Preface

In the nineteen sixties with the publication of his Pulitzer prize play, J.B., Archibald MacLeish, who was considered one of the major poets of America upto the nineteen fifties, emerged as a playwright of prominence. His first little verse play, Nobodaddy (1926), had failed to draw the attention of the critics. They considered him mainly a poet rather than a playwright. My attempt in this dissertation has been to focus light upon the economic, social, political and moral themes in the plays of MacLeish and also point out the technical difficulties involved in writing a verse play in the modern times. In comparison to a writer of the prose plays, the verse-playwright is confronted with the problem of meter and rhythm suitable to the modern times on the one hand and of finding audiences who are attuned to hear verse on the stage on the other. Moreover, while the prose-playwright had a rich dramatic tradition initiated by Ibsen and other subsequent writers, the verse-playwright had no such tradition which could show him a way to solve his technical problem.

Under these conditions where there is no viable dramatic tradition and a verse form suitable to the modern times, it is certainly more difficult to write a verse play than a realistic prose-play which, in fact, conforms to the temper and spirit of the modern age in many respects. From this point of view if MacLeish's plays reveal less ingenuity than the plays written in
prose, the reason can be found not so much in any limitations of the poet as the experimental nature of his work and the uncongenial circumstances under which he has to write. Seen in this light, all MacLeish's plays in verse deserve a serious attention and a critical appraisal. Such an effort should definitely add to the interest in the genre in general and MacLeish in particular.

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( Pavitra Devi )