The Feminine in *Winesburg, Ohio*

Sally Adair Rigsbee

Studies in American Fiction, Volume 9, Number 2, Autumn 1981, pp. 233-244 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/saf.1981.0008*

THE FEMININE IN *WINESBURG, OHIO*

Sally Adair Rigsbee*

The meaning Sherwood Anderson gives to the characters of women and to the qualities of the feminine is an important source of unity in *Winesburg, Ohio*. Anderson identifies the feminine with a pervasive presence of a fragile, hidden "something" that corresponds both to the lost potential of each of the grotesques and to the secret knowledge that each story is structured to reveal. The themes most frequently identified as the unifying forces of *Winesburg, Ohio*, the failure of communication and the development of the artist, are closely related to Anderson's focus on the meaning of the feminine. In *Winesburg, Ohio* communication is blocked because of the devaluation of the feminine qualities of vulnerability and tenderness even though the artist's creativity springs from deep feelings of vitality which Anderson associates with the feminine.[1]

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

> "It's a woman and, oh, she is lovely! She is hurt and is suffering but she makes no sound. Don't you see how it is? She lies quite still, white and still, and the beauty comes out from her and spreads over everything. It is in the sky back there and all around everywhere. I didn't try to paint the woman, of course. She is too beautiful to be painted."[2]

Enoch's painting portrays precisely the condition of the female characters who inhabit Winesburg. The women are "invisible" because their real identities are eclipsed by their social roles. The relationships between the men and women of Winesburg are corrupted and uncreative, for their acceptance of conventional sexual roles prevents them from experiencing the genuine communication that comes when

*Sally Adair Rigsbee is the author of *Faulkner's Women: Characterization and Meaning* (1972) and of a number of essays on American literature. She is currently working on a study of the role of women in the works of Hawthorne and Lawrence.

relationships are equal and reciprocal. The neediness, frustration, and failure that encompass the lives of Louise Bentley, Alice Hindman, Elizabeth Willard, and Kate Swift are the result of the discrepancy between their own capacity for intimacy, affection, and creativity and the inability of others, especially the men in their lives, to "see" or to relate to who they really are. In Enoch's painting, as in Anderson's stories, the beauty and suffering of woman become visible only through art that brings to a level of conscious awareness what is unrecognized by conventional society.

It is in his characterization of Louise Bentley that Anderson shows best the suffering of women that results from the devaluation of feminine needs and aspirations. Louise is completely rejected by her father because, as a female, she is an unacceptable heir. She is ignored and unloved as a child, and her vulnerability is heightened by her instinct to value relationships intensely. As a young girl, Louise has a remarkably intelligent and mature vision of what is necessary for human intimacy. She imagines that Winesburg is a place where relationships are natural, spontaneous, and reciprocal: ". . . Men and women must live happily and freely, giving and taking friendship and affection as one takes the feel of a wind on the cheek" (p. 88). Louise turns to John Hardy in search of a friend who will understand her dream. She seeks from her husband an intimate exchange of feelings and thoughts. Hardy seems kind and patient; however, his vision of Louise's humanity is limited to his own very inadequate concept of "wife":

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

To Hardy, Louise is a sexual object whose human voice he suppresses by kisses which are not a mark of affection but an unconscious means of ignoring and belittling his wife's desperate effort to be her deepest self. Louise's complete defeat in the denial of her personhood by her father and her husband is expressed in her rejection of her child: " 'It is a man child and will get what it wants anyway. . . . Had it been a woman child there is nothing in the world I would not have done for it' " (p. 96). Anderson's point is that in her surrender to marriage Louise surrenders all hope that her gift for friendship and affection will be realized.

Through the story of Alice Hindman, Anderson shows how the conventional sexual morality of Winesburg works against the fulfillment of women's needs.[3] Alice is clearly morally superior to her lover, Ned Currie, and is capable of a much finer quality of relationship than he is. Just as Ned is contemplating inviting her to become his mistress, Alice proposes that she go to the city to live and work with him until they are sufficiently established to marry. Unable to comprehend the spirit of independence and equality Alice envisions, Ned demands that she wait for him in Winesburg, forcing her into a passive dependency which denies her the sustained relationship she needs. Their brief sexual intimacy is so sacred to Alice that she feels bound to Ned in a spiritual marriage even when years of waiting prove he has abandoned her. Despite her economic and legal independence, Alice Hindman is as much imprisoned by marriage as Louise Bentley is, for she has no understanding of Anderson's concept of "the growing modern idea of a woman's owning herself and giving and taking for her own ends in life" (p. 115).

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

Similarly, conventional sexual morality does nothing to protect women but actually contributes to their destruction. Alice Hindman's strength of character is undermined when her lover uses social conventions as a rationale for abandoning her and when she succumbs to the pressure to regard her spontaneous expression of love as binding. Anderson makes it clear that conventional sexual mores make no provision for woman's need to judge sexual relationships in terms of spiritual

communion. There is no social stigma attached to John Hardy or Tom Willard because they do not love their wives even though the deprivation the women suffer makes them mentally and physically ill. Yet, one of the few moments of genuine intimacy in Winesburg, Elizabeth Willard's self-revelation to Dr. Reefy, is tragically cut short by their fear of being caught in an illicit embrace. As Dr. Reefy knows, "love is like a wind," "a divine accident," which cannot be structured or controlled. The deep, intimate communion which the women of Winesburg are seeking can occur only when traditional role expectations and conventional morality are transcended.

Once the theme of the suffering of women is identified, it becomes obvious that an emphasis on the crippled feminine dimension of life permeates *Winesburg, Ohio*. The image of Elizabeth Willard, "tall and gaunt" with her face "marked with smallpox scars" (p. 39), is repeated in the wounded bodies of other overworked and suffering women who hover in the background: Dr. Parcival's mother with her "red, sad-looking eyes" (p. 53); Joe Welling's mother, "a grey, silent woman with a peculiar ashy complexion" (p. 103); Tom Foster's grandmother whose worn hands look like "the dried stems of an old creeping vine" (p. 210). The general abuse of women is captured most vividly in "Paper Pills" when a young girl is so frightened of the lust of her suitor that she dreams "he had bitten into her body and that his jaws were dripping" (pp. 37-38).

Less immediately apparent, perhaps, is the fact that femininity is the crucial issue in the lives of all of the male grotesques. In *Winesburg, Ohio* mature development depends upon the male's ability to accept affection and passion as natural and valuable aspects of life. As the men struggle to expand their personalities to include these tender feelings, they become obsessed by the figure of a woman upon whom their emotions are projected. Tom Foster finds there is more order in his life after he gets drunk and fantasizes a romantic relationship with Helen White. For Seth Richmond, Helen is the key to freedom from his silence and isolation. Through his intense obsession with Kate Swift, the passion Curtis Hartman needs to renew his religious commitment is born. However, because he does not see Kate as a human being but as the female object of his contemplation, his religion, like Jesse Bentley's, is warped by the split between religious symbols and the meaningful realities of human experience. Each male's grotesqueness is indicated by the gap between his intense need of the feminine and his inability to establish relationships with real women. Enoch Robinson is so open to the power of the feminine that he feels his own identity would be "submerged, drowned out" by any intimate relationship with a real

woman. Similarly, Wash Williams struggles to keep the feminine at a distance, first through his idealization of his young wife and then through his obsessive hatred of her.

The male grotesques of Winesburg have not developed the hard masculine persona which would make them immune to femininity. Tom Willard, on the other hand, projects his failures onto the ghostly figure of his wife and falsely views himself as "one of the chief men of the town." Willard warns his son against the introspection that makes him look like "a gawky girl" and tries to force on George his own ambitions for materialistic success, which he defines in terms of masculinity: " 'You're not a fool and you're not a woman. You're Tom Willard's son and you'll wake up' " (p. 44). The male grotesques who acknowledge their tender feelings are especially vulnerable in a culture in which femininity is not respected. The most striking example of the cruel rejection of the feminine in men is the opening story, "Hands." Anderson shows the foolish and tragic injustice of the devaluation of the feminine when he creates the sharp contrast between society's view of Wing Biddlebaum and Wing's potential identity as a priestly mediator who possesses those secret, holy gifts necessary for spiritual communion: love of truth and affection for mankind. Because the qualities of the feminine are regarded as weaknesses, the most precious human experiences—vulnerability, intimacy, and tenderness—are repressed by those who fear their own deepest mysteries.[4] As a result, marriages fail, and family and community life in Winesburg suffers.

Furthermore, Anderson shows that the qualities of the feminine are intricately related to the powers of creativity and spirituality, and, therefore, the devaluation of the feminine means that these dimensions of human life do not develop in Winesburg. Because characters like Wing Biddlebaum, Elizabeth Willard, and Kate Swift are not nurtured or given the freedom to grow psychologically, their spiritual and artistic gifts are not meaningfully realized. To escape the crippling effects of Winesburg life, George Willard must learn to value the creative, spiritual dimensions of the feminine through the women with whom he is intimate, his mother, Kate Swift, and Helen White.

Through the character of Elizabeth Willard, Anderson shows that the urge for creative self-expression is an extension of the basic feminine instinct for intimacy. Restless and energetic, Elizabeth dreams of becoming an actress in a big city. Her fantasy is a symbolic expression of her need to develop the full range of her personality and to achieve the artistic expression that would bring her into intimate communion with the world. Like Louise Bentley and Alice Hindman,

Elizabeth's openness to life makes her open to sexual relationships. Her lovers, the traveling men who stay in her father's hotel, are her only means of touching the larger and more vital life of the cities. When she turns to marriage as the conventional solution to her restlessness, Elizabeth quickly discovers that the "secret something" growing within her is killed by her insensitive husband. Unable to extend the boundaries of her life, Elizabeth creates dramatic roles for herself in an effort to be the person she can only vaguely imagine. In "Mother," when she is determined to protect the creativity of her son from her husband's materialistic ambitions, Elizabeth uses theatrical make-up to transform herself into the powerful woman who can kill the "evil voice" of Tom Willard.

Just as Elizabeth Willard imagines, women can transform themselves through their own creative powers. In fact, Anderson suggests that the creativity of the feminine is such an energized force in these sensitive women that a moment of crisis can release deep feelings that have been suppressed for years. In these "adventures," the bodies of the women are transformed to reveal their hidden power. When Louise Bentley fears her son is lost, all of her capacities for motherly care flow out to embrace him. To David Hardy, the voice of his mother is "like rain falling on trees," and her face becomes "the most peaceful and lovely thing he had ever seen" (p. 77). In Alice Hindman's "adventure," the rain releases her suppressed spontaneity; the imagery of falling rain and of leaping and running reveals the potential of Alice's sexual passion and creative vitality. Kate Swift's scarred face is transformed when she walks the winter streets of Winesburg: ". . . Her features were as the features of a tiny goddess on a pedestal in a garden in the dim light of a summer evening" (p. 160). Elizabeth Willard's wild drive into the country, which she describes to Dr. Reefy in "Death," expresses the mounting tension of her desire to transcend the limitations of her life. The black clouds, the green trees, and the falling rain (symbols of the natural, reproductive processes of the earth) represent the vital, spontaneous, and creative life Elizabeth is seeking but cannot quite comprehend.

The language that describes these "adventures" links the moments of feminine self-actualization to the rich beauty of nature and to the spiritual transformation associated with creative inspiration and mystical religion. The "something" which Elizabeth Willard is seeking is a more humane life in which her sexuality, her need for intimacy, her creativity, and her spirituality, can be fully realized, harmonized, and expressed: a life in which the wholeness of her selfhood might be

recognized and appreciated by some other human being.[5] Years later, in her encounter with Dr. Reefy, Elizabeth glimpses momentarily the magnitude and significance of the emotions she has experienced. In the excitement of describing her "adventure" to her friend, she transforms herself into the gifted actress who can miraculously "project herself out of the husk" of an old, tired body into the image of "a lovely and innocent girl" (p. 228). Dr. Reefy is entranced by the beauty and rhythm of Elizabeth's body, the symbolic expression of her hidden capacity to move with life and to express her creative vitality. This moment of communion in "Death" is the experience of liberating, intimate understanding which all of the Winesburg characters are seeking. The intimacy is achieved because Dr. Reefy possesses the sensitivity and wisdom that enable him to see and appreciate the hidden identity of a woman: " 'You dear! You lovely dear! Oh you lovely dear!' " (p. 227). When the moment is broken by their fear of an intruder, Elizabeth turns to death as the only lover who can receive her full identity.

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

Kate Swift is eager to share with George her love of art and her understanding of life. However, George understands Kate's earnest seriousness as evidence that she is in love with him, and his mind becomes filled with "lustful thoughts" about her. Thus, in "Teacher," when Kate comes to him ablaze with the intensity of her desire "to open the door of life." his sexual desire kindles her own, and she loses touch with the intellectual, spiritual, and creative potentials of her emotion.[6] At last, however, George begins to perceive that there is something more to be communicated between men and women than physical encounter; he knows that he is missing something important that Kate Swift is trying to tell him.

Gradually his boyish superficiality fades, and in "An Awakening" George consciously begins his search for those truths that will give order and meaning to his life. However, the moment the thrill of a new insight comes to him, he is eager to share it with a woman, not in order to enrich a relationship but to have the pleasure of releasing physically his new surge of energy. George's spiritual experience merely heightens his grandiose egocentricity, and he plans to use his new self-confidence to win sexual mastery over a potent and challenging woman. As George walks with Belle Carpenter, unaware that they are pursued by her lover, he becomes "half drunk with the sense of masculine power" (p. 187). However, when he is duped by the older couple, George's sudden loss of power becomes precisely the reversal of fortunes his character needs.

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

In "Death" George is still egocentric enough to be "half angry" that his mother's death has interrupted his plan to spend the evening with Helen White. However, when he goes alone to stand by her dead body, George is suddenly overwhelmed by a belief that beneath the still, white sheet, his mother has been transformed into a vitally alive and unspeakably lovely woman. Through this strange, mystical experience, George is miraculously able to see the spiritual essence of his mother's womanhood. His vision of the hidden beauty of his mother is reminiscent of the effect created by Enoch Robinson's painting in which the invisible, suffering woman is a transforming power which permeates the landscape of the artist's canvas. It is a moment of spiritual inspiration for George, for an "impulse outside himself" enables him to speak the same words of full appreciation for his mother's identity that Dr. Reefy has spoken: " 'The dear, the dear, oh the lovely dear' " (p. 232).

The sensitivity that comes to George as a result of his mother's death and his vision of her spiritual beauty prepare him for his

experience with Helen White in "Sophistication." "Sophistication" is a very slight story, actually a denouement of the two climactic moments in "Death" when Elizabeth Willard's true identity is recognized. However, the story is profoundly meaningful when it is read with an awareness of the thematic significance of Anderson's portrayal of the devaluation of the feminine throughout *Winesburg, Ohio*. At the end of the story Anderson describes the satisfaction Helen White and George Willard have achieved through their relationship:

> For some reason they could not have explained they had both got from their silent evening together the thing needed. Man or boy, woman or girl, they had for a moment taken hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world possible (p. 243).

The tone and placement of this passage make it clearly a key thematic statement; yet, there is very little clarity in the passage itself or even in the story about exactly what the "thing" is that Helen and George have experienced. The various interpretations of the passage which focus on the theme of communication are accurate enough,[7] but the episode itself as well as Anderson's emphasis on "the mature life of men and women" certainly indicate that the focus of his concern is not just human relationships generally but the special problems of communication between men and women. It is against the background of Anderson's presentation throughout *Winesburg, Ohio* of the suffering of women and their unfulfilled relationships with men that the encounter of these two young people can best be appreciated.

The positive nature of the experience which George and Helen share is a product of their mutual treasuring of those tender, vital feelings that Anderson associates with the feminine. Both are aware of a fragile, new self that is alive in each of them; their silent communion gives these sensitive feelings the nurturing that is needed. Despite their youth and inexperience, they momentarily share a relationship that is trusting and reciprocal, for in George and Helen, Anderson creates characters who are free of sexual role expectations. It is appropriate that Helen and George should recapture the joyful, natural spirit of childhood when males and females meet in relationships that are equal. Their release of emotions in spontaneous playfulness is integrated with their mature, brooding reflection on the transience of life. George's awareness of the reality of death and of his own finitude is his "sophistication," but he has also learned that he needs to share this new knowledge with a woman, for "he believes that a woman will be gentle, that she will understand" (p. 235). His acceptance of Helen as a spiritual mediator indicates that George's masculinity is balanced

by the feminine qualities of tenderness and gentleness, an integration that Anderson suggests is necessary for the artist.

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

> "There is a woman coming. . . . Perhaps of all men I alone understand. . . . I know about her struggles and her defeats. It is because of her defeats that she is to me the lovely one. Out of her defeats has been born a new quality in woman. . . . It is the quality of being strong to be loved. . . . Be brave enough to dare to be loved. Be something more than man or woman. Be Tandy" (p. 145).

The suffering of women, Anderson argues, will lead to the evolution of a new kind of woman who will insist that sexual roles be transcended and that she be loved as a human being, an event that Anderson suggests is as much needed by men as it is by women.[8]

There are clearly two different aspects of the portrayal of the feminine in *Winesburg, Ohio;* Anderson reveals the needs of men and women in a society where the feminine is devalued, and he presents a vision of the feminine as a source of creative inspiration. Anderson's concern for the fulfillment of women as whole persons was, no doubt, inspired in part by the silent, resigned suffering of his own mother, to whom *Winesburg, Ohio* is dedicated. Her stoic endurance, which dominates the opening sections of *A Story Teller's Story,* led Anderson to view women as spiritually superior to men.[9] However, Anderson did not simply idealize woman but recognized in her a maturity that made her a superior human being: "One does so hate to admit that the average woman is kinder, finer, more quick of sympathy and on the whole so much more first class than the average man."[10] Whatever difficulties Anderson had in embracing his own weakness or acknowledging the strength of women,[11] few other modern male writers have been able to convey with such loving sensitivity the hurt women bear or to advocate as openly as Anderson does that the relationships of men and women should be equal. Anderson certainly recognized that those qualities associated with the feminine—vulnerability, tenderness, and the need for intimacy—should be valued and nurtured by society rather than repressed. *Winesburg, Ohio* is one of those "thoughtful books" which Anderson argues must be written if sensitive women are to survive.

In Enoch Robinson's painting the suffering woman brings beauty and unity to the work of art. The theme of the feminine as the source of creative inspiration, which is captured in this image and developed through the growth process of George Willard, is reinforced by Anderson's description of the creative process in "The Book of the Grotesque." The persona of the narrator of *Winesburg, Ohio* is an old writer who compares himself to a pregnant woman. The new life growing within him, however, is not a baby but "a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight" (p. 22). The "young indescribable thing" within the old man inspires the parade of grotesques that becomes the subject of his writing. This creative, feminine power also inspires a youthful vitality which keeps him open to change and prevents his embracing only one truth and becoming a grotesque himself. This image of artistic power as a woman within a woman indicates that Anderson viewed the instinct for growth and creativity in human life as a feminine quality.

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

Notes

[1]No study has suggested that the feminine is a major theme of *Winesburg, Ohio*. See, however, the analyses of Anderson's characterization of women by William V. Miller, "Earth-Mothers, Succubi, and Other Ectoplasmic Spirits: The Women in Sherwood Anderson's Short Stories" in *Midamerica*, 1 (1974), 64-81, and by Nancy Bunge, "Women as Social Critics in *Sister Carrie*, *Winesburg, Ohio*, and *Main Street*" in *Midamerica*, 3 (1976), 46-55.

[2]Sherwood Anderson, *Winesburg, Ohio* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), p. 170. All quotations are from this edition.

[3]Two of Anderson's earliest stories, "Sister" and "A Vibrant Life," show his interest in characters who need to break away from the repressions imposed by conventional sexual morality, a theme which is more fully developed in *Many Marriages*.

[4]Jean Baker Miller, in *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), pp. 29-47, argues that the feminine traits which are often regarded as weaknesses are in fact evidence of women's superior psychological strength. Women develop a mature sensitivity because they embody for males as well as themselves deep psychological

experiences which men tend to fear and repress. *Winesburg, Ohio* illustrates Miller's point well as does the short story, "The Man Who Became a Woman," in which the narrator matures as a result of his immersion in his unconscious, which he fantasizes as "becoming a woman." The hero's encounter with irrational male violence, his experience of the vulnerability of being a woman, and his confrontation with his own deepest fears develop in him broader human sympathies which enable him to transcend his adolescent mood and to develop a more balanced personality.

[5]See Jarvis A. Thurston, "Anderson and *Winesburg:* Mysticism and Craft," *Accent,* 16 (1956), 107-27. Thurston identifies Elizabeth Willard as one of Winesburg's "frustrated spiritual questers" who seek a "greater union beyond the reciprocal love of man and woman" (p. 113). The point, however, is that Elizabeth Willard and the other grotesques are not experiencing "*reciprocal* love" and are, therefore, driven to self-expression in extreme ways. Mystical feelings are intense because they are a sudden intuition of the discrepancy between ordinary reality and the potential for intimate communion in human experience.

[6]See Chris Browning, "Kate Swift: Sherwood Anderson's Creative Eros," *TSL,* 13 (1968), 141-48. Browning is mistaken to regard Kate's withdrawal from her physical embrace with George as a deliberate choice. Kate is confused by the intense pressure of her own sexual needs, the cause of her grotesqueness, which Browning tends to ignore.

[7]The "thing" Anderson refers to is defined, for example, by Richard Abcarian in "Innocence and Experience in *Winesburg, Ohio,*" *UR,* 35 (1968), 102, as "the innocence and spontaneity of youth"; by Edwin Fussell in "*Winesburg, Ohio:* Art and Isolation," *MFS, 6* (1960), 47, as respect for "the essential privacy (or integrity) of human personality"; by Donald Rogers in "The Development of the Artist in *Winesburg, Ohio,*" *STC,* 10 (1972), 95, as "the loving touch of another human being" which can "shatter the walls of isolation."

[8]Donald Rogers' definition of "Tandyism" neglects the central point of Anderson's story, for he makes no reference at all to the story's comment on woman or man's relationship to the feminine.

[9]Imagining women gossiping while his mother was giving birth to him, Anderson says: "If the men had to have the babies there would never be more than one child in a family. What do men know about suffering? It's the women who have to do all the suffering in life, I always said—I said a woman feels everything deeper than a man—don't you think so? A woman has intuition, that's what it is." Sherwood Anderson, *A Story Teller's Story* (New York: Scribner's, 1922), p. 105.

[10]*A Story Teller's Story,* p. 216.

[11]The occasion of Anderson's comment on the superiority of women is an episode in *A Story Teller's Story* when his friend Nora becomes aware of the insecurity beneath his braggadocio. The rest of the quotation is evidence of both Anderson's limits as a male who wants to maintain his superior power and his gift for admitting rather than rationalizing his weakness: "It is a fact perhaps but a fact that I have always thought men should deny with all the strength of our more powerful wills. We men should conquer women. We should not stand in the darkness with our heads on their shoulders, blubbering as I was doing at that moment" (p. 216). Anderson goes on to say, "I was not ready for the Noras. Perhaps I would never be ready for them. Few American men I have ever known have ever shown any signs of being ready for the Noras of the world or of being able really to face them" (p. 217).