RICE UNIVERSITY

STRUCTURE AND UNITY IN THE NOVELS OF SHERWOOD ANDERSON

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study Sherwood Anderson's novels, showing how the unity of the works is destroyed by the author's limited ability to develop and sustain characterizations and themes. Anderson was uniquely limited by personal experience, and when he stepped beyond the bounds of this experience in his development of themes and characterizations, his writing became inconsistent and unconvincing.

Chapter I shows how in his first novel, Windy McPherson's Son, Anderson worked within his limitations as he wrote the first section of the work. The early part of Windy deals with the small town milieu, and Anderson's writing is coherent, unified, and forceful. However, in the second half of the novel, the emphasis falls on the intellectual and social problems of an urban society of which Anderson was not really a part. Thus the unity of the novel is broken as the author deals with unfamiliar material.

In Chapter II Anderson's fourth novel, Poor White, is analyzed. This is another novel in which the opening sections succeed as Anderson tells the story of Hugh McVey and shows the effects of industrialization on a small midwestern town. In the midst of this novel Anderson suddenly begins to develop a new set of characters and crops the themes
of social and economic development. This break in the unity of the novel is never healed although Anderson does try to return to his original themes as the novel ends.

Chapter III deals entirely with *Winesburg, Ohio*, Anderson's most artistically successful work. In *Winesburg* Anderson developed a form which allowed him more freedom than he had found in the conventional novel. In this volume of loosely bound but closely related sketches Anderson created a unity of tone and theme which makes *Winesburg* his most unified and coherent piece of work. In dealing with a small town and the problems of its people, Anderson developed symbols, themes, characters, mood, and tone to produce a real sense of unity in the book.

The last chapter of this thesis deals briefly with Anderson's six other novels, *Marching Men*, *Many Marriages*, *Dark Laughter*, *Tar*, *Beyond Desire*, and *Kit Brandon*. Anderson's use of characters and themes is discussed, and the role which his personal experience played in causing disunity in the novels is evaluated. Patterns of development similar to those found in *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Poor White* are pointed out, and lack of unity in development of characters and themes is noted as the fault which causes each of these novels to fail to be artistically satisfying.
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INTRODUCTION

In 1916 with the publication of Sherwood Anderson's *Windy McPherson's Son*, Ben Hecht wrote:

A new writer has risen to sing the Iliad of America, a fellow full of rugged poetry and great reticence—an artist by the name of Sherwood Anderson. His first book, *Windy McPherson's Son*, is more than a contemporary novel. It is a prelude, passionate and quiet. It is the rolling of drums. In its pages lies the promise of a new human comedy and a new, fresh, clean and virile spirit in American literature.1

Today readers with critical perception realize that *Windy McPherson's Son* does not deserve such extravagant praise. Recognition of Anderson's potential as a new voice in American literature, however, was not unwarranted. The key word mentioned by Hecht is promise. Sherwood Anderson wrote at least nine works which can be classified as novels, but only one, *Winesburg, Ohio*, fulfilled the promise which the critics had hailed.

In speaking of Anderson's work, recent critics like Frederick J. Hoffman often say such things as "it is one of the curious paradoxes of modern literature that a man of whom one can say so many things in praise turns out after all to be the author of so little that is first-rate or enduring."2 Following this and similar assessments of Anderson, critics have limited their discussions of him and his work to a few topics. Anderson's role as an adviser
of his contemporaries such as Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner has been much discussed. Critics have praised his ability to capture the feeling of the lonely and unloved in his writing, and these same critics have also spoken of the failure of Anderson's novels as opposed to the success of many of his short stories. Few people, however, have tried to determine precisely what caused the novels to fail.

The purpose of this thesis is to study Anderson's novels, showing how the unity of the works is destroyed by the author's limited ability to develop and sustain characterizations and themes. As the unity of the novel is destroyed, the ideas which have been developed lose force, and the novels fail to be artistically satisfying. Anderson was at times able to express himself with great sensitivity, but he was handicapped by his failure to develop a technique for relating his themes and characters in a unified form. In studying Anderson's novels, one finds that consideration of character and theme provides a sound basis for evaluation of the unity of the work as a whole.

Because reference to Anderson's life is made at several points in this thesis, it seems appropriate to give a brief account of his life. Sherwood Anderson was born in Ohio in 1876, and his boyhood was spent in a number of small Ohio towns. The family was rather poor, and Sherwood often dropped out of school to work at odd jobs. He grew up resenting his father's lack of ambition, and became known for his own industriousness. After serving in the Spanish-
American War, Sherwood spent one year in an academy in Springfield, Illinois, attempting to make enough credits to be able to enter college. However, he was offered an advertising job in Chicago, and he left school in order to accept it. Anderson rapidly became successful in this work, and in 1904 he married a well-educated young woman from a wealthy and socially prominent Ohio family. Soon after this marriage Anderson became president of a mail-order organization which was quite successful and led him to the establishment of his own business in 1911. In December, 1912, Anderson quit his firm, and went to Chicago. There, while writing advertising copy, he met such authors as Carl Sandburg and Floyd Dell, who encouraged him to publish his first book, *Windy McPherson's Son*. From this time on Anderson devoted himself more and more to his writing. He divorced his first wife, giving her the custody of their three children. Anderson was to marry three more times, but only the last marriage showed signs of being at all happy or successful. From 1916 to 1941 Anderson was primarily concerned with his writing career. He had not begun to write until he was nearly forty years old, but this interest was to consume him until he died at the age of sixty-five.

Many critics have stated that Sherwood Anderson did not seem to be very interested in what might be called the mechanics of writing a novel. Certainly, he was not a craftsman of the novel form like Ernest Hemingway. Anderson's
interest was primarily directed toward an expression of a feeling or emotion in his characters. Once he had written of a moment of understanding or thrown light upon an aspect of a man's inner life, he did not care to document the entire situation. In his novels there are no really complete, three-dimensional portraits. Anderson's great faculty was not that of an imaginative expression which sets forth a complete, detailed description of character, setting, and theme in the style of his contemporary Sinclair Lewis; it was rather that of a probing and penetrating insight.

It is unfortunate that in most of the novels Anderson was unable to combine episodes written with clarity and insight into a unified narrative. Too often the novels seem to be made up of unrelated vignettes which fail to emphasize a theme. As Alfred Kazin says in *On Native Grounds*, Anderson could point to his realizations and wonder about them, but his writing in the end seemed to be a perpetual groping with little revelation.

The impression of groping and incomplete revelation which Kazin mentions seems to be the result of a combination of things. The lack of unity of course contributes a large share to the unsatisfactory development of ideas, but merely noting disunity does not explain the weaknesses of an Anderson novel. There seem to be certain characteristic faults which affect the unity, and these should be mentioned. It had been stated that a lack of sustained character development is one of the most important of these faults, and in
discussing Sherwood Anderson's characters one must consider his own character and the limitations which it placed upon his writing, because these limitations give rise to many of the weaknesses in technique.

Anderson was uniquely limited by personal experience. As the summary of his life indicates, he had little education, and this contributed to his rather narrow outlook on life. He also had a tendency to develop his ideas intuitively, giving little thought to the problems encountered by readers who did not experience these same intuitive discoveries. He might have overcome these difficulties, but his intellectual and imaginative powers were not strong enough to allow this. All of these factors had a vital influence on the development of characters and themes in Anderson's work. An author cannot be criticized for having limitations, but he can be judged by his failure to adjust his writing wisely to these restrictions. For example, Anderson's novels, especially the later ones, were harshly criticized for their inconsistencies and their nebulous expression of ideas, yet he refused to alter his style to any great extent in order to produce a unified work with clarity of theme.

These limitations are obvious in the character development in the novels. Anderson relied heavily upon his own life for material, and his best characterizations were drawn either from his own life or from the lives of people he knew and observed closely. He was never able to depict convincingly characters which represented levels of
society to which he had never belonged. When he stepped beyond the bounds of personal experience in his writing, Anderson became inconsistent and unconvincing.

As Anderson's friend Paul Rosenfeld said, the novels do not reveal a many-sided contact with life. Anderson was not an intellectual critic of society. His best work was always that which grew out of the Western soil. The problem novel was not Anderson's field, and when his novels did deal exclusively with social themes, they tended to lose their vitality. He was unable to integrate theories of social reform into the novels. Sections dealing with problems of man and society stand out like treatises in such novels as *Marching Men* and *Beyond Desire*. The characters become mouthpieces for theories rather than human beings, and the novels degenerate into a patchwork of story and theory. Of course these faults are part of the lack of unity, and in a discussion of Anderson's novels, one inevitably returns to this subject.

Closely related to this problem of technique is another of Anderson's personal limitations, his reliance upon intuition in the writing of his novels. When he was asked if he did much library research in preparing to write his novels, Anderson said, "I spend as much time as I can with human beings and really think this is my library." In Anderson's opinion the only background needed for writing a novel was personal experience. He relied upon his own experience to provide him with inspiration for creation of
his plots and characters. Many very successful writers like Hemingway have done this too, but success depends upon communication with the reader. Too often Anderson did not seem to understand that what was perfectly logical to him might need to be explained in more detail to his readers. Because his writing depended so heavily upon the reader's ability to experience the same emotions as the author had, both plot and character development often seem unsatisfactory. Too much is left to the reader's intuition, and too often the scanty development of theme and characters causes confusion and misinterpretation. This tendency in Anderson's writing is unquestionably linked with his failure to be consistent and develop a unified work. If he had not relied so upon instinct, he would probably have become more adept and skillful in the construction of his novels.

As Edward Wagenknecht says in *Cavalcade of the American Novel*, the novel calls for too much in the way of development and externalization of characters to lie within the range of Anderson. He sustains his ideas consistently for only short periods, thus all the memorable passages in his novels are vignettes.8

These vignettes are often reminiscent of the Anderson short story. In fact in the novel *Tar*, the best writing in the book is a vignette which is almost identical with the excellent short story, "Death in the Woods." While this thesis will not deal with Anderson's stories, it seems appropriate to note that many of the limitations which caused
Anderson to have difficulty in the writing of novels did not affect his writing of short stories. The latter form allowed him to write within his limitations, and when he could remain within these limitations, he could also be consistent and could develop a unified work of art. The short story form does not require the author to sustain at length his characterizations, themes, and plot, whereas the novel does. Extended character development is impossible in a short story and a limited use of detail is a necessity rather than a fault. The form itself caused Anderson to be unified and consistent in his writing. In producing his short stories, Anderson naturally abided by the rules of craftsmanship which he seemed unable to follow while writing a novel. Anderson was at his best in the short story where he could reveal his instinctive understanding of one moment or one emotional experience in human life, write of it with sympathy and acuity, and end with the assertion of a single feeling.

A novel requires more than the assertion of a single feeling, though, and Anderson was never able to write in the conventional novel form and be successful. However, in Winesburg, Ohio Anderson did create a unified work. This book is unique in form and quality in Sherwood Anderson's work, and it serves as a contrast to the other novels. Winesburg is often called a collection of short stories, but it is more than that. It will be used as an illustration of an entire work in which Anderson unifies story, action,
characters, language, and setting to produce an entirely successful work of art. In this sense perhaps it can be considered Anderson's own form of the novel.

_Windy McPherson's Son_ and _Poor White_ are novels which illustrate how Anderson, working within the conventional novel form, did at times work successfully within his limitations to produce unified sections of writing but failed to produce a totally integrated work. In these works Anderson's failure to observe his natural limitations mar the novels.

_Windy McPherson's Son, Poor White, and Winesburg_ will be discussed in detail in this thesis. The relation of characters and themes to the unity of each of these works will be developed in the first three chapters. One chapter will be devoted to Anderson's other novels, _Marching Men, Dark Laughter, Many Marriages, Tar, Beyond Desire, and Kit Brandon_. This chapter will show how these novels too suffer from a lack of unity similar to that found in _Windy McPherson's Son_ and _Poor White_. 
CHAPTER I

WINDY MCPHERSON'S SON

In the first one hundred pages of *Windy McPherson's Son*, Sherwood Anderson's writing is coherent, unified, and forceful. Sam McPherson, the town of Caxton, Iowa, and the people Sam knows in Caxton come alive with a clarity and sureness of touch which is quite exciting in a first novel. In Book I Anderson is at home with his material, for Sam McPherson and Windy, his father, are highly autobiographical characters; and Caxton and the townspeople exist as portraits of towns and people Anderson knew from his boyhood.

The reasons for the successful beginning of the novel are readily apparent. Anderson's faults in the writing of novels lie in his inconsistency and his inability to sustain the development of characterizations and themes, but in telling the story of his own youth he did not have these difficulties. When Anderson wrote about the small town and the problems of its inhabitants, he worked well within his limitations. This choice of subject matter imposed a natural order on the development of characters and action. Relying upon his own experience, Anderson wrote with clarity and force in the opening pages of the novel. Both the events of life in Caxton and the people who carried them forward are convincingly portrayed. It is particularly
the description of these characters which constitutes the memorable sections of *Windy McPherson's Son*. In Book I these characters dominate the scene in contrast to the later sections in which characterization degenerates as emphasis on the plot predominates.

The opening picture of Sam McPherson illustrates Anderson's technique in Book I.

At the beginning of the long twilight of a summer evening, Sam McPherson, a tall big-boned boy of thirteen, with brown hair, black eyes, and an amusing little habit of tilting his chin in the air as he walked, came upon the station platform of the little corn-shipping town of Caxton in Iowa. It was a board platform, and the boy walked cautiously, lifting his bare feet and putting them down with extreme deliberateness on the hot, dry, cracked planks. Under one arm he carried a bundle of newspapers. A long black cigar was in his hand."

In the first paragraph of the book, Anderson has carefully introduced his hero. He appears to be alert, walking with his chin up, and serious about his business. The purpose of the cigar which he carries in his hand is soon explained. The use of the cigar is one of Anderson's first indications of what the character of Sam McPherson really is. Sam uses the cigar to bribe the baggage-man to leave the rival newsboy's papers in the baggage room. When the train stops, Sam immediately boards it and goes through most of the cars before his rival even finds his newspapers. This incident describes Sam as a "go-getter" and a success in his business from the first page. Anderson also notes that Sam is only thirteen years old. In Caxton most boys of this age spent
the summer days and evenings swimming, fishing, and playing ball, but Sam is intent upon selling his newspapers. The boy's serious attitude toward his job is also indicated by the description of his deliberate, purposeful manner of walking. Sam McPherson the man lies hidden in the description of Sam as a boy. This description foreshadows the development of the youth who works feverishly to enable himself to leave Caxton and the man who will begin his adult life by thinking of business before everything else.

In the first chapter, Anderson introduces also a group of peripheral characters. This group of village men is used by the author to provide comment on Sam and to give an insight into village life through the development of their personalities, yet they also exist as interesting characters in their own right.

John Telfer is the most important member of the group. Telfer dresses well, has an air of sophistication about him, and says that his aim in life is "to give tone to the town." He has lived in New York and Paris but has given up his study of art and returned to Caxton where he married a prosperous milliner. Sam is inordinately impressed with Telfer and his talk of the world outside Caxton.

Freedom Smith is a buyer of butter and eggs and a man who enjoys life in the village as he enjoys his minor success in the world of trade. His values and ideas provide a marked contrast to Telfer's.
Valmore is an even sharper contrast. As a blacksmith he is Anderson's representative of the craftsman who works with his hands and lives a life relatively untouched by the newer commercial values.

Anderson supplies a contrast of the three men in the following incident which occurs early in Chapter I. Freedom Smith reports that one of the young men of the village has married a girl from Parkertown. "She gives lessons in painting—a kind of an artist, you know" (WMS, 12). Telfer responds with great disgust and excitement:

"An artist!" he exclaimed, his voice tense with excitement. "Who said artist? Who called her that?" . . . "Let us have an end to this blatant misuse of fine old words. To say of one that he is an artist is to touch the peak of praise . . . ."

"An artist is one who hungers and thirsts after perfection, not one who dabs flowers upon plates to choke the gullets of diners," declared Telfer, setting himself for one of the long speeches with which he loved to astound the men of Caxton . . . (WMS, 13).

Valmore's response to Telfer's oratory is to say "Well, we can't all be artists and the woman can paint flowers upon dishes for all I care . . . We can't all paint pictures and write books" (WMS, 14). Freedom Smith comments that Telfer talks too much, and Smith and Valmore turn away from him. But Sam does not turn away. To him Telfer's talk is an indication of higher values than those of Caxton, and he puzzles over the meaning of Telfer's discussion of art before he runs to the train to sell his papers.

As Sam runs toward the train, Telfer makes a remark
about Sam and his business enterprise which completes the first chapter and strikes a note which will recur many times throughout the novel when the author describes his hero.

"Bully for Sam! Who says the spirit of the old buccaneers is dead? That boy didn't understand what I said about art, but he is an artist just the same. Look at him sell those papers!" (WPS, 17).

The picture of Sam as a buccanneer who, at the age of thirteen, is willing to use his wiles to dominate the newsboys' world of Caxton prefigures the mature Sam McPherson who coldly plots his spectacular rise in the Chicago business world. A very important indication of character is implicit in Sam's instinctive understanding of business. Anderson makes this trait more meaningful by juxtaposing it with Sam's inability to understand Telfer's comments on art. Throughout the novel it is the abstract notions such as love, loyalty, and devotion which cause Sam difficulty whereas his ability to organize and develop a business is never in question.

Thus in Chapter I Anderson does much to develop Sam's character and indicate a great deal about Caxton and its inhabitants through his portraits of Telfer, Freedom, Valmore, and Sam himself. He prepares the reader for Sam's later business success and gives indications of Sam's interest in the world outside Caxton.

Throughout the first section of the novel the theme of man's isolation slowly emerges. Even as a boy, Sam is set apart from most of the people in Caxton, but it is the relationship of the father and son which emphasizes the
solitary position of the boy.

Anderson next begins to develop the role of Sam's father, Windy McPherson. Windy is seen primarily from Sam's point of view, and in that sense he is not fully developed. However, this kind of development does not prevent him from being a figure who comes alive in the novel. With his bitter feelings about his own father present in Anderson's mind, he takes the real Irwin Anderson and builds a vivid, believable character in Windy. The development of Windy and the townspeople of Caxton show Anderson's ability to use his personal experience imaginatively.

Probably the best writing in the book deals with the relationship of Windy and Sam. The climactic point in this relationship is reached as the two clash over Windy's role in the Caxton Fourth of July celebration. At the town meeting it had been decided that a bugler mounted on a white horse should open the day's events by riding through the village blowing reveille. He would close the celebration by blowing taps as he stood on the steps of the town hall. Windy has arisen in the meeting, recounted his experiences as a bugler in the Civil War, volunteered for the place, and been accepted.

Sam's reaction to these events follows:

He was filled with astonishment at his father's folly and was still more astonished at the folly of those other men in accepting his statement and handing over the important place for the big day. He knew his father must have had some part in the war as he was a member of the G.A.R., but he had no faith at all in the stories he had heard.
him relate of his experiences in the war. Sometimes he caught himself wondering if there had been such a war and thought that it must be a lie like everything else in the life of Windy McPherson (WMS, 27-8).

Sam rushed home and begged his mother to stop Windy from participating in the celebration. He was sure that Windy could not blow a bugle, and he was certain that this would be just another excuse for the town to have a laugh at the expense of the McPherson family. The conflict in Sam's mind is well described by Anderson. The boy's shame and skepticism in regard to Windy is revealed; but at thirteen Sam had not yet decided that shame and skepticism must be his final attitude toward his father.

Anderson reveals Sam's desire to believe in his father. In spite of his fears that Windy will once more disillusion him, Sam allows himself to hope that Windy is telling the truth and will bring honor to the family because of his performance. Sam had not yet developed an unyielding hatred for his father, and Anderson's description of Sam's withdrawing money from his "carefully built-up bank account" to buy a shining new bugle for Windy reveals this. His mother had made Windy a new uniform, and the new bugle will add the ultimate touch to Windy's triumph. The bugle does not arrive on time, and Sam spends more of his savings sending telegrams of inquiry and is moved almost to tears of thanksgiving when the shiny new instrument arrives safely.

Anderson describes the great day as follows:
A cheer broke from the crowd massed along the street. Into the street rode a tall figure seated upon a white horse... Windy McPherson, sitting very straight in the saddle and looking wonderfully striking in the new blue uniform and the broad-brimmed campaign hat, had the air of a conqueror come to receive the homage of the town. He wore a gold band across his chest and against his hip rested the shining bugle. With stern eyes he looked down upon the people.

The lump in the throat of the boy hurt more and more. A great wave of pride ran over him, submerging him. In a moment he forgot all the past humiliations the father had brought upon his family, and understood why his mother remained silent when he, in his blindness, had wanted to protest against her seeming indifference. Glancing furtively up he saw a tear lying upon her cheek and felt that he too would like to sob aloud his pride and happiness.

Slowly and with stately pride the horse walked up the street between the rows of waiting people. In front of the town hall the tall military figure, rising in the saddle, took one haughty look at the multitude, and then, putting the bugle to his lips, blew.

Out of the bugle came only a thin piercing shriek followed by a squawk...

It is doubtful if Windy had ever had a bugle to his lips until that moment, but he was filled with wonder and astonishment that the reveille did not roll forth. He had heard the thing a thousand times... the thing, he felt, was in him, and it was only a fatal blunder in nature that it did not come out at the flaring end of the bugle. He was amazed at this dismal end of his great moment—he was always amazed and helpless before facts(WMS, 31-2).

Sam ran away from the laughing crowd, and as tears ran down his cheeks he said, "You may laugh at that fool Windy, but you shall never laugh at Sam McPherson"(WMS, 33).

In these scenes Sherwood Anderson develops his characters with penetrating insight. Just as he had used Valmore, Freedom Smith, and John Telfer to reveal Sam's character while making them stand out as individuals themselves, he has used Windy to bring about Sam's emergence
from childhood dreams. The theme of isolation emerges with great strength at this point, for Sam has learned that he can depend on no one but himself. If he is to gain any kind of respect from the world, he must work for it, and Sam turns to his work in an attempt to forget the shame that he has felt at Windy's performance.

The bugle scene stands out as an extremely effective vignette. This is Anderson at his best, capturing the fleeting emotional impact of a moment. One cannot miss the reality of the instant when Windy raises the bugle to his lips. Every element of the characterizations of Sam and Windy has led perfectly to that moment. In reaching this point in the novel, Anderson has handled material from his own life imaginatively, and blended characters and theme into a harmonious whole.

With this much achieved, Anderson knows exactly where he wants to take his hero. He wants him to increase his business success in Caxton, and when he reaches the proper age to decide that he should leave and find success in the world of which John Telfer spoke. Yet Anderson does not rush into these developments. He leads Sam to the point of departure as he describes the growth of the boy.

The problems of adolescence begin to worry Sam, and Anderson continues to develop the boy by describing his involvement in these problems. Sam has often heard Telfer, Valmore, and Freedom Smith discussing religion and the Bible, and he begins to wonder just what part religion should
play in his life.

Sam read the book in secret. He had a lamp on a little stand beside his bed and a novel, lent him by John Telfer, beside it. When his mother came up the stairway he slipped the Bible under the cover of the bed and became absorbed in the novel. He thought it something not quite in keeping with his aims as a business man and a money getter to be concerned about his soul (WMS, 39).

In describing Sam's feelings about reading the Bible and in showing the conflicts in his mind about religion, Anderson makes even clearer a pattern in Sam's behavior which has been developing since the beginning of the novel. Sam often struggles to understand an abstraction such as the importance of art in man's life or the meaning of a man's soul, but he never fully grasps the idea. Instead, he always returns to his business success. Sam at last gives up his Bible reading because he fails to get any message from the book. His failure disturbs him, and to solace himself he turns his energies more fully than ever toward his work. The only other interest stirring in the teen-age Sam is an awakening interest in sex.

At this point in Sam's life, Anderson describes him as a "boy who couldn't get hold of his impulse toward God, whose sex impulses made him at times mean, at times full of beauty, and one who had decided that the impulse toward bargaining and money getting was the impulse in him most worth cherishing"(WMS, 41).

The issue of organized religion is soon settled for Sam. One evening while attending a revival meeting with his mother, Sam is called upon by the minister who says,
"Sam, what have you to say for the Lord?" Standing terrified before the congregation, Sam stammers and bursts out, "The Lord—the Lord maketh me to lie out in green pastures" (WMS, 44). The congregation burst into laughter, and Sam gets up and walks out. "I'll never go into any church again," he swore. "It is a place to make public asses of the public" (WMS, 45).

Anderson's picture of the boy's confusion, his hesitation, and his automatic mouthing of the words from Psalms which he had no doubt memorized at one time is extremely convincing. Sam's violent reaction and embarrassment are appropriate to his character as it has been developed.

It is obvious that Sam is searching for respect. His family, particularly Windy, causes him great embarrassment. He feels very much alone in his efforts to gain respect, and he is led to rely upon himself and see his way to success in his ability to make money and be a part of the business world. The search for respect is important to Sam, but he has other interests in life.

John Telfer, who had influenced Sam in so many ways, also influences him in his feelings toward women. One of Sam's interests, besides his business dealings, was a flirtation with the banker's daughter. John Telfer knew more of this than Sam supposed, and Telfer makes it a point to tell Sam the following:

I think a man or boy who has set for himself a task had better let women and girls alone. If he is a man of genius, he has a purpose independent of all the world, and should cut and slash and pound
his way toward his mark ... a woman is at war with him and has a purpose that is not his purpose. She believes that the pursuit of women is an end for a life ... 

Set your mark at money making if you will, but drive at that ... No man or boy can grow toward the purpose of a life while he thinks of women (WMS, 69-70).

However pompous Telfer might sound to others, he seemed to Sam to be uttering the truth. Sam responds to Telfer:

"I will try," he stammered, "I will try to be a man. I will try not to have anything to do with them—with women. I will work and make money—and—and—" ... "to Hell with women and girls ... "(WMS, 73).

Telfer's remarks and Sam's response are especially significant when they are considered in regard to Sam's later experiences with women. At this point in the novel, however, they serve to point what by now seems inevitable. In Sam's opinion respect lies in work and money. Human contacts lead only to disillusion and embarrassment; Sam will be lonely but successful.

As a step upward in the business world, Sam sells his newspaper concession for a nice profit and goes to work for Freedom Smith. This proves to be a fruitful move. Not only is Sam a very successful buyer of butter and eggs but also Freedom gives Sam an introduction into the Chicago business world. He recommends Sam as a promising young salesman to a Chicago business firm.

Sam is now eighteen and his longing to leave Caxton has increased with the years. His greatest pleasure is
derived from the fact "that men of Caxton had stopped calling
him a bright boy and now sopke of him as a good business
man" (WMS, 85).

Before Sam left Caxton, though, his childhood ties
are to be broken completely by the death of his mother and
his complete estrangement from Windy.

Anderson carefully led Sam to this climactic point.
Sam's hatred for his father had been growing throughout the
boy's youth. His mother, Jane McPherson, had become an
invalid largely because she had worked so hard to support
the family. Sam was worried about his mother, and Windy
infuriated his son by coming home drunk and bemoaning his
condition in life while his wife lay dying in the next room.

In the confusion of love for a dying mother and
hate for a drunken father, Sam's emotions are so disturbed
that he feels he must choke Windy until he is silent. Sam
writes the following note:

"Be silent . . . if you say another word or
make another sound to disturb mother I will choke
you and throw you like a dead dog into the street."
Windy taking the note in his hand, read it
slowly and then, not understanding its import and
but half getting its sense, put it in his pocket.
"A dog is dead, eh?" he shouted. "Well,
you're getting too big and smart, lad. What do
I care for a dead dog?" (WMS, 93).

This reply further enrages Sam. He intends to silence Windy
by choking him, but he does not intend to kill his father.
As Windy became unconscious, Sam believes he is dead. He
runs from the house to find help.
He soon learns that he had not killed his father, but his mother had died that night; and with her death and his final break with Windy, Sam is ready to leave Caxton. Now he is truly alone in the world, and Anderson's theme of man's isolation is emphasized once again.

Anderson has seen the necessity for bringing the Caxton section to a close as he is ready to describe Sam's entrance into the Chicago business world. He wants Sam to reach maturity, and this step is achieved in the emotional experience suffered by Sam when Jane McPherson dies. One loose end remains, and this is the great hatred for Windy which so dominates Sam. Before he can immerse his character in a new life, Anderson needs to provide a means for letting Windy fade into the background. Obviously he cannot accomplish this purpose by letting Sam kill his father. Instead, Anderson shows that when Sara believes that he has killed Windy, he is so shocked by his own actions that his feelings of hatred and resentment toward his father are numbed. Even though Windy had not died Sam's emotions are spent, and he is ready to turn his attentions toward a new life.

Up to this point in the novel all of the developments of theme and characterization have led to Sam's final acceptance of his role in society. He has little hope of finding any kind of love or true human companionship in life, but he has every chance to gain the respect he so craves by attaining a material success in life. However, the direction in which Anderson develops the themes and
characterization of Sam in the remainder of the novel is quite unexpected, and is distinctly disappointing.

In the first section of *Windy McPherson's Son*, Anderson is primarily concerned with the development of the character of Sam McPherson and the portrayal of the people who influenced him. In achieving this goal, Anderson created a number of interesting secondary figures and described several memorable events. The writing is controlled, the tone is even, and the various elements of the novel form a harmonious work of fiction. In the second section of the novel, the emphasis falls much more heavily upon the plot. New characters are never integrated into the substance of the story as they are in the Caxton section, and they seem to be created only to serve the exigencies of plot development. Even Sam degenerates as he becomes an automaton, going through the motions of an Horatio Alger success story, complete with a contrived "happily ever after" ending. The actions of the characters, Sam in particular, are intended to symbolize a search for truth, but this theme is poorly articulated and does not provide a background strong enough to give meaning to the plot.

There are a number of reasons for this rapid degeneration in the quality of the writing. The fact that Anderson was no longer writing about the small town had some effect. He was never able to describe the city and its inhabitants with the same understanding that he displayed in his writing about the small town. In the Chicago section of *Windy*
McPherson's Son, Anderson had to deal with people of a class with which he was not particularly well acquainted, and he introduced a woman as one of the main characters in the novel. Anderson was seldom able to write about women, especially those of the upper classes of society, with the same conviction and assurance that he displayed when he dealt with male characters.

In relation to the difficulties which Anderson had in dealing with a cosmopolitan atmosphere, Irving Howe notes that Anderson was essentially a folk or sectional writer who did his best work about the rural Midwest which he knew surpassingly well. In discussing Anderson's attempts to extend his subject matter, Howe says, "Had he deliberately restricted himself to . . . those subjects which he knew well . . . Anderson might have been able to produce first-rate stories written in his native manner." Howe then mentions that "the whole bent of Anderson's literary life was toward the big city" and toward the kind of culture which had been so foreign to him all his life. Unfortunately, this interest drew him away from the subjects about which he wrote best.

This tendency can be seen in *Windy McPherson's Son* and most of the novels which follow. Sam McPherson is Anderson yearning for and going to the city, and just as Anderson never made himself a part of the cosmopolitan environment, neither can he develop Sam as a man of the city.

Sam poses less of a problem, however, than do the
women characters who appear in the second half of the novel. Sam at least has his roots in Caxton, although at times Anderson seems to forget this fact, while the women represent a type which Anderson hardly understood. In fact, the very attitudes which he found so incomprehensible in the wife he was about to divorce as he wrote *Windy McPherson's Son* are the ones which he tried to develop in the woman whom Sam McPherson marries.

In trying to integrate into the second section of the novel all these elements which were not part of his experience and of which he had little instinctive understanding, Anderson failed. He could not make these characters live, as had Telfer, Valmore, Windy, and others in the Caxton section. Neither could he produce the same effect of unity in theme and characterization which had marked the opening of the novel. Anderson's sudden, melodramatic ending of the book seems to indicate that he had grown impatient with the direction in which the novel was progressing and had decided to end it without reaching a conclusion which satisfied either him or the readers.

The Chicago section begins with a description of Sam's boarding house and the other people who live there. Sam is surrounded by a group of peripheral figures much as he was in Caxton; the differences between the two groups, however, soon become apparent. The figures in the Caxton section had existed as believable people outside their relation to Sam, but the characters who surround Sam in
Chicago exist only as they fit into Sam's life.

Frank Eckardt, the medical student, serves only as a means for providing Sam with some money. Frank inherits twenty thousand dollars, and he allows Sam to take the entire sum and invest it for him. As V. F. Calverton says, this seems to be sheer melodrama. Sam was virtually unknown to Eckardt. The only information he had about Sam's ability as a financier was boarding house gossip. Not only did Sam get Eckardt's money, he got it with an unfair contract in which he stood to lose nothing, and Eckardt could lose all.

With this money Sam expanded his operations, and he immediately made contact with Colonel Tom Rainey of the Rainey Arms Company. From this point on, little attention is given to characterization, and the plot alone carries the novel. Sam attains great success with Rainey and is soon made treasurer of the company. In a space of only six pages Anderson moves Sam from a newly hired buyer for the Rainey Company to the position described here:

Sam was a growing force in the company. He sat on the board of directors, the recognised practical head of the business among its stockholders and employees; he had stopped the company's march toward a second place in its industry and had faced it about. All about him in offices and shops, there was the swing and go of new life and he felt that he was in a position to move on toward real control and had begun laying lines with that end in view . . . Through his head went big ambitious projects. "I have in my hand a great tool," he thought; "with it I will pry my way into the place I mean to occupy among the big men of this city and this nation"(WE, 145-50).

Sam McPherson as the newsboy of Caxton was a
thoroughly believable character, but Sam as the tycoon is a stereotyped figure. Anderson does not bridge the gap between the two stages in Sam's career, and the character neither grows nor matures. Though Sam's position in life is drastically changed, he retains the same attitudes and goals which are identified with his life in Caxton until he marries. Then the change in character is so complete that it destroys the unity of the book.

In the midst of the narrative of Sam's rise, Anderson introduces one incident which could have been used to develop Sam's character, but he does not explore this possibility in his rush to narrate Sam's success story. This incident describes Sam's acquaintance with Janet and Edith Eberley. Sam had borrowed six thousand dollars from the sisters during the first year in Chicago. Janet is a cripple who makes her living trimming hats, and Edith is a stenographer. Sam first noticed the strikingly attractive Edith, but he falls in love with Janet and would have married her if she had not been in such poor health. She dies suddenly during Sam's second year with the Rainey Company. Anderson describes their relationship as follows:

\[
\text{She was the first woman who ever got hold of and stirred his manhood, and she awoke something in}
\text{him that made it possible for him later to see life with a broadness and scope of vision that was}
\text{no part of the pushing, energetic young man of dollars and industry . . . (MBS, 159).}
\]

Had Anderson developed this line of thought concerning Sam, he might have been able to work out a more satisfactory conclusion to the book, but this one comment
is the only hint of something other than the businessman in Sam until Anderson makes a sudden, unprepared-for shift in Sam's character later in the novel.

Not long after the death of Janet Eberley, Sam explains his personal philosophy of life and conduct to Sue Rainey, daughter of the owner of the Rainey Company.

... I myself fly the black flag. I would lie about goods to sell them, but I would not lie to myself. ... If a man crosses swords with me in a business deal and I come out of the affair with money, it is no sign that I am the greater rascal, rather it is a sign that I am the keener man"(WMS, 177-8).

It is as Sam discusses these ideas with Sue that he first thinks that he would like to marry her, thus even his first thoughts about their marriage are mixed in with his ideas about the expansion of the Rainey Company.

However, Anderson's entire development of Sam's and Sue's relationship is based on an entirely different Sam McPherson. Their decision to marry is based upon Sam's acceptance of Sue's terms for marriage. She wants to live a life of service to humanity through the raising of children. She believes that the two of them should give up any interest which would distract them from complete devotion to their children. Sam must no longer think solely in terms of his own advancement in business Sue tells him, "You will have to live wholly for me because I am to be their mother, giving me your strength and courage and your good sane outlook on things"(WMS, 191). Sam immediately responds by saying:
"It cleanses me! this cleanses me!"... He began to understand how distorted, how strangely perverted, his whole attitude toward women and sex had been. "Sex is a solution, not a menace—it is wonderful," he told himself without knowing fully the meaning of the words that had sprung to his lips (WGS, 191).

It seems that Anderson does not fully know the meaning of the words which have sprung from his pen. In a single stroke he has made Sam turn about completely and assume an entirely different personal view of life. In one breath Sam had said business is all, and the next he has given it all up "to live wholly" for a woman for whom Anderson had yet to indicate that Sam really feels true love. In doing this Anderson causes a definite break in the development of character and themes, and this break leads to disunity in the book. From the beginning of the Chicago section, the quality of the writing in the novel declines. The harmony of the Caxton section had been broken by the uncertain character development, but Anderson had at least maintained some unity in the development of Sam and the theme of man's inevitable isolation. But with the marriage of Sam and Sue even this unifying theme is lost.

The love scenes seem to be beyond the author's control. He is definitely working in a realm of which he has little understanding. This seems to be attested to not only in the poorly controlled writing, but also in Anderson's personal lack of marital happiness. When Anderson steps so drastically beyond the limits of what he understands, his writing immediately reveals it. Sam McPherson is no longer
the character who has been developed from the beginning of
the novel, and he can no longer be expected to act consistently
as he has done before. The quality of characterization
began to degenerate when Sam left Caxton, but it is with
the love scenes that the novel seems to fall apart. The
marriage of Sue and Sam becomes the primary element in the
novel, and Anderson seems to be singularly ill-equipped to
develop this relationship. Anderson himself was married
four times, and at the time he was writing *Windy McPherson's Son*
his first marriage was rapidly degenerating. It seems
likely that the strain present in his own marriage is
reflected in the writing he did at the time.

As Anderson describes Sue's and Sam's honeymoon in
the northern woods and their first year of marriage in
Chicago, he no longer imparts the sense of vitality and life
to his novel and its characters. He relates the events but
he includes nothing like the vivid, carefully detailed
descriptive incidents which had so enlivened his relation
of Sam's boyhood. The following passage describes the
marriage:

Sam stayed diligently at work in the offices and
in the shops, but kept within himself most of his
reserve of strength and resolution that might have
gone into the work. With Sue he took up golf and
morning rides on horseback, and with Sue he sat
during the long evenings, reading aloud, absorbing
her ideas and her beliefs. Sometimes for days they
were like two children, going off together to walk
on country roads and to sleep in country hotels.
On these walks they went hand in hand or, bantering
each other, raced down long hills to lie panting
in the grass by the roadside when they were out of
breath . . . Sam thought that he and Sue touched
ideal happiness constantly . . . (*WMS*, 199-200).
The entire description of the marriage is pat and idyllic. Sam has given up his former interests to a large degree and has wholly accepted Sue's ideas as a pattern for his life. The development of both of the characters is unsatisfactory at this point. Sam bears no resemblance to the man Anderson had created earlier, and Sue seems to be a mouthpiece for a strange kind of social doctrine rather than a real woman.

Edward Wagenknecht writes in *Cavalcade of the American Novel* that the truest note of character portrayal struck by Anderson in this section of the novel is his description of the frustration felt by Sue and Sam at their inability to have children. These emotions were something with which Anderson was better able to deal. He was often at his best in presenting the emotionally upset, frustrated human figure. In their unhappiness Sam and Sue become more interesting characters than they are in their idyllic early married days. When their third attempt to have a child ends as the first two had with a stillbirth, Anderson turns the narrative in its final direction.

We have seen Anderson shift his picture of Sam from the young, practical, materialistic business man to the idealistic husband devoted to the vision of a life of service through his children. This shift is not accomplished with any firmness or finesse, and the idealistic Sam is a rather ludicrous figure. Bowing to the exigencies of plot, Anderson now makes another complete shift. Sam goes back to his
business with a zeal and a degree of ruthlessness which far exceed his former devotion to such activities. He betrays his wife and her father in a business deal and thus gains control of the Rainey Company plus other large holdings. Anderson describes Sam's manner of dealing with the affair in this way:

He did not see Sue again. When the news of his betrayal reached her she went off east taking Colonel Tom with her . . . To her eastern address, got from her attorney, he wrote a brief note offering to make over to her or to Colonel Tom his entire winnings from the deal and closed it with the brutal declaration, "At the end I could not be an ass, even for you" (WM3, 241).

Much as the critics have deplored this development, it seems more in character with the first Sam than any of the description of the idealistic young husband. This statement even sounds somewhat like the Sam who swore that he would never again allow anyone to laugh at him after Windy had performed so ignominiously on that fateful Fourth of July. When it came to a matter of saving face for his father-in-law by making an unwise business decision, Sam could not do it. In this moment he is once again the pirate flying the black flag as both John Telfer and Sam himself had described him earlier. This turn in events picks up the theme of human isolation once again. It suggests that Sam has once more learned that to gain what he wants in life he must rely on himself alone.

If Anderson had gone on from here and developed Sam as the unrelenting materialist who found self-respect only
in his business success, and who felt that this respect and its accompaniments were the only worthwhile goals in life, he might have salvaged his novel. The continuity would have been broken drastically by the episode dealing with Sue and the marriage, but the results would almost certainly been better than what did develop, because the novelist could have retained some unity of theme and consistency of character.

Anderson faltered disastrously in *Windy McPherson's Son* when he introduced a number of new elements into his novel. The city environment is less realistically presented than that of the small town. The introduction of a woman character in a leading role is a failure. The attempt to change the focus of the main character's life is especially displeasing and unconvincing. All these things combine to make the novel a weak attempt rather than the essentially strong, well-defined piece of writing which is promised in the first one hundred pages.

The final, and most serious, break in the continuity of the novel comes when Sam leaves his business altogether and becomes a dissolute wanderer. He says he is again "searching for the truth" as he had in his marriage. He finds the "truth" in a melodramatic moment when he impetuously adopts the three children of a woman of disreputable background, takes them to Sue, with whom he has not communicated for years, and lives with her and the children happily ever after.
At the door Sam stopped for a moment and, excusing himself, stepped out on the porch, he stood for a moment alone in the darkness, wondering if he had found the way or if life with Sue and the children would become petty as the life of big affairs had become brutal (WMS, 347).

Sam has the impulse to run away and begin seeking the truth once more, but he convinces himself that he has found in Sue and the children the truth he seeks.

Anderson himself has made an extremely valuable comment about the effect that his conclusion has upon the novel as a whole. He says that he was trying to finish the novel with a flourish and that his treatment of Sam in the end was trickery. He writes: "Sam and I tiptoed out of the book leaving the reader with three children." He goes on to make further comments about the conclusion of the novel.

... the simple fact is that when I come to the rereading of *Windy*, I have no stomach for repeating that performance. The crudities of the book, the occasionally terrible sentences, the minor faults I am willing to let stand. They are faults of a badly educated man struggling to tell a story to his own people in his own way. But in the new printing of the book I want to take those three children back to their mother in St. Louis and leave Sam facing what he and every American must face, the fact that it is hardly fair...

At that point the letter is left unfinished. Perhaps Anderson never really knew what he wanted Sam to face. At any rate Anderson realized that he had cheated artistically in his creation of Sam. He truly felt that the materialistic way of life which he had made seem inevitable for Sam was not satisfactory, but he was not able to devise an alternative
which he could develop and still be able to retain continuity in his portrayal of Sam. The conclusion of the novel is particularly inept because it destroys the one element of unity remaining in the book. Despite the many discontinuities in character development, Anderson had, until the end of the novel, insisted upon the unavoidability of isolation. Reuniting Sam with his wife destroys even this unity of theme.¹⁰

In the final analysis the novel splits apart at various times and in various ways as has been noted. The worth of the book lies in the vivid character portrayals in the Caxton section. When Anderson's ability to make his characters both live and portray the themes of the novel fails, then the novel fails. Anderson is at his best when the emphasis is on the people, their problems, their emotions, and their success or failure in dealing with life. Windy McPherson's Son is a portent of what was to come in Anderson's writing. His successes were to be in the manner of the Caxton section, with its emphasis on the small town and its people and values. His failures were to come when he wrote of the intellectual and social problems of a milieu of which he was not really a part.
CHAPTER II

POOR WHITE

The consideration of Poor White before Winesburg, Ohio deviates from the order of publication, for Winesburg appeared in 1919, while Poor White was first published in 1920. It seems more appropriate, however, to discuss in detail the partial success but overall failure of Windy McPherson's Son and Poor White before considering the success of Winesburg.

Poor White is another novel in which the opening sections succeed as Anderson quite competently tells the story of Hugh McVey and very convincingly shows the effects of industrialization on a small midwestern town.

V. F. Calverton, in The Newer Spirit, writes "the study of character is more thorough and successful in Poor White than in any other of Anderson's novels, in fact it is surpassed only by the studies in Winesburg." Anderson traces the life of Hugh McVey with close attention to detail from his early association with his father and Sarah Shepherd to his brilliant achievement as an inventor and his marriage with Clara Butterworth. Calverton notes that the story begins to drag when Clara is introduced.

This pattern is similar to the one developed in Windy McPherson's Son. The introduction of the wife of the
main character in both novels is a source of great difficulty to Anderson. It is at this point in the two novels that a sudden shift in purpose and development occurs which results in a lack of unity in both works.

This problem is mentioned by Oscar Cargill in his criticism of Poor White. Cargill states that Anderson's real interest was in the individuals in the novel. Hugh McVey, Sarah Shepherd, Steve Hunter, and various other characters, Cargill says, are all developed quite effectively; and the novel seems to be leading definitely to a conclusion dealing with the effect of industrialization as seen through such characters as Hugh and Steve, when Anderson suddenly changes from this line of development to the marriage of Clara and Hugh. All the emphasis shifts, and the novel breaks apart.  

Anderson was unable to make Clara a necessary part of the novel. In dealing with her Anderson was once again working with an unfamiliar subject, and was unable to write of Clara with the same sympathy and understanding displayed earlier in the novel. After introducing Clara, and marrying her to Hugh, the author was never able to recover his original line of development. He kept adding episode after episode which took him farther and farther away from the earlier direction of the book. In the concluding section of the novel, Anderson does manage to return to his original course. That is, he relates Hugh and Clara to the industrial development of Bidwell and shows the effect of this development
upon the people of the town. The digressive effect of the sections about Clara remain, however, as a serious break in the unity of the novel.

There is one critic who sees the entire novel as related and well unified. Blanche H. Gelfant in The American City Novel says that Poor White is Anderson's technical masterpiece. She believes that he has successfully integrated theme and form in the novel. Her analysis of the novel is ingenious, but it depends on reading the entire work as an elaborately developed series of symbols. She says that each stage in Hugh McVey's development symbolizes a stage in the development of urbanization, and she goes on to say that even the secondary characters are "human correlatives to a process of social change." Even in this interpretation of the novel it is difficult to integrate the relationship of Clara and Hugh into the pattern of symbolism. Mrs. Gelfant believes that the relationship of Clara and Hugh represents a failure of love which is a corollary in the novel to the rise of industrialization.

Much of what she has to say about Poor White is suggestive and stimulating, but fitting the novel into such a precise scheme is somewhat misleading because Anderson obviously changes the direction of the novel and causes his pattern of themes and symbols to be discontinuous. Analyzing the novel as Gelfant does is appropriate only until Clara is introduced as a primary character. Before this, the emphasis falls on the development of an industrial society as seen
through Hugh and the secondary characters. Anderson makes
the two aspects of people and town interdependent so that
the people do function as symbols of the social changes
in Bidwell. But as Anderson became preoccupied with devel¬
oping Hugh and Clara and their personal problems, the theme
of the development of the town is dropped almost completely.
It is at this point that the unity of the novel is disrupted.
Mrs. Gelfant attempts to relate the two sections by saying
that the theme of the marriage section is loss of love and
that this theme is intimately related to the effect of
industrialization upon people, but this forces the use of
symbols too far. Anderson's complete change in emphasis
still does not seem to be either sufficiently prepared for
or explained. These criticisms can be more clearly under¬
stood by an examination of passages from the novel itself.

The opening chapter of Poor White has often been
noted for its reflection of the influence of Mark Twain in
Anderson's description of Hugh McVey, his father John, and
the town of Mudcat Landing on the banks of the Mississippi
in Missouri. The descriptive quality is vivid:

Hugh McVey's father, John McVey, had been
a farm hand in his youth but before Hugh was born
has moved into town to find employment in a tannery
. . . He also became a drunkard. His wife died and
the idle workman took his child and went to live
in a tiny shack by the river. How the boy lived
through the next few years no one ever knew . . .
At fourteen Hugh was . . . almost without education.
For days sometimes he did nothing but lie half asleep
in the shade of a bush on the river bank . . .
In his fourteenth year . . . something happened
to him. A railroad pushed its way down along the
river to his town and he got a job as a man of all
work for the station master...  
Hugh began to awaken a little. He lived with his employer, Henry Shepherd, and his wife, Sarah Shepherd, and for the first time in his life sat down regularly at table. His early life... had bred in him a dreamy detached outlook on life. He found it hard to be definite and to do definite things, but for all his stupidity the boy had a great store of patience...

Anderson goes on to describe in great detail Hugh's life with the Shepherds. Sarah, a hardworking, alert, New Englander became like a mother to Hugh. She also became his schoolteacher and told him, "It's a sin to be so dreamy and worthless" (PW, 12).

Sarah Shepherd convinced Hugh that the sleepy life of Mudcat Landing was far inferior to a life of industry and work.

Hugh began to hate his own father and his own people. He connected the man who had bred him with the dreaded inclination toward sloth in himself... After a year or two he paid no attention to the dissolute farmhand who came occasionally to the station to mutter and swear at him; and when he had earned a little money, gave it to the woman to keep for him. "Well," he said, speaking slowly and with a hesitating drawl characteristic of his people, "if you give me time I'll learn. I want to be what you want me to be. If you stick to me I'll try to make a man of myself" (PW, 14).

In the first half of Chapter I, Anderson has already set forth his main character and has foreshadowed many of the coming events. Hugh always struggles with his inarticulateness. He knows the value of work and tries to make something of himself. Sarah Shepherd has pictured the goodness of life in a society where people are industrious and where business is important. The theme of industry is increasingly emphasized in the novel.
As in *Windy McPherson's Son* the themes of hatred for the father and shame of family background are emphasized. Anderson is working with familiar material in *Poor White*, for Hugh McVey is, in many ways, another kind of Sam McPherson. Hugh is less a portrait of Anderson himself and is more a product of the imagination than Sam, but the themes of revolt against father and family plus the desire to go out into the world are quite familiar.

As Anderson narrates the story of Hugh from the time of his employment at the depot in Mudcat Landing to his arrival in Bidwell, Ohio, he presents a fully integrated, successful picture of his character and the society of the time. Irving Howe calls these chapters valuable for "their authenticity as a portrait of late-19th-century American life." Howe goes on to say that the "by far the best part of the novel is the early story of Hugh McVey, which constitutes a beautifully proportioned portrait of the transition from the craftman's town to the factory town." The following quotation is an example of Anderson's sensitive descriptions of the society of the time:

The small farms lying close about the town of Bidwell raised berries that brought top prices in the two cities, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, reached by its two railroads, and all of the people of the town who were not engaged in one of the trades—in shoe making, carpentry, horse shoeing, house painting or the like—or who did not belong to the small merchant and professional classes, worked in summer on the land. On summer mornings, men, women, and children went into the fields. In the early spring when planting went on and all through late May, June, and early July when berries and fruit began to ripen, every one was rushed with work and the
streets of the town were deserted. Great hay wagons loaded with children, laughing girls, and sedate women set out from Main Street at dawn. Beside them walked tall boys, who pelted the girls with green apples and cherries from the trees along the road, and men who went along behind smoking their morning pipes and talking of the prevailing prices of the products of their fields. In the town after they had gone a Sabbath quiet prevailed. The merchants and clerks loitered in the shade of the awnings before the doors of the stores, and only their wives and the wives of the two or three rich men in town came to buy and to disturb their discussions of horse racing, politics and religion (PW, 45-6).

The opening pages of Poor White are filled with such beautifully written reminiscences of the life of the Ohio towns which Anderson knew so well. The tone is subdued, soft, and in places almost lyrical.

With great sensitivity Anderson pictures Hugh and his lonely life as a telegraph operator at the small depot a mile from Bidwell. He tells how Hugh sees that the people of the town have no desire to take him into their town life, and how, as a consequence, Hugh becomes even more isolated and turns to his work for something to occupy his mind. Hugh becomes interested in machinery and from watching people labor in the fields near the depot thinks of trying to invent some labor-saving device for farm work. Legends began to grow up concerning Hugh, and because of his strangeness and his silence, the people in Bidwell believe him to be some kind of lonely genius.

One of Anderson's best-described series of events tells how Steve Hunter takes advantage of and makes commercial Hugh's inventive ability. Hunter is pictured as the complete
antithesis of Hugh. While Hugh is unable to communicate with anyone, Steve is the budding young entrepreneur of Bidwell. He hoodwinks the town's bankers into believing that he has made a deal with Hugh to control the marketing of a sensational new invention. In truth, Steve Hunter has never talked to Hugh and is not even sure that a machine exists, but he has the bankers anxious to furnish capital to him in order to be included in the profitable scheme. In the course of the novel Hugh does develop a cabbage-planting machine. Steve Hunter raises funds for a factory by selling stock to practically every citizen of Bidwell and by enlisting the aid of the town's bankers plus Tom Butterworth, the most wealthy farmer in the area.

Anderson begins to disclose the disruptive effects of industrialization on the town as he describes the dishonesty of Steve Hunter and his associates. Production of Hugh's machine is discovered to be impracticable before the factory is completed, but Steve Hunter conceals this fact.

Things kept on the stir in Bidwell and the gods of chance played into the hands of Steve Hunter. Hugh invented an apparatus for lifting a loaded coal-car off the railroad track, carrying it high into the air and dumping its contents into a chute... a patent was secured. Then Steve Hunter carried it off to New York. He received two hundred thousand dollars in cash for it, half of which went to Hugh... Steve looked forward with a feeling of almost approaching pleasure to the time when the town would be forced to face the fact that the plant-setting machine was a failure, and the factory with its new machinery would have to be thrown on the market. He knew that his associates in the promotion of the enterprise were secretly selling their stock (PW, 127-8).
At this point Anderson introduces a peripheral character, Joe Wainsworth, who is the subject of some of the most stimulating writing done by Anderson in the novel. Joe represents the craftsman, a harness-maker, who is greatly hurt by the coming of the machine. He is the first man in Bidwell "to feel the touch of the heavy finger of industrialism" as Anderson says.

When Steve Hunter organized the Bidwell Plant-Setting Machine Company, the harness maker put his savings, twelve hundred dollars, into the stock of the company. One day, during the time when the factory was building, he heard that Steve had paid twelve hundred dollars for a new lathe that had just arrived by freight and had been set on the floor of the uncompleted building (PW, 134-5).

Anderson then tells how Joe Wainsworth sneaks into the factory to see "his" machine. Joe had felt many doubts about his investment, which unknown to him were fully warranted. But upon seeing and touching the giant lathe, Joe feels renewed confidence. Surely this investment would make him comfortably rich in his old age. When he reaches home the following event occurs.

Joe heard his neighbor, David Chapman, a wheelwright, praying before an open window. Joe listened for a moment and, for some reason he couldn't understand, his newfound faith was destroyed by what he heard... Joe knew his neighbor had also invested his savings in the stock of the new company. Joe had thought that he alone was doubtful of success, but it was apparent that doubt had come also into the mind of the wheelwright. The pleading voice... as it broke the stillness of the night, cut across and for the moment utterly destroyed his confidence... "Make the plant-setting machine a success. Bring light into the dark places, O Lord, help Hugh McVey, thy servant to build successfully the plant-setting machine" (PW, 137-8).
With this extremely effective incident Anderson closes Book II of *Poor White*. He has up to this point created a well-integrated, unified novel. Throughout these first two books Anderson deals with materials which are completely familiar to him. The story of Hugh McVey is in many ways a version of Anderson's own life, and the description of the rural midwestern setting is drawn primarily from the author's observation of the area in which he grew up. In developing the story of Hugh and describing his surroundings, Anderson was able to employ a technique which allowed him to use very little dialogue. Irving Howe notes that this was a particularly happy combination of circumstances, because it not only enables Anderson to use the material with which he was most successful but also allowed him to write in his most natural and convincing style.\textsuperscript{10}

Anderson's portrayal of characters and his explanation of themes in the first two books of *Poor White* point with clarity and force one to the idea that the industrialization of Bidwell is inevitable. The author shows that this industrialization will obviously come about at the expense of the people like Joe Wainsworth and David Chapman, a harness-maker and a wheelwright. The role Steve Hunter will play is established by revealing his conniving methods and describing his selfish interest in Hugh. Hugh McVey remains an enigma, and it is his development which is awaited. The question of his role as a helper or destroyer of man should be answered next. Will he realize what the effect of his
work is and try to see that his inventions are used properly, or will he continue to let men like Steve Hunter take advantage of his work?

Anderson does not choose to answer such a question yet. Instead he makes Book III a long, digressive account of the life of Clara Butterworth, the daughter of the wealthy farmer. This shifts the focus of the novel very sharply, and results in a sharp decline in the interest of the writing. Irving Howe states that the book is split in half by Clara's story, and he says that this is "a wound which is never quite healed." Clara's problems with sex, her friendship with a lesbian, her decision to marry Hugh because he is like "an honest, powerful horse" fall somewhere between the mildly ridiculous and the barely plausible. The entire section of the book dealing with Clara lacks the knowing certainty of representation that is present in the first part of Poor White.

Early in Book III Anderson attempts to describe Clara's awakening interest in sex. The manner in which he does this illustrates how he has changed the subject and tone of the novel.

Clara jumped quickly out of the hammock and walked about under the trees in the orchard. Her thoughts of Jim Priest... startled her. It was as though she had walked suddenly into a room where a man and woman were making love. Her cheeks burned and her hands trembled. As she walked slowly through the clumps of grass and weeds that grew between the trees, bees coming home to the hives flew in droves about her head. There was something heady and purposeful about the song of labor that arose out of the beehives. It got into her blood. The
words of Jim Priest that kept running through her mind seemed a part of the same song the bees were singing. "The sap has begin to run up the tree," she repeated aloud. How significant and strange the words seemed! They were the kind of words a lover might use in speaking to his beloved. She had read many novels, but they contained no such words. It was better so. It was better to hear them from human lips (FW, 148-9).

Anderson's novel would be better if it contained no such words, but not for the reason Clara gives. It is hard to relate this description of Clara to any of the events which have occurred earlier in the novel. This is another example of the lack of unity in Poor White, and it is especially indicative of how the direction of the novel is shifted in Book III.

Lack of unity in theme and characterization are the major faults of Windy McPherson's Son and these same faults are found in Poor White. In changing the focus of the novel from Hugh to Clara, Anderson begins to develop a completely different set of characters and themes. He changes the setting from Bidwell to Columbus, Ohio, and begins to describe Clara's life at college. As Anderson concentrates on the development of Clara's personality, the themes of social and economic development emphasized in the Bidwell section are dropped. He introduces as a theme the problems of a woman in finding love, and the description of Clara's life is completely separated from the novel's original line of development. This produces a definite break in the unity of the novel.

In concluding Book III, the author makes some attempt
to return to his original theme. In a series of vignettes Anderson describes the people of Bidwell and shows how the changes in the town's economy have affected their lives during the three-year period that the novel has centered on Clara's life. Ben Peeler, the town carpenter, has allied himself with one of the bankers and has gone into the lumber business on a large scale, constructing houses for the rapidly growing population. He can no longer sleep at night for fear that his lumberyard will be set afire. Joe Wainsworth has become more pathetic because he cannot see that his craftsman's approach to work is becoming obsolete. He has hired Jim Gibson, a loud-mouthed proponent of "the new way." Jim has so intimidated the old man that the shop is run as Jim sees fit while Joe works in silence, repairing one set of harness after another. Tom Butterworth, Clara's father, has succumbed to the temptation of money and is a hardened man. Steve Hunter has had an affair with the daughter of a small farmer and has set her up as the proprietor of a "prosperous house of ill fame" in Cleveland. One after another of Bidwell's citizens are described by Anderson and the unsettling effect of money on each one of them is made evident, but this return to the original theme is short-lived.

The problem of Hugh's relations with women plagues the author throughout the rest of the novel. Hugh is first attracted to Rose McCoy, the daughter of the woman who owns
the house where he lives. After one casual conversation and some fruitless maneuvering on the part of both of them, Hugh gives up his interest in Rose.

"You tend to your business and don't be going off on that road any more," he said, as though speaking to another person. "Remember she's a good woman and you haven't the right. That's all you have to do. Remember you haven't the right," he added with a ring of command in his voice (PW, 243).

This confused statement is the extent of the comment Hugh makes. He is obviously disturbed by his inability to communicate with Rose, but Anderson cuts the affair off at this point. The entire episode seems pointless.

In the next chapter Hugh meets Clara and is unaware that she immediately has him under consideration as a possible husband. Later they meet again and less than one week after their conversation, they are married. At this point, the novel has lost completely any relation to the themes established in the first two books.

Upon hearing three men talk of a scandalous and untrue story about Clara, Hugh is seized by the desire to help her. He proceeds to beat up two of the men, frighten the third away, and start for the Butterworth farm. Upon reaching the farm, he finds Clara at home and says with no preamble, "I came out here to ask you to marry me... Will you do it?" (PW, 275). Clara's response is to get her hat and coat, go to the barn, hitch up the horse, and tell one of the farm hands that they are going to the county seat to be married.
Admittedly, this summary of the events is somewhat unfair, but unfortunately it is accurate. The comparison of the beautifully written narrative style of the beginning of the novel, such as the quotation describing the berry pickers, and the dialogue between Hugh and Clara at this point is painful. Anderson had little or no gift for the writing of individualized dialogue, and his attempts to produce intimate conversation between a man and a woman were particularly unsuccessful. This fault limits Anderson severely in the remainder of the novel. The plot reaches the heights of implausibility when, after a raucous welcoming party sponsored by Clara's father, Hugh is unable to face the physical fact of consummation of the marriage and runs away by jumping out of a second-story window. He returns the next day at the insistence of his father-in-law.

Anderson describes the relationship of Hugh and Clara after three years of marriage as follows:

After that night when he ran away from her bridal bed, Clara had more than once thought the miracle had happened. It did sometimes ... There was a wall a blow could shatter, and she raised her hand to strike the blow. The wall was shattered and then builded itself again. Even as she lay at night in her husband's arms the wall reared itself up in the darkness of the sleeping room (PW, 332).

This kind of writing is as pointless as it is vague. Anderson does not come to grips with the problems which he sets forth. In Poor White, as in Windy McPherson's Son, Anderson's personal limitations, particularly manifested in the resulting lack of unity, cause the novel to fail. Lack of clarity
in the writing of the closing sections and disunity in the structure of Poor White are specific faults which mar the work.

In the last few pages of the novel Anderson does return to the Bidwell theme and particularly to Joe Wainsworth as its exponent. Here the writing is clear and to the point as it once more deals with the themes and characters which Anderson understood best. Joe Wainsworth is driven to murder Jim Gibson, the man he hired to work in the shop. Gibson had forced Joe to place an order for machine-made harness, and this was the act which caused Joe to revolt. After the murder he hacks the machine-made harnesses to bits. He shoots Steve Hunter, for he sees Hunter as one of the causes of all the changes in Bidwell. After his capture Joe sees Hugh McVey and attacks him. In Joe's mind Hugh is identified as the root from which all the evils of industrialism have sprung. This incident is well written and recalls the original direction of the narrative. Hugh strongly feels his responsibility for the changes that have occurred in Bidwell, and the attack by Joe Wainsworth effectively points up Hugh's role in the changes.

Anderson does begin to develop Hugh's discontent with his work and his life.

Ever since that night when he had been attacked . . . the sense of some indefinable, inner struggle had been going on in Hugh . . . The time of comparatively simple struggle with definite things, with iron and steel, had passed. He fought to accept himself, to understand himself, to relate himself with life about him. The poor white, son of the defeated dreamer by the river, who had forced himself in advance of his fellows along the road of mechanical development, was still in advance
of his fellows in the growing Ohio towns. The struggle he was making was the struggle his fellows of another generation would one and all have to make (PW, 384).

Like Sam McPherson, and ultimately like Sherwood Anderson, Hugh is seen as the man who first breaks away from a worthless father, then revolts against a commercial life which cheats his fellow man in order to search for a more meaningful existence. But Anderson fails to resolve one of the central difficulties in the book, the problem of Hugh's and Clara's marriage. He attempts to bring Hugh and Clara together, but their relationship remains a question mark in the book.

Irving Howe ably sums up the failures of the final section of the book as follows:

Most unsatisfactory is the book's ending in which through some vague gesture of coupling, Hugh and Clara are supposed to find each other. Anderson has not allowed Hugh's internal drive to self-defeat to reach its necessary end and, through a curious aversion to dramatic conflict, has failed to bring Hugh and Clara into the expected and necessary confrontation.

In considering Poor White as a whole, one can only conclude that the novel is a work severely marred by disunity. The opening books reveal Anderson at his best. He is at home with his deep feeling for the land and people of America. The character of Hugh grows from this feeling as do the characters of the inhabitants of Bidwell. The understanding of a small town and its people is shown clearly and artistically in the writing. The scene is sketched in a "tone of controlled reminiscence, low-pitched
and subdued, full of notes of near-silence to suggest a lost past.\textsuperscript{14} The unfortunate introduction of the figure of Clara and the relation of episodes about her destroy the unity of the novel. Then, as Anderson continues to develop Clara and turns to the use of dialogue, he goes further astray. His description of Clara as a college girl in Columbus is not convincingly done, and he is not able to do much better with the marriage of Clara and Hugh. Once again Anderson had tried to write of experience of which he had little understanding, and had failed to write of them convincingly or realistically. In \textit{Poor White} the long discussion of Clara's life is particularly unfortunate because the novel would have been better if he had avoided these incidents altogether.

Once again Irving Howe has a good analysis of the success and failures of the novel.

\textit{Poor White} does not succeed in becoming a unified narrative . . . it is very hazy about time progressions, and its two major themes, though not necessarily unrelated, are never welded together. But its first part remains one of the most beautiful and significant pieces of American imaginative prose. Here Anderson speaks clearly and movingly in his own voice, the voice of the bardic chronicler . . . From \textit{Poor White} there emerges an imaginative version of American society at its late-19th-century turning-point which other writers have equalled or surpassed in acuity but none in blending acuity with a uniquely tender nostalgia.\textsuperscript{15}

As Irving Howe has noted the first section of \textit{Poor White} is extremely well done. When Anderson developed Hugh, Bidwell, and the citizens of Bidwell, he wrote of the people and the environment he knew best. He understood these people.
He saw their good points and their failings. He both praised and criticized them, but he always wrote with understanding when the small town was his subject. Anderson wrote surpassingly well until he succumbed to the impulse to broaden his references and use Clara Butterworth to introduce new themes in the novel. Then he failed to produce a unified work, just as he had in *Windy McPherson's Son*, because he was trying to deal with characters and themes which he did not understand.

Perhaps the most disturbing comment made upon the book is one made by V. F. Calverton shortly after *Poor White* was published.

> It is a radiant promise of what Sherwood Anderson will be able to do when his technique has become more subtle and refined, and the element of the dramatic is introduced into his art with more frequency and elegance.

Unfortunately Anderson's best writing in the field of the novel was behind him at the time Calverton made this remark about *Poor White*. *Winesburg, Ohio* had already been published. Anderson would continue to produce some good short stories for a number of years, but the "radiant promise" which so many critics had seen in his novels was never to be completely fulfilled. Anderson never developed a technique which was suited to the writing of novels, and while he used more dramatic interplay of characters, he was never able to write a unified novel. Well-dramatized scenes would stand out as vignettes in all of his works, but he did not succeed in relating these scenes to one another within the works.
CHAPTER III

WINESBURG, OHIO

In both Windy McPherson's Son and Poor White some lack of consistency in the development of characters and action could be tolerated if Anderson had consistently developed some idea of theme which would fuse the parts of the novels into a whole. This is what he accomplished in Winesburg, Ohio, and it is this faithful adherence to an underlying theme which makes Winesburg Anderson's most unified and coherent piece of work.

Irving Howe calls Winesburg "an episodic novel made up of loosely bound but closely related sketches."\(^1\) Certainly it is a form which allowed Anderson more freedom than he had found in the conventional novel, and it is also a form which resulted in a greater complexity of meaning than is found in a volume of individual sketches. The conception of the ideas behind Winesburg is original with Anderson, but it is probable that reading of Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology suggested the form. It was the discovery of this form which seemed to give Anderson the much-needed method for organizing his ideas.\(^2\)

It is to these ideas behind the work that one must turn when reading Winesburg. In the following passage, Irving Howe notes some of the ways in which Anderson's
ideas have been interpreted:

The history of Winesburg is a curious instance of the way criticism, with its passion for "placing," can reduce a writer to harmless irrelevance. At various times the book has been banished to such categories as the revolt against the village, the rejection of middle-class morality, the proclamation of sexual freedom, and the rise of cultural primitivism... it is now quite obvious that Anderson's revolt was directed against something far more fundamental than the restrictions of the American... 3

Winesburg is a novel which explores the position of man in society by showing how the failure to find love or friendship isolates and twists people. It is a nonrealistic "fable of American estrangement" according to Howe, and certainly this and the theme of loss of love are the unifying elements of the book. Anderson himself opens the book with a fantasy called "The Book of the Grotesque" which indicates symbolically man's estranged position in the world. These ideas are expressed through some two dozen characters who are not at all like figures usually found in a novel. Only one, George Willard, is allowed to grow or develop in any way. All the others are presented in a single situation in which it is necessary to describe only one facet of the personality. In using this form Anderson escaped the difficulty he had encountered in Windy McPherson's Son and Poor White in sustaining characterizations.

The characters of Winesburg are often personifications of the one trait which has made them grotesques, and that one element of personality is developed by Anderson. The stories of these people follow similar patterns. Each
grotesque reaches out for some communication with the world, but none succeeds. This pattern of reaching out for help, failing to gain understanding, and withdrawing again is one of the unifying elements of the book.

In the first story, "Hands," Wing Biddlebaum had formed only one friendship in Winesburg and this was with George Willard. Wing saw something of the idealism which he had possessed as a youth repeated in George, and he tried to tell George that he must preserve this trait which set him apart from the others in the town. But Wing had once been severely punished for his attempts to teach and direct young boys, and he feared that he would again be misunderstood. He could not break out of the shell which encased him. His message was only half given; his strength of expression was reduced to futile movements of his hands, and he left George perplexed and frightened rather than enlightened.

In the story "Mother," a similar sequence of events occurs as Elizabeth Willard tries to tell her son that the goal his father has set for him "to be smart and successful" is not all life should hold. She wants to tell George much the same thing Wing had thought, but she can tell her son only to go outside and play with the boys. Although there is a bond of sympathy between mother and son, there is no real communication or understanding. Elizabeth Willard remains a solitary grotesque.

Doctor Parcival too tries to tell George of his feelings.
Wash Williams reveals his reasons for hating women only to George. However, Seth Richmond finds that George's volubility annoys him, and he turns to Helen White for understanding. She feels sympathy for Seth, momentarily revealing it. This brief time of shared sympathy is lost, though, as Helen immediately thinks of her desire to be alone. Seth feels the rebuff and thinks, "When it comes to loving someone, it won't ever be me. It'll be someone else--some fool--someone who talks a lot--someone like George Willard." This statement in itself points up the unique role of George Willard in the book as the person for whom love and understanding is possible.

"The Teacher" is another tale which shows a character drawn to George. Kate Swift had taught George and thought that she sensed some special talent for understanding life in her student. Her passion for teaching the boy becomes at one point a physical passion as she desires not only to communicate her feelings but also to be loved. George is confused by the two feelings mingled in the embrace of Kate Swift. He desires to be receptive, but he cannot understand her meaning. In this same story the Reverend Mr. Hartman bursts into the newspaper office just after Kate Swift has left. Mr. Hartman tries to tell George how he has experienced a revelation from God and has been released from the torments of sin by Kate Swift, "an instrument of God bearing a message of truth." The meaning of this is intelligible to the reader because the previous tale,
"The Strength of God," dealt with the Reverend Mr. Hartman and his obsession with spying upon Kate from his study in the church. After her frustrating encounter with George Willard, Kate had rushed home and thrown herself upon her bed. The sudden sight of her nude body had shocked Mr. Hartman, and had broken the spell of his obsession. This had been interpreted by him as an act of God leading him back to the truth. The two tales are bound together very closely as they occur contiguously in time and involve the same people. Both Kate and the Reverend Mr. Hartman try to tell George of their discoveries, but he cannot understand. George thinks the minister has suddenly gone insane, and he says, "I have missed something. I have missed something Kate Swift was trying to tell me" (WO, 196).

The story of Elmer Cowley again illustrates the inability of the grotesques to communicate their feelings to another human being. All his life Elmer has felt rejected and queer. His frustrations center on George Willard who, to Elmer, seems so happy and at home in the life of the village. Throughout the tale Elmer's determination to show George that he is not queer mounts. In the end Elmer cannot talk to George as he had planned; instead he suddenly turns on George and begins to rain blows upon him. Then, pitifully proud of his accomplishment, Elmer says, "I guess I showed him I ain't so queer" (WO, 243). The story is made doubly ironical because Elmer had not sensed that George Willard had wanted to befriend him. The real pathos connected
with human isolation is shown here. Without understanding, neither friendship nor love can develop, and Elmer Cowley could never know that the young man he had so rudely beaten was his potential friend.

"Death" is the story of how Elizabeth Willard and Dr. Reefy meet in one moment of love and understanding before the spell is broken by a stray noise. This is the one story in which two of the grotesques seem to meet. In all the others the grotesque figures reach out for normality in the figure of another person, usually George Willard. Yet the relationship between Elizabeth and Dr. Reefy does not extend beyond that moment. The story goes on to relate how Elizabeth dies in a few months, and Anderson touches her death with pathos and a kind of triumph as George is moved to follow the ideals she had hoped that he would. But Anderson immediately undercuts this triumph with irony. Elizabeth had secretly saved eight hundred dollars for George, to send him on his way to a new life. The existence of the money remained a secret because she died without telling George of it. With this touch Anderson shows the complete lack of communication between mother and son. The means of escape which Elizabeth had provided to give George a chance at the life she dreamed of for him remains hidden away just as her feelings for him had always been hidden and unspoken.

In each of these tales the pattern repeats itself. The grotesques try to save themselves through George, but
they cannot. In each story George is revealed as a sympathetic but immature person. He is too involved in his own problems to be able to give much help to anyone else. The themes of isolation and loss of love repeat themselves over and over.

The last two stories in the book set George Willard and Helen White apart from the grotesques. While they are beyond salvation, George and Helen are on the brink of life. They can become either grotesques, unable to communicate with any other human beings, or they can establish some kind of contact with the world. Momentarily, George and Helen do communicate. It is not a communication which is aborted, as was that of Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth Willard. Instead, it is a fully realized understanding which shows the possibility for fulfillment in both of them. It is at this point that Anderson indicates that George is ready to leave Winesburg. He has attained some degree of maturity in his ability to feel something other than self-interest. His future is unsure, but it is not hopeless.

Irving Howe uses the following metaphor to describe one kind of unity found in Winesburg.

From the story "Queer," it is possible to abstract the choreography of Winesburg. Its typical action is a series of dance maneuvers by figures whose sole distinctive characteristic is an extreme deformity of movement or posture. Each of these grotesques dances, with angular indirection and muted pathos, toward a central figure who seems to them young, fresh, and radiant. For a moment they seem to draw close to him and thereby to abandon their stoops and limps, but this moment quickly dissolves... the central figure cannot be reached. Slowly and painfully, the grotesques withdraw while the young man leaves the stage entirely...
Howe's beautifully phrased description confirms the presence of a unified story pattern in *Winesburg*, and the importance of this pattern in giving unity to the book has already been discussed at length. The movement of the grotesques in relation to George Willard throughout the novel is an outstanding example of the carefully worked out plan developed by Anderson in *Winesburg*; but this is not the only unifying element of the book.

John J. Mahoney in an article for the *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* analyzes *Winesburg* and its form by considering the pattern of speech followed by the characters in the tales and by the voice of the author. He notes that vocal speech between characters is used sparingly and that the voice of the author predominates. Anderson sets up a pattern in which tales frequently begin with a generalized account of a person's early life or even the life of his parents. Some kind of sociological discussion and relation of local history may also be included in the first stage of a tale. As Anderson brings the story nearer the point of the climactic speech, he becomes more specific and makes closer reference to the present situation. Mahoney notes that Anderson puts a great deal of emphasis on these climactic speeches in the tales. He isolates these utterances almost as if they were dramatic soliloquies. In fact, Mahoney has examined *Winesburg* closely and has discovered that none of the utterances in the novel is replied to. Conversation is implied, but there is never any direct reply
to a statement or question. This technique is used throughout the novel and is certainly one factor in the unusual stylistic effect which is evident in the tales. The fact that the speeches are made in much the same style as a monologue increases the effect of the themes of loneliness and isolation. Mahoney notes that the speakers never refer to any plan for gaining help in their troubles, that they often have great difficulty in speaking at all, and that they seldom ask for or seem to expect a direct reply to their statements. The fact that a reply is never given increases the sense of isolation which pervades the book.  

One cannot be certain how much of this was done as a part of the author's conscious technique. Dialogue was one of Anderson's weak points, and he may have used these isolated speeches as a means of avoiding direct dialogue. At any rate, a definite pattern of speech does emerge in Winesburg, and it is one which reinforces the pattern of story structure and further unifies the themes and tone of the book.

The mood of the novel is carried consistently from story to story in a number of ways. All but five of the stories come to a climax in the evening. Darkness in varying degrees is a recurrent feature of the tales. In "Hands," "Mother," and "Loneliness" the light of a single lamp illunines the setting. "The Untold Lie" takes place at twilight, and "Sophistication" is set in the early evening. A great number of tales end with the grotesque figure surrounded
by total darkness. The use of a device like this serves not only to link the tales but also to give them added significance. Certainly, these grotesques were best suited to a world of dim light. The reader is not allowed to scrutinize these twisted figures. He gets only the brief glimpses of a darkened life which are allowed by the fading light. It is meaningful that George Willard leaves Winesburg at seven forty-five on a spring morning when the sun shines pink in a morning sky and illumines trees leafing out from the buds. In Winesburg George is the one character whose future could be described in terms of dawn and spring. He has the possibility of happiness before him while the grotesques do not.

Anderson makes effective use of more than one set of symbols in Winesburg. His use of the room also has a significant meaning. It often suggests the isolation of the figures in the tales. Enoch Robinson is the most obvious example of this as the room is the most important element in his story. His room becomes his entire world. Kate Swift is set apart in her bedroom, as is Dr. Reefy in his office, Reverend Hartman in his church study, and Wing Biddlebaum in his house.

Another repeated element is the recurrent use of the word "hands." Hands are often used to symbolize potential or actual communication of one human being with another. The hands of Wing Biddlebaum are the most important feature of his story. They represent the reasons for his isolation and his means of communication. Dr. Reefy's hands are
then Anderson relates this description of the hands of Dr. Reefy by saying, "Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples" (WO, 20). It is Dr. Reefy who momentarily touches Elizabeth Willard with his hands and gathers her into an embrace for a brief time of understanding. George Willard notices how extraordinarily long and white and sensitive his mother's hands appear, and these words describe far more than just her hands since she is pale and thin with illness, and sensitive in her love for George. One of the most realistic descriptive passages in the book gives the details of the physical appearance of Tom Willy, the saloon keeper. His hands were colored by a flaming red birth mark which revealed his emotions by becoming a deeper red when he grew excited. This odd descriptive touch is reminiscent of the revealing character of Wing Biddlebaum's hands. In the story "Nobody Knows" George Willard is pleased by the feel of Louise Trunnion's "rough and delightfully small" hand as he anticipates his sexual initiation. Wash Williams is called the ugliest thing in town, since he is dirty and obese, but his hands are clean; and though they are fat they are sensitive and shapely. He is a good telegraph operator, and the dexterous use of his hands at the telegraph is his one source of pride. Hands play an important part in the tales of the Reverend Curtis Hartman and Seth Richmond and are mentioned in virtually every tale in the book. The final moment of communication
between George Willard and Helen White is expressed in silent clasping of hands. This emphasis on hands seems to indicate that while physical contact does not always bring understanding, it does indicate the possibility of human communication.10

Another repeated element in Winesburg which must be considered is the figure of George Willard. Obviously his repeated presence in the tales serves as some kind of link and does supply a pattern for the book. His function as a norm toward which the grotesques move in abortive attempts to establish human contact has already been discussed. This function alone provides unity of form in a number of the tales, but the presence of George Willard lends unity to the tales in a number of other ways.

Upon examining all the tales, one discovers that George Willard is mentioned in all but five of the twenty-four stories. Four of these tales in which he is not mentioned are essentially one story with four parts. Considering the tales in that light George is mentioned or takes part in all but two of them. In several instances George plays no role in the story, and his name is mentioned only in passing. It seems obvious that Anderson was using the name merely to fit some of the tales more definitely into the Winesburg scene. The tales had appeared originally in three separate publications, the Masses, Seven Arts, and Little Review. When Anderson decided to prepare them for book publication, it was necessary to make only a few minor
changes, for they were already remarkably consistent in mood and theme. By repeating character and place names throughout the tales in the book, Anderson built up definite connective elements between the stories which were already unified by mood and theme.

Walter B. Rideout in an article in Shenandoah has pointed out three additional ways in which the character of George Willard gives a "definite yet unobtrusive" unity to the book. The first of these is the manner in which George's inward life develops and reflects the life of Anderson himself.

Whatever the outward difference between created character and creator, George's inward life clearly reflects the conflict Anderson himself had experienced between the world of practical affairs, with its emphasis on the activity of money-making and its definition of success in financial terms, and the world of dreams, with its emphasis on imaginative creativity and its definition of success in terms of the degree of penetration into the buried life of others.

This idea is very clearly stated in the first tale, "Hands." Wing Biddlebaum recognizes George's inclination toward the world of dreams and wants to encourage it. In this tale the way of life which George will follow is not made definite. It is in the third tale, "Mother," that he makes his choice. His father's ideas about material success are rejected, as George realizes that the life of ideas and dreams is the one which he must strive for. As in Anderson's own life, the death of his mother is the event which causes George to break away from the ties of the village and go
out and try to make a life for himself. This same pattern of development has already been seen in Windy McPherson's Son. The great conflict in Sherwood Anderson's life came later in life than it did for George, but the basic elements of the conflict were the same. Throughout the tales George is drawn from his life as the reporter gathering facts about church socials and bumper harvests toward his role as a listener and confidant of the grotesques in the novel. These two aspects of his life form another pattern in the structure of Winesburg. It is a pattern which leads inevitably to George's recognition of the value of the world of ideas as represented by his growth in understanding. The problems of humanity take on an importance to him, and he commits himself fully to the world of ideas in the last tale, "Departure." The last paragraph of the book describing George as he leaves Winesburg on the train indicates how the pattern is working itself out in George's life.

The young man's mind was carried away by his growing passion for dreams. With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood (WQ, 303).

Rideout notes a second aspect of George's development which runs throughout the stories as unifying theme. This is George's growing desire to become a writer, and it is certainly related to his interest in the world of ideas and dreams. Once again the influence of Anderson's own life is
seen in his depiction and development of George. Rideout says that George's interest in creative writing is not mentioned until the book is half finished, but there are some indications of this interest earlier. In one of the early tales, "The Philosopher," Dr. Parcival keeps talking of writing a book and says to George, "If something happens perhaps you will be able to write the book that I may never get written" (WO, 48). In another tale Tom Willard questions his son about the possibility of his having notions of becoming a writer since he had been working as a reporter. Casting George Willard as a reporter in his youth seems to lead directly toward his developing desire to become a writer. If Anderson had not intended the connection, he could have made George a newsboy as was Sam McPherson in Windy McPherson's Son and Anderson himself in real life.

In the tale "The Thinker," this theme is brought out definitely as George tells Seth Richmond that he has been trying to write a love story. Anderson points out that "the idea that George Willard would some day become a writer had given him a place of distinction in Winesburg . . ." (WO, 153).

In this tale George talks about the ease and enjoyment of a writer's life and speculates about what fun it would be. His interest at this point is immature as he dwells on what he considers the glamorous aspects of a writer's career. Later in the novel Kate Swift warns George of the difficulties of a writer's life, but he is still not mature enough to consider seriously what she says. Kate tries to tell him
that "he must become more aware of the real meaning of life and stop fooling around with words" before he can become a writer (WO, 192).

Throughout the tales the development of George's attitude toward writing and his maturity can be related. Only at the end of Winesburg does George face with seriousness the idea of life and a career. With the death of his mother, George realizes that he must leave Winesburg if he intends to develop further. He no longer sees the writer's life as an easy and romantic occupation. Instead he realizes that his job will be "on some newspaper," supporting himself and learning how to write. "In 'Departure' the commitment of George Willard to writing unites with his final commitment to the world of ideas. For both George and his creator the two are indeed identical."15 Thus two lines of development in the tales have been brought together in the final scene of the book.

There is yet another aspect of George's growing maturity which can be traced in Winesburg. The stories "Nobody Knows," "An Awakening," and "Sophistication" all deal with George's relationships with women. As Walter B. Rideout says "... they are arranged in an ascending order of progression. The fact that one comes near the beginning of the book, one about two-thirds of the way through, and one at the end suggests that Anderson was not without his own subtle sense of design."16

In the first story George is initiated into manhood
by having with Louise Trunnion his first sexual experience. He is both aggressive and unsure of himself by turns, but above all he is unsympathetic with Louise and interested only in satisfying his own desires. He is proud of his conquest, but not completely at ease about it. The experience had been an exploration into passion of which George seems somewhat ashamed. As the story ends he laughs nervously and says, "She hasn't got anything on me. Nobody knows" (WO, 54). For George this has been only an experiment. Emotionally he remains untouched, and Louise Trunnion means nothing to him.

In "An Awakening" George suffers great humiliation because of his inability to see beyond his grand illusions about himself to the truth. Belle Carpenter, who is considerably older than George, goes walking with him for the sole purpose of making her lover, Ed Handby, jealous. George romanticizes the situation and creates in his mind an illusion that Belle plans to surrender herself to him. As George takes her in his arms while muttering "lust and night and women" into the darkness, Ed Handby sends him sprawling into the bushes. Belle and Ed then leave together quite happily. George is disgusted and disillusioned by the experience. His interest in Belle had been slight, but his fine image of George Willard the lover has been destroyed. George's interest in women at this point has been purely selfish in nature, but his experiences are helping prepare him for a new kind of relationship which is described
in the story called "Sophistication."

George and Helen White share an hour of understanding and human communication in "Sophistication" which is unlike any other experience described in Winesburg. Their movement toward understanding and affection is not stopped short. They attain a companionship which none of the grotesques were ever able to achieve. In this companionship and mutual respect George and Helen gain an insight into the meaning of life. As Anderson said, "They had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible" (WO, 298). It is at this point that Anderson describes George as being ready to leave Winesburg. He has grown to maturity in another aspect of life.

Anderson's use of symbol patterns, his thematic development of George's life, and his consistent description of the mood and tone combine to produce a web of connective themes, ideas, and characters which give a real sense of unity to the book.

Various critics have noted that certain ones of the tales do not seem to fit the pattern established by the others. The four-part section, "Godliness," dealing with Jesse Bentley and members of his family, is most often criticized in this light. Some points can be made to support this view, but basically the tales seem of a piece with the rest of the novel. It is true that George Willard is neither mentioned in passing nor does he play any part in the action
of the tales. The tales begin and end on a farm outside Winesburg, and the characters do not reappear in any other tale. The elements which connect the tales with the rest of the stories are those of theme, mood, and tone. Jesse Bentley is a grotesque in the style and manner of many of the others in Winesburg. His problems may have different manifestations, but he too suffers from delusions about himself, isolation from other human beings, and inability to find love and communicate his feelings to a loved one. He virtually kills his wife through lack of understanding, alienates his daughter, and then causes his young grandson to run away. Jesse Bentley turns to David Hardy, the grandson, in an attempt to express his feelings just as many of the other grotesques had turned to George Willard. David too is quite young, and he is unable to understand the actions of his grandfather. Jesse is seized with a passionate feeling of religious fervor and thankfulness. In his truly grotesque attempt to give thanks by offering a burnt lamb to God and by anointing his grandson's head with the blood of the lamb, Jesse Bentley terrorizes the boy. In a heavily symbolic action David strikes his grandfather with a stone from his sling shot and thinking he has killed the man, flees from Winesburg. David Hardy is never heard of again. Jesse Bentley has lost the one human being he really loved, and his isolation is complete. The stories of the Bentley family are truly set in darkness and shadow. The themes of isolation and despair
are repeated. The pattern of human behavior in the attempt to approach another person and the subsequent failure is repeated not only in Jesse and David but also in the daughter, Louise Bentley, and her husband, John Hardy. Anderson relates the tales in the same manner, with the same feelings of love and pity for the characters he creates, that he uses in the other Winesburg tales. Considering these aspects of the Bentley tales, they fit into the scheme of the book and do not mar its unity.

The tale called "The Untold Lie" has also been called inappropriate to the rest of the book. Again it occurs on a farm outside Winesburg, and the two main characters are mentioned nowhere else in the book. Anderson mentions familiar character and place names in the tale; but more important to the unity of the book as a whole is the fact that once again the theme of the story is the problem of communication between two people. It emphasizes the difficulty that different age groups have in understanding each other. Again the older person fails to speak and make himself understood by the younger. This is the same pattern of approach, attempt to communicate, and failure accompanied by withdrawal, which has been noted so many times before.

Irving Howe notes that "the one conspicuous disharmony of the book is that the introductory 'Book of the Grotesque' suggests that the grotesques are victims of their wilful fanaticism, while in the stories themselves grotesqueness is the result of an essentially valid resistance to forces
external to its victims."17 This is a definite discrepancy in the structure of the book. However, since the tales themselves are alike in the portrayal of the grotesques as making a valid attempt to save themselves from the situation that is making them grotesque, the disharmony is not one which destroys the meaning of the book.

Anderson himself saw the tales as a unified whole and described them as such in his Memoirs and in a note which was among his unfinished works at the time of his death.

The stories belonged together. I felt that, taken together, they made something like a novel, a complete story. . . . I considered then . . . that my earlier stories both Windy McPherson's Son and at least in the writing, Marching Men, had been the result not so much of my own feelings about life as of reading the novels of others . . . I have sometimes thought that the novel form does not fit an American writer, that it is a form which has been brought in. What is wanted is a new looseness, and in Winesburg I had made my own form. There were individual tales but they were all connected.18

While Anderson has stated that he considered the tales as part of the novel form in the sense of a long, unified fiction, Irving Howe has aptly summarized the reasons for the unity, beauty, and artistic success of these tales.

Winesburg is an excellently formed piece of fiction, each of its stories following a parabola of movement which abstractly graphs the book's meaning. . . . there develops in one of the grotesques a rising lyrical excitement, usually stimulated to intensity by the presence of George Willard. At the moment before reaching a climax, this excitement is frustrated by a fatal inability at communication . . . This structural pattern is sometimes varied by an ironic turn . . . but only in one story, "Sophistication," is the emotional ascent allowed
to move forward without interruption . . .
Through a few simple but extremely effective symbols, the stories are both related to the book's larger meaning and defined in their uniqueness. . . .
But the final effectiveness of this book is in its prevalent tone of tender inclusiveness . . .
The ultimate unity of the book is a unity of feeling, a sureness of warmth, and a readiness to accept Winesburg's lost grotesques with the embrace of humility.19

When one compares Winesburg to Windy McPherson's Son, which was published earlier, and to Poor White which was published later, one is struck by a number of similarities. In all three novels the hero has many traits of Anderson himself. The themes of loneliness and the struggle to find love or friendship are present. The problems of finding a worthwhile goal in life is met by the hero in each novel. But Windy McPherson's Son and Poor White have one more similarity which is not shared by Winesburg; both take the hero away from his native town and relate his experiences as an adult. They deal with the problems which man must face in making his place in the world. It is in trying to develop these themes that both the novels fail. Anderson had not resolved the conflicts in his own life, and since these two novels deal with problems which he himself faced, they too fail to express satisfactory solutions to the difficulties faced by the heroes. In Winesburg he avoided this difficulty by ending the novel as George Willard left to begin his adult life. Thus Winesburg, Ohio deals completely with the materials which Anderson knew and understood best. He was able to incorporate his feeling for the
small town, his understanding of sensitive and disturbed minds, and his own experiences, into a successful work of art.

Anderson was never able to recapture this vein in his writing. He wrote a few good short stories after the publication of *Winesburg*, but his attempts to write in the conventional novel form were not successful. He never again experimented in form as he had in *Winesburg*, and it remains as his most original and most outstanding work of fiction.
CHAPTER IV

ANDERSON'S OTHER NOVELS

Anderson's first four novels, *Windy McPherson's Son*, *Marching Men*, *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Poor White*, are in many ways rehearsals of his own life or of the legend which had grown up about him. The story of Anderson's success as a business man and his subsequent abandonment of business for writing was widely known and highly romanticized by writers and their public in the years from 1916 to 1925. Anderson's natural subject in his writing was one which capitalized on his own experience, and the previous chapters have shown how *Windy*, *Poor White*, and *Winesburg* successfully dealt with themes related to Anderson's life and the small town milieu. In each of these novels the hero is a man who develops an understanding of life which leads him to see that monetary success is not the most important element in life. This pattern manifests itself in various ways but the basic elements are the same, and these elements are taken directly from Anderson's own experience. This pattern forms the core of each novel, and it is in the process of drawing in material which goes beyond his personal experience that Anderson causes both *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Poor White* to split into episodes that are not unified. All of this has been discussed earlier, but is important in relation to the
discussion of the remaining one of the first four novels, *Marching Men*, and it must also be considered in the treatment of the five novels which follow *Poor White*.

Irving Howe says of *Marching Men*:

As a novel for a study of Anderson's apprenticeship, *Marching Men* is of slight interest, but as an expression of ideas it remains highly relevant. It represents the price Anderson was to pay, and which he never quite reckoned, for his failure to assume the responsibilities of the mind; a price he was to pay again and again.\(^1\)

In *Windy* when Anderson had tried to express why Sam McPherson felt that he must abandon his career to "search for truth," the novel became diffuse, disunified, and intellectually confusing. In *Marching Men* Anderson makes no real attempt to explain why Beaut McGregor, the protagonist, feels that he must rebel against modern life. *Marching Men* is marked by an extreme lack of coherence, and its motivating idea is never fully explained in the novel itself.

While the characterization in *Marching Men* is weak and the structure is somewhat vague and confusing, the primary failure of the novel is found in the disparity between intent and accomplishment. In such a novel as *Poor White* one can easily point out sections which destroy the unity of structure and note that they are ones alien to Anderson's own experience, but the failure to realize one's purpose in a novel is a kind of disunity which is more difficult to illustrate in criticism. Yet it is just as damaging, perhaps even more so, to the book, because it affects the unity of the entire work.
This failure in *Marching Men* must once again be traced to Anderson's personal limitations. The purpose of the novel is to express through Beaut McGregor a program which would rescue the working man from his drab acceptance of misery in life. McGregor is to lead a movement symbolic of the rise of the proletariat. Anderson proposed to illustrate this movement, but he was unable to do so. He was never able to give his idea any coherent expression. McGregor is one of the most inarticulate characters Anderson ever created. The author had no imaginative control of the ideas which he wanted McGregor to express. Intuitively Anderson sensed the power which a movement of labor would have, but he was unable to articulate his feelings. True to form, Anderson could give his novel a sense of emotion, of groping for a solution, but he could not go beyond this groping and find an answer to the problem he posed.

The opening section of *Marching Men* is strongly reminiscent of *Windy*. The description of Beaut McGregor as a youth in the town of Coal Creek, Pennsylvania, is similar in tone and style to Anderson's earlier novel. The use of peripheral characters to describe Beaut and the village is done in a realistic manner just as it was in *Windy*. It is the most vividly realized section of *Marching Men* and related quite closely to Anderson's own feeling and experiences. McGregor, like Sam McPherson, is a character who resembles Anderson in several ways. The following quotation illustrates the similarities in style and tone in the opening sections of *Marching Men* and *Windy*. 
Uncle Charlie Wheeler stamped on the steps before Nance McGregor's bake-shop on the main street of the town of Coal Creek, Pennsylvania, and then went quickly inside. ... With a wink at the Reverend Minot Weeks who stood by the door leading to the street, he tapped with his knuckles on the showcase.

"It has," he said, waving attention to the boy, who was making a mess of the effort to arrange Uncle Charlie's loaf into a neat package, "a pretty name. They call it Norman--Norman McGregor."

Uncle Charlie laughed heartily and again stamped upon the floor. Putting his finger to his forehead to suggest deep thought, he turned to the minister. "I am going to change all that," he said. "Norman indeed! I shall give him a name that will stick! We will call it Beaut--Beaut McGregor." ... The McGregor boy, tall and awkward, and with a towering nose, great hippopotamus-like mouth and fiery red hair, followed Uncle Charlie, Republican politician, postmaster, and village wit to the door ...  

Anderson has McGregor leave Coal Creek to go to Chicago to make his fortune, and it is in the Chicago section that Anderson's approach changes. Once Beaut becomes convinced that his role in life is to lead labor, his portrayal becomes almost entirely symbolical. Beaut becomes a cloudy, romantic figure with little relation to the realistic figure earlier portrayed. This change in the portrayal of Beaut emphasizes the difficulty Anderson had in expressing his ideas. Beaut's early life was real to him and he could describe it vividly, but his program for labor was not real, and he retreated to a confused use of symbolism in an attempt to express his ideas. As Irving Howe points out, Anderson did not accept the responsibility of thinking through his ideas in order to give them clarity.

The use of symbolism is in itself not a failing, and Anderson used it with great strength and understanding.
in *Winesburg*. But the difference between *Winesburg* and *Marching Men* is that in the successful novel Anderson was in complete imaginative control of his symbols while in *Marching Men*, he attempted to mask an uncertainty of purpose by using symbolism which is vague and unsubstantiated.

Examples from the novel itself will best illustrate this point. Anderson, speaking through an anonymous narrator, tries to explain the labor movement and its mysterious leader, McGregor.

> It is difficult not to be of two minds about the manifestation now called, and perhaps rightly, "The Madness of the Marching Men." In one mood it comes back to the mind as something unspeakably big and inspiring. We go on each of us through the treadmill of our lives caught and caged like little animals in some vast menagerie . . .

> And so about the business of our lives we go, and then of a sudden there comes again the feeling that crept over us all in the year of the Marching Men. In a moment we are again a part of the moving mass. The old religious exaltation, strange emanation from the man McGregor, returns. In fancy we feel the earth tremble under the feet of the men—the marchers. With a conscious straining of the mind we strive to grasp the process of the mind of the leader during that year when men sensed his meaning, when they saw as he saw the workers—saw them massed and moving through the world . . .

> McGregor was near to being a god then . . .

> His long shadow will fall across men's thoughts for ages. The tantalising effort to understand his meaning will tempt us always into endless speculation (*M Men*, 275-6).

This is Anderson's most extended attempt to explain the spirit of the movement. But, as the quotation illustrates, Anderson never came to terms with his idea. He felt that there was power in the movement, and the passage quoted above shows how he was straining to give reality to his ideas.
McGregor is seen as a god, but his strength is never made tangible. Anderson thought of Beaut and the movement only in terms of emotional response, and it is this response which is felt in the descriptions in the book. The movement is never explained in a manner which allows the reader to accept it intellectually.

In the novel McGregor organizes a large number of laborers in Chicago into marching units. Rumors about their mysterious purposes circulate, are printed in newspapers, and result in some spread of the marching units to other cities. But they have no goal. McGregor says that the essence of the movement is to give men "a sense of order" (Men, 277). He says that through this order, labor will gain strength; however, the movement never exercises its power. McGregor never bargains with management in the familiar sense of a modern union leader. The movement trickles away into nothing, and the novel ends on a note of question.

Anderson hinted at many things in the novel, but he refused to make any positive statement, and the movement of the marching men remains such an enigma that critics have dismissed the novel as incomprehensible. The theme of proletarian revolt in the novel is undermined by the failure of the proletariat in the novel to do anything besides march.4 Anderson brought the movement to the brink of success and then abandoned it. As Irving Howe states "at the novel's end the movement collapses for reasons that are never clear,
perhaps because Anderson hadn't the faintest notion of what to do with it." With the collapse of the movement, the split between intention and accomplishment is complete. McGregor is still seen as a god and the movement of the marching men is still considered as a way for labor to win a new way of life when both have obviously failed. Anderson's vision of McGregor and the movement remains unchanged even though the novel's outcome indicates that both have been unsuccessful.

Anderson's failure in this novel must again be traced to his personal limitations, and the portrayal of McGregor is the key to the failure in many ways. In working with such a strange and unfamiliar figure, Anderson was unable to control the development of his ideas. The result is that McGregor, who is supposed to be a savior, is portrayed as an inarticulate fanatic. It is lack of control in dealing with unfamiliar material and inattention to matters of structure and technique which mar the novel, and cause the themes to be obscured.

After 1921 and the publication of Triumph of the Egg, a successful book of short stories, Anderson seemed to be searching for a new style and new themes. He was dissatisfied with the reaction of the general public to his novels and felt the need of expanding the scope of his writing. It was at this time that he moved to New Orleans and began work on his fifth novel, Many Marriages. It was also at this time that Anderson began to write fiction with contemporary
settings. In his first four novels Anderson had described America, specifically the Mid-West, and at the end of the 19th century. Now he felt the need to turn to more current themes and settings. Irving Howe describes the feelings which motivated Anderson as follows:

The key word was freedom. To a writer like Sherwood Anderson the 1920's created an atmosphere of freedom in at least three senses. The persistent campaign, and sometimes cant, directed against "puritanism," the theme of self-realization that Anderson had first celebrated in Chicago, the credulous expectation that without regard for a limiting social context one could escape and then again escape to some new and grander share of personal freedom...

The revolt against "puritanism" was particularly appealing to Anderson. He felt strongly about this himself, and in the years since *Windy McPherson's Son* had been published Anderson had associated with a group of people who shared these feelings. Besides this he had begun to read more widely and had discovered both Freud and D. H. Lawrence. As Anderson's books became better known, he was linked to Freud with increasing regularity. In his *Letters and Memoirs* and in various public statements Anderson denied ever having read Freud, but as Howe says, "This statement... is impossible to believe... Far more credible is the assumption that... he did try to read Freud and found him too difficult or too scientific." Howe believes that the systematic development of theory expounded by Freud would have had little appeal to Anderson. However, the use of the name probably did appeal to him. Simply alluding to the name and repeating the stock Freudian phrases probably satisfied Anderson's needs.
Anderson had read D. H. Lawrence, though, and modern critics, following Anderson's own statements of indebtedness, have tended to see the novels after 1921 as owing more to the inspiration of Lawrence than Freud. Irving Howe devotes a chapter in his book on Anderson to the influence of Lawrence. In this chapter Howe states that Anderson probably found most of what interested him in Freud stated more to his liking by D. H. Lawrence. 10

Anderson's novel Many Marriages shows the influence that the ideas of Lawrence and Freud and the revolt against "puritanism" had on Anderson's writing. However, even though Anderson tried to break through to new ideas in this novel, if the book is examined closely traces of the old themes and situations become apparent. The hero, John Webster, is an unhappy businessman who sees himself escaping from his adult responsibilities by leaving his wife and daughter in order to start a new life of freedom with his secretary. In Many Marriages the escape is supposed to be found in sexual expression. In the earlier novels other means of escaping had been emphasized, but the pattern remains the same. Anderson continued to use his favorite myth—that of his own life. But in this novel Anderson wanted to show that freedom is found not by living through children as in windy, or by leaving home for a career in writing as George Willard had done, but by breaking all bonds of responsibility and finding freedom in a love affair.

The theme of the novel is stated over and over by
John Webster as he says, "I am myself. I am trying to be myself... I crown myself with the crown of life..." Symbolically and literally John Webster says that the repression of American life as he has lived it as a washing-machine manufacturer is damaging to him. He feels that he must escape this repression and be "himself."

As Edward Wagenknecht notes, Many Marriages is more unified in structure than are many of Anderson's novels, but it still contains a basic disunity. Unity can be accomplished in the writing of a novel only when the author is able to develop his characters so that they illustrate the themes introduced in the work. Anderson failed to do this and "the result is a cruel parody of his intention. A novel meant to celebrate sex fails completely to show sexual desire or the sexual relation."

John Webster's freedom was to be shown by his enlightened attitude toward sex, but his relations with his wife, his daughter, and his newly discovered love reveal that he has no understanding of women in any relationship. This flaw in the characterization of John Webster is inevitably related to Anderson's own limitations as a novelist.

Anderson obviously intended for the course of action taken by Webster to be accepted as necessary and right. However, he failed once again to achieve his purpose, and the truth that he hoped to express in the novel became a falsehood because of the incoherent handling of themes and characters. The split between intention and accomplishment...
occurs in *Many Marriages* just as it had in *Marching Men*.

As the novel ends there is little indication that Webster's affair with Natalie will end any more successfully than his marriage had. Anderson refused to face the problems posed by the novel in much the same manner that he had refused to work out the problems in *Marching Men*. Just as *Marching Men* fails to affirm the first premise made by the novel, so does *Many Marriages* fail to affirm that John Webster has found freedom. Such a basic contradiction in the novel cannot fail to destroy its unity.

Webster himself states this negative view at one point in the novel.

And then it might well be true that the whole matter simply resolved itself into this—that he, John Webster, was merely a man who had become enamoured of his stenographer and wanted to go and live with her and that he had found himself without the courage to do so a simple a thing without making a fuss about it, without in fact an elaborate justification of himself, at the expense of these others. To justify himself he had devised this strange business of appearing nude before the young girl who was his daughter and who in reality, being his daughter, deserved the utmost consideration from him. There was no doubt but that, from one point of view, what he had done was altogether unforgivable. "After all I am still but a washing machine manufacturer in a small Wisconsin town . . . (*MM*, 120).

Anderson rejected this speculation and portrayed Webster as being entirely right in his actions, but to most critics and readers Webster is only a washing-machine manufacturer. It is difficult to see him as an idealist searching for truth and freedom. From a critical point of view, Webster's actions are unforgiveable not because they are
immoral but because they so obviously fail to mean what Anderson wanted them to mean.

These discrepancies between intent and accomplishment in the novel can be traced once again to Anderson's artistic limitations. The relationship of John Webster to the three women in his life is what the novel consists of, and Anderson was always uncertain in his portrayal of male-female relationships. There are no sections which can be selected as examples of Anderson working within his limitations, for the entire novel illustrates the author's inability to establish his intended themes. The inability results not only from the problem he had with the female characters but also from his reliance upon the reader's ability to understand instinctively his themes and characterizations. Many Marriages was written first as a short story, and if Anderson had left it in that form, he might have escaped these problems.

The previous discussion in this chapter tried to show how Anderson failed to develop his characters so that they illustrated the themes of the novel. This break in the unity is a fault which is easily traced to the author's inability to articulate his themes. Anderson's failure to explain his ideas and his refusal to come to grips intellectually with his subject is always related to his reliance upon writing intuitively. He understood and sympathized with John Webster; so he assumed that his readers would feel the
same emotions. This assumption causes the book to fail as Anderson's limitations cause him to be unable to develop his intended themes.14

In 1925 success came to Sherwood Anderson. His novel Dark Laughter was published and became a best seller. Anderson was already secure in the knowledge that Winesburg, Ohio, while not a popular success, had achieved such critical acclaim that it would be called an American classic. But before Dark Laughter none of his novels had sold widely.

Anderson had turned to a new experimental style in Dark Laughter, and in doing so he abandoned his natural manner of writing. The result is a pastiche in which sections of his old objective style abruptly contrast with sections of subjective and loosely impressionistic writing.15 While the popular success of the novel gave Anderson faith in his new impressionistic style, the sections in which he slipped back into his old methods stand out as the most interesting and readable in the novel.

The popularity of the novel was not long-lasting and later Anderson sensed that the novel was artistically a failure. In his Letters he commented on Dark Laughter by noting that although he made more money on it than any of his other books, he believed that he had written others which were better and which went deeper into life's problems.16 Then referring to his favorite characters he wrote that "the old gaffer" Sponge Martin from the first chapter of Dark Laughter was one of his best.17 Certainly the portrait
of Sponge Martin is the most memorable piece of writing in
the book. In writing of him Anderson achieved his authentic
style and tone. Such sporadic flashes of fine, controlled,
imaginative writing only serve to point up the failure of
the major part of the book.

A brief resume of the plot followed by appropriate
quotations will illustrate how the contrasting styles form
a major break in the book's unity.

Bruce Dudley, the central figure, becomes dissatisfied
with the life of urban bohemianism which he leads with his
wife, who writes newspaper fiction and is a poor house-
keeper. Dudley leaves his wife and wanders south to New
Orleans where he is fascinated by the Negroes and the lives
they lead. He settles in a small-town and takes a job as
an anonymous factory hand. While he is there he attracts the
restless eye of Aline Grey, the wife of the owner of the
factory where Bruce works. He takes a job as her gardener
and "persuades her to leave with him for that hazy vista
of freedom which had so unsettled John Webster."^19

When Bruce went to work in the factory, he met
Sponge Martin. Anderson's description of Sponge is one of
the most convincingly written parts of the book.

As for Sponge himself, he had been a carriage-
painter in the town of Old Harbor before anyone ever
thought of building any such thing as a wheel
factory there, before anyone had ever thought of
any such thing as an automobile. On some days he
talked of the earlier days when he had owned his
own shop. There was a kind of pride in him when
he got on that subject . . . Sponge could have been
foreman of the factory finishing room if he had wanted to lick boots a little . . . The trouble with Sponge was that he had known the Greys too long . . . Bruce watched Sponge's hands . . . The brush was held just so. There was a quick, soft movement. Sponge could fill his brush very full and yet handle it in such a way that the varnish did not drip down and he left no ugly think places on the wheels as he did. The stroke of the brush was like a caress.20

A romantic but finely drawn picture of Sponge develops as Anderson weaves together episodes about Sponge's youth, his marriage, and his present position. All the incidents are related to the picture of the man skillfully wielding the varnish brush in the wheel factory. This portrait of the old craftsman is done in the Winesburg style with understanding and sympathy. Blended with the themes of industrialization discussed in Poor White, the depiction of Sponge Martin shows how Anderson wrote successfully when he dealt with the small-town craftsman in his familiar style. When he attempts to develop Bruce and Dudley and Aline Grey in an atmosphere of intellectual Bohemianism using his experimental style, the novel collapses. Anderson described this kind of life poorly. While he moved in intellectual circles at times, he never became a part of the intellectual world. He always felt outside the society which he tried to illustrate through Bruce and Aline, and consequently they are not depicted convincingly.

The following quotation shows how artificial Anderson's writing became when he assumed what he thought was an intellectual attitude:
When the sweat runs down high brown backs
the colors come out and dance before the eyes.
Flash that up, you painters, catch it dancing.
Song-tones in words, music in words—in colors
too. Silly American painters! They chase a
Gauguin shadow to the South Seas. Bruce wrote a
few poems. Bernice had got very far away in,
oh such a short time. Good thing she didn't
know. Good no one knows how unimportant he is.
We need earnest men—got to have 'em. Who'll
run the show if we don't get that kind? For
Bruce—for the time—no sensual feeling that need
be expressed through his body.

Hot days. Sweet Mama! (DL, 77).

This kind of loose, impressionistic writing was
definitely not Anderson's style. In the passage quoted
above Anderson jumps from one topic to another in a manner
which causes the writing to be confused. He begins by men¬
tioning the appearance of the Negroes working on the New
Orleans docks. Then he switches to commentary on American
painters. The mention of Gauguin seems pretentious, and
his calling the painters "silly" strikes a false note.
Even in such a loosely constructed paragraph as this the
flow of ideas should have smoothness, and the sudden shift
to the relationship of Bruce and Bernice seems forced. The
slangy phrases which end the passage have an artificial
ring in their reference to sensual feeling, and they do not
achieve the note of sophistication which Anderson wanted.

In Dark Laughter Anderson was forced back to the
old style almost every time he wanted to advance the plot,
yet he did not see that he was getting nowhere with his
new form. James Schevill quotes Anderson as saying that
he regarded such writing as "an attempt towards the beginning
of sophistication."21 Yet this new style, used so successfully
by a great writer like James Joyce, was to be only an unsuccessful, assumed mannerism when used by Sherwood Anderson. Dark Laughter represents Anderson's attempt to write "modern" fiction; it is painfully obvious that in his effort to be modern he lost touch with the themes that had brought him his greatest successes in writing. Perhaps he sensed that the story of the past was the one he must tell, for in 1926 Anderson wrote Tar, a fictional memory of his childhood. He called it a novel, yet, it is very close to autobiography. The material is similar to that treated in his most successful works, but the style is extremely casual and impressionistic. Schevill notes that Anderson's characteristic carelessness is carried to an extreme in this book. He seems to have done little rewriting, and jarring grammatical errors occur frequently in the book.22

For one who has read Anderson's previous works Tar offers little that is new. It is the story of a young boy as he grows up in a small town in the Mid-West. Echoes of Windy McPherson's Son and Winesburg, Ohio are particularly strong. The mother and father are again drawn from Anderson's own life, and the entire book suffers from the fact that the material seems old and worn out.

Irving Howe notes that the most obvious artistic flaw in the book is its lack of tonal unity.23 Anderson's perspective is uncertain and as he shifts from the point of view of the child to the point of view of an omniscient
narrator, the book loses the quality which could have made it unique. Anderson was able at times to capture the feeling of childhood and to sketch the boy's life in his own terms. However, the difficulty posed by writing entirely from the child's point of view was great, and Anderson often slipped into the role of the adult commentator, thereby producing discontinuities in the development of tone, themes, and character.24

Anderson describes Tar's first trip into the country strictly from the point of view of the child. The entire section seems curiously detached from the adult world and is perhaps the author's most successful attempt at picturing the child's world. The section begins by capturing Tar's feeling of awe at the vastness of the world outside the narrow confines of the neighborhood in which he lives. Then the child's reaction to being left alone in a farmyard is described. After his initial fascination with his immediate surroundings abates, Tar wanders into a neighboring field and observes the horses and sheep.

He decided it was time for him to go and eat grass. . . Getting down on all fours again he began crawling on the soft grass that grew near the fence . . . White clover grew among the grass and first of all he bit off one of the clover blossoms. It did not taste badly and he ate another . . . How many would he have to eat . . . before he grew big like a horse or even like a sheep. He kept crawling about, biting at the grass, but the edges of the grass blades were sharp and hurt his lips. When he had chewed a mouthful of the grass it was strange and bitter to the taste . . . Already he had eaten two, three, half a dozen mouthfuls of the grass. Now surely he was growing bigger . . . Something dreadful happened . . . In reaching for the last handful of grass he had captured a bee and had carried it to his lips . . . 25
When he is stung by the bee, Tar immediately forgets his dream of growing to be as big as a horse. He lies on his back, kicking and screaming and crying. All he wants is sympathy, but one of the farm men sees the grass stains on the child's face and laughs at Tar for eating grass. Anderson relates the child's distress sensitively, and the reader sees the incident as Tar does rather than as an adult like the laughing farmhand. If Anderson had not captured the emotions of the child and described the incident in this light, the entire episode might have become ridiculous. Because the author did not make any intrusive comments in an adult's voice, one accepts the reasoning of the child and perhaps feels vague stirrings of memory. Few adults are unable to recall the bitterness attached to a childhood dream which ended in ignominy.

Anderson was unable to maintain his communion with the spirit of childhood, though, and much of the novel has a ring of falseness about it. The integrity of the child's vision is marred again and again by the comments of the author who can explain the emotions of Tar only in terms of an adult.

One example of this incongruity is the comment made after Tar, now an adolescent, has seen a married woman meeting a man who was not her husband. He says, "Plenty Madame Bovaries in American small towns what!" (Tar, 230). This is obviously Anderson's feeling, and the remark is entirely too cynical and sophisticated to made by Tar Moorehead.
Another example of Anderson's intruding his adult views in the boy's thoughts occurs early in the book when Tar is worried about having to fight with a bully.

Now Tar had got himself into one of his thinking times, one of his questioning moods. One of the reasons it was fun to read books was that while you were reading, if the book was any good and had any good exciting places in it, you did not think or ask questions while you were reading. At other times—oh well. (Tar, 142).

Few six year old children are so tortured with self-doubt and are so concerned about problems in life that they must escape by reading. Anderson has described his own reactions to "bad times" in his life rather than a boy's reaction to problems.

Instances like the ones quoted above are numerous in Tar, and they more than offset the moments of authentic insight in the novel. These moments of insight give the material a momentary freshness, but this fades as the unity in tone is lost. Anderson's familiar inability to sustain his themes and tone between moments of insight is extremely obvious in this novel. This failure is traced once more to Anderson's faulty technique. In Tar the subject matter was congenial, but the loose style Anderson used led him to be even more careless than usual in his writing. This carelessness results in the breaks in tonal unity which mar the novel. One may speculate that Tar could have been a hauntingly true portrait of American boyhood if Anderson had been able to maintain the child's point of view of life, but this was not to be the case, and the novel stands as another failure for Anderson.
The years between the publication of *Tar* in 1926 and the appearance of *Beyond Desire* in 1932 were marked by Anderson's brooding over the decline of his creative powers. He now knew that his old themes were exhausted. *Tar* had shown just how time-worn they had become. In 1930 the country was in the midst of a social crisis, and Anderson turned to this situation as a source for new themes. He became interested in the labor movement and in Communism. These interests led to the publication of *Beyond Desire*, a work which according to Irving Howe "marked Anderson's nadir as a writer." 26

This novel relates the story of Red Oliver and his sexual attraction to the local librarian in a small Georgia town. This episode is followed by Red's drifting into a town where a group of Communists are striking and his being killed as the result of a completely unmotivated act of defiance on behalf of the Communists. The story of Red Oliver, rambling and lacking unity in itself, is interrupted by a sketch called "Mill Girls" which has very little relation to the rest of the novel. This section has been published separately at one time, is self-contained, and has within it the only organized and convincing writing in the novel.

In a letter to his brother Karl, Anderson partially explains why the structure of *Beyond Desire* is so loose. "I am trying to finish a long book. It is a kind of enlarged *Winesburg, Ohio*, a group of short novels really." 27 However the material in *Beyond Desire* is never successfully integrated
into a whole as was that in *Winesburg*.

*Beyond Desire* deals with exactly the kinds of relationships and themes which Anderson was least equipped to develop. His inability to write convincingly of the personal relationship between a man and woman influences his ability to develop the affair of Red Oliver and Ethel Long, the librarian, and his inability to deal with themes which demand intellectual understanding and articulation is extremely obvious in his treatment of Communism and the role of labor in the novel. Just as the failure to make Beat McGregor and John Webster think had ruined *Marching Men* and *Many Marriages*, Anderson's portrayal of a ridiculously inarticulate Red Oliver destroys the themes of *Beyond Desire*. Howe states that "the real problem of the book . . . is the absurd disproportion between the serious themes which disturb Anderson and the mental sluggishness of the character assigned to cope with them." Anderson himself could not, or at least would not, cope with these serious themes. When asked what the difference between Communism and Socialism was he replied, "I guess the Communists mean it." This muddled answer is typical of the kind of thinking that went into *Beyond Desire*, and the confusion of the author becomes obvious in the writing. In describing Red Oliver's first experience in a strike Anderson wrote:

There had been strikes in several Southern cotton-mill towns, strikes breaking out suddenly, upflarings from down below . . . Then one at Langdon, Georgia.

Red Oliver had been in that strike; he had
Anderson never indicates what the contradiction means. Does it mean that Red participated in body but not in spirit? Was his participation somehow involuntary? The reader never knows, thus the stylistic device used by Anderson is not only awkward but is also meaningless. The book is filled with such confused passages. Phrases dangle without support, sentences are jarring in their clumsiness, and the entire novel seems to be a jumbled confusion as the author exercises almost no control over his material.

In his next novel, Kit Brandon, Anderson had at last found a new set of themes about which he could write. In 1926 he had built a home in the country near Marion, Virginia. This was in the mountainous part of the state where the Blue Ridge range runs on down through Kentucky and Tennessee. Anderson felt that he had at last found a new set of rural folk, suffering from evils which came as a result of social changes around them. Here again were the village characters of Winesburg, Bidwell, and Caxton in a new setting. The mountain setting changed the people. They were more ignorant and poor than the people of the Mid-West that Anderson had known, but they were basically the simple people with whom Anderson felt such a bond of sympathy and understanding. Once more he felt an interest in the effects a changing society might have on these people.
Again he saw money used for evil instead of good. The miserable lot of the mountaineer who sold his bootleg whiskey to the gangs fascinated Anderson. He saw that the mountaineers got very little for their product and only ran the risk of being arrested while the gangs of bootleggers made the profit.

Anderson's interest in these mountain people forms the background of the novel, Kit Brandon. It is the story of the daughter of a Blue Ridge moonshiner who sees that the money is being made by the gangs of bootleggers. She marries the son of the head of one of the most powerful smuggling gangs, is miserably unhappy, and becomes a driver in her father-in-law's gang. She comes to feel that the wealth and excitement she has found are meaningless, and she leaves the gang but has no sense of direction. The novel ends with Kit knowing only that she must find a way to make contact with people and find some warmth and love in life.

The initial conception of the novel and the use of the search for meaning in life as its theme are both fully acceptable. Irving Howe sees Kit Brandon as a character who is closely related to F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby and John O'Hara's Gloria Wandrous. He says that though Kit Brandon is "not nearly so good a novel as The Great Gatsby nor nearly so skillful a novel as Butterfield 8" there are moments when Anderson fully perceives and expresses the "moral uncertainty in American life."31 This idea is expressed with
great skill and power in an incident in which Anderson describes a young man who has longed all his life to own a horse. He has never been able to afford one, so he has learned to imitate a horse’s movements.

The little dark squat man from the mountains had a shambling gait, going across an open moonlit place with the sight of a Southern mill town in the distance... electric lights showing down there. He could prance, trot, single-foot, pace. He could do the slow gallop and the fast gallop.

The town was in the distance... "We've got industries, we've got progress," I kept thinking irreverently as Kit told of her extraordinary evening.

There was a man... being a horse. He had caught just the horse rhythm...

"He was beautiful. He frightened you," she said. "He was so in earnest about it." He was determined, absorbed in being a horse—not a common horse but a highly trained, highly bred, aristocrat among horses.

Kit momentarily admires the man's skill and then begins to scream at him to stop. She realizes that this is somehow degrading, for Anderson is saying that the man is less as a man than he is when imitating a well-trained horse. The only thing he can do well is imitate a horse. He cannot be one, and he certainly can never own one. This scene is shown in relief against the industrial town, and Anderson brings in references to industry as he describes the man’s actions. Bud, the horse-man, is very close to the Winesburg grotesques, and the description of character mingled with references to the theme also recalls the Winesburg method. This incident is strikingly different from most of the rest of the book, but it illustrates the theme
beautifully. The position of man in relation to the horse skillfully points out the degraded morals of a society which cares so little for human beings. The values of this society are subtly inserted into the incident by having the mills form the background for the action.

Unfortunately, most of the incidents in the book are not nearly so well related to the theme. *Kit Brandon* suffers in general from a lack of unity in structure. Sections of loose, extremely impressionistic writing mar the structure, and numerous grammatical errors dot the pages. Contributing further to the flaws in technique is Anderson's use of the author himself as a narrator in the book. Irving Howe notes that "Anderson's intrusions in the opening chapters are effective in setting the novel's tone," but as they continue they destroy the continuity of the work and become definitely irritating as they fragment the book's structure.33

*Kit Brandon* shows flashes of the old objectively controlled, imaginative style, but Anderson's inspiration is sporadic, and he does not develop any connective tissues of narrative to hold together the isolated sections of good writing. An example of the kind of writing which fills in between the carefully developed and controlled scenes follows:

The moving lights, people hurled thus so easily, swiftly through space . . .
Story of the modern American world . . .
Significant of what was going on out there, across darkening fields . . . an age when man, in his concentration on one phase of life, the mechanical . . . much, oh much achieved . . . the automobile
perhaps the finest expression of it all . . .
"I want . . . (in a material) . . . "I want."
The overbalance, science gone a little insane.
O. K. Go on child-man. We'll see what you get out of that (KB, 213-14).

The above quotation is just as Anderson wrote it with nothing omitted. This kind of loose impressionism has little relationship to the rest of the novel even when read within context. It becomes obvious that Anderson was attempting to comment on the achievements and aspirations of the American people and was questioning the value of their goals. However, the writing is not well controlled. It intrudes upon the themes rather than amplifying them. It is particularly in passages like this that one sees a number of Anderson's old difficulties coming forth in Kit Brandon.

Anderson was haunted again by his limitations as a writer even though he had found a congenial setting and theme for Kit Brandon. In the development of Kit, Anderson is most successful early in the novel when he portrays her in the mountain environment. His attempt to illustrate her growing sophistication when she joins the bootleggers is far less convincing. The same problems he had faced in his first novel, Windy McPherson's Son, came back to plague him in Kit Brandon, his last novel. The development of Kit strangely parallels that of Sam McPherson. The description of her home and the portrayal of the mountain people, such as Bud the horse-man, is handled quite well by the author. Anderson was able to make Bud come alive as his understanding of the character and his problems reveals itself in the vivid
characterization. However, the author begins to lose his grip on the characters and themes when he moves Kit to the city and surrounds her with wealth and luxury. Anderson still wrote most successfully when he dealt with the small town or country people whom he understood so well.

In considering Kit Brandon as a whole, one sees that the novel is basically sound in conception, but because of Anderson's refusal to make even the most obviously needed corrections in the rough draft of the novel, structural faults exist which do great damage to the book. This again is a familiar fault in Anderson's writing, but it is more disturbing to note what it does to a novel like Kit Brandon with so much potential for artistic success than it is to see its effect on a poorly conceived novel like Beyond Desire.

In Kit Brandon Anderson presented his flashes of insight just as they must have occurred to him. He did not seem to realize that these moments should have been explained to the reader and related to the themes of the novel. Only in rare moments can an author rely upon sheer emotional appeal to summon up the proper responses in his readers. He must use mind as well as feeling to convey his ideas. Anderson failed to do this in Kit Brandon. The novel is much more carefully designed than is Beyond Desire, but it falls far below such a work as Winesburg or even Poor White. If Anderson had reworked his material and eliminated the roughness in grammar and style, the novel would be far more readable. But Sherwood Anderson was working under a new
limitation—that of a tired and defeated spirit. As his gift had begun to wither, he had lost the will to write, and Kit Brandon illustrates the difference between work done with inspiration and that done as a chore. Anderson wrote his last novel in an attempt to prove that his talents were not dead, and while it does reveal an occasional gleam of the old flame, it also reveals a gift which was not strong enough to survive the effects of a dying spirit.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this treatment of Sherwood Anderson's novels has been to establish a relationship between the unity of the works and their artistic success. In order to set forth this relationship, Anderson's treatment of character and theme has been used as a basis for evaluation of the unity of the novels.

One of the most important influences on Anderson's work is the role which his personal experience played in the shaping of his novels. By examining the influence which Anderson's personal experience had upon the development of his characters and themes, one is able to learn a great deal about the forces which affect the unity of the novels.

When Anderson could tell what is essentially the story of his own life, he often achieved unity in the development of both characters and themes. The autobiographical element is particularly strong in the first half of *Windy McPherson's Son*, the early chapters of both *Marching Men* and *Poor White*, and throughout *Winesburg, Ohio*. These sections of work and the entire novel, *Winesburg*, are among the most unified and artistically satisfying which Anderson ever wrote.

He dealt most knowledgeably with the small town
environment, and his portrayals of the small town people in *Winesburg*, *Windy*, and *Poor White* are done with sympathy and understanding. Relying upon his own experiences, Anderson wrote with clarity and insight about the problems of small town life. He captured the image of the rural Mid-West and sounded the depths of human experience on the basis of his own experiences in the world he understood. Yet this was not enough for him. Sherwood Anderson was always striving to go beyond the limitations which his personal experience placed upon him. In *Many Marriages*, *Dark Laughter*, and *Beyond Desire* he was working with material which he did not fully understand, and this resulted in lack of unity in the novels. This disunity is seen both in his development of characters and themes and in his attempt to turn to new subjects and a different style of writing.

Development of women figures seems to have been Anderson's most difficult problem in characterization. His personal life with its four marriages reflects the difficulty which he had in understanding women. The development of female roles became a problem in all of the novels except *Winesburg* and particularly in *Windy*, *Poor White*, *Dark Laughter*, *Beyond Desire*, and *Kit Brandon*.

Anderson's attempts to break into new subjects are also part of his striving to go beyond the bounds of his personal experience. The use of subjects and themes not directly related to his own life is accompanied by a change in style in *Dark Laughter* and *Beyond Desire*. Old themes
receive a new stylistic treatment in *Tar*. In attempting to change his style, Anderson abandoned his simple, objectively controlled narrative manner for a loosely impressionistic style which he adopted after having read works by James Joyce. Anderson never fully succeeded in mastering this form. He was also influenced by the ideas he found in the writings of D. H. Lawrence. The result of these outside influences is seen in Anderson's turning away from the subjects which he knew and understood and in his abandoning his natural style.

*Winesburg* is his highest artistic achievement. Its subtly designed form and carefully drawn characters endure the rigid tests of literary criticism. In *Winesburg* the author worked with a full understanding of his subject to produce a unified work of art.

After *Winesburg* Anderson's creativity is less imaginative and sure. Too often the artist wrote without full understanding, and the novels are marred by breaks in unity. Thus it is seen that Anderson's most artistically satisfying work, *Winesburg, Ohio*, is the one in which he worked within his limitations to produce a unified novel. Lack of unity in development of character and theme prevents the other novels from being equally successful artistic achievements.

Alfred Kazin's comments on the place of Sherwood Anderson in American literature seem to be a singularly appropriate conclusion for a study of Anderson's novels, for Kazin sees the fragmentary and disunified quality of
Anderson's work as its central feature. He also relates Anderson's personal characteristics to the fragmentary nature of his work.

... it is a terrible thing for a visionary to remain a minor figure. Where other minor figures can at least work out a minor success, the visionary who has not the means equal to his vision crumbles into fragments. Anderson was a minor figure as he himself knew so well; and that was his tragedy. For the significance of his whole career is that though he could catch, as no one else could, the inexpressible grandeur of those special moments in experience, he was himself caught between them. Life was a succession of moments on which everything else was strung; but the moments never came together, and the world itself never came together for him.
NOTES

INTRODUCTION


5Whipple, p. 128.


CHAPTER I


3Howe, p. 253.

4Howe, p. 253.


7Wagenknecht, p. 314.
Letters of Sherwood Anderson with an introduction and notes by Howard Mumford Jones in association with Walter B. Rideout (Boston, 1953), pp. 81-82.

Letters, pp. 81-82. Anderson did revise the last chapter of WMS and a new edition was published in 1921. However, he does not take the children back to their mother. Little is done to improve the novel actually. He does emphasize the fact that there is still conflict in Sam about what he should do in life, but he does nothing to develop a more unified work.

CHAPTER II


Calverton, pp. 111-112.

Oscar Cargill, Intellectual America (New York, 1941), pp. 677-678.


Gelfant, pp. 101-5 passim.

Gelfant, p. 105.

Sherwood Anderson, Poor White (New York, 1920), pp. 4-5. Hereafter cited as PW.


Howe, p. 124.

Howe, p. 126.

Howe, pp. 129-130.

Howe, pp. 129-130.

Howe, p. 130.

Howe, p. 126.

Howe, p. 130.

Calverton, pp. 112-3.
CHAPTER III

1 Irving Howe, Sherwood Anderson (New York, 1951), p. 93.
2 Howe, pp. 93-95 passim.
3 Howe, p. 97.
4 Howe, pp. 98-101 passim.
6 Howe, pp. 105-6.
9 Howe, pp. 101-8.
10 Rideout, p. 25.
11 Howe, p. 106.
13 Rideout, p. 27.
14 Rideout, p. 27.
15 Rideout, pp. 27-8.
16 Rideout, p. 28.
17 Howe, p. 107.
19 Howe, pp. 107-9 passim.

CHAPTER IV

Anderson devotes one very short chapter to McGregor's explanation of the purpose of the marchers. It contains one paragraph and a short song called "The Marchers." This song is the only thing McGregor ever wrote about the movement, and it is supposed to be the final explanation of his ideas. The song is as follows:

"They ask us what we mean.
Well, here is our answer.
We mean to go on marching.
We mean to march in the morning and in the evening when the sun goes down.
On Sundays they may sit on their porches or shout at men playing ball in a field
But we will march.
On the hard cobblestones of the city streets and through the dust of country roads we will march.
Our legs may be weary and our throats hot and dry, but still we will march, shoulder to shoulder.
We will march until the ground shakes and tall buildings tremble.
Shoulder to shoulder we will go—all of us—
On and On forever.
We will not talk or listen to talk.
We will march and we will teach our sons and our daughters to march.
Their minds are troubled. Our minds are clear.
We do not think and banter words.
We march.
Our faces are coarse and there is dust in our hair and beards.
See the inner parts of our hands are rough And still we march—we the workers." (Men, pp. 287-8).

And this is all Anderson ever said about the movement. He was unable to decide what should come of the marching.

Howe, pp. 84-5.

Irving Howe has discussed the possibility that some of the aspects of the Populist Movement influenced the writing of Marching Men. Anderson himself stated that his experiences in the Army prompted his visions of the power of a group of marching men. Many critics have noted that some of Anderson's inspiration was also a part of the fanaticism which arose in Nazi Germany. However, this theme never reappeared in Anderson's work, and it seems quite safe to assume that he had no real notion of favoring any kind of totalitarian movement.

Howe, p. 140.
8Howe, pp. 138-9.
9Howe, pp. 180-1.
10Howe, p. 181.


13Howe, p. 184.

14In a letter to Roger Sergel Anderson says that Many Marriages is a book written with a feeling of purity and innocence. He notes how terribly misunderstood the book has been. Anderson himself stated that he had failed utterly to communicate his ideas to the readers.


17Letters, p. 390.

18Howe, p. 186.

19Howe, pp. 185-6.

20Sherwood Anderson, Dark Laughter (New York, 1925), pp. 22-3 passim. Hereafter cited as DL.

21Schevill, p. 211.

22Schevill, p. 235.

23Howe, p. 209.

24Howe, p. 209.


26Howe, p. 232.

27Schevill, p. 296.

28Howe, p. 232.
29 Howe, p. 219.


31 Howe, p. 233.


33 Howe, p. 234.

34 James Schevill in his book *Sherwood Anderson* (Denver, 1951) relates that Roger Sergel, one of Anderson's friends and literary advisers, was visiting him when the proofs of *Kit Brandon* arrived. He offered to correct the galleys when he saw that Anderson was not going to do it, but Anderson packed up the uncorrected proofs and sent them back to the printer. He could not make himself go through with even the fundamental revisions.

CONCLUSION

LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY SOURCES

Books


Articles


Frank, Waldo. "Winesburg, Ohio After Twenty Years," Story, 19 (September-October, 1941), 29-33.


