

SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S CRITICAL THEORY  
AND LITERARY PRACTICE

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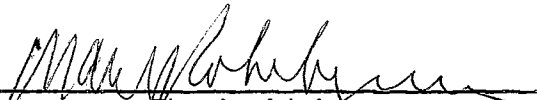
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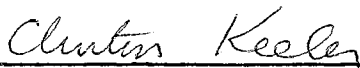


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## PREFACE

Sherwood Anderson is an important figure in American literature and especially in the development of the short story. Although Anderson never constructs a formal discussion of his literary theory, in his non-fictional writing, he shows much concern with theory and frequently comments on his own. His statements are often metaphorical; nevertheless, a coherent theory seems to emerge. This thesis is an attempt to extract from Sherwood Anderson's non-fictional writing his literary theory and to apply this theory to his most frequently anthologized short stories.

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Mary Rohrberger for her very patient guidance and her helpful suggestions in the preparation of this thesis and to thank Dr. Clinton C. Keeler for his careful reading of the manuscript and his suggestions concerning it. I would also like to thank Dr. Samuel H. Woods, my third reader. My appreciation also goes to Kay Nettleton, my typist, and finally to my husband, Mark, whose aid was invaluable.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Sherwood Anderson's autobiographical works are filled with an astonishing consciousness of his Americanism. He found much to disparage in American culture, but much to praise and more to hope for. His quarrel with America was a lover's quarrel. He saw her as slightly tainted, an older America whose original dream had not come true in the way one would wish. He believed the Puritan tradition to be the cause of America's maladies: the sexual repression and moral narrowness, the emphasis on acquiring material possessions, the standardization industry had brought, and the consequent loss of spiritual life. He writes in A Story Teller's Story, "Industrialism was a natural outgrowth of Puritanism; . . . having renounced life for themselves the Puritans were determined to kill life in others."<sup>1</sup>

As a writer, Anderson was naturally concerned with the American arts, and he believed the life of the arts had suffered much because of Puritan, and more generally, certain European influences. He wished for pride in America; he disliked her being the "cultural foster child of Europe" (STS, 395). Certainly he acknowledged the validity of European literary tradition:

I have a notion that in all of the arts there is a thing called 'the great tradition.' I think it goes on and on. . . . The difficulty is to keep it straight. All the morality of the artist is involved in it.<sup>2</sup>

However, he believed that for the most part, the American literature

preceding his generation was outside of or at least off the center of the great tradition.

The Puritan influence, he says, prevented American writers from being honest, being moral, by inhibiting them, placing certain areas of life and certain techniques out of their range. Anderson disliked most the intellectual influence of Emerson, Longfellow, and Hawthorne in whom he seemed to see a disgusting Puritan desire "to uplift, to remake life on some definite plan conceived within the human brain," (STS, 77) and he says of his own generation of writers, "we were intellectually dominated by New England... We wanted to escape from it. We were all in revolt."<sup>3</sup> Although Anderson expresses great respect for Mark Twain, he believed he was "too much afraid... In all his writing there is too much of life left out." (SAM, 212). W. D. Howells completely disgusted him. "What the hell's he so afraid of?" (SAM, 164) he asks. Anderson wished to express certain areas of human relationships in words Howells would not approve of, to free American literature from its Puritan inhibitions. He was not, of course, the first writer to express such a desire, but Charles Child Walcutt believes Anderson surpassed even the American naturalists in his efforts in this direction.

Anderson renders qualities of personality and dimensions of experience beyond anything in the work of Crane, Norris, London or Dreiser. He is far freer from taboos than they... As a result he has laid bare an American heart which had not been known until it was caught and felt in his stories.<sup>4</sup>

In this same regard Alfred Kazin writes:

Living in the heart of the 'Robin's Egg Renaissance' in Chicago, as he called it later, it even seemed to Anderson that hardly anyone had ever before him in America asked the questions he needed to ask about people. The novels he knew did not tell their story; their creators were afraid, as the New England writers who had written too many of the first American stories before Dreiser were afraid. Between





One had first of all to face one's materials, accept fully the life about, quit running off in fancy to India, to England, to the South Seas. We Americans had to begin to stay, in spirit at least, at home. We had to accept our materials, face our materials. (STS, 385)

Waldo Frank analyzes the situation in his essay "Emerging Greatness." He suggests that American writers have been of two extremes:

. . . those who gained an almost unbelievable purity of expression by the very violence of their self-isolation, and those who, plunging into the American maelstrom were submerged in it, lost their vision altogether. . . . The significance of Sherwood Anderson. . . is simply that he has escaped these two extremes, that he suggests at last a presentation of life shot through with the searching color of truth, which is a signal for a native culture.<sup>7</sup>

Alfred Kazin also sees Anderson's contribution as distinctly American.

Anderson turned fiction into a substitute for poetry and religion. . . . 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 in it; there was confusion and mystery on earth, and he would summon all Americans to wonder at it. . . at the moment it seemed as if he had sounded the depths of common American experience as no one else could.<sup>8</sup>

Anderson's hope for American fiction was that it might free itself from the influences he believed kept it outside of the great tradition, and it is the opinion of the majority of the critics that his contribution to American literature is significant. Horace Gregory lists Anderson among those writers who achieved the promise of immortality by joining in "the large, and for them victorious, cause of liberating prose from a multitude of literary cliches, and thereby saving their own works from the dust that falls so thickly upon library shelves."<sup>9</sup> During his career, Anderson published seven novels and six collections of short stories. However, his novels, Windy McPherson's Son, Marching Men, Poor White, Many Marriages, Dark Laughter, Beyond Desire, and Kit Brandon were never very successful. Malcolm Cowley writes,

Among the seven, Dark Laughter was his only best-seller, and Poor White, the best of the lot, is studied in colleges as a picture of the industrial revolution in a small Mid-western town. There is, however, not one of the seven that is truly effective as a novel.<sup>10</sup>

Jarvis A. Thurston attributes Anderson's failure as a novelist and his success as a short story writer to his vision of life. "He never fully realized that it was his 'vision' of life, the consequent views of art and artist, and his working habits that blocked his doing the 'long sustained thing'--and gave to his short stories their quaint strength."<sup>11</sup>

Anderson's contribution to American literature is primarily through his short stories. Of his books of short stories, Winesburg, Ohio, The Triumph of the Egg, Horses and Men, Hands and Other Stories, Alice and the Lost Novel, and Death in the Woods and Other Stories, Sister M. Joselyn says his reputation rests primarily on Winesburg, Ohio and stories from The Triumph of the Egg and Death in the Woods and Other Stories.<sup>12</sup> His reputation as a short story writer is, however, considerable. At the time when Anderson was writing, the formula short story in the O. Henry tradition had become quite popular and Anderson is credited with revitalizing the genre. Nathan Fagin writes:

Sherwood Anderson made the short story a vehicle for the transmission of genuine thought and emotion....Our story writers have been content to go on weaving fancy little fables, graded little fables, depending upon the 'culture' of the periodical for which they wrote. Our story writers have come in types, in droves, in tribes....They have been experts on Romance and Sport and Crime and Adventure and Ghosts and Humor and Business and Success and Manners. . ./Anderson/ has said things that a Short-story writer, by all the rules of the game and tradition, should not say. . .and a new Short Story has emerged. The American Short Story, through his efforts, is receiving a new tradition. Year after year he has gone on writing in his own way, creating new forms, enlarging and vitalizing the substance of a trivial, frivolous genre.... He has brought an age of sincerity, of honesty, of artistic integrity into a frail, vulgarized medium. He has liberated the Short Story.<sup>13</sup>

Ray Lewis White says of Anderson's contribution to the American short story, "He influenced the development of the American short story more strongly than anyone except, possibly, Edgar Allen Poe; the contemporary short story has become a major form of literature through Anderson's achievement."<sup>14</sup>

It is this influence that White mentions which is perhaps the most decisive evidence of Anderson's contribution to the American short story. "His writing strongly influenced the work of such diverse authors as Hart Crane, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Katherine Anne Porter, Ernest Hemingway, Henry Miller, James T. Farrell, and Nathanael West."<sup>15</sup> It is common knowledge that Anderson was, for a time at least, a personal friend of both Hemingway and Faulkner. Faulkner wrote an essay entitled "Sherwood Anderson: An Appreciation" in which he says Anderson taught him the most important thing of all, "that to be a writer, one has first got to be what he is, what he is born...."<sup>16</sup> To an interviewer he said of Anderson's stature, "He was the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on. He has never received his proper evaluation."<sup>17</sup> Finally, Malcolm Cowley has written,

Sherwood Anderson was 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 him an unmistakable debt.<sup>18</sup>

Besides his novels and short stories, Anderson also wrote several non-fictional books, among these A Story Teller's Story and Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs. These works are primarily autobiographical and are centered around events in Anderson's life which he considered to be significant. However, he digresses often, giving his opinions on

everything from poetry to politics, and he writes especially about his ideas concerning fiction. A third book, Sherwood Anderson's Notebook, contains a collection of articles written by Anderson about various subjects and often, as in the other two books, he expresses concern with literary theory. The Letters of Sherwood Anderson, published after his death by Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout, also show Anderson's interest in literary theory; in fact, Jones and Rideout explain that they chose to include particularly those letters which Anderson wrote to his literary proteges and those in which he comments on the art of fiction (LSA, xix). Anderson makes further remarks on his literary theory in various of his essays. It is surprising in light of the general agreement on Anderson's influence that there has been no serious study of these critical comments. Alfred Kazin writes that "Anderson on the subject of writing is moving rather than interesting."<sup>19</sup> The word "moving" is perhaps less descriptive than a word such as metaphorical. His critical comments are often contained within anecdotes or expressed figuratively. Unlike Henry James, Anderson seldom intellectualized his ideas. He never constructed a formal discussion of his literary theory. However, in the autobiographical books mentioned above, in his Letters, and in certain of his essays Anderson reveals his critical theory of literature. Because of the important place Anderson holds in the development of the short story, it seems to me a study of his critical theory as applied to his short stories would be worthwhile. It is the purpose of this paper to extract from Anderson's non-fictional writings his literary theory and then to examine representative short stories by Anderson to determine its application.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sherwood Anderson, A Story Teller's Story (New York, 1927), p. 376. (Subsequent references to this book will be given parenthetically in the text, the page number to be preceded by the abbreviation STS.)

<sup>2</sup> Sherwood Anderson, Letters of Sherwood Anderson, ed. Howard Mumford Jones in association with Walter B. Rideout (Boston, 1953), p. 442. (Subsequent references to this book will be given parenthetically in the text, the page number to be preceded by the abbreviation LSA.)

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs (New York, 1942), p. 246. (Subsequent references to this book will be given parenthetically in the text, the page number to be preceded by the abbreviation SAM.)

<sup>4</sup> Charles Child Walcutt, "Sherwood Anderson: Impressionism and the Buried Life," The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson, ed. Ray Lewis White (North Carolina, 1966), p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Kazin, "The New Realism: Sherwood Anderson," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York, 1966), p. 326.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Woolf, The Moment and Other Essays (New York, 1948), p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Waldo Frank, "Emerging Greatness," The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Kazin, "The New Realism," p. 322.

<sup>9</sup> Horace Gregory, ed., The Portable Sherwood Anderson (New York, 1949), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Cowley, ed., Winesburg, Ohio (New York, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Jarvis A. Thurston, "Technique in Winesburg, Ohio," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, p. 344.

<sup>12</sup> Sister M. Joselyn, O.S.B., "Sherwood Anderson and the Lyric Story," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, p. 444.

<sup>13</sup> Nathan Fagin, "Sherwood Anderson: The Liberator of Our Short Story," English Journal, XVI (April 1927), 278.

<sup>14</sup>Ray Lewis White, ed., The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>William Faulkner, "Sherwood Anderson: An Appreciation," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, p. 491.

<sup>17</sup>Brom Weber, Sherwood Anderson, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 43 (Minneapolis, 1964), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup>Malcolm Cowley, "Anderson's Lost Days of Innocence," The Achievement of Sherwood Anderson, p. 224.

<sup>19</sup>Alfred Kazin, The Inmost Leaf: A Selection of Essays (New York, 1955), p. 224.

## CHAPTER II

### SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S CRITICAL THEORY

When Sherwood Anderson walked out of his paint factory in Elyria, Ohio, to devote himself to art, he took with him no formal training; yet it is Anderson who is credited with having liberated the American short story. He went to New York where he sought guidance from those he believed to be his intellectual superiors, the cultured group; and yet he found that they had no answers themselves, that it was only the formula writers who were certain of the rules for literary creation. Anderson's entire literary career is characterized by a groping, a searching after the mystery of art. Ultimately, what Anderson brought to American literature was the result of his own intuitive searching, and it seems to me his greatest contribution is his refusal to proclaim a set of rigid laws for art in general: ". . .indeed there are laws. . . .There are laws within the laws, laws that ride over the laws," (LSA, 189) but no one set of laws. What Anderson gives us in the way of critical theory in his non-fictional books is a general theory of literature and certain specific theories appropriate to his own special conceptions of literature as an art form. Often his critical ideas are couched in a metaphorical language; nevertheless, a coherent theory seems to emerge.

Although Anderson seems hesitant to present laws, he is quick to point out exactly what good writing is not. It is not, he says, the short story of the O. Henry style, the formula story. During Anderson's time short story writing, at least in some circles, even academic ones, had largely been reduced to a formula. Typical of this trend is

Carl H. Grabo's classification of stories into five different kinds and his suggestions as to how each of these kinds should be written.<sup>1</sup> Less offensive, but still exhibiting a certain rigidity is Brander Matthews,

But although the sense of form and the gift of style are essential to the writing of a good Short-story, they are secondary to the idea, to the conception, to the subject. . . . one might almost say that a Short-story is nothing if it has no plot. . . .<sup>2</sup>

He adds that such a subject as the novel Tristram Shandy uses, what we would today call a psychological study, the type of subject used often by Anderson, could not be dealt with in the short story. Whether Anderson was cognizant of either Grabo's or Matthews' comments, he was very much aware of what he calls "the poison plot" (STS, 352) stories he saw in popular magazines.

Anderson objects to these stories for many reasons. As is obvious from his term "poison plot," he dislikes the emphasis on formula writing, the surprise ending, the necessity for "a little unexpected turn of events" (STS, 426). "No short stories with clever endings--as in the magazines--happened in the streets of the town at all. . . . There was drama in the street and in the lives of the people in the street but it sprang directly out of the stuff of life itself." (STS, 437). Because of its emphasis on the unexpected, the formula story necessitates a sacrifice in the area of character.

People pushed here and there in the imagined world. There was a constant violence being done these people. Some scheme for a story or novel had come into the writer's mind. They were making the character of the story. . . do this or that to fit into the scheme. Often a horrible violence done to these people. (LSA, 446).

Anderson objects also to what he sees as stereotyped characters. He parodies the formula for character by listing certain requirements: the story must be about people in comfortable circumstances, there must not



be anything unpleasant, there must be nothing that will remind readers of "certain sordid moments, thoughts, passions...."<sup>3</sup> He believes that most popular writers had the newspaper headline point of view. If a woman is murdered, she has to be beautiful, "the cowboy is brave, the thief bold and dangerous...."<sup>4</sup> No real people live in these stories, says Anderson. The treatment and subjects of these stories seem to Anderson to lend a false glamour to life, to oversimplify. He is offended by W. D. Howells' statement that a writer should present only "the more cheerful aspects of our common existence!" (SAM, 212). There is too much phrasemaking "to cover up the reality of feelings, of hungers!" (STS, 392)..

Finally, the idea that the short story should point up a moral, should represent clean and healthy young America offends Anderson. In these moral stories, he sees only a pretense of solving some problem of life, with the problem so childishly stated that only a childish solution seems natural. "Popular fictionists are born, not made. What is acquired is a stopping place. People want something finite, something definite. If there is a certain limitation to the searchings of your own mind you are all right!" (SAN, 165). He finds in these childish constructions none of the wonder, the sense of strangeness of life. He accuses the popular fictionist of betraying the imagination of the public, of betraying his own imagination. "The imaginative life of the romancer [his synonym for the popular fictionist] must be lived entirely in a pasteboard world." (STS, 354).

Anderson's comments on and objections to the popular American short story are a key to his literary theory, and his comments have first of all to do with the relationship of life and art. Implicit in all of his

criticism is his idea that the popular American short story "had got too far away from the manner in which we men of the time were living our lives." (SAM, 243). Anderson is concerned with a firmer grounding of the short story in the materials of life, and just what Anderson considers to be the materials of life should become apparent as this study progresses. The relationship of life and art is best expressed by Cézanne, says Anderson. "Cézanne said it art was parallel to life as opposed to being separate from it. It is the best explanation I have ever heard." (LSA, 189). Such a statement as this, though brief, is by no means simple. A general examination of Anderson's view of the artist's relationship to society should help to clarify his thinking in this area.

It would certainly be a mistake to suggest that Anderson believes art to be the servant of society. His disgust at the notion that stories should uplift, point up a moral, precludes any such notion. He believes story telling to be worthwhile in itself. To set out writing a story with the idea of giving it social implication he thinks somehow fraudulent. "As to the social implication of a story, my own mind simply does not work in that channel...." (LSA, 116). After Anderson had obtained some degree of fame, he was called the voice of laborers, of Negroes, to which he replied, "It all makes me laugh." (LSA, 134). In a letter to John Wheelock he writes, "I want to do the job I have in mind without any social theories. When I wrote Winesburg, I had no social theories about a small town. I just wanted to get a picture of life in a small town as I felt it...." (LSA, 217). The first obligation of the artist, then, is to his art. However, in Anderson's views, art springs from life and by definition contains social implication. "Don't you rather think,"

he writes to a friend of his, "that the quality that makes people aware of social implication is and should be implicit in good work?" (LSA, 116). Writing to the editor of Bookman Anderson says, "As literary critic and editor, you must believe that our writers are the awakeners and creators of the conscience of the nation. You must believe in the dignity and high office of the writing profession."<sup>5</sup> One might say that Anderson's idea of the relationship of art to society is much like that of the professor to his students. The professor's first allegiance is to his area of study, and if his knowledge is sound, he should, therefore, have something of importance to give to his students.

Certain of Anderson's comments lead one to believe that he did indeed hope to give something of importance through his art. Unlike the professor, however, Anderson is not interested in intellectual theories. In his correspondence with Theodore Dreiser on the subject of the artist's place in society Anderson accuses Dreiser of being in error (in his theories).

Ted, I think you're wet in part. .... I think the general notion of the writer being also thinker, philosopher, etc., is the wet part. . . when we are simply telling, as we should be trying to tell, the simple story of lives, we are doing our best service. (LSA, 344)

Anderson's distaste for the popular fiction of his day has much to do with the fact that he does not believe the simple story of lives was being told; the fictional characters seem to him stereotyped and superficial. The popular fictionists were presenting lies to the public in his opinion, and "the deuce of it all is that, wanting to believe the lie, one shuts out the truth, too." (STS, 428). Anderson thinks that the problem stems from what he calls the Puritan tradition, the idea that there are pure men and impure men.

Every intelligent man knows that since Eve tempted Adam with the apple, no such thing as a pure man or woman has ever existed in the world but these poor devils /the romancers/ are compelled to believe, against all the dictates of common sense, that purity is a kind of universal human attribute and departure from it a freakish performance. (SAN, 145).

Anderson thinks that the popular fictionist presents a superficial view of life and believes Americans have been giving themselves to surface facts for too long. "Suppose everyone in America really hungers for a more direct and subtle expression of our common lives than we have ever yet had and that we are only terribly afraid we won't get it." (STS, 324). More than once he says that he wishes to devote himself to "another effort at the rediscovery of man by man," (STS, 271) and to Sergei Dinamov he writes: "I myself, as a writer, have wanted more than anything else to make Americans, in the civilization in which they are compelled to live now, better known to each other." (LSA, 269). Anderson's aim, then, is to discover in his art what he sees as the truth about men. Truth, of course, is a moral matter, and while Anderson does not believe a story should point a moral, he does believe it should explore moral problems, or what he calls truth.

The question must arise here as to what sort of truth Anderson is concerned with. He wants reality, truth to life in literature, but what is the nature of this truth he seeks? What is its relation to the world of fact? We must again return to his criticism of the popular fiction writer to gain insight, especially to his accusation that the romancer

. . . betrays our imaginations. It is really the great betrayal, and it is being done all the time. It is one of the things that has most to do with our loneliness, our separation from each other. It does it by killing any real understanding. (LSA, 415).

Anderson is after understanding. The truth he is concerned with is the truth implicit in an understanding of human nature. Understanding, he says, is acquired through the use of the imagination.<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that Anderson is entirely unconcerned with the world of fact:

"...the imagination must constantly feed upon reality in the factual sense or starve."<sup>7</sup> The relationship between what Anderson calls the world of fact and the world of fancy (the imaginative world) is extremely significant and extremely complex. The two are separate and yet each has its effect on the other. He lists the qualities of these two aspects of the life of man's mind. The world of fact is static, without a recognition of the endless possibilities hidden under the surface.

In the world of fancy even the most base men's actions sometimes take on the forms of beauty. Dim pathways do sometimes open before the eyes of the man who has not killed the possibilities of beauty in himself by being too pure. (STS, 78).

So it is through the imagination that the truth of understanding is perceived by men, and it is the purpose of art, Anderson believes to discover the truth.

"Writing, or any art for that matter, concerns the world of the imagination....The artist tries to bring this world over into life." (LSA, 332). Artists, Anderson says, are striving for a realization in art of something out of their own imaginative experiences fed on the life immediately about. (SAR, 343). Because Anderson believes the artist should realize in his art that reality of the imagination, the reality beyond the world of fact, he is not interested in primarily photographic fiction. In A Story Teller's Story he writes, "It is my aim to be true to the essence of things," and therefore, "these notes make no pretense of being a record of fact." (STS, 100). Factual reality, he says, is not art. Although he is not seeking photographic fiction, he does seek

to ground his art in life. "There is no reason at all why I should not have been able, by the instrumentality of these little words. . . . been able to give you the very smell of the little street wherein I just walked. . . ." (STS, 291). He wishes, however, to restrict his use of realistic detail so that he is able simultaneously to tie his art to life and to appeal to the understanding of the imagination. In other words he desires to use the concrete to suggest the universal which is feeling. ". . . the fabric, the feel of surfaces must be consciously sought after," but "There must be flame and play too. . . ." (LSA, 113). That is the prose must suggest, must appeal to the imagination, that faculty which allows the perception of the endless possibilities hidden beneath the static world of fact, and at the same time be grounded in the world of fact. Of the use of realistic detail for its own sake he writes,

Would it not be better to have it understood that realism, in so far as that word means reality to life, is always bad art. . . . The life of reality is confused, disorderly, almost always without apparent purpose, whereas in the artist's imaginative life there is purpose.

The popular fictionist gives "purpose," achieves order, primarily through plot, by imposing a structure on his material. This offends Anderson. "The plot does not grow out of the natural drama resulting from the tangle of human relations." (LSA, 93). The plot, Anderson believes, should be an organic thing, not something artificially imposed. Actually, Anderson seldom uses the word plot except in a pejorative sense. What he wants is more elusive, he says, than plot. He wants form. "This thing called form in art. It exists, of course. It is the force that holds the thing of loveliness together." (LSA, 191). Anderson was likely to become disgruntled when asked to discuss form.

I think it would be a great mistake to waste any time at all thinking of 'form' as form. It is one of the things artists, and most of all half-artists, babble when their minds are most vacant. Form is, of course, content.<sup>9</sup> It is nothing else, can be nothing else. A tree has bark, fiber, sap, leaves, limbs, twigs. (LSA, 202).

Anderson's comparison of the relationship of form and content in fiction to the relationship of a tree and its parts is significant. A tree is an organic thing; the bark, fiber, sap, leaves, limbs, and twigs can be identified as parts of the tree, but they cannot exist separately from the tree. Each of these parts is related to the other parts, each grows out of the other elements. This is the relationship Anderson believes should exist in fiction. The elements of fiction, such as incident, tone, character, theme, must grow out of each other, must be as organically related as the elements of the tree. No one part should be able to exist separately from the total structure.

Anderson's concepts that art should not point a moral but should explore moral problems, that the universal must be grounded in the concrete, and that form and content in art are one are the basis for all his literary theory. This theory is basically an organic one, and while it is not a new theory, it had been lost in the popular fiction of Anderson's day. Anderson was instrumental in giving new emphasis to this organic concept which modern criticism holds to be the basis for all good fiction. Ray B. West appears to be paraphrasing Anderson when he writes of the modern criticism of the short story. This criticism

sees the short story as an organic whole in which none of the parts may be considered in isolation, in which each element must contribute its full share toward the achieving of a final effect. Incident must not exist for its own sake, as it seemed so frequently to do in the stories of O. Henry or in the superficial fiction of the popular magazines.<sup>10</sup>

This organic theory of Anderson's is the reason for his irritation

with the popular fictionist. The romancer usually chooses one of the elements of the short story and forces the other elements to serve it. He chooses a tricky plot and the characters do cartwheels. He chooses to present a moral and immediately the characters become the pure man or "the winner" and the evil man or "the loser." The problem which faces the author who works according to Anderson's theory is extremely complex. Each element of the story must contribute its part but contribute naturally. The difference in intention is, of course, at the heart of the problem. The popular fictionist's intent to present a moral or an entertaining plot is basically a simple one. One can usually summarize in a sentence either a moral or a short story plot with a surprise ending. However, Anderson is concerned with understanding, with feeling, and certainly one cannot reduce feeling to a sentence. His problem is how to give form to such a complex thing as feeling. It is feeling, not a summary sentence, which Anderson uses as a point of departure in his artistic efforts. He says that he first gets the feeling for a story, but often it is years before he finds the right words to clothe it. (SAM, 344). The feeling is nebulous, undefined until the right tools are used.

In view of Anderson's theory that form and content are one, it would be inappropriate in this paper to attempt to discuss what Anderson considers to be the proper content of fiction and what he believes to be the proper form. It might be acceptable here to borrow Mark Schorer's terms "undefined social experience" (the intended area of artistic exploration) and "technique." Like Anderson, Schorer does not believe it possible to speak separately of form and content: "in art they are one and indivisible."<sup>11</sup> He equates content with subject and form with



technique. He defines technique as "any selection, structure, or distortion, any form or rhythm imposed on the world of action; by means of which. . . our apprehension of the world of action is enriched."<sup>12</sup>

Technique, says Schorer, is not separate from content or subject for it is the only means by which the author discovers, explores, develops and conveys the meaning of his subject. Anderson had certain purposes in mind when writing, and he indicates in his non-fictional writing some areas of undefined social experience he considers to be appropriate for exploration and certain techniques of exploration he thinks most appropriate.

Critics of fiction generally agree that an artist, whether writing science fiction or a historical novel, draws upon his own experience. The type of fiction he writes will determine those areas of his experience of which he will make use, and conversely, a writer's experience will often determine the kind of fiction he writes. The imaginative life which Anderson seeks to bring over to life in his art he believes should be firmly rooted in the world of experience. A writer who tries to depict something with which he is not familiar, Anderson says, usually ends up with work "full of holes and bad spots."<sup>13</sup> Anderson insists that all of his materials "came out of my experiences of life."<sup>14</sup>

Howard Mumford Jones in his "Introduction" to the Letters of Sherwood Anderson goes so far as to say, "There is no such thing as a work of fiction by Sherwood Anderson." (LSA, vii). Anderson's purpose in his art, to deal with the truth of understanding or feeling, indicates that he is obviously primarily concerned with his experiences with people. Anderson even issued a warning in this regard. "If people did not want their stories told, it would be better for them to keep away from me. I would tell if I could get at the heart of it. . . ." (SIS, 332). In

order to clarify this discussion of Anderson's choice of undefined social experience, his areas of potential artistic exploration will be referred to as subjects with the understanding that subject in this sense means subject as undefined by technique.

Needless to say, Anderson's basic subject is the whole complex of human experience, and when asked by a friend of his for advice to young writers he wrote: "It seems to me that the duty of the storyteller is to study people as they are and try to find the real drama of life just as people live and experience it." (LSA, 447). Research is to be had by observing people. "People," he says, "are my library!" (LSA, 299). However, it would be difficult to imagine Anderson writing a story about the Duke or Duchess of Windsor. He is interested in what he calls "simple folk" (STS, 269). He is certainly not interested in the stereotyped heroes of popular fiction. In fact these heroes, he says, never exist in real life. His interest is in the businessman, the farmer, the schoolteacher, in short, in what might be called the average man (with the knowledge that Anderson knew no such creature exists.) It is interesting to note that Mary McCarthy in her essay "Characters in Fiction" says that the unheroic character in fiction offers potentially much more than the heroic one. He is "likely to be more complicated and enigmatic than a hero or heroine. . . ." <sup>15</sup> This Anderson recognized. He indicates in his non-fictional writing some of the specific areas of the complex of everyday human experience which he thinks should be explored.

Primarily, he is interested in the internal aspects of men, what he would call the imagination. "I would like to write a book of the life and the mind of the imagination," he writes in his Memoirs, (p. 7). He seems almost obsessed with the idea that the surface, the faces which men present in the factual world, hide the truth about them.

I would like to write the story of a man during an hour of his life, without physical action, the man sitting or standing or just walking about, all that he is that made him what he is. I have this temptation and at the same time realize that man is best understood by his actions. (LSA, 441).

Anderson wishes to enter the minds of his characters and to discover "the hidden passions of the peoples, their little household traits, their loves and hates" (STS, 328). In other words, he wishes to explore beneath the surface, beneath the appearance, to discover internal reality.

Anderson believes that American authors had failed for the most part in discovering internal reality, mainly because the forces of the conventional world had caused them to ignore certain thoughts and actions believed to be unacceptable or impure. He accuses these authors of being afraid. Huckleberry Finn, he says, is an "amazingly beautiful book" but "after all, a tale of childhood. . . . what about the real life on the Mississippi, on the river boats. . . in the red light districts of St. Louis and New Orleans!" (SAM, 246). He believes that sex should be openly and honestly dealt with in fiction. It is a "tremendous force in life. . . . It twisted people, beat upon them, often distracted and destroyed their lives!" (SAM, 212). He says of his generation of writers,

I do not think that any of us at the time wanted to over-play sex. But we wanted in our stories and novels to bring it back into real relation to the life we lived and saw others living. We wanted the flesh back in our literature, wanted directly in our literature the fact of men and women in bed together, babies being born. We wanted the terrible importance of the flesh in human relations also revealed again. (SAM, 247).

The effect of society on the sexual lives and attitudes of people is particularly relevant:

You and I know that the big story here is the story of repression, of the strange and almost universal insanity of society. The story does not have to be an unpleasant one to right-minded men and women, but it does need to be boldly and and subtly told. . . . (LSA, 44).

He is not only concerned with sexual repression, but with other repressions he feels men suffer because of society. He believes society to be partly the cause for men's isolation, for their loneliness; it had somehow, he thinks, killed the interest of one man in another. Robert Morss Lovett once accused Anderson of writing about people who "are mussed up," to which Anderson replied that he didn't know anyone who wasn't mussed up. "Perhaps the word 'mussed' is too strong. I mean to imply that the general mess reacts on the lives of all sensitive people. That I try to make the implication of my tales." (LSA, 122-123).

Anderson wishes to explore man's relationship to society and its effect on him, his sexual life, his repressions, and his loneliness and isolation.

Anderson expresses concern not only with man's relationship to society but also with his relationship to nature. He seems to see nature as a more positive force than society. He views man as a part of nature and seems to think that to some degree, the problems of modern man are due to his separation from nature. He once wrote that no man can be a pessimist who lives near a brook or a cornfield. "Is it not likely. . . . men. . . alone in the fields and forests. . . got a sense of bigness outside themselves that has now in some way been lost. . ." (LSA, 23).

Anderson's concern with man's relationship to nature is related to his interest in the beauty of nature and the beauty of natural or simple people.

I do not like ugliness. but to me the soil, the houses in which poor people live, the overalls of workers, the brown strong gnarled hands of workers are not ugly. Often these things have for me a strange haunting and unforgettable beauty that cannot be matched in the most delicate fabrics, in the most elegant house. (SAM, 168).

In all of these potential subjects, Anderson sees what he calls variously mystery, strangeness, wonder, love, joy, beauty. He writes to Charles Bockler, a painter, that an artist can choose any subject as long as he finds in it "wonder or some such thing.... I don't forget that one of the clear, lovely little water colors you did had a shithouse in it!" (LSA, 223). He dislikes what he calls the art of protest. "Much of my energy is exhausted. . . in an effort to keep my outlook on life sweet and clear. Most of our artists give themselves up to protest and become in the end embittered and shrill!" (LSA, 45). It is not, however, simply the subject of protest he dislikes, it is the tone of this fiction. He believes it is the artist's purpose to explore his subject sympathetically. He criticizes Sinclair Lewis and Henry James for failing to give "joy" to their readers. He thinks Lewis' Main Street a narrow book. Certain forces have escaped Lewis.

What a different book Main Street might have been had a circus ever come to his town, had his town baseball team ever whipped a team from a neighboring one--had spring but come. . . had he but kissed some high-school girl on a dark porch. . . thus putting one over on Papa. (SAM, 14)..

Anderson calls Henry James the novelist of the haters. He was a man who did not dare love, says Anderson. "Oh the thing infinitely refined and carried far into the field of intellectuality, as skillful haters find out how to do" (LSA, 103). It becomes at this point impossible to

separate Anderson's potential subject from his technique, for he not only wishes to explore this tone of love he sees in life, he believes the proper tone of fiction to be one of sympathy. "What I am after," he writes, is "love in words." (LSA, 171).

A second area in which Anderson's comments on subject and technique become inseparable is the matter of what he calls "moments." "I have come to think that the true history of life is but a history of moments. It is only at rare moments we live." (STS, 309). They are the moments when the forces of experience come together as a sort of blinding flash of revelation, of understanding, like James Joyce's epiphany. ". . .epiphany. . .name is that moment of revelation when words and acts come together to manifest something new, familiar, timeless, the deep summation of meaning."<sup>16</sup> These moments he sees as potential areas of exploration, but more than that, he believes it is the artist's place to limit his subject in order to bring forth the moment of revelation. "It was the artist's business to make it the moment stand still--well, just to fix the moment, in a painting, in a tale, in a poem." (STS, 403). To summarize, Anderson wishes to explore certain areas of human experience, and he seeks to discover these areas through a sympathetic point of view and to bring forth the moment of revelation.

What the artist seeks, writes Anderson, is "the tale of perfect balance, all the elements of the tale understood, an infinite number of minute adjustments perfectly made. . . ." (STS, 206). The elements of the story must all be integrally related and the technique must discover them as such. It is difficult to separate and define the functions of the technical devices which Anderson sees to be the appropriate tools for exploring and defining his subject. The functions of the tools overlap.

Each tool is related to every other tool and it is well to bear this in mind. Furthermore, the specific techniques Anderson discusses are related to his potential subject areas and to his basic intentions as an artist, that is to his particular conception of literature. Risking oversimplification, one might say Anderson believes that fiction should:

- 1) bring over into life, giving the sense of real life, out of the author's imagination, that moment of revelation which is the truth of understanding or feeling;
- 2) reveal the truth of understanding through a sympathetic point of view, this point of view to include a sense of mystery or wonder;
- 3) discover organic unity.

Anderson says the test of a storyteller is "Does he make me feel what he felt?" (LSA, 116). He says he works out of pure feeling, having the conviction that if he keeps the feeling straight, the form will follow and this product should be as "light in darkness. . . . To make me see something so vividly, the intensity of life in you at the moment, makes new life in me. So that I am for the moment no longer blind. Isn't that the object of all so-called art?" (LSA, 448-449). All of Anderson's ideas about technique can be related to his organic theory and to his desire to bring forth the moment of revelation through a sympathetic point of view. Again risking oversimplification, these techniques will be discussed as related to point of view and to language.

Anderson himself never uses the term point of view, but he does indicate through his comments certain general requirements in this area. First, of course, the point of view should be sympathetic to the material. Form, he says, grows from the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them. (STS, 360). The narrator's position and frame of reference are therefore extremely important. The teller of the tale

must be in a position to bring out of his telling the proper tone and structure.

The first requirement of point of view is that the teller be somehow innocent. This does not necessarily mean that Anderson insists on an adolescent narrator--he might be any age and yet retain his innocence; it simply means the teller must be free from what one might call conventional standards. Charles Child Walcutt writes that "inwardness of experience cannot be reached by a writer who recognizes conventional standards and judges his characters according to them."<sup>17</sup> One cannot operate with a solid reference to any conventional good and evil standards and still retain the possibility of general sympathy for all areas of human experience; his sympathy will of necessity be with the "good." An innocent point of view, then, allows the teller the freedom to render any area of human experience sympathetically. The praise Anderson has for Huckleberry Finn is largely due to the point of view Mark Twain employed when writing it. Anderson says it is his best book because he got away from the intellectuals and his good wife. "Again he was the half-savage, tender, god-worshipping, believing boy. He had proud conscious innocence" (LSA, 33). Anderson understandably does not think an intellectual point of view the proper one. He believes that feeling or sympathy is largely an intuitive thing which has nothing to do with the logical processes of the mind. Hence his distaste for the intellectual narration in the fiction of Henry James. He often refers to himself as a poet. "It is the nature of the poet to have something primitive in him. ... When he is a true poet he is tender, and cruel."<sup>18</sup> It is this point of view he wishes to use.

It is important to understand that Anderson's desire for a



sympathetic point of view is usually not related to sentimentality. "I would so like to write before I die, one joyous book, not at all sentimentally joyous, but having in it a deeper joy. . . ." (LSA, 297). The tone of joy or love, what we are calling sympathy, should be of a type innocent of conventional sentiment. The narrator's innocence is important in this regard also, for it allows him to be free of sentimentality, and it permits him the quality of detachment. Anderson believes that a certain distance in his stories is necessary. He had to feel that "my whole being had become a quite impersonal thing. . . ." (STS, 377) before he could achieve the proper tone. Again, the primitive innocent is the appropriate point of view. It is at least theoretically possible for an innocent narrator to view experience objectively without reference to learned emotions.

Anderson says often in his non-fictional writing that he wants to tell his stories as if he were walking along a country lane, chatting with a friend, digressing here and there as they walked. (STS, 121). The friendly narrator allows the establishment of an intimate tone. This draws the listener, or in this case the reader, into the story, which is useful if feeling is to be discovered. It also permits the narrator the freedom to digress, that is to arrange his material in the order he wishes. Anderson's desire to bring forth the moment of revelation makes this narrator quite helpful, for he is free to ignore an intellectual or logical ordering of events and to substitute one more conducive to the exploration of inner experience, such as associational or chronological order.

Anderson's concern with language as an artistic tool is apparent throughout his writing. He exhibits an almost religious respect for

words. While working as a writer in advertising, he bemoaned the fact that he was betraying words, those words which could make men better known to each other. "Words... words, I apologize to you....Dear little lovers" (SAM, 169). He is always concerned that his language be sincere, honest. "I have a great fear of phrase-making....I do have to come to words slowly. I do not wish to make them rattle" (LSA, 79). He believes words to the writer of fiction are like colors to the painter, notes to a musician, and he often speaks of the color and music he wishes to get into his prose. He chooses to approach his fiction with two basic tools, the everyday language of the American people, and the language of poetry, and in fact he hopes to fuse the two.

It is my own language, limited as it is. I will have to learn to work with it. There was a kind of poetry I was seeking in my prose, word to be laid against word in just a certain way, a kind of word color, a march of words and sentences, the colors to be squeezed out of simple words, simple sentence construction. (SAM, 242).

He hopes to construct with these words, sentences like windows looking into houses, "Something is suddenly torn aside, all lies, all trickery about life gone for the moment." (STS, 328).

Anderson is vehement on the subject of the use of everyday language. He believes American writers have been ignoring the English language for too long. Only American slang, he says, has been used; American writers think they have to write correctly in British terms. "What has the language of Thackeray or Fielding to do with an American tale? Surely Americans have suffered the same emotions as the English. Why can't their tales be told in American?" (STS, 361) He says that in telling a barroom tale the best effect could surely be had by using the vocabulary of the men about and perhaps even a little profanity and other

unprintable words. It is fairly obvious that in order to explore and define artistically the experiences of everyday men, the language of everyday men is most suitable as a tool of discovery. This language, Anderson believes, represents the lives of the people. Good sentences "have their roots down deep in the life about them." (STS, 328).

Unsophisticated language is also necessary due to the use of the innocent narrator, and like the friendly narrator, tends to draw the reader into the story. In his Memoirs, Anderson tells us he was pleased when Gertrude Stein once said, "You sometimes write what is the most important thing of all to be able to write, passionate and innocent sentences." (p. 176).

The word "passionate" is a key word in Stein's comment, for Anderson's desire to bring forth the moment of revelation, by definition an experience of intensity, calls for a language of intensity. He wishes to use everyday language as a poet would use it for the qualities of poetry are the qualities he seeks in his prose. The first of these qualities is implication. Anderson believes that no man can arrive at truth, that is the truth of the imagination, except by "what seems like indirection." (LSA, 50). "Everything that has to be definitely said so falls to pieces when said. It becomes at once half a lie." (SAN, 174). The language of poetry, "at once bold and subtle," is the language of indirection, the quality necessary for bodying forth the revelation. "I have a notion that prose writing can't go on just stating. It has to become more sensually aware of life. . . . There must be flame and play too. . . ." (LSA, 112-113). In other words, the prose must suggest. Anderson believes that in the tale of perfect balance there is "the shifting surface of word values." (STS, 206). Certain words then must

suggest numerous relationships. It seems proper to assume that Anderson is speaking of the suggestive, expansive quality of symbol as an artistic device, a device which expands the imagination. However, the device of implication serves another purpose. Anderson believes that it is necessary to tie the story to real life. This is also achieved by suggestion in prose more sensually aware of life. The artist, he says, should portray the "sensual love of life, of surfaces. . . colors, the soft texture of the skin of women. . . ." (STS, 80-81). The concrete, then, must be used to seize the universal.

Another poetic technique Anderson wishes to use is economy in the choice of image and detail. The true artist, he says, should give the complete sense of his scene with a true and vital economy of ink. (STS, 320). And again this precision of choice is for two purposes: to tie the subject to life and to suggest. In praise of a story he particularly likes he writes, "What was attempted was that there should be actual words said while the readers should be given the sense of things felt for which there were no words!" (STS, 318-319). The details given must be realistic, the image must be integrally related to the feeling of the story, and it must suggest. Of this same story he writes, "There was everything in just the way the man's hands played with that knife. That told the whole story!" (STS, 318). Anderson is concerned that there be no extraneous detail in a story. He says that writers escape into words when they have grown tired of seeking after the heart of their stories. They are likely to become feverish and wordy (STS, 333). In other words, the essence of the tale will be lost in the words if the choice is not economically precise.

Anderson also desires to employ the rhythm of poetry in his fiction.

This rhythm he sees as a part of that truth which is hidden by appearance. "The rhythm you are seeking in any of the arts lies just below the surface of things in nature," (SAN, 185) he writes. Rhythm is necessary for the discovery of this truth and for the exploration of understanding through feeling. He says of his work, "I want to achieve in it rhythm of words with rhythm of thought. . . . The thing if achieved will be felt rather than seen or heard perhaps. . . ." (LSA, 77).

The question will arise at this point, but what of plot and characterization, those two terms which appear frequently in discussions of literature. Anderson's quarrel with plot has been made apparent; however, he realizes, as he says, that men are best revealed by their actions. One could, I believe, say that Anderson does not dislike plot so much as the misuse of plot. The popular fictionist's emphasis on external event is not the sharpest tool to be used by an artist who wishes to explore internal events. Anderson simply insists that "the stories and the drama of the stories should come out of the real lives of the people. . . ." (LSA, 448). The action, then, which is considered to be necessary to literature must grow out of the internal state of a character; such action should then be an indication of the internal aspects to be discovered.

As to characterization, one must note that Anderson's concept that drama should come from the real lives of people implies that every aspect of the story should grow from the lives of the people. In short, his subject is the lives of men, and as such, every technique previously discussed is a technique of characterization. The most important thing to realize here is that it is again internal experience Anderson is after. Concrete detail such as height and weight are only important if they are

instrumental in the discovery of internal reality.

Persons . . . have a certain tone, a certain color. What care I for the person's age, the color of his hair, the length of his legs? When writing of another being I have always found it best to do so in accordance with my feeling. Besides men do not exist in facts. They exist in dreams (SAM, 9).

In conclusion, it can be said that basically Anderson expresses an organic theory of art. First, literature should not point up a moral, but it should explore moral problems. Second, fiction must be tied to the lives of men, the concrete must be used to capture the universal. Third, form and content are one and each element of the literature must be integrally related to every other element to provide a unified effect. More specifically, literature as Anderson sees it should deal with the materials of the life of the average man, his relationship to society and hence to other men, and his relationship to nature. The fiction should bring forth the moment of revelation and should be told from a sympathetic point of view. The technique should allow the development of these requirements and also achieve the organic relationship necessary. These techniques are the innocent narrator and the poetic use of everyday language.

#### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Carl H. Grabo, The Art of the Short Story (New York, 1913), p. 198.
- <sup>2</sup>Brander Matthews, "The Philosophy of the Short Story," Discussions of the Short Story, ed. Hollis Summers (Boston, 1963), p. 12.
- <sup>3</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "The Sound of the Stream," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, ed. Paul Rosenfield (Boston, 1947), p. 359-360.
- <sup>4</sup>Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Notebook (New York, 1926), p. 166. (Subsequent references to this book will be given parenthetically in the text, the page number to be preceded by the abbreviation SAN.)
- <sup>5</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "When Are Authors Insulted?," Bookman, LXXV (October, 1932), 564.
- <sup>6</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "A Writer's Conception of Realism," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, p. 342.
- <sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 344.
- <sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 345.
- <sup>9</sup>The italics are my own.
- <sup>10</sup>Ray B. West, The Short Story in America: 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1952), p. 22-23.
- <sup>11</sup>Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery," Critical Approaches to Fiction, ed. Shiv K. Kumar and Keith McKean (New York, 1968), p. 267.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 269.
- <sup>13</sup>Anderson, "A Writer's Conception," p. 344.
- <sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 338.
- <sup>15</sup>Mary McCarthy, "Characters in Fiction," Critical Approaches to Fiction, p. 92.
- <sup>16</sup>Herbert Gold, "Winesburg, Ohio: The Purity and Cunning of Sherwood Anderson," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, p. 397.
- <sup>17</sup>Walcutt, p. 157.
- <sup>18</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "One Throat," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, p. 226.

## CHAPTER III

### AN APPLICATION OF SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S CRITICAL THEORY TO HIS SHORT STORIES

Because Sherwood Anderson's literary theory is organic, based on the assumption that form and content are inseparable and that each of the elements of fiction must be integrally related, I have chosen to analyze separately seven of his most frequently anthologized short stories<sup>1</sup> in the hope that my analyses will indicate the organic relationship of the elements. The analyses are primarily aimed at showing how the elements of the stories grow from each other. I have centered the analyses of technique around the use of the innocent narrator and the poetic use of everyday language specifically as they are related to the use of implication and to the use of concrete detail to capture the universal. If the technical elements Anderson mentions are used organically, a discussion of the other elements should be implicit. The following analyses will, I believe, exhibit that Anderson does make use of his own theory in his better work.

A discussion of the techniques Anderson uses necessitates also a discussion of meaning, for as Mark Schorer says, "When we speak of technique. . .we speak of nearly everything. . .technique is the only means the author has of. . .conveying meaning."<sup>2</sup> Anderson desires to reveal meaning by focusing on a limited moment in time, and I believe that such revelation will be apparent in the discussion of the technique. I have not attempted to suggest all the possibilities of meaning in



Anderson's stories, only to touch upon them insofar as my discussion of the application of his literary theory of technique requires.

The story "Brother Death" centers around the cutting of two oak trees on a Virginia farm. The characters are the members of the family of John Grey, a successful farmer-cattle owner. The story focuses on two children, Mary and Ted; Ted suffers from a heart disorder which threatens him with death at any moment, and Mary has befriended him because she is the only one in the family who understands that he does not wish to be protected. The two have a sort of secret understanding. The father, John Grey, is a practical man who decides to cut down two beautiful oak trees, trees especially loved by Ted and Mary, planted on the farm by his wife's grandfather, an Aspinwahl, whose farm John Grey has bought little by little. He cuts the trees in order to allow more grass to grow for the cattle and also to show his authority to his son Don, who, like his father, is a man who wishes to own things and exercise control.

The story is told by a third person narrator. He focuses primarily on Mary, on the impressions Mary receives about her family and the world around her. At times the narrator appears to know exactly what Mary is thinking, but at other times he asks such questions as "Did Mary Grey think such thoughts at that moment?"<sup>3</sup> His hesitancy to be always explicit about her thoughts allows him to retain an air of mystery and subtlety. We actually see the story as Mary might perceive it years after the event, but we see it as once removed by the narrator. This narrator reveals himself through his simple sentence structure, his use of colloquial language, his frequent digressions, his questions, his hesitations, and his bits of wisdom, as a modest, naïve and yet wise man, seeming himself to be tenderly groping after the essence of his story,

so that the reader is forced to grope with him. The tone of the story becomes one of gentle searching.

The order of narration, associational, is made possible by the special character of the narrator and is full of halts and starts and digressions. The narrator begins in time after the trees have been cut, moves backward to the actual incident of the tree cutting, and finally forward again to a time after Ted has died. This confusion of time allows the implications of the story to merge around the cutting of the trees somewhere outside of time. It contributes to the revelation of the implications of the relationships explored in the story.

The rhythmic shifts in the distance of the point of view also contribute to this revelation. We view the story through the eyes of the narrator as he focuses on Mary's perceptions. However, within this framework, the narrator alternates to view the story from the neighbors' point of view, from the mother's and father's points of view, and from the older son Don's point of view. These shifts in view create a certain in and out rhythm. So we are moving simultaneously back and forth in time and in and out in perspective. This framework of rhythm is reinforced by the rhythm Anderson achieves in his sentences, moving from soothing, rather lyrical structure to short abrupt structures.

There was something joyous, the feel of the cold water on the body, under clothes, and they were shrieking with laughter when the mother came to the door. She looked at Ted. There was fear and anxiety in her voice. 'Oh, Ted, you know you mustn't, you mustn't.' Just that. All the rest implied. (p. 310).

The story "Brother Death" is basically an exploration of the relationship between the practical man and the imaginative man, and the rhythm created by the changes in perspective, the changes in time, and the changes in sentence structure, reinforce the movement back and forth,

from the world of the imaginative man to the world of the practical man. In fact, the sentences mirror the worlds; lyrical structure is often used when Anderson is describing the imaginative worlds of Ted and Mary. "It was a world to be thought about, looked at, a world of drama too, the drama of human relations, outside their own world, in a family, on a farm, in a farmhouse. . . ." (p. 312). However, a more abrupt structure is used when the world of the father and Don is described. These two men are practical men. "They were both heavy men. Already the young man walked like the father, slammed doors as did the father. There was the same curious lack of delicacy of thought and touch--the heaviness that plows through, gets things done." (p. 315). The words used in this description of the men suggest a certain insensitivity. In the story, these men are contrasted with the Aspinwahls who are "aristocratic," "naturally sensitive," (p. 308) who have "a special feeling for trees," (p. 313) but men who "couldn't hang onto land!" (p. 308).

Anderson uses implication to relate the children, Ted and Mary, to the Aspinwahls, primarily by relating them to the two trees planted by an Aspinwahl. At the beginning of the story, the stumps of the two oak trees are described as "knee-high to a not-too-tall-man," (p. 306) much as two children would be described. Mary suggests the trees have human qualities when she says speaking of the cutting, "'I wonder if they bled, like legs, when a surgeon cuts a man's leg off.'" (p. 306). Ted is described as a boy who will soon die, "cut down like a young tree!" (p. 307). The trees have "their roots down in the rich, always damp soil, and one of them had a great limb that came down near the ground so that Ted and Mary could climb into it and out another limb into its brother tree. . . ." (p. 313). The two trees are siblings, as are Ted

and Mary. The worlds they occupy merge, just as Ted's and Mary's merge. The autumn leaves of the trees "were like dry blood on gray days" (p. 313). The word Grey comes to mind in connection with the image of death, "but on other days, when the sun came out, the trees flamed against the distant hills." (p. 313). The very name Aspinwahl calls to mind a tree, and the narrator says of the two children at one point in the story "Aspinwahl blood also in the two children, Ted and Mary!" (p. 316). The position of the two trees is metaphorically similar to the children's: ". . .the two trees stood close together beyond the spring house and the fence. . .," (p. 313) separated from the rest of the family, outside of their narrow, fenced world. The children are further related to the trees for from their world, which is outside the world of the rest of the family, they "could suddenly look out at the outside world and see, in a new way, what was going on out there. . .," (p. 312) as from a distance, from a height.

The cutting of the trees provides a focus on a concrete action which serves to expand the implications of the story. The father cuts the trees to allow grass to grow for the cattle, which he will sell to make money. He sacrifices the beauty and the pleasure his family finds in the trees for practical purposes. However, he also cuts the trees to show his son that he is in control, the man with power. He metaphorically has the power of life and death over those things connected with the tree--the aristocratic man, the sensitive man, the imaginative man--his own children. The implication is awesome.

The son Ted's reaction to this cutting also provides suggestion. He views the father and his desire for power with contempt. He views the cutting of the trees with contempt, and metaphorically he sees his own

death as unimportant. The father, in contrast, is afraid of death because he will lose his power and his possessions to his son Don. This son leaves the farm in defiance of his father's decision, vowing never to return, but coming sheepishly home several days later, providing the basis for the narrator's comment that "Something in you must die before you can possess and command." (p. 320).

The basis of exploration in this story is the relationship between the imaginative man and the practical man, but the exploration of this relationship blossoms into the exploration of the meaning of power, the meaning of freedom, the meaning of possessions, even the meaning of life and death. Commenting on Anderson's use of the concrete to capture the universal in this story, Walter Havighurst writes:

This human episode occurs once, in a specific family, on a Virginia farm, at a particular season of a particular year. Yet the story is not limited to this single incident; it represents a process that is timeless and universal. These people in the story cast long shadows. The father is all fathers, all authority, all established ownership and command; the older son is all assertive youth, all young and willful ambition; the younger son is all who do not compete and so do not have to surrender. The characters are representative, and the incident also is representative of many situations. The story presents a conflict--the same as that of Absalom and King David three thousand years ago--as old as history and as new as life.<sup>4</sup>

All the elements of Anderson's literary theory are at work here. The narrator provides the sympathetic point of view required by Anderson in his modest groping for the essence of the story. His groping digressions allow him to bring forth the moment of revelation through his associational arrangement of material and through the rhythm of association. This rhythm also reinforces the contrast between the two worlds represented in the story. The details of description provide a concrete basis for the story while suggesting numerous relationships.

The trees and the cutting of the trees become symbolic. Fundamentally, all the elements of the story, even the sentence structure, serve to characterize members of the Grey family. The action of the story, the cutting of the trees, grows out of the conflict between the characters. In short, each of the elements of the story is related integrally and these elements come together to provide the moment of revelation.

"Death in the Woods" was one of Anderson's favorite stories; "to my mind," he writes, "it is one of the best, most solid of all my tales" (SAM, 40). The story is of an old farm woman, Mrs. Grimes, who walks four miles to town on a snowy day with the Grimes dogs following her to get feed for the animals. Her husband, Jake, and her son are a "tough lot";<sup>5</sup> they leave the care of the farm to the old woman, coming home only to be fed and to get the very little money the old woman manages to acquire. Mrs. Grimes is in her younger days a bound girl on a farm belonging to a German. The German molests her, and Jake has a fight with the German, carries her away, and she marries him. The story is of the old woman's death. On her way home from town, she takes a shortcut through the woods and sits down to rest. She is very tired and falls asleep, but her sleep is fatal for the freezing weather causes her death. The dogs run in circles in the moonlit clearing, performing an eerie death ritual. The next day a hunter finds the body which looks like "the body of some charming young girl!" (p. 129). A group of men from the town go to get the body, and the narrator of the story, at that time a young man, is among them. The scene in the forest becomes "the foundation of the real story I am now trying to tell" (p. 131).

As in all of Anderson's stories, the real story the narrator tells cannot be summarized. The telling of the story takes place years after

the death of the old woman, when the narrator has become a man.

Anderson's use of the sympathetic narrator in this story is extremely important for the story of the old woman's death is actually a story about the narrator. Again, the narrator is searching after the essence of his tale, has sought it before, that is why "I have been impelled to try to tell the simple story over again!" (p. 132). John Lawry writes of this story, "The narrator is. . .revealed as an artist in the essential gesture of art. . . ." <sup>6</sup> The narrator in this case not only treats the subject of the woman's death sympathetically, he also treats the subject of the act of creation sympathetically. He is dissatisfied with the way his brother tells the story immediately after it happens, and he hopes to tell it as he feels it should be told.

The poetic use of implication is important in the story, because it allows the narrator to tie his own life to that of the woman. The narrator tells the story as if he were talking with someone, bringing in little details about himself which seem to be extraneous but are relevant, for they serve, as does the total frame of the story, the act of creation, to tie the narrator's life to the old woman's through suggestion. In the second paragraph of the story, the narrator says that the butcher may give some liver to the old woman, and then comments, "In our family we were always having it!" (p. 121). Such connective suggestions appear throughout the story. The narrator tells us that once he saw a pack of dogs running in circles waiting for him to die, and he tells us he visited the deserted Grimes' farm years after the death of the old woman. The narrator's story, his identification with the old woman, mirrors the process of understanding, and in doing so brings forth understanding. At first the old woman is vaguely recalled,

but as the story progresses the narrator brings in specific details about her life and even seems to become the old woman.

Through implication, the old woman transcends her place in the story. We are told that she feeds animals, that she fed the German farmer and his wife and that she now feeds Jake and her son and the animals on the Grime's farm. This feeding process is shown through suggestion to be outside the rational process, especially in the scene in town when the butcher attempts to sympathize with her saying he'd see her husband and son starve before he'd feed them. The old woman thinks, "Starve, eh? Well things had to be fed. . . .Horses, cows, pigs, dogs, men!" (p. 125). The old woman takes the shape of a sort of blind force, almost a mother nature figure with her constant feeding process. Again Anderson uses suggestion to identify the author with the old woman. The author also seems compelled by some force outside of reason to try to tell over and over the story of her death.

The central image Anderson uses is the old woman's body in the snow. The dogs, in an effort to get the food out of the pack on her back, tear her dress down to her waist, exposing her "as a charming young girl." The unity of the old woman's life--she fed animal life "before she was born, as a child, as a young woman. . . .when she grew old," (p. 132)--plus this image cause the reader through the power of suggestion to see in the old woman the universal cycle of life. Mary Rohrberger reveals in her book Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story Anderson's suggestion in this story of the ancient Demeter-Persephone-Hecate trilogy.<sup>7</sup> What we see is the continuity of creation in the life-death-life cycle. Again the narrator in his repeated efforts to create the story is identified with this cycle.



This story is a very good example of the complexity which Anderson achieves through the use of the innocent narrator. His innocence is basic to the story, for it not only allows a sympathetic treatment of the materials, it actually motivates the telling of the story: "Something had to be understood. . . .A thing so complete has its own beauty" (p. 132). The language the narrator uses is simple, natural to him, for he tells us he lived in a small town when the incident of which he writes occurred. The simplicity of the language mirrors the stark and simple quality of the old woman's life. The action of the story is really the action of the creation the narrator feels compelled to make; it grows out of the narrator, and the whole story characterizes this narrator as a man searching after an understanding of the mystery of the life cycle. The concrete fact of the old woman's death expands to touch upon the mystery of the universal cycle of creation. The form of the story cannot be separated from its content, for they are one and the same. Horace Gregory says that "Death in the Woods" is one of Anderson's finest stories; it has "the penetrating quality of Ishmael's gaze in the opening chapters of Moby Dick."<sup>8</sup>

Ray B. West includes the story "Seeds" in his list of Anderson's best stories.<sup>9</sup> It is certainly one of his most complex. The story concerns four people; the narrator, a psychoanalyst, LeRoy (a painter), and a twenty-seven year old woman from Iowa. The story begins with a conversation between the narrator and the psychoanalyst. The psychoanalyst is weary of trying to cure people of their illnesses and wishes to rest. The narrator says to the psychoanalyst, "The illness you pretend to cure is the universal illness. . . .Fool--do you expect love to be understood."<sup>10</sup> The doctor replies that to be so definite is to miss the point. The

people "are being choked by climbing vines. The vines are old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men." (p. 273). He, himself, wishes to be like a dead leaf blown by the wind. The story then shifts to the Iowa woman who has come to Chicago ostensibly to study music, but actually to find a man to love her. However, whenever a man approaches her she becomes alarmed. She invites men with her actions, but rejects them when they attempt advances. Her attitudes cause trouble in the boarding house she is staying in, and the landlady asks her to leave. LeRoy rescues her by pretending they are engaged to be married, and he helps her find another apartment. They become friends and she speaks to him of her problems. The story ends as the narrator and LeRoy are talking; the narrator asks why LeRoy did not become her lover. LeRoy replies that he cannot be a lover because old thoughts and beliefs choke him. (p. 277)..

This story explores the relationship between instinct and reason. The poetic use of repetition in this story is particularly astute. Certain words are repeated in special contexts and act to suggest certain relationships between instinct and reason. These words are "idea," "passion," and "thought." The narrator tells us of the doctor, "the idea of psychoanalysis was the passion of his life!" (p. 272). Of LeRoy he says, "The passions of his brain have consumed the passions of his body!" (p. 275). Anderson uses some form of the word passion to introduce abstract ideas expressed by the separate men in the story, the narrator included. Through the constant juxtaposition of these words, "passion" is taken out of the physical world, the world we ordinarily expect to find it in, and put into the world of ideas. The girl, the narrator says, "had thought too much and acted too little!" (p. 276).

Certain phrases are also repeated. The doctor says at the

beginning of the story,

'The lives of people are like young trees in a forest. They are being choked by climbing vines. The vines are old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men. I am myself covered by crawling creeping vines that choke me,' (p. 273) and 'I want to be like a dead leaf blown by the winds. . . .I have one desire and one only--to free myself! (p. 272).

At the end of the story LeRoy echoes these same phrases. "I cannot be a lover. . . .Old thoughts and beliefs--seeds planted by dead men--spring up in my soul and choke me," (p. 227) and "'I would like to be a leaf blown away by the wind.'" (p. 277). The repetition of phrases serves several purposes. First, their appearance at the beginning and at the end of the story gives a sort of circular pattern to the story. The circular pattern reflects the circular motions of the men. They are "going in circles" in attempting to enter the lives of others. The pattern recurs. Each attempts to enter but fails, each attempts to help another person but fails. Second, the words seem to connect the men's lives and also connect their lives with the woman's life. The words imply that all three, LeRoy, the doctor, and the woman are somehow made helpless by thoughts, by ideas--"seeds planted by dead men." The desire on the part of the men to be dead leaves blown by the wind suggests that they wish to be free of the tree choked by vines that are thoughts. The doctor says he wants "'to run and play,'" (p. 273) suggesting he desires the uninhibited freedom, the instinctual freedom of a child. The device of repetition is a poetic device, and it creates the circular pattern and provides emphasis in this story.

The seeds planted by dead men take on symbolic significance, and they are related through implication to Christianity. The description of LeRoy connects him with Christ. His name itself means the king. He is described as being "tall and lean," his life spent "in devotion"<sup>11</sup> to ideas," (p. 275) and the narrator indicates he is celibate. This

description plus the image of the girl kneeling in front of him suggest his relationship to Christ. The reference to seeds in the story brings to mind Christ's parable of the sower.

A sower went out to sow his seed. . . .And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. . . . The seed is the word of God. . . .And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.<sup>12</sup>

The story implies an inversion of this parable. Instead of the pleasures and riches of life choking the words of God, the words, "old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men," seem to choke the instinctive pleasures of life. The men desire to free themselves from these beliefs, to act instinctively, but their desire to be dead leaves reveals the impossibility of this freedom. They would have to be dead to be free. This desire to be dead leaves blown by the wind also implies that the men themselves feel helpless, unable to act, and in fact wish to be passive, to be acted upon by the wind. The men's desire to be passive, the suggestion that LeRoy could not be the woman's lover, and the men's general inability to act implies sexual impotency.

The narrator of this story is actually a character in the story himself, although he is a peripheral character. He is somewhat different from the narrators in the stories "Brother Death" and "Death in the Woods" for we do not see him hesitating and groping or having sudden flashes of insight. In fact, he has a definite opinion about the meaning of all the events he relates. His conviction is that "you cannot venture along the road of lives." (p. 275). He seems to believe he is making this point in the story, and he is partially, but he also indicates that it is natural to attempt this venture for he appears unwittingly to do exactly what he says cannot be done. He says "the

figure of the woman kept coming into my mind. An idea<sup>13</sup> came to me," and to LeRoy he says, "'You might have been her lover.'" (p. 276). He attempts to enter the lives of the doctor and LeRoy with advice, and at least in a remote way he attempts to give advice concerning the young woman's problem. The narrator's innocence of the contradiction between his words and actions allows the sympathetic treatment of the materials in spite of the fact that he appears to take a definite stand. His attempt to enter other lives reinforces the circular pattern mentioned previously.

The narrator tells the story in an informal way which allows him to digress. The pattern his digressions take reinforces the pattern created by the repetitions of words and phrases and events. He first has a conversation with the psychoanalyst. Then abruptly, with no transition whatsoever, he moves to the woman's story. Just as abruptly he moves from the woman's story to the conversation he has with LeRoy. This abrupt movement mirrors the jarring effect of the repeated attempts and failures of the characters to enter the lives of others. Also, the conversations at the beginning and the end form, along with the connecting words and phrases, a sort of circle around the inner story of the woman, suggesting that the woman is trapped by the men, or at least by the forces that trap the men. The symbolism of the seeds reinforces this implication, for the men, shown to be victims of old dead thoughts, are revealed as helpless or impotent and metaphorically unable to act as lovers.

The stories "I Want to Know Why" and "I'm a Fool" differ somewhat from the preceding stories primarily because of their young narrators.

In "I Want to Know Why," Nathan B. Fagin sees "Anderson's almost uncanny understanding of the adolescent boy."<sup>14</sup> Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren analyze the story in their book The Scope of Fiction as a story of "initiation." The adolescent boy in the story "discovers something about the nature of evil."<sup>15</sup> Because their analysis is extremely enlightening and touches on the elements which Anderson's literary theory requires, I will mention it from time to time in my own analysis.

The story concerns a fifteen year old boy who lives in Beckersville and who loves horses. He and three of his friends run away to go to the Saratoga racetrack to see two Beckersville horses, Middlestride and Sunstreak, run. While they are there, the boy has an upsetting experience which causes him to write the story in an effort to understand his experience. He has a mystical sense about horses, and he knows on the day of the race that Sunstreak will win. The boy believes Jerry Tillford, the horse's trainer, also has this mystical perception, and the boy says, "I guess I loved the man as much as I did the horse because he knew what I knew."<sup>16</sup> After the race the boy wants to be close to Jerry, and he follows him. He finds him going into a "rummy farmhouse," (p. 93) a house of prostitution. He sees Jerry kiss one of the women, a woman who "looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him," (p. 94). A year later when the boy actually tells the story, he still goes to the racetracks, but things are different. He says, "What did he do it for? I want to know why!" (p. 94).

Brooks and Warren point out in their analysis that the language used in the story is a style appropriate to the boy who is its first person narrator.<sup>17</sup> He is from a small town and spends most of his time

around the racetracks. The language he uses differs slightly from the American informal style used in the previous stories discussed for he often slips into the vulgate. Such phrases as "he don't" (p. 88) and "we done," (p. 90) and slang phrases such as "Mother jawed" (p. 90) and "It's what give me the fantods" (p. 93) are the kinds of phrases one would expect to hear around a racetrack. The unpolished language also seems appropriate to the narrator's unsophisticated internal state. However, the thoughts the boy expresses with his language show him to be sensitive. He is puzzled about certain moral problems. He is getting to be a man and he wants "to think straight and be OK" (p. 88). His feelings about horses, "It brings a lump up into my throat when a horse runs," (p. 89) also show him to be sensitive.

The boy narrator writes the story because he is puzzled, and he seems to feel that his writing will somehow straighten things out. He is interested in gaining an understanding of the materials he relates, and is, of course, sympathetic to these materials. Anderson's use of a fifteen year old narrator allows the order of narration which is important to the revelation. The boy tells the story almost as if he were talking to himself, using a mixture of chronological and associational order. He tells about the trip to Saratoga and the races and what happened when he got home, often digressing to tell little events that come to his mind and to express certain of his reflections on the events. He then returns to the situation at Saratoga, working up to the scene in the farmhouse which he relates near the end of the story. The order he uses is essential to the intense quality of the final revelation.

First of all the order the narrator uses permits him to express in the first half of the story his feelings about horses. Everything about

the horses and the racetracks is beautiful to him--it is good. This order also allows him to reveal in the first half of the story certain questions he has about the accepted values of society. He doesn't understand why his friends' fathers don't want them to associate with Henry Rieback because his father is a gambler. He can't understand why people refuse to see the beauty in horses just because they dislike the gambling at the tracks. He believes that the Negroes in the community are more honest than the white men which is confusing since they hold an inferior social position. He wants "to know why" about all these things and these questions combine later with his larger question to give the climactic scene its qualities of intensity and complexity. The boy has begun to discover that the world is not black and white, and yet there remains for him the racing world in which everything is good. Through unconscious identification with the boy, the reader of the story also begins to see the world of racing as beautiful and good, and he shares in the boy's revelation of the complex nature of the relationship of good and evil during the scene in the farmhouse.

The concrete details in this story function to characterize the boy and also to suggest the complexity of the relationship of good and evil. The most important detail is the horse itself which functions as a symbol. The horse is beautiful and the boy attributes human qualities to it. It is "clean," "full of spunk," "honest," (p. 89) and it does not brag. The boy expects to find these same qualities in Jerry Tillford whom he connects to the world of horses. The scene in the farmhouse expands and complicates his perception, for Jerry Tillford looks at the woman "and his eyes began to shine just as they did when he looked at me and at Sunstreak. . . ." (p. 94). The good and evil become related. The



woman "looked a little like the gelding Middlestride, but not clean like him." (p. 94). The black the woman represents is related to the good the horses represent. What the boy sees in the farmhouse somehow spoils the purity of his vision of the racing world, he says, "because a man like Jerry Tillford, who knows what he does, could see a horse like Sunstreak run, and kiss a woman like that on the same day." (p. 94). Brooks and Warren write that the boy "discovers that good and bad are very intimately wedded in the very nature of man. . . ."<sup>18</sup>

The implications of the story, however, expand to cover other discoveries the boy is making. The horse is traditionally a sexual symbol, and it functions as one in this story. As has been mentioned, the horse is given human qualities, and these qualities expand to reflect the boy's growing sexual awareness and his adolescent sexual fantasies. "Sunstreak is like a girl you think about sometimes but never see. He is hard all over and lovely too. When you look at his head you want to kiss him." (p. 91). This passage is important first because of the words "never see." This object of the boy's affections does not exist in the actual world; it is the ideal of his fantasies. Second, the passage is important in suggesting the boy's nebulous ideas as to his own sexual role. The male and female become confused in the symbolism of the horse. He is like a girl but he is a male. Jerry Tillford is identified with the horse in the story, and becomes thereby the human embodiment of the boy's sexual fantasies. Jerry is also connected with the boy's father, the figure through which a boy receives his sexual identity. The boy says he likes Jerry "even more than I ever liked my own father" (p. 92). In the scene in the farmhouse, the prostitute is related to the horse Middlestride which reinforces the sexual symbolism of the horse, but she

is not clean like him. She exists without the ideal qualities of the boy's fantasies, the clean and lovely qualities he gives to the horse. The scene disillusiones the boy in two respects. First, Jerry's function as an object of the boy's affection causes him to be disappointed because Jerry has chosen to give his attention to a prostitute instead of to the boy himself. Second, Jerry functions as a symbol of sexual identification for the boy. His identification with Jerry causes him to see Jerry's sexual partner, the prostitute, as his own, a partner in the real world who is not equal to the partner of his sexual fantasies. The boy not only discovers the complex nature of good and evil, he also discovers the complex relationship between fantasy and fact.

It is the unity that the different elements of the story provide through their interlocking which makes the discoveries possible. The concrete details which make the story readable on a rational level also suggest on another level the complex relationship of good and evil and of fantasy and fact. The narrator who attempts to participate in the conventional black and white division of moral problems, discovers that there is no such division. Brooks and Warren are careful to point out that Anderson is not presenting a moral: ". . .one should remind himself that the 'message' is, as such, not the story." Although "the message is something of which everyone is aware. . . .it is revitalized and becomes meaningful again, when it is shown to be operating in terms of experience."<sup>19</sup>

"I'm a Fool" is probably the most frequently anthologized of Anderson's stories. Anderson says in a letter that it "is a piece of work that holds water, but do you not think its wide acceptance is largely due to the fact that it is a story of immaturity and poses no

problems?" (LSA, 102). I suspect that one of the reasons for its wide acceptance is that it approaches the comic and is therefore quite entertaining. The reader both sympathizes with and is tempted to smile at the narrator's comments about himself. It may be that this story does not explore the complex problems of such stories as "Death in the Woods," or "Seeds" but it does explore problems. The story seems to me to be an exploration of personal limitations, of the conflict often implicit in a person's vision of himself as he is and as he'd like to be.

The story concerns a nineteen year old boy who, in his own words, makes a fool of himself while watching a horse race. He tells us that he feels foolish sitting in the stands anyway, because the summer before he worked with Harry Whitehead and Burt, a Negro, as a swipec with race horses. His mother and sister both thought it was disgraceful, but he needed a job. The summer the story takes place, he is working in Sandusky taking care of horses. He gets a day off and goes to the races where he meets Wilbur Wessen, a college boy, Elinor Woodbury, Wilbur's girlfriend, and Miss Lucy Wessen. He gives the three a tip on a horse and then pretends his father owns the horse to impress Lucy. He lies and says his name is Walter Mathers, and he is the son of a wealthy man from Marietta, Ohio. He and Lucy get along quite well and it occurs to him that "She wasn't stuck on me because of the lie about my father being rich and all that."<sup>20</sup> She is the kind of girl he would like to marry, but the lies he tells make another meeting between them impossible. It is a hard jolt for him, "one of the most bitterest I ever had to face!" (p. 380).

This story resembles "I Want to Know Why" in several ways. The narrators are both telling stories about themselves, and both are rather

naïve. They are the main characters in their stories and they characterize themselves by language which reflects their social position and their individual personalities. The narrator in this story is particularly charming in his adolescent way. He tends to exaggerate and to make rather foolish, thoughtless remarks such as, "Sometimes I hope I have cancer and die. I guess you know what I mean," (p. 389) and "I'll bet you what--if I had an arm broke right now or a train had run over my foot--I wouldn't go to no doctor at all. I'd go set down and let her hurt and hurt--that's what I'd do!" (p. 390). Anderson uses the narrator's remarks and his language in general to characterize him as an impulsive person, who likes and dislikes himself at the same time. Like the narrator in "I Want to Know Why," this boy uses vulgate English. However, his language is different from the other boy's just as his character is different. He reveals himself to be more excitable through his impulsive remarks and his periodic interjections of "Gee Whizz" (p. 382) and "Craps amighty." (p. 39). His language is also important for it defines his social position and his social position is what he feels ambivalent about. His ambivalent feelings motivate his action, his fabrication, which causes the ultimate predicament.

Again, like the narrator in "I Want to Know Why," this boy seems to be telling his story to himself, and this allows the chronological-associational order which is important for the reader's experience of revelation. The order is necessary so that the reader will understand the full significance of the boy's lies to the girl. In the first section of the story, the narrator explains why he feels foolish sitting in the grandstand, and in doing so he reveals his confused feelings about himself. This is done through the use of implication. The narrator

explains why he feels foolish sitting in the grandstand, and in doing so he reveals his confused feelings about himself. This is done through the use of implication. The narrator never admits that he has conflicting feelings; he perhaps does not consciously know that he does. His statements, however, do reveal his feelings. He says

Sometimes I think that boys who are raised in regular houses, and never have a fine nigger like Burt for best friend, and go to high schools and college. . . .Such fellows don't know nothing at all. They've never had no opportunity. But I did. (p. 381).

He feels it is necessary to constantly reaffirm the correctness of his job as swipe and the great advantages of such an education. "You can stick your colleges up your nose for all me. I guess I know where I got my education!" (p. 382). These affirmations of his pride in himself appear somewhat strange when he feels compelled to lie in the second half of the story in order to impress Lucy and her brother, who has been to college.

Particular details in the story serve to characterize the boy, but again, Anderson's use of concrete detail is basic to the meaning of the story, and these details act to suggest the meaning. The background details of the lie the boy tells are important in this regard. He says he and Burt were once in Marietta, Ohio, at the home of the wealthy Mr. Mathers whose son he pretends to be. Mr. Mathers loves race horses, but his wife is a stiff Presbyterian, so he never races his own horses but allows another man to race them. The Mathers family situation parallels the boy's own, for his sister and mother think racing is disgraceful. Since both men must go against the wishes of the women, the boy's choice of Mr. Mathers as his imaginary father seems appropriate. However, in truth Mr. Mathers has no son, only a daughter, and the fact that

Walter Mathers does not exist makes the boy's pretensions more empty than ever. Another example of this use of detail is the narrator's comments on Burt the Negro. He says twice that Burt could have gotten up in the world, "if he hadn't been black." (p. 381). He realizes that Burt can never escape the limitations of the color of his skin. The narrator indicates that he often identifies with Burt and this identification suggests that perhaps he is as much a captive of his limitations as Burt is a captive of his color. He verbally punishes himself throughout the story for lying to the girl, but he affirms the necessity for putting on a front without realizing the contradictions he suggests. He pretends to own Harry Whitehead's horses, and he feels it necessary to spend his money on expensive twenty-five cent cigars and to push aside a man in a bar who is carrying a cane and wearing a Windsor tie.

The implications of the elements of the first half of the story combine with the lie in the second half of the story to suggest several things. On the literal level, the boy will never be able to see the girl again. There is something which he wants very badly but which is out of his reach, something which, in the final analysis, he himself has placed out of reach. The suggestion is not only that men are victims of their limitations (in the boy's case lack of money and education) but that men define their own limitations: "I don't care nothing for working, and earning money, and saving it for no such boob as myself!" (p. 390).

If this story is not as complex as some of Anderson's other stories, it is no less unified. It exhibits the same organic quality as the other stories. The action grows out of the character of the narrator himself as does the language of the story. All the elements of the story, the language, the events, the details given, combine to characterize the

narrator, to justify the actions he makes, and finally to allow the discovery of meaning.

Of the several Winesburg stories which are printed separately as short stories, "Sophistication" is the most frequently printed.

Both Walter B. Rideout and Edwin Fussell note that the story is one of the few Winesburg stories that exhibit a "triumph"<sup>21</sup> a "happy ending."<sup>22</sup> Fussell believes the theme of the story to be that

. . . loneliness is assuaged--there is no other way--by the realization that loneliness is a universal condition and not a uniquely personal catastrophe; love is essentially the shared acceptance by two people of the irremediable fact, in the nature of things, of their final separateness.<sup>23</sup>

The story takes place in the evening of a day in fall while the Winesburg County Fair is going on. The town is filled with people, as is the road, Trunion Pike. George Willard has been impatiently waiting to see Helen White. He is growing to be a man and is about to leave Winesburg. He is having "thoughts"<sup>24</sup> this evening, and he wants someone to understand his new position and feelings. Helen White is having a similar experience; however, she has spent the day with a pedantic young man, an instructor from a college who is a guest of her mother's, and she is anxious to get away from him to see George. She finally manages to escape while her mother is talking with the man, and she runs into a side street where she meets George. The two walk hand in hand to a deserted grand-stand where they sit in silence together. They do not kiss because, "George wanted to love and be loved by her, but he did not want to be confused by her womanhood." (p. 241). Each is thinking, "I have come to this lonely place and here is this other." (p. 241). They rise and begin to walk home. Stopping by a tree, they kiss, and to relieve their embarrassment, they begin to laugh and play like children.

Later they continue home in dignified silence and the narrator remarks,

For some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing needed. . . . They had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible. (p. 243).

Jarvis A. Thurston says of the Winesburg stories,

Anderson uses his narrator's mixture of inarticulate wisdom and naïveté in a controlled way that constantly suggests more than is said. . . . The inarticulateness seems appropriate to his spiritually confused characters and to a narrator whose wisdom is more of the heart than the head.<sup>25</sup>

His comments affirm Anderson's use of his own theory, the use of the sympathetic narrator, the use of implication and the organic relationship of the elements of point of view, language and characterization. The narrator is omniscient and he moves in and out of George and Helen's thoughts, makes philosophical comments in a very humble way, and describes external events--the people in the streets, the cornfields, and the music from a dance. All of this movement functions organically. The shifts in focus that the narrator creates reflect George's shifting thoughts. George seems to be looking alternately deep within himself and then outward at the world around him. He thinks of himself as an isolated entity; he thinks of Helen and wishes to be near her. He thinks philosophically of the world outside him, "the countless figures of men who before his time have come out of nothingness into the world, lived their lives and again disappeared into nothingness!" (p. 234).

The language of this story, as Thurston says, "expressive of 'wisdom,' sympathy, and humility," is flavored by the "poetic" and is appropriate to the narrator.<sup>26</sup> The narrator's bits of wisdom reveal George's thoughts sympathetically. The narrator often does not say what George is thinking but merely implies his thoughts: "There is a time in



the life of every boy when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. Perhaps that is the moment when he crosses the line into manhood!" (p. 234). Such passages as the following show the narrator's poetic use of repetition.

With all his heart he wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands, be touched by the hand of another. If he prefers that the other be a woman, that is because he believes that a woman will be gentle, that she will understand. He wants, most of all, understanding.  
(p. 235).<sup>27</sup>

This repetition functions organically in the story, for Helen's thoughts seem to be a repetition of George's thoughts. Both feel trapped by the people around them, both are tired of meaningless words, and both seem to be reaching for adulthood. This repetition points to the meaning of sophistication or of adulthood, a process that all of the millions of people who disappear into nothingness repeat.

The narrator's descriptions of what is going on around George are important to the revelation of George's feelings. He describes the noisy crowds, working "terribly at the task of amusing themselves", (p. 233). He implies that the task is somehow absurd. George is looking at the people with "feverish" (p. 233) eyes. He has ambitions and is thinking of the "figure he will cut in the world!" (p. 234). However, at the same time, he sees his own minuteness, "a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village!" (p. 234). He feels lonely but yet smothered by people; he feels important yet insignificant.

All these elements of the story reinforce and give meaning to the scene of George and Helen sitting in the grandstands. The stands, which have only recently been filled with people, are now empty and silent. George and Helen, "human atoms," (p. 241) sit together in silence and do not speak, do not impinge on each other's privacy, but in sharing the

same feelings--"One shudders at the thought of the meaninglessness of life while at the same instant. . .one loves life so intensely that tears come into his eyes" (p. 241)--they are renewed and refreshed. The fact that they do not speak is important for the only dialogue actually given in the story, such as Wesley Moyer's boasting and the pedantic young man's foolish prattling, appears to be superficial. Words, then, become a part of the meaninglessness, and in not speaking George and Helen partially escape the meaninglessness for they are not trying to hide their loneliness with words. All the details of the story contribute to the understanding which is discovered in the climactic scene in the grand-stands. George's and Helen's realizations that isolation is the ultimate condition of every human and that the sharing of this knowledge is the only way to relieve its burden become the reader's revelation.

Like the story "Death in the Woods," Anderson considers "The Egg" to be one of his finest. In a letter to Roger Sergel he writes "'The Egg' is to my mind about my best shot." (LSA, 110). David Anderson sees the story as an illustration of man's frustration at his inability to understand the source and meaning of man's tragedy.<sup>28</sup>

The story is told by a young man and concerns his father's efforts to rise in the world. His father marries at the age of thirty-five and a year later the narrator is born. The husband and wife become ambitious: "The American passion for getting up in the world took possession of them."<sup>29</sup> They buy a chicken farm and run it unsuccessfully for ten years. The mother then induces the father to go into the restaurant business. They move to town and the father takes with him a collection of "grotesques," (p. 79) chickens born with four legs, two heads, etc.,

preserved in alcohol. The father believes the people who come into the restaurant will enjoy looking at them. Sometime afterwards, the father, who is a silent man, gets the idea that he should be more cheerful, that he should entertain the young people who come into the restaurant. When a young man named Joe Kane comes in, the father attempts to entertain him, first by standing an egg on its end. When this fails, he tries to place an egg in a bottle by boiling it in vinegar. He becomes so frantic to succeed that he breaks the egg. Joe laughs and the father in a rage throws an egg at him. The father then goes to his wife's room where his rage turns to tears. He and the narrator both cry. The narrator wonders "why eggs had to be" but the problem remains unsolved in his mind "And that, I conclude, is but another evidence of the complete and final triumph of the egg. . . ." (p. 85).

David Anderson writes of this story, "Anderson uses an adolescent narrator who sympathizes with his father." The narrator presents a "sympathetic portrayal of a grotesque. . . ." <sup>30</sup> This sympathetic narrator, however, differs from those adolescent narrators in "I Want to Know Why" and "I'm a Fool." His grammar is quite correct, and his language, although informal, reveals a certain glibness, a certain literary inclination. This inclination can be seen in his descriptions of his boyhood impressions of life on a chicken farm.

From the beginning they were impressions of disaster, and, if, in my turn, I am a gloomy man inclined to see the darker side of life, I attribute it to the fact that what should have been for me the happy joyous days of childhood were spent on a chicken farm. One unversed in such matters can have no notion of the many and tragic things that can happen to a chicken. (p. 77).

This language is both appropriate to the character of the narrator and to the theme of the story. He tells us his mother was a school teacher

before her marriage, and that it was probably from her reading that she got her notions of getting up in the world. We assume that she probably has influenced him, and he says as a child he had already begun to read books and "have notions of my own" (p. 78). The story itself is about the frustration that ideas bring, and his language reflects his interest in ideas and at the same time tells of his own frustration. "Most philosophers," he says, indicating he is speaking also of himself, "must have been raised on chicken farms. One hopes for so much from a chicken and is so dreadfully disillusioned" (p. 77).

Anderson's use of implication in this story is brilliant and inexhaustible. Both the egg and the grotesques (chickens) achieve symbolic importance through his use of implication. All the concrete details given by the narrator to describe the lives of chickens serve, also to suggest that the same description fits the lives of men. "They are so much like people they mix up in one's judgments of life" (p. 77) says the narrator. The egg itself contains the mystery of life, and that mystery, the narrator discovers, is impenetrable. To attempt to penetrate it leads to frustration. The father's desperate attempt to conquer the egg in the scene with Joe Kane and his fascination with the grotesques and eggs in general reveal this frustration through implication in terms of experience. The narrator tells us, "There was something pre-natal about the way eggs kept themselves connected with the development of his idea to entertain his guests". At any rate, an egg ruined his new impulses in life" (p. 82).

Through the use of implication the father himself is shown to be a grotesque. The restaurant the family owns is at a railroad station in a place called Pickleville. The implication is obvious. The grotesques,

the father believes, will entertain people, and his own desire to entertain his customers connects him with the grotesques. The father's relationship to the grotesques is most obvious in the scene with Joe Kane. In his natural state, the father is a silent rather gloomy man, but he forces himself into playing the role of entertainer and in so doing, distorts himself, makes himself grotesque.

This grotesqueness is not only related to the attempt to understand the mystery of life. Anderson uses implication to suggest that on a different level it is related to the American dream (idea) of success. The narrator tells us that his father was a happy man before he got married, content with his lot in life, but after marriage, the American passion for getting on in the world took hold of him. The idea that this passion is a largely futile one is implied throughout the story. The narrator tells us at one point in speaking of the chicken farm that a literature has been built up on the subject of how to make a fortune in raising chickens. "It is intended to be read by the gods who have just eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (p. 77). This sentence implies that in reading this literature, one will suffer the same fall Eve did when she ate the fruit of knowledge. The fruit is promising, but in the end disastrous. Anderson's narrator tells us his father speaks of Christopher Columbus when trying to entertain Joe Kane. "That Christopher Columbus was a cheat," (p. 83) he declares, referring to the fact that Columbus broke the end of an egg to make it stand. However, his words here have a double meaning. Columbus discovered America, the land of the impossible promise of success. The father's attempt to capture the dream, and his consequent grotesqueness, implies that the dream, in the end, is a cheat.

"The Egg," as well as the other six stories analyzed, seems to me to exhibit the organic unity which Anderson's literary theory requires. The very difficulty of separating his use of the various elements attests to this unity. In all seven of the stories analyzed he consistently allows a sympathetic treatment of the materials of the stories through the use of an innocent narrator. In his stories "Brother Death" and "Sophistication," the narrator is a third person who exhibits a naïve wisdom and a humble desire to seek out the essence of his tale. In the stories "I Want to Know Why," "I'm a Fool," "The Egg," "Seeds," and "Death in the Woods," the first person narrators render the materials sympathetically because of their own personal relationships to the materials. These narrators use language which is appropriate to them, primarily American informal, with a slight deviation in "The Egg," in which the narrator uses a somewhat more literary style, and in "I'm a Fool" and "I Want to Know Why," in which the narrators slip now and then into the vulgate.

Anderson consistently makes poetic use of the everyday language which grows from the narrators of the stories. Herbert Gold in writing that Anderson "does not import his poetry in the work--he allows only the poetry that is there,"<sup>31</sup> testifies to its organic nature. The use of the innocent narrator allows digression and the mixture of chronological and associational order which appears in all seven of the stories. These digressions often create a rhythmic effect such as that in "Brother Death" achieved through shifts in point of view and time. The rhythmic shifts in time are apparent in all of the stories. Loose, rather lyrical sentence structure is often used, especially in the stories "Brother Death" and "Sophistication." The poetic device of

repetition which is part of the total pattern of rhythm appears also in all the stories, most noticeably in "Seeds" and "Sophistication." The rhythm Anderson uses is part of the poetic device of implication. Suggestion is further achieved through the use of detail. The descriptive detail allows the literal level of the story, provides concrete references, and at the same time suggests numerous relationships which finally imply meaning that is universal. In the story "Brother Death," the descriptions of the oak trees and of the children Mary and Ted imply the symbolic importance of the cutting of the oak trees and hence suggest meaning. The description of the old woman in "Death in the Woods," of the men in "Seeds," of the horses in "I Want to Know Why," of the boy's lies in "I'm a Fool," of George and Helen sitting in the grandstands in "Sophistication," and of the chicken farm and the scene in the restaurant in "The Egg" suggest the symbolic importance of the death of the old woman, the seeds, the horses, the lies, the relationship of George and Helen, and the egg. The descriptive detail provides the symbols which suggest the meaning of the stories.

Anderson's desire is to escape from the use of a superficial plot and to give the events of his stories the flavor of real life, the flavor of ordinary, everyday life. He does this first by choosing characters who are average and by allowing the action of the stories to grow out of the characters and their conflicts. The cutting of the trees in "Brother Death" is an action one might expect from the character of John Grey. It grows from his practical nature and from his desire to control. The action in itself is quite imaginable, not at all extraordinary. In "Death in the Woods," the old woman's simple life and her death in the snow are, as the narrator says, nondescript events

typical of the lives of such old women and are common knowledge to anyone who has lived in a small town. The second action, that of the creation of the story, grows from the narrator who reveals himself as an artist and thus makes his attempt at creation natural. In "Seeds" the only real action is that surrounding the event of the girl's eviction from her boarding house, and her mental confusion makes her actions quite believable. All the events in "I Want to Know Why" spring from the boy's love of horses, just as the lies the narrator tells in "I'm a Fool" are motivated by the boy's desire to be something he isn't. The action in "Sophistication," Helen and George's efforts to be alone together, is justified by their affection for each other. In "The Egg" the family's attempt to raise chickens, their move to Pickleville, and the father's effort to entertain his customer stem from the family's desire to come up in the world. None of the events in the stories seem out of the ordinary and all grow from the characters. All the elements of the story serve to characterize, and the characters are seen mainly from the inside out. The narrators of the stories are able to get inside the minds of the characters either because they are the main characters or because the narrators are sympathetically involved with the characters.

The meaning which Anderson discovers in his stories is not the type of meaning which can be reduced to a moral. As Ray B. West writes, "Theme, or idea, represents not the mere drawing of a moral--the reducing of the story to a fable or a merely illustrative statement. The idea must be embodied by the structure itself. . . ." <sup>32</sup> The seven short stories discussed reveal meaning in terms of experience realized artistically. The organic nature of the stories does not allow the



superficial imposition of a moral, for the meaning expressed is as integrally related to the other elements of the stories as are the narrator and the language. Anderson's desire to allow the "moment of revelation when words and acts come together to manifest something new, familiar, timeless, the deep summation of meaning," necessitates a limitation of subject. It will be noted that each of the seven stories centers around one moment, or one incident--the cutting of trees, the death of an old woman, the eviction of a girl from her boarding house, the scene in a house of prostitution, the event of a lie, two people sitting in an empty grandstand, and a scene in a restaurant. All of the words and acts Anderson uses in his stories come together to reveal the epiphany, the truth of understanding, the deep summation of meaning which cannot be reduced to a moral. Herbert Gold writes, "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."<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note here that Anderson's desire to focus on one particular moment may explain both his success with his short stories and his failure with his novels. Malcolm Cowley says,

Those moments at the center of Anderson's often marvelous stories were moments, in general, without 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 structure and a development, whereas for Anderson there was chiefly the flash of lightning that revealed a life without changing it.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, Anderson's literary theory requires that the general subject of fiction be the internal reality of everyday characters as related to their relationship to society and their relationship to nature. The characters in the seven stories analyzed are of the type Anderson requires. The main characters in these stories are the members

of the family of a Virginia farmer, a poverty stricken old woman, a psychoanalyst, a painter, a music teacher, two adolescent boys who love horses, a young newspaper reporter and his girlfriend, and a family in the restaurant business in Pickleville, Ohio. Anderson deals primarily with the general subject of man's relationship to society in the stories "I Want to Know Why," "Seeds," "I'm a Fool," and "Sophistication"; and he deals mainly with man's relationship to nature in "Death in the Woods." In all five of these stories, however, man's relationship to society and his relationship to nature tend to overlap; they merge especially in "Brother Death" and "The Egg." More specifically, Anderson uses these subjects to reveal internal reality through the exploration of the relationship of good and evil and of fantasy and fact in man, the relationship of instinct and reason in man, the meaning of human limitations, the meaning of man's isolation and loneliness, the meaning of the universal cycle of creation, the relationship of the imaginative man and the practical man, and the frustration of the attempt to understand the mystery of life. Anderson's short stories do make use of the subjects as well as the techniques his literary theory requires.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>I have examined eighty-three anthologies and have selected for study those stories of Anderson's which appear most frequently. The stories are "Brother Death," "Death in the Woods," "Seeds," "I Want to Know Why," "I'm a Fool," "Sophistication," and "The Egg." I have used the standard versions of these stories which appear in The Art of Modern Fiction, The Sherwood Anderson Reader, Sherwood Anderson: Short Stories, and the Viking Press edition of Winesburg, Ohio.

<sup>2</sup>Schorer, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "Brother Death," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, p. 314. (Subsequent references to "Brother Death" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>4</sup>Walter Havighurst, ed., Masters of the Modern Short Story (New York, 1955), p. xii-xiii.

<sup>5</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "Death in the Woods," Sherwood Anderson: Short Stories, ed. Maxwell Geismar (New York, 1962), p. 122. (Subsequent references to "Death in the Woods" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>6</sup>Jon Lawry, "'Death in the Woods' and the Artist's Self in Sherwood Anderson," PMLA, LXXIV (June 1959), 307.

<sup>7</sup>Mary Rohrberger, Hawthorne and the Modern Short Story (The Hague, 1966), p. 97.

<sup>8</sup>Gregory, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup>West, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "Seeds," The Art of Modern Fiction, ed. Ray B. West, Jr. and Robert Wooster Stallman (New York, 1949), p. 273. (Subsequent references to "Seeds" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>11</sup>The italics are my own.

<sup>12</sup>Luke 8:5-14.

<sup>13</sup>The italics are my own.

<sup>14</sup>Fagin, p. 274.

<sup>15</sup>Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, The Scope of Fiction (New York, 1960), p. 286.

<sup>16</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "I Want to Know Why," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, p. 92. (Subsequent references to "I Want to Know Why" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>17</sup>Brooks and Warren, p. 292. (Although Brooks and Warren say that Anderson uses a style appropriate to his narrator, they see what they believe to be two violations of this style. The first violation they list as ". . .and with the true instinct of Kentucky boys found our way across town and to the racetrack at once." The second is "and they didn't want their boys brought up to hear gamblers' talk and be thinking about such things and maybe embrace them." The first quotation may be seen as inappropriate in its phraseology. However, the second quotation does not seem to me to be a violation of style, for the boy is simply paraphrasing the adults he has heard talking, and he uses the word "embrace" which under other circumstances might not be characteristic of his language.)

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "I'm a Fool," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, p. 388. (Subsequent references to "I'm a Fool" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>21</sup>Walter B. Rideout, "The Simplicity of Winesburg, Ohio," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, p. 299.

<sup>22</sup>Edwin Fussell, "Winesburg, Ohio: Art and Isolation," Sherwood Anderson: Winesburg, Ohio, p. 392.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>24</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "Sophistication," Winesburg, Ohio, p. 233. (Subsequent references to "Sophistication" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>25</sup>Thurston, p. 335.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 336.

<sup>27</sup>The italics are my own.

<sup>28</sup>David D. Anderson, Sherwood Anderson: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1967), p. 64.

<sup>29</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "The Egg," The Sherwood Anderson Reader, p. 76. (Subsequent references to "The Egg" will be taken from this book and will be given parenthetically in the text.)

<sup>30</sup>David Anderson, p. 64.

<sup>31</sup>Gold, p. 400.

<sup>32</sup>West, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup>Gold, p. 397.

<sup>34</sup>Cowley, Winesburg, p. 11.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

Sherwood Anderson is interested in what he calls the great tradition in literature. He believes that the popular American fiction of his day is outside of this great tradition. He dislikes the superficial plots, stereotyped characters, and efforts to point a moral in this popular fiction. In his non-fictional writing, Anderson reveals his own literary theory and the reasons for his disgust with the romancers.

Anderson desires a firmer grounding of the materials of art in life. He believes the fiction of his day is too far removed from the lives of men. Although he does not think an artist should attempt to give his work social significance, he believes that social significance is inherent in good work. He does not think literature should point a moral, but he does believe it is the artist's place to deal with moral problems in his work, with what Anderson calls truth. This truth is related to the world of fact, but it is truth as perceived out of the world of fact by the imagination; it is internal truth. In order to discover this internal truth in fiction, Anderson believes that literature, like the truth of the imagination, must be grounded in the facts of life. It must, however, appeal at the same time to the imagination; the concrete must be used to suggest the universal truth. The facts of life must not be violated, and therefore the use of an unrealistic plot to impose form on artistic materials is untenable. The form of fiction must

also be tied to life, must duplicate nature by being organic. Anderson believes that form and content in literature are one. All the elements of fiction must be integrally related. Anderson's desire to use the concrete to capture the universal, to deal with moral problems but not to point a moral, and his belief that form and content are one reveal his general organic theory of literature.

Specifically, Anderson sees certain subjects as appropriate to his own goals as an artist. He believes the artist should reveal internal experience, and therefore his basic subject is the whole complex of that human experience. He thinks the lives of everyday people should be the basis for fiction, and that the action of a story should grow out of the characters in the story. He believes it is the artist's place to explore both man's relationship to society and his relationship to nature. He sees the sexual lives of men, their repressions, and their isolation and loneliness all as subjects of exploration. He does not like the art of protest and he believes the artist should use as his subjects the mystery of life and the moments of revelation when words and acts come together to manifest meaning or understanding.

In order to explore these areas, Anderson mentions certain techniques as most appropriate. These techniques are related to point of view and to the use of language. First, an innocent narrator should be used, and he should provide a sympathetic point of view for the materials he is dealing with, but his sympathy should grow from a desire for true understanding and not from sentimentality. Therefore, he should not be bound by conventional standards. The narrator should be allowed to tell the story informally in order to arrange his material so that it allows the moment of revelation. The informal style should allow the narrator

to digress, to use the associational order instrumental in revealing internal truth. The language of the narrator should be the language of everyday men, a language appropriate to the narrator himself and to the everyday characters in the story. This language, however, should be used poetically. It should include the techniques of implication, symbol, rhythm, and economic choice of detail. All these poetic techniques should allow the fiction to be tied to life and at the same time suggest the truth of the imagination.

Anderson's objections to the popular fiction of his day are due largely to his organic theory. He believes that the fiction in the great tradition of literature is that which is organic. An application of Anderson's literary theory to his short stories reveals that these stories are also organic. Form and content are one in the stories; each of the elements grows from the other elements in the stories. The concrete is used to seize the universal and the stories deal with moral problems but do not point a moral. More specifically, these stories deal with the moments in lives of everyday characters and explore man's relationship to society and his relationship to nature. Both the use of the innocent narrator and the poetic use of everyday language are revealed in these stories. They are told from a sympathetic point of view and all the elements of each of the stories come together to allow the moment of revelation Anderson desires to achieve.

Sherwood Anderson's literary theory and his literature both stem from his very modest, very human interest in understanding the men around him. He writes that often he could not sleep at night because faces of people kept appearing before him. He believed they were the faces of men whose stories should be told and whom he had neglected.



He says of these faces, "It is very hard to understand any other human being. It is difficult to tell truly the story of another, but it is, I think, rather a grand challenge."<sup>1</sup>

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Anderson, "A Writer's Conception," p. 342.

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