

Stein, Gender, Isolation, and Industrialism:  
New Readings of *Winesburg, Ohio*

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## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Any biographical details of Sherwood Anderson's life will prove tricky. Sounding a bit too much like Huck Finn, he always took great joy in re-creating himself and everyone around him, then bragging about the distortion. Anyone who reads his letters, diaries, and supposed autobiographies will find constant contradictions, all further contradicted by what his acquaintances say about him.

However, relying on Anderson scholars like David D. Anderson, Cleveland Chase, and Irving Howe, we can find agreement on some basic facts. In Camden, Ohio, Sherwood Anderson was born September 13, 1876, to Irwin and Emma Anderson, who already had a son and a daughter. Three more sons came after Sherwood. Irwin drank heavily, and though he charmed everyone with his story-telling, he often failed to maintain a stable home for his family. Emma kept the family together and inspired her children to, in Sherwood's words, "see beneath the surface of life."

In 1884, after moving around between Ohio towns, the family settled in Clyde, Ohio, which became the model for *Winesburg*. As he grew toward manhood, Anderson's penchant for money-making earned him the nickname "Jobby." As I will explain in Chapter VI, Clyde became increasingly industrialized over the next few years. In 1895, at age 19, Anderson enlisted in the Ohio National Guard, shortly before his mother's death. Four years later, he enrolled in Ohio's Wittenberg Academy. After graduating in 1900, he moved to Chicago, where he would write and sell advertising copy.

The first of his four marriages occurred in 1904; his first wife, Cornelia Lane, would give him all three of his children, and the family would frequently move around. In 1907, he became president of a paint factory in Elyria, Ohio. In 1912, he suffered a nervous breakdown, which he later characterized as a mere fluke used to help him escape the paint factory and begin writing full time. He moved back to Chicago the following year, where he wrote fiction prolifically while also working for an advertising agency. Over the next several years, he became known as part of the Chicago literary renaissance and an avid socialite.

In 1915, Anderson divorced Cornelia, leaving her with the children, and began dating artist Tennessee Mitchell, the former mistress of poet Edgar Lee Masters. *Spoon River Anthology*, the only successful book Masters would ever write, emerged that year. Perhaps not coincidentally, Anderson began writing character sketches set in a fictional small town, this one called "Winesburg." Anderson would, varyingly, claim to have not read *Spoon River* when he wrote *Winesburg* or to have read it in a single

night and loved it. As John H. and Margaret Wrenn explain in their essay "'T.M.': The Forgotten Muse of Sherwood Anderson and Edgar Lee Masters," if Anderson avoided the influence of Masters from his fellow socialites, he could not have avoided it from Mitchell. Still, he often maligned the book, perhaps to escape the anxiety of influence. Of course, one cannot help but recognize the simple fact that jealousy probably added to that anxiety of influence, considering that Anderson found himself compared to Mitchell's former lover.

Anderson and Mitchell married in 1916, the same year of Anderson's first novel publication, *Windy McPherson's Son*. His first two novels, *Talbot Whittingham* and *Mary Cochran*, never saw publication in their entirety. Besides his essays, plays, short stories, poems, and pseudo-autobiographies, he also completed several other novels over the years: *Marching Men* (1917), *Poor White* (1921), *Many Marriages* (1923), *Dark Laughter* (1924), *Kit Brandon* (1936). Still, his reputation mostly rests on *Winesburg, Ohio*, the subject of this dissertation. In 1919, after most of the stories had appeared separately in various little magazines, Anderson released the story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio*, creating a frenzy of critical applause and moral outrage, but I will return to that shortly.

In 1922, Anderson left Chicago, the advertising agency, and Tennessee Mitchell, then met Elizabeth Prall in New York. They married soon afterwards. In 1927, Anderson bought two newspapers; never financially secure as a writer, he often but begrudgingly relied on lectures, newspapers, and other sources of income throughout his life.

In 1929, he separated from Elizabeth. The following year, he met activist Eleanor Copenhaver and helped her champion mistreated mill workers. In 1933, he married Eleanor; he remained intensely in love with her the rest of his life. In his diary and letters, he refers to her as "E" and complains about missing her whenever they part for the slightest amount of time. In 1941, while involved in social activism in South America, Anderson died of peritonitis, survived by Eleanor and the children of his first marriage.

Besides Eleanor, his closest friends included the novelist Theodore Dreiser, whom he idolized, as well as the editors he began corresponding with while trying to get the *Winesburg* stories published in magazines: Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and especially Paul Rosenfeld. Along with his noteworthiness as the first person to receive the prestigious Dial award, and his many accomplishments as a writer, Anderson also holds the honor of playing an early role in the careers of many upcoming writers, including William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway. Sadly, both of those novelists ended their friendship with Anderson by satirizing

him in books released in 1926: Faulkner's *Sherwood Anderson and Other Famous Creoles* and Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring*. However, most biographies of Faulkner and Hemingway will give details about their relationship with Anderson; I want to focus more on a few of the literary and cultural influences that informed Anderson's writing of *Winesburg, Ohio*, while also providing close readings of that book.

As for his political and religious views, Anderson considered himself a liberal Democrat, and he treasured the poetic language of the King James Bible; however, he never liked anyone to identify him with organized religion or any trendy political movements. No doubt, many of his readers take offense at what he wrote within one of his diary entries, but no statement could clarify his world view more succinctly: "Christianity is like communism, it would be all right but for the Christians" (336). In other words, he cared about the individuals that religious, political, and other movements wanted to help, but he found himself at odds with the individuals within the movements themselves. He cared about the condition of women, but never saw himself as a feminist. He took interest in workers, but examined then rejected communism. He wrote about sex as a prime mover, but discouraged critics from placing him within the Freudian school--or any other school, for that matter. He liked for critics to relate him to particular writers, but not to place him or his work into neat little categories.

While avoiding categorization, we can place Anderson with dozens of writers and within dozens of movements, but that would take dozens of volumes. For my dissertation, I decided to focus on his greatest book and some of the traditions in which we can place it. In the chapters ahead, I will offer various readings of *Winesburg, Ohio*, as a work of great social and literary worth, examining Anderson's fascination with gender roles, sexual frustration, isolation, and the threat of mechanization. As Gertrude Stein seems to affect him more than any other writer--and he her--I devote the following chapter to that relationship.

CHAPTER II  
ANDERSON AND STEIN: SYMBIOSIS

As I begin to reevaluate the place of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* in the development of American fiction, I first want to look at Anderson's symbiotic relationship with Gertrude Stein, a relationship most Stein devotees will know about through her *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in which Stein pretends to write as her lover, Alice. Anyone interested in Stein or Anderson should also read *Sherwood Anderson/Gertrude Stein*, edited by Ray Lewis White. This book features chronological excerpts from their letters to each other and from their published comments about each other.

Anderson apparently came to love Stein through some of her portraits and through her 1909 book *Three Lives*. Stein generated considerable controversy with *Lives*, a controversy she would sustain with her subsequent works. In writing about the critical reactions to her prose, she sounds as frustrated as Anderson often felt, and much of what she says about her frustration could apply to Anderson, who appears prominently and constantly in literary anthologies and literary history books, yet continues to receive the label "marginal." Stein says the newspapers claim "that my writing is appalling but they always quote it and what is more, they quote it correctly, and those they say they admire they do not quote" (*Alice* 70). The newspapers, however, reflected the general public, who found Stein's work fascinating and repulsive.

Unlike the response to Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, which appeared a decade after *Three Lives*, critical objections to Stein's work focused on its form rather than its content. Stein experimented radically with syntax, punctuation, and narrative form. In "The Work of Gertrude Stein" (1922), Anderson says he learned about her 1914 book *Tender Buttons* through his brother, and he shared his brother's enthusiasm for Stein's experimentation with words, her emphasizing of each word's importance (White 14). Before beginning my studies of *Winesburg*, I want to look at Stein and at the relationship between Stein and Anderson, a relationship that helped define the face of American literature in the twentieth century. It began when Anderson introduced himself to Sylvia Beach, a bookstore owner in Paris, and she offered to introduce Anderson to Stein. Using the voice of Alice B. Toklas, Stein writes lovingly about their first meeting:

Gertrude Stein was moved and pleased as she had rarely been. Gertrude Stein was in those days a little bitter, all her unpublished manuscripts, and no hope of publication or serious recognition. Sherwood Anderson came and quite simply and directly as is his way told her what he thought of her

work and what it meant to him in his development. He told it to her then and what was even rarer he told it in print immediately after. Gertrude Stein and Sherwood Anderson have always been the best of friends but I do not believe even he realizes how much his visit meant to her. (197)

Just how much the visit meant soon became obvious, and she spoke of him as highly as he spoke of her.

In 1935, she wrote and published "Idem The Same," a valentine about Anderson. The valentine includes a reference to Anderson as sweet fruit, a comparison she would often make, and one she finally explains in "Sherwood's Sweetness" (1941), her epitaph to him: "in New Orleans when he came into the room he had a bag of oranges, twenty-five for twenty-five cents, and he and we ate all the twenty-five oranges; they were orange sweet" (White 114). Somehow, the simplicity and pleasure of that moment personified Anderson for her. She always saw him as the great but humble man who helped foster twentieth-century American literature.

In a letter written to him in August 1926, Stein praises *Sherwood Anderson's Notebook*, including his portrait of David, a character he apparently based on his former drinking companion, William Faulkner; she told Anderson, "some day Sherwood you must write a novel that is just one portrait and nobody else's feelings coming in" (White 56). Her review of *Puzzled America*, Anderson's 1935 collection of essays about the depression, compares him to Mark Twain in his ability to capture the paradoxes and personalities of America's people. In a letter written to Anderson in April 1935, she praises *Puzzled America* again, saying, "your writing is progressively getting more power and more simplicity" (White 95).

Why would she consider increasing simplicity power? I think she saw Anderson's work as containing a sharp use of language that needed little elaboration, just as her work uses simple words in the most complex ways. She seemed to see this easy reading as Anderson's strength, as something he gained from Twain—not shallowness, but something profound with a simple surface. That holds true not just for Anderson's writing but for his personality as well: he portrayed himself as the irresponsible but lovable country-bumpkin story-teller; that image might fit his father as well as Anderson himself, but he obviously held deep insight into both literary technique and human nature.

Besides encouraging his sharp use of language and his tendency to create portraits rather than stories, Stein's advice to him often addresses sentences. In a 1925 letter, she tells him that her book *The Making of Americans* includes "some pretty wonderful sentences in it and we know how fond we both are of sentences" (White 49). Like her claim about power and simplicity,

this statement speaks volumes about the writing styles of Stein and Anderson. They would create sentences they considered wonderful, then spend the rest of the story, novel, or essay experimenting with variations on those sentences—constantly returning to and adapting them. When they liked the way a sentence sounded or the connotations it evoked, they would rework it exhaustively. If we removed all the repetitions from *Winesburg* or *Lives*, the deletions would leave us with two rather thin, disjointed volumes.

Anderson appropriated that use of repetition after falling in love with the *Three Lives* story "Melanctha." In fact, no other work seems to germinate *Winesburg* more than "Melanctha." In a 1924 letter, Anderson remembers his initial reactions to that story, the first Stein work he read: "Why it hasn't been included in some of the lists of great short stories I don't know" (White 39). In fact, Anderson helped Stein achieve much of her reputation by simply challenging people to give her work a chance, by explaining how she champions the beauty of words, and by writing an introduction to her 1922 collection *Geographies and Plays*. In "The Work of Gertrude Stein," Anderson praises her decision not to seek fame or acceptance, but to "go live among little housekeeping words, the swaggering bullying street-corner words, and all the other forgotten and neglected citizens of the sacred and half forgotten city" (White 17). Also, in his 1934 essay "Gertrude Stein," Anderson calls her "a releaser of talent" and "a pathfinder" who "dared, in the face of ridicule and misunderstanding, to try to awaken in all of us who write a new feeling for words" (White 83). In his "Four American Impressions" (1922), Anderson sees Stein as a cook in a kitchen who finds new flavors in words (White 25-27). She works slowly and deliberately, and he takes great interest in her work. Her cooking in "Melanctha" would forever alter his approach to writing. This love for language typifies both "Melanctha" and *Winesburg*.

A love of character also typifies both works. In *Lives*, Stein offers expanded sketches of individual characters—not their life stories but simply stories of their lives, stories that illustrate how it feels to be those three women. Stein experiments with a non-linear form, which she calls a "continuous present" ("Composition" 498). To understand the continuous present and the impact of Stein on Anderson, we must first consider the life of Gertrude Stein and the life of the fictional Melanctha Herbert. In college, Stein took three classes taught by the psychologist William James, who introduced her to concepts such as what he called "stream of consciousness." In the first class, he worked with two other teachers and used his *Principles of Psychology* (1890) as his text, a book whose theories permeate Stein's early fiction. He later convinced Stein to attend medical school, as she

hoped for a career in psychology, but she soon lost interest in it. They corresponded until he died in 1910, just after James had sent her an acknowledgment of how much he enjoyed *Three Lives*.

Of her many borrowings from James, we can probably benefit most by first considering his "Five Characters In Thought," from *Principles of Psychology*:

1. Every thought tends to be part of a personal consciousness.
2. Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing.
3. Within each personal consciousness thought is sensibly continuous.
4. It always appears to deal with objects independent of itself.
5. It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—chooses from among them, in a word—all the while. (49)

According to James, our perceptions of individual activities and events change over time, and we wonder how we once treasured something we now detest or ignored something we now consider paramount. Even past events receive constant new interpretations, as we grow and continually look back through new lenses: "Experience is remolding us every moment, and our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date" (49). He even finds change within how we perceive and choose which objects and events we consider important; those foci come either from the present or from past events that inform our consciousness in the present.

Exactly how much these teachings affected Stein will seem obvious shortly, and we will also see how she served as a conduit between James and Anderson. Her involvement with James also included an elaborate experiment, which she explains in her 1935 essay "How Writing Is Written." The experiment involved what and how people write in various situations; rather than learning so much about their writing, she learned of "a certain kind of human being who acted in a certain kind of way, and another kind who acted in another kind of way, and their resemblances and differences" (156). From there, she became interested in those similarities and differences, both in people and in moments. Her supposed use of constant repetition grew naturally from this interest in what she actually saw as repetition with variation, what James would call "consciousness." She uses the example of someone telling a story to one person then to another, changing the details ever so slightly with each re-telling, letting one's perspective change with each attempt to articulate what happened

(158). That metaphor leads into another one that can help us understand how to read "Melanctha," including the arguments between the two main characters.

All my early work was a careful listening to all the people telling their story, and I conceived the idea which is, funnily enough, the same as the idea of the cinema. The cinema goes on the same principle: each picture is just infinitesimally different from the one before. If you listen carefully, you say something, the other person says something; but each time it changes just a little, until finally you come to the point where you convince him or you don't convince him. (158-59)

Though she followed in James's theoretical footsteps, she dropped out of medical school and soon expatriated. As I will show in Chapter III, the teachers of Winesburg seem like dislocated centers—living outside the community they try so desperately to impact. We could say the same about Gertrude Stein. Though a uniquely American writer who championed American ambition and fostered many other American writers, she lived in France, which meant not needing to hide her lesbianism or her feminist views—neither of which would have received a warm welcome in early-twentieth century America. It also meant neither needed explanation, apology, or discussion. She lived the better part of her life with Alice B. Toklas. However, even in France, she used the innocuous term "companion" in place of "lover." At any rate, the two women obviously loved each other dearly, and that love included a romantic, sexual relationship. Furthermore, she and Toklas hardly isolated themselves in France. Stein's brother collected paintings by emerging artists, and introduced many of those artists to Stein. Those painters, especially Matisse, influenced her focus on character and spatiality. Like Anderson in Chicago, Stein found herself in the center of a constantly changing and energetic circle of writers, painters, philosophers, and critics.

Stein's "Melanctha" provided the catalyst for bringing Anderson's orbit into her system. This almost-plotless tale follows an African American woman who, preoccupied by a best friend raised in the white world and a doctor guided by traditional philosophies of black self-improvement, tries to avoid introspection about her life of continual wandering and desiring. Of course, form dominates "Melanctha" more than anything else.

To help readers understand the structure of her work, Stein explains her techniques in her lecture "Composition As Explanation." The same lecture introduces readers to her terms "prolonged present," "continuous present," "beginning again and

again," "insistence," and "using everything," terms that constantly suggest the influence of James's principles of thought. I will continue to use those terms throughout my studies of Stein and Anderson, so it will help to look at what Stein apparently means by them, no matter how difficult her language might seem. She says that in writing "Melanctha,"

there was a constant recurring and beginning there was a marked direction in the direction of being in the present although naturally I had been accustomed to past present and future, and why, because the composition forming around me was a prolonged present. A composition of a prolonged present is a natural composition. . . . I created then a prolonged present naturally I knew nothing of a continuous present but it came naturally to me to make one, it was simple it was clear to me and nobody knew why it was done like that, and I did not myself although naturally to me it was natural.

(*Composition* 498)

From there, Stein says she began to see that a series of repeating events and phrases seems to occur in the past, present, and future of an individual, defining that individual. Therefore, she tried situating that person in a continuous present, with the phrases and events that keep imposing themselves on that person. All changes seem subtly muted, because of the echoing similarities, but those changes occur as part of the similarities: the repetitions occur in constantly new variations.

If she shows us one picture a thousand times, she will let us see it from a thousand different angles; therefore, we actually "see" different things, revisiting the object on different levels of consciousness. She tried "using everything," so she could fully explore every angle, every detail, every nuance (500). Besides her metaphors about a retold story and the cinema, we might compare her to a detective constantly going back over a crime scene and constantly replaying testimonies, always finding something new, always experimenting with new perspectives, always discovering—though the crime scene and the actual events remain the same. Stein apparently saw herself not as creating something bizarre but as creating something natural, something closer to the natural rhythms of thought, speech, and life than the artificial formulas of the fiction she usually read; in essence, she wanted to create what she saw in life, through an approach that reflects how people absorb events, reactions, etc., into their consciousness.

The "direction" to which she refers in the passage above should not evoke the usual paradigm of a story moving from balance to imbalance to crisis to resolution. The direction moves instead ever deeper into consciousness. That means moving backward and

forward in time, constantly repeating, to get at the complete expression of the moment, the now. The work might or might not use a certain amount of linear movement. More importantly, its main direction involves, to paraphrase a Winesburg citizen, getting at what the characters think, not just what they say. Getting there involves admitting a frustration with language and other human interactions; it also involves a constantly varied repetition of both—a constant rehearsal for the moment of successful contact. In bringing all of these elements into her work, Stein succeeds at creating a sense of consciousness within a work of fiction.

Unfortunately, most of her contemporaries neither saw nor wanted to see her accomplishments, and the literary establishment worked hard for the next few decades to block her from the literary canon. In "Gertrude Stein and the Modernist Canon," Marianne DeKoven claims that the establishment sought to marginalize Stein because they preferred not to acknowledge the literary innovations of a woman, especially not a gay woman (11-12). According to DeKoven, some critics even went so far as to suggest Stein coerced Anderson and other men into liking her work. Anyone who reads Anderson's writings to and about Stein can see that he needed no coercion to stand in awe of her accomplishments: her reclaiming of language and restructuring of narrative.

In drawing attention to those accomplishments, Carolyn Faunce Copeland explains Stein's narrative ability of picking up the speech patterns of characters (22). Copeland says Gustave Flaubert's narrative techniques greatly influenced *Three Lives*, as Stein had been impressed with those techniques while translating Flaubert's *Trois Contes*. However, she clarifies that Stein uses a much less distant narrator than Flaubert, one who can adapt to the individual character, one who

enters the minds of her characters without appearing to do so. In fact, she is not, strictly speaking, inside their minds; but her narrator picks up their speech patterns and rhythms—thereby 'sounding' like the characters themselves.  
(22-3)

While Flaubert works to give the narrator and the characters separate voices from each other, the narrator of "Melanctha" seems to blend with the fabrics of Melanctha, Jeff, and Rose, making the narrative voice sound much like the dialogue or thought patterns of those characters. Though never using first-person, the narrator still seems to become the particular characters in certain ways.

For example, the narrator uses a slow, steady pace that relies on circumlocution whenever focusing on Dr. Jeff Campbell, who relies on circumlocution; also, the slow evolution of the repeated phrases reflects the hesitance of Jeff and Melanctha

toward each other, as they come closer to touching (Copeland 31). Sitting on the stairs while her mother is dying, Jeff and Melanctha keep repeating themselves, with slight variations, slowly but cautiously revealing their interest in each other. Just as the sentences take many repetitions to become only slightly different, it takes Jeff and Melanctha many attempts to move only slightly closer together—ten pages of seemingly unchanging narrative. However, the sentences and the situation both develop.

Continuing her point about the narrator's appropriating a character's voice, Copeland quotes a passage from "Melanctha," which shows Jeff lying in bed thinking about a disagreement with Melanctha (*Lives* 178). According to Copeland, Stein makes the narrative seem more natural by using Jeff's language:

Her use of the gerunds 'his thinking,' and 'any sleeping,' echoes Jeff's use of the present participle in his thoughts. The narrator blends with Jeff again in the phrase, 'and it all came clear to him.' Strictly speaking, that phrase is not standard English; but it is the English that Jeff speaks. (32)

Stein allows the narrator—and the reader—to get below the surface of the story, into what the characters think and feel, by weaving their thought patterns into the narrative.

To distinguish Melanctha from Jeff, and to show their opposing views, the narrator constantly refers to Melanctha's "always wanting new things just to get excited" (*Lives* 119). Like most of the characters in *Winesburg*, she lives her life desiring something inexpressible, and wanting to go on desiring. As Lisa Ruddick illustrates in her book *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis*, Jeff wants to know through watching people, while Melanctha wants to know through random and exciting experiences. Both consider their way of knowing superior; however, Ruddick clarifies, the "question endlessly debated by Jeff and Melanctha is whether life is to consist of 'excitements' cultivated for their own sake or whether it should be directed toward broader ends" (17). Jeff and Melanctha keep moving in circular repetitions while trying to both meet their individual needs and win the on-going argument with the other person. That circular motion, of course, feeds into the words of the narrator, who seems sympathetic toward both characters but mostly interested in Melanctha.

The narrator describes her as "always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw" (89). Like many of the women in *Winesburg*, Melanctha sometimes takes sudden risks to fulfill her desires, but then regrets those risks. In fact, though the setting differs, Melanctha's wandering and desiring sounds like that of

many *Winesburg* characters: she keeps going to the railroad yards, hoping to find something, not knowing what. The fall of darkness gives her more courage, and she sometimes lets the men in the railroad yard go further than merely flirting. Later, she wonders why she goes there. Jeff seems to refer to such behavior when he criticizes other African Americans for always looking for ways "to get excited" and for not being good (119). Melanctha points out that Jeff never even goes to church, but he counters that he sees church as a necessary safeguard for most blacks, an alternative to getting into trouble; of course, he sees himself as an exception. After their long talk on the steps, Melanctha excuses herself to go lie down, leaving Jeff there to ponder his realization that he feels something deeper for Melanctha than all the people who find him interesting but only briefly keep him amused. In this sense, Melanctha and Jeff both live in a constantly unfulfilled state of desire.

A relationship slowly blossoms, but then they begin to grow apart, as their failure to communicate goes from a challenge to a source of annoyance. Notice how the repetition of the word "always" emphasizes the relentless nature of their frustration:

It was a struggle, sure to be going on always between them. It was a struggle that was as sure always to be going on between them, as their minds and hearts always were to have different ways of working. (153)

The difference between how men and women think and feel seems to erect a barrier, keeping them from understanding each other. We will encounter this same frustration repeatedly during my remaining chapters, as I look at some of the *Winesburg* citizens Melanctha apparently inspired.

The narrator's portrayal of Jeff also seems to affect many of *Winesburg's* citizens. For example, like George Willard, he begins to see the difficulty of knowing what other people think and feel—who they really are and what they really want. If he cannot even decide what he wants for himself, how can he grasp someone else's desire? Jeff admits to himself that he cannot understand himself or Melanctha, nor can he understand what they want from each other, just as *Winesburg* citizens like the teacher Kate Swift and her student George Willard never quite know what to say to each other or what they want from each other. That comparison seems especially apropos here, because, in his frustration, Jeff half-mockingly frames their relationship as student/teacher, though they actually learn from each other: "'I sure am a good boy to be learning all the time the right way you are teaching me'" (160). Continuing with the same metaphor, he calls himself "'a good scholar'" who is "'never playing hooky ever'" from his teacher.

As in *Winesburg*, the teacher/student relationship often goes awry. In the case of Jeff and Melanctha, both learn as much as they can from each other then grow bored. Worse yet, their sense of direction thwarts their connection: his life goes forward while his language goes in circles; Melanctha lives in circles but demands straight-forward language. In her unhappiness and restlessness, Melanctha begins to think she can no longer stand their discussions or his verbiage. In the following passage, his repetition of "always now" builds on the repetition of "always" I mentioned earlier, and it brings out his frustration with the rut they fall into, though he cares about her. He fears telling her his feelings, because they will argue. She expects him to always act a certain way and talk unequivocally, though he prefers to be in charge and to talk in circles:

Always Jeff felt now in himself, deep feelings.

Always now Jeff had to go so much faster than was real with his feeling. Yet always Jeff knew now he had a right, strong feeling. Always now when Jeff was wondering, it was Melanctha he was doubting, in the loving. . . .

Always now Jeff felt in himself, deep loving. Always now he did not really know, if Melanctha was true in her loving. . . .

Always now he liked it better when he was detained when he had to go and see her. Always now he never liked to go to be with her, although he never wanted really, not to be always with her. Always now he never felt really at ease with her, even when they were really good friends together. Always now he felt, with her, he could not be really honest to her.  
(165)

This fear of staying together and fear of letting go resolves itself when Melanctha returns to her wandering, and Rose returns to the center of her life. Melanctha never comes to understand her desiring and wandering, though she keeps finding new people to "get excited" with and new distractions to keep her mind occupied. She feels trapped in a man's world, a strong black woman in a system that prefers silent white women, but never quite articulates those feelings. Instead, she just keeps wandering and wanting not to wander. She knows she wants something more, but not how to obtain it or even recognize it.

In *Winesburg*, Louise Bentley's story echoes Melanctha's desire for understanding, learning, and communicating, as well as Melanctha's feeling of being trapped in a man's world. In this story and throughout *Winesburg*, Anderson appropriates much from *Lives*, including Stein's use of what she alternately refers to as

the "prolonged" or "continuous" present. Louise echoes Melanctha in other ways as well, as I will show after considering her story.

The following explication relies on chronological order, unlike the narrator's telling of the story. Most short stories take place in chronological order, within a short span of time—possibly including a brief flashback or a framing flashforward, but mostly limiting themselves to a few scenes that take place over a few days or weeks. If we follow Anderson's Steinien experimentation with time, we find a different order. First of all, it works as part of a story cycle that occurs within a larger story cycle, so it blurs the traditional sense of a short story as an independent and isolated work. Bravely assuming the story "Godliness III" begins where "Godliness II" ends, we see that "Godliness III" opens with Louise as a middle-aged woman who recently let her son go live with her father; I make that assumption because the narrator begins by referring to Louise as living with John, but not with their child.

With that in mind, we can establish the following time structure for "Godliness III: Surrender": (1) a middle-aged Louise; (2) looping back to her early childhood; (3) Louise as a fifteen-year-old; (4) one evening, shortly after her arrival at the Hardy home; (5) some time within two months after her arrival; (6) one evening that winter; (7) the next day; (8) the next evening; (9) several days later; (10) two or three weeks later; (11) looping back to the Friday before the scene I mention as #10; (12) whenever Louise and John Hardy become lovers (no definite time lapse given); (13) a few months later, when they marry; (14) a few more months later; (15) the first few months after their child's birth. The story never returns to the latest time-frame, the time with which it begins: the closing scene happens years before the opening scene. Anderson's use of time here warrants attention not only because the narrative order shifts around like consciousness (i.e., like Stein's narrative) but also because it epitomizes the "everything is now" approach of "Melanctha" and *Winesburg*, the continuous present.

As with many of Winesburg's other citizens, we can relate Louise Bentley to learning and communicating, partially because of her love for books and studies, which, ironically, isolates her. The narrator tells us that "The story of Louise Bentley. . . is a story of misunderstanding" (87). Furthermore, he sees Louise, like many of his other characters, as another job for the poet, another soul he cannot understand but can only try to understand by writing about her: "Before such women as Louise can be understood and their lives made livable, much will have to be done. Thoughtful books will have to be written and thoughtful lives lived by people about them."

At age fifteen, Louise leaves her widowed father to live in Winesburg, with Albert Hardy's family, so she can go to Winesburg High School. She wants to better herself, to make an education possible. Albert lives with his son, John, and two daughters, Mary and Harriet. Louise and John will later become lovers, but Mary and Harriet despise her, responding jealously to her success in school. Albert, a member of Winesburg's board of education, keeps telling his daughters about the need for books and learning, using Louise's studiousness as an example they should follow. He thinks an education would have made his life easier, and he knows his two daughters will need an extra edge to survive. Harriet replies, "'I hate books and I hate anyone who likes books'" (88).

The narrator links Louise to books, then shows Harriet's rejection of books. He says we need to read books to understand Louise, then makes it clear that the Hardy sisters want neither to read books nor to understand her; thus, she remains isolated, a book left on a shelf. Besides, Louise's education fails to help her with human interaction, her most immediate need. As I will discuss in Chapter III, the teacher Kate Swift worries that George Willard will write without looking beneath the surface of lives, thus finding nothing substantial to say when he writes; Louise embodies Kate's concern in that she reads and writes without living, loving, questioning, or being heard. She never sees beneath the surface of her own life, much less anyone else's.

As noted above, Louise's studious nature leads to acknowledgment and acceptance from Albert Hardy. Though she never seems to notice his compliments, they make the other two girls envious. Louise even starts going back to the loneliness of the isolated farm during the weekends, to escape the loneliness of a crowded house and town. Realizing Mary and Harriet will never accept her, she begins to think of making friends with John and catches herself watching him. Like Melanctha, who gives up her wandering for the black patriarch Jeff Campbell, Louise turns to a patriarchal figure for safety, even if he can offer her nothing else.

Louise's longing for acceptance from the young man seems to spring, at least in part, from the way her father rejects her. In "Godliness I," Jesse wants a son to help him carry out God's will, a son he will name David. Given Jesse's obsession with the Bible and with biblical names, even Louise's name suggests Jesse's rejection of her, in that the name Louise never appears in the Bible. Maybe Jesse rejects her because he assumes a woman cannot serve a divine purpose, other than bearing a child; Jesse treats his wife poorly, and she then fails to show love to Louise. Whatever the limited connection between Jesse and Louise, she will later name her male child David, in accordance with the wishes of a father who never grants her wish for love.

With no template for the expression of love, Louise's attempts at contact manifest themselves in surprising and absurd ways. She acts as desperately as Melanctha in her desire for something she cannot articulate. Though she never acts out her mental wandering sexually, as Melanctha does, she still manages to put herself into unexpected situations.

At one point, she impulsively projects her amorphous desire for John onto the farm hand who brings her home during the weekends. In one of the book's most comical moments, he ignores her advances, so she leaves him on the side of the road. However, that angry reaction happens after we learn the depths of Louise's bafflement; the desolation of her childhood mixes with a new loneliness, and she tells the "frightened" boy, "I hate everyone. . . . I hate father and old man Hardy, too. . . . I get my lessons there in the school in town but I hate that also" (95). The Steinien echoing here sounds like Harriet's hate dialogue, which Louise integrates into her consciousness of her situation. It links the characters together, unifying them while ironically emphasizing their isolation; after all, if the characters fully recognized each other's isolation, they would probably understand how to destroy those barriers or at least how to accept them as simply a part of human existence.

Louise wants contact, a shared quality of some sort. Like Melanctha's relationship with Jeff, Louise's relationship with John keeps bringing the two young people near contact, understanding, but they never quite reach it:

The mind of the country girl became filled with the idea of drawing close to the young man. She thought that in him might be found the quality she had all her life been seeking in people. It seemed to her that between herself and all other people in the world, a wall had been built up and that she was living just on the edge of some warm inner circle of life that must be quite open and understanding to others. (91)

That passage uses the book's pervasive metaphor of the walls between the characters, but the more Louise explores her feelings, the more those feelings move from mystery to status quo:

The age-old woman's desire to be possessed had taken possession of her, but so vague was her notion of life that it seemed to her just the touch of John Hardy's hand upon her own hand would satisfy. (94)

That sentence contains many of the words the narrator uses for repetition throughout *Winesburg*: *desire*, *vague*, *notion*, *touch*,

hand; she suddenly resigns herself to Winesburg's stagnation. While Melanctha thinks casual sex might fulfill her longings, Louise thinks physical yet unsexual contact might work, but she cannot be sure of anything about such a vague desire. John also acts from an old notion, when he figures she simply wants sex. Also note the Steinien wording of "desire to be possessed had taken possession of her." Rather than falling in love with John, she falls in love with a notion of security and tradition. By belonging to someone, she can feel safe, if not fulfilled, so she continues trying to gain John's interest, hoping he can end the isolation.

Like Melanctha, and like her fellow Winesburg citizens, Louise makes most of her attempts at contact under the cover of night, telling herself, "'In the darkness it will be easier to say things'" (93). One night, wanting to spend some time with John, Louise accidentally walks in on Mary and a young man, but neither notices her; seeing their passion furthers Louise's notion that she simply needs a man. The same night, fearing she will never make an ambitious enough move toward John, she slips a note under his door. She tries to articulate her desires within the note, but it says nothing about him or her attraction to him. Instead, it only reflects the ambiguity of her desire and the fact that she settles for the nearest young man: "'I want someone to love me and I want to love someone'" (94). In other words, she chooses John by default; he happens to live in the same house. From there, she states not her love for John but simply the urgency of "someone" meeting her needs. The letter concludes with directions for setting up their rendezvous, not with any question of how John might feel about her.

It takes John "two or three" weeks to come to her (94). The narrator's use of indefinite time here adds to the timelessness of the book, the non-linear structure of the stories, and, most importantly, the idea that Louise's life seems somehow shapeless, indefinite, poorly defined. Most writers would give a definite time, or say "after a while," but Anderson makes a special point of giving two different, undistinguished times, projecting the directionlessness of Louise's life into that of the narrative, in the same way Stein makes Melanctha's story wander as much as her mind and body. Like Jeff's circumlocution and Melanctha's desiring, Louise's monotony and sense of futility affect the language of the narrator.

Predictably, Louise becomes lovers with John, and, fearing pregnancy, they soon marry. Actually, she just wants friendship, or something else she cannot explain to herself, and she soon comes to resent his confusion of emotional needs with sexual desire. His misinterpretations start from the time she first initiates contact with him, and they never seem to end.

Not surprisingly, Louise's affair with John Hardy begins after she writes him the note. Again, her inexpressible feelings tie in with written language, a desire to exist on the page, a desire to find articulation. And again, no one understands—not even the writer. She neither understands what she hopes to say nor understands why her designated "someone" sees her advances as strictly sexual. Even after they marry, he always sees her effort at communication as an endeavor to initiate sex. He interprets none of it on a communicative level, other than the communication of sexual desire; instead, he reduces all her language to a mating call. Like Jeff, he cannot comprehend what his lover expects of him. Maybe she could correct him, if only she knew what she wants to voice, but the narrator makes it clear she never knows that:

All during the following year Louise tried to make her husband understand the vague and intangible hunger that had led to the writing of the note and that was still unsatisfied. Again and again she crept into his arms and tried to talk of it, but always without success. Filled with his own notions of love between men and women, he did not listen but began to kiss her on the lips. That confused her so that in the end she did not want to be kissed. She did not know what she wanted. (96)

The words "vague and intangible" suggest something abstract—not concrete, not solid, not expressible—the desire she shares with Melanctha, a desire for desire itself. Her desire, like her life and the narrative, lacks definite lines or boundaries. How can she possibly explain such a desire to someone else?

More confusingly, the narrator refers not to a "vague and intangible need" but to a "vague and intangible hunger," so even the readers cannot help but interpret her desire as sexual, just as we cannot help but see Melanctha's desire as sexual when she wanders through the railroad yard looking for men. Louise becomes angry and frustrated at John for interpreting her advances sexually, but the advances sound sexual; her unsatisfied hunger causes her to creep into his arms. Why would he not interpret that sexually? Why does that surprise her? As the narrator points out, society conditions John to interpret her advances as erotic, rather than think she might actually want to articulate something. He cannot see her attempts at making a metaphysical connection. In his mindset, he merely performs the function society, and Louise, should expect of him.

Instead of trying to consider any other possibilities, John shuts her mouth by pressing his mouth against it: "he did not listen but began to kiss her on the lips." The lips almost used to express her meaning become the lips used to physically express

their indescribable connection—or lack of connection. The lips that cannot convey can only kiss. Louise accepts the kiss, and certainly seems to like it at first, considering that the narrator says it “confused her so that *in the end* she did not want to be kissed” [emphasis added]. This suggests that she wants his kisses at first, but since the kissing never transcends physical connection, she eventually rejects even the physical connection. For most of the *Winesburg* characters, sexual contact tends to replace any emotional contact, but when the substitute becomes paramount, it becomes worse than nothing. We might say that sex repulses her, an attitude she would share with many Winesburg citizens, or we might say that sex serves only as a painful reminder of the deeper “hunger” no one seems capable of filling.

The same passage that begins with the inexpressible (“vague and intangible”) also ends with the inexpressible: “She did not know what she wanted.” Without knowing what she wants, how can she explain it to him? She knows only that she wants something. How can she share a message she cannot articulate for herself? How can she escape her shell without knowing what locks her inside it? Like Melanctha, Louise feels entrapped in a patriarchal world but cannot articulate her entrapment or how to escape it. Marilyn Judith Atlas explains:

Through the development of Louise . . . Anderson again explores how the society they live in and the people with whom they associate victimize women. When Anderson presents Louise Bentley’s frustrated life and her inability to find the love she needs he has his narrator intrude with a statement [about the need for certain books and lives] indicting society and calling writers of the period to action. (258)

Ultimately, Atlas sees Louise Bentley as “one of the female victims of *Winesburg* whose strength and creativity lead nowhere” because Anderson traps her with an incompatible life and situation (259). However, Atlas feels such depictions actually help women, by exposing injustice, but I will save that discussion for later chapters. The point to consider here is that Louise feels a longing, wants to communicate, and becomes a victim of misunderstanding—including her own misunderstanding of her own desires. In a better society, Louise’s education would garner more encouragement, and would benefit her more, leading to a more productive life. In *Winesburg*, Louise’s education means nothing, except the chance to meet a man and produce another man-child.

Despite how this continued lack of contact makes her feel, Louise passes the problem on to another generation. In a

surprising reversal of Winesburg tradition, Louise rejects her male child, treating him the same way Jesse treated her:

Sometimes she stayed in the room with [David] all day, walking about and occasionally creeping close to touch him tenderly with her hands, and then other days came when she did not want to see or be near the tiny bit of humanity that had come into her house. (96)

She will eventually submit him willingly to the father who failed to love her. She resents David but figures that, as a boy, he will survive. Consumed by her loveless upbringing, she says she would have been a better mother to a girl.

The story ends there, on a seemingly hopeless note. However, we might consider that, in all his going back and forth in time, the narrator never stops referring to Louise as "Louise Bentley," despite her marriage to John Hardy. If this marriage completely traps her and destroys her identity, why would the narrator continue to use her maiden name? Living in rural America at the turn of the century, it seems unlikely for a woman to keep her maiden name after marriage, and they are clearly married when "Godliness III" begins. Yet the narrator still calls her "Louise Bentley." Perhaps a part of her continues to assert itself, and the narrator wishes to reflect that. Whatever the case, her entrapment never completely suffocates her, just as Melanctha continues to struggle within the confines of patriarchy.

Consider the similarities between this story and "Melanctha": (1) the use of continuous present, with all of Louise's life seeming to occur at the same time; (2) the use of beginning again and again, with the story looping backward and forward, as many as three times within a single paragraph, just as "Melanctha" uses the analeptic structure I will discuss momentarily; (3) a woman who feels unloved by her parents; (4) a woman who wants to assert herself within a patriarchal society, but resorts to men as a safety net; (5) a desire to keep desiring, for "ways to get excited"; (6) a courage linked with darkness, which I will also discuss more momentarily; (7) an awareness of and boredom with tradition. As examples of that last similarity, we might consider Melanctha's not caring about what Jeff or Rose see as "right" for her, as well as Louise's not feeling any need to maintain her marriage or care for the son she knows society will embrace. And if we broaden our comparison to look not just at the story of Louise Bentley but also to include the other tales from *Winesburg*, we find further evidence of Anderson's constant appropriations from "Melanctha." Stein and Anderson both avoid cause and effect: "Melanctha" and *Winesburg* both ask us to recognize repetition with variation, part of Stein's notion of a continuous present.

Anderson even re-uses the same plots, but with different characters and situations; in fact, many of the characters have almost the same name, which only summons more attention to their similarities.

In both works, the semantics of social interaction keep breaking down, leaving the characters unable to truly express themselves. Linda W. Wagner sees the failure of language to help characters finally reach an anticipated connection as the "mood of isolation, of emotional poverty, that haunts the stories of *Winesburg* and gives them the strongest bond with Stein's *Three Lives*" (83). I will explore that mood in the chapters ahead, but I think the connections between *Winesburg* and "Melanctha" go even further.

Anderson and Stein both loved to create long but simple-sounding sentences, either by swirling phrases around a single noun, or by listing adjectives or verbs. Take, for example, this sentence from one of the *Winesburg* stories: "Before they knew what had come over them, the base runners were watching the man, edging off the bases, advancing, retreating, held as by an invisible cord" (107). The sentence starts with a slow and steady subordinate clause, then intensifies by stringing together participles; thus, the sentence structure reflects the excitement and anticipation the sentence describes. In a less easily discernible though no less innovative manner than Stein, Anderson captures the playful experimentation with syntax that she uses to capture Melanctha's moods. Of course, that playfulness sounds more obvious in "Melanctha," but without Stein's radical experimentation, Anderson would never have taken that reclaiming of language and applied it to his supposedly tame prose style. Though his sentences seem to bear no resemblance to hers at first, we can easily see that many of them, including the one I just quoted, use a folksy sounding version of Stein's sentences, like this one from "Melanctha," which mirrors Rose's overbearing personality:

And so Rose had Melanctha Herbert always there to help her, and she sat and was lazy and she bragged and complained a little and she told Melanctha how she ought to do, to get good what she wanted like she Rose always did it, and always Melanctha was doing everything Rose ever needed. (215)

With both writers, the sentences reflect the action or the mood, by stringing together participle phrases.

Besides such toying with a sentence's structure to add to the impact of its words, Anderson also appropriated Stein's tendency to repeat words to show a slowly changing viewpoint. Compare Jeff's "always now" passage I quoted from earlier with the

following passage in the *Winesburg* story "The Strength of God," which I will discuss in Chapter III. I will italicize the words used for insistence: *passion*, *lust*, *has*, and *will*. Notice that *lust* replaces *passion* right after *will* replaces *has*, as if moving from the lifeless *has* to the more determined *will* somehow adds to the savagery the passage describes. Read aloud, the passage demands more intonation with each *will*. Frustrated with his desire for the teacher Kate Swift, the Rev. Curtis Hartman tells himself,

"She *has* always been ashamed of *passion* and *has* cheated me. . . . Man *has* a right to expect living *passion* and beauty in a woman. He *has* no right to forget that he is an animal and in me there is something that is Greek. I *will* throw off the woman of my bosom and seek other women. I *will* besiege this school teacher. I *will* fly in the face of all men and if I am a creature of carnal *lusts* I *will* then live for my *lusts*." (154)

That passage borrows Stein's technique for revealing the process of consciousness through the use of repeated words that form slowly evolving sentences.

Stein explains that sentence usage in "More Grammar For A Sentence" in which she defines a paragraph as complete and not in need of repeating. Rather than merely a collection of sentences, it forms a work with closure. The paragraphs end, but the sentences continue. Any sentence worth using the first time will probably begin again. A work contains rivaling sentences, and they will war in varying forms, creating different paragraphs. Seeing sentences as more important than paragraphs, Stein keeps referring to paragraphs as "natural" and "resolution." She takes more interest in the sentences that build the paragraphs, explaining that a paragraph "says so," but implying that a sentence leaves itself more open to interpretations and possibilities (White 562). Letting her sentences manifest themselves in constantly new forms helps her build the continuous present.

Anderson drew from his profound understanding of how Stein utilizes the continuous present in "Melanctha," how she avoids simple progression in some formulaic, causal fashion. Rather than a definite direction, the story meanders about with Melanctha, pulled around by her desires; she wanders, so the narrator wanders with her. *Winesburg* also features constant wanderings provoked by desire. George Willard, Alice Hindman, and several other Winesburg citizens often take walks, down the streets or in the woods; this action expresses a seeking, a desire. As with his other appropriations, Anderson is less obvious with the technique than Stein, but he uses it nonetheless.

The lives of George and Melanctha coincide in another way, a way that forms the structural basis of both books. As I will discuss in more detail in the chapters ahead, George's life begins to change during his early adolescence, when others see some special quality in him or simply assume that the job of reporter makes him a listener. During these years, he begins trying to interpret the words of the grotesques to benefit himself, then simply to try to understand the grotesques, even if their words and actions confound him. As with Melanctha, sexual desire and confusion deflect his journey, and the self-righteousness of others sometimes confuses him. However, his mother's death finally transforms him, allowing him to share a pure and fulfilling moment of contact with another young seeker.

Melanctha's story also centers around life and death. The story begins with her delivering Rose Johnson's baby. It then loops back to when she met Rose and back further to Melanctha as a twelve-year-old girl who rebels against her parents. Her only sustained romance begins with her mother's death, and she begins to reexamine her relationship with a mother she always resented; as with George, the mother transforms in her time of death. This story ends with Melanctha's dying, while George's journey ends with a departure from the setting that would entrap him, that would kill his imagination. Viewed from a structural basis, Stein's story follows the same analeptic pattern as most of the *Winesburg* stories. Viewed from a thematic basis, the story uses the same thematic framework as *Winesburg*, showing death as the only obstacle to a life of continued searching. Seeing the deaths of others deeply affects the main characters; in George's case, however, his journey seems to begin just as the book closes, while Melanctha dies at the end.

In both works, the narrator seems at times focused on one particular character, at times focused on another particular character, and at times slightly or extremely detached from the characters. Marianne DeKoven explains this fluidity in her essay "Half In And Half Out of Doors: Gertrude Stein and Literary Tradition," saying that each of Stein's tales from *Lives* features not just a separate narrator, but a constantly transforming narrator. Despite looking alternately through the eyes of Jeff or of Melanctha, the narrator often criticizes both characters, or all the characters. Sometimes the narrator tries to move the story forward; other times, the narrative keeps looping backward or stalling in a particular moment. Anderson, with his idea of life as a series of important moments, also looks for various ways to focus on those moments. Therefore, his narrator will look through the eyes of George for a while, then the eyes of another character, then the eyes of another, all the while moving back and forth in time. Like the narrator of "Melanctha," he also likes to

comment on the characters, though much more gently. Both narrators even seem to lapse into a social/historical voice at times, creating a wider framework for the story.

Despite these frequent changes in the narrative voice, "Melanctha" and *Winesburg* both remain cohesive, largely by constantly returning to central images. As I mentioned earlier, both works contain frequent references to night as a time that grants courage to the timid, allowing them to initiate contact without fearing embarrassment from those who see them. Consider, for example, when the narrator refers to Melanctha as a "seeker" and describes her "wandering" in the railroad yards:

Then when the darkness covered everything all over, she would begin to learn to know this man or that. She would advance, they would dimly respond, and then she would withdraw a little, dimly, and always she did not know what it was that really held her. Sometimes she would almost go over, and then the strength in her of not really knowing, would stop the average man in his endeavor. It was a strange experience of ignorance and power and desire. Melanctha did not know what it was that she so badly wanted. She was afraid, and yet she did not understand that here she really was a coward. (96)

That passage sounds like the one that repeats itself throughout *Winesburg*: under the safety of darkness, the grotesques approach George Willard, not really knowing what they want from him or want to say to him. In some cases, they use physical contact; in others, they try to connect with words. Either way, they remain seekers, with the darkened streets of Winesburg serving as their railroad yards. Though George recognizes some strange, unidentifiable power in them, he fails to give them the ineffable something they need, fails to quench their "vague and intangible hunger." Stein lets the same situation constantly happen, with her main character as the seeker; Anderson lets it repeat with the main character, the person the grotesques seek, which causes George to become a seeker as well. Melanctha, however, never recognizes the simple fact of isolation that George eventually recognizes, so she spends her entire life seeking something she cannot find.

Despite both writers' focusing on the secret, hidden, and unspoken desires, Anderson makes the unlikely advance of using gay subtext even more obviously in *Winesburg* than Stein uses it in "Melanctha." I consider that odd because, despite his loss of interest in his first three wives, no indications suggest Anderson was gay or bisexual, while we know Stein was both gay and

concerned with gender issues. However, I will save most of those issues for my next few chapters.

One gender issue we might consider here, however, involves the fact that Melanctha's discovery of her "power" as a woman makes her resent her father's anger and stand up to him (95). As with everything else about Melanctha, she cannot understand this power, but her interest in it consumes her, and she keeps exploring it. In a similar scene I will examine in Chapter IV, Belle Carpenter discovers her power over men and rebels against the father who abused her mother (*Winesburg* 112).

Finally, both writers play with time. During his sometimes condescending introduction to *Winesburg*, Malcolm Cowley makes a point about Anderson's use of time, but he sees it as a defect, and fails to see the link with Stein. He refers to Anderson's working of the subconscious mind, then says,

Time as a logical succession of events was Anderson's greatest difficulty in writing novels or even long stories. He got his tenses confused and carried his heroes ten years forward or back in a single paragraph. His instinct was to present everything together, as in a dream. (4)

Actually, Anderson probably intended all of that, and Cowley's reference to the subconscious mind feeds back into Stein's intentional use of the continuous present to show the workings of the subconscious mind. Anderson uses that technique throughout *Winesburg*, not by accident but as a tool to capture the inner workings of the characters' thought patterns. In getting at what people think, the narrator fulfills the goal of his main character, George Willard.

Exactly how well Anderson utilizes the techniques he and Stein pioneered will provide much discussion for the chapters that follow. Though my concern rests primarily on *Winesburg*'s value as an individual work, I also want to clarify its value as a work influenced by various writers and movements in American literature. For now, I want to begin looking specifically at some of the characters and themes of *Winesburg*, beginning with how several authority figures confront problems of communication, language, and isolation.

CHAPTER III  
TEACHERS GROPING IN THE DARK

The two teachers in *Winesburg, Ohio* both become victims of their desire to connect with others. I want to examine how Kate Swift and Wing Biddlebaum feel drawn toward and alienated from the citizens of Winesburg, then look at several other authority figures who play some recuperative role in the life of the community in general and George Willard's life in particular. Anderson's most loved work contains many isolated characters, but the narrator finds special irony in isolating the two teachers, the two individuals whom we most expect to touch other people's lives. Because of their occupation, we count on Kate and Wing to communicate knowledge and articulate some sort of message; on the surface, they seem capable of neither.

The students of Kate Swift see her as cold and unfeeling, but the narrator reveals her status as "the most eagerly passionate soul among them" (162). Kate ridicules her own creativity by using it for no greater purpose than to make up strange anecdotes about Charles Lamb and other famous writers. We see little of her artistic ambitions, other than what the narrator tells us about her past, and she never even acknowledges her own success at sharing practical advice about words and writing. If we see this teacher as unfortunate, what should we make of the one who no longer thinks of himself as a teacher?

In "Hands," the town boys make fun of Wing Biddlebaum, and almost everyone else tries to avoid him, but the narrator relates him to poets. A poet names him Wing (28); telling about his hands "is a job for a poet" (29); and it would take a poet to fully explain Wing's background and his love for the schoolboys he once taught. As I discussed in Chapter II, the narrator often appropriates a character's personality and thought patterns; in this case, the need for poetry and poetic expression links with Wing's submerged past.

In fact, Wing kept his past as a teacher secret throughout the twenty years since he fled to Winesburg to escape an angry and misinformed crowd. "Hands" opens with Wing standing outside, waiting for George Willard. It then begins again at the time Wing first tried to express himself to George, and then begins again even further back. This constant looping backward in time while standing still represents Anderson's sense of a continuous present: Wing's life never progresses, but stays in a perpetual state of unarticulated desire. Wing lives his life wanting to reach out but afraid to reach out, constantly lunging his hands forward then having to clench them and beat them on something, in an almost masturbatory motion.

Chronologically, Wing's story began in the Pennsylvania town where he taught local boys. Unlike the boys who taunt Wing in Winesburg, these boys loved Wing, then known as "Adolph Meyers." The narrator describes the younger Wing as "one of those rare, little understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness" (31). Of course, that term "little understood" describes most of Winesburg's citizens; the character of Wing foreshadows the longing for the right words or right touch we will constantly encounter in the other *Winesburg* stories. Wing's tragedy epitomizes the tragedy of Winesburg; yet his charm epitomizes the town's charm. Though living on the outskirts of town and outside the realms of acceptance, he introduces us to struggles common to Winesburg's citizens, to themes and images that assert themselves throughout the *Winesburg* volume.

Despite the link of Wing with Winesburg, the story's mixing of past and present reveals that Wing's struggle began outside Winesburg, away from the berry pickers, away from the decayed house where he now lives. Just as Kate Swift would later try to nurture the spark she sees in the young writer George Willard, Adolph Meyers used his touching, stroking, caressing hands to channel the ability to dream, to create, into the boys. But his mission died when a half-witted boy shared erotic fantasies about him, presenting those fantasies as reality. We learn that the fathers always harbored such fears about Adolph in the back of their minds. When the other boys innocently reported that he constantly touched them, it seemed to substantiate the idea of Adolph as a pedophile.

We can safely call the character gay, from the reference to his "hunger" for George Willard (33), and from Anderson's notes and drafts (see Chapter V). That would make him an outcast in any turn-of-the-century American town. However, nothing in the story corroborates what the men wanted to believe. Still, they punched him, kicked him, and drove him from the town, without ever explaining his banishment to him. While Adolph always used his hands for positive efforts, the narrator tells us the men used their hands to grab lanterns like a lynch mob, and to grab a rope for hanging (32). One of them screamed, "'Keep your hands to yourself'" (33). Wing only knows that their accusations somehow involved his hands, thus initiating the guilt his hands now bring him.

In their innocence, the boys saw nothing sexual about Adolph's hands or his touch. In their willingness to interpret something innocent as sexual, the men turned a pure act into a source for scandal. As Ray Lewis White illustrates, sex in general tends to sound filthy and repulsive in the *Winesburg* stories, because of the characters' attitude toward it. They repress sexuality, and blame their sexual thoughts on someone else. The

men feared Adolph's sexual orientation might differ from what they accepted or understood, so they quickly believed he would commit an atrocity. This confusing of homosexuals with child molesters hardly sounds unlikely, considering that people still make that mistaken connection, and that David D. Anderson, one of the leading Sherwood Anderson scholars, even fails to separate the two concepts when he explicates "Hands" in his essay "Sherwood Anderson's Moments of Insight" (160-61). Anyone who fails to see the differences will also fail to see how skillfully Sherwood Anderson exploits the human fears regarding sexuality and social identity, as well as the tendency to blame others for those fears.

Though also failing to see that distinction between sexual orientation and sexual victimization, Rex Burbank supplies a fascinating metaphor for how Anderson builds the story around the image of Wing's hands as a reflection of a trapped creativity that keeps reaching outward then repressing itself:

The epiphany occurs after Willard leaves, and the full ironic meaning of Biddlebaum's life is felt in the discrepancy between his religious posture, as he kneels, and the meaningless drumming of his fingers as they pluck bread crumbs from the floor: Biddlebaum is a kind of defeated, strangely perverted priest of love. (65)

However, Burbank might amplify that image into one of Christ, considering that the imagery here, and in "The Strength of God," links teachers to Christ. As a Christlike martyr, Wing accepts and internalizes the burdens placed upon him by others, even if they only blame him for their own fears and desires. Eventually, his desire to emotionally or sexually connect with someone focuses strictly on one particular person: George Willard.

The scene that provides a framework for establishing the story's continuous present revolves around Wing standing on his decaying veranda, waiting to see George Willard. Welford Dunaway Taylor sees their relationship not as potentially gay but strictly as that of teacher/student, claiming Wing sees George as "a sensitive boy who should be encouraged" (28). However, when he catches himself almost touching George the way he had touched his students, Wing looks horrified and walks away with tears in his eyes. Though somewhat sympathetic, George realizes Wing's conflict involves those famous hands, and decides he wants to know nothing about them. He even fails to show up when Wing expects him. With George's own fear and confusion over his budding sexuality, he certainly cannot feel equipped to deal with someone else who fears the power of touch. However, he never blames Wing for any of his cravings or anxieties, and never intends to punish Wing in any

way. Nonetheless, we might consider avoidance the worst of unintentional punishments, since Wing already feels alienated.

In "The Strength of God," the Reverend Curtis Hartman, another perverted priest of love, blames Kate Swift for his own sexual desire, labeling her a creature of sin. Just as Adolph never learned of the accusations against him, Kate never knows she serves as the target of the reverend's lust, as well as his accusations. He directs his sermon at her, thinking of her, though he is the one who peeps at her through the hole he smashes in a stained glass window, destroying the image of a small boy kneeling before Christ, who lays his hands upon the boy's head. This image, ironically linked to Hartman's desire to touch Kate Swift, echoes the purity of Adolph's love for the boys, by showing Christ as a teacher of children.

Despite their pessimistic tone, "Hands" and "The Strength of God" both end with images that clearly link teachers to Christ. However, we should keep in mind that, following the gospels, any Christ figure holds the potential of becoming a martyr, especially in the place where he or she lives. As I will discuss in relation to Dr. Parcival, the Christ figure tends to receive a hostile reception, not as one who teaches and touches, but as one who disrupts the established social order and poses some sort of threat. After all, Christ received the greatest persecution at the hands of the religious, patriarchal hierarchy, while he allied himself with the grotesques of his time, such as prostitutes or people of mixed pedigree. In other words, by linking certain characters with Christ, Anderson elevates their nobility, but he also sets them up for rejection, often at the hands of men who see themselves as holy.

Like the men attacking Adolph to protect their sons, Hartman almost makes the peeping sound like a holy mission. At first, he relates Kate to "good but somewhat worldly women" in a novel that had "fallen into his hands" (149). The narrator's language here, weaving into Hartman's thought patterns, suggests that Hartman would pretend not to read such a risqué novel on purpose; this note reveals much, since Hartman constantly makes himself sound innocent and pure, blaming Kate and even God for his lust (153). While Hartman directs his sermons at Kate, supposedly to save her soul, he continues to think of her in fleshly terms: most of his thoughts and observations about her involve her skin. This lusting, peeping, and feeling guilty lasts throughout the fall and winter, ending with his seeing Kate praying naked. Her innocence finally asserts itself through her nakedness, which Hartman relates to the sexless picture of the boy kneeling before Christ.

Still, when Hartman tells George Willard of this final look at Kate, he almost makes it sound like God always wanted him to peep, saying that "she is an instrument of God, bearing the

message of truth" (155). We could compare his rambling to what Kate and Wing say about words: a message longing for definition and articulation, a message more suggestive than denotative. Hartman's sudden revelation, however vague, occurs quickly after his decision to live out his lusts, to admit that in people "there is an animal" and in himself "something that is Greek" (154). Sexuality appears as bestial and forbidden. Neither Greek nor animal seems appropriate for a reserved Methodist minister who never slept with any woman but his wife: Christian tradition associates animalistic instinct and the ancient Greeks with paganism and dangerously unrestrained sexuality. In seeing Hartman's struggle with sexuality, we also see him as more than the stock hypocritical character. As Charles Glickberg I explains, this story

strikes an authentically new note in American fiction as it portrays with compassionate insight the struggle of this inhibited minister, lineal descendent of Hawthorne's Arthur Dimmesdale, to face the truth of his carnal nature. (53-54)

As he struggles with his confusion, he will grow, even if his insights still seem blurred at the end. Whatever his own limitations, he succeeds in escaping his victimizing of Kate Swift, and he succeeds in pushing George toward further growth.

Hartman's confession to George epitomizes both the fractured nature of Winesburg lives and the careful architecture of Anderson's story cycle. This scene represents a structural intersection of "The Teacher" with "The Strength of God." In "Strength," Kate remains completely unaware of Hartman, though she launches the central conflict in a year of his life. In "The Teacher," George remains completely unaware of how he affects Kate, though her frustration causes her to run to her room, throw herself on her bed, and pray in the nude. Hartman, in "Strength," sees the action, unaware that George causes it. He runs and tells George, who—like everyone else—knows nothing about the peeping, and he gives George a religious interpretation of the event. George tries to read something profound into what Hartman says, then later goes home and tries to read something profound into what Kate says before running away from him. Even if he means to articulate something else, Hartman actually manages to articulate something important to George: Kate is pure in her nakedness and desire; she faces her sexual and emotional frustration by stripping and throwing herself on the bed.

Because of his obvious criticism of the failures and fragmentation in human interaction, Anderson has often received the label of holding a dim view of human nature. Still, though Anderson joins Theodore Dreiser and some of the other naturalists

in criticizing society's fear, prejudice, and dehumanization, he shows a great love for many of the individuals society mistreats. David D. Anderson illustrates the distinction in his essay "Sherwood Anderson's Moments of Insight":

He was not writing about society at all; he was writing about people. Each of his people is conceived and presented as an individual rather than as merely another manifestation of society. That he is part of the social structure is important only insofar as every individual is part of that structure, and Anderson was not merely interested in treating the individual in terms of that relationship; he was interested in treating the individual as human being. (155)

David D. Anderson sums up the lesson that most of Winesburg's inhabitants fail to learn: to tear through the superficialities of Winesburg and see the truth and beauty in each individual human being. That lesson also comes through in some of what the teachers try to share with George Willard, but Sherwood Anderson remains highly conscious of the societal and verbal barriers that keep even his most sympathetic characters apart from each other. In "The Teacher," Kate Swift and George Willard want to communicate with each other, but their societal fear of sex frustrates their efforts. Feeling connected to no one else in Winesburg, she wants to connect with him emotionally, philosophically, and sexually. Her initial desire to nurture his creative spark becomes tangled up in the sexual impulse she wants to restrain: expression through words collides with expression through sex. Because her sexual frustration disrupts their conversation, she never fully explains what she means about the difficulty of a writer's life, or why she tells him, "'The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say'" (163). However, she communicates that advice through spoken language, so she never feels fully confident that he gets at what she thinks, rather than what she says.

In "Hands," Wing tries to connect with George while touching him, tries to teach him to dream, telling him "'you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices'" (30). However, Wing's fear and guilt upset George so much that George begins to avoid him, and keeps worrying about Wing's hands. Still, he decides to not ask about the hands. Though Kate's advice resembles Wing's, George seems even less equipped to interpret her affection. When her desire overwhelms her, she also runs away, but then she comes back, embraces him again, beats his chest, runs away again. But he continues to desire her, not realizing that she wants to articulate something other than sex, something she cannot even explain to herself.

In his essay "*Winesburg, Ohio: Art and Isolation*," Edwin Fussell examines how the characters reach George with their words, not because the words make sense, but simply because he sees the urgency in their longing to communicate something to him. Fussell sees the advice of the various characters to George as "not wholly sound" but "well-intentioned," emphasizing part of the book's appeal as George's ability to nevertheless "credit the local talkers with more wisdom than they must strike us as having" (42). That the characters can make George grope in the dark for their implications says something about their ability to touch each other; the insistence of that image suggests that the attempts at communication keep causing teachers and students to continue groping, searching. When his advisors fail to articulate their message, George seems to assume he merely cannot comprehend the message, yet that one day he will. As Fussell illustrates, when George says he "missed something Kate Swift was trying to say" (*Winesburg* 166), he could easily make the same comment about all the characters who try to tell him something. However, the very effort at articulation accomplishes much more than the passive existence characters like Louise Bentley eventually come to accept. Ultimately, it matters less that certain characters fail than that those characters try—as opposed to accepting the status quo. Despite his hatred of Carl Van Doren's popular term "the revolt from the village," Anderson seems to push his characters toward a revolt from village conformity and village isolationism, as I will show in the chapters ahead.

Kate and Wing both try to connect with others, through George Willard, and neither realizes that he later begins to understand what he thinks they mean. Wing sees George as "the medium through which he expressed his love of man" (33). Despite his own fear and confusion over what he might learn, George will continue to think about the words and the hands of Wing Biddlebaum, and he will continue to think about the words and the embrace of Kate Swift, but both teachers feel that they cannot connect with George, that they fail in their attempts to reach him, that they cannot even decide for themselves what message they should impart to him.

Kate and Wing face constant rejection and disconnectedness. Using the poetic language Wing would probably favor, the narrator compares him to a caged bird and a thrown-back fish, suggesting imprisonment and abandonment. Hartman rejects Kate completely at first, and later accepts her only as an object or a symbol; the townspeople constantly reject her on the basis of her looks and her supposed lack of feeling. This sense of isolation and unexpressed emotions finds a voice in John Dos Passos, an American writer influenced by Anderson. We can hear a revealing echo of Kate and Wing's link with forbidden sexuality, and their subsequent rejection, in Dos Passos's novel *Manhattan Transfer*.

When Tony Hunter tells Jimmy Herf about his homosexuality and the pain of hiding it, Hunter quotes another character's understanding of sexual desire:

"Everything would be so much better if suddenly a bell rang and everybody told everybody else honestly what they did about it, how they lived, and how they loved. It's hiding things that makes them putrefy. By God it's horrible." (235)

The men in Adolph's Pennsylvania town, uncomfortable with the thoughts in the backs of their minds, convinced themselves of Adolph's guilt in what our society considers the worst criminal act, child molestation. Rev. Hartman, unwilling to confront his sexual desires and curiosities, violates Kate's privacy and turns her into an object of lust and blame. Kate and Wing, afraid of their own desires, fear they will lose their chances to connect with George. Despite their association with Christ imagery at the end of "Hands" and "The Strength of God," Wing and Kate remain alienated victims of the society in which they live. Despite its pastoral and poetic aspects, Winesburg remains disconnected, untrusting, stagnant.

However, the stories discussed here represent a central need in Anderson's *Winesburg*: the hope for connection, sharing, and change. Rev. Hartman misses that hope by never listening to Kate. The men in Wing's former hometown missed that hope by driving away the one who wanted to inspire their children to dream. Wing and Kate seem to miss that hope by not taking their own advice. As Marilyn Judith Atlas points out in her study of *Winesburg's* female characters, Kate abandons her former life of adventure to live in Winesburg "frustrated, unwilling to be sexual, unable to communicate, watching herself grow old" (261).

Yet, even if the two teachers can no longer assert themselves as individuals, they manage to inspire George Willard, a young writer, who will speak for silent and rejected people across America. In that sense, they succeed as teachers, encouraging George to share the unspoken and indescribable thing that turns people into what the narrator calls grotesques. By escaping the shame and alienation caused by silence, fear, and other barriers, George Willard can not only escape becoming a grotesque but also prove the humanity of Winesburg's other inhabitants, finding beauty and meaning in the town he will soon leave behind, the town he will carry with him as he learns to express, to connect, to see inside the individual. Three other characters provide him special guidance in learning to fulfill that role: Dr. Parcival, Dr. Reefy, and Elizabeth Willard. As authority figures, they also serve as George's teachers.

I want to use the above examination of the two teachers to open a discussion of how communication fails within Winesburg, as well as how Anderson uses symbolism and structure to accomplish his tales of isolation. In "Sherwood Anderson's Moments of Insights," David D. Anderson examines how Sherwood Anderson uses *Winesburg's* first three stories (excluding "The Book of the Grotesque") to explore the way people become isolated within society (160): each of these stories reflects an inability to communicate something: feeling ("Hands"), thought ("Paper Pills"), and love ("Mother"). We could easily add many of the other stories to that list, but I want to focus on just a few: feeling ("The Strength of God"), thought ("The Teacher" and "The Philosopher"), and love ("Death"). Since we have already considered some of those stories, I will now explore the rest.

As with the stories we just explored, George Willard continues to serve as a sounding board for ideas and desires the other characters cannot articulate. Anthony Channel Hilfer sees the cohesive use of George Willard as something new Anderson developed from a pattern set by Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*, which builds "around isolated characters who were united by their reflection of the spiritual quality of the town, by the common theme of the buried life, and by the tone of naturalistic pathos qualified by irony" (147-48). However, aside from the obvious difference that Masters's book uses free verse poems told in first-person while Anderson's uses poetic prose told in third-person, Hilfer points out the most profound distinction: "while Masters' characters hide their feelings, Anderson's characters hardly know what their feelings are" (148). Still, they know the desires exist, and that those desires want to find utterance in a society that wants them kept quiet. According to Hilfer, that society allows for the expression of formality and even friendship, but not "forms and patterns for the life of the heart" (149).

The desire and repression of "the life of the heart" we first encounter in "Hands" repeats with variations in the stories of Dr. Parcival, Dr. Reefy, and Elizabeth Willard. Like Kate and Wing, these lonely people try to impart to George wisdom that they never fully apply to their own lives, and they try to help him take chances they never, or rarely, take. They project their dreams and desires onto him, sometimes to the point of trying not to see his own dreams. Nonetheless, like Kate and Wing, they assume the teacher's role of touching and communicating, as well as the teacher's predicament of trying to overcome repression but never managing to express how to overcome it.

Dr. Parcival needs not only to hold wisdom but also to impart wisdom, to know that someone has heard him. At other times, he fails to love, while seeing the need for love. Like Louise Bentley

(whom I discussed in Chapter II), he wants someone to listen to him. Like Kate and Wing, he tries to accept the role of teacher, but encounters problems with his pedagogy. He starts telling George Willard about himself, and why he wants no patients, then says,

“Why I want to talk to you of the matter I don’t know. I might keep still and get more credit in your eyes. I have a desire to make you admire me, that’s a fact. I don’t know why. That’s why I talk. It’s very amusing, eh?” (50)

Parcival wants acknowledgment, affirmation, admiration, and understanding from George Willard. But he never seems to know why, nor what he wants to say. He even knows that his words might lead to embarrassment and failure, and that he might win George over more easily by saying nothing—taking no chances, like most of the other characters. But that nonverbal connection lacks something. Parcival needs to speak to George. He wants to be someone whose ideas and words a young writer would want to appropriate; he wants to become a topic, subject, or object of attention; he wants involvement in George Willard’s process of becoming a writer.

Dr. Parcival, like George’s mother Elizabeth, is outwardly grotesque. A fat man with ugly teeth and ugly eyes, he smokes cigars and talks of writing a book, his reason for coming to Winesburg. He stretches his role as would-be writer, attempting to become a would-be teacher. When Parcival shares tales about his life with George, the young reporter finds them meaningful. As with the words from the other characters, George overestimates their importance, seeing their full impact as just beyond his grasp. Though Parcival babbles, George blames any failure of communication on himself: a poor, inexperienced student who cannot yet understand the wisdom imparted to him. George sees Parcival’s tales as probable lies that nevertheless “contained the very essence of truth” (51), again giving people’s advice more weight than they might seem to hold. Parcival even reads George parts of his unfinished book, between railings about his life.

Parcival had moved to Winesburg from Chicago five years earlier, arriving drunk and getting into a fight with Albert Longworth, the baggageman. He would sleep in his filthy office and eat daily at Biff Carter’s filthy lunch room. As in “Mother,” a story I will discuss momentarily, the narrator presents a long list of the characters Parcival encounters, as if a parade goes by Parcival all the time, but he never joins it. Following what Stein calls “using everything,” Anderson reveals the disconnectedness of Parcival’s life by showing his countless opportunities for connecting.

Parcival's disinterest reaches its height when he refuses to go see a little girl who is thrown from a buggy. In all the chaos, no one notices his absence. Besides, she dies on impact, so he could not have helped her anyway. Still, he fears the public's reaction, that they might hang him. Like the old man in "The Book of the Grotesque," he tells George he might have to write the book. Anderson solidifies the martyrdom image of the other stories by letting Parcival reveal that the book centers around a basic premise, a premise Parcival insists George must remember: "everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified. That's what I want to say. Don't you forget that. Whatever happens, don't you dare let yourself forget'" (57).

Like Jesus, all the characters become martyrs for something they want or something they want to impart. That "something" ultimately makes them grotesques then destroys them, but they embrace it as truth. They feel they must build their lives around it, though it builds walls around their lives. Elizabeth lets her desires imprison her, then she becomes a martyr for George. Early in the story "Mother," Elizabeth decides to protect George at all costs, even with her death, even beyond the grave. When she prays to God about it, she sounds Christlike, saying she will accept any punishment to keep George from suffering. Elizabeth apparently succeeds in her martyrdom: after her death, George will become her follower, her disciple.

During her life, Elizabeth and George never understand what they want to say, how to say it, or when to say it. Just as Wing stands on his porch thinking of what he wants to express to George, Elizabeth stands in George's room thinking about what she wants to express to George, or they look out the window together, standing in awkward silence as they watch the hopeless events in the alleyway. Of course, Elizabeth has countless opportunities to talk to George, but she always retreats into safe words about his needing to be outdoors with other boys, while he always retreats into an almost obligatory *Winesburg* line about needing to take a walk—a line that signals the restlessness and desire George and many of the other characters feel.

Elizabeth masks what she wants to say to George; however, when he leaves, she invades his room, his space. We could see her desire as somehow sexual, but I think she just wants a way to communicate with him. Since living spaces often define *Winesburg's* citizens, while symbolizing their barriers, we know that by examining his room, Elizabeth examines George. We also know that by looking out a window together, Elizabeth and George silently share in a dream of release and escape. Elizabeth even projects her life onto him: she wants to give her dream to George, to make him live for both of them.

In a pivotal scene, a lonely Elizabeth eavesdrops outside George's bedroom door. Though they never communicate openly during their conversations with each other, she feels connected to him when she hears him apparently talking to himself, which contributes to their "secret bond" (43), a bond so secret it even escapes George. After all, she listens to him without his knowing she listens, while they say virtually nothing when they speak to each other. The words of George seem to mean more than what they say, as Kate Swift later encourages. His struggle for articulation touches something Elizabeth lost:

He is groping about, trying to find himself. . . . He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself. (43)

Her idea of George "groping about, trying to find himself" suggests a search for self, a life she relinquished. She seems to think George can find himself through the act of looking for himself: a journey that contains the goal, a meaning that comes from the search for meaning. While the scenes of frustration in *Winesburg* represent the Steinien insistence I discussed in Chapter II, they also contain the gradual progression of Stein's narratives. Elizabeth seems to realize that each moment in George's life provides a rehearsal for the next, that he can slowly grow through them; to use an analogy, every step in a staircase might look the same, but each step takes us closer to the next floor. Her position as a woman in a patriarchal society denies her that benefit: she can only watch the progression in George's life or outside her window, even if what she sees in him or outside might reveal something about herself. Her joy in George's "groping about" sounds almost desperate, but at least it implies a search, a desire to find something—or a desire to continue desiring. It also evokes the symbolism of the book's light and dark imagery, as when George's hand gropes in the darkness, reaching for the meaning of Kate Swift's words.

But after making George sound like a searcher, Elizabeth reaches a seemingly bizarre paradox: "He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness." How do "words and smartness" make one "a dull clod"? Elizabeth's thoughts reflect Wing's warning about "the roaring of the voices" and Kate's warning regarding "what people are thinking about, not what they say." Louise Bentley, Wing Biddlebaum, Kate Swift, and even Tom Willard, find intellect, book knowledge, and words, but they still cannot express themselves. George tries to transcend such limitations, in that he says words but also digs below the surface of life, constantly echoing the epigraph Anderson wrote for *Winesburg*: "To the memory

of my mother, Emma Smith Anderson, whose keen observations on the life about her first awoke in me the hunger to see beneath the surface of lives, this book is dedicated."

"Death," which I will elaborate on shortly, refers back to the young Elizabeth and the babble of the men's words. Most men, with the exception of Elizabeth's father and a few others, take pride in a businesslike manipulation of words, rather than linking words to feelings and desire. In "Death," Elizabeth's father referred to his failure as a father and called the money he gave her a door. He never wanted her to marry Tom Willard, because he knew the marriage would trap her. He insisted that she not tell Tom about the money. As fathers, the men of Winesburg (except for Jesse in "Godliness III") seem somewhat sympathetic to the plight of the town's women. As husbands or lovers, they seem to treat women as figures of idealization or scorn. Wash Williams, whom I will discuss in Chapter IV, epitomizes this tendency.

Tom Willard, for example, fails to distinguish between his run-down hotel and his run-down wife, completely overlooking the fact that he ran them both down through neglect and spite. Even while he dreams his own dreams and regrets his own missed opportunities, he never thinks of the dreams and opportunities Elizabeth relinquished to serve as wife, mother, and hotel manager. Instead, he blames her for his losses, and he ignores her. He busies himself with the semantics of politics and formality, while she runs his unprofitable hotel. He treats others just as poorly, especially when he bitterly and arrogantly announces his status as an unrewarded Democrat in a Republican community. Surprisingly, Tom got George his job, contributing to George's role as communicator; we might expect Elizabeth to encourage that side of George more, while Tom rambles on about money, politics, and gender roles.

However, Elizabeth resents Tom even more than he resents her, as we learn during the scene when she eavesdrops on George. Just as she starts to leave, she realizes George was not talking to himself after all, and she listens in on a rare exchange between the usually distant father and son. Will Henderson, editor of the *Winesburg Eagle*, had complained about George to Tom. After reassuring Will, Tom comes home and lectures George, which makes Elizabeth violently jealous: "The fact that the conversation between Tom Willard and his son had been rather quiet and natural, as though an understanding existed between them, maddened her" (45). Worse yet, Tom's advice to George involves "words and smartness" about going to the city to make money, and he employs language that degrades both women and dreams. As Rex Burbank points out, George becomes

the source of conflict between his father, who wants him to stop his adolescent dreaming and become ambitious of success, and his mother, whose own unhappy life with the conventional Tom Willard makes her fearful that George's capacity for a rich imaginative life will be destroyed, as her own was, by the conventionality of her husband. (69-70)

Tom sees success as receiving admiration for one's political and business endeavors; he wants the voices to roar, and he cares little about what people think or feel. Conversely, Elizabeth thinks the imaginative life, the self, needs fulfillment, regardless of what Winesburg recognizes as important; she cares deeply about not only thoughts and feelings but also aspirations. Knowing what Tom cannot see, that the public discourse of Winesburg provides no outlet for self-expression, she tries to shield her son from the advice of her husband, who wants to make George a part of a system that devalues imagination. She deplores any counsel that could threaten to destroy the dreamer within George.

She always hated her husband, but now, jealous and resentful over this exchange with George, this poisoning of George, she wants to stab Tom with a pair of scissors. Scissors might suggest separation, but the symbolism here also provides a transformation of a domestic image—a tool from her sewing box—into a source of violence; it provides a means of rebellion against patriarchy. But what agitates her so badly that she wants to stab her husband? Tom and George seem to communicate, with no struggle. Even with all her struggling, Elizabeth cannot seem to communicate with George. She can speak safe words to him, and he can speak safe words back to her, but they never talk with each other; they never communicate. It upsets her that Tom and George seem to communicate. Notice also that when the narrator delves into Elizabeth's thought patterns, he says the father and the son speak "as though an understanding existed between them." Why should she begrudge Tom that? After all, a "secret bond" exists between her and George (43).

The bond is, at least to some extent, a mutual desire to communicate some unknown something. Elizabeth mistakenly assumes George and Tom share what she and George lack. The connection of father and son seems to work, while the connection of mother and son seems to limit itself to a lack of connection. Of course, Elizabeth cannot know how much George will later think about the myriad meanings behind her attempted articulations, while he will reduce all of Tom's advice to a trite homily about money. For now, Elizabeth and George share an inability to share, like the hero and his mother in *Windy McPherson's Son*, *Marching Men*, and the unpublished *Talbot Whittingham*, three novels Anderson wrote before

the *Winesburg* story cycle. In both reaching out but neither apparently connecting, mother and child share the search for something more.

To Elizabeth's surprise and delight, George quietly rejects the words of Tom when she confronts George by deliberately echoing and mocking Tom's words. Not knowing she overheard the conversation, George says he knows his father will make him move out soon, but that he wants something neither she nor his father can understand: "'I just want to go away and look at people and think'" (48). With that statement, he validates the dreams of Wing, Kate, and Elizabeth, making it clear that they communicate something meaningful to him: something that will shape his life as a person and a writer. Because of her years of repression, Elizabeth cannot express the joy she feels at hearing George say those words, but they please her deeply. Elizabeth never acknowledges to George that she sees her contribution to him: that she, like Sherwood Anderson's mother, helps her son see beneath the surface of life. She can no longer express satisfaction in her pursuits or accomplishments.

The search, in and of itself, no longer quenches Elizabeth's thirst for something more. Before this scene, she wants simply to know what she wants for herself, and what she wants to say to George, but she knows neither. She wants a destination, not just a journey. But she has no notion of that destination's nature or location. At least she knows Winesburg cannot provide what he needs, and she will ultimately send George out to find a destination. Until then, she must repeatedly send George into the streets or the woods, to search for something—to find anything but resignation, stagnation, and Tom Willard's status quo.

Perhaps this frustration with and longing for the destinationless journey is what she gets at when she thinks of George as "not a dull clod, all words and smartness" (43). Words lack meaning as merely words: they serve no self-referential purpose. Words must signify something of value. One must choose what one wishes to say, then find the best words with which to say it. However, Elizabeth never reconciles her insight with one obvious fact: we think in language, in words. We must use words not only to say but also to decide what we wish to say. If George must find what people think, he will still find words. George will struggle with those same issues several times, as I will show in the chapters ahead.

Elizabeth fails to acknowledge the power of the vehicles that help her in becoming: she never uses the money that could help her leave Winesburg; she never asserts her personality enough to seem like more than furniture to her husband; she never uses the words that could at least show her desire to communicate something to George; she never tries to nurture the connection of "the

unexpressed" she sometimes felt in her youth, when touching the hand of a lover (46); she never lets her restlessness convince her that she needs to stop resting and start escaping.

The conditions of grotesqueness include suffering the cost of words separated from their meaning, signifier separated from signified, parent separated from child. The grotesques find something they see as truth, but fail to apply it to life. Wing and Kate serve as a center to the town, but they get pushed to the side. All the grotesques want to love something, but they cannot find or identify that thing. With that in mind, it seems less odd that Elizabeth wants to go after Tom with scissors; after all, she feels severed, cut off, from her dreams and her son.

In earlier days, Elizabeth used sex to bridge the gap between herself and the rest of humanity. The walks Elizabeth took with men would always turn to sex, and she would later cry. The sex satisfied her at first, but left her feeling worse:

When that came she felt for a time released and happy. She did not blame the men who walked with her and later she did not blame Tom Willard. It was always the same, beginning with kisses and ending, after strange wild emotions, with peace and sobbing repentance. (46)

She sought a contact beyond words: an embrace, a connection. It turned into sex, which seemed to provide what she desired, but later just made her feel guilty. Oddly, she never blamed the men, though they misunderstood her and took advantage of her confused state. Sex provided a connection, but not the needed connection (as I will discuss in my next two chapters). Unfortunately, Tom Willard makes her feel even more disconnected. When the narrator tells of Tom Willard's dissatisfaction with his hotel and his wife, the language links Elizabeth to the decaying hotel even more graphically than Wing embodies his decaying house:

Listlessly she went about the disorderly old hotel looking at the faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets and, when she was able to be about, doing the work of the chambermaid among beds soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men. . . . He thought of the old house and the woman who lived there with him as things defeated and done for. The hotel in which he had begun life so hopefully was now a mere ghost of what a hotel should be. As he went spruce and business-like through the streets of Winesburg, he sometimes stopped and turned quickly about as though fearing that the spirit of the hotel and of the woman would follow him even in the streets. (39)

That passage sounds like it belongs in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. The decayed house in that novel not only embodies the two siblings but also seems to follow them as they travel and try to escape its life-draining entrapment. However, those two characters show much more compassion for each other than do Tom and Elizabeth.

Though she should reject her husband's tendency to see her as a "thing," rather than a person, Elizabeth accepts the linkage of the house to herself: "The hotel was frequently losing patronage because of its shabbiness and she thought of herself as equally shabby" (43). Like Wing, Elizabeth looks much older than her actual age. Smallpox left her face scarred, making her outwardly grotesque. The sickly woman keeps herself hidden from the visitors she helps, all the while remembering her "shady" past and great ambitions. She takes care of the hotel, hoping the guests never see her. Despite her dedication to her husband's inheritance, she finds its run-down condition as embarrassing as her own: a hollow and ugly shell provides a dwelling place for another hollow and ugly shell.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth rarely realizes her importance; instead, she finds herself merely observing the lives of others. She watches out her window, seeing people like Skinner Leason, the express agent. Like Dr. Parcival, she catalogs the people and events around her—as an observer rather than a participant. Life continues for everyone else. Eventually, she even gives up on looking out her window, after tiring of the constant replay of Abner Groff throwing things at a cat that belongs to Sylvester West, the druggist: "It seemed like a rehearsal of her own life, terrible in its vividness" (41). With such bleakly internalized images, "Mother" seems to suggest no man can ever fulfill or appreciate Elizabeth, or any of the women in Winesburg.

However, *Winesburg* contains at least one male character who acts both romantically and compassionately toward a female character. In "Paper Pills," we meet Dr. Reefy: a tall, old widow, with features distinguished by a white beard, a huge nose, huge hands, and inhuman knuckles. With the window of his "musty" office stuck shut, it seems Reefy can obtain no air, no exchange, no hope of escape or communion (34). Like Wing and many of the other characters, his environment defines him. Still, regardless of his unpleasant appearance and environment, we learn of his role as yet another philosopher/writer/teacher: "Little pyramids of truth he erected and after erecting knocked them down again that he might have the truth to erect other pyramids" (35).

Reefy throws the paper pills at John Spaniard, owner of the nursery, saying, "'That is to confound you, you blithering old sentimentalist'" (36). Besides showing Reefy's unusually playful and childlike affection for his friend, this statement also sounds

unlike most of *Winesburg* in that Reefy wants to confound someone. To confound someone, we must make that person question and think; we must make contact. All of that sounds like remarkable accomplishments for a Winesburg citizen. Immediately, we realize that Reefy's attempts at reaching outside his own limited existence will touch some of the other characters.

A nameless tall, dark girl comes to him pregnant, but she miscarries during an illness. A man obsessed with virginity got her pregnant. She marries Dr. Reefy, seeing a sweetness in his gnarled hands and gentle heart like the "sweetness of the twisted apples" most people would reject (36). But, to his sadness, she dies the next spring.

The paper pills contain the truth (37). During the winter after their marriage, Dr. Reefy reads the pills to her then stuffs them back into his pocket. We never learn the tall dark girl's name, even though he communicates the truths to her. Otherwise, he only throws them at John Spaniard, a physical act that substitutes for spiritual contact. He never seems to share them with anyone else, so his truths die with the dark girl. It seems ironic that Anderson never gives us the name of the most seemingly fulfilled and happy woman in the book, and that he kills her off rather quickly. Still, we must consider the victory here: Dr. Reefy manages to communicate spiritually and connect with her, then with Elizabeth Willard, just as Elizabeth manages to communicate spiritually and connect with George.

Because of the simple yet beautiful connection that takes place here, A. Maxwell refers to "Paper Pills" as the "most satisfactory of the [*Winesburg*] sketches," saying that Anderson shares the brief tale "effortlessly, almost carelessly," but that it somehow manages to epitomize the book's theme of

the loneliness of human life, the baffled search of every personality for meanings and purposes deeper than anything that may be said or done, answers that will cut under the superficial axioms by which we are judged. (33)

In "Sherwood Anderson's Moments Of Insight," David D. Anderson compares "Paper Pills" to "Hands," because both involve "the relationship between a man's hands and his inner being" (161). However, to avoid the danger of people misunderstanding his thoughts, Reefy simply writes them down and balls them up with his hands. As David D. Anderson states,

the hard shells of the pills represent the barriers of isolation that surround human minds, and Doctor Reefy, voluntarily isolating himself rather than trying to overcome

those barriers, deliberately avoids inevitable misunderstanding. (161)

He expresses himself, but then refuses to take the risk of expressing himself to someone, knowing that only he can fully understand his own words—if he truly understands them himself. He carefully wedges a block between signifier, signified, and audience. By throwing the pills at his friend, he throws words at his friend, but the form of the paper disallows the reading of those words. Reefy traps himself in a quandary: no one can misunderstand him, but no one can understand him either, because he allows no one to hear him. He writes in a book no one will read, except the dark girl, George Willard, and Elizabeth Willard.

In the table of contents, "Death" is the only story explicitly identified as "concerning" two characters: specifically, Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth Willard. This tale appears after their previous, separate tales, creating both an inner trilogy and a climax for George Willard's bildungsroman. Much of what begins in "Paper Pills" and "Mother" concludes in "Death." Simultaneously, the running subplot of George Willard's process of becoming reaches a turning point in "Death," before concluding in "Departure," the only story the narrator lists as "Concerning George Willard," the book's central character. Observing the importance of this intersection, Irving Howe refers to "Death" as the one story where "the grotesques seem to meet" (103).

In "Death," Elizabeth Willard tells her only friend, Dr. Reefy, about how she felt trapped shortly after entering into her loveless marriage with Tom: a marriage she entered due to tradition and the advice of other young women. In an adventure that sounds like a cross between those of Louise Bentley and Alice Hindman (a character I will discuss in Chapter IV), she rides her buggy wildly, under an approaching storm, trying to escape her own thoughts: "I wanted to go at a terrible speed, to drive on and on forever. I wanted to get out of town, out of my clothes, out of my marriage, out of my body, out of everything'" (227). The narrator's insistence on infinitive verb forms and phrases that start with "out" emphasizes Elizabeth's desperate hunger for any action that can provide escape of any kind.

Touched by her story, Reefy suddenly sees her as a young woman, instead of an old and sickly one, and he calls her a "lovely dear" (227). They make a spiritual connection before almost making love in his office, but a noise interrupts the sexual consummation that will never happen. Their moment never reaches fruition: "On the summer afternoon in the office when he was on the point of becoming her lover a half grotesque little incident brought his love-making quickly to an end" (228). The "incident" referred to involves a man who comes up the stairs and

throws an empty box into the hallway. When the man leaves, Elizabeth also leaves. Symbolically, the man restores Winesburg's status quo with an empty box—something obviously not serving its intended purpose, though someone could easily fill it.

Welford Dunaway Taylor sees the disruption as "the destruction of the beautiful by the mundane in Elizabeth's life" (33), but suggests that they never try to recapture that moment because they fear any sort of fabricated duplication would ruin the validity of the fleeting experience, a fear George will later encounter with Helen White. Of course, Anderson spoke often of life as a series of moments that define our existence, and he designed the *Winesburg* stories as flashes of lightning that illuminate a life momentarily, usually without changing it. Elizabeth and Dr. Reefy seem to recognize that idea here, that somehow they make a temporary connection that must remain temporary: two dreamers embrace for a moment, in a life that took away their dreams. Taylor sees their situation as among the most tragic in *Winesburg*, because they both simply want to love, help, and communicate with others. Still, they reawaken desire in each other, and they enjoy the fact that someone else desires them; they both urgently needed that acknowledgment.

While a touching connection develops between Dr. Reefy and Elizabeth in this story, a similar one develops between George and Elizabeth. In the scene where George wants to kiss his dead mother, he begins to see her as the "lovely dear" Dr. Reefy sees and her young suitors saw (231-32); besides tying the trilogy of stories together, the "lovely dear" phrase also shows the human ability to find a seemingly broken person physically or spiritually desirable, as when the dark girl prefers "the sweetness of the twisted apples" over the seemingly perfect apples in big-city apartments. The last time the scene echoes, the words come from the lips of the town's artist as young man. Unlike the young suitors, who forgot her, or Dr. Reefy, who will roll the insights she gives him into paper pills, George will share his insights, through his writing. George's ability to see this outwardly repulsive woman as a "lovely dear" not only strengthens the link of "Mother," "Paper Pills," and "Death," but also shows that he now sees beneath the surface, the key to becoming the writer Kate and Wing imagined. Like Dr. Reefy, he sees a beautiful young dreamer in place of a middle-aged woman who grew old too early.

This scene uses imagery from the introductory tale, "The Book of the Grotesque," which first reveals the need to articulate in writing what drives isolated but potentially beautiful people to become grotesques. In that story, we learn of an old writer who never manages to accomplish the task he will then leave to George Willard, the writing of *The Book of the Grotesque*. Despite the old

writer's frail condition, we learn that he holds something inside him, something like the "thing" George holds inside and the "thing" Elizabeth "let be killed" in her. The narrator uses tellingly feminist language:

something inside him was altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight. It is absurd, you see, to try to tell what was inside the old writer. (22)

The narrator struggles with words and their limitations, introducing one of the book's main themes, while he uses those words to discuss the notion of the creative inner life, another of the book's main themes. Besides the fact that he uses the feminist metaphor of creation/procreation, he also makes the unborn youth a young woman, perhaps even an Amazon ("a coat of mail like a knight"), or perhaps even Tandy, the idealized subject of a story I will discuss in Chapter V.

Near the book's end, Elizabeth becomes the young woman inside, the Tandy, the dark girl, the muse who allows George Willard to dream. Suddenly and obsessively thinking that something has replaced Elizabeth under the sheet, he wants to look at her corpse to find out for sure:

The body. . . was long and in death looked young and graceful. To the boy, held by some strange fancy, it was unspeakably lovely. The feeling that the body before him was alive. . . became so overpowering that he could not bear the suspense. (231)

He keeps reaching for the sheet then drawing back, echoing the constant movement of the characters toward then away from each other; however, connection occurs this time, even if he never manages to pull away the sheet. After leaving the room, he acknowledges her death, but his transcendent moment leaves him forever changed, forever aware of the "lovely dear" who teaches him to dream.

George connects with Elizabeth in her death by thinking of what her life means. Echoing George's life-affirming fascination with his mother's corpse, the narrator refers to "Death and Doctor Reefy" as Elizabeth's lovers, at least in the eyes of George (232). This new, seemingly dark side of George actually hints at his beginning to grow beyond sexual communication, into emotional communication. At first, George resents his dying mother for distracting him from his current sexual interest in Helen White. However, as Rex Burbank illustrates,

his adolescent resentment at the inconvenience caused by his mother's death in keeping him from seeing Helen White gives way to realization of the finality of death and to consciousness of the tragic beauty his mother represented.  
(71)

The death of Elizabeth finally pushes George out of selfish isolation. While alive his mother could only repeat inarticulate phrases to him, yet George apparently learned something from her stunted declarations; for he has assimilated her fascination with dreams and contempt for conventional success. At her death, he repeats the same exclamations used by Dr. Reefy, the one human being to whom Elizabeth has unburdened her longing; for a moment George understands that his mother's stooped figure contained a lovely person.

In her essay "Women in Sherwood Anderson's Fiction," Nancy Bunge points out that the simultaneous impact of Elizabeth's death and George's realizing the depth of his love for her changes the way George perceives himself and others, that he now sees the temporal nature of life, as well as the need for people to touch and understand each other. He and Dr. Reefy both now see the scarred and hidden Elizabeth as beautiful, perhaps even as a beautiful bride who waits for someone to lift the sheet that serves as her veil.

That George learns about life from women will receive further treatment in my next two chapters. That he learns specifically from Elizabeth matters most here. We expect a mother to serve as her child's guide and teacher, and she succeeds, through her death. Like Kate and Wing, she never manages to articulate what she wants to tell him, but she knows she wants him to dream, and not worry too much about words or what people say.

Death provides the ultimate severing, the ultimate barrier: in losing all hope of communicating with his mother, George begins to realize that we must try to express ourselves and live our lives while we can. George learns the lesson written on Sherwood Anderson's tombstone: "Life, not death, is the great adventure." Despite the separation George now feels, Elizabeth and the other characters begin to speak to him more clearly than ever before.

Elizabeth and the two doctors try to express the secret something to George. In their desperate attempts, they fan the flames Kate and Wing sparked. Louise Bentley, on the other hand, seems to touch no one—not even the child she casually surrenders to her half-insane father (see my previous chapter). Still, all these characters represent the narrator's compassion for people whose lives often lack meaning and fulfillment. If their lives mean nothing and their efforts accomplish nothing—like a man who

always yells at a cat that will always get into the same trouble—then the narrator probably would not record those lives. He not only adds certain symbolic meanings to their lives by writing about them but also validates the importance already there. He says that these people, these twisted apples, deserve recognition, and that we can learn from them. In this sense, the narrator writes the book Louise Bentley needs someone to write, permitting the grotesques to feel like someone wrote about them, understood them, and found meaning in their lives. Ultimately, Anderson challenges readers to live and to interact, even when life and language seem like mechanical repetitions.

CHAPTER IV  
MEN AND WOMEN

In Anderson's 1923 novel *Many Marriages*, John Webster obsesses over nudity, rape, incest, and erotic fantasies. The book deals mostly with nakedness and sex, but, by extension, it also deals with honesty, openness, shame, guilt, and taboo. In his lengthy interior monologues, John Webster refers constantly to his own nudity, as if he had never seen himself naked before. He also becomes fixated upon his daughter's sexuality and the guilt he feels over thinking about it. The words "nude," "naked," "body," and "fancy" seem to appear with more insistence in this book than any of the key phrases in the earlier *Winesburg*: they appear ad nauseam, as asides, as qualifiers, as substitutes for other articulations. In some cases, "nude" and "naked" occur several times within only a few sentences.

In his introduction to this somewhat tedious novel, Douglas C. Rogers discusses the pornography and obscenity charges it faced. Many libraries and bookstores refused to carry it. Dr. Bliss Perry, then chairman of the Harvard University English Department, referred to it as posing a "clear and present danger" to America (xiv). Anderson, though used to such responses against his work, was hurt by the reception, because he considered *Marriages'* stream-of-consciousness narrative a new form of the novel, and one of his greatest literary accomplishments. Though difficult to endure, *Marriages* poses no threat to society, other than to distract many critics from the considerable accomplishments of Anderson's story collections and quasi-autobiographies. Still, those interested in sexual themes in Anderson's writing will need to plow through the rambling of John Webster, though a coherent critical framework, such as that offered by Ray Lewis White's fascinating essay "The Warmth of Desire: Sex in Anderson's Novels," may be necessary. That essay only briefly covers *Winesburg*, but it would be helpful to consider Anderson's novels before looking at themes of sex and gender in *Winesburg*.

White points out that in *Windy McPherson's Son* (1916) Sam McPherson feels drawn to sex and even prostitutes but clings to Puritanism, seeking money in place of sex, and marrying an heiress "more as a reputable source of babies than as a partner in sex" (26). Comparing Sam to Beut McGregor of *Marching Men* (1917), White notes their small-town origins, their confusion over life's chaos, their hunger for meaning, and, most importantly, their inability to confront sexual desires (26). Though tempted, McGregor manages to abstain until marriage. Irving Howe sees considerable evolution here in Sherwood Anderson's depiction of emotion and sexuality:

Where *Windy*, because of its intellectual confusion, is limp and diffuse in feeling, *Marching Men* is full of spastic aggression and sadism which reflect undifferentiated anger at the burdens imposed by modern life. And where the earlier novel portrays sexual indecision, the later one conveys a scorn of women and celebrates the brotherhood of a potentially homosexual band. (86)

White feels that Anderson's attitude toward and depiction of the libido matures even further by his third published novel, *Poor White* (1921), in that Anderson moves beyond the main character, Hugh McVey, to present Clara Butterworth, a woman who finds meaning through sex and learns to use men as sexual objects that help her unlock that meaning. While at college, she briefly becomes interested in exploring feminism and finding a new identity for women. However, after struggling with her desire for sexual liberation and her attraction to a lesbian, Clara resigns herself to the safe prison of loveless marriage. As I will explain in Chapter VI, Anderson apparently wrote his earliest draft of *Poor White* before polishing *Winesburg*, causing their themes to overlap considerably, but I will come back to *Winesburg* shortly.

White sees *Many Marriages* as the first Anderson novel to suggest the possibility of sexual liberation. However, White points out that *Dark Laughter* (1925) deals even more openly with sex than all the previous novels, by looking at Bruce Dudley's fascination with African American life and any other life but the dull one he leaves behind. Like *Winesburg* and *Beyond Desire* (1932), *Laughter* centers around people who try to find something more satisfying than sex, though they often settle for sex. *Kit Brandon* (1936), the only Anderson novel with a female main character, lets that heroine become even more sexually aggressive than Clara Butterworth. Though sexually active, Brandon seems much less pre-occupied with sex than the male main characters of Anderson's earlier novels—maybe because she actually has sex, instead of just feeling sexually frustrated.

White states that "In his best short fiction, Anderson was able to create brilliantly the effects of sexual adventures and sexual frustration in human beings" (40). In the short stories, specifically those from the *Winesburg* volume, we will find compassionate and revealing studies of sex and gender. *Winesburg*, not *White*, reveals the fruition of Anderson's dealing with sexuality and sexual identity. Though he deals with sex more explicitly in *White* and the later novels, he works best within the story cycle, probably because his ambitions required a book-length work but his abilities required the short story form.

In this chapter, I will explore *Winesburg's* female characters and sexual themes, while further exploring the influences on and reception of *Winesburg*. As with my previous chapters, I will focus on particular stories, but also include references to others, as they tend to overlap and echo each other, most of them raising issues of sex and gender. As I mentioned before, the sexual themes created quite a stir, even among critics. For example, Cleveland Chase attacks the supposed sex-obsession of *Winesburg*, calling it "a decided weakness in craftsmanship" (39). Oddly, Chase makes this claim just after explaining that the "sexual crises" actually reveal other emotional problems, as well as the overall difficulty of human interaction (38-39). What Chase terms a weakness Anderson would term honesty, a willingness to delve below the surface.

Anderson's most explicit defense of the use of sexual and gender themes appears when he defends the work of a writer who greatly influenced his approach of giving voice to the silenced. In introducing Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Anderson characterizes the poet as

the singer of the strong lustful ones of the men who could love a woman or a field or the sky above prairies, forest or seas. He walked far and wide, bare-throated, brown-armed and singing. . . not up in the mind only but with his whole body. He was thought too crude, too lustful. They turned away from him. As a boy and a young man I myself went into respectable middle-class homes and found there volumes of "Leaves of Grass" with the so-called ugly lustful passages cut out with scissors.

How shameful! How can there be real delicacy without strength? I proclaim Whitman the most delicate and tender of all American singers. . . .

Whitman is in the bones and blood of America. He is the real American singer. (20-21)

Considering Whitman's already established acclaim as the first quintessentially American poet, it hardly seems unusual that Anderson would bestow such generous praise on a gay writer who uses heteroerotic and homoerotic passages to express patriotism and religious fervor. What seems more unusual for Anderson's time is that he specifically praises those particular passages as Whitman's strength. While others say they love these poems except for certain elements, Anderson says he loves them largely because of those elements.

In the same manner, the influence of Theodore Dreiser comes through to Anderson as mostly a sense of brutal honesty. In his *American Writing in the Twentieth Century*, Willard Thorp explains that Anderson championed Dreiser "for his honesty and boldness and

as the pioneer and hero in the modern movement in American prose writing" (168). However, as Frank Gado points out in "The Form of Things Concealed," the influence of Dreiser on Anderson does not include Dreiser's naturalistic use of determinism and artistic detachment (105). Naturalism focuses on the internal and external forces working upon people, driving them to whatever desperate actions they might take and whatever tragic consequences they cannot avoid. Anderson looks at the internal forces (sexual desire and emotional needs) as well as the external forces (patriarchal norms and societal prohibitions), but he makes it clear that some people will learn how to escape the consequences. Furthermore, Anderson goes beyond the earlier movement of realism in that, instead of simply giving emphatic details for the sake of verisimilitude, he reduces most description to symbolic details, focusing on the motivations behind internal forces, especially sexual desire.

Using decidedly naturalistic language for referring to the controversial elements of *Winesburg*, Anderson says in his *Memoirs* that, "My own experience in living had already taught me that sex was a tremendous force in life. It twisted people, beat upon them, often distracted and destroyed their lives" (243). Though he would not read and fall in love with the works of D. H. Lawrence until after writing *Winesburg*, and though he never really cared for Freudian theories, Anderson uses *Winesburg* to fully explore sexual desire as a prime mover in human behavior. Anderson's friend Van Wyck Brooks even went so far as to use his *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* as a chance to decry the sexually suggestive "Hands," hurting Anderson's feelings by giving him the unfortunate title of "the phallic Chekov." Actually, Anderson had yet to discover Chekov and the other Russian realists when he wrote *Winesburg*; the only Russian writer informing his early works was Turgenev, whose *Annals Of A Sportsman* receives constant praise throughout Anderson's diaries, letters, and essays. According to an interview with Anderson's widow, Eleanor, he later came to admire the Russian realists (Campbell and Modlin 73), so while he may have found the Chekov reference flattering, he found the "phallic" reference insulting, as he never understood why people read *Winesburg* as a bawdy work.

In his book *The Sexual Revolution In Modern American Literature*, Charles Glickberg I says *Winesburg* upset the public because it reveals how much sexual repression affects people in Western towns, and because it shows how their impossible morals keep clashing with their desires, making them grotesques. For example, in discussing the young Elizabeth Willard's feelings of guilt over using sex as an escape from a socially restrictive life, Glickberg poses what he sees as a central question, "What is the curse, Anderson asks, that has befallen these men and women?"

They are accursed because they have denied their instincts and their capacity for love" (51). Glickberg sees Anderson's attention to that curse as part of Dreiser's influence, and part of Anderson's critique of American life:

One theme that repeats itself with obsessive insistence in Anderson's work focuses on the traumatic effect of sexual frustration on the individual, the spiritual tragedy caused by the culturally imposed necessity for the repression of instinct. If people in this country are afraid of sex because they are ashamed of their body and its needs, their lives will be joyless and they will never know the beauty of fulfillment in love. Like Dreiser, Anderson is leveling the charge that Americans, infected by the Puritan tradition, accept the myth that sex is dirty and sinful, that the body is to be used exclusively as an instrument for procreation, that it is downright immoral to exploit sex for the purpose of pleasure. (52)

Put succinctly, Dreiser and Anderson seem to say that people cannot deny the existence of their amorous desires, but that they still feel ashamed of those desires. However, other critics argue that the desires themselves go way beyond sex, that Anderson champions honesty in general more than he specifically champions sexual liberation. In defense of Anderson's less erotic concerns, Anthony Channell Hilfer complains about the early attacks on *Winesburg's* sexual content, claiming that Anderson actually focuses on characters who confuse sex with other desires. In summation, Hilfer affirms simply that "Anderson's stories are not about fornication but about longing" (154). Rather than merely reaching out for sex, the characters try it as a means of contact, but then continue reaching out, or simply give up. In truth, they seek a nonverbal and nonphysical contact, which they rarely attain, because they cannot articulate their need for it. The libido, therefore, exists as part of our overall entanglement of hidden desires, and we need to deal honestly with the entire entanglement to make our lives meaningful.

Of course, that position leads to the temptation of reducing the constant sexuality in *Winesburg* to allegorical purposes, to say that sex destroys us, or to say that denying our sexuality—the Greek and the animal inside—destroys us. Both ideas of consequential destruction oversimplify Anderson's accomplishment, but both hold some merit and can launch us into more complex explications of the individual characters. We could say, for example, that sex destroys Tom Foster, Wash Williams, Enoch Robinson, Belle Carpenter, and Louise Trunnion. We could also say that denying their sexuality destroys Alice Hindman, Seth

Richmond, Louise Bentley, and Elizabeth Willard. However, we must also consider that acknowledging sexuality first confuses but then frees George Willard and Helen White, while the sexless Tandy Hard and David Hardy seem to progress separately toward a sense of realized identity without ever confronting or even feeling any sexual longings. I will save Tandy and David for my next chapter, which will focus on gender-blurring and gender-transcending. As I return to looking closely at the citizens of Winesburg, I want to first focus on some characters destroyed by sex, starting with Tom Foster.

In "Drink," George Willard talks with a drunken Tom Foster, who angers George by claiming he slept with Helen White. Within the span of a few sentences, George's relationship with Tom goes from threatened male, to gay male, to maternal woman, to contemplative person:

his anger concerning Helen White passed and he felt drawn toward the pale, shaken boy as he had never before been drawn toward anyone. With motherly solicitude, he insisted that Tom get to his feet and walk about. Again they went back to the printshop and sat in silence in the darkness. (218)

In *Winesburg*, pairings of the words "silence/darkness" or "hands/darkness" generally suggest either a lack of contact or a search for meaning. In this case, it probably suggests a search for meaning, a search George carries out by moving through various gender roles. It brings George to a higher ground, above gender identification, as I will show at the end of my next chapter. Unfortunately, Tom shows less maturity, as revealed by the stories he tells George.

Tom's main impression of sex sprang mostly from watching the people in front of Cincinnati whorehouses. He dwelled on the horrid sights and sounds of those places he passed at night, but thought nothing about feelings or passion. Instead, he decided "he would put sex altogether out of his own life" (215). What made him keep walking by the whorehouses, and what made him finally decide to go into a room with one of the women? We never know for sure. Whatever the case, he went into the room, confusing his perception of women in general with his perception of his grandmother, and found himself utterly revolted by both the woman and sex. He could not seem to associate women with his sexual desire, so the whole ordeal left him wary of both. However, the narrator assures us that "he could not hate anything and not being able to understand he decided to forget" (215).

This scene resembles a story William Faulkner later wrote, "Divorce in Naples," in which the character Carl turns out to be gay: Carl finds heteroeroticism repulsive in the same manner in

which a heterosexual character might find homoeroticism repulsive—certainly a more complex situation than someone simply not liking sex. Whatever Tom's sexual orientation, he clearly wants to avoid sex, mostly because it forces him to question his ideas about women, to no longer see them as "quite innocent things, much like his grandmother" (215). Wanting women to be angelic, he finds his new knowledge repugnant. He seems to want to remain naive and preadolescent. We should keep in mind, however, that he falls in love with Helen White two years after moving to Winesburg, so we can assume he eventually feels attracted to at least one member of the opposite sex. Still, the idea of a sexual woman frightens him, which suggests a fear of female empowerment in general. He can only fall in love with a woman who holds the innocuous last name "White," but at least he never tries to make George hate women. Wash Williams and Enoch Robinson expose George to more definitely misogynistic views.

In "Respectability," Wash Williams is fat, ugly, and dirty, except that he constantly washes his hands. Wash, a once-popular telegraph operator, received an unwanted transfer to "the obscure office at Winesburg" (122). Once there, he never wants to associate with Winesburg's men, and sees all women as "bitches" (122). When a woman sends a complaint about the dirtiness of his office, he tears it up, thinking of his former wife. After becoming angry about the letter, he sees George walking with Belle Carpenter. Later, after having been on the verge of doing so many times, George finally talks to him, and Wash's inchoate speech weaves in and out of a narrative about his wife. Since George often trembles when thinking of women or sex, it hardly seems surprising that Wash frightens George with his tone and his words, saying all women are dead, and that he (Wash) should kill them all. He rambles for a while before telling his story, which he shares mostly as a warning about women: "'Already you may be having dreams in your head [regarding a woman]. I want you to destroy them'" (125).

Fortunately for George, he can see that he should not grant Wash the same wisdom he grants others, and he never seems to think he should apply Wash's advice. Still, he listens intently, hoping to decode some sort of message from it that he can apply, something other than what Wash literally says. Of course, we know that Wash cannot possibly see the complexities of women when he admits he started his marriage by seeing his wife as a fertility goddess and even "'crawled along the black ground to her feet and groveled before her'" (126). He obviously sees sex as a call for debasing oneself, even after the experiences that should have challenged his naiveté. If he never knew his wife, he should blame himself for never trying to know her; he looks at her as goddess then as snake, but never as individual, as human being.

Apparently, Wash was a virgin until the marriage that left him seeing sex as repulsive, so we can assume he only had sex with one woman in his life. Of course, we never learn if she was a virgin, or what happened to her after the events Wash narrates. He keeps interrupting the story, and his tone keeps shifting from harsh to soft, as if he cannot decide how he should feel about the story or if he should even tell it. Though he loved his wife, the marriage collapsed when he learned three lovers were coming to the house while he worked. He sent her to her mother's. The mother then sent for him, and he was ready to take his ex-wife back, but the mother had the daughter strip for him, hoping it would sexually arouse him and make him want her back. However, Wash makes it sound as if the girl never wanted her mother's bizarre intervention: "'The girl was ashamed and stood perfectly still staring at the floor'" (127). Still, the forced striptease caused him to hate both women, all women. A neighbor stopped him from killing the mother with a chair, but she died of a fever a few months later.

Like the tall dark girl who marries Dr. Reefy, Wash's wife remains nameless. She is also one of the most sexual characters in the book—as opposed to sexually frustrated characters—in that she simultaneously retained a husband and at least three lovers. She finally scared Wash away completely when her mother forced her to take off her clothes. Obviously, sexual women scare Winesburg's men to death. We cannot help but wonder how little Wash knew about her life, and if she had more than those three lovers, before, during, and after her marriage. She never seemed particularly fazed by losing him; instead, she seemed to know what she wanted and how to obtain it. Her mother, on the other hand, wanted her in a respectable marriage, even if that meant prostituting her. Some might not see a difference here, claiming that she already was a whore; keep in mind, however, that she used men for sex, while the mother wanted her to use sex to get a man and return to the safety of marriage.

Instead of these events making Wash see women as capable of sexual expression and longing, they made him see women as snakes, serpents in the Garden of Eden. His violent talk reduces women to animals, scavengers, who come to destroy men's lives:

"It is a trick in Nature. Ugh! They are creeping, crawling, squirming things, they with their soft hands, and their blue eyes. The sight of a woman sickens me. Why I don't kill every woman I see I don't know." (121)

However, we should keep in mind that, just before telling about how the mother disrobed her, he actually blames the men, as

opposed to the usual Winesburg tendency of blaming women for male sexual behavior:

"I hated the men I thought had wronged her. I was sick of living alone and wanted her back. The longer I waited the more raw and tender I became. I thought that if she came in and just touched me with her hand I would perhaps faint away. I ached to forgive and forget." (127)

In his loneliness, he wanted to offer compassion, forgiveness. He wanted the tenderness he once felt for her. The erratic range of emotions Wash expresses suggests that marriage cannot always cure loneliness, and that, for many people, marital sex only further confuses the need for contact.

Enoch Robinson learns that lesson along with Wash and many of the other characters. In fact, his story, "Loneliness," uses one of those titles that seems interchangeable with most of the *Winesburg* stories, demonstrating his typification of the other Winesburg lives. The narrative takes place largely in New York City, and like the other stories that take place largely away from Winesburg, this one also shows the big city as no better than—perhaps even worse than—the small town. Because of the city's failure to fulfill him, Enoch Robinson now lives in a rented room in his hometown of Winesburg. "Loneliness" warrants attention here because of certain passages, including the narrator's immediate statement that "The child in him kept bumping against things, against actualities like money and sex and opinions" (168). To make the abstraction of Enoch's "bumping" more concrete and naturalistic, the narrator adds that Enoch "was hit by a street car and thrown against an iron post. That made him lame." Paired with the abstractions, the narrator's off-hand mention of the accident sounds almost funny, in the same dark way Faulkner and then Flannery O'Connor would later mix dark comedy with their depictions of the grotesque. However, whether Anderson intended the humor matters less than the fact that everything seems to turn into an obstacle for Enoch.

Because of his confusion over sex and those other frustrations, Enoch feels cut off from society, as if no one understands him. He tells George that, while briefly living in New York City, he joined a group of young artists, but kept getting upset because people misinterpreted his work. He once approached a prostitute, hoping to become involved with her, but then "grew afraid and ran away." Obviously, sex scared Enoch as much as it scared Wash and Tom, but mostly because the desire came from within him. As with Tom's city experiences, Enoch found it easy to look down on the people at the whorehouse he kept passing, but it

angered him when he realized he shared the desires of the people he despised.

Enoch eventually married, largely out of loneliness, largely out of his desire to seem conventional and normal, but also out of the lust he confused with the desire for touch: "At night strange fevers, burning within, kept him awake" (171). However, finding his "strange fevers" unquenched, he soon lost interest in his marriage and moved back into his New York apartment, where he talked with his imaginary friends. He later tells George that, after his marriage, he had an affair with a woman who happened to see him in the hallway. She would visit him but "'said nothing that mattered'" (175). Other people's words mean nothing to Enoch, and his desire for understanding drowns them out, before finding itself usurped by his desire for sexual contact.

He tells how he lusted after her, while she just wanted to talk. Still, his desire could not stop his masculine fears of a tall, strong, sexual woman. The fact that a woman stood taller than he bothered him, and he wanted to conquer, to make her see him as big and important in his room. He clearly perceived her as a threat: "'I felt that she was driving everything else away'" (176). His imaginary friends could not understand her or his lust for her—i.e., he could not understand her or his lust for her—so he decided to drive her away rather than face his sexual confusion. With his masculinity and his traditional notions of gender ideology threatened, he turned against her.

One night when she came to visit, he acted insanelly, trying to make her understand him. However, he says that when he realized she always understood, it made him even more angry. At that point in the telling, he starts directing his anger toward George and telling him to leave—one of Enoch's constant intrusions into the disorderly narrative—but George insists on hearing the rest of the story. Enoch says he hurt her so much and said such terrible things to her that she left and took the imaginary friends with her. When George goes home and lies in the darkness, he feels haunted by Enoch's loneliness.

The loneliness of individuals haunts George in other ways: instead of just listening to their stories, he becomes entangled in their sexual chaos. With Kate Swift, it causes wonderment, despite her bizarre treatment of George. With Louise Trunnion and Belle Carpenter, it causes George to harbor negative, misogynistic feelings. Though he never seems as hateful as Wash, he is not yet the sexually and emotionally mature George we see at the book's end. George apparently loses his virginity to Louise, after she turns his life into a nervous condition, as we learn in the story with the ambiguous title "Nobody Knows."

Louise Trunnion ends up making George feel threatened and insulted, by sending him a note that simply says "'I'm yours if

you want me'" (60). A woman acting so aggressively sexual, stating her desires so bluntly, scares George. In building toward the revelation of the letter's content, the narrator spends nearly half of the brief story describing George's trepidation, his shaking body (58-59). They meet promptly afterwards, but she begins to clarify that he should not look down on her, even as she draws closer. For example, when he goes to her door and her father eyes them suspiciously, she immediately asks him, "'How do you know I want to go out with you. . . . What makes you so sure?'" (59). She seems to say this for her father's benefit, but it confuses George. The story's ambiguous title evokes many nuances, possibly including the fact that nobody knows why these two young people meet and have sex, not even either of them. It simply seems like the expected actions of a young boy and girl, as I will explain in Chapter V.

He begins speaking words without meaning, but his thoughts sound much worse than his words: "The whispered tales concerning her that had gone about town gave him confidence. He became wholly the male, bold and aggressive. In his heart, there was no sympathy for her" (60-61). The narrator's vision of "the male" hardly sounds like something to which Kate or Elizabeth would want George to aspire. Maleness sounds ugly here, intent on hurting and damaging. His thoughts reveal that he has yet to outgrow Winesburg's destructive views of sex and gender.

Yet, when George goes afterwards to talk to the clerk Shorty Crandall, the narrator says he "felt satisfied. He had wanted more than anything else to talk to some man" (61). In his maturity, George will later learn to seek the company and wisdom of a woman. For now, talking to a man seems safer, easier. Still, it remains unprofitable. Even though George refrains from bragging about his conquest, he still reduces and resents Louise, not seeing yet that women will become his main guides. Nancy Bunge explains,

All of George Willard's healthy capacities derive from his contact with those Winesburg women who spend their evenings taking wild rides in the country or energetic walks through the streets. Before he hears what they have to tell him, he adulates himself and power. He exults over his first sexual conquest; he dismissed the girl, but worries briefly about his reputation until he remembers that nobody knows.  
(245)

I believe Louise Trunnion embodies Anderson's desire to expose the plight of women, to make society feel some sense of duty regarding the need for social change. She cannot address her desire for contact without offering herself as a sexual object. She must choose between two roles: virgin or whore. I see this not

as Anderson's putting women on a pedestal then debasing them but as his revelation of those tendencies in society. He accomplishes the same castigation in a story with a title that ironically alludes to a tale of feminist empowerment, Kate Chopin's 1899 novel *The Awakening*.

In "An Awakening," we meet George's next conquest, Belle Carpenter: "She was tall and strong. When black thoughts visited her she grew angry and wished she were a man and could fight someone with her fists" (179). More than anywhere else, the narrator makes it emphatic here that one of the female characters wishes to be a man, and that she associates violence with men, settling problems—or at least taking out frustration—with violence. Again, the view of maleness sounds less than desirable. Yet we soon see why Belle would not grow up thinking highly of men: "When she was a young girl Henry Carpenter [her father] made life almost unbearable for Belle, but as she emerged from girlhood into womanhood he lost his power over her." Because she is taller than her mother, she refuses to let her father abuse her like he did her mother. She even smears mud on his ironing boards, to get back at him. He finds himself afraid of her. In this case, womanhood equals power, but only because the woman stands taller than the man, as in "Loneliness." Thus, the Winesburg idea of a strong woman refers only to height, which shows the wolf-pack mentality of people who cannot see strength as anything other than physical fighting ability, brute force, the ability to hurt someone.

Belle Carpenter feels limited by how much control she can hold over men. However, Ed Handby, the reckless bartender she is in love with, is both bigger than her and bad for her reputation, so she walks with the younger and shorter George, feeling she can control that relationship, including the possibility of sexual contact. She even lets George kiss her one time.

The narrator turns the focus to George, who begins to explore his feelings, his desire to reach out, as he walks through a poor area of Winesburg at night. Thinking of people like Belle, people who live among the factory-worker underclass, he begins to contemplate all his reading and all his theories. It causes him to list words that the narrator describes as both "without meaning" and "full of meaning" (185). In a scene I will come back to during my discussion of David Hardy, this pondering of words makes George feel connected to others in Winesburg:

He felt that all of the people in the little streets must be brothers and sisters to him and wished he had the courage to call them out of their houses and to shake their hands. "If there were only a woman here I would take hold of

her hand and we would run until we were both tired out," he thought. "That would make me feel better." (185)

Sounding much like his mother in her youth, he wants freedom and contact; he wants to take action and burst out of his shell. He also recognizes that houses represent the people and the barriers that surround them, while hands represent the idea of contact. His thoughts reflect the overall symbolism of *Winesburg*. Most importantly, he begins to see the need for a special contact with a woman, though that special contact happens in a later story, not here. In this story, George quickly reduces the need into sex.

Overwhelmed and threatened by his own thoughts, George suddenly decides he must prove his manhood to Belle. After finding her, he walks with a swagger and suddenly takes her in his arms. Belle casually surrenders. The encounter makes him feel empowered at first, but then he begins trying to understand the meaning of their encounter, trying to sound like a poet and to idealize women. His idealization causes him to speak more words without meaning: "'lust and night and women'" (188). Later, in his confusion, he begins to hate her. Belle becomes an object in George's mind, and even the narrator seems to forget about her. Ed appears, but decides to cast George aside rather than fight him. Further feeling his manhood threatened, George keeps lunging back at Ed, who keeps tossing him aside, until George finally cuts his head on a stump. Still needing to grow in his understanding of others, he starts looking down not just on Ed and Belle, but on their entire neighborhood, never realizing that Belle succeeds in using him to make Ed jealous. Belle's sexuality reduces her, at least in the naive George's eyes, but denying sexuality causes some of the characters to act bizarrely, often making them seem like the most grotesque of all the Winesburg citizens.

The Alice Hindman story, "Adventure," not only uses one of the many titles that could fit most of the other stories but also leaves readers with a stark image of how many of the other characters feel: naked and isolated, crying out in the rain. At twenty-seven, Alice lives with her re-married mother and works as a clerk in Winney's Dry Goods Store. The narrator slowly reveals how she came both to live and accept a life of solitude. At sixteen, she had an affair with Ned Currie of the *Winesburg Eagle*. Initially, Ned had decided for her to become his mistress, but he then decided to just watch over her in a nonsexual relationship. Just before he moved away, he told her he would come get her after making some money. She had suggested they both work in the city, living together—but not marrying at first. Such an idea sounds bold and liberated, but she only made the suggestion for Ned's convenience.

Their ideals of mutual respect remained strong as long as their relationship remained chaste, but they became lovers the night before he left. Her surrender sounds more like a daydream than passion: "Alice, betrayed by her desire to have something beautiful come into her rather narrow life, also grew excited" (116). As with Elizabeth and Louise, she simply wanted some unnamed "thing," some indescribable and fulfilling release. The moment seemed to give her hope of emancipation, but he later met someone in Chicago. One time, at eighteen or nineteen, she went out in her best dress, lonely. She later feared a lifetime of loneliness, because she worried that Ned would no longer want her as she grew older. At twenty-two, Alice got a job to support herself, but still thought Ned would return. She decided not to marry anyone else, even if he never returned. She found other ways to occupy her time, but avoided spending money. Still denying the reality of her abandonment, she hoped she and Ned could use her savings for traveling.

At twenty-five, Alice began to interact with others a little by joining the Methodist church. After her mother's re-marriage made Alice realize her isolation, she took walks with a clerk for a while. Now twenty-seven, she feels restless and imaginative, even though she starts to avoid the clerk. Like Enoch, she eventually resorts to an imaginary companion, but the attempt only leaves her more sexually frustrated. After embracing a pillow, she uses a blanket to create the likeness of "a form lying between the sheets," then keeps asking it or herself, "Why doesn't something happen? Why am I left here alone?" (118-19), as if the form should come alive and return her embrace. Interestingly, the narrator refers to it as a "form" rather than a man because Alice no longer wants "Ned Currie or any other man," but simply "to be loved, to have something answer the call that was growing louder and louder within her" (119). By this point, her desire seems to have gone beyond the sexual, but her actions still involve the sexual: she holds the pillow against her breasts, and she creates a form in her bed, in the darkness.

One night she decides to run naked in the rain, hoping for "some creative and wonderful effect on her body" (119). She wants human contact, and she runs after a man she sees walking alone, because she feels connected to him by solitude. "Somewhat deaf," the old man tries to figure out the words she screams (120). This scene epitomizes the lack of contact in Winesburg: when she finally chooses to cry out to someone, her random choice turns out to be someone who cannot hear her. She lies on the ground, trembling, then crawls home, resigned to the loneliness of Winesburg, shocked by her own actions: "trying to force herself to face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg" (120). She goes home, not simply regretting her

risky adventure but bolting the door and blockading it with furniture, fearful that she might take more chances in the future.

Again, her actions would seem sexual, though she acts strictly from emotional needs when she walks naked in the rain: "she wanted to leap and run, to cry out, to find some other human being and embrace him" (119). Her desire sounds much like that of the sexless David Hardy, whom I will discuss shortly. It sounds anything but erotic. Perhaps her nudity provides a release for her, as when Kate Swift throws herself naked onto the bed and Elizabeth Willard drives the horses to a dangerous speed, or perhaps it connects her more with David's naive innocence. It certainly sounds nothing like the nudity of Wash's wife, though we never really know what goes through that woman's mind. Especially within a work that uses a rural setting, rain suggests renewal and constructive forces, as the narrator makes clear by conveying Alice's thoughts about the rain's potentially "creative and wonderful effect." In fact, Robert Allen Papinchak notes several passages in *Winesburg* where the narrator lets rain suggest creativity, procreation, or sexuality, usually linking women to those rain metaphors (24).

The connection of women and nature also suggests primitive rites that could involve fertility or could involve simply a celebration of earth as a creative and feminine entity. Such a celebration might empower a woman who cannot seem to accept the possibility of female liberation without male acknowledgment, a woman who thinks she can only live freely and sexually if she subordinates that liberation to the supposedly higher purpose of not burdening Ned. Even if Alice cannot believe she goes on such a dangerous adventure, the facts remain that she goes and that she can continue living without Ned, but she returns without allowing the adventure to transform her. She never seems to accept what the narrator refers to in the same story as "the growing modern idea of a woman's owning herself and giving and taking for her own ends in life" (115). Instead, she continues to trap herself in the physical confines of her room and in the emotional confines of Ned's broken promise.

Marilyn Judith Atlas finds Anderson's depiction of women in general disappointing, but she specifically points out that though Anderson "began to make a number of his women strong each one eventually catches herself in a traditional trap," the trap of simply needing love (253). Atlas sees this as part of Anderson's limited perception of women, his idea that most women simply want the best possible lover. I would argue, however, that most women in *Winesburg* simply settle for the best possible lover because they never know what else they want or how to get it.

Nancy Bunge examines why the *Winesburg* women tend to look for affection from men who seem to lack the capacity for it. She also

discusses how the futility of characters like Louise Bentley and Elizabeth Willard epitomizes that of those around them:

they try sex and then marriage, but neither satisfies them. Like Alice Hindman and Kate Swift, they also attempt to hide in fantasy; but the insistent demands made by their instincts drive all four women out of doors where they attain some peace through contact with nature. (244)

In "The Thinker," one of the longer stories, the male character Seth Richmond hopes contact with nature can provide him with peace, with an escape from loneliness. Seth, who still lives with his mother, envies the laughing, boisterous berry pickers. Clarence, Seth's father, was killed in a street fight, after literally and figuratively building the house in which Seth and his mother live. Clarence's labor left them with shelter, but his bad investments left them with little money. Never believing the rumors she hears about her dead husband's alleged dishonesty, and telling Seth not to believe them, Virginia Richmond raises her son alone. She eventually becomes a stenographer to supplement their income. She is almost afraid of the tall Seth and his gaze; again, height evokes fear in a member of the opposite sex.

At sixteen, he gets drunk with some friends. She writes down what she will tell him, fearing he will meet a violent death, like his father. When Seth returns, days later, she cannot seem to "reprove" him (131). To her delight, it turns out he was repentant and had wanted to come home.

One day, going to see George, Seth passes Tom Willard and hears him lecturing a man about two politicians. Something about their talk awakens a loneliness in him, and the narrator starts listing the characters Seth passes, revealing the boy's detachment. The people of Winesburg call Seth "the deep one" and hold great respect and hope for him (133). He seems disinterested in life, but searches for a way to become interested. His friendship with George Willard almost sounds gay, but possibly only because of their still-undefined sexuality: "George Willard was older than Seth Richmond, but in the rather odd relationship between the two, it was he who was forever courting and the younger boy who was being courted" (134). After making that peculiar statement, which I will come back to in my next chapter, the narrator quickly moves on to tell us that George takes a break from writing his lists of who does what in Winesburg, so he can tell Seth of his plans to fall in love with Helen White. Stranger yet, he says falling in love with her will help him write a love story, and that he wants Seth to go tell Helen of his (George's) love for her. Annoyed, Seth gets up and says goodbye. He decides to talk to Helen, but not about George. Feeling even more

disconnected than usual from Winesburg, as if he belongs somewhere else, Seth wants to leave his hometown. As Seth walks across the town, the narrator begins cataloging characters again, using the list to stress Seth's disconnectedness from them. Just as George's newspaper pieces try to mention everyone in town in every issue, leaving no room to really delve into any of their lives, Seth knows names but not people.

After Helen agrees to go walking with Seth, he tells her about his dreams of leaving Winesburg. When they see a man kissing Belle Turner, he tells her George is in love with her, despite his earlier decision not to speak of George. He imagines embracing her. When she says she must go, he says she should go home and talk to her mother. Perceptively realizing that hollow words often seem to replace honest and meaningful expression in Winesburg, he worries that Helen will end up with someone who uses empty speech: "'It'll be someone else—some fool—someone who talks a lot—someone like that George Willard'" (142). The repetition of "someone" suggests that he thinks it could be anyone but himself. Of course, George later almost ends up with Helen, but then leaves, in "Departure." More importantly, George ends up not being someone who talks a lot, "all words and smartness."

The acknowledgment of sexuality fulfills both George and Helen, as we see in the volume's next-to-last story, "Sophistication." A melancholy George Willard reflects on the ambitions and regrets of his eighteen years, feeling the impact of his mother's mortality, and facing the concern that he has accomplished nothing. Though the narrator mostly uses past tense, he slips into present tense for this vivid moment, telling us of George's passionate desire

to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands, be touched by the hand of another. If he prefers that the other be a woman that is because he believes that a woman will be gentle, that she will understand. He wants, most of all, understanding. (235)

George now sees much of what he needed to see in order to understand the grotesques of Winesburg and to prevent himself from becoming a grotesque: that we need physical, nonsexual contact, that we need to feel connected, that we need someone to understand, that only someone not caught up in the templates of patriarchy can provide that understanding. He thinks that means only a woman can provide it, but he will manage to provide it to Helen. With the insight he receives from the others, George can transcend the dominant social ideology of gender roles.

In thinking of the woman to provide the understanding, his mind wanders back to Helen White, the banker's daughter: "He had

tried to make her think of him as a man when he knew nothing of manhood and now he wanted to be with her and to try to make her feel the change he believed had taken place in his nature" (235). That passage sounds much like the ones that precede his sexual encounters with Belle and Louise, but he never belittles Helen. Instead, their sexual encounter seems like only a fraction of the connection that occurs between them. She also senses a change in him, and it sparks something inside her. To show the movement of George and Helen toward maturity, and of the book toward its conclusion, the narrator brings together the key words "darkness," "hands," and "thing" with an allusion to a passage I will discuss in my next chapter, where a drunken stranger tells the child Tandy Hard about "being strong to be loved":

He had reverence for Helen. He wanted to love and to be loved by her, but he did not want to be confused by her womanhood. In the darkness he took hold of her hand and when she crept close put a hand on her shoulder. (241)

We know that they can finally escape the confines of tradition, gender, and ideology when the narrator refers to them not as boy and girl, man and woman, but as "two oddly sensitive human atoms" that patiently hold each other. Atoms, of course, have no gender, and they carry no form without finding and clinging to other atoms. On a minute and invisible level, they connect, instead of worrying about what anyone expects of a boy and a girl or what anyone will say about their encounter. Thus, they transcend gender, as I will discuss in Chapter V.

Though he still seems to fear womanhood a little, he decides to continue reaching out to her, both of them knowing the importance of this instant: "In the mind of each was the same thought. 'I have come to this lonely place and here is this other,' was the substance of the thing felt" (241). Unlike most of the ambiguous uses of "thing," the narrator identifies the "thing" in this case, allowing both Helen and George to articulate the same simple but profoundly important statement. Helen and George see the obvious fact that most of the other characters miss: that they must turn to each other if they want to overcome their emptiness. They must be strong to be loved, and they must grow from their pain.

Surprisingly, the narrator then begins to refer to them as animals. They turn to animalism to relieve embarrassment. It sounds like Rev. Hartman's rationale about desire, but they feel and project none of Hartman's guilt. In fact, the narrator keeps referring to their respect for each other. Far from sounding degenerate or degrading, becoming less human releases them from institutionalized human guilt. Their sexuality becomes innocent,

natural. As they briefly step away from each other, they feel even more connected. Unlike other cases, where the man resents the woman for both male and female sexuality, they skip the motions of hating the object of their desire, or of trying to see each other as sinful and in need of saving. Like Elizabeth on her deathbed, they suddenly transform into something new: "chastened and purified by the mood they had been in, they became, not man and woman, not boy and girl, but excited little animals."

As they fall down Waterworks Hill, Anderson's playful allusion to the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill" recaptures innocence. Of course, it also evokes the guilt imposed by society, in that the rhyme originally referred to a common punishment for adultery, but they seem totally unconcerned with what society might say:

It was so they went down the hill. In the darkness they played like two splendid young things in a young world. Once running swiftly forward, Helen tripped George and he fell. He squirmed and shouted. Shaking with laughter, he rolled down the hill. Helen ran after him. For just a moment she stopped in the darkness. There was no way of knowing what woman's thoughts went through her mind but, when the bottom of the hill was reached and she came up to the boy, she took his arm and walked beside him in dignified silence. (242-43)

Instead of saying words without meaning, they share an unspoken connection. The communication obviously works, giving them both "the thing needed. Man or boy, woman or girl, they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible." While they still cannot understand their unarticulated needs, they manage somehow to meet those needs, and find a way to go on maturing.

This tender scene reflects the one in the room with Elizabeth and Reefy, a shared silent moment that cannot be repeated, a memory the man and woman would taint by trying to replicate. It also shows that George has learned from Elizabeth, that he can help a young woman connect to the "thing" everyone needs—that he can make that connection for himself. In this case, George helps a woman in her becoming, and she helps him in his becoming, instead of just one helping the other. In that sense, communication truly succeeds: they both intuit and fulfill what the other needs. Referring to this scene, Anthony Channell Hilfer says

George is able to do that rare and momentary thing: break through to the world and to another human being. In contrast to the stories of Louise Bentley and Elizabeth Willard ("Mother"), the diffuse impulse to communion is not

confused and destroyed by narrow limitation to direct sex.  
(155)

Rex Burbank sees the moment of contact between George and Helen as the book's climax, the departure of George not simply from Winesburg into the life beyond it but from boyhood into manhood. Both George and Helen begin to realize that little else in the universe holds the same value as the fulfillment of human emotions. According to Burbank, the realization allows George to "separate closely related and confused, overlapping feelings; to distinguish passion from compassion, for instance, which he had not been able to do earlier with Kate Swift" (71). The George who found Kate confusing, the George who resented the young women who offered themselves to him sexually—this George no longer exists. The awakened George now wants to learn to confront the isolation that plagues everyone.

However, breaking through to that place of understanding requires something other than Winesburg's set notions of men and women. In fact, it involves becoming "more than man or woman," the subject of my next chapter. For now, we can say that *Winesburg, Ohio* dares to show sex as an important but confusing part of human existence, one that further complicates that existence. Rather than using sex for sensationalism or shock value, Anderson uses it to show both our humanity and the societal factors that keep us from fully exploring the possibilities of that humanity. Denying their sexuality destroys some of the characters, just as confronting it recklessly or in ugly forms destroys some of the others, but two people approaching each other with reverence and mutual understanding manage to make their sexuality part of their growing insight into the need for human contact. In my next chapter, I will show how the actual sex act ultimately matters very little to George, and to *Winesburg*, though the revelations to which it leads help George break free of patriarchal limitations.

CHAPTER V  
 "MORE THAN MAN OR WOMAN"

Sexual desires and frustrations appear frequently in *Winesburg*—mostly the frustrations. To further complicate matters, Anderson infuses a certain amount of gender blurring into the narrative, sometimes to the point of making characters like Wing Biddlebaum, George Willard, or Tom Foster seem gay, but mostly by showing that the characters sometimes identify with the emotions and behaviors society imposes onto the opposite gender—i.e., men showing affection towards each other, or a woman wanting to punch someone. However, when discussing gay issues, I will avoid the common tendency of using the terms "gay" and "homoerotic" interchangeably, as "gay" suggests only same-gender attraction or identification while "homoerotic" adds the connotations of attempted, metaphoric, or actual homosexual intercourse. Psychologists coined the term "homosexuality" during the 1860s, when they started seeing gayness as an orientation rather than simply a sex act, but even that term calls attention to sex. Finally, the term "sodomy" refers to a highly questionable but rarely questioned reading of Genesis, a reading popularized by the early church leader Philo Judeaus; this word also reduces every aspect of gayness to genital stimulation. I call attention to all this terminology because Anderson transcends those societal perceptions of gayness; his use of gay themes has little to do with sex and everything to do with human contact.

Gayness, of course, relates to defying gender roles, and any defiance of gender roles will generate controversy in *Winesburg*, such as when the young Elizabeth Willard "startled the town by putting on men's clothes and riding a bicycle down Main Street" (45). Both of these, the men's clothes and the bicycle riding, are scandalous activities for a young lady in turn-of-the-century America. As I showed in Chapter II, Louise Bentley comes to see the realities of gender politics when she realizes her male baby will receive advantages a female baby would never receive. I will show other examples of how gender roles, including those involving marriage, often ensnare the characters.

In this chapter, I will also look at how Anderson juxtaposes George Willard and David Hardy to deal with sex and gender, and look briefly at "The Man Who Became A Woman," a story from Anderson's 1923 collection *Horses And Men* that utilizes gay overtones more overtly than the *Winesburg* stories. Before those discussions, I want to consider "Tandy," the story that provides the title for this chapter. In Chapter IV, I showed how sex can fulfill or destroy characters, and how George and Helen mature by facing their sexuality as part of their unarticulated desires. I also showed how gender roles often entrap both men and women.

Anderson sometimes reveals the possibility of escaping that entrapment by introducing us to characters who neither understand nor care to understand sex and gender roles, specifically the sexless characters of Tandy and David. These two innocents show the possibility of fulfillment, then reflect off the sexual and sympathetic George Willard to show that mature adults can share in that fulfillment. Adulthood need not mean a loss of dreams; innocent comradeship can coexist with sexuality.

Tandy Hard is the only character whose name the narrator uses as the title of a story; however, it turns out that Tandy is not her real name but the quality of which a drunken stranger speaks. Like many of Winesburg's residents, he thinks that "of all men" he understands women, but he actually just sees his own idealization, rather than the actual person (145). He never truly sees the little girl, or even asks her real name. We never learn that name; instead, we only see the projection of the stranger's dreams and ideals onto her. He begins to ignore the father and talk to the little girl, or rather, to the person he sees in place of her.

The little girl lives with her widowed father, Tom Hard, an atheist. The stranger came to Winesburg in an unsuccessful attempt to escape his alcoholism. One day, the five-year-old sits on her father's knees in front of the New Willard House, with George Willard sitting beside them. The stranger, recovering from a binge, joins them and says his self-destruction stems from the fact that he cannot find an object for his love: "'I am a lover and have not found my thing to love'" (144). Saying he keeps searching for a special woman, he tells the child to be Tandy, "'something more than man or woman.'" In describing Tandy, he describes what Elizabeth and Reefy, George and Helen provide for each other, and the way George ultimately learns to see people:

I know about her struggles and her defeats. It is because of her defeats that she is to me the lovely one. Out of her defeats has been born a new quality in woman. I have a name for it. I call it Tandy. I made up the name when I was a true dreamer and before my body became vile. It is the quality of being strong to be loved. It is something men need from women and that they do not get. (145)

Like Elizabeth at the beginning of "Mother," he can no longer dream, so he projects his dreams onto someone else, just as Elizabeth projects her dreams onto George. As we shall soon see, George eventually embraces the Tandy ideal he hears about that day, though the little girl might embrace it as well. Like Elizabeth at the end of "Death," Tandy can become something beautiful through her defeat and her desire to be loved. Anderson allows the stranger to express an optimism that most miss when

branding *Winesburg* nothing more than a castigation of small-town life, and he later allows George to become a manifestation of that optimism.

Getting on his knees and kissing the girl's hands, the stranger urges her to dream: "'Dare to be strong and courageous. That is the road. Venture anything. Be brave enough to dare to be loved. Be something more than man or woman. Be Tandy.'" This passage suggests either gender-blurring or gender-transcending: "more than man or woman." Of course the stranger never finds Tandy because such a person can never exist. No human being can fully embody those ideals. Still, in reaching toward those ideals, George will become more Tandy than grotesque.

Shortly after the stranger talks to the little girl, she asks her father not to use her real name, but to call her Tandy. She insists and begins to tremble and cry: "shaking and sobbing as though her young strength were not enough to bear the vision the words of the drunkard had brought to her" (146). Whether she will ever bear the vision goes unsaid, but we will meet other characters who want to take the risks of embracing, of venturing anything.

Surprisingly, the other sexless but seemingly fulfilled character serves the role of George Willard's doppelgänger—surprising because George's growth revolves so largely around sex, while David Hardy substitutes sex with harmless embraces. Even at fifteen, David never seems to think about sex. Though overly obvious, Anderson's linkage of David Hardy to the biblical King David provides a tremendous irony; after all, sexual desire drives the biblical David to adultery and murder, then to tremendous guilt over those actions, while David Hardy never thinks about lust or guilt but feels a sense of divine empowerment when he mistakenly thinks he kills his grandfather in self-defense. Rather than go on with the David Hardy/King David comparisons, including the overbearing Goliath allusion, I want to explore how Anderson manipulates the David/George reflections.

As we have already looked at many of the George Willard passages, it would help to first consider David Hardy's failed adventures in male bonding and universal harmony. As I discussed in Chapter II, "Godliness III" tells how Jesse Bentley's daughter Louise married John Hardy, who became a banker. John tried to make her happy, but she demonstrates violent behavior and lives as a "half recluse" (75). One evening, their son David becomes frightened by his own imagination and gets lost. Everyone goes looking for him. When he makes it home, Louise holds him more gently than ever before, and he sees her as some beautiful stranger whose

habitually dissatisfied face had become, he thought, the most peaceful and lovely thing he had ever seen. When he began to weep she held him more and more tightly. On and on went her voice. It was not harsh or shrill as when she talked to her husband, but was like rain falling on trees. (77)

Oddly, David seems less interested in her words than in her voice, as if he already understands the failings of language yet can hear the love she wants desperately to express.

However, this moment of tenderness passes soon. At twelve, he goes to live with his grandfather, who insisted on raising him. Jesse feels David can finally provide for him the chance to become God's instrument, a dream he had almost abandoned. David loves the farm, and wants to

embrace everyone in the house. If Shirley Bentley, the woman who came each night to sit on the floor by his bedside, did not appear at once, he went to the head of the stairs and shouted, his young voice ringing through the narrow halls where for so long there had been a tradition of silence. (82)

The word "narrow" appears throughout *Winesburg* to evoke narrow-mindedness, limited opportunity, and confinement. The people feel trapped by their own "tradition of silence," but David provides release. His shouting and George's writing bring voices to "narrow halls," to places of silence.

David and Jesse walk into the woods together. Jesse, controlled by his thoughts of biblical destiny, suddenly grabs David by the shoulder. David becomes frightened and runs away, cutting his head when he falls. He later tells his grandfather, "Take me away. There is a terrible man there in the woods." Jesse feels rejected by God when David rejects him.

That scene serves as a precursor to an even more violent scene in "Godliness IV: Terror." David Hardy will leave Winesburg one fall, at fifteen, after a life-changing adventure. David recently started carrying a slingshot all the time, after killing a rabbit. He enjoys going off in the woods by himself. One Saturday morning, Jesse stops him, with the "strained serious look that always a little frightened David" (99). They leave the farm via Jesse's carriage to go catch a lamb. Jesse, who has been prayerful and elated lately, lets David carry the tied-up lamb. Alarmed, David loosens the string on the lamb, so he and the lamb can both run, if needed. Jesse starts a bonfire, because he wants to put the lamb's blood on David, but the fifteen-year-old sees the knife in Jesse's hand and runs. The lamb also runs, and Jesse runs after it. In the overbearing Goliath allusion I mentioned before, David uses the slingshot to hit Jesse in the head with a

stone: "I have killed the man of God and now I will myself be a man and go into the world" (102). He walks down a road, leaving Winesburg, unaware that Jesse only fell unconscious. Jesse talks about God, and thinks nothing of the boy's disappearance. Later, he always tells people a messenger from God took the boy, saying it came about from his remaining "too greedy for glory" (102).

With that summary of David's two stories in mind, we can draw parallels between George and David. George's mother, Elizabeth, is a dreamer, hotel manager, and would-be actress isolated by her supposedly faded beauty and her supposedly racy past. Her father wanted her to leave Winesburg, just as she wants George to leave Winesburg. Not content, she feels trapped by her husband, and apparently never loved him.

George's father, Tom, is a Democratic leader and failing businessman in a town with few successful businesses and even fewer Democrats. We know nothing about Tom's parents, but we know he thinks very highly of himself, and that he follows practical-sounding business advice. Not content, he feels trapped by his wife, and apparently never loved her. He also feels trapped by the hotel he inherited from her father. Tom wants George to leave Winesburg.

George, a compassionate listener, asks questions, sometimes even demands to hear people's stories. He loves words: speaking them, writing them, hearing them. He wants contact, by embracing people. As soon as he feels like a man, he leaves Winesburg.

David's parents, Louise and John, are obviously not in love. Louise married John out of an unarticulated desire, as with Elizabeth's marriage to Tom. David's father is practical like Tom, while his mother is misunderstood like Elizabeth. David wants contact, by embracing people. He seems to say words more than he listens to them; he enjoys shouting. When he listens to people, he thinks of their voice rather than their words. His rich maternal grandfather rejected his mother, but never tried to make amends. As soon as he feels like a man, he leaves Winesburg.

Unlike David's grandfather, George's grandfather died long before his birth. Still, he indirectly impacted George's life by encouraging Elizabeth to want more, to dream. He felt like a bad father, but tried to make up for it by giving Elizabeth some money to escape Winesburg. She planned to give it to George, but, like much of the potential in Winesburg, it remains sealed up behind the bed of a loveless marriage. With both George and David, only the maternal grandfather impacts their lives. The maternal grandfather's wishes for the parent affect both boys. Since Jesse did not have the son he wanted, he passes those dreams onto David; he skips his daughter to become a parent to his grandson. Despite Winesburg's patriarchal nature, Anderson allows a grandparent—albeit a male one—to influence the two boys from the mother's side

instead of the father's side. Both David and George identify with the mother's side of the family. By extension, in rejecting paternal influence, they also reject the patriarchy. David seems unaware of his father, and feels a need to kill his grandfather. George half-listens to his father's banal advice about success, but takes more interest in what his mother struggles to tell him.

George's coming of age happens through women, often taking sexual forms, never taking violent forms. Conversely, his encounters with men often turn out unproductive or even violent. David's violent, primitive, and biblical coming of age happens through a man, after his only temporarily transforming encounters with women. Both boys cut their heads on tree roots during violent encounters, David when running from his grandfather, George when trying to force Ed Handby to fight him. Such violence goes against the boys' gentle natures.

Like George, David wants to embrace people, though he feels less hesitant about the notion of physical contact, because he never confuses embracing with sex. Thus, sexual desire cannot defuse his hunger for emotional contact. That purity allows him greater ease of contact. Understanding the importance of touching, he loves the way his mother holds him that night, after he runs away, and he loves the way the women at the Bentley farm hold him. Still, as I mentioned before, it seems strange that David takes no interest in sex, even at fifteen. He should be well into puberty. Apparently, sexual matters never become a priority for him, at least not during his life in Winesburg.

In "Godliness II," the narrator tells us about David's "habit of talking aloud to himself" and the fact that "early in life a spirit of quiet sadness often took possession of him" (76). Considering the conclusions she reaches when she hears George's voice through the door, Elizabeth Willard would probably take the "talking aloud to himself" and the "quiet sadness" as evidence that David wants to move beyond "words and smartness," that he can sense something deeper than anything articulated by the practical words of Winesburg businessmen.

George sees into people, but David three times sees people as not themselves, something that finally happens to George in "Death." David sees his mother transformed after he comes up missing. He also sees Jesse transformed during the two encounters in which he cannot acknowledge the possibility of Jesse's trying to hurt him. However, throughout the book, George sees people as more insightful than others, including readers, see them. It might seem strange that David sees his aunts in the Bentley home as happy, since the readers know how miserable Jesse tends to make women, but Jesse seems to treat his sisters much better than he treated his wife and daughter.

David and George both search through darkness to find the light, to find a "thing," and their searches both lead them to abandoning their fears and seeing their mothers transformed. The narrator has David think of his mother as suddenly "lovely," clarifying that David never saw her that way before; she seems completely different from the woman he knew (78). This anticipates George's later revelation about Elizabeth as "the lovely dear." "Godliness" is a sort of micro-microcosm, distilling the themes and developments of an overall book into which Anderson distills the themes and developments of an overall world: the struggles with industrialism, sex, gender, guilt, acknowledgment, connection, loss.

David is a spokesman for George, and George is a spokesman for all of us. David threads together "Godliness I-IV," the story cycle within the story cycle, while George helps thread the entire book together. Surprisingly, however, George and David never appear in the same story. Anderson forces us to trace the connections between them, without allowing their lives to connect physically. In letting the boys separately transcend stereotypical male gender roles, he lets them both become guides for the reader and the grotesques, people who can escape the restraints of a patriarchal society, both by physically leaving and by emotionally growing.

Thus far, I have referred frequently to gender-blurring and gay subtext in *Winesburg*. At this point, I would like to elaborate exactly how and why Anderson uses those elements, and to make it clear that he intended their presence. Not surprisingly, this discussion will take us back to Gertrude Stein. Stein often deals with homosexuality within her work, but not as bluntly as the heterosexual Anderson deals with it. In "Melanctha," we might read the relationship between Melanctha and Rose as potentially lesbian, but Stein works with gay subtext more playfully in one of her less popular works.

In discussing Stein's short story "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene," Marjorie Perloff notes that Stein uses "gay" as the story's key word, and that she exhausts the term of all possible meanings, including the then-underground definition of "homosexual" (102). Perloff illustrates the way Stein uses a swirl of associated words around "gay" to slowly suggest Helen Furr's lesbianism, an idea most of Stein's contemporaries might not otherwise perceive. Over and over, the story suggests an understood but private relationship between the two women, like the one between Stein and Toklas.

As a close friend of Stein, Anderson could not help but pick up on her concerns about not only the difficult lives of women but also the difficult lives of gays. The benefit of this exposure obviously made him sympathetic, and it upset him when people took

offense at his use of a gay character in his favorite of the *Winesburg* stories, "Hands." In a 1920 letter to Van Wyck Brooks, Anderson counters the aforementioned charges Brooks makes in *The Ordeal Of Mark Twain* by saying he used "Hands" to speak more honestly about a topic usually confronted with general or scientific language, because he hoped to "dip down into the living stuff," but it only led to accusations of baseness (Jones and Rideout 60). He saw the populace's need to deny the simple existence of gay human beings as contrary to reality: "Dozens of men have told me privately they know Wing Biddlebaum. I tried to present him sympathetically—taboo" (60).

Elsewhere, Anderson claims he first considered writing about Wing Biddlebaum while pondering the glances he would get from other men at a bar when he would jokingly refer to his male friend as "Mabel" (*Reader* 325-27). Anderson's letters and diaries contain many references to gays and lesbians, all of them brief but none of them homophobic. He always seems curious and observant rather than judgmental. If he states that he thought some men might be gay (*Diaries* 21), it sounds no different than his observations about someone else's height or weight, and he makes none of the sorts of homophobic remarks like those Hemingway makes about Stein in his *The Torrents of Spring*. Apparently, Anderson never seemed to share the common fear others hold of someone considering them gay. That seems most obvious in a 1935 letter to English professor Roger Segel, when Anderson ponders male friendship:

Now you see, this is something men do not yet understand, or perhaps do not dare quite understand concerning their relationships. A man, to be my friend, must attract me physically, not as a woman does, in a special way. We modern men are afraid of facing that fact. I must like something about my friend's eyes, the way he carries himself as he walks along, something in the temper of the man that fits into my own temper. It is a thing distinct from the tenderness a man feels for his woman. (Jones and Rideout 325)

The qualification "do not dare quite understand" suggests both his awareness of homophobia and his determination not to let such fears stop him from understanding himself or others. Moreover, the phrase "We modern men" suggests Anderson would prefer we think more like earlier men—perhaps the Greeks and Romans, perhaps Whitman—instead of succumbing to societal anxieties. That same year, Anderson found similar sentiments in the collected letters of Van Gogh. According to a letter Anderson wrote to Eleanor's mother, reading about the bond he saw between Van Gogh and other male artists made him think of his own

fraternity with the likes of Brooks and Waldo Frank, men for whom he often stated his love (Jones and Rideout 331).

Obviously, Anderson saw gayness and same-gender affection as simple parts of life: he treated neither as a threat, and he understood that one did not necessarily presuppose the other. However, that Anderson meant specifically to present Wing as a gay character becomes obvious when William L. Phelps discusses the writing process of *Winesburg*. Anderson loves to say that he wrote "Hands" in a single sitting after which, sounding like David Hardy and George Willard, he ran out into the snow wanting to hug people (Jones and Rideout 314-15). Supposedly, he never changed a word of "Hands" afterward. However, Phelps shows changes in the manuscript that toned down the more obvious references to Wing's sexual orientation. For example, "The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands" originally read "of his hands" (Phelps 31). Phelps clarifies,

Anderson was first of all aware that he would have to avoid any details about Wing's case that would disgust the "normal" reader if he were to treat the homosexually inclined character with sympathy. He must avoid the suggestion that Wing Biddlebaum's attraction to George Willard is wholly erotic in nature. Thus he added the qualifying "something like" in "With George Willard. . . he had formed something like a friendship"; instead of "he still hungered for the boy" he wrote "he still hungered for the presence of the boy"; and he replaced "[Biddlebaum's hands] stole to George Willard's shoulders" with "[Biddlebaum's hands] stole forth and lay upon George Willard's shoulders." (31)

As I mentioned earlier, Anderson would later show less reticence in dealing with gay themes, particularly in the *Horses And Men* story "The Man Who Became A Woman." To summarize briefly, young Herman Dudley's simple life of taking care of horses slowly becomes complicated as he begins to acknowledge the wild sexuality symbolized by the horses. However, he shifts from emergence to denial after a dreamlike night finds him both falling naked into the skeleton of a horse and nearly experiencing rape at the hands of some drunken black men. In his "The Form of Things Concealed," Frank Gado points out that Anderson uses suggestive nomenclature by naming a horse "O My Man" and naming the main character "Herman Dud-ley" (117). Gado also points out that Herman avoids confronting his homosexuality by pretending the men either mistake him for a woman, or just want to play a joke on him (118). The story's mystical-sounding title reinforces Herman's denial of the obvious: he lies there naked, seeming to offer himself to other men, but then runs away when they take him up on the offer.

Considering his nakedness, it seems unlikely they could mistake him for a woman. Thus, the story centers not around mistaken identity but around Herman's denying the possibility of his own emerging identity.

In his introduction to *The Portable Sherwood Anderson*, Horace Gregory avoids specifically homosexual references, but links the symbolism of "adolescent sexual experience" during the homoerotic scenes of Ishmael and Queequeg sleeping together in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* with the homoerotic ones in "Hands" and "The Man Who Became A Woman" (9-10). Gregory says Anderson saw Melville's ability to create sexual undertones with a series of actions that, taken together, suggest something mysterious, and that Ishmael's "decision to share a bed with Queequeg," despite his initial disgust with the savage "is closely, if broadly, allied to these mysteries, the transcendental qualities, of sexual experience in Anderson's stories" (10). Of course, to simply call the relationship between George and Wing, Herman and the men, or Ishmael and Queequeg "gay" not only distorts but also reduces the discomfiting effect Anderson and Melville achieve.

Melville's and Anderson's scenes evoke homophobia in readers, society, and characters, but both writers channel that homophobia into a more general sense of apprehension and curiosity about the unknown, the different, the other. Ishmael fears and desires the savagery and uniqueness of his companion, just like Wing's two towns want his contribution as teacher then berry picker but not his reality as a gay man. In other words, the towns want the person but not his personality; they want worker bees, not individuals. Facing individuality forces the characters to challenge countless axioms and anxieties; more painfully, it makes them question themselves.

Anderson's manipulative strategy taps into such fears as fully as Melville taps into them in the following discomfiting passages from the constantly homoerotic *Moby Dick*, beginning when Ishmael tells of the earliest nights with a savage who symbolizes everything he rejects but becomes his "bosom friend." On the first night, Ishmael wakes to find Queequeg holding his hand and embracing him; his memories of that realization cover several pages, though the situation ends with no conflict and soon integrates into their relationship. After they settle the matter of remaining bunkmates, Ishmael keeps finding himself unable to stop staring at the repulsive savage, whom he soon refers to as looking "by no means disagreeable" (144). He even prays to Queequeg's male idol, and kisses its face, before comparing himself and the savage to a married couple, "a cosy, loving pair" (148). The next sentence tells of their next morning, beginning with language that suggests a honeymooning couple. Notice how it reflects none of his former revulsion:

We had lain thus in bed, chatting and napping at short intervals, and Queequeg now and then affectionately throwing his brown tattooed legs over mine, and then drawing them back; so entirely sociable and free and easy were we. (148)

In his essay "'Enviably Isles': Melville's South Seas," Robert K. Martin sees the relationship of those two men foreshadowed by the love between Tom and Toby in Melville's first novel *Typee*. Tom often uses metaphors related to marriage and engagement in reference to his relationship with Toby, who travels with him between two worlds: an island paradise, with references to consenting gay sex, and the ship, with references to same-gender rape (226). Martin points out that "the term 'homosexuality' did not exist in the 1840's" but that Melville uses the terms "buggery" and "sodomy." Most importantly, the island's appeal slowly draws Tom, Toby, and the unsuspecting readers into a world of primitivism and taboo.

Anderson plays with the fear of sexuality or sexual differences in much the same way as Melville when George tries not to think of Wing's hands, when Rev. Hartman decides he needs to save Kate, when Wash tries to strike his former mother-in-law with a chair, when Enoch runs from the prostitute, and in countless other passages. By exploiting those fears, Anderson also evokes others, such as loneliness, change, and loss of religious certainty. Thus we can see the importance of Anthony Channell Hilfer's saying Anderson never writes about fornication; he simply takes that road as a way of leading readers to a destination: the confrontation of fears. Though he would later come to consider his own work inferior to that of D. H. Lawrence, Anderson never shared Lawrence's interest in the mysteries of sex as the main subject of his works; instead he looked honestly at sex as part of, and often symbolic of, the overall mystery and chaos of human existence.

The use of gender-blurring often reflects what Anderson sees as the more general apprehension of exploring that mystery and chaos. The men live in terror of someone acting gay or female-like; of course, it scares them even more that someone might see them as homosexual or feminine. The women dare not act liberated, because the society considers female liberation either manly or whorish. All of the gender-blurring language suggests an atmosphere of antagonism toward anyone who seems unlike the prescribed gender stereotypes. Consider, for example, the misogynistic speech Tom Willard gives George, the speech that so upsets Elizabeth:

"Will Henderson has spoken to me three times concerning this matter. He says you go along for hours not hearing when

you are spoken to and acting like a gawky girl. What ails you?" Tom Willard laughed good-naturedly. "Well, I guess you'll get over it," he said. "I told Will that. You're not a fool and you're not a woman." (44)

Tom tries desperately to intimidate George not into being a better writer or person but into acting more like Will's perception of how a man should act. Obviously, Tom feels embarrassed by the comparison Will makes of George "acting like a gawky girl," not by any failure at work. In fact, the narrator constantly makes it obvious that George performs exceedingly well as a reporter. It just scares Tom that someone would refer to his son as a girl.

Winesburg's men, in general, seem to see feminine qualities as negative, especially when they appear in men. Even the cold and callous Jesse Bentley receives the unwanted branding of appearing female: "By the standards of his day Jesse did not look like a man at all. He was small and very slender and womanish of body" (66). By making that distinction, the narrator immediately alerts us to Jesse's position as an outcast. However, aside from Jesse, the most insightful and mature characters in the book are either women (Elizabeth, the dark girl), men with feminine qualities (Wing, Dr. Reefy), or men who allow themselves to learn from women (George, David). As Nancy Bunge points out, "the adult males in Anderson's fiction who show any capacity for vital relationships were influenced by loving women in their youth" (246). Only the characters who question the sex and gender codes of Winesburg can inspire contact and live meaningful lives. However, even the very insights of women like Elizabeth Willard make their tragedy more complete, considering that the entrapment of their marriages will keep them from living out their own intuition.

Like Stein, Anderson often portrays a hopeless view of marriage. In writing about Stein's last major work, the opera *The Mother Of Us All*, Robert K. Martin says Stein looked at marriage as "an inherently destructive institution that denies the self while remaining unable to eliminate the fundamental human experience of isolation" ("Opera" 216). Of course, Stein never married officially, but we could look at her relationship with Alice B. Toklas as an unrecognized marriage, and she seemed to thrive within that. The problem then is not marriage itself, but the fact that loveless marriages tend to imprison women in a safe but unfulfilling routine. Anderson depicts the same de-glamorization of marriage during a scene in "Godliness III," making statements that seem to cover most of the wedlock in Winesburg. The narrator seems to forget about Louise Bentley for a moment to speak in general terms about what people in the 1900s saw as "a nice girl":

If a nice girl, she had a young man who came to her house to see her on Sunday and on Wednesday evenings. Sometimes she went with her young man to a dance or a church social. At other times she received him at the house and was given the use of the parlor for that purpose. No one intruded upon her. For hours the two sat behind closed doors. Sometimes the lights were turned low and the young man and woman embraced. Cheeks became hot and hair disarranged. After a year or two, if the impulse within them became strong and insistent enough, they married. (92)

This custom sounds flatly ritualistic and unromantic, like breeding dogs by putting them in a pen together and hoping they mate. It sounds nothing like the passionate relationship between Elizabeth and Reefy or George and Helen.

The cold depictions of marriage get worse. In "The Untold Lie," marriage sounds like nothing more than a side-effect of casual sex: Ray Pearson's "marriage had come about through one of his days of wandering. He had induced a girl who waited on trade in his father's shop to go with him and something had happened" (204). Of course, in that story, Ray's motivations for not wanting his friend to marry become suspicious.

An awkward silence falls between Ray, who only married because of a pregnancy, and his younger roommate Hal Winters, who now faces the same situation. After referring to Ray as "more sensitive" than Hal (204), the narrator tells of how the two men stare into each other's eyes and fall into "an earnest mood" (205). Agitated, Hal begins pacing among the cornstalks—an obvious play on phallic/fertility symbolism, perhaps mixed with the image of a man outside a delivery room. He then places his hands on Ray's, and they apparently stand that way for a while, as they "become all alive to each other." Hoping to break the awkwardness of their semi-embrace, Hal jokingly refers to Ray as "old daddy" and makes some disparaging remarks about marriage, causing Ray to pull away from Hal's touch.

Later, while thinking of how he cannot stand his own wife, Ray also keeps thinking about Hal. Staring at the beautiful countryside, he regains the feeling of "all alive" he felt while Hal touched him, and he decides he and Hal owe no woman marriage. The same Ray who spends all his time with men, either in the fields or in the pubs, wants to protect his relationship with the younger man.

Especially considering how they confide in each other and how Hal calls him "old daddy," we could easily discount that relationship as merely best friends or father/son, but it also sounds romantic, perhaps even like the ancient Greek relationship

between an older man and his beloved apprentice. Hal, a sort of Walt Whitman character in love with men and the fields, is stricken with a fear of change: a fear that Winesburg will lose its beauty, and that he will lose Hal. Becoming protective, perhaps even obsessively jealous, he runs crying and screaming against all the unfairness and ugliness in life. He finally decides to tell Hal something of great importance, something the narrator never reveals, only to hear Hal's claim that he and the young woman really love each other. Even more frustrating for the reader, Ray dismisses the whole emotional ordeal, deciding that whatever he said to Hal "'would have been a lie'" (209). Was the untold lie really just a truth Ray could not handle or would not dare articulate? We never find out. Winesburg allows only so much love and expression of love between two men; the narrator suggests that when Ray questions certain boundaries and institutions, it causes him to run, fearing both Hal and himself.

Whatever the potential relationship between Ray and Hal, the story still shows heterosexual marriage as often unromantic and women as nothing more than victims of their own desire for contact. However, as I have mentioned before, Anderson helps women in their plight by exposing that plight. Cleveland Chase criticizes Anderson's tendency either to not develop his female characters at all or to put them "on such a pedestal that he can't possibly treat them as human beings" (80), but Anderson seems keenly aware that Winesburg (i.e., society) treats them in those very ways: either as inconsequential or as a nice accessory. He wants to show how he sees women misused. No one can read the stories of Elizabeth Willard or Louise Bentley without seeing how their unrealized desires cause a life of suffering. Anderson reveals loveless marriage as nothing more than prostitution and abandonment. It leaves the woman giving up her body in order to survive, giving up her dreams in order to maintain the status quo. Anderson seems concerned with women like Alice Hindman, who want to be modern but feel they cannot, and women like Belle Carpenter, who want to hold someone without receiving the scarlet letter of town whore. Such women must seek refuge in marriage, but they find only refuge, not completion.

As bleak as Anderson's views toward marriage might sound, we should not overgeneralize them, or assume that the situations in his fiction fully represent them. After all, he kept re-marrying and, long after *Winesburg*, eventually found the perfect woman for himself, Eleanor Copenhaver. However, we can say that his treatment of sex and gender ultimately tackles the imposing and unquestioned institution of marriage. Anderson asks if, in order to uphold tradition, we all must reduce our lives to the following formula: boy meets girl; boy and girl both learn their supposed "place"; boy marries girl; boy and girl produce more boys and

girls. Anderson suggests that life offers so much more, requires so much more. The individual, regardless of gender, must decide what fulfills himself or herself before making decisions about marriage or parenthood: one must think about one's place in society and one's meaning as an individual.

As with all roads in Winesburg, this one leads us back to George Willard. Saying "you're a boy so you must do these things" cannot fulfill George; unlike most of the other male characters, he allows the female characters to teach him that lesson. Because he examines then transcends sex and gender impositions, he can focus instead on selfhood and transcendent human contact, thus embodying the Tandy ideal he overheard in front of the hotel, the stranger's words about becoming "something more than man or woman." Of course, the stranger who talks to the little girl always expected a woman to become Tandy, but Anderson further rebels against gender impositions by letting a boy become a man, then letting the female characters shape the man into Tandy.

I believe the "courting" that goes on between George and some of the other male characters refers not to adolescent sexual experimentation or to his budding sexual identity, but to his budding ability to transcend gender roles in order to show compassion and solace—universal human qualities that we tend to see as strictly maternal qualities. He learns those qualities from his mother, but willingly shares them with other characters, regardless of their gender. Furthermore, his sexual encounters, except for the one with Helen, reflect Winesburg's initial success at projecting more limiting gender roles onto George. When he "becomes wholly the male" and immediately afterward resents the women who give themselves to him, we should hardly see those scenes as passionate. He has sex with the first two women; he makes love with Helen. His encounter with Helen shows not just sexual maturity, but an emotional capability to connect with another human being.

From his identification with Helen, and from his wanting the touch of a woman, I would not refer to George as gay, and that is not at all my intent with this discussion. I simply mean that George learns to use sex as a way of confronting the gender roles, then begins to question those gender roles. That rejection not only banishes the guilt and resentment he associates with sex but also makes copulation irrelevant in comparison to the overall contact. "Nobody Knows" and "An Awakening" revolve around George having sex; "Sophistication" revolves around George and Helen finding the unspoken "thing" that will allow them to endure the loneliness of life and give them the courage to love. Furthermore, even if he misinterprets it, George accepts advice from the disregarded and the rejected, especially lonely women and even a gay man. He seems to eventually forget the advice of most other

men; the more misogynistic or patriarchal the advice, the less it seems to inform the mature George. Instead of staying within the accepted paths of Winesburg's "narrow" roads, George rebels against the establishment by facing the forbidden and the unspoken to become "sophisticated," to become "more than man or woman."

CHAPTER VI  
INDUSTRIALISM: THE MACHINE IN THE BERRY FIELD

In this chapter, I want to use the writings of various literary historians and critics as an introduction to the concerns of industrialism that strongly informed Anderson and his writing. After considering these writers, I want to look at the influence of Twain and Whitman, then look at Anderson's response to industrialism in *Winesburg* and *Poor White*. Though my other chapters generally limit their focus to *Winesburg*, the industrialism motif closely binds *Winesburg* with *White* as well as the weaker novels *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Marching Men*, which warrant less attention. It also places *Winesburg*, the best of those four books, within yet another important phenomenon in American literature, one we can begin tracing by looking at the speeches of R. G. Ingersoll.

We find the most obvious evidence of Col. Ingersoll's influence on Anderson in the fact that the narrator of *Poor White* goes so far as to mention him by name: "Robert Ingersoll came to Bidwell to speak in Terry's Hall, and after he had gone the question of the divinity of Christ for months occupied the minds of the citizens" (155). What made the controversial and eloquent speaker stick in the mind of a writer who never considered himself an intellectual? Despite his atheism, Ingersoll appealed to countless Americans during Anderson's lifetime, traveling all over the country to speak about religion, war, patriotism, the economy, and myriad other topics.

Possible seeds of *Winesburg* and *White* appear in Ingersoll's speech entitled "The Farmer and the Mechanic—Which the Colonel Thinks Has the Best of It," a warning not to rely on jobs within factories that might close at any moment. Ingersoll seems concerned about over-specialization, that someone will receive narrowly focused training for a particular task that can easily disappear, in which case the training becomes worthless. As an example, he refers to a shoe-factory with "hundreds of men, but not a shoemaker. It takes them all, assisted by a great many machines, to make a shoe. Each does a particular part, and not one of them knows the entire trade" (77). A farmer, on the other hand, knows many different skills and can adapt when needed. The farm will remain, even if a certain crop fails; the factory, however, always faces the prospect of closing.

He also worries about the mercy, or lack thereof, employees find from those who can easily replace them, those who fail to see them as anything more than expendable parts of the machine. This reliance on mercy from the often merciless leads Ingersoll to prefer the independence of farming: "It is better to till the ground and work for yourself than to be hired by corporations. Man

should endeavor to belong to himself." Here, the pastoral not only holds the ideals of hard work and communion with nature but also the fundamental American premise of individuality and freedom. Ingersoll subtly contrasts an image of conquering ("till the ground") with one of being conquered ("hired by corporations") before making the more overt statement about belonging to oneself.

Surprisingly, Ingersoll seems to offer contrasting views to that speech during another one entitled "Industry and Brotherhood," in which he claims farmers and inventors need each other, that the "world advances by the assistance of all laborers; and all labor is under obligations to the inventions of genius. The inventor does as much good for agriculture as he who tills the soil" (85). In this speech, he presents all laborers as partners, even as "brothers," while presenting "the idler" as the enemy of all laborers. Contrary to the speech's overall tone of reconciliation, the colonel still manages to find an enemy. Anderson would come to see humanity's common enemy as loss of contact: with the land, with the past, with one's self, with each other.

In his introduction to *The Portable Sherwood Anderson*, Horace Gregory discusses the influence of Ingersoll on Anderson, explaining that Ingersoll balances a dogmatic rhetoric of progress with a vigilance against lost individuality (5). Therefore, the seeming contrasts between the two speeches I just mentioned actually resolve themselves by reflecting a desire to gain from progress without losing ourselves, a sentiment shared by many of the writers I will discuss shortly, including Anderson. Of course, the idea of synthesis as a solution permeates American literature and the American identity, but this particular synthesis seems to closely relate Anderson and Ingersoll, both on a thematic level and in the language. Gregory sees Ingersoll as a surprising yet obvious influence on Anderson, who never cared for scientific dogmatism or inflated rhetoric:

yet the sentiments of Ingersoll, overheard or half-heard from the lips of talkers in small-town newspaper offices and saloons, are of the same character as those that filled the young and speculative mind of George Willard in Winesburg, Ohio. (6)

According to Gregory, if Ingersoll's reasoning helps George understand the grotesques, it also "provides a logic of its own for the arrival of Hugh McVey," the main character of *White*, who sees the mechanical advantages Ingersoll champions without seeing the humanity Ingersoll fears the mechanical could destroy.

While the soapbox eloquence of Ingersoll can help disclose the common concerns of people during Anderson's boyhood, we can

also find a larger framework for the discussion of industrialism, starting with Leo Marx's landmark book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Marx says the early view of the machine tended toward the positive: mechanization as a reflection of nature's inner working, of the Newtonian machine of life (162). Though mentioning the often-noted fact that the "dominant structural metaphor of the Constitution is that of a self-regulating machine" (165), he traces changing and often ambivalent views about technological advances. The German writer Friedrich Schiller's book *Letters upon the Aesthetical Education of Man* (1795) warns that mechanization might destroy individuality (Marx 169). The popularity of Schiller and other dissenting voices would only intensify over the next four decades, slowly reaching England and America.

In his 1829 essay "Signs of the Times," the English writer Thomas Carlyle shows machinery as one of the most important and needed aspects of a progressive society, yet he sees flaws in industrialism, including both an increasing rift between economic classes and the tendency of machines to make people machine-like. Carlyle rejects the utilitarianism popularized by John Locke, claiming it falsely assumes both that government will run like a finely-tuned machine and that new inventions will end human suffering. Far from taking an anti-technology stand, however, Carlyle wants to see people using machines, instead of people becoming machines. Most of all, he wants the internal will and imagination to sustain equilibrium with the external industrial environment (Marx 170-76).

In explaining his term "machine in the garden," Marx uses the prevalent metaphor of a locomotive that disrupts the landscape. This appearance causes an immediate recognition of change, simultaneously positive and negative, simultaneously hopeful and destructive: "It causes the instantaneous clash of opposed states of mind: a strong urge to believe in the rural myth along with an awareness of industrialization as counterforce to the myth" (229). Marx uses the familiar example of Frank Norris's naturalistic novel *The Octopus* (1901), which focuses not only on the train but also on a corrupt railroad company that manages to strangle a formerly peaceful and trusting community. Writing about the opening chapter's ending, Marx says, "Presley, a poet, is walking at sunset in the rich San Joaquin Valley. It is a lovely, mild evening. Everything is still. He is in a reverie" (Marx 343-44). Of course, when the train suddenly appears, a monstrous cyclops, it leaves Presley terrified and disgusted. Those without such poetic sensibilities might fail to sense the danger Presley senses, the danger that unchecked faith in technology will destroy many good people. Norris in no way romanticizes or excuses the effects of

the machine, but rather shows how those people become entangled by it in their need for a secure life.

In *The Octopus*, we find the story of Magnus Derrick, a manifestation of small-town, nineteenth-century values. Derrick, the owner of Los Muertos Ranch, encounters the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad, a powerful corporation that buys up ranch land in the San Joaquin valley and begins charging incomprehensible tariffs on wheat, destroying the local economy and way of life. The railroad practically owns the railroad commissioners, so Derrick, his sons, and his neighbors seem helpless and slowly resort to questionable ethics. Even Derrick, long considered the epitome of goodness and values, destroys himself by getting caught up in a bribery conspiracy. In the end, many members of the San Joaquin community die in a senseless gunfight. Throughout the novel, Norris juxtaposes images of the machine with references to wheat, constantly echoing the invasion of two beasts: one of metal, the other a beast of corporate greed that encases itself in the metal shell. Ultimately, the forces of power taint the protectors of the garden.

In *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), Adams shows another disturbing dichotomy at work, one he explains with his concept of the Dynamo and the Virgin. Adams, who refers to himself as being the same age as the railroad, becomes fascinated and horrified by the inventions he sees at scientific expositions, worrying that the Dynamo (power, the machine) will take the place of the Virgin (religion, the arts) as an organizing principle in modern society. While he sees many new possibilities coming from technological advancements, including new outlets for the human desire to constantly improve, he wonders if the Dynamo will take us too far from nature, art, and the spiritual life.

Many American fiction writers of the next few decades, including Anderson, approach mechanization with the same ambivalence. In fact, some of Anderson's key passages involve a simultaneous deification and demonization of the machine, as I will discuss shortly. Though Marx's study ends well before the 1919 publication date of *Winesburg*, he specifically mentions Anderson as one of the twentieth-century fiction writers whose works reflect the same concerns as *The Machine in the Garden*.

While Marx concerns himself primarily with literary responses to the machine, Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* illuminates the cultural and historical context, including how the Homestead Act of 1862 turned into a tool for industrialism to bring the machine into the garden:

perhaps only a tenth of the new farms settled between 1860 and 1900 were acquired under the Homestead Act; the rest

were bought either directly from land or railroad companies (beneficiaries of huge land grants), or from the states.

Rather than fostering a region of family farmers, the Homestead Act would prove instrumental in furthering the incorporation of Western lands into the Eastern industrial system. Until the practice was discontinued in 1871, the Republican Congress had enthusiastically donated more than a million and a half acres of public domain in the form of "land grants" to railroad companies operating west of the Mississippi. (22)

The railroads then began re-selling the lands to whomever they wished, while Congress continued to pass acts that amounted to corporate welfare for the railroad, mining, and timber industries. Trachtenberg says that because of pressure from business lobbies, the government increasingly sponsored numerous programs that benefited private corporations more than the public, thus enabling those businesses to strip the earth of its resources, leaving needy individuals with little choice but to seek employment from industrial forces.

Food production became mechanized by the 1890s, diminishing the pastoral ideals of farmers (23). Increasingly, the machine became indicative not only of progress and opportunity but also of the

newly visible poverty, slums, and an unexpected wretchedness of industrial conditions. While it inspired confidence in some quarters, it also provoked dismay, often arousing hope and gloom in the same minds. (38)

Even the military became industrialized, while industry used fairs and expositions to idealize the use of technology, intertwining industrialism with concepts of progress and patriotism. The use of carefully set clocks and carefully set propaganda soon brought everyone into a world of mechanical regulation, one above question, above reproach (41). The educated grew increasingly more powerful and created bureaucracies in which the upper class could climb even higher, while the uneducated found little chance for improvement (54). Graduate programs began to produce corporate managers, replacing the traditional concept of apprenticeship with the less idealistic fact that those with money could buy the education, which would give them control over machines, which would give them control over the masses (64).

Those masses included the citizens of Clyde, Ohio, because industrialism eventually spread from the larger cities into the smallest communities. In his book *On Native Grounds: An*

*Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*, Alfred Kazin illustrates how industrialism directly affected Anderson's life and his work. Because Anderson grew up during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, he could clearly see the effects of the machine invading Clyde and other small Ohio communities. Kazin observes a specific tendency in Anderson's work that separates him from other writers of his time, a tendency to keep conjuring images of "the world of the old handicraft artisans, the harness makers and Civil War veterans like his father, the small-town tailors and shoemakers, the buggy and wagon craftsman of the old school" (211). Anderson became a sort of historian for forgotten people, occupations, traditions, and values—for anything and anyone that seemed to fade in the light of technology.

According to Walter B. Rideout, the Clyde that influences *Winesburg* is not the Clyde of the 1910s but the one Anderson remembers from 1893, the year machines and electricity suddenly encroached upon Anderson's boyhood world, the year before a massive bicycle factory came to Clyde, and a few years before Anderson's departure:

Anderson was to give imaginative embodiment to this development in *Poor White*, but the *Winesburg* tales he conceived of as for the most part occurring in a pre-industrial setting, recalling nostalgically a town already lost before he has left it, giving this vanished era the permanence of pastoral. ("Simplicity" 149)

Throughout his writing, Anderson would keep reliving the sense of abrupt change, the sense that something came in like a tornado and ripped away a part of American life. Anderson's urgent remembering might seem to sentimentalize the end of the nineteenth century, but his interest in the pastoral grows rather naturally from the time during which he saw the pastoral diminishing. It involves a need to document more than it involves his commonly criticized tendency toward maudlin sentimentality.

In their book *Sherwood Anderson: Centennial Studies*, Hilbert H. Campbell and Charles E. Modlin locate Anderson within a pastoral tradition that chronicles the "struggle toward resolution between the character and a threatening society," a struggle they see as not simply glorifying country life and country people but also examining "the contrast between rural simplicity and urban complexity," as well as "the need for those participants in this complexity, that is, the writer and his audience, to measure their world against the radical vision of country life" (236). Campbell and Modlin maintain that while *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Marching Men* both investigate the need for a life with meaning amid a world of machines, those novels also look at how a young man leaves the

country life for the machine, only to find disappointment. Hence, both works take the boy from what little remains of the rural setting. *Winesburg*, on the other hand,

distills these tensions into a "moment" in which the small town and its inhabitants are poised in an uneasy equilibrium between an agrarian past and the threatening industrial age ahead. The keynote of *Winesburg* is the balancing of these two worlds in innumerable ways. The old world, the source of the book's evocation of a lost innocence and goodness, is the world of the setting, the fields and farms around Winesburg, as well as the simple round of daily life in the town itself. Set against this is the implicit presence of the city, which stands on the horizon of the book's scenes and events, an analogue of irresistible change. (237)

Clarifying that Anderson knew we could not return to the pastoral life, and that he knew such a life never offered perfection, Campbell and Modlin say Anderson wanted to reach back into the pastoral age and take certain values from it that could make life during the industrial age more meaningful (245). Far from living in the past, Anderson wants to draw from the pastoral, while living in modern life. Like Ingersoll and Carlyle, he wants not to destroy the machine but simply to avoid becoming one. Like countless other American writers, he recreates and mythologizes the American past, so we can better face the realities of the present, rooting our lives in some sense of cultural tradition.

In his essay "Sherwood Anderson's Moments of Insight," David D. Anderson also sees Anderson's first two novels as using "the premise that the effect of industrialism on the individual was to isolate him" (169). While Sam McPherson realizes his isolation halfway through the narrative and begins trying to reintegrate himself into society, *Marching Men* extols the notion that workers simply need to unite, to march together in a workers' song. Though Anderson wrote Waldo Frank in 1917 about his plans for *Winesburg* to capture the same "song of men, machines, and the ground" as the one explained by the narrator of *Marching Men*, he also held new ambitions for *Winesburg* (Jones and Rideout 14). He came to see the endings of his first two novels as too pat, so he wanted to give the story cycle a guardedly optimistic ending rather than a fully "happy" or simplistic one. His previous focus on occupations gave way to a focus on personalities, mostly those he calls "the grotesque." Still, the grotesques spring forth from the same industrialized environment that creates the dilemmas in his first two published books.

Welford Dunaway Taylor believes Anderson's experience with industrialized environments helped him give insight into alienation. After all, watching the entire world change as he grew up showed him "an erosion of close human relationships as one man competed with another for financial success and positions of authority" (1). While any child will see the world in a different way after reaching adulthood, Anderson saw a different world, one that troubled him. We can understand why he kept clinging to parts of the past, why the book he juxtaposed between those two worlds would avoid a clear sense of past and present, and why he would intentionally appropriate the influences of Walt Whitman and Mark Twain—two writers who epitomize the pastoral tradition and the American literary tradition.

Anderson loved *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* but disliked most of Twain's darker works. In a 1918 letter to his friend Van Wyck Brooks about Brooks's work-in-progress, *The Ordeal Of Mark Twain* (1920), Anderson explains that Twain let his contemporaries turn him into a pessimist and destroy his imagination. He believes Twain wrote best when in contact with nature because "a man cannot be a pessimist who lives near a brook or a cornfield. When the brook chatters or at night when the moon comes up and the wind plays in the corn, a man hears the whispering of the gods" (Jones and Rideout 33). Expressing a desire that *Winesburg* can somehow recapture some of the communion with nature he sees in *Huck Finn*, Anderson speculates that Twain

wrote that book in a little hut on a hill on his farm. . . . I fancy that at night he came down from his hill stepping like a king, a splendid playboy playing with rivers and men, riding on the Mississippi, on the broad river that is the great artery flowing out of the heart of the land. (33)

Anderson constantly relates romance with rivers in his works, but never fully explores that metaphor until *Dark Laughter*. Of course, despite the absence of a river, *Winesburg's* events and themes often relate to hills, streams, rain, cornfields, and berry fields: symbols of creative force he appropriated from both Twain and Whitman.

In his introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, Anderson finds Whitman "in the bones of America as Ralph Waldo Emerson is in the American mentality" and speaks of a need to reawaken the awareness Whitman displayed of "land hunger, river hunger, sea and sky hunger" (19). While it would overstate the case to say Anderson tries to recreate *Leaves of Grass* in prose form, we know that he constantly referred to a desire to make his prose poetic, that he succeeds most fully within *Winesburg*, that he uses Whitman's blending of pastoral and sexual imagery, that he shares Whitman's

interest in everyday folk, and that *Winesburg* embodies Whitman's sense of becoming a singer for everyone. Rather than reflecting the industrial song of *Marching Men*, however, the song in *Winesburg* reflects Anderson's desire for "the return to Whitman, to his songs, his dreams, his consciousness of the possibilities of the land that was his land and is our land" (21). Anderson's poetry collection *Mid-American Chants* (1918) provides the transition from *Marching Men* to *Winesburg*; in these poorly written but highly ambitious poems, Anderson proudly beats the drums of fertility and patriotism in America's cornfields, appropriating the uniquely American song Whitman celebrated and the love of nature Whitman treasured.

The fact that Whitman's characters interact with nature while the characters in *Winesburg* slowly lose contact with nature serves to illustrate Anderson's sense of a vanishing pastoral, a loss of everything Whitman celebrates. In his book *Sixteen Authors To One: Intimate Sketches of Leading American Story Tellers*, Anderson's acquaintance David Karsner compares Anderson's characters to those of Whitman, but recognizes how Anderson complicates their peaceful lives by making them react to unavoidable changes:

these people, put upon by circumstance and entangled in the tentacles of vast industrialism, are sleeping giants tethered for a time until they regain their birthright of an existence as individuals and partake of a new baptism with the tools and materials of their craft. (56)

Karsner recognizes Anderson's confidence that many of the "sleeping giants" can and will rise from their slumber, even if they must walk forth into a world that no longer seems to need their skills or tools.

Robert Allen Papinchak sees the grotesque as "a direct descendent of Washington Irving's recluse, Nathaniel Hawthorne's isolate, and Edgar Allan Poe's monomaniac" (5), a descendent born of and stranded by the increasing emphasis on money and machines (6). As the American fear of isolation intensifies, the depiction of such characters intensifies. Drawing from his experience and his many influences, Anderson creates a community in a state of loss and emptiness, a community that wakes like Rip Van Winkle to find the past suddenly gone.

Though the pastoral imagery in *Winesburg* might occur with less persistence than in *Leaves of Grass* or *Huck Finn*, Anderson can evoke it with the same poetic beauty. And though the mechanistic imagery might seem less overt and striking in *Winesburg* than in Norris's *The Octopus*, the effects of industrialization cause as much damage, particularly in the "Godliness" stories. *Winesburg* often focuses on what the garden

will soon lose, rather than always looking at the moment of the loss. The "Godliness" stories, however, show that moment of loss, and they show that the moment will repeat itself with increasing severity as industrialism continues to destroy the pastoral landscape, the farmer's life.

Apparently, Anderson originally intended his tales of the Bentley family to figure closer to the beginning of the book. In a 1917 letter to Waldo Frank, one that continues the thoughts of his letter to Brooks about Twain living on the hill, Anderson says,

I have become less and less the thinker and more the thing of earth and the winds. When I awake at night and the wind is howling, my first thought is that the gods are at play in the hills here. My new book, starting with life on a big farm in Ohio, will have something of that flavor in its early chapters. There is a delightful old man, Joseph Bentley by name, who is full of old Bible thoughts and impulses.  
(Jones and Rideout 15)

Anderson changed the main character of "Godliness" to Jesse Bentley, and the adjective "delightful" hardly seems to fit him, unless in a sarcastic sense. Still, it seems important that Anderson originally intended those stories to open the book, since beginning with them would have foregrounded his industrial theme. In fact, the "Godliness" internal cycle (as we might call it) gives more background into the situations of *Winesburg* and its people than the other stories offer. Despite the absence of the story cycle's central character from the internal cycle, it seems the most logical base for an explication of *Winesburg* as a commentary on industrialism, for there Anderson explicitly addresses the problem:

The coming of industrialism, attended by all the roar and rattle of affairs, the shrill cries of millions of new voices that have come from overseas, the going and coming of trains, the growth of cities, the building of the interurban car lines that weave in and out of towns and past farmhouses, and now in these later days the coming of the automobiles has worked a tremendous change in the lives and in the habits of thought of our people of Mid-America. (70-71)

The changes arrive noisily and annoyingly, like an unwelcome neighbor or an unexpected landlord.

Anderson explains the situation in more detail in his next book, *Poor White*, in which poorly constructed buildings spring up around exploitative industry, and a new social hierarchy develops. In a passage I will return to later, this new social hierarchy

replaces talent with money, heroes with corporation presidents; those at the top of the hierarchy create myths of themselves that appear in the mass media.

Those meaningless words also receive attention in the "Godliness" stories, when the narrator tells us that unimaginative, poorly written books and magazines spring up everywhere, corrupting the "beautiful childlike innocence" of farmers and other country folk until they speak "as glibly and as senselessly as the best city man of us all" (71). While one might wonder what Anderson would think of the Information Superhighway, it seems strange that a narrator showing the need for more communication objects to farmers reading books and magazines.

The farmers, including Jesse Bentley, become poisoned by city ideas and intoxicated by meaningless words; mass media represents the propaganda of industrialism rather than the dreams of poets. Words become meaningless when detached from feelings. As Robert Allen Papinchak explains, the printed materials come from the mere peddlers of words Kate Swift warns George not to become, with an increasing mass market only leading to a demand for more words with less meaning (7). Of course, *Winesburg's* narrator dismisses the fact that people just after the Civil War read less by saying that they "labored too hard and were too tired to read" (71). However, he then shows how Jesse Bentley's reading of the Bible leads him to see himself as one of its characters. Despite his hollow use of biblical rhetoric, Jesse becomes grossly mutated by the newspapers and magazines, the priests of industrialism.

According to Benjamin T. Spencer, people in villages like Winesburg expect industrialism to make their lives better but find it destroys the pre-existing culture, leaving "a residue of fragmented grotesques" (156). Rather than contributing to the existing life, industrialism suffocates whatever values the village previously held. Jesse Bentley finds himself in this situation, but creates a plan for his life, conveniently attributing that plan to God. However, the narrator hardly presents the Bentleys as godlike.

When we meet Jesse, the narrator immediately begins to toy with insect motifs, introducing the people in the Bentley home as inhuman drones. The house itself sounds like something built by soldier ants: "It was in reality not one house but a cluster of houses joined together in a rather haphazard fashion" (73). In case that image fails to dehumanize the Bentleys, the narrator adds, "At meal times the place was like a beehive."

The internal cycle actually spans over twenty years in the lives of those worker drones. "Godliness I" begins with the description of that house, located on the farm where the Bentleys worked for generations, the men as dirty and coarse as their lives. Jesse never becomes as heroic as his brothers, with their

"naturally strong lusts" that bursted out with "animal-like poetic fervor" when they got drunk and shouted at the stars (65). Though he never sees and will never emulate their usually silent dignity, Jesse must take charge of the farm after they die in the Civil War. He had previously left, so he could study to become a minister, and living in the city, where everything seemed automated, made him yearn for the spiritual so much that he becomes obsessed with the scriptures he thinks might apply to his life. He comes back from the city with a delicate wife and with visions of glory.

Jesse keeps thinking about his farm, and his place in life. He begins to see himself as superior, set apart by God, and everyone else as inferior: himself as the biblical Jesse, and everyone else as God's enemies. Shortly before the birth of his child, Jesse prays God will send him "a son to be called David who shall help me to pluck at last all of these lands out of the hands of the Philistines and turn them to Thy service and to the building of Thy kingdom on earth" (73).

Self-righteousness makes Jesse Bentley a grotesque. Seeing others as "clods" and himself as God's servant, he alienates himself, blinds himself. As his financial success increases, his plans for the ministry fall to plans for God to make him rich. At the same time, Jesse becomes increasingly cruel, inhuman, heartless. His frail wife Katherine must continue "doing a strong woman's work even after she had become large with child" and he fails to see her "killing herself in his service" (69). That wording clearly shows Jesse's denigrating view of Katherine as a biblical handmaid. The wording also clearly blames Jesse for the fact that Katherine dies a year after giving birth to Louise. Leveling such charges against Jesse effectively destroys the illusion of him as anything but a cruel taskmaster. We can scarcely give Jesse the same sympathy we might give the rest of the grotesques, especially not when we also consider that he inherits the farm from his father then ignores that father and leaves him to die in a corner like a dog.

Rather than feel guilt over the way he treats others, Jesse continues to convince himself that God wants him to serve as rich oppressor. He prays, "'O God, create in me another Jesse, like that one of old, to rule over men and to be the father of sons who shall be rulers!'" (70). In blurring his favorite Old Testament passages with his life, he comes to see the other farmers around Wine Creek not just as "clods" or God's enemies but literally as Philistines who might steal his belongings. He lives in fear of everyone else; thus, he denies himself contact. He builds a wall between himself and others.

His progress, like that of Hugh McVey, costs men their jobs, but that serves his purpose. He wants fewer men working for him because he would rather deal with machines than people:

He began to buy machines that would permit him to do the work of the farms while employing fewer men and he sometimes thought that if he were a younger man he would give up farming altogether and start a factory in Winesburg for the making of machinery. (81)

Echoing the earlier comments about the sources of much modern shallowness, the narrator says Jesse "formed the habit of reading newspapers and magazines." In other words, Jesse becomes a part of the mass-produced modern life, a mere peddler not only of words but also of loveless existence.

Not surprisingly, the machine Jesse creates involves making fences. Fences, a sort of outdoor wall, provide a barrier, another cage he creates for himself. Still, he eventually senses the loss of pastoral places and ideals, as well as the replacement of God with a morality tailored to the making of money. However, making those connections only adds to the ironic force of Jesse's character, as he is one of the harbingers of industrialism, and as he obviously cares more about money than serving God. Instead of a young thing, a creative thing, or the expected spiritual thing, Jesse has a "greedy thing in him."

Jesse and the industrialism he champions would continue to destroy people's lives, as we see in the third "Godliness" story:

Born of a delicate and overworked mother, and an impulsive, hard, imaginative father, who did not look with favor upon her coming into the world, Louise was from childhood a neurotic, one of the race of oversensitive women that in later days industrialism was to bring in such great numbers into the world. (87)

From that statement, it sounds like the situation is getting worse, like Louise Bentley is becoming a rule rather an exception. Despite its positive connotations in the rest of the book, even the word "imaginative" sounds pejorative here, as if Jesse manages to corrupt everything with his obsessive behavior. Charles Glickberg I sees the industrialism Jesse embodies as "a tremendous change for the worse in the character of life in the mid-West," one that destroys Louise and leaves her so desperate for love that she marries without first finding love (51).

In the story "An Awakening," we learn more about the underclass who would soon leave the fields for the factories:

In Winesburg, as in all Ohio towns of twenty years ago, there was a section in which lived day laborers. As the time of factories had not yet come, the laborers worked in the fields or were section hands on the railroads. They worked twelve hours a day and received one dollar for the long day of toil. The houses in which they lived were small cheaply constructed wooden affairs with a garden in the back. (184)

Obviously, their life sounds far from ideal. Already industrialism has come in the form of the railroad; soon it would also come in other forms. Still, even with such a hard life and such small houses, they work the ground and own their own gardens. The poor still have contact with nature, and sing their songs of labor, but they will find much worse conditions in the factories.

Even the most misguided of the grotesques can see the destruction brought by modern changes. In the story "A Man of Ideas," Joe Welling captures the sense of loss with surprising acumen when he makes a connection between fire and decay. After discussing his own desire to be a writer, and hence to reach others, he tells George to get out his notepad and take down these ideas:

"Let's take decay. Now what is decay? It's fire. It burns up wood and other things. You never thought of that? Of course not. This sidewalk here and this feed store, the trees down the street there—they're all on fire. They're burning up. Decay you see is always going on. It doesn't stop. Water and paint can't stop it. If a thing is iron, then what? It rusts, you see. That's fire, too. The world is on fire. Start your pieces in the paper that way. Just say in big letters 'The World Is On Fire.'" (106)

Joe recognizes not only Winesburg's state of decay and change, but also that nothing can stop it, not even human discoveries like paint. Still, he fails to see that he might be able to preserve some of the ideals from the pastoral age, that by writing about the past and the people, George can keep them alive.

As part of a constant warning about the industrial takeover, the narrator keeps weaving together pastoral and industrial imagery, such as when discussing Wing Biddlebaum's hands: "The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression" (28). The same character, constantly linked with the pastoral, tells George about his anti-industrial dream. In the dream, Wing sounds like the Greek philosopher and teacher Socrates in a field of grass, with his young students encircling him:

In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them.  
(30)

Anderson's granting the gay teacher Wing such a dream produces much irony, due to the facts that the ancient Greeks accepted same-gender romance, that Wing can no longer teach, that people in Winesburg never seem comfortable with teachers, and that the dream takes place in what the narrator identifies as a "pastoral" age rather than in the present reality of the industrial invasion. Wing dreams of the lost and the ideal, sharing Anderson's aspiration of fusing part of that vision into the present; as I will explain shortly, however, *Poor White* reveals Anderson's belief that we missed the opportunity to fulfill that vision.

The narrator of *Winesburg* relates Wing and several other characters to the berry pickers, who symbolize money-making, fertility, and lost pastoral ideals. The berry-picking repeatedly appears as an image in Wing's story, and his hands—his most distinguishing feature—can pick "as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day" (29). As Walter B. Rideout illustrates, Wing's use of his hands for berry-picking represents the money-making, survival part of life—the mechanical surface of life—while Wing's use of his hands for teaching and expressing represents the ability to dream, the ability to find and express the meaning below life's surface ("Simplicity" 151). Anderson again mixes symbols of labor and humanity.

As Robert Allen Papinchak illustrates, Anderson uses pastoral images to show "unfulfilled promise," including the field of yellow mustard seeds in "Hands" and the unharvested cornfield in "The Untold Lie" (Papinchak 22). In the latter case, the field also ties in with the somewhat unwanted fertility of Ray Pearson and Hal Winters, as well as the unexpected pregnancy of Nell Gunther. Papinchak also notes the obvious symbolism in the fact that George Willard passes unharvested cornfields on his way to his sexual encounters with Louise Trunnion and Helen White. With Louise, George finds the obvious sexual harvest but not the deeper emotional harvest he will find with Helen. The narrator uses such passages to evoke sexual/pastoral imagery, infusing that imagery with the connotations of something unused, unharvested, or abandoned. Furthermore, the narrator often ties such conditions to industrialism, reminding us that the "roar and rattle" of modern

preoccupations causes those cornfields—those opportunities—to go unharvested.

In "Mother," when Elizabeth Willard sees that "within [her son] there is a secret something that is striving to grow" (43), she captures the agricultural image that begins in "Hands." The increasingly industrialized Winesburg is losing something, something that tries to grow without soil or sunlight, a plant that struggles through concrete. She wants her dream re-awakened in George (40). Walter B. Rideout sees a "conflict between practical affairs and dreams" that begins in "Hands" and manifests itself in this story through the advice each parent thinks George should receive ("Simplicity" 151).

Consider her language: Elizabeth identifies the something she sees in George as "'the thing [she] let be killed in [her]self,'" going from an agricultural image to an image of violence, or of miscarriage (43). She succeeded in letting a child, George, grow within her, but she fails to nurture and guide the child as much as she wishes. Another child, her vision as artist and actor, also grew within her, but that one received less nurturing and eventually died. The passive voice construction especially warrants attention here: "the thing I let be killed." She makes the responsibility vague, but apparently not completely her own. Still, she "let" it happen, even if someone or something else killed the "thing." Her father even gave her money to escape Winesburg and fulfill her dreams, but she convinced herself she simply needed to marry.

Despite her father's efforts, Winesburg failed to nurture her dreams—just like the visiting actors, who discouraged her talk of a creative life on the stage. Elizabeth thinks Tom helped destroy her dreams, and fears he will cause the same to happen to George. Read from the perspective of the machine in the garden, instead of my earlier reading of "Mother" as a teacher-student relationship, Elizabeth represents the pastoral age, and Tom represents the industrial age. In the language of *Poor White*, Elizabeth belongs to "the age of flesh and blood," and Tom belongs to "the new age of iron and steel" (*Portable* 234). Tom invaded Elizabeth's garden and helped to kill something special that tried to grow there. Now she fears he will kill the same something in George if he becomes the only influence on the young writer. She must serve as a conduit between the age of pastoral dreams and the age in which her son must live. Remember that, in his letter about Twain beside the brook, Anderson clearly connects dreams and the imagination with the pastoral; the same fertile soil that grows corn and berries also grows poetry and community.

At first, Elizabeth Willard keeps sending George out within Winesburg, into nature or the streets. What matters most is that she pushes him outside the walls that entrap her, limit her, stop

her growth. In nature, he finds contact with the earth; in the streets, he finds contact with other people. Eventually she pushes him outside Winesburg's borders, on one of the ultimate symbols of the machine in the garden: a train. The train, the invading industrialism of Norris's *The Octopus*, will help him escape, taking him and the reader away from Winesburg, but will leave him and the reader with the knowledge that dreams can survive within an industrial setting. Anderson seems ultimately but intensely ambivalent toward the train, using it as both monster and liberator. Yes, it helps George escape, but it just brings other characters into the more advanced industrial decay of the cities. That the citizens of Winesburg seem unaware of how to respond to the train shows in Anderson's most memorable and bizarre train scene, when old Windpeter Winters drives his team of horses down the tracks and into an oncoming train: "he fairly screamed with delight when the team, maddened by his incessant slashing at them, rushed straight ahead to certain death" (202). These ambivalent feelings about industrialism become even more obvious in the work Anderson wrote at the same time as *Winesburg*.

In a 1918 letter to Van Wyck Brooks, Anderson uses a pastoral metaphor in discussing how he overlapped the writing processes of his two best books about the effects of industrialism on a pastoral setting. Notice how he returns to the image of the cornfield:

I came West with my new book, *Poor White*, about laid by, as we out here say of the corn crop in early October. It is in shocks and stood up in the field. The husking is yet to do. I will not attempt it for a time, as the proof of *Winesburg* should be along most any time. (Jones and Rideout 43)

That new book tells of Bidwell, a town further along in the process of industrialization. Though the narrator diverges for a while into the story of Clara Butterworth, the industrialism theme centers mostly around Hugh McVey, whom Cleveland Chase refers to as "a listless and anemic descendent of Huck Finn, who lives in the Missouri village of Mudcat Landing on the Mississippi" (51). However, some of the book's most memorable passages about industrialism occur when the narrator forgets about all the characters and comments on the changes taking place in America.

In one of those passages, the narrator begins talking about the berry pickers, then about "a time of waiting" that occurred after the battles with the Indians and the battle between North and South (*Portable* 155). People discussed religious issues, and all the members of any given small town belonged to one "great family" with a "kind of invisible roof beneath which everyone

lived" (156). The roof provided not only protection but also a strong sense of community, where people knew each other. In this grand but quiet age, "mankind seemed about to take time to try to understand itself."

Soon, however, something tore away the invisible roof. New talk began to fill the streets of Bidwell, Ohio: a "new force that was being born into American life and into life everywhere all over the world was feeding on the old dying individualistic life" (170). This new life, like the fire from "A Man Of Ideas," consumed and replaced everything in its path, using promises of profit to convince everyone that they should join in its march across the landscape. Echoing the "Godliness" passage about "the roar and rattle of affairs," the narrator tells about the arrival of the railroad:

the roar and clatter of the breathing of the terrible new thing, half-hideous, half-beautiful in its possibilities, that was for so long to drown the voices and confuse the thinking of men, was heard not only in the towns but even in lonely farm houses, where its willing servants, the newspapers and magazines, had begun to circulate in ever increasing numbers. (170-71)

Of course, this passage seems to refer to the train at first, in even more intensely ambivalent terms than Anderson uses in *Winesburg*, but it also refers more generally to industrialism, corporate greed, and mass culture. Probably upset over needing to make his living by writing for newspapers and advertising agencies, Anderson makes many such links between cultural decay and mass media, starting with the swipe in "Godliness" but intensifying throughout *White*, where newspapers create myths for the people in power while corporations turn the Whitmanesque symbol of corn into a corn flakes advertisement. Worse yet, Anderson keeps us keenly aware that, in another age, the people who wrote for corporations and politicians would have become poets. Instead, these people wrote the propaganda that convinced would-be farmers and poets into thinking they needed corporations and factories. Rather than realizing the moment of "understanding itself," humanity brought itself into a state of creative and spiritual ruin: "Thought and poetry died or passed as a heritage to feeble fawning men who also became servants of the new order" (171).

The servants worked in Washington and in newspaper offices to create illusions of greatness about the men in power. They squandered all their talents and misled common people, "like the trained sheep that are used at great slaughterhouses to lead other sheep into the killing pens" (199). In fact, their efforts

required no talent at all, but simply repeating unsubstantiated claims of the men's greatness, using the same repetition as advertisers would use for pitching "brands of crackers or breakfast food." In order to make everyone and everything fit the new corporate ideology, the producers of mass culture worked to change both the American landscape and the American mind.

Though Anderson sprinkles these passages throughout the book, they refer mostly to the recent past that created the world in which the characters of *Poor White* now live. We find Hugh McVey in this world, a world that leaves the heroic young man feeling betrayed by his own noble ambitions. Early in *White*, the railroad where he works changes Hugh's life, and his employer's wife basically adopts him, replacing his missing mother (121). After the owner and his wife move away, Hugh takes over as stationmaster at the rural depot. He had already come to resent his "poor white trash" father and now avoids him all the time. At first, Hugh thinks labor in industrial settings is easier than working in the berry fields. Like Jesse Bentley, he becomes an inventor, but he shows much nobler intentions. He simply wants to make life easier for the berry pickers, so they can accomplish more; thus, he tries to make machines that lessen the work of farmers. He even crawls on the ground, imitating the movements of the workers, as he devises a machine that will help them.

With his mind already clouded by constant talk about machines and factories "saving" people from small-town life, the well-meaning young man lets himself get pulled into plans that will make him a target of praise and scorn, a magnet for hopefulness and deceitfulness. When Steve Hunter helps bring industrial enterprise to Bidwell, he also helps Hugh sponsor one of his machines, which soon becomes all-important. In fact, it becomes so important that Steve decides they should conceal any of the machine's limitations.

Anderson carefully adapts his initially positive language regarding industrialism into language that slowly becomes slightly menacing and deified, such as when the narrator refers to "Joseph Wainsworth the harness maker, who had been the first man in Bidwell to feel the touch of the heavy finger of industrialism" and tells of how Joe feels embittered and reduced by the constant presence of a machine that might soon cause him to lose his life savings (233). Above, I referred to the following passage in reference to Elizabeth and Tom Willard, because it contains the *Winesburg*-like language of isolation and of night-time walks that bring hope of contact. The passage tells of Joe's desire to meet with Hugh, who now sounds like a stuffy businessman, in a factory that sounds ominous and alienating. Neither of the two men can see the other's loneliness:

The man of the age of flesh and blood wanted to walk in the presence of the man who belonged to the new age of iron and steel. When he got to the factory it was dark. . . . Joe walked. . . to the station door and then returned along the platform and got again into Turner's Pike. He stumbled along the path beside the road and presently saw Hugh McVey coming toward him. It was one of the evenings when Hugh, overcome with loneliness, and puzzled that his new position in the town's life did not bring him any closer to people, had gone to town to walk through Main Street, half-hoping someone would break through his embarrassment and enter into conversation with him. (234-35)

Shortly afterwards, the language takes an even more telling "mechanical" turn, when the wheelwright David Chapman echoes Jesse Bentley's confusion of religion and industrial greed. Chapman prays an industrial prayer, in which Anderson echoes Henry Adams's fears of the Dynamo having replaced the Virgin:

"O God, help the man Hugh McVey to remove every obstacle that stands in his way. . . . Make the plant-setting machine a success. Bring light into dark places. O Lord, help Hugh McVey, thy servant, to build successfully the plant-setting machine." (237)

The term "dark places" obviously refers not to places of sin but to pre-industrialized communities, places still living in the pastoral age.

The parallels with *Winesburg's* language continue, such as when Clara and the farmhand John May sound like George and Helen: "For a moment the two young animals, so unlike each other, stood staring at each other and then, to relieve her embarrassment, Clara began to play a game" (246). But then he nearly rapes her, afterwards attributing the incident to her naiveté, rather than his own brutality (247). Like so many of *Winesburg's* citizens, he projects his sexual weaknesses onto others, blaming them for his lust. John thinks she only resists him out of her shyness and inexperience.

The narrator attributes John's behavior and attitude to "male confidence," sounding like the narrator of *Winesburg*, who often uses "male" as a pejorative adjective with connotations of violence and oppression, a male dominance strengthened by the power of the machine. After all, men and women in agrarian America worked together on their farms and ranches. The industrial age sends the men into factories, promoting them to the higher role of breadwinner at home while often degrading them at work. The role

of the woman goes unnoticed and unrewarded because it less often involves making money.

However, Clara rejects this system by both working in the factory and deciding not to live in fear of John's "male confidence." She sounds like Belle Carpenter when she concludes that John, through his attack and his intimidating behavior, gives her a lesson and a strength that will empower her to

conquer men. The touch of her father's shrewdness, that was a part of her nature, had come to her rescue. She wanted to laugh at the silly pretensions of the man, to make a fool of him. Her cheeks flushed with pride in her mastery of the situation. (247)

She refuses victim status. Also like Belle Carpenter, Clara rebels against her father and will no longer let him intimidate her. Instead of answering his angry questions about where she and John May went, she wants "to scream, to strike him in the face with her fist as she had struck the man in the shed" (247). She now finds herself hating her father, instead of John, and she will further rebel by seeking a somewhat subversive education.

Most of the remainder of the novel deals with how industrialism slowly leads to dehumanization, violence, and greed. Near the novel's end, when we learn that Hugh feels crushed, we cannot miss how pessimistic the narrator sounds about the future of industrialism:

The poor white, son of the defeated dreamer by the river, who had forced himself in advance of his fellows along the road of mechanical development, was still in advance of his fellows of the growing Ohio towns. The struggle he was making was the struggle his fellows of another generation would one and all have to make. (429)

Hugh turns himself into the monster so many others will become. By focusing on the industrial rather than the human, people like Jesse and Hugh become nothing more than by-products of the very machines they create.

Married to and pregnant by Hugh, Clara eventually finds herself hating him for the industrialism he represents. Still, she saves him from the violent attack of the harness maker who resents the invasion of industrialism. The battle between the two men represents a battle of ideologies. However, the same woman who hates mechanization also wants to protect the father of her unborn child, awakening within herself "the mother, fierce, indomitable, strong" (432). Ultimately, Hugh finds protection from her sense of lost values, rather than his own sense of profit, but he never

seems to see the success of marrying such a perfect soul mate. Rather than feel grateful for finding Clara, he feels the machine has destroyed his chances of happiness and community. Unlike our departure from Winesburg, we leave Bidwell in a state of ruin, a wasteland that destroys itself.

A decade after completing *Winesburg* and *White*, Anderson would continue to show concern over the effects of industrialism, even if it appears less prominently within his later fiction. In a 1930 letter to John Hall Wheelock, an editor at Scribner's, Anderson says he wants to give pictures of what happens inside factories because so many people spend so much time there. He even wants to go inside those factories, rather than simply imposing "social theories" on them: "When I wrote *Winesburg*, I had no social theories about the small town. I just wanted to get a picture of life in the small town as I felt it, and I would like to do that for the factories now, if I can" (Jones and Rideout 216). Exactly what sort of picture he wanted to give we may never know, as his topics would lean more toward sex, horses, the household, and African American culture. Still, in a 1932 letter to Valenti Angelo, Anderson encourages the author and illustrator to continue exploring the factories, saying he explored them in *Marching Men* and sees them as an important part of modern life (Jones and Rideout 258).

Perhaps Anderson never wrote another industrialism novel because, as he grew older, he could no longer escape the fact of industrialism's settlement on the landscape. His later novels begin in a sort of post-apocalyptic world, where people leave their jobs to wander across the country in search of meaning. Born during the twentieth century, these characters cannot remember the world Jesse Bentley, Hugh McVey, or the other characters from the early works remember. Sadly, Anderson succeeds a little too well in creating the sense of meaninglessness in his last few novels, which wander even more aimlessly than his characters. However, the short stories he writes after *Winesburg* take advantage of their brief space by capturing the "moments" Anderson loved to explore, like the moments that make up *Winesburg*.

Even in a world becoming cold and mechanical, Anderson uses those moments not only to give *Winesburg* a sense of direction and hope, but also to give his characters a sense of direction and hope. In my conclusion, I will return to a stricter focus on explicating *Winesburg*, this time by looking at how Anderson ties his opening and closing stories in with the progress of George, the grotesques, the book's themes, and the book's structure.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION: CLOSING THE BOOK OF THE GROTESQUE

Anderson's genuine concern for the humble, laboring masses shows not only in *Winesburg* and his novels but also in his letters and essays. For example, in a 1936 letter to Theodore Dreiser, he praises his mentor for simply telling about people's lives, about "this terrible loneliness of people in America" (Jones and Rideout 344). Seeing his own returns to small towns as looking inside a goldfish bowl, Anderson tells of watching "the most sensitive ones breaking down, becoming drunkards, going all to pieces because of the terrible dullness" (344). Within the same letter, however, he discourages Dreiser's interest in scientific advancements, blaming the mechanical for many of the problems in modern life. The "terrible loneliness" Anderson speaks of here parallels *Winesburg*, in what Charles Glickberg I terms "the characteristic American tragedy of loneliness, spiritual emptiness, disillusionment, and neurotic unfullfillment" (52). Referring to the grotesques of *Winesburg* as "broken on the wheel of life," Glickberg says they must simply accept their isolation and failure. Still, though Anderson realizes the same fact, he presents those broken people sympathetically, not with mere pity or condescension.

Cautiously bearing in mind Anderson's tendency to constantly create new mythologies about himself, we can say he allegedly became aware of the grotesques while living in Chicago. In his essay "Why I Write," he describes walks through the Chicago streets that "exhausted" him, not because of the exercise, but because "a passing face was like reading the whole life history of some man or woman. It was too much. I couldn't stand it. When I went home and to bed at night, the faces kept closing before my eyes" (353). The faces would beg him to simply tell their stories, to serve as their George Willard.

Of course, Anderson overlooks the obvious fact that his own ambition and creativity, not the people, haunted him. He knew nothing about those people, but longed to make stories about their possible lives, to project tragic events in place of their actual experiences, just as his characters project stories, roles, and meanings onto each other, never seeing the actual person. Still, this anecdote epitomizes Anderson's great love for individuals and his great love for story telling.

To conclude my readings of *Winesburg*, I want to look at what Anderson saw in his goldfish bowl, using the brief sketch that first brings us into *Winesburg* and the two stories that bring us out. *Winesburg* begins with a prologue that bears the title Anderson originally intended for the entire volume: "The Book of the Grotesque," a brief sketch about an old man who watches the goldfish bowl of *Winesburg*. He sometimes becomes thoughtful while

lying in the bed his friend, the carpenter, elevated to the window. Like Elizabeth and George Willard, he carries an indescribable "something" inside him. Before giving up on futile attempts to put the quality into words, the narrator describes it as "young," then as "a youth," then as "a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight" (22). Words fail the narrator, as they fail the grotesques, so he tries to get at the old man's thoughts by revealing his dream.

One night, neither fully sleeping nor fully awake, the writer dreams that everyone he knew so well in his younger days slowly became grotesque. The dream haunts him, so he tries to write *The Book of the Grotesque*. In that book, many truths exist, but when individuals try to embody one of the truths, they become grotesque. Somehow, "the young thing inside him" saved the old man (24). But he never publishes or even finishes the book. Instead, he watches the grotesques out his window and feels a kinship with them.

Like most of the stories, the prologue gives considerable attention to walls and windows: human constructions that separate us. Yet, windows also allow us to watch each other. In keeping with this human construction motif, the prologue even features a carpenter, the friend who made the bed; the same carpenter keeps returning to make more renovations but usually gets too caught up in conversation to finish anything. The carpenter, an ex-con and Civil War veteran, lost his brother to starvation at Andersonville prison and now relies on the old man for human interaction. The narrator mentions this character "because he, like many of what are called very common people, became the nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of all the grotesques in the writer's book" (24).

The writer and the carpenter talk about all the isolation and tragedy in the lives of the people outside the window, bringing each other to tears with their words of compassion. In sharing this moment, they share a vision of humanity, and they succeed in one of Anderson's moments of contact. Thus, they escape the lonely sentence of the grotesques. Understanding each other's words matters less here than sharing in the universal condition of isolation; in sharing it, they overcome it for at least that one moment when they let the "young thing" emerge and bring them together—the type of moment Anderson constantly celebrates.

What saves the writer and the carpenter? Despite one's working with words and the other's working with his hands, they seem unlike the grotesques they introduce. These two men talk with each other, not at each other. They see each other, instead of projecting concepts onto each other. In other words, they become the fully developed people the other characters strive to become, the fully developed person George Willard becomes.

Anderson's metafiction here seems somewhat obvious when we first read this sketch, but increasingly more so as we finish the book. The old writer, of course, might be George Willard, the person whose friends in Winesburg all beg him to tell their story. However, he might also be Anderson himself, who saw the faces in Chicago and felt a maddening need to free himself by writing about them. Either way, Anderson cleverly brings us into the book by telling a story about the writing of the very book we just started reading. From there, he (1) presents the stories that lead to the development of the old writer, George, and/or Anderson; (2) shows, at the same time, the characters who become grotesque, even though some of them have the "young thing" inside them; (3) shows the fully developed George encountering but ultimately escaping the dangers we learn of from the old man's dream; (4) shows George leaving to fulfill his chosen role as watcher and chronicler of people, the person the old man has already become.

Rex Burbank says that the *Winesburg* stories stand up well together or separately, but that they must come together to tell George's story, just as we can only see George's victory by surrounding him with the failures of the grotesques (66). Thus, George serves as "the symbolic counterpoint" to the grotesques, part of the book's overall contrasts, even in the stories that never mention him. The prologue introduces the contrasts we will see throughout the other stories: the writer, like George and Helen, accepts the fact of human isolation while both carefully nurturing his friendship and keeping his mind busy with the struggles of others.

Unlike the grotesques, he never collapses into himself or tries to project his ideas onto others. Instead, he simply observes and listens, living vicariously through other people. In fact, he never even writes, but he becomes an artist whose memories of the grotesque give him what Burbank calls "a rich inner life that distinguishes him from the psychic fragmentation of the characters who pass through his mind" (67). Because of the old man's ability to take pleasure in simply and unjudgmentally getting caught up in people—as opposed to getting caught up in absolutes, money, or industrialism—Burbank refers to him as both "a priest of life" and "an artist of life."

Like George, the artist/priest escapes becoming grotesque by taking a consuming interest in the lives of others. The young thing inside him allows him to simply observe all human beings and human experiences, rather than trying to shape them and distill them through the lens of a perceived "truth." He sees none of them as "queer," "somewhat worldly," "Philistines," or any of the other titles they impose on each other; instead, he sees them as a song of life and himself as their singer.

In "Sophistication," the next-to-last story, we see a new George Willard clearly emerging, his development surpassing not only that of most of the other characters but also anything we previously expected of him. These faces that linger in George's mind, like the ones Anderson encountered in Chicago and the ones that haunt the old man, beseech him to tell stories. Though his stories might differ from the stories the grotesques want him to tell, they will document small-town lives and the importance of every life, including "the sweetness of the twisted apples." Edwin Fussell aptly refers to George's visitors as "quite literally characters in search of an author" (43). Of course story tellers will embellish; Anderson knew that all too well, from his father's life and his own life. As a self-titled "story teller," Anderson took an almost perverse pleasure in his constant and contradictory embellishments about himself.

Still, not realizing the futility of their attempts, the grotesques keep approaching George, instructing him in his development as artist and young man. Fussell sees this constantly repeated action as giving the entire volume "some of the formal quality of a procession, imbued like a ritual pageant with silent and stately dignity." All the grotesques initiate contact with George, perhaps walking in the dark with him for their own privacy. They all share some truth with him or make physical contact with him, sexual or otherwise. Fussell recognizes another form of motion:

throughout *Winesburg* runs the slow and often hidden current of George Willard's growth toward maturity; often the stream is subterranean and we are surprised to see where it comes out; sometimes it appears to lose itself in the backwaters of irrelevance or naiveté.

Still, the book keeps moving forward with George's growth.

The nocturnal meeting that occurs in "Sophistication" seems to demolish the book's recurring ritual of characters seeking contact but leaving frustrated. The situation in this story frees the characters rather than concealing them: night provides a peaceful atmosphere rather than a camouflage. Besides containing no shred of sexual guilt over the implied sexual encounter, this story contains no anger. Even the embarrassment George and Helen feel manifests itself as playfulness and helps them connect. Unlike George and Helen in this story, the grotesques idealize life to the point of not accepting the simple fact of human separateness, especially in an industrial age.

Trying so desperately to escape their anxieties makes the grotesques even more grotesque; their passion for life actually distorts them because they become passionate about something they

cannot attain: life without isolation. Conversely, George takes an increasing interest in the lives of others: first, with the grotesques in terms of what they can teach him or give him; secondly, with the grotesques in terms of what he can write about them; thirdly, with his mother, in terms of how one person can transform another's perception and life; and finally, with Helen White, in terms of two people who make a connection on numerous levels that only lasts briefly but leaves them both forever changed. In "Departure," when he leaves Winesburg on a spring morning, he leaves not only as a man but also as someone who can both accept the condition of loneliness and find ways to subside that loneliness.

The series of moments that bring the grotesques to George come together to form a moment where he feels compelled to continue both reflecting on those moments and seeking new experiences. Far from attacking small towns, Anderson uses them as a goldfish bowl, a microcosm, through which we can see all the ways we isolate ourselves, hurt ourselves. At the same time, he shows how small-town culture can help us resist the fragmentation of modern life: by remaining connected to the soil and each other. As George leaves Winesburg, thinking of how it will shape his future life, he leaves readers in a state of reflection about the lives that go into shaping his bildungsroman, about how Winesburg becomes what the narrator calls "a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood" (247). He never deserts Winesburg; he simply lets its people motivate him to go on seeking and learning. George now knows what the grotesques needed to tell him, even if they never figure it out: that he must seek moments of contact and taste twisted apples, even in a world of isolation and rejection.

Regardless of whether we see Anderson, George Willard, and the old writer as all the same person, they clearly reveal the need for people to try to understand each other—not because they will succeed but because the attempt forces them out of their dark alleys and decayed homes. It forces them to try to enter the lives and minds of others, to see the burdens of others. That they remain isolated and continue to misinterpret matters considerably less than the simple fact that they escape their absorption with personal gain. They escape becoming grotesque by simply escaping self-absorption and recognizing that others share their feelings of isolation and misunderstanding.

The book's following such simple themes and sustaining such simple images while using such an unconventional structure shows Anderson's quiet but impressive accomplishment. Though it appropriates much of its contents and structure from the revolutionary Gertrude Stein, though it dares to question established gender ideology, though it mixes the short story form with that of the novel, though it mourns the loss of the pastoral

age, and though it shocked the public of 1919 with its sexual references, *Winesburg* ultimately stands as a simple framed narrative about people needing simple human contact. Charming yet profoundly insightful, Anderson's story cycle will always warrant new readings.

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