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edited by
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in honor of
William Maxwell

PREFACE

No American writer has received more critical and biographical attention than Sherwood Anderson in the Society's publications, the Annual Symposium, and other Society-sponsored programs, including, in 1984, the first issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* devoted to a single writer. Perhaps this attention reflects, in part, my own abiding interest, but I am convinced that it is a manifestation of Anderson's central role in the literary definition of the Midwest in his time and ours. Certainly we receive more essays devoted to Anderson than to any other single writer.

Just as Anderson's work is central to any definition of the Midwest as a literary place, the Clyde, Ohio of his youth—the Winesburg and Bidwell, Ohio, and Caxton, Iowa, of Anderson's works—is central to his portrayal of the Midwest in transition from an agricultural, village-centered nineteenth century to an industrial and urban twentieth. This transition made the people of Anderson's literary world reflections of those of the reality of Clyde, and, as he commented, of Chicago, Elyria, and even Company "I," Sixth Ohio Regiment of Volunteer Infantry in 1898-99. I delight in quoting Eleanor Anderson's comment that "Sherwood was such a Midwesterner," and his works are reflections of that lifelong identification.

That this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* is dedicated to William Maxwell, recipient of the Mark Twain Award for 1995, is no mere coincidence. Like Anderson, Maxwell is a self-described literary son of Mark Twain, and again like Anderson, his abiding literary place is at once real, remembered, and imagined in the rural Midwestern landscape. Maxwell's Lincoln, Illinois, as Lincoln, Draperville, or Logan, is, like Clyde, Ohio, transmuted in his works into Midwestern myth as durable and as significant as any other literary place or habitation in the crowded literary landscape of a remarkably fertile region. Thus, it is especially appropriate that we dedicate this Sherwood Anderson issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* to William Maxwell.

September, 1995 DAVID D. ANDERSON

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S ORAL TRADITION

PHILIP GREASLEY

Midwestern people, politics, architecture, arts, and literature have given us a rich and unique cultural legacy. More important, they have fostered our sense of distinct regional American identity. Recognition and acceptance of this Mid-American identity by writers like Mark Twain and Sherwood Anderson have resulted in widespread use of the oral style in American literature.

While not directly rejecting East Coast "establishment" literature, language, or values, the oral style consciously represents the American masses. It asserts the dignity and importance of common people. As such, within the oral tradition, Midwestern lives and language become fit subjects for serious literary treatment.

But specifically what constitutes the oral style, and how do we recognize it? Critics and scholars have studied this question for years. This paper will present and extend their findings, particularly those of Richard Bridgman, whose book, *The Colloquial Style in America,* has made the greatest single contribution. I hope that my pairing of oral literary theory with examples from Sherwood Anderson's novel, *Kit Brandon,* will make the American oral literary tradition easy to recognize and understand.

Thematically, American oral literature tends to glorify the common man, see life through his eyes, or present his rebellion against a social order which blocks him from achieving fulfillment. Quite often this literature includes direct statements extolling America's potential or bitterly denouncing the pernicious values and social institutions which have misled Americans.

In *Kit Brandon,* Sherwood Anderson details the life of a poor Appalachian hill country girl. Kit's experiences as mill girl, factory worker, and sales clerk expose pervasive American class injustice and alienate her from the self-serving legal and social establishment. In describing the destruction of Appalachian hardwood forests, she states what she and Anderson see as the central theme of American history.

> The great lumber companies came, the coal companies ripping out the timber, ripping out the coal. . . . [leaving] a wild country more wild. There are deserted mining and lumber towns, denuded hills, once covered by majestic timber, the soil now washing away with every rain, clear streams made muddy, the hills every year growing more and more bare—an old story in America now. "We are after the money. Let the land and the people go to hell." (p. 28)

Anderson's narrator suggests that Kit

> felt within herself the conviction growing that in the life of the factory there was no chance for something within herself to grow, that it was choked there, the conviction that is in so many younger Americans now, that the day of opportunity is gone here, an old myth that in America any one may rise to dizzy heights of splendor quite exploded. (p. 81)

Yet even Kit sees that America had far greater potential. She knows "the people of the mountains . . . were not too far away from something else, something once very much alive . . . individuality . . . the day of America's greater richness . . . Day of the farmers on their own land . . . Day of the craftsman too" (p. 84). America's path to the future has bred her cynicism.

Oral literature's second characteristic is focus on a dialect-speaking narrator or character, like Kit Brandon. This dialect character is at or more normally below average social level and regularly exists outside prevailing social norms, while remaining attuned to true morality. This character's idioms, speech rhythms, and non-standard diction authenticate his (or her) regional and proletarian origins. As such, dialect paves the way for expression of non-establishment values. In *Kit Brandon,* for example, the narrator calls attention to Kit's speech, saying, "Kit, when she spoke of her childhood, occasionally fell into the vernacular. . . . The language, words coming straight down out of Elizabethan England; songs—low keyed and wistful. Kit Brandon, when she was telling her story to me—often broke into one of these low-keyed songs" (p. 13, p. 29). Kit's own regular substitution of words like "poke" for sack, her use of occasional double negatives, and her recourse to dialect patterns like, "Can't no girl depend" and "They were wanting" emphasize her non-establishment heritage.

Sherwood Anderson's novel, like all oral literature, transmits the dialect speaking character's language and mentality by using direct quotation extensively. This quotation is not, however, just a neat trick for asserting humble origins and social status. It bespeaks real reverence for the word—precisely as spoken, unrevised and unedited. It finds real meaning only in the simple, often ungrammatical, speech of common people, real beauty in the regional rhythms and idioms. It is true that Anderson, like other oral writers, is only simulating dialect and is, in fact, carefully manipulating the audience's responses, but in Anderson's case, as in almost every instance, the author finds his roots (real or imaginative) in the geographical area or social class of the dialect character. Thus, the imaginative identification between author and character is so close that the book might be viewed as the author's emotional autobiography. Such is clearly the case with Anderson, who also encounters hard times as a child; rejects the greed, corruption, and callousness of the establishment; and seeks integration with the common people and retreat from the problems of America's industrial, capitalist future.

Another characteristic of the oral tradition is the way the story is told. Oral stories are normally non-linear, episodic, or rambling. These stories reject direct, chronologically arranged structure. Here, as before, the halting, episodic presentation lends authenticity to both teller and tale. It suggests that the character telling the story is one of the people, not a "slick" writer capable of distorting facts to serve his own ends. Oral literature often uses apparent indirection in telling the tale to suggest that the dialect character, like Kit Brandon, must dredge up the story from the well of—sometimes troubled—personal experience. Instances of garrulousness and uncertain memory also assert that the speaker is one of the people.

Sherwood Anderson's *Kit Brandon* is typically oral in its rambling, episodic plot. The story is told by a newspaper man, based on several meetings with Kit. While the plot is generally chronological, each interview is a series of autonomous memories spanning Kit's entire life. Even when the memories are linked together chronologically, her life remains a welter of episodes and characters related only by their cumulative effect on Kit. A backwoods Appalachian child becomes a millhand, factory worker, and store clerk. Later, Kit is a bootlegger's wife and a driver herself. In this role she engages in several independent adventures, culminating in the gang leader's death and her flight to escape capture and prosecution. Emphasis on plot is very strong. The cumulative force of the episodes and the panorama of American life make Anderson's theme clear.

Yet theme, characterization, quotation, and plot structure are really only prerequisites to oral style. Still unmentioned are the many specific techniques for simulating vernacular speech in writing. The simplest way to approximate common speech is to move away from the sentence length and pattern common to almost all written discourse. Thus, oral style deemphasizes the 10-15 word, Subject-Verb-Object sentence. In its place oral literature uses several recognizable alternative sentence patterns.

Very, very short staccato sentences appearing in series form one important alternative pattern. These sentences are often extremely blunt, suggesting the directness of common speech. These lines from Anderson's *Kit Brandon* capture this oral quality. "Be careful, be cautious, be shrewd. Do not mind too much using others. Be as fair with them as you can. . . . Don't waste words either" (p. 126).

At other times Anderson, following the oral tradition, uses very short oral sentences in a different way. Here each contains very little information, with each added sentence only slightly varying or increasing the facts presented. Kit Brandon uses this pattern when remembering her father.

> He'd trade horses and trade horses. It was his fun. He loved it. It was his way of outwitting some man or being outwitted. He'd get on a bony old horse we had and ride off. It might be that some other man, a neighbor on another old horse, would go with him. He might be gone for days. He was horse trading. It was seeing people, other men, and being with them. It was drinking some. It was showing how smart you are. (pp. 2-3)

Even more characteristically oral are these slow moving short sentences describing Kit. "She was wanted. She was a dangerous and desperate woman. She was wanted for the shooting of the man Steve Wyagle" (p. 348).

Sometimes, however, oral literature goes the other direction in avoiding the standard written sentence pattern. It turns to very long, rambling, excessively qualified sentences. Here there is often no clear interrelation between the ideas forming the sentence. Dashes and non-directive transitions like *and* offer the only separation of words and ideas, and do so without ever clearly organizing the flow of thought. Run-on sentences are common. The author wants these sentences to sound as if the speaker is thinking as he speaks. Therefore, association of ideas, sound patterns, and sentence rhythms often dominate and the central idea is submerged. Two passages from *Kit Brandon* show Anderson's use of these patterns. The first uses extreme qualification and modification in describing a moonshiner wanting to molest Kit.

> He stood looking, wanting no doubt to pounce, not daring, that other man, her father, the dark, clean-looking one with the swarthy skin, dark, almost black eyes, white teeth, just outside the house somewhere, within call. (p. 18)

The second sentence exemplifies the long, rambling oral pattern.

> And afterwards, that night, and for several nights after that, while the big run of moon whiskey was being run off for the unknown big-town man who had contracted for it, Kit, barelegged, barefooted, in the cold, in the dark up there hidden in the bushes, near where the little road ran up into the big road, by the bare place, the bell with her—some rags to wind around her feet to keep them from freezing; the long dark hours of waiting and watching, her father, with the other men at work at the still—hurriedly, furiously working, that big man who had so touched her—her first—with them, smoking his cigar. (p. 20)

Even more characteristic of oral literature than very short or very long sentence patterns is the regular use of sentence fragments. These fragments immediately identify the character as an uneducated person with little social status. Quite often oral literature uses sentence fragments when the character is lost in thought. Two particular types of thought are most likely to be embodied in sentence fragments—ecstatic wonder and memory. In either case the speaker passively wells up for the audience's inspection a series of intense images of great personal importance. The author suggests that in such a moment of thought or reverie a character is incapable of lying.

Anderson's entire structure in *Kit Brandon* is based on the stream of memory pictures, identified by their fragment structure. These pictures define Kit and give meaning to her existence. Almost always these fragments are verbless sentences or sentences in which an *ing* form of the verb appears unaccompanied by an auxiliary verb. This pattern emphasizes the picture while removing all indication of time. Anderson's narrator emphasizes this timeless memory pattern, saying, "They were fragmentary pictures she gave me . ." (p. 4). The first sentences of several paragraphs from *Kit Brandon* show the pervasive importance of sentence fragments in oral literature.

> A mountain road going up and up . . . [ellipsis Anderson's]
>
> . . . .
>
> Little pockets of flat ground, a few acres. Hillsides planted to corn, so steep, some of them, you'd think a horse or an ox pulling a plow would fall off and be killed.
>
> . . . .
>
> The little houses, usually very small, tucked away on some side road, very narrow, winding and stony, almost always the house standing by a mountain stream.
>
> . . . .
>
> And then father gone sometimes for days, on one of his horse-trading trips, usually with other mountain men
>
> . . . .
>
> Every man with a bottle of moon whiskey in his hip pocket.
>
> . . . .
>
> Drunken fights—stabbings, and shootings sometimes among the hill men, horse trading—
>
> . . . .
>
> That work for the child to do and plenty of other work. (pp. 4-13)

The oral style is also identifiable because of its emphasis on repetition and rhythm. Oral literature repeats words, phrases, and sentences to emphasize key ideas. Moreover, the very process of repeating any syntax creates a parallel structure and a recognizable rhythm. This rhythmic repetition lends order and structure otherwise apparently lacking in oral literature because of its deliberately non-linear narrations, episodic plots, and incomplete or rambling sentence structures. Parallelism results in chantlike sections in which material is presented and then varied within the limits of the structure. These sentences from *Kit Brandon* show the importance of parallelism in the oral tradition.

> *She had been,* after her escape from her house, what *she had been,* that is to say a factory girl. *She had been* in a cotton mill and a shoe factory. *She had been* a clerk in a five-and-ten-cent store.
> And all the time *she had been* thinking and planning . . . Although *she had,* for herself, within herself, no special call toward men, they seemed to want her. *She had been* specially attracted toward the college boy Jim because he made no play for her.
> *She had liked* that and *she had liked* his telling her how things are run in the world. . . . *She had let* [one man] take her out in his car. *She had gone* even farther than that. . . . *She had got* . . . the notion . . . that *she might get* him so. . . . (p. 50)

Key words also recur frequently in Anderson's oral style. Here the droning repetition of important terms creates an almost hypnotic centering on these words and an accompanying sense of structure. The slow evolution of these key words directly mirrors the development of the central idea, as in this passage.

> There had been the months and months of *loneliness*. . . .
> *Loneliness.*
> The *loneliness,* so pronounced in Kit at that time, was not so unlike the *loneliness* of many Americans.
> *Loneliness* of the radical in a capitalistic society, of the man who wants to fight it, who does feel in himself a kind of social call. . . . [ellipsis Anderson's]
> . . . . [ellipsis Anderson's] The *life* of the artist in any society.
> . . . . [ellipsis Anderson's] *Life* of the labor leader and for that matter *loneliness* also of the *lives* of *successful* Americans, even the very rich, the *leaders* of a capitalistic society:
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . . [ellipsis Anderson's] The *leader,* the *successful* one, in any competitive society having, as an essential to his *success,* to climb up over the shoulders of others. (pp. 323-324)

This is the American oral style: theme, character, quotation, plot and sentence structure, rhythm, and repetition—a cohesive entity based upon consistent use of interrelated techniques. The oral tradition asserts the dignity and importance of the American masses while rejecting the excessive claims of the literary, social, economic, and legal establishment. The nature of Midwestern life and the experiences of Midwestern writers, like Sherwood Anderson and Mark Twain, make it a natural form for their literary expression. Using the oral style they have added to Midwestern life and enriched our cultural heritage.

University of Kentucky

THE UNREALIZED CITY IN SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S *WINDY McPHERSON'S SON* AND *MARCHING MEN*

CLARENCE B. LINDSAY

My inquiry into the unrealized city in Sherwood Anderson's fiction stems from two separate sources. (In respect to Anderson's treatment of the city I will be limiting my remarks to Anderson's first two novels, *Windy McPherson's Son* published in 1916 and *Marching Men* published in 1917.) Some years ago when reviewing a collection of short fiction, I found myself nettled, unreasonably perhaps, by several dust jacket statements praising the stories' sense of place. Although I was convinced that these particular stories had little sense of anything, let alone place, I found it a difficult issue to engage. While it's easy enough to imagine elements that might be present in a successfully achieved sense of place, not one of those features necessarily *has* to be there. Even more problematic, at least in respect to contentious assertions, is that the presence of one or several of these constituent elements does not guarantee a feeling of place. So, feeling then that I could say little more than. "No they don't, for me these stories have no sense of place," I abandoned the issue, spent my venom on other more arguable issues and forgot about it.

The second source of my interest in this particular subject springs directly from some difficulties that I had with these two early novels. After doing a fair amount of work with *Winesburg, Ohio,* I had turned my attention back to the first two novels which I had pretty much forgotten in my absorption in *Winesburg, Ohio.* I had convinced myself that the general critical dismissal of those two novels must be based on the same kind of naive and often passé critical assumptions of those who had, I felt, praised *Winesburg, Ohio,* for all the wrong reasons. But after several rereadings I didn't have anything especially new to say. Those first two novels weren't very good—didn't excite me the way that *Winesburg, Ohio* did. I once again folded my critical tent and stole away.

But last year while reading Kenny Williams' *A Story Teller and a City,* a study of Anderson's urban fiction, I found that several of her theses quickened my interest and focused my thinking. Williams is anxious to place Anderson in the general setting of urban fiction and Chicago fiction in particular. She feels that Anderson needs to be seen as a "significant urban voice analyzing both the phenomenon of the American city and the effects of urbanism upon a group of characters" (23). For reasons that will emerge, at least tangentially toward the end of my essay, I don't, finally, agree with Professor Williams, don't accept her thesis that Anderson was interested in the city, its "impact on the human" (31) to use her phrase, in the way Professor Williams assumes him to be. Quite apart, however, from any specific agreement or disagreement, her remarks made me aware that in those first two novels it is precisely when the plots take their heroes out of their villages and into the city that the writing goes dead—the plot becomes implausible and the characters so often begin to seem inert, lifeless.

It is one of the commonplaces of Anderson's criticism to remark on the apparently inexplicable transformation of Anderson from these two first mediocre novels to the miraculous achievement of *Winesburg, Ohio*. I want to examine the possibility that it was the fictive treatment of the city that both obscured and delayed Anderson's emerging aesthetic. I want to suggest that there was something not only in the city but the way he imagined the city (or failed to imagine it) that was terribly at odds with aesthetic principles that amounted to moral convictions.

It is not especially contentious to say that in *Winesburg, Ohio,* Sherwood Anderson realized place most effectively. What is interesting, at least to me, is that he does not capture that sense of place the way that we would most likely expect him to. The characters' speech in *Winesburg, Ohio,* what little there is, while effective in a number of ways, is certainly not a precise rendering of local speech either in vocabulary or style. In fact, some of the most memorable, effective speech is that which is most unrealistic. I am thinking of such things as the curious but nearly identical phrases "Oh, you dear, you lovely dear" uttered by Elizabeth Willard's young passionate lover, by Dr. Reefy her thwarted lover of later middle age, and by her son George after her death. The slightly stilted, unrealistic phrasing becomes a metaphor of their common passion rather than being exactly realistic speech. Or statements like the stranger in "Tandy" who says "I am a lover and have not found anything to love" (144). Such peculiar unusual pronouncements take on a resonance, easily become representative speech rather than accurate speech. Nor does the sense of place depend on physical description of setting, the other element that we might expect. There is surprisingly little description of either landscape or physical settings such as houses. (One student of mine from Clyde, Ohio claimed to recognize her own home in the description of Banker White's house, described simply as a big brick house.) No, the feeling of place in *Winesburg, Ohio* depends on neither language or physical description but on other more subtle qualities. If we can locate what was difficult or problematic in Anderson's treatment of the city, perhaps we can in turn see what he did especially right in his successful realization of the Winesburg community and in the process perhaps discover one or several aspects of Anderson's aesthetic.

I spent several readings of those first two novels trying to put my finger on exactly what caused the peculiar discomfort I experienced once Sam McPherson and Beaut McGregor arrive in Chicago.[1] At first, I thought it had something to do with the way these characters (and the narrator who conveys their thoughts) confront and move through urban space. Sam and Beaut will occasionally reflect on the cityscape or the notion of the city. These thoughts and/or images are usually hackneyed. For example, consider Sam's unwitting journey into a seedy section of town where "he was suddenly aware of the faces of women looking at him" (*Windy* 119). In a series of hallucinatory images Anderson presents a fairly tired, clichéd drama of sleazy seductive evil. "The voices called, smiles invited, hands beckoned." (*Windy* 119) Men, apparently deeply mortified by their own physical desires, have "their coats turned up about their necks, their hats pulled down over their eyes" (*Windy* 119). When they finally submit to the siren's call they "sprang in (the doorway) as if pursued" (*Windy* 119).

In the entire scene there is a certain melodramatic exaggeration of the city's sexual evil, a cloying, miasmic sense of sin: "In the air was lust, heavy and hideous" (*Windy* 119), and Sam reacts with nearly a cartoonish country bumpkin's prudishness. "It [the lust] got into Sam's brain and he stood hesitating and uncertain, startled, nerveless, afraid" (*Windy* 119). To be frank, this all seems a bit comic, nearly a parody of the pastoral innocent's confrontation with the big, bad city. And immediately following Sam's paralysis, he remembers something revealing. "He remembered a story he had once heard from John Telfer, a story of the disease and death that lurks in the little side streets of cities, and ran into Van Buren Street and from that into lighted State" (*Windy* 119). This memory of Sam's may help to reveal why this city scene and others are so unconvincing. The fiction serves only to reintroduce and reinforce the most clichéd of rural mythologies in respect to the city. Kenny Williams wants us to believe that Anderson and his protagonists approach the city with the shining myth of success, the Horatio Alger rags to riches story, only to find out the city's reality (89).[2] The passage just cited, however, clearly indicates a more complex truth. The city's evil, the "reality," is also part of an elaborate rural mythological structure. Anderson's characters, and I think Anderson himself, see the city, when they actually do stop to see it, through the fictive structures of their rural myths. In a way they are like Tom Sawyers who can't see the life in front of them, can only see the fictions of their education. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting that there is no factual basis for such scenes but rather that the experience is palpably filtered through a literary prism and consequently seems unconvincing, or "unrealized."

But perhaps a more serious problem than the way the urban space and content is navigated is the fact that for the most part it simply doesn't seem to be there at all; or rather it's there but doesn't seem to be seen, confronted. Sam McPherson and Beaut McGregor are constantly on the move. They swing back and forth through the city, walk constantly through the streets, sometimes covering enormous distances in a sentence or two, unencumbered and apparently untouched by the surroundings. It's true that there are similar instances in *Winesburg, Ohio* of such unawareness of physical surrounding; but somehow we expect the urban environment to impinge, to intrude more on characters' consciousness. We especially expect such an awareness when the city's disorder and chaos is supposedly of such concern to Beaut McGregor, when "the one vast gulf of disorder" (*Marching* 113) is what drives McGregor to his implausible notion of "forcing men to do the simple thing (march) full of meaning rather than the disorganized, ineffective things" (*Marching* 118). This great disorder of the spirit, this chaos which is Chicago, remains, however, an unrealized abstraction, stated but never plausibly imagined and consequently never viably connected to the agonizing ponderings it (the urban experience) is said to have stimulated. Beaut and Sam are too preoccupied to experience what they are moving through. And in Beaut's case ironically he is often so preoccupied with the issue of disorder, his plans for his peculiar marching, that he can't see the city which supposedly is the very condition which demands order. Often we are told how either Beaut or Sam will wander oblivious to the life without seeing the people. "McGregor walked slowly through the streets without seeing the people" (*Marching* 155). Such inattentiveness is, I think, a trope of the characters' general distraction, their intense inner life which precludes any sort of alertness to the outside. And their disengagement is in turn a trope of Anderson's own failure to engage imaginatively the city.

So far I have focused on two possible explanations for the unrealized city in these early novels: the literary or mythic structures through which the city is "seen;" and the peculiar inattentiveness to the urban experience of characters and narrator which I've chosen to regard as a trope of Anderson's failure to engage the city. Perhaps by looking at how Anderson successfully conveyed a sense of place in *Winesburg, Ohio,* I can focus on one more related failure in his treatment of the city. If there is one unchallenged critical commonplace regarding *Winesburg, Ohio,* it is that Anderson there examines the compelling and often pathetic isolation of its citizens. But this is a commonplace in need of at least some modification.

Any of the tales will serve to demonstrate the seemingly impenetrable boundaries between the narratives which make up the various selfhoods in this small Ohio town. In "The Strength of God" the Reverend Hartman constructs his own drama of sin and redemption using Kate Swift as the fallen temptress. He does so completely ignorant of her own complicated selfhood.

Her "affair" with George Willard (found in the subsequent "The Teacher" but the events of which occur just prior to the preceding story's conclusion) is over almost before it begins, ending after their first and only real embrace as she pounds his face with her "two sharp little fists" (165). She had wanted to urge him as a writer to attend not to the surface (implicitly false) of people's words but instead to the deep (implicitly real and therefore privileged as we like to say today) significant interior of their inner lives which is her way of articulating her own claim for that singularly special inner life. George Willard misinterprets her plea (or "text") as sexual desire. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he doesn't comprehend fully, doesn't understand how intertwined her sexual desire—she does submit for a moment—is with her own urgent sense of self. After she has fled he is confused, certain that she was trying to tell him something but unsure of what it was. It is into this confusion that the lunatic Hartman, or so he must appear to George Willard, bursts with his incomprehensible, to George at least, conclusion to his own tale of successful resistance to sin. These two stories represent, then, the peculiar misinterpretations, the aesthetic miscalculations, that constitute the drama of personal relationships in *Winesburg, Ohio.*

While the drama of these selfhoods is marked by the aesthetic confusions and misinterpretations just described, it is a mistake to say that these selfhoods are isolated from one another. For they are clearly intimately connected. Hartman may not know the "real" Kate Swift, if there is such a thing, but his interpretation of her is central to his own being, the fiction that makes up his selfhood. The town may only be aware of her oddities, her peculiar "biting and forbidding" (161) quality, but they are intensely alive to her: "Everyone felt it" (161). Their interpretation of her may not be correct or complete, but they do interpret her, have an idea about her, know her in an intense way. In fact all the self hoods in *Winesburg, Ohio* are thus intimately bound together. Elmer Cowley's tortured fear of being seen as queer is inseparable from his sense of George Willard's normality: "George Willard, he felt, belonged to the town, typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town" (194). In contrast to the truly isolated consciousnesses of Beaut and Sam, who seem to float through their respective urban spaces unaware and unengaged, the Winesburg grotesques can hardly take a step without some sort of meaningful collision, some friction that stimulates their own sense of self. In "The Thinker" Seth Richmond overhears Tom Willard in an apparently familiar political discussion filled with boasts and loud certainties: "Something in the voices of the men talking in the hotel office started a chain of thoughts in his mind. He was lonely and had begun to think that loneliness was a part of his character, something that would always be with him" (133). Having moved away from those contentious voices, he then looks out the window only to see Abner Hoff, the town baker, standing at the back of his shop pretending not to hear someone calling to him from the front. Seth Richmond interprets the baker's look ("an angry sullen look" <133>) according to community interpretations of the baker: ". . . the fits of sullen anger for which Baker Goff was noted" (133). This interpretation immediately becomes part of his own self's desires: "Now, as he stood in the half-darkness by the window watching the baker, he wished that he himself might become thoroughly stirred by something . ." (133).

It is precisely this remarkable interpretive intimacy that constitutes the "feeling of place" in *Winesburg, Ohio.* It is not the characters' language nor especially apt physical description which results in this especially fine realization of small town American life at the turn of the century. Rather it is the characters' alertness to these human textures of space's boundaries, a sort of human geography. Each of Winesburg's citizens formulates his own psychological life through imaginative fictionalizing of his fellow citizens. The psychological lives, the self hoods, of the citizens of Winesburg, are inseparable from each other.

So far I have been talking mainly about the characters' awareness, the web of intimately connected fictions, that create a sense of place. But it is also the reader's sense of connections which help to fashion sets of unities that in turn stand for place. Repeated contexts and settings (such as Tom Willy's saloon), repeated activities (berry picking, discussion of Tony Tip's chance in a coming race) become the formal equivalent of our own familiarity. For readers such repetitions, especially in the related tale format, carry the force of a past felt more than actually remembered so that an early reference to the berry pickers in "Hands" constitutes a sort of memory which resonates with subsequent references. The narrator and the reader share also repeated images and scenes which form various communities of specialized feeling or suffering. For example, we link Louise Trunnion's attempt to satisfy her own vague psychological spiritual hungers through sex ("Nobody Knows") with the young Elizabeth Willard's sexual adventures which expressed her own spiritual restlessness ("Mother"). Later when we see Louise Bentley have her note of yearning misunderstood as a sexual invitation ("Surrender"), we see another instance when the sexual act is, in effect, a man's aesthetic misinterpretation of a woman's more complex message of selfhood. "Louise Bentley took John Hardy to be her lover. That was not what she wanted but it was so the young man had interpreted her approach to him."

Winesburg is made up of a number of such communities of experience as distinctly separate in their emotional costumes and language as ethnic communities. For the reader (and for the narrator) they form unities out of the apparent chaos of isolations, unities which cut across social, gender and age boundaries. When we speak of community in *Winesburg, Ohio* we refer, I believe, to this extraordinary system of interlocking and overlapping communities of experience.

No such communities can exist in the Chicago sections of those first two novels because Anderson cannot imagine the lives of the city's citizens, cannot adequately imagine how they came to be. In Caxton, Iowa, the narrator is constantly in danger of being diverted from his protagonist, Sam McPherson. There rich stories compete for his attention, draw him away from Sam McPherson, threaten in fact the novel form which depends on the intense preoccupation with the protagonist. In a sense it can be argued that in order to continue to write a novel, Anderson had to move his hero out of the village because inside that village the narrator knew him too well or to put it another way knew others so well that he wouldn't have been able to keep his mind simply on him.

When Sam McPherson reaches Chicago he stays in a rooming house, the Pergrin house, where three of the eight tenants are from Caxton. The rooming house serves as a sort of half way house for the transition to Chicago. There the "thoughts and talk of the town (Caxton) pervaded the house and crept into every conversation" (*Windy* 114). The boarding house acts as a sort of aesthetic delaying technique which allows Sam and the narrator to adjust to the new world. When he and the narrator begin to encounter citizens we are struck by two things: first, when we do meet characters who have some sort of a story, some bruise where the sweetness has gathered, almost always that grotesqueness, which of course is their humanity, belongs to a past, a life disconnected to the city. For example, Major Eberly, the father of Edith and Janet Eberly, is a recognizable Anderson grotesque but his story remains severed from the emotional lives of his daughters. Janet, Sam's crippled confidante, becomes a tiresome, vacuous affirmer of tiresome vacuous truths because those truths are not rooted in a social or psychological context. We don't quarrel with them but she is dead, lifeless.

But even these disconnected grotesqueries are few. We are mainly struck by how dull and unexciting, uninteresting and undifferentiated these stories appear to be, the few that we actually are allowed to hear about. We perhaps might explain what I've been calling Anderson's failure of imagination as a comment on history. The grotesques that we meet in Chicago, the ones connected to Chicago all have the same story—they want to make money. The soul's hunger for power, for success, the American "success disease" as Anderson called it (*Letters* 24), is expressed in only one way—the desire for money. In Winesburg each of the grotesques is marked by this same soul hunger, this same compelling need to distinguish himself from the common clay; but there is an extraordinary range for expressing the various superiorities—from Mook Wilson's dream of raising ferrets to Wing Biddlebaum's glorified teacher raised above an adoring community of students; from Wash William's misogyny to Alice Hindman's obsessive fidelity. But in Chicago, everyone seems the same. Anderson might argue, and in fact has so implied in these first two novels, that the real tragedy of history and industrialism is this aesthetic sameness of the city's citizens.

The problem with Chicago is that we can't (or Anderson can't) manage to distinguish among its hideousnesses. When describing the special ugliness of the street where Beaut McGregor lives in Chicago, "the street was complete in its hideousness" (*Marching* 54), the narrator goes on to say that the Great West Side of Chicago has hundreds of such streets" (*Marching* 54). And that is the problem; the ugliness repeats itself without variation, becomes ineffective and uninspiring. The undifferentiated ugliness of these city streets is then contrasted with the "inspiring" and "dreadful loveliness" (*Marching* 54) of Coal Creek, also the result of industrialism but remembered in a distinctly realized tableau which dramatizes the forces of history.

Faced by the sameness of the human stories, the undifferentiated hideousness of their lives, there is no digressive urge on the part of the narrator. Like his characters who are disembodied, disconnected to the life about them, he (the narrator) is trapped, in a sense, inside their disembodied consciousnesses. Chicago remains a city seen only from the outside, its voices unheard, its stories not relished.

Winesburg, Ohio is, of course, exactly the opposite. There the digressive impulse has been integrated into the formal structure. In fact the related tale format can be seen as the formal expression of an extraordinary intimacy with the community's myriad patterns of experience. This intimacy manifests itself in a form which insists on and allows for a pure democracy of engagement, both sympathetic and intellectual, a form which through its repetitions makes us see Mook Wilson the idiot as a spokesman for George Willard, makes us see the slatternly Louise Trunnion acting out the same drama of womanhood as the superior Elizabeth Willard and the intellectual Kate Swift.

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NOTES

1. I must admit that "sense of place" is a peculiarly subjective issue. Kenny Williams, for example, apparently feels that Anderson is successful in this regard: "In addition to the expected general allusions to crowds, tall buildings, and other manifestations of urban life, the novel transmits a sense of place by specific references to fixed landmarks and recognizable sites." (52) I may be merely pitting my subjective response against hers, but I would argue that sense of place cannot be established by place names alone, and moreover that those who are familiar with the "place" in question are perhaps not the best judges for they carry the place with them, easily invoked by the simple mention of a street name.
2. This is another point that I would contest with Professor Williams. Her argument depends too often, I think, on the easy opposition of illusion (the city's glittering promise of material success) to reality (the spirit breaking poverty, the greedy corruption, the ugly slums and the sin-filled streets). In fact the city as repository of corruption has always been a companion mythology, existing alongside the more optimistic Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches mythology. To assume the reality of the "real" as it is represented by the catalogue of urban miseries is one aspect of a familiar romantic paradigm.

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON AND MIDWESTERN LITERARY RADICALISM IN THE 1930s

DOUGLAS WIXSON

> "We are in the new age. Welcome, men, women and children into the new age.
> Will you accept it?
> Will you go into the factories to work?
> Will you quit having contempt for those who work in the factories?"
>
> —Sherwood Anderson, "Machine Song: Automobile"[1]

In the course of exploring a group of writers who contributed to little magazines published in Moberly, Davenport, Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, Peoria, and other Midwestern towns during the 1930s I discovered, not surprisingly, that Sherwood Anderson's name was invoked, sometimes deprecatingly but more often appreciatively. Critics and literary historians of the 1930s tend to gather the work of writers on the left whose subject-matter involved working-class people into a loosely-defined category called "proletarian literature." It was a term the writers themselves frequently used without knowing for sure what it meant. "Proletarian" was a politically loaded term suggesting alignment with a Communist-oriented cultural movement in the 1930s that viewed society from a class perspective. To young radical writers like Joseph Kalar, Jack Conroy, Robert Cruden, Warren Huddlestone, Meridel Le Sueur, Sanora Babb, Joseph Vogel, H. H. Lewis, Paul Corey, and Ed Falkowski, proletarian sounded like a foreign import poorly translated into American working-class life: they used it without fully appreciating its origin or implications. Class, on the other hand, had unmediated meanings grounded in personal experience.

Possessing little Marx and less Engels, the Midwest literary radicals drew upon indigenous traditions of protest and progressive thought in responding to economic crises and the perceived failure of government to curb or eliminate them. The generation of Midwest radicals who came of age in the 1920s and produced most of their work in the economic Depression that caught them in its coils responded to the proletarian movement feelingly without participating in the ideological discussions taking place "east of the Hudson," the expression the Midwesterners often used to indicate, from their perspective, the geographical location of East Coast intellectuals, implying both the latter's propensity to fruitless debate and their blindness with respect to events and people in the hinterlands. The pragmatic Midwesterners had little patience with long-winded discussions of political theory in John Reed Club meetings and New York "coffee pots." Conroy liked to say that he had no interest in counting how many Marxian angels could dance on the head of a pin.

Fostered by editors like H. L. Mencken, John T. Frederick, Conroy, Richard Johns, Ben Hagglund, Noah Whitaker, Dale Kramer, Kerker Quinn, Frederick Maxham, and others, the Midwest radical writers hoped to carry on the work of Dreiser, Norris, and Anderson in laying bare the realities of Midwest existence.[2] Like Sherwood Anderson before them, the young literary radicals viewed themselves as "untutored Midwestern story tellers." Distinguishing them from Anderson, on the other hand, were issues of generational difference and historical circumstance—and the fact that Anderson's work achieved wide acclaim while theirs came under the shadow of literary oblivion during the Cold War which witnessed the decline of critical realism, as Maxwell Geismar points out, and the repressive effects of de facto censorship.

In a letter to his literary pen-pal in 1924, Warren Huddlestone, Joe Kalar describes the effect of first looking into Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. Kalar had sold his collection of *Lone Scout* magazines to purchase Modern Library editions of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Whitman's poems.

> At times /Kalar writes/ I come upon a writer whom I envy. Then I bewail my apparent crudities—not realizing for a moment that I am seventeen and but starting out on my literary career, while the other is at the height of his creative power. There are very few present day writers that I feel I will not be able some day to surpass. Anderson is the greatest American today. My

> admiration for Ben Hecht is in the decline. Anderson, one feels, has guts to him. His stories flow deep, if slow. He has a solidity to him that is admirable. I am not well acquainted yet with Dreiser as yet—though I intend to be soon. Dreiser and Anderson are the leaders. . . .

And in a subsequent letter, Kalar compliments Huddlestone's story patterned on Anderson's "I'm a Fool":

> I can't forget "A Perfect Fool," and the other story that you were so kind as to let me peruse. In them there appeared to be the kernel of a slumbering genius, a writer with talent who could take up the work when Anderson makes his exit, and do it well.
> (Kalar 134-5)

Kalar and Huddlestone were two very young Midwesterners at the time who "met," as most of the Midwest radicals did, through little magazines that served as circuits of communication connecting isolated young men and women living in small towns throughout the Midwest. Kalar, like Huddlestone, submitted juvenalia to the *Lone Scout*, the *Bohemian*, and other ephemeral magazines.

Born in a Slovenian community in northern Minnesota, Kalar had trained to become a teacher but abandoned the profession after a year in isolated Koochiching County. Unable to find employment as a journalist, he worked in paper mills and saw mills. During brief "proletarian nights"—to borrow the title of one of his poems—between days of factory labor, he slaked off the residue of flowery diction and preciosity, the "Victorian hangover," as the radicals called it. Kalar began submitting his work to the new crop of radical magazines appearing in the late 1920s and early '30s—*New Masses, Rebel Poet, Anvil, The Left.* The aesthetic of early Depression-era "proletarian" writing called for narratives deriving from personal observation and experience, written with vigor and conviction. Personal narrative and documentary were welcomed. Factory life provided Kalar plenty of material; his writing quickly lost its jejeune romantic coloring on "the anvil of experience."

Huddlestone, raised in Kokomo, Indiana, likewise got his start as a writer submitting pieces to the *Lone Scout* magazine, a publication of the Lone Scout organization which was the rural equivalent of the urban Boy Scouts except that the Lone Scouts gave attention to intellectual development. The publication served as a networking center for youngsters with literary aspirations living in widely scattered locales. An avid reader, "Hud," as he was known, assisted his father, a housepainter, until work dried up in the early Depression. Unwilling to burden his parents, Hud tramped around the United States, hungry and homeless, an experience that supplied material for sketches and stories submitted to editors such as Conroy and Malcolm Cowley. What attracted Kalar and Huddlestone to Anderson's writing was the possibility that an "untutored" young person from the provinces might learn his craft through emulation and sharp observation. There was also the important question of form. Anderson had demonstrated, in fact argued, that "formless" story methods do greater truth to life than do formal techniques such as plot. "Life" was something the radicals were receiving in heavy doses in the early Depression. But how best to write about it?

The notion of writing as learned craft rather than divinely inspired "art" was attractive to the Midwest radicals who in demystifying literature hoped to make it more accessible, and in a sense, more democratic. Anderson had himself apprenticed his writing craft in trade journals: to Kalar, Huddlestone and others he was an "ordinary" person who, possessed of a wealth of experience, desired to communicate his vision of things from within the crucible of small Midwestern life—a crucible that continued to produce young people who longed to break out of their isolation and make contact through their writing. Anderson's example was instructive and emboldening.

Growing up during the early years of industrialism in this crucible of experience—the villages, mining camps, and small factory towns of the midlands with their sense of settled community—was an experience that the radicals shared; yet each had a different story to tell. Moberly, Missouri was, like Clyde, Ohio, a railroad division point whose central feature was the railroad station where destinies were engaged in the arrivals and departures of townspeople and visitors. Born in a nearby coal camp, Jack Conroy entered an apprenticeship in the Wabash railroad shops in Moberly at age thirteen. The railroad reading room and the Carnegie library in Moberly were his "university."

As recording secretary of his union local, Conroy submitted his earliest writings to the *Railway Carmen's Journal.* Kalar, Huddlestone, Conroy, and other Midwest radicals grew up when the older rural economy and craft trades that Anderson celebrated in his early writings had begun to yield to industrial development and small town commerce. The radicals, with the possible exception of Meridel Le Sueur, raised no protest to the fact of industrialism itself, only to the terms on which it functioned. The "mad awakening" (131) that Anderson writes about in *Poor White* when "the giant, Industry, awoke" (133) was to them an established fact; a handful of intellectuals and artists-expatriates had fled to Europe in the 1920s seeking to escape it, but the Midwest literary radicals had no such option. They were exiles in their native land. Worker-writers like Kalar and Conroy felt the realities of industrialism in their aching muscles and heads numbed by noise and routine—the same mind-numbing dullness that Anderson had complained about in his factory iobs. After the failed Great Railroad Strike of 1922 in which Conroy, along with thousands of other striking railroad workers, was forced to find other employment, there seemed to exist little choice but continue as laborer. Writing would have to take place in-between factory shifts and during periods of unemployment, made anxious by family responsibilities. Moreover, to attempt to escape working class existence, as their intelligence and ambition appeared to prepare them to do, meant to abandon the very conditions which nurtured them and their writing—and which they hoped to improve through efforts to give them expression.

Anderson had found little literary matter in the talk of his fellow workers. They "talk vilely to their fellows," he recalled later (*A Story Teller's Story* 148-50). "There was in the factories where I worked and where the efficient Ford type of man was just beginning his dull reign this strange and futile outpouring of men's lives in vileness through their lips. Ennui was at work. The talk of the men about me was not Rabelaisian" (148). Elsewhere, in commenting on Whitman's and Sandburg's views on workers, Anderson wrote: "already the democratic dream had faded and laborers were not my heroes" (107). The rejection of factory existence and of workers' values that Anderson expresses in his autobiography, *A Story Teller's Story,* seemed irrelevant to the Midwest radicals who, in the early years of the Depression, hoped through revolutionary struggle to forge a new existence for the factory worker, the dispossessed "proletariat." On occasion, however, they expressed disgust with their fellow factory workers—their behavior and aspirations—in private correspondence. Their status—both worker and writer—placed them in an ambivalent position vis à vis other workers. This position was both a strength and a source of conflict.

In *Worker-Writer in America* I describe the ambivalent status, the necessary counterpart of the "proletarian night" in which the worker-writers struggled to create something of literary worth, had to do with the fact that although they worked in factory jobs and were of working-class origins, they thought like intellectuals. Accepted by their work colleagues on equal terms, nonetheless, they were perceived as being different in this respect: they read, liked to discuss ideas, and aspired to write. Forsaking the sleep of the ordinary laborer, they pursued their literary ambitions at night. The paradox of their situation was that unskilled labor left their minds hungry for intellectual stimulus, yet bodily fatigue demanded rest. During feverish nights, the brief interstices during which literary activity could occur, the worker-writer is released to his imagination. This liminal space, the correlative of necessity and aspiration distinguishes worker-writers from their factory colleagues. The hyphenation joining worker and writer engenders ambivalences within which creativity takes place.

More familiar to the general reader are the ambivalences incurred when working-class subjects cross class boundaries, such as occurs in the work of D. H. Lawrence, Jack London, and Sherwood Anderson. Literature has generally treated labor as a prison-house from which the bright youngster seeks escape through intellectual achievement. The situation of the worker-writer, however, engenders ambivalences of another kind, reconciled in the uneasy balance between the two statuses, worker and writer. Conroy felt comfortable in the familiarity of working-class existence—the existence in which Anderson felt alienated—which he was loath to exchange for something uncertain. Both Kalar and Conroy felt this. What promise in the early Depression years was there, after all, for a better life? In the streets were jobless white-collar professionals along with dispossessed factory workers. Kalar and Conroy craved recognition. Authorial status, reputation, would, on the other hand, introduce new ambivalences, the loss of the hyphenated status, separation from the workers' world. Such choices and constraints define their literary work and energize their writing.

The longing, isolation, frustrations expressed in Anderson's work, such as *Winesburg, Ohio,* spoke to the Midwest radicals in immediate ways. The breakup of communal life, such as Conroy had experienced in Monkey Mining camp and the Wabash shops, meant the loss of intimacy, of human connection. The Communist Party attempted to offer programs to build new futures and new existences among the dispossessed. Party rhetoric, Conroy perceived, would not salvage the destruction of a communal past, a conclusion that Anderson likewise reached after a brief period of support to Party ideals and signing of manifestos. A workers' culture, however rude, had once existed, at least as Conroy, Le Sueur, Ed Falkowski and other radicals had known it. Any authentic tradition on the left must reflect actual experience, not wishful thinking, and serve to reproduce the cultural memory of shared values lost with the destruction of older work communities and the emergence of a new consumer-oriented mass culture. The project the radicals set before themselves was to help establish rhizomatous circuits of communication and explore new forms appropriate to a workers' culture worth its name. This renewed culture would release workers from their spiritual prison, empower them. And it would occur within the conditions that presently existed—those that Anderson had accurately perceived in earlier manifestations—the cheap subdivisions, the false consciousness, the "new order of industrialism" when "thought and poetry died or passed as a heritage to feeble fawning men who also became servants of the new order" (*Poor White* 63-4).

This new culture would give voice to "those who do not write." New forms were required, ones that corresponded to the conditions of working-class existence: the fact that most workers did not write or indeed even read literature; that the lack of time and education denied them access to literary tools; and that traditional literary forms were inappropriate. Most of the Midwestern radicals' early writing attempts had been instinctive affairs, unstructured and impressionistic, full of flowery diction and preciosity. Now Kalar and others began to talk about the "sketch" form. Anderson provided both models and justification for their efforts. The "plot-less" stories of *Winesburg, Ohio* reflected things as they were lived: "it was certain," Anderson wrote, "There were no plot short stories ever lived in any life I had known anything about" (*A Story Teller's Story* 162). The problem, as Anderson saw it, was that people had got the notion from their reading of how a story should be told, and in the process "spoiled the tale in telling" (255). Plots were a trick, he wrote, to lure readers. They were of little use in exploring the buried lives of Midwest small-town people: a story should take its own course.

Anderson and the radicals turned to the same sources for the "plot-less" sketch: the Russian storytellers. In an attempt to define a proletarian aesthetic, American radical critics often borrowed—sometimes inaccurately—from the Soviets. The word *Ocherkism,* a virtually untranslatable term meaning the making of stories or sketches, appeared in a 1931 *New Masses* essay written by Leon Dennen, an American living in Moscow. Among the forms available to the literary radicals was the "sketch." In the Soviet Union, the sketch form—*skaz*—had served an important literary purpose during the first Five Year Plan: Gorki defended it vigorously against critics who viewed it as a lower form of art. Actually "sketch" stories were a very old form in Russian literature: in Gogol's "The Overcoat," plot is reduced to the minimum, personal tone is correspondingly stressed, signaling the "transfer of focus from the narrative plane to the discourse plane" (quoted in *Worker-Writer in America* 298). Mikhail Bakhtin underscored the oral quality of the sketch, "a socially or individually defined manner of storytelling" in contrast to literary professionalism. The storyteller is not a literary man, Bakhtin wrote; "he usually belongs to a lower social strata, to the common people . . . and he brings with him oral speech" (*Worker-Writer* 298).

It is, however, a simplification to suggest that the Midwest radicals borrowed the idea of the sketch from Anderson alone—or the Russians. There were models and examples much closer to home. E. Haldeman-Julius, for instance, penned sketches of working class life for socialist publications like the *Milwaukee Leader* and the *Western Comrade.* Most little magazine contributors were familiar with Jack London's sketches of working-class life on the bum and with Mike Gold's *120 Million.* The plotless nature, the personal narrative quality of the sketch, preserving accents and idioms, was a form suited to the purposes of the Midwest radicals. Conroy, Kalar, Le Sueur, H. H. Lewis and others made abundant use of it in their writing. H. H. Lewis's prose narratives represent perhaps best the early proletarian sketch in their subjective evaluation of events and in communicating the personality of the narrator through the writing. They are scenes, really, not fully developed narratives.

It was inevitable, given the immediacy and authenticity that Conroy sought for the *Anvil*, that the sketch form would predominate. It was the form that most fiction writers begin with: it need not be an amateur effort, however, as Gogol's work (and Anderson's) had shown. It seemed eminently suited for Conroy's purposes and the time. In the pages of *Anvil* writers like Erskine Caldwell, Nelson Algren, Meridel Le Sueur, Sanora Babb, Joe Vogel, as well as others whose names have been consigned unjustifiably to the dustbins of literary history, employed the sketch form to communicate the experience of "those who do not write"—black sharecroppers, women millworkers, migrant laborers and farmhands.

Apart from the limitations of time that hampered the literary radicals, there was a suggestion that too much attention to art deprived the subject matter, drawn from life, of its vigor and authenticity. The great realist writers like Balzac had made their writing seem real, concealing their art. Literary realism, however, had become conventional, losing "a quality of authenticity," a term that to the radicals called forth the taste of dust, the grit of factory floors, and the poignancy (and anger) of families sitting on the sidewalk in front of their foreclosed homes. Conroy, Lewis, Le Sueur, and, to a lesser extent, Kalar, eschewed verisimilitude, transforming the materials of oral and extraliterary narrative to create verbal performances that call upon the reader's imaginative participation. They gave their attention to language and the manner of telling in portraying events and people, to the point that Mencken urged Kalar "to inject a little more dramatics in the episodes" (*Worker-Writer* 299).

One further point I wish to make briefly: the terms of the cultural transcription that the Midwest literary radicals contemplated were essentially social, occurring not within the solitude of the individual soul but through communication with others, something akin to Dewey's notion of "conjoint communicated experience." The voices of "those who do not write" overheard in the factories and on the streets and parks where the unemployed gathered existed dialogically on the same level as the narrator's voice. The writer's task, at least as Conroy perceived it—and I think he was joined in this by the other Midwest radicals—was to be a witness to his time, to record the inner *and* outer struggles.

There is something radically different from traditional ideas of authorship in this attitude toward writing, toward literary production. For example, in Conroy's writing the authorial voice of the text is only one among many voices existing on the same level. The literary work contains no single subject but a multiplicity of utterances in collective arrangements. Inscribed in the writing are the circumstances of its production, the situation, for instance, of the worker-writer who crosses boundaries and the domain of literature, in which his or her status is still undefined and his work, sensitive to the marginalized voices of his culture, fundamentally anticanonical.

Sherwood Anderson—by all lights one who benefitted from the traditional view of authorship with its hierarchical scale of literary prominence—wrote Meridel Le Sueur in 1936 about the necessity of transforming such a view. Le Sueur, along with Conroy, Dale Kramer, and others had embarked on the project of publishing a new magazine entitled *Midwest—a Review.* Giving Le Sueur (and Kramer) editorial advice, Anderson wrote:

> Why not really run your magazine in a new way . . . the wrongs and injustice done writers for example quite forgotten. Let us all work for it, free, but let no man sign his work. There is all this talk, as you know, of giving up individuality, etc., let's see how deep it goes. Let's see how many of us are really interested in good work, the good life, and how many only in getting printed, getting our names up.
>
> (*Midwest* 1 (November 1936):33).

Anderson's letter to *Midwest* challenged the radicals—after all, they had spoken of "democratizing" literature! It was a radical idea, to say the least, the proposal to abandon assigning the name of an author to the work. Was Anderson serious, or simply taking to a logical consequence the radicals' talk of doing away with individuality? Whatever the case, the Midwest radicals had in mind something quite different from Anderson's rather disingenuous proposal. Their project was to deconstruct the notion of authorship which privileges the dominant culture and marginalizes the work of creative people—including women, blacks, workers. The status of author in the traditional sense was closed to the literary radicals of the 1930s, owing to the conditions of literary production which they had attempted to alter and the social content of their work. If as a result of personal conviction, prevailing conditions of literary production, and economic necessity they sought alternatives to arborescent scales of literary reputation, they nonetheless, owed immense debts to those who had succeeded in ascending these scales. It is fair to argue, therefore, that the "greats" of Midwestern literature—Anderson, Dreiser, Garland—and the Midwest literary radicals of the 1930s comprise a continuous tradition of literary expression that focuses on both the social circumstances and inner lives of people in the isolated villages and factory towns of midland America. Theirs was a considerable achievement, for in different ways they all strove to give voice to "those who do not write." The tragedy is that in doing so, the literary radicals, rightful epigones of the great naturalist-realist writers of the Midwest, themselves fell into obscurity, so that the task before us now is to recover them—and through them regain those lost voices.

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NOTES

1. Anderson's poem first appeared in *Unrest, 1931,* edited by Jack Conroy and Ralph Cheyney, along with poems by Midwestern literary radicals such as H. H. Lewis, Joseph Kalar, Kenneth Porter, W. D. Trowbridge, and Jim Waters.
2. Little magazine editor and Conroy's *Anvil* printer, Ben Hagglund, found a model in Anderson's Marion, Virginia newspaper. See *Worker-Writer in America* 278.

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S CREATIVE DISTORTION OF HIS SISTER STELLA'S CHARACTER IN *THE MEMOIRS*

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In his *Memoirs* Sherwood Anderson describes a moment in his youth when he got so close to his sister Stella that one could imagine a whiff of incest in the air. It was an idyllic summer night in Clyde, when Sherwood took his lonely, beautiful sister for a walk, pretending at her suggestion that he was a suitor, James by name, come to court her. Born in 1875, a year before Sherwood, Stella as a young woman had become heavily burdened by housekeeping for four of her brothers still at home, the youngest being ten when their mother died in 1895. In the course of walking out that evening, some months after their mother's death, Sherwood and Stella held hands; soon afterwards, he held her in his arms and kissed her. Later, in a field of yellow wheat "like a little yellow lake with waves running across it," she put her arms around his neck and drew his face down to hers. "Do you love me, James?" she whispered. Then she kissed him on the cheek, drew quickly away from him with a nervous laugh, and the couple returned to their usual brother-sister relationship for the rest of the walk (106-08).

Later in the *Memoirs* it became clear that Anderson turned against his sister, accusing her of exploiting her brothers financially in her seemingly endless pursuit of education, and even worse, of becoming a religious fanatic. Though there may be some slight grounds in reality for the first of these charges, the second, so far as I can determine, is unsupported by outside evidence. Anderson's older brother Karl (1874-1956) summed up the matter succinctly in his retrospective account of the family shortly before he died: "What he [Sherwood] wrote of sister Stella . . . I am in complete disagreement with. I never felt he

was quite fair to a beautiful girl and a fine, spirited character. He wrote of her as a religious fanatic ("Memoirs of Sherwood Anderson by his Brother Karl" 14). Karl's judgment is confirmed by Stella's daughter, Margaret Hill Schroeder, who in a telephone interview insisted that there was nothing extreme or fanatical about her mother's religion, that in her religious life she was simply part of her generation (October 1, 1994).

What are some of the factors entering into Anderson's creative, distorted portrayal of his sister? Much of this artistic distortion came from the fact that Anderson, as Eleanor Copenhaver Anderson noted in an interview some years after his death, was anti-church, so he tended to be severely judgmental about church members, even those in his own family. In Marion, Virginia, he attended church only for weddings and funerals; when others were in church, he would sit on the courthouse steps (74). He was also pro-alcohol, or anti-Prohibition, and his sister had had the ill grace to leave the Presbyterian church in Clyde to join the Methodist church in Chicago some years later. Of all the Protestant churches, the Methodist was most closely linked to the cause of temperance in the early 1900s. According to *The History of American Methodism*, "the temperance movement was in many respects the *characteristic* Methodist battle of the century, the one which most fully enlisted the interest and enthusiasm of the church" (Miller 330 quoted from Halford E. Luccock *et al.*, *The Story of Methodism* [2nd ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1949] 465). Adding insult to injury, Stella in 1910 married John H. Hill, a Methodist lawyer and leader of Prohibition in Chicago who about 1905 had founded Little Point Sable, Michigan, on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan as a family summer resort, a kind of little Chautauqua where the consumption of alcoholic beverages was forbidden and where noted temperance speakers drew Sunday afternoon crowds at the outdoor Tabernacle by the lake (Mulvihill 24-31). By 1915, Hill was so much associated with the cause of temperance that he ran a spirited though unsuccessful campaign for mayor of Chicago on the prohibition ticket (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 7, p. 1). It is little wonder that Sherwood is reported to have visited Little Point Sable on only one occasion, some months after his first wife Cornelia moved there with the children in the spring of 1913, when the Anderson marriage was disintegrating (*Oceana Herald*, August 15).

Not all of Anderson's distortion of his sister's character can be explained in terms of his hostility to the church and to the cause of temperance, however. Unconsciously he may have projected onto the Stella of his imagination the idealistic, revolutionary impulse buried deep within the author himself in his early years. At the core of his idealism, gradually abandoned for more modest artistic goals, was the belief in the task of the artist to somehow nurture a radical transformation of society through revolution. In Anderson's own words: "For a time I did dream of a new world to come out of some revolutionary movement that would spring up out of the mass of people" (Sutton 354 quoted from Anderson's letter to Paul Rosenfeld ca. 1921). Just how this revolution would come about is not clear, but presumably artists like Anderson were not only to be interpreters but also catalysts of radical change.

As William Sutton noted, Anderson could not see or would not admit that Stella's alleged "mania" for "doing something for the world" through her commitment to the Christian gospel was different from his own early commitment only in the form it took (*The Road* 572). Having once been almost as close as a lover to his sister, he turned against her till eventually he found her religious life so "deeply embarrassing" that he saw her less and less. Perhaps by seeing her seldom he crowded out his memories of the naive dreamer of revolution he himself had once been.

In creating a Stella of the imagination in place of the sister recognizable to the other members of his family, Anderson was following a creative process that he recognized as his own, but not uniquely his. Indeed he maintained that any artist worthy the name, like any ordinary human being, does the same thing as he lets his imagination wander. Only the strict realist, whom he contemptuously labeled "the note taker," does otherwise in his writing. For according to Anderson, although art has to be grounded in reality lest it starve, it soon leaves reality behind ("Man and His Imagination" 66-67).

Aware of the discrepancy between his portrayal of his family and his family as perceived by its other members, he jocularly maintained in his autobiographical *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* that he would avoid the problem by creating a Tar Moorhead to stand for himself. He knew, of course, that this transparent subterfuge was no solution to the problem, for his relatives, and indeed all his readers, would substitute the name Sherwood Anderson for Tar Moorhead when they read this unabashedly autobiographical work, the follow-up to his equally autobiographical *A Story Teller's Story*, which appeared two years earlier in 1924. In the conclusion of his foreword, Tar, that is, Anderson, claims to have settled comfortably into writing as "a born liar, a man of the fancy" but of course he lies when he calls himself a born liar, for much of what he writes about his family as well as himself is notably insightful and accurate (xviii). The tension between what Anderson called realism or factual representation, on the one hand, and imagination or fancy on the other, remains a constant in all his writing, but especially in the avowedly autobiographical works like *A Story Teller's Story*, *Tar*, and the *Memoirs*. The challenge to the Anderson scholar is not merely to respond to the imaginative dimensions of Anderson's art but also to recognize, as Anderson himself did, the severe limitations of his art as a record of everyday reality.

His portrait of Stella in the *Memoirs* is a case in point. Though many aspects of her life can of course no longer be reconstructed, those that can, suggest that Anderson's treatment of his sister was so lop-sided as to be grotesque, with much of the effect of her allegedly hysterical personality being achieved by distortion or omission of the perfectly normal characteristics and events that made up most of her life. And though little can be accomplished now by rehabilitating the reputation of Anderson family members long forgotten, we can still sympathize with Anderson, fearful of being rejected by family and friends whose twisted but still recognizable features he created, and with the victims of his art, outraged to see their reputations ruined by his portrayal of them as gnarled, twisted and sometimes sour apples. In his foreword to *Tar*, Anderson writes comically but with an undertone of pain about his own and his literary victims' discontents:

> We modern writers have got a reputation for boldness . . . but none of us like to be knocked down or cut on the street by former friends or by our relatives. . . . Now it happens that my friends and relatives have already stood much from me. I am forever writing of myself and dragging them in, re-creating them to suit my fancy. . . . It is dreadful really having a scribbler in the family. Avoid it if you can. (x-xi)

Returning now to Anderson's conception of Stella, we note two principal charges of religious fanaticism against her that need to be answered—that she claimed in a letter to Sherwood to have had a visit from Jesus, and that sometime before her death in 1917 she wrote a tract, printed and distributed by a tract society, entitled "The Story of a Christian Life." In this tract, according to Anderson, she represented herself as a Christian martyr sacrificing her own life by bitter hard work for the education of her brothers, who had gone on to become successes in painting, business, or other fields. This idealized portrait of Stella, totally unrecognizable to her brothers, or at least to Sherwood, was presented in the form of a eulogy to Stella by the minister conducting her funeral service in a north Chicago Methodist church on May 12, 1917, with the brothers present. Later the minister explained to Sherwood that he had drawn his material for the eulogy from the above-mentioned tract. Anderson took her writing of this tract to mean not only that Stella had conveniently forgotten her brothers' sacrifice for "six, seven, perhaps eight years" to send her as a student to the University of Chicago, but also that she was suffering from delusions based on a Christian martyr complex already evident in the letter about her vision of Jesus (*Memoirs* 140-41). Elsewhere in a letter to Marietta Finley about Stella, he wrote: "She got into a queer, fantastic notion that she was a kind of representative of Christ on earth" (*Letters to Bab* 94).

Though Stella's letter has not survived, Sherwood's resume of the classical mystical experience described in it is characteristically vivid:

> It was at night, and she was in her bed. She had been thinking of her brothers, blaming us, had been filled with a great bitterness against us but, while all of this was going on in her, as she lay in the darkness in her room in a boarding house in the town, there had come a great light into the room.
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> She said that it was Jesus himself and that he had taken her into his arms. He had caressed and comforted her but he had also told her of the wrong she had done to us. It was Jesus, she said, who had told her to write the letter, asking my forgiveness for the scene she had made in the restaurant [in Chicago, when Sherwood as spokesman for the brothers announced that they were going to stop supporting her studies]. (*Memoirs* 140)

Stella must have written this letter sometime in the academic year 1909-1910, when she was a lonely woman of about thirty-four teaching high school in Rock Island, Illinois, and boarding at 901 20th Street, in a house that still stands (*Rock Island City Directory* 1909.) Apart from some early teaching in Clyde, this is the only year she taught, following which she married Hill on June 15, 1910. According to Sherwood in the *Memoirs*, the marriage was not a success, for she felt that all men, including her husband, are carnal, whereas she had been "touched by the hand of Jesus himself." Weeping in a moment of confession, she reportedly told her brother that her life might have been better if she'd been Catholic; she should have been a nun (*Memoirs* 140).

Quite another picture of Stella emerges from her mature student days at the University of Chicago, from the reminiscences of her daughter, and from occasional references to her in a weekly newspaper published in Shelby, Michigan, near Little Point Sable. From these gleanings one may establish a composite picture of Stella as an outstanding student with a sustained interest in theology among wide-ranging academic subjects, but with no narrow or obsessive interest in mystical experience or with the Christian ideal of self-abnegation. Stella also emerges as a wife with a more normal relationship with her husband than Anderson allows, and as the proud and loving if sometimes quick-tempered mother of a charming daughter Anderson never mentions. Especially in the newspaper reports of her and her husband's role as leaders of the summer resort at Little Point Sable, Stella appears to be a woman of diverse interests beyond the world of the intellect, including social events such as amateur skits and theatricals and nature walks on which she served as expert guide to the hidden fastnesses of Little Point Sable.

In the first place, to set the record straight, Stella Anderson attended the University of Chicago not "six, seven, perhaps eight years," as Anderson states, but five years, from 1903-1908. She was graduated in June of that year with a Bachelor of Philosophy degree. After her first year in the College of Literature, she transferred to the Divinity School for academic work in the New and Old Testaments. "In the Autumn of 1905 she began a more diverse study . . . German, History, English, Psychology, Geology, even two courses in Household Administration but continued to register for work in the field of New Testament" (Aug 10, 1994 letter of Maxine Hunsinger Sullivan, University Registrar). According to one official I consulted at the University, her grades were As and Bs. Several years after Stella's graduation, her sister-in-law Elizabeth Sewell Hill writing in the *Oceana Herald* of July 10, 1914 summed up Mrs. Hill's (i.e. Stella's) impressive qualifications to serve as one of the Little Point Sable summer Sunday school workers: "Some of her work at the U. of C. was along the line of Bible Study, part of it with Shailer Mathews, some with Prof. Moulton, but much with President Harper. She has done much of the work of the regular divinity students." A signal honor she received in her senior year at the University was being chosen as one of President William Rainey Harper's ten female student aides, along with the ten male aides selected (Interview of Margaret Hill Schroeder on September 15, 1994).

According to her daughter's childhood memories, Stella maintained a civil and considerate if not impassioned relationship with her husband, who left her free to pursue her own interests. Typically John Hill would come home relatively late from his downtown Chicago law office, then he and Stella would have dinner and exchange the news of their day. On Sundays Stella attended St. James's Methodist Church with her husband, as years earlier she had attended the Presbyterian Church in Clyde with her mother. Stella also took her daughter to Sunday school. But according to Margaret, there was nothing extreme or fanatical about her mother's religion; she was simply part of her generation in her religious life, whereas Sherwood was anti-church. (In an aside on the Anderson brothers, Margaret observed that Karl was her mother's favorite; not Sherwood, whom Stella would have liked to kick in the pants.)

Though Margaret, born on March 18, 1911, was only six years old when her mother died, she remembers her as well liked, and careful about her grooming, with beautiful, clear skin and dark eyes. She was very kind, with a good sense of humor, and a certain way of throwing her head back when she laughed that her daughter has inherited. But Stella also displayed a flaring temper on occasion, as when she spanked her daughter for crossing a busy street without an adult to go with her, or when she ferociously scolded some boys she caught holding Margaret's head under a water tap when they tired of her tagging along behind them.

Margaret also remembers her mother's death on May 10, 1917, following gynecological surgery for removal of a tumor "as big as an alarm clock," to quote Aunt Bessie Hill, the woman primarily responsible for rearing Margaret after her mother's death. The funeral was held two days later in the Sheridan Road Methodist Episcopal Church, Chicago, with interment in Memorial Park Cemetery, Skokie, Illinois. Margaret sat in the front row with her father at the funeral service and rode to the cemetery afterwards with Sherwood and his brothers (*Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 12, 1917, p. 17; letter of Irene Z. Noparstak; interview with Margaret Hill Schroeder, September 15, 1994).

Aunt Bessie's weekly Little Point Sable column in summer issues of the Shelby *Oceana Herald* supplement our portrait of Stella as a lovable and loving human being with diverse interests that go beyond her intellectual, academic and religious pursuits. In the *Herald* she is variously reported as participating in a skit to celebrate the Glorious Fourth, giving a dramatic rendition of "Mary Had a Little Lamb," hosting a "little tea party for the little Margaret," her three year old daughter, redecorating an old house, and decorating the Tabernacle for a special service. To achieve the desired effect she used "white and gold and white and yellow daisies" in the Tabernacle (July 10, 1914; July 24, 1914). Perhaps the entry which best captures Stella's love of nature and her love of people, written up in Aunt Bessie's lushest rhetorical style, is that of August 15, 1913: "Mrs. John Hill, official guide, is making many happy memories for our guests in piloting them to the hidden recesses of woods and shore by unfrequented wood-paths and some unexplored ones. A trip to and down into "Dead Man's Gulch," via the wonderful south shore, is a trip that can hardly be duplicated anywhere on earth." Do we have here the emerging portrait of a religious fanatic? I think not.

In conclusion, some comment is called for on her reported vision of Jesus, and on the tract Stella wrote.

Though visions are not a necessary part of mystical experience, they often accompany it. Whether or not accompanied by visions, mystical experience involves the dropping away of screens of consciousness in "spirit persons" specially open to psychic or other-worldly influence. Whereas most of us have hardened rinds of consciousness, spirit persons, of which Stella must have been one, have rinds that are unusually permeable (Borg 34). In achieving intimate communion rather than unity with the divine, Stella's mystical experience was distinctively Christian, as was that of her contemporary, the Chicago poet William Vaughn Moody, who in two of his poems, "Good Friday" and "The Second Coming," described waking visions of Jesus much like hers (8-11, 115-20). Unlike Eastern mysticism, Christian mysticism "teaches a union of love and will which always retains the distinction between the Creator and the creature" (Parrinder 161). In its erotic overtones also, Stella's vision of Jesus is characteristic of theistic mysticism as found in patriarchal Christianity. Thus when Jesus takes Stella in his arms in her bed, caressing and comforting her, her experience resembles that of many other Christian mystics, including St. Teresa of Avila (Parrinder 169). Commenting on the erotic aspects of theistic mysticism, the scholar R. C. Zaehner writes: "There is no point at all in blinking the fact that the raptures of the theistic mystic are clearly akin to the transports of sexual union, the soul playing the part of the female and God appearing as the male (Parrinder 170 quoting Zaehner, *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* 151 f.). In the light of her reported vision, one must conclude that Stella truly was a "spirit person," a kind of person anathema to Sherwood in spite of or perhaps because of his early revolutionary idealism and his early numinous experience in the corn fields, as described in *Mid-American Chants* ("I have heard gods whispering in the corn and wind" and "I have come to the face of the gods through the cornfields." Quoted by Sutton 406).

With Stella, too, though there is no denying the powerful impact of her vision, it may have been a unique event in her life, so disturbing that she eventually drew back from mysticism to settle into the more conventional life of mainstream Methodism in her later roles of wife and mother. At any rate, we never hear of her having another vision, nor does her daughter recall her ever referring to the vision she had, or mentioning any religious experience apart from the ordinary experience of worship in church and Sunday school.

A last word about Stella's tract, entitled "The Story of a Christian Life." Sherwood Anderson must have been well acquainted with the once-popular sub-genre of Christian literature known as the tract, dramatically proclaiming through the personal experience of redeemed sinners that "ye must be born again." If acquainted with this sub-genre, then he must also have known that its hallmark was sensational, melodramatic anecdote rather than strict fidelity to what Anderson, in another context, called the realism of the note taker. Thus there may be something disingenuous in his finding fanaticism in Stella's tract, which exhibits the same creative imagination that he justified time and time again in his own writing. For the tract writers, like Anderson himself, had learned that "a well-told lie is worth a thousand facts" (Verhoeven 36).

To put the matter another way, the tract writers were convinced that reshaping one's personal experience in a tract is justified by the souls to be saved in fields ripe unto harvest, especially when, as in Stella's case, the title of her tract does not commit her to writing autobiography, but merely to telling "the story of a Christian life."

In sum, the evidence of the *Memoirs* supplemented by outside sources leads inexorably to the conclusion that although Stella had a profound mystical experience sometime in 1909-10, her subsequent life, in Little Point Sable as well as Chicago, was that of a devout but quite conventional Methodist of her time and place, far removed from the religious fanaticism which Anderson, following his imaginative bent, perceived in her.

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THE DURABILITY OF *WINESBRUG, OHIO*

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In 1919, just after the end of the war that presumably changed the Western World and much of the Eastern for all time, Booth Tarkington won the first Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *The Magnificent Ambersons.* His novel, published in 1918, has seldom been in print since. Also in 1919, Sherwood Anderson published *Winesburg, Ohio,* a work that was overlooked for the prize in 1920—no work of fiction received the award that year—but that, ironically, has never been out-of-print since its publication. Currently, more than seventy-five years after its publication, four trade or text editions are in print in the United States as well as two limited collectors' editions and other editions in Europe and Japan.

But the durability of *Winesburg, Ohio,* is not merely marked by its continued and continuing presence in publishers' catalogues, nor is it marked by the apparent permanence of its place in the syllabi of American literature courses in America as well as in France, Germany, Japan, the Peoples' Republic of China, and beyond. Nor is that durability marked by the fact that its title remains, more than seventy-five years after its publication, synonymous with the mythical Midwestern small town in that long moment before nineteenth-century American innocence and individualism were overwhelmed by urbanism, industrialism, and internationalism, although those factors reflect its permanent place in our literature. Its durability is, more than anything else, the result of Anderson's accomplishment: in it, he reconstructed the form of the short story, he rewrote the language of literature, he defined the nature of the human experience in our time, and he combined them to create a work of literary art that in whole as well as in each of its twenty-six parts remains central to the literary heritage that this century will transmit to the future.

Anderson's fourth book, in a literary career that had begun three years before at age forty, following two mediocre but promising novels and a collection of free verse, *Winesburg, Ohio* is the work to which critics turn and return in any discussion of Anderson's work. Called by Anderson a novel in a form invented by himself as well as a collection of tales, it has been, from its publication in May, 1919, to the present, dissected, analyzed, interpreted, understood, and misunderstood perhaps more than any other single work in this century. At the same time, in the dozens of editions published here and abroad from that time to this it has been and continues to be taught and to be read, even as it has taught and continues to teach succeeding generations of young writers in English as well as the dozens of languages into which it has been translated.

The list of writers here and abroad who have acknowledged their debt to Anderson is itself nearly a who's who of significant twentieth-century writers, ranging from William Faulkner to William Saroyan, from Thomas Wolfe to John Steinbeck, from Flannery O'Connor to Toni Morrison. When the English critic-novelist H. E. Bates wrote at Anderson's death in 1941 that "*Winesburg, Ohio* is the first directional signpost of the contemporary American short story . . ." and that "The ultimate effect of Anderson's pioneering example was . . . to have . . . immense creative results," he anticipated Faulkner's statement in 1956 that Anderson ". . . was the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on . . ." as well as Herbert Gold's statement the next year that Anderson ". . . has helped to create the image we have of ourselves as Americans" and the more recent comments of Nobelists Saul Bellow and Toni Morrison of Anderson's impact on their formation as writers. No other American writer of this century, not even Hemingway, who repudiated Anderson even as he later repudiated his contemporaries, has been cited and paid tribute to by his successors as often as has Anderson and his most important work.

But influences and tributes, however significant, are not the test of durability; that can only be determined by the writer's accomplishment as he or she attempts to fuse language, form, subject matter, and idea into a work of literary art and a statement of literary truth. Anderson's work is such a fusion of his native Midwestern language, that which he gave to Hemingway and the mainstream of American literature; of his intuitive knowledge that form follows the structure of human life and of the oral tradition that antedates any conscious literary attempt; of his awareness that the people, places, and experience of his own Ohio youth are in microcosm those of his time and ours; and of his certain knowledge that each of us, however twisted or distorted, however grotesque each of us has become, is worthy of understanding, of compassion, perhaps even of love.

Anderson knew intuitively, before he read *Huckleberry Finn*, perhaps as late as 1916 or 1917, that the language and people he had known in his youth and the experiences that gave form and purpose to their lives were the substance of literature, a realization that Mark Twain helped reinforce when Anderson began in late 1915 to write the stories that were to become *Winesburg, Ohio*. He and Twain shared a common Midwestern background, a language of indelibly unique words and rhythms; they shared, as well, a common oppressive religious experience and a taste and ambition that reflected their time and place in a primitive nineteenth-century America. Twain perfected his craft through small-town journalism, to the detriment of his literary form, that, even in *Huckleberry Finn*, detracts from its ultimate achievement. Anderson was luckier; his father was a storyteller in the oldest of literary traditions, and Irwin Anderson gave him a sense of form as indelibly and clearly imprinted on his psyche as was the image of Windy McPherson that Anderson used in his first novel but that he repudiated when he realized how great was the debt that he owed to his father.

But the durability of *Winesburg, Ohio* is not the result of the sum of what Anderson inherited, absorbed, and experienced; it is the sum of the elements of his art, of the elements that his successors learned from as they pursued their own literary fates. Of most importance in his own work and theirs are language, form, and subject matter, specifically, in Anderson's case the place that was to become Winesburg, Ohio, in all its manifestations, and the people who were to become the grotesques not merely of Winesburg but of the varied American landscape of his successors.

Anderson's language, for the first time in the stories that were to become *Winesburg, Ohio*, makes no pretense of being what anyone might consider literary. Instead, in the sense which he attempted to articulate in his first two literary essays, "The New Note," published in *The Little Review* 1 (March 1914) and "An Apology for Crudity" in *The Dial* 63 (8 November 1917), Anderson is determined to reproduce the living language, the easy rhythms, the idiomatic vividness, and, yes, the crudity of the language that had come across the mountains and up and down the rivers with the people who had settled what Anderson was to call Mid-America, the land of the great rivers between the mountains. This was the language of the people who had built the towns and then stood, poised for the moment that was to become *Winesburg, Ohio,* before plunging into a new century and a new America. The new note for the new American writer Anderson saw himself to be is, he wrote, "as old as the world, rooted firmly in the simplicity and honesty and truth" that lives in the writer's own mind. The writer must, he wrote, if he or she would be true, "live as the men of his time live," . . . "share with them the crude expression of their lives . . ." and transmute it into living experience.

To deny or avoid or subvert this crudeness is, Anderson said, to settle for slickness rather than truth, whether in language or structure or both. There are no plots in human life, he insisted on many occasions, and to impose such an artificial structure on the sequence of interrelated events, experiences, and relationships, some of them significant, most of them not, but all of them intensely human and personal, is to deny the ultimate truth of human existence. Conversely, to recognize that truth is, in the language and life of the people of Winesburg, to know that each of us must live and die alone, that, like the twisted apples left behind by the pickers in the orchards north of Winesburg, we have been distorted by life into a knowable but intangible sweetness, that, as a lonely and alienated Dr. Parcival makes clear to a young George Willard slowly becoming sensitized to Anderson's ultimate human truth, "everyone in the world is Christ, and they are all crucified," that, as Hal Winters learns in the fields outside of town, "'Whatever I told him would have been a lie.'"

These are the secrets of the lives of the people of Winesburg, the people who came across the mountains and up and down the rivers to found the town and the farms around it, the people of whom Anderson wrote in 1922, "In our father's day, at night in the forests of Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and on the wide prairies, wolves howled. There was fear in our fathers and mothers, pushing their way forward, making the new land."

Now, with the land cleared, crops planted and harvested, towns founded, to flourish or die, railroads built, a war fought and won, the people of Winesburg contemplate the future and the world beyond, and, Anderson wrote, "When the land was conquered fear remained, the fear of failure. Deep in our hearts the wolves still howl." It is this fear of failure—failure to love, to understand or be understood, to grow, to come to terms with the demands of life, whether of the town, the psyche, the spirit, or the glands, or the unknowable fusion of all of them—that makes his people what they are.

These are the people of Winesburg, the people whom Anderson knew in his youth—in Clyde and Springfield and Elyria, Ohio, in the Army during the Spanish-American War, in his Chicago boarding house, in his travels as an advertising salesman, the people he had determined to define and to celebrate in his work from the start, those whom he transmuted in *Winesburg, Ohio* into the most durable American myth and the basis of the durability of *Winesburg, Ohio.*

These are the people, too, whom Anderson called grotesques, those whom life and circumstance and the peculiar fear that defines our Americanness and our uniqueness have transformed into a denial of our natures, our identities, our worth. These are the people, too, who led Anderson to his original title for the book, "The Book of the Grotesque."

In the prefatory sketch in which he preserved the original title, Anderson defines in mythic terms his people as he knew them. In the sketch he describes an old writer, living alone, who has a dream one night that is not a dream. In it he imagines that all the people he had ever known were passing before his eyes, and each, he realizes, is a grotesque:

> The grotesques were not all horrible. Some were amusing, some almost beautiful, and one, a woman all drawn out of shape, hurt the old man by her grotesqueness. When she passed he made a noise like a small dog whimpering. . . .

At the end of the procession the old man crept out of bed and began to write what became his never-published "The Book of the Grotesque." In it he defined, in mythic terms, the origin of the people's grotesqueness: that in the beginning of things there were no truths in the world, but there were a great many thoughts. In time, people made truths out of the thoughts, and each truth was attractive and beautiful, so beautiful that each of the people took one of the truths as his or her own and determined to live by it. As each did so, the truth became a lie and the person became a grotesque.

This mythical beginning was, like all myths, an attempt to explain the unexplainable, both in terms of what Anderson had come to believe about the people who had touched his life and his own experience in writing "Hands," the first of the stories in the book, that of Wing Biddlebaum. In several similar versions, Anderson said that he had been sitting in his Chicago boarding house looking out the window at the passersby. He watched an old man walk past, and suddenly he knew the truth of the old man's life, the essence beyond his appearance. He went immediately to his room and in a frenzy he wrote the old man's story, following it with the other stories, all written with the same fury in the following days.

Like his prefatory sketch, Anderson's telling of the origin of "Hands" and the other stories is substantially myth rather than objective fact, of what he later described as "the spirit of something" that transcended objective truth. From the beginning of his writing career to the end of his life, Anderson was not concerned with facts or with things or with events but with whatever it was, however vaguely it might be defined, that gave them purpose and meaning. His story of the writing of "Hands" and the rest of *Winesburg, Ohio* may not be literally true, but it is true to its spirit, just as each of the stories in the book allows us to glimpse, however briefly, whatever it is that makes each of his people what he or she is, that makes each of them a grotesque, distorted by thoughts become truths become lies into something worthy of our compassion, deserving of our understanding and love.

In each of the stories Anderson's focal character—not central character because often the central character is George Willard, the young reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle,* whose hunger for life becomes, in Anderson's terms, "The hunger to see beneath the surface of lives"—is spiritually and sometimes physically a grotesque, one whose life and dreams find their only expression in alienation, in isolation, in frustration. In each of the stories Anderson penetrates the surface of life, in many cases synonymous with the apparently placid life of the town, in a moment of intuitive insight that reveals in that moment whatever it is that makes his focal character the grotesque that he or she has become, possessed of a dream, of a faith or a feeling or an idea that he or she can neither achieve nor express nor share. Whether isolated physically or spiritually or both, each must, whether understanding it or not, recognize that language, whether of words, of touch, of love, is forever inadequate to transcend the barriers of isolation; that can only be done in moments of mutual acceptance.

Thus, in "Hands" Wing Biddlebaum reaches out to touch another in a language foredoomed to misunderstanding and he himself is doomed to a lonely, fearful life on the edge of Winesburg; in "Mother" Elizabeth Willard can only hope that her son George will understand what she cannot say; in "Paper Pills," Dr. Reefy, the skillful and sensitive country doctor, knows the ineffectuality of words, the impermanence of love, the transience of ideas except in such moments. In "Nobody Knows," George reads Louise Trunnion's plea for acceptance as an invitation to a sex adventure and he is ashamed; in "The Teacher" he nearly misreads Kate Swift's reaching out of her confusion, and in the dark of his room he suddenly realizes that "I have missed something. I have missed something that Kate Swift was trying to tell me;" finally, in "Sophistication" he learns, in a quiet, uncomplicated moment with Helen White in the dark, empty fairgrounds, that neither words nor sex nor touch, none of the languages by which people reach out in their attempts to transcend isolation, can be assured of understanding. It can only be done in moments of mutual human acceptance. At such a moment, Anderson tells us, both George and Helen, on the verge of adulthood and a new age, realize, independently of each other, what can only be inadequately expressed in words. " 'I have come to this lonely place and here is this other' was," Anderson tells us, "the substance of the thing felt."

George and Helen have found, for a moment, whatever it is, in Anderson's words, that "makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible." But for most of the people of Winesburg such moments never come. Joe Welling is forever doomed to choose and define the ideas that the townspeople find ridiculous; Alice Hindman must accept her lonely, conventional fate, and Wash Williams will forever tap inconsequential messages on his telegraph key; Seth Richmond will continue to try desperately to reach out, but he'll never know how; Elmer Cowley will always strike out in a frustration that can never be vanquished, and Tom Foster's drinking permanently confuses dream and reality. Finally, in "Departure," when George boards the train for Chicago taking with him bits and pieces of his life in Winesburg, each of those he leaves behind remains vividly individual and alone, permanently etched in the time and place, the memory and imagination, of America in Anderson's time and ours.

These are the people, too, who give life to Hemingway's Paris and Pamplona, Faulkner's Yoknapatapha County, Carson McCullers' Sad Cafe, which might have been located on the Trunnion Pike, just west of Winesburg. They are the people, too, of Farrell's Southside and Bellow's northside Chicago, of Wright Morris's Nebraska and Fred Manfred's Siouxland, of the later Ohio recreated by Herbert Gold, Don Robertson, and Toni Morrison, even those of my own Titus, Ohio. Of all the elements of memory and imagination and talent out of which Anderson created Winesburg, Ohio, none is more durable than the people who throng its lonely but crowded Main Street on Saturday nights, who watch the lonely trains come and go, who watch the lamplighter Turk Smollet make his lonely rounds, who know in their hearts what each of us must learn if we are to survive and that so few of us do. In each of the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson has touched and defined, however briefly, whatever it is that makes human life what it is; there can be no more durable element in the story or the literature of our time.

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