Walter Winchell, New York Daily Mirror, October 30, 1938.
- 5 Variety, October 5, 1938.

used in the Grecian way of enlarging on an idea already expressed by a character. Anderson created a plot structure and theme which have coherence coupled with good characterizations. Critics may have thought these two features ponderous impediments to an airy and jolly musical comedy, but it must be remembered that two glaring faults which recur constantly in musical comedies are the lack of plot structure and poor development of character. The feature of Knickerbocker Holiday which attracted most attention was the social criticism it contained. It expounded Anderson's beliefs in an amusing manner, but it was pertinently put.

Although Maxwell Anderson was not a complete success in this medium, he should not remain aloof from musical comedy with the fear that failure will result a second time. Many phases of this play are noteworthy although the verse is sometimes pedestrian and prosaic. The verse contains flashes of exciting rhythm and verve, but it is not sensible to compare it to that of his more pretentious works. Anderson must not consider Knickerbocker Holiday a greatly significant part of his work, but he must have enjoyed doing it, and he is enough of a craftsman to learn and improve by experience. If he ever writes another musical comedy, it should be excellent.

Chapter VIII

JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Journey to Jerusalem is a biographical drama about the God-child, Jesus, who is called Jeshua in this play, when he went to Jerusalem at the age of twelve. The play is based upon the Book of Enoch and St. Luke, Chapter II, but following his usual procedure, Anderson took liberties with Biblical history as he took liberties with Elizabethan history. Actually he suggests only the bare outline of the story, adding sentries and characters for his dramatic purpose. One character who is partly fictional and partly Biblical is that of Ishmael.

St. Luke states:¹

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem,
whose name was Simeon... waiting for the
consolation of Israel:... and it was revealed
unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should
not see death, before he had seen the
Lord's Christ.

Simeon happened to go into the temple at the time of Christ's baptism, and he fell upon his knees in prayer at the sight of this salvation, for there was the Savior, whom he recognized immediately.

Ishmael is fabricated from this character, but is made into a daring apostle who is outlawed by the edicts of Herod. A survivor of a revolution led by Judah against Rome, he roams the hills of Lebanon waiting for the time when his people will be led from oppression and delivered by the "chosen one". Ishmael devises a method to sneak Jeshua past the city gates where the recorder has a sharp eye to detect the twelve-year-old whom Herod fears and wishes dead. In the temple Jeshua

¹ St. Luke, Chapter II, Verses 25-35.

tells Ishmael of a dream which is the key to Ishmael's search. It reveals Jeshua to him as the Jewish savior of his people. Jeshua says:

Then I went up the cloud
among the army, and took the sword that hung
above the door in the sky, and we came together
down the steps of air. The Romans had drawn up
across the Phoenician plain, toward the great sea,
but when they saw that we walked above the sunrise
they sent out an embassy. This came to me,
and I said, "Send out the evil men" ...
...and I came here
To the holy city, to make it my capitol,
and rule wisely and justly. This was my dream--
and now I've told it.¹

Ishmael is exalted, but in the flush of his excitement centurions pounce upon Jeshua, who has been detected as the only twelve-year-old in the city. Ishmael protects him, but in the shuffle is mortally stabbed. Ishmael says in his death scene:

And in the end
for this love and bitterness with which he speaks
he will become a symbol of those who are guiltless--
and those who are quietly seeing in him this symbol,
will turn and destroy him. He will suffer
for them and conquer them in their heart.²

Ishmael is the most colorful and imaginative of all the characters in the play, including Jeshua. The most dramatic and fiery scenes are those in which he plays the central part. Herod, a sombre character who fears the "chosen one", is a despot and a tyrant who is working Roman tyranny upon the Jews. In mortal anguish and torment he says:

When a man's a ruler
he feels the tides and currents under him
as a helms man feels the sea. I keep a look out.
The revolution of Judah washed clear up
to the palace walls. The next wave may run higher.

¹ Journey to Jerusalem, p. 78.

² Ibid., p. 81.

And what do the agitators cry, and the people
 whisper, like a wind blowing close to the earth?
 Listen and you can hear it--'The messiah, the messiah!'¹

There is a prophetic aspect to Herod, Jeshua, and Ishmael, a symbolism which Anderson is definitely trying to point through his theme. In his historical and biographical plays, he almost always points to things which have a modern parallel. Ishmael discovers Jeshua as a savior of his people. The world today must discover again the teaching of Christ and the principles of Christianity to survive. With this idea is coupled a deliverance from Hitlerism and brutal tyranny. The nearest thing to Axis domination is the Roman power invoked on the Jews, and its analogy to present-day Hitlerism forced upon weak neighboring nations. In Biblical times all conquered nations paid homage to Rome, and all roads led to Rome, which brutally dominated the world. Today Nazism and Fascism crush opposition and demand subservience, just as the tyrannical Romans demanded of the land of Israel. Jeshua realizes that he must suffer and die to save the world, just as countless other youth must die before man will realize the teachings of mercy and brotherhood. In speaking to Miriam, he tells her of his mission:

But he (the Messiah) must die.
 ...He will find a teaching
 which can save men, but they will not follow it.
 They will despise him, will send soldiers to find him
 and set him before the judges. He will die
 to save others. This was said to me by the Robber, Ishmael,
 and I couldn't believe him. But now I read the rolls
 day and night--read all the passages
 that have to do with his coming, and it's true
 if I'm chosen the Messiah then what it means
 is that I'm chosen out of all the children
 to be tortured for the others when the time comes
 for us to be men together.²

¹ Journey to Jerusalem, p. 12.

² Ibid., p. 102.

Anderson has the philosophic idea that many years must elapse before men will live harmoniously on this earth. Man is still in the stages of early growth in respect to conduct, morals, and ideals; and it will take many years of living for man to gain perspective and experience in order that the principles of Christ's teaching may truly function on earth. Anderson is a staunch advocate of individual democracy, and rabidly opposes anything which savors of oppression and corruption in high places. His purpose in writing Journey to Jerusalem is to make people think how far the human race has departed from the Christian doctrines of harmony and peace.¹ Rosamond Gilder also remarks on the stressing of the theme, and the resemblance of the picture of the times in Jesus' childhood to modern conditions.²

Theme and character are closely allied in Anderson's work because he uses character as a means to enforce his theme. On the whole, Jeshua is an academic youth who sees a great vision. He is not corporal or a real boy, as the Christ child may have been. Except for Herod and Ishmael the rest of the characters are merely names from the Bible and prototypes for expository purposes. J. W. Krutch found the play dull, even though he has an unfailing liking for Mr. Anderson's work. He writes:

...the fact remains that Mr. Anderson seems to have been singularly little inspired by an inspiring legend and to have found extremely little of even the obvious to suggest in drawing the parallel.³

Very little in the play lifts one into the realm of ethereal beauty of word or dramatic impact. But Anderson was consciously striving, it

¹ Time, October 14, 1940, p. 42.

² Theatre Arts Monthly, December, 1940, pp. 850-3.

³ The Nation, October 19, 1940, p. 1.

seems, to develop a cadence which was pure, unaffected, simple, and extremely naive. This type of verse or dialogue shows his ability to recreate the unaffected language of the Biblical personages.

Critics did not, however, interpret the play or the medium in this fashion. Most of them found the play undeserving of favorable criticism. Stark Young puts his reaction in a few words:

I can only honor Mr. Anderson for his dream and purpose, his departure quite knowingly from theatre surefire--his choice of timelessness and Parnassus or Galilee.¹

John O'Hara says:

I went to this play deliberately reverent, and I came away from it angered by its obscurity.²

Most critics, in charging Anderson with limp verse, boredom, and dullness, did not attack the play for its defects in structure. The narrative of the play was told with the technique of the parable form, unfolding the theme in sequences which gave it a slow progressive movement. This method was used in keeping with Biblical technique. George Jean Nathan is one of the few critics to sense this method, although he did not realize the author's intention:

Anderson brings even further deficiencies to his already deficient craft. He merely states his play, failing save in one brief instance--the meeting of the young Jesus with the bandit Ishmael--even faintly to dramatize it. Except for that one brief moment there isn't a single dramatic situation nor a flicker of suspensive action.³

Nathan exaggerates a little, but his criticism indicates that the play was not of Anderson's best quality.

¹ The New Republic, October 21, 1940, p. 557.

² Newsweek, October 14, 1940, p. 4.

³ American Mercury, December, 1940, pp. 481-3.

The severest attacks on the play were directed against the verse employed in it. Anderson has had to contend with some of this from all critics who accuse him of being too intellectual, too verbose, too archaic, too indirect, too romantic. But there seems to be a unanimous feeling among critics that the verbal possibilities of the play were neglected.¹ Anderson did not attempt to write in flowing cadence, or strict verse with a flourish of metaphor and simile. He wanted only simple, truthful, straight-forward rhythmic speech. One cannot conceive how he could mount Parnassus and float on the wings of lyric verse when his subject and theme screamed for a realistic medium to accompany a realistic content.

Grenville Vernon says:

The trouble with Anderson's play...
is that his language brings up comparison with
the magnificent phrasing of the Gospels...

Unfortunately Journey to Jerusalem finds
him in a more pedestrian mood...

Moreover his deliberate colloquialisms in
the case of the more humble characters jar on
the ear. A great theme must not be cheapened
by language.²

However, there is a grace and a beauty in the way in which Anderson retold this great story. Without his ability, his imagination, his courage to attempt it, we would have had less upon which to judge further effort in religious plays. Certainly Journey to Jerusalem surpasses much that is written in the way of religious and secular plays.

¹ John O'Hara, Newsweek, October 14, 1940, p. 68.

George J. Nathan, American Mercury, December, 1940, p. 47.

² The Commonwealth, October 18, 1940, p. 86.

Wyatt, of The Catholic World, writes with much perspicuity and perspective when she says:

Journey to Jerusalem is not as fine as some of Anderson's other works in the actual writing, but it has strength and nobility and added interest in the fact that it is another study of Christ from a Jewish angle.¹

Journey to Jerusalem is not a stirring success, but is definitely an added contribution to the ever-widening scope of subject matter and treatment in Anderson's writing. Anderson is definitely an experimenter who writes for an artistic purpose, who writes regardless of precepts conceived by dilettantes according to the aesthetic of drama and verse. He is bold enough to do his own thinking and to execute his thought accordingly. It takes such men of courage to plumb the depths of the literary unknown and discover things worthy of a literature. Blazing literary trails may mean that desired changes conceived in the progressive poet's mind will never be accomplished by himself or other poets of his time. But that poet will have engendered a creative idea in the fertile realm of thought which will await the great creative genius who may later treat that idea with a mature conception and power of words.

¹ E. Van Rensselaer Wyatt, The Catholic World, November, 1940, pp. 216-7.

Chapter IX

CONCLUSION

One of the most distinctive and conspicuous elements of Anderson's work is his dialogue, which is noted for its beauty, and also for its realistic effectiveness, for its vigor and aptness. It is rich in refined metaphor, simile and reality; it is simple and graceful in its metrical structure. The lines of most speeches are filled with spirit and verve which makes them seem to float in a transcendent airiness of grace. Sometimes Anderson's lines run thin in thought, are filled with wind and bombast; at other times they strain at a fussy insistence to create atmosphere and mood. His dialogue and speeches employ varied media: prose, blank verse, and free verse with an excellent rhythm to fit the content of his plays. The use of poetic diction is also one of his great contributions to the modern theatre. His poetry in strict metre ascends sometimes to the heights of beauty, or it contains rhythmically patterned speech less strictly measured. His poetry at other times does not reach the elevation where it can be called lyric or powerfully dramatic, but its quality rarely descends to mere fustian. His verse is consistently dramatic and descriptive. It may not be rated as pure poetry or great blank verse, but it serves its purpose well in the theatre and is cited as very successful.¹

In his poetic dramas such as Mary of Scotland, Elizabeth the Queen, The Masque of Kings, and Wingless Victory there are excellent poetic

¹ See Mary of Scotland, Chapter III, p. 38.
The Masque of Kings, Chapter VI, p. 68.
High Tor, Chapter I, p. 14.

speeches which are definite indications of his power as a craftsman and a poet. The final scenes in Elizabeth the Queen, between Essex and Elizabeth, the final scene between Oparre and Nathaniel in Wingless Victory, the dream speech by Jeshua in Journey to Jerusalem, the final scene between Elizabeth and Mary in Mary of Scotland, most of the love scenes between Mio and Miriamne in Winterset, or the turbulent mutterings of Gaunt in the same play are great instances of Anderson's ability. These few examples from the many purple passages of his plays illustrate his extremely effective use of blank verse.

In his historical dramas such as Mary of Scotland, Elizabeth the Queen, and Journey to Jerusalem, Anderson has his characters speak in modern diction. This is a means of reconciling the difference between the periods of time and the customs of people of two different ages. He gives the diction just enough of the archaic to supply the atmosphere appropriate to the historical aspects of the play. When Shakespeare wrote his dramas dealing with Roman themes, his characters spoke in the language which was used in Elizabethan England. Shakespeare could not avoid anachronisms, which really did not affect the value of his plays. Anderson is not violating principles of the use of language by disregarding the diction of historical periods. But as in the case of Shakespeare, he uses language and creates a style appropriate to his purposes of dramatic effect.

Anderson's prose writing is well exemplified by his work in What Price Glory?, Saturday's Children, Both Your Houses, Gods of Lightning, and parts of Valley Forge. In these plays the writing is definitely realistic and pointed. There is a strong searching for truthful representation. This type of treatment gives his style a freshness and

boldness in attack. The lines are filled with humor, seriousness, and human wisdom resulting from much reflective thought.

Anderson's approach to his material is studied and deliberate, yet highly aesthetic; and the language, especially in his verse plays, reflects his intelligent attitude toward his material. Yet the journalistic style of writing which he employed in his early plays certainly cannot be called intellectual, but on the other hand racy, human, and earthy.¹ Anderson's tendency, however, is to be intellectual in choice of word and in treatment of content. This tendency may account for his inclination to be over-elaborate in speech and dialogue.² It may be the basis for his desire to seek the correct nuance of emotional expression. His description of emotional quality fades into wordiness. Over-elaborate dialogue results in protracted interest and arrested action; it retards the resolution of plot, and it deadens the warmth of character. Empty speeches, however beautiful, do not add to the dramatic quality of a play, but deaden its total impression. Verbosity or prolixity is one of Anderson's marked faults. When words are substituted for action, a static play results. Plays such as Journey to Jerusalem, The Masque of Kings, Key Largo, and Star Wagon appear static because of this fault.

Atmosphere is an integral part of Anderson's plays. His latest play, Candle in the Wind, is written in a reflective mood with a

¹ See Gods of Lightning, chapter I, p. 3.
What Price Glory?, chapter I, p. 2.

² See Wingless Victory, chapter I, p. 11.
Key Largo, chapter I, p. 16.
The Masque of Kings, chapter VI, p. 69.

reminiscent quality to create the atmosphere of futility and crushed hope which is the attitude of fallen France today. In High Tor there is the atmosphere of mysticism and delicate fantasy created by the style, language, and characters. Van Dorn, Lise, and the Dutchmen lend an ethereal quality to the play. In Elizabeth the Queen and Mary of Scotland there is the atmosphere of turbulent times, precarious living, decisive and dramatic action, subterfuge and trickery. The characters are alive and active, forward and daring.

Winterset, The Masque of Kings and Key Largo are pervaded by a sense of doom and inevitable tragedy. The characters speak in emotional phrasings and deeper tones which bespeak hidden motives in action. In Valley Forge a feverish mood of excitement and heroic endeavor permeates the whole play. Anderson uses a very subtle and delicate shading to give mood and atmosphere. He has a very sensitive appreciation of variations from play to play, and he makes a conscious and skillful art out of creating the correct mood and atmosphere for each play he writes.

Anderson is so skillful a coordinator of material and subject matter that one would never realize his skill unless his plays were analyzed completely. For instance, in High Tor he has an Indian, Dutch explorers, modern youth, and crooked business men climbing on a mountain throughout the play. They speak in blank verse and criticize modern business practices. In Wingless Victory there is a Malay Princess who tries to live with puritanical New Englanders. They speak in poetic language about religious tolerance and racial prejudice. In most of his historical plays Anderson has his characters revolve around a theme taken directly from modern life.

Anderson's use of themes is very important. In most of his plays he

definitely criticizes present day opinion, action, or governmental practices. He has a tendency to over-emphasize theme by rewriting it into the speeches of the characters several times in a play. This practice frequently sacrifices interest in character and plot. For instance, in Night Over Taos the theme of the changing order, that the old must make way for the new, occupies so important a place in the exposition that the characters do not ring true and seem false representations, hollow creatures spouting words. Knickerbocker Holiday becomes uninteresting in places because Anderson is eager to give his lecture on governmental inefficiency. Wingless Victory loses much of its dramatic power because the characters rant about bigotry, social justice, and religious tolerance. Winterset is filled with the inadequacies of justice and its true administration. Character and plot become thin and uninteresting when the theme becomes too obvious. But a great point of strength in Anderson's plays is his ability to tell a story well in very excellent dramatic technique.¹ He has close-knit plots which, for the most part, are well conceived, initiated and executed to complete resolution.

Anderson uses history extensively for locale, background, character, or political purposes. He employs early American history, (i. e., Spanish-American, Dutch-American, Revolutionary), contemporary history, European history, Biblical history, and Elizabethan history. In Knickerbocker Holiday, history and characters of history such as Pieter Stuyvesant are used for background and atmosphere. In Elizabeth the

¹ See Winterset, chapter V, pp. 51-4.
Mary of Scotland, chapter III, pp. 38-9.
High Tor, chapter I, pp. 12-3.
Valley Forge, chapter IV, pp. 48-9.

Queen and Mary of Scotland, a verisimilitude to historical fact and character is maintained, but these plays are plays of character with history contributing to the general impression. The characters are interpreted as the poet fancies them in his mind, regardless of fact. Night Over Taos is a story about the struggle of modern civilization trying to conquer in an area of the United States which still clings to the old Spanish civilization of the West. This is a phase of Western American history which was treated symbolically but truthfully. The history of Austria-Hungary in The Masque of Kings follows the general pattern but does not strain to maintain fact or sequence of time. This is also true of Valley Forge and Journey to Jerusalem. The playwright has assumed the right to employ dramatic license in history and biography to fit his purpose in each play wherein history or biography is used. He has done it successfully. He has used history to show that former periods were beset with the same problems which modern times must face. He gains perspective on his themes by using the method of analogy of circumstances between ages and periods of history.

Characterization is a great attribute of Anderson's plays. His imagination and his accurate knowledge of human nature give his creations an unfaltering reality and sincerity. His characters have depth and human warmth, are full-rounded beings. A deepening, penetrating desire to explore the psychological motive for action in his characters seems to be Anderson's latest tendency.¹ Dramatic license used in

¹ See Key Largo, chapter I, p. 17.
Winterset, chapter V, pp. 58-60.
Mary of Scotland, chapter III, pp. 33-5.

portraying people such as Elizabeth of Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Mary of Scotland, Rudolph of The Masque of Kings and Washington of Valley Forge left Anderson free to create traits of character as he wished, which resulted in warm, human characters with nimble wits, charming grace, and compensating virtues for ugly traits. The long array of splendid personages created from Anderson's fertile mind well illustrates his power to delineate character. Sergeant Quirt, Captain Flagg, Mio, Miriamne, Gaunt, King McCloud, Alegre, Van Van Dorn, Montoya, Morgan, Jackson and many more are robust figures which walk the pages of Anderson's plays, strikingly portrayed. Yet Anderson does let some characters slip to the side as mere machinery when the need arises to create atmosphere and reveal important information. Burbage, Hemmings, Bacon, Loschek, Don Miguel, Don Hermano, Mary Phillipse, General Howe, many lords in Mary of Scotland, and others remain undeveloped in some of his plays. But Anderson will long be remembered as a great creator of fine characterization.

Anderson has maintained a very human attitude toward his historical personages. He has drawn them well. Rudolph from The Masque of Kings, Mary and Bothwell from Mary of Scotland, Elizabeth and Essex from Elizabeth the Queen, Ishmael from Journey to Jerusalem, Washington from Valley Forge, and Pieter Stuyvesant from Knickerbocker Holiday are examples of excellent character depiction. Yet many characters are mere shadows--wax mummies revived from a museum to walk across the pages of Anderson's plays, contributing atmosphere for the sake of the leading characters of the plot. Anderson sacrifices his minor historical characters to

the major impressions in his historical plays.¹

The main trend of Anderson's work has been on the serious, even the tragic side, with intervening comedies. He has written many tales of adventure and romance, yet he has also done the realistic well. From history and far-away places he has drawn his material and treated that material poetically. For this treatment of material he is definitely labelled a romantic playwright. Notwithstanding such a categorical classification, his early writings and all of his prose plays such as Outside Looking In and Gods of Lightning reveal an impressive, realistic quality.

Anderson has endeavored to interpret the American scene. He has set himself up as a minor prophet as to what is good and bad in America. Witness the attack upon graft and corruption in Florida in Key Largo; how he definitely accused Congress of unethical ways of making laws in Both Your Houses. In Wingless Victory accusations are made against religious and racial intolerance in America. Congressional inefficiency and selfishness are assailed in Valley Forge. Corruption of justice on the basis of social position is flouted in Gods of Lightning and Winterset. Saturday's Children shows an observation of the moral philosophy of modern youth, while High Tor and Star Wagon satirize and show contempt for modern business methods and practices. Outside Looking In is a depiction of American hobo life, and What Price Glory? is a vivid reaffirmation that the Yankee soldier is a rough and tough

¹ See Journey to Jerusalem, chapter VIII, p. 83.
Elizabeth the Queen, chapter II, p. 30.
Valley Forge, chapter IV, p. 47.

gun-toting fighter. This tendency to interpret the American scene characterizes a large part of Anderson's writing.

Anderson has been accused of political pessimism and defeatism in his outlook of life. In the treatment of his themes he attacks political corruption and illegal practices in government in a forceful and vicious manner which shows his vehement dislike for these phases of every government. But he does have faith in the principles of democracy and what it stands for;¹ although he detests political intrigue and dominance and oppression.² Anderson is a free American who doesn't want his rights infringed upon and doesn't want the government to use his money foolishly. Wintersot, The Masque of Kings, and Key Largo show a deepening sense of the futility of opposition. Wrongs are so definitely intrenched in human institutions that they will never be eradicated. But Anderson does say that a man will try to better his position until the light of truthful living will shine through the oppressive gloom. Mio and Miriamne do not die in vain nor does King McCloud, for each sees that a lesson and a principle will be derived from his death by other humans, and thereby bring the hope of truth and justice some day in the future to all mankind. Rudolph, in The Masque of Kings, dies in the belief that all life is futile and not worth living, so that he never attempts to fight the wrong in his government. Here the charge of defeatism is substantiated.

Maxwell Anderson is a versatile playwright. He has written plays in a naturalistic vein, such as What Price Glory?; he has interpreted

¹ See Valley Forge, chapter IV, p. 47.
Knickerbocker Holiday, chapter VII, p. 74.

² The Masque of Kings, chapter VI, p. 67.

modern youth realistically in Saturday's Children; he has criticized the government in Both Your Houses and Knickerbocker Holiday; he has written fantasy in High Tor and Star Wagon; he has written comedy and musical comedy in Knickerbocker Holiday and What Price Glory?; he has collaborated with Stallings, Hickerson and Weil; he has written beautiful tragedy and melodrama in Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and Winterset; he has written effective poetry in The Masque of Kings; he has combined content and form in blank verse successfully in Winterset; he has used history and historical characters expertly in Valley Forge and Mary of Scotland; he has used religion and religious themes effectively in Journey to Jerusalem and Wingless Victory; he has written some of the best blank verse and poetry in the modern theatre. These varied accomplishments are all of high merit. Few playwrights of today can boast of so varied a range.

Anderson has the fault of writing in too profuse a fashion; his verbosity cloyes the action of his plays, making them appear static and ponderous in movement. He has the fault of repeating his themes in the characters' lines for reemphasis, which deadens the characters' effectiveness and dulls the interest of the play. He has the fault of using historical and other characters for atmosphere in plays, and for exposition, without giving them full-rounded personalities. He permits his political philosophy to interrupt the movement and depletion of character in his plays. On the other side of the ledger, Anderson has the very facile ability to write excellent poetic verse. This is one of his distinctive contributions to American drama. Character creation in vivid terms is a strong attribute of his plays. His fine sense for dramatic construction is almost unerring. Anderson

can weave a plot and tell a story in efficient, beautiful terms with a finesse and penetration of subject matter equal to that of the masters. The use of history and historical personages in poetic dramas of high tragic quality is a definite part of his present greatness. Anderson's style and technique are excellent. He has used many themes for his plays. Anderson, in other words, is a great American playwright who has written at least three dramas, Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and Winterset, which should live in world literature as examples of fine imagery and the product of a fertile, sensitive brain. Winterset will live in American literature as a successful drama concerning a modern subject of social significance treated in a poetic medium.

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