

**Requiem for a Wanderer**  
*Sherwood Anderson's Last Days*

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**Welford Dunaway Taylor**



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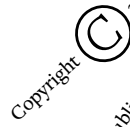
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*For Fletcher and Kit, my two Miracles*

# Introduction

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*The following narrative sets forth the events surrounding the death of American author Sherwood Anderson (1876–1941), which occurred on March 8, 1941, in the Canal Zone. Although often cited in broad terms, Anderson’s bizarre demise has never been presented as a full-blown episode in a life and career characterized by the unconventional. Though possessing little formal education, Anderson had developed a prodigious native talent by means of voracious reading and unrelenting experimentation. Having worked first as an advertising salesman and copywriter and then as a businessman, by late 1912, at age thirty-six, he felt confident enough in his self-developed skills to pursue a writing career. Although he owned his own business, was married, and had three children, he left his home in Elyria, Ohio, for Chicago in early 1913. (His family followed soon thereafter.) He had two completed novels in manuscript; however, he continued to work in advertising for his primary livelihood. In the winter of 1915–16 he achieved full realization of his evolving literary style and over the next three years produced the series of innovative short stories that were published together in 1919 as Winesburg, Ohio. This volume, credited as having a revolutionizing influence on the American short story, has since gained classic status. In the years following, Anderson produced multiple stories and collections, notably The Triumph of the Egg (1921) and Horses and Men (1923); a fictionalized autobiography, A Story Teller’s Story (1924); and*

novels, including *Many Marriages* (1923) and *Dark Laughter* (1925). From the mid-1910s to the mid-1920s, as he produced much of his best work, he lived at various times in New York, Mobile, Chicago, and Reno and was twice divorced. In 1925, while living with his third wife in New Orleans and seeking a cooler, less humid climate, he vacationed in Troutdale, Virginia, on the advice of a friend. Taking a fancy to this locale, he purchased land and began the country house he named “Ripshin,” into which he moved in 1926. Troutdale and nearby Marion would remain his home for the rest of his life. During this fifteen-year period Anderson’s literary fortunes were uneven, and he veered into different genres. In 1927 he purchased two weekly newspapers in Marion and for more than a year managed and frequently wrote for them. *Hello Towns!* (1929) is a collection of these columns. He also explored the American South, especially after he met Eleanor Copenhaver of Marion, whom he married in 1933 (his third marriage had ended in 1929). She was a YWCA executive with a particular interest in women workers in the South. Anderson adopted the cause as well, and it is reflected in his writing during this period. Although he never enjoyed the popularity in his Virginia period that he had known in the years following World War I, Anderson published actively until his death and was well along on his memoirs when he died in 1941. *Sherwood Anderson’s Memoirs* appeared posthumously in the following year.

# Requiem for a Wanderer

## *Sherwood Anderson's Last Days*

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The platform of the Marion railroad station was a favorite spot for townspeople to loiter about, especially when certain trains were arriving or departing. It was only a short walk from Main Street, and on this Sunday afternoon in late February 1941 the crowd was unusually large because, as virtually everyone knew, Sherwood and Eleanor Anderson were set to leave at 3:20 on the “Memphis Special” for New York. There they would board a ship for South America, where they expected to live and travel about for an undetermined time. That two of Marion’s most prominent citizens were setting off to such exotic destinations, with no certain return date, seemed to fascinate their friends. Although Marion rightly thought of itself as an important population center in Southwestern Virginia, few of its four thousand residents were travelers. In truth, the fact that Sherwood had brought with him an aura of distant places—Chicago, New York, New Orleans, Paris—was one of the reasons that Marionites had been drawn to him when he moved to Virginia in 1926. They were aware that although he was commonly identified with American small towns (most of them would at least have been familiar with *Winesburg, Ohio*), he had been shaped in part by his residence in fabled, far-off locales.

Travel had been a significant part of Eleanor’s life as well, both before her marriage to Sherwood in 1933 and afterward; her position with the YWCA required it. Their train travel had been more frequent than usual over the preceding two months. Just a week before Christmas they had arrived on a sleeper from New York, summoned by news that Eleanor’s mother, Laura Lu Copenhaver,



*Sherwood Anderson as the people of Marion knew him. At the time of his death, this likeness was published in the two Marion weeklies that Anderson had once owned.*





*Anderson's country house, Ripshin, near  
Troutdale, Virginia*

had died suddenly the night before. In the weeks since, as the Copenhavers struggled to reorganize family life at “Rosemont,” Eleanor and Sherwood had been in and out of Marion numerous times as they attempted to balance family obligations with demanding careers.

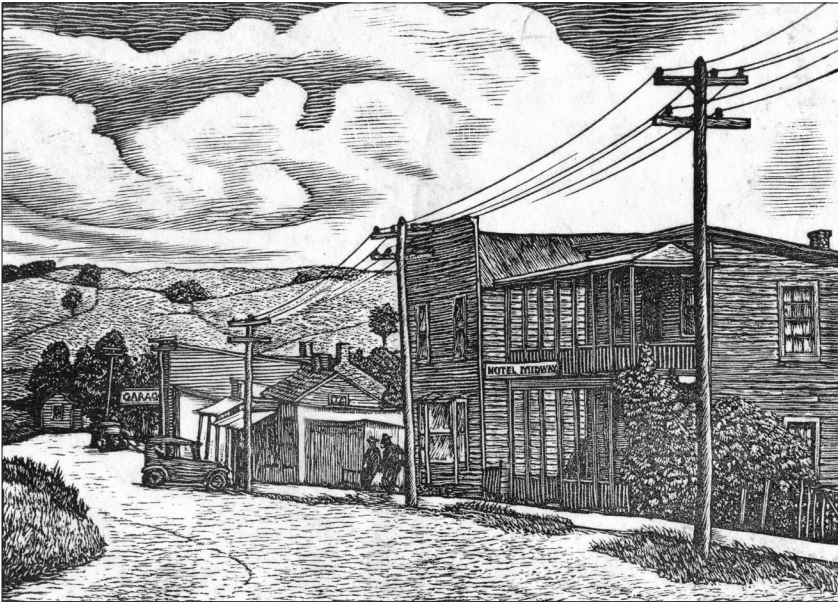
But the forthcoming journey was different. It would take them to distant countries they had never seen. He would be writing about new places and people and would in effect represent authors in the United States to their South American counterparts. For her part, Eleanor had taken extended leave from the YWCA and would be free to share in the adventure, however prolonged it might prove to be. Both of them were filled with eager anticipation.



Although Sherwood was noted for making important decisions on the spur of the moment, his preparation for this voyage had been unusually deliberate and detailed. For almost two years—since the opening of the New York World’s Fair in April 1939, in fact—he had been conversing with a group of cultural officials from South America whose role in the fair was to effect a “Good Neighbor Policy” among the authors of the Americas. This delegation regarded him as one of the most important literary figures in North America, and he was soon introduced to Carlos Davila, a former president of Chile and ambassador to the United States. Over the next year, as new friendships were made, the ties had strengthened, and a cultural visit to South America was actively discussed. The plan, it was agreed, would be for him to travel with

the blessing of the State Department but not as an official representative. By late October 1940 Sherwood was talking with friends about the proposed trip as if it were a certainty. Upon returning to New York, he began an intensive study of the Spanish language, working alone with interactive phonograph records and with a tutor who came regularly to the Andersons' room at the Royalton.

Unsure about the cost of travel in South America, or even the length of the trip, Sherwood explored several possibilities for funding. He spoke with a Guggenheim Foundation representative about a grant. He approached publishers—*Reader's Digest* and others—about commissioning a series of articles on South American subjects, and he discussed the nature of his proposed travels with officials at the State Department. Although these efforts produced no tangible commitments, the positive responses were encouraging.



"Main Street, Troutdale, Virginia," woodcut by J.J. Lankes

Then the planning was briefly interrupted by Mrs. Copenhaver's death in mid-December, but on December 30 Sherwood purchased \$1,600 in traveler's checks from the Bank of Marion. Bob Garnett, his banker and a personal friend, recalled that in the intervals between writing the thirty-two required signatures Sherwood had talked excitedly about his trip, gesturing so vigorously (his hands trembled slightly anyway) that a spray of ink drops from his red Waterman pen landed on Garnett's white shirt.

Sherwood spent most of January 3—the day before he was to take a sleeper to New York—with a photographer from *Life* magazine. He was one of four American authors being photographed in their home environs for a projected series of feature articles. The session lasted all of a rainy day, and it took them to numerous sites in Marion and at Ripshin, his country house. One of the most evocative images shows him on the front walk of Rosemont, the house that Eleanor later claimed he had fallen in love with before he fell in love with her. He is clad in his signature overcoat and scarf, hat held behind his back, head bowed as if in deep thought, walking from the large white house toward the street. A man at home surely, content in his familiar surroundings but moving, as always, inexorably toward a new destination.

By evening of the next day, January 4, Sherwood and Eleanor had left from the Marion station, although headed in different directions. Both had important travel matters to resolve. They had not obtained passports, purchased tickets, or even determined a sailing date. While Eleanor attended to "Y" business in Chicago, Sherwood addressed these and other questions while pursuing his normal work schedule. Over the summer and throughout the fall he had made significant progress on his memoirs, in addition to placing several short journalistic pieces in popular magazines. His most recent book, *Home Town*, was just out and was receiving appreciative reviews.

Sherwood's routine was to begin at 7:30 and write throughout the morning, unless prevented by some impediment. Of late the restriction had usually been a cold or flu (abetted certainly by decades of heavy cigarette smoking). Still, since arriving in New York on January 5 he had worked well for almost a week before an attack of flu slowed his progress. A few days later, as he eased back into routine, he was felled by a severe cold that lasted almost a week. For much of the month the weather was extremely cold, with occasional snow, which always left him dejected. His spirits were further depressed by news of the war in Europe and by the fact that Eleanor would have to remain in Chicago for most of the month.

When Sherwood felt overwhelmed, his usual impulse was to escape to a more pleasant setting. Choosing Florida as his ultimate destination, he first took the train to Marion, which to his surprise was free of snow. After visits with his son Bob and with his neighbor Charles H. "Andy" Funk, he noted that he felt "a bit less blue and worthless." He continued on to Tampa by car, as he loved driving and the freedom to explore. However, he arrived in Tampa with yet another case of flu, which lasted almost a week. He had hoped to live with a Spanish-speaking family in order to immerse himself in the spoken language, but a few days later he was on the road back to Marion, where he found Eleanor waiting.

A little more than a week remained before they were to leave for New York and embark on their grand excursion. Sherwood spent the first couple of days resting from his travels and answering a "heavy" accumulation of mail before turning to his regular work and some remaining travel details. He then resumed his writing schedule with remarkable success, completing three short chapters for the memoirs in as many days and at least one magazine article.



*Anderson in his studio at Ripshin*

Reinvigorated after the long drive, and reassured that Eleanor would be with him until they left for New York, Sherwood spent the afternoons and evenings doing things he particularly enjoyed. He made a trip out to Ripshin and found the house and farm in good order. He dined with the Bob Andersons. He enjoyed a two-day visit from Eleanor's sister Mazie and her family and seemed not to mind having his work interrupted.

On at least two occasions he visited with Andy Funk, his closest friend in Marion. For years these visits had been a singular pleasure, as they usually took place in the one-room clapboard structure that sat in a corner of Funk's side yard, adjacent to Rosemont and Marion College. A respected attorney by day, Funk enjoyed hosting evenings in the "Funk Institute," which had been built and equipped primarily for furniture making, a favorite hobby that often involved the assistance of the guests. The institute also served as a makeshift winery where the jovial host produced a passably good product that institute members

savored and occasionally contributed to. Back in mid-September Sherwood had picked fourteen bushels of grapes from the vines at Ripshin and brought them to Funk to be fermented. As it was now late February, he naturally hoped the concoction would be mature enough for sampling. Although it was not quite ready, the visits were nonetheless enjoyable. The “affection” with which Sherwood presented a copy of the recently published *Home Town* to his “good friend Andy Funk” was both heartfelt and long-lasting. Funk and several other institute members were among the male friends for whom Sherwood gave a dinner on the evening of February 22, his last evening in Marion. They sat talking till 10:00 p.m.



The collection of mail awaiting Sherwood on his return from Tampa included a letter from a group of students at Marion College asking him to write something for the *Squib*, the school newspaper. Because various members of the Copenhaver family were involved with the college (Eleanor’s grandfather J. J. Scherer had founded it), he took time to compose a brief but thoughtful statement, written with fountain pen in his famously illegible—and now hurried—hand.

In several respects the article for the *Squib* recalls “The Fortunate One,” a short chapter he had already written for the still unfinished memoirs. Sketching the rich and varied life he had experienced as a writer and touching on subjects such as religion, the essence of male and female, and his residence in Virginia, he had ended this paean to living with a summarizing statement: “Life, not death, is the great adventure.”

Titled “Chance Rules Us All,” the *Squib* piece asserted that by sheer fate a seemingly negligible happening can change the entire

course of a life. He cited his own case as an example, noting that years before a friend's casual suggestion that he consider spending his summer vacation in Grayson County, Virginia, had ended up shaping his future. Although he emphasized how lucky he was that fortune had treated him so well, he cautioned that "the best of prearranged plans can be thrown out of gear by some trifling incident."



It was almost time to leave for New York. Friends and neighbors were expressing farewells in various ways. David and Virginia Greear walked over to Rosemont one evening during that last week to say their goodbyes, as intimate friends would. Sherwood's bond with the Greears had grown over the years since the day in June 1925 when he and his wife, mysterious strangers from New Orleans, had arrived in Southwestern Virginia and began boarding with the Greears at Troutdale. Sherwood had treated David, then a slender preteen and now newly married and a successful entrepreneur, like a third son.

Others waited till the day of departure and gathered for a more public leave-taking on the station platform. Conspicuous among the friends and neighbors were some of the "boys" from the newspaper office, young men who had worked for Sherwood after he acquired the *Marion Democrat* and *Smyth County News* in 1927 and now worked for Bob Anderson, who had succeeded his father as owner-publisher in 1932. Jack White was there as was Joe Stephenson, the linotype operator, whom Sherwood had befriended in various ways. Also present was Dr. Ray Courtney, a well-known dentist in Marion. As he and Sherwood exchanged pleasantries, Joe Stephenson walked up and casually remarked, "Doc, you better take a good look at him; that might be the last time you



ever see him.” They all laughed, but nevertheless realized that the journey would probably be long and its consequences uncertain.

The “Memphis Special” (Train 26) arrived on time—at 3:19 p.m. It allowed a maximum of three minutes for boarding. Almost before they realized it, Sherwood and Eleanor were on their way.



The train—known now, because of an engine exchange, as Pennsylvania Railroad Train no. 108—arrived at Penn Station in New York just before 7:00 a.m. the following morning, February 24. Their ship was scheduled to leave on the twenty-eighth, which left them only four days in the city to take care of last-minute details, of which there were plenty. During the days Sherwood visited with several of the South Americans who had helped plan the trip and arrange contacts for him once he arrived in Santiago. He also had business matters to resolve, such as purchasing the publication rights to several of his books from Viking. (This he accomplished the day before sailing.) He also saw his literary agent, Jacques Chambrun, who surprised him with a check for an article he had just sold.

What mainly filled the time were friends old and new. Mary Emmett was one of the most cherished and loyal of the former. She and her late husband, Burton, a noted advertising executive and book collector, had often exchanged visits with the Andersons and had befriended Sherwood more than once with their generosity. After spending two nights at the Royalton, the Andersons moved to Mary’s house in Greenwich Village (Washington Mews). With characteristic graciousness, she gave a party for twenty in their honor the evening they arrived. Many of the guests later dined at Grand Ticino.



Over the years Sherwood's table conversations were occasionally written down. Back in December he had dined with August Derleth, a young writer from Wisconsin with whom he had corresponded and who recorded some of what Sherwood said on this occasion. After Derleth made a number of references identifying authors with particular regions, Sherwood stated that he felt he had completely severed his own Midwestern ties. "I never look back," he continued. "What's gone is gone. What's done is done. You live in the moment. You can't live it over again."

Was this the same man who had been pictured so recently walking away from Rosemont, leaving a beloved familiar place as he headed toward a new, as yet undiscovered one? Perhaps. But on his last full day in New York an unlikely figure from his Midwestern past unexpectedly materialized in the person of Ben Hecht. Sherwood and the now famous screenwriter and director had met in Chicago in the early 1910s, at the beginning of their literary careers. Although their association had ended unhappily some twenty years before, now their differences—and the intervening years—suddenly seemed irrelevant. Over wine they laughed and talked of people and places they had known in the heyday. Then the conversation turned to the future. As Hecht reported it, Sherwood declared, "I'm goin' to Santiago, Chile on a steamboat this Friday." Hecht inquired for how long and Sherwood responded, "Oh, pretty long . . . maybe a year. Maybe two. Maybe forever."

The Andersons' last evening in New York began with a small cocktail party hosted by Lewis Galantière, a translator and journalist, and his wife, Nancy, at their apartment on 72<sup>nd</sup> Street. The guests included Sherwood's brother Karl, a well-known artist who had traveled in from Westport; novelist James Boyd, in town from Southern Pines; and Paul Rosenfeld, editor and critic. Surrounded by intimates, buoyed by events of the last two days, and eagerly

anticipating the adventure ahead, Sherwood was exuberant. The conversation was fueled in part by his favorite cocktail—dry martini with olive—which flowed freely. After he had consumed five or six, Eleanor tried to slow his pace. Her attempts came to nothing. They were discussing contemporary authors after all, a subject about which he held strong opinions. Karl later recalled that Sherwood added emphasis to one point he made by snapping his teeth down firmly on a cocktail sausage skewered on a toothpick, unwittingly swallowing sausage and skewer together. Incredibly, he was presumably never aware, then or later, that he had done so.

After leaving the Galantières' apartment, Sherwood, Eleanor, and Karl dined with Roberto Rendueles and his wife at their apartment. Rendueles, an employee of the Editors Press Service, had played a key role in organizing the South American itinerary, and the impending trip was the main topic of conversation. After



*Marion railroad station*

dinner, as he said goodbye to Karl, Sherwood handed him the outline of a book “of men and places” that he intended to write. It would include sections on Karl, Stella (their only sister), and Earl (the most interesting and ill-fated of their three brothers). Although Karl felt some apprehension about what Sherwood might say about him and their siblings, the evening would stand out in his memory because of Sherwood’s excited anticipation of seeing new countries and meeting their writers.

The next morning, February 28, at 11:00 a.m. Sherwood and Eleanor boarded the Grace Line *Santa Lucia* at Pier 58 on West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, bound for Santiago. A press photographer took several photographs at a deck rail. One shows the two of them, Eleanor fashionably dressed and beaming, Sherwood more serious but smiling slightly, bundled up against the bitter cold in a bulky overcoat, scarf, and felt hat. Another, taken in the same location, shows him conversing with novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder, a fellow passenger. They sailed at noon.



On that day the sea was so rough that everything that wasn’t stationary flew back and forth across the cabin. Almost immediately Sherwood was seized with intense abdominal pain. He was soon being attended by the ship’s medical staff, who initially gave him magnesium sulfate. It seemed to help, but some pain persisted and he was unable to eat lunch. As the *Santa Lucia* made its four-day journey down the Atlantic coast to Cristóbal, in the Canal Zone, Sherwood endured various levels of distress. Four days of illness on a turbulent late-winter Atlantic was bad enough, but the doctors’ inability to make a precise diagnosis was even more vexing. They tried various treatments, even resorting to cherry flip, a cocktail consisting of whisky, cream, and cherry juice, hoping to

relax and soothe the stomach. No medication seemed to work.

Although the medical staff was unable to determine the precise source of Sherwood's illness, it was obviously severe enough for family members to be notified. Karl responded by telegraphing Henry Wallace, a friend of Sherwood's and the recently inaugurated vice president of the United States. Wallace arranged for the ship to be met at Cristóbal and for Sherwood to be transferred to the naval hospital at Colón (some fifteen miles away). According to Karl, Eleanor's brother Randolph, a military doctor then stationed in Alaska, urged the ship's doctor to have a prominent Chilean doctor meet the ship and take over the case. The *Santa Lucia* doctor objected.

Throughout his ordeal Sherwood remained in unusually good spirits. He submitted to the various treatments but saw his illness mainly as an inconvenience, an impediment to the adventure upon which he was so intent. He jokingly told another passenger, Freda Kirchwey (editor of the *Nation*), that he had considered the possibility of dying aboard ship and being buried at sea but had decided that he preferred to continue on his mission to South America.

When they docked at Cristóbal on March 4, Sherwood's condition had seemed to improve, if only slightly. He even had eggs and tea for breakfast. As Kirchwey was saying goodbye, prior to disembarking, he declared that he would "let them examine me here at the Canal and do what they have to do and then I'll catch the next boat. They aren't going to spoil my trip."

In Marion, Bob Anderson ran a brief article in the *Smyth County News* stating that, according to doctors, "the writer was expected to respond [to treatment] but they indicated that his condition

was grave.” The respite was short-lived. Suddenly the pain returned and grew worse (he was now in the hospital at Colón). Morphine was administered, but his condition worsened over the next few days. On the morning of March 8 the physicians reported that he was slightly better and that his pulse was improved. However, later in the day the pulse began to accelerate uncontrollably until he lapsed into delirium, then into coma. He died at 5:00 p.m. That evening his body was taken by train to Gorgas, in Panama City (some fifty miles distant, on the Pacific side).



Sherwood had known Dr. Ben Kean in the mid-1930s from the Bohemian literary “salon” that Maxwell Bodenheim presided over at his Greenwich Village apartment. Now, years later, they were reunited in a sense, but in a laboratory in Gorgas where the young pathologist was charged with determining the cause of death of his friend, who lay on a marble slab before him. He knew only what the medical records stated—that death was the result of an intestinal obstruction, “cause and location undetermined.” Kean soon discovered that the pelvis was filled with poisonous exudate, the result of a puncture in the colon, made by an offending object, which he also found: a toothpick, still intact, a grim reminder of the festive food and drink that Sherwood had enjoyed the night before sailing from New York more than a week before. Dr. Kean reported his findings to Eleanor, who was staying in the Tivoli Hotel nearby. As Kean remembered it, she received him graciously and was relieved that he at least had been able to determine the cause of death. She was also relieved when he told her that he had made arrangements for Sherwood’s body to be returned home.





*Sherwood and Eleanor Anderson aboard the Grace Line's Santa Lucia on the morning of February 28, 1941, just prior to their departure for Santiago, Chile. This is likely the last photograph taken of him.*



There followed a frenzied exchange of telegrams among Eleanor, her family, and Sherwood's. Bob Anderson felt strongly that he should be buried at sea (in ironic fulfillment of Sherwood's remark to Freda Kirchwey). Finally, however, it was agreed that he would be buried in Southwest Virginia, in Round Hill Cemetery, overlooking the town of Marion and the Holston Valley. Most of the planning would be carried out by Miss May Scherer, Eleanor's aunt, who lived at Rosemont and was dean of Marion College.

Sherwood's death caused widespread shock and sadness. News services that had been covering his mysterious illness now made much of his death and its bizarre cause as they recounted his unusual path to authorship and his many achievements. The impact on family and friends was devastating. His daughter, Mimi, cried all night upon receiving the news. Decades later Virginia Greear, David's widow, recalled that the only time she ever saw her husband cry "real salt tears" was when he learned of Sherwood's death. Many friends among the American literati responded by penning tributes, some of which—by Theodore Dreiser, Paul Rosenfeld, Ben Hecht, among others—appeared in the immediate aftermath and many later in the year in a memorial issue of *Story* magazine.

In the meantime, Eleanor, still in Gorgas, was experiencing delays of various kinds. Sherwood had been dead almost ten days when his body was finally placed on the Grace Line *Santa Clara*, on March 17; it did not arrive at New York until March 24. Assembled family and friends were waiting. They assisted Eleanor in transferring the coffin immediately to a baggage car of the Washington, Chattanooga, and New Orleans Limited, which left Penn Station at 7:30 p.m. She and several of the group also boarded for the familiar trip that took them south through Washington, DC;

Lynchburg; Roanoke; and finally to Marion at 9:30 a.m. The train, now known (after engine exchanges) as Norfolk and Western Train no. 41, was met at the Marion station by representatives of Seaver and Son, local funeral directors, who were handed the flag-draped coffin by baggage handlers and transported it to Rosemont, where a viewing was scheduled for that evening. One of the printshop “boys” who attended later described what he beheld there as “ghastly.”

The memorial service began at 11:00 the following morning (March 26). By that time an impressive miscellany of mourners from far and wide had gathered: Sherwood’s children, Bob, Mimi, and John; brothers Karl and Ray; Paul Rosenfeld, Roberto Rendueles, Mary Emmett, the Lewis Galantières, Stanley Young (Sherwood’s editor at Harcourt, Brace), and his wife—all from New York; Wharton Esherick, an artist friend, from Paoli, Pennsylvania; James Boyd and the playwright Paul Green, both from North Carolina; publisher Roger Sergel and historian Ferdinand Schevill, from Chicago. In addition, many Marionites and other friends and admirers were there, as the service had been announced by several radio stations. Also, the previous day Bob Anderson had run a short article in the *Marion Democrat* that stated, “The family wishes it known that all friends, white and colored, are invited to be present at the ceremonies at the home and at the grave.”



Just a couple of blocks away a different kind of activity had been in progress since early that morning. March 26 was a Wednesday, and Bob Anderson had to have the weekly edition of the *Smyth County News* finished for distribution on Thursday. He had told the “boys,” who no doubt had assumed that the office would be closed in tribute to Sherwood, that they were to show up at the



usual time. Just before 11:00 a.m. he interrupted their work by announcing, in a voice audible to all, "All right, let's go bury Sherwood!" Whereupon they began the short trek to Rosemont.



Although Sherwood generally avoided organized religion in all forms, he had great respect for the King James Bible and had a number of clerical friends. He would have approved of the simple service that Miss May had planned for him and of the ministers she had chosen to conduct it. Dr. Hugh H. Rhyne, president of Marion College, officiated. Eleanor's uncle, Dr. J. J. Scherer, a prominent Lutheran minister whom Sherwood admired, had come from Richmond and read the Lord's Prayer. Reverend John Brokhoff, the "red haired preacher" at the Marion Lutheran Church, read the twenty-third Psalm. The choir and sextet from the college sang "sweetly," as if to thank their famous next-door neighbor for the article he had written for their newspaper just a few weeks before. (Chance had indeed ruled, yet again.) Pastor Brokhoff then began to read "A Tribute by a Friend," one of two short eulogies prepared for the occasion (published thereafter as "The Man of Good Will," by Paul Rosenfeld, who, though present, preferred to remain anonymous). Suddenly Brokhoff was interrupted by the wailing of the Marion municipal siren, an unsettling intrusion that was perceived by some as simply a rude but accidental disruption and by others as an expression of shared sorrow. But for those who knew Sherwood's novel *Poor White* and loved its author, it evoked, with ironic poignance, the last scene of that novel, in which a moment of tender reconciliation between a husband and wife is interrupted by the piercing blast of a factory whistle—a crass reminder of the fragility of human sensibilities in an indifferent mechanized age. It was a frequent and celebrated theme in the work—and life—of the man now being

memorialized. The service ended with Stanley Young reading a tribute from Theodore Dreiser.

The pallbearers represented the broad spectrum of Sherwood's friends: Andy Funk, his neighbor and confidant; Burt Dickinson, his attorney; John Sullivan, the Ripshin farm manager; Arlie Stamper, the Troutdale neighbor who repaired his automobiles and invited him to listen to the World Series; Bob Garnett, his banker; Fred Killinger, a Scherer relative; Joe Stephenson, his linotype operator; Bob Williams, former newspaper employee and protégé; and David Greear, perhaps the most admiring and bereaved of them all. W. F. Wright, Sherwood's Troutdale neighbor and sometime banker, served as usher. They now placed the flag-draped coffin into the Seaver hearse, which in turn led a procession of some thirty cars, many from out of state, up to Round Hill Cemetery, to a spot near "Mother" Copenhaver's recent grave.

It was later remarked that this was a perfect spring day—warm, sunny, cloudless—and fittingly so, given the occasion. For most, however, it was overshadowed by a sense of irreparable loss and sadness. For Wharton Esherick, an intimate friend of twenty years whose imposing abstract granite sculpture would mark Sherwood's grave several months hence, it was certainly that. His feelings were affirmed as he viewed the mourners, especially by John Sullivan, the Ripshin neighbor who had come to be more friend than farm manager to Sherwood. He now stood among the pallbearers, lanky and dejected, head bowed, hat held at his side. Esherick recognized Sullivan's silent but fervent emotion as something more than grief, and this realization would inspire Esherick's evocative bronze sculpture "Reverence," titled in honor of that emotion. Dr. Scherer read the Beatitudes and the service was concluded.



*Anderson on the road near Ripshin, January 3, 1941. One of many photographs taken that day by a photographer from Life magazine. The feature article for which they were intended was never published.*

At least the formal obsequies were. Bob Anderson immediately summoned the boys from the printshop and told them it was time to get back to work: the unfinished edition of the *Smyth County News* was still on the presses.

Andy Funk had a different mission in mind. Following the service at Round Hill, he gathered several of his and Sherwood's closest comrades and retired with them to the Funk Institute. The new spring wine—the batch on which he and Sherwood had collaborated—was finally ready. But the method of its degustation would be anything but new: it would evoke a ritual as ancient, as symbolic, and in its way as sacred as the civilization itself. First Professor Funk produced a long, thick block of wood (presumably mahogany, which he favored for making furniture). After securing it onto the spindles of his lathe, he switched on the machine. When it was whirring at full speed, he picked up a roughing gouge and applied it to the wood. As a recognizable shape began to emerge, he had the other institute members follow suit, each taking a turn with the gouge until the block had been transformed into a chalice. Then they watched as Funk filled the vessel with the new vintage and, one by one, each man took it and drank—to their esteemed friend, home now from the great adventure.

# Sources

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*Although every fact and quotation contained in this essay is source verified, I have chosen not to follow a traditional scholarly format with footnotes, bibliography, etc., as this form would undermine my primary intentions. However, the following informal listing includes the primary sources of information:*

*Many of these details and recollections were gleaned from talking with individuals who knew Anderson and were close to him in some capacity. Foremost was Eleanor Anderson, whom I knew from 1962 until her death in 1985. Invaluable facts were also furnished by Wharton Esherick; Mrs. Charles H. Funk; David and Virginia Greear; Miss May Scherer; Joe Stephenson; “Doc” and Mrs. James A. Thompson; Jack White; and Bob Williams. Ken Miller of the N & W Historical Society supplied details of railroad travel between Marion and New York in 1941 that I had no idea were retrievable at this remove in time. I am profoundly grateful for his expertise and generosity in providing such enhancements as engine names, schedules, and operating procedures.*

*Published details concerning the prelude to and aftermath of Anderson’s death are to be found, piecemeal, in various printed sources. The most comprehensive presentation, to date, is in Walter B. Rideout’s *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America*, volume 2. This work, more than fifty years in the making, is commonly acknowledged as the definitive biographical source on Anderson. In many respects it is, but it is not exhaustive, especially on this subject. The purpose of this essay is not to criticize Rideout’s treatment, which is accurate and informative despite being essentially a conflated, unnuanced chronology. Rather, my intention is to round out, to give needed emphasis, to combine as many*

*scattered pieces of the intricate mosaic as possible, and to view them close-up and intimately, in order to bring out the intrinsic irony and tragic inexorableness of the whole.*

*In addition to the Rideout volume, I acknowledge, with gratitude, a number of other published sources: The Sherwood Anderson Diaries, 1936–1941, edited by Hilbert H. Campbell; B. H. Kean, M. D.: One Doctor's Adventures Among the Famous and Infamous from the Jungles of Panama to a Park Avenue Practice; Ben Hecht, "Go, Scholar-Gypsy." Reminiscences by August Derleth, Bob Garnett, Freda Kirchwey, Virginia Greear, Joe Stephenson, Chad Walsh, and Bob Williams are all reprinted in my volume Sherwood Anderson Remembered. Accounts of the funeral by Karl Anderson and Davis T. Ratcliffe are published in the Winesburg Eagle, as is Anderson's short feature "Chance Rules Us All." Tributes and news articles covering the final illness and funeral are found in the Marion Democrat and Smyth County News.*

*The context that formed Anderson's Southwest Virginia world was also informative and enriching in ways both obvious and subtle. To have walked over the same ground, occupied (if only briefly) some of the same spaces, beheld many of the same landmarks, and listened to some of the same voices that he had heard was a rare and invaluable privilege enjoyed sporadically over some three decades. Much of this backdrop has sadly passed away; even Rosemont, home to generations of Scherers and Copenhavers, no longer exists. But at least in small ways bits of this storied past remain—and I hope enrich—this brief narrative.*





*Wharton Esherick's abstract sculpture marks Anderson's grave in Round Hill Cemetery, Marion. It bears an epitaph that is also the final sentence of his memoirs:  
"LIFE, NOT DEATH, IS THE GREAT ADVENTURE."*

# Special Thanks

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*All illustrations in this volume courtesy Special Collections at Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, Virginia.*

*Special Collections at Virginia Tech played an integral role in the organization of this volume and the related events to commemorate the life and legacies of Sherwood Anderson. In recent years, Special Collections at Virginia Tech has acquired a number of original documents, personal correspondence, and rare publications related to Anderson's years in Southwest Virginia. I invite you to consult these important "new" Anderson collections to explore the writer's relationship with the region.*



*This book is set in Freight Text,  
which was designed by Joshua Darden,  
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