

Fort Hays State University

## FHSU Scholars Repository

---

Master's Theses

Graduate School

---

Spring 1937

### Sherwood Anderson: An Appreciation of His Life and Fiction

Kenneth Davenport

*Fort Hays Kansas State College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Davenport, Kenneth, "Sherwood Anderson: An Appreciation of His Life and Fiction" (1937). *Master's Theses*. 252.

DOI: 10.58809/EWQZ3370

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/theses/252>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact [ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu](mailto:ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu).

Sherwood Anderson:

An Appreciation of his Life and Fiction

being

A thesis presented to the graduate faculty  
of Fort Hays Kansas State College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Science

by

Kenneth Davenport, A.B., 1936

Fort Hays Kansas State College

Approved

Myrtle E. McGinnis  
Major Department

Acting

J. B. Street  
Chairman, Graduate Council

Date May 15, 1937



## Contents

Introduction: A Sketch..... page 1

Extended Abstract: A Brief Sketch..... page 2

Synopsis and List of References..... page 3

## To The Macs

Abstract and Object: A Brief Sketch..... page 4

Principal, Style, and Technique: An Introduction..... page 5

Conclusion: An Appreciation and Evaluation..... page 6

Summary: A Conclusion..... page 7

Bibliography: A List..... page 8

## Contents

Introduction: A Reason.....	page 1
Sherwood Anderson: A Life Sketch.....	page 5
Synopses and Plot: An Analysis.....	page 122
Character and Color: A Description.....	page 25
Principles, Style, and Technique: An Interpretation...	page 37
Conclusion: An Appreciation and Evaluation.....	page 45
Summary: A Condensation.....	page 49
Bibliography: An Aid.....	page 50



## Introduction

"He (Sherwood Anderson) also is an offspring of the prairie. Taine has long been dead and his theory of la race, le milieu, le moment is today as dead as he. And yet, there is a great temptation to revive it to help us link Anderson's primitivism to his environment. In fact, Anderson saved us that trouble recently when he published Tar, an autobiography redolent with the smack of the crude land where corn, cattle and people grow together, in torrid atmosphere, over the huge plains swept by torrents of heat and light. The boy in Tar was not made out of the common clay, but of the tepid dark loam on the shores of the giant Mississippi. Only amidst the Russian steppes, or in the valleys of the Ganges, could one find to-day as crude and primitive a setting for a writer. In this respect Tar strikes an almost savage note. One would wonder how such wild phases of life could appear in a modern country like the United States, if one ignored the fact that geography has not kept pace with history in the growth of America. The land is still, in many parts, as crude as it was in the days of the Indian. The primitivism of Anderson and Whitman is still written in the expanse of their country, a country as large and wild to-day, here and there, as the African jungle. The real wonder is not the resemblance between American people and their surroundings, but the fact that art of any sort can grow in such primitive parts."

It has been only in the past four decades that Americans have awakened to the fact that they could have a literature which is not dependent on any foreign country, particularly that of England. It has been only in this period of time that an interest has been awakened in the history of American letters and the reasons for their development along their

specific lines. Without attempting to assign causes, it is at once in evidence that the literature of America, with only two exceptions, to the beginnings of realism is strongly tied to the literature of Europe, particularly to the Anglo-Saxon heritage found in English ancestry. Poe and Whitman are the exceptions--and both are raceless, not American. Mark Twain wrote of American and its middle Western frontiers, yet he has that moral ideal of the Anglo-Saxons.

Literature in America, as such, has followed the European trends, modified, to be sure, by indigenous roots--geography, frontier crudity, pugnacity, freedom. It has had all the Puritanism, romanticism, realism that its model has had, and in certain respects traits of pure Americanism have crept in, at times, seemingly in spite of those who wished to keep literature in the state described by Dennie: "So far from courting the mob, our editors should treat the herd of swine and their feeders with the most ineffable contempt, and be satisfied with the general applause of scholars and gentlemen." A cavalier-like way, surely, of doing things in a democracy; though, to be sure, forty years of that democracy was under the rule of "blooded" English gentlemen.

By 1870 American literature had grown considerably in size and strength. Till the Civil War, Boston,

"Where the Lowells talk to the Cabots  
And the Cabots talk only to God,"

and its seat of culture, Harvard University, were the ruling



forces in letters. Emerson, Holmes, Bryant, Whittier, Cooper, Irving, Lowell, Longfellow, all were deeply influenced by the old Puritan spirit and did little to put native blood into their writing. The Indians of Cooper and Longfellow, the poems of Holmes and Bryant and Whittier, while undoubtedly a product of the times, are essentially a withdrawal from life and America and a return to or submergence in books and Europe. This was particularly noticeable during and after the Civil War. The few exceptions were the anti-slavery poems, particularly those of Whittier and Bryant, and the Bigelow Papers and Commeration Ode by Lowell. Throughout this whole period, until his death, Poe shot in occasional blasts at his contemporaries for neglecting to write from the life in which they lived, instead preferring to write from books. Yet even he was influenced by both German and English writers, more so than is generally realized.

After Whitman, who was American yet bore startling resemblances to some of the later Scandinavians, came a period of development--that of Western humor and color. Twain, Harte, and Hay upset the staid conservative New England; Grant published his Memoirs, and Howells became editor of The Atlantic Monthly: thus giving rise to the introduction of realism into the East--but their kind of realism seems the rosiest kind of fiction when compared with the productions of the modern "realists."

Sherwood Anderson has been arbitrarily chosen for an

illustration of the modern American naturalist. He pictures in his life, his philosophy, his technique, and his writings the essences of which realism in America is composed. In attempting to catch the individual characteristics of this author, I hope to show that America has gone far in developing a creative artist with a high standard of excellence, one who has not had to depend a great deal upon European literature for his background.

---

---

The material for this chapter has been gleaned from a great number of books and magazines. Two very helpful ones have been Blankenship's American Literature and Foerster's Re-Interpretation of American Literature. The opening quotation is from Regis Michaud's The American Novel of To-day, and the lines of verse are found in On The Aristocracy of Harvard by J. C. Bassidy.



## Sherwood Anderson

Sherwood Anderson was born in Camden, Ohio, September 13, 1876. With a father smitten with wanderlust--and not being financially able to stay long in one place--the family was forced to move soon, and at intervals moved from one Ohio town to another. In one of his sketches Anderson confesses he has never seen, to remember, his birthplace and, what's more, doesn't intend to. He would much rather keep the dreams he has built through childhood and adolescence than to visit the small town and have them destroyed.

His parentage is mixed. His father, Irwin Anderson, was presumably of Scotch-Irish ancestry, and much preferred to tell tales, both apocryphal and true, of his Civil War experiences than to make a good living for his family. His mother, Emma Smith Anderson, is supposed to be partly of Italian ancestry. Indeed, in A Story-Teller's Story, he gives a vivid description of his Italian grandmother: a woman of advanced age with the fire and vigor of youth.

In addition to the father's being a teller of tall tales, he was lazy and proud. He would much rather be

known as a sign painter (when he was doing that for a living) than a barn or house painter; and he would turn down a job of house painting which would last three or more weeks and bring in much needed money to paint signs for a store which would take a day or so and be paid for in cheap goods. Though not a habitual heavy drinker, Irwin Anderson, when times became very hard, would drink. A spectacle of pity he became then, one such episode being described in Tar.

"The strange man who had suddenly come into the house was Tar's father and was at the same time not his father. The man's hands kept making uncertain movements. There were baked potatoes for supper and he tried to begin serving the children by sticking a fork into a potato but missed and the fork struck on the side of the dish. It made a sharp metallic sound. He tried two or three times and then Mary Moorhead (Emma Anderson), getting up from her place, walked around the table and took the dish away. Having been served, all began eating in silence."

Such was the father; by long association--if sixteen years can be so called--he had given to Sherwood a taste and a knack for telling tales in a dramatic fashion, filled with characterization and a feeling of truth.

Emma Anderson, who bore her husband eight children, of whom Sherwood was the third, had a deep influence over her offspring. When she died in 1890 the household broke up; the shiftless father could not hold it together. She did not outwardly show affection to her children but each sensed her love for him. Silent, old before her rightful



time, she was a tragic figure of American womanhood, dead before she should be because of child-bearing and a husband who was not a suitable provider for his family. On Halloween neighbor boys would throw cabbages at the doors of houses. If the inhabitants did not open the door and give chase, that house was undisturbed for the rest of the night. A chase, however, drew more of the same missiles. Mrs. Anderson would extinguish the lights early and ferociously chase those who made each sally--after which she and the children would hastily gather up the cabbages, put them in a straw-lined trench, and await the next onslaught. The Andersons lived, those winters, mainly on cabbage soup. The story of her death, as told in Tar, is a genuinely moving story: strong, quiet, and simply told.

"Now and then either Margaret or Tar went to put a stick of wood in the stove. Outside the house it rained and the wind came in through a crack under the door. There were always holes like that in the houses the Moorheads lived in. You could throw a cat through the cracks... The two children got outside the house and Tar knew at once what was up. They went along the street to Dr. Reffy's office, not saying a word to each other... The children took the doctor home with them and then went upstairs. They wanted to pretend that the doctor had just come by accident--to make a call... She said she would not die, but she did. When she had spoken a few words to the children they went back upstairs, but for a long time Tar did not sleep. Neither did Margaret. Tar never asked her afterwards, but he knew she didn't."

Sherwood spent most of his boyhood in Clyde, Ohio, where his father worked at his trade of painting as well as attempting to run a harness shop. Irregular schooling

did not keep Sherwood from a love of books and words; but in his boyhood he learned much about people as he wandered about the town selling newspapers. He loafed around pool halls and bar-rooms; and in harness shops, stables, and around race tracks he learned that love of horses (and its associated idiom) which so distinguished him later as he wrote about them in The Triumph of the Egg and in Horses and Men.

After the death of his mother and the consequent break-up of the family, Sherwood went to Chicago, then from job to job in the Middle West. During the Spanish-American War he served in Cuba and, though he says he did nothing great, was acclaimed as a hero when he arrived back in Ohio. After a try at various jobs he became manager of a paint factory at Elyria, Ohio, and was accounted a successful business man.

During the years after the war he had been writing in an effort to satisfy some inner compulsion. In 1910 he broke away in a dramatic fashion, so dramatic that he was called crazy. He tells the incident in A Story-Teller's Story. He was dictating a letter to his stenographer and was thinking how easy, yet how hard, it would be to walk away from it all. He suddenly stopped after having said, "The goods about which you have inquired are the best of their kind made in the ...," then "What's the matter?" asked his stenographer. "I've been wading in a long river and my feet are wet." Then he walked out the door of his



office and did not go back for many years--never as a paint executive; he was from that time on through with business.

Sherwood went to Chicago where his brother, Paul Anderson, lived. He found work with an advertising agency, yet all the time he kept writing. Paul introduced him into that group of Chicago "new writers," Dreiser, Floyd Dell, Carl Sandburg, Ben Hecht, Robert Lovett, and others. As this group met often for informal discussion, manuscripts and books were bought for discussion.

It was largely through the work of Floyd Dell that Anderson received impetus and sufficient encouragement to write, and to have published, his first book--in 1916. This was Windy McPherson's Son, which, as early as 1913, had been read to the group. Dell recommended the book to the London firm of John Land, after many American publishers had refused it. The work, though roughly done, was recognized in England as an authentic piece of Americana. It was received with many different critical attitudes in America. Perhaps it is proof of Oscar Wilde's statement, "Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital. When critics disagree the artist is in accord with himself."

The next year came Marching Men. Mid-American Chants in free verse, polyphonic prose, or whatever you may call it, was published in 1918; it sold few copies but had a good critical reception. With the publication of a group

of sketches--they could hardly be named short stories--called Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson became known and recognized as a capable American writer.

In the twenty-one years since Windy McPherson's Son, Anderson has published twenty-one books. Many have been collections, in part, of his many magazine and newspaper articles and stories. They have been novels; essays on literature, economics, sociology, and politics; verse; and autobiographical books.

In 1921 Sherwood Anderson was awarded the Dial prize for promise as an American writer. He then spent a year in Paris, alternated for several years between New Orleans and New York. In the middle twenties he bought a house in Marion, Smythe County, Virginia. There he became the town's only editor--of two papers, one Democratic, the other Republican. He is still there, in an American small town, writing weekly comments as he likes, using his "words on white paper" as he has always loved to do.

His character will be, I hope, developed in the following sections. This may serve to introduce it.

"He was a fellow of perhaps forty-five, a short strongly-built broad-shouldered man with greying hair. There was in his face something of the rugged simplicity of a European peasant. One felt he might live a long time, do hard work, and keep to the end the vigor of that body of his... 'Come on in,' I said, perhaps a little pompously. Before sensitive people I am likely to become a bit bovine. I do not wag my tail like a dog. What I do is more like a cow. 'Come into the main stall and eat hay with me,' I seem to myself to be saying at such times."



Most of the material above has been from Tar and A Story-Teller's Story. The last quotation is from the latter book. Additional information has been gleaned from Chase's Sherwood Anderson, Living Authors, and many magazine articles.

#### Synopsis and Plot

"The telling tales of themselves people constantly spoiled the tale in telling. They had some notion of how a story should be told, got from reading, little lines wrought in. They had some something more and tried to justify some actions that for the tale's sake did not need justification."

"There was a notion that ran through all story-telling in America that the stories must be built about a plot and that should angle-fisherman that they must point a moral, uplift the people, make better citizens, and so on. 'The Fiction Plot' I called it in conversation with my friends as the plot notion did seem to be in prison all story-telling. What was wanted, I thought, was love, not plot, an altogether more elusive and difficult thing to come at."

This quotation is from A Story-Teller's Story and

there comes further justification in The Fiction Plot.

"Consider for a moment the materials of the prose writer, the teller of tales. His materials are human lives. To him these figures of his fancy should be as real as living people. He should be no more ready to sell them out than he would sell out his own friends or the woman he loves. To take the lives of these people and bend or twist them to suit the needs of some cleverly thought out plot to give your readers a false emotion is as mean and ignoble as to sell out living men or women."

From these quotations one would think that Anderson is a naturalist; and, indeed, he is to a certain form and degree. In Blankenship is a definition of naturalism which is very apt to this discussion:

## Synopses and Plot

"In telling tales of themselves people constantly spoiled the tale in telling. They had some notion of how a story should be told, got from reading. Little lies crept in. They had done something mean and tried to justify some actions that for the tale's sake did not need justification.

"There was a notion that ran through all story-telling in America that the stories must be built about a plot and that absurd Anglo-Saxon notion that they must point a moral, uplift the people, make better citizens, et cetera... 'The Poison Plot' I called it in conversation with my friends as the plot notion did seem to me to poison all story-telling. What was wanted, I thought, was form, not plot, an altogether more elusive and difficult thing to come at."

This quotation is from A Story-Teller's Story; and there comes further amplification in The Modern Writer.

"Consider for a moment the materials of the prose writer, the teller of tales. His materials are human lives. To him these figures of his fancy should be as real as living people. He should be no more ready to sell them out than he would sell out his men friends or the woman he loves. To take the lives of these people and bend or twist them to suit the needs of some cleverly thought out plot to give your readers a false emotion is as mean and ignoble as to sell out living men or women."

From these quotations one would think that Anderson is a naturalist; and, indeed, he is to a certain form and degree. In Blankenship is a definition of naturalism which is very apt to this discussion:



"Naturalism may be defined as a literary method which uses the material ordinarily used by realism, the common and ordinary along with the elevated, and at the same time attempts to appraise the value of this material in terms of a pessimistic philosophy."

Sherwood Anderson takes the materials of realism-- actual people and their doings--and then does the opposite of most "realists" in that he treats of the personalities and egos of his characters, rather than picturing the social conditions which made them and in which they live. This phase of naturalism is an outgrowth of Flaubert and tends to make lop-sided people, characters which have only certain portions of themselves portrayed--grotesques. And, in Winesburg, Ohio, he subtitles his book A Book of Grotesques. He accepts, as do most of the moderns, the philosophical theory that there is a force which determines our actions, with a negative, oftener impersonal, end in view. He never defines this force; it is implicit. It is because of these two elements in his writing that plot can not have a strong part in his writings, and that character occupies the center of his stages.

Adherence to his own rules is perhaps the reason Sherwood Anderson is not a popular writer; it is also due to a following of these rules that his really fine pieces of writing are essays and short stories or tales, rather than novels.

Anderson has written seven novels: Windy McPherson's Son (1916), Marching Men (1917), Poor White (1920), Many

Marriages (1922), Dark Laughter (1925), Beyond Desire (1932), and Kit Brandon (1936). None is of first rank in the world's collection of novels, yet there is some good in each, but only in spots; he carries only one to a high pitch throughout, and this is through his style, not his plot or characterization.

A brief synopsis of each will reveal, I think, the limitations which Anderson's creed places on his longer prose works.

Windy McPherson's Son is the sprawling tale of Sam McPherson, who grows up in the small Iowa farming town of Caxton. His father, Windy, is a slightly shell-shocked Civil War veteran, who boasts that he has been the main reason why the North defeated the South. This constant boasting becomes humiliating to Sam, who decides to make a great deal of money, which will make up for his boyhood humiliation.

He is a newsboy at nine, sells his business at fifteen, becomes a buyer for a farm dealer, makes money (puts it in the bank), discovers sex, revolts at old-time religion, makes a friend of dandified John Telfer, a pseudo-student of art who has been to Paris.

Sam goes to the city, becomes successful in one business after another, finally merges together many manufacturers of firearms. He becomes hard-boiled and unmoral in business dealings. Smitten with the lust for power, he



marries the daughter of the owner of the munitions plant which he bosses. He breaks with his wife over a shady business deal, branches out in business, drinks and attempts to find satisfaction in physical pleasures--then skips out.

Stopping at a small Illinois town, he becomes a carpenter and a socialist; then, being recognized, hence distrusted, he is forced to leave. He spends a year hunting in Africa and being a typical man of the world. On one of his many drinking sprees he goes home with a woman, buys clothes for her three children, legally adopts them and takes them back to his wife, who, apparently, has been waiting all this time.

The concluding words, "'I cannot run away from life. I must face it. I must begin to try to understand these other things, to love,' he told himself. The buried inner thing in him thrust itself up," give a picture of the idealism which Anderson tries to instill in his novels and, because he is an idealist--attempting to show, through novel form, his bewilderment at the actual practical difficulties which human beings endure--the end overcomes the means and both are obscured.

Marching Men has nearly the same scheme, with different characters and situations. "Beaut" McGregor is the name of the boy. His father, too, is slightly insane as was Windy McPherson; but in this book he is a coal miner. "Beaut", after working in his mother's bakery and in a stable, leaves

his coal mining village and, to seek fame and fortune, goes to Chicago. Here, after adventures similar to those of Sam McPherson, he becomes a lawyer and wins national renown by his successful defense of a man wrongly accused of murder.

Instead of using his fame to win wealth for himself, he devotes his time to forwarding his idea of marching men. This is his idea of furthering the cause of the working man, to that future, vague, undefinable goal of brotherhood. By marching, these men would become conscious of their collective power, and would transmute this sense of power to their employers, so that, through fear, these employers would help this future "Utopia" to arrive. During his crusade he falls in love with the daughter of a wealthy man, a woman who wants "all of life. I want the lust and the strength and the evil of it. I want to be one of the new women, the saviors of our sex."

"Beaut" has nearly decided to marry her in an effort to give her this freedom, but he changes his mind, goes back to his old home, and marries instead the milliner who had given him her savings when he had gone to Chicago. The men are still marching, but toward that vague goal in the future: Anderson is aware of the strength in unionization of labor, but does not know for what end, exactly, it might work.

Poor White is both thematically and in plot form the



same as the two previous novels. Its hero is Hugh McVey, a lazy youngster who grew up in a Mississippi river town--Mudcat Landing, Missouri. At fourteen, Hugh, in some manner, got a job in the railroad station. He lived with the station master and his wife; and the woman, a transplanted New Englander, "sharp-tongued, good-natured," had an influence which lasted throughout his life. She made him work and made "loafer" so disgusting to him that he was afraid to be idle.

Hugh McVey wanders about the country side, studies mathematics, becomes an inventor, makes money and fame, marries the daughter of a wealthy industrialist. This daughter is a woman who thinks about life and the problems of a modern woman. The couple grow apart and Hugh, like the heroes of the other novels, is dissatisfied with his material success. When, however, the wife becomes pregnant with her second child, Hugh has had an attempt made on his life, they are drawn more closely together; his dissatisfaction is temporarily appeased.

One wonders if it was not at about this time that Anderson formulated the doctrine which was quoted at the beginning of this section. Surely the form of Poor White and that of the following novels is more nearly naturalistic than the rough plot sketch of the first two. Then again it is after his success with the tale in Winesburg, Ohio that these later novels appear, suggesting that he became

aware of the cumbersome way in which his first books were handled.

His next novel, Many Marriages, is perhaps the most discussed of all. It is an attempt to interpret the subconscious elements in life and is a study of sexual repressions and their effect on the unconscious.

The story is simple. John Webster, a middle-aged manufacturer, makes love to his stenographer-secretary, largely because she is the only handy woman around. Falling in love with her, he plans to desert his wife, daughter, and business to run off with the other woman. Before doing so he wants to explain his action to his daughter, hoping that thereby she may escape an inhibited life such as he has had. He stages, nude before an altar and crucifix, a scene in which he tries to justify his views on life and love to his daughter. Then he and the secretary walk off into the night and the wife commits suicide.

As in his next novel, Dark Laughter, the materials in plot have only short story length. It is only through the soliloquies and ruminations of Webster's mind that there is sufficient material for 264 pages of reading matter.

Dark Laughter is a novel with a plot sufficient in stuff for a moderately long short story, yet Anderson skillfully carries out to genuine novel length its nuances, making the reader unaware of the slight thread on which the story depends. Whereas in Many Marriages the attempt at stream-of



consciousness is not very skillfully worked out, there is throughout Dark Laughter excellent writing.

John Stockton, a reporter, gets tired of his wife and job, and walks out on them--his wife not objecting strongly. He slowly travels around the Mississippi listening to the negroes, their laughter and talk (whence, of course, the title). Under an assumed name he goes to his boyhood town and obtains work in a carriage factory. He, as Bruce Dudley, works beside Sponge Martin, who is a philosophizing old man, happy, knowing how to live because he is close to reality. The wife of the employer meets Dudley, hires him as her gardener, and runs away with him, with all the negroes of the town looking down from their section. A weak plot, yet there is such skillfully wrought craftsmanship of Dudley's thoughts, past and present, and their attendant circumstances, that this scarcity is not noticed.

In Regis Michaud's Le Roman Americain D'aujourd'hui the following interpretation is found:

"La musique nègre est pour Anderson le symbole de la libre expression instinctive. Il y avait longtemps que la musique nègre le hantait. Produit immédiat de l'instinct, protestation de la vie naturelle, il avait introduit les chants des noirs dans ses histoires. Quel contraste plus saisissant, nègres et puritains, âme blanche et âme noire, Amérique de l'instinct naïf et Amérique du refoulement? Le Rire Noir est la protestation, la réponse directe faite par la nature et la vie, le démenti donné par la simple, franche et sensuelle nature aux hypocrisies sociales. Tandis que l'Américain blanc reste silencieux dans son home, le nègre rit et chante, nous dit Anderson. Il trouve dans ces chants negres

ce qu'il nomme <<a way of getting at the ultimate truth of things>>, <<un moyen d'arriver à la vérité dernière des choses>>."

It was seven years before Anderson published another novel--Beyond Desire. Not of much importance as literature, it marks his acceptance of certain principles which are advocated by the Communist party. It is the story of Red Oliver, a college graduate, who goes to his home town in the South, works in the textile mill there, is ostracized by his own middle class and unaccepted by his fellow workers. He is dissatisfied with his experiences, joins the communists, and is shot--killed--when he disobeys the orders of a captain of the local militia. Contrasted to Oliver are the group of mill girls, and the town librarian.

In his latest novel, Kit Brandon, he substitutes a woman for his usual questing man, gives her wealth, though illegally gained, makes her unsatisfied with material gain, and has her recognize that "partnership in living" was needed; incidentally it is the only novel in which Anderson comes to any conclusion or offers any solution to his problems of humanity.

From the above it may be seen that in seven novels Anderson has one situation--poor boy makes good in wealth, becomes dissatisfied with his wealth, tries to find something which will satisfy his longings--his novels usually end with the character unsure of what he wishes, or how to attempt to find it. And in each there is a definite



preoccupation with sex; it is still to Anderson among the puzzling things of the world.

"A word of good sense would have blown the whole thing to pieces"; "No one lived in such a tale"; these are Anderson's criticisms of most short stories. In his own tales, at least in his best, that criticism is not applicable. Because "it was life he was after and not plot," and the psychological revolutions of the personality, his tales are nearly plotless in the accepted sense of the word, because this searching psychoanalysis leads to the inward changes and wanderings of a character--not his outward doings. His books of tales: Winesburg, Ohio (1919), The Triumph of the Egg (1921), Horses and Men (1923), and Death in the Woods (1933), contain stories that live, and are among the best in America because he follows these two dicta: "An artist tries to express to others some thought or feeling of his own," and "It is only at rare moments that we live."

In Cleveland Chase's disparaging short criticism of Anderson, he makes this point, which explains very well the faults and virtues of the books of the latter author:

"Not only does Anderson look at life from the short story point of view, but this medium tends naturally to restrain and to correct what we have already seen to be two of the great weaknesses in his writing. In such limited space there is little chance for him to become tangled up in profitless philosophic speculations; as a result of being forced to concentrate and focus his attention, Anderson forgets somewhat his worries about ultimate values and devotes himself

to the definite and factual present, to the great profit of his writing. The short story also offers fewer temptations to day-dreaming, which may be indulged in more pleasantly in the more leisurely form of the novel."

To attempt to give the story plot of each of Anderson's tales would be an idle and useless, also boring work. It is not in the story plot itself that he shows his power as an author of the first rank; it is more, even, than his style--the sculptured necessity of each word; though each tale is complete in itself, with the exception of some in Winesburg, Ohio, it is in more than these that his tales are vital--it is in the ramifications which they start in the mind of the reader.

However, to show that each is truly whole within itself, and does hold to his theory that life is lived when there comes a moment of high tension--and there are few of these, most of man's days are spent in ascending to or descending from one of these peaks--brief synopses of five of his stories follow.

To name the best of the author's work is hard in the case of nearly every author; in Sherwood Anderson's tales it is conceded that his stories of the race track--I Want To Know Why, I'm a Fool, An Ohio Pagan--are his most valuable contributions to American short stories; other well-known tales are Out of Nowhere into Nothing and Death in the Woods.

I Want to Know Why is the story of a youngster, a lover



of horses and worshipper of their trainer. He runs away from home, goes to a race track--following the trainer and him thoroughbreds--sees the shiny light in the trainer's eyes when he watches his horse run, and "wants to know why" that same light is there when, the same evening, he drinks and goes to a house of ill fame. I'm a Fool is the lamentation of a young man who, because he has lied about his family, his horses, his associations, to a young lady at a race, is unable ever to meet her again. An Ohio Pagan is the awakening of a youth into adolescent desires and thoughts of religion and love.

Out of Nowhere into Nothing is the story of a girl who has come home to tell her mother of her intended love affair with her married employer. Unable to tell of her intention because of the personal walls which shut off contact with her mother, and because of the narrow atmosphere of the small town, she is unexpectedly heartened to her purpose by the understanding sympathy of the man living next door to her parents. Death in the Woods pictures the death of an old woman, who even after death feeds her dogs.

The only thing which makes Winesburg, Ohio a unity is its theme--the effect life has had upon the inhabitants of a small town; they are maladjusted from causes both within and without. Even in The Triumph of the Egg, though it takes its title from a single tale, and is a book of short

stories, yet it serves to develop one particular point, perhaps unconsciously--that there is, in one form or another, a single driving force of the society he pictures: the egg, the reproductive force of biological creatures.

Sherwood Anderson has no facility when dealing with a progressive factual story plot. His novels and stories have themes and, when built from a single emotion or human climax, are structurally well handled as far as their scant plot permits. He takes the story which he has to tell, brings into it the material necessary to understand the story which he proceeds to relate, then ceases, having done that which he attempted. The chief emphasis is upon the threads of habit, thought, and conduct which make up an individual's personality.

---

In addition to the books of Anderson's mentioned, Blankenship's American Literature, Chase's Sherwood Anderson, Michaud's Le Roman-Américain D'aujourd'hui, and all the essays and reviews of single books to which I had access were used.



## Character and Color

"Je voudrais insister à ce propos sur le rôle important que joue le bovarysme dans les romans et les contes de Sherwood Anderson. Dans ses livres, le grand issue des sensibilités comprimées c'est l'érotisme. On dirait à le lire, comme à lire Dreiser, qu'il n'y a aux Etats-Unis pour l'individu que deux façons de réaliser lui-même, l'ambition et la passion, ambitio et libido. C'est bien là le pivot central de la vie de ses larves. Le mâle cherche la richesse. La femme tend de toutes ses aspirations vers l'assouvissement sexuel. L'homme se console aisément de ses fallites par l'ironie, par le travail ou par l'alcool. La femme, elle, est inconsolable dans sa détresse. Elle incarne dans les histoires de Sherwood Anderson la libido toute pure. Cette libido confine de près au mysticisme. Il a fait dans son oeuvre une place que peut sembler excessive à l'érotisme. En cela, il est véritablement freudien. Mais il ne se contente pas avec Freud de traiter l'érotisme comme une maladie plus ou moins curable. A côté du psychologue, il y a en Sherwood Anderson un poète."

Indeed, throughout Anderson's works does one find the preoccupation with sex. The psychoanalytical way in which he treats his characters is as scientific as though he had studied under Freud or had assiduously applied himself to a study of Freud's works, for he makes, as does the Austrian, the sexual the basis for the maladjustments in all his characters. But it must be noticed that this use of the word "sexual" has in Anderson's terminology the same wide meaning as in Freud's system--that of the

entire field loosely termed love or affection. Yet it is true that Anderson learned all he knew about psychoanalysis and its probable effect on mental diseases and their cures by observation and deduction; it was long after Winesburg, Ohio that he read any psychoanalyst.

Some notion of his characters was unavoidably introduced in the previous section on synopses; it has been evident also, I think, that, without exception, they have had a great problem with sex. To Anderson, the author and mystic, it is as mysterious as compelling. But to carry out at length the symbolical meanings and frustrations which such preoccupation necessarily means is the graveyard for most authors. This is because diagnosis and explanations can be achieved only through presenting either pure or modified stream-of-consciousness. When this is carried out at great length, it leads to confusion both in the author and the reader. There is inevitably some selection, and this selection breaks down the unity of the whole. The last portion of Joyce's Ulysses is the best example in modern literature of such writing and it even becomes creaky with its own cumbersomeness. This is another reason why Anderson's novels have been less conspicuous in their excellence than have his tales. Particularly may the failure of Many Marriages be assigned to this cause, though as a book of true psychoanalytical symbolism it is valuable.

Sherwood Anderson, through experience, discovered that



sexual inhibition was the chief cause of the hypocrisy of the modern social order. His cure is implicit in his later works; it is never stated. Absolute sexual sincerity, not license, is the primary requisite for moral social progress.

What makes his character work so valuable is that he was the first of the naturalists and realists to leave the old biological approach, the study of society and its effects, to venture into the minds of his characters, to try to find out what made them so, so that he might feel himself in union with them. He has been unable to do this in so far as anyone fails to penetrate into the deep regions of the unconscious and subconscious.

But what distinguishes him from those others of the same school is that Anderson has an almost boundless pity for his characters and communicates this feeling to his readers. It is said that Dreiser weeps when he sees or relates an incident of pathetic or tragic nature, but Dreiser can not convey its pathos or tragedy to the reader. (In his dedication of Horses and Men Anderson pays a tribute to Dreiser, one of the most sincere and true tributes of homage in American literature.) Masters is ironical and pities not at all his creations. Lewis is a caricaturist and has little use for any of his characters. Only Anderson, of these story-tellers,

"has felt nothing but pity for his characters, and the tragic fate which has befallen them... The flare of satire and the whip of irony have been absent from his delineation. Only an aching nostalgia for that dead world when hands and hearts worked as one has pervaded

his work and sapped it dry of hope."

In spite of this lengthy discussion, it should be noted now that in the strict sense of the word, Anderson has not real characterization. His characters are, as the subtitle of Winesburg, Ohio indicates, grotesques. By portraying only one side of their personalities he does not make complete living (except in rare instances) people, but the people whom the world considers as odd or crazy.

It is because Winesburg, Ohio is Anderson's most significant work, and his best, that I turn to it so often for discussion and examples. I have already stated that it is a book of grotesques placed in a small town, a book of people who are essentially lonely, as all people must be in certain degrees, and their strivings to overcome the barriers which keep them from an understanding of their environment and other persons. The book is introduced by a chapter entitled The Book of the Grotesque. In this is a passage so beautiful in content and form, and so definitive of the entire work, that I quote it entirely.

"At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called 'The Book of the Grotesque.' It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. The book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:



"That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

"The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

"And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

"It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood."

From this, then, it should be noticed that there is a distinction between Anderson's use of the word "grotesque" and the common connotation of the word. Anderson uses it in the broad sense that no one can be wholly developed, and that most of the grotesqueness is psychological. Hence, his answer to my question about his use of grotesque, is this:

"Are you quite sure you are not grotesque, speaking in these terms? I am quite sure I am. It seems to me that in speaking of literary characters you are making some queer separation between people in stories and people in life. I rather think that modern life and in fact any life wherein most people are compelled to be driven by the profit motive makes it impossible for all of us to be anything else but grotesque."

Because Anderson wants to get at the basis for this

afore-mentioned loneliness, he spends comparatively little time in outward characterization. His characters are not different from the average in external appearance.

"Doctor Reffy was a tall man who had worn one suit of clothes for ten years";

"Elizabeth Willard, the mother of George Willard, was tall and gaunt and her face was marked with small-pox scars. Although she was but forty-five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure";

"Doctor Percival was a large man with a drooping mouth covered by a yellow mustache";

"Joe himself was small of body and in his character unlike anyone else in town. He was like a tiny little volcano that lies silent for days and then suddenly sprouts fire";

"At twenty-seven Alice was tall and somewhat slight. Her head was large and overshadowed her body. Her shoulders were a little stooped and her hair and eyes brown";

"Wash Williams, the telegraph operator of Winesburg, was the ugliest thing in town. His girth was immense, his neck thin, his legs feeble. He was dirty. Everything about him was unclean. Even the whites of his eyes looked soiled"

--and so on, not one that does not have his counterpart in the many small cities and farming towns in the Middle West.

But in the actions and thoughts of his characters Anderson vivifies his creations. One kneels and prays each night; one runs naked through the rain; one is forever frustrated by her inability to approach her son, who is in turn unable to express his thoughts; one attempts to reenact the story of Isaac and Abraham; one has become a misogynist because of the infidelity of his wife--each of the twenty-four who live in the book is an individual who



is unable to express or sublimate a thought or drive resulting from an experience. Michaud has summed up very well Winesburg, Ohio when he says,

"There is a moral attached to these tales. Anderson's philosophy, as well as his mysticism, centers upon what may be called the problem of deliverance. It is based upon a tragic feeling of the complexities of the human self, on the necessity and difficulty of extracting from the unconscious labyrinth our real personality. It slumbers, deep within us, buried under formalism. A city filled with millions of living people can be, in reality, a necropolis for the dead."

And in his later novels and tales, the characters are the same. As previously shown in the section in synopses, there is no completely distinguishable character in the physical sense; only the diverging and divergent thoughts and emotions distinguish these characters from any small-town banker, doctor, loafer, or housewife. The boys in I Want to Know Why and The Man Who Became a Woman, the youths in An Ohio Pagan and I'm a Fool, the men in The Door of the Trap and Milk Bottles, the old men in The Sad Horn Blowers and Senility, the women in Out of Nowhere Into Nothing, "Unused", and Death in the Woods make one wonder about his acquaintances, even one's friends.

Does your physician have thoughts which make him doubt the world and its inhabitants as do Doctors Parcival and Reefy? Does the school-teacher who is nearing the prospect of life of singleness have the thoughts which trouble Kate Swift? Do the elderly men who sit in the shops in winter and under the trees in summer regret the past and

fear the future as does the old man who wants to play the cornet when he wishes? Is there any real difference between any of the people whom you greet and think you know and those whom Anderson pictures? Could one not cry for them with double feeling as he does for those of this American author, "--but yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago."?

As a corollary, perhaps the characters develop out of it, his color is monotonous. That is perhaps because he writes of the prairie, the rolling cornfields of the Midwest. There is flat monotone, grey and black and dark brown. There is dust and rain, but seldom is there a note of light or bright color in the backgrounds he pictures. And that is as it should be, if he can only give his characterizations against that kind of background. However, one does wish for a glint of green and blue, with a dish of red thrown in for contrast.

Even his cities are the same. They are merely an enlargement off the small villages, which are, in turn, so near to, and so deeply influenced by, the drabness of the countryside.

A typical passage of Anderson's color is in Out of Nowhere Into Nothing.

"For two miles the railroad tracks, eastward out of Willow Springs, went through corn fields on a flat plain. Then there was a dip in the land and a bridge over Willow Creek. The creek was altogether dry now but trees grew along the edge of the grey streak of



cracked mud that in the fall, winter and spring would be the bed of the stream. Rosalind left the tracks and went to sit under one of the trees. Her cheeks were flushed and her forehead wet. When she took off her hat her hair fell down in disorder and strands of it clung to her hot wet face. She sat in what seemed a kind of bowl on the sides of which the corn grew rank. Before her and following the bed of the stream there was a dusty path along which cows came at evening from distant pastures. A great pancake formed of cow dung lay nearby. It was covered with grey dust and over it crawled shiny black beetles. They were rolling the dung into balls in preparation for the germination of a new generation of beetles."

In addition to the color of the flat country setting this also gives as good a description of the physical Rosalind as is found in the story.

Winesburg, Ohio is a mythical village, peopled with its twenty-four grotesques, yet it is as much a part of the United States as Emporia, Kansas; New York City; or Boston; and is more nearly true to the nation than Gopher Prairie, Minnesota. Its characters were drawn from boarding-houses in Chicago, from farming sections and city factories, yet to-day they are permanently live inhabitants of the fictitious city which they people.

On the front fly-leaf of the book is a map of the town. From that can one get a plat, as it were, of it. Yet nowhere is the village described in actual words. Only from snatches of description can one build a picture.

"In the darkness George Willard walked along the alleyway, going carefully and cautiously. The back doors of the Winesburg stores were open and he could see men sitting about under the store lamps";

"The house in which they lived stood in a little grove

of trees beyond where the main street of Winesburg crossed Wine Creek";

"...beneath a wooden awning that extended out over the sidewalk before Voigt's wagon shop on Maumee Street just off the main street of Winesburg."

Such serve to give an impression of the way in which Anderson handles the problem of realizing local color.

There are two other quotations, the first from A Meeting South in Sherwood Anderson's Notebook, the second from A Story-Teller's Tale. They have the combination color-character, with a glimpse of philosophy that is characteristic of Anderson's work.

"The house she had opened was one of the older places in the French quarter down here, and when she had got her hands on it Aunt Sally had a hunch. Instead of making the place modern, cutting it up into small rooms, all that sort of thing, she left it just as it was, and spent her money in rebuilding falling old walls, mending winding broad old stairways, repairing dim high-ceilinged old rooms, soft-colored old marble mantles. After all we do seem attached to sin and there are so many people busy making sin unattractive. It is good to find someone who takes the other road."

"On a certain Sunday morning of that summer I found myself sitting in a little garden under apple trees back of a red brick house that had green window blinds and that stood on the side of a hill near the edge of an Illinois town of some five or six thousand people.

"Sitting by a small table near me was a dark slender man with pale cheeks, a man I had never seen until late on the evening before and who I had half thought would die but a few hours earlier. Now, although the morning was warm, he had a blanket wrapped around him and his thin hands, lying on the table, trembled. Together we were drinking our morning coffee, containing a touch of brandy. A robin hopped on the grass nearby and the sunlight falling through the branches of trees made yellow patches at our feet."

These two quotations are mellower and richer than in



most of his short stories. They are from books printed six and seven years later than Winesburg, Ohio; hence he has had time to settle his colors and add to his palette.

That Anderson has created intenseness in the tale which rivals Poe--though at rarer intervals--is becoming evident. On reading Poe's best, The Tell-Tale Heart, then reading "Unused", one gets the same feeling of heightening tension until the end of the tale is reached. Poe does not go about it as leisurely as does Anderson, yet the cumulative effect is as powerful. (I do not mean to compare anything but emotional intensity in these two stories; the handling of color, plot, and character differs much.) In a personal letter Anderson says that he doubts that he has been influenced in any way by Poe, and that he does not believe much in his (Poe's) "mathematical clear-cut explanations." Yet it would be interesting to work out a complete comparison between these two Americans.

It is true that Sherwood Anderson has taken only one kind of people about which to write, but that he has made that kind live and awaken the reader no one will deny.

His characters contain much of what constitutes Sherwood Anderson; his color and characters are, to a considerable degree, a reflection of the environment which helped to mould him; his philosophy is a determining factor of both. What makes both his characters and color, and what determines his sympathy for them, may well be illustrated from A Story-Teller's Story:

"I had suddenly an odd, and to my own seeming, a ridiculous desire to abase myself before something not human and so stepping into the moonlight road I knelt in the dust. Having no God, the gods having been taken from me by the life about me, as a personal God has been taken from all modern men by a force within that man himself does not understand but calls intellect, I kept smiling at the figure I cut in my own eyes as I knelt in the road and as I had smiled at the figure I had cut in the Chicago saloon... There was no God in the sky, no God in myself, no conviction in myself that I had the power to believe in a God, and so I merely knelt in the dust in the silence and no words came to my lips."

Surely there could be no more reverent agnostic.

---

The opening quotation is from Michaud's Le Roman Americain D'aujourd'hui; the quotation on page twenty-seven is from Calverton's The Liberation of American Literature; the quotation of Michaud in English is from The American Novel of To-day; the line from Shakespeare is in Act IV, scene 1, of Othello; all others are acknowledged in the text. Other works of help have been Blakenship's American Literature, Hazard's The Frontier in American Literature, Spokesmen by Whipple, Sherwood Anderson by Chase, the books of Anderson, and Midwest Portraits by Hansen.



## Principles, Style, and Technique

"What never seems to come quite clear is the simple fact that art is art. It is not life...Imagination must constantly feed upon reality or starve. Separate yourself too much from life and you may at moments be a lyrical poet, but you are not an artist... Life is never dull except to the dull...Realism, in so far as the word means reality to life, is always bad art. Which is but another way of saying that all of the so-called great realists were not realists at all and never intended being."

In such manner in A Note on Realism does Sherwood Anderson state the principle of his creative art.

It is then that an artist must go to life as he sees it, and as he measures the influence which the society and the individuals have upon him, to get the materials from which to create. The artist who lives in the sequestered castle, moody and introspective, attempting to gain a form of "Yogi" renunciation of life, becomes dangerously near not being an artist; he may think, perhaps sense, that he has contacted something over and beyond this existence and, in giving voice to that sense or thought, become a lyricist. But again one can not picture life as it is. To carry out to such degree as the French naturalists demanded would be impossible--to record the actions and thoughts of one person during one day, or even one

hours (except perhaps when he is asleep) is not art; it is science. The artist must make selection; he must choose such actions and speeches and thoughts as serve to develop the particular aim for which he is striving. And in so doing he becomes not the reproducer--a realist--but the interpreter--an artist.

The fruit of many years of writing and searching is brought out keenly in "The Story-Teller's Job" in The Bookbuyer (December, 1936).

"It seems to me that the story-teller is one thing, and the thinker, the political economist, the reformer another...

"The business of the story-teller is with life, in his own time, life as he feels it, smells it, tastes it. Not for him surely the making of a revolution. At his best he is too much lost in the life about him, having really no absolute convictions as to the road to man's happiness, the good life. He is to remain curious, absorbed, wanting only the story, to tell it truly, with some grace, if that is possible; for the truth is that, if he can remain truly concerned with the life about him, and particularly in others, the social implications which come in, as they should, come almost unconsciously. It is the story-teller's setting out, in his own person, to try to correct personally the social evils of his times that is the real violation of his obligation."

It is interesting to note, in passing, that Anderson has been compared often to the Russians, particularly Chekhov. Critics believed he stemmed directly from them; his handling of character and color, his pity, his sketchiness of plot, his ability to feel his characters and make them alive to the reader--all are characteristic of the Russians and the American. Yet he avers that until that



comparison had become general he had read none of these: Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Tolstoi. As nearly as he can judge the only reason for such a comparison is that the Russians make their peasants live on cabbage soup; and Anderson himself had to eat a great deal of such food, as previously related. But since reading these Russians, Anderson says this (in a personal letter): "I have an idea that the American short story was tremendously corrupted by O. Henry, influenced by de Maupassant. Both Chekhov and Tergeniev are to my mind infinitely greater masters." But there is a marked difference between the characters of the Europeans and those of the American--the former, while peasants and ordinary folk, can talk among themselves on such abstractions as philosophy and ethics, while the latter are unable to give voice to their longings and do not have the calm certainty that Russian characters have,

There is a great deal of that thing which Kant calls "the universal" in the emotional feeling given by Anderson at his best. By his portrayal of the thoughts of an adolescent or youth, one gets the impression that everyone must have felt, at one time or another, the same restless strivings, must have asked the same unanswerable questions which his protagonists feel and ask in his tales.

From previous quotations it is easy to grasp the

style of Anderson. His sentences usually are short; his words are common English and American, simple in formation and structure; he has few adjectives, relying on the simple concrete nouns and verbs to say what he wishes. He does not, when uncertain of what he wishes to say, add more and more words in an attempt to obscure his puzzlement; instead, facing frankly his own doubt, he honestly sets before us his uncertainty.

His words are powerful, they are common everyday words, which is probably the secret of their power. Only occasionally does one find a compound, almost never a foreign word, and, rarer still in a naturalist and realist, colloquialisms are scarce. Occasionally one finds a bit of Biblical phrasing.

Here is an illustration of the simpleness of his word and sentence structure. It is from "Respectability" in Winesburg, Ohio.

"George Willard and the telegraph operator came into the main street of Winesburg. The lights from the store windows lay bright and shining on the sidewalks. People moved about laughing and talking. The young reporter felt ill and weak. In imagination, he also became old and shapeless. 'I struck her once with a chair and then the neighbors came in and took it away. She screamed so loud you see. I won't ever have a chance to kill her now. She died of a fever a month after that happened.'"

And this illustration from Godliness in the same book shows what can be done now with Biblical suggestions.

"In the woods an intense silence seemed to lie over



everything and suddenly out of the silence came the old man's harsh and insistent voice. Gripping the boy's shoulders, Jesse turned his face to the sky and shouted. The whole left side of his face twitched and his hand on the boy's shoulder twitched also. 'Make a sign to me, God,' he cried, 'here I stand with the boy David. Come down to me out of the sky and make Thy presence known to me.'"

After a reading of many of the hortative Psalms and the twenty-second chapter of Genesis, the strong use of modern English is seen.

In these quotations are shown how effectively he uses colloquial expressions.

"It is your first question that has me thrown back on my haunches."

"It gave me the fantods."

The race-track idiom should be quoted in nothing less than the entire story, but such expressions as

"He always helped me cool Pick-it-boy only after a race and he did the things himself that take the most skill and quickness, like getting the bandages on a horse's leg smooth, and seeing that every strap is setting just right, and every buckle drawn up to just the right hole, before your horse goes out on the track for a heat";

and

"He was a gelding and had a mark of 2.21, but could step it in .08 or .09,"

make it evident that he knows the language and how to use it.

Indeed, one can not use big and bloated words to portray the characters with which Anderson deals. It would be impossible to picture Judge Farmer or Alonzo Berners in swollen rhetoric.

Characters make words for him.

"The three of them just suddenly came out of the church together and walked away together in silence. That was all. All tales presented themselves to the fancy in just that way. There was a suggestion, a hint given. In a crowd of faces in a crowded street, one face suddenly jumped out. It had a tale to tell, was crying its tale to the streets, but at best one got only a fragment of it."

And in Out of Nowhere into Nothing:

"After all human beings might be understood...There was the voice that said words. Words came forth from lips. They conformed, fell into a certain mold. For the most part the words had no life of their own. They had come down out of old times and many of them were no doubt nice strong living words, coming out of the depth of people, out of the bellies of people. The words had escaped out of a shut-in place. They had once expressed living truth...It was with them as with other people. A thing happened. The lips said certain words but the eyes of the people said other words...What a confusion.

"It was clear there was something hidden away within people that could not get itself expressed except accidentally. One was startled or alarmed and then the words that fell from the lips became pregnant words, words that lived."

And words suggest character. In A Story-Teller's Story,

"There was something within me, truth, facility, the color and smell of things. Why, I might have done something here. Words are everything. I swear to you I have not lost my faith in words.

"Do I not know? While I walked in the street there were such words come, in ordered array! I tell you what--words have color, smell; one may sometimes feel them with the fingers as one touches the cheek of a child."

This is true of his best work--that his words do have life and color, that they are a vital part of his work.

In these instances Anderson probably fulfills more than any



American fictionalist of recent times Colredge's dictum that there must not be one word capable of being changed in order that the creation be a work of art. But in a great deal of his work, particularly in his novels before Dark Laughter, one feels that, while his technical knowledge is still present, his actual handling lacks much.

He has a knack of using words so suggestively that the immediate picture they conjure brings up an infinite variety of others. For instance--"The hands were like old grape vines that cling to the trunks of trees."

Often he uses the psychological symbol of a house for the human body. Characters are struggling to get out of themselves, trying to get over the wall that separates their house from the one next door. In Tar he says, "Houses were like people. An empty house was like an empty man or woman." Each individual has a "kitchen," or "pantry," or "living-room," in his "house," yet so clearly is the symbolism wrought that one does not get confused.

To sum it all up, Anderson has a bare and simple style, but one that is pure and intense. His technique is to use straightforward ways of telling his story. His principles are these: that art is art; an honesty in person and craft; and a belief that a society which is based on love of money, and which is concerned mainly with machines, is stifling the sensibilities of the human race,

but that there is developing a consciousness of the necessity for art.

---

All quotations are acknowledged in the text except one--it is from A Story-Teller's Story; for discussion I have depended upon principles gained from reading, but have referred to Paul Rosenfeld's discussion of Anderson in Port of New York for an excellent and convenient starting place.

can not be a valid evaluation, though future events and studies prove it right. The man is too much tied up with the emotions and thoughts of the present; it is impossible to divorce the feelings and give an impassionate objective criticism of an author--any artist, in fact--while he is living and while his immediate presence is felt. It is for this reason that this small bit about, and of, Sherwood Anderson is called an appreciation. He is yet too much with us to pass objective judgment on him.

Then one studies American literature from its inception to the present day, and the criticism of such literature, he must be astonished at the apologetic tones taken by nearly all authors and their works; they compared their works to those of European authors and took no cognizance that an entirely different kind of civilization had those for which they bow their heads in shame.

But when the day of awakening came, the revolt against such abnegation had so much force, it swept along with it most of the American authors. And Sherwood Anderson came with a revolt. He belongs to the end of the period of



### Conclusion

Any contemporary evaluation of a man and his works can not be a valid evaluation, though future events and studies prove it right. The man is too much tied up with the emotions and thoughts of the present; it is impossible to divorce the feelings and give an impassionate objective criticism of an author--any artist, in fact--while he is living and while his immediate presence is felt. It is for this reason that this small bit about, and of, Sherwood Anderson is called an appreciation. He is yet too much with us to pass objective judgment on him.

When one studies American literature from its inception to the present day, and the criticism of such literature, he must be astounded at the apologetic tones taken by nearly all authors and their works; they compared their works to those of European authors and took no cognizance that an entirely different kind of civilization bred these for which they bow their heads in shame.

But when the day of awakening came, the revolt against such abnegation had so much force, it swept along with it most of the American authors. And Sherwood Anderson ends such a revolt. He belongs to the end of the period of

naturalism; he did not herald in the new period of naturalism and Americanism--that was for the younger war-bred bitter authors, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Wolfe.

Of that entire group of authors who developed with the end of a geographical frontier--Sandberg, Masters, Lewis, Dreiser, Anderson--only Sandberg has adjusted himself somewhat to an industrialized America; Anderson, in his best novels and tales, has become the one singing the death song for the opportunities lost when the frontier ended.

Anderson was raised a Mid-westerner. He has some of that expansiveness which characterizes such persons, but he has little of that feeling of inferiority to other persons which so frequently is a part of those who live in the vast middle section, on the spacious prairies, of America. Rather than a sense of inferiority he has a sense of curiosity about these people whom he knows so well.

It is about this curiosity that he writes. And in discovering the well-springs of personality he has become more than ever hopeless that a civilization which so represses individuality as does our present one can develop character which will be whole and rounded. Yet his work is not gloomy. It is filled with pity for his characters; pity that there must be such a loneliness of spirit when the country is so filled with people; pity that in a country



of plenty there must be so many who have nothing.

Because he believes that an essential sexual morality is a basis for a living personality, and because in his searching and writing he has found that there is a deep social sexual hypocrisy, all his works deal with the way in which his characters react to that drive of human nature. While he is certain that life is dull only to the dull, he realizes that too many persons have become dull through the pressure and pain of society.

So Anderson's self-appointed mission in literature is to give a picture of these characters who have been the victims of such social hypocrisy or who are puzzling whilst they are about to become so. He has treated of only this one group of people, yet he has contributed to American literature, in them, some enduring narratives.

Personal judgment at such close distance precludes any valid prophecy of which of Anderson's works will live. This, however, seems definite, that Winesburg, Ohio will be recognized in years to come, as it is now, as the final judgment and treatment of one state in which people lived at the close of the frontier.

His stories of the race-track, I'm a Fool, An Ohio Pagan, I Want to Know Why, The Man Who Became a Woman, may well be considered as among the best short stories in which complete authenticity of color, style, and characterization are perfectly blended.

He has one novel which may be remembered--Dark  
Laughter, for the wholly peculiar style in which he describes a modified stream-of-consciousness.

The one work, however, on which I should most depend for Anderson's connection with the future is his A Story-Teller's Story. This autobiography is comparable to that of Henry Adams in that it is one of the spirit, not of the day by day happenings of the mere body. But it is told with much more simplicity than that of the New Englander; it is more humble and, while it is not possible for it to be more sincere, it has a greater ring of truth than has that of Adams. It might, by its own strength, keep alive Tar, for this latter book, while fictional, shows why, to a great degree, Anderson is what he is.

So one hundred years from now the Americans who read in the literature of the past will know Sherwood Anderson for an author who was a man of great sensitiveness reacting keenly to the mad money chase of the early twentieth century. They will read him for a sincerity of style and purpose and an understanding of character. They will value him for his intensity of emotion in several short stories and they will consider his autobiography a spiritual document of the greatest sincerity.



## Summary

To one studying the works and life of Sherwood Anderson and the extant criticisms, it is evident that he is an author who has registered a protest in an individual style against the repression which modern industrial America has placed on its inhabitants. He has a naturalistic philosophy and this makes him center most of his attention on the psychology of his characters. Color and plot are merely incidentals which help to further the feeling in each character of an inability to be himself. To American letters he has made definite contributions to the field of short story and tale and in his autobiographies.

## Bibliography

1. Anderson, Sherwood. Winesburg, Ohio. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1919. 302 pages.

A collection of character sketches, grotesques in the small mythical Ohio town of Winesburg.

2. \_\_\_\_\_. Poor White. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1920. 371 pages.

A novel of Hugh McVey and his search for spiritual satisfaction.

3. \_\_\_\_\_. The Triumph of the Egg. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921. 269 pages.

A collection of tales, containing some of the best short stories written in America.

4. \_\_\_\_\_. Many Marriages. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1922. 264 pages.

A novel of symbolism in sexual relations to contemporary society.

5. \_\_\_\_\_. Horses and Men. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923. 347 pages.



11. Another collection of tales, with a dedication to Theodore Dreiser.

6. \_\_\_\_\_. A Story-Teller's Story. New York, B. W. Huebsch, Inc., 1924. 442 pages.

A spiritual autobiography, showing the development of a sensitive man in relation to the economic and social cannibalism of the past half century.

7. \_\_\_\_\_. The Modern Writer. San Francisco, The Latern Press. Gelber, Lilienthal, Inc., 1925. 44 pages.

A statement of Anderson's creed and principles which are employed by modern writers.

8. \_\_\_\_\_. Dark Laughter. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1925. 319 pages.

The story of Bruce Dudley, his escape and thoughts. The best of Anderson's novels.

9. \_\_\_\_\_. Sherwood Anderson's Notebook. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1926. 230 pages.

A miscellany of essays, short stories, and diary extracts.

10. \_\_\_\_\_. A New Testament. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1926. 118 pages.

A collection of verse or polyphonic prose.

11. \_\_\_\_\_. Tar. New York, Boni and Liveright, 1927. 346 pages.

A fictional autobiography of Anderson from the age of four to adolescence.

12. \_\_\_\_\_. Death in the Woods. New York, Liveright Publishers Corporation, 1933. 298 pages.

A volume of short stories and tales.

13. \_\_\_\_\_. Puzzled America. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935. 287 pages.

Essays on the state of Middle western and southern sections of the United States.

14. \_\_\_\_\_. "The Story-Teller's Job." (In The Bookbuyer, vol. 2, page 6. December, 1936.)

A short essay on the author and society.

15. Blankenship, Russel. American Literature. New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1931. 731 pages.

A very readable book on the history of American literature. It includes some good criticism of Anderson between pages 665 and 672.

16. Calverton, Victor Francis. The Liberation of American Literature. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932. 500 pages.



The first history and survey of American literature written from a Marxist viewpoint. Pages 400 to 500 treat of the moderns, including Anderson.

17. Chase, Cleveland. Sherwood Anderson. New York, Robert M. McBride and Company, 1927. 84 pages.

An unsympathetic and disparaging review of Anderson and his methodology. On the whole not a very good piece of criticism.

18. Hansen, Harry. Midwest Portraits. New York, Harcourt Brace and Company, 1923. 357 pages.

Portraits of contemporary authors of the middle west. Anderson is called a "corn-fed mystic" and is sympathetically treated in pages 109-179.

19. Hazard, Lucy Lockwood. The Frontier in American Literature. New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1927. 308 pages.

A study of how American letters have been influenced by the frontier. An account of Anderson's use is in pages 290-297.

20. Karsner, David. 16 Authors to 1. New York, Lewis Copeland Company, 1927. 290 pages.

A book of personalities of various authors. Anderson is treated in pages 43-66.

21. Lovett, Robert Morss. "Sherwood Anderson." (In The New Republic. vol. 89, pages 103-105. Nov. 25, 1936.)

A revaluation of Anderson's work by an outstanding critic, sympathetic on the whole.

22. Michaud, Regis. Le Roman Americain D'aujourd'hui. Paris, Ancienne Librairie Furne. Boivin & Cie., Editeurs, 3 et 5, Rue Palatine (VIe), 1926. 248 pages.

A French evaluation of the use of psychology in the modern American novel. Anderson is treated in pages 140-180.

23. Michaud, Regis. The American Novel Today. Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1928. 283 pages.

1 A later American revision of the French book mentioned immediately above. Pages 154-199 contain an excellent analysis of the psychology of Anderson.

24. Rascoe, Burton. "Contemporary Reminiscences." (In Arts and Decorations. Vol. 21, pages 66-67. Aug., 1924.)

A short discussion of Anderson's philosophy.

25. Rosenfield, Paul. Port of New York. New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924. 311 pages.

Intimate and critical discussions of authors and artists by a critic of ability. Pages 175-198 have the best discussion of the style of Anderson I found.

26. West, Rebecca. The Strange Necessity. Garden City,



N. Y., Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928.

380 pages.

A discussion of poetry and poetic values. In pages 309-320 the author gives an intelligent criticism of Anderson's poetic traits, and particularly a criticism of Tar.

27. Whipple, Thomas King. Spokesmen. New York, D.

Appleton and Company, 1928. 277 pages.

A book of portraits of ten American men of letters with an introduction and conclusion. Pages 1-23, 115-138, and 254-274 are very good.