

SHERWOOD ANDERSON AND THE MEANING
OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

David D. Anderson

1960



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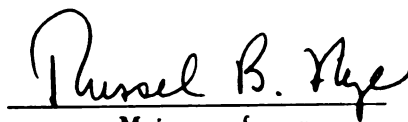
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SHERWOOD ANDERSON AND THE MEANING
OF THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

By

David D. Anderson

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted to the School of Advanced Graduate Studies of
Michigan State University of Agriculture and Applied Science
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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1960

Abstract

It is the thesis of this study that Sherwood Anderson's works in all their variety of form from short story to essay to novel to autobiographical memoir must be approached as a unit rather than as isolated segments in order to determine what Anderson was trying to do in his writing career, what he was trying to say, and whether or not he was successful. Thus approached, the thesis further contends that the works as a whole provide the record of one man's attempt to understand the relationship between the individual and the time in which he lived and to determine the ultimate meaning of that relationship.

In attempting to establish the validity of this thesis the study takes three factors into consideration. First, the works are examined chronologically in the effort to determine the evolving pattern of Anderson's approach to finding the meaning of the relationship between the individual and his time. Secondly, the study focuses on the works themselves. However, because Anderson's letters and the background of his life shed much light on the specific instances of experience that he was trying to interpret, they are discussed when they aid interpretation. Thirdly, the study includes all of Anderson's works pertinent to the

study, including all that appeared in book form and much that appeared in periodicals only.

For purposes of convenience the study divides Anderson's literary career into three major periods: from 1912 to 1918, when Anderson first began to attempt his analysis of the American scene; from 1919 to 1929, when his analysis became close and penetrating; and from 1929 to 1940, when he began to formulate his conclusions.

The first period is discussed in Chapter II, "The Man and the Myth," and Chapter III, "Tentative Analysis." The former deals with the background of Anderson's formative years, an understanding of which is essential to the analysis of a majority of his works, while the latter discusses his first three books, Windy McPherson's Son, Marching Men, and Mid-American Chants, as well as several of the early uncollected essays and short stories.

Anderson's second period is discussed in Chapter IV, "Moments of Insight;" Chapter V, "The Larger View: Social Analysis and Despair;" and Chapter VI, "Introspection and Identification." The first deals with Anderson's achievement in Winesburg, Ohio. The second studies Anderson's attempts at analysis of major social problems in the novels Poor White and Many Marriages and the volumes of short stories, The Triumph of the Egg and Horses and Men, in which Anderson came closest to naturalism. The third deals with Anderson's search for permanent values in his own life

and his native Midwest, and it records his slow discovery of such values.

Anderson's last period is discussed in four chapters, Chapter VII, "The Townsman;" Chapter VIII, "Re-entry Into the World;" Chapter IX, "The Townsman and the World;" and Chapter X, "Final Statement." Chapter VII discusses Anderson's attempts to recreate the nineteenth century personal world in his own life as well as in his writing; Chapter VIII looks at the works in which Anderson attempts to bridge the gap between past and present; and Chapter IX records Anderson's attempt to diagnose the ailments of a depression-torn nation and to point out the values that may remedy those ills. Chapter X discusses Anderson's last two works, Home Town, in which he evokes the spirit that he feels is permanent in America, and his Memoirs, the work in which he records his final appraisal of the meaning inherent in the American experience.

The study concludes with a discussion of Anderson's permanent contributions to American literature and an evaluation of his place as a writer in relationship to the major literary figures of his time.

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Preface

For the many kinds of assistance necessary to a study of this sort I owe many thanks: to the libraries of Michigan State University, The State of Michigan, and the City of Lansing for securing and making available source materials; to Professors Russel B. Nye and Bernard I. Duffey for the assistance and advice that gave shape to the study; to Professors Evelyn H. Scholl, Carson C. Hamilton, and Claude M. Newlin for critically reading and commenting on the text; to William B. Thomas for making books available and for a good deal of helpful conversation; and to my wife, Pat, not only for many hours of physical labor but for making the whole thing possible.

D.D.A.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For more than thirty years it has been stylish for critics to regard Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio and a handful of his individual short stories as solid literary achievements and to dismiss the bulk of his work (often apparently unread by the critics) as failures or, more charitably, as not quite satisfying.¹ Such criticism of Anderson's work tends to take either one of two directions: the first of these is the attempt to combine subjective value judgments and sweeping generalities in brief essays which purport to give the modern reader all he needs to know about the works in a few dozen pages.² The second critical approach, represented by Irving Howe³ and James Schevill,⁴ attempts to be comprehensive and thus fair to most or all of Anderson's work, but ultimately this approach bogs down in biography and Freudian analysis, both of which are fascinating byways, but neither of which is an adequate substitute

¹See, for example, Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1948), pp. 33-43.

²Ibid.

³Irving Howe, Sherwood Anderson (New York, 1951).

⁴James Schevill, Sherwood Anderson, His Life and Work (Denver, 1951).

for careful attention to the works themselves in the effort to find out what Anderson was trying to do, what he was trying to say, and whether or not he was successful.

Both of these critical approaches are for obvious reasons unsatisfactory; the first, while often written in brilliant and presumably profound phraseology, says little about the most famous works and nothing about the lesser known, depending for its effect upon the condescending pity of its conclusions. The second, on the other hand, while attempting to unravel the web of biography, autobiography, myth, and fabrication, nevertheless bogs down in the side issues cited above and results in critical biographies which turn out to be unsatisfactory as either criticism or biography.

Ultimately criticism must be based firmly on a careful examination of the works themselves in an effort to interpret the meaning of those works, to determine the relative success or failure of the techniques of expression employed by the writer, and to establish the relationship of each of the individual works to the writer's work as a whole. In Sherwood Anderson's case, this approach has not been used consistently by any critic. (Maxwell Geismar's essay on Anderson in his The Last of the Provincials⁵ approximates this approach, but it has the misfortune of being too brief

⁵Maxwell Geismar, The Last of the Provincials (Boston, 1949), 221-284.

to examine all the works in the detail necessary); and in Anderson's case this approach is mandatory, for it is only by such a careful examination of his works that their ultimate meaning can be determined.

Much has been made of the fact that the bulk of Anderson's work is autobiographical; he has been identified with the protagonists of most of his novels and a good many of the short stories; in addition, he wrote three volumes of autobiographical sketches and memoirs as well as six of essays, one of journalistic writings, and the text of a photographic essay. Such a concentration upon one's self is dangerous from a critical point of view because it gives rise to complaints that the writer lacked objectivity and the ability to select artistically, and that he did not grow intellectually. All these criticisms have been directed at Anderson by critics who complain that he was so fascinated with the wonder of his mythical escape from industrialism and of his becoming a writer that he was unable to grow artistically and intellectually into the literary gianthood that had been prophesied for him early in his literary career.

Such criticism does have in it some truth, but it does not contain all the truth about either the man or his work, and to accept it as such is unjust. Anderson's works were essentially autobiographical, as he frequently admitted in his letters and published memoirs, but as he further pointed out, his autobiography was not intended to be concerned

with facts but with feelings, not with names, dates, and places, but with meanings. As a result it is evident that the works as a whole comprise a multi-volume spiritual biography that records and attempts to determine the meaning of the impressions of generic man in the unique period that saw America transformed from an agricultural to an industrial state.

For Anderson this change coincided with the time of his own life, and the place where that change occurred most suddenly and spectacularly was in his own Mid America. As a result his works attempt to analyze and interpret that experience, ranging from initial awareness in Tar: A Midwest Childhood through man's attempt to regain his individuality in Many Marriages; through the initial impact of industrialism in Poor White, the inarticulate attempts of the worker to cope with the machine in Marching Men, and into ultimate contamination of the countryside and the individual in Beyond Desire. That Anderson and his life play central roles in these works is obvious, but the material facts have been transmuted into an analytical biography of an era.

Not only is it apparent that Anderson has devoted his works to an increasingly careful analysis of his time in an effort to determine its ultimate meaning, but a careful analysis of the works indicates that he was continually coming closer to the recognition and realization of that

meaning. Through apparent repetition that actually proves to be closer and more careful examination of the material with which life provided him, Anderson arrived at some recognitions that may be the only possible answers to the question of the ultimate meaning of our time.

It is the argument of this study, then, that Anderson's works, in all their variety of forms, from short story to essay to novel to autobiographical memoir, must be approached as a unit; that the works as a whole provide the record of one man's attempt to understand the relationship between the individual and the time in which he lived and to determine the ultimate meaning of that relationship for the individual.

In any attempt to establish the validity of such a thesis, several factors must be taken into consideration. First, the works must be examined chronologically in the effort to determine what Anderson has learned about the relationship between individual and era. Secondly, this examination must focus on the works themselves. Because Anderson's biography and his letters often aid interpretation, they will be discussed where necessary, but only as aids to understanding the works. Thirdly, the examination must include all the works that are pertinent to the study.

For purposes of convenience the works may be divided into three major periods: from 1916 to 1918, when Anderson first began to attempt his analysis of the American scene; 1919-1929, the period in which his analysis became close and penetrating; and 1929-1939, in which he began to formulate his conclusions.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AND THE MYTH

The Elyria Chronicle-Telegram, the only newspaper in that business-oriented and boosting community in North Central Ohio carried a news article in its March 9, 1941, issue headed "Sherwood Anderson, Former Elyria Manufacturer, Dies,"¹ Had the article been printed forty years earlier it would have been less ironic and more factual whether or not Anderson had physically died at that earlier time because it marked the actual death of Sherwood Anderson, businessman, industrialist, and booster, and the birth of Sherwood Anderson, novelist, short story writer, and constant, eager seeker of the ultimate meaning of the American experience.

In the years prior to February, 1913, when Anderson made his final break with manufacturing and with the Elyria in which such a label was regarded as a badge of honor, he had come a long way, as measured by the standards of Elyria, of most of America, and of the Taft Administration, just then clearing out its desks in preparation for its reluctant trek northward. At thirty-six years of age Anderson had accomplished what would seem to the superficial observer to

¹The Elyria Chronicle-Telegram, March 9, 1941, 1.

be visible proof of the reality behind the myth promulgated by Horatio Alger and the campaign biographers of James A. Garfield, and he was still a young man with the time and the potential to carry his re-enactment of the myth to its logical conclusion in a position of wealth, prestige, and power. Hence this same superficial observer would be baffled by Anderson's sudden departure from Elyria and his vague explanation of his actions more than ten years later in "When I Left Business for Literature" and in A Story-Teller's Story. A more discerning observer, however, would not only accept Anderson's departure but he would have known that it was inevitable, just as was the vagueness of the long-delayed explanations. He would have seen that the American myth had not been personified in spite of the fact that the folklore of literature has perpetuated the belief that it had, and he would have seen that the same forces and pressures that had produced Anderson the businessman made inevitable Anderson the writer and the seeker.

Anderson was born, according to the records of Preble County, Ohio, on September 13, 1876,² as a new, vindicated America was self-righteously flexing its economic muscles ✓ in one arm while with the other it was waving the bloody

²For the facts of Anderson's early life this chapter is indebted to the unpublished doctoral dissertation by William Sutton, Sherwood Anderson: The Formative Years (1876-1913), The Ohio State University, 1943. Unless otherwise cited factual material comes from this definitive source.

shirt, meanwhile mouthing the words of the myth with which Anderson's life has become so entangled. These activities were to continue throughout his formative years, and they provided much of the impetus that, when combined with the intimate environment of his family and of the small Ohio towns in which he grew into adulthood, determined the course of his life.

The year 1876 was a time of conflict and controversy on the national scene stemming from the scandals of the Grant Administration and the narrowly-averted return to revolution that saw power politics make a mockery of democratic procedures in the attempt to insure continued control of the American governmental machinery by the forces of the increasingly powerful manipulators, speculators, and industrialists who had come into their own with the close of the Civil War. For the Anderson family of Camden, Ohio, it was a time of peace and of economic security, however, almost the last such time that its members were to know. Anderson's father, Irwin, was a skilled harnessmaker, practicing the trade he had learned in the Seventh Ohio Cavalry during the Civil War. He owned his own shop and employed a helper; he participated in such activities as the town band and the local Sunday school; and he was noted as one of the town's best practitioners of the ex-soldier's ancient art of refighting the war orally and retelling the adventures he had experienced in the Southwest after his discharge. The harness shop, like the barber shop

and the general store of late nineteenth century rural America, was an ideal place for combining skilled hand-craftsmanship with storytelling, and Irwin Anderson made the most of both. He was secure in a friendly environment that valued his traits, and he was a successful small-town family man.

Irwin Anderson was not the ruined Southern dandy that Sherwood has described, but was rather the son of a prosperous farmer, one of the pioneers who had changed rural Ohio from a wilderness into a prosperous agricultural state in less than fifty years. He was the product of an environment that believed firmly in the virtues of hard work and thrift as the sure road to success. In spite of his youthful excursion to the Southland after the war, there is no reason to suspect that he did not himself believe in those virtues.

By 1872, he had already established a harness shop in the village of Morning Sun, near Camden, and he married Emma Smith, a girl of twenty who had been the serving girl and ward of a nearby farmer. To her the young craftsman must have seemed an ideal catch. Here in Morning Sun, Karl Anderson, the artist, was born in 1874, and about that time the family moved to nearby Camden, a larger town, where Irwin opened another shop, a daughter, Stella, was born, and then Sherwood. At that time the family future seemed secure and happy.

The luck that had served Irwin so well through the war and into the Camden period seemed to desert him after

a few years, and his business began to decline in spite of the fact that he was respected and liked in the town. It was more than a matter of changing luck, however, as his son Sherwood later came to know; it was that he had been born in a time when America was undergoing its transition from an agricultural country served by hand craftsmen to an urban society geared to consume the standardized products of mass manufacturing. Caught in the conflict between the old and the new, Irwin found that the old virtues had no bearing on success or failure, and he began to drink and to take refuge in his stories.

When the shop failed, evidently caused by the availability of machine-made harnesses and by Irwin's drinking, the family began a series of moves to other small Ohio towns, still pursuing the promised but elusive prosperity, but no Ohio town could provide Irwin with the opportunity that national economic forces denied him. In Caledonia, near Marion, he opened a shop for a time. Here Irving Anderson was born, and the stay there gave rise to the family legend,³ denied by the evidence,⁴ that Irwin and Warren G. Harding,

³Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (New York, 1924), 103.

⁴The Harding family moved to Caledonia in 1870, when Warren G. was five, and at fourteen he moved to Iberia. According to his biographer, Willis Fletcher Johnson, in The Life of Warren G. Harding (N.P., 1923) Harding's musical interests and band membership began in Iberia.

a resident of Caledonia at the time, played together in the town band. At any rate two of the most widely different lives that Ohio has ever given rise to paralleled momentarily before the Anderson family moved to Clyde on its path downward in the late nineteenth century economic and social scale, while Harding, on the crest of the times, moved to Marion and eventually to the White House and notoriety. For Irwin Anderson notoriety of a different sort came earlier.

In Clyde, the first family home town that Sherwood had any remembrance of, the family fortunes declined rapidly. By this time Irwin Anderson must have realized the folly of any dreams he had of success as a craftsman-owner. Defeated, he worked for others, in harness shops and in a small factory, but increasingly he found refuge and satisfaction in drinking and in story-telling. This was the image of his father that Anderson remembered most clearly and eventually learned to understand, the father that caused him so much anguish in his youth. Irwin Anderson had for all practical purposes become a displaced person, deprived of his place as craftsman by the changing economy of the new America, and for the remainder of his life he was as Clyde knew him: humorous, fun-loving, and likable, just as he had been in Camden, but, deprived of his pride in his work and of the respect it earned for him, not of much account.

When Sherwood grew old enough to see the social and economic structure of the town around him, he realized that

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his father did not fit into it except on the lower levels of toleration and acceptance rather than belonging. In spite of the image of the family that appears in Anderson's early works, the family was not desperately poor; rather, as Anderson stated later in A Story Teller's Story and as William Sutton has confirmed, they managed to maintain at least the outward appearance of respectability. Each of the children in turn began to work to help out as he became old enough, but this was customary and expected in a society that had not yet learned to pamper and over-protect its children.

Living as they did, with Irwin changing jobs as other men change their moods, the family maintained its precarious hold on respectability, Stella teaching school for a time and the boys helping the father in his new occupation of house and sign painter. Odd jobs were plentiful, too, in a small town, and Sherwood's ability to find and work at a variety of them gave him the nickname "Jobby." Evidently a bright, alert boy, as well as an ambitious one, he became well known and liked in Clyde, especially as a re-affirmation of the old belief that environment alone could not hold down a willing, able worker.

During these years, the late 1880's and early 1890's, various forces were at work in America that were beginning to be felt even in a rural town such as Clyde. America was growing, expanding, controlling, providing the maximum of opportunity for a young man to rise in the world; and this

spirit, more than a reaction against his father's ways, probably accounted for Sherwood's ambition, although his later works indicate that he held the opposite impression. Towns surrounding Clyde, even as close as Fremont, seven miles west, and Bellevue, seven miles east, were booming. Fremont's limestone quarries and its promise of natural gas indicated a bright future, while Bellevue became a division point on the Nickle Plate Railroad, and it, too, began to expand. That their fever for growth had to spread to Clyde is indicated in Tar, A Midwest Childhood, and there is no reason to disbelieve it. In this new age education itself was relatively unimportant beyond the ability to read, write, figure, and deal shrewdly, and Anderson's school records indicate that he subscribed to the belief. Ambition, shrewdness, and willingness to work would put a young man in the position to ride the crest of the boom, and Sherwood had plenty of these. The failure of Irwin Anderson to cut himself off from his belief in the old and to join forces with the new was part of the force behind Sherwood's drive to succeed, but the principal credit must be given to the times themselves and to their promise of liberal reward in the form of things that the Andersons lacked. Hustling was in the air, and Sherwood, like his later fictionalized self-portrait, Tar, hustled at every job he could find, eager to work his way up.

Something else was in the air in Clyde that, while less obvious to the ambitious boy, nevertheless became increasingly important to him as he became a man and a writer. Almost unconsciously, through his surroundings, his activities, and undoubtedly through the stories of his father he absorbed the traditions of the rural nineteenth century Midwest. The Clyde Race Track, a point of major local interest in Clyde as in all of the Midwest trotting belt, attracted and held his interest, and, as Sutton shows, his boyhood activities were essentially the same as those Mark Twain has described for Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and the rest. Perhaps this accounts for Anderson's frequent acknowledgement of his debt to Mark Twain as he learned to know Twain and to realize that these things were significant. Thus, although young Sherwood was a hustler, he was also a pirate, an adventurer, an idler in summer fields and woods. Anderson's cave can still be seen near his old home just as can Tom Sawyer's near Hannibal.

More important in later years than these boyish excursions was the town itself. As the birth and burial place of Major General James B. McPherson, the friend of Grant and a hero of the campaigns in the West, Clyde was a proud little town,⁵ described by Henry Howe in the eighteen eighties as "a wholesome, cleanly-appearing town,"⁶ with a population of

⁵Clyde residents also take pride in its being the birth-place of the late Senator George Norris and of Pvt. Roger Young, a leading military hero of World War II.

⁶Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio (Norwalk, Ohio, 1896), II, 556.

2,380. As such, in spite of the influx of the new philosophy of acquisition and the farm implement and bicycle factories that brought the new techniques of standardization to Clyde, it was throughout Anderson's residence there essentially a rural community, the trading center for the surrounding farms and smaller villages that dotted the fertile sandy lake plain. Clyde was for all practical purposes the important center of a comparatively small world, and in such an atmosphere one could not help but live on the most intimate terms with his fellow residents. One could feel that he belonged, that he had put down roots, that his fellow human beings knew that he was alive, and knowing, cared. It was this air of intimacy and of friendly concern that Anderson took for granted while he lived in Clyde, even noting that his father was liked in spite of his vagaries, and he later observed that this intimacy was the first casualty caused by modern industrialism. As smothering as Anderson noted this intimacy to be on occasion, nevertheless in an increasingly de-personalized society he saw that basically it was good, that in Clyde man was his brother's keeper, lending a hand or a hoe or carrying a pot of soup to a sick neighbor just as willingly as he gave odd jobs to a boy who both needed and wanted them.

Anderson's realization of the importance of this aspect of village life could only come later, however. Meanwhile his life was centered in Clyde, in doing the things that young men do and in his preoccupation with his mother, a

hard-working woman who, according to Sutton, was not the silent, mysterious woman whom Anderson later portrayed but who was in fact as well as in later symbol the figure of strength and stability that held the family together and give it direction. Sherwood loved her intensely although there is nothing to indicate that he ever learned to understand her as he did his father, whom he never loved even though he later came to identify himself with Irwin, a long process that points out the direction for much of his later creative work.

In a burst of martial ardor, perhaps engendered by the heroic bronze figure of General McPherson looming over the village graveyard where he had played as a boy, Anderson enlisted in the local National Guard Company, Company "I" of the Sixteenth Infantry. Evidently at nineteen, in 1895, he had no plans for leaving Clyde, at least not immediately, for he enlisted for five years and began attending drills and summer encampment regularly as well as participating in the local parades, meanwhile working in the new bicycle factory, learning about mass production techniques through first-hand experience. At this age there was nothing to distinguish him from his companions except possibly a restlessness that, coming from his father, found its release not in story-telling or in tipping a bottle but in frequent changes of jobs, and perhaps in dreaming of military glory as he polished the buttons of his National Guard blues.

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Later that year, his intimate world began to disintegrate. His mother died at 43, officially of tuberculosis, and his father had neither the strength nor the ability to keep the family together. Karl, nursing his ambition to paint, left for Chicago shortly after, and later Sherwood, after working as a stable groom for about a year, joined the great influx of farm boys whom Sandburg noted as they came to the big city. This was probably in the fall of 1896. Sherwood was twenty, and he was eager to find the opportunity that Chicago promised. He moved in with Karl and began looking for a job.

Rolling apple barrels in a warehouse was not much of a job, but it was a start, and Anderson was willing to work at it even though he hated it. To a friend from Clyde, Jeanette Paden, he talked about his unhappiness, while to her brother Cliff⁷ he revealed his dreams of wealth and position, still convinced that because he was willing to work he would gain them.

As almost all of his works inspired by this early period show, Anderson, the boy from the country, was alternately awed and repulsed by the city around him, and the American dream, still alive within him, seemed more remote

⁷ Later known as John Emerson, a leading movie producer and life-long friend, one of the few who had known Anderson in Clyde.

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at times than it ever had in Clyde, as the Padens, brother and sister, remembered. Nevertheless, the Clyde Enterprise reported that he had obtained a "lucrative position" in Chicago,⁸ and Anderson, who undoubtedly had let the home town think so, was probably confident that he was merely anticipating what would soon be true.

The pattern of the times conspired to take him out of the apple warehouse, however, as the American consciousness became increasingly aware of the island to the south, torn by revolution threatening American investments and possessed by enormous potential as a logical place for American expansion. William Randolph Hearst, his New York Journal, and his followers kept the situation alive in the American mind until the Maine was sunk in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898. Hundreds of Americans were killed, and the yellow press pointed to the Spanish as the perpetrators. The country demanded war, and McKinley acquiesced, making unacceptable demands on the Spanish government. The nation needed a minor war to keep its patriotic muscles in trim, and young Americans, Sherwood Anderson included, were eager to prove themselves in the eyes of the G.A.R. and U.C.V. as the aging veterans' war stories gained gloss and glamour over the years. Perhaps an eagerness to show Irwin was

⁸Quotations from newspaper accounts and from Anderson's early advertising writing are from Sutton.

partially responsible for Anderson's letter to his company commander, printed in the Clyde Enterprise. He wrote:

If by any chance this war scare amounts to anything, and the company is called, please telegraph me 708 Washington Boulevard and I will be with you.

Whether this was engendered by patriotism, by the desire to show Irwin, or merely by the desire to escape the apple warehouse is debatable. Anderson himself always deprecated his motives, noting that he was broke and that yellow fever seemed more desirable than cold storage. His reception as a hero in Clyde, he later commented, was nothing but bunk. Nevertheless such an explanation, especially in retrospect, fails to take into consideration the spirit of the times, sparked by the press and fanned into flame by the oratory of politicians, boosters, and the G.A.R. Anderson's enjoyment of his military service, as reflected both in his fiction and in his autobiographies, seems to be hardly that of a man who saw the war as the lesser of two evils. In all probability he was as eager as any of the others to participate in the manifest destiny of America, an activity that came to be regarded as ludicrous if not dishonorable in later years by sensitive Americans including Anderson himself.

Anderson's Spanish-American war service was short and comparatively uneventful so far as the war itself was concerned. Of course, at Clyde the men received heroes' send-offs including a banquet complete with patriotic program and speeches at the opera house, followed by a dance. The company



joined its regiment in Toledo on April 26, 1898, and the regiment was sworn into federal service on May 12, the Clyde company becoming Company "I" Sixth Ohio Regiment of Volunteer Infantry. Later it went south to the notoriously ill-planned camp at Chickamauga, Georgia, and to Camp Poland, Tennessee. They finally arrived at Cienfuegos, Cuba, on January 4, 1899, well after the war was over, for four months of occupation and patrol duty before returning to the States, a lavish oratorical welcome in Clyde, and mustering out. For Company "I" the war was brief, uneventful, and without glory.

For Anderson, however, the Spanish-American War provided important personal experiences. Perhaps the most important of these was the almost mystic concept of unity inherent in large bodies of men working and marching together, welded into a non-thinking but strongly-feeling mass. That this concept gave rise to the novel Marching Men is obvious, but this was not merely an isolated incident. Rather the memory of that communal power engendered by the mass of men recurs in his work and in the search that his life became, possibly accounting for much of his fascination with industrialism and the machine at the same time that he feared and hated them for what they had done to men.

Although this almost mystic concept of sheer physical power still influenced his work as late as A Story-Teller's Story and in the 1930's when he was working with the idea of making a play out of Marching Men, nevertheless, Anderson

knew that it was dangerous. Not only did he see men become united through their mass activities, but he saw men battered and bruised by the mass action of other men. This happened in several instances in the training camps, perhaps accounting for Anderson's indecisiveness in concluding Marching Men and for his life-long unwillingness to identify himself completely with any mass movement. Always willing to stand and be counted on the side that he thought right, nevertheless he would never submerge his own individuality in the movement.

More significant than the influence of the army as a mass, although Anderson never perceived it himself, was the fact that Company "I" in particular and the army in general was a microcosm of late nineteenth century American life, especially of the villages and towns. Each company was from a town and as such was representative of the cross-section of its origin. Thus Company "I" was Clyde in miniature, and the company street became a main street, but here in a town of tents, barriers were down and Anderson lived on the most intimate terms with all of them, from the banker's son to the ne'er-do-well. The uniform had removed the barriers of appearance among them; the freedom from town mores gave them the opportunity to show themselves as they were, and Anderson was able to move freely among them in a way that the walls of houses, churches, and social groups would have made impossible in Clyde.

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Anderson had enjoyed his army experience, and that he was successful as a soldier is demonstrated by his promotion to corporal, but he was mustered out in May, 1899, having traveled, having been exposed to a foreign country, to foreign manners, and to the heady stuff of being part of a conquering and heroic army by acclamation if not in fact. Whether or not he thought consciously of the matter, he realized that there was nothing in Clyde for him; probably only his father and his brother Ray still lived there, and he went to Springfield to visit Karl, who was drawing illustrations for The Woman's Home Companion, and Stella and Earl, who also lived there. Irving was working at Sherwood's old job, rolling apple barrels in the Chicago warehouse, but that was not for Sherwood.

His goal of achieving material success was unchanged, and realizing keenly that education was becoming more and more necessary as society became more complex, he returned to Clyde briefly to work on a farm during the summer and then in the fall returned to Springfield, again moving in with Karl, planning to make up enough high school credits at Wittenberg Academy so that he could enter the college. At twenty-three, a grown man and a veteran, he applied himself diligently, perhaps in an effort to compensate for his lack of comradeship with the younger boys; he served as a handyman at the boarding house to earn his keep, and he finished the year successfully, graduating and serving as a commencement speaker at the exercises on June 4, 1900.

That the academic aspect of Anderson's career was distasteful to him and unpleasant in spite of his good academic record is shown by the fact that Anderson ignored this phase of his career whenever possible, on occasion mentioning briefly, as in the Memoirs, that he had attended the college rather than the academy.⁹ His life outside the school was undoubtedly more satisfying to him, encountering as he did the world of business and the world of ideas, both of which attracted him strongly. The former, of course, was more immediately important to him, especially in the person of Harry Simmons, advertising manager of Crowell Publishing Company, but the influence of the other world, represented by Trilena White, a schoolteacher whom he long remembered, had effects on him that fired much of his later restlessness and dissatisfaction.

Anderson's formal education ended at the Wittenberg Academy commencement. Perhaps he was restless, perhaps impatient, perhaps unhappy and frustrated. At any rate, when Simmons, impressed by his commencement speech on "Zionism" offered him a job in the Chicago advertising offices of the company, he accepted immediately. Stella, Irving, Ray, and probably Earl were in Chicago at this time, and he joined them. The sense of family was still strong in Anderson at twenty-four as it was to be for the rest of his life.

⁹Sherwood Anderson, Memoirs (New York, 1942), 136.

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Perhaps this, too, was one of the factors behind his readiness to move on.

At the time Anderson arrived in Chicago the age of the booster was a lusty infant eager to break its way out of the confines of its Victorian crib and grow to the proportions that were to dominate so much of American life and consciousness during the new century. The new and growing advertising industry was the voice of that infant, and its function was not merely to inform the public of the availability of the goods produced by the new industrialism but to create an ever-increasing demand for them in order to insure not only the continued growth of industry but the continued growth and influence of its advertising voice. Depth and motivational research had not yet been discovered, Freudian psychology was unheard of, and with the exception of newspapers and magazines the mass media were still in the future. At this time the advertising man was primarily a booster, a man who could meet other men on their own level, chew a cigar, have a drink, tell a few stories, and sell either space or services or both. In this respect he was descended from the drummer, a late nineteenth-century human phenomenon with whom "Jobby" Anderson was thoroughly familiar from his activities up and down Main Street and at the train station in Clyde.

There were other qualities desirable in one who would be an advertising man at the beginning of the century, before specialization, standardization, and an all-important hierarchy

entered the agencies, and Anderson was prepared to meet both of these. The first of these was something that any newsboy, even in Clyde, learns early: to take advantage of the breaks before someone else does, and Anderson had the opportunity to show his dexterity in this way soon after his arrival. The head of the Chicago office had wanted to hire another, and Anderson's position was hardly secure. Then a manufacturer ordered two hundred lines of copy. Anderson was sent, primarily as an errand boy, to have the contract signed. Discovering that the order was a mistake and that the manufacturer had wanted two thousand lines, he telegraphed Simmons that he had engineered the increase, and he returned to Chicago to a salary increase and an even more hostile immediate boss.

Another quality necessary for the well-rounded advertising man of the day was a certain flair for words, combined with an imagination strong enough to make them live, aggressively and confidently, on the page. Anderson had his opportunity to show this ability when he changed employment, going to the Frank White agency as a copywriter at the instigation of a Springfield friend, Marco Morrow. With this agency and the Long-Critchfield agency which absorbed it, he maintained a long connection, traveling and soliciting accounts as well as writing copy.

In his mid-twenties Anderson was a success, presenting a picture of a young American not only on the rise but on the make, just as was the age of which he was a part. With self-

confidence, money in his pocket, and stylish clothes to wear he was sure that he had discovered the path that so many Americans before him had traveled. But Anderson was not one who could rest easily or relax; the combination of "Jobby's" eagerness and Irwin's wanderlust, joined with the fact that all Chicago was available for his inspection, made him restless. Just as he had known Clyde so thoroughly, so did he want to make Chicago his own, and his odd moments were spent wandering, looking, asking questions, and listening. A man learned by being alert, just as did a small-town boy, and Anderson would not be caught napping. Combining this with his travels to factories throughout the Midwest, he was getting a thorough acquaintanceship with the America that had come into being as industrialism came of age.

That Anderson was still convinced of the validity of what he was doing is evident from the articles that he wrote for the agency's magazine, Agricultural Advertising, a trade journal sent to clients and prospective clients. During 1903 he wrote a column called "Rot and Reason" and for ten months in 1904 he wrote one called "Business Types." In addition he wrote other articles for the magazine and several for The Reader, a publication of the Bobbs-Merrill Company. The value of these articles is two-fold: first, they provide tangible evidence of the type of philosophy that dominated business and industrial consciousness during the early part of the century when merchandising techniques were coming

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into prominence, and secondly they show that Anderson accepted such beliefs. Although this has been characterized as booster or huckster philosophy, the sort of thing that reached its inane peak when Bruce Barton became its theologian in the 1920's, actually the movement was permeated by a sincerity that the contemporary names tend to deny. The motivating philosophy was naive, stressing the necessity of diligence and ambition as prerequisites to success; it was righteous, stressing the sacred quality of property and the peculiar endowments of the men to whom it was entrusted; it was evidence of a faith transcending reason that accepted the rightness as well as the inevitability of the establishment of a business-dominated culture in America.

All these things appear in Anderson's trade journal writings, and there is no evidence that he did not subscribe wholeheartedly to them. In "Push, Push, Push!" he wrote:

Put your shoulder to the wheel, infuse some of that whole-souled energy you have sticking in that frame of yours, and you will find inanimate things will fairly fly.

This is the philosophy of "Jobby" Anderson as well as the business age, the belief that carries within it the culmination of three hundred years of puritan conviction that the elect, those who showed that they were worthy, would be rewarded. Couched in the terms of a football coach in the locker room at the half, it is reasonable to believe that Anderson, like the coach, mouthed the phrases without questioning them. Later, in "The Lightweight," after noting that the

prizes would go to the fittest, he went further to predict the outcome of this philosophy of "push":

We'll balance up all right in the end. We'll do our share toward making this the biggest and brightest spot on the whole black earth, and we'll now and then make a winner out of a possible suicide. It's all a question of knowing and teaching...

That Anderson was convinced of the validity of these beliefs when he first began writing them is unquestionable. Still, some notes of tempering or of realistic acknowledgment appear. In "The Born Quitter" he injected a sly plea for mercy for the unsuccessful, and in another piece he frankly acknowledged that the only possible goal and measuring stick for business success was money. Perhaps even then he was beginning to question the values that he had adopted so easily and naturally, although Anderson himself gives no such hint in his later autobiographical works and in the Memoirs acknowledges frankly that his prime interest was in boasting and in showing off his success.¹⁰

Still, however, changes were taking place in his thinking, imperceptible at first. In the Memoirs he testifies that on trips he began to cheat a bit, writing his copy hurriedly and then taking time to walk the streets of little towns, taking time to "think."¹¹ Marco Morrow remembered that Anderson had begun to write a bit on these trips, once

¹⁰Ibid., 138. ¹¹Ibid., 139-140.

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mentioning that he was undecided whether he would be an artist or a millionaire, and in the Memoirs he recounts a brief episode during which he taught history to boys in a settlement house.¹² Obviously something was happening, something that Anderson himself was unaware of, and he had begun to re-examine the path that he had marked out for himself. Further indication of this is the response to a story he had submitted to the Saturday Evening Post at the request of its editor, George Horace Lorimer, whose attention had been called to Anderson by the magazine's publisher, Cyrus Curtis, a reader of Agricultural Advertising. The story was rejected, according to Marco Morrow, because it did not glorify business and the business man. Yet at about the same time Anderson delivered a speech on "making good." Clearly Anderson was no longer the confident young man he had been a few years earlier. Perhaps he still had faith in the American myth, but it was no longer unshaken.

Meanwhile, however, Anderson's personal affairs had changed, so that he was no longer the free agent that he had been. On one of his advertising business trips to Toledo, Ohio, he had met Cornelia Lane, a girl whose background indicated that she would be a suitable wife for a man who was determined to be a business success. Born on May 16, 1877, she was a member of a middle class family that was both well-off and socially respectable. Her father was a shoe wholesaler and a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Toledo.

¹²Ibid., 141-142.

Cornelia herself was a graduate of Western Reserve University, receiving the degree of Ph. B in June, 1900; she was a sorority girl, a literary editor of the school annual, a devotee of the University Theatre, in which she had acted; and she had traveled in Europe after her graduation. She represented, in short, all the things that Anderson was not and was painfully aware that he was not. She was attractive, well educated, refined; he was physically attractive, self-assured, possessed a flair for words, and dressed like a dandy, with overtones of the race track and the smoking car, and perhaps the reason for their mutual attraction was in these contrasts. He was successful in the business world that was sanctified by her father; she was a lady, skilled in the graces that had been lacking in the long series of small-town frame houses in Ohio and Chicago boarding houses. It would be pleasant to assume that they shared literary interests, but Anderson was still largely untutored, finding stimulation in people more frequently than in books.

Cornelia, however, had the advantage of exposure to books and plays, and it is safe to assume that she was willing to act as tutor if Anderson would permit it. At first mutually-shared literary interests could hardly have been more than casual, although both possessed the capabilities for a more discerning and intense interest once the potential of literature had been revealed, a discovery that they probably made together.

They married on May 16, 1904, had a brief honeymoon, and then settled in an apartment in Chicago while Anderson resumed his career with added incentive. Marriage into a family such as the Lanes gave him standards upon which to base his life and his work, standards that could be maintained only by acquiring enough money to live a life of the sort of genteel respectability that was approved by the middle class of Toledo, Ohio, at the beginning of the twentieth century. Part of this genteelness consisted of the social graces: well-appointed table, pleasant talk, a circle of friends in for a quiet evening; but a more significant part was the occasional quiet evening when, prior to the discovery of the vacuum tube, it was considered civilized to spend quiet evenings taking turns reading aloud. The Andersons did this increasingly often. There is no record of what was read, but Cornelia, with her flair for the dramatic and her suitable background, was probably the instigator of these evenings, while Sherwood, conscious of his educational shortcomings, followed along. He always remained silent on this aspect of his personal life, and Cornelia has chosen to follow the same course. Whatever the facts of these early married years, it is obvious that Sherwood had entered a life different in two ways from his past. First there entered the elusive quality called taste, changing with the times, but nevertheless an attempt to value what seems to be first-rate; and secondly, an awareness that words could take

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on form as well as function. The two were to merge, joining forces with his own always intense interest in the intimacies of human life, and emerge in his work.

Within two years Anderson had decided to leave Chicago, and in the fall of 1906, he took on the presidency of the United Factories Company, a Cleveland firm that specialized in direct-mail advertising and selling on the behalf of firms subscribing to the service. The reason for this move seems to be clear: this was an opportunity to move up the socioeconomic scale. As the president and principal officer of a firm, he could match titles if not salary with his father-in-law. Behind this laudable motive, a growing dissatisfaction with what he was doing was making itself felt. It is impossible to measure the extent of this, but in 1938, he remembered: "I grew sick of it. I think I was most worried by my own growing slickness. I determined to get out of advertising writing. There were too many lies being told," and so he accepted the Cleveland job.

That this reason was partially the result of hindsight based upon a vague amount of fact is indicated by the nature of his new job. Essentially it was an extension of what he had been doing in Chicago. Although he headed the firm, he was primarily brochure and advertising writer and traveling solicitor of new companies to join the firm. One of his first efforts was to place the company's business on a man-to-man basis with its customers, writing

I promise as a decent man trying to be square that every man, rich or poor, small or large, shall have a square deal from my company.

Every word of this book is written under my personal supervision, and for it I am responsible to you...what is written...is true in spirit and in fact...If you are not satisfied, you can feel free about taking the matter up with me personally, and I promise you that I will not...pile up words to confuse you...

Here is the first clear-cut evidence that Anderson was becoming aware of the fact that words had a power and an innate ability of their own that their user should respect rather than pervert; here is a situation that presents an odd contrast in that Anderson is trying to adapt the intimate business relationships of Clyde, Ohio, to an increasingly impersonal business structure; and here is the first tangible evidence that something was going wrong with Anderson's dream of material success. Such a statement could hardly have been written with such a strong air of conviction by a man who knew he was lying; hence, it is safe to assure that Anderson was convinced of the honesty of his efforts. Still a business man, however, still dreaming of material success in terms of a bigger house, prestige colleges for his children, and a life of middle-class respectability, as he recounts in the Memoirs,¹³ nevertheless Anderson was seeking to return to an intimacy and a code of values that was rapidly being pushed out of the American business scene as growing industrialism demanded greater impersonality. The move from Chicago

¹³Ibid., 152-153.

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was the first of a long series of movements, each engendered by dissatisfaction and disillusionment, and already, while still actively engaged in his present he was unconsciously seeking a way back to Main Street in Clyde, Ohio by attempting to use a personal, small-town approach in a business as impersonal as mail-order selling.

Nevertheless Anderson tried to be a good company president and a good family man. Perhaps his dreams of business gianthood began to fade as he immersed himself in the two. Difficulties arose over defective incubators that were difficult to resolve without sacrificing either his personal integrity or the financial stability of his firm. Anderson emerged shaken but with integrity intact although the firm barely survived, and disillusionment with this venture started to gnaw at his dreams. However, on August 16, 1907, his son Robert was born, and Cornelia was still living up to his image of her, providing a good home life, with poetry and French lessons to soften the bluntness of his background. In Cleveland Anderson was in a trap: he knew that the new age conspired against honesty, and at the same time he had committed himself too fully to be able to do anything but what he was doing. Late in 1907 he found a way out of the Cleveland fiasco in a mail-order paint business in nearby Elyria.

The early years in Elyria promised a great deal, both to Anderson and to his new fellow townsmen. Here there was not the intensity of competition that marked Chicago and

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Cleveland, but rather a quieter, less grasping way of approaching a sure thing, although the ability to take advantage of one was no less respected in Elyria than elsewhere. Elyria in 1907 was a town of contrasts, an old town with a tradition of righteousness stemming back to its New England founders and a town fully committed to the industrialism that had been part of its consciousness since its founding at the falls of the Black River. In 1907 stately homes held themselves aloof from the drabness of small factories and workmen's houses along the New York Central, the river, polluted by industrialism, serving as an effective barrier. Caught midway between the booming brashness of the steel mills in Lorain and the sedateness of an Oberlin that had lost the somewhat disreputable air of excitement of its early years, the residents of the stately homes turned their backs on the former even while they invested in its shares and looked toward Oberlin for cultural sustenance.

Here was a town that perhaps indicated both to Anderson and to Cornelia that the dream was still within reach. Here the dream would not culminate in the spectacular success possible in the great cities, but the reduction in material scale would be more than offset by the opportunity for cultural pursuits to which they were firmly committed, and here Anderson became "The Roof-Fix Man" and president of the Anderson Manufacturing Company. His new venture represented something entirely new. In this he was no longer an employee,

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and the business was successful from the start. At first it was patterned after the United Factories structure, but later it started manufacturing when in 1908 his company merged with a paint factory from nearby Lorain.

Essentially Anderson's function was similar to what he did in Cleveland. The company operated on a mail-order basis, and Anderson's responsibilities were for sales promotion and advertising. Again Anderson attempted to inject a personal note into his sales brochures, but the sincerity of the Cleveland advertisements was missing, and one advertisement showing the back of a man's head, identified by the words "This is the Roof of the Roof-Fix Man" indicates that he was getting more and more cynical about his chosen profession and about his own role in it. Shortly after this he started a scheme, patterned after the United Drug Company, which he termed "Commercial Democracy." Simply stated, this was a plan to sell shares of stock to paint dealers. A little magazine of the same name, written by Anderson, advocated a close personal relationship between manufacturer and dealer and hinted vaguely at a new socialistic economic order that the plan would result in if successful.

It is doubtful if the Elyria business and professional men who subscribed to stock in the resulting company, the American Merchants Company, knew that Anderson was planning such economic heresy. Rather it must have seemed like a good venture, for the company was capitalized at \$200,000, of which

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Anderson held \$25,000 in stock and was in complete charge. Evidently Anderson still planned to succeed, but it was a different sort of success from that he had anticipated only a few years before in Chicago. Not only had its scope narrowed considerably, but reaction against the conventional kind of commercial success was beginning to become pronounced.

Meanwhile Anderson's family life was apparently happy. Two more children had been born, John in 1908 and Marion in 1911. Anderson, in common with other businessmen of the town, belonged to the Elks and the Clyria Country Club; Cornelia was active in the Fortnightly Literary Club, and both belonged to a discussion club. From all indications the Anderson home life, like his business life, was secure and promising, and the family was destined to find a solid place for itself in Elyria.

Surface appearances were deceiving, however, and the growing disenchantment evidenced in his advertising work was symptomatic of even more serious doubts that Anderson was keeping to himself. William Sutton notes that several Elyria residents began to think him moody, a bit radical, and increasingly careless about his appearance. In the Memoirs he remembers that he was suddenly struck with the meaninglessness of what he was doing,¹⁴ and in 1938 he stated that it was then that he began to drink, to do a bit of woman-

¹⁴Ibid., 154-157.

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chasing, and then to write. Essentially his writing was undirected, at least at first. He remembered, "I quit wanting to change people. I began to want more and more to understand rather than change," thus starting almost at once the course that his writing was to take throughout his life in a career that was devoted not to changing but to understanding.

His writing was not the secret sin that he pictured in A Story-Teller's Story, but, as Sutton shows, rather almost common knowledge, perhaps even an exciting idea to the people in their small literary circles. As he remembers, probably accurately, Cornelia was not hostile to it; she was merely sceptical, and Anderson, conscious of the educational gap between them, resented this.¹⁵ Their family relations began to deteriorate rapidly, and time that should have been devoted to business was spent writing. Often he mentions writing and destroying a book called "Why I Am a Socialist," but none of his acquaintances ever remembered having seen it. If the book actually was written, Anderson was still too shrewd in the game of business ever to let it get out of his hands. Yet he continued to write.

During these years of uncertainty, depression, and frustration the origins of the Anderson myth began to take form, rising partially from the fact that Anderson himself

¹⁵Ibid., 188-189.

was unable to discuss the period with any degree of objectivity until many years later when the almost-unnoticed Memoirs were published. Even then, however, he was unable to force himself to be complete and impersonal, yet he revealed that much of the anguish of the time stemmed from the quandary he was in. On one hand he was a man with family responsibilities which he knew he was obliged to discharge, and on the other he couldn't go on with what he was doing. Perhaps the shadow of Irwin Anderson's improvidence haunted him. At any rate it was a situation in which he couldn't do right, and even in later years he was unable to acknowledge that he couldn't or wouldn't discharge his family obligations. The specter of family haunted him almost always, until years later when he gathered his children around him in Virginia.

William Sutton has, however, done a remarkable job of gathering the facts that Anderson forced himself to forget. Among these were the details of his writing that his associates remembered. During 1911 and 1912, his secretary remembered typing several stories, the details of which escaped her, which were sent off to publishers and subsequently rejected. More importantly, friends remembered that both Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men were conceived and the first drafts written in Elyria, and stockholders in his company remembered him writing at his desk when he should have been tending to business. Whether it was a substitute for drink as he later recalled or not, clearly the image of

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the success of "Jobby" Anderson had become something that he was desperately trying to understand.

Cornelia neither encouraged nor discouraged his writing, maintaining an aloofness that he could not help resenting, at the same time planting the seeds of doubt that were to plague him for years; yet her efforts to help him with grammar, punctuation, and spelling were humbly accepted. When he read parts of Windy McPherson's Son to their literary group, the consensus was that the novel was hopeless. Mere dedication could hardly have made him continue; writing must have become like drink. As the novels as finally published indicate, he had completed his rejection of materialistic values, but he had no idea of what was next. ✓

The quandary that he was caught in was not easy to solve. In his business life he had found it impossible to put into practice the human values that he derived from Clyde and from his experiences in the army; his efforts to determine what had gone wrong in American life through his writing were not only ineffectual but scorned; and he had a position and a family to maintain, neither of which was responsible for his present predicament. Such a condition could not last indefinitely, and in late November of 1912, the event occurred that gave rise to the Anderson myth of abrupt rejection of business and materialistic values, a myth perpetuated by Anderson and his friends in spite of the fact that it contains only the spirit, not the essence, of truth.

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As Anderson later recalled the incident,¹⁶ his departure from the Anderson Manufacturing Company was abrupt, conscious, and yet mystical. Suddenly in the midst of dictating a letter to his secretary he stopped, all at once overwhelmed by the sordidness of his business career. He toyed with the idea of a rational explanation of his sudden decision to quit, and then decided against it. In a moment which he said was either dominated by shrewdness or insanity, he looked at his feet and said, "I have been wading in a long river and my feet are wet."¹⁷ After a moment he said, "My feet are cold, wet, and heavy from long walking in a river. Now I shall go walk on dry land."¹⁸ With that he walked out the door and along the railroad tracks, determined to devote the rest of his life to literature.

Such an explanation fails to take into consideration Anderson's mental state at the time, his innate sense of responsibility and practicality, and the accounts of the episode that appeared in Elyria and Cleveland newspapers. The evidence points either to an ill-conceived attempt to run away or to a temporary mental breakdown, and it tends to support the latter view. The facts of his actual leaving

¹⁶In Sherwood Anders, "When I Left Business for Literature," Century, CVIII (Aug., 1924), 489-496.

¹⁷Ibid., 496. ¹⁸Ibid.

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have never been established, but on December 2, 1912, the Elyria Evening Telegram carried a news story headed, "Elyria Man is Found Dazed in Cleveland." The story states that he was found dazed and incoherent in Cleveland and hospitalized suffering from nervous exhaustion. This was ascribed to overwork, the article concluding:

Added to the cares of the Anderson Manufacturing Co. and other enterprises in which Anderson was the guiding spirit, for the last several months he has been working on a novel and at odd times has been writing stories for magazines. Engrossed in writing Anderson worked many a night until nearly dawn and then attended to business affairs.

Two months ago he was warned by a physician that he was overworking and...friends...only a week ago remarked his fagged out condition.

This account, corroborated by articles in the Cleveland Press and the Cleveland Leader, disputes the fanciful accounts in the Century and in A Story-Teller's Story and the even more incorrect version in the Memoirs.¹⁹ In each case he implied that he never returned to Elyria and presumably that his business and family were left stranded. However, although this did not happen, nevertheless it was this incident that served as his point of no return. A final account appears in the Elyria paper a few days later headed "Sherwood Anderson Will Write Book on Experiences as Nomad," stating in the course of the article that Anderson had "through deep thought" thrown

¹⁹Here he mistakes the date, giving it as 1910 rather than 1912, an error that might have been caught had he lived to correct his copy.

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himself into a trance deliberately for the experience in order that he might understand it, and in all probability he believed it himself, but the news story suggests another possible explanation. This seems to be another manifestation of Anderson's life-long need to explain and to justify his actions in his fiction, his autobiographies, his letters, and in the series of prefaces, ~~fore~~words, and notes with which he introduced his works. There was considerable scepticism in Elyria as to whether or not Anderson was really sick at the time, but in all probability he was. His mind was demanding that he find a way out of the quandary that he had put himself in.

After brief hospitalization and a short vacation in Toledo, Anderson returned to Elyria, having made up his mind to dispose of the business, either because he had determined to find a job in which he could devote more time to writing or because the Andersons felt that they could no longer stay in Elyria after such an episode. Probably both factors are involved, for he began to wind up his business affairs upon his return, and the Elyria Democrat carried a notice in its February 16, 1913, issue that Anderson had decided to return to Chicago to the Taylor-Critchfield Advertising Company. Three days later he left, to be followed by Cornelia and the children when he made preparations for them.

The break that Anderson made with business ethics was not at this point a physical one as he would have us believe,

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but it is a very definite spiritual break. Although he was to continue writing advertisements for a number of years, many of them in the same boasting vein, he no longer believed what he wrote. Rather, belief was reserved for the personal writing that had become more and more important to him, especially after he became imbued with the aesthetic atmosphere of the Chicago Renaissance. The important fact was that his ideological ties were broken, that he knew that the American dream had become corrupted, and that through his examination of the dream as it was approached in his own experience he would come to understand it and perhaps to find a solution to the inevitable dehumanization that accompanied it. The Elyria years that had provided him with the most promise for material success were behind him, deliberately rejected as the standards they represented proved to be meaningless, and his life had taken a new direction.

Almost thirty-seven years old, with a trunkfull of manuscripts, Anderson was taking a decisive step, but not one that would destroy him if he failed. He could always write copy if his writing failed, just as he was going to in the immediate future, whether he believed it or not, but without knowing it he was taking the only step that could make his writing come alive. The heady atmosphere of Chicago in its most fertile literary period would provide the needed impetus, together with much dross that he would have to learn to reject. Had he deliberately foreseen what was

ahead he could not have made a more opportune decision to join ambition, a way with words, and an eagerness to learn with an atmosphere that would enable him to go on from there.

Problems remained: he was still a family man, and he had not broken with Cornelia although his recent behavior had placed a good deal of strain on their marriage, and so he knew that he was not entirely free, either to follow his fancy or to be entirely honest, but the emphasis at least had been shifted. The myth of the abrupt break still persists, but it is not far from the essence of the truth. Anderson had rejected the standards of the market place and had set off to find his own.

CHAPTER III

REJECTION AND THE BEGINNING OF THE SEARCH, 1913--1919

The years following Sherwood Anderson's return to Chicago, from early 1913 through 1919, were the single most important period in his life. Entering them as an unknown with vaguely defined protests against modern American materialism, a few rough manuscripts, and the urge to write so that he might free himself from the demands of materialism and understand what it had done to him and to all men, he emerged from those years regarded as one of the most promising writers of the period and one who had come close to the essence of human experience. Combining to bring about this result were three factors: Anderson's personal experiences in the transformation of the American Midwest from an agricultural to an industrial society; his desire to understand his experience and to write; and the atmosphere of the Chicago to which he returned. Resulting from this combination of forces were two novels, the early manuscripts of which he had brought with him, a book of free-verse chants, and a collection of integrated short stories. The first three works are the subject of this chapter; the last merits treatment alone.

Anderson's own experiences, as detailed in the preceding chapter, provided the raw material for much of his life's work as well as for the material of this, his first creative period. More importantly, however, they provided the problems that were at the core of his life-long search for the understanding of American life that he first began to seek in Elyria. Some of these were intensely personal problems: the meaning of his father's life and his relationship to it; the problem of human isolation that he had seen personified in the life of his mother; the secret behind the human love that seemed so much at the mercy of outside economic and materialistic forces; and the problem of personal identity. These, however, as Anderson was to learn, were manifestations of universal problems made more intense by the forces that had come to dominate the American consciousness during his own lifetime. His resulting efforts to understand them in terms of the society that had intensified them gives his lifetime work the ideological unity that this study maintains they possess. This unity changes, shifts its focus, and occasionally seems to back up on itself as various approaches turn out to be unsatisfactory, but they continue to attack the central problem and its numerous manifestations, and out of them he eventually determines what seems to him to be the essence of the meaning of his experience and of the American experience. But that

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discovery is a long time in his future, at the end of a career marked by trial, error, frustration, failure, and solid, lasting literary accomplishment.

Anderson's desire to write of these problems and to understand them was, as the previous chapter indicates, much more than a mere wish or vague yen; it had taken over control of his life so completely that at a time when he could have been sliding easily into a comfortable middle age, he changed the course of his life. He had provided himself with a place of retreat as well as a means of earning a living in the advertising business, it is true, but nevertheless he maintained only a loose and increasingly looser tie with that anchor. His goal was to write and to understand his world and his life, but what he needed was direction in order to give form to his tentative efforts. The literary renaissance in the Chicago to which he returned provided that direction as well as the sympathy, the encouragement, and the stimulation that he needed if he were to do more than fumble as he had in Elyria.

The literary renaissance in Chicago has been ably described by Bernard Duffey, who aptly terms it a movement of liberation¹ that was to have lasting effects on American literature. For Anderson, as Duffey points out, Chicago

¹Bernard Duffey, The Chicago Renaissance in American Letters (East Lansing, 1954).

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provided two things: an introduction to Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons, and the opportunity, through the 57th Street artistic colony, to seek out his own means of expression through an intimate knowledge of himself.² The impact of the first was so great that it opened possibilities undreamed of by him in Elyria, as the abrupt shift in fictional techniques between Marching Men and Winesburg, Ohio shows. His first published fiction, an innocuous short story in Harper's called "The Rabbit Pen"³ shows his earlier fumbling although it did give him a measure of local prestige, but the Stein volume, given him by his brother Karl, was a revelation that he remembered all his life as the first indication that he might be able to produce a style of his own.⁴

As Duffey points out, the 57th Street group reinforced this sudden shock of discovery, and for Anderson it provided two things: his realization that he was a writer and as such had responsibilities as writer-craftsman rather than as the propagandist-reformer he saw himself to be in Elyria and in the two early novels; and his realization that as writer he must be free from responsibilities he did not choose in order to carry on his work.⁵ The first changed the focus of his

²Ibid., 200-201.

³Sherwood Anderson, "The Rabbit Pen," Harper's Magazine CXXIX (July, 1914), 207-210.

⁴Memoirs, 234. ⁵Duffey, 201.

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efforts to write and to understand from an exercise in purging and in preaching to an awareness of the responsibilities inherent in the act of writing, while the second provided him with the rationalization necessary for his cavalier treatment of his advertising job as well as for the coming permanent break with Cornelia so that he might be free to write. It also resulted in a mistaken view of the meaning of freedom that led to his next marriage, to a good deal of posing, and to a standard of values that he found necessary to repudiate later in Dark Laughter, but in Chicago it freed him to write. Both of these discoveries, together with the introduction to the possibilities of style through Tender Buttons, were to control the rest of his career. His rejection of outside responsibility, however, disappeared in the 1920's, and in the economic chaos of the early 1930's he acknowledged that he had to accept responsibility for a world he had no part in making.

Meanwhile, to follow up his minor success in Harper's, Anderson was trying to do something with the two manuscripts he had brought with him from Elyria. It is impossible to tell how much work Anderson had done on them in Chicago, but in scope if not in final form they must have remained essentially unchanged, for in both, fulfillment is found in the act of rebellion against materialistic standards, and after rebellion there is nothing except the vaguely-sensed fulfillment that both protagonists find in physical intimacy with others

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and determined efforts at spiritual intimacy. Both of these points are reminiscent of Anderson's earlier efforts at attaining "Commercial Democracy." Both works are autobiographical, the first of them, Windy McPherson's Son, factually so, and the second, Marching Men, as Anderson the reformer saw himself after his world of commerce became meaningless in Elyria.

Windy McPherson's Son⁶ had an interesting pre-publication history of rejection, angry exchanges between Anderson and editors, and an enthusiastic reception in manuscript form by the Chicago group before it was finally published in 1916 through the efforts of Floyd Dell, who had become a friend as well as champion. In 1916 it was published by the John Lane Company of London. As a novel it contained little of absolute value, its real significance lying in two areas, in his ability to recapture the essence of seemingly meaningless incidents in brief sketches, and in its embryonic recapitulation of the theme that dominated Anderson's life work: the search for human values and meaning in a materialistic world that he did not make but that he had been seduced into accepting and serving for a time.

Essentially the story is a simple one, the story of Anderson's own life up to his rejection of materialistic standards in Elyria, somewhat magnified in accordance with

⁶Sherwood Anderson, Windy McPherson's Son (New York, 1916 and 1922).

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the requirements of the American dream. A poor boy from a small town rises, by hard work and sharp dealing, into a position of wealth and responsibility. Later, he learns painfully that money isn't everything. Such a story is far from new, as Anderson realized later, but in Elyria it was both new and heretical to him. The protagonist of the novel, Sam McPherson, was clearly Anderson himself, and Sam's family, especially his father and mother, are drawn from life, as are the settings of the small Midwestern town of Caxton and the metropolis of Chicago. The raw material of the story is the personal experience that Anderson is trying to understand.

Sam, like Anderson, is a small-town boy from a poor background who, partially in the effort to rise above that background and partially as a result of the spirit of the new materialism, is determined to rise in the world. At the same time Sam has a curiosity that almost becomes a hunger for insight into the meaning of the lives around him, including his own. The two are, of course, incompatible, and Sam loses sight of the latter as he pursues the material success that seems so attractive. Called "Jobby" because of his eagerness to work and succeed, just as Anderson was, he attains modest success as a trader in his home town and then goes to Chicago, the Midwestern Mecca of ambitious country boys at the end of the last century. In Chicago he practices the hard work, thrift, and sharp dealing that he had learned in his home town and rises to the top of the armament industry,

in the process subordinating all his human instincts to his goal as well as marrying the boss's daughter in the finest Horatio Alger tradition.

Suddenly his success explodes in his face as his business practices result in his wife leaving him and his father-in-law committing suicide. Finding himself completely alone and realizing that he has sacrificed human beings and human relations for things, he decides to throw over his business affairs and try to find the human feeling that he has lost. After a series of adventures as a laborer, an anonymous benefactor of a small town, an altruistic strike leader, and a frustrated playboy, he realizes that these efforts are futile and that he must take a different direction. Finding a woman who wishes to be rid of her children, he takes them home to his wife, and together they decide to build a new life based on love.

Such a brief outline indicates the parallel between Anderson's life and that of his protagonist, but within this framework are presented in detail the problems that made Anderson turn to writing in the attempt to understand the world that he had been caught up in. The first of these is the problem of human isolation that dominates the book just as it dominated Anderson's life in Elyria after he realized that materialism was designed not to unite people as human beings but to exploit them as consumers. This problem becomes evident to the reader almost at once, although it

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takes Sam years to recognize it. Early in the novel the problem is presented in three characters in the book, in Sam's father, Windy; in his mother; and in John Telfer, a wealthy, educated man of the town who befriends Sam.

The figure of Windy McPherson is central to the story, although Sam leaves him behind as inconsequential when he leaves the small town behind him. As the man's nickname implies, Windy is unable to separate reality from imagination. In the town he is a failure, just as was Irwin Anderson, and this portrayal is interpreted by many critics as a vicious portrait of Anderson's own father. Such is not the case, however. Windy is a man completely isolated from his wife, his children, and his contemporaries. As Windy's background shows, he has not always been that way; as a young man he had belonged in a simpler society, but he is a man who does not understand and does not belong in an age in which personal worth is measured by material acquisitions. He does not understand competition, so he is unable to compete, and he remains a craftsman, and he becomes a wanderer and increasingly a story-teller and a dreamer who is tolerated, even liked, but not accepted by his more successful fellow townsmen. Drawn in the image of Thomas Lincoln, he is, like Abraham's father, a failure, and Sam, accepting the conventional standards of success in his time, rejects his father as did Abraham sixty years before, while the rest of the

family, including Sam's mother, accepts him as a burden rather than as a human being. In this portrait of Windy, Anderson is not condemning the man who does not belong; rather, he is drawing him as he was seen by the times, a lazy liar rather than a wandering storyteller and craftsman. Sam, of course, in spite of his later realization that he, too, was isolated from his fellow humans, never does come to view his father in that light; for Anderson, on the other hand, the figure of his father becomes increasingly important until finally in the autobiographical works of the 1920's he realizes the meaning of his father's life. Sam, however, a manipulator rather than an interpreter, never makes the recognition that Anderson's title implies, and although he knows instinctively that there is meaning somewhere in people and events, he is unable to go beyond that vague realization.

Feeling shame and disgust for his father, Sam is drawn closer to his mother, but here he again faces something he is unable to understand: her love that finds its only expression in service. Completely dominated by her necessity to keep the family together and fed, she is overworked, sickly, and inarticulate. Yet her love for her children is shown graphically in a series of incidents dominated by the self-sacrifice that asks nothing for herself. This is the love that Sam later tries to recapture and understand, the love that demands nothing but the opportunity to serve, but in his efforts to put it into practice after his rejection of business ethics, he fails.

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Outside his own family Sam is drawn to John Telfer, a wealthy idler and dilettante about the town. Telfer is the man who combines the qualities that Sam most desires for himself: leisure and money as well as the ability to indulge in the luxuries of art and ideas. He tells Sam, "...in our day money-making precedes many virtues that are forever on men's lips...money makes life livable. It gives freedom and destroys fear. Having it means sanitary houses and well-made clothes. It brings into men's lives beauty and the love of beauty. It enables a man to go adventuring after the stuff of life as I have done."⁷

This is the lie that Sam accepts wholeheartedly, ignoring Telfer's true position in the town. Telfer is the symbol of the materialistic future, no less anachronistic than Windy and no less isolated. Telfer, by virtue of his wealth and his education, is feared and respected, but he is not loved in the town. As the local apostle of the new materialism he is admired by Sam, who fails to see that Telfer has lost his humanity and his human feeling, deriding love as a trap to be avoided or as a weapon to be used. As the spokesman for the new age, Telfer promises much in return for little, money in exchange for the love personified by Sam's mother.

Sam himself becomes isolated as a result of his acceptance of Telfer's words, and the last part of the novel is devoted to his efforts to break through the barriers

⁷Ibid., 78.

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separating him from others. In a moment of despair after his rejection he implores, "Are you there, O God? Have you left your children here on the earth hurting each other? Do you put the seed of a million children in a man, and the planting of a forest in one tree, and permit men to wreck and hurt and destroy?"⁸ Later, at the end he resolves, "'I cannot run away from life. I must face it. I must try to understand these other lives, to love.'"⁹ He has finally rejected the image of Telfer.

Out of this theme of human isolation Anderson draws these conclusions. He sees industrial and business ethics as conducive to the dehumanization of modern society; he sees that man has lost all concepts of meaning in a society dominated by superficiality; and he sees that man has lost awareness of himself as a natural human being. That these were in themselves problems crying for solution Anderson seems not to recognize in the novel; rather, he implies that the act of rejection of materialistic standards is almost sufficient in itself to break down the barriers of human isolation and to nullify these subsidiary problems.

⁸Ibid., 323.

⁹This quotation appears on p. 349 in the revised edition published by Huebsch in 1922. It shows Anderson's unsuccessful attempt to resolve the ambiguity of the earlier conclusion.

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That rejection is no answer but merely a beginning, Anderson knew well from his own experience, but he had no idea of what came after that, and in the novel he sought a simplified solution in a simple event. But the situation was far more complex than he realized, and the ending is as indecisive as Anderson himself was in Elyria. In effect he had described the beginning of a search for meaning inherent in the American experience and had defined the area to be searched, but he was far from its conclusion.

As a first novel Windy McPherson's Son has strengths and weaknesses, both of them inherent in what Anderson was trying to do. In attempting to lay bare the American myth, to disclose its essential meaninglessness, and to provide a solution to it Anderson had undertaken a job that he was unable to complete because he had no idea of what came next. As such, in the overall view of Anderson's work, Windy McPherson's Son provides an introduction that rejects American folklore so that he is free to seek the truth of the American experience wherever it lies. The tentative answer that Anderson provides, that one must learn "to understand these other lives, to love,"¹⁰ is not the end of a search; it is a beginning, pointing out the future direction of his work.

The shortcomings in the novel are numerous, so much

¹⁰Ibid.

so that they tend to obscure the merits of the work. Dialogue is stilted, rhetorical, and unnatural; didacticism appears all too frequently; the good portraits and sketches in the early portion devoted to the small town are overwhelmed by the unreality of Sam's careers as tycoon and as wanderer; style is self-conscious, naive, and contrived, giving little indication of Anderson's later stylistic powers; and the story itself seems dated. Yet in spite of these shortcomings the real significance of the novel endures. It is a novel of rejection and of seeking, reflecting the pattern of Anderson's life up to that time. The ethics of the market-place had been put behind him, and he had marked out the questions that he was attempting to solve: the problem of the barriers between individuals, the problem of dehumanization in a materialistic society, and on the personal level, the problems of his own identity, his own values, and his self-realization through the lives of others. The weakness of the last part of the novel indicates that he found no easy answers, but like his protagonist, he would continue to search them out, knowing that if he found the answers he would find the meaning of his own experience and of America.

Critical reception to the novel was generally favorable, and Anderson's prestige among the Chicago group rose accordingly, giving him confidence enough to branch out in new literary directions inspired by his Chicago contacts. In the meanwhile, however, he brought out his second novel,

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Marching Men, also essentially a product of the Elyria years and also an attempt to find an easy answer to the same basic problems centering around the conflict between the individual and his world. In this novel, however, Anderson shifts his center of focus from a protagonist who has risen to the top of the materialistic world only to find it meaningless, to one who by choice remains on its lowest levels, aligning himself with those whom the system exploits.

In Marching Men Anderson has again written an autobiographical novel, but it is autobiography of a different sort. Instead of dealing with fictionalized fact, Anderson bases the novel in fictionalized fancy of the sort that engendered his "Commercial Democracy" movement, his secret book "Why I Am a Socialist," and his efforts to find an answer to the problem of what one should do after the act of rebellion has been accomplished. The ending of Windy McPherson's Son was inconclusive, vague, and elusive, as Anderson was well aware, even though he did make an effort to make it more definite in the 1922 edition. However, a course of positive action was needed, and Anderson conceived Marching Men to satisfy that need. This solution, too, was predestined to failure, as Anderson realized once he was well into the matter and recognized the complexity of the social and economic structure that he was trying to reform in one easy swoop.

Beaut McGregor, the protagonist of Marching Men, is essentially Sam McGregor in his determination to make his presence felt in the world, but there is one major difference in the motivation behind his early career. Sam was motivated by faith in the traditional American virtues, but Beaut was driven by hate for the people in the little Pennsylvania mining town in which he was raised who were stupid enough to go into "the black hole between the Pennsylvania hills"¹¹ and dig coal. Early in the novel he muses on the words of the town socialist, "who was forever talking of a day coming when men would march shoulder to shoulder and life in Coal Creek, life everywhere, should cease being aimless and become definite and full of meaning."¹² If such did occur, Beaut reflected, he would march them to an abandoned cut and push them in.

Beaut's hate resulted from his father's death in an abandoned mineshaft, and it was intensified during a strike when his mother, owner of a small bakery, went bankrupt feeding the miners. During the strike he was fascinated by the power of soldiers who marched through the streets restoring order. Full of hate, he went to Chicago to seek his fortune, convinced that he must take what he wanted.

¹¹Sherwood Anderson, Marching Men (New York, 1917), 11.

¹²Ibid., 13.

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Later, while studying law, he realized that "Brains are intended to help fists!"¹³

At this point Beaut's career parallels Sam McPherson's, but again a significant difference is evident. While Sam saw life as a game, with the rewards going to the quickest, the most able, and the shrewdest, Beaut saw it as a vicious battle, with the victory going to the strongest and most unscrupulous. Sam saw the shining mountain tops, while Beaut focused on the debris at their base. While Windy McPherson's Son reflects Anderson's disillusionment with the world of commerce, Marching Men shows his bitterness at it and his willingness to fight it on its own terms, matching brute strength against animal savagery and cunning.¹⁴

However, the direction of Beaut's hatred shifts to the exploiting employers when his mother's death demonstrates to him the love and loyalty that the miners hold for her. Hate for the miners turns into love for them as suddenly and instinctively as Sam McPherson turned for fulfillment to the lives of others. Determined to lead them out of their misery, Beaut fuses love, desire for freedom and dignity of the individual, and the concept of men marching solidly together, imbues the result with his recognition of the basic savage

¹³Ibid., 74.

¹⁴This indicates that Marching Men is probably the product of Anderson's last, bitter years in Elyria.

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nature of the materialistic structure, and then dreams up the marching men movement.

The movement as it grew was force personified, taking its strength from the mass of men who made up its body, and again, as in the conclusion of Windy McPherson's Son, Anderson was faced with a dilemma: after the movement, what? After force has defeated force, is there any hope for the individual anyway, or will he be destroyed forever by the dehumanizing forces that were set in motion to save him? Anderson is unable to answer the question, and the novel concludes with the implication that the movement is doomed and that Beut will go down fighting with it.

However, in spite of the often-noted weakness of the second half of the novel, certain significant factors are apparent. First, of course, is the fact that Anderson had made a headlong attack on the basic problem that concerned him, the dehumanizing effects of the new materialism, and in doing so learned that there was no easy solution to it, that he could not adapt its own weapons to a fight against it without in the end compounding the evil. It was this kind of realization, more than any other, that later prevented him from going over to Communism when he was attracted to it.

Another significant point that Anderson learned from the novel is that there is no gimmick that will solve the problem of human isolation. Although in his army days he

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had felt himself to be one of the boys as they marched together toward an objective, he found that there was danger in such a movement. Shoulders touching did not mean that men's souls were in harmony, as he later pointed out in A Story Teller's Story, and a mass movement is too easily dominated by instincts that the individual conscience rejects. The problem of human isolation could not be solved by such a mere gimmick, and the direction of his future work shows that he realized it.

Finally, the conclusion points out a significant but ignored point that reveals Anderson's conception of the only meaningful road for man, a concept that becomes increasingly important in his later works, culminating in his novels dealing with the class struggle of the 1930's. This is the belief that man can never triumph over his materialistic environment, that he can only resist it. As the novel closes, Beaut's counterpart among the industrialists, a rich plow manufacturer says:

...perhaps McGregor knew he would fail and yet had the courage of failure...What if after all this McGregor and his woman knew both roads. What if they, after looking deliberately along the road toward success in life, went without regret along the road to failure? What if McGregor and not myself knew the road to beauty?¹⁵

Perhaps this is merely a rationalization and an ennobling of Anderson's decision at the end of his Elyria

¹⁵Marching Men, 314.

years to reject business success and to follow his drive to write and to understand, but the recurrence of deliberately-chosen failure in the conclusions of his later works indicates that it is more than mere rationalization; it indicates that Anderson sees the ultimate end of man as tragic and that any meaning inherent in his life lies in the means rather than the end. Life has meaning and hence is good if it is expended in a cause that is worth dying for. This is the belief that Ernest Hemingway accepted more than twenty years later as Robert Jordan lay wounded but still fighting in For Whom the Bell Tolls; it is just as clear in Marching Men.

This point as well as Anderson's continued concern with the basic sickness in an industrial society has been lost in the shadow of the solution that Anderson had proposed. The image of men marching together as unthinkingly as Beut McGregor's followers has engendered obvious comparisons from a number of critics. Maxwell Geismar has commented, "So it isn't surprising that this early Anderson, motivated by revenge and contempt, infatuated with 'discipline' and 'order', should arrive at an early brand of Fascism in the last half of his novel."¹⁶ Irving Howe makes an interesting comparison with the earlier Populism in which he saw "... an insistently programmed mindlessness...that was sometimes its

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only program..."¹⁷ Furthermore he too sees that the novel "...uncritically anticipates the power worship, the irrationality, and the asexual fanaticism of modern totalitarian leaders..."¹⁸ James Scheville agrees, and even Anderson says, "It was Hitler who eventually worked out what was in my head."¹⁹

Such criticism does seem eminently valid when one considers only the movement itself, isolated from the intent of the work as well as that of its predecessor. Lessening the validity of this view, however, is the fact that it ignores three points: first, the relationship between industrialism and the individual as shown in both novels; secondly, the barriers of inarticulateness and isolation that Anderson was trying to overcome; and thirdly, the nature of totalitarianism as it has been practiced. Much of the neglect with which these factors have been met is due, of course, to the vagueness and indecision of the last part of the novel, but much more is the result of failure to look beyond the surface appearance of the movement and to see it as Anderson was trying to present it.

¹⁷Howe, 87. ¹⁸Ibid., 85.

¹⁹Memoirs, 285. He qualified it, however: "...Hitler did work out my idea and he didn't. There was a danger which I did not see, the one that inheres in all ideals. It is that beneficence or harmfulness depends on the sort of man who puts them into practice."

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In the first place, the relationship between industrialism and the individual, as Anderson shows in Windy McPherson's Son, is such that one cannot remain passively disinterested unless he wishes to become a displaced person like Windy. He can either go along with the system until the price demanded for success becomes too high and then rebel, only to find himself alone as did Sam; he can remain at the lowest levels and suffer alone, as did Beaut's miners; or he can attempt to organize the resistance that can meet industrialism on its own ground, matching force against force, and bring unity to the lonely workers in the process. In choosing the latter course Anderson was not recommending violence, but he was pursuing the course that Samuel Gompers advocated and that the Knights of Labor and the later C.I.O. tried to put into practice: the attainment of regard for workmen as human beings rather than as raw material through concerted, continuous pressure. That this can become fascism has been shown by certain unscrupulous labor leaders, but others have shown it need not.

Anderson's concern for the barriers of isolation and inarticulateness is a theme that recurs in his work. In Windy McPherson's Son it was evident in the inability of Sam's mother to communicate her feelings except through service; it was evident in Sam's relationship with his wife; and it was evident in Sam's search when he was unable to convince people of his altruism during his wandering. In

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Marching Men the problem becomes even more serious because Anderson is dealing with people who are not only suspicious in their hostile environment but people who are completely dominated by it. To overcome the barriers that exist in such a society is not easy, except on the lowest physical levels, as other modern novelists as diverse as Joseph Conrad, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Wolfe, and Ernest Hemingway have demonstrated. Anderson's solution to the problem is to have physical and emotional unity result from the movement, believing that psychological and spiritual unity would follow. That Anderson realized he was oversimplifying is obvious in his ending, but it was this intent that dominated the movement. Again something much more than power for power's sake was intended.

The third factor ignored by those who accept the superficial similarities between totalitarianism and the marching men movement is the most complex, resulting in an almost inevitable misinterpretation, not only because those superficial similarities can easily be mistaken for intrinsic similarities, but more importantly because the modern critic is reading the novel in an atmosphere dominated by the spector of Hitler's men marching over Europe in the thirties and forties and that of Russia's troops doing the same in the fifties. But behind the appearance of these movements and Anderson's, certain intrinsic differences are apparent. Success of a totalitarian movement depends primarily upon

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the deliberate isolation of an individual from his fellows. The individual in such a situation has only one place to turn in a society where brother is turned against brother and child against parent, and that is the state. As a result, the state becomes the center of the individual's world by default if not by conviction because it has eliminated loyalties among individuals. The members of the state appear united as they carry out the state's dictates, but beneath the appearance of unity there are suspicion and fear and hence deliberately contrived isolation among men.

Anderson's movement, on the other hand, was supposed to instill loyalty among men on every level, stemming from their surface unity. Distrust, fighting among themselves, and petty differences would be eliminated, and in their place would be a spiritual affinity that would remove all barriers between them. Thus the men would be able to achieve meaning, dignity, and fulfillment through close association with their fellows, and their surface unity would indicate the depth of their actual unity. It was a fantastic assumption, of course, one that provided a simple and impossible solution to a complex and perhaps unsolvable problem, but in conception it was far from totalitarian.

As previously mentioned, this misinterpretation of the central incident in the book stems not only from the above factors but from the vagueness and indecision with which the movement was surrounded. This was true largely because

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Anderson did not understand the forces that such a movement would unleash and because he was striving to transfer a personal feeling into a positive suggestion without realizing that such an intangible thing cannot be transmuted into a single all-inclusive event. Actually, this is the same sort of difficulty that he found himself in at the end of Windy McPherson's Son when he attempted to solve Sam's dilemma by the simple act of adopting the orphans. Here it is on a much larger scale, dominating the last half of the book. The event itself looms larger and larger, while the human feeling that it was supposed to engender fails to come through, not because it isn't there, but because Anderson's skill was not sufficient to make it clearer and because Anderson was trying to solve too many complex problems with one broad, sweeping solution, and it simply would not work. Hence the movement itself had to be abandoned, and in the process Anderson learned that there are no easy answers; that he would have to probe more deeply and be content with solutions to phases of the overall problem.

Other weaknesses are apparent in the book, primarily of the same sort that appeared in Windy McPherson's Son. Dialogue is still stilted, and unnatural rhetorical flourishes still abound. Characterization tends to become stereotyped, with the single exception of Ormsby, the plow manufacturer, leading Maxwell Geismar to state that he rather than McGregor emerges as the true hero of the book.²⁰ However, in this

²⁰Geismar, 232.

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novel Anderson has advanced in two directions beyond the earlier work. In the first place, from an ideological point of view, Anderson's realization that there is no easy solution also brings him to realize that truth must lie in another direction, in people rather than in circumstances. From this point he marks out a new direction for his following and much more important work. Stylistically, too, the novel marks an advance in that in several instances Anderson permits himself to indulge in a release of free verse-like rhythms, notably in the arbitrarily-inserted passage on Chicago. He writes:

And back of Chicago lie the long corn fields that are not disorderly. There is hope in the corn. Spring comes and the corn is green. It shoots up out of the black land and stands up in orderly rows. The corn grows and thinks of nothing but growth...

And Chicago has forgotten the lesson of the corn. All men have forgotten. It has never been told to the young men who come out of the corn fields to live in the city.²¹

Stylistically this is self-conscious and naive as well as jarring in the context of the novel. Probably it is an early product of the impact of the Chicago experiences, inserted in the process of revision, but it does point out the forthcoming attempt to find a natural style of his own in Mid-American Chants as well as his attempt in that work to effect an ideological return to enduring aspects of the

²¹Marching Men, 156.

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American environment. Here, however, is Anderson's first conscious effort at putting into practice the discovery made through the Chicago renaissance: that a writer must find himself and his own means of expression rather than imitate others.

With the publication of Marching Men Anderson has ended one phase of his literary career and tentatively commenced another. This earlier phase, largely the product of the untutored, almost isolated efforts of the Elyria years, indicates that Anderson was trying desperately to understand himself in relation to the standards of the times, possibly to rationalize and certainly to explain to himself his rejection of those standards, and finally, vicariously, to overthrow them and to put in their place the intimate concern for man as a human being that he saw lacking in the times. Anderson was quick to realize that both attempts were failures. In his attempt to find fulfillment in the act of rebellion, as in Windy McPherson's Son, he found that mere rejection was not enough, that the resulting void must be filled, and that it could not be filled by desires, no matter how strong, nor by a simple act or event. In moving beyond this point in Marching Men he began to realize the enormity of the problem that he had undertaken to solve so easily, in the end indicating that it was merely an honest if unsuccessful attempt and that if love and understanding

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among men could not be induced by a gimmick, nevertheless somehow they could be attained.

In effect with the completion of Marching Men Anderson has completed his attempts to write fiction based upon transferring his own experiences and daydreams directly into the novel form. He was to write much more fiction based upon his own experiences but in future attempts fact was to be subordinated to the demands of his creative imagination, so much so that even the volumes of autobiography are in effect fact transmuted into fancy. These two novels are tentative rather than final efforts; they are novels of rejection and of fumbling efforts to move beyond rejection into realization, and because of the limitations of insight under which their author was working, they are ideological failures in their original conception. However, as the beginning efforts of what was to be a long literary career embracing a search for intrinsic rather than superficial meaning in the American experience, they are most important. Out of them Anderson evolved the course that his future work would take.

In the novels he focused on two basic problems that he knew he had failed to solve and that were to recur in his work almost to the end as he realized that the problems were more universal than he had originally supposed. The first of these, the basic isolation of the individual, is shown in these novels on a number of levels ranging from the apparent intimacy of family relationships to the obvious

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impersonality of industrial cities, and in future works Anderson was to narrow his field of concentration considerably. The second problem, the dehumanizing effects of modern materialism, is not a matter of a course of action that can be reversed as easily as it was placed in motion but is actually a by-product of the other more universal problem.

At this stage in his career Anderson marks his first important shift. The two novels had been the voice of the disillusioned businessman trying to explain to himself the causes of his disenchantment and to propose, again primarily to himself, a panacea for the world's ills. If he had remained in Elyria after this point, content to have put his ideas and his dreams on paper and then to settle back in despair as they were ignored, he might have become another Irwin Anderson or Windy McPherson, lost in a world that he could neither accept nor understand. But two factors combined to prevent this from happening. One of these was, of course, Anderson's fascination with the power of words, stemming from his early experiences at Wittenberg and in advertising and intensified by the determined pursuit of culture during evenings at the Anderson home; and the second was the influence of the Chicago years after he had fled in fact as well as in spirit from the acquisitive life.

As previously indicated, even while Anderson was attempting to find a publisher for these two early efforts, the influences that he found in Chicago were making themselves

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felt in a number of ways, most importantly in bringing Anderson to regard himself as a writer rather than as a businessman-amateur or as a parlor radical trying to undermine the status quo. Two other products of the Elyria years, the manuscripts of the novels Mary Cochran and Talbot Whittingham, were put aside, never to be published,²² and he began to see writing as an artistic end in itself rather than as a means to communicate or to convince as his earlier advertising training had taught him to regard it. Through the reading of Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons and through his introduction to the 57th Street literary colony, both of them brought about by his brother Karl,²³ and in keeping with what he had learned from his writing of Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men, he was literally discovering a world that the Elyria businessman had never dreamed of. The rapidity with which Anderson assimilated the atmosphere of personal and artistic liberation exuded by both Stein and his new associates is indicated by the appearance of a brief essay of his in the first issue of Margaret Anderson's Little Review, the magazine that was the voice of the Chicago literary renaissance. In this essay, entitled "The New Note," Anderson combines facts about writing (as well as about life) that he had instinctively perceived much earlier with the

²²"Unlighted Lamps" and "The Door of the Trap" were derived from the former, however.

²³Duffey, 201.

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belief in self-expression and self-trust emphasized by the Chicago Liberation²⁴ and proclaims a philosophy of writing that is to dominate his career to the end. In terms remarkable for their self confidence after the doubt and indecision that had torn him in Elyria, he writes:

In the trade of writing the so-called new note is as old as the world. Simply stated, it is a cry for the reinjection of truth and honesty into the craft...it is an appeal from the standards set up by money-making magazine and book publishers ...to the older, sweeter standards of the craft itself...²⁵

This is a mere rephrasing of the standards Anderson had advocated in the advertising literature written in Cleveland, adapted from the business world to the literary, and as such it is nothing new. Rather, it indicates Anderson's determination not to let his new career be contaminated as was the old. It is nothing more than a pledge to resist cheapness, no matter how profitable, and to do only what is intrinsically worth doing. In effect Anderson had found an area in which he could put into practice the principles of an innate honesty that were out of place in the business world. Perhaps this was what originally attracted him to writing; it was a field in which he could work without concern for the standards of the market place. From this basis, however, the rest of the essay turns to the new spirit of self expression released by the liberation:

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Margaret Anderson, ed., The Little Review Anthology (New York, 1953), 13.

"...In the love of his craft he [the writer] has done the most difficult of all things: revealed the workings of his own soul and mind." ...Whenever he finds himself baffled in drawing a character or in judging one drawn by another, let him turn thus in upon himself, trusting with child-like simplicity and honesty the truth that lives in his own mind.²⁶

Thus armed with a new faith that was to provide the basis for the rest of his literary career Anderson had in effect purged himself of his earlier view of writing as merely another job of selling; no longer viewing it as a means of propagandizing, he was ready to embark upon his new, consciously-chosen career. He was still married at this time and he still earned his living as an advertising writer, but these were remnants of an earlier existence that had nothing to do with his new sense of liberation. His marriage with Cornelia had been seriously strained when he left Elyria, and although she brought the children to Chicago, it was almost over in spirit if not in fact. The wife suitable for the ambitious young businessman was hardly the mate for the even younger and more dedicated literary artist, and although she tried to accept the new Anderson with good grace, even contributing a book review to the first issue of the Little Review, the marriage could not last. In the fall of 1915 they were divorced, an event that Anderson, evidently feeling guilty about, chose to remain almost silent on in his published memoirs, although he and Cornelia remained on

²⁶Ibid., 14-15.

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good terms. Later he commented that "...it was this feeling of dirt in life, in myself, that had destroyed my relations with my family."²⁷ This comment places the blame for the breakup on the revulsion with which he regarded life in Elyria, but the immediate cause was more likely his acceptance of the spirit of the Liberation.

Entering whole-heartedly into this spirit of the Chicago Liberation, Anderson undertook to express his new-found personal liberation in two obvious ways. His dress became markedly colorful and unconventional, especially in the matters of loud socks and scarves worn in place of neckties; and even before his divorce he spent the summer of 1915 at Lake Chateaugay, New York, with Tennessee Mitchell, a small-town Michigan girl turned musician, dancer, sculptress, and epitome of the newly-emancipated modern woman. Later, in 1916, he married her, inaugurating a relationship designed, in keeping with the spirit of liberation, to place responsibility on neither person.

The Chicago period was the only time when Anderson led what is conventionally considered to be a Bohemian life. The circle of Anderson, Cornelia, and Tennessee remained on good terms even after Cornelia took a teaching job in Indiana, and the three of them, together with the children, vacationed

²⁷Memoirs, 222.

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together in 1916. Meanwhile Anderson's attitude toward his copywriting job became more and more cavalier. Truly he was pursuing the new freedom with the same determination that brought him the nickname of "Jobby" in Clyde and the reputation of a promising young man in business. More significant, however, than these evidences that he was taking his personal liberation so seriously was the fact that he broke literary ties with his earlier works and branched out in an entirely new and free direction, both in fiction and in what was for him an entirely new field, that of free-verse lyricism. The former resulted in Winesburg, Ohio, while the latter made up his next book, Mid-American Chants, the last of the three volumes that his contract with John Lane called for.

Mid-American Chants is a volume representing an abrupt shift from the nature of his previous works in two different directions. Substantially it contains the first fruits of the literary liberation that he had experienced in Chicago. Written probably in late 1914 and early 1915, the verses illustrate his transition from the earlier effort to write in a self-consciously literary and rhetorical style having nothing to do with his own Midwestern personality to a no less self-conscious effort to liberate his writing from "literariness" and to allow it to seek its own natural rhythms. Consequently, in the same sense that the earlier works are the thematic forerunners of Anderson's later works, the Chants are the stylistic ancestors from which they evolve.

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In addition to the stylistic change that Anderson so abruptly makes, a change in purpose is also significantly evident. In the verses as a whole he is no longer interested in selling ideas; rather he is earnestly trying to transfer moments of feeling, of emotion, and of what he feels is insight from his consciousness to that of his reader. His purpose as he states it in the ~~foreword~~ of the slender volume, is to sound a note of affirmation in the American scene, to explore the "...few memory haunted places"²⁸ that have been hidden by the coal piles and slag heaps of an industrial civilization and to celebrate them, hoping that in the process he can set free the spirit of the American people by ridding their consciousness of the sordidness of materialism and puritanism so that they, too, may be able to sing freely.

The resulting collection of verse is so free and so unformed that it becomes not only trying but tiresome; as verse, it is insignificant, but from the point of view of Anderson's literary and thematic development it is the most important of his earlier works. The two-fold shift, in style and in regarding his native experiences as meaningful and worthwhile, lays the groundwork for the outstanding short stories that follow it; hence, in a very real sense the new freedom made it possible for him to discover himself both as writer and as interpreter of the Midwestern experience.

²⁸ Sherwood Anderson, Mid-American Chants (New York, 1918), 7.

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Indications of his newly-found freedom from conventional imitative literary style abound in the volume, much of it out of place in what is supposed to be pure and spontaneous lyricism. Often, however, it seems peculiarly right as he feels his way toward the essence of Midwestern feeling expressed in its native idiom; for example, in "Song of Industrial America" he writes, "Now here's how it's going to come--the song, I mean. I've watched things, men and faces --I know."²⁹ Continuing, he writes:

First there are the broken things--myself and the others. I don't mind that--I'm gone--shot to pieces. I'm part of the scheme--I'm the broken end of a song myself...Now, faint voices do lift up. They are swept away in the void--that's true enough. It had to be so from the very first. Pshaw--I'm steady enough--let me along. Keokuk, Tennessee, Michigan, Chicago, Kalamazoo--don't the names in this country make you fairly drunk? We'll stand by this brown stream for hours. I'll not be swept away. Watch my hand--how steady it is. To catch this song and sing it would do much --make much clear.³⁰

Taken out of the arbitrary verse arrangement in which they were published, verses such as these are not poetry by any stretch of the imagination; they do, however, belong to a tradition that is much older--the tradition of oral storyteller, the man whose purpose it was to seek and to hold the attention of his listeners while he found his way through to the point that he was trying to make. This is the tradition of the Middlewest of the eighties and nineties, when the countless counterparts of Irwin Anderson were holding court in the

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harness shops, the general stores, and the barber shops scattered across the rural countryside, and when Anderson turned his writing loose to seek its own natural style, it turned instinctively to that tradition. Often exasperating in its meandering way and hence unsatisfactory to a modern reader accustomed to crisp directness, nevertheless it is a true rendition of a native Midwestern technique that is not studiously correct but spontaneous, unsophisticated, and honest. As a result it is a style that would naturally attract a man who declared himself to be tired of dishonesty, artificiality, and trickery in the use of words as well as in normal human affairs.

Contrasting with this are instances in which the speech is forced and unnatural, stemming from efforts to be poetically profound, as when he writes, "Into the cities my people had gathered. They had become dizzy with words. Words choked them. They could not breathe,"³¹ but even here the artificial sonorousness is punctuated by the hard, direct language of a rural people. Words like "dizzy" and "choked" are hardly poetic, but they are both functional and right for the people and the places to which Anderson was to devote himself. In keeping with the spirit of the Liberation, which demanded that the artist look to himself for the means of expression suitable to the fusion of experience, emotion, and intuition that he is trying to put into words, Anderson has discovered

³¹Ibid., 11.

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one of the individual talents that he as a craftsman of words will bring to its own appropriate perfection in future works. Here in the Chants, in a medium to which it is not suited it results in a markedly naive and unsuccessful literary effort; when consciously adapted to the form from which it was derived and for which it is most suited, the short tale, it becomes something more, as Anderson was to show in his later works.

The second major shift in direction that occurs in this work is also significant as a point of departure for his later works. In both of the earlier novels Anderson had been so overwhelmed by the evils that he was trying to combat that he could see nothing else. The rural countryside, the peaceful atmosphere of the small town, the order and beauty and fertility of a field of growing corn were ignored by the young man on the make and the hater devoted to crushing the thing that he hated; but in the freedom of form in this volume Anderson permits himself to pause, to look around, and to see that in spite of the industrial monster dominating the American scene, there is much untouched by it that is both good and enduring. He has not forgotten industrialism; it concurrently fascinates him and repels him, recurring in the imagery of verses like "Song to New Song," sung in the face of fiery furnaces, coal heaps, and a sky black with smoke. It exists, but it is unimportant in the light of the important things that he and his people

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had neglected in the novels and to which he now wants to return, taking his people with him.

This concept makes up the major thematic expression of the volume. In "The Cornfields" he sets up his purpose, to call to attention the health, vitality, and fertility that America possesses but has lost sight of; "Song of Industrial America" carries the idea further by focusing on the human things, place names evocative of those strengths and human lives made up of them, that also have been ignored and that must be revived. Even beyond this Anderson proclaims that we are one with our past and our environment and that we must recognize this kinship. In "Song of Cedric the Silent" Anderson bridges the gaps between these things by proclaiming spiritual unity in a manner adopted from Whitman's "Song of Myself."

Throughout the Chants Anderson celebrates whatever he sees to be right and natural, pointing out that the people and the earth exist and that they are good. Much of this celebration is couched in the sexual symbolism of Walt Whitman, as in "Song of Theodore," and in his recurring use of corn as a symbol not of order as in the brief passage in Marching Men but of fertility inherent in the American scene and waiting for whoever is willing to seek it out. He concludes the volume with "Evening Song" and "Song of the Singer" in which he returns to the open fields that hold so much promise and then defies the might of the industrial machine. In

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the former he concludes with hope and trust in the Midwestern countryside; in the latter he proclaims his faith.

As the volume stands it was one that Anderson had to write. At the conclusion of Marching Men he acknowledged that a frontal assault on the forces of materialism was futile and that humanism could not win without giving up its essence and becoming what it was attempting to destroy. Yet he ended on a note of faith as he had in Windy McPherson's Son. Somewhere, he knew, there was something that would instill meaning into lives and break down the barriers between them, but desire, no matter how strong, or action, no matter how sustained, could not do it. One thing remained: to probe into the American consciousness, to find what was true, and to make it known. In effect he is doing what Sam McPherson set out to do in his wandering, to discover for himself what was lasting in America, but he was not trying to do it by direct action, as businessmen McGregor and Anderson had been trained to attempt; rather, he was seeking understanding instead of cures. If he were successful the walls between people would not be demolished by brute force; they would be undermined and collapse of their own weight.. Mid-American Chants marks this change in approach, essentially for Anderson a change from reformer and propagandist to artist.

Here in Mid-American Chants Anderson no longer advocates open rebellion but rather acknowledges and deplores the presence of industrialism and then turns his back on it

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to find meaning and fulfillment in the phenomena of his own Midwest, an environment that he finds is remarkably adapted to solving the problems inherent in American life. In so doing the direction of his search for meaning has become clearly defined, and he turns deliberately away from the battleground of the cities in order to learn to understand the American past and the innermost lives of American individuals, hoping to find in the process whatever it is that isolates man from his fellows and makes him such an easy prey for the philosophy of materialism.

As a book of verse, Mid-American Chants is "perhaps as bad a case of maundering and abortive work as the whole Chicago Liberation, so ready in formless effusion, was to produce;"³² liberty had been too readily interpreted to mean license by Anderson as well as his colleagues, and although the resulting free verse style that is related more closely to prose than to verse has shown Anderson the way to a new literary style reproducing the flat, meandering Midwestern idiom, it does not result in the lyricism that was intended. Rather it results in awkwardness, repetitiousness, and monotony instead of spontaneous expression. From this point of view the book is a failure as a whole, the few genuine lyrics in it insufficient to redeem it. However, from the point of view of Anderson's literary development it is a success

³²Duffey, 203.

because in it Anderson has discovered both himself and his material. No longer seeking fulfillment either in rebellion or in propagandizing against the forces he hates and fears, he is seeking it in a conscious effort to know, understand, and embrace his own Midwest and the people who make it live.

Although writing under the obvious influences of Whitman and Sandburg, alternately celebrating the American scene through an expanded consciousness of the things that make it up and retreating into meaningful and isolated segments of it, Anderson went beyond them in displaying not merely acceptance and sympathy but in showing that although the shortcomings of the new materialism did exert such power, there was hope that they might be overcome by a return to appreciation of the basic values and virtues of the unspoiled pre-industrial American spirit. Hence, America in the Chants is no longer the hostile place that he had depicted in the earlier works, but, epitomized by the Midwest, it has become a source for sympathetic appraisal by a new Anderson giving free reign to an imaginative, sensitive, and sympathetic appreciation of a geographic area seen from a completely fresh point of view. As he concluded the Chants, he had accepted this new view of the area he knew so well, and he had accepted his new role as artist-interpreter of its people who thereby become his.

Even while he was releasing himself in unrestrained and undisciplined lyricism in the verses that were to become Mid-American Chants Anderson's newly-awakened sensitivity toward the psychological and spiritual depths was becoming evident in the short fiction that he was writing between 1914 and 1916. His first published short story, "The Rabbit Pen," as previously indicated, was an innocuous attempt at fusing the symbolism of a buck rabbit running wild in his pen and the improbable love affair of a writer. The fusion is unsuccessful, the symbolism remains hazy, and Anderson is forced to rely on a trick ending. In spirit if not in actual fact, this story is a product of the Elyria years, when Anderson was concerned with telling about people and events rather than showing them in depth in writing. From this point, however, changes became increasingly evident as he shifts from a manipulator of words to an artist who refuses to do tricks with them and from a man concerned with making a point at all costs to one concerned with understanding his people through close attention to psychological rather than surface detail.

This development is illustrated in two of the earlier stories that he contributed to The Little Review. The first of these, "Sister,"³³ published in December of 1915, shows

³³Sherwood Anderson, "Sister," The Little Review II (Dec., 1915), 3-4.

a complete rejection of the artificiality and contrivance of the earlier story. Closely related to the impressionism of the poems, although still vague and indecisive, it nevertheless depends upon force of style and of psychological insight to create its effect. As a story it is weak, but it indicates clearly the direction in which he is moving.

Following this, the story "Vibrant Life,"³⁴ is a semi-autobiographical attempt to lay bare the essence of a man who breaks away from convention only to find himself trapped again. Finally in a macabre scene he attacks a young woman who is sitting with him in the presence of his dead brother; the coffin breaks open, the body rolls to the floor, and the protagonist leers triumphantly at the young woman. The symbolism is heavy-handed and awkward and the story is fantastic, but it was a step closer to the stories of Winesburg, Ohio. Increasingly he was becoming interested in the inner secrets of human life, the twists, the quirks, and the secrets that make communication between individuals so difficult, and he was moving slowly in the direction that would bring them to light in his work. The short fiction of this period provided the apprenticeship in form that he needed, just as the failures in the novels turned him inward and the Chants

³⁴Sherwood Anderson, "Vibrant Life," The Little Review III (March, 1916), 10-11.

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taught him that he had both style and increasingly trustworthy perceptiveness within himself.

The importance of the influence of Gertrude Stein and of the Chicago Liberation group cannot be over-emphasized in bringing about this shift in Anderson's literary direction, both in style and in focus, but other factors were also at work. One of these was his awakened interest in painting, not as a means of expression but primarily because he was interested in color and in the endless possibilities for effect that color provided. As art, his canvasses were meaningless in spite of the fact that the Radical Book Shop gave him a one-man show,³⁵ and Anderson was not deluded into thinking otherwise. But the possibilities inherent in color indicated to him the equally endless potentialities inherent in the words of his own craft.³⁶

Another influence of this period was his discovery of the rhythmic cadences of the Bible, an effect that he tried to secure in his own experimental work. One day he startled the copy room at the agency by announcing that he "was sold on Jesus Christ."³⁷ He was not referring to theology or even to morals, but the music that fascinated him in the New Testament, and he wrote a number of prose poems in which he tried to capture it.

³⁵Not until 1920, however.

³⁶Schevill, 84-85. ³⁷Ibid., 85.

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These factors were primarily stylistic influences; however, his friendship with Trigant Burrow, a pioneer psychoanalyst, brought into sharper focus his increasing interest in the inner workings of the human mind. He had met Burrow during the summer of 1915, and their friendship became close.³⁸ However, Anderson's interest by this time was not in curing but in understanding the ills as well as the strengths of the human heart, and although he approached psychoanalytical techniques in many cases, he relied primarily on his own intuition to ferret out the essence of human character, thereby maintaining his primary interest in understanding rather than merely revealing the human soul. However, detailed discussion of the influence of psychoanalysis on his work is better reserved for the later works, when sexual repression and domination begin to play a major role, but its influence is evident in the Winesburg, Ohio collection.

During the time when these influences were most active, in late 1915 and throughout 1916, he had begun to work on the stories that were to make up Winesburg, Ohio, but as yet he had no idea of their potential as an organic whole. At the same time he was straining at the ties that held him to Chicago. His advertising work had become almost free-lance, and the Liberation group itself was breaking up as the drift to New York began. The early volumes had brought him a measure of

³⁸Duffey, 200.

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fame and respect in the East, and he began to look in that direction, spending more and more time out of Chicago until he began again a period of restless wandering that occupied most of the 1920's.

His association with the Chicago Liberation had served its purpose, and he felt enough confidence in himself and in his work to strike out on his own. During the almost five years of close association with the Chicago group he had changed from a lone reformer trying single-handedly to attack and overthrow a country dominated by the impersonal forces of materialism to a writer who had come to regard his craft not as a weapon but as a means of expression. This shift had been brought about almost entirely through the influence of the Chicago years, and as their hold on him started to loosen, he was about to put into final form the work that these influences had combined to produce out of his native ability. By the end of 1918, he had served an effective literary apprenticeship, and his next published work was to bring him recognition as a master of American writing, a reputation that has endured in association with this work in spite of the many fluctuations of critical estimate of the works preceding and following it.

As the publication of Winesburg, Ohio approached, Anderson had come a long way from a frustrated and embittered businessman who was trying to find personal fulfillment and meaning through condemning and attacking the American business

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civilization to a promising writer with three published books behind him and an enthusiastic if small audience awaiting his next. At this point he had found himself in three ways: he had found himself as an honest writer-craftsman rather than an increasingly hypocritical and disillusioned businessman; he had found the beginnings of a style that was to reflect both himself and the Midwestern world of which he realized he was intrinsically a part; and he had found that beneath the seeming meaninglessness and ugliness of the industrial and commercial surface of America, there was still a solid core that was worthwhile. This core and its most obvious manifestation in the people who had not sold their individualism for material gain was to be the next area that he would explore, not in complete acceptance but in an honest and intense effort to understand. From Sam McPherson's abortive efforts to love without understanding, he had learned that understanding and compassion had to precede love, and in the Winesburg, Ohio stories he was to find all three.

At this stage of his career Anderson had discovered the major direction of his life's work, a direction that is epitomized in the themes he is to pursue, all of them stemming directly from his continued concern for man both as individual human being and as member of society. These themes are not new; they are merely intensifications and clarifications of the unrest and dissatisfaction he had

felt in Cleveland and Elyria. The theme of meaning in a society dominated by superficiality and the theme of man's loss of awareness of himself as a natural being play subordinate roles in his next work, waiting until later for their full expression. In Winesburg, Ohio he once more plunges headlong into the problem of the isolation of the individual human being, but this time he is not a frustrated polemicist; he is a conscious literary artist.

CHAPTER IV

MOMENTS OF INSIGHT

In 1919 Sherwood Anderson published Winesburg, Ohio, a collection of short stories and sketches written between late 1915 and late 1917, the years during which the influences of the Chicago Renaissance had their strongest impact upon him. In the collection he has fused successfully for the first time the elements of his Chicago discoveries about himself and his chosen work; he has passed beyond mere dissemination of propaganda and explanation, gone far beyond self-expression, and produced a mature piece of literary art.

In the Winesburg, Ohio achievement, relationships to Anderson's earlier work are immediately apparent: in subject matter he has returned to the small Midwestern town that had provided the background for the earlier parts of Windy McPherson's Son; in theme he is primarily concerned with the isolation of the individual as he had been to a lesser extent in the first two novels; and in technique he has combined his natural Midwestern style with the short form that he had been experimenting with in the short stories for The Little Review. But to say that Anderson merely combined all these factors and emerged with a major literary

achievement is to over-simplify to an unacceptable degree; there is no intermediate work between his earlier unsuccessful attempts and Winesburg, Ohio that would show that Anderson was consciously striving for the literary effect that he achieved in the volume.

Anderson himself has attempted to account for the abrupt shift from mediocre to substantial achievement several times, most recently and in detail in the Memoirs.¹ According to him the first of the stories, "Hands," was written in its entirety at one sitting as the result of a moment of intense emotional excitement. For days he had been sitting at the window of his room in his boarding house, watching people pass by. "Somehow it had seemed to me...that each person who passed along the street below...shouted his secret up to me. I was myself and still I fled out of myself. It seemed to me that I went into the others."²

This must have been just before or shortly after he had completed the Mid-American Chants volume, in the writing of which he had consciously and deliberately released in himself the spontaneous lyricism that can only be the product of emotional release and the desire to probe deeply into the meanings of things as reflected in one's self. At this time, as he had in the past, even in the years in Cleveland and

¹Memoirs, 279-280 and 287-288.

²Ibid., 279.

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Elyria, he found himself drawn strongly to the people with whom he felt so much sympathy. He was "Trying for something. To escape out of old minds, old thoughts put into my head by others, into my own thoughts, my own feelings."³ Thus far what he had been attempting was very much in keeping with the spirit of the Chicago Liberation, to look into his own heart and to understand others through himself, as he had emphasized in his essay "The New Note" a year or so before. Now he wanted to go farther:

To at last go out of myself, truly into others, the others I met constantly in the streets of the city, in the office where I then worked, and still others, remembered out of my childhood in an American small town.⁴

Suddenly it happened. He went to his table and wrote, finishing "Hands" at one sitting, knowing when he had finished that it was right, that he had captured the essence of "...a poor little man, beaten, pounded, frightened by the world in which he lived into something oddly beautiful."⁵ When he knew that it was right, he knew also that he had found both himself and his vocation, "Getting for the first time belief in self."⁶ In the succeeding days and weeks he finished the rest of the stories, writing furiously at work, in his room, or wherever he could find a moment.

³Ibid. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid., 280.

Whether this account is factually correct or not⁷ really doesn't matter. What had happened was that Anderson had attained artistic insight in a form eminently suited to his own peculiar talents for attaining empathy with other human beings. It is not a thing which can be sustained for long periods of time, certainly not throughout a novel, although flashes of it occur in almost all of his following novels, but in the short forms it is superb. Thus Anderson had found, almost by accident, the form best suited for his ability, one in which he could fuse sympathy, insight, and lyrical excitement and in the process lose consciousness of self in the production of the work.

The last phrase contains the key to Anderson's achievement in the ensuing volume, to be discussed later in dealing with the figure of George Willard, the major unifying figure in the collection. Anderson had been dealing in his earlier works with himself, directly in the case of Sam McPherson and vicariously in the figure of Beaut McGregor. Here he has used the fruits of his personal experience as he had in the novels, but his experiment in Mid-American Chants had shown him that mere experience was not enough, that there was something beyond it, and in Winesburg he goes beyond his own experience into an intuitive perception of the experience of others.

⁷Anderson tells a somewhat different version on pp. 287-288.

Hence, in dealing with other human lives he has passed the surface appearance of each and caught it at a moment that reveals its essence. As he commented, it is as though each person had shouted its secret up to him. Each story is a moment in the life of the central figure, but in that moment Anderson reveals the secret that made that life what it was.

Incorporating these isolated moments of insight into an integrated whole presents a problem in categorizing the volume into one of the convenient pigeonholes of literary convention. It has been called both a novel and a collection of short stories, and Anderson himself always called each element a story, but in its entirety he considered it a novel in a form invented by himself rather than in the derivative form of his earlier works.⁸ In the Memoirs he recalls that

I have even sometimes thought that the novel form does not fit an American writer, that it is a form which had been brought in. What is wanted is a new looseness; and in Winesburg I have made my own form. There were individual tales but all about lives in some way connected. By this method I did succeed, I think, in giving the feeling of the life of a boy growing into young manhood in a town. Life is a loose flowing thing. There are no plot stories in life. I had begun writing of the little lives I knew, the people I had lived, walked and talked with...⁹

⁸Anderson's debt to Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Tilbury Town" poems and Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology" has long been recognized, however.

⁹Memoirs, 289.

Again, whether this new form was a conscious contrivance at the time, as Anderson here indicates it was, or not makes very little difference. The form is, as he comments, a loose one, having elements that draw the stories together, but within the unity thus imposed, there is the diversity inherent in the dozens of lives portrayed, each of them different from the others, and all of them different from Anderson's own. The result is in a very real sense Anderson's first work that is undeniably fiction rather than autobiography.

The difficulty in ascribing a conventional category to the volume has resulted in a number of mistaken interpretations of the work, the most common being that Anderson is showing a cross section of a small town, revealing its secret sins in such detail that he is in effect "revolting from the village," as Carl Van Doren¹⁰ and Russell Blankenship¹¹ have commented. Although this was an early attempt to categorize the book, the generality has endured, in spite of the fact that it is far from what Anderson had either intended or accomplished. Anderson was not writing about any particular social setting, nor was he attacking the social structure as he had in his earlier works. Rather he was writing about

¹⁰Carl Van Doren, Contemporary American Novelists 1900-1920 (New York, 1922), 153.

¹¹Russell Blankenship, American Literature (New York, 1931), 671.

people, exploring deeply and in detail individual human lives in the attempt to set aside the barriers of human isolation and to discover them as individuals, at the same time discovering whatever it was that had erected those barriers. That the individuals he portrays are neither unique products either of the small town or of the large city but common to both is demonstrated by his own statement that many of the characterizations came from "...everywhere about me, in towns in which I had lived, in the army, in factories and offices,"¹² and from William Phillips's study that shows its relationship to Clyde and Elyria.¹³ The work is a composite, drawing for its substance on all of Anderson's experience, but it is not an attempt to describe or to explain any one. Anderson had left such attempts behind him as a result of what he had learned from the novels.

The book is in essence an exploration of the problem of human isolation; however, it does not approach the problem from the sweeping social-structure centered view of the earlier novels but from a much narrower point of view. Anderson has learned that isolation is not merely a product of modern materialism, as Marching Men implies, but that it originates in a narrowness of human vision and an

¹²Memoirs, 205.

¹³William Phillips, Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (University of Chicago, 1949).

inability or in some cases an unwillingness to grapple with and attempt to understand the complexities of human life and experience. These shortcomings result in a self-centered world that precludes the understanding of others. His earlier protagonists, failing to realize this truth, had been unable to penetrate the barriers of isolation because they were attempting to approach others as extensions of themselves rather than as individuals; hence they became caricatures of the epic figures they might have been. In the short stories of this volume Anderson has narrowed his field and has determined to treat isolation as a phenomenon of the individual in an individual sense rather than as a manifestation of a social evil. That it cannot be cured by an all-embracing remedy, he learned from Marching Men; Sam McPherson taught him that it cannot be understood by a direct, determined approach. Now, in Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson is approaching the problem in its simplest individual terms, seeking understanding through intuitive perception of the essence of individuality.

In the first of the sketches, "The Book of the Grotesque," utilized as a statement of purpose, Anderson points out his approach in symbolic terms. As the title indicates, he points out that the individuals he is dealing with in the stories have each been twisted into psychological shapes having, in most cases, little to do with external appearance. This distortion results from both the narrowness of their

own vision and that of others; in some cases the first is primarily at fault, while in others it is the latter. From this point the problem inherent in human isolation takes on two aspects: the first is, of course, the specific cause in individual cases; the second and more important is determining with exactness and hence understanding the nature of each grotesque. Thus, in the book he is approaching the understanding that McPherson sought in a way that demands empathy, compassion, and intuition rather than fierce desire.

In this sketch, which characterizes an old writer who has attained understanding of his fellow men and has retired from life to observe men and to teach them understanding, Anderson defines his problem symbolically because he has learned that there is no direct, obvious cause but that there are causes as diverse as the individuals who make up the world. In the sketch the old writer reveals his secret knowledge of the nature of mankind, noting

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 in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

...There was the truth of virginity and the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of 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 moment that 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.¹⁴

Using this symbolic interpretation as a basis, Anderson sets off to use intuitive perception to try to find in the lives of the people with whom he is dealing whatever it is in themselves that has prevented them from reaching their full potential as human beings and that has cut them off from their fellows. He shows, too, his realization that the cause is not something as easily perceived and denounced as modern industrialism but that it is as old as the human race. False ideas, false dreams, false hopes, and false goals have distorted man's vision almost from the beginning; Anderson is attempting in the stories to approach these people who have had such indignities inflicted upon them as to become spiritual grotesques, and most importantly, he is attempting to understand them as people rather than as curious specimens of spiritual deformity.

Anderson's use of the word grotesque is quite important in this context.¹⁵ In its usual sense in reference to human

¹⁴Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (New York, 1919), 4-5.

¹⁵Although critics have attributed the origin of Anderson's use of the term "grotesque" to adaptation from Poe's Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, a more likely explanation is that it came from the play Grotesques by Cloyd Head

beings it commotes disgust or revulsion, but Anderson's use is quite different. To him a grotesque is, as he points out later, like the twisted apples that are left behind in the orchards because they are imperfect. These apples, he says, are the sweetest of all, perhaps even because of the imperfections that have caused them to be rejected. He approaches the people in his stories as he does the apples, secure in his knowledge that the sources or natures of their deformities are unimportant when compared to their intrinsic worth as human beings needing and deserving of understanding. This approach is based on intuition rather than objective knowledge, but it is the same sort of intuition with which one approaches the twisted apples: one dare not reject because of mere appearance, either physical or spiritual; that appearance may mask a significant experience made more intense and more worthwhile by the deformity itself.

In the body of the book proper, following this introductory sketch, Anderson has set up an organizational pattern that not only gives partial unity to the book but explores

and Maurice Brown. This play was produced at the Chicago Little Theatre in 1915, and Anderson was undoubtedly familiar with it because a review of it appeared in The Little Review II (Dec., 1915), 38-40, the same issue that contained Anderson's "Sister." Also, the use of the term in the play suggests Anderson's later use of it. In the play a sardonic artist manipulates his characters, called grotesques, who are presented as marionettes until they perceive what is being done to them, turn on the artist and rebel. The concept of rebellion of grotesques shows up in some of Anderson's stories written late in the Chicago period and incorporated in later collections.

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systematically the diverse origins of the isolation of his people, each of whom is in effect a social displaced person because he is cut off from human intercourse with his fellow human beings. The first section of the book deals with three aspects of the problem of human isolation, one in each of the first three stories. The first story, "Hands", deals with the inability to communicate feeling; the second, "Paper Pills," is devoted to the ability to communicate thought; and the third, "Mother," focuses on the inability to communicate love. This three-phased examination of the basic problem of human isolation sets the tone for the rest of the book because these three shortcomings, resulting partially from the narrowness of the vision of each central figure but primarily from the lack of sympathy with which the contemporaries of each regard him, are the real creators of the grotesques in human nature. Each of the three characters has encountered one aspect of the problem: he has something that he feels is vital and real within himself that he wants desperately to reveal to others, but in each case he is rebuffed, and turning in upon himself, he becomes a bit more twisted and worn spiritually. But, like the apples left in the orchards, he is the sweeter, the more human for it. In each case the inner vision of the main character remains clear, and the thing that he wishes to communicate is in itself good, but his inability to break through the shell that prevents him

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from talking to others results in misunderstanding and spiritual tragedy.

The first of the stories, "Hands," immediately and symbolically approaches a problem that as a phase of the overall problem of human isolation recurs in Anderson's later work. The story begins by describing the remarkably active and expressive hands of an old recluse in the town. George Willard, a young reporter on the Winesburg Eagle and the unifying figure in the stories, is fascinated by the old man's hands, and in time the old man tells Willard his story: once, as a schoolmaster, he had been accused of homosexuality because in moments of excitement or affection he would tousle the hair of his students or touch them. Thus, instead of being a source of expression, the old man's hands had become a source of shame to him, and he tried to keep them hidden. In the town he is a pitiful and fearful creature, always expecting the spontaneous actions of his hands to be misinterpreted.

The concept of hands as the basic tools of expression of the craftsman is very important in this story as it passes beyond the immediate and takes on overtones of the universal. As Anderson points out with increasing frequency during both this and the next periods of his career, man's efforts to communicate with his fellows have traditionally depended upon his hands because for many things words either do not exist or have been rendered meaningless. Hence, the hands

of a craftsman, a painter, a surgeon, a writer, a lover communicate indirectly something of the truth and beauty that each of them feels inside. Although Anderson is fascinated by the idea, nevertheless he knows that the language of hands is as subject to misinterpretation as any other. In this story he points out that this is not only possible, but it is probable, that the widely-held truth in this case, the existence of homosexuality, has become a falsehood because appearance has been accepted in place of truth. Symbolically he shows how such widely-held truths become falsehoods have inhibited the forces in man that allow him to express himself intimately and creatively. Fortunately, however, he shows that the force still exists, making its possessor the more human and the more deserving of compassion for it, although isolation has deprived him of the power to express his creativity.

In "Paper Pills" Anderson again writes of the relationship between a man's hands and his inner being, this time in the person of Doctor Reefy, a conventionally wise and perceptive country practitioner. Doctor Reefy is as cut off from effective communication with others as Wing Biddlebaum, but his problem is his inability to communicate his thoughts without being misunderstood. Because he recognizes this shortcoming, he writes his thoughts on bits of paper, puts the bits into his pockets, where they become twisted into hard little balls, which he throws playfully at his friend the nurseryman as he laughs.

Here Anderson carries further his introductory comment that there is no such thing as a truth, that there are only thoughts, and that man has made truths out of them through his own short sight. On the bits of paper Doctor Reefy knows that he is writing mere thoughts, but he knows that they would be misinterpreted if communicated directly, so to prevent them being reduced to the grim joke of misinterpretation he prefers that they become the means of a lesser joke in the form of paper pills. Cut off from attempts at direct communication through his knowledge of its inevitable misinterpretation, Doctor Reefy prefers that his paper pills be considered as bits of paper and no more; in effect, the hard shells of the pills represent the barriers of isolation that surround human minds, and Doctor Reefy, voluntarily isolating himself rather than trying to overcome those barriers, deliberately avoids inevitable misunderstanding.

Waldo Frank sees this story as representing the ineffectuality of human thought as it is isolated and fragmented on the bits of paper,¹⁶ but Anderson indicates no such shortcoming in the thoughts themselves. The difficulty, he points out, lies in the process of communication, which, as Reefy indicates, is something that cannot be carried out directly with any assurance of success. Rather than risk

¹⁶Waldo Frank, "Winesburg, Ohio After Twenty Years," Story XIX (Sept. - Oct., 1944), 30.

misinterpretation, he lets the paper pills be considered products of his hands rather than his mind. Yet, even while he throws them playfully at his friend, he hopes that his friend will see them in the light in which every craftsman hopes his work will be regarded--as a product that has taken shape through the work of his hands but that is expressive of his soul. Reefy knows that this intuitive understanding is as unlikely as direct understanding, and so he lets himself become a grotesque because he is unable to find a satisfactory means of communication. The shortcoming lies not in the thought but in the process of communication, and he prefers to convey his thought ironically in the form of a joke, even while he knows that faulty communication of the intimacies of human life is life's inherent tragedy.

The third story, "Mother," deals with the relationship between George Willard and his mother, Elizabeth Willard. In effect the story is the exploration of a theme that Anderson had adapted from his own experience and used in both Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men: the inability to communicate love or understanding between mother and son. The relationship between the two is completely inarticulate, just as it was between mother and son in each of the novels and, more importantly, as Anderson's autobiographies show was the case between him and his own mother. As a result, although this phase is part of the overall problem of isolation, Anderson feels that understanding in this area is

vital. As the theme unfolds in this story, Elizabeth has been forced through the inability of her husband to take over management of both the family hotel, a failing business, and the inner affairs of the family proper. She is resented by her husband as a usurper, and unable to love or respect him, she focuses her interest and love on her son, in whom she sees the potential for the individual fulfillment that her role as woman and as head of the household had denied her. Inwardly she was a mass of determination that violently defied anything that threatened her son; outwardly she was perfunctory, almost apologetic in his presence.

Consequently Elizabeth is continually afraid that her life, spent in opposing both the forces of conventional success and her husband with her son as the stake, is indecisive and meaningless. She can only hope that somehow the boy understands. Finally he announces that he is going away: "I just want to go away and look at people and think."¹⁷ She is unable to reply, but she knows that she has won; "She wanted to cry out with joy...but the expression of joy had become impossible to her,"¹⁸ and the story ends in perfunctory formality, the barriers still solid between them.

In these three stories Anderson sets forth the theme of the problem of human isolation in the three aspects that recur in most of the other stories. These three problems,

¹⁷Winesburg, Ohio, 36. ¹⁸Ibid., 37.

the inability to communicate one's feeling, one's thought, and one's love, are at the heart of the problem, and in the following stories he shows these shortcomings at work in other situations with other central characters but essentially as restatements of the same theme. In each of the characters something deep within him demands expression. Essentially it is part of him that he wants desperately to share with others directly, and he is unable to do it, either through his own inability to break through the shell that surrounds him or else because society forbids it or distorts it. In each case this inability makes him turn in upon himself, becoming a grotesque, a person deserving of understanding and wanting it desperately, but completely unable to find it except in occasional flashes, as in the embrace between Elizabeth and Doctor Reefy in "Death" and in the attempts made by many of them to seek understanding in George Willard. However, such moments merely serve to emphasize the intensity of their isolation as they are startled by a noise or as George misunderstands or fails to understand and leaves them behind in frustration.

As George Willard appears and reappears in about half of the stories as leading character, as an audience, or as a casual observer he lends a unity to the collection that makes it approach the novel form. Much more important, however, is his role in permitting full development of Anderson's theme. In two of the first three stories, "Hands" and "Mother," he

plays the part that has been ascribed to him in more than half of the following stories. To each of the grotesques he appears to be what that individual wants him to be. To his mother he is an extension of herself through which her dreams may be fulfilled; to Wing Biddlebaum he is the symbol of the innocent love that had been denied him; to others he becomes, in turn, a symbol of a long-lost son, of father-confessor, of masculine strength and fertility, of innocent, undemanding human understanding. Each interprets George as he wishes, but to each he primarily serves the function of an ear into which can be poured the inner stirrings of fear, hope, love, and dreams of which each is made. Because he is a part of the apparently integrated community in his job as reporter on the Winesburg Eagle, he represents to each of them the opportunity to restore communication with the world from which each feels excluded. These grotesques see in George the key that will release them from their personal prisons and enable them to resume normal human forms, either vicariously, as in the case of his mother and others, or directly, through understanding, acceptance, and love. Because George is innocent, unspoiled by the world that has rejected and isolated them, they see in him their only chance to return to the fellowship of men.

As a result, Wing Biddlebaum feels confident in his presence and is willing to walk freely with him through the town; his mother feels a sudden surge of strength in his

presence; Doctor Parcival feels confident enough to reveal the secret behind his mask of hate--the overwhelming compassion that makes him declare that "...everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified;"¹⁹ Louise Trunnion in "Nobody Knows" seeks him out for a moment of love that manifests itself in sex. In following stories the role of George Willard parallels these. He is sought out, he receives confidences, he is receptive and sympathetic, and the grotesques for the most part go away momentarily satisfied, unaware that while they have found temporary release, they have not found freedom from the confines of their spiritual prisons.

Only in "Queer," the story of Elmer Cowley, does the grotesque resent the person of George Willard. Just as the others have seen Willard as the symbol of whatever will free them from their isolation, Elmer sees George as the manifestation of the society that rejects him. In this story Elmer resents George and yet attempts to establish satisfactory relations with him. Failing this, he assaults George, leaving him behind bewildered and half-conscious, and hopping a freight, Elmer voices his frustration as he cries, "I guess I showed him. I ain't so queer. I guess I showed him I ain't so queer."²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., 48. ²⁰Ibid., 196.

In this story Elmer Cowley points out the difficulty that the other grotesques thus far have failed to perceive: George Willard does not understand. All of the others had seen him as an extension of self that could not fail to understand and that could ease their passage into the intimacies of human life, and each believed that he did somehow understand, even as he left in sympathy but baffled or, as in the case of Louise Trunnion, completely misunderstanding. But Elmer sees him as society, as the symbol of rejection, and finding himself tongue-tied in George's presence, he can do nothing else but assault George and then run off, defiant but defeated. Elmer sees that George as society does not understand, while the others fail to see that as son, as lover, as mirrored self, he does not understand either.

As the grotesques reveal themselves to George, they do not arouse in him the conventional understanding that they seek, but without realizing it, each of them is contributing to the growth of a more important kind of understanding in him. This kind is based on compassion and on the sincere desire to understand what these people are trying to tell him, and it does not result from objective analysis but from intuitive perception of the nature and worth of the individual. As the stories unfold he is still too young and inexperienced to grasp much more than that, but his contacts with the grotesques are drawing him closer

to eventual understanding through teaching him the compassion and the empathy that will permit him in time to know and understand others.

In the development of George Willard, Anderson indicates that one can learn to seek out moments of understanding, of acceptance, of communication without the use of words that can be twisted, distorted, or misunderstood. Early in the collection George had completely misinterpreted a lonely plea, mistaking it for an invitation to a sex adventure; later, with Kate Swift he almost makes the same mistake, finally realizing that "I must have missed something. I have missed something Kate Swift was trying to tell me;"²¹ and finally, in "Sophistication" his brief meeting with Helen White brings him to realize that sex and love are not synonymous but that they are often confused. This realization makes possible for him the eventual achievement of understanding. In the process he has learned something of the nature of the human heart, both of others and of his own, and he has learned to open his and to listen with it rather than through ears that have become too accustomed to the sound of the truths become falsehoods all around him.

The sketch "Departure" is for George anti-climax. In the microcosm of human nature that is Winesburg he had learned the fundamental secret of human society that one must reach

²¹Ibid., 298.

out and accept and love; he had "...for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible;"²² and he is ready to take his place in that world, taking with him something of each of the grotesques who had sought him out. As long as he remembers that secret he can never become one of them; he knows that understanding comes only in moments of uncomplicated acceptance and love.

Willard's two-fold position in the volume goes well beyond the obvious factor of providing a unifying figure and becomes the means through which thematic development becomes apparent. Human isolation can be overcome and man can take his place in an understanding relationship with his fellows, but such understanding can only come about through intuitive perception of the others as human beings. The normal processes of direct communication are useless; what is needed are increasing and deliberate efforts to attain empathy with others through compassion, through love, and above all, through the process of one's own intuition. That this can be learned Anderson shows through the evolution of Willard's experience from complete misunderstanding through increasing awareness and finally into a state where understanding and fulfillment become possible, at least momentarily. For this, conditions of receptivity must be right; that is,

²²Ibid., 298.

the truths become falsehoods disseminated by society must have been driven from the consciousness.

In his progress from misunderstanding to intuitive insight George Willard's development parallels that of Anderson himself, and in this sense Willard is an autobiographical figure. In his own career Anderson had followed the same path. From misunderstanding and grasping at single truths and rendering them false as he pursued a business career, he had become increasingly aware of others and of the desire to understand them even while his business career began to go to pieces. Then, finally, as shown in the pages of Winesburg, Ohio, he found the secret of intuitive communication with the inner lives of others. As he has pointed out in the Memoirs he had begun to write hoping to find understanding; after the false starts that he made in the novels when he had mistakenly focused on himself and on the world and had failed to find understanding, he has turned away from self into others and has begun to find the understanding he had been seeking.

However, Winesburg, Ohio must not be interpreted as merely an exposition of the theme of human isolation, nor must it be seen primarily either in the light of a young man learning about life or as a symbolic representation of Anderson's acquisition of the powers of intuitive perception. The book's chief merit is that it is about people. Willard's role is secondary to the people about whom each individual

story centers. Whereas the leading character in each of the novels was clearly Anderson himself, either as disillusioned seeker or as fulfilled hero, in this work his role is minor, and he has gone beyond himself and into the lives of others. Each character has elements in common with the others and with Willard, just as all men share the common bonds of humanity, but in each case the character is primarily an individual, differing from the others and of course from Anderson himself in all the idiosyncrosies that make up human character. For the first time Anderson is attempting to write fiction rather than disguised autobiography, and the breadth of individuality in the stories shows the success of the attempt.

Anderson's characterization in the stories is not fully developed, however. In the Memoirs he points out that "...Winesburg, Ohio tried to tell the story of the defeated figures of an old American individualistic small town life..."²³ and in this phrase he points out what he was trying to do and at the same time sheds lights on both characterization and structural technique of the individual stories. The limitations in Anderson's statement account for the fact that although each character was an individual, each was primarily defined by one controlling characteristic that provided both the key to his character and to the nature of his grotesqueness.

²³Memoirs, 290.

More importantly, however, from the point of view of Anderson's narrative technique, each key characteristic was easily definable in a moment of the author's insight into the individuality of the person concerned. Thus, in the stories in which George Willard is absent or makes brief, unimportant appearances, Anderson utilizes not only theme and subject matter to tie the stories into the unified collection, but he uses the same technique of a revealing moment to permit the reader to grasp at the same time both the nature of the individual's isolation and his controlling characteristic as an individual, at the same time effectively strengthening the unified structure of the whole. In "Godliness" he shows Jesse Bentley as a God-intoxicated man who sees in himself the reincarnation of an Old Testament patriarch; in "The Untold Lie" Ray Pearson is depicted as a man who has discovered the futility of judging an act absolutely; "Respectability" pictures a man who seeks love but finds it perverted into sex; "The Strength of God" shows a minister who renews his faith through an unconscious distortion of his own inner drives.

Each of the characters can be revealed in a phrase because each of them carries within himself the complicating factor that provides the framework for the story. But this does not mean that characterization in the stories is slight or simple; it does mean, however, that the characterizations are primarily based upon depth rather than breadth, and each

is a narrow area deeply explored, with the emphasis placed upon the uniqueness of that basic trait.

This concept of characterization leads directly into the narrative technique that Anderson has employed in the stories. There are no carefully-constructed plots, sequences of significant incidents, or patterns of rising or falling action. Rather, the stories are character-plotted, and each consists of the revelation of the character core that is the essence of the central figure's being. Outside events in the stories are normally of little or no importance except as they provide opportunity for this revelation, and in effect Anderson has primarily been providing opportunity for his reader to peer deeply into a man's soul as he puts his stories together. In each this is but the work of a moment, sometimes handled in a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph, but in that brief moment Anderson has revealed, with his sincere compassion, the deepest secret of each character's being, the fear, the frustration, or the love or hope that he kept within himself, often afraid to reveal it.

In combining this method of characterization with an intuitive approach to its ultimate revelation Anderson has provided in the stories a series of moments of insight, each of them designed to provide a brief, intuitive, but true glimpse of the anguish of the human heart. Although his interest in psychoanalysis had been increasing during the Chicago years, nevertheless he does not use the techniques

of artificially induced self-revelation nor does he reveal for the sake of reaching objective conclusions. Rather the technique that he employs is intuitive perception accomplished not through analysis but through empathy, and his purpose is not to diagnose and to cure but simply to understand and to love. The stories are not literary psychiatrists' couches; they are vehicles by which Anderson as craftsman can express the insight into individual aspects of human nature as it has been revealed to him through the intuitive approach that he as artist feels is valid in artistic expression.

In attempting to measure the achievement of Winesburg, Ohio critics have evolved numerous conflicting theories. Criticism contemporary with the publication of the work had seen it as naturalistic or realistic;²⁴ in the thirties it was called primitivistic;²⁵ and more recent critics have seen in it an elaborate structure designed "...to replace the myth of the small town Christian virtues with the myth of the grotesque..."²⁶ by showing "...the sexual and imaginative frustrations of the townspeople."²⁷ This continued attention to the volume indicates the respect that critics have for it and their realization that Anderson has accomplished a substantial piece of work in writing it, but the resulting contradictions indicate primarily the difficulty of ascribing satisfactory

²⁴Blankenship, 665.

²⁵Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America (New York, 1948), 323-327.

²⁶Schevill, 102. ²⁷Ibid., 103.

categories to or providing acceptable explanations for a complex literary work. The categories of realism or naturalism are unsatisfactory as an examination of Anderson's technique and theme shows clearly. Anderson is not expounding the theory of a universe of mechanistic forces operating on his people as the term naturalism would indicate, but he is showing the essence of their humanity. Neither does he depend for effect upon the constant and careful accumulation of sharply drawn detail in the tradition of realism, but rather he sketches, he implies, he insinuates, and he reveals insights in order to arrive at delineation of character and of situation that is inward rather than external. Both categories are unsatisfactory because the stories cannot be twisted or distorted to meet the demands even of loose application of the terms.

The interpretation of the work as an attempt to construct an elaborate American myth is an unnecessary complication that never occurred to Anderson in any of his published remarks on the book. Rather, as Anderson conceived and wrote the book and as the completed work shows, he was not writing about society in the aggregate, either realistically or in the symbolic structure of mythology. He was not writing about society at all; he was writing about people. Each of his people is conceived and presented as an individual rather than as merely another manifestation of society. That he is part of the social structure is important only insofar as

every individual is part of that structure, and Anderson was interested not merely in treating the individual in terms of that relationship; he was interested in treating the individual primarily as human being.

Winesburg, Ohio is the book that provides the solid foundation of Anderson's literary reputation in times of disfavor as well as of favor, and his accomplishment in the work is impressive. It is not a book of rebellion as were his earlier works of fiction; instead, it is an affirmation of Anderson's belief in the durability of the human spirit and of the compassion that he felt was needed at the heart of human relations. In it Anderson has examined the problem of human isolation, not in the hope of curing, but in the certainty of his belief that understanding of men is important because man himself is important individually as well as collectively. In doing so he points the way toward further understanding, hoping that barriers among men can be removed. However, understanding, he points out, must come first, not only because it may eliminate barriers, but more importantly because to know other human beings is to love them, and love is the essence of life.

In the process he examines many specific instances of human isolation, recognizing diversity in both kind and degree and showing understanding of the nature of the problem far greater than that he had shown in the two novels. This major shift in approach indicates that he was consciously

avoiding the mistake of over-simplification as he became writer rather than propagandist or panacea seeker. His most important discovery, however, was his realization that human isolation stems primarily from entirely human shortcomings, those inherent in sex, in inarticulateness, in "...the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence....,"²⁸ and even in deliberate cruelty. For its victims he had hope as well as compassion because, however seriously they might be distorted, nevertheless they were reaching out, aware that others existed and hoping that somehow they might be able to establish communication. Occasionally, however, when he perceived that the new materialism was making inroads among the people, as in "Godliness" and in "Queer," and the central figures were isolated by greed, flashes of the old Anderson shine through. For these people he had contempt, and compassion and hope are replaced by irony that rises at times, as in "Queer," to ludicrousness.

In an examination of Winesburg, Ohio in the light of Anderson's previous works a number of revealing factors come to light. In the first place, he has not shifted abruptly from the thematic focus of the previous works, but a gradual shifting of thematic focus has taken place. The theme of

²⁸Winesburg, Ohio, 66.

human isolation in Winesburg, Ohio is a direct and logical result of the shift that had evidently been taking place in Anderson's thinking. In both Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men Anderson had started with the premise that the effect of industrialism on the individual was to isolate him. In the former Sam McPherson's acceptance of the concepts of materialism had completely cut him off from others, and half of the novel is devoted to his attempts to find his way back into human society. But his direct efforts are futile, and his final decision that it can only be done through love of others is vague and unsatisfactory; his concept of intimate relations with other human beings carries with it too much of the air of Madison Avenue togetherness, but in spite of its vagueness, the ending points out the direction that Anderson will take in his efforts to find fulfillment through understanding his fellows.

In Marching Men Anderson attempts to reduce the vagueness of this ending to concrete terms. His villain is still industrialism and its destructive effects on the human qualities of individuals, but he attempts to break down the barriers of spiritual isolation among men by forging physical bonds among them, hoping that as a result the villain will be overcome and spiritual ties will grow also. Again, however, Anderson indicates in the end that he knows too little of the nature of the problem he is dealing with; such an easy solution, he realizes, is primarily the result of wishful

thinking and it is no solution at all, but it raises other problems instead of solving the overall problem. Both of his early frontal assaults on the problem have proved futile, and a change of focus rather than problem becomes necessary.

Mid-American Chants represents this pause to re-examine both his own position and the validity of his original thesis. His own position has changed and he has found himself as writer; his point of view has been narrowed and deepened; and his realization grows that the problem of human isolation is not manifested in social movements but in individual circumstances in human lives. Combining these three factors he finds that a new approach is necessary, that individuals cannot be categorized or manipulated as easily as he had thought. Using the symbol of the strong, fertile corn that does not seek to interpret, explain, or exploit its existence and its relationships but merely accepts them, he shows that man, too, can only be approached in the same intuitive, compassionate, and accepting manner. At this point, although his basic problem remains the same, his approach to that problem becomes an effort to understand rather than to generalize and cure.

Winesburg, Ohio is Anderson's attempt to incorporate this lesson in human terms. In a much looser form than that permitted by the conventional novel and yet unified by theme, by technique, and by the gradual emergence of intuitive understanding in George Willard, Anderson has narrowed the range of

human isolation from a manifestation of society to a characteristic of individuals. In the process he has probed much more deeply than he had in the past, and he has found that dehumanized materialism is only a symptom of a much older and much more serious human malady. Although he still condemns the isolation that results from the worship of things, he demonstrates many more basic isolating factors in human life: simple inarticulateness; the shortcomings of words as media of communication; the fallacies of class and of status; the misinterpretations which society makes especially in the meaning behind sexual differences; and the confusion of spiritual seeking with sexual desire. All these, as he shows in the collection, can only be understood in individual rather than societal terms.

These factors, he points out, cannot be overcome by specific remedies; they can only be approached and penetrated through intuitive understanding and compassion. That this technique can be learned he demonstrates in the figure of George Willard. Anderson has not sought to erect a myth of the grotesque; he has sought to demonstrate that the grotesque is a human being, an individual, who can be understood if one is willing to make the effort to learn the technique. The false gods, the isolated thoughts become truths become falsehoods, cannot be easily overcome; they can only be overthrown through understanding, through mutual

seeking, and through intuitive perception of the worth of each individual.

Thus, Winesburg, Ohio is not an isolated work as some critics maintain,²⁹ standing apart from Anderson's earlier work. Although as a work of literary art it is far superior to them, the thematic relationship, actually an intensification, is readily apparent. Equally apparent are stylistic and structural relationships. The rhetorical awkwardness that was so apparent in Windy McPherson's Son has almost disappeared, but it was becoming less conspicuous in Marching Men and it received its final blows in Mid-American Chants. Conversely the experimentation with the natural rhythms of American speech that he had conducted in the previous work has become his major stylistic characteristic, pointing toward his later mastery of the reproduction of the oral storytelling tradition that halts, digresses, becomes seemingly irrelevant at times and yet proceeds swiftly toward a carefully defined climax and swift decline. Conversations have become almost entirely natural, the flat Midwestern tones naturally reproduced replacing the earlier imitative and artificial rhetorical flourishes. Characterization has deepened in contrast to the earlier surface treatment; and storytelling technique has become carefully controlled and orderly when compared to the formlessness of the earlier

²⁹Howe, 91.

works. In the book as a whole and in most of the individual stories there is evidence of a plan. In Winesburg, Ohio Anderson knew where he was going, and he was consciously aware of the implications and ramifications of his theme. Each of the stories is a manifestation of that theme, and through the regular appearance of George Willard, the solution to the problem of human isolation becomes increasingly closer as George approaches eventual understanding.

In addition Anderson uses the technique of framing the collection by using sketches at the beginning and the end both to document his thesis and to further aid structural unity. "The Book of the Grotesque" sets up the problem of human isolation and presents its origins in symbolic terms; "Departure" shows that these shortcomings, made real in the stories, are not insurmountable, that there is hope if the individual seeks out the basis of understanding among men.

With the publication of Winesburg, Ohio Anderson had achieved full stature as a writer, but it was not a stature that could remain static. Rather the book marks both the close of the earliest period in his writing career and the beginning of the second. It represents the culmination of his discovery of his own particular talents and his own view of individual lives, and it points out the directions that his future works are to take, two directions that are diametrically opposed, one of them looking backward in time at the American past, and the other forward into the age of industrialism that had been his former prime interest.

In pointing to the past that Anderson will become increasingly concerned with both in later works and in his own life, the volume is permeated with an air of nostalgia, a wished-for return to a state of human society that was uncomplicated, that was characterized not only as "brutal ignorance"³⁰ but also and more importantly, as "...a kind of beautiful childlike innocence [that] is gone forever."³¹ Coupled with this is, of course, the realization that the past is not perfect, nor does Anderson want it so. He realizes, as did one of his people, "...the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg."³² However, in a world less complicated, less dehumanized than the age of industrialism, understanding can be more easily achieved. As a whole, the book nostalgically evokes the memory of a way of life that is gone, and as George Willard looks back from the train he sees that "...the town of Winesburg had disappeared, and his life there had become but a background upon which to paint the dreams of his manhood."³³

Man cannot live in the past, Anderson knew, and Winesburg and its people could not remain static in twentieth-century America, but the town's image remained, to grow in importance in his memory, even as he made plans to "...carry these same people forward into the new American life, into

³⁰Winesburg, Ohio, 66. ³¹Ibid. ³²Ibid., 134.

³³Ibid., 303.

the whirl and roar of modern machines."³⁴ But that way were the frustrations and defeats that he had experienced before, and the image of Winesburg was to become increasingly real so that he would in time seek a return in the fact of his own life as well as in his artistic fancy. However, in 1919, full of the heady stuff of literary success and confident in his own creative powers, Anderson had no anticipation of that possibility. Rather he was already at work on a new novel designed to carry Winesburg and its people into the new age; he was broadening his personal contacts with that age; and he was moving confidently into what he felt was the main current of intellectual and artistic life in the America of his time.

The Chicago Liberation had served its purpose and almost run its course; he had a solid literary achievement behind him; and he felt that he could break ties with advertising and move into full realization of the literary success and personal fulfillment that he felt he had earned. He had served his literary apprenticeship, achieved master's status in his craft, and laid out the direction of his future works, all of them designed to further understanding of the phenomenon of the American experience. Winesburg, Ohio had been a beginning for him, an exercise in understanding that would

³⁴Memoirs, 290.

permit him to move forward, examining larger areas of the American experience, and eventually achieve the understanding that the fictionalized versions of himself in the novels had sought. But these hopes were just that and no more. He had yet to understand the peculiar nature of his own literary gift in spite of his success in Winesburg, Ohio, and he still did not realize the enormity and complexity of the experience that he was trying to assimilate, understand, and define.

CHAPTER V

THE LARGER VIEW: SOCIAL ANALYSIS AND DESPAIR

In spite of Sherwood Anderson's realization that in Winesburg, Ohio he had accomplished a substantial piece of literary work, he was unhappy and dissatisfied even before it was published. Part of this frame of mind stemmed from his dislike of his advertising work and his disenchantment with the direction that the Chicago Renaissance had taken, but even more of it came from his realization that the Winesburg, Ohio collection was not an accomplishment in itself as much as it was a beginning of the work that was yet ahead of him. All of these points of view were expressed in letters written prior to the publication of Winesburg, Ohio, even while he was working on Poor White, the novel that was to take the people of Winesburg forward in time into the new industrial age. The old restlessness resulting from dissatisfaction had returned, almost as intensely as it had struck him in Elyria, and he was ready and eager for changes both in the direction of his personal life and in his chosen work.

In spite of his easy and cynical return to advertising, he despised it and wanted to break away. To Trigant Burrow, he wrote "...it seems to me that I am now ripe to

do something, and I hate to see the years and the days go by in the writing of advertisements for somebody's canned tomatoes..."¹ Instead of devoting his time to trivialities he wanted "...to go up and down the great valley [the area between the mountains] here seeing the towns and the people and writing of the [m] as I do not believe they have been written of."² Nevertheless, although, as he wrote, "...I am willing to live in the very simplest way to accomplish what I want, ...I do need some assured income. I have three children who have to be supported."³ People were willing to pay him for written nonsense rather than what he believed, and he had very little choice. A short stint as a movie publicity man in New York disgusted him even more, and it seemed to him at the time that much as he hated it, he was doomed to the advertising business.

Chicago itself was even more disgusting to him then. It was "...simply formless. You know what that means--jazz bands; weariness; dreary stretches of dull, middle-class houses; [d]umb, badly organized labor; rattling, stinking streetcars; utter shiftlessness."⁴ All this he could ignore if he were permitted to do his work in the way he felt

¹Sherwood Anderson, Letters of Sherwood Anderson, Howard Mumford Jones and Walter P. Rideout, Eds., (Boston, 1953), 45.

²Ibid. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., 30.

it should be done, but even the literary movement that had freed his talents had degenerated: "The Little Review got too dreadfully inartistic and bad. I can't stand appearing there any more, and there is no place else to appear. There has never been a time in America when the literary artist was so completely stranded high and dry."⁵

Nevertheless, out of this seeming indecision and confusion Anderson was slowly but surely evolving a sense of direction both for his own life and for his work in the period following the publication of Winesburg, Ohio, and so tightly did the two become fused in his mind that he laid out the paths of both concurrently. To Van Wyck Brooks, a newly acquired friend, he showed this unconscious fusion clearly.

One has to realize that, although there is truth in the Winesburg things, there is another big story to be done. We are no longer the old America. Those are tales of farming people. We've got a new people now. We are a growing, shifting, changing thing. Our life in our factory towns intensifies. It becomes at the same time more ugly and more intense.

God damn it, Brooks, I wish my books would sell for one reason. I want to quit working for a living and go wander for five years in our towns. I want to be a factory hand again and wander from place to place. I want my frame to unbend from the desk and to go back and listen to this new thing.⁶

At this stage Anderson well knew that if he was to continue his self-appointed task of trying to understand the

⁵Ibid., 44. ⁶Ibid., 31.

American Midwestern experience as he had known it, he had to make a break once more, just as he had when he left Elyria, but now, as then, it was a difficult proposition. During these few years between early 1918 and the publication of Poor White in 1920, he spent as much time as he possibly could away from Chicago, from advertising, and incidentally, away from his second wife, Tennessee Mitchell, who was still a sincere believer in the Chicago Liberation movement which he was beginning to realize he had outgrown. Poor White was started in New York during his abortive press-agent experience, and most of the first draft was written there, evidently under the same conditions of pretended attention to business affairs that he had maintained in Elyria and in the Chicago advertising agencies. During this time, too, he was becoming more widely acquainted in New York, meeting through Waldo Frank The Seven Arts circle, including Van Wyck Brooks, with whom Anderson found a common absorbing interest in the meaning of the American experience. In spite of their different backgrounds and educational levels, the two became close friends, and Anderson returned to Chicago reluctantly even though he couldn't stand the dishonesty that he found inherent in press-agentry. Nevertheless, the influence of Brooks remained strong, partially accounting for his coming shift to the analysis of American society that was to find expression in his novels of the next few years.

In Chicago, Poor White was temporarily abandoned; it was "...about laid by, as we out here say of the corn crop in early October. It is in shocks...The husking is yet to do,"⁷ and he worked sporadically at other things while he sought for a means of escape from Chicago. In January of 1920 he became ill with influenza, and seeking an inexpensive, warm climate in which to recover he went to Mobile, Alabama, where he discovered the leisurely sort of life that he thought had died with the coming of industrialism. Here he finished Poor White, returning to Chicago in the spring with some measure of confidence returning together with his health and with the "husking" of the manuscript. Combined with this sense of satisfaction, too, Anderson shows an increasing awareness of his relationship to the Midwest that he had discovered in writing Winesburg, Ohio. To Brooks he wrote:

Back here I almost feel able to say I don't care if I never travel again. The place between mountain and mountain I call Mid-America is my land. Good or bad, it's all I'll ever have.⁸

Although the first part of his statement may have been sincere at the moment, nevertheless his restlessness continued, especially because of his strong attraction toward the literary circles of the East and his new interest in the South. The latter part of the statement is, however,

⁷Ibid., 43. ⁸Ibid.

indication of his continued intuition that he both could and would unlock the secret of the uniquely American Midwest of his youth.

Poor White⁹ is the first product of his efforts to go beyond the limitations inherent in the Winesburg, Ohio approach and to build on the lessons he had learned in writing it and at the same time carry his people forward into the new age of industrialism. In this respect it is a continuation of the story of Winesburg, in which individual lives become lost in the face of the gigantic industrial forces let loose on the Midwestern countryside. As Anderson remarked in the introduction to the Modern Library edition of the novel, it was in that sense an autobiography of a town during its transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy. The people of the town gave it its life, but the unfeeling forces of industrialism gave it its direction.¹⁰

Such a statement, however, must not be taken too literally because Anderson had learned in preparing for and writing Winesburg, Ohio that he could not ignore the individual, and the story is in fact not the biography of a town but the biography of people in the town whose lives have been warped by industrialism and its concomitant greed. In writing Winesburg,

⁹Sherwood Anderson, Poor White (New York, 1920).

¹⁰Sherwood Anderson, Introduction to Poor White (New York, N.D.), ix.

Ohio he had focused on individual lives, providing as a by-product an intimate and detailed picture of American village life in the late nineteenth century; in Poor White he was to do the same thing in the tighter form of the conventional novel, focusing on fewer characters in more detail, but at the same time depicting what has happened to the town and its people during the period of change.

In seeking to go back in time to identify the origins of the American Midwestern experience as clearly as possible Anderson draws heavily on the work of another Midwesterner, Mark Twain, for whom he had a deep, intuitive sympathy, seeing him as a man who "...hears the whispering of the gods... [because] he was the half-savage, tender, god-worshiping, believing boy. He had proud, conscious innocence."¹¹ Poor White begins in Mark Twain's Mississippi River Valley, the microcosm of what he had characterized in Winesburg, Ohio as the age "...of the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence..."¹² Out of this environment that produced Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, the symbol of that age of innocence, Anderson has produced Hugh McVey, the protagonist of Poor White, who grows up in the image of Abraham Lincoln, to emerge, like Lincoln, an unwitting symbol of a new age.

¹¹Letters, 33. ¹²Winesburg, Ohio, 66.

McVey's father, like Huckleberry's, is a drunkard, a victim of failure in an age increasing conscious of success, and in McVey's early years in Mudcat Landing, Missouri, Anderson shows the first evidences of the loss of childhood innocence and the intensification of brutal ignorance. This is the point where Winesburg, Ohio leaves off; from here Anderson moves McVey rapidly and inevitably into the new era.

The coming of the railroad is the immediate symbol of the new age as well as the means whereby McVey enters it, but more important is the philosophy he learns through the wife of the stationmaster who employs him. Just as Huck Finn had been forced to become civilized by the Widow Douglas, Hugh is also, but whereas Huck rebels, Hugh is unable to, and he absorbs and accepts her New England philosophy that "It's a sin to be so dreamy and worthless."¹³ He is determined to succeed, to amount to something, to get ahead in the world.

Here Anderson touches upon a phenomenon noted by other Midwestern novelists: the impact on the area of the New England puritan concept that work and close attention to business affairs were the only acceptable Christian activities for a man. Louis Bromfield calls this influence the concept of the peddler,¹⁴ a pragmatic materialistic philosophy

¹³Poor White, 12.

¹⁴Louis Bromfield, The Farm (New York, 1933), 68.

that had much to do with the direction of thinking and action in the Midwest after the frontier had passed. Anderson, growing up as he did on the western edge of the Firelands Area of Connecticut's Western Reserve, had had the opportunity not only to learn the philosophy but to experience it in action.

In spite of his proclivity to dream, McVey perseveres, becomes a skilled telegrapher, and in time comes to Bidwell, Ohio, a town that is in effect Winesburg as it was when George Willard left it. Anderson sketches the spirit of the town, the time, and the area as it was:

In all the towns of mid-western America it was a time of waiting. The country having been cleared and the Indians driven away..., the Civil War having been fought and won, and there being no great national problems that touched closely upon their lives, the minds of men were turned in upon themselves...

In all the great Mississippi Valley each town came to have a character of its own...a kind of invisible roof beneath which every one lived spread itself over each town. Beneath the roof boys and girls were born, grew up, quarreled, fought, and formed friendships with their fellows, were introduced into the mysteries of love, married, and became the fathers and mothers of children, grew old, sickened, and died.

Within this invisible circle and under the great roof every one knew his neighbor and was known to him. Strangers did not come and go swiftly and mysteriously and there was no constant and confusing roar of machinery and of new projects afoot. For the moment mankind seemed about to take time to try to understand itself.¹⁵

¹⁵Poor White, 46-47.

Bidwell was, then, Winesburg as George Willard had seen it from the train, poised and waiting on the verge of entering into the new age. It was still a town of individuals and of groups, of craftsmen and of laborers, but a wise man of the town saw the change coming: "'Well, there's going to be a new war here...It won't be like the Civil War, just shooting off guns and killing people's bodies. At first it's going to be a war between individuals to see to what class a man must belong; then it is going to be a long, silent war between classes, between those who have and those who can't get. It'll be the worst war of all.'"16

It is this war that Hugh McVey, the unconscious instrument of the age, is to bring about. He becomes an inventor, his inventions are taken up by young men of affairs in the town, and in time Bidwell becomes an industrial center. Again Anderson attempts to recapture the atmosphere that made this transformation emerge from idealistic dream to realistic and materialistic fact:

New talk ran through the town. A new force that was being born into American life and into life everywhere all over the world was feeding on the old dying individualistic life...It was meant to seal men together, to wipe out national lines, to walk under seas and fly through the air...17

As the new industrialism, sparked by the inventive genius of Hugh McVey, came into being in the town the realities of greed, corruption, and cruelty replaced these

¹⁶Ibid., 51. ¹⁷Ibid., 62.

ideals. McVey, the innocent creature of circumstance, rebelled, but it was too late, and the war prophesied by the old man came true: oppression and strikes became the fruit that the town harvested instead of its earlier agricultural products, and McVey, like the earlier Anderson, could only turn his back on the industrial giant and seek meaning elsewhere.

This skeletal outline of the book's narrative structure indicates that Anderson has written the biography of a town, and in doing so he was drawn heavily on the experience that went into both Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men. But, although Anderson's earlier protest against industrialism is still very much in evidence, this is not a sociological document nor is it mere protest. Rather, Anderson's concern here is with the impact of the new industrialism on the individual and the ensuing warping of character that produces technological grotesques more horrible than those he had depicted in Winesburg, Ohio. The work becomes, then, much more than the biography of a town; it becomes the vehicle for moving the people of Winesburg into an age that produces a more rigid isolation, a more horrible individualism, and a more demanding conformity than anything they had ever known before.

This, then, becomes the major theme of the book: the study of the impact of industrialism upon the human personality. The central figure, Hugh McVey, shows this impact

most clearly and definitively, but its ramifications are evident throughout the book on every level of society ranging from the country squire turned entrepreneur to the farm boy turned millhand. The effects of industrialism are shown to be an intensified isolation, a confused and often meaningless sense of values, and an economic inhumaneness more pronounced and more deliberate in the economic jungle than it had ever been before. ✓

In delineating Hugh McVey as the central character Anderson has not merely given his novel focus; rather, he has attempted to portray a character that would incorporate within himself the essence of the American myth as it has been taken over by industrialism. As executed, McVey is another Edison, a man capable of seeing through to the heart of a practical problem and taking practical steps to solve it, in the process making human life a bit easier and more convenient to live. However, Anderson embodies in the character of this Edison-like figure an insight and a sense of human worth that a practical man rarely has time for, and the resulting combination produces a figure who occupies a position in the industrial realm parallel to that of Abraham Lincoln in the political realm.

The resemblance of Hugh McVey to Lincoln is not merely accident, however, rather, Anderson has constructed it carefully, utilizing physical awkwardness, a dreamy nature, and a strain of practicality as well as a deep sense of compassion

to produce a man capable of embodying the various American myths and giving them focus, as had Lincoln.

Anderson has done this because he has seen the parallel between the struggle of which Lincoln became the focal point and that which he intends to symbolize by McVey. The Lincolnian struggle was an effort to attain political freedom that in time, it was hoped, would result in spiritual freedom and the ultimate ennobling of man, and this struggle Anderson sees as a forerunner of the fight for economic freedom that he hoped would ultimately have the same end.

Like Lincoln, McVey's origins are humble, obscure, and firmly rooted in the frontier traditions of freedom and individualism. At the same time each feels a compassion for his fellow man that transcends the ruggedness of frontier individualism and makes him, in effect, his brother's keeper rather than his competitor. Each man has a personality made up of a combination of dreamy idealism and practical dedication, the latter both threatened and modified by the former so that a stormy balance is struck. Taciturn and unpretentious, each has pursued a course of meeting the problem of liberation head on, seeking an idealistic solution in a practical, direct way, and each sees the goal of physical liberation within reach and the final spiritual liberation on the horizon.

In carrying on the struggle, however, each has become an unwitting tool both of men whose motives are less noble

than their own and, more importantly, of forces of their respective ages. Although each has unleashed the forces, he can no longer control or direct them to desirable ends, and neither physical nor spiritual liberation materializes. Lincoln's death left the forces unleashed, resulting in the chaos of Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, but Anderson lets McVey live, and his final realization of what he and industrialism had done and his resolution to find a cure for the resulting evils through an increased awareness of human values leave hope for the future.

The parallel between Lincoln and McVey is carried through in the area of human relations. Lincoln is the classic isolated figure in American history. Tall, silent, and mysterious, he has given rise to an entire body of American folklore that shows him constantly reaching out to others, pardoning sleeping sentries and bewildered deserters, taking time to write letters of condolence to poor widows, attempting to establish a common ground with an unsympathetic wife; and in McVey Anderson portrays the same characteristics in essence if not in fact. Again, Lincoln's death left his isolation unresolved so that myth-makers may make of it what they will. But McVey lives, and in the final pages of the book Anderson indicates that McVey's reaching out is beginning to show results, that the first, most intimate gap has been bridged.

Anderson provides no blueprint for carrying this out, however. His means had already been proposed in Winesburg, Ohio: to ignore the conventional and superficial interpretations of human acts and relationships and to probe intuitively and compassionately beneath them for common understanding as man and man rather than man and woman, doctor and patient, teacher and pupil, or any of the other conventional dichotomies.

The impact of industrialism upon Hugh has been to de-lude him into confusing means with ends and to make of him a well-paid but unthinking servant. He has been saved, however, by his innate sense of honesty that made him revolt at the obvious theft of another's patents and by the influence of his wife, the daughter of the richest man in Bidwell. Prior to her marriage she had maintained an active rebellion against the forces of convention that attempted to make her a grotesque, and she maintains that attitude toward industrialism and materialism. She represents in the novel the free spirit who refuses to let herself become imprisoned and distorted by outside pressures of any kind, and in spite of the misunderstandings she encounters she maintains her personal integrity and tries to expand it through intimacy with others. It is this lesson that McVey eventually learns from her as he begins his search for personal fulfillment through understanding and loving others rather than through the invention and accumulation of things.

On lower levels the impact of industrialism is both immediate and brutal. In some of the best and most intimate sections of the book, strongly reminiscent of the moments of insight in Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson shows the farmhand who comes to the factory to save himself from the isolated drudgery of the farm, only to find a more intense isolation and more demanding and degrading job in the shops; he portrays the bewilderment of the little people of the town, especially of Joe Wainsworth, the harness-maker, whose craft has been superceded by the machines;¹⁸ he shows the degeneration of human values into materialistic values as the townspeople seek fulfillment in selling out to the new age.

The struggle in the novel, then, is actually that of attempting to find and retain human values in the face of a defiant, whistling, screeching industrialism, just as it had been in Anderson's earlier novels. But Poor White is a much more analytical approach to the same problem. Industrialism itself is no longer the villain, the source of all human spiritual ills, as the earlier novels maintains. Rather, it merely provides the opportunity for an intensification of the same inhumanity, the same individualism run wild, that had distorted the people of Winesburg and all people since men began to live in groups and to adopt standards of appearance rather than intrinsic value as measures of worth.

¹⁸This, perhaps, indicates an increasing understanding of the quandary his father had been in, and it lays the groundwork for an important theme in his next period.

Industrialism is potentially a source of much good, as Anderson points out; it becomes evil when it is controlled by materialistic values rather than human values. In the long range view, however, he has hope that man may acquire the proper sense of values, as Hugh McVey indicates, but in the meanwhile life for the little people is destined to be a series of private, personal tragedies of farmhands, harness makers, and others who have found their lot to be exploitative.

In the novel Anderson has furthered his attempt to understand the Midwestern experience of his time by fusing the first major theme with which he dealt, the impact of industrialism on the individual, with the second, the problem of human isolation. Both appeared in Windy McPherson's Son, but they were parallel stories because Anderson's anger at materialism prevented him from seeing that the former is merely a manifestation of the latter, and both appeared but remained unjoined because Anderson was misled by his search for a cure. Winesburg, Ohio, following tentative explorations in Mid-American Chants, brought him to the realization that human isolation resulted from the confusion of appearance with reality, and here in Poor White he has finally learned that the giant industrialism is neuter, that it takes on meaning only from the human elements that control it; thus the problem resolves itself to the ultimate one of attaining the intuitive perception of human worth that he

had sought among the people of Winesburg and placing that value rather than the superficial value of appearance in the controlling position in the new age. Hugh McVey, in the end, is marking out this path; as Anderson comments, "The poor white...who had forced himself in advance of his fellows along the road of mechanical development, was still in advance of his fellows of the growing Ohio towns. The struggle he was making was the struggle his fellows of another generation would...have to make."¹⁹ This is the problem that Anderson is to return to, after a good deal of doubting, searching, and questioning at the end of his career.

As a novel, Poor White is a complex and important work, chronicling as it does the rapid transition of the American town from an agricultural to an industrial economy, but it is not a perfect work. Problems of structure remain to mar it as they had the earlier novels, although the artificiality of style, diction, and conversation of the earlier novels has been replaced by the natural idioms and style of Winesburg, Ohio. Digressions that seem to belong in the shorter pieces become barriers that prevent the easy flow of narrative in the novel form as in the long section devoted to Clara Butterworth. More important than this, however, is the fact that Anderson had not yet learned to end a novel. Indecision is acceptable at the end of one of his sketches or stories; it

¹⁹Poor White, 304.

is accepted as part of life rather than life itself, but in a novel the same sort of ending results in dissatisfaction.

These shortcomings are strengths in the shorter forms when combined with Anderson's ability to penetrate to the essence of character; in the novels they tend to point out Anderson's major ability as a writer: his propensity and ability to tell only part of a larger story. In the short forms, the reader feels, therefore, that he has been permitted a glimpse beneath the mysterious surface of life; in the novels he has had more than a glimpse but he is still no closer to the ultimate meaning of life than he had been before. The result of such indecisiveness is further documentation of the thesis that consciously or unconsciously, Anderson is making each of his works a part of the panorama of Midwestern experience that all of them combine to make. Nevertheless, the individual novels leave the reader unsatisfied. In Poor White the individual sketches of the little people of the town remain vivid, but the demands of the novel form limit his ability by forcing him to straight exposition, and his particular gifts suffer as a result.

On the whole, however, Poor White is a major achievement. Marking as it does Anderson's first attempt to fuse and interpret the apparently diverse themes with which he had been concerned, it is the first novels of his artistic

maturity, and with Kit Brandon it remains one of his best. Furthermore it is clear indication that Anderson's concern is not with the naturalistic or the realistic in human life and affairs but with the humanistic values that make life livable.

Poor White ends on a note of optimism that Anderson was finding difficult to maintain in his personal affairs. In spite of a favorable critical reception that added to his growing reputation as a writer, it added little to his financial standing, and the future seemed to be a long, bleak succession of advertising agencies. He worked sporadically at free verse to be incorporated in a volume called A New Testament; he worked on a never-completed novel called Ohio Pagans, and he worked on short stories in the Winesburg, Ohio manner, but the demands of the advertising agency made him grim, and he felt that his escapes from it could be nothing more than momentary releases.

At the same time he was bitter about both the general reception of Winesburg, Ohio and the difficulty he was having placing some of his work. Not only had he received a substantial amount of poison pen letters accusing him of writing filth, but even some of his friends missed his point. To Van Wyck Brooks he write, "It did hurt...when I found you also taking Winesburg...as a sex book. It got under my hide a bit. I'm usually thick-skinned."²⁰ In the Memoirs he

²⁰Letters, 59.

recalls that "At the time however I was half ill for months. 'I will write no more,' I told myself, and sometimes when I had received...perhaps a half dozen abusive letters I went and got drunk. 'If I am so filthy I shall be filthy,' I told myself."²¹

Not only were his published works not selling well,²² but he was having trouble placing shorter pieces, and he had little hope that he would ever be able to earn a living writing. "New Republic, Nation, Freeman," he exploded, "None of them give a damn for literature really. They seem to feel that creative writing has nothing to do with revolution."²³ They had just in turn rejected a short sketch, "The Man in the Brown Coat," which subsequently appeared in The Little Review.

Meanwhile, sick and disgusted, he continued to work, abandoning Ohio Pagans in favor of sustained work on short stories, which he began to see as a collection in a form much looser than the Winesburg stories but nevertheless a unified and organic whole. Poor White came out, was well received, but did not sell. At this point he wrote the long tale "Out of Nowhere into Nothing" for the collection that he started to call The Triumph of the Egg. Early in

²¹Memoirs, 297.

²²Winesburg, Ohio, for example, sold less than five thousand copies in two years.

²³Letters, 59.

1921 he completed the collection and was casting about at odds with himself, even quarreling with Waldo Frank, when suddenly Paul Rosenfeld offered to pay passage to Europe for both him and Tennessee. He accepted immediately, and in May they sailed for France.

In spite of the fact that the exodus of the expatriates was on, Anderson was not running from America; unlike the others of the times he had no intention of remaining in Europe. Rather, as he indicates in A Story Teller's Story,²⁴ he was eager to drink in all the culture and sense of time and beauty that his narrow life had denied him, but he was not critical of America for the cultural shortcomings that it possessed. Rather he believed that America, like him, had much to learn, and he felt they would learn together, he directly and America vicariously. At the same time, France, he felt, was old, but America was young and adaptable, and in time its culture would surpass that of France. Generally his trip was enjoyable and broadening. He met Gertrude Stein for the first time; he made many literary acquaintances; and he arranged for European publication of his earlier books.

In view of an abrupt change in his handling of sex in works immediately following the trip, it may be that

²⁴Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (New York, 1924), 398-410.

there is a direct relationship between the two, and there is some evidence to support the hypothesis. In the earlier works, from Windy McPherson's Son to Poor White, the sex act is either a brutal hunger, as between customer and prostitute, or a tawdry, half-shameful, furtive, and mutually unsatisfactory relationship between husband and wife. In works following this trip, starting with Many Marriages, Anderson tries to bring sex out into the open so that it may be seen as the healthy and good thing that he maintains it is. To attribute this shift to three months in Europe is to oversimplify to a dangerous degree, but as James Schevill points out, in the notebook that Anderson kept during the trip appear statements admiring the free acceptance of the human body and sexual love among the French.

Upon his return his fortunes began to change. In October of 1921 he was awarded the Dial Prize of two thousand dollars for a promising young writer. Anderson, who was forty-five, accepted gratefully, and the ensuing publicity, aided by favorable comments by W. L. George and Sinclair Lewis, tended to increase the demands for his earlier books. When The Triumph of the Egg appeared later that fall, it was well received and sold well, and Anderson saw the chance to free himself from advertising, which to him was dishonesty; Chicago, in which he felt that both the Liberation and its ideas were dead; and the marriage with Tennessee which had been unsatisfactory for him for some

time. Tennessee, like Chicago, symbolized a break with convention and with the past, and both of them had served their purpose. Now he felt that he had gone beyond them, and with his increasing sense of social and literary responsibility he had no more patience with either.

The most important event after his return was, of course, the publication of The Triumph of the Egg. As if in realization of the fact that he could very often most nearly approach the essence of human existence in the short story form, he made very few pre or post publication comments about what he was trying or had tried to do. Instinctively he seemed to realize that it would stand on its own literary merits and that his own defense of it would be unnecessary, a supposition that, if made, was entirely correct. The volume contains some of the stories that have been consistently pointed out in anthologies as models of the American short story.

Unlike his previous collection, Winesburg, Ohio, The Triumph of the Egg does not have the unifying factors of setting, character, time, and structure that have made Winesburg approach the novel in form. It does, however, have a unifying theme that serves the prime purpose of tying the stories together so that the work becomes more than a general collection and approaches a consistent statement of Anderson's view of the ultimate end of the individual human life. In the sketches devoted to the little people caught

up in the onslaught of industrialism in Poor White Anderson had pointed out that their lot was hopeless, that only in the larger sense could man regain control of his destiny by regaining control of the industrial giant; here in The Triumph of the Egg he ignores the larger view, focuses his attention upon the individual lives of the same little people he had seen in Bidwell, in Winesburg, and in Chicago, and points out that for them there is no hope nor is there any promise of any. As the book continues from story to story, the intensity of the premise accumulates until finally at the end of the volume Anderson's compassion for his people culminates in despair over the tragedy inherent in their lives. Prior to this, even though the context of each earlier work contained much that was tragic, he ended each on a note that indicated the chance that personal salvation, however unlikely, nevertheless was at least possible for his people. In this work that possibility no longer exists.

An important difference between the individual tragedies of Poor White and of this collection immediately becomes apparent, however, In Poor White these tragedies were induced by the economic framework of society; here in The Triumph of the Egg they result from the same human shortcomings that he had pointed out in Winesburg, Ohio, intensified, however, by the social structure. As a result he sees man imprisoned by forces primarily of his own making, either in the personal or the collective sense, and the

individual is able to do no more than glimpse the bright promise of personal fulfillment somewhere outside the iron bars of his own personal cage.

In order to give a semblance of structural unity to the volume Anderson begins and ends with brief prose-poems, the first of which is designed to set forth the theme of the book, and the second of which concludes the theme by placing the responsibility for the lack of human fulfillment squarely on man himself. In the former, "The Dumb Man" the direction of the stories is laid out: in the midst of an incident that is apparently meaningless Anderson points out it is possible for one to determine the secrets of life, death, and love, and hence know both himself and others, but that the insight gained can never be given to others. "I have a wonderful story to tell but know no way of telling it,"²⁵ he laments in conclusion.

As in Winesburg, Ohio Anderson is primarily concerned with the problem of human isolation in each of the following stories, but the last line of "The Dumb Man" indicates the seriousness of the problem as he now sees it. A sense of inadequacy, frustration, and despair emanates from those lines and finds its way into the human lives and relationships that he probes for understanding in the stories. As

²⁵Sherwood Anderson, The Triumph of the Egg (New York, 1921), 4.

he intuitively grasps the essence of each life he also makes apparent the inherent tragedy of personal and human inadequacy in each.

In the first of the stories, "I Want to Know Why," Anderson returns to the rural Midwest and to a boy's initiation to the realities of life to start off the collection on a note of frustrated bewilderment. Long considered an example of the art of the short story at its best and widely anthologized, it is considered a classic example of the "adolescent initiation" theme. However, this interpretation is only possible when the work is examined alone; when treated in the context of Anderson's work as a whole and especially in its position in this volume as the opening story following such a declaration of frustration and despair, it takes on a deeper, more complex, and more significant meaning. In spite of its adolescent atmosphere Anderson uses the story as a vehicle for expressing what is to him the most important of adult tragedies: the inability to understand the complexity of values and emotions that not only make up society but, more importantly, that make up each of the individuals of which society is composed. The adolescent narrator is convenient, perhaps even necessary, because he is uninhibited enough to give voice to frustrations that an adult would be expected to accept.

The story tells of a Midwestern youth who, fond of race horses almost to the point of obsession, follows the

races to a meet at Saratoga. In the course of the story Anderson examines values of society and of individuals through the eyes of the boy, noting the contradictions and the illogicality inherent in them, and at the end the boy protests at his inability to understand them. The first of these contradictions is on a comparatively simple note: a white man will tell on a bad or mischievous kid; a negro man won't. The boy makes no attempt to explain the contrast, but he muses on it, while Anderson implies that the white men, having given their allegiance to a standard of values outside themselves, have lost the ability to understand others. The negroes, on the other hand, have not had to make that concession, and their understanding remains intimate, uncomplicated, and personal. This is a theme to which Anderson returns later, examining it more closely in Dark Laughter.

There are other contradictions apparent to the boy: the good, generous man who is condemned because he is a gambler; the men who fail to see the beauty of a race horse but see him only as a vehicle for gambling. (The negroes, incidentally, are capable of seeing and appreciating that beauty, but few adult whites are.) The most important contradiction, however, is that which gives rise to the plaintive title: the trainer of a beautiful, smoothly-coordinated horse who can leave the horse and visit a prostitute who, although she is superficially pleasing, is "not clean like

...[the horse], but with a hard, ugly mouth."²⁶ There lies the real tragedy of human life: that a man who has seen real beauty can fail to recognize it and turn instead to a cheap substitute. It is the basic confusion of values that underlies all the rest, and the boy, like Anderson, is unable to explain it.

Here Anderson is not talking about adolescent initiation to life; he is talking about the same confusion of values that had misled Sam McPherson and Hugh McVey. In this story, however, Anderson points out that the problem is too deeply rooted in individual as well as societal standards to be expelled either by personal rebellion or rejection or by sudden altruism. It is tragic because man is unable to distinguish between the beautiful and the cheap or the real and the make-believe.

Brooks and Warren comment adversely on the lapses in style that permit occasional glimpses of the adult narrator who has intruded on the boy's story,²⁷ but Anderson has become craftsman enough by this time so that it is safe to assume that these lapses are not accidental. Rather, they permit the reader to see the adult implications of the theme. Anderson had adopted a Swift-like mask of youth, but again like Swift he wants to run no risk of misinterpretation,

²⁶Ibid., 18.

²⁷Cleanth Brooks, Jr. and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York, 1943), 349.

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and so the mask is permitted to slip. The boy is bitter at the dichotomy of values that has destroyed his world. The adult is even more bitter because he is helpless in the face of it.

In the second story, "Seeds," Anderson provides an adult commentary on the same human phenomenon. An experimental piece containing an opening dialogue between two symbolic figures and a concluding illustrating sketch, the story first contrasts the role of the artist with the role of the psychoanalyst. Intuition is the key to understanding the human heart, he concludes; "'It is given to no man to venture far along the road of lives...Fool--do you expect love to be understood?'"²⁸ he asks. Only the artist, with compassion and understanding, can penetrate the "...old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men"²⁹ that are choking human life and preventing its fulfillment. The concluding sketch, the tragedy of a young woman who confuses love with sex, bears him out. We know that love will save us, he concludes, but we are unable to recognize or find it.

"The Egg," the most complex and the best of the stories in the collection, is an example of Anderson's story-telling art at its best. On the surface it is the story of another of Anderson's grotesques, a man who is congenitally incapable of reaching the levels of success that he and society respect.

²⁸The Triumph of the Egg, 23. ²⁹Ibid.

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His comic efforts to give the public what it wants and the frustrations that result from his inability to do so are described by his adolescent son who sympathizes with his father, but, like the adolescent in "I Want to Know Why," is unable to do more than speculate on the causes.

Within this story framework Anderson has not only provided a sympathetic view of one of the grotesques like those in Winesburg, but he has attained a symbolic level that points out the growing frustration with which Anderson was beginning to regard his inability to understand through intuition the basic failure of man that made him carry within himself the seeds of his own tragedy. In nature, as the story shows, the problem of deformity is simple. If the hand of the Creator slips, the resulting physical grotesque dies, and the process of reproduction continues. Man's problem is more complex, however, because his most serious deformity is not physical but spiritual, and such deformities, created by his own failures, are not fatal. In spite of his grotesqueness, man lives, but because of it he is unable to find fulfillment. The egg contains the key to the secret of life, but that secret, like the source of man's deformities, is hidden by the strong but fragile shell. Both shells resist attempts to steal their secrets until, unable to resist any more, they explode into chaos. As Anderson said in "Seeds," man cannot venture far along the road of human lives; the grotesque in each man prevents him from understanding

the grotesqueness of others. If he persists in his attempts he discovers chaos instead of the order he seeks; he is not merely defeated, but he is made into a fool in the process.

The father in the story is worth further consideration, both as a grotesque who is baffled and helpless as he fails to recognize this inability to cope with the complexities of a world that has no place for him and as a contrast to father portrayals in Anderson's earlier works. Here for the first time Anderson portrays the father as a grotesque, as a man who is spiritually deformed but nevertheless deserving of the compassion that he eventually finds in the narrator, his own son. In Windy McPherson's Son, Sam had seen Windy as a fool; in Winesburg, Ohio, George Willard saw his father as completely neuter, deserving of neither compassion nor scorn; while here the son regards his father with a sympathy and understanding that transcends his obvious shortcomings. The son is, of course, no more capable of understanding his father than he is the mystery of the egg, but in spite of this he recognizes intuitively that his father is worthy of love, whether understanding of him ever comes or not.

Through this evolving portrayal of the father image Anderson is intuitively and unconsciously moving toward penetrating the shadow of Irwin Anderson that had dominated his youth, remaining as an unsympathetic, inept figure during his business years, and emerging as a caricature of a

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wastrel in Windy McPherson's Son. Anderson has not yet consciously attempted to probe his own personal life and relationships as he is to do during the middle of the 1920's, but his intuition is preparing him to go beyond appearance and determine the essential meaning of those experiences and to know his father. This possibility is not apparent in "The Egg," of course, because Anderson does not see it himself, and in the story the father remains forever unknowable and alone.

This note of frustration at the hopelessness of the situation each central figure is caught in continues throughout the collection, with nothing to mitigate it as the central figure of George Willard counteracted the hopelessness of the individual grotesques in Winesburg, Ohio as he moved toward eventual understanding of them. The people in the stories are completely unable to penetrate their isolation, even though they catch occasional glimpses of the liberated life outside themselves, because there is no one they can approach without being completely misunderstood. In "Unlighted Lamps" this difficulty is especially obvious, as a young girl seeks love and understanding first from her father and then from a young man. Repulsed by her father and completely misunderstood by the young man, the girl is alone at the end, lost and unfulfilled.

The other stories combine to turn this hopelessness into despair; "Senility" portrays an old young man who can

cure "coughs, colds, consumption, and the sickness that bleeds"³⁰ but not the sickness in his own heart. "The Man in the Brown Coat" parallels this story on another level as its central figure, a college professor, learns to understand the secrets of ancient civilizations but not the secret that will enable understanding and love to grow between him and his wife. He is "...as alone as ever any man God made,"³¹ Anderson comments as he too is left to sit in hopelessness.

In two of the stories, "Brothers" and "The Door of the Trap" Anderson shows the fate of two people who attempt to penetrate the barriers isolating them from others. In the former the old man who proclaims his kinship with other men is called insane; in the latter, another college professor realizes that his efforts can only be misunderstood and so, like Doctor Reefy in "Paper Pills" he voluntarily withdraws from his efforts and becomes another unfulfilled grotesque. The sketches "War" and "Motherhood" reinforce and extend the air of despair that emanates from each of these lives as they point out that man's only hope lies not in personal fulfillment but in the mindless impersonality that makes the cycle of life go on.

Paralleling the adolescent initiation into the imponderability of life in "I Want to Know Why" is that of

³⁰Ibid., 93. ³¹Ibid., 100.

the emotionally adolescent spinster in "The New Englander." Here, too, the story goes beyond the theme of mere initiation and portrays adult frustration and despair. Transplanted to the new, fertile land of the Midwest, the woman finds that human society, characterized by the sterile ideas of dead men, forbids her to emulate that fertility by finding acceptance and understanding, and she, too, learns the futility and hopelessness of trying to break through her isolation and find understanding and fulfillment.

The intensity of the despair that permeates the volume is epitomized by the last story, "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing," as Anderson documents the title by a story that shows not only the rigidity of man's prison of unfulfilled and unknown self but goes beyond this point to intensify man's sense of aloneness by permitting him to hope for liberation and to see the possibility of it almost within grasp, only to find himself mistaken in what liberation is as it turns ironically into the same sort of misunderstanding that he has been fleeing. The story of a young girl who goes from her small town home to the city and finally back to the town in her search, "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing" plays an important part in Anderson's analysis of contemporary life. Here the heroine has given up the battle in the city; it, she feels, has already been lost, and she has returned to the town for the final struggle against dehumanization and isolation. Instinctively the girl feels that somewhere in the people

of the town there is meaning, but after thinking she has found it and then realizing her folly, she is left with no choice but to run off into the night, into the emptiness that had characterized her life. Here Anderson foreshadows his own return to the town and his own intuitive hope that he may find meaning there.

Concluding the volume with his statement that men can do nothing but run from life with "fleeing harried minds,"³² Anderson concludes his examination of all these facets of human life lost in despair. Up to this point, no matter how desperate the situation might appear in each of the earlier works, at the end he had shown that there was at least hope that individual human beings might be able to break through the barriers that kept them from finding fulfillment in love and understanding mutually achieved. Here, however, there is none. As he had learned earlier that mere rebellion and intense desire are not enough to liberate the individual, so here he shows that he has learned something else: that there are limits to the intuitive understanding that he had had such high hopes for as he concluded Winesburg, Ohio. Intuition, like rebellion, is not an end in itself; it is merely a means to an end, and neither alone is sufficiently strong to carry the individual through to ultimate realization.

³²Ibid., 269.

In The Triumph of the Egg Anderson recognizes the triumph of the imponderables as he documents the lot of his people who, frustrated and bewildered at every point, can only conclude that they have come out of nowhere, that their lives are completely hopeless, and that they can end the torment of their existence only when they as individuals go back to the emptiness of their origins. Life may continue its immutable cycle, but there is no hope for the individual. At this low point, completely frustrated by such a situation and blinded by despair, Anderson's people are ready for another sort of rebellion, a blind and mindless striking out at the forces that are destroying their identities; just as the Marching Men movement was an attempt to break down the barriers between people by force, so is the futile assault against the "creeping crawling things"³³ that Anderson portrays in his next work, the novel Many Marriages.

As a whole, The Triumph of the Egg is a solid literary achievement. Two of the stories, "I Want to Know Why" and "The Egg," are among the best that Anderson was ever to write, and "Seeds," "The New Englander," and "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing" are more complex although not as well executed. The latter two, especially, seem more like first drafts than perfected works because structural awkwardnesses occur and

³³Ibid., 32.

the symbolic structure is somewhat hazy. However, none of the stories is a failure although the prose poems used as preface and conclusion are redundant in the light of the sustained impact of the theme.

The volume is not as effective as Winesburg, Ohio, not only because the stories are uneven in execution but because it lacks the unity in setting and characterization of the earlier volume and, more importantly, because the steady, insistent note of hopelessness in all the stories tends to callous the reader's mind with its repetition long before the final note of despair is struck. Like Winesburg, however, the collection is about people, all of them different, all of them human, and all of them effectively portrayed. Just as Winesburg provided a cross section of village life as it presented the individual people of the town, The Triumph of the Egg presents a cross section that transcends the boundaries of village life and comes closer to a portrait of the people of Anderson's Mid-America as they emerge from the village and move into the world. As in Poor White, the frustrations that make men grotesques in this work are increasingly the products of society and of economics rather than men's own limited vision.

In the context of Anderson's work at this point the ensnarement of his people and their ensuing despair is no accident as the cumulative intensity of the theme shows. When the works are considered as individual stories rather

than a unified whole, much of that intensity is lost, and resulting interpretations see only part of the whole. This loss results in an undue emphasis upon Anderson's view of sex as frightening or unwholesome, but in the context of the collection unsatisfactory sex is shown as only one of the many manifestations of the isolating barrier between men. "I Want to Know Why? then becomes not merely "...the awakening of sex in a boy of fifteen"³⁴ but a desperate, frustrated plea for insight into the seeming imponderability of human life, a naive pleas that only an adolescent is free to make, and "Out of Nowhere Into Nothing" reflects the hopeless confusion of an adult who has learned that he can never find the answer to that question.

Further documentation of the fact that this overwhelming air of despair in the work is no accident is seen in Anderson's actions after the book had been published. As it began to sell fairly well, he took the Dial prize money and went South again, to New Orleans, leaving Tennessee and advertising behind him. There he began sustained work on Many Marriages, evidently again at peace with himself. In February, 1922, he wrote Gertrude Stein that "I came down here about a month ago and am living in the Old French Creole Quarter, the most civilized place I've found in

³⁴Schevill, 162.

America, and have been writing like a man gone mad ever since I got off the train."³⁵ In addition to the novel, he continued prose poem experimentation and work on short stories, but he knew that this period was only a temporary respite. He had to decide his future course with both his wife and the advertising business. Late that spring he returned to Chicago. That summer he made his final break with both and headed east.

Anderson's goal was New York, but his trip there was slow and uncertain, and he was evidently undergoing a soul-searching as intense as that which had brought him to nervous exhaustion just before he left Elyria. This was undoubtedly the time that he stopped in Elyria "...to try to arrive at some sort of basis for self-criticism."³⁶ He wandered around the old scenes; he saw that another name had replaced his on the paint factory sign that he had erected so proudly; anonymously he passed his former banker in the street; in the process he knew that he had made another irrevocable move and that advertising and Tennessee were as far removed from his life as were paint manufacturing and Cornelia. He continued his trip to New York, renewed in his determination to remain free and to write.

³⁵Letters, 87.

³⁶A Story Teller's Story, 316.

In New York Anderson underwent a period of discovery similar to but far less intense than that after his original flight from Elyria. The literary circle in which he found himself was far more subdued and a bit older than the Chicago Liberation group. He became close friends with Alfred Stieglitz, a craftsman-photographer for whom Anderson had deep respect; he renewed his friendship with Paul Rosenfeld; and he met Elizabeth Prall, who was to become his third wife. His days were devoted to working on Many Marriages and on short fiction, and his evenings to plays and conversation.

Many Marriages was finished late that fall, and it was published in February, 1923. During the intervening months, with the pressures of sustained composition eased, Anderson and Elizabeth saw a great deal of each other. Before long they were in love. At this time a shorter version of Many Marriages was appearing serially in The Dial, and his literary reputation in New York was growing. Miss Prall was a quiet, well-educated intellectual, and perhaps each of them saw in the other an ideal realized. To the bookish young woman Anderson was a literary lion, while to Anderson Elizabeth was a new anchor that would halt his increasing restlessness and at the same time complement his increasing literary respectability and acceptance. Shortly after the beginning of 1923 they decided to be married, and in February Anderson went to Reno, Nevada, to get a divorce from Tennessee.

Almost simultaneously with this trip, Many Marriages appeared. In this novel Anderson has taken up the offensive against the social forces that have frustrated his people and driven them into despair. This novel is a product of that despair, just as Marching Men was the product of his earlier hopelessness in Elyria. Like Marching Men, this novel goes beyond mere rebellion and attacks the source of despair head-on, and like his earlier attack this, too, is doomed to failure because it is instinctive rather than rational and blind rather than directed.

The novel is a direct outgrowth of the belief expressed in "Seeds" that we are "...covered with creeping crawling things³⁷...choked by climbing vines...[of] old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men;"³⁸ and as that story and many of the others following it point out, the most deadly and the most unnecessary of these forces is the perversion of the potentially mutually fulfilling sex act into a secret sin, and Many Marriages is an attempt to expose that error for what it is.

The resulting novel was one of the most startling and controversial of its day. Hailed as a masterpiece by such of Anderson's contemporaries as Theodore Dreiser and Scott Fitzgerald, it began to sell very well, and Anderson's

³⁷The Triumph of the Egg, 32.

³⁸Ibid., 23.

decision to leave the security of advertising seemed justified. But a strong reaction against the nature of the book set in; it was condemned in New England, libraries refused to buy it, and even booksellers were keeping it under the counter. It became known as a dirty book in a day when puritan influences were still strong enough to prevent its wide dissemination, and the sales dwindled to nothing. The book has never been reprinted.

Contemporary criticism has preferred to see it remain hidden, primarily because it is considered an unfortunate lapse in what had to this point been a growing literary career and reputation. On artistic grounds this decision is justifiable; Many Marriages is not a good novel, and it is far from Anderson at his best, especially in the short fiction that preceded and followed it. Yet, to ignore it with conventional adverse criticism about the defects in structure and symbolism that mar the book is dangerous. From the point of view of Anderson's continued search for self-identity and for extension of his identity into final understanding of the American Midwestern experience, Many Marriages is very important.

The novel is, as previously indicated, a mindless rebellion growing out of frustration and despair, an offensive against stifling and dehumanizing convention. Essentially it describes the attempt of John Webster, a small-town manufacturer of washing machines, to break

through the accumulated morass of middle class values and to find personal fulfillment, leaving home, family, business, and social position behind him as he runs off with his secretary. To this point the novel appears to be another retelling of Anderson's theme of rebellion, with moral standards the villain instead of industrialism. The difference here becomes more important than the similarity, however, because the rebellion and its aftermath take on ramifications that never would have occurred to the Anderson of the earlier period but that are products of Anderson's new awareness of the complexity of standards of values and behavior and of their effect on the individual.

One of the most important distinctions is that Webster was not a self-made man as were the earlier Andersonian heroes. Having inherited his ideas along with his business and social position, his questioning of them does not result from physical acts, as is the case with the earlier protagonists, but from intuition, from a vague feeling that something is wrong with those values. This sense grows stronger until Webster realizes that they are denials of the right of the individual to know and to fulfill himself through others. As he comes to recognize this feeling as valid, it becomes epitomized in his relationship with his wife, and the rebellion follows, culminating in a long, symbol-strewn scene in which he tries to explain and justify his actions to his daughter so that she may escape the

ruinous effects of conventional mores, and then he goes off with his secretary into what he hopes will be a life of fulfillment.

Thus examined superficially, the book appears to be a symbolic representation of the intellectual revolt of the Chicago Liberation during the previous fifteen years and of the expatriate movement then going on, but beneath this surface treatment three factors are evident that distinguish Anderson's attempts in this book from his earlier rebellion against industrialism and his participation in the later intellectual revolt. First is the fact that Webster himself is a grotesque and remains one to the end; second is the long explanation that occupies most of the book; and third is the ending itself, which contrasts strongly with the optimism of the endings of the earlier novels and with the spirit of artistic liberation.

The first of these factors, the grotesqueness of John Webster, places his hero in the same category as the people of whom he had been writing since he started the Winesburg stories, and Webster is at once a refinement and an extension of the type of warped personality that results from the isolation of the individual both from self-knowledge and fulfillment and from effective communication with his fellows. Unlike the Andersonian heroes of Windy McPherson's Son, Marching Men, and Poor White, Webster is unable to find the hope of eventual fulfillment through the act of withdrawing,

but, like the people of Winesburg, he can only hope to find it through indentifying himself, his hopes, and his dreams with another person. In Winesburg, Ohio George Willard did not understand the grotesques who sought him out, partially because they did not understand themselves and partially because of George Willard's inadequacy. The same situation exists here. Webster seeks understanding from his daughter and from his secretary, but there is no evidence that either understands, and in spite of his rebellion he remains as isolated, as far from reaching understanding and fulfillment, and as tragic as any of the earlier grotesques. In effect, Webster, like the central figures of The Triumph of the Egg, has passed out of nowhere into nothing. The thought that the hero could remain unfulfilled would be heresy either to Sam McPherson or to the liberated individual of the artistic rebellions of the time.

The long explanation that occupies much of the book is also a strong and significant contrast to both of these factors. This is not only the plea for understanding in which the grotesques of Winesburg indulged themselves, and it is not merely the plea for sexual liberation that most critics call it, although these are part of the whole, but it is primarily the extended verbalization of the frustrated grotesques who have been victimized by personal or societal factors since the dead ideas of dead men first began warping human personality. Simply stated, it is a protest against

the shortcomings inherent in human relationships: the lack of ability to communicate and to reciprocate understanding and love; and the tendency to accept the surface values of relationships rather than to probe their essence. These shortcomings were what eventually trapped Sam McPherson and Beaut McGregor into accepting pat instead of intrinsic answers, and they were the same shortcomings that allowed the liberation movement to become stagnated in perpetuating the act of rebellion and prevented it from going on to the understanding Anderson sought.

Because Anderson couched this long protest in sexual and ritualistic symbols without making them clear, the symbols have become mistaken for the thing symbolized. The passage was intended to be shocking so that it would be eloquent and forceful in calling attention to the shortcomings in human relations, but the impact was such that the passage failed in its purpose, and its symbolism as well as that of the title lost its significance. "How many marriages among people!"³⁹ Anderson cries out, but he is not merely regretting those made according to law, the most common, the most abused and abusing; rather, he is protesting that the important marriages, those of human sympathy and understanding, have been made impotent by man-made and perpetuated errors.

³⁹Sherwood Anderson, Many Marriages (New York, 1923), 193.

The third factor that marks a contrast between the ending of Many Marriages and the optimism with which Anderson concluded the earlier novels and adopted the spirit of the liberation is the outcome of John Webster's rebellion. At the end of the novel he was as trapped by the demands inherent in his decision as he had been before; the outward signs of ensnarement had changed, but inwardly he realized that he had merely traded one set of limiting and dehumanizing values for another. He still had no understanding of himself; the secretary at his side was a stranger; and he had no choice but to continue to carry through his rebellion. He could not turn back, nor could he assume that he was moving forward into realization. Rather, in spite of the decisiveness of his act, he did not walk forward into the future confidently; instead he ventured uncertainly into the unknown. The rejection of convention had been accomplished, but after the purging of his emotions through the long, ritualistic explanation, he was left with nothing.

Many Marriages then is a product of Anderson's attempt to understand the world around him in terms of the grotesques who populate it, and like The Triumph of the Egg, in its rejection of easy solutions to the problem of human isolation it becomes a document of frustration and hopelessness. No longer can the individual find fulfillment in the act of rebelling, as Anderson has learned; to think that one can is merely to delude one's self. Rebellion is a beginning, not

an end in itself, but once the act has been accomplished, one has no choice except to go on searching for the answers to that problem. At this stage, as Anderson sees the individual frustrated and defeated all around him, he feels that the chances of success are very slight, but he must go on searching.

Many Marriages is neither a good novel nor is it bad enough to consign it permanently to oblivion, as critics who mention it prefer to do. Of course, to regard it with the high praise of many of Anderson's contemporaries is absurd, but to ignore the important position that it occupies in the chronology of Anderson's work is equally absurd. Behind the many excesses with which Anderson cloaked it is a thematic statement that is simple yet profound, and it is not trivial. Unfortunately and rightfully, however, a writer cannot expect his reader to fight his way through a mass of undigested symbols that in effect become red herrings before emerging with full understanding of the author's purpose.

The weaknesses in the novel are, of course, serious. The worst defect is structural, especially in the fact that Anderson devotes more than half of the novel to the long, cumbersome explanation that Webster makes to his daughter. Actually this incident is the novel, and the events leading up to and following it are mere framework. While explanation and protest are what Anderson was trying to express in the novel, nevertheless the incident has been padded to the point

where it loses most of its dramatic impact through constant repetition and through the introduction of so much shocking material that it loses its value as an attention-getting device and becomes the center of attention. This can only result in detracting from the value of the novel from an artistic as well as from an ideological point of view.

Not quite as serious but equally annoying is the general air of excess about the book, especially in the actions of John Webster and in Anderson's attempts to attain universal significance through the use of symbol. Webster's eccentricities and nudity serve a limited purpose, as do the symbols of the Virgin, the candles, the "Jewel of Life," and Webster's ritualistic actions, but the emphasis upon substance rather than appearance that these things represent becomes lost, and they become merely trite and meaningless, so much so that even Anderson himself abandons them after having made them so obvious.

There are, of course, many possible explanations for the fact that these defects appeared in a work so soon after the first-rate work in Winesburg, Ohio, Poor White, and The Triumph of the Egg. The most plausible are two: first that the "irresistible impulse" that Anderson maintains compelled him to expand the Dial version into a novel was just that. Anderson felt himself frustrated both in his personal life and in his work. The difficulties of earning a living, publishing his work, and attempting to undo

the mistake he had made in marrying Tennessee had combined with his encounter of social disapproval in his attempts to be honest in his work at the same time that he was discovering the hopelessness of the lot of the little people with whom he was dealing. The result was an explosion, an ill-considered novel that was primarily a vehicle of rebellion and denunciation.

A second possibility is that Anderson was conscious of the fact that this, like Winesburg, Ohio, might be considered a dirty book, and in his desperate efforts to convey the implication that sex was a mere symbol of a more serious malady he piled symbol upon symbol in such confusion that an idea that was perfectly clean to him became obscure to his readers, and in the process he compounded his difficulties by distorting his original purpose into something he hadn't intended. His letters of this period are evidence that he had taken such criticism strongly enough for it to have had this effect on his work.

Weak though it is as a novel, Many Marriages has a valid point to make, that many of the standards of value and behavior in our society work irreparable damage to the psychological structures of the people who live in accordance with them. Although he has not formulated any answers to this problem, he is focusing on it. What is lacking, however, is the indication that Anderson is yet beginning to understand the origin or nature of these standards. As Many Marriages ends, he is contemplating them in despair.

While Many Marriages ran its brief course, Anderson remained in Reno, establishing the six weeks of residency needed for a divorce, but Tennessee, who had long proclaimed in keeping with the spirit of the Liberation that marriage should be mutually liberating rather than confining, refused to give her consent, and Anderson remained in Reno until January, 1924, when Tennessee finally consented. Here he put the finishing touches on another book of stories, Horses and Men, and started the impressionistic memoir that was to become A Story Teller's Story. The mood of frustration remained with him in spite of his enthusiasm for the desert and the mountains, and the enforced loneliness made him start to re-examine himself and his beliefs. Shortly after his arrival there he wrote, "There is so little one man can do for another. What is to be said? What is to be done?",⁴⁰ and again, "I know I do not want New York and the neurotics any more for a long, long time. I've got some seeds in me, and if they'll sprout, I'll grow a little fruit..."⁴¹ Of himself he thought "...I've had too much prominence. It isn't any good. It's bunk."⁴²

This desire for withdrawal and a sense of personal as well as philosophic futility dominated his thinking, and his many letters from Reno not only reiterate and emphasize his moods but they point out his efforts to reach out to

⁴⁰Letters, 94. ⁴¹Ibid. ⁴²Ibid.

and hold onto his friends, especially Gertrude Stein, Van Wyck Brooks, Alfred Stieglitz, and Jerome and Lucile Blum. To them he wrote primarily of himself but not about himself. Rather the letters, like John Webster's long performance in Many Marriages, were attempts to verbalize his beliefs so that he could not only make himself understood but so that he could understand them himself. The basis of his belief he recognized early: "You see...I believe in this damn mixed-up country of ours. In an odd way I'm in love with it. And you get into it, in my sense of it, quite tremendously,"⁴³ but this was just a beginning. Here in Reno he was beginning a period of personal analysis in an effort to know and understand himself and his beliefs. His attempts to understand the American Midwestern experience through the medium of the intuition that had promised so much in the Winesburg stories had resulted in frustration and despair, and he was casting about for a new approach, a process that would occupy him for five years.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 1923, Horses and Men was published. The critical reception was generally enthusiastic, but he seems to have paid little attention to it after it was published. This volume was the last expression of the hopelessness out of which he had begun to emerge. In this collection, similar in scope and approach to The

⁴³Ibid., 95.

Triumph of the Egg, Anderson carries on the sense of despair of that and Many Marriages to a point suggestive of touches of insanity and psychological torment in the makeup of his people. This collection, too, contains some of his best short stories, and here, too, much of their significance beyond the particular is lost when they are taken out of the context of the collection.

In this volume Anderson makes use of an introductory foreword to set the tone of the theme as he had used the prose poem in The Triumph of the Egg and the sketch in Winesburg, Ohio. His purpose, as he points out, is as it had been in the past, to probe beneath the dark surface of life and to get at its essence; but almost immediately the self-doubts, the uncertainty, and the frustration of this period make themselves felt. Almost as a continuation of John Webster's uncertainty as Many Marriages ends, Anderson goes on: "I had pushed myself off into a world where nothing has any existence."⁴⁴ Yet he still hopes that he is wrong. "Had I done that, or had I merely stepped, for the moment, out of the world of darkness into the light?"⁴⁵ The uncertainty continues: "It may be that my eyes are blind... It may be I am deaf...Now, alas, I am absorbed in looking

⁴⁴Sherwood Anderson, Horses and Men (New York, 1923), 1x.

⁴⁵Ibid., 1x-x.

at my own hands. With these nervous and uncertain hands may I really feel for the form of things concealed in the darkness?"⁴⁶ There is no answer to his uncertainty, and he had no choice but to go on, hoping somehow that he can discover whatever meaning there may be through the gentle, compassionate use of his intuition.

The thematic pattern shows an evolving development in this collection much as did those in both Winesburg, Ohio and The Triumph of the Egg, but here Anderson starts on a level of frustration and despair in the foreword and carries through on that level until the final third, when, in spite of the evidence against it, he begins to show a cautious and subdued optimism based more on faith than on any real belief that the individual can find fulfillment. For the most part, however, his people remain frustrated and despairing until their repression intensifies to the point that they seem ready for the sort of mindless rebellion that John Webster waged. They do not quite reach that point in any of the stories, however, not because the people are unwilling or afraid to rebel but because they are too blinded by their despair to be able to single out any particular thing and attack it as John Webster had done.

Like The Triumph of the Egg, Horses and Men opens with a story that centers around a boy who likes horses and

⁴⁶Ibid., x.

who finds that the society of men in the world is infinitely more complex than that in the stables. In this story, "I'm a Fool," Anderson again uses the framework of the adolescent initiation theme on which he constructs a story that goes beyond its framework and emerges into adult recognition of the potential destructiveness inherent in the superficial and materialistic conventional standards of value. As in "I Want to Know Why," the air of personal futility that accompanies this discovery is minimized and becomes less effective when the story is taken out of the context of the collection.

The story is that of a boy growing into manhood as he follows the Ohio racetrack circuit. In the stables, working as a swipe, he lives a life that, while sometimes brutal and often crude, is nevertheless innocent, honest, and uncomplicated. On his day off he pretends to be a dude in order to gain favor with a young lady. She accepts him, but the fabrication of lies that he had erected to impress her becomes a more effective barrier between them than that of social status he had lied to overcome. At the end, concluding that he was a fool for permitting himself to think those standards important enough to lie about, he is ready to strike out at the symbol of those standards, a real dude whom he imagined himself to be competing with, and he feels like kicking himself, but the dude is gone, and he feels that kicking himself is futile.

Here Anderson is moving out of the specific and into the universal in the same way as in the other racetrack stories of this period, and in doing so he points out the same sort of paradox. Man can be exposed to what is meaningful, honest, and worthwhile in life, as are all of his racetrack people, and yet he is unable to act in accordance with his intuitional perception of these values when society demands acceptance of its contradictory values that are based upon appearance rather than intrinsic worth. In both "I'm a Fool" and "I Want to Know Why" the protagonists raise this question but find no answers; in the latter the protagonist has not yet had to make a choice between them, but in the former, having been seduced, he is ready for rebellion although he has no idea of just what to oppose. The complexities of the situation are beyond him, and he can only despair in his frustration.

Even the act of rebellion itself presents a paradox: because society has so dominated the individual, his rebellion can only be on society's terms, and he tends not only to attempt to rationalize his actions in relationship to social values, but he even interprets them as anti-social acts and hence recognizes that society has the right to punish his transgressions. This is certainly the case with John Webster in Many Marriages, and here in "I'm a Fool" the young man's attempt to "show" society, essentially an act of rebellion, is couched in acceptance of society's

standards, even while he knows that they are essentially meaningless, and his regret at the end is not based on his acceptance of them but is based on his lying, actually an anti-social act. Here Anderson continues to show that mere rebellion is not enough, that one must know his enemy before he can go on to fulfillment, but the complexities one must straighten out before he can understand the problem are still not only unresolved but at this point apparently unresolvable.

In the short sketch "The Triumph of a Modern" Anderson continues in this vein, but here for the first time he approaches the problem in terms of the modernist revolt in which he had participated in Chicago during the Liberation. In this story a "liberated" young man who prides himself on his rejection of puritan patterns of behavior writes an intimate letter to a maiden aunt he had never seen. Deliberately employing the word breasts rather than the conventional bosom in a carefully-contrived emotional passage in order to convey an unfelt love for her, he so impresses her that she wills him her fortune.

Here Anderson deals with a theme to which he returns later in detail in Dark Laughter: the fact that even the act of rebelling against these dead ideas may be false and dishonest, that it may be perverted by its participants who find in it an excuse or a tool for selfish purposes rather than the honest attempt to strike out at the forces

that deny man his fulfillment. His disillusionment with both the Chicago and the New York modernist movements and his disenchantment with the kind of marriage that he had with Tennessee are more than mere restlessness, as this story indicates. His objections to the new philosophy of liberation seem to have been based on his conviction that the movements had become ends in themselves rather than means to the end of eventual human fulfillment. In this story he indicates that the liberation impulse had led him to a blind alley, and the depth of his frustration is indicated by the irony of the title.

It would be interesting to know if Anderson had in mind the reception of both Winesburg, Ohio and Many Marriages when he wrote this story. Both were hailed among liberated circles as calls for rebellion against puritanical sex standards. That Anderson had a far greater and more inclusive problem in mind is evident from his reaction to these interpretations, and his disappointment at the narrow interpretations of the works must have given him a great deal of insight into the short-sightedness of the movement which, as he indicated in letters from Reno, had attracted neurotics rather than seekers. In this study Anderson rejects the movement that he had thought held the power to liberate the individual so that he could find fulfillment and understanding because it had become dominated by the same sort of dishonesty it had ostensibly been fighting. As a result,

at this stage Anderson has no place to go except deeper into despair. More seriously, however, he points out that the real tragedy of the modernist movement lies in the fact that it does not recognize the evil it has done in the name of honesty.

These first two stories set the pattern for the rest of the collection, both structurally and thematically. In order to give an organizational framework to the collection he alternates as he has in these two between a rural agricultural setting and an urban commercial setting, each pair of stories designed to be mutually complimentary as the same basic factor enters to defeat fulfillment in each of the pair, regardless of background. In the first pair each young man has been defeated because he fails to distinguish between appearance and reality and finds himself willing to lie in order to gain in appearance, at the same time failing to realize that he has cut himself off from reality as he does so. In each case the lack of ability to make the proper distinction is complicated by the failure of the young man to realize that one cannot gain truth by rejecting. This is the real prison that, as Anderson indicates, will keep them from fulfillment and understanding forever. Rebellion is futile unless it is honest rebellion that precedes the search for truth.

"Unused" and "A Chicago Hamlet" continue this pairing of setting and theme, both of them concerned with

people whose efforts to carry through an honest rebellion against conventional standards and to live as individuals result in tragedy. The first, set in Bidwell, Ohio, concerns a young girl from a disreputable background whose efforts to rise out of it are frustrated by misinterpretation until in despair she runs into the lake and drowns; the second, set in Chicago, records the story of a man who "...had gone the same road I and all the men about me were no doubt going, the road of surrender to ugliness and to dreary meaningless living."⁴⁷ His efforts to break out of this path were frustrated to the point where, dead spiritually, he could only say, "It is horrible stuff, this whiskey, eh, but after all this is a horrible town."⁴⁸ Out of the despair that this tragedy engenders, the narrator can only cry out:

Millions of us live on the vast Chicago West Side, where all streets are equally ugly and where the streets go on and on forever, out of nowhere into nothing. We are tired, tired! What is it all about?⁴⁹

In these two stories Anderson looks at honest attempts to rebel and to carry rebellion through to understanding and fulfillment, but in each case the act is destined to be futile from its inception. The preconceptions and superficial judgments of society have placed each person in a predetermined category, and attempts to transgress these limits

⁴⁷Ibid., 143.

⁴⁸Ibid., 158.

⁴⁹Ibid., 140.

have been made so difficult that the individual, frustrated and despairing, finds himself no longer able to live under such conditions. Physical death or the oblivion that comes in bottles is the individual's only recourse. In the former story the narrator is filled with compassion as he views the girl's body, but the memory of her bedraggled ostrich feather, symbol of her frustrated attempt to find beauty, throws him into continued despair. The narrator of the latter story re-emphasizes this despair as he recounts his friend's drunken attempt to escape his recurrent dream of a slender and beautiful woman who, as she comes closer, is revealed to be broken in pieces, a grim caricature of beauty. In these two stories Anderson shows his conviction that the rebellion of his grotesques, the meek who inhabit his world, can only result in intensified tragedy.

In the next pair of stories, "The Man Who Became a Woman" and "Milk Bottles" Anderson writes of another facet of the hopeless lot of his people in depicting two young men who have been forced to deny their individuality. Here the penalties of non-conformity are brought home to both in moments of horror, in the first case among the discarded bones of an abandoned slaughterhouse and in the latter in the grimness of rubbish heaps in the shadow of a tenement. In both cases the protagonists' dreams of fulfillment are left behind to join the rubbish of a civilization that is devoted to consumption of men and dreams as well as things.

"The Man Who Became a Woman" is one of Anderson's best stories, ranking with "The Egg" and "I Want to Know Why." Another of his stories dealing ostensibly with an adolescent lover of race horses and racetrack naturalness, this, too, goes beyond mere adolescent initiation and beyond the concept of homosexuality implied in the title because in it Anderson comes close to identifying the source of much of the difficulty in which man finds himself as the two sides of his nature, the brutality of masculinity and the compassion of femininity, clash within him. In this story he points out society's demand that brutality overcome compassion, and that the individual has no choice but to yield.

This story, like "Unused," is told by an adult narrator who is looking back on an adventure in his youth, but here the narrator has completely lost sight of the significance of the incident, yet he is driven to explain it, much as John Webster is driven to explanation, almost as though explanation will make the meaning of the act clear to him as well as to his audience. However, the audience is given no indication that understanding occurs. Rather, the story ends with the narrator still plagued by the intuitive feeling that in accepting the dictates of convention he was surrendered a major part of his personality and has cut himself off from fulfillment. The key to nullifying this surrender

is hidden somewhere in the act, as he realizes in adulthood, but he is unable to find it.

Briefly the story recounts the adventure of a night on the racetrack circuit. The boy, left alone at the track, decides to go to town. Stopping in a rough bar, he remembers past dreams in which he thought he was a girl. Looking into the mirror behind the bar he sees that his face looks like a girl's, and afraid, he decides to leave. A giant brute of a man enters, starts a fight, and in the ensuing disorder, gives the boy a chance to flee. Still frightened, he runs back to the stables to sleep, but he is awakened by two drunken negro swipes who mistake him for a girl, and again frightened, he runs off. In the dark he runs behind an old slaughter house, where he falls into a pile of bones and remains hidden for the night. His terror is so strong that "It burned all that silly nonsense about being a girl right out of me,"⁵⁰ and the next day he left the racetrack forever.

Such a brief telling of the plot fails to indicate the complex symbolic structure that Anderson has kept under careful control. The comparison between men and horses is used as a contrast between uncomplicated beauty and distorted ugliness, as in the earlier racetrack stories, and it provides the opportunity for expression of Anderson's

⁵⁰Ibid., 225.

bitterness: "A race horse isn't like a human being. He won't stand for it to have to do his work in any rotten ugly kind of a dump the way a man will, and he won't stand for the smells a man will either."⁵¹ Such a view of the nature of man is bitter enough as it stands, but Anderson goes beyond this in the despair he displays at the resolution of his theme.

Man's lot is hopeless, he points out, because he permits and even encourages the brutal side of his nature to destroy his innate understanding, compassion, and intuitive perception, the only tools that he has for becoming a complete individual and for breaking down the barriers that isolate him from others. As the scene in the saloon indicates, society interprets these tools as degeneracy, and in order to live within society's framework he is forced not only to deny them but to destroy them in himself. In this story Anderson is not writing of the revolt of the tortured, as he had in the preceding pair of stories; rather, he is writing of the majority of men who have been forced to deny part of their natures and to live as grotesque caricatures of themselves.

Imposing such a thematic structure upon the framework of this story calls for careful and complete control of

⁵¹Ibid., 204.

materials, and the skill with which it was executed both structurally and stylistically makes the story one of Anderson's best.

Such an attempt might easily have been offensive, as Many Marriages was to so many people, because this story has such strong overtones of one of society's strongest taboos. Just as sexual license and implied incest have been read into Many Marriages, so might this be considered a story of latent homosexuality rather than the duality of man's nature, but Anderson's careful execution, always at its best in the short stories, makes such an interpretation impossible for the perceptive reader. For the less perceptive Anderson points out through his narrator that appearances are not indicative of the nature of underlying reality: "...a man here don't dare own up he loves another man, I've found out, and they are afraid to admit such feelings to themselves even. I guess they're afraid it may be taken to mean something it don't need to at all."⁵²

This statement carries further implications at this point in its reflection of the fact that Anderson has not completely given up hope in spite of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Here the narrator catches a glimpse of the necessary distinctions between appearance and reality,

⁵²Ibid., 188.

and the mere fact that he is compelled to tell the story indicates that he instinctively realizes that somewhere under the appearance of the incident there is truth, but as the story ends the narrator has failed to find it, and he remains a grotesque, deprived of the fulfillment that he might have found.

Paired with this story is "Milk Bottles," a less ambitious but no less definitive reiteration of the same theme. Here a young advertising writer tries to write what he feels is true, but the combination of the lies by which he earns his living and the grimness of his surroundings makes it impossible for him to recognize either truth or beauty, and the lies of the boosters eventually become true for him. In the background of the story the theme of lost humanity and meaninglessness makes the young man's tragedy only a part of a much greater tragedy: in the comment of an actress that "'we live such damned lives, we do, and we work in such a town! A dog is better off! And now they are going to take booze away from us too!'"⁵³ and in the reality behind the advertising slogan that proclaims milk as "'The health and freshness of a whole countryside...'"⁵⁴ as the bottles stand sour on window sills, Anderson portrays a humanity made up of individuals who are tortured and lost, unable to rescue themselves because there is no way open for their escape.

⁵³Ibid., 232. ⁵⁴Ibid., 238.

The last pair of stories returns to the theme that attempts to rebel or escape are futile. In the first, "The Sad Horn Blowers," a young man flees the dehumanizing influences of a small town only to find himself condemned in the city to a lifetime of drilling meaningless holes in meaningless pieces of metal. All he can do is pick up his trumpet and join others in a muted and futile gesture of protest. In the second, "The Man's Story" a similar situation occurs. A married man runs off with another woman, and they flee to the anonymity of a large city. She is murdered; he is arrested but acquitted through another's confession. Nevertheless he might better have been hanged: "The man had come up out of the sea of doubt, had grasped for a time the hand of the woman, and with her hand in his had floated for a time upon the surface of life--but now he felt himself again sinking down into the sea."⁵⁵ Again Anderson pleads that we understand, but as narrator he indicates that this is unlikely. Perhaps this is the end of John Webster's rebellion.

"The Sad Horn Blowers" is interesting for another reason: for the light that it sheds upon Anderson's changing view of the father-son relationship. When it was last evident in his work in "The Egg," the portrayal had changed drastically from complete misunderstanding, as shown in

⁵⁵Ibid., 311.

Windy McPherson's Son to recognition of the father as a grotesque and as one who is deserving of compassion, perhaps even because of his spiritual deformity. Here in "The Sad Horn Blowers" Anderson moves beyond mere compassion and portrays the son as intuitively learning to understand his father and finally coming to identify his life with his father's. This can only be possible, Anderson points out, after the initial intimacy of the relationship has passed and after the son has experienced the same sort of frustrating experiences that the father has gone through. In his next work, A Story Teller's Story, Anderson carries this new sense of identification through to its logical conclusion in his own life.

In the last story, "An Ohio Pagan," Anderson returns to the rural scene in a story that ends on a note of admittedly unjustified optimism, culminating a gradual re-emergence of faith in man that had begun to assert itself in "The Man Who Became a Woman." After exposure to de-humanizing influences of both city and village, the young man protagonist of "An Ohio Pagan" decides that he can find fulfillment through love and understanding only by looking for it. This belief is not in the easy-answer manner of the earlier novels, however, because Anderson no longer believes that such a search will actually find any meaning. Rather, as he implies, the man may find satisfaction in the search even though it never ends. As a result, in spite of the fact

that there may be no ultimate solution to the problem of man's isolation, he can find meaning in the fight against it. Here he is returning in spirit to the ending of Marching Men, when he points out that perhaps man's true meaning lies not in attaining any eventual victory, but in the spirit with which he goes down to defeat.

As Anderson concludes this volume he concludes the search that he had started in Winesburg, Ohio: the attempt to determine the ultimate relationship between man and his time by examining the effects of society on the individual. In the ensuing attempt to come to know these effects through the intuitive perception of the essence of each individual, he has found that the individual is helpless as a result of what society has done to him; he has come to realize the complexity of the social structure that has isolated and deformed man's spirit; and he has come to recognize the futility of open rebellion against those social standards. Despair, however, cannot be maintained indefinitely, and, although at the end of Horses and Men he still sees no hope for the ultimate liberation of the individual, he has begun to regain his faith that somehow man can come to know and understand himself and his fellows, and that through that knowledge will come a worthwhile and satisfying existence. The influence of society on the people whom he has examined has been completely negative, and yet through his own experience he has seen that man can reach out and find some understanding, as he had shown in the Winesburg stories.

Nevertheless, although this basic approach seems to be sound and because he has learned that the act of rebellion is meaningless unless it is carried through, his efforts to resolve the problems of modern life through knowing others have come to a dead end, and in order to continue his search in spite of the almost overwhelming evidence that it is useless, he must find a new direction. Because he has been frustrated in his efforts to find meaning through the lives of others and because he still believes that the key to understanding lies in the experiences of human life, he can only turn to the one other source available, his own life, and probe that for meaning by using his basic tool of perception.

In this last volume of his period of social analysis Anderson has maintained a high level of literary achievement, both in the individual stories and in the collection as a whole. The stories are written in the Winesburg manner, emphasizing revelation of character through moments of intense experience and depending for their effect upon this revelation rather than through any significant plot structure. Also he has continued the stylistic technique of the earthy Midwestern story-teller with the same generally good effects. As a result, two of the stories, "I'm a Fool," and "The Man Who Became A Woman" are among his best, and others, including "A Chicago Hamlet" and "The Sad Horn Blowers," are very good. None is a complete failure,

although some, like "Unused," would profit from condensation or rewriting. In combining the stories into a collection Anderson has used both structural and thematic means to unify the diverse subject matter into a statement of his view of the lot of modern man. As the shifts from city to country and back again indicate, Anderson has learned that grotesques do not result from values peculiar to either, but to our society as a whole, and his particular instances of deformed humanity are projected into a universal image as a result.

During this period, Anderson's work and his personal life combined to show his efforts to move beyond the initial discoveries of the Chicago Liberation and to come to know the meaning of the human experience in his time. In his personal life he learned that rebellion for the sake of rebellion results in a dreadful and dishonest conformity unless it is used as a point of departure rather than for an end in itself. As a result he moved out of the area of the Chicago Liberation, he rejected the New York modernists as neurotics, and he sought out a deeper and more mutually fulfilling relationship than was possible in his "enlightened" marriage with Tennessee Mitchell. The direction that his life would take was uncertain to him at this point, but he knew that he had to move on, that these factors had served their purpose in permitting him to find a means toward personal as well as artistic fulfillment, but to carry that means through

to an end he had to put them behind him. As he left Reno early in 1924 with his divorce granted, he married Elizabeth Prall in the hope of finding a mutually fulfilling personal relationship, and he began a period of wandering across the American countryside hoping that he might find a place and a people who respected and understood the values that antedated materialism and individualism run wild.

In his work at this point he had already started in a new direction in order to find meaning where apparently there was nothing but chaos and despair. When he left Reno he carried with him the partially-completed manuscript that was to start him probing into his own life and experience. In this manuscript he started to look for an intuitive bridge between appearance and reality so that he might find behind experience the values that would free the individual from the intensity of his isolation, cure his spiritual ills, and permit him to take his place in a new, humanized society. As he started in this new direction his letters from Reno began to show an air of cheerfulness, but behind this cheerfulness is a deeper and more insistent note of anxiety that betrays the despair that he was trying to overcome because failure to continue his search would be to surrender to the grotesqueness he was trying to cure. To Roger Sergel he wrote:

To tell the truth, I've found a lot of men. Don't ask too much...The staleness exists, the flatness. Often enough it gets into a man and

infects him like a disease. It is a disease,
I think, crawling fear of what? Life, I
fancy.⁵⁶

Yet he still felt instinctively that there was a secret to the meaning of the American existence if he could find it. After considering the idea of trying to find it through writing a life of Abraham Lincoln,⁵⁷ who together with Mark Twain epitomized the Midwestern experience to him, he decided to finish A Story Teller's Story, realizing that his was the only life that he could hope to understand completely. As he left Reno he wrote, "I feel like a man recovering from a long illness, every day more ready for work now,"⁵⁸ and with his new wife he started out in a new literary as well as personal search.

⁵⁶Letters, 120.

⁵⁷The fragments of this life later appeared in Paul Rosenfeld's The Sherwood Anderson Reader (Boston, 1947) as "Father Abraham: A Lincoln Fragment", 530-602.

⁵⁸Letters, 125.

CHAPTER VI

INTROSPECTION AND IDENTIFICATION

During the mid-twenties Anderson's published work was almost entirely autobiographical or semi-autobiographical, with the single major exception of Dark Laughter. Two of these works, A Story Teller's Story and Tar: A Midwest Childhood, are direct attempts to evaluate and interpret his own experience against the backdrop of the Midwestern experience in the years between the end of the Civil War and the early 1920's; Sherwood Anderson's Notebook examines his experiences as writer in America; and Dark Laughter is the fictionalized account of his latest rebellion, this time against the stagnation of the modern liberation movements that had failed to carry through their mission to eventual liberation of the human spirit but had remained on the level of rebellion as novelty, as inconoclast, and as neurotic excess.

The years between 1923 and 1927 were a time of uncertainty, searching, and aimlessness for Anderson in spite of the facts that his new marriage promised to be successful and that he was writing almost constantly, finishing one manuscript and turning immediately to the next. Shortly after his divorce was granted, when Tennessee had finally

withdrawn her legal objections,¹ he and Elizabeth were married, and they lived in Berkeley, California, for a few months before going on to New Orleans, where they intended to live permanently. Finances were tight, as usual; Horses and Men was not selling; and Anderson began to feel the pressures that would take him from his writing again, but he was determined to do anything rather than go back to advertising.

Meanwhile, completely absorbed in his new projects and in his new marriage, he was determined to put off such necessities as long as he could and to continue trying to determine the meaning of the Midwestern experience as he knew it. Basic to this understanding was his growing need to rid himself of the uncertainties about the direction his life had taken ever since he had left Elyria, especially about the writing career that had almost forced itself upon him, about the value of his work, and about his presumption in thinking that he could do it justice. During his stay in Berkeley this problem was very much on his mind, and he wrote, "...I am too unsure of myself. I'm rather afraid...The one thing I detest, because it makes me feel detestable, is preaching or being wise man or seer. The whole secret lies in the fact that it is also my problem

¹Howe, 143, points out that Tennessee finally consented after Ferdinand Schevill made her admit that she, as a "modern" woman, could hardly hold a man to a marriage he didn't want.

to be 'just the man, walking along, seeing, smelling.'² Later he wrote, "The desire to write surges up, but often you are too tired or distracted with other things to quite follow out your impulses,"³ but nevertheless he forced himself to write, and shortly after his return to New Orleans he finished A Story Teller's Story. Nevertheless, he was quite uncertain about it because he was afraid that it didn't accomplish what he had thought it would. As he wrote to his brother Karl,

Don't know about A Story Teller's Story, whether I got what I was after or not. I didn't try to set down obvious facts, only tried to get the spirit of something.⁴

The spirit of the something that he was trying to get through this work and those that followed it during the succeeding three years was insight into the meaning of his own life as it had been shaped by experience. The means that he chose to find this insight was the same technique that he had employed in the Winesburg stories, in the sketches in Poor White, and in many of the stories in the two more recent collections. This was the technique of intuitively examining the meaning underlying the appearance both of people and events. In such a technique, factual appearance is unimportant, except as the roughest sort of guide, and in practice it must be ignored in order to

²Letters, 124. ³Ibid., 126. ⁴Ibid., 129.

penetrate beyond it to the essence of things. The resulting work cannot be considered a reliable guide to factual material, but as the earlier results showed him, it is capable of revealing the essence of individuality and of the relationships between man and man, man and circumstances, and man and ideas. This approach had worked for him in fiction and he had no reason to suppose that it would not work in dealing with his own life. Of course he could not anticipate the reactions of critics who assert that he turned to himself because he had nothing else to say and then castigate him because the result "...is neither record nor fiction, loyal neither to fact nor to imagination."⁵

If Anderson had been attempting to write either fiction or autobiography such criticism would be valid, but, as Anderson points out in the book, "I have perhaps lied now and then...but have not lied about the essence..."⁶ because, he explains, "In the world of fancy...no man is ugly. Man is ugly in fact only."⁷ If one is to probe beneath the surface of life and to find beauty and truth, he has no choice but to ignore the facts, as he had learned in the Winesburg stories; he must explore life with the

⁵Howe, 143.

⁶Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (New York, 1924), 383.

⁷Ibid., 78.

receptive intuition of a romantic poet rather than with the sharply factual mind of a journalist who reserves his attention for the surface trivialities. As a result, A Story Teller's Story uses fact as a point of departure from whence intuitive perception takes over rather than as an end in itself. The result, of course, does not fit conveniently into either of the conventional categories of fact or fiction, and consequently Anderson's purpose in writing the book is lost in the resulting confusion.

Basically, Anderson is attempting to solve one problem in the book: the matter of his own identity. Thus far his life had been a series of rejections on every level of his life, ranging from his initial rejection of the small town to his rejection of the city, from his rejection of business ethics to rejection of the ethics of the liberation, and from rejection of his father to rejection of the women whom he had married in the hope of finding love. At this stage of his life he was forty-eight years old, but he had found no stability in life because each of the things he had experienced proved to be disappointing and frustrating. Now he was starting to look back, to re-examine these experiences in the light of what had come after, and to try to determine whether or not these rejections were sound, and if they were not, to try to find out what he had missed that had made him what he was. Then, perhaps, he could find out whether he was a mere idler and player with words and was

fooling himself as he had heard almost from the beginning of his writing career, or whether he was really on the path that, if he followed it long and diligently enough, would lead him to understanding of the human experience. The protagonist of "An Ohio Pagan" had set out in renewed confidence to find this understanding in spite of all the evidence he had amassed that pointed out the essential meaninglessness of life, and now Anderson was attempting to find out whether that confidence was justified.

Anderson's re-interpretation of the facts of his earlier life are apparent from the first page. The harshness of childhood that he had portrayed in all of his novels except Many Marriages is gone, and in its place is a life that was hard but not heartless and poor but not poverty-stricken. Appearance, he decides almost at once, had been deceiving him for a long time, and he had been failing to see the warmth of intimate family relations that more than compensated for the lack of material things. The father brought romance into the life of his family; the mother brought love and comfort; the brothers provided strength and confidence; and the legendary grandmother brought the security of earthy mystery. In such a portrayal, the contrast with that presented in Windy McPherson's Son is obvious. The facts are substantially the same, but behind them Anderson has begun to see a meaningful human relationship that he had unwittingly rejected.

The most striking change in this portrayal of the early years is the change Anderson has wrought in the portrayal of his father, Irwin Anderson. As seen through the eyes of Sam McPherson he was a failure, a windbag, and a symbol of personal inadequacy, even though Anderson's own sympathy had shown through to make Windy at times a ludicrous rather than a vicious characterization. The reversal of his interpretation is not sudden, as his recognition of the plight of the craftsman in Poor White, the sympathetic portrayal of the father as grotesque in "The Egg," and the intuitive understanding of the father in "The Sad Horn Blowers" show, but it is a new view that Anderson has been fumbling for, perhaps unconsciously, since he found himself following Irwin in rejecting the practical life for the impractical and the world of facts for the world of dreams. The new portrayal here gives Anderson a sense of identity and of purpose as he draws Irwin Anderson as the displaced person of the 1890's just as he had begun to regard himself as unable to find a permanent place for himself in the 1920's. The image of Irwin Anderson is thus presented as the archetype of the artist in America:

My father lived in a land and in a time when what one later begins to understand a little as the artist in man could not by any possibility be understood by his fellows. Dreams then were to be expressed in building railroads and factories, in boring gas wells, stringing telegraph poles. There was room for no other dream and since father could not do any of these

things he was an outlaw in his community. The community tolerated him. His own sons tolerated him.⁸

This is a portrayal of Irwin Anderson that departs considerably from the facts, as William Sutton's study shows. Irwin was not regarded as an outlaw in Clyde, but he was liked and at times rose to the level of community leader in spite of his improvidence and his occasional bout with the bottle. However, it is an image that Anderson, sensing himself to be a double outlaw, not only for his rejection of materialism but more importantly for the misunderstanding that both Winesburg, Ohio and Many Marriages met, could accept. It was at this point that he had asked himself "Had I a sex obsession? Was I a goner?"⁹ and in recognizing the misunderstanding that Irwin met because of his rejection of the standards of his time he saw himself as the same sort of victim, true to himself and to his view of life, and misunderstood as a result.

The identification of himself with his father goes beyond this sort of rationalization, however; it gives him a sense of identification with a tradition much older than the societies that could not understand either him or his father, and at the same time it reinforces his concept of craftsmanship in art by pointing out that it, like the old hand crafts, has been handed down from father to son. This

⁸Ibid., 26. ⁹Ibid., 377.

tradition is that of the storyteller, the man who belongs to no group or society because his calling transcends such appearances and deals with the essence of life. This identification provides the rationale that he needed at this time so that he could continue the writing that had become the center of his existence.

As a result of this changed view of his father, Anderson has withdrawn the first of his rejections, and he moves on to examine others and to examine values that he had previously accepted unquestioningly. In rambling, formless style as the impressions occur to him he recounts the impact of pride of workmanship, of the new philosophy of success, of new, cheap, impressive construction. In each of the incidents Anderson questions himself: did he recognize each for what it was, or did he accept the appearance of things as indicative of their intrinsic worth? He has no answers, and so he passes on to the greater decisions and acceptances of his life.

Youthful adventuring along the racetrack circuit, the early laboring years in Chicago, and the Spanish-American War experience are treated in detail. In the first, he deduces, the real desire for material success was implanted in him through a Judge Turner who was for him the same sort of father image that John Telfer was for Sam McPherson; at this point he made his first rejection, of simple and natural values, as he went to Chicago to follow the glitter

of materialistic success. The early Chicago years saw him as confused; on one hand he saw hardness, brutality, and poverty; on the other he was still blinded by the dream of success. The myth Turner had taught him as true was already beginning to break down as he saw the images he had carried from Clyde destroyed in the flesh around him: the strong mother love of the town needed reinforcing by gin in the cities; the respected merchant-wise man became a single-minded exploiter. The only values that had any permanency, he found at this point, were those of warm human relationships, and these were threatened by his life in the factory. His ensuing dilemma was temporarily solved by the Spanish-American War.

The Army experience, as he looks back, was one of the most misleading in his life. Here he had mistaken the appearance of unity among men for a depth of comradeship that did not exist. It was a dream that he tried to bring into existence in Marching Men, he concludes, as he asks himself "Is all feeling of comradeship, of brotherhood between many men, a little absurd?"¹⁰ His attempts to break the barriers among men and his failures have taught him by this time that he had indeed confused appearance with reality, and here he is still confused by his discovery.

¹⁰Ibid., 285.

His rejection of industrial and commercial success and his decision to become a writer are treated in detail, including the dramatic exit from the paint factory that has been incorporated into the Anderson myth. Discrepancies with the actual circumstances abound, but they are immaterial. Here Anderson is trying to determine the motives, conscious or unconscious, that brought about his action, and he is trying to find the meaning of his literary career. They are identical, he decides; industrialism is dehumanizing, while he is driven by the desire to humanize. Just as industrialism had destroyed craftsmanship while it was replacing individuality with standardization, he sees his job as restoring craftsmanship in his own chosen field and at the same time probing beneath the standardized surface of human life in order to find its hidden but real meaning. Even though he re-visits Elyria anonymously he finds that he not only has no regrets, but that his rejection is validated by his recognition of the meaninglessness of his former life.

The last major rejection that he reviews is his determination to ignore the equally destructive forces of both the stagnated liberation movement and the standards of the literary market place. At this point his discouragement, his frustrations, and his persistent doubts about his abilities are most in evidence but, as he recognizes himself as his father's son, he recognizes that he can do

nothing else. Here he records his decision to look South in the almost optimistic hope that he can find a place that will permit him to do his work honestly. As the decision is made, illogical though he recognizes that it is, he becomes like the young man in "An Ohio Pagan," confident that somewhere he can find meaning, and the book ends on a note of faith in his work if not in his abilities. In the background there is nostalgia but there are no regrets.

In A Story Teller's Story Anderson has accomplished one important thing from the points of view both of his personal life and his writing career: he has fused the two into a mutually justifying and mutually supporting whole. Through his identification of himself with the re-interpreted image of his father he has rationalized away the concept of himself as "a goner," as one who had become a degenerate, at the same time that he has replaced the memory of Irwin as a drunkard and braggart with the image of a romantic storyteller who found meaning in the imagination rather than in the surface standards of society. At the same time he has justified the instability of his own family life by excusing his father because he had followed a higher calling; he has verified his rejection of materialistic standards through the same means; and he has emerged with a new sense of mission for himself in his role as storyteller. The "spirit of something" that he was trying to get was the spirit that he needed to carry himself through

the doubt and despair that he was plagued with in both writing and personal life. His immediate plunging into Dark Laughter and the furious pace with which he wrote it indicate that he had succeeded, at least for a time.

From Anderson's point of view A Story Teller's Story was a success because it did allow him to find this sense of personal identity by leading him "...toward understanding of whatever may be beautiful and fine in life, my own life and other lives,"¹¹ but he did not expect it to sell because it was such a personal thing. In this he was right, but as in the past he did not anticipate the criticism that would be leveled at it for its looseness of structure and for its content.

The form of the book is a direct result of the intuitive approach that Anderson had employed toward his subject matter. The intuition approach depends for its effectiveness upon bursts of illumination or of insight into the meaning behind appearance. It is not capable of sustaining a prolonged narrative of any kind although, as its practitioners from the romantic poets to Anderson show, it is most effective in short works, either of poetry or prose. In the Winesburg and later stories as well as in the sketches interspersed in Poor White Anderson's use of it was justified.

¹¹Letters, 105.

Here, however, it results in a loose, unconnected narrative uneven in execution. As a result, when the work is considered as a series of parts, individual passages, especially those on the machine age, on the return to Elyria, and on the thoughts of America inspired by the cathedral at Chartres, are among his best works. On the other hand, when considered as a unified whole, the book's unsatisfactory passages detract greatly from its overall effectiveness.

Structurally and stylistically the book is Anderson's nearest approach to the oral story-telling tradition as it was practiced in the Midwest and undoubtedly by his father, and this, too, accounts for the looseness of the narrative. Rambling, digressive, and disorganized on the surface as it pauses to explore a side issue to to explain a bit of seemingly irrelevant background, it incorporates the qualities of the rural gossip or "talker," and then suddenly the reader is aware that these seeming irrelevancies are pertinent, that the narrative has been moving forward, and that a point has been made. While this technique is often exasperating to the sophisticated reader, nevertheless it is in keeping with the tradition with which Anderson has identified himself and which has value beyond its legitimate ancestry. As Maxwell Geismar has pointed out, "...this local gossip has its own flavor, wit, and specifically human bearing that may be a national antidote to publicity slogans as

well as continental salons."¹² The slickness and superficiality common to both were part of what he had rejected, and that his rejection was more than mere words is born out by his return to this old and authentic tradition.

A Story Teller's Story had solved, at least temporarily, Anderson's doubts concerning the worth of what he was doing and the honesty of his decisions, but it did not solve the most immediately pressing of his personal problems: the need for money. His children were growing, and he could not ignore his obligation to them; he had resolved to live permanently in New Orleans, which was not a cheap city in which to live; and he had a new wife to support. At the same time he was determined not to go back to advertising, so he compromised by working as rapidly as he could on Dark Laughter as long as he had money, meanwhile making arrangements to go on the lecture circuit during the winter months of 1925. However, in spite of his financial difficulties he found the fall of 1924 to be one of the happiest, most satisfying times of his life after having purged himself of his doubts. To Paul Rosenfeld he wrote,

The new book [Dark Laughter] flows like a real river, so far. It should dance, a little crazily--bags of corn in the moonlight, niggers, a man and woman at the center of it. I'm at it hard anyway, and the days have joy in them. I've an idea there are fields ahead in which I haven't tried walking before.¹³

¹²Geismar, 254. ¹³Letters, 130.

As the time came for him to go on the lecture tour, shortly after he had finished Dark Laughter, he became depressed again: "I'm utterly gloomy myself, always am when I have published a book...Also I am gloomy about the new novel. It is on a shelf in my workshop."¹⁴ What was really bothering him, however, was the reception that his recent works had had among the general public and his fear of facing these same people from the lecture platform:

I am known as a dangerous man...I think Many Marriages did it. The whole mood is one out of which I have quite passed now, but the public does not know that. It seems to them that when they come toward me I do something terrible... That in reality is the reason why people are afraid to engage me as lecturer. They fear I will piss against the leg of the man who is introducing me or bring on the stage a lady and do her violence there to promote the higher life...I can't make out whether they want me to do some such violence or are really afraid I will.¹⁵

Even more than these problems, however, he was beginning to feel again the old question that had bothered him before he had finished A Story Teller's Story: after his rejections, what then? After he had rationalized the question away he had been able to devote himself to sustained work, but now, at loose ends while waiting for the tour to begin, he fretted about it again: "What is really puzzling is that I feel that the publication of A Story Teller's Story marked a period for me. I have been so much a naked man walking through the streets after all. Now I

¹⁴Ibid., 133. ¹⁵Ibid.

begin to want clothes again."¹⁶ Already he was ready to return to the probing of his past, hoping that he could find direction as well as identity there, and he began to make notes for Tar: A Midwest Childhood.

Meanwhile, he went on tour, spending the months of January and February, 1925, on the circuit, and as much as he enjoyed travelling about again, seeing new places and meeting new people, he was depressed, he felt that lecturing was somehow dishonest, and he was eager to be at the new book. Nevertheless, the tour was successful, and in The Modern Writer,¹⁷ which contains the lecture he delivered, he attempts to define the rationale behind his writing career as he had evolved it in A Story Teller's Story. The writer, he points out, is caught in the same dilemma that all of America has been in for years: the necessity of making a choice between commercial success, measured in terms of cheapness and wide sales appeal, and honest craftsmanship that is often not only unrewarded but unrecognized. The former, he says, is dishonest, while the latter is made up of "...workmen whose materials are human lives..."¹⁸ The modern writer, then, is one who is attempting to "...get back into his own hands some control over the

¹⁶Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁷Sherwood Anderson, The Modern Writer (San Francisco, 1925), the first of his small limited editions, this one of 1,000 copies.

¹⁸Ibid., 29.

tools of and materials of his craft."¹⁹ All the writer can want or expect if he is honest is the freedom to do his work, and he should not ask for more. "The real reward I fancy lies just in the work itself, nowhere else. If you cannot get it there, you will not get it at all... You are undertaking a task that can never be finished. The longest life will be too short to ever really get you anywhere near what you want."²⁰ That Anderson believed what he said is shown by the fact that almost all of his spare time was being devoted to Tar.

In March the ordeal was over, and from New Orleans he could write "Am working again, the pen flying. I lectured, I saw people...Made a little money and often an ass of myself."²¹ Preparing Dark Laughter for publication (Deep Laughter was suggested as a title, but he rejected it as "too pretentious") and working at Tar absorbed his time and energies; he had signed a five-year contract with Horace Liveright that would take care of his financial worries, and in restless moments he and Elizabeth would take short trips through the South. In looking for a place to finish Tar in peace, he discovered the Virginia mountains.

¹⁹Ibid., 31-32. ²⁰Ibid., 44.

²¹Letters, 135-136.

In the fall of 1925, while he was finishing Tar, Dark Laughter was published. In it Anderson had tried to convey "The neuroticism, the hurry and self-consciousness of modern life, and back of it the easy, strange laughter of the blacks,"²² and although he does convey this contrast, actually the novel is the story of the last of his rejections which, in effect, was the rejection of rejection. Anderson again employs the materials of his own life, in this case his disenchantment with the shallowness and meaninglessness of relations among people in the supposedly emancipated circles of Chicago and New York, including the kind of marriage such a movement produces; he reiterates the rejection of middle-class values that he had proclaimed in Many Marriages and re-affirmed in A Story Teller's Story; and he begins a symbolic return to the unspoiled primitive life that he had accepted in A Story Teller's Story and was to bring to its culmination in Tar. At the same time he was accepting it in his own life through his attraction to the French Quarter in New Orleans until he made his final move to the mountains of southwestern Virginia.

Anderson sets the tone for Dark Laughter in a preliminary sketch done in the Winesburg manner. Here, in the portrait of a minor character, Sponge Martin, a primitive craftsman who refuses to surrender either his sense of a job

²²Ibid., 142.

well done or his own individuality to the new age, he shows how life might be lived in simple, uncomplicated, and honest directness. Martin appears and reappears in the novel as the symbol of the uncorrupted wise man, apparently an outcast, but in reality a free man, just as do the negroes, but the novel from this point centers around Bruce Dudley, formerly John Stockton of Chicago, who has not only rejected conventional standards of values as had John Webster, but who has gone beyond that rebellion and has rejected rebellion as an end in itself. The novel traces his attempts to find fulfillment and liberation after the last of these rebellions.

The two most important incidents that led Dudley through renunciation of the liberation movement are told in a series of skillfully handled flashbacks that show the Liberation movement as shallow, superficial, and insincere, and that show his movement backward in American history in an effort to find a place and a people that had not been corrupted either by materialism or by middle-class standards of behavior. In both cases the implications of Anderson's life since he had written Winesburg, Ohio are made clear as Dudley is shown to be another of the Andersonian heroes.

In Chicago Dudley had been an advertising man, a member of the Liberation group, and a partner in a childless modern marriage that was nothing more than a convenient but legal arrangement. All three of these were meaningless to Dudley, the first because it offended his growing sense of crafts-

manship and the integrity of words; the second because it is so busy being free that it has no time to go beyond the act and do something with its freedom; and the third because the relationship stops on the surface and has no depth. In one of the subtlest passages Anderson was ever to write, he shows the shallowness of this whole phase of Dudley's and therefore his life.

The surface picture of the Liberation movement makes it appear to be an earnest attempt to find a meaningful life, and the keynote of the movement is self-expression at all costs. This surface presentation is largely responsible for the novel's initial reception as a laudation of the modernist movement as well as for much of the more recent accusations of naivete, but both ignore two facts of his treatment of the movement. In the first place, the portrayal is entirely superficial, and he makes no effort to penetrate the surface as he does in his customary intuitive approach; and more importantly, secondly, he uses a powerful illustration that makes clear the impotence of the movement.

Dudley's wife is a writer; a vivid scene on a street corner strikes her as significant, and she makes it into a story. But she is unable to finish it; although she has caught the surface of the scene, she is unable to capture its essence because she can't understand it, and the story remains meaningless. The bitter undercurrent is as strong

here as it is in the short stories Anderson wrote during his last Chicago years as he punctuates his indictment with an acid, "For the sake of art, eh?"²³

The rest of the novel is concerned with Dudley's search for fulfillment. Leaving the sterility of his marriage, the movement, and his job behind him, he heads down the Illinois River toward the Mississippi, New Orleans, and a renewed sense of identification with America, convinced "...that he, in common with almost all American men, had got out of touch with things--stones lying in fields, the fields themselves, houses, trees, rivers, factory walls, tools, women's bodies..."²⁴

From this point the novel is the story of that search. In New Orleans he is fascinated by the foreign air and by the negroes, but he is unable to know them, and so he returns anonymously to the Midwestern town where he was born, gets a job in a factory working beside Sponge Martin, has an affair with the factory owner's wife, and then, when she becomes pregnant, runs off with her, presumably to fulfillment, although in the background her negro servants laugh mockingly and wisely as they recognize the futility of the attempt. The two of them have made the only choice

²³Sherwood Anderson, Dark Laughter (New York, 1925), 50.

²⁴Ibid., 62.

possible between sterility and fulfillment, but their elopement remains in the end a gesture of rebellion rather than an arrival at freedom. It is merely another point on a long road that, as Anderson indicated in The Modern Writer, has no real end, either in fact or in fancy.

Like all of his earlier novels, Dark Laughter is a story of rebellion and rejection, and like the others, except Many Marriages, the ending is optimistic but inconclusive, again pointing out Anderson's major weakness in the novel form. The novel has no real ending, and the impression remains that there is a much larger and more significant story to follow. In spite of the fact that both rebellions, Dudley's rebellion against the superficialities of liberation and the manufacturer's wife's rejection of her sterile and shallow marriage, were conscious and deliberate; in spite of their acceptance of each other as human beings; and in spite of Dudley's confidence that somehow he would find a meaningful work, the laugh of the negro servants is as mocking as the factory whistles that accompanied Hugh McVey's decision in Poor White. There is no assurance that they will be successful; like Anderson's decision to turn South at the end of A Story Teller's Story their rejection is deliberate and optimistic in spite of the doubts surrounding its eventual success. Rejection is the beginning of the road to understanding and fulfillment, and integrity demands that one follow that road regardless

of its outcome. At this point Anderson can see no other meaning for man's life.

Structurally the novel is very much like its predecessors, especially Many Marriages and Poor White, in that Anderson devotes a substantial portion of the middle section to a long background digression that, for all its interest, is actually irrelevant. In his efforts to incorporate as much of the atmosphere of the times into the novel, his description of the shallowness and decadence of post-World War I international society becomes more than a mere contrast with the forceful, primitive, and meaningful life, and it becomes more than motivation for the girl to enter into a marriage devoid of feeling in her efforts to escape it. It becomes instead a long distraction from the main purpose of the novel in spite of Anderson's attempts to tie it in structurally through flashbacks; and it does not broaden the base of his objections to the superficiality of society because it is too remote from the Midwestern sterility that he castigates. As a result it leads the reader into irrelevant and misleading byways.

Stylistically the novel is a departure from the solidity of Poor White, and it follows the disjointed technique of Many Marriages to the point where it loses the spontaneity of Anderson's Midwestern idiom and syntax and seems contrived. Although Maxwell Geismar refers to this difficulty as a "...shiny machine-made veneer...[over] ...Anderson's

honest western grain,"²⁵ actually this description is not accurate. No machine would be tolerated that produced such unevenness. Occasionally, however, the Midwestern Anderson takes command over the unhappy stylistic experimentations, as in the Sponge Martin sketch, and one wishes he would have continued in that vein.

In this novel Anderson was strongly under the influence of James Joyce, as he noted before its publication: "I think as a matter of prose experiment you will sense what Mr. Joyce was driving at when you read Dark Laughter ...I very frankly took his experiment as a starting place for the prose rhythm of the book."²⁶ What he failed to realize was that his own earlier experimentation had led him to a style that had become his own, and that the imitation of Joyce was actually hindering rather than advancing his career as a prose stylist. The result is unsatisfactory and obvious imitation rather than solid originality.

It is unfortunate that Ernest Hemingway chose to parody this novel in The Torrents of Spring. Not only was the result inept, but it indicates that Hemingway, like so many of the other creative writers of the period,²⁷ had accepted the Anderson stereotype as the celebrator of the

²⁵Geismar, 255. ²⁶Letters, 148.

²⁷See, for example, Theodore Drieser's comments on Many Marriages in his Letters, Robert H. Elias, ed. (Philadelphia, 1959), II, 422.

Liberation. Instead, as Geismar comments, "Ostensibly a portrait of the emancipated modern ego, Dark Laughter is actually a portrait of the inadequate modern ego,"²⁸ and as a result Hemingway's burlesque is actually a parody of what Anderson had himself ridiculed. It is difficult, however, not to make this mistake because of the broken form of the novel. More serious, however, from Hemingway's point of view, is the stylistic parody that in effect is a burlesque of his own in The Sun Also Rises.

Other misinterpretations have resulted from the interpretation of the novel in the light of the Anderson stereotype. Oscar Cargill, for example, sees Anderson's characters as intellectuals and the novel as essentially a story of contrast between the loves of the intellectuals Dudley and Aline and the unintellectual negroes.²⁹ Rather, in the very passages that Cargill uses to support this contention, notably in the passage about Gauguin, it is evident that his characters have rejected the pseudointellectuals that represent the only intellectual life they know, and are trying to find a new freedom uncomplicated by the jargon and the superficialities that Cargill points out. Again, the mistake is an easy one to make because of the novel's structural defects, but it is an unnecessary one.

²⁸Geismar, 256.

²⁹Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America (New York, 1948), 329.

The most serious accusation that can be leveled against Anderson in this novel is thoughtlessness;³⁰ just as that is the basic trouble with Many Marriages, here again it results in formlessness and in his inability to carry rebellion through to whatever follows the act. That there is something next is clearly implied, but whatever it is, it is cloaked in nothing more than a vague hope and overtones of failure. Anderson has made clear his conviction that rebellion is not enough, but he is unable to go beyond that point either to the fulfillment that he seeks for his people or to the inevitable tragedy that was so evident in the short stories.

³⁰It is not, however, the same sort of thoughtlessness that Irving Howe has seen fit to make much of in Anderson's handling of Jewish characters. Howe complains that all of them are nameless and are characterized as Jews rather than human beings. He feels that this is not due to Anderson's prejudice but the unforgivably thoughtless acceptance of a folk stereotype of the Jew as alien and therefore unknowable. That this is a folk stereotype is obvious, but objecting to it in Anderson's work is the same sort of misguided liberalism that removed Huckleberry Finn from public libraries and schools. Just Mark Twain did not characterize Jim as he did thoughtlessly, neither did Anderson approach his Jewish characters thoughtlessly. Rather each knew what he was doing; each was working in a tradition that accepted the stereotype, and honesty demanded that they portray it. In dealing with the problems and peculiarities of his Midwestern rural people among whom the Jew is considered unknowable and alien because of cultural and religious differences, Anderson had no choice but to proceed accordingly. At the same time he pointed out that the attitude was one of the many barriers that would have to be destroyed before men could know each other.

This ultimate vagueness is not unexpected, however; rather, it parallels Anderson's own position. He had turned South at the end of A Story Teller's Story, not because he knew he would find any answers there but because it was a continuation of his rejection. Bruce Dudley is in the same situation, and Anderson's thoughtlessness lies in his inability thus far to find meaning anywhere after the act of rejection. That he did not follow this novel with other fictional works but instead followed it with two more volumes of what for want of a better word must be called autobiography is indicative of his pressing need for answers to the questions raised in his fiction and his continued inability to find them outside of himself and his own world.

Dark Laughter has two unique values at this stage of his literary career. The first is, of course, the rejection of rejection, the recognition that the modernist rebellion against puritanism, materialism, and conformity is not an answer but a beginning; the second lies in Bruce Dudley's anonymous return to the small town in which he was born, hoping that in accepting the uncomplicated and unsophisticated life of the town he may find fulfillment. He did not anticipate the inroads of materialism that Anderson knew were there, of course, and so he did not find what he sought. At this point, working on Tar: A Midwest Childhood, Anderson was seeking a vicarious return that he could not achieve in fact.

Dark Laughter was Anderson's only work to approach the level of a best seller, paying him more than \$8,000 during 1925. This, combined with several thousand dollars from the serial rights to Tar in The Woman's Home Companion, removed at least temporarily the financial difficulties that continued to plague him and, in addition, provided the opportunity for the last and most significant of his moves. In the hills of Southwestern Virginia, which he and Elizabeth had visited while he was working on Tar, he discovered Troutdale, Virginia, where

The mountain people are sweet.. No books, little false education, real humbleness. It does so beat talking to pretentious half-artists. We may try to acquire a few acres and a cabin...Everyone wants you to come in, to drink moonshine, to eat, to spend the night.³¹

With the money from his successes he was able to afford more than a new acres and a cabin; although he was committed to a late fall lecture tour, he made arrangements to buy Ripshin Farm near Troutdale and to start construction not only of a cabin but of a big stone house. Meanwhile, back in New Orleans he put the final revisions of Tar aside long enough to collect essays, sketches, and bits of memoirs from the past few years and to put them together under the title of Sherwood Anderson's Notebook, which was published in the spring of 1926. It was published in the

³¹Letters, 145.

midst of a personal crisis: his brother Earl, who had lived with him for a time in Elyria, and who, Anderson comments in the Memoirs had much to do with his decision to become a writer, turned up in New York after thirteen years of silence, partially paralyzed, poor, and a failure in his attempts to become an artist. Karl was caring for him, but Sherwood, conscious of his debt to Earl and fond of him as a brother, was eager to help. At the same time he was ashamed of his success in the light of Earl's failure. Nevertheless, he insisted that Earl come to the farm to recuperate and to make it his home.

At this time, too, Anderson's son John was determined to be an artist, and he was trying to temper his own sympathy with the boy's ambition with a proper but belated sense of parental caution and prudence. When Sherwood Anderson's Notebook was published he was so busy with family and farm that he gave it almost no attention. He hoped, he commented, that it had "...a healthy, nice tone,"³² but the book as published can hardly be described that way. Instead it is the record of the years of frustration, despair, and rejection from the time of Poor White until he began to regain his equilibrium with the publication of A Story Teller's Story. In the Notebook Anderson records what he thinks is permanent in his thinking and his life in

³²Letters, 151.

the years of maturity following Winesburg, Ohio, not as formal autobiography, but as observations, impressions, and experiences loosely linked chronologically.

Its value is more than a convenient "...collection of magazine pieces written several years earlier,"³³ as Irving Howe dismisses it, because it provides insight into Anderson's thinking and his attitudes during the period of wandering after he rejected the liberation, and it shows the development of the style that he used unsuccessfully in Dark Laughter. Also, in spite of the air of bitterness and pessimism that permeates the later pieces, it shows the turning point that led him to Troutdale, Virginia, accepting it as a counterpart of the simple, honest ways of late nineteenth century Clyde, Ohio.

The collection is an apparently artless and naive accumulation that could be just what it ostensibly is, a notebook or daybook containing the distilled wit and wisdom of the author. Actually, however, it does not represent Anderson as he was when it was published; instead it shows him at his low point during which the stories of frustration and despair were written. Here one sees the state of mind behind the stories, a state that sees no hope for modern man as a group, as an individual, or as Sherwood Anderson, unappreciated and impoverished writer.

³³Howe, 208.

There is no shadow of the coming best seller, of the generally successful lecture tours, or of the security of place that the farm was to provide.

Anderson's state of mind concerning the hopelessness of the lot of modern man and of himself in his efforts to come to some sort of understanding of his dilemma are best shown in three of the essays, "I'll Say We've Done Well," "Notes on Standardization," and "When the Writer Talks." The first is a look at his native state of Ohio in an article written in 1922, and in it Anderson is at his bitterest. Instead of realizing its potential as a place where the individual could find a meaningful life, Ohio has become as dirty a place as it is possible to find. His irony in the essay is so heavy that it becomes denunciation as he comments that Ohio cities "...can put themselves forward as being as ugly, as noisy, as dirty, and as careless...as any American cities anywhere."³⁴ But his denunciation is not mere muckraking; it is bitter regret at what has happened:

Have you a city that smells worse than Akron, that is a worse junkheap of ugliness than Youngstown, that is more smugly self-satisfied than Cleveland, or that has missed as unbelievably great an opportunity to be one of the lovely cities of the world as has the city of Cincinnati? ...I claim we Ohio men have taken as lovely a land as ever lay outdoors and that we have, in our cities and towns, put the old stamp of ourselves on it for keeps.³⁵

³⁴Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Notebook (New York, 1926), 90.

³⁵Ibid., 90-91.

But it wasn't easy, Anderson comments; "First we had to lick the poet out of our hearts and then we had to lick nature herself, but we did it."³⁶ Now,

...A man in Ohio can lead a decent life. He can get up in the morning and go through a street where all the houses are nicely blacked up with coal soot, and into a factory where all he has to do all day long is to drill a hole in a piece of iron...Nowadays all you have to do, if you live in an up-to-date Ohio town is make, say, twenty-three million holes in pieces of iron, all just alike, in a lifetime. Isn't that fine?³⁷

"Notes on Standardization," written in 1921, continues in this vein, examining the mass-produced culture of America until he sees no way out of the dirt around him, and he cries out, "Are our lives worth living? Is it living at all to spend all of our best years in helping to build cities larger...make more dirt and noise and indulge in an ever-increasingly louder talk of progress?"³⁸ Nevertheless, more in hope than in conviction he continues on a lower pitch: "Or is there a quieter, more leisurely and altogether more charming way of life we might begin to live, here in America?"³⁹ To this there is no answer in the essay.

"When the Writer Talks" brings Anderson's personal problems into the picture. Not only is lecturing a necessary evil that takes him away from the writing he should be doing, but it poses new problems. Basically he feels that

³⁶Ibid., 91. ³⁷Ibid., 99. ³⁸Ibid., 147. ³⁹Ibid.

it is silly and degrading, and at the same time that it stimulates him, raising the old question of his values and the dichotomy of standards that he finds in himself. On one hand, he says, "'This lecturing business is so exciting and interesting. I love it.'" On the other, he feels that "'This lecturing business is so terrible. It makes me feel so cheap.'"⁴⁰

"King Coal," like "Notes on Standardization," passes beyond regret and bitterness and points out the increasing need that Anderson feels for a sense of place and of permanence in his life, the same need that led him to buy the farm in Virginia: "If a man lives in a street in a modern industrial town can he love that street? If a man does not love the little patch of ground on which his own house may stand can he in any sense love the street, the city, the state, the country of which it is a part?"⁴¹ The need for an answer to this problem leads him to search for a "forgotten spot where progress is unknown."⁴²

Besides this record of his despair, his frustration, and his growing need to identify himself with a place that will ease his growing despair, the book contains liberal samples of his newly-acquired Dark Laughter style that suffer in comparison with the unpretentious prose of these

⁴⁰Ibid., 177. ⁴¹Ibid., 215-216. ⁴²Ibid., 219.

essays. In the intermittent "Notes Out of a Man's Life," the product of odd moments during and after the writing of Dark Laughter, Anderson employs the jerky, disjointed, impressionistic prose style that hinders and distorts the clear expression of his thought. Nevertheless, here, too, the bitterness grows softer toward the end, as his personal problems become eased and Ripshin farm becomes closer to reality as a place in which he can find refuge from the harshness of America. In the last of these Anderson concludes with regrets at the little that he understands and with the hope that some day he may know more; with puzzlement at the recurrence of the same old problems; and with a final reiteration of his faith in craftsmanship as a way of life. The final sketch, of a man who has rediscovered craftsmanship, is the reiteration of Anderson's belief that although the end of his search may be beyond his abilities to grasp, nevertheless he can find a measure of satisfaction and fulfillment in the means.

Until after the economic collapse of 1930-31 Sherwood Anderson's Notebook remains as the last real expression of his doubts about his own place in modern America and, most importantly, his inability to find a means for putting into effect the only solutions he saw for the problems of modern society. The return to pride and satisfaction in work; to compassion, love, and understanding for other human beings; and to a state of innocence even if it might be brutal at

times were fine theories, but in a modern, sophisticated society he knew that talking about them was futile, even among those whom he had earlier regarded as fellow revolutionaries. Although these were the only possible solutions that he could see, he realized that his talking, like that of his father, could only be misinterpreted or ignored among a people who were madly pursuing economic and materialistic success.

The end of this book, like that of A Story Teller's Story, points toward a period of withdrawal from the public scene and a concentrated attempt to find meaning in life through the means that he had been suggesting for so long and that he had redefined in both of these autobiographical memoirs. At this point the world is not for him, and Ripshin Farm becomes the focal point of his need to reject it so that among a simple, honest people he can put his principles into practice. One more task remains for him: to see Tar: A Midwest Childhood into print as the final step before he completes his withdrawal at a time when he feels that "A man plows on and then dies. God knows about it all.. Rubbish piled up. The real flaw always eluding a man. Then when it is almost hopeless, a bit comes...These times of discouragement come like a disease. A man never escapes. Sometimes I think I can feel them in the air, from North, South, East, West."⁴³

⁴³Letters, 160.

Early in the summer of 1926 he and Elizabeth moved into the completed cabin on the farm near Troutdale, "... planning to make it our permanent home."⁴⁴ Here he had found the way of life that he depicted in Tar and that he had thought was gone,

...a way of life that is outside the tone of most America just now. The machine has not penetrated deeply into the hills. Hand weaving is still being done. Grain is still cut with a cradle. You may see oxen on the hill roads and in the fields, and when a man dies his neighbors come to his house and build his coffin in the yard before his door...The hills have, however, their own fools, their beautiful women, their liars, their over-sensitive and their easily-hurt ones.⁴⁵

Tar: A Midwest Childhood is the product of this new sense of discovery. It is the record not merely of Anderson's own childhood but of an America still possessed of much of the innocence, exuberance, wonder, and unconscious brutality of all childhood. Written primarily in the hills during the late summer and fall of 1925, it is neither autobiography nor fiction although it is close to being a novel, but it is an attempt to fuse past and present and to compile a portrait of a world in which it would be possible for man to practice the virtues that would lead him to fulfillment; it is the temporary world of the 1870's and 1880's in rural Ohio made permanent as a refuge for his dreams; and at the same time it is his recognition that such a place still

⁴⁴Ibid., 152. ⁴⁵Memoirs, 389-390.

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exists in the hill country that has been overlooked at least for a time by the exploiting forces of material progress.

In Tar Anderson is not attempting to provide either a factual or an ideal or idealized portrait of an America that he would like to see return in fact. Rather, again using the intuitive approach to understanding the essence underlying the surface phenomena of life, he is trying to recapture the spirit of that time in its code of inarticulated values and its sense of the worth of the human individual as they are shown in its actions. Kindnesses shown to an insignificant boy or a pot of soup carried to a sick neighbor are thus made more meaningful than all the millions of dollars poured into impersonal, standardized, and dehumanized charity.

On the jacket of the book he comments that "It is, of course, autobiographical, as such a book would be bound to be, but it is not written as an autobiography." It is, in fact as well as in intent, another of the combinations of fact and fiction that have exasperated category-minded critics. In the foreword he states that his purpose in writing the book is his belief that "Like every other man and woman in the world I had always thought the story of my own childhood would be an absorbingly interesting one,"⁴⁶

⁴⁶Sherwood Anderson, Tar: A Midwest Childhood (New York, 1926), ix.

but as the foreword goes on to point out, his real reason is not quite that simple. If it were, the story as it had been told in Windy McPherson's Son and A Story Teller's Story might have been sufficient. But neither of them satisfied him because in both of these he had missed the "spirit of something" that he had been trying to catch. Now he was starting over, reinterpreting again, in the hope that this time he might grasp it. His neglect of the facts he dismisses with artful but insincere naivete as a writer's fancy, but as both his letters and later Memoirs show, he was deadly serious in writing the book.

The reason for returning to his childhood background in Tar in order to recapture this spirit of innocence is made clear by the cyclical structure of his life as he showed it in A Story Teller's Story. The first part of his life he saw as essentially good and meaningful in spite of the occasional brutal innocence of the age; the early Chicago years were essentially meaningless in spite of his growing awareness of the intrinsic worth of the individual; the Army period was good; the following commercial years bad, the early writing years good, and the later "literary" years bad. He had rejected both the commercial and the "literary" years as meaningless; the early writing years were a time of personal discovery impossible to recapture; he had tried to find and utilize the meaning of his Spanish-American war experience in Marching Men and

learned that he had been deceived. The only place in his experience that remained for him in which to find personal and social meaning was the Clyde, Ohio, of his childhood and youth.

The outline of the book shows an almost complete identification with the autobiographical materials Anderson had used in both Windy McPherson's Son and A Story Teller's Story, but the presentation of these facts is a complete repudiation of the interpretation put on them in the former and an amplification of that in the latter. The most important new material that Anderson introduces is a dream of childhood and youth that had largely faded away under the impact of materialism in adulthood, and the revelation of this dream points out what he is looking for in writing the book. It is of a town that is perfect in its pastoral simplicity, and it is a town that he acknowledges could not possibly exist in fact. Whether the dream was actually a dream of his youth or whether Anderson imagined its existence as a frustrated adult doesn't matter. What does is his seeking for a refuge where, in his imagination, he could withdraw from the world. It is this dream that he has identified with the hills of southwestern Virginia.

The portrayals of both the father and the mother carry on from the point at which he left them in A Story Teller's Story. In the case of the father Anderson has completed the portrayal as that of the mythological free

adventurer-craftsman-storyteller, and in the process he makes the earlier tentative identification complete. The father tells the tales of his real or imaginacy adventures; he goes steadily downhill from draftsman to employee to wanderer; and he is just as disreputable as Windy McPherson, but here Anderson takes pride in the disreputableness, which he identifies with his own: like his father, "Tar became a story teller but, if you will notice, it is the shiftless roving fellows who tell tales. Few tellers of tales are good citizens. They only pretend to be."⁴⁷

The concept of the mother has changed from the earlier portrayals too. No longer is she the patient, suffering, pitiable woman of Windy McPherson's Son. Still inarticulate, remote, and mysterious, she is no longer tortured by her life as the wife of a wastrel, but her evolution, begun in Winesburg, Ohio when she sought fulfillment vicariously, is now carried through to completion, and she emerges as a woman fulfilled in the mysterious role of motherhood, which combines compassion, service, and intuitive understanding. As a result, she is no longer a person; instead she becomes the symbol of female strength and innate wisdom upon which Anderson will later build his hopes in Perhaps Women.

More important than these changing views of the parent images, however, are two aspects of the book that point out the "spirit of something" that Anderson is looking for.

⁴⁷Ibid., 11.

The first of these is Tar's introduction to what can be called the awareness of and reverence for life. In a manner that is gradual, natural, and accepted in such an environment, Tar comes to realize that as diverse as the many facets of life are, nevertheless they are part of a whole. The earliest sounds of rural life stirring in the morning, the feel of a horse's tongue on his hand, and the attempt to emulate animals by eating the grass are the earliest manifestations of life to him. Later, these impressions are joined by other discoveries: the potential threat of a newborn child; the sheer enjoyment of spring grass after the winter; and more vividly the sting of a bee and the increasing desire to know the wonder of a girl's body. This long but unified process becomes epitomized in the sketch of the old woman who dies alone in the woods, the best passage in the book. However, as Anderson points out, it is only the adult who can look back and see the meaning of both the growth of this awareness and of the incident in the woods that symbolized it,⁴⁸ and then only after he has realized the meaninglessness of the things that had blurred the image for a time.

Equally important to his adult recognition of this childhood value is his reconsidered view of the town itself,

⁴⁸ Shortly after Tar was published Anderson expanded the incident into "Death in the Woods."

a view that is the most nostalgic thing Anderson had yet written. Here are the fertile countryside and the closeness of the town to it; the give and take of small town raillery; early morning at the racetrack; the quiet of a drive through the country; and the excitement of Saturday night on Main Street. But all this is mere background for the recognition of the values that Tar had missed. It was a society in which the individual had dignity because he was permitted to have it. Although Tar recognized this instinctively, the imagined stigma attached to his father, who was really well liked, prevented him from becoming a full participant in the town life, and in imagined self defense he became a hustler as he accepted other values.

Yet Anderson's portrait of the town is not one-sided. He "...is no necromancer,"⁴⁹ as Maxwell Geismar points out. Even in retrospect Anderson can see it:

Boys, Tar's own age, had secret vices. Some of the boys at the swimming hole did things, said things. When men grow older they grow sentimental about the old swimming hole. They remember only the pleasant things that happened. There is a trick of the mind that makes you forget the unpleasant. It's just as well. If you could see life clear and straight maybe you could not live.⁵⁰

Evil did exist, along with the good, but it was human evil stemming from the brutality of innocence rather than the inhumanity of materialism, although Tar did not realize

⁴⁹Geismar, 261. ⁵⁰Tar, 233-234.

it then. Instead, he accepted the values of the new materialism as good, and with that he hustled into maturity, leaving innocence behind. Only much later, as Anderson points out, could he realize his loss.

As Anderson's attempt to capture the spirit of the values that he wanted America to accept in place of material standards and of the values that he sought for himself, the book is successful, but many factors combine to prevent its success as a work of literary art. The first of these is the repetitious nature of the material that he uses, especially since it was written so soon after A Story Teller's Story. Critics have complained that Anderson had exhausted his creative imagination at this point and was reduced to using the same material over, and in spite of the importance that this book has as a literary interpretation of what Anderson was seeking in his own life, the criticism is justified. Even the new materials, the new interpretations, and the interesting attempts to reconstruct a world view as seen through the eyes of a child are not enough to overcome the repetitiousness of the book.

Structurally the book is one of Anderson's best executed works; the jarring structural weaknesses of his previous book-length manuscripts have been overcome, and the narrative is unified, but stylistic difficulties that he should have been able to remove occur frequently to mar the work. Not only are they the obvious ones, such as

awkward sentences and grammatical weaknesses, but they are more serious ones, such as the attempt to return to his Winesburg style as a child would write it. As a result the effect of the solid Midwestern style that he had evolved is lost, and a weak imitation of it predominates until it becomes too evident that he is an adult trying consciously to relive his childhood.

In spite of these two weaknesses the book is an important one in Anderson's career, both because it is his most eloquent denial of the generalities that have surrounded his work and because it is a book that he had to write at this point. It certainly refutes the persistent myths that he was a naturalist or that he was revolting from the village, and it points out his true attitudes toward both life and the town. More importantly, however, it comes as close to being a positive statement of Anderson's personal values as it was possible for him to make up to this point. Here he shows the pattern of behavior that he feels would make possible meaningful relations among people; he shows that things are not important; and he shows that simple ways and simple standards can go far toward removing the barriers that isolate men from each other. It is a statement of belief that he could not make directly; he could only make it under the guise of fiction.

The values that he found in his imaginative return to the Clyde, Ohio, of the late nineteenth century are the

values that he sought to surround himself with in Troutdale, Virginia. As he concluded this long period of introspection he had achieved identity and vindication and then, finally, a sense of place in a world increasingly hostile to his ideals. Vindication came easiest; he had been convinced of the validity of his rejections and of the direction of his life almost from the beginning, and what he needed was reassurance in the face of the failures, the misinterpretations, the many difficulties, and the qualms of conscience about the way he had neglected his wives, his children, and his brother. It was a simple matter, but it was necessary because his view of the world had become so bitter, as the two volumes of short stories indicate, that he could not go on without it.

Personal identification was a bit harder, although it too became increasingly necessary because of his intensified sense of aloneness as he faced a hostile and misunderstanding world. Yet the way was prepared for him to identify himself with his father as early as Winesburg, Ohio, and in each of the following father pictures he came closer until it became inevitable that he see himself as another Irwin. Irwin was a craftsman; so was he. Irwin had rejected material success; so had he. Both of them were misunderstood wanderers who followed a calling that justified their neglect of others; both of them were seekers after a higher fulfillment through their imaginations. In rehabilitating

the memory of his father, Anderson found an image of himself that removed the stigma of failure and eliminated his despair so that he could go on writing and living with himself.

Finding a sense of place that would permit him to live with his values and to ignore a world that, whether materialistic or liberated, sneered at them to the point where he was ashamed to confess them was more difficult. The series of moves from Chicago to New York to New Orleans were manifestations of that search, and finally he had to acknowledge that such a place existed only in the past. As he started Tar as a statement of beliefs, his trip to Virginia was more than mere coincidence or a search for a quiet and cool place in which to work; it was a continuation of his restlessness that resulted from his need. That he would fuse the two in his mind, seeing the values that he accepted put into practice, was almost inevitable, and finishing Tar and buying the farms were acts that had the same meaning. At that time he felt that he really had found what he had been looking for, and in his personal life at least he began to feel secure.

This sense of security was not to last, however, and already factors were combining to destroy it. Economic chaos was not far off and it would shake even the Virginia hills; his marriage had reached a peak of success and would soon begin to decline; and most important of all, the long

period of introspection had done damage to his literary reputation that was just beginning to be felt. He felt that the period was successful from his point of view; he had achieved satisfaction and had even made some money, but he was aware that the material of the period was not as good as it could be, and he was having difficulty with a new novel, Talbot Whittingham, which he subsequently abandoned after numerous false starts.

As understandable as it is when viewed in the light of the personal and ideological crisis that Anderson was undergoing during the period, nevertheless his creative abilities had declined considerably during this period. They had not disappeared by any means, as the many excellent passages in all four of these books and as "Death In the Woods," written just after Tar show, but the major works of the period are marred by stylistic difficulties that could have been eliminated easily were it not for his increased tendency toward experimentation that was actually imitation and by the sheer haste with which he wrote all of the books. The repetitiousness of the material adds to indications of a decline, and Dark Laughter, his only major attempt at fiction is, in the final analysis, a weak novel rather than the powerful portrayal of postwar life and values that it was intended to be. During the period Anderson had become a seeker rather than a craftsman, and

the resulting work shows the difference when compared to the Winesburg, Poor White, and short story achievements.

There can be little doubt of the fact that personal problems, ideological doubts, and lack of understanding of the nature of his own talents were at fault in this decline. Nevertheless at this time they were apparently resolved, and as though in celebration he turned to an old work, A New Testament that, when revised, would indicate that one period in his life had ended and that another had begun. But making it a piece of work that would signify what he wanted it to was hard work, and as he commented, "There is a lot to say, but I am too tired to write."⁵¹ In spite of his new sense of identification and his discovery of a place in which he could live, he had found no ultimate answers, and he was beginning to realize that he never would. With the comment that "It helps being down here. I'm done with cities...I wanted to bury myself in the field and come up green,"⁵² he was ready to use Ripshin Farm as the refuge for which it was intended. A quick trip to Europe to arrange for foreign publication of A Story Teller's Story, the Notebook, and Winesburg made him more determined; on his return he wrote

I went to Paris and found myself close to famous. That's just plain sickening. God knows, I hope you escape it. It's sheer nonsense without a spark of meaning.⁵³

⁵¹Letters, 168. ⁵²Ibid., 171. ⁵³Ibid., 170.

In the effort to forget this sort of thing he buried himself in the countryside, he sought to gather his family and his old friends around him, and he worked sporadically at A New Testament. Now that his period of introspection was over he found himself as despairing as he had been before. Now, however, he was trying to regain strength and faith through the hills and the people in them rather than through himself. At this point Anderson was tired, and it would take a long time for him to regain the confidence that he almost had within his grasp. He had rationalized his problems and he had returned physically to an older way of life, but he still had to learn to live it.

CHAPTER VII

THE TOWNSMAN

During the late twenties and early thirties Anderson withdrew almost entirely both from literary work and from the literary scene. Even after the long period of introspection that had resulted in his discovery of a place with which he could identify himself and an acknowledgment of his self-imposed role as storyteller and outcast, he was full of despair. For the most part the trouble was with his work. Not only had his literary reputation and output declined, but he was afraid that his career was over in spite of the fact that he knew "Death in the Woods" was one of his best stories. During the few weeks in Paris in January, 1927, he was at his low point:

Everything I have written seems dead stuff... My fancy tosses and jumps constantly. I work on a novel for a week, then throw it away. I write a short story. It seems nothing...I can see nothing I am doing as really worth presenting.¹

At the same time, however, his old illogical optimism reasserted itself:

Well, I'm too old a bird to think it is all necessarily final for me. I have waded through other long swamps...I may right myself like an old ship.

¹Letters, 165.

We'll be back in America early in March...
 God knows, I hope I will be something less
 rudderless by then.²

Even after his return the despair continued: "Long days nothing to do. 'Write, man.' But what shall I write? I am sitting on a hill in the country or walking in the streets of a town. I am in despair, such despair..."³ This was to continue until he made the decisions that his withdrawal demanded. These decisions would have effects on his career and marriage that he could have anticipated, but nevertheless they had to be made. The first was primarily acknowledgment of a fact rather than a conscious choice: "...now I am in somewhat of a better temper, having come to a resolution. I have decided that, for my soul's good, I have got to give up the notion of living by writing. This idea that one must produce constantly, or starve, is terribly detrimental to any sort of freedom of approach. All the time I am driven by this demon of necessity...I want what writing I do to be incidental, a part of my life, not a profession."⁴

This decision demanded another: he had to find a means by which to earn a living. He considered returning to the city to find a job but rejected the idea when the opportunity came to buy the two weekly newspapers, one Republican and one Democratic, in nearby Marion. Financing the purchase

²Ibid. ³Ibid., 177. ⁴Ibid., 174-175.

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was difficult but a loan from a wealthy admirer, Burton Emmet, made it possible. In late 1927 he became a country editor, a role that absorbed his energies and made it possible for him "...to get back into closer association with all kinds of people in their everyday lives."⁵ This, too, was something he had been needing if the sense of place he had found was to be anything more than geographic.

The effect of these decisions upon his marriage was to come later; meanwhile he celebrated them in A New Testament, which he finally published in 1927. Alternated with the notes of celebration are shadows of the fears that had been plaguing him, but these fears recur only intermittently, and the overall tone of the book is one of joy and release. A New Testament has much in common with Mid-American Chants in that it, like the earlier collection of free verse and verse prose, marks the end of one phase of Anderson's life and the beginning of another. Equally importantly, it bears the same relationship to Anderson's prose style of the late 1920's that Mid-American Chants bore to his style in the late teens and early twenties. The volume also provides further evidence that Anderson was not a poet, although there is no indication that he ever pretended to be one. It is not a book that has much interest or appeal other than to Anderson specialists, although occasional flashes of

⁵Ibid., 175.

insight and frequent pleasing phrases make it often rewarding.

In this collection as in the earlier, Anderson was taking advantage of a freedom that neither fiction, autobiographical memoir, nor conventional verse could provide so that he could give expression to a new sense of discovery. Because he did not fully understand his feelings and was still uncertain of them he could not have expressed them in any other way, although as he became accustomed to them he used them in shorter pieces in Hello Towns! and in The American Country Fair. In effect, in A New Testament he shows the rural midwesterner kicking up his heels in the pasture as he feels the freshness of a new point of view and a new direction in his life.

Occasional shadows of the doubts, fears, and frustrations recur in the book just as shadows of brutality and harshness drift into Tar, but essentially it is, like Tar, a new affirmation of what Anderson had long believed, and it is full acceptance of his role as townsman. It is not a serious effort at poetry; it is Anderson indulging himself, looking on the remote past fondly and the immediate past fearfully; acknowledging the harshness of the present; and looking forward to an honest future.

Early in the book, in "Testament" he sets the tone of optimism and affirmation that predominates in the verse. He is, he says, writing a testament "...of one who would be

a priest;"⁶ yet he can only "...stumble into the pathway of truth...I smell the footsteps of truth but I do not walk in the footsteps."⁷ He knows what he is seeking, he points out, but he does not know how to find it except through his old intuitive empathy: "It is when you are torn from your moorings and drift like a rudderless ship that I am able to come near to you."⁸ This is the role that he had been living for most of his life, and in seeing it in himself, he knows and understands it in others.

Nevertheless, in "Song Number Three" he reverts to celebrating his role as story teller:

My throat has not yet been choked
by the dust of cities.
My mind is a Kansas tumble-weed. It
rolls and bounces and skips on wide
prairies. The wind tosses it about.
It scatters its seed.
My spirit has not yet been imprisoned
by walls of stone and iron.⁹

In "Song Number Four" this tone of freedom continues as he fuses his optimism, his new sense of freedom, and his role as story teller:

Listen, little lost one, I am testifying to
you as I creep along the face of a wall.
I am making a testament as I gather
stones and lay them along the face of
a wall.¹⁰

⁶Sherwood Anderson, A New Testament (New York, 1927), 12.

⁷Ibid., 12-13. ⁸Ibid., 16-17. ⁹Ibid., 17.

¹⁰Ibid., 22.

These excerpts indicate the dominating theme of the volume: Anderson has accepted his role as storyteller reluctantly and yet confidently because now having found his way through the worst periods of despair and having found what seems to him to be meaning, he feels qualified to point out the way to others. In spite of intermittent occasional flashes of the old fear, as in "The Man With the Trumpet," included from The Triumph of the Egg, in other verses such as "Hunger" he sees life as promising, and in "Death" he finds a new sense of identity with the world and with others. In "Ambition," however, Anderson returns to the quandary he had been in:

I am one who has walked out of a tall building into the streets of a city and over plains into a forest that fringes a river. My notion is one of escape. I can no longer bear the life led in my father's house. I am a child and cannot escape out of my childhood. There is a door through which I cannot enter, a wall I cannot climb. The idea of escape long ago attacked the seat of my reason.¹¹

From this rejection, wandering, and searching has come a new discovery:

I have remade the land of my fathers.
I have come out of my house to remake the land.
I have made a flatplace with the palms of my hands.¹²

This is the discovery that Anderson focuses on in most of the volume: the sense of identity and the sense

¹¹Ibid., 38. ¹²Ibid., 39.

of place that he had sought in reinterpreting his past. The shorter pieces like "A Persistent Lover" and "The Visit in the Morning" reaffirm his old faith in the mutually regenerating influences of people reaching out to understand the essence of each other, and he revels in the resulting strength.

"The Dumb Man" from The Triumph of the Egg is another of the jarring backward glances included to temper the optimism of these shorter pieces, but following this he again reaffirms his strength. Only once, however, does he look away from his role and his new sense of place to the outside world. In this verse, "A Young Jew," he points out the sheer horror that destroys so much of human individuality. This mood continues in "The Story Teller," but again he turns to optimism in the verses that conclude the volume, asserting his belief that "...something lovely may happen."¹³

These last verses comprise a solid note of affirmation of his beliefs. Three are especially significant. "Young Man Filled With Power" is a strange verse for Anderson at this stage of his life, yet it represents the youthful strength that surged over him as he learned to understand his past. "Two Glad Men" carries this strength into sheer joy; while the final verse, "A Man and Two Women

¹³Ibid., 82.

Facing the Sea" represents Anderson's paradoxical position at the time. The imponderables, fears, and misunderstandings of the past have been overcome, but their shadows are still with him, and although he has found the direction to be followed in the future he is impatient at his slowness in following it.

As a creative work, A New Testament is unimportant in the Anderson canon. It is not a volume of verse that can stand on its own merits; it does not convey emotions that can be vicariously experienced; and it is repetitious and awkward. It is, however, important for two reasons. In the first place, it shows that Anderson has decided to abandon the Joycean experimental prose and structural patterns that had marred Dark Laughter and has decided to return to the Midwestern idioms and rhythms that he had used in Tar as well as in the earlier and more successful works. More important, however, is the second reason: its position at this stage of Anderson's career. Just as Mid-American Chants had marked an earlier decision and beginning, so does this volume. The earlier collection showed the emergence of Anderson the conscious literary artist, while this volume marks the emergence of Anderson the townsman.

Anderson had not expected the book to be successful, and he was not surprised at its critical reception. "... the Testament has brought down a furor on my head," he wrote. "My death as a writer is being tolled up and down

the literary press. The crapehangers have all been busy. Well, I have been thrown that before. It does not matter much."¹⁴

What did matter was his new role as townsman-editor of Marion, Virginia. The purchase of the papers had given him a new interest and a new purpose in life, both of which promised stability and the chance to become accustomed to his acceptance of the way of life he had rejected long before and then rediscovered. During the next few years, withdrawn from the literary scene, free of the pressures to write constantly, and with the opportunity to live close to the lives of other people and to learn to understand them, his frustrations, his despair, and his fears that he could no longer write began to ease, and he was personally a happy man who was doing something he enjoyed. Summing up his new life, he wrote:

Now I am getting up in the morning at six and am at my desk at eight. I do everything. A man wants a little handbill got up for the sale of steers. I write it for him. An old mossback farmer comes in and spends an hour trying to get me to knock off 25 cents on the subscription price of his paper. I enjoy it all and in the moments I catch am writing again. That is what a man lives for.¹⁵

During the fall and winter of 1927 and all of 1928 the papers and the life of the town occupied almost all of Anderson's attention and energy. The Smyth County News

¹⁴Letters, 175-176. ¹⁵Ibid., 180.

was Republican, and the Marion Democrat was Democratic. Never having been seriously interested in politics, Anderson farmed out the political editorials to local politicians, but the life of the town as recorded and interpreted in the papers was his exclusive province. Creative work became for him an avocation, a secondary interest that he could indulge himself in, and he became almost entirely the country editor. All the time, however, he was a journalist with integrity, with respect for the innate intelligence of his readers, and with a great depth of feeling for words, for colloquial rhythms and idioms. Town projects and needs, ranging from the jail to the band, "Henry Mencken Park," and a lending library were sponsored by his editorial columns. News items were mixtures of fact, conjecture, and imagination that had nothing to do with textbook maxims of journalism but everything to do with the meaning of life in the town and the surrounding hill country.

In the papers Anderson was trying to do the kind of writing that he felt the mass media could produce if they wanted to. He was not trying to sell anything, and so he put the techniques of advertising behind him and wrote for his readers rather than down to them. At the same time he tried "...to give the fancy a little play, create in the town imaginary figures of people and situations."¹⁶ The result was country journalism that showed the possibilities

¹⁶Ibid., 183.

inherent in a medium that was free of the pressures imposed by the profit motive, and it was successful. Not only did Anderson get "...150 new subscribers in six weeks without asking anyone,"¹⁷ but many of the articles were reprinted in national magazines, especially Vanity Fair, and in early 1929 he was able to combine much of the best of the material into a book, Hello Towns!

During these months of devotion to the papers Anderson had entered into the life of the town as completely as he had when he was "Jobby" Anderson thirty-five years before. He solicited advertisements from the merchants, attended meetings of clubs and the town council, covered trials, became a member of the "town senate" in the local drugstore, and spent a good deal of time gossiping on the steps of the courthouse. All the time he was storing up information, impressions, and ideas as he had in Clyde, gathering raw material for his future work, and he was drawing closer to the townspeople. At the same time, however, he knew that he could never fully belong, and the basic isolation of authors became an occasional topic for editorials.

Creative work would not really come through during these months, however, and Anderson worried about it. Several things were started and then abruptly abandoned. At the same time he was concerned about the attitude that

¹⁷Ibid., 181.

some of his friends were taking toward his new career. In one testy letter he wrote, "Of course, the idea that there is anything condescending about my working here is all nonsense. I am not after anything for others as much as I am after it for myself, and when I can get nothing more out of it here, I shall leave."¹⁸ What is was that he was hoping to find he still didn't know, but he felt himself "...getting weaned away from myself to again begin thinking of other lives and loving and enjoying people again."¹⁹

During these months, however, his third marriage began to deteriorate, and early in 1929 he and Elizabeth separated, she going to California and he giving way to an increased restlessness as his inability to do sustained creative work continued. Like his previous marriages, this one had been based upon a time of his life that had passed, and Anderson the country editor and former prominent writer was not the man Elizabeth had married five years before. In Virginia Elizabeth had tried to maintain the pretense that his creative impulse was still strong, she saw the farm as a literary salon, and she was out of sympathy with his increased frustration at his inability to do any sustained writing. When the break between them came it was the result of Anderson's rationalization that he must cut loose again

¹⁸Ibid., 193-194. ¹⁹Ibid., 194.

and leave the farm and the papers if he was to write. Suddenly they had become a burden rather than a source of pleasure.

With the break between them permanent he left the papers in charge of his son Robert and began to wander--to Florida, to Chicago, and then back to the farm. His prime interest in these months was in putting together Hello Towns! and in concentrating on creative work, the only tangible results of which were the short pieces Nearer the Grass Roots, Alice and the Lost Novel, and The American County Fair. In these works Anderson combines solid affirmation of the enduring quality of life in the American small town with indications of the tentative direction in which his restlessness is going to lead him as he begins again to look at the world. The first of these works, Hello Towns!, was published in the fall of 1929.

Hello Towns! takes up where he had left off in A New Testament, because it, too, is a testament of his belief in his rediscovery of a way of life and a scale of personal values that he thought had disappeared. Essentially it records that rediscovery, in fact rather than fancy; it reaffirms his belief in the intrinsic worth of uncomplicated human life; and it provides the key to the problems that had prevented sustained and worthwhile creative work during the previous two years.

The rediscovery is shown in the relationship between

the impressionistic world of Tar Moorehead and the factual world of the country editor. Here the events that had so impressed a small-town boy, "--births and deaths, what the churches are doing...Who gets hurt during the fall threshing or shoots somebody for getting gay with his wife..."²⁰ are transposed into the mature efforts of the country editor "--to give expression to the joys and sorrows, the political fights, all of the everyday life of a very typical American community."²¹ That Marion, Virginia, was not a typical American community in the 1920's but that it was rather typical of the America that Anderson would have preferred in an age devoted to materialism seems not to have occurred to him. Rather, the small Midwestern town of the late nineteenth century is here factually recreated as an oasis devoted to human life remote from a world devoted to things.

Reaffirmation of his belief in the intrinsic worth of human life is evident as Anderson moves beyond reportorial journalism and shows that the factual material he is dealing with is significant in its own right. Here in the news items describing the life of the town he shows the core of his beliefs: the worth and dignity of the individual, the enduring solidity of lives lived in close proximity to other lives, and the satisfaction inherent in a good job well done. All this is recorded in Hello Towns! and the result is complete

²⁰Quoted by Schevill, 246. ²¹Ibid.

affirmation of the validity of his rejection of materialism.

The reason for his inability to carry through creative projects is equally evident. During these months his life had been devoted to rediscovering the essence of his America, and in the mass of details that that essence consists of, there was no time for the evaluating, selecting, and organizing that is essential to creative writing. During this time he was working on the foundation for his work in the 1930's, work that was as different from the work of the previous few years as Winesburg, Ohio was from Marching Men. During the next few years he was to record the impact of industrialism on the individual in the South as he had attempted to do it for the Midwesterners in Poor White, and he was becoming acquainted with those individuals just as he had done earlier in Clyde, Ohio, and had given them significance and existence in Winesburg. Hello Towns! starts him in that direction by enabling him to gain insight into the lives of his people through intuitive understanding of their lives and problems.

Like so many of his earlier works, Hello Towns! has a ~~foreword~~ in which he explains the background or the purpose of the work. In this he records briefly how and why he had turned to country journalism: "...there is no place for the artist in American life,"²² he says. Writing should not be

²²Sherwood Anderson, Hello Towns! (New York, 1929), 7.

an occupation but a spontaneous thing, and in America one must have an occupation, so he had drifted aimlessly, finally resolving to be a countryman. After buying his farm, he had been idle until he bought the newspapers, finding through them purpose and belonging in his rural environment. This presentation of what is ostensibly a factual account is oversimplified and dramatized to the extent that it, too, has become part of the Anderson myth, but it does convey the spirit of what Anderson had done: he had found a place in America where he belonged, where life could be lived outside of the main stream of American competitiveness, and for a year he had known a great deal of personal contentment.

In his role as country editor he found primarily the identity that he had been seeking: the intimate relationship with the human lives around him that had been missing since his early years in Clyde. Here he saw himself in the role of chronicler, story-teller, and sage to his people, and in time he hoped to become elder philosopher, commentator, and interpreter of the new America that was invading the South. Such an identity demands full acceptance of what he finds as well as rejection of the view of the small town portrayed by Sinclair Lewis. As he records in "A Beginning," "'The names Main Street, Elmer Gantry, Babbitt are lies in themselves...They are too easy. There is too much malice in them'".²³ And he points out that small town life is the

²³Ibid., 19.

essence of human life as he commences his career as editor at the heart of the life he had sought.

Hello Towns! is organized to represent a year in the life of the country editor, from November to the following October, and in it Anderson has compiled a cross-section of the life of the small town in pieces ranging from accounts of shooting scrapes, the results of the "brutal innocence" he had portrayed as early as Winesburg, Ohio, to editorials on "The New Frankness," which he sees as the major redeeming feature of modern life, on Van Gogh, on the role and meaning of the town band, on the solid virtues of American life, on the need for remodeling of the town jail. Throughout the factual accounts of events that occur in the town, the apparent trivia that occupy the attention and the central role in the gossip in the small town, two aspects of his treatment are at once apparent.

First, Anderson attempts to portray these things as significant in themselves, as manifestations of the meaning of life rather than as isolated segments of fact included to edify the idly curious or to flatter the participants. In so doing Anderson has rejected the usual journalistic techniques of incorporating who, what, when, and where in the lead paragraph and then following with amplification, and he has utilized his storytelling style to inject into news items the overtones of the larger picture of which they are a part, the meaning behind the events themselves,

and often the editorial interpretation or opinion of that meaning. In so doing Anderson has applied the craftsmanship of which he was so conscious to the raw material of news and raised its presentation above the level of rote regurgitation of fact by writing to his readers as participants in the human experience rather than as mere bystanders whose curiosities must be satisfied.

Second, Anderson has, in the selection and presentation of his news stories, accomplished what many critics maintained he had done in Winesburg, Ohio although he had not. Here Anderson presents a picture of the life of the small town as he both saw and experienced it. This could not be done in a single issue or two of either or both of the papers, but over a year's time the cross-section was possible, as the compilation in Hello Towns! indicates, and here the factual material becomes the microcosm of small town life and of human life everywhere.

The selection of a few paragraphs at random from almost any of the news stories is sufficient to illustrate these qualities in Anderson's news presentation. Under the heading "At Chilhowie, William McVey 15 Kills His Cousin Paul McVey 17," Anderson incorporates them all:

The quiet and peace of an unusually beautiful Sunday was broken by a shocking killing at Chilhowie. William McVey, son of Andy McVey, a farmer living near Chilhowie, stabbed and killed his cousin, Paul McVey, a son of Harrison McVey, another farmer and the brother of Andy McVey.

The cutting was done with a pocket knife and the boy who did the cutting is but fifteen. His dead cousin was seventeen.

Our correspondent says the boys had been playmates for a long time. The two farms were near each other. The boys had been trapping and got into a quarrel over the ownership of a steel trap. They became inflamed by passion and a fight started. In the fight the younger boy drew his pocket knife and stabbed his cousin in the neck. The jugular vein was cut and the boy died within the hour. William McVey was brought to Marion and lodged in the jail here.²⁴

Here is the essence of Anderson as journalist, as townsman, as writer. First of all, the event is not treated as news, nor is it in the sob-sister tradition. Rather it is human tragedy, and the tone is that of regret and compassion. There is no indignation or condemnation of the event; instead, there is a recognition that such things happen because those who do them are human, and behind the event are the implications of all that that entails. Here, too, the style which Anderson employs is designed to engender in his readers the empathy that he feels. This is not mere journalism; it is an attempt to convey human feeling, and in doing so Anderson has presented in microcosm the tragedy inherent in human life as pointedly as he had in many of his short stories. In accepting appearance rather than reality, he points out, young McVey had allowed himself to be trapped as completely as the boy in "I'm a Fool."

In addition to the recreation of human experience in the news stories, Anderson has, in the included editorial writings, presented a picture of himself in the new role he

²⁴Ibid., 52-53.

has adopted for himself. In the editorials, as personal as they often are, Anderson portrays himself as mentor, as spokesman, as booster, as participant in the life of the town. The editorial column becomes for him a pulpit, a lectern, and a crackerbox as well as occasionally a confessional. In "Group Feeling" it becomes the latter, as he confesses the inadequacy that he has always felt in the company of others; in "Here Comes the Band," he is a booster of one of the town's sources of pride; in "Gil Stephenson" he preaches the doctrine of craftsmanship; in "Hello Towns!" and in "Aftermath" he pulls himself close to the crackerbox and gives his candid appraisal of the world, the town, and the events that keep both from stagnation. In the combination of them Anderson has found the identity that he sought, and he has found a place for himself where he can practice it. Neither role nor place is enough to absorb his full attention for the rest of his life, but its significance lies in the fact that for the first time he feels that he has found the foundation that he had been seeking since he first rejected materialism and industrialism and began his search for something permanent and worthwhile in American life.

Hello Towns! may seem at first glance to be a collection of news items, sketches, random thoughts, jottings, and ideas put together in a hit or miss fashion reminiscent of the pattern of a shotgun blast, but it is not. Rather it is one of Anderson's most carefully constructed books in spite of

the fact that the material in it is much more diverse than anything he had attempted before. This is the biography of a town that he said he had been writing in Poor White. However, that had dealt with one manifestation of the town's life, whereas here he attempts to incorporate it all, and the structural device of using a month-by-month approach ties it together as well as it could be done. It is not unified because the events and relationships that make up a town's life are not that, and the diversity of the material occurs just as spontaneously as the events themselves seem to come to the surface of life. Tragedy, humor, pathos, trivia, none of it significant except in its relationship to the lives involved and yet part of the essence of life itself, are the materials of a town's life, and it is precisely this material that Anderson has put together to make this book.

Here is the record of a man who looks at the town around him and finds it worthwhile and meaningful just as he shows that he has found meaning in the role that he is playing in that town. That this has nothing to do with journalism he is well aware: "I cannot be a slave to the papers. I shall let my fancy loose...There are stories here...There will be this life of the town and my own life outside. There is the life of the fancy too. Perhaps newspapers have become too much newspapers,"²⁵ he comments in

²⁵Ibid., 40.

setting forth the philosophy of his new venture, at the same time revealing that his new life and role have not made him forget his larger role as a writer. Although he feels that he is in the town and of the town, he still has another duty and responsibility, one that becomes more and more important to him again as the novelty and the wonder of his new position wear off. That duty and responsibility is that of the creative artist, and as he admits, while he has found a place for himself that is as stable and permanent as he had wanted, nevertheless the creative life can never achieve stability or it ceases to be creative. As the book progresses, three things are increasingly evident: his attention to affairs of the outside world, his preoccupation with the problem of the artist in society, and his further injection of fancy into journalism as he moves back into the role of writer.

In venturing out of the small town world to go to Washington to interview Herbert Hoover, then Secretary of Commerce under Coolidge, he voices the first of a number of vague discontents that recur as the book becomes increasingly personal: "We who live in country towns miss certain things, The radio and the phonograph can bring us music by the best orchestras...we can hear speakers talk, but there are things we cannot get..."²⁶ An artist needs not only raw material as

²⁶Ibid., 118.

he finds it around him, but he needs the stimulation that will help him to make something out of it. In going on to describe his impressions of Hoover he shows a new awareness of the meaning of the age outside the town as well as an insight into what both Hoover and his age needed, the cleansing effects of the failure that was to come so soon.

They [the industrialists] have raised this Mr. Hoover up out of the ranks of men as perhaps the finest Republican example of manhood and ability in present day American political and industrial life. He is, apparently, a man very sure of himself. His career has been a notable one. From a small beginning he has risen steadily in power. There has never been any check. I felt, looking at him, that he has never known failure.

It is too bad never to have known that. Never to have known miserable nights of remorse, feeling the world too big and strange and difficult for you.²⁷

This moment of insight that almost sees a need for one of the most perplexing problems of the age in the coming depression is not prophetic, of course, but it does indicate that Anderson is coming to a new and valid understanding of his time, possible only because for the first time he felt a solid foundation of belonging beneath him. As he concludes the essay, he points this out:

I had tried to be smart and had not been smart. I had got myself into a false position. What happens to the age in which a man lives is like the Mississippi, a thing in nature. It is no good quarreling with the age in which you live.²⁸

²⁷Ibid., 123. ²⁸Ibid., 126.

In such pieces as "Conversing With Authors," "Just Walking," "The Winter's Trade," and "In New York," Anderson shows his continued concern with the problems of the artist in society, but here, too, his point of view has altered perceptibly from the earlier positions cited in A Story-Teller's Story and The Modern Writer. Whereas formerly he was concerned with the lack of attention, understanding, and financial support which a serious artist encounters, here his point of view has shifted from criticism of society for its position to one of attempting to explain the artist and at the same time pleading for understanding. In the first of these, "Conversing With Authors," Anderson attempts to mask his concern with a satirical, jocular style, but beneath this his genuine feelings are evident. Here, too, Anderson seems aware of something entirely new to him: if the author is misunderstood or ignored by society, very frequently it is his own fault for not attempting to bridge the gap between himself and his fellows. Beneath the surface of the piece and the fun that Anderson pokes at himself as he suggests segregation for all authors, it is evident that he realized that the surface intimacy between him and the town was just on the surface. In spite of his eagerness to belong to the town there were too many reasons why he could not. The townsmen were aware that he was part of a larger world of which they knew nothing, and he could not forget it himself.

Examples of the injection of his artistic fancy into journalism abound. Not only has he introduced more or less stock fictitious characters such as Buck Fever and Hannah Stoots in humorous, semi-satirical bits, but he has incorporated sketches such as "A Mountain Dance," "Small Town Notes," and "A Criminal's Christmas," which, although fiction, are nevertheless as true in their insight into the tragedy of rural life as any of his news columns. "A Mountain Dance" depicts the insistent forces that carry the race spontaneously through its cycle, while "Small Town Notes" are simple, direct, and compassionate portrayals of two men, one of whom dreamed about being a baseball player but was unable to be, and the other who used his wife as an excuse for his inability to do things that men were expected to do. Both of the men are grotesques, and either sketch might have been the nucleus of another Winesburg story. "A Criminal's Christmas," reprinted from Vanity Fair, is the story of a youth whose dishonesty is rooted in love and compassion, while his reversion to honesty is a product of fear. It is one of the old Anderson paradoxes that baffle the seeker for an easy answer.

Throughout the book, through the unfolding months and the changing seasons of the structure Anderson has given it, one is aware of the cycle of small town life through its interpreter-editor as in none of Anderson's works, even in Tar, where he had tried to recreate such a world from his memory and imagination. Here, however, he has incorporated

fact and fancy, observation and interpretation, and through the device of the year's cycle presented a picture of the ebb and flow of rural life as a montage of sight, sound, and feeling. It is a picture of life that is real, that is understood, and that is believed in by its portrayer. Here rather than in A New Testament is Anderson's real statement of belief and affirmation, his first tribute to the life he had lost and then found.

Anderson concludes the book with an answer to the question "Will You Sell Your Newspapers?" that many people had asked him. His reply was indirect but as negative as he could make it. Here, he says, in this place and this town he has found that he belonged: "Yesterday I drove my car down a street of our town I had never been on before. I didnot know the street was there. Men hailed me. Women and children were sitting on doorsteps. 'It is our editor.' ...I have a place in this community. How difficult to feel that in the city."²⁹ Later he says, "A man has to work. He cannot be just a teller of old tales. He has to find somewhere a place into which he fits."³⁰ A direct answer to the question is unnecessary.

As Anderson concluded Hello Towns! he felt some of his old confidence returning. He saw it as "...a damn good book...one of the best I ever did...It's a real picture of

²⁹Ibid., 336. ³⁰Ibid., 339.

life--fragmentary as I have been lately, but real..."³¹

In this case his judgment, in spite of his enthusiasm, was almost sound. Hello Towns! is a good book of its type. It does show the potentialities inherent in journalism when it can afford to reject commercialism and to take upon itself the role that had traditionally been played by men such as Irwin Anderson and as now he saw himself to be: the role of the wandering storyteller who combines entertainment, news spreading, and respect for the human experience in all its implications as well as for its factual basis.

The book is also both real and fragmentary. It is real because it has been drawn from life, and the people and situations it describes are the material out of which human life is made, and it is fragmentary because that material was not assimilated and digested as it had to be before it could become more than a tentative portrayal of life. The book affirms his belief in the material he had incorporated in it, and he was eager to do something with it, but still he didn't know what he could do. As a result, in spite of the strong affirmation of the raw material in the book, he turned his back on it temporarily while he sought a creative theme that he could take hold of and make into a novel. But nothing would come, and with his son Bob running the papers he roamed

³¹Quoted by Schevill, 257.

through the South, absorbing its sights, sounds, and experiences. His life as he realized at this point was as fragmentary as Hello Towns!, but the newspapers were not enough to tie it together, and again, he felt defeated.

Meanwhile, however, he published three short works, each in a limited edition, and each a cameo-like example of the creative craftsmanship of which he was capable. More importantly, however, the three of them combine to provide the bridge between Anderson the country editor, the role that he had temporarily adopted, and Anderson the townsman, who is very much aware that the town is not a refuge but a part of the world. In these three works the values he has affirmed in Hello Towns! are restated, while at the same time the direction that his attention, his thinking, and his work during the final years of life were to take is pointed out.

The first of these works is Nearer the Grass Roots, a book of only 35 pages, hand set and printed in a limited edition of 500 copies by the Westgate Press in San Francisco. The book contains two short essays that are almost completely ignored, even by Anderson scholars, but it occupies a key position in any attempt to understand the emergence of the new Andersonian role of townsman-philosopher, a role that was inevitably assumed as the novelty of small-town journalism wore off and Anderson again became convinced that he could not cut himself off from the world in which he lived.

The first of the essays, untitled, is primarily a biographical sketch including in abbreviated form much of the material that Anderson has used so many times, but in the last half of the essay he reveals what may be the reason why he was having difficulty resuming his creative work after his long period of introspection: "I was associating altogether too much with one Sherwood Anderson. I never grew so tired of a man in my life."³²

The purchase of the newspapers, he points out, had served a dual purpose: to provide him with a small but reasonably secure income, and to give himself something to do that would take him out of himself and once more into the living world: "In Virginia there is a touch of the South without too much of it. It suited me. I had no quarrel with my surroundings or my friends. My quarrel was with myself."³³ Now, having found his place and his role in life, he finds, "...that it is the most fun of anything I have ever done in life."³⁴ The most important part of his new life, however, is summed up in the essay's conclusion:

And, in addition, there is the tremendous advantage of being in close and constant touch with every phase of life in an American community every day of the year.

What could any writer ask more enticing than that?³⁵

³²Sherwood Anderson, Nearer the Grass Roots (San Francisco, 1929), 7.

³³Ibid. ³⁴Ibid., 16. ³⁵Ibid., 18.

Here, almost apologetically as an afterthought, Anderson has indicated the true reason for his purchase of the farm and the papers, for his long period of introspection, for the bitterness and wondering that had characterized his life for so many of his years. It was part of his search for a solid foundation of values and of place, both for his own life and for his work. Now at last he feels that he has found both, he has rid himself of the specter of the past, and he is free to live in the world of his age. However, he is still faced with the problem of finding his way back into that world as townsman-editor and as writer-artist.

The second of the two essays is "Elizabethton, An Account of a Journey." In this essay, even shorter than the first, Anderson points out the direction that his future work and his interests would take. Elizabethton, Tennessee, incorporated as recently as 1905, was one of the new Southern cities that, blessed by abundant water power and cheap labor, grew as a result of the twentieth-century industrial revolution in the South. Here were some of the largest rayon mills in the country, and, as Anderson points out, "It has been held up as representing the industrialist's finest and latest achievement in building an industrial town."³⁶ Also it was the home of low wages, long hours, insecurity of tenure, and all the other evils of industrialism, including the dehumanizing

³⁶Ibid., 21.

aspects that Anderson had protested for so long. When the workers' dissatisfaction reached the point of eruption there was a strike, and Anderson the editor drove over from Marion for the story. What he saw as an observer was one of the crucial factors that led him back into the world that he found he could not ignore.

This essay is a series of impressions, including among them more restrained, almost objective pictures that still reflect the old Anderson as well as those that foreshadow much of his future work. The first reflects the old, but regret has replaced indignation:

Here is a town not more than five years old. Already the buildings have that half-decrepit worn-out look that makes so many American towns such disheartening places. There is a sense of cheapness, hurry, no care for the buildings in which men and women are to work. "The premature aging of buildings in America," says my friend Van Wyck Brooks, "is the saddest thing in America."³⁷

Coupled with this are new observations, especially of the thin, too-young mill girls who lie about their ages to find jobs in the mills. This was a facet of industrialism that had escaped him in his earlier fight against the giant; now his old indignation rises at the thought that the girls in their poverty have no choice but to lie. As he looks at the mills in which they work he again sees something new:

³⁷Ibid., 23.

The mills themselves had that combination of the terrible with the magnificent that is so disconcerting. Anyone working in these places must feel their power. Oh, the beauty and wonder of the modern intricate machines. It is said that many of the girls and women in these places are half in love with the machines at which they work. We have one of the modern wonder machines here in our own little country print shop, a modern linotype. Joe, the young man who runs it, has pride in it. It is superhuman in its accuracy, in its tirelessness.³⁸

Here, in Anderson's first direct concern with the machine in almost ten years since the appearance of Poor White, is indication that Anderson regarded the machine as more than a symbol of the industrial conscience behind it. Formerly the machine itself symbolized the villain that destroyed the craftsman and his work and deprived man of his pride and his creative ability. In Poor White he had asserted that man had conceived the machine thinking that it would result in good, but he was deluded and mistaken. At the same time he saw it as a thing in itself, the product of man's inventive genius, and neither good nor bad except as man's mind directs; and it is in man that the ultimate answer lies. He restates this belief and the old bitterness flashes as he comments, "There is always the old question--to make men rise in nobility to the nobility of the machines."³⁹ It hadn't happened in Elizabethton, he reflects.

However, he sees symptoms of the possibility that it may yet, as the new union gives dignity and recognition to

³⁸Ibid., 25. ³⁹Ibid.

the workers and they find a new sense of belonging and of purpose. Once again the mystical unity that he had striven to attain in Marching Men reasserts itself: "'They have got a realization of each other. They have got, for the moment, a kind of religion of brotherhood and that is something!"⁴⁰ More importantly for himself, however, is his instinctive selection of a new symbol for the people of the South as Irwin Anderson and Abraham Lincoln had become for the Midwest. Noticing a meaningless monument erected in the town square in the same type of shoddy construction as the town itself, he reflects, "How I would have liked to see one of those delicately-featured, hard-bodied little mountain girls, done in stone by some real artist standing up there."⁴¹ It is more than a wish, however; it is an indication of re-surg-ing creative power, but its culmination was still in the future, giving rise to Beyond Desire. Meanwhile, his personal search for a way to incorporate his new awareness into creative work continued, and to this problem he added concern for the victims of Southern industrialism.

The second of these short typographer's tours de force was published in London in 1929. This book, also in a limited edition of 530 copies was printed by Elkin Mathews and Marrot as one of the Woburn Books. Called Alice and the Lost Novel, it contains two short pieces of those titles,

⁴⁰Ibid., 34. ⁴¹Ibid., 35.

both previously published in periodicals. The first of these, "Alice," is a brief attempt to define and make tangible the beauty of a woman, a beauty that he sees as an inner thing, an ability to give of herself and to project understanding and trust from herself to the men around her. Diametrically opposed to Philip Wylie's concept of Momism, what Anderson personifies in Alice is the same intuitive wisdom and feeling that he found in his mother and that Sam McPherson and Tar Moorhead had found in theirs. Here, however, Anderson has made it more articulate and more specific, with less of the dream-quality that surrounded his earlier portrayals of the same thing. Alice herself is made an East Tennessee mountain girl grown into a woman of the world rather than the earlier Midwestern wife-mother, but the image is the same; Anderson is feeling his way toward the monument to the mill girl, and this is one of his tentative sketches, a marriage of the past and the present chronologically, that in Anderson's intuitive perception are merely two facets of the lasting strength and power of women. He was to become increasingly aware of both of these as he began to conceive of Perhaps Women and Kit Brandon.

The other piece, "The Lost Novel" is another attempt at something about which he had thought much: the mystic qualities of the creative experience that occurs not in the artist's hands or as a result of his materials but in his mind and emotions. To him the resulting work is only the

tangible symbol of the act of creation, and it is less important than the act itself, which only the artist can experience.

In this short work, too, Anderson has bridged the gap between past and present both in his own life and in his work, just as he had in Nearer the Grass Roots, and again he pointed out future trends in both. Also, and more importantly, he has written one of his most pleasant works, embodying the personification of Anderson at his Midwestern story-telling best, seeing connections where none are apparent and finally making them clear, rambling genially rather than blundering determinedly to his point, and at the same time providing sketches that are graphic in their insight into the problems with which he is dealing. It is unfortunate that these shorter works have been so limited in distribution and in appeal to his critics.

The third of this series of short books was The American County Fair, published in 1930, also in a limited edition of 875 copies, hand-printed by the Southworth Press for Random House. This, too, is Anderson at his Midwestern best in a sketch that combines his wealth of feeling for the smooth movement of the race horse with his love of the rural countryside and the uncontaminated past.

Impressionistic rather than consciously descriptive, the sketch embodies Anderson's attempt to recapture and convey the sight, the sound, the flavor, and above all,

the feeling of that exciting and typically rural aspect of American life. The American County Fair is another of Anderson's testaments. It is much more deeply felt and spontaneous than his efforts to recapture the feeling in verse, and it is more valuable and lasting because he is not consciously poetic; rather, he is striving to convey feeling and to describe at the same time as he had learned to do for the papers. That this interlude of the fair is a passing thing, a dream rather than a fact, Anderson is well aware, however, as he concludes with the realization that even the beauty of the race horse is fleeting: "There is, after all, the uncertainty of this sort of thing. You have to take chances in life."⁴²

Between 1926 and 1931 Anderson's creative ability was not dead as some of his critics maintained and as he himself feared. Although A New Testament is not of the calibre that might be expected of him and his output was slight, nevertheless when he permitted himself to venture into the role of townsman-observer, his intuitive perception of meaning and his ability to communicate it effectively were still very much alive. His main trouble during these years was that he was attempting to use the wrong material. Instead of moving into the area that his rediscovery showed

⁴²Sherwood Anderson, The American County Fair (New York, 1930), 13.

him had the meaning he had been seeking, he was attempting to be the modern Anderson of Many Marriages and Dark Laughter, and he was working on the wrong material at the wrong time.

During most of 1929 he was working on a novel first called No Love, and later No God, Sacred Service, and finally Beyond Desire, but it had nothing to do with the later novel of that name. Rather, it was very much in the modern liberated tradition, a tradition that he had put behind him when he rejected that life in Dark Laughter. Desperately trying to prove that he was not a has-been and trying to regain the critical and financial success that he had had with Dark Laughter, he revived its approach and technique. The novel as he conceived it was to be "...the story of a man having his roots in the pre-War life, accepting the present-day post-War life," and he was in love with a girl who was "...the young female kid of today. She has had sex experience and will have more, when she wants it."⁴³ But the novel would not come through because it was a lie and he knew it, but he couldn't force himself to admit it yet. In December, 1929, he wrote his publisher, Horace Liveright, that "I think you know...that I have to have this book right, not only on account of its chances of success, but also because of myself. I want to ship out of me this sense of defeat I have had...All I can say is that I will do nothing else..."⁴⁴

⁴³Letters, 199. ⁴⁴Ibid., 200-201.

Two weeks later, however, after a meandering trip from Chicago to Florida he knew that he had to admit the truth, both to himself and to Liveright:

I never will write that novel now. The truth is I have been forcing my pace on it all the time.

I'm going to fool around down here for a month or two and then go up into North Carolina and hang around there. The novel went wrong because I never was honest-to-God behind it. There were some gaudy chapters, but she didn't move.

She didn't move because I'm through with the ordinary problems of middle-class people in love, etc.

I've got an interest, though, and I'm going to go to it, though I'm not going to make promises about delivery. It is working people in the mills particularly the working people, the poor whites, in the mills in the South. I'm going to build my novel around a little poor white mill girl, what happens to her coming to town, in a strike, etc. It's living stuff whether it will sell or not.⁴⁵

With this he began another period of wandering, but this time it was directed and purposeful. With the papers in the hands of his son Robert to provide for him and for his other children, John and Marion, he was free to follow his new direction, wherever it might lead. He schemed to free himself from Ripshin Farm by turning it into a club, a project which he described to his friend and benefactor, Burton Emmett, early in 1930, but the plan was fortunately unsuccessful because the farm was to be a base of operations and a place in which to gain perspective during the remaining

⁴⁵Ibid., 202-203.

years of his life. At this time, however, he was beginning his last search, and unconsciously he was attempting to cut himself free from any ties that might hinder it as he had so often done in the past.

At this time two factors were combining to influence the direction that this new search would take. The first was the economic collapse that led to the depression of the 1930's, intensifying the problems of the Southern mill workers. The fading of Coolidge prosperity into Hoover depression made him aware of industrialism not only as an enslaver of his people but as a further symbol of a society that was sick both economically and fundamentally. Through this he began to take an interest in political and economic systems as such for the first time in his life, hoping that a cure for both the symptom and the sickness might be found.

The second factor that entered at this time to direct his search was a young lady twenty years younger than he. Eleanor Copenhaver was a Marion girl who had ventured out into the world, become a social worker for the Y.W.C.A., and then devoted herself to helping the mill girls of the South. It was Miss Copenhaver who accompanied him to Elizabethton and who introduced him to the mill girl who became the symbol of his new interest. Their friendship soon became love, but both were reluctant to marry, and they did not until July, 1933, more than three years after they met. In the meanwhile they often traveled together, Eleanor in her official capacity

and as guide, and Anderson as observer, as sympathizer, and on occasion as active participant in the attempts of the workers to bring order and dignity into their lives.

With his new direction, with his new sense of a role, and with a secure base in the Virginia hills from which he could operate, his sense of equilibrium returned and with it the confidence that he could write. He began the new Beyond Desire, cautiously rather than hurriedly, and he continued to travel about the South during 1930, returning at intervals to Marion but always conscious of the world outside. By the end of the year he could write:

...the artist is, after all, partly a product of his environment...He does not escape the general tone and mood of the world in any event. It is antagonistic now...We have to participate ...I can't quite draw away from my fellows no matter how much I try. I draw away and then come back, waver about uncertainly a great deal.⁴⁶

At this point he was ready to participate in the world again for the first time since he had turned in upon himself in despair at the end of 1923, and he was ready to work. He was slower now, and his optimism at his chances for success was tempered a great deal by his creative difficulties as well as by the grimness of the world outside the town, but it was still strong, and once more he set out to try to cope with the problem of the dehumanization of men, this time in a political and economic framework rather than in the determined

⁴⁶Ibid., 226.

emotionalism of the past. He had few illusions about his chances for success either in writing or in solving the country's problems, but he was eager to try.

CHAPTER VIII

RE-ENTRY INTO THE WORLD

Coincidental with the country's descent into the depression of the thirties, Anderson's reawakened interest in the problems of individuals living in an industrial society became acute, dominating his thinking and his writing during 1930, 1931, and 1932. Just prior to the depression his work had taken up essentially where he had left off with Poor White, with the sudden impact of industrialism on individuals who had learned to live in an agricultural society, merely shifting the locale from the Midwest to the South. This stage did not last long, however, and he learned quickly that the view was dated. Combining to move his approach beyond this stage were two factors. First, he could view the situation with much clearer perspective because he no longer felt the threat of an industrial society's domination over himself. The second, more important reason was the rapid extension of the depression to every part of American life, even to towns in the Virginia hills. This made him realize that the real force behind industrialism in any society dominated by materialism is the economic system.

His personal non-involvement was important. During his earlier attempts to delineate the effects of the impact

of industrialism on the individual he saw himself as one of those people. Not only was the memory of the Elyria experience still clear in his mind, but as an advertising writer he was dependent upon mass production for his living and he saw no way to free himself; he could only hope. Now, however, that was behind him, and with family responsibilities at a minimum he no longer saw himself as a victim. At the same time he not only had his own industrial experience to draw upon, but he was in a remarkable position to watch from the sidelines as factories began to dominate the Southern skyline and the lives of the hill people. When Northern Ohio had been taken over by the factories in the last quarter of the nineteenth century he had been too young to know what was happening. Now he knew what to look for.

The depression, of course, was highly influential in changing his view of the problem of industrialism. In late 1930 he wrote "The general spirit...seems to be one of heavy sadness...A little bit, I guess, America is being caught up with...more and more men unemployed, while there are more goods than ever being produced."¹ In common with the rest of the country he had no idea that the difficulty was to be as severe as it became, but he went on, "An artist cannot help being affected by the mood of his time...We have now, in our cities, really hard times...We have hordes of unemployed. There are bread lines everywhere."²

¹Letters, 231-232. ²Ibid., 232.

During Anderson's years of self-imposed exile he had paid almost no attention either to Coolidge prosperity or to the business dominated political structure behind it, but with his re-entry into the outside world he became aware immediately not only of prosperity's aftermath but of the political and economic irresponsibility that brought it about. By the end of 1930 he was fully committed to the search for a system that would not only enable the people with whom he had always aligned himself to maintain human dignity but which would also prevent the sort of collapse that had engulfed the country. The writing that he turned out during the next few years was dominated by both the problem and the search, and after his abortive attempt to support the Danville, Virginia, textile strike during the fall and winter of 1930-1931, he, like most other intellectuals and especially writers, turned to look at Communism and its promises as a possible answer. However, stung too many times by too-rapid commitment, he was cautious, but his flirtation, brief though it was, has often been misconstrued. In November, 1930, he wrote, "I am not so sure...that we want Socialism and certainly not wholesale Communism."³ He did not condemn either, however; he wanted a closer look.

Travelling through the South, looking at the problem and talking to its victims, and then returning to Marion to

³Ibid., 227.

think and to write occupied most of his time through the next few years. Essays such as "Cotton Mill" in Scribners, "Factory Town" and "Loom Dance" as well as "Danville, Virginia" in The New Republic, and others appeared, all of them concerned with the sick giant industrialism and the relationship between man and machine. At the same time he was partisan but detached, fascinated by his renewed interest in the machines and pessimistic about their effect on his people. To Ralph Church he described his position clearly:

I am sitting in my print shop, a great snow-storm raging outside, some 18 inches down now and more coming. I doubt whether I shall ever return to Paris, Stein's room, Lipps, etc. Lately I have produced little in the imaginative world.

I work here, and I got interested in modern factories. I spent part of last winter at that and will return to it this winter, some notion of a prose full of machinery.

Things will crack over here presently. The machines throw more and more out of work. Unemployment will grow chronic. The American industrial scheme isn't going to work out.

I look for a time of agitation, new interest in politics, discussions breaking out again. The tired, cynical crowd will have to cough it up.

Right now the reality of life is more fantastic than any imaginary life.⁴

Early in 1931 he began to make a book out of the essays, observations, and ideas engendered by his new venture

⁴Ibid., 233.

out into the industrial south. He was depressed at the failure of the Danville strike, he was broke, as usual, and the book reflects these two factors although in spite of the regret, the occasional indignation and bitterness, and the concern about the seductive appeal of the machine, Anderson is not despairing. He is excited and at times almost optimistic. He is not yet concerned with the depression, however; that is to come later in Puzzled America. Here he is trying to recapture the meaning of industrialism as it impressed him during his wandering. In this book Anderson no longer deals with industrialism as an abstraction; for the first time he takes his reader into the factories and makes them come alive.

This new book, Perhaps Women, published in 1931 while Anderson was putting together a series of lectures in order to make some money, shows a number of significant but generally ignored factors about Anderson, his beliefs, and the fascination that the new Southern industrialism held for him. Because he had been too young for the great period of labor protest and unrest that industry knew in the comparable period in his own Midwest in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was almost as though he had turned the clock back in this way as well as in his return to the rural, simpler life.

Two themes run through the essays in Perhaps Women: the wonder that Anderson felt at his introduction to the

actual machines about which he had theorized in the abstract ten years before, and, as he points out in the introduction, "a growing conviction that modern man is losing his ability to retain his manhood in the face of the modern way of utilizing the machine and that what hope there is for him lies in women."⁵ Thus there is combined Anderson's old fascination with the new and with his deep faith in the long-suffering, inarticulate, but intrinsically wise woman, a figure that had resulted from the memories of his mother, whom he has begun to see reincarnated in the person of the Southern mill girl.

Out of this combination Anderson draws a third theme that encompasses all of the above, the theme that the machine is the dominating factor in American life, having conquered, destroyed, or seduced anyone who would stand against it, and that under the new order the machine age has come to have a life of its own, tolerating the men and women who feed it only because they are willing to become its slaves. At the same time ironically and yet with poetic justice the machine age itself is bringing about its own economic destruction.

The book itself is made up of a combination of free verse, essays, sketches, and random thoughts, all centering around Anderson's fascination with the industrialization of the new South. The first piece, "Machine Song," is Anderson's

⁵Sherwood Anderson, Perhaps Women (New York, 1939), 7.

attempt to point out the seductive wonders of the age that permits men to roar through space and time so rapidly that the countryside becomes one. The tone of the piece, in spite of the repetitious style, is clearly and understandably eulogistic until at the very end Anderson points out the exchange that must be made before one can enter wholly into the new age. Not only must he give up an unspoiled and natural world, but most importantly, in asking, "Will you give up individuality? Will you live, or die?"⁶ Anderson points out man's greater loss. Just as certainly as he saw the dehumanization of the industrial processes at work in the North, so he sees it now, loose in the South that he had thought was his refuge.

In "Life Up Thine Eyes" Anderson epitomizes the new mass-produced assembly-line type of industrialism in a description of an automobile plant that is dedicated to eradicating the human element in the factory by eliminating it in the workers themselves. Although the piece was written before the days of automation, nevertheless Anderson observed that the automatic factory was an ideal to be striven for. The auto plants were coming as close to it as possible in spite of the fact that the electronics field had barely been tapped and automation was no more than a dream. Even so, the factory was rapidly taking the central role in the country:

⁶Ibid., 17.

"Life up thine eyes,"⁷ Anderson implores in a mockery of reverence as he beholds it.

In one of the most effective sketches in the book, "Loom Dance," Anderson deals with two things: the wonder of these machines that seemingly have a life and almost a brain of their own, so powerful that it has set forth forces in motion that no man can stop, demanding more and more from the human slaves who serve them; and the momentary loom-induced madness of the workers, culminating in revolt that can slow the process on occasion, as it did on this, but can never hope to overthrow the machine's domination.

The essays "It is a Woman's Age" and "Perhaps Women," in three parts, combine to convey what Anderson sees to be the main result of this process and the only hope for man's continued existence as an individual in the fact of this force set loose by man and now beyond his control. In the former he looks at the age that has taken dignity, confidence, and ability from man and given it to the machines so that the very essence of maleness, the qualities that in every age in the past had made man a natural leader, have now disappeared.

As he points out, this has not been brought about by the machines themselves, but by the forces that the machines have unleashed. "The big complicated beautiful machines...

⁷Ibid., 29.

are in no way to blame."⁸ Rather, although they are beautiful, seductive, and awe-inspiring, nevertheless they are things, but such things as man has never known before and knows not how to live with:

The machines are beautiful with a cold kind of classic beauty, but they are beautiful. In motion they become gorgeous things. I have stood sometimes for two or three hours in some big factory looking at the machines in motion. As I stand looking at them my body begins to tremble. The machines make me feel too small. They are too complex and beautiful for me. My manhood cannot stand up against them yet. They do things too well. They do too much... I have to keep telling myself, "remember men made those machines."⁹

Thus, he points out, man is bound to feel that he has lost his potency to the machine. His potency was based on his ability to do things and to do them well, but he is unable to compete with the productivity of the machine, so he is lost. The women, on the other hand, who are coming into the factories in increasing numbers, are aware of this lack of potency in their male counterparts and tend to shun them both as lovers and as mates because while the essence of maleness has been replaced by the machine, the essence of womanhood is internal, untouched, and untouchable by any outside factor except a man. So, he points out, "No woman really wants a man who feels defeated, crushed by life,"¹⁰ as are the men around them. This tendency he sees as becoming more

⁸Ibid., 44. ⁹Ibid., 45. ¹⁰Ibid., 48.

and more significant. Combined with his beliefs that women always rule in a factual age such as this and that the passion for possessions, the dominant feminine trait, is so common in this age, it inevitably follows that this is an age designed to be ruled by women.

The following essay, "Perhaps Women," builds on this point, upon his observations in the factories, upon the increasing complexities brought about by the factory system, including technological unemployment resulting from the increasing use of automatic machinery, and upon the confusion that he finds, not only among workers, but on almost all levels, including the artistic and the religious. He sees the result of all this to be a process of degeneration that, beginning with the working classes, has begun to work its way upward, eating into the middle classes, emasculating and dehumanizing each in turn until all of society becomes displaced by the machine, not merely in the work that they perform but more importantly in their own sense of worth.

"Night in a Mill Town," "Ghosts," and "Entering the Mill at Night" explore the ramifications of this fear through observations and through conversations with mill owners, supervisors, and workers. Here Anderson sees a tendency to extent the concept of what has more recently been designated "the Organization Man" to every level of industrial society by placing each individual in his place in the hierarchy of industrialism, promising each that he will be provided for

as long as he conforms to what is expected of him. Here in the South he sees this theory brought to its inevitable conclusion in the mill villages, built and maintained by the factories even to the extent that schools and churches are built and teachers and preachers paid by the factory. This, combined with the fact that the residents are effectively disenfranchised by the lack of incorporation of the villages, places the mill in effective control over the entire lives, mental and spiritual as well as physical, of the people.

Thus, a new god has come into control of much of America and as Anderson examines the scene, he finds its control extending into almost every facet of American life, preaching the gospel of mass production and mass consumption, both stemming from the power of the machine. It is not a pleasant picture, and Anderson sees no hope except in the faith that he has always had in the power of women to save men from the tragedy resulting from their own folly. He asks them to assume this responsibility once again now that they have the power.

I am asking for a statement of the inner strength, of the living potency of present-day American women, of their hunger, the potentiality of new strength in them, that may save American civilization in the face of the machine.¹¹

The last part of the essay "Perhaps Women" contains Anderson's statement of his belief in the utter hopelessness

¹¹Ibid., 97.

of the position of men in the face of the machine. Man has been seduced by the fake vicarious power that he derives from the machine that has replaced him and provided him with other machines to play with, and he is deprived of the creative and imaginative powers that he once had. Women, on the other hand, are untouched by this seduction because the machine has not penetrated into their peculiar function. It is time, he states, for women to take over active control of the machine so that it may be returned to its proper place as a servant of man rather than as his master. That the women are aware of this masculine decline he makes clear at the end of the book in a vivid sketch from the life of the mills: the women are making fun of the men. They often do, he is told.

In Perhaps Women the country editor seems at first glance to have almost disappeared and the bitter, frustrated Anderson of the earlier years to have returned. In a sense this observation is true, at least on the surface. However, in point of view and in tone, the country editor is very much on the scene, observing, taking notes, and trying to determine the effects that would come about, now that "The bitch was trotting in the South..."¹² These things do not affect him directly now; he is secure in his own life and role, and his approach is direct and concerned but detached. He is attempting to report facts, impressions, and deductions

¹²Ibid., 77.

about a phenomenon that he has conquered, accepting for himself the automobile and the linotype as good because they can be used and yet kept in their proper places, but he is deeply concerned that this new god is threatening the countryside and attempting to seduce the townspeople whom he had come to know and love. This point of view he made quite clear in a letter to Laura Lou Copenhaver, his future mother-in-law, at about the time that Perhaps Women was published in 1931.

There is little enough love of country. Mr. Copenhaver, in loving his bit of land out on the Walker Mountain road, is loving his bit of the U.S.A. It's the only sort of love of country that is worth a whoop. All the rest is just talk. There you have Marion, a lovely little town really. And how quickly the citizens would rush forward to bring there some dirty factory, making cheap goods of some kind, pouring more cheap, shoddy goods out into the world. And they would call that Love of Their Town. A bit more money brought to a few, the rest degraded, all of us hoping to get up there among the few.¹³

This is the sort of thing that the country editor is trying to save his town from, the evil that had stricken Bidwell so long before and that now, even more seductive in its chrome-plated elegance, is threatening the refuge that he had thought was safe from it in his time at least.

If Anderson's solution to the problem of industrialism seems too naive, dated, or romantic to be acceptable,

¹³Letters, 248.

too much versed in the mystic reverence with which he had approached all of the women in his works thus far, placing them on pedestals so high that they do not exist as human beings, nevertheless there is much that is valid both in observation and interpretation of the machine age and in anticipation of its coming expansion and further domination of the American scene. The dehumanizing aspects of the mass production factory are obvious, ranging from the inclusion in union contracts of twelve minutes per day personal time to the remarkable rise in automation resulting from electronic advances in World War II. The entirely automatic factory has become a distinct possibility. Such changes leave for man only the roles of servant to the machine and of consumer of all these products, no matter how shoddy. Technological unemployment is increasing, leisure resulting from advances is devoted primarily to consumption of mass-produced goods and entertainment, and the hidden persuaders that Anderson knew in their embryonic state have grown to awesome proportions. What he failed to foresee, of course, was the inevitable seduction of the women through automatic appliances, quick-freezing, and the material advances that have taken function away from the female breast and made it a curiosity so that women have also become drugged servants of the system with their inner function reduced to that of producing more and more consumers.

In Perhaps Women Anderson has attempted to incorporate the techniques of country journalism as he had practiced it in a book designed to attract the readers of the nation rather than merely those of Smyth County, Virginia, and the attempt is almost successful. In each of the pieces he does manage to convey a sense of the universality of the problem of man versus machine by moving out of the particular and showing its ramifications on a larger scale. On the other hand, two difficulties prevent the book from being as good as Hello Towns! The first of these is the nature of the material itself. In journalism for the papers Anderson was dealing with situations that were centered in human life, something which he regarded as intrinsically valuable as well as worthy of compassion. Here, however, the machines dominate the essays, and although he manages to convey his wonder and his fascination with them, nevertheless the feeling is obviously insignificant when compared with his regard for people, and the essays remain lifeless.

More serious are the technical shortcomings of the essays. Having seen activity in the factories as a ritualistic dance, Anderson has attempted to convey this sense of motion in his style. Unfortunately, in order to do so he has resorted to the jerky rhythms that he had used in Dark Laughter, and instead of reproducing the smooth motion of machines fed by men who have incorporated their actions into the cyclical demands of a mechanical cycle, Anderson's

style seems more appropriate to a grotesque caricature of machine activity. Admittedly, his problem was a difficult one that could not have been solved by resorting to his usually satisfactory Midwestern rhythm, but the effect he sought has not been attained by resorting to disjointed, unrhythmical structures.

There is none of the bitterness in Perhaps Women that Anderson had earlier experienced; frustration, of course, is there as he feels his own insignificance and inability in the face of this giant that he had feared so long in the abstract. Now, having encountered it face-to-face and having seen and almost succumbed to it as he saw the beauty of the thing in action, he has realized that it is here to stay, that he cannot protest its existence, and that he can merely hope to contain it. The country editor's first excursion away from his refuge while still carrying on his role has sent him back in retreat to the security of the simple social values of the village, but he sees even those threatened just as the Midwest had been threatened and then destroyed.

During this period Anderson was strongly attracted to Communism as a way out of both the economic depression that was deepening everywhere and out of the impasse that he saw in industrialism. Something was needed to bring order to the economic structure and something was needed to restore human dignity to the worker. On all sides of him his fellow intellectuals were going over, but he still mistrusted the

movement, as much as it appealed to him. He continued to visit strikers, publishing his talk to the Harlan County, Kentucky, miners in Harlan Miners Speak, together with Dos Passos and others in 1932, and he wrote to his future wife Eleanor Copenhaver, "I may conceivably go to communism."¹⁴ Yet he could not. A few weeks later, in July, 1931, he wrote to Edmund Wilson, "I suppose the Negroes are good Communist material; but they will be making a mistake, won't they, if they take that material just because it is easy?"¹⁵ And later on his lecture tour that fall and winter, he continued this distrust, writing to several people his doubts. To Theodore Dreiser he wrote:

I am puzzled about Communism, as I am sure you may be. It may be the answer, and then it may only be a new sort of Puritanism, more deadly than the old moral Puritanism, a new kind of Puritanism at last got power in one place to push its rigid Puritanism home.¹⁶

Meanwhile all this concern with and indecision about the future of America, of industrialism, and of his own economic and political beliefs had resulted in his next novel, Beyond Desire, which used the title but not the substance of the aborted novel immediately preceding. Years before, in Poor White, he had foreshadowed the substance of this new novel when he had made one of his people say

¹⁴Quoted by Schevill, 278.

¹⁵Letters, 249. ¹⁶Ibid., 256.

Well, there's going to be a new war here... It won't be like the Civil War, just shooting off guns and killing people's bodies. At first its going to be a war between individuals to see what class a man must belong; then it is going to be a long, silent war between classes, between those who have and those who can't get. It'll be the worst war of all.¹⁷

In Beyond Desire Anderson has attempted to provide the record of that war, the worst of all wars, as he saw it being waged in the mill towns and the mining towns, and the novel not only draws on the background of the observations he had made from his observation post on the front lines in the South, but it reflects the uncertainty in his own mind at the time as to the causes, the effects, and the cures for the disorder around him. Written in a confused time by a man who has not yet made up his mind about the proper course for his country or his people, the book contains in it more of the genuine flavor of the age in which it was written than any of Anderson's other novels, and the material out of which it is made is part of the times themselves, undiffused by memory or passing events. It is the first work of fiction in which Anderson has come directly to grips with a problem in his time that he knows he can neither retreat from nor reject, and he knows that there is no longer any need for him to do either. As a result, Anderson has recaptured more immediacy in this novel than in any

¹⁷Poor White, 51.

of the others thus far except in the vignettes in Poor White.

In this new novel Anderson has gone beyond the story of the industrial revolution and unrest, however, and has incorporated all that he has learned about the South, its traditions, its people, and the peculiar psyche that makes it a region or a sub-country rather than merely a part of the whole. In it the central role is played by Red Oliver, a boy of good but somewhat impoverished family (although his mother is regarded as a "stranger") who goes to work in the mills to work his way up in a manner approved by his class. Later, however, he turns his back on that class and aligns himself with the workers. In that sense Beyond Desire is another of Anderson's stories of rejection and rebellion, but here Anderson goes beyond the mystic rejection in his early novels and in a manner much improved since he started it in Poor White, he shows the evolution of the change through Oliver's identification of himself with the mill workers, and he carries it ~~through~~ to the outcome that seems to him to be the only one possible during this time in which he has so little hope for industrial America. In concept, Anderson has moved forward in his handling of the novel form, although other difficulties persist.

In addition to the story of Red Oliver, Anderson includes a section, Book Two, concerned with the mill girls who had occupied so much of his attention during these years,

and then Book Three, the story of a small-town librarian caught up in the mores of the Southern town, concluding the novel with Book Four, "Beyond Desire," which again focuses on Red Oliver and ties up the threads of narrative and theme that have recurred throughout the novel. In effect Anderson has attempted another Winesburg, Ohio in Beyond Desire, using four short novels rather than stories and sketches as the main fabric of the book and giving as in Winesburg, Ohio, the impression of a broad cross-section of the social structure of the milltown. That this Winesburg type of structure was his intent is revealed in a letter written to his brother Karl while he was working on the novel. The resulting structure of the book is not unsuccessful. Rather, granting Anderson's intent to fictionalize the revolution that he saw underway in the South, the scope and organization of the book is in order because the structure gives him the opportunity to range widely and utilize the many diverse elements in Southern society.

Book One, "Youth" is devoted primarily to portraying the social background of the South, contrasting the "few" whom he had mentioned in the earlier letter with the many. In doing so he shows the origins from whence this revolution had sprung. The society includes three levels, the members of the old Southern families who are long established, financially secure, and traditionally powerful in the community; the newcomers from the North who, as supervisors and engineers,

are primarily concerned with getting cloth manufactured as quickly, efficiently, and economically as possible; and at the bottom the mill workers, poor whites from the town and the hills. A middle ground between the few and the many is almost nonexistent, and the negroes, comparatively few in the mill town, are considered to be equally nonexistent, exploited, and tolerated but ignored in spite of their often intimate relationships with the highest social level.

The rigid line between classes is illustrated by Anderson's comments about the two baseball teams in the town, the "town team" and the "mill team." They did not play each other but played their counterparts from other towns. "For the town team to have played the mill boys would have been almost like playing niggers."¹⁸ Against that background, Red Oliver, son of the respected town physician and a woman considered to be poor white trash by the negroes, exposed to radical and revolutionary theory by friends in the Northern college he had attended, and forced into the mills by the death of his father, is faced with a decision. Not quite belonging to the town group because of his mother, yet suspected by the mill workers, he must choose a team to play with because of his skill at the game in high school. He chose the mill team, made up of his mother's people, with whom he had begun to feel increasingly sympathetic.

¹⁸Sherwood Anderson, Beyond Desire (New York, 1932), 49.

In the background of this book Anderson introduces the mills, the machines, the specter of advancing technology, and the girls who run the machines. Book Two, "Mill Girls," is devoted to Doris Hoffman, the strongest of the mill girls, and their natural leader. In effect she is a symbolic portrayal of the monument in stone that he had wanted to see erected as he mused about the mill girls at the end of Nearer the Grass Roots. In this part of the novel Anderson is at his best, combining his insight into the workers with whom he always aligned himself and his deep compassion for them. In this portrayal Doris is the eternal symbolic mother, the product of the line reaching through her immediate predecessor, Alice, in Alice and the Lost Novel, back to the earliest version in Windy McPherson's Son. But Doris, like Alice, is no longer inarticulate; rather she has verbally as well as spiritually accepted the responsibility for her weaker, less wise sister workers and for the tiredness and emptiness that fill them.

Here, too, in this section, the shortest but the most directed and economically executed of all in the novel, Anderson shows the background of the mill girl in her servitude to the machines and her insecurity except insofar as she can make herself indispensable by hard work, skill, and efficiency. In one of the best passages in the book he describes the girl's attempt to find diversion and relaxation at a fair. Coming so soon after An American County Fair,

it might be expected that there would be striking similarities, that the same impulse that brought about the former work would be seen at work in this, but the dissimilarity between the two is almost shocking. In the former Anderson had shown the spontaneity and depth of feeling, the age-old celebration of fertility, the closeness of the fair in spirit to the earth from which its products and celebrants had sprung, but this is a new sort of fair, a mechanical ovation to the industrial age, composed of machine-induced vicarious thrills, the consumption almost as a rite of the machine-produced Coca Colas and Milky Ways, and above all, penetrating to every corner of consciousness, the ballyhoo that is so much a part of the machine age.

The fair, as Anderson remarks, "fed Doris Hoffman's consciousness of worlds outside her own mill-bound world,"¹⁹ but it was merely an indication of the fact that the world outside was an enlarged version of her own, dominated by the machine, by the feverish desire to consume machine-made products mechanically, by the specter of insecurity. "The fair was crowded and your shoes got dusty and the shows were shabby and noisy but Doris didn't know that,"²⁰ Anderson says; she, like so many others, felt that there was no life possible other than the one she knew.

¹⁹Ibid., 81. ²⁰Ibid.

Here, too, in this brief sketch Anderson shows the unconscious efforts of the mill workers to inject some meaning into their lives. The fair is a fake and a bit of opium thrust at them, but even that wears off and they have nothing and know it. The only possibility they could see was in the union; that, at least, might give them some measure of control over their own lives, but organizing was flying in the face of the power behind the machine, and they were afraid, even as they were driven to it by the emptiness of their lives. Nevertheless the union, as it grew, filled their emptiness with hope. Contrary to what Irving Howe says, the section does belong in the book; it provides the muted obligato that accompanies the song of revolution that Anderson is directing toward its crescendo. It is restrained, it is pointed, and it provides the key to the theme of revolution.

Book Three, "Ethel," shifts the scene again to another aspect of the revolution that Anderson was describing, this time the efforts of a woman to free herself from the rigid restraints of Southern convention as well as the newer demands of the symbols of material success and to assume in the name of humanity the leadership that Anderson had pleaded for in Perhaps Women. Ethel Long, like Red Oliver, is a product of the old Southern mores, and like him as she read and thought in her job as librarian, she had been exposed to the same new impulses of human equality,

fulfillment, and understanding that Red had experienced. The many double standards of Southern life annoyed her: the reverential attitude toward women held by Southern men at the same time that the tan population increased; the puritanism that made it the "Bible Belt" at the same time that it held out its arms to the ugly aspects of industrialism; the social standards that made Red Oliver a lone figure, hovering between the two extremes of Southern white civilization. In Red she saw the symbol of hope for the South in a blending of the two extremes, understanding and tempering the beliefs of each while at the same time accepting the best of each. But Red was unaware of her attitude toward him, and they became friends as he came into the library increasingly often, at first because he had nowhere else to go, and then because he wanted to learn and books were the only source of information and possible understanding in the town.

In the figure of Ethel's father Anderson constructs an effective representation of the Old South that is moving into the new. Having accepted the faith in the old ways and beliefs that had been handed to him by his inheritance, he went on to accept the new faith in industrialism that was introduced to him by the clergy, the wealthy, and the established, all authorities whom he knew and respected. In both cases he was incapable of questioning; he could only accept.

Here, too, Anderson is sketching in the background of the coming revolution in a portrayal that is neither unsympathetic

nor vindictive as might be expected. Rather it is an acknowledgment of the man's point of view, a sympathetic understanding of the paradox of his position, and a regret that the man is not only incapable of questioning either the old gods or the new, but beneath this inability, afraid to question them even if he could. Here, Anderson implies, is the real tragedy of the modern South, affecting political, economic, social, and religious problems indiscriminately; it is the tragedy of refusing to acknowledge that the problems exist. This is the state of mind that Ethel Long, the librarian who is eager to take up her position in the attempt to humanize society, is struggling against.

Ethel's past had been a series of contradictions almost as complex on the personal level as that of the South on a regional basis. She wanted wealth and position as the age demanded and yet she didn't; she wanted the sexual freedom that she saw was the prerogative of men, and yet she was afraid of its brutality and sordidness; she wanted to live the life of an intellectual and literary person, but she was suspicious of the shallowness and superficiality of it when she was introduced to it, so, having returned to Georgia, her rebellion was resolved in taking the position as librarian, a gesture that was considered daring for a girl of good family. A flirtation with a scheming, unscrupulous, ungentlemanly politician amused and flattered her, but she was drawn to Red Oliver, and eventually, in spite of the discrepancy of

ten years in their ages, she had a brief affair with him. Faced with the impossibility of going on with the affair or of anything more growing out of it, in despair she married the politician, not daring to think beyond the marriage and yet seeing in him a reflection of a growing force in the world and in the South.

In this section of the novel Anderson carries through the observation made in Perhaps Women that the future of America lies in its women, and he finds that it is invalid, that women, even when they have the desire, the capabilities, and the willingness, are unable to assume the responsibility that he was so willing to give them. In Ethel Long's case, the complications that society introduces, the sexual drive that nature has provided, and the inability to force herself into acceptance of a role that rejected freedom per se because by its very nature it demanded the highest type of servitude combine to show Anderson that his theory is doomed to failure. In her rejection of Red Oliver, whom she might have saved from the destructive forces around him, she has only made the outcome of his struggle inevitable. Her desires to be strong, to be responsible, and to be free are too much for her, and the fears raised by her background and the conflicts it raises in her are too much to overcome. In despair she casts herself into the midst of the new brutality, a move that can end only in her destruction as an individual.

That this is a confused section of the novel is inevitable, probably consciously so on Anderson's part, dealing as he does with forces that are more complex than any he has dealt with previously and that disprove for him the hope that he saw for containment and control of the forces of the machine age. But here Anderson is not a vicarious participant; he reports the facts as he sees them as though he has no stake in the outcome. His job as country editor, observer, and reporter is not to interpret or to hope or to search out a happy ending; rather it is to describe the manifestations of the forces operating in American society whether he understands them or not. That his prognosis is unfavorable stems from his observations of both the manifestations and the confusions that they bring about by their inherent paradoxes.

Book Four, "Beyond Desire," deals with the climax of the worst war of all, carrying Red Oliver to the end that has become inevitable for him. After his rejection by Ethel he has begun to wander aimlessly through the South, and as the section opens he awakens confused and then remembers that he is in a strikers' camp where he had been mistaken for an expected Communist leader and made welcome the night before. Oliver's confusion persists, however, and he is unable to deny that he is a Communist or to affirm that he is one, thereby reflecting the uncertainty that Anderson himself felt at this time. He thinks to himself:

"Perhaps I would like to be the thing you think I am. I don't know. Anyway I'm not.

"If the thing you think I am is something fine and brave, then I would like to be it.

"I want that: to be something fine and brave. There is too much ugliness in life and people. I don't want to be ugly."²¹

If that means to be a Communist, then Oliver, the Andersonian hero, is willing, but Oliver, like his creator, still doesn't know, and it is significant that the emphasis here is not on economic or political beliefs but on relationships to people and to an ideal, essentially the same attitude as the strikers have toward Communism, which they see as an experience that is to free them physically just as their religious experiences are to free them spiritually. Still, however, Oliver hasn't cleared his confusion; it is further revealed in his efforts to rid himself of the haunting memory of Ethel Long. In the process, however, he remembers that he had almost unconsciously revealed himself as a Communist to a motorist who had given him a lift; later he finds that the motorist has told the police that Red had threatened him, and the police have been searching for him as a dangerous young criminal. Still he is unable to make up his mind, and he sees what is happening around him as the fulfillment of Anderson's prophecy in Poor White.

There were new words, new ideas, striking on the consciousness of people. The words themselves

²¹Ibid.

bothered Red. "Communism, socialism, the bourgeoisie, capitalism, Karl Marx." The bitter, long struggle that had to come...the war...that was what it would be...between those who had and those who couldn't get...There would be all sorts of queer new alignments of people in life ...new alignments made, having to be made. In the end every man and every woman, even the children, would have to line themselves up on the one side or the other.²²

Both Anderson and his hero knew the side that they were on; in Harlan Miners Speak Anderson had made public his alignment, and Oliver had participated in a strike at his home-town mill and had fled when it was broken. Red had seen the brutality on the Communist's side; "he had got just enough of Communism, its philosophy, to make him afraid. He was afraid and at the same time fascinated. He might at any moment surrender, become a Communist...He wanted to go. He didn't want to go."²³ He knew that Communism meant the most brutal sort of war, and yet he was afraid that there was nothing else.

This is the indecision and confusion that drew the caustic comments of some critics at its appearance in 1932 just as it drew those of Irving Howe. The earlier critics, many of whom had "gone over" or thought they had or said they had because it was stylish, have a position that is understandable; Anderson was to them that most anachronistic of political phenomena, a mugwump, but Howe, with the advantage of perspective, should have known better. Red Oliver is

²²Ibid., 271. ²³Ibid.

drifting, just as the times themselves were drifting and as countless thousands of young Americans were drifting physically and intellectually, drawn toward Communism and yet afraid.

This chapter, more than any other in the book, reflects the kaleidoscopic structure of the times, the indecisions, the search for a firm and promising hand in its quick, vivid sketches of the workers, their backgrounds, their fears, and their few hopes. Occasionally a doubt comes through, almost in anguish: "'How do I know that I give a damn for people in general, the generality of people ...their suffering? It may be all bunk?'"²⁴ But Anderson's deep compassion as well as his often implied question answers that: "'Oh, hell, it's true [that] those who are always getting it in the neck are the nicest people. I wonder why.'"²⁵ In the end his hero, Red Oliver, gets it in the neck also. In an encounter with the militia, led by a young officer who is also one of the "nicest people," Red steps forward, still uncertain as to the label that should be pinned on him, but certain of the side he is aligned with, and he is shot dead. The question has been resolved; names are not important, nor is political or social theory. Man's willingness to act on the side of his sympathies is the only ultimate determining factor in the struggle.

²⁴Ibid., 312. ²⁵Ibid., 293.

Beyond Desire is not a novel about Communism nor is it a call to revolution. Rather it is a portrayal of a time, place, and combination of circumstances that gave rise to more indecision and self-interrogation than any other in American history with the exception of the Civil War. Anderson has attempted to cram all of this atmosphere and background into his novel, giving rise to the charges of formlessness, meandering, and introduction of irrelevancies that have been leveled against it. But if the novel is formless and confused, so were the times that produced it, and Anderson, as fascinated by the events and as naturally sympathetic to those caught up in them as he was, has produced a novel that, like Poor White, as a social document is an accurate reflection of the spirit of the age. When the novel is considered entirely as a work of literary art it is possible to find evidence for the charges made against it. The material Anderson was dealing with was too immediate for the refinement of treatment that would be possible later. However, the real value of the book lies in that immediacy rather than in its artistry. It is closely related to the journalism of Hello Towns!. Anderson the townsman, secure in his personal identity and in his place, has looked out at the world, has reported what he has seen, and has mirrored effectively the spirit of those observations; yet, canny in his role, he has refused to permit himself to be labeled.

Instead he is willing to be counted on the side of humanity, justice, and courage.

In Beyond Desire, as in Tar and the later Kit Brandon, Anderson wrote another of his almost-good novels. In spite of his earlier declaration that he was through with hurried work and that he would take his time and ignore pressures, this novel suffers both structurally and stylistically from his desire to get it done and through the presses. Parts of it are handled with care, resulting in writing as good as he had ever done, especially in the portions dealing with the mill girls, which for their economy, their artless grace, and their intensity are reminiscent of Winesburg. Elsewhere, however, he has resorted to the jerky rhythms that were conducive to easy writing but not to smoothly-flowing writing, and the novel suffers accordingly. As a result, development of character through his usual intuitive approach is often ineffectual and disappointing. His haste is partially understandable; he was finishing his first novel in seven years and he saw it as the opportunity to restore his literary reputation, but the haste was both unnecessary and unwise.

While Beyond Desire was in the presses, Anderson joined the American delegation to the leftwing "World's Congress Against War," which met in Amsterdam in August and September of 1932. While Communist delegates were in the majority, nevertheless Anderson was impressed by the seeming harmony of the meeting, with people of all liberal

persuasions uniting in common activity against fascism and war. Anderson made a brief speech on the problems of the artist in America, but for the most part he remained in the background, seeing in the gathering something of the mystic unity that he had sought to portray in Marching Men. As in his novel, he failed to look beneath the surface harmony or to read the adopted "Manifest-War Congress Against the Imperialist War" carefully enough to see how effectively Communist domination had made the Congress an instrument of its own ends rather than a common protest.

However, shortly after his return, his renewed faith in his creative ability led him to start a never-finished autobiographical work called A Book of Days, parts of which were later incorporated in the Memoirs; to put together a new volume of short stories, Death In the Woods; and to work on a stage version of Winesburg, Ohio. At the same time his relationship with Eleanor Copenhaver was moving steadily toward marriage. As a result, his interest in the political and economic scene began to wane temporarily, and the end of his indecisive flirtation with the Communist Party dates from this point. Perhaps he had taken a second, closer look at the Manifesto he had previously accepted. Although Communist sympathizers and reviewers had seen Beyond Desire as evidence of his conversion, they had failed to see his indecision which was coming to an end. He had been counted on the side that he felt to be right, he had participated as actively as a literary

figure might in the stirring times, and now he had refused to take the easy way out, that of rebellion for the sake of rebellion.

Having written to Tom Smith, his editor at Liveright, that he was too much concerned with the individualist's point of view to accept the dogma of the Communist Party although the philosophy of Communism and of the individual might at times coincide, he told Smith that he had decided not to go over, and in a later series of letters to Russian editors who had evidently wanted to exploit his interest for propaganda purposes he made clear his point of interest in the movement without personal acceptance of it. To the editor of the Soviet Literary Gazette, who had criticized his work as too much concerned with bourgeoisie psychology, he pointed out his own position:

America started out, apparently, with so much to offer to the world. In making our offer to the world we have apparently failed. We have become as a people, rich in goods and too poor in something else...For one thing, we as a people do not know each other very well, do not draw close together, and I myself, as a writer, have wanted more than anything else to make Americans, in the civilization in which they are compelled to live now, better known to each other.

I am not so sure that simple stories of human beings, caught and held suspended in a civilization, are not better material for the ultimate revolution that must come here than anything else I can do...I am not at all troubled over what you are doing over there, although I admit that I am sometimes troubled a good deal as to how I may make my own best contribution here.²⁶

²⁶ Letters, 268-269.

Almost immediately after this, as though to reiterate his faith in his own simple little stories as vehicles to bring about a better life, Anderson wrote "Brother Death," one of his best, for inclusion in the Death in the Woods collection, and then, perhaps reassured by the foreshadowing of the New Deal, he returned to concern with personal affairs, experimenting with novels, traveling, and looking forward to the publication of Death in the Woods, which, he was sure, contained some of his best work. This occupied him from the early fall of 1932 to late the following spring.

In the volume Death in the Woods Anderson collected the best of the short fiction that he had written during the preceding several years, including the title story which remains among his best work. In this book Anderson has for the first time dispensed with the use of a foreword, preface, introduction, or tone piece, preferring instead that the works themselves be interpreted through their own literary art rather than through the arbitrary intrusion of his own comments. Perhaps he no longer felt the need for explaining himself and his works as he had for so long; at any rate, the decision was a wise one, resulting partially from his annoyance at the cool critical reception accorded Beyond Desire. He was sure that this book would more than compensate both for the lack of financial success and for the blow to his reputation, and a great deal of care went into its preparation. Not only did he change the order and content

of the volume after he had received the proofs, eliminating several stories that he felt were unsatisfactory, but he wrote "Brother Death" for inclusion. The latter was, he felt, "...one of the finest stories I've ever done, and I even dare to say one of the finest and most significant any-one has ever done. Sounds cocky, doesn't it?"²⁷

The comment was cocky, hardly a comment that would be made by one desperately unsure of his creative powers and fumbling uncertainly, as Irving Howe maintains Anderson was at this time. Not only was the statement cocky, but it was not far from the truth. "Brother Death" and "Death in the Woods" are two of Anderson's best stories, ranking easily with any of those in the earlier collections, and the volume as a whole is evidence that he had reached his maturity in sureness of style and execution in the short story form, of which more will be said after a brief glimpse at the volume.

To give form to the book Anderson has again used a framing technique, leading off with "Death in the Woods" and concluding with "Brother Death," both of which are companion pieces in mood, theme, and setting, ostensibly dealing again with the theme of initiation that has unfortunately all too often been accepted as the essence of Anderson's best stories.²⁸ In the former story Anderson has used as a basis

²⁷Letters, 278.

²⁸See, for example, Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1953), 35-36, which provides much of the basis for contemporary Anderson criticism.

an incident presumably from his own childhood, described at length in Tar: A Midwest Childhood. When expanded into a short story the incident moves beyond the mere impact of death upon an adolescent mind and becomes symbolic of the universal inevitability both of death and of the modern tendency to attempt to ignore it, to deny it, and failing these, to misinterpret it.

The story is a simple one, told by an adolescent narrator, and in it Anderson returns to the grotesque cast-offs of society that have consistently been his people. The story is that of the life and death of an old woman who is exploited by her husband and son, both of whom are completely brutal without the redeeming innocence of primitiveness, and by the dogs that the men keep as extensions of themselves. Beaten into perpetual silence by their fists and their domination, her main function is to scrape up food for both men and dogs. One night, while returning from the village with meat given her by a gruff but humane butcher, she set off through the woods accompanied by the dogs. Tired, she sat down to rest in a clearing in the snowy woods, and a day or two later she was found naked and dead; the dogs had taken the meat, tearing her clothes off in the process, but she was untouched, and the tracks in the snow showed that the dogs had circled around her in reversion to the savage instincts that had been repressed in them.

In death she was young and beautiful to the boy who

look on; she was untouched by the years of beating and bullying, as though death had erased the marks of her tragic life. The boy always remembered the sight, but only in later years did he come to know that she was one whom life had forced to its lowest levels and made of her, even in death, a feeder of animal life. Thus, as in Anderson's earlier stories dealing with adolescent initiation, the story transcends that initial basis and becomes a story of adult realization, of recognition that death is inevitable but not terrible, that it can be and should be a release from and a compensation for the brutality and the lack of feeling that one encounters in life.

The story has been interpreted as a symbolic presentation of the life and death of Anderson's own mother, whom he had earlier pictured as silent, inarticulate, and sent to her early grave by hard work and selfless devotion, but the story is too harsh and too brutal to be representative of the early years that he had seen in perspective as satisfying and rich just before writing this story. Furthermore, having rehabilitated the image of his father just before this, it seems unlikely that Anderson would have returned to an image that was as animalistic and as shadowy as the father in this. Rather Anderson had chosen this stark, depersonalized presentation not to symbolize family relations but to commemorate the silent, welcome deaths that occur whenever man reduces his relationships with his fellows to the level of the jungle.

In "The Return" Anderson counters the grimness of the

preceding story with a return to the age of the machine and to the realization that it had replaced the past that the protagonist remembers. His only choice is to have the machine carry him quickly away from the fears that the realization brings on. "There She Is--She Is Taking Her Bath" is a seemingly humorous piece that points out the inarticulation of modern life and the folly that results when modern man is afraid to let himself penetrate the surface barriers. The humor disappears as the impotent protagonist realizes that his fears will continue, that his hands will shake, and that he will spill his desert.

"The Fight" is another story set in the present, an attempt to point out the senselessness and the irrationality that is at the heart of human rivalry and that no amount of reason can change. Only a change in heart can do this, Anderson points out, an act of love that cannot be intellectualized. "That Sophistication" carries this theme through to the bohemian, avowedly modern revolt of the twenties, pointing out that deliberately intellectualized rejection is futile, that it results in a meaningless ritualized morass, as the naive heroine utters a bit of unconscious wisdom: "I might have saved my husband all the money and got all this sophistication I'm getting, or anyway all I needed, right in Chicago."²⁹ Here

²⁹Sherwood Anderson, Death In the Woods (New York, 1933), 138.

again he emphasizes that changes in human relations can only come about by something more far-reaching than merely willing them.

The other stories in the collection continue exploring other aspects of the futility of intellectualized revolt. "In a Strange Town" turns to the opposite side of the preceding attempts to control the human experience through rational action. These have failed, the wanderer in this story points out, because they have attempted to analyze what cannot be analyzed. One can penetrate to the core of human meaning only through empathy and through sincerely approaching human lives and deaths as significant extensions of one's self. The mountaineer juror in "A Jury Case" realizes this instinctively as he learns that there is a difference between human truth and intellectualized legal truth, while the middle-aged doctor in "Another Wife" points out that true feeling transcends things that can be seen, felt, or measured. With true maturity comes wisdom in the form of the realization that appearance, the only thing upon which man can focus his intellectual powers, is unimportant and that human emotions, if they are true, perceive this difference and penetrate through to the essence of other lives. In "The Flood" Anderson portrays the scholar's inability to define this ability of the human heart in spite of the fact that he has experienced it and will again.

Through the stories in the collection Anderson has been weaving a steady and progressive thematic thread, stressing the inability of the human mind to determine the ultimate reality behind appearance and events. This thread runs from the apparent tragedy that is not a tragedy at all in "Death in the Woods" through modern man's ignorance of or fearful unwillingness to search for the meaning beneath the surface of human life, whether it be the appearance of change, of revolt, or of human relations. This, Anderson points out, results in man's attempts to rationalize away his insecurities even while he knows that he could find the truth if he were not afraid. The theme reverses itself then, turning to the positive side that, according to Anderson, contains the key to any ultimate fulfillment of the potential inherent in human life. This lies in rejecting attempts to solve human problems through the rational methods of scientific analysis or of sense observation and attempting to build relationships upon an instinctive, non-sensuous appreciation of the fact that reality can be found only through the determined effort to enter into the lives of others. This, of course, is contingent upon an appreciation not only of the intrinsic worth of human life but also of death that, far from being an intruder to be denied or deliberately misunderstood, is actually life's culmination and its final triumph.

This thematic thread leads directly to "Brother Death," the last story in the collection and the one that Anderson

wrote as a capstone in order to bring the theme full circle by completely reversing the conventional roles of appearance and reality. Significantly, this story, like the first one, deals with a girl's realization that death can be life and that life can be death, but again as in the first story, that realization can only come with maturity. The story actually has two plots, both of them centered within the same family and each of them an amplification of the same themes. The first plot concerns the young girl and her younger brother who has a heart condition so serious that it may result in death at any time. In an effort to prolong his life, the family determines to prevent him from indulging in any physical activity. To the young girl this is wrong, and finally her protests result in the boy's freedom. After a year or two he dies, quietly and peacefully, in his sleep.

The second plot centers around the conflict between the father and the oldest son, each of whom has definite ideas about running the family farm. As a focal point for the conflict, Anderson uses two huge oak trees, beautiful and shady but useless, standing in the pasture. The father wants to remove them, but the son protests. Eventually the father has his way, and the son can only choose between accepting the decision and protecting his position as heir or leaving the farm. He remains, and in doing so he surrenders his individuality to the will of his father. In the

end the girl realizes, after she has lived and observed for a long time, that the physical death of her younger brother was more humane than the spiritual death suffered by the older. Thus, the conventional roles have been reversed, and to die is to preserve one's freedom while to live is to give it up. Anderson concludes:

But while he lived, there was always, Mary afterwards thought, a curious sense of freedom, something that belonged to him that made it good, a great happiness, to be with him. It was, she finally thought, because having to die his kind of death, he never had to make the surrender his brother had made--to be sure of possessions, success, his time to command--would never have to face the more subtle and terrible death that had come to his older brother.³⁰

"Brother Death" was Anderson at his mature best, dealing with a setting, a group of characters, and a plot that contain in microcosm all that he had experienced in his long observation of America, and here is the first indication that he had at last recognized the basic problem that had corrupted American civilization as a result of the rise of industrialism and materialism. It was the inability to distinguish between substance and dross and the all too frequent willingness to accept the cheaper substitute rather than to search for the more valuable. This concept goes far beyond his old belief in the age as one in which man lets himself be deluded into believing that the standardized machine-made

³⁰Ibid., 297-298.

product is as satisfying as the one which resulted from a combination of love, satisfaction, and the skilled hands of a craftsman. Here Anderson points out that the same way of taking the easy way out extends to the world of values and that man has let himself be deluded into accepting material values, the stuff of which appearance is made, in place of the spiritual values of life itself.

Nowhere is this more evident than in an age that denies the existence of physical death, hiding it behind such euphemisms as "memorial park" or "slumber parlor," while it smothers sincere emotion and understanding in a welter of maudlin grief and the overpowering smell of perfectly-arranged hothouse flowers. Death of the body, as Anderson points out, is man's opportunity to triumph over his environment, not because he will pass on to a perfect state but because he no longer is faced with demands that he surrender to it, whereas to live in compromise with the prevailing standards of society is to place one's individualism in danger and eventually to have it die. This is the real death that society ignores even while it denies the existence of the other, and this death could be prevented while the other should be accepted as right.

This collection of stories contains Anderson's surest and most perceptive comments on American civilization, stemming as it does from the experiences of his entire life, ranging from boyhood to retirement in the Virginia hills.

Coming at this time, as he was trying to find a solution to the immense personal as well as economic problem that was the depression, it represents his belief that a reversal of American values was needed, that America had to look beyond the immediate and below the surface of life in order to find the belief that it needed so desperately if it were to survive. Too, the book marks Anderson's disenchantment with another way of life, that of Communism, a way that, like materialism of any other sort, makes the same sort of demands on individualism in exchange for the same kind of things. There was no easy, dogmatic answer to the problem of the struggle between material and individual; an answer could arise only from a re-examination of life and a rededication to human principles, a process that Anderson himself had struggled through and that now promised him a measure of fulfillment.

The collection not only contains a mature statement of belief, but it gives further indication of Anderson's mastery of his craft. Always at his stylistic best in the shorter forms, here again he reproduces the flat rhythms of the American Midwest, and he constructs his stories in the old oral tradition that behind its seeming formlessness is carefully controlled so that the apparent digressions are incorporated in their cumulative intensity into the climax of the story. This technique, for which he alone is responsible, has been criticized as indicative of Anderson's

"compulsive, obsessive, repetitive quality which finally impresses itself on us as his characteristic quality,"³¹ but such a criticism is best answered by Maxwell Geismar, who states that "Anderson gives us many examples of the pains that he took to develop this style, and the critics who have stated that he wasn't really interested in good writing are simply looking for another kind of writing."³² The literary influence of his reproduction of the Mid-American idiom is further indication of the questionable validity of such criticism. Through Hemingway it has come to dominate much American fiction, although unfortunately it has often been reduced to caricature by less able and less conscientious followers.

The publication of Death In the Woods so soon after Beyond Desire is refutation enough of the persistent critical complaint that Anderson had lost his creative powers. Not only was Beyond Desire his most ambitious novel to this point, but it ranked after Poor White in effectiveness, and of all his novels it is surpassed only by Poor White and Kit Brandon. Death In the Woods, immediately following, is his most consistent collection of stories if Winesburg, Ohio is excluded, and the two volumes together point out that Anderson had learned to use the material that he had gathered after he had had enough of withdrawal and had re-entered the

³¹Trilling, 36. ³²Geismar, 273.

world. Anderson's difficulty with critics at this point was primarily that he had become stereotyped in the minds of most critics and reviewers, and they saw in his works what they assumed would be there or conversely did not find what they had anticipated and consequently were disappointed. The curious fact about the critical reception of each of these books is that each critic seemed to be looking for something different, although it was stylish to be contradictory and condescending toward his work, an attitude that had its inception with Hemingway's Torrents of Spring.

If there is a common core of the adverse criticism leveled at Anderson at this time, it is mindlessness, the failure to think his material through and to show its logical culmination. Such criticism was justifiable when directed against the novels of personal rebellion, but it was strangely lacking. However, to direct it against either Beyond Desire or Death In the Woods is indicative of lack of critical perception. Beyond Desire is politically inconclusive, but it is not philosophically inconclusive as it points out that man must identify himself with a side in the economic struggle and act to support it. Death In the Woods carries on from this point and makes observations about the meaning of life and death that not only are not mindless but are among Anderson's keenest.

The contrast between these two works does, however, point out Anderson's real creative difficulty. It was not

in conception of the works, but it was in execution. Not only was he still at his best in the shorter forms as usual, but since Dark Laughter he had been having stylistic problems. The shorter works, including "Mill Girls" in Beyond Desire, are in the Midwestern idioms and rhythms that he had first used in Winesburg, but most of the novel is in the jerky experimental style that fascinated him to the detriment of his work. This inability to recognize his own most effective style is mindlessness of a sort, but it is concerned with technique rather than conception, and the two should not be confused.

With the conclusion of Death In the Woods Anderson had completed his re-entry both to the literary world and to the world of intellectual and emotional concern with the problems of the people who dominated his creative work. His literary work was resumed with the same sort of accomplishments and failures that had characterized it before his withdrawal, and the world that he found outside the Virginia hills had the same problem that resulted from dehumanizing factors in society. His approach to both, however, was different. In fiction, especially in the novel, he sought to find meaning in the act of rebellion itself rather than to leap at an easy answer, and he came to accept the view that to stand up for one's beliefs, no matter what the cost, was to find purpose. More importantly, he had accepted the belief that life and death are not what they seem, and that life, by which he

means the personal integrity affirmed in Beyond Desire, is the great adventure, while spiritual death is the denial of individuality and humanity.

His view of the world was different also. Its problems were not his personal problems; they were his as a man rather than as an individual, and his attempts to find solutions to them were not couched in individual terms but in terms that were designed to find relief for all men. At the same time his flirtation with Communism was brief because he had learned that appearances and promises are not reality, and that such a system made demands and had results that often were at odds with the promises and with his beliefs. He still sought to find something that would provide the human feeling that his Marching Men and "Commercial Democracy" concepts had sought, but he knew that like them, Communism was too easy, too pat to be true.

At this point Anderson was entering the last phase both of his life and his career. He was about to marry Eleanor Copenhaver, who was partially responsible for his renewed attention to both his work and his world; he had five more books to write, four of them concerned with his final statements on the meaning of the American experience as he had known it; and he was to find and support a movement that promised to bring dignity to the individual instead of demanding that he sacrifice individuality for security. During those last years the farm and the Virginia hills were to

provide a place where he could withdraw occasionally in order to carry out his final role as townsman who looks at the world and likes most of what he sees at the same time that he re-
~~views~~ his fight against the barriers that divide men and make them less than human beings.

CHAPTER IX

THE TOWNSMAN AND THE WORLD

Through an unfortunate series of circumstances Death In the Woods did nothing to revive Anderson's literary reputation among critics although it was one of his best books, and from its publication until his death in 1941 his position in American literature was anachronistic. To the critics of the 1930's, imbued as they were with a culture that saw meaning only in violence and in the adherence to an ambiguous code of defiance propagated by Hemingway and his followers, Anderson was a failure because he sought meaning inherent in human relations; to those critics who were unable or unwilling to acknowledge Anderson's attempts to find an authentic American style, he was a failure because his writing was stylistically different and therefore bad; and to the many academic critics who found difficulty in categorizing his work it was ultimately unsatisfactory. The combination of points of view was one that Anderson could do nothing to combat, even if Death In the Woods had been successful.

In two areas, however, during the 1930's Anderson found a large measure of understanding, appreciation, and acceptance. The first of these was in the academic community which, traditionally conservative in accepting the modern

artist, had finally discovered him, incorporating his work in classroom anthologies and inviting him to participate in academic writers' workshops. The second was the political area, in which the New Deal brought into prominence a great many men who were spiritually close to Anderson and who recognized that they were trying to do the same thing in the socio-economic area that he was trying to do in the literary. This latter factor was very important during this last period of his life and career. Not only did it provide much of the material about which he wrote, but it made him a semi-official arm of New Deal policy during a good portion of the time. In fact the trip to South America upon which he died was one of the semi-official jobs that he had taken on.

Anderson's loss of his reputation among critics continued to hurt him up to the end, partially because he felt that it was deserved because of difficulties in finishing a number of projects that he started, and partially because, since he could only be himself and could not become another member of the current cult of violence, there was nothing he could do to gain the good will of critics and reviewers for the popular literary journals. Nevertheless, in spite of this difficulty, Anderson's last years were happy. He knew that he had done good work in the past, he was working conscientiously if sporadically, and he felt that he still had good work in him. At the same time he felt secure in the

print shop, on the farm, and in the purposeful travels of those years. Most importantly, his last marriage was a happy one.

Death In the Woods, which should have been one of his most successful books, became a victim of the financial instability of the times. While it was in the presses, Anderson's publisher, Horace Liveright, failed, and the book never really came out. Only a few copies had been bound and sent to reviewers, and the remaining finished copies were impounded during bankruptcy proceedings. Much later they were sold to remainder houses. The book received little critical attention, and even if it had been promoted, there would have been no copies available for sale. Consequently, not only was there little of the financial return that Anderson would have welcomed, but there was little opportunity for this book to provide rebuttal to those who saw Anderson's literary career as finished. However, Anderson was accustomed to such bad breaks by this time, and his only regret was expressed in a letter to Gertrude Stein later that year: "I wrote one good story last winter, in a book called Death In the Woods. I'd send the book on to you, only the publisher went smash and I haven't any copies. The one story I liked best was called "Brother Death."¹

¹Letters, 295.

The most significant factor in Anderson's disregard for the failure of his book was his forthcoming marriage to Eleanor Copenhaver, a marriage that held more promise of lasting satisfaction and fulfillment than any of his previous marriages. Anderson had known Miss Copenhaver, a Marion girl, since shortly after he had come there, and her work for the Y.W.C.A. with mill girls and her interest in the Southern labor movement reflected her deep concern for the people whom Anderson had been championing for most of his creative life. In spite of a pronounced difference in ages, they shared compelling interests and a compassion for the people with whom both were so intimately involved. The values that they had in common were a firm foundation for a mutually satisfying and fulfilling relationship.

From Sherwood Anderson's standpoint, his relationship with Eleanor was the most important in his life for several reasons, as he pointed out in numerous letters, especially in those to her father, who disapproved of their marriage. When Anderson had found his way to Marion, Virginia, he had retreated to the past, seeking a refuge from a society that he could rebel against but could not understand. To Eleanor he gave the credit for showing him that he should regard Marion not as a place in which he could withdraw from the world but one that he could use as a base of operations for carrying on his search for the ultimate good that could be found in America. It is impossible to determine fully the

influence that Eleanor had on the course of his work during the years of their friendship, courtship, and marriage, but the evidence points to the assumption that she provided direction to him through her interest in working directly with the people of the Southern industrial revolution and coming to know and understand them. That Anderson was aware of his debt to her is evident from many of his letters, especially in the explanation of their relationship and of himself that he wrote to her father, B. E. Copenhaver, just before their marriage in the summer of 1933. He wrote:

As regards Eleanor and myself. We have known each other a long time now. We began as friends and then began to love each other. She has done some wonderful things for me. When I first knew her and we were but friends, I was almost altogether a defeated man.

She gave me new courage, made me see myself, I believe made me a workman again.²

More than this, however, Anderson indicates that his long period of introspection had given him insight into what had been driving him for so long and what had finally led him to Marion, to Eleanor, and to a renewed confidence in his own creative powers and in the people about whom he wrote:

As men our two lives have been, I should say, altogether different. I have taken great risks, made mistakes you haven't made. In my own way, I think, Mr. Copenhaver, I have also been a God-seeker. To be the kind of writer I have been and am I had to take great risks of misunderstanding. I thought that to understand men and

²Ibid., 289-290.

women, get at the inner secret of them, was more important than to gloss over life.

I have been punished for that, misunderstood often. It is, I believe, partly, maybe altogether, the secret of my failure in marriage. I have got in some places the reputation of being what I am not, a sensual man.

On the other hand...I have got, by the course I have taken, the love and loyalty, I believe, of some of the finest men in America. On the whole I can't apologize. In the end I will stand on my work, and it is because Eleanor has had a real sense of that always, has helped me so much, has stood by me when I was discouraged and defeated that I love her so much, more than I ever thought I could love.³

At this point Anderson was not a defeated man, nor was his creative life over. Rather he was full of ideas and projects, not only for new creative work but also for the direct action that he had learned was both necessary and effective in dealing with the overall problems that plagued America as a result of the economic collapse. Secure in his own personal life and in his rediscovery of the America that he had forsaken for so long while he was exploring both the aggressively modern America of the twenties and the American past, he turned again to the present. He had determined in Eleanor's company to rediscover the modern scene and to find out what had happened to the American character as a result of the depression. First, however, he took time to put into form for publication a collection of some of his

³Ibid., 290.

short, impressionistic pieces. The result, No Swank, is another of the works that show Anderson's control of the shorter forms, and it is another of his works deserving of more attention than it has received.

No Swank is one of the limited distribution books that Anderson wrote in Virginia, a collection of essays in which he tried to incorporate as much of his thinking as he considered to be worth preserving. Published by the Centaur Press in 1934, it is primarily a tribute to the people who have, without pretense, self-righteousness, or indignation, tried to make the world a more meaningful place in which to live and in the process have made Anderson's life richer as they stimulated his mind and his emotions. In a sense the book serves, as Maxwell Geismar has commented, as a preface to the final stage of Anderson's life, not, however, as an indication that Anderson is trying to point out the breakdown of "Industrial Separatism,"⁴ but because it marks his withdrawal from the active combat and searching that have characterized almost all of his personal and literary life and into a phase that, in his last four books, is a summing up and a final statement of his belief in the old truths and in the enduring qualities of the human spirit. No Swank bridges the gap between search and final affirmation; it

⁴Geismar, 274.

reflects the turmoil of the early depression years and the vestiges of hope as the New Deal starts to function; and more importantly, it reiterates his faith in humanity.

The book consists of a series of impressions, as Anderson states in his introductory apology for the briefness of the sketches and possible inaccuracies; these impressions are not attempts to characterize the people with whom he deals but to indicate their meaning to him and to the world of which he has again become a part. Growing out of the uncertainty and despair of the depression, No Swank is a tribute to what Anderson felt was worthwhile, and it is part of his attempt to help people to know and understand each other. In the title essay, devoted to Henry Wallace and the spirit of the New Deal, he makes clear this belief in a revolution, not of force, but of humanizing impulses:

There is this desire among men, here in America just now, to like and understand each other. It is a pretty dominant hunger among us. I can't help feeling that this thing we are going through, this depression, men and women hungry, suffering, out of work, the spiritual stress and strain of all this...the old prosperous, proud, cock-sure America in some queer way blown up, rows of staring blank-eyed factories in industrial towns, Wall Street men who were but yesterday millionaires now broke and knowing the common man's fear of the future...there is or at least should be some chance for something humanizing to grow out of all this, and it is needed, for the successful Americans of the past have been about the most lonely people in the world. Individualism and loneliness always go together.⁵

⁵Sherwood Anderson, No Swank (Philadelphia, 1934),

Here is Anderson's real purpose in the book: to break down some of the isolation that has concerned him so long as a by-product of the American spirit that had been taken over, exploited, and perverted by industrialism. Here in No Swank, as the title indicates, he is attempting to break down the artificial barriers of pretense and show the meaning intrinsic in the lives of these people who have been misinterpreted or ignored by the public at large and yet have gone on to find meaning, each in his own way.

In "Meeting Ring Lardner," the first of the essays, he tries to reveal something of the essence of the man who sought in public to take refuge behind a mask of indifference, and yet who was possessed of a deep compassion behind that mask, a compassion that was reflected in his friends' protective attitude toward him. For a moment Anderson reveals Lardner with the mask gone, a shy man reaching out for understanding, before he passes on to "Death on a Winter Day," in which he tries to recapture his friend Leon Bazalgette's feeling for life in a tribute on his death.

"The Dreiser," another of his expressions of admiration for Theodore Dreiser, is a study in contrasts, the burly, outspoken man who knows he is right and sets out to prove it; the browbeater who demands to be heard; and then suddenly, inexplicably, the man who becomes "like a shy and very sensitive boy"⁶ when he talks about life and its

⁶Ibid., 16.

phenomena. Dreiser, he says, "...has the gift. It is rare enough in this world. It is the gift of infinite tenderness, always reaching out to the others."⁷ Like Lardner, he, too, had had to adopt a mask, one that had nothing to do with his real self.

From Dreiser he turns to "J. J. Lankes and his Woodcuts." He sees Lankes as a man whose real worth lies in "his determination, his assertion and reassertion, as well as the beauty of his work that...make Lankes...one of the very significant living artists of our day."⁸ Then in "Two Irishmen," a brief, moving tribute to Fred O'Brien and Maurice Long, he recounts their hunger for an understanding of life. "To George Borrow" and "Gertrude Stein" acknowledge literary origins that, he feels, will go on and on, and "A Man's Mind" and "Lawrence Again" reveal the adulation of a disciple for a master who has done much to broaden men's understanding. "Margaret Anderson: Read-Unreal" and "Paul" are tributes to old friends, the latter being Paul Rosenfeld whom Anderson had known so long and understood so infrequently. Here he recaptures one of those moments.

The three most revealing essays in the book, however, are "A Stonewall Jackson Man," "Lincoln Steffens Talks of Russia," and "No Swank." The first is an obituary, reprinted from one of his country newspapers, and in it Anderson has

⁷Ibid. ⁸Ibid., 28.

recaptured more of the essence of America and of the earlier American crisis, the Civil War, than in any of his other writings. Here is the defiance of the Rebel Yell, as strong in defeat as it was in victory, and as enduring. The final paragraph is a testament to nobody who was everybody:

Mr. George Sells was a sturdy American commoner, a farmer. He worked hard all of his life on the land. He acquired land, a strip of woods here, a valley bottom piece there. He asked favors of no man. He was a good neighbor. He died, at ninety-three, August tenth, nineteen hundred and thirty-four at the home of John Woods, in Grayson County, Virginia.⁹

In effect, this is Anderson's obituary of the passing of the old life and the old ways of individualism, a way that in its place was good, but that there was no more room for in the new America that had perverted individualism into an evil that had brought on a crisis more destructive than that in which the first Rebel Yell had been raised. More significantly than this, however, Anderson has written an obituary that goes beyond regret and compassion for the passing of the individual and reaffirms his belief in the intrinsic worth and the enduring spirit of man.

"Lincoln Steffens Talks of Russia" returns to the present in a brief sketch that not only illuminates Steffen's concern for humanity but gives insight into what Anderson feels should be true after the revolution that he sees the depression in America to be, a revolution not of political

⁹Ibid., 51.

or economic dogma, but of the way men treat each other. In Russia, as Steffens told it and as Anderson understood it, there was "...a sense of a people who in this confused time feel they are building. They are not living in the past, but in the future. Belief has come to them."¹⁰ This concept is exciting and it is an ideal long held by Anderson; if it can happen in Russia, he is all for it. People marching together toward a new future, no longer alone, has been his dream since Marching Men; perhaps now, out of chaos, it might become a reality and inhumanity might disappear in a new sense of order, purpose, and above all, faith.

"No Swank" illustrates Anderson's conversion to the New Deal that resulted from the bloodless revolution at the polls and to the hope for the future that he saw personified in Henry Wallace, Roosevelt's Secretary of Agriculture and the man whose dream it was to restore dignity to the rural American countryside. Wallace, for Anderson, exemplified the peculiar combination of Midwestern practicality and American idealism that was necessary to resolve the American crisis into what truly would be a New Deal not only for the farmer, who had been caught up in too much individualism, but for the American people as a whole. Here Anderson reaffirms his faith, not in what Russia is trying to do, but

¹⁰Ibid., 56-57.

in what America is going to do, what America, in men like Wallace, is striving for:

It does look as though Russia would succeed at something. Apparently men in government in Russia are succeeding in an effort to lift a primitive agricultural people across at least a century and to set them down in the midst of industrialism. They may do it, but that isn't our problem. Our problem is apparently to lift a whole race of so-called individualists out of individualism and into civilization. It will take very sincere and human and civilized men of the Henry Wallace sort to do that.¹¹

As a whole, No Swank, like so many of Anderson's other short works is a direct expression of his point of view, and at this crucial stage in his examination of the world that seems to be crashing down around his refuge in Marion, Virginia, it reflects strongly his sense at that time of death and of hope. The air of death, of regret at the passing of the old individualistic world is pervasive. He both understands the old and knows its many values, but he knows that it has been corrupted and must give way to the new, responsible age that will be brought about by men who, like Wallace, have in them that sense of dedication. Over the depression's aura of death, then, Anderson projects another even stronger air of hope. The countryside is still here, as are the old worthwhile values, and America has the men. Out of this crisis that in reality is a failure and a purging of materialism, something new and real may emerge. He is confident, but not

¹¹Ibid., 75-76.

blindly so, although it is a testament of faith as he concludes, "Sometimes you have made me feel that we Americans might yet, in spite of hell and high water, be a people. For they do join you, cling, stick to you."¹²

As the product of the first real venture back into the world, No Swank points out that Anderson has already bridged the gap in his own mind between the human values of the pastoral and humanistic collectivism that he saw small town life to be and the needs of a nation that has let selfish materialism bring it to the verge of destruction. The apparent incongruity has been resolved, and to him the New Deal is a native movement that is to bring into American life a new awareness of and respect for the intrinsic worth of human life. Like so many of his contemporaries, including many of the movement's more active participants, Anderson saw it as a revolution in the truest sense, an abrupt change in men's thinking that would lead to a new America. The revolution was to be neither political nor economic; it was first to be essentially spiritual, and then more superficial changes would follow as they were needed.

Like most of his contemporaries Anderson did not anticipate the direction that the New Deal was to take. Like its more sweeping counterpart in Russia, it did not become the spiritual revolution that he wanted it to be, but it remained

¹²Ibid., 130.

on the materialistic level because things are much easier to manipulate than ideas and because ideals can often be expressed only in terms of things. Consequently the movement came to mean material security for more people, and it has remained on that level, resulting in a broader base for the feverish consumption of shoddy products that Anderson had deplored.

As literature No Swank is unimportant. Too often Anderson has used the fragmented style that marred his work during the late twenties and early thirties, and the result detracts from the evident deep feeling with which he approached his material. However, in some of the essays, especially "No Swank," Anderson puts this technique aside occasionally and reverts to the old natural style that is his best, and the result not only has form but conveys the feeling that is inherent in his approach.

On the whole No Swank is a personal volume, one that is important primarily for its insight into Anderson's interpretation of men and their work. Consequently, at this stage of Anderson's career, it is important because it reflects his increased concern with the world outside his town, it shows that he is approaching a junction between his values and the world in which he lives, and it provides the basis for his final statement of affirmation.

Although Anderson had begun to see a way out of chaos both for himself and for America, he could not rest with that,

nor could he return wholeheartedly to his role of storyteller. At this time he attempted to work on an American folk-opera, tentatively called The Mississippi, with Louis Gruenberg, and on dramatizations of short stories, but nevertheless he was unable to keep away from the main stream of events long enough to do much with them. To Gertrude Stein he wrote, "You ought now to have one big taste, square meal of America again, don't you think?"¹³ and that was just what was in store for him a short time later when, after a prolonged visit to Washington, he found himself caught up in the contagious excitement of those times during which the participants felt that something vital and significant was happening in America and that they were bringing it about. Anderson, of course, wanted to help; again he wanted to be counted, but his finances were always precarious and after his marriage they were even more so since he wanted to provide for his wife and was unable to.

Instead of serving without pay as he wanted to, he accepted a commission from Raymond Moley, Braintruster and editor of Today, to travel through America. In a letter to Moley on January 5, 1934, he set forth the scope of what he wanted to do. It was another indication of his belief that something big and worthwhile was taking place in America and that he wanted to be in the middle of it:

¹³Letters, 296.

I would like to go to some of the C.C.C. camps, this new venture, young boys, mostly city boys, working in the forest. I would like to try to get the tone of some of these camps, what this new out-of-doors life is doing to these boys...The feeling in these camps and the work being accomplished.

I would like to take a look at the Tennessee Valley venture, spend some time down there, talking to men...I would like to revisit some of the Southern cotton mill towns...after the coming of the NRA...under the New Deal.

I would really like now to take six weeks or two months for a kind of roving venture, looking and listening...through...the country and the small towns.¹⁴

Then, Anderson, conscious of his role of small town editor and reporter to the nation rather than merely to Smyth County, Virginia, went out into the American South and Middle West to try to find out what was happening as a result of this sudden infusion of new energy and belief, and for two months he roamed the countryside, looking, listening, and prodding the often inarticulate citizens into something that often approached eloquence by the persistence of his questions. He was getting the new square meal of America that he had prescribed for Gertrude Stein. The result was a series of articles in Today, which grew into Puzzled America, an account of rural and small town America as it started the long struggle upward out of the ruin brought about by materialism run wild.

¹⁴Ibid., 298-299.

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Published in 1935, Puzzled America, like so many of the other collections of shorter works, has unfortunately been almost ignored by critics. Like Beyond Desire, it is a record of a confused people in a confused time, some of them hopeless, others resigned, even a scant few of them optimistic, but all of them trying to grope their way out of the social and economic debris resulting from the Crash. That the book reflects a "puzzled Sherwood Anderson,"¹⁵ as Oscar Cargill comments, is true enough; as Anderson wrote to Maxwell Perkins, in discussing the makeup of the book, "...for a year or two, I did rather go over to something like a Communist outlook. Now again I am rather uncertain about all that. This attempting to touch off the lives of human beings in relation to the world about them is much more healthy for me. I have no solution."¹⁶

Obviously Anderson had intended no solution in Puzzled America, and his puzzlement is not the bewilderment implied by Cargill; rather, as the letter indicates, it is in Anderson's reflection of the relationship between the lives around him and the world in which they are lived. The people themselves are puzzled in the early nineteen thirties, and the book is in itself a statement of the point of view of the people whom he knew as well as anyone else and much better

¹⁵Cargill, 685. ¹⁶Letters, 307-308.

than those critics who are usually so remote from them. In this book, more than any other of Anderson's last period, the country editor is at work, interpreting the times and the people for the benefit of his fellow townsmen and countrymen.

In introducing the collection Anderson summarizes the observations he has made and the conclusions he has drawn from them, and some of both are revealing, especially the one that reflects more than any other the significance of his title: "The amazing thing to the observer is that there is so very little bitterness."¹⁷ Thus, the essential ingredient of revolution is mission, and in its place is a bewilderment and a sense of being deprived of long-held beliefs, not in American Democracy itself, but in the leaders it had produced. The result is an observation that more than any other single factor explains the overwhelming majorities that kept returning Franklin Roosevelt to the White House:

We are the people who passed through the World War and its aftermath. We saw the upflaring of prosperity, lived through the Harding and the Coolidge times. We got the hard-boiled boys and the wise-crackers. We got, oh, so many new millionaires. As a people we are now fed up on it all.

We do not want cynicism. We want belief.

Can we find it in one another, in democracy, in the leadership we are likely to get out of a democracy?...If the leaders we, as a democracy--

¹⁷Sherwood Anderson, Puzzled America (New York, 1935), ix.

and we are still a democracy, very much a democracy--if the leaders we are now throwing up into places of power do not lead along new roads, if they fail us, the failure will not be due to a lack of belief.¹⁸

Here was the real power behind the jaunty, defiant upthrust of the cigarette holder that became the symbol of belief in the 1930's, and here, in one of Anderson's least-known works is one of the clearest indications of the sureness with which Anderson was capable of interpreting the people whom the main stream of American life had left in a backwater. Puzzled America is full of these observations that not only note "the ravages wrought by a half-century of homage to pure materialism,"¹⁹ as Maxwell Geismar has noted, but give further testimony to Anderson's faith in the geography and the humanity that go together to make up his America.

In the first section, "In the South," Anderson reiterates his theme of the need for a controlling belief that could serve as catalyst to start again the intimate, functioning relationship between human and natural resources. "At the Mine Mouth" he notes that "'There's power, lying asleep here in this valley, to run half America',"²⁰ and he sees a new sense of identification between citizen and government that indicates the seeds of the hoped-for belief: "'We have

¹⁸Ibid., xv-xvi. ¹⁹Geismar, 276.

²⁰Puzzled America, 17.

got to get our union stronger before we can help the government take care of the chiselers.'"²¹ In a brief, sure sketch Anderson makes this belief vivid in the personification of a negro coal miner, who says, "'We have been like hogs rooting in the woods for acorns...We have had our eyes on the ground but now we are beginning to look up.'"²²

"The Price of Aristocracy" looks at the abuses that have been wrought on the South for so many years by an archaic set of cherished beliefs that have for so long abused the land and the majority of the people. However, Anderson sees growing a new set of beliefs that look to identification with other Americans and with a concerned and directed government in place of the distorted notions of chivalry and of maudlin self-pity that had occupied the Southern consciousness for so long. More effective, however, than any other part of the book is the section called "People," in which Anderson turns to a series of brief personal sketches that catch the flavor of this new search for a belief to replace the old ways in the South.

In "A Rural Realist" Anderson introduces a new kind of woman, a former weaver who "...had become an adventuress, a pure gypsy type"²³ as she sought something new, attaining in the process, "...a kind of air--no beauty, but something attractive."²⁴ In "He Found His Racket," he portrays her

²¹Ibid., 8. ²²Ibid., 20. ²³Ibid., 42. ²⁴Ibid.

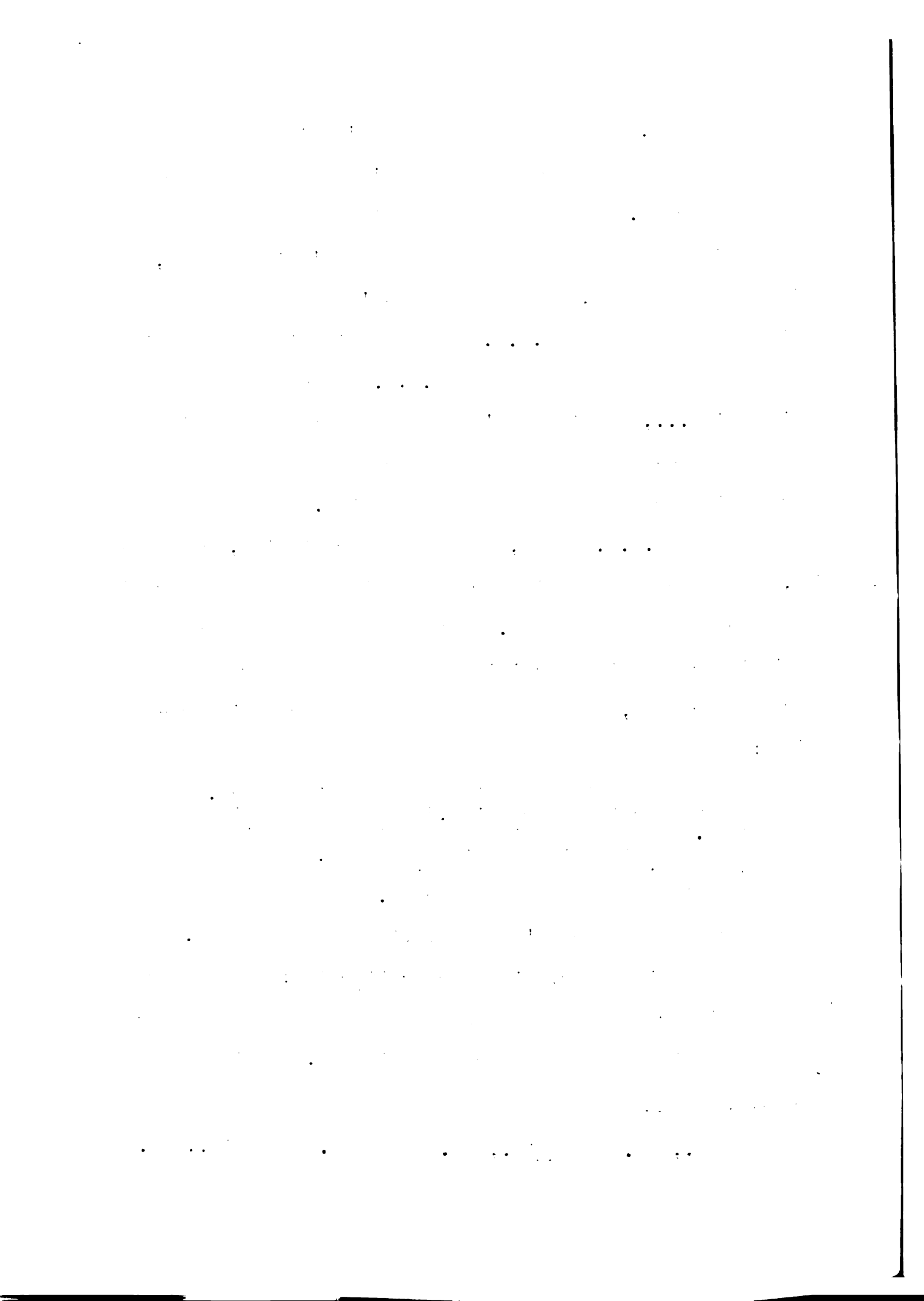
male counterpart, a panhandler who doesn't mind too much because he knows that "pretty soon" he'll go back to work as an electrician. The vignettes continue: an old farmer who lost his farm but wants to go back to "'being useful, making something grow, to feed people--'";²⁵ the eagerness and interest of a young C.C.C. worker aiding in archeological excavations; the man who sees in T.V.A. "Something new in American life..., and it mustn't be stopped";²⁶ a "feeling of men for men--desire to some day work for others"²⁷ that Anderson finds remarkably strong in America.

Thus the C.C.C. Camps, work in reforestation, reclamation, and other conservation projects give Anderson a great deal of hope for two reasons. Not only are the ravages of insatiable greed being rectified by a sane and worthwhile government program, but the boys themselves are being reclaimed:

The depression has given them their chance. "Hurrah for the depression," one of them said to me. They are making a new kind of American man out of the city boy in the woods, and they are planning at least to begin to make a new land with the help of such boys.²⁸

Throughout Anderson's observations of the South, the two aspects of his observations are reiterated: that there is both bewilderment and a renewed sense of hope that someone somewhere in government cares about them. In the tobacco

²⁵Ibid., 49. ²⁶Ibid., 65. ²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid., 83.



country, a man defines the New Deal as meaning "...that people have to to be made to quit cutting each other's throats;"²⁹ in an unemployed mill worker Anderson sees an "undying so-American optimism"³⁰ that borders on the pathetic; in a Southern doctor he finds a compassion that transcends that demanded by his calling; in "A Union Meeting" he observes the poor sharing with the poorer. There is hope as well as hunger in the South, he notes as he turns toward the agricultural breadbasket of the Upper Middle West.

The greedy exploitation that had ruined much of the South was at work here, too, he noted. Farms were being blown away even more rapidly than they were foreclosed, and men alone were helpless to do anything about either. Instead they looked to each other and to Washington for the help that they needed so desperately and couldn't find in the archaic myth of rugged individualism. Anderson epitomizes this new belief in an encounter with a little old tramp printer who distributes his own pamphlets setting forth the demand for a new people-centered government. He reiterates it in the portrait of a people who can dance even though they are on relief.

Further indication, if any is needed by this time, of Anderson's rejection of the Communist solution is found in a little corn town in the Middle West, when he reaffirms

²⁹Ibid., 97. ³⁰Ibid., 110.

both his faith and his hope in America and in a native American way out of chaos. He states the need for a new American belief that will enable man "...to destroy only what needs destroying and then to build, to make something new--if we could find it as a real American impulse--something not imported, something that is our own."³¹ He concludes that here in the heart of America he has found "...this quiet determination, this patience, this persistent belief that life in America can be made a good life for Americans,"³² a belief that is echoed in the mining and mill towns as well as the farms and county seats everywhere he has visited. In his concluding essay, "The Return of the Princess," he records the plea of a stranger to America, a refugee noblewoman, whom he had encountered at Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933. In words not his own and yet that express completely his own faith that the American ideal that he has sought so long and in which he always believed might yet be realized, he quotes the woman:

"You in America, in spite of all the desperate position you may now be in, may be again what you were. You were once the hope of the world, the place to which the oppressed came. You may be it again...There must be one strong land in the world to which no dictator comes, to which the creeping fear does not come."³³

Puzzled America is a cross-section of America in the midst of the most severe economic upheaval it has ever

³¹Ibid., 270. ³²Ibid. ³³Ibid., 287.

experienced. Like Beyond Desire, it has a great deal of value as a social document of the times, reaching out, as it does, to the people in the grassroots rural and industrial areas in the attempt to understand the predicament that they are caught in and to describe it. The book has also gone beyond that original intention and has become a renewed profession of faith, both by the people involved and by Anderson himself, in the intrinsic ability of both the country and the people to rise out of economic chaos. Just as they had made a wilderness into a productive homeland, they believed that they were going to construct a new, responsible governmental framework that reflected accurately the needs, the hopes, and the desires of the people. This is far from a cry for upheaval or for revolution, either by Anderson or by the grassroots spokesman, but it is a hope and a plea for the destruction of the perverted concepts of individualism that had resulted in exploitation and in inevitable collapse. God was remote under the old system and all too often the property of the exploiters, they well knew, and they could not look to Him. Instead, their only opportunity for that hope and belief to become reality was in exercising the democratic prerogatives and putting into power men who could and would translate the dream into action and return dignity and self respect to those who had been deprived of it.

The results of Anderson's accurate and unappreciated interpretations of the times have become history: the symbol

of hope was a man who was willing to act, and the results of his actions have changed the American scene to one that would be unrecognized by William McKinley. The Wagner Act, TVA, Social Security, and the countless alphabetical agencies were the results of the fusion of democratic strength, American faith, and the leadership of a man who could transmute dreams into actions. The combination gave Sherwood Anderson's people much of the dignity and self respect that he sought for them.

Puzzled America is not, of course, a prophetic book in the sense that Anderson foresaw the specifics of the social revolution of the 1930's that resulted in the realization of many tangibles and a few ideals, although Anderson voiced the demand for that change, and the voice that he made articulate is a peculiarly American voice. Over and over again, with a faith reminiscent of Hoover's belief that America was fundamentally sound, Anderson restates his belief that America itself is all right. But Hoover and Anderson were talking about two different Americas. Hoover's faith was in the economic structure that had rewarded him so liberally and that had engendered his faith in outmoded concepts of paternalism; Anderson's faith was in the land and in the people and in their ability to combine to produce a richer, more meaningful world through the democratic process. Anderson's America was one that had been forgotten by the Hoovers.

Puzzled America, like Hello Towns! is ostensibly journalism, but as Anderson had shown in the earlier book that it was not necessary to stop with mere rote recitation of fact, so here he applies the same approach to a much larger scene. The result is a collection of sketches of the people as he found them, sketches that take these people out of the realm of journalistic subject matter and make them representative of the spirit of America in a way that borders on a new kind of folklore, a folklore of faith instead of bluster and humility instead of pride. In doing so, Anderson points out that there are not many Americas--rural America, industrial America, Southern America, Midwestern America, and all the other apparent dichotomies--but there is one, which he depicts in this volume. Out of the basic unity beneath apparent diversity Anderson makes clear the theme of the book: a people's search for faith.

Although the book was a financial failure, nevertheless it contains Anderson's best journalistic writings, some of which are worthy of much wider dissemination. In this volume as in Hello Towns! he attempts to transcend the immediate and to show the universal implications of his subject matter. In doing so he has returned to the old Winesburg style, joining it with his intuitive approach to understanding the people, and he has been largely successful. Unfortunately the depression subject matter limits its appeal in spite of the fact that it shows what journalism can be.

In effect Puzzled America marks another of Anderson's rejections, this time of any alien politico-economic structure, including Communism. After his return to the security and meaningfulness of the American past that he had rediscovered in rural Virginia the economic collapse had momentarily drawn him back into active combat against the materialism of the outside world, and after weathering the temptations of Marx's panacea, he has returned, as Puzzled America shows, to his belief in the same old values that had drawn him to Virginia.

During the remaining six years of his life Anderson lived much more quietly than he ever had before. Happily married and feeling secure in that aspect of his emotional life, he spent most of his time at Ripshin Farm, leaving it only for winter trips farther south and to Mexico and for visits to old friends. In December 1934, he expressed something of his renewed faith in a letter to Ralph Church:

I get a good deal from nature down here, and it may be that I should have been a painter. It is a very beautiful country I have got into here, and I keep going to certain spots I've picked out, a little, I guess as one might go to church. I never could get anything from places--churches, etc.--where people were engaged in the corrupt business of trying to save their souls.³⁴

During this period, after Puzzled America had been essentially completed, Anderson worked with Jasper Deeter of the Hedgerow Theatre, an experimental group in Pennsylvania,

³⁴Letters, 309.

on a dramatic version of Winesburg, Ohio which, when Deeters produced it, was successful. However, Broadway was not interested; the age demanded lighter fare. Although it was a good adaptation when staged, nevertheless, the power that marked the original version was not the sort of thing that could be transferred successfully to another medium, and the dramatic version as a result was inferior to the book.

Meanwhile Anderson's mind was full of other creative projects at this time, most of them dramatic adaptations, from Dark Laughter, from Marching Men (in which he wrote to Roger Sergel that he was fascinated by the effects that might be had by sound experimentation), and in a play thematically close to Poor White, which he had tentatively entitled They Shall Be Free.³⁵ Also the Civil War and Lincoln continued to play a large part in his preoccupation with the American ability to rise above crisis, and he continued to read everything on the subject that he could find, planning eventually to use the material in a study that would, he hoped, epitomize the American story. Of this unrealized dream, a fragment exists, possibly written as early as 1924 (not 1925, as Paul Rosenfeld says³⁶) and unpublished until Rosenfeld's Reader appeared in 1947. It is unfortunate that this project, which

³⁵Several of these were collected in Plays: Winesburg and Others (New York, 1937).

³⁶Rosenfeld, Reader, xxviii.

was based on a life that he saw as the essence of American life, was never finished, perhaps because he was too closely identified with it in his own mind. At any rate, in the summer of 1935, he began sustained work on his last novel, Kit Brandon, an effort that he found trying, as his letters of the period indicate. Nevertheless he finished it, although his mind was preoccupied with his Civil War project, and it was published in late 1936.

Kit Brandon is a combination of solid Anderson writing and of hurried, almost frenzied prose that seems to indicate Anderson's desire to put the thing on paper and get it over with. Growing out of Anderson's continued interest in the southern mountain girl and the strength he saw in her as well as out of the widespread bootlegging industry in the Virginia hills, Anderson attempted to fuse the two into a novel that would provide for all time his monument to both the mountain girl and her embodiment of the realistic environment from which she came. He almost succeeded, and there are many indications that had he been as absorbed in this novel as he was in some of the earlier ones, he would have written his best novel. In many ways it remains close to his best although it is well below the level of his collections of shorter works.

Anderson's approach to Kit Brandon is a technique that he had never used before: he put himself into the novel as a sympathetic listener to whom Kit tells her story.

Partially as a result of this effort to act out in his fiction the role of observer-interpreter-storyteller that he had accepted, and partially as a result of a carefully-controlled objectivity, the novel is the best constructed of any of Anderson's works. The subject matter, too, is such that Anderson can feel deeply sympathetic with the people and yet, as with the miners and weavers he wrote about in Puzzled America, remain sufficiently detached so that he can see them as human beings rather than as extensions of himself or as objects of pity. These factors combine to produce Anderson's only major fictional attempt to interpret the strength and the individualism of the Southern hill people among whom he found so much to admire and to regret.

Kit was a mountain girl, a product of the sort of brutal innocence that Anderson had been concerned with since Winesburg and that he had rediscovered in the Southern hills. Like so many of the other hill families, hers found it more convenient and more profitable to measure its corn in gallons rather than bushels in a tradition that is older than the United States. Her father was a man who had the ability to go far had he had the opportunity; her mother was a nonentity. At fifteen Kit bore all the responsibility for such a home as they had; she served as lookout while the moon was cooking; and at sixteen, like so many of the other hill girls, she ran off to get a job in the mills.

After several years, during which she had been helped in reading by a sympathetic woman whom she had met in a library, she got a job in a store, where she met Gordon Halsey, the wealthy but weak son of a highly successful bootlegger. Kit provided the strength that Gordon lacked, but after their marriage their relationship deteriorated, while Kit, at first for the thrill but later primarily for the material returns, became a highly-successful runner and decoy for the gang's operations. As she became increasingly notorious both adventure and desire for things paled, and eventually she found that it was not worthwhile. Meeting a young man crippled in the war who helped her elude the police, she wanted to know and help him, but realizing that more than a casual relationship would be impossible, she slipped off into the night. She had learned that there are more important things in life than money and adventure, and that somewhere, somehow she might find "some one other puzzled and baffled young one with whom she could make a real partnership in living."³⁷

Such is the bare plot outline of the book. Such a superficial sketch gives the impression that Anderson was striving for sensationalism of the type that came into prominence with the hard-boiled novels of the 1930's, but this is far from the truth. The novel is not concerned with happenings, sensational or not, but it is concerned with the

³⁷Sherwood Anderson, Kit Brandon (New York, 1936), 373.

people and the land in the South that by now Anderson had assimilated as thoroughly as he had his native Ohio. In the process of assimilation he had learned that rural Ohio and rural Virginia were for all practical purposes identical.

In many respects Kit Brandon parallels Poor White in theme in spite of the differences in style and approach. Poor White is the record of the growth of materialism around a naive and innocent Hugh McVey, who remains untouched by it until he is almost submerged in it, while the later novel deals with a girl who maintains her innocence, like Hugh, until she, too, recognizes that the material things and the adventure she sought are meaningless. Thus, the theme with which Anderson is dealing is an old one, not only as far as his own work is concerned, but as far as human activity itself is concerned. Three times Anderson had the opportunity to face evil and know it for what it was, in industrialism, in so-called modern emancipation, in both of which he was himself intimately involved, and finally as an observer of the chaos and physical suffering resulting from individualism and materialism run wild. The first two produced the earlier, semi-autobiographical novels, while the third, carefully-controlled by Anderson's consciousness of his new role, resulted in Kit Brandon, a symbolic interpretation of what he observed. In this sense Kit Brandon is as much the biography of an era as Poor White.

Into the novel Anderson has poured the knowledge of

rural America that he had gained from almost a half century of wandering and feeling the pulse of the whole mid section of the continent. In addition to that knowledge he has utilized the ten years of learning to interpret meanings and values, not as a man trying to probe his own psyche but as a man trying to understand the relationship between his times and the people who lived in it. Finally, in this novel, he has made his mature statement of the meaning of that relationship, and having completed it, he gave his final answer to the problem he had been trying to solve for so long.

The first significant factor that Anderson establishes in the novel is the sense of place, a reproduction of physical environment that is firmer and surer than anything he has previously done. Here he portrays the origin in fact of the two-headed monster of individualism and materialism that had come to dominate the American scene. In the hard, uncertain life of primitive America, the time of the brutal innocence that had fascinated Anderson for so long, there was only one way that a man or woman could rise, and that was by the strength of his own two hands and by the cunning of his own mind. Also in such a life the only way that success could be measured was by the things accumulated in the process. Anderson had obtained the evidence for this deduction a long time before, as shown as early as in Windy McPherson's Son, but in Kit Brandon for the first time he draws the conclusion that American materialism is the logical result of the

circumstances under which America was built. In this novel he portrays the cause and effect sequence for the first time, showing the strengths that might have resulted in a different, a kinder and more understanding America had its original impetus been less brutal and less concerned with the physical things that had to be done. He writes:

Kit said, "I don't care. I think if my father-- if he had been born different, in a different place, had got him a different wife--" She was implying that there was something to be said. "If he'd even had the chance I've had."³⁸

Later, in describing Kit herself he amplifies this concept of the origin of American materialism and individualism when he describes the self-centeredness that stemmed from her background:

She went smiling off into one of her side talks, away from her own story, speaking of the great numbers of people there were in the world you had to just let go to hell, she said, not counting on them, using them where and when you could. She had got, out of her living, a philosophy common enough to a certain kind of Americans, for the most part successful ones. More than once during my acquaintance with her I thought of Kit that she might, under other circumstances, have been one of our successful ones, another Rockefeller, a Harriman, a Gould.³⁹

Anderson writes of this growth of modern American brutality without regret or indignation as he had done earlier, but in his description of its origins there is a new note of acceptance following its understanding. It

³⁸Ibid., 7. ³⁹Ibid., 8.

is especially significant that in this novel the central figure never attains this realization just as the protagonists in the earlier novels had not. Rather the closest that Kit comes to realizing that she must struggle against a cultural accumulation of more than two hundred years is the same kind of instinctive feeling that Sam McPherson, Hugh McVey, and the others had that there were values to be found in human intercourse rather than in things, and she, like them, could only move fumblingly to seek them.

Full understanding of the cultural phenomena that led to Kit's predicament was reserved to Anderson who, as interested and sympathetic bystander, could only hope that someday she would be able to accept the America that is and that both she and America would muddle through to a new appreciation of human worth. Here is the real meaning of Anderson's comment that in a single valley was locked the power to run half of America. It is the human power, properly directed, that will set up the course out of materialism and propel it into a social structure based on human values. This cannot be arbitrarily explained or dictated, he implies; as he wrote to Max Perkins, he had no answers except a faith that somehow the democratic process, properly directed by men who had a vision of human worth, might bring about that new, meaningful society.

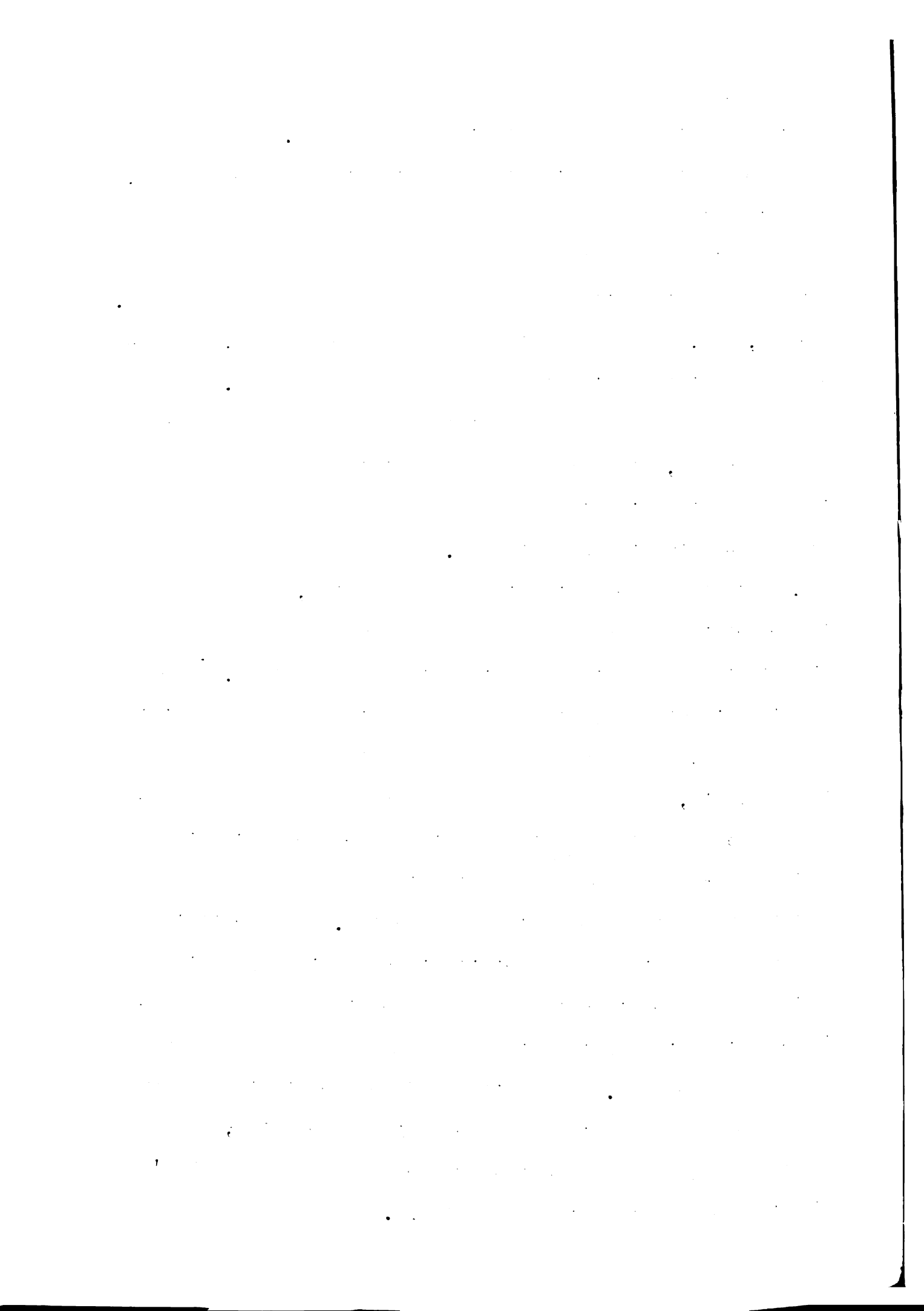
In symbolically portraying the growth of modern American pragmatism in the novel, Anderson has gone beyond

the recognition of its origins, however, and has shown especially clearly the relationship between man and his impersonal environment in the relationship between Kit and the automobiles she drives. Then, passing beyond this, he shows the sterility in modern life that makes such a relationship necessary. Human intercourse, he points out, was impossible, not only for Kit but for almost all of the people with whom she came into contact, and this was true for a number of reasons. In the first place the barriers that prevent the communication he had sought for so long are made up of things, he finally recognizes. On the lowest levels these things are the elements of food, clothing, and shelter that are necessary to human existence. In a competitive situation in which not enough of them are available or released for general consumption, the result can be and often is jungle warfare or fratricide unless man learns to submerge his own interests in those of the common good. This is what Anderson hoped would result from the union movement, with which Kit was in sympathy. Yet, with her shrewd and sceptical insight into the aspects of the savage side of human nature, she was highly suspicious of such movements.

On the higher levels this barrier of things is that erected by status symbols. Not only are the symbols themselves barriers between groups and individuals, but the drive to accumulate them results in the view of human beings as pawns to be manipulated. This view results in a spiritual

barrier that is even more difficult to remove. The outcome of the resulting isolation is sterility in human relations, symbolized in the novel both by the perfunctory and finally empty marriage that Kit had contracted and by her continued childlessness in spite of the numerous affairs that she had. For her, sex, the most intimate of human relations, had become a bargaining point in the struggle for things.

As a result of her sterility and her isolation from her fellow men, Kit became the personification of modern man in her relationship with the automobiles that she drove on her booze-delivering expeditions. The cars became part of her, subject to her domination and her skill, and she found in her driving the completely attuned and coordinated relationship that she failed to find with human beings. Her relationship with cars is not compensation for her inability to assume the male sexual role as Freudian interpretation would have it, although Anderson has commented on the phenomenon he had noted of girl machine operators rejecting their male counterparts and dedicating themselves almost religiously to the service of the machine. Rather it is the result of the universal sterility in a machine and thing dominated culture in which the only predictable and enduring relationship possible is one between man and the new god that he has created. Thus Kit knew her cars intimately and had absorbed them until they merged into her being; as a result she found an extension of herself that she couldn't find in her relationships with others.



There are other factors in the novel indicative of Anderson's grasp of the meaning of American existence, among them the setting in time that he has selected and the ultimate meaning of the passage in which a tubercular young mill worker demonstrates his ability to transpose himself into a horse or a bear while walking on all fours.⁴⁰ The significance of the former lies in its predepression and prohibition setting, selected primarily because at the Coolidge-Hoover peak of materialistic prosperity, Kit is the epitome of the adman-preacher's gospel of material accumulation and consumption brought to its logical conclusion and turned into an anti-social, anti-legal nightmare. Things are needed in order to belong under the new order, the admen proclaim without saying how they should be acquired, and the lawbreakers are merely pursuing that material ideal as quickly and efficiently as the admen demand.

In addition to Anderson's choice of this particular phase of America's economic history as part of the chronological setting, the prohibition-bootlegging background is also important. Prohibition was the last concentrated and direct effort of a puritan minority to impose its will on the American majority, giving rise to a so-called "noble experiment" that was designed to appeal both to the idealistic and to

⁴⁰Reprinted in The Reader, pp. 663-678, as "Bud (As Kit Saw Him)."

the practical. To the former, it was explained as an opportunity to usher in a new, clear-headed era free from poverty and crime, and to the latter as an opportunity to rid the nation of a distracting influence so that it could devote its attention to its proper business of business. A good many Americans, Sherwood Anderson among them, knew that both of these claims were nonsense. As Anderson had shown, drink was as much a blessing as a curse to the imprisoned people on the levels he had dealt with in Horses and Men, just as he knew that nothing, not even the individualism and industrialism that he decried, was bad in itself.

More significant than this, however, is the fact that Anderson has employed the bootlegging background in an ironic sense: those who profited the most by it and hence were accumulating the material things that the new system said were good were also doing the most to undermine the legal and ethical code that made the system possible. Also the puritans who advocated prohibition were placing their own lives in jeopardy through the resulting lawlessness. Thus Anderson points out that both materialism and puritanism carry the seeds of their own destruction.

In the passage describing the young mill worker's ability to transform himself into a bear or a horse by strapping leather hooves on his hands and prancing on all fours, Anderson returns to the peak of his interpretive powers. In this passage he expresses man's eagerness to

break through the shells of flesh and convention and make himself both more and less than he is by entering into the lives of animals that have the integrity and beauty denied to man. Here, as graphically portrayed as in "Hands," Anderson symbolizes man's impotence and frustration when he tries to communicate his own wants and needs to his fellows.

In concept, in execution, and in scope, Kit Brandon is more complex and more evocative of subtleties of meaning than any of Anderson's other novels. It represents Anderson's final appraisal of the ultimate meaning of American civilization, its origins, and its ultimate destiny, couched in a logically arrayed structure of symbols that represent the whole of America in a small, seemingly isolated segment of it. The novel might have been one of the best of its time had it not been marred by mechanical and structural difficulties such as grammatical lapses and transitional disruptions that are annoying, especially because they could have been eliminated so easily had Anderson wanted to. Unfortunately, as Roger Sergel, who was visiting Anderson when the proofs arrived at Ripshin Farm, points out, Anderson disregarded them as though he was through with the novel forever; the proofs were returned uncorrected,⁴¹ and the flaws remain to detract from the effectiveness of what could have been his best novel.

⁴¹Schevill, 318.

Anderson seems to have been aware even while he was writing it that Kit Brandon would be his last effort at a major work. In spite of his continued interest in the Civil War, he dropped his plans to write his interpretation of it, and although he was disappointed at the reception and sales of Kit Brandon, he really wasn't concerned about them. Rather his last four years were probably the happiest of his life; his ideological battles had been fought and won, as he pointed out in a letter written to Paul Rosenfeld but never sent;⁴² his marriage to Eleanor Copenhaver was both happy and stimulating, and his family was nearby, Robert running the papers, John assisting him and painting, and his daughter and her husband running a country paper in North Carolina. Ripshin Farm, which he fortunately had not sold, became the refuge and base that he originally intended, and excursions following the sun were only interludes away from what had become his home.

Anderson was far from idle, and he maintained his active interest and participation in political, economic, and especially artistic affairs during these years. He worked on what he called Rudolph's Book of Days, a work that eventually became the Memoirs; he continued his new interest in the theatre; he devoted much attention to the Spanish Civil War, lending his name to numerous anti-Fascist organizations, and writing, "It is...the one thing I would go to any lengths

⁴²Letters, 358-361. Anderson noted on it, "Not sent. Too smug."

for, to defeat dictatorship, either Communist or Fascist,"⁴³ Preparing his plays for publication occupied some of his attention in 1937, and his interests in the machine age continued, even to the point where he anticipated the post-World War II "do it yourself" mania, writing in 1937 that "...there is an interesting development. In this town, for example, I know six or eight men, lawyers, doctors, and businessmen, who have set up workshops in their houses. They are trying to make things..."⁴⁴ Was this a new attempt to achieve fulfillment through craftsmanship or was it another form of obeisance to the industrial god? He wasn't sure, but he marked the phenomenon for watching. If his attitude seems vacillating and undirected during this time, a letter to Roger Sergel goes far to explain the attitude of a man of sixty at the end of a career:

I got the copy of the magazine put out by the University of Chicago students and certainly understand Chris's interest, but as for writing something that they might want, I am a little doubtful.

The trouble is, Roger, that I am no longer young. I certainly sympathize with and admire the enthusiasm and determination of Chris and his friends, but as to just where they are going, or where any of us is going, I have these dreadful times of doubt. As you get older, and perhaps a bit more sophisticated, you are eternally asking yourself questions that can not be answered. The truth is that we are

⁴³Ibid., 364.

⁴⁴Ibid., 375.

probably all headed for something, but whether it will be better or worse than what we have I don't know...

The great difficulty with me in all this matter of going somewhere is that I am not terribly interested in arriving. My chief interest is what happens on the way, and this makes me a bum revolutionist.⁴⁵

The truth is that Anderson was tired, that he felt his work of recording what had happened on his way was over, and that he was happy and secure in his personal life. Increasingly during these years his attention was devoted to the place and purpose of the artist in society, an old interest again revived, rather than in the creative act itself. Writing and revising had taken such a toll of nervous as well as physical energy during the writing of Kit Brandon that he was reluctant to go through the experience again for any sustained time. The other interests, especially that of the position of the artist, absorbed the same sort of drive and attention that Anderson had devoted to his writing, and he remained happy. The difficulties that he was having with critics and finances annoyed him, however, on the occasions that they were called to his attention. Somewhat testily and yet with characteristic honesty he expressed his views on this matter in late 1937 in a letter to John Paul Cullen:

I think I should write you at once to get something straightened out. It is about my getting it in the neck. You are all wrong there...It's true

⁴⁵Ibid., 378.

that among American writers who have got a lot of attention I've probably made less money than any of them. Well, what of it? I haven't found that the ones who have made a lot of dough have got much fun out of it.

You see...I have had and am having a damn good life. In some way I have managed to sleep pretty well, have loved some damn fine women, wear good enough clothes, have always had a roof over my head.

People...come along and do swell things for me. In my wanderings I've probably covered more of the country than most men. I have known, pretty intimately, practically all the outstanding men in the arts in my time.

It has been a damned good life for me. It is right now. I might very well have got it in the neck a hundred times worse by being a big popular success. People do pretty nasty things to successful men. Don't go wrong on that...

I just wanted to get this clear with you...⁴⁶

Returning sporadically to creative work, Anderson started a novel called How Green the Grass in 1937, and then another, Brother Carl.⁴⁷ Later he started A Late Spring, recast it and retitled it Men and Their Women, and then abandoned it, all within a few months in 1938, as though in tacit admission that sustained creative effort was too much for him. Then he took up his intermittent work on the Memoirs and later on the essay that grew into Home Town. His name

⁴⁶Ibid., 391-392.

⁴⁷Based on his brother's life, it was primarily a tribute and an effort to clarify their relationship rather than a serious attempt at a novel.

appeared in connection with more and more anti-Fascist and anti-totalitarian organizations, and as a result of his interest in young writers he appeared at the Writers' Conference at the University of Colorado, at Olivet College in Michigan, and at Antioch College in Ohio.

At Olivet his principal contribution was a lecture entitled A Writer's Conception of Realism, in which he spoke more of himself and his philosophy of life than he did of writing. Here, almost at the end of his active writing career and of his life he reiterates certain beliefs about himself: "It must be that I am an incurable small town man;"⁴⁸ about the state of the world: "The old human interest of one man in another seems to have got lost somewhere;"⁴⁹ and about writing: "The life of reality is confused, disorderly, almost always without apparent purpose, whereas in the artist's imaginative life there is purpose...to give...form--to make it true and real to the theme, not to life."⁵⁰

As Anderson points out in the talk, his own work has been based on his own life, but the material used is transformed by his imagination and the theme that he is working with so that the material is no longer realistic in the sense that it is true to life but only in the sense that, given the

⁴⁸Sherwood Anderson, A Writer's Concept of Realism: An Address (Olivet, Michigan, 1939).

⁴⁹Ibid.

particular circumstances, it could be real. Thus, as in "A Note on Realism," published in the Notebook, Anderson denies that his work is an attempt to reproduce life in a small town or anywhere else. It has been, he says, an attempt to understand and interpret it wherever it may be found.

Anderson's career as college lecturer and professional man of letters was short although since he had been invited to return to Colorado, it could not have been unsuccessful. He did not like the lecture platform but preferred writing. His letters during these years are full of advice to young and aspiring writers. Above all, he told them to be honest, both to themselves and to their work, and the rest would take care of itself. During these last years, too, demands were made on him constantly by the myriad committees of which the 1930's were so fond. "I seem to have become a kind of stuffed shirt for all sorts of things," he wrote. "People keep coming to me, wanting me to sign this or that manifesto, for Cultural Freedom, for Peace and Democracy, for this and that. I do it and find myself involved."⁵¹ The truth was that Anderson had at last entered on almost a full time basis into the role that he had long sought and now fully enjoyed. Secure in place and in his own emotions he found less and less inclination to explain and to interpret and more and

⁵¹Letters, 441.

more to advise; he had at last become the small-town philosopher-sage who had fought his battles and was now able to retire to the fireside and attempt to help his successors in theirs.

CHAPTER X

FINAL STATEMENT

During the last two years of his life Anderson reached a state of personal satisfaction and equilibrium that would have seemed impossible to him ten years before, but his literary reputation had largely evaporated. Nevertheless, in 1937 he was elected to the Department of Literature of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. At first he was indignant; he felt that it was one of the phony honors that distracted men from their work. Then, however, the irony of the situation began to amuse him, and he wrote that he couldn't attend the official dinner because he had the diarrhea. There is no record of the committee's response.

At the same time the rise of Hitler Germany depressed him, not only because he as a pacifist was being forced to accept the idea of a necessary war, but because he saw that the increased attention given international affairs by the Roosevelt Administration meant that the revolution in human values engendered by the New Deal would have to be delayed until Hitler and fascism were eliminated.

Nevertheless during these years he worked on his last two long works, Home Town and the Memoirs, which was

unfinished at his death. Most of this writing was done in his "Rogue's Gallery," a room lined with photographs of old and new friends ranging from Waldo Frank to Henry Wallace. In this atmosphere, evocative of a past that was sweeping into history and being forgotten as Hitler moved into Austria, Czechoslovakia, and then Poland, Anderson wrote the works that comprise the final statement of what he saw to be the meaning of the American experience. These two, together with Puzzled America and Kit Brandon, make up Anderson's definitive commentary on the permanent values he had found in his life, his relationships with others, and his country.

Home Town, the last full work Anderson saw completed and published, appeared in 1940 in a shorter version as one of "The Face of America" series.¹ Actually a long essay, illustrated by superb Farm Security Administration photographs, the book as published shows Anderson's work come full circle as he returns to the literary point of departure that he had left behind when he saw Bidwell grow into an industrial city. In effect it is his final tribute to the town as the solid foundation of values upon which America can build a new and human rather than material civilization. It is Anderson's last tribute to the American past and at the same time it indicates his hopes for the future.

¹Sherwood Anderson, Home Town (New York, 1940).

In this version Home Town was cut to fit the needs of a text and photograph combination. However, the full essay, which was published as "The American Small Town" in The Sherwood Anderson Reader is more effective than the book version in developing and making clear Anderson's final statement of belief in the intrinsic value of rural small town America and its meaning to him. Thus it is more satisfactory for the purpose of this study.

In his preface Anderson describes the intimacy of his own feeling for the small town that had become his home: "Perhaps I am in love with my own town of Marion and my Virginia countryside;"² but it is a love rooted in the human relations for which he had been seeking:

My work is constantly calling me away from Marion, but I always hunger to get back. There is in the life of the small town a possibility of intimacy, a chance to know others--an intimacy oftentimes frightening, but which can be healing. Day after day, under all sorts of circumstances, in sickness and health, in good fortune and bad, we small-townners are close to one another and know each other in ways the city man can never experience...In a way it is too intimate. Life can never be intimate enough.³

The essay proper is both an evocation of understanding on the part of his readers for a life that is close to the springs of fertility in nature and at the same time a

²The Sherwood Anderson Reader, 740.

³Ibid., 740-741.

delineation of the meaning of that life. The small town, he says, is America in its most immediate form, lying as it does "...halfway between the cities whence we get the ideas and the soil whence we get the strength."⁴ Hence, to know it and to live in it is to keep in the main current of American life. The changing seasons of nature are the main-springs that actuate life in the small towns, sending their impulses through them and into the most complex reaches of American civilization, while at the same time the intellectual impulses reach downward out of the complexities until they are humanized and made part of American life in the towns. There at the crossroads is where Anderson feels he is closest to the essence of human life, where ideas are made fertile.

The essay uses as its framework the seasonal cycle of a year, tracing through the seasons the human activity that each engenders, not only in the general repetitious chores that are part of human life, but most effectively in the individual reactions that are known only to those who are aware of the intimacies possible in the small town. Spring is an awakening both for the land and for the people. Trees bloom, grass grows green, and the people indulge in the human activities that Anderson can and does sketch both economically and vividly. The town ball team starts its

⁴Ibid., 744.

annual drive for financial support, the kids start to think about creeks and fields, and the town non-conformist has his annual shave and bath. Spring is indeed a happy time and a time of reawakening in the towns.

Summer is a time of growth and of restlessness, culminating in the days of hard work, harvest, and fulfillment, but there are days of enjoyment, recreation, and wandering as well. During the long summer days and evenings the kids learn the things that the schoolbooks don't teach about life. Anderson says, "Hot, dusty days, long days, summer rains-- the summer days are the best of all the year's days for the American small-towner."⁵ As the days shorten and fall comes, the small town experiences "...the checking-up time, the harvesting of the year's efforts of the American man to survive, getting a little forward in life,"⁶ the time that generates gentle nostalgia as well as stark fear. For the fortunate, regret is easy and kind, but for the poor it brings the fears for survival through the winter, the waiting time during which the fears are realized or forgotten. But over all there is the anticipation of spring, the realization that it always comes.

The essay goes far beyond the mere recounting of the symbolic representation of the seasons, however, and upon this framework Anderson erects an almost kaleidoscopic array.

⁵Ibid., 772. ⁶Ibid., 778.

of the intimate observations and knowledge possible only in the small town. All the village characters are here: the tough, the chicken thief, the gossip, the politician, the boy who doesn't quite have nerve enough to go into the small house on the back street, the moralist, the merchant; the focal points of town life in the churches, the schools, the main street, and the newspapers are shown in their proper roles; and over all the influx of new ideas, humanized to fit the town situation, is shown. In effect Anderson has made the town itself a symbolic hero of what has actually become primarily an elegy for a time and place that Anderson knows no longer exists and yet that he knows is part of his life. Throughout the book the undertones of "breakup" are heard; the upheaval that started in the cities has found its way into the towns, marking an end to the era not only of industrialism but of the American small town.

Yet throughout the book there is an undercurrent of permanence and inevitability. Just as the seasons change from hope to fulfillment to need and then through the cycle again, Anderson points up the permanence of the worthwhile values that he has found in small-town life, and he makes clear his belief that no matter what the physical setting may be, man will still search for and eventually find the value that is at their core--an intimacy between men and between man and nature that teaches that the meaning of life is in the recognition of man as an individual among

individuals who must be aware of his responsibilities to his fellow man. In the small towns Anderson finds that one is his brother's keeper, and in this concept he sees the ultimate salvation of man.

In this essay Anderson returns to the Winesburg prose style at its best. His writing is rhythmic, it is smooth, and in the interspersed portraits of small-town life it is real in the sense that he used the word in his talk at Olivet. Touchingly but not sentimentally he portrays the America that he had been seeking since he first turned his back on Clyde, Ohio. This is the America that he had rediscovered in Marion, Virginia, as one of the last refuges of the old life and at the same time one of the preservers of the ultimate American values that he hopes to see revived after America has passed through its time of trial and purification and has attained once again an age of belief. Home Town is Anderson's last work published during his lifetime; it symbolizes the spirit of what he had learned in absorbing the material for the works from Hello Towns! to Puzzled America; and it remains his testament to what he has rediscovered as the essence of meaning not only in Midwestern America but in all of America.

With the publication of Home Town Anderson's active literary life was at an end. Work on the Memoirs and on several magazine pieces was sporadic, and he spent most of time at the farm and in Marion, writing to friends and

visiting with them. For the first time he had no plans for creative work but was content to take it easy, a happy man and undoubtedly a tired one, both of which he had been during most of the Virginia years. As Home Town shows, he had found faith in the permanence of peculiarly American institutions, a faith that is reiterated in one of the last letters that he wrote:

I have lived long enough, traveled widely enough, and have known the so-called common people enough in the United States to believe that there is, at bottom, a great store of common sense and of belief in democracy in our American people...As for our own democracy, why I dare say it will always be a somewhat blundering thing, but it can always cure itself.⁷

During these last years and months it is easy to go through the letters and diaries, picking out fragments that indicate dissatisfaction, frustration, and growing fears on Anderson's part, much of which stemmed from difficulties with writing, and it is even easier to accept the most obvious explanation of them, that Anderson had finally come to realize that he could no longer write. However, such an interpretation is not the truth, as Home Town shows. Anderson could still write; Home Town is a carefully written imaginative work as well as a clear statement of the values that he recognized; and it indicates that the periods of crisis he underwent during the last years were no more

⁷Letters, 466.

significant than his earlier crises. Rather, at this time Anderson had come to the end of his evaluation of the American scene, and at the beginning of 1941 he was casting about for a new direction for his work. On February 28, 1941, with a semi-official State Department commission and a Reader's Digest contract for articles, he turned toward South America and the new experiences he was looking for. On March 8, he was dead at Colon in the Panama Canal Zone, ironically the victim of peritonitis from a pre-sailing cocktail party toothpick that he had swallowed. He had found the ultimate meaning of his America, and he had no place to go except back to the hillside overlooking Marion on which he is buried.

The irony of the obituary that appeared in the Elyria Chronicle-Telegram is made even more tragic by the combination of circumstances that made the appearance of the Memoirs pass almost unnoticed. In December, 1941, America went to war; in March, 1942, the Memoirs appeared and in a nation listening to the reports of defeats in the Philippines it simply was not important just as Anderson, categorized as a has-been, was no longer important. Critical attention was scant, reviewers commented superficially that it was the same old material, providing further evidence that Anderson was through, and then it was ignored. None of them thought to evaluate it either as literature or as a definitive statement of the meaning of the American experience as interpreted by one who had

devoted a major portion of his life to defining that experience in terms of what it meant to the people who lived it.

Like Anderson's earlier autobiographical works, the Memoirs defy classification because, as Horace Gregory points out, Anderson was primarily an interpreter rather than a disseminator of factual material.⁸ As numerous critics have justifiably commented, his autobiographical works are often useless and certainly untrustworthy as factual sources without corroboration, and this is certainly true of the Memoirs. Not only are dates and places hazy or at times wrong, but Anderson interprets situations to suit himself and he places emphasis upon apparent trivialities while he ignores facts that an objective biographer would consider important.

All this points out that in the Memoirs as in the other autobiographical works Anderson had something else in mind. Here, as in the other similar works, Anderson was concerned not with his own life, but with American life, although the only source through which he could approach it intimately was through his own experience. In the preface he made this clear:

Is there even such a thing as a life of one's own? Is it not some illusion, some limitation in ourselves that makes us feel there is? It seems to me that all lives merge...I want to use my own life as a kind of springboard...I want to make my book, my rambling house of a book, a book of people...There is still another desire. I would like to write a book of the mind and of the imagination. Facts elude me. I cannot remember

⁸Horace Gregory, Introduction to The Portable Sherwood Anderson (New York, 1955), 11.

dates. When I deal in facts, at once I begin to lie. I can't help it. I am by nature a story teller.⁹

With this warning from Anderson in mind it is not only possible but necessary for one to approach the book as imaginative literature as it should be regarded rather than as autobiography, the convenient but inaccurate pigeonhole of card catalogues and critics. James Schevill compares Anderson's approach and purpose with that of Henry Adams in writing his Education, and the point is valid, although the works as well as the authors are dissimilar. However, Anderson was not merely recording the growth of his imagination, as Schevill comments;¹⁰ rather, he was using the record of that growth as he used the facts of his own life, as a springboard from which he could leap into the American experience as he had known it, define it, and point out its meaning, its true values, and its strengths at the same time that he pointed out its confusions and its failures.

In carrying this purpose to its culmination Anderson has, of course, used much of the same old material, as critics have duly noted, and his recounting of the early years is closely related in spirit to the portrayal in Tar. Here, however, he is not attempting to show the events through the eyes of a child; instead, he is a man aware that he is at the end of life, looking back in the attempt to portray the

⁹Memoirs, 7. ¹⁰Shevill, 342.

microcosm of American life. Looking back as an adult he sees life in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as characterized by the human intimacy that he had paid his tribute to in Home Town. It was an age in which lives merged so that individualism was subservient to sympathy, kindness, and love. This was the America that he saw destroyed by materialism as it at once isolated and cheapened the individual by deluding him into accepting things rather than relationships as valuable. In recounting his early advertising and commercial experience he epitomizes this substitution of values, not only as it had deluded him but primarily as it had captured the mind of America.

The Elyria years become then the reawakening of his realization that human rather than material values are meaningful, and the rest of the book is devoted primarily to depicting his efforts to identify and to understand those values as well as to rediscover them in American life. Behind this personal struggle Anderson sees an America going through the same crisis, with a subconscious awareness of failure emerging slowly into consciousness as the depression makes clear the transience of things and the endurance of the human spirit. At the end he has returned to a life in which he can accept and live by those permanent values, and he feels that America will do the same.

Such is the sequence of the Memoirs, in essence a history of the cycle of American life through the period that

saw it change from an agricultural to an industrial society. But it is not a factual and documented history; instead it is the record of the influence of factual happenings upon human life, and the focus lies not upon the events but upon the lives themselves, Anderson's own and those of the people he had come to understand and love during those years. In the final analysis, then, the Memoirs is a book about people rather than things or events, and its subject is the nature of life rather than its surface. Its theme is the understanding of the American experience, the identification of what is worthwhile in it, and the attempt to reconcile the two in life.

Out of this theme grows Anderson's final commentary on American life, and it is stated in the curious blend of optimism and despair that had characterized his work and his life almost from the beginning. The nature of life, he points out, is tragic; man is destined to live and die alone, isolated from his fellows, unable to know or be known by them, and he lives distorted and unfulfilled because of circumstances over which he has no control. However, the tragedy of life is unimportant to him because in spite of it life has meaning that lies in refusing to despair and in continually opposing the nature of life by trying to break down the barriers between men, by refusing to accept the inevitable, and by slowly coming closer to the understanding and fulfillment that man needs. Meaning is not in the end but in the means, he concludes, as

he sums up in one phase what he has learned: "Life, not death, is the great adventure."¹¹

In concept as well as in execution the Memoirs is closely related to Winesburg, Ohio. Like Winesburg, it is essentially a story of people set in a particular period in time and space and unified thematically as well as structurally through the presence of a central character. Just as George Willard was the catalyst that made life and experience come clear in Winesburg, so does Anderson himself serve the same purpose here. The grotesques who people the world become human beings again just as had those of the village; still isolated and alone because of the force of circumstance, nevertheless they become knowable and lovable as they are revealed. Winesburg is the story of the growth of awareness of the intrinsic worth of human beings as a young man comes to know them; the Memoirs is the story of that young man grown old as he looks back over a life devoted to breaking down barriers so that men may know each other.

The youthful confidence that sees the possibility of removing barriers through love is gone, of course. As George Willard went off into the world he saw a long life ahead in which full understanding would come. Here, however, is the mature individual who knows now that that is impossible and who has accepted that inherent tragedy of life. In spite

¹¹Memoirs, 507.

of this realization, however, he has maintained his faith in the intrinsic worth of the individual, and he still accepts the validity of searching for understanding and coming closer to it.

Like Winesburg, too, the Memoirs deals with the distinction between appearance and reality. Just as in Winesburg Anderson had shown the growth of realization that the two are not synonymous, here, too, Anderson makes that point clear, but again there is a difference. The earlier book had dealt with gaining that knowledge. Here Anderson describes the efforts needed to learn to distinguish between the two and to find the reality that underlies appearance. The difference between the two points of view is, of course, the difference between youth and age. Not only is it necessary to understand that a dichotomy between appearance and reality does exist, Anderson points out, but once having reached that understanding, it is necessary to learn to apply the difference in life situations. This is the task of a lifetime.

Not only is there a direct thematic relationship between Winesburg and the Memoirs, but structure and style are also closely related. Like Winesburg, the Memoirs is a unified collection of sketches that are amplifications of theme rather than plotted and individualized stories or descriptive narratives. Just as each story in Winesburg was an attempt to remove the barrier of appearance and to make clear the

essence of a human spirit in a particular moment in time, so too is the nature of each of the sketches in the Memoirs. Anderson is trying to show the reality underlying appearance as he has come to know it, and each sketch brings the reader closer to understanding his view of the basic dichotomy. As a result, the individual sketches become unified by approach as well as by theme and the presence of a central figure.

In style Anderson has gone back to the natural Midwestern rhythms of Winesburg, abandoning the jerky experimental style that had marred so much of his work between 1925 and 1935. As Puzzled America, Kit Brandon and Home Town show, Anderson had come to recognize the ineffectiveness of much of his experimentation and had moved away from it and back into his most effective and most individualized style. Here he shows complete rejection of innovation, and the style is that of the American townsman who looks at his life and world and describes clearly and easily what he sees.

The Memoirs might have been Anderson's best book, and as published it indicates that stylistically, structurally, and thematically it was to be his most carefully controlled and planned work. Unfortunately at his death it was incomplete, existing only in a mass of unrelated manuscript pages, and the published version is the result of editing by a group of friends headed by Paul Rosenfeld. Making a book out of another man's manuscript is difficult at best, and the incomplete state of this one made the job even more

difficult. Although Anderson had left an outline of the book, some of the material was unwritten, and in the effort to fill out the framework the editors resurrected material that Anderson had written and cast aside as early as 1920. The result mars the finished work, detracting from its unity and effectiveness in spite of the fact that the skeleton of some sections has been fleshed. The book would have been more satisfactory had the editors recognized that Anderson was not writing a factual autobiography and had merely noted that portions were incomplete instead of trying to make an autobiography out of it. The book as a whole is less satisfactory than it might have been because of faulty editing rather than shortcomings in Anderson's conception of it. It is unfortunate that Anderson did not live to complete it.

In addition to the failure of the editors to recognize the approach that Anderson was using and to maintain it, another serious editorial shortcoming detracts from the effectiveness of the book. This is the fact that they did not see the changing styles of Anderson's work during the twenties and thirties. In the middle thirties he had returned to the Winesburg style, and the Memoirs was for the most part written in that style. However, in introducing material written during the late twenties and early thirties the editors used sections that were written in the jerky experimental rhythms of that period, and stylistic unity suffers as a result.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in financial matters. The text suggests that organizations should implement robust systems to track every detail, from small expenses to major investments.

2. The second section focuses on the role of leadership in setting the tone for ethical behavior. It argues that leaders must not only follow the rules themselves but also ensure that their actions are visible and consistent with the organization's values. This involves creating a culture where ethical considerations are integrated into every decision-making process.

3. The third part of the document addresses the challenges of maintaining integrity in a complex and fast-paced environment. It acknowledges that there will be moments of temptation and pressure to cut corners, but it stresses that the long-term benefits of honesty and integrity far outweigh the short-term gains of dishonesty. The text encourages individuals to stay vigilant and seek support when needed.

4. The fourth section provides practical advice on how to handle difficult situations and conflicts. It suggests that open communication and active listening are key to resolving disputes effectively. The text also highlights the importance of documenting any incidents and taking appropriate disciplinary actions when necessary to maintain the integrity of the organization.

5. The final part of the document concludes by reiterating the commitment to high standards of conduct. It expresses confidence that by following these guidelines, the organization can achieve its goals while upholding its values. The text ends with a call to action, urging everyone to take responsibility for their actions and contribute to a positive and ethical work environment.

On the whole, however, the Memoirs is a book that is both important and good. It is important because it provides tangible evidence that Anderson had finally reconciled experience and ideal and had come to the conclusion that although the evidence of experience indicated that man's life was essentially tragic because of forces that he could not control, nevertheless there was meaning in life if one sought it: the values inherent in a job well done, in an appreciative and understanding relationship with others, and in the realization that life itself was "the great adventure."¹² It is a good book in spite of the shortcomings of the editorial work because as conceived and partially executed it has something to say about the American experience that is worth saying, and it says it well.

During the last few years of his life Anderson had come a long way, and he had incorporated into his life the ideal meaning that he had been looking for. After his discoveries of his own identity and of a permanent place in a changing society he was capable of identifying and pointing out the permanent values that continued to exist in America in spite of the powerful but misleading veneer of materialism that had disguised the real America for so long.

This last period of his life saw, as a result of his reaffirmation of human values, another rediscovery as

¹²Ibid.

important to Anderson as the earlier two. This was the rediscovery of faith in the democratic process. After examining the glib, easy solution to the problems of industrialization, materialism, and dehumanization that was offered by Communism, he recognized that the cure was as dangerous as the malady, and as a result he renewed his belief in the admittedly imperfect, often blundering, but nevertheless inevitable reflection of the peoples' hopes and desires through American democratic procedures. That this was not an idle dream or irrational hope he saw demonstrated as the New Deal effected the revolution in the relationship between government and individual that he had sought and that Communism had seemed to promise. In response to the democratic will the focus of government had shifted from its concept of its proper role as an extension of materialism to its new role as an extension of the individual, helping him to do what he could not accomplish alone.

Anderson had not formulated specific answers to specific aspects of these problems that had occupied him for almost all of his adult life, nor did he really expect to. Rather what he sought and eventually found was a code of values embracing his faith in intrinsic human worth that, when adopted by government as well as individuals, would bring about specific solutions by action controlled by compassion for the individual, and he lived long enough to insure himself that the ultimate solution to all the specific problems was within reach as the New Deal extended its influence.

This last period was not a time of frustration, of despair, and of degeneration of creative powers, as some critics maintain. Rather it was a productive time, a time of fulfillment, and a time of optimism. His critical reputation had remained in the low state that it had been in for more than ten years, but he realized that that was mere appearance and, as such, unimportant. Understanding of others was the important thing, and he had devoted his life to it. Shortly before his death he wrote "If real understanding is to grow, it cannot be done by politicians and businessmen. There must be, instead, a flow of ideas back and forth, a flow of feeling."¹³ This was what he had been striving for both in his writing and in his life.

Not only is the work of these last few years sufficient to refute the accusation that Anderson could no longer write, but Anderson attained intellectual maturity in his rejection of rebellion as a satisfactory solution to social and economic evil; he attained emotional maturity in his successful marriage relationship; and, most importantly, he indicated in his handling of complex thematic material in Kit Brandon and "Brother Death" that he had maintained his hold on artistic craftsmanship. The final works, Home Town and the incomplete Memoirs, remain as good craftsmanship as well as final affirmation of the human values that he had sought and effective recreations of a vanished society.

¹³Letters, 426.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

After an active literary career of nearly thirty years, Anderson was in critical disfavor when he died, a disfavor that has persisted in spite of its paradoxical nature. Critical opinion generally has relegated Anderson to a minor position in American literary history, and yet it has not only been unable to ignore him but has continued to give him more attention than many figures considered to be major. The reason for this is obvious: when he was at his best, he was very good, so good, in fact, that Winesburg, Ohio and some of the shorter works have become modern classics, while on the other hand, when he was being most determinedly modern and artistic as in Many Marriages and most of the later novels he imposed a kind of dating on his work that made it as old fashioned as any other passing fad almost as soon as it was written.

Behind this dichotomy in his work lies another reason for the continuation of critical examination in spite of the absolute pronouncements critics have made. Even while he was still alive Anderson had taken on the proportions of a mythical figure, one who perhaps more than any other American embodied the dream of almost every critic, academic or

commercial, who has ever approached him. The myth has maintained that almost alone among people prominent in the history of twentieth century American literature, Anderson had the courage to reject commercial success and to devote himself to his art. That this does not correspond closely to the facts of his life has been pointed out by numerous academic critics, but such disagreement is unimportant because it is apparently embedded as firmly as the George Washington-cherry tree story in American folklore. Incorporating an ideal almost as difficult to realize as absolute truth, the myth seems likely to endure.

The dichotomy in Anderson's work and the myth that has grown up around his life have tended to engender two emotions that dominate Anderson criticism: harshness, stemming from the inability to reconcile the two extremes of his work, and sentimentality that results from personal identification with the problem behind the myth of his life. These two emotional approaches have become so commonplace that they sometimes exist side by side in the same critical study, resulting in a stereotyped approach that hinders evaluation of Anderson's work, understanding of what he was attempting to do, and recognizing the importance of the close relationship between his work and the unique American experience through which he lived.

Winesburg, Ohio and a number of individual short stories, notably "I Want to Know Why," "I'm a Fool," "The

Egg," and "The Man Who Became a Woman," have been frequently and justifiably pointed out as Anderson's permanent contributions to American literature, and Poor White has often been added to the list. However, these works are the products of Anderson's earlier active career, when he still received wide critical acceptance, and their worth has never been seriously questioned. At the same time the list ignores the fact that the short stories have been lifted out of the context of the volumes in which they appeared and have lost much of their meaning and effectiveness in the process. This generally acknowledged list is accurate as far as it goes, but it is incomplete. To these products of his early period must be added the entire volumes The Triumph of the Egg and Horses and Men, not only because they include such other excellent stories as "Seeds," "Unlighted Lamps," "The Sad Horn Blowers," and "An Ohio Pagan," but because they are collections that are of comparatively even quality. Much of the time they rise to the levels of the usually cited stories, and, most importantly, they are unified collections both structurally and thematically that comment on the nature of men's lives as effectively and as perceptively as does Winesburg, Ohio. Stories and sketches are included that are less satisfactory than the best, just as there are in Winesburg, but to ignore the subtlety with which Anderson brought unity out of apparent diversity is to ignore one of his most skillful capabilities.

Because the stereotyped approach to Anderson's work

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in financial matters. The text suggests that organizations should implement robust systems to track every aspect of their operations, from procurement to sales.

2. The second section addresses the challenges faced by organizations in managing their resources effectively. It highlights the need for strategic planning and the allocation of resources based on long-term goals. The author argues that without a clear vision and a well-defined strategy, organizations risk inefficiency and failure. This section also touches upon the importance of regular communication and collaboration between different departments to ensure that everyone is working towards the same objectives.

3. The third part of the document focuses on the role of technology in modern business operations. It discusses how digital tools and platforms can streamline processes, reduce costs, and improve overall productivity. The text mentions various software solutions for project management, customer relationship management, and data analysis. It also notes that while technology offers many benefits, it is not a silver bullet and must be used judiciously, with a focus on training and support for employees.

4. The fourth section explores the impact of external factors on an organization's performance. It discusses how market trends, economic conditions, and regulatory changes can influence business outcomes. The author suggests that organizations should stay informed about these external factors and be prepared to adapt their strategies accordingly. This part also touches upon the importance of building a resilient organization that can withstand uncertainties and maintain its competitive edge.

5. The final part of the document provides a summary of the key points discussed and offers some concluding thoughts. It reiterates the importance of a holistic approach to management, where all aspects of the organization are considered and managed in a coordinated manner. The author encourages organizations to embrace change and innovation, and to continuously seek ways to improve their performance and achieve their goals.

states that he had lost his effectiveness at this point, worthwhile contributions of the later periods are unfortunately ignored. To the list must be added parts of A Story Teller's Story from the following period, especially Book One and a number of other sections. This volume does contain the same old stuff, as many critics are quick to point out, and the book as a whole is uneven in execution, but both structurally and stylistically here Anderson is often at his best, reproducing both the Midwestern rhythms and idioms almost flawlessly and incorporating them in the old oral story-telling tradition so that the result elevates that same old subject matter to the realm of American mythology.

From the last years of Anderson's career it is necessary to add the complete volumes Death In the Woods and Kit Brandon, the incomplete Memoirs, and numerous essays from Hello Towns!, Puzzled America, and other sources. The first is not only his most consistently high-level collection of stories, but it also contains two of his best, "Death In the Woods" and "Brother Death." Most importantly it is an integrated and mature examination of Anderson's belief that reality must be separated from appearance if it is to be recognized and understood. The collection as a whole is as good as anything he had done in the earlier years.

Kit Brandon is his most objective and most fully realized novel, suffering only from carelessness and inattention, neither of which is sufficient to condemn it. In this novel

Anderson comes close to understanding the nature of the American experience as a product of the peculiar circumstances inherent in the growth of the country, an achievement that is matched in his own work only by the incomplete Memoirs that was to be his definitive interpretation of the American experience as he had known it.

The best of the essays are parts of this whole, each of them an attempt to come closer to an understanding of an individual moment in space and time, whether it concerned an individual, a group, or a set of circumstances. Each of the better essays is dominated by careful attention to craftsmanship as well as by penetrating intuitive understanding of the essence of the material, and in them Anderson focuses attention on the significance of the small, the seemingly unimportant, and the easily ignored in human life.

These are the works that must be included in a convenient list of Anderson's permanent contributions to American literature, a list that, while it is not imposing, is nevertheless not as insignificant as it may seem. But in order to understand Anderson and what he was trying to do, it is not enough to limit attention to any list of most successful works. Rather, as this study has attempted to show, Anderson's work can only be regarded as a whole, composed of many parts, because the major theme to which he devoted his attention was the meaning of the American experience as he had known and lived it.

Anderson's work in its entirety is an attempt to penetrate appearance and to determine the nature of the reality beneath it. To Anderson, material manifestations were unimportant. He did not deny their existence; on the contrary, as in the case of the twisted apples left to rot in the orchards near Clyde, he knew that often appearance was in some odd way related to essential nature, but that the relationship was often ignored or misunderstood. This realization came to him early, certainly by the time he had established himself in business in Elyria, and the literary career that followed resulted from the impact of that discovery upon his mind, a mind that was essentially untrained and uneducated and that found its way to a satisfactory resolution of the dilemma only through a long process of trial and error, acceptance and rejection.

The most obvious discrepancy between appearance and reality was for Anderson the difference between the American ideal as he had learned it and as he had seen it put into practice during the years that America became increasingly a country dominated by the production and consumption of things at the cost of the values inherent in the ideal. The attempt to separate traditional values from a materialistic ethic that had subverted them led him into literature by way of a back door because the words that he had learned to use effectively as a means of promoting consumption were the only means he had by which to attack this distortion

and confusion of values. In actuality Anderson began his literary career as a propagandist fighting against the corruption of the American ideal by materialism.

However, Anderson learned by the time he finished Marching Men that there was no easy answer to the problem, and the discovery made him a writer instead of a propagandist. His goal had not changed, but the means he had brought to bear on it were insufficient. Between 1915 and 1918 he began a tentative analysis that would lead him deeply into his subject matter at the same time that he realized the necessity of evolving a stylistic technique that would make his writing effective rather than merely functional.

With the writing of Winesburg, Ohio he had not forsaken his purpose to determine the relationship between nature and experience and appearance and reality; he had merely intensified it by closely examining individuals who had been crippled spiritually by the confusion of values inherent in a confused society. Encouraged by the success of his approach he broadened it in following works, attempting to incorporate more of his experience into his works, only to find that there still were no answers to his problem, a problem that became increasingly personal as he realized that he, too, had been confusing many things for a long time. Once more he shifted his direction and narrowed his scope in order to examine his experience more closely. The introspection that followed enabled him to accept his inability to reconcile the apparent

dichotomies in life at the same time that penetration of the surface of his own life gave him a sense of identity and a sense of role, both of which pointed out the values that he had thus far been unable to define in his works.

Out of this crucial period Anderson formulated the concepts that dominated his later work and that remain as his final comments on the meaning of the American experience as it had been reflected in his own life. They were simple enough, so simple that they seem naive at the same time that their simplicity emphasizes the depth that often lies behind the apparently simple. The identity and the place that he determined to be his were those that he had misunderstood and rejected when he had accepted the appearance upon which a material society is constructed, and after re-establishing himself as an artist-craftsman who belonged in a town rather than a center of materialism he could go on to formulate his concepts of the nature of the reality behind experience. Actually they were concepts that he had intuitively recognized from the time that he first realized the existence of the discrepancy between appearance and reality, and they had been reflected in his work from the beginning: man could break down the barriers that separated him from his fellows through compassion and through empathetic understanding. In the process he would recognize the true values in human life, the understanding and love that, mutually achieved, would make human life worth living.

This is the essence of Anderson's philosophy, a solution to the problems inherent in human experience that is both simple and complex. It was easy to say, as he had long known, but at the same time it was, he finally concluded, impossible to realize. Close as he was to naturalism and despair at this point, he finally acknowledged that the end itself was an ideal, and like all ideals, beyond the capabilities of human nature. Resulting from this was his ultimate conclusion that the means rather than the end, life itself rather than an impossible perfection, was the only meaning man could know, but it was far from a petty or ignoble meaning.

This is the concept that dominates both his life and works from 1929 to his death: man is his brother's keeper, he declared, whether he would acknowledge the fact or not. It was the realization of this truth that made human life meaningful, and its rejection, brought about by a preoccupation with things, that led to the inevitable dehumanization of American society. The American experience was therefore one that demanded a careful and continuous examination if one would find meaning inherent in it. Its nature, as he pointed out, had been such that from the beginning it demanded that man concern himself with the material appearance of life in spite of its great potential of achieving human fulfillment, and only the individual himself could prevent the material from completely nullifying his potential in his own life.

Anderson's works as a whole record his discovery of this truth, one that a more sophisticated man possessed or more education would have accepted as obvious and then promptly forgotten. However, Anderson, like his nineteenth century predecessors Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, was not interested in discovering the physical laws that govern the universe; instead, he restricted his attention to the obvious problems of human life and tried to find a way to live with them. The entire range of his works from Windy McPherson's Son to the Memoirs is the record of his attempt to make that possible by finding the meaning inherent in human experience as he had known it.

Anderson belongs properly in the main stream of American idealism that had its inception in the self-evident truths of natural rights, was nurtured in the Transcendentalist realization that somewhere beyond physical appearance lay the ultimate truth of man's fate, and then fell into confused disorder before the combined onslaught of Darwinism and economic determinism. The confusion endured in a world suddenly grown complex, but by the beginning of the twentieth century the disorder had been replaced by a counter-offensive determined to show the evils inherent in a world dominated by materialism. Anderson was temperamentally suited to become a member of this counter-offensive, and he was a member in spirit long before he became one in fact.

The literary movement and atmosphere with which he associated himself as he found himself as a writer is clear indication of his membership in the idealistic counter-offensive. The keynote of the Chicago Renaissance was Liberation, and it was devoted to freeing the writer from confusion and from the concessions that idealism had made to genteelness. Liberation meant honesty, and honesty meant that the major issues in American life could no longer be ignored. The movement had its superficial aspects, as Anderson learned; at times it seemed to be dominated by superficiality, but its core was a determination to right old wrongs at the same time that it established a new and honest American literary tradition.

Before Anderson joined the Chicago group, he had been primarily a propagandist, focusing on issues rather than people. His reaction to materialism was instinctive and direct, so that the early novels, Windy McPherson's Son and Marching Men, are based in protest and rejection while they are expressed in the formidable diction and style of late nineteenth century popular literature. But the literary movement of which the Chicago group was a part taught him that what he was doing was not literature, and it pointed out his new direction.

In the context of the new literary tradition of protest and rejection Anderson's relationship to his major literary contemporaries is evident in both his attitudes and his

techniques. Although he often gave credit to Gertrude Stein for having made him aware of the potential inherent in words and style, nevertheless his affinity to others is much closer. He moved out of Miss Stein's orbit of experimentation after the initial impetus and into a circle that was largely Midwestern, so much so that in its view of its birthplace it has been called a Russian view by D. H. Lawrence.

The two major Midwestern novelists with whom Anderson can be compared are Theodore Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, while among the poets his closest relationship is with Vachel Lindsay and Edgar Lee Masters. Anderson has much in common with all of them although at the same time there are major differences. Like Dreiser and Lewis Anderson protested against an environment that made people less than human, and he was aware of this kinship, especially with Dreiser, to the end. But the protests of the three took different directions; for Dreiser there was no way out of the deterministic environment that his people were caught in, while for Lewis there was no need to wrestle with the imponderables as long as one could expose and at the same time secretly understand and sympathize with a society devoted to externals. Anderson could not accept the naturalistic helplessness of Dreiser's people and his own, even while the evidence overwhelmingly indicated that Dreiser was right. Nor could he be satisfied with the indictment of a system as was Lewis. Instead he sought in his own way to find permanent answers, even after he accepted the

impossibility of finding those answers and had to settle for the meaning inherent in the search and in love and compassion for his people.

In spirit Anderson is closer to the poets Masters and Lindsay. Not only is the basic structural pattern of Master's Spoon River Anthology close to Winesburg, Ohio, but both works penetrate below surface appearance to reveal the essence of repressed humanity, an approach that became Anderson's most effective technique. Masters, however, is protesting against the system in the Anthology; in Winesburg and the other sub-surface examinations Anderson regrets the shortcomings inherent in human nature that prevent deep understanding.

The relationship between Lindsay and Anderson is closest of all because these two, more than any of the others, sought to go beyond protest and condemnation and to find new and enduring values upon which to build a humanized society. Both of them sought a faith that was essentially spiritual and idealistic, although Lindsay was primarily concerned with a faith firmly rooted in conventional Christianity, especially in his early years, while Anderson rejected such values in favor of a secular although no less mystic faith. Both of them moved beyond rejection and rebellion and into a final and positive affirmation.

In moving beyond rebellion Anderson became most clearly an idealist and a romantic. He believed firmly that somewhere

a life based upon compassion, love, and understanding could be found, and he sought it in the past and in the towns, where man could live communally and close to nature at the same time, finding strength and mutual fulfillment in the process of living.

This is the Sherwood Anderson who is little known and usually misunderstood, and this is the Anderson who did much misunderstanding himself. He was a seeker once he realized that there were no easy answers and put propaganda behind him. In his search for the almost perfect world (he rejected perfection because it is no longer human) he fused his work and his life, and in so doing moved across both literary and ideological lines so freely that he confused both his contemporaries and himself. Although he considered himself a "modern", he looked back in spirit to a romanticism that freed the individual from his environmental confines. As an artist he attempted to be advanced and experimental, but his most effective style grew out of an old oral tradition.

The confusion and misunderstanding inherent in these contradictions affected both Anderson and his contemporaries to the extent that the idealistic and romantic nature of his work passed almost unnoticed during his lifetime. Instead he was called a realist, a naturalist, a modern, a Freudian, and a Marxist, all of which he was not, and to a great extent he must have accepted the titles because he did little or

nothing to deny them, and the title of realist that he often applied to himself implies a close adherence to surface phenomena that is merely the point of departure for most of his work.

This misunderstanding has continued to the present. Generally Anderson is still grouped loosely to naturalism and occasionally to the post-World War I decadents, especially Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot. However, Anderson's links to these groups are tenuous at best. Not only did he go well beyond naturalism in his search for answers to problems that he saw as essentially spiritual rather than deterministic, but from the beginning of his literary career he rejected the decadence that eventually drove Eliot into the dogmatism of the past in religion and politics as well as literature and Pound into incomprehensibility and authoritarianism. The answers that Anderson sought were no less individual than mystic, and they resolved themselves into a compassion for people rather than theories or systems of any kind.

On the other hand Anderson's affinities to D. H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway are quite close. Like Lawrence, with whom Anderson identified himself in the twenties, Anderson was concerned with breaking down the artificial barriers isolating men so that mature and lasting love might become possible, and again like Lawrence Anderson did not hesitate to use physical love as the outward manifestation of a deeper spiritual love. However, in spite of Anderson's

reputation as a daring and shocking writer, he could never bring himself to treat the physical aspects of love with Lawrence's frankness.

The relationship between Anderson and Hemingway is even closer. Not only did Anderson's literary style inspire Hemingway's and through Hemingway an entire generation of American writers, but also the thematic ties between them are quite close. Essentially both of them are idealistic romantics whose people, hurt spiritually by a hostile world, have embarked on a search for meaning in spite of the fact that apparently there is none. Eventually both of them point out in their works that the end of the search is not important; that what matters is the way in which the search is carried out. This is the position that Anderson approaches as early as in Horses and Men, while Hemingway arrives there much later in For Whom The Bell Tolls. For each it comes after a period of flirtation with despair.

After Anderson's idealism had rid itself of anger and indignation when he began his search for permanent values through his association with the Chicago Renaissance, his search for the values that he could adopt and affirm led him to focus on people, on the individual human lives that make up the generality "America" that had been celebrated by others such as Carl Sandburg. In so doing Anderson found himself in the difficult position of trying to find abstract principles through examinations of individual human lives.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that this is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in the organization's operations.

2. The second part outlines the various methods and tools used to collect and analyze data. This includes both traditional manual methods and modern digital technologies, highlighting the benefits of each approach.

3. The third part focuses on the role of the management team in overseeing the data collection process. It stresses the need for clear communication and coordination between different departments to ensure that data is collected consistently and accurately.

4. The fourth part discusses the challenges faced during the data collection process, such as incomplete information or data quality issues. It provides strategies to overcome these challenges and ensure that the data collected is reliable and useful.

5. The fifth part describes the final steps in the data collection process, including the review and validation of the collected data. It emphasizes the importance of double-checking the data to ensure its accuracy before it is used for analysis and reporting.

6. The sixth part concludes the document by summarizing the key points and reiterating the importance of a systematic and thorough approach to data collection. It encourages the organization to continue to improve its data collection processes over time.

That he was never able to find those principles not only emphasizes the difficulty of the task, but more importantly, it provides the most enduring of his works--those in which he penetrates for a brief but revealing moment into the heart of another human being.

The durable qualities of Anderson's work lie in the closeness and persistence with which he came to grips with his purpose, and they lie in the subject matter, the techniques, and the spirit that he combined to give form to his theme. The experience that he chose for treatment in his work is the record of America as it moved from idealistic youth into cynical and selfish maturity. The loss of innocence concurrent with the rise of industrialism has had no more effective and conscientious chronicler. Furthermore, the people with whom he is always concerned are people still possessed of that innocence who find themselves lost in a society that no longer values either it or them, and again Anderson's portrayal is honest, compassionate, and effective as he brings them alive.

The durability of the style that Anderson made his own in Winesburg, Ohio and gave freely to the mainstream of American literature is unquestioned. As long as the American idioms are spoken in the easy rhythms radiating out from the Midwestern heartland, Anderson's style will be recognized, understood, and appreciated by the people who gave rise to it, no matter what the current critical preference may be.

In style more than anywhere else Anderson has come closer to reproducing and interpreting a vital part of the American experience.

The spirit of Anderson's work is the spirit of life, and this, too, will endure. The wonder of human life, a compassionate regard for it, and a compelling sense of discovering significance in the commonplace permeate his works, giving rise to a lyric beauty even in despair. Love, compassion, sympathy, and understanding are the human virtues that raise man above his animal origins and prevent him from being a machine, as Anderson points out at the same time that he shows his acceptance of the concept in his work. Life is not only the great adventure for Anderson; in the final analysis it is the universal value.

In an age that denies the values Anderson believed in even more emphatically than did his own, Anderson's place among the journalists and the sensationalists is small, and his shortcomings as a literary artist will undoubtedly prevent much enlargement of that place in the overall range of literary history. However, as a man who approached life with reverence, who spoke of it with love, and who provided some of the most eloquent expressions of both in his time, his place is secure.

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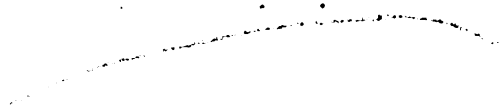
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