Chapter IV

Men and Women

Anderson's novels grow from America and reveal his general dissatisfaction with contemporary American life. He believes that modern Americans, although born healthy like all human beings, become progressively alienated from the land, themselves and each other because of the combined impact of the repressive social norms inherited from the Puritans and the inhuman patterns incorporated into society with the machine. Factories stunt the growth of the rich individuality, which comes from extending the self, not isolating it. When one loses oneself in others, life at once becomes more interesting. The imagination becomes constantly more and more alive and the world seems just a new one.

Anderson seems to believe in:

We are not anymore in the center of the universe, we are not any more the purpose of the creation, we are not anymore of the masters of a manageable and recognizable
world – we are a speck of dust, we are nothing, somewhere in space without any concrete relatedness to anything. (Erich, 110)

He realised that mechanical advancement, scientific discoveries, money – making mindset obliterated the traditional bonds, the feeling of togetherness and concern for fellowmen. The definiteness and concreteness seemed to be dissolving away into nothingness. The feelings of worthlessness, despair and loneliness permeated the whole America in consequence of man’s decline.

It wasn’t only Anderson’s perspective. Many other including Nietzsche, Freud and Marx predicted these changes and their perilous effects. Freud by advocating this theory of mass neuroses corroborated their pernicious fear. He maintained that loneliness symphonised neuroses which he considered, was the consequence of the continuous conflict between human nature and society or of the excessiveness of man’s frustrated desire to get happiness, Marx opined that it was man’s dehumanisation which produced alienation and resultant loneliness. Man has created a distance between his
external life and inner self. And the result is frustrated inner self and alienated figures. The forces may vary; sometimes it is man’s uncommunicative nature with a desire to express his thoughts and feelings, sometimes it is man’s alienation with the desire of social contact, love, human understanding and sometimes it is death with a desire to live. Anderson portrays this inner self with all its problems, telling causes and up to a great extent suggesting solutions also.

His "The Man Who Became a Woman", exceeds "I Want to Know Why" in psychological depth and in symbolic richness. The story consists of two parts: the first is a long-view narrative of events leading up to the main episode, which comprises the second part and is presented "scenically". The remarkable Gothic, nightmarish quality-similar to that of Faulkner’s Sanctuary, later-of the second part of this tale is achieved by Anderson’s gradual intensification of symbols of action and atmosphere which culminate in the death of the boy’s cherished but doomed innocence in the rib casement of the horse’s skeleton. Destruction of his impossible ideal begins when he enters the bar, and it ends with his fall into the rib casement, which
symbolises death of his youth in the grim skeleton that was the embodiment of his ideal and pure beauty. The nightmarish atmosphere of the story both weighs upon the boy’s sensibility and mirrors his inner conflict, matching his own physical impotence and moral confusion or the spiritual impotence and fragmentation of society, as symbolised by the countryside consisting of “stones sticking out of the ground and trees mostly of the stubby, stunted kind”; by the mining town where the long rows of coke ovens at night look “like the teeth of some big man - eating giant lying and waiting...”; and by the saloon, whose diabolic atmosphere reflects the brutality of the spiritually emasculated miners. The ugly facts of the outer world combine with the demand of a repressed - or at least a resisted - subconscious to force him to abandon his childhood world of ideal innocence and become a man. In Freudian terms, the “big wave” that hits him releases his male sex drives; and his scream frees him from his verbal and physical paralysis. Entering the haystack naked with the sheep, he is in a figurative sense born again into a new innocence of manhood. When he leaves the track for good, he leaves behind both an ideal impossible to maintain and a sordid reality
impossible to ignore. He assumes his role in the adult world where pure non-physical innocence does not exist, where innocence compels a discriminating selection from among complex alternatives.

Anderson made it evident in "Seeds" that he reprehended a detached or even temporarily involved tampering with the inner life. In discussing the woman's actions, the narrator and his psychologist acquaintance take opposite views of the extent to which one may probe clinically into the secret recesses of the inner life for the purpose of "curing" a psychic illness. The narrator, speaking for Anderson, maintains that the professionally induced love the psychologist practices upon his patients, violates love by rationalising it. The point of this story is that the inner life is a myriad of often-conflicting impulses - of love and hate, revulsion and attraction, beauty and ugliness. And the inner life has been choked by "old thoughts and beliefs - seeds planted by dead men", by efforts to control it, or understand it. What the woman needed was "to be loved, to be long and quietly and patiently loved... the disease she has is...
universal. We all want to be loved and the world has no plan for creating lovers" (Sherwood, *Triumph* 115).

In the complete spiritual exhaustion of both the scientist and the artist (Le Roy is a painter), we see Anderson's statement of the need for psychic rebirth; and the fact that the "disease" is universal indicates the need for a cultural rebirth.

But man's extortionate desires for material success paused him afar from religion, making traditional religion extraneous for him; from family, the most primitive unit of communal life which was threatened with extinction and even from himself leading his goals towards obscurity. Instead of pursuing personally feasible goals man craved to fulfill the goals set by others, by the anonymous authority called society or time or history.

Man was no longer a piece de resistance of a compassable whole. Many other offshoots of the twentieth century thought as Psychology and Sociology testify to the fact that man had begun to lose his ancient moorings in nature, religion and simple human relationships at the turn of the century with the advent of science,
technology and industrialisation in American life. Starting from different premises they come to the common conclusion that “there is something fundamentally wrong with the way life and the aims towards which we are striving” (Erich 110).

Loneliness seems to be the most striking symptom of the mass sickness of man in the twentieth century. Sigmund Freud believed that people wish to share their feelings and desires but due to some inner conflicts or outward reasons they pass their whole life with this unfulfilled desire of self-expression. They wish to establish significant relations with their fellow beings, society and even with themselves but this remains a wish throughout their lives. Freud’s this belief struck a responsive note in Anderson whose works are free expressions of the feeling of isolation, of secret dreams, unfulfilled desires and agony of lonely people. In Winesburg, Ohio he explained that villagers, due to their inability to communicate their passion suffered from deep inner anguish.
World War I too played an important role in this process by casting its foreboding shadow on the life and art as it heightened the sense of insignificance and loneliness by destroying traditional values and blighting man's security. It was vast exercise in futility which raised a sense of nothingness and the resultant alienation and isolation. In *Winesburg, Ohio* the thematic key to stories lies in the titles: “Unused”, “Unlighted Lamps”, “Out of Nowhere into Nothing”, and “Seeds”. They present a picture of waste, of human sensitivity never fully developed, of physical and spiritual potential untapped, or of a sensitive nature crushed.

I sang the ugliness of life, the strange beauty of life pressing in on the mind of a boy”. Anderson said of the *Mid-American Chants*. Such was to be the theme of his finest fiction. Anderson felt that there is something that separates, people, curiously, persistently, in America. (Kazin, 215)
And this something he identifies with materialism, man's hunger for success and moneymaking. 'Brother Death' can be taken as his most powerful statement against the materialism of America. He believed that man due to this materialism was losing his ability of understanding his fellowmen. Man wants to possess more and more material things and in this effort he turns from human values. To Anderson, the end of material prosperity does not justify the means of dehumanisation. He says that human values should be respected otherwise all the material gains will be nothing but symbols of selfishness and ruthless avarice.

Anderson depicted in his novels the rootlessness and devastation of the modern world, the estrangement of man in an inhuman milieu, the emptiness of a commercial culture and a loveless ethos. Anderson wants to suggest that America must learn to respect human values if its material achievements are ever to be anything other than empty symbols of selfishness and hypocrisy.
In the pursuit of material gains man is turning from his roots i.e. Nature. This was the main reason why Ted in Brother Death asserts over and over again "only men got their arms and legs cut off". Greed leads man nowhere. In order to quench the thirst of his greed man becomes more and more isolated, he dies many times before death, and he feels unable to live his life fully.

Irving Howe observes that in *Perhaps Women*,

"...in his own way he arrived at a central insight into modern life – that factory system tends to reduce men to a function and there by drain them of human inwardness.... Nor could the condition he noticed be restricted to men in as literal a manner as he did – it was rather a pervasive important before the emotional possibilities of life, a failure of both sexes to achieves human personality, a loss of dignity and selfhood.(227)

This migration from human values is product of industrialisation. Anderson tries to find out the ways
through which it can be restricted as it is perilous for a
country as well as for individual.

“Anderson’s dress, his interest in women and in Negroes,
his liking for the odd corners of New Orleans, were less
spontaneous responses to actual moments of his
experience than symbols of rebellion against the
standardization and abstraction of American urban life; he
was searching for saving remnants of values that were
rapidly being destroyed. (Irving, 141)

He had, in the process, discovered a great deal about the past,
about the present, and about his own roles as a writer and as
interpreter of America, its people and its values. Much of what he
learned manifested itself almost immediately in the house that he
built, primarily to provide an articulation and an affirmation of his
new identity.

In his last works Anderson celebrates the timelessness of
values he had thought long gone: of uncomplicated
human closeness and love; of kindliness and
neighbourliness: of reaching out across the barriers of social status, money, prestige, sex and all the other things that separate, mislead, and ultimately confuse and corrupt human beings. In these last works Anderson has indeed sought the past and found it alive.

Man now is living at a stage of complete loss. He is losing his manhood, his positive feelings towards his fellowmen, his values, the purity of his soul, and his touch and attachment to Nature. Now he feels himself nearest to the feelings and desire of success and money-making only. Rest of the things are secondary for him. Before the devil of industrialisation crept in to America, it was an agrarian heaven providing love, peace and togetherness but after that it seems that along with the business and things, feelings are also industrialised. There occurs a sudden change in the feelings of man towards his fellowmen, Nature and even to himself. He is facing the loss of love which is the major theme of *Winesburg* stories.

Winesburg may thus be read as a fable of American estrangement, its theme the loss of love. The books major
characters are alienated from the basic sources of emotional substance – from the nature in which they live but to which they can no longer have an active relationship, from the fertility of the farms that flank them but no longer fulfill their need for creativity; from the community which, at least by the claim of the American mythos, once bound men together in fraternity but is now merely an institution external to their lives; from the work which once evoked and fulfilled their sense of craft but is now a mere burden; and most catastrophic of all, from each other, the very extremity of their need for love having itself become a barrier to its realization.(Irving, 101)

The dreams of the characters in Winesburg stories are crippled; their capacities are not used constructively; their emotions are crushed; their communicative skills are crumpled by the fear of to be misunderstood. That is why they become grotesques. As a result the isolation seems to rule over their lives. In “Hands” with lots of
symbols. Anderson reveals that human beings are losing the creativity in using human body. "Paper Pills" depicts the inertia of human thoughts, pocketed in the paper pellets which communicate nothing, to no one. In "Mother" Elizabeth Willard, Winesburg’s mother figure, fails to communicate her love to her son. In "Unlighted Lamps" Dr. Lester Cochran is a physician and a taciturn man who despite his daily public contacts, leads a solitary life in which he develops strong feelings for others that he is never able to express. Mary, his daughter wonders why a man can express kindly impulses in a material way while being apparently unable to express them directly? She remembers how as a child she has dreamed of the father’s caresses, she never experienced.

Anderson wants to suggest that life is worthwhile only when one is allowed to be free from restrictions imposed by anyone else—whether individuals or society. At the same time, Anderson explored those areas of human relationships and human problems which were considered taboos. Anderson feels that ordinary and usual things can best seen through the intense light cast by the strange and the unusual.
Hence in his stories dealing with ‘initiation’ the narrator highlights the strange and unique quality of his remembered experience. At the same time, he is aware that life is full of frustration and loneliness and only in rare moments does one find its ‘epiphany’ the true moment.

He made his novels an instrument for serious, moral and psychological examination; not merely light escapist entertainment. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, he has delineated the desperate need of every person to make human contact and to move beyond the narrow limits of the self. What Anderson catches and dramatizes with great economy of words in the novel is the profound paradox of human existence that we all live alone, while we live in a world crowded with others.

Anderson’s success in *Winesburg, Ohio* permitted him to approach, with decisive results, the problems of human isolation and frustration. Increasingly it became evident to him that human closeness had once been a reality – in childhood, in small towns, in uncomplicated moments – but in adulthood in cities, in the resulting increasingly complicated human relation of the modern world it had
become impossible. The mark of a time, a place, a way of life beyond recall or re-creation, and human closeness had vanished, except in fiction in the 20th century.

Beneath the seeming contradictions of Anderson’s discussions in his memoirs, novels and typical essays of socialism, democracy, and the 20th century “machine age”, there lies a singular loyalty to the heritage of a Middle Western boyhood. It is in this connection that the year of his birth, 1876, and the place where he was born, Camden, Ohio, are of relevant meaning. Anderson grew up in a place that was permeated by that “religion of humanity” of which Emerson was the transcendental fountainhead.

The 1920’s were for Anderson a period of personal and literary frustrations, of sustained introspection, and finally of remarkable discovery. The first effect of that turmoil is evident in Poor White (1920), his major attempt to combine the substance of Windy McPherson’s Son with the moment of understanding he had found in Winesburg, Ohio. At this point, with the failure of the present, with the search for personal fulfillment more frustratingly unsatisfactory
than it had been for Anderson at any time since he had left the paint factory in Elyria in 1912 to begin his own personal odyssey, he turned to his own past in a disjointed search for the substance if not the reality of the subject matter of fulfillment, and he began to wander aimlessly across America – to New York, to Reno, to California, to New Orleans, and finally to the hill country of western Virginia.

In his *A Story Teller's Story* and *Sherwood Anderson's Notebook* (1926), he re-examined his values, his work, his life, and his search and found the early years, those of his youth, to be the most meaningful. This discovery he celebrated in *Tar: A Midwest Childhood* (1926). Tar is the record of the growth of human consciousness. As in *A Story Teller's Story* Anderson is searching for "the spirit of something" that he had been seeking for so long. However, Tar is neither a real nor an idealised portrait of Midwest childhood, an America, or an era itself, neither real nor idealised; it is an attempt to define the essence of simplicity, of innocence, and even of brutality. However at the end, Tar, the Midwestern child, is not moving out of that simplicity into an idealised, successful future, as
was George Willard: instead he is hurrying into a 20th century
dedicated to hustling, to money making, to the pursuit of a material
ideal. The unthinking innocence, the omnipresent brutality, the
simplicity itself are the very elements that not only permit the people
of Winesburg, of the Midwestern childhood, to move into the new
age, but they make it also inevitable that the people of that childhood
do so.

But, although his discovery of the significance of his youth was
clear in these volumes, equally clear was his conclusion that the past,
that of innocence, however brutal, and of human closeness, however
imperfect, the past of the post Civil War Midwest before the impact of
industrialisation, was gone forever, and the note of regret, of lost, of
adult aimlessness is evident as Tar becomes “Jobby”, an ambitious
early adolescent dominated by the drive for material success.

Anderson used his pen for writing about lonely people who feel
ensnared and who have been incapacitated, hurt and broken by life.
He feels that man is experiencing homelessness because
industrialisation has uprooted him from nature, craft and vocation. In
this process Anderson perceived an unavoidable transgression of certain values that were of great value in the older midwestern society. Items consisting of love and integrity of their makers were shunted aside by the less expensive machine made products which were only products revealing nothing. The love and integrity were diminishing not only from objects but also from relations such as neighbours and parents etc. In fact the very existence of a man has become a commodity to be used by others.

In *Poor White* the loss of self and the state of non-relation and the resultant loneliness and alienation are symbolised and pictured perfectly through Hugh's story. The novel presents an analysis of the physical and psychological realities of the experience of loneliness. He realised that most Americans were repressed without realising it. He felt that if Americans could be made to see the extent of their repression in compassionate but unvarnished terms, individuals might be made more aware of the sufferings of their fellow beings and act with more understanding toward them.
Isolation and dismemberment are the product of industrialisation. Anderson along with several other mind of his era views the transformation from agrarian to industrial society as a defeat to American dream Anderson’s men long for to get rid of the depressing life of commerce and industry; Hemingway’s live on the outskirts of industrial life for ever seeking possibility and opportunity to regenerate their close union with nature. Thomas wolf is bitterly critical of the money – dominated culture of his country.

Anderson feels and depicts in his fiction that man is dragging himself in the realm of impotence by getting into artificial life slowly but continuously. Not only his fiction but also his autobiographical work like A Story Teller’s Story may be read as pungent condemnation of industrial culture: “Standardisation: standardisation was to be the cry of my age and all standardisation is necessarily standardisation in impotence” (Sherwood, Tellers 195). Impotence, in Anderson as also in other modern American writers, is at once a token of man’s decline and badge of his loneliness. Anderson depicts the drastic perils of mechanisation of man’s life and thoughts:
Men more than they yet realized live through hands. When the hands become useless something happens also to the mind. The real danger in automatic machinery lies in the fact that it produces impotence. (Gregory, 602)

He feels that the machine shouldn’t be given too much importance in human life as when people become a slave of it, their values are destroyed.

In his final role as radical and social critic, Anderson repeatedly put forth – as he does in *Kit Brandon* – psychological and moral rather than political or economic solutions to the problems of the machine age. Kit is able to retain a sense of inner wholeness while being threatened by the same external forces that weaken her counterparts in Anderson’s fiction. She is exposed to selfishness, yet she remains generous. She is exposed to the machines yet she holds on to human values. She encounters lonely, confused people, yet she is able to realise a sense of purpose and meaning in her life.

Like May Edgley in the story “Unused”, Kit has not allowed the physical act of love making to debase her. Though she had many
lovers, she declares, "Not a one has ever touched me yet". She has kept in reserve her sense of personal dignity and integrity; her character has remained intact.

Yet, Anderson felt that retaining a sense of selfhood was not enough one must also exercise concern for one's fellow man. Kit does it to a greater degree than any other character in Anderson's fiction. She shows compassion for the labourers in the factories; she gives understanding and support to Alfred Weathersmythe. The outcome of her relationship with Joel Hanaford is never told, but his plight causes her to realise the importance of placing the well-being of others before her own. The story ends with Kit's realisation that the confused, troubled Hanaford is the person "with whom she could make a real partnership in living". She can therefore be happy because she can give freely of her own strength and experiences to someone who needs them. Within the context of Anderson's novels, she epitomises the virtues of selflessness and compassion.

Anderson, in all the roles, had assumed that he was basically a moralist; and to the end of his life he regarded the invasion of the
great American continent by the factory and machine, and the
growing absorption of the child-like Americans with gadgets and
profits, as results of negligence of the sacred human responsibility
toward nature and one’s fellowman.

Like Thoreau, Anderson refused to accept the idea that money and machines could make life better. He believed with Thoreau that the great mass of men lived lives of quite desperation in what he called their 'terrible loneliness'.(Rex, 46)

Anderson was certain that America would one day get out of its confused present and forward into its living past, the past of values still surviving, still strong inspite of the industrial-material complex whose weak foundations and inadequate framework had led to economic collapse.