

PAL: Perspectives in American Literature - A Research and Reference Guide - An Ongoing Project

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Chapter 7: Sherwood Anderson (1876-1941)

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"I will be a servant to words alone." - SA

An excellent storyteller, Anderson seems to be preoccupied by a need to describe the plight of the "grotesque" - the unsuccessful, the deprived, and the inarticulate. He sensitively describes poverty and eccentricity. His simple style, in the oral tradition of storytelling, influenced writers like Hemingway and Faulkner who, in 1956, acknowledged Anderson as "the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on."

Primary Works

Windy McPherson's Son, 1916; *Marching Men*, 1917; *Winesburg, Ohio*, 1919; *The Triumph of the Egg* (short stories), 1921; *Many Marriages*, 1923; *Horses and Men* (short stories), 1923; *Dark Laughter*, 1925; *Death in the Wood* (short stories), 1933; *Kit Brandon*, 1936.

Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio. Ed. Ray L. White. Athens: Ohio UP, 1997.

Selected Bibliography 1980-Present

Anderson, David D., ed. *Critical Essays on Sherwood Anderson*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981. PS3501.N4 Z57

Bassett, John E. *Sherwood Anderson: An American Career*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna UP, 2006.

Dunne, Robert. *A New Book of the Grotesques: Contemporary Approaches to Sherwood Anderson's Early Fiction*. Kent:

Kent State UP, 2005.

Papinchak, Robert A. *Sherwood Anderson: A Study of the Short Fiction*. NY: Twayne, 1992. PS3501 .N4 Z76 1992

Rideout, Walter B. and Charles Modlin. *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America, Volume 1*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 2006.

Spears, Timothy B. *Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871-1919*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005.

Study Questions

1. At the end of "The Egg," Anderson's narrator writes, "I wondered why eggs had to be and why from the egg came the hen who again laid the egg." Analyze the multiple symbolism of the egg, what it comes to represent by the end of the story, and how Anderson uses it to unify his narrative.
2. Paraphrase the above quotation from "The Egg " as follows: "I wondered why stories had to be and why from the story came the storyteller who again produced the story." Each of the anthologized stories from *Winesburg, Ohio* bears some relation to George Willard. Discuss the significance of this relation, using the paraphrased quotation, if helpful.
3. Anderson and Cather were contemporaries and each chose to write about regional life. Compare and contrast the narrators of "The Egg" and "My Mortal Enemy." What significance does the story each narrator tells have for the narrator's own developing consciousness? What role does region play in that developing consciousness?
4. Discuss "Death in the Woods" as a story of initiation.
5. Discuss the symbolism in "Death in the Woods." What is suggested by the narrator's comment that "The running of the dogs may have been kind of death ceremonial"? Comment on the almost mystical illumination that the incident, the silent tableau, and the presence of death had for the boy.

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