



Constructing Social Memory in Industrialization in Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White*

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Abstract: With a story of a small American rural town undergoing industrialization, Sherwood Anderson's *Poor White* displays that the small town of Bidwell has lost its individuality and beauty in America's transformation from a primarily agrarian society into an industrialized nation. The critical concern has always focused on the nostalgia reflected in the social transformation, paying little attention to the formation of industrial social memory. This paper, borrowing Jan Assmann's illustration of material, spatial and conceptual memories, will try to analyze the construction of industrial social memory in the story. It argues that the story records how industrialization causes significant changes in the life of the small town and the citizens by penetration of mechanical memory, homogenization of spatial memory and embodiment of conceptual memory. It holds that the story reflects in the gradual fading of agricultural material memory, a new mechanical production method replaces the traditional labor-intensive method and transforms traditional labor patterns and rural life into industrial style in which a new social memory, the mechanical memory, is formed. In representing that the rapid industrialization in the small town of Bidwell compels spatial changes with extensive construction of factories, buildings, and railways, Anderson exposes natural and cultural spaces are remodeled and altered along with the country's industrial development, which constitutes the townspeople's spatial memory in industrialization. Meanwhile, their self-identity and values are greatly affected by the completion of industrialization. Their consumption concepts and lifestyles have undergone tremendous changes, and their desires for money and profit become increasingly strong. All these result from the materialistic and mechanical ideology that serves as the origin and embodiment of their conceptual memory in industrialization. Anderson's story manifests that social memory is a dynamic entity undergoing repeated revisions by newly acquired knowledge or expanded cognitive abilities. In this course, it is not the past itself, but the way people modernize the past in relation to the present and to the desired future that matters. Therefore, Anderson finally conveys the idea that real values will survive in the construction of industrial social memory, although he gives a nostalgic glimpse of the social upheaval with struggles between the old and the new versions of social memory.

Keywords: Sherwood Anderson; *Poor White*; Industrialization; Material memory; Spatial memory; Conceptual memory

Introduction

In 1920, just one year after the publication of *Winesburg, Ohio*, Sherwood Anderson published *Poor White*, another book about a small town in Ohio. This book traces Hugh McVey's life and rise from his humble beginnings in rural Missouri to a life where he becomes absorbed in the work of inventing and manufacturing agricultural machinery. Hugh is regarded as typical Anderson hero who follows a familiar pattern of rejection and affirmation as he attempts to lead a good life in the new age, and "the conflicting impulses within [him] remains as evidence of an unresolved tension within Anderson himself"^[1]. In a letter to his publisher, Anderson describes the book as "the story of the development of an American town into an industrial center and the effect of the coming of industrials on the people"^[2]. In presenting "both the history of Mid-America...as well as the story of the Mid-Americans" in the social transformation^[3], he portrays Mid-America as "a rural, communal, craft-centered culture which had become, under the influence of New England, an industrial, competitive, and production-centered culture"^[4].

Since the book focuses on the socioeconomic and cultural shifts that occur during America's transformation from an agricultural society to an industrialized nation, the critical concern is often on the nostalgia revealed in the story of the agricultural town losing its individuality and beauty in the process of industrialization. Irving Howe, as an instance, refers to the nostalgia as "a social memory uniquely tender and vulnerable"^[5]. Some other critics usually emphasize the industrialized environment in the work, either examining how the novel illustrates regional, masculine and modern identities have developed along with the period's socioeconomic changes in the combination of rural agrarian and urban economies, or highlighting the historical significance and recollection of the industrial development with suggestion that industrialization disturbs the equilibrium between humans and nature to argue about the negative effects of industrialization on natural environment. But how industrialization brings into being its social memory or how the industrial culture is constructed has received little attention from the academia.

Based on Halbwachs' contribution of establishing the connection between a social group and collective memory, many scholars have furthered the study of social memory. For example, Paul Connerton, in his book *How Societies Remember*,



extends that social memory pertains to the shared social experiences of a sizable group, holding that commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices are the two distinct areas of social activity moments of recollection^[6]; while Jan Assmann develops social memory into “cultural memory” to stress the point “memory needs anchoring in space just as much as it does in time”^[7]. To become cultural, collective memory must be inscribed on material carriers^[8]. Moreover, the essence of cultural memory lies not just in the material or spatial, but in the conceptual—the frameworks or reference points that give collective experience its sense^[9]. Assmann’s evolution of cultural memory divides social memory into types of material memory, spatial memory and conceptual memory. Generally speaking, material culture concerns with the material dimension of memory that holds the most basic position in the construction of social memory. Spatial memory is an important component of the human memory system, mainly referring to the ability of individuals to remember spatial positions and layouts jointly with temporal memory. Conceptual memory is the spiritual and cultural mentality of human subject’s ability and essential power, and its objectification in conceptual form includes various forms of cultural psychology, ideal beliefs, values, and social consciousness.

In Misztal’s view, in today’s societies, “social memory refers not so much to living memory but to organized cultural practices supplying ways of understanding the world, and providing people with beliefs and opinions which guide their actions.”^[10] In order to understand the production of social memory we need to examine how a group maintains and cultivates a common memory. Misztal suggests one approach to study the social formation of memory is to “analyze social contexts in which memories are embedded—groups that socialize us to what should be remembered and what should be forgotten; so-called mnemonic communities”^[11]. This paper, then, will borrow Assmann’s divisions of material, spatial and conceptual memory to discuss the formation of industrial social memory in Sherwood Anderson’s *Poor White*, arguing that the story records industrialization causes significant changes in the life of the small town and their citizens by penetration of mechanical memory, homogenization of spatial memory and embodiment of conceptual memory, from which Anderson, though with a nostalgic glimpse of the social upheaval, conveys the idea that the real values will survive in the construction of industrial social memory.

1. Penetration of Mechanical Memory

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, significant advancements were made in agricultural technology in the United States. Modern agricultural tools and equipment such as steel plows, reapers, and steam-powered machinery were widely used, enabling farmers to cultivate and harvest crops more efficiently. In this background, the novel revolves around Hugh’s new invention, a cabbage planting machine that disrupts the tranquility of the existing town, evoking strong reactions from the town’s inhabitants, either for or against the machine. According to Jelin, something becomes “memorable” when a crack appears in one’s learned, expected routines, when a new event throws a spoke in the wheel^[12]. Hugh’s invention is such a new event that it disrupts the farmers’ past lessons and current memories of agricultural production. Over time, the new technology becomes widely utilized in the town, and farmers begin purchasing the machines to abandon traditional labor practices. This is a change that not only alters the lives and work methods of farmers but also has profound effects on constructing the industrialized social memory of the town’s lifestyle and economic development. With the gradual fading of agricultural material memory, a new mechanical production method replaces the traditional labor-intensive method, transforming traditional labor patterns and rural life into industrial style in which a new social memory, the mechanical memory, is formed.

Firstly, rural labor is replaced by Hugh’s machine. The residents of Bidwell town live a life of generational farming, with “hoe and sickle” as carrier of their agricultural memory, and they usually use simple agricultural tools for the family-based production, so “large tracts of American land [has] not been cultivated, and the shortage of labor [is] insufficient to form large-scale production”^[13]. However, this phenomenon changes with the widespread industrialization. Hugh’s invention of the “cabbage planter” and “wheat harvester”, symbols of the beginning of mechanical memory penetration, melds ruralized and urbanized abstractions to a concrete representation of modern rurality^[14], brings about initial change in the mode of labor, where agricultural tools are replaced and mechanical memory emerges and transforms the farm landscape into an industrial landscape, although the process undergoes with difficulty.

Many of the Bidwell farmers have an attachment to and retention of traditional agricultural labor memory. They would rather choose to turn a blind eye to the emergence of new machines or even sneer at the new machines. For example, when Joe customizes four sets of “new mechanical farm tools” (175), he remains silent for two or three hours, apparently unwilling to accept the gradual replacement of traditional craftsmanship by machines. They would mainly rely on their life experiences for natural phenomena and hand tools for production. Their knowledge about the “mild climate” and “thick soil” along the Mississippi River embodies ancient agricultural memories, the majority of the farmers’ memories, a kind of physical memory stored in labor products and labor activities, is far greater than the “intellectual memory”^[15].

Nonetheless, the development of large-scale agricultural mechanization provides many conveniences for farmers. Tractors replace manual labor in plowing, sowing, and harvesting. “Seeders” “fertilizer spreaders” “weeders” (63) greatly save the physical labor of farmers, and other mechanical equipment help farmers complete field management work more efficiently. As well, agricultural sprayers can effectively control pests and diseases, improve crop yields, and the construction of farmland water conservancy facilities also provides good conditions for agricultural production. In this course, the survival space of traditional agriculture is squeezed, which causes the decline of agricultural craftsmanship. In result, traditional agricultural tools become memories of the past, while new machines start to posit the farmers’ daily life. When the townspeople talk about grain harvesters and cabbage planters, an interaction about a new social memory is generated. The mechanization not only substitutes the rural labor but promotes the collective memory of the townspeople to an industrial reign. Traditional farm tools and modern machinery, spanning time and space, have become special

memory links connecting the present and future of the townspeople. After Bidwell embarks on the path of industrialization, “wooden barrels” and “rusty sickles” are often found discarded at the roadside, creating a strong contrast with the modern large machinery, whose buzzing permeates townspeople’s lives after the their “sickle” is taken away, leaving only memories of the past.

Secondly, the employment modes are altered by mechanical factories. The application of large-scale machinery in agricultural production leads to changes in labor and the traditional way of life, and complicates the labor relations. Traditionally, the farming memory in *Poor White* is expressed through a way of life in harmony with nature and self-sufficient cultivation because most people revere agricultural production. A diligent farmer named Silk, typical of the Bidwell residents, is not very open to foreign things yet engaging himself in his own small piece of land. He considers it essential for his survival and would guard the farms and fear nature.

In contrast, as a direct consequence of the decline of agricultural traditions and the emergence of new types of farms and factories, Hugh “[keeps] on innovating with his new inventions”^[16] and continues to push forward the industrialization of the small town with his exceptional inventive ability and creativity. With his influence, the residents of Bidwell agree to the use of the “advanced machines”, gradually transforming traditional small farms into factories or mechanical farms, so factories appear like “mushrooms after the rain” (96). Subsequently, the cultivation methods are changed by machines, and the production efficiency is increased by mechanization. Most of the factories adopt an employment mode and produce agriculturally processed products. Though different in types or categories, the factories share similar features in scale, mechanization, and intensification. In the novel, Anderson acknowledges the contribution of Hugh’s new machine to the town and accepts the fact of mechanical development although he repeatedly expresses his disgust for industrialization. He is actually clear of the significance of industrialization by narrating in the novel “[s]tanding firm in the world and entering the new era has a huge impact on the lives of the residents of the town of Bidwell” (306). It can be detected that the emergence of factories provides a form of externalized power for the residents of small towns, absorbing people to a new situation through new platforms, new spaces, and new forces, and forming a collective memory belonging to the workers of the early 20th century.

With the employment mode altered by factories, a large number of farmers leave their land and move to towns or cities to engage in industrial production or investment. The new industrial system gives rise to a new set of production relations and brings about substantial changes in townspeople’s social roles. The farmers are no longer independent individual laborers but workers who have to establish a relationship with their bosses, the capitalists. This signals a new form of exploitation, which is extensively described by Anderson in terms of the environment of the factory^[17]. It becomes a new basis for modeling “factory memory” where machines and workers correspond to the means of production and the relations of production. Subsequently, many farmers shift to working as industrial laborers or investors in urban areas, experiencing substantial changes in their societal roles to establish new relationships with capitalists that move towards a new system of exploitation in the growing industrial areas.

In this process, industrial capital intervenes to accelerate the industrialization of the small town Bidwell to a climax, supporting mechanical culture to enter the town. Consequently, young people are brainwashed by the investors to make a difference and to realize their ambition to “produce corn harvesters” (356). Hugh, who urgently needs capital turnover, is persuaded by Steve to buy stock shares to start his own business. The latter part of the story witnesses the buying and controlling of factories become the main form of capital development in the small town. Intelligent individuals seek to get control of these factories in order to acquire shares. Manufacturers would efficiently initiate production processes, utilize equipment, technology and labor, to swiftly bring products to market at minimal cost. Their objective is to capture market share and generate profit through price differentials. Different capitals try different means to dominate an industry: production capital expects to have a strong grip on raw materials; commercial capital desires a presence in certain markets, and finance capital endeavors to obtain extensive control over funds to influence price trends. In this way, company replaces factory, and “capital supersedes machinery”(257). The novel designs such a plot in which the New Yorkers propose a “secret plan” to Tom, with an aim to sign a contract with him in order for the first option for all his future inventions (378), because this act can enable them to seek financing in New York and profit from transferring the production rights of the new inventions as “initiators” to make easy money. Steve’s words also prove the relationship between capital and control: “You can sell shares or go to the bank for a loan, and get everything you want, but never lose control. Persist, and this is the secret of my success, always maintain control”(417). Such examples reflect that the residents of the town gradually lose their eagerness for new inventions; instead, they turn to worship capital. It is obvious the capital intervention in the factory has caused changes in social memory.

These changes, borrowing Geismar and Tilley’s term, shape a kind of “industrial capital memory”^[18]. This memory is not only reflected in the novel’s vocabulary as “capital” “entrepreneur” “company” and etc., but permeates every aspect of the small town^[19]. By this means, the novel illustrates the shift from a pre-industrial to an industrial civilization through noticeable job dynamics caused by capitalism, and the social relations are turned into commodity-based and materialistic. Ultimately, the intrusion of industrial capital leads the small town to complete industrialization, with complete fading of traditional agricultural social memory and replacement of mechanical memory.

2. Homogenization of Spatial Memory

Space, as the primary carrier of memory, is the main medium for the construction and inheritance of memory. In this sense, spatial memory is not only an important part of individual cognitive ability and adaptability, but also a solid foundation for developing social culture. In the early 20th century America, the rise of factories and manufacturing facilities expanded the industrial areas within cities and resulted in unprecedented spatial expansion at an astonishing pace. This kind of

spatial extension changed the urban landscape as well as created a dichotomy between urban and rural areas, profoundly influencing the social structure and the labor market. In *Poor White*, Anderson exposes in the rapid industrialization in Bidwell the extensive construction of factories and buildings compels homogenization of social memory by spatial changes. Specifically speaking, natural and cultural spaces are remodeled and altered along with the country's industrial development, which constitutes the residents' spatial memory in industrialization.

Located in Ohio and nourished by the Mississippi River, Bidwell is made lush and suitable for cultivation. Before the numerous factories emerge, the land adjacent to the town is divided into small plots for growing various fruits and berries. Farther away, there are expansive fields yielding amounts of wheat, grains, and cabbages. These spatial dimensions of traditional agriculture serve as the natural spatial memory for the inhabitants of the town. According to Lefebvre, "natural space is the origin and original form of social processes"^[20], so each chapter of the novel describes the town's environmental characteristics and geographical location, setting the "stage" for the introduction of the characters.

But as factories are built, the industrial society's spatial production under the domination of capital has turned the town's natural space into a symbolic commodity production, the town itself into a convergence hub for factories, commodity circulation, and personnel exchanges. The first half of the novel repeatedly mentions "walking in the fields" "going to the farm", while the latter half features endless repetitions of the word "factory"(396), indicating a replacement of the natural space pattern. In other words, industrialization drives the transformation of industrial structure with the scale of the primary agriculture industry shrinking progressively. A large number of forces detached from agricultural production are absorbed into the secondary and tertiary industries. Cities gradually become concentrated places for human resources, production factors, sales markets, and information exchange. Within the city, the construction and renewal of space are planned under the collusion of capital and power. Under these circumstances, urban space or architectural space is no longer arbitrary, daily, or informal, but intentional, rigid, and formalized. The space is used by capitalists to build salable residences and factories in a quick speed: "Today it's a house, tomorrow it's a factory"(248). Especially after the commercialization of housing, a vast number of commercial houses have sprung up like mushrooms since "apartment building consists of 'livable boxes' stacked layer by layer" (106).

Consequently, a contrast between the free and open rural space and the narrow and crowded urban space is formed. In the connection between the "new home" and the "old pickling factory"(137), and from a "coiled planting base" to the "ever-emerging factories"(141), and also with the establishment of railroads, the town of Bidwell is "abuzz" with industrialization. The alterations in its land use precipitate continuous changes in natural space, ultimately engendering the reshaping of social space. Young individuals like Hugh consciously begin utilizing scientific power to convert and remodel nature, so as to direct the industrialized spatial structure towards a standardized mode of operation. Among the town residents' communication new vocabulary such as "relocation" and "migration" constantly appear and spread, manifesting of social behavior^[21].

It is no doubt that such redefinitions of natural spatial memory bring about the loss of sense of place. The townspeople feel the industrialized town has gradually lost its original beauty and would like to retain their original memories through rituals, activities, or oral texts, to convey their emotions to the town, to relieve the sense of loss of local feelings. Although this is usually read as Anderson's nostalgia for natural space and a criticism of urbanization, it should be noted that Anderson discovers "the complex beauty of...machines" in the factories^[22]. Put it in another way, Anderson has accepted the remodeling of natural space into industrial social memory.

As a microcosm of American society, Bidwell's evolving from agricultural society to industrial society inevitably contains changes in social space. In Rothbard's view, the most direct cause for these changes is the formation of the "urban-rural dual system" resulting from urbanization^[23]. This formation not only delineates the boundaries between cities and rural areas in geographical space, but also represents a spiritual and cultural production. On the one hand, the spiritual and cultural space is equally subjected to the domination of capital operation in industrial society. On the other hand, under the conditions of urban-rural duality, people's sense of boundaries is strengthened, for "city dwellers" and "rural residents" will label each other culturally. No matter what group they are categorized, a large portion of the residents have been detached from the tranquil rural life.

In addition, the transportation improvements significantly reduce the time required for people to travel the same distance in space compared to before. Farmers once used horses to haul large quantities of berries and agricultural products, and then transported them to the market for sale. While railways and vehicles help them shorten the travel time hence a relative reduction in spatial distance. The dialectic relation between time and space, either time-space compression—the increasingly shrinking social distance and the gradual shortening of social time spent, or time-space restoration—new social space created by social time and changes in the form of social space winning more social time for economic development, enlarges the farmers' cultural vision and social space with technological progress. Take an example, Tom's exclamation "What used to take five or six days of farm work, can now be completed in one day with the help of machines"(320) proves the efficiency of Hugh's invention in farm production that saves more time for farmers to involve themselves in breeding their social and cultural space. This is in conformity with Lefebvre's view that more time can be spent to be engaged in the "production of mental space" in terms of the perception of geographical space and social time^[24]. In essence, this kind of mental space exacerbates the evolution of people's identity and their different perspectives on the world since they have entered a new industrial cultural space.

According to Oler, Hugh and Bidwell "reincorporates ruralized identities, spaces and products into American and Midwestern modernity, which requires them to negotiate a broad range of experiential and socioeconomic discourses"^[25]. Individuals and communities, pushed by a variety of forces with mobility and changeability, have to attain a usable identity to control a usable present in the modernizing Midwest. Influenced by the new industrial culture, Clara, a

protagonist who moves to the city, becomes greedy and materialistic, and looks down on her past life in the countryside, even resists remembering the beautiful farm where she once lived. Comparatively, Jim, originally a young man from a small town, who is proactive and progressive even though plotted against by others due to “land distribution issues”(117), becomes a person who learns to exercise power and follow the wind with series of actions. But for Hugh, whose economic and affective changes are connected to his travels through Midwest, and who wishes to realize his childhood dream to be “a man among men” and to acquire a masculine identity, creating and manipulating an industrial memory requires “not only balance and flexibility but also a willingness to change perspective”^[26]. Actually, this perspective is something concerned with conceptual memory.

3. Embodiment of Conceptual Memory

Conceptual memory is the spiritual and cultural mentality of human subject abilities and essential powers and their objectification in conceptual forms^[27]. It includes people’s cultural psychology, ideal beliefs, values, and forms of “social consciousness”^[28]. As social memory is a source of knowledge, the transition from a beautiful agricultural town to an industrial one means Bidwell takes on a new face with new comprehension of the society. Meanwhile the townspeople’s self-identity and values are greatly affected by the completion of industrialization. Their consumption concepts and lifestyles undergoing tremendous changes, their desires for money and profit become increasingly strong—the materialistic and mechanical ideology serve as the origin and embodiment of their conceptual memory in industrialization. At the cognitive level, money-worship emerges as a new knowledge concept in the town, leading people to convert their enthusiasm from farming to running factories and to entrepreneurship, and giving rise to materialism and “core pursuit of profit”^[29]. This money-worship concept exerts influences especially on the young people, with Jim as the representative. His leaving hometown is purely for financial gain and his first goal of life is making money. Besides, Anderson depicts more than once the town’s life where people sit on the side of the road talking about farming and future harvest. Contrastive to these scenes, he also describes that the fast-paced lifestyle in industrial society disturbs people’s vision of the idyllic ideal. Topics such as “quickly turn to the money” “only want to be in the factory”(253) dominate their dialogue. Although the “sound was so powerful that everyone’s mind was confused” (203), yet it is welcome by the young people. Most of their conversations are about money and capital. As Anderson’s narrator comments, “the older generation was still thinking about what to eat for the evening, while the next generation was thinking about the school where they will go to learn skills to make money”(205). The young want to start their own business with their energy, taking a scornful attitude towards traditional agriculture, and trying to find the value of their own existence by proving themselves in the new industrial era of modernity. This modernity is, in Eyerman’s opinion, “characterized by the ‘tradition of the new’, by future, rather than past, orientation”, so “memory provides individuals and collectives with a cognitive map, helping orient who they are, why they are here and where they are going.”^[30] The reason is that new historical processes, new junctures, and new social and political scenarios are constantly modifying the interpretive frameworks for understanding the past and thinking about the future^[31], all happening mainly owing to changes of the concepts or ideas.

Therefore, an obvious transition can be seen in the town: decorating house luxuriously and opulently, wearing expensive jewelry, driving expensive car, etc. are considered a material basis for doing business. These material conceptual understandings replace the old concepts in agricultural society, bringing into being an industrialized conceptual memory. The development of the novel also shows this transition. At the beginning of the novel, the simple and peaceful folk of the town is often depicted, but at the end, money becomes the most important thing, turning the young such as Clara and Steve into a confused generation.

The materialization of conceptual memory in Bidwell is only part of the picture of the American nation at the early 20th century. Some critics point out that America at this period was in an age of paper and money, because the prevalence of money worship idea shaped the national character at that time. Anderson shows his nostalgia for the simple countryside of the past, but he has to accept the fact that the essence of the subject of the past is “fixed and amended”(445). At the same time, he is clear when the pursuit of wealth is prioritized, ethical standards may diminish and may cause unconventional behaviors.

Steve, a businessman, takes advantage of the residents’ trust to persuade them to join his private fund-raising, with no valid agreements. After his factory goes bankrupt, he does not compensate the residents for their losses. Depicting Steve as someone willing to manipulate, deceive, focus on industrial expansion and self-interest, ignore the negative impacts on townspeople or the environment, Anderson attributes Steve’s moral degradation to industrialization. In his words, “if there were not so many factories, Steve would be just a farm boy”(362). But in Oler’s view, Steve’s ethically suspect attempt to control the community implies Anderson’s suggestion of “a more fragmentary approach to modernity in rural settings”^[32]. In contrast, Redondo agrees that the true cause is indeed rooted in the “alienation of morality” brought about by the material production^[33]. Nonetheless, many townspeople, especially the men, follow Steve’s dream to get rich by using every means possible for personal gains. This to some degree reflects rural masculinity is made as modern masculinity “based on homosocial competition”^[34], and it is fashioned by “upending urban-oriented definitions of modernity”^[35]. In this process, Steve’s moral issue evolves into an “unusual moral code” acceptable to the world^[36], hence part of the national character of the American nation in the industrial transformation.

In addition to Steve’s transmutation, the change of ideas is also subtly revealed in Clara and Hugh’s marriage. This couple’s gender experiences assume a basic similarity between masculine and feminine experiences of modernity^[37]. Hugh, born as a poor white, always suffers from class inferiority in face of Clara, the daughter of a landlord family. Yet it is industrialization that brings him to success and that incorporates materialism into his personality. His feelings to Clara stem from doubt, then change to accept her due to his material success that satisfies Clara’s desire. When he asks her to

marry him, she jumps at the chance, “like a wild animal seeking its prey”(506). Unfortunately, their marriage, based on the materialistic oriented values, is marked by their emotional distance/alienation or missed connection. Indulging himself in the world of mechanical invention, Hugh feels his life split and separated from the outside and himself incompetent and loss of masculinity, causing Clara’s resentment to Hugh and his machine^[38]. But the assault on Hugh from Joe Wainsworth, defender of agricultural society and opponent to Hugh—the climax of the story—reconciles the couple’s relationship and unites Hugh and Clara and even restores Hugh’s masculinity. The trauma of Hugh’s injury and his vulnerability create a context in which Clara becomes gentler and more attentive in nursing Hugh and entering his personal space with new tenderness. Comparatively, Hugh, hurt and weakened, is more open to emotional connection. However, Anderson is realistic rather than sentimental. Partial and understated, the reconciliation hints it is just a moment when the possibility of healing appears, even though it is not fully realized. It seems Anderson is critical of the submersion of materialistic values, but he is smart to remind, though in an indistinct manner, how to weaken the negative effect of materialistic oriented values and notice its impact on human relationship in an industrializing America is of importance. That is why he gives a deep suspense to the couple’s marriage.

Conclusion

Anderson’s *Poor White* represents a small town in the machine age that has to face the conflicts in the social transition and exposes the effects on fashioning an industrialized social memory. Truthfully, “Anderson’s town was hardly a place of virtue, though the city was not an ideal place either”^[39]. Either to defend against, or remain consciously or unconsciously troubled by the new social memory in whatever form or pattern, the townspeople, including Anderson himself, have come to understand about a past agrarian experience and have to be involved in the industrial experience. More significantly, Anderson’s story manifests that social memory is a dynamic entity undergoing repeated revisions by newly acquired knowledge or expanded cognitive abilities. In this course, it is not the past itself, but the way people modernize the past in relation to the present and to the desired future that matters. Although there are struggles between the old and the new, the major factor to be considered is whether newer versions of memory supplement the older versions and continues to exist with new understanding to substitute or even remove the older one. The ending of the story, which alludes Hugh’s marriage to Clara and the future of the unborn child guides him to be aware of his own deeper need is connectedness and finding meaning in life beyond worldly success, tells the reader that the real values will survive in the construction of industrial social memory.

Note: Quotations from the novel are all from Sherwood Anderson, *Poor White*. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1982. Page numbers are put in the brackets in the paper.

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