CHAPTER V

THE IMPRISONED BIRDS : ENVIRONMENTAL NATURALISM

Anderson's naturalistic conception of life quoted in the first chapter may be recalled here: Man's life is governed by "inside" and "outside" forces for which reason he does not live his life according to his intention and plan. He makes futile attempts to impose a pattern on it. In the preceding three chapters the specifics of the "inside" forces have been discussed.

In this chapter an attempt will be made to discuss the characters who are victimised by external forces. As will be seen below, these external forces operate from different sources. The title of this chapter, "Environmental Naturalism," implies the devastating impact of these external forces on some of the Anderson characters. The focus of this chapter will be on the minor characters of some of Anderson's novels and the characters of his short stories whose destiny is presided over by external forces.

One way to understand the naturalistic aspect in Anderson's stories is to remember the words of the small, bearded man of the story, "Seeds", included in The Triumph of the Egg (1921). He claims to be "trying to cure people of illness by the method called psychoanalysis." He likens people to young trees in a forest and
says that the people are "being choked by climbing vines. The vines are old thoughts and beliefs planted by dead men" (p.23). The obnoxious vines shrouding the tree of life are, obviously, the heritage of the conventional mode of life which tradition thrusts on man and demands his conformity to it. And, conformity implies inhibition. It stunts man's inwardness and limits his actions by enforcing constricting discipline on him. The illness of man, claims the bearded man, stems from his subservience to this inhibiting factor. He recognizes human desire for "freedom" from this state of inhibition and maintains that much of man's illness can be cured by love and understanding.

Apart from the strictures of conventions and a puritanical code of conduct, other external forces governing the lives of the Anderson characters include the narrowness of a joyless surrounding in which the characters' inner needs remain unfulfilled. Some of them are brought up in a debilitating family atmosphere devoid of love and emotional togetherness. A few of them are victimized by uncontrollable circumstances. Because of these external forces their longings remain thwarted and their attempts to circumvent these forces paralyzed.

The total picture of Anderson's conception of "outside" forces will not emerge by identifying the factors which mould the destiny of the characters in his stories. Some minor characters in Winesburg, Ohio, Poor White and Beyond Desire are also governed by external forces not identical with those which governs the characters in the stories. Therefore, before analyzing the stories in order to
ascertain what, according to Anderson, determine human life, let us return to the three novels mentioned above for a while and examine the outside factors determining the lives of these minor characters.

On the outskirts of Winesburg, Wing Biddlebaum (of "Hands") has been leading a life of self-imposed excommunication for twenty years in a small, old frame house. He was a teacher in Pennsylvania. His conscious dread of society resulting in his estrangement from it is due to his hands which are restless like the "beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird;" but through these hands he was trying to "carry a dream into the young minds" (p.32) of his students. The trouble with him is that he tries to express his love and affection through his hands instead of his tongue. Thus, he is misunderstood as a homosexual. A half-wit is enamoured of the young master and imagines unspeakable things in bed at night. In the morning he goes about recounting these things concerning Wing as facts. The saloon keeper takes the words of his boy as true and Wing is given a thorough beating. He escapes from Pennsylvania and this brutality on him forces him to lead a life of loneliness in Winesburg. He is victimized by a combination of human beings who are not able to comprehend the import of his expressive hands. This traumatic experience from society imprisons the wings of Wing Biddlebaum's love and tenderness for human beings. Therefore, it is society's rejection and neglect of Wing rather than the latter's sin against it which result in the waste of his potentiality.
Louise Bentley (of "Surrender") reminds one of James Schevill's observation that one of the sources of American grotesqueness is the evangelical tradition carried to the limit of fanaticism. Louise is the victim of this fanaticism personified by her father, Jesse Bentley. His fanaticism is twofold: he wants to serve God and, secondly, his conviction is that this can best be done by material advancement. He subjects his people, including his two sisters, to nerve-shattering labour in his ever-expanding farm. His family, perpetually tired of toil, knews no joy and emotion. This twofold passion makes Jesse an abnormal man which is symbolized by his physical oddity: his left eye restlessly twitches.

Implicit in Jesse's character is Anderson's indictment of the American rapacity. Rosemary M. Laughlin notes that the concept of godliness and the passion for wealth represented by Jesse Bentley were "dynamically operative in American life and culture," but in Jesse's case the combination of these two ideas not only defeats him, but also destroys his posterity.

The birth of Louise is in itself a painful shock to Jesse who pines for a son to inherit his wealth. The motherless girl grows up in the peculiarly built house in complete neglect and emotional malnutrition making her temperamentally volatile and irascible. She becomes a "silent, moody child, wanting love more than anything else in the world and not getting it" (p.87). Her going to the Hardy house for higher education brings relief both to herself and her father.
Utterly timid to make acquaintances she becomes proficient at her studies which strengthens her isolation from the two Hardy girls who have contempt for books. Her pent-up emotions and inner dissociation never give her a moment of rest and mental peace. Like Elizabeth Willard she drives the buggy at a reckless speed to quieten her lacerated, repressed spirit. Pathetically love-starved, she becomes a neurotic and marries John Hardy because of the fear that she has become pregnant.

The apprehension having proved wrong, she becomes more violent in temper, grows more resentful. A "vague and intangible hunger" assails her and "She did not know what she wanted" (p.96). She makes an attempt on the life of her husband with a knife, sets the house on fire, and has almost nothing to do with her son, David.

The story of emotional privation proliferates. Denied motherly tenderness and love, David stays with his grandfather, Jesse. Jesse identifies himself with the Biblical Jesse, whose son, David, on the instruction of God, had defended the Israelites from the Philistines in the Valley of Elah. In his insane enthusiasm to give his life this Biblical orientation, Jesse takes David to the nearby valley with a lamb for sacrifice. The religious intentions of the grandfather become incomprehensible for the young boy who is frightened beyond measure. The surroundings and his grandfather assume a quality of murderous mystery. Besides, the restless twitching of the old man's eye and his pursuit of the running lamb are sufficient to prompt the boy to escape from that place. David hits Jesse with a piece of stone and, as the grandfather falls
unconscious, flees for life. His whereabouts are never known.

Jesse's perverse religiousity is the dehumanizing, destructive force for the family, particularly for Louise and David. David oscillates between a grotesque mother and a grotesque grandfather. His hitting Jesse with a piece of stone is, indeed, a symbolic gesture of repudiating all the life-denying values with which he is brought up. In the end, Jesse remains a defeated man; Louise a twisted, hungry woman. Victim of these two, David becomes a rootless, estranged boy. The lives of Louise and David are misdirected and wasted by Jesse's disastrous and life-negating fanaticism.

Reverend Curtis Hartman (of "The Strength of God") is overwhelmed with passion for the school teacher, Kate Swift, whom he sees through the church window praying naked in her bed. The severity of his profession, demanding absolute moral discipline and spotless thoughts, gets swept aside under the sway of this passion. He becomes resentful against his hesitant wife who is always "ashamed of passions." He even thinks of running away with Kate Swift abandoning his wife.

He permits himself to indulge in the "blackest thoughts of his life" (p.154). He thinks of kissing the bare shoulders of this woman who is not his wife. He declares: "'God had appeared to me in the person of Kate Swift, the school teacher, kneeling naked on a bed'" (p.155). His perversity persuades him to believe that he has been "delivered" by God.
The Reverend, however, does not realize that this deliverance has no spiritual connotation. His carnal thoughts concerning Kate only momentarily release him from the rigour of his profession. His passionate desire for her superimposes itself over his consciousness of the frigidity of his wife.

Thus, the Reverend's basic nature remains imprisoned in the inescapable cage of his public image. In a fit of intense possessiveness for Kate he breaks the glass window with his fist; a symbolic act of attempted rejection of the values that constrict his nature. But, in the end, he remains confined to his room and profession. His bleeding fist, like his repressed self, fails to find any release. For, the glass pane is not the only barrier that separates him from Kate.

The buried life led by Dr. Reefy (of "Paper Pills") is symbolized by the window of his lonely and cobweb-ridden room. This permanently shut window gets stuck to the frame. The death of his wife destroys his once animated and vivacious spirit and his desire for human intercourse. This estrangement from society distorts his life which he compares with the twisted apples. Like other Winesburg characters, his life becomes a prolonged process of self-immolation. Beset with the problem of self-expression, he writes his thoughts on scraps of paper and puts them in his pocket. After a few days they become paper pills and he throws them away without ever showing them to anybody. The squalid room with its window closed forever and the scraps of paper, never read by anybody, emphasize the doctor's anxiety for self-expression which remains hopelessly trapped. With the burden of a stagnant life he patiently
awaits a release from it.

What differentiates him from the rest of the Winesburg characters is that he never allows his inner turmoil to spill over his placid appearance. But the true insight into his disorganized self is not to be found in "Paper Pills." It is provided in the story, "Death", in which his unrealized life parallels Elizabeth Willard's. At her death bed both become conscious that "something inside them meant the same thing, wanted the same release" (p.221) and before her death she and the doctor are emotionally united for a brief moment. The death of his wife accounts for the doctor's buried life and the world, once magnificent and glorious, dies for him. His love for Elizabeth Willard, finding no means of expression, also remains thwarted in his self.

The above Winesburg characters are defeated by various external forces identified in the above analysis. Like the other Winesburg characters blighted by psychic finitude, they also lead twisted lives. The Winesburg people, therefore, remain hungry and repressed trying perpetually to overcome the inhibiting factors.

It is noted in the second chapter that the story of Hugh McVey and the story of the town, Bidwell, are integrated in Poor White. Hugh's metamorphosis into an inventor is brought about by the pioneering New England values enforced upon him by his foster mother, Sarah Shepard. The crisis of the inventor is due to his being supplanted from his natural surroundings and initiated into a pattern of life which is constantly at odds with his self.
This predicament of Hugh parallels that of Bidwell which experiences birth-pangs: the factory is born because of his inventive genius. The quiet, sleepy pastoral community life of the town undergoes total transformation. It becomes an aggressively tension-ridden industrial centre. An amoral, competitive Darwinian world sets in in which the process of natural selection starts. Those who assimilate the new values of the industrial world survive; the rest perish. The impact of the process of industrialization on social and human issues is unprecedented as well as overwhelming. Anderson records this impact in such a way that Tom Butterworth, Steve Hunter, Ed Hall, Ezra French and Joe Wainsworth become human correlatives; indeed, archetypes of the different facets of the survival of the fittest ethic. They are essentially naturalistic characters because their lives confront the force of the industrialization process which changes the complexion of their habitual old world.

Tom Butterworth, Steve Hunter and Ed Hall adapt themselves to the new demands made by the new age on man for his survival. The stark naturalistic phrase, "survival of the fittest" is first uttered by Steve Hunter and later by Tom Butterworth (p.180). Their shrewdness, opportunism and moral rottenness enable them to prosper in the competitive world of the law of the jungle.

The dissolute and possessive Tom Butterworth, in his sixties, obviously belongs to the old world of agrarian community life, but he splendidly recognizes the pulse of change. Convinced that the "age of flesh and blood" is going to be superseded by the "new age
of iron and steel" (p.133), he, along with Steve, takes the initiative of manufacturing the machines invented by Hugh. His daughter, Clara's marriage with Hugh, makes him happy because of the prospect of monopolizing Hugh's future inventions. When Hugh tries to be conscious of self-identity and develops a moral attitude towards things with the result that his inventive force weakens, Tom becomes resentful. The fact that he persuades Hugh to resort to dishonest means to perfect the hay-loading machine suggests the extent to which he wants to use Hugh for his selfish ends.

Deceit and treachery, the spirit of boldness to take risks and the courage for adventurism—like Tom, Steve Hunter also embodies these qualities. Young as he is, his intuition enables him to visualize the nature of the imminent new age. He is quick to be convinced that Hugh is the upcoming inventor and persuades him to enter into a business deal which commits Hugh to selling the patent of his invention to this shrewd man.

Hugh's first invention, the plant-setting machine, fails; but Steve sticks to Hugh whose later successful inventions pay him rich dividends. The expanding industry starts swallowing the corn-growing fields and the farm hands take no time to become factory hands.

The world of industrialism is an uncertain one. It is precariously dependent upon the success of the man of inventions. This is demonstrated by the failure of Hugh's plant-setting machine which spells disaster for those who invest their savings for the establishment of the factory. The new prayer in the new age is not for God's grace or for salvation; it is for the success of the inventor. David
Champman prays: "O Lord, help Hugh McVey, thy servant, to build successfully the plant-setting machine" (p.136).

The evils of industrialism find detailed description in Beyond Desire, but they have been hinted at in Poor White. The inescapable concomitants are the growth of slums and the ineradicable discontent among the workers. Forced to lead a life of economic and emotional privation due to ruthless exploitation, they resort to strike which turns out to be violent. Such a strike takes place in Poor White due to the foreman, Ed Hall's betrayal of the workers.

The devastating and brutal impact of industrialism finds expression in the characters of Ezra Franch and Joe Wainsworth. They symbolize values which are shattered by the new scheme of things.

The story of disintegration and eventual dissolution of the agrarian age is personified by Ezra French. Once a wealthy farmer he does not comprehend the new mood and the new temper. His stubborn belief is that man has to earn his bread by his own sweat and labour. He looks at the machine as a violation of God's design, a desecration of the laws sanctioned by the scriptures. He does not realize that the new laws no longer flow from the scriptures but from the factories. For this reason he gets uprooted and swept aside by the force of the machine age. His wife, four sons and three daughters who toil like slaves in the farm in silent resentment, fail to sustain the farm from the invasion of the expanding factory. The defeat comes quickly and inevitably. Ezra French,
who considers the machine to be "wicked" and "ungodly" sees his sons deserting the farm to be factory hands in order to lead still more degrading lives. When factory homes are built over the French farm, the triumph of the new age over this farmer and the values he represents is decisive and final.

The clash between the past and the present, between craftsmanship and machine is poignantly depicted in the character of Joe Wainsworth, the old harness maker. Anderson says that the past of Bidwell is "represented by the figure of the old harness maker" (p.360) who rises in symbolic protest against the present personified by Hugh. He attacks the inventor with his teeth and nails. This attack is the externalization of the dying past's accumulated resentment against the present because it destroys craftsmanship and renders the craftsman obsolete. And the fact that Joe has no child reinforces the discontinuity and obituary of craftsmanship whose place is taken over by the triumphant and indomitable machine.

In a letter to Roger Sergei in 1937, Anderson says: "Basically, I do believe that the robbing of man of his craft, his touch with tools and materials by modern industry does tend to make him spiritually impotent." Joe indeed dies spiritually under the assault of the new culture. Craftsmanship is a self-satisfying and self-rewarding art for Joe which gives him a sense of pride, honesty and moral integrity. The first tremor of shock comes to him when Tom Butterworth asks him if he could repair the machine-made harnesses purchased from the city. Joe's wounded pride turns down this offer, but he entertains forebodings about the future of his craft.
With the failure of the plant-setting machine he loses his entire saving of twelve hundred dollars invested in the proposed factory. After this disaster his grip over his affairs loosens pathetically. Jim Gibson, a dissolute, dishonest man becomes his assistant and dictates terms to Joe and reduces his employer to the level of a passive creature. A personification of the modern salesmanship of deceit and dishonest tricks, Jim, of course, enables his employer to save money twice as much as he had invested and lost in the plant-setting factory. This hardly consoles Joe whose passivity in the face of his assistant's assertiveness symbolizes the past fumbling for a foothold in the incomprehensible turbulence of the present.

Joe is awakened from dazed inaction the day Jim displays factory-made harnesses in the shop taking for granted the passivity of his fumbling employer. With Jim's sharp knife, Joe almost chops off the assistant's head, cuts the factory-made harnesses into bits, and comes out of the shop with the frenzied impulse to destroy anything and anybody responsible for the destruction of his old world. He sees Hugh, Clara and Tom Butterworth in the car and attacks Hugh on the neck and cheek with teeth and nails.

The march of time does not halt by this attack; on the contrary, at the end of the novel the factory whistle blows laud and triumphant. Tom Butterworth's old farm hand, Jim Priest's snoring and the sound coming from the animal farm lose their entity in the piercing sound of this whistle. The new age has come to stay.
The harsher and more brutal impact of industrialization is dealt with in *Beyond Desire*. Written during the depression of the thirties, the novel embodies moral and economic uncertainties of the period. The confusion and apprehension of the time are objectified by the protagonist, Red Oliver.

The second part of the novel, "Mill-Girls," depicts the inhibited and cramped life of the girls working in the factories. Says Anderson: "Being just a mill hand, born one, was like being always a prisoner." A little later: "Their lives were walled in, shut in" (p.94).

The victim of economic circumscription, the mill girl spends her time in the trap-like factory. Its inexorable walls symbolize the life of utter limitedness she is condemned to lead. The husband and the wife, assigned to different shifts, do not see much of each other. Estranged from the baby at home, the mother experiences ache in her breasts.

This part of the novel "written with a certain creative economy and emotional conviction" conveys the picture of disintegration and dissociation: disintegration of the worker's family owing to the lack of opportunity to lead an emotionally satisfying life and his dissociation from the outer world.

She leads a smothered and joyless life, but as Walcutt points out, "there always remains the dimension of inwardness, where the secret heart lives" and this inwardness is sweet. This aspect of the mill girl's nature is brought home by the tender
relationship existing between Doris and Grace. With a feeling of nostalgic retrospect Grace recounts her sweet childhood spent in the lap of nature and laments the dichotomy between the past and the present. The realities being harsh and painful, the worker indulges in day-dreaming in which he heroically becomes a person of achievements and fulfillment.

This part of the novel gives a general picture of the pattern of life led by the factory workers, but no character has been adequately particularized and dramatically developed as is done in the case of Molly Seabright who figures in the last part of the novel, entitled "Beyond Desire". Molly provides more insight into the predicament of the mill girls and into the "Lives of such people, caught thus in the trap of life. . ." (p. 268).

Like Red Oliver, Molly struggles for self-identity. "She had never had a man, a lover. She did not know why" (p. 278). For years on end she is put on the night shift with her body gradually becoming synchronized with the movements of the machines. Because of intense exhaustion and drudgery she feels inclined to throw herself into the machine to end it all. She is inescapably imprisoned in the mill: "She could not quit working. Life would never open out for her" (p. 295).

A victim of economic and emotional privation, the love-starved Molly comes across two harrowing experiences which leave permanent scars on her mind. When she was just coming out of her girlhood, a young, rough mountain man had made an abortive attempt
to outrage her. But her experience with the foreman of the factory is more devastating. She had to take "great quantities of quinine" in order to dissolve the conception.

At the age of twenty-nine she has no dream, life has no assurance for her. In _Perhaps Women_ (1931) Anderson records his experiences he had on visiting a cottonmill. In _Puzzled America_ (1935) he describes his interviews with a number of nameless men rendered jobless by the factory owners. The situation reminds one of _The Jungle_ and _The Grapes of Wrath_ in which the painful scramble for jobs presents a horrifying picture. Anderson transmutes his experiences recorded in _Perhaps Women_ and _Puzzled America_ into fictional form in _Beyond Desire_.

The novel underscores the author's deep compassion for the workers and prescribes communism, however unconvincingly, as the protective shield against the rapacity of the industrialists. The idea of communism in the book does not assume the proportion of political propaganda; it remains as the author's humane attitude towards the workers victimized by an unfair economic system in a country afflicted by moral bankruptcy.

Inhibited as he is, man's dream is for "freedom", as the bearded man claiming himself to be a psychoanalyst in the story, "Seeds", puts it. He implies that man's ultimate goal is the liberation of his self, its state of total release from inhibiting factors.

Like the minor characters of the novels discussed above, the protagonists of Anderson's naturalistic stories wither away
because of their inability to secure liberation of the self. Their dreams remain thwarted, desires suppressed. Life becomes an agony, a frustration for them. In varying degrees, the female characters of the stories, "Seeds", "Unlighted Lamps", "The Door of the Trap", "The New Englannder" and "Out of Nowhere into Nothing" in The Triumph of the Egg conform to this naturalistic vision of Anderson. The stories "Unused" in Horses and Men (1923) and "Death in the Woods" in Death in the Woods (1933) also embody identical naturalistic substance. The titles of some of the stories mentioned above hint at the story of imprisonment and waste of human potentialities depicted in them. As Burbank points out, the stories "present a picture of waste, of human sensitivity never fully developed, of physical and spiritual potentiality untapped, or of a sensitive nature crushed."^10

How the life force within a person can become "decentralized" and his normal attitude towards things mutilated by environment is exemplified by the twenty-seven-year-old music teacher of Iowa in the story, "Seeds". She comes to Chicago ostensibly to study advanced methods for teaching music, but her real motif is to find a lover for herself.

The crisis of this woman is that in her native town she is totally deprived of opportunities to be acquainted with any person belonging to her opposite sex. With the loss of her parents during her infancy, she loses her emotional prop. Her monotonous and narrow life with her three elder sisters who are unable to find lovers for themselves, restricts her perception of realities. The
result is that she is not able to assess her subjective needs in the light of any experience in life. The utterly feminine world in which she grows up incapacitates her to establish relationship with any man.

Her profession as a music teacher for young girls completes her isolation from the male world. Her inwardness is distorted because her sexual desire remains in a state of arrest and her dream of having a lover is thwarted. She considers this unrealized desire and this unfulfilled dream to be the only substance in her life. She does not allow any man to touch her lest this substance should be defiled.

For the first time in her life she is exposed to the male world in Chicago. A man comes forward to be friendly with her, but he is bewildered when the love-starved music teacher shrieks on being touched by him. The wall of her alienation from the male world remains impenetrable. Her timidity and taciturnity force her to shrink away from any possible meaningful relationship with a man. "At the last she was sex personified, sex become condensed and impersonal" (p. 30).

Like the music teacher, Mary Cochran of "Unlighted Lamps" is brought up in a life-negating environment. The lamp of human affection remains unignited by verbal expression. Doctor Lester Cochran is beset with the problem of communication. He makes futile attempts to circumvent the wall of his innate reticence and inarticulateness. Ultimately he resigns himself to his failure. Mary
grows up in this tradition of silence in the house. Lack of communication makes the father-daughter relationship devoid of emotional togetherness inspite of their pining for it. Mary remains nailed to silence which makes her a lonely creature in the town.

It is difficult to agree with Taylor's observation that "Anderson was predictably silent in fixing blame for the doctor's failure to communicate freely with other people." The doctor's is, obviously, a case of psychic drawback. Like Elmer Cowley and Seth Richmond of Winesburg, the doctor is naturally timid to establish channels of human intercourse by self-expression. He confesses: "I've been a fool and a coward. I have always been silent because I've been afraid of expressing myself" (p.85) — a confession which indicates his awareness of his failing.

Cursed with this psychic imperfection, the doctor encounters social crises. His marital life is destroyed because his wife deserts him. Essentially generous and benevolent he even envies the common man who knows "how to live with your children and with your wife. You know how to make them happy" (p.79). The desire to express himself twitches and writhes beneath his apparently placid and blank exterior. His hands—nay, his entire being—ache to reduce all distances that separate him from mankind. But his hands do not even reach his daughter in order to make their physical proximity emotionally meaningful.

Mary Cochran grows up in this environment of taciturnity and silence. Both the father and the daughter are afflicted by guilt-consciousness but fail to take any initiative to come closer for
which their tender hearts remain hidden under the shroud of reticence.

Anderson suggests how human relationship is dependent upon the word which illuminates man's self and how, its antithesis, Silence, keeps the self concealed in darkness. Mary's predicament is aggravated by the doctor's death owing to heart disease. Already crippled by the incapacity of self-expression, she is to confront the complexities of life with very little money left behind by her father. Both Doctor Cochran and Mary "seek to extricate themselves by groping toward the light of love, but the lamps are unlighted and Anderson leaves the father dead and the daughter helpless."  

The irony is that the doctor dies after successfully helping a woman deliver a baby. Whereas he helps others bring life to the world, he is unable to help his daughter encounter the problems of life. Mary figures in the story, "The Door of the Trap," as a college student. Irving Howe comments thus on "Unlighted Lamps" and "The Door of the Trap": "The theme of unlived life receives two major variations, first as a fear of expressing emotion ('Unlighted Lamps') and then as a hesitation to accept sex from which love might follow ('The Door of the Trap')."  

In the later story, the trap is marriage itself in which the college professor, Hugh Walker, finds himself imprisoned. He has no plan to desert his wife whom he thinks uninteresting and unlivable. Nor does he have affectionate attachment to his three children. He is vaguely conscious of the monotony in his life, but does not
know what exactly he should do to make it animated and exultant.

In response to his request, his student, Mary Cochran, comes to his house several times a week whose attitude towards the children is one of tenderness and love. Hugh is tormented by sexual desire for Mary which he reveals in an abrupt and brutal way. One day he throws her book into the fire. After a few days he pulls her towards him, pours hysterical kisses on her cheeks and lips, and asks her not to come to his place in future.

Hugh's frustration with life and his inability to explore avenues of joy, get externalized in this crude and violent way. Thus the blame for the termination of the Hugh-Mary relationship lies not with Mary but with Hugh. He does not know how to initiate intimate relationship with Mary which would have served a basis for Mary's acceptance of sex. Irving Howe, undoubtedly, misreads the story. Hugh's misdemeanour and futile inward struggle to express himself make him another Elmer Cowley. Unable to explain himself to George Willard, Cowley inflicts violence on the young reporter on the Winesburg railway platform and renders him unconscious. In "The Door of the Trap", Mary encounters this dehumanizing experience which is sure to make her more timid in establishing human relationships and render her a pathetically lonely person.

Life-denying environment brings about waste and decay of the inner being of Elsie Leander in the story, "The New Englander." This thirty-five-year old unmarried woman lives with her silent parents in a desolate valley which becomes a correlative of her
desolate self. She hears persistent cries of unborn, imaginary children coming from within the depth of her starving being. She is alternately driven to kiss the ground, hold the tall corn stalks, and press the pillow against her breasts. She sees the extension of her empty life in the empty rooms of the house in which she runs restlessly. As a means of escape from this life of unrealized longings, she runs wildly into the corn fields. She looks at the wire fences or the dilapidated stone walls around the corn field and concludes that her life is ineluctably limited by insurmountable barriers. She is aware that "Something within herself was being twisted and whirled about" (p.158) for which "She wanted to get out of her life and into some new sweeter life" (p.154), but is nailed to a futile life. She is like Elizabeth Willard pining for release but not knowing how to reach it.

Anderson uses a variety of evocative images which are an intensification and identification of the frustrated self of this decaying woman. The environment in which she spends thirty-five years is in itself barren. The soil of the valley is dull and hard promising no good crop. The quality of the soil finds its reflection in the nature of Elsie's silent and hard-working parents in whom the seeds of emotion and self-expression donot sprout. The valley having no other human habitation, Elsie becomes a personification of loneliness and silence. Sometimes the compulsion for self-expression makes her indulge in sporadic gibberings when she is alone.
This valley in Vermont with its stamp of unchangeable finality of drabness, convinces her that there will be no change in her death-like existence. But a faint glimmering hope comes when, along with her parents, she goes to the West after disposing of the farm. Her only surviving brother, Tom, secures a large house for them. As they undertake the long train journey, she is filled with excitement and joy while looking at the ever changing picture of the landscape. But the moment she reaches the new house, the pattern of her life becomes a repetition of what it was in Vermont.

Most of the rooms of the new house remain empty with thick layers of dust. Surrounding the house are distant stone walls and wire fences. The lusty corn fields almost reach the edge of the house. The keeper of a grocery, her brother comes to visit them every week-end with his energetic wife and three exuberant children. With their arrival the graveyard silence of the house caves in. The noisiness of the children, their running about all over the place arouse waves of desires in Elsie and make her feel restless. In her fancy the distant noises of the children get metamorphosed into sharp and clear cries of her unborn children. The wildness of the children presents to her the picture of life itself, its exultation and riotous activities. The difference between the new environment and the previous one is quite explicit. Whereas the old environment was an identification of Elsie's barren life, the new one serves as a contrast to it. But so irremediably has her life been twisted that despite her wish to participate with the children in their pranks, she remains lonely and
life-hungry.

With the help of dogs the children are in pursuit of rabbits. Occasionally they take out a bleeding, dead rabbit from the grasp of a dog. Anderson's repeated references to the dead rabbit emphasize the death of Elsie's dream of attaining motherhood and leading a life of fulfillment. Moreover, a bird imprisoned in one of the empty rooms of the house becomes a living image of her buried life. But the bird, after desperately flying for some time in the room, escapes through a broken window. On her part, "Elsie turned and ran nervously downstairs and out into the yard. She climbed over the wire fence and ran with stooped shoulders along one of the tunnels" (p.154). Her running here and there does not promise escape from her empty life; it under­scores the state of her entrapment.

When a farm boy furtively kisses Elizabeth, the eldest child of her brother, Elsie clutches at the ground and kisses it smearing her face with dust. In such moments of despair, the ground not only gets transformed into a lover; it becomes a symbol of life-bearing fertility which she wants to absorb into her desert-like being. She feels that this will enable her to become a mother like the ground in the womb of which the seeds sprout and grow into corn stalks. In the end, nothing assures her of any change in her decaying life; nothing relieves her anguished self. Therefore, she bursts into spasmodic sobs which synchronize with the stormy rain outside.
The above characters are victimized by debilitating environments. Their inner self is distorted and outlook narrowed to such an extent that they are perplexed and overwhelmed by the external world. As a result, they sink deeper into their being which intensifies their isolation still further. The gulf between their ideal and the real life widens because their yearnings are not accompanied by active search for fulfillment; so pathetically is their vision of life restricted and their capacity to participate in life crippled. The clamour of their desires demanding fulfillment becomes insistent and maddening within the confines of their barren self.

The case of the twenty-seven-year-old Rosalind Wescott of "Out of Nowhere into Nothing" is different. Her life in Willow Springs till she is twenty-one does not encounter any hostile or debilitating circumstance to make her hopelessly timid and indecisive. Her loneliness is an ineradicable aspect of her nature. She has no emotional rapport with her parents. She refuses to be drawn into conversation with her schoolmates. Her six-years stay in Chicago as the secretary of Walter Sayers does not help her in any way. She has no connection with her brother who stays in Chicago; rather she turns down his suggestion that she stay with him.

Rosalind's dream was to be an actress, but she becomes Walter Sayers's secretary in Chicago. Walter had wanted to be a singer for which he had some training, but the death of his father forces him to be the treasurer of a piano factory. Melville Stoner,
her immediate neighbour in Willow Springs, is always absorbed in books. He feels that he can best express himself if he becomes a writer or a painter or a musician. He has not yet explored any means for self-expression.

The plight of these characters is due to their paralyzed will and inability to take stock of their situation in the scheme of things surrounding them. They allow themselves to be drifted by time and circumstances which account for the deflection of their lives from their ideal. Here are three characters who lead unfulfilled and unexpressed lives.

At the age of twenty-seven and after spending six years in Chicago, the educated Rosalind wants to ascertain her mother's opinion about whether she should go ahead with her love affair with the thirty-eight-year-old Walter. He is bored with his complacent wife and two sons. He is extremely irresolute for which reason he is mentally dependent upon his wife. He can neither desert her; nor can he be normal in his relationship with his family. He does not struggle to realize his ideal; he accepts defeat: "I know defeat. I can accept defeat" (p.250). The presence of Rosalind, however, instils a sense of enthusiasm and love for life into him. When alone with her, he sings in a feeble voice. Rosalind, on the other hand, does not know what to do with her relationship with Walter. The Walter-Rosalind friendship, then, is not based upon any principle; nor has it any goal.

Rosalind comes home to clear up the dilemma she faces with regard to Walter. She takes several days before revealing her
purpose of suddenly and unexpectedly coming to Willow Springs. Meanwhile, she meets the middle-aged bachelor, Melville, who by means of his perceptive insight, knows what torments her soul. She is afraid of his aggressive assertiveness and domineering quality. She resents the fact that he has penetrated into the secret chamber of her being. She considers Melville to be a "vulcher" and a "sea-gull", stranded in a hostile part of the land searching for a way out.

Before ascertaining her mother's opinion about her relationship with Walter, she is for some time fascinated by Melville. She vacillates between Melville and Walter before reaching the conclusion that "She loved Walter Sayers, wanted to offer herself to him" (p.246), but before her mother she becomes a prisoner of indecision. Says she: "I have fallen in love with a man and can't marry him". (p.248)

But the mother does not help the daughter overcome the cross-purposes. Instead, a barrage of invectives flows from the mother against the concept of marriage which she describes as a crime. She says that the "whole fact of life was a lie" (p.259). According to her, marriage perpetuates sex and sex is an act of outrage indulged in by the husband who leaves the wife's body defiled and trampled down. She describes love as false and life a colossal sin.

The mother's outburst is due to her sense of disillusionment about love, marriage, sex and life. Since the day of her marriage she has been leading an animal life within the limits of the kitchen
knowing no joy and enjoyment. She concludes that what happens to her is a universal story from which her daughter cannot escape. Having failed to get the right type of advice Rosalind leaves Willow Springs at night. Her future remains as uncertain and dark as the enigmatic darkness of the night.

Devoid of introspection, these characters do not know what they want, much less how to resolve the dilemma they encounter. They grope for the song of life that can triumph over death. But their inaction and paralyzed will force them to lead a death-like existence. Anderson maintains that "a kind of white wonder of life" (p.237) can bring man a sense of lively animation. It can bring to his life a sense of purpose and direction. But in the story the song which can herald life's victory over death remains unsung. Not white wonder, but the darkness of indecision because of diffidence and lack of self-knowledge condemns the characters to defeat in life.

In the above stories Anderson subordinates physical details of the surroundings in favour of depicting the finite life each character leads. He focuses on the futile struggle for liberation which endlessly goes on in the dungeon of each character's self. Danforth Ross observes that Anderson "works with interior monologues to bring out this inner life. In the end his naturalism probes so deeply that it disappears into mystery." Like the stories in *Winesburg, Ohio*, the above stories present a claustrophobic picture: man remains trapped within himself.

Before discussing "The Egg" included in *The Triumph of the*
Egg to which all the above stories belong, an attempt will be made to identify the external forces responsible for the destruction of another woman character, May Edgley, of the story, "Unused", in *Horses and Men*. May, as will be seen, differs from the female characters discussed above, but she is a victim of hostile environment and conspiracy of circumstances. She is endowed with the potentiality to realize her objective to be a teacher. But something goes wrong which unleashes a series of events which eventually lead to her abrupt end. In "Unused" the destructive forces surrounding May are given the most palpable and uncompromising form.

Till she is seventeen, the people of Bidwell, Ohio, regard May as an exception in her family. Her three brothers are town scoundrels; the two elder ones occasionally create a nuisance in the town in a state of inebriation and are badly beaten. Her two elder sisters, Lillian and Kate, are infamous in several neighbouring towns because of the life of ill-repute they lead. They hardly belong to the family nor do the parents ever exercise any restraint over them. A very serious and perseverant girl, May fights against these odds at home with the dream of leading a respectable life.

The death of her mother, however, dislocates the course of her life. In order to augment the family earnings, she goes to the berry fields to pick berries. Silent and serious as she is, she does it alone with great dexterity. But temptation comes to her in the person of Jerome Hadley who outrages her in the forest. "Well, she had gone, and by her manner she had invited, urged him to follow, but she had not expected anything really to happen."\(^{15}\)
Her going to the forest leaving her lunch packet on the fork of a tree is an act impelled by her impulse and sense of curiosity. Her sense of judgement is momentarily rendered inoperative. She becomes blind to the possible repercussions that would ensue from that act.

Immediately after Jerome's brutal assault on her, the whole world dramatically changes for May. With her image shattered, she is identified with her two elder sisters. Her act violates the town conventions of respectability. Hereafter she leads a life of total excommunication.

All the while May had been silently resenting her being treated differently by the town people. "How cruelly the town had patronized May, setting her apart from the others, calling her smart" (p. 71). But she did not want to be treated as a respectable exception; she wanted to belong to the current of town life. Therefore, she tried to disengage herself from the values that had made her respectable in the eyes of the town people. But the error she committed was not certainly the means to accomplish this purpose; nor was she aware of what would happen to her in the forest and the consequence that would flow from it. Therefore, her "sin had temporarily released her from the respect of her fellows, but for several reasons it did not point the way to full happiness." 15

This temporary release, ironically, imprisons her in inevitable loneliness and destroys her future prospects. She finds company in Maud Welliver, a pale, emaciated girl and the only child of a railway man. The Welliver family comprises the father,
the daughter and her severe, fastidious aunt. Having come from Fort Wayne, the family had to settle in the vicinity of the Edgley family—the epitome of the town's bad name for which the father feels unhappy and resentful. Forever confined to the house, Maud hungers for friendship and her acquaintance with May develops surreptitiously notwithstanding her father's warning against the family of ill-repute.

May tells Maud that the Jerome affair with which the town censures her has been interpreted out of the context. The truth, she insists, is that Jerome wanted her to carry poison to a lady. The lady, pining for Jerome as her lover, wanted to get rid of her hateful husband with that poison. May's refusal to be a party to the intended crime enraged the desperate Jerome whose savagery burst into physically assaulting her in the forest.

This lie invented by the ingenuity of her mind "made her feel glad and free" (p.60). It lifts the terrible weight of guilt-consciousness from her mind and becomes the truth for her effacing her experience in the forest from her mind. She tells Maud that she is betrothed to a wealthy and handsome prince of a foreign land who had taken shelter in her house for a few days. The richness and lavish luxury of her imaginary world become real to her. It is an exercise in self-deception, but the world she builds in her mind, gives her strange happiness by keeping at bay the cruel realities of which she is afraid.

It is not strange that a naturalistic character, circumscribed by forces, finds illusory release from them only in the world of
his fancy. And this is exactly what May does. May's going to the forest with Jerome starts the process of her destruction; her going to Dewdrop with Maud completes it. Maud is to meet a widower in Dewdrop with whom she had a brief affair when she was in Fort Wayne. With great premonition May accompanies her only friend with her best dress on and, for the first time, with the large hat belonging to Lillian on her head. In the dance hall in Dewdrop the worst happens at eleven in the night. Much to her terror she sees six Bidwell men enter the hall who had far gone in drink and some of them were quite in bad shape. This was because of their altercation with some Clyde roughs who had given them a good beating.

Her presence there at that unusual time with her gaudy dress on convinces them that she has got herself initiated into the type of life led by her elder sisters. Besides, Jerome had created the impression in Bidwell that contrary to public opinion about her, May is the easiest thing among her sisters.

One of these men asks May to go out with him and she follows him meekly without protest. Her meeting these hooligans does two things: it demolishes the edifice of the fanciful world she had elaborately invented. All her lies about herself which had become truth in her mind collapse into a shambles and from this ruin the truth of her life gets resurrected to stare her in the face. Not the prince of her dream but the flesh-hungry men confront her to repeat what Jerome had done to her in the forest.

Secondly, by inflicting serious injuries with a rod on the
man who takes her out, May takes vicarious revenge on Jerome and what he personifies. But this act of revenge cannot restore the purity of her body to her. Neither can it possibly bring back the same world which was destroyed by what the Bidwell people interpret as her sinful act.

After being discovered in Dewdrop she cannot go back to Bidwell. With the world of her fancy destroyed, she runs wildly without any direction in quest of release. After a few days her dead body is discovered in a river, lodged among the submerged tree roots with the white hat of Lillian still clinging to her hand. This puts the stamp of identification in the eyes of the town people her image merges with that of her elder sisters. She remains misunderstood not only during her life but also after her death.

No doubt, Elyde Griffith of *An American Tragedy* wanted to get rid of his once-girlfriend and pregnant Roberta Alden so that he might carry on his affair with the sophisticated and rich Sondra Finchley. But he had never imagined that Roberta's chance-death in the boat mishap in the lake would lead to his eventual doom. Bigger Thomas, the Negro protagonist of *Native Son*, accidentally causes death to a white girl, May Dalton, which gives rise to a series of events encircling him and finally condemning him to death. May Edgley's going to the forest followed by Jerome is similarly an accident. Her resentment against the people's opinion that she is exceptional and smart is understandable. Her desire to be a part of the current of town life and not to stand apart from it
is quite obvious. But her so-called crime is not an act calculated for accomplishing this purpose.

As the title suggests, her potentiality which could have been used for her good and for the good of the community, is destroyed. The conventions of the small town with its severe puritanical code of conduct do not excuse May for her misdeed. May is clearly a victim of external forces who is more sinned against than sinning.

The common ground on which the above stories stand, is man's desire to establish harmonious relationship with the external world which alone can fulfill his psychic needs. But this world is either so mysteriously complex that it overwhelms his finite perception of life or so malevolently sinister that it destroys him once he violates the social mores.

This naturalistic framework is the basis on which the thematic metaphor of "The Egg" stands. As Michael D. West observes, in this story the "language, images, details and themes coalesce and enrich one another in extremely subtle relationships, the complexity of which verges on poetry and defies logical exposition." Because of its rich, evocative suggestiveness a variety of critical judgements can be made of this story, but one way of understanding it is the naturalistic predicament man faces on this planet. Anderson's intuitive perception of man's existential crises is uniquely blended with his creative force in this story as in *Winesburg, Ohio*. These manifold crises depicted in the story are of archetypal significance. Anderson's insight probes the very
centre from which the cycle of life, defeat and death radiates. In symbolic terms he locates the roots of terror and malignance which pervade the universe and destroys life.

The trouble starts when the father in the story along with the mother "became ambitious. The American passion for getting up in the world took possession of them" (p.46). "Incurably ambitious" for the husband and the son, the mother wrenches him from the values with which he was "quite happy in his position in life." Before his marriage this man was cheerful and kindly by nature. But his wife enforces values upon him and tries to make him enter into the realm of material success and possessiveness. He fails to come to terms with these values because they are discordant with his nature. Thus, he is forced to enter into a world the logic of which he fails to understand; much less control and resolve for fulfilling the desire implanted in his mind. The wife uproots a healthy plant from the hospitable soil and propitious environment and plants it on a soil and in an environment which prove to be disastrous for its survival. The spiritual destruction of the father becomes inevitable for this reason.

To achieve material success they launch out into chicken raising on ten acres of poor, stony land eight miles from Bidwell. The distance of the farm reinforces the estrangement of the family from the stream of town life. The quality of the soil suggests the imminent failure of the enterprise. From this farm emerges the image of the egg embodying the cycle of birth and death. Moreover, the egg becomes the centre of terrifying and malevolent forces.
which defy human comprehension and control. The operation of these forces finally defeats man.

Instead of bringing the anticipated dividends, the enterprise ends in failure destroying the father's cheerful disposition. Having lost track of life, the restlessly unhappy father flounders to get back the old pattern of his life which was once harmonious and satisfying. On the farm chickens grow; some of them get diseased and die, medicines notwithstanding. The mysterious process of life and death, thus, goes beyond the range of scientific knowledge represented by the medicines. Still more mysterious is the occasional birth of physically deformed chickens: the grotesque chickens. These chickens with three legs, double heads or parts on wrong places also come out of the apparently identical eggs. These monstrous chickens do not live for long—a much lamented fact for the father. He wants them to live, so that people would regard them as strangely wonderful and pay to see them.

The dissolution of the father's old world and his desperate attempt to adapt himself to a set of values which can bring him wealth, twist his mind and disharmonize his self. This state of his mind is aggravated by the fact that the world of wealth eludes him. The desire inserted in his mind for achieving this world is always at odds with his natural idiosyncrasies. This condition of the father's psychic distortion brought about by these external factors gets identified with the misshapen grotesque chickens. And his "attempt to preserve the life of what is symbolically his image,"¹⁸ suggests his attempt to preserve himself in a world which
gradually becomes uncontrollable and overwhelming.

The egg as a symbol of creativity and renewal of life gets undermined because of the failure of the chicken farm and its being folded up after ten futile years. The father embarks upon restaurant business in the desolate neighbourhood of the Pickleville railway station. The family leaves the chicken farm which defeats the parents' desire for wealth and proceeds to Pickleville. The journey parallels the beaten troops fleeing a battlefield, bewildered and nervous about the future. The battle for material success, however, continues despite defeat.

The location of the restaurant, away from the town, accounts for its not attracting patrons. The poor stony land of the chicken farm and now the location of the restaurant indicate that the parents' mental equipment for the achievement of wealth is poor. In the restaurant there is the display of the dead grotesque chickens preserved in glass bottles with alcohol. In the basket there are eggs—the symbolic remnant of the past defeat. In the restaurant the father's twisted psyche merges with the image of the grotesque chickens. And the egg becomes the centre of sardonic and malignant forces. As Howe puts it, the egg gets transformed into a symbol of "all the energy in the universe—arbitrary, unmotivated, ridiculous, and malevolent—against which man must pit himself." 19 Unable to confront these forces, the father resigns himself to defeat and weeps helplessly; tears being the language of defeat and despair.
In the restaurant the father tries to assume the role of a pleasant entertainer in order to attract more patronage. Obviously he tries a wrong role since by now he is a desperate man with his cheerful disposition destroyed by defeat. Success-obsession has been putting him in wrong places, but the finality comes now.

A young man of the town, waiting for the arrival of his father in the train, takes a seat in the restaurant. The father offers to display a few tricks with the egg before this uninterested man. His frustration and restlessness mount as the egg does not stand on one end contrary to his boastful declaration to do so. He tries stubbornly to make the egg enter into a bottle through the narrow mouth. He becomes bewildered and enraged at his failure. The egg breaks and its content smears his clothes. With the arrival of the train, the young man, thinking the restaurant keeper to be mildly insane, leaves the place throwing a smile of derision. The father catches hold of an egg and externalizes his sense of failure and protest by throwing it at the young man narrowly missing his head. With another egg he goes upstairs. He weeps profusely before his wife. His anguished self is not to be comforted by any words of consolation.

The father's so-called egg tricks reflect his demented bid to bring his desired world within his grip. He does not realize that he is hopelessly inadequate to overcome the powerful barriers he is to encounter before attaining this world. The father's attempt to tame the egg parallels Windy McPherson's abortive attempt
to tame a bugle in the Fourth July celebration. The father does not know the egg tricks; Windy does not know how to blow the bugle. Both these men's desire to achieve the impossible runs to such an excess that they believe that the desire is no longer an abstraction: it has already been accomplished and has become a truth in their lives. They live in this world of wishfulness and superimpose it on the real. Precisely at that moment the wishful world becomes non-existent to their bewilderment and anger. The egg tricks do not come off; the bugle does not produce the intended tune. They are rudely and drastically confronted by realities—a painfully shocking situation for both. Neither has the means to forge a workable relationship between himself and the world he yearns to possess. In such self-situation conflict, the situation remains triumphant.

The story of man withering in loneliness and his inwardness drying up is repeated in the title story of Anderson’s last collection of short stories, *Death in the Woods*. In this story, death is conceived of as an elemental, mysterious force through which life secures release to be united with nature. Mrs. Grimes's dead body discovered in the snow after a few days of her death achieves an uncanny beauty she never had in her joyless and passive life. The primitivistic aspect of the story is emphasized by the fact that this woman had lived only to feed "animal life in cows, in chickens, in pigs, in horses, in dogs, in men."20 Her death in the woods indicates how lonely she was, but this loneliness is recompensed by her merger with nature. The boy who narrates this story claims to have entered into a different realm of experience.
What he sees in the forest leads to a reorganization of his attitude towards life and the world.

The narrator's intuitive response to the sight of Mrs. Grimes's dead body is one of the thematic strands of the story. This response awakens the question of life and death in his consciousness. This is the focus of Jon S. Lawry's discussion of the story. Moreover, he points out how "Anderson's personal and artistic beliefs operating under the fine control of an artistic discipline", renders a seemingly commonplace event into a great story.

But the following analysis of the story will concern itself with the type of life Mrs. Grimes was leading which constitutes the naturalistic strand of the story and can be discussed independent of what the sight of Mrs. Grimes's dead body does to the growing mind of the adolescent narrator.

From the point of view of this victimized woman's life, "Death in the woods," as Willard Thorp observes, is "The most completely naturalistic story Anderson wrote and one of his few masterpieces;" a story which reflects how the animal kingdom embodies the elemental forces pervasive in the world.

In the story the animal world—"Horses, cows, pigs, dogs, men" (p.125)—is identified by one animalistic trait: to feed upon something for the continuation of its existence. Mrs. Grimes is pitted against this universe of hunger which eternally demands food. It relentlessly eats into the vitality of this small, frail
The women characters in Anderson's short stories are endlessly tormented by their unrealized yearnings. Despite their inarticulateness this inward turmoil achieves palpable magnitude. For these characters, the objective world exists insofar as it heightens their inner disharmony or becomes its correlative.

This familiar situation is modified in "Death in the Woods." Mrs. Grimes is beset not with the problem of her life's fulfillment; she is anxious to satisfy the remorseless and insatiable hunger represented by men and animals surrounding her. Never for a moment are Mrs. Grimes's eyes directed towards her own self: "She had to scheme all her life about getting things fed..." (p.124). Anderson has not created another character whose inner life has been completely obliterated under the weight of drudgery; never has he reduced a character to the level of an uncomplaining, passive commodity meant for others' consumption. Mrs. Grimes is after all a nameless, anonymous being. This fact emphasizes Anderson's creating this character who lives and dies without experiencing herself, without knowing if she has an inner being within her frail physical frame.

Mrs. Grimes's victimization "pertains not merely to man's animal hunger for food, but... includes the adult male's hunger for the sexual victimization of women" and this process starts when, as a "bound girl", she serves a German farmer. She cooks food for the farmer and his wife, feeds the cows, the pigs, the horses and the chickens. The farmer tries to seduce her, but fails
because of his fear of his domineering wife.

After saving this girl from the clutches of the German, Jake Grimes perpetuates what the farmer was trying to do to her. Indolent and evasive, Jake, the town scoundrel, now and then steals horses, disappears from the town, and comes back to her after a few days to satisfy his physical and sexual hunger. Her physical charm is drained out and she becomes a stooped shouldered woman after a few years of her marriage. The burden of her responsibility to feed her husband and the son and the animals destroys her. She ceases being a sexual appetizer for her husband.

She becomes a "rickety" thing like the house she lives in. She "sees her existence turn into a sordid round of silent, slavish labor that, before she is forty, has driven her to the edge of madness." Her twenty-one-year-old incorrigibly worthless son treats her as a slave and she endures it without protest. He occasionally becomes violent, breaking apart the crust of sloth, and fights with his father. They sometimes drink together and, if they do not find enough to it, the father brutally beats her. However, "She did not mind much; she was used to it. Whatever happened she never said anything" (p.126).

The end of this life comes in the forest. While on her way home from the market, she sits leaning against a tree with the pack of provisions tied on her back. Utter exhaustion and ill-health overcome her. She surrenders herself to death silently, without a struggle, as was the pattern of her life. Her four gaunt dogs
along with three from the neighbourhood make circles on the snow as a ritual of her death ceremony. They feed upon the pack of meat kept in her bag. Significantly, they are all male dogs and they drag her dead body into the circles they make on the snow. They continue to move round her dead body.

Mrs. Grimes is victimised by two primitivistic forces—hunger and sex. The timelessness and relentlessness of these forces are brought home by the fact that the male dogs almost rummage the dead woman for food. In death she achieves release and beauty. And transcends her loneliness: she is united with nature.

Anderson feels dismayed and anguished that man is circumscribed by forces denying him a wholesome and spontaneous life. He laments that "There is this sense of something drying, getting old without having ripened." This naturalistic conception of life is given expression in his creative writings. What he implies by "ripeness" is life's total liberation from all imprisoning forces and its attaining a state of experience where the sense of fulfillment becomes an abiding condition, where the inwardness of man enjoys wholesome bliss.

This is the ideal all the Anderson characters search for. This hunger in their lives makes all of them alike, be it Sam McPherson, Elizabeth Willard, John Webster, Kit Brandon or Elsie Leander. Anderson approaches these hungry characters with a spirit of profound compassion, as if his artistic self were anxious to compensate for their emotional privation. His humane and moral
self is disturbed by the life unlived and unrealized. What makes his writings pessimistic is his conviction that the drying up of man's inner self is the eternal, universal illness that defies remedy.26

A naturalistic strain is perceptible in some of the adolescent stories, particularly in "I Want to Know Why" (The Triumph of the Egg) and "I'm a Fool" (Horses and Men). In these two stories, the narrators aged about fifteen and nineteen respectively, recollect events which continue to perplex them. The bewildering import of these events leads them to the realm of discovery. In "I Want to Know Why" the narrator, contrary to his earlier conception, discovers painfully shocking realities in the external world. The discovery of a shameful aspect in his nature puts the narrator of "I am a Fool" to humiliation within himself.

In the first story the narrator's perception of the world undergoes change through a process of shocking disillusionment. The boy has unqualified love for race horses and the trainers because he recognizes a stamp of purity and cleanliness in them. He believes that the world is itself pure and clean. In Saratoga, however, where he comes with his friends to see the famous horse race, his conception of "purity" is shattered. The boy sees his favourite trainer, Jerry Tillford, going to a house of ill-repute and kissing an unclean prostitute. Tillford's lust for a degraded woman, in the judgement of this innocent and uninitiated boy, is incompatible with the trainer's association with the clean and pure horses. The boy's sense of shock is due to the reason that the "fundamental system of
values by which he lives . . . is totally shattered by what he sees in the house of ill-repute."^{27}

As the boy sees the incident in the house, "I began to hate that man. I wanted to scream and rush in the room and kill him" (p.19). He undergoes a painful process of initiation from the world of innocence into the world of knowledge and experience. His enraged revulsion at what Tillford does, is due to the loss of his ideal and pure world. But the boy has to reconcile himself to the fact that the real world is not pure; indeed, it is ugly and corrupt.

Society does not provide man with a milieu in which his potentiality and goodness can find expression. This is one reason why his ideal world remains beyond his reach. But he creates a fanciful and wish-fulfilling world which brings him a sense of deceptive release from the harshness and denial of the real world. In "I'm a Fool", the adolescent narrator indulges in falsehood to project a picture of himself he wants to attain. In the absence of alternative opportunity, this boy belonging to a not very well-to-do family, takes up the job of a swipe-boy of race horses. Later he finds himself in the unenviable position of a care-taker of the race horses.

His situation restricts him at a level from which he yearns to rise further. However, he claims himself to be the son of a prosperous race-horse owner belonging to an unquestionably respectable family. His falsehood makes him feel at par with the rich and sophisticated Lucy Wessen, her brother and his girl friend. The narrator meets them at the Sandusky horse race and spends a good
time with them, particularly with Lucy. After they leave for their place in Ohio, the narrator's make-believe deserts him. His awareness of his own situation convinces him of his smallness. "Even yet sometimes, when I think of it, I want to cry or swear or kick myself" (p.3). He is pained not only by the fact that his desire to rise is destined to remain unfulfilled, but also by his foolish conduct which makes him feel guilty and belittled in himself.

Anderson's last stories not included in any of his three short-story collections are brought together in The Sherwood Anderson Reader (1947) edited by Paul Rosenfeld. A brief discussion of two naturalistic stories, "Nobody Laughed" and "Daughters," will be made below.

The naturalism in "Nobody Laughed" arises from a joke which assumes cruel proportions. It destroys the hitherto harmonious husband-wife relationship between the seventy-year-old Pinhead Perry and his wife, Hallie, who is older than him. The joke that the people, even the respectable people, of Greenhope are after Hallie is fantastic in itself. Pinhead believes the story that several people have been seen coming out of his rickety house apparently after having an affair with his wife. The enraged husband suspecting the wife's fidelity fights with them. This obviously lands him in gaol for a brief period. Of course "Pinhead was a little off in the head from the first, but not so much;" a fact which makes him incapable of understanding the fundamental
logic behind realities. But as it is, the town enthusiasts carry this joke to the extreme limit and enjoy the old man treating his wife in an absurd and cruel manner. Pinhead ties her to a chair, and scatters flour on the dilapidated porch and the floor of his one-room house in order to have irrefutable proof of a man's entry into the house. Next, he is seen hiding himself in the neighbourhood anticipating the arrival of his wife's lovers.

This brings an end to the joke. The people who were enjoying it are assailed by a sense of guilt. The destructive nature of the joke plays havoc with the harmless and innocent lives of the couple and brings to the surface the hitherto unknown passions of Pinhead—his jealousy, possessiveness, brutality and sense of vengeance. For the first time he is seen crying. He encounters a hostile and malignant world hereafter.

The animal instincts of man sometimes assume murderous dimensions and paralyze his sense of reason. Under the pressure of provocation these instincts erupt in all abruptness and fury exploding man's gentle and calm exterior. These instincts are an indelible part of man's nature and are the thematic basis of most of Jack London's writings and of Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*. Man's degeneration into animalism is an important naturalistic theme.

In a moment of intense fury John Shepard of "Daughters" nearly strangles to death his thirteen-year-old daughter, Wave. Unlike her sober and careful elder sister, Kate, Wave is wild, impulsive
and untamable. She disdains social conventions by spending most of her time with boys. Her total disregard of her father makes him boil in anger, but he fails to articulate his resentment against his incorrigible daughter's misdemeanour. John Shepard's violent act is the externalization of his accumulated anger at his daughter's waywardness, but at the same time the act is impelled by his sense of jealousy of the boys with whom the girl spends her time in total abandon.

It may be maintained that the naturalism which is forceful in *The Triumph of the Egg* declines through *Horses and Men, Death in the Woods*, and the last stories. In the first story collection, life withers without achieving ripeness; it is circumscribed and cramped by deterministic forces. In the subsequent volumes Anderson recaptures this vision of life with less regularity. Stories like "The Corn Planting" (in *The Sherwood Anderson Reader*) and "Brother Death" (in *Death in the Woods*) make a departure from his pessimistic naturalism reflected in the earlier stories. Such stories celebrate life, its magnificence, and its energy, its endlessness. They are a forceful statement that life remains triumphant, assertive and unruffled.

Life flows unabated, without interruption in the face of determinism and death. Maxwell Geismar observes that "'The Corn Planting', sometimes considered the best of all Anderson stories . . . is a variation on the theme of "Death in the Woods"." The attitude towards life presented in "The Corn Planting" is purely
anti-naturalistic in which the promise of the continuous flow of life registers victory over death. Life emanates from the depth of the soil—the symbol of sustenance and fertility. It grows unconscious and unafraid of death and defeat. This positive aspect of life is depicted in symbolic terms in "The Corn Planting." The old couple having lost their only son stoically go to the field in order to plant—a symbolic gesture of refutation and defiance of death. On the surface there will be a wave of life. This eternal story of the cycle of birth and growth of life suggests the resilient tenacity of life, its indefatigable capacity to absorb the shock of defeat and the apprehension of death.

The small boy, Ted, in "Brother Death" is aware that he stands on the margin of his life. His heart disease can claim him at any moment. But he does not give himself up to despair. He lives happily, never allowing the thought of death to threaten his celebration and enjoyment of life.

The fact is that Anderson's idea of life's significance and greatness filtered into such stories has not been built up into a systematic and consistent principle. He does not come frequently to the same angle through which he sees life in "Brother Death" and "The Corn Planting." Life's quest for release from its eternal and irremediable state of imprisonment is his colossal truth. From his first novel, Windy McPherson's Son, to his last, Kit Brandon, he is seriously concerned with man's yearning to
transcend the barriers arresting his inwardness. His few stories embodying the affirmative spirit and celebration of life are like oases in the boundless desert of human defeat; of unlived, unrealized life.
CHAPTER V

Notes

1 The Triumph of the Egg (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1921), p.21. All subsequent page references to the text in parentheses are to this edition.

2 Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres, p.28.

3 See James Schevill, "Notes on the Grotesque: Anderson, Brecht, and Williams".

4 See "Godliness and the American Dream in Winesburg Ohio." Twentieth Century Literature, 13, No.2 (July 1967), 97-103.

5 Poor White, p. 122.


7 Beyond Desire, p.81.

8 Irving Howe, Sherwood Anderson, p. 231.


10 Rex Burbank, Sherwood Anderson, p. 88.


15 Horses and Men (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1923), p. 67. All subsequent page references to the text in parentheses are to this edition.

16 Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind, p.244.
The psychoanalyst in the story, "Seeds" (The Triumph of the Egg) boastfully declares that he is trying to cure people of their illness. The listener, who is the writer himself, replies:

"The illness you pretend to cure is the universal illness," I said. "The thing you want to do cannot be done" (p.23).

