# Winterset Study Guide

## Winterset by Maxwell Anderson

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# Introduction

Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset* (1935) is one of the most important verse dramas, or plays written largely in poetry, in the twentieth century. Produced on New York City's Broadway at the height of the Great Depression, Anderson's play is a striking tragedy that deals indirectly with the famous Sacco-Vanzetti case, in which two Italian immigrants with radical political beliefs were executed. With its combination of "low" prose and "high" poetic verse, which enables it to be sharply realistic while simultaneously commenting on universal philosophical themes, *Winterset* is widely considered Anderson's best verse drama. Its ambitious political and philosophical agenda, as well as its elegant poetry, earned Anderson the Drama Critics' Circle Award of 1936. The style of *Winterset* has inspired many critics to compare the play to a Shakespearean tragedy.

The plot of *Winterset* follows Mio Romagna's quest to prove his father's innocence in the years after Bartolomeo Romagna was executed for a robbery and murder he did not commit. This quest is complicated by Mio's newfound love for Miriamne Esdras and the difficult ethical decisions that result from his connection with her family. A challenging political play, with philosophical meditations on faith, truth, justice, love and duty, *Winterset* not only alludes to Shakespearean and Judaic philosophy; it develops a profound moral system of its own. Available in individual editions such as that published by Anderson House in 1935, *Winterset* is a landmark in American drama universalized by its superbly crafted poetry and its profound philosophical assertions.

# Author Biography

Anderson was born on his grandmother's farm near Atlantic, Pennsylvania, on December 15, 1888, but he moved westward with his father, a Baptist minister, and went to high school in Iowa. After graduating from college in North Dakota, Anderson married a classmate and taught English in a high school for two years before moving to San Francisco and earning a master's degree at Stanford University. He returned to teaching, but was fired from a head-teaching job at Whittier College in 1918 because he defended a student whose antiwar articles were censored from the college newspaper. He then began writing for various newspapers and pursued his interest in poetry, which he had been writing and occasionally publishing, since he was in college.

Anderson's theatrical career began with the production on Broadway of the tragedy *White Desert* in 1923, and, although this play failed after twelve performances, his anti-war collaboration with Laurence Stallings entitled *What Price Glory* (1924), was a huge success. Continuing to write plays throughout the 1920s, Anderson developed a habit of referring to and borrowing from playwrights and authors from the past. He also expressed a desire to write plays in verse but did not do so until the 1930s, when he wrote the verse dramas for which he is most famous, including the historical *Elizabeth the Queen* (1930) and *Winterset* (1935). Anderson continued to write in various other styles as well, however, including satires such as the Pulitzer Prize—winning *Both Your Houses* (1933), and a musical play entitled *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938).

In the years that followed the financial success of this musical, Anderson wrote a number of plays dwelling on spiritual themes that were less critically successful. Then he turned to the subject of fascism and World War II with such plays as *The Eve of St. Mark* (1942), which was dedicated to his nephew, who was shot down over the Mediterranean. After the war, Anderson turned back to his interest in historical drama, and he continued writing plays during a series of financial difficulties, and the suicide of his second wife. He died from a stroke on February 28, 1959, at his home in Stamford, Connecticut.

# Plot Summary

## Act 1

Act 1 begins with the gangster Trock Estrella talking to his sidekick, Shadow, in a New York City riverbank tenement. Trock has six months to live. He wants to make sure none of the people in the tenement will share evidence that could send him back to jail for the rest of his life. Miriamne Esdras finds out that her brother Garth knows that Estrella is guilty of a murder for which a radical thinker named Bartolomeo Romagna was executed. After hearing that a professor is causing a new stir about the case, Trock visits Garth to threaten him.

In scene 3, Judge Gaunt of the Romagna case enters the tenement street scene and argues that he was right to give the death sentence. Then Mio Romagna enters, telling his friend Carr that he has come to the tenement to prove his father's innocence. Mio is struck by Miriamne's beauty, and they dance to the music of Lucia's barrel organ until a policeman enters and tells Lucia to stop playing it. A young radical preaches against the oppression that this represents. Mio tells the policeman that he is stupid and handled the situation badly. Mio then has a passionate discussion with Miriamne until they are interrupted by Trock talking with Shadow. While Mio and Miriamne hide behind a rock, Trock has Shadow shot by two thugs because Shadow knows too much.

## Act 2

That evening, Esdras and Garth talk with Judge Gaunt, whom they have taken into their home fearing that Trock would kill him. Then Mio enters the cellar apartment, asking what Garth knows about his father. Garth denies any knowledge. Judge Gaunt argues with Mio that Romagna was guilty. Esdras then leaves with Judge Gaunt. Mio is left with Miriamne, whom Garth directs not to reveal anything. Upset by what he thinks is a dead end in proving his father's innocence, Mio tells Miriamne that a relationship between them could come to nothing because love is not for him. Garth reenters to ask Mio to leave, and Miriamne says she loves Mio. The hobo then enters to ask to stay under the pipes. Mio tells Miriamne he loves her too. Esdras enters with Judge Gaunt, followed by Trock.

After asking the hobo and Mio who they are, Trock tells Garth he is going to take Judge Gaunt for a long ride. As Trock is going to leave and kill Judge Gaunt, lightening flashes, and they wait inside. Shadow, who is bloody but still alive, then enters and says he is going to kill Trock, but he cannot see and goes instead to lie down. Mio then starts questioning Trock with Judge Gaunt acting as a judge over them until Trock, enraged, tells him that Shadow committed the murder. Judge Gaunt admits to Mio that he knew Romagna was not actually guilty but that it was better for him to die for the "common good." Mio vows to proclaim the truth. Trock threatens that it will not go far, but then the policeman and his sergeant enter, looking for Judge Gaunt. Although Mio accuses Trock

of two murders, the policemen do not believe him because they do not find Shadow's body. Garth and Miriamne deny everything. Mio finally admits, at Miriamne's silent request, that he was dreaming. After they and Trock leave, Mio discovers Garth's role in the crime and accuses Miriamne of trapping him into the lie.

## Act 3

When Mio leaves the apartment, Miriamne follows him out and tries to advise him about an escape from Trock. They watch Garth and the hobo bring Shadow's body down to the river, and Mio philosophizes about his situation. Esdras then tells Mio to wait inside while he calls the police, which he is willing to do even if Mio implicates Garth in the crimes. Carr arrives and offers his help. Mio refuses it and does not tell Carr what he has found because Mio does not want to implicate Miriamne's brother by telling the truth. Miriamne tells Mio that his father would have forgiven the people that actually committed the crime. They declare their love for each other.

Arriving back with a cut on his head, Esdras tells Mio that Trock would not let him pass to call the police, and he goes to look for a passage on the roof. Esdras waves from above that it is not safe. Miriamne suggests that Mio try another path, but when he does so, Trock's thugs are already waiting for him. They shoot him with a machine gun. Mio comes back and dies in Miriamne's arms. Miriamne walks out to declare to the gunners that she will tell the truth. They shoot her too. Garth and Esdras mourn her death, Esdras saying that they were noble and it is wiser to die young and pure while proclaiming the truth.

# Act 1, Scene 1

## Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

*Winterset* intertwines the stories of three people struggling to escape their unhappy ties to a past crime. Written in a combination of prose and blank verse, the play develops a tragic love story at the same time as it explores thematic questions about the natures of both justice and death.

This scene is set on the banks of a river under a bridge. Two Young Men lean against the struts of the bridge. Trock appears, accompanied by Shadow. Trock tells the Young Men to watch his car, and they go out. In poetic language, Trock shouts at the city, referring to the stupidity and empty lives of the people who live there. Conversation with Shadow reveals that Trock has just been released from prison, that Shadow is concerned that bad behavior like shouting in public will put Trock back there, and that Trock thinks Shadow doesn't take life seriously enough. He talks poetically about how he feels poisoned after being in prison, referring to himself as having "one liquid puke inside where [he] had lungs." He also talks about how the authorities want him back behind bars. Shadow reassures him that they have no evidence with which to try, but Trock says he's there to find out whether that's true. He adds that he doesn't have much time and reveals that the prison doctor gave him six months to live.

Lucia and Piny, a street piano player and an apple seller, appear. Trock and Shadow quickly hide. Lucia (a man) wonders who they were. Piny talks about how frightened she was. Lucia tells her to look on the bright side, like him, referring to how, "every day in every way," he gets to raise hell.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

Aside from introducing Trock, one of the play's three central characters, the key purpose of this scene is to introduce the manner in which the story is to be told, specifically its poetic dialogue. In drama, poetic language is generally used to indicate intensity of feelings in the characters, to evoke a sense of heightened emotional, spiritual or intellectual awareness in both the characters and the audience, and/or open the audience to the possibility that the experiences of the characters are, in some way universal or archetypal. In other words, poetic language in drama serves to awaken the audience to a broader experience of themselves, and of humanity in general. In this scene, for example, intense imagery defines both Trock's emotional and physical unhappiness. This is illustrated most vividly by his reference to feeling like he's all puke inside, and by what he shouts at the city, which indicates his hatred for society. The idea here is to awaken in us a different, increased understanding of how powerful hate can be. Various uses of this powerfully evocative language occur throughout the play, challenging us both directly and indirectly to identify with what the characters are living through.

In terms of story, the conversation about Trock being put back in prison and coming to the city in search of evidence that the authorities might use against him, simultaneously foreshadows and parallels the later arrivals of Mio and Judge Gaunt, who are there on similar missions to Trock's. All three characters, as well as Garth, are defined by their search for ways to redeem their pasts, will all these searches shaping the action of the play and its conflicts. At the same time, reference to Trock's imminent death gives both him and the play a sense of urgency. They increase the story's intensity, by defining him and his quest as desperate and; therefore, setting up the possibility that future conflict with him will be defined by that desperation.

# Act 1, Scene 2

## Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

This scene is set in a basement apartment near the bridge. Garth inspects his violin as his sister Miriamne comes in. Their conversation reveals that the violin needs repair, that Garth hasn't gone out of the apartment for three days, and that their father is frightened. Miriamne describes him as reading without knowing what he's reading. He's fearful that, when a shadow crosses the page of his book, a blow will soon follow. Garth says she sees too much, and tells her she should go to school. Miriamne says she doesn't like school, because people whisper about her. When Garth asks her what they whisper about, she avoids answering by asking him what the letter he received from a lawyer was about. It's revealed that she read it, and knows that it indicated Garth should stay hidden. Further conversation reveals that Miramne believes Garth has evidence that could have freed a wrongly executed murderer named, Romagna. Garth was never called to give evidence, and he doesn't believe he has it. He also talks about how he's desperate to get his violin fixed, so he can start teaching and earning some money. He has doubts that any of it will happen. As Miriamne talks about her desire for him to not be afraid, Garth hears someone coming and tells her to be quiet.

Esdras comes in, followed by Trock and Shadow. Trock and Garth recognize each other, Garth introduces Miriamne and Esdras, and he and Trock both tell them to go out, with Trock threatening to shoot through the door and kill them if they listen. Conversation between Trock and Garth reveals that they're both unhappy, because a university professor has started digging into the history of the murder with which they were both involved. Trock is suspicious that Garth has given his evidence to the authorities and; therefore, triggered the professor's suspicions. Garth insists that because Romagna was executed, there would be no point.

Garth says that he's trying to leave his life of crime behind him, and he's told nobody about what happened. Trock reminds him that he told Esdras, but Garth says Esdras was only told enough to make him hand over the money Garth gave to Trock. He adds that Esdras is as safe as Shadow. Trock suggests Shadow isn't safe at all, and that he'd be safer if he were dead. Shadow says he thinks Trock would be happier if everyone in the world was dead, and Trock agrees.

He then asks about the judge at Romagna's trial, Judge Gaunt, and says the papers are reporting that he's lost his mind, wandering the streets and proclaiming Romagna's innocence. Shadow tells Trock that he's got nothing to worry about. Trock becomes angry. Shadow tells him to be calm, and refers to the guns they both have in their pockets. Trock tells Garth to stay close to home until he (Trock) can find out whether he (Garth) is telling the truth. He then takes Shadow and goes out.

Garth tells Miriamne and Esdras to come back. As Miriamne fearfully asks what's going on, Garth explains he was involved with a gang that committed a robbery. During the

course of that robbery, Trock killed someone. If the truth got out, both he and Trock would be executed. He goes on to say that he feels dead, anyway, knowing the truth but keeping quiet about it, while allowing an innocent man to be executed. He says he's had enough of the guilt and indicates he's going to tell the authorities what he knows. He says that he'll destroy Trock at the same time, making everything balance. Esdras speaks in poetic language about how guilt is only in people's minds, about life being merely a shadow cast by the all-consuming fire of time, and about how Garth should let his guilt be destroyed by that fire, rather than letting his guilt destroy him. He also speaks about justice, referring to it as a "blind snake" and saying Garth should pass it by in silence. Miriamne argues that if someone died because of Garth, his guilt won't just be burned away. Garth says he always was and always will be a coward. He goes out. After he's gone, Miriamne asks whether it's better to tell a lie and live, rather than speak the truth and die. Esdras says it is. Miriamne says she'd rather die. Esdras says the only reason she believes that is that she's young.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

There are three primary levels of function in this scene. The first is dramatic, in that essential information is provided about the murder with which Trock and Garth were involved. As a result of this information, we understand why Trock has come to the city and also Garth's dilemma, both important elements of the plot about to unfold. Also on this dramatic level, the reference to Judge Gaunt foreshadows his appearance later in this act, and the central role he plays in the action of Act Two.

The second level of function is thematic, as the theme of justice is introduced in Esdras' speech, where he tries to convince Garth to remain quiet. The third level of function is poetic and intricately tied in with the second, given that the themes in this scene and throughout the play are explored and defined as much by the poetry as by the action. Esdras' speech is the most intensely poetic in the scene, with its images of fire and the snake evoking the sense of danger posed by both, which is a universal or archetypal response. Through the use of this imagery, we are led to more deeply identify both with Garth's fear of death and Esdras' desperation that he avoid it. This is another example of how poetry in drama functions to bring audiences more intimately into the lives and experiences playing out on the stage.

There are two smaller points of interest in this scene. Miraimne's reference to the shadows that trouble Esdras while he's reading represents the relationship between Shadow and Trock. The shadows in her speech are the precursor of violence, echoing how Shadow's caution is generally a warning of Trock's potential for exactly the kind of violence Miriamne and Esdras fear. The second point of interest appears at the end of the scene, in which Miriamne's preference for speaking the truth and dying foreshadows the final moments of Act Three, in which she does exactly that.

# Act 1, Scene 3, Part 1

## Act 1, Scene 3, Part 1 Summary

This scene is set in the same location as Scene 1, under the bridge. Miriamne sits alone, as a Tramp comes and digs himself into a pile of rags to sleep. Two Girls pass by, chattering about how one has been proposed to by a man with whom she had a fight but later reconciled. They comment with disgust on the Tramp, and go out.

Gaunt appears, and asks the Tramp for directions. He believes the Tramp recognizes him and says he's not who the Tramp thinks he is. He then rambles on about evidence that he has with him, relating to a court case he's trying. He suddenly stops, moving out of sight as Esdras appears in the doorway to the apartment. He calls Miriamne to come in, but she says she needs to stay outside for a while, adding that she didn't want Garth to see her crying. Esdras says he understands and goes back in. As Miriamne gets up to follow him, Mio and Carr come, talking about how Mio said he would never come back east, but had to because of the "same old business." After Mio talks at length about how he's been traveling, he sees Miriamne, notices she's been crying and tries to comfort her. She says that she's all right and goes out. Mio tries to follow her and calls for her to wait, but she disappears.

Further conversation between Mio and Carr reveals that Mio has been wandering aimlessly for some time, desperate for food and despondent. It's also revealed that Mio is Romagna's son, that he believes the police know his father was innocent, and that he's been following up on the professor's investigation of his father's case. As he and Carr joke about their education in English literature, thunder rumbles. They joke about its poetic meaning, ultimately deciding it just means there's going to be rain. Mio returns to the topic of his father, saying his investigations have led him to this apartment building. Carr tells him he'll never get anywhere, saying the State can't afford to be proven wrong. Mio speaks poetically and passionately about what the authorities did to his father and the rest of his family, indicating that his mother's dead. He vows to prove his father was innocent, saying that once he does, he might be able to really live.

After a Young Man comes in looking for the girls from the beginning of the scene, Piny and Lucia come in, talking about how Lucia is being ordered by the authorities to stop playing his piano in public. They believe that the authorities are just trying to get bribe money. Lucia plays the piano one last time, as the Girls, the Young Man, a Sailor, a Young Radical, and two Street Urchins come in and dance. As the dance continues, Lucia shouts that this is the last time the piano will be heard, saying there will be "no more music." Miriamne appears and listens. The Tramp also begins to dance, and Mio goes to Miriamne to ask her to dance, too. After a moment, she accepts.

Judge Gaunt appears and watches, while thunder rumbles again. A Policeman comes in, ordering Lucia off the street and the dancers to disperse. The Young Radical says what the Policeman is doing is an example of "capitalist oppression," discouraging

freedom and enslaving the poor. Garth comes out of the apartment, listening, as the Radical talks about how no law is being violated. The Policeman tells him that the law being broken is speaking in public without a flag, and the Radical pulls out a small American flag. As he and the Policeman argue, Judge Gaunt comes forward and speaks in very legal language in support of the Radical. The Policeman doesn't understand what Gaunt is saying, shaking him off when Gaunt takes his arm. Gaunt urges tolerance, refers to his own lack of tolerance, and then suddenly changes his mind, referring to himself as upright and calling everyone else liars. The Policeman shakes him off again, shouting back at the others in the crowd, when they shout at him for being so rude to an old man.

Mio steps forward, urging the crowd to give the Policeman a chance to do his job. When the crowd challenges him, his poetically written comments reveal his real attitude. He truly thinks that this Policeman, like all policeman, has a mental deficiency that has been proved by autopsies on policemen's brains. As the Tramp cheers him on, Mio, ironically in poetic language, tells the crowd to leave the poor, stupid Policeman alone. As Mio and the Policeman argue, Trock appears, accompanied by the Two Young Men he spoke to at the beginning of Scene 1. All three watch in silence, as Mio says he's got a score to settle with the police and demands an apology. The Policeman moves as though to strike him. Carr steps into his way. The Policeman accuses the crowd of trying to start a riot and orders them all to leave. The crowd disperses, Carr whistling the "Star Spangled Banner."

The Policeman, Garth, Trock, Miramne, and Esdras remain as Gaunt, speaking in poetic language that sounds almost Biblical, urges the Policeman to be careful. As the Policeman goes, Garth recognizes Gaunt and tells Esdras to bring him into the house. Esdras goes to Gaunt, who sees him as a fellow old man and refers to how carefully old men have to proceed in life. Esdras agrees, and as he leads Gaunt into the house, they talk about how no one, even an old man, is free of guilt. Esdras, Gaunt and Garth go into the apartment. Trock disappears with the Young Men. Mio and Miriamne are alone.

## Act 1, Scene 3, Part 1 Analysis

Once again, there are three principle levels of function in this scene, and again, they are dramatic, thematic and poetic. In terms of the drama, the main function here is to introduce the characters of Mio and Judge Gaunt, whose appearances add a layer of suspense to the action, as we wonder how the lives and attitudes of characters already introduced will be affected. This is particularly true in terms of both Garth and Trock, who because of their already established involvement in the Romagna case, clearly have a considerable stake in what both Gaunt and Mio do. Garth's taking Gaunt into the house; therefore, foreshadows the development of the plot and the playing out of both the action and the intellectual debate triggered by his appearance.

On the thematic level, the question of the nature of justice is developed through the episode of the street dance. There are several aspects to this. First, the way that Lucia, the street piano player, is treated with apparent injustice reflects the way Romagna was

also apparently treated. This makes the thematic statement that, in this play, justice is seen as both corrupt and capricious. Mio's comments about the Policeman's stupidity take this point to an extreme, adding that so-called justice is also foolish, pointless and ill-considered. The Radical's comments follow through on this point, making the thematically relevant statement that justice is, in fact, a synonym for oppression. This particular idea is developed further in the second act through the actions and attitudes of Judge Gaunt. He is the personification of justice in the play, whose apparent membership in the privileged class reinforces the Radical's statements.

Third, the pronouncements of the Young Radical also develop the point through the ironic references to America, which was founded on the principle, among others, of "liberty and justice for all." The point made by the reference is that there is no justice for all, and the American dream of such justice is a hollow one. This irony foreshadows what happens at the end of the play to Mio and Miriamne, whose innocent quest for justice is ironically rewarded with violence. Fourth, the incoherence and apparent mental instability of Judge Gaunt indicate that justice is, at its heart, insane and dissociated from reality. This idea is developed further in the confrontation between Mio and Gaunt that makes up the main part of the second act.

On the poetic level, the scene's most evocative and image-filled language appears in the context of Mio's memories of his father and his descriptions of the Policeman, all of which illustrate the play's previously discussed thematic intent to condemn the idea of American justice. In other words, Mio intensely resents the way his father was treated, and therefore he speaks about it in intensely imagistic language. Throughout the play Mio's dialogue is a vivid example of the way poetry is used in the play to define the relative importance of the play's key thematic points - the more poetic the language, the more important the idea behind the poetry.

Also on the poetic level, the twice repeated rumbles of thunder function on two levels. The first, when the thunder is first heard, is to trigger the humorous and ironic suggestion that not everything that comes across as a symbol should be taken as a symbol. The second level turns this idea around, when the thunder is heard for the second time in the middle of the dance. At that point, it is a symbol of both the trouble Lucia is in, and the trouble facing Mio later in the play. As such, it's not only symbolic, but a clear manifestation of foreshadowing.

Finally, Lucia's reference to "no more music" is a metaphoric foreshadowing of what happens to Mio later in the play. In the same way as the Policeman takes away the joy and hope represented by Lucia's music, Judge Gaunt, who represents justice in the same way as the Policeman does, takes away Mio's hope. This represents the way hope for justice is hollow and empty, the play's central thematic statement.

# Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2

## Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2 Summary

Throughout this section, Mio speaks in intensely poetic language. Alone with Miriamne, he comments that she took his call for her to wait for him too seriously, saying he's not good for her. As she turns to go, he tells her to enjoy love where and when she finds it, adding that there are no guarantees of anything other than coldness in winter and death. Their conversation turns to faith, with Mio saying faith is easy if a person is a fool, and that words describing values are just words. Miriamne comments in a way that suggests Mio believes in those values anyway, and Mio says he does only because he's alone and an outcast. Miriamne offers to go with him, wherever he wanders. He swears at her and tells her if she's got a home, she should stay there. Miriamne says. again. that she'd go with him wherever he went. She admits that she's never had experience with a man, but adds that she knows about love.

They exchange names, with Mio saying his name is short for Bartolomeo, and Miriamne saying her mother's name was Miriam. Miriamne means "Little Miriam." Mio then speaks a long, poetic speech that first refers to how Miriamne is going to take up being wifely and motherly, where her mother stopped. She then talks about how, when he first saw her, he began to dream of sharing his dreams with her. He goes on to say, in even more richly poetic language, that the world and society destroyed his father. Therefore, he thought, they destroyed his capacity to dream. However, after seeing Miriamne, he has discovered that that capacity is still there. He speaks of how intensely he longs for Miriamne, but then tells her to go inside before she "catch[es] death from [him]."

Miriamne promises to help him keep his dreams alive, Mio talks about how he's "half mad with hate and longing," and Miriamne talks in language almost as poetic as Mio's about how there has to be a place where they can make a home. When he doubts her, she tells him to leave her then and there. He kisses her, and they speak in the language of love poetry about how passionately they love each other. Mio tells how he and his mother visited his father in prison, how his father left only his love when he died, and how he (Mio) will never forget him. Miriamne realizes his father was Romagna, and that he's there to find out the truth of what happened to her father from Garth. As he asks her what exactly she knows, she tells him that death is near and urges him to leave. When he demands to know why, she says she can't tell him and that she can't ever see him again.

As Miriamne is saying that she will only bring Mio death, Shadow and Trock appear. Miriamne notices them and pulls Mio into the shadows. Shadow tells Trock that one day he'll be grateful that he (Shadow) kept him out of trouble. Trock asks if he's all through, and Shadow becomes suspicious, saying the last time Trock asked a person if they were all through, that person died. Trock says Shadow can go. Shadow searches him, saying that, before he turns his back on him, he'd like to know what Trock is armed with. He discovers a gun, takes it, says "so long," and leaves. As he goes, the Two Young

Men from the beginning of the scene appear and follow him off. Trock watches them go, and disappears.

After a moment, two shots are heard. Mio starts to run after Shadow, but Miriamne holds him back. Carr rushes in, saying someone has just been shot and fell into the river. Mio and Carr run out, but as Miriamne starts to go back into her apartment, they run back in. They say that there's no way to retrieve the body, because it's been taken by the tide. Mio seems preoccupied, and Carr asks what's on his mind. Mio says he's got business to take care of, tells Carr he can't help, and urges him to keep out of it. Carr leaves, shivering and saying how cold it is. After he's gone, Mio sits and watches as Lucia and Piny come in and take away the piano.

## Act 1, Scene 3, Part 2 Analysis

The play's main sub-plot, the love story between Miriamne and Mio, comes into focus in this section of the play. The previously discussed point about the use of poetry indicating the relative importance of what's being discussed is clearly applicable here. Both Miriamne and Mio, but particularly Mio, speak in intense, passionate language that is perhaps deliberately reminiscent of the two lovers in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The young lovers in both plays are instantly and deeply attracted. In both plays, the lovers are ultimately doomed. However, unlike Romeo and Juliet, Miriamne and Mio have an awareness of the potential for destruction inherent in their relationship. This adds both depth and anguish to their imagery - while Romeo and Juliet longed with hints of despair, the poetry of Mio and Miriamne indicates that they long and despair in equal proportion. In any case, the intense poeticism of their encounter indicates that their story is a key component of both the play's dramatic and thematic premises.

In terms of the dramatic aspects of the play, the relationship adds an extra level of intensity to the plot. We'll see in Act 2, Part 1, that it is driven by Mio's search for a truth to live by; a truth he is surprised to discover in his relationship with Miriamne. In this, his motivation, is a parallel to Trock's, who is also searching for a truth to live his last six months by. In Trock's case, however, he's clearly prepared to kill in order to preserve that truth. Mio, on the other hand, is only prepared to love.

In terms of the play's themes, the relationship between Mio and Miriamne's romance and the justice theme is relatively undeveloped until late in the play. At that point, both the capricious nature of justice and the futility of pursuing it are dramatized by their deaths. The theme exploring the nature of death, on the other hand, shows up right away in this section, and on two different levels. The first is the way both Miriamne and Mio refer to themselves as bringing death to the other. It's a uniting of love and death in a cause/effect relationship that again awakens echoes of *Romeo and Juliet*, in which both characters die as a direct consequence of loving each other. The second level of development of the death theme emerges through the apparent killing of Shadow. Later in the play, he turns out to be not dead at all. The implications of this turn of events will be discussed at the point in which they appear in the text (Act 2, Part 2).

In relation to the play's poeticism, an interesting development occurs in the act's final moments in the re-appearance of Lucia and Piny. This is a piece of visual poetry, since the removal of the piano, which for a few moments symbolized happiness and spontaneous joy, echoes how the few moments of happiness and similarly spontaneous joy experienced by Mio and Mio are also taken away. It's no coincidence that at the end of the play, Piny and Lucia appear and help Esdras take away Miriamne's body. That aside, what we have in this moment is an example of how the spirit and intentions of poetry infuse the play as a whole, and not just its language.

In the same vein, it becomes possible to see the Two Young Men as another piece of visual poetry. As a result of the action of this scene, it's clear that they are instruments of death, a visual image that adds an interesting layer of meaning to their appearance alone onstage at the beginning of the play. In the context of their symbolic value, their appearance creates the sense that death is everywhere, waiting.

# Act 2, Part 1

## Act 2, Part 1 Summary

This entire act consists of a single scene, and takes place in the same apartment as Act 1, Scene 2. The music of Garth's violin is heard offstage, as Esdras talks at length about the philosophy of life he learned from studying the Talmud. When he's done, Miriamne apologizes, saying she hadn't really been listening. Esdras asks whether she knows his name. When Miriamne asks what he means, he says that when people are young and listening for a footstep, that footstep should have a name. We understand from this that Miriamne is waiting for Mio.

Garth comes in. Conversation between him and Esdras refers to someone sleeping in the other room, whom we understand to be Gaunt. They agree to say nothing about him to anyone. Miriamne voices her concerns for Garth, saying there's no place safer in the city for him than in the apartment. She also worries that it's the first place Trock will look for him. Garth says the best thing for him to do is stay where he is and to see what happens.

Gaunt comes out, saying he feels better, apologizing for intruding. He offers to pay Esdras for his trouble, but admits that he has little cash. He introduces himself and Esdras does the same, also introducing Miriamne and Garth. As he hears Garth's name, Gaunt seems troubled by a memory, connecting Garth with a case over which he recently presided, but unable to remember which one. He also refers to being unable to remember how he got to the apartment and asks for assistance in finding his way home. Garth suggests that it would be safer if he stayed awhile. Gaunt says that he finds the apartment distasteful, but Garth urges him to wait. Gaunt suddenly remembers who Garth is.

Gaunt refers to the article written by the professor, saying that it's pure invention. He adds that he could have called Garth to the witness stand at Romagna's trial, but the evidence was clear. He talks about how his integrity has been attacked since the trial, and about how he's been wandering in both mind and body as a result. He asks Garth and Esdras to keep his visit a secret. As Garth and Esdras agree, Gaunt says if there was any good to be gained by speaking out about the trial he would. He adds that what's done is done. Esdras agrees to show him to a transit terminal. Just as they're starting to leave, there's a knock on the door. Esdras answers it, as Miriamne goes into the other room.

Mio comes in, introduces himself as Romagna's son, recognizes Garth, and says he's come to find out what, if anything, Garth knows about the killing. Esdras says that if Garth can help him in any way, he will. He suggests that he come back the next day. Mio asks what Garth knows, and Esdras says he knows nothing. Garth explains that he was taken in for questioning at the time of the murder, because he resembled a suspect. Esdras refers to having heard Romagna speak, and tells Mio he was lucky to

have him as a father. Mio thanks him for the compliment, but then refers to his journey as having reached a dead end. He poetically asks how someone is meant to go on without a truth or faith to live by. Esdras, also in poetic language, speaks about how society is built upon injustices like those suffered by Romagna. Then, Garth points out that Romagna was guilty. Mio angrily says that his father was murdered, but Garth insists that due process of the law was carried out. As Mio mocks that process, Gaunt comes forward and says that he's certain Romagna was guilty.

Mio talks about having searched through all the trial records and being unable to find any unbiased evidence. When Gaunt asks whether Mio is himself unbiased, Mio recognizes him as the judge at his father's trial. In angrily poetic language, He asks what punishment would fit the crime of a judge lying in his instructions to a jury. Then begins a long section in which Gaunt struggles to convince Mio that he was telling the truth. Gaunt says that he understands Mio's anger, adding that never before or since Romagna's trial have his judgments been questioned, that he always carries with him the responsibility for seeing truly, and that the law is necessary to remind human beings they aren't animals. He says he's reviewed the transcripts of the Romagna trial and found nothing to indicate he made a bad judgment. He adds that in all the commentary on the trial he's read, the one thing referred to by all his critics is that Garth wasn't called as a witness.

Gaunt and Mio agree that a deposition from Garth would not have triggered a new trial, but Mio angrily tells him he's said nothing different from anything he's ever said and again accuses him of deliberately misleading the jury. Gaunt says if that was true he'd freely admit it and accept the punishment he'd deserve. He then says that a judge's mind is too delicate to withstand the pressures of such a lie and would go mad if such a lie were told. Mio accuses him of having already gone mad for exactly that reason, but Gaunt says his only insanity is to want to look back on his life and free it from the stain that the perceived injustice of the Romagna trial has put on it.

Gaunt asks Mio whether it's possible that the greater injustice is Mio's repeated insistence that he lied, saying it's often happened in his career that good people like Romagna committed evil. He also asks, in intensely poetic language, whether, as a result of brooding on the trial, Mio's perspective has become warped. As Mio denies it, Gaunt explains that he's seen it happen, asking in poetic language whether Mio feels haunted by his unjustly executed father. He says that he, too, has been haunted. However, the ghost haunting him has been put to rest by the realization, after reconsidering and re-investigating the evidence, that Romagna was guilty.

Mio threatens Gaunt with murder, and Gaunt says that, because there was murder in Mio's father (Romagna), there would be no surprise if there was murder in him. Mio accuses Gaunt of wanting Mio to kill him, saying that would prove Romagna's guilt once and for all and clear his name forever. He refuses to kill Gaunt, urging him to go home and die in bed. In poetic language, he adds that he's still a poisonous snake and can kill, but suddenly says that all his threats will do no good and sits down. Gaunt and Esdras leave, with Gaunt refusing Esdras' offer of a grubby coat to wear. After they've

gone, Garth asks Mio what he's going to do next. Mio asks to be left alone. Garth goes out, letting Miriamne back into the room. Miriamne and Mio are alone together.

## Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

The play's thematic debate about the nature of justice develops further in this section, as Gaunt defends his position that the justice faced by Romagna was correct. The first thing to note is that his dialogue is written poetically, meaning that its content is thematically important. That content can be distilled into the central point that justice can't allow itself to be swayed by people who wish things were another way. This key element of the play's theme is dramatized by the action, in that again and again, characters try to reshape justice into what they want it to be. Again and again, they fail. This is most apparent in the character of Mio, whose entire purpose is to revise justice. His entire world falls apart, when he realizes it isn't possible. The point is also made through the actions of Trock, who believes the justice meted out to Romagna isn't enough and is trying to spread it around to Garth and Mio. Most interestingly, this point is also made through the character of Gaunt, who as previously discussed is a personification of justice.

In this scene, Gaunt's sometimes rambling speeches indicate that, where once he was firm and upright as a judge, he has allowed his sense of self, his personal integrity and his sense of justice to be called into question by people like Mio and the professor. They are people who wish justice in the Romagna case had gone differently. As a result, he's gone somewhat crazy. In short, his disjointed state of mind proves his point - if he hadn't let himself be affected by others, he'd still be dispensing good, fair and necessary justice. His situation; therefore, becomes a metaphor for the idea that, if justice is influenced by others, it becomes corrupt.

On the other side of the coin is the argument put forward by Esdras. He says that society is and has been founded on acts of injustice. This belief is a potent contrast to Gaunt's, with the way it's expressed so tersely and vividly defining an additional level of contrast when compared with the insistent and almost verbose way that Gaunt defends his position. Esdras' position reiterates and foreshadows another aspect to the nature of justice spoken of by Gaunt later in this scene, that the decisions made by justice must not be questioned, in order to preserve the status quo.

Meanwhile, the length at which Gaunt speaks raises the question of whether he truly means what he says. It's debatable whether he actually speaks so intensely, because he's trying to convince himself, defending what he knows to be an incorrect position. This is not to say that he doesn't believe what he says. However, on some level, he might know that that belief is wrong, an idea reinforced by his clearly unhinged reappearance later in the act. If this is the case, and Gaunt does know he's wrong, his story is a clear parallel to Mio's, who discovers that he too has been wrong. Both could have been betrayed by their ideas of justice. It's interesting to note that at Mio's lowest point, once he's made to believe the truth he's lived by all his life is gone, a new truth appears - Miriamne, who literally enters the scene at the moment at which his hope

leaves. Gaunt, on the other hand, has nothing to replace his previous faith in justice and himself. As a result, he goes even more insane, as we shall see later.

An interesting development is that at, one point in his argument, Gaunt refers to Romagna's first name, Bartolomeo, which is the same as Mio's. This suggests that, on a metaphoric level, Mio is his father. His quest for justice is his father's quest. His confrontation with Gaunt is the confrontation that his father never got to have. His love for Miriamne is the love that his father never got to share with his mother. This also develops the previously discussed idea that Romagna hasn't really died. His spirit carries on in his son, meaning that death isn't really death. When the presumed dead Shadow re-appears later in this act, this aspect of the play's theme relating to the nature of death is developed even further.

# Act 2, Part 2

## Act 2, Part 2 Summary

Mio notices Miriamne and seems surprised to see her. She tells him that she's Garth sister, and that she heard everything that passed between him and Gaunt. He prepares to leave, but she kisses him in an attempt to get him to stay. He speaks poetically about how he's got nothing left to live for. She tells him that, in spite of everything the others said, he's still a king among men. He talks at length about how he suddenly feels as though all the hatred heaped on him and his father was deserved, and how Miriamne's too good for him. However, Miriamne tells him that all he has to do is say he loves her, and she'll give him everything she has and is. Garth comes in, commenting sardonically on the love scene he's interrupting. Miriamne tells him to leave them alone. She says that she loves Mio, and if Garth did anything to damage the relationship, she'd want to die. Garth tells Mio to go, and he starts for the door.

At that moment, the Tramp comes in, desperate for a place to stay. Miriamne lets him lie down under the water pipes, explaining that Esdras let him stay there last winter. She invites Mio to stay. When he insists upon leaving, she gives him what little money she has and asks him to say he loves her. He says she's too beautiful and sweet and good not to love, but refuses to kiss her, because Garth is angrily watching them.

Esdras and Gaunt come in, followed by Trock, who sarcastically apologizes for keeping them from their train. He says that they will always have time to catch another train, but he has very little time to do what he wants to do. He asks who everybody in the room is, and Mio, at first, identifies himself by a false name. He is later identified by Esdras, as Romagna's son. Trock asks what he's doing there, and Garth says that he just walked in. Trock says that the only person they need to make the gathering complete is Shadow. When Mio asks who Shadow is, Garth explains that Shadow is "nobody," ,"that he just blew away. He says that Trock is threatening Garth with violence if he doesn't stay quiet about the truth of what happened during the robbery. Mio asks why Trock keeps his hand in his pocket, and Trock says it's because he's cold. He then tells Garth there's a car nearby to take Gaunt home. Both Esdras and Garth say Gaunt can stay, but Trock says, with meaningful menace, that Gaunt is going to be taken care of.

Trock opens the door to go and discovers that it's pouring rain. He closes the door, saying that every time he goes out in the rain, it takes ten days off his life. This implies that anything that might make him ill aggravates whatever is already killing him. Gaunt speaks ramblingly about the future of mankind, and then announces that he's hungry. The Tramp offers him some of his bread. Gaunt tries it, but then he says it's not very good, adding that he's accustomed to much better food and company. Trock recognizes Gaunt, Mio taunts Trock, Trock threatens him, and then tries the door again. He sees it's still raining and closes it, but it reopens quickly to reveal Shadow, pale and bloodstained. Trock backs away from him in terror. Gaunt rambles to the Tramp about how long someone could live if he took care of himself.

Shadow warns Trock to keep his hands visible, saying he knows Trock was behind his death, and that God gave him a chance to come back and confront him. He pulls out a gun, nearly collapses from loss of blood, and drops the gun. Miriamne, Garth and Esdras help him into the other room. As Trock is recovering from the shock of seeing him, Mio picks up his gun, and Gaunt talks poetically about how only the young are eager for justice. He also talks about Death doing what's right by killing the old and giving the young their places. He then sings a couple of verses of a raunchy song, but as the Tramp laughs, he stops suddenly. He says that the Tramp should restrain himself.

As Esdras and Garth come back in, Trock insists that they shut the door into the other room, afraid Shadow will come back from the dead again. He refers to Romagna, another dead man who, in his mind, has also come back. Mio says the dead won't stay dead, demanding to know why Trock had Shadow killed and taunted Trock with the idea that all the other people he killed are also at the door. Trock tries to flee, but Mio holds the gun on him and keeps him in the room. As they argue, Gaunt imagines himself to be presiding over a trial. Mio goes along with the delusion, pretending to be a lawyer re-trying the Romagna case. He calls Garth to speak as a witness, but Garth says he'll say nothing different from what he said before (that he saw nothing). Mio then calls Trock, who refuses, and then Shadow, saying to Trock that he'll again get up and talk.

Trock reacts with terror, saying that Shadow committed the killing Romagna was executed for. Mio accuses Trock, Garth and Gaunt of coming together to arrange their stories, adding that Trock killed Shadow to keep him quiet and accusing Gaunt of lying. Gaunt confesses that the verdicts of justice, right or wrong, must be supported in order to maintain the common good. He also says that justice depends on the class the accused belongs to and refers to Romagna as unfortunate. He says that because of what happened to him, he (Gaunt) is just as unfortunate. He asks Mio to promise that what he said won't go any further, but Mio says it will go as far as it needs to go. Trock, now calmer, promises it won't go far at all. However, Mio shouts that the truth has freed both him and his father.

There's a knock on the door, and Garth opens it to reveal a Policeman and a Sergeant, who say they're looking for an old man who's been acting strangely. At first, it seems as though they're talking about the Tramp. However, it turns out that they're looking for Gaunt, who says he's lost his way. The Sergeant and Policeman recognize him as a person of rank and value. As the Policeman helps Gaunt prepare to leave, the Sergeant recognizes Trock. Mio shouts that he's responsible for the deaths of both the man in the next room and the man who was killed years ago in the Romagna case. The Sergeant and Policeman dismiss what he's saying. Mio tries to convince them to go into the next room and see Shadow's body for themselves. Miriamne and Garth both say they don't know what he's talking about. The Policeman goes in and doesn't find a body, and Mio goes in to find out for himself what's going on. When he sees Shadow's body is gone, he asks Garth what he did with him. Garth says again that he doesn't know what he's talking about. The Sergeant gives Mio a warning, and Mio accuses Miriamne of deceiving him. Miriamne hints that he should say he was dreaming. Mio takes the hint, and says it. The Sergeant and Policeman take Gaunt out.

After they're gone, Trock asks what happened to Shadow. Esdras explains that he fell in the hall outside the other room and died. Trock tells them to throw Shadow's body in the river and prepares to go, saying he doesn't know yet whether he's coming back. He tells Garth to turn Mio loose, and wishes they all rot in hell. As he goes, Miriamne watches him. When he's out of sight, she urges Mio to hurry and leave. As Garth tells her to let Mio choose for himself, Mio asks Garth why he lied about Shadow. Garth just tells him to go and tell his story if he wants to. He cautions him to be careful, since Trock is still out there. Esdras urges Mio to stay silent, saying that Trock's crimes drove him and his family into poverty. If Mio tells his story, they'll sink even lower.

Mio speaks accusingly to Garth and Miriamne, who says she couldn't turn her brother over to the police. Mio agrees with her, commenting that the gods are being ironic, since all his life all he's ever wanted is to shout the truth about his father. Now, he's got a girl in the way of him achieving that goal. He speaks poetically about how what brought him and Miriamne together is what's keeping them apart. He prepares to leave. She tries to keep him there. However, he says that there's no difference between the dangers posed by Trock and those posed by staying. He goes out, saying all of them are casting their fate to the winds.

## Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

Several previously discussed elements develop further in this scene. These include Gaunt's increasing insanity, which makes the thematic suggestion that justice is itself ultimately insane. They also include the idea that the dead are not really dead, a point made specifically by both Trock and Mio in reference to the way Shadow's living on is similar to the way Romagna lives on in Mio's memory and his desire for revenge. Also repeated is the portrayal of Gaunt as a snob, indicated here by his reference to the company he's accustomed to keeping and by the way the Policeman and the Sergeant recognize him. Once again, because Gaunt symbolizes justice, his snobbery suggests that justice is more for the wealthy than the poor.

At this point, it might be appropriate to look at the two relationships between father and son in this play, between Romagna and Mio and between Esdras and Garth. In the first, the son is defending the father; while in the second, the father is defending the son. In both cases, there is clearly a bond of, if not love, then at least of responsibility. It's interesting to note that earlier in the play, Esdras praises Romagna for his apparent devotion to his son, a value he clearly shares. It's also interesting to note how Mio reciprocates that devotion, while Garth clearly sees his father as someone to be used. Remember the comment that Garth made earlier about borrowing money from Esdras to help Trock. Also note that Garth is essentially using Esdras' home as a hideout, putting both him and Miriamne in danger. All of this combines to suggest that the Garth/Esdras relationship is one of user and used. It functions to define, by contrast, the more positively accepted relationship between Mio and Romagna.

Caught in the middle of all the drama is Miriamne, an embodiment and symbol of compassion in the same way as Gaunt is an embodiment and symbol of justice, and

Trock is the embodiment and symbol of humanity's power to destroy. As a result of her compassion, Miriamne clearly empathizes with many of the men - with Garth's fear, Esdras' concern, Mio's obsession, Shadow's pain, Gaunt's madness, and even the Tramp's homelessness. What's interesting to note is that, in this scene, she manages to do what's best for everyone, balancing pragmatism with consideration. For example, although she is clearly moved by Shadow's plight and tries to ease his discomfort, when he dies, she's realistic enough to know that keeping his body hidden will prevent the police from becoming suspicious of Trock, who would then implicate Garth in his crimes. She also knows that lying to the police about Shadow's body and convincing Mio to do the same will prevent Trock from being questioned, an action ultimately triggered by Mio's accusation for which Trock would want to take revenge. All this sets up the tragedy of her death at the play's climax. It also sets up the thematic point made by her death that there is, in fact, no justice in this life.

# Act 3

## Act 3 Summary

This act also consists of a single extended scene, and is set in the same place as Act 1 Scene 1 - under the bridge. The Two Young Men are again waiting, playing a game of chance as they keep an eye on the apartment and the street. Trock comes out of the apartment and speaks to them in low tones that can't be understood. Trock goes out in one direction, the Young Men go out in another. We understand that the action here is taking place as the action inside the apartment at the end of Act 2 is ending.

Mio comes out of the apartment, followed shortly by Miriamne. Mio talks about feeling claustrophobic in the apartment and wanting to die in the open air. Miriamne suggests that Lucia, the piano man, might be able to give him refuge. Mio talks about how her fear is wise, given that he's just glimpsed Trock hiding and waiting. Miriamne says she'll blame herself if Mio is killed, but Mio says he got into this situation on his own and has to find a way out on his own. He compares the situation to the chess problems posed in the papers in which white always wins. He says that if the situation were reversed, white would be black and vice versa. He then asks Miriamne whether she thinks he'll have time to pull out his gun.

Garth and the Tramp come out of the apartment with Shadow's body and quickly go off, as Mio speaks a poetic eulogy, making a joke about his bad rhymes. He then talks about how there's nothing truly mysterious about human life, saying it runs just like an electric machine and making a joke about how he and Shadow would make good sausages. When Miriamne reacts with disgust, Mio apologizes. Garth and the Tramp return, going into the apartment without responding to another joke from Mio. Esdras then comes out, saying he'll call the police to serve as an escort when Mio wants to leave. Mio thanks him for his concern, but says the police will ask questions. As Mio will answer them truthfully, Garth will be implicated in the Romagna killing. Esdras pleads with him to let Garth live, and then says he's going to go to the police, no matter what, in the hopes that the fact that Esdras is trusting him will move Mio to change his mind. As Esdras goes, Miriamne kisses him.

Garth's violin is heard as Mio speaks at poetic length about the legendary war between angels and devils, wondering who won. He and Miriamne talk about Esdras, whom Miriamne says is afraid, because he's old. He adds, "the less one has to lose the more [one is] afraid." Miriamne embraces him, saying that what comes for him can come for her, too. She berates herself for not speaking up about Garth when the police were there. Mio tells her that she made an understandable choice, her brother over him. Miriamne tells him that Garth has suffered enough and urges him to let go of his urge for revenge. Mio says he can't, adding that his desires live within his bones. He vows to pursue and reveal the truth, once and for all.

Carr appears, making a joke about how Mio is doing much better for himself, holding a pretty girl in his arms, than he was the last time they saw each other. Miriamne offers to leave, but Mio tells her to stay. Carr says that he only came back, because he was concerned, adding that the two Young Men he and Mio met earlier are back, lingering by the river. He asks whether Mio has had any luck in his investigation, but Mio says he hasn't. He tells the incredulous Carr about Shadow and then telling Miriamne, who wants him to tell Carr the truth about Garth. He thanks Carr for being a good friend. Carr says he sounds like he's saying farewell. He says that that if he's in trouble, he'll help any way he can. Mio says he's protected from all harm, apparently referring to Miriamne. He says that he might take Carr up on his offer to visit and stay for a while. Carr says good night to Mio and Miriamne, and goes out.

Miriamne asks Mio why he let Carr go, and Mio says he did it for her to keep Garth safe. When Miriamne protests that he's just cost himself his own safety, Mio says he's feeling his desire for revenge slip away from him, speaking poetically about his need to forgive and asking her to teach him how. Miriamne says Mio's father (Romagna) would have forgiven. Mio agrees, saying that, for some reason, he's never remembered that. They speak poetically about their hope for the future and a life together. They kiss, vow to meet again and to always think of each other. Mio says that he came to the city "running from the dawn, and stumbled on a morning."

Esdras comes in, bleeding and battered. Miriamne runs to him but he tells her to keep away. He tells Mio that Trock wouldn't let him pass and urges him to save himself. He adds that Trock is determined to live all his remaining six months of life. He hints that if Mio's gone, he'll have them for sure. He then volunteers to try to find a way for Mio to escape and runs off. After he's gone, Mio speaks a poetic prayer for mercy on him and Miriamne, referring to when "winter sets his foot on the threshold ... let fall some mercy with the rain." Miriamne talks about how a bitter prayer like that will never result in good things, and then sees Esdras waving them to stay where they are. She spies a way out, a path through the rocks by the river. Mio resolves to try it, Miriamne urges him to stay safe, and he bids her good-bye and runs out.

An instant later, machine gun fire is heard, and Mio comes back, bleeding and dying. As he sinks to the ground, he promises to love Miriamne forever. She wishes they'd never met, saying that it's because of her that he's dying, but he tells her she's wrong. Esdras and Garth come out of the house as she gets to her feet, shouting that she knows who killed Mio and how and why, and that she'll never stay silent. The machine gun sounds again, and Miriamne falls to the ground. Garth runs to her, but she tells him to stay away. She crawls to Mio but realizes he's already dead. She dies next to him.

The Tramp, Lucia and Piny come out of hiding. Garth wonders aloud why Mio was born, and why he came. Esdras speaks a long poetic speech about how the deaths of young people who love each other are worth more than the deaths of old men. He says that Miriamne and Mio died glorious, courageous deaths, and wishes that he'd died such a death. He refers to a cry of the heart as something greater than life, suggesting that Mio and Miriamne died giving voice to that cry. He talks about the relative meaninglessness of lives lived and died in other ways, saying that the only responsibility of those who

lived such lives is to bury those who didn't. He, Garth, Piny and Lucia pick up Miriamne's body and take it out.

## Act 3 Analysis

Given how the Young Men, as previously discussed, are embodiments of death, their presence at the beginning of the scene warns us, as Mio said earlier, that death is very near. The appearance of the Young Men creates a sense of suspense, drawing us into the action, as we wonder whose death their appearance foreshadows. Similar foreshadowing also appears in the form of Carr, whose appearance reminds us of the presence of the Young Men, and ultimately death.

At the same time, the sense of suspense is developed through the repeated imagery of competition or struggle, appearing in Mio's references to chess and to the battle between angels and devils. Both these references question the nature of good and evil, indicating that on some level and after some time, the battle lines become blurred. This indicates that Mio is perhaps feeling a degree of remorse over the violence he's bringing into Miriamne's life. It also foreshadows the play's ending, in which his and Miriamne's deaths can be interpreted either as tragedy or, as Esdras suggests, a triumph.

Also in this scene, an intriguing explanation for Trock's behavior is provided in this scene by Esdras' comments about Trock wanting to live his last six months completely free. Up to this point, there's been no clear explanation of why Trock is there - we know he's looking for evidence, but we don't have any information as to why. Esdras' comment brings an interesting level of potential humanity to Trock's character, explaining, but not for a moment excusing, why he does what he does.

The key point of this final act, however, is the way that Mio goes on at such length and with such varied imagery about his love for Miriamne and about how he's been redeemed by hers for him, all of which is undermined by his fatalistic certainty that he's about to die. Perhaps that knowledge gives him the freedom to love fully in a way he never has, or perhaps his love gives him the freedom and the courage to face death directly. Either way, the scene reiterates the point discussed earlier that love and death, at least for these two young people, are irrevocably and fatally entwined. Their deaths make the final point in what might be described as a very cynical thematic statement - the pursuit of true justice leads to suffering and death. As Mio and Miriamne, for various reasons and in various ways, are both struggling to free themselves from the influences of the past, their death can also been interpreted as a triumph, an escape that Garth, Esdras and Gaunt aren't granted. They don't become free, and won't until they die.

The same point could be made of Trock. However, the important thing to note in his case is that he creates his own freedom, killing whoever he thinks will stand in his way. Either way, it's possible to see, as Esdras suggests in his final speech, how Mio and Miriamne have died gloriously, loving and faithful. The question is whether we see their deaths from the same perspective, as an embodiment of a completely different theme from the play's clear theme relating to justice.

The key to answering this question can be found in the reference to the play's title in Mio's prayer - specifically his request that as "winter sets his foot on the threshold ... let fall some mercy with the rain." The image functions on two levels, first as a suggestion of inevitability, with the invocation of winter suggesting that death, like the changing of the seasons, is inescapable. The second level of function occurs in the second half of the phrase, which invokes the idea that even in dark or unpleasant times, it's possible for good to emerge. Aside from the fact that its phrasing awakens an echo of another Shakespearean play (*The Merchant of Venice*, in which Portia, in the famous "quality of mercy" speech, refers to mercy dropping "as the gentle rain from heaven"), the image suggests that, even in dark times, there is still hope. This leads us to understand that the play, even while making its cynical points about the nature of justice, is also making the point that hope, joy and freedom are always, possible.

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# Characters

## Carr

Mio's intelligent and devoted friend, Carr is an old acquaintance that Mio has not seen for many years. Carr is native to New York City and understands the danger of the tenement very well. Although Miriamne describes Carr as Mio's "angel," Carr is ultimately unable to help his friend or spread the word of Romagna's innocence, because Mio keeps his conflict to himself.

## Garth Esdras

Garth is a former member of Trock's gang who saw Trock commit the murder for which Romagna was executed. A violinist who has abandoned any involvement in crime, Garth suffers because of his family's poverty but has little opportunity of advancing. He is timid, afraid that Trock will kill him or that he will be punished for his involvement in the crime. Garth refuses to tell the police anything. However, he is tormented by his role in Romagna's execution. He admits his knowledge to Miriamne and his father. At the end of the play, Garth blames Mio for his sister's death.

## Miriamne Esdras

An innocent and idealistic girl of fifteen whom Mio describes as "clean and sweet," Miriamne falls deeply in love with Mio. Charmed by Mio's romantic observations about the world and his steadfast love of truth, she has a number of realizations herself, such as her awakening belief in spirituality and the mystery of life. Miriamne is torn between her lover, who must proclaim the truth about his father in order to live, and her brother, who withheld information from the court and has been threatened with murder by Trock. She refuses to give up her brother when the police are asking questions in their apartment. She changes many of her own convictions in the course of the play, and she is wracked with guilt about failing to stand up for Mio when he needs her. When she sacrifices herself for Mio, it comes too late for him to realize, and she dies in despair.

## Rabbi Esdras

Garth and Miriamne's wise father, Esdras is continually providing moral and philosophical advice. His bleak view of life's struggle, in which he believes there is no truth, comes from his long experience and his reading of the Talmud, the vast collection of Jewish laws and traditions. He pleads with his children and others to let the past be and forget guilt, since it is better to live and lie, than to die trying to tell the truth. Esdras tries to provide humane advice to his children and friends. In his final speech, however, deeply affected by his daughter's and Mio's deaths, Esdras seems to come to some

new conclusions by proclaiming that they were better to die young and pure than to suffer as long as he has.

## Trock Estrella

Trock is a ruthless gangster just released from prison. He is the actual murderer who committed the crime for which Romagna was convicted. He runs the riverbank tenement and wants to make sure no one gives any evidence on him that could send him back to prison for the final six months of his life, which is all he has left according to the prison doctor. Not only does Trock threaten and beat the residents of the tenement; he shows no remorse over killing anyone that might be a problem for him, including his close friend and accomplice, Shadow. Anderson is careful to emphasize the darkness of Trock's personality with such techniques as making sure the gangster and his two thugs are continually lurking in the shadows. Trock's success in suppressing the truth and murdering Shadow, Mio, and Miriamne is central to the melancholy vision of the play, though Trock will die himself within six months.

## Judge Gaunt

The judge in the Romagna case, Judge Gaunt is an "elderly, quiet man." He is plagued by guilt and doubt over sending Romagna to be executed. His doubt plagues him to the point where he is paranoid, desperate, and on the edge of sanity when he comes to the New York tenement, stopping people on the street to argue that his verdict was correct. Like Esdras, Judge Gaunt believes that only the young love truth and justice, although he is obsessed with the unwavering uprightness of the courts. Judge Gaunt finds the squalor of the tenement disgusting. He never admits his error in the Romagna case, although he is delusional and shattered by the end of the play.

## Herman

A "gawky shoe salesman," Herman forces himself upon a girl, who gives in out of pity, and he wants to marry her afterwards.

## Professor Hobhouse

Professor Hobhouse does not appear in the play, but he is the person trying to open the Romagna case to further investigation.

## Hobo

The hobo who lives under the bridge is generally a silent observer of what is happening around him, although he assists in disposing of Shadow's body. He tells Trock he is called "Oke."

## Lucia

Lucia is a poor street vendor with a barrel organ that is operated by turning a crank. The police ban him from using the barrel organ.

## Piny

The apple-woman of the tenement, Piny is Lucia's friend and lives in the shack next to his. Apple-selling was a common trade amongst the poor and unemployed during the Great Depression.

## Policeman

The district policeman, who is from Ireland, is bullying and slightly brutish. Mio comments on his incompetence and stupidity.

## Radical

The young radical who appears in act 1, scene 3, of the play protests against the policeman's "capitalistic oppression," defends the freedom of speech, and stirs the emotions of the crowd.

## Bartolomeo Romagna

Romagna is Mio's father, the Italian immigrant executed for a murder he did not commit. Romagna was a social and political radical, which is why he was blamed for the crime. Mio remembers his father's love for him.

## Mio Romagna

A melancholy boy of seventeen, Mio (short for Bartolomeo, after his father) has been so thoroughly "[cut] off from the world" that his only desire is to prove his father's innocence. After his father was executed for murder and pay roll robbery, and his mother died of grief, Mio was asked to leave his hometown. Since then he has drifted around the country in despair. Mio is an intelligent, well read, and passionate person. His sleuthing does uncover the truth of his father's innocence, although Mio does not proclaim it to the world according to his original plan.

Despite Mio's profound sadness, and his inability to live and forget what happened to his parents, he falls in love with Miriamne. Their relationship is a glimmer of hope in the play, although Mio recognizes that his character is not suited for love because he cannot live without proclaiming the truth about his father. At first Mio feels Miriamne has betrayed him by refusing to tell the truth to the police, but then he forgives her and

realizes that she could not give up her brother. In fact, it is out of love for her that he does not ask Carr for help in spreading the truth about his father's innocence, which would send her brother to prison.

Associated with Christ although he is an atheist and often speaking in mystical and lofty verse, Mio finds that the real world is not suited for him. He is continually making literary references from a wide variety of sources, and his romantic philosophizing reveals his view of a vengeful and evil world full of lies. This view fits with Mio's fatalistic personality, and he thinks of himself as speaking "from a high place, far off, long ago, looking down."

## Sailor

The sailor is part of the crowd dancing to Lucia's barrel organ.

## Sergeant

A fairly unobservant policeman, the Sergeant enters the Esdras apartment to take Judge Gaunt home. He is suspicious about Mio's claims but fails to discover what has happened.

## Shadow

Shadow is Trock's gangster sidekick, who was involved in the murder for which Romagna was executed. Trock has Shadow shot because he refuses to kill Judge Gaunt. Shadow tries to convince Trock to stop killing in order to cover his tracks, and he vows never to tell the police anything, but Trock does not believe him. After Trock has him shot, Shadow manages to walk all the way to the Esdras house, but he cannot see well enough to shoot Trock himself, and he dies in the apartment. Shadow likes to joke occasionally and is a contrast to Trock's earnest, dark personality.

# Themes

## Truth and Justice

Mio's principal struggle in *Winterset* is to find proof of the injustice done to his father and publicly proclaim this truth; he is so obsessed with this one truth that he believes his life has no purpose other than to find and preach it. It is not necessarily clear in the melancholy world of the play, however, whether it is possible or desirable to achieve this revenge and approach life with the burning truth of a past injustice. The play continually tests and questions not only whether truth should be proclaimed and justice done, but whether truth exists and justice is possible.

These philosophical questions are addressed in Mio's eloquent speeches, in Esdras's wise observations, and in Judge Gaunt's obsessive self-defense, as well is in the convictions and actions of other characters and in the plot. Until he falls in love with Miriamne, Mio believes that truth is all-important. He feels so cut off from the world that he does not care if he dies proclaiming the truth. But Mio's love, and his knowledge of the consequences for Miriamne's brother if he unearths the truth, eventually cause him to abandon his original purpose. Esdras's observations about the lack of any real truth, and the fact that the world is built on lies and injustice, also seem to affect his decision. As does Judge Gaunt's questioning of whether anyone can be objective, and whether justice should actually serve not to proclaim truth but to protect society.

Anderson does not abandon the idea that truth and justice are important, however. Esdras's monologue to close the play honors Mio and Miriamne's desire for these noble ideas, and he says it would have been better to die young and pure like they do than to lie and live to old age. Also, the historical context of the play, which makes direct reference to the Sacco-Vanzetti case (discussed below), suggests that it is vital to proclaim the truth about a historical injustice.

## Love and Duty

Mio and Miriamne's love is the pivotal factor in the play. As Miriamne tells Garth, "the world's all changed" after she meets Mio. Love changes their basic convictions as moral duty comes into conflict with family obligations and the choices they must make become much more unclear and complex. Miriamne must choose between saving her brother from jail and supporting her lover. Mio feels he cannot carry out his revenge, fulfilling his duty to his father, without sabotaging his lover's family. Ultimately, they try to choose each other over their duties to their families and their previous moral convictions, but this choice results in their deaths.

In arranging a tragedy with such difficult choices, Anderson forces his audience to evaluate the importance of love and duty and to question how far one ought to be willing to go to uphold his/her convictions. Mio decides that protecting his lover's family is more

important than his revenge, but this turns out to be as fatal, as does Miriamne's passionate declaration that she will uphold the truth. The audience, like Esdras, may admire the purity of this decision, but they also may be skeptical of whether this is the correct choice. Anderson therefore does not necessarily attempt to resolve the complex and contradictory demands of love and duty, although he provides a profound insight into the problem.

## Radicalism

With its atmosphere of extreme opinions and desperate circumstances, *Winterset* is a play about radicalism. The young radical who complains about the "capitalistic oppression" of the New York mayor and the police force provides some of the politically radical ideas in the play, which might be connected to socialist thinking. Other characters such as Esdras challenge a variety of other mainstream convictions. It is Mio, however, who provides the bulk of the controversial and visionary ideas, some of which relate to the anarchism and socialism associated with his father. But many of the ideas are Anderson's own inclusions, such as atheism, Freudian psychology, fatalism, and materialism.

Anderson bases his main plot on a historical case famous for the political extremism of its defendants, and he includes a variety of competing opinions and philosophies that radically depart from social norms. The play does not necessarily advocate these ideas, but Anderson does think seriously and philosophically about them, and he is certainly interested in questioning mainstream assumptions. He recognizes that the poverty of the tenement and the general desperation of many of its characters tend to make radical ideas appealing. He may be suggesting that the state of the United States during the Great Depression required a drastic change from the predominant ideology.

# Style

## Verse Drama

One of the best-known aspects of *Winterset* is the fact that it is a verse drama, written in poetic lines whose meter and length determine the visual and auditory rhythm of the text. T. S. Eliot was one of the most important early-twentieth-century advocates of verse drama, which he considered the highest form that a play could take. But few playwrights even attempted it and fewer still have met with any success. Anderson taught William Shakespeare's verse dramas, and had a long-standing interest in poetry. It was only with this experience, and after many previous attempts, that Anderson was able to write such effective and successful dramatic poetry.

Ambitious and sophisticated in its style, *Winterset* often uses "blank verse," or unrhymed lines in iambic pentameter, which is a meter of five two-syllable units that was also used by Shakespeare. But Anderson varies the verse greatly throughout the play, using different meters and styles, and he often includes prose sections, which are in paragraph format. As in Shakespeare, the balance between these styles allows a great flexibility in theme, and Anderson makes full use of the "high" (poetic and universal) or "low" (common and realistic) emphasis that his poetic structure provides in order to bring out certain themes and balance the universal with the specific. Also, the combination of the play's philosophical meditations with realistic voices and a contemporary setting allows Anderson to contemplate themes of wide philosophical significance while remaining grounded in a real and immediate story. Mio's poetic monologues, for example, are balanced with his authentic speech patterns and the gritty reality of his fate.

## Literary and Theological Allusions

*Winterset* includes allusions to a wide variety of authors and works, in specific phrases, in theme, and in the very structure of the play. Carr alerts the audience to this fact when he recognizes Mio's allusions to the Victorian poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson and the English Renaissance writer Ben Jonson. But most of Anderson's literary allusions, from classical mythology to T. S. Eliot's poetry, are not cited. Two of the most important allusions, that are more than simple references, are to Shakespeare and to Judeo-Christian religious texts, as many critics have noticed. The theme of avenging one's father is similar to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Mio's comment to Miriamne in act 2 that she should leave him and keep herself chaste, is similar to Hamlet's famous speech in which he tells Ophelia to become a nun. Mio and Miriamne also have many similarities with Romeo and Juliet, including their self-destructive love and their nearly dying together. Aside from Esdras's comments related to the Jewish Talmud and elements in common with Judaic lore and the Book of Job in the Old Testament of the Bible, Mio is something of a Christ figure in his transcendent view of another world, his wandering as a teacher and a beggar who is shunned by society, and his desire to preach the truth.

All of these allusions add depth and significance to Anderson's themes, as well as adding substance to the play's philosophical content.

# Historical Context

## The Sacco-Vanzetti Case

In May of 1920, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants known to be anarchists and labor union organizers, were arrested in Staughton, Massachusetts and charged with the murder and robbery of a paymaster and his security guard. Sacco was found in possession of a .32 caliber pistol that, ballistics experts claimed, contained the same kind of bullets used in the crime. Several eyewitnesses positively identified them. In the spring of 1921, a jury found the two men guilty of the crimes, based largely on circumstantial evidence. The trial judge sentenced both men to death by electrocution.

Sacco and Vanzetti initially had little popular support because of their radical views and their Italian accents, but their lawyers managed to stay the execution for several years. During this time, liberals and intellectuals reevaluated the case and began to believe that the men were condemned simply because of their political views. By 1925, a defense committee formed, holding demonstrations throughout the country, enlisting the help of a new lawyer, Michael A. Musmanno.

Public pressure eventually led to the Massachusetts governor organizing a commission to investigate the case, headed by Harvard Professor A. Lawrence Lowell, which completed its inquiries in June of 1927. The Lowell Commission upheld the validity of the verdict, despite widespread accusations of a government whitewash. The Supreme Court denied appeals from Musmanno and other defense lawyers to stay the execution. On August 23, 1927, Sacco and Vanzetti were executed. There is still considerable controversy over whether they were actually guilty.

By combining characteristics of Sacco and Vanzetti into the fictional character of Mio's father, Anderson takes the stance that Sacco and Vanzetti were innocent. Anderson is critical of the system that condemned them. Critics have noted, however, that Anderson was less forceful in his condemnation of the justice system in *Winterset* than he was in his previous play on the subject, *Gods of the Lightening* (1928), which was a failure on Broadway. *Winterset* seems less politically motivated because it is distanced from the specifics of the case and because it takes on a variety of wider moral and philosophical issues. However, it does contain numerous references to the execution and its implications, from its imagery of lightening and electricity to Anderson's choice of Bartolomeo Vanzetti's first name to that of Mio and his father.

## The Early Years of the Great Depression

In October of 1929, the United States stock market crashed, marking the beginning of a period of extremely high unemployment and financial difficulty for many Americans. The optimism that characterized the 1920s, which was a prosperous era for the middle and

upper classes, had come to an end. While the Great Depression affected nearly all aspects of society in some way, however, its specific effects varied sharply depending on social class and source of income. Members of the upper class largely remained financially secure, while lower class workers and farmers often found themselves out of work or bankrupt. Many in the working class found that their situations had not drastically changed from the 1920s. Middle class jobs were more difficult to find, and often both parents of a family would try to seek jobs in order to live comfortably.

With the financial desperation of the 1930s came increased activism on the part of socialists and union organizers, and many workers unionized to demand better conditions from employers and the government. Activism among radical groups was particularly high in the slums of big cities, such as that portrayed in *Winterset*, where many former workers were reduced to street peddling in order to survive. City unions asked for mandates requiring electricity and heating companies to maintain the supply when bills had not been paid. Thousands of workers marched on Washington in 1932 to demand bonuses, but the government was largely unsympathetic; President Herbert Hoover violently quashed the 1932 march by calling in the army. This reflected the upper and middle class distrust and fear of radical groups.

Most political participation came in the form of voting for the Democratic party, however, which made enormous gains in the 1932 election. Franklin Delano Roosevelt remained in power from 1932 until the end of the Great Depression, instituting the New Deal, a series of reforms meant to create jobs and institute social services and welfare. The New Deal did create jobs and had wide support in the lower class, although it is unclear whether it actually contributed to the recovery of the economy or whether it addressed the problem of extremely high rates of poverty among racial and ethnic minorities. Among the hardest hit by the depression, ethnic minority groups encountered widespread racism and economic oppression.

# Critical Overview

*Winterset* was a success on Broadway and was largely met with reviews that praised Anderson's ability to combine poetry with realistic contemporary drama. Some critics found the play's Shakespearean themes jumbled and its poetic voices unconvincing, but these critics were in the minority. In 1936, the play was awarded the newly created Drama Critics' Circle Award, which led to its popularity across the country for five years. Later critics, while sometimes finding fault with aspects such as its melancholy ending, tended to agree that the play was one of Anderson's finest achievements and one of the best American verse dramas of the twentieth century.

In his article, "*Winterset* and Some Early Eliot Poems," Perry D. Luckett characterizes the substance of the critical approaches to the play as follows:

Critics initially concerned themselves with its use of verse, a major experiment in a theater devoted largely to prose, and only later began to examine the play's theme and characters to determine whether it had anything important to say.

As Luckett goes on to acknowledge, many critics, such as Francis E. Abernethy in his article, "*Winterset*: A Modern Revenge Tragedy," highlight the play's many sources and allusions. Abernethy argues that the play is a revenge tragedy heavily indebted to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. However, Robert L. Gilbert states in his article, "Mio Romagna: A New View of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*" that "*Winterset* is not 'a revenge play.'" In addition to discussing the influence of Shakespeare, Judaic lore, and T. S. Eliot over the play, later critics have explored its themes of love and justice, its view on traditional values, and its politics. The play, along with Anderson's other works, was rarely performed in the early 2000s, but it was still considered one of the most notable twentieth-century verse dramas.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

# Critical Essay #1

*Trudell is a freelance writer with a bachelor's degree in English literature. In the following essay, Trudell discusses the techniques Anderson uses to develop and test the philosophical assertions of his tragedy.*

Profound and thematically ambitious, with commentaries on the nature of truth, existence, religion, love, death, and many other fundamental values and ideas, *Winterset* is a philosophical play. Anderson does not merely imitate Shakespeare in style; he follows the famous playwright's tendency to present and examine a number of philosophies and traditions that are represented and expressed by various characters. For example, Mio's contemplative speeches have roots in Senecan (based on Seneca, the ancient Roman writer of revenge tragedies) and Shakespearean philosophical traditions. Also, Esdras's wise commentaries owe much to Judaic lore and the biblical book of Job. As Robert L. Gilbert points out in his essay, "Mio Romagna: A New View of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*," Anderson does not rely entirely on these traditions. In fact, the philosophies expressed in *Winterset* are often quite original. But Anderson expresses and tests these unique ideas both in the contemporary world and in the context of a long-standing philosophical tradition.

Vital to this interaction with tradition is the play's unique verse form. Anderson's style of verse drama, which often uses the blank verse characteristic of Shakespeare and the English Renaissance, is perhaps the main feature for which the play is known. This poetic form, which recollects not only Shakespeare and the English tradition, but verse drama reaching back to the ancient Greeks, was a style advocated by one of the period's most important literary scholars and poets, T. S. Eliot. Thought to elevate the lines to a greater and even universal significance, verse had long been a means by which playwrights could declare the importance and vitality of what they wrote, and the technique was experiencing a minor resurgence in the 1930s. The language and poetic style used to express the various philosophical themes of *Winterset* are therefore quite useful in determining the tradition and source of various philosophies, as well as highlighting which are most important to Anderson.

With its atmosphere of desperation which tests its characters' beliefs to the extreme, Anderson's play is committed to bringing out the essence of the philosophies that each character holds and expresses. For example, Anderson was criticized for setting the speeches of gangsters into verse□many felt this was asking for an impossible suspension of disbelief□but the poetic form of their dialogue is extremely effective in establishing the true nature of their function in the play. Trock is not simply a selfish and petty crook; because his poetry connects him to the theater's greatest villains and ancient evils, the gang leader seems to have accumulated the ills of the entire world. When he says, "They've soaked me once too often / in that vat of poisoned hell," Trock gathers not just one man's misfortune but the wider significance of evil, which he comes to represent in an abstract and philosophical manner.

Each character's worldview does not necessarily remain the same as the drama progresses, however. Trock's philosophy becomes increasingly dark and destructive because he becomes increasingly unable to forgive anything or to accommodate his world view to something more meaningful than his petty fears. In fact, many characters go through a sincere change in outlook before the play is complete because this is one of Anderson's most effective methods for comparing and evaluating their philosophies. The hypocrisy of Judge Gaunt's belief system drives him insane with guilt and reduces him to a desperate attempt to convince himself, through an inconsistent muddle of philosophy, that he was right to execute Romagna for the welfare of the community.

Esdras's experience in sorting through a philosophy based on life experience and the dramatic events of the plot is perhaps a clearer example of how Anderson develops and considers philosophies through his characters, a technique made possible through the playwright's careful use of language. Esdras initially reveals his commitment to the relativity of truth, and the arbitrary nature of guilt, in a world of shadows in which "There's no guilt under heaven, / just as there's no heaven, till men believe it□/ no earth, till men have seen it, and have a word / to say this is the earth." As Esdras points out in act 2, this philosophy, which maintains that "truth's a thing unknown" and justice remains undone, comes from his reading of Jewish Talmud. It seems to embody everything Esdras stands for in the play, as he tries to convince Mio and the children to expect less from the world, to recognize that there is no justice, and to survive however they can.

However, after Esdras endures the knowledge of his son's complicity in Trock's original murder, recognizes his daughter's love for Mio, is plagued by guilt for being a part of a major injustice, and realizes that he has failed to protect his family, the old rabbi is severely shaken□enough to reconsider his world view. Esdras does not entirely or unrealistically transform his character, but his final monologue reveals that he has been pushed beyond his capacity to endure injustice. Valuing Mio and Miriamne as greater than "all / a city's elders" in their wisdom, a statement that contradicts the Jewish value system, Esdras signals a conversion from the Judaic philosophical tradition as he sees it: "I wish that I'd died so, / long ago; before you're old you'll wish / that you had died as they have."

It is significant that Anderson chooses to end the play in this manner; had it come in another place, or had it not been written in blank verse, it might have signified a moment of desperation after which Esdras would return to traditional Judaic philosophy. But as the final monologue, which in a Shakespearean tragedy normally marks a return to a world of order with justice having been served, it represents an affirmation of love, truth, and justice at whatever the cost. The high style of the monologue's verse is vital to its success and believability in this regard. Its repetition of words and sounds, such as "Mio," "died," "star," and "yet," reinforces the insistent and unflinching conviction of the speech. Although the lines do not rhyme, their dramatic rhythm and meter also reinforce the sense that Esdras is rising above his background, belief system, and previous convictions in order to declare something permanent and meaningful.

Miriamne also experiences a traumatic test of her philosophical convictions, which are initially summarized by the disillusioned response she makes to Mio's question of what she believes in: "Nothing." Yet she changes her convictions to center on her love for Mio, and she comes to believe in this so strongly that she dies attempting to prove her devotion to him. This gesture comes too late, however, after Miriamne feels that she has betrayed Mio by refusing to give away her brother to the police and thus verify Mio's proclamation of his father's innocence. Anderson reinforces the inconstancy of Miriamne's convictions and the impressionability of her youth by leaving her lines short and choppy, seldom giving her any substantial speeches, and even associating her with the moral degeneration of T. S. Eliot's famous *Wasteland*, which is characterized by a widespread lack of faith:

Oh, Mio, Mio, / in all the unwanted places and waste lands / that roll up into the darkness out of sun / and into sun out of dark, there should be one empty / for you and me.

This darkness and faithlessness is, for Anderson, very dangerous ground, and perhaps this is why Miriamne is the one to draw Mio away from his martyr's faith in truth and justice. In his 1947 essay, "Whatever Hope We Have" Anderson reinforces this idea in a quote that Perry D. Luckett uses to associate Anderson's philosophy with that of the devout Christian T. S. Eliot: "we must have a personal, a national, and a racial faith, or we are dry bones in a death valley, waiting for the word that will bring us life." It is therefore appropriate to Anderson's philosophical agenda that Mio, by far the most substantial philosopher in the play, with his numerous monologues contemplating everything from honor and freedom to truth and enduring love, answers the above question simply, "No." There is no empty wasteland away from the troubles of the world for Mio because he is committed to wide and uncompromising justice and the public proclamation of the truth.

Yet Mio also experiences a traumatic test of his convictions that brings him to change his initial philosophy. Ultimately, he alters his own commitment to truth and justice in order to spare his lover's brother from jail. Remaining silent about his knowledge, instead of passing it on to Carr in act 3, Mio reverses his previously exclusive desire to proclaim his father's innocence. Instead, he comes to value the "enduring love" that he previously told Miriamne exists only in books. More so than any other character, Mio is allowed to express his convictions and observations about the world in elegant and dramatic verse, but when it comes to explaining his reversal of philosophies he can only say, "it strangled in my throat" and "It stuck in my throat." It is actually Miriamne who causes her lover to understand the change in his thinking when she says, "He would have forgiven," which refers to his father but also alludes to one of the central premises of Christian philosophy: Jesus' forgiveness of sins. Once he understands this, Mio is able to provide a number of transcendent and romantic explanations of his new convictions, universalized by Anderson's carefully crafted verse.

Mio's philosophical journey therefore results in a conviction in faith and forgiveness, but it only becomes a convincing and powerful declaration after it has been tested by the desperate realities of the drama. Universal and abstract philosophies such as Mio's

must always, for Anderson, be balanced with contemporary politics and the individual concerns of the character, a duality that is reflected in the playwright's language. *Winterset* is powerful and unique because it is able to articulate this interplay between the universal and the specific, through the sophisticated use of verse, which represents the highest philosophical convictions of a character without reaching outside that character's realistic voice and distinctive personality. Anderson ties together high and low, universal and specific, and abstract and real through his careful use of language. It is in these combinations that the play establishes a philosophy of faith and hope.

**Source:** Scott Trudell, Critical Essay on *Winterset*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

# Adaptations

*Winterset* was adapted into a film that was nominated for two Oscars. The film version significantly changed the ending of Anderson's play. Directed by Alfred Santell, it appeared in 1936 and is available in VHS format from Timeless Video.

# Topics for Further Study

*Winterset* has been compared to William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as well as to *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth*. Read *Hamlet* or another of these tragedies, and compare it to Anderson's play. How would you characterize each playwright's use of language, and what do these approaches have in common? How does the use of historical material compare in each play? Discuss the elements of Shakespeare's style, themes, and plot that you find in *Winterset*, and share how your reading of Shakespeare affects your understanding of Anderson's play.

*Winterset* is normally considered a tragedy in a contemporary setting. Do you think it is a tragedy? Explain why or why not. Research the classical definition of a tragedy and discuss why and how Anderson uses various tragic conventions, as well as why the play is generally considered to be a tragedy. Then imagine a variety of different outcomes to the play and consider how they would have changed its meaning. Do you prefer any of your new endings to Anderson's? Would you change the play if you could, or do you think it needs to be in its current form? Explain why or why not.

Do some reading about the Sacco-Vanzetti case on which *Winterset* is indirectly based, and research the events of the trial and the history of the investigations afterwards. Do you think Sacco and Vanzetti were guilty? Why or why not? What would have been your vote if you were in the jury, or your verdict if you were the trial judge? Explain your decision. Also, discuss the results of the trial, its effect on American society, and its representation in the news media. How do you think Sacco and Vanzetti would have been treated in the early 2000s?

*Winterset* contains a variety of references to radicalism as well as a variety of radical ideas. What do you find radical about the play? Explain why you find certain ideas radical. Then make a list of all ideas that you would consider radical. How do you think radicalism has changed since the 1930s? Which, if any, radical ideas out of those you have listed do you think are important or true? Why have you chosen them? In what ways can radicalism be useful, and in what ways can it be dangerous? What do you think Anderson would have to say about this topic?

Some critics complain that *Winterset* is not realistic. Research and discuss the concept and practice of realism in the theater. Do you think Anderson's play is realistic? Why or why not? Discuss whether the play's poetry, plot, and characters are realistic, and whether you think Anderson is attempting to be realistic. Read another 1930s play, such as Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!*, and describe whether you think it is more or less realistic than *Winterset*, and in what way you think so. Do you think realism in the theater is important or desirable? Discuss your feelings about realism and how they affect your views on *Winterset*.

# Compare and Contrast

**1930s:** The Sacco-Vanzetti case remains a controversial issue. To many people, it represents a miscarriage of justice and discrimination against racial minorities and those with radical political views.

**Today:** The trial of O. J. Simpson in 1995 remains controversial, since many people believe his acquittal was a miscarriage of justice because he was guilty of murdering his wife.

**1930s:** The effects of the Great Depression are being felt across the United States, and an attitude of pessimism about the economy is widespread.

**Today:** The economy may be recovering from the economic slump that coincided with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

**1930s:** Welfare is a new concept that has not taken effect in slums similar to the one portrayed in *Winterset*.

**Today:** The unemployed are eligible for economic assistance from the government, but this is not a comprehensive system, and there remain areas of stark poverty in most American cities.

**1930s:** The crime rate is high, corruption is widespread, and gangs are a major problem in inner-city New York slums.

**Today:** The crime rate in New York City remains high and gangs have a significant influence, but conditions have improved in many low-income areas. Corruption has decreased, and gangs are less powerful than they were in the 1930s.

**1930s:** Verse drama, although it is not popular or widespread, is in vogue amongst adherents of T. S. Eliot's literary theory.

**Today:** Verse drama has all but disappeared from the mainstream theatrical repertoire.

# What Do I Read Next?

Anderson's *High Tor* (1937) is an intriguing play about nature and beauty that takes place on a mountain near the Hudson River.

T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), the influential playwright, poet, and critic's most successful verse drama, is about the martyrdom of Saint Thomas Beckett of Canterbury.

Paul Avrich's *Sacco and Vanzetti* (1996) is a thorough and compelling nonfiction overview of the case in the background of *Winterset*.

*Sunrise at Campobello* (1957), by Dore Schary, is a popular play that looks back at the political career of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who led the country through much of the Great Depression.

John Dos Passos's most famous novel, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), contains some radical ideas attacking American materialism and social injustice.

# Further Study

Anderson, Maxwell, *Dramatist in America: Letters of Maxwell Anderson, 1912—1958*, edited by Laurence G. Avery, University of North Carolina Press, 1977.

This collection of letters that span Anderson's life shed light on his working life, his relationship to the theatrical world, and his views on his own plays.

Bailey, Mabel Driscoll, *Maxwell Anderson: Playwright as Prophet*, Abelard-Schuman, 1957.

Bailey provides a critical interpretation of Anderson's work with a focus on the playwright's religiosity.

Clark, Barrett Harper, *Maxwell Anderson: The Man and His Plays*, S. French, 1933.

Although it was written before *Winterset* first appeared, Clark's biographical study is a useful contemporary view of the playwright.

Hampton, Wilborn, "Back to the Shadows of Sacco and Vanzetti," in the *New York Times*, April 23, 1999, p. B3.

Hampton reviews a production of *Winterset* in New York City.

Shivers, Alfred S., *Maxwell Anderson*, Twayne Publishers, 1976.

This literary biography provides a useful overview of Anderson's life and career.

# Bibliography

Abernethy, Francis E., "*Winterset*: A Modern Revenge Tragedy," in *Modern Drama*, Vol. 7, 1964, pp. 185—89.

Anderson, Maxwell, "Whatever Hope We Have," in *Off Broadway Essays about the Theater*, William Sloane Associates, 1947, p. 42, quoted in Perry D. Luckett, "*Winterset* and Some Early Eliot Poems," in *North Dakota Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Summer 1980, p. 36.

□□□, *Winterset*, Anderson House Publishers, 1935.

Gilbert, Robert L., "Mio Romagna: A New View of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset*," in *North Dakota Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No.1, Winter 1970, pp. 33—44.

Luckett, Perry D., "*Winterset* and Some Early Eliot Poems," in *North Dakota Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 3, Summer 1980, pp. 26—37.

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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