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Sherwood Anderson's Theory of Art.

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S THEORY OF ART

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

Sherwood Anderson's philosophy is based on a pantheistic vitalism and corresponding intuitive "love of life" which functions on two levels: as primitive rapport with the rhythm and harmony of life processes and as humanitarian compassion. The Puritan heritage of materialism and industrialism, he believed, had suppressed the vitality of life in America and had resulted in personal psychic distortion as well as fragmentation and disorder in social experience. The function of art is the restoration of instinct and emotion in a civilization which subordinates human vitality to impersonal structures of materialism.

Anderson's theory of art—he is concerned only with American art—is focused in three basic concepts—life, love, and beauty. He begins with the premise that aesthetic value is dependent on vitalist value. Where vitality thrives Anderson finds beauty: where it is suppressed (which is his typical theme), he finds ugliness—but also an "odd" beauty in the pathos of privation. The sense of beauty therefore arises from appreciation of life, either as joy in vital fulfillment or poignant recognition of the unfulfilled potential for life where it is inhibited, the latter resulting in the muted tone of Anderson's grotesquerie.
For the writer, style is the approximation in language of the vital expressiveness attained by the painter in the color and texture of a canvas. In terms of style words have a dual function: cognitively, they communicate the "essence" of the subject as felt by the author; and, through their impact as sensory objects, they endow prose with vitality and surface beauty. Form is likewise defined in vitalist terms. Objectively, form exists as the rhythm and symmetry of life hidden beneath chaotic factual reality. Subjectively, it is manifested, first, as the artist's intuition of order in experience and his simultaneous realization of the intuition in a work of art where it organizes and manifests beauty and, second, as the viewer's or reader's corresponding discovery of life and beauty evoked in the artifact. Realized form is an illumination of the coherence of a work of art, which brings together artist, reader, and character (usually a grotesque isolated and crippled by emotional privation) in a shared intuition of the coherence of life. And the communion thus established through sympathy for life constitutes a start toward restoration of vital contacts and harmonious order in social arrangements. The "purity" of feeling--i.e., fidelity to one's authentic reactions to life as it actually is--required of the artist who evokes form in experience is, Anderson believed, perhaps the only basis of moral value in the meaninglessness of modern life.

Anderson conceived beauty in humanistic rather than aesthetic terms--as a function of vitality. His humanitarian
impulses also led him to a concept of the artist as "lover," whose sympathetic imagination can transform human frustration and express it as beauty. At every point aesthetic value is authenticated by human value. Hence the moral significance of aesthetic form, which is inseparable from form in human arrangements. Only that art which comprehends life in its disorder and crudity can be pure and moral, Anderson argues, and likewise only a value system which recognizes the crudity of life and does not gloss it over in the interest of false idealism can have moral validity. Hence also Anderson's religious definition of the role of the artist who, because his materials are human lives and his objective the salvation of men, is seen as a priest and a prophet of personal and national renewal. The artist seeks nothing less than the regeneration and reordering of American life.
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM OF THE ARTIST IN AMERICA

Like Mark Twain and Henry Adams before him Sherwood Anderson was disturbed by the cultural effects of industrialization in the West. He feared no cataclysms of uncontrolled technology such as those suggested in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court and The Education of Henry Adams and he was little concerned with European civilization, but his career was determined to an unusual degree by preoccupation with the spiritual condition of American life. The discontent began while he was a small-time business executive and when later he became a writer, his spiritual preoccupation became an artistic preoccupation as well.

American Culture and the Puritan Spirit

Anderson recognized in modern American life certain forces—all of them, he thought, products of Puritanism—which frustrate human development and result in impotence, both psychic and sexual. He believed that craft and art are intimately connected with instincts and passions which are largely suppressed in a technological civilization. "When you take from man the cunning of the hand, the opportunity to constantly create new forms in materials," he writes in
A Story Teller's Story, "you make him impotent. His man­
ness slips imperceptibly from him and he can no longer give
himself in love either to work or to women." As will later be­come apparent, this frustration of the male creative in­
stinct is a pivotal idea in Anderson's philosophy.

Anderson clarified his understanding of American cul­
ture through study of well-known critics. In A Story
Teller's Story he remarks that Waldo Frank and Van Wyck
Brooks had decried the grip of Puritan thinking on American
life and had shown that industrialism is an outgrowth of Puri­
tanism—that "having renounced life for themselves, the Puri­
tans were determined to kill life in others." From his own
largely intuitive insights, from Frank and Brooks, and from
Henry Adams, whom he had read at least by 1918, Anderson
drew the ideas for an attack on Puritanism as the great ob-

1 Ed. Ray Lewis White (Cleveland: Case Western Re­
serve Univ. Press, 1968), p. 146. All subsequent references
are to this edition, hereafter cited as STS.

2 P. 273. In a footnote Editor White identifies
Anderson's references as: Brooks' The Wine of the Puritans
(1909) and Frank's Our America (1919). Around 1916-17 Ander­
son began a long friendship with a group of New York intel­
lectuals who published The Seven Arts. Besides Brooks and
Frank, the group included Paul Rosenfeld, who became one of
Anderson's closest friends and edited his memoirs.

3 Letter 37, Dec. 1918, Letters of Sherwood Anderson,
ed. Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout (Boston:
Little, Brown, 1953), pp. 42-43. Hereafter cited as LSA.
The letter also suggests that by 1918 Anderson had read
America's Coming of Age, in which Brooks analyzes the American
mind as a compound of the moral idealism of Puritanism and
the practical opportunism of the business ethic, with the
result that Americans tend to look at success in making a
living as the central end of life ([New York: Huebsch, 1915],
pp. 9-10, 17-18).
struction to spiritual and cultural fulfillment in America. He attributes the spiritual sterility of the United States to three Puritan impulses: pietism, materialism, and industrialism.

Pietistic suppression of vital instinct obviously is a factor in Anderson's theory of American impotence. In The Modern Writer he contrasts the English Protestants who formed the American mind with the Southern European immigrants who built up the American physique. In A Story Teller's Story, with the same opposition in mind, he argues that a true American culture would come from the masculine vigor and "sensual" love of life manifested by the pioneers of the Midwest rather than from the ideality of the Puritans with their fear of the flesh. A true civilization is a product of workmen's hands. Insistence on direct contact of the hands with materials--"love of surfaces"--is axiomatic in Anderson's thought. Blood, flesh, physical engagement are primary: personally, fulfillment comes through sensual and creative contact with the physical world outside oneself; culturally, it is physical creativity--not precept and ideal--that defines a civilization (pp. 61-62, 77). Henry Adams had observed that in Catholic Europe where the Virgin signifies creative force, the aesthetic impulse flourishes; but in Protestant America where the Virgin has value only as sentiment, the artistic impulse has always been feeble. In previous ages sex was strength;
under Puritanism it is sin. The sexual energy of the Virgin, which has created four-fifths of the world's noblest art, Adams wrote, is unknown to Americans, who may know something of fact but nothing of feeling. American civilization has replaced the power of the Virgin with the power of the Dynamo, and American art, because it is sexless, is also lifeless.  

Although he certainly borrowed images and motifs from Adams, Anderson seems to have arrived by his own intuition at conclusions very similar to those Adams had reached by historical analysis: that sexuality is life and its absence is death, and that suppression of sensuality in America has produced a sterile culture. In Anderson's view, the Puritan denial of the senses and emphasis on material success has resulted in the American's loss of capacity to feel life as a whole, and restoration of that loss is the theme of Anderson's Many Marriages, which plainly reflects Adams' influence. In this bizarre novel a middle-aged businessman named John Webster abandons his wife, who recognizes sex only for purposes of childbearing, to go off with a more convenient secretary. On the night of his departure he strips cere-


7 New York: Huebsch, 1923. Rex Burbank believes it is to Adams rather than to D. H. Lawrence that Anderson is indebted for his fundamental concepts of vitalism and sexual primacy (Sherwood Anderson [New York: Twayne, 1964], p. 110. See also STS, p. 275).
monially before an image of the Virgin and, standing nude before his wife and teen-aged daughter, declares in a long monologue that his purpose is to liberate the daughter like himself from the mother's sterile world.

Anderson also held Puritan inhibition responsible for much of the psychic distortion of American life. In *No Swank* he speaks of "a queer sort of separation from the life about us" that dams up the "flow of life." As I shall subsequently show, Anderson conceives this separation in a vitalist as well as a social sense, but here I refer to social isolation: people, he says, want to draw close to each other but they cannot. The "unlived life" is a basic theme of his fiction. An individual such as Clara Butterworth in the novel *Poor White* hungered for understanding and love but is cut off from vital relationships with others by inability to communicate personal feeling. In the tale "Unlighted Lamps" Dr. Cochran on the day of his death realizes the incompleteness of a life of locked-in emotion, of having failed to express his affection to his family. Anderson's well-known "grotesques" are embodiments of this reticence: the picture of Alice Hindman silently reaching out to touch a man's coat, clutching a bed pillow to her breast, and then going naked

8 *No Swank* (Philadelphia: Centaur Press, 1934) pp. 22-23. For the "vitalist" aspect of separation, see below, pp. 54-55.

9 1920; rpt. New York: Modern Library, 1926. All subsequent references are to this edition.

into the street in search of another "lonely human" to em­
brace is actually a sensitive and sympathetic statement of
the strength of the hunger for intimacy. 11

Another factor of American sterility is the prevail­
ing philosophy of materialism. The American character,
Anderson believed, is being corroded by the commercial cli­
mate. He saw few Americans doing what they really wanted
with their lives: most felt obliged to seek economic success
and, having attained it, experienced the emptiness of having
devoted themselves to the means rather than the ends of life
(STS, p. 234). His first novel was inspired by this discon­
tent. In Windy McPherson's Son a newsboy fulfills his am­
bition to become an industrial tycoon, then senses the futil­
itv of the American dream. 12 Sam McPherson's troubled soul
is, of course, a reflection of the author's state of mind
when he wrote the novel prior to his celebrated walk-out from
the paint business he managed. He left his business career
convinced that wealth is personally destructive: the mer­
chant spends his life working for security but, when he
achieves it, "something" stops and begins to rot. The whole
business enterprise with its little "cheating" and "robbing,"

11 "Adventure" in Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres
(New York: Viking, 1966), pp. 112-120. All subsequent ref­
erences are to this edition, hereafter cited as Winesburg.

published 1916. All references are to the revised edition,
hereafter cited as Windy.
Anderson thought, is a "universal whoredom."\textsuperscript{13}

It was the influence of industrialism on American life, however, which most concerned Anderson. He saw mass production contributing to impotence by stifling creative expression. He feared the psychic and neural effects of factory discipline which demands of man's imperfect spirit a machine-like perfection.\textsuperscript{14} In pre-industrial times, he remembered, craftsmen had a feel for their work, a direct control of their tools which is now lost (Modern Writer, pp. 26-27). The factory denies the creative experience which is all-important to the male—"the feel of a thing growing into a life of its own under [the] fingers." When this creative expression is denied to man, "something" within is betrayed and only the shell of the man is left (STS, p. 325).

Impotence in the American worker is the subject of Perhaps Women, a collection of Anderson's essays on the machine age. Thomas West summarizes their argument as follows: machines do more than abolish a man's sense of craft; they destroy manhood by their very efficiency, before which the machine operator feels inferior. The converse also holds


true: the man who derives a vicarious sense of power from the machine deserts his own power of manhood.\textsuperscript{15} To live, Anderson says elsewhere, the human must involve himself in the creative process of life, either through organic reproduction (as in woman) or through the shaping of materials with the hands (\textit{STS}, p. 146).

Furthermore, Anderson saw that industrialization contributes to impotence through the social fragmentation it fosters. \textit{Perhaps Women} shows how the textile industry tends to separate men who in previous times had been linked in common enterprise: under the factory system textile workers are completely unknown to those who produce the cotton. The striking thing about the factory age, Anderson says, is "the loss of a sense of common interest." "The machine has become a wall between man and man."\textsuperscript{16} In \textit{Poor White}, which is Anderson's most comprehensive treatment of industrial disassociation, Bidwell, Ohio, has been an intimate village where people live as a family under an "invisible roof" until industry moves in, creating class distinctions and rivalries which break the community apart. The neighborhood carpenter becomes a hard-driving contractor with no time for casual friendliness. The harness-maker, unable to compete with the new factories, fails in his craft and reacts with violence, and a former carpenter's assistant, when he becomes a factory

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 29.

foreman, withdraws self-consciously from contact with the workers (pp. 46-47). Loss of community under industrialization is a favorite Anderson motif.

The Impotence of the Artist in America

Few American writers have been so conscious of their American identity as Anderson; he defined himself as man and as artist in relation to the American environment. His aesthetic likewise grows out of reflection on the position of the artist in American culture, a theme which insistently recurs in his autobiographical and critical works as well as in his earlier fiction. In a sense he had grown up pondering the problem of the artist as it was embodied in his father, Irwin Anderson, a harness-maker who, partly by technological change and partly by instability of character, had been reduced to painting houses as a livelihood. To Sherwood, however, he was the prototypal American artist--a storyteller and would-be actor, a man who, like Sherwood, lived by dreams. But Americans of the late nineteenth century were dreaming of building railroads and factories and since Irwin did not do any of these, he was "outlaw in his community" (STS, p. 23). Sherwood Anderson understood that in developing their new country Americans believed they were building for the glory of man. Personal happiness and fulfillment were to come from economic success and industrial progress, and if anyone betrayed these goals, he betrayed the Cause--the American dream. As Anderson knew, there is no place in such
a society for the artist because he clears no land and builds no railroads.\textsuperscript{17}

In his biography of Sherwood Anderson, James Schevill concludes that the central question of Anderson's work is: "what is it in our national life that has tended to inhibit the immense latent power of our artistic expression?"\textsuperscript{18} The answer given in Anderson's criticism is that American art is inhibited by the same environmental forces that inhibit life in America, and the theory of aesthetics he advances constitutes an effort to counteract those forces and restore vitality to American experience.

He believed that New England pietism by its denial of sensual expression has suppressed the vitality of art and made the American artist a servant of morality, unable to deal either with unpleasant or sexual aspects of experience. Puritanism has imposed on the American writer the formula of a moralizing "plot," which falsifies life by representing success as a reward for virtue.\textsuperscript{19} The formula is objectionable because it violates Anderson's cardinal aesthetic principle of "truth to life":\textsuperscript{20} it subverts the integrity of the writer by requiring him to manipulate characters to fit our


\textsuperscript{18} Sherwood Anderson (Denver: Univ. of Denver Press, 1951), p. xi.

\textsuperscript{19} Modern Writer, p. 8, and STS, pp. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{20} Letter 270, LSA, p. 135.
ideas of how they should act when, in fact, people hardly ever act as we think they should (Modern Writer, pp. 22-23).

Moreover, the profession of the arts, especially literature, has become an industry in America. Anderson notes that the short story had been standardized and was mass-produced in accordance with formulas designed to meet popular demands, with the consequence that the writer's creativity was suppressed by a discipline not much different from that of the factory. Editors with an eye to the market were training "trick" writers who produce an illusion of ordinary life by dwelling on realistic surface details but omit the "honest reactions to life" that Anderson considers the sine qua non of art. The publishing industry, he says, has twisted writers out of their "natural function as artists." American writers—and American artists in general—have had to ignore such universal human attributes as sex hunger and greed: "the basic stuff of human life that all real artists . . . have handled all through the history of writing has to be thrown aside. The writer is perpetually called upon to seem to be doing something while doing nothing at all." For the writer there is "a perpetual tragedy of unfulfillment": he learns the formula, the technique of creating sensations

23 Notebook, p. 145.
of suspense and amusement but fails to touch "the reality of human lives" (Modern Writer, pp. 19-20).

Finally, the American artist's career is formed by a materialistic standard of success. Since Americans tend to think of that which succeeds as good, Anderson says, "the man whose books sell by the hundreds of thousands is looked up to with respect. If success is the standard . . . , how can we do anything else?" (Modern Writer, pp. 17-18). Though the criticism is sound, it is derived more from personal experience than from considered judgment. Anderson's early-and best-writing did not sell: in 1938 he recalled that for fifteen years after publishing Winesburg, Ohio he had been compelled to make his living by means other than writing and added that his stories still were not found in the high-paying, popular magazines.\(^{24}\) Doubtless, much of his animosity for commercial magazine publishing was born of professional frustration.

As an epilogue to A Story Teller's Story Anderson wrote a sketch which epitomizes his conception of the plight of the artist in America. A writer of "slick" sports stories confides to Anderson that after fifteen prosperous years of turning out moralizing success stories he has come to realize that he has compromised himself as an artist. He wants now to write stories of a kind forbidden to magazine writers--stories, Anderson says, not of the "surface life"

\(^{24}\) Letter 342, LSA, p. 405.
but of a "more subtle life going on below the surface." The problem is that social status and financial security are standing in the way of his being an artist: "he wanted to grow up, to let his fanciful life keep pace with his physical life, but . . . the magazine editors would not let him."

"He lives in America, where as yet to mature in one's fanciful life is thought of as something like a crime" (STS, pp. 340-41).

The writer Sherwood Anderson and the writer of sports stories represent opposite sides of the dilemma which preoccupied Anderson during the formative stages of his career, the problem that stirred him to moral reflection and led to the theory of art which is the subject of this study. On one side is the sports writer who has surrendered aesthetic integrity for success and respectability: on the other is Anderson, whose commitment to the "morality" of art made impossible the exploitation of popular taste which—so he thought—is necessary for recognition as an artist in America. The problem of the artist, as he sees it, is much like the problem of the craftsman. The heritage of Puritanism—an unrealistic pietism, a compulsion to industrialize and standardize, success conceived in economic terms—has rendered the American artist as impotent before his materials as the factory worker before his machine.

Anderson's personal dilemma is aptly documented by his correspondence, through which—say Jones and Rideout—runs a persistent theme:
What is the writer's true self, his dream self or the economic unit that he is? What is the relation of imaginative work to the world of bargain and sale? How much shall an artist sacrifice to the market place? Can an honest man split himself in twain, one half of him creating after his instincts and the other half becoming a literary carpenter at contractor's labor?

Anderson knew that the problem posed by these questions had to be resolved if twentieth-century America was to achieve a meaningful expression of art. His worth as an American literary figure lies in the honesty with which he faced the problem both in criticism and fiction: his answer is a theory which defines art as the expression of the artist's authentic reactions to life and a small body of fiction in which he plumbs "the reality of human lives" perhaps as profoundly as any American artist ever has.

In the chapters following I propose to formulate Anderson's aesthetic theory as a product of an acute consciousness of the problems of the artist in a materialistic culture. I shall attempt to describe the basis and terms of his approach to art, to explicate the principles of the theory and indicate their implications for the art of fiction as he saw it, and finally to define what he conceived to be the function of art and the role of the artist in American life--for it was in the interest of restoring the humanity of American life that he valued art at all.

25 Introduction, LSA, p. xiii.
CHAPTER II

ART AND IMAGINATION

The focus of Winesburg, Ohio on aspects of life traditionally ignored in earlier fiction led some critics to call Anderson a realist, but he disclaimed the label and in so doing raised questions of the interrelations of life, imagination and art that constitute the basis of aesthetic theory. Ironically, his preoccupation with imagination suggests that he may be more romantic than realistic. Because Anderson's doctrine of imagination provides important insights into the principles of his aesthetic, this chapter is devoted to an analysis of the role of imagination in the artistic process.


as Anderson understood it.

Scattered among his books, essays, and letters are many statements which reveal Anderson as a penetrating though unsystematic thinker, especially in the area of psychology. He approaches art psychologically—from a preoccupation with questions of perception and the subjective nature of reality. His conception of art and the imaginative process is inseparable from an intuitive comprehension of life. For him, imagination is more than a source of aesthetic vision; it is a mode of living: "all the art of life perhaps . . . consist[s] in just letting the fancy wash over and color the facts of life" (Many Marriages, p. 203). Subjective experience is his authority and he never seems to question its sufficiency for his wide-ranging generalizations.

In this chapter I shall bring together his principal ideas on the relationship of imaginative and objective experience—organized, first, as a dualism of "worlds" or "lives" and, second, as a corresponding dualism of selves. Then I shall discuss Anderson's use of these concepts in defining the work of the artist, specifically of the storyteller.

Two Worlds

Anderson divided life into two realms of experience: the subjective and the objective. The subjective realm—the world of "fancy" or "imagination" (sometimes "dreams")—is

Anderson ordinarily makes no distinction between
opposed by an objective realm which Anderson calls the world of "fact" or "reality."
Often he substitutes the term "life" for "world" and freely interchanges the two. Although his language seems to designate one world or life within man and another outside, Anderson actually is concerned not with ontological but with psychological reality: the two "lives" are "lived within one body" (STS, p. 59). He characteristically thinks in metaphor.

There is what we call the world of reality and there is the somewhat unreal world of the imagination. These roads do not cross each other but the road of the imagination constantly touches the road of reality. It comes near and it goes away. All of us are sometimes on one road and sometimes on another. I think that we are all living more of our lives on the road of the imagination, or perhaps I had better say in the world of imagination, than in the real world.

In spite of drifting metaphors Anderson's meaning is clear. All men experience both a factual and an imaginative life, the imaginative constantly modifying and conditioning the perception of the factual. Anderson says that the central idea of A Story Teller's Story is

that one's fanciful life is of as much significance as one's real flesh and blood life and that one cannot tell where one cuts off and the other begins... .

In fact, so strongly has the purely fanciful lived fancy and imagination but uses the terms interchangeably. For an exception see Robert Hart's analysis, below, footnote, p. 38.

4 MHI, p. 44. By "reality" and "real world" Anderson usually signifies the external, physical world, but his usage is not entirely consistent. Here he concedes that the imaginative world is "somewhat unreal," but in other statements he assigns primary importance to the imagination and seems to credit its complete reality (see below, pp. 18 and 44).
in me that I cannot tell after a time which of my acts had physical reality and which did not. Years later he was still insisting "always the imagined world is more important than what we call 'reality'"\(^5\) and "man's real life is lived out there in the imaginative world."\(^7\)

Any effort to reduce the insights of so intuitive a thinker to a strict logical system is doomed to failure, but the subject of imagination is so significant in Anderson's aesthetic that his observations on the subject, though often obscure, simply cannot be ignored. Moreover, his critical statements when interpreted in the light of relevant passages in his fiction yield the outlines of a surprisingly coherent set of principles which I believe are operative in his literary method. Although the conclusions of any analysis based on inference and extrapolation will necessarily be open to challenge, they can also be illuminating when related to statements in which Anderson's meaning is clear. At any rate, such a method is the only one available for expanding the meaning and intention of Anderson's more obscure exposition.

The most comprehensive description of the life of fancy is a puzzling, semi-allegorical section in *A Story Teller's Story*, which, except where otherwise noted, is the basis for the following discussion. To allow the reader to

\(^5\) Letter No. 79, *LSA*, p. 100.


\(^7\) Letter No. 370, *LSA*, p. 436.
comprehend the passage as a whole, it is given here in full.

To the imaginative man in the modern world something becomes, from the first, sharply defined. Life splits itself into two sections and, no matter how long one may live or where one may live, the two ends continue to dangle, fluttering about in the empty air.

To which of the two lives, lived within the one body, are you to give yourself? There is, after all, some little freedom of choice.

There is the life of fancy. In it one sometimes moves with an ordered purpose through ordered days, or at the least through ordered hours. In the life of the fancy there is no such thing as good or bad. There are no Puritans in (that life). The dry sisters of Philistia do not come in at the door. They cannot breathe in the life of the fancy. The Puritan, the reformer who scolds at the Puritans, the dry intellectuals, all who desire to uplift, to remake life on some definite plan conceived within the human brain die of a disease of the lungs. They would do better to stay in the world of facts—to spend their energy in catching bootleggers, inventing new machines, helping humanity—as best they can—in its no doubt laudable ambition to hurl bodies through the air at the rate of five hundred miles an hour.

In the world of the fancy life separates itself with slow movements and with many graduations into the ugly and the beautiful. What is alive is opposed to what is dead. Is the air of the room in which we live sweet to the nostrils or is it poisoned with weariness? In the end it must become the one thing or the other.

All morality then becomes a purely aesthetic joy—what is ugly must bring aesthetic sadness and suffering.

Or one may become, as so many younger Americans do, a mere smart-aleck, without humbleness before the possibilities of life, one sure of himself—and thus may remain to the end, blind, deaf and dumb, feeling and seeing nothing. Many of our intellectuals find this is the more comfortable road to travel.

In the world of fancy, you must understand, no
man is ugly. Man is only ugly in fact. Ah, there is the difficulty!

In the world of fancy even the most base man's actions do sometimes take on the form of beauty. Dim pathways do sometimes open before the eyes of the man who has not killed the possibilities of beauty in himself by being too sure.

Anderson's interest centers in the world of fancy: presumably his readers are well informed about the world of fact, which in "Man and His Imagination" he characterizes as confused, disorderly, and lacking in purpose (p. 70).

The feature of the fanciful world which he seems to value most highly is its freedom from ugliness and evil. "There is no such thing as good or bad," and "no man is ugly. Man is only ugly in fact. Ah, there is the difficulty." But for the student the difficulty is in the next sentence, the meaning of which—I propose to show—is the clue to the entire passage. "In the world of fancy even the most base man's actions sometimes take on the form of beauty." (Italics added) The difficulty is: what is meant by the word "base"? It often connotes low moral quality, but the immediate context—especially the preceding paragraph—seems to dictate a meaning related to beauty and ugliness. On the other hand, the sentence begins a new paragraph and, considered in isolation, would likely be taken in a moral sense. But the problem is compounded by Anderson's insistence on

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8 STS, pp. 59-60. Throughout this dissertation, where quoted material has already been bracketed, I have changed the editor's brackets to parentheses. Brackets left in the text are my own.
beauty in the predication of both sentences of the final paragraph, which seems to connect the latter paragraph again to the idea of the former and round out the aesthetic context. Since the last two paragraphs of the discussion are dominated by the idea of beauty, the meaning Anderson attaches to "base" must then depend on how he uses the word "beauty."

The principle of transmutation predicated by the sentence in question is a premise that underlies Anderson's discussion of both aesthetic and moral values, which—it is worth noting—he sometimes juxtaposes in the excerpt. If we assume that Anderson's statements are premised on subsuming negative aesthetic values and all moral values under beauty, then he may be using the term "base" ambiguously, vaguely and suggestively (as was his frequent practice), to connote here a generalized inferiority or low esteem. Since Anderson himself has not made his meaning clear, it seems best to follow his lead and not insist here on a precise definition for the word, but assume as an hypothesis that the aesthetic and moral aspects of the imagination are functions of a single principle. The hypothesis can then be tested against the argument developed in the passage and against other appropriate comments in his criticism and fiction. I propose to follow this procedure.

The question of the meaning of "base" aside, the sentence clearly states that actions of base men or base actions—whether the man or the action is base does not affect
the operative principle--under certain conditions become beautiful. Under what conditions then? Following immediately is the statement "Dim pathways do sometimes open before the eyes of the man who has not killed the possibilities of beauty in himself by being too sure," which fortunately provides some clarification. Earlier Anderson has condemned the smart-aleck as being sure of himself and "without humbleness before the possibilities of life," seeing and feeling nothing. Anderson's characterization of the smart-aleck is a virtual paraphrase of his characterization of Puritans, Philistines, and intellectuals (self-assured in their desire to remake the world in accord with a plan formed in their brains), who are equally sure of themselves and lacking in humbleness. "Smart-aleck" may be considered a general term for all those inhabitants of the world of fact who are cocksure, "without humbleness." The phrase "possibilities of beauty" in the final paragraph is an unmistakable rhetorical echo of the earlier "possibilities of life." The parallel phrasing, common context, and coupling of both phrases to the idea of being "sure" suggest that Anderson in some way links beauty and life. The same connection is made in Poor White, where Anderson declares that Clara Butterworth's emotional isolation shuts her off from "the beauty of life." Now if we assume a connection between possibilities of life and possibilities of beauty and relate the meaning implied by that

assumption to Anderson's characterization of Puritans and intellectuals, then the inability of Puritans and intellectuals—smart-alecks—to recognize the value of human life is linked to their failure to see possibilities of beauty in human life, particularly in flawed and inferior men.

In "Man and His Imagination" Anderson uses the phrase "humbleness before life" to characterize the quality he admires in the work of Turgenev and Dreiser, and he opposes the fictional method of Sinclair Lewis to that of Dreiser. Lewis' method is to show people up, expose their pretensions and absurdities, stand above characters and judge them by abstract standards; but in Dreiser's work one feels a "tenderness for all life," a humbleness which is "a kind of love for other humans," a surrender of self in sympathy (in the literal sense of "suffer with") and the realization that one shares their weaknesses. The same "humbleness before life" enabled Turgenev, an aristocrat, to participate with such feeling in the lives of the serfs that his stories touched the hearts of other aristocrats, including the Czar's (pp. 42-43). It is probable that the love and tenderness for life Anderson associates with humbleness before life is also the intended meaning of humbleness before the possibilities of life, which, as has been indicated, is linked by close parallels to the negatively stated not killed the possibilities of beauty. Anderson proceeds imaginatively, not bothering with formal deductions; but, when considered together, the interlocking meanings of the three parallel
phrases indicate a clear commitment both to a philosophy of humanism and a related humanistic theory of beauty. For Anderson, art always involves a human situation: a story teller, he writes, "must always be concerned, first of all, with human life" (MHI, p. 40).

If a semantic connection between possibilities of life and possibilities of beauty is assumed, then in the statement "pathways do sometimes open before the eyes of the man who has not killed the possibilities of beauty in himself by being too sure" Anderson must be saying there are possibilities in every person—even in the most unattractive or inferior—if viewed through eyes of imaginative compassion. The phrase "being too sure" would then refer to the self-assured smart-aleck, who has killed in himself all sensitivity to beauty and become blind, deaf, unfeeling. Such an interpretation is supported by Anderson's preoccupation with the theme of strange beauty revealed unexpectedly in ordinary experience. 10

Acceptance of Anderson's doctrine of tenderness for all life as the condition for the transmutation of the actions of base men provides a coherent principle for interpreting an otherwise almost unintelligible exposition which apparently is intended as a statement of theory, and the entire concept, so interpreted, falls in line with Anderson's

10 Letter 343, LSA, p. 409; Notebook, p. 24; and "Mr. J. J. Lankes and His Woodcuts" in Nø Swank, pp. 21-29. Cf. John Webster's alertness to "the poetry of the actual" in Many Marriages, p. 148.
tendency to favor intuition over intellect. Pathways to the discovery of beauty in ordinary or inferior lives are open to those who, like Turgenev and Dreiser, set aside moralistic and intellectual absolutism and through imaginative sympathy discover the beauty of human life. Such understanding underlies Anderson's Winesburg stories, which he says he wrote as "one who could not be smart about life" but knew that "love, understanding" was what was most wanted by all people. His grotesques are revealed in an aura of moving beauty, a beauty like the sweetness of the rejected apples in "Paper Pills." The gnarled, twisted apples left by the pickers look unattractive, but all their sweetness has gathered in one place and only "the few"—the humble—know their sweetness (Winesburg, p. 36).

Beauty thus conceived is a humanistic rather than an aesthetic value. The beauty of a man or of his action is judged not by an abstract ideal but by recognition of the human need for expression and communion. Consequently, as Anderson says in Memoirs, beauty can be found where the rationalists of the world of fact would not recognize it: among the aged, the tired, the defeated—inasmuch as these may be seeking fulfillment. Hungering for "understanding, love, and friendliness," Clara Butterworth tries to break through the walls that shut in her "youthful desire to reach

11 Letter No. 342, LSA, p. 404.
12 P. 557.
a hand out of the beauty in herself to the buried beauty in others" (Poor White, pp. 147, 181-82). The vital, emotional center of life is here identified with beauty. It is usually seen in a person reaching out for emotional contact: Anderson occasionally refers to beauty of this kind as "odd" or "strange"—the strained, poignant beauty that for him sometimes flashes out from a human spirit struggling against emotional privation. As a young woman, Elizabeth Willard is always seeking "some hidden wonder in life," always putting out her hand to take hold of some other hand. Twenty years later, when dying in Dr. Reefy's embrace, she appears as a lovely girl projected, as Anderson says, from the husk of the tired-out woman (Winesburg, pp. 224-28).

Often such beauty involves aberration. In the story "Respectability" the ugliest man in Winesburg is transformed into a strange incarnation of beauty as he tells George Willard his story of frustration. Out of the acute disappointments of his marriage, Wash Williams had come to hate women and life. But as he talks, his sympathetic listener forgets the bloated, purple face and perceives instead a comely young man with a note of beauty in his voice. In "Hands," Wing Biddlebaum is a schoolmaster driven from town because his compulsion to express himself through the caress of his fingers has been mistaken for homosexual activity. Anderson characterizes him

13 Winesburg, p. 125. Cf. Kate Swift's transformation when she makes tentative advances to awaken George Willard's mature emotions (Ibid., pp. 163-64).
as "a poor little man beaten, pounded, frightened by the world into something oddly beautiful" (Memoirs, p. 352). He is last seen kneeling on the floor, his bird-like hands picking crumbs from the floor and carrying them to his mouth. But Anderson's gentle insight into man's need to express his love transfigures Wing Biddlebaum into the radiant image of a kneeling priest whose expressive fingers seem those of "the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary (Winesburg, p. 34).

Many Marriages—a novel given over to free play of fancy—is Anderson's most explicit statement of the relationship of beauty and the instinctive life. In a passage which shows Anderson's debt to Freudian thought and as well perhaps to Lawrence's dark God of passion, John Webster imagines a deep well of silence to be found within everyone, a deposit of unexpressed emotions and unheard words. This well of festering instincts was covered by a heavy iron lid, which, though secure by day, trembled during the dreaming hours of night (Many Marriages, p. 155). When the god "Life" entered and tore the lid off, a transformation occurred.

Dark hidden things festering in the well, came out and found expression for themselves, and the miracle


was that, expressed, they became very beautiful. There was a cleansing, a strange sort of renewal within the house [body] of the man or the woman when the god Life had come in.16

The hidden things are what Anderson calls "the basic stuff of life" which the magazine fiction of his day ignored--the sex hungers and "the sometimes twisted and strangely perverted desires for beauty in human beings" (Notebook, p. 145).

There is a possibility of moral ambiguity in the situation of Wing Biddlebaum, but the adultery of Webster and his secretary, Natalie Swartz, is plainly immoral by conventional standards. And, clearly, Webster's soliloquy on the beauty of expressed instinct is intended to sanctify sensual and sexual acts (apparently including immoral ones) which promote a renewal of life. The body is "cleansed"--the word connotes purification and more than once in the novel sex is associated with religious ritual.17 Webster glories in the cleanliness and

16 Many Marriages, p. 217. Cf. Lawrence's Richard Somers who wants to serve "the God from whom the dark, sexual passion of love emanates, not only the spiritual love of Christ." (D. H. Lawrence, Kangaroo [1923; rpt. New York: Viking, 1960], p. 205.) In Many Marriages Webster has repudiated the spiritual love (a "meaningless" word) he and his wife had tried without finding happiness and now affirms physical love and the flesh completely (p. 189). Irving Howe discusses Anderson's debt to Lawrence, particularly in Many Marriages and Dark Laughter. By 1921 Anderson was reading Lawrence and acknowledging him as his literary master. Irving Howe believes Lawrence--not Freud--was the imaginative influence on Anderson during this period: in Lawrence Anderson found a vision of passionate life, a morality which affirms the body, and a Weltanschaung which shatters social convention (Sherwood Anderson [1951; rpt. Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966], pp. 181-82). Rex Burbank disagrees, holding that Henry Adams was the real influence, especially with respect to Anderson's attack on Puritan repression and machine civilization (p. 110).

17 See especially Bk. II, Ch. III, pp. 85 ff.
sweetness of Natalie's body, which he calls her "house," a cleansing accomplished by opening the doors of her body. Natalie has cleansed herself with "prayers and devotion, a simple-minded devotion to the interests of another" (pp. 41-42). In a similar reverie Webster envisions "an amazingly beautiful thing": if all men, women, and children should come onto a great open field and publicly "commit the most unforgivable sin of which they were conscious, what a great cleansing time that would be." Many Marriages amounts to a narrative gloss on Anderson's idea of imaginative transcendence as stated in A Story Teller's Story, which was published a year later than the novel. The "animal" act which to Webster's wife is loathsome, foul, and shameful, in Webster's vision of the sacredness of the flesh is made beautiful. "Dark hidden things festering in the well"—aesthetically disagreeable and, in the context of illicit sex, immoral—are under the aegis of Life exalted. Commission of unforgivable sin results in great cleansing.

Anderson's fiction gives ample support to the hypothesis that "base" in the allegorical excerpt includes both ugliness and immorality, as Anderson implies in his double

18 P. 33. The nature of this sin is not clear, but the context of Webster's thought indicates an act of sex which would offend Puritan standards. Elsewhere Anderson refers to "an unforgivable sin, the sin of sex" ("Out of Nowhere into Nothing," in Triumph, p. 259).

19 Many Marriages, pp. 163 and 186.

20 Ibid., p. 102.
declaration that in the life of fancy no man is ugly and there is no good or bad.

It is important to note, however, that Anderson views aesthetic and moral values differently. He recognizes the aesthetic norm in the imaginative life but holds that what may be seen as ugly in fact is, on being taken into the life of fancy, converted into beauty. But he recognizes no moral norm, for in the fancy there is neither good or bad. The implication is that with the exclusion of Puritans and moralists, questions which would have moral import in the world of fact are in the world of fancy either ignored or assimilated to values relevant to imagination, i.e., life and beauty. Although Anderson's expression is anything but definitive, the nature of the opposed values is clear enough when he says,

In the world of fancy life separates itself with slow movements and with many graduations into the ugly and the beautiful. What is alive is opposed to what is dead. Is the air of the room in which we live sweet to the nostrils or is it poisoned with weariness? In the end it must become the one thing or the other (STS, p. 59).

Ugliness, death, poison are opposed to beauty, life, and sweetness: in the world of fancy all life becomes either one or the other. Then Anderson goes on to say,

All morality then becomes a purely aesthetic joy—what is ugly must bring aesthetic sadness and suffering,

by which he implies an assimilation of moral to aesthetic value.

In his little allegory Anderson seems to say that in
the world of fancy—which is to say, the story teller's imagination—all actions are judged by their value for vital human experience. Life-releasing acts issue in beauty while life-suppressing acts produce ugliness. Some actions considered ugly by conventional standards but which promote vital health take on the form of beauty, but essential ugliness—which results from the suppression of vitality—does not survive in the imagination.

The underlying principle is that beauty is a function of vitality. In the imagination actions which fulfill the instinctive and sensual nature can be neither ugly nor immoral. The artist, then, is not concerned with conventional morality, for art assimilates moral value to aesthetic value, and beauty itself is not an absolute but in Anderson's humanistic aesthetic has meaning only in terms of the fulfillment of the possibilities of life.

Anderson admits that the life of fancy and the life of reality can become confused in the consciousness (see above, pp. 17-18). William Sutton concludes, in fact, that Anderson himself throughout his adult years could not and did not separate the reality from the fiction of his life. Nonetheless Anderson makes a clear theoretical distinction: the life of fancy "feeds upon the life of reality but it is not that life—cannot be" (MHI, p. 67).

21 Exit to Elsinore, Ball State Monograph No. 7 (Muncie, Ind.: Ball State Univ., 1967), p. 21.
Two Selves

Although Sherwood Anderson's speculation about a duality of worlds is actually a matter of psychology rather than cosmology, he also devoted much thought to the psyche itself, which was his real interest. We find in fact that he analyzed the self into an objective-subjective duality which complements the vision of two worlds. To New York psychologist Trigant Burrow, Anderson proposed the writing of an "autobiography of a man's secondary self, of the . . . fancies that float through his brain, the things that appear to have no connection with actualities."\(^{22}\) In so defining a "secondary" self, which is conscious of fancies, Anderson implies a "primary" self (though, to my knowledge he does not use this term) conscious of actualities, and it is clear that the inner and outer "lives" he discusses in A Story Teller's Story refer to the same division of consciousness implied in the letter to Burrow (See STS, pp. 107-08).

Jon S. Lawry explains that Anderson considered the secondary self--composed of imagination and dreams--to be the center of a man's significance and the source of the essential truths that can be known about him. Anderson believed, he writes, that "every person lives a secret life, the life of his imagination, and that alone is real. . . . The reality of each of us consists of our hopes, fears, desires, and dreams. It is not what we do and act, but what

\(^{22}\) Letter 42, LSA, p. 50.
we feel and think that composes us." It is the dream self, the "hidden life" so prominent in Anderson's tales, that defines a man, for "men do not live in facts. They live in dreams" (Memoirs, p. 26).

In describing the dual selves, Anderson does not discard the traditional tripartite psychology of body, mind, and spirit. The primary and secondary selves, both faculties of consciousness, are rough equivalents respectively of mind and spirit—the outer self or mind being conscious of actuality, the inner self or spirit (imagination) being conscious of fancies apparently unconnected to actuality. Of course, he refers also to body but does not include it here, one might assume because he is discussing faculties of consciousness. However, in another context which I will later indicate he does attribute a form of cognition to the body.

Anderson in fact made several formulations of psychology. In A Story Teller's Story he describes the body as a house inhabited by from two to twelve unidentified "personalties," all apparently vying for control. The fancy sweeps the body off on wild adventure, or the mind restrains the body and lays down laws. Then physical desire, the "lustful self," takes charge (STS, p. 200). Evidently in terms of his metaphor, physical desire is not identical with body but...
is one of several faculties dwelling in it. Later in the same book Anderson cites another triad of human functions: the body, the mind, the "sensual faculties" (STS, p. 236). In this grouping the fancy is missing, the body is a faculty, but seemingly the sensual faculties, like physical desire above, are separate from the body. Anderson makes no effort to reconcile his various schemes of psychology or to relate them to the classical divisions of psychology to which he continues occasionally to allude. The evidence is that he emphasized the aspects of consciousness that were convenient at the moment and never seriously deliberated any system of his own. In the case of the duality of selves which is our present concern, he simply imposed his subjective-objective analysis on the classic categories: he substitutes imagination for spirit and continues to speak of mind and body. But in every case the imagination is sovereign, controlling all other faculties, however they are divided.

For example, however objective its originating stimulus may be, perception is largely a function of imagination. Anderson does not think anyone knows how much "our point of view, and in fact, all our touch with life, is influenced by our imaginations." He theorizes that once he has met a person he can never again see that person. The imagination has immediately modified the original perception and so affected all subsequent perceptions that it is impossible to see the person again as he appeared on first impression (MHI, p. 49). Objective reality therefore is known only as conceived and
presented to consciousness by the imagination. It may be, Anderson says, "that all the people we know are only what we imagine them to be" (MHI, p. 65). We may say that if in Berkeley, man is a prisoner of his mind, in Anderson he is a prisoner of his fancy. Thus, according to Roger Sergel, the new acquaintance does not exist as a fact but as a part of one's dream of that person. Sergel explains that Anderson believed "our dreams about each other are . . . perhaps the most important matter of our lives: that the importance of the man who sits across from you in the streetcar is above all the dream you have of him . . . ."24 The subjectivist trend in this reasoning is obvious but Anderson stops short of thorough-going idealism. As I shall later show, he calls for tests of fancy against objective reality, presumably by means of the outer self which is connected to actualities.

The imagination is also the agency of social intercourse, which is carried on between "secondary" selves.

Nearly all of our intercourse with each other is through the imagination. If I take you as a friend, it is because you feed my imagination. If I get high on some woman, it is because she does that or because I can exercise my own imagination by court ing her.25

Love is a function of the secondary self, but Anderson does not say that imaginative experience can be wholly satisfying, i.e., that a love relationship can be consummated imag-

The theory of the fancy does not deny the reality of flesh and senses and these are necessarily involved in vital fulfillment. What Anderson says here is that the sensory and physical faculties are stimulated and ruled by the imaginative faculty—but not superseded by it.

In addition, Anderson claims for the imagination a cognitive role of supplementing and occasionally overriding mental processes to apprehend truth in situations where intellect fails. There are times when one gets lost trying to find his way by thought on a difficult road and at a critical moment becomes distracted and cannot act. Such a time for John Webster was his hesitation to enter the door of Natalie's "house," when "too much thinking had upset him." At such times, Anderson thinks, a man must simply rely on the fancy to carry him through. The context of sexual release in Many Marriages may seem to suggest that Webster is guided by instinct, but we have already seen that Anderson viewed the imagination as sympathetic to the instinctive life and here Webster has from the first been guided by fancy in his adventure. Furthermore Anderson directly attributes Webster's action to

a man's fancy, the creative thing within him [which] was in reality intended to be a . . . supplementary and healing influence to the working of the mind. Men sometimes did a thing they called "going it blind," and at such moments did the least blind acts of their whole lives. The truth was that the mind working alone was but a one-sided, maimed thing (p. 200).

26 Above, pp. 26-30, 35.
"Going it blind" demonstrates how close Anderson is to the position of D. H. Lawrence, whose credo is "a belief in the blood, the flesh as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels . . . is always true. The intellect is only a bit and bridle." Yet Anderson's intuitionism is less radical than Lawrence's, for in Many Marriages, as elsewhere, fancy is tied to reality through the mind. Anderson sees the fancy not as a substitute for mind but as a supplement to its limited abilities: the fancy is a "healing influence" leading to a state of psychic health unattainable by mind alone. It is therefore a means to a more complete experience of life. Nevertheless, a strong intuitional bias and distrust of reason is also apparent in much of Anderson's work, and his assertion of the supremacy of imagination is one result.

Imagination and the Artist

The artist or story teller works primarily in the world of fancy, yet Anderson is careful to balance the two worlds by insisting that the artistic process begin in factual reality. A story begins with an objective occurrence. When some person has an interesting experience the story


28 See below, pp. 46-48, for the therapeutic value of the imagination in curing the "disease of self." Although both ideas concern psychic health, in that instance Anderson is discussing the function of the imagination in the artistic process; here he treats the imagination in relation to other human faculties.
teller may seize on that person as the basis of a character for a story (MHI, pp. 52-53). Anderson himself was extraordinarily sensitive to story "hints": "a single glance at a human face seems to tell a whole life story . . ." (MHI, p. 50). Thus a little drama he observed at Chartres provided the flash of beauty that became a story. He had watched an American young man with two young women, one French, the other American. The young man was flirting with the French girl while the American girl, obviously his wife or sweetheart, was pretending not to notice. She came out of the church, wiped her eyes and went back in to join the others. The end of the drama Anderson did not know, but it was living material for his fancy to play with. "All tales presented themselves to the fancy in just that way. There was a suggestion, a hint." The writer gets only a fragment from real life, the fancy supplies the rest (STS, pp. 309-311). But since a story deals primarily with imagination, the fragment of reality is shifted from the factual to the imaginative plane where the hint is assimilated and transformed.  

29 MHI, p. 44.  

30 Fancy and imagination are frequently used as loosely synonymous terms in Anderson's criticism as they are in the discussion summarized here, but Robert C. Hart believes that in discussing the craft of fiction Anderson makes a distinction. The fancy, Hart finds, is the elaborating faculty which invents circumstantial detail used to expand the gist of a story into a full narrative—usually a novel. Such writing is conscious and involves editing and revision. The imagination, by contrast, is more nearly equivalent to the unconscious, which nurtures an impression over a long period until it is grasped as an artistic whole and written—usually as a short story. Hart remarks the general similarity to
As an example of the transformation Anderson cites the heroine of his last novel, *Kit Brandon*. He began with a real person, but when the woman became his heroine, his imagination gave her a new appearance and new characteristics: the whole point, he says, is that she became "completely another person . . . [who] no longer lived in the reality of her own life, but had a new life in this imaginative world . . ." (*MHI*, pp. 56-67). The artist's imagination begins with a fact and gives to it a new reality or "essence" which, as Anderson says, the best of journalistic realism with its concentration on pictorial surfaces would miss (*MHI*, p. 52).

Art therefore is not reality but a product of the imagination, which draws its material from reality. "Art is art. It is not life," Anderson declares, but he thinks there is a great deal of confusion on this point. The writer may create fanciful people of such credibility that "the imaginative life becomes to the reader for the time real life. . . The imaginative world . . . has become . . . more alive than the world of reality can ever become. [The writer's] very sincerity confuses." Critics, also confused, call the writer a realist and his work "reality" (*MHI*, pp. 68-69).

Coleridge's distinction of fancy and imagination but notes that Anderson makes no formal distinction. See Robert C. Hart, "Writers on Writing: The Opinions of Six Modern American Novelists on the Craft of Fiction," Diss. Northwestern 1954, pp. 204-08. Hart uses the term "subconscious," but I use "unconscious," which is the term Anderson favored. In any case, the terms are used as interchangeable synonyms throughout this dissertation.

31 *MHI*, p. 67.
But art is not reality. Reality, Anderson concedes, can give a thrill—a man being killed by an automobile can stir the emotions—but no one confuses the event with art (MHI, p. 66). Therefore, Anderson concludes that the writer who tries to record direct observation of life is not an artist, because he limits himself to the world of fact and distrusts his imagination. He records conversations, but in books people do not talk as they do in real life. The so-called realists, he continues, are not actually realists in the accepted sense. Madame Bovary never existed in fact but only "in the imaginative life of Flaubert and he managed to make her exist in the imaginative life of his readers." So, in Anderson's opinion, any art which attempts a picture of life is necessarily bad art, though it may be good journalism (MHI, pp. 69-71). Art and reality, fancy and fact, are never to be confused.

Anderson does not mean, however, that the world of the story teller has no reality. Imaginary characters have a reality within the story; that is, they must be allowed to act according to their own natures and not be distorted and manipulated for the sake of illustrating an idea or theme. The premise of Anderson's theory of literature is that the story must begin with and be governed by character: characters must not be invented simply to act out a theme and be sacrificed to it. As Anderson puts it, if the writer does tricks with his characters, tells lies about them, or "sells them out" as human beings to make them conform to a pre-
conceived plot, he is not writing a story but a romance (MHI, p. 71). Since he begins with character, Anderson rejects the story built around a plot or designed around a theme promoting good citizenship or moral living (STS, p. 255). If, however, a writer will let his characters live, the story will create its own reality. There is a reality to story people. "They may, in the beginning, be lifted out of life, but . . . once become a part . . . of the story life, realism in the sense in which the word is commonly used no longer exists" (MHI, p. 71).

What then is the relation between physical reality and art?

The imagination must constantly feed upon reality or starve. Separate yourself too much from life and . . . you are not an artist. Something dries up, starves for the want of food. Upon the fact in nature the imagination must constantly feed in order that the imaginative life remain significant. (MHI, p. 57)

The artist must constantly nourish his imagination on fact if his art is to remain significant, but his art is separate from reality—it comes from within himself. So John Marin painting and Henry Fielding writing a novel are not picturing reality: "they are striving for a realization of something out of their own imaginative experience, fed to be sure on the life immediately about. A quite different

32 Anderson does not define the term "significant," but he seems to use the word here in the ordinary sense of "meaningful"—art which has not lost touch with ordinary human experience. See Notebook, p. 198, and below, p. 45.
matter from making an actual picture of what they see before them" (MHI, p. 67). Since in art significant reality is not a visual impression but an expression of imagination, Anderson's theory must be considered expressionistic. He complained that one writer was too dependent on his notebook and "seemed to have very little to give out of himself" (MHI, p. 66). The effect of great painting comes, Anderson believes, from the revelation of "the secret inner world" of the painters; the true painter reveals "all of himself in every stroke of the brush." In the same way, a writer such as Balzac reveals "the universality and wonder of his mind" (STS, p. 261). And it was the expressive technique of the photographer Stieglitz which won Anderson's admiration: Stieglitz had used a machine to express "what was sound and sweet in himself" (Notebook, p. 152-53).

To Anderson the substance of art is the expressed feeling of the artist for the essence or intuitive value of his subject—not faithfulness to objective fact. His parents figure in the reminiscence Tar: A Midwest Childhood, but Anderson admits that his brothers failed to recognize his picture of their father and mother. The objection was beside the point, he explains, because "they were my father and mother as I felt them." He had not tried to depict them photographically but to seize their essence, to register their particular "tone and color in words as in notes of music" (Memoirs, pp. 21-22, italics added).

Anderson liked to say that the story teller is neces-
sarily a liar; that is, he is not faithful to the facts of his characters because he must be faithful to their dreams (Memoirs, p. 26). Since men do not live in facts, the artist is obligated not to factual but to imaginative truth. This truth is doubly subjective: it is a truth of the imaginative life of the character, which Jon S. Lawry calls "the central meaning of the man--his desires, hopes, fears, beliefs," and it emerges from the story teller's consciousness, his feeling for the character he creates. The writer, Anderson argues, must honestly face and record the working of his own mind before he can understand and depict the workings of other minds; he must trust "with childlike simplicity and honesty the truth that lives in his own mind." That truth is the artist's intuition of "essential" reality.

In his Memoirs Anderson confesses that statements he had attributed to a certain colorful fisherman were largely invented. He had freely embellished the account, but if the man had not said some of the things attributed to him, then he should have said them, Anderson writes, because they express the "quality" of the man (pp. 25-26). Of his method


34 In Memoirs Anderson reverses the principle: thinking of imaginary people is a means to self-knowledge. See below, p. 48.

35 "More About the 'New Note,'" Little Review, 1 (April 1914), 16-17.
of writing *A Story Teller's Story* he says he has made no pretense of making a record of fact, but has tried to "be true to the essence of things" (*STS*, p. 76). If in the book he has lied in exaggerating the showmanship of his father, he has surely not lied about the essence of his father's life (*STS*, p. 286). Paul Rosenfeld says with respect to this principle that Anderson believed "experience is more important than action, that the great events of life are connected not with external circumstances but with the development of consciousness," and cites this fact as the basis for the "air of ideality" and intangibility which envelops Anderson's great stories. Most readers would agree that his most distinguished work is marked by a sense of essence or ideality. Anderson himself often pointed to "Hands" as one of his best tales and said that it came not out of reality but out of "that strange more real life . . . that is the only reality" (*Memoirs*, pp. 237-38).

If a corollary of an essentialist viewpoint is preoccupation with the universal, it should not be surprising to find in Anderson—as we do—a focus on general experience. Anderson's essences often distill universal human traits. Although his writings have a local or regional identity, he searches out universal significance in every situation. In a letter to a publisher of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, in fact, Anderson repudiates regional art, explaining that

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an expression of art is to him important only when it has universal reference.\textsuperscript{37} The great strength of the Winesburg figures—everyday small-town people—was, he felt, their universal relevance to men around the world. He valued the Winesburg tales for their focus on "this common thing we have, so essentially alike, deep down, the same dreams, aspirations, hungers" (\textit{Memoirs}, p. 553). Although the Winesburgers are usually taken as examples of abnormality, Charles Walcutt believes that they actually demonstrate the surprisingly wide range of the normal, that Anderson has penetrated to the heart of bizarre and fantastic, but universal experiences.\textsuperscript{38}

Yet for all of Anderson's emphasis on its primacy, the validity of the imagination for art is dependent on content furnished by factual experience. The writer whose imagination floats free from objective reality may be a lyrical poet but he is not an artist, because art is nourished by fact. Anderson advises the artist to stay close to his own experience; by accepting the limits of his experience he converts the limitation into a virtue which enables him to produce significant work.\textsuperscript{39} He admits that he had been victimized by an uncontrolled imagination in writing his early novel \textit{Marching Men}, the thesis of which he had seen worked out to its conclusion by the Fascists. In that instance, he had

\textsuperscript{37} Letter 338; \textit{LSA}, p. 400. \textsuperscript{38} P. 161.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{MHI}, pp. 67-68. See Schevill, pp. xiv-xv.
tried to think "too big," to write of social movements on a grand scale, but when he returned to "life on a smaller scale" he felt he was on solid ground (MHI, p. 62). The solid ground of course was Winesburg, Ohio; he had found his medium and "thinking small" became a conviction of his philosophy and his art.

By 1941, when he published "Man and His Imagination," Anderson had seen the political and military effects of large-scale thinking which ignores the worth of the individual; many world leaders had "pretty much chucked human beings" by fitting them into abstract categories. In response, Anderson wanted to direct the imagination again to the little world where the individual lives—"the little life, in streets, on farms, in towns, in little frame houses and cities." He felt a need for "working in the small, trying to save a little of the feeling of man for man." Love, which Anderson defines as the feeling of man for man, is therefore the basis of his social philosophy; we will later see that it is also the attitude which controls the theory and method of his fiction.

Finally, Anderson believed that the imaginative process has therapeutic value—primarily for the artist but also apparently for anyone who can use his imagination. There is a "disease of self" which destroys instinctive bonds with


41 Letter 392, LSA, p. 459.
other people, and the cure is imaginative projection. Even the non-artist can, by putting imagined figures in backgrounds and situations like his own, lose his sense of self and gain comfort and "understanding." If, for example, you are a business man devoted to promoting self, you lose interest in life; but if you learn to lose yourself in others, life becomes interesting, your imagination comes alive and the world seems renewed. Anderson means that the method of the imaginative artist, when used by anyone, effects a surrender of self through empathy with others (humbleness before life), which results in a restoration of psychic health.

The "understanding" which results from projection is double. First there is understanding of others. Imaginative writing (or imaginative therapy for the non-writer) by redirecting sympathy from self to other personalities encourages an emotional identification with other people which, in Anderson's psychology, is a form of love. "In the end the real writer becomes a lover." When psychological and emotional dynamics come into play in this manner, writing may be a way of life—"of making love"—of relating to others. And the reader should be able to experience a similar though perhaps less intense enlargement of sympathies. Anderson says that when he reads the work of another author, he expects to

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42 MHI, pp. 64-65. See also Notebook, pp. 23-24, and Letters 141 and 366, LSA, pp. 167 and 443.
43 Letter No. 399, LSA, p. 464.
44 Letter No. 343, LSA, p. 409.
broaden his vision, increase his capacity to feel, and add to his understanding of others. 45

Secondly, there is self-understanding. By thinking about other people, even imaginary persons, Anderson was surprised to discover things about himself. And from that experience he derived a basic aesthetic principle: man cannot truly know himself except through knowing others. 46

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that Anderson's interpretation of man is chiefly psychological: the essence of a man is his imagination. Because the dream life tells more of truth about a man than his factual life, Anderson's interest is always in the subjective and his stories characteristically explore the hidden life.

Ultimately he conceives beauty in humanistic rather than aesthetic terms—as a function of vitality. In art the key to this relationship is the imagination, which enables the artist to enter sympathetically into the lives of others and to recognize the potential for life-fulfillment in all persons, even the least admirable. Ugliness and immorality are viewed as manifestations of the privation imposed by intellectualized, Puritan society (from which most men, in one way or another, seek to escape) 47 and, conversely, an act of 45 Ibid.

46 Memoirs, p. 20. See below, pp. 89-90.

47 Intellectualism may not ordinarily be linked with materialism, but Anderson links the two and opposes both. The world of fancy excludes intellectuals who would remake life on a plan conceived in the brain. (See above, p. 19). Anderson values not intellect but intuition.
vital human fulfillment—even a grotesque act—is *per se* deemed an act of beauty. Beauty, therefore, is inherent in vitality and realization, and human imperfections—i.e., the aesthetic and moral distortions observed in those deprived of instinctual fulfillment—are transfigured by a sensitive artist into a beauty born of compassion.

The artistic process itself (which Anderson conceives in terms of story telling) begins with a fragment from factual life, which becomes art only after it is transformed into imaginative expression true to the essence—not the appearance—of the fact. Stated another way, art is the imaginative expression of an artist's intuition of his subject. And since the story teller's art always begins in a character situation and its values are human values, Anderson believes that art should be confined to the small-scale world of ordinary men living ordinary lives. In this sense art is democratic: it springs from a feeling of man for man. Therefore the artist sets aside abstract concepts of human value and proceeds instead from an intuitive appreciation of the individual's need to fulfill himself as a creature of feeling and instinct.
CHAPTER III

AN AESTHETIC OF FEELING

Although the imagination plays a major role in Anderson's theory, he conceives it to be instrumental to love—which motivates and shapes his philosophy and his aesthetic. "All art that has vitality must have its basis in love," he maintains (Notebook, p. 83).

A writer who makes love the basis of aesthetics is necessarily thinking of love in more than one sense, and, in fact, we find several manifestations of it in Anderson's criticism. In its most basic sense, Anderson conceives of love as intuition; indeed, Anderson's thinking about philosophy and art is grounded in intuited values even though he seldom uses the word "intuition." In this dissertation I use "intuition" broadly to refer to any immediate and direct cognition apart from inferential reasoning, and especially that which is felt or apprehended on the emotional levels of consciousness.

Since Anderson's philosophy is derived largely from affective value, I shall begin this chapter with an examination of the several intuitive relationships which Anderson designates by the term "love." In the remainder of the chapter I shall explore the intuitive nature of his approach to
Fundamental to Anderson's philosophy is a primitive sense of "life" in nature and a corresponding sympathy which he calls a "love of life." In this respect Anderson is as romantic and pantheistic as Wordsworth or Whitman. With some equivocation which I shall later explain, he implies a spiritual concept of matter, recognizing a universal life principle, a "flow of life," in all nature. This vitalist concept has obvious affinities with Bergson's "élan original de la vie" which pervades the evolutionary process and gives rise to living bodies, a theory Bergson expounded in *Creative Evolution* (1907). It is perhaps even more closely related to Whitman: the "leaves" of *Leaves of Grass*, Roger Asselineau says, symbolize the universality and eternity of life. "Whitman constantly perceives the presence of this current beyond the inner appearances of material things and translates it into poetry. . . . The same life flows through . . . all animate and inanimate things." For Whitman, Asselineau continues, "God was essentially Life, an irresistible and indestructible force pulsing through the universe interconnecting all things, immanent even in apparently lifeless materials."\(^1\)

What is said here of Whitman's mysticism also characterizes the nature mysticism which underlies Anderson's con-

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ception of art. In Anderson's view art affirms life: the vitality of art comes from "love of life"—of "life as it is in the stones, trees, skies, seas, people" (Notebook, p. 83). It should be noted that life here is conceived as inherent in animate and inanimate nature alike. In Anderson's novel Dark Laughter, for instance, the Negroes are primitives in tune with life in matter; they have an "unconscious love of inanimate things lost to the whites—skies, the river, a moving boat—black mysticism—never expressed except in song or in movements of their bodies."² He sensed in the black stevedores on the Mississippi a peculiar accord with the cosmos: mystery seemed to whisper to them out of the river (Notebook, p. 134). Plainly, he felt a primitive mystery in physical nature, but there is evidence that his attitude was not consistent. At times he seems to ascribe "life" only to objects associated with humans. In No Swank, for example, he speaks admiringly of a certain artist named J. J. Lankes, who in his woodcuts is able to convey a sense of the vitality of the houses, barns, and sheds which surround the lives of the poor farmers he depicts. In his comment Anderson implies that human life is the important thing, that it is human touch that endows the inanimate with life and consequently with value for art: "'Because these things have been touched by human hands,'" he has the artist say, "'because they have become a part of this strange muddle we call life, they have become sacred

things. See the significance, the beauty in them." Anderson did not obligate himself to justify inconsistencies and it appears in these instances that he is having it both ways. I think, however, that his vitalism is in reality a two-leveled affair, recognizing a mystic life-pulse in everything but attaching a special value and sacredness to those things which express or signify human vitality.

Sympathy for life became Anderson's criterion of criticism. He was puzzled by Hemingway's feeling about life which impelled him to kill. He considered Henry James "the novelist of the haters" because James never had found anyone to love and resorted to an intellectualized fiction which Anderson believed takes away love. Conversely, he felt close to Wolfe and Faulkner because, although their subjects often were ugly, there was always in their work "an inner sympathy with the fact of life itself." But above all he admired the vitalism of D. H. Lawrence who dared to "reach toward all life" (No Swank, p. 96). Writing to his brother Karl Anderson about the spiritual emptiness of their time, he enunciated his vitalism in explicit terms: what the age demanded, he thought, was "the inner love of life." "That terribly abused word 'love' is at the bottom of all of the decay. When men

4 Letter 327, LSA, pp. 392-93.
5 Letter 81, LSA, pp. 102-03.
6 Letter 327, loc. cit.
do not dare love, they cannot live, and the men of our day
did not dare love either God or their fellow man."  

Anderson's enthusiasm at times led him into Whitmanian
expansiveness. He proclaimed himself "the American Man" and
announced that he meant to take all unto himself--salesmen,
businessmen, laborers--to be "a kind of composite essence of
it all." And he was able to an extraordinary degree to iden-
tify with individuals. He claimed that his feeling for
people was so intense that when he walked in a crowd he had
a "physical feeling of being completely en rapport with every
man, woman and child . . . ."  
The mystic note, the tran-
scendental urge for union is unmistakable. Howard Mumford
Jones calls it a "spiritualized pantheism," shared with Whit-
man, Van Gogh, Dostoevski, and the religious mystics.

The longing to escape from self, the desire to merge
with others and with the universe, is central in An-
derson's complex outlook. . . . His desire to tran-
send mere egoism runs through his correspondence.

The disease of his age, Anderson believed, was aliena-
tion from the sources of life. Men are constantly attacked
by a "queer sort of separation" that interrupts the "flow of
life." As I indicated in Chapter I, Anderson often means by
this phrase personal alienation, but he also means loss of
rapport with the physical sources of life--loss of ability
to "get at life through things" and to feel "the reflected

7 Letter 71, LSA, p. 89.
8 Letter 82, LSA, p. 104.
9 Introduction, LSA, pp. xii-xiii.
life in things" (No Swank, p. 28). It is what Augusto Centeno calls "livingness." Anderson, he says, "insists against separation. Separation from other human beings, from his own created people. Separation from livingness anywhere that livingness is, and livingness is everywhere." ¹⁰

In the male, sympathy for life is characteristically expressed through "love of craft." In his essay "Lawrence Again," Anderson identifies two basic human impulses—the impulse to do in the male and the impulse to be in the female. "Manhood that finds its full fruition only in work, and womanhood that comes to full bloom only in physical life—in the reproduction of physical life—both these qualities . . . imply also a rich full flowering of individuality" (No Swank, p. 100). "Work" means here not simply useful work but the imaginative, creative activity which Anderson calls "cunning of the hand."

He advances two reasons to support the contention that "love of craft" is exclusively a male instinct. First, there are the emotional differences between men and women. The "need for giving love" is the basis for both impulses; but, Anderson says, while women find it easy and natural to express love to people about them, men are inhibited so that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, for them to express emotion directly. "It may be that men are intended primarily to be workmen, that they must find an outlet for their inner needs . . .

in their work or they will not find it at all" (Notebook, pp. 83-84). The second reason is biological: the woman creates directly through her body and finds accord with physical life through her intrinsic role as creator and sustainer of life. While the childbearing woman feels "a direct relation between herself and the trees, grasses, animals," the male, being "much less the animal," has only intermittent and indirect ties to physical process through occasional acts of procreation in which he is merely ancillary to the female. Consequently he is impelled to compensate in imaginative creation through craft and art (Notebook, pp. 129-30). Anderson held that only men are fitted for the practice of imaginative art; women, he says, "relate always to the world of nature, the male to the spirit," a distinction, it should be noted, which correlates with Anderson's dual worlds of fact and fancy. Man's natural creative medium therefore is imaginative and spiritual experience while woman's is organic and physical experience. Woman expresses herself directly in nature; the male can fulfill the instinct for direct creativity only in craft. For that reason Anderson considered craft to be the essence of manhood (No Swank, p. 100).

Although his linking of sexual and artistic energy seems to suggest Freud, a more direct—and acknowledged—influence on Anderson is Henry Adams. With Adams, Anderson

12 See above, pp. 3-4, and STS, p. 275.
held that there are various expressions of sexual energy, includ­ing art; he remarks, for example, that he is not a particularly lustful man because he has spent much of his male energy in art.\(^{13}\) The corollary of this thesis is Anderson's theme of American impotence: as craft is the realization of manhood, the frustration of the craft impulse (in a machine civilization) results in impotence. In *Dark Laughter* we read of Bruce Dudley, a hack newspaper writer who has never "taken hold of life with his hands," wandering down the Mississippi valley in search of personal completion, "his brain . . . churning . . . a feeling of being all corked up--unreleased" (p. 118).

Anderson conceived of craft in somatic and instinctive terms as the male counterpart of gestation. For the painter Charles Bockler, Anderson compares artistic creation to a mother creating and feeding her baby. So "when you paint you feed out of your own body in a queer subtle way at your painting."\(^{14}\) The experience of feeding the self into craft affords a rapport with nonhuman nature which satisfies man's basic need for giving love. Anderson contends that "men cannot live in the end without love of craft. It is to the man what love of children is to the woman" (*Modern Writer*, p. 35). By craft, he means all inventive activity, making no distinction between practical crafts and fine arts: they spring from the same intuitive impulse, the arts being

simply intensified developments of the old crafts (STS, p. 236). His emphasis is on the need for work which allows the worker "some control over the tools and materials of his craft" as opposed to standardized manufacture. In literature, craft takes the form of the author's realization of authentic feeling, which is the expressiveness urged by writers of the Chicago Renaissance and defended by Anderson as the "new note." Anderson defined the "new note" as "the reinjection of truth and honesty into the craft, . . . an appeal from the standards set up by money-making magazines and book publishers . . . to the old, sweeter standards of the craft itself. . . ." Love of craft, he says, results in the author's revelation of himself in his work. If the writer has lived the "substance" of his book, he puts the reality of his life into the book and so reveals the workings of his soul and mind.

In Anderson's usage "love of craft" amounts to an instinctive drive toward a significant relationship with the world outside the self, i.e., the material environment. By expressing himself in materials, the craftsman merges his identity with matter and thus experiences a satisfying union

15 Modern Writer, pp. 31-32.
16 "A New Note," Little Review, 1 (March (1914), 23.
17 "More About the 'New Note,'" p. 16. In this article Anderson apparently distinguishes craft from expressiveness, declaring that the "new note" includes both the "note of craft love" and "the spirit of self-revelation." Nevertheless, he does link craft with self-expression.
with the cosmos. Love of craft defines a rapport which is the male's "source of strength, . . . of life itself," which comes to him through his hands (Memoirs, p. 387). The artist or workman "must feel within himself some deep relationship between himself as a man, and the world of nature, of materials"—which Anderson also calls an "accord with the materials of his life" (Memoirs, p. 268). He found such rapport in the "masculine tenderness" or tactile sensitivity of the artist George Bellows—"the way he touches things, what it means for him to touch things—life in trees, in stones, color, materials of all sorts." 

Anderson believed that the survival of male function in the age of the machine depends on achieving sensual rapport with the physical through craft.

If our youth is to get into his consciousness that love of life—that with the male comes only through the love of surfaces, sensually felt through the fingers—his problem is to reach down through all the broken surface distractions of our modern life to that old love of craft out of which culture springs. (STS, p. 62, italics added)

Hence love of craft is essential to the male's love of life—which to Anderson is the fundamental value.

Nor are Anderson's primitivist assumptions confined to vitalist psychology and the idea of craft: his theory of education is distinctly Thoreauvian. The young male, he believes, will find the handling of materials his primary

18 Notebook, pp. 82-83. 19 Ibid.

20 Perhaps Women, p. 55; Memoirs, p. 389; Letter 266, LSA, p. 322.
source of knowledge; he will be better educated by handwork than he could possibly be by book study. The theory is elaborated by Bruce Dudley, who reflects that

the beginning of education might lie in a man's relations with his own hands, what he could do with them, what he could feel with them, what message they could carry up through his fingers to his brain, about things . . . . (Dark Laughter, p. 62)

Thus Anderson tells his readers that because Sponge Martin, the archetypal craftsman of Dark Laughter, lived and felt down through his fingers, he "apprehended life more clearly" (p. 96).

Although Anderson's mysticism begins with a cosmic life-consciousness, his sympathies are more specifically humanitarian and personal than a comparison with Whitman may suggest. Humanitarian love—with emphasis on the individual rather than on man in the mass—is in the forefront of Anderson's philosophy: pantheistic consciousness occupies the background. Anderson found the model for a humanitarian literature in the Russians, whose writings sprang, he said, from "an impulse of sympathy and understanding with the man beside you." He acknowledged that in Tolstoy and Dostoevski, and especially in Turgenev's Annals of a Sportsman he found "love of human life, tenderness. . . ."23

But there was also a more fundamental source for this

22 Letter 73, LSA, p. 93.
23 Letter 94, LSA, p. 118.
third type of love. In his early life around racetracks and warehouses Anderson discovered an unexpected tenderness and sensitivity in the toughest of characters. One night he overheard a man weeping in a field: the man had lost his farm and in darkness had returned to the land. Anderson was working in the same factory with the man and knew him as a smiling, apparently contented man. Such revelations led Anderson to the conclusion that what men most want is "love, understanding." He believed Americans to be the loneliest people on earth; "we keep feeling for each other and so seldom finding." He was in a position to know. In the crisis preceding his break with a business career he says that more than anything else he wanted "to draw close to someone." Voices kept urging him to "reach out to someone. Find someone in this muddle . . ." (Memoirs, pp. 253-54). Out of this alienation came his literary creed: as an artist he would reach out to offer love and understanding to those who want and need it, and his observations had convinced him that many more Americans than would admit it crave such communion. We find him advising the artist Bockler to go out and "talk to Negroes, poor farmers, etc. We as artists, ought to keep that human love alive in us if we can." His compassion for the alienated became the prime source of his art, branding it with the hallmark of the grotesque. The artist,

24 Letter 342, LSA, p. 404.
25 Letter 388, LSA, p. 455.
he says, should seek the "wonder" in anyone "hurt or twisted by life."  

Love, understanding, tenderness all seem to be used as synonyms for a broad, humanitarian sympathy which inspires Anderson's vision and provides the emotional charge of his work. In his judgment the breakdown of communion among Americans was the basic problem in American life, and he believed that the remedy was a recovery of something like religious compassion. "The old comforting belief in salvation through our Lord has passed and something wanted, as between man and man, has not been found. It may be that what is wanted and so much needed is just more understanding." The kind of understanding he means is most clearly seen in his sketch of Alonzo Berners, a semi-invalid who, Anderson claims, had an extraordinary capacity to lose himself in the minds of other people. Alonzo could enter into the thoughts of a troubled person and give him "sympathetic understanding without sentimentality." This gift was contagious, for after spending a week with Berners, Anderson for the first time began "to live in another, suffer in another, love another perhaps" (STS, pp. 182-35, 193, passim).

It is necessary here to examine Anderson's use of the term "understanding." I have shown that he frequently brackets that word with "love" and "tenderness" as a synonym.

26 Letter 182, LSA, p. 223.
for the humanitarian sympathy which governs his philosophy. Thus he speaks of "sympathy and understanding with the man beside you," and of "love, understanding" as what people most want. He links the growth of his own capacity to love another person to Berner's "sympathetic understanding," and in a passage yet to be explicated he defines a type of love between men which is founded on the understanding of self through understanding of another. Plainly love and understanding are treated as synonyms in these references, but in other statements Anderson's language suggests a distinction. He asks Van Wyck Brooks, "Can we understand at all, ever, where we do not love?" And in the Little Review he turns the query around: "How can I love my neighbor if I do not understand him?" Taken together, however, these two statements show that Anderson considered the acts of understanding and loving as inseparable and complementary; a time sequence is not a necessary inference. The latter sentence, from the Little Review, is linked by context to Anderson's formula requiring that an author record the working of his own mind before he will be able to record the working of other minds, by which he means entering imaginatively into the mind of a fictional character. Understanding, in this instance therefore, means what it means in the Berners sketch, where Berners "entered into the man's thoughts, understood him," and

28 Letter 82, LSA, p. 104.
29 "More About the 'New Note,'" p. 16.
Anderson himself learned to live in, suffer in, love another. Hence in both statements understanding must be taken to mean empathy or the sympathetic power to live in another person. Moreover, we have already seen that Anderson thought of understanding as a substitute for the comfort of the Christian Savior. The term "understanding" is to be taken not in its conventional sense of intellectual comprehension (which would be counter to Anderson's characteristic anti-intellectualism) but as a synonym for imaginative sympathy or empathy, which is the most usual meaning Anderson attaches to love.

In *A Story Teller's Story*, such understanding is termed an "unasking love," involving the power of giving oneself, "something like the love of God" (p. 197). Anderson's language often hints at Christian love, but the point he is emphasizing is love's altruism; humanitarian love is a tenderness for others defined by its freedom from self-consciousness (*Memoirs*, p. 3). Anderson's thought is grounded not in Christian but in primitive impulses. He testifies that he was drawn to horses, dogs, simple folk with no intellectual pretensions, and workmen, who . . . still loved the materials in which they worked, who loved the play of hands over materials, who followed instinctively a force outside themselves, they felt to be greater and more worthy than themselves, . . . all people in fact who lived for something outside themselves, for materials in which they worked, for people other than themselves . . . . (*STS*, pp. 197-98, italics added)

The implication is that love of craft (living for materials)

30 Above, p. 62.
and humanitarian love (living for people) arise from a single naturalistic motive. Humanitarian love, which for Anderson has no moral connotation, is therefore closer in spirit to pagan naturalism than to Christian love. In fact, Anderson no less than Lawrence, Dreiser, and Freud—and doubtless through their influence—recognized the elemental, irrational passions which unite man to the life of the cosmos. In the view of Lawrence, as one commentator writes, "man's life is only a portion of the forever mysterious vitality of the whole universe with which 'the blood, the flesh' is immediately in contact."\(^3^1\) For his part, Anderson recommends as an antidote to impotence that men seek a new religion, more natural and pagan, "more closely connected with fields and rivers," linked also to a "stronger sympathy between man and man" and to sexual expressiveness, which—he says—accounts for three-fourths of the charm of life (Perhaps Women, pp. 57-58). By thus reasserting spirit and passion in a de-natured society Anderson places himself in the tradition of Nietzsche and the rediscovery of the Dionysian self. The implications of this tradition for Anderson's aesthetic will become apparent in the ensuing discussion.

It is obvious to every reader of his stories that erotic love is important to Anderson, but what is often missed is the transcendent meaning he assigns to sex. He did not think his stories were primarily concerned with sex and

denied that he had treated the subject with prurience, as many early readers thought. One critic, he said, had called him "the phallic Chekhov," but Anderson pleaded that his purpose in emphasizing sensual love was to prevent the loss of a "sense of life" in America. Indeed, sex does have a vitalistic signification in Many Marriages, his most frankly erotic novel, in which he explains that the love-making of Webster and his secretary, Natalie, "had after all been but a symbol of something more filled with meaning than the mere act of two bodies embracing, the passage of the seeds of life from one body to another." Immediately following this comment is Webster's apocalyptic vision of love as a sheet of fire tearing down barriers and restoring communion between emotion-starved men and women (p. 78). In Walter Rideout's phrase, Anderson's references to acts of sex are "primarily metaphors for the intuitive union of one personality with another."

That conclusion is substantiated by Anderson's treatment of yet another form of love—"male tenderness," a com-

32 The Winesburg tales were labeled "unclean, dirty, filthy" (Letter 342, LSA, p. 405). One woman wrote after reading his stories: "Having been seated beside you [at dinner] I feel I shall never again be clean" (Memoirs, p. 446).

33 Letter 63, LSA, p. 78. Here Anderson says it was Brooks who called him "the phallic Chekhov," but in Memoirs he attributes the phrase to Rosenfeld (see p. 451). It was Rosenfeld, writing in The Dial, 72 (Jan. 1922), 35.

union between men which he characterizes as nonphysical.\textsuperscript{35} To offset the decline of the male's effectiveness in a machine civilization Anderson thought men should "renew themselves in other men" through a stronger sympathy "as between man and man."\textsuperscript{36} This "male comradeship" is actually a logical extension of one of his premises: the universal need for love in personal fulfillment. He knew that men are inhibited in expressing emotion among themselves: "our intentions are so splendid and our acts so meager and full of fright."\textsuperscript{37} What is wanted between men is "something like tenderness," he wrote, but more than "the casual thing we call friendship." The relationship should be predominantly mental and spiritual and based on common experiences—with books, he suggested, or a feeling for nature. He cites a personal experience: he once was hunting mushrooms at dusk when he had a sudden "recognition" and felt the need for a comrade who could feel the experience as he did, without words. Understanding of that kind, Anderson believed, is possible only between men. If the companion were a woman, he reasoned, he would be tempted to make the relationship physical. Men tend to intoxicate themselves with words when

\textsuperscript{35} To my knowledge this aspect of love is not treated in Anderson's fiction but is confined to expository and autobiographical writing. See LSA; Memoirs, pp. 519-27; STS, pp. 318-19. The story "Hands" is based on misunderstanding, and "The Man Who Became a Woman" deals with sexual ambivalence, which is quite another matter in Anderson's definition.

\textsuperscript{36} Letter 266, LSA, pp. 320-28. \textsuperscript{37} STS, p. 319.
dealing with women, expressing more than they genuinely feel and consequently "selling" themselves out, but common understanding between men is communicated intuitively, without words.\footnote{38}{In a fine example of his "groping" style, Anderson attempts to explain the idea that love could grow as between man and man, a thing outside sex, a feeling perhaps founded upon brotherhood, realization of self in another man, your own curious loneliness in life in him too, understanding of self a little got at perhaps through understanding of another. . . . (Memoirs, p. 286)\footnote{38}{Letter 266, LSA, pp. 322-28, passim.}}

Anderson concedes that male comradeship has a faint touch of the flesh, and his descriptions suggest something of the homosexual sensuality of Whitman's "manly love of comrades."\footnote{39}{We find him writing, for instance, "I must like something about my friend's eyes, the way he carries himself as he walks along. . . ."\footnote{40}{But Anderson contends that the attraction is entirely different from that between men and women and argues that it is a normal and natural relationship. Why is it that men as males, constantly deny their inheritance, the love of the male for the male? The love of man for woman is a different matter. The two passions are not alike. The whole thing has nothing to do with a man's being, or not being a fairy. (Memoirs, p. 521)\footnote{41}{And in It is "outside the flesh, . . . an attempt at the very core of the thing is (sic) the mystery of life itself."\footnote{41}{Ibid., p. 322.}}}}

\footnote{39}{See the Calamus Poems in Leaves of Grass. Anderson had read Whitman and admits the possibility that he was influenced by Whitman's "manly love" (Memoirs, pp. 248 and 522).\footnote{40}{Letter 266, LSA, p. 325.\footnote{41}{Ibid., p. 322.}}}
the Memoirs he admits that "perhaps in some essential part of me (never in the flesh) I have, all my life, loved men more than I have ever loved women" (p. 307). There is an affinity or at least parallel to Lawrence’s ideas of brotherhood, especially as seen in the nude wrestling of Birkin and Gerald (Women in Love, 1920) to seal their Blutbruderschaft in the manner of the old German knights who mingled their blood in mutual wounds. Birkin says Blutbruderschaft is not "sloppy emotionalism" but "an impersonal union that leaves one free," as a unit with woman does not. The males in Lawrence have a more explicitly physical relationship than Anderson’s proposal suggests, but a practice of Anderson and his son shows that Anderson thought nudity added to the efficaciousness of male communion "outside the flesh," just as it does in Lawrence’s wrestling scene. Anderson and his son John, then about twenty-five, built a retreat in a remote area of their farm where they would lie naked. It was, Anderson remarked, "man’s receiving place, aside from all women, even aside from nature . . .," where they could find renewal in other men "as perhaps they did in the old days, in battles,—hate that became almost love. . . ."  

Anderson’s doctrine of love is epitomized in a single sentence of A Story Teller's Story: "When you take from


man the cunning of the hand, the opportunity to constantly create new forms in materials, you make him impotent. . . . he can no longer give himself in love either to work or to women" (p. 146, italics added). Anderson is writing of male impotence, but he is also asserting his understanding of love as the motivation of what he considers the two most important functions of manhood. And in both senses implied here—broadly intuitional or specifically sexual—it is clear that he considers love a means of escaping self-isolation, of effecting vital union of the self with matter in one case and with person in the other. Here love of women refers to erotic attachment, but as I have noted, Anderson expands and sublimates sexual love into a sign of universal communion. In its most inclusive meaning, therefore, Anderson uses love to signify the intuitive outreach of the self to identify with and creatively affect the non-self on two planes—the human through humanitarian sympathy and the nonhuman through "love of craft."

**Art as Intuition**

Anderson's aesthetic assumptions are primitivist; his approach to art is often naive, and always nonintellectual. There is, for instance, a pronounced anti-intellectual stress in his criticism. He had little use for theory, which he felt writers become involved in to the detriment of expressiveness: his advice was simply "to tell the story straight
Talking about art, he declared, is rather like handling a flower until it wilts. Art is a matter of sensual vitality, of flesh and emotion—not intellect. He felt that American painters "get painting too much up in their heads to ever paint really well"; instead, they need the "straight sensual joy in life—in fruits, hills, women's bodies, skies, rivers, etc." A work succeeds in conveying sensual joy in life only if it is itself infused by a sense of life, and this is achieved not through the intellect but through the sensibilities of the artist.

The student of Anderson soon discovers that much of his theory of the sources of art is romantic commonplace. His definition of fiction is almost identical to Wordsworth's formulation of poetry as a spontaneous overflow of feelings. Writing is a release of primal feeling which is often connected in Anderson's mind with primitive nature mysticism. For example, he thought Mark Twain's regrettable pessimism resulted from his natural inclination to escape from the cultural restraints of his Eastern associates, and that when he did escape—in Huckleberry Finn—he was released from pessimism into a primitivist ecstasy such as Anderson thought the true writer experiences. In writing his masterpiece,

46 Letter 155, LSA, p. 185.
Mark Twain had heard "the whispering of the gods," a healthy vitalism achieved when intellectual discipline gives way to full expression of feeling. For once, says Anderson, Mark Twain forgot the influence of his wife and Howells and "again became the half-savage, tender, god-worshiping, believing boy." He professes to believe that Twain had written *Huckleberry Finn* "in a little hut on his farm. It poured out of him."47

The same stress on spontaneity is apparent in Anderson's advice to other writers and painters. He complains that Waldo Frank is preoccupied with method, trying to say things in unusual ways: Anderson thought he should free his expression, "write with a swing—weeping, praying, and crying to the gods on paper instead of making sentences."48 He criticizes his son's painting as being too much "thought through" and recommends that he abandon himself to frenzy:

I would have you more reckless sometimes, as I have seen you on several occasions when you have been drinking—this I mean in work, more and more drunken giving, in perhaps just a half-mad thrust at the moment.49

Another letter calls for "more freely letting loose on emotional reactions."50 There is a recognizable Dionysian stress: the advice that the artist give himself up to madness and drunken abandon suggests both Plato and Nietzsche.


The Dialogue of Phaedrus describes the inspired madness of the poet and Nietzsche characterizes the awakening of the Dionysian impulse in art as a drunken joy or ecstasy. Actually Anderson stops just short of the Dionysian conception and defines art as "controlled" ecstasy. The artist "wants to dream of color, to lay hold of form, free the sensual in himself, live more fully and freely in his contact with the materials before him. . . . He seeks a kind of controlled ecstasy and is a man with a passion . . . " (STS, p. 217). Nevertheless, his informal remarks indicate that Anderson was committed to feeling as the sole requirement of the artist. According to Hansen, Anderson liked to announce: "Someday, when the spirit moves me, I am going to that piano and play for you and I won't need a knowledge of the piano to express myself. I will play what is in me." In an essay entitled "From Chicago" Anderson describes

There is "the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers. . . . But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, . . . thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art--he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted." The Dialogues of Plato, 3rd ed., trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Random House, 1937), I. 249.


Hansen, Portraits, p. 164.
a fictitious Chicago novelist who is seized by a madness which he can't shake off; for hours he writes madly, throwing about sheets of paper. He is writing the story of Virginia Borden, a Chicago woman in whom he has glimpsed "strange, beautiful, unexpected little turns of the mind and body"; in his novel he wants to make people understand his "feeling" for the woman, make them feel his sense of her beauty. In order to convey the immediacy of his intuition he projects himself into the book as her husband so that he lives imaginatively with her. His impulse is as much to explain himself as it is to explain Virginia Borden, and to do this he is describing not the woman who has been seen on the streets, but the Virginia Borden he knows in his mind (Notebook, pp. 26-31, passim).

The implications of the writer's emotional involvement with his subject and his seizure of madness are worked out in Anderson's definition of writing as an act of love. "The madness of the writer is the madness of a lover. As he writes he is making love" (Notebook, pp. 30-31). That is, he is seized with a compulsion to express the emotion generated by his intuition of the woman's beauty— the woman not objectively known but known in his mind. The act of love is not addressed to the woman but to the readers— those the novelist wants to understand his feeling. The writer's "love" includes not only an intuition of the subject but also a compulsion to communicate, to share his "sense" of the subject, and as such it is tantamount to "love of craft," which, An-
derson tells us, results in a revelation of the workings of the writer's soul and mind in his work. 54

Two types of love are involved: first, the novelist's love of (or response to) the subject—the originating intuition of art 55—and, second, the act of writing as an act of love—an impulse of the writer to reveal himself, to impress himself on the materials of his art. Love therefore is doubly operative in the artistic process—as the artist's intuition of beauty and as the drive to communicate the intuition. As Anderson sees it, art is intuitive both in inspiration and in execution: the content is the sense of beauty and the technique is simply the spontaneous release of that sensibility through whatever innate abilities the artist may possess. No technical skills are necessary. Thus "love," as an instinct for expression and communion, is as integral to Anderson's aesthetic as it is to his psychology. The writer is a lover because his art is the realization of an intuitive sense of life and beauty. Art, then, is a function of love: it is objectified intuition.

In the view of Howard Mumford Jones, Anderson's criticism is more profound and more fundamental than that of Henry James. James' great prefaces deal only with the secondary stage of writing when the author reflects on the various relationships of his completed work, but in Anderson's let-

54 "More About the 'New Note,'" p. 16. Also see above, p. 58.
55 See below, p. 88.
ters, according to Jones, the subject is

an earlier and more primitive stage in the creative process. He brings us down to a more primary level of the psychology of writing—to writing as obsession, to writing as rhythm, to writing as a function to a large degree of a subconscious, certainly of a non-rational part of the psyche.

Anderson does consider the writing process to be unconscious; repeatedly he warns writers against conscious "statement," against writing "sentences." Art comes from life, and life—Anderson insists—cannot be "thought out clearly." "There is an underflow, a current, but God man, you cannot get at it by statement" (Memoirs, p. 268). In that exclamation Anderson states the rationale of his intuitional philosophy with respect both to experience and art: as life itself can be felt but not stated, so art—which "parallels life"—like-wise can be felt and communicated as feeling, but it cannot be stated. He bluntly told one amateur that she was awe-struck with her own thought. "I am afraid you are writing sentences. The sentence should fairly tear itself out of you because it must. It is . . . a terrible mistake to think in sentences." By thinking in sentences, as he indicates in No Swank, he means "thinking the words out as I go, making an argument . . ." (p. 83).

56 P. xv.

57 "I am afraid . . . you get (?art) as too separated from life. Cezanne said it was parallel to life. It is the best explanation I have ever hear(d)" (Letter 158, LSA, p. 189). Also see below, p. 110, and footnote.

58 Letter 383, LSA, p. 449.
Writing to his son, Anderson also cites the danger of statement for artists, because "we . . . get between ourselves and the thing sought"—meaning that the artist tries consciously to control the intuition and give it formal organization. He would leave the intuition to create its own effect and organize its own expression. He says his stories did not come as "definite facts." The originating intuitions formed according to their own nature. "These floating ideas, always drifting through the mind, if given free play by actions, seem to become definite and alive." Anderson's description of the spontaneity of intuition and the passivity of the artist again indicates his affinity to the romantic tradition. Nietzsche held that both the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses are expressions of nature itself, without any mediation by the artist; the artist in fact ceases to be an artist and becomes a work of art. Anderson doesn't go so far, but he does make intuition autonomous. A work of art is organized by the artist's intuition; its form emerges in feeling and tone rather than in conscious design. In a comment on Anderson's abstract paintings, Hansen says they were purely "internal reactions." "Technical questions dropped away before the mighty artistic impulse, the impulse to express. The technique, in Anderson's mind, would have de-

59 Letter 296, to John Anderson, LSA, p. 357.
60 Ibid. (italics added).
Anderson conceived the writing process as a somatic activity. Once the writer's imagination is seized by a subject, a "hint," drawn from the life of fact, he loses control of his faculties to an autonomous response which then creates through the writer's faculties. Thus Anderson sees no need for a writer to get the story clearly in mind before writing; instead, he says, you should "have your own thoughts and feelings get the habit of running down through your arm and fingers to the paper." Or the intuition may not produce writing but merely hold the "hint" of a tale and allow it to mature in the unconscious, in which case the writer is helpless to do anything consciously on his own.

A short story, in Anderson's view, is the result of a seizure or "sudden passion" in which the idea of the story is "grasped whole," like picking an apple. Robert Hart has shown that this seizure is the work of the unconscious, which he identifies with what Anderson calls "imagination." The

62 *Portraits*, p. 165.

63 The autonomy here claimed for the imagination apparently applies only to creative activity, once it is initiated. As we saw in Ch. II (above, p. 45), the imagination is dependent on objective reality for the content which guarantees the significance of art.

64 Letter 399, LSA, p. 465.

65 See footnote, above, pp. 38-39, on the use of the term "unconscious." Anderson viewed only the short story as a product of the unconscious. For his theory of a more deliberate process of novel writing which involves the fancy, see Hart's discussion in the footnote cited.
writer, Anderson says, may have had a theme for a long time and have repeatedly failed in attempts to write the story, and then one day the story comes easily and unexpectedly. When it comes, the passion which brings it seizes the writer bodily; as Anderson explains, the story "is in your brain, in your arms, your legs, your whole body."\textsuperscript{66}

The somatic character of writing is further emphasized by Anderson's use of analogies of conception and pregnancy. Having got the "tone" of a tale from a conversation, he testifies that he "was like a woman who had just become impregnated. Something was growing inside me . . . I could feel the heels of the tale kicking against the walls of my body . . . but when I got out of bed to write it down the words would not come" (STS, p. 260).

The unconscious, Hart explains, nurtures a story impression over a long period and then presents it as an artistic whole.\textsuperscript{67} Anderson describes his tales as the products of "things seen and that have been lying like spermatazoa in the sac of my mind [which] grow and are fertilized by the facts of my own journey through the world" (Notebook, p. 36). Impressions may stay in the writer for years. "He must wait. He is like a woman . . . pregnant. . . . [The story] writes itself, as though it used me merely as a medium, or it is n. g." (Memoirs (1942), p. 286). Again the intuition is  


\textsuperscript{67} Hart, p. 208.
autonomous, the writer passive. Once inspired, Anderson claims he has "no consciousness of time passing, completely lost, the words and sentences with a fine rhythmic flow, ideas coming like flocks of birds." There is, he adds, complete loss of self-consciousness. Hence the story seems to be almost entirely a product of the unconscious. Under the spell Anderson claims that his hands had "of a sudden come to life. They had arranged words on paper . . . very skillfully . . . my whole being had become a quite impersonal thing, expressing itself on paper through written words" (STS, p. 274).

Anderson elaborates the psychology of unconscious writing and shows the seriousness of his interest in the subject in a letter inspired by a B. F. Skinner article on Gertrude Stein in the Atlantic. In the article Skinner analyzes Miss Stein's experiments at Harvard in which she attempted to write in an automatic manner while engaged in some other activity such as reading an interesting story. In his letter, Anderson says he had attempted such writing but had thrown the results away. He insists that his own writing is not "automatic," but is done by a secondary personality which occasionally is released within himself.

I have always thought it quite possible to make the habit of writing with the hand, the arm, so automatic that something within is released. This is surely not automatic writing, and yet I think that all the more beautiful and clear, more plangent and radiant writing I have done, has all been done by a kind of secondary personality that at times takes possession of me.

68 Letter 263, LSA, p. 316.
He then goes on to say that neither he nor Miss Stein knows what he writes (which certainly sounds like unconscious activity), but that while Miss Stein denies a secondary self, he attributes all to the operation of the secondary self, the "poet-writing person," which he says Miss Stein taught him to recognize in himself. 69

His statements are not consistent, however, for in spite of what he says here, he was later to write of the "unconsciousness of the act of writing." 70 It seems, therefore, that if Anderson did not subscribe to a theory of automatic writing, he accepted something very like it: writing done by a secondary personality or self (he uses both terms), which apparently has its own separate consciousness and occasionally takes possession of the writer's faculties to produce "poetic" prose which the author's conscious self has no knowledge of. The distinction is between "automatic" writing done unconsciously by the ordinary self, in Miss Stein's case, and writing done consciously by a secondary personality which has its own consciousness but is unknown to the ordinary consciousness, in Anderson's case. This literary schizophrenia recalls Anderson's description of the madness which possesses the novelist so that today he writes furiously but tomorrow, as a more rational personality, he will decide that what he has written doesn't fit the life-story he is attempting and


70 Letter 379, LSA, p. 445.
will throw away his script (Notebook, pp. 26-28).

The secondary poet-self is an artistic alter ego who does Anderson's writing for him. He saw himself essentially as a poet, for, as he says, there is "a very difficult and very elusive poetry in all fine prose" — the quality he prized in his own prose. But being known as a poet has disadvantages, and for that reason Anderson says he splits off his conscious identity from the poetic self and thus escapes the nuisance of being viewed as a poet. The poetic self has no other life than that of writer: Anderson claims that even his friends and family have little or nothing to do with his poet self. There are implications in this theory for Anderson's personal adjustment beyond those he admits. Eleven years earlier Hansen had noticed "a hard fight ... going on within Sherwood Anderson today, a fight between the artist who demands isolation and the man who seeks social contact with his fellows." 

In an essay on Gertrude Stein in No Swank Anderson labels "nonsense" the automatic writing practiced by Miss Stein. He has his own idea of automatic writing: "All good writing is, in a sense, automatic. It is and it isn't." He means that writing skill is innate and that technical training counts for little, probably nothing. Good writing, he claims, is automatic because it is done by a person having

71 Letter 245, LSA, p. 300. 72 Ibid. 73 Portraits, p. 166.
"real talent," defined as "a feeling for words, word relationships, word color." Without talent one writing automatically will produce drivel, but the talented person will produce good work. "All of us write as well as we can," he maintains. "What is there comes out." This spontaneous gift (apparently of the poet-writing person) is innate and untrained, and consequently "in a sense," automatic. "When I am really writing"—that is, not writing sentences or statements, but releasing self in poetic prose—"it is always half automatic. There is something stored within that flows out." The "elusive poetry," the "unnamable overtone— to be got by word color" is an instinctive achievement; "you have it or you haven't. Thinking, consciousness, will not do it" (No Swank, pp. 81-84). Moreover, the writer of talent is not in control of his gift; he can produce poetic prose only when seized by passion. The poet-writing self, or the agent of intuition, is autonomous. 74

Anderson had a primitivist's preference for the unsophisticated, self-expressive amateur (Notebook, p. 31). "The object drawn doesn't matter so much," he advised his painter son; "it's what you feel about it, what it means to you." 75 In his view aesthetic value is located in the artist's sensibility, 76 and the artist's creative act is both a self-

75 Letter 140, LSA, p. 166.
76 For Anderson's explanation of the psychology of intuitive apprehension, see below, pp. 103-104.
discovery and a self-revelation.

One of Anderson's most suggestive discussions of the subjectivity of art is the account of the Virginia Borden novelist—a fragmentary, five-page sketch of an imaginary author writing an imaginary novel about an imaginary woman. Since the novel never existed, we cannot appeal to the text for clarification of Anderson's theories about the method of its author as stated in the sketch. However, Jon Lawry, in his study of Anderson's "Death in the Woods," has identified a number of principles which closely correspond to Anderson's somewhat cryptic comments on the work of his hypothetical novelist. A comparison of Anderson's and Lawry's observations is illuminating.

"Death in the Woods" (1926) concerns a farm woman who is "old" and broken at forty by service to a worthless husband, son, and assorted farm animals. Walking home from a trip to the village butcher, she stops to rest in a snow-covered clearing and there dies of exhaustion and cold while dogs ritually circle her body and then rip open her pack and devour the meat. When her body is discovered, the narrator—who then had been a small boy—is among those going to the scene. Now a man, he recalls that he had mistaken the woman's half-nude, frozen body for that of a young girl. According to Lawry, the narrator has constructed the story in layers or stages of recollection and association, gradually bringing

77 The material on the novelist here and following is from Notebook, pp. 29-31.
adolescent memory and adult comprehension into coherence and focus. He begins with a generalization about every town having an old woman who walks in for groceries—and so, he says, did his boyhood town. In the second stage, memory gathers specifics about the generalized woman until the narrator identifies with her experience and through shared sensations effects communion with her. Next her experience merges with a similar one of his own, as evoking the memory of her death he recalls a cold day when he too was encircled by dogs. The final stage is the direct, historical convergence of their lives when he recalls the day he saw her frozen body transformed into an image of beauty. He apparently attempted to maintain that contact because while still a boy, he had gone to the woman’s farmhouse and found two dogs still hungrily prowling about. Thus, only at the climax of recollection does the death of the defeated woman become for the narrator complete and comprehensible, having beauty of its own.  

Anderson tells us that the novelist of his Notebook is not telling the story of the objective Virginia Borden whom men knew but is giving his feeling, his "sense" of the woman’s beauty. Similarly Lawry shows that "Death in the Woods" is not concerned with the old woman alone but with the receiving and creating consciousness of the "I" narrator as well. The

discovery, through sympathy and communion, of the woman's "self" leads the narrator into full recognition of his own being, Lawry says; and Anderson's novelist likewise, while discovering the Virginia Borden of his imagination, is also discovering his true self. "As the Virginia Borden men saw was but a caricature of the Virginia Borden who lived in the mind of the novelist, so he knows that he is himself but a shadow of something very real." In clarifying his feeling for the woman he necessarily explores his own psyche and uncovers a self which is "very real" and quite different from the one his friends know. Although Anderson doesn't speak here of a secondary, poetic self, the novelist's real self and the poet-writing self are remarkably similar, neither being known to the writer's friends.79

Again, Lawry finds that the adult narrator approaches his own experience through rendering the experience of the woman, passing by stages from cold observation, through pity to whole knowledge—not of the old woman primarily, but of himself. In similar manner Anderson's novelist focuses on his own psyche, making up stories about himself and putting himself into the novel as the woman's lover. The writer, he says, is a lover, and "so vividly does he love that he has the courage to love even himself." The novel is an exercise

79 The Virginia Borden material is in "From Chicago," written in 1916 and published in The Seven Arts, May 1917. Anderson's "poet-writing self" is a later development contained in Letter 245, Jan. 1934, LSA. The later elaboration, however, shows considerable consistency with the earlier statement.
in narcissism; the author begins with a desire to express his love for Virginia Borden but is inevitably led to fascination with his own feelings, the dream life in which, Anderson says, men really live.

Hansen cites and elaborates some of Anderson's insights on the subjectivity of writing. Anderson believed that unless the novelist has managed to "catch, understand and record [his] own mood" truthfully, his work will be false; the discipline acquired in honestly facing the inner workings of his own mind is essential to the artist. The writer, Hansen says, attributing the thought to Anderson, must live "deeply, wholly," and give the world "chapters of self-revelation." In the article from which Hansen quotes, Anderson relates the artist's ability to intuit the essence of another's life to his ability to examine and understand his own psyche. "When a man can thus stand aside from himself, recording simply and truthfully the inner workings of his own mind, he will then be prepared to record truthfully the workings of other minds." Although the sentence seems to imply that the two recording actions occur consecutively, the surrounding discussion as well as parallel statements in the Borden novelist passage suggest rather that the writer's 80 Portraits, p. 134. Hansen bases his summary on quotations from an article by Anderson. Here I quote from Hansen in order to show how he interprets Anderson's statements, which he has drawn from "More About the 'New Note,'" pp. 16-17.

81 "More About the 'New Note,'" p. 16.
creative activity and self-examination occur simultaneously. For Anderson, the writer's power to create character comes not from empirical observation of real people but from intuition: the writer's childlike trust in "the truth that lives in his own mind." The writer looks within himself for understanding of human character. I have already shown that when Anderson says the writer is a lover, he implies a double function of love. The act of writing is an act of love, but the originating intuition ("a single glance into the face of another") is itself a response of love, and that is what is intended here. Through love or intuition the writer becomes one with his subject, which in Anderson is always a person. The writer must trust the truth of his own mind--his intuition of persons--as the source of his understanding of them. In this sense the artist as lover is one having tenderness and "humbleness before the possibilities of life." Anderson speaks in fact of "a great humbleness" creeping over the Borden novelist as he writes about the woman whose spirit "might have become a flame." The novelist's love illuminates the possibilities of beauty in the woman and enables him to create her in an image which will enlist the love of other men.

The writer's love is his intuitive sensitivity to the

82 Ibid., p. 17.

83 Through intuitive understanding, Anderson claims, "the writer will find himself becoming in truth a cattle herder, a drug clerk, a murderer for the benefit of the hand that is writing. . . ." (Ibid., p. 17).
possibilities in other people. But what are we to make of Anderson's assertion that the novelist loves even himself? We have noted Anderson's assertion that a man must understand his own mind to be able to understand other minds: in Memoirs he tells us that the reverse is also true—that a man discovers his true self in others.

It is only by thinking hard of others that you can find out anything at all of self. Man cannot think clearly of self, cannot see himself, except through others. The self you seek, the true self you want at last to face, is hidden away. . . . it is everywhere in others. (p. 20)

Since for purposes of the novel Virginia Borden exists wholly in the novelist's dream, in telling her story the novelist is compelled "to explain himself also." The novelist's self-love then is Anderson's terminology for romantic narcissism: mind perceiving all objects as reflections of itself. When the novelist Aschenbach contemplates the beautiful youth in Death in Venice (1913, English version 1925), Thomas Mann comments that "what he saw was beauty's very essence; form as divine thought, the single and pure perfection which resides in the mind, of which an image and likeness, . . . was here raised up for adoration." Mann's story, which is stated in Platonic terms, again suggests the classic sources of Anderson's intuitionism. Anderson's novelist, like Aschenbach, has fallen in love with an ideal of beauty which originates within himself, not—to be sure—through intimations of divine

forms but through his love of life. Nevertheless, in both artists the source of beauty is intuitive and the world they create is a reflection of their own minds.

The centrality of the self in this theory raises a question of consistency, since Anderson frequently views the self as an obstacle both to art and communion. He advises men to get rid of self yet advances the theory that art is derived from self-knowledge. Jon Lawry sees no real conflict: Anderson, he says, uses "self" in two senses. First, there is self as a disease, meaning that the self is "restricted" through preoccupation with its own interest and fails to connect with other persons. All men and especially artists need to lose this self through love or understanding so that they can discover self in the second sense, the "true" self which is hidden in others.85

Anderson himself reconciles the paradox when he writes that "individuality has gone to seed in us and we do not dare yet reach toward all life--sense a moving pageant outside self--that might lead into a purer finer individuality" (No Swank, p. 96). He maintains that man can't see himself clearly except by identifying with other people and at the same time holds that one can understand other minds only through honest examination of his own mind. Considered as complementary halves of a single proposition (as Anderson

never explicitly considers them), these assertions suggest two of Anderson's fundamental themes: communal love and art as self-disclosure. The true self is hidden in others. As the artist breaks out of the restrictive self through sympathy for others, his self-consciousness fuses with intuitions of other selves to form a transcendent "true" self. Hence, to look into his true self or "finer individuality" is to know and understand the other minds contained within it; and, conversely, to know other minds bound in communal solidarity to oneself is to discover the true self, which is characterized by the generosity and sensitivity which enable one to understand others. Stated analytically the idea seems to rest on circular argument, but the case is not that of one event coming before and causing another. The point is that the artist realizes his own humanity through empathic identification with others, and art is the imaginative medium which effects that communion through a focus of sympathy. At the same time the imaginary characters which are realized through his art constitute a disclosure of the artist's inner self--that finer individuality characterized by the love which makes possible both the communal bond and the creation of art.

We have been examining the role of intuition in relationships between people, but Anderson's nature mysticism and sense of the unconscious--influenced by Lawrence and Whitman, and less directly by Freud--were bound to lead him at some point to a study of the primitive unconscious. "Death in the
Woods," notwithstanding Lawry's interpretation, is such a story; it shows us the intuitive writer in the very act of drawing material from the unconscious. The narrator has always been dissatisfied with the version of the woman's death which his brother had told at home. Because he felt the brother had missed the point, he is now retelling the story in his own way, and the point he repeatedly emphasizes is that the woman was destined to feed animal life "before she was born," during her human life, and "after her death." The narrator is not speaking merely of the drudgery of her life as a farm wife: her destiny as a feeder is involved in naturalistic processes prior and subsequent to her human life. Jon Lawry misses the significance of these extensions of the woman's function beyond mortal limits and dismisses Anderson's statement "She had spent all her life feeding animal life" as a "moral" inadequate for a story containing an eerie death ritual and having a narrator who consciously creates its meaning from memory of his own and others experiences.

It is true that we hear the narrator recalling conscious experiences, but Lawry overlooks elements in the tale which, if drawn from memory, could not have been objectively experienced. Archetypal suggestions abound: under a winter moon dogs circle in silent ritual before a woman dying in a hilltop clearing deep in a forest. The dogs await and mark

her death but do not disturb her body. We are told that the boy narrator had observed the dog's circular track and later in life had seen a different pack of dogs circling on a winter night. These images come from memory, but the dog's incantation had to come from a source deeper than conscious memory:

Now we are no longer wolves. We are dogs, the servants of men. Keep alive, man! When man dies we become wolves again.

At some point in the process the narrator's mind has moved beyond objective memory to the archetypal unconscious, and we can assume that his intuition of the unconscious underlies his dissatisfaction with his brother's merely factual narrative.

The narrator who intuits the mysterious meaning of the dogs' behavior has also intuited the continuity of the woman's role in the economy of life: she has always been a feeder of animals and will continue to be after death, which she accepts as quietly and serenely as any other part of nature accepts change in its life cycle. Her transition from organic to inorganic state is presented in the context of cosmic process: she is reabsorbed into the subhuman, her body becoming part of the frozen marbleized landscape, her face obliterated by snow—yet her function remains unchanged for she has become again a part of the primordial flow of life which feeds and sustains all things. The narrator as boy and

87 Ibid., p. 16.
man has felt the elemental mystery of the scene. His experience has not been, as Lawry believes, the discovery of the self in his conscious memory alone; it is also a journey into the unconscious—where intimations of human and cosmic destiny mix and mingle. It is true that he has discovered his "true" self, but the discovery is on not one but two levels: consciously, in sharing the woman's defeat in life he has discovered his solidarity with humankind, and, subconsciously, by intuitting the significance of her silent surrender to the elements in death, he has discovered his solidarity with a cosmos of order and harmony, as suggested by his simile of music heard from afar.

The adult now is able to supply what was missing in the brother's unsatisfying account—an intuition of the mysterious connections of human life to the life of the cosmos which the circumstances of the woman's death demand. The atavistic behavior of the dogs had suggested a similar atavistic pattern in the woman's role: she continues to feed animals in the unconscious state as she had in consciousness. The narrator's diction is deceptively simple: "The woman who died was one destined to feed animal life. Anyway that is all she ever did." But knowingly or unknowingly he furnishes the symbol which unifies both his intuition and his story—the circle of the dogs' path. The circle described by the woman's transitions from unconscious to conscious to unconscious functions is paralleled by the cyclic development of the wolves into dogs and reversion at the woman's death to primitive behavior. And with the narrator's recognition of his human
ties to the subhuman and subconscious, the circle of the story is closed—"a thing so complete has its own beauty," he says.

The elements of the story have been to the narrator through the years "like music heard from far off" not only because his memory is dim but because the values of the memory objects originated not in his personal past but in shadowy memories of the racial past. Viewed in this way, the narrator's insistence on the role of the woman as feeder of animals is in full accord with the overtones of the unconscious which envelop the action and in no way limits the narrator in creating the meaning of the story from recalled experience, but immeasurably enlarges the scope of that experience and the range of its signification. In fact, I see no other way to do justice to the intuitions of cosmic mystery which are unmistakably the prime concern of the narrator.

Death is rarely the theme of an Anderson story: it usually affirms life is some transcendent way, as it does here and in "Brother Death." If, in "Death in the Woods," the woman's death is beautiful, we should remember that the account of her human life is suffused with Anderson's characteristic tenderness for people defeated in the struggle for vital expression. But death in this tale is a window into the unconscious, intuitering the primal unity and harmony of life, human and nonhuman, animate and inanimate. In this story too we see Anderson's suggestive manner at its best, creating coherent patterns of experience out of acute aware-
ness of the complexity of experience and presenting them with the naive simplicity of an artist who relies on his ability to feel a reality which escapes intellection.

Though death is not the obsession of Anderson that it is of many modern writers, "Death in the Woods" is a point of contact with such explorers of the unconscious as Joseph Conrad, who asserts that the source of truth for the artist is the unconscious. Unlike the philosopher who explores ideas and the scientist who deals in facts, the artist--Conrad says--who seeks for fundamental, essential truth, "descends within himself and in that lonely region of stress and strife, . . . he finds the terms of his appeal." Anderson's narrator, like Conrad's artist, descends into his subconscious and in discovering truth discovers also his true self. But there is a difference. Conrad's narrators find meaninglessness and annihilation at the end of their quests while Anderson's narrator finds a world of which he is a compatible and natural part, and a vital force that unites matter, vegetation, animal and human in a single destiny.

Despite his two early propaganda novels and later articles protesting conditions in Southern textile mills during the 1930's, Anderson was not by temperament a reformer. Once he had discovered the theme of humanitarian love, he em-


89 Earl Hilton defines the change in feeling in Anderson's successive novels as a movement from a spirit of hatred in the early ones to acceptance, understanding, and love in
braced a philosophy of "thinking small" in personal terms. In his criticism he stresses the necessity for the writer to accept the world he lives in and to take his art from experience close at hand. The frequent association of Anderson with literary realism doubtless arises from his insistence on accepting the world as it is without idealization or retreat; he believed the artist should stay close to life. When critic Dwight Macdonald complained of the awkward impressionistic prose of Dark Laughter, Anderson charged that Macdonald's concept of art was too much separated from life and that the critic himself was too withdrawn from life to be an adequate judge of art. 90

In A Story Teller's Story he argues for a grassroots spirit. In his opinion American writing and criticism in general suffered from a sentimental separation from life, and the work of sophisticated New Yorkers in particular suffered an intellectual separation from "American" life, which Anderson identified with the Midwest and West. Especially Waldo Frank, he felt, left out the "sturdy stuff": Frank had not lived enough in American actuality and had too much of the flavor of the study. Consequently Anderson demands that a writer immerse himself in the surrounding life, however

the mature ones, beginning with Winesburg, Ohio (1919). Prior to Winesburg, Anderson espoused a philosophy of power, strength, and war—the "heroic vitalism" whose sources Hilton traces to Carlyle and Nietzsche ("Sherwood Anderson and 'Heroic Vitalism,'" Northwest Ohio Quarterly, 29 [Spring 1957], 97-107).

90 Letter 158, LSA, pp. 189-90, passim.
rough and unaesthetic it may be. When Robert Morss Lovett criticized the "mussed up" characters of Anderson's *Horses and Men*, Anderson replied by asking if Lovett knew anyone who was not mussed up?\(^91\)

In 1917 Anderson published an essay entitled "An Apology for Crudity," which Hart cites as the landmark of Anderson's rejection of the Puritan in favor of the Midwestern tradition of *Huckleberry Finn*—already espoused by the circle of "modern" writers with which Anderson was associated in Chicago.\(^92\) In the "Apology" he calls for a frank acceptance of the ugliness and cultural immaturity of industrial America and justifies rough expressiveness as the proper mode of American art. There is no subtlety of thought or living in America, he argues. Life in the United States is "ugly": industrialism is never "lovely." Genteel American writers had withdrawn from the rawness of American life in their efforts to imitate European subtlety and in doing so had produced a literature without significance for America. To be significant, American fiction would have to come from American reality.

The work of the novelist must always be somewhat out-


\(^92\) Hart, pp. 169-70. Anderson became linked to the Chicago Renaissance of Letters after returning to Chicago from Elyria, Ohio, in 1913. His acquaintances among the Chicago group included Ferdinand Schevill, Robert Lovett, Ben Hecht, Floyd Dell, Carl Sandburg, George Daugherty, Roger Sergel, Margaret Anderson, and Harriet Monroe (*Memoirs*, pp. 315-17). For Anderson's "modern" sympathies, see "A New Note," p. 23, and *Modern Writer*. \(\uparrow\)
side the field of philosophic thought. Your true novelist is a man gone a little mad with the life of his time. . . . He lives, not in himself, but in many people. Through his brain march groups of figures. Out of the many figures one emerges. If he be at all sensitive to the life about him and that life be crude—the figure that emerges will be crude and will crudely express itself. (Notebook, pp. 199-200)

Anderson cites as such novelists, Dreiser—and Dostoevski, who had faith in the simplicity of the Russian people and expressed their life and time with candor. The need of American writers, Anderson thought, was to renew faith in themselves and become more simple and real, like their countrymen. 93

The "Apology" is for Anderson an unusually clear and coherent exposition which follows a straight-line argument to a conclusion. He argues that the literature of a crude culture cannot and should not escape the influence of that culture. "Crudity is an inevitable quality in the production of a really significant present-day American literature." A crude life will necessarily express itself in "crude and broken forms" (Notebook, pp. 195-200, passim). Anderson advances similar arguments in several other writings. A writer who honestly expresses the looseness, immorality and meaningless of his culture does not have a sophisticated style:

"his words do not cling, his art forms become at times shape-
less, he stumbles, going crudely and awkwardly forward." Anderson is probably rationalizing his own weaknesses, at least in part, for he was severely wounded by criticism of his style. Dwight Macdonald attacked it as "loose, sloppy, badly joined together," while other critics labeled it "confused" and--the term that caught on--"groping." Anderson admits his "confusion about money, government, sex, all kinds of relationships," but maintains that such honesty is preferable to accepting easy solutions. He knows that he should be able to stand apart from life's confusions to analyze and understand them but confesses that he cannot. "When people about me are in a muddle I get into a muddle too." To Robert Lovett's complaint of his lack of intellectuality, Anderson retorted, "Can a man be at all sensitive to life and be quite clear and unriled?"

Anderson's instinct for a valid American art has proved remarkably true. It was the "raw truth" and "clumsy" manner of Windy McPherson's Son which brought Anderson his first important critical notice. Waldo Frank in 1916 cited that book as a significant development in native American culture: Anderson had for the first time struck a balance between James' idealistic withdrawal and Dreiser's complete

94 Letter 158, LSA, p. 193, and Notebook, p. 31
95 Letter 158, LSA, p. 190.
97 Letter 97, LSA, pp. 122-23.
abandonment of vision by plunging into American fact. Anderson, Frank wrote, "has felt the moving passions of his people, yet sustained himself against them just enough in a crude way to set them forth." Much of Anderson's fiction fulfills his own tests for American art, although it might be more accurate to say that he defines American art in terms of the dual limitations of his own talent and his environment. Yet, however we view his achievement, his aesthetic judgment has been justified by later criticism. Frederick J. Hoffman, writing in 1962 for example, finds that the most important fact of Anderson's work is its "native simplicity" and that, correspondingly, his worst writing resulted when he attempted to imitate the sophistication of writers such as Joyce—an ironic verdict in view of Anderson's criticism of American genteel writers for imitating European subtlety. But Hoffman attributes Anderson's considerable achievement to the closeness to life which Anderson advocates. "At his best Anderson succeeds because he is closer to his world than most writers are to theirs." In Poor White and in Winesburg, there is a sense of 'simple profundity' which comes from his having attended to his creatures on his level and on theirs." 

I have shown that Anderson rejected the idea of art

98 "Emerging Greatness," The Seven Arts 1 (Nov. 1916), 73-78, reprinted in Achievement, pp. 20-21.

as imitation in favor of a theory of art as expressed essence, in which the truth of any subject is what the artist intuitively feels it to be and the expression of that truth usually involves "lying" or distortion. The source and criterion of art therefore is the truth of the artist's mind, to which Anderson says the artist is to give childlike trust. Thus the writer with a "true note" is one who discloses himself, who catches and truthfully records his own mood. And, since "something within" tells the writer when he has not made a truthful record, the writer's intuition becomes the guarantee as well as the source of his art. The extremity of Anderson's reliance on intuition is demonstrated in "Father Abraham" (1929), a sketch originally projected as a book, in which--as Lawry states--Anderson seeks to explain Lincoln's legendary sympathy not, as one would expect, through his feeling about Lincoln but through his feeling in and of himself. Anderson's method is simply to read his own feeling of a subject. Of his approach to Lincoln he wrote a friend, "I want him on my own terms, as I understand such a man. . . ." "I am frankly going to make my own story. . . ." To write the story of Lincoln as the experience of Sherwood Anderson, he limits historical facts to a few inescapable generalities and fills in with events from his own experience, including materials which make up background events in "Death in the

100 "More About the 'New Note,'" p. 16.
Anderson speaks of intuition under various names—love, humbleness, understanding, tenderness between artist and subject—but it is best understood by the simple term "feeling." Communion is established between the imaginative self and the essence of the subject so that the artist begins "feeling into life and things," relating both to people and to the material environment. The more important of these for Anderson, of course, was people.

We have Anderson's testimony that his successful writing ("Hands," he says, was the first "real story" he ever wrote) did not begin until he realized the need to "let other people with their lives come into me." Previously he had written only out of his head and not out of feeling for life. Factual observation, of course, would be of no epistemological value to the artist since what people "say and think isn't of very much importance"—a proposition based on Anderson's assumption that men are too inhibited to express their true thoughts. Instead of listening to what people say, the writer "must try to go deeper into their motives."

Discerning the truth about any person is wholly de-

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103 Memoirs, p. 417.

104 Letter 36, LSA, pp. 41-42. Cf. Kate Swift's advice to George Willard as a writer: "The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say" ("The Teacher," Winesburg, p. 163).
dependent on one's ability to enter another's life through empathy, which, as Bernard Duffey observes, has its own way of getting at the human situation. In one of his letters Anderson describes the intuitive mode of cognition. A man is speaking about literature when he has a sudden desire to "lie with" one of the women present. Though he says nothing aloud, his desire is communicated and the woman answers. Beneath the overt conversation there is an "unspoken communication between people, a constant flow," which it is possible at times to get into, "the undervoice becoming audible." Anderson seems to have in mind something similar to stream-of-consciousness (when he wrote Dark Laughter, he thought he was approximating the rhythms of Joyce's prose experiments): a free flow of unspoken thought such as goes through the mind of a man who is hearing bits of conversation and background sounds while his thoughts are wandering. This free flow is the quality Anderson sought in his writing and attributed to the "unconsciousness of the act of writing." He thought he had achieved it in Dark Laughter.

Anderson believed that the development of sensitivity to the real but hidden lives of people, "feeling into" their lives, is the value of art, a value both personal and social.

106 Letter 121, LSA, p. 148.
108 See especially Bk. IV, Ch. 10.
What is important is not the artifact produced but the awakening of the artist's human sensibilities. Believing that most people are in a stupor, Anderson held that "the point of being an artist is that you may live," it is to "make yourself alive." "The object of art is not to make salable pictures. It is to save yourself." But personal salvation, in Anderson's terms, is the discovery of the "true self" in others: personal realization is effected through vital union with other persons. And since for Anderson art is a medium through which vital human contacts are made, the aesthetic function is essentially humanitarian. "The writer," he declared, "is but the workman whose materials are human lives" (Modern Writer, p. 29).

A life of intuitive contact with people is a life requiring depth and concentration, and Anderson's decision after publication of Marching Men (1917) to limit his scope as a writer to the values of the individual was occasioned in part by his realization of the need for depth of experience not only for the artist but for men in general. By "working in the small" he was trying to preserve "the feeling of man for man" in a collectivized society. "Let me take some little girl, or man," he wrote, "and try to think and feel my way through one life."

109 Letter 140, LSA, p. 166.
111 Letter 392, LSA, p. 459.
112 Letter 351, LSA, p. 417.
Although his chief concern was human understanding, Anderson was also aware of vital and aesthetic value in the nonhuman and material world. In Anderson's stories there is only an abstract sense of landscape but there is a pervasive, mystic suggestion of human intimacy with physical substance and natural process. I have discussed the intuitive rapport at the heart of Anderson's doctrine of craft-love, a "deep relationship between [the artist] . . . and the world of nature, materials." Art, he believed, challenges a man to "get a little closer" and "love more," to "really feel the thing on which he is at work." Without this intimacy, this "love," between craftsman and materials, there can be no art. "Nothing," Anderson declares, "either animate or inanimate can be beautiful that is not loved" (Many Marriages, p. 27).

The theory of aesthetic potential in human expressiveness is actually a specific application of a more comprehensive principle—the potential for beauty in the commonplace, which in turn is an aesthetic corollary of Anderson's commitment in the later phase of his career to values found in the "small world": by penetrating more deeply into limited and ordinary experience he would be able to discover unexpected beauty in commonplace things and events. Like the beauty inherent in human life, the beauty of the commonplace is conceived in vitalist terms; it springs from a profound sympathy with life and is therefore the gift of those who feel life

113 See above, pp. 58-59.
deeply. One man who was able thus to intuit beauty, Anderson believed, was the woodcut artist J. J. Lankes, who had "that odd quality, . . . the feeling . . . for the reflected life in things." "He goes about looking for little slices of something significant and lovely in commonplace things" (No Swank, pp. 23-24, and 21).

Lankes' perception is akin to that which Anderson elsewhere ascribes to the artist as lover, losing himself in his work until aesthetic reality emerges. The painter "becomes always more and more conscious of nature, its moods, of the strange beauty coming unexpectedly out of . . . commonplace scenes." The artist-lover has sympathy for the reflected life in things—and, in the Anderson aesthetic, beauty inheres in life. For example, Anderson describes a Lankes woodcut of a barnyard. —With egg and butter money, Anderson surmises, the farmer's wife has bought a dozen fruit trees but various hazards have killed all except one. The farmer has thrown together a crude stick fence around the sole surviving tree. Anderson contends that with one glance at Lankes' rude scene, you know the whole story of the farmer's wife, her hopes and disappointments. Though she is not seen, "your heart [is] filled with anxiety. You do so want the last young tree to live, to bear fruit for that woman" (No Swank, pp. 27-28). Thus the viewer apprehends the whole "truth" of an art work at a single glance in the same intuitive

114 Letter 343, LSA, p. 409.
way that the artist apprehends a whole life story in one glance at a face. Lankes' art evokes such compassion for a defeated farm woman and a tree pathetically clinging to life that his audience shares his empathy; an intuitive circuit is set up between artist, art work, and viewer.

While national reformers were failing to inspire brotherhood and restore vital relationships, Lankes' simple sketches succeeded—Anderson thought—because Lankes was trying to renew understanding through little things and personal relationships (*No Swank*, pp. 23 and 25). The intuitive artist takes commonplace incidents, presents them "so that we feel them as part of ourselves," and the result is beauty. By feeling into life Lankes is "making others feel" (*No Swank*, p. 25). What the viewers feel is a rapport, a love of life, which opens emotional channels between men and puts them in contact with the life flow. This restoration of vitality through love is the major function of art: art embodies love and through it generates a response of love in those who view the artist's work.

For Anderson art is connected closely with life, and life is mysteriously present even in the inanimate. But his aesthetic is distinctly humanistic and in art he always seeks human value. Consequently, as he wrote to Dwight Macdonald, he believes it a mistake for the artist to attempt escape into life untouched by man—as did Gauguin. If art can be too much separated from life, it also can be too much separated from human life, which remains the center of Anderson's
value system. Yet his aesthetic does not restrict art to human subjects as such: he theorizes that the inanimate is impregnated with human significance by contact with humans. The stove in a village store absorbs the "life" of the people who have gathered around it: "there is a fragment of the essence . . . of a dozen, two dozen people in that stove. . . ."

"Life is in inanimate things you see, too. Men and women are touching. . . ." As I have shown, Anderson acknowledges a cosmic life force, but in elaborating his theory of the "flow of life" he sometimes qualifies the idea of life in inanimate things by specifying those things touched by humans. In the passage just quoted it is the association with human touch that makes inanimate things "sacred," "significant," and "beautiful." Anderson admires Lanke's work because it emphasizes the vital significance and beauty of objects touched by men. "He is a man deeply concerned with life, but it is his way to get at life through things"—barns, houses. "He is reasserting the life and the beauty buried away in things . . . in every woodcut he makes" (No Swank, p. 28).

Repeating to a critic who had complained that Anderson's art consisted only of "telling of some little incident, in a curiously illuminating way," Anderson asserted that the "illuminating touch is all of painting, music, sculpture, dancing, poetry, prose, what have you. How silly this demand that life

115 Letter 188, LSA, pp. 189-90, passim.
be thought out clearly. Who can do that?" (Memoirs, pp. 267-68). Since life, which is the stuff of art, cannot be neatly analyzed and "stated," Anderson argues that the expression of life as art likewise defies formulation into a rational design. Instead, intuition realizes itself apart from any intellectual effort of the artist. If the essence of a situation is apprehended at a glance, then it should be expressible in a climactic disclosure. "The true history of life is but a history of moments," Anderson argues. "It is only at rare moments that we live" (STS, p. 224). Hence, he concludes that art should concentrate on the vital moment when "little illuminating human things happened," and that the artist's business is "to fix the moment in a painting, tale, or poem" (STS, p. 312). The idea is much like the Joycean "epiphany" but Anderson more likely borrowed it—if he did borrow—from Turgenev.

The all-important illumination may be wordless, even

116 This contention is the theme of "Seeds," a story in which Anderson rejects the methods of psychoanalysis. As narrator he says the depths of life are beyond analysis and the illness the psychoanalyst pretends to cure is a natural, universal need for love—"Fool, do you expect love to be understood?" "It is given to no man to venture far along the road of lives" (Triumph, pp. 23 and 31). Anderson accepts life's irrationality ("the muddle of life") as normal and necessary (perhaps beneficial), and rejects preaching and scolding the world for its confusions. The world cannot be expected to think clearly and beautifully, he says; "life can only be beautiful at odd moments and in quite unexpected ways" (Letter 26, LSA, pp. 28-29).

117 STS, p. 338.

118 Irving Howe notes that Anderson's stories, like Turgenev's, depend on a climax of lyrical insight rather than dramatic crisis (p. 93).
unconscious, and is always intuitive. Anderson explains it by analogy: a sudden attraction of love may be experienced without overt declaration. "I see a man or woman perhaps walking across a room. Something happens of which the person may be unconscious. . . . They [sic] suddenly become beautiful." Here, as always to Anderson, significant value lies in what can be sensed but not articulated.

As for the character of the illumination in Anderson's stories, we have the analysis of Tulane philosophy professor James K. Feibleman, who as a personal friend knew Anderson's skills at first hand. Anderson, he says, used the technique of a bedtime story teller—surrounding trivial events with an atmosphere of mystery and investing ordinary objects with enormous significance. The illuminating effects of his tales, Feibleman believes, comes from a "metaphysical" apprehension of experience. To Anderson,

it was of significance . . . not that a man walked strangely but that he walked at all. The metaphysician is concerned with the commonplace but he has, so to speak, an uncommon interest in it. For motion itself is the mystery; how can there be the phenomenon of motion?

But that is not to say that Anderson is philosophical. Anderson's interest in motion is not a philosopher's interest in the abstract law of motion but an artist's interest in the general as seen through the particular. Neither a man walking nor the laws of motion would have been of interest by themselves, but

119 Letter 296, LSA, p. 357.
a man walking somehow illuminated for him the whole value of motion, and consequently was heavy with large and powerful symbolism. Sherwood could catch that significance readily, he could catch it but he could not hold it. That is why he wrote greater short stories than novels. His art was the art of the flash, the single impression. 120

One of Anderson's most effective short pieces is a sketch dealing with the subject of beauty and entitled "Like a Queen." In it Anderson has organized a seemingly loose construction by bringing its casual elements together in a clarifying psychological climax which exemplifies his illuminative technique. Through two-thirds of the sketch he builds a realistic characterization of a stout, sloppily-dressed woman of sixty who has a gift for understanding and helping people. Then in the final episode he recounts a trip he made with her to the Adirondacks, where on a mountain walk her beauty was suddenly illuminated. "I got a glimpse of [beauty] in Alice that night," he says. "She crossed the open space ahead of me and there it was." "The thing lasted but a fleeting second." "She was walking across the open moonlit stretch of road like a queen..." 121

In such flashes art fuses with life, communion is renewed and the flow of life restored. And more than mere cognition is involved. The reader learns something from the story, of course, but Anderson maintains that the chief effect

120 "Memories of Sherwood Anderson," Shenandoah, 13 (Spring 1962), 31-34.

is a direct communication of vitality from author to reader which bridges the isolation of the lonely. Writing to Carrow De Vries about the effect of one of De Vries' stories, he says: "To make me see something so vividly, the intensity of life in you at the moment, makes new life in me. So that I am for the moment no longer blind." "Isn't that the object of all so called art?" \(^{122}\)

The experience of an intuitive moment has a spiritual effect on the individual virtually identical to that which Anderson ascribes to the artist in his discussion of the Virginia Borden novelist: a loss of self and discovery of the finer individuality through identification with another person. In his Memoirs Anderson details the mystic expansion experienced in such an illumination. He imagines that while walking, his attention is arrested by a plowman and a team of horses, the rhythmic play of the horses muscles, the curling furrows of plowed land. The scene awakens in him a wish to merge himself with "this unison in men, horses, field, sky overhead, old passionate wish in man for flowing accord with the materials of his life." Self-consciousness yields to an instinct for solidarity with men and nature, the restrictive self to the finer individuality. You wish to know in the plowman, Anderson says, this unison and accord with the materials of his life because "you so passionately also wish

it in yourself and also that in transferring it to him, for the moment, you also become for the moment not yourself but a part of him." That is why, he adds, "nothing matters but the illuminating moment." The urge to unite with man and nature, again recalls Nietzsche and the awakened primitive passions reuniting man to men and to the universe. When an author experiences this vital contact, Anderson asserts, he is so caught up in his intuition that technique becomes secondary and virtually unconscious. De Vries, Anderson supposes, did not know he was writing well because he had forgotten the writing and was thinking "only of the moment."

The ultimate objective of literature, according to Anderson, is to bind people together in love. He wanted the American readers of his stories "to feel toward the people of my tale as I had felt as I wrote. If I could make them do that I would draw them closer to myself, too. I would draw closer to them" (STS, p. 297). He believed that the writer's art has extraordinary power to create unity of understanding;


124 When the Dionysian passions awaken, writes Nietzsche--borrowing from Schopenhauer's monistic terminology --"not only is the covenant between man and man again established, but also estranged . . . nature again celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man. . . . Now all the . . . barriers between man and man are broken down. Now at the evangel of cosmic harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, blended with his neighbor, but as one with him as if the veil of Mâyâ [the illusion of individuality] had been torn and were merely fluttering in tatters before the mysterious Primordial Unity" (pp. 26-27).

125 Letter 382, LSA, p. 449.
indeed, this accord is the justification of fiction. The merit of Dreiser, Anderson thought, is that he succeeds in making these emotional connections: "out of a kind of love for other humans [he] identifies himself more closely and with a deeper feeling with us, through the characters of his stories" (MHI, p. 42). Consequently, in a story love functions in two ways: within the story as a focus for emotional unity and intensity and outside the story as the evoked humanitarian passion needed to redeem real people from crippling psychic isolation. Love, therefore, is basic both to Anderson's fictional method and to his concept of the role of art.

That concept, particularly as it pertains to writing, justifies Anderson's definition of the writer as lover—i.e., one who seeks intuitive connection with other persons. As the characters—the grotesques—reach out for understanding, the author's responding love in the form of controlled empathy tends to elicit a similar affection in the reader—uniting in this way the writer, the person whose hidden need initiated the writer's intuition, the fictional characters, and the readers in a community of concern. Since the organization and focus of the tale depends thus upon emotional dynamics which frequently escape control, Anderson fails in many stories to bring off the desired effect, but when intuitive fusion does occur (when the story achieves "form"), he produces tales which have brought him enduring recognition. The list would include—in addition to several tales in Winesburg—"I
Want to Know Why," "The Egg," "The Man Who Became a Woman," "Death in the Woods," and "Brother Death." These depend not on ideas or pictorial realization but on Anderson's intense feeling for the plight and confusion of his characters and his ability to induce reader empathy. The characters are neither clearly visualized nor rationally analyzed: they are felt both by author and reader, felt as persons desperate to share their feeling with someone who cares. 126

Nowhere is desperation felt with more power and concentration than in the story "Adventure" (Winesburg, pp. 112-20). At sixteen Alice Hindman had been courted by a young man who one night—in Anderson's euphemism—became her "lover" and then went away to the city. When he refused to take her with him, Alice built her life around the fantasy that Ned Currie was her husband and would return for her. She resisted the approaches of other young men and withdrew to live her dream. When, eleven years later, she realizes that she has been cheated of life's happiness, she reacts compulsively—running naked into the night to accost an old deaf man who happens to be passing. The girl's shocking conduct at the conclusion somewhat obscures the tenderness with which the author has rendered the situation; the story is not focused on Alice's bizarre action but on the pathos of a human being yearning for beauty in her narrow life. Anderson

126 That the principle of sympathetic response applies to pictorial as well as literary art is shown by Anderson's analysis of Lankes' woodcuts (above, pp. 107-08).
has prepared for the girl's final gesture of desperation by carefully detailing her background and motivation so that instead of condemnation we feel sympathy for her plight and then are led to universalize our understanding. As readers we share with Anderson and Alice the final realization "that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg."

As Anderson conceives it, literary art originates in intuition, is motivated by love, and results in a renewal of instinctive contacts needed for personal realization and human solidarity. In his view, love—communion—is the source of personal psychic health and social sanity. Yet the sympathy Anderson fosters through art is not to issue in programs of mass social reform.\textsuperscript{127} Salvation in Anderson's philosophy is a personal matter. In his mature career, he had little respect for mass movements or ideologies which dealt with men collectively, and the reason is his intuitive approach to experience. He could feel sympathy and love for one needful person but found identifying with a "class" extremely difficult.\textsuperscript{128} Again to paraphrase Lawry, Anderson's artist opens himself to other persons not in order to change

\textsuperscript{127} Lawry, "The Artist's Self," p. 309; Letter 61, LSA, p. 75; Letter 63, pp. 78-79; MHI, pp. 78-79; Burbank, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{128} Memoirs (1942), p. 497, and Letter 392, LSA, p. 459. In Memoirs Anderson says he had watched an unemployed man going through a garbage can: "He is one man to me and seeing him I am deeply hurt, but my mind cannot multiply the man indefinitely. He remains a solitary figure to me. I identify myself with him personally, not with a whole class of men."
the physical conditions of their lives but to give understanding and expression to their unarticulated feelings by telling their stories, thereby— it may be added— reestablishing their communion with mankind. Anderson declared his objective quite simply in a letter to Hart Crane: "One doesn't hunger to defeat the materialism of the world about. One hungers to find brothers buried away beneath all this roaring modern insanity of life." He knew the artist could not change the world but he hoped he might at least open avenues of understanding. Of one thing he was convinced— such love as the writer seeks must come before social advances will be possible. In his own words, "it is just in the wider diffusion of this understanding that the work of a great writer helps the advance of mankind." 

If, by way of summary, the intuitional principle of Anderson's aesthetic can be reduced to its essence, it seems to me to focus on three concepts: life, love, and beauty. His is a theory in which aesthetic value is dependent on vitalist value: beauty, as he conceives it, inheres in expression of life instinct. Where vitality thrives Anderson finds beauty: where it languishes or suffers suppression (which is his typical theme), he finds ugliness but he also finds an "odd," strained beauty in the pathos of priva-

130 Letter 44, LSA, p. 52.
131 "More About the 'New Note,'" p. 16.
tion. The sense of beauty, then, arises from appreciation of life, either in the form of joy in vital fulfillment or a poignant recognition of unfulfilled potential where life is inhibited, the latter resulting in the haunting, strangely-muted tone of Anderson's grotesquerie.

The apprehension of life and, consequently, of beauty is the function of intuitive "love," or "feeling" for life. Thus, Anderson tells us, nothing is beautiful that is not loved and, likewise, all art that has vitality must originate in love. Beauty therefore is dependent on the shared intuitions of both artist and viewer, or reader. But the artist possessed of love, sympathy, understanding, is able to feel "the life and beauty buried away in things" (italics added), and by feeling into life make others feel. In Anderson's theory love is the faculty by which the beauty inherent in life is intuited by the artist and shared with others through the medium of art.

132 See "Hands" and "Respectability" in Winesburg, and above, pp. 25-27.
CHAPTER IV

STYLE AND FORM

In _A Story Teller's Story_ Anderson wrote that as a tale teller he "wanted to establish [his] own sense of values in form and in surfaces. It was something to tell a story but it was something else to tell it just right" (p. 296, italics added). His statement implies a rejection of conventional "plot" form and of what he called the slick, tricky style of commercial writing. Form and style, he believed, should develop from within—from the essence of the tale rather than from without. Often, however, Anderson's theory is obscure: he sometimes confounds form and style, and in defining style resorts to mixed analogies of painting and music, shifting capriciously from one to the other, especially with respect to the favored term "color."

**Style**

"By 'style,'" he says, "I mean a kind of dance, an overtone. I mean color and life in prose." Style is at once different from subject matter and a part of it, as a woman's gown is not in _itself_ the woman yet becomes the woman when she puts it on (_Hello Town!_, p. 326). The garment metaphor is a favorite with Anderson: the "clothing," the "surface"
of the tale is composed of words which the writer uses as a painter uses colors (STS, p. 261).

The idea that the writer approximates the effect of painting comes partly from Anderson's amateur interest in painting but more, one suspects, from Gertrude Stein, whose prose work Three Lives (1909) and poems Tender Buttons (1914) had impressed him,\(^1\) especially the latter volume with its experiments separating words from intelligibility (STS, pp. 260-61). Apparently his reading of Tender Buttons suggested his own experiments with language based on a theory of "word color" or a "feeling for words, word relationships" (No Swank, p. 81).

The theory of word color implies a dual function of words: they are vehicles of cognitive and of sensory value. Cognitively, words communicate the essence felt by the author. Sensorially, through their "color" and "tone" they have an impact which endows prose with vitality and beauty of surface. "There is a certain music in all good prose," he says. "There is tone and color in words as in notes of music" (Memoirs, pp. 21-22). Many critics have felt the lyricism of Anderson's short stories, and none more sensitively than his friend Paul Rosenfeld, who sees Anderson primarily as an auditor, "one who achieved connection with the nature of things through his auditory imagination." The tales, Rosenfeld believes, are essentially lyric poems, the immediate in-

\(^1\) Hansen, Portraits, p. 132, and STS, p. 260.
spiration for which is Gertrude Stein's rhythmic style, its periodic repetitions and use of echo words and phrases. Anderson manages to get sonority and cadence from vernacular language by using many of Miss Stein's devices, but the lyric mood and conception of his stories suggest to Rosenfeld that they may derive from the earlier tradition of German romantic tales, which give "singing expression of the effects of the life of things upon the authors' dreaming selves."  

Believing himself a poet, Anderson aimed for a poetic prose style. In poetry he says, "the very color of the words themselves, the feeling of the artist trying to release itself is a part of what must get over to the reader." Anderson refers to the artist's intuition of essence—"a certain tone, a certain color" which, as I explained earlier, he holds to be unique to each person or object. The writer seeks to seize this in his work (Memoirs, pp. 21-22). By means of word color the writer conveys, as Burbank says, the "feelings" as distinguished from the facts of life, i.e., the writer's cognition of intuited truth.

In searching for ways to express "essence" rather than fact, Anderson was undoubtedly influenced by Gertrude Stein, but, unlike her, he did not attempt a completely impersonal and objective expression. Miss Stein tried to abstract language from memory and emotion and to focus on the word as

2 Rosenfeld, xiv-xv, xix.

3 Letter 181, LSA, p. 225 (italics added).

4 P. 64.
word. In the view of Frederick J. Hoffman, she felt it most important to see the word as contemporary object, isolated as much as possible from extra-situational meaning, which might weaken the conscious "grasp of the thing seen at the moment in which it is seen." Hoffman shows that the language of Tender Buttons represents a shift away from familiar denotation toward abstraction; objects are not named and the words do not connotatively suggest their referents. In sum, Miss Stein's words and sentences are "creations in themselves, independent existences," the language tending to "fix attention entirely upon itself, not upon . . . what context it might allusively suggest."^5

If we accept Harry Hansen's version of the values Anderson perceived in Gertrude Stein's work, Anderson seems to have misinterpreted her intention. However, since no support for Hansen's analysis is found in Anderson's writings, the more likely conclusion is that it is Hansen who misinterprets. In his view, Anderson believed that for Miss Stein, words were "only vocal symbols, and that she was using these symbols to express only her own intimate feeling; that the word then came to signify not the fact found in the dictionary, but stood for something inside the consciousness of Madame Stein which she was trying vaguely to suggest."^6 It is prob-

^5 Gertrude Stein, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 10 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1961), pp. 11, 15, and 38. Cf. the objectivity sought in impressionist painting, below, p. 129.

^6 Portraits, p. 133.
ably true, as Hansen also says, that Anderson listened to people in order to speculate what lay behind their words because he felt that "many words are but inexact devices for our thoughts"; but if Anderson thought Miss Stein looked at words as devices for conveying vague suggestion and feeling, he was seriously misled. Her statement "If you feel what is inside [a] thing you do not call it by the name by which it is known" may seem to be related to Anderson's indefinable essences and symbolic suggestion, but her true inclination is precisely the opposite: "I did not want," she wrote, "when I used a word, to make it carry with it too many associations. I wanted as far as possible to make it exact, as exact as mathematics." Despite their common use of vernacular and fascination with the sensory properties of words, Miss Stein's and Anderson's intentions are quite divergent. She is aligned with the twentieth-century Imagist poets in demanding hard, clear, exact expression. Anderson is closer to the nineteenth-century French symbolists in relying on evocation and mystery. He might easily have endorsed Mallarmé's well-known formulation of poetic theory:

To name an object is largely to destroy poetic enjoyment, which comes from gradual divination. The


ideal is to suggest the object. It is the perfect use of this mystery which constitutes symbol. An object must be gradually evoked in order to show a state of soul."

A "state of soul" evoked through mystery is something very close to Anderson's essences caught and held in art.

Communication of cognitive essence is one function of word color: another—the other part of what must "get over" to the reader—is the sensory impact of the "clothing" or "surface" of the tale. Anderson believed that the writer should seek the "exact word" appropriate to a given effect and display each word to best advantage (STS, p. 263). His character Bruce Dudley thought the art of writing consisted of "handling words as you might precious stones giving them a setting." Words have sensory values comparable to those of musical notes or painters' brush strokes.

Anderson recognized the problem inherent in the fact that writing is a mixed medium. Absolute art, such as non-programmatic music and nonrepresentational painting, can express pure emotion, but literature involves words which conventionally convey ideas as well as feeling with the result


that writers typically sacrifice the affective value of words to "statement."\textsuperscript{12} Anderson, however, was interested in the imaginative and emotional properties of words and style. There is such a thing as "pure and beautiful prose," he contends in the essay "Gertrude Stein." "I have often heard sentences on the street that glow like jewels"; Hemingway, he adds, writes such sentences. What is needed is a "new feeling for words" (\textit{No Swank}, pp. 82-83, 85). He felt that words had too long been subordinated to thought. Prose should do more than state ideas; it should—in his words—be "sensually aware of life, color, sound, form. There must be flame and play too, the fabric, the feel of surfaces must be consciously sought after."\textsuperscript{13} To revitalize prose in this manner, words would have to be broken out of dead idioms which had become barriers to expressiveness, and Anderson believed Gertrude Stein had showed the way.\textsuperscript{14} In his introduction to Miss Stein's \textit{Geography and Plays} (1922) Anderson credits her with transcending the limits of the literary medium. A writer's

\textsuperscript{12} Gertrude Stein, adapting cubist principles to writing, addressed her narrative experiments in part to the solution of this problem. Oscar Cargill cites the word portrait "Susie Asado" in \textit{Geography and Plays} (1922) as an example of complete verbal abstraction, comparable to Picasso's "plane geometry" phase. At this point, Cargill says, Miss Stein had almost completely eliminated narrative line and was relating fragments of her portraits entirely by sound associations (\textit{Intellectual America} [New York: Macmillan, 1941], pp. 319-20).

\textsuperscript{13} Letter 90, \textit{LSA}, pp. 112-13 (italics added).

aim, he says, is "to create in [the] reader's mind a whole new world of sensations, or rather . . . to call back into life all the dead and sleeping senses." To extend the province of his art, the writer needs words that have a taste on the lips, . . . a perfume to the nostrils, rattling words one can throw in a box and shake, making a sharp, jingling sound, words that when seen on the printed page have a distinct arresting effect on the eye, words that . . . one may feel with the fingers. . . .

Words of that kind were to be found in Tender Buttons and Three Lives, books which, in Anderson's opinion, "recreate life in words."^15

Color—whether in painting, music, or prose—furnishes the "feeling," the vital emotion, which Anderson demands of all art. In terms of his theory, the world of art or imagination lacks the expressiveness and human emotion of the real-life world, and color is needed to bring it to life. Thus Whistler's monochromes are lifeless and therefore bad art, but Cezanne's color canvases throb with vitality (No Swank, pp. 84-85). Likewise, word color gives feeling and life to prose. "What I'm after, is love in words," Anderson wrote to Paul Rosenfeld, adding that it was poetry that he really wanted to write.16 To get feeling in writing, to create poetic prose, "word is laid against word as carefully, and

15 Geography and Plays, (Boston: Four Seas, 1922), pp. 6-7.

16 Letter 143, LSA, p. 171 (italics added). He wrote two unsatisfactory volumes of verse: Mid-American Chants (1918) and A New Testament (1926).
always as instinctively, as any painter would lay one color against another" (No Swank, pp. 83-84). This instinctive word sense is, of course, the innate, semi-automatic, writing talent which Anderson attributes to the "poet writing" self.\footnote{Above, pp. 80-83, and Letter 245, LSA, p. 300.}

Although his language is equivocal ("consciously sought" and "carefully" are hardly consistent with the earlier emphasis on the spontaneous, instinctive character of "fine writing" which has an "elusive poetry"\footnote{Letter 245, LSA, p. 300.}), there can be no doubt that Anderson considers word color and poetic prose to be products of an intuitive sensibility. He frequently warns against the idea that writing is a virtuoso skill, against "escape into style" and "tricks of style." Instead of trying for technical effect, the story teller should concentrate on the "heart" of the story, bury himself deeply in it so that finally he emerges "with the substance of it firmly in his hand" (STS, p. 298). According to Hansen, Anderson believed that most writers who fail, do so because of preoccupation with theory and methodology. They don't tell the story "straight out"; if they did, style would take care of itself. And again Anderson uses the garment analogy: style is like an actor's dress—"the way he walks across the stage." The actor does not concentrate on his stage manner but seeks to feel the role he has to play. Style "should grow naturally out of the content of the thing itself";\footnote{Anderson, as quoted in Hansen, Portraits, p. 173.} like form, it is a spontaneous
By his own admission Anderson's theory of word color was influenced by his admiration for the French post-impressionists. He had seen work by Cezanne, Gauguin, and Van Gogh when the famous Armory Show of French painting toured Chicago in 1914. When he refers to words separated from intelligibility, to the pure beauty of prose, to sentences that glow like jewels, he reflects the influence of an earlier school, the impressionists—Monet, Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Degas—who in the 1870's attempted to break pictorial form into discreet optical sensations of light and color. They composed paintings not by draughtsmanship and color blends but by application of unmixed primary colors side by side in uniformly small strokes or points, leaving the mixing process to the viewer's eye. In the primitive vision, bold expressiveness, and psychological penetration of his characteristic work, however, Anderson has closer affinities to the post-impressionists than to the "scientifically" objective impressionists. He might well be considered a literary counterpart of Van Gogh, whose inner emotional conflicts are embodied in dynamic designs of violent color.

Anderson found similar boldness, vitality, and color

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20 Burbank, p. 61.
22 Ibid., p. 323.
in the work of Gertrude Stein. She had rediscovered the sensory reality of words as spatial objects, isolated and immediately perceived. He says that in Tender Buttons he had found words laid out like an artist's color pans, to be rearranged into ever-fresh combinations. After reading the book he had "spent days making new and strange combinations of words" (STS, p. 263). Richard Bridgman has analyzed Miss Stein's unusual treatment of language. She had by eliminating remembered action, centered attention on

the page, the paragraph, the phrase, the single word. This "discontextuated activity" focused the reader's attention on the surface of the prose by emphasizing the appearance of the word, syntactical relationships, prose rhythms, and harmony of sounds.

The sound, appearance, and placement of words: upon these Tender Buttons centers, with meaning left largely private.

A single poem from Tender Buttons should suffice to demonstrate the effect:

SHOES

To be a wall with a damper a stream of pounding way and nearly enough choice to make a steady midnight. It is pus.

A shallow hole rose on red, a shallow hole in and in this makes ale less. It shows shine.

Although the prose poems of Anderson's Mid-American Chants (1918) are more dependent on representational organization and conventional meaning, they yet testify to an imitation of


Miss Stein, although with largely unfortunate results. In addition to an obvious similarity of verse format, Anderson's poems reflect the Stein manner in the fixing of attention on individual words and in the broken pace of monosyllabic stress:

**UNBORN**

Swift across the night a little cry  
Against the cold white night a stain of red.  
The moon dips down,  
The dull winds blow.  
My unborn son is dead. (p. 53)

Anderson rejected English literary diction in favor of the instinctive "barroom" language which Americans naturally use in telling tales (**STS**, pp. 261-62). Conscious of his limited vocabulary and ignorance of foreign languages, he knew he had to rely on subtleties of native vocabulary to get desired shades of meaning and wanted to develop a painterly technique—"word to be laid against word in just a certain way, a kind of word color, an arch of words and sentences, the color to be squeezed out of simple words, simple sentence construction (**Memoirs**, p. 338).

Oscar Cargill identifies the simple syntax and limited vocabulary of **Windy McPherson's Son** as primitivist elements, "limitations" he calls them, partly of Anderson himself and partly of the Chicago Group which nurtured him.\(^25\) Since the book was written in Elyria, Ohio, sometime prior to 1913\(^26\)

\(^{25}\) **Intellectual America**, p. 324.

\(^{26}\) Sutton, pp. 17 and 21. According to Howe, Anderson was introduced to Stein's early writings at the time of his exposure to the Chicago Group between 1913 and 1915 (p. 95). See **STS**, p. 260.
and therefore before Anderson's exposure to sophisticated literary influences, Cargill assumes that the simple syntax he finds in it antedates Stein's influence. On examination, however, though its vocabulary is plain, Windy turns out to have many relatively involved sentences—a fact which weakens Cargill's contention that Anderson's plain style originates in his apprentice writing before he read Gertrude Stein. But Miss Stein's influence is unquestionably present in Winesburg (1919): Cargill cites its "studied conscious simplicity of style," which, while suggesting Three Lives, is yet "in a sense original and [Anderson's] own." Cargill is thinking of the story "Hands":

Adolph Meyer had walked in the evening or had sat talking until dusk upon the schoolhouse steps lost in a kind of dream. Here and there went his hands caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the touseled heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also. Most readers and critics concede that Anderson is at his stylistic best in this story, which seems to fulfill his ideal of a pure and beautiful prose through a preference for native words, a lyric mood and fluid rhythm, phrases that glow with jeweled warmth, and the "unnamable overtone," which I take to be an air of ideality.

For example: "Also, he thought that Jack Prince had put a chair under the bar and that he sat on it explaining to the hurrying drawer of beer that although the Egyptian kings had built great pyramids to celebrate themselves they never built anything more gigantic than the jag Tom Morris was building among the farmhands in the room" (p. 132).

As quoted in Cargill, p. 325.
Bridgman traces the influence of Stein's bare syntax and repetitive rhetoric through several phases of Anderson's writing, from the introduction of *Winesburg* ("The Book of the Grotesque"),

Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful,

to the story "Not Sixteen" (published a year before Anderson's death in 1941) where the style is further simplified but the basic structure remains,

He went up to her. He went up in his bare feet.
Her father snored and her mother snored. He waited until he heard it, and then he went up to her. 29

Anderson's debt to Miss Stein is apparent when this passage is placed beside one from "Melanctha," the second and principal story in *Three Lives*, in which one also finds restricted vocabulary and simple structures arranged in repetitive patterns:

Melanctha Herbert was sixteen when she first met Jane Harden. Jane was a negress, but she was so white that hardly any one could guess it. Jane had a good deal of education. She had been two years at a colored college. She had had to leave because of her bad conduct. She taught Melanctha many things. She taught her how to go the ways that lead to wisdom. 30

Anderson gave himself more and more to experiments of diction and rhetoric, as the jazz rhythms of *Dark Laughter*


(1925) and the machine poetry of *Perhaps Women* (1931) demonstrate. But if intuition and spontaneity granted him early success, his later preoccupation with stylistic experiment, especially as influenced by Joyce, proved his failure. William Faulkner makes a just assessment of the significance of style in the older writer's career. Anderson's style was that fumbling for exactitude, the exact word and phrase within the limited scope of a vocabulary controlled and even repressed by what was in him almost a fetish of simplicity... He worked so hard at this that it finally became just style: an end instead of a means: so that he presently came to believe that, provided he kept the style pure and inviolate, what the style contained would have to be first rate...

Nevertheless, Anderson's contribution to prose style in America is considerable. In Bridgman's opinion he was "the first writer since Mark Twain to take the vernacular as a serious way of presenting reality. He did not regard it as mere seasoning nor was he tempted to investigate its comic possibilities. To him the vernacular was an innately honest medium, worthy of respect."  

31 In *Dark Laughter* we find such rhythmic exhortations as: "Slap it home to the women! Hit 'em where they live! Slap it home to the gabblers! Give 'em the riz-raz!" (p. 179). Anderson is more successful and his method perhaps more justified in the "Loom Dance" of *Perhaps Women:*

All the looms in the room kept running.
Light danced in the room.
The looms kept dancing.
A weaver was dancing on a minute-man's watch.
A weaver was dancing on a minute-man's glasses. (p. 27)


33 P. 155.
Anderson was annoyed and doubtless hurt by criticism of his lack of definite form, and refused to defend his work in critical terms, pleading that form is "as intangible a thing as love" (Hello Towns!, p. 293). He rejected all concepts of preconceived form, even the idea that a theme or plot should control a story, and insisted that it is not plot that is needed but "form," which he considered a much more elusive thing (STS, p. 255). Not surprisingly, he subscribed to the organic theory of form: it grows "out of the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them" (STS, p. 261). According to Hansen, Anderson's technique emphasized achieving a "sense of life": he did not see why a story should encompass the full life of a character when real-life persons are seldom known in full development. Experience is a fluid, fragmentary thing. Instead of a tightly controlled plot, Anderson developed— or more accurately, as James Schevill shows, adapted from Master's Spoon River Anthology—a "loose" form which more closely conforms to experience. Life itself, Anderson explains,

... is a loose flowing thing. There are no plot stories in life. We are all controlled, constantly and deeply influenced by passing people, passing adventures. ...

34 Letter 59, LSA, p. 7. Floyd Dell objected that the Winesburg tales failed to qualify as stories, that they had neither beginning nor ending (Letter 342, LSA, p. 405). Cf. the comment of Van Wyck Brooks, below, p. 136.

35 Letter 59, LSA, p. 72.

What is wanted is a new looseness. . . .
. . . lives flowing past each other, the whole
however to leave a definite impression, this as a
form that fits one way of life. 37

It is, as Van Wyck Brooks writes, an "unstudied," "lifelike"
form: Anderson's stories "began nowhere and ended nowhere,
as life itself seemed to begin and end." 38

In 1934 when he wrote "Gertrude Stein," Anderson ap­
parently was so absorbed in his study of post-impressionist
painting that he wanted to interpret form as well as style
in the language of painting. He felt a special affinity to
Cezanne not only because of the painter's technique of build­
ing up form in planes of color but also because he too was
attacked on grounds of formlessness (No Swank, p. 85).
Cezanne, not satisfied with the evanescence and superficial­
ity of impressionism, believed painting should be an act of
the mind as well as of the eye and therefore set about re­
storing permanence and substance to painting, using geometri­
cal patterns of light and color to suggest inner realities
beyond the range of sensation. 39 Although Cezanne's color
technique doubtless inspired much of Anderson's aesthetic
theory (the similarities of their philosophies of art are
more extensive than indicated here), we find that in develop­

37 As quoted by Schevill, pp. 96-97. Schevill specu­
lates that this note was intended for Memoirs but fails to
acknowledge a specific source.


ing a theory of form Anderson used a variety of figures, several of which are more suggestive of the principles of his actual practice than are his ambitious statements on color in form. Indeed, when he asserts in the essay on Gertrude Stein that "color lies in the word, form in color," he contradicts an earlier statement which indicates that vocabulary has little to do with story telling, that words must be subordinated to structure. The word must be fitted into the "whole" of the story, he wrote: "the whole thing must have a design, form" (Hello Towns! p. 292). Moreover, Robert Hart cites several statements to show that Anderson puts almost all emphasis on inner structure rather than surface style: the "soul" or "meat" of a story is not the style it is told in, and the "method of writing prose has nothing to do with the story itself." The important thing in story telling, as Hart interprets Anderson, is the "seed," the "heart," the form, which is different from the words. 40

An important clue to the meaning of form in Anderson's thought is the figure of rhythm (musical, though he does not develop it in musical terms): "The writer has a certain tune, a rhythm. When he has caught it the words and sentences flow freely." The writer must "get below the surface," must get into his body "the lower rhythm" which "lies just below the surface of things in nature" (Notebook, p. 185). In other

40 Hart, footnote, p. 189. See Hello Towns!, p. 293, and the statement: "The words used by the tale teller were as colors used by the painter. Form was another matter. It grew out of the materials of the tale and the teller's reaction to them" (STS, p. 261).
words, the heart or seed which informs a story is the writer's intuition of the rhythm of life.

When Anderson speaks of form, he refers primarily not to literary form but to a rhythm pulsing through the cosmos. Nevertheless, this vital current, which is scarcely distinguishable from the "flow of life" at the heart of his nature mysticism, serves as his definition of form—in its cosmic, social, personal, and artistic manifestations. If in his fiction Anderson is able to catch that rhythm, he has achieved the only form that matters, and its realization in a story provides the only organization and design that a story needs. The "form" of a story is its realized sense of life. Consequently, Anderson did not think in terms of crafting a well-made story: to him, as Howard Mumford Jones observes, any doctrine of external form would have been meaningless, since "he sought, instead, the under surface, the subconscious meaning of a human situation: and form . . . is not something imposed, but is brought to life by the mystery of creation itself."\(^{41}\)

The source of this cryptic concept of form is Anderson's almost obsessive need for order in social and personal experience, dating from his early novels attacking industrialization. In *Marching Men*, the second published novel, he appeals from the competitive chaos of the industrial city to the ordered rhythm of corn rows on the land. The vitalist

\(^{41}\) Introduction, *LSA*, p. xviii.
implications of the images of fertile land and maturing grain should not be passed over, for in Anderson's writing order and form are linked to fruition and fulfillment.

Chicago is one vast gulf of disorder. Here is the passion for gain, the very spirit of the bourgeoisie [sic] gone drunk with desire. . . . Chicago is leaderless, purposeless, slovenly. . . .

And back of Chicago lie the long corn fields that are not disorderly. There is hope in the corn. Spring comes and the corn is green. It shoots up out of the black land and stands in orderly rows. The corn grows and thinks of nothing but growth. Fruition comes to the corn and it is cut down and disappears. . . .

And Chicago has forgotten the lesson of the corn. . . . It has never been told to the young men who came out of the corn fields to live in the city.

For Anderson the order and symmetry of the corn rows offered, as Percy Boynton states, "a restoration of the rhythm of life [which would] set all things in their places. . . ." 43

In his early writing career and under Carlyle's influence, 44 Anderson felt that order and discipline were worth almost any cost (a position he was soon to abandon 45), and his early ideas provide a key to the meaning of form as contained in his later, more mellow writing. In Marching Men, for example, he sees that

in the heart of all men lies sleeping the love of order. How to achieve order out of our strange jumble of forms, out of democracies and monarchies, dreams and endeavors is the riddle of the Universe

42 (New York: John Lane, 1917), p. 156.
44 Hilton, p. 103.
and the thing that in the artist is called the passion for form. . . . (pp. 65-66, italics added)

Here Anderson equates the artist's instinct for form with the demand for order in broader relationships of life. "Passion for form"—form being defined as a cosmic tendency toward order, growth, completion—is as fundamental to Anderson's aesthetics as it is to his naturalism. He consistently defines form, even in the context of art, not in artistic or structural but in naturalistic and vitalist terms. It is a universal, living force in nature, and the artist is simply that person who by virtue of his peculiar sympathy is able to evoke its contours in a given experience.

The artist, any man born artist as I was . . . , has this hunger to remake, to recreate. There is this shapeless thing all about him everywhere and the fingers ache to reshape it. (Memoirs, p. 251)

What Anderson terms "reshaping" and "recreating" is actually the more passive act of catching in a work of art the symmetry underlying the disorder and distortion—grotesquerie in Anderson's fictional vision—of American life. The artist intuits and defines hidden form: in that sense he is a creator, but the form exists prior to his "creative" action. Often, Anderson declares,

I walk about knowing there is form existent everywhere, in lives, things, in nature too.
It does not become form to me until I comprehend form in it.
There is a little reaching, a straining after the thing, the form. In comprehending it I create it too.

46 Letter 158, LSA, p. 191 (italics added).
The artist thus "bring[s] life out of the _______ of hidden form, in lives, nature, things, the living form.

In an important letter to Norman Holmes Pearson, Anderson says that the artist begins from a "hunger for order"--a desire to have "brought into consciousness something that is always there but that gets so terribly lost." "I have the belief," he continues, "that in this matter of form it is largely a matter of depth of feeling. . . . Feel it deeply enough, and you will be torn inside and driven on until form comes." 48

In this statement Anderson links form with feeling; at other times he connects it to love. We should recall in this connection that he defines love in the broad sense of a capacity for sympathy and tenderness. He attributes the disorder and competitiveness of American life to a loss of unifying affection and pins his hope for national redemption on "this universal thing, scattered about in many people, a fragment of it here, a fragment there, this thing we call love that we have to keep on trying to tap." 49 As Pearson interprets this statement, Anderson holds that fragmentation of affection results in what we recognize as disorder and

47 *Ibid.*, p. 192 (italics added). The editor notes that this letter is only partly legible; hence there are occasional omissions and indications of questioned readings.


crudity, but beneath the surface is latent coherence—a solidarity of feeling and understanding which Anderson calls "this universal thing." 50

According to Anderson's theory, crudity and ugliness represent the fragmentation of "living" form brought about by frustration of the passional drives toward wholeness, symmetry, and beauty; and, since the fragments have the potentiality of perfection in form, art can and should embrace crude, disordered, ugly experience. 51 When the artist is able to feel into the life of an experience, its form becomes apparent. Form and therefore beauty are inherent in all experience and are evoked by feeling, or love. Love has ordering power. Hence Pearson concludes that from Anderson's point of view, "nothing if seen and felt deeply enough, could remain outside of order or the truly organic form of a work of art, for which one hungered as one hungered for order in society." 52

As in his social criticism discordant society could be restored to wholeness by recharging its life with love, so in Anderson's fictional practice a story attains form when infused with feeling and tenderness. Moreover, his characters are defined by their compulsion to bridge emotional gaps in

50 P. 61.

51 Cf. Anderson's observation that writing which is close to life will find expression in "crude and broken forms" (Notebook, p. 198).

52 P. 61.
order to complete the symmetry of their lives. Often blindly and always instinctively the grotesques are seen groping toward a fully "formed" life. Thus, according to Pearson, Wing Biddlebaum represents a "frustrated impulse toward achievement of form and beauty in life" and Kate Swift, who lies naked clutching a pillow to her breast, "aches for the fully formed circle which sex might have completed." Their gestures toward fulfillment may appear crude and vagrant but in them lies a form which love discerns. They are grotesque only because involved in disordered society—disordered by emotional and spiritual constriction. The relevance of Anderson's cornfield imagery for the human situation should now be clear. Whether searching out form in a landscape or a human situation, he perceives order—symbolized by corn rows—as related to vitality, instinctive fulfillment, sexuality—symbolized by ripening grain.

It is significant that Anderson defines both form and beauty in vitalist terms. The connection he makes between the two is inherent and organic: form is the organizing principle of beauty. In art, he asserts, form is the "force that hold(s) the thing of loveliness together." Form exists objectively, but is known subjectively. Since Anderson held that the artist, or any sensitive person, comprehends experience in artistic, i.e., imaginative-intuitional terms, it follows that "form" is comprehended only in art or at least

in the terms of art. In Anderson's thinking, therefore, art has philosophical value: it is the only means of ordering and expressing intuited reality—which for Anderson is the dimension of reality in which men actually live.

Ultimately the artist's comprehension of form and its realization in a work of art are identical to what Anderson describes as "illumination." I have already cited as an instance of illumination the "unison." Anderson claimed to feel with plowman, horses, and earth during one of his walks in the country. There are two accounts of that experience. In the Memoirs version he says that the sense of unison, the passion for "flowing accord with the materials of . . . life" arises from discrimination of form and rhythm in the pastoral scene: ranks of diagonal plow furrows, play of horses' muscles, land curling behind a marching plow. He notes that painters and poets favor such lyrical scenes of reaping and plowing, and adds that comprehension of this kind is experienced in "illuminating moments" (pp. 267-68). In the letter to Pearson, however, Anderson uses the same incident to explain the aesthetic apprehension of form, contending that art grows out of a "hunger for order," the urge to bring "into consciousness something that is always there. . . ." In the context, the "something" referred to is unmistakably "form,"

56 See above, pp. 113-14.
57 Letter 322, LSA, p. 387.
which is equated inferentially with illumination. When, therefore, Anderson speaks of the artist's or writer's free floating ideas and indefinite intuitions which "become definite and alive" in "a sudden realization of beauty,"\(^{58}\) he is describing both illumination and spontaneous achievement of form. The narrator's sudden comprehension of ordered relationships in confused and fractured experience is to the reader a simultaneous disclosure of the psychic unity and coherence of a tale, which hitherto has seemed a welter of yearning and puzzlement.

Anderson wrote to Charles Bockler that he considered it futile to think of form as form because it is and can be nothing else than "content." As Anderson sees it, the need of the artist is not to devise or construct form but rather to unite himself intuitively with living reality. A tree, he says,

> can grow . . . in the soil of your own being.

> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

> The great thing is to let yourself be the tree, the sky, the earth. . . . It is difficult and can only happen rarely. . . . My meaning is that life is not so separated from art. How often I go away from . . . artists [who endlessly theorize about art] into the street, the field.

> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

> What I want is there. If I go in and come out clean, . . . in the end these same people who say I have no form will be prattling of the "form" in my work.

Thus the theory of vital form returns us to Anderson's basic principle of feeling into the life of things and "love of

\(^{58}\) See above, p. 77, and Letter 296, LSA, p. 357.

To his mind, the content of art is a sense of life; and the realization of life as beauty—whether in personal fulfillment or in artistic expression—is the achievement of form. In the novels of the great Russian writers, he says, one feels life in every page. When the writer gives a sharp sense of the life about him, the reader "enters into that life, feels the hidden passions of the peoples. . . ." Something is "torn aside, all lies, all trickery about life [are] gone for the moment. It is . . . what one seeks constantly in one's own craftsmanship . . ." (STS, p. 237).

If a "sense of life" is content, and therefore form, then a story achieves form not primarily as a literary structure but as psychological and spiritual experience. In the shared discovery of a sense of life there is among author (or narrator), character, and reader a fusion of sensibility, a closing of the circle of identity, a realization of solidarity and wholeness—which according to the narrator in "Death in the Woods," has a beauty of its own. Anderson seems to equate as interrelated elements of the artistic process: content or intuition, the sense of life, beauty, and form—all of which are brought into coherent focus in an illuminating moment or epiphany.

In Anderson's theory, form is defined, somewhat mystically, in terms of the opposition of factual and imaginative experience, the universal tendency of life to organize

60 Letter 73, LSA, p. 93.
itself, and the intuitive capacities of man to engage the vital order of nature. The artist or narrator discovers meaning and coherence when experience is subjectively transferred from the plane of fact to the plane of imagination where the hidden, living order becomes apparent to the intuitive mind. It will be recalled that Anderson draws a clear distinction between the chaos and privation of factual experience and the liberating vitality of imaginative experience. For him the life of fact is confused, disordered, and usually purposeless whereas in the aesthetic, imaginative life "there is determination to give the tale, the song, the painting, form, to make it true and real to theme, not to life" (MHI, p. 70). On its face this statement seems to contradict positions we have seen Anderson taking earlier, but the problem is actually one of failure to develop a consistent critical vocabulary. He has reversed the meanings and values he customarily assigns to the terms "theme" and "life." "Theme" is used here to mean not a controlling "moral" but an intuitive order of the imagination while "life"—which usually refers to vitality and fulfillment—now means the life of fact, of Puritan inhibition and materialism. The life of fact lacks "real morality": it is "loose, immoral, meaningless" and the artist must find his values and moral standards apart from it. 61 The tension implied in this opposition of values—the awareness of transcendent harmony concealed in the world of fact—

61 Letter 158, LSA, pp. 192-93.
accounts for the complexity of mood and tone in the characteristic Anderson tale.

"Hands" in *Winesburg* is one such tale and one of Anderson's finest achievements, in which he attains a near-perfect fusion of psychic and structural coherence. Wing Biddlebaum is, as Burbank says, a "human fragment," frightened, reticent, and filled with self-doubt; yet we soon learn from his compulsive actions and the vehemence of his release in talking to George Willard that he scarcely restrains a rare and powerful creativity. The story of the traumatic event which made Biddlebaum a "shadow" man reveals his extraordinary humanity—tragically thwarted by a society so crass that it finds gentleness and love incomprehensible in their own terms.

"Hands" also exemplifies Anderson's conception of form as order latent in fragmented experience and intuited by love. The form of the story is focused through the images of the Golden Age which Biddlebaum evokes for George Willard and through the author's "hidden wonder story" of the hands. The warmly lyrical picture of the young schoolmaster's intuitive rapport with his charges suggests the ideal of understanding and instinctive community:

The stroking of the shoulder and the touching of the hair were a part of the schoolmaster's effort to carry a dream into the young minds... Under the caress of his hands doubt and disbelief went out of the minds of the boys and they began also to dream. (Pp. 31-32)

As the reader comes to share in the author's compassion for
Wing Biddlebaum, he begins to feel the coherence and beauty hidden in Biddlebaum's life and the story. Anderson's sympathetic characterization gradually reveals Biddlebaum as a man so attuned to the flow of life that his natural and innocent tenderness is mistaken for evil by an alien world. He does not even understand what has happened, but he feels vaguely that his hands must be to blame.

The story is an intuitive evocation of rhythm and harmony in human disorder. Its motive force is love for life and the beauty of life. It is so infused with the author's affection that the reader's corresponding sympathies almost unconsciously—Anderson never forces the effect—engage with the pulsing sense of life which defines its form and meaning. And in uniting author, character, and reader in a community of understanding, the story offers promise of the recovery of form in society as well.62

Only at the end, however, is the dichotomy of factual and intuitive values resolved in a vision of the schoolmaster beatified and transfigured: the full disclosure of the story's meaning and the perfection of its form occur simultaneously in a final illumination. The typical Anderson story, as Walcutt notes, ends with a climactic "revelation or a sharing of experience that suddenly becomes coherent out of the chaos of the narrator's apparently objectless rambling."63

62 See below, pp. 170-71.
63 P. 165.
We have seen that Anderson uses the term "form" in several senses. Objectively, form exists as a vital rhythm submerged in the loose, meaningless life of fact. Subjectively, it is manifested, first, as the artist's intuition of order in fragmented experience and his simultaneous realization of that intuition in a work of art where it organizes and manifests beauty, and, second, as the reader's corresponding discovery of a sense of life and beauty evoked in the artifact.

As Anderson conceived it, form is essentially a sense of rapport with life. He confessed that he knew little about a work of art on first seeing one, but after letting it "live" before him for a time, he found that it had a "definite life" of its own. "What to you now seems loose, sloppy, badly joined together, may tomorrow, before your very eyes, be(g)in to tighten up." Form is an intuitive, quasi-mystic phenomenon, known only to those equipped with such exquisite feeling for life as unifies Anderson's philosophy. He says, for example, that if he were to place an apple before him and contemplate it at length, he would gradually discriminate its "form" and find himself unable to touch it; his hands would tremble as they approached because he would feel that the apple had been shifted from a world of darkness into the world of light, where form is revealed. The artist is one who seeks the hidden form in life and sets it forth as beauty in the illumina-

64 Letter 158, LSA, p. 190.
tion of fancy. With "nervous and uncertain" hands he "feel[s] for the form of things concealed in darkness." 65 Comprehension of form is not in the artist's control; he must strain after it. The "groping" manner which annoys the critics is inherent in Anderson's definition of art as a quest for vital form and significance in experience.

Writing to Maxwell Perkins in 1935, Anderson confided: "I have always tried to work out of pure feeling, having the conviction that if I got the feeling straight and pure enough, the form I wanted would follow." 66 For his surrender to feeling Anderson paid a high price in the failure of most of his stories and all of his novels with the exception of Winesburg—if it is considered a novel. But only by relying on feeling could he attain the "purity" and "form" his aesthetic required. The English novelist George Borrow (author of Lavengro and The Romany Rye) and the Russians were his models of literary purity. Anderson admired Borrow for letting his stories grow from loosely associated ideas, shifting attention easily to any character which happened to "pop" into his head. His virtue was that he was governed by no plan or


66 Letter 269, LSA, p. 331 (italics added). Anderson adds that he has since abandoned reliance on intuition as the only means of achieving form. At the time, he was writing a novel which he was trying "to make more objective, . . . trying . . . to use mind as well as feeling." A month later he wrote Dreiser that he was trying "to get a bit more outside, not quite so much surrender to pure feeling, more observation—more mind . . . (Letter 272, LSA, p. 335). He apparently referred to his last novel, Kit Brandon (1936).
plot, but trusted his own "prejudices" and cared only for the glory of writing: these qualities, Anderson felt, gave his work a special purity (*No Swank*, pp. 44-46, *passim*). By "purity" Anderson means that the writer creates out of his own thought and feeling without regard to what the public or editors demand (*Modern Writer*, p. 33). A pure feeling gives rise to appropriate form.

Anderson's interest in form was not merely artistic, however; he believed it has moral significance as well. Since the writer's materials are human lives, any betrayal of the integrity of the writing craft constitutes a betrayal of humanity. The achievement of form, he declares,

> must be in some way tied up with something I can find no other word to describe aside from the word "morality." . . . The artist who doesn't struggle all his life to achieve this form . . . betrays this morality.67

A writer betray his craft when he lies about story people or when he resorts to sentimental ("tricky") solutions to human problems. In a letter to De Vries, Anderson argues that the moral obligation of the artist to imaginary characters is greater than his obligation to real people. Real people can at least deny the lies told about them, but story people are often made to do things which real persons of similar character would not do. In Anderson's opinion, fiction of that kind is bad art but--more importantly--it is also immoral art. He insists on the sacredness of imaginary

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persons and deplores the violence done them when writers make them "do this or that to fit into a scheme thought out." Pure form, therefore, derives from the writer's aesthetic integrity—which again is essentially a matter of feeling—the writer's reliance on his "own reactions to life" in shaping a story.

Furthermore, Anderson believed that "morality of form" is relevant in social conduct and he offered it in challenge to established middle-class morality. Throughout his writing career he had objected that commercial fiction and American art in general were based on the false sentimentalism of Puritan ethics. Earlier, when he had rejected idealistic literature and produced the Winesburg tales out of the repressed, "muddled" life about him, he had been denounced as unclean, nasty, and perverted, but he insisted that while writing such stories he had experienced a rare engagement with life and emerged feeling especially "clean" (STS, p. 274).

What shocked his readers in the early 1920's and earned for him the labels "realist" and "naturalist" was the operation in his fiction of a moral paradox implied in the doctrine of purity: namely, the proposition that only art which com-

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68 Letter 379, LSA, p. 446. See also Letter 322, p. 388.
69 Letter 73, LSA, p. 92. See also Letter 384, p. 451, in which Anderson attributes the writer's integrity to his interest in the lives of people.
71 Letter 73, LSA, p. 93.
prehends the whole of life including its looseness, immorality, and disorder can be clean, pure, moral. On this premise Anderson defended Dreiser, arguing that despite the ugliness of his subject matter, Dreiser is wholesome because "he is true to something in the life about him and truth is always wholesome." Always it is truth to life that governs Anderson's values. Augusto Centeno states the thesis more summarily than Anderson: "The morality of art is not the morality of morality. But in a profound sense, art—that is true art—is essentially moral. The complete symbolic possession of livingness is itself a moral good."

The story "Hands" is a demonstration of aesthetic morality. There is no falsification, no sentimentalizing of character or the conditions of life: in social terms Wing Biddlebaum's extraordinary gentleness brings personal calamity, and the ugliness of factual reality is presented with uncompromising honesty. Nor can there be any question of sincerity: the characterization of Biddlebaum defies conventional expectation and can only have been created from a visceral reaction to experience. He acts as only Wing Biddlebaum

72 Letter 158, LSA, pp. 192-93.

73 Notebook, p. 199. This argument does not contradict Anderson's assertion that the artist is obligated to "essential" rather than to factual truth. Writing out of authentic feeling for life (purity) is tantamount to another Anderson doctrine—that the writer must immerse himself in the life around him.

could; his conduct is dictated by no pre-conceived scheme. In its purity of feeling, its respect for characters as persons in their own right, and its comprehension of life's looseness and ugliness, this tale attains the wholesomeness, the integrity of vision which Anderson calls the morality of form. And the revelation of Wing Biddlebaum as one who had been in unison with "the force that creates life" at once gives form to the story, measures the moral failure of American society, and exalts the principle of life which, for Anderson, is the ground of aesthetic and moral value.

As an artist Anderson renounced responsibility for reforming the world at large, but to the world he knew during the twenties and thirties—a world without transcendent values—he believed that the discipline of aesthetic form and its implied purity of feeling offered a basis for moral reconstruction. The morality the world was seeking would be found "in an attitude, first of all, to [the] imagined life."

Anderson's ethics, like his aesthetics, begins in rigorous fidelity to the conditions of actual life. In his judgment, the artist is obligated to search out the essence of human "livingness," accepting disorder, ugliness, and immorality—"grotesquerie"—for what they are and feeling into the vital form—i.e., the potential for completeness, unison,

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75 See below, pp. 167-68.
76 See above, pp. 117-18.
77 Letter 379, LSA, p. 446.
and beauty— inherent in factual experience. A morality of that kind might lack the refinement and gentility of a more idealistic ethics, but for Anderson its very rudeness was the hallmark of its integrity. He had after all founded his aesthetics on the proposition that an artist's faithfulness to tangled human relations results in a crude and imperfect execution of art. But its beauty, its wholesomeness, its morality lies in its integrity. So he claims of his own work:

My own errors, my looseness, my constant experiment—and failure is [sic] the only decent thing about me. . . . What is to . . . make the air sweet, the ground good under the feet, can only be got at by . . . trial . . . and . . . failure.

Like many other writers after 1850 and especially in the twentieth century, Anderson was seeking in art a religious mode for an age which had discredited Christian idealism. There was urgency in his tone when he pleaded that artists must struggle to achieve form because the morality of form "may be the only true morality there is in the world." The moral problem was still before him two years later when he wrote that art backed by integrity—purity of feeling—is "perhaps the only real moral base we have left to us. . . . The great want of our lives [may be] just a moral base on which to stand."

78 Letter 73, LSA, p. 93, and Notebook, p. 198. See above, pp. 98-100.
81 Letter 363, 1939, LSA, p. 430.
Although Anderson scorned critical theory, the concepts we have examined thus far demonstrate that his observations on the nature of art, though scattered and casual, add up to a theory of considerable fullness and unexpected logical consistency. In this chapter we have seen that Anderson's vitalist and intuitive premises pervade his ideas of the most technical aspects of aesthetics—style and form. His demand for "color" in prose is directed toward achieving a vital expressiveness born not of calculation but of emotional engagement—he called it the expression of "love in words." This is not to say, of course, that Anderson's practice always or even usually conformed to his theory: indeed, as Faulkner indicates, after 1924 Anderson's writing tended in many instances to degenerate into pursuit of surface stylistic effect and he lacked the self-critical ability to see what was happening. But in theory he held that style grows from intuition and he conceived of form in vitalist terms—as a latent tendency to order and completeness which is manifested as coherence and beauty in the work of an artist who feels deeply enough the need for order and growth in human experience.
CHAPTER V

THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST

Anderson's concept of the artist's role, like the whole of his theory of art, was an outgrowth of his own experience as a writer. The redemptive implications of his themes and his humanitarian sympathies quite naturally led him to think of himself and of the artist class as a positive spiritual force and a public voice. His early posture as a writer, however, was negative rather than positive.

Anderson's Literary Development

Between Anderson's first two novels and his later writings there is a decisive shift in his attitude toward the American Midwest. Bernard Duffey defines this as a change from rejection and rebellion to appreciation and concern: Anderson's writings evolve from a fiction of propaganda and political reform to a fiction based on loving scrutiny of individual lives.1 Windy McPherson's Son (1916) and Marching Men (1917) are motivated by his discontent with a disorderly, purposeless, and constrictive culture. In Marching Men Anderson answered the need for order by creating a Carlylean

1 Pp. 49-55.
strongman who single-mindedly imposes order by regimenting workers into unthinking, robotic marching units. The book is inspired by hate\(^2\) and Nietzschean contempt for ordinary men and their institutions.\(^3\)

The new note of concern and compassion becomes evident in *Mid-American Chants* (1918) and in *Winesburg* (1919). Since *Chants* was published first, it has generally been assumed that the poems mark the turning point and represent the shift in attitude that generated the vision of *Winesburg*. Although Anderson himself apparently confirms that assumption by implying that *Chants* came first,\(^4\) the reverse seems to be the actual case. Walter Rideout has developed evidence to show that the majority of the *Winesburg* stories were completed before *Chants* was written,\(^5\) thus making *Winesburg* the earliest evidence of Anderson's new spirit and the turning point of his development as a writer.

But it remains true, as Duffey observes, that *Chants*

\(^2\) Hilton, p. 97. Note the contrast Hilton draws between the early and later novels.

\(^3\) *Marching Men*, Bk. I, Ch. III, pp. 38-50.

\(^4\) Letter 91, *LSA*, p. 93.

\(^5\) The significance of *Chants* in Anderson's development is scarcely challenged by the question since in any event the two works, as I shall later demonstrate, are so close in time that the periods of composition overlap in part. The contention that *Chants* directly influenced *Winesburg* as a whole is, of course, refuted by Rideout's chronology, according to which *Chants* was written in two or three months between the last of February and mid-April or possibly early May 1917 while most of *Winesburg* had been completed by the summer of 1916 (see Rideout, *Chants*, pp. 150-52).
marks an end of Anderson's rebellion and an acceptance of the Midwest as his America, now recognizing it as the only America he would ever have. Furthermore, as I shall later show, Chants seems to have influenced the last three Winesburg tales, which were written after Chants and, in varying degrees, share with it a hopefulness not characteristic of Winesburg as a whole. Anderson himself saw Chants as a break between two phases of his career: an early phase of reaction against the Philistinism of American business and alliance with revolutionary liberalism (which he later repudiated), and a mature phase, accepting the city and factory as the basis for cultural and artistic renewal (the thesis of "An Apology for Crudity").

Critics agree that it was a visit in New York with the editors of The Seven Arts during the winter of 1917 (about the time Rideout assigns for the writing of Chants) that showed Anderson the creative potential of his own region: these editors—Frank, Brooks, James Oppenheim, and Rosenfeld—were at the time discovering the significance of the Midwest in the American ethos. A new sympathy for the people of the

6 Pp. 49-55. See Letter 37, LSA, p. 43.

7 Below, footnote, pp. 169-70.

8 Letter 63, LSA, pp. 78-79. Cf. Letter 73, pp. 92-93. The first phase represents a time earlier than the 1916-17 dates of Windy and Marching Men since drafts of those novels were written in Elyria, Ohio, prior to Anderson's removal to Chicago early in 1913 (Sutton, p. 17).

Midwest is evident in the compassionate treatment of character in Winesburg and confidence in the future of the region appears in the conclusion. These attitudes, much enlarged and intensified, appear as the announced themes of Chants. After Marching Men Anderson abandoned any but psychological and moral goals; more than once he renounced mass reform movements—which he called "socialistic"—partly because they suppressed individuality but also because he believed their usually materialistic goals to be incompatible with the spiritual purposes of the artist. He makes a clear distinction between the reformer or propagandist and the writer, and insists on the uniqueness of the writer's vocation.

His anti-materialist and moralizing tendencies, Pearson thinks, link Anderson to the New England introspective tradition. Anderson certainly thought of himself as a moral spokesman for his age: Mid-American Chants goes beyond social criticism and reveals the writer in a prophet's role leading his people to a rebirth of brotherhood. And the poems also display the outlines of a mystic naturalism which furnishes a religious and philosophical basis for the doctrine of brotherhood.

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10 See Burbank, p. 46.


12 Letter 265, LSA, pp. 319-20.

13 Hello Towns!, pp. 327-28, and Letter 61, LSA, p. 75.

14 P. 52.
Agrarian Mysticism

Anderson told Waldo Frank that in writing *Chants* he wanted to "bring God home to the sweaty men in the corn rows. My songs shall creep into their hearts and teach them the sacredness of the long aisles of growing things that lead to the throne of the God of men." He had already produced in the tales of *Winesburg* a medium more compatible with his lyricism than the imitative chants, but he was never to abandon the spiritual commitment which the chants express. He thought of art as a vehicle of religious value in the same way that he thought of the artist's intuition as a source of moral value. He perceived in art alone the possibility of attaining the "impersonal" love that is necessary to the good and satisfying life. In one letter he flatly declares that the artist is the only religious man alive.

In *Memoirs* Anderson calls his religion a "cornfield" mysticism (p. 487). Actually, except for an explicit agrarian emphasis and perhaps an obsessive need for order, it differs little from the nineteenth-century pantheism popularized by Transcendentalism, which had taken from Deism the concept of universal, perfect, moral laws manifested in the order and harmony of nature and adapted it to a different epistemology. In Transcendentalism the archetypal laws are known

by intuition rather than by reason. After taking into account Whitman's intermediate influence, one need look no further than American Transcendentalism for the origin of Anderson's philosophical speculation.

Agrarian motifs, often expressed in specialized symbols of fertility and sexuality, predominated in Anderson's publications from the first and continued to orient his thought through the final decade, when he professed to find in the machine the order and force he earlier had ascribed only to nature. The agrarian outlook is native to the Midwest and in Anderson's case is reinforced by his admiration for Mark Twain, but, of course, it is the myth of all America. Anderson mines a well-worked vein: his basic images, for instance, can be found in Hawthorne's notebook sketch of an idyllic valley tasselled with corn: its tranquil spell is undisturbed by the sounds of husbandry but is jolted by intruding industry in the form of a locomotive's shriek.


19 While Anderson's ideas are markedly similar, his formative work anticipates by several years the impact of the Nashville Agrarians in the 1920's and early 30's, and there is no evidence that he took notice of them when they did appear.

20 See below, pp. 175-79.

Anderson's conception of transcendent reality is vague in the extreme. Essentially it is a metaphysical "presence" defined primarily by orderliness and infinite size, and manifested in nature as life-rhythm. George Willard feels impelled on occasion to align his life with "something orderly and big that swings through the night like a star" (Winesburg, p. 183, italics added). Men of pastoral America, Anderson says, had a "sense of bigness outside themselves" that is now lost in shrillness and emptiness. In the Golden Age there was order and repose; "mystery whispered in the grass."  

Anderson's mysticism involves two basic values: instinctive vitality and order in human relationships. The second is dependent on the first and each is objectified by an aspect of Anderson's chosen metaphor—corn. What industrial America needed, Anderson thought, was a revival of primitive instinct and a religion of nature unafraid of sex and the senses, which would restore the emotional connections between person and person (Perhaps Women, pp. 57-58).

The instinctive life is symbolized by germinating corn. The Midwesterners of "The Cornfields" are loosed from their chains by the poet incarnated as a corn god dying and rising again in the grain. Finding his own "bands" broken, the poet vows to set up in the cornfields the sacred vessel which will bring love to the hearts of his people, who have forgotten the corn. This chant is Anderson's credo: in the person of

the corn god-poet he affirms his faith in instinctual renewal, the recurrent regeneration of life, which is the great theme of his vocation as an artist.

Completing the metaphoric pattern, social arrangements are likewise expressed by an agrarian figure—the spacing and ordered planting of the corn on the land. Thus the significant features of the corn are growth and orderliness: the cornfield represents a stable world in which proportion and beauty as well as growth and renewal are yet possible—a symbolic return to the pastoral order and spontaneity of pre-industrial experience. The cornfield is a token of transcendent promise: "Long aisles running into the dawn and beyond / To the throne of gods" (p. 35). The spatial order of the corn, in Rideout's phrase, points to "the metaphysical order of 'the gods,' who represent the essentially religious harmony of brotherhood toward which the poet hopes to guide [America] . . . ,"—a conception at the center of Anderson's philosophy, which pivots on the relevance of comic harmony for human relationships. The mystic faith and vision of brotherhood are universalized projections of his own quest for transcendence growing out of the personal crisis that set him writing, and _Mid-American Chants_ is the record of his successful resolution of that crisis in a spiritual definition of the literary vocation. _Chants_ is an intensely personal document, as Anderson reveals in describing its origin:

I reached into my own personal muttering, half-insane and disordered, and tried to take out of them [sic] a little something ordered. . . . I clutched at the ordered cornfield(s), insisted on them to myself, and took them as about the only thing I could see.

The Artist in a Religious Role

It would be a mistake to accept Anderson's assertion that story telling is worthwhile in itself as a declaration of aestheticism, for although as an artist he rejects the role of reformer, he does not reject the role of religious spokesman or prophet. Pearson characterizes Anderson as a man "most concerned with the lesson he could teach his time," and indeed Anderson frequently casts himself as the spokesman-bard of his country. He wants to encompass America in all its vastness, to know and feel it in all its variety (Memoirs, p. 554). He declares himself "the American man"—one in rapport with all men—and, because of his position as writer, "a kind of composite essence of it all." In Chants he is even more explicit. The poet proclaims: "I will renew in my people the worship of gods" (p. 11), and the foreword states Anderson's prophetic intention:

In secret a million men and women are trying, as I have to express the hunger within and I have dared to put these chants forth only because I hope and believe they may find an answering and clearer call in the hearts of other Mid-Americans. (p. 8)

26 P. 58.
27 Letter 82, LSA, p. 104.
Anderson, like the bard of *Leaves of Grass*, assumes that by speaking his own feeling he can be the spokesman of his people and articulate their unspoken dreams. That assumption, as is well known, underlies *Winesburg*. Moreover, it is an implied axiom in the Anderson aesthetic: the artist by trusting his feeling is able to intuit and express the hidden thoughts and yearnings of others and thereby restore them to communion with their fellows.

The artist is characterized as a prophet chiefly in Anderson's earlier writing; in later works he tends to emphasize the artist in a priestly role. In "Man and His Imagination" he calls on artists and writers to shun any ambition to correct social evils and to live instead by the morality of the artist, based on understanding of individual men. By feeling into lives, by understanding what hurts particular people and causes their strange behavior, artists can develop the unique moral point-of-view needed to become "priests to the imaginative lives of [them]selves and others" (pp. 77-79). Thus the work of the artist is sacramental. Imaginative art is a means of uniting subject, artist, and spectator in a community and affection which redeems all from isolation and sterility. It is when community is experienced that the artist's work attains "form"—evoking the power of love to reorder and reunite divided humanity. Art, at least the writer's art, is morally significant because its materials

28 *Rideout, "Chants,"* pp. 158 and 163.
are human: basically it is an ordering of human relationships. This identity of art and life is the heart of Anderson's doctrine of craft. According to Duffey, Anderson believed that the writer was the artist of language and the artist of life: "in discerning and arranging one, he arranged and so discerned the other. In realizing one he realized the other. The two could not in his view be separated without destroying the very nature of literature." It may be, Anderson says, that "just this artist's point of view, this morality . . . that occasionally forces him to bring his materials into real form, is the only thing that may, in the end, pull mankind out of its mess." The artist, then, is not only a prophet-spokesman but a priest as well, a mediator between transcendent experience and ordinary men. Indeed, from Anderson's point of view, art is the only available means of relating cosmic energy and order to men's lives. The materials of art, he once said, "have to take the place of God."

The Artist and America

Anderson, like Nick Carraway, was absorbed in contemplation of America's lost promise. His thought is motivated by an acute consciousness of American failure: "America started out . . . with so much to offer the world [and] . . . we have failed. We have become as a people, rich in goods

29 P. 54. 30 Letter 322, LSA, p. 388.
31 Letter 140, LSA, p. 166.
and too poor in something else."32 Nevertheless, he was saved by his vitalist faith from the despair that overtook the "lost generation" and remained one of the few who did not lose confidence in American institutions, although he did, like many, become tentatively involved in some socialist movements. Doubtless because he is known almost exclusively through the grim characterizations of Winesburg and a few stories of adolescent puzzlement, Anderson's optimism has passed virtually unnoticed. But Winesburg does not end with Wash Williams' diatribe of hate but with an idyll of youthful awakening and fulfillment; even while writing those twilit tales of defeat and frustration, the author was—as Mid-American Chants proves—working through the chaos of American experience to a lyrical vision of personal and national renewal—a possibility of beginning again.33 Because it places the

32 Letter 219, LSA, p. 269.

33 See Pearson, p. 58. Although most of the Winesburg tales had been written by spring or summer 1916, "Sophistication" and "Departure," the two stories of final affirmation, are among a group of four which, though apparently written later, cannot be accurately dated. These two, along with the story "Death," seem to have been written to round out the volume for publication in April 1919, after it had been rejected by one publisher. If allowance is made for delay in switching publishers and time required to prepare the manuscript for the first publisher, the last three stories must have been completed by the summer of 1918 or about a year after Rideout's date for the completion of Chants (see William L. Phillips, "How Sherwood Anderson Wrote Winesburg, Ohio," American Literature, 23 (March 1951), rpt. in Achievement, pp. 79-84. Chants, then, falls between the composition of the first twenty-one Winesburg tales and the undated four which come later, three of which reflect a new mood of affirmation and form the conclusion of the book. "Death" represents a momentary release from isolation, too late to save the older generation in the persons of Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth Willard; but the theme of regeneration leads di-
grotesque elements of the book in perspective, the final para-
agraph and especially the final sentence are important to un-
derstanding the total moral outlook of Winesburg, Ohio. As
the book ends, the adolescent who has glimpsed horror beneath
the American surface leaves that dark world for a new day
and the promise of a new beginning as a man in the city.
Glancing from the train window, George Willard discovers that
the childhood town has disappeared: "his life there had be-
come but a background on which to paint the dreams of his
manhood," the author concludes (p. 247).

Anderson puts a heavy burden on the artist, who as
priest to the imaginative life must effect nothing less than
a regeneration and reordering of American life. The recovery
of order and harmony, like the achievement of artistic form,
is a matter of feeling: if the artist feels deeply enough
the hurt of men cut off from their fellows, his work is so
imbued with tenderness that those who see it are moved to like
compassion; and the tendency to unity and coherence, which is
manifest in the natural state and latent in social experience,
is then recovered in community and brotherhood. Thus, through
the ordering power of love the artist does, as Anderson says,
act to bring life out of the hidden, living form of things.
The task of the artist is essentially religious: to realize
the order of the gods in the disorder of experience.

rectly into the vital awakening of youth in the two final
stories. It seems therefore that Anderson's discovery of a
principle of faith detailed in Mid-American Chants precedes
and probably accounts for the modulation of tone and the
lyric mood of resolution in the conclusion of Winesburg.
In the Andersonian vision of a new America the grotesquerie of persons involved in disordered society is resolved when through a rebirth of instinct they become newly conformed to a truly ordered world— that is, a world of vitality, imagination, and beauty. In *Winesburg* the resolution comes in the affecting story "Sophistication." In the darkened grandstand of Winesburg's fairgrounds George Willard and Helen White seemed to be two oddly sensitive atoms [who] held each other tightly and waited. In the mind of each was the same thought. "I have come to this lonely place and here is this other," was the substance of the thing felt.

.......

She took his arm and walked beside him in dignified silence. For some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing needed. (Pp. 241 and 243, italics added)

The spontaneous, natural ordering of human relationships has here been comprehended in a story which itself exemplifies Anderson's theory of form as feeling. Form as social experience is achieved by the instinctive contacts of boy and girl which awaken them to vital awareness and acts of mutual support in the face of surrounding confusion. Form as literature is achieved in the reader's discovery of his empathy with the youths' instinctive need and their easy and uninhibited way of satisfying it. *Winesburg*'s frustration is

*34 Pearson, p. 55.*

*35 Anderson's formulation of their spiritual anxiety: "One shudders at the thought of the meaninglessness of life while at the same instant . . . one loves life so intensely . . ." (p. 241).*
finally resolved in a liberating affirmation of the spirit and of life which looks beyond the boy and girl, beyond the tale and the book to a prospect of regeneration at large: "Man or boy, woman or girl, they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible" (p. 243, italics added).

Because in Anderson's judgment the artist alone in the twentieth century has the means and influence to tap the fund of love and understanding needed to reorder American life around more humane values, the artist seems the final hope of salvation. Sanity, perhaps survival, depends on success in his role as prophet and priest. Anderson certainly believed—as Duffey suggests—that it is only through love that men can be redeemed and the world be made habitable. For him art is neither an aesthetic construct nor an instrument of reform: it is a gospel, a communication of life. The artist's function is evangelical and redemptive: he draws men into fellowship with others and rapport with nature—not, to be sure, through exhortation but through infusion of love. As Rideout remarks, the experience is not primarily social but religious; Anderson does not simply seek a return to the village but a change of heart, a conversion. Nonetheless, his image for the millennium is the village of his pre-indus-

36 Letter 233, LSA, p. 287.  
37 P. 51.  
38 Above, pp. 112-13, and Anderson's letter to De Vries, LSA, pp. 448-49.  
trial youth. Under its "invisible roof" men lived like members of a single family, he recalls. "Everyone knew his neighbor and was known to him ..." and "for the moment mankind seemed about to try to understand itself" (Poor White, pp. 46-67).

Sherwood Anderson's fundamental concern as a writer, he repeatedly stated, was human life, and in America he saw human impulses locked in by emotional inhibition on the one hand and depersonalization and dissociation on the other. His stories and his theory of fiction alike are responses to that condition. As is well known, Anderson began writing as an escape from the spiritual and emotional constriction of life in the Midwest. He wrote to save himself. Thus the impetus of his art is not aesthetic but psychological and spiritual. Similarly, his theory of writing is stated not in terms of literary execution--how to devise a successful story--but in terms of human development--how to enhance the vitality of life in America.

The humanitarian impulse, as we have seen, led Anderson to a vitalist definition of beauty and a concept of the artist as a lover whose sympathetic imagination can transform frustrated instinct and express it as beauty. At every point aesthetic value is authenticated by human value. Hence the moral significance of aesthetic form, which is inseparable from form in human arrangements, and the religious role of the artist who, because his materials are human lives and his objective the salvation of men, is seen as a priest and
a prophet.

As a generalization of the artistic process Anderson's critical theory has obvious limitations, the most serious of which, doubtless, is that it requires a surrender to intuition which would leave the artist no control. Even in Anderson's writing it rarely leads to satisfactory results, and the most successful writers of our time have followed very different principles. However, in its insistence on the essential human value of art, the theory has a validity which is demonstrated in his own work. It is the humanity of his stories that moves us, and the same can be said of his theory, flawed and imprecise though it is.

The Anderson aesthetic is grounded in a felt need to restore intimacy and communion in a civilization which subordinates human vitality to the impersonal structures of materialism. An absorbing compassion for those whose lives are thwarted and incomplete shapes his theory of art and his conception of the artist. In the end, it is Anderson himself with his profound love of life and humanity that compels assent to his concept of art as it does to his masterpieces of short fiction.
During the last decade of his life Anderson's attitude toward industry shifted significantly, probably as a result of tours he made through factory towns during Depression years. In 1930 he wrote to Nelson Crawford, editor of Household Magazine, that he was no longer protesting the machine age but now accepted the factory as the biggest thing in American life.\(^1\) By 1932 he was arguing that the factory should be assimilated into all artistic disciplines\(^2\) and was himself writing impressionistic essays celebrating the machine age, in which he tried to adapt machine rhythms to the language of the essays.

Anderson's attitude is markedly ambivalent, however. In the essays collected as Perhaps Women (1931) his praise of the machine is systematically qualified by a concluding skepticism. "Machine Song," for example, acclaims the versatility of machines but concludes with the ironic observation that those who give themselves to the new age must be prepared to give up individuality (pp. 9-17). In other selections Anderson wonders at the speed, accuracy, and beauty of the factory but also reflects that it is responsible for

\(^1\) Letter 171, LSA, p. 207.

social divisiveness and for degrading the men who operate the
machines (pp. 44-46 and 118-40, passim). The following year
he published Beyond Desire, an approach to a proletarian
novel, which examines mill town life in the New South and,
while pointing toward new values and possibilities of under­
standing among workers, also voices some of Anderson's early
objections to industrialization, and adds a few new ones. 3

By 1935, however, Anderson was writing of industry as
the new way for the nation. Puzzled America contains his ob­
servations on economic conditions of the South and Midwest
and prospects for recovery under the New Deal. As awed by
the machinery of the TVA dams as Henry Adams had been by the
dynamo in Chicago, he wrote lyrically of the singing motors
which represent the power of the land. 4 Thomas West believes
that Anderson sensed in the dams the same mass and power he
had always associated with the land: the hydroelectric plant
was a fusion of the wealth of technology with the wealth of
the land. The TVA gave Anderson a vision of power ordered and
purposive, as he had not seen it in chaotic industrial cities
such as Chicago. 5 The TVA's use of technology seemed en­
lightened and creative: it conserved resources through re­
forestation and reclamation and poured benefits back into the
region from which power was taken. More important, perhaps,

3 See Walter Rideout, Introduction, Beyond Desire
5 Pp. 22-23, 33-34.
he found in the engineers and foresters a craftsman's sensibility: they felt they were building and conserving, and they were motivated by a sense of purpose. The accomplishments of the TVA suggested to Anderson that technology might be accommodated to a humane philosophy and thus assimilated to the purposes of his mystic faith and his art.

Anderson doubtless believed that, separated from materialistic objectives, industrial power offered the best hope of recovery to the nation. At any rate, by 1930 he had accepted the factory and the machine as permanent and important aspects of American life and had begun to examine them for their spiritual values. His correspondence suggests what he had in mind. In February 1930 he wrote to Horace Liveright that he was looking for the swing, the music, that would give his prose "poetic content" and thought he had found it in the whirl and wonder of the factory; in his new writing he was concentrating on the "energy" and "dance" of the high speed machine. In the letter to Crawford, dated the same month, he says he has written a piece which has "the hum and speed of modern machinery." But Anderson's interest in machine phenomena had begun much earlier, at least as early as Marching Men (1917), which suggests the influence of Futurist art flourishing in Italy at that time. His robot

6 Puzzled America, pp. 59-65.
7 Letter 173, LSA, p. 209.
8 Letter 171, LSA, pp. 207-08. The article referred to is "Cotton Mill," Scribner's, 88 (July 1930), 1-11.
vision in that novel bears remarkable similarity to the Futurist political ideal of men functioning as cogs in a mechanized society, and his later enthusiasm for a machine aesthetic unmistakably echoes the machine vocabulary and thematic interest in speed, force, and velocity characteristic of Futurists such as Fernand Léger and Gino Severini. While there is no specific evidence of direct influence, Anderson was sufficiently knowledgeable of contemporary trends in art at least to be acquainted with the movement. Moreover, the work of one painter of the mechanical style could not have escaped his notice: Marcel Duchamp's study of motion, "Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2," was the sensation of the Armory Show, which Anderson saw when it toured Chicago in 1914.

The hum of the machine, its many parts coordinated in perfect harmony, appealed to Anderson's sense of form and rhythm. He was trying, he said, to "go to machinery as a man might go to the mountains and to the forests and rivers," looking to the factory as well as to the farm for a new religious experience which would be the way of the future. The trend of his thought is clear: he was seeking in technology a way to bring over into the new age the psychic satisfac-

9 Fleming, pp. 345-46.
11 Letter 171, LSA, p. 207.
12 Letter 211, LSA, p. 258.
tions of agrarian experience. His hymns to the machine are inspired by its force, ordered movement, and poetry: his agrarian fiction is inspired by similar qualities—the vital energy, harmony, and rhythm he felt in nature. The prompting impulses are basically no different in one than in the other.

Just what effect the new slant on technology may have had on Anderson's aesthetics is something of a puzzle. Anderson's only story collection published after 1930 is Death in the Woods (1933), which shows little evidence of change. "The Mountaineers" makes brief mention of Southern mills and striking workers, and in "The Return" the automobile provides escape back to the city for an architect who is disillusioned by a nostalgic visit to his home town. The remaining stories, however, are pastoral in tone and the book as a whole seems much closer to Anderson's agrarian period than to his last phase. "The Mountaineers" had been published separately in 1930, but most of the stories had been published even earlier. An exception is "Brother Death," a pastoral in Anderson's lyric style, written to round out the collection apparently in 1932,13 well after his announced change of thinking. Evidently, as late as 1932 Anderson had not abandoned the fictional approach of Winesburg and the early story collections. It might be argued that in this case he was obliged to complete the book with a story in the prevailing tone; but the tender feeling of this—one of his finer stories—is too gen-

uine to be contrived and, furthermore, if we credit Anderson's life-long profession of aesthetic integrity, we cannot believe he either would or could write a story in accord with principles he had already abandoned.

Equally significant is the dating of critical writings. "Mr. J. J. Lankes and His Woodcuts," possibly Anderson's most vitalistic interpretation of art in terms of pastoral and folk experience, was published in 1931. "Man and His Imagination," published in the year of Anderson's death, likewise is unaffected by any reappraisal of art in terms of technology.

Moreover, Anderson's attempts to capture the rhythm and force of the machine are mainly confined to rhapsodic passages in essays on the factory theme, the most effective of which—"Loom Dance"—is a burlesque of the factory system. And the equivocal tone persists in other fiction as well. In Beyond Desire (1932) the writer's exaltation before dancing machines and ordered factory processes is countered by the observed tenseness and exhaustion of workers whose movements are geared to the unrelenting pace of the machines (pp. 49-54). In only one novel, Kit Brandon (1936), is there positive evidence of revaluation. Land is viewed in a new perspective: no longer an ordered pastoral, it is the realistic geography of the hill farmer, but even so the author

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14 Perhaps Women, pp. 30-40.
15 New York: Scribner's.
finds in the hills an individuality not possible in the factory town. There are speeding high-powered cars and whirling mill looms, but these prove to be not positive values but mere escapes from subsistence in the hills, and the heroine fails to find the liberating power which Anderson had hoped for in the machine. The fact is that Anderson continued to harbor significant reservations about industry throughout his career in spite of occasional professions of faith in the machine as the road and religion of the future.

On balance, it seems that, although technology became Anderson's increasing preoccupation during years of the Depression and Recovery, he did not follow through on his stated intention to make the machine the basis of a new artistic vision. His interest in a technological religion and art appears as an abortive gesture, the last of several experimental enthusiasms which characterize his restless career. There is no evidence that he rethought his formulation of aesthetics or—as the pastoral mode of "Brother Death" proves—changed his approach to the writing of the short story.
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Commemorative Issues


VITA

Mr. Sebastian was born August 19, 1926, in Winter Garden, Florida, and was brought up in that state, graduating in 1944 from Plant City High School and in 1947 from Stetson University, where he received an A.B. degree with honors.

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