

THE RECOGNITION SCENE IN MAXWELL
ANDERSON'S POETIC DRAMAS OF THE
THIRTIES

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by
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Joan Reynolds Harris entitled "The Recognition Scene in Maxwell Anderson's Poetic Dramas of the Thirties." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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Accepted for the
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A virtual literary revival occurred in America in the period between the wars. During this time American drama shared the power and popularity of the other genres and became a widely recognized vehicle for national expression. Although Eugene O'Neill soon became the dominant figure on the American scene, somewhat later Maxwell Anderson attained a position second only to O'Neill's. In fact, some believe that Anderson actually dominated the theatre of the 1930's.¹ He seemed to capture the more serious mood of that decade and his successes were rewarded with two New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards and a Pulitzer Prize.

Even though much of Anderson's work contained an element of social protest, his range was much broader than that of the strictly "social theatre" playwrights of that decade. While he wrote about social problems such as the struggle for political power, the nature of revolution, and the need for racial tolerance, as well as about such topics as the Spanish Civil War, man defying the machine, and the Sacco-Vanzetti case of the twenties, he also experimented extensively with the various types of plays and practically

¹Alfred S. Shivers, Maxwell Anderson (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 30.

all of the avant-garde theatrical devices.² In his pragmatic search for effective drama Anderson challenged the prosaic leftist stage concerned primarily with issues and turned to a poetic theatre dedicated to the exaltation of man's spirit.

After a decade of experience in writing and studying no fewer than nine full-length and two shorter serious verse plays, in 1939 Anderson published a collection of essays, The Essence of Tragedy and Other Footnotes and Papers, in which he turned critic and enunciated his own theory of serious drama. With that publication he became the only American dramatist to date to issue such a systematic critical approach.³ In these essays he reveals himself to be a traditionalist in his views about certain elements in the creation of drama. However, since the essays followed a decade in which Anderson re-discovered the effectiveness of the rules of the past through experimentation with their various elements, it should not follow that his specific formula will apply perfectly to every play written during this time. The focus of this study is Anderson's treatment of one important dramatic element, the recognition scene,

² John Gassner, The Theatre in Our Times: A Survey of the Men, Materials and Movements in the Modern Theatre (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1954), p. 236.

³ Shivers, p. 31.

in his verse dramas of the thirties, the period during which he sought to define its importance to the effectiveness of serious drama.

Aristotle described the importance of recognition to the plot of the drama over two thousand years ago. He stated that it is simply a "shift from ignorance to awareness."⁴ Anderson explains in "The Essence of Tragedy" that after studying The Poetics and probing into the memorable works of Shakespeare as well as those of the modern theatre, he became convinced that even though "modern recognition scenes are subtler and harder to find, they are none the less [sic] present in the plays we choose to remember."⁵ He defines the recognition scene in the modern play as one in which the main character discovers "some element in his environment or in his own soul of which he has not been aware--or which he has not taken sufficiently into account."⁶ He then provides further explanation of his formula for serious drama:

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

⁴Aristotle, Poetics, trans. with intro. and notes by Gerald F. Else (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 36.

⁵Maxwell Anderson, "The Essence of Tragedy" in The Essence of Tragedy and Other Footnotes and Papers (Washington, D.C.: Anderson House, 1939), p. 6.

⁶Ibid., p. 6.

completely alters his course of action. The leading character, let me say again, must make the discovery; it must affect him emotionally; and it must alter his direction in the play.⁷

Several critics have studied the various aspects of Anderson's dramatic theory. A few have judged specific plays against his theories. Others have attempted a broader analysis. Gassner discusses Anderson's theories as "Romantic Aristotelianism" and disagrees with him on the primary purpose of the recognition scene. Gassner contends that the "fundamental enlightenment must be for the audience, whether or not the character achieves it for himself. . . ."⁸ He uses no in-depth studies of specific Anderson plays. Mabel Driscoll Bailey makes an attempt to examine Anderson's theories in some of his plays in her published doctoral dissertation; but since she is mainly interested in the examination of the theme play in its modern setting, she provides only limited insight into Anderson's use of the recognition scene.⁹ A recently published book by Alfred S. Shivers explains Anderson's dramatic theories and practices; and although occasionally quite perceptive in his discussions of the recognition scene, his book is too all-inclusive as a biographical-critical-analytical study to do justice to any

⁷Ibid., p. 7.

⁸Gassner, p. 74.

⁹Mabel Driscoll Bailey, Maxwell Anderson: The Playwright as Prophet (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1957).

one idea.¹⁰ In his illuminating essay, "Theory and Practice in Maxwell Anderson's Poetic Tragedies," Arthur Sampley attempts to prove that various other elements are more important in successful drama than a formula, and he tends to concentrate on numerous weaknesses in the plays. At times he mentions the recognition scene but does not try to analyze its effectiveness in all of the dramas of the

period.¹¹ An interesting essay by Allan G. Halline seeks to analyze Anderson's dramatic theory and to view it in relation to several of his dramas. He tries to show that they are consistent with Anderson's theory in the fundamentals of structure and philosophy. He also recognizes the fact that Anderson believed his basic theory could be applied to all serious plays, not just the tragedies. Since Halline was absorbed in the entire Anderson formula, he did not do an extensive study on any one dramatic element; however, he does provide valuable insight into the structure of several plays.¹²

Although critics have analyzed Anderson's dramatic theories in depth, they have not addressed themselves to a

¹⁰Shivers.

¹¹Arthur M. Sampley, "Theory and Practice in Maxwell Anderson's Poetic Tragedies," College English, V (May, 1944), 412-18.

¹²Allan G. Halline, "Maxwell Anderson's Dramatic Theory," American Literature, XVI (May, 1944), 63-81.

detailed discussion of the recognition scene and its effect on the central character in his serious verse plays of the 1930's, the period just prior to the publication of his dramatic theories. Thus, this discussion will be an attempt to determine the type of recognition which occurs in each play. It will focus on whether the protagonist becomes aware of some element from his environment or whether he discovers something within himself which he has not previously understood. In addition, the discussion will show the effect this awareness has on the character's course of action. It is not the focus of this study to be judgmental as to the merits involved in this process but to elucidate the ways in which Anderson used this important dramatic device during this experimental period.

The one verse play written during this period which does not lend itself to this discussion is Anderson's short play, The Feast of Ortolans.¹³ In this play, which is set on the eve of the French Revolution, a group of intellectuals and a few representatives of the aristocracy are seated about the dinner table awaiting the serving of the feast of ortolans. Since the ortolans are birds caught in nets and fattened in the dark, the ritual of the feast is, of course,

¹³Citations from the plays in the text are to Maxwell Anderson, Eleven Verse Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., by arrangement with Anderson House, 1940). Note: Each play in this collection is numbered separately.

symbolic of the exploitation of the French peasants of that time. Although the play produces an ironic effect as the dinner companions converse merrily while on the verge of what the audience realizes to be their impending doom, the characters are not truly sufficiently ignorant of what is about to happen in the country. They are basically a group of intellectual liberals who are proud of their roles in promoting the revolution. Of course, they do have their blind side; they do not expect the revolution to be such an all-encompassing bloody purge. Even though the group is warned and at the end of the play the host is killed (off stage), there is never any real understanding of the magnitude of the situation on the part of the group. In this play Anderson provides an interesting concept with no leading character and no recognition scene.

With Elizabeth the Queen Anderson created a fascinatingly complex leading character. In this play Queen Elizabeth is an older woman passionately in love with an ambitious younger man. Her lover Essex, not content to be merely a queen's companion, is lured into a disastrous trap in Ireland by jealous plotters in the queen's council. Before he leaves, Elizabeth gives him her father's ring and tells him that if he should ever need to present it to her, she will forgive him anything. Victims of intrigue, both Elizabeth and Essex are led to believe the worst of each other in this power struggle until finally he returns home

at her request. He refuses, however, to disband his army and actually seizes the palace. Although Elizabeth and Essex soon realize the treachery which has transpired, it is too late; for they have both also realized that power stands between them.

Recognition occurs for Elizabeth during the palace scene. Knowing that Essex is more ambitious than ever but that he still loves her, she tricks him by promising a joint rulership, and he then dismisses his palace guard. During this scene she realizes that her power is more important to her than love and that she cannot have both. Although it costs her dearly in emotional anguish later, at that time Elizabeth very coldly has Essex placed under arrest and informs him:

I have ruled England a long time, my Essex,
And I have found that he who would rule must be
Quite friendless, without mercy, without love.
(Elizabeth the Queen II,iii,
p. 106)

During that scene Elizabeth becomes aware of the strength of the forces within her which will not allow her to share her power. The tendency to distrust all those around her, even those whom she loves, is re-enforced. She agonizes over her decision to have Essex killed, and his acceptance of death rather than his begging for forgiveness torments her as she awaits the day of his execution. She appears to waver at times and to doubt herself; but since the recognition scene, she has realized the awful result of

her love for power. As she tells Sir Robert Cecil,

The snake-in-the-grass
Endures, and those who are noble, free of soul,
Valiant and admirable . . . they go down in the
prime,
Always they go down. . . .

To the end
Of time it will be so . . . the rats inherit the
earth.

(Elizabeth the Queen III, p. 121)

Finally, at the eleventh hour she sends for Essex and urges him to give her the ring; but he admits that if he were free, he would only try again to usurp her power. She then proclaims that her throne is all she has and tells him indignantly in her divine-right manner:

Why, who am I
To stand here paltering with a rebel noble!
I am Elizabeth, daughter of a king,
The queen of England, and you are my subject!
What does this mean, you standing here eye to eye
With me, your liege? You whom I made, and gave
All that you have, you, an upstart, defying
Me to grant pardon, lest you should sweep me
from power
And take my place from me? I tell you if
Christ his blood
Ran streaming from the heavens for a sign
That I should hold my hand you'd die for this,
You pretender to a throne upon which you have
No claim, you pretender to a heart, who have been
Hollow and heartless and faithless to the end!
(Elizabeth the Queen III, pp. 128-29)

Elizabeth's discovery does not make her a better person, only a more aware one. In fact, it is Essex who is ennobled and Elizabeth who becomes a tired bitter woman who realizes that she will become a "queen of emptiness and death. . . ." (p. 130).

In Night Over Taos Anderson presents another type of power struggle, but this time he sets it in the 1840's during the conflict between the Spanish in the Southwest and the United States government. Taos, which is located in what is now New Mexico, is one of the last remnants of the old-world Spanish settlements. Even though Mexico has become a republic and the United States has taken over that area, the people of Taos are determined never to surrender to the "demon" from the North. The sixty-year-old autocratic ruler of Taos is the protagonist, Pablo Montoya. He is devoted to preserving the old customs and traditions which center around the master/peon relationship. The women in this society have few rights; the master can at any time decide he prefers a younger woman and simply put his other wife aside. Pablo is a master steeped in these traditions and determined to preserve this way of life.

The priest Martinez, who is in a position to observe the entire society and to feel its heartbeat, says of Pablo:

His father was lord of life and death before him, and he's been a god so long here in the valley that he thinks he's a god in fact. That's his strength, too, though it sometimes makes him a fool.

(Night Over Taos I, p. 13)

At the beginning of the action the masters have just returned from a disastrous battle with the Northerners which saw many of the people of Taos caught in an ambush. It is believed that Pablo is also dead on the mountain and

the fate of the leaderless group is uncertain. Pablo finally makes his way home, however, and finds that his sons have betrayed him. One is responsible for the massacre and the other is in love with the beautiful young Diana who is soon to become Pablo's wife. He immediately undertakes the task of reassuring everyone that nothing has changed or ever will change in Taos. He tells them:

We come of an old, proud race,
From that part of the earth where the blood
 runs hot, and the hearts
Of men are resentful of insult. We are either
 lords
And masters of ourselves, or else we die.

 Oh, brothers in blood,
If you are proud, take pride now in what we are!
It is said that Spain has abandoned us here,
 that we live
Cut off from allegiance . . . under an ancient
 banner
That's lost its meaning . . . but Spain has never
 gone back!

 She has ruled so long,
That they are a race of children . . . and their plans
Are a child's plans, playing with sticks and mud.
 We have never
Gone back, our people . . . we never will!
 (Night Over Taos I, pp. 57-58)

The priest, who has a printing press and has been teaching the servant class to read, urges Pablo to initiate some gradual changes and perhaps even give the people the franchise. He sees this as an alternative; but Pablo replies indignantly:

I fight the north
Because I despise what it stands for! Why should
 they think
About government, these peons? They're happier

With someone thinking for them! Why should the
 young
 Take rank above their elders?

.
 All rule is based on fear
 On fear and love . . . but when they know too much
 They neither fear you nor love you! Teach them
 too much
 And you tear your empire down, and what you have
 left
 Is what there was before there were empires!
 (Night Over Taos II, pp. 76-77)

Pablo tries to defend the old ways but recognizes somewhat later that his world is falling apart and cannot survive in its present form. After he has killed his traitorous son and is preparing to kill the young son and Diana, he finally hears his son proclaim in lines somewhat reminiscent of the Essex reply to Elizabeth that he will forever be a rebel at heart and yearn to do things his way. Pablo then realizes that forces beyond his control will eventually be predominant in Taos and that the world he knows will come to an end. With awareness at last he says:

I'm old and alone, and my people fall away,
 And the race is old and nerveless. The village
 is eaten
 With doubt of me and my purpose. They're all
 decayed
 Under the skin.

.
 Our race is done.
 The Spanish blood runs thin. Spain has gone down,
 And Taos, a little island of things that were,
 Sinks among things that are.
 (Night Over Taos III, pp. 130-32)

After the recognition scene, Pablo very quickly (in fact, almost implausibly for his character) changes his course of action and commits suicide, leaving the future of

Taos in the hands of the more progressive. It is difficult to credit his suicide, however, to a more generous nature. It appears to be the result of a pride which cannot cope with the new order.

Anderson is again concerned with the cycles of history in his difficult-to-classify (comedy, fantasy, satire, serious drama, or melodrama) play, High Tor. The plot is a familiar one. The protagonist, Van Van Dorn, is an individualistic young man of Dutch descent who owns a small mountain on the upper Hudson. He is content to shun conventional employment and live from nature's bounty on his mountain. His beloved mountain, however, is in danger of being taken over by a company which wants to use the rock and leave only a facade facing the river. Van Dorn represents the natural man resisting the mechanistic age.

Inevitable as it seems, Van Dorn resists valiantly until he spends part of the night with a lovely ghost girl Lise who has been marooned on the mountain for centuries with a crew of Dutch sailors. Van Dorn and Lise are both, of course, trying to cling to a reality which is slipping away from them. She exists only in the world of shadow. She tells Van Dorn that she and the crew "have clung/ beyond our place and time, on into a world/ unreal as sleep . . ."

(II,ii,p. 103).

Two external forces contribute to Van Dorn's recognition. One is, of course, his involvement with the lovely

Lise. The second is his contact with the last surviving Indian on the mountain. He too is a remnant of a past about to fade forever from that area. At the end of Act II Van Dorn recognizes his position and says:

Maybe I'm ghost myself
 trying to hold an age back with my hands;
 maybe we're all the same, these ghosts of Dutchmen
 and one poor superannuated Indian
 and one last hunter, clinging to his land
 because he's always had it. Like a wasp
 that tries to build a nest above your door--
 and when you brush it down he builds again,
 then when you brush it down he builds again--
 but after a while you get him.

(High Tor II,ii,p. 113)

The Indian re-enforces Van Dorn's discovery as he relates what the Indian sachems had said to him:

Our god is now the setting sun,
 and we must follow it. For other races,
 out of the east, will live here in their time,
 one following another. Each will build
 its cities, and its monuments to gods
 we dare not worship. Some will come with ships,
 and some with wings, and each will desecrate
 the altars of the people overthrown,
 but none will live forever. Each will live
 its little time, and fly before the feet
 of those who follow after.

(High Tor III, pp. 127-28)

Van Dorn's recognition of his inability to preserve the past by clinging to its forms changes his course of action somewhat since he agrees to sell, with certain provisions, his beloved High Tor. There is no evident amelioration of character, however, for he resolves simply to go farther west to a new frontier.

In Valley Forge Anderson once again treats a historical event which deals with a drastic change in the affairs of men. This time he chooses the awful winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge; and, of course, George Washington is the protagonist. During this terrible winter when Washington's men are without even the remnants of suitable food and clothing to survive, much less wage war, Anderson portrays Washington as an idealistic, yet practical, man wavering between his idealism and his perception of the reality of the situation.

Although Washington began the separation effort as an interesting possibility for him militarily, he has come to truly believe in this new beginning for mankind. He tells his men:

What I fight for now is a dream, a mirage, perhaps, something that's never been on this earth since men first worked it with their hands, something that's never existed and will never exist unless we can make it and put it here--the right of free-born men to govern themselves in their own way.

(Valley Forge I,iii,pp. 23-24)

Yet during this desperate time when his men are dying and deserting, he begins to waver and considers whether or not the revolution is truly over and whether it will make any difference if his army is able to hold on until spring. He is encouraged by Lafayette's vision of man in the new world:

This world
 you have cut from a wilderness, is a new world,
 brighter
 with sun in summer, colder with winter cold
 than the world I knew. The air's strange-sharp,
 the voice
 rings here with a hard ring. I find no man
 but looks you in the eye and says his thought
 in your teeth, and means it. This was not known
 before
 on this star we inhabit. Europe has thirty
 kings
 and a hundred million slaves. But here in this
 land
 each man's a king, and walks like a king, each
 woman
 bears herself regally, like a queen. You will
 find
 this is not easy to throw away.

.
 Not since Prometheus
 drew the gods' fires in heaven and left them cold
 to bring fire down to men, there's been no action
 better worth risk of stapling to the rocks
 with vulture at your liver, than your defiance
 of Hanoverian kings!

(Valley Forge I,iii,pp. 64-66)

Washington's resolve is then strengthened; and he concludes
 at this point that even though he realistically should dis-
 band his army and forfeit his cause, he will continue to
 make his stand.

Washington's resolve is soon tested. He learns, in
 the first of two recognition scenes in this play, that he
 does not have the support of the government, which has been
 deliberately withholding the food and supplies from his
 army. Since he realizes that to many the war effort is only
 a financial endeavor, he becomes disillusioned and frustrated
 and finally decides to abandon his dream. He concludes:

I've been the fool!

It began to get into my blood, this crusading zeal
 pumped up by the counter-jumpers to fill their
 tills
 and edge out competition!

I've given myself
 to a footless insurrection, drained out my blood
 on a mock heroic altar
 (Valley Forge II,ii,pp. 125-27)

As he takes steps to surrender, he encounters a group of his hungry, ragged soldiers. They, along with one of his officers, a visiting woman acquaintance of his youth, and Lafayette, convince him of the gravity of the cause and persuade him to continue. At this second recognition scene when he becomes aware that he is "servant to these men in the rags of homespun" (III, p. 162) who are willing to follow him to promote their dream even though they may lose, his course is again altered. He meets the challenge and tells his men:

For myself, I'd have died
 within if I'd surrendered. The spirit of earth
 moves over earth like flame and finds fresh home
 when the old's burned out. It stands over this
 my country
 in this dark year
 It's destined to win, this dream,
 weak though we are. Even if we should fail,
 it's destined to win!
 (Valley Forge III, p. 164)

In this play Anderson uses two recognition scenes, and the protagonist changes his course of action after each. It is difficult, however, to credit any real ennoblement to Washington since his new direction at the end of the play is attributable more to others than to him.

With Mary of Scotland Anderson has returned to Tudor England for his protagonist. He portrays the Catholic Mary returning from France to Scotland to rule the divided country as a charming and caring young woman. The jealous Elizabeth, who persuades herself that Mary is a direct threat to the throne of England, begins to plot against Mary almost as soon as Mary arrives on that windy, sleety pier in Scotland to begin her troublesome reign.

Just as Elizabeth wrestles with the conflict between the lust for power and the desire for fulfillment in love in Elizabeth the Queen, Mary too confronts this problem. The very feminine Mary loves Bothwell but fears that if she marries him, she will have to share her power with him. He warns her that without him she has little chance of surviving against the various factions. She tells Bothwell that she will not rule his way by wrath and violence but will follow what she knows to be true--"That to rule gently/ Is to rule wisely" (I,iii,p. 36). Mary's naiveté is even more obvious as she reassures Bothwell:

This is my faith, dear my lord, that all men
Love better good than evil, cling rather to truth
Than falseness, answer fair dealing with fair

return;

And this too; those thrones will fall that are
built on blood

And craft, that as you'd rule long, you must rule
well--

This has been true, and is true.

(Mary of Scotland I,iii,p. 37)

Mary rejects Bothwell, who tells her that she is hungry for power and has "the blight of Charlemagne--/ The itch to conquer" (I,iii,p. 61). In what she believes to be an attempt to strengthen her position, she marries the totally inadequate Darnley. Unable to see things as they really are, she clings to her position that justice will inevitably win and becomes a ready victim for the deceptive practices of Elizabeth and the opposing Scottish religious factions. As predicted by Bothwell, step by step Mary loses her power until she finally ironically flees to England for help. She is quickly imprisoned by the one from whom she had expected aid and refuge.

The recognition scene in this play is an Anderson masterpiece. Elizabeth comes to visit Mary in prison to try to persuade her to abdicate her throne. Mary greets her with warmth and charm; and before Elizabeth explains her mission, Mary ironically appeals to her:

As you are a woman and I am--and our brightness
 falls
 Soon enough at best--let me go, let me have my
 life
 Once more--and my dear health of mind again--
 (Mary of Scotland III, p. 145)

Elizabeth then urges her to abdicate. For the first time Mary becomes aware of the major source of all of her problems:

Stay now a moment. I begin to glimpse
 Behind this basilisk mask of yours. It was this
 You've wanted from the first.

 I see how I came.

Back, back, each step the wrong way, and each sign
 followed
 As you'd have me go, till the skein picks up and
 we stand
 Face to face here. It was you forced Bothwell
 from me--
 You there, and always. Oh, I'm to blame in this,
 too!
 I should have seen your hand!

(Mary of Scotland III, pp.145-46)

Mary not only recognizes that Elizabeth is her real enemy but also that her own weakness of wanting power but refusing to use its weapons to obtain and keep it have brought her downfall.

At this point Mary has two choices. She can abdicate and remain at Elizabeth's court or she can remain true to her faith that justice will inevitably win. She chooses the latter, which will cost her her throne, her love, her freedom, and finally her life, and tells Elizabeth:

And suppose indeed you won
 Within our life-time, still looking down from the
 heavens
 And up from men around us, God's spies that watch
 The fall of great and little, they will find you
 out--

Win now, take your triumph now,
 For I'll win men's hearts in the end--though the
 sifting takes
 This hundred years--or a thousand.

(Mary of Scotland III, pp.149-50)

Like Essex, Mary transcends her earthly defeat.

There is a certain ennoblement of character in this woman who is willing to face her adversity all alone with the faith that posterity will redeem her.

In The Wingless Victory Anderson continues to experiment with the recognition scene and its possible effects on the actions of the protagonist.

In this play, which has strong overtones of the Medea theme, the protagonist, Nathaniel McQueston, returns home to Salem, Massachusetts, in 1800 with a stolen ship loaded with a fortune in spices. He returns with enough money to buy the town as he had vowed he would when he left home seven years earlier. He had never really been accepted in the narrow-minded, Puritanical community nor respected by his mother and intolerant minister brother. The timing of his arrival coincides with that of the family's severe financial problems; therefore, he believes that he will be able to buy their acceptance.

During his seven adventurous years Nathaniel has also fallen in love with a Malayan princess, and he has brought this rather dark wife and their two children home to his pious intolerant Puritan family and community. Although he is certainly "right" in expecting his family to accept his wife, his motives immediately come under scrutiny since he was aware of the intolerance which existed in this smug New England town before he decided to return home. He could hardly have found a better way to flaunt his values than the one he chose.

The community has such need for his money that he is able to force a kind of surface acceptance. However, his

Oparre, who brings a refreshing air of primitive innocence to the drama, is never invited to visit nor is she treated with the dignity her position as his wife should require. Just as Nathaniel is about to threaten many of the locals with foreclosure on the numerous loans he has foolishly made them if they do not accept his wife, they confront him with their knowledge of his closely guarded secret that his ship is a stolen vessel. They then give him the choice of leaving penniless with his family or retaining his solvency while remaining behind as Oparre and the children are forced to leave.

Forced to choose, at first Nathaniel plans to go with his family, but then he tells the group to send her back, thus choosing the materialism of his world over the unknown future in an alien world. Although Nathaniel makes his choice known before a group, recognition actually comes for him earlier when he becomes aware that the society will never accept Oparre and that he harbors some regret for his previous decisions. His realization is subtle and does not actually occur on stage. Earlier when he feels the situation pressing in on him, he tells a lady friend whom he has known since childhood:

And sometimes I think I am mad.--Say
 you'd married as I have--for love--and loved him
 still--
 and had two dark-skinned children--and you lived
 in a few rooms with this same black love of yours--

and black children, and a black servant--while the
 town
 stepped round you carefully--pointing, whispering,
 never to you--always among themselves--
 laughing a little when you come down the street--
 behind their hands--some excellent jest, no doubt,
 at your expense.--It's hard to maintain your
 love--
 you begin to gnaw at this thing you're chained to,
 even
 hate where you love--curse at it in secret, curse
 yourself and all the world equally.

(The Wingless Victory II, pp. 71-72)

But his pride forces him on. After he has made his decision
 to send Oparre away, his mother perceives his relief and
 says, "You want it yourself./ You've wanted her away. I've
 seen it" (II, p. 98). Thus, the group may very well have
 provided the desired "out" for Nathaniel.

When he attempts to explain the situation to Oparre,
 he wavers in his decision; but he then tells her:

I love you still--but they've made
 our love a torment--it's the world that does it--
 it won't have us together.

.....
 It's not
 the money--or the ships--that's something, but
 when we're together we're in an empty world--
 we live nowhere--we're not counted--we're
 some kind of horrible presence they're always
 trying
 to explain away--

.....
 I've tried to meet it--every way there was,
 with force and money and flattering--it's no use--
 it was no use from the beginning!

(The Wingless Victory II, pp. 106-07)

That night Oparre goes to the ship with her children
 and servant and out of despair poisons them all. Just before

she dies, Nathaniel enters her room and tells her that he has changed his mind:

They may have it all,
ship, goods and money--whatever we brought with us,
may it prosper them--because I've nothing left
if I let you go.--A man must keep something within
or it's no use living--

(The Wingless Victory III,ii, p. 127)

In what could be called Nathaniel's second discovery, the awareness again comes off stage and is reported later. The second recognition indeed changes his course of action and affords some ennoblement, albeit a bit late; for our protagonist vows to sail at dawn and leave Salem forever.

Anderson again uses two recognition scenes in The Masque of Kings, a play which provides his interpretation of the events surrounding the mysterious suicide in 1889 of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria.

This play treats the power struggle from a slightly different angle. Although Rudolph is the protagonist, his father, the Emperor Franz Joseph, is a fascinatingly complex character. He openly admits that in the game of power such words as truth, honor, and faith play an insignificant role in the realities involved in ruling. Cynical about government in general, Franz Joseph does, however, care about the continuation of the Habsburg tradition and is willing to sacrifice everything, including himself, to that end.

Realizing that his son Rudolph is espousing liberal causes which he considers to be dangerous to the empire, he undertakes the task of revealing to Rudolph the realities which

are an integral part of power. Franz Joseph tries to acquaint Rudolph with the techniques of intrigue he believes must be used to preserve power.

Rudolph is a liberal who is aware of the tyranny of his father's rule; and being of a generous nature, he is determined to use power to correct the evils he perceives. He tells his friends:

I've looked beyond you
and caught a vision of what a man might do
if he were king. And having that vision in me
I've set myself to make myself a man
and unlearn kingliness, shed it like the rag
it is, till a king stands up a man, but a man
with power to make men free!

(Masque of Kings I,ii, p. 44)

Rudolph does not originally plan to use the violent methods of revolution, for he believes that "A government will end as it begins,/ and if it builds on slaughter it will stand/ on slaughter till it falls!" (I,ii,pp. 42-43). After much intrigue on both sides, however, he is impelled in that direction by a complex set of forces all around him. As the result of an explosive situation which develops in Hungary, his father's interference in his love life, and the discovery that an intimate friend is a spy, Rudolph finds himself using the old rationale--the end justifies the means. He decides to seize the power. He plans to use it to grant many freedoms to the people, but he quickly finds he is responsible for what may simply be another tyranny rather than a liberation.

After Rudolph seizes the Hofburg, Franz Joseph accepts his lot and begins to instruct Rudolph in ways to handle the revolution. At first Rudolph tries to retain his idealism and tells his father:

Sir, you may hear my creed.
 There's been no king, since the half-mythical
 figures
 of medieval times, who took for his motto:
 Nothing for myself. But I shall take it.
 I'm tired of having. Let me drink plain water
 and eat plain food, and turn what mind I have
 to an instrument of justice, clean of greed,
 despising politics. The first steps we take
 may seem arbitrary or tyrannous,
 but when we're once entrenched we'll lighten all
 oppression from above, and let the garden
 grow, for it will!

(Masque of Kings II,iii,p. 101)

But in this first major recognition scene the evidence begins to mount and Rudolph soon realizes that his revolution and its outcome will be no different from his father's. When Franz Joseph steps in front of a would-be assassin and saves his life because, as he tells him, "What I want most is to leave a king behind me/ such as I see you are!" (p. 110), Rudolph faces what he has become. He tells his friends:

I am the thing I hate!
 Among us all we've made of me the thing
 I shall hate most till I die. The thing I do,
 caught on this bayonet of time, and driven,
 repeats in word for word and death for death,
 his coronation.

(Masque of Kings II,iii,p. 111)

His disillusionment becomes complete when he also discovers that the lady he loves sought him out in order to report on

his activities to Franz Joseph. Having lost faith in himself and his cause, he changes his course of action completely, gives up the revolution, and goes to the hunting lodge.

The second recognition occurs for Rudolph when his lover chooses to commit suicide rather than risk losing the faith she has after they are separated. This awareness changes his course of action, for he too chooses to die and tells his parents just before ending his life:

If I go back
this morning, and leave her lying in this room
alone, then hour by hour you'll win me from her,
and in the end it will be my hand that guides
all Europe down to hell. I know myself
and what you'll want of me, and what I am,
and my black destination. But I've learned
from the little peddler's daughter, the Vetsera,
how to keep faith with the little faith I have
quite beyond time or change.

(Masque of Kings III, p. 136)

Since he believes that he will become what they are if he lives, there is supposedly some degree of ennoblement in his unwillingness to compromise his ideals; however, most modern readers consider suicide an act of weakness rather than strength.

Whereas ennoblement of the protagonist is questionable in The Masque of Kings, Anderson certainly realizes the desired result of the recognition scene in his one-act play, Second Overture.

The protagonist, Gregor, finds himself huddled with an assortment of refugees in a Russian execution chamber in 1918. He is an exile, escaped from the Siberian mines where he has been held since he participated in the uprising of 1905. Knowing that there must be some mistake in his capture, he reassures the others who are fearful for their lives. He tells them:

My friends, since you are guilty of nothing that would demand punishment, you distress yourselves unduly. I take it upon myself to promise you that there will be no injustice done. It must be that you have misunderstood our revolution.

But I assure you that what we fought for in 1905 we have now won.--We fought for free speech, for civil rights, for the abolition of arbitrary and tyrannical power, such as was exercised by the Czar, such as was carried out, perhaps, under your orders. But the safety from oppression which was never vouchsafed us under your regime you shall receive under ours.

(Second Overture, p. 5)

He is even more confident when he realizes that an old friend beside whom he previously fought is the commissar in charge of the prisoners.

When the friend appears, Gregor and he renew their friendship. Gregor then explains that since these people are all innocent, they should be set free. The commissar is eager to free Gregor but insists that the others are guilty and says that "Their crime/ Is what they are. Yes-- what they mean in the world!" (p. 14). Gregor replies:

And what was ours when we heard a sentence read
That sent you off to prison, me into exile,
Under the Czar? Our crime was what we were--
And what we meant to have was a government

Of equal justice! And now, by some strange
 chance,
 You are the government, but our equal justice
 Is far away as ever! It's murder
 To kill men for opinions! It's the terror
 And tyranny back again!
 (Second Overture, p. 14)

The commissar stands firm in his conviction that it is necessary for them to die in order to build the new nation from the ground up. Gregor then recognizes that the revolution for which he had earlier been willing to die has denied all the values he supports. He tells his former friend:

You strangle with your own hands
 All hope for the revolution. Your aspiration,
 Your faith, and your nobility go down
 The drain with this unnecessary blood--
 Shed as a military measure. Justice--
 To attain justice you revoke all justice--
 To attain mercy you repudiate
 The principle of mercy.--Blood will breed murder,
 Murder breed blood--the evil means we use
 For a good end, will bring down only more evil
 And curses at the end. There was a time
 You knew this. You must dismiss these prisoners,
 Or your regime will emulate the Czar's,
 Only bloodier and less honest.
 (Second Overture, pp. 16-17)

When Gregor realizes that the revolution for which he fought has been corrupted by its own violence and will be a greater tyranny than the one he opposed, he changes the course of his life. He chooses to remain with the group and later helps them escape. He chooses also to go down with his faith. Trying to make amends for the violence which he realizes that he helped to initiate, he sacrifices himself.

Perhaps in no other play does Anderson achieve the dramatic results of a recognition scene which combines external and internal discovery as effectively as in his recognized masterpiece, Winterset.

The protagonist, Mio Romagna, the seventeen-or eighteen-year-old son of an Italian-American radical executed years before for a crime he did not commit, returns after years of wandering to clear his father's name. At the same time public interest has been renewed in the case by the investigation of a professor who has revealed that one witness, Garth Esdras, had not been called to testify. All of the major participants in the case quite plausibly emerge on the scene. Trock Estrella, the real murderer, has been released from prison and comes to insure Garth's silence. The judge who presided at the trial has gone somewhat mad under the strain of possible guilt on his part, and he too is seeking Garth to reassure himself.

Mio has directed all his energies toward vindicating his father and has neither given nor received love since the loss of his family. He has become practically obsessed with the need to seek revenge for the injustice. Searching in the neighborhood where he has been told there lives a man who can possibly prove his father's innocence, Mio meets and falls in love with Miriamne, who is ironically the sister of Garth Esdras.

As the plot unfolds, Mio learns at a kind of mock trial that his father was entirely innocent. During this scene Mio becomes aware of the circumstances surrounding the case which will provide him with the opportunity to reveal the truth. He tells the group:

This is the thing I've hunted
over the earth to find out, and I'd be blind
indeed if I missed it now!

(Winterset III, p. 98)

Armed with the evidence, he attempts to give the information to a policeman, but Miriamne's refusal to corroborate his story leaves him unable to achieve his goal. Just at the moment when the opportunity for revenge is delivered into his hands and all the guilty parties are in a position to be punished, he has his first taste of the power of love which is evidenced in Miriamne's protection of her brother. He begins to realize that he has indeed been blind. He tells her father:

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

(Winterset II, p. 109)

Although Miriamne's love is beginning to awaken Mio, he still plans to have the facts revealed. He tells Miriamne:

I've steeped too long
in this thing. It's in my teeth and bones. I
can't
let go or forget. And I'll not add my lie
to the lies that cumber his ground.

(Winterset III, p. 121)

Shortly after he has his chance to tell what he knows when his friend comes to see him, but he pretends that he is in no danger and reveals nothing. The full recognition of the emptiness of a heart obsessed with revenge rather than filled with love comes gradually for Mio, but he is finally able to tell Miriamne:

I've lost
 my taste for revenge if it falls on you. Oh, God,
 deliver me from the body of this death
 I've dragged behind me all these years!

 I think I'm waking
 from a long trauma of hate and fear and death
 that's hemmed me from my birth--and glimpse a life
 to be lived in hope--but it's young in me yet, I
 can't
 get free, or forgive! But teach me how to live
 and forget to hate!

(Winterset III, p. 125)

She has only to tell him that his father would have forgiven, and he is able to recognize the destructive nature of his previous obsession:

I've groped long enough
 through this everglades of old revenges--here
 the road ends.--Miriamne, Miriamne,
 the iron I wore so long--it's eaten through
 and fallen from me.

I came here seeking
 light in darkness, running from the dawn,
 and stumbled on a morning.

(Winterset III, pp. 126-27)

Mio's illumination changes his course of action and his attitude toward life. He grows from a bitter avenger to a more trusting individual redeemed by love and faith.

In Key Largo, the last verse play Anderson wrote in the 1930's, the protagonist faces the universal question of what is significant enough for men to give their lives.

Anderson attaches a prologue to this play which shows the young American, King McCloud, trying to convince his comrades to desert a hill on which he has learned they are to be sacrificed. These are the same men he had earlier persuaded to join the Loyalist side of the Spanish Civil War. No longer idealistic, he pleads with them; but they remain to die for what King has come to believe is a lost cause. He tells them:

I tell you it was a dream,
all a dream we had, in a dream world,
of brothers who put out a helping hand
to brothers, and might save them.--Long ago
men found out the sky was empty; it follows
that men are a silly accident, meaningless,
here in the empty sky, like a flag on the moon,
as meaningless as an expedition led
to take possession of it--in the name of Marx--
or maybe democracy--or social justice!
Why should we die here for a dead cause, for a
symbol,
on these empty ramparts, where there's nothing
to win,
even if you could win it?

(Key Largo Prologue, pp. 22-23)

After he leaves them, he is captured and even fights for the other side to save his life. After he returns home, he feels a kind of Ancient Mariner compulsion to visit each of the families of his friends who remained to try to find some inner peace. This brings King to the d'Alcalas in Key Largo.

The blind d'Alcala and his daughter Alegre are being harassed by a dishonest gambler and his friends who have murdered a man; but since they have bought police protection, they cannot be dislodged. King is given the opportunity to stand up to the gambler, but for the second time he values his life more and backs down.

In the last act King is once again given the chance to redeem himself. Trying to help expose the murderers, he is given the choice by the sheriff of protecting himself or the lives of innocent Indians who will be used as scape-goats. For the third time King has to decide whether to give or save his life.

He is tempted once again to continue his belief that nothing in life matters except the self. He tells Alegre and her father that men no longer live by faith, honor, or justice. They live as the animals they are he contends. He then proceeds to tear down all the doors of illusion which man has always trusted for answers. Alegre pleads with her father to answer King's pessimistic view of man. D'Alcala then speaks convincingly of the upward progress of man toward an unknown higher destiny:

Over and over again the human race
climbs up out of the mud, and looks around,
and finds that it's alone here; and the knowledge
hits it like a blight--and down it goes
into the mud again.
Over and over again we have a hope
and make a religion of it--and follow it up
till we're out on the topmost limb of the tallest
tree

alone with our stars--and we don't dare to be
 there,
 and climb back down again.
 It may be that the blight's on the race once
 more--
 that they're all afraid--and fight their way to
 the ground.
 But it won't end in the dark. Our destiny's
 the other way. There'll be a race of men
 who can face even the stars without despair,
 and think without going mad.
 (Key Largo II, p. 114)

In this recognition scene King accepts this
 philosophy and his destiny. He recognizes that a person
 must believe in something beyond himself to endure:

A man must die
 for what he believes--if he's unfortunate
 enough to have to face it in his time--
 and if he won't then he'll end up believing
 in nothing at all--and that's death, too.
 (Key Largo II, p. 118)

As the result of his new awareness, King changes his course
 of action by sacrificing himself for the innocent Indians.

An examination of the recognition scene and its
 effects in Maxwell Anderson's verse plays of the 1930's
 reveals that although there is a protagonist who becomes
 more aware of something either in his environment or within
 himself or both, the effects of that knowledge vary consider-
 ably from play to play. The only verse play written during
 this time which does not have a recognition scene is The
Feast of Ortolans. This study shows that all of the other
 plays have recognition scenes and Anderson even uses two
 separate recognition scenes in three of the plays, Valley
Forge, The Wingless Victory, and The Masque of Kings. In

all of the plays the protagonist becomes more aware of factors both in his environment and within himself which he did not previously understand as clearly before the scene. All of the discoveries occur on stage except for those in The Wingless Victory. Also, all of the protagonists change their courses of action as a result of their discoveries.

The effect of the discoveries on the character of the protagonist is treated quite differently, however, in the various plays. There is no ennoblement of character in Elizabeth the Queen, Night Over Taos, and High Tor. It is rather insignificant or limited in Valley Forge, The Wingless Victory, and The Masque of Kings. There is definite ennoblement of character in the protagonists of Mary of Scotland, Second Overture, Winterset, and Key Largo.

In most of Anderson's plays the result of the protagonist's discoveries leads him to believe that there is something worthwhile in the traditional ideals associated with love, loyalty, heroism, etc.; and even when the question is asked as to whether or not they have ultimate meaning as in Key Largo, the discovery is that there is certainly value in reaching for a destiny higher than the self.

Anderson's treatment of the worth of the individual and his ideals may have given some hope to the people of the thirties whose faith in the traditional values was being sorely tested from every direction.

Observable from this study of the recognition scene in his serious verse plays of the thirties is a playwright experimenting with the scene and its effects on the entire play. During this period he sought to define the importance of the recognition scene to the effectiveness of serious drama. As shown in this discussion, the scene can be an especially effective structural device. Although no one element in a play can guarantee the success of the entire dramatic effort, a recognition scene which is not forced but proceeds naturally and spontaneously out of the character and action of the protagonist enhances the dramatic impact. The recognition scene is perhaps most effective structurally when it is accompanied by a reversal, which is a change in fortune for the protagonist. This combination adds a powerful dimension to the play. Although apparent in Night Over Taos, The Masque of Kings, and Key Largo, it is nowhere more dramatic than in Second Overture, Winterset, and Mary of Scotland. When utilized effectively, the recognition scene is indeed a powerful structural tool.

Anderson did not claim to have "solved the Sphinx's riddle which fifty generations of skillful brains have left in shadow"¹⁴ when he described the recognition scene as part of his dramatic theory; but this study reveals that he was perceptive in realizing the added dimension an effective recognition scene can bring to drama.

¹⁴Anderson, "The Essence of Tragedy," p. 3.

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