

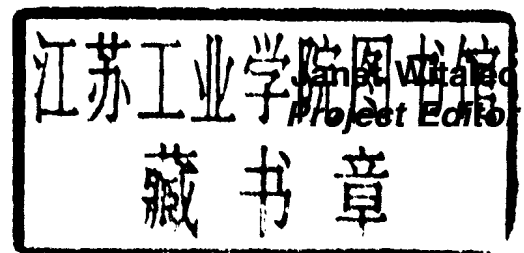
Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 144

Volume 144

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 144

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Preface

Since its inception more than fifteen years ago, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by nearly 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 500 authors, representing 58 nationalities and over 25,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

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- A **Portrait of the Author** is included when available.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Maxwell Anderson

1888-1959

American playwright, essayist, and poet.

The following entry provides criticism on Anderson's works from 1970 through 1999. For criticism prior to 1970, see *TCLC*, Volume 2.

INTRODUCTION

Anderson was a prolific and versatile playwright best known for his revival of verse drama and his application of the tenets of Aristotelian tragedy to the modern stage. Anderson's work ranged from historical drama to comedy, musicals to serious political pieces. Some plays were written simply to entertain, others to galvanize an audience into political action or to fight injustice. In addition to a substantial output of plays, Anderson published poetry, editorial commentary, and literary criticism. He also adapted a number of prose works for stage and screen. Of his generation of American playwrights, only Eugene O'Neill left a comparable artistic legacy.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Anderson was born on December 15, 1888, in Atlantic, Pennsylvania, to William Lincoln and Charlotta Perimela Stephenson Anderson. Because his father was an itinerant Baptist preacher, Anderson's schooling was interrupted repeatedly by his father's work. In 1911 Anderson graduated from the University of North Dakota and married Margaret C. Haskett, a fellow student. He taught high school English for two years, periodically publishing poetry in the *New Republic*. After graduate study at Stanford University, where he wrote a master's thesis on William Shakespeare, Anderson returned to teaching English for three years before being appointed head of the English Department at Whittier College in Southern California. However, Anderson was discharged in his first year for his strong anti-war stance. He then joined the editorial staff of the *New Republic*, moving on to the *New York Evening Globe* and the *New York World* while continuing to write poetry. Anderson soon realized that poetry would not support him, so he turned to drama for its financial promise. After a series of apprentice pieces, Anderson collaborated with Laurence Stallings, a veteran of World War I, on his first major play, *What Price Glory?* (1924). The success of this shocking but realistic portrayal of war enabled Anderson to quit journalism and establish him-



self as a playwright. Anderson achieved great success as a playwright, collaborating with such notables of the American stage as Stallings, Harold Hickerson, and Kurt Weill. In 1931 his wife died, and two years later he married Gertrude Maynard. The same year, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his play *Both Your Houses* (1933), and he won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for *Winterset* (1935) and *High Tor* (1937). Anderson also wrote screenplay adaptations for Hollywood films, including the 1930 version of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Death Takes a Holiday* (1934), and *Joan of Arc* (1948), based on his own play *Joan of Lorraine* (1946). The last decade of Anderson's life was clouded by financial problems and Maynard's suicide. In 1954 he married actress Gilda Oakleaf. He died of a stroke at his home in Stamford, Connecticut, on February 28, 1959.

MAJOR WORKS

Anderson had little success with his early plays. But with *Elizabeth the Queen* (1930), Anderson defined for

the first time his hallmark mode of poetic tragedy and his use of historical settings. Throughout the 1930s he continued his exploration of tragedy and combined historical and contemporary themes. *Both Your Houses* is a satirical portrait of the United States Congress. In *Mary of Scotland* (1933) he returned to poetic tragedy. In *Winterset*, considered one of his greatest achievements, Anderson used the Sacco-Vanzetti case to explore the moral questions of guilt and forgiveness. His next play, *High Tor*—also a critical and popular success—was a combination of tragedy and farce in which Anderson developed his capacity for fanciful stagings of moral issues. *Key Largo* (1939), which concerns the conscience-stricken aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, marks the beginning of Anderson's involvement in the Allied struggle against fascism. The start of World War II brought a new urgency to Anderson's moral vision, and he immediately put his art at the service of the war effort. The retrospective tone of *Key Largo* gave way in *Candle in the Wind* (1941) to alarm at the Nazi invasion of France and a call to action. The success of Anderson's most important play of the war, *The Eve of St. Mark* (1942), was due to his own experiences with troops at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. His involvement in the Allied effort deepened when he traveled to North Africa to research *Storm Operation* (1944). With the war over, Anderson once more turned his attention to historical subject matter, but now with an increasing interest in formal dramatic problems rather than poetic tragedy, as in *Joan of Lorraine*, with its "play within a play" structure, and *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1948), with its flashbacks from Anne Boleyn's impending execution. With his humanist play *Lost in the Stars* (1949), an adaptation of Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Anderson returned to the theme of moral urgency that had characterized his best work.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Despite Anderson's huge canon and many successes, he has been relatively neglected by critics since his death. Nonetheless, in the body of criticism that is devoted to him, Anderson is highly admired for bringing verse drama onto the American stage, as well as for his use of historical settings to explore contemporary themes. He remains one of the most important representatives of twentieth-century American theater.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

White Desert (play) 1923
What Price Glory? [with Laurence Stallings] (play) 1924
The Buccaneer [with Laurence Stallings] (play) 1925
First Flight [with Laurence Stallings] (play) 1925

Outside Looking In (play) 1925
You Who Have Dreams (poetry) 1925
Gypsy (play) 1927
Saturday's Children (play) 1927
Gods of the Lightning [with Harold Hickerson] (play) 1928
The Essence of Tragedy and Other Footnotes and Papers (essays) 1929
All Quiet on the Western Front (screenplay) 1930
Elizabeth the Queen (play) 1930
Night Over Taos (play) 1932
Rain (screenplay) 1932
Both Your Houses (play) 1933
Mary of Scotland (play) 1933
Death Takes a Holiday [with Gladys Lehman] (screenplay) 1934
Valley Forge (play) 1934
So Red the Rose [with Laurence Stallings and Edwin Justus Mayer] (screenplay) 1935
Winterset (play) 1935
The Wingless Victory (play) 1936
High Tor (play) 1937
The Masque of Kings (play) 1937
The Star-Wagon (play) 1937
Knickerbocker Holiday [with music by Kurt Weill] (play) 1938
Key Largo (play) 1939
Journey to Jerusalem (play) 1940
Candle in the Wind (play) 1941
The Eve of St. Mark (play) 1942
Storm Operation (play) 1944
Joan of Lorraine (play) 1946
Off Broadway: Essays about the Theatre (essays) 1947
Anne of the Thousand Days (play) 1948
Joan of Arc [with Andrew P. Solt] (screenplay) 1948
Lost in the Stars (play) 1949
Barefoot in Athens (play) 1951
The Bad Seed (play) 1954
Dramatist in America: Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912-1958 (letters) 1977

CRITICISM

Arthur T. Tees (essay date winter 1970)

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[In the following essay, Tees notes that although Anderson's characters rarely find justice within the American legal system, they do achieve poetic justice outside of it.]

Maxwell Anderson was frequently interested in the problem of justice in his plays. Eleven of his thirty-one Broadway productions were directly concerned with justice inside and outside the courtroom. In only one of these eleven, however, is there any optimism that legal procedures can bring justice; the characters in the remaining ten plays find justice outside but not inside the courtroom. Legal injustice and poetic justice are the rule in Anderson's plays.

Anderson's attitude toward the different kinds of justice—that dispensed by the courts and that found elsewhere in life—is summarized in a passage from *Anne of the Thousand Days*. The ill-fated Queen asks the Lord Chancellor, "Do you love justice, Sir Thomas?" To which More replies, "Now where would I have seen it? . . . Still, men do seem to get what they deserve—in a rough way—over a long period." If England's leading jurist had not seen justice, it was not likely to be found in the courts. And through Sir Thomas More, Anderson was speaking not only of More's era but of the twentieth century as well.

The lack of justice in courts of law is a theme which Anderson first voiced in 1925 in *Outside Looking In*. Based on Jim Tully's novel, *Beggars of Life*, this play has as its central theme the conviction that there is more justice to be found among the hoboos who are outside of organized society than can be found within society itself. Thus Edna, who vengefully killed her stepfather because he seduced her and started her on a life of prostitution, is aided in her escape from the North Dakota authorities to the sanctuary of Canada. In the process the hoboos who befriend her hold a kangaroo court in which the hobo "judge" comments on organized justice as he has known it:

Be it known by those present that this here court will dispense with justice for the present, like every other court in this land of the millionaire and home of the slave. This here court is a bar . . . for the subornation of evidence and the laying down of the law. Gentlemen may cry for justice, gentlemen may plead for justice, but I tell you that a court is a place where justice can be evaded by anybody that's able to afford it.²

In *Outside Looking In* Anderson commented on legal or courtroom justice without actually showing it in action. But in collaborating with Harold Hickerson on *Gods of the Lightning*, he demonstrated directly the type of justice he felt was common in the courts. This 1928 drama, based on the famous Sacco-Vanzetti trial of the same period, was the most devastating indictment of courtroom jurisprudence to come from his pen. All opportunities for justice are ruthlessly blocked by the dramatists in the trial of two innocent men for the murder of a pay-master during a robbery.

The *Gods of the Lightning* cast includes (1) a district attorney under political pressure to obtain a conviction he knows is wrong, (2) a defense attorney who, because

of personal indiscretions, can be threatened with exposure if his defense is effective, (3) a judge who overrules every objection of the defense while sustaining those of the prosecution, and (4) a jury foreman who asks one of the accused if he was the man who planted a bomb under the foreman's front porch the night before the trial. In addition there are prosecution witnesses who swear to things they were not in a position to see and a misinterpreted ballistics report. The stage is set for an inevitable miscarriage of justice.

The extreme nature of the indictment of American jurisprudence in *Gods of the Lightning* may have been due in part to the play's proximity in time to its subject; the Sacco-Vanzetti trial was a much-criticized event even as the play was being presented. However, the basic distrust of courtroom justice in it was hardly temporary, for a decade later Anderson again staged a miscarriage of justice in *Knickerbocker Holiday*. Set in seventeenth-century New Amsterdam, the musical comedy does not have as formal a trial as is found in *Gods of the Lightning*, but the city council which serves as both legislature and judiciary passes an equally fatal sentence upon the hero of the play, Brom Broeck. Broeck correctly but indiscreetly accuses his former employer, Tienhoven, of selling liquor and firearms to the Indians, a capital offense. Unfortunately, making accusations against the council is also a capital offense, and Tienhoven is a member of the council. Consequently it is Broeck, not Tienhoven, who is sentenced to hang. Tina, Tienhoven's daughter and Broeck's sweetheart, intervenes:

TINA:

Father, father, would you hang the man I love?

TIENHOVEN:

He was going to hang me, wasn't he?

TINA:

But you were guilty!

THE CHORUS:

Yes, you were guilty!

TIENHOVEN:

Not legally, I wasn't!

TINA:

And he's innocent!

THE CHORUS:

Yes, he's innocent!

TIENHOVEN:

Not legally, he's nod!

TINA:

But it's not justice!

THE CHORUS:

No, it's not justice!

TIENHOVEN:

Nobody said it was justice! We said it was legal!

TINA:

But what are laws for, if not for justice?

TIENHOVEN:

I tell you not some other time, not now.³

For Tienhoven and Anderson, justice and legality were two different matters. Since *Knickerbocker Holiday* is a musical comedy, Broeck escapes hanging, but this is due to events outside the courtroom-council chamber.

Once again a decade passed before Anderson returned to the question of legal justice, and again his attitude remained unchanged. 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.

The following year Anderson reiterated his distrust of the trial system in *Lost in the Stars*, a dramatization of Alan Paton's famous novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Three Africans are accused of the murder of a white man during a robbery. All are in fact guilty, but only Absalom, son of a clergyman, admits his guilt at the trial; the others have witnesses who testify that they were elsewhere at the time of the killing. Although the judge suspects that Absalom is right in implicating the others, the evidence is insufficient, and Absalom alone is sentenced to die.

One of the songs of *Lost in the Stars* has as its haunting refrain the admonition that "the wild justice is not found in the haunts of men!"⁴ The song suggests that it is as easy to sieve up the moon from the sea or snare the rainbow as it is to catch the elusive justice men seek. Legal justice is an unreachable goal.

For a fifth time Anderson returned to the quest for justice through a trial in *Barefoot in Athens* (1951). This time it is Socrates who is on trial, with the citizens of Athens as the jury. He is charged with treason, corrupting the young men of Athens by teaching them to question everything including their devotion to the city, and placing the quest for truth above loyalty to Athens or

the gods. Despite Socrates' warning that his death would be a blot on the record of their city, the citizens vote against him.

The five trial plays span the period from 1928 to 1951 and cover much of Anderson's playwriting career which ran from 1923 to 1958. They reflect a continuing mistrust of traditional courtroom justice, a mistrust that had been voiced in *Outside Looking In* only two years after he began writing for the stage. The courts were not, in Anderson's view, a place where one could expect justice.

Anderson saw several reasons why the courts could not dispense justice. One was the failure of the men on the bench to be trustworthy judges. This was evident in the unfair manner in which the judge conducted the trial in *Gods of the Lightning*. In two plays—*Night Over Taos* and *Winterset*—Anderson advanced the idea that judges are selected from the wrong age group.

Pablo Montoya is the patriarchal ruler of a nineteenth-century Mexican community in *Night Over Taos*. Shortly before turning over the leadership of that community to his young son Felipe, he instructs Felipe to select only young men as judges. The young alone can be trusted to provide wisdom and justice; old men are prone to madness in devotion to a cause or to their own interests.⁵

Much the same thought is expressed by Judge Gaunt in *Winterset*. "Only the young love truth and justice," he cautions the son of the man he sent unjustly to the electric chair. "The old are savage, wary, violent, swayed by maniac desires, cynical of friendship or love, open to bribery and the temptations of lust."⁶

The breakdown of justice in the courts cannot be blamed alone on those who sit on the bench. Juries, too, can be capable of injustice, as the examples of *Gods of the Lightning* and *Barefoot in Athens* indicate. In both instances there is a strong distrust of the accused by the jury. Macready and Capraro in *Gods of the Lightning* are radicals; Capraro is a pacifist with anarchical leanings. In *Barefoot in Athens* Socrates, with his questioning of everything and his failure to find anything certain in life, is suspected of undermining religion and patriotism alike. In both situations the juries, seeing the accused as dangerous persons, vote for condemnation not on the basis of guilt or innocence alone, but out of a desire to be safe from such ideas as they espoused. In *Winterset* Judge Gaunt recognizes this as he tries to justify the injustice done the innocent anarchist:

For justice, in the main,
is governed by opinion. Communities
will have what they will have, and it's quite as well,
after all, to be rid of anarchists. Our rights
as citizens can be maintained as rights

only while we are held to be the peers
of those who live about us.⁷

Part of the failure of the courts to provide justice is caused by the system itself which turns trial procedures into a contest between prosecution and defense rather than a joint search for the truth. John Kumalo, uncle of the accused in *Lost in the Stars*, describes the judicial process to his brother:

The defendant may be guilty as hell but he goes in and pleads not guilty and his lawyer tries to make the evidence look as if he's not guilty. The prosecution may be weak as hell but it goes in and tries to make things look as if the defendant's guilty as a hyena. . . . It's a game. Truth has nothing to do with it.⁸

Even if the legal system were designed to search for truth rather than to play a serious game, justice would still be difficult to achieve in the courts for truth is extremely elusive. Sheriff Gash in *Key Largo* recognizes this when he cautions:

The truth in court
is what sounds like the truth in court, and not
what happened,
not necessarily.⁹

As Mio Romagna had discovered in *Winterset*, truth is a difficult commodity to discover, especially when men stand to gain from its absence.

With all the handicaps under which the courts labored—corrupt judges, prejudiced juries, competitive trial systems, and the elusive nature of truth—Anderson nevertheless believed that they were necessary. In *First Flight* (1925) Anderson, collaborating with Laurence Stallings, portrayed Andrew Jackson as a young lawyer bringing colonial government and justice to an anarchical backwoods area of Tennessee. Although Jackson is wary of the powers of a central government, he sees government, laws, and courtroom justice as an essential improvement over the anarchical conditions of the frontier.

Judge Gaunt in *Winterset* also expresses an appreciation of the law:

Without law men are beasts, and it's a judge's task to lift and hold them above themselves. Let a judge be once mistaken or step aside for a friend, and a gap is made in the dykes that hold back anarchy and chaos, and leave men bond but free.¹⁰

The problem in *Winterset* is, of course, that the judge has done the very thing he abhors. A potential for justice exists in the legal system; it simply is not realized.

The widespread lack of legal justice in Anderson's plays is only a part of the total picture. Where legal justice failed, poetic justice took over. In most instances Anderson's plays end with the scales of justice balanced for the characters.

There are two exceptions to this. One is *Gods of the Lightning* which provides poetic justice for the robbers Heine and Suvornin but not for the heroes Macready and Capraro. These men lack any character flaw which would make their sentence severe but tragically just. Their characters are not developed well enough to qualify them as heroes of a victim tragedy along the lines of Sophocles' *Antigone* or Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Although their deaths, as Capraro points out, vindicate their belief that the power of the state is the power of corruption, it is impossible to see their sentence as an act of poetic justice. This failing may well have contributed to the play's closing after only twenty-nine performances.

The second exception is in *Lost in the Stars* when the two accomplices in the murder escape punishment through false alibis. Only the man who actually fired the murder weapon pays with his life. Here Anderson was less meticulous about justice for minor characters than he had been in *Gods of the Lightning*. At the same time, the execution of three men for the killing of one would have been justice hardly more defensible than allowing the two to go free.

Poetic justice is evident in *Winterset*. Mio's death is tragic and hence cannot be expected to be entirely just; it is characteristic of tragedy that the hero is punished severely for his tragic flaw. If Mio had not begun his vengeful quest for the killers of the paymaster, he would have avoided death. For the others, justice is inexorable. Trock, one of the murderers, has contracted tuberculosis while in prison for another crime and will die within six months. Shadow, the other gunman, has been killed by Trock for refusing to kill Judge Gaunt. The judge, in turn, has gone mad with guilt over his part in the trial. Garth Esdras, a witness to the robbery-killing, loses his sister Miriamne as a result of his silence in the affair. His father, who has also known of Garth's secret, is likewise punished. Miriamne, who had kept silent about the body of Shadow when the police came to the apartment, is punished for her betrayal of Mio's cause by losing him. In her grief and fear that he may think she betrayed him a second time, she challenges the gangsters and is killed. At the final curtain, all have received justice outside the courts.

Although in *Anne of the Thousand Days* the Queen is punished for a crime she did not commit, she recognizes her sentence as an expiation for an earlier crime of hers—insisting that More and others be executed for failing to sign the Act of Succession. Henry's punishment is more subtle—he has to live with the memory of what he has done. On the morning of her death he muses:

Open the bag you lug behind you, Henry.
Put in Nan's head.