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THE DRAMATIC THEORY OF MAXWELL ANDERSON  
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO REVIEW  
& SCHOLARLY CRITICISM OF  
THE TUDOR TRILOGY


BY

ANDREW B. TRUMP


A thesis submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree Master of Arts, Major in  
Speech, South Dakota  
State University  
1979

THE DRAMATIC THEORY OF MAXWELL ANDERSON  
AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO REVIEW  
& SCHOLARLY CRITICISM OF  
THE TUDOR TRILOGY

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

 Dr. Judith Zivanovic  
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 Date

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Origin of the Problem

Playwrights and critics (both reviewers and scholars) have an interesting relationship in the theatre. Plays in the form of performance, unpublished manuscripts, and published texts come under the scrutiny of critics who then give interpretation to the works of playwrights. Most elements of playwriting are examined: language, imagery; character development. Searches are conducted for the obvious and the most subtle of nuance. Phrasing is looked at closely by critics for consistency or contradiction. Out of this effort the critics rationalize singular or collective theories concerning dramatists and their work in an attempt to provide insight for interested readers.

Reviewers and scholarly critics, while occupying the same general intent in giving as much considered opinion as possible to dramatic works, go about their respective tasks in different ways and from dissimilar circumstances to arrive at final judgments. Reviewers often write in the immediate heat of post-performance glow or letdown for weekly and monthly magazines or daily newspapers, these having a wide base of circulation. The reviews are aimed at a readership deciding whether or not to part with the price of tickets. Deadlines for publication in the more broadly-based medium are a matter of days or even hours after initial exposure to the

dramatic work under consideration, and often without benefit of a text before the reviewer. Scholarly critics, contributing to journals with more limited readerships often give their opinions after quiet contemplation and consideration of the texts of plays: the resulting articles are meant to be read by other scholars or interested students of literary and dramatic criticism.

Whether praised or attacked by critics, most playwrights continue to write and prepare their works for performance and publication, rarely answering critics publicly or by writing their own criticism or theory. One exception was Maxwell Anderson (1887-1959), who began his career as a playwright in 1923 and continued to write through the 1950's. Anderson's drama became well known and popular when his first theatrical success, What Price Glory?, was enthusiastically received in 1924. The enthusiasm lasted well into the 1930's and after with a series of verse dramas. With these plays and their critical receptions Anderson was assured of a prominent place in the American theatre of that period. But Anderson also expounded on dramatic theory and criticism, publishing his ideas to justify his approach to writing plays and to rebuke others who passed judgment on his dramatic work.

Maxwell Anderson's dramatic and theoretical works, the critics who commented upon his plays, the disputes, agreements, and digressions engendered have proved to be interesting, informative, and often lively reading, and have outlined a significant period of development in American theatre during the first half of the twentieth century.

### Statement of the Problem

This study proposed to establish a basic overview of Maxwell Anderson's dramatic theory, then to analyze review and scholarly criticism of three Anderson plays according to guidelines set up in the study. Finally, it proposed to draw conclusions concerning the critics' emphases relating to Anderson's theory and the contribution this playwright-critic "clash" exhibited for the study of theatre and dramatic criticism.

Maxwell Anderson's dramatic theory as stated in his essays was utilized as a framework for agreement, comparison, and contrast with a body of reviews and scholarly articles about Anderson's three plays. This review and scholarly criticism was analyzed in respective chapters according to guidelines that were found to stem directly from ideas expressed in Anderson's theory. The reviews analyzed were those from weekly and monthly magazines, quarterly journals, and issues of the New York Times on the following plays: Elizabeth the Queen, 1930; Mary of Scotland, 1933; Anne of the Thousand Days, 1948.

Anderson's theory, as developed in essays, was published periodically from the late teens and early 1920's through the 1950's, especially in contributions to the New York Times. Writings up to the 1940's were collected under two titles, The Essence of Tragedy and Other Footnotes and Papers (1939) and Off-Broadway: Essays About the Theatre (1947). The three plays span an eighteen-year range representing Anderson's first years as a verse playwright,



his subsequent output of verse drama, and the eventual completion of the three plays known as the "Tudor trilogy." The years 1930-1948 also saw Anderson bring forth such plays as Valley Forge, Night Over Taos, The Wingless Victory, High Tor, Key Largo, and the most well-known verse play Anderson wrote came during this time, the twentieth century verse play, Winterset. This was a crucial period for Anderson as a playwright and theorist. Reviews, scholarly articles, and Anderson's theory all serve as complements to one another in examining the intent of the playwright and the subsequent interpretation of Anderson by his critics.

#### Procedure

1. A survey of the following reference works was conducted to determine the extent of previous academic studies of Maxwell Anderson:

Auer, J. Jeffrey, "Doctoral Dissertations in Speech: Work in Progress," Speech Monographs, annual issues, 1956-1969.

Bibliographic Annual in Speech Communication, (Speech Communication Association), Volumes I-VI.

Comprehensive Dissertation Index: Communication and the Arts, 1861-1972, Supplements 1973, 1974, Part 2, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms.

Dissertation Abstracts International, Part A, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1956-1979.

Dissertations Accepted by American Universities, annual issues, 1935-1955, New York: H. W. Wilson Company.

Dow, Clyde W., "Abstracts of Theses in the Field of Speech," Speech Monographs, annual issues, 1956-1969.

Litto, Frederic M., American Dissertations on Drama and the Theatre - A Bibliography, Kent State University, 1969.

Masters Abstracts: Abstracts of Selected Masters Thesis of Microfilm, Volumes I-XIV, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1962-1976.

2. There were a number of unpublished masters theses and doctoral dissertations from the late 1930's to the early 1970's that used Maxwell Anderson's work in whole, or in part, in their respective studies. The following titles were found during research and it was determined they could yield beneficial information, especially in their bibliographies, to the writer of this study:

Buchanan, Randall John, "Maxwell Anderson's Rules of Playwriting and Their Application to His Plays," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1964).

Blanchard, Fred C., "The Place of Maxwell Anderson in the American Theater," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1939).

Cox, Martha H., "Maxwell Anderson and His Critics," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arkansas, 1955).

Gilbert, Vedder M., "Maxwell Anderson: His Interpretation of Tragedy in Six Poetical Dramas," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Cornell University, 1938).

Mordoff, Helen Lee, "Dramatic Theories of Maxwell Anderson," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Cornell University, 1942).

Nardin, James T., "Maxwell Anderson: A Critical Estimate," (unpublished M.A. thesis, Lehigh University, 1947).

Four titles and authors were available through purchase from University Microfilms, inter-library loans, and abstracts: a Xerox

copy of Randall John Buchanan's study was bought from University Microfilms; an abstract of Fred C. Blanchard's thesis was obtained from NYU; a microfilm of Martha H. Cox's dissertation was lent from the University of Arkansas; and Cornell University lent a copy of Vedder M. Gilbert's thesis. The two remaining titles could not be obtained.

The Buchanan, Blanchard, and Cox studies were, in their respective contexts, overviews of the body of Anderson's work. Cox's study, of particular interest here, charted the critical response to the total of Anderson's performed stage plays from 1923 to 1955. Through the reading and analyzing of more than 1,500 reviews and articles, Cox attempted, in a chronological survey, to reach general conclusions about the critical reception of Anderson. Buchanan also took a chronological approach. By establishing Anderson's "rules of playwriting" from his dramatic theory essays, Buchanan showed the extent to which Anderson applied these rules to all of his published plays. Blanchard examined the trends of theatre in Anderson's time; surveyed the body of his plays (as it then existed) for content on their stages of background, writing, production; then, he polled professional and scholarly critics about the worth of Anderson's work and his subsequent influence in the theatre. Gilbert, by limiting himself to six verse plays, analyzed Anderson's use and interpretation of tragedy compared to the tragic standards established by Aristotle, Shakespeare, and Victor Hugo.

Abstracts of other titles showed approaches to the survey and analysis of Maxwell Anderson's dramatic works as literature or the use of criticism as support for hypotheses the individual writers were making. No study had been previously conducted that used the central tenets of Anderson's dramatic theory as a basis for comparison and contrast to determine how successful Anderson was in fulfilling his goals in theatre as determined by review and scholarly criticism of the "Tudor trilogy" plays. This study made that its goal; it was neither a chronological nor literary survey of Anderson's work.

3. A review was made of sources listing all published reviews and articles about Maxwell Anderson and as many of these listed publications as were available were gathered.

Cursory reading of initial materials that were gathered revealed references to more sources and articles about Anderson. The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature listed published reviews of all of Anderson's plays. Particularly helpful were Dramatic Criticism by Arthur Coleman and Gary R. Tyler, and Dramatic Criticism Index by Paul F. Breed and Florence M. Sniderman. Martha Cox's Maxwell Anderson Bibliography gave the most comprehensive listing of reviews and articles, especially older and less well-known references. Books that were about Anderson or that mentioned him as part of a larger study proved useful in provided background material, bibliography sources, and idea development. These included Mabel Driscoll Bailey's Maxwell Anderson: Playwright as Prophet, a

published version of her earlier dissertation; Barrett H. Clark's Maxwell Anderson: The Man and His Plays; and Alfred S. Shivers' Maxwell Anderson. These works all provided full bibliographies and information for background. Other books on dramatic criticism that were consulted were Essays in Modern Literary Criticism by Bernard F. Dukore, and Criticism: Speculative and Analytical Essays, a compilation edited by L. S. Dembo.

In its analysis of Maxwell Anderson's dramatic theory and the criticism of his three plays, this study utilized only commentary published in reviews and articles printed in newspapers, magazines, and journals. In one instance a book of collected essays was used in order to analyze one specific essay that proved beneficial to this study.

### Organization

Chapter II outlined the central ideas of Maxwell Anderson's dramatic theory:

- 1) Poetry for the Modern Audience
- 2) Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on Anderson's Concepts of Character, Plot and Structure
- 3) Themes for the Modern Audience

Using the central ideas expressed in Anderson's dramatic theory as guiding criteria and as subheadings for organization, Chapter III analyzed reviews of three Anderson plays: Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and Anne of the Thousand Days. Chapter III came to conclusions about the following:

- 1) Agreement and disagreement reviewers had concerning Anderson's three plays and indirectly with his dramatic theory.
- 2) Aspects of Anderson's writing reviewers focused on most and those they most often overlooked.
- 3) Changes evident in reviewers' later approaches in evaluating Anderson's plays as compared to earlier critiques.

Chapter IV, again using the theory guidelines established in Chapter II as a basis for organization, analyzed a body of scholarly criticism on Maxwell Anderson's plays and arrived at conclusions about the following:

- 1) Aspects of Anderson's three plays scholars focused on most and those they most often overlooked.
- 2) Points of agreement and disagreement with Anderson's plays in the body of scholarly criticism under analysis.
- 3) Agreements and disputes scholars most often exhibited amongst themselves while analyzing Anderson's plays.
- 4) Changes scholars noted in Anderson's work as they wrote about him over the years.

Chapter V drew conclusions and comparisons concerning agreement and disagreement, similarities and differences among the reviewers, scholars, and Anderson's theory; finally, it showed the contribution of this critical "contest" to dramatic criticism.

#### Justification

Because of the general lack of very recent publication on Maxwell Anderson, once a very prominent American playwright, his contributions to theatre seemed overlooked and unappreciated. This

writer felt new academic research was needed from the standpoint of Anderson's dramatic theory and criticism of him as a playwright. This study can provide valuable information for the student interested in theatre criticism and supplies analysis of the playwright-critic relationship in general, regarding both review and scholarly criticism, and of Anderson's trilogy plays in particular. Also, it serves as a contribution to theatre history by showing the ideas an American playwright expressed and attempted to bring to fruition, and how well or ill he was judged by critics during that time.

The playwright-critic relationship is a very important one which deserves study and understanding by interested observers: students, scholars, audiences, and readers. Such a relationship allows theatre to receive and analyze new ideas, constantly shaking this institution from ever-present, and ultimately threatening, complacency. At the same time, it is useful to note the manner in which playwrights and critics may work at cross-purposes. Maxwell Anderson, as both playwright and theorist, provides an ideal medium for a study which can place the playwright-critic relationship in perspective.

## CHAPTER II

### MAXWELL ANDERSON'S

### DRAMATIC THEORY

#### Introduction

Before attempting an analysis of Maxwell Anderson's dramatic theory, it is necessary to establish Anderson's standards for "art," of which theatre, and more specifically poetic tragedy, is a part. Anderson saw the worth of art best exemplified in longevity: "The test of a message is its continuing effect on the minds of men over a period of generations."<sup>1</sup> In Anderson's mind, art and its

"message" was represented by a very slow growth that man experiences through an "artistic faith": "The artistic faith is simply a faith in the human race and his gradual acquisition of wisdom."<sup>2</sup>

Emphasizing faith, Anderson at the same time saw much ambiguity in the future of the human race: "What faith men will then have . . . I don't know, having myself only a faith that men will have a faith."<sup>3</sup>

Theatre to Anderson had religious significance, as this one of many references to the classical past indicates:

The theater originated in two completely religious ceremonies, one celebrating the animal in man and one celebrating the god. Old Greek Comedy was dedicated to the spirits of lust and riot and earth, spirits which are certainly necessary to the health and continuance of the race. Greek tragedy was dedicated to man's aspiration, to his kinship with the gods, to his unending blind attempt to lift himself above the lusts and his pure animalism into a world where there are other values, than of pleasure and survival.



This two-fold aspect of theatre represented to Anderson the condition of man: he was capable of inspiration and rising to noble ends yet he was weak and susceptible to his baser instincts. Theatre, as a religious experience, would nudge man closer to his noble potential.

Anderson justified theatre as being religion in this way:

I have found my religion in the theatre, where I least expected to find it, and where few will credit it exists. But it is there, and any man among you who tries to write plays will find himself serving it, if only he works his apprenticeship, that the theatre is the central artistic symbol of good and evil within man.<sup>5</sup>

The "central artistic symbol" just alluded to will be especially relevant to Anderson's ideas on theme.

Basically, Anderson's theory was underlined by the following: the best art [meaning theatre] was the result of endurance that came from many years of acceptance and undying faith in human potential as opposed to earthly weaknesses. Theatre, to Anderson, was a religion based upon faith in mankind and this particular art form.

Along with George Bernard Shaw, Anderson thought of the theatre as a place of worship: "a cathedral of the spirit, devoted to the exaltation of man."<sup>6</sup> Anderson often returned to the religious significance of theatre, this concept having stemmed from his admiration of the ancient Greeks. This concept will serve as a foundation upon which an analysis of Anderson's dramatic theory will rest.

### The Dramatic Theory

Employing the criteria set up in Chapter I, the following subheadings will be used in the analysis of Anderson's dramatic theory:

- 1) Poetry for the Modern Audience
- 2) Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on Anderson's Concepts of Character, Plot and Structure
- 3) Themes Essential for the Modern Audience

It was upon these aspects that Anderson most often wrote when commenting on theatre. Anderson attempted to gain a modern insight into the great theatrical achievements of the past. Unlike many other observers of twentieth century American theatre, Anderson wrote plays that reflected the ideas in his theory.

#### Poetry for the Modern Audience

Just after World War I, Anderson looked at the artistic scene of writers and found despair and cynicism because, as he wrote in 1920: "The war robbed us of certain sensibilities--made them look in retrospect like affectations."<sup>7</sup> Anderson also found poetic efforts to be extremely wanting:

What are poets doing and saying, in this age of disillusion which gives promises of glories in the verse of tomorrow? They sit sadly, by twos and threes, in the back rooms of restaurants, discussing the futility of effort and the disappearance of aesthetic standards . . . on one thing only will they agree with any unanimity--the utter lack of fundamentals on which to build.<sup>8</sup>

These years were to Anderson a time of impermanence: "We have seen concepts and traditions vanish like names written in water."<sup>9</sup>

Anderson saw little from contemporaries that he felt could provide a lasting, inspirational effect. He detected only static lament.

Anderson wished to help bring about something in art other than the despair of the times. In 1919 Anderson had written:

"America has not yet been expressed."<sup>10</sup> He wanted to be a part of bringing this about, if proper conditions could be met:

. . . if we stage a renaissance it will be unlike the one for which we remember Elizabeth . . . such awakenings have been marked by faith and confidence, by emotional tension and a love of life for which we can offer no substitute or parallel.<sup>11</sup>

Anderson claimed the past offered the greatest examples of poetry that had a "continuing effect over the generations." In his mind the poetic masters from the past were most secure in their faiths and in the goodness of the human race:

The writers of poetry in every previous play have felt some ground or other solid beneath their feet. Shakespeare, discouraged as he may have been with humanity, was still possessed of the Ptolemaic illusion. Man was to him the center of the universe, clay, yet godlike.<sup>12</sup>

Those responsible for the great achievements in the past did not indulge in the despair that Anderson saw around him; rather, they were faithful and confident men, secure in their times and worshipful of mankind. That optimism, Anderson professed, produced the most immortal work of literate man. In contrast, in its literary output, the twentieth century was obsessed with the "clay".

Anderson was enamored of the classics: he often cited the accomplishments of the ancient Greeks and the Elizabethans. Like many before and after him, Anderson saw these two periods as

representing the best of poetic creativity. He stated that a similar experience was needed in the twentieth century; however, only special men could be counted on to bring this about:

Those who have read their literary history carefully know that now is the time for our native amusements to be transformed into a national art of power and beauty. It needs the touch of the poet to make the transformation, a poet comparable to Aeschylus in Greece or Marlowe in England. Without at least one such we shall never have a great theatre in our country, and he must come soon, for these chances don't endure forever.<sup>13</sup>

This belief in the classical tradition was followed by other statements indicating that the past displayed certainty. He also expressed another of his intensely-held beliefs, faith as expressed by confident men: "Milton planted his feet firmly on the tradition of an all-wise Providence, and his verse rings clearly, free of doubt."<sup>14</sup> In Anderson's estimation, such poets and beliefs were sadly lacking in the twentieth century post-war experience.

The modern theatre failed to measure up to Anderson's expectations and goals. The disappointment began with the shortcomings of contemporary playwrights: "Our modern dramatists are not poets, and the best prose in the world is inferior to the best poetry."<sup>15</sup> In illustrating the dichotomy between prose and poetry, Anderson showed the two forms of language as having differences in intent: "To me it is inescapable that prose is the language of information and poetry the language of emotion."<sup>16</sup> In other words: prose informs and is factual, objective, and logical; poetry transforms and ennobles through lyrical and other emotional-arousing uses of

language. In his writing the poet expressed fervent ideas in which he and his reader could find common ground, ideas about which men had expressed themselves many times:

The writers of epics celebrate the youth, the hope, the victory, the disillusion and the defeat of man; the writers of lyrics are always young, and their constant theme is the anguish of youth in its first contact with reality and inevitable despair, the authors of tragedy offer the largest hope for mankind which I can discern in the great poetry of the earth, a hope that man is greater than his clay, that the spirit of men may rise superior to physical defeat and death.<sup>17</sup>

Poetry expressed, or was an attempt to express, the inexplicable; it attempted to show a commitment to inspiration. To Anderson, prose could not meet this requirement.

Anderson yearned for the form he saw least in modern theatre, beauty in language: "I have a strong and chronic hope that the theater of this country will outgrow the phase of journalistic social comment and reach occasionally into the upper air of poetic tragedy."<sup>18</sup> Anderson allied himself with Goethe in insisting that dramatic poetry was the most admirable creation of literary man.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1920's Anderson turned to playwriting and the first play he authored, White Desert, a verse drama, was produced. He used verse because he "was tired of plays in prose that never lifted from the ground."<sup>20</sup> This was Anderson's first attempt to bring together again the stage and poetry, or verse, the term he used most often when he discussed poetry. It was during this period that Anderson wrote What Price Glory?, a war play collaboration with Laurence Stallings. In 1930 with the writing of Elizabeth the Queen and

during most of the following years, Anderson often returned to verse. Eventually Anderson's playwriting in this vein culminated in his best-known work, Winterset, a verse drama set in depression-era New York. Winterset has also been analyzed for its classical content: it has been shown to have a Romeo and Juliet motif and likened to a revenge tragedy.<sup>21</sup>

Anderson had established himself as a playwright of historical drama. The settings in the historical plays were of the conventional type for the genre: circumstances, manners, figures of speech, and characters with which audiences of the present century were not immediately familiar. Anderson at this point was following the classical poets in their form and content. To make poetic tragedy into a dramatic event with twentieth century surroundings onstage would be something new, Anderson claimed:

. . . Winterset is largely in verse, and treats a contemporary tragic theme, which makes it more of an experiment than I could wish, for the great masters themselves never tried to make tragic poetry out of the stuff of their own times. To do so is to attempt to establish a new convention, one that may prove impossible of acceptance, but to which I was driven by the lively historical sense of our day--a knowledge of period, costume, and manners which almost shuts off the writer on historical themes from contemporary comment.<sup>22</sup>

At first Anderson took the more conventional path to poetic tragedy that his much admired predecessors had taken. "There is not one tragedy by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripedes, Shakespeare, Corneille, or Racine which did not have the advantage of a setting either far away or long ago,"<sup>23</sup> Anderson wrote.

Audiences in Anderson's time had been mostly exposed to the theatre of "realism" or "impressionism" and poetic drama was new to most theatregoers. Audiences were used to the prose drama and did not see the relevancy of poetry onstage:

So emphatic is this feeling that one is doubtful of being able to explain to this majority that verse was once the accepted convention on the stage, as prose is now, that prose fought its way into playbooks with difficulty at the beginning of the scientific era in which we live and will hold its place there only so long as men make a religion of fact and believe that information, conveyed in statistical language, can make them free.<sup>24</sup>

The idea of bringing poetic drama back to the stage as a fully accepted artistic form appealed to Anderson as a worthy challenge; as a playwright he attempted this form that most of his contemporaries either only talked about or chose to bypass altogether.

Poetry and theatre must be brought together again on the modern stage, Anderson pleaded. Yet throughout his often-eloquent essays, Anderson did not reveal a general or specific style of verse writing that would fulfil his intentions. Instead, Anderson repeatedly cited past accomplishments by the ancient Greek and Renaissance poets. These highpoints were Anderson's main frame of reference for literature, poetry, and drama. Because of such referrals it can be assumed Anderson wished to emulate the achievements of those he most admired. In his dramatic theory Anderson did not proclaim any "style" that he wished to develop in his verse writing, other than to be influenced by the "immortal greats."

Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on  
Anderson's Concepts of Character,  
Plot and Structure

"I reread Aristotle's Poetics in the light of some bitter experience," Anderson wrote, "and one of his observations led me to a comparison of ancient and modern playwriting methods."<sup>25</sup> In setting up the central ideas expressed in Anderson's theory, it is necessary to establish this self-admitted influence of Aristotle on Anderson.

#### Recognition

Aristotle and Anderson put emphasis on "recognition," or, more accurately, "discovery." Aristotle stated that recognition was the change from ignorance to knowledge on the part of those marked out for tragedy. A "recognition" along with a "reversal" is to bring about an evocation of "pity and fear." Anderson professed the Aristotelian belief in the heart of a play's development as being "recognition":

The recognition scene, as Aristotle isolated the tragedies of the Greeks, was generally an artificial device, a central scene in which the leading character saw through a disguise, recognized as a friend or as an enemy, perhaps as a lover or as a member of his own family, some person whose identity has been hidden.<sup>26</sup>

Anderson qualified his own belief in "recognition" by calling it "artificial" and felt the above usage was inappropriate for "modern" drama save for detective stories; however, like Aristotle, Anderson thought recognition, aside from disguised or unveiled identity, gave direction to a play. For the purposes here outlined, "recognition"



as used by Aristotle and Anderson will mean "discovery," especially in regard to character. For the modern theatre, stated Anderson, "the element of discovery is just as important as ever."<sup>27</sup> Discovery in Anderson's usage meant the finding of an unknown strength by a character within himself as the tragic situation unfolded.

### Reversal

Through a character's development, a particular dramatic milieu had to be established leading then to the reversal point.

Anderson stated that the discovery highlights the reversal:

The leading character . . . must make the discovery, it must effect him emotionally; and it must alter his direction in the play . . . the discovery has a profound emotional effect on the hero; and gives an entirely new direction to his action in the play.<sup>28</sup>

A reversal or "crisis" had to be central to a character and his actions:

. . . a play should lead up to and away from a central crisis, and this crisis should consist in a discovery by the leading character which has an indelible effect on his thought and emotion and completely alters his course of action.<sup>29</sup>

Anderson demanded the centrality of this discovery in the play:

"Everything else in the play should be subordinated to this one episode."<sup>30</sup> Anderson wished to emphasize the inner workings of the main character, showing a course of action leading up to an equally logical recognition and reversal that changes the character's and, hence, the play's whole course of action. However, the exact dimensions of the discovery were not always immediately apparent.

Aristotle was concerned with events that lead up to the reversal that resulted from "probability and necessity."<sup>31</sup> Character development and the action of a play are very much intertwined as shown in Aristotle's and Anderson's respective writings; the influence of the ancient Greek philosopher on the more recent American playwright is very evident.

### Character Flaw

A tragic character could not be perfect and without fault, or be wholly villainous; Aristotle stated: "Both violates our human sympathy and contains nothing of the pitiable or fearful in it."<sup>32</sup>

"What is left," continued Aristotle, "is someone who falls in between these extremes."<sup>33</sup> Anderson paralleled this Aristotelian guideline closely and indebted himself once again to the philosopher:

The hero who is to make the central discovery in a play must not be a perfect man. He must have some variation of what Aristotle calls a tragic fault; and the reason he must have it is that when he makes his discovery he must change both in himself and in his action--but if he has no fault he cannot change for the better, but only for the worse, it is necessary that he become more admirable, and not less so, at the end of the play.<sup>34</sup>

A character who is perfect is static. He detracts from the whole purpose of the play which is to bring about an improvement through his insight into a previously misjudged course of action on his part and the attempt he makes to rectify the error.

. . . 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 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. In a serious play which does not end in death he suffers a lesser punishment, but the pattern remains the same. In both forms he has a fault to begin with, he discovers that fault during the course of the action, and does what he can to rectify it at the end.<sup>35</sup>

In a cathartic experience, the audience, while observing this character onstage, becomes ennobled itself.

### Plot and Structure

It is difficult to separate Anderson's comments on plot and structure from the rest of his theory. Anderson interlaced ideas on plot and structure with comments on character, as shown in this passage concerning the construction of a play:

He [the playwright] must build his plot around a scene wherein his hero discovers some mortal frailty or stupidity in himself, and faces life armed with a new wisdom. He must so arrange his story that it will prove to the audience that men pass through suffering purified.<sup>36</sup>

Anderson failed to make a clear delineation between plot/structure and character; however, he emphasized the importance of a character coming to a realization of his previously misguided judgment. This again reflected Aristotle, especially in regard to the following statement from the Poetics:

Aspects of the plot must develop directly from the construction of plot, itself, so that they occur from prior events either out of necessity or according to the laws of probability. For it makes quite a difference whether they occur because of these events or merely after.<sup>37</sup>

Anderson's theory reflected the propter hoc and post hoc differentiation and he followed the idea of consequential development. Both

Aristotle and Anderson believed in the plot line "that arises from the incidents themselves, striking as they do with astonishment through the very probability of their occurrence."<sup>38</sup>

#### Themes Essential to the Modern Audience

Despite the accomplishments made in the twentieth century, Anderson felt man needed some form of direction:

Men have not been altered by the invention of airplanes and the radio. They are still alone and frightened, holding their chance tenure of life in utter isolation in the desolate region of revolving fires. Science may offer a few necessary questions for them, but in the end science itself is obliged to say that the fact is created by the spirit, not spirit by the fact.<sup>39</sup>

Themes in Anderson's reference were a central controlling element of a play in all its aspects--character, plot and structure. Themes were also guides to human experience with man portrayed as bettering himself in some way within the confines of earthly existence. Most themes seemed to center on the struggle of the good and bad within man, and, to Anderson, the theatre should reflect this:

. . . the theatre is the central artistic symbol of the struggle of good and evil within men. Its teaching is that the struggle is eternal and unremitting, that the forces which tend to drag men down are always ready to attack, that the forces which make for good cannot sleep through a night without danger.<sup>40</sup>

Themes to Anderson offered "lessons" illustrating succinct concepts:

'Oedipus Tyrannus' and 'MacBeth' and 'Little Eyolf' and 'The Little Foxes' teach one and all that evil revenges itself upon the doer. 'Antigone' and 'Hamlet' and ten

thousand modern plays agree that injustice is a corrosive, and will eat the heart out of him who practices it.<sup>41</sup>

Such basic themes, stated Anderson, had fascinated audiences for many years and would continue to do so.

Themes also tied into Anderson's concern for longevity:

"Analyze any play you please which has survived the test of continued favor and you will find a moral or a rule of social conduct or a rule of thumb which the human race has considered valuable enough to learn and pass along."<sup>42</sup> Anderson stated that plays and their themes might reflect "money isn't everything" and "tolerance is the great virtue" in such works as You Can't Take It With You and The Time of Your Life,<sup>43</sup> respectively. In illustrating this, Anderson showed one main aspect of the thematic nature of the play: "A play is not required to make ethical discoveries. It is only required to have a meaning, and a sound one, one, that is, which is accepted as sound by its audience."<sup>44</sup> Anderson said the audience held certain preconceptions, outlooks, traditions, and biases with which the playwright had to contend. This puts great demands upon the dramatist: "It is incumbent upon the poet to be prophet, dreamer of the racial dream . . . the theater, more than any other art, has the power to weld and determine what the race will become."<sup>45</sup> Anderson was giving great status to the truly poetic playwright, calling him an interpreter of man's aspirations. This, to Anderson, was the most effective use of theatre and theme.

Theme, while reflecting the accepted standards of a particular audience and providing guidance within those limitations, should also bring about some change in the audience; the change, Anderson reasoned, did not have to be overt:

As audiences change the standards of good and evil change, though slowly and unpredictably, and the meanings of plays change with the centuries. One thing is certain; that an audience watching a play will go along with it only when the leading character responds in the end to what it considers a higher moral purpose than moved him at the beginning of the story, though the audience will of course define morality as it pleases and in the terms of its own day. It may be that there is no absolute up or down in this world, but the race still believes that there is, and will not hear of any denial.<sup>46</sup>

Audiences wished to be reassured and, while they themselves might change, they would not necessarily be aware of it.

In working with thematic material, Anderson discovered what he called eight "essentials" in playwriting which he felt worked most successfully to bring across the theme in a play:

1. The story of a play must be the story of what happens within the mind or heart of a man or woman. It cannot deal primarily with external events. The external events are only symbolic of what goes on within.
2. The story of a play must be a conflict, and specifically, a conflict between the forces of good and evil within a single person. The good and evil to be defined, of course, as the audience wants to see them.
3. The protagonist of a play must represent the forces of good and must win, or, if he has been evil, must yield to the forces of the good, and know himself defeated.
4. The protagonist of a play cannot be a perfect person. If he were he could not improve, and he must come out at the end of the play a more admirable human being than he went in.

5. The protagonist of the play must be an exceptional person. He or she cannot be run-of-the-mill. The man in the street will not do as the hero of a play . . . He must be so presented as to epitomize qualities which the audience can admire. Or he must indicate how admirable human qualities can be wasted or perverted-- must define an ideal by falling short of it, or become symbolic of a whole class of men who are blocked by circumstances from achieving excellence in their lives.
6. Excellence on the stage is always moral excellence. A struggle on the part of a hero to better his material circumstances is of no interest in a play unless he comes out of his trial a better man.
7. The moral atmosphere of a play must be healthy. An audience will not endure the triumph of evil on the stage.
8. There are human qualities for which the race has a special liking on the stage; in a man, positive character, strength of conviction not shaken by opposition; in a woman, fidelity, passionate faith. There are qualities which are superficially disliked on the stage, in man, cowardice, any refusal to fight for a belief, in a woman, an inclination towards the Cressid.<sup>47</sup>

Through an interrelationship of his eight essentials, Anderson hoped to bring onstage a dramatic form that he felt was needed in the modern American theatre. Through all the elements of theatre, Anderson put great demands upon the poetic playwright to achieve the vision that he had: a drama that would show man at his potential best and provide man with an inspiration to fulfil that ideal.

#### Summary

Anderson felt that cynicism and despair permeated the arts in the post-war years of the early twentieth century. By reviving poetic drama and using Aristotelian guidelines, it was Anderson's

idea to see theatre armed with a new purpose: to provide inspiration to modern audiences as the poets of ancient Greece and the Renaissance had done. The artists from the past and their audiences had a profound faith in themselves which made tragedy possible in their poetry and drama.

Anderson thought theme should provide a play with a central idea or image. Modern man, despite ever greater technological achievements, was spiritually poor and needed themes that could inspire him through the power of representation that poetry and theatre could provide. Themes also served as moral guides, according to Anderson, while providing new insights concerning human nature; in this way the audience's outlook was to be broadened. Anderson aimed at longevity or "endurance" which was his test for a desirable effect of theme.

Anderson's theory showed a great influence of Aristotle, especially in regard to character and plot/structure. Anderson often directly mentioned or paralleled Aristotle and his Poetics and used classically oriented dramatic elements and labels in his illustrations about playwriting, for, as he insisted, they provided the best examples. Anderson wrote plays using, in various ways and with varying degrees of success, the theory he set down. Critics and scholars since then have studied, debated, and argued about Maxwell Anderson's theory and the effectiveness of his attempts to put it into effect.



## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Maxwell Anderson, "The Arts as Motive Power," New York Times, 17 October 1937, sec. 11, p. 1.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup>"The Essence of Tragedy," Off Broadway: Essays about the Theater, (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1947), p. 63.
- <sup>5</sup>"By Way of Preface: The Theatre as Religion," New York Times, 26 October 1941, sec. 9, p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup>"Poetry in the Theater," Off Broadway, p. 48.
- <sup>7</sup>"A Note on Modern Poetry," New Republic, 22 June 1921, p. 113.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 112-113.
- <sup>10</sup>"One Future for American Poetry," Dial, 31 May 1919, p. 568.
- <sup>11</sup>New Republic, op. cit., p. 113.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup>"Poetry in the Theater," p. 53.
- <sup>14</sup>New Republic, op. cit., p. 112.
- <sup>15</sup>"Poetry in the Theater," op. cit.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 50.
- <sup>17</sup>"Yes, by the Eternal," Stage, May 1937, p. 51.
- <sup>18</sup>"Poetry in the Theater," op. cit., p. 48.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>21</sup> See: Francis Abernethy, "Winterset: A Modern Revenge Tragedy," Modern Drama 7 (September 1964): 185-189. Jacob H. Adler, "Shakespeare in Winterset," Educational Theatre Journal 6 (October 1954): 241-248. Robert C. Roby, "Two Worlds: Maxwell Anderson's Winterset," College English 18 (January 1957): 195-202. These articles analyzed Winterset from the standpoint of Shakespearean and other classical elements that are seen to be within the play. Yet another image was raised with religion: Samuel Klinger, "Hebraic Lore in Maxwell Anderson's Winterset," American Literature 18 (November 1946): 219-232.

<sup>22</sup> "Poetry in the Theater," op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>25</sup> "The Essence of Tragedy," Off Broadway, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 59-60.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Leo Golden, Aristotle's Poetics: A Translation and Commentary for Students of Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>34</sup> "The Essence of Tragedy," op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>37</sup> Leo Golden, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> "Poetry in the Theater," pp. 51-52.

<sup>40</sup>New York Times, 26 October 1941, sec. 9, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>"Poetry in the Theater," op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>46</sup>"The Essence of Tragedy," op. cit., p. 62.

<sup>47</sup>New York Times, op. cit., p. 1 & 3.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS OF REVIEW CRITICISM

#### Procedure and Organization

This chapter will analyze contemporary theatre reviews from 1930, 1933, and 1948 for the first performances of Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and Anne of the Thousand Days, respectively.

For content analysis of the reviews, Chapter III will follow this format and use these headings:

- 1) Poetry for the Modern Audience
- 2) Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on Anderson's Concepts of Character, Plot and Structure
- 3) Themes for the Modern Audience

To determine content analysis and to come to general conclusions in the overall summary of the chapter the criteria referred to in Chapter I (P. 9) will be used. Following the analysis of the reviews, there will be a short section that will discuss Anderson's responses to reviewers in general.

#### Poetry for the Modern Audience

##### Elizabeth the Queen

This play, written and produced in 1930, was Anderson's first successful verse drama. It portrays the stormy relationship between Queen Elizabeth and Lord Essex, the Essex rebellion, and the eventual imprisonment and subsequent death of Essex.

The comments on Anderson's verse in Elizabeth were guarded

when reviewers gave positive judgments. Richard Dana Skinner, writing in Commonweal, gave a slightly favorable passing reference to the language of the play after he faulted Anderson for some liberties taken for dramatic license:

Except for occasional cheap blasphemies, this drama is one of the most distinguished efforts in a season that has been all too lean. It is distinguished . . . for the beauty of many passages in its dialogue which have a distinct Shakespearean flavor.<sup>1</sup>

Skinner was the one reviewer who came closest to praise of the verse when he wrote that "many passages had beauty."<sup>2</sup> It was not, however, an enthusiastic endorsement.

Mark Van Doren for the Nation made another comparison to the classic past: "[Anderson] has written with splendor yet with tact, with just enough of the archaic in his style to make us think of Shakespeare yet without that excess of it which would prevent us from appreciating his play as the work of a contemporary."<sup>3</sup> Van Doren then went on to mention Anderson's standing as a playwright: "He is one of the few playwrights today who are gifted with rich tongues."<sup>4</sup> Skinner and Van Doren, with inevitable comparisons to Shakespeare, both admired Anderson for having attempted to write poetic drama.

On the other hand, Francis Fergusson in the Bookman disliked what he called Anderson's "relaxed, blank verse, with a phrase or two from Marlowe."<sup>5</sup> Fergusson felt there was good poetic writing, such as that by Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. Eliot, Fergusson stated, had "studied the Elizabethans with the utmost

care."<sup>6</sup> Fergusson suggested that Anderson should do likewise, then the result could have proved beneficial: "[Anderson] might work out a language that fitted his theme; then we might hope for something genuinely important."<sup>7</sup> George Jean Nathan in writing for Judge called for a "glow" in the language of a play that retold the relationship between Elizabeth and Essex; this glow had to reflect a superior kind of writing, and to Nathan, Anderson fell short: "Mr. Anderson manages to negotiate such writing in only three scenes of his play; for the voices of the actors are pitched to a poetical hope and wish that are never realized."<sup>8</sup> Like Skinner and Van Doren, Nathan professed appreciation for Anderson's intent while he faulted his execution:

That he started out to write his play as straight poetic drama, I have a rather definite feeling . . . that somewhere along the line he either lost his nerve--because of a belief that poetic drama pretty generally spells ruin on Broadway--or that some where along the same line someone got to him and said, "Come, come, Max!" I have a feeling still more definite. The play that we see hardly persuades me as being the manuscript that Anderson first dreamed of and first wrote.<sup>9</sup>

### Mary of Scotland

This second play of Anderson's Tudor trilogy came in 1933; it is a portrayal of the return of Queen Mary to Scotland after many years exile in France. Mary encounters resistance from her people, has two ill-fated marriages, is the cause of civil war, and, in this version, is eventually brought down by the machinations of her rival, Elizabeth. At the end as a prisoner of the English queen, Mary is executed.

Reviewers of this play mentioned Anderson's verse more often in their comments and were more favorable to the verse, as a whole. In the New York Times Brooks Atkinson gave an enthusiastic response to the verse in Mary: "It has restored the English language to its highest estate as an instrument of lustrous beauty . . . If poetry was the language of modern times, Mr. Anderson and his actors made it so last evening by the beauty and bite of their address."<sup>10</sup> In Stage an unnamed writer was equally laudatory: "There is little doubt in our mind that Maxwell Anderson has, in Mary of Scotland, written the finest drama of his generation, that he has restored language to its high estate in the theatre."<sup>11</sup> George Brandt in Review of Reviews contributed this judgment to the verse of the play: "'Mary of Scotland' demonstrates the power and beauty of the English language, and justifies the cause of romantic drama."<sup>12</sup>

Other writers were more restrained in their comments.

Richard Dana Skinner for Commonweal was mostly agreeable, but again he raised limitations:

He has also written a poem, both in the literal sense that he has brought the flame of the poet's insight to bear upon a human struggle of epic proportions. If I am permitted to except the last act, I should be inclined to say that this is the finest work of poetic eloquence yet produced by an American dramatist.<sup>13</sup>

To Skinner the play had very strong qualities in its language, yet he found the last act did not possess the spark found earlier in the play. Whether this was due to the poetry exclusively or some other

aspect of the play was not made clear, but the context of his remarks seemed to indicate a lack of an important element in the verse of the play.

In Vanity Fair George Jean Nathan also expressed reservations about Anderson as a poet. Still, in comparison to other playwrights, Nathan felt Anderson had attained a higher level of achievement:

For Anderson, though he is hardly the lush poet that certain commentators would have us believe, is at least more expert in the use and facile rhythm of words than most of his American dramatic contemporaries and, in addition, has a touch of imagination superior to the majority of them.<sup>14</sup>

Nathan liked the idea of a poetic and "inspired drama," and he felt that Anderson aimed this play in that general direction. However, Nathan stated, its execution fell short: "His play aspires to the heights, but the escalator of his blank verse that essays to carry it to the mountain top periodically lets out disturbing little creaks."<sup>15</sup> Despite some skepticism on his part, Nathan thought Anderson was a well-meaning, if flawed, poet-playwright.

### Anne of the Thousand Days

The 1948 play, Anne of the Thousand Days, the last of the Tudor trilogy, portrayed Henry VIII's wooing of and marriage to Anne Boleyn, the split of England from the Church of Rome, Henry's divorce from Catharine of Aragon, Thomas More's martyrdom, Elizabeth's birth, Anne's fall from grace after her plotting and failure to bear a male heir, and her eventual imprisonment and execution.



By 1948 an "Andersonian" tradition had been established; reviewers had come to see Anderson as being a verse or "poetic" playwright. From the 1930's on, Anderson had written the three plays discussed here and others, also in verse: Winterset, Key Largo, Night Over Taos, Valley Forge. Anderson had become more or less a known quantity; reviewers had developed their own preferences and disagreements with this dramatist during these years.

Reviewers were not universally enthusiastic in their assessments of Anderson's verse in Anne. Still, some reviewers complimented Anderson's intent in writing poetic drama. "As usual Mr. Anderson had pitched his drama high,"<sup>16</sup> wrote Brooks Atkinson. John Mason Brown in a column for the Saturday Review of Literature made a comment that attested to Anderson's noble ambition: "It cannot be denied that [Anderson's] aims are of the highest. His is a splendid, lonely courage. The theatre of which he dreams, is the theatre at its noblest."<sup>17</sup> Favorable comment was restricted to a recognition of Anderson's aims in writing verse for his drama rather than pointing out any feature of the language of the play that reviewers felt was outstanding.

Instead, the reviewers as a whole evinced overall disappointment with the verse Anderson wrote. Atkinson, in another article for the Times called attention to Anderson's ability and willingness to experiment:

Over the years he has experimented with styles of verse that are acceptable to modern audiences unaccustomed to grand sounds and sublime images. The style of verse he

has settled on as the most satisfactory is bewildering to me. Until I have seen the play in print I never know what speeches are prose and what are verse; and even when I see them in print the verse seems to me distinguished chiefly for its self-consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

John Gassner was an exception to the general lack of reviewer enthusiasm for the verse in Anne. Gassner focused on Anderson's intent and gave credit to Anderson's past efforts; while not exactly praising Anderson for the verse in this particular work, Gassner did attempt to give a balanced analysis of the play's verse. In Forum Gassner wrote: "Once more Mr. Anderson gives [the play and its characters] literate language, finebursts of eloquence."<sup>19</sup> Gassner continued with a positive description of Anderson even though he found the playwright had limitations:

If you do not set yourself exalted standards of poetry, which Mr. Anderson has never really pretended to meet, although he has made valiant effort to do so, you will even acknowledge that the author of Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and the new play is almost singlehandedly holding the fort for poetic drama.<sup>20</sup>

This special status Gassner ascribed to Anderson stemmed from comparison to contemporary poets who had tried writing plays:

. . . it has been plain that [Anderson] is the only practitioner who has been able to make [poetic drama] prevail in the midtown area, because he knows how to create theatre whereas better poets than he who have a flair for the dramatic don't quite have the knack. MacLeish, Kreyborg, Eliot, have all tried to give their considerable talent to the stage, but only Murder in the Cathedral proved strong enough to hold the interest of strictly theatre audiences. Unlike the theatre of the Greeks, Elizabethans, and the age of Louis XIV, ours is a theatre of movement rather than of sound.<sup>21</sup>

The thrust of Gassner's analysis demonstrated that Anderson was a

man of the theatre and a superior playwright in comparison with better poets who had tried but had not adapted well to the theatre. This review by John Gassner presented a more substantive picture of Anderson as a poet and playwright than other reviews that merely reflected a simple positive or negative position about Anderson.

John Mason Brown in the Saturday Review provided perhaps the clearest representation of the overall disappointment reviewers had with Anderson's verse for Anne. Brown expressed disenchantment with Anderson's verse when he asked the following rhetorical questions:

Why is it then, notwithstanding single speeches of interest in such of his other plays as "The Masque of Kings," "Valley Forge," or "Key Largo," that Mr. Anderson does not wear well as a poetic dramatist? Why is it that a good many of us approach his plays with less anticipation than we once did and sit through them with less pleasure? Why is it that, even when as in "Anne of the Thousand Days" he is writing more tightly and strongly than he has written of recent years, we feel no real enthusiasm?<sup>22</sup>

Brown intimated a decline in esteem for Anderson's verse compared to the reception of his earlier work. Speculating further, Brown posed still more rhetorical questions that addressed possible reasons for the lack of enthusiasm:

Is it because we are onto the trick? Is it because the horrid conviction is bound to overtake us that what Mr. Anderson paints as poetry, and his actors speak as such, is not poetry at all but a sort of singing in which very simple thoughts are ornately stated? Or is it because, Mr. Anderson raises our hopes as high as his own--and then leaves us hoping?<sup>23</sup>

### Summary

In his dramatic theory Anderson stated that poetic drama should be brought to the popular stage again. He wished to see the emotion-arousing and inspirational qualities of immortal poetry coupled with the immediacy of the theatre. Not since the early nineteenth century had verse appealed to theatre audiences. In 1930, 1933, and 1948 Anderson wrote three commercially successful verse plays.

The verse in the plays was not received with great enthusiasm, however. Except for Mary of Scotland, the verse Anderson wrote was not judged to be of exceptional quality. Although the reaction to the verse of the plays was mixed, Anderson was credited with having made the attempt to revive the poetic drama. In most reviewers' minds, however, Anderson did not attain the poetic and dramatic heights to which he aspired--that of classical Greek and Elizabethan drama. In comparison to some contemporary and more accomplished poets, he was judged to be the superior playwright. Although some appreciation was expressed for what Anderson was attempting, most reviewers' expectations concerning verse apparently went unfulfilled by Anderson.

Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on  
Anderson's Concepts of Character,  
Plot and Structure

This section of Chapter III will analyze reviews of Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and Anne of the Thousand Days for their criticism of Anderson's use of character, plot and structure. Reviewers' perception of the tragic potential pertaining to Anderson's main characters will be the main concern of this section.

Character

Elizabeth the Queen

New York Times reviewer Brooks Atkinson gave this enthusiastic description of the characters Elizabeth and Lord Essex:

Mr. Anderson has portrayed Elizabeth as a woman stormy of temperament, torn between natural tenderness and the brutality of office, sharp of tongue, quick-witted, decisive and wise. She can curse like a fishmonger's wife. She is blunt and precise in her State judgment. As personal fortunes turn against her she faces the world with bitter fortitude . . . Essex is mettle worthy of a queen--audacious, proud with a great capacity for anger . . . 24

From Atkinson's viewpoint Anderson developed Elizabeth into a strong character: she has womanly tendencies, yet is ruthless in her statecraft. Essex seemed somewhat less interesting, although Atkinson found him fully developed in opposition to Elizabeth. Richard Dana Skinner in Commonweal analyzed Elizabeth and also gave her the edge in dramatic interest:

The author has not attempted to be too closely historical and has therefore managed to give a portrait of Elizabeth in the terms of her battle between love for the considerably younger Lord Essex and her love of the throne itself . . . no matter how interesting the study of

Essex's character might be, it is the queen who dominates the play at every moment . . . She is neither loveable nor sympathetic, yet one manages easily to understand her and to realize the strange and fatal atmosphere of intrigue and uncertainty with which the throne of England was surrounded at that time.<sup>25</sup>

Skinner mentioned the primary conflict between Elizabeth and Essex--love they had for each other and love they both had for power, each mutually exclusive:

The furious jealousy of the queen does not permit her a single instant of enjoyment when she is with her lover. She is not only jealous of his affections, but even more deeply resentful of his lust for power. She would like to destroy him as a menace to her own authority yet, because he helps her cling to her fleeting youth and because his love for her is strangely real, she needs him too intensely to be able to give way utterly to her jealousy and resentment.<sup>26</sup>

Skinner then outlined the other side of the conflict in this way:

Essex, for his part, is equally torn. In the play, he is never conscious of how much he really owes to the queen for the opportunities she has given him. He is largely carried away by the personal popularity he enjoys with the English people . . . He has dreams of empire in terms of warfare and conquest. He accuses Elizabeth of womanly cowardice in attempting to keep her kingdom in peace. Yet she has a genuine fascination for him which he cannot throw off. He is evidently fully aware of her increasing age, but her mind holds him as keenly fascinated as if she were still in her first youth.<sup>27</sup>

Skinner found character development and motive to have been fully presented by Anderson in Elizabeth.

Stuart Beach in Theatre wrote that the play had "the most plausible re-creation of the Elizabeth-Essex affair that I have seen."<sup>28</sup> Beach appreciated the "reality" of Anderson's characters:

"[Anderson's] people talk and behave like human beings and not like

players acting in a play. There is no ranting, no grand manner, no histrionics, no bombast."<sup>29</sup>

Mark Van Doren focused his commentary on the obstacles that were apparent to him in recreating dramatically believable characters for historical drama. In Van Doren's opinion such a task presented monumental obstacles:

The playwright who goes to history for his characters must solve one problem before he solves any other--the problem of how these characters are to be made convincing . . . the audience already knows them, or thinks it knows them, and while this might be seen to be a help it is actually a handicap . . . the author cannot create with a free hand, he cannot begin with nothing. He begins with people of whom we long ago formed some picture in our minds, to whom we have attached a certain importance.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Atkinson, Skinner, and Beach, Van Doren seemingly ignored Anderson's achievement in surmounting the obstacles with which he was so concerned. Further, in outlining the problems of historical recreations, Van Doren mentioned audience preconceptions:

[Historic people] are sacred to us in the sense that we have conceptions of them which it is dangerous or ridiculous to violate . . . the playwright, in other words, is having to match his picture with our own, and since no two persons see with the same eyes, he is attempting the impossible.<sup>31</sup>

Van Doren posed the risks that were inherent in creating dramatic characters from history; as to Anderson's success or failure at creating such characters, nothing was said.

Richard Dana Skinner found tragic elements in the struggle between Elizabeth and Essex:

We thus have a dual struggle on both sides, this love of power in one form or another supremely controlling

both Elizabeth and Essex and tearing them apart while personal devotion draws them together. This is the seed of tragedy as Mr. Anderson has written it. It is tragedy in the truest sense of a culmination which grows out of the inevitable characters of these two people. One or the other must conquer completely.<sup>32</sup>

Skinner illustrated the decisive turning point of the play and Elizabeth's ultimate recognition of Essex:

When Elizabeth refuses to make [Essex] king consort, he threatens her. This threat opens her eyes at last to the real nature of the conflict between them . . . If ever suicide of a soul was portrayed on the stage, it is the moment when Elizabeth sends Essex to his death, knowing that in doing so she is killing everything in herself except her one determination to rule.<sup>33</sup>

To Skinner, Maxwell Anderson wrote a play with tragic characters.

In Drama Barrett H. Clark emphasized the dimensionality of the main characters in the play and their tragic stature: "Essex becomes not a pitiable fool, but a tragic figure, and Elizabeth not a heartless tyrant but a sort of superior Cleopatra."<sup>34</sup> This was only a passing reference and did not match the full scale analysis of Skinner's review.

### Mary of Scotland

A common trait among some reviewers who discussed character development in Mary of Scotland was to address the dramatic potential of Mary, the historical personality. Stark Young in the New Republic saw Queen Mary as having great possibilities for dramatic treatment and development in a play:

The Mary Stuart that Mr. Anderson writes about he well knows was a person most complex--tall, witty, tangled within sex in the manner peculiar to the Stuarts; impetuous,



often peremptory, generous . . . She had a good brain, not only ardent and agreeable, but stuffed with diplomacy. He knows how she plotted, as any Stuart had to do, and that some of her last years were haunted by the fear lest they should make away with her by poison and destroy her chance to enjoy a martyr's light.<sup>35</sup>

Euphenia Van Rensselaer Wyatt in Catholic World also commented on the historical Mary and what she offered the playwright: "Mr. Anderson had chosen wisely one of the most fascinating of all ladies over whom had descended such a cloud of mystery that everyone is free to their [sic] own interpretation."<sup>36</sup> Miriam Motherwell in Stage likewise speculated on the mystique this queen held for Anderson and others over many years:

When Maxwell Anderson undertook to dramatize Mary Stuart he took on a controversy which has fascinated readers of history for more than three centuries. Mary's legend is natural tabloid material--personal beauty, fascination, aristocracy, intrigue, the rivalry of two jealous women, reckless love, murder, peril and pursuit, and finally death. If Mary had not been finally beheaded she might today be forgotten. But her death wrote the fifth act of a play which Shakespeare could hardly have matched for color, dramatic excitement, and pathetic appeal.<sup>37</sup>

It was to such material that poets and playwrights before Anderson had been attracted. Motherwill demonstrated that legends of young women have been favorites of writers and that the legend of Mary Stuart would prove no exception: "The legend of Mary has in it the material for a great play."<sup>38</sup>

Motherwell also recognized the creation of Anderson the playwright in revealing the historical character: "This Mary is an interpretation on the part of Anderson, the historian; it is a

creation on the part of Anderson, the dramatist."<sup>39</sup> Motherwell continued with a description of Anderson's re-creation of Mary:

[Anderson's] Mary is a woman who might have lived, and who--to the best knowledge of us modern bourgeois mortals-- might have been a queen in the Renaissance, and mortal rival to that greatest of Renaissance queens, Elizabeth. Her famous charm was not the projection of sex appeal, such as our current movies display as the compelling motive in human affairs. It was compounded of many qualities. It included intelligence, and shrewdness, and intuition of the motives and desires of her adversaries; even Master John Knox was for more than a moment one of her unwilling slaves.<sup>40</sup>

Anderson's Mary was a successful combination of history/legend and dramatic plausibility in Motherwell's view. The result was a full dimensional and believable character: "Mr. Anderson has woven many strands of Mary's character together . . . pride of language, habit of authority, gentle breeding, womanly intuition, statesmanlike insight, kindly affection for all, and wayward impulsiveness of feeling."<sup>41</sup>

Joseph Wood Krutch in the Nation did not compare Mary's historical background with the play's central character. Primarily, Krutch commented on the interpretation Anderson chose and the resultant direction of the play. Krutch stated that the play had tragic dimension because of Mary's character:

. . . whether [Anderson] would regard her primarily as a woman who happened to be a queen or primarily as a queen who happened to be a woman; and once that choice was made, the whole character of the drama was determined . . . he chose the first alternative, and "Mary of Scotland" . . . becomes, therefore, the romantic tragedy of a woman who loved and lost . . . one does, to be sure, catch an occasional hint of the fact that the fate of empires is also at stake . . . Mary is before all a woman who made the

mistake of refusing love when love was offered . . . But she is the victim of one of those moments of weakness which constitute what the ancients called a "tragic guilt."<sup>42</sup>

Krutch interpreted Mary as a tragic character, who pays with her life because of shortsightedness and weakness.

After he gave Mary a build up to tragic significance, Krutch then questioned the whole idea of history as portrayed in drama. Even tragedy no longer seemed relevant to him. History, Krutch contended, muddled Anderson's intent, and tragedy came across as irrelevant:

. . . as I watched "Mary of Scotland" unfold itself I could not but ask, "Why history?" To a story of the sort Mr. Anderson has to tell the associations inevitably connected with the struggle between Elizabeth and Mary are almost wholly irrelevant. No matter how determined he seems to use them only to give weight and dignity to the characters, they get in the way. Mary's private tragedy cannot be detached from public affairs, and public affairs get no adequate recognition. This is not, one says to oneself, the story of Mary of Scotland, and why, one asks, should anyone pretend that it is? . . . Aristotle believed that only kings and queens could have personal stories worth the telling, and Shakespeare's contemporaries had at least the feeling that robes and sceptres were the fitting adjuncts to a heroic character.<sup>43</sup>

Further, Krutch maintained, tragedy in any form was not relevant to the theatre of the twentieth century; Anderson's play looked anachronistic:

That sense [of tragedy] we no longer have, and it is because Mr. Anderson counts so heavily upon it that his play cannot wholly shake off its slightly archaic air. The idea of kingship has lost its magic. Characters do not automatically grow in stature when a title is conferred upon them and the story of a broken heart does not seem more significant because that heart was filled with royal blood. Mary's story as a woman is no more than the

story of any other woman her equal in intelligence or sensibility, and the trappings have become no more than merely trappings.<sup>44</sup>

Krutch's central contention was that the historical material upon which Anderson based his story made the play look dated and superficial.

Edith J. R. Isaacs in Theatre Arts Monthly stated that Elizabeth's scenes were static, had no dramatic interest: "The playwright gives [Elizabeth] no variety, no change of emotional quality, or almost none, which results in transferring the basilisk quality that should be the surface of her performance to its spirit."<sup>45</sup>

Cy Caldwell in New Outlook belittled the play and the main character completely:

Boldly kicking sour-visaged history out of the back door, Mr. Anderson has gallantly ushered into the Alvin Theatre a queen fashioned to his own ideas of what a queen ought to be, even if she wasn't. Mr. Anderson's Mary of Scotland . . . is a brave, sweet, lovely numbskull, trusting, patriotic, pure in heart.<sup>46</sup>

Caldwell described Elizabeth as being "the sour, vicious, imperious woman who was England's queen."<sup>47</sup>

### Anne of the Thousand Days

In their evaluations of Anderson's character development in Anne of the Thousand Days, reviewers tended to use superlatives. Henry and Anne were very instrumental in shaping history; apparently many reviewers were taking this into account. As a result, reviewers tended to analyze the main characters of this play from historical comparisons.

Joseph Wood Krutch found the characters to be very compelling and the best element in the play because "a certain naked fierceness in the characters themselves is made real."<sup>48</sup> Historically, Krutch maintained, such characters were justified in Anne: "Englishmen and Englishwomen had in that day an almost Latin tempestuousness of soul which they did not entirely lose until the eighteenth century was under way, and Mr. Anderson has captured more of it than in any of his previous historical plays."<sup>49</sup> Krutch thought Anderson created characters and atmosphere comparable to the time of Henry and Anne; these characters were cut from rich material, and this was a challenge to the playwright:

They loved and hated, they destroyed each other and they destroyed themselves with a passionate recklessness which one must believe in if one is to understand how history could ever have happened. The dramatist who would make the personages believable must make them imposing, terrifying even, rather than what is commonly called "sympathetic."<sup>50</sup>

Krutch wrote of Anderson's characters as mighty forces, large in stature. He used strong adjectives in his assessments of these characters.

Brooks Atkinson found Anderson's Henry and Anne as having tragic stature. Anne especially fitted this description:

Anne is a woman of courage, independence, ambition and few scruples. Henry is selfish, ingenuously sanctimonious, brutish and opportunistic . . . Although Henry has a number of misgivings, Anne is the one who fulfills Mr. Anderson's conception of tragedy.<sup>51</sup>

Atkinson then dwelt on some of the consequences and the results that this union of two high-powered characters had:

Since Henry is a king, his amours have terrible consequences. Innocent people are crushed; a few die; others are executed; ministers topple; the whole country seethes with anger. Anne is a person of keen mind with great capacity for tenderness and loyalty; and Henry is the master of his profession and understands the consequences of what he does. Although they love each other in a kind of tragic alternation, and love ardently, they are not innocent lovers. For the brief liaison of Anne and Henry which gave England its greatest queen, is monstrous and horrible amidst the corruption of a wanton and cynical court.<sup>52</sup>

In another Times review Atkinson saw almost god-like results in Anderson's character development in his overall view of the play: ". . . the drama as a whole is a passionate chronicle of heroic people who move in a barbaric world of cynacism, indulgence and promethean [sic] audacity."<sup>53</sup>

Reviewers Krutch and Atkinson stated that Anderson's Henry and Anne were almost legendary or superhuman with tragic overtones. Other reviewers thought that Anderson made these characters, above all, human, as is stated in this unsigned review for Newsweek: "History has supplied the facts, and in using them Anderson is less interested in the royal couple's offstage impact on a nation than in finding words and motives that will present them in a more sympathetic light as lovers and human beings."<sup>54</sup> This was in direct contradiction to Krutch and Atkinson's findings that stressed "imposing . . . terrifying . . . promethean [sic]" imagery. This Newsweek reviewer saw living human beings first, with historical shifts and consequences second.

Still other reviewers looked for something more than the obvious theatrical elements in the play. Gilbert W. Gabriel in Theatre Arts summed up Anne as being essentially honest and uncomplicated:

Mr. Anderson throws little chiffon upon his heroine's essential character. She wears no ceinture of chastity to start with, nor will she mistake her hand-wrangled crown for a halo anywhere throughout the play. She is laid out in honest humor on an analyst's table, and the poet who peeks and eavesdrops on the sessions sympathizes with her all the more for her unabashed boldness and her honest flesh.<sup>55</sup>

Euphenia Van Rensselaer Wyatt also noted aspects of character development aside from larger-than-life attributes. She found Henry to be a well-crafted character; he was portrayed as a man compelled by a woman he loved to act against his better judgment:

Anderson's Henry is not just the glutton for money and lechery he was to become. This Henry still has the personal charm, the political tact and intuitive sense of psychology he was to pass on to Anne's daughter. Anderson adds a dry humor. His Henry also realizes the cost to his people of his seizing their Church. He fully appreciates the integrity of such men as Sir Thomas More, Bishop John Fisher and Prior Houghton, and hesitates over their death warrant until Anne exacts it.<sup>56</sup>

Reviews such as those by Wyatt and Gilbert emphasized the human qualities with which Anderson endowed his Anne and Henry.

Yet some fault was attributed to Anne as a character, although this was not due merely to Anderson's execution. The following comment by Joseph Wood Krutch best exemplified any unfavorable judgment about Anderson's representation of Anne:

Anne must not be merely a pathetic victim but also unconquerable and ruthless . . . but on the stage she seems less imposing than Mr. Anderson drew her. The conception is made to seem less Elizabethan, more Victorian.

And from the standpoint of a critic this remains unfortunate, even though it may possibly be true that a contemporary audience would rather have both Anne and the others made understandable in its terms than in their own.<sup>57</sup>

### Summary

Unlike the commentary they made about his dramatic verse, reviewers displayed a marked consistency in favorable remarks about Anderson's character development in the trilogy plays. Reviewers found the characters of Elizabeth, Essex, Mary Stuart, Anne Boleyn, and Henry to be full characterizations that are rich in motivation, in the actions taken, in consequences that befell the characters, and in subsequent history. Negative reviewer comment showed doubts about recreating historical characters and Anderson's efforts in this vein. To such reviewers tragedy and Anderson's attempts at writing it seemed futile. History became more important to reviewers with the appearance of each new play in the trilogy. In Elizabeth history was seen as part of the background, with Mary much review commentary discussed Mary the historic person, and finally reviewers of Anne focused on how Anne and Henry were responsible for much religious and social disruption. Some reviewers of each of the plays claimed the main characters attained a degree of tragic dimension and flaw due to mistaken courses of action. These reviewers stated that the tragic significance that Anderson's characters possessed reflected the classical tragic forms, which were often assumed rather than actually spelled out. The strong endorsement reviewers gave Anderson in this aspect of his playwriting attested



to the near success he had in creating characters in the manner he proposed in his dramatic theory.

### Plot and Structure

#### Elizabeth the Queen

In the New York Times Brooks Atkinson wrote favorable commentary on Elizabeth the Queen's structure. He stated Anderson was not excessive in his effects:

. . . Maxwell Anderson's unassertive "Elizabeth the Queen" is a more symmetrical piece of playwriting, it is the sort of drama that requires artistic sponsorship . . . Mr. Anderson has made no attempt to whip his audience into submission by employing the bastanado of flamboyant melodrama.<sup>58</sup>

Atkinson also felt that Anderson respected his audience and its intelligence in his use of content: "Intentionally or not, he has written for audiences discerning enough to perceive intaglio beauties. When a playwright writes in that inbred style he estranges himself from most producers."<sup>59</sup> Here again Anderson was placed in a special position far above most playwrights of the time.

Stark Young in the New Republic felt the play was not hampered by any historical obstacles: "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."<sup>60</sup> Young stated that the plausibility of the play was limited only by Anderson's playwriting ability: "How far that is a dangerous freedom and distortion is the artist's business: he can do what he can do and that is all there is to it."<sup>61</sup> Young's evaluation attested to Anderson's talent as an

arranger of incidents in the plot of Elizabeth and in the manipulation of the dramatic setting: ". . . there is some deft management in the situations, which is to say there are sequences in the dramatic motivations that are highly effective, exciting and well-emphasized."<sup>62</sup> Otis Chatfield-Taylor in Outlook thought Anderson built up his plot well, even though his beginning initially seemed unpromising: "After a pretty slow beginning . . . Elizabeth the Queen builds in strength and intensity up to a final act that is nothing short of glorious."<sup>63</sup> Francis Fergusson found Anderson's play to have a well-developed plot and structure, especially one portion:

Mr. Anderson showed great ingenuity in some of the scenes, especially in the one in the second act where Elizabeth betrays Essex . . . In the mere plot or story of this scene Mr. Anderson evinces genuinely first-rate qualities. He has clarity and a mastery of situation: the scenario is a brilliant success.<sup>64</sup>

This represented the range of supportive comment Anderson received from reviewers to the plot and structure development of Elizabeth.

George Jean Nathan proved very unenthusiastic about the plot and structure of the play. There was a lack of overall dramatic excitement according to Nathan: "The play is interesting during its first act, somewhat less so in its second, and--save for a well contrived scene--hardly at all interesting in its last act. It begins in rather fine color, but thereafter gradually peters out."<sup>65</sup>

Barrett H. Clark compared the play to tragedy; the plot, he stated, had similar characteristics:

. . . The first part of the Anderson play is not much more than an ably presented preparation for a splendid and glowing last act, which borders on high tragedy . . . we are suddenly confronted with the meaning of the whole thing, precisely as we realize in life that the haphazard episodes that went before are part of some larger scheme that are used to call fate or destiny.<sup>66</sup>

Although Clark liked the play's construction better than did Nathan, Clark wrote that the play was not sufficient to be full tragedy in the Shakespearean sense:

For Elizabeth the Queen, however honest an attempt and however impressive in its last moments, lacks that logical and inevitable onrush that belongs to all tragedy in its most perfect and satisfying form . . . you will see that the modern play is too deliberate, too planned and calculated, while with Shakespeare whatever there may be of deliberation and calculation seems to belong not to the situation he imagined and projected. Where Mr. Anderson arranges his effects, Shakespeare stands aside and lets them have their tempestuous way.<sup>67</sup>

In Clark's estimation Anderson was too obvious in plot and incident arrangement in comparison to Shakespeare, who could seemingly make a play run on its own motion.

### Mary of Scotland

"The great achievement of Mr. Anderson," wrote Richard Dana Skinner, "is in bringing humanity, warmth, credibility, humor, pathos and rich illusion to a chain of events, that might easily have become cold and lifeless in the theatre."<sup>68</sup> Skinner was impressed by Anderson's ability to take historical material and turn it into a play with a free-flowing plot line and structure.

Euphenia Van Rensselaer Wyatt was equally enthusiastic: "Mary of Scotland has beautifully definite construction. The background and the famous personages stand clearly drawn but never obstruct the inexorable action."<sup>69</sup> To Skinner and Wyatt the play was able to move and was not hampered by obstacles inherent in the material with which Anderson worked.

Miriam Motherwell summed up the story of the play and showed how Anderson made Elizabeth destroy Mary:

Here are made clear Mary's position as next in succession to the English throne, the complication of the religious issue, the political need for marriage and an heir; and through it all Elizabeth's particular brand of statescraft, which does all things by indirection. Here the plot is plotted: Elizabeth is not to destroy Mary; Mary is to be cozened into destroying herself.<sup>70</sup>

Anderson, in Motherwell's view, was judged to have been very proficient in keeping his plot from bogging down into detail because of the complexity of events portrayed. Rather, Motherwell saw that Anderson was adept in his plot progression for this play:

Mr. Anderson moves swiftly over the remainder of the story--the uprising of Mary's outraged subjects (with Elizabeth in virtual command of operations); Mary's defeat at Dunbar and Bothwell's escape; Mary's virtual imprisonment in Carlisle Castle, and (surely apocryphal) the confrontation of the two rivals, and their mutual defiance. Throughout, the strands of history are kept fairly clear--to a surprising degree, if one considers the intricacy of this most intricate of medieval intrigues. It is one of Mr. Anderson's achievements to have preserved, within all the rigorous limitations of dramatic structure, the illusion of history in action.<sup>71</sup>

William Rose Benet in Saturday Review of Literature wrote a very strong endorsement of Anderson; Benet stated that in Anderson

"one could perceive the poet."<sup>72</sup> "That is why I think that Anderson may well become the best playwright we have,"<sup>73</sup> Benet continued.

Then Benet compared Anderson to Eugene O'Neill. Anderson was judged the superior playwright in use of play construction and as a poet; O'Neill showed greater depth of psychological motivation and in imaginative use of theatrical conventions.

In his evaluation of the play Benet analyzed Anderson's ability to arrange his plot from complex biographical and historical material:

As a good playwright--and no playwright today has a better sense of structure than he--his business was to carve moving drama out of [Mary's] life, and in my opinion he has done it. He has seized upon every dramatic possibility within the compass of the sequence of episodes he chose, he has given us much of the feeling of the times, he has characterized saliently, he has brought humor to bear in the interludes from tragedy. And he has not unravelled knot by knot the coil of state affairs, if he has here and there taken liberties with history, if he has over and again modernized speech, I for one do not hold it against him.<sup>74</sup>

Benet felt Anderson gave this play much life and the result was quite remarkable for the modern theatre: ". . . he has returned to the drama something of the magnificence it possessed in Elizabethan times--has done this, and held a modern New York audience with it night after night. No inconsiderable achievement."<sup>75</sup> To Benet, Maxwell Anderson in this close-knit drama "attained great stature with his considerable playwriting skills."<sup>76</sup>

However, Mary of Scotland also received its share of negative comment for its plot and structural development. Skinner took

issue with the last act of the play which he found structurally weak, thus diminishing the impact of the first and second acts. "The last act," Skinner wrote, "suffers from self-consciousness translated into a curious attitude of historical self-esteem on the part of the two queens, Mary and Elizabeth."<sup>77</sup> The last act, Skinner's review stated, was reduced from a "woman-to-woman struggle" to a duel of rhetoric and prophecy. Each solemnly declaims about her position in history yet to be written."<sup>78</sup> To Skinner this reduced the play to a form of didacticism that was too obvious in intent and execution; the play's whole illusion was thus defeated:

We are told what we should think--that Mary conquers in defeat, and that Elizabeth, through a consciously created legend, will be said to have governed England. This breaks the illusion, so expertly created up to this point, that we are privy to history in the making. It makes us suddenly conscious that we are merely seeing history re-created.<sup>79</sup>

The construction of the play was good up to that point; then, according to Skinner, the initial drive was deflated by the final scenes.

Skinner had detected weaknesses earlier in the play where Anderson found it necessary to condense historical material to fit his particular dramatic context. The Elizabeth and Lord Burghley scenes were faulted by Skinner as being "little more than condensed explanatory material."<sup>80</sup> These scenes, therefore, came across as being hurried: "Plans and plots spring full-fledged into

Elizabeth's mind which, in human terms, would take days or weeks to germinate and develop."<sup>81</sup>

### Anne of the Thousand Days

The historical events Maxwell Anderson wrote of in Anne spanned centuries. John Gassner focused on this when he analyzed Anderson's use of plot and structure in relation to the events that surrounded Henry and Anne:

Anne of the Thousand Days retells the familiar story of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, his second queen and the mother of Elizabeth--their passionate affair which changed the course of history, cut England adrift from the Church of Rome, ultimately made England the empire that superseded continental Spain and determined the destinies of three-quarters of the world for more than three centuries.<sup>82</sup>

Gassner demonstrated that Anderson was adept at handling such far-ranging material:

That is a lot of history to pack into a play, but Mr. Anderson is craftsman enough to limit himself to what a play can present without attenuation. He confines himself to the love affair and leaves the political ramifications to summary and implication, in this respect proving once again that he has a neat way of conjuring up the shades of all but vanished romanticism.<sup>83</sup>

Gassner stressed Anderson's use of economy to move this play along, as did Gilbert W. Gabriel: "[The play] has been stripped down to race, and it races; to effects, and it is highly and immediately effective."<sup>84</sup> To Gabriel, the effect Anderson attempted to convey made a good impression:

If sometimes . . . it seems reduced to too many small capsules, too little real medicine for such a series of hasty gulps, that's an agreeable way to take it. Mr. Anderson

had originally more history in it than its present ingredients suggest. He had more thoughtful hesitation too, and a slower, perhaps a subtler, taste. He lingered over the acids and ichors he was extracting from his two chief characters' veins, and these made pleasurable chemistry, fascinating poetizing.<sup>85</sup>

An unnamed writer for Time also thought Anderson used his play construction talents well in Anne:

Anne of the Thousand Days has scenes of spitting, high-busted theater, and a good many moments--early rather than late--when it is about equally fustian and firm. It is full of twists and contrasts--of Anne's hate turning to liking as Henry's liking turns to hate; of Henry's determination to have a throne and Anne's determination to have a throne for her daughter (Elizabeth).<sup>86</sup>

There were more mixed judgments about Anderson's playwriting abilities, also. The flashback technique bothered Brooks Atkinson somewhat: "The scheme of short scenes breaks the rhythm."<sup>87</sup>

Commonweal's Kappo Phelan was not only dissatisfied with the plot development but even with the whole conception of the play itself:

What the business gives us is a spotlight stage: Anne in one corner, in the Tower, awaiting the headsman; Henry in another corner, sealing the death warrant; and both soliloquizing for all they are worth. From thence we travel backwards in time through the ill-fated courtship, marriage and preceding divorce, with a few minor Woolsey scenes included, although no political ones; so that most of the stuff of the piece is done into speeches of emotional verbiage only. In this manner we learn that Mr. Anderson's Anne was no innocent, no pawn; that she and she alone was responsible for the deaths of More, Fisher and the rest. In view of this conception, it is a little difficult to summon an appropriate amount of sympathy for this heroine when she is roaring through another of Mr. Anderson's wrung reiterations announcing--"And so, I am to die!"<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, Phelan stated, nothing in Anderson's whole play had genuineness. Phelan rejected the concept, the stage picture, and



other aspects of the play. This was the only reviewer to take exceptional issue with the plot and structural development of Anne.

### Summary

In what little he did write on plot and structure, Anderson reflected Aristotelian ideas of playwriting: propter hoc as opposed to post hoc. To most reviewers, Anderson was very skilled in writing plays about the events and times of Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, and Anne Boleyn. Plot and structure in these plays were unencumbered by the historical material from which Anderson worked. Negative commentary was primarily focused on Anderson's inability to maintain the initial momentum of his plots in the plays. Anderson, compared to Shakespeare, was judged not to be as great a tragedian. His plots, it was stated, lacked the inevitable onrush of events found in Shakespearean works. However, one comparison did go in Anderson's favor: O'Neill, while excelling in psychological probings, could not match Anderson for economy and smooth-flowing dramatic plot and structure.

While Anderson did claim that he was greatly influenced by Aristotle and often referred to him, reviewers were not explicit in finding Aristotelian elements in Anderson's playwriting. From the commentary analyzed and the summary here, it can be assumed that reviewers themselves followed Aristotle's guidelines. This went unacknowledged; yet, from their writings it shows that reviewers favored the very elements Aristotle had addressed: well-made plots

that developed from previous action and unencumbered dramatic structure. This shows the pervasive influence of Aristotle in playwriting and criticism.

### Themes for the Modern Audience

#### Elizabeth the Queen

Theme was, as a whole, not treated extensively by reviewers. Yet some consideration was given to the central ideas Anderson was attempting to convey in the trilogy plays.

Otis Chatfield-Taylor in Outlook and an unnamed writer for the Literary Digest focused upon the most obvious theme of the play: pursuit of romantic love and love of power between Elizabeth and Essex. Chatfield-Taylor saw the political and love interests almost as one in the same: "Inextricably intertwined with the political situation is the human spectacle of an older woman in love with a younger man."<sup>89</sup> The Literary Digest writer identified the theme of Elizabeth as being: "[Elizabeth's and Essex'] loves and rivalries."<sup>90</sup>

Stark Young stated the theme of Elizabeth emerged most clearly to him in the third act: "An empire lies between [Elizabeth and Essex] and that they sacrifice themselves to it."<sup>91</sup> What comment was available on theme in Elizabeth was concentrated about the love affair of Elizabeth and Essex, their lust for each other, and their equally strong attraction to power and dominance over each other and the kingdom.

## Mary of Scotland

Reviewers for this play did not consider theme too much of an element to be analyzed, as was the case for Elizabeth. Those writers who did analyze thematic material often failed to mention what the themes were. An unnamed writer in Stage gave this account of theme in Mary, without saying what it was: "Here is a grandly human tragedy which, with the universality of all great epic themes, touches intimately every person it reaches, as little fretful plays never can."<sup>92</sup> Stark Young stated that the nameless themes were impeded in places, being part of the play's action: "At times, no matter how great the simplification, this story is ruffled by outside issues historically inherent. These complicate the smooth stream of the main themes."<sup>93</sup> Young did not analyze theme as an element in and of itself. Euphenia Van Rensselaer Wyatt did some overlapping with plot and structure in her reviewing when she mentioned theme: "For the theatre a theme must be developed which must both condense the scenes and clarify the motives without undue distortion of the actual facts and characters."<sup>94</sup> Wyatt illustrated the centralizing aspect of a theme while not mentioning what it was. Such was the nature of most of the reviewing in relation to theme identification and analysis about Mary.

Miriam Motherwell named two themes in her analysis of the play: "In Mary of Scotland you have love, generous and complete, caught in the web of policy woven by a spinster of matchless

artifice."<sup>95</sup> Mary was the victim of love and manipulation according to Motherwell.

### Anne of the Thousand Days

John Gassner wrote: "Sometimes a play reaches that common denominator and at the same time expresses its author's probings and convictions. This appears to be the case with Maxwell Anderson's Anne of the Thousand Days."<sup>96</sup> Like most reviewers of Mary, Gassner did not mention what exactly the theme was or what Anderson's "probings and convictions" were. However, further in his review Gassner stated that the play showed "gambits of love and hate."<sup>97</sup> Gassner's references to thematic material and development in Anne were indirect and passing.

Joseph Wood Krutch specifically noticed a lack of focus regarding theme. Krutch felt theme had been "played down": "[The play] is not primarily concerned with a large general problem, either moral or metaphysical. But as Mr. Anderson wrote it, the romance is something more than mere romance because some such problem is just visible in the background."<sup>98</sup>

### Summary

It was difficult to gain insight into most reviewers' thoughts on Anderson's development of the thematic aspects of his plays. Commentary about theme was for the most part brief and usually referred to it in a passing and cursory manner. There was no detailing of strengths and shortcomings in Anderson's use of

theme in the trilogy plays. Those few reviewers who made any reference at all to theme usually mentioned one or two ideas that could have been considered as themes: love and temporal power in the lives of Elizabeth, Mary Stuart, and Anne Boleyn. These or any number of other ideas could have been interpreted by reviewers as being either main or subordinate themes, but this was not done.

#### Anderson's Estimation of Reviewers

Like many playwrights Maxwell Anderson found himself at odds with the reviewers of his work. Anderson took the added step of putting his thoughts into print and publicly announcing his disagreements. Nowhere did Anderson rebuke reviewers for a particular instance of their having attacked one of his plays or his works collectively. Instead, Anderson was reacting to what he felt was the seemingly absolute consequences of reviewers' individual and collective judgments on theatre activity in the United States.

Reviewers' power, as Anderson saw it, came from the high concentration in the 1940's of legitimate theatre production in New York. In an article for the New York Times Anderson wrote: ". . . since New York is the only play-producing center for the country, these same critics constitute a censorship board for the theatre of the United States."<sup>99</sup> According to Anderson, at one time a play had more direct access to an audience without the gauntlet of reviewers being such a determining power to its fate. But rising costs made that almost impossible; therefore, Anderson continued:

"Plays now live or die by the verdict of the reviewers."<sup>100</sup>

Anderson was more inclined to call reviewers "judges from whom there is no appeal. . . . This court of final resort has the whole power of the metropolitan press behind it and operates in security, with no chance of adequate discussion or reply."<sup>101</sup>

Anderson delineated the differences between reviewers' power, which he opposed, and their influence, which he felt could be justified. Audiences, stated Anderson, demonstrated the public's tendency to believe what they read:

The difference between power and influence is almost an absolute difference. The critics used to influence a play's destiny. Today they have the power of life and death over it. Plays are struck down on the opening night, with very brief consideration but complete finality. The public, reading tens of thousands of words of praise or dispraise, naturally attends or stays away as advised by the newspapers, and hits and failures are so arrived at.<sup>102</sup>

If audiences were allowed to decide for themselves, Anderson claimed, they would prove able to choose intelligently:

My own observation makes me certain that the public would accept many more plays, many more playwrights and a far wider range of subjects if it were allowed to choose for itself . . . the theater public contains audiences of many kinds--overlapping but almost infinite. Left to themselves these audiences would find out and support the plays that suited them, with the result that the theatre would take in vastly more territory and reach both higher and lower than its present leading-strings would allow.<sup>103</sup>

Frustrated though he was with reviewers, Anderson admitted some reviewers had a pioneering spirit. Often, Anderson stated, individual reviewers discovered a new playwright or dramatic mode

and began an eventual acceptance that audiences ordinarily would not have bestowed.

Still, Anderson remained convinced of reviewers' perceived misunderstandings, their ill-considered opinions, their hit-and-run evaluations, and their so-called final judgments deciding the future of a play. Anderson stated that this was a wrong, not in keeping with democratic traditions:

It follows, as I have said before, that when the critics say no to a play that no is final. And that being true, they operate a censorship over the plays that may be seen in New York and--since New York is our one production center--in the United States. This is an unhealthy state of affairs whether the critics are learned or unlearned, witty or dull, just or unjust. It's unhealthy because it's undemocratic. The people of a democracy should decide for themselves what plays they will see.<sup>104</sup>

Anderson presented no evidence to support his contentions. Rather, he felt if only the rules of the game could somehow have been altered, that if somehow reviewers were not to be so heavily relied upon, audiences could have demonstrated what he felt was innate good judgment concerning the good and bad in the theatre. As discussed earlier, Anderson availed himself of a strong faith.

#### Summary

By setting down his "dramatic theory" and "replying" to reviewers, Maxwell Anderson demonstrated his deep commitment to theatre. Anderson emphasized the supposed power of reviewers over the ultimate fate of a play.

### Summary and Conclusions on Chapter III

Reviewers, as a whole, judged Maxwell Anderson to be a competent, but not an outstanding, poet. Those reviewers being the most positive about his verse indulged in some hedging. Comparisons and contrasts to the classical poets were made; Anderson, invariably, could not match their poetry. Anderson's verse was found inferior to contemporary poets, although they could not match him in playwriting. Some of the commentary was sharply negative, and, except for the very guarded endorsement by other reviewers, Anderson did not fulfil his intention as announced in his dramatic theory: to make verse drama active in the modern theatre. No reviewer saw this happening to the modern stage. However, despite the shortcomings seen in his efforts, Anderson was credited for having attempted verse drama.

Anderson was judged by most reviewers to be a masterful creator of dramatic characters. Reviewers were generally consistent in finding Anderson's main characters in the trilogy endowed with complexity, intelligence, motivation, strength, and ruthlessness. Most reviewers did not mention tragedy. A few reviewers did state that they found Anderson's protagonists in the trilogy to possess tragic stature. None of these reviewers, however, made any outright comparisons or contrasts to the Aristotelian genre. Other writers came to opposite conclusions about the characters portrayed. Problems were perceived in overcoming obstacles or preconceptions in regard to history because historical tragedy seemed irrelevant.



Anderson's characters elicited the most discussion from reviewers in their newspapers and magazine articles. The material from which Anderson created his characters invited comment: Elizabeth and Essex' love affair; Mary Stuart, as the historical person and as the dramatic character; and finally, the consequences deriving from Anne and Henry's tempestuous courtship, marriage, and estrangement. From the reviewers' overall standpoint, Anderson came closer to fulfilling what he expressed in his theory concerning character development. Anderson did state that he wanted to write tragedy based upon Aristotelian precepts; only a few reviewers agreed that he had done this. Otherwise, reviewers either ignored the whole issue of tragedy or stated that Anderson definitely had not created it. This was, in all, a very mixed success for Anderson in comparison to his announced goal in the dramatic theory.

With the appearance of each individual play of the trilogy, character development brought out the most discussion by reviewers, plus the most obvious change in the writers' perceptions about Anderson's playwriting. From 1930 to 1948 discussion of history went from the background to the forefront of reviewer judgment. From Elizabeth, continuing with Mary, and up through Anne, the historical events portrayed were seen as having increasing importance for the plays in reviewer criticism.

Favorable commentary about plot and structure development stated that Anderson constructed well-crafted and free-flowing plays that were not overwhelmed by historical detail. Here was an

indirect admission of Aristotelian guidelines for playwriting. Reviewers of an opposing view found that Anderson had trouble sustaining the initial drive of his plots. This deflated the impact of his plays; therefore, they lacked tragic inexorability. Concern was also expressed about distortion of character due to the condensing of plot. In his dramatic theory Anderson stated that a plot should be constructed in a way that gives prime dramatic importance to the self-recognition scene. The preceding and antecedent action should revolve around this scene. Those reviewers who endorsed Anderson on plot and structural elements came close to stating that Anderson had accomplished this. Both Anderson and the reviewers, in their separate writings, favored fast-moving plot lines that told their stories simply and without digressive and burdensome adornment. This was in the Aristotelian tradition of propter hoc.

Reviewers either overlooked theme completely or analyzed it with little depth. Among the few reviewers who did mention theme the one idea that consistently came forward in the reviews was love--as it exists between Elizabeth and Essex, Mary and Bothwell, Anne and Henry. To a lesser extent, temporal power as a theme was mentioned. Considering the emphasis that Anderson placed on theme and the scarcity of comment about it or its omission by reviewers, a definite separation existed between the playwright and his reviewer critics on this aspect.

Comments and judgments of reviewers on the trilogy and some of his other plays caused Anderson to publish his thoughts on drama

reviewers. This highlighted even more sharply the differences that are inherent between playwrights and critics. Anderson stated that drama reviewers possessed too much power over the determination of the fate of a play. To Anderson, this method of judging the worth of a play seemed unfair, but he offered no practical alternate proposals.

Overall, Anderson's reception by reviewers was considerably mixed in relation to his dramatic theory. Only in their criticism of character development (aside from tragedy) and plot/structure construction did reviewers come close to seeing his ideas in somewhat the same fashion as Anderson had articulated them in his theory.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Richard Dana Skinner, "The Play," Commonweal, 19 November 1930, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Mark Van Doren, "Drama: Elizabeth the Queen," Nation, 19 November 1930, p. 562.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Francis Fergusson, "The Theatre Versus Certain Artists of the Theatre," Bookman, February 1931, p. 627.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre of George Jean Nathan," Judge, 29 November 1930, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "The Play," New York Times, 28 November 1933, p. 28.

<sup>11</sup>"A Playgoer's Discoveries," Stage, January 1934, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>George Brandt, "Manhattan Offers," Review of Reviews, February 1934, p. 39.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Dana Skinner, "The Play," Commonweal, 15 December 1933, p. 189.

<sup>14</sup>George Jean Nathan, "The Theatre," Vanity Fair, February 1934, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Brooks Atkinson, "Anne and Henry," New York Times, 19 December 1948, sec. II, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup>John Mason Brown, "Seeing Things," Saturday Review of Literature, 25 December 1948, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup>Atkinson, op. cit.

- p. 92.
- <sup>19</sup>John Gassner, "The Theatre Arts," Forum, February 1949,
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup>Brown, op. cit.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup>J. Brooks Atkinson, "The Play--Every Inch A Queen," New York Times, 4 November 1930, p. 30
- <sup>25</sup>Richard Dana Skinner, "The Play," Commonweal, 19 November 1930, p. 76.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>Stuart Beach, "The Editor Goes to the Play," Theatre Magazine, January 1931, p. 66.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup>Van Doren, Nation, 19 November 1930, p. 562.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup>Skinner, op. cit.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup>Barrett H. Clark, "Broadway Plays Pass in Review," Drama Magazine, December 1930, p. 12.
- <sup>35</sup>Stark Young, "Shadow's Shadows," New Republic, 13 December 1933, p. 130.
- <sup>36</sup>Euphenia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "The Drama," Catholic World, January 1934, p. 473.
- <sup>37</sup>Miriam Motherwell, "Queens at Daggers Drawn," Stage, December 1933, p. 15.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama--Why History?," Nation, 13 December 1933, p. 689.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 689-690.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Edith J. R. Issacs, "Good Playing A Plenty," Theatre Arts Monthly, January 1934, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup>Cy Caldwell, "To See or Not to See," New Outlook, January 1934, p. 42.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Joseph Wood Krutch, "Drama," Nation, 1 January 1949, p. 24.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Atkinson, New York Times, 19 December 1948.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Atkinson, "At the Theatre," New York Times, 9 December 1948, p. 49.

<sup>54</sup>Newsweek, "The Lust of Henry VIII," 20 December 1948, p. 72.

<sup>55</sup>Gilbert W. Gabriel, "Playgoing," Theatre Arts, March 1949, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup>Euphenia Van Rensselaer Wyatt, "The Drama," Catholic World, January 1949, p. 322.

<sup>57</sup>Krutch, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup>J. Brooks Atkinson, "When the Guild is Good," New York Times, 9 November 1930, sec. ix, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Stark Young, "Elizabeth," New Republic, 19 November 1930, p. 17.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Otis Chatfield-Taylor, "The Theatre," Outlook, 19 November 1930, p. 472.

<sup>64</sup>Fergusson, Bookman, February 1931, p. 627.

<sup>65</sup>Nathan, Judge, 29 November 1930, p. 16.

<sup>66</sup>Clark, Drama Magazine, December 1930, p. 12.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Skinner, Commonweal, 15 December 1933, p. 189.

<sup>69</sup>Wyatt, Catholic World, January 1934, p. 473.

<sup>70</sup>Motherwell, Stage, December 1933, p. 16.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>William Rose Benet, "Brightness Falls From the Air," Saturday Review of Literature, 17 February 1934, p. 496.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Skinner, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Gassner, Forum, February 1949, p. 93.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Gilbert W. Gabriel, Theatre Arts, March 1949, p. 54.

- <sup>85</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>86</sup>"New Play in Manhattan," Time, 20 December 1948, p. 60.
- <sup>87</sup>Atkinson, New York Times, 9 December 1948.
- <sup>88</sup>Kappo Phelan, "The Stage & Screen," Commonweal, 24 December 1948, p. 281.
- <sup>89</sup>Otis Chatfield-Taylor, Outlook, 19 November 1930, p. 472.
- <sup>90</sup>"Every Inch a Queen," Literary Digest, November 22, 1930, p. 17.
- <sup>91</sup>Young, New Republic, 13 December 1933, p. 130.
- <sup>92</sup>Stage, January 1934, p. 12.
- <sup>93</sup>Young, New Republic, op. cit.
- <sup>94</sup>Wyatt, Commonweal, 15 December 1933, p. 189.
- <sup>95</sup>Motherwell, Stage, op. cit.
- <sup>96</sup>Gassner, Forum, op. cit.
- <sup>97</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>98</sup>Krutch, Nation, 1 January 1949, p. 24.
- <sup>99</sup>Maxwell Anderson, "The Mighty Critics," New York Times, 16 February 1947, sec. 2, p. 1.
- <sup>100</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>101</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>103</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup>Maxwell Anderson, "More Thoughts About Dramatic Critics," New York Herald-Tribune, 10 October 1948, sec. V, p. 1.



## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF SCHOLARLY CRITICISM

#### Procedure and Organization

Chapter IV of this study will analyze scholarly articles for their content about Maxwell Anderson's use and development of dramatic verse, character, plot and structure, and theme in the Tudor trilogy plays. Scholars did not write articles on one Tudor trilogy play, exclusively. Either the articles considered them together as a group or as a part of Anderson's larger output of plays, both prose and verse. Therefore, commentary that specifically refers to the trilogy or was part of an overall general view will be used by this study. The major organization of this chapter will follow the format of Chapter III. A departure will be made in one respect. Since none of the articles or their organization followed the trilogy as the newspaper reviews did, the subdivisions using the three individual play titles will not appear. Conclusions about the content of this chapter will use the guidelines found in Chapter I (P. 9).

#### Poetry for the Modern Audience

The year 1930 was noted as the beginning of Anderson's verse contribution to theatre, specifically with the trilogy plays. Harlan Hatcher in the English Journal wrote: "On November 3, 1930, the Theatre Guild, Inc., produced Maxwell Anderson's Elizabeth the Queen."<sup>1</sup> With Elizabeth and later verse plays, Anderson was attempting something mostly untried up to that time: "Here was a

modern play about historic figures written largely in verse . . . The success of the play, and of certain others which have followed it, has revived general interest in the contemporary drama in verse."<sup>2</sup> Because of his early efforts with Elizabeth and his subsequent verse drama, noted Hatcher, "[Anderson] has thus become identified more than any other dramatist with the renewal of interest in the problem of the representation of dramatic subjects in elevated speech that soars at appropriate moments into verse."<sup>3</sup>

Hatcher focused on some specific extracts from Elizabeth, then made this judgment: "Conforming to the demands of the practical theater, Maxwell Anderson has taken care to restrain these flights into verse within limits of verisimilitude, seldom permitting them to outrun or weigh down the action of a character."<sup>4</sup> Hatcher felt that Anderson was a dramatist who was careful in not using excess in his language. Hatcher noted that Anderson's verse needed to be experienced in the theatrical setting as well as read:

. . . it must be borne in mind that these plays were built to be spoken, as accompaniment to action and only incidentally to be read . . . When the ear catches the language direct from the uttering player, it is aware only that the speech is noble, fluent, and carefully cadenced; speech as it should be if feeling were always matched with the right and the beautiful word.<sup>5</sup>

Hatcher also discussed Anderson's verse technique: "Anderson has used a free and often a relaxed form of iambic pentameter, but he has striven to prevent the lines from regularizing themselves by deliberately forcing a chantlike irregularity after a line or two of strict blank verse."<sup>6</sup> Summarizing his article, Hatcher wrote that

Anderson had a classical background and approach to verse:

"Anderson's work is close to the great tradition of the English stage, and when it touches the level of verse, it slides pliantly in and out of a pattern recognizably similar to Marlowe's mighty line."<sup>7</sup>

Hatcher felt Anderson had made a significant contribution to literature and theatre with his verse plays, specifically with Elizabeth and Mary.

Philip Stevenson in New Theatre noted Anderson's turning to dramatic verse and historical drama at the beginning of the 1930's: "1930 marked Anderson's return to the past for his material, and poetry for his medium. He deserves high praise for his revival of the use of poetry in the theatre, regardless of whether we accept it as true dramatic poetry."<sup>8</sup> These plays had significance for Anderson as a playwright: "The two 'queen plays' should be regarded as trial balloons with which Anderson tried his audience's reaction to poetry."<sup>9</sup> Stevenson then gave an overview of Anderson's work in verse drama:

The impressive success of Anderson's ventures in poetic drama, no less from box-office than from the critical point of view, the growth of his confidence and the maturity of his craftsmanship, made it possible for him to indulge his own desires as to choice of subject and method.<sup>10</sup>

To Stevenson this represented a progression that began with the first plays of the trilogy and which would eventually result in Winterset.

In Stage, Ruth Woodbury Sedgwick also noted 1930 and Anderson's accomplishment at that time:

When Anderson came back to poetry in 1930 he had bulwarked his majestic inspiration with all of the skills of the showman's art. Deliberately in Elizabeth the Queen he held his verse as near the level of prose as possible. Rhythm and figures were simplified almost to the point of austerity . . . one associated, in the subconscious of every player, with the cadence of blank verse.<sup>11</sup>

Sedgwick was, like Hatcher, impressed with Anderson's technique in verse writing. Her comparison of his verse to prose in general implied an economy and an absence of excess that she found in Anderson's writing of Elizabeth. The result, stated Sedgwick, was good for Anderson and theatre: "The play surged into immediate and notable success; a distinguished contribution to dramatic literature, a sumptuous piece for the theatre."<sup>12</sup> But it was with Mary, according to Sedgwick, that Anderson attained the best response to his dramatic verse:

With Mary of Scotland the last barrier against magnificence fell; and playgoers rushed through the gaps to bask in beauty and heroic attitudes. Here was language which traced its lineage honestly in the legitimate classic line; back to Kit Marlowe, father of English tragedy, pioneer in dramatic blank verse.<sup>13</sup>

As Hatcher had previously, Sedgwick used allusions to classical English theatre for comparison to Anderson. Sedgwick stated that Anderson went on to even greater acceptance of his dramatic verse with Valley Forge, Winterset, Masque of Kings, and High Tor. Like Stevenson, Sedgwick had traced a progression in Anderson's playwriting abilities and accomplishments.

Homer E. Woodbridge for South Atlantic Quarterly wrote about Anderson's beginning his verse drama in 1930: "He returned to his first love, the poetic drama, with a historical tragedy in verse, Elizabeth the Queen. This was, I believe, the turning point of his career."<sup>14</sup> Anderson, thought Woodbridge, proved to be a leader because of his verse writing: ". . . he gave the public what he wanted to write instead of what it was supposed to want; and he won a great and deserved success."<sup>15</sup> Woodbridge believed the 1930's was a period of high achievement for Anderson: "it is this series of plays by which his work up to the present must be judged; it is in them, and not in the strictly realistic plays, that the distinctive traits of his genius have found expression."<sup>16</sup> But it was with Elizabeth and Mary that Anderson developed his verse to the fullest extent: "Mr. Anderson really discovered himself, I think, in the historical plays."<sup>17</sup> Woodbridge found Anderson's verse in the history plays exciting and versatile:

[In the history plays] he developed his characteristic verse-form--a rather blank verse with a sort of tumbling, hurrying rhythm, like that of a tossing sea--a verse that can be used in colloquial scenes, but that is capable of rising to high levels of imaginative beauty.<sup>18</sup>

Henry C. Lee in North Dakota Quarterly found Anderson engaged in a pioneering effort with a "new" form of theatre:

Elizabeth the Queen (1930) was his first play in this new vein and remains one of his finest plays . . . it was an impressive play which demonstrated that Elizabethan-type blank verse could be made acceptable to the ears of a modern audience . . . [Anderson] wanted very much to see the development of a modern form of tragedy. He believed with Aristotle that tragedy requires a heightening of

effect, that poetry was the true medium of tragedy, and he felt that American drama needed the hand of a great poet.<sup>19</sup>

To Lee there was one play above all others that was to be remembered for Anderson's work in verse drama: "Elizabeth the Queen was the first modern American drama to be written in verse, and its success called attention to the genuine thirst for poetry in the theatre."<sup>20</sup>

William E. Taylor held that Anderson's verse drama was an ideal to which the playwright gave his career: "Anderson devoted his life to attempting to restore poetic drama to the modern stage, feeling it was the only right instrument to lift drama to the high function he believed it had."<sup>21</sup> Taylor called Anderson's concept of poetry "Victorian," but mainly he felt it succeeded in its purpose: "[Anderson] writes, for the most part, a rather loose and innocuous blank verse which on many occasions rises to the emotional demands he places upon it and only seldom intrudes upon the conscious reader as a distraction."<sup>22</sup> While not mentioning the trilogy plays, Taylor's judgment was made from them as part of his consideration.

Vincent Wall in Sewanee Review Quarterly wrote that Anderson's dramatic verse often put him at odds with "his critics and peers": ". . . he has dared to write plays which were romantic and tragic and in verse when a good many of his critics felt that contemporary life could only be expressed realistically and in prose."<sup>23</sup> Wall thought that Anderson's onetime professions as a journalist and as a professor were excellent qualifications for his attempts to revive verse drama:

. . . Anderson brought to the theatre not only the journalist's and editor's awareness of contemporary events, and the poet's depth of feeling and sense of language but also the scholar's knowledge of the heritage of the theater from Aeschylus to Ibsen.<sup>24</sup>

Elizabeth and Mary were the examples Wall used to show how Anderson developed his verse. In these two plays, Wall stated, verse--and prose--were used to calculated effect:

In ELIZABETH THE QUEEN and MARY OF SCOTLAND Anderson was taking legends familiar to theater-goers and decorating them with verse . . . There is fairly judicious mingling of prose and poetry, for instance, in ELIZABETH THE QUEEN: the bustle and confusion of the council scene of the third act is entirely in prose. The dialogue turns to poetry only when Elizabeth and Essex face one another alone. In MARY OF SCOTLAND . . . his style seems to be more disciplined, at times almost becoming sparse and barren.<sup>25</sup>

Anderson could create a powerful language in his playwriting that was not limited solely to verse, Wall stated.

Among scholars from Hatcher to Wall the consensus was that Anderson had composed a competently written verse in the history (trilogy) plays while attempting to reacquaint modern audiences with verse drama. Other scholars dissented from this overall view. John Gassner had mixed judgments on Anderson's verse in the trilogy plays. In Theatre Time Gassner at first described what, to him, were good elements in the verse:

His line structure, which may be described as a free kind of blank verse in the main, is close enough to conventional dialogue to pose no difficulties for the playgoer. Anderson is always crystal-clear in statement, and it is probable that even the prolixity and rhetoric which have been noted to his discredit have been incurred by him less because he is intoxicated with language than because he wants to be understood. Also, he entertains a decorative

view of poetry, and this gives his poetic plays a colorfulfulness of speech that is attractive to a public not particularly dedicated to rigorous standards of poetry.<sup>26</sup>

For the general theatre audience for whom Anderson was aiming, Gassner claimed, the verse did well. The trilogy best exemplified Anderson's success in audience acceptance: "[Anderson] started with the historical plays Elizabeth the Queen and Mary of Scotland. These, along with the latest treatment of a sixteenth century subject, Anne of the Thousand Days, have been his most popular efforts."<sup>27</sup> Gassner's view was that Anderson's success came from giving his audiences a different theatre experience without making inordinate demands on them.

Gassner then discussed the weaknesses he found in Anderson's verse. There was, stated Gassner, a too obvious deliberateness in the verse writing and an absence of a genuine free-flowing quality:

Although Maxwell Anderson is a high-minded man, his tragic feeling seems too often pre-fabricated or imposed by him upon life. And the same sense of something laid on can also be observed in his dramatic verse, since the poetic quality is frequently a polish added to a thought or sentiment rather than compulsive expression or incandescence. A good deal of even his most forceful verse seems less generated by the flame within than acquired by a knowledge of literature and by association with its tradition . . . The consecration of art in most of Anderson's work has been, one can suspect, too transparently willed. His poetic drama seems rather academic, an impression also supported by the reminiscent quality of lines and situations.<sup>28</sup>

Even in his dissatisfaction Gassner found positive comment to give concerning the verse that Anderson wrote: "If Mr. Anderson has earned our esteem, it is for setting a high valuation of dramatic



art and for making literary drama attractive on our tawdry stage."<sup>29</sup> The quality of Anderson's verse seemed too formal for it to be truly expressive poetry, according to Gassner. Still, he felt the theatre was better for Anderson's having written his dramatic verse.

Edmund Wilson in the New Republic raised the idea that verse was useless in modern writing, especially in theatre. It was Wilson's contention that Anderson's work exemplified the datedness of theatrical verse:

Mr. Anderson, it seems to me, in his own plays has given the most striking confirmation of the obsolescence of verse technique . . . I do not mean that he is technically incompetent; but he writes badly because English blank verse no longer has any relation whatever to the language or tempo of our lives, and because, as soon as he tries to use it, he has no vehicle for his genuine gifts of dialogue--he has no resources but a flavorless imagery which was growing trite in our grandfathers' time.<sup>30</sup>

Wilson contended that this indulgence in an archaic form of writing severely hampered Anderson's true and valuable abilities as a playwright: "I am inclined to believe, furthermore, that it is this unhappy infatuation with blank verse which has aborted Mr. Anderson's talents all around."<sup>31</sup> Wilson further asserted that the almost intractable limits placed upon Anderson prevented his plays from realizing their potential: "Mr. Anderson's plays can only proffer the dimmest imitations of the sentiments of the Elizabethans and Greeks in connection with events of a quite different character."<sup>32</sup> Anderson, the modern playwright, could not meet the demands of modern theatre using antiquated verse, Wilson contended: "A technique should grow out of the material: and Mr. Anderson is

trying to impose an old technique which has nothing to do with his material. Instead of getting deeper into reality as he develops, he is carried by his verse farther away."<sup>33</sup> Wilson found confusion in Anderson's playwriting due to his dramatic verse. Consequently, so long as Anderson kept to his dramatic verse, Wilson could see nothing of importance emerging from Anderson's playwriting.

Donna Gerstenberger in an article for Modern Drama also claimed that Anderson's verse was antiquated. The effect, Gerstenberger stated, "continues unbroken the tradition which has limited the growth of verse drama in our time."<sup>34</sup> Anderson's plays Elizabeth and Mary "are not distinguishable in intention and construction from the turn-of-the-century practice of verse drama,"<sup>35</sup> wrote Gerstenberger. Anderson's efforts, therefore, had the opposite effect of what Gerstenberger desired--verse drama had not evolved into a relevant theatrical use, rather, she contended, it had remained static.

#### Summary

The year 1930 was when Elizabeth the Queen appeared, the first play of a long line of verse drama and the start of what by 1948 would be known as the "Tudor trilogy." Scholars favorably disposed to Anderson thought that his verse was marked by the right amount of restraint and economy, which avoided ornateness and heavy imagery that could have weighed down the plays. With some inevitable comparisons to Shakespeare and others from the "classical"

period, it was felt Anderson had created a carefully wrought verse language for his trilogy plays. Although writing in a time when prose dominated the theatre, Anderson was judged to have crafted a theatrical form considered worthwhile in its purpose of being written for the modern theatre audience.

Perceived shortcomings cited by other scholars included a self-consciousness inherent in Anderson's writing. His verse, stated these scholars, seemed artificial and not dramatically powerful. According to them Anderson's efforts seemed only a very dim reflection of Shakespearean forms. Rather than writing a language that seemed to flow naturally, such scholars asserted, Anderson's verse appeared too planned and deliberate, as if Anderson was showing off his erudition. Scholars who held this view assumed that instead of reviving interest in verse drama, Anderson's plays reinforced the medium as an anachronism for the modern stage. The effect of all this, according to this viewpoint, was that Anderson's playwriting abilities were not allowed to adequately and fully develop.

Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on  
Anderson's Concepts of Character,  
Plot and Structure

Character

Scholars tended to agree that Anderson had created tragedy in the trilogy plays. Differences were evident as to what genre of tragedy Anderson had written. Two scholars thought Anderson wrote a new and modern tragedy and went so far as to give labels to Anderson's "modern" version of tragedy.

Herbert Ellsworth Childs in a detailed article for English Journal emphasized "circumstance" as the key to understanding

Andersonian tragedy:

In these plays the conflict lies always between the hero and circumstances. Sometimes the hero is opposed, sometimes reinforced by a secondary hero (Mary by Bothwell and Elizabeth, Elizabeth by Essex). But always the conflict is one of circumstance.<sup>36</sup>

Anderson was, according to Childs, writing about man and his surroundings where there are no absolutes to struggle against, a common trait among many twentieth century writers:

For Anderson to write a tragedy of character would be to deny one of the chief intellectual advances of the world--our widely diffused lack of confidence in the freedom of the will. A human being free to choose may take this way to destruction, that way to immortality. The truth is, Mr. Anderson seems to imply, that we do not know what makes man good or bad, a success or failure. The only answer is circumstance--to most people an unsatisfactory, agnostic answer, but apparently Mr. Anderson refuses to go beyond it. Consequently hero after hero meets destruction because the incomprehensible forces of life are too strong for him.<sup>37</sup>

Circumstance determines tragic fate in Andersonian tragedy, wrote Childs, "most plays are maneuvered into situations from which there is no escape except compromise with the forces of evil, itself a form of tragic failure."<sup>38</sup> Such tragedy was very relevant to twentieth century audiences: "It is a kind of tragedy easy for us to believe in, who are losing our last faith in things seen and dissected and mathematically hypothecated."<sup>39</sup>

Childs illustrated "tragedy of circumstance" by citing Elizabeth where expediency decides Essex' tragic fate:

Though in Anderson's version Essex makes the final decision, the central figure is Queen Elizabeth; the problem is the age-old necessity of sacrificing the eggs to the omelet. In order to rule and keep peace in her kingdom Elizabeth treacherously condemns her lover to death.<sup>40</sup>

The "circumstance" makes the eventual fate of both Essex and Elizabeth certain. Further, Childs stated, it is tragedy of two characters:

It is one of inevitable conflict between Essex's irresistible ambition and Elizabeth's immovable throne. Neither prevails, for though at the last moment Elizabeth abjectly offers him a share in the kingdom, Essex refuses and walks to his death. Both are victims of necessity, figures of tragic circumstance.<sup>41</sup>

Through unalterable "circumstance" the characters are confronted with no recourse; they must act in a certain way, Childs contended. Mary, likewise, was confronted with circumstance: "She did not marry Bothwell at the right time, and, giving him up, later accepted him when it was disaster to do so."<sup>42</sup>

Harold H. Watts in College English also had a twentieth century interpretation of Anderson's tragic genre. Anderson's plays were definitely products of a modernistic outlook, stated Watts:

"They contain a tragic insight that is notably a product of our age-- perhaps the single one possible to our age as Anderson and those who share his background have envisaged."<sup>43</sup> In Elizabeth, stated Childs, a transformation comes slowly and inexorably:

. . . to the aging woman her love for the young man is a rock . . . On it drip--and beat, in time of flood-- waters that alter its firm outlines. The rock lacks power to turn aside the trickles and torrents that wear it away. The Cecils and Burghleys and Bacons will have their way . . . so that by the end of the play the love, the fixed rock, is changed and offers footing to neither of the lovers . . . That which both regarded as the most admirable fact in their lives has endured for too long the attrition of the waters . . . That which gave the two characters dignity and worth as individuals is (both admit) worn away.<sup>44</sup>

From this came Watts' label for modern Andersonian tragedy-- "tragedy of attrition." The difference between Anderson's "tragedy of attrition" and classical tragedy lay in the following dichotomy: in classical tragedy "the conflict is not primarily between good and bad men; it is between the good and bad in man, in the tragic figure itself."<sup>45</sup> Externals, however, dominate in "attrition" tragedy: "Good always lies in the pose taken up by the tragic figure, and evil manifests itself in the abrasive, external forces. One man is good, mankind is predeterminedly evil; hence, the endurance contest."<sup>46</sup> Where classical tragedy was concerned with the internal struggle within the protagonist, attrition tragedy has a

protagonist pitted against the external world, with outside surroundings dictating. Watts explained Anderson's tragic form in this way: "According to this picture, all men are part of the stream that effects attrition; none can offer resistance to it."<sup>47</sup> Still, Watts stated, Anderson's characters did not yield supinely to the unyielding world; they offer resistance. Watts indicated this as an encouraging sign: "Yet that some persons do, history and Anderson's private hope indicate."<sup>48</sup> Still, Anderson's tragic protagonists in Elizabeth and Mary "will sink before the rushing forces of attrition."<sup>49</sup> Like Childs, Watts thought Anderson's tragic genre reflected the literary and theatre fashions of the time, this making Anderson a part of the overall trend.

William E. Taylor was another scholar who took the more modernistic interpretation of Anderson's tragic characters. Paraphrasing Shaw, Taylor stated the characters in Elizabeth experience "the passion of discussion": "[Anderson's] characters do talk . . . they often talk well and even subtly."<sup>50</sup> After the events of Essex' rebellion, recounted Taylor, his arrest and imprisonment, Anderson has his characters confront each other where they bow to their respective fates:

They talk this over, offering each other alternatives, but both know and recognize the irreconcilable nature of the paradox . . . Anderson . . . leaves his audience with the impression that there is nothing that either Elizabeth or Essex can do. He will therefore go to his death, and she will live on through a powerful reign but a personally sterile life.<sup>51</sup>

Taylor likewise emphasized the despair of the times discussed in Childs' and Watts' commentaries: "In Maxwell Anderson's plays . . . men do fight very much alone--and they fight a losing battle."<sup>52</sup> With scholars Childs, Watts, and Taylor the picture developed of Anderson's having written a tragedy relevant to the twentieth century experience. Environment was the determining factor in the tragedy rather than the internal weaknesses and the resultant self-discovery that held in the classical Aristotelian definition.

Vincent Wall likewise saw such a trend in modern drama but considered Anderson's work to be an exception: "Having lost all belief in the gods as well as arbitrary rights and wrongs, modern authors can only write tragedies which are an accusation against the world rather than a justification of it."<sup>53</sup> Anderson, he stated, was trying to retain some of the magnificence of classical tragedy in his plays:

ELIZABETH THE QUEEN was to be a tragedy--if not a modern tragedy, at least a tragedy by a modern author. The protagonists were heroic: a queen, capricious, fierce-tempered, proud and lovely, and a young and ambitious courtier . . . here a man and woman were working out their own inevitable destruction; yet it was one which must leave the audience with the satisfaction that it was not only inevitable but that the characters were somehow ennobled by it.<sup>54</sup>

Wall was appreciative of Anderson's writing in a classical tragic tradition for twentieth century audiences. Anderson's *Essex*, Wall believed, fitted very well into the classical tragic frame: "Lord Essex is destroyed by his tragic flaw, ambition, just as surely as was MacBeth; he has realized that he would have ruled Elizabeth's



kingdom rashly and heedlessly, that she was cautious and wise in intrigue and diplomacy."<sup>55</sup> Wall gave primary importance to "tragic flaw" in further discussion of Elizabeth's two main characters:

It is true, then, that the tragic flaw which in this case is an essential in the character of each of the protagonists is that which dictates the end of the tragedy. Ambition, pride of place, prevents them from enjoying their love, since it causes them to doubt that love.<sup>56</sup>

Elizabeth's and Essex' mutual love is their mutual "tragic flaw"; this was the central aspect of the tragedy of the two characters, as Wall saw it. Destruction comes to both characters, still, it is ennobling:

In ELIZABETH THE QUEEN both protagonists are destroyed since Essex realizes that if he lives it will only be to wrest the kingdom from the woman he loves. Both, however, have risen to heights: Elizabeth, the queen, has offered Essex her kingdom; and Essex has preferred the scaffold rather than take it from her . . . here is evinced man's belief in his own destiny.<sup>57</sup>

Such playwriting and development of character, in Wall's view, made Anderson take an Aristotelian direction. Wall was in direct contradiction to Childs, Watts, and Taylor, all of whom came to a modernistic interpretation of Anderson's work.

Not limiting himself to a purely classical or modern concept of tragedy in Anderson's characters, Arthur T. Tees in North Dakota Quarterly discussed the role of feminine superiority in the trilogy plays:

Maxwell Anderson used women in major roles in several of his plays. In an age of women's liberation ferment, it is of interest to determine how this prolific playwright depicted the fair sex in his dramas . . . Anderson treated his women characters favorably; they fare better than

their male counterparts . . . he often portrayed women as superior to men and saw them as playing a pivotal role in the improvement of the human race.<sup>58</sup>

According to Tees, Anderson assigned to his female characters a special status as a direct counter to an implied less subtle tendency in his male characters.

Tees gave an overview of Anderson's women characters in the trilogy: "Three of his plays dealt with queens and their manner of rule--the 'Tudor trilogy' of Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, and Anne of the Thousand Days. In each of these the queens are seen as wiser than the men around them."<sup>59</sup> Tees showed how Essex comes to his destruction through impetuosity and the betrayal by Elizabeth. Through their mutual betrayals Essex and Elizabeth realize any love that they had must be sacrificed. What tragic significance there is in the play was not to be found with Elizabeth:

While in prison Essex . . . comes to realize that he would never be content to allow Elizabeth to rule even though he knows her approach to be superior; this discovery prompts him to refuse her offer of clemency and go to his execution. Because the crucial self-discovery and decision are Essex' rather than Elizabeth's, he thus becomes the central figure in traditional Aristotelian terms.<sup>60</sup>

Using the Aristotelian argument, Tees saw the tragic end come to Essex. However, Tees developed another viewpoint more in keeping with the article's main contention, the overriding importance of the woman character:

Elizabeth the Queen may also be viewed as a dual tragedy with Elizabeth making the fateful decision when she rejects Essex after learning that she would have to give up her power if she were to marry him . . . She is at best the heroine of a victim tragedy, denied happiness by

having been born in the royal line. Although hers is a lonely fate, there can be no doubt of her superiority to the man who challenged her throne.<sup>61</sup>

Elizabeth shows that she can be the master over a man and still retain her power as sovereign; yet in this she loses any chance at love with Essex' banishment and death. So in this "dual tragedy" context of Tees' Elizabeth also undergoes self-discovery; but Tees felt Elizabeth is not a complete tragic character as is Essex. Elizabeth, in the following play Mary, also appears as the most adept character; yet she does not possess tragic stature from the strictly Aristotelian standpoint:

Elizabeth appeared again three years later in Anderson's Mary of Scotland. Once again she is not the protagonist but the antagonist, and once more she is shown to be politically more astute than the men around her. Lord Burghley, in discussing the threat Mary poses to Elizabeth's throne and safety, advocates immediate armed intervention, but the cautious ruler has her own clever way of combatting the Northern threat. She tricks Mary into an unsatisfactory marriage, spreads evil rumors about the Scottish sovereign, and encourages those in the Highland court who would oppose the Catholic Queen. Her tactics are as effective as they are repulsive; in the final scene she has the pleasure of confronting Mary in an English prison.<sup>62</sup>

Here, Elizabeth displays her duplicitous nature most effectively.

Mary is the tragic character in this play:

. . . if Mary shows qualities of an ideal ruler at the start of her reign, she displays apparent bad judgment in her choice of a husband. Warned in advance by Bothwell that Darnley drinks excessively and is no suitable match for her, she nevertheless marries him. The marriage rapidly deteriorates. Darnley questions whether the child she carries is his. In due time his opponents at court conspire to have him murdered while throwing the blame for his death on the Queen.<sup>63</sup>

While Elizabeth is insidious, Mary is too trusting and too easily manipulated. According to Tees, Mary was Anderson's most fully-realized character: "Mary's choice of a husband is clearly the turning point of the play. Anderson has given Mary several motives for her choice making her the most complex character he had created up to that time."<sup>64</sup> The study of contrasts was best exemplified in the final scene of the play:

What had begun as a distant struggle between two monarchs ends as an angry test of will between two women, and the suspicion grows that what Mary really wanted was not only to rule her kingdom well, but more important, to triumph over Elizabeth as one woman to another. It gives Mary a human quality that makes her seem more real than the characters Anderson had created earlier. By her participation in the confrontation Elizabeth likewise achieves a depth not generally seen in the playwright's work.<sup>65</sup>

In Mary Tees felt Anderson created two very strong dramatic characters: one, very skilled in manipulation; the other, well-meaning, but easily cozened by the former's devious craft. Mary, in Tees' view, fulfils the Aristotelian definition of tragedy, while Elizabeth is a one-dimensional villainess.

Anne in the final trilogy play is dissimilar from Elizabeth and Mary, in Tees' estimation. There was more than just the wills of two strong characters battling each other as there were in the first two plays:

The heroine of Anne of the Thousand Days is more successful as a character and a philosopher, although it is questionable whether she is a spokesman for Anderson's own point of view. Like his earlier queens, she is capable of deep emotion, so much so that the confrontation between her and Henry at her trial for adultery is the most

memorable in all of Anderson's work, surpassing even the Elizabeth-Mary clash. It is all the more powerful because it is both an intellectual and an emotional conflict, a clash of persons and philosophies, of husband and wife, as well as of traditional Christianity and modern materialism.<sup>66</sup>

Tees saw the confrontation of Anne and Henry as going beyond two dramatic characters merely trying to gain supremacy. Tees found these characters representing larger forces and possessing philosophical overtones:

The struggle in Anne is not only between two strong-willed persons but also between two philosophies. Henry sees the darker side of his own and others' natures; for him it is the animal aspects of man's nature that determine what a man does, where he loves. Anne, on the other hand, espouses a traditional Christian view.<sup>67</sup>

Tees also gave attention to the more conventionally dramatic elements in Anderson's characters of Henry and Anne:

Both [characters] share equally in the thought and emotion of the scene, with Anne penetrating through Henry's rationalization and Henry ranging from tenderness to anger in his last meeting with his queen. Henry, in fact, takes the emotional lead in the scene in confessing that he came there to find out if his queen really had been unfaithful to him; he admits his vulnerability at that point. He is also the first to become angry later when Anne points out that his need for a new queen springs not so much from a desire for an heir as a thirst for a fresh young girl as his bride.<sup>68</sup>

But Anne is Henry's equal in dramatic interest:

Anne matches Henry in range of emotion, from confessing that she still loves him to taunting him at the end with a false confession of infidelity that will leave him forever uncertain of the truth. But she also matches him, bests him perhaps, in espousing an enduring philosophy. Given one last chance to escape for her own past, a death that brings an inner li é.<sup>69</sup>

In the queens Elizabeth, Mary, and Anne, Tees found three very complex, fully-dimensional, loving, yet determined women, each one possessing some tragic stature in the Aristotelian sense. Tees, however, was more concerned with their demonstrated finesse compared to their male counterparts. Tragedy was a secondary concern in the article.

Thomas H. Dickinson also sidestepped the issue of complete tragedy:

Because [Anderson] is interested in the great aspirations and struggles of men, he tends to choose for treatment those men and women whose aspirations have the widest social significance. So he finds the most fruitful material in the heroic figures whose exploits cover the beginnings of the modern democratic tradition.<sup>70</sup>

Dickinson was attempting to analyze Anderson's characters from a historical viewpoint. Dickinson named his choices of Anderson's top achievements in his playwriting career, all history plays:

These are Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, Joan of Lorraine [not included in this study], and Anne of the Thousand Days. Putting aside for a moment the fact that I do not consider all these equally successful, they are alike in that they employ the lives of great women as source material into social organization.<sup>71</sup>

Some of what Dickinson discussed parallels Tees' article: men and women attain their ends by different means--man often falls back on the violent and savage, woman uses "the principle of accommodation by the meeting of wits, rather than the contests of brawn."<sup>72</sup> It was this aspect that made the main characters of the trilogy so compelling to Dickinson. Tragedy was not the prime concern of the analysis in this article.

Other scholars discussed Anderson's perceived failure to achieve tragedy. Allan G. Halline in American Literature found that Anderson could attain the outward signs of tragedy, as in this passage about Elizabeth:

In this play there is a struggle not only between the leading characters, Elizabeth and Essex, but also within each as to which emotion or ambition shall be sovereign; unquestionably these characters are exceptional persons; their struggles may easily be viewed in terms of good and evil, and both have qualities which people admire. Then, too, there is the recognition scene in which the protagonist makes an important discovery: that he who would rule must be without friends, mercy, love. In the foregoing respects, the play measures up to the specifications for tragedy.<sup>73</sup>

However, Halline did not feel that Anderson had succeeded in creating true tragedy:

But, in the main, it falls well short of the ideal tragedy. Elizabeth, having made the discovery, is not changed for the better, in fact, she determines to take Essex's life. There is no inward ennoblement to offset her failure in love . . . Essex loses both his love and his life, and there is no indication of a compensating philosophic outlook, or spiritual growth . . . man is here a victim of circumstances, and life is fatally ironic.<sup>74</sup>

To Halline, then, Anderson did not endow Elizabeth with the requisite stature for her to be tragic in the Aristotelian sense of the term.

John Gassner also felt that Anderson could attain the appearance of tragic forms but not the actual content needed for tragedy:

Having set himself the high objective of writing tragedy, Anderson has often created the simulacrum rather than the real article. The formal and synthetic quality, not always apparent while the theatrical spell of a good

production is upon us, ultimately reveals itself in a variety of ways. Thus, his traditional philosophy of tragedy make him take an exalted view of human strivings and gives his leading characters a certain nobility of spirit in a crisis or a denouement.<sup>75</sup>

Anderson's characters seemed, to Gassner, too obviously manipulated, rather than having been defeated due to an internal weakness in and of themselves:

Often . . . the undoing of a character is the result of a conspiracy (see Elizabeth the Queen, Mary of Scotland, Anne of the Thousand Days) rather than the effect of a grave flaw in that character which affords insight into the abysses of human nature. The point of view that emerges concerning the characters, the historical situation, man's destiny or the nature of his world, is always forcefully expressed in Anderson's tragedies and yet seems a formal conclusion, like the conclusion in a Euclidean proposition set up for the purpose.<sup>76</sup>

The hand and thinking of the playwright, to Gassner, seemed too much of an obvious presence in the play. Consequently, they came across as belabored and with a somewhat didactic quality.

Arthur M. Sampley in College English faulted Anderson for what he labeled the playwright's "oversimplification" which "mars Mary of Scotland. Mary Stuart is here romanticized until she becomes hardly a historical person at all; the real Mary was infinitely more complex . . . much more interesting."<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth also becomes distorted, according to Sampley's view: "Conversely, Elizabeth is transformed into a Machiavellian of quite impossible fiendishness . . . Moray and the Protestant lords are little more than stage villains."<sup>78</sup> The total effect was not tragedy, stated Sampley:



The play thus ceases in large measure to be a dramatization of life and becomes a romantic melodrama. In achieving clarity and eliminating complexity, Mr. Anderson has sacrificed that internal clash of personality which the greatest masters of drama have revealed.<sup>79</sup>

Because of this perceived lack of diversity in Mary's character, Sampley did not feel that she attains tragic stature: "Though Mary of Scotland is a brave and tender woman, she lacks the infinite variety which Shakespeare's Cleopatra has and which the real Mary Stuart likewise abundantly possessed."<sup>80</sup> Melodramatic simplification and a lack of complexity in the characters, stated Sampley, were the hallmarks of Mary of Scotland.

#### Summary

Scholars differed in their assessments of the trilogy plays as examples of tragedy. To some, Anderson reflected much of the despair and alienation of the twentieth century so evident in much writing and in theatre. "Circumstance" and "attrition" were used by two writers to explain Anderson's modern tragedy. According to these viewpoints, Anderson's characters were seen to struggle against outside and impersonal forces rather than combatting an internal weakness and undergoing a resultant self-recognition. Rather than the characters bringing tragedy to themselves, it was contended, tragedy is brought to them. One scholar stated that Anderson was a modern writer, but one who did keep to the old classical tragic forms. Another recognized some tragic elements, but the study of woman's response to situation was given primacy,

especially in relation to male counterparts. Still another scholar analyzed the issue of woman's superiority from a historical background.

The major fault attributed to Anderson in some scholarly commentary was a perceived inability to write tragedy. It was expressed that Anderson could attain the appearance of tragedy. However, on closer analysis, scholars thought Anderson could not sustain character with genuine self-recognition and a resulting spiritual/emotional release that they considered necessary hallmarks of tragedy. The scholarly consensus here was that Anderson's characters did not seem to be fully-dimensional; they appeared too theatrically manipulated in their actions by the playwright. Also, concern was expressed over characters being historically distorted due to the demands of dramatic structure.

#### Plot and Structure

Here the scholars often cited plays other than just the trilogy or else summarized their judgments in generalized commentary that named no specific plays. References to the trilogy plays were made, and the study will utilize these and some of the summarized judgments of scholars.

Some scholars gave brief descriptions of Anderson's skill in the basics of play construction. These scholars found Anderson as having possessed a wide-range of accomplishment in playwriting. Vincent Wall wrote: ". . . as a craftsman [Anderson] has written in

several different mediums [sic] ranging from prose realism to poetic tragedy."<sup>81</sup> Later in the same article Wall recounted Anderson's variety of accomplishments more specifically: "He has tried his hand at melodrama, realism, poetic tragedy, comedy farce, and comedy drama. He has had the courage to revive dramatic forms which have not been used successfully since the closing of theaters in 1642."<sup>82</sup> Thomas H. Dickinson also recalled Anderson's achievements in drama: "His plays run the gamut from the hard imaginative artistry of Elizabeth the Queen and Mary of Scotland, to folk drama, musical tragedies and domestic comedies."<sup>83</sup> Finally, Homer F. Woodbridge briefly discussed Anderson's attainments and felt that he had succeeded in one particular dramatic construction: "[Anderson] had experimented with the poetic drama, the realistic play, the melodramatic play, and the thesis play, and had gained conspicuous success in only one of the genres, the realistic."<sup>84</sup> Anderson's dexterity in dramatic construction was considered to be wide-ranging; he did not limit himself exclusively to any one dramatic form.

Woodbridge continued by discussing Anderson's development in play construction with the history plays: "[Anderson] learned to simplify and clarify his story, just because the materials with which he was dealing were so complex that severe simplification was necessary."<sup>85</sup> From this, Anderson had developed economy in plot and structure: "[Anderson] has written no more of those story plays overstuffed with situations; he has limited himself to fewer

situations, more fully developed."<sup>86</sup> In Woodbridge's analysis Anderson's play construction benefitted from economic writing and the avoidance of excessive historical detailing.

However, Anderson's plots would not satisfy everyone, stated Woodbridge, especially historians who would demand complete historical accuracy:

The historians, of course, are not satisfied with these history plays; but have they ever been satisfied with any good history plays? Like all romantic dramatists, Mr. Anderson is indifferent to minor anachronisms and inaccuracies. In more serious matters, too, Mr. Anderson feels at liberty to modify and interpret history as he chooses. So did Shakespeare, so does Mr. Shaw in our time. It is the playwright's prerogative and we can dismiss the objections of the historians as irrelevant.<sup>87</sup>

It was proper for all playwrights to be concerned with the demands of dramatic structure rather than to give complete subservience to historical detail; to Woodbridge the latter seemed secondary.

However, Woodbridge did acknowledge one historical fact that proved too large to be completely subdued by dramatic imperative:

[Elizabeth] is dramatically effective and poetically honest and sound, and the scenes between Elizabeth and Essex are firmly and strongly handled. The difficulty is that Mr. Anderson runs into a historical fact too well known for him to venture to change it--the wide difference in age between Elizabeth and Essex. This makes it hard to believe, as the play requires us to, in the genuineness of Essex's love of the Queen. Mr. Anderson's mistake perhaps was in idealizing the character of Essex, and making him much more honest and sincere than he was. He would have done better to show Essex as a brilliant adventurer whose love for the Queen was a pretense. Elizabeth's tragedy would then have been less theatrical but more real.<sup>88</sup>

Where the first play demonstrated some problems in coping with history in dramatic structure, Woodbridge believed Mary showed

Anderson's growth in the ability to handle the challenges posed by historical material to plot and structure:

Mary of Scotland is distinctly a finer and stronger piece of work . . . Mr. Anderson had learned one thing by the time he wrote Mary of Scotland which he never fully recognized before, the power of restraint. More than once in the play, when the situation might seem to justify a long and violent speech, he gives to the character concerned only a few telling words.<sup>89</sup>

Economy, then restraint, were the two strengths Woodbridge felt best exemplified Anderson's plot and structure in the history plays.

Anderson's ability grew even more with plays that followed the first two in the trilogy: "There is a gain . . . in the steadiness and sureness with which the story advances; the playwright seems now to have fully mastered the art of plotting."<sup>90</sup>

Arthur M. Sampley initially faulted Anderson for having written a "melodramatic plot" for his "formula of tragic weakness followed by self-discovery."<sup>91</sup> Although this seemed to have created some structural confusion in Anderson's work, to Sampley, Anderson's "formula" could be used to good effect:

. . . the formula, properly developed, is capable of producing plays of substantial worth, as a glance at Mr. Anderson's more notable efforts will reveal. The Aristotelian design, reveals, indeed, a quality of the sublime. In some of his plays Maxwell Anderson gives the promise of this grandeur, and in a few . . . his work represents not so much promise as fulfilment.<sup>92</sup>

When Anderson did fulfil Aristotelian standards, stated Sampley, his work could attain greatness. Among scholars cited here, Sampley's comment came the closest to negative analysis on Anderson's development of plot and structure.

## Summary

Anderson was credited with success as a technical craftsman due to his playwriting in a wide range of dramatic forms. With this background in a variety of accomplishments, Anderson created what scholars considered were the well-crafted trilogy plays. In the opinion of several scholars, these plays showed Anderson's best progression of technical expertise in play construction. Some allusion was made to Anderson's "Aristotelian" influence in plot and structure in the trilogy, but mostly in a brief and indirect manner. Anderson's main overall strengths exemplified in the trilogy plays, it was stated, were structural economy and a lack of complete reliance on exact historical detail. Anderson was seen instead as developing his own dramatic contexts with history, thus making his plays successful. Subsequently, it was judged, Anderson could create a believable historical and dramatic atmosphere in each of his plays. Except for some uncomfortable moments caused by historical circumstance, Anderson was judged to have served both his historical and dramatic demands well.

### Themes for the Modern Audience

The commentary by scholars on Anderson's thematic development was generally not extensive. Theme was not considered in the analyses of most scholars. Much of what was mentioned on theme was done in a passing manner, although four scholars later in this section will be seen to have been exceptions.

Homer E. Woodbridge very briefly mentioned Anderson's thematic development in his verse dramas. Woodbridge thought Anderson's intention was: ". . . the passionate desire to treat high and difficult themes in the manner they deserve."<sup>93</sup> Another all-encompassing, but non-specific, reference came from William E. Taylor: "[Anderson] wrote plays that dealt with what he believed were the permanent, the universal themes."<sup>94</sup> Woodbridge and Taylor apparently assumed that others knew what "high and difficult" and "permanent . . . universal" themes were, as they did not name them.

Other scholars did express the ideas that they thought Anderson was attempting to convey. Vincent Wall referred to Elizabeth in terms of Anderson's belief in some higher purpose in man: "In this play . . . Anderson gives fuller voice to his conviction that there is in men some dim, indestructible belief that whatever the conduct of the rat-men may be, a lost cause is better than no cause at all."<sup>95</sup> The specific theme Wall mentioned was the role of temporal power in characters' fates: ". . . what Anderson is essentially trying to do is dramatize the destroying power of power. It is a pitch that defiles all who touch it. It brings about the destruction of the Earl of Essex, of Mary of Scotland."<sup>96</sup> Wall stated that Anderson showed power to be a corrosive and a destroying element to the characters portrayed.

John Gassner thought Anderson was not overt in developing theme: "Anderson . . . exercised considerable caution by encroaching upon themes gradually."<sup>97</sup> These themes were

". . . bitter commentary on political chicanery."<sup>98</sup> Thomas H. Dickinson also found political themes in the trilogy plays: "All are concerned with problems of government. In these plays we find a veritable catalogue of the arts and crafts that enter into the practice of the civic life on its higher planes."<sup>99</sup> Government affects those characters who are to rule; this was the central concern of Anderson's historical plays and characters: "One of the first issues faced by the man or woman who would serve as agent for the purposes of the state concerns the completeness of the identification of private interest and public function."<sup>100</sup> Temporal power decided the characters' fates. Dickinson explained the relevancy of that theme in the more contemporary experience:

It is when we come to the question, "What is truth?" that we reach the universal dilemma in the jungle of statecraft. It can be said for Anderson that the . . . plays mentioned are storehouses of insights and example into the complexities of the very modern struggle of freedom and power, of selfishness and otherness.<sup>101</sup>

Henry G. Lee also examined Anderson's theme of temporal power in the trilogy:

[Anderson's] generalized theme was the callousness which inevitably accompanies political power.

Elizabeth the Queen was followed by a long line of romantic history plays in verse with generalized themes. Power lust was again explored in Mary of Scotland (1933); and Anne of the Thousand Days (1948) completed a Tudor trilogy.<sup>102</sup>

Another, mentioning power as a theme, was Winifred L. Dusenbury in Modern Drama, who stated that political power was part of an ongoing process:



In Elizabeth the Queen and in Mary of Scotland, he evinces an understanding of the ancient process of the struggle for power which caused Shakespeare to write one history play after another, illustrating the murder of a king, the rise of a new, the death of that king, and the rise of a new in a never-ending cycle.<sup>103</sup>

Dusenbury emphasized the transitory nature of power to which Anderson's characters were subjected. To this scholar, it represented a common theme in Anderson's work.

Arthur Tees took a different approach in analyzing theme in Anderson's work. His plays, Tees explained, portrayed a corruption of power and its direct result: "Legal injustice and poetic justice are the rule in Anderson's plays."<sup>104</sup> Throughout his article Tees discussed the idea of judicial perversion. Anne, for one, is a victim of injustice:

In Anne of the Thousand Days (1948) the Queen is tried for adultery. She is convicted on the testimony of Smeaton who perjures himself under torture. This injustice rebounds on the king, however, for having heard Smeaton's testimony, Henry wonders if it might be true after all. To taunt him, Anne corroborates Smeaton's story, forcing Henry to question the witness further until it becomes obvious that Smeaton is lying. Nevertheless, an innocent victim is sentenced to die in a miscarriage of courtroom justice.<sup>105</sup>

Anne's attainment of eventual poetic justice is at the expense of the corrupting temporal power that was wielded by Henry. Tees and the other scholars cited here saw Anderson's theme of political power as corruption.

### Summary

Theme in the trilogy was not discussed at as great a length or in as much detail by scholars as was Anderson's verse, character, and plot and structure development. A few scholars made vague overall references about Anderson's use of noble and unnamed themes that assumed readers' knowledge of their identity.

Scholars who were specific in their comments explained Anderson's thematic development in terms of political power in government and statecraft, that finally manifests itself in corruption. The characters in all the plays, went this scholarly consensus, are in some way affected by and suffer from corrupt political power. Lives are lost, people are tortured, and justice is mocked because of political machinations and manipulation of the political process. One scholar found some good above the overall pessimistic outlooks cited by most writers: although corruption seemingly wins, poetic justice is attained by one character at the expense of that corruption.

### Summary and Conclusions on Chapter IV

Anderson's dramatic verse was very strongly endorsed by scholars who liked the language of his plays. The verse Anderson had composed was noted for its simplicity of style and lack of ornateness. This was attributed to an uncomplicated verse technique that was discussed. Scholars thought that the verse was expressive and that it revived interest in verse drama for the modern stage.

Although he wrote verse, Anderson's language was judged not to be esoteric; therefore, it was understandable to a general theatre audience. A majority of scholars expressed a great admiration for Anderson's work and felt that he had created a viable verse drama in his own unique style. Other scholars felt that Anderson tried too hard to appear literate; this gave the verse a false quality.

Dramatic verse in general, and Anderson's in particular, was found to be archaic and to have no place in the modern theatre. Anderson was perceived as wasting his playwriting talents on an irrelevant dramatic form. His writing of dramatic verse only reinforced its old stereotypes, according to this viewpoint. Scholars endorsing his verse came very close to what Anderson had expressed. In the dramatic theory, Anderson stated that the modern theatre needed the verse drama. This became one of his central contentions. Anderson and some of his scholarly critics operated on the same premise: there was a place for the verse drama on the modern stage.

Character development and tragedy, specifically as Anderson had created them, garnered the most commentary from scholars and indicated where scholars most often disagreed among themselves. It was established by scholars that Anderson wrote tragedy. The tragedy as written did not, however, mean that it necessarily was of the Aristotelian genre. Scholars stated that "circumstance" tragedy and "attrition" tragedy represented a "modern" tragic form that Anderson had written. Still other scholars found tragedy a secondary element in the analysis of character development. Rather, the actions,

motivations, and historical background, elements aside from tragedy, were discussed. In the end, Aristotelian tragic development was separately and indirectly recognized in only a few comments.

Opposing scholars specifically stated that Anderson had failed in writing tragedy. Anderson was capable of attaining the appearance of tragedy, they wrote; but upon closer examination his characters did not possess tragic stature. Either the playwright's clumsy hand seemed to force the characters' actions or melodrama resulted.

Scholars did find tragedy, but the consensus among themselves was divergent as to what kind Anderson had written.

With scholars who analyzed character development, a change was evident. Earlier scholarly articles had considerable comment about what sort of tragedy Anderson had written. The issue of tragedy diminished in the later articles, scholars tended to discuss and analyze the characters less on the significance of their tragic suffering. Topics such as Elizabeth's, Mary's, and Anne's feminine superiority and their roles in history were discussed by scholars who were not so interested in tragic dimension.

Scholarly commentary on plot and structure had several citations of Anderson's many accomplishments in various dramatic forms. Because of this wide range of plot and structural elements, Anderson earned much favorable criticism by scholars. Scholars stated that Anderson wrote strong plots that moved the plays forward in a simple and direct manner. Anderson, it was stated, did not insert confusing twists and turns of plot which might slow down the dramatic

action. Some structural distortion was caused by historical detail; however, this was a minor point. Anderson was very brief about plot and structure development in his theory; however, he did imply that propter hoc construction was best for playwriting. One reference was made in the scholarly criticism about Anderson's Aristotelian design in one of the plays. Scholars' propensity for Aristotelian construction, as briefly advocated by Anderson, was proven indirectly by their endorsement of well-made plot and structural development in the trilogy.

Scholars tended to mention theme briefly in comparison to the amount of analysis they gave to verse, character, and plot/structure. Except for scholars who made vague references to theme, specific thematic identification centered exclusively on temporal power and some manifestation of it. Scholars therefore touched upon the concern about theme represented by the struggle of good and evil that Anderson previously discussed.

Both Anderson and some of his scholarly critics identified closely with the idea of strong central themes for specific plays. Anderson, however, took a larger view about the overall need for effective themes for drama in general. Scholars did not address this point.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Harlan Hatcher, "Drama in Verse: Anderson, Eliot, MacLeish," English Journal 25 (January 1936), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Philip Stevenson, "Maxwell Anderson: Thursday's Child," New Theatre, 31 September 1936, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Woodbury Sedgwick, "Maxwell Anderson," Stage, October 1936, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Homer E. Woodbridge, "Maxwell Anderson," South Atlantic Quarterly, 44 (January 1945), p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Henry G. Lee, "Maxwell Anderson's Impact on the Theatre," North Dakota Quarterly 25 (Spring 1957), p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>21</sup>William E. Taylor, "Maxwell Anderson: Traditionalist in a Theatre of Change," Modern American Drama: Essays in Criticism (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards Inc., 1968), p. 56.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Vincent Wall, "Maxwell Anderson: The Last Anarchist," Sewanee Review Quarterly 49 (July-September 1941), p. 340.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. p. 348.

<sup>26</sup>John Gassner, "Anchors Aweigh: Maxwell Anderson and Tennessee Williams," Theatre Time 1 (Spring 1949), p. 8.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Edmund Wilson, "Prize-Winning Blank Verse," New Republic, 23 June 1937, p. 194.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Donna Gerstenberger, "Verse Drama in America," Modern Drama 6 (December 1963), pp. 316-317.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Herbert Ellsworth Childs, "Playgoer's Playwright: Maxwell Anderson," English Journal 26 (June 1938), p. 481.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 483.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Harold H. Watts, "Maxwell Anderson: The Tragedy of Attrition," College English 4 (January 1943), p. 221.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>50</sup>Taylor, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Wall, op. cit., p. 343.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Arthur T. Tees, "Maxwell Anderson's Liberated Women," North Dakota Quarterly 42 (Spring 1974), p. 53.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-57.



<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 57-58.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>70</sup>Thomas H. Dickinson, "The Theatre of Maxwell Anderson,"  
Theatre Time 2 (Spring 1950), p. 94.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>73</sup>Allan G. Halline, "Maxwell Anderson's Dramatic Theory,"  
American Literature 16 (May 1944), p. 72.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-73.

<sup>75</sup>Gassner, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>77</sup>Arthur M. Sampley, "Theory and Practice in Maxwell  
Anderson's Poetic Tragedy," College English 5 (May 1944), p. 413.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 413-414.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 414.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Wall, op. cit., p. 340.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>83</sup>Dickinson, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>84</sup>Woodbridge, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 80-81.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

- <sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 62.
- <sup>90</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup>Sampley, op. cit. p. 414.
- <sup>92</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>93</sup>Woodbridge, p. 68.
- <sup>94</sup>Taylor, p. 57.
- <sup>95</sup>Wall, p. 356.
- <sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 364.
- <sup>97</sup>Gassner, p. 8.
- <sup>98</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>99</sup>Dickinson, p. 95.
- <sup>100</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>101</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>102</sup>Lee, op. cit., p. 50.
- <sup>103</sup>Winifred L. Dusenbury, "Myth in American Drama Between the Wars," Modern Drama 6 (December 1963), p. 297.
- <sup>104</sup>Arthur T. Tees, "Legal and Poetic Justice in Maxwell Anderson's Plays," North Dakota Quarterly 38 (Winter 1970), p. 25.
- <sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

## CHAPTER V

### COMPARISONS, CONTRASTS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Comparisons and Contrasts Among Reviewers, Scholars and Anderson's Theory

##### Poetry for the Modern Audience

Anderson had more success among scholars than with reviewers in the critical reception of his dramatic verse. Reviewers were either very guarded or openly dissatisfied with Anderson's writing. Scholars, on the other hand, reacted very favorably. The need for a verse drama in modern theatre was recognized by scholars, but this was not the case with most reviewers. The analyses of the verse by scholars went deeper than that of reviewers, but scholarly reception to the verse had its hostile side as well. To these scholars the verse appeared, at best, not nobly inspired and more an academic exercise, or, at worst, archaic and useless in the modern theatre.

Anderson expressed the need for verse drama in modern theatre. Some scholars also expressed this need and found Anderson's verse a help in reviving this dramatic form. Among reviewers, the negative reception, though a minority view, was strong. Anderson's efforts were, concluded both reviewers and scholars, not enough to begin the "golden age" in verse that Anderson wanted.

Tragedy--Aristotelian Influences on  
Anderson's Concepts of Character,  
Plot and Structure

In analyzing Anderson's characters, historical aspects and dramatic elements other than tragic definition seemed to count more among the reviewers. Some reviewers proved dissatisfied with the characters because historical tragedy seemed irrelevant in the modern age. Scholars stated that Anderson had created a modern tragedy for the modern theatre. However, scholars with a negative view faulted Anderson for having not written tragedy.

Anderson wrote that he wished to see a resurgent tragedy based on the precepts of Aristotle's Poetics. The reception of reviewers and scholars to Anderson's tragic vision was varied. Reviewers either refused to accept the works as tragedy or stated that tragedy as a form was not relevant to the times. Scholars stated that Anderson had written tragedy, but their definition of tragedy was not limited exclusively to the classical. Both reviewers and scholars wrote more about the character development in the plays than of the other aspects of Anderson's playwriting. In either case, the perception of critics concerning the plays differed from Anderson's intentions as he set them down in his theory.

Most critical appraisal noted that the plot and structural elements of the trilogy plays had much that was commendable. Reviewers and scholars recognized the well-crafted construction of Anderson's three plays. Anderson's plays were noted for telling their stories simply, clearly, and without adornment. Scholars went

beyond merely stating that the trilogy plays were well-crafted. Anderson's ability to write in dramatic forms other than verse was seen as an asset to his dramatic construction skills. This attested to Anderson's growth as a playwright. However, some reviewers mentioned that there was an absence of tragic inevitability in the three plays. Another complaint was the perceived inability of Anderson to maintain the dramatic intensity from earlier to later scenes. Condensing the historical material was deemed by some to cause problems for Anderson; however, other scholars noted that the loss of some historical elements was not really a drawback. Rather, the critics held that the dramatic context was more important than complete historical accuracy. Along with Anderson, reviewers and scholars favored the Aristotelian propter hoc plot and structural development. Although such explicit expression of this theory came from neither Anderson nor his critics, its application illustrates the pervasive influence of Aristotle on playwriting and dramatic criticism.

#### Themes for the Modern Audience

In comparison to their analyses of verse and character development, reviewers and scholars gave relatively little attention to theme. Those reviewers and scholars who commented on theme tended toward short comments and cursory judgments. Some critics mentioned "theme" and failed to disclose what they determined it to be. However, within both groups of critics, the opinion as to what the

themes of the plays were came to unanimity or close to it. Reviewers thought love was the primary theme with temporal power as a secondary one. Scholars stated that temporal power was the central theme in the plays, and the scholars tended toward longer discussions about theme than did their reviewer counterparts. Discussion of temporal power touched upon the concern of good and evil that Anderson mentioned should be a part of thematic development.

#### Final Conclusions

Maxwell Anderson's announced goal was to see verse tragedy develop, grow, and become an accepted convention in the modern American theatre. Anderson was going against an entrenched tradition of prose in the theatre of his time where melodramas, comedies, and musicals were the dominant output of most dramatists.

Reviewers took the most visible line of overall resistance to Anderson's three verse plays as verse tragedies. As a whole, what success reviewers saw in the trilogy was not attributed to Anderson's abilities as a poet or tragedian. Instead, the plays were seen to be good because of the use of historical material and exciting story lines with romantic characters in interesting settings. Because reviewers were writing from memory of a performance after a dash to the typewriter, a possibility exists that such points as the beauty of the verse and the tragic fates of characters were overlooked in favor of more obvious theatrical elements. In

most reviews, the verse was not thought to be particularly outstanding nor the characters tragic. Although the plays were considered to be well-written, the reviewers either failed to detect or to consider sufficiently important the qualities that Anderson discussed in his theory.

Anderson came from an intellectual background and had taught English literature. He became a contributor to several publications by writing poetry and book reviews for magazines and newspapers. Eventually, Anderson became a playwright. Having studied and taught the great masters of poetry and literature to students, Anderson possessed a deep appreciation for what those writers had accomplished. As revealed in his dramatic theory, Anderson was very dissatisfied with twentieth century writing. Anderson aspired to the sublime in writing verse tragedy for the modern stage.

Reviewers probably did not share Anderson's enthusiasm for the nobility of poetry and tragic suffering; or, if they did, they realized that most of their readers and most modern playgoers did not. Scholars, on the other hand, were intellectuals and professors of literature as were many of their readers. They shared Anderson's background and were, no doubt, more attuned to what Anderson was attempting to accomplish.

Anderson's relationship with his reviewer and scholarly critics earned him admirers, detractors, and observers with more moderate viewpoints concerning his playwriting. To his critics, Anderson was interesting because he was a self-proclaimed verse

dramatist who attempted to write tragedy along Aristotelian guidelines for a mass theatre audience. This made him an exception to contemporary American playwrights. Anderson's verse and his tragic characters elicited much commentary and strong argument. Reviewer criticism obviously antagonized Anderson at times: he published two essays that attacked what he perceived to be their lack of careful scrutiny and exclusive power of determination over the success of a play or its demise on the stage. Anderson publicly aired the frustration most writers have experienced over critical reception of their work; yet he did not reject all criticism--scholarly criticism was not at issue in his responses.

The impact Anderson had on theatre was more apparent during his playwriting years than subsequently. The advent of a new verse play by Anderson always caught the attention of critics and audiences alike. All of the trilogy plays were, in the main, successful with the critics and even more so with audiences. Each of the plays had long runs. Reviewers proved not to be the serious determinant to failure that Anderson assumed. Still, reviewers were often harsher in their criticism than were scholars overall; they also seemed less inclined to value the theoretical elements that Anderson revered. Anderson failed to establish a verse tradition in modern American theatre. Those reviewers who received Anderson's efforts with only luke warm approval should perhaps bear a measure of the burden for this failure. Anderson's legacy of verse drama nonetheless constitutes nearly the whole of plays which may be labeled



"verse drama" or "verse tragedy" written for the twentieth century American theatre. Except for the modestly received few works of T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry, no verse plays were as widely received by American critics and audiences as were those of Anderson. The theatre for which Anderson wrote, however, did not encourage verse or tragic drama--the combination of a prose tradition, the hostility that much of the reviewer criticism expressed for his verse, plus the lack of consideration concerning the trilogy's tragic nature reflected an unwillingness to have verse tragedy thrive.

The trilogy, the other verse plays, and the balance of Anderson's work were no small achievement for one playwright. Anderson was a major presence in the theatre of his day and his plays continue to cause discussion among those interested in American theatre. Whether or not he was a great poet and tragedian, Maxwell Anderson proved that he was an accomplished man of the theatre and a very successful writer of plays, all of which earned him the respect, if not the complete acceptance and encouragement, of most theatre critics and audiences.

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