Winesburg, Ohio Study Guide

Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Winesburg, Ohio was Sherwood Anderson's breakthrough work, the one that first gained widespread attention for him as an artist, although it was years before he would produce a best seller. He was forty-two when it was published, with two novels published previously that had received little interest from the reading public.

According to the story that Anderson would later relate in his *Memoirs,* the book started one night when he was living by himself in a run-down rooming house in Chicago, in 1915: it was a place full of would-be artists, and Anderson, who was supporting himself by writing advertising copy, sat down one December evening and, almost miraculously, produced the story "Hands" in one sitting. In the version he often told, the story came out exactly as he wanted it and he never changed a word, although researchers have since turned up drafts that show substantial differences.

Having found his style in this one inspired flash, he went on to develop the other stories that make up *Winesburg, Ohio* over the next few years. When the book was published in 1919, it did not sell very well, but the critical response marked the author as a man of talent and artistic integrity. Some critics lambasted it for being immoral because of its sexual themes, both hidden and blatant, such as the child molestation charge in "Hands" or the implied impotency in "Respectability."

For each critic put off by the buried subjects, though, there were two or three who appreciated Anderson's courage in examining areas previously untouched by mainstream writers. Anderson's greatest influence on American literature has been indirect, in the ways that *Winesburg, Ohio* inspired the following generation of post-World War I writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, and John Steinbeck. It was when these writers began speaking of the debt they owed to Sherwood Anderson that the book stopped being just a favorite of writers and gathered mass attention from the public.

Author Biography

Sherwood Anderson was born in 1876 in Camden, Ohio. In 1884 his family moved to Clyde, the small Ohio town that Winesburg is patterned after. After his mother's death in 1896, be moved to Chicago. He hoped to find better opportunities in the big city, but was unable to find any employment except menial, back-breaking labor; discouraged, he joined the army two years later, serving in the Spanish-American War.

After the war he finished his high school degree in Ohio and. invigorated by travel and education, he moved to Chicago again in 1900. He found employment working in the new field of advertising. In 1907, after marrying a wealthy manufacturer's daughter, he moved to Elyria, Ohio, as president of the Anderson Manufacturing Company. For five years he struggled to keep his business afloat, writing a few poems and some short stories that were of no interest to anyone until later, when he became famous.

What followed has become one of the great legends of American literature. According to Anderson's version, he simply realized, sitting at his desk one afternoon, that the business life was vapid and shallow, and so he stood up, walked out of the door, and kept on walking. According to the Cleveland hospital he checked into four days later, he had suffered a nervous breakdown. Either way, his career in business was over, and in early 1913, at age thirty-seven, he left his wife and family and returned to Chicago again. He worked for an advertising firm by day, wrote by night, and associated with other aspiring writers in the lively Chicago artistic scene whenever he had the time.

The short stories he wrote were traditional, and he was dissatisfied with his output until one day late in 1915, when, in a flash of inspiration, he sat down and wrote "Hands." After that, the other stories that comprise *Winesburg, Ohio* followed slowly. He published the stories in magazines as they appeared, and at the same time published his first two novels, *Windy MacPherson's Son* and *Marching Men.*

Winesburg, Ohio was not a commercial success when it was published in]919, but it was well received among writers. Anderson traveled and met European and American writers in Europe, who began mentioning him in interviews as an influence on their work. He was not financially comfortable enough to quit his advertising job until 1922, and did not have financial success with a novel until 1925, with *Dark Laughter.*

With his reputation established. Anderson continued to be sought as a writer up to his death in 1941, producing three volumes of autobiography, some memorable short stories (especially those in *Death In the Woods.* which some critics argue rivals *Winesburg).* Most of his time in his later years was spent writing social essays, which are seldom read anymore.

Plot Summary

Rather a single, well-defined plot, *Winesburg, Ohio* has a loosely interconnected set of stories with overlapping time frame and characters. Only when the town itself is considered the "main character" can one speak of an overall plot. In this macro-plot, the traditional small town life of nineteenth-century America comes to an end; its hard but stable community is broken into the dynamic but impersonal atoms of twentieth-century American society

The historical macro-plot is composed of twenty-four micro-plots centered on individual characters, the inhabitants of Winesburg. Some characters appear as supporting players in more than one story, and one figure appears In several: George Willard, a youth working as a reporter in Winesburg's newspaper office. Many characters are connected to George, and his departure at the end brings the whole phase of Winesburg' s history to a close.

Anderson prefaces his stories with a list of the tales and a chapter entitled "The Book of the Grotesque." This chapter suggests that a grotesque character comes into being when a man or woman takes one of the many truths of life and pursues it obsessively. Anderson's stories illustrate, often in a few terse pages, how a character becomes trapped by his or her obsession with freedom, lost love, sex, innocence, age, power, money, or indecency.

The first story, "Hands," focuses on an oddball named Wing Biddiebaum, whose hands are always in motion. A friend of George Willard, he is about to tell the youth about his past when he breaks off in fright. Anderson's narrator, however, fills in the story. Once named Adolph Myer, Wing was a teacher in a Pennsylvania town. Much beloved by his boys, he was tender with them in turn. One boy, however, fell in love with Adolph and recounted his fantasies as if they were facts. Branded a pervert, Adolph was beaten and chased away, barely escaping being lynched. He took the name Biddlebaum from a box in a railway station and ended up in Winesburg, tormented by his hands, which in his trauma he blamed for His undeserved suffering.

"Paper Pills" sketches Doctor Reefy, who fills his pockets with bits of paper on which he jots down ideas and inspirations. The narrator connects this peculiarity to the Doctor's courtship of his wife, who visited his office with an illegitimate pregnancy and died less than a year after their marriage. He did not condemn her, and his strange thoughtful nature, represented by the wads of paper, made her love him.

"Mother" reveals the family background of George Willard. His mother Elizabeth, disappointed with her life, has come to despise her husband Tom. Her love for her son is mixed with an anxious hope to be fulfilled through him. George tells his mother that he wants to leave Winesburg, a wish he will eventually carry out after her death.

"The Philosopher" presents the shabby, idle doctor, Doctor Parcival. The doctor tells young George about his family. The doctor's father was insane and died in an asylum;

his brother was run over by a train when drunk. At the end of the story, the doctor refuses to come down from His office to look at a child who has been thrown from a buggy and killed. He visits George Willard In panic, convinced that the town will be enraged at his callousness about the child. He whispers his obsessive idea to George:

everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified. That's what I want to say.

"Nobody Knows" narrates George Willard's sexual adventure with Louise Trunnion, who offers herself to him in a note. When she later hesitates, he coaxes her by telling her that no one will know. Later, after he has left her, he repeats the thought, but with a different sense: she has nothing on him, no one knows.

The four-part story "Godliness" focuses on the patriarchal head of the Bentley Farm, Jesse. The first part depicts Jesse's background and His tough management of the farm after the Civil War. It introduces his biblical obsession: he imagines himself the only godly man among "Philistines." He prays to God for a son called David to help him overcome his enemies. In the second part, the ironic thwarting of his prayer is revealed: his wife had died in childbirth, giving birth to a girl, Louise. Louise is unhappily married to the banker John Hardy; their child is named David. Jesse takes the grandchild to the farm. Still biblically obsessed, however, Jesse frightens the boy with an intense prayer, and the child flees.

Part three narrates the youth of Louise, passed In the Hardy household. Mistreated by her foster sisters, she seeks to become the lover of John, her future husband. David's birth disappoints her hopes for a daughter, just as she had foiled Jesse's desire for a son. In part four, David abandons Jesse, who has tried to realize His religious designs by sacrificing a lamb. Boy and lamb flee from the knife-wielding grandfather, and when David knocks Jesse unconscious With a stone, he thinks he has killed the old man and runs away forever. Coming to in despair, Jesse believes God has cursed him for his pride.

The next three stories, "A Man of Ideas," "Adventure,"_ and "Respectability" offer character sketches. In the first, Joe Welling, a generally quiet man, is seized with fits of obsessive thinking, poured out in a torrent of words. In the second, Alice Hindman goes out walking naked, driven by solitude to a desperate, half-mad desire for adventure. The third, "Respectability,"' focuses on the gross, dirty, and misogynistic telegraph operator Wash Williams.

"The Thinker" introduces Seth Richmond, George Willard's friend and a failed candidate for the love of Helen White, who figures in several stones. Seth cannot shake his feeling of not belonging in Winesburg. Tills sense inhibits him from trying to Win Helen's love. He leaves her to George Willard, considered the typical Winesburg insider.

In "Tandy,"' a drunken stranger perceives in a little girl an image of a love he will never possess. The qualities of this love he calls "Tandy,"' which the girl takes as her name.

"The Strength of God" depicts the Reverend Curtis Hartman, who peers through a hole in the bell-tower window at the schoolteacher Kate Smith, whose bedroom is opposite

the church. Torn with guilt, the minister continues peeping until one night he sees Kate naked, beating her bed with her fists, then kneeling to pray. Believing this sight a message from God, the minister breaks the glass with his fists, destroying his post of forbidden observation.

The next story, "The Teacher,"' returns to these same events from another angle. The mature and experienced teacher detects something special in young George Willard, and she seeks him out to advise him about his pursuit of writing She initiates an erotic encounter but breaks it off, beating at him with her fists, and fleeing to weep and pray in her room.

"Loneliness" portrays the aging child-man Enoch Robinson, who earlier lived in a world of make-believe in the art world of New York. In order to preserve his imaginary life, he drove off the woman who loved him, destroying his dreams as well.

In "An Awakening,"' George Willard is seduced by Belle Carpenter to make her real love, Ed Handby, jealous. Ed deflates George's pride by breaking in on them, knocking George around, and leaving with Belle. In the story" 'Queer,"' George also gets a surprise beating. Elmer Cowley, the misfit son of a shop owner, thinks George, like all of Winesburg's inhabitants, laughs at him and thinks him "queer." Before fleeing Winesburg on the train, Elmer' calls George to the platform, tries to speak his mind, and when unable, beats George half-unconscious.

In "The Untold Lie,"' a middle-aged farm worker, Ray Pearson, is asked by his younger friend Hal Winters what to do about a woman Hal has made pregnant. Ray wants to advise him not to throwaway his freedom, as he himself did in marrying. But he holds his tongue, realizing that anything he said would only be a lie.

A quiet boy, Tom Foster, is the central figure of "Drink." One night the boy gets drunk and visits George. Tom tells George that he drank to understand something and that he has learned from it, comparing it to how he imagines making love must be.

The last three stories conclude George's life in Winesburg, "Death" describes the circumstances of George's mother's death, including her passionate encounter with Doctor Reefy late in her life and the stash of money that will allow George to escape the town that made her suffer, "Sophistication" depicts a brief moment of silent understanding between Helen White, back from college, and George, who will soon leave for good. "Departure" presents the town's send-off of George. Winesburg fades from view as the train pulls away, changed to nothing more than "a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood."

The Book of the Grotesque

The Book of the Grotesque Summary

Winesburg, Ohio is Sherwood Anderson's collage of life in a small Ohio town, exploring human motivation and communication. Episodic in nature, *Winesburg, Ohio* falls in between a collection of short stories and a novel. The twenty-two named sections, one broken into four sub-sections, follow different characters in the same town. Many of their lives are connected through George Willard, a young writer who witnesses his townsfolk's stories and must ultimately leave Winesburg to pursue his own life's journey. On a deeper level, their lives are connected through a drive for human connection that often is impossible to fulfill.

The first section describes an unnamed writer. A carpenter comes to make the writer's bed level with the window, so that he can look out it. The two talk, and the writer leads the carpenter to speak of the carpenter's time spent in a prison during a war. His brother died of starvation. The carpenter cries as he speaks of it, a grotesque sight. The project is eventually done, but the writer cannot get into his bed without climbing on a chair. The carpenter's story, drawn out of him by the writer, overshadowed the carpenter's job.

Afterwards, the writer lies in his bed, thinking about how he is going to die. He is a heavy smoker and worries about his heart. The idea of death makes him more alive, and he feels young inside, as if he has something young and brilliant inside of him. He dreams of all the people he has known during his life, the "grotesques." Not all the grotesques are horrible, but some are amusing or almost beautiful. When he awakes, he painfully gets out of bed and begins to write about these people. The result is a book called *The Book of the Grotesque,* which does not get published. However, the narrator reads it, and it leaves an impression on him. The book talks about people's personal truths, many types of beautiful truths about virginity or passion or wealth or poverty, which people take inside of themselves and which make them grotesques. The narrator notes that he mentions the carpenter only because he, a common person, is the only nearly understandable and lovable person in the old man's book.

The Book of the Grotesque Analysis

Sherwood Anderson was an American short story writer and novelist who lived from 1876-1941. He grew up in Clyde, Ohio, and served in the Spanish-American War. He managed a paint factory before leaving his wife and job to move to Chicago to become a writer. He eventually moved to Marion, Virginia, and in 1927, he owned and edited two newspapers. He lived during the beginning of the industrial age, when man was quickly beginning to use machines. He presented himself as a sardonic critical of American provincialism and materialism. *Winesburg, Ohio* is his most critically acclaimed work.

The characters are not meant to be realistic, but instead they portray extremes, grotesques and people on the cusp of life. Many are driven nearly mad at their attempts at human connection, something Anderson sees reflected in American society. His characters are separated by walls of misunderstanding, clutching onto an idea or truth and left sputtering. This first section is self-reflexive and ambiguous. The unnamed writer seems like a caricature of the author himself, or he may be George Willard, the novice writer who appears throughout the book but doesn't yet grasp the motivations behind people's actions. *The Book of the Grotesque* is a reflection of *Winesburg, Ohio*. When the narrator describes the author's idea that "the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque," he obligates the reader to look for this in the following stories.

Hands

Hands Summary

Wing is a fat little old man who waits on his veranda, watching berry pickers pass. His hands move over his bald head as if he were fixing his hair, though he doesn't have any. Wing is constantly fearful. He feels isolated from the residents of Winesburg. His only friend is George Willard, son of Tom Willard, who runs the New Willard House. George is a reporter for the *Winesburg Eagle*. Wing is waiting on his porch, hoping that George will visit, as he often does. Wing watches the road, walking down to look down for George. When Wing spends time with George, Wing loses some of his timidity and his personality emerges.

Wing uses his hands extensively when talking. His hands move like birds' wings, hence his name. He tries to hide them, but they are like a security blanket when he speaks to George. These hands are famous, picking unprecedented quantities of strawberries in a day. George is curious about Wing's hands, but he is respectful of Wing and doesn't question him. One day while he is talking, Wing puts his hands on George's shoulders with affection. Wing is horrified and draws back, hiding his hands, and he tells George that he has to go and can't speak to him anymore.

The narration then shifts to the past, to tell the story of Wing's hands. Wing was a gentle teacher named Adolph Myers, who touched his students with affection. A slow boy imagined that Wing abused him, and talked about these imagined abuses. Myers was investigated, and students told about how Myers caressed them. A saloonkeeper beat Myers up in the schoolyard in front of his students, and he was driven from the town. Myers has lived alone in Winesburg for twenty years and looks much older than his actual age. Myers doesn't know why he was driven from his town and from teaching, but he knows it has something to do with his hands.

Hands Analysis

Wing is the first of several characters who will confide in and teach George Willard. Wing is naturally a teacher, and his friendship with George arises from his natural desire to teach. He tells George, "You must begin to dream...shut your ears to the roaring of the voices." He is telling George to not rely on what others think or want.

A tragic figure, Wing's hands are symbolic of the desire to communicate, to touch others. It is at the point of communication, of teaching, that Wing touches both his students and George Willard. When he talks, his hands move, beating against a fence or tree stump. His ability to communicate, though, makes him an outcast. "Keep your hands to yourself," repeats the man who beats him, and this is like saying, "Keep your ideas to yourself; keep your thoughts to yourself." Wing is rendered mute and is unable to explain himself. Like a caged bird, he is imprisoned by his circumstances and is

forced to quell his natural inclinations. His prison is not a prison of the body, but a prison of the mind. Wing becomes trapped in his own mind, separated from real communication. He only talks to George, the gifted listener, and even with George he must contain himself.

Neither George nor Wing truly knows the story of Wing's hands. Wing has hidden his background as a teacher from George, and Wing himself does not know of the accusations of molestation. These hidden motivators are thematic. The things that drive people, that motivate people, are often unseen, emphasizing the distance between one mind and another.

Paper Pills

Paper Pills Summary

Doctor Reefy is a man with a white beard and big nose and hands. He does house calls on a white horse, riding from house to house. He marries a rich girl, who is quiet, tall, dark and beautiful. Everyone wonders why she marries him. She dies only a year after they marry. He is a tall man who has worn one suit for many years. The doctor puts scraps of paper in his pockets, which turn into hard paper balls, and he dumps them on the floor. These are the "paper pills."

The story of the doctor's courtship of the girl is delicious, like the twisted little apples that grow in the Winesburg orchards. In the fall, the ground is hard with frost, and the apples have all been picked, except for a few twisted apples that are left. These rejected apples look like the doctor's knuckles. These apples are delicious when nibbled, but only a few know of their sweetness.

The story of the courtship is this: The girl comes to see the doctor because she is pregnant. Her parents are dead, and because of her rich land many young men court her. Except for two, they are all alike. The two suitors that attract the girl are opposites. The jeweler's son talks only of virginity, and a black haired boy with big ears rarely talks but negotiates her into dark places and kisses her. For awhile, she thinks she will marry the jeweler's son, but she becomes afraid that his talk of virginity disguises an enormous lust. She has a dream where he bit into her body. The other boy, who did once bite her shoulder in the heat of passion, gets her pregnant.

The girl goes to the doctor's office, and it seems like he knows what is wrong with her without her saying anything. He is pulling out a woman's tooth while her husband watches, and blood gets on the woman's white dress. The girl ignores it. The doctor asks the girl to go for a ride in the country. For several weeks after that, they are together every day. She loses the baby in an illness, but she cannot get enough of the doctor, like those addicted to the sweetness of twisted apples. The two marry, and he reads to her what is written on the bits of paper. Then he balls them up and puts them into his pocket.

Paper Pills Analysis

"Paper Pills" is one of the few stories in *Winesburg, Ohio* where George Willard does not appear. Instead, this story gives the story of one of the town's grotesques, Doctor Reefy. The doctor builds up a great undefined truth inside himself, which is what "The Book of the Grotesque" says makes people grotesques. He cannot communicate, and instead, his personal truth builds up inside him, turning into the little paper pills he discards on the floor. Readers, like the world, never know what this truth is, and it seems a deeper truth than other truths. It is composed on thoughts on bits of paper,

which dry up into hard balls and are lost. The only one who knows what the paper pills say is the doctor's wife. Their immediate sympathy is a connection that allows communication. The girl's earlier suitors were all physical suitors. Their relationship to the girl centered around sex. The truth of one suitor is virginity. The truth of the other is passion. These suitors are grotesques because they make one simple truth their own truth: virginity or passion. Their lives don't go deeper than these ideas, which are united because they are opposites. When the girl meets the doctor, she finds that he has a sweeter truth. Their connection does not revolve around sex, but around ideas.

The twisted apple is a symbol of the doctor himself - someone who appears ugly on the surface but good and sweet underneath. The girl is the only one who sees his inner goodness. The thoughts that the doctor writes are called "paper pills" in the title of the story. This implies that his truths are healing truths, "pills" that can potentially cure. Because of this, the doctor's wife's death is ironic. His truths may cure her emotionally, but he cannot cure her physically.

Mother

Mother Summary

Elizabeth Willard, George Willard's mother, looks older than her age, and she is not happy with her life in the deteriorating New Willard House, owned by her husband Tom Willard. Tom in turn is angered and depressed by the deterioration of both his wife and hotel, which he thinks of as ghosts, "things defeated and done for." The leading Democrat in a strong Republican community, Tom dreams of the tide of thought turning in his favor and raising him up. Meanwhile, he feels the ghosts of failure - his wife and business - following him out into the streets.

Elizabeth and George silently empathize with each other, but their communication is outwardly formal. She sees in him the possibility of fulfilling her own dreams from her younger years, and she even vows to come back from the dead if he turns into "a meaningless, drab figure like myself." She wants him to express something for them both, but she adds in her prayers, vaguely, that he shouldn't become smart and successful - traits she associates with her husband. George visits his mother when she is ill. They sit by the window and watch the town outside. Elizabeth tells him that he ought to be playing with his friends.

Once when Elizabeth is sick, George does not visit her for several days. Elizabeth is overcome by anxiety and fear, and she sneaks out and kneels by the door of her son's room. She smiles when she hears her son on the other side. She thinks she hears him talking to himself, which has always given her a peculiar pleasure. She feels he has a way with words and has something special inside him that reflects something unexpressed in herself. She sees in him her unrealized potential.

As Elizabeth is sneaking away from the door, she sees her husband come out into the hall and realizes that she heard her son and husband talking. Tom Willard has his own hopes for his son. He thinks of himself a success, despite his failure to achieve anything and he got his son his newspaper job. She hears her husband tell George to "wake up," and saying that he knows his son will wake up and make something of himself. She is horrified at the conversation, which seems to show a sympathetic relationship between her husband and son. She plans to stab her husband with a pair of scissors because she cannot stand the idea that her son relates to her husband and may become like him.

Elizabeth, in her room, considers confronting Tom. Instead, her strength fails her, and she sobs. George enters the room to tell her that he is leaving home, but he hasn't decided where he is going.

Inspired, Elizabeth reiterates her husband's words, to become a businessman in the city and make lots of money, but George says that she doesn't understand. George tells her that he wants to go away in order to observe people and things around him. He says

that he can't talk to his father about it. Elizabeth contains her joy at his reaction and tells him to go play with his friends.

Mother Analysis

Elizabeth sees some of herself in her son, and she puts all of her hopes and dreams on him. She needs her son to reflect her and to have the life that she wishes she had. She cannot stand the idea that her son may become like his father. She even plans to kill her husband to prevent him from controlling or changing her son. She wants George to be a reflection of her own inner life. Elizabeth is a grotesque because she holds on to an inner vision of what she could have been, her personal truth. She never communicates this vision to her son, muted and inarticulate like many of the characters in the book, but her entire world is wrapped up in the idea that her son will fulfill this unspoken vision.

The Philosopher

The Philosopher Summary

Doctor Parcival has an affinity for George Willard and visits him at the newspaper's office after the editor has left. He tells George long stories about himself, and George admires him and looked forward to his visits.

Doctor Parcival has been in Winesburg for about five years. He arrived from Chicago drunk, got into a fight with the baggage man and wound up in the village lockup. Upon release, he rented a room above a shoe repair shop on the lower end of town and put up a sign announcing himself as a doctor. He has few patients, most being poor and unable to pay, but nonetheless he always seems to have enough money for his purposes. He says that it is not an accident that he has few patients, and it is not because he is a poor doctor. He sleeps in his office, which is exceptionally dirty. He eats at Biff Carter's lunchroom, which is filled with flies. The doctor stalks in, deposits twenty cents on the counter and laughs, telling Biff to feed him whatever leftovers and rotten food he wishes for that price.

Doctor Parcival tells George stories that don't begin or end. George thinks that they are lies, and then he thinks that they convey an important truth. The doctor claims that he was a reporter like George and implies that perhaps he is cloaking his true identity. He also implies that his money comes from a mysterious source. Perhaps his is a thief or a murderer. The doctor states that if George were a good reporter, he would look it up.

The doctor had a poor mother who encouraged his studies to become a Presbyterian minister. His father was in an insane asylum in Ohio, and the location is a clue regarding his identity that he lets slip. His brother was a railroad painter, who would come home to the house where George and his mother lived when he got paid. He would leave his money on the table and yell at George and his mother not to touch it. He would use the money gradually to go out to the saloons, never giving his mother any money, and when it ran out, he would go back to work. He would have things like groceries and clothing delivered from time to time after he went back to work. Doctor Parcival on the other hand brought his paycheck straight home to his mother, and on occasion he stole a few dollars from his brother.

When Dr. Parcival's father died, he was treated like a king at the asylum, where they were afraid when they found out he was a reporter. They didn't want him to write about the asylum's treatment of his father. The doctor never intended to do anything of the sort. He went in the room where his father lay dead, held his hands over the body and blessed it.

George thinks that Dr. Parcival seeks to cast a negative light on everyone and make him despise everyone. Dr. Parcival feels that doing so makes people superior and that his brother, who hated Parcival and his mother, was an example of this. Dr. Parcival

came to Winesburg to write a book. One day, a little girl, the daughter of a farmer, is run over by a buggy and killed. All the doctors in town are called upon to look at her. Dr. Parcival refuses to go. He is then afraid that word will get around and that he will be hanged, not realizing that the person who came to call him was in so much of a hurry that he didn't even hear the doctor's refusal. Dr. Parcival tells George that if not then, then eventually, he will be "uselessly crucified." He tells George that if he is killed, he hopes that George will finish his book. The message of the book is simple: Everyone is Christ, and we are all crucified.

The Philosopher Analysis

Dr. Parcival is another character who wants to talk to George and explain his life's meaning. The doctor is a grotesque, because he's taken into himself a personal "truth" that everyone is Christ and that everyone is crucified. When he is a boy, his brother is "superior," even though (and perhaps because) he doesn't give the family money and despises them. Parcival suffers silently in the background. His father dies in an asylum; his brother is run over by his coworkers while he is drunk. They are both crucified for their particular sins, insanity and hedonism. Parcival, after suffering in silence as a child, feels he is Christlike and blesses his father's body. In Winesburg, his fears of his own crucifixion come when the little girl is killed.

Dr. Parcival is an unreliable character, and his stories may or may not be true. George, though, sees truth in them whether they are lies or not. This self-reflexive thought reflects the idea that in the fictional tales of *Winesburg, Ohio,* there is truth about the human condition. Parcival's writing of a book indicates his need to communicate. When he asks George to take over the book, he is asking George, the writer, to express his truth for him. When people talk to George throughout *Winesburg, Ohio*, they seem to be taxing him with understanding their truths and communicating them.

Parcival is dirty and a slob, seeming to have low standards both for himself and for things around him. Ironically, his self-esteem is rather high. He considers himself to be a smart philosopher and attempts to win George over to his way of thinking. Dr. Parcival's way of raising himself up is to try to debase everything around him. To despise others makes one superior. By saying that everyone is Christ and that everyone is crucified, he seemed to be implying that there is nothing to aspire to. We all take on the sins of humanity and are doomed because of it.

Nobody Knows

Nobody Knows Summary

One night, George leaves the newspaper office at around eight o'clock. He is nervous and dazed. He walks down the dark alleyway cautiously and carefully. All day, he has been trying to decide to whether to embark on an adventure. He suddenly starts off without thinking. He is afraid that the adventure will not turn out as he hoped or that he will be too scared to go through with it.

George goes to Louise Trunnion's house, where he finds her at home. She asks him how he is so sure that she would want to go out with him, but she agrees to meet him outside the Williams' barn. George received a letter that morning from her that said, "I'm yours if you want me." He is annoyed that she is now pretending there is nothing between them.

George and Louise stand in the shadows, neither speaking. George wants to touch her, even to touch her dress, but he is unsure. George remembers the look in Louise's eyes when she passed him on the street and the rumors that have been whispered about her. He becomes confident and masculine. George tells her that no one will find out, as he whispers coercively to her. The road is rough, as is her small hand, which George holds. Quietly, Louise says she is not able to go very far. They walk and sit down on some boards in Will Overton's berry field.

George returns to Main Street around ten o'clock. He wants desperately to talk to another man, and he speaks to Shorty Crandall, the drug store clerk. Afterwards, he stops walking, as if he is listening. He laughs a nervous laugh, reassuring himself this time that nobody knows.

Nobody Knows Analysis

As George is coming of age, he begins to explore his sexuality. "Nobody Knows" shows an illicit encounter between George and Louise. George is a boy, sexually inexperienced, but experimenting. This somewhat pathetic interaction gives him male bravado; he feels he is becoming a man. At the same time, his conscience worries about what society thinks and what could be the ramifications of his actions. When he wants to bed Louise, he calms her fears, telling her that nobody can know. Afterward, to calm his own conscience, he tells himself the same thing. He is simultaneously emboldened and ashamed by his actions. Louise also wants to experiment but seems to resent her own desires. The whispers about her that George remembers indicate that this is not a new experience for Louise. She is the instigator, and she is probably experienced. Even though she initiates the encounter, she feigns gruffness and lack of enthusiasm to mask her nervousness and guilt at doing what is disapproved of by society.

The encounter between George and Louise is full of the secrecy of sex. Louise pretends to deny her note to George. She does not acknowledge her sexual experience. Even if others know about her sexual desires, she must hide them. George, too, falls into the veil of secrecy. "Nobody Knows" is the title, and the most essential aspect of this sexual adventure is that nobody knows. Throughout the book, communication will be shown to be the key to satisfying intimacy; it is ironic that the most intimate act is the one that can't be communicated.

Godliness, Part 1

Godliness, Part 1 Summary

One can always expect to see several old people either on the Bentleys' front porch or in their farm's garden. Three are Jesse's sisters, and the fourth is his uncle. In addition to the sisters and the uncle, four hired men, Aunt Callie Beebe, Eliza Stoughton, the stable boy and the owner, Jesse Bentley, also live on the farm. Aunt Beebe is in charge of the housekeeping. Eliza Stoughton, a slow girl, makes beds and assists with the milking. Twenty years after the Civil War, Northern Ohio (where the Bentley farms are located) has started to develop and modernize. When this land was first settled, it was farmland, and clearing trees and stumps was backbreaking labor. When Jesse's father and brothers came to work on the farm, the harder work had been done, but they clung to old traditions and worked like animals, ate coarse, greasy food and slept on straw. They wore dirty overalls and had red, cracked hands. When the boys would go into town, they would get drunk, and their animal nature would come out in fights or in singing. Enoch, the oldest of the boys, struck his father with a whip while the boys were drunk and hid out in the barn while waiting to see if his father would die, sustained by food brought by his mother. When the father recovered, all went back to work as though nothing had happened. During the Civil War, all four of Jesse's brothers were killed, and Jesse was summoned home from school, where he was studying to be a minister.

At twenty-two years of age, Jesse is thin, sensitive and the odd sheep of the family. Those living in the town of Winesburg find the idea of him running the farm to be amusing. He is small, slight and womanly looking, and he wears a long black coat and narrow string tie. His wife, Katherine Bentley, is a city girl not suited for such a rough life, and she dies after giving birth. Though Jesse looks delicate, he is fanatical and determined. He is tough on everyone and makes people afraid of him. Running the farm is easy for him, and he is always making plans for it. Jesse is very passionate but cold. He coerces people into listening to him. Jesse is ambitious and wants to be better than those around him. He pours all of his talents and his unexpressed needs into running and planning for the farm. Still, he feels unfulfilled, and he is completely absorbed in himself and his own ambition. In his self-absorption, he doesn't notice that his wife is working herself to death and that his father is retiring into the background, a sad and lonely old man.

It would be hard for people of today to understand Jesse Bentley. The coming of industrialism has vastly altered people's lives and thoughts. Books, magazines and newspapers are now everywhere. In Jesse's time, hard work exhausts people, and they haven't the energy for reading. Church and God encompass both their intellects and their social lives. Thoughts of God engross Jesse. He thinks God caused his brothers to die in the army and his father to get sick, so that he would be in control of the farm. He walks his farm and those of his neighbors and thinks of God, becoming impatient that the farm only contains six hundred acres. Jesse feels that because he believes in and

faithfully serves God, his neighbors' land should belong to him. He blames his dead brothers for not accomplishing more.

A Bible story talks about another Jesse, who God tells to send his son to the Valley of Elah to fight the Philistines with Saul and the Israelites. Jesse begins to believe that all of the other farmers are Philistines and enemies of God. He becomes afraid that a Goliath will rise from the neighboring farmers to take his lands and accomplishments away. He prays to God that God will send him a son named David to defeat the Goliath and assure his rise. He appeals to God for a son, as his wife nears childbirth.

Godliness, Part 1 Analysis

God and religion are central thematic elements in *Winesburg, Ohio*. What God is depends on each character's individual interpretation. Jesse is overwhelmed with ambition. He doesn't really know what he wants, but he knows that he wants to be great and achieve great things. Since God is the greatest of all things, Jesse wants recognition by God. He feels that his status is as great as the kings of the Old Testament. His religion is entirely wrapped up in ambition and self-aggrandizement.

Jesse's personality overcompensates for his diminutive stature. He has usurped and twisted religion to facilitate and justify his own personal goals. He is quite egotistical and self-centered, caring little for those around him. Because he is wrapped up in his own mind, he cannot even see those around him. This is the essence of the grotesque. Jesse has built up thoughts and ideas, melding religion and ambition, into a personal world that has little relationship to the real world. He cannot see beyond his own personal truth, and he communicates with no one. He is completely separated and isolated by his self-obsession.

Godliness, Part 2

Godliness, Part 2 Summary

David Hardy, the grandson of Jesse Bentley, is sent to the Bentley farm to live when he is twelve. His mother is Louise Bentley, who was born instead of the son that Jesse wanted. Her husband is John Hardy, a banker. She is quick-tempered and grouchy. Her husband tries to appease her by buying her a big house and keeping a manservant to drive her carriage. Louise throws temper tantrums, wields a knife toward her husband, tries to burn the house down and locks herself in a room. People think that she drinks. She drives the carriage down the road, recklessly, as fast as she can, nearly hitting people. People jump out of her path and think she is trying to run them down on purpose.

Because of David's mother, he does not have a happy childhood. David is quiet and neat and generally considered to be a dullard. He tends to look at people and things for a long time without processing what he is looking at. He runs and hides when he hears his mother yelling at his father or the townspeople criticizing his mother. When he can't find a hiding spot, David becomes confused, hiding his face and avoiding thought. He is quiet and sad and often talks to himself.

David is happy when he visits his grandfather on the farm, wishing he never had to go home. One incident that occurs after his return to town has a deep impact on him. One of the hired men brings him back to town and leaves David at the head of his street. David doesn't want to go home and decides to run away. He decides to go back to the farm, but he gets lost on the country roads. It becomes dark and starts to rain, with lightning flashing in the sky. He becomes tired and excited and starts to cry. A farmer finds him and brings him home. David's mother holds him in her arms, and David is shocked and pleased. For the first time, his mother bathes him and cooks for him. Rather than putting him to bed, she holds him in her arms in a chair in the darkness. She speaks to him in a low voice, rather than the harsh, shrill voice she normally uses. Her normally dissatisfied face becomes the most beautiful thing he has ever seen. When men begin coming to the door to report he has not been found, she makes him hide until they go away. David laughs, thinking that this must be a game they are playing. David thinks the scare he had was well worth it to get his mother to behave like this.

As David grows older, he becomes more distant from his mother. When he is twelve, his grandfather Jesse demands that David come live at the farm. To Jesse's surprise, his mother agrees, stating that it will be an atmosphere not tainted by her presence. While the farm was toxic to her, it will suit David well. She does not come out of her room when he leaves, and after he leaves, she and her husband do not argue as much. Her husband is pleased by this outcome.

Two of the old farmer's sisters are still alive. They fear Jesse and are silent in his presence. One of them becomes David's caretaker and sits on his bedroom floor until he falls asleep every night. Jesse is thrilled at her nurturing. The house becomes happy once David is there. Jesse becomes softer due to David's presence. It is as if God has finally given him a son as he had asked. Although Jesse is only fifty-five, he looks seventy. His years of effort and hard work have taken their toll. Though he is a successful man who has reached his goals, he is also a bitter and unhappy man until David comes. Jesse fervently desires to be both a man of God and a leader among men of God. He was deeply disappointed when a daughter was born to Katherine rather than a son. He believes that God might appear to him. He wishes that he was born in a simpler time when he could use his restless energy to build temples, slay unbelievers and conduct the work of glorifying God's name on earth. He is also greatly influenced by modern industrialism. He begins to buy machines that will allow him to do the farm's work while employing fewer men. If he were a younger man, he thinks he would give up farming and start a factory to make machinery. He begins reading newspapers and magazines. He invents a machine to make fence out of wire.

Jesse sees an age of materialism coming with the advent of industrialism. He is a man of God, but he also is a man of ambition. Jesse wants to use his land to make money faster than is possible. He goes into town a number of times to discuss the opportunities for wealth with his banker son-in-law, telling John that he will have chances that Jesse never had. Jesse grows more alive, excited and energetic as he talks.

Jesse feels that the coming of David shows that God finally approves of him. In turn, David flourishes on the farm. Because everyone is so nice to him, he becomes more comfortable in his own skin and more confident. He wants to hug everyone, and he is happy and looks forward to each and every day. His old life and thoughts of his mother fill him with dread. Every morning, he runs downstairs and outside to see what has happened on the farm during the night while he was sleeping. Whenever one of the farmhands laughs, David laughs along with him. One farmhand, who has never been known to make a joke before, makes the same joke every morning, causing David to laugh and clap his hands.

One afternoon, Jesse and David are driving through the valley, and Jesse stops the buggy and starts to walk through the forest, muttering to himself. He wants to pray in the forest with David, to receive a sign from God. Jesse grabs David by his shoulders roughly and falls into a kneel, praying loudly. David becomes afraid. He starts trembling and begins to cry. David is afraid that Jesse has turned cruel and might hurt him. Jesse seems like another person to him. Jesse shouts out to God, saying that he is there with "the boy David," and that God should reveal Himself. David pulls away and runs through the forest sobbing, falling, rising and running again. He hits his hand and falls down, unconscious. He awakes to find himself back in the buggy, with Jesse stroking his head. David's terror leaves him, and he tells his grandfather to take him away and that there is a terrible man in the woods. Jesse looks away, again calling out to God, whispering and asking why God does not approve of him.

Godliness, Part 2 Analysis

Jesse is driven by materialism, but he considers himself a man of God, and he wants God's blessing and acknowledgement. He needs a sign to show him that he is successful and great in God's eyes. Though his materialism consumes him and defines his work, he strives for a godliness that he doesn't know how to define or achieve. Jesse takes on the sin of avarice and makes it a religion, dedicating himself to God.

David is treated as an unfortunate symbol of events in Jesse and Louise's lives, rather than a real person. To Jesse, David is a gift from God, a symbol of his own power and glory. To Louise, David is a symbol of what she could never have as a child. If she had been a boy, like David, her father would have loved her. As a girl, the air on the farm was a poison to her. David hungers for love and believes he has found it at the farm. His maleness is what turns Louise off him and what spurs Jesse's interest. David does not know what to make of the day in the woods. Jesse transforms into another person. This is the inner Jesse, the part of him that is a grotesque, consumed with his own ideas, emerging. Jesse's dangerous egotism reveals itself in a maniacal way and potentially damages the boy. Ironically, Jesse goes through a transfiguration in the forest. Instead of God coming through his soul and transfiguring him, Jesse is transfigured by his own twisted "personal truth."

Godliness, Part 3

Godliness, Part 3 Summary

Louise Bentley is a neurotic, oversensitive woman born to a delicate and overworked mother and a father who did not welcome her birth. She was a silent, moody child who wanted love more than anything in the world but did not get it. At the age of fifteen, she goes to reside with the Hardy family in the town of Winesburg so that she can attend high school. Her father is friends with Albert Hardy and arranges for her to stay there.

Albert Hardy was not educated himself, but he is a strong advocate of it and believes that if he was exposed to books, life would have been much better for him. His two daughters hate books and learning and threaten to quit school. Louise is not happy in Winesburg. She had dreamed of freedom and escaping the farm for years, but she is quite unhappy in town. She is a shy, quiet girl and does not fit in or make friends.

Louise alienates the two Hardy girls because of her dedication to her schoolwork. A timid girl, Louise has no friends. She goes home to the farm on weekends, and because she has nothing else to do and is all alone, she throws herself into her work. The Hardy girls think she is trying to create problems for them with her diligence. She continuously jumps up from her classroom seat in her attempts to answer every question. She thinks she is making it easier for her classmates, so that they will not have to answer questions that they don't know.

Albert Hardy begins speaking highly of Louise in the evenings. He is delighted at her teachers' praises. He says that he is ashamed that the teachers does not speak this way of his own girls. The girls shake their heads wearily, and their father becomes angry. He tells them that big changes are overtaking the world and that education is the only way to keep up. He points out that Louise is the daughter of a rich man, but she is not afraid to study. He says that his daughters should be ashamed of themselves and that they will never reach Louise's level.

After that, the Hardy girls stay away from Louise. She decides to befriend Albert's son, John, but she is too timid to talk to him. The Hardy girls are more knowledgeable in the ways of the world than Louise. One evening, John comes to Louise's room to deliver firewood. She is too afraid to speak with him, but after he leaves she calls out to him softly through her window. She thinks she hears a noise in the orchard, and she goes downstairs to see if John is underneath the window. As Louise groping through the small, dark room next to the parlor, Mary hardy and her suitor enter. Louise hides and witnesses Mary Hardy's interactions with her young man. She thinks that Mary is being given a gift from God, and she does not understand why Mary protests and tries to get away. Louise decides to write John a note, telling him that she wants someone to love and to love her. She writes that if he is the man for her, he should go to the orchard at night and make a noise under her window. Louise waits, but he doesn't come.

One weekend when riding home with one of the farmhands, Louise feels acutely lonely. She begins to cry and puts her cheek on his shoulder. He is alarmed and ignores her. Louise becomes angry. She grabs his hat from his head and throws it in the road. When he jumps out of the buggy to get it, she takes off with the buggy, forcing him to walk home.

Two or three weeks later, John comes for Louise, and they become lovers. That was not what she wants, but she cooperates to gain his approval. A few months later, they are worried that she is pregnant, and so they get married. It turns out to be a false alarm. During their first year of marriage, Louise tries to explain to John why she wrote the note and what she is looking for. John tries to kiss her when she talks, because that is his limited understanding of the interaction between men and women. She begins to dislike being kissed. The divide between them grows.

Louise becomes bitter and harsh in her treatment of John. When she has her son David, she is ambivalent, sometimes coming to the crib to touch him but often ignoring him. John criticizes her, but she shrugs aside his words. She tells him that as a male, David will get what he wants anyway. Louise tells John that if she had given birth to a girl, she would have done anything for the child.

Godliness, Part 3 Analysis

In the third part of "Godliness," titled "Surrender," Louise's personality is explicated. She is similar in some ways to her namesake in "Nobody Knows." She wants human connection and communication, but she does not know how to make a human connection or become close to another person. She has grown up without love, under her self-obsessed father, and her shyness is a self-fulfilling prophecy, causing further isolation. She takes the same route as the Louise in "Nobody Knows," giving a note to her intended love. All she gets is sex, when what she wants is a meeting of minds and souls. Perhaps this is intended to make the reader reflect back and rethink the other Louise's intentions.

Louise cannot move outside of her hurt to save her son, rather than placing him in his grandfather's grasp. Louise feels that she is the victim of a man's world and feels wronged by the men in her life. Her hatred of men is so intense that she cannot care for her own child.

Godliness, Part 4

Godliness, Part 4 Summary

David has a life-changing experience at the age of fifteen. Jesse has bought a long strip of black swampland for a low price, but he expends a large sum of money to improve it. Some neighbors laugh and hope Jesse will lose money, but Jesse makes an incredible profit. In the fall of that year, David spends all of his time that he is not in school outdoors. He gathers nuts, and once he kills a squirrel, which he cooks and eats with tremendous pride. David makes himself a slingshot, which he always carries with him. He thinks of his impending manhood, but in the interim he embraces his youth.

One day, Jesse tells David to come with him, since they have something important to do in the woods. Jesse takes a lamb that has been born out of season from a neighboring field, telling David that the lamb reminded him of what they need to do. His abundant year, combined with David coming to live on the farm, gratifies him, and he wants to make a sacrifice to God. He thinks that if he offers the burned body of the lamb, God will come and speak to him and David.

Jesse and David go to the place where Jesse previously appealed to God, and David begins to tremble with fear. Jesse starts the fire and thinks to himself that he has to put the blood of the lamb on David's head. Jesse walks towards David, who is holding the lamb, with a knife in hand. David drops the lamb, and both he and the lamb begin to run. Jesse runs to pursue the lamb, still wielding the knife. David pulls out his slingshot, puts a stone in it and hits Jesse in the head. Jesse falls forward in front of David's feet. David panics, thinking he has killing Jesse, but then he thinks to himself that he does not care and runs away.

Jesse eventually awakes, confused, but David's disappearance doesn't surprise him. Whenever David's name is mentioned, Jesse states that a messenger from God has taken David and that Jesse himself was "too greedy for glory."

Godliness, Part 4 Analysis

The fourth part of "Godliness," entitled "Terror," shows David's last encounter with his grandfather. This second trip into the woods ends similarly to the first, with one of the two unconscious on the ground. However, this time Jesse is unconscious, and David thinks he's killed him, harking back to Jesse's brother who thinks he's killed his father with a whip. The symbolism of the slingshot, the Biblical David's weapon against Goliath, implies that Jesse's offspring is in fact the David sent to slay the Goliath of Jesse's obsessed mind. That Goliath is Jesse himself, his own enemy, created from his avarice and ambition. In the end, Jesse interprets the events only according to his own grotesque truths.

Godliness is another story that does not include George Willard. It instead tells a multi-generational tale of Winesburg, touching on the major themes of God, sex, communication and the grotesque. In this tale, the reader sees how the outward appearance of a person is only part of his or her story. When Louise is first introduced, the reader sees her as the town sees her, a neurotic, probably alcoholic, nagging, unhappy woman. As her story unfolds, the reader sees that her struggle for love and human communication has left her hollow and destroyed.

A Man of Ideas

A Man of Ideas Summary

Joe Welling is like a man who suddenly throws fits, his body convulsing, except his fits are of ideas and thoughts instead of physical seizures. He is captivated by ideas and engages people against their will with his maniacal monologues about them. Joe is a Standard Oil agent who travels to Winesburg stores. One day, Joe enters Sylvester West's drug store, where four men are talking about horse racing. He announces that the water is up in Wine Creek, poking at Ed Thomas's chest. Joe states that he could not believe it at first, so he went and got a rule and measured it. He doesn't know what to think, as it hasn't rained in ten days. He eventually realizes that it must have rained in Medina County. Joe is excited to find out that they can determine when it has rained in Medina by looking at Wine Creek.

Joe Welling envies George Willard and gives him much attention. As Joe tells George, he feels he was meant by nature to be a reporter. Joe tells George he has nothing against him and that Standard Oil pays more anyway, but Joe says that he deserves George's job. Joe shares one of his ideas with George. Decay, Joe tells George, is fire. As the whole world is decaying, the whole world is on fire. Joe says that would be a great headline, and he has just plucked the idea out of the air. George is welcome to it, Joe tells him. Joe feels that everyone knows that he should start his own paper.

Joe's love affair repels the entire town, making them gossip and laugh unconvincingly. He falls in love with Sarah King, who is tall and fair with dark circles under her eyes. Joe and Sarah go for walks in the evenings. The consensus is that they look ridiculous together. One day, George runs into Sarah's father and brother in Joe's room at the Willard house. Joe is telling them of an idea he has, spreading a handful of weeds and grasses upon the floor. He says that he planned to tell George about it for the paper. He says he wishes Sarah was there and that he was planning to go to the Kings' house and tell her some of his ideas. Joe says that Sarah will not let him, as she says they would quarrel. Joe thinks that is foolish.

Joe's idea is something big, he tells them excitedly. He says to imagine that there are no crops and that all only grasses are left. According to Joe, this hardship can be overcome. They can breed new fruits and vegetables. Joe proposes they all go to tell Sarah. According to Joe, Sarah is always interested in ideas, and you can never be too smart for Sarah.

A Man of Ideas Analysis

"A Man of Ideas" again connects the reader to George Willard and the people who talk to him. Like the philosopher, Parcival, Joe has his own perspective and his own wild imaginings that he wants desperately to communicate. Recall that Parcival claims to

have been a reporter, like George, while Joe claims that he should be a reporter. Both men have a desire to communicate, and their attempts to connect themselves to the job of reporter show the symbolism behind George's profession. The job of reporter signifies the ability to communicate, to express and to connect ideas with the public consciousness.

Joe fancies himself a genius, and he is caught up in ideas, impractical and abstract ideas that he builds up in his own mind. Joe's ideas are centered more around his own thoughts and imaginings of possibilities than around usefulness. He does not realize that his ideas may be commonplace and/or foolish. He is excited about breeding foods from grasses, but there is no need for this. He enthuses over gauging rainfall in another county by the height of the creek, but is this really a useful, practical tool? Joe is a grotesque in that his ideas are more important in his own mind than they are in the world. His words that one can never be too smart for Sarah are ironic in that Joe is not truly a bright man, and Sarah nonetheless cares for him.

Adventure

Adventure Summary

Alice Hindman clerks in Winney's Dry Goods Store and lives with her mother and stepfather. When she is a pretty sixteen-year-old, before her father dies, Alice has a love affair with Ned Currie, who is older than she is. Ned works at the newspaper during the day and sees Alice almost every night. Ned gets carried away when he kisses her and says things he doesn't mean. Alice falls in love with him. Ned is moving to Cleveland to work for a city paper, and Alice wants to go with him. She tells him that they can both work. They can be together, and he will not need to marry her. Ned originally wants Alice to become his mistress, but he is touched by her words and becomes protective and caring. He tells her that he cannot let her do that and that he will come back for her when he has a good job.

Ned can't find a newspaper job in Cleveland, and he moves to Chicago. For awhile he is lonely and writes to Alice nearly every day. Soon he makes friends, though, and is caught up by city life. He starts dating a woman at the boarding house in which he is staying. He stops writing Alice letters and rarely thinks of her.

For years, Alice believes Ned will return to her. She begins working in the dry-goods store and plans to save money to follow Ned. She works long hours and becomes lonely and sad. Years later, she realizes that her beauty and youth have passed, and she begins to feel cheated. When she is twenty-five, her mother remarries, making Alice feel even more alone. She decides to stop isolating herself and joins the Winesburg Methodist Church. She goes to prayer meetings on Thursdays and a church group on Sunday evenings. A middle-aged man named Will Hurley begins to walk her home at night. Alice feels that they shouldn't make a practice of it, since she is still loyal to Ned, but she thinks that once in a while won't hurt.

At the age of twenty-seven, she becomes restless, and she can no longer bear to be around Will. She no longer depends on Ned, but her desire for love has become vague and powerful. She doesn't know who or what she wants, just to be loved. Sometimes, she uses blankets to make a figure in her bed. One evening, she is alone undressing in the house. She listens to the rain outside and feels wild and desperate. She runs outside naked in the rain. She calls out to an old, somewhat deaf man on the sidewalk. He does not see her and calls back. Alice falls to the ground, trembling. She is so afraid at what she has done that she crawls back to the house so no one will see. Inside, cold and trembling, she weeps brokenheartedly and thinks to herself that she will do something dreadful if she is not careful. Alice tries to be brave and deal with the fact that even in Winesburg, people frequently die alone.

Adventure Analysis

Alice and Ned do not truly have a communion. Their communication fails, and their interaction means something different to each of them. To Ned, Alice is merely a girl and a potential lover. To Alice, Ned is a point of real human contact. Alice becomes a grotesque as her mental picture of Ned becomes less and less attached to the world and more and more a figment of her own mind. Instead of moving into reality, she moves into fantasy and denial until her emotions bubble over in a wild and irrational evening. In the end, Alice cannot even really define what she wants anymore. Like Louise in "Godliness," her desire for love is mixed up with sexual desires.

Respectability

Respectability Summary

If you have walked through a city zoo in the afternoon, you may have seen in one of the cages a huge, grotesque monkey with "ugly, sagging, hairless skin below his eyes and a bright purple underbody." The monkey is a "true monster" that is so ugly that his ugliness is a kind of beauty. A person from Winesburg, Ohio, would say that the monkey looks exactly like Wash Williams.

Wash Williams is the town telegraph operator and "the ugliest thing in town." As young man, Wash is known as the best telegraph operator in the state. Though the Winesburg office is a demotion, he is still proud of himself. Wash sets himself apart from the Winesburg men, drinking beer heavily at Ed Griffith saloon by himself and then staggering home to his room in the New Willard House.

Wash Williams thoroughly hates life. He hates all women, calling them bitches. The banker's wife complains to the telegraph company that Wash's office is dirty and stinks. Wash laughs and tears up the letter, thinking of his wife while he does so. Wash once had an attractive wife in Dayton, Ohio. Wash himself was attractive when he was young. He loved her with an intensity as great as the hatred he now feels for all women.

George Willard is the only one who knows the story of Wash's wife and what has turned his character so ugly. George goes out walking with Belle Carpenter, who works at the millinery shop. Wash sees George with Belle, and the next day Wash walks with George down to the railroad. They sit down by the tracks. George asks Wash if he has ever been married. Wash tells him that all women are dead, even when they are alive. Wash saw George walking with Belle the day before and wants to prevent him from making the same mistake he did. Wash says he was a fool to marry his wife. He was madly in love with her. Once, while he was planting seeds in the garden and she stood near him, handing him the seeds, he kissed her ankles and feet while he was on the ground before her. He later discovered that she had three lovers. He sent her home to her mother, giving her all the money he had in the bank.

Wash's wife's mother called upon Wash to visit. He came to their house, and as he sat in the parlor, he thought that if his wife just came in and touched him, he would forgive her. He longed to be with her again. Instead, his wife's mother undressed Wash's wife and sent her into the room naked, waiting outside to hear if her tactic worked. Wash hit the mother with a chair, and the neighbors intervened. Wash complains bitterly to George that he will never have a chance to kill the mother now, as she died of a fever a month later.

Respectability Analysis

Wash is an ugly man whose life had been marred by ugly circumstances. Due to the actions of his wife and her mother, he hates all women. Alice stands as an example of a woman who loves someone who is merely using her, and Wash is her male counterpart. He loves his wife unequivocally. He does not know that her feelings and her inner reality are different than his. Her disloyalty shocks and horrifies him, because he has been completely wrapped up in her. At the moment he thinks that he could forgive her, his mother-in-law's crass action, using raw sex to lure him back, horrifies him. He becomes a grotesque by building up in his mind the "truth" that all women are hateful creatures. The actions of two women become representative in his mind of all women, and his perspective deviates from the real world, making him twisted and bitter.

The Thinker

The Thinker Summary

Seth Richmond watches wagons full of berry pickers drive past his house. The men are chattering, boisterous and making crude jokes. He is irritated by them and regrets that he cannot act in such a manner. Seth's father, Clarence, was killed in a street fight with the editor of a newspaper in Toledo. He tried to shoot the editor because his name was mentioned in the paper in regards to a woman schoolteacher. Upon his death, it was discovered that he had squandered money in speculative investments. Despite this, Seth's mother, with whom he lives, speaks highly of his father and hopes that Seth turned out like him.

Seth's mother cannot understand why Seth does not react like other children do. He simply looks her straight in the eyes when she scolds him, rather than trembling and crying. She doesn't know how to react to him, because his reactions aren't what she expects. When he is sixteen, he runs away from home with several other boys. When he returns a week later, she is afraid to reprove him and says nothing.

One summer evening, Seth goes to visit his friend, George Willard. Seth is called the "deep one." Though he, like most boys, is deeper than people imagine, he is not what they think he is. He has no great purpose or plan for his life. Seth is uninterested in his surroundings and wonders if anything will ever capture his interest. Though George Willard is older than Seth, George is always courting Seth as a friend.

George's place and prospects as a writer have given him some distinction in the community. George often speaks of his future career, and when Seth visits him, George tells Seth that he wants to write a love story. He has decided that he must fall in love, and he has chosen Helen White. He asks Seth to tell Helen that he is in love with her and find out what she has to say. Seth is irritated and gets up to leave, telling George to tell her himself.

Seth decides to go to talk to Helen, but not about George. As he walks he becomes depressed, thinking that he is not a part of the town. He decides to leave Winesburg and go to work. He feels that by working he could make a place for himself. When he and Helen go for a walk, he tells her of his plans. They have a long, mutual, unexpressed crush. She has written him a deluge of notes. He feels flattered by the notes, but he has never answered them. Boldly, Helen takes his hand. He tells her that George is in love with her. They continue to walk in silence. She is impressed, thinking him manly. Seth tells her that everyone talks, and he wants to get in some sort of work where talk does not matter. He tells her it is the last time that they will see each other. Helen is touched and puts her head on his shoulder. She tells him that he needn't walk her home, but that he must go speak to his mother, to tell her that he's leaving. Helen turns and runs off.

Seth wants to run after her, but he doesn't. He walks home and sees his mother on the porch. He thinks to himself that Helen will be like everyone else and that she will look at him strangely. He thinks that she will be embarrassed and uncomfortable to be around him. Seth thinks that Helen will love someone like George - someone who talks a lot.

The Thinker Analysis

Seth lives inside his own head. He is not as deep as people think him; he is merely silent. People mistake his silence for an intelligence and profoundness that simply isn't there. Still ponds do not always run deep. He is a man of action, not words. One might sympathize for him in his mute isolation, but he is nonetheless an ordinary boy, not to be idealized. Seth does not communicate, and others don't understand him. Because of this, he is left in isolation. His lack of response to Helen's letters shows his lack of ability to connect with other people. Helen expresses her feelings for him, but Seth cannot express his feelings. He cannot respond to his mother's scolding or Helen's notes, and he cannot run after her when she is leaving. Because there is a disconnect between Seth and the world, a lack of communication, his desires will not be fulfilled.

Tandy

Tandy Summary

Tandy is a seven-year-old girl whose father pays little attention to her and whose mother is dead. Her father, Tom Hard, is an agnostic and tries to convert everyone to his opinions. He is so absorbed by this quest that he ignores Tandy, who lives off the occasional bounty of her dead mother's relatives.

Tom befriends a visitor to the town. The visitor is a young, red-haired man who moved to Winesburg in an attempt to rid himself of bad influences and quit drink. However, he winds up drinking more than ever out of boredom.

Late one evening, as Tom sits with his daughter in his arms, the drunken stranger begins to babble, tears running down his face. He says that he has failed in his attempt to stop drinking but that there is a reason. He says that he is a lover who has not yet found someone to love. The stranger feels that this makes his destruction inevitable. He says that he has not lost faith but that perhaps he has missed her. He points to Tandy, stating that it would be like fate to let him only stand before his love once, when he is drunk and she is still but a girl. He says that it is not easy for a woman to be loved and that he knows all about her, her strengths and her defeats. He says that her defeats are what make her lovely and give her a new quality in women. He calls this the strength to be loved, which men need from women and do not get. He calls it "Tandy." He drops to his knees on the sidewalk and kisses the hands of the little girl, begging her to be Tandy, to be strong and courageous.

Days later, when the girl's father calls her by her name, she says she does not want to be called that. She cries, and her father attempts to soothe her. She tells him that she wants to be called Tandy Hard, sobbing like she can't handle the thought of it.

Tandy Analysis

The little girl's original name is never given in this story. She is only known as "Tandy," the name that the drunken stranger gives her. Tandy is a sad little girl who has not gotten the nurturing she deserved. She is starved for attention, and the drunken stranger is able to connect with her through his words. Both Tandy and the stranger want love, and neither have found it. When the stranger tells the girl that she has the strength to be loved, she is so moved that she must take on his name for that strength, as if the name gives her the power to be loved. It is ironic that the drunk talks about a woman's strength to be loved, when like this little girl, women are so often starved for love and unable to find it, women like Alice and Louise. It is also ironic that the stranger attributes to this little girl the strength to be loved, when she in fact is unloved. Tandy cries because she wants so fervently to be loved, as she perhaps she is loved temporarily by this stranger.

The Strength of God

The Strength of God Summary

The Reverend Curtis Hartman is the pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Winesburg. Shy by nature, he finds standing before the parish on Sundays to be difficult. From Wednesday to Saturday, he worries perpetually about his sermon. The Reverend does not inspire strong feelings in people - either positive or negative. He is uncertain if the spirit is really inside of him, and he dreams of a day when the Spirit of God will be present in him and inspire others. He thinks it will never happen to a "poor stick" like him, and he dejectedly figures that he is doing "well enough."

One morning as Reverend Hartman sits at his desk in the church, he looks out the window and is horrified to see a woman through the window of the house next door, lying on her bed, reading a book and smoking a cigarette. He is horrified that a woman is smoking and that he has gazed upon her bare neck and shoulders. He is so transfixed that he gives his oration without his usual self-preoccupation. This sermon is perceived as being unusually powerful and good. He begins to hope that his sermons will reach the woman and cure her of her evil ways.

Two women - Aunt Elizabeth Swift, a widow, and Kate Swift, a trim thirty-year-old schoolteacher, occupy the house next door. The Reverend recalls that Kate lived in New York for two years and visited Europe, and he thinks that perhaps her smoking is without significance. Once again, in his zeal to reach her, he has new determination and lack of embarrassment in his sermon.

The Reverend struggles between his desire to reach Kate and his desire to gaze upon her. He makes a hole in the window glass so that he can see Kate's bed. One Sunday morning, he prays his thanks to God for deliverance when the aunt pulls up the window shade and Kate is not there. That day, he makes a fervent sermon about how preachers have faults too, and he declares that he too was tempted and surrendered to temptation. After that day, he tries desperately to think and act appropriately.

The Reverend over time becomes increasingly troubled. He doesn't understand why God would test him, when he has never before flouted God's law. He tries to convince himself that he has overcome his desires. He visits the church in the evenings when Kate is usually lying on her bed, while denying to himself the reason that he is going there.

The Reverend begins thinking repeatedly of giving in to sin. He thinks that he should leave the ministry and become businessman, so that at least he won't be a hypocrite. He thinks of his wife, almost hating her and thinking that she has denied him of passion and cheated him. He decides that since he has urges and needs, he will give in to temptation. He waits for Kate to appear, as he peers through the broken hole in the stained glass window. For a long time, she doesn't appear, and he waits in the cold.

Kate finally emerges naked and crying and throws herself on her bed. Then, she begins to pray.

The Reverend does not remember how he found his way out of the church. He goes to the newspaper office to find George Willard and rambles incoherently. He tells George that God works in mysterious ways, but he has seen the light. He says that Kate is an instrument of God and that he has learned a lesson and is thus transformed. He raises his bleeding fist, with which he broke the window, and he says that the strength of God was in him and that he broke the whole window with his fist.

The Strength of God Analysis

In the beginning of this story, the Reverend does not feel his religious purpose. His duties as a pastor have become routine. He is not connecting with his parishioners or with his wife, or even with himself. Ironically, his passion for Kate inspires his so-called religious fervor. In fact, he is displacing his emotions to be more socially acceptable. His passion as a peeping Tom appears as passion in the pulpit. When he sees Kate pray, he feels that he has been given a vision and that he has been redelivered his faith and calling. What the Reverend experiences really has nothing to do with Kate or the reality outside of his head. He forms his own "personal truth" about what he sees, becoming a grotesque. At the end of the story, the Reverend seeks out George Willard, as so many people do when they have stories to tell. In speaking with George, the writer, the Reverend expresses a desire to communicate the "truth" that he has found.

The Teacher

The Teacher Summary

One snowy day, George has nothing to do and goes to the pond. He has his skates with him, but instead of skating, he builds a fire by a log and sits down to think. George thinks of Kate Swift, his former schoolteacher who has tried to explain something to him several times. He doesn't understand her and thinks she is in love with him. He has mixed feelings about this. He goes home and has erotic thoughts about both his teacher and Helen White, whom he has long been half in love with.

Night is winding down in Winesburg. Hop Higgins, the night watchman, goes to sleep, leaving only three people in Winesburg awake. The Reverend waits for Kate to appear, and George is at the newspaper office pretending to write. Kate is at home, reading a book. She suddenly feels an urge to walk in the snow, as if the man and boy, both thinking of her in the snowy night, are calling her out. Kate goes out for a cold and snowy walk. Everyone thinks of Kate as an old maid, but she is one of the most truly passionate people in the town beneath her cold exterior. In the snowy night, her mind is ablaze with thoughts of George Willard. Kate thinks George has the potential to be a genius and seeks to cultivate this. One day, she told him that to be a writer, he had to stop playing around with words and learn about life. She said he should give up the notion of writing until he was better prepared and had more experience. She told him he needed to know what people were thinking, not what they were saying.

The night before the night that the Reverend stays up to look at Kate, George came to her to borrow a book. Kate spoke to him with great enthusiasm as the lights grew dimmer. He was on the cusp of becoming a man, and Kate was touched by this. She kissed him on the cheek, and they both became embarrassed. She scolded him to hide her embarrassment, telling him he wouldn't comprehend what she was saying for another ten years.

On the night of the storm, Kate goes to the newspaper's office to speak to George. For an hour, she pontificates about life. Then, she holds him by the shoulders and tells him that she had better go or she will want to kiss him. He looks like a man in the dim light. George takes her into his arms, and at first she concedes. Then she stiffens, though, and hits him in the face with her fists. She runs out, leaving him to swear. As George paces, frustrated, in the newspaper office, the Reverend comes in and calls Kate an instrument of God.

At home in bed, George rolls around thinking of Kate. He reflects on the Reverend's words and tries to understand what has happened. He thinks for hours, but he knows he is missing something. He decides to reflect on it another day and is the last person in Winesburg to go to sleep.

The Teacher Analysis

Kate is a passionate woman without direction for her passions. She tries to explain things to George that she fears he cannot (and in fact does not) comprehend. Kate is a teacher, and she tries to teach George. Her message that he must look beyond what people say, into their minds, is a central idea of *Winesburg, Ohio.* The surface truth of the town is not truth at all. The real truth happens beneath the surface.

As the companion to "The Strength of God," "The Teacher" illustrates how the truths inside people's minds and hearts are different from any objective reality. The night that the Reverend experiences with Kate is entirely separate from the night that Kate experiences, completely unaware of the Reverend. Until George is able to understand the workings of people's minds and hearts, he will never understand what has happened to him with the Reverend and Kate, and he will not become a great writer.

George is shown again as the one to whom people tell their stories and reveal their frustrations, trying desperately, with George as a conduit, to communicate. Communication and sex are again linked in this story. Kate's passion for teaching, for communication, leads to sexual passion. That she pulls away from George shows that she recognizes that sex is not real communication and that George is not ready to make a true human connection yet.

Loneliness

Loneliness Summary

Enoch, the son of Mrs. Al Robinson, is a silent boy who sometimes walks in the middle of the road with a book, so that drivers yell at him to get him out of their path. When he is twenty-one, he goes to New York City to study art. He plans to go to Paris to continue his education, but it doesn't work out.

Enoch never seems to succeed at anything. He has artistic ability and a sensitive mind, but he is still a child. He doesn't really understand people, and they don't understand him either. At first in New York City, he has friends, before he becomes confused and disconcerted about the facts of life. He keeps running up against things like sex, money and opinions that he can't deal with. He once gets arrested when he is drunk, and he is terribly frightened by the police magistrate. Another time, he tries to have an affair with a woman, walking with her three blocks before he becomes afraid and runs away. The woman is drunk and laughs at him, and a passerby stops to laugh with her. They walk off together.

Enoch lives in a long narrow room facing Washington Square. Epoch's story is more of a story about a room than about a man. His artist friends come to the room and talked about art. Enoch has thoughts that he is too afraid and too excited to contribute, and he gradually begins to doubt his own thoughts. He wants to explain his pictures and explain that his friends, talking about line and value and color, don't understand the pictures at all. They have hidden meanings, things that can't be seen but are essential to understanding. He decides that he doesn't need people, locks his door and stops inviting them over. He invents imaginary friends to whom he can talk on his own terms. Enoch is a boy and an egotist, who likes these imaginary friends because he can always talk best and last.

Enoch has sexual urges and begins to desire a flesh-and-blood person, so he decides to get married. He marries a fellow art student and moves with her to Brooklyn. They have two children. He gets a job doing illustrations for an advertising agency. He pretends that he is a citizen of the world and becomes quite proud of himself. He votes, has the newspaper delivered and talks politics. He walks around trying to look substantial and important.

Enoch's marriage does not work out, so he ends it. He begins to feel choked and walled in by his wife and children. He makes excuses to be alone and even re-rents his old room. When his mother dies and leaves him money, he gives it to his family and leaves them. The wife cries, is angry and even threatens him, but Enoch just stares at her silently in response. Truthfully, the wife is afraid of him and doesn't like him particularly anyway.

Enoch goes back to his old room and imaginary friends. Eventually, he returns to Winesburg as a result of a woman. He tells his story to George Willard. The woman lives in a room in his New York building. Enoch is not sure what she does in there. He thinks that perhaps she plays the violin. Every once in a while, she knocks on the door, comes in, sits down and speaks of inconsequential things. Enoch thinks that her presence is oversized in the room and that there isn't room for anything else with her in there. Enoch wants to kiss her, simultaneously wishing for her to be there and for her to leave. He is overcome with the urge to tell her about his people and how his presence looms in the room, how important he is among his imaginary friends. When she tries to leave, he runs and locks the door. He presses on, trying to explain, trying to force her to understand him. Then, a look of understanding comes on her face, and he knows that she does understand. Suddenly, he cannot stand her knowing.

At this point, Enoch tells George he does not want to tell him anymore, but George spurs him on. Enoch swears at the woman, throwing her out of the apartment and telling her never to return. Everything falls apart for Enoch after that. When she leaves, she takes all of life of the apartment with her. All of his people leave when she leaves. That is why Enoch returns to Winesburg. When George leaves, he can hear Enoch whining that he is all alone.

Loneliness Analysis

Enoch is a man who feels safer and more comfortable and satisfied in a world of his own invention. He cannot communicate with real people, but he has a drive to communicate and express himself. His paintings are a metaphor for his inability to communicate. The real meaning he intends to express is below the surface of the painting, hidden behind trees in the background, implied perhaps but never stated. As with his painting, the true feelings of Enoch are always below the surface and never expressed. He builds his own fantasy world from his imagination in order to fulfill his desires. If a grotesque lives in his own mind with his own personal truth, then Enoch is truly a grotesque.

Enoch's satisfaction with his world is first interfered with by his desire for sex. He needs a flesh-and-blood person to fulfill his lust. He finds his marriage, however, unfulfilling in any other ways, and he goes back to his apartment. His female neighbor finally ruptures his fantasy life. It is not just sex he needs from a real human companion. He desires true interaction and understanding. He is taken with his neighbor, and he feels drawn to her and repulsed by her. He explains that he cannot control himself. He doesn't want to let her in, but he does. He doesn't want to tell her about his friends, but he does. The need for real human interaction is fundamental. Enoch ultimately cannot escape it, and his imaginary world collapses, leaving him more alone than ever before.

An Awakening

An Awakening Summary

Belle Carpenter is a dark, strong and tall woman. Her father is Henry Carpenter, the bank bookkeeper. As a child, Belle's father makes life unbearable for her, but he loses control over her when she becomes an adult. He is a bully who fears his daughter, who is the sole witness to how he treats his wife.

Belle spends time with George Willard, but she secretly loves Ed Handby, the bartender in Ed Griffith's saloon. Her feelings for Ed make her anxious, and so time spent with George serves as a reprieve. She lets George kiss her because she feels she can control him, whereas with Ed she isn't so sure.

Handby is formidable in appearance, but he has a gentle voice. At the age of twenty-five, he inherits his uncle's farm, but he quickly spends the proceeds. He gives parties, gambles and keeps mistresses. Handby and Belle have only had one date. He wants to marry a wife and take care of her, and he tries to tell Belle this. He kisses her repeatedly and will not let her get away. When he releases her, he tells her that the next time he is playing for keeps and that she can't play with his head. In Handby's mind, George is the only obstacle to getting Belle.

One night, George is overcome by his thoughts and thinks that if he can only run with a woman until they both tire out, he will feel better. He feels he has undergone an epiphany, a fundamental change. He thinks that Belle will understand. In the past, he has felt used by her, but he now feels too powerful to allow that to happen. When he arrives at Belle's house, Handby is there. He wanted to ask Belle to marry him, but he lost his confidence. He threatens physical harm to both her and George if she doesn't stay away from George. George is invigorated with his newly discovered male power and wants Belle to realize the new him. Though Belle doesn't seem aware of him and his words, George thinks she will submit to him.

Belle lets George kiss her. Handby appears and pulls George off Belle. Handby tells Belle that she is no good and that he would have nothing to do with her if he didn't want her so much. George is humiliated and keeps springing at Handby, who sends him sprawling repeatedly into the bushes. George is rendered immobile when his head hits a tree. Handby leads Belle away. When George awakes, he is miserable and humiliated. He feels drained of his previous confidence and power and desires to escape the surroundings that hold no appeal for him.

An Awakening Analysis

George uses Belle to test his manhood, while Belle uses George so as not to be alone and because Nick is a risky variable that frightens her. Nick has feelings for Belle but

does not know how to conduct himself to avoid coming across as a brute. George is the unfortunate pawn between these two lovers.

Belle, Nick and George all suffer from a lack of communication, an inability to show others what is going on in their minds. The lack of ability to communicate, to really connect with others, is the primary theme that runs throughout *Winesburg, Ohio*. It is seen when Enoch cannot talk with his friends and must invent imaginary ones. It is implied when the teacher tells George that he must learn to understand what goes on in people's heads, not merely what they say, to become a great writer. In "Paper Pills," the doctor's notes, which he only shares with his wife, are symbolic of the private reality that goes on inside his head. The fact that he shares this communication with his wife shows that he achieves what other characters cannot - real communication. Nick and Belle's relationship clearly shows the vast gap between the understanding of two people. Nick struggles to convey that he wants to marry Belle, but he cannot make his meaning understood. Belle wants Nick, and so she continually avoids him, going with the safer George instead. With one lover unable to speak and the other avoiding the first, only the power of jealousy manages to somehow bridge the gap.

In "An Awakening," George thinks he awakens to a new and powerful manhood, but he is soon disillusioned when Nick quickly puts him out of the picture. In the end, he awakens to another epiphany, that his earlier sensation of powerful manhood was false.

Queer

Queer Summary

Elmer Cowley is the son of Ebenezer Cowley, and they run Cowley and Son's store. Through the dirty window of the store, Elmer can see into the offices of the *Winesburg Eagle*, as he sits putting shoelaces in his shoes. George Willard comes out of the newspaper office and stands by the door. Elmer thinks that George must be listening to what's going on in the store. Elmer's father, Ebenezer, is talking to a traveling salesman. Elmer is sure that George thinks he and his father are queer - strange and odd.

The store sells what Will Henderson once described as "everything and nothing." A chunk of coal is in the window to indicate that they sell coal, next to honey that has been there for six months. Also for sale are coat hangers, patent suspender buttons, cans of paint, bottles of rheumatism cure and coffee substitute. Ebenezer wears the long Prince Albert coat that he wore on his wedding day. This coat is discolored with age and dirty, but it makes Ebenezer feel smartly suited.

Elmer, his sister Mabel and Ebenezer live above the store. Ebenezer's problems are not financial because it doesn't cost a lot for them to live, and they have the proceeds from the sale of Ebenezer's farm. Ebenezer's troubles lay instead in the fact that when a traveling salesman comes, he is afraid. He is afraid he will stubbornly refuse to buy, and miss a chance. He is afraid he will buy something that cannot be sold. Ebenezer is a poor merchant, and trade has not come to his shop. On this day, the salesman is trying to sell a metal fastener that is a substitute for collar buttons. Ebenezer vacillates while the salesman gives him a hard sell. The salesman is about to push a sale on Ebenezer when Elmer becomes enraged and points a gun at the salesman, telling him to leave and that they will not be buying from him. After the salesman leaves the shop, Elmer's father says, in surprise, "Well, I'll be washed and ironed and starched." This enrages Elmer.

Elmer thinks that the town is talking about them and laughing, and in his mind, George as a reporter is a microcosm of the town at large. Though he has been in Winesburg for a year, he is friendless and afraid that he will live his life friendless. He leaves the store and walks for an hour to the farm where they used to live. He comes upon Mook the half-wit and begins to talk to him, feeling that Mook is the only one he can express himself to. He says that his mother was queer and so was his father and that they didn't dress like other people. Elmer bemoans the fact that his father won't buy a new coat and that he doesn't know that he is queer. Elmer says that the store was queer too, a hodgepodge of unmarketable items, and that his father doesn't realize it. Mabel does, but she doesn't say anything. His father is unaware of the severity of the situation. Elmer is an observer. People don't approach him, and he is too intimidated to approach them. That is why he has sought out Mook, another queer, to talk to.

Elmer becomes energized, saying that he won't be a queer and that he will speak up to George Willard. He leaves Mook to return to town. After he leaves, Mook tells a couple of cows that Elmer is crazy and will hurt someone yet. Mook also says, "Well, I'll be washed and ironed and starched," as he is the one who taught Ebenezer the expression. Elmer goes to the newspaper office and tells George to come outside, since he wants to talk to him. George has been hoping to make Elmer's acquaintance and is pleased, wondering if Elmer has a story for him. They walk, and then Elmer tries to speak to George, to tell George that he is not queer. Elmer's face works spasmodically, but he cannot speak. He finally shouts to George to go back, since he has nothing to say to him. Elmer then walks for three hours, thinking of his failure to speak to George and thinking that he has no future.

Elmer gets a new idea and returns to the store. He takes twenty dollars from the four hundred dollars remaining from the sale of their farm and decides to run away from home. He knows that a local freight train passes through Winesburg at midnight to go to Cleveland, and he decides to steal a ride on it. He figures he will get work in a shop and will make friends and no longer be queer. Rejuvenated, he decides again to talk to George Willard. He goes to the New Willard House and demands that George be awakened and meet him at the depot. George does so and asks what Elmer wants.

Elmer is again rendered mute, and all he can say is, "Well, I'll be washed and ironed and starched." He gives George the twenty dollars, telling him that he stole them from his father and that George should return the money. He then attacks George, knocking him unconscious with his fists. Elmer jumps on the passing train. Once aboard, he is swelled with pride, telling himself that he has shown George that he isn't so queer.

Queer Analysis

Elmer is fixated on appearing normal and what people around him think. When the dice are thrown, however, he is more like his father and Mook than he thought, falling back on their expression when he is otherwise rendered mute. He views George as a disapproving microcosm of the town, when he is in fact no such thing and is eager in actuality to make Elmer's acquaintance. Elmer's fear that the town is looking down on him and his family is based on self-loathing. His attempt to vindicate himself (by beating up George) ironically and unfortunately makes him far more "queer" than he has ever been. The fact that he has George return the stolen money shows, though, that he loves his father despite himself.

The difficulty of communication again appears in this piece. Elmer cannot communicate his feelings, and so he can never correct his misapprehensions. His lack of communication becomes impossible to bear, causing him to run away and to beat up George.

The Untold Lie

The Untold Lie Summary

This is Ray Pearson's story. Ray Pearson and Hal Wills are farmhands together. Ray has worked extremely hard for many years and is fifty years of age. His shoulders are bowed from too much work. He lives in a dilapidated little house on one corner of the farm with his wife and around six thin-legged children.

Hal is very unlike Ray. Hal's father was Windpeter Wills, an old reprobate whose death was far from run of the mill. He got drunk and drove along the railroad tracks. The butcher tried to stop him, but Windpeter lashed his whip at the butcher and continued his journey. Windpeter stood up on the seat of his wagon and yelled happily as his horses rushed to their death toward an oncoming train.

Hal is constantly getting into trouble. He once stole wood from his father's mill and sold it. He used the money to buy a gaudy outfit and get drunk. His father found him, and the two of them got into a skirmish in the street. Both were jailed. The twenty-two-year-old has already gotten into several mishaps related to women.

As Ray and Hal work in the cornfields, Ray thinks back to when he was a boy and wandered in the fields, gathering nuts or hunting. One day, he asked the girl who worked in his father's shop to go with him, and something happened. It altered the course of his life. He bemoans that God has wronged him and that he has been stupid.

Hal speaks up, as if reading Ray's mind, laughing and asking if marriage is worth it. He then becomes more serious, asking if men have to get married. Hal tells Ray to keep his mouth shut about it and confides that he has gotten Nell Gunther in trouble. He asks Ray whether he should marry her or not. Ray knows what he should tell Hal, but he can't get the words out. He goes into the barn.

Later that afternoon, Ray looks longingly at the country's expanse and resents his wife. She asks him to get groceries, telling him that they have nothing for dinner. She tells him to hustle, as he is always puttering about. Ray takes off, and finds himself overcome by his emotions. He shouts about the unfairness of life and its ugliness. He shouts that Hal has made no promise and that Nell went into the woods with him because she wanted to. He feels that Hal should not have to pay and that he should not have had to pay by marrying his wife. He doesn't want to see Hal beaten down by life. Ray feels compelled to catch Hal and tell him not to marry Nell. For years, Ray has quelled his thoughts about how he wanted to be a sailor or work on a ranch, rather than being a farmhand. Ray imagines his children clutching at him and pictures them doing the same to Hal.

When Ray comes upon Hal, who is cockily smoking a pipe, his resolve is lost. Hal laughs and grabs Ray by the collar, saying that he guesses Ray has come to tell him.

Hal says that he is not a coward and has made his own decision. Nell didn't ask him to marry her, but he wants to settle down with her and have a family. Ray feels like laughing at everything. As he returns home, he recalls some good times spent at home with his family. He feels that either answer given to Hal would have been a lie.

The Untold Lie Analysis

Ray is struck dumb by Hal's question: Should a man marry the woman he's gotten pregnant and get tied down? Society has only one answer, and Ray has been down that route. In this story, conflicting emotions are what creates a lack of communication. Ray feels constrained by society against telling Hal how he really feels. He is filled with regrets at having married his wife. When he tries to tell Hal that he should marry Nell, he cannot.

When Ray tries to tell Hal the opposite, tries to communicate his own feelings about his marriage, he is again struck dumb. Hal has already decided to marry Nell, so Ray's unspoken advice is unneeded. This is Ray's story though, and the point of his story is that he cannot say what he intended to say. He realizes that advising against marriage, too, is a lie. Whatever he has lost, he has gained some happiness. Ultimately, Ray is conflicted, not between society's expectations and his own views, but between his regrets and his love for his family.

Drink

Drink Summary

Tom Foster moves to Winesburg from Cincinnati with his grandmother while he is still young. Before coming there, they live above a junk shop, with his grandmother scrubbing floors and working as a dish washer. One day, she finds a pocket book with thirty-seven dollars in it, and she insists that she and Tom leave for Winesburg, her old hometown, that night, before someone discovers that they have the pocketbook. In Winesburg, they are employed as servants at the Whites' home.

Tom is small for his age. His voice is the "softest thing imaginable," and he is so gentle and quiet that he slips through life without attracting attention. One would never know that he had grown up in rough Cincinnati neighborhoods and ran around with tough boys. His passivity is what saved him and enabled him to escape. He remains surprisingly unaffected by the violence and debauchery that has surrounded him. He only stole once, because his grandmother was ill and he was out of work. He stole $1.75 to buy food from a harness shop. He was caught, and his grandmother cleaned the shop twice a week for a month to resolve things. Tom felt ashamed but glad, and he told his grandmother that it was good to understand new things.

Tom loses his job at the Whites' because he doesn't take good care of the horses and forgets to do things. Instead, he rents a room at the back of a lawyer's office for a dollar a month, because the lawyer likes him. He likes life in Winesburg, doing odd jobs which allow him time to loaf. He wears cast-off clothes from the Whites. His ability to find pleasure in minutiae inspires people's affection.

One night, Tom decides to get drunk for the first time. He has never been drunk before, despite seeing many drunk people in Cincinnati, but he decides he needs to experience it. He saw sex in Cincinnati as a sick and horrible thing, and it left a deep impression on him. Once a neighborhood woman tempted him, but when they got to her room, he was horrified by the greedy look in her eye. After that experience, he decided not to think of women. He forgot women until he came to Winesburg. He sees other young people in love and falls in love with Helen White.

Tom gets very drunk in a very short amount of time, sitting on the grass at the side of the road and drinking a bottle of whiskey. George finds him wandering around. Tom begins speaking of Helen, saying he made love to her by the sea. George becomes angry, since he also has feelings for Helen. He yells at Tom and decides Tom is out of his mind.

When Tom begins to sober up again, he says that he has learned a lesson from being drunk and that it was good to do so. He doesn't have to do it again, but he says that people make mistakes and that he wanted to experience it. George does not understand, but he is less angry and feels close to Tom. Then Tom begins talking about

Helen again, and George's anger resurfaces. He tries to explain to George, saying that both Helen and that night filled him with joy. He says that he wanted to experience suffering and unhappiness like everyone else did. He didn't know how to do it, since he doesn't want to hurt anyone else. He thinks his night was the equivalent of making love and that it was a learning experience for him.

Drink Analysis

Tom is another figure who is tangentially related to George Willard. George helps Tom when he is drunk, and they are both in love with Helen White. Tom's personal truth, that makes him a grotesque, is his desire to quietly experience all the aspects of life. He steals, and he feels ashamed. At the same time, he feels that the experience of shame and guilt is a valuable experience, even though his grandmother has to scrub floors to repay the money he has stolen.

Tom is remarkably unaffected by things, and he disappears into the background wherever he is, but he seeks to be a participant rather an observer, almost as if he realizes he is sitting on the outside rather than being actively involved in things. He does not need as much stimulus as others (for example, he doesn't need to actually sleep with Helen), but sticking his toes in the shallow end is sufficient (dreaming and talking about sleeping with Helen). His experiences with theft, sex, and drunkenness are all experiments, ways to "experience" life without actually participating in it.

Death

Death Summary

Elizabeth Willard, who has been married for many years, visits Doctor Reefy, tall and awkward in his middle age, at his office. She is also tall, but she slouches with life's weight. They talk not only about her health but also about ideas and life in general. After visiting him, Elizabeth is rejuvenated in body and spirit, more youthful. She thinks back to her childhood and remembers past men, when adventure was a possible thing for her. She remembers a past love who in his moment of passion cried out, "You dear! You dear! You lovely dear!" She thinks that the words expressed something she would have liked to have achieved in life.

Elizabeth begins to weep bitterly back at home in the shabby rooms of the New Willard House. In her youth, she had many lovers, desiring passion and adventure. She married Tom Willard, a clerk in her father's hotel, because they both desired to marry at the same point in time. Her father was close to death and opposed to the marriage, speaking ill of Tom. Elizabeth defended him because her father criticized him. Her father told her the hotel had not done well and that he owed money. He told her that there was a way out - eight hundred dollars in a tin box, which she could take and go away with. He made her promise that if she chose to marry, she would not tell Tom about the money but keep it as a secret door that she might need to open.

Elizabeth tells Doctor Reefy this story and how she chose to marry. She hadn't wanted Tom, simply marriage. The town was filled with stories about her, and she didn't want to be a bad woman or to have Tom change his mind. She once thought of telling Tom about the money when he needed it for the hotel, but she realized that she didn't like him enough to do so. She begins walking about the doctor's office, telling about a time she drove her buggy in a storm, trying to run away from things. She and the doctor begin to kiss passionately. She tries to keep talking, but the doctor kisses her. He thinks he holds a lovely and innocent girl in his arms as he says, "You dear! Oh you lovely dear!" There is noise of someone coming up the stairs, and the two lovers are parted by fear that someone will catch them.

Elizabeth leaves, and the doctor does not see her again until after her death. She spends the last few months of her life trying to summon her other lover, Death. Then she dies too quickly to tell George about the hidden money, despite her pleas to Death to give her another hour or two. George is eighteen and does not yet register the concept of death, and he is in fact annoyed that day that her death upsets his plans to go see Helen. That day he decides definitely to make a change in his life, to leave Winesburg and get a job on a paper. When he looks at his mother's body laid out under a sheet, she looks like a young and lovely woman to him. He wants to pull back the sheet, but he cannot. He whispers to himself that that is not his mother. He then realizes that his mother is dead and sobs with grief.

The tin box with the eight hundred dollars remains hidden behind the plaster by Elizabeth's bed. She was unable to give up its promise of release, a release that she only experienced twice - with Doctor Reefy and by death.

Death Analysis

In "Death," Doctor Reefy is connected to George Willard through his mother, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's character is further revealed. Elizabeth is a woman who has sought passion and fulfillment, but she did not find it. She marries to fulfill society's expectations, and with society's promise that marriage will in itself give her something missing in her life. She finds little comfort or solace in her assumed role. She finds it briefly in Doctor Reefy, with whom she has long talks. The theme of communication is revisited here, as Elizabeth finds passion through being able to talk. As the doctor watches her speak, he even imagines that her body is becoming younger and healthier. Communication, connecting with another human being, is at the core of Elizabeth's desires and something she has never experienced with her husband. She is able to connect with Doctor Reefy, who will later connect with (and then lose) his young wife. Elizabeth holds onto the tin box of money as an escape route and last hope, but she is not able to use it or pass it on to her son. The box of money is unfulfilled hope. In the end, it is useless and hidden. Elizabeth is at last released by death, her other lover. In a way, her death also releases George into his new life.

Sophistication

Sophistication Summary

During Winesburg's fall county fair, many country people make the journey into town. George Willard is growing into manhood and about to leave Winesburg to get work on a city newspaper. When a boy is close to becoming a man, he necessarily backtracks. He ponders the future, where life will take him, limitations, ambitions and regrets. Sophistication brings with it melancholy. A boy knows that nothing in life is a sure thing. He sees the tenacity of life and wants bond with another.

George wants to see Helen White and show her what he has become. Helen is home from college and feeling the same way. One of her mother's guests is an instructor from the college, but he is not to Helen's tastes. She knows that attention will be aroused because he is sitting next to her in the grandstand, and she wants people to see her with someone sophisticated like the instructor. During the day she is happy, but at night she grows restless and wants to get away from the instructor. Because she is so attentive during the day, knowing that her escort will be admired by people, the instructor becomes interested in her, thinking that as a scholar he needs money and should marry a wealthy wife. Helen, though, thinks of George at the same time as he thinks of her, wanting him to see how she has been affected by living in the city.

A summer evening George and Helen spent together made an indelible impression on both of them. They went for a walk on a country road. George tried to tell her he was growing up and was going to be somebody someday, boasting. He told her that he wanted her to be special and unique. George thinks back on this and feels embarrassed. He is lonely and dejected, thinking she should stay with the instructor if she wants to. Then, he has a change of heart. With a burst of energy, he decides to go to Helen's house and insist upon speaking to her.

Meanwhile, Helen sits on the veranda of her house, restless, distraught and wearied by the instructor's talk. Although he was also raised in an Ohio town, he has put on city airs, trying to appear cosmopolitan. He thanks Helen's mother for allowing him to observe his female student's background and hometown. He laughs condescendingly, asking if Helen's life is still tied to town life and if she is interested in anyone there. Her mother says that no one there is good enough for Helen, and Helen steals away.

Helen leaves to find George. They meet, as George is on his way to her house, and they stare at each other with surprise at their chance meeting. They walk off to the fair ground, hand in hand. Now that George has her, he wonders what to do with her. George feels insignificant, but he is somehow reassured and made right as a result of being in her presence. He admires her and desires their mutual affection, but he doesn't want a grown up relationship. They kiss, each respecting the other. Embarrassed, they revert to youthful patterns of horseplay. Afterwards, they walk sedately, hand in hand. Both of their needs have somehow been met.

Sophistication Analysis

George and Helen are both on the cusp of adulthood. They find in each other something sympathetic, which resonates within both of them. They see the changes in themselves and look to their respective childhood crushes to remark on and validate the persons they are becoming. Not fully comfortable in their new phases of life, they revert back to their younger, less mature ways. Ultimately, they get what they need from each other, and their places as adults are better established for it. This section of the book is more about coming of age than about communication and the keeping of hidden truths. However, the theme of communication (and also of the difference between people's thoughts and actions) does appear. Helen wants to appear grown up and enviable, so she flirts with the instructor. He does not understand her motivations. She does not communicate with him, and she does not communicate with her mother. Her real feelings are distant from both of them. Only with George, who relates to her on a deep and basic level, does she feel truly comfortable.

Departure

Departure Summary

George Willard arises early for his journey. More than a dozen people are on the train platform for his send-off. George's height now exceeds that of his father. All of the attention embarrasses him. Helen White runs down Main Street to have a word with him, but he has already gotten on the train and does not see her. George glances up and down the car to make sure no one is looking and then counts his money, after his father warns him to keep track of it. George does not want to appear an inexperienced traveler.

Off to experience life's adventures, George slips into reverie. His focus isn't on monumental events, but on small items. George is a dreamer, and at first glance, he does not appear to be especially smart. Leaning back, he shuts his eyes. Later he looks out the window, where the town of Winesburg has faded into the background. It is the canvas on which his future experiences will be painted.

Departure Analysis

In the final section, "Departure," George, who readers have watched throughout the book, goes off into the world to seek his dreams. George is still relatively young and unaffected. The stories and burdens placed on him might have made him much wiser beyond his years, but he has not yet learned as much as he could have. He remains an empty canvas for life's experiences to draw upon.

George Willard is a writer, though, a fledgling communicator, and this provides hope. The whole community comes out to see him off, as if they place their hopes of communicating their stories and their inner lives in him, much as his mother did. Throughout the book, people come to George to express themselves. Through George, the writer, these people hope to eventually be expressed and find a way of communicating their personal truths. In a way, *Winesburg, Ohio* seems to be the writings of an older and wiser version of George, now with the ability to understand not only actions but thoughts and feelings behind those actions, looking back with more knowledgeable eyes on the place of his youth.

Characters

Jesse Bentley

He is the main character of the four-part story in the middle of the book, "Godliness," A reluctant farmer, who studied to be a minister but took over the family farm when his brothers died in the Civil War, his farm grew huge over the course of several decades, Jesse believes that the growth of his farm was God's will, and in his old age, he wants to sacrifice a lamb to God, as Abraham did in the Bible. His grandson David Bentley, who he takes along to the sacrifice, fears that the old man intends to kill him with the knife instead, and he shoots Jesse in the head with a slingshot, Just as David lid to Goliath in the Bible.

Wing Biddlebaum

In "Hands,"' the story of Wing Biddlebaum is revealed: the citizens of Winesburg know nothing of his past before he came to town because he was run out of his former town, were he was a schoolteacher accused of touching one of his male students inappropriately.

Belk Carpenter

She spends time with George Willard, dating him casually. Her true love is Ed Handby, a bartender at the saloon, but he is too embarrassed to ask her out until he has enough money to date her in style. In "An Awakening," Ed does approach her while she is on a date with George, shoving George aside repeatedly while the lovers discuss their mutual affection.

Curtis Hartman

In "The Strength of God." Reverend Hartman, who has been finding his sermons uninspired lately, notices that he can see into the bedroom of the woman next door from his office in the bell tower, and he becomes obsessed with looking at her.

Dr. Parcival

Dr. Parcival is not really a doctor at all, but a drifter who came to town calling himself a doctor. He relishes the fact that he has had several identities in different towns and that nobody knows the true story of his past. In "The Philosopher," his delight in fooling the citizenry tumsto paranoia: when he refuses to see a child who has been killed in a horse accident, he is certain that the people of Winesburg will come to lynch him, even though they have simply gone to another doctor and forgotten him.

Dr. Reefy

The doctor is one of the few citizens of Winesburg to figure prominently in two of the stories in the book, "Paper Pills" and "Death." In "Paper Pills," the second story, he is an old man, described in the first line as having "a white beard and huge nose," while the other story, which appears near the end of the book, he is a middle-aged man: "The gray beard he later wore had not yet appeared, but on his upper lip grew a brown moustache."

"Death" concerns his relationship with Elizabeth Willard, George's mother. She was a very sick woman and therefore a frequent patient, but as she talked during her office visits, he fell in love with her. Once, they embraced, but were interrupted by a clerk from the store downstairs emptying the garbage. He did not see her again after that. "Paper Pills" tells of his marriage to a much younger woman whose name is never given. She comes to him with an illness and a relationship develops, during which she appreciates the eccentric ideas that he writes on scratch paper sheets and stuffs in wads in his pockets. Within a year of their wedding, she dies, and he is alone again.

Seth Richmond

In the story that features him, "The Thinker," Seth Richmond is presented as George Willard's friend, and of all of the citizens of Winesburg, he seems like the one that George feels most comfortable with. In many ways, Seth is similar to George in disposition, but he is a little more reserved. His father died a scandalous death when Seth was young, killed during an argument with a newspaper editor when an article alleged that the older Richmond was having an affair. After his death his family discovered he had lost all of his money in investments, showing him to be a bad husband and worse businessman, like George's father (who is seen in "The Thinker" arguing politics With his hotel guests).

Like George, Seth is an intellectual, but, he is too emotionally insecure to pursue the girl he has a crush on, perhaps made timid by the family scandal. In "Respectability" George has a conversation with Helen White where he is as awkward as Seth is in "The Thinker," but George does not leave her until he has said what he wants to tell her.

Enoch Robinson

Enoch is a member of a family that moved to Winesburg from the country and opened a small, eclectic odds-and-ends store. He is very self-conscious of how he and his family appear to the other citizens, and in the story "Queer" he confronts George Willard, who he thinks is one of the main people in town laughing at him.

Kate Swift

Kate Swift appears in "The Strength of God," as the woman that Reverend Hartman looks at and fantasizes about in his tower room, and in the following story, "The Teacher," she is George Willard's former teacher. In her excitement over teaching and expressing herself to him, she kisses him on the lips.

Louise Trunion

In "Nobody Knows," George Willard has sex with Louise after receiving a letter from her that says, "I'in yours if you want me." Rather than feel triumphant, he immediately becomes afraid that she will hold this over him, even though she gives no indication of wishing to do so.

Joe Welling

Joe Welling is an agent for the Standard Oil Company. His mind is continuously running, almost tripping over itself as he thinks up new things. "A Man of Ideas" tells the story of his falling in love with Sarah King, which could be trouble because her father and brother are violent bullies. Rather than assault Joe, they fall under the spell of his jittery enthusiasm and walk off down the street with him, engrossed in what he has to say.

Helen White

Helen White is a girl, about George Willard's age, who has the distinction of being the banker's only child and therefore coming from one of Winesburg's wealthiest families. In "The Thinker," George Willard expresses a romantic interest in Helen to his friend Seth Richmond, but he does so casually, claiming that he is working on a story about love and would like to practice being in love with her. Helen is briefly attracted to Seth when he conveys the message, but her attraction is based in part on the fact that he has claimed to be saying his final goodbye at that moment.

The other story that concerns Helen prominently is "Sophistication." In this story, George Willard's thoughts turn to her as he reaches a moment of emotional maturity: Despite the fact that she is only in town briefly, having come home from college on break with a young instructor, her thoughts are on him also: "What George felt, she in her young woman's way felt also." What they both feel is not lust, even though they temporarily confuse it for something sexual.

Anderson uses Helen's privileged background to highlight George's moment of feeling a sense of responsibility, as he sees beyond the temporary distractions of his day-to-day life in the same way that she can see the town objectively, because she is an outsider now. Although the story is about adolescent confusion and is therefore a jumble of confused emotions, the narrative sums up the feelings that both George and Helen feel:

"'I have come to this lonely place and here is this other,' was the substance of the thing felt." They find out that what they want is not a physical encounter, but just a chance to act child-like again, and they chase each other down the hill, running and laughing. Helen White is not the love of George Willard's life, but she is more like him, than any other character in Winesburg.

Elizabeth Willard

George's mother is featured in two of the stories in this book, the third from the beginning and the third from the end. Her existence is marked by depression and bitterness, symbolized by the unspecified illness that keeps her shut up in the boarding house and under the doctor's care. She is disappointed that her life has not had more excitement and she has a vague hope that her son's life will turn out better than hers.

'Mother" explains that she grew up in the boarding house and dated, or "walked with," the traveling men who stopped there briefly, and that when she was young she enjoyed drawing attention to herself: "Once she startled the town by putting on men's clothes and riding a bicycle down Main Street." As an adult she slinks along In the shadows of the boarding house, dreading the idea that one of the boarders will see her because her former vibrancy is gone, leaving her now ghostly and worn out.

There is a great deal of empathy between Elizabeth Willard and her son, as she recalls what it was like to grow up being aware of the world's wide greatness but having that sense of wonder held in check by narrow-minded men like the boy's father, Tom Willard. In "Mother," she braces herself to confront her husband in the boy's defense, to insist that George must be free to leave Winesburg and discover the world for himself. When George comes to her and reports that a talk with his father has convinced him to do just that, she finds herself taking a position just opposite the one she had intended, mocking his ambitions when she had meant to be encouraging.

'Death" tells of a somewhat romantic relationship at the end of her life with her doctor. In his grim, dusty office, she talks freely about her life and is finally able to discuss her father's disgust with the man she chose to marry, and his warnings that the marriage would turn out miserably, which it did. Being open with Dr. Reefy leads to the closest thing she has to intimacy in her married life; for one moment, they find themselves in each other's arms, but they are interrupted and the moment never presents itself again. Elizabeth Willard has a stroke and lingers for a week before dying, never able to tell George that she has hidden eight hundred dollars for him to live his life in freedom.

George Willard

The central character in the book, it sometimes seems as if George Willard is the central character in the town: because he is the son of rooming-house owners, Anderson has put him in a position to meet travelers passing through town, while his job as a reporter for the *Winesburg Eagle* makes him known to all of the town's citizens.

Only a few of the stories in this book are explicitly concerned with events in George's life-Mother," 'Nobody Knows," "The Thinker," "The Teacher," 'An Awakening," 'Sophistication,"' and 'Departure." In the other stories, the main characters generally find some reason to relate their stories to George, or he has some other connection to the action, such as when "'The Untold Lie" explains to readers, "Boys like George Willard and Seth Richmond will remember the incident quite vividly " Other examples are when Dr. Reefy of 'Paper Pills" later develops a secret relationship with George's mother, or the folktale tone of "Godliness,"' that makes it seem as if everyone in town is familiar with what has happened. It is through the use of this structure that Anderson reveals influences that mold the young man into who he will become by the time of his departure from the town.

From the start, George is the son of an unhappy marriage, whose parents have conflicting expectations for his future. As related in 'Mother,"' his father is an unsuccessful businessman, transferring his own ambitions to hopes for his son's future success. His mother also copes with her disappointment by living vicariously through George, but her hopes are conflicted within themselves: "Even though I die I will in some way keep defeat from you," she promises George in a prayer. Soon after that she asks God to "not let him become smart and successful either."

With his father's encouragement to be practical and his mother's hopes that he transcend his meager upbringing, George could grow up in any direction, and it is his encounters with other people in town that define his growing personality. From Wing Biddlebaum he learns the danger of being too familiar with others Dr. Parcival's story is a warning against being too cerebral, but he also sees Joe Welling survive by staying true to his dreams. From Belle Carpenter he learns not to be too free with his sexuality, while Kate Swift's behavior shows him what happens if he suppresses it too thoroughly. There is a lesson for his life in each story, and, even if George does not seem to learn the lesson each time, the reader can absorb it as something he should learn.

In the book's climax, "Sophistication," George and his female counterpart, Helen, not only learn how to act maturely, but they also learn that behaving immaturely once in a while is necessary, after running down a hill and rolling in the grass like children, "they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible."

Tom Willard

George Willard's father was a clerk at the boarding house in Winesburg, hoping to become a successful businessman some day. He married the daughter of the boarding-house owner, possibly because she was pregnant. In "Death," it is revealed that her father was so against her marrying Tom that he gave her eight hundred dollars cash to leave town, but she married to spite her father. Tom Willard is an unsuccessful businessman, and in his hands the boarding house is becoming shabby and decrepit. He is interested in local politics, and enjoys arguing with customers about political issues.

Wash Williams

A friend of George's, the name is considered ironic, bestowed on him because of his poor hygiene. In "Respectability," he explains to George Willard that he was once married, but that his wife was unfaithful.

Themes

Rite of Passage

The overall arc of this book is George Willard's maturation; the climax is when he finally leaves town. Unlike a novel that is driven along by external events and situations, this book has no specific occurrence that prompts him to leave. As a matter of fact, George appears to be the ideal Citizen for Winesburg. as much as the various citizens seem to rely upon him as someone that they can tell their stories to, he seems to need them equally, to feed his curiosity The way that he outgrows the town is developed indirectly, through the positive and negative responses that readers have toward each character. "Hands," for instance, might be about Wing's determination to outrun his past, but a sub-theme is the small-mindedness and anger that can boil up in a small town. When George has a sexual encounter in "Nobody Knows," his main concern is that no one finds out about it. The King bullies accept Joe Welling in "A Man of Ideas" exactly because he is oblivious to the dangers that surround him in Winesburg. "The Untold Lie," which does not mention George, still raises the reader's awareness that the miseries suffered by Ray Pearson are unavoidable in a town like Winesburg.

Even as the town seems more and more like a trap for someone like George, the decision to leave does not become comfortable to him until the moment in "Sophistication" when he turns the clock back on his maturation process and for once, instead of trying to act older, he breaks from a kiss with Helen White and they both laugh, becoming "not man and woman, not boy and girl, but excited little animals." The drive toward experience and understanding leaves them, and as they run down the hill they have climbed "they played like two splendid young things in a young world." The struggle with "the young thing within" that has pulled at George in every story, through his association with disappointed older Winesburg citizens who had or had not won the struggle, is settled for him, and then it becomes time for him to leave.

Loneliness and Alienation

The main source of dramatic tension in this book is that Winesburg is a small town. This means that the citizens are familiar with one another and hold each other to certain standards of behavior, but, within this frame of familiarity, all of the people who make up the group feel that they do not belong to it. Of all of these, the most blatantly alienated might be Elizabeth Willard, the mother of the novel's central character. "Mother," the first story concerning her, establishes the fact that she had, at one time in her youth, felt a bond to the travelling men who had stayed at the Willard house and had romanced her. The story says that "They seemed to understand and sympathize with her." In maturity, though, she has no such bond with anyone, not even her husband or her son, and she hides upstairs, hoping to not be seen.

In the last years of her life, related in "Death," her alienation is pierced by the relationship she forms with Dr. Reefy, meeting him in his secluded office that is adjacent to a dusty storage room. The climax and destruction of their relationship occurs when they embrace for the first time and are interrupted by a clerk throwing an old box onto a pile of rubbish in the hall: "Doctor Reefy did not see the woman he had held in his arms again until after her death." Elizabeth Willard is so alienated that she does not get the chance to pass on the secret that she had been saving for her son-eight hundred dollars in cash, hidden within a wall.

The other glaring example of the loneliness that permeates the characters in this book is, of course, Enoch Robinson, in the story titled "Loneliness." Interestingly, the story explains that it was in New York City that Robinson withdrew from life with fellow human beings to live with the people of his imagination, and in New York that he lost his imaginary people to the girl he was involved With. Robinson is lonely in Winesburg, but the town itself has not made him that way, indicating that the alienation felt by each of Winesburg's citizens is more a condition of human experience than a result of small-town life.

Doubt and Ambiguity

Most of the characters in this book suffer from their efforts to keep their true natures hidden from other people and themselves. In cases like those of Wing Biddlebaum, Wash Williams or Dr. Parcival, the effort is to obscure shameful deeds in their past. Others, such as Reverend Hartman, Jesse Bentley, Kate Swift and Seth Richmond, feel that they have a reputation in the community that must be upheld at all costs, and so they do not allow themselves to become introspective enough to wonder what it is they really want.

In most cases, the citizens of Winesburg want desperately to be someone they are not, but their personalities are too strong to be changed, which leaves them in an ambiguous state where truth and lie mingle together freely. The problem is that they have doubts about what is real, and this often turns out to be devastating in the end, leaving the characters torn apart when they are forced to face the bare, unvarnished truth.

Style

Structure

Winesburg, Ohio is most noticeably a series of short stones, each one capable of making sense if read by itself. Reading the book as a novel requites some imagination and a willingness to be loose with one's definition of just what a novel is.

There is a main character, George Willard, but his significance is based mainly on the fact that he appears in almost all of the stories. Often, he is not central to the story's action, but is just mentioned as someone that a central character has spoken with. If the reader accepts the fact that George's appearances must be more than a coincidence, then it would follow that the whole book is one continuous piece, with each independent story defining George and moving him forward toward some final resolution. The fact that George leaves town in the last story supports this reading. It seems to provide a climax to the book in general.

There is a continuing character who comes to a resolute change at the end Readers who are willing to agree that this is enough evidence that the book is indeed a novel will look for signs within the stories, even those with little or no mention of George, that he is growing throughout the book to be the person he is in "Departure." They will find enough evidence to see a novel's structure running throughout the collected stories.

Plot

Sherwood Anderson despised stories that existed in order to serve their plot, usually with the actions occurring one upon the next in order to lead readers in one direction, with no more purpose than to sting them with a surprise at the end. An example of such a story might run like this: a man decides to make enough money to marry the girl he loves; he works hard for years and uses inferior materials in his construction business, in order to amass his fortune; the *very day* that he is on his way to propose to her, he finds out that she has been killed in the collapse of one of the shabby buildings he put together. Anderson called such stories "poison-plot" stones because they were built upon coincidences, not character. When he was writing *Winesburg, Ohio,* poison-plot stories were practically all that mainstream magazines published-today we still have the stories of O. Henry (William Sydney Porter) as examples of the types of heavily plotted stones published at the turn of the century.

The stories in *Winesburg, Ohio* often fail to capture the interest of novice readers of literature because they are structured around character, not plot. These stories introduce readers to their central characters, show how these characters see the world, and then, at the climax, their external circumstances do not change much, even though their personalities may be changed forever.

Setting

The events of this book could happen nowhere else but in a small Ohio town. In part, this is due to definition, because the author has defined this book as happening in or around the town of Winesburg. In addition, the stones all stay close to Winesburg because they just would not make sense anywhere else. In a larger town, in another part of the country or in a different country, there would not be the social pressure toward conformity that is unique to the American Midwest. That pressure is integral to the stories, squeezing any artificial sense of comfort out of the characters, which pushes them to act, which develops their stories.

The map of downtown Winesburg in the front of the book helps to orient readers to where specific actions take place in relation to others, but Anderson could have explained such relationships within the text if they were important. More significantly, the map makes the town seem real, as if offering proof of Winesburg's existence, beyond what the fiction writer says.

Prologue

The one story that is written in a distinctly different style from the others is "The Book of the Grotesque," which mentions neither George Willard nor the town of Winesburg and uses a different narrative style, with a narrator who exists within the story. "The Book of the Grotesque" helps introduce readers to the story that follows by placing the incidents in Winesburg within the memories of a tired, disturbed old man, which helps to explain why the stories have such an indistinct, dreamy feel about them. It also introduces the idea of the grotesque, asserting that each of the characters to follow has one thing exaggerated, which helps readers of *Winesburg, Ohio* understand what makes the characters behave as they do.

Historical Context

The First World War

World War I was the first of two conflicts in this century to draw most of what is referred to as Western Civilization (generally speaking, Europe, North America and Russia) into battle. It was the first war to use submarines, aerial bombings and chemical warfare, which added a new dimension of Impersonality to the usual carnage of war. It began in Europe, where the battles between ethnic groups in the Balkan nations at the end of the nineteenth century led to a balance of power between two rival military alliances: The Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy, and the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France and Russia. Most of the smaller countries were affiliated with one of these or the other. On June 28, 1914, Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian. When the Austrian government blamed Serbia, obligations to existing treaties pulled most of the nations into war, one at a time.

Originally, Americans were reluctant to become involved: President Woodrow Wilson was reelected in 1916 with the campaign slogan "He Kept Us Out Of War." In early 1917, though, Germany started using submarines against ships travelling to Great Britain, and the United States, which had warned against such action, was drawn into participating. When peace was declared in 1918, thirty-two nations had been involved in the fighting, with 37 million casualties and 10 million civilian deaths.

The veterans who returned to the United States in 1918 were angry and disillusioned, having participated in destruction on a greater scale, with deadlier weapons, than the world bad ever known before. Of the one million Americans drafted and sent overseas, many came from small rural towns like Winesburg, and may never have gone beyond the county limits, much less traveled to Europe and killed people, if not for the war. The returning veterans brought back stories of their experiences, cracking the shell that secluded farm towns from the outside world. *Winesburg, Ohio* was published the year after the war ended.

The Rise of the Soviet Union

Russia's weak economy, coupled with the strain of a great number of military defeats in World War I and the subsequent high casualties, forced Russian Tsar Nicholas to abdicate his throne in March of 1917. A liberal government took control of the country briefly, but protests and riots quickly forced them from power; the moderate government that followed did no better to restore order. In October of 1917 the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Vladimir Ilich Lenin, staged a revolution and reorganized the country under principles of Marxist socialism.

To American artists and intellectuals, the Russian Revolution stood as a symbol of hope that social progress toward equality was possible and that the market forces that

disfavored creativity could be overthrown one day. Journalist John Reed, whose 1919 book *Ten Days That Shook The World* gave his eyewitness account of the Revolution and who founded the American Communist Labor Party, became a sought-after speaker for social events.

To American politicians, the threat of a revolution was justification for continuing the wartime censorship that had been established to protect military secrets. Charges were brought against writers and publishers who were branded as "radicals" and "freethinkers." Ordinary citizens were split: more identified themselves as "communists" or "socialists" than at any time since (their affiliation with leftist politics would come back to haunt them thirty years later, during the blacklisting that made many lose their jobs in the 1950s), but those who supported capitalism feared leftists as being not just different political parties, but as a threat.

The Chicago Renaissance

When Sherwood Anderson moved to Chicago in 1913, he found a blossoming literary environment. Among the writers that he became acquainted with, some famous and some yet-to-be, were Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Harriet Monroe, Ben Hecht, and Floyd Dell. Literary magazines of lasting cultural significance, such as *Poetry, Little Review,* and *Seven Arts* were new and eager to publish works by writers who were just starting to build their reputations.

Enthusiasm was high among this group for the experimental art of the post-Impressionist painters, such as Cezanne, van Gogh, and Gaugin, who stopped trying to reproduce visual images and worked instead to record their internal impressions of what they saw, reducing physical forms to abstract structures. The art exhibit at the 69th Regimented Armory in New York City from February 17 to March 15, 1913, made history as the first modern art showing in the United States. To this day, the Armory Show is referred to as a determining moment in American art. In 1914 the show traveled to Chicago, where angry students of the Art Institute were so offended that they burned an effigy of painter Henri Matisse. Anderson and his friends spent nights discussing artistic theory and determining how they could apply theories about paint to their work with words.

Critical Overview

As is the case with any groundbreaking work of art, there is a tendency to view the early critical responses to *Winesburg, Ohio* as being shortsighted and prudish, reflecting a world that was both unable to appreciate Anderson's accomplishment and much less sexually sophisticated than our own. There is some truth to this view, but much of it can be traced to the fact that the original reviewers did not, for obvious reasons, have the benefit of studying the book for eighty years, and so their analyses seem to be much simpler than those written today.

Adjusting for the modern critic's advantage of accumulated Anderson studies, the critics who commented on *Winesburg* when it was first published appear to have been quite astute in what they had to say. Only a few critics took Anderson to task for examining subjects like shame and lust in his work, like the writer for the *New York Sun* who announced to the world that the book dealt with "nauseous acts" in a review called "A Gutter Would Be Spoon River" (the title refers to Edgar Lee Masters' 1915 poetry collection, also about inhabitants of a small town). A few other reviewers proclaimed disgust, but they were published mostly in family papers where the main interest was not literature but sales.

Their influence was exaggerated by several sources, including Sherwood Anderson himself, who seemed to allow each negative comment to strike with ten times the impact that he allowed to praise. In his *Memoirs,* he complained that he had been portrayed "almost universally, in public prints, as a filthy-minded man and that after the book was published, for weeks and months, my mail was loaded with letters calling me 'filthy, "an opener of sewers,' etc." It may have been convenient for him to remember himself being martyred like this, for, as he says in the following paragraph, "We men of the time had a certain pioneering job to do ..."

A more typical response of the time would have been H. W. Boynton's generally favorable review in the August 1919 edition of *The Bookman.* Boynton recognized the depiction of life in Winesburg as being "a life of vivid feeling and ardent impulse doomed, for the most part, to be suppressed or misdirected... ". He did not ignore the sexual content of the book, but correctly and quietly assumed that Anderson was caught up in the excitement about Sigmund Freud that was sweeping the intellectual community: "At worst he seems in this book like a man who has too freely imbibed the doctrine of psychoanalysis At best he seems without consciousness of self or of theory to be getting to the root of the matter-one root, at least-for all of us."

Throughout the decades, it is this lack of self-consciousness that has made *Winesburg, Ohio* a favorite among writers. The writers of the "Lost Generation," those who had been through World War I and started making their mark in the literary world in the late twenties, looked upon Anderson as a sort of father figure in a way that they never looked up to his peers, probably because his success without being too obvious appealed to their artistic senses.

The book's appeal to artists was captured by Rebecca West, whose 1922 review for *New Statesman* called *Winesburg, Ohio* an "extraordinarily good book." She went on to explain that "it is not fiction, it is poetry. It is unreasonable; it delights in places where those who are not poets could not delight... it stands in front of things that are of no Importance, infatuated With their quality, and hymns them with obstinate ecstasy "

Waldo Frank, who in the 1910s edited *Seven Arts,* a Chicago magazine that originally published several of the Winesburg stories, remembered in a later essay that he had been thrilled with the intuitiveness of the stories. For that reason he had feared revisiting them after twenty years, not knowing if they would have the impact they had in his youth. To his delight, the stones that he had remembered as being held together by the writer's instincts actually turned out to be examples of "technical perfection."

Because Anderson was so popular with writers, he drew the attention of critics, who could not accept the strange elements of Winesburg with a sense of mysticism: it was their job, after all, to explain It. In 1960, Malcolm Cowley's famous essay that introduced the Viking Press edition of *Winesburg, Ohio,* identified the root of the book's intangible greatness in the way that Anderson worked. "He knew instinctively whether one of his stories was right or wrong, but he didn't always know why," Cowley wrote. "[I]f he wanted to improve the story he had to wait for a return of the mood that had produced It, then write it over from beginning to end... ".

As the world has become more logical and accountable, so literary criticism also has been able to accept a successful mystery, and as *Winesburg, Ohio* has continued to hold public attention, critics have sought to identify what creates the book's unique mood. Tony Tanner's essay in his book *The Reign of Wonder: Naivete and Reality in American Literature* Identified the unnamed element as "the constant inclusion of seemingly gratuitous details." James M. Mellard explained in 1968 that other critics had overlooked the fact that there was not just one structure to the stories, but many. Sam Bluefarb identified a pattern of escape that he found common in American literary works in his 1972 book *The Escape Motif* in *the American Novel.* A. Carl Bredahl found the book to be held together by the twin urges of sex and art in his 1986 essay "The Young Thing Within: Divided Narrative and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio."*

As these examples show, recent critical trends have pushed toward more complex explanations of the book, but admiration for Anderson's artistry have stayed fairly constant throughout the book's long history.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Miller is *an assistant professor of Comparative Literature and English at Yale University. In the following essay, he discusses the thematic and formal significance of storytelling in* Winesburg, Ohio.

From the time of Its original publication as a complete book in 1919, *Winesburg, Ohio* has posed readers, reviewers, and critics with a puzzle: is it a short story collection or a novel? Already in 1916, Anderson had published sections of it as stories in the "little magazines" of the Chicago Renaissance and modernist literary movements: in Floyd Dell's *The Masses,* Margaret Anderson's *Little Review,* and Waldo Frank's *Seven Arts.* By their author's own admission, then, the individual chapters appeared to stand on their own, and early readers generally followed this lead, seeing in *Winesburg* a short story collection. Only later, after greater critical scrutiny and further experimentation in prose by innovators such as James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and William Faulkner, did Anderson's readers seriously consider the possible unity of *Winesburg* as a novel.

Much of the later critical discussion of *Winesburg, Ohio,* however, has been constrained by this problem of identifying its proper genre. Much ink, argument, and intelligence has been dedicated to discovering the hidden thread, narrative or thematic, binding its apparently disconnected stories

Equal effort has been spent in denying that this missing link really exists.

Winesburg's admirers praise the book's disjoined structure as poetical, lyrical, even mystical, and have valued its flashes of psychological and spiritual insight over any mere realism to be found in more conventional novels. Its detractors, cool and skeptical about "lyrical form," have. found *Winesburg* too slack and intellectually murky to be a good novel, yet also lacking the compactness of incident, the quick narrative punch of a well wrought short story.

These debates have gone round and round, largely on the same terrain, for three-quarters of a century. And the very grounds of the argument-novel or not, good one or bad one-have led to this stalemate. Without a shift of the question no satisfactory resolution is likely to be forthcoming.

Winesburg, It must be said, is a mixed work and can only be approached with finer instruments than the crude tool kit of genre categories. The question of its nature and, eventually, its quality cannot be answered without more careful attention to its subtler design. Its patterns are not set down by a generic stamp, but rather come faintly into view in the knots of a complex weave: the multiple dimensions of storytelling employed by Anderson, ranging from narratives told or withheld by characters within individual stories, the narrational modes of the individual chapters, the explicit and implicit joins and intersections between stories, and the narrative implied by the work as a whole.

Anderson sets *Winesburg* in a transitional period in American history, the years between the Civil War and the turn of the century, when small town communities were just starting to be affected by the consolidation of wealth and the sharpening of class divisions; the shift from small farming towards banking and manufacturing; the spread of newspaper reading and the rise of a consumer culture; the flight of the young to the large cities and the stagnation of towns by-passed by new developments.

Storytelling, for Anderson, is the key index of these large-scale social tendencies, for in the changing nature and value of stories one can grasp the effects of these trends in the lives of individuals and particular communities. In an earlier epoch, stories had served as the social glue for small communities such as Winesburg, articulating a shared experience and rendering it transmissible to new candidates for membership, whether they came from outside or from the younger generations of the town. The correspondence of the story to factual truth was less important than the recognition of itself accorded by the community to a given story: a story became truth by being transmitted among its members and down to its children.

But Anderson presents a new phase in this history, a turning point at which this glue of shared experience has ceased to hold. His storytellers, by and large, fail at their craft, unable to furnish myths to the community that might become its truth. The stock of transmissible experience has been tapped down to dregs, and the community can only perceive individual eccentricities in the stories its members tell rather than recognizing its collective identity in each of them.

Stories themselves have become poorer in form and sense, less able to offer guidance to the lives of the listeners. Thus dramatizing this impoverishment of the communal economy of stones, Anderson does not simply "use" the story as a literary form. He makes It a central theme, an object of scrutiny to be held up to the reader's gaze, revolved, and interrogated. In his handling of stories as thematic matter, Anderson registers the rising skepticism about the cognitive worth of narrative itself; he depicts the loss of faith in stories, their diminished capacity to connect modern Americans.

In many cases, Anderson's concern with narrative and its ability to inform the lives of people remains implicit, though crucial. His four-part story, "Godliness," for example, seems to be primarily a set of character-sketches of the farmer patriarch Jesse Bentley and his family. Yet two of the parts, Part II and Part IV (subtitled "Terror"), hinge on a pathological translation into real life of stories from the bible: Jesse destroys his relation to his beloved grandson David by trying to reenact the Old Testament stories through which he interprets his experience.

The other two parts, dealing with Jesse's troubled daughter Louise, are more subtly connected to the same sort of twisted reading. Her life has been tainted at its source, it is suggested, by Jesse's desire to live out the biblical succession of patriarchs and their sons. In his pursuit of this terrible dream, Jesse drives his delicate wife to exhaustion, and at the birth of Louise, she dies. As a girl-child, Louise can never fit into Jesse's story. Substituting for any more intimate human bond, his inner narrative has no place for a girl despite her bothersome presence in his outer life. Nor can she look to her

mother for the tenderness she can never receive from her father. At her very birth, the child was sacrificed to her father's destructive story.

Winesburg, Ohio is full of storytellers of different sorts. Its opening and closing stories present the most formal sort: professional writers, artists of the word. The prefacing chapter, "The Book of the Grotesque," thus depicts an old writer composing a book out of the many "grotesque" characters who populate his memory. The concluding story "Departure," a mirror-image of the opening tale seen across tune, tracks the young reporter George Willard as he leaves Winesburg to become a writer.

The old writer, lying in his bed, watches "a long procession of figures" pass through his mind, while on the train taking him to the big city, George consigns his life in Winesburg to "a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood." Though Anderson does not explicitly identify the youth and the old man, he does suggest that George may be destined to become like the old writer, while the old man seems to account for his "book of the grotesque" by including a story like "Departure," in which a younger version of himself gets free of the town that gave him his stock of memories.

Both the old writer and young George picture their life as a broad interior tableau, a novel-like prospect of the mind that differs greatly from the damaged braggarts, compulsive confessors, and tongue-tied sputterers of their old town. Their sort of storytelling is uniquely whole, able to encompass all the other forms, although it never reduces the other storytellers to mere puppets of their literary design

Of the figures of the town, Doctor Reefy in "Paper Pills" and Doctor Parcival in "The Philosopher" together offer a distorted mirror-image of these two successful writers. Reefy is a writer, but only of scraps and fragments. His words congeal into unreadable wads, rather than coalescing into an artistic whole. Parcival is also a writer, but a debilitated one. The doctor claims to have come Winesburg to write a book, and George visits him to listen to the doctor read from his manuscript. Anderson, however, clearly suggests that the doctor's book will never be completed. He is too much the traditional storyteller to limit his book to a rounded, novel-like design:

The tales that Doctor Parcival told George Willard began nowhere and ended nowhere. Sometimes the boy thought they must all be inventions, a pack of lies. And then again he was convinced that they contained the very essence of truth.

Moreover, even the doctor's exchange of stories with George is marked by an ambiguity. When he reads to George from his *manuscript,* their relation is that of author to reader; at the same time, however, the author and reader sit face-to-face, an overlay from the older relation of storyteller to listener. In this ambiguity, Anderson subtly suggests the grounds of the doctor's failure as a writer. He has not made the break from the already obsolete world of Winesburg into the modern urban life of the city, the precondition of being a "real" writer. The writer must accept the tragic distance between the author and his anonymous readers, a distance spanned only by a silent book. One does not *come to* Winesburg to become a writer, one escapes from it. The doctor

headed the wrong way on the train, and his book will never be written. He is doomed to be, at best, a storyteller in a town that no longer believes in stories.

Opposed to the synthetic vision of the old man and George and distinct from the failed doctor-writers are such town figures Joe Welling in "A Man of Ideas," Reverend Curtis Hartman in "The Strength of God," and Tom Foster in "Drink." These characters, unlike all the writers, are bound to speech. Yet each of the three founders as storyteller when he tries to capture his inner, personal experience in communicable form. Though Joe Welling tries to use narratives to illustrate his ideas, the churning motor of his overactive brain makes futile his attempt to give them narrative order. The result is stories that skirt the edge of sense, leaving his listeners baffled and dazed:

Suppose this-suppose all of the wheat, the com, the oats, the peas, the potatoes, were all by some miracle swept away. There is a high fence built all around us We'll suppose that No one can get over the fence and all the fruits of the earth are destroyed, nothing left but these wild things, these grasses. Would we be done for?

The Reverend, similarly, bursts in one night on George to announce that he has seen God in the naked body of the schoolteacher. The reader, filled in by Anderson's narrator about the background to this strange declaration, understands it as meaningful; George, however, lacking all context, takes it as nonsense if not insanity. Tom Foster, finally, does manage to tell a story about his (imagined) love-making to Helen White, but he fails to convey to George that it is a fantasy, a metaphor seized upon to capture his inner experience of being drunk for the first time. George, who has seen Helen that same night, becomes angry, misunderstanding Tom's flight of fancy as a slur on Helen's good character.

One final type of storytelling demands special mention: the story not told. This "negative storytelling," implying the existence of a story while refusing to tell it, is characteristic of the loneliest and most disappointed figures of the town: Wing Biddlebaum in "Hands," Alice Hindman in "Adventure," Seth Richmond in "The Thinker," and Elmer Cowley in "'Queer'."

Seth Richmond reveals that his refusal of words is not simply alack of something to say, but a rejection of contact with those who know how to use words superficially, with the community bound by stories. His shortcoming points beyond itself toward an unconventional and more genuine form of community-akin to the silent understanding achieved by George and Helen in the late story "Sophistication." Explaining to himself his failure to express his love to Helen White, Seth concludes, "She'll be embarrassed and feel strange when I'in around. When it comes to loving someone, it won't never be me. It'll be someone else-some fool-someone who talks a lot-someone like that George Willard."

Wing Biddlebaum, whose all-encompassing tenderness earned him the fear and hatred of the Pennsylvania town from which he fled, a community that saw perversion in a love that went beyond its narrow bounds, likewise keeps his story to himself. In all these cases of withheld storytelling, however, Anderson's narrator, implicitly a professional

writer like the old man or George, steps in to allow their silence to have its word, to take its place among the stories actually pronounced.

Storytelling in *Winesburg* is not simply a formal or generic issue, a choice Anderson made before a stack of paper about whether to tell little stories about many characters or one big story about a few characters. The generic uncertainty of the work-story collection or novel?-was not the result of indecision or literary incompetence, but rather the complex outcome of Anderson's concern with the crisis of storytelling itself.

Storytelling is an invisible actor throughout the book. A character's telling a story or holding it back can itself be the crucial "plot" event in a given chapter. More than outward incident or even psychological detail, the different forms and rhythms of storytelling are the reader's main clues to the book's inner design, the primary facts calling for further thought and explanation.

Source: Tyros Miller, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Rigsby argues that Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio is *concerned with the meaning of the feminine and the "relationships between the men and women of Winesburg.* "

The meaning Sherwood Anderson gives to the characters of women and to the qualities of the feminine is an important source of unity in *Winesburg, Ohio.* Anderson identifies the feminine with a pervasive presence of a fragile, hidden "something" that corresponds both to the lost potential of each of the grotesques and to the secret knowledge that each story is structured to reveal. The themes most frequently identified as the unifying forces of *Winesburg, Ohio,* the failure of communication and the development of the artist, are closely related to Anderson's focus on the meaning of the feminine. In *Winesburg, Ohio* communication is blocked because of the devaluation of the feminine qualities of vulnerability. and tenderness even though the artist's creativity springs from deep feelings of vitality which Anderson associates with the feminine.

Through one of Enoch Robinson's paintings in "Loneliness," Anderson creates an image that reveals his vision of a woman's condition in Winesburg and of her potential power. The painting is of a man driving down a road to Winesburg. The look on the man's face indicates that he is vaguely aware of "something hidden" behind "a clump of elders" beside the road. Enoch longs for his critics to see this hidden subject, an essence so beautiful and precious that it could not be rendered directly:

"It's a woman and, oh, she is lovely! She is hurt and is suffering but she makes no sound. Don't you see how It is? She lies quite still, white and still, and the beauty comes out from her and spreads over everything. It is in the sky back there and all around everywhere I didn't try to paint the woman, of course. She is too beautiful to be painted "

Enoch's painting portrays precisely the condition of the female characters who inhabit Winesburg. The women are "invisible" because their real identities are eclipsed by their social roles. The relationships between the men and women of Winesburg are corrupted and uncreative, for their acceptance of conventional sexual roles prevents them from experiencing the genuine communication that comes when relationships are equal and reciprocal. The neediness, frustration, and failure that encompass the lives of Louise Bentley, Alice Hindman, Elizabeth Willard, and Kate Swift are the result of the discrepancy between their own capacity for intimacy, affection, and creativity and the inability of others, especially the men in their lives, to "see" or to relate to who they really are In Enoch's painting, as in Anderson's stones, the beauty and suffering of woman become visible only through art that brings to a level of conscious awareness what is unrecognized by conventional society.

It is in his characterization of Louise Bentley that Anderson shows best the suffering of women that results from the devaluation of feminine needs and aspirations. Louise is completely rejected by her father because, as a female, she is an unacceptable heir. She is ignored and unloved as a child, and her vulnerability is heightened by her instinct

to value relationships intensely. As a young girl, Louise has a remarkably intelligent and mature vision of what is necessary for human intimacy. She imagines that Winesburg is a place where relationships are natural, spontaneous, and reciprocal: "... Men and women must live happily and freely, giving and taking friendship and affection as one takes the feel of a wind on the cheek." Louise turns to John Hardy in search of a friend who will understand her dream. She seeks from her husband an intimate exchange of feelings and thoughts. Hardy seems kind and patient; however, his vision of Louise's humanity is limited to his own very inadequate concept of "wife"... .

To Hardy, Louise is a sexual object whose human voice he suppresses by kisses which are not a mark of affection but an unconscious means of ignoring and belittling his wife's desperate effort to be her deepest self. Louise's complete defeat in the denial of her personhood by her father and her husband is expressed in her rejection of her child: "'It is a man child and will get what it wants anyway.... Had it been a woman child there is nothing in the world I would not have done for it.'" Anderson's point is that in her surrender to marriage Louise surrenders all hope that her gift for friendship and affection will be realized.

Through the story of Alice Hindman, Anderson shows how the conventional sexual morality of Winesburg works against the fulfillment of women's needs. Alice is clearly morally superior to her lover, Ned Currie, and is capable of a much finer quality of relationship than he is. Just as Ned is contemplating inviting her to become his mistress, Alice proposes that she go to the city to live and work with him until they are sufficiently established to marry. Unable to comprehend the spirit of independence and equality Alice envisions, Ned demands that she wait for him in Winesburg, forcing her into a passive dependency which denies her the sustained relationship she needs. Their brief sexual intimacy is so sacred to Alice that she feels bound to Ned in a spiritual marriage even when years of waiting prove he has abandoned her. Despite her economic and legal independence, Alice Hindman is as much imprisoned by marriage as Louise Bentley is, for she has no understanding of Anderson's concept of "the growing modern idea of a woman's owning herself and giving and taking for her own ends in life."

The tragic loss which characterizes the lives of Louise Bentley and Alice Hindman and the accompanying shriveling of their sexuality and their capacity for affection suggest that Anderson regarded the failure to find fulfillment in love as a crucial issue of female identity. The natural, reciprocal relationships which Louise Bentley and Alice Hindman envision are a reasonable expectation; however, Anderson shows that the patriarchal marriages of Winesburg preclude the possibility of achieving the intimacy of equal relationships. When they are not related to as persons, and no emotional or spiritual dimension emerges in the marriage relationship, all possibility for sexual satisfaction is completely lost to the women. The marriages of Louise Bentley and Elizabeth Willard are in no sense real to them except as a legal duty. Furthermore, the social pressure to limit feelings of intimacy to monogamous marriage denies the women of Winesburg any legitimate way of establishing the land of relationships they need. When women are subordinates, the institution of marriage becomes a social means of controlling their natural instincts for love and self-actualization....

Once the theme of the suffering of women is identified, it becomes obvious that an emphasis on the crippled feminine dimension of life permeates *Winesburg, Ohio.* The image of Elizabeth Willard, "tall and gaunt" with her face "marked with smallpox scars," is repeated in the wounded bodies of other overworked and suffering women who hover in the background: Dr. Parcival's mother with her "red, sad-looking eyes,"' Joe Welling's mother, "a grey, silent woman with a peculiar ashy complexion,"' Tom Foster's grandmother whose worn hands look like "the dried stems of an old creeping vine." The general abuse of women is captured most vividly in "Paper Pills" when a young girl is so frightened of the lust of her suitor that she dreams "he had bitten into her body and that his jaws were dripping.".. .

Through the character of Elizabeth Willard, Anderson shows that the urge for creative self-expression is an extension of the basic feminine instinct for intimacy. Restless and energetic, Elizabeth dreams of becoming an actress in a big city. Her fantasy is a symbolic expression of her need to develop the full range of her personality and to achieve the artistic expression that would bring her into intimate communion with the world. Like Louise Bentley and Alice Hindman, Elizabeth's openness to life makes her open to sexual relationships. Her lovers, the traveling men who stay in her father's hotel, are her only means of touching the larger and more vital life of the cities. When she turns to marriage as the conventional solution to her restlessness, Elizabeth quickly discovers that the "secret something" growing within her is killed by her insensitive husband. Unable to extend the boundaries of her life, Elizabeth creates dramatic roles for herself in an effort to be the person she can only vaguely imagine. In "Mother,"' when she is determined to protect the creativity of her son from her husband's materialistic ambitions, Elizabeth uses theatrical make-up to transform herself into the powerful woman who can kill the "evil voice" of Tom Willard.

Just as Elizabeth Willard imagines, women can transform themselves through their own creative powers. In fact, Anderson suggests that the creativity of the feminine is such an energized force in these sensitive women that a moment of crisis can release deep feelings that have been suppressed for years. In these "adventures,"' the bodies of the women are transformed to reveal their hidden power. When Louise Bentley fears her son is lost, all of her capacities for motherly care flow out to embrace him. To David Hardy, the voice of his mother is "like rain falling on trees," and her face becomes "the most peaceful and lovely thing he had ever seen." In Alice Hindman's "adventure," the rain releases her suppressed spontaneity; the imagery of falling rain and of leaping and running reveals the potential of Alice's sexual passion and creative vitality. Kate Swift's scarred face is transformed when she walks the winter streets of Winesburg: "... Her features were as the features of a tiny goddess on a pedestal in a garden in the dim light of a summer evening." Elizabeth Willard's wild drive into the country, which she describes to Dr. Reefy in "Death," expresses the mounting tension of her desire to transcend the limitations of her life. The black clouds, the green trees, and the falling rain (symbols of the natural, reproductive processes of the earth) represent the vital, spontaneous, and creative life Elizabeth is seeking but cannot quite comprehend.

The language that describes these "adventures" links the moments of feminine self-actualization to the rich beauty of nature and to the spiritual transformation associated

with creative inspiration and mystical religion. The "something" which Elizabeth Willard is seeking is a more humane life in which her sexuality, her need for intimacy, her creativity, and her spirituality, can be fully realized, harmonized, and expressed: a life in which the wholeness of her selfhood might be recognized and appreciated by some other human being. Years later, in her encounter with Dr. Reefy, Elizabeth glimpses momentarily the magnitude and significance of the emotions she has experienced. In the excitement of describing her "adventure" to her friend, she transforms herself into the gifted actress who can miraculously "project herself out of the husk" of an old, tired body into the image of "a lovely and innocent girl." Dr. Reefy is entranced by the beauty and rhythm of Elizabeth's body, the symbolic expression of her hidden capacity to move with life and to express her creative vitality. This moment of communion in "Death" is the experience of liberating, intimate understanding which all of the Winesburg characters are seeking. The intimacy is achieved because Dr. Reefy possesses the sensitivity and wisdom that enable him to see and appreciate the hidden identity of a woman: "'You dear! You lovely dear! Oh you lovely dear!' "When the moment is broken by their fear of an intruder, Elizabeth turns to death as the only lover who can receive her full identity.

Elizabeth Willard hopes that her creative drives will be expressed through her son, however, not until her death does George acquire the quality of feeling necessary for the artist. The progress of his development toward that goal is revealed by the nature of his relationships with women. Early in *Winesburg, Ohio* in "Nobody Knows," George takes advantage of the subordinate position of Louise Trunnion, impersonally using her for sexual adventure. Proud, satisfied, and egotistical, George divorces himself completely from any possible affiliation with Louise, for he sees women only as objects to be used to expand his own sense of personal power. In "The Thinker," a story at the midpoint of the collection, George brags that he plans to fall in love with Helen White to get material for a story. Yet, beneath his nonchalance there is the hint of a deeper self in George which gradually emerges through a series of encounters with Kate Swift, Belle Carpenter, his mother, and Helen White.

Kate Swift is eager to share with George her love of art and her understanding of life. However, George understands Kate's earnest seriousness as evidence that she is in love with him, and his mind becomes filled with "lustful thoughts" about her. Thus, in "Teacher," when Kate comes to him ablaze with the intensity of her desire "to open the door of life," his sexual desire kindles her own, and she loses touch with the intellectual, spiritual, and creative potentials of her emotion. At last, however, George begins to perceive that there is something more to be communicated between men and women than physical encounter; he knows that he is missing something important that Kate Swift is trying to tell him.

Gradually his boyish superficiality fades, and in "An A wakening" George consciously begins his search for those truths that will give order and meaning to his life. However, the moment the thrill of a new insight comes to him, he is eager to share it with a woman, not in order to enrich a relationship but to have the pleasure of releasing physically his new surge of energy.. George's spiritual experience merely heightens his grandiose egocentricity, and he plans to use his new self-confidence to Win sexual mastery over a potent and challenging woman. As George walks with Belle Carpenter,

unaware that they are pursued by her lover, he becomes "half drunk with the sense of masculine power." However, when he is duped by the older couple, George's sudden loss of power becomes precisely the reversal of fortunes his character needs.

Although the Winesburg stones are loosely connected and do not generally follow any logical sequence, the stories that show George Willard's growing understanding of the meaning of the feminine do progress sequentially. In the last third of the collection, George's increasing sensitivity to women is extended through his initiation into suffering. In "An Awakening" George is tricked and humiliated; in the following story, "Queer," he is knocked "half unconscious" by the force of Elmer Cowley's undirected efforts to express himself. In "Drink" George tries to defend Helen White's good name from Tom Foster's drunken fantasies but, instead, becomes deeply moved by the young man's sincere effort to understand and experience suffering. The story is a humorous, indirect, and understated preparation for "Death "

The sensitivity that comes to George as a result of his mother's death and his vision of her spiritual beauty prepare him for his experience with Helen White in "Sophistication." "Sophistication" is a very slight story, actually a denouement of the two climactic moments in "Death" when Elizabeth Willard's true identity is recognized. However, the story is profoundly meaningful when it is read with an awareness of the thematic significance of Anderson's portrayal of the devaluation of the feminine throughout *Winesburg, Ohio.* At the end of the story Anderson describes the satisfaction Helen White and George Willard have achieved through their relationship:

For some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together 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.

The tone and placement of this passage make it clearly a key thematic statement; yet, there is very little clarity in the passage itself or even in the story about exactly what the "thing" is that Helen and George have experienced. The various interpretations of the passage which focus on the theme of communication are accurate enough, but the episode itself as well as Anderson's emphasis on "the mature life of men and women" certainly indicate that the focus of his concern is not just human relationships generally but the special problems of communication between men and women. It is against the background of Anderson's presentation throughout *Winesburg, Ohio* of the suffering of women and their unfulfilled relationships with men that the encounter of these two young people can best be appreciated.

The positive nature of the experience which George and Helen share is a product of their mutual treasuring of those tender, vital feelings that Anderson associates with the feminine. Both are aware of a fragile, new self that is alive in each of them; their silent communion gives these sensitive feelings the nurturing that is needed. Despite their youth and inexperience, they momentarily share a relationship that is trusting and reciprocal, for in George and Helen, Anderson creates characters who are free of sexual role expectations. It is appropriate that Helen and George should recapture the joyful,

natural spirit of childhood when males and females meet in relationships that are equal. Their release of emotions in spontaneous playfulness is integrated with their mature, brooding reflection on the transience of life. George's awareness of the reality of death and of his own finitude is his "sophistication," but he has also learned that he needs to share this new knowledge with a woman, for "he believes that a woman will be gentle, that she will understand." His acceptance of Helen as a spiritual mediator indicates that George's masculinity is balanced by the feminine qualities of tenderness and gentleness, an integration that Anderson suggests is necessary for the artist.

The conclusion of "Sophistication" suggests that *Winesburg, Ohio* is intended to be a prophetic statement about the quality of the relationships of men and women in the modern world. That prophetic tone is even more direct in "Tandy," a story that seems to have been created primarily as an invocation of the woman of the future. The drunken man who defines the meaning of Tandy expresses the view of the feminine that pervades *Winesburg, Ohio:*

"There is a woman coming... Perhaps of all men I alone understand 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 It is the quality of being strong to be loved. Be brave enough to dare to be loved. Be something more than man or woman. Be Tandy."

The suffering of women, Anderson argues, will lead to the evolution of a new kind of woman who will insist that sexual roles be transcended and that she be loved as a human being, an event that Anderson suggests is as much needed by men as it is by women....

Throughout *Winesburg, Ohio* Anderson associates the feminine with a quality of feeling that is delicate and intangible; it is a tender nuance, a transient moment of intimacy, a creative, secret something growing within the self, a slight quiver of insight that seems to hold great promise. Anderson's mode of presentation of the feminine is as appropriate as the invisibility of the woman in Enoch Robinson's painting, for *Winesburg, Ohio* presents a microcosm of the modern world in which the potential of the feminine has not yet been realized.

Source: Sally Adnir Rigsby, "The Feminine In *Winesburg, Ohio,"* in *Studies in American Fiction* Vol. 9, No 2, autumn, 1981, pp. 233-44.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Murphy categorizes characters according to their "responses to sexual emotion" and follows this theme throughout the entire novel.

One of the bits of learning which students of modern literature treasure up against their examinations is the notion that Sherwood Anderson was an American equivalent of D. H. Lawrence. Indeed, Irving Howe, the critic who has been most insistent upon Anderson's debt to Lawrence, has pointed out that even Anderson's most "sex-centered" work reveals that "for the man who wrote those novels sex was a source of deep anxiety".

Nowhere is the weight and tenor of the evidence for this anxiety quite so impressive as in *Winesburg, Ohio,* the early work on which Anderson's greatly depleted reputation now almost entirely depends. In that work he displays an extremely hesitant, almost puritanical attitude toward physical sexuality which seems to have been considerably more Platonic than Lawrencian or Freudian in its complexion. In fact, most of the major characters in *Winesburg* "may be seen as illustrating this markedly cautious attitude toward sex on the part of their creator, and ... [that] attitude exerts a controlling influence upon the form and theme of the book "

The majority of *Winesburg's* grotesques can be classified into four distinct types on the basis of their responses to sexual emotion: the first type consists of those who are repelled by their sexual feelings and desperately seek to avoid the fact of sex altogether. The second is devoted to those who complacently accept sex and cannot see beyond it, while the third group embraces those who, though they wistfully apprehend a state of feeling which transcends the merely sexual, are compelled by circumstance to settle for sex. Finally, there is that very important group of initiates who perceive the role of sexuality in Anderson's own terms and experience it as a prelude--a material reflection of a kind of Platonic perfection of the soul.

Familiar examples of tile first type-the characters whose grotesqueness derives from their in ability to accept the gross fact of sex-are Wash Williams ("Respectability"), the telegrapher who went berserk when brusquely confronted with his naked wife, and Enoch Robinson ("Loneliness"), the childlike, schizoid artist who, to his pain, kept "bumping against things, against actualities like money and sex and opinion" and whose precious fantasy life was destroyed by contact With an actual woman. Another of this company is Wings Biddlebaum ("Hands"), the inspired teacher whose hands were vital to his communication and who had been accused of homosexuality on the basis of the fantasies of a half-witted student. Wings is very often cited as a victim of the low-brow's intolerance of the life of the spirit, but his real tragedy seems to me to he in his own demoralizing recognition of the essential truth of the embattled farmers' charges. For Wings is of the homosexual persuasion, or, as Anderson puts it, "In their feelings for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men."...

Very few of the grotesques in *Winesburg* fall into [the] second classification-that is, the frankly and uncomplicatedly sexual. One of them, however, is Will Henderson, the newspaper owner and George Willard's employer, who is, as Anderson styles him, "a sensualist," and who, at the beginning of "The Philosopher," figures in as explicit a bit of moral allegory as ever Hawthorne created: one of Will's cronies is the bartender Tom Willy, whose hands are blotched by crimson birthmarks, and, as he and the newspaper owner talked of womanizing, "he grew more and more excited" and the red of his fingers deepened. "It was as though the hands had been dipped in blood that had dried and faded." This scene, which is so evocative of bloody , violent sexuality, is juxtaposed with George Willard's philosophical conversations with Parcival. Art Wilson, the butcher's son of "Awakening," is another of the sensualists whose chief use is to be employed in one of these contrapuntal tableaux, for as he sits in the pool room, spitting and talking of whores, George Willard is portrayed as wandering through the moonlit night entertaining a vision of cosmic love and order. Belle Carpenter and Ed Handby are a pair of full sublunary lovers who figure in the same story. Their love is depicted as restricted to the sensual order, condemned to sexuality for its expression, and, when George Willard unwittingly intrudes into their relationship, to violence.

Throughout *Winesburg* Anderson seems to have been establishing a connection between sexual ardor and violence Certainly Dr. Reefy's young wife ("Paper Pills") made that connection subconsciously when, before her marriage, she was haunted by a nightmare in winch one of her suitors "had bitten into her body and ... his jaws were dripping." She married Dr. Reefy-who figures as a kind of wise mystical *guru* to his young wife and to Elizabeth Willard-after she watched him pull a tooth from a patient, thereby exorcising, or, if you will, symbolically castrating, the ravenous sexual monster of her dreams.

George Willard's mother, Elizabeth, is the most pathetic representative of the third category of grotesques to be discovered in *Winesburg.* These are the sexually injured and insulted, those who, though they are tantalizingly aware of the possibility of a more satisfying mode of communication, confuse It at a critical time in their lives with sexuality and are condemned to an existence of dreary frustration as a consequence. In her youth George's mother had been visited by a great restlessness and a yearning for "some big definite movement to her life," and had sought relief in the specious glamour of sex with the travelling men who frequented her father's hotel and with her husband-to-be, Tom Willard. In sexuality "she felt for a time released and happy," but the satisfaction was ephemeral and, when we first encounter her in "Mother," she is broken and despondent, hoping only that her son will somehow manage to achieve the freedom of expression that she had once glimpsed....

[These] three categories of grotesques may be regarded as constituting a paradigm of the clue to the thematic unity of *Winesburg* which Anderson himself supplied in the gnomic "Book of the Grotesque" with which he prefaced the volume.

There he put it forward that spiritual deformity must result from the kind of obsessive rigidity winch selects only one "truth" from the multitude which make up reality. The Wash Williamses of the world can only comprehend the "truth" that sex can be gross,

violent and repulsive. The Will Hendersons can only see the "truth" that sex is a powerful, absorbing and attractive force, while the Elizabeth Willard's ... dimly descry another "truth" about life but, to their cost, confuse it with sex. Although the Elizabeth Willards come close, none of these characters appreciates the point that Anderson seemed to be trying to establish, and that is that there can be many "truths" about sex, just as there can be many "truths" about life, and that the most comprehensive of these truths is that while sex can be gross, violent, and degrading, it can, when sublimated, be tremendously inspiring, lifting the personality into a higher stage of consciousness.

The *Winesburg* characters who attain to this last view of sexuality fall into the fourth and most thematically significant category... and, on the internal evidence, Anderson appears to have regarded them as constituting a sort of spiritual elite. They are Love's Elect, those who have approached the final stages of that mystical mode of communication Anderson so highly prized. Their company numbers Dr. Reefy, the Reverend Curtis Hartman ("The Strength of God"), Kate Swift ("The Teacher"), Tom Foster ("Drink"), and George Willard. In every case they are presented as being in the grip of a strong physical passion which, for one reason or another, they do not consummate. Rather, they sublimate their desire and, by avoiding the trap of a merely sensual mode of communication, are admitted to a plane of consciousness where communication operates in terms of an imaginative, mystical sympathy. These folk, at least, manage to grasp two of the paradoxical truths which Anderson sets forth in "The Book of the Grotesque"-"the truth of virginity and the truth of passion."

"You must not try to make love definite," says Dr. Reefy to Elizabeth Willard. He had loved her chastely for years, and he goes on to say, "If you try to be definite and sure about it ... the long hot day of disappointment comes swiftly". Gentle Tom Foster of "Drink" had had an early experience of the more definite and violent aspects of love as a youngster in Cincinnati and had determined "that he would put sex altogether out of his own life." But he was human and young, and one spring he fell in love with Helen White, the banker's daughter with whom all the youth of Winesburg dallied in their fantasies. He resolved his emotional dilemma in a most peculiar and deliberate way: he neither repressed nor physically indulged his emotion, but allowed himself to "think of Helen White whenever her figure came into his mind and only concerned himself with the manner of his thoughts." The manner of his thoughts took a mystical turn, and one night, with the aid of a little alcohol, he conceived of her in terms of images of flame and wind. It was allover in one night, and, as Anderson pointedly remarks, "no one in Winesburg was any the worse for Tom's outbreak." And Tom himself was all the better for his expansion of consciousness, for, as he said to George Willard later, "I want to learn things, you see. That's why I did it."

The Reverend Curtis Hartman ("The Strength of God") had felt his life become stale and empty, he had come to dread delivering his weekly sermon and "dreamed of the day when a strong sweet new current of power would come like a great wind into his voice and his soul and the people would tremble before the spirit of God made manifest in him." Instead he is visited by an awesome lust for the teacher Kate Swift. In a bit of strenuous allegory, Anderson depicts him as seeing her in her bedroom through a chink in the stained-glass window of his church. Night after night he watched her, racked by

his conscience, yet unable to repress his passion. He had almost determined to throw over his cure of souls and become a "creature of carnal lusts," declaring that man "has no right to forget he is an animal," when he noticed that Kate, who is now naked, has begun to weep and to pray. Instantly his lust is quite sublimated away, and his desire for her as a woman is replaced by a sympathy and concern for her as a person. As he tells the baffled George Willard later that night, "After ten years in this town, God has manifested himself to me in the body of a woman "

Earlier on the same night that the Reverend Hartman was to undergo his revelation, Kate, who was "the most eagerly passionate soul" among the inhabitants of Winesburg, sets out in search of George Willard, an ex-pupil in whom "she had recognized the spark of genius." On another occasion she had been filled With a "passionate desire to have him understand the import of life," and their interview had closed With a kiss from which she broke away, declaring angrily that "It will be ten years before you begin to understand what I mean when I talk to you." But on this fateful evening she became again possessed by the impulse to communicate with George, to try again "to open the door of life" for the boy whose potential for communication she had divined, and once again the attempted moment of epiphany was obscured by sexual excitement. "So strong was her passion that It became something physical," and she allowed George to take her into his arms, only to break away, leaving him alone, confused and "swearing furiously." It is Kate's frustration at being unable to communicate with George which precipitates the moment of despair in her bedroom. And, ironically, it is the sight of that despair that brings about the dramatic enlargement of the Reverend Hartman's understanding of humanity. George Willard, however, had managed to confuse the Reverend's exaltation with madness and Kate's compassionate concern with garden-variety lubricity, and he goes to bed that night mattering, "I have missed something." He has indeed something, but he will not have to wait ten years until he begins to understand what it is.

Several years ago, Edwin Fussell [in *"Winesburg, Ohio:* Art and Isolation," *Modern Fiction Studies,* VI (summer, 1960), pp. 106-14] addressed himself to the popular Critical exercise of attempting to isolate the unifying elements which make *Winesburg* something more than a series of loosely articulated short stories. Wondering whether the simple themes of "loneliness and isolation" were really enough to account for the work's cumulative effect, Fussell argued persuasively that the real Unity of the work is not to be found among the grotesques themselves, but rather in their relation to George Willard. *Winesburg,* he felt, is in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman,* and in it we may observe at work the theme of George Willard's maturation as an artist. My reading of *Winesburg* has brought it home to me that Fussell is essentially correct in his appreciation of the fact that George Willard's development as an artist is central to the meaning of the work, but It has also suggested that the *Bildungsroman* view of *Winesburg* may be enlarged to include the complementary theme of George's development from a merely passionate, dull sublunary lover to the stage of becoming an initiate of the more Platonic aspects of human love. At the book's end George too seems to have grasped the simultaneous and arcane truths of virginity and passion.

In the early episode called "Nobody Knows," we observe George Willard's conduct of his first amorous affair in concert with the obliging Louise Trunnion. His approach to Louise is marked by adolescent awe and shy terror, but, once he has had her, he comports himself like any other coarse, his tic roaring-boy, desiring to boast of his conquest while at the same time meanly assuring himself that "she hasn't got anything on me." The incident is entirely physical and egotistical with none of the expansion of consciousness and the quality of communion which Anderson so valued. A little later in the book-in the twin episodes of "The Strength of God" and "The Teacher"-we see that George still takes a most mundane view of the nature of human passion as he utterly fails to appreciate the quality of the emotions animating the Reverend Hartman and Kate Swift. It is, in fact, not until we reach the adventure which is aptly called "An Awakening" that we see any notable tendency in George to view love on any but the most basic terms. Here we discover George in the toils of a frustrated physical passion for Belle Carpenter which becomes converted into a mystical yearning for self-expression of a more abstract nature than the merely sexual. Some little time after this, George's encounter with the gentle, mystical Tom Foster is described in "Drink," and the stage is set for George's initiation into the company of Love's Elect in "Death" and "Sophistication."

A remarkable experience overtakes George at the death-bed of his mother. He has come there unwillingly, for he has had to break an appointment with Helen White to do so and, even as he stands by his mother's corpse, he is preoccupied by persistent sexual fantasies: "He closed his eyes and imagined that the red young lips of Helen White touched his own lips." So absorbing were these imaginings that his "body trembled" and "his hands shook,"' and then, as Anderson simply puts it, "something happened." George became convinced that it was not the corpse of his mother before him, but rather the "unspeakably lovely" body of a young and graceful living girl. Running out of the room, and "urged by some impulse outside himself,"' George exclaimed, "The dear, the dear, oh the lovely dear,"' thereby unconsciously echoing the words uttered years before by Dr. Reefy when, for a moment, he held the living Elizabeth Willard in his arms.

Although the symbolism here cannot be subjected to any very precise analysis in terms of conventional discourse, I believe that the conversion of George's sexual impulses into a vision of his mother as a young and desirable girl is more than simply Oedipal, and emphasizes instead the subtle connection which Anderson discerned between *eras* and *agape-between* a specific, egocentric sexual desire and a generalized love and sympathy for humanity.

In any event, George's attitude toward Helen White has changed considerably in "Sophistication,"' *Winesburg's* penultimate episode. Here Anderson shows us George Willard as he and Helen walk out together one evening to the deserted fair ground. This is a tender interlude, and he and Helen hold hands and kiss, but Anderson takes especial care to indicate that the nature of their relationship is now more than simply sexual, and indeed, that the physical aspect of love would constitute a profanation of the feeling that had taken hold of them, the feeling that "makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible." There is a sense of communion between them,

but there is also the sad knowledge of the essential and inviolate loneliness that must tinge ail mature affection. In describing the state of George's mind as this bittersweet emotion replaces his earlier desire, Anderson employs an almost Manichean imagery: "In youth there are always two forces fighting in people. The warm unthinking little animal struggles against... the more sophisticated thing [that] had possession of George Willard."

Standing in the deserted fairground, George felt a "reverence for 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." On this note, one which is reminiscent of the arcane code of Courtly Love, George Willard may be said to have completed, in Anderson's terms, his novitiate in art, in life, and in love. An ardent candidate for experience, he has sublimated his passion and achieved, for the moment at least, the delicate equipoise between "the truth of virginity and the truth of passion."

Source: George D Murphy, "The Theme of Sublimation In Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio"* in *Modern Fiction Studies,* Vol 13, No 2, summer, 1967, pp. 237-46.

Adaptations

There are three different versions of a "Winesburg, Ohio" audio cassette available: from the Audio Bookshelf, 1995; from Recorded Books, 1995; and as an audio cassette or phonographic album from Caedmon, 1983.

A 1977 video, "Sherwood Anderson's I'in a Fool," is available from Perspective Films, 1977.

Topics for Further Study

The characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* are very specific to their place and time. Write a short story that brings one of these characters forward to your town. Would they be better adjusted than they are presented in the book? Would the added burden of fast-paced modern life be too much for them? Would they find help for their problems that was not available in Winesburg?

Research the Chicago renaissance of the 1910s and 1920s. Report on one of the writers that Anderson was acquainted with: Edgar Lee Masters, Harriet Monroe, Margaret Anderson, Francis Hackett, Ben Hecht, or Floyd Dell. Try to focus your biographical report on where the writer lived before coming to Chicago, and how moving to a major metropolitan area affected her or his writing.

In the twentieth century, America had gone from being a principally rural country to being overwhelmingly urban and suburban. Explore the social elements that changed society during Anderson's time, when towns like Winesburg were already becoming old fashioned.

One of the few things that is learned about George Willard's father, Tom Willard, is that he is a staunch Democrat. In "The Thinker," Tom Willard argues with a travelling salesman about the relationship between President William McKinley and Mark Hanna, the U.S. Senator from Ohio. Explore the situation that is referred to in this story and report on what it tells readers about the two men holding the argument.

Compare and Contrast

1919: Soldiers coming back from World War I had experienced massive destruction in the age of airplanes and automation. Because American manufacturing facilities were not damaged the way those in Europe had been, the U S. economy prospered in the 1920s.

Today: After the military build-up of the 1980s created an economic crisis, running up unprecedented trade deficits, the American economy has stabilized and is enjoying prosperity without war.

1919: F. W. Woolworth died at age 67. The Woolworth chain of five-and-dime stores started in 1879 and had over 1000 stores in small American towns by the time it was incorporated in 1911, becoming the first franchise in many rural centers like Winesburg.

Today: The Woolworth chain closed its last stores in 1997, run out of business by huge discount stores, particularly the Wal-Mart chain, which has over 1700 stores built on the outskirts of American downtown areas.

1920: The 18th Amendment, prohibiting sale and consumption of alcohol, was passed by Congress, to go into effect on January 20, 1920.

1933: Prohibition was considered a failure because It did not greatly reduce alcohol consumption and it encouraged gang violence. The 21st Amendment, repealing Prohibition, became effective December 5, 1933.

Today: Many states are lowering the amount of alcohol that the law will tolerate in the blood of a person who has been operating a motor vehicle; at the same time, a growing percentage of the population, discouraged by the feeble results of strict drug policies, is calling for legalization of drugs.

1919: The 19th Amendment, allowing women' to vote in the United States, was adopted by Congress and was ratified by the states the following year.

1972: The Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have guaranteed that women would be treated equally with men, but It failed to be ratified by two-thirds of the states in the next ten years and therefore did not become law

Today: Social groups monitor discrimination against women and offer legal support to those who have been mistreated due to gender.

1921: The pogo stick was invented. Throughout the 1920s, children kept themselves amused bouncing on a spring-powered stick.

Today: The most sought-after games for children are those with computer graphics.

1921: The first nonstop transatlantic airplane flight went from Newfoundland to Ireland in 16 hours, 12 minutes.

Today: The Concorde can fly from New York to Paris in less than four hours.

What Do I Read Next?

Edgar Lee Masters' 1915 collection of free-verse poems, *Spoon River Anthology,* was one of the most direct influences on *Winesburg, Ohio.* Published the year that Anderson started the book, each poem tells the story of a different citizen of a fictional town, Spoon River.

When Anderson was writing this book, between 1915 and 1919, Chicago was experiencing a literary renaissance. Among the writers of Anderson's circle of friends in those days, Floyd Dell is considered one of the most innovative. His 1920 novel, *Moon Calf,* is like *Winesburg, Ohio* in that it draws heavily on the author's past in a farm community, applying urban sensibilities and a sense of pity that comes from sophistication.

Although *Winesburg, Ohio* is considered Anderson's finest, most haunting work, he wrote many other novels, poems and short stones. His 1925 novel *Dark Laughter* is the most highly regarded work of long fiction and was the most financially successful during his lifetime.

Ernest Hemingway considered Anderson to be a friend and mentor-it was Anderson who introduced Hemingway to Gertrude Stein and other European writers who were to become part of the Hemingway legend. Hemingway's 1925 collection of stories, *In Our Times,* shows the influence of *Winesburg, Ohio* in the way that the separate stories all refer back to one main character and theme.

Anderson wrote several autobiographies, but the one he had been working on for nine years before he died is considered the most important one. When It was first published, it was dramatically cut, but as Anderson's reputation as a literary figure grew, his original writing was added back in. The revised, restored version was published in 1943 as *Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs.*

Irving Howe, one of the most respected literary critics of our century, published *Sherwood Anderson: A Biographical and Critical Study* in 1951, adding a new introduction to the 1966 edition. His explanation of Anderson and his works is not the only one, but he does give a brief, intelligent, comprehensive explanation that Students can follow and understand.

Further Study

David D Anderson, "Moments of Insight" in *Sherwood Anderson. An Introduction and Interpretation,* Barnes and Noble, 1967, pp. 37-54.

Views *Winesburg, Ohio* as a "collection of short stories and sketches" and emphasizes Anderson's focus on problems of communication Describes Anderson's narrative mode as "character-plotting," in which changes in the character's state are more important than outward incident.

Maxwell Anderson, "A Country Town," in *Critical Essays on Sherwood Anderson,* edited by David D. Anderson, G K. Hall & Co , 1981, pp 32-4

This review of *Winesburg, Ohio,* originally published in *The New Republic* in June of 1919, shows that at least some of the reviewers of the book's time "got" the ideas that Sherwood Anderson was presenting.

Sherwood Anderson, *The Writer at His Craft,* edited by Jack Salzman, David D Anderson, and Kichinosuke Ohashi, Paul P. Appel Publisher, 1979.

A collection of Anderson's minor texts, including reviews, tributes to other writers, travel sketches, and notes on writing. A good source of background to Anderson's writing career.

Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations,* edited by Harry Zohn, Schocken, 1968, pp. 83-109.

A brilliant essay, focused on the 19th-century Russian Writer Nikolai Leskov. Benjamin establishes Important distinctions between novels and storytelling in their handling of time, their relation to readers, the nature of experience, and the place of death. He sees in Leskov the remnants of a storytelling culture about to disappear definitively with industrialization and the rise of information.

Peter Brooks, "The Storyteller,"' in *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling,* Blackwell, 1994, pp. 76-103.

Though not specifically about Anderson, Brooks provides ways of thinking about the meaning of storytelling in *Winesburg, Ohio.*

Irving Howe, "The Book of the Grotesque,"' in *Sherwood Anderson,* William Sloane Associates, 1951, pp. 91-109.

Interprets Anderson's use of the grotesque as ethically motivated. The grotesques are those who have sought the truth and been misled; grotesqueness is not merely deformity, but also the trace of deeper feeling that has been damaged or estranged

Clarence Lindsay, "The Community in *Winesburg, Ohio.* The Rhetoric of Selfhood,'" in *Midamerica,* No. 15, 1988, pp. 39-47.

Challenges "romantic" readings of Anderson's characters that pit the good individual against the bad, narrow-minded community Anderson uses subtle Irony to unsettle this opposition, showing how characters use It rhetorically to justify Isolating themselves and defining themselves as different.

William L. Phillips, "How Sherwood Anderson Wrote *Winesburg, Ohio,"* in *Winesburg, Ohio: Text and Criticism,* edited by John H Ferres, Penguin, 1996, pp. 267-90.

An Important study, based on manuscripts discovered in the 1940s, of the genesis of *Winesburg, Ohio.* The manuscripts reveal that Anderson had a large-scale work in mind in composing the individual chapters and that the book versions of the chapters published separately in magazines were often closer to the original drafts.

David Stouck, "Anderson's Expressionist Art," in *New Essays on Winesburg, Ohio,* edited by John W Crowley, Cambridge Umver81ty Press, 1990, pp. 27-51.

Discusses Anderson's connections with modernist painting and writing.

Wellford Dunaway Taylor, "Anderson and the Problem of Belonging,'" in *Sherwood Anderson. Dimensions of His Literary Art,* edited by David D Anderson, Michigan State University Press, 1976, pp. 63-75.

Examines Anderson's status as an "outsider" in the world of literature, speculating on how that may have helped form the prevailing mood of *Winesburg, Ohio.*

Ray Lewis White, *Winesburg, Ohio. An Exploration,* Twayne Publishers, Inc, 1990. .

White is one of the foremost scholars on Anderson's works, having edited all three volumes of the author's autobiography and written numerous books and articles about him This one explores three themes: "The Youth,'" "The Grotesques,'" and "The Town and the Time."

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H. W. Boynton, "All Over The Lot," in *The Bookman,* Volume XLIX, No.6, August, 1919, pp. 728-34.

Carl Bredahl, "'The Young Thing Within' Divided Narrative and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio,"* in *The Midwest Quarterly,* Vol XXVII, No 4, summer, 1986, pp. 422-37

Malcolm Cowley, "An Introduction to *Winesburg, Ohio,"* The Viking Press, 1960, pp. 1-15.

Waldo Frank, *"Winesburg, Ohio* After Twenty Years," in *Story,* Vol XIX, No 91, September-October, 1941, pp. 2933.

James M Mellard, "Narrative Forms in *Winesburg, Ohio,"* in *PMLS,* Vol. 83, No 5, October, 1968, pp 1304-312 "A Gutter Would Be Spoon River," in *New York Sun,* June 1, 1919, p. 3.

Tony Tanner, "Sherwood Anderson's Little Things," in *The Reign of Wonder' Naiveté and Reality* in *American Literature,* Cambridge Umver81ty Press, 1965, pp. 205-27. Rebecca West, *"Winesburg, Ohio,"* in *New Statesman,* Vol. XIX, No. 484, July 22, 1922, pp. 443-44.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) 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, NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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 NfS 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

NfS 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 Novels 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 NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS 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 Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels 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 NfS 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.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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 NfS, 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 Novels 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:

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