Chapter V
Tearing the Tangled Net
Key Largo, Candle in the Wind

We are not here to triumph by fighting,
By stratagem, or by resistance,
Not to fight with beasts as men, we have fought the beast
And have conquered. We have only to conquer
Now, by suffering.

- Murder in the Cathedral

Man is thesis and antithesis, perfection and imperfection, something and non-something at the same time. He is thesis, perfection, and something for what he is; antithesis, imperfection, and non-something for what he ought to be. This clash of the thesis and antithesis, perfection and imperfection creates tension, seeking resolution in synthesis and equilibrium. For subhuman beings such tension is resolved automatically. Man with freedom to choose, and under moral obligation to do so, seeks his own synthesis and equilibrium. On the causes and dilemmas confronting choice, Karl Jasper states:

Human life understands itself in terms of its potentialities and perils, its greatness and nothingness, its human and diabolical strains, its nobleness and meanness, its sheer joy of being alive and its bewildered terror at failure and destruction, its love, dedication and openness of heart, and
then again its hatred, narrowness and blindness. All in all, humanity sees itself confronted by an unanswerable problem, by the ultimate collapse of every effort to realize its promise – all this against the background of unshaken order and a strongly felt contrast between Good and Evil.¹

Maxwell Anderson strongly affirms these struggles of the spirit are enacted in the historic conflicts of man, some representing good and some evil. To him, "the good and evil in man are the good and evil of evolution, that men have within themselves the beasts from which they emerge and the god toward which they climb."² He believes that the theatre offers man, the criteria for identifying what is good and what is evil. "It affirms that evil is what takes man back toward the beast, that good is what urges him up toward the god."³ This contrasting pattern in human life, this struggle between the good and the evil looms large whatever be the age.

The image of good and bad, the beast and the beauty is vibrated in many literary works. The legend of the Beauty and the Beast, the Beasts in The Faerie Queene, the Beast in the Book of Revelation in the Bible, Shakespeare’s perception of Ariel and Caliban as fiery and earthly in The Tempest, and Plato’s vision of man as a charioteer driving two steeds, one bright and fiery and the other ugly and sluggish, exemplify the dispensation of conflict between the good and the bad.
Melville depicts in the Epilogue to *Clarel* the conflicting attributes embedded in man and the eternal battle between them:

Yea, ape and angel, strife and old debate –
The harps of heaven and dreary gongs of hell; […]
No umpire she betwixt the chimes and knell:
The running battle of the star and clod
Shall run for ever.  

The world today abounds with instances of conflict situation. Man is split between flesh and spirit, wooed by good and evil, enfeebled by enigmatic situations and weighed down by fear and guilt. His conflicts are inflated by political, socio-economic, and cultural forces of the world. In conflict situations, one is confronted with the choice between two or more mutually exclusive evil or good. How does man react to conflicting circumstances? What is the moral obligation of man?

Answers to these queries are found in Anderson’s *Key Largo* (1939) and *Candle in the Wind* (1941). The playwright envisages man making the right choice in the face of conflicting demands which test his moral fibre. With the rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe, Anderson turned to serious materials touching on the upheavals produced by contemporary political events which had their genesis in ideologies that negated morality itself. *Key Largo* draws a parallel between Spanish Fascism and gangsterism in Florida; *Candle in the Wind* lays bare the predicament
of the French under the Nazi occupation. Both the plays present the facets of morality, the good and evil embedded in man and the choice that confronts him. Anderson uses the imagery of beast to personify the evil which always wars within man.

**Key Largo** symbolizes the complexity of moral dilemmas. The play raises the question: How should modern man respond to moral crisis and conflicts? According to Esther Jackson, "Anderson seeks to set this question fully in the context of ordinary life; that is, within commonplaces of action, character, dialogue and scene appropriate to twentieth-century American experience." He interprets his theme with the dual subject of the civil war in Spain and the struggle against gangsterism in Florida. This poetic drama concerns a defector from the Loyalist side in the Spanish Civil War who ultimately learns that there is no integrity without courage and commitment. **Key Largo** is an outgrowth of Anderson's unpublished play, *The Bastion Saint-Gervais* (1938) where he attempts to dissect the ideological crisis of the battlefield.

The storyline of **The Bastion Saint-Gervais** is similar to the prologue in **Key Largo**. Four young Americans defend a weak fortification in Spain against the advancing armies of Franco. They are the only remnant of a company of volunteers holding the line after the rest of the troops have pulled back. Despite the hopeless situation, they realize that if they desert and prove unfaithful to their ideals they
will die within and lose the sense of their own human dignity which makes life meaningful. Convinced of their purpose, they chose to die in the end, holding back momentarily the advance of the Fascists. In *Key Largo*, the accent is again on satisfying the spiritual aspirations of man. Robert Healy opines, “Anderson aims to express in dramatic terms as an all-inclusive way of life satisfying not only the material but the spiritual aspirations of man.” An understanding of the prologue is essential to trace the development of conflicts in the play.

King McCloud, a young American leads a group of spirited men to fight for the Spanish Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. He learns that he and his friends are being left to hold a hill to facilitate the escape of the Loyalists forces. In that desperate situation he feels betrayed and decides to quit from the battle and tries to convince his companions to do likewise because the war is lost. McCloud discovers how resolute his friends are in their faith to remain and fight for what they believe right, even though it means death to them. He abandons his friends to their fate and escapes. However, his enemies, the Franco forces capture him and when forced to fight for them, he joins them to save his life.

After the war, when McCloud returns to America he is driven by a sense of guilt compulsion. He visits each of the families of his slain comrades to report how they met their death and to seek penance for his tortured soul. He strives hard to justify his desertion and expects at
least one person to accept his flight from the battlefield as a right decision. His search takes him to Key Largo, south of Florida mainland, where his friend Victor’s family, the blind father d’Alcala and sister Alegre live. Here, once again he encounters the forces of evil represented by a gangster who preys on the helpless family. When Murillo the gangster arrives, McCloud passes off as Victor to keep the villain at bay, but this strategy sets a trap for him. He is forced to make a stand, either to save two innocent Indians or his own life. He chooses the former, confronts Murillo and dies killing him.

Though Edmond Gagey observes that Anderson focuses, “on the conflict between scientific materialism and idealism,” the play can be studied from the point of view of conflicts arising out of moral choice presented to the protagonist. “But I have a demon [...] that lives in my soul” (KL 65). As McCloud wrestles with the beast within, he acknowledges that making moral choice is not an easy proposition.

The conflict in Key Largo revolves around the internal convulsions experienced by the protagonist in making moral choice in three different situations. Arthur Sampley tersely captures the dilemmas faced by the protagonist that causes conflict of choice: “Three times in the play he is given the choice of death or of surrender to the overwhelming forces of evil; twice he chooses surrender, and the third time he is seriously tempted to make the same choice.” McCloud’s conflict with his idealist friend
Victor when in Spain, over the question of fighting for the Loyalists, is the first situation where the protagonist is called upon to exercise a choice. The second records the conflict when he is caught by his enemies in Spain. The third is McCloud’s confrontation with the gangsters at Key Largo.

The protagonist reacts to the first trial by taking the realistic way out; since it is sensible to save one’s life given the futile situation, he deserts the Loyalists. The idealism which sent him to Spain to fight for the cause of liberty gives way to the instinct of self-preservation. This first trial can also be regarded as a conflict between idealism and pragmatism represented by Victor d’Alcala and King McCloud respectively. Though both of them have come believing that, “if a lot of good, healthy men don’t die for Spain right now there won’t be any place on earth where a free man can live in a couple of years” (KL. 8), McCloud at this stage is on the threshold of making a choice. To him freedom is a worthy cause, worth fighting for but given the realities of the situation, not worth dying for. He has not reached a stage where he is so irrevocably wedded to the cause that he is prepared to die for realizing his ideals.

On the other hand, Victor is an idealist for whom the choice is complete wherefrom there is no looking back. He remains convinced that it is better to die for an ideal than to live without one. He does not
waver, once he has exercised his choice. This difference in the stage of choice is brought out in their analysis of the ultimate victory of the cause. Victor rationalizes:

Hasn’t it always looked the same, the fight for freedom? [...] A lot of people die, good and bad, but there is more freedom later, for the next generation, there is. If you want a clean, Armageddon battle, all the beasts of hell against the angels of light, you won’t get that, not in this world. (KL 10)

Victor, “embodies the never-dying optimism, the faith in a better future built upon a clear understanding of all-pervasive uncertainty, evil and pessimism.” As an idealist, he believes that even if they die, freedom can be assured for the next generation, but McCloud being a pragmatist claims that it is a belief contradicted by reality. He does not consider death as the litmus test for proving one’s commitment. Therefore, when Victor accuses him of being overcome by sudden fear, McCloud justifies his action declaring:

Nobody’s afraid to die when he sees good reason for it. [...] I’ve been trying to believe the whole world would rise up and step on this evil
that crawls over Spain - and it has risen up, and stepped on us. (KL 16-17)

McCloud's decision to withdraw from the struggle is therefore no reflection on the genuineness of his commitment to freedom. Like his other friends he chose to fight for it in his inexperienced state. When exposed to the realities of the situation, he faces the moral dilemma of deserting them. The conflict McCloud undergoes within seeks for an answer to resolve the dilemma: Should one sacrifice his life for a lost cause? Their battle seen in the new light of reality is, "one blood-purge or the other, but never justice, / only the rat-men ratting on each other / in a kind of rat despair" (KL 22).

McCloud realizes their dreams are betrayed and doomed and their ideals evanescent:

I tell you it was a dream, all a dream we had, in a dream world, of brothers who put out a helping hand to brothers, and might save them. (KL 22)

This realization is attributable to McCloud's pragmatism. He deserts his friends because his faith in the sacredness of a lost cause runs dry, while his companions believe that despite the situation the original proposition remains unchanged. Vincent Wall comments on the changed perception of McCloud:
Spanish democracy has been a symbol of something far greater. It was an ideal made tangible, something to believe in, a standard to defend. It was to give meaning to an otherwise meaningless life. Yet now, the cause of Spanish democracy is being abandoned and this ideal has been betrayed.\textsuperscript{11}

Deserting the hill is not cowardice but common sense learnt in actual experience of war and is not a weakening of the commitment to freedom: “Why should we die here for a dead cause, for a symbol, / on these empty ramparts, where there’s nothing to win” (KL 23). The obliteration of the symbol of freedom drives McCloud to relinquish his post.

Contrarily, if McCloud’s decision to desert the hill and leave his comrades to their martyr’s death is seen as a mark of pusillanimity, his action echoes Anderson’s belief that everyman has the choice to determine the purpose for which he wants to die. When Howard pointed out to Anderson that the play’s central character McCloud seemed, “realistic about saving his life in the Prologue but cowardly about it in Act I,” Anderson was determined to, “Rearrange the prologue so that King wins the argument more definitely.”\textsuperscript{12} It can also be taken that in the first trial, the protagonist exercises a wrong choice and comes out as a moral failure. The beast in him triumphs over the good.
McCloud’s second temptation occurs when he is taken captive by
the Franco forces. Abandoning his principles, he fights the rest of the
war for the Insurgents to preserve his life. The protagonist does not
register even a modicum of scruple in electing to join his erstwhile foes.
The transformation is swift and sudden. The overpowering instinct is to
avoid death and there is not even an iota of moral compunction at the
betrayal of his convictions. It is only later that McCloud realizes that his
leap into the enemy lines is a moral fall. Anderson portrays the effect of
the second conflict of choice through the words of the protagonist:

I ate dirt, and I’m damned.

I had to tell them I was one of them —
and then there was no way out. And now you know me.

I deserted, and left my friends to die alone —
and fought on Franco’s side — and I’m alive —
and better men are dead. (KL 63)

The choice opted in the second conflict leaves McCloud a
psychological wreck overcome with pangs of guilt, driving him to the
point of insanity. It is a psychological suffering experienced by the
individual with a sensitive conscience roused from hibernation. The
remedy for the hapless and haunted state of guilt is to find someone
who would concur with the correctness of his choice. Edmond Gagey
comments on the protagonist’s predicament:
He finds, however, that he cannot rationalize or justify his action, and he wanders about telling his story to the families of his dead companions, hoping thereby to do penance and to find at least one person to agree that he did right in running away.  

Bailey acknowledges the universality of the conflict experienced by McCloud by asking, “Who does not feel the terror of King McCloud’s dilemma.” Though McCloud declares the purpose of his pilgrimage to the house of all his friends is for “penance and expiation” (KL 60), the fact appears rather different. The immediate concern is not expiation but one motivated by selfish interest. He is “driven by an evil / that must see the light or strangle me to death / working inside!” (KL 60). The evil in him is the guilt arising out of deserting his friends and becoming a “turncoat”. His conscience gnaws him once he is removed from the immediate vicinity of danger and his guilt so overwhelms him that he declares: “I can’t stand men! / It seems that I’m allergic to the race / of men and their women!” (KL 61). He is apprehensive that in making the wrong choice he has not just betrayed his comrades, but the basic tenets of humanity as well. He is on the verge of becoming a misanthropist.

McCloud goes to Spain not to fight for the freedom of the Spaniards alone. His conviction to fight for them symbolizes his fight for humanity. Initially, humanity was the focal point of his concern; ironically, when
he returns he hates the same humanity. This transformation, this moral fall is wrought by the wrong choice he makes, whereby he allows the animal instinct of self-preservation triumph over his moral self. In the second trial, Anderson shows that the beast in the protagonist has subdued the good in him.

McCloud’s third opportunity to reinstate his integrity arrives when he encounters Murillo, the leader of a band of gamblers, who takes over for gambling, the lodge run by d’Alcala and Alegre. The gangster fleeces the tourists and holds his position by force and threats. His overtures towards Alegre are not honourable and he is a constant threat to the beleaguered family. Although McCloud gets a chance to kill Murillo, he surrenders his gun and the thirty dollars he had won from Murillo’s crooked game. Commenting on this action Bailey adds, “we sympathize with King McCloud in his failures. We agree, certainly, that it is not worth a man’s life to defend thirty dollars taken in a gambling game.” McCloud justifies his action:

I’ve been in tighter places
than this, and I’ve had better chances to die,
and didn’t take them. You’ll think that’s cowardice.
But there are more than two kinds of men.
And I belong to a kind you haven’t met
and wouldn’t know about. (KL 72)
The choice offered to the protagonist in the third conflict is either saving his own life or two innocent Indians. Murillo had killed and sunk the body of a road gang foreman in the bay. In his efforts to oust the gamblers, d'Alcala persuades the innocent Indians to float the body ashore. He expects the police who are in dark about the murder, to arrest the gangster. Instead the strategy backfires on McCloud who being a newcomer to the place is an obvious and prime suspect. Further, there is an old charge against Victor d'Alcala and since d'Alcala, the senior presents McCloud as his son, Sheriff Gash threatens to reopen the old case. In this situation, McCloud confronts a moral conflict of great intensity. To disclose his true identity would mean menace to Alegre. Denying his alleged culpability in the murder would mean death to the innocent Indians arrested for a crime they did not commit. In this conflict he makes an honourable choice and comes out regenerated and atoned.

Evil intimidates good into submission by resorting to force. To overcome evil buttressed by intimidation, courage of conviction is essential. Once conviction is total, it manifests in external act. The protagonist’s conduct drives home this fact. Till the final episode, McCloud undergoes vacillation whether it is worthwhile to oppose evil because for him the end should have a meaningful purpose. The instinct to avoid death still overpowers him, despite the conviction that evil ought to be checkmated. Hence, the brooding query: “Isn’t it a question /
whether I'm more useful here, and alive, and trying, at least, to ward off Murillo?" (KL 108). Towards the end, he is fully convinced that a decisive stand has to be taken, irrespective of the outcome. Only at this stage, he chooses to take the final plunge against evil. In the words of Gerald Rabkin, "King comes to realize that one must take one's stand against evil, despite the knowledge that evil will never be entirely vanquished." This choice, however, does not result entirely from self-realization, but because of two remarkable external forces that act on him, namely the idealistic convictions of d'Alcala and the redemptive love of Alegre.

One of the two things that help McCloud to re-establish moral conviction is d'Alcala's hope that men will eventually gain the wisdom to improve from what they are. d'Alcala's conviction helps persuade the protagonist to make his final decision for ideals. The old man admits that those who lead the race upward often accomplish little, and that the race seems to make little headway. Though futile and feeble the efforts may be, it is only those individuals who strive with ideals can lead the race upwards. These endeavours may seem to be in vain for the present but they will eventually succeed. d'Alcala's conviction is indeed the spiritual testimony of Maxwell Anderson.

One reason why McCloud is disinclined to make a choice which is inimical to his interest is because he is cynical and sceptical of all faith
and proves a typical product of his times. It is essential to note the
cynicism of the thirties as amplified in his voice:

Show one thing secure
among those names of virtues – justice and honor
and love and friendship – and I’ll die for it gladly,
but where’s justice, and where’s honour, and where’s
friendship, and what’s love under the rose? (KL 110)

Anderson answers all these queries through d’Alcala’s cosmic
philosophy. d’Alcala’s reply is that while there may be little evidence of
ideals visible in the world as it is, only by ideals can there ever be hope
of a better world. He articulates Anderson’s belief that the present
situation of the race is indeed a dismal one, but whatever hope there is
for the race resides with those who make the effort to lead it upward
toward a better tomorrow. Idealism is man’s answer to the challenge of
making a place for himself in the scheme of the universe for it reinforces
his moral fibre and affords him a purpose in life. Alfred Shivers opines:

Through his mouthpiece d’Alcala, Anderson gives us not
only a cogent explanation of that peculiar sickness of our
times, which is the mind’s subtle attack on itself, but also a
poignant hope that man must and will persevere as an
idealist in a universe bereft of God and be guided along the
way by some noble purpose that, however vague it may be
now, is nevertheless sure.\textsuperscript{17}
A contributory influence that cures McCloud of his cynicism is Alegre’s love for him. His picture with the inscription of Shakespearean sonnet ‘Let me not to the marriage of true minds’ preserved by her reveals her profound love for McCloud and veneration for the ideals he held dear in Spain. It is this love that transforms his sterile spirit: “It is love which emerges as the instrument of reconciliation – the agent of moral enlightenment.” The conventional treatment of love as the redemptive power in the play becomes an invigorating force aiding the protagonist’s moral regeneration. The love of Alegre and d’Alcala’s faith in the face of despairing reality enable the protagonist to comprehend the purpose of life:

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

In the end, McCloud decides that in sacrificing himself for the ideal of justice he will be, for the first time in his life, accomplishing a meaningful purpose. He agrees to “confess” and save the Indians. Having laboured for so long to escape the feeling of guilt that dogged him, he at last realizes the validity of the simple truth – the truth for which Victor and his companions gave up their lives on the mountaintop in Spain – if a
cause is just, the situation does not alter the righteousness of that cause. To live, a man must be willing to die for the things he believes in.

McCloud’s realization is synonymous with Victor d’Alcala’s determination to stay back in Spain. He now makes an irrevocable choice. The last confrontation with Murillo ending in moral victory at the expense of his life is simply an extension of his regenerated faith and righteous opposition to tyranny: “the moment chosen is not the moment when the choice which starts the train of events is made but the epoch during which the consequences of that choice are becoming fully apparent.”19 The dithering protagonist comprehends the despicable consequence of the erroneous choices he had made hitherto, and in the third instance salvages his moral stature by conquering the demon within.

**Key Largo** presents an individual’s reactions to moral issues in different circumstances and in different levels of magnitude. Anderson does not pontificate that moral convictions must never admit compromise as witnessed in the first two situations encountered by McCloud. Rather, he emphasizes that the essential integrity of an individual should not be lost in the process of rationalizing moral failures. Anderson’s message is that opportunities to prove one’s idealism do not come to all. It comes to many in certain generations, and to only a few in others. He therefore, reiterates that every man must choose to affirm or deny certain
factors. Every individual must be willing to modulate his opinions when experience changes but he cannot sacrifice his moral vision to material reality if he aspires fulfilment of life.

The plays Key Largo and Candle in the Wind are aligned on the subject of conflict with the 'beast'. While Key Largo exposes the demon within, Candle in the Wind portrays the beast as the external element. Candle in the Wind presents the unwavering commitment of the protagonist to a cause that brooks no compromise. It portrays the devotion of an American actress to her French lover and her valiant efforts to save him from Nazi imprisonment. The play is also a fight against the ruthlessness of Gestapo which personifies the active arm of evil. In the struggle, her youth and fortunes are wasted but her indomitable warrior spirit sees the ultimate victory.

The play takes place after the German invasion of France in the Second World War. A celebrated American actress Madeline Guest is stationed in Paris before and after the Nazi capture of the city. She is in love with Raoul St. Cloud, a French naval officer whose boat sinks during the retreat from Dunkirk. Raoul who comes to meet Madeline is captured and interned by the Gestapo. He is not an ordinary naval officer but was, before the war, an active anti-Nazi journalist and therefore an important political prize for the Nazis. Madeline resorts to bribing the captors to secure his release. She pays for a number of schemes
and is each time double-crossed. The abortive escape plans to save Raoul are the focus of the play. At last, a German officer Schoen moved by Madeline's faith and commitment helps Raoul to escape. After a brief meeting with Madeline, Raoul flees to England, but the Germans imprison Madeline who refuses to divulge where her lover has gone. The play ends with Raoul's escape to England and Madeline's internment in France.

Anderson was deeply perturbed by the Nazi threat to the free world and regarded it as an epitome of evil. He believed that the evil should be arrested and in his characteristic manner reposed faith in the goodness of man to act as a counter check to the scourge. Despite being overwhelmed by the horrors of the world at war, he reaffirmed the basic belief that selfless devotion to a morally noble cause would prevail against all odds. He challenged the individual to exercise the right choice when confronted by overbearing forces of evil. Anderson's declaration, "Analyze any play you please which has survived the test of continued favour, and you will find a moral or a rule of social conduct or a rule of thumb which the race has considered valuable enough to learn and pass along," vouches his concern for moral values.

Brooks Atkinson says that Candle in the Wind represents Anderson's personal convictions about social morality in the contemporary world. He also observes that the target of the playwright's
indictment of Nazi malevolence is on social treachery and not on their military might. According to Atkinson, "Anderson has had the wisdom to perceive that one of the chief sources of Nazi might is its cunning betrayal of codes of personal honour among civilized people." 21 The playwright stresses that codes of personal honour have moral foundation and any betrayal would bring down the social edifice.

_Candle in the Wind_ is a drama of external events charged with moral conflicts arising out of personal commitment of individuals. The individuals are given the choice either to affirm or betray the codes of personal honour when under assault by evil. Though the play does not explicitly focus on the moral choice between good and evil, it highlights the significance of moral obligations arising out of love, loyalty, and integrity in the face of overbearing evil. The conflicts generated by these polarities can be analysed at two levels. The first is captured through Madeline who acts in absolute faith in her commitment to Raoul and against Colonel Erfurt, the representative of Nazi oppression. The battle of the good and the evil is externalized through these two prime characters. The second is the conflict internalized within Lieutenant Schoen. Both the conflicts are projected in the backdrop of evil personified by the Nazis.

The external conflict in the play is woven around a struggle arising out of the infringement of the private right of the protagonist. Yet,
Anderson has vested the conflict with universality by raising the level of the clash to that of good and evil in man. The play is about the resolute attempts of Madeline to purchase Raoul’s freedom. She remains unaltered in her love and commitment to save him. Her tenacity reveals that the personal moral codes of honour and integrity once imposed on oneself by choice cannot be weakened by a brutal system. “But I shan’t be put aside! You will not stop me! I shall haunt this prison. I shall not leave France till I have seen Raoul St.Cloud!” (CW 192). Madeline is thus, “a symbol of resistance, an outward and visible sign of man’s unconquerable will,” posits Rosamond Gilder.

The source of Madeline’s inner dynamism is the selfless ardour of her love and through that she understands the meaning of allegiance to a larger cause and acquires the moral strength to battle evil. Though she is conscious of the fate of those who enter the Nazi concentration camp from where it is “impossible for a man to come through free and alive” (CW 184), her faith in securing Raoul’s release remains solid. In this struggle, she transforms her personal plight to a universal predicament and vows not to be cowed down by oppression: “The whole world’s changed. Maybe it’s because the Germans have set out to kill all love and kindness, and instead of killing it, they’ve made love and kindness more precious than ever” (CW 184). Anderson’s conviction in the invincible power of love as a universal virtue is indeed amplified by the words of Madeline.
Madeline discovers her moral strength in the confrontation with the overpoweringly evil force of Gestapo. The intensity of the struggle gains greater potentiality from love which has concretized itself on commitment to set Raoul free from Nazi imprisonment. The commitment is total and will settle for nothing but victory as revealed in her spirited response to the hectoring Colonel:

ERFURT. Will you give up this living dead man, and your dead love, and go sensibly back to America? [...] You have never been up against sharp iron. I it is your destiny to be beaten! [...] 

Madelaine. I will never be beaten. Never. I will stay — and I will win! (CW 192)

The plot in Candle in the Wind is both meagre and monotonous since from the time of capture to the final escape of Raoul, it consists chiefly of a series of repetitive interviews between the protagonist and various German officers. But these encounters are essential to portray the vicissitudes experienced by virtue in conflict with villainy. It is true that Madeline lacks the same tragic fire implicit in tragic characters in other plays. However, her character is balanced by the pathos and devotion to love. Her confrontation of evil on moral terms enhances her appeal. She stands for the dictum that force and authority can never be substituted for the liberty of choice of an individual.
While virtue is Madeline’s great potential, evil is embodied in Erfurt. He exhibits only rashness of temper, obstinacy and conceit. Anderson’s villain has no lust for flesh or money. He is a sincere officer blindly yoked to the Nazi philosophy in all its brutality and depravity. Encroachment on the rights of others, cruelty of disposition, pride which derives gratification from the abasement of others - these are his moral infirmities which stand counter-poised with the goodness of Madeline. He stands for evil, tyranny, lack of humanity and moral standards. In short, Erfurt is the antithesis of the moral values represented by Madeline. Such is his blind devotion to Nazi ideology that he is delighted with Corporal Behren’s conviction: “In any conflict between the state and the individual, the state is right, and the individual is wrong. [...] There is no God except the state, and the state carries out our Fuehrer’s will” (CW 188). Save for the loyalty he displays for the Nazi ideology and the Nazi administration, Erfurt has no positive traits. Anderson exposes this morally bankrupt Nazi who defends accepting bribes with a specious reason:

State control is the only efficient control, but it requires a large corps of officials – a bureaucracy, if you like. And under a bureaucracy, there comes a time when the government mills grind slowly, and a modest amount of bribery becomes necessary to the functioning of the state.
[...] And thereby we convert a weakness into a source of strength. (CW 191)

Atkinson notes that Madeline exploits this chink in the system as it is, "founded in the corruption of moral code." Erfurt is a representative of the beast without, whose origin cannot be fully explained in terms of socio-political and economic laws. The absence of moral values transforms any individual into a state of animal existence devouring all the finer aspects of humanity. However, in the midst of this seemingly overpowering evil, Anderson gives out the message of hope in the words of Madeline:

In the history of the world there have been many wars between men and beasts. And the beasts have always lost, and men have won. (CW 211)

Amidst the Nazi evil, "which is keen and active and thoroughly organized," and a rule established by, "the Nazi method of conquest by depravity, trickery and mendacity," Anderson has presented Schoen as a laconic character who powerfully articulates his own faith in the individual to battle evil. The inner conflict that one experiences when entangled by evil and persuaded to be a perpetrator of that evil is portrayed through him. He is innately good and despite being in an evil system is not an ardent subscriber to that ideology. It is this
characterization of Schoen which makes the play more dynamic than a mere melodrama by its contemporary implications.

Anderson presents Schoen as "a tortured soul beneath the Nazi uniform." Being a part of the system, he faithfully discharges his duties. But within him a struggle occurs that comes to the surface in his encounter with Madeline. He warns Madeline not to trust any prison official including him in her attempts to secure Raoul’s freedom. He is well acquainted with the treachery of the Nazi system and therefore despite his sympathy for her, and genuine commiseration for Raoul, he is not prepared to assist Madeline. The trappings of Nazi rule exercise such powerful constraints on his delicate conscience that he tries to assuage himself by the confession: “It’s not a crime, even in the Reich, to feel sympathy with the suffering” (CW 204).

Unlike Erfurt, he does not take an unflinching stand either on good or evil, though unmistakably he is drawn to the former. The oscillation in exercising choice of good over evil pulsates within him. Being a prisoner of the evil ideology, he finds decision making a difficult process. This inner struggle is manifested in his refusal to give a concrete assurance to Madeline in her quest to secure Raoul’s release. But the intrinsic good in him triumphs at last, breaking out the rigid Nazi discipline. Moved by the devotion of Madeline, he assists Raoul’s escape by deliberately sending the search party in the wrong direction. His confession uttered
aloud reinforces Anderson’s view on the choice one has to make when faced with conflicting demands:

I have come to the end of this quarrel with myself. This quarrel over whether it is better to be what you are and die for it, or to be what they would have you, and live. Perhaps I have found a sort of courage. [...] For I am now a soldier against what I hate, and it’s good to fight alone. (CW 207)

Schoen’s profound understanding of the motivating dynamics of love and commitment empowers him to breach the rigid Nazi barriers. His moral choice leads him to self-esteem and integrity born out of the tough decision to let Roaul free much against the military code and Nazi principles. He ennobles himself through compassion for the predicament of another person at the risk of his own life.

Anderson believes that the individual should fight against the oppression of evil at any cost. He trusts in the uniqueness of the individual’s will which cannot be controlled: “The mind has no master save the master it chooses.” Madeline’s action asserts this message. She faces the mighty Nazis by making the right moral choice and pursues it with single-minded devotion, eventually winning over Schoen from the stable of the Nazis. This invigorating spirit achieves her goal because she is an exemplifier of Anderson’s belief that, “of all wild things in the world, the most uncontrollable – the least tameable – is the human
mind. No King or Priest or Dictator has ever tamed it. It cannot rest in captivity” (CW 204).

Anderson shows that despite the Nazi attempts to denigrate the accepted norms of civilization, evil represented by them can be met with heroically and successfully. Seemingly ineffectual force like love can penetrate the rigid fortress of evil. The title of the play bears testimony to Anderson’s faith. Rosamond Gilder’s exposition that, “Love is the light in darkness, the candle flickering undaunted in the night and the wind that guides his heroine’s feet through her strange pilgrimage and lights her way to an understanding of the forces engaged in a battle which is tearing civilization to pieces,” pithily sums up Anderson’s confidence in the unconquerable will of the individual moved by the power of love.

King McCloud and Madeline are not idealists like Socrates, Rudolph, and Gregor. They are just ordinary people landed by situation to combat forces of evil, with no preparation. Madeline’s confession, “I came into this fight tardily and by chance, and unwillingly” (CW 210 – 211), shows that it is not essential that one should necessarily be an idealist to face evil. These protagonists provide an answer to the question raised in the beginning of this chapter: What is the moral obligation of man in this world? Anderson strongly postulates that man’s obligation to others includes - the integrity of his belief and actions, his agreement and pledges;
his sincerity; the bond of his word; his honesty, his conformity to right and good; his fairness and his receptiveness to these traits, which make life more valuable and meaningful in this world.

Anderson comprehends that in discharging his moral obligation, man will be confronted by the forces of evil and called upon to elect between evil and good. The choice may not be one which can be made with relative ease; in several instances it might be a tortuous one, placing great demand on his physical, material, and spiritual resources. On the fate of those who choose not to confront evil, Anderson posits:

That which is considered despicable on the stage will be held despicable in real life – not only evil but those who will not fight evil are rejected on both sides of the footlights, [...] a hero may have his doubts and indecisions for that’s only human, but when it comes to the test he must be willing to take steel in his bosom or take lead through his intestines or he resigns his position as a man.  

Anderson does not adopt a sectarian pose in the matter of one’s freedom to chose and empathizes when erroneous choice is made. Yet he profoundly warns through the plays analysed here that the beast within and the beast without should be reigned in, lest humanity is in peril. The net is for the beast; man’s destiny is to tear the tangled net of moral perplexity and allow the spirit to soar high.