

30 CRITICS DISCUSS

Winesburg, Ohio (1919)

Sherwood Anderson

(1876-1941)

“Every Middle Westerner will recognize Winesburg, Ohio as the town in which he grew up. Devon, Iowa, would have furnished forth just such a book as this...or any one of ten thousand others. The story of a small town anywhere is the story of the revolt of youth against custom-morality; with youth winning only occasionally and in secret, losing often and publicly. In the middle west the dominant morality of the crossroads is puritan inheritance. Puritanism went over to Ohio from New England with the settlers, and has taken a firmer hold on the minds and the lives of the inhabitants of the Mississippi valley than it ever had in the east.... As a challenge to the snappy short story form, with its planned proportions of flippant philosophy, epigrammatic conversation and sex danger, nothing better has come out of America than *Winesburg, Ohio*.”

Maxwell Anderson
The New Republic
(25 June 1919)

“Anderson is not a short story writer in so far as that implies a man who can handle the form of the short story. His metier is rather the—to qualify what alone would sound like a trifle—significant episode. Here, for example, are a number of episodes in the lives of the dwellers in a small Ohio town, in a country where farming and berry growing and merchandising occupy the people. They have no form in the sense of artifice—a bad sense in which to use the word, however. To be more accurate they have no pattern. Artistic form they have in that each episode in its outer garb reflects and presents some emotional reality.

It was in one of Barrie’s early books that I first read the remark, which other people have also made, that genius is the ability to prolong one’s childhood. Sherwood Anderson has in these pages given remarkable proof of his power to hold I a realm of the mind more intimate than memory the very feel of what his own youth must have been and the inner aspects of all the youth, the age, the whole psychic atmosphere of this Ohio town. He has not merely remembered the peculiarities of his townsfolk and made stories of them, he has in a manner altogether peculiar to himself managed to stay in the center of each little town tragedy or comedy—and he tells you about it.

He does not write these stories—the writing seems an accident. A writer would have patterned and transformed the tales. Sherwood Anderson lets you overhear him telling the tales—telling them to himself or to the moon, very often... How slight and fugitive and unimportant [it] is as prose.... And most of the tales in this book have that strange air of seeming inconsequence that only life has, that conscious art strives so hard to avoid. More than once, for instance, Mr. Anderson shows us an ‘affair’ brewing between some village man and maiden, and then a tremor of the soul or an almost imperceptible zephyr of circumstance intervenes. And the story as the reader tried to imagine it fades away. Nothing is left but the revelation of some living soul’s thoughts and feelings for a brief time.”

Llewellyn Jones
“The Unroofing of Winesburg:
Tales of Life that Seem Overheard Rather than Written”
The Chicago Evening Post
(20 June 1919)

“This Anderson is a man of whom a great deal will be heard hereafter. Along with Willa Cather, James Branch Cabell and a few others, he belongs to a small group that has somehow emancipated itself from the prevailing imitativeness and banality of the national letters and is moving steadily toward work that will do honor to the country. His first novel *Windy McPherson’s Son*, printed in 1916, had plenty of faults, but there were so many compensating merits that it stood out clearly above the general run of the fiction of its

year. Then came *Marching Men*, another defective but extremely interesting novel, and then a book of dithyrambs, *Mid American Chants*. But these things, for all their brilliant moments, did not adequately represent Anderson. The national vice of ethical purpose corrupted them... Now, in *Winesburg, Ohio*, he throws off that handicap. What remains is pure representation—and it is representation so vivid, so full of insight, so shiningly life-life and glowing, that the book is lifted into a category of its own. Nothing quite like it has ever been done in America....

In form, it is a collection of short stories, with common characters welding them into a continued picture of life in a small inland town. But what short stories! Compare them to the popular trade goods of the Gouverneur Morris and Julian Streets, or even to the more pretentious work of the Alice Browns and Katherine Fullerton Geroulds. It is the difference between music by a Chaminade and music by a Brahms. Into his brief pages Anderson not only gets brilliant images of men and women who walk in all the colors of reality; he also gets a profound sense of the obscure, inner drama of their lives. Consider, for example, the four part story 'Godliness.' It is fiction for half a page, but after that it seem indubitable fact—fact that is searching and ferret-like—fact infinitely stealthy and persuasive—the sort of fact that suddenly changes a stolid, inscrutable Captain MacWhirr into a moving symbol of man in his struggle with the fates.

And then turn to 'Respectability,' and to 'The Strength of God,' and to 'Adventure,' and to 'The Teacher.' Here one gets all the joy that goes with the discovery of something quite new under the sun—a new order of the short story, half tale and half psychological anatomizing, and vastly better than all the kinds that have gone before. Here is the goal that *The Spoon River Anthology* aimed at, and missed by half a mile. Allow everything to the imperfection of the form and everything to the author's occasional failure to rise to it: what remains is a truly extraordinary book, by a man of such palpably unusual talent that it seems almost an impertinence to welcome him."

H. L. Mencken
Smart Set
(August 1919)

"A comparison between [*Winesburg, Ohio*] and *The Spoon River Anthology* is inevitable. Here, as there, the inner individual life of a typical American small town is laid bare, or let us say illuminated from within, so that we perceive its reality shining through the dull masks of convention and humdrum. It is a life of vivid feeling and ardent impulse doomed, for the most part, to be suppressed or misdirected, but still existent and potent as nothing is potent in the life of the community as a community. We must look past the fact at the outset that with this writer sex is well-nigh the mainspring of human action. At worst he seems in this book like a man who has too freely imbibed the doctrine of the psychoanalysts, and fares thereafter with eyes slightly 'set' along the path of fiction. At best he seems without consciousness of self or of theory to be getting at the root of the matter—one root, at least—for all of us. His style is plain, staccato, perhaps a little deliberately unliterary....

Frank and momentarily disconcerting as their detail often is, we feel in them none of the spiritual grossness of the Russian naturalists and their imitators.... Always he seems to be after the true morality that so often governs men and women when they are at odds with, or merely conforming to, conventional morality. I do not know where in prose a tenser moral action is concentrated than in the dozen pages of 'The Strength of God,' that amazing tale of the conversion of the Reverend Curtis Hartman... It may be suspected that most American readers will find themselves so busy recognizing Winesburg that they will have to be reminded to exercise their inherited prerogative of moral judgment upon it."

H. W. Boynton
The Bookman
(August 1919)

"The step from real merit to worthlessness in writing is so imperceptible that many times the average reader misses it, unless he be the intelligent sort of person who searches his reading matter paragraph by paragraph for new ideas and bits of beauty. And this last is the only sort of reading by which a person may gain any profit from reading Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, tales of Ohio small-town life. Mr. Anderson has striven to create stories according to his own conception of the new realism. Some of his

sketches, which are all impressionistic, have an underlying significance and real beauty of feeling, but more of them are descriptions, somewhat boldly naked, without a spark of life or creative feeling.”

Anonymous
The Springfield Republican
[Massachusetts]
(20 July 1919)

“In *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) Anderson turned to a village which he knew as Masters knew Spoon River. But Anderson was less satirical than Masters. The central figure of the Winesburg stories is a young reporter about to leave the place where he has always lived. He has not greatly hated it, and now because he is going he views it with a good deal of tenderness. It seems to him that most of his old neighbors are cramped spirits, repressed by village life. This part of their natures distorted beyond all symmetry, that part wasted away in desperate disuse, they have become grotesques. Their visions have no chance to be realities, and so make visionaries. Their religion, without poetry, is either rigid or cloudy. Love, lacking spontaneity, settles into fleshly habit or is stifled and malicious. Heroism of deed or thought either withers into melancholy inaction or else protects itself with a sullen or ridiculous bravado. If Masters in Spoon River looked cynically at the stealthy life there, Anderson in Winesburg looked sympathetically at the buried life, buried and pitiful.”

Carl Van Doren
The American Novel 1789-1939, 23rd edition
(Macmillan 1921-68) 296-97

“Mr. Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* is not so much a distinguished book as *The Triumph of the Egg*; but as that contains two of the half dozen most remarkable short stories written in this century that is not surprising. But it is an extraordinarily good book. Yet if one takes it as fiction, particularly if one has read and admired the class of fiction to which to judge from outward appearances it might be trying to belong—Booth Tarkington’s provincial novels, Miss Jewett’s and Miss Wilkins’ and Miss Deland’s short stories—one may be disappointed. But it is not fiction. It is poetry. It is unreasonable; it delights in places where those who are not poets could never find delight; it will not follow logic and find connections and trace ‘plots,’ but stands in front of things that are of no importance, infatuated with their quality, and hymns them with obstinate ecstasy; it seems persuaded there is beauty in anything, in absolutely anything. In such a spirit Mr. Anderson moves about his ugly little town and watches his dull ugly people. It lives, it glows, they exist as immortal souls. If we have listened truly to the sanctified old tunes we must know that this difficult new tune also is music.”

Rebecca West
The New Statesman
(22 July 1922)

“Unlike our earlier naturalists in handling of material and dramatic interests. Concerned with inner life rather than outer, with hidden drives rather than environment. Accepts the main criteria of Naturalism.... A lean and sparing writer whose symbolisms are obscure and puzzling. A single theme: the disastrous effect of frustrations and repressions that create grotesques. Due to (1) Crude, narrow environment ha t drives to strange aberrations; (2) Repressed instincts that break forth in abnormal action. The consequence a black loneliness—the hunger of fellowship and its denial. Limited in scope to episodic crises—hence his better stories short. Many failures: *Marching Men*; *Windy McPherson’s Son*; *Poor White* (1920); *Many Marriages* (1923)—a clumsy account of a Babbitt gone on a psychological spree; *Horses and Men* (1923)—some more Grotesques; see in particular ‘A Chicago Hamlet.’...

The Triumph of the Egg (1921). A strange and difficult book with its subtle symbolisms. The theme is the common hunger for romance and fellowship that confuses itself with sex and is unsatisfied. Suggested in prefatory poem: ‘I have a wonderful story to tell but know no way to tell it. ‘The Egg’: An epitome of his philosophy of grotesques. The egg breeds life that is futile, and life reproduces the egg. A morbid disgust that would bottle the egg, and the failure.... The note of determinism in Anderson expressed in two images, the wall and escape—running to get away from what holds us fast. But in running away from the old self to find a new, we carry the old self with us. Anderson one of the three or four most important men now writing fiction in America. Compare with D. H. Lawrence....

Winesburg, Ohio [1919]. A prose *Spoon River Anthology*, with an excellent collection of grotesques. Sharp vignettes; lonely, thwarted lives, 'confused and disconcerted by the facts of life.' A background of earlier America, crude and ugly, that drives to religious fanaticism in Steve Bentley; to passionate rebellion in Kate Swift; to bitter irony in Ray Pearson. Note the deterministic conclusion of 'The Untold Lie'—'Tricked, by Gad, that's what I was; tricked by life and made a fool of'; and the pessimism:... 'He shouted a protest against his life, against all life, against everything that makes life ugly'."

Vernon Louis Parrington
Main Currents in American Thought III
(1927,1930; Harcourt 1958) 370

"Good, I think, but somehow hard to take in: like a nightmare one can hardly recall distinctly."

D. H. Lawrence
quoted by B.W. Huebsch
"Footnotes to a Publisher's Life"
Col, N.S. III (1937) 406-426

"It was not until 1919, when *Winesburg, Ohio* appeared, that he first attracted wide attention. These stories of small-town people voice the philosophy of life expressed in all his later works. Adopting a naturalistic interpretation of American life, he believed that the primal forces of human behavior are instinctive and not to be denied, as he supposed they are, by the standardization of a machine age. His characters are puzzled, groping, baffled, and possess no vision of order or channel for directing their energies against the frustrations of contemporary existence. Primarily through sex, which he endowed with a mystical significance, Anderson conceived man as having an opportunity to escape from the confinement of this regulated life. Similarly, he placed stress on the mystical identification of man with the primal forces of nature....

The preface, 'The Book of the Grotesque,' explains the author's unifying conception of his characters: 'It was the truths that made the people grotesques.... The moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.' In a simple and intense style these psychological portraits of the sensitive and imaginative of Winesburg's population are seen through the eyes of George Willard.

'Hands' is the story of Wing Biddlebaum, who has an innocent passion for caressing living things and is driven from the town because of this misunderstood eccentricity [driven from a different town, not from Winesburg]. 'Queer' tells of Elmer Cowley, who has grown up on a farm, and is lonely and frustrated in Winesburg, until, obsessed by the idea that he is considered 'queer,' he runs away to begin life anew. 'Godliness' is a long tale concerned with Jesse Bentley, who prays for a David to help him despoil his Philistine neighbors of their farms and is himself nearly slain by a stone from the sling of the young David, his grandson. 'The Strength of God' tells of the religious Rev. Curtis Hartman, who is obsessed with sexual desire until his 'cure' after an intense inner struggle, in which he believes that 'God has manifested himself to me in the body of a woman'....

In *Poor White* (1920), a novel of the Midwest, 'the town was really the hero of the book.... What happened to the town was, I thought, more important than what happened to the people of the town.' What happens is that the machine comes to the town, destroying whatever beauty and significance it once possessed. The same themes and attitude of mind are evinced in subsequent books: *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), stories and poems depicting the frustration and maladjustment in typical American backgrounds; *Horses and Men* (1923), stories mainly about horse racing; and *Man Marriages* (1923), a novel about a businessman's attempt to escape routine. In *Dark Laughter* (1925), a novel contrasting the laughter and song of unrepressed blacks with the spiritual sterility of the whites, he reached artistic maturity both in his style—simple, direct, consciously naïve, and admittedly indebted to Gertrude Stein—and in his mastery of form."

James D. Hart
The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition

(Oxford 1941-83)

“Sherwood Anderson wrote his most famous book about a generation ago; and it reveals a Mid-American world that already then was a generation dead. A full half-century therefore divides the mind that reads the book today from the life it portrays. Since, from this adequate perspective, the work stands firm in its form, true in its livingness, strong in its light upon our present, it is clear that *Winesburg, Ohio* is a classic.... For an analogy to the aesthetic of the Winesburg tales, one must go to music, perhaps to the songs that Schubert deftly wove from old refrains; or to the lyric art of the Old Testament psalmists and prophets in whom the literary medium was so allied to music that their texts have always been sung in the synagogues. The *Winesburg* design is quite uniform: a theme-statement of a character with his mood, followed by a recounting of actions that are merely variations on the theme....

It has become a critical commonplace that Winesburg faithfully portrays the midwest village of two thousand souls during the post-civil war pre-motor age. Let us look.... No even bearably married couple is to be found in Winesburg; there are few marriages in the book, and these without exception are described as the harnessing together of strangers by the bondage of sex or a morality hostile to the spirit. There is no communion with children. There is no fulfilled sex life, sex being an obsession, a frustration and a trap. There is no normal sociability between men and women: souls lonely as carnivore for once in their lives burst into melodic plaint to one another, and lapse into solipsistic silence. There is indeed more muttering than talk. There is no congregated worship, and no strength to organized religion except in the sense of a strong barrier; as in the piteous tales of the Reverend Hartman whose sins by knocking a piece from his stained-glass church window (part of the figure of Christ) in order to gaze at the body of [Kate Swift] in bed. There is almost no joy, beyond the momentary joy of contemplating nature. And the most mature of the characters, Doctor Reefy, Seth Richmond, Elizabeth Willard, the Rev. Hartman, et al., do not evolve beyond a sharp negation of the things that are, in favor of a nebulous dream of ‘life’...

The positive substance of the book is the solitariness and struggle of the soul which has lost its ancestral props: the energy of the book is the release from these old forms into a subliminal search for new ones. The farms of Robert Frost’s *North of Boston* are also peopled by broken, lonely lives; but their despair is hard, heroic. The folk of Winesburg are soft in a tenderness, in a nebulous searchfulness, that have gone farther in decay than the still standing families and churches of Frost’s New England.... This hardness of irony in the author [Anderson] points to his spiritual transcendence over his subjects. Anderson has inherited intact a strength long since vaporized in Winesburg—and yet the heritage of Winesburg. His sureness of vision and of grasp enable him to incarnate in a form very precise the inchoate emotions of his people. To portray the deliquescence of America’s agrarian culture beneath the impact of the untamed machine age required a man spiritually advanced beyond that culture’s death....

Winesburg’s men and women are old souls, inheritors of a great Christian culture who have been abandoned and doomed to a progressive emptiness by the invasion of the unmastered Machine.... The perfect readability of this book within our agonizing world proves the potential that lived—needing only to be transfigured—within a world already gone when *Winesburg* was written. Here are intrinsically great stories: as great as any in our language.”

Waldo Frank
“Homage to Sherwood Anderson”
Story (September-October 1941)

“In *Winesburg* Anderson used his narrator’s mixture of inarticulate wisdom and naivete in a controlled way that constantly suggests more than is said. Even in risky passages like those in ‘Hands’ (‘it needs the poet there’) carry, in the context of the book, an air of rightness. The inarticulateness seems appropriate to his spiritually confused characters and to a narrator whose wisdom is more of the heart than the head. But by the time Anderson had got to *Tar* he had begun to overwork exaggeratedly and too self-consciously the approach he had discovered. In *A Story-Teller’s Story* and in *Tar* the narrator’s naivete frequently seems sham and the wisdom an unconvincing sly smile....

In spite of Willard’s unifying function, it is not, really, as a novel that *Winesburg* has its success as a totality. Structurally, like all of Anderson’s longer work, it has serious flaws. The book’s unity rests

ultimately in its being, in effect, a series of mutually supporting prose poems on a theme, held together by the consistency of the author-narrator's attitude—a blend of the oracular and the sympathetic—toward subject and the audience. This Anderson seems to have never clearly understood.”

Jarvis A. Thurston
“Technique in *Winesburg, Ohio*”
Accent (Spring 1956)

“*Winesburg, Ohio* made a stir among the critics and pleased such writers as Dreiser and Carl Sandburg. It was rather widely attacked by the prudish, the general opinion being that the author was a pessimist whose morbidity was in sharp contrast to the healthy cheerfulness and good humor of Booth Tarkington's novels of much the same region. Actually, the difference was in selection. Tarkington was writing well for cheerful people, and, so far as they went, his portraits of the Middle West were true and excellent. He had been in Princeton, or lived far away from the railroad tracks of his home town, while Anderson was listening to the sordid tales of the village gossips at the livery stable. Born outside both Puritan and genteel traditions, Anderson felt no compulsion to make success stories of what he wrote. The somewhat stereotyped lives of the successful he took for granted as by-products of the American code of progress. Importance lay in what this emotionally sterile life of the small town and the impersonality of the big city had done to the individual. He found failures the most revealing.”

Henry Seidel Canby
The Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1232

“Does *Winesburg* deserve the charges of sexual perversion hurled at its author when the book appeared—was Anderson really the ‘Phallic Chekhov’?... The hero of ‘Hands,’ for example, is a champion strawberry-picker—but Wing Biddlebaum is an inhibited champion, a homosexual strawberry-picker. His profession and his repressions may have seemed equally curious to some readers in the early twenties...and this array of ailing ordinary souls in *Winesburg* culminates with Anderson's tormented preacher who gazes out from his church upon an almost naked female schoolteacher—a teacher, moreover, who is *smoking*. In these respects, *Winesburg* does help to inaugurate a decade of revolt. It foreshadows the imminent crusade against bourgeois, Victorian, and puritanical taboos: it sets the stage for O'Neill's entrance. Yet, preoccupied as Anderson may seem to be with sexual maladjustment, very early in the book you realize that his concern is not with human copulation...but with human isolation: and sex, which is a prelude to love as well as an ending, is the method used by Anderson, like D.H. Lawrence, to convey this isolation.... These people *are* lovers, and if their object of love hasn't been found, it *can* be found. ‘Many people must live and die alone even in *Winesburg*,’ Anderson says...”

Winesburg is not a radical but a nostalgic document. This opening gun for a decade of revolt is not an indictment but an evocation of a society.... And the pressure of the new materialism grows stronger as *Winesburg* draws to a close, as the earlier compassion goes out of the tales and the stress on human inversion and social disorganization increases. While the neurotics ‘whom industrialism was to bring in such numbers’ play out their role, the advent of the factories brings to a halting climax this account of an earlier rural existence....we have watched his [Anderson's] transformation from a rebellious and power-seeking individualist to the lover of his communal Ohio tales: what he started out by condemning, he has...come to cherish.”

Maxwell Geismar
“Sherwood Anderson: Last of the Townsman”
The Last of the Provincials
(Houghton 1948)

“European readers who come to Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* for the first time feel the proximity of a new speech, a ‘new country,’ a fresh view of the Main Street that Sinclair Lewis had opened for them.. The interrelated stories of *Winesburg, Ohio* offer something that is less foreign to them than the restless, half-satirical observant eye that guides the reader so faithfully through the pages of Lewis's realistic novel. What is felt in *Winesburg, Ohio*, felt rather than read, overheard rather than stressed, is a memory of youth, of early ‘joys and sorrows,’ and this is conveyed with the simplicity of a folk tale, a style known in all languages.... His sources were the air he breathed, childhood memories of talk, of the few books loaned to

him by schoolmasters, by older men in small Middle Western towns who took a fancy to the brilliant, sensitive, imaginative son of a Southern drifter and tall-tale-teller....

The impact on Anderson's imagination of Thoreau and Whitman came in later life, but the important impressions of his boyhood were the associations of what is now called a 'democratic' heritage: the diluted forms of oratory at Fourth of July celebrations, the speeches made at county fairs, the talk overheard at race tracks, and through the swinging doors of the nineteenth-century, Middle Western, small-town saloon.... Anderson grew up in a place that was permeated by that 'religion of humanity' of which Emerson was the transcendental fountainhead, showering forth his concepts of the 'oversoul' like rain from the clouds... The new priests of the 'religion of humanity' were champions of reason and of Herbert Spencer's *First Principles*, of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, of Robert Ingersoll's lectures on The Gods.... These new priests spoke in the names of 'democracy,' 'science,' 'progress,' and 'liberty'; most of them were in revolt against the older Protestant sects and denominations of New England, against Puritan restraints and moralities...

The sentiments of Ingersoll [an atheist who attack Christianity] prepared Willard for the story of the Reverend Curtis Hartman in 'The Strength of God,' and the same source of inspiration provides a logic of its own for the arrival of Hugh McVey, the inventor, the central figure, if not the 'hero,' of Anderson's *Poor White* [1920]....like D. H. Lawrence, Anderson is a singularly unbookish figure, an 'original,' a 'maker' in his own right. He is also the self-educated writer... He thought in symbols, in metaphors, in images, in turns of phrasing, in terms of a situation, or a scene of action...

It was once fashionable to call such 'mysticism' [as his] Freudian, because it touched upon the emotions of adolescent sexual experience. In Anderson those emotions are transcended in 'Death in the Woods,' and whatever 'mysticism' may be found within them including the expression of mystery and awe, is of an older heritage than are the teachings of Freud in America... Despite the 'naturalism,' despite the skepticism concerning the conventional moralities of the orthodox church-goers and the Reverend Curtis Hartmans, an atmosphere of Biblical vision and of semi-divine 'animal faith' attends these movements and awakenings in the physical world of Middle Western America."

Horace Gregory, ed.
Introduction
The Portable Sherwood Anderson
(Viking 1949)

"*Winesburg, Ohio*...is a collection of sketches held together by a unity of theme, mood, and place. Stories like [them] were something new in American literature in 1919. Hawthorne (and other American writers to a lesser degree) had dealt perceptively with neurotic states, but several new elements gave to *Winesburg* a uniqueness and special power: the pervasive tenderness; the simplicity, directness, and understatement of the writing; the Freudian view of sex-repression, were for the first time frankly embodied in American fiction. Terms like 'realism' and 'naturalism' seem inappropriate here. Nor is it satisfactory to take the book, in any special sense, as a picture of the Midwest, or as an allied part of the 'revolt from the village,' the chief manifesto of which was Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street*.

Winesburg is rather a parable of the human condition, with reference to the world in general, and more particularly perhaps to modern industrial America. Anderson called his characters 'grotesques.' He was dissatisfied with the surface medium popularized by Howells. He had 'a hunger,' he said, 'to see beneath the surface of lives.' *Winesburg, Ohio*, in the words of Anderson's best critic, Irving Howe, 'may be read as a fable of American estrangement, its theme the loss of love. The book's major characters are alienated from the basic sources of emotional sustenance.... They are distraught communicants in search of a ceremony, a social value, a manner of living, a lost ritual that may, by some means, re-establish a flow and exchange of emotion'."

Walter Blair
The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 1165-66

“It has been continuously in print since its first appearance in 1919... It has been translated into twenty-two languages... It once had a reputation for being ‘shocking,’ or at least controversial, yet today it carries almost everywhere the PTA’s seal of good reading for the young; instead of being immoral or ‘dirty,’ it is now viewed as a profoundly moral book. The paradoxes continue. *Winesburg* was supposed to represent a revolt against the American village; modern readers find its dominant tone to be one of nostalgia. It was supposed to be a landmark in the development of the American short story, which of course it is; yet critics have always discussed it as if it were a novel, and some early reviewers believed it had no form at all. Its author was supposed to have been influenced by writers and thinkers he had never read or heard of. He denied having any interest in religion, yet *Winesburg* is full of biblical accents. Its admirers greeted this ‘favorite child’ of Anderson’s as the beginning of a real career, but the author decided that as a serious writer he must turn his back on stories of adolescence and the past, and partly as a result nothing he wrote thereafter equaled his achievement in *Winesburg*.”

John H. Ferres, ed.
Winesburg, Ohio
(Viking Critical Library: Text and Criticism 1966) 7-8

“*Winesburg, Ohio* is a primer of the heart and mind, the emotions and the method of Sherwood Anderson. It is the most compact, the most unified, the most revealing of all his books. It is his most successful effort technically, for in it he has told the story of one community in terms of isolated short stories.... The author presents the impression that he is discovering for the first time the situations that he reveals to the reader, consequently he leads up to them as haltingly, as slowly as a child opening a door and entering an old, unused room. In the end the effect is cumulative and powerful.”

Harry Hansen
Midwest Portraits
(Harcourt 1923) 147-48

“*Winesburg, Ohio* is a psychological document of the first importance; no matter that it is an incomplete picture of modern American life, it is an honest and penetrating one done with bold and simple strokes. These pictures represent the finest combination Anderson has yet achieved of imagination, intuition and observation welded into a dramatic unity by painstaking craftsmanship. They are one of the important products of the American literary renaissance and have probably influenced writing in America more than any other book published within the last decade. They made and they sustain Anderson’s reputation as an author worthy of comparison with the great short story writers.”

Cleveland B. Chase
Sherwood Anderson
(McBride 1927) 51-52

“I was much taken by Anderson’s human quality, by a certain serious interest he would have in the person he was shaking hands with or talking to for a brief, formal moment, by a certain graciousness or gracefulness which seemed to arise from an innocence of heart.... There is a special poignancy in the failure of Anderson’s later career.... From the wonder of [his escape from business] he seems never to have recovered, and his continued pleasure in it did him harm, for it seems to have made him feel that the problem of the artist was defined wholly by the struggle between sincerity on the one hand and commercialism and gentility on the other.... Anderson’s greatest influence was probably upon those who read him in adolescence, the age when we find the books we give up but do not get over....

Windy MacPherson’s Son, despite its last part which is so curiously like a commercial magazine story of the time; *Marching Men* has power even though its political mysticism is repellent; *Winesburg, Ohio* has its touch of greatness; *Poor White* is heavy-handed but not without its force; and some of the stories in *The Triumph of the Egg* have the kind of grim quaintness which is, I think, Anderson’s most successful mood, the mood that he occasionally achieves now and then in his later short pieces, such as ‘Death in the Woods.’ But after 1921, in *Dark Laughter* and *Many Marriages*, the books that made the greatest critical stir, there emerges in Anderson’s work the compulsive, obsessive, repetitive quality which finally impresses itself on us as his characteristic quality....

It was the truth—or perhaps we must call it a simple complex of truths—of love-passion-freedom, and it was made up of these ‘vague thoughts’: that each individual is a precious secret essence, often discordant with all other essences, that society, and more particularly the industrial society, threatens these essences; that the old good values of life have been destroyed by the industrial dispensation; that people have been cut off from each other and even from themselves.... But what hostile critics forget about Anderson is that The cultural situation from which his writing sprang was actually much as he described it. Anderson’s truth may have become a falsehood in his hands by reason of limitations in himself or in the tradition of easy populism he chose as his own, but one has only to take it out of his hands to see again that it is indeed a truth. The small legitimate existence, so necessary for the majority of men to achieve, is in our age so very hard, so nearly impossible, for them to achieve....”

Lionel Trilling
The Liberal Imagination
(1940; Doubleday/Anchor 1950) 21-23, 25,31

“We must enter the realm of myth if we are to penetrate deeply into the form of *Winesburg*.... The myth of *Winesburg* concerns the legendary American small town, the town represented in the popular tradition as the lazy, gentle village of the Christian virtues.... The author’s intention is to replace the myth of the small town Christian virtues with the myth of the ‘grotesques.’ It is important to remember that the ‘grotesques’ are not merely small town characters. They are universal people, defeated by their false ideas and dreams.... The ‘grotesque’ is neither misshapen nor abnormal. He is an unintegrated personality, cut off from society and adrift in his own mind.”

James Schevill
Sherwood Anderson
(Denver 1951) 100-03

“*Winesburg, Ohio*...is a collection of sketches held together by a unity of theme, mood, and place....something new in American literature in 1919. Hawthorne (and other American writers to a lesser degree) had dealt perceptively with neurotic states, but several new elements gave to *Winesburg* a uniqueness and special power: the pervasive tenderness; the simplicity, directness, and understatement of the writing; the Freudian view of sex-repression, were for the first time frankly embodied in American fiction. Terms like ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’ seem inappropriate here. Nor is it satisfactory to take the book, in any special sense, as a picture of the Midwest, or as an allied part of the ‘revolt from the village,’ the chief manifesto of which was Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street*.

Winesburg is rather a parable of the human condition, with reference to the world in general, and more particularly perhaps to modern industrial America. Anderson called his characters ‘grotesques.’ He was dissatisfied with the surface realism popularized by Howells. He had ‘a hunger,’ he said, ‘to see beneath the surfaces of lives.’ *Winesburg, Ohio*, in the words of Anderson’s best critic, Irving Howe, ‘may be read as a fable of American estrangement, its theme the loss of love. The book’s major characters are alienated from the basic sources of emotional sustenance.... They are distraught communicants in search of a ceremony, a social value, a manner of living, a lost ritual that may, by some means, re-establish a flow and exchange of emotion.”

Walter Blair
The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 1165-66

“The nostalgia for a lost moment of American pastoral which saturates *Huckleberry Finn* is also present in *Winesburg*. Twain’s influence on Anderson is most obvious in the early portions of *Poor White* and some of the stories in *The Triumph of the Egg* but it can also be seen in *Winesburg*, particularly in Anderson’s attempt to use American speech as the base of a tensed rhythmic style.... Anderson has recalled that he ‘had come to Gertrude Stein’s book about which everyone laughed but about which I did not laugh. It excited me as one might grow excited in going into a new and wonderful country where everything is strange....’

His first reactions to Stein were antagonistic: At a Chicago party in 1915 he...thought it merely funny that anyone should take *Tender Buttons* seriously, and shortly afterwards he even composed a parody of

Stein for his advertising cronies.... Though he laughed at Stein when he first read her, she seems to have stimulated him in a way few other writers could. Nearly always one parodies, for good or bad, those writers who deeply matter. To Anderson Stein suggested that, at least in the actual process of composition, words could have an independent value: they could be fresh or stale, firm or gruelly, colored or drab. After reading the fanatically monosyllabic *Three Lives* Anderson would hardly try again, as he had in his first two novels, to write 'literary' English. But despite such surface similarities as repetitions of key words and an insistently simple syntax, their styles had little in common. Stein's language was opaque, leading back into itself and thereby tending to replace the matter of fiction, while the language of *Winesburg* was translucent, leading quickly to the center of the book's action. Stein was the best kind of influence: she did not bend Anderson to her style, she liberated him for his own....

At various times the book has been banished to such categories as the revolt against the village, the rejection of middle-class morality, the proclamation of sexual freedom, and the rise of cultural primitivism. Whatever the justification for such tags may once have been, it is now quite obvious that Anderson's revolt was directed against something far more fundamental than the restrictions of the American village and was, for that matter, equally relevant to the American city; that *Winesburg* is not primarily concerned with morality, middle-class or otherwise, if only because most of its characters are not in a position to engage in moral choice; that while its subject is frequently tangential to sex it expresses no opinions about and offers no proposals for sexual conduct, free or restricted; and that its style is only dimly related to anything that might be called primitive. If read as social fiction *Winesburg* is somewhat absurd, for no such town could possibly exist. If read as a venture into abnormal psychology the book seems almost lurid, for within its total structure the behavior of its hysterics and paranoids is quite purposeless and, in the absence of any norms to which their deviations might be compared, even incomprehensible. In fact, if read according to the usual expectations of twentieth-century naturalistic or conventionally realistic fiction, *Winesburg* seems incoherent and the charge of emotion it can still raise inexplicable....

In rather shy lyrical outbursts the book conveys a vision of American life as a depressed landscape cluttered with dead stumps, twisted oddities, grotesque and pitiful wrecks; a landscape in which ghosts fumble erratically and romance is reduced to mere fugitive brushings at night; a landscape eerie with the cracked echoes of village queers rambling in their lonely eccentricity.... *Winesburg* is a book largely set in twilight and darkness, its backgrounds heavily shaded with gloomy blacks and marshy grays—as is proper for a world of withered men who, sheltered by night, reach out for that sentient life they dimly recall as the racial inheritance that has been squandered away. Like most fiction, *Winesburg* is a variation on the theme of reality and appearance, in which the deformation caused by day (public life) are intensified at night and, in their very extremity, become an entry to reality. From Anderson's instinctively right placement of the book's central actions at twilight and night comes some of its frequently noticed aura of 'lostness'—as if the most sustaining and fruitful human activities can no longer be performed in public communion but must be grasped in secret....

Misogyny, inarticulateness, frigidity, God-infatuation, homosexuality, drunkenness—these are the symptoms of their recoil from the regularities of human intercourse and sometimes of their substitute gratifications in inanimate objects, as with the unloved Alice Hindman who 'because it was her own, could not bear to have anyone touch the furniture in her room.' In their compulsive traits these figures find a kind of dulling peace, but as a consequence they are subject to rigid monomanias and are deprived of one of the great blessings of human health: the capacity for a variety of experience. That is why, in a sense, 'nothing happens' in *Winesburg*. For the most of its figures it is too late for anything to happen, they can only muse over the traumas which have so harshly limited their spontaneity. Stripped of their animate wholeness and twisted into frozen postures of defense, they are indeed what Anderson has called them: grotesques.

The world of *Winesburg*, populated largely by these backstreet grotesques, soon begins to seem like a buried ruin of a once vigorous society, an atrophied remnant of the egalitarian moment of 19th-century America. Though many of the book's sketches are placed in the out-of-doors, its atmosphere is as stifling as a tomb.... Only 'Tandy' is so bad that its omission would help the book. On the other hand, few of the stories read as well in isolation as in the book's context. Except for 'Hands,' 'The Strength of God,' 'Paper Pills,' and 'The Untold Lie,' they individually lack the dramatic power which the book has as a whole....the most important symbol is that of the room, frequently used to suggest isolation and

confinement. Kate Swift is alone in her bedroom, Dr. Reefy in his office, the Reverend Curtis Hartman in his church tower, Enock Robinson in his fantasy-crowded room. Enock Robinson's story 'is in fact the story of a room almost more than it is the story of a man.' The tactful use of this symbol lends *Winesburg* a claustrophobic aura appropriate to its theme....

Though *Winesburg* is written in the bland accents of the American story-teller, it has an economy impossible to oral narration because Anderson varies the beat of its accents by occasionally whipping them into quite formal rhetorical patterns. In the book's best stretches there is a tension between its underlying loose oral cadences and the stiffened superimposed beat of a prose almost Biblical in its regularity. Anderson's prose is neither 'natural' nor primitive; it is rather a hushed bardic chant, low-toned and elegiacally awkward, deeply related to native speech rhythms yet very much the result of literary cultivation....

But the final effectiveness of this prose is in its prevalent tone of tender inclusiveness. Between writer and materials there is an admirable equity of relationship. None of the characters is violated, none of the stories, even the failures, leaves the reader with the bitter sense of having been tricked by cleverness or cheapness or toughness. The ultimate unity of the book is a unity of feeling, a sureness of warmth, and a readiness to accept *Winesburg's* lost grotesques with the embrace of humility. Many American writers have taken as their theme the loss of love in the modern world, but few, if any at all, have so thoroughly realized it in the accents of love."

Irving Howe
"The Book of the Grotesque"
Sherwood Anderson
(William Sloane 1957)

"'Godliness' is a story in four parts, each a self-contained vignette. The central character is Jesse Bentley, an old farmer who rigorously dominates the lives of his wife, his daughter, and his grandson. Trained in his youth to be a minister, Jesse turns instead into a religious crank. He imagines that he, like the Biblical Jesse, is divinely chosen to rear a new race. His daughter Louise flees from him in terror and disgust and marries a town banker, John Hardy. Her son David, however, is induced to come back to the farm to live with old Jesse. The third quarter of the story is concerned with Louise's life, her persecution at the hands of other girls, and her desperate seduction of John, who she hopes will extricate her from an impossibly dull and narrow life. At last married to the responsible banker, she finds she has only changed one kind of monotony for another; she becomes a miserable, even a dangerous neurotic.

The final quarter of the story comprises a sort of denouement of all these conflicts. David Hardy, at fifteen, is taken by the old Jesse on a strange mission into the woods. The old man, having found a lamb born out of season, is driven by a senile obsession to sacrifice it to God in order that he may be chosen among men. He plans to daub David, his heir, with the blood, but David takes fright, strikes down Jesse with a slingshot, and runs away never to be seen again. The ironic parallels to the Biblical David and Jesse are obvious. 'Godliness' is structurally a novel, condensed to occupy a mere fifty-five pages."

Donald Heiney
Recent American Literature 4
(Barron's Educational Series 1958) 298-99

"In 1915-16, when the sketches collected in *Winesburg, Ohio* were written, American culture was in the process of making its way from muck-raking to depth psychology; they have in common the discovery of hidden truth behind false appearances...there are few works of modern fiction in which the artist's relations with ordinary men are seen so well as *fitting together* in a complementary union that permits us to make distinctions of relative value while at the same time retaining a universally diffused sense of equal dignity....

Everyone is ready to give George Willard good advice. Doctor Parcival urges him to write a book saying that all men are Christ and that all are crucified. Wash Williams is anxious to save him needless pain and trouble by putting him on his guard against 'bitches.' Joe Welling is pleased to confide in him a

few secrets about the art of writing. Kate Swift, his former English teacher, tries to tell him to ‘know life’ and ‘stop fooling with words.’ Perhaps none of this advice, in the form in which it is offered, is wholly sound. But it is well-intentioned, and one of the most engaging things in *Winesburg* is the way George Willard, on his part, is always ready to credit the local talkers with more wisdom than they may strike us as having.”

Edwin Fussell
“*Winesburg, Ohio: Art and Isolation*”
Modern Fiction Studies VI
(Summer 1960)

“Anderson, in his best work, exhibits a typical Middle Western town with its narrow horizons and ingrown passions; he does so through the lives of various inhabitants—‘grotesques,’ he calls them. The young reporter George Willard, groping to find himself and achieve ‘the sadness of sophistication,’ forms the connecting link among these fragmentary lives. The sketches are written in simple language, straightforwardly realistic; they were considered a radical venture in the new literature at the time of their publication. At their best the sketches do approach the work of the author with whom Anderson has been most often compared, the Russian, Chekhov. It is generally believed that *Winesburg* is really Clyde, Ohio, a small town where Anderson lived during his boyhood. An artist from *Life* visited the town (June 10, 1946) and in his report and pictures showed that it has not changed much from the time when Anderson wrote about it....

A collection of [23] related stories about life in a small town, the book develops the theme of youth in revolt against respectability and the conventions of commercial society, and it became exceedingly popular among young people throughout the country. Its style, a mixture of simplicity and soft rhetoric which later critics depreciated from its sentimentality, was influenced by the early work of Gertrude Stein and in turn influenced such writers as Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, William Saroyan, Erskine Caldwell, and John Steinbeck. Anderson never again equaled *Winesburg*, though he remained in vogue for a number of years.”

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

“All the time, from 1913 on, Anderson was working toward something quite different from [his first books]—his masterpiece, *Winesburg, Ohio*, published in 1919.... The book comes directly out of the life of Anderson’s boyhood in Clyde, and the central figure, who appears in most of the separate parts, George Willard, is drawn after Anderson in his late adolescence. Without explication of any sort, the book somehow evokes the dying end of an agrarian culture as it slips over into industrial culture. It evokes, too, the intellectual climate of that late nineteenth-century mid-America in which Anderson grew up: the world that fostered the heroic individualism of men like Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain; the atmosphere that encouraged the atheism of a man like Robert Ingersoll, the rhetoric of William Jennings Bryan, the ‘grass roots’ stir of such a movement as the Populist party; the era that brought to an end gas-lit streets, wooden sidewalks and the cracker barrel, the flourishing village saloon, thriving village eccentrics....

He was not happy with the more or less conventional novel form that he had already twice attempted. He was no more happy with the prevailing fashions in the short story, either in the formal sense—the slick machinery of O. Henry, for example—or in the conventional interpretation of village life—the sentimental romanticism of the Hoosier school. He had observed the pathos, the suffocation of hope and dream in small town characters, the cruelty no less than the comedy. And in form he wanted something loose and impressionistic and without the contrivance of ‘plot’ that would permit him to get under the surface of manners and character, into the secret life, and into what he felt was the soft, warm flow that, taken together, all the secret lives made into life itself....

He had heard talk of Sigmund Freud in bohemian Chicago, and this helped him. He was reading, or was about to read, the fiction of D. H. Lawrence, and this would help him, too. Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives* (1909) had helped him to discover the language that he now knew he wanted to use—the colloquial language of Mark Twain, of everyday America, of country roads and village streets. Yet his problem was

not solved until 1915, when he read Edgar Lee Masters' long poem, *The Spoon River Anthology*. As Masters had done in verse, so he could do in prose.

Like Masters, he would give a certain unification to the separate stories of his twenty-two characters through the background of a single community. As the stories progressed, characters would keep reappearing: someone who had been a minor figure in one story would presently emerge as the major figure in another, and so on, until a whole sense of the community would emerge. He would supplement Masters' unification with another means: in most of the stories George Willard would appear, and while the other characters would come to George in the dumb expectation that he could somehow tell their story, their stories would also be like gifts to him, gifts that would help him grow until, at the end, he was mature and made the characteristic gesture of flight into freedom. And he would have a third means of unification—a theory embodied in the opening section, a prelude called 'The Book of the Grotesque.'

A 'grotesque' is formed, Anderson tells us, when an individual seizes on some single truth from the whole body of truths and tries to live by that alone. A single truth, a single wish, a single memory, a single obsessive ambition that distorts the self even as it compels it—these are the motivations of Sherwood Anderson's grotesques. But what is probably a further consequence of these motivations is perhaps more important than the grotesques themselves: in their single pursuits, the characters isolate themselves from one another, and in their isolation, they are at once lonely and mute. Everyone in this world seems to grope helplessly toward everyone else, but no one can communicate with anyone else—or only with the artist-reporter, George Willard. And that, as Anderson came to understand it, is the function of the artist: to absorb the lives of others like himself, and himself to become those others and their lives."

Mark Schorer
Major Writers of America II
(Harcourt 1962) 673-74

"The more one learns of the town as it was in the 1890s, the more he sees the actual Clyde [Ohio] under the imagined Winesburg.... One device...is that of setting the crisis scenes of all but five of the tales in the evening. In a very large majority of the stories, too, some kind of light partly, but only partly, relieves the darkness. In 'Hands,' 'Mother,' and 'Loneliness,' for example, the light is that of a single lamp; in 'The Untold Lie' the concluding scene is faintly lit by the last of twilight; in 'Sophistication' George Willard and Helen White look at each other 'in the dim light' afforded, apparently, by 'the lights of the town reflected against the sky,' though at the other end of the fairgrounds a few racetrack men have built a fire that provides a dot of illumination in the darkness. Finally, many of the tales end with the characters in total darkness. Such a device not only links the tales but in itself implies meaning. *Winesburg* is primarily a book about the 'night world' of human personality. The dim light equates with, as well as literally illuminates, the limited glimpse into an individual soul that each crisis scene affords, and the briefness of the insight is emphasized by the shutting down of the dark.

Another kind of repeated element throughout the book is the recurrent word. Considering the sense of personal isolation one gets from the atomized lives of the 'grotesques,' one would expect a frequent use of some such word as 'wall,' standing for whatever it is that divides each person from all others.... [Another that recurs] frequently is 'hand' [which] suggests, even symbolizes, the potential or actual communication of one personality with another. The hands of Wing Biddlebaum and Dr. Reefy come immediately to mind; but, to name only a few other instances, George Willard takes hold of Louise Trunnion's 'rough' but 'delightfully small' hand in anticipation of his sexual initiation, Helen White keeps her hand in Seth Richmond's until Seth breaks the clasp through overconcern with self, in the field where they are working Hal Winters puts 'hi' two hands' on Ray Pearson's shoulders and they 'become all alive to each other,' Kate Swift puts her hands on George Willard as though about to embrace him in her desire to make him understand what being a writer means.

Obviously the physical contact may not produce mutual understanding. The hand may in fact express aggression. One of the men who run Wing Biddlebaum out of the Pennsylvania town at night 'had a rope in his hands'; Elizabeth Willard, who as a girl had put her hand on the face of each lover after sexual release, imagines herself stealing toward her husband, 'holding the long wicked scissors in her hand'; Elmer Cowley on the station platform strikes George Willard almost unconscious with his fists before

leaping onto the departing train. Nevertheless, the possibility of physical touch between two human beings always implies, even if by negative counterpart, at least the possibility of a profounder moment of understanding between them....

Whatever the outward difference between created character and creator, George's inward life clearly reflects the conflict Anderson himself had experienced between the world of practical affairs, with its emphasis on the activity of money-making and its definition of success in financial terms, and the world of dreams, with its emphasis on imaginative creativity and its definition of success in terms of the degree of penetration into the buried life of others.... Wing declares the absolute opposition of the two worlds by telling George that he is destroying himself because 'you are afraid of dreams. You want to be like others in town here.' The declaration indicates that George has not yet resolved the conflict, and his irresolution at this point is reinforced by his ambivalent attitude toward Wing's hands. Unlike the other townspeople he is curious to know what lies beneath their outward skill; yet his respect for Wing and his fear of the depths that might be revealed make him put curiosity aside."

Walter B. Rideout
"The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio*"
Shenandoah XIII
(Spring 1962)

"In the late fall of 1915 Anderson began writing the...tales that would compose the only one of his books still regarded as a major achievement, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). By the middle of the next year he had finished most of 'The Tales and the Persons' that make up his 'Book of the Grotesque.' Thematically, Anderson's *Winesburg* tales (the name of the fictional town suggests a combination of the dreamy and the mundane) anticipate the wasteland image explored by T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Nathanael West. The truncation of life that his characters experience becomes a kind of living death. Their senses seem anesthetized, their sensibilities numbed, their spirits shrunken.

Though the feeling of small-town paralysis derived directly from Anderson's experiences, *Winesburg, Ohio* was structurally indebted to such collections as Ivan Turgenev's *A Sportsman's Sketches* (1852), James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), and particularly Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915). Anderson acknowledged the influence of Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909)—'She is making new, strange and to my ears sweet combinations of words'—in the development of his repetitive, colloquial prose style. So deliberately did Anderson resist fancy writing ('I have had a great fear of phrase-making') that his prose might be said to approach a poetry of inarticulation. Nearly all of his characters struggle at self-expression and, as stories like 'Hands' and 'Mother' clearly reveal, live in a conversational world of unfocused feelings and awkward silences.

Winesburg, Ohio has had an enormous influence on the development of the American short story. Its sequential pattern anticipates such collections as Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*, William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, and more recently, John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* [? Barth is the antithesis of Anderson in every way]. Its preoccupation with American eccentrics and 'grotesques' foreshadowed the characterizations of such later short-story writers as Flannery O'Connor and Carson McCullers. And its spare poetry of ordinary American speech anticipates the recent working-class tales of Raymond Carver and Bobbie Ann Mason. Anderson also demonstrated in his stories and critical essays an aesthetic resistance to the literary slickness of contrived plots."

David Minter
The Harper American Literature 2
(Harper & Row 1987) 1165

"Anderson made his greatest contribution to American literature in the genre of the short story. With the publication of *Winesburg* in 1919, the American reading public was introduced to a volume of stories innovative in two important ways. First, the individual stories break with the tradition of tightly plotted, linear stories in order to tell and retell a significant moment until all its meaning is revealed. Second, *Winesburg* is not a collection of isolated stories but is a story cycle, a grouping of stories which, in Anderson's own words, 'belong together.' In *Winesburg*, in addition to the fact that the individual stories have their own unity and beauty, the cycle itself acquires an artistic integrity because of the relationship of

all of the stories to each other. Examples of American story cycles which followed *Winesburg* are Hemingway's *In Our Time*, Toomer's *Cane*, Caldwell's *Georgia Boy*, and Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* and *Go Down, Moses*."

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

Michael Hollister (2015)