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Sherwood Anderson

(1876-1941)

“You can almost hear him breathe. It is all so real. This is the way people feel and the way they think, the way a story of this kind must be told. And though this may not be all the world...it is the frustrated world of the artist, driven back upon himself, and the repressed world of youth. And between the lines there is something—call it symbolism, atmosphere, the mystery of being, what you will—that is in all of Anderson’s stories....To him the world is—close-knit, throbbing, pulsating with one life, men and animals, trees, clouds, earth, the whole of nature. And it is this throb, the pulse of creation, that makes the rhythm of his prose.”

Charles C. Baldwin
The Men Who Make Our Novels
(Dodd 1919) 27

“The year after *Spoon River* Sherwood Anderson...published his first novel—*Windy McPherson’s Son*—and the next year his second—*Marching Men*. In both of them the heroes detach themselves from their native villages to seek their fortunes in the city. In both they succeed without satisfaction, unable to find a meaning in the world which has let them have what they thought they wanted. The novels ache with the sense of a dumb confusion in America. Anderson wrote as if he were assembling documents on the verge of revolution. Village peace and stability have departed...

In the short stories collected in *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), *Horses and Men* (1923), and the later *Death in the Woods* (1933) Anderson did his most lasting work. Touching American life at many places and always throwing a warm if sad light upon it, the stories had a point and impact which he sometimes lost when he wandered and brooded through novels like *Poor White* (1920), the contorted *Many Marriages* (1922), and *Dark Laughter* (1925), with its rich, deep background of instinctive life among the Negroes who make white life seem thin and dry in comparison. *A Story Teller’s Story* (1924) and *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926) have Anderson himself as a hero, but the same kind of hero as in most of the other books. Perhaps there is as much fiction in his autobiography as there is autobiography in his fiction. In any case, his own life was the chief source of his art.”

Carl Van Doren
The American Novel 1798-1939, 23rd edition
(Macmillan 1921-68) 296-97

“Out of...fallen creatures, Sherwood Anderson has made the pure poetry of his tales. He has taken the words surely, has set them fiercely end to end, and underneath his hand there has come to be a surface as clean and fragrant as that of joyously made things in a fresh young country. The vocabulary of the simplest folk; words of a primer, a copybook quotidianess, form a surface as hard as that of pungent fresh-placed boards of pine and oak. Into the ordered prose of Anderson the delicacy and sweetness of growing corn, the grittiness and firmness of black earth sifted by the fingers, the broad-breasted power of great laboring horses, had wavered again. The writing pleases the eye. It pleases the nostrils. It is moist and adhesive to the touch, like milk.”

Paul Rosenfeld
Port of New York
(Harcourt 1924) 176

“The thing which captures me and will not let me go is the profound sincerity, the note of serious, baffled, tragic questioning which I hear above its laughter and tears. It is, all through, an asking of the question which American literature has hardly as yet begun to ask, ‘What for?’...It is that spirit of profound and unresisting questioning which has made Russian literature what it is. ‘Why? Why? Why?’ echoes insistently through all their pages....It echoes, too, in this book, like a great bell pealing its tremendous

question to an unanswering sky, and awakening dangerously within one's self something that one has carefully laid to sleep—perhaps one's soul, who knows?"

Floyd Dell
Looking at Life
(Knopf 1924) 83-84

"He has a humanity and simplicity that is quite baffling in depth and suggestiveness." Hart Crane
(c.1925)

"He is one of the very best and finest writers in the English language today. God, he can write!... Simple! The word on the lips of the critics makes me hilarious. Anderson's style is about as simple as an engine-room full of dynamos."

F. Scott Fitzgerald
in conversation to editor Maxwell Perkins (c.1925)

"Dear Archie:...My mother sent me your review of *Dark Laughter* from the *Atlantic Monthly*. *Monthly* is correct. It is a damned good review. My mother always sends me everything that shows up Sherwood or when he gets a divorce or anything because she has read that I am much the same thing only not as good and she naturally wants me to know how the Master is getting along. You wrote a good review, intelligent and not to be roused to enthusiasm by exclamation points, mentions of the *quarz arts bal* or the omission of verbs or other things that at once point a masterpiece...[to Archibald MacLeish, 20 December 1925] Dear Scott: Have just received following cable from Liveright—Rejecting *Torrents of Spring*....I have known all along that they could not and would not be able to publish it as it makes a bum out of their present ace and best seller Anderson....So I'm loose....[to F. Scott Fitzgerald, 31 December 1925-1 January 1926]

"Sherwood Anderson is something of an anomaly. He has been more daring than any of his contemporaries in his attempts to get to the basic facts about people. He has tried to explore deeper into human emotions and reactions than they. He has tried to seize on the important, significant moments in the dull and drab lives that go on about him. In his search for the until recently disguised facts about modern life, and in his statement of human problems he stands shoulder to shoulder with the best of his contemporaries the world over. But if he has attempted much, he has often failed. In his disposal of these facts and in his interpretation of these problems he often goes as far off the track as did the writers of the Pollyanna school. His work contains more sentimental alloy than that of any other 'serious' modern writer."

Cleveland B. Chase
Sherwood Anderson
(McBride 1927) 4-5

"To Sherwood Anderson through whose kindness I was first published, with the belief that this book will give him no reason to regret that fact."

William Faulkner
Dedication of *Sartoris* (1929)

"To the student of human nature under the conditions of provincial neo-Puritanism there must always belong a high interest to these documents with their toneless murmur as of one who has exhausted eloquence and passion and found them of no avail, with their tortured sense of life as a thing immitigably ugly and mean, with their delineation of dull misery so ground into the bone that it no longer knows itself for what it is. Nowhere in all these pages of Anderson will this student find a breath of freedom or of joy—never the record of an hour of either passion or serenity. Life is wall in; it is imprisoned from itself, from the sources without which it withers and dies. Who will knock down the walls? There is no one, least of all the author himself."

Ludwig Lewisohn
Expression in America
(Harper 1932) 484

“[Hemingway and Gertrude Stein] disagreed about Sherwood Anderson. Gertrude Stein contended that Sherwood Anderson had a genius for using the sentence to convey a direct emotion, this was in the great American tradition, and that really except Sherwood there was no one in America who could write a clear and passionate sentence. Hemingway did not believe this, he did not like Sherwood’s taste. Taste had nothing to do with sentences, contended Gertrude Stein.”

Gertrude Stein
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas
(Harcourt 1933) 268

“Anderson’s early contact with the Bible no doubt explains the simplicity of his style and narrative. At times this simplicity palls; it leaves the impression that the writer is merely assuming naivete. Of naivete there is plenty in Anderson’s work, however, and it is a real, rustic, homespun type of naivete. He is most successful when he writes about the country, the small town, the laborer in either. As a delineator of metropolitan life, he is a failure. He is inclined toward the neurotic and the pessimistic; but when he comes to portray the neurotic adolescent, he is remarkably sympathetic and true to life. Frequently he merely maunders, and he is usually prolix, at times beyond endurance.

He is an earnest student of the social and economic ills that beset the mid-region of the United States. There is not a trace of the academic, however, in Anderson, nor of the pretentious; he flaunts a kind of triumphant bourgeois attitude or proletarianism that does not always seem genuine because he is morally out of step with the bourgeoisie. He remains, none the less, an important phenomenon of the early 1920’s; and although his later work failed to fulfill the promise of his earlier, he has been a significant figure in the liberation of recent American letters from the conventional and the pharisaical. But as one critic has remarked, there is in Sherwood Anderson ‘too much smug subscribing to the sentiments of the popular song, ‘Hallelujah! I’m a bum!’”

George K. Anderson & Eda Lou Walton, eds.
This Generation: A Selection of British and American Literature from 1914 to the Present
(Scott, Foresman 1939, 1949) 309

“For Anderson, so often described as a ‘Naturalist’ at a time when any effort at Realism was still associated with Dreiser’s dour massive objectivity, even appeared to be inadequately conscious of objective reality. His great subject always was personal freedom; out of it he made a kind of left-handed mysticism, a groping for the unnamed ecstasy immanent in human relations, that seemed the sudden revelation of the lives Americans led in secret. If Sinclair Lewis dramatized the new Realism by making the novel an exact and mimetic transcription of American life, Anderson was fascinated by the undersurface of that life and became the voice of its terrors and exultations. Lewis turned the novel into a kind of higher journalism; Anderson turned fiction into a substitute for poetry and religion, and never ceased to wonder at what he had wrought. He had more intensity than a revival meeting and more tenderness than God; he wept, he chanted, he loved indescribably. There was freedom in the air, and he would summon all Americans to share it; there was confusion and mystery on the earth, and he would summon all Americans to wonder at it. He was clumsy and sentimental; he could even write at times as if he were finger-painting; but at the moment it seemed as if he had sounded the depths of common American experience as no one else could....

Unlike most modern American Realists even of his own generation, in fact, Anderson always evoked in his books the world of the old handicraft artisans, the harness makers and Civil War veterans like his father, the small-town tailors and shoemakers, the buggy and wagon craftsmen of the old school. It was almost a forgotten America which he brought back out of religious stirrings, of the village workmen and saloonkeepers and stablemen....A certain sleepy inarticulation, a habit of staring at faces in wondering silence, a way of groping for words and people indistinguishably, also crept into his work; what one felt in it was not only the haunting tenderness with which he came to his characters, but also the measureless distances that lay between these characters themselves. They spoke out of the depths, but in a sense they did not speak at all....The conventional world for him was a snare that fearful little men had agreed among themselves to perpetuate; the reality lay underground, in men and women themselves....

The rebels against working-class squalor and poverty, like Beut McGregor in *Marching Men*, finally do rise to wealth and greatness, but only to lead men—as Anderson, though a Socialist in those early years,

hoped to lead them—out of the factory world itself into a vague solidarity of men marching forever together....The businessmen who have revolted against their families, like John Webster in *Many Marriages*, make an altar in their bedrooms to worship; the sophisticated artists, like Bruce Dudley in *Dark Laughter*, run away from home to hear the laughter of the triumphant unrepressed Negroes; the ambitious entrepreneurs, like Hugh McVey in *Poor White*, weep in despair over the machines they have built. And when they do escape, they all walk out of the prison house of modern life, saying with inexpressible simplicity, as Anderson did on the day he suddenly walked out of his paint factory in Ohio: ‘What am I going to do?...In those early days it was as if a whole subterranean world of the spirit were speaking in and through Anderson, a spirit imploring men to live frankly and fully by their own need of liberation, and pointing the way to a tender and surpassing comradeship. He had left his own business and family to go to Chicago—‘there was a queer kind of stoppage of something at the center of myself’—and he would dream...

He was among the first American writers to bring the unconscious into the novel, yet when one thinks of how writers like Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce pursued the unconscious and tried to trace some pattern in the fathomless psychic history of men and women, it is clear that Anderson was not interested in contributing to the postwar epic of the unconscious at all. What did interest him was sex as a disturbance in consciousness, the kind of disturbance that drove so many of his heroes out of the world of constraint; but once he had got them out of their homes, freed them from convention, their liberation was on a plane with their simultaneous liberation from the world of business. It was their loneliness that gave them significance in Anderson’s mind, the lies that they told themselves and each other...

Life was a succession of moments on which everything else was strung; but the moments never came together, and the world itself never came together for him....Anderson had nothing else in him that was equal to his revelations, his tenderness, his groping. He was like a concentration of everything that had been missed before him in modern American writing....He was a Prospero who had charmed himself to sleep and lost his wand; and as the years went on Anderson seemed more and more bereft, a minor visionary whose perpetual air of wonder became a trance and whose prose disintegrated helplessly from book to book. Yet knowing himself so well, he could smile over those who were so ready to tell him that it was his ignorance of ‘reality’ and of ‘real people’ that crippled his books....

There was always an image in Anderson’s books—an image of life as a house of doors, of human beings knocking at them and stealing through one door only to be stopped short before another as if in a dream. Life was a dream to him, and he and his characters seemed always to be walking along its corridors. Who owned the house of life? How did one escape after all? No one in his books ever knew, Anderson least of all. Yet slowly and fumblingly he tried to make others believe, as he thought he had learned for himself, that it was possible to escape if only one laughed at necessity.”

Alfred Kazin

“The New Realism: Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis”

On Native Grounds

(Reynal 1942) 166-72

“Sherwood Anderson’s method of story-telling was even more consistent than Willa Cather’s. He had one objective, and one technique, which is often loose, sprawling, and repetitive, though sometimes tightened, and particularly in his short stories, with very great art. His purpose was to get under the surface of everyday life in the America he knew best—the Ohio country and its small towns just below Lake Erie, with excursions to Chicago and New York. But his interests were very different from Miss Cather’s or Sinclair Lewis’. It would be oversimplification to say that he worked in the subconscious of men and women whose conscious thoughts and feelings were commonplace, since the violent emotional lesions he reveals in his characters have often become conscious before the story begins.

It would be more accurate to compare him with the students of abnormal psychology who were his contemporaries, although they did not influence him. His characters, however, are not pathological, but show what Anderson believes to be the normal results of emotional wounds in a sensitive mind. A disciple of either Freud or Jung would say that they are all subjects for psychoanalysis, yet Anderson was in no sense a scientific psychoanalyst. On the contrary, the spiritual lessons of his characters are precisely what

make them important and valuable as human beings. His object was not to adjust the individual to a society which he regarded as dull, sterile, and insensitive, but to show how love in all its variants, and especially sexual love, will resist suppression by a mechanical and materialistic society, with such dynamic energy that it may crush or cripple the passionate man or woman.

It was Anderson's idea—and he wrote out of a rich experience—that something in the life of the Middle West he knew so well (though not only the Middle West) was inimical to love....Were the factory workers who boasted of their sexual effectiveness doing so because year by year they were becoming less effectual as men? 'Were modern women going more and more toward a man's life and man's attitude toward life because they were becoming all the time less and less able to be women?' Sinclair Lewis felt all this, too (as did D. H. Lawrence in England). But Anderson, though his scope and his skill are less, is more intuitive, much more mystical, and far more concerned in his stories with the hurt girl or the warped man than with the apparatus and the traits of this mechanical civilization. His best stories, indeed, go back often to the horse-and-buggy age of his youth, and smugness, commercialism, respectability—anything that cramps emotion—will serve for his narrative as well as the industrial revolution.

All of Anderson's short stories and novels begin with a gesture, a look, or an episode, however trivial, suggesting emotional tension and asking to be explained. Like the young man in *Winesburg, Ohio*, he was constantly being told stories, and in them one sentence would set his imagination going....Such sentences (and scenes) were the 'seeds' of stories....And so, as Whitman rebelled against the conventions of meter and diction as not expressing his themes, Anderson rebelled against the current fashions of plot.... Confession stories, most of Anderson's tales might be called—a kind of story which, when cheapened and vulgarized, had great popular appeal. His novels are only expanded tales. As is true of so many American writers of fiction, the short story was his best medium, and there, in such stories as 'I Want to Know Why' and 'I'm a Fool,' he did his finest work. Sometimes, as in the first of these two, it is a boy escaping from a restricted environment into the rich, easy life of the stables and track, where the Negroes take human nature and its pleasures as it comes, with no Protestant compulsions to bother them. And with the Negroes live the noble thoroughbreds, clean and courageous. How, admiring them, can human beings be so gross in comparison? (Whitman felt about animals much as he does.)

Often the inspiration is neurotic but noble, as in the novel *Many Marriages* (1923), where a symbolic (and faintly absurd) nudity represents the ruthless stripping of convention necessary in order to begin a new emotional life. Sometimes the story explains the fluttering hands of a man in hiding, who has been a teacher with a gift for affection until his caresses had been misunderstood and his life broken. Nowhere is satire, everywhere sympathy, sometimes heated to anger. And if every story is a study of behavior, explained by a confession, the behavior is not for the sake of Realism, though realistic enough, but is an index of thwarted or suppressed emotion.

Many of his narratives—notably *Many Marriages*—shocked readers by their sexual frankness. But it should be clear now that Anderson explored the sexual only because it is one of the chief paths to the secrets of the inner life. His courage in that still reticent time gave him a fictitious reputation as a breaker of taboos, which he did not really deserve. His true innovation was his sympathetic analysis of the inner emotional life of the victims of success in his Middle West. He often fumbled in his narrative, which is always honest but sometimes truly artless. The style, however, is effective, and deceptively ingenuous and impromptu. Although, like Lewis, he dealt with familiar people in a familiar way, his prose is stylized. It has little of the colloquial, few differentiations between this man's speech and another's. What he did was to listen to his home town folk with affectionate intentness, and then make out of their vocabulary and rhythms a style to express them....He resolved, as he says, to escape from the patterns of British prose as taught to his generation, and this is the way he did it. It is, nevertheless, a mannered style, supple, familiar, a little monotonous, but an excellent medium for the homely incidents he chose as revealing the inner life of seemingly commonplace people. Perhaps no American has more consciously made a personal style for his own needs....

Anderson's first book of importance was *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), a collection of sketches of life a small Ohio town....He found failures the most revealing....His succeeding books were all built upon this theme, with no notable advance except in his growing power over the short story, which ceased to be a

sketch and became organic and dynamic. *Poor White* (1920) is semi-autobiographic; *Dark Laughter* (1925) is another story of his own people with the dark laughter of the Negroes as a sardonic background and commentary. These indicate a widening of social observation. But *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921) and *Horses and Men* (1923), books of short stories, are most characteristic of his resources, his skill, and his quality—also of his faults, for each book contains narratives that do not ‘jell.’...[“The Egg”], the story of an unsuccessful chicken farmer whose life is dominated by eggs until, in its grotesque, half-mad conclusion, one egg broken lifts the tale into significant tragedy, is a perfect example of Anderson’s way of interpreting life....

Sherwood Anderson did not belong with the postwar generation of writers who felt themselves to be pioneers in a new social structure and a new (but unformed) philosophy....His task was to explain a neglected aspect of an era of easy success. Without him and his people, the Middle West would have gone uninterpreted in an important area of emotional experience. He could not really create characters, except for boys’—perhaps one boy’s—character. He lacked the power to synthesize a region as a society. He was less of a Realist, more of a mystic than Dreiser; indeed, his Realism was confined to the honesty with which he confessed personal experience, and to his descriptions. In these qualities he anticipated Saroyan and Steinbeck; and he explained, as Sinclair Lewis did not, why so many of the Babbitts became increasingly unsatisfied and hollow within.

His place in American literary history should be given further distinction by his very great influence in liberating the American short story from a petrifying technique. His own tales, appearing first in experimental magazines like the *Dial* and the *Little Review*, gradually acquired fame and were eagerly read by younger men and women trying to escape from the technical tradition of Poe, Aldrich, and O. Henry, which cramped expression even though it seemed to guarantee financial success. That the best and the most successful American short stories of the next decades—whether by Stephen Vincent Benet or Katherine Anne Porter or Eudora Welty—are in free forms where plot is subordinated to theme and form springs from the situation, must be credited in no small degree to the example set by Sherwood Anderson.”

Henry Seidel Canby
The Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1229-33

“Anderson’s inclusion among the authors of the lyric story...flows first of all from the fact that, using the language of actuality, he nonetheless invariably wrings sonority and cadence from it; unobtrusively indeed, without transcending the easy pitch of familiar prose...He sustains tones broadly with assonances and with repeated or echoing words and phrases. He creates accent-patterns and even stanza-like paragraphs with the periodic repetition or alternation of features such as syllables, sounds, words, phrases, entire periods....As for his own specimens of the lyric story-kind, they have ‘inner form’ like Gertrude Stein’s, but their rhythms are livelier, longer, more self-completive than those of the somnolent lady-Buddha of the rue de Fleurus. While wanting the suavity of expression in Turgenev’s lyric tales, Anderson’s share the warmly singing tone of the Russian’s, surpass them of course in point of tension, and have the Andersonian qualities of subtlety of attack and humorous and acute feeling, perceptions of the essential in the singular glamour over the commonplace, boldness of image....Wonderfully they stay by us.”

Paul Rosenfeld
Introduction
The Sherwood Anderson Reader
(Houghton 1947)

“The book was conceived as a unit, knit together, however loosely, by the idea of the first tale, ‘The Book of the Grotesque,’ and consisting of individual sketches which derived additional power from each other, not, as anthropologists of Anderson repeatedly suggest, a collection of short stories which can be separated from each other without loss of effect....All of these people were grotesques, suffering from the universal illness of isolation and frustration...One other factor helped to crystallize Anderson’s conception of a ‘book of the grotesque’—Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology*....Some of the stylistic traits that have been noticed in Anderson’s prose—colloquialisms, repetitive patterns, and frequent auctorial

intrusions—can be seen to have arisen in the revisions. He can be seen changing a more formal, Latinate expression to a colloquial, Anglo-Saxon one...

Just as in *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Marching Men* it is the deaths of the mothers of Sam McPherson and Beate McGregor which stir them to leave their villages permanently, so Elizabeth Willard's long-awaited death is the event which sends George Willard out of Winesburg and which prepares for the short resume of his career in 'Departure.' The Lane firm had lost confidence in Anderson after the weak sales of his early books, and they refused the *Winesburg* stores on the ground that they were 'too gloomy'."

William L. Phillips
"How Sherwood Anderson Wrote *Winesburg, Ohio*"
American Literature XXIII
(March 1951)

"To say that cultivated readers of the early 1920's admired Anderson's work as highly as such readers today admire Faulkner's is to exaggerate only a little....Read for moral explication as a guide to life, his work must seem unsatisfactory; it simply does not tell us enough. But there is another more fruitful way of reading his work: As an expression of a sensitive witness to the national experience and as the achievement of a storyteller who created a small body of fiction unique in American writing for the lyrical purity of its feeling. So regarded his best work becomes a durable part of the American literary structure....

While Steinbeck and Saroyan could enlarge on his occasional sentimentalism and Hemingway could tighten and rigidify his style, no American writer has yet been able to realize that strain of lyrical and nostalgic feeling which in Anderson's best work reminds one of another and greater poet of tenderness, Turgenev. At his best Anderson creates a world of authentic sentiment, and while part of the meaning of his career is that sentiment is not enough for a writer, the careers of those that follow him—those who swerve to Steinbeck's sentimentalism or Hemingway's toughness—illustrate how rare a genius sentiment still is in our literature."

Irving Howe
Sherwood Anderson
(Sloane 1951) 249, 255

"It was the individual sentence that [Gertrude Stein] admired in Anderson's writings...for some writers—noticeably, Sherwood Anderson—who did not possess sufficiently a sense of compositional strategy or whose view of character was limited, her influence could only make them repeat awkwardly what they had earlier done more effectively....His heroes almost invariably prove their distaste for society by leaving it and by making a meaningful ceremony of their going. Of course, for George Willard in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), the going is not so much a protest as it is the beginning of fulfillment; his manhood as well as his career is at stake. Sam McPherson of *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916) abruptly leaves the commercial world so that he may 'spend his life seeking the truth.' In *Many Marriages* (1922), John Webster turns away from his business and his family, convinced that both are morally incompetent and potentially evil. His departure is a climactic act in the pattern of Anderson's 'Out of Nowhere into Nothing.' In other novels, reasons are given for the divorce of man from the business world....

What made all of this so terribly important in the 1920's was the deadly earnestness with which Anderson developed his fictional explanations of this complex of truths. Anderson was a man with a mission and he tried sincerely and repetitiously to recommend himself as a serious missionary. His criticism of the industrial demon led him to the creation of simple angels. Their most highly intelligent act was their groping toward profound truths, from which each fashioned his own grotesque. The individual inadequacies of these people added up to a huge and grotesque inadequacy located at the heart of modern American society. Anderson's characters find no relief in Floyd Dell's bohemians; they are, in fact, illiterate, unlettered, and inarticulate, striving desperately and vainly for a verbal equivalent of their feelings. It is only occasionally that they can find such an equivalent; but when they do, as do Songe Martin and Bruce Dudley of *Dark Laughter* (1925), they become not only articulate but garrulous....

Anderson...made a virtue of his own lack of subtlety. He defended his work chiefly on the grounds that simple truths need no more than a literal transcription, even when they acquire complexity through distortion into grotesques....[His] defense of what is substantially an unintellectual point of view was not without its justification in Anderson's world. There was a whole-hearted repudiation of subtlety, which, along with an indiscriminating enthusiasm for reading, established a current of literary attitude in twentieth-century fiction. As a form of Realism it was both naïve and artless.

The mysterious fascination of words and vague thoughts of which Anderson so often spoke in his critical pieces was a precious motivation for this kind of writing. The words came together in a kind of unconscious process of creative illiteracy and left the thoughts free of damaging subtlety—indeed, created their own brand of subtlety, in their confused meandering among the subconscious will and mind. It is of course true that none of Anderson's 'minds' deserved the subtlety of rendering given hers by Virginia Woolf. But Anderson could have had only a damning consequence for American letters through his having provided a constant justification for crudity and made a virtue of it. Only if taken seriously, of course; but who did not take him seriously in the 1920's?

The fundamental difference between Anderson and Hemingway is a difference in attitude toward the art of writing. Both, as we know, sat at the feet of Gertrude Stein. But Anderson brought what he knew and took nothing away, and Hemingway learned the hard lessons of the discipline of writing fiction, in the profitable realization that the art demanded more than perfect sentences. Anderson expanded from these sentences into themes vaguely but urgently developed into novels. The themes acquired the quality of the 'vague thoughts' which everywhere dominated his vision of his own experiences: the vision of 'the great renunciation,' for one [his dropping out of the business world], and its resulting views of industrial Philistia and its hapless victims; the persistently earnest search, for another, in naïve symbols for the verbal equivalent of dimly known feelings."

Frederick J. Hoffman
The Modern Novel in America
(Regnery/Gateway 1951,1956,1961) 85, 87, 115-16, 118-19

"Sherwood Anderson was the D. H. Lawrence of American literature. Like Lawrence, he attempted almost every literary genre; unlike him, he was entirely successful only with his sketches and short stories...His novels are all unsatisfactory, and it is only because of the wide influence he acquired when in the 'twenties he was regarded as one of the liberators of American literature that he deserves extended consideration in this book. What Anderson shared with Lawrence was his revolt against an industrialized civilization and his feeling that in order to recover mental and spiritual health men must learn to live more 'natural' lives. From this follows naturally the affection which both writers feel for animals, for Negroes of the primitive, African variety, for men who work with their hands, and for nonintellectual types in general. It is all, as Frederick J. Hoffman says, 'a kind of Freudianized Rousseauism.' Craftsmanship is a way out from the blind alley into which we have wandered, but sex is a door more readily and universally accessible....

Sex plays a large part in Anderson's books, and he is such occupied with its more wayward manifestations. Many of his characters are perverts and other frustrated creatures. It is often complained that there is something morbid or unclean in the fascination which such persons have for Anderson. On the other hand, one must admit that there is something beautiful in the quite uncondescending compassion he feels for them, at least when it stops this side of mawkish sentimentality. Anderson praises [photographer] Alfred Stieglitz for the something which happened to him that 'sweetened the man's nature, made him a lover of life and a lover of men.' The same thing obviously happened to Anderson....And sex is less important in his books for its own sake than as a possible point of assault against the loneliness by which his people are always oppressed.

Though Anderson is often called a naturalist, this is true only in a qualified sense. He shares the naturalistic faith in instinct, the naturalistic tendency to use aesthetically the stuff of common life, and the naturalistic determinism not to permit his presentation to be warped by any conventional 'moral' considerations. But he never approaches objectivity, and he is completely concerned with the life within. In his technique he is more expressionist than naturalist.

One hears much of the influence of the Russians upon him. Yet he never read many of the writers he was supposed to resemble until his attention had been called to them by his own reviewers. Hoffman has shown conclusively that there is very little evidence to show that he based his stories upon a careful study of Freud. Anderson himself has a good deal to say about his use of George Borrow and of the Bible, while Horace Gregory has argued the case for the influence upon him of Melville and Mark Twain.

He *was* influenced, unfortunately, by Gertrude Stein's experiments with words, and possibly also, as Paul Elmer More suggested, by her notions about the 'continuous present.' This might explain his curious mingling of past and present into 'a kind of unprogressive circulation' and his trick of 'beginning again and again and again.' He gets drunk on words, and in his more apocalyptic moods he seems not to care whether he communicates an idea or not....

Windy McPherson's Son [1916] opens upon a vivid picture of a boy suffering in revival meetings, yearning after beauty, and awakening to the sting of sex. From here we pass on to his business success, which is dull. The first part of the story of his marriage with Sue is straight out of the women's magazines. With the account of the couple's frustration in their desire for parenthood, the novel picks up again, only to become ridiculous in its record of Sam's wandering about America, savoring various experiences with common men, trying to aid strikers, searching for a philosophy of life, and getting drunk. There is little unity, and no pains are taken with transitions: Sam, for example, becomes a drunkard in one sentence. His relation with Janet and Edith Eberly are not uninteresting in themselves, but Anderson merely 'tells' us about them instead of portraying them, and he leaves the whole experience as a detached episode without building it into either the development of Sam's character or the development of the book. The ending, where Sam makes up with Sue by returning to her with a parcel of adopted children, is pure sentimentality.

In *Marching Men* (1917), the hero is still Sam McPherson, but this time he is called 'Beaut' McGregor. He is the son of a coal miner who lost his life through heroic conduct in a mine accident. McGregor first attracts attention as a lawyer in Chicago, when he saves a petty criminal who had been 'framed' to cover up tracks for the 'big shots' in the First Ward. Though he loves the daughter of a capitalist, he gives her up because he cannot bear to break away from the milliner who has befriended him. Finally, he trains vast hordes of workmen to march ceaselessly through the streets of Chicago and scare the daylight out of everybody because nobody knows what they are marching for. They don't know. McGregor doesn't know. Anderson doesn't know. 'The thing was hypnotic. It was big.' But it fails to win credence even upon a symbolical level. Anderson addresses the reader directly whenever he takes the notion, and shows no scruples about letting any part of his story hang in the air at any time. Character is rarely portrayed in action. After McGregor decides to stay with Edith, we never hear of her again. The book is full of flashbacks which are never related in any vital way to the subject in hand....

Anderson's last two novels were little regarded. By the time he wrote *Beyond Desire* (1932) he had become very socially minded. The scene is a small Georgia mill town and the hero is Red Oliver, who comes home from college for the summer. Sex and the economic order combine to disturb him, and his unrest is reflected in that of the community, which is just undergoing industrialization. Red finally dies for the Communist cause in a strike, without ever quite making up his mind that he believes in it. Anderson's confused chronology is at its worst in this novel, and unity is menaced both by the long account of the 'Mill Girls' in Book II and, more seriously, by the shift from Red and his problems to the frustrated Ethel in Book III. *Kit Brandon* (1936) is about a Southern mountain girl, daughter of a moonshiner, and her experiences as factory-hand, shop-girl, and bootlegger. The best part is the description of the mountain people; the end is mere adventure story.

It should be realized that Anderson's virtues as well as his faults make it difficult for him to write a successful novel. He was at his best in his burning, vivid realization of the moment; he believes, indeed, that 'The true journey of a life is but a history of moments,' and, by his own admission, he had no hold on facts. He could not even write the story of his own childhood as a factual record; he had to turn it into fiction as *Tar* (1926). His virtues are those of the lyric poet, but unlike the best of such poets, he achieves no balance of the world without and the world within. His picture of the world without is shadowy; he fails to visualize either characters or background; everything else is sacrificed to a welter of moods. This, of course, is limitation even in a short story.

Robert Moses Lovett calls Anderson's stories centripetal, not centrifugal, and Virginia Woolf, who admired him, speaks of his tendency 'to land...softly in a bog.' Nevertheless, both Chekov and Katherine Mansfield have taught us that a short story which is merely the expression of a mood can be very powerful, and when Anderson is at his best he is of their company. The novel calls for too much in the way of development and externalization to lie within the range of such a writer, especially when as Lewisohn remarks of Anderson, he finds 'continuity...almost insurmountably difficult.' All the memorable passages in Anderson's novels are vignettes'."

Edward Wagenknecht
*Cavalcade of the American Novel:
From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century*
(Holt 1952) 311-18

"One day during the months [1922-23] while we walked and talked in New Orleans—or Anderson talked and I listened—I found him sitting on a bench in Jackson Square. Laughing with himself. I got the impression that he had been there like that for some time, just sitting alone on the bench laughing with himself. This was not out usual meeting place. We had none. He lived above the Square, and without any especial pre-arrangement, after I had something to eat at noon and knew that he had finished his lunch too, I would walk in that direction and if I did not meet him already strolling or sitting in the Square, I myself would simply sit down on the curb where I could see his doorway and wait until he came out of it in his bright, half-racetrack, half-Bohemian clothes....

He expected people to make fun of, ridicule him. He expected people nowhere near his equal in stature or, accomplishment or wit or anything else, to be capable of making him appear ridiculous....His was not the power and rush of Melville, who was his grandfather, nor the lusty humor for living of Twain, who was his father; he had nothing of the heavy-handed disregard for nuances of his older brother, Dreiser. His was that fumbling for exactitude, the exact word and phrase within the limited scope of a vocabulary controlled and even repressed by what was in him almost a fetish of simplicity, to milk them both dry, to seek always to penetrate to thought's uttermost end. He worked so hard at this that it finally became just style: an end instead of a means: so that he presently came to believe that, provided he kept the style pure and intact and unchanged and inviolate, what the style contained would have to be first rate: it couldn't help but be first rate, and therefore himself too....

Yet...he found himself to be only a one-or-two-book man....That was why he had to defend the style. That was the reason for his hurt and anger at Hemingway about Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* [parody of Anderson's *Dark Laughter*], and at me in a lesser degree since my fault was not full book-length but instead was merely a privately-printed and subscribed volume which few people outside our small New Orleans group would ever see or hear about, because of the book of Spratling's caricatures which we titled *Sherwood Anderson & Other Famous Creoles* and to which I wrote an introduction in Anderson's primer-like style. Neither of us—Hemingway or I—could have touched, ridiculed, his work itself. But we had made his style look ridiculous; and by that time, after *Dark Laughter*, when he had reached the point where he should have stopped writing, he had to defend that style at all costs because he too must have known by then in his heart that there was nothing else left....

He was a sentimentalist in his attitude toward people, and quite incorrect about them. He believed in people, but it was as though only in theory. He expected the worst from them, even while each time he was prepared again to be disappointed or even hurt, as if it had never happened before, as though the only people he could really trust, let himself go with, were the ones of his own invention, the figments and symbols of his own fumbling dream. And he was sometimes a sentimentalist in his writing (so was Shakespeare sometimes) but he was never impure in it. He never scanted 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 himself to and into it. He hated glibness; if it were quick, he believed it was false too. He told me once: 'You've got too much talent. You can do it too easy, in too many different ways. If you're not careful, you'll never write anything.'...

In the later years when he finally probably admitted to himself that only the style was left, he worked so hard and so laboriously and so self-sacrificingly at this, that at times he stood a little bigger, a little taller

than it was. He was warm, generous, merry and fond of laughing, without pettiness and jealous only of the integrity which he believed to be absolutely necessary in anyone who approached his craft; he was ready to be generous to anyone, once he was convinced that that one approached his craft with his own humility and respect for it. I gradually became aware that here was a man who would be in seclusion all forenoon—working. Then in the afternoon he would appear and we would walk about the city, talking. Then in the evening we would meet again, with a bottle now, and now he would really talk...So I began a novel, *Soldier's Pay*. I had known Mrs. Anderson before I knew him....She said, 'Sherwood says he'll make a swap with you. He says that if he doesn't have to read it, he'll tell Liveright (Horace Liveright: his own publisher) to take it.' 'Done,' I said, and that was all.

Liveright published the book and I saw Anderson only once more, because the unhappy caricature affair had happened in the meantime and he declined to see me, for several years, until one afternoon at a cocktail party in New York; and again there was that moment when he appeared taller, bigger than anything he ever wrote. Then I remembered *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of the Egg* and some of the pieces in *Horses and Men*, and I knew that I had seen, was looking at, a giant in an earth populated to a great—too great—extent by pygmies, even if he did make but the two or perhaps three gestures commensurate with gianthood.”

William Faulkner

“A Note on Sherwood Anderson,” originally “Sherwood Anderson: An Appreciation” (1953)
Essays, Speeches & Public Letters by William Faulkner
(Random House 1965) 3-10
ed. James B. Meriwether

“Anderson published—in 1919—*Winesburg, Ohio*, his masterpiece. This was followed by two other collections of short narratives similar to *Winesburg* and almost as good: *The Triumph of the Egg* in 1921, and *Horses and Men* in 1923. The intense and unconventional stories in these books are Anderson's special contribution to American literature. His long list of publications includes other kinds of writing. Among his novels are *Poor White* (1921), *Many Marriages* (1923), and *Dark Laughter* (1925). He wrote several ostensibly autobiographical works, such as *A Story Teller's Story* (1924) and *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926). *Perhaps Women* (1931) and *Puzzled America* (1935) are social reports which deal sympathetically with the mill workers of the new industrial south.”

Walter Blair

The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 1164-65

“To the generation of writers who flourished in the 1920's, Sherwood Anderson was a force and a pioneer, and he exercised an indirect influence on the literature of two decades. His unblemished powers are recognized today in a handful of magnificent short stories, in his perceptive and passionate letters, and in three 'autobiographies' whose legendary character is frankly acknowledged. His other books, particularly his novels, are confused in purpose and uneven in performance. Yet in whatever he wrote there is always the fascination of his personality, complex and brooding, groping for answers to the riddles of the individual being, and desperately aware that to find answers for others, he must overcome the disunity in his own experience. He is one of the most genuinely subjective of our story tellers, at his best in such narrative episodes as involve his own experience and perplexities.

Although largely self-educated, Anderson was a serious thinker, and he read widely. He was among the earliest to respond to the new Freudian psychology, and was convinced that much of human behavior is a reaction to subconscious realities and to experiences hidden in the forgotten past of the individual. His characters grope unsuccessfully to discover the reality within themselves, while with equal frustration they confront the complexities of the machine age and the conventionality of urban and small-town life. If they escape at all, even briefly, it may be through the experience of sex, although this escape also is often blocked by brutalizing debasements. Another resolution is sometimes found, as in *Dark Laughter* (1925), when man is able to identify himself simply with the primitive forces of nature....

In 1919 his fourth book, *Winesburg, Ohio*, a short-story collection, won international attention with its intense psychological studies of trapped and warped personalities and its pity and tenderness....*Dark*

Laughter (1925), his best and only popular novel, Anderson satirizes the arid pseudo-sophisticated intellectuals, particularly in their neurotic debasement of sex, and in contrast to the carefree and uncorrupted sensuality of the Negro characters in the story. But his novels are unsatisfactory as wholes, though they have pages of brilliance and even of sheer genius.”

Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, E. Hudson Long, eds.
The American Tradition in Literature 2, 3rd edition
(Norton 1956-67) 1155-56

“Sherwood Anderson said he followed in the steps of the heavy feet of Dreiser...*Sister Carrie* and *Jennie Gerhardt* ‘jolted’ Sherwood Anderson’s mind and turned him away from books to the life about him. With his deep feeling for the natural and the human, he was to become the perpetual student of life. No one avoided more than he any suggestion of the artificial. He rejected O. Henry as a model because he had ‘learned too many tricks.’ He shrank from everything that was meretricious. If he was drawn to Gertrude Stein, it was mainly because she reminded him of a countrywoman baking her own bread, and he was determined not to write stories of the factory-made kind with sawdust inside, in standard-sized shapes. His were rather to be stories that ‘began nowhere and ended nowhere,’ as life seemed to begin and end. As for ‘good old human nature,’ the storyteller born had been absorbing it ever since he was a boy, sitting on the curb of the main street of a small Ohio town, listening to people, watching, wondering about them. As a house-painter, a salesman, a soldier, an assembler in a bicycle factory, a worker in a Chicago warehouse rolling kegs, and especially as a stable-boy following race-horses from town to town, he had been all eyes...

While Sherwood Anderson himself had broken with this small-town life, he was always returning to it both in fact and in fancy, in search of the little people he liked to write about, the ‘obscure’ people who, as he put it, had given him life. Years later he would disappear at times and stop for weeks in one of these towns in some dingy hotel room, walking the deserted streets at night with a heart that went out, as he later said, to all the defeated people in the little wooden houses. He had wished to escape from them at first, hoping as a boy to get up in the world and even to be one of the Western captains of finance, for the story of *Windy McPherson’s Son* was largely his own story.

Anderson’s father appeared in many of his books. He was, in a way, the son’s greatest creation, side by side with the mother of the family who saved the household by desperate ruses like those to which Dreiser’s mother had also been driven. Anderson’s own chosen world was mostly made up of the obscure, or what he called the ‘starved side of small-town life.’ He was drawn to the misfits, the half-wits, the sex-mad. What was new in Anderson’s tales of solitary souls and village grotesques was the sense of a buried life they gave the reader, the hidden depths that lay behind the mechanical gestures and banal remarks that expressed the surface-existence of all these people, ‘twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg.’ His inarticulate people with their strange turns of mind seemed curiously emblematic of American life. They were types of a post-pioneer world in which countless individuals felt they were astray or somehow lost, while their lives went on like the prairie, an infinity of flat lands.”

Van Wyck Brooks & Otto L. Bettmann
Our Literary Heritage: A Pictorial History of the Writer in America
(Dutton 1956) 206

“Sherwood Anderson was full of something that had happened to him, a step he had taken, a decision he had made that was of the greatest importance in his life. I listened with suspense to the story of how he had suddenly abandoned his home and a prosperous paint business, had simply walked away one morning, shaking off forever the fetters of respectability and the burden of security. Anderson was a man of great charm, and I became very fond of him. I saw him as a mixture of poet and evangelist (without the preaching), with perhaps a touch of the actor. Anyhow, he was a most interesting man....

Sherwood told me that Gertrude Stein’s writing had influenced him. He admired her immensely, and asked me if I would introduce him to her. I knew he needed no introduction, but I gladly consented to conduct him to the rue de Fleurus. This meeting was something of an event. Sherwood’s deference and the

admiration he expressed for her writing pleased Gertrude immensely. She was visibly touched. Sherwood's wife, Tennessee, who had accompanied us, didn't fare so well. She tried in vain to take part in the interesting conversation between the two writers, but Alice held her off. I knew the rules and regulations about wives at Gertrude's. They couldn't be kept from coming, but Alice had strict orders to keep them out of the way while Gertrude conversed with the husbands. Tennessee was less tractable than most. She seated herself on a table ready to take part in the conversation, and resisted when Alice offered to show her something on the other side of the sitting room. But Tennessee never succeeded in hearing a word of what they were saying. I pitied the thwarted lady—I couldn't see the necessity for the cruelty to wives that was practiced in the rue de Fleurus. Still, I couldn't help being amused at Alice's wife-proof technique. Curiously, it was only applied to wives; non-wives were admitted to Gertrude's conversation.

Sherwood Anderson was judged harshly by the young writers; and suffered considerably from the falling-off of his followers. But he was a forerunner, and, whether they acknowledge it or not, the generation of the twenties owes him considerable debt."

Sylvia Beach
Shakespeare and Company
(U Nebraska 1956) 30-32

"Anderson's Naturalism may be considered on three planes: (1) His exploration of character without reference to the orthodox moral yardstick; (2) his questionings, 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 major themes. One is discovery, the other inhibition. These themes correspond with the demands of the two branches of the divided stream of transcendentalism. The theme of discovery is the recognition of Spirit, the unfolding of the world and its perception by the intuition, the secret insight by which man's life is suddenly revealed to him. It comes when George Willard sits in the dark over the fairground with Helen White....

The theme of inhibition appears in almost every story of Anderson's, and it relates to three general areas of cause and experience. The first is the problem of growing up....Second is the frustration which comes from the absence of a tradition of manners...he evolves the concept of the *grotesque* to indicate what small-town life has done to its people. 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 Man in the ideal sense....*Winesburg, Ohio* is full of insights into the buried life, into the thoughts of the repressed, the inarticulate, the misunderstood. Most frequently frustrated is the desire to establish some degrees of intimacy with another person. A tradition of manners would accomplish just this by providing a medium through which acquaintance could ripen into intimacy. Small-town America has wanted such a tradition. In place of it, it has had joking, back-slapping, and buffoonery which irk the sensitive spirit and make him draw ever more secretly into himself. The concluding paragraph of 'The Thinker' shows these confused and constricted emotions working at a critical moment in the life of a boy who wanted to get away....

In the mixture of impressionist rendering of experience and the device of a story told by a disorderly narrator we find the heart of Anderson's form. He makes a virtue of beginning a story at the end and ending it at the middle. He gives away 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. 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'...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."

Charles Child Walcutt
"Sherwood Anderson: Impressionism and The Buried Life"
American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream
(U Minnesota 1956)

“Sherwood Anderson in his *Memoirs* testifies to the nearly miraculous sense of ease and liberation with which the stories of *Winesburg, Ohio* were written--poured out in a Chicago room in a concentrated fury of creation, sometimes two or three stories in a week. If his account of their composition is literally true, it is a symbolic parallel to the creative exuberance of the Twenties. The *Winesburg* stories speak with the voice of the Twenties too in their rebellion against lingering Victorianisms, middle-class repressions, Midwestern pieties, Puritan hypocrisies, village narrownesses--all the things which hampered and limited the ‘life of realization’ upon which Anderson and his whole generation were bent.

Individually the stories of *Winesburg, Ohio* do not represent Anderson’s best and richest work, and we have acknowledged that fact by selecting a story from another book, *The Triumph of the Egg*. But collectively they are both impressive and of absolutely first importance. They were revolutionary in more than their disregard of conventional morals. The outraged protest that they inspired may even have been obscurely aesthetic in part, for these were no stories by conventional standards: even Anderson’s friend Floyd Dell said so; Mencken said so; the reviewers said so. They were little vignettes of buried lives, throbs of muffled desire, sketches of characters foundering among the village tribalism, glimpses of torment behind drawn (and sometimes undrawn) blinds. They were not only plotless, but they did not even make use of the sensuous impressionism by which Crane and Steele could impress by mere vividness. These stories moved obscurely, like night-things. To this day the warmest admirers of Anderson cannot quite say how they get their effects.

The style is flat, the method more narrative than dramatic, and yet *Winesburg*’s people have the terrible shame-faced look of people caught in something unspeakably personal. The suppressed emotions of their lives burst out of them like moans or cries, and they compel attention and exact sympathy as more cunningly made and steered characters could not. The influence of Chekhov, obviously, is strong here: Chekhov was one of the new and exciting writers of whom Anderson’s mind was full, and it was not entirely unjust that a reviewer should later call him the ‘phallic Chekhov.’ It may be precisely the strong Chekhovian sympathy that makes *Winesburg, Ohio* a great book--William Faulkner says it is the only great book that Anderson ever wrote. ‘Unlighted Lamps’ is our choice because it contains, along with the themes of frustration and loss and yearning and human waste that were the soul of *Winesburg*, the rich and warmly felt background of the county fairgrounds and race tracks where many of his best *Winesburg* stories are laid. If a single story is to represent Anderson, this will serve as well as any, and better than most. And after Anderson, the deluge.”

Wallace Stegner
Introduction
Great American Short Stories
Wallace and Mary Stegner, eds.
(Dell 1957) 23-24

“Anderson’s most successful works are his stories and short pieces, especially the highly poetic and dramatic set of sketches of *Winesburg, Ohio*. Like Edgar Lee Masters, he seeks to avoid the artificial literary [cliches] of the city and the return to the more authentic life of rural America; like Masters also he sees the American small town as a suppressed volcano of frustrations, passions, and bitterness. Most of Anderson’s characters are people a psychologist would term neurotic; many of them are amiable, a few dedicated or selfless, but none are entirely happy or complacent. Anderson belongs to the Lost Generation of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Dos Passos, and like these authors he is torn between affection and bitterness toward the land of his birth.

Anderson’s attitudes are consistent throughout his work, although they appear only nebulously in his earlier books. He is suspicious and antagonistic in regard to middle-class virtue, and he is scornful of what is ordinarily called respectability in American life. He detests puritanism, and this has led him into an antagonism toward American religion. He is by no means irreligious; in fact there is a strong almost mystical element of ethical religion in his work. His dislike of hypocrisy, however, causes him to view American Protestantism merely as the solace of frustrated clergymen, hysterical wives, and frigid spinsters. The characters in his stories we are meant to admire are the eccentrics: alcoholic artists, degenerate telegraph clerks, all the dregs and outcasts of respectable bourgeois society.

Anderson's style reflects an effort to capture the authentic colloquial atmosphere of American folklore. The language is simple and laconic, often resembling the dialogue of Hemingway. The stories are usually told in retrospect, as though seen through the veil of years; we hear about them as we could hear the half-forgotten scandal of a generation back. The stories in *Winesburg, Ohio* tend to follow a consistent pattern. First we are shown the protagonist, usually a neurotic or misfit, in the latter stages of his life and told the attitude of the town toward him. Then little by little the author reveals to us the factors which have made a human wreck out of this person who might have been happy and successful. The intolerance of a town has castigated and driven away a sensitive young teacher; misunderstanding has parted a young couple and warped the bride's life; sexual frustration has turned a useful citizen into a drunkard; or a family disgrace has preyed on the mind of a young boy until he grows up an eccentric.

In the beginning of each story we feel a disgusted fascination toward these characters, but before we are done we understand them and sympathize with them. Thus Anderson demonstrates a basic proposition of modern psychology: that social misfits are not evil or reprehensible, that they are merely mental invalids warped by their contact with organized society and its rigid conventions."

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron's Educational Series 1958) 296-97

"Rereading Sherwood Anderson after many years, one feels again that his work is desperately uneven, but one is gratified to find that the best of it is as new and spring-like as ever....Anderson made a great noise...when he published *Winesburg, Ohio* in 1919. The older critics scolded him, the younger ones praised him, as a man of the changing hour, yet he managed in that early work and others to be relatively timeless. There are moments in American life to which he gave not only the first but the final expression. He soon became a writer's writer, the only story teller of his generation who left his mark on the style and vision of the generation that followed.

Hemingway, Faulkner, Wolfe, Steinbeck, Caldwell, Saroyan, Henry Miller...each of these owes an unmistakable debt to Anderson, and their names might stand for dozens of others. Hemingway was regarded as his disciple in 1920, when both men were living on the Near North Side of Chicago. Faulkner says that he had written very little...before meeting Anderson in 1925 and becoming, for a time, his inseparable companion...Thomas Wolfe proclaimed in 1936 that Anderson was 'the only man in America who ever taught me anything'...

All the disciples left him sooner or later, so that his influence was chiefly on their early work; but still it was decisive. He opened doors for all of them and gave them faith in themselves....As the disciples were doing, most of Anderson's readers deserted him during the 1930s....*Dark Laughter* [1925] was his only best-seller, and *Poor White* (1920), the best of [his novels], is studied in colleges as a picture of the industrial revolution in a small Midwestern town. There is, however, not one of [his seven novels] that is truly effective as a novel; not one that has balance and sustained force; not one that doesn't break apart into episodes or nebulize into a vague emotion....He had achieved a quality of emotional...truth and he preserved it to the end of his career, while doing little to refine, transform, or even understand it....He depended on feelings so deeply embedded in his personality that he was unable to direct them....

Writing was an activity he assigned to a different level of himself, the one on which he was emotional and unpractical....He might start a story like a man running hard to catch a train, but once it was caught he could settle back and let himself be carried—often to the wrong destination. He knew instinctively whether one of his stories was right or wrong, but he didn't always know why. He could do what writers call 'pencil work' on his manuscript, changing a word here and there, but he couldn't tighten the plot, delete weak passages, sharpen the dialogue, give a twist to the ending; if he wanted to improve the story, he had to wait for a return of the mood that had produced it, then write it over from beginning to end....Sometimes, in different books, he published two or three versions of the same story, so that we can see how it grew in his subconscious mind....Time as a logical succession of events was Anderson's greatest difficulty in writing novels or even long stories. He got his tenses confused and carried his heroes ten years forward or back in a single paragraph. His instinct was to present everything together, as in a dream....

He was essentially a story teller, as he kept insisting, but his art was of a special type, belonging to an oral rather than a written tradition...Most of his literary masters were English or American: George Borrow, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain (more than he admitted), and Gertrude Stein. D. H. Lawrence was a less fortunate influence, but only on his later work. His earliest and perhaps his principal teacher was his father...who used to entertain whole barrooms with tales of his impossible adventures in the Civil War. A great many of the son's stories, too, were told first in saloons...Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*...pointed the way toward a simpler and more repetitive style, closer to the rhythms of American speech, than that of Anderson's first novels....

American folk tales usually end with a 'snapper'—that is, after starting with the plausible, they progress through the barely possible to the flatly incredible, then wait for a laugh. Magazine fiction used to follow—and much of it still does—a pattern leading to a different sort of snapper, one that calls for a gasp of surprise or relief instead of a guffaw. Anderson broke the pattern by writing stories that not only lacked snappers, in most cases, but even had no plots in the usual sense. The tales he told in his Midwestern drawl were not incidents or episodes, they were *moments*, each complete in itself. The best of the moments in *Winesburg, Ohio* is called 'The Untold Lie'....

That single moment of aliveness—that epiphany, as Joyce would have called it, that sudden reaching out of two characters through walls of inarticulateness and misunderstanding—is the effect that Anderson is trying to create for his readers or listeners....That moment of revelation was the story Anderson told over and over, but without exhausting its freshness, for the story had as many variations as there were faces in his dreams....Anderson had that gift for summing up, for pouring a lifetime into a moment....Those moments at the center of Anderson's often marvelous stories were moments, in general, without a sequel; they existed separately and timelessly. That explains why he couldn't write novels and why, with a single exception, he never even wrote a book in the strict sense of the word. A book should have a structure and a development, whereas for Anderson there was chiefly the flash of lightning that revealed a life without changing it.

The one exception, of course, is *Winesburg, Ohio*, and that became a true book for several reasons: because it was conceived as a whole, because Anderson had found a subject that released his buried emotions, and because most of the book was written in what was almost a single burst of inspiration, so that it gathered force as it went along....In structure the book lies midway between the novel proper and the mere collection of stories. Like several books by more recent authors, all early readers of Anderson—like Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses*, like Steinbeck's *Tortilla Flat* and *The Pastures of Heaven*, like Caldwell's *Georgia Boy*—it is a cycle of stories with several unifying elements, including a single background, a prevailing tone, and a central character....

George Willard is growing up in a friendly town full of solitary persons; the author calls them 'grotesques.' Their lives have been distorted not, as Anderson tells us in his prologue, by their each having seized upon a single truth, but rather by their inability to express themselves. Since they cannot truly communicate with others, they have all become emotional cripples. Most of the grotesques are attracted one by one to George Willard: They feel that he might be able to help them. In those moments of truth that Anderson loves to describe, they try to explain themselves to George, believing that he alone in Winesburg has an instinct for finding the right words and using them honestly...*Winesburg, Ohio* is far from the pessimistic or destructive or morbidly sexual work it was once attacked for being. Instead it is a work of love, an attempt to break down the walls that divide one person from another, and also, in its own fashion, a celebration of small-town life in the lost days of good will and innocence."

Malcolm Cowley

Introduction

Winesburg, Ohio

(Viking/Compass 1960) 18, 11-12, 14-15

"Of his life Sherwood Anderson always wished to construct a parable, even a myth. It had various forms, but they all sprang from a central action. That action he recounted with varying details throughout his work, fiction and nonfiction, and that is why his fiction is never without autobiography just as his autobiographies are never without fiction. The central action is this: on November 27, 1912, a successful

manufacturer in the town of Elyria, Ohio, dreaming sometimes of becoming a great benevolent tycoon, chafing more often at the stultifying routines of promotion and salesmanship, Sherwood Anderson, aged thirty-six, walked out of his office and away from his wife and family into the freedom of a wandering literary life, never to return to business....

[His first novels, *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916) and *Marching Men* (1917)] although they caused considerable excitement as marking the appearance of an original genius, had small sales and were, in fact, poor novels. They are loose and sprawling works, without unity of theme or action, with comically unreal dialogue and with narrative and analytical passages written in long, straggling sentences that bear no relation to the style that Anderson presently would make his remarkable own. In the themes there are hints of what he was to become: the brooding boyhood in a drab Iowa town; the eccentric character of Windy, drawn, Anderson said, after his own father; and above all, the criticism of the myth of business idealism and the assertion at the end of the novel of his own myth—the break with manufacturing into freedom, to ‘find truth.’

In *Marching Men*, a curious story about a mindless and militant brotherhood formed by workers under the leadership of Beaut McGregor, intent on violence to free themselves from the routines of industrial slavery, both the inarticulate, somewhat Whitmanesque yearning for a bond between man and man and the aspiration to freedom, however ill-defined, suggest characteristic future themes. It is less easy to see the future Anderson at his best in the volume of inchoate poems called *Mid-American Chants*, published in 1918....As a totality, as a book, that is, *Winesburg, Ohio* is the height of Anderson's achievement. Taken singly, however, none of its separate pieces is as good as any of a half-dozen or more truly separate short stories that he was to write then and later—stories like ‘The Egg’ and ‘I Want to Know Why’ from *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), ‘I'm a Fool’ and ‘The Man Who Became a Woman’ from *Horses and Men* (1923), and ‘A Meeting South’ and ‘Death in the Woods’ from the volume called *Death in the Woods and Other Stories* (1933). Grotesques still appear in all of them; perhaps Anderson's masterpiece of grotesquerie is the father in ‘The Egg.’

Loneliness and isolation continue to be the condition of the characters, whether grotesques or adolescent boys such as the hero of ‘I Want to Know Why’—drawn again after Anderson himself. The style continues much the same—the slightly hesitant, slightly repetitious, and considerably rhythmical prose that bases itself so clearly on the spoken American language, sometimes, indeed, as in ‘I'm a Fool’ and ‘I Want to Know Why,’ becoming the dialect itself, as it had been earlier used by Mark Twain in *Huckleberry Finn* and elsewhere. Whatever similarities these later stories may bear to the slighter sketches of *Winesburg, Ohio*, it is nevertheless in their fuller embodiment that we can best see why Sherwood Anderson was nothing less than a revolutionary force in the American short story, and why the short story was the form most suited to the full expression of his talent.

These stories, like the Winesburg pieces, seemed to contemporary readers to be a new victory for realism, and in a sense they were. They closed their eyes to nothing, glossed over nothing, neither the brutalities of men nor the beauty of animals. Their candid concern with the sexual relationship and with sexual motivations and repressions, their implied criticism of a society that frustrates individuality and of an individualism that creates a society of hermits, their accurate report of physical detail and of a certain range in the speaking voice—all this and more made Anderson seem to be the liberating champion of realism both in subject matter and in method. Yet when we put stories like ‘The Egg’ or ‘I Want to Know Why’ beside the work of such a realist as Stephen Crane or such a naturalist as Theodore Dreiser, we seen readily enough that, with their impressionistic method, the first story is more nearly a fable and the second more nearly a poetic lamentation than either is a conventionally realistic or a naturalistic report, that Anderson's important observations are at once under the surface of manners and transcendent of the surface of society.

The short story was perfectly calculated to articulate those glimpses—James Joyce's word ‘epiphany,’ is not inappropriate to Anderson's gift—into the secret, inarticulate life that was his special province. Yet over and over he would attempt the longer form of the novel where, over and over, he would lose his imaginative grip on his materials.”

Mark Schorer

“Sherwood Anderson...was the dreamy, dad, Romantic idler within each of us, evoking with nostalgia and grief the bitter moments of recognition which have formed him—formed all of us in our lonely America....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....The romantic Platonist sees a conflict between the deepest meaning and the facts of our lives, between what we do and what we ‘really’ are....

It was the deep trouble of Anderson’s own life that he was his self, which could be realized only by that monstrous thing, the Life of Art, as flourishing in opposition to decent connections with others in society. Marriage, work, friendship were beautiful things; but the gray series of furnished rooms, in which he wrote, enough rooms to fill a city, were his real home. Writing letters and brooding behind his locked door, he idealized love, he idealized friendship. He withdrew to the company of phantom creatures. He hoped to guard his integrity. He kept himself the sort of child-man he described with such comprehending sympathy in the character of Enoch Robinson....He is related to his material with a love that lacks aesthetic detachment and often lacks the control which comes with that detachment.

[His stories] are practically unique in his among modern story telling, and it is partially this that gives them their sometimes embarrassing, often tormenting and unforgettable folk quality....They have a curious archaic directness that amounts to a kind of stylization. The unanalytic simplicity itself is a sophisticated manner....He is strikingly the perpetual adolescent in love with love rather than with a specific girl with changing flesh. One can see him dreaming after his dream girl even as he approached old age. His Romantic chivalry, his lust for the proletariat, his fantastic correspondence in which the letters seem to be written to himself, no matter how touching their apparent candor and earnest reaching out—is he perhaps the other side of the coin of his accusation against Henry James? To be a novelist of lovers who did not dare to hate—this, too, is a limitation. He seems obliged to love others as a function of his own faulty self-love....His failures help to make still more brilliant his achievements in certain of the stories of *Winesburg*, in ‘The Egg,’ and in scattered paragraphs, stories, and sections of novels....

He carried his childhood like a hurt warm bird held to his middle-aged breast as he walked out of his factory into the life of art. The primitive emotions of childhood are the raw material of all poetry. Sometimes the indulgence of them to the exclusion of the mature perspectives of adult life prevents Anderson from equaling his aspiration and his own best work....The faults of unevenness, egotism, lazy acceptance of ideals, and Romantic self-glorification are as nothing against the realized works of art which force their way through....Curtis Hartman, George Willard, Enoch Robinson, all of the people of *Winesburg*, haunt us as do our neighbors, our friends, our own secret selves which we first met one springtime in childhood.”

Herbert Gold
“*Winesburg, Ohio: The Purity and Cunning of Sherwood Anderson*”
The Age of Happy Problems
(The Dial Press 1962)

“After 1926 Anderson’s career as a writer was anticlimactic. In the early 1920’s, the era of the *Seven Arts* and *The Dial*, his stories appealed to many young people who, when they reread him several years later, found him embarrassingly adolescent and quite outmoded. Still, in spite of his sentimentalisms, cruelly exposed by Hemingway in [his parody] *The Torrents of Spring* (1926), he had helped a generation to grow up. His ideas about the importance of love and the need for a more humane industrialism are still valid. The best of his short stories, ‘Hands,’ ‘I’m a Fool,’ ‘Death in the Woods,’ and ‘I Want to Know Why,’ retain as much vitality as anything by Sinclair Lewis or Dreiser, his contemporaries in the naturalistic movement, and he did as much as anyone to create a public for modern American fiction.”

Max J. Herzberg & staff
The Reader’s Encyclopedia of American Literature
(Crowell 1962)

“The language of *Winesburg, Ohio*, contrary to what one might expect from an advertising man given to hyperbole and gratuitous grandiloquence, should be colorless and flat. The style is quite unaffected, for the most part containing little that is striking or arresting. There is, in fact, a certain poverty of style, which is surprising considering the richness of the subject. But the language is really more emotional than sensuous. 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. Lionel Trilling has put this quite well: ‘In Anderson’s world there are many emotions, or rather many instances of a few emotions, but, there are very few sights, sounds and smells, very little of the stuff of actuality’....

Anderson detested industrialism too much to seek enrichment of his vocabulary in its neologisms, as Whitman had done. His taste for the idyllic country life led him toward a chasm of a non-literary and rustic flavor such as still survive in certain rural areas of the United States, words like ‘afoot’ (‘Hands’), ‘unto’ (‘Hands’), ‘to set afire’ (‘Terror’), ‘abloom’ (‘The Thinker’), etc....The most striking trait of Anderson’s style is the extreme simplicity of its syntax. Most of his 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 mostly temporal and widely separated. It is the exact opposite of a periodical style. Anderson proceeds by accumulation and juxtaposition and almost never relies on subordination. His stories are a series of independent affirmations placed end to end and strung together by innumerable ‘ands.’ This is probably an equally accurate description of the style of Mark Twain, who came before him, and that of Ernest Hemingway, who came after. To quote Joseph Warren Beach, we are dealing here with the ‘great leveling democracy of the “and”.’ The result of this is that the reader often has the impression of a story told by word of mouth. Anderson has his roots in the great American tradition of story tellers which flourished in the Middle West in the frontier period at a time when the village grocery store was the center of social life in the rural community....

However, despite the monotonous and very simple structure of the sentences, despite the oral character of the tales and the frequent colloquialisms, his style is not really familiar, an only rarely does it have the spontaneity and naturalness of the folk tale. In fact there is always a kind of stiffness or dignity about it.... This prose is never the prose of speech; 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. As a result these stories are like nothing heard now or then in a small-town grocery store. They bear quite undeniably the mark of the special genius of their author....

In short, it is a style that lacks style. Although Anderson admired Gertrude Stein, he never tried to write ‘perfect sentences’ as she did. And this is why Hemingway, who at first had taken him for a master, quickly turned away from him. He was susceptible to the awkward charm of Anderson’s rambling tales, but he was convinced of the need for tighter form and stricter aesthetics. Anderson had a different conception. His aim was not to sculpture stories which would then take on a life of their own quite independent of the author, but rather to make his readers share certain emotions which he regarded as important....He once wrote...an ‘Apology for Crudity.’ Like Whitman, he wanted to sing his ‘Song of Myself,’ but in the form of stories instead of poems. Despite appearances, Anderson is fundamentally a lyric poet rather than a story teller....

The stories that make up *Winesburg, Ohio* are meditations on life in the form of images. They express at once Anderson’s conviction that life is absurd and the love he was unable to keep from feeling for everything that exists....Sherwood Anderson’s art is thus, in the final analysis, that of a poet. For this reason 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 than forms its substance....Anderson was essentially an inspired amateur, a Romantic poet who expressed the insights of sensibility in tales that have more or less the appearance of Realism...he was convinced that art is synonymous with artifice and he preferred life.”

Roger Asselineau
“Language and Style in Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*”

“At this date, not much remains to be done by way of appointing Sherwood Anderson a place among American writers; in fact he himself succinctly indicated his own position when he remarked in the *Memoirs* that, ‘For all my egotism, I know I am but a minor figure.’ There is little disagreement, either, about the work on which Anderson’s reputation rests—*Winesburg*, ‘Death in the Woods,’ a few stories from *The Triumph of the Egg*. When we come to estimate the accomplishment represented by *Winesburg*, however, things are not quite so clear....

Perhaps the sanest way to view *Winesburg*, an uneven collection, as a special kind of amalgam of naturalism and lyricism. Every reader, whether approvingly or not, acknowledges the lyric intensity on the best Anderson stories. To Herbert Gold, Anderson is ‘one of the purest, most intense poets of loneliness,’ while Irving Howe (who has also called Anderson a ‘pre-poet’) holds that no other American writer ‘has yet been able to realize that strain of lyrical and nostalgic feeling which in Anderson’s best work reminds one of another and greater poet of tenderness, Turgenev.’ Robert Gorham Davis ascribes the ‘great impression’ made by *Winesburg* to its ‘freshness and lyric intensity.’ It is Paul Rosenfeld, however, who has seen most clearly that Anderson’s lyricism is a method as much as an effect, for to this reader, Anderson’s narratives ‘really are lyrics with epic characteristics, lyrics narrative of event.’

In analyzing the elements that go into Anderson’s lyricism, Rosenfeld notes the ‘legendary tone, the repetitions of slow rhythms and the loose joints’ of the American tale, as well as the personal feeling that rises from the region between Anderson’s ‘conscious and unconscious minds.’ But Rosenfeld places greatest stress on the purely verbal aspects of Anderson’s poetic quality...the best Anderson stories always contain and lead up to a revelation, epiphany, or state of realized experience....To Herbert Gold, ‘The experience of epiphany is characteristic of great literature, and the lyric tales of Anderson give this wonderful rapt coming-forth, time and time again.’ Irving Howe—uncomplimentarily—notes that Anderson ‘wrote best when he had no need to develop situations or show change and interaction—‘...

Anderson’s abandonment of pure naturalism involved him in a movement away from structures dependent upon sequential action or gradually increased intensity and toward an arrangement of events which would better dramatize the centrifugal, diffused, digressive style, and the circular, hovering or ‘Chinese box’ approach to ‘what happened’ thus do not so much demonstrate Anderson’s affection of the manner of oral tale-telling as they illustrate his understanding that the ‘epic’ base of the story must be manipulated in such a way that weight is thrown upon the significance of the happenings as it reveals itself to the central consciousness and to the reader, rather than upon the events themselves. This is, of course, essentially a ‘poetic’ strategy....It is in the *Winesburg* stories such as ‘The Thinker,’ ‘Adventure,’ ‘Hands,’ ‘Sophistication,’ and ‘The Untold Lie’ that Anderson manages to reinforce a certain surface fidelity with what Ernest Boyd has called the ‘deeper realism which sees beyond and beneath the exterior world to the hidden reality which is the essence of things.’”

Sister M. Joselyn, O.S.B.
“Sherwood Anderson and the Lyric Story”
The Twenties / Poetry and Prose
(Everett Edwards 1966)
Richard E. Langford and William E. Taylor, eds.

“As for his alleged debt to Anderson, Ernest could not agree. “‘My Old Man’ was about a boy and his father and some race horses. Sherwood had also written about boys and horses, but “very differently.” Ernest was sure that he had not been inspired by Anderson, whom he knew pretty well but had not seen in the flesh for several years. Sherwood’s recent work seemed ‘to have gone to hell, perhaps from people in New York telling him too much how good he was.’ But Ernest was very fond of him. He had written good stories.... [1923] Ernest acknowledged a more remote obligation to Sherwood Anderson, to whom he had lately written a warm letter of appreciation for his part in persuading Liveright to accept *In Our Time*.... Every writer eventually needed freedom from outside influence. Ernest was uncommonly vehement about this matter...Edmund Wilson had said that he belonged to the same school as Anderson and Gertrude

Stein. It was a connection that he wanted to live down as rapidly as possible....Ernest was sick of being compared to Anderson. He said as much to Edmund Wilson as long ago as 1923. Anderson had started well, but his work had lately been going to hell...

In the dark days of November, Ernest began to meditate a parody-satire. It might help to head off future comparisons between Anderson's work and his own...Turgenev's *The Torrents of Spring* gave him his title, and Fielding's *Tom Jones* provided an epigraph to the effect that the only source of the true ridiculous is affectation. Ernest's method was mainly a parody of the affectations in Anderson's latest novel, *Dark Laughter*, a rather silly book that deserved the lampoon. Ernest's manner was brash. He made no pretense of serious purpose. One of his notes to the reader told how he had written Chapter Twelve straight off on the typewriter in a couple of hours...As Anderson's publisher and friend, Liveright could not possibly publish such a book. In turning it down he would automatically release Ernest from the terms of his contractual agreement....[1926]

Still in Madrid, Ernest wrote Sherwood Anderson about *The Torrents of Spring*, which was about to be published by Scribners. He admitted that Sherwood might regard it as a 'lousy, snotty letter' about a 'lousy, snotty book.' But, said he, he felt obliged to explain his seemingly irresistible urge to push Anderson in the face after all his help in getting *In Our Time* published and praised....It was a joke, not meant to be mean, but absolutely sincere. Writers should not have to pull their punches among themselves. When a man like Sherwood, who was capable of great things, wrote something 'rotten,' it was Ernest's obligation to 'call' him on it...Most of the commentators found the book 'great fun,' and one called it 'the best take-off on Anderson' in existence....*The Torrents* echoed some of Anderson's seedier mannerisms in the shrewdest possible fashion. But Sherwood himself was considerably upset. Ernest's letter from Madrid had struck him as 'possibly the most self-conscious and patronizing' ever written from one literary man to another, while the book itself gave evidence of jealous resentment. It might have been funny, said Anderson, if Max Beerbohm had condensed it to a dozen pages....

When Sherwood Anderson came to Paris, Ernest asked him out for a drink. In reporting the visit to [editor Max] Perkins, he said that Anderson was 'not at all sore' about *The Torrents of Spring*, and that they had had a 'fine time' together. Anderson took a somewhat different view of the incident. By his account, Ernest came knocking at his door, asking him out for a drink, talked for a few minutes, and then turned on his heel and strode rapidly away. Anderson said charitably that Ernest's 'absorption in his ideas' had doubtless 'affected his capacity for friendship'."

Carlos Baker
Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story
(Scribner's 1969) 119, 147, 159, 160, 170-71, 181

Dear Sherwood Anderson: Your letter was fine (this is not the Master talking to his pupil) and what a horse's ass I must become as soon as I sit in front of a typewriter if those are the snooty kind of letters I've written you. But anyhow if I did write that way I won't write that way anymore...[1 July 1926] Dear Mr. Perkins:...Sherwood Anderson is in Paris and we had two fine afternoons together. He said a very funny thing about the Editors of the *New Masses*: They, he said, wanted a revolution because they hoped that under some new system of government they would be men of talent...[to Maxwell Perkins his new editor, at his preferred publisher, Scribner's, 20 January 1927]

Dear Mr. Lewis:...I was very glad you liked *The Torrents of Spring*...[D. H.] Lawrence, you know, was [Sherwood] Anderson's God in the old days—and you can trace his effect all through A's stuff after he commenced reading him. But of course in his autobiography *A Story Teller's Story*, he never mentions him...[to Wyndham Lewis, 24 October 1927] Dear Mr. Gingrich:...Learned from Anderson but it didn't last long...to publisher Arnold Gingrich, 3 April 1933] Dear Max:...Writers are certainly dying like flies. It is a damned shame about old Sherwood...." [to Maxwell Perkins, 29 April 1941]

Ernest Hemingway
Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1917-1961
(Scribner's 1981) 178, 183, 210, 241, 264, 385, 23
Carlos Baker, ed.

“One explanation of the discrepancy between Anderson’s achievement and his influence has to do with his origins. Many critics and readers were easterners who nevertheless believed, as Van Wyck Brooks put it, ‘that the heart of America lay in the West’ and that ‘Sherwood was the essence of the West.’ A second explanation lies in the overriding importance of the theme and scene that Anderson sought to explore: the loneliness of the modern world as manifested in the social, cultural, and spiritual impoverishment of small-town America. The isolation that haunts Anderson’s characters is religious as well as social; felt as a form of orphanhood, a kind of ultimate separation, it leads them almost inevitably to flight that is undertaken as a kind of return. The struggle his characters wage, they wage in the name of reestablishing ties with a community, a family, or a self that they have somehow lost. A third explanation lies in Anderson’s capacity for deliberate self-dramatization.

Like Walt Whitman, Anderson viewed himself as a composite of us all; he was the American as writer. In the tales he told about himself, in his three volumes of autobiographical writing, *A Story-Teller’s Story* (1924), *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926), and the posthumous *Sherwood Anderson’s Memoirs* (1942), and in his letters, he insisted on mixing his life and art, on making himself into a fictional character for his time as well as for himself. In this, too, his motives were mixed: They were social and even didactic as well as personal and artistic. Anderson wanted to teach us, among other things, the value of dropping out and breaking away....Most of all, Anderson wanted to teach us that the purpose of art, like the purpose of love, is self-transcendence.”

David Minter
The Harper Anthology of American Literature 2
(Harper & Row 1987) 1166

“Sherwood Anderson was above all a storyteller, and in all of his writings he has left his readers a rich record of his life....The hunger to see hidden significance and beauty beneath the surface of lonely, often frustrated lives became Anderson’s main preoccupation as a writer, whether the setting is ‘Winesburg,’ or ‘Bidwell,’ as in his best novel, *Poor White* (1920), or described directly as Clyde in his three autobiographies...In depicting the inhabitants of the small midwestern town at the turn of the century, Anderson depicts the struggles of all of us, especially when we are on the threshold of adulthood....‘Death in the Woods’ tells the story of Ma Grimes, an old woman who spends herself ‘feeding animal life.’ More important, however, it tells the story about the moment in a young boy’s life when he realizes that there is a meaning behind Ma Grimes’s existence and a radiance to her body after death. Ultimately, it tells the story of the way Ma Grimes feeds the mature narrator’s artistic life.”

Martha Curry
The Heath Anthology of American Literature 2
(D. C. Heath 1990) 1118-19

Michael Hollister (2015)