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George Willard's Progress toward Maturity in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio

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George Willard's Progress toward Maturity

in Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio

(TITLE)

BY

Patrice Grassinger Spencer

THESIS

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Sherwood Anderson said of Winesburg, Ohio in his Memoirs, "The stories belonged together. I felt that, taken together, they made something like a novel, a complete story. . . the feeling of the life of a boy growing into young manhood in a town."¹ This statement clearly tells the major theme of the novel; that is, the story is concerned with the growth of a boy into a man. A few critics in the past have argued that this is not the subject that Winesburg treats primarily. For instance, Sister M. Joselyn in an essay discounts this completely and says, "Those. . . who want to read Winesburg as an initiation novel about George Willard have to face the problem of resting their case upon a character who in the end remains the thinnest figment."² Instead, she deals with it as a lyric story saying, "Perhaps the sanest way is to view Winesburg, an uneven collection, as a special kind of amalgam of naturalism and lyricism."³ Critic Irving Howe lists some other subjects that have at times been discussed as possible themes of Winesburg. He says, "The book has been banished to such categories as the revolt against the village, the rejection of middle-class morality, the proclamation of sexual freedom, and the rise of cultural primitivism."⁴ Howe says later that he believes, "Like most fiction, Winesburg is a variation on the theme of reality and appearance. . ."⁵ Howe's work then deals primarily with the question of the grotesques and their plight. While critic Lionel Trilling

does not deny that Anderson deals with the adolescence of George Willard, he does believe the story is unrealistic. He says, "Most of us will feel now that this world of Anderson's is a pretty inadequate representation of reality. . . ."6

Trilling sees a difference in life as most people live and in life as Anderson portrays it. He says, "In Anderson's world there are many emotions, or rather many instances of a few emotions, but there are very few sights, sounds, and smells, very little of the stuff of actuality."7

These subjects, while undoubtedly important, are not, I believe, the foremost idea with which the book deals. A good author, Anderson being no exception, may include numerous themes in any one work. While I do not deny that other lesser themes are present in Winesburg, I choose to concentrate on that one concerned with the maturity of George Willard. George seems to serve as a unifying factor in tying all the various themes together. His involvement with most of the characters helps to show the relationship of the themes to one another. As George becomes aware of each person's problems, he, in a sense, experiences them himself. In that way, he is familiar with all the themes--those of sexual frustration, inability to communicate, religious eccentricity, and frustration with small town life in general.

The book unquestionably deals with more than the simple story of a boy becoming a man. In this case, the boy is becoming a special type of man: that is, an artist, a writer. In almost every case where George is shown making progress towards maturity, Anderson also shows that he is developing as a more sensitive, conscious person, one destined to be a writer.

This paper will deal with four main topics related to George Willard's development. The first will deal with George's interaction with the people of Winesburg, the grotesques. It will trace his increasing ability to observe more than surface details and to perceive life more fully. Second, I will show how George's increasingly important dealings with women parallel his own growth. The third topic concerns his parents' effect on him. Although they are only minimally influential, it is interesting to note how alike George's parents and Anderson's own parents are. Finally, I will discuss the importance of dreams to George. As he becomes more mature, dreams become a more vital part of his life.

The novel provides a variety of characters who influence to some degree the growth of George Willard. The opening story is of Wing Biddlebaum and his amazing, expressive hands; the closing scene is of George leaving Winesburg to

make a life of his own, a life as a writer. What happens between these two points? How does George change from a bewildered boy who has little understanding of life into a sensitive young man whose goal is to be a writer? By tracing the experiences George Willard has and examining the people who influence him one can see the transformation take place.

In the first story, "Hands," George is identified immediately as "the reporter on the Winesburg Eagle." The fact that his occupation is that of a reporter is important. Obviously, by placing him in that role, Anderson created a character who can feasibly have many of the townspeople talk with him. He was always readily available for conversation in the newspaper's office. However, Anderson could have placed him in many other roles that would have equally given people a reason to talk with him.

That George Willard is a reporter enables Anderson to show in very concrete ways the growth the young man achieves. The ultimate goal for which George is striving is "to see beneath the surface of lives." What George needs, according to critic Walter B. Rideout, is "to perceive the intricate mesh of impulses, desires, drives growing down in the dark, unrevealed parts of the personality like the complex mass of roots that, below the surface of the ground, feeds the

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common grass above in the light."⁸ In the beginning it is quite clear that he does not even realize that this is his goal. The book is half over before George himself reveals that he plans to become a writer.⁹ Winesburg contains twenty-one stories and George states his plans in the tenth story, "The Thinker." Other characters have hinted that these are his plans, but he has not made any statement about it prior to this story. In the first story, "Hands," for example, Wing Biddlebaum advises George to dream his own dreams. The importance of dreams to a writer is only implied at this point, however. Doctor Parcival in "The Philosopher" asks George to write the book he may never write, even though George has not yet informed anyone of his intentions to be a writer.

It takes, perhaps, half the novel before George feels any realistic commitment towards his future. Up to this point he is primarily an observer who merely records the actions and takes little part in them. He is totally concerned with external details, the "little facts." His behavior is described in this way:

Like an excited dog, George Willard ran here and there, noting on his pad of paper who had gone on business to the county seat or had returned from a visit to a neighboring village. All day he wrote little facts upon the pad. "A.P. Wringle had received a shipment of straw hats. Ed Byerbaum and Tom Marshall were in Cleveland Friday. Uncle Tom Sinnings is building a new barn on his place on the Valley Road."¹⁰

George does not overnight make a decision to stop dealing only with external superficialities. Slowly, he learns to consider both the surface and what is hidden below it.

He "continues to run about writing down surface facts for the newspaper, but his essential life consists in his efforts, some successful, some not, to understand the essential lives of others."¹¹ Anderson was well aware of the difficulty of becoming an artist. He says, "It is a slow painful process, this training the senses toward the more subtle things of life, toward something of getting, or at least beginning to get some sense of the real beauty of life in its physical aspects" (Memoirs, p. 181). ✓

As the story develops, George is shown more and more often as attempting to understand people. This in itself sets him apart from most of the people of the town. They are content to view only superficialities and are not interested in perceiving any depth. They see each other, and many see even themselves, only as very shallow persons. It is part of George's artistic nature to want to understand something deeper.

A good example of the differing levels of perception between the townspeople and George is the story of "Hands." The citizens view Wing Biddlebaum only on the surface. For them, "the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked

as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day" (Winesburg, p. 29). To the people of Winesburg, he was simply a very good berry-picker. They had no idea of how expressive those hands could be. Only George senses that there must be some explanation for those strange hands and, "At times an almost overwhelming curiosity had taken hold of him. He felt that there must be a reason for their strange activity and their inclination to keep hidden away. . ." (Winesburg, p. 29). Wing senses that there is something different about George, possibly before George senses it himself. Wing warns him not "to be too much influenced by the people about him." Anderson implies George might not mature into a writer if he does not heed Biddlebaum's advice to listen to an inner voice, not to let people destroy it. "You must try to forget all you have learned," said the old man. "You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices" (Winesburg, p. 30). The experience is not one that George is ready for; it leaves him "perplexed and frightened." He has had a glimpse at what lies hidden in Wing but is too immature to want to understand him. He says, "There's something wrong, but I don't want to know what it is" (Winesburg, p. 31).

As the book progresses, several other characters also

attempt to help George understand what it means to be a writer. In some cases he has the same difficulty as he had in his encounter with Wing Biddlebaum. He receives good advice but is unable to appreciate it because he is too immature to understand it. The fact that he does not really understand what a writer does is most clearly shown in "The Thinker." First of all, George enjoys the position he finds himself in as a result of his decision to become a writer. "The idea that George Willard would someday become a writer had given him a place of distinction in Winesburg" (Winesburg, p. 134), and he is very pleased by it. He tells Seth Richmond why he wants to become a writer:

"It's the easiest of all lives to live," he declared, becoming excited and boastful. "Here and there you go and there is no one to boss you. Though you are in India or in the South Seas in a boat, you have but to write and there you are. Wait till I get my name up and see what fun I shall have." (Winesburg, p. 134)

It is clear at this point that, although George has made his declaration that he intends to become a writer, he still does not understand the kind of life he must lead, a life where he must look deep into events and people, not simply have a good time sailing around the world. He is still seeing the surface of life. Looking at a writer, he sees only someone who has freedom, the chance to

travel and live a life that is "fun." He has not considered the inner workings of a writer's mind.

George's immaturity is further shown when he explains to Seth he has been "trying to write a love story." He realizes that he lacks the knowledge that comes from first hand experience. The solution is simple he feels; he says, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to fall in love. I've been sitting here and thinking it over and I'm going to do it."" (Winesburg, p. 135). George wants Seth to go find out if Helen White would be interested and, understandably, Seth resents the whole idea. The incident emphasizes the idea that George is still concentrating solely on externals. He does not consider the deep feelings that are associated with love. He naively expects to fall in love just for the purpose of writing a story. Obviously, George still has a great deal to learn about emotions. "The absurdity, Anderson suggests, is twofold: falling in love is not something one rationally plans to do, and one does not write thus directly and literally out of experience anyway."¹²

The incident of "The Teacher" shows George has made only a little more progress towards maturity. Kate Swift realizes George has the potential to become a great writer because, "In something he had written as a school boy she thought she had recognized the spark of genius and

wanted to blow on the spark" (Winesburg, pp. 162-163).

She knows that his concept of a writer's life is incorrect and she tries to explain some "of the difficulties he would have to face as a writer." Her advice is:

"You will have to know life," she declared. . .
 "If you are to become a writer you'll have to stop fooling with words," she explained. "It would be better to give up the notion of writing until you are better prepared. Now it's time to be living. I don't want to frighten you, but I would like to make you understand the import of what you think of attempting. You must not become a mere peddler of words. The thing to learn is to know what people are thinking about, not what they say."
 (Winesburg, p. 163)

George does not realize what valuable advice Kate Swift has given him. At one point he even mistakenly thinks she wants a sexual adventure. He misinterprets her physical reaching out as an invitation to him and is bewildered when she runs away. The fact that he is confused by her actions, but that he tries to make some kind of sense out of them, shows that while he is not completely mature, he is making progress in that direction. That night he continues his attempts to understand:

The resentment, natural to the baffled male, passed and he tried to understand what had happened. He could not make it out. Over and over he turned the matter in his mind. "I have missed something. I have missed something Kate Swift was trying to tell me."
 (Winesburg, p. 166)

He is still not able to perceive what has taken place but, at least, he recognizes he has "missed something." By

the end of the novel, he is able to understand what Kate Swift tried to tell him.

The relationship between George Willard and the grotesques is one which is important in his progress towards maturity. Depending on which critic one reads, the grotesques are said to view George as someone who can help them, or as someone they can help.¹³ Both opinions can be justified, and it seems best to say that both are correct. It would appear that there is a sort of balance established between George and the townspeople. Edwin Fussell explains it in this way:

. . .there are few works of modern fiction in which the artist's relations with ordinary men are seen with such a happy blend of acuity and charity, few works of any age in which the artist and ordinary men are seen so well as fitting together in a complementary union that permits us to make distinctions of relative value while at the same time retaining a universally diffused sense of equal dignity.¹⁴

One might be tempted to say that the grotesques are not "ordinary men" but Anderson certainly believed that they were typical representatives of the world of the small town.

Consider first what the grotesques feel they have to offer George. Two such characters, wing Biddlebaum and Kate Swift, have already been discussed. Both felt compelled to give George advice concerning his desire to become a writer. Other characters, likewise, offer him advice on how to write. Most of their information is worthless,

but nevertheless, he listens and tries to understand what they tell him. Doctor Parcival in "The Philosopher" explains his theory that all men are eventually persecuted.

"You must pay attention to me," he urged.
 "If something happens perhaps you will be able to write the book that I may never get written. The idea is very simple, so simple that if you are not careful you will forget it. It is this--that everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified."
 (Winesburg, pp. 56-57)

Joe Welling, the "Man of Ideas," feels he himself should have been a reporter but says, "I make more money with the Standard Oil Company" (Winesburg, p. 106). He believes he is a great thinker who is continually discovering new and revolutionary ideas. Naturally, he feels George should report these ideas in the newspaper. Most of the time, however, George is understandably bewildered by Joe and his thoughts.

Wash Williams is another person who feels an obligation to impart what he feels is a great truth to George. In "Respectability" the telegraph operator warns him to beware women and avoid their evil traps. Wash believes firmly all women are the same because of his unfortunate experience with one. He says:

"I tell you, all women are dead, my mother, your mother, that tall dark woman who works in the millinery store and with whom I saw you walking about yesterday--all of them, they are all dead . . . They are sent to prevent men making the world worth while. It is a trick

in Nature. Ugh! They are creeping, crawling, squirming things, they with their soft hands and their blue eyes." (Winesburg, p. 124)

Enoch Robinson is an old, lonely man who feels a closeness to George because both of them have a sense of art within themselves. Anderson uses Enoch to show what could happen to George if he does not continue to mature. Enoch's problem is "He never grew up and of course he couldn't understand people and he couldn't make people understand him. The child in him kept bumping against things, against actualities like money and sex and opinions" (Winesburg, pp. 167-168). Enoch is another example of a man unable to communicate with other people. He is representative in a way of an entire town filled with people unable to express themselves. There is a chance that if George can understand what happened to Enoch he will be able to prevent it from happening to himself. He must keep striving for that goal of maturity, striving to understand himself and others.

It is apparent that what the grotesques offer George if not always understood by him. In fact, as Fussell says, "It is only a superficial irony that so few of the gifts (like the mother's \$800) can possibly have for the young writer the same values that have been assigned to them by the givers. Their understanding is inevitably not the same as his, which is one of the general truths

Winesburg readily enforces; but another is that without their gifts there would be no writer at all."¹⁵ In other words, the grotesques give something to George but not necessarily what they think they are giving. David Anderson explains:

As the grotesques reveal themselves to George, they do not arouse in him the conventional understanding that they seek, but without realizing it, each of them is contributing to the growth of a more important kind of understanding in him. . . his contacts with the grotesques are drawing him closer to eventual understanding through teaching him the compassion and the empathy that will permit him in time to know and understand others.

As earlier stated, the grotesques do more than merely offer advice. Many come to George hoping to gain something for themselves. What they want varies, and quite often George is unable to provide what is needed. In the beginning of the novel, he is incapable of understanding other people and is able to give very little to them. His progress towards maturity is shown in his increasingly close, personal relationships with people. As he grows, he is better able to understand what people need, even though in many cases he is still not able to help them. At least, he is able to listen with more sympathy. What the grotesques want most often according to Malcolm Cowley is that "George Willard will some day speak what is in their hearts and thus re-establish their connection with mankind. George is too

young to understand them at the time, but the book ends with what seems to be the promise that, after leaving Winesburg, he will become the voice of inarticulate men and women in all the forgotten towns."¹⁷ These people seem drawn to George with the hope that he will be able to accomplish what they have failed to do, to communicate. Dr. Parcival, for example, very bluntly tells George to "write that book I may never get written" (Winesburg, p. 56).

It is unrealistic to portray the grotesques as simply coming to George to keep him from making the same mistakes that they have. He serves numerous functions and, in effect, plays many roles for them. This is perhaps best stated by David Anderson in this way:

To each of the grotesques he appears to be what that individual wants him to be. To his mother he is an extension of herself through which her dreams may be fulfilled; to Wing Biddlebaum he is the symbol of the innocent love that had been denied him; to others he becomes in turn, a symbol of a long-lost son, of father-confessor, of masculine strength and fertility, of innocent, undemanding human understanding.

One example of a grotesque seeking something from George is that of Elmer Cowley. What he wants is someone who will do more than listen to his troubles; Elmer wants to be able to prove himself to someone. He has been unable to talk with the people of Winesburg. It is true that very

few of the townspeople really communicate deep feelings to each other, but Elmer does not have even the ability to engage in the friendly, street corner chatter that goes on. When he meets with George he is unable to explain himself and instead, filled with frustration, he begins to strike out, hitting George. Somehow Elmer feels satisfied by these actions and while leaving Winesburg "Pride surged up in him." He says, "I guess I showed him. I ain't so queer. I guess I showed him I ain't so queer." (Winesburg, p. 201).

It is true that the incident with Elmer Cowley is a slightly unusual one. Most people go to George as they would go to a psychiatrist. He cannot solve their problems, but he can listen to them. So each of the grotesques "interprets George as he wishes, but to each he primarily serves the function of an ear into which can be poured the inner stirrings of fear, hope, love, and dreams of which each is made."¹⁹ By listening to these people, George is better able to understand them and life. Each time he hears someone's problems he is exposed to another aspect of life and may, in fact, progress a little himself.

It is the fact that George has the ability to progress that sets him apart from everyone else (with the possible exception of Helen White). They have already grasped hold of their particular "truth" and can go no further. "It

is indeed the very description of their grotesqueness that each of them is forever frozen somewhere below the level of a full and proper development."²⁰ The growth George achieves is made more obvious because no one else can develop. He is a character who shows development; the other figures remain flat, without any depth.²¹ The grotesques would cease to be grotesques if they could advance. Instead, according to Howe, "The grotesques rot because they are unused, their energies deprived of outlet, and their instincts curdled in isolation."²²

A great portion of the book describes the long time it takes for George to reach a point of maturity. The change is difficult as it is for any adolescent. Critic Charles Child Walcutt says, "The pains of growth are probably inevitable, but the whole world is not as confining as Winesburg, and Anderson seems to say that people should be able to grow up less painfully to more abundant lives."²³ His mother's death is a very important element in George's growth. At the time he does not realize it, however. "Elizabeth died one day in March in the year when her son George became eighteen, and the young man had but little sense of the meaning of her death. Only time could give him that" (Winesburg, p. 229). He thinks about what has happened and yet does not feel any great sense of loss but has only "a queer empty feeling in the region of his

stomach." George knows his mother's death should affect him but "The notion of death could not get hold of him and he was in fact a little annoyed that his mother had died on that day" (Winesburg, p. 229).

The story "Sophistication" contains what is actually the climax of the whole book. That it follows "Death" reinforces the importance of the impact of Elizabeth Willard's death on George.²⁴ The story takes place in the evening but is not filled with the dark, depressive atmosphere that many others contain. Fussell explains it is "nocturnal, but not that nightmare climate common to so many of the Winesburg stories, and pleasantly informal as the evening stroll that provides its slight framework."²⁵ Anderson makes it very clear that a turning point has come in George Willard's life. "George Willard, the Ohio village boy, was fast growing into manhood and new thought had been coming into his mind. . . The mood that had taken possession of him was a thing known to men and unknown to boys. He felt old and a little tired. Memories awoke in him. To his mind his new sense of maturity set him apart, made of him a half-tragic figure" (Winesburg, pp. 233-234). Anderson even defines the exact moment a boy becomes a man and says, "There is a time in the life of every boy when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. Perhaps that is the moment when he crosses the line into

manhood" (Winesburg, p. 234). George is somewhat frightened by what he is discovering about life and not sure he wants to cross that line. His view of life as a boy was a very simple one, and now suddenly, it seems, everything has become very complicated. "From being quite sure of himself and his future he becomes not at all sure. . .The sadness of sophistication has come to the boy. With a little gasp he sees himself as merely a leaf blown by the wind through the streets of his village. . .Already he hears death calling" (Winesburg, pp. 234-235). A conflict is felt; on one hand, he wishes to be a man and on the other, he wants to remain a child. Critic Epifano San Juan says, "Anderson believes that in youth there are always two forces in conflict: the warm, unthinking little animal, and the thing that reflects and remembers, that is, the sophisticated mind."²⁶

Feeling the need to share his thoughts, George reaches out to Helen white. She, too, has been moving towards a kind of maturity and can, therefore, understand what feelings George is having. Together they experience feelings of "loneliness and isolation." George has to learn to accept loneliness as a part of life. Russell says:

The loneliness is assuaged--there is no other way--by the realization that loneliness is a universal condition and a uniquely personal catastrophe; love is essentially the shared acceptance by two people of the irremediable fact, in the nature of things, of their final separateness.²⁷

These are indeed difficult truths to recognize, but Anderson says "One shudders at the thought of the meaninglessness of life while at the same instant, and if the people of the town are his people, one loves life so intensely that tears come into the eyes" (Winesburg, pp. 240-241).

After George and Helen have shared their discovery of maturity, they feel again the "animal struggles," and "They were both embarrassed and to relieve their embarrassment dropped into the animalism of youth. They laughed and began to pull and haul at each other. In some way chastened and purified by the mood they had been in, they became, not man and woman, not boy and girl, but excited little animals" (Winesburg, p. 242). So while they know what it means to be mature, they still experience a conflict. They know and understand life and yet it is much simpler to remain a child.

Something very dramatic has happened to George; he has taken that "backward look at life" and thus approaches maturity. This is the point the book has been moving towards. Therefore, the last story, "Departure," is anti-climactic; there is nothing remaining except for George to leave.²⁸ The usual bits of last minute advice are given him and he is on his way. Although some of the townspeople are at the train station to see him go, it is not a dramatic event. On board the train the conductor does not see anything

unique about George because "Tom had seen a thousand George Willards go out of their towns to the city. It was a commonplace enough incident with him" (Winesburg, p. 246).

Even George himself is not filled with exciting thoughts, but instead, "The young man, going out of his town to meet the adventure of life, began to think but he did not think of anything very big or dramatic. . .He thought of little things" (Winesburg, pp. 246-247).

Thus far, the progress of George Willard has been traced from boy to man. Three important aspects relating to his development remain to be discussed; they are George's dealings with women and how they relate to maturity, his parents' effect on him, and the importance of dreams to an artist.

George's progress towards maturity can be seen in his increasingly important relationships with women.²⁹ Four women are especially relevant in tracing his development. The first, Louise Trunnion, means very little to George. The story "Nobody Knows" briefly discusses how George's first sexual adventure happens. It is a simple experience and George attaches no great importance to it. His feeling is one of satisfaction with a suggestion of a little guilt. He decides, though, "nobody knows" and then "went on his way." George's immaturity is shown in his total disregard for Louise and her feelings. His concern is only for himself.

The phrase "nobody knows" also continues the idea of the lack of communication between characters in the novel. George and Louise exchange nothing meaningful. After their experience George is left alone and has no one to talk with about his feelings. Thus when George says "nobody knows" he is relieved but at the same time wishes he did have someone to talk to.

George's next experience involves Belle Carpenter; it is slightly more complex. Still at this point he is concerned only with his own needs and feelings; he pays very little attention to Belle's. He goes to her house because "The desire to say words overcame him and he said words without meaning, rolling them over on his tongue and saying them because they were brave words, full of meaning" (Winesburg, p. 185). He feels a need to share these words with someone; actually any woman would serve his purpose. He feels no particular affection for her. Belle obviously does not understand George and he becomes annoyed with her because she does not seem really to listen to all his fine wonderful words. The incident ends as Ed Hanaby grabs Belle and marches her home leaving George sprawling in the bushes. This experience makes him feel humiliated; he is far from satisfied.³⁰ He is disappointed with both himself and Belle. He has taken a step forward, though, simply by being intelligent enough to be disillusioned.

Kate Swift's role as a teacher has already been discussed. She has seen his potential for becoming a great writer and tells him of the principles a writer must have and follow. Although George is bewildered by some of what she says, he does later see how important her observations concerning a writer's life are.

In "Sophistication" comes his most satisfying involvement with a woman, Helen White. It is with her that he is aware of a great insight: that is, the oneness of all people. It is his deepest, most involved encounter. Even though they do little talking, they are able to share a great deal. Both understand how the other feels; it is this understanding that shows George is actually becoming a man.

Parents are usually thought of as a major influence on their children's lives, and yet, George's parents are not shown as playing very vital roles. This is especially true of his father. It is helpful to know how Anderson felt about his own parents because George is placed in a very similar position. Anderson says his father was "always showing off" (Memoirs, p. 30), but he did have some admiration for the man. He was displeased with his father's behavior towards his mother though. Anderson felt she was made to suffer needlessly. Critic Fredrick S. Hoffman says, "For his mother Anderson felt great sympathy and love. His desire to romanticize her, to show her a heroine who

struggled boldly and patiently with poverty and loved silently but sincerely, results in several idealized portraits in his early works."³¹

The similarities between Anderson's parents and those of George are apparent. George's father, Tom, enjoyed village politics and went through town looking "spruce and business like." He wished to be free of his wife and resented her working so hard in his unprofitable and failing hotel. "He thought of the old house and the woman who lived there with him as things defeated and done for" (Winesburg, p. 39). Tom Willard is described as "ambitious for his son," (Winesburg, p. 44) but there is very little deep feeling or conversation between the two of them. There is no suggestion of any closeness.

Elizabeth Willard, too, resembles Anderson's image of his own mother. She is a very frustrated woman who lives only because she thinks her son may be able to accomplish what she has not had the chance to do. She wants to be close to George but their relationship is very strained. "In the evening when the son sat in the room with his mother, the silence made them both feel awkward" (Winesburg, p. 42). Their inability to communicate is obvious when George does not realize that his mother is thrilled when he decides to leave Winesburg. For years, she has hoped he will be able to escape from the small town but when she hears that

he wants to leave, she hides her feelings from him. For that reason George thinks she does not want him to leave and does not understand her feelings. Elizabeth is full of dreams and even though George may not see them, they do influence him and he, too, develops as a dreamer.

"The young man's mind was carried away by his growing passion for dreams. . . Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood" (Winesburg, p. 247). Anderson believed strongly in the importance of dreams or imagination and this belief is woven into Winesburg. George's increasing recognition of the value of dreams parallels his approaching maturity. In the opening story "Hands" Wing gives him the advice, "You must begin to dream." George cannot yet understand how important this advice is for an artist. Elizabeth Willard, too, is shown as a dreamer. George has some difficulty accepting dreams as anything vital to him. He early views the writing profession as an easy job, one that is "fun." He mentions nothing about the need for dreams.

By the time he leaves Winesburg, he does, however, perceive that dreams are vital to him. In fact Winesburg and all its realities have become only a "background" for future writing. Anderson says something very similar to this in A Story-teller's Story.³² In it he says reading

is important because it provides ". . .a background upon which I can construct new dreams."³³

Anderson believed that the "dream is an artist's birth-right" (Memoirs, p. 9). He said further, "I believe in the imagination, its importance. . .Besides, men do not exist in facts. They exist in dreams" (Memoirs, p. 9). This is one of the facts that George realizes as he reaches maturity. Perhaps, belief in dreams is the only way an artist can survive. Hoffman says, "They are the means by which Anderson flees reality; most often, they are simply wish-fulfillments, with the artist playing a heroic role and gaining in fancy what he has failed to get in actual life."³⁴ George has been confronted by the grotesques and their particular realities. To escape becoming one of them, he must dream. One of the greatest problems is their inability to communicate, and dreams permit George a means to express himself. Anderson, too, could only cope with life through dreams. "Dreams are for Anderson the most coherent expression of his other world."³⁵ This is because for him "Dream fragments are the facts of the world of fancy."³⁶

A final sign that George has matured is the isolation he feels. It is ironic that he, the only one who is capable of communicating, expressing himself through dreams, is set apart from everyone. In "Sophistication: George felt

a sense of the oneness of all people; he became aware that what all men share is a sense of loneliness. For the artist there is probably even greater isolation. Anderson certainly felt this to be true. His own life was spent in isolation, apart from most of society, and quite naturally this life-style is reflected in his works.³⁷

There is no question that numerous other events take place in Winesburg, but it is primarily the story of George Willard growing up. Fussell says:

. . .throughout Winesburg runs the slow and often hidden current of George Willard's growth toward maturity; often the stream is subterranean and we are surprised to see where it comes out; sometimes it appears to lose itself in backwaters of irrelevance or naivete. But all the time the book's current is steadily setting toward the ultimate "Departure."³⁸

Anderson shows that maturing is a slow painful process especially for the young artist. Maturity, understanding, and awareness do not come smoothly but ultimately they do arrive.

ENDNOTES

1 Sherwood Anderson, Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), p. 289. All subsequent references to this work will be made in the text of the paper itself. They will be indicated in this way, (Memoirs, p. 289).

2 Sister M. Joselyn, O.S.B., "Sherwood Anderson and the Lyric Story," The Twenties/Poetry and Prose, (1966), in the Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 444.

3 Ibid., p. 445.

4 Irving Howe, "The Pook of the Grotesque," from Sherwood Anderson (1957), in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 410.

5 Ibid., p. 411.

6 Lionel Trilling, "Sherwood Anderson," from The Liberal Imagination (1947), in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 458.

7 Ibid., pp. 461-462.

8 Walter B. Rideout, "The Simplicity of Winesburg, Ohio," Shenandoah, 13 (Spring 1962) in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres

(New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 291.

9 Rideout, p. 295.

10 Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 134. All subsequent references to this primary source will be made in the text of the paper itself. They will be indicated in this way, (Winesburg, p. 134).

11 Rideout, p. 295.

12 Ibid., p. 296.

13 Irving Howe in Sherwood Anderson (1957) describes how much the grotesques need George. Edwin Fussell, on the other hand, believes that instead of giving something to the grotesques, George takes from them (Modern Fiction Studies, Summer 1960).

14 Edwin Fussell, "Winesburg, Ohio: Art and Isolation," from Modern Fiction Studies, 6 (Summer 1960) in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 387.

15 Ibid., p. 387.

16 David Anderson, "The Grotesques and George Willard," from "Sherwood Anderson's Moments of Insight," in Critical Studies in American Literature: A Collection of Essays (1964) in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 430.

17 Malcolm Cowley, "Introduction to Winesburg, Ohio," Winesburg (1060) in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 367.

18 Anderson, p. 428.

19 Ibid., p. 428.

20 Fussell, p. 389.

21 Howe, p. 411.

22 Ibid., p. 413.

23 Charles Child Walcutt, "Naturalism in Winesburg, Ohio," in American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream (1956) in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 440.

24 Fussell, p. 392.

25 Ibid., p. 393.

26 Epifano San Juan, Jr., "Vision and Reality: A Reconsideration of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio," American Literature, 35 (May 1963) in The Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 480.

27 Fussell, p. 394.

28 Ibid., p. 392.

29 Rideout, p. 297.

30 Rideout, p. 298.

31 Frederick J. Hoffman, "Anderson and Freud," Freudianism and the Literary Mind (1957) in the Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 312.

32 Ibid., p. 311

33 Ibid., p. 312.

34 Ibid., p. 312.

35 Ibid., p. 312.

36 Ibid., p. 312.

37 Herbert Gold, "Winesburg, Ohio: The Purity and Cunning of Sherwood Anderson," The Age of Happy Problems (1962) in the Viking Critical Library Sherwood Anderson Winesburg, Ohio, ed. John H. Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1973) p. 399.

38 Russell, p. 389.

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