

**THE ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN AMERICAN SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE
WORKS OF SHERWOOD ANDERSON**

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Abstract: *The article examines the artistic interpretation of the relationship between the individual and society in the prose of Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941). The novelty of the study lies in treating the writer's social criticism not as a thematic statement but as a structural factor operating at the level of plot construction, character system and narrative manner. The material comprises Windy McPherson's Son (1916), Marching Men (1917), Winesburg, Ohio (1919), Poor White (1920), Beyond Desire (1932) and Kit Brandon (1936), together with the author's memoirs and reportage, A Story Teller's Story (1924) and Puzzled America (1935). The analysis proceeds along three lines: the erosion of communal ties under industrialisation; the mechanism by which an isolated individual turns into a grotesque; and the social meaning of the departure motif. The study concludes that in Anderson's work the relation between individual and society is interpreted not as a simple opposition but as mutual conditioning, and that the impact of social structure upon the individual is shown primarily through communicative rather than economic loss.*

Keywords: *Sherwood Anderson, American literature, individual and society, industrialisation, small town, grotesque, isolation, social criticism, short story cycle, artistic interpretation.*

**AMERIKA JAMIYATI VA SHAXS MUNOSABATINING
SHERWOOD ANDERSON IJODIDAGI BADIY TALQINI**

Annotatsiya: Maqolada Sherwud Andersonning (1876–1941) nasriy merosida shaxs va jamiyat o'rtasidagi munosabatning badiiy talqini o'rganiladi. Tadqiqotning yangiligi shundaki, yozuvchining ijtimoiy tanqidi mavzu darajasidagi qayd sifatida emas, balki syujet qurilishi, obraz tizimi va hikoya qilish usuli darajasida amal qiluvchi struktur omil sifatida qaraladi. Material sifatida “Uindi Makfersonning o'g'li” (1916), “Safdagi odamlar” (1917), “Uaynsburg, Ogayo” (1919), “Kambag'al oq tanli” (1920), “Istakdan tashqarida” (1932), “Kit Brendon” (1936) asarlari hamda muallifning “Hikoyachining hikoyasi” (1924), “Hayron Amerika” (1935) kabi memuar va ocherk kitoblari olindi. Tahlil uch yo'nalishda olib borildi: sanoatlashuv sharoitida jamoaviy aloqalarning yemirilishi; shaxsning yakkalanish natijasida “grotesk”ka aylanish mexanizmi; “ketish” (departure) motivining ijtimoiy mazmuni. Tahlil natijasida Anderson ijodida shaxs va jamiyat munosabati oddiy qarama-qarshilik sifatida emas, o'zaro shartlanganlik sifatida talqin qilinishi, ijtimoiy tuzilmaning shaxsga ta'siri esa iqtisodiy emas, avvalo kommunikativ yo'qotish orqali ko'rsatilishi aniqlandi.

Kalit so'zlar: Sherwud Anderson, Amerika adabiyoti, shaxs va jamiyat, sanoatlashuv, kichik shahar, grotesk, yakkalanish, ijtimoiy tanqid, hikoyalar turkumi, badiiy talqin.

ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ВЗАИМООТНОШЕНИЙ АМЕРИКАНСКОГО ОБЩЕСТВА И ЛИЧНОСТИ В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ ШЕРВУДА АНДЕРСОНА

Аннотация: В статье исследуется художественная трактовка отношений личности и общества в прозе Шервуда Андерсона (1876–1941). Новизна работы состоит в том, что социальная критика писателя рассматривается не как тематическое высказывание, а как структурный фактор, действующий на уровне построения сюжета, системы образов и манеры повествования. Материалом послужили романы «Сын Уинди Макферсона» (1916), «Марширующие люди» (1917), «Уайнсбург, Огайо» (1919), «Бедный белый» (1920), «По ту сторону желания» (1932), «Кит Брэндон» (1936), а также мемуарные и очерковые книги «История

рассказчика» (1924) и «Озадаченная Америка» (1935). Анализ проведён по трём направлениям: разрушение общинных связей в условиях индустриализации; механизм превращения изолированной личности в гротеск; социальное содержание мотива ухода. Установлено, что отношения личности и общества трактуются Андерсоном не как простое противостояние, а как взаимная обусловленность, причём воздействие социальной структуры на личность показано прежде всего через коммуникативную, а не экономическую утрату.

Ключевые слова: *Шервуд Андерсон, американская литература, личность и общество, индустриализация, малый город, гротеск, изоляция, социальная критика, цикл рассказов, художественная трактовка.*

INTRODUCTION

In early twentieth-century American prose, the relationship between the individual and society became one of the major concerns of literary thought. Rapid industrialization, the movement of people from rural areas and small towns to growing urban centers, and the increasing division of labor significantly changed the way individuals experienced and related to their social environment. These changes were initially explored within the framework of critical realism, but their deeper human consequences, particularly the changes taking place in the individual's inner life, found a distinctive expression in the fiction of Sherwood Anderson.

Anderson's literary career was closely connected to his own life experience. He grew up in a poor family in a small town, worked in sales and advertising, managed a paint manufacturing company in Ohio, and unexpectedly left his job in 1912 to pursue a career in literature [10; 14]. For this reason, the tension between the business world and the individual seeking a more meaningful life is not an abstract idea in his fiction. It is closely connected with experiences that Anderson himself had encountered.

This article examines the social dimension of Anderson's fiction not simply

as a matter of theme, but as something embedded in the structure of his narratives. This perspective is important because Anderson rarely presents social criticism through direct authorial statements. Instead, he conveys it through incomplete plots, characters who struggle to express themselves, failed attempts at communication, and changes in narrative tone. Society, therefore, is not simply an external force acting upon Anderson's characters. It becomes part of the environment that shapes their inner lives and their ability to communicate with others.

The aim of this study is to examine how the relationship between the individual and society is represented in Anderson's prose and to identify the artistic mechanisms through which this relationship is constructed. The study focuses on the ways in which the social environment is portrayed, the artistic factors that contribute to individual isolation, and the social and existential meaning of the recurring motif of "departure."

STATE OF RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT

Scholarly interest in Sherwood Anderson began during his lifetime, but more systematic studies of his work appeared mainly in the second half of the twentieth century. In his study of the development of American prose, A. Kazin presents Anderson as a writer who opened up new thematic possibilities for the postwar generation [18]. I. Howe also gives particular attention to Anderson's early fiction, while taking a more critical view of his later works. In his study, the central idea of Winesburg, Ohio is discussed in terms of a moral problem [11].

D. D. Anderson's introductory study proposes a periodization of the writer's literary career and traces the development of social concerns in his fiction [12]. R. Berbank connects Anderson's work with the American Romantic tradition and views the individual's struggle against society as a continuation of this tradition [13]. K. Townsend's major biographical study examines Anderson's move from business to literature as an important turning point in his creative development [14]. W. Rideout's two-volume monograph, meanwhile, uses archival materials to trace the development of Anderson's social views [15].

Later scholarship increasingly turned to the study of Anderson's literary

techniques and narrative style. A collection of essays edited by J. Crowley examines Winesburg, Ohio as a modernist work and treats the small town as more than a physical setting, viewing it as an important part of the book's conceptual structure [16]. Another collection of critical essays, compiled by D. D. Anderson, brings together critical responses from different periods and shows how interpretations of Anderson's literary legacy have changed over time [17].

Russian scholarship on American literature has generally approached Anderson as a writer working between modernism and socially oriented fiction. A. M. Zverev examines Anderson's formal experiments in the context of modernist literature [19], while Ya. N. Zasursky places his work within the broader development of twentieth-century American literature [20].

Despite this substantial body of scholarship, one aspect remains relatively underexplored. Previous studies have often examined the relationship between the individual and society either from a social and historical perspective or from a psychological one. Less attention has been paid to how these two dimensions work together within the artistic structure of Anderson's fiction. This article addresses that gap by examining social relations through plot structure, characterization, communication, and recurring narrative motifs.

MATERIALS AND RESEARCH METHODS

The study is based on six major works of Sherwood Anderson's fiction and four nonfiction works. The fictional texts examined are Windy McPherson's Son (1916) [3], Marching Men (1917) [4], Winesburg, Ohio (1919) [1], Poor White (1920) [2], Beyond Desire (1932) [5], and Kit Brandon (1936) [6]. The additional sources are Puzzled America (1935) [7], Perhaps Women (1931) [8], A Story Teller's Story (1924) [9], and Memoirs of Sherwood Anderson (1942) [10]. These works were selected to cover three major stages of Anderson's literary development: his early novels, his mature works, and his socially oriented writing of the 1930s.

The main unit of analysis is a plot situation in which a social relationship is clearly expressed. Each situation is examined from three perspectives: the protagonist's social position and how it changes; the success or failure of

communication between the protagonist and other people; and the way the situation is resolved, whether through adaptation, isolation, or departure. Using the same criteria throughout the analysis makes it possible to compare different works more consistently.

The study uses several complementary methods. The historical-literary method is applied to examine the connection between Anderson's works and the social changes of his time. The comparative-typological method is used to compare similar situations in different works, while motif analysis helps identify recurring plot patterns. Hermeneutic analysis is used to interpret meanings that are not stated directly in the texts. In the main body of the article, the titles of the works are given in their Uzbek equivalents; the original publication information is provided in the reference list in the original language.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

1. Industrialization and the Breakdown of Social Bonds

In Anderson's fiction, the social changes brought about by industrialization are most fully explored in *Poor White* [2]. The town of Bidwell is at the center of the novel, and its transformation from an agricultural community into an industrial town provides the main background for the story. What matters here is that Anderson does not describe this transformation mainly through economic changes. Instead, he shows how it affects the relationships between people and, ultimately, their sense of themselves.

The craftsman is one of the clearest examples of this change. For someone who earns a living by making things by hand, work is more than a source of income. It is also closely tied to personal pride and self-worth. When factory-made goods enter the market, his skills lose their value, and this loss affects not only his livelihood but also his sense of identity. Anderson presents this change as deeply painful. Social transformation does not destroy the individual through direct force; rather, it gradually takes away the values and sources of dignity on which the person has built their life.

The inventor represents the other side of the same process. His machines

help make the town more prosperous, but he himself struggles to form meaningful relationships with other people. Anderson therefore draws attention to an important contradiction between progress and personal well-being. An activity that benefits society does not necessarily make the individual happier. In some cases, it can even deepen a person's sense of isolation. This idea is also connected with Anderson's own experience. In his memoirs, he reflects on how success in business did not resolve his own sense of inner emptiness [10].

The issue is treated differently in Anderson's early novels. In *Windy McPherson's Son*, the protagonist comes from a modest family and eventually becomes wealthy, but material success does not bring him lasting satisfaction. He leaves his previous life behind and begins searching for a deeper sense of purpose [3]. In *Marching Men*, Anderson explores another possibility: whether individual isolation can be overcome through collective action [4]. Neither novel offers a fully developed social solution. Their open-ended quality, however, is significant because it shows Anderson's reluctance to present a simple or ready-made answer to complex social problems.

2. The Transformation of the Individual into the "Grotesque"

The relationship between the individual and society receives perhaps its most concentrated treatment in *Winesburg, Ohio* [1]. In the introduction to the collection, Anderson develops the idea that there are many different truths in the world, but when a person turns one truth into an absolute principle and organizes their entire life around it, that truth can become a falsehood, while the person becomes a "grotesque."

This idea provides a common pattern underlying many of the stories in the collection. The characters—a former teacher who expresses himself through his hands, a doctor who writes his thoughts on scraps of paper, a woman who becomes unable to leave her house, and a landowner who uses religion to serve his own interests—were not originally strange or isolated people. Their problems develop over time. In Anderson's portrayal, the small-town social environment gives them little opportunity to express their inner lives or establish genuine connections with

others.

This is one of the distinctive features of Anderson's treatment of society. He does not simply portray society as an oppressive or hostile force. Instead, he presents it as an environment in which people gradually learn to remain silent. The characters are not necessarily punished or openly rejected. Their tragedy is often that no one truly hears them. This is reflected in the structure of many of the stories, where a character tries to communicate something deeply personal but fails to make that experience understood. The failure of communication consequently becomes one of the clearest signs of social isolation. When words fail, physical actions often take their place. A movement of the hands, an unexpected touch, or a character leaving the house at night can communicate feelings that cannot be expressed verbally. Critics have also drawn attention to this feature of Anderson's writing, noting his tendency to rely on suggestive details and gestures rather than extended psychological explanation [11; 16].

3. The Social Meaning of the Motif of "Departure"

One of the most persistent patterns in Anderson's fiction is the protagonist's departure from the environment in which they have been living. Winesburg, Ohio ends with the young protagonist leaving the town; the protagonist of Windy McPherson's Son leaves behind his business and former way of life; and the protagonist of Kit Brandon leaves a mountain community in search of an independent life [1; 3; 6].

At first, departure may appear to be a form of romantic escape. A closer reading, however, suggests something more complicated. Anderson does not present departure as a final solution to the protagonist's problems. He either gives little attention to what happens after the character leaves or suggests that isolation continues in a different form. Departure, therefore, does not necessarily resolve the social conflict. Instead, the conflict is transferred from one environment to another.

This motif takes on a more explicitly social dimension in Anderson's writing of the 1930s. In *Beyond Desire*, a strike at a textile factory brings the protagonist's personal search into contact with collective social action [5]. In *Puzzled America*,

Anderson turns directly to the lives of ordinary people affected by the economic crisis and draws on his observations of American society [7]. His social concerns become more explicit in these works, but he still avoids presenting a political program. His focus remains on how large social changes are experienced by individuals in their everyday lives.

Overall, the analysis shows that Anderson repeatedly constructs the relationship between the individual and society through a three-stage pattern. First, the social environment limits the individual's ability to express themselves. This limitation gradually produces inner conflict and distortion. The individual then responds either by withdrawing from others or by leaving the environment altogether. Although the form of this pattern changes across Anderson's different periods, its basic structure remains recognizable throughout his fiction and represents one of the central principles of his literary vision.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that in Sherwood Anderson's fiction, social criticism is embedded in the artistic structure rather than presented as a separate theme. In *Poor White*, industrialization is portrayed as a social and psychological transformation that affects individual dignity, identity, and sense of purpose. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, the "grotesque" is closely linked to social isolation and the inability to communicate inner experiences. When words fail, gestures and physical actions often convey what remains unspoken. The recurring motif of "departure" is not presented as a final solution but as a transfer of unresolved conflicts into a new environment, reflecting Anderson's modernist understanding of alienation. Overall, his fiction presents a recurring pattern in which social constraints limit self-expression, communicative failure leads to isolation, and inner conflict results in withdrawal or departure. The findings can be applied in courses on American literature and comparative literary studies. Further research may compare Anderson's representation of the small-town environment with its portrayal in Uzbek prose.

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