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Brenda H. Renalds

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON, DRAMATIST

BY

BRENDA HART RENALDS

A THESIS
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MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

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Preface

Sherwood Anderson's position as an important figure in American literature is a secure one. *Winesburg, Ohio* and several of his tales are established as minor American classics which, unlike many classics, are still widely read; and although he left a relatively small body of first-rate work, the quality of that work has assured him a significant and lasting place in twentieth-century literature. Anderson's plays represent a little-known facet of his career and, indeed, in relation to the whole of his literary output the plays are insignificant. They are interesting to a student of Anderson, however, because they give insight into both his personal life and his literary career.

This study begins with a chronological account of Anderson's interest in drama and the theater. In it I have tried to show that Anderson's playwriting was one of several attempts in his later life to reinforce his waning reputation. Chapter Two presents a comparison of the plays and the related stories, with emphasis on the process of adapting for the stage. In the final chapter I have attempted to analyze Anderson's dramatic technique as displayed in his published plays.

I wish to express my appreciation to those who have helped me in preparing this paper. Mrs. Sherwood Anderson of Marion, Virginia, suggested to me possible sources of information for my topic and also let me use four unpublished manuscripts by Anderson. Jasper Deeter of the Hedgerow Theatre, Paoli, Pennsylvania, talked with me
about Anderson's interest in the theater and thus provided much information that is not available in any of the biographies of Anderson.

The staff of the University of Richmond library, and especially Mrs. Betty Spencer, have co-operated greatly by locating hard-to-find books and articles for me.

Dr. G. O. Gunter of the English Department, University of Richmond, has been extremely helpful by reading the rough draft of this paper and offering suggestions for improvement, especially those concerning the Conclusion.

My especial thanks are extended to Dr. Welford D. Taylor of the English Department, University of Richmond. It was because of his interest in Sherwood Anderson that he suggested the topic of this paper. I am indebted to him for his knowledge of Anderson materials which saved me much time in research and his sharing of ideas which helped me formulate a working outline for the paper. I also appreciate his careful perusal of the rough draft and his comments suggesting corrections and improvements for this final copy.

B. H. R.
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Chapter I
Anderson's Interest in the Theater

Sherwood Anderson published only a few plays and, beside his lasting contributions to American literature (such as Winesburg, Ohio), these plays are of little literary value. To the student of Anderson, however, they are important not only because they reflect one of the many facets of Anderson's interest in literature but also because, near the end of his life, his dramatic attempts reflect concern for his literary career. Although his interest in the theater began early, he turned to the writing of plays later when he suffered through long periods of time in which he could not create the kind of fiction which he justly felt was his true calling. Anderson's enthusiasm for the theater was genuine and seemingly not initiated by hope of monetary gain. However, his dramatic attempts, along with his political and newspaper activities of the thirties, are probably most accurately viewed as an effort by Anderson to revive the urge to create and to regain his slipping reputation.

Anderson's initial interest in theater was influenced by Jacques Copeau, the French critic, actor, manager, and producer, who visited Anderson in 1917 while he was in America with his players of the Vieux Colombier Theatre of Paris. In later years their visit was recalled by Anderson in his Memoirs. In this account Anderson stated that Copeau wanted to dramatize the Winesburg stories, for he believed that these tales were the first full rich
expression of something he, a foreigner, felt about American life. The two men were going to write the play together; they wandered through the streets of Chicago so that the Frenchman might observe the city's life "over the back fences," and all the time they talked of the making of the play. Copeau would make one of his broad gestures: "Oh, the theater, theater! It should bring all of this in. Life should come pulsating into the theater from the very streets. Try Sherwood. You must try. Who knows. There is a great new drama here, in America. You may be the American dramatist. You may be it without knowing that you are." With that the thought was put into Anderson's head.

The Winesburg play, which Anderson was to do with Copeau, never materialized, but the idea of being "the American dramatist" lingered for a time. Anderson began going to the theater. Through a friend, John Emerson, he secured a job in New York in the fall of 1918, as a publicity man for a large movie company. While working at the studios Anderson did not try to write any movies, for "the whole thing seemed too wonderful to me. I went about in a daze." He felt, however, that the movies were "a great door opening" for the actor and the play maker—a medium that allowed the imagination to roam unfettered over the world. Short stories, even novels could be done in pictures. An ordinary man's life could be put on

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2 Ibid., p. 305.
3 Ibid.
the screen and everyone could understand "how accidental life is, how men are blown about like dry leaves before a wind, some called 'good,' others 'bad.'" Before everyone's eyes the little deceptions of life could be exposed and destroyed.

This was a time of inner excitement for Anderson, who thought he might get a chance to write his kind of stories for the movies. But he was soon disillusioned, for the seemingly open door closed as entertainment alone became the dominant theme of moviemaking. He realized that money, in the studios as in advertising, was the ruling force--making both actor and playwright subservient. This fact hastened Anderson's decision not to write for films.

And so, for a long period of time, there was little thought of the stage. In a letter to the American writer Mary Austin in 1923, in which he mentions Copeau's influence, he adds: "Whenever I go to the theater, I shudder at the notion [of writing drama]. I've a fancy myself that anything I have to give can be given as a tale teller as well as any other way." However, some of the Frenchman's enthusiasm must have lingered, for two years later in a letter to Laurence Stallings, the dramatist and journalist, Anderson asked that Stallings "look through my stuff" in a search for possible dramatic material. Evidently there was no positive reply and once again, from 1925-1932, Anderson's theater ambitions lay dormant as major changes occurred in his artistic and personal

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1Ibid.

life. These changes were, for the most part, motivated by his desire to regain the creative urge and to restore his failing critical image—the same desire which motivated his renewed interest in the theater in 1932.

In the early part of this period, Anderson split with the publishing firm of Ben Huebsch and signed a contract with Horace Liveright. He was to be paid $100.00 per week as a drawing account against royalties and was to get fifteen per cent of the retail price and ten per cent from Modern Library reprints. Thus Anderson would have the security he longed for and would not have to waste writing time on money-making lecture tours. The only drawback was that he was obligated to deliver one full-length work each year. Liveright's abilities as a "book salesman" were affirmed when the writer's income suddenly increased after the new contract was signed. Dark Laughter (1925) was made Anderson's best selling book—a public success that he never again achieved.

In July 1925, Anderson and Elizabeth, his third wife, first visited Marion, Virginia, where in one of his afternoon travels he discovered a cabin beside Ripshin Creek, in a small upland valley near Troutdale. By October, when his finances had begun to improve and he had started on another lecture tour, he and Elizabeth planned to buy the farm and build a house there. Construction on the house began in the spring of 1926, and, when completed, the cost of $10,000, actually very little for the space provided and the quality of the workmanship involved, represented almost all of Anderson's capital. He knew, however, that he could always raise
money by lecturing; the important fact was that his house was now a reality.

Somehow, with the building of the house, the urge to write had lessened and almost disappeared. Anderson had been too excited while watching the construction to concentrate on writing and then had felt too guilty to proceed from any of the many starts he made on a never-completed novel. His second trip to Europe was taken, in the winter of 1926-1927, so that he might possibly regain the lost impulse to write and obtain a fresh approach to his work. This "frantic attempt to pull away from dead center" was not successful, for even after returning to Ripshin, the image of artistic failure continued to haunt him. This sense of failure was heightened by the death of his brother Earl, whose poignant endeavor to become a painter symbolized to Anderson his own search for literary achievement.

For a time his artistic spirit lay quiescent, although in 1927 he did publish A New Testament, a collection of poems, most of which had been written in the early twenties. Moreover, Anderson was going through the trial of directing the lives of his two sons; a discord was beginning between him and Elizabeth, caused by their basic temperamental differences; and his contract with Liveright to produce a work each year was especially disturbing. So, through the summer of 1927, Anderson struggled to write but

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was "hardly able to do more than string together single-sentence paragraphs that were almost individual cries of pain."  

Anderson spent much time working on the farm and even became interested in mushrooms as a new hobby. But because his writing would not flow, he wanted some activity besides farming. He tried to fill his periods of creative inactivity with letter writing, but eventually he decided that he must leave the secluded farm. He felt that a job (other than a routine business job, which would leave him no time to write) would involve him with others and would prompt his lagging inspiration.

In the fall of 1927, the ideal position appeared. Two country newspapers, the Smythe County News (Republican) and the Marion Democrat were on sale in Marion. With financing by his friend Burton Emmett, Anderson bought them, hoping that country journalism would be the ideal way of re-entering the social contacts that had provoked his better writing. To John Anderson, he admitted that he bought them "because, having nothing to do but write, I found myself unable to do that."  

Soon the dark mood vanished. As he regained the urge to create he exulted to Emmett, "As I suspected the moment I had something else to do I began wanting to write." Although he did articles for magazines and began a novel, he was,

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7Ibid.

8Letters, p. 182.

during the last months of 1927 and the whole of 1928, content to
be reporter, editor, and publisher of the papers. In July 1928,
he told Gertrude Stein, "All the work I am doing is the paper. It
is a busy and amusing life."\textsuperscript{10}

In 1929 Anderson published a collection of his newspaper writ-
ings entitled \textit{Hello Towns}. Although this volume has of necessity
much of the transient quality of reportage, it retains interest in
some respects. In writing a dreamlike flow of small town life,
Anderson returned to his early ideas of structure. \textit{Hello Towns}
frequently rises above mere reportage in the touches of fantasy
which go behind the placidity of the small town inhabitants, and
portray the queer twists of imagination brought about by the same-
ness of daily life. Temporarily, the newspapers solved Anderson's
problem by lifting him into the stream of life. The understanding
of village life—the ability to see "the humorous side of tragedy,
and the tragic side of humor"—seen in \textit{Hello Towns} mark it as a
return to the days of \textit{Winesburg, Ohio}, with a greater maturity.
Although the book was not a financial success, Anderson considered
it an artistic achievement, and it set a standard for country jour-
nalism. Its fragmentary quality may be a result not only of
Anderson's life and the nature of newspaper work, but also of the
temper of the nation in the year 1929.

During the twenties Anderson had had little interest in poli-
tics. Although he sympathized with the working class, he had

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 247.
remained aloof from participation in political activities. Even during World War I Anderson had been concerned mainly with his literary struggles and seemed content to leave the political world alone. However, the disaster of 1929 changed not only his belief that the best government governs least, but also his distrust in group action.

Behind the national tragedy lay a personal crisis: in the first months of 1929 he and Elizabeth separated. And, too, he was still plagued with the inability to do satisfactory creative work. Although he had been enthusiastic about his newspapers, he had considered them only a stopgap—a lead back into contact with the imagination. As he continually brooded over the decline of his creative powers and his personal relations, Anderson wrote to Ferdinand and Clara Schevill:

To tell the truth, I have been this year more dispirited that I ever remember to have been. That made me determined to fight it out with myself, if I could...

There was a great temptation to throw everything up and try something new, as I had done so often before—a new place, a new woman, a new book to write, etc.

Anderson left Ripshin in December and returned to Chicago. He was writing Beyond Desire (to be published in 1932) and he desperately needed the assurance that the success of the book would bring. "I think you know, Horace," he wrote to Liveright, "that I have to have this book right, not only on account of its chances of success, but also because of myself. I want to whip out of me

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11Letters, p. 194.
this sense of defeat I have had. As in other instances, the course of his own life was foreshadowed by the role portrayed by one of his characters. Like Red Oliver in Beyond Desire, Anderson came out of the village to champion the cause of the working man and to become a reformer. He realized that he needed to find some objective interest in the outer world, some cause which would lead his thoughts from concentration upon his disturbed self. The social crisis of 1929-1930, which was permeating the country, provided this interest, but the intensity with which he turned to it was due to the influence of Eleanor Copenhaver.

Miss Copenhaver, reared in a cultivated Marion family, was a social worker who had risen to become the Industrial Secretary of the YWCA. Through her activities in the Southern labor movement she helped give Anderson a deep insight into the problems of women factory workers. Soon, on their trips through the South, he saw at first hand the conditions of the mills in the small towns; and he began enlisting aid for the cause of the workers. Anderson often found himself speaking at mill-town strike rallies and, because he instinctively turned to the back-country language of the workers, he quickly managed to reach an intimate rapport with his audiences. By the middle of 1930, Anderson was able to write the Schevills: "I do seem to myself alive again and wish you could see me now, rather than have the memory of me as I was last winter. . . . I did right to go to the factories. I'm going back to

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12 Ibid., p. 200.
them this winter."\(^{13}\)

If his feelings for Eleanor deepened his interest in industrial problems, it was the mill strike at Danville, Virginia, beginning on September 29, 1930, that brought him to the heart of the labor struggle. The Communists were active in the strike and Anderson commended their action on the part of the workers. His sympathy for their movement reached its peak in 1932, but he had to leave participation in group movements to return to the individual in order to establish contact with creative sources. In the fall of 1932, on the boat coming back from the Amsterdam Peace Congress ("one of the innumerable gatherings of the innocent arranged by the not-so-innocent"\(^{14}\)), Anderson noted: "I have got rested and have begun to think again aside from--World conferences--the proletariat. I have been reading Lawrence and that awakes in me as he always does the individual that is Sherwood Anderson aside from everything."\(^{15}\)

In the latter months of 1932, Anderson was continually asked to express his approval of Russia. He could only answer, "I have not been to Russia and do not know,"\(^{16}\) and express his sympathy for the "experiment" going on there. Actually, his interest in the theater had revived during these months, and as always,

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 219.

\(^{14}\)Irving Howe, Anderson (New York, 1951), p. 220.

\(^{15}\)Schevill, p. 295.

\(^{16}\)Letters, p. 269.
his concern with politics became secondary.

That year The Dramatic Publishing Company of Chicago published The Triumph of the Egg, a one-act dramatization of Anderson's short story made in 1922 by Raymond O'Neil. A production based on this dramatization had been given on February 10, 1925, by the Provincetown Players as a curtain-raiser for Eugene O'Neill's two-act play, Different. Evidently it caught the fancy of the audience and was a success. In a letter to the publishing company, which became a foreword to the play, Anderson displayed his renewed interest in drama:

The Provincetown Players did some things to the setting of the play that I rather liked. The scene of the mother and the child was done offstage, in a room opening off the restaurant, the father standing in the doorway and talking to the mother. The audience never did see the stage child and got the sense of him from the mother's talk and from the little voice of the child saying his prayers. . . . Your own imagination—you being of the audience—made the child exist. You—being of the audience—recalled perhaps your own childhood. It was very effective and satisfactory.

At the last—by my friend's, Mr. Raymond O'Neil's, version of the story—you see the two people. . . . They having thrown themselves sobbing on the bed. This ending did a little violate my own conception when I wrote the story. To me the whole point of the play should be that the audience stays balanced between laughter and tears. . . .

In the fall of 1932, Eleanor Copenhaver and Anderson attended a gathering at Horace Liveright's in New York. The publisher was on the verge of physical and financial collapse, but he spoke eagerly of the future and mentioned the plays he planned to produce.

\[17\text{Ibid.},\ p. 263.\]
He enthusiastically introduced Anderson to Arthur Barton, a former actor and the author of a play entitled *Wonder Boy*. With a smile Barton told Anderson of a drunken actor who always carried a copy of *Winesburg* with him and read the stories aloud whenever he was given a chance to do so. Barton then suggested that he might make a play of *Winesburg* and Liveright talked excitingly of producing it.

When he returned to Marion, the fresh memories of the New York stage and of his conversation with Barton set Anderson to work. Soon he wrote his brother Karl: "I went to work—going it like mad night and day for three weeks and a play came forth."  

In January 1933, Anderson went to Kansas City to stay for several months while Eleanor was there in connection with her job. He was excited about the play and still hoped that Barton might help with the adaptation. In a letter from his hotel he wrote:

"I hardly know what I'll do now. The play has gone off to N.Y. to see if anyone wants to play it..."  

Late in the winter Anderson's theatrical hopes were boosted when he learned that the Theatre Guild had taken an option on the *Winesburg* play.  

This good news was heightened by another pleasant prospect. On April 5 of the previous year, H. S. Kraft, a free-lance writer in New York, had first written Anderson to suggest that they work together on a movie or a play. Letters between

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18 Schevill, pp. 298-299.
19 Letters, p. 275.
20 The play *Winesburg, Ohio* will be hereafter distinguished from the short story collection thus: *Winesburg, Ohio* (P)
the two followed, and on March 16, 1933, Anderson wrote to Kraft from his Kansas City hotel suggesting possible material for a dramatic work:

This thought has occurred to me—a combination of the figures of Henry Ford and Abraham Lincoln. Think about the figure of Hugh in Poor White, who has something of a Lincoln quality, and then combine him with the figure of Henry Ford. This could be worked out into the factory so that the town of Bidwell in Poor White became a place like Ford's Dearborn.

All this contrasted with changing life out of agricultural and into industrial America, the splendor of the machines and the factories contrasted with the growing degradation of the life of the people.

I presume we would have to work out a definite story hung about one man or a family, and above all we must get into it the feeling that it is a transition period into some more splendid America. If we cannot get the story and the figure of one man, I am sure we can do it with a family.

It is significant that the figure of Abraham Lincoln, so admired by Anderson, is here merged with Henry Ford, the symbol of modern industrialism. This combination of the two figures indicates the writer's change in attitude toward the machine. From being "one of the outstanding little protesters against the machine age" Anderson had come to accept it and to realize that the machine might free a people as Lincoln had once done. It is typical of Anderson's dramatic schemes that the line, "I presume we would have to work out a definite story..." is included almost as an after thought. The theme, the message, not the practicalities of the stage, were the important things to him.

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21 Letters, p. 279.
22 Ibid., p. 207.
Later, the possibility of Anderson and Kraft collaborating on a work developed into a project for an opera and also involved Louis Gruenberg, the composer of a successful opera adapted from O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*. Anderson spoke of Gruenberg's interest in a letter to Adelaide Walker, written while he was still in Kansas City. Mrs. Walker and her husband, Charles, were at the time making preparations to establish a workers' theater, later the Theater Union, and had written to Anderson suggesting that he apply to the Guggenheim Foundation for financial assistance so that he might write labor plays. She requested that he give a brief summary of his life and work and a statement of his theatrical aims ("my situation, my plans, and my dreams") for the benefit of Henry Moe, the Secretary General of the Guggenheim Foundation. His reply was, in part:

> Several things have happened in the last few weeks which I must tell you about to make the situation clear... Mr. Gruenberg... got excited by some of my machine things and by things of mine touching on the relationship of man and the machine, such things as "Lift Up Thine Eyes," "Loom Dance," and others... Now Gruenberg wants to work on this with me this summer. What I have in mind is a kind of march of machinery across American life, the glory and the tragedy of it.

Although he was very interested in the money and the travel that this fund would provide, Anderson was hesitant to leave the United States because of his belief that much dramatic material lay in this country:

> The truth is that I am very anxious to pick up anything

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23 Ibid., p. 282.
24 Ibid., p. 280.
I can from the German or Russian theatre, but I am also anxious not to be out of America for any long period during the next two or three years if it can be avoided. Things are too exciting here, and I do think that we are on the edge of getting hold of something in relation to man and the machine and particularly in relation to America, that might possibly find a grand expression both in plays and in music.  

However, this money from the foundation, which would have allowed Anderson to give all his energy to production and would have removed his constant fear of financial failure, was presented to someone else.

Still the plans for a three-way collaboration on a dramatic production continued. Just before he left Kansas City in March to return to Marion, Anderson wrote Kraft and Gruenberg a letter which included detailed, and yet dramatically vague, ideas for an opening scene. Anderson's fascination for sound and color, for the Abraham Lincoln theme, and for man's relation to the machine are all seen here.

How are you, Kraft, for action? Can you dance, climb trees, leap mountains? I keep wondering if G. is going through my stuff finds anything that makes him want to sing. I've thought all these years I've been writing, that if I'm any good at all, there should be music at the bottom of my prose. . . . I have . . . dreamed all the time that I might be planting song. You know, something like song seeds in prose, I guess.

Anderson had been ill and as he lay in bed with fever the beginnings of the piece had begun to form in his mind:

There was, first of all, a grey blanket of sound . . .

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26 Ibid., p. 253.

25 Ibid.
(City sounds coming to a sick man in a hotel room.)
Like a theatre curtain of sound.
Not too grey. Let flashes of warm color shoot through
the grey monotony of it . . .
Maybe factory whistles on a winter morning, when it
is still dark, police sirens, etc. . . .
Then to the first scene.
It is a potato field on a cold moonlight night, and
people are at work. Everything is cold. The people are
poor and ragged.
The cold makes them jump, jump, jump. The ground is
icy cold. "We got to get these potatoes out."
Their fingers are cold. They are picking up the po-
tatoes and running with them to bags.
They blow on their hands.
They thrash their arms.
They are passing a bottle about, drinking and dancing
as they work. They sing and shout and curse.
Then a strange figure appears. The potato field is
at the edge of a wood. The figure comes half crawling
out of the shadows.
It is Abraham Lincoln, working now, not just to free
the blacks, but to free all labor, the heavy, brutal
labor that for ages has tied men to the soil.
"Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?"
This is the American man, tall and uncouth, the
dreamer.
He is at the same time practical and shrewd.
He is in the field at night, trying to make his body
into a machine. Song of labor. Song of hope.
He crawls grotesquely, writhing, singing, raises arms
and legs—the machine being made . . .
The figure on the ground arises and proclaims the
machine, the machine that will dig and plant potatoes,
make men's shoes, make clothes . . .
Man is to be free, free, free.
As the man who has been trying to make himself into
a machine, in order to understand the machine, dances,
a queer, jerky machine dance, proclaiming man's machine
dream, the workers huddle against the fence. They are
like the potato bags, standing there trembling.

With this as an opening scene, Anderson saw it as being developed
into "the story of man's making of the machine, then his struggle
with it, the coming victory proclaimed." 28

27 Ibid., pp. 283-284.
28 Ibid., p. 285.
In early May Anderson wrote from New York that "the Gruenberg thing is on fire."29 After visiting the Gruenbergs, however, he continued: "As for Gruenberg, when it came right down to it, I found him afraid of the machine theme, fascinated but afraid."30 Unacquainted, Anderson presented him with another idea, "an opera to be called Mississippi, the story of the Mississippi River set to music. He has jumped at this like a hungry fish, as it gives him colorful opportunities. . . ."31 On May 6 Anderson wrote to Gruenberg: "As to the work we want to get into . . . the idea of the Mississippi stays in my dreams at night and I constantly see new scenes that I can put before you."32

This expectant mood was jolted by Liveright's shocking failure as a publisher. The company's financial crash coincided with the publication of Death in the Woods, which was getting a fine press. What Anderson suspected, that "it could be sold, but the Liveright mess will probably check it," became truth. Earlier, this failure might have been fatal to Anderson's work but, fortunately, his love for Eleanor had helped bring on a renewal of the creative spirit. Realizing this, in July he wrote to Burton Emmett: "I am on my way down south to get Eleanor and bring her home. I am going to make her marry me." They were married on July 6, 1933.

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
32 Scévill, p. 301.
and from the beginning the marriage was a happy one.

After his marriage, Anderson's last years were spent largely in desperate and truncated efforts to continue creating: plans drawn and unfulfilled, books begun and unfinished, books finished and unpublished. F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote bitterly, "There are no second acts in American lives," and it is true that the early achievement of American writers is seldom enlarged in maturity. Our society tends to glorify only a beginning or a dead creative talent and yet, if Anderson's talent failed to fulfill itself, the fault did not lie simply in the flaws of a materialistic society. Anderson also suffered from personal failings. His wanderlust often drove him from his purpose and he had entered too many blind alleys—his first marriages, newspaper work, political propaganda, lecturing. Although his marriage somewhat revived his waning creative powers, he still let himself be distracted from the writing of fiction, which he knew to be his major purpose.

The ambition to write for the theater became more frustrating when the collaboration with Arthur Barton on Winesburg (P) did not work out. Barton's play, Nun Bites Dog, which opened in New York on April 1933, was labeled "pure horrible . . . such stuff" by Anderson; and it soon became apparent that Barton could not write what to Anderson was a good play. By the middle of July, Anderson had rewritten the draft:

I have been finishing the play, that is to say, rewriting

\[33\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. } 305.\]
it. It's rather fun; the whole business of playwriting being different than any other form of art in that it is, all through, a social art—that is to say, an art in which others must participate. You see, a play, even when you have done all you can on it, must yet move through others, a director, actors, etc. Already, of course, I have had experiences, my first collaborator turning out rather second-rate, so that I had to get rid of him.34

Even with the new version, the possibility of production seemed to fade as the Theatre Guild released its option and other producers showed only temporary enthusiasm. Hopes were revived in May, 1934, when Anderson met Jasper Deeter at Wharton Esherick's in Paoli, Pennsylvania, and discovered that Deeter, the head of the Hedgerow Theatre, was interested in staging *Winesburg* (p). Deeter liked the play except for the last scene, which he described as "very fumbling, very bad." He made suggestions for changes to Anderson, who revised the final scene and added an epilogue. In a letter to Mrs. Copenhaver, Anderson spoke of Deeter's reading of the play and of the changes to be made in the ending:

By this new plan, if it works out, we can avoid all that business over the money in the last scene. The money will rather pass out of the play as it does in the book. It may take a good deal of writing to get just the quality necessary into this scene, but if it can be done, it might give the play at the end just the thing needed. I had an idea after hearing it read by Deeter that what it needed was a thing you might call horizon—the lives of the people in the play passing into other lives of the town and life going on. After the intense evening a laugh at the end, with Parcival used as a kind of symbol.35

34 *Letters*, p. 291.

The dramatic version of *Winesburg, Ohio* received its premiere at the Hedgerow on June 30, 1934. Although the Philadelphia critics were "careful, cautious," the play was popular with the audience and remained in the theater's repertory. A few days after the opening, Anderson, who had returned to Marion, wrote Deeter to suggest some changes, especially in the characters of Parcival and Tom Willard. Although the play seemed solid to him, he planned to "do some effective cutting that will not hurt but will help the movement and the music," and to keep working with Deeter's company until "we get it absolutely right."

As soon as Anderson had completed the new draft of *Winesburg* in July, 1933, he announced that he planned to tackle something new and "I think it will be *The Mississippi*, with Gruenberg." The writing of this opera, however, was also doomed to failure. Although these two men stayed friends, they were too different in temperament to work well together. Gruenberg had a sophisticated European-Jewish background, and he found it difficult to comprehend Anderson's midwestern traits. And certainly, Anderson's vague theme for the opera, "the Mississippi River, the flowing of the waters out of a great continent, floods, the fight to save the farms, cities, etc.," was not really suited to the stage.

Despite these failures, Anderson continued his playwriting

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37 *Letters*, p. 306.
38 *Schevill*, p. 306.
activities. A suggested collaboration with Paul Muni, the movie actor, and Kraft on a mining story for a movie script was dropped before it was begun. Soon, however, he was considering a possible play to be made of Dark Laughter. In a letter to James Creelman, Mrs. Karl Anderson’s nephew, Anderson talked about the use of sound in the theater, his difficulties with playwriting, and the central idea of the Dark Laughter play:

I do think, Jim, that something striking might be worked out in the theatre in the use of sound... I don’t see why sound, voices of people, broken sentences, laughter, and things of that kind, could not come out of the walls of a theatre during a play, giving the audience the feeling of sitting down in the midst of Life going on busily all around them.

The central idea of the Dark Laughter play... should be... the contrast between so-called sophisticated civilized life and the life of the primitive. I do not see why the play could not be played out in, say, the sitting room of a house, just such a story as the story of the two men and a woman in Dark Laughter.

Then the same story could be told in the lives of Negro people, servants in the same house, the same problems facing both masters and servants.

I have the idea, Jim, that my own difficulty, as regards playwriting, is and will always be a matter of structure. I believe I could make people live and can build character.

Evidently John Lloyd of New York worked on such an outline, and Anderson also approached Laurence Stallings about a possible collaboration on a dramatization:

I wonder how much in earnest you were in the little talk we had about our doing a play together. I do

39Letters, p. 268.
40Ibid., pp. 301-302.
think there is a play in Dark Laughter, and I believe we could do it together if you are interested. I find my weakness in playwriting to be the structure rather than dialogue, and I believe that if you could bring up the structure of a play out of Dark Laughter, perhaps using the Negro voices in somewhat the way you suggested in our talk, we might get at something.

The Dark Laughter dramatization was never written, but Anderson continued his playwriting—hoping perhaps to recapture his former fame with a successful play. In his best theatrical efforts he turned to his earlier fiction for ideas because friends had assured him of its dramatic quality. Certainly these works were more adaptable to the stage than such epic themes as "the Mississippi" or "man and the machine." Jasper Deeter said that the practical side of the theater always eluded Anderson. He never understood that "the first demand of the arts is practicality," and he usually became irritated when the impracticality of his dramatic schemes was pointed out to him. 42

In April, 1935, Anderson began his next play. To Roger Sergel he wrote: "I got down the first scene and think it is rather corking and have the next scene sketched out. . . . I think that I learned this from the Winesburg, that I can make the task for the producer easier without sacrificing anything." 43 The play was to be made from Poor White, with names, scenes, and other details changed to avoid copyright trouble with Viking. Anderson's

41 Ibid., p. 304.
42 Interview with Jasper Deeter.
43 Letters, p. 313.
enthusiasm for theatrical work is shown in his remark to Sergel:
"I have a hunch that this playwriting thing is really my meat... I know all of the difficulties, but in some way love the whole idea, even the stink of the theatre..." 44

Anderson was delighted with the young apprentice actors at the Hedgerow and, indeed, with the whole atmosphere of experimentation which prevailed there. He usually spent about two months of every year there, seeing the new plays and working on his own projects. He recorded his 1935 visit in letters to Theodore Dreiser and Roger Sergel.

The Hedgerow had taken into its repertoire the Dreiser-Fiscator dramatization of An American Tragedy, and Anderson was "bowled over" by the "gorgeous, beautiful, direct" production. He thought it much stronger as pure propaganda than the plays of social protest being done by the Theatre Union. "Jesus," he commented to Dreiser, "if some producer had the guts to take these two things [the Tragedy and Minesburg (r)] and put them on on New York, he'd upset the town, and that's a fact." 45

During this visit to Hedgerow, Anderson completed half of his new play on the same theme as Poor White, which he intended to call They Shall Be Free. To Sergel he suggested that "this playmaking thing may have just begun... Man, I'll tell you what you do. Make an outline for a play. Then let's hammer away at it..."

44 Ibid.
I can see no reason why this playmaking thing shouldn't be a social art, two, or even three men engaged in it..."  

Sergel, who, according to Deeter, disliked the version of "Minesburg" that Anderson did, must have also criticized this play, for Anderson wrote defensively in a letter to him:

I couldn't resist showing Jap your letter. It started a long discussion, nothing of course settled. It ended by his saying, "Well, it may all be true, but on the other hand, it may be that you can make a new form for us." So there you are.

I have been reading Chekhov's letters. How much letters tell. It is not said to back up my own convictions, I'm quite sure, not absolutely, but it is true that he was accused, when he went as a story teller into the theater, of almost this same thing. I spoke to Jap of this. "Was Chekhov a real playwright?"

"Yes. He brought something new in. Half the mss. I get show the Chekhov influence."

This sounds, I know, as though I were trying to build up something, a defense. I wonder if I am?

Of setting myself up. I think I am very uncertain. I like the idea of playmaking. As to my being able to do it, that puzzles me.

Deeter did not like They Shall Be Free either and, although, Anderson was offended and hurt, there were no readings of it. Anderson finally conceded that Sergel might be right about the play and his abilities as a playwright. He felt, however, that his great fault was

in the theme, the handling of it. I have been trying to tell, in the play, the story of a creative man, working in the fact, that is to say machinery, and realizing how his creativeness, intended to be a help for others, has ended in what seems to be hurt.

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46 Ibid., p. 318.
My difficulty is that I have been trying to find the answer. That got me muddled, because, as yet, no one, least of all yours truly, knows the answer.

Now I am going to attack in a new way, simply making the play tell, in action, the story, making it a simple tragedy.

Even though this dramatic attempt failed, Anderson was ready to begin again: "If it can be born, it will be born. I've been through abortions before." Anderson added: "In the meantime, I did get, out of an attempt that failed, a very beautiful one-act play." This was *They Married Later*, the better of Anderson's two short plays included in his published volume *Plays: Winesburg and Others*.

Sergel had once suggested the possibility of dramatizing *Marching Men*, but, in a letter to him, Anderson queried: "Aren't you somewhat afraid of *it* ?" He believed that it could be done, but--although he could evoke the proper atmosphere for such a dramatization--his ideas offered little practical material for the plot:

I've been, for some time, hot on the idea of sounds off stage--the threatening thing coming--coming--coming.

This broken and then coming again.

This perhaps against a little inner circle of smug life being played out, in sight.

Far down underneath--

The thing would be to get a story.

It might be just the story of a man's life how he lies to his wife, lays up with whores, etc.--31

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49 *Ibid*.
50 *Ibid*.
Work on this project never began, but Anderson's interest in playwriting did not decline. In May, 1936, during another visit to the Hedgerow, he completed a dramatization of "Hands" from Winesburg, Ohio. It was never performed nor published, however.

Next, Anderson considered it "time to write a comedy." His topic, the Southern aristocracy, was influenced by his continuous interest in the Civil War. For years he had read widely on the subject and in March, 1934, he had written the Emmetts of a project he was considering:

There is something I have wanted to do since I was a boy and I half think now that if I can get the money together so that I can afford it I shall begin the attempt next fall. I want to write a long history of the Civil War with all its implications. I have been reading and preparing for it for years and believe if ever I am to do it I should get at it. If I attempt it, I believe I will go down to Washington next winter and work in the Library of Congress down there. . . .

A note he made for this project, "the true aim of history is human understanding," showed that he understood historical forces; but his friends were doubtful that he had the patience needed for the long scholarly research that would be necessary. Finally Anderson reconsidered, and after meeting Deeter and renewing his interest in the theater, more or less dropped the plan for a Civil War history. His interest did not end, however, and in 1936 he wrote several letters on the subject to Laura Lou Copenhaver. He felt that "what is wanted and needed is a devastating indictment!" 53

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52 Schevill, pp. 314-315.
53 Letters, p. 348.
of the South, exposing its cheapness, hypocrisy, and "lousy pretension to culture." Since Anderson was visiting at Hedgerow and was constantly near the theater, he was "unable to think except in terms of the theater." Therefore, his indictment of the Southern aristocracy was to be couched in dramatic form.

The comedy was never completed, and neither were any of the other dramatic projects that were begun during the last few years before Anderson's death in 1941. In December, 1938, he approached Robert Sherwood, the author of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, with his idea for a play concerning the relationship between Abraham Lincoln and his Secretary of State, William Seward. Anderson believed that each of the two men had something to supplement and strengthen the other, and that out of their relationship two quite different men emerged. A drama emphasizing how the two profoundly affected each other could "bring out the curious misunderstanding of the rest of the country by the New Yorker and of the East by the native Westerner." In his answer, Sherwood thanked Anderson for his approval of the Lincoln play, but said that he would not write another play on the same theme.

Influenced by the success of Paul Green's *The Lost Colony*, Anderson tried to interest Maury Maverick (then mayor of San

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 351.
56 See Letters, pp. 351-352 for the plot outline.
57 Ibid., p. 425.
Antonio, Texas) in sponsoring a similar drama about San Antonio.

I think of a play bringing back that early life, the creation of a state, done by local people, native Americans and Mexicans, trained there, played, say, for two weeks each year or even longer, the thing properly publicized. Where is there another city in America that has such grand dramatic material? 58

If a good man, "someone like Paul Green or Sherwood Anderson," 59 wrote it and trained the players, Anderson thought it could "be built up into an institution, an annual affair, a real part of the city's life." 60 Although Anderson published an article on Maverick in the New Republic of March 25, 1940, there was no other communication about the suggested idea for a play.

During 1936 and 1937 Anderson tried to get a New York producer for Winesburg (P), but was never successful. Even the publication of Plays: Winesburg and Others (1937), which included Winesburg (P), The Triumph of the Err (O'Neil's version), and two one-act plays, Mother and They Married Later, failed to arouse any enthusiasm.

Mother was published separately in Percival Wilde's collection, Contemporary One-Act Plays From Nine Countries (1936), and was produced by the Johns Hopkins' Players under the direction of N. B. Fagin. Textiles, a radio play which reflects Anderson's interest in the machine and the mill workers, was published in Contemporary One-Act Plays, edited by William Kozlenko (1938). It was broadcast in April (or June), 1941, by the Theater Division of the

58 Ibid., p. 456.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
Baltimore Museum of Art.

The last thing Anderson worked on was a play to be produced by The Free Company. His was to be one of a series written by famous American authors on "the meaning of America." James Boyd outlined their purpose in his introduction to the published series,

The Free Company Presents:

We did not wish to preach or argue, we wanted to present. As we talked the scheme developed. We would follow the method of the Bible parable, of Aesop's fables, and broadcast a series of plays, each one dealing with one of the basic civil rights or with the whole subject of freedom, and each written by a leading American writer. ... We would be, in short, a group of Americans, unsponsored and uncontrolled, expressing as a voluntary act of faith our belief in our fundamental institutions.

Anderson had chosen the title Above Suspicion, but did not live to complete the script. The Free Company took his original idea concerning freedom from police persecution, developed it, and presented it, not as his own work, but as a tribute to his memory. As an introduction to the play, the last to be presented in the series, Burgess Meredith, the announcer, gave a fitting tribute to Anderson:

For thirty years Sherwood Anderson represented a vital part of the United States, the America of the small town. He was never fooled about our pettiness and limitations, but he was never fooled about its good side either. He saw its beauty too; its courage and its never ending struggle for a freer life. Not only in his work did Sherwood Anderson stand for freedom, he stood for it in his life. He was kind and gentle, he was the easygoing friendly American with everybody he met. But there was nothing soft about his friendliness. When it came to justice for the oppressed, to freedom for all in equal measure, nothing could move him. He was poor,

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he was not always well, but he was always ready to give himself for a juster, a fairer, a more honest world.  

In February, 1958, a dramatization of Winesburg done by Christopher Sergel opened, unsuccessfully, in New York. A few days before the opening, in an article for the New York Times, Sergel described the "haunted voices" that accompanied his writing. The work on the play was difficult for him, and, as he grappled with the problems of the dramatization, Sergel had a growing sense of Anderson's voice being with him in the room. "Sometimes he'd get up and demonstrate a line. 'Whiskey was the only mother I ever had,' he'd exclaim, and then raising an imaginary bottle, 'At thy breast, dear mother.'" Sergel felt that he had little perspective about his work, and therefore had no idea whether he had been able to translate to the theater the dramatic excitement, the insight, and the honesty underlying Anderson's writing. But he was certain of one thing: "I could hear Anderson's voice as I wrote this play."

Since the production of Sergel's dramatization of Winesburg, no one has attempted to revive any of Anderson's plays. In truth, they remain only a minor aspect of the career of a writer who said of himself: "I know I am but a minor figure." Yet Anderson, even if only a minor figure, has earned a place in the ranks of American authors. Some of his works, most notably Winesburg, Ohio, The Triumph of the Egg, and Death in the Woods, are permanent

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62 Ibid., p. 270.
64 Memoirs, p. 3.
contributions to American literature, and his influence on other writers--Faulkner, Hemingway, Wolfe and others--was great.

To the student who would evaluate Anderson's writing career, his interest in the theater is important for, like his newspaper writings and his political activities, he considered the theater only a stopgap--a force that would lead back to an area of imagination that produced his best works, and would provide a chance to revive former glories. His relatively unsuccessful attempt at playwriting is an example of the symptomatic incidents which marked Anderson's last years, as he tried, often with doubt and a mild bitterness, to spur his talent and to recapture his former critical esteem.
All of Anderson's plays published in *Plays: Winesburg and Others* (1937) utilize situations and characters drawn mainly from earlier works. *Winesburg*, the major play in the collection, is an attempt to assemble the famous series of short and related stories into a play with a definite sequence. *Mother* is an expansion of a scene in *Winesburg* (P) and *They Married Later* is adapted from an unpublished full length play, *They Shall Be Free* and ultimately from the novel *Poor White*. Considerable changes were involved in making the dramatic adaptations.

*Winesburg* (P) was, after experimentation with various structures, written in nine short scenes (actually eight scenes and an epilogue), and, in the play's published form, the dialogue is heavily padded with stage directions. In production, the scenes were to move rapidly with only a few minutes of darkness in the theater for the shifts, so that the action would flow and a greater freedom of movement would be obtained. Because Anderson was attempting a "play of character," the settings were simple, placing greater emphasis on the people.

One expects drama to be one of the most concise of genres. Actually, however, *Winesburg* (P) is less compact and unified than the twenty-four stories of *Winesburg, Ohio* which Anderson labeled "half individual tales, half long novel form." In the short

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stories, several elements are used to achieve unity. The setting, the small town of Winesburg itself, obviously links all the lives of the characters. In an introductory fantasy, "The Book of the Grotesque," Anderson introduces a narrator who greatly resembles the author himself. This old writer is not an intrusive character; he is actually central to the stories he tells. Occasionally (e.g., "Respectability") he appears as an "I" and frequently (e.g., "Hands") he appears as a commentator. And in all the stories his presence is always nearby, and this

... unites the stories through a consistent tone and perspective, and justifies the characterization, structure and style. It is his oblique vision and pervasive sympathy which persuades the reader to tolerate what on the surface seems to be little more than character sketch or anecdote."

George Willard's unifying role is one of the most obvious in the Winesburg tales. In sixteen of the twenty-four stories Willard appears as either protagonist or secondary character; in three other tales he is mentioned in some passing remark. Besides the role of this character, Anderson uses other devices to achieve unity. One is that of setting the crisis scenes, in all but five of the stories, in the evening. In many of these, the darkness is only partly relieved by some kind of light, thus equating the dim light with the limited glimpse into an individual soul which the scene affords. One critic points out the repetition of words, especially the word hand, as a unifying element. Again this suggests deeper meanings: the word "symbolizes the potential or

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actual communication of one personality with another."³

The stage adaptation of the Winesburg tales is a long and loosely-constructed drama. Anderson always felt that his greatest difficulty in playwriting was with structure, and in this play he is troubled by dramatic construction. He has fallen back on the makeshift device of using separate scenes, each a unit, and joined to the others mainly by the recurrence of characters. Each scene takes us to a different part of the town: the Winesburg Cemetery; Doctor Reefy's office; Banker White's house; a village street; George Willard's room; Helen White's house; Louise Trunion's house; and Ed Hanby's Saloon. These settings seem to embrace the whole town and are somehow opposed to the background presented in the Winesburg stories. In those, the concentration on individuals tends to isolate them from the community as a whole. As the scenes unfold, a rather squalid series of incidents is presented. Some of the action is lifted directly from the short stories; other incidents are a modification of themes found in them; and a few incidents are new ideas.

Scene I is the funeral of the town drunk, Windpeter Winters, whose death is also described in "The Untold Lie" of Winesburg, Ohio. In both the play and the short story he is a minor character who never appears—notable only for his unusual and tragic death. In the play, Dr. Parcival describes Windpeter, who has returned home drunk one night:

³Ibid., p. 293.
"He stands in the middle of the railroad track shaking his fist. 'Get out of my way,' he cried. The train whistles. It screeches. The people shout. 'Go to hell. I'm Windpeter Winters, God damn you.' Thump. Sausage meat, gentlemen." (Scene I, p. 20.)

Everyone in town says that the old man will go straight to hell and that the community will be better off without him; yet, they all have a secret conviction that he knew what he was doing and admire his courage. His funeral is one of the biggest ever seen in Winesburg because of the curiosity of the townspeople:

"I wanted to be at the church to see what they'd say about Windpeter . . . ."
"I wanted to see a man I was sure was going to hell . . . ."
(Scene I, p. 24.)

Their morbid curiosity enables Anderson to introduce in the first scene nearly all the characters of the play (and several who never appear again4), and to lay the foundation for events that occur later.

The story of the trouble over Belle Carpenter's illegitimate child, hinted at in Scene I, develops in the next scene. Although Anderson took Belle's name from "An Awakening," in the Winesburg stories, her story is different. In the play she is pregnant by Banker White, a married man, but out of desperation she plans to blame George Willard and force him to marry her. She quickly repents of her scheme, however, under the influence of Dr. Reefy and her conscience.

The personality of Belle Carpenter is developed in the play

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4 At least one such character, a townsman named Mr. Funk (see page 15) shows the influence of Anderson's life in Marion. Charles H. (Andy) Funk was the town lawyer who remained a close friend throughout Anderson's last years.
and shows the influence of Anderson's attitude toward women which he assumed in later life and stated in such works as *Perhaps women* (1931). From the impressions he had received from the mills in the early thirties, Anderson advanced the idea that the machine has taken from men the creative function they enjoyed as craftsmen and rendered them sexually impotent and spiritually empty. What hope there is for him lies in women. Belle Carpenter is an offspring of this idea, for she displays a strength that neither George Willard nor Banker White possesses. Dr. Reefy partially recognizes the source of her strength and explains to her why she must go on living:

> Oh, you women... There's new life in you now, Belle. It has happened! It is a fact. I dare say you have already felt the stirrings of the new life. A woman--to feel that--no matter who the father is. The new life in you--in your own body. The beginning of a strange secret communication between you and the unborn new life. Belle,--I guess you'll have to face it...  

*(Scene II, p. 30.)*

Scene II also introduces the love affair of Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth Willard, which is touched upon in "Death" of the *Winesburg* stories. In the story, the two are on the verge of becoming lovers but a grotesque little incident--noise from a store next door--interrupts them and the thing that had come to life between them died suddenly. Dr. Reefy does not see her again until the day she dies. Their love blossoms in the play, however, and Dr. Reefy is Elizabeth's confidant.

The first half of Scene III is a dialogue between George Willard and Helen White, the banker's daughter. It is obvious
that Anderson had the story "Sophistication" in mind here, although that story is next to the last tale in the collection. In the play as in the story the setting involves the fairgrounds, and the conversation concerns George's planned departure from Winesburg. "Sophistication" is the climax of Winesburg, Ohio, for in it George realizes that a moment of shared understanding transcends anything that might be found in physical union. This episode loses this important function in the play, however, and becomes a means to further George's involvement with Belle, and in the latter portion of the scene, to bring on the character of Dr. Parcival the philosopher.

Dr. Parcival, whose philosophy "that everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified," is explained in "The Philosopher," became Anderson's favorite character in the play. He saw Parcival as something special: "Joe tells Helen about him and his curious religion. Ed Hanby likes him and wants him about his house and his saloon. Reefy, who is himself not a drinker, wants him as his friend." Despite Anderson's insistence that Parcival is important, a reader soon feels that, although Anderson may like him, he is not particularly necessary to the action.

An incident involving Louise Trunion and George Willard makes up the next short scene. The action is taken from "Nobody Knows" and is little changed, except that Louise is spoken of as the

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6 Letters, p. 305.
girlfriend of Ed Hanby the bartender (Belle Carpenter's suitor in the original work). After receiving a note from Louise seeking him out for a moment of love, George meets her secretly and the scene ends as they are going out to make love. In the short story the sex act and the overtures preceding it were a fumbling search for understanding on Louise's part that is misinterpreted by George. As a result he is unsatisfied and afraid. This ending is deleted from the play and the scene assumes a sordidness because it is not completely justifiable.

A conversation between George and Fred, one of the boys of the town, that is vaguely reminiscent of one between Seth and George in "The Thinker," occupies the first part of Scene V. As in the story, the two boys discuss George's writing ability, and he asks Fred (Seth in the story) to speak to Helen on his behalf. Whereas Seth turns furiously on Willard, Fred (in the play) agrees to help him.

After Fred's exit, Joe Welling, who is here the same character as in "A Man of Ideas," enters to present some of his schemes to the reporter. As abruptly as he entered, Joe leaves the stage. George's father comes in and the remainder of the scene is from the short story "Mother." Here George Willard is the source of conflict between his father, who wants him to stop his adolescent dreaming and become ambitious for success, and his mother, whose own unhappy life with the conventional Tom Willard makes her afraid that George's capacity for a rich imaginative life will be destroyed, as hers was, by the conventionality of her husband. One critic
of Winsburg (p. 7) said that the worst moment of the play occurs in this scene when Elizabeth says that her husband "has chosen to be the voice of evil."

In an episode that is original to the play, Helen White and Belle Carpenter confront each other in Scene VI and Belle, who is leaving town, assures Helen that "most of the stories you hear about me aren't true. I want you to know that the story that has been bothering you [i.e., the story about Belle and George] isn't true." Helen later confesses to her father, who is, in actuality, Belle's lover, that the woman is "nice." Banker White makes several remarks like, "If she is going to have a child its father will be a better man than George Willard."

"An Awakening" provides the plot for Scene VII. As in the story, Ed Hanby's girlfriend deliberately plays up to George because she knows Ed is watching them. In the play, however, George's humiliation at being knocked out by Ed deepens when he realizes that Seth Richmond, a sometime friend, was watching. The scene ends with George challenging Seth to a fight while Louise "is filled with delight" and "is rocking with laughter." Elizabeth Willard's death in Scene VIII is reminiscent of the short story "Death," although her conversation with Dr. Peefy is prolonged. She explains to him the continuing feud between the

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8 Scene VI, p. 96.
9 Scene VI, p. 103.
10 Scene VII, p. 120.
neighbor and the alleycats—a feud which symbolizes the frustration of her own life and of the lives of those around her. Before Elizabeth dies she confronts her husband with the fact, known only to herself and Dr. Neefy, that George is not Tom's son. She dies in an attempt to kill her husband so that he cannot succeed in making George like himself.

The epilogue (Scene IX), which takes place two or three years later in Ed Hanby's Saloon, has been called the best scene of the play because of the combination of irony and realism presented. The majority of the characters are brought together again and we learn of their situations in life. Ed and Louise are married; George has left town and his writing is becoming well-known; Tom Willard has married a wealthy widow and is repairing his hotel; and Parcival, the "mystic and poet" sits in the saloon drinking and making speeches about drunkenness. Anderson saw Parcival as a man who wanted "above everything else closeness to others, human brotherhood. The man is wiser than all the others about him, sees life more clearly than the others, and this is what stands in the way of the closeness he wants." As all but Parcival rush out after receiving news that the new Willard House is afire, he addresses his "Alter Ego":

"We are both too wise and too stupid, Alter Ego. In spite of our wisdom we think too much. We get too much

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11 An incident adapted from "Mother."


13 Letters, p. 305.
in the way of our own dreams. Let's get back into the
boat, Alter Ego.

[He drinks.]

As for these others all of them, God help them all, Alter
Ego. They are all caught as we are. They are all Christs
and they will all be crucified.

[He drinks.]

Drown it, man! Drown it. (Scene IX, pp. 163-164.)

To achieve unity of the separate scenes, Anderson has relied
on the character of George Willard almost as much as he did in the
Winesburg tales. Willard, because of his newspaper job and because
of his own adolescent adventures, is present or is mentioned, in
every scene and thereby creates a link between the separate units.
The author's main attempt to achieve unity, however, is the inser-
tion of short but formidable interludes having to do mainly with
bedroom chatter and throwing bottles at cats. In "Mother," of
Winesburg, Ohio, the feud between Abner Groff the baker and a gray
cat belonging to Sylvester West the druggist, which often evoked
violent contests, seemed to Elizabeth Willard "like a rehearsal of
her own life, terrible in its vividness."14 In the play the out-
bursts directed toward a number of alleycats are an attempt by the
baker, Bun Grady, to relieve the anger aroused by a scolding wife.
His offstage battles with his wife and with the cats begin between
Scenes I and II and continue during and between Scenes VII and VIII.
Scene VIII ends with the sound of smashing glass accompanied by
of a cat. Elizabeth Willard explains the feud to Dr. Reefy:

The poor man, so angry all the time. He'd like to hurt
his wife—to kill her. She scolds and scolds. She

14 *Winesburg, Ohio*, p. 28.
never stops. When he gets angry at her she begins to cry. So he takes it out on the cats... You know, there are times when I sit here... and pray. I so want the poor man to have, at last, some day, before I die--his moment of triumph--the satisfaction of killing, or hurting one of those cats. (Scene VIII, p. 127.)

Ironically, as Elizabeth dies, an exultant voice is heard from the alleyway: "God damn--I got him--I got him that time." 15

Anderson said that Winesburg (F) itself "is concerned primarily with no particular person, that the hero of the play is the town." 16

At the same time, in his "Notes on Production," included in Plays: Winesburg and Others, the author emphasizes that this is to be "a play of character, the attempt being made to give each character full development." 17 Anderson fails to do this, however. He is so familiar with the characters from his stories that he seems to forget that a reader or viewer of the play might not be able to fill in the background and motivation of a character with a similar knowledge. There is a great deal of entering and exiting of characters without reason, and Anderson attempts to project a great many people, in many cases with no adequate preparation. They have to be accepted in such varying scenes and moods that we become confused. Nor are we ever quite sure what the central theme of the drama is.

Anderson wrote the Winesburg tales with the hope that "these

15Scene VIII, p. 144.
16Letters, p. 305.
17P. 3.
stories told would, in the end, have the effect of breaking down a little the curious separateness of so much of life, these walls we build up around us. The visitor in "Tandy" voices the underlying emotion of the town. "I am a lover and have not found my thing to love. That is a big point, if you know enough to realize what I mean. It makes my destruction inevitable, you see." This is the crux of Anderson's message. While human understanding is so often disfigured and disjointed in the Winesburg stories, it is still possible. The theme of isolation gives the tales an inner unity and provides them with a universal quality.

The characters of the stories, the lovers who have not found the objects of their love, are grotesques, who "personify to fantastic excess a condition of psychic deformity which is the consequence of some crucial failure in their lives, some aborted effort to extend their personalities or proffer their love." They are those "whose humanity has been outraged and who have had to suppress their wish to love in order to survive in Winesburg." Grotesqueness is, then, a remnant of misshapen feeling, what one character calls "the sweetness of the twisted apples." Because George Willard is not yet a grotesque, the others realize his moral freshness and flock to him. All seem to believe that he is "a

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16 Ferres, p. 15.
19 Winesburg, Ohio, p. 168.
20 Howe, p. 99.
21 Ibid., p. 100.
22 Winesburg, Ohio, p. 20.
young priest who will renew the forgotten communal rites by which they may again be bound."  

In the play, George Willard forfeits his role as "priest," for the other characters are not grotesques and the search for human communication seems nearly forgotten. In the stories there is a muted, dream-like reality through which the characters move "in soft gray outlines as they [go] about their vague but poetic struggle."  

On the stage, however, the characters shed the qualities responsible for their charm, and "rant and rave in a bold and frequently embarrassing manner."  

Anderson's dramatic version retains the taste--and distastefulness--of a small town in Ohio; but crude photography has replaced painting, and the effect for Winesburg (F) is not good.

Anderson's dramatic adaptation of Winesburg has quality, and it gets at least part of the way back to the unusual book of short stories. Jasper Deeter, of the Hedgerow Theatre, produced it with a sensitivity that indicates the play is not without possibilities. Deeter's personal enthusiasm, and the rustic setting of the theater probably contributed greatly to the successful performance; the play's fate might have been otherwise in a less intimate theater. Nevertheless, Winesburg (F) was produced some forty times, from 1934 to 1936, at the Hedgerow and, although it never went to New York, it was well received.

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23 Howe, p. 102.
25 Ibid.
York, it was quite popular locally and became a permanent part of the theater's repertory. This is perhaps, after all, the best test of Anderson's playwriting ability.

Anderson's two one-act dramas in *Plays: Winesburg and Others* are as tightly-woven and concise as *Winesburg* (P) is sprawling. The first of these, *Mother*, is not an adaptation of Anderson's short story with that title, but is a variation of one of the themes from *Winesburg* (P)--the situation of a mother who tries to be intelligent and sympathetic when her young son is seduced by an older woman. The plot involves four frustrated people: George Horton, the father, who would like to be a bigger man than he is and is irritated because his son has inherited his weaknesses; Mary Horton, the mother, who regrets a marriage which is a failure, longs for the freedom she might have used better, and attempts, at this late date, to be dominant chiefly to prove that she can; Mabel Clark, the dressmaker, who has made a compromise with normal inclinations by misbehaving with a boy; and the boy, who has unthinkingly slipped into a stupid liaison.

The three main characters (the boy never appears) and the situation in which they are placed could have, with only a few small changes, fitted into *Winesburg* (P). George and Mary Horton are recognizable as the Willards, and Mabel Clark, although a less intelligent character here, is comparable to Belle Carpenter. The action is reminiscent of Scene II in which Elizabeth confronts...

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26. The *Triumph of the Egg*, also included in the volume, is a dramatization done by Raymond O'Neil in 1922. Since Anderson had no part in its writing, it will not be discussed here.
Belle with the story about her and George. 

Mother takes place in Mary Horton's room in the hotel owned by her and her husband. George Horton has learned that his son, Harry, has been spending time with an older woman, and it is rumored that she is pregnant. George's plan is to use his influence to get the boy to the city so that he can get a job and change his name. Then "if she is going to have a kid, as they say, and Harry's gone, she'll blame someone else. She won't get him."27 The boy's mother cares little for this idea, however, for she does not "want to make a sneak out of him."28 She invites Mabel Clark up to her room, but instead of facing the problem of which both women are aware, Mary pretends that the occasion is a social one. She confesses her envy of Mabel, who she sees as "a proud, free, independent woman," and she also hints of a relationship in her own past not unlike that existing between Mabel and Mary's son. Mabel, the stronger character, is suspicious, puzzled, and sure that Mary means her no good. She finally makes a hasty retreat, after promising the pleading mother that she will "stick to Harry . . . be his real friend . . . tell him things a mother can't tell him."29

Mother is distressingly naive. The characters do not come to grips with the problem presented, although they may think they do.

27 P. 200.
28 P. 201.
29 P. 214.
At the end they, and the viewer, are no nearer a solution than at the beginning.

The last one-act play in the collection is called They Married Later and perhaps should have a P. S. prefixed to its title. It has never been acted and, inasmuch as the setting is a chamber, and about half the dialogue is supposed to be overheard, coming from downstairs, it possibly never will be acted.

The theme of the play is the effect on a bride and bridegroom of the drunken innuendoes of their wedding guests—including the bride's father. Miriam Grey has married Robert Forest, an inventor, because a previous love affair with a married man failed, and because there was no one else with whom she could get away from her father's schemes and money grabbing. The crudeness of the wedding guests (friends of her father's) has angered Miriam, but she gains no support from Laura, her mother, whose attitude is "all men are like that." However, when Laura overhears her husband and a business partner discussing how they will profit from this marriage, she tells her daughter: "If you are afraid, Miriam, if you want to come away from it, now, tonight, even if you want to run away, I'll understand."30

Miriam decides she must stay, and so she awaits her husband. He is so humiliated and embarrassed by the men's insults that he leaves with no explanation. When Miriam finds the open window she exults, "He couldn't. After all that vulgarity down there, he

30 p. 235.
couldn't. He isn't as they are. He is all right. I'll get him back. I'll have a real marriage." And she runs down the stairs calling, "Mother! Mother! It's all right. Mother! It's all right."  

They Married Later is a free adaptation of chapters sixteen through eighteen of Anderson's novel, Poor White. Anderson had previously worked on a long adaptation of Poor White, called They Shall Be Free, which was never completed. He remarked, however, that he "did get, out of an attempt that failed, a very beautiful one-act play." This is probably a reference to They Married Later. From the novel Anderson added the character of Laura, the mother, and reworked the plot so that it is logical and unified, and not merely an excerpt from Poor White. Plotwise this is the best play in the volume. It has conflict and it carries one situation from the beginning when the crude voices are overheard, to the logical and natural ending when Miriam happily realizes that she and her husband will truly be "married later."

Textiles, published in William Kozlenko's Contemporary One-Act Plays (1938), is an original radio play that was broadcast in 1941 by The Theater Division of the Baltimore Museum of Art in connection with an exhibit at the Museum entitled "Design Decade."

31 P. 242.  
32 Ibid.  
33 Letters, p. 353.
There is no record of when Anderson wrote this play, but in theme and content it reflects his interest in the machine and the problems of the mill workers, which reached its peak in 1930-1931.

In his "Note for Director" attached to the play, Anderson indicates that Textiles "is written as a kind of panorama of an industry. The idea is to use a chorus of men and women's speaking voices." There are no individual characters and no story or plot; it is "a short play that sings the song of the weavers, the cloth makers."

The theme of Textiles is the paradox of the machine—the force that has put so many workers out of their jobs is the force which has, at the same time, provided them with a better living than ever in the past. Anderson himself had had this divided attitude, for he had once been "one of the outstanding little protesters against the machine age." Croaker (a croaking voice), who constantly warns throughout Textiles that "the machine will destroy you all," voices Anderson's past beliefs. In the thirties, however, he had a "change of heart," and began to realize that the machine, if controlled by man, can make a new age of plenty. This change is seen in Anderson's speech to the Danville workers on January 13, 1931, in which he urged them to look for something beyond their

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35 Ibid., p. 3.
36 Letters, p. 207.
37 Contemporary One-Act Plays, p. 7 and following.
immediate need:

Today when a worker surrenders, when he makes a surrender that further degrades himself, he degrades all men. You can't get away from it. In fighting this battle here you are not fighting for yourselves. You are fighting for humanity. . . . It may be well that you are fighting to save civilization. . . .

There is a struggle going on here that far transcends any local struggle. It is the struggle of all mankind against the dominance of men by machines, or groups of men, who happen because they have money, to own the machines. . . .

The women in Textiles voice this change in attitude toward the machine when they answer Croaker, who has urged that the machine be destroyed:

We have come out of darkness and poverty. We cannot go back. (p. 12.)

As drama, Textiles is sadly lacking. In essence it has no setting, characters, plot, story, action, or conflict. Yet, as a dialogue it is effective. With good use of sound effects and a voice chorus, Anderson has portrayed the opposing attitudes that have always prevailed toward the machine and progress. On the one hand are those who see only the destructive power of the machine:

The machine will destroy you all.
Man has invented the loom.
From the first the loom has thrown man out of his work.
When you rob a man of his work you destroy him.
(p. 8.)

The opposite view, although cognizant of this destructive power, also sees the potential good in the machine. The workers, with help from others, will enter the "age of plenty":

38 Schevill, p. 273.
We are the makers of cloth, of textiles. 
We want to help make the age of plenty. 
We are not afraid of work. 
We are not afraid of the factories, of the machines. 
Planners, plan for us. (p. 21.)

Three of Anderson's four published plays are adapted from earlier works, but *Winesburg* (P) is nearest, at least superficially, to the original. Although Anderson was trying only "to capture again the spirit of the tales, to make the play fit the spirit of the tales as regards time and place"\(^{39}\) he also transfers episodes and characters from the original *Winesburg* and therefore makes comparison of the two works inevitable. The major criticism made by all the reviewers of the play was the most obvious one—"it does not live up to the stature of the short stories. Unfortunately, an adaptation must always suffer when compared with its source. However, much of the blame for the adverse criticism of the play must be placed upon Anderson. As Chapter III will indicate, Anderson lacked the dramatic technique to make a stage version worthy of the original *Winesburg*.

\(^{38}\) *Plays: Winesburg and Others,* p. viii.
Chapter III

Anderson's Dramatic Technique: An Evaluation

In his attempt to write plays Anderson failed to realize completely two things: that there are major differences between prose and dramatic techniques and that dramatic prose is not always theatrical. Although the prose writer and the dramatist both work with the elements of story, characterization, and dialogue, the differing conditions under which they work effect differing treatments of these elements. The speed, compactness, and vividness of the drama as well as its impersonality, its co-operative nature, and its appeal to the group rather than to the individual bring about differences which create the fundamental technique which distinguishes drama from prose.¹

The prose writer who does not fully consider the differences between the art of prose and the art of drama will often fail to realize that not all dramatic material is theatrical. The process of converting intrinsically dramatic material into a vehicle for the stage primarily involves the technique of playwriting. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and evaluate the dramatic techniques which Anderson used to adapt prose material (whose dramatic quality was attested by friends) into a form fitted to the use of the theater.

The technique of the dramatist has been defined by one of

America's most successful playwrights as "his ways, methods, and devices for getting his desired ends." For this reason, an evaluation of Anderson's dramatic technique should begin with a statement of his dramatic purpose. Unfortunately, Anderson never set down, at length, such a statement; but by compiling a number of his random remarks on the theater, one may gain insight into what he was trying to do in his plays.

The plays in Plays: Winesburg and Others are free adaptations of Anderson's earlier prose works. In dramatizing them, he did not try to follow the exact pattern of the originals, but rather wanted to retain only their spirit. The first consideration in writing a play was, to Anderson, the portrayal of character. Structure, setting, and plot were all to be subordinate to it. To develop the characters fully, the settings were simplified and the scenes (of the full-length play) moved rapidly so that all emphasis would be on the people. Anderson believed that plot must conform to the characters presented. He disliked dramatists who "sold out" their created people:

...There was some problem of life stated [in the play]. The dramatist had gotten certain people onto the stage. They made on your mind a certain impression. Being what they were, they would, under certain conditions, act so and so.

But they didn't. They must fit into the plot then, into a certain framework... Anderson did not want his characters to "perform to schedule." He

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2 Ibid., p. 1.
felt it a betrayal when "you can take a man, who, after you have built him up, turns out to be a fellow who could not possibly shoot anyone, and make of him, with a few words, a killer." Plot, then, was unimportant to Anderson because he believed that, if emphasized, "you inevitably made the plot dominate the people."  

These are general purposes for dramatic writing, but, according to Baker, an author should also have in mind a specific idea or theme for each play he writes. In the dramatic evolution from main idea to story to plot, the key for the successful playwright is selection. In Winesburg (P) in particular, Anderson suffers from the inability to select a theme or central idea which communicates itself obviously to the audience. Since Anderson said that the play was to repeat the spirit and theme of the original, is one to assume that this is about George Willard's developing sensi-
tivity? Or, is it a treatise on human loneliness and isolation, as was the original work? Is the play simply a character study and if so, to which character does the play belong? Or, as Anderson once indicated to Jasper Deeter, is this simply the story of a town told through its people? Whatever was foremost in Anderson's mind was never clear, and the audience comes away from the play somewhat confused and dissatisfied.

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5 Ibid.
6 Ferres, pp. 373, 378, and 413.
7 Letters, p. 305.
With his purpose clearly in mind, the dramatist next selects his characters. Among all the possible people who might be the main figure in accomplishing his purpose, he picks the one most interesting to him, or the one who he believes will most interest his public. From all the people who might surround his central figure he chooses the few who will best accomplish his purpose. Because Anderson seemingly did not have his central idea firmly in mind, he had difficulty choosing one main figure, and he included too many supporting characters. George Willard, by virtue of his appearance in nearly all the scenes of the play would seem to be Anderson's choice for the main character. However, because Anderson presents about twenty episodes in the play which are linked mainly by the recurrence of the thirteen characters, it is easy to lose sight of George as the central figure and begin to view him simply as a unifying element.

Whether a writer conceives his situations or his characters first, he must eventually decide on a story and a plot. In drama, the story is what a play boils down to when one tries to tell a friend briefly what it is about. The plot, however, involves more. It is a process of molding the story--by proportioning and emphasizing--so that the playwright's purpose is fulfilled. In Anderson's never-completed plays such as Dark Laughter and The Mississippi, there is a definite disregard for plot, even for story. He conceived these in terms of epic dramas and placed great emphasis.

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9Baker, p. 50.
on sound and visual effects; only as an afterthought did he realize that he needed story and plot to portray his theme and characters to carry the action.

Since most of Anderson's plays are adaptations of earlier works, he began his playwriting with his stories already made. The demands of plot stipulated, however, that he select from the numerous events and reflections in the stories those items which had a certain unity, which pointed to a certain end, which had a common interrelationship. *Winesburg* (F) lacks a strong plot because Anderson was unable to narrow down the number of items far enough. Consequently, the two or three threads of interest and activity to which a well-ordered plot should be limited are far exceeded. The major relationships presented, involving Doctor Reefy and Elizabeth Willard, Louise Trunion and George Willard, Louise and Ed Hanby, Tom and Elizabeth Willard, Belle Carpenter and George, Belle and Banker White, Helen White and George, are not the only ones portrayed. Other less important activities, such as the story of Joe Welling, are also present. These add little to the play; in fact, they weaken it. In a closely-knit plot the removal of one incident might bring the whole structure down, as if an important prop were moved from the scaffolding of a building. In *Winesburg* (F), however, the removal of an incident--either major or minor--would leave simply a gap.

In *Mother* and *They Married Later* Anderson adheres to the essentials of one-act play construction, and presents a more tightly-knit plot and has in each a single climax. The plot of *Mother* is
the weaker of the two, for there is little conflict between the characters and there is nothing resolved in the end. *They Married* Later is probably the best plotted of all Anderson's plays because the situation portrayed moves from a beginning (the voices and conversation of the drunken guests overheard from downstairs) through a logically related sequence to a logical and natural outcome when Miriam discovers that her husband is not like her father and the other men.

After the story and plot have been chosen through a process of selection and elimination, the dramatist must turn to the arrangement of his material.¹⁰ Because Anderson did not more carefully select the incidents to be used in *Winesburg* (P), he could not easily assign the traditional three, four, or five acts to his play. To avoid such major problems in proportioning his diverse material, he fell back upon the makeshift device of scenes. Each of the nine scenes is a separate unit, but by using numerous exits and entrances, Anderson can work in three or four incidents in a scene. For example, Scene V relates incidents involving George and Fred, George and Joe, George and Tom, and George and Elizabeth. The incidents achieve unity because the setting remains the same and because George is involved throughout the scene. Although Anderson unifies each scene in similar ways, the overall effect is not good. The nine divisions seem arbitrary and do not always fulfill the purpose of such divisions—to lead the audience on to the next

¹⁰Ibid.
scene and, above all, to the ending.

By utilizing the funeral of the town drunk to gather the townspeople in Scene I, Anderson shows a realization of the primary desire of a dramatist beginning to arrange his material—to create interest as soon as possible. Anderson has correctly assumed that neither striking dialogue nor stirring situation is necessary here. What is necessary is that the audience understand, as quickly as possible, who his characters are, the time of the play, where his characters are, and what in the present and past relations of his people causes the story. Anderson depends on the theater program, and perhaps the costumes of the characters, to set the time of the play as summer, 1900; but through setting and dialogue the audience immediately realizes that the characters are gathered at the Winesburg cemetery. Of the thirteen characters listed on the program only Elizabeth Willard, a semi-invalid, is not introduced at the funeral. A few characters at a time separate themselves from the group and begin to talk. In the process, the foundation is laid for all the relationships (except the love of Elizabeth Willard and Dr. Reefy) which will develop in later scenes. Although the presence of the twelve characters, a few unnamed men and women, and voices from offstage may produce a cluttered effect on stage, Anderson has performed well a primary function of the first act. The audience learns at the cemetery who the people are with whom the play is to be concerned and their relationship to each other.

As the scenes progress and the relationships develop, it is obvious that each scene is a separate unit and that, although
interesting itself, it does not lead the audience on to its immediate successor. Anderson has utilized several things, but mainly the repetition of characters, to achieve unity and link the individual scenes. George Willard becomes a major link because his position as town reporter justifies his presence in many instances and because he is personally involved with about half of the characters.

In attempting to link the nine scenes of the play, Anderson has used one of his favorite theatrical techniques—off-stage sound effects. Just as O'Neill used a background of drumbeats of increasing intensity to frame Jones' descent into primitivism in *The Emperor Jones*, Anderson uses sounds between the scene shifts. His are humble, however: a husband and wife quarreling, a man trying to maim or kill the alley cats with which he has a continual feud, the off-stage voices of girls or boys, a phonograph record playing a song that is particularly appropriate to the closing or beginning of the scene, and the sound of horses' hoofs. Except for the off-stage battles with the cats (which Elizabeth Willard explains in Scene VIII as the symbol of the man's frustration in life), these sounds, although effective as such, have little relation to the contents of the scenes which they introduce or end. They are essentially an artificial device to link the scenes, which have little inherent unity.

Anderson's two one-act plays possess the unity demanded of their form, and they are structurally superior to *Winesburg* (P). *Mother* is less effective because Anderson chose a situation which
was complete and could be handled easily, but which really leads nowhere and has little significance out of the context of *Winesburg*.

Except for the expository section of *They Married Later*, most of which is overheard from below stairs, this is a good play technically. It possesses singleness of impression and situation and concentrates its interest on one character. The situation develops logically to the climax (when Robert Forest runs away from his bride) and has an ending that is satisfactory to the audience. In short, *They Married Later* is as tightly-knit as *Winesburg* (P) is rambling.

Although *Winesburg* (P) is divided into nine scenes, the program labels the last as an epilogue. Anderson does not give the word *epilogue* its historical use—"verse or prose spoken in front of the curtain . . . at an end of the play, in order to win or intensify sympathy for it." Rather, with an increasing sense of dramatic technique, he tries by nomenclature to emphasize the difference he discerns in the relationship of this division to the eight preceding scenes. Although Anderson uses the name *epilogue* interchangeably with *scene*—in the body of the play it is labeled Scene IX—this division does assume some of the functions of the traditional epilogue. Primarily it serves to answer the inevitable question of the audience at the end of the eighth scene: What happened to the characters afterward? Anderson also tries to relate the main play to larger values by bringing back the character

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of Dr. Parcival and his plea:

As for these others all of them, God help them all, Alter Ego. They are all caught as we are. They are all Christs and they will be crucified. (Scene IX, p. 164.)

The techniques involved in the arrangement of dramatic material should all lead toward one end—the effective presentation of character. For Anderson this was the most important element in playwriting, and it is true that for ultimate convincingness no play can rise above its characterization. For the practical purposes of the dramatist, character "may be defined as a complex of intellectual, emotional, and nervous habits"—some innate and some temperamental. Characters may be presented in a number of ways.

Anderson sometimes has one character describe another. This can be an effective device as long as it is natural and the character speaking is not simply a mouthpiece for the dramatist. When Belle Carpenter tells about her affair with George—a scene that would be awkward to stage because it occurred out of the time scheme of the play—the audience gains an insight into his character that is most effective because of who relates the incident. In Scene III, however, when George relates in detail Parcival's philosophy that all men are Christs and are crucified, Parcival enters immediately after George's speech. Here, the character of Parcival, so liked by Anderson, would have been perceived more vividly by his own actions and speech. Action, the best method of character portrayal is combined with description by another

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character and is thus weakened. For example, in the feud between
the neighbor and the cats, Elizabeth explains the full significance
of the man's actions. The effectiveness of the man's frustrated
battles as a unifying element would have been heightened if the
audience could have gleaned their significance from his actions
alone.

The proper development of a personality is a major aspect of
good characterization. This development implies not necessarily a
change, but rather an unveiling or disclosure. A dramatic crisis
ought to disclose latent qualities in the characters chiefly con-
cerned in it, and at the end should show more about the person than
he himself or his best friend would have known in the beginning.
Judged by these standards Anderson, who was attempting to write a
"play of character," was not successful. Anderson's people display
two or three characteristics when they are first introduced, and
then keep on repeating themselves. Parcival is revealed as the
philosopher who pities mankind, and he remains the same until the
last scene; Elizabeth Willard is introduced as a physically weak
woman who can be very strong to protect her son and she stays the
same. In her final scene she dies trying to kill her husband in
order to save her son. And so on down the list of characters.
Anderson did not develop a single character as he had planned be-
cause, for one reason, he simply tried to project too many char-
acters. They appear in so many scenes and incidents that eventu-
ally neither the playwright nor the audience has time to follow a
character through a logical development.
Anderson does not delve into the psychology of his characters; he does not explore their personalities nor bring new knowledge of the human personality to the knowledge and comprehension of the audience. Rather, he engages in character-drawing—that is, the presentation of human nature in its commonly recognized, understood, and accepted aspects.

Still, character-drawing is not necessarily inferior to psychological exploration; if Anderson did not venture into the untrodden fields of character, he at least presented a group of people recognizable to the audience.

The main technique for effective characterization is proper motivation of the characters so that the conduct of a person seems to grow out of his personality. Although Anderson's characters have verisimilitude and do not commit actions which jar our senses, we cannot always fully understand their personalities from the text of the play. Questions come into the reader's mind: What in Parcival's experience has made him a philosopher who pities mankind? How or why did Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth Willard become lovers? Why does Seth Richmond behave so abominably toward George? The answers to these and other questions posed by the relationships between characters would provide valuable clues to why these people act as they do. Some of this background information could be supplied by a knowledge of the stories of Winesburg, Ohio, but no dramatist can depend on his audience having such knowledge. Although the characters of Winesburg (P) are engaged in believable actions, we are not wholly prepared by Anderson for these actions.
Rather, the characters seem to be nearly the creatures of a particular situation into which he has thrust them.

Only after the plot has been planned in detail and the characters are fully conceived is the playwright ready to execute his play in dialogue. This is the characteristic which most distinguishes a play from other forms of literature and it is "the quality which gives a play life and magnetism."\(^\text{13}\)

Anderson had special dialogue problems in *Winesburg* (P) since the original dialogue of the short stories, with its accompanying narrative description, was often not suitable for literal translation to the stage. An example of this is seen by comparing an episode from "An Awakening" and the corresponding adaptation in Scene VII of *Winesburg* (P). In the short story, George Willard is walking with Belle Carpenter (Luise Trunion in the play):

Belle Carpenter did not resist. When he kissed her upon the lips she leaned heavily against him and looked over his shoulder into the darkness. In her whole attitude there was a suggestion of waiting... As in the vacant lot, by the laborers' houses, he had put up his hands in gratitude for the new power in himself and was waiting for the woman to speak when Ed Hanby appeared.

The bartender did not want to beat the boy, who he thought had tried to take his woman away. He knew that beating was unnecessary, that he had power within himself to accomplish his purpose without using his fists. Gripping George by the shoulder and pulling him to his feet, he held him with one hand while he looked at Belle Carpenter seated on the grass. Then with a quick wide movement of his arm he sent the younger man sprawling away into the bushes and began to bully the woman, who had risen to her feet. "You're no good," he said

roughly. "I've half a mind not to bother with you. I'd let you alone if I didn't want you so much. . . .

Three times the young reporter sprang at Ed Hanby and each time the bartender, catching him by the shoulder, hurled him back into the bushes. . . . George Willard's head struck the root of a tree and he lay still. Then Ed Hanby took Belle Carpenter by the arm and marched her away.

In the play George and Louise are talking when

Suddenly she throws her arms around George's neck and falls against him, clinging to him. George is beside himself with embarrassment. He takes hold of her arms and tries to pull them from about his neck. At this moment Ed Hanby enters. He rushes upon the two people. He grabs Louise's arm and jerks her away from George. Ed turns to face George and Louise draws away. She laughs.

**Ed**

To George

Damn you, you smart aleck kid. . . . This is my girl you're monkeying with, here. I've been waitin' to catch somebody monkeyin' with her. So you're hanging around, trying to get gay with her.

Suddenly Ed's fist shoots out. He hits George and he goes sprawling.

**George**

He is furious and begins to cry.

But I didn't . . . I didn't.

Ed stands over George and when George gets to his feet, Ed knocks him down again.

It's a damn lie . . .

He gets to his feet and rushes furiously at Ed. George is beside himself with anger now and each time he rushes Ed, the bartender slings him aside. Finally Ed knocks George down. He lies still on the ground--knocked out.

**Ed**

Turning to Louise and advancing on her.

And you too! I told you! I want you, and I'm gonna get you! You can't monkey with me!

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He grabs Louise by the shoulder and shakes her. With his big fist he slaps her and knocks her down. Louise is crying. She springs at Ed Hanby and tries to bite and scratch him. She is helpless in his hands. He flings her to the ground and stands over her.

Are you going to, or ain't you?

She lies still a moment and then a smile comes through her tears. She rises and suddenly grows tender. Ed steps back and Louise goes to him, throwing her arms about his neck. He takes her rather gently into his arms. He looks over toward George, who is lying still on the ground.

He'll be all right. I didn't want to hit the kid, but I can't have any monkey business about you any more.

He turns toward Louise and with his hand he turns her face up toward his

Are you gonna behave?

Louise

Yes Ed, I'll behave.

Ed

No more foolin' around?

Louise

No, no more.

Ed

Well, we might as well get going. You're mine now. I'm gonna marry you right away. I'm gonna go get the license. I'm gonna make a good woman of you—my woman...see!

Louise

Oh, Ed!

They stand for a moment embracing. Louise is very humble now. Ed kisses her. He goes to George, who is lying on his face on the ground, and turns him over. George half sits up

Ed

Oh, hell, you're all right.

(Scene VII, pp. 117-119.)
As in many of the Winesburg stories, there is little actual dialogue in "An Awakening." In the stage adaptation Anderson often skirts the issue of changing narration to dialogue by relying heavily upon stage directions to set the mood for the characters. Anderson's narration in the stories was influenced by the "literary" language of eighteenth and nineteenth century novels and by the poetic language of the Bible which provided a quaintness that heightened the grotesque quality of the characters. However, the dialogue of the play—couched in ordinary, everyday language—brings the characters out of the shadows and thereby destroys much of their appeal. In this respect the dialogue contributes much to the destruction of the spirit of the original stories.

Anderson has attempted to produce realistic dialogue in his plays, but his characters often speak in the form of conversation rather than in the heightened, selected speech that is the actual basis of realistic dialogue. Many times the reproduction of exact conversation does not reveal character and situation, and, for this reason, Anderson must rely upon stage directions to fill in information that the dialogue does not include.

Anderson attempted to reproduce the informal and colloquial speech of Midwesterners in his dialogue, and he did not make the mistake of utilizing the current slang of the period and thereby dating the play. Occasionally profanity or words then tabu appear, but Anderson used these, not for shock effect, but because they
are suitable to the character portrayed. 15

In answer to the question "Could Sherwood Anderson write successfully for the theater?" Jasper Deeter replied, "Yes. In this play [Winesburg] he did so very successfully." 16 Although the play was popular when done in Deeter's theater, Anderson lacked the technical ability to make it a work that would be significant in dramatic literature.

Anderson's main fault in Winesburg (P), his major play, resulted from an over familiarity with his sources. Because of this it was difficult for him to be selective enough in choosing incidents and characters to present. This, and the fact that he seems hazy about his purpose, gives the play an overall vagueness that is dissatisfying to the audience.

The abundance of episodes and characters presented points out another technical difficulty involved in Winesburg (P) --the achievement of unity. Anderson uses devices such as character repetition and sound effects to do this, but he is not entirely successful.

Anderson was most interested in character portrayal; but, here again, he was not completely successful. His people remain the same throughout the play, and they are not always properly motivated.

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15 Jasper Deeter recalls an incident during a Hedgerow production of Winesburg (P) when an irate father removed his young daughter from the theater after the line, "Did you ever have a piece?" (Scene IV, p. 59.) Anderson, sitting nearby, was deeply hurt by this and insisted that, in future productions, Deeter change the line to "Did you ever have a girl?"

16 Interview with Jasper Deeter, May 26, 1967.
Anderson does not delve into the psychology of his characters as he does in the short stories, but, at the same, he creates identifiable people who speak in a colloquial dialogue. If Anderson has lost the grotesques of the old Winesburg, at least he has presented a gallery of small town characters recognizable to the audience.
Conclusion

Anderson's interest in playwriting reached its peak in the thirties with the publication of his major play, *Winesburg, Ohio*, an adaptation of his short story collection, and three other short plays. *Winesburg (P)* was produced with some success by Jasper Deeter of the Hedgerow Theatre in Pennsylvania. Deeter had founded the Hedgerow as an answer to the long-run policy of the commercial theater which often made the actor's job humdrum repetition rather than creative art. It was not an experimental theater as such, but often, as in Anderson's case, the actors performed plays which were known not to be first rate artistically, but which were interesting for other reasons.¹

Although *Winesburg (P)* was optioned by the Theater Guild, it never reached New York—partly because of the indifference of the commercial stage to experimentation. An analysis of the relationship of Anderson's plays to the major trends in American drama of the thirties indicates that they were not material for the commercial theater. *Winesburg (P)*, in particular, was nearly an anachronism and Anderson's special brand and presentation of Americanism was not in style at the time.

The fundamental optimism of the twenties produced a multitude of plays and stimulated experiments with forms and ideas, but Robert Spiller in *The Literary History of the United States* narrows the most influential trends down to four. These four trends,

developed during the thirties when Anderson's interest in drama was at its peak, are as follows:

1. S. N. Behrman's development of a comic style not wholly different from that of his predecessor Rachel Crothers or his contemporary Philip Barry, but seeming to be more consciously aware of the problem of adapting conceptions of the nature of comedy to the circumstances of American life;

2. the attempt on the part of several otherwise diverse writers to develop a dramatic form in which symbolism and fantasy definitely replace the realistic method;

3. Maxwell Anderson's experiments with tragedy which, unlike those of O'Neill, assume that verse is necessary if the highest effects are to be achieved;

4. the work of Clifford Odets as representing the most successful cultivation of the play intended to further a definite political and social ideology.2

The first two of these trends have little to do with Anderson's plays, but there is evidence that he was interested in the poetic and political aspects of the drama.

Maxwell Anderson (no relation to Sherwood Anderson) began building his dramatic reputation when he and Laurence Stallings collaborated on the realistic What Price Glory?, the sensation of the 1924 theater season. Anderson wrote other plays--some serious, some light comedy-dramas--but in 1930 he revealed an entirely new style in the formal tragedy in verse, Elizabeth the Queen. Although he later wrote plays of diverse types, it is probably with the formal tragedy that his name is most often associated. His

plays of this kind include, besides the first just mentioned, *Mary of Scotland* (1933), *Valley Forge* (1934), *Winterset* (1935), *Key Largo* (1939), and *The Eve of St. Mark* (1942).

Two serious criticisms were often made of his work; one was that his verse, while speciously poetic, was too often inflated, banal, and monotonous; the other was that by choosing traditional subjects and also treating them traditionally, Anderson did not create genuinely modern tragedy. It must be admitted, however, in response to the first criticism, that his verse was at least theatrically practicable and that it was understandable and acceptable to a modern audience. Anderson himself replied to the second charge when he wrote *Winterset*, based on the Sacco-Vanzetti case, and demonstrated the possibilities of lyricism and tragedy in a modern story of crime and detection set in the New York slums. 3

Maxwell Anderson was the only conspicuously successful dramatist except O'Neill who persistently wrote tragedies in the first forty years of the twentieth century. Comparisons between the two playwrights are inevitable, but the men differ greatly except in their general aim to revive formal tragedy in the modern theater. Anderson won success more easily than O'Neill; he more easily adapted himself to the requirements of the modern stage, and he showed the verbal facility that O'Neill lacked. Anderson represents one aspect of a movement which seemed, before the interruption of World War II, likely to achieve plays richer and more intense

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than the mere problem play.\textsuperscript{4}

Sherwood Anderson had been convinced by his friend Jacques Copeau, the internationally known artist-director, that the scenic life of a play should not be paramount, as in the Broadway theater, but should be subordinate to the poetic drama. It is evident in the plans for Anderson's unpublished plays that he found it difficult to think in terms of theatrical form. He often planned dramas with epic themes without characters to carry the action. And in \textit{Winesburg} (P) "the mythological background of the small town is cramped and confined instead of expanded as in the book."\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Textiles}, Anderson's short radio play, is an example of his conception of poetic drama. However, it offers very little dramatically and falls far short of other productions written specifically for radio, such as Norman Corwin's semi-documentary plays which utilized a speaking choir and Archibald MacLeish's outstanding play \textit{The Fall of the City} (1937), which employed a recitative verse.

"Art is a weapon" was a frequently heard slogan in the thirties and for a while the theatrical scene was seemingly dominated by the Theatre Union, the leftish Group Theater, and the various units of the Federal Theater. None of these has survived, however, and of the playwrights who wrote for them, only one, Clifford Odets, earned a notable place in the theater.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 1323.
\textsuperscript{5}Schevill, p. 316.
\textsuperscript{6}Spiller, p. 1327.
Although S. N. Behrman and Maxwell Anderson, along with Elmer Rice and John Howard Lawson, responded to the changed political atmosphere following the crash of 1929, it was Odets who became "the Golden Boy of Depression drama." He was the angry young man of his day who represented a new generation forced to come to grips with fundamental social and political questions. He voiced the dilemma of a society frustrated by economic breakdown and he offered a faith in the possibilities of a new world. The critical acclaim which hailed Odets as a major dramatist began in 1935. That year he had five plays produced, four of them on Broadway: Waiting for Lefty, Till the Day I Die, Awake and Sing!, and Paradise Lost.

Odets, for all his leftist ties and sympathies, is not always a complete or consistent Marxist. It is because he is more artist than propagandist that his plays have greater vitality than other plays of the type. His virtues as a dramatist are great. His portraits of the little people of the bourgeois world come alive on the stage with the aid of his great gift for dialogue, and his humor arises out of his characters' personalities. Odets' concern with love is unusual in proletariat drama. This passion is often shown as finding fulfillment only after breaking sentimental or conventional shackles. Through love Odets' characters often experience personal conversion—not unlike religious conversion—which leads to full realization or action. This is characteristic

of the reforming movement of the thirties and probably accounts for much of the leftism in his plays. 8

Textiles is the only play by Anderson which is based on an awareness of the changing economic scene in his time. This was the result of Anderson's sympathy with the workers at the Danville strike in 1930 and his admiration of the communists for their support of the strikers. Although he felt close to the idea of communism, his doubts about mixing his writing with politics can be seen in Textiles. He believed that writing should reflect social problems, as this play does, but he could not justify "the thought that a writer could transform himself into the situation of the worker." 9 As always, Anderson's concern was for humanizing, not communizing, the social system. For this reason Textiles does not seem to be the blatant left wing propaganda that many plays of the thirties are.

Social criticism is evident in Anderson's one-act play They Married Later, but again it is the "new gods—money power, imperialism, industrialism" 10 that he abhorred, and not just the capitalistic control of them. Miriam's criticism of her industrialist father and his friends is a typical theme from the twenties (Poor White, from which They Married Later was adapted was published in 1920) when criticism was often directed toward materialism and the


9Schevill, p. 282.

10Howe, p. 220.
gospel of success.

In light of the vigorous propaganda plays of the time, Winesburg (P) seems almost mild and nostalgic. An actor who once performed with the Hedgerow group mentioned the play in an open letter to Jasper Deeter in which he urged that Deeter use the theater as an artistic force in the revolutionary movement instead of performing plays in a vacuum. "You cannot use your theatre and your ability to produce pap...and respect yourself or your art. Winesburg, Ohio may seem vigorous to you in the isolation of lovely Rose Valley but it is not enough."11

It was Copeau who talked to Anderson about writing of America and American life as portrayed in Winesburg. Although Anderson fully realized the crisis in the political and economic life of the thirties, he wrote in the New Masses that "revolutionists will get the most help out of such men as myself not by trying to utilize [us] as writers of propaganda but in leaving us free as possible to strike, by our stories out of American life, into the deeper facts."12 By taking this attitude Anderson removed himself from the most outspoken part of the drama of the thirties—the propaganda plays.

An examination of Anderson's plays reveals that they are outside the main stream of the theater of the thirties. However, Anderson's relative failure in the theater also resulted from his


12Howe, p. 221.
own misconceptions about drama and his lack of skill in the use of 
dramatic techniques. In many of his plans for plays that were not 
completed he showed an inability to think in terms of stage practi-
calities. He admitted that he had difficulties with structure, and 
this is most apparent in *Winesburg* (P). His choice of episodes and 
characters from the short stories is not selective enough; the re-
sult is a work that needs better unity, some shortening, and the 
tempo speeded up. The major criticism of the adaptation is that 
in it Anderson violated the spirit of the original—both in the 
action of some of the scenes and in the characters themselves. 

Anderson's interest in the theater, which was most apparent 
in the thirties, was evidently motivated, not from an urgent crea-
tive desire to write for the stage, but from a desire to reclaim 
his failing reputation by having done a successful play. It is 
for this reason, perhaps more than any other, that he chose to 
adapt rather than to create for the stage. Because his adaptations 
were inferior both to their sources and to other plays being writ-
ten at that time, Anderson was unable to establish a significant 
position in American drama.
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