

Sherwood Anderson's Influence on Modern America Literature

It is often forgotten that Sherwood Anderson was a major influence on many of the giants of modern American literature. Among the most prominent were William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, who were personally mentored by Anderson. At the beginning of their careers, he took each fledgling author under his wing providing critical assistance with their early writing and supplying valuable introductions that boosted their initial efforts to be published.

Faulkner later honored his mentor with a dedication to him in the first of the Yoknapatawpha novels: "To Sherwood Anderson through whose kindness I was first published, with a belief that this book will give him no reason to regret that fact." By contrast, Hemingway's allegiance to Anderson was overridden by his arrogance. After acknowledging "his first pattern [of writing] had been *Winesburg, Ohio*," in later year Hemingway paid homage to his early champion by publishing a nasty parody depicting the older writer as pretentious—an act that sabotaged their long friendship.

After Anderson's death in 1956, Faulkner called him "the father of my generation of American writers and the tradition of American writing which our successors will carry on." Indeed, Anderson's simple narrative tone, precise unsentimental style, and Midwestern colloquial settings would continue to inspire and shape the work of American authors—Thomas Wolfe; Studs Terkel; Carl Sandburg; Edmund Wilson; and Norman Mailer, among many others. *Winesburg* was an all-time favorite of John Steinbeck, whose early short story cycle, *The Pastures of Heaven*, is said to be modeled on it. In a 1951 letter, Steinbeck wrote that "Sherwood Anderson made the modern novel and it has not gone much beyond him."

One notable fledgling in the wave of 20th century writers who fell under the influence of Anderson was 24-year-old Ray Bradbury. Years later, reflecting back on his early quest for his own framework, tone and writing style, Bradbury exclaimed, "I was stunned by [*Winesburg's*] dozen characters living their lives on half-lit porches and in sunless attics of that always autumn town. "Oh, Lord," I cried. "If I would write a book half as fine as this, but set it on Mars, how incredible that would be!" Bradbury succeeded, and as he notes in his preface to a later edition of *The Martian Chronicles* "It was Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* that set me free."

In addition to *The Martian Chronicles*, countless American short story cycles that have become contemporary classics can trace their lineage back to *Winesburg, Ohio*, including Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.

Anderson's work continues to serve as a model of excellence for 21st-century student writers, according to writer and literary critic Alan Cheuse, "Among the Americans, Sherwood Anderson and Faulkner teach you how good writing can be and how good it must be, and that it's possible for Americans to write in American English, to make art in America."