Chapter IV
Unlocking the Power Vault

The Masque of Kings, Second Overture, Barefoot in Athens

Jesus wept, Voltaire smiled from that divine
tear and from that human smile is derived
the grace of the present civilization.

- Victor Hugo

Men gathered in families, families joined to become clans, clans united themselves into tribes, and gave rise to societies. In this process the individual suffered infringement of his freedom and rights. Individual aspirations were subjugated to the mores, ethos and other demands of the society resulting in conflict. On the origin of the rights of individuals and its relevance to the current world, Colin Morris states in The Discovery of the Individual:

Political thought in the West has been deeply influenced by individualistic assumptions. Whereas Aristotle began from the polis, the city which to him was the natural unit of society, the “classical” Western political philosophers (among whom one must count Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) assumed that the individual person and his rights pre-existed any form of society. [...] It is embodied in the constitution of some modern states (notably that of the
The conflict between the individual and the society can be attributed to man's very nature. Individual needs and desires are too vast to be satisfied by one man's efforts alone; only a co-operative effort of the society can gratify them. Even his very survival depends how collectively he is organized for it would be impossible to surmount hostile forces, if he has a solitary existence. This need places obvious limitations on individual freedom. Individual freedom is sacrificed for the sake of collective freedom of the society, and this process has ever been going on.

As societies grew complex, institutionalized control to maintain basic law and order within the constituents, and to provide security from subjugation by enemies grew up. These institutionalized controls which go by the name of government took the form of despotism, oligarchy, democracy, communism, but all these manifestations had the encroachment of individual freedom as one necessity, though the degree differed.

In the course of human history, there has been a continual conflict amongst these forms of government, with autocracy yielding to democracy, and democracy in turn leading to despotism or oligarchy. Analysing the cause, Edith Hamilton observes: "The rule of the one, of
the few, of the many, each is destroyed in turn because there is in them all an unravaging evil - the greed for power [...] The nineteenth century saw the rise of Marxism emphasizing the curtailment of individual freedom, and until a decade ago the world was divided into two opposing ways of life. One recognized the freedom of the individual to make decisions that shape and direct the course of his life and development; the other denied and suppressed that freedom, and turned him into a mere cog in the social machine, designed and operated by an elite group of social engineers. The former life is that of the democratic west and the latter of the now defunct communist block.

This dichotomy raises the question as to what constitutes the freedom of the individual. Absence of restraint is the popular connotation of freedom; however, none has satisfactorily defined it. Austin Sagothey comments on the nebulous nature of freedom: “though freedom looks so positive, its only definite meaning is negative. Freedom enables a person to do what he wants, but it does not tell him what to want.” When divergent concepts of freedom are put into action, conflicts arise and in this connection William Carlo observes:

All are agreed as to the value and desirability of freedom, and yet so many difficulties arise in its pursuit. One reason for this is that freedom does not mean exactly the same thing to all men. Freedom exists in different ways and
under different conditions in the several spheres of human activity.  

In the political sphere also, freedom means different things to different systems. Communists equate freedom with materialism, requiring total subjugation of the individual. The communist theory holds: "all men have an equal value, no man is deemed to have a final or absolute or eternal value. In practice the individual as such has no intrinsic value except as a member of a class. The ultimate value is not man but an economic order [...]." Anarchists take the extreme end of the line; they so value individual liberty that they recognize no authority. Their dogma is that man is born free but he is in fetters everywhere. Midway comes democracy with its emphasis on individuality, freedom, and liberty. Even among the proponents of democracy, the definition as to what would constitute democracy differs and conflicting opinions run high. Governmental regulations by constitutions are incompatible with the lack of restrictions implied by freedom and liberty. Respect for authority, law, and order may at times conflict with freedom and liberty.

Maxwell Anderson is concerned with the freedom of choice or the freedom to pursue what is best for an individual: "The aim of every reformer, if he knows what he is about, is to secure a larger life for the individual, and man does not live by bread alone. [...] Personal liberty at all costs, rather than comfort under benevolent autocracy." In other
words, more than economic freedom Anderson advocates the freedom of the individual, and any restraint enforced by any type of government is viewed with scepticism.

Anderson is a votary of individual freedom, yet he is not an anarchist to recognize no government. He understands institutional power structures as unalterable facts of life, but does not subscribe to the view that individual freedom can be found in any particular political or economic system. He views power structures as encroachers of individual freedom and in that conflict he is predisposed to the individual. To him, "A government is always on the side of the powers that be; and the citizen is always flattened by its processes." Vincent Wall opines: "In an age of increasing governmentalism he could still maintain that the best government was that which governed least." Anderson saw the calling of an artist as an example of the unrestrained functioning of independent thought in a society. He asserts in his letter to Brooks Atkinson:

A poet or artist is able to function only in a free society; his vision and the effort towards his vision are only possible where men are free to act and think without despotic repression. Arbitrary power in any form is his enemy, whether it be the power of a bank, a corporation, a labor official, a conquerer or a government.
Anderson thus associates freedom with artistic creativity. He believes that unbridled expression of thought is possible only in a free society and loathes the intrusive tendency of power in whatever manifestation as it abrogates the freedom of the individual.

The conflicts arising out of the struggle of the individual with the institutionalized power of the government are dealt by Anderson from the perspectives of three idealistic individuals placed in three different political environments in the plays: The Masque of Kings (1937), Second Overture (1938), and Barefoot in Athens (1951). In The Masque of Kings, the protagonist is an idealistic Prince imbued with the notions of individual liberty and pitted against an autocratic regime. Second Overture depicts the fate of an idealistic proletariat in a communist rule pitched against the betrayers of the ideals of revolution. Barefoot in Athens is a telling comment on a democratic society's violation of the individual liberty of an intellectual idealist.

The Masque of Kings is based on a historical fact. Crown Prince Rudolf, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne was found dead in a hunting lodge at Mayerling, Austria, along with his 18-year-old mistress Mary Vetsera. The mysterious death occurred on January 30, 1889. Anderson takes poetic license in the play and presents Rudolf as an idealist in the pursuit of political goals of freedom and democracy for his people.
Franz Joseph, the Emperor, represents the old forces of aristocracy. He is convinced that as a ruler he owes a duty to his dynasty and that his son should carry on the family name and tradition, unsullied by the current fads of democracy and rights of man. Rudolph, the heir apparent is disillusioned with the affairs of the court and with his wife, Stephenne. He is attracted to the forces of modernity, to the ideas of democracy and to the rights of common man – ideas which are anathema to the Emperor. He is also in love with Mary Vetsera.

Rudolph takes two precipitate actions which draw the Emperor’s intervention. One is that he petitions to the Pope for the annulment of his marriage and the other, he arranges to retire to a quiet place with Vetsera. Rudolph is also egged on by his friends to usher in revolution by taking over the leadership of the rebels in Hungary. The Prince does not yield for he is aware of the ruthlessness and the immense power of his father who would put the motley crowd of rebels to death even before they make any move.

The Emperor tries to reason out that Rudolph’s liberal views on governing the people are impractical and the proposed marriage to Vetsera scandalous to his stature. Finding Rudolph unyielding, he has Vetsera interned. This galvanizes the relatively placid Prince into action. Casting aside his dithering, he joins the rebels and puts his father in prison. The Emperor is gratified at the mechanics of power which
demand that his son should imprison, murder, introduce censorship, and trample upon the rights of others, and jettison the very ideals that he once cherished.

On reflection, the Prince is ashamed of indulging in activities which are base according to his convictions and consciously decides to abort the revolution. His disillusionment is compounded when he learns that Vetsera has been a spy on the roll of the imprisoned Emperor. Despite her protestations that she gave up spying him once she fell in love, Rudolph is unmoved and retires to a hunting lodge. Vesta joins him, and to prove her genuine love commits suicide. Having failed in his idealistic pursuit and personal love, the prince shoots himself.

The play presents concentric circles of power and love moving in tandem. However, unlike conventional tragedies, conflicts do not stem from the collision of these two primordial forces of human nature. According to Bailey, "the central conflict of the play is not between power and love, except as the love story is a symbol; the conflict is between power and freedom."\(^{10}\) It is the pivot around which the play revolves. Anderson's theme is to depict the confrontation between the forces of modernism and traditionalism in political domain.

The conflicts in the play can be approached from two directions: the external conflict between the father and the son, and the internal
conflict experienced by the son when he finds that realities of power contradict his idealism.

Rudolph is convinced of his goal in life, “either I take the road free as a beggar, / or from now on my life’s my own” (MK 30). So does the father: “God send me the wit I need / to save my empire from the son I have” (MK 13). The proclaimed stand of the protagonists earmarks the battleground wherein the external conflict occurs. The stark difference in the motives of how best the country can be governed is the cause of the conflict, while “the question of modern government” is the crux of the conflict between the father and the son. Grenville Vernon records: “Rudolph is philosophical, rational, idealistic, a poet at heart, he is shown against the background of a court stifled by the traditions of an age long dead and dominated by an Emperor who is the epitome of those traditions.” The Prince, unusual for a person of his class, nurtures the ideals of democracy and empowerment of common man and in his idealistic conviction finds his father an obstacle.

Rudolf dreams of a society in which man is naturally free, unfettered by aristocratic and autocratic elements. His aspirations are to grant autonomy to the subject states in the empire, accord voting rights to all men, introduce free press, and release all political prisoners, and bestow only a ceremonial role to the monarchy. Anderson projects the Emperor as the sum of all that is absent in the Prince. Edmond Gagey observes:
"the author shows the struggle between the autocratic and Machiavellian
old Hapsburg emperor, Franz Josef, and his weak, democratic, idealistic
son."¹² This fundamental hiatus in temperaments which contributes to
the conflict is apparent in their approach to ruling Hungary. Rudolph’s
sympathies for Hungary are resented even though the Queen rightly
points out that the Hungarians are “a freedom loving people, never /
ours except by conquest” (MK 7). The Queen suggests:

There’s but one way to keep them—
that’s to extend the suffrage, rule them gentler
than they can rule themselves – give without asking
more than they think to ask. (MK 7)

But her caution and the solution to the conflict are shrugged off
by the Emperor who deems, “all these things / are words – faith, treason,
honour – behind them lie / realities of government which I face / daily
here at my desk” (MK 10). The realities of government require the ruler
to be a “book-keeper to an empire” (MK 10). To the calculative Emperor,
every credit should have a debit and every debit a credit to make things
even. In that world, there are no places for scruples; keeping them will
only trip one up. The father is candid when he teaches the first lesson
in government to his son:

When you’re
crowned king, leave scruples at the chancel door
with the holy water. If you keep them by you
they'll trip you up. (MK 93-94)

The father-son conflict in the play rests on ideological grounds and
is not attributable to personal antagonism stemming from Oedipus
complex. The filial devotion of the son does not suffer from insincerity.
In turn the Emperor deeply loves his son who has “an archangel’s face
and tongue” (MK 10), but resents only his “devil’s will” (MK 10). In the
words of Grenville Vernon: “The Emperor loves his son and is in despair
that he does not possess enough iron in his nature to prove true to the
ideas and traditions of the Hapsburgs.”13 The conflict that causes strain
in their relationship is in large measure due to the anxiety of a parent
who desires the heirloom safe in the hands of the successor. Arthur M.
Sampley comments on the nature of this conflict: “Once a liberal, now a
reactionary, he is torn between love of his son and concern for his
kingdom. Trying to save the boy from what he regards as misguided
altruism, he plays with him as a cat plays with a mouse […].”14

The external conflict between the Emperor and the Prince
originates at a personal level over the mundane question of retaining
political power with in the dynasty. It is to the credit of Anderson that he
has raised the father-son conflict from interpersonal stage to ideological
plane where the forces of modernity and tradition are in collision. The
ideological divergence is well marked in the protagonists’ perception of
the vital matters of governance – the role of a king, the inevitability of warfare and the welfare of the subjects.

Rudolph finds kingship a vehicle for personal aggrandizement and its values revolting to his ideals. He perceives it as inflated in importance and callous to the plight of the common people. The court is equally distasteful and the courtiers cringing, “two parts crawling / and three parts venom” (MK 93). The Prince finds the mantle of kingship not just uncomfortable; he is ashamed of it: “I’ve schooled myself/to live my birth down” (MK 24). For him, his ideals are greater than the kingship he has been groomed for. He views kingship as a source of curse, as an embodiment of all that is evil. Anderson uses the imagery of a healthy body invaded by a malignant disease to underscore the evils wrought by power. Kingship to Rudolph is:

that quick ulcerous growth
men call a king, a tumor on the lives of men,
with no other function than to spread, grow and eat,
rot into the body politic [...]. (MK 50)

He resists the attempt to be made an emperor for, “all emperors / have been, blind parasitic poisonous mouths / sucking at arteries” (MK 52). Particularly, he is against the house of Habsburg which according to him has been, “a cancer on mankind, a fluke / that eats till the host dies!” (MK 51). Rudolph regards kings as warmongers for, “who
gains by wars but the kings?" (MK 53). The old Emperor’s defence of war using Malthusian logic to keep population under check attests his insensitiveness to human life and parades the imperial arrogance which is in sharp contrast to the humility displayed by the Prince. The father argues that in earlier times, plagues and famines limited the population, and in their absence the number of mouths have increased. The result is the inevitable fight to:

- snatch the food from one another’s mouths
- and fight for standing room. Those who fight best.
- will live, and those who will not fight will die. (MK 53)

Hence, the destiny of a king is “war, and not peace” (MK 53). The Prince on the other hand considers the purpose of kingship is to rule:

- As if the lives of men
- were precious things, as if men’s happiness
- was precious as your own. (MK 52)

The external conflict in the play feeds on the polarity of their views on governance. The idealistic Rudolph is oblivious to the fact that the prescription of the Golden Commandment, though possible in interpersonal relationships, would be unworkable in government. Not only that, he harbours a vision which is incompatible with the conventional role assigned to a king. It is a vision which is grand, unlike the Emperor’s which is limited to the continuance of the Habsburg dynasty. It is a
vision which the greatest minds have written about, valiant men fought for, and countless dreamt of. It is "to make men free!" (MK 44). The Prince believes he is on a messianic mission like the Son of God who came down to earth to let men know the truth, so that the truth can set them free. Rudolph declares:

I've set myself to make myself a man
and unlearn kingliness, shed it like the rag
it is, till a king stands up a man, but a man
with power to make men free! (MK 44)

The external conflict between the father and the son acquires a crescendo and moves from an ideological plane to precipitate action. In this violent phase involving death and murder, the Emperor in a quick turn of events is thrown into prison. The metamorphosis is reached after a period of internal conflicts experienced by Rudolph on account of his idealistic views. Grenville Vernon's comment that the Prince is "philosophical, rational, idealistic, a poet at heart [. . .],"\textsuperscript{15} holds good for he is an admixture of all these qualities which lend an aura about his personality. These contrasting virtues create internal conflict which is reflected in the enigma surrounding his idealistic principles. As an idealist, are the Prince's ideals concrete and realistic? How far are they feasible and to what extent do they contribute to the conflict in the play? Examining these questions, one finds three stages in the struggle encountered by him.
In the first stage, Rudolph is under the spell of idealistic fervour counterpoised by the constraints of reality almost in a state of Hamlet-like inaction. Though he expresses his ideals in concrete terms like free press, individual liberty etc, he has no clear vision of how he proposes to reach his destination. The modus operandi of the goals are nebulous, hazy and amorphous in that he is unsure of what his revolution would beget. This vagueness contributes to the conflict within the protagonist. He wants to usher in an ideal state where freedom will be the cornerstone, where tyranny of law, “the dragoons on every peasant’s back” (MK 42) will be removed.

At the same time, Rudolph is aware that past abounds with incidents where the idealists have failed and all their ideals went to grave with them. He is equally conscious of the terrible price that has to be paid for inaction. He fears, “if the empire / drifts as it’s drifting now, it will smash up / and I’ll be left nothing to rule” (MK 41). The state of the country is alarmingly ruinous; the reigning monarch is oblivious to the need for change. Paradoxically, the very effort to stem the rot will hasten the ruin of the empire, if the authority is seized by force:

If I seize
on Hungary, there’ll be a war, and all reform
wiped out for a decade, what advance we’ve planned
towards tolerant government will be ridden down
not only in Austria, but by my orders
in Hungary, and the empire will break up. (MK 42)

Rudolph is apprehensive that he would become an old tyrant as his
father: The predicament between the professed ideals and the method
of realization contributes to the conflict within the protagonist producing
an oscillation similar to Hamlet. "To do or not to do" becomes the
question. Not to do will lead to ruin but to do will be even worse for it
would lead not just to ruin, but to the negation and betrayal of ideals
long cherished. The idealistic Prince considers the means as important
as the results.

In this respect, Rudolph stands in sharp contrast to the two
co-conspirators, Sceps and John. Sceps considers that means are justified
by the end, "the means are rendered gracious by the end, / though the
means be evil" (MK 42). John judges it is the right time to strike the
Emperor or never for, "a revolution grows like fruit / and you pluck it
when it's ripe or not at all. It won't keep on the tree" (MK 39). Bailey
remarks on the struggle both within and without caused by the opposing
forces of pragmatism and ethical constraints:

Though Rudolph sees so clearly the nature of the whole
tendency of violent revolution, he is nevertheless impelled
irresistibly to it by the complex interplay of forces in and
around him: by the hopes his liberal views have aroused in
his friends, by his craving for personal freedom, by the
tensions in him produced by his own unused abilities, by
his father’s firm resistance to all that he desires, and finally
by the explosive situation which has developed in Hungary.¹⁶

However this stage of inaction disappears and the conflict between
pragmatism and idealism is resolved in favour of the former. The second
stage finds the Prince an apostate, and an iconoclast breaking the Golden
Calf of his earlier belief. In trying to instil his new vision, Rudolph is
convinced, “that certain men must die / if we’re to win. And we must
win” (MK 77). He has no qualms in imprisoning and murdering a few
whom he considers as impediments. He has the Emperor under arrest.
This stage of action which finds the Prince in his Machiavellian best,
does not last long. He soon realizes the bitter truth that the road to
kingship is the same road tread by his father or any other victorious
sovereign. The tables turn and stung by the realization that his ideals
have not found the right path he becomes disillusioned and withdraws
the revolution.

In the last stage of realization, a chastised Rudolph discovers that
the road he has taken to achieve his ideals is a circular one taking him
back to the very spot where the Emperor stood. The futility of the
idealistic expeditions aggravated by the betrayal of his love drives him to
his end. Vincent Wall posits that Anderson dramatized the “destroying
power of power. [...] to show how even a liberal monarch cannot rule without being corrupted."\textsuperscript{17}

The external and internal conflicts in the play provide a vehicle for Anderson to articulate through Rudolph his views on the power-play staged on the world scene. Bailey observes: "In the unfolding of the action and in his comments upon it we hear again Mr. Anderson's comment upon contemporary events."\textsuperscript{18} The Prince makes caustic remarks about personalities who abused the trust of people, and who in the name of freedom made them slaves – Napoleon Bonaparte 'the runt' who invented "the formula still used for consolidating conquest" (\textbf{MK} 75), Caesar the imperialist, and young scrub Napoleon, the descendant of Bonaparte, who has "a heart like that of a cheap Swiss watch, and the brain of a coffin salesman" (\textbf{MK} 75). There can be no greater righteous indictment of these autocratic peddlers of freedom.

Nonetheless, the Prince is aware that people have to be promised Utopia, a heaven on earth. It is hope that sustains human beings. Hence the assurance to the subject race of Hungary on his assuming power would be: "We come to set men free!" (\textbf{MK} 108). These words of Rudolph acquired a prophetic ring, for in just two years after the play was staged the world plunged into World War II – a war claimed to end all wars and to bring peace. In this connection Bailey remarks:
There is no mistaking the implication of these lines. 'We come to set you free' has been the promise of all the modern dictators. And of the millions yearning for freedom few have paused to ask whether the thing is possible - whether one man by an exercise of authority or by yielding the control, can confer freedom on other men.  

Contemporary events attest the universality and timelessness of the issues implied by Anderson. Seen in this context, the criticism of Eleanor Flexner is without substance: "we are aware that this is historical drama for its own sake, devoid of all contemporary implications. The Masque of Kings carries no real meaning for modern audiences." She also indicts Anderson for lack of knowledge of the forces at work in history. According to her history is more and more clearly revealed as the dynamic working-out of certain basic principles; if the historical dramatist confines himself to recounting a court cabal, his work will suffer in importance. She argues, "'To tell sad stories of the death of kings' is no longer enough. Above all, what is needed is a grasp of the forces at work in history, an understanding which is not apparent in Anderson's work." Nothing can be farther from truth.

Anderson understands that the old forces are dying and a new one is in the throes of birth. The play testifies his awareness that the power and craze for power are common denominators in the past and present
and so will be in future. The quest for power is the decisive force in the history in all forms of governments, be it totalitarian or democracy. It is common to a despot as well as a democrat. Towards the end, Anderson’s protagonist understands the stark nakedness of the pursuits of all types of governments and the savagely true doctrine underlying all centres of power: “ruled in whatever fashion, king or franchise, dictatorship or bureaucrats, they’re run by an inner ring, for profit” (MK 112).

Bailey lauds Anderson’s treatment of forces at work in history. She points out though Rudolph utterly repudiates the kind of power that Alexander and Napoleon stood for — power for the magnificent distinction of possessing and exercising power, he desires it for modern reasons that he may use it for the good of mankind. She observes:

It is the reason put forth by all the dictators. It is likewise the claim by which the defenders of freedom justify their meeting force with force and violence with violence. Again Mr. Anderson has presented the terrible ironies of human dilemma, and has not resolved them by any of the tricks of logic or romance, but has let them take their tragic course.22

Rudolph aborts the revolution when he finds that it would end in the betrayal of his aim to usher in freedom. Anderson offers “the thesis that revolution breeds the same evils it was designed to destroy, for, to retain power, revolutionaries are forced to restrict the freedom they
intended to establish. 23 This message is reiterated in Second Overture where the protagonist is a proletarian imbued with ideals of freedom and justice, and who volunteers to court death rather than to remain alive in a regime where the ideals are dead.

To the masses, rebellion is freedom for it brings down an existing order which they find oppressive; yet they fail to perceive that rebellion is a false port in the storm of change. A revolutionary thinks of altering the oppressive external structure of rules and laws ignoring the fact that his security is dependent on the external structure he attacks. In trying to demolish the existing edifice, one can make only a cosmetic change; the core structure will remain the same. This fact is brought in Second Overture, a play in one-act. Tracing Anderson's disillusionment behind the origin of the play, Shivers observes: "The Russian Revolution that he had joyously hailed in his poem 'Sic Semper' back in 1917, he showed as betrayed in his 1938 one-act Second Overture." 24

Set in the village of Tiumen, east of Moscow, 1918, after the communist take over, a group of aristocrats are arrested on charges of conspiracy while trying to escape from Russia. Gregor the revolutionist who participated in the communist uprising of 1905 against the Czarist regime happens to be in the crowd and is imprisoned. He finds that the aristocrats are not guilty of any crime that would entail punishment and believes that the arrest must have been an administrative mistake as in
his case. By coincidence, Charash, his erstwhile comrade in the uprising is the Commissar with the authority to sentence the prisoners. Gregor assumes that since the revolution is for justice, the innocent aristocrats would be set free. Despite his plea to his friend, they are all condemned to death. In a melee that occurs shortly, the aristocrats escape. Charash decides not to pursue them so as to allow his friend Gregor to escape, not knowing that he has stayed behind. The disillusioned Gregor opts to die as he finds the revolution for which he fought is dead.

According to Bailey, the core action of the play centres around, "violence of a conflict in which moral issues are at stake." The play is often looked upon as a melodrama; however, Bailey argues that, "it is not a melodrama [. . .]. In melodrama Gregor would have fled with the rest."26

**Second Overture** projects the conflict arising out of difference in perception of an ideology to bring about "a world set free of nobles, free of profit, / Free of oppression, free of armies" (SO 15). Gregor is an idealist for whom realization of such a world should not violate the absolute notions of individual liberty. For Charash, it is the system that is supreme; individuals do not matter. He aims at the annihilation of aristocrats lest they, "would return / To load us with the chains of the old empire, / Even the children among them!" (SO 15). He looks upon the aristocrats as barriers in establishing the noble vision on earth:

Where men share equally and humbly all
The fruits of labor, no man starves, no mother
Need prostitute herself to feed her child,
Where men have time for beauty, and the sunlight
Of what is learned of wisdom and of truth
Falls to all men by right. (SO 15)

The elimination of the aristocrats becomes a prime requisite lest
the proletariat “lose all we hoped to gain!” (SO 16), and “A nation new
from the ground up – rebuilt / Without one stick of the old materials / In
the whole structure” (SO 14). The conflict between Gregor and Charash
become concretised on this issue. Gregor regards the aristocrats innocent
and “arrested without cause” (SO 14), whereas Charash considers the
crime of the aristocrats is “what they are” (SO 14).

The dialogue between Gregor and Charash captures the conflict
between an idealist who remains an individualist and who does not allow
his conscience to be sacrificed at the altar of ideological needs, and a
person who has become a henchman sans individuality and conscience.
In Charash, Anderson shows communism as a pernicious ideology
demanding total negation of individuality and effacement of conscience.
Not surprisingly, Gregor’s plea to set the innocents free fails miserably
to strike the right chords with Charash.

Like Rudolph, Gregor considers the means to the end important.
His motives in 1905 when he was a part of the vanguard, he recalls: “we
fought for free speech, for civil rights, for the abolition of arbitrary and tyrannical power, such as was exercised by the Czar" (SO 5). The ideals of the past are incompatible with the realities of the post-revolution. His agonized cry over the perversion of justice and his warning of the vicious circle of violence fail to achieve any impact on Charash:

To attain justice you revoke all justice--
To attain mercy you repudiate
The principle of mercy – Blood will breed murder,
Murder breed blood – the evil means we use
For a good end, will bring down only more evil
And curses at the end. (SO 16-17)

Gregor believes in the existence of absolute justice which knows no class difference. Commenting on his conviction Harold H. Watts says: “There must be, insists the doomed man, a justice higher than bourgeois or proletariat whim.”27 The disillusionment felt by Gregor with the means adopted for realizing the ideals is synonymous with that of Rudolf in The Masque of Kings. Anderson underscores the fact that idealistic individuals can be found in every strata of society – be it a Prince like Rudolph or a proletarian like Gregor or an intellectual like Socrates. Like them, Gregor willingly gives up his life to vouch for the credentials of his faith:

Better to lose
Than lose your faith. (SO 17)
In *Barefoot in Athens*, Anderson portrays Socrates as a divinely inspired idealist in search for truth. It is a strange mission which draws the wrath of his fellowmen and culminates in his death. The origin of the conflict is traceable to the Oracle at Delphi which proclaimed Socrates as the wisest man, though the immediate provocation for his death is the Socratic method of questioning. The Athenians considered it as the reason for corrupting the society and for causing irreverence to gods. Anderson observes on the inspiration of the idealists:

There have been men among us from time to time who had more wisdom than the majority, [...]. Some of them claimed inspiration from beyond our earth, from spirits or forces which he cannot apprehend with our five senses. Some of them speak of gods that govern our destinies, but no one of them has had proof of his inspiration or of the existence of a god. Nevertheless [...] we have taken their precepts to heart and taken their gods and their inspiration for granted.²⁸

Anderson has delineated Socrates not only as a divinely inspired idealist but also as a person with a divine commission to expose ignorance. What was Anderson’s aim in his recourse to classical history? Why did he attempt to present a ‘historical parable’ like the life and death of Socrates on stage? *Barefoot in Athens* is a continuation of Anderson’s commitment to democracy, tempered by his experiences
during World War II and by the cold war between Russia and the United States. It is also a reflection of Anderson's views on the political climate and the threat of communist infiltration of the U.S. institutions. He believed that the Communist Party was an international Ku Klux Klan devoted to the extirpation of all human rights and liberties among non-members and the destruction of all governments which it did not control. "It has enslaved the peoples of Russia and her neighbors, it has murdered millions, it is conducting a war against the United Nations, it has undercover agents in every country trained to destroy and taught that any method that wins for their despotism is a good method." His indignation over the totalitarian dogma and the covert methods adopted by the communists required a vent in the form of a play.

Anderson's Preface to *Barefoot in Athens* titled, "Socrates and His Gospel," throws light on his choice of an episode from Athenian history. He characterizes the historical period of Socrates as "a long quarrel between a communist state and a democratic state." He paints Sparta as a complete, conscious communist society and Athens as a free society. In his "Notes on Socrates" though Sparta is again considered as a communist state, Anderson avoids the term "democracy" in describing Athens. He observes that the communism of Sparta and that of Plato's Republic is, "very much like the dictatorship of thugs which exists in Russia today [. . .]."
Jackson Hershbell objects to the playwright's classification on historical basis, noting that Sparta's actual government was a mixture of forms more totalitarian than communist and that Athens was not truly democratic. Anderson undoubtedly used the term "communist" loosely to suggest the Russian brand of totalitarianism, but he was fully aware of undemocratic elements in the political and legal systems of Athens. He acknowledged the evils of slavery, imperialism, limitations on citizenship, faulty design of juries, and legal proceedings of Athens as significant drawbacks of the Athenian democracy.

In *Barefoot in Athens* Anderson displays his faith in democracy despite the limitations he saw in the past and in the contemporary period. To accomplish this, he turns to Athens to write a play parallel to the modern world. He takes liberties with dates and incidents to get across his message. For dramatic purpose, Anderson changes the dates of Sparta's conquest of Athens to interrupt the progress of the trial of Socrates. He places Athens under the Spartan rule after Socrates is indicted. The defeat of Athens delays the trial until after the city is free again, while according to history the indictment of the philosopher and his trial came several years after the Spartan occupation.

The play opens with Socrates and his family discussing his unorthodox lifestyle which causes a lot of embarrassment. Regardless of the plea of his son Lysis, he is resolute in his decision not to wear
sandals. His wife Xantippe’s suggestion to earn money out of teaching is brushed aside with the same determination, as according to him he knows nothing. Socrates’ friend comes with the news that he has been arraigned on charges of not worshipping the gods of the city and for corrupting the minds of young men. This is followed by the report that Sparta has invaded Athens. The Spartan King Pausanias in a brief encounter with Socrates ridicules the concept of democracy held dear by the Athenians. Socrates defends democracy and his faith in its ideals is such that he believes he would be able to prove his innocence before the majority of the Athenians. Critias, the one time pupil of Socrates and a renegade democrat schemes to kill Socrates but is in turn murdered by Pausanias over the ill-gotten fortunes of a citizen.

The trial takes place in which Socrates is faulted for corrupting the youth and the faith in gods, with his question-answer method of teaching. When asked to choose between Athens and Truth, he unequivocally declares his preference to Truth. Ignoring his plea not to sentence him to death as it would bring disrepute to Athens, he is awarded death penalty. Pausanias offers to ransom and make him a part of the government of Sparta. Socrates rejects the offer preferring the flawed democracy of Athens to the totalitarianism of Sparta and heroically awaits his death.
Jackson Hershbell reports the comment of the producer-director George Schaefer which sums up the ideological conflict in the play:

Mr. Anderson has written a fascinating character study of Socrates, the philosopher and the man; [...] the playwright has woven a very timely play which contrasts the dictatorship of Sparta with its enemy, the world's first democracy, the city state of Athens. \(^{33}\)

It would be profitable to encapsulate the personality of historical Socrates to understand Anderson's treatment of the philosopher in his play. Socrates was the most outstanding personality of Greek antiquity; in the words of Plato, "the best and wisest and the most righteous man of all those of his time we have known." \(^{34}\) Socrates left no writings of knowledge. He was an itinerant Guru in Athens gathering the youth around him and using his own pedagogic method to make them aware of their ignorance which for him was the root of all evils. His method of teaching was dialogue or dialectic. He questioned people, pretending to be ignorant, trusting that the truth within would emerge without any brain waving lure by the teacher. Socrates called this the midwifery method.

Socrates was a child of democracy born to a heritage of freedom where the right of free discussion was unrestrained. The sacred name of democracy was not immune from his criticism. His spirit and the
ideas that he made current were a menace to the cohesion of the social fabric, as there was not a stone or a joint in the social edifice that he did not question. In other words, he was an active apostle of individualism which led to the subversion of the local patriotism which had inspired the cities of Greece in her days of greatness. Socrates who died for what he thought was the truth can be hailed as the most outstanding representative of the moral conscience of humanity.

In *Barefoot in Athens*, Anderson delineates Socrates as an idealist in confrontation with a society that is unable to comprehend his goal and mission in life. The indictment and trial of Socrates for not worshipping the Athenian gods, and for corrupting the young minds of the city is in a larger sense, a battle between the old order and individualism. The execution of Socrates is a protest of the spirit of old order against the growth of individualism. Anderson gives snapshots of how idealistic Socrates is in his personal life to reinforce the ideological fervour of his protagonist. The title of the play *Barefoot in Athens* which conveys Socrates' unwillingness to conform to the convention of wearing sandals embodies his individualism. His son Lysis' plea to wear sandals as he is subjected to ridicule by his friends is met with a candid admission: "The truth is, I couldn't put them on" *(BA 9).*

The conflict which brings to light the strong ideals of Socrates can be analysed at two levels. The first mirrors the individual's assertion of
his convictions against the political clout of the Athenians and supplies dramatic intensity to the play. The second chronicles the clash of systems of governments at Sparta and Athens. This is brought out through the dialogues of Pausanias, the King of Sparta and Socrates.

As an individual, Socrates is a patriot. He believes in Athens and in democracy. The magnitude of his belief is of a high order and exists at a different level. The Athenians are not able to comprehend the uniqueness of his belief. His wife Xantippe’s reflection on the famous barefoot campaign shows Socrates’ love for Athens is not just platonic but practical in the face of all danger and personal privation:

barefoot he fought, barefoot he won -- the others were freezing all about him, but he marched sturdily on over ice and snow in his one ragged garment, filling his comrades with courage, and the enemy with despair. (BA 8)

To Socrates, love for the city is of cardinal importance. He considers Athens above his family and looks upon it as a hope for its diverse citizens – a combination of slaves, poets, generals and commoners who had built the great city of advanced learning. He sees Athens as the embodiment of the principle of the basic worth of every individual. It is essential to note that Athens stands as the object of his faith and not just a concept of democracy. Yet he would have no intellectual compromise if there were to be a conflict between his cherished ideals and patriotism.
As an advocate of democracy, Socrates displays supreme confidence that the majority of Athenians can be persuaded by logical argument. He naively judges people as best equipped to discern truth. Therefore, the news of his indictment fails to perturb him. He views:

It's a heaven sent opportunity to prove the value of freedom of inquiry and Athens will laugh them into exile. In any other city there'd be doubts of the outcome. Here among the clear heads of the merry Greeks its unalloyed good fortune. I'll win and they'll pay and never hear the end of it. (BA 16)

Reposing unreserved faith in the efficacy of democracy, Socrates discards courtroom theatrics and dispenses with the need for a lawyer proclaiming:

I look forward to the trial as an athlete looks forward to the race, he has longed for, as the wrestler looks forward to the bout for which his whole life he has been at training.

(BA 49-50)

The faith of Socrates extends to the Athenians beyond their government. To the Athenians, blind allegiance to the city is the culmination of all the endeavours of a citizen; they see truth as divorced from patriotism, whereas to Socrates both are homogeneous. This basic difference in the approach of the majority represented by Lycon and
the individual represented by Socrates causes the conflict in the play. If patriotism and search for truth were mutually exclusive, Socrates would rather choose the latter. When Lycon questions him about his allegiance, he affirms:

I must say that the search for truth is more sacred than any god, more desirable than any woman, more hopeful than any child, more lovely than any city even our own. (BA 84)

When truth and reality split apart conflict occurs. Psychological and sociological analyses aid comprehension of the basics of these conflicts in terms of facts. However, for a true appreciation one must approach from the point of view of the antagonists: “The individual is opposed to universal laws, norms, necessities: untragically, he represents mere wilfulness opposing the law; tragically, he represents the genuine exception which, though opposing the law, yet has truth on his side.”

Socrates’ refusal to demarcate between patriotism and truth is beyond the comprehension of Athenians. Though he has truth on his side, his compatriots consider him a law-breaker. Here lies the root of his tragedy. The same divergence colours their response to the Socratic method. The resultant conflict anoints the personality of Socrates with a tragic grandeur of far greater intensity than what the historical Socrates might have evoked in the minds of his sympathizers.
The Athenian majority representing the universal norm of their society find the Socratic method employed in quest for truth, repulsive. His dialectics are seen as a source of hostile forces that undermine authority. Lycon captures the terror and the bafflement created by the Socratic method:

This little question-and-answer game which you play at the bidding of Apollo, this game is not so harmless as you pretend! It is a murderous weapon, this little game! You point it at patriotism and it degenerates into treason! (BA 82)

Anderson, thus, presents Socrates as a person on a mission not understood by the Athenians. Socrates’ search for truth augmented by his unorthodox approach for this virtue highly perturbs the Athenians, causing profound conflicts to comprehend the individual. There is a paradox as Socrates himself is not sure where the end will be except he is on the right path. The Oracle at Delphi had pronounced that there was no man wiser than Socrates which leads him on a mission to find out “What can the god mean?” (BA 79). Even after an arduous search to find somebody wiser than him, he fails to come across one. Sequel to this quest is the ‘question-and-answer game’ which exposes the sad fact that he has “not found one man who knows what holiness is, or wisdom, or courage or loyalty or faith” (BA 79). His own state is no different from the others, for his method has got him “just about nowhere” (BA 79). He
confesses, "I have put in a lifetime of Herculean labor to prove the god wrong, and I have not proved him either wrong or right" (BA 79).

Anderson portrays Socrates' divine inspiration as a sort of beacon lighting up the way of a traveller in search of truth. Save the assurance that there is a destination, the god does not show the direction. The individual has to struggle within to find it and in the process he is misunderstood by the society. The society looks upon him as a wrecker of social stability and not a visionary of the future. This is the fate of Socrates. The origin of his inspiration and the unorthodox method adopted by him in his quest contribute to the tension or conflict with the Athenians.

Though on surface it would appear that the struggle is between democracy and the individual, and presents democracy in a rather dim light as a form of despotism of the majority, the real undercurrent is contributed by the universality of the conflict: power versus individual. The picture of David pitted against Goliath is true in any form of government. Anderson's message is that the individual should plough on despite the misunderstanding of the society, and even if the encounter does not lead to positive and visible results, for Goliaths are not slain every time.
The second conflict involving Socrates and Pausanias, the Spartan king is less dramatic as it occurs on ideological level. The first ends in the death of the protagonist and victory, in a narrow sense, of the Athenians. Contrarily, in the battle of wit between the champions of democracy and totalitarianism there is no victor and vanquished, though Anderson unmistakably points out where his sympathies lie. The incident of Pausanias meeting Socrates is a fictional device employed by him to draw a parallel to the modern world when communism was taking long strides in the global arena.

The change of government in Athens provides Anderson an opportunity to contrast the democracy of Athens with the dictatorship of Sparta. The play opens with Athens as a democracy but the city soon falls to the totalitarian Sparta and is occupied by its troops which delays the trial of Socrates. Pausanias who confronts the nonconformist Socrates is an example of Plato’s philosopher king; Anderson has created the character of Pausanias as a representative of communism.

To Socrates, the license of free inquiry to question authority is the hallmark of democracy. Totalitarian governments deny this vital component of an individual’s freedom. The right to question may not lead to the enlightenment of all. Nevertheless, it is a cardinal ingredient which would act as a bulwark against the encroachment of individual freedom by governments. The conversation between the Spartan king
and the philosopher highlights the importance assigned by Anderson to the concept of free discussion. Pausanias finds the concept irrational to the system of government he espouses: “Nobody goes about asking questions in Sparta” and mockingly queries “Is this democracy?” and concludes “democracy is as stupid as I am”. Socrates reply posits his conviction and the hallowed place he assigns to the freedom of inquiry: “As stupid as all of us put together O King, But free!” (BA 25). An individual can be anything, even ‘stupid’ but without the freedom of inquiry he will be no better than a beast.

Anderson equates the freedom of individual with the freedom of inquiry, though he is aware that the tool of inquiry could also be put to destructive end. He designates the system of government which guarantees this freedom as true democracy. In contrast, dictatorships curtail this freedom and debase an individual to the level of animal existence. He declares:

it is true that the examination of the bases of morality can destroy morality and lead to disintegration. [. . .] yet freedom can live only when life is constantly examined and there are no censors to tell men how far their investigations can go. Human life lives in this paradox and on the horns of this dilemma. Examination is life and examination is death.\textsuperscript{36}
Critias, the Governor of Athens under Sparta and a former pupil of Socrates contrives to end the threat posed by his erstwhile mentor by making the philosopher a part of the Spartan government, but meets with failure. Socrates refuses to accept the position of a judge offered in exchange for legitimizing the execution of Leon of Salamis for dissent against the Spartan rule. By declining the position, Socrates maintains his independent convictions and refuses to become a part of the autocratic system which rules Athens at that time. This incident is an affirmation that idealists do not suffer value conflict even in the face of strong temptations.

Through Socrates and Pausanias, Anderson depicts a contrasting picture of Athenian democracy and Spartan despotism. He exposes the dictatorial governments and their leaders as ruthless and greedy. Pausanias appropriates the fortunes of Leon of Salamis from Critias who had earlier executed Leon for the same. "Critias stole the money. I stole it from Critias and have it" (BA 36), is the rationale adduced for this depraved act. Anderson observes acquisition of capital through political liquidations, subjugation of the individual, terrorism, and outright gangsterism as the devices for maintaining power in a totalitarian state. To the King of Sparta, democracy is an ugly and disorderly form of government. "The people of a democracy have no respect for their superiors; they do what they please and say what they like and they
actually charge a profit for supplying each other with the necessities of life!” (BA 39). In contrast, he commends the government at Sparta:

there all men get the same wages and eat the same rations and — well, it's like a great army — every man working for the common good. [...] It is perfect. All property is in common, you see, and no man attempts to get ahead of the others, because he can't — and there's no unseemly scramble for wealth and honors such as you have. (BA 39)

Anderson looks through the persuasive propaganda employed by the communists who promise Utopia where every man is a monarch and where all have a share of milk and honey that would flow in the blessed land. Socrates response to the bragging Pausanias is a reminder by Anderson that things have not changed in the intervening 2500 years and totalitarianism is a "governing class of freebooters and murderers, holding the population down by terror and strict controls" (BA 40).

In his enthusiasm to present democracy in a better light, Anderson has overlooked the actual faults of the Athenian democracy leading to an ironical situation. Hershbell comments:

For one of the ironies of Barefoot in Athens is that Socrates is tried and put to death in a city-state having a basically democratic form of government. Under the
protection of the Spartan king, Pausanias, Socrates could have left Athens and lived elsewhere. 37

However, The Saturday Review of Literature comes to the defence of Anderson: “A healthy, democratic Athens (as Athens understood democracy) found Socrates embarrassing but put up with him; a defeated Athens found him unendurable and put him to death.” 38 Alfred Shivers notes the conflict between the democratic ideals and democracy in practice and reconciles Anderson’s dilemma: “He admires the ideal of democracy as it is advocated and defended by Socrates, but he cannot help distrusting and disliking that ideal as objectified in an actual city state that lawfully liquidates one of her noblest citizens.” 39

The democratic Athens is intolerant to the intellectual idealist whereas the ‘stupid’ Spartan king is willing to accommodate Socrates. Yet if he had been executed in Sparta, where injustice was erected into a system, his death would have passed unnoticed. It was because Athens made an attempt at injustice that this outstanding miscarriage of injustice had so stunning an effect. As Socrates says:

But please remember citizens, when you vote, that it is my good luck to be tried in a democracy, where injustice, when it happens, is public and infrequent and therefore a cause for protest and astonishment. If I had died under Critias nobody would have heard of me. In a despotism injustice
is the usual thing and public opinion is not free to raise an outcry. But here in Athens [. . .] if I am lucky in my friends and my times, my name and thoughts will last as long as our city's history! (BA 88).

Of course, Anderson realizes that injustice can occur in a democracy but he believes that such instances are less frequent and more widely condemned in a democracy than in any other form of government. The parting of Pausanias and Socrates indicates that ideological conflicts can never be resolved and as history would attest, freedom means many things to many people. Even the erstwhile Russian communists argued that their government was democratic since it allowed certain individual freedom.

In spite of the defects of democracy, Anderson believes that man should be free and only democracy offers man the best chance for freedom. Socrates summarizes Anderson's idea of democracy to Critias thus:

the most valuable thing a man or a state could have was freedom. We concluded that if a man or a state was to retain freedom three things were needed; power and incorruptibility and frugality – the art of wanting little for yourself. And the more frugal and honest you are the less power you need. (BA 29)
Anderson concedes that freedom cannot be guaranteed without employment of power. In this paradox, he lays stress on self-restraint of the individual - "the art of wanting little for oneself" (BA 29), as the antidote to the corrosive influence of power. In conquering oneself true freedom is gained; yet self-restraint cannot negate the inalienable right of freedom. If this truth is discovered and acted upon, it might pit one in conflict with the society resulting perhaps in imprisonment and death. It is a high price an idealist has to pay. Anderson emphatically believes freedom is expressed in one's ability to make choice.

The three protagonists in the plays analysed, Rudolph, Gregor and Socrates make a choice in the face of all odds, and wrestle with the political forces which are intolerant to their ideals. In trying to achieve their vision, these idealists suffer and die. Anderson has arrayed them in idealistic individualism. Among them apparently there is no divergence of emphasis. Prince Rudolph stands for the empowerment of the common man, which he believes would guarantee the freedom of the individual. Gregor is the quintessential disciple who feels that liberty is synonymous with life and Socrates represents the freedom of enquiry which is the cornerstone on which all other freedom rest. When these protagonists find that their ideals will not be realized save by compromise, they choose death rather than deliverance.
In the battle between the individual and the society, no conclusive verdict can be passed. John Palen notes the subjective nature of the issue:

The conflict over whether the ills of society results from the faults of individuals or are caused by the society as a whole is a philosophical one, resting ultimately not on science but on one's view of human nature. On one hand we have Rousseau's view of humanity as basically virtuous but corrupted by Government. On the other side is Hobbes' view of a less perfect and pleasant nature that must be controlled by society if society is to survive.

Anderson is positive that human nature cannot be perfected by government; he is aware of the futility of trying to build a New Jerusalem with the tools of politics. Ruthless ideologies have stocked the world, promising Utopia but in the end even the basic humanity is negated. In realizing their pledge to move the world, they have filled it with innocent blood. Charles Colson observes:

In Communism and Fascism we have seen rulers who bear the mark of Cain as a badge of honor; who pursue a savage virtue, devoid of humility and humanity. We have seen more people killed in this century by their own governments than in all its wars combined. We have seen every utopian experiment fall exhausted from the pace of its own brutality.
Yet utopian temptations persist, even in the world's democracies - stripped of their terrors perhaps, but not of their risks. Anderson emphasizes that no government can be trusted entirely to value individual's need for freedom to find meaning in life. Man must remain ever vigilant and regardless of the outcome face the might and power of the government. This is the call of the playwright who has the rights of individuals as the core of his philosophy.

Anderson is not polemical on the issue of freedom for he does not restrain it with any particular attribute. Nevertheless, he takes a categorical stand on power. He asserts that power is the anti-thesis of individual freedom. He believes that power saps the creative faculties and emasculates man to the level of animal existence. Figuratively stated, it is a chain that manacles and confines man to a locked and sealed vault. Anderson's remedial measure to frustrate its pernicious tendency is not greater legislation or ideology based political movements. He reposes his faith in the individual. He exhorts every individual to yearn for freedom, for it is the key to unlock the power vaults and to let man's spirit soar. Every endeavour may not meet with success. There could be a time for joy, a time for sorrow; a time to laugh and a time to shed tears. Yet the yearning should not die. This is the message that Rudolph, Gregor and Socrates proclaim through their death.