Sophistication Study Guide

Sophistication by Sherwood Anderson

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Sherwood Anderson wrote "Sophistication" as part of his novel *Winesburg, Ohio,* which was first published in 1919. For four years, living alone in an apartment in Chicago, he had worked steadily on the stories comprising the longer work, having been inspired by Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* and Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives.* "Sophistication," one of the final three chapters of *Winesburg, Ohio,* though part of a larger work, has often been interpreted by critics and readers as an independent story. Early reviewers said that the story reveals the secrets and hopes of George Willard and Helen White through its use of clear, conversational diction and graphic description of setting. Critics also noted that the character of George was a not-well-disguised portrait of Anderson himself. In the story, George hopes to fulfill his dream of becoming a thoughtful writer, not a "mere peddler of words," as one of his teachers puts it. Back home during a summer festival, George visits Helen White again. With her encouragement, he seeks to escape peer pressure from old and young citizens of the town by undertaking the rites of passage that every young person must endure. From initial praise by reviewers in the early 1920s, through a lapse of attention through the 1930s and on to the present day, both the short story and the novel of which it is a part have become minor American classics that evoke the stifling nature of small-town life in the early twentieth century.

Author Biography

Sherwood Anderson was born the third of seven children in Camden, Ohio, on September 13, 1876. His father was locally renowned as a storyteller, and his brother Karl achieved success as a painter. Thus, from an early age Anderson was exposed to the arts. His father's changing financial fortunes caused the family to move several times; they finally settled in the village of Clyde, Ohio, which is the model for the village in *Winesburg, Ohio.* Anderson's education was sporadic and erratic. His formal education ended after one year at Wittenberg Academy, but his many jobs as newsboy, farmhand, and laborer gave him a lively awareness of small-town life and served as an inspiration for his fiction. He served for one year in the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War, after which he began writing advertising copy in Chicago, which helped him to launch a successful business career as the owner of a paint factory, the Anderson Manufacturing Company. However, he suffered a nervous breakdown in 1912 and walked away from his paint factory, never again to return. His first marriage — the first of four —ended shortly after his collapse.

Moving back to Chicago, he began writing stories and novels, one of which was "Sophistication." With *Winesburg, Ohio,* Anderson greatly influenced a later generation of writers, including Ernest Hemingway, through his simple style and straightforward sentences, whether describing situations and persons, or writing dialogue between characters. In addition, novelists such as John Stein-beck and William Faulkner learned from Anderson the importance of regional emphasis and local color.

Anderson lived from 1927 until his death in 1941 in the small town of Marion in southwestern Virginia, where for a time he edited and published two local newspapers. He also published numerous articles, short stories, memoirs, and novels. Perhaps the most distinguished of his later works are the novels *Dark Laughter* and *Poor White,* along with the short stories collected in *The Triumph of the Egg, Horses and Men,* and *Death in the Woods.* For a while, during the 1930s, he became a fellow traveler with communists and socialists. His died in South America from peritonitis, which developed after he swallowed a broken toothpick while eating hors d'oeuvres.

Plot Summary

It is important to note that although the plot of "Sophistication" is self-contained, it also relies heavily on the events that precede it in *Winesburg, Ohio.* Furthermore, the story is more a moment in George Willard's and Helen White's shared life than it is a story with a typical plot. It is late fall. George is pushing his way through the crowded streets of his hometown, and he hides in the doorway of Dr. Reefy's office so that he can observe the ebb and flow of the children and farmers, the buggies and wagons, the wives and grandmothers, the dogs and horses. The Winesburg County Fair has brought almost everyone to town, and George, a young man with high hopes but vague plans, seeks to separate himself from these townspeople, who seem vulgar to him. He feels lonely and old; he is still mourning the death of his mother and he longs to find Helen White, whose respect and affection he yearns for.

George is agitated that Helen has come home from college in Cleveland with a young college instructor. George finds the crowd distracting and boorish, especially a group of men listening to Wesley Moyer coarsely bragging about the victory of his stallion in a race at the fair ground earlier in the day. George vows to go straight to Helen's house to see her, so that his moment of sophisticated sadness might not destroy him.

In the story's second part, the narrator describes Helen's restlessness with the college instructor, who bores her with his belittling remarks about the town as they sit on the veranda of her house. To her ears he sounds "pompous and heavy."

Helen leaves the veranda and goes to the garden in the back of the house. In the same way that George finds communication with others impossible, she thinks that "the world [is] full of meaningless people saying words." Crude farm language or highborn college talk cause both Helen and George to seek "sophistication" with each other. As she cries to herself, "George, where are you?," George stumbles into her, still muttering, "I'll go to Helen White's house. . . . I'll walk right in." He takes her hand, and they walk off to the Winesburg fair ground. The final part of the story depicts the simultaneously sad and joyous moment that they share together.

At the empty fairground, George and Helen climb the bleachers and sit beside each other. Just a few hours earlier, the town and the fair ground had been filled with life; people had poured into Winesburg from outlying farms, but now the fair is over and the people, like ghosts from the past, have departed. George's loneliness is "both broken and intensified" and "what he felt was reflected in her."

Remembering the ghosts of the past, revering the multitudes of the present, they experience a moment of depth. He takes her hand, and as she leans closer, he holds her shoulder. After shuddering at the meaninglessness of life earlier in the evening, George now shares understanding caresses with Helen, who has been frustrated by the patronizing college instructor. "In the mind of each was the same thought. 'I have come to this lonely place and here is this other.'"

For a moment they are embarrassed by what they have experienced, and they begin to tease and chase each other, laughing and shouting like children. This mood passes quickly, and though they cannot understand it or explain it, they have shared "the thing needed."

Characters

College instructor

This ambitious young man is Helen's pompous, vain instructor at college. Though Helen's mother believes the professor is a better match for her daughter than any of the men in the town, the professor makes George and Helen appear "sophisticated" in comparison.

Wesley Moyer

Wesley Moyer is a farmer and owner of a livery stable in Winesburg who brags about winning a horse race with his stallion, Tony Tip, at the Winesburg County Fair. When George overhears Wesley's boasting, he becomes inflamed with anger at the small-mindedness of the townspeople and decides to find Helen — the one person he feels he can identify with.

Helen White

Helen White is the daughter of the only banker in the town of Winesburg. She has a certain elegance that causes George to distinguish her from others. In fact, "When the moment of sophistication came to George Willard his mind turned to Helen White, the Winesburg banker's daughter." Helen is a college girl who is home for the county fair. Her mother has invited Helen's college instructor along with her for a visit, and she says to him, "There is no one here fit to associate with a girl of Helen's breeding." Helen is vain enough to want to be seen in public with the professor because he is a well-dressed stranger. However, in a short time she finds him to be empty and conceited. Thus, like George Willard, she too is caught between her past and her future; between people she perceives as country bumpkins and a professor whom she initially admired but has found to be flawed, between her girlish vanity and developing grace. In the midst of this conflict, she seeks out George, and together in the grandstand at the empty fairground, a moment of understanding— at once sad and fulfilling —passes between them.

George Willard

George Willard is an eighteen-year-old newspaper writer in the small town of Winesburg, Ohio, who seeks to rise above the constraints of his unsophisticated background. However, his distaste of small-town life does not prevent many people around town from seeking his company and advice, because they see in him hope and possibility. While examining his life after forming goals for his future, the dissonance between who he is and who he wants to become forms the basis for his moment of "sophistication" with Helen. This discomfort with his past leads George on the journey to

adulthood as he reacts to his upbringing, finally rejecting most of it— except for what he has found with Helen, another soul also on the brink of maturity, who understands him.

George is angry because of the lack of culture among the adults in the community. He is saddened by the unfulfilled lives he has seen and heard of; he is frightened at the loneliness he feels: "He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun."

Themes

American Dream

George and Helen, both seeking to escape from the restrictions of small-town life, find in each other a moment of sophistication, or wisdom, as they sit in the empty grandstand together. Part of their wisdom is gained from their disillusionment with the Ameri-can Dream. The idea that anyone can succeed through hard work and determination is a lie— as George realizes from listening to the townsfolk, and Helen learns from suffering the pomposity of the college professor. None of the many people who come and go around the fair ground is a success; they work hard and hope hard, but they are doomed to being lost in the crowd. The melancholy mood arising from this realization, and their separateness from society because of it, draws them together in a moment of mutual understanding. Their sophistication results from rejecting the deceit of the American Dream in favor of the realization that a true connection with another human being is a greater reward than the American Dream.

Art and Experience

George hopes to be a writer. On the day of the fair, he is planning to leave Winesburg and go away to a city where he hopes to work for a newspaper. This decision makes him feel grown up. He wants to put into words the depth and sadness of human beings, most of whom live lives "of quiet desperation," as Henry David Thoreau had put it. And so George "began to think of the people in the town where he had always lived with something like reverence." Indeed, George's plan to be a writer reflects Anderson's own struggle to become a writer. In "Sophistication," Anderson transforms a simple moment of mutual recognition in the lives of two young people into a work of literature, thus bridging the chasm between art and experience.

Sex

George has changed from an adolescent boy with sexual impulses into a thoughtful young man. As he confronts Helen, "He wanted to love and to be loved by her, but he did not want at the moment to be confused by her womanhood." As they embrace and kiss, their moment of sophistication deepens, and they become "Not man and woman, not boy and girl, but excited little animals." This is followed by a moment of respect, when "she took his arm and walked beside him in dignified silence." Though George and Helen have not been physically intimate, what passes between them is a moment of sexual awareness that transcends the body. Sexuality, far from being ignored, becomes only one component of their relationship, which has been cemented by a bond of unspoken understanding about their place in the world.

Growth and Development

At eighteen, George has reached a point in his life at which he feels ready to leave Winesburg, Ohio, to pursue "the dreams of his manhood." In the stories that precede "Sophistication," namely, "Hands," "The Thinker," and "An Awakening," the process of George's maturation is outlined. George, through conversations with town drunks, barbers, religious fanatics, failed farmers, and older and wiser women, grows to this moment of sophistication, where he sees and reflects upon his place within the confines of small-town life. In "Sophistication," both George and Helen see the difference between the townspeople and themselves, and their resulting loneliness causes them to seek each other out. They are not shallow; they know that they, too, will be bruised by life. George "already . . . hears death calling"; which makes all the more precious his moment of wisdom with Helen. The moment when each of them seeks out another to help fill the emptiness inside of them is the moment in which their development into mature adults is complete.

Style

Point of View

"Sophistication" is told in the third person omniscient, meaning that readers have access to the thoughts of both George and Helen. The narrator, who is not to be confused with the author, succeeds in moving readers into George's mind for the purpose of identification with a young man on the brink of maturity. In the same way, the narrator explains how Helen feels: "What George felt, she in her young woman's way felt also. She was no longer a girl and hungered to reach into the grace and beauty of womanhood." At the same time, the narrator remains somewhat distant. The distance created by a third-person point of view helps instill a tone of wistfulness to the moment of discovery between the young couple.

Setting

The setting for "Sophistication" is the small midwestern town of Winesburg, Ohio. More specifically, the social hubbub created by the county fair creates a contrast for the tale of loneliness and connection between two people. The action and words of the townspeople, which George takes to be coarse, create the scene from which his understanding of self arises. Both George and Helen share a magical moment in the bleachers of the empty fair ground, the silence even more striking after a day of carefree fun by others, but fun that neither of them felt or enjoyed themselves.

Descriptive Language

The language of "Sophistication" is simple, and the narrator carefully paints a colorful portrait of a town during its county fair, using many adjectives and metaphors: "People surged up and down like cattle confined in a pen." "Young men with shining red faces walked awkwardly about with girls on their arms." There are "murmurs of voices and the loud blare of horns." Other metaphors include the description of "little flames of the fire [that] danced crazily about," and "the wind [that] whispered among the dry corn blades." Through the description of so much action, all happily attributed to the social event of the fair, George's bad mood and Helen's longing appears all the more out of sync with the setting. Through these descriptive contrasts Anderson gives more power to the very understated plot of his story.

Historical Context

Anderson's "Sophistication" reflects almost none of the modern culture into which the United States was moving during the time of the story— the 1890s. During this time, the nation's cities were rapidly industrializing— railroads and steel mills dominated the landscape of the Eastern United States. In a few years, automobiles would begin to irrevocably fracture community life by allowing people to live and work in vastly wider areas. But in Winesburg, Ohio, modeled on the town of Clyde, Ohio, where Anderson lived as a child, life had not yet succumbed wholly to the modern age. Nevertheless, young people of the day, like George and Helen, felt the pull of the cities and longed to break free of the "old-fashioned" world of their parents, in which county fairs and horse races figured prominently. George longs for city life, where he can immerse himself in the frenetic pace of a daily newspaper, making an impact in a realm larger than his own small town. Likewise, Helen is attending college in the city of Cleveland— still an unusual move for a young woman of the time. Though she invites a professor home with her, his trite attempts at urbanity bore her. She urges George to follow his dream to the city, in a scene that was undoubtedly played out by millions of young people at the turn of the century as the United States became increasingly urbanized. As an exercise in bittersweet nostalgia, Anderson ignores the era in which he was writing. In 1919, the world had just waged the deadliest war in history, and technologies like airplanes, automobiles, telephones, and modern weaponry were transforming the world, both for better and for worse. During this time of chaos and immense growth, Anderson recalls an earlier time, evoking vivid memories of small-town life— both the joyousness of a county fair and the restlessness of the young generation who felt the urge to participate in the urban turmoil of modern life, forsaking the things they grew up with as being old-fashioned and "unsophisticated."

Critical Overview

Published as one of the final chapters of *Winesburg, Ohio,* "Sophistication" received positive criticism when it first appeared in 1919. In the *New Republic,* Maxwell Anderson remarked, "As a challenge to

the snappy short story form, with its planned proportions of flippant philosophy, epigrammatic conversation and sex danger, nothing better has come out of America than *Winesburg, Ohio.* . . . It was set down by a patient and loving craftsman; it is in a new mood, and one not easily forgotten." The acerbic critic H. L. Mencken, whom Anderson himself criticized for making fun of small-town folks, nevertheless declared that "What remains is pure representation— and it is representation so vivid, so full of insight, so shiningly life-like and glowing, that the book is lifted into a category all its own. Nothing quite like it has ever been done in America. It is a book that, at one stroke, turns depression into enthusiasm." The author Rebecca West in 1922 called it "an extraordinarily good book."

As the twentieth century advanced, Anderson lost his initial critical acclaim; he was satirized as "Sherwood Lawrence" (a reference to D. H. Lawrence) because a dark sexuality seemed to be the primary motivation of many of his characters. When Anderson died in 1941, Waldo Frank paid critical homage to the novel twenty years after it first appeared, calling *Winesburg, Ohio* "a classic." Ten years later, Irving Howe contended, "The ultimate unity of the book is a unity of feeling, a sureness of warmth, and a readiness to accept Winesburg's lost grotesques with the embrace of humility. Many American writers have taken as their theme the loss of love in the modern world, but few, if any at all, have so thoroughly realized it in the accents of love." In 1962 Walter Rideout, Anderson's biographer, agreed that *Winesburg, Ohio* is "a kind of American classic." Among other Anderson critics, Malcolm Cowley has stated about that "There are moments in American life to which [Anderson] gave not only the first but the final expression."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4
- Critical Essay #5
- Critical Essay #6

Critical Essay #1

Reist is a Christian clergyman and Professor of Christianity and Literature at Hillsdale College in Michigan. His 1993 essay on the unity of Winesburg, Ohio *was included in a recent critical edition of that work. In the following essay, he attempts "to show how Anderson's descriptive power, haunting language, simple dialogue, and carefully arranged series of events all come together to form an artistic and moral whole" in* Winesburg, Ohio, *with "Sophistication" being "a fundamental part of the novel."*

Ever since "Sophistication" appeared in 1919 as part of the ending of *Winesburg, Ohio,* critics have been unable to account for the continuing hold it has on the literary world. Even though we live in a highly technological, industrialized world, the cluster of stories which make up the novel still provides a telling account of human life trapped in community— the same community in which each townsperson, druggist, grocer, parson, and farmer searches for lasting communion. The purpose of this essay is to show how Anderson's descriptive power, haunting language, simple dialogue, and carefully arranged series of events all come together to form an artistic and moral whole. "Sophistication" is a fundamental part of the novel, and in this essay it will be treated as such, instead of as a short story on its own.

Irving Howe has commented that " *Winesburg* is an excellently formed piece of fiction, each of its stories following a parabola of movement which abstractly graphs the book's meaning." However, he concludes that "The ultimate unity of the book is a unity of feeling, a sureness of warmth, and a readiness to accept Winesburg's lost grotesques with the embrace of humility. Many American writers have taken as their theme the loss of love in the modern world, but few, if any at all, have so thoroughly realized it in the accents of love." The accents of love ebb and flow in the novel as each of the characters in each of the stories reaches out for acceptance and fulfillment. However, these absorbing, moving, sometimes terrifying searches for acceptance come to a climax in "Sophistication" as the ebb and flow of emotion is realized in a dramatic merger of the feeling of "mutual respect" that envelopes George and Helen. This wisdom, this insight, as momentary as it is, nonetheless prepares George to leave Winesburg to search for his own identity, freed from the trap of the small town, but also educated by the relationships he has experienced with various lost and searching souls.

Waldo Frank, who first published some of the episodes of the novel in the journal *Seven Arts,* of which he was managing editor, has argued that the power of the novel is lyrical: "For an analogy to the aesthetic of the Winesburg tales, one must go to music, perhaps to the songs that Schubert wove from old refrains; or to the lyric art of the Old Testament psalmists and prophets to whom the literary medium was so allied to music that their texts have always been sung in the synagogues. The Winesburg design is quite uniform: a theme-statement of a character with his mood, followed by a recounting of actions that are merely variations on the theme." He goes on to say "These variations make incarnate what has already been revealed to the reader; they weave the theme into life by the always subordinate confrontation of other characters (usually one) and by an evocation of landscape and village." But the confrontation of characters is not

subordinate to the theme; it *is* the theme, for the novel weaves its magic into a web of social encounters that constitute finally a total moral, social and artistic unity that is unforgettable.

For example, Helen White is not the only woman with whom and by whom George is shaped. Similarly, Kate Swift, George's school teacher, realizes his literary potential: "Kate's mind was ablaze with thoughts of George Willard. In something he had written as a schoolboy she thought she had recognized the spark of genius and wanted to blow on the spark." She has been unable to express her inner passionate nature, and like Dr. Parcival, she hopes that George might become her surrogate. And after his rendezvous with Louise Trunnion, George sneaks back to town muttering, "nobody knows." Continuing to seek his identity through sexual encounters, George ultimately fails with Kate Swift because he is younger than she, and because he has not gained enough discipline with the words that he speaks.

It is not only sexual encounters with women (for which Anderson was criticized as immoral and lascivious) that shape George. The novel is also about writing— its importance and effects. George is a younger newspaper reporter, and the villagers seek out George for his power with words, for they— many of them quite older than he— have never been able to say what they mean. For example, Dr. Parcival, who is a failed medical doctor, is writing a novel which almost certainly will never be published. So he declares to George: "You must pay attention to me. . . . If something happens perhaps you will be able to write the book that I may never get written. The idea is very simple, so simple that if you are not careful you will forget it. It is this— that everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified." The doctor is rather excessive in his reference to Christ; but if that crucifixion was for all humankind, it is not difficult to see that all pain, all suffering, all hope and hopelessness are gathered up into one aching whole, the town of Winesburg, which is a local manifestation of the entire human race.

Anderson in the section called "Godliness" provides the religious context for the townspeople. Jesse Bentley is an old man who thinks he is a failed prophet of Yahweh. "There were two influences at work in Jesse Bentley and all his life his mind had been a battleground for these influences. First there was the old thing in him. He wanted to be a man of God and a leader among men of God. His walking in the fields and through forests at night had brought him close to nature and there were forces in the passionately religious man that ran out to the forces in nature." It is in his cultural insecurity that Bent-ley's religion also fails, for modern life has produced an almost entirely new world in which "Jesse formed the habit of reading newspapers and magazines. He invented a machine for the making of fence out of wire. Faintly he realized that the atmosphere of old times and places that he had always cultivated in his own mind was strange and foreign to the thing that was growing up in the minds of others. The beginning of the most materialistic age in the history of the world, when wars would be fought without patriotism, when men would forget God and only pay attention to moral standards, when the will to power would replace the will to serve and beauty would be well-nigh forgotten in the terrible headlong rush of mankind toward the acquiring of possessions, was telling its story to Jesse, the man of God as it was to the men about him." So, the older gods of the harvest, the supernatural God of the

heavens, has begun to die, or at least to disappear, and thus Jesse is losing his grip: "when night came on and the stars came out it was harder to get back the old feeling of a close and personal God who lived in the sky overhead and who might at any moment reach out his hand, touch him on the shoulder, and appoint for him some heroic task to be done." His failure as a lost leftover from the 1890s (the time of the novel) obstructs achievement of the religious sophistication or wisdom which the ancestors of Winesburg achieved. This makes all the more profound George's and Helen's moment of sophistication at the end of the novel. Emptied of supernatural power, loosened from Bentley's God, George and Helen show that modern community, though momentary, is still deep and moving.

Anderson combines the themes of sexuality and verbal power in George's humiliation with Belle Carpenter, in the story "An Awakening" : for "an hour Belle Carpenter and the young reporter walked about under the trees in the sweet night air. George Willard was full of big words. The sense of power that had come to him during the hour of darkness in the alleyway remained with him and he talked boldly, swaggering and swinging his arms about." His silly preening, ranting and whispering to Belle lead to his embarrassment, for Ed Hanby, Belle's real lover, arrives and makes a fool of George. "Three times the young reporter sprang at Ed Hanby and each time the bartender, catching him by the shoulder, hurled him back into the bushes. The older man seemed prepared to keep the exercise going indefinitely but George Willard's head struck the root of a tree and he lay still."

What an immense difference between these encounters and the final sophistication, or achievement of communion, between George and Helen at the end! George seeks another of like mind; Anderson puts it this way: "With all his heart he wants 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." This moment of sophistication is sad and bittersweet, but not cynical and bitter and dark, as some critics have said. For example, Lionel Trilling remarks: "his people have passion without body, and sexuality without gaiety and joy, although it is often through sex that they are supposed to find their salvation." He further contends, "Anderson liked to catch people with their single human secret, their essence, but the more he looks for their essence the more his characters vanish into the vast limbo of meaningless life, the less they are human beings.... Certainly the precious essence of personality to which Anderson was so much committed could not be preserved by any of the people or any of the deeds his own books delight in." Although these judgements come from one of the finest literary and cultural critics the United States has produced, they are wrong, especially as they might apply to "Sophistication" and all of *Winesburg, Ohio.*

Better to listen to another great American novelist, William Faulkner, who contended that Anderson "was sometimes a sentimentalist in his writing (so was Shakespeare sometimes) but he was never impure in it. He never scanted it, cheapened it, took the easy way; never failed to approach writing except with humility and an almost religious, almost abject faith and patience and willingness to surrender, relinquish himself to it and into it." Such was the writer Sherwood Anderson, about whom Faulkner also wrote

these lines after having seen him at a cocktail party for the first time in a long while, because Anderson had been affronted by an unpublished satire on him which Faulkner had done: "Then I remembered *Winesburg, Ohio* and *The Triumph of The Egg* and some of the pieces in *Horses and Men* and I knew that I had seen, was looking at, a giant in an earth populated to a great—too great— extent by pygmies, even if he did make but the two or perhaps three gestures commensurate with gianthood."

"Sophistication" is one of the gestures, part of the greater gesture, *Winesburg, Ohio* which endures because it grips us as an artistic unity comprised of many shorter narratives. In "Sophistication" George and Helen attain "the thing needed"; and in "Departure," George prepares to leave the town on the morning train. "With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood."

Source: John S. Reist Jr., "Overview of 'Sophistication'," in *Short Stories for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Ward offers his interpretation of the role played by spoken language and silence in "Sophistication," especially in regard to how they relate to theme and characterization.

Anderson shows the impossibility of the honest communication of feeling by surrounding his grotesques [in *Winesburg, Ohio*] with a chorus of towns-people whose constant example reveals the meager possibilities of actual speech. The speech of the chorus is nothing but cliches and slogans, the language of the near-official American dogma of success and masculine bullying as it has filtered down to the small provincial town. Implicit in a number of the stories is the belief that most speech is mimicry, that most of the words that people say are imitations of what they have heard others say. Thus George reiterates the military officer's command and Elmer the idiot's foolish saying. The overheard loud chatter of the town is mostly boasting, the telling of lies that are regarded to be assertions of deeds that deserve society's approval. Anderson relates little of such discourse, but he refers to it as gossip, boasting, and joking—modes of speech essentially self-serving, as well as impersonal and unoriginal. Winesburg culture offers no acceptable mode of private communication. Dr. Reefy writes notes to himself, which he crumples in his pockets; other characters wave their arms, pace the streets, and get drunk— all improvised, inadequate substitutes for a speech that always fails them.

In several of the stories sexual contact is represented as an easier form of communication between man and woman than conversation, and probably for that reason not as satisfying as the dreamed of conversation would be. In the fragile and rare moments in which love is experienced in *Winesburg, Ohio* its expression is in silence. The main example is "Sophistication," the climactic story that concerns George Willard's final experience before his departure from Winesburg. In other ways as well, the story is the coda of the principal themes of the book and its most coherent resolution of the difficult problem of communicating for characters most comfortable with silence.

"Sophistication" is George Willard's story, and it shows his state of mind and feelings after his encounters with numerous lonely people and before his departure from Winesburg. The recent death of his mother has brought home to George a strong sense of his own mortality. "The sadness of sophistication has come to the boy. With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds". He recalls with shame his own "stout talk" in his previous walk with Helen White, whom he desires to be with this night. On the previous summer evening he could speak to Helen only by boasting of his confident ambitions: "I'm going to be a big man, the biggest that ever lived here in Winesburg". The distasteful recollection makes addedly repugnant the overheard boasting of a man whose horse had just won the race at the country fair, to which George had responded: "Old windbag . . . . Why does he want to be bragging? Why don't he shut up?"

The important setting of "Sophistication" is the Winesburg County Fair, the day-long celebration in which "an American town worked terribly at the task of amusing itself". At first the "sense of crowding, moving that closed in about him" is oppressive to George, an intensification of the usual threat of the townspeople to his private self. But as in most of the stories the life of the town— even on its annual day of festivity— barely touches George, and in this story more than any we see Anderson's representation of community as a hollow fiction.

Helen's mother had invited an instructor from her daughter's college to stay with the family during the fair, and through the instructor and Helen's mother Anderson gratuitously introduces another instance of fraudulent speech— the language of class and intellectual pretension. When the instructor tells Helen, "Your life is still bound up with the life of this town" Helen thinks "his voice sounded pompous and heavy". She flees to the garden thinking "that the world was full of meaningless people saying words". In the garden she encounters George, who has impetuously decided to enter Helen's house to speak with her. Thus the meeting is prepared by the separate repudiations of "bragging" and "words" by the young man and woman. When George finds Helen he wonders "what he had better do and say". In fact he says nothing, nor does Helen, as they walk to the grandstand in the fairground, where they sit for awhile, and then walk down the hill. For more than three pages the couple is together and Anderson includes not a word of dialogue. Earlier in the evening George had felt the need for Helen's understanding, and at the very end of the story, "for some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing they 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".

Nearly as reticent as his characters, Anderson does not further elaborate "the thing they needed"; to do so would cheapen the various desperate efforts of the other characters to define the object of their desires. But in the course of the interlude shared by George and Helen, some striking feelings that affect George give substance and definition to that which makes maturity in the modern world possible. First, George experiences the strange silence of the fairground a few hours after it had been crowded with people: "The place has been filled to overflowing with life. It has itched and squirmed with life and now it is night and the life has all gone away. The silence is almost terrifying". This is a new and different silence for the Anderson character— the silence not of inarticulateness but of loss, negation, the absence of life. It is a silence external to oneself and therefore a mode of experiencing the relation of the world of nonself to the self, which is also silent. Explicitly George interprets the sensation as a reinforcement of his sense of "his own insignificance in the scheme of existence", but the insignificance is a paradoxical kind of significance. Retaining the mood induced by the deserted fairground, he tightly holds Helen. The two share the same feeling and thus further enlarge their sense of identity as they experience its frailty: "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".

Helen and George remain silent. "They kissed but that impulse did not last." Slightly embarrassed, they "dropped into the animalism of youth. They laughed and began to

pull and haul at each other. . . . they became, not man and woman, not boy and girl, but excited little animals". They laugh again; George rolls down the hill; Helen runs after him. Then, with Helen holding George's arm, they walk away "in dignified silence". Except for the momentary embarrassment after each rejects the tentative impulse to kiss, the entire episode is remarkably easy and spontaneous— certainly the only occasion in the book of such intensely felt companionship. The close emotional attention to external silence takes George and presumably Helen beyond the confines of self, and presents George for the first time with a consciousness of his neighbors as "his people," most vividly felt in their absence. The refusal of sex underscores the inadequacy of sexual relationships apparent in the several stories that deal with the subject. The recovery of the ability to play like children, even animals, is a physical expression of life and joy that is not sexual but is more satisfying than sexuality, perhaps because it is free of tension, aggression, and the awkward assumption of adult powers. Although George realizes that "there is no way of knowing what woman's thought went through her mind," he feels little need to know and is not once disturbed by his own silence during the entire episode.

The experiencing of love and friendship through silence is very much in accordance with Emerson's and Thoreau's prescriptions for "love" and "friendship." But ideal silence in Anderson is no transcendence of materiality and mortality, rather an untroubled acquiescence in one's normal mode of being. Otherwise in *Winesburg, Ohio* silence is almost always a handicap, a terrible disability resulting from what the inarticulate characters mistakenly regard as a crippling affliction that prevents intercourse with others. In "Sophistication" it is the opposite. Silence itself becomes the only and the essential mode in which love and understanding can be achieved.

Source: J. A. Ward, in *American Silences: The Realism of James Agee, Walker Evans, and Edward Hopper,* Louisiana State University Press, 1985, pp. 46-50.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, the critic offers her interpretation of Anderson's use of lyric and epic elements in "Sophistication."

At this date, not much remains to be done by way of appointing Sherwood Anderson a place among American writers; in fact he himself succinctly indicated his own position when he remarked in the *Memoirs* that "For all my egotism, I know I am but a minor figure." There is little disagreement, either, about the work on which Anderson's reputation rests— *Winesburg,* "Death in the Woods," a few stories from *The Triumph of the Egg.* When we come to estimate the accomplishment represented by *Winesburg,* however, things are not quite so clear. There are those who wish, still, to view the collection as a frame-story, but they then must reckon with the difficulty of seeming to reduce all the stories to the dead level of equivalent exhibits. Those on the other hand who want to read *Winesburg* as an initiation novel about George Willard have to face the problem of resting their case upon a character who in the end remains the thinnest figment. To choose to relegate Anderson and *Winesburg* to the limbo of regionalism is no longer acceptable.

Perhaps the sanest way is to view *Winesburg,* an uneven collection, as a special kind of amalgam of naturalism and lyricism. Every reader, whether approvingly or not, acknowledges the lyric intensity of the best Anderson stories. To Herbert Gold, Anderson is "one of the purest, most intense poets of loneliness," while Irving Howe (who has also called Anderson a "pre-poet") holds that no other American writer "has yet been able to realize that strain of lyrical and nostalgic feeling which in Anderson's best work reminds one of another and greater poet of tenderness, Turgenev." Robert Gorham Davis ascribes the "great impression" made by *Winesburg* to its "freshness and lyric intensity." It is Paul Rosenfeld, however, who has seen most clearly that Anderson's lyricism is a method as much as an effect, for to this reader, Anderson's narratives "really are lyrics with epic characteristics, lyrics narrative of event."

In analyzing the elements that go into Anderson's lyricism, Rosenfeld notes the "legendary tone, the repetitions of slow rhythms and the loose joints" of the American tale, as well as the personal feeling that rises from the region between Ander-son's "conscious and unconscious minds." But Rosenfeld places greatest stress on the purely verbal aspects of Anderson's poetic quality, for

Anderson's inclusion among the authors of the lyric story . . . flows first of all from the fact that, using the language of actuality, he nonetheless invariably wrings sonority and cadence from it; unobtrusively indeed, without transcending the easy pitch of familiar prose. . . . He sustains tones broadly with assonances and with repeated or echoing words and phrases. He creates accent-patterns and even stanza-like paragraphs with the periodic repetition or alternation of features such as syllables, sounds, words, phrases, entire periods. . . . (Introduction to *The Sherwood Anderson Reader,* pp. xiv-xv.)

Many readers of Anderson will see these assertions as a part of Rosenfeld's special pleading and will doubtless be more inclined to share Irving Howe's belief that amidst the " chaos of his creative life Anderson had to cast around for a device with which to establish some minimum of order in his work" and found it "in the undulations of his verbal rhythms. . . ." Indeed, it is precisely in those pieces where he was "most at sea imaginatively" that "the rhythm is most insistently established."

Rosenfeld, I think it can be shown, is on much stronger ground when contending that Anderson's stories are— in other ways— "lyrics with epic characteristics," and in holding that

As for his own specimens of the lyric story-kind, they have 'inner form' like Gertrude Stein's, but their rhythms are livelier, longer, more self-completive than those of the somnolent lady-Buddha of the *rue de Fleurus.* While wanting the suavity of expression in Turgenev's lyric tales, Anderson's share the warmly singing tone of the Russian's, surpass them of course in point of tension, and have the Andersonian qualities of subtlety of attack and humorous and acute feeling, perceptions of the essential in the singular, glamour over the commonplace, boldness of image. . . . Wonderfully they 'stay by us.' (*Sherwood Anderson Reader,* p. xix.)

What, precisely, is the "inner form" of Anderson's stories and how can they be said to be "lyrics with epic characteristics"?

In the first place it must be noted that the best Anderson stories always contain and lead up to a *revelation,* epiphany, or state of realized experience. Robert Morss Lovett has said that Anderson's stories "reach outward into the unknown," while Granville Hicks asserts that "Surfaces, deeds, even words scarcely concern him; everything is bent to the task of revelation." To Herbert Gold, "The experience of epiphany is characteristic of great literature, and the lyric tales of Anderson give this wonderful rapt coming-forth, time and time again." Irving Howe— uncomplimentarily□ notes that Anderson "wrote best when he had no need to develop situations or show change and interaction— ," but Anderson's own ideal of art is expressed precisely in his idealization of "the tale of perfect balance," with all its "elements . . . understood, an infinite number of minute adjustments perfectly made...."

Summaries of Anderson stories reveal even less than is usually the case about the significance of the narratives; obviously in Anderson what is at stake is not histories, biographies, gossip, or even tales. From Anderson's best work one does derive an unmistakable sense of authentic experience being worked out from within, in the manner of the great Russians— Turgenev and Chekhov— with their unparalleled suggestiveness and extreme economy of means. Like the Russians, Anderson does not "import his poetry into the work — he allows only the poetry that is *there"* (Herbert Gold). The significance of an Anderson story has very little to do with the "facts" that are related but it has something to do with the arrangement of those facts and with the relationship of these "epic" elements to other, more properly poetic strains.

Anderson's abandonment of pure naturalism involved him in a movement away from structures dependent upon sequential action or gradually increased intensity and toward an arrangement of events which would better dramatize the centrifugal, diffused, resonant effect his materials called for. The halting, tentative, digressive style, and the circular, hovering or "Chinese box" approach to "what happened" thus do not so much demonstrate Anderson's affectation of the manner of oral taletelling as they illustrate his understanding that the "epic" base of the story must be manipulated in such a way that weight is thrown upon the significance of the happenings as it reveals itself to the central consciousness and to the reader, rather than upon the events themselves. This is, of course, essentially a "poetic" strategy.

Moreover, as Jon Lawry has demonstrated in his reading of "Death in the Woods," the narrative strategy, by which the story is not really "told" to any assumed audience, makes it possible that "its process of growth and contact is discovered by the audience, through the act itself rather than through the narrator's relation of the act," for "The audience is invited to enter as individuals into a process almost identical with that of the narrator and to reach with him for contact with another life." This narrative method makes it possible for the "unacknowledged audience" to "share directly not only the narrator's responses but his act of discovering and creating those responses" — and this is precisely the "method" of the post-symbolist lyric. It is also the technique by which in Anderson fantasy is most controlled, or, "if not exactly controlled, simplified, given a single lyrical line," and ambivalent— if not contradictory— emotions enfolded within one action. . . .

In "Sophistication," the "epic" elements are arranged in such a way that George Willard's restlessness and puzzlement are dramatized— rather than merely reported— through the structure itself with its jerky, spasmodic focusing and refocusing. Anderson, moreover, demonstrates a high degree of cunning in not attempting any sort of philosophic resolution of George's dilemmas but by providing instead a rather quiet culminating scene in which all the contradictory aspects of George's and Helen's consciousness are caught up in a symbolic action (is it ludicrous to see a resemblance to Yeats' use of the great-rooted blossomer?):

It was so they went down the hill. . . . 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. . . . 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.

Other symbol-like devices appearing in the story are the cornfields, the dry leaves and trees, the stallion, and the grandstand. Anderson's conducting of the narrative is too loose and diffuse for these objects to form a genuine symbolic pattern, but their presence does add power to the lyric suggestiveness of the narrative. . . .

It is in the *Winesburg* stories such as "The Thinker," "Adventure," "Hands," "Sophistication," and "The Untold Lie" that Anderson manages to reinforce a certain surface fidelity with what Ernest Boyd has called the "deeper realism which sees

beyond and beneath the exterior world to the hidden reality which is the essence of things." By combining in a special manner the story's "epic" elements with characteristic lyric devices, Anderson is able, at least on occasion, to reach the "something totally private, untouchable, beyond appearance and action, in all of us" and thus exemplifies his own belief that "To live is to create new forms: with the body in living children; in new and more beautiful forms carved out of materials; in the creation of a world of the fancy ; in scholarship; in clear and lucid thought. . . ."

Source: Sister M. Joselyn, "Sherwood Anderson and the Lyric Story," in *The Twenties: Poetry and Prose, 20 Critical Essays,* edited by Richard E. Langford and William E. Taylor, Everett Edwards, Inc., 1966, pp. 70-3.

Critical Essay #4

Rideout has written a biography of Sherwood Anderson, scheduled for publication in 1998. In the following excerpt, he offers his interpretation of "Sophistication" as the climax of George's coming of age.

Where "An Awakening" records a defeat, "Sophistication" records in all ways a triumph. Though Anderson presents the moment in essay rather than dramatic form, there comes to George, as to "every boy," a flash of insight when "he stops under a tree and waits as for a voice calling his name." But this time "the voices outside himself" do not speak of the possibilities of universal order, nor do they speak of guilt. Instead they "whisper a message concerning the limitations of life," the brief light of human existence between two darks. The insight emphasizes the unity of all human beings in their necessary submission to death and their need for communication one with another. It is an insight that produces self-awareness but not self-centeredness, that produces, in short, the mature, "sophisticated" person.

The mind of such a person does not "run off into words." Hence Helen White, who has had an intuition similar to George's, runs away from the empty talk of her college instructor and her mother, and finds George, whose first and last words to her in the story, pronounced as they first meet, are "Come on." Together in the dimly-lit fair grounds on the hill over-looking the town of Winesburg, George and Helen share a brief hour of absolute awareness. Whereas his relationship with Belle Carpenter [in "An Awakening"] had produced in George self-centeredness, misunderstanding, hate, frustration, humiliation, that with Helen produces quite the opposite feelings. The feeling of oneness spreads outward, furthermore. Through his communication with Helen he begins "to think of the people in the town where he had lived with something like reverence." When he has come to this point, when he loves and respects the inhabitants of Winesburg, the "daylight" people as well as the "night" ones, the way of the artist lies clear before him. George Willard is ready for his "Departure."

Like Hart Crane, other readers will find the simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio* "baffling"; but it is very probably this paradoxical quality which has attracted and will continue to attract admirers to a book that Anderson himself, with a mixture of amusement, deprecation, defensiveness, and satisfaction, quite accurately termed "a kind of American classic."

Source: Walter B. Rideout, "The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio,*" in *Shenandoah,* Vol. 13, no. 3, Spring, 1962, pp. 20-31.

Critical Essay #5

In the following excerpt, Walcutt offers his interpretation of the precise moment when George and Helen feel that they have reached mutual understanding and have undergone individual growth.

The climax (perhaps it should be called the high point in George's life until then) of [*Winesburg, Ohio*] occurs when George and Helen White reach a complete understanding one autumn evening, sitting up in the old grandstand on the fair grounds, rapt and wordless. "With all his strength he tried to hold and to understand the mood that had come upon him. In that high place in the darkness the two oddly sensitive human atoms held each other tightly and waited. 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." It is most significant that this experience is almost entirely wordless. The shared feeling, indeed, is of seeking and wondering. It is inarticulate because it occurs in a world without meaning. Such incidents suggest that men's instincts are good but that conventional morality has warped and stifled them. Interpreted in terms of the divided stream of transcendentalism, they show that the spirit is misdirected because its physical house is mistreated. When Whitman wrote

Logic and sermons never convince, The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul Only what proves itself to every man and woman is so.

he was making the same plea for the liberation of body and spirit together that we infer from *Winesburg, Ohio.* I say infer, because Anderson does not precisely say this; one might infer that he regards these repressions as inseparable from life— that he takes the tragic view of man— but I do not think entirely so. The pains of growth are probably inevitable, but the whole world is not as confining as Winesburg, and Anderson seems to say that people *should* be able to grow up less painfully to more abundant lives. His protagonist does, and gets away from Winesburg, though he endures torments and misunderstanding and unsatisfied love which cannot be laid to Winesburg so much as to the condition of youth in this world.

Source: Charles Child Walcutt, "Sherwood Anderson: Impressionism and the Buried Life," in *The Sewanee Review,* Vol. 60, no. 1, January-March, 1952, pp. 28-47.

Critical Essay #6

In the following excerpt, Howe offers his view on George Willard's relation to the other characters in Winesburg, Ohio, *as well as on the place of "Sophistication" in that story cycle.*

The burden which the grotesques would impose on George Willard is beyond his strength. He is not yet himself a grotesque mainly because he has not yet experienced very deeply, but for the role to which they would assign him he is too absorbed in his own ambition and restlessness. The grotesques see in his difference from them the possibility of saving themselves, but actually it is the barrier to an ultimate companionship. George Willard's adolescent receptivity to the grotesques can only give him the momentary emotional illumination described in that lovely story, "Sophistication." On the eve of his departure from Winesburg, George Willard reaches the point "when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. . . . With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. He knows that in spite of all the stout talk of his fellows he must live and die in uncertainty, a thing blown by the winds, a thing destined like corn to wilt in the sun. . . . Already he hears death calling. With all his heart he wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with all his hands. . . ." For George this illumination is enough, but it is not for the grotesques. They are a moment in his education, he a confirmation of their doom. "I have missed something. I have missed something Kate Swift was trying to tell me," he says to himself one night as he falls asleep. He has missed the meaning of Kate Swift's life: it is not his fault: her salvation, like the salvation of the other grotesques, is beyond his capacities. . . .

Winesburg is an excellently formed piece of fiction, each of its stories following a parabola of movement which abstractly graphs the book's meaning. From a state of feeling rather than a dramatic conflict there develops in one of the grotesques a rising lyrical excitement, usually stimulated to intensity by the presence of George Willard. At the moment before reaching a climax, this excitement is frustrated by a fatal inability at communication and then it rapidly dissolves into its original diffuse base. This structural pattern is sometimes varied by an ironic turn, as in "Nobody Knows" and "A Man of Ideas," but in only one story, "Sophistication," is the emotional ascent allowed to move forward without interruption.

Source: Irving Howe, "The Book of the Grotesque," in *Sherwood Anderson,* Stanford University Press, 1951, pp. 91-110.

Topics for Further Study

Research psychologist Erik Erikson's theory of psychological development. To what extent does "Sophistication" explore the stages of development known as Identity versus Identity Confusion and Intimacy versus Isolation?

Read Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* , which ends with George's departure from town several months after his moment with Helen White. Does "Sophistication" need to be read as part of the novel, or does it have its own meaning without the novel? Also, does the novel need this story to make sense? What is missing from the novel without "Sophistication?"

As he sits beside Helen in the empty grandstand, George thinks that he "wanted to love and be loved by her, but he did not want at the moment to be confused by her womanhood." Examine two current books on adolescent sexual relationships and compare contemporary depictions of such relationships to the relationship between George and Helen. Have things changed in the years since Anderson wrote "Sophistication"?

Modern feminists have sought to reinterpret traditional texts such as "Sophistication." How does Helen represent feminism? In what ways does she not represent feminism? Analyze some of the other female characters in *Winesburg, Ohio,* in a feminist light.

Compare and Contrast

1890s: In "Sophistication," the town's residents "work terribly at the task of amusing itself." Entertainment of the day takes a variety of forms. Drinking occupies many men, but it is unacceptable for a woman to appear drunk. Socializing is a favorite activity of women, and they frequently gather for meals, or in parlors to talk, sing, play games, or have afternoon tea. Dances are popular, and more physical activities such as roller-skating and bicycling are gaining in popularity.

1919: Movies are a primary source of entertainment, though they remain silent until 1927. At 10 cents a ticket, however, it is an affordable way for many people to spend a weekend afternoon. By 1916, comedic actor Charlie Chaplin was well-known around the world. In 1918, Chaplin and another popular movie star, Mary Pickford, each signed contracts with film studios for more than $1 million. Other forms of entertainment include burlesque and vaudeville shows.

1990s: New technologies, including television, VCRs, cable television, and computers expand possibilities for in-home entertainment. Popular social activities include movies, sporting events, and theater. Admission to movies may cost $7.00 or more.

1900s: The Winesburg County Fair is responsible for bringing crowds of "country people" into town. County fairs have been in existence in Ohio since the mid 1800s and are promoted by the Ohio Agriculture Department, organized in 1846. The fair brings people together to celebrate the state's farming industry. Livestock and other farm products are judged and awarded prizes.

1990s: Farmers comprise about 2 percent of Ohio's population in 1996, but agriculture remains the state's largest single industry, and county fairs are still popular. Modern county fairs are promoted on the World Wide Web and livestock are tested for illegal drugs that may be used to enhance the appearance of champion animals. Of Ohio's 88 counties, 87 have county fairs. While fairs are still designed to showcase local agriculture, additional attractions often include carnival rides, political booths, and variety of merchants and entertainment.

What Do I Read Next?

A Story-Teller's Story (1924) by Sherwood Anderson is a semi-autobiographical work in which the author outlines his journey as a writer and artist in the early twentieth century.

James Joyce's *A Portrait Of The Artist as A Young Man* (1916) portrays the development of Stephen Dedalus, an Irish man, from childhood to his leaving a Roman Catholic seminary. Stephen is a writer, as George is, and this novel depicts Stephen's departure for the larger world.

Ernest Hemingway's *The Torrents of Spring* (1926) is a satirical novel which ridicules Anderson's simple, small-town prose, as well as his focus on common folk.

William Graham Sumner's *Folkways* (1907) is a sociological study which argues that all ethics and customs begin with intuition and instinctive responses to hunger, sex, vanity, and fear.

Edgar Lee Master's *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) is a series of stories told from beyond the grave by small-town midwesterners. The stories reveal candid, bitter, and cynical portraits of small town and rural life. Anderson was influenced by Masters.

Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd's *Middletown* (1929) is a sociological study of small-town life, tracing the development of a midwestern town of grocers and farmers from 1890 through its growth to a center of industry by 1924.

Further Study

Abcarian, Richard. "Innocence and Experience in *Winesburg, Ohio.*" *University Review,* Vol. 35, Winter, 1968, pp. 95-105.

Considers the wastefulness of human life to be the central focus of Anderson's novel.

Asselineau, Roger. "Beyond Realism: Sherwood Anderson's Transcendalist Aesthetics," *The Transcendentalist Constant in American Literature,* New York University Press, 1980, pp. 124-36.

Argues that each story in the novel is lyrical poetry.

Baker, Carlos. "Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg: A Reprise," *The Virginia Quarterly Review,* Vol. 48, Autumn, 1972, pp. 568-79.

States that the themes of quest and suppression, not sexuality, unite the stories.

Boyd, Ernest. Introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio,* Modern Library, 1919.

Theorizes that the novel is a depiction of rebellion against American society.

Dewey, Joseph. "No God in The Sky and No God in Myself: 'Godliness' and Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio, Modern Fiction Studies,* Summer, 1981, pp. 251-59.

Jesse Bentley unlocks the puritan vision of life for George Willard.

Gross, Barry. "The Revolt That Wasn't: The Legacies of Critical Myopia," *CEA Critic,* Vol. 2, January, 1977, pp. 4-8.

Gross states that the novel is a nostalgic memoir for rural America, not a critique of it.

White, Ray Lewis. "Of Time and *Winesburg, Ohio.*" *Modern Fiction Studies,* Vol. 25, Winter, 1979-80, pp. 658-66.

Discusses the historical facts of the novel, stating that the action of the novel extends from July, 1894 to April, 1896.

Bibliography

Anderson, Maxwell. "A Country Town." *The New Republic,* June 25, 1919, pp. 257, 260.

Cowley, Malcolm. Introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio,* by Sherwood Anderson, Viking Press, 1960, pp. 1-15.

Faulkner, William. "A Note on Sherwood Anderson." In *Essays, Speeches & Public Letters,* edited by James B. Meriwether, Random House, 1965, pp. 3-10.

Frank, Waldo. " *Winesburg, Ohio* after Twenty Years." *Story,* Vol. 29, no. 9, September-October, 1941, pp. 29-33.

Howe, Irving. *Sherwood Anderson: A Biographical and Critical Study,* William Sloane Associates, 1951, 271 p.

Mencken, H. L. "Novels, Chiefly Bad — II." *The Smart Set,* Vol. 59, no. 4, August, 1919, pp. 140, 142.

Rideout, Walter. "The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio,*" *Shenandoah,* Vol. 13, no. 3, Spring, 1962, pp. 20-31.

Trilling, Lionel. "Sherwood Anderson." In *The Liberal Imagination,* Viking Press, 1947, pp. 22-33.

West, Rebecca. Review of *Winesburg, Ohio,* by Sherwood Anderson, in *The New Statesman,* Vol. 29, no. 484, July 22, 1922, pp. 443-44.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Short Stories for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Short Stories for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535