

## UNIT 7

### SHERWOOD ANDERSON (1876-1941)

#### *THE UNTOLD LIE & I'M A FOOL*

### I. INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Sherwood Anderson brought simultaneously the instincts of a naïf and the earnestness of a devotee to bear on the craft of writing and became one of the important catalysts in the literary world of the 1920s, stimulating other prose writers to achievements beyond his own. He also produced in *Winesburg, Ohio*, one of the masterpieces of American prose fiction.

Born in southern Ohio near the Kentucky border, the third of seven children in a family that drifted north through small Ohio towns as his father turned from harness-making to ad jobs and sign-painting. In 1894 they settled in Clyde. His memories of that rural town were to provide the setting for *Winesburg*. His memories of his mother's stamina(endurance) and tenderness, and of his father's wanderlust(impulse toward wandering), his boozing(drinking), and facility as a storyteller, were to appear, altered and magnified, in his three volumes of highly imaginative autobiography: *A Story-Teller's Story* (1924), *Tar* (1926), and *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs* (1942).

His family's migration and his jobs as farm hand, stableboy, and worker in a bicycle factory made for irregular schooling, and he dropped out of high school before graduating. He worked with his brother in Chicago, served in the Spanish-American War and enrolled for a year in the Wittenberg Academy, where he became acquainted with editors, artists and advertising men at Crowell Publishing Company. In 1904 he married the first of his four wives,

and moved to Ohio, where he managed a mail-order business and two paint firms, living the life of a successful businessman but writing fiction in secret and finding that his business career and his writing craft were increasingly incompatible.

In 1912 he suddenly disappeared for several days, reappeared in Cleveland in a state of nervous collapse, and after a quick recovery made the partial break with the business world that he later dramatized repeatedly in his autobiographical essays and memoirs. He became acquainted with serious writers of the Chicago "renaissance" such as Floyd Dell, Carl Sandburg, and Theodore Dreiser, who encouraged his serious ambitions. His reading had included figures such as Poe, Whitman, and Twain, British poets such as Keats and Browning, and English novelists such as Arnold Bennett and Thomas Hardy, and the English writer of characters sketches George Borrow. Now he read D.H. Lawrence, Sigmund Freud, Turgenev, and Gertrude Stein. His first major publication was *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916), the story of a man who flees a small Iowa town to engage in a futile(vain) search for life's meaning first as a businessman, then as a vagabond among the common people, finally as father to three adopted children. In *Marching Men* (1917), a charismatic lawyer, combats the dehumanization of an industrial society by organizing its masses into phalanxes(groups of people) which threaten their further dehumanization.

The first tales of *Winesburg, Ohio*, began to appear in 1916, before they were gathered in 1919, and acquired the integral coherence of a novel. His models were the comparably related sketches in Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* (1852) and Edgar Lee Masters's collection of elegiac(sorrowful for past) portraits in verse, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915). But Anderson's volume is unique. Each character is a "grotesque" whose conduct and usually

fumbling(awkward) attempts at communication are warped(imperfect) versions of some reality or "truth", whose realization is never achieved in the life of the community. The pathos of the inhabitants' isolation and quest for fulfillment is given focus by the maturing consciousness of the young reporter and future writer, George Willard, who discovers his ties to the community in the process of deciding to leave it. The groping(a tientas) attempts of the townspeople to articulate their feelings and communicate with others -the repressed yearnings(longings) and obsessions which surface fleetingly(transitorily) or explosively from the depths of their experience- are surrealistic or expressionistic in their effects, captured by the narrative's simple but bold(intrepid) imagery and the stylization of Anderson's prose, which becomes a species of elegiac(sorrowful) poetry. The simple vernacular diction and the declarative sentence structure, the repetition of words and phrases, the recurring restatements of ideals and feelings have at once the power of colloquial speech that Anderson admired in Twain and the "pure and beautiful prose" that he found exemplified in Gertrude Stein.

Anderson's best writing in *Winesburg* was matched only by his short stories (collected in *The Triumph of the Egg*, 1921; *Horses and Men*, 1923; and *Death in the Woods and Other Stories*, 1933) and, to a lesser extent, by the novel *Poor White* (1920), the story of an inventor who brings industrialization to a rural town only to find that it blights(frustrates) the community and that his business success is no answer to his alienation from his fellows. The two novels about sexuality, *Many Marriages* (1923) and *Beyond Desire* (1932), and *Kit Brandon* (1936) were neither critical nor popular successes. Anderson published a volume of rhapsodic(rapturous; emotional) free verse (*Mid-American Chants*, 1918), a volume of prose poems (*A New Testament*, 1927), four plays (*Winesburg and Others*, 1937), as well as collections of essays on

social issues (*Perhaps Women*, 1931, and *Puzzled America*, 1935) and essays on literary figures (*No Swank(elegance; pretentiousness)*, 1934). But more important were in the 1920s and later his series of autobiographical volumes that centered on his own professional career and his attempt to define the writer's vocation in America and on his impact on other writers. While Hemingway had mocked Anderson's style and cult of the primitive in *Torrents of Spring*, he had been inspired by the "simplification" of Anderson's prose to make his own, similar break from the more elaborate conventions of earlier fiction. Anderson's treatment of violence and his "grotesques" provided models for Nathanael West in the 1930s. During two periods, in 1922-23 and 1924-25, Anderson had known William Faulkner in New Orleans and had shared an apartment with him. Faulkner later said that Anderson's encouragement(aliento), and his example, had enabled him to see that he could rely on the uniqueness of his own talent as a writer and on the milieu of his own native region for material.

Anderson's own search for roots in his native land was never satisfied. He moved with his third wife to Virginia in 1927 and bought two local newspapers to bond his attachment to the region (editorials in *Hello, Towns*, 1929). His concern with the dislocations of modern industrialism led to his involvement in leftist political activity in the early 1930s, and his interest in public issues continued until 1941, when he died on a good-will mission to South America for the State Department.

## II. FREUDIAN FEAR IN OLD AMERICA

The myth of Sherwood Anderson -that in the middle of a successful advertising career he repudiated the money-making ethics and the regimentation of business in order to realize himself as a writer- has become part of our literary tradition, an ironic reversal of the Horatio Alger myth (~American Dream). He was thirty-six and living with his wife and three children in Elyria, Ohio. The Anderson Manufacturing Company -he was president- mixed paints and roofing compounds and sold them by direct mail advertising. He was also having marital difficulties, apart from business problems. Some of these troubles he escaped at night, when he retreated to a desk in his attic to write.

He was in his office that morning "buying and selling as usual", dictating letters, when suddenly he had a moment of terrible clarity, an epiphanal (manifestation; appearance) moment when the fraudulent quality of his life was revealed to him and he realized that he was being dishonest with words and dishonest with himself. In the first decades of the twentieth century the country was changing rapidly from an agrarian to an industrial economy with its new methods of mass production, its efficient assembly lines, its standardization of parts and of lives. In the stories he came to write, he lamented this waning (disappearance) of the pastoral life, and he warned against the shrinking significance of the human being in the expansion of industrial, urban society.

At the peak of his career, in the mid-twenties, critics hailed Sherwood Anderson as the "American Freudian", the one American writer who knew his psychology and possessed a rich fund of knowledge and experience to which it could be best applied. In *A Story-Teller's Story* (1924), the image of his father,

who was "made for romance. For him there was no such thing as a fact", possessed the same quality of vivid imagination that Sherwood was to exploit in himself: "He was a story-teller as I was to be". For his mother, Anderson felt great sympathy and love. His desire to romanticize her, to show her a heroine who struggles boldly and patiently with poverty and loved silently but sincerely, results in several idealized portraits in his early works. The "mother image" pursues him through his later years, and the fear that he may be like his father in the treatment of women colors much of his self-criticism. Anderson entertained the idea that the people of his dreams and visions might have more reality than his own physical self and the men and women who populated the ostensible world. Yet Anderson regards the dream as the artist's birthright, an image of the fancy which he may treat as he pleases. With the help of Floyd Dell, whom he first met in 1913, Anderson was soon associating with the Chicago intellectuals in their "Greenwich Village". He was present when his friends discussed Freud eagerly as a new thing, and he agreed to an amateur analysis. He was in the habit of reading widely, with no more deliberate purpose than to add to his dreams, it was his habit to search out a man's works, once they had been referred to him, or he had seen some similarity to his own way of thinking. Anderson was hailed (acclaimed; greeted) as the leader in the American fight against conventional repression; his novels appeared coincidentally with the beginning of the interest in the new psychology. He dealt with frustration, in many cases with the frustration of normal sex expression. There is some justification in noting the parallel courses of psychoanalysis and Anderson's fiction, but there seems little evidence to prove that those two courses intersected at any vital point.

His was almost a forgotten America, brought back out of the memory - the America of the old slumbering (sleeping) village towns, of religious

stirrings(agitations), of the village workmen and saloonkeepers and stablemen. No other novelist of the time gave so vividly the sense of *not* having been brought up to the constraints, the easy fictions, the veritable rhythm, of modern commercial and industrial life. His heroes were forever rebelling against the material, yet they were all, like Anderson himself, sublimely unconscious of it. It was their loneliness that gave them significance in Anderson's mind, the lies that they told themselves and each other to keep the desperate fictions of conventionality; and it was inevitably the shattering of that loneliness, the emergence out that uneasy(unquiet) twilit(alba; penumbra) darkness in which his characters always lived, that made their triumph and, in his best moments, Anderson's own. It was not his vision that was at fault, it was that human situation embodied in him, that story he told over and again because it was his only story -of the groping that broke forth out the prison house of life and...went on groping; of the search for freedom that left all the supplicants brooding(sadly reflecting) and overwhelmed.

Between the people he saw and the books he read, Anderson saw the chasm(abismo) of fear in America -of sex, of telling the truth about the hypocrisy of those businessmen with whom he too had reached for the "bitch-goddess of success"; the fear, even, of making stories the exact tonal equivalent of their lives; the fear of restoring to books the slackness (negligencia, flojedad) and the disturbed rhythms of life. For if "the true history was but a history of moments", the dream of life could be captured only in a fiction that broke with rules of structure literally to embody moments, to suggest the endless halts and starts, the dreamlike passiveness and groping(ir a tientas) of life. What did interest him was sex as a disturbance in consciousness. (Freudian)

### III. LITERARY & STYLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

According to Philip Rahv's theory, Anderson belongs to the Redskins but with Paleface blood in his veins, nevertheless; for his art is much less brutal and much more subtle than one might think. Like all Redskins in American literature, Anderson was very fond of resonant and colorful words. Anderson is interested primarily in the interior reality rather than in material appearances, and thus he emphasizes emotions, sentiments, and subjective impressions rather than sensory experience. Anderson employs a vocabulary that is limited and sometimes flat or banal. The same words are used over and over: "thing", "feel", "think", "fix"; these accord with the subjective element in *Winesburg, Ohio*. He was looking for a certain familiar tone found, for instance, in expressions like "She got nowhere" and "back of" instead of "behind".

The stories express at once Anderson's conviction that life is absurd and the love he was unable to keep from feeling for everything that exists. His art is somehow poetic; this is why he sometimes expresses himself in a prose that is rhythmical, full of assonance and musical repetition, and very close to free verse. He wrote his stories in one go, never revising, and this doubtless explains the lack of polish in his style. He preferred to rewrite a story completely rather than correct it. He believed, like the Transcendentalists and all romantics generally, in the possibility of an "organic" form, a living form growing naturally with the material that forms its substance. Anderson was essentially an inspired amateur, a romantic poet who expressed the insights (discernment; penetration) of sensibility in tales that have more or less the appearance of realism. Like all the Redskins, he was convinced that art is

synonymous with artifice and he preferred life. He was, moreover, prepared to make the necessary concessions to art so that this form might reveal itself more clearly.

Anderson's naturalism may be considered on three planes: (1) his exploration of character without reference to the orthodox moral yardstick(norm); (2) his questioning, and his quiet, suppressed conclusions as to what orders our Cosmos and what is man's place in it; (3) his social attitudes, which are left-wing and increasingly critical, as the years pass, of American business enterprise. Anderson explores two main themes: (1) discovery -as related to the recognition of Spirit, the unfolding of the world and its perception by the intuition- and (2) inhibition, which reflects the materialistic branch of the transcendental stream when it identifies spiritual and material privation, and is related to three general areas of cause and experience: the problem of growing up, the frustration, and social opportunity.

The stories of Anderson are marked by a union of surprise and insight. The grotesque is the person who has become obsessed by a mannerism, an idea, or an interest to the point where he ceases to be a Man in the ideal sense. All the gropings reveal the failure of communication in *Winesburg*. The mores(customs, habits) impose a set of standards and taboos that are utterly incapable of serving the pent-up(repressed) needs in the hearts of the people. They regard themselves with wonder and contempt while they study their neighbors with fear and suspicion. If the universe here seems meaningless, the needs and emotions of men are intensely meaningful. Anderson feels love for them and pity for their desperate and usually fruitless questing(search).

The order in Anderson's work is one of its most striking qualities, for he shows people thinking of several things at once, combining incidents in the past with present experience which now makes those incidents relevant, and

having at the same time emotions which they cannot understand while they entertain thoughts which do not do any sort of justice to their emotional states.

In his language, Anderson mixed a series of elements that he had natively at hand: (1) the "literary" (a kind of belated village Johnsonese (pompous, erudite in style) learned in the advertising experience and through his attempts to reproduce the educated language of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novelists he read -Cooper, Borrow, Austen, Wells): "Hidden, shadowy doubts that had been in men's minds concerning Adolph Myers were galvanized into beliefs" [Hands]; (2) the biblical poetic (in the use of incremental repetition; expanded, rounded cadences, and diction): "Youthful sadness, young man's sadness, the sadness of a growing by in a village at the year's end, opened the lips of the old man" [Loneliness]; (3) the American colloquial (the kind of language commonly used by the American oral story-teller): "Hal was the worst of the lot and always up to some devilment... [The Untold Lie]; (4) the English and American informal (the "middle" world of diction and syntax that is used wherever the English language is spoken): "Hop Higgins sat down by the stove and took off his shoes. When the boy had gone to sleep he began to think of his own affairs..." [The Teacher].

Though it is the fourth of these ingredients that provides the basic stock of Anderson's narrative style, it is given an air of quaintness (originality; singularity) by being constantly flavored with the other ingredients, and particularly by the biblical poetic when Anderson is seeking to express the inarticulate intensity of feeling that seizes his characters.

The most striking trait of Anderson's style is the extreme simplicity of its syntax. Most of the sentences are built according to the same rudimentary model: subject, verb, object, complement, or a variant of this scheme:

complement, subject, verb, object. Such adverbial clauses as there are are mostly temporal and widely separated. He proceeds by accumulation and juxtaposition and almost never relies on subordination. A series of independent affirmations placed end to end and strung together by innumerable "ands". (= Twain, Hemingway) The result is that the reader often has the impression of a story told by word of mouth. However, despite the monotonous and very simple structure of the sentence, and the oral character of the tales and the frequent colloquialisms, his style is not really familiar, and only rarely does it have the spontaneity and naturalness of the folk tale. In fact there is a kind of stiffness(rigidity) or dignity about it. It is really stylized speech. This is especially obvious in Anderson's strong aversion to both relative and personal pronouns. He prefers to repeat nouns, a device which confers both independence and dignity on each sentence.

Strangely enough, there is no difference in tone or manner between passages of pure narration and dialogue; nor is there any between the utterances of the various characters. He wanted to re-create life so that his stories would be the fruit of imagination rather than exact observation. In short, it is a style that lacks style. Although Anderson admired Gertrude Stein, he never tried to write "perfect sentences" as she did.

Like Whitman, he wanted to sing his "Song of Myself", but in the form of stories instead of poems. He has a primitive idealism, a spoiled romanticism like that of Rousseau: we could be all innocent and pure in our crafts if the machines of America and the fates that bring machines did not cripple us. Marriage, work, friendship were beautiful things; but the gray series of furnished slum(barrio bajo) rooms, in which he wrote, enough rooms to fill a city, were his real home. Writing letters and brooding(sadly reflecting) behind his locked door, he idealized love, he idealized friendship. Despite

appearances, Anderson is fundamentally a lyric poet rather than a story-teller. The author is not interested in painting the outside but in suggesting what is inside. There is a peculiar significance in *hands* for Anderson. They are symbols whose meaning is revealed near the end of the book: they signify communication between human beings. Love passes through them from one human being to another. Quite the opposite of the stereotyped images which are part of everyone's language, these metaphors constitute the personal language of Anderson and serve to express what he feels at the deepest level of his being about people and things.

Women are not women in Anderson's stories. For him, they have a strange holy power; they are earth-mothers, ectoplasmic(telekinetic) spirits, sometimes succubi(she-devils), rarely individual living creatures. He is strikingly the perpetual adolescent in love with love rather than with a specific girl with changing flesh. The primitive emotions of childhood are the raw material of all poetry. Sometimes the indulgence(complacencia) of them to the exclusion of the mature perspectives of adult life prevents Anderson from equaling his aspiration and own best work. He has helped to create the image Americans have of themselves as Americans.

#### **IV. THE UNTOLD LIE (1916-1919) (<-WINESBURG, OHIO)**

The *Winesburg* stories are "oral", but are not merely oral stories written down. Anderson solved the problem of telling stories in which nothing much happens externally by using a narrator-bard whose sympathetic vision is never far away. His bard is like the writer in the prefatory "Book of the Grotesque" (and not unlike Anderson's conception of himself as a "story-teller"). He is a

wise old man who has "entered into lives" and who has kept alive the "young thing" (imagination, fancy) within him that in that state between sleeping and waking (the daydreaming, creative state) brings a vision of truth (out of which the artist makes his art). For the old writer it is the truth that all the people he has known are grotesques (esperpento, deformado).

Far from being the intrusive character that criticism has complained about, the narrator of *Winesburg* is central to the stories he tells. But if Anderson's narrator seems to share his creator's traits, he is, nevertheless, a persona(máscara) that makes possible Anderson's use in story of a frame of reference that might more appropriately have been used in poetry. Anderson uses his narrator's mixture of inarticulate wisdom and naïveté in a controlled way that constantly suggests more than is said. This inarticulateness seems appropriate to his spiritually confused characters and to a narrator whose wisdom is more of the heart than the head. Also the pervasive(omnipresent; ubiquitous) presence of the quirkily(caprichosa, raramente) religious author-narrator determines the essential characteristics of Anderson's prose style.

In its fundamental quality, *Winesburg* is nonrealistic; it does not seek to gratify the eye with a verisimilitude to social forms in the way a Dreiser or a Lewis novel does. It is a book largely set in twilight and darkness, its backgrounds heavily shaded with gloomy(melancholy, sullen) blacks and marshy(pantanosos) grays -as is proper for a world of withered(atrofiados) men who, sheltered by night, reach out for that sentient(sensible) life they dimly recall as the racial inheritance that has been squandered away. The two dozen central figures in *Winesburg* are hardly characters in the usual novelistic sense. They are not shown in depth or breath, complexity or ambiguity; they are allowed no variations of action or opinion; they do not, with the exception of George Willard, the book's "hero", grow or decline. The world of

*Winesburg*, populated largely by these backstreet(de barrio) grotesques, soon begins to seem like a buried ruin of a once vigorous society, an atrophied remnant of the egalitarian moment of 19th-century America. *Winesburg* may be thus be read as a fable of American estrangement(enajenación), its theme the loss of love. The book's central strand(hilo) of action, discernible in about half of the stories, is the effort of the grotesques to establish intimate relations with George Willard.

Possibly, one of the stories that does not fit into the pattern of the novel as a whole, is "The Untold Lie", a beautiful story measuring the distance between middle-age and youth. *Winesburg* is an excellently formed piece of fiction, each of its stories following a parabola of movement which abstractly graphs the book's meaning. Through a few simple but extremely effective symbols, the stories are both related to the book's larger meaning and defined in their uniqueness. Most of the stories are further defined by symbols related to their particular meanings. Though it is written in the bland(unperturbed; soso) accents of the American story-teller, it has an economy impossible to oral narration because Anderson varies the beat of its accents by occasionally whipping(mixing) them into quite formal rhetorical patterns. The ultimate unity of the book is a unity of feeling, a sureness of warmth, and a readiness to accept *Winesburg's* lost grotesques with the embrace of humility.

In *Winesburg*, the narrator has essentially the role of a wise epic poet as it has come down into modern times in a long line of English and American story-tellers. This permitted Anderson the close relationship of teller to audience, the authorial "wisdom", the apparent artlessness of episodic structure, the moving back and forth in time, and the moving in and out of the story as narrator and commentator.

"The Untold Lie" has most of the basic characteristics: the laying at the beginning of blocks of background before the story proper is taken up; the apparent wandering away from the story because of some associational interest provoked by the mention of a name, object, or place; the frequent authorial intrusions in the form of "insights"(discernimiento, lucidez) and self-dramatizations; the shifts in time, and the occasional stopping of the story to lay in apparently overlooked materials necessary to the "point" of the tale.

In the opening page of "The Untold Lie" we are summarily told the names of the two characters -Ray Pearson and Hal Winters- where they live, their occupations, ages, marital status. Ray is characterized swiftly as "an altogether serious man...quiet, rather nervous...with a brown beard and shoulders rounded by too much and too hard labor"(202). When he turns to Hal, Anderson asks us -as if we might know him- not to confuse him with Ned Winters' family, a respectable family, for Hal is "one of the three sons of the old man called Windpeter Winters who had a sawmill(serrería) near Unionville, six miles away, and who was looked upon by everyone in *Winesburg* as a confirmed reprobate"(202). In oral telling the mention of any person, even though he may have little relation to the story, commonly results in a digression. One of the ten pages of the story is an account of Windpeter's death, which serves a purpose: to compare his moral status with that of the weaker and more respectable Ray Pearson. To get back from the digression the teller has to address his listeners: "But this is not the story of Windpeter Winters nor yet of his son Hal...It is Ray's story...into the spirit of it"(203).

It is not until page four that the tale promised us begins with "And so these two men, Ray and Hal, were at work..."(204), but the story is immediately interrupted by the teller's addressing us again to insist upon the reasons for Ray Pearson's "distracted mood": "If you knew the Winesburg

country in the fall and how the low hills are all splashed with yellows and reds you would understand his feeling"(204). From this point on the story is presented dramatically with only two more brief interruptions; the latter of these -"Ray Pearson lost his nerve and this is really the end of the story of what happened to him"(208)- is disarming(encantador, conciliador), for the one page that follows is really not the afterthought(late occurrence) it appears to be; the teller is enjoying his craftiness(skill, cleverness).

In "The Untold Lie", two men tenderly meet in order to talk about whether one, the younger, should marry the girl he has made pregnant. It would be a lie to say that the life of conjugal sorrows is merely a life of conjugal sorrows. The story finally breathes the sadness, the beauty, the necessary risks of grown-up desire. "Whatever I told him would have been a lie"(209), he decides. Each man has to make his own decisions and live out his chosen failures of ideal freedom.

Only in *Winesburg* did Anderson manage with some success a structure larger than the single story. Whatever the original conception might have been, a reading of *Winesburg* suggests that the novel was superimposed upon the tales at a rather late date and that the earlier pieces were not reworked to fit as well as they might into a new structure. In sixteen of the twenty-four stories George Willard appears as either protagonist or secondary character; in three other, such as "The Untold Lie", he is just mentioned as a passing remark: "Boys like young George Willard and Seth Richmond will remember the incident..."(203).

The writing of a novel and a book of stories in the same volume results in some inconsistencies, but it also explains certain matters: some unnecessary endings, the sometimes ambiguous and limited meanings. Though less successful as a novel than as a collection of tales, *Winesburg* is a kind of

portrait of the Midwestern artist as a young man. Between the opening story in which Willard is fascinated by the love and fear expressed in Biddlebaum's hands and the closing story in which he leaves a *Winesburg* which is to "become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood", much has happened to him. In spite of Willard's unifying function, it is not, really, as a novel that *Winesburg* has its success as a totality. Structurally, like all of Anderson's longer work, it has serious flaws(imperfections): they are held together almost only by the consistency of the author-narrator's attitude and a theme, toward subject and audience.

#### **V. I'M A FOOL (1922) (<-- HORSES AND MEN)**

The authorial self-effacement(autodesaparición, borrado) of the frequently anthologized "I'm a Fool" and "I Want to Know Why" is distinctly uncharacteristic. In the brief decade when he wrote his best stories, he did look homeward. In his attic room in a boarding house(pensión) near Michigan Boulevard, he returned in his imagination to his unhappy childhood, to the years he spent growing up in Clyde, Ohio, and to the memories of his dour(adusta), self-sacrificing mother and of that smiling failure, his father. Though he always chastised(castigar) himself for it, he never really got over his feelings of shame because his mother had to take in washing and because other louts(gamberro, patán) ridiculed the clownish antics(bufonadas) and drunken vagaries(extravagancies) of his cornet-playing(dreamer) father.

Impressionism involves two or three attitudes and literary modes which can be related to naturalism only by careful definition. To this end, Anderson presents the mind of the character receiving impressions rather than judging,

classifying, or speculating; and because it attempts to catch the experience as it is received, that experience will not have a reasonable order but a chronological or associational one.

He makes a virtue of beginning a story at the end and ending it at the middle. He gives information which would create suspense of the conventional sort and yet contrives to produce a surprise and a satisfaction at the end of his story by a psychological revelation or a sharing of experience that suddenly becomes coherent out of the chaos of the narrator's apparently objectless rambling(confusion). Often what begins as incoherence emerges as the disorder caused by emotion which the story discloses and which indeed turns out to be the cause of its telling. Such a story is "I'm a Fool" (*Horses and Men*, 1922). Its indignant narrator, who is all mixed up(bewildered; confused) about money, horses, and girls, tells about a day at the races and his meeting with a truly nice girl who is strongly attracted to him. He tells her a pack of fantastic lies in order to impress her and of course comes too late to the realization that he loves her and can never go back to her and endure the shame of admitting to all the lies he has told. The rambling(intrincada) story represents the ignorant and disorganized character of the narrator. It reveals his naïveté and his ludicrous(ridiculous, absurd) confusion of values. It also shows how the absence of "manners" makes it impossible for him to establish an easy intimacy with the girl. And finally it represents the universal in this provincial story -the tendency of all young men to brag before girls and be ashamed of themselves afterwards. The "disorderly" arrangement of the details in the story finally appears quite orderly, for it is perfectly suited to the kind of experience that it renders.

In addition to identifying new flavors of experience and providing a new order for story-telling, Anderson's impressionism quite obviously questions

the established social and moral orders. What the true reality is remains a mystery, and characters continually discover that the world is complex, that evil and good are inseparable, and that their simple ideals are inadequate.

Young boys growing up and merging into manhood is the central concern of the stories for which Anderson is celebrated today. It's the linking theme of his classic cycle of related stories about Winesburg, Ohio, and it's the subject of the three famous monologues which recapture his summers at the race tracks: "I Want to Know Why", "The Man Who Became a Woman", and "I'm a Fool". In these stories Anderson temporarily abandoned his author-narrator role for the objectivity of the uneducated main character telling his own story; these are the pieces that most closely link Anderson to Mark Twain and Gertrude Stein.

In these oral narratives, the race-track setting and the sounds and earthy smells of the stables, the closeness of horses and men, represent the easy, intimate and idyllic relationship which Anderson was convinced existed between human beings and the natural world before the onslaught(ataque violento) of the machine. The stables and the race track (like the raft(barcaza) and the river in *Huckleberry Finn*) are places of contentment(satisfacción) and escape, Edenic oases for the Adamic adolescent. Horses in this context embody the noble fulfillment of purposeful nature; they are dependable and honest and fine, whereas adults are ambiguous, devious(enrevesado, tortuoso) and phony(false). Each of these three monologues is a tale of resistance to the loss of boyhood innocence and of reluctant(disinclined) initiation into the complexities of manhood, especially the shadowy complexities of adult sexuality.

The emotional tone of these tales, on which so much of their lasting appeal is based, mixes boyish bewilderment(aturdimiento, perplejidad),

frustration, and vulnerability. The boy-man in each suffers from feelings of inferiority (social and sexual), and he speaks from the depths of his being, confessing his burden of guilt and confusion "in order to get everything straight", to come to terms with it and to subdue(dominate) it forever. His pitiful search for the meaning of the experience, for understanding, is his reason for telling the story, for taking us into his confidence.

He blames his foolishness on the dude(fellow, guy) in the Windsor tie and on being slightly drunk, not on the unresolved conflict of values which is tearing him up inside, the conflict between life in the stables and life in the grandstand(tribuna). When he capitulates to the social importance of appearances, he too can put up(display) a good front(appearance); it's easy to deceive, when one is at the mercy of economic and social force beyond his control. It is only after, on the beach, against the background of a clump of roots "sticking up like arms", that he realizes that his denial of his origins, of who he is, will hold him back from the fulfillment of the tenderness, the love he feels. But he never understands why.

The main character challenges in dramatizing "I'm a Fool" are to convert the oral monologue into a dialogue and a series of incremental dramatic scenes, and to rearrange time in an orderly manner. The unskilled speaker in the story, unable to control his responses, rambles(wander; roam) and runs on, in and out of time, telling about events which took place in the past, and events which took place on the day of the races (which was some time ago, before Prohibition), and telling about now, his compulsive desire to make himself look cheap. That the story should adapt to a dramatic form as faithfully as it does is further evidence of Anderson's painstaking(laborioso, concienzudo), original craftsmanship(art; skill), and of his finesse(delicacy, refinement) in making colloquial conversation -essentially an ancient way of story-telling-

serve the needs of modern fiction and drama. In Anderson's dramatic monologue, the artless(sin artificio) rambling(divagación) of the boy-man artfully(artísticamente) pushes the action forward all the time.

"I'm a Fool" was sold to the *Dial* for less than hundred dollars, because in the mass market editors found it unfinished, vague, groping(inseguro). But so was life for Anderson and Virginia Woolf was later to call "shell-less"-stories that exposed the vulnerable areas, the secrets, of thwarted(destrozadas, frustradas) lives, and that illuminated the obscure realm of personal relationships.

By the example of the crisis in his own life, Sherwood Anderson has liberated man from timetable servitude to business; by the example of his art, he has liberated the short story from its previous dependence on slick(astutos, hábiles) plots and trick(engañosos, con truco, artificiales) endings. Though Anderson was a provincial in his choice of subject matter, in his concentration on the limited lives of human beings, he was a pioneer in his narrative techniques.

Study people, don't try to think out plots, was his advice to a young writer; "it seems to me that the stories and the drama of the stories should come out of the real lives of people". It's easy now to understand why.

## **VI. LAST CRITICAL REMARKS (<-- LIONEL TRILLING)**

Anderson's greatest influence was probably upon those who read him in adolescence, the age when we find the books we give up but do not get over. Anderson is connected with the tradition of the men who maintain a standing quarrel with respectable society and have a perpetual bone(core; essence) to

pick(pierce) with the rational intellect. But Anderson lacked what his spiritual colleagues have always notably had: mind, or energy and spiritedness(brío), in their relation to mind. Anderson never understood that the moment of enlightenment and conversion -the walking out(abandon, exit)- cannot be merely celebrated but must be developed, so that what begins as an act of will grows to be an act of intelligence.

Love and passion, when considered as they are by Anderson as a means of attack upon the order of the respectable world, can contrive(devise, plan) a world which is actually without love and passion and not worth being "free" in. And just as there is no sensory experience in Anderson's writing, there is also no real social experience. His people have passion without body, and sexuality without gaiety and joy, although it is often through sex that they are supposed to find their salvation. In their speech his people have not only no wit(ingenio), but no idiom(discurso). To say that they are not "real" would be to introduce all sorts of useless quibbles(objeciones) about the art of character creation; they are simply not there. This is not a failure of art; rather, it would seem to have been part of Anderson's intention that they should be not there. But of course, we do not love people for their essence or their souls, but for their having a certain body, or wit, or idiom, certain specific relationships with things and other people, and for a dependable continuity of existence: we love them for being there. It is easy enough to understand this crude mysticism as a protest against philosophical and moral materialism; easy enough, too, to forgive it, even when, as in Anderson, the second births and the large revelations seem often to point only to the bosom(heart) of a solemn bohemia, and almost always to a lowering rather than a heightening of energy.

He spoke in visions and mysteries and raptures(ecstasies), but what he was speaking about after all was only the salvation of a small legitimate

existence, of a quiet place in the sun and moments of leisurely peace, of not being nagged(criticado, fastidiado) and shrew-ridden(maltratado), nor deprived of one's due share of affection. Anderson's truth may have become a falsehood in his hands by reason of limitations in himself or in the tradition of easy populism he chose as his own, but one has only to take it out of his hands to see again that it is indeed a truth. The small legitimate existence, so necessary for the majority of men to achieve, is in our age so very hard, so nearly impossible, for them to achieve:

The exactitude of purity, or the purity of exactitude: whichever you like. He was a sentimentalist in his attitude toward people, and quite often incorrect about them. He believed in people, but it was as though only in theory...He never scanted(la hizo escasa) it, cheapened it, took the easy way; never failed to approach writing except with humility and an almost religious, almost abject faith and patience and willingness to surrender, relinquish(abandon) himself to and into it. (William Faulkner on Sherwood Anderson, 1953)

I learned that, to be a writer, one has first got to be what he is, what he was born; that to be an American and a writer, one does not necessarily have to pay lip-service(allegiance only in words) to any conventional American image...

Yes, but America aint cemented and plastered yet...That's why ignorant unschooled fellows like you and me not only have a chance to write, they must write. All America asks is to look at it and listen to it and understand it if you can. Only the understanding aint important either: the important thing is to believe in it even if you dont understand it, and then try to tell it, put it down. It wont ever be quite right, but there is always next time; there's always more ink and paper, and something else to try to understand and tell... (Sherwood Anderson in a conversation with William Faulkner, 1923?).