

The Disappearing Village: Anderson, Glaspell, and the  
Modern American Landscape

by

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## Chapter One

### *Urban/Rural Dynamics in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century America*

In “Departure,” the final story of Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), the book’s central figure, George Willard, leaves his small hometown behind in the hopes of pursuing his dreams in the city:

The young man’s mind was carried away by his growing passion for dreams. One looking at him would not have thought him particularly sharp. With the recollection of little things occupying his mind he closed his eyes and leaned back in the car seat. He stayed that way for a long time and when he aroused himself and again looked out of the car window the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood (203-204).

With this passage Anderson places his book in a long line of stories about young men who set out from the province for a grand career in the city. In Anderson’s case, however, this concluding vision comes as something of a surprise. Through almost the entirety of Anderson’s story cycle our attention is kept focused on the narrow lives of the inhabitants of what seems at first glance to be an isolated rural town. Those characters who are described by Anderson as “grotesques” appear to be trapped and distorted by their lives in the American hinterland. Other characters may dream of leaving their rural homes to pursue a life elsewhere. But in the fictional town of Winesburg, George Willard is the only character who is able to successfully depart Winesburg to pursue a life in the city. The rest of the characters remain in

Winesburg, where their dreams become obscured and their lives unfulfilled and isolating.

Yet, George Willard's departure for the city also reminds us that in many respects the lives of the people of Winesburg are not as isolated as they may seem at first and that everything that happens in Anderson's small town is framed by its close interaction with the metropolis. As unique as George Willard is presented to be, his desire to relocate from the country to the city is not unusual. The conductor Tom Little "had seen a thousand George Willards go out of their towns to the city. It was a commonplace enough incident for him" (203). Here Anderson directly places his protagonist amid an important trend in American life of the 1910s and 1920s, when many children of rural communities left their families and their lives in small-towns in order to pursue more financially and intellectually fulfilling opportunities in the big city. This trend, as it was represented in literature, is conventionally known as "The Revolt from the Village."

This literary phenomenon was first identified during the 1920s when it seemed representative of new literary styles and cultural attitudes. In an article from a 1921 issue of the *Nation*, Carl Van Doren identified a shift in literary attitudes about the small town, which he first coined, "The Revolt from the Village." As Van Doren explained, the new literature challenged the traditional image of the rural village as a "cosy . . . microcosm":

The village seemed too cosy a microcosm to be disturbed. There it lay in the mind's eye, neat, compact, organized, traditional: the white church with tapering spire, the sober schoolhouse, the smithy of the

ringing anvil, the corner grocery, the cluster of friendly houses; the venerable parson, the wise physician, the canny squire, the grasping landlord softened or outwitted in the end; the village belle, gossip, atheist, idiot; jovial fathers, gentle mothers, merry children; cool parlors, shining kitchens, spacious barns, lavish gardens, fragrant summer dawns, and comfortable winter evenings (147).

As Van Doren pointed out, the Industrial Revolution had already begun to undermine this cultural stereotype—“planting ugly factories alongside the prettiest brooks, bringing in droves of aliens who used unfamiliar tongues and customs, and fouling the atmosphere with smoke and gasoline” (147). In the new literature exemplified by the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters, Van Doren explained, the literary image of the village was subverted. These writers, then, addressed the effects of the Industrial Revolution and of mass transportation. As Van Doren claims in his analysis of Edgar Lee Masters’ *Spoon River Anthology*, “The closets were open and all the skeletons rattled undenied; brains and breasts had unlocked themselves and set their most private treasures out for the most public gaze” (149). As Anthony Channel Hilfer explains in his discussion of Van Doren’s influential formulation, the critic was one of the first to realize that a cohort of younger writers was

attacking one of the most cherished American beliefs: the belief that the American small town is a place characterized by sweet innocence, an environment in which the best in human nature could flower serenely, a rural paradise exempt from the vices, complexities, and irremediable tragedies of the city. These American writers were

presenting a quite different and more realistic interpretation of the town, emphasizing its moral repressiveness and stultifying conformity, and protesting its standardized dullness (3).

Van Doren's aptly coined phrase became a literary commonplace because it captured something important about the shifting cultural attitudes that were expressed in the work of young American writers in the 1910s and 1920s. Literary depictions of the frustration with the limits of the rural village were a widely shared trend at the time. In his novel, *Main Street* (1920), Sinclair Lewis's protagonist Carol Kennicott declares that the reason "more intelligent young people . . . flee to the cities with agility and, despite the fictional tradition, resolutely stay there" is because the small town contains

an unimaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment . . . the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is the prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-sought and self-defended. It is dullness made God (170).

Such complaints were widely echoed in the 1910s and 1920s. Ezra Pound wrote from Europe, for example, to encourage the "helpless few in my country" who were of "finer sense" to beat out of their exile in his poem "The Rest" (1913):

O helpless few in my country;  
O remnant enslaved!  
Artists broken against her,

A-stray, lost in the villages,  
Mistrusted, spoken-against,

Lovers of beauty, starved  
Thwarted with systems,  
Helpless against the control;

You who can not wear yourselves out  
By persisting to successes,  
You who can only speak,  
Who can not steel yourselves in reiteration;

You of finer sense,  
Broken against false knowledge,  
You who can know at first hand,  
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought;  
I have weathered the storm,  
I have beaten out my exile (93-94).

So common were such complaints that they have become part of the conventional image of the emergence of American modernist writing, which was understood at the time, and has often been since, to involve a stark culture war between the urban and rural. Yet, because the image of the Revolt from the Village is so powerful, it can oversimplify our understanding of the literature the phrase describes and the social history that the literature represented. Van Doren himself noted that Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* fit somewhat awkwardly into his category. As Van Doren explained, Anderson's earlier works *Windy McPherson's Son* and *Marching Men* told a version of a then common story in which "a superior youth"



flees “in disgust from his native village” (153-154). But, *Winesburg, Ohio* was different:

The young man who here sets out to make his fortune has not greatly hated Winesburg, and the imminence of his departure throws a vaguely golden mist over the village, which is seen in considerable measure through his generous, if inexperienced eyes. A newspaper reporter, he directs his principal curiosity towards items of life outside the commonplace and thus offers Mr. Anderson the occasion to explore the moral and spiritual hinterlands of men and women who outwardly walk paths strict enough.

If the life of the tribe is unadventurous, he seems to say, there is still the individual, who perhaps all the more because of the rigid decorums forced upon him, may adventure with secret desires through pathless space. Only, the pressure of too many inhibitions can distort human spirits into grotesque forms (Van Doren 155).

In later years, the eminent critic Frederick J. Hoffman elaborated on this view of *Winesburg* in his classic study on American modernism, *The Twenties*. The people of Winesburg, Hoffman notes, are “not pure victims of community dullness or suppression, the fault lies in themselves as often as in the community manner; it is the incapacity for feeling, for thinking, and for expressing themselves in public that Willard causes to be revealed” (334).

Ezra Pound, Edgar Lee Masters, Sinclair Lewis, and even Anderson himself had contributed to a vision of the village that emphasized the limits that rural

conventionality placed on freedom and innovation. However, in *Winesburg, Ohio*, Anderson created a somewhat more complex image, one in which George Willard is less at war with his community than he is linked to people who are like and unlike him and where the division between the “superior youth” and his “native village” is both highly significant and often vague or uncertain. In keeping with this perspective, moreover, Anderson’s book does not depict Winesburg as Masters did *Spoon River* or as Lewis described *Gopher Prairie*. Anderson’s small town is not an isolated hamlet far from the city, but, as the closing scene’s reference to the railroad suggests, a community that is directly linked to the metropolis.

In short, the conventional view of the *Revolt from the Village* does little to capture the intricacies of Anderson’s work or of the complexities of the social history it reflected. The conventional view underemphasizes the way Anderson and similar artists like Susan Glaspell restaged the image of the country at the same time that the country was being changed by industrialization and mass transportation. In this thesis, I will reinvestigate Anderson and Glaspell’s work, drawing attention to the subtleties in their depictions of rural life and to the way these features negotiate the transformation of American geography.

During the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, the shape of American geography was changed by industrialization and modernization. With the industrialization and urbanization of the east coast, the focal part of the country shifted from the agricultural communities of the Midwest to the cities. In 1880, 70% of all Americans lived in rural areas or in towns of fewer than 2,500 people and 42%

of the labor force was engaged in farming. In 1880, only 25% of the nation's population resided in urban places larger than 5,000. By 1900 this number had grown to nearly 40%. In the early twentieth century, the nation's rapid industrialization continued. Between 1900 and 1910, the nation's cities grew by 12 million people, 30% of whom came from agricultural areas in the United States (Jakle 3). The population of Pittsburgh alone went from 299,000 inhabitants in 1870 to 2,702,000 in 1920 (Warner 100).

There are generally thought to have been two eras of industrialization in the history of the United States: the first occurred from 1820 to 1880 and the second from 1880 to 1920. Sam Bass Warner Jr. describes the emergence of the second era of industrialization as beginning in 1863 in France when the Siemens-Martin open-hearth method of steelmaking was invented. In 1865, cheap Bessemer production began in Troy, New York. As steel became more readily available in New York, railroads, bridges, skyscrapers, and automobiles began to change the American landscape and altered the way cities were constructed. In addition, the development of electricity made it possible to light up entire buildings and changed the scale and nature of industrial manufacturing. With electricity, the source of power could be hundreds of miles away from the point of production, making it possible for manufacturers to carefully pick their sites, rather than having to rely on localized waterpower. The growth of petroleum drilling and technological improvements in refining during this era also contributed to the emergence of a new, highly efficient energy source that permitted the creation of vast industrial operations and huge networks of commerce and transportation.

With the second wave of industrialization and urbanization, the complex machine was no longer seen as a rare innovation, but increasingly became part of many people's every day life. New technological advances mechanized what had previously been done by sheer manpower. The mechanization of agriculture, mining, and lumbering cut down the amount of labor needed in those industries and freed workers to pursue other sorts of jobs centered in cities—in industrial production, but also in the fields of work that burgeoned alongside it: finance, business, marketing and entertainment. As the economic center of those rapidly growing industries, American metropolitan centers grew dramatically in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Warner 86).

The new industrial metropolis of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was not only bigger and more economically powerful than earlier cities, it also introduced new cultural styles and ways of life. In addition to serving as an embodiment of mechanization and modernization—the city as a vast machine—the new industrial metropolises became places of intense consumerism and entertainment. Theaters, dancehalls, vaudeville acts, and department stores grew along with the city and became places of spectacle and temptation. As Jessica Sewell writes, “The department store was designed to stimulate women's desires through visual displays as well as music, light displays, food and other aspects of festival” (245). A typical example, circa 1910, might include:

a parlor with papers, periodicals and writing materials; a children's nursery; an emergency hospital, with trained nurse in attendance; a Post Office station; a Western Union telegraph office; a theater-ticket

office; a manicuring and a hair-dressing parlor and a barber shop; public telephones; a lunch room; an information bureau; [and] always some free exhibition in the art rooms (qtd. in Sewell 245).

Just as department stores and theaters helped create new urban lifestyles, so too did the growing artistic centers of bohemia. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, artists and intellectuals, who had been drawn to the cities by the growing demand for entertainers, journalists, and information workers, began to follow the lead of their European predecessors and came to view artistic experiment and intellectual rebellion as a means to escape their conventional destinies. These American bohemians were almost all well-educated products of the traditional middle class, but they wished to pursue alternatives to Victorian propriety. They found in the cities' poorer immigrant neighborhoods the cheap housing and intellectual stimulation that enabled their experiments. Originally, the bohemian world was comprised of only men but gradually women started to gravitate towards the bohemian lifestyle as well, especially around the turn of the century. Christine Stansell classifies the type of people who were attracted to bohemia in this way: “gentlemen at odds with their class, females at odds with their roles, immigrants seeking conversation outside the ghetto” (14).

Enabled by the industrial metropolis, the new bohemians also began to change conventional attitudes towards the city. Traditionally, the city was understood to be a place of vice and corruption—“a place that shattered romantic illusions” (Stansell 16). Beginning in the 1890s, artists and intellectuals revised this view. Bohemians

believed that the city was an invigorating place of infinite opportunity where the young and bold might meet all types of different people, pursue creative ventures, and find intellectual nourishment. They rebelled against their middle class lives and hoped they could create a viable alternative to Victorian conventions. They were optimistic about the possibilities of the cities as well as about the literary and artistic work they produced. Viewing themselves as a select group of artists who were uniquely able to speak for the voiceless and the poor, they believed that literature would be able to transform society (Stansell 74). There was a strong determination to link art and politics in a way that could not only represent modern life, but also change it.

As part of this effort, bohemian artists and intellectuals began a resolute campaign against Victorian manners, engaging in behavior that their parents and contemporaries would find morally questionable. Drinking alcohol was “virtually a social duty” (Stansell 82). Men and women could mingle together while they drank, women would walk out on the street without a male escort, and sexual relationships outside of marriage were no longer seen as morally problematic. Sex was talked about freely between both genders and new views on marriage were generated. The value of marriage was rejected in lieu of a relationship based on honesty between equals: “Truth telling and equality, not a church ceremony, became the basis of morality, signs that distinguished honorable from immoral sexuality, whoever the parties and whatever the context” (Stansell 273). Though this type of sexual freedom did in some ways promote promiscuity, the idea behind this new view of relationships was a monogamous companionship between two partners. These unions should be based on sexual attraction as well as emotional compatibility (D’Emilio and Freedman 230). In

Sherwood Anderson's words there emerged among the new bohemian quarters of the cities, "a healthy new frankness in the talk between men and women, at least an admission that we were all at times torn and harried by the same lusts" (qtd. in D'Emilio and Freedman 229).

The new cultural styles of the metropolis intensified the way people viewed the city and its differences from the country. Traditionally, the city had been viewed as a place of freedom, but also of moral corruption exemplified by promiscuous sex, gambling, excessive drinking, and superfluous spending. The rural community was imagined in opposition to this corrupt city: the country offered a simple existence where family, religion, and community were the anchors of everyday life. Around the turn of the century, the traditional view of the city was intensified among rural communities, which became increasingly anxious that the city was a dangerous place that would capture their children and corrupt them. Yet, during the same years a new view was developing among American urbanites, who began to see the city as a place of modernization and freedom and the country as backward and simplistic. As Maria Farland explains, in the early decades of the twentieth century, reformers and intellectuals began to characterize rural America as regressive or degenerate. For instance in *Rural versus Urban: Their Conflict and its Causes* (1910), John Wesley Bookwalter claimed that the American farmer was a victim of "progressive degeneracy" (19) and "permanent subordination" (264). Educators and reformers responded to this developing view by proposing programs of reform and cultivation. "If rural populations needed 'uplift' or improvement," Farland writes, "it was in part

because they were seen as a ‘lower’ or less developed race” (908). This attitude was particularly evident in the movement for “scientific agriculture,” which proposed replacing backward tradition with self-conscious innovation. Aided by training and expertise, modern farming would be ““a matter of fertile brain rather than fertile field”” (Farland 910).

In short, the vast industrial development of the late nineteenth century encouraged an increasingly intense ideological conflict between country and city. Yet, the perception of this ideological conflict exaggerated the differences between the rural and urban and underemphasized the connections between the metropolis and the hinterlands. The developing city and country were not only culturally divided but also economically interrelated in complex ways that the conventional images of urban and rural do not capture.

One way this complexity can be considered is through an examination of the different types of cities that developed around the turn of the century. Industrialization altered the way cities functioned in a national framework, creating a complex network of different kinds of urban concentrations. Warner outlines two types of cities that developed as a result of industrialization: large diversified cities and small, specialized cities. Warner notes that the variety of cities was reflected both in population and in economic diversification. In the 1920s census, the network of American cities was composed of twenty-five metropolises ranging in size from New York (5,620,000) to Denver (256,000). The larger cities had become centers of manufacturing, as well as of commerce, finance and entertainment. New York,



Chicago, and Philadelphia produced goods ranging from textiles, clothing, flour, and meat to steel, petroleum, automobile parts, and electrical machinery. Small cities, on the other hand, specialized in a few or even one form of production. Rochester concentrated on producing men's clothing, boots and shoes, foundries and machine shops, furniture, and optical instruments. Denver centered on railroad car building and repair, foundries and machine shops, and slaughtering and meatpacking (*Fourteenth Census of the U.S.: 1920*, IX qtd. in Warner 87).

Warner explains that within specialized cities there lay a further subdivision: one type provided rural areas with the commercial and financial services of the city. These small cities would then process and ship their local specialties to the national and international market. For instance, Tampa manufactured cigars from Cuban tobacco, Tulsa refined petroleum, and, El Paso, Houston, and Forth Worth built and maintained railroad cars and equipment, which carried the Texan farmer's crops and livestock (Warner 88). Warner labels the other type of specialized city the "Mill Town." Located mostly in the Midwest and the Northeast, Mill Towns capitalized on their regional and national markets for consumer goods. For example, Albany mostly produced shirts, Bridgeport concentrated on corsets, brass, and machine tools, and, Columbus, Ohio, on railroad cars.

In other words, industrial development led not only to the creation of great cities that were vastly different from the traditional vision of the rural village, it also created a national network of linked and differentiated urban centers. As Alan Trachtenberg explains:

cities expanded by . . . regional networks of transport and communication. Internally, each region replicated the relations between ‘advanced’ and ‘backward’ which characterized the entire national system of urban regions—smaller cities, such as Bridgeport, Trenton, Fall River, Evanston, remaining relatively backward, less diverse and dense than nearby metropolises. Often, mill cities or government centers, subordinate places, performed clear-cut specialized functions with their regions. Distinctly cities, yet hardly metropolitan, they served as vehicles of urban influence on large numbers of people: intermediary places, in some ways trapped by their specializations in limbo between the cosmopolitan of the big city and the provincialism of the small town. They were confined to hinterland status by the same process, which brought regional watersheds, farmers’ markets, milk sheds, and rural trade within the metropolitan orbit (113-114).

Both Susan Glaspell, who grew up in Evanston, and Sherwood Anderson, whose childhood was spent in Clyde, Ohio—a small manufacturing city on which his Winesburg was based—came of age in such “intermediary places.”

The geography of the industrial metropolis was not only complex and varied than is often remembered, the division between country and city was far less stark than was widely assumed. In “America’s Small Town/Big City Dialectic,” John A. Jakle argues that, in fact, the rural town and the industrial city had much in common.

As Jakle points out, most residents of big cities had arrived there recently from small towns or rural backgrounds, and they recreated traditional ways of life in the city. Turn of the century fiction and sociology often suggested that the city represented a different type of civilization from the country, one characterized by mass society and individual isolation. Such writers frequently suggested that as people migrated from the country to the city they moved irrevocably into a different world, as Sister Carrie does in Dreiser's novel. But in fact, those who migrated from the nearby hinterlands were usually able to return to their hometowns frequently, something Sherwood Anderson himself did many times after he left Clyde for Chicago. Migrants also "reconstructed rural and small town institutions and ways of life in the city itself. When rural migrants neighbored in the city in traditional ways, something of the small town was sustained" (Jakle 5). Through "neighboring," people could recreate the feeling of a small town community in a large metropolis: "Neighboring was locality-based. It was necessarily parochial . . . in landscape, it did not produce grand gestures" (Jakle 5). Jakle claims that the idea of urban alienation is a stereotype that came more from "social scientists than the minds of the urbanites themselves. Substantially overlooked were the more traditional and more parochial social impulses imported from rural and small town places" (10).

In short, the industrial metropolis in some ways was more like the rural village than conventional images of the city suggested. Likewise, the view of the country as either an idealized pastoral landscape or as a dying place filled with degenerates was also oversimplified. Despite a growing ideological divide between urban and rural worlds, industrialization also made the country and the city more technically and

economically interconnected than in the past. In his history of the gradual dissemination of industrial technology and communication through the Midwest, Ronald R. Kline discusses both the influence of urbanization on rural communities and the ways Midwesterners adapted technological advances to fit their own distinctive needs. Rural Midwesterners, Kline claims, used urban technologies to create their own rural identities, which were distinct from those who lived in the city. Kline explores four urbanizing technologies—the telephone, the automobile, the radio, and electricity—and how they were integrated into rural life. The proponents of the modernization of rural areas predicted that telephones and automobiles would help improve the marketing of agricultural products and consumer goods and encourage farm families to integrate themselves into urban culture. This may imply that farm life was, previous to the advancements of electricity and other industrial technologies, culturally backward and economically deprived. Evidence shows however, that in the “golden age” of American agriculture (1909-1914), the purchasing power of farmers was equal to or greater than that of nonfarm workers and that rural areas were quick to adopt new technologies. As Kline notes, “the Census Bureau reported in 1920 that slightly larger percentages of farm households owned telephones (39%) and automobiles (31%) than did nonfarm households (34% had telephones, 25% had automobiles)” (4).

While agricultural communities were increasingly drawn into the industrial world, for many people there remained a feeling of ambivalence towards new technologies. Research demonstrates, for example, that rural and urban people used the telephone in both similar and different ways. Both types of people used the

telephone most often to make local rather than long distance calls, evidence that the phone was used as a tool to facilitate a sense of local community. Country people also used the telephone for other, distinctly rural purposes like broadcasting sermons, political speeches, and, newspaper and weather reports. Because the technology was not as advanced as it is today, telephonic conversations were not at all private. Many people could listen in on conversations, oftentimes inserting their own opinions on the matter at hand. Reactions to this eavesdropping varied, with some rural people resenting the intrusion on privacy that was allowed by this new technology and others welcoming the sense of togetherness it enabled. In 1908 a farm community in Iowa held a meeting to address complaints about eavesdropping and gossiping: “Lifelong friendships have been broken, relations have become estranged, and it is said that a dozen lawsuits will result from the feud” (*Telephony* 1908 qtd. in Kline 46). Other farm people viewed eavesdropping as a way to get involved with their community. After being caught eavesdropping a woman replied, “We all listen. Why shouldn’t you listen? I heard four receivers go up just when I stopped talking. There’s lots of people [who] wanted to know about that [neighbor’s] chimney [that caught fire]” (qtd. in Kline 47). Some viewed the telephone as promoting personal relations by involving the greater community; others thought that it was destroying established social customs. People did not have to go see each other to have a chat, and gossip was becoming a greater part of everyday life.

The automobile served a different function in urban/rural relations, bringing the city people to the country and country people to the city. At first, automobiles were widely viewed as “devil wagons” (Kline 57). Rural people were skeptical of the

automobile because of the loud noise it made and the effects that it had on livestock. The automobile also created dust problems on unpaved roads. Eventually, automobiles that specifically fit the needs of the rough terrain of rural communities were produced and adopted into farm culture. The automobile, like the telephone, had a complicated effect on the community. In some ways, it connected people to each other. People were able to go farther away to attend church, school, or other social events. A writer for the *New York Times* suggested that the automobile had solved the problem of rural isolation: “The trouble with the farm was three miles an hour—three miles by horse and buggy or two by team and wagon . . . What was needed for the farmer’s family was twenty miles an hour” (*New York Times* 1917 qtd. in Kline 79). So, in some ways the automobile made it easier for people to communicate, yet automobiles also contributed to the decline of local institutions like general stores and one-room schools (Kline 80).

In other words, like the economic expansion of the metropolis, the dissemination of new, urbanizing technologies had complex effects. Telephones and automobiles both brought the country and the city closer together while also encouraging the deepening ideological sense of their cultural differences. Just as urbanites stereotyped rural people as backwards and degenerate, rural people stereotyped life in the city as corrupt and full of vice. As William Cronon points out, there were concerted efforts on the part of the farmers to fight the tide of migration to the cities and to try to keep rural children on the farm. Agricultural publications published articles and poems that suggested ways to keep children from leaving for

the city. A poem, “Don’t Leave the Farm,” printed in the Wisconsin State Grange *Bulletin* in 1878 demonstrates how rural people used menacing language as a way to scare the rural children:

Come, boys, I have something to tell you;  
Come near, I would whisper it low;  
You are thinking of leaving the homestead,  
Don’t be in a hurry to go.  
The city has many attractions,  
But think of the vices and sins!  
When once in the vortex of fashion,  
How soon the course downward begins... (Bulletin Aug. 1878  
qtd. in Cronon 357).

Despite efforts like this, rural youth were drawn to the city by the promise of wealth and opportunity and by frustration with the hard labor of farm life.

Farmhands had to be up with the sun and be all day at chores, even long into the night, for a grudging monthly wage of \$20 plus board and washing. In the city, on the other hand, the hours of work were from seven to noon and from one to six, with plenty of time left over for reading, entertainment and time with friends. An intelligent young person in the city could become a clerk, a bookkeeper, or telegraph operator . . . Best of all, the monthly wage of such work was about \$50 a month (Cronon 359).

As one correspondent wrote in the *Western Rural* in response to an article about the corruption of the city: ““they are going where they can get the most pay”” (qtd. in Cronon 359).

This very outmigration, however, intensified the perception on the part of rural Midwesterners that the country and the city were at war. As their children departed for the city, farmers became increasingly suspicious that “urban culture rested on the backs of rural farmers” (Cronon 360). The city was thought to be able to pay higher wages because it extracted profits from the country farmers. Farmers got poor prices for their crops, they believed, because the railroads, grain elevators, speculators, and merchants were all extracting profit. Country people feared that their children would go off and become part of the group of people who profited at their parents’ expense (Cronon 360). That perception led to a growing sense of anxiety about rural life and to increasing efforts to both celebrate the disappearing rituals of the country and, simultaneously, to modernize and improve it.

In sum, the industrial transformation of American geography was highly complex. It led to growth of urban centers and to the decline of some rural areas. However, it also encouraged the expansion of agricultural production and the development of a network of diversely sized cities across the continent. In many respects it brought the country and the city into closer relation. At the same time, however, the ideological vision of city and country increasingly emphasized the gulf between them.

Sherwood Anderson and Susan Glaspell experienced these developments in their personal lives. Both Anderson and Glaspell grew up in the Midwest in middle-class families, and they both experienced rapid change as their hometowns were



reshaped by the larger patterns of industrial development. Both, too, left their “intermediary” cities for the new bohemian quarters of Chicago and New York. They even met a few times, though they were never close friends. Although they each became critical of some of the backwards views they perceived in their Midwestern heritage, even after they moved to the city, they continued to return with some frequency to the Midwest or to the “countryside.” Despite being heavily influenced and inspired by their fellow cosmopolitans, both Anderson and Glaspell did their best writing when they were representing the lives of rural people.

Like many of their contemporaries, Anderson and Glaspell are often taken to be part of a “Revolt from the Village”—a phenomenon in which artists who migrated from rural backgrounds to the bohemian neighborhoods of large cities looked back on the worlds they had left and portrayed them as parochial and confining communities in decline. But Anderson and Glaspell create complex, ambivalent portraits of the small town or of rural life and that complexity reflects the fact that the relations between the city and country were more intricate than people often realized at the time or have recognized since.

## Chapter Two

### *Winesburg, Ohio: A Village of Outskirts*

Walter Rideout, author of Sherwood Anderson's biography, *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America*, states that "one quite misunderstands Sherwood Anderson, both the man and the writer, if one labels him part of the Revolt from the Village" (23). With careful attention to his life, one can see that Anderson's personal experience of the urbanization of the United States was complicated and that he had complex views of both his time in the country and in the city.

Sherwood Anderson was born to Emma and Irwin Anderson on September 13, 1876, in Camden, Ohio. The Andersons only lived in Camden for one year after Sherwood was born and then, because of the failure of his father's business, they moved to Independence, Caledonia, and subsequently to the small town of Clyde, Ohio, population 2,400, where Anderson and his four siblings spent most of their childhood. Situated seventeen miles southwest of Sandusky, halfway between Cleveland and Toledo, Clyde was connected to those larger cities by train. Just as in *Winesburg, Ohio*, the railroad station in Clyde was the center of town and the focus of the townspeople. There also are specific places in Clyde that match those in Winesburg. The Empire House Hotel appears in Winesburg as the New Willard House and Clyde's Raccoon Creek was the site of the Clyde Fair, an important annual community event (Rideout 24).

Anderson's life in Clyde was far from idyllic; his family was poor throughout much of his childhood and his mother and the children were forced to find work due to Irwin Anderson's drinking. Even so, Anderson seemed to enjoy his childhood and

appreciated Clyde's strong sense of community. Anderson's siblings, Karl and Stella were prominent members of the community, and as an artist and a teacher respectively, they brought a sense of local fame to the Anderson family. Anderson himself, though he did not share the local renown of his siblings, found great comfort in the rituals of small town life. He was an umpire for the Clyde Baseball Club and wrote nostalgically about his experiences with his teammates in his *Memoirs*: "For Anderson, the profoundest meaning of Clyde, as of *Winesburg*, is . . . not alienation but communion" (Rideout 46). Two of Anderson's friends growing up, Bertha Baynes and Herman Hurd, provide us with a few insightful anecdotes from Anderson's adolescence. Bertha Baynes, Sherwood's girlfriend of sorts, later said about Anderson:

Sher and I were in the same group of young people—In those days there were no movies—radio's nor T.V. in our town—so we made our own good times by going to different homes—some one would play a piano—we would dance, sing—pop corn—etc—It became a habit for him to walk home with me. We had dancing school every Friday nite where we all went—Sher loved to dance and so did I—we danced most every dance together—and afterwards would walk me home—This if course was during the winter month—we also had sleigh rides, parties—during the summer we would go on picknicks (qtd in Rideout 48).

This account provides us with a sense of what Anderson did to occupy his time, which was spend it with other people.

In 1895, at the age of nineteen, Anderson enlisted for a five-year term in the Ohio National Guard, an experience that took him far beyond the limits of the world he had known. During the same years, Clyde itself was transformed by the era's expanding urbanization. When Anderson arrived in Clyde in 1884 the town, which had not benefitted from the natural gas that had powered development in nearby cities, was, despite the presence of telegraph and railroad, mainly a preindustrial community (Rideout 58). With the growth of electrical power, however, the town was increasingly drawn into the industrial economy, and its landscape was changed by the introduction of the "modern conveniences" of a sewer system and electrical lighting (Rideout 59). Anderson himself, after first working with harness race horses, became a laborer in the enamel shed of the Elmore bicycle factory, an experience that made him aware that he preferred mental to manual labor. Soon after, he joined the outmigration of Clyde residents to Chicago, where he joined his brother Karl the artist. Following a stint in the army during the Spanish-American War, an experience that he found exciting for its military camaraderie, Anderson began a career in the nascent advertising industry, working as an associate editor for *Agricultural Advertising*, a newly created publication that typified the era's movement to bring modern technology and consumer goods to agricultural communities. Eventually, he moved on to a successful career in management, which led him to travel throughout the industrial cities of northern Ohio, before a psychological breakdown and his encounter with the International Exhibition of Modernist Art in Chicago convinced him that he wanted to become a writer.

In Chicago, Anderson joined the newly flourishing bohemian community that sprung up on the abandoned grounds of the World's Columbian Exposition, a milieu he found exhilarating for the artistic and personal freedom it encouraged. But he retained a lifelong nostalgia for the lost features of rural community, and he often joined other artists on weekend jaunts to the countryside in an effort to recapture it. Importantly, however, the small town he portrayed in *Winesburg, Ohio* was not that world. Rather, like the Clyde on which it was based, Winesburg was an "intermediary" location in the era's booming industrialization, neither a metropolitan center nor a rural outpost. The problems Anderson depicts in Winesburg are not the problems of the village, but those of people like Anderson who found themselves newly drawn into an urbanizing society. As Anderson himself said about *Winesburg, Ohio*: "Whatever is wrong with the people in the book is wrong with me" (qtd. in Rideout 320).

*Winesburg, Ohio* is a collection of short stories set in the small, fictional town of the title. This cycle of stories does not make up a coherent novel but rather a fragmented collection of individual stories. Though published in 1919, the book is set towards the end of the nineteenth century. Its central figure, George Willard, a young reporter for the *Winesburg Eagle*, is the confidante of the townspeople who are described by the narrator as "grotesques." They are isolated, lonely people with an inability to communicate. Through George, they are able to partially express themselves and tell their stories. Despite his appreciation for the town and for the people who live there, George eventually moves out of Winesburg to pursue his

career in the city. Although he takes with him the stories and dreams of the grotesques, the book's conclusion implies that George will be capable of living a spiritually fulfilled life in the city and that the grotesques of Winesburg will not.

*Winesburg, Ohio*'s innovative narrative structure resembles that of James Joyce's *Dubliners*, which similarly uses the form of linked stories to outline the features of an urban community on the outer edges of metropolitan society. Like *Dubliners*, *Winesburg, Ohio* is a collection of short stories which do not have complex plots, but rather focus on revealing poignant moments in the characters' lives. However, despite the fact that they appear to live in a small town, the people in Anderson's book share still less in the way of an established community than do the people of *Dubliners*, who are bound together by networks implied by the recurrence from story to story of characters and places. In Anderson's book, only George Willard engages with more than one character, making the town most striking in its absence of community ties.

In order to understand how Anderson is distinctive in his depiction of rural life and how *Winesburg, Ohio* is not a conventional Revolt from the Village narrative, one may also examine Anderson in light of the comparable vision of the village in local color and regionalist fiction prominent in the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In comparison to the work of writers such as Mary Wilkins Freeman, Hamlin Garland, and Edith Wharton, Anderson's rendition of the rural village stands out for its uniqueness. Each in their own way may be considered

Revolt from the Village stories, but their depictions of the village and the revolt against it look nothing like they do in Anderson.

Mary Wilkins Freeman's "The Revolt of 'Mother'" (1890), for instance, tells the story of a New England farm wife, Sarah Penn who overcomes the patriarchal authority of her husband, Adoniram, by transforming his new barn into her new home. Even though "The Revolt of 'Mother'" takes place almost entirely on the Penn's property, the social geography of the story is quite intricate. In the opening scenes of the story, the reader is introduced to a family with complex relationships. The opening line of the story is perhaps an example of this: "Father!" (116). Though this quotation may seem innocuous, it provides the reader with valuable information: there are at least two people in the story, there are children, the characters are intimately connected—i.e., they are family. The people in these stories are connected to one another and their relationships are not simple. When Sarah Penn does not receive an adequate response from her husband, she proceeds to talk to her children. It is from her son, Sam, not her husband, that she learns of her husband's plan to build a larger barn to house livestock. Later in the story, Sarah Penn essentially tricks her husband into converting the new barn into a home for her family, something that she did not do through simple communication, but rather through sly maneuvering and manipulation.

Not only is the Penn family itself a complicated group of people, but also there are other characters that are prominent in the story, adding to the story's complex social geography. The reader knows that the daughter, Nanny, is engaged to be married. The local minister visits the house when he hears of Sarah's plans,

indicating not only that the town is involved in the family life of the Penns, but also that he feels that it is his customary place to intervene. When Adoniram is scheduled to come home, the whole town gathers around the property to see how he reacts to Sarah's ploy. Even though almost the entire story takes place in the home, a complete world revolves around that home. The world of "The Revolt of 'Mother'" is socially intricate and the people in the world must not only communicate with one another, but also know each other well enough to be able to manipulate them.

Hamlin Garland's story "Up the Coolly" (1899) presents a far different portrayal of rural life. Garland's village is not a nurturing world but rather a trap. In "Up the Coolly" a theater actor, Howard McLane, returns to the farm where he was raised. Here he reconnects with his ailing mother and his younger, hardworking brother, Grant. Grant has not had the same educational opportunities as Howard and, forced to stay home and work on the family farm, is now stuck in a life of poverty. As Howard arrives by train, he describes the town's decline in comparison to the majesty of the natural landscape:

The town caught and held his eyes first. How poor and dull and sleepy and squalid it seemed! The one main street ended at the hillside at his left, and stretched away to the north, between two rows of the usual village stores, unrelieved by a tree or a touch of beauty. An unpaved street, with walled, drab-colored, miserable, rotting wooden buildings, with the inevitable battlements; the same—only worse and more squalid—was the town.



The same, only more beautiful still, was the majestic amphitheatre of green wooded hills that circled the horizon, and toward which he lifted his eyes. He thrilled at the sight (70-71).

Despite its entrapment and misery, however, the town itself is a full social world of multiple characters who share customs and a context. These characters are brought together, for instance, in a party scene, which shows their deep connections to one another. The party is busy, as people from all over the town come to the house to see Howard:

A moment later there came a laughing, chattering squad of women to the door. Mrs. McLane and Laura stared at each other in amazement. Grant went outdoors.

Rose stood at the door as if she were hostess.

‘Come in, Nettie. Glad to see yeh—glad to see yeh! Mrs. McIlvaine, come right in! Take a seat. Make yerself a home, *do!* And Mrs. Peavey! Wal, I never! This must be a surprise party. Wal, I swan! How many more o’ ye air they?’

All was confusion, merriment, hand-shakings as Rose introduced them each in her roguish way (108).

The excitement and intimacy of the town emanates from this description. Everyone knows one another and all are welcome in the house. Howard feels overwhelmed by the party, not just because of its busyness and the amount of people there, but because he knows he stands out against the group: “Howard felt nervous under this furtive scrutiny. He wished that his clothes didn’t look so confoundedly dressy. Why didn’t

he have sense enough to go and buy a fifteen-dollar suit of diagonals for everyday wear” (109). Not only is Howard different compared to everyone else, the townspeople all share common customs and ways of speaking. Though they are trapped in the world in which they live, these characters are highly connected to one another in a way that Howard cannot be because, although he is a product of a small town, he is no longer part of one.

In Wharton’s novella, *Ethan Frome* (1911), the village is presented as even more of a trap and explicitly a backwater. Wharton’s narrator finds himself confined in the New England town of Starkfield for the winter where he attempts to put together the story of mysterious local Ethan Frome and his “smash up.” One gets the feeling that it is perpetually winter in Starkfield and that the people who live there are in a constant state of slowly dying. But despite this representation of the small town as stultifying, in Wharton’s novella, as in Garland and Freeman’s work, the main characters are surrounded by people who know and understand them and who share their experiences. This is highlighted by the fact that the narrator first hears Ethan’s story, not through the telling of Ethan himself, but rather through the minor characters Harmon Gow and Ruth Varnum. Wharton’s novella shows that Ethan is trapped in Starkfield precisely because it is a community with strong norms and customs to which Ethan feels ethically bound. It is expected, for instance, that Ethan take care of his mother, that he not run off with borrowed money, and that he not abandon his ailing wife, all expectations that help to limit his dreams of freedom and escape.

All of these stories implicitly show through the depictions of the movements and interactions of the characters that the village—whether it is comforting, a

backwater, or a trap—is a community. In all of these stories there are places where villagers come together. In “The Revolt of ‘Mother’” families meet in the home and even townspeople are expected to play a role in that home life. In “Up the Coolly,” an impromptu party is arranged in the home and villagers often gather at the train station as well. In *Ethan Frome*, as the narrator points out, people come together at the post office.

All three of these writers, too, emphasize the great distance between the village and the urban centers. Both Garland and Wharton do so by stressing the sheer difficulty of traveling from the city to the village. Howard’s journey in “Up the Coolly” is described as pleasant, but long:

The ride from Milwaukee to the Mississippi is a fine ride at any time, superb in the summer. To lean back in a reclining-chair and whirl away in a breezy July day, past lakes, groves of oaks, past field of barley being reaped, past hay-fields. . . His mind all day flew ahead of the train to the little town, far on toward the Mississippi, where he had spent his boyhood and youth. As the train passed the Wisconsin river, with its curiously carved cliffs. . . The hills changed in character, growing more intimately recognizable. They rose higher as the train left the ridge and past down into Black River valley, and specifically into La Crosse valley. . . At about six o’clock . . . he caught sight of the splendid broken line of hills on which his baby eyes had looked thirty-five years ago (69-70).

When Howard finally arrives in town, he needs to take a horse and wagon in order to reach his farmhouse. Wharton's narrator similarly must travel by horse and cart from Starkfield to the train at "Corbury flats," a journey of three miles that takes an hour in good conditions. The locales of all three of these tales of the rural village are places of what Wharton calls "moral isolation" (Wharton 15).

*Winesburg, Ohio* differs from these stories in telling ways, which are especially visible in the distinctive social geography of Anderson's community. M.M. Bahtkin, in his essay on "The Chronotope" and Franco Moretti in his book, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* discuss the literary significance of the imaginative social geographies provided by works of fiction. Bahtkin points out that narrative genres have characteristic ways of representing the movement of people through time and space and that this type of geography can be analyzed. Moretti explains how works of fiction imply maps of their world that reflect historical and social ideologies.

According to Bahtkin, narrative genres have distinctive chronotopes. A chronotope literally means, "space-time" and is defined by Bahtkin "as a formally constitutive category of literature" that act as "organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel" (250). Bahtkin highlights the representational force of the chronotope:

Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins . . . it is precisely the chronotope that provides the

ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events (250).

As an example, Bahktin refers to the Flaubertian provincial town.

Here there are not events, only ‘doings’ that constantly repeat themselves. Time here has no advancing historical movement; it moves rather in narrow circles . . . The markers of this time are simple, crude, material, fused with everyday details of specific locales, with the quaint little houses and rooms of the town, with the sleepy streets, the dust and flies, the club, the billiards and so on and on. Time here is without event and therefore seems to stand still (247-48).

In Bahtkin’s view, the Flaubertian provincial town is defined by its cyclical nature—everything in the town replays itself over and over again without change. This slow quality disallows any advancement of historical movement and instead creates a sense of stasis for the people who live there. Thus these peoples’ interactions are not marked by comings and goings—for no one ever truly leaves. Rather their interaction, like time itself, is unchanging without beginning or end. Thus, such chronotopes function as the primary way for understanding space and time in the novel. In other words, it makes the abstract elements of a novel like its philosophy and ideas, evident in the qualities of its imagined world.

In *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Moretti suggests a similar notion—that the real world and the represented world are fused. Moretti suggests that by drawing a map of events depicted in a narrative, a critic can develop a deeper understanding of the social ideology that informs the narrative. Such literary maps, Moretti claims, prepare a text

for analysis and can reveal something ideologically and historically illuminating about the worlds the authors create: “You reduce the text to a few elements, and abstract them from the narrative flow, and construct a new, artificial object.” Such maps are “*more than the sum of their parts*: they will possess ‘emerging’ qualities, which were not visible at the lower level” (53). Moretti uses Bakhtin’s discussion of the village as an example of his own view of social geography.

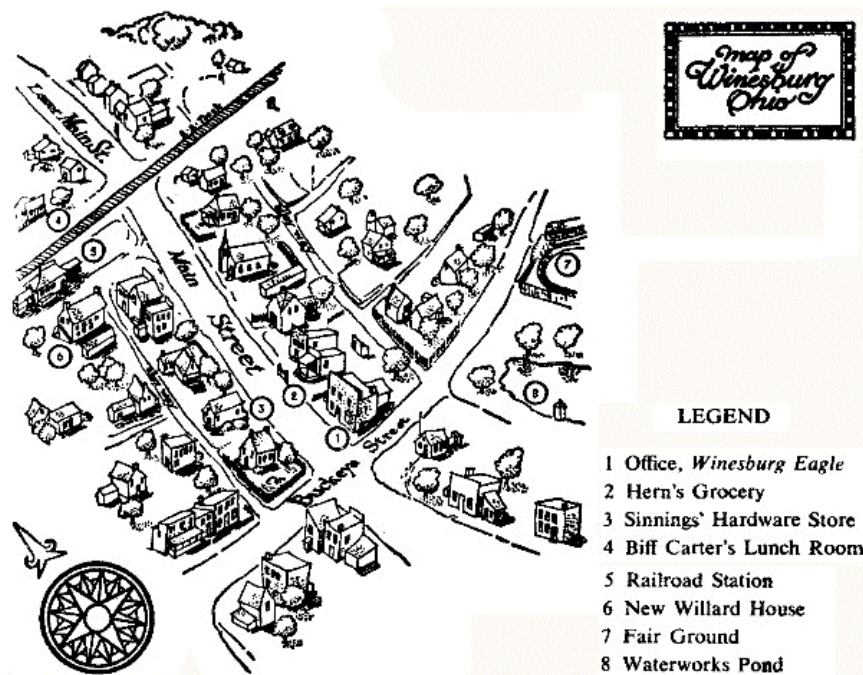
‘Birth, labour, love, marriage, death’, wrote Bakhtin of this *longue duree* chronotope: ‘only a few of life’s basic realities . . . a little world . . . sufficient unto itself, not linked in any intrinsic way with other places.’ Sufficient unto itself: this is why the village stories organize themselves in circular patterns: a circle is a simple, ‘natural’ form, which maximizes the proximity of each point to the center of the ‘little world,’ while simultaneously sealing it off from the vast universe that lies outside its perimeter (44).

The map of a village story, as Moretti shows in his discussion of Mary Mitford’s *Our Village*, is centralized and built around a circle. The villages envisioned in such fiction do not rely on outside sources to maintain their livelihood but are rather capable of sustaining themselves as complete worlds.

One way in which Moretti distinguishes himself from Bakhtin is in the distinction he draws between “the village” and “the province.” The village, as described above, is imagined as an enclosed world; the province, on the other hand, is terrain seen as a backwater of the capital. In a province, the interaction between other provinces, or metropolises appears necessary for the survival of that province,

whereas, the village is self-sustaining. In Moretti's words, "Village and region are alternative homelands of sorts, whereas the provinces embody the capitulation of local reality to the national center" (52). Moretti goes on to explain that the provinces are "negative entities"—that is they are defined by what is not there rather than what is there. Moretti thus claims that you cannot map provincial novels.

This distinction between a province and village is pertinent to the reading of *Winesburg, Ohio*, for the story cycle does not fit well into either category. The local color fiction writers like Mary Wilkins Freeman are identifiably village fiction. *Ethan Frome* and Garland's story take place in what Moretti calls the region. But Anderson's book does not truly inhabit any of these categories. Winesburg is in some respects village-like. For example, Anderson provides a physical map of the town, demonstrating that Winesburg is a mappable contained space in the way that Moretti suggests provinces are not.



The map shows that there are clearly defined streets and houses, and Anderson even labels some of the important buildings and attractions of Winesburg. However, the map of the town itself is not centralized. Despite the fact that the town resembles a village, it appears to have no town center, but rather a series of streets and of houses that do not seem to face each other. (The houses on the south side of Buckeye Street, for example, all face away from each other, a pattern that is repeated throughout the map). Anderson's map, in effect, is of a village with only outskirts.

That impression is born out by the events that take place in *Winesburg, Ohio* and by the form of Anderson's narrative. One would expect, for example, that a church, a town hall, a grocery store, or maybe a saloon would be among the main places that members of the community would meet. But out of the three buildings that Anderson's map labels on Main Street—Hern's Grocery, the *Winesburg Eagle* office, and Sinnings' Hardware Store—the only one that ever gets mentioned in the stories is the newspaper office. The *Winesburg Eagle* office is not only significant because that is where George Willard works, but also because it is implicitly a place of nonlocal communication. Just as the newspaper office connects the readers of Winesburg to other towns and cities, the newspaper building itself is a place of exchange and communication between George and the inhabitants of Winesburg.

Though Hern's Grocery and Sinnings' Hardware Store are also located on Main Street, these places are not the centers of the stories. The stories take place mostly off Main Street, either near the railroad tracks, or off the map entirely. For example, "Hands" takes place at "the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg" (11) and "The Untold Lie" takes places "three miles north of Winesburg" (165). Even



the businesses discussed in the Winesburg stories do not face Main Street. For example, in “Queer,” Cowley & Son’s store “did not face the main street of Winesburg. The front was on Maumee Street and beyond it was Voight’s wagon shop and a shed for sheltering farmers’ horses” (155). This placement of Cowley & Son’s reflects the fact that the Cowleys are unable to contend with the traveling salesmen who arrive in town by train from the metropolis. Tellingly, their business itself faces the image of declining means of transportation: horse and wagon.

Just as there is no center of a city, the townspeople of Winesburg themselves seem to all live on the outskirts of the village. Wing Biddlebaum, with whom the book begins, does not even live in Winesburg. Rather, he lives in “a small frame house that stood near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg” (11). Biddlebaum is the first among a series of eccentric characters who are shown to be socially and geographically marginal figures. One such figure is Seth Richmond. Seth Richmond lived in a house that

had been at one time the show place of the town, but when young Seth lived there its glory had become somewhat dimmed. The huge brick house which Banker White had built on Buckeye Street had overshadowed it. The Richmond place was in a little valley far out at the end of Main Street. Farmers coming into town by a dusty road from the south passed by a grove of walnut trees, skirted the Fair Ground with its high board fence covered with advertisements, and trotted their horses down through the valley past the Richmond place into town (99).

Seth Richmond is set up as a comparable figure to George Willard, his friend and contemporary. But his geographical location in comparison to that of George, whose home in the New Willard House places him in proximity to the railroad, implies that unlike George, Seth will not be able to leave Winesburg. Seth, whose home is by the fairgrounds, will forever be connected to the rural, communal events like the Fair.

Similarly, in “A Man of Ideas,” the Kings are said to live “in a brick house that stood opposite the gate leading to the Winesburg Cemetery” (81). As their name may suggest, the Kings are described as relics of another age, and as migrants from the South, they appear to be visitors from a distant culture:

They were called proud and dangerous. They had come to Winesburg from some place in the South and ran a cider mill on the Trunion Pike. Tom King was reported to have killed a man before he came to Winesburg. He was twenty-seven years old and rode about town on a grey pony. Also he had a long yellow mustache that dropped down over his teeth, and always carried a heavy, wicked-looking walking stick in his hand. Once he killed a dog with the stick. The dog belonged to Win Pawsey, the shoe merchant, and stood on the sidewalk wagging its tail. Tom King killed it with one blow. He was arrested and paid a fine of ten dollars (81).

Just as it is fitting that Wing Biddlebaum lives on the edge of a ravine, it is fitting that the Kings live opposite the gates of a cemetery. For, the Kings too are isolated from the community. Though the map does not delineate exactly where the cemetery is, one can assume it is near the Fair Ground and the Waterworks Pond for it was at

Waterworks Pond that one could hear Joe Welling's "passionate eager protestations of love" for Sarah King (82). Thus the Kings, like the Richmonds and Wing Biddlebaum, live off the strangely inappropriate map with which Anderson prefaces his book.

If Anderson's community lacks a center, it is also not distant from the city in the way the villages of Freeman, Garland, and Wharton are. Merchants and salespeople from the city are shown to visit Winesburg for business often—as in the story "Queer," when a Jewish travelling salesman confuses the unsuccessful Cowleys—and Anderson undermines the conventional image of the rural village as a refuge from the city. In the story "Tandy," for example, the son of a rich merchant arrives in town hoping to cure his alcoholism. He "thought that by escaping from his city associates and living in a rural community he would have a better chance in the struggle with the appetite that was destroying him," and is proven unsuccessful (113)

In addition, Anderson frequently highlights how easy it is for Winesburg inhabitants to migrate in and outside of the city. In the final story of *Winesburg*, Anderson notes that the train line running through town goes to Cleveland "where it connects with a great trunk line railroad with terminals in Chicago and New York" (202). Migration in and out of Winesburg, too, is common. The reader is told that Wing Biddlebaum once lived and worked in Pennsylvania. Ned Currie, Alice Hindman's beau in "Adventure," moved to Cleveland to work for a city newspaper and eventually went on to Chicago. Enoch Robinson moved from Winesburg to New York City and eventually came back to Winesburg. The stranger in "Tandy" came

from Cleveland, and Doctor Parcival from Chicago. Even the train conductor Tom Little who is characterized in a simple and childlike way as the name “Little” would suggest—“he has a small round red face and small blue eyes,”—is able to go fishing in Lake Erie in the fall and spring (202). Anderson writes, “He knows the people in the towns along his railroad better than a city man knows the people who live in his apartment building” (202). This quotation demonstrates that Tom Little is connected to people from *many* towns not just *one*, casting Winesburg in the context of urban geography.

Winesburg then, is neither a province nor a village, but a combination of both. Just as the map of Winesburg reveals a unique geographical and social layout, furthermore, its patterns of social interaction greatly differ from those implied in stories like those told by Freeman, Garland, and Wharton. There are many social encounters in the town of Winesburg, but they are almost all between only two characters, and these encounters are usually in private places or involve concealed activities. For example, in “The Strength of God,” the Presbyterian minister Curtis Hartman witnesses Kate Swift in an intensely private moment:

On the January night, after he had come near dying with cold and after his mind had two or three times actually slipped away into an odd fantasy so that he had by an exercise of will power to force himself back into consciousness, Kate Swift appeared. In the room next door a lamp was lighted and the waiting man stared into an empty bed. Then upon the bed before his eyes a naked woman threw herself. Lying face

downward she wept and beat with her fists upon the pillow. With a final outburst of weeping she half arose, and in the presence of the man who had waited to look and to think thoughts the woman of sin began to pray (124).

Here, Curtis Hartman is privy to a significantly personal moment for Kate Swift, but the connection he has to her is not due to some mutual understanding, but rather to coincidence. The striking diction in this passage, moreover, makes it seem both as though the characters are in two different buildings and also that they are somehow together and aware of each other. They have a nonverbal, nonsocial intimacy. They are “alone together.” Where an exchange of thoughts and feelings might occur through ordinary dialogue in a more conventionally realist novel, in *Winesburg* it is presented as at once intimate and voyeuristic.

*Winesburg* is full of such accidental, private encounters. In the story, “Nobody Knows,” George Willard has his first sexual experience. This experience is not a culmination of a courtship but rather the result of Louise Trunnion’s secret advances towards George. Louise sends George a letter at the office telling him that he can have her: “The letter was brief. ‘I’m yours if you want me,’ it said” (39). The meeting between the two is not described as romantic but rather as an act of coercion. George Willard

remembered the look that had lurked in the girl’s eyes when they had met on the streets and thought of the note she had written. Doubt left him. The whispered tales concerning her that had gone about town gave him confidence. He became wholly the male, bold and

aggressive. In his heart there was no sympathy for her. ‘Ah, come on, it’ll be all right. There won’t be anyone know anything. How can they know?’ he urged (40).

The concern that both Louise and George have is whether or not their concealed activity will somehow be revealed to the greater community, whereas in the stories of Hamlin, Freeman, and Wharton, as in most realist fiction, the community would most likely be aware of the attraction between the characters or would learn of their affair. Anderson, however, does not choose to have this encounter revealed to the greater public, and nobody ever finds out about it. Winesburg is not primarily a typical gossip small town, but rather a world of isolated individuals and isolated events.

The one opportunity that might provide a communal event—the town Fair—Anderson chooses to ignore. George and his love interest, Helen White, walk through the deserted fairground at night, and the reader is told that the Fair has in fact already occurred: “All that day, amid the jam of people at the Fair, . . . [George] had gone about feeling lonely” (192). But the actual event of the Fair itself is not discussed. Instead, the empty grounds are described:

At the upper end of the fair ground, in Winesburg, there is a half decayed old grand-stand. It has never been painted and the boards are all warped out of shape. The fair ground stands on top of a low hill rising out of the valley of Wine Creek and from the grand-stand one can see at night, over a cornfield, the lights of the town reflected against the sky (197-198).

In contrast to the hustle-bustle of the day, George and Helen share an intensely private experience at the very place of communal interaction. Their private encounter exists far from the town's Main Street. In Winesburg, true moments of connection do not come out of communal events like fairs or church services.

At the very center of his text, Anderson provides an implicit point of historical comparison that underscores the relative urbanization of the town he depicts. Here, in the four-part story "Godliness," Anderson provides in both style and subject matter a glimpse of Winesburg's historical past against which its present can be measured.<sup>1</sup> These stories differ importantly from the others in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Anderson calls "Godliness" a "four-part tale" indicating a sense of developmental narrative and cohesion that does not exist amongst the other stories in the cycle. In addition, the four related stories tell the saga of three generations of the Bentley family, providing a full account of a family's history in a way that no other episode in the book matches. The "Godliness" narratives are also longer and the writing style is less lyrical and abstract than that of other stories in the book. George Willard does not even appear in these stories, underlining their unique place in the book.

The opening paragraphs of "Godliness" indicate that this world is inherently different from the one the reader has come to recognize as Winesburg:

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<sup>1</sup> "The Untold Lie" is another story that when juxtaposed to other *Winesburg* stories, highlights Winesburg's urban qualities. Firstly, "The Untold Lie" does not take place in Winesburg, but rather three miles to the north. The two main characters, Hal Winters and Ray Pearson, are the only farmers mentioned in the book, yet neither of these two farmers actually lives in Winesburg. The main question that "The Untold Lie" brings to the fore is whether or not Hal Winters should marry the girl he has impregnated. Right from the start this story has something different in it—the promise of a life. Though there are numerous sexual encounters in Winesburg the only ones that result in pregnancy are the ones from the past. Winesburg, as it is in George Willard's day, is sterile. The values of marriage and family are often associated with the farm-life and the conventional farm story. For example, The Penns in "The Revolt of 'Mother'" are all closely connected and dependent on one another.

There were always three or four old people sitting on the front porch of the house or puttering around the garden of the Bentley farm. Three of the old people were women and sisters to Jesse. They were a colorless, soft-voiced lot. Then there was a silent old man with thin white hair who was Jesse's uncle.

The farmhouse was built of wood, a board outer-covering over a framework of logs. It was in reality not one house but a cluster of houses joined together in a rather haphazard manner. Inside, the place was full of surprises. One went up steps from the living room into the dining room and there were always steps to be ascended or descended in passing from one room to another. At meal times the place was like a beehive. At one moment all was quiet, then doors began to open, feet clattered on stairs, a murmur or soft voice arose and people appeared from a dozen obscure corners (42).

From the opening lines, the reader is aware of a sense of traditional community.

While the other interactions in the book have been between two people, this story is about multiple people who rely on each other. The house itself reflects this feeling of community; it is not just one house, but really a "cluster of homes." Even the layout of the house with all of its stairways and twists and turns suggests a complicated but interrelated social map. Anderson even compares the house to a "beehive," implying that its inhabitants all live and work together in a codependent way. While stories like "Hands" and "Queer" highlight personal isolation, "Godliness" presents a world of interrelated and mutually dependent social networks. The farmhouse in "Godliness"



looks like a mini-version of what Moretti would call “a village.” It is self-sustaining and self-reliant.

Anderson himself comments that these stories are emblematic of a different time-period and also offers a description of how industrialization has changed Middle America:

It will perhaps be somewhat difficult for men and women of a later day to understand Jesse Bentley. In the last fifty years a vast change has taken place in the lives of our people. A revolution has in fact taken place. The coming of industrialism, attended by all the roar and rattle of affairs, the shrill cries of millions of new voices that have come among us from over seas, the going and coming of trains, the growth of cities, the building of the interurban car lines that weave in and out of towns and past farmhouses, and now in these later days the coming of the automobiles has worked a tremendous change in the lives and in the habits of thought of our people of Mid-America. . . . Much of the old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence is gone forever. The farmer by the stove is brother to the men of the cities, and if you listen you will find him talking as glibly and as senselessly as the best city man of us all (48).

This is the only passage in *Winesburg* in which Anderson explicitly discusses the effects of industrialization and urbanization on the Midwest. It is also the only place in the book in which the narrator provides the overarching perspective of a traditional realist narrator. Anderson highlights how the railroads and automobiles changed the

landscape of the Midwest and how the “thought” of Midwesterners also changed. Anderson claims that before industrialization farmers were both ignorant but also had a quality of “beautiful childlike innocence.” With the coming of industrialization, these men become capable of talking “as glibly as senselessly as the best city man of us all.” They become, in other words, urbanites.

The passage also emphasizes the connection between the rural past and traditional religion. The “churches,” Anderson remarks, “were the centers of the town’s activities and social gatherings.” This is not the case in Winesburg. While other Winesburg stories like “The Strength of God,” do discuss spiritual desire, they do not refer to the authority of traditional organized churches. The “Godliness” stories engage with Christianity in an entirely different way. The “Godliness” stories highlight the failing of religion in a changing and industrializing world. In keeping with this depiction, the world of the “Godliness” stories is envisioned as an archaic past. The Old Testament permeates the “Godliness” stories. The very names of the characters, Jesse and David are Biblical figures. Anderson describes Jesse as an Old Testament patriarch, a man who wanders the fields and talks to God. Anderson himself invokes Old Testament Christianity through a re-formation of the stories of David and Goliath and the Trail of Jacob. In the story, “Godliness,” Jesse tries to be a good Christian. He searches for significance in the way that those in the Bible did, by being a chosen servant to God. Despite his sense of purpose and his longing to please God, Jesse is constantly left questioning and unfulfilled. No matter what Jesse does, he cannot gain recognition from God and this lack of recognition and understanding drives him mad. In a desperate attempt to generate a miracle, he takes his grandson,

David, into the woods to sacrifice a lamb. Jesse is so consumed by his longing for recognition that he scares his grandson into thinking that he would hurt the boy by reenacting the Biblical task asked of Jacob. David Bentley, like David in the Bible, “slays” the giant, his grandfather, with a slingshot and is able to escape not only his family but also Winesburg. In the last scene of the story, the young boy is shown disappearing from his grandfather’s world.

“Godliness” thus shows traditional religion to be unsatisfying and even dangerous in the transforming rural world. This notion is furthered by the fact that the other Winesburg stories, which take place after the “Godliness” stories, rarely discuss Christianity and if they refer to religion at all, focus on individual, spiritual desire rather than theological belief or community ritual. For example, at the end of “Hands,” Wing Biddlebaum is described, eating crumbs off his floor, as kneeling “like a priest engaged in some service of his church” (17). Here, Wing Biddlebaum’s religious experience is entirely private and personal, emphasized by the words “his church.”

The typical attributes of the rural lifestyles that are viewed as disappearing in “Godliness” are otherwise absent from *Winesburg, Ohio*. Yet, neither is Anderson’s community an obvious example of the era’s new industrial cities. Unlike the Clyde in which Anderson grew up, for example, it includes no factories or workers. Anderson does not depict a fully industrialized world. Rather, he projects psychic aspects of the new metropolis onto the country. In doing so, Anderson comments on the mental experience of the modern world.

The prologue of *Winesburg, Ohio*, “The Book of the Grotesque” begins, fittingly, with a creation story. In the title of the prologue, Anderson sets up contradictions that he will address and integrate throughout the novel. “Book” has religious connotations, implying that Anderson not only references religion, but creates his own story. This “Book of Grotesque” is hardly a typical Biblical story. It is rather a reworking of biblical language in an attempt to mythologize American life. The creation story reads:

In the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were beautiful.

The old man had listed hundreds of truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carefulness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the manner. It was his notion

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 and the truth he embraced became a falsehood (9).

In this creation story, a person's tendency to cling to certain "truths" leads to him/her to become a grotesque, an abstraction or a caricature. As the narrator called, "the writer," explains, the grotesques are not in and of themselves evil, but rather, they are misshaped and can be "lovable" (10). The stories that follow in Anderson's collection are dedicated to describing these "grotesques," telling their stories and giving them a voice that they themselves cannot muster.

The critical reception of Anderson's story cycle suggests that his vision of human grotesques is at once evocative and vague.<sup>2</sup> But, if it is read in light of the psychological and sociological developments of the time, one sees that Anderson's "Book of Grotesque" offers a powerful version of a then prominent theory about the way that urbanization affected the mentality of the modern individual. As sociologist, Louis Wirth reveals in his essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life," turn-of-the-century social science saw the metropolis in terms of the masses and isolated individuals: "Characteristically, urbanites meet one another in highly segmental roles. They are . . . less dependent upon particular persons . . . The city is categorized by secondary

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<sup>2</sup> The implications of "The Book of the Grotesque" have been debated. Ralph Ciancio explains that while some critics like James Schevill "condemn the grotesques on the basis of the prologue" other critics, like Irving Howe, "condemn the prologue on the basis of the grotesques" (Ciancio 994). Read in Schevill's way, Anderson's characters are meant to be seen in a negative light, as creatures who severed "the connection between man and society" (Schevill qtd. Ciancio 994). In Howe's reading, Anderson's grotesques are vulnerable individuals; the external forces were stronger than their willpower. Another critic, Malcolm Cowley, believes that the cause of grotesqueness is not what is described in the creation story, but rather a failure of communication and an inability to express themselves (Cowley qtd. in Ciancio 994). Walter Rideout characterizes Anderson's vision of grotesqueness "as a universal but outward condition of the world which both defeats men's dreams and separates them as individuals" (Rideout 203).

rather than primary contacts. The contacts of the city may indeed be to face to face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory and segmental” (12). Such thinking viewed the metropolis as a mass of disconnected and isolated individuals. Anderson’s book fits this model. Its “grotesques” are not traditional rural people. Rather they embody the traits that Anderson’s contemporaries observed in the metropolis.

Georg Simmel’s classic essay on “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), is the most subtle of the era’s views of the metropolis. Simmel claims, “the psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli” (325). According to Simmel, the metropolis overwhelms one with sensory experience. Rural and small town environments shape life according to custom and habit. Urban life, on the other hand, is characterized by rationality and alienation. The individual person “creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it” (Simmel 326). Because of this, city people appear more closed off, cold, and introverted. But, such outward reservation, according to Simmel, also corresponds with a deeper inner psychological experience. The metropolitan person’s inner depth “assures the individual of a type and degree of personal freedom to which there is no analogy in other circumstances” (Simmel 332).

Such inner experience, moreover, fits well with the economic structure of the metropolis. Cities, Simmel points out, operate on the division of labor. Cities are:

receptive to a highly diversified plurality of achievements while at the same time the agglomeration of individuals and their struggle for the customer forces the individual to a type of specialized accomplishment in which he cannot be so easily exterminated by the other. The decisive fact here is that in the life of a city, struggle with nature for the means of life is transformed into a conflict with human beings and gain which is fought for is granted, not by nature, but by man (Simmel 336).

In an attempt to maintain a sense of personhood, urban individuals are thus encouraged toward eccentricity: “For many types of persons these are still the only means of saving for oneself, through the attention gained from others, some sort of self-esteem and the sense of filling a position” (Simmel 336). In short, the metropolis provides people with the opportunity to develop rich inner lives, but it also creates eccentricities, personalities, and peculiarities that are evident in the outer life.

In effect, Simmel predicts what Joel Pfister later describes as a twentieth-century interest in “depth psychology.” Pfister argues that in the twentieth-century American intellectuals defined “the psychological”

as a human essence that is simply discovered rather than created as an idea and made significant in ways and forms that change over time, across cultures, and within any given era. Its power resides in its commonsensical pretense that it has nothing to do with social power, only with the clinical, literary, or artistic revelation of classifiable desires filling the contents of one’s depth (53-54).

In the 1910s and 1920s, as Pfister explains, an interest in psychoanalysis flourished in the United States. Though Pfister's *Staging Depth* focuses on the works of Eugene O'Neill, Pfister cites modernist literary writers like O'Neill, Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, and Sherwood Anderson as figures who "legitimated the psychological common sense prompted by pop psychology" (62). *Winesburg, Ohio* demonstrates Anderson's interest in depth psychology and echoes Simmel's view of metropolitan mentality.

The opening story of *Winesburg, Ohio*, "Hands" tells the tale of Wing Biddlebaum, an ex-school teacher who, the reader later learns, was chased out of his previous town because of inaccurate charges of child molestation. Wing Biddlebaum demonstrates the qualities of a Simmelian eccentric. Biddlebaum was "forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years" (11).

Characterized above all by his solitude and by the nervous tic referred to in the title of the story, Biddlebaum exemplifies aspects of Simmel's reading of the mental lives of city people. Biddlebaum is isolated from his community and has developed bizarre outer traits. Biddlebaum also has a very deep inner life. However, he is unable to fully express it and can do so only in the presence of George Willard. In effect, Anderson problematizes one of Simmel's main points. If urbanization produces people who have deep inner lives, what happens if they cannot express them? Without customary personal relations, how can one truly communicate with another?

Doctor Reefy is another example of Anderson's eccentrics. Though he is certainly more socially integrated into the community than Wing Biddlebaum, he still suffers from the same anxieties about expressing himself. Anderson describes Doctor



Reefy, as he did Wing Biddlebaum, as decaying. In his appearance, Doctor Reefy is anachronistic, a figure of a doctor from the past: “Doctor Reefy was a tall man who had worn one suit of clothes for ten years. It was frayed at the sleeves and little holes had appeared at the knees and elbows. In the office he wore also a linen duster with huge pockets into which he continually stuffed scraps of paper” (18). While Wing Biddlebaum paces back and forth and speaks with his hands, Doctor Reefy’s idiosyncrasy is his tendency to write his thoughts on papers, crunch them up in a ball, and stick them in his pocket. These papers held “written thoughts, ends of thoughts, beginnings of thoughts . . . One by one the mind of Doctor Reefy had made the thoughts. Out of many of them he formed a truth that arose gigantic in his mind. The truth clouded the world. It became terrible and then faded away and the little thoughts began again” (19). Doctor Reefy too is thus presented with a strong internal life. Though he is able to draw conclusions and articulate his thoughts in writing, the idea of the “truth” frightens him.

A third story featuring the town telegraph operator, Wash Williams, emphasizes its important context by beginning with a reference to urban life: “If you have lived in cities and have walked in the park on a summer afternoon, you have perhaps seen, blinking in a corner of his iron cage, a huge, grotesque kind of monkey” (93). Comparing the town’s view of Wash Williams to the reader’s view of the monkey, Anderson almost literally puts Williams in Simmel’s context and, perhaps indirectly, alludes to Max Weber’s renowned “iron cage of rationality.” As a telegraph operator, Williams is, too, a symbol of modern communication. In the view of the townspeople of Winesburg, Williams is “unclean, . . . even the whites of his

eyes looked soiled.” But as with Wing Biddlebaum and Doctor Reefy, Anderson echoes Simmel’s intuition that public eccentricity corresponds with private depth. In the presence of George Willard, Wash is able to tell his story and even though the story is full of hatred, distrust, and anger, he is still able to express those emotions clearly. “There was something almost beautiful in the voice of Wash Williams, the hideous, telling his story of hate” (96). In the next sentence, Wash is described as “a poet” (96). Wash Williams has an ability that Wing Biddlebaum cannot seem to grasp and that Doctor Reefy, though he may have it, cannot share with anyone. In this way, Anderson introduces a complication to the idea of the eccentric. Wash is a fiery, passionate, and irrational man and in this way he fits the mold of a “grotesque” but he also represents someone who is almost a mistaken grotesque, for he does have the ability to be a poet.

Anderson’s grotesques differ significantly from other contemporary representations of rural people—they are not victims of circumstance. This is in stark contrast, for example, to the rural people depicted in the work of the regionalists like Hamlin Garland or Edith Wharton. At first glance, the description of Grant, in “Up the Coolly” may resemble that of a Winesburg grotesque:

His suspenders, once gaycolored, had given most of their color to his shirt, and had marked irregular broad bands of pink and brown and green over his shoulders. His hair was uncombed, merely pushed away from his face. He wore a mustache only, though his face was covered

with a week's growth of beard. His face was rather gaunt, and was brown as leather (83).

Grant's physical description is similar to the decaying appearance of Anderson's Wing Biddlebaum or Doctor Reefy. However, Grant, like Ethan Frome, is not a grotesque, but a broken giant. "His brother was a man of great character. He could see that now. His deep-set, gray eyes and rugged face showed at thirty a man of great natural ability" (82). His "problem" is not therefore inherent to him, as Howard discovers in the story's final scene: "'Good God! I see it all now. . . Circumstances made me and crushed you. That's all there is about that. Luck made me and cheated you. It ain't right'" (127). Though constrained by circumstance, moreover, Garland's rural characters do not lack understanding of their situations or of their worlds. Grant is aware of his place in society, he understands how society works, and he is capable of verbalizing his thoughts. It is Grant who accurately diagnoses the economic injustice that imprisons him and leads his brother to see the truth. Anderson's grotesques, by contrast, are not victims of circumstance, but instead implicitly lack the mental and spiritual ability to cope with the modernizing world. In "The Thinker," for example Seth Richmond eavesdrops on a conversation between Tom Willard and a group of traveling salesmen:

Tom Willard was berating the traveling men. 'I am a Democrat but your talk makes me sick,' he said. 'You don't understand McKinley. McKinley and Mark Hanna are friends. It is impossible perhaps for your mind to grasp that. If anyone tells you that a friendship can be deeper and bigger and more worth while than dollars

and cents, or even more worth while that state politics, you snicker and laugh.’

The landlord was interrupted by one of the guest, a tall grey-mustached man who worked for a wholesale grocery house. ‘Do you think that I’ve lived in Cleveland all these years without knowing Mark Hanna?’ he demanded. ‘Your talk is piffle. Hanna is after money and nothing else. This McKinley is his tool. He has McKinley and don’t you forget it’” (102-103).

This passage stresses the naïveté of Tom Willard’s political thinking, which is highlighted by his pathetic attempt to demonstrate his superiority. He is unable to compete with the urban salespeople and has no grasp of the political realities that determine his world.

Though Anderson gives voice to and honors his grotesques, he does not imply that these people are misshapen because of their circumstances, but rather because they lack some mental and spiritual capacity. Anderson emphasizes this point by providing an example of a person who succeeds in the modern world—George Willard. *Winesburg, Ohio*, is, in essence, a *Künstlerroman*. The book follows George’s intellectual and spiritual development, making George the counterpoint through which the reader analyzes the failings of the other characters of Winesburg. It is through George Willard that one implicitly learns how to be a spiritually fulfilled person in the modern world.

Winesburg is a town filled with people who have interior thoughts but who cannot seem to express them properly. Some people, like Wing Biddlebaum, cannot

express themselves at all. Other people like Doctor Parcival, talk too much, and others, like Joe Welling, have an ability to use language but implicitly lack the intellectual capacity or spiritual depth to make his speech meaningful. Anderson warns the reader against these types of people. It is not enough to have verbal eloquence, but this eloquence must also be combined with a spiritual awareness.

Doctor Parcival's story is ironically called, "The Philosopher." In contrast to Wing Biddlebaum, Doctor Parcival has the ability to speak, but "the tales that Doctor Parcival told George Willard began nowhere and ended nowhere" (33). Doctor Parcival's stories are fabrications and it is unclear whether or not he is ever telling the truth. Anderson brings up the idea that Doctor Parcival was a reporter "in Iowa—or was it Illinois?" (33) which immediately sets Doctor Parcival up as a comparison figure to George, though it is unclear whether or not Doctor Parcival was ever actually a reporter. Doctor Parcival's stories are mere attempts to excite and impress George: "I have a desire to make you admire me, that's a fact. I don't know why. That's why I talk. It's very amusing, eh?" (32). This admission exemplifies the same kind of feeling that most Winesburg residents have, George has some sort of magnetic power and people long to prove themselves to him.

Anderson reveals the dangers of person like Doctor Parcival in two ways. The first is by demonstrating how Doctor Parcival's use of language is aimed only at pleasing others and not at telling the truth. The second way is through a more concrete example of Doctor Parcival's insincerity. One day an accident occurs on Main Street. A little girl is killed by a horse and buggy and Doctor Parcival refuses to go out and help. Afterwards, he becomes paranoid that the town will lynch him for

his inaction. Anderson reveals through this anecdote both that Doctor Parcival is not a morally good person and also that his type of thinking leads to paranoia and misery. This paranoia and misery is most evident in the summation of his philosophy ““The idea is simple,”” Doctor Parcival says, ““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”” (37). Doctor Parcival is not a person who is made grotesque by his circumstances, but because of his misperceptions about language and his longing to impress people with false information. Doctor Parcival’s views are not necessarily inconsistent with Anderson’s views. But Doctor Parcival does not understand the implications of the idea himself and it has not made him sympathetic to others. He has, instead, a very partial grasp on a bit of truth.

Loquaciousness is not the only danger in the modern world, Anderson also warns the reader against those whose silence is mistaken for spiritual depth. ““The Thinker,”” Seth Richmond, is another figure posited in counterpoint to George. He is the same age as George and was known throughout the town as ““the deep one”” (103). However, ““he was not what the men of the town, and even his mother, thought him to be. No great underlying purpose lay back of his habitual silence, and he had no definite plan for his life”” (103).

Seth does identify George’s unique power to communicate, ““When it comes to loving some one, it won’t never be me. It’ll be some one else—some fool—some one who talks a lot—some one like that George Willard”” (112). However, he does not understand the difference between talking a lot and saying something. Seth’s problem, Anderson seems to indicate, is not that he does not speak well but that he

really does not have anything to say. He lacks spiritual depth. In keeping with this limitation, Seth is shown to belong more properly to the rural village. Seth's focus is straightforward and simple. He wants to marry Helen White and become a mechanic in a shop. In other words, he wants to be like one of the bees that he stumbled upon on a walk, "Seth had seen the bees everywhere all about him in the long grass. He stood in a mass of weeds that grew waist-high in the field that ran away from the hillside. The weeds were abloom with tiny purple blossoms and gave forth an overpowering fragrance. Upon the weeds the bees were gathered in armies, singing as they worked" (109-110). The bees reflect a world that no longer exists in Winesburg—a community working together for mutual benefit. This longing to live in a rural village is underlined by the subtle but significant fact that even when Seth runs away from home with his friends he travels forty miles to a town just like Winesburg to go to a Fair. Seth is not trying to escape the provincial life of Winesburg, but rather seeking return to a sense of community. This contrasts George and Helen's walk on the empty fairgrounds in "Sophistication." While Seth goes to the fairgrounds to seek out the traditional pleasure of community, Helen and George go alone, after everyone has left and everything is quiet. Both Seth's intellectual and spiritual shallowness and his longing to return to an earlier time indicate that he is not equipped to handle the modern world.

Anderson offers a depiction of a failed George Willard through the character, Enoch Robinson. In "Loneliness," Enoch Robinson is an artist from Winesburg who moves to New York City to pursue his artistic career. He is not a successful artist and eventually moves back to Winesburg. This is the only story in the collection that

takes place explicitly out of Winesburg and in an urban area. Even though it takes place in New York City, the story is based in one, claustrophobic room.

Enoch Robinson is lame and crippled, creating an image of a grotesque: “Once he was hit by a street car and thrown against an iron post. That made him lame. It was one of the many things that kept things from turning out for Enoch Robinson” (135). Enoch was not only physically disabled, but he was mentally incapable of expressing his artistic vision. He was not without artistic talent but he was unable to bring his ideas to his artwork: “Nothing ever turned out for Enoch Robinson. He could draw well enough and he had many odd delicate thoughts hidden away in his brain that might have expressed themselves through the brush of a painter, but he was always a child and that was a handicap to his worldly development” (135). In comparison to the other New York artists, Enoch Robinson was naïve and underdeveloped. Anderson exemplifies Enoch’s failings by claiming that the room he worked in was more of a story than the man himself: “The room in which young Robinson lived in New York faced Washington Square and was long and narrow like a hallway. It is important to get that fixed in your mind. The story of Enoch is in fact the story of a room almost more than it is the story of a man” (136). This is the only time in the book where Anderson explicitly denigrates one of his characters, emphasizing Enoch’s artistic failings in counterpoint to George’s spiritual and artistic capabilities.

“A Man of Ideas,” is perhaps one of the most ambiguous stories in the book—it depicts a man who seems happy. The main character, Joe Welling, offers another counterpoint to George Willard, but he, unlike Doctor Parcival, Seth Richmond, or



Enoch Robinson does not seem to be particularly maladjusted or miserable.

Physically, he is described like the other grotesques:

He was like a tiny little volcano that lies silent for days and then suddenly spouts fire. No, he wasn't like that—he was like a man who is subject to fits, one who walks among fellow men inspiring fear because a fit may come upon him suddenly and blow him a way into a strange uncanny physically state in which his eyes roll and his legs and arms jerk. He was like that, only that the visitation that descended upon Joe Welling was a mental and not a physical thing. He was beset by ideas and in the throes of one of his ideas was uncontrollable. Words rolled and tumbled from his mouth. A peculiar smile came upon his lips. The edges of his teeth that were tipped with gold glistened in the light. Pouncing upon a bystander he began to talk. For the bystander there was no escape. The excited man breathed into his face, peered into his eyes, pounded upon his chest with a shaking forefinger, demanded, compelled attention (77).

This portrayal of Joe Welling is sinister. He is uncontrollable like a volcano, he is subject to strange fits, and he captures bystanders with his rants.

Joe Welling also embodies a city person. Though his job is a Standard Oil agent, Joe Welling has the elements of a salesman: “Astride an idea, Joe was overmastering. His personality became gigantic. It overrode the man to whom he talked, swept him away, swept all away, all who stood within the sound of his voice” (78). Joe Welling’s ability to verbalize his ideas and convince others of his wisdom is

highlighted at the end of the story. George Willard watches Joe Welling and the Kings from the window: “Leaning out the window he saw Joe Welling going along the street with the two Kings. Tom King was forced to take extraordinary long strides to keep pace with the little man. As he strode along, he leaned over, listening—absorbed, fascinated” (84).

Joe Welling’s language epitomizes urban advertising. This is highlighted most in the descriptions of his baseball games. Joe Welling is the organizer of a baseball club and it is through the success of the baseball team that he earned respect from the town: “Joe organized a baseball club because he wanted to be a coach and in that position he began to win the respect of his townsmen. ‘He is a wonder.’ They declared after Joe’s team had whipped the team from Medina County. ‘He gets everybody working together. You just watch him’” (80). Joe has the ability to bring members of this disjointed and disconnected town together and he is the only character in the book with the ability to do so. Though baseball is a communal sport, highlighting Joe Welling’s longing for a sense of camaraderie, it also originated in urban areas. In effect, Joe brought the city to the country. Joe was an attention grabber at these games: “‘Now! Now! Now! Now!’ shouted the excited man. ‘Watch me! Watch me! Watch my fingers! Watch my hands! Watch my feet! Watch my eyes! Let’s work together here! Watch me! In me you see all the movements of the game! Work with me! Work with me! Watch me! Watch me! Watch me!’” (80) This language actualizes what advertisements attempt to portray more subtly. This quotation is a confusion of demands—to work together and also to focus on him. This type of relationship resembles that of a salesperson pitching an idea to a potential

client. The enthusiasm is at once convincing and at the same time, overwhelming and unappealing. Joe Welling represents both the power and the dangers of city language.

At the same time, it is not as though Anderson completely detests Joe Welling. In fact, Anderson was himself a baseball umpire for the Clyde Baseball club in his young adulthood and particularly enjoyed the communal aspects and camaraderie of the team (Rideout 46). Joe Welling is successful at his job and respected throughout the community for his baseball coaching. Joe is also the only character in the book who appears to have a healthy romantic relationship. Though others in the town do not approve of the courtship between Joe Welling and Sarah King, Joe and Sarah do appear to genuinely care about one another. It is clear that Joe Welling enjoys Sarah's company partially because she will listen to his rants, but he also appears to genuinely respect her and enjoy her company. At the end of the story Joe talks to Tom and Edward King. In their conversation Joe mentions how he wishes Sarah was there multiple times: "I wish Sarah were here also" (83) and "Say, I wish Sarah was here" (84). These moments are almost afterthoughts, lending to their genuine nature. The final lines of the story reveal Joe's respect for Sarah: "Wait till you see Sarah, she'll get the idea. She'll be interested. Sarah is always interested in ideas. You can't be too smart for Sarah, now can you? Of course you can't. You know that" (84). Though the first two sentences reveal Joe's longing to be listened to, the last four highlight his appreciation of Sarah and his longing for her approval. This kind of romantic respect does not appear in any other relationships in the book. Though Joe is presented as an almost manic, fast-talking egotist, the story does not end on that note, but rather on this seemingly genuine and loving remark.

Joe Welling is an example of a Winesburg inhabitant who can adopt the modern, urbanizing lifestyle, and even help bring it to Winesburg. However, his ability to adapt to a changing environment does not make him an equivalent to George Willard. Despite Joe's happiness, comparatively to George, he is spiritually unfulfilled. His ideas, though they may be interesting are not spiritually enlightened. The discrepancy between the two is underlined by the very fact that Joe is envious of George: "Joe envied the boy. It seemed to him that he was meant by Nature to be a reporter on a newspaper" (79). When Joe tells the Kings of his ideas, he indicates that he wants George to hear them and make a story out of them: "I was going to tell George Willard about it, let him make a piece out of it for the paper" (83). Joe still relies on George for his sense of purpose and acceptance. Though Joe is able to verbalize his ideas to most of the community, they never get developed into anything more than a collection of thoughts presented with fervor. Through a comparison of George and Joe, Anderson distinguishes between someone who is truly happy and someone who has the appearance of it but will never truly be so because he lacks spiritual fulfillment. In other words, Joe lacks the right kind of language.

In *Winesburg*, language is the problem and the antidote to the modern world. Joe Welling represents the power of urban language. The way Joe uses language and communication is convincing, but unenlightened and spiritually dangerous. The right kind of language, Anderson argues, is the kind that George uses to communicate with Helen in the final chapters of the book. After the death of his mother and upon his imminent departure from Winesburg, George's artistic and spiritual potential comes into fruition. George not only becomes a man, but an artist:

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. The boy is walking through the street of his town. He is thinking of the future and of the figure he will cut in the world. Ambitions and regrets awake within him. Suddenly something happens; he stops under a tree and waits as for voice calling his name. Ghosts of old things creep into his consciousness; the voice outside of himself whisper a message concerning the limitations of life. From being quite sure of himself and his future he comes not at all sure. If he be an imaginative boy a door is torn open for the first time he looks out upon the world, seeing, as though they marched in procession before him, the countless figures of men who before his time have come out of nothingness into the world, lived their lives and again disappeared into nothingness. The sadness of sophistication has come to the boy” (193).

This passage reveals a spiritual awakening and transformation in George. George is “an imaginative boy” and so for the first time, he is able to look at his world and the people in it and fully analyze them. At this moment, George becomes frightened, for he fears that he will become one of these ghosts, but he does not. His connection with Helen prevents this from happening.

The reaction to this realization, Anderson describes, is a longing to connect with another person physically, particularly a woman. George longs to reach out to

the banker's daughter, Helen White.<sup>3</sup> George and Helen do kiss but "that impulse did not last" (199). Instead, George chooses to disregard his sexual feelings towards her:

The presence of Helen renewed and refreshed him. It was as though her woman's hand was assisting him to make some minute readjustment of the machinery of his life. He began to think of the people in the town where he had always lived with something like reverence. He had 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 (199).

Through Helen, George is able to contemplate the grotesques of his town and feel appreciation for them. Though he wants the love of Helen, he does not want this love to be sexual. Instead of sexual attraction, the two sit in dignified silence. Their thoughts are not about romantic longing but rather described by Anderson in this way: "I have come to this lonely place and here is this other,' was the substance of

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<sup>3</sup> Helen White is portrayed as the female-equivalent of George Willard. As with George, Anderson sets up contrasts between Helen and the other female characters through which the reader analyzes the failures of the urban woman. In her essay, "Modern Sexuality and the Myth of Victorian Repression," Christine Simmons discusses four types of women portrayed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the matriarch, the complaining wife, the career woman/lesbian, and finally, the new ideal woman: the flapper. Anderson addresses the same issues in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Anderson also portrays the "modern woman" in the novel, but this portrayal is not offered as an ideal. In the stories about Elizabeth Willard, "Mother" and "Death," Elizabeth is the figure through which Anderson questions the ideal of the modern woman. Elizabeth exhibited, at least in her youthful days, the qualities that Simmons ascribes to the flapper—that is, a simultaneous sense of independence yet a longing to be settled down, and, an ability to have sexual relations with someone they love, even before marriage (32). Anderson also plays with notions of the "career woman." In "The Teacher," the people of Winesburg view Kate Swift as "a confirmed old maid and because she spoke sharply and went her own way thought her lacking in all the human feeling that did so much to make and mar their own lives (130). Anderson dislodges this view in the following sentence: "In reality she was the most passionate soul among them" (130). Kate is not asexual at all, but rather presented as almost hypersexual. Kate fantasizes about her old pupil, George Willard. Though she later pulls away from George, these intense emotions present Kate as being almost too forward in her sexuality. Kate does exactly what modern day women were supposed to do, realize she had sexual desires and follow those desires, but in this case, Anderson points to these desires as cheap and animalistic.

the thing felt” (199). Helen and George are spiritually but not romantically connected. Their relationship is not marked by mutual attraction, but rather “mutual respect.” (200).

At the end of the story, Helen and George leave the abandoned, quiet fairgrounds, fulfilled.

There is no way of knowing what woman’s thoughts went through her mind but, when the bottom of the hill was reached and she came up to the boy, she took his arms and walked beside him in dignified silence. For some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing they needed. Man or boy, woman or girl, they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible (200).

Helen and George are able to tap into the right kind of communication that makes genuine connections possible in the modern world. It is not through witty remarks, long intellectual conversations, or through sexual advances that George and Helen communicate, but rather through a specifically nonsexual, nonverbal encounter. It is this spiritual ability that George and Helen have that distinguishes them from the other inhabitants of Winesburg and it is this ability that will keep them from becoming grotesques.

Neither in his life, nor in his seminal book, *Winesburg, Ohio*, did Sherwood Anderson fully reject the rural world he had known in his childhood. He moved in

and out of the city throughout his entire life, seeking to reconcile the quiet of the countryside with the intellectual stimulation of the city. *Winesburg, Ohio* is not a typical Revolt from the Village narrative. Its social geography differs significantly from those of regionalist and naturalist authors like Freeman, Garland, and Wharton who emphasized the great economic and cultural gulf dividing country and city, but it is also unlike that of writers like Sinclair Lewis who emphasized the confinement and cultural isolation of the Midwestern village. The people of Winesburg do not live in a town with a center and a strong sense of community. Rather, they live on the outskirts of an absent community and their interactions with one another are almost accidental. Stories like “Godliness,” which highlight the image of a rural past, provide a comparison point through which the reader understands that Winesburg is not a conventional rural village.

Although aspects of the city are projected onto Winesburg, Winesburg itself is not a metropolitan area. For example, there are no workers and few immigrants in Winesburg. Instead, Anderson projects the psychic and mental attributes conventionally used to classify urbanites onto the inhabitants of Winesburg. These people, unable to cope with industrialization and what Simmel referred to as the mental life of the metropolis become “grotesques.” The question of the book becomes: how does one escape becoming a grotesque? By posing this question and answering it through the character, George Willard, Anderson sets up an intimate connection with his readers. Anderson instructs his readers how to escape the grotesque distortion that traps his characters and suggests that, as readers of his book, we too could be like George Willard.



The connection Anderson establishes with his readers is one implicitly based on literary talent and spiritual depth—the qualities George most directly demonstrates. But as George's intimacy with Helen White, his only fully successful connection in the book, suggests, it is also one of class. George and Helen are representatives of the kind of people that can escape becoming grotesques and they are also from the only identifiable middle-class families in the book. George's family owns the New Willard House and clearly has enough money to help George leave Winesburg. Helen is the daughter of a banker and the only character in the book who attends a University. Anderson suggests that Helen and George are part of the new middle class that can emerge from Winesburg and flourish in the industrialized world.

Anderson creates a complex, ambivalent portrait of rural life in *Winesburg, Ohio*. The urban and the rural are combined, demonstrating not a growing estrangement between the city and the country but rather that the city and the country have become inextricably linked through urbanization and can fall victims of the same sort of isolation and distortion. Though urbanization and modernization alienates the individual and causes him or her to develop eccentric qualities, urbanization and modernization can also lead to a greater spiritual union like the one felt between Helen and George. Those incapable of spiritual fulfillment, the grotesques of Winesburg, it is implied, will die out. *Winesburg, Ohio* acts, then, not only as a guide to spiritual fulfillment in the modern world and as a justification for the rise of developing white-collar middle class, but also as an elegy for those destroyed by modernization.

## Chapter Three

### *New Forms of Community in Trifles and Winesburg, Ohio*

Like Sherwood Anderson, Susan Glaspell led a life whose dramatic transformations highlighted the way that rapid urbanization transformed the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century. Susan Glaspell was born in 1876 to a middle-class family in Davenport, Iowa. In the 1830s, Davenport was described by a correspondent for the New York *Star* as “an unspoiled valley . . . In the beauty of the scenery . . . I have found imaged all the charms I had pictured in my youthful imagination while reading a description of the Happy Valley in *Rasselas* but which I never expected to see in the world of reality” (Newhall qtd. in Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 12). In the decades before Glaspell’s birth, however, immigration from Germany and the expansion of the railroads brought Davenport rapid growth, turning the once small farming community into an expanding commercial center. By the time Glaspell was born, her family, once prosperous farmers, had moved into a rented house in a poor area of the city.

When interviewed about her youth, Glaspell consistently declared that her childhood was happy. She would attend Sunday night dinners, visit neighbors, go to picnics, and attend church (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 22). Upon graduating from high school, Glaspell worked for the *Davenport Morning Republican* and two years later for the *Weekly Outlook*. Glaspell wrote a column called, “Social Life.” This column was a series of sarcastic vignettes usually about the “upper ten.” Glaspell would criticize what she called the “society girl” in favor of “the New Woman” or “The

Bachelor girl”—i.e. “a woman who has chosen not to marry, but cannot be dismissed as an ‘old maid’” (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 33).

At the age of twenty-one, Susan Glaspell enrolled in Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. After receiving her B.A., Glaspell worked for the *Des Moines Daily News*. Her job had two facets; she wrote a weekly column called “The News Girl” and covered the state legislature and the local crime beat. Glaspell covered one specific case in 1900, the Hossack murder case, which provided her with the plot for her most remembered work, the play, *Trifles*. Margaret Hossack was charged with killing her husband John Hossack with an axe while he slept in bed beside her. Glaspell wrote twenty-six newspaper stories about the Hossack case (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 42). After the trial, Glaspell resigned from her position at the *Des Moines Daily News* and moved back to Davenport and began to write fiction. In the summer of 1902, Glaspell enrolled in the graduate English department at the University of Chicago, moving on after graduation to a successful career as a fiction writer and to life, with her husband George Cram Cook, in the newly flourishing bohemian community of Greenwich Village. There, Glaspell became a prominent member of the Heterodoxy Club, the group of radical, middle-class feminists that led the movement toward the era’s new feminism (Pfister 191). Many of the women who formed the club came, like Glaspell, from Midwestern backgrounds and would discuss their childhoods with one another. Their stories became the inspiration for many of Glaspell’s works, and the members of the club were often the first audience for her plays (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 126).

Cook and Glaspell, along with other radical and intellectuals of the Village, summered in Provincetown, a fishing village on the tip of Cape Cod. Though Glaspell claimed that Provincetown reminded her of her Midwestern roots (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 140), the bohemian community in which she and her husband lived was not homogenous, but was made up, as Hutchins Hapgood recalled, of “Anarchists, the I.W.W.’s, the extreme left wing of the Socialist, the females militantly revolutionary about sex-freedom, and the Cubists and Post-Impressionists in art” (qtd. in Ozieblo 106). Amongst these revolutionaries, Cook and Glaspell found a niche for themselves with writers “who, like themselves, had fled small-town values and constrictions” and yet reproduced in their new community some of the forms of neighborliness and sociability they remembered from their small-town youths (Ozieblo 106-107).

It was in Provincetown in 1916 that Glaspell wrote *Trifles* for the Provincetown Players. Though she is now best remembered for the play, in her own day Glaspell was a successful and highly regarded fiction writer as well as playwright. By the time Glaspell wrote *Trifles* she had already published three novels, thirty-one short stories, and a collection of short fiction. Her novels were reviewed favorably in the *New York Times* (Carpentier 93) and her plays were successful and lauded by reviewers. She was popular and respected until the mid 1930s. Despite her success, Glaspell’s work has not been canonized.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Critics offer various reasons as to why Glaspell’s work has been excluded from the literary canon. Joel Pfister argues that Glaspell’s plays were left out of the literary canon because her plays did not show a deep interest in popular psychology, a field that was at the heart of the modernist movement. Instead of using psychology as a way to explain female desires, Glaspell plays focused on the problems of gender (191-194). Paul Lautner, in his essay, “Race and Gender in the Shaping of the Literary Canon” identifies three forces that excluded women’s work from the America literary canon: “the professionalization of the teaching of literature, the development of an aesthetic theory that privileged certain texts, and the historiographic organization of the body of literature into conventional ‘periods’ and ‘themes’” (27). Lautner’s second force, “the development of aesthetic theory that

One reason for Glaspell's relative neglect is that her work was long branded as regionalist and local colorist. This is mostly a result of the work of her biographer, Arthur E. Waterman, whose 1966 contribution on Glaspell to the Twayne's United States Author series, was until 1983, the only discussion of Glaspell's *oeuvre*.

Waterman claims that Glaspell is a regionalist writer:

Throughout her career as a writer of fiction and drama Miss Glaspell remained a Midwestern idealist. Her concern is with the Midwest—its lands, its people, its heritage—and her own fundamental Midwestern attitude unify all her work . . . In her early short stories, written in the local-color tradition, she accepted without question the land and the people she knew. When she moved East, married George Cram Cook, and joined the Village revolt against outmoded traditions, such as the sentimental, Romantic one she had adopted in her short fiction, she came to view her region more objectively. She then satirized its limitations in . . . the play *Trifles*. She did not reject her homeplace, however, but held to the belief that, in spite of its superficial pretentiousness, the Midwest could supply the means for the individual to rise above the small-town limitations to find a better life . . . Thus Susan Glaspell is a regionalist (117).

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privileged certain texts," he claims, was the most influential in marginalizing Glaspell's work. Carpentier paraphrases Lautner's point in this way: "Increasingly nationalism between the wars contributed to the need to create an American literary tradition that was seen to 'embody the values of masculine culture' and to be distinct from the British tradition . . . Such literature was seen as universal, whereas tags like 'sentimental' and 'regional' came to brand women's fiction as provincial and inferior" (94).

Waterman claims that Glaspell's work reveals "the defects of regional writing: conservatism, unabashed sentiment, an overwhelming middle-class point of view, and reverence for tradition for its own sake" (118). He attributes her success as a playwright to her husband's influence, and he devalues Glaspell because of what he defines as her audience: "She speaks to and for a large segment of the American public: the middle-class, feminine, traditionally minded, basically hopeful and pragmatic, charitable and cheerful reader who clings to the belief, perhaps the illusion, that life has meaning, virtue is rewarding, love brings happiness, the past can help the present prepare for the future" (Waterman 121). This view of Glaspell is incorrect. Though she did certainly appeal to women perhaps more than men, these women were not traditionally minded or simple, but members of a free-thinking intelligentsia whose attitudes toward traditional gender ideals was best indicated by the feminism of the Heterodoxy Club. The ideals of love and hope that Waterman claims exist in Glaspell's work are not readily apparent in *Trifles*. Waterman claims that Glaspell finds "oversimplified answers to ambiguous questions" (121). This claim has no validity in regard to *Trifles*. Glaspell's questions are not "ambiguous" but complex. Nor she does provide "oversimplified answers." In fact, she does not supply any clear answers at all.

Partially as a reaction to Waterman's misreading of Susan Glaspell's work, Glaspell has sometimes been pegged as part of the Revolt from the Village. Marcia Noe places Glaspell in this tradition. Carpentier claims that this categorization is "quite right" and suggests that Glaspell even influenced Sinclair Lewis's harsh views of the Midwestern small town (98). But, though it is certainly true that Glaspell's

*Trifles* resembles more of a Revolt from the Village narrative than it does a regionalist or local color story, to categorize the play in this way simplifies the complexities of Glaspell's text and the messages and the questions it raises. Critics have chosen to focus primarily on analyzing gender relationships in *Trifles*, but there has not been adequate discussion of how the play's depiction of the relation of the urban to the rural world furthers and reflects Glaspell's interests in gender and women's roles in society. The unique world Glaspell creates in *Trifles*, which like Anderson's Winesburg is neither urban nor rural but an illuminating combination of the two, makes it clear that the issues Glaspell addresses are not the Revolt from the Village problems of narrow-mindedness and conformity; they are gender issues that pervade American culture in a way that the urban transformation of the United States allows Glaspell to perceive and address. Like Anderson, Glaspell depicts the village as a powerful form of community disappearing in the modern world and hints at new forms of community that may rise to replace it.

*Trifles* depicts the aftermath of the murder of John Wright. His wife, Minnie Wright, has already been arrested for the murder and does not even appear onstage. The entirety of the play takes place in the sparse and cold kitchen of the Wright farmhouse. Two officials, Sheriff Henry Peters and the county attorney, George Henderson, question Mr. Lewis Hale, the Wright's farmer neighbor who had discovered Mr. Wright's body upstairs in the couple's bedroom. County Attorney Henderson and Sheriff Peters set out to search the house for clues that will provide them with a "motive; something to show anger, or—sudden feeling" (15). Mrs. Peters

and Mrs. Hale accompany their husbands. Mrs. Peters is in charge of collecting some items that Mrs. Wright has asked to have brought to the jail. Mrs. Peters asked that Mrs. Hale be brought along to keep her company in the kitchen while the men search the house and the farm.

While the men search the house for clues, the women remain in the kitchen, examining the “trifles” the men disregard and piecing together the murder story. The women are, as Ben-Zvi claims, “like quilters” who “patch together the scenario of . . . [Minnie Wright’s] life and of her guilt” (Ben-Zvi, “Murder, She Wrote 34). Through reading these “trifles,” (e.g., a log-cabin quilt with erratic stitching), as clues, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are able to put together Minnie’s personal history. Minnie Wright had once been a lively, beautiful girl with a lovely voice, but the stresses of her farmwork and her cold husband had isolated her from the rest of the community. When the women discover a birdcage and a dead bird, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters put the story together: Mr. Wright killed his wife’s prized possession and only comfort in her lonely life. The bird is understood by Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters to be a symbol of Mrs. Wright’s imprisonment. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters discuss and try the case, find Minnie Wright guilty, based on the circumstantial evidence they have gathered. However, instead of providing the Sheriff and Henderson with the evidence the men seek, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters keep it to themselves, recognizing Minnie Wright’s hardships and her need to escape her husband’s strangulating hold.

Glaspell based *Trifles* on the Hossack murder case, which she reported for the *Des Moines Daily News*. On December 2, 1900, a well-to-do farmer, John Hossack,



was struck twice on the head with an ax, while he slept in his bed. Margaret, his wife of thirty-three years, claimed to be sleeping in the bed next to him and reported that there was a strange sound, “like two pieces of wood striking” (qtd. in Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 42). This sound awakened her and she jumped out of bed and went into an adjoining sitting room where she claimed she saw a light shining on the wall and heard the front-porch door close. Margaret Hossack reported hearing her husband’s groans. She gathered five out of her nine children and reentered the bedroom where she found her husband’s head crushed, with brain matter oozing out (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 42). Originally, the police assumed that prowlers committed the crime but they found no evidence of anything being stolen. It was then that a coroner was called and the presumed murder weapon was found smeared with blood under the family corncrib (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 42). Margaret was arrested and charged with murder.

Between December 3, 1900 and April 11, 1901, Glaspell published twenty-six stories on the Hossack murder case. These stories “made ready use of hyperbole, invention, and supposition, all filtered through one of Susan’s most common journalistic devices: a lively, often opinionated persona . . . She constructed a presence who invites the reader to share privileged information, intriguing rumor, and running assessment of the case and of the guilt or innocence of the accused” (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 42).

Glaspell’s articles were thus by no means entirely unbiased. Her own perceptions of Margaret Hossack’s guilt altered throughout the case. This is demonstrated through her varying portrayals of the accused Hossack. Glaspell’s

initial descriptions of the defendant suggest that she believed Margaret Hossack to be guilty. When arrested, Hossack “manifested no emotion,” Glaspell reported, “took her arrest calmly and absolutely declined to make a statement concerning her guilt or innocence” (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 152). This intimation is furthered in another description: “Though past 50 years of age, she is tall and powerful and looks like she would be dangerous if aroused to a point of hatred” (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 182). This harshly judgmental portrayal underwent a transformation after Glaspell visited the Hossack house. Glaspell’s “references to the accused woman became more benign, the ‘powerful’ murderer becoming, with each story, older, frailer, and more maternal” (Ben-Zvi, “Murder She Wrote” 25). The headline of the article following this visit was “Mrs. Hossack May Yet Be Proven Innocent: Tide of Sentiment Turns Slightly in Her Favor—Notified Today That She Will Soon Be Released—First Photographs Bearing on the Tragedy” (Ben-Zvi, “Murder, She Wrote” 25). These photographs were actually three pencil drawings. The first was of Mrs. Hossack in a rocking chair with her head down, the second of Mr. Hossack in his bed with two gashes on his head, and the third was an image of the ax with four dots of blood on it (Ben-Zvi, “Murder, She Wrote” 26). Glaspell now described Mrs. Hossack not as a murderer but rather as an “aged prisoner” (qtd. in Ben-Zvi, “Murder, She Wrote” 26).

The style of these articles was constructed to keep readers interested and engaged in the case. The articles became almost like detective pieces. As Ben-Zvi explains, Glaspell dangled “tantalizing details. The test on the murder weapon may

now be known, but the readers will have to wait until the trial to learn the results” (44).

The trial began on April 1, 1901 in the Polk County Courthouse and was held there every day except Sunday for the next ten days (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 44).

The trial attracted thousands of people. Glaspell reported

Fully 1,200 people flocked out of the court house when court adjourned yesterday at the close of the second day of the Hossack murder trial. During the afternoon session, which began sharply at 1:30 o'clock, the seating capacity of the court room proved inadequate to the demand and scores of people crowded into the aisles and stood packed in about the railing separating the attorneys, witnesses and defendant from the promiscuous multitude (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 183).

Glaspell describes the crowd as having “the appearance of some social function” (Glaspell qtd. in Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 45). On the final day of the trial over 2,000 people attended to hear the verdict.

The last day of the trial ended with a “bombshell” (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 47). The prosecution revealed that Margaret Hossack had been pregnant before her marriage to John Hossack. This, the prosecution claimed, was the reason that the Hossacks had been unhappy in their marriage for thirty-three years. According to Glaspell, it also provided the jury with a reason not to trust Margaret Hossack (qtd. in Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 47). Margaret Hossack was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 47). This was the last story Glaspell filed

about the case and it was also the last story she ever wrote for the *Des Moines Daily News*. Though there was an appeal in 1902-1903 that acquitted Hossack, Glaspell had already moved back to Davenport and subsequently, Chicago.<sup>5</sup> It is unknown whether or not Glaspell knew that Mrs. Hossack's case was acquitted. (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 47).

When Glaspell reported for the *Des Moines Daily News*, she was only twenty-four and had just graduated from college. By the time she wrote *Trifles*, she had turned forty and had already published a great deal of fiction. When Glaspell returned to the subject, she viewed it through a significantly different critical lens.

Though *Trifles* and the Hossack murder case differ in essential ways, Glaspell retains telling aspects of the case in the play. Just as in the trial, the men in the play are reluctant to examine the motives behind the murder. Ben-Zvi outlines the major questions that the witnesses were asked during the Hossack trial. These witnesses focused on seven specific questions over the course of the trial, all of which focused on the plausibility of Margaret Hossack's version of events or on the state of her marriage.<sup>6</sup> Though these questions were certainly important to determining whether

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<sup>5</sup> In April 1901, Hossack's lawyers, Henderson and Berry, lost an appeal with a lower court but in 1902 the supreme court of Iowa agreed to hear the case. "Citing several instances where the trial judge had ruled incorrectly on evidence, the higher court overturned the original conviction and requested a new trial. A second took place in Madison County in February 1903. This time the jury, after twenty-seven hours of deliberation, was unable to reach a verdict: nine voting for conviction and three for acquittal. In papers filed in April 1903, the prosecutor stated that, since no further information had surfaced, it would be a waste of taxpayers' money to ask a third jury to hear the case. Mrs. Hossack, then near sixty and in failing health, was ordered released and was allowed to return to her home, her guilt or innocence still in question" (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 47).

<sup>6</sup> The questions were: (1) Would it have been possible, as his son testified, for John Hossack, who had sustained two traumatic blows—one made with the ax head, the second with the blunt handle—to call for and talk to his wife and children? (2) Were the blood found on the ax and the hairs later discovered nearby human, or were they, as claimed by the family, the residue of the turkey killed two days earlier

Margaret Hossack murdered her husband, they could not adequately account for a motive. Question six—“were earlier domestic troubles and dissension in the Hossack house resolved over a year before the murder, as the family stated?”—vaguely attempted to conjure the question of why Margaret Hossack would kill her husband, but it is not direct. When questioned, William Hossack, one of Margaret and John’s sons, claimed that the couple had not quarreled “within a year” (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 185). The question ““Did your mother and father quarrel any?”” was objected to by the defense, but the court held it to be pertinent (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 185). However, though the fact that the couple may have quarreled was pertinent, the underlying reasons for the Hossack’s marital unhappiness were not considered. In other words, the question for the court was not: *why* were Margaret and John Hossack fighting? The question was, *were* they fighting?<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, in Glaspell’s play, the County Attorney is clearly biased in favor of one motive—Minnie Wright and her husband did not get along well—and prejudiced against another, the idea that Minnie Wright was responding to mistreatment.

Mrs. Hale: (*Looking about.*) It never seemed a very cheerful place.

County Attorney: No—it’s not cheerful. I shouldn’t say she had the homemaking instinct.

Mrs. Hale: Well, I don’t know as Wright had, either.

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for Thanksgiving? (3) Was the ax, which the youngest son said he placed inside the corncrib after killing the turkey, moved by the murderer from its usual place? (4) Were the ax and Mrs. Hossack’s nightclothes washed to remove incriminating stains of blood? (5) Was the dog, which always barked when strangers appeared, drugged on the night of the crime, as family members testified? (6) Were earlier domestic troubles and dissension in the Hossack house resolved over a year before the murder, as the family stated? (7) Was it possible for an intruder or intruders to enter the house through the bedroom window, stand at the foot of the bed, and reach up to strike the fatal blows without rousing the woman who slept by her husband’s side? (Ben-Zvi, Susan Glaspell 45).

County Attorney: You mean that they didn't get on very well?

Mrs. Hale: No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being there.

County Attorney: I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now (11-12).

In this scene, the County Attorney is given an opportunity to press Mrs. Hale for important information, but as with the testimonies in the Hossack murder trial, he shies away from considering evidence that could suggest domestic abuse.<sup>8</sup> Ben-Zvi claims that the jury of the Hossack murder case,

May not have been convinced that she was guilty of murder, but she certainly was guilty of questionable female behavior: she had left her husband, discussed her marital troubles with neighbors, and, most damaging, had been pregnant before marriage. To have found such a woman innocent or to have explored the question of justifiable homicide would have been unthinkable in the Iowa court of 1901. Such a direction in the trial would have necessitated an investigation of the family, the power wielded by the husband, his physical abuse over a long period, and the circumscribed lives of the wife and children; both the prosecution, and tellingly, the defense seemed loath to pursue such investigations (Ben-Zvi, "Murder, She Wrote" 33).

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<sup>8</sup> The Iowa state supreme court ruling in 1902 acknowledged John Hossack's mistreatment of his wife. John Hossack repeatedly beat his wife, "with his hands and with a stove lid." However, domestic abuse was absent from the seven points on which the ruling reversed the lower court decision. (Ben-Zvi, *Susan Glaspell* 48).

Though it would have been unthinkable for the jury to consider, or for Glaspell to suggest the possibility of a justifiable homicide in 1901, by the time the play was written in 1916, this was no longer the case. In Ann Jones's book, *Women Who Kill*, Jones reveals through her description of the coverage of murder trials of women during the time of the Hossack trial, the news accounts only offered "what society will bear" (Ben-Zvi, "Murder, She Wrote" 41). In 1916, though the general public may have been resistant to Glaspell conjuring notions of justifiable homicide, Glaspell's unique audience would not have been. Glaspell's audience, as will be addressed later on this in chapter, would "see the Hossack trial in light of their own agitation for the Nineteenth amendment" and women's rights (Ben-Zvi, "Murder, She Wrote" 41).

Yet, while there are strong similarities between the Hossack trial and *Trifles*, still more striking is the extent to which Glaspell altered important details of the original murder case. She did so not only to make Minnie Wright a figure whom audiences might understand, but in ways that reflected her own changed view of rural community and literary expansion. Perhaps the most obvious detail is the murder weapon. In *Trifles*, the murder weapon is not an ax, but a rope. The use of the rope no doubt adds to the symbolism of the murder. Just as the bird's neck was broken, and just as Minnie Wright felt suffocated by her husband, John Wright has been fittingly murdered by strangulation. Interestingly, the hatchet does come up in the play, but instead of becoming a symbol of a woman's fury, it becomes a sign of male brutality

that the play suggests is common throughout society and of the anger and resentment that even otherwise happy women feel.

Mrs. Peters: (*In a whisper*) When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—(*covers her face an instant*) If they hadn't held me back I would have—(*catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly*)—hurt him (22).

Mrs. Peters's memory suggests that the aggression of men is ordinary and widespread. The boy's brutality is alarming considering his age, the victim's innocence, and his weapon.

Glaspell also alters more subtle aspects of the case. Most importantly, *Trifles* almost completely erases an important theme in Glaspell's coverage of the Hossack murder trial—the extent to which the crime and trial revealed and emphasized the existence of powerful networks of social belonging. Glaspell's newspaper coverage consistently places Margaret Hossack at the center of a thriving rural community. For example, Glaspell highlights the fact that Hossack was part of a large and close family. Margaret and John Hossack had nine children, five of whom lived in the house when the murder took place. During the trial, Margaret Hossack was supported by her large family. At one point, one of the Hossack's sons, James, a sixteen-year-old, testified that

he had not told the truth before the grand jury, that he had been intimidated by the county attorney. He denied everything that he said to the grand jury relative to the quarreling on the night of the murder,



prior to the aged couple's retiring. He declared yesterday that he had heard no quarrel or angry words. The introduction of evidence as given before the grand jury by this witness is thought to be a great point in favor of the prosecution as it is generally thought the boy on more mature deliberation is making an endeavor to shield his mother (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 189).

Even though this testimony proved to be detrimental to the defense, it demonstrates that Margaret Hossack was loved and supported by her children. When the description of the crime scene was read aloud to the jury,

Mrs. Hossack, who occupied a seat by the sheriff's wife, surrounded by three of her daughters and all but one of her sons, broke completely down and wept bitterly. Grief was not confined to her alone, it spread until the weeping group embraced the family and the sympathetic wife of Sheriff Hodson, who frequently applied her handkerchief to her eyes (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 184).

As horrible as her marriage to John Hossack might have been, Margaret was not isolated from other members of her community and was supported by family and friends during her trial. Glaspell claims that at the reading of the final indictment Margaret Hossack was "surrounded by her friends whose sobbing could be heard through the hall and into the open court yard, continuing until Sheriff Hodson led the prisoner back to jail awaiting final judgment" (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 194).

As noted above, the trial drew thousands of people interested in the case. Somewhat as in “The Revolt of ‘Mother,’” the entire town became caught up in the public event of the trial, which highlighted less the isolation of the accused than the way the Hossacks were part of a community that was intimately familiar with the details of their married life. One of the witnesses, Mrs. Haines claimed that she had heard Mrs. Hossack say, “it would be a Godsend if Mr. Hossack was gone.”

She also stated that she and her husband had often called at the Hossack house and that they had sometimes been called upon to talk to Mr. Hossack. That she knew the Hossacks frequently quarreled. That on one occasion Mrs. Hossack had asked her and her husband to come down to her home and bring with them several of the neighbors as she was afraid that her husband would kill the family before morning (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 186).

Unlike Margaret Hossack, Glaspell’s fictional Minnie Wright has been deprived of the essential quality that defines a woman in this rural world—motherhood and community. Minnie’s world is one of complete isolation and infertility. These alterations create an image of Minnie Wright, despite her arduous work on the farm, as exhibiting more conventional aspects of a city person than a rural farmer. As with Anderson’s treatment of Winesburg’s grotesques, Glaspell casts Minnie Wright as a far more isolated and vulnerable figure than her model.

Minnie Wright has no children and few friends, a fact that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters emphasize. “Not having children makes less work,” Mrs. Hale remarks, “but it

makes a quiet house” (19). As a farm wife, Wright’s neighbor Mrs. Hale has had similar amounts of exhausting labor as Minnie Wright, but she also has children. Even though Mrs. Peters is a sheriff’s wife and not a farmer, she, too, underlines how lonely life can be for a childless wife. At the end of the play, Mrs. Peters recalls her life in Dakota. Mrs. Peters almost goes into a trance, which indicates, much as in *Winesburg, Ohio*, that we are becoming privy to private, interior experience. Glaspell’s stage directions read, “*Something within her speaking*” (23). Mrs. Peters says, “I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then . . . I know what stillness is” (23). Without a child, Mrs. Peters felt paralyzed and isolated. Though Mrs. Peters was obviously devastated by the death of a child, Glaspell emphasizes that this was Mrs. Peters only child at that point, so it was not just the desolation of losing a child that led Mrs. Peters to understand “stillness” but the fact she was alone. This passage underscores Glaspell’s main point about Minnie Wright, that she has been reduced to a life of isolation.

Minnie Wright’s isolation is also emphasized geographically. Both the interior of the house and its location of the house are described as cold and removed:

Mrs. Peters: But I’m awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would have been lonesome for me sitting here alone.

Mrs. Hale: It would, wouldn’t it? (*Dropping sewing, voice falling*) But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over some times when *she* was here. I—(*looking around the room*) wish I had.

Mrs. Peters: But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale—your house and your children.

Mrs. Hale: I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—(*shakes her head*) (18-19).

Both Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are discomfited by the coldness and isolation of the house. Minnie Wright, like Anderson's grotesques, lives on the outskirts of a community we never really see.

For, while communal events are referred to in *Trifles*, they are significant only because Minnie Wright has not been allowed to be a part of them. At the beginning of the play, Mr. Hale mentions a “party telephone”—the new technology that, as chapter one pointed out, both brought the rural world closer to urban society and intensified some of the traditional forms of rural community. In *Trifles*, however, this new technology is mentioned only because John Wright has refused to make use of it, emphasizing the extent to which the Wrights are neither part of urban society or of the rural community that surrounds them. Mr. Wright, it is explained, thought “folks talked too much anyway” and that all he wanted was for “peace and quiet” (4). In addition, we are told that Minnie Wright has not been part of any of the traditional forms of rural women's sociability. Mrs. Hale comments that Minnie Wright did not sing in the choir and was not a part of the “Ladies' Aid”—a common church auxiliary

society in which women would sew, braid carpets, and quilt in order to raise money for foreign missionaries, new flooring or carpets, decorations for the church (Hedges 61). These societies provided women with an escape from the duties of their farm life and also “a public role, or place. And through the female friendships they fostered they helped women” (Hedges 61). Just as Anderson refers to the rural world in stories like “Godliness” and “The Untold Lie” as a way to highlight Winesburg’s urban qualities, a rural community is referred to in Glaspell’s world. However, just as Winesburg is no longer like the village suggested in “Godliness,” Minnie Wright is no longer a part of a rural community in *Trifles*. In both the book and the play, the rural world is barely present. It is a ghost that looms over, reminding the reader what is missing, without providing any hope of it returning in the same form.

Minnie’s alienation from the community is embodied in the patchwork quilt that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters find in the Wright kitchen. Mrs. Hale examines the quilt and exclaims, “Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she as working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It’s all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn’t know what she was about!” (16). Upon seeing the messiness of the quilt, Mrs. Hale immediately attempts to fix it.

Like her comments about failing to visit Minnie Wright, Mrs. Hale’s actions in this scene suggest both Minnie Wright’s isolation from her rural community and the incomplete efforts of the two women characters in the play to compensate for that isolation. This point is emphasized by the rich symbolic meaning that quilts have often possessed in the history of the United States. Quilts are useful (and would have been needed in the Wrights’ cold house) but they also became in the nineteenth

century a “the major creative outlet for women” (Hedges 61). Quilting was generally a communal activity, one that women could do together during Ladies’ Aid meetings. Minnie Wright, however, has been forced to construct her quilt alone. Mrs. Hale’s attempt to fix the messiness of Minnie’s sewing is portrayed as immediate and almost instinctual because quilting is supposed to be a communal activity (Hedges 62). In her essay, “Small Things Reconsidered” Elaine Hedges, discusses the pertinence of the “log cabin pattern” used by Minnie for her quilt.

The log cabin pattern was one of the most popular in the second half of the nineteenth century, frequently chosen for its capacity to utilize in its construction small scraps of leftover fabric. For Minnie in her poverty it would have been a practical pattern choice. But there accrued to the pattern a rich symbolism that would not have escaped a farm woman like Mrs. Hale and that adds yet another rich layer of meaning to Glaspell’s exploration of women’s place . . . As a replication of that most emotionally evocative of American dwelling types, the log cabin quilt came to symbolize both the hardships and heroisms of pioneer life. More specifically, it became a celebration of women’s civilizing role in the pioneering process (64).

As Hedges points out, dominant nineteenth-century gender ideology claimed that, though subjugated to men, women were authorities in their homes. Glaspell reworks this notion in *Trifles*. The home is not a haven for Minnie Wright, nor is it her kingdom, but a trap. Thus it is fitting, as Hedges notes, that Minnie Wright would feel more “natural” (Glaspell 14) wearing an apron in prison, “since in moving from

house to jail she has but exchanged one form of imprisonment for another” (Hedges 65). While examining the quilt, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters wonder whether or not Minnie intended to quilt her blocks or knot them. This question seems ridiculous to the men, but the question is telling. The difference between knotting and quilting is this: “To knot a quilt is to sew the fabric together, generally through a thicker lining, only at the corners of each patch. Quilting emphasizes the thickness of the blanket; knotting emphasizes the distinctions . . . Minnie’s patchwork would have been knotted not quilted because knotting is easier and can be worked alone” (Alkalay-Gut 79-80). Even Minnie’s “communal” activity is constructed in a way that highlights her isolation.

By alienating Minnie Wright from her community, Glaspell implicitly alters the perspective taken by earlier newspaper writing. In contrast to the thousands of people who Glaspell showed attending the Hossack trial, only five characters appear in *Trifles*. The Hossack trial was a public event that brought together—both in the courthouse and through Glaspell’s newspaper reports—a vibrant community. In *Trifles*, the audience only hears of communal events secondhand, and the implication may be that these types of events are dying out.

In short, like Anderson, Glaspell shows a world in which the qualities of the rural village are disappearing. As in Anderson’s work, this disappearing rural world leaves people vulnerable to imprisonment and isolation, even as it creates new opportunities for community. In Anderson’s book, the connection between George and Helen provides them with an opportunity for a shared, intimate relationship. In

*Trifles*, Glaspell offers the intimacy and solidarity among women as an alternative to the public world of men.

Glaspell's creation of this perspective hinges on the generic transition she made from being a newspaper reporter to becoming an avant-garde playwright. As a newspaper reporter, she addressed a mass public; as a playwright, she addresses a much smaller, self-selecting community. As Ben-Zvi notes:

The audience for the Provincetown Players was already a body of the committed, who in 1916, worked for suffrage and for social reform that would redress class distinctions in the United States and who, for the most part, were opposed to Wilson and the war. Unlike many suffragists, their arguments were usually posited on a materialist rather than essentialist reading of gender, concerned either with class struggles of which gender limitations were part or enlightenment ideals of individualism applicable to both women and men (Ben-Zvi, "Murder She Wrote" 41).

Though the traditional audience for newspaper crime coverage might have been troubled by Glaspell's questioning of gender roles, the bohemian audience for the Provincetown Players was not. In an essay from 1918, "How Experimental Theaters May Avoid the Pitfalls of Professionalism," published in *Current Opinion*, the unsigned author claims that the Provincetown Players audience "comes, seven nights every month, and continue to come—the same audiences. The Players know them, and have them classified like beetles in a case" (qtd. in Gainor 16). Glaspell knew her audience and the audience knew her.



In the play, Glaspell emphasizes the inconsistency between the attitudes and experiences of men and those of women, which demonstrates the density of men versus the depth of understanding and intimacy of women. In *Trifles*, the men are incapable of reading the clues in the Wright farmhouse that point to the misery and oppression of Minnie Wright's life. They are both oblivious to the significance of the "trifles" and dismissive of any information that would refute the motive they are attempting to pursue.

For instance, the men do not have an interest or an understanding of the kind of grueling work farm women do. Upon seeing the contents of the kitchen cupboard, Mrs. Peters says: "Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. (*To County Attorney*) She worried about that when it turned so cold She said the fire'd go out and the jars would break" (Glaspell 10). Like the County Attorney, the audience may wonder why a woman who was held for murder would still worry about her preserves. However, Mrs. Hale understands the physical labor that goes into preserving the fruit. Mrs. Hale says:

It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder it's all gone (*Gets up on a chair and looks*) I think there's some here that is all right, Mrs. Peters.

Yes—here; (*holding it toward the window*) this is cherries, too.

(*Looking again*) I declare I believe that's the only one. (*Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to sink and wipes it off on the outside*) She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer (13).

Mrs. Wright would have had to gather and broil the fruit in the scorching heat of the summer, in order to preserve it for the winter (Hedges 56). The women sympathize

with Minnie's concern, but the men find it ridiculous. Similarly, the men ridicule Mrs. Wright's housekeeping skills. The County Attorney

*goes to sink, takes a dipperful of water from pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place) Dirty towels! (Kicks his foot against pans under the sink) Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?*

Mrs. Hale (*stiffly*): There's a great deal of work to be done on farm.

County Attorney (*with conciliation*) To be sure. And yet (*with a little bow to her*) I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses, which do not have such roller towels. (*Gives it a pull to expose its full length again.*)

Mrs. Hale: Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be. . . . Farmer's wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson (10-11).

Before the introduction of plumbing, it took an extremely long time to do laundry. In her study on housework, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*, Susan Strasser explains the process of doing laundry: "One wash, one boiling, and one rinse used about fifty gallons of water—or four hundred pounds—which had to be moved from pump or well or faucet to stove and tub, in buckets and wash boiler that might weigh as much as forty or fifty pounds" (105). It would have taken Mrs. Wright hours to clean that one towel. The County Attorney does not realize this, but Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are able to understand it and use it as a clue as to why Mrs. Wright may have acted the way she did.

Despite being categorized as a Revolt from the Village play, *Trifles* is not primarily about rural and urban dynamics. Tellingly, this play does not promote rejecting rural ways. Minnie Wright *wants* to be part of the community. The problem is not that there may be “simple” rural communities, but that Minnie Wright cannot be a part of one. As Anderson does to his characters, Glaspell situates Minnie Wright in a world where the rural village is already gone. With urbanization, Glaspell suggests, comes possibilities for individual isolation and devastation, but also, a new forms of community. Glaspell demonstrates that new kinds of community and solidarity can be formed among women in recognition of sexism across class and geographical lines.

The vision of newly established community is most clearly suggested in the friendship that Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters establish in their mutual discovery of the suffering of Minnie Wright. The two women importantly come from different social backgrounds. The Hales are implicitly of a lower class than the Peters. Mr. Hale is excited by the fact that he is allowed to be a part of the investigation with the County Attorney, George Henderson, and Mr. Peters, the sheriff. Mr. Hale rambles on excitedly as he tells the story to the two men. It is Mr. Hale, for example, who says, “Women are used to worrying over trifles” (Glaspell 10). In this situation, Mr. Hale’s power has been elevated and he uses it as an opportunity to demean women, one of whom in a different situation might have greater status than he.

As a farm wife, Mrs. Hale understands the kinds of labor that Minnie Wright had to endure. She also provides both Mrs. Peters and the audience with a description

of what Minnie was like before she was married. Mrs. Peters plays a different, yet, essential role in the play because she has the trust of the men. As a sheriff's wife, she has insight into the legal world that Mrs. Hale would have little knowledge of. The men trust Mrs. Peters because she is married to the Sheriff.

Sheriff: Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

County Attorney: (*Goes to table. Picks up apron, laughs*) Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. (*Moves a few things about, disturbing quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back*) No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law (25).

Mrs. Peters is not only of an implicitly higher social status than Mrs. Hale, she is also significantly from another place. Mrs. Peters did not grow up in the same town as Minnie Wright and did not know Minnie before she was married. However, despite being from a different class and from a different location, she is able to understand Minnie's position. She is intensely moved when she reflects how hard it would be not to have children on a farm. Mrs. Peters has no personal relationship with Minnie, yet, at the end of the play, when she and Mrs. Hale decide to hide the incriminating evidence, the dead bird, from the men, Mrs. Peters chooses to abide by a law of female solidarity rather than the law that she is "married to" (25).

These women are from two distinct backgrounds with differing capabilities and strengths. Without the other, it is hard to imagine that either of the women would have the ability to successfully hide the evidence from the men. Glaspell highlights not only the power of women, but especially the power of women to work together.

By choosing women from differing backgrounds, she does not make the play specifically about farm-women. It is suggested, rather, that all women, despite their social status, can be trapped by their gendered roles.

Glaspell focuses the audience's attention on the power of the bond between the women by never depicting Minnie Wright. By removing the story's central figure from the stage, Glaspell depersonalizes the issues addressed by the play, implicitly making them structural and systematic rather than matters of individual experience. This depersonalization is in direct opposition to the Hossack murder trial, in which the central preoccupation of the trial concerned what kind of woman Margaret Hossack was. Even Glaspell's coverage of the trial focused largely on Hossack's personality. Glaspell was first so affected by Hossack's appearance that she came to automatically suspect her of murder. Later, Glaspell's view of Hossack as a person changed and she described the woman as a gentle creature. In effect, Glaspell's coverage, like the trial itself, engaged in a contest over the most compelling interpretation of the defendant's character. In that context, how spectators felt about Hossack was essential.

This kind of personal relation is precisely what conventional drama usually emphasizes—the audience's emotional reaction to the actors onstage. But by never showing Minnie Wright, Glaspell's *Trifles* challenges both conventional drama and conventional attitudes towards marriage and murder. Glaspell chooses not to let Minnie distract the audience from addressing the more general concerns of the play. Because Minnie Wright is not a person onstage toward whom the audience can have feelings, the audience can instead view sexism as a structural issue. Without an actor

to sympathize with and feel for, Glaspell makes the audience's personal relation to Minnie nearly insignificant.

Although the audience's emotional relationship to the murderer may be insignificant, by comparison, *Trifles* solicits the audience's sense of commonality with the women who seek to understand Minnie. Glaspell allows her audience to be in on the intimate knowledge of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, placing the play's viewers in implicit contrast to the obtuse men who never understand either Minnie Wright or their own wives. The audience remains with the women the entire duration of the play, never following the men upstairs to the bedroom or outside the farmhouse. This choice bonds the audience with the women instead of the men. Similarly, the audience is let in on the intense and personal moments of the women. When "something within" Mrs. Peters speaks, the audience is privy to a richly emotional description of a difficult point in Mrs. Peters's life. Similarly, when Mrs. Hale confesses that she wishes she had visited Minnie Wright more often, she lets both Mrs. Peters and the audience in on a poignant moment of self-doubt that contrasts with the arrogant certainty of the play's men.

In effect, Glaspell gives Minnie "a Jury of her Peers," by letting not just Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, but the audience play a role in understanding her. During the Hossack murder trial, only men were allowed to be on the jury. In Glaspell's final article about the Hossack murder case, she includes Judge Gamble's instructions to the jury. Part of it reads:

You should bring it into consideration the evidence your every day common sense and judgment as reasonable men, and make those just and reasonable inferences from circumstances proven, which the guarded judgment of a reasonable man would ordinarily make under like circumstances; and those just and reasonable inferences and deductions which you, as reasonable men, would ordinarily draw from facts and circumstances proven in the case you should draw and act on as jurors; and if, on a consideration of the whole evidence before you, you then have no reasonable doubt, as in these instructions defined, as to the guilt of the defendant, you should convict her; but if you then entertain such a doubt, you should acquit her (Glaspell, *Des Moines Daily News* 195).

By providing the general public with these instructions Glaspell allowed her newspaper readers to step into the shoes of the jury's "reasonable men." In her play, however, by demonstrating the men's inability to detect clues and by allowing Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters to be the jury, Glaspell highlights the inadequacies of such claims of gendered reason. The audience does not decide the final verdict in *Trifles*. Glaspell could have chosen to leave the play more open-ended, leading the audience to wonder: should Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters hide the evidence? What is the *right* thing to do? But Glaspell does not do this. Instead, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters act without the audience. Glaspell had a clear view of what the right course of action was and by having Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters demonstrate it, forces the audience not to question but to respond. Instead of an invitation to judge Minnie Wright's case,

Glaspell suggests that the audience can share an unrecognized, covert knowledge with rural women. It is this shared experience that is significant and will implicitly have positive implications in the modern world.

Much as Anderson sets up a community among his readers and George, Glaspell sets up an intimacy between her audience, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters. In effect, both Anderson and Glaspell show how the urbanization of the United States had already undermined the conflict between the village and the city. This urbanization and modernization could lead to suffering and isolation, but it also made possible new kinds of social relationships that would overcome the limited, communal, hierarchical world of the village.

Both Anderson and Glaspell point to language as both the problem and the solution to modern isolation. For Anderson, language can be dangerous and a sign of a person's grotesque qualities. Characters who speak too much, like Doctor Parcival; who speak too little, like Seth Richmond; or who can manipulate others with their verbosity, like Joe Welling, are problematic people because they are spiritually unfulfilled. George Willard, through his spiritual and unspoken union with Helen White, however, is able to use the right kind of language that will protect him from becoming grotesque. Similarly, Glaspell's play juxtaposes the public language of the men with the intimate knowledge of the women. The women can read clues that the men cannot and are able to develop an intimate bond that the play's men are unable to share. New social relationships are borne out of urbanization in *Winesburg* and *Trifles*. In both cases, these social relationships are based on "mutual respect"



(Anderson 200). These relationships are, moreover, in their purest forms, distinctly nonsexual. Despite participating in and living through the Sexual Revolution, Anderson and Glaspell shy away from presenting modern romantic love as a possibility for spiritual redemption and connection.

These new kinds of social relationships are also specifically class-related. In Anderson's case, that new kind of relation is mainly one of the expertise of a rising white-collar class. In *Winesburg*, Helen and George represent the rising middle-class and intellectual elite. They are unique individuals not only because they can leave the Midwest and escape becoming grotesques, but also because they implicitly represent a level of skill and education that is not shared by other characters in the book. In other words, they are like Anderson himself. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, because they come from different social backgrounds and have different strengths, are able to work together to outwit the men who control power in their world. However, in Glaspell's work it is the ability of gender solidarity to transcend class and regional differences, not the elevation of one class over the others that can protect individuals from becoming vulnerable and isolated.

In this light, neither *Winesburg, Ohio* nor *Trifles* should be categorized as part of the Revolt from the Village. The village, in *Winesburg, Ohio* and *Trifles*, is not presented as a stultifying backwater. For, in both works, the village no longer exists. In place of the village, Glaspell and Anderson offer something they find to be far more significant and spiritually gratifying—for Anderson it is the rise of the white-collar middle class and for Glaspell it is the possibility of feminist solidarity.

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