



Poor White

Sherwood Anderson

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Hugh McVey was born in a little hole of a town stuck on a mud bank on the western shore of the Mississippi River in the State of Missouri. It was a miserable place in which to be born. With the exception of a narrow strip of black mud along the river, the land for ten miles back from the town - called in derision by river men "Mudcat Landing" - was almost entirely worthless and unproductive. The soil, yellow, shallow and stony, was tilled, in Hugh's time, by a race of long gaunt men who seemed as exhausted and no-account as the land on which they lived. They were chronically dis-couraged, and the merchants and artisans of the town were in the same state. The merchants, who ran their stores - poor tumble-down ramshackle affairs - on the credit system, could not get pay for the goods they handed out over their counters and the artisans, the shoemakers, carpenters and harnessmakers, could not get pay for the work they did. Only the town's two saloons prospered. The saloon keepers sold their wares for cash and, as the men of the town and the farmers who drove into town felt that without drink life was unbearable, cash always could be found for the purpose of getting drunk.

Poor White Details

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From Reader Review Poor White for online ebook

Christine Granados says

Enjoyed reading "Winesburg, Ohio" but this one not so much. I kept thinking that McVey's internal monologues could have been edited to one page. I did come away from the book with lines worth quoting about how America created/started its myth of greatness: "In a sweeter age many of these young men might have become artists, but they had not been strong enough to stand against the growing strength of dollars. They had instead become newspaper correspondents and secretaries to politicians. All day and every day they used their minds and their talents as writers in the making of puffs and the creating of myths concerning the men by whom they were employed."

Mad Dog says

An ambitious book that bored me for much of its length. This book's intent was telling the tale of the impacts of the Industrial Revolution on small-town America as well as telling the personal tale of some of those involved. But the book got bogged down (in parts) by the boring telling of the story of the lead character (Hugh McVey). The character never really progressed (throughout the book), but worst of all he never really got interesting. He took long walks and brooded about how he didn't fit in with society. And he did this a lot. Brooding can be interesting if it is varied and insightful, but it can be really BORING if it is the same thoughts over and over. Hey, the main character was a great inventor, but the author never really showed the excitement of this aspect of the main character's life. The secondary main character (Clara) also lead a life of 'quiet desperation', but at least her thoughts (as one-sided as they were) were sometimes interesting. Her portions of the book were the most interesting to me.

As far as the Industrial Revolution goes, this book IS IMO too one-sided to be very impactful. The author is preaching to the choir (with me) when he criticizes the results of business ambitions. But I lost interest in the author's heavy-handed and one-sided railing against businessmen. I don't buy that things were all idyllic and thoughtful in America before the Industrial Revolution came along to make everything about money and 'progress'. I don't buy that things were so great (and spiritual and personal) when people worked long days in the fields. There is some truth in the author's railing against the Industrial Revolution, but the author shows no balance whatsoever in his observations.

I liked *Winesburg Ohio* (the collection of short stories written earlier by this same author) a whole lot. And this book contains that book's sensitivity to social awkwardness and inner purposelessness, but takes the 'negativity' to a whole new level. And it involves the abovementioned social commentary (whereas *Winesburg* is more personal). It is like the author's world view got a lot bleaker after he wrote *Winesburg*. Bleak can be OK, but not when it is this one-sided and disinteresting(one-dimensional).

Clayton Brannon says

One of the greatest American authors of all time. He is a master story teller of an era that will never come again. His character descriptions of their thoughts and feelings and everyday fears is masterful.

Jim says

Sherwood Anderson is best known for WINESBURG, OHIO. POOR WHITE is another tale set in Ohio in a small town called Bidwell. The most fascinating thing about Anderson's writing is that it is so quiet. The story is simply told and yet there is an underlying current of electricity. I have no doubt that many people would find the book boring because what happens is very little and yet is monumental in the lives of the people within the story.

Here is the story of industrialization through a small town's frame of reference.

Here is a story of a man that pulled himself up to become more than his father because one woman took the time to teach him the value of working hard and learning.

Anderson's language is clear and beautiful in description and spare in style. I will happily get more books by Anderson to take my time to read -- because reading it slow is like savoring a ten-course meal and although you cannot wait to get to the rich chocolate dessert -- all the other courses are so good, you don't want to stop eating them either.

Guille says

Si han leído "Winesburg, Ohio" y les ha gustado, disfrutarán también de este libro (puede que un pelín menos o puede que dos pelines menos, pero no más pelines).

Tiene los mismo ingredientes que aquellos cuentos: un lenguaje sensible y sencillo, tanto que a veces parece ingenuo; ese mundo rural de principios de siglo que el autor trata con una profunda melancolía; personajes con historias aparentemente insignificantes, con problemas triviales, que intentan salir de sí mismos o del estrecho mundo en el que viven o que no se les escape todo aquello que ha definido y determinado sus vidas; narraciones cotidianas que tienen dentro otras historias en las que todos podemos vernos reflejados porque tocan temas eternos; en fin, la vida misma.

En este caso, todo ello se enmarca en una época de cambios sociales, políticos y económicos que van a cambiar por completo el ritmo de vida de las personas, el modo en el que se relacionan, las pautas de comportamiento entre el hombre y la mujer, entre patrón y empleado, toda una forma de entender la vida.

Stefaan Sterck says

i

Iván Ramírez Osorio says

4.5

Es un libro entretenido. Una imagen cruda del impacto de la industrialización en el campo, de la

transformación de la vida rural a la vida urbana y de la crueldad que emerge con el dinero, el egoísmo y la avaricia. Hay unos pasajes en el libro que evocan profunda belleza y , como otros escritores de su generación, logra envolver al lector en el mundo que ha construido. Sin embargo, hay algunos pasajes que se antojan innecesarios lo cual, bajo ningún motivo, quita atractivo a la obra.

Recomendado para personas que busquen lecturas similares a John Dos Passos y , en menor medida, a William Faulkner.

Sherwood Anderson es la puerta y la bienvenida a la generación perdida.

Dan Honeywell says

This book is rather slow going, a little corny and sensational at times, but it is very good and very human. I give it 4 1/2 stars.

James Govednik says

It seems everything I've read about Sherwood Anderson rates *Winesburg, Ohio* as Anderson's best work, but I like *Poor White* better. Like *Winesburg*, the plot is strongly rooted in the internal struggles of the characters. While *Winesburg* is a series of character studies, *Poor White* takes us along on the journey of Hugh McVey as he grows from a dazed social outcast to an unwitting mover and shaker of commerce, from the 1890s into the 20th century. Like life 100 or so years ago, the story moves along at a slow pace, but every bit of time I spent reading it felt like time I was unplugged or off the grid. And yet, I could sense the modern world looming over the characters, and I wondered who would be liberated and who would be crushed. Period novel (1920), very enriching read.

Eldonfoil TH*E Whatever Champion says

I can understand most readers' criticism of this book. But it's Sherwood Anderson and he's got much to say. He has left his writing as the definitive stamp for the Midwest (and into Appalachia and other regions), for the turn of the century, and for modern America and the new industrialism. He's the one who puts things in its proper perspective and sees a bit further. He's the one who felt it so much he just got up and walked *into the cornfields*. I wish he could have walked another hundred years. Throughout a text that might be criticized as simple, prosaic, and even disjointed, there are scattered some miraculous kernels of insight, beauty, and that lonely, lonely feeling of our age.

Russel Henderson says

I had mixed feelings about this. It featured Anderson's characteristic patchwork of character sketches, a sort of pre-Kundera ability to show events from myriad points of view and demonstrating that many conflicts

result from different motivations and perceptions regarding the same incidents. He sought to portray the growth of America through the microcosm of a small American city, from agriculture and artisanal crafts such as smithing and harness-making through small-scale industrialization, automation and wage labor. Hugh is his socially awkward but fundamentally good protagonist, moving the town and America forward with his inventions but inadvertently sowing dissension among his peers, who are awed by and a little angry at him. Clara is his love interest, a proto-feminist trying to make peace with the expectations her dad levels on her. Her father and his cronies are perhaps the foremost beneficiaries of Hugh's genius and the changes he helps bring about; their scheming and striving manages to be both useful and ugly. The harness-maker, Joe, manages to benefit from the changes and still feels repulsed and cheated by them. Anderson is heavy-handed with his symbolism. The work is sort of a disjointed Horatio Alger tale, and it does capture to an extent the zeitgeist of an era, but it was neither his best work nor the best such attempt to paint that portrait.

Illiterate says

Industrialization of rural communities in the 1890s.

Cynthia Moore says

After reading White Trash- a 400 year history of class in America, this was a breezier version of the same story. White Trash WAS excellent, but this felt like a more personal story brought to life.

Veronica says

It saddens me to say that I was, once again, disappointed with an admired author's work. Poor White felt like it was trying much too hard to be a work of historical fiction, and in doing so, had this reader losing interest. I have read many great books within this category, however, this was not one of them.

Anderson's commentary on the burgeoning Industrial Revolution during the early 20th century reads at times like a scholarly work, rather than a piece of fiction, and has an academically dry tone.

Born in 1866, Hugh McVey lives with his widowed drunkard of a father who leaves his young son without food or shelter while he disappears on drinking sprees. Hugh longs for human connection, but seems destined to live without it. He is taken in by a family for a few years who provide some education and stability, but they relocate and inexplicably, do not ask him to join them. With no expectation of success, the 6' 4" loner ventures forth and somehow manages to become a successful inventor of agricultural machines. This was a character I wanted to cheer for, but just didn't care about in the end.

The woman who takes Hugh into her home, Sara Shepard, is taciturn and shows little affection towards Hugh although she cares for him deeply. She puts all her efforts into educating him and plans daily lessons for him that prove successful. When she and her husband decide to move, they leave abruptly and for some obscure reason, no invitations are extended to Hugh.

Clara Butterworth, another unsympathetic character, was the suffragette figure. Oppressed and reviled by her widowed father, she is sent off to college, not for an education, but for a prospective spouse and to take her

away from her father's home. Sure wish I could have something positive to say with regards to this character, but words fail me.

Quotes:

All men lead their lives behind a wall of misunderstanding they themselves have built, and most men die in silence and unnoticed behind the walls.

No discussion around Poor White would enter my conversation with Mr. Anderson and I would intentionally focus on Winesburg, Ohio. We could sip Martinis sans the speared olive and perhaps he'd share his methodology or some other significant writing tips.

My rating for Poor White is a 6 out of 10.

Martin says

This is a wonderful piece of Americana about the transition of one Ohio city from agriculture to industry. There are also some complex psychological characterizations in the book including a lesbian & feminist character. I read Winesburg, Ohio in many years ago in high school but plan to read it again as there are excerpts in the anthology. I don't know why this book is wider known or taught in school.
