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Allegory of the Grotesque:

A Modernist Reading of *Winesburg, Ohio*

The search for the origins of literary styles and the evolution of established genres is often the best way to understand both the influence of older forms of writing on contemporary works and also an important part of interpreting them within a meaningful context. Often, current trends and techniques can be traced back to specific authors and artists, and even specific works. Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* is such an example of a text that took an established form of literature and used innovative approaches to create something new and unique. Widely accepted as a work within the modernist movement, Anderson's most famous work was created in response to the older pastoral story mode in a short story cycle that functions as a novel, fully embracing the modernist Ezra Pound's maxim of "make it new". Anderson used an unconventional narrative structure and a new approach to social and moral commentary that can be interpreted as a modern form of allegory. The novel was written and published during a time when the world was experiencing a rapid expansion of industrialization and changing social norms, as well as groundbreaking philosophical and psychological theories, and facing global conflict for the first time. This paper examines the influences of the modernist movement and the First World War on Anderson's writing, and analyzes the ways in which the author moved beyond structuralism and classical pastorals to create a new literary style, thereby allowing room for further developments in literature that influenced his contemporaries. *Winesburg, Ohio* should be read as an early modernist short story cycle with elements of allegory that speak to issues that were of concern to anyone in the emerging industrialized world that influenced the direction of the movement for future writers, and yet contains timeless moral truisms.

It is important to consider the historical context of *Winesburg, Ohio* at the time of publication to appreciate how the work was received and in what way the concepts contained therein would have resonated with the first readers, as well as how it is viewed by critics today.

Anderson's text was originally serialized before being published as a collection of short stories in 1918. Stylistically and within the chronology of literary movements, the work is considered a modernist novel by many critics. *Winesburg, OH* conforms to an Oxford Press description of modernist literature as early twentieth century prose that rejected 19th century conventions and styles while adopting new and more complex forms and styles of writing using multiple points of view and urban cultural dislocation. The collection is cohesive enough to be considered a novel which is comprised of short stories as it uses loosely tied individual narratives to form a complete story arc that unites the stories with central concepts and motifs. Among the important concepts explored within the text are industrialization, morality, and ecological shifts from small towns and farm communities to urbanization and militarism. These concepts were central to modernists during publication of the text, and Anderson's work uses allegory as a literary device to relate these concepts as they affected the citizens of Winesburg throughout the novel.

Andrew Yerkes's analysis of *Winesburg, Ohio* points to the text's connection to the modernist psychological theories. The influence of Sigmund Freud's work on Anderson's writing is difficult to avoid given its popularity at the time of publishing. Andrew Yerkes urges that "We should understand the Freudianism of *Winesburg, Ohio* as a result of the general prevalence of psychoanalytic ideas that had seeped into America's intellectual culture during the 1910's, and had broken into mainstream awareness during the 1920's" (199-200). While this short story collection is not a scientific work, the allegorical elements are often meant to illustrate individual psychological, and national sociological concerns which nations that were undergoing industrialization and the loss of a pastoral ecology were dealing with, as well as timeless individual human flaws such as greed, shame, and alienation. Yerkes agrees that Anderson's text is too focused on the individual to be categorized as pure satire of social

commentary: “Compared to other contemporaneous treatments of small-town America, such as Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street* or Edgar Lee master’s *Spoon River Anthology*, *Winesburg, Ohio* is not sociological realism” (200). Yet the influence of new psychology and biology of the era was not lost on Anderson, who chose to include enough contemporary social analysis through his characters to show that he, along with most other modernists, rejected the established world-view of nature over nurture and fatalism. Reading Anderson’s text as a more than just a collection of loosely related short stories is best accomplished by “Considering these neurologically allegorical characters alongside the novel’s grotesque imagery and its distrust of linguistic expression, what starts to emerge is a picture of a novel defying the intellectual fashion of the twenties” (Yerkes 201). The style employed by Anderson reflects the changing literary art form that was just beginning, and can be understood to be partly in response to a “decade in which biological expectations of consciousness were largely being replaced by cultural ones. Modern Psychological theory during that decade was predominantly behaviorist” (Yerkes 201).

Central to the conflict between characters like the artistic but mentally unstable Enoch and comparatively more lucid George Willard is the rise of industrialism in Winesburg. The shift from agrarian lifestyles to urban sprawl and regionalism echoes throughout the novel, and serves as a national and individual conflict for both the characters in the novel as well as the original readership. The once simple pastoral life that many characters in Winesburg allude to is the foundation of the grotesque, for the newness that has taken over the land and the psyche of the townspeople is often the source of the cognitive dissonance that deludes their “truth”. There is a sharp contrast between the simple country life that has largely disappeared and the tumult of world war, industrial revolution, and the media storm that assaults the mind with new threats and

a much too rapid pace of living. The biological nature of humanity has become a mental victim to the technology it has created. (Yerkes 205)

The huge cultural impact that the psychoanalytic approach to understanding the human mind had on the public was clearly incorporating into Anderson's work; his characters suffer from their grotesqueness due to events in their past that manifest in their present. Rather than being explained by strictly deterministic models or older biological imbalance theories, Anderson's text incorporates emerging psychological theories subtly, rather than explicitly. Yerkes writes that "It is thus no surprise that the text has been described as Freudian, even though, as argued earlier, this resemblance is the result of a shared contemporary interest rather than a systematic application of Freud's ideas" (206). The connection is even more strongly shown in the conclusion of the work, where George's departure focuses on memories of "small things"- human interactions, rather than traumatic life events that will influence him just as the subconscious works on all the characters to bring about each individual personality. The novel ends with George validating the influence of his unconscious memories. Yerkes writes that "Th[e] final line suggests that George takes his observations of Winesburg with him as a source for his fiction" (213). But beyond the realm of psychoanalysis on the mental states of Anderson's Grotesques is the other great catalyst of the work; the encroaching juggernaut of twentieth-century industrialism on the rapidly vanishing and nineteenth-century farming community.

Industrial progress and pastoral heritage meet in the small town of Winesburg, and Anderson creates a cultural and geographical junction that all the flawed characters would expect to be found in, but serves as a healthy and lasting home for none of them. Molly Gage argues that while downtown Winesburg "may offer the only means by which a community can be connected, that community is not only monstrous and deformed, but functions as a trap" (2). As

the United States felt the same uncertainty of direction that characters in the novel as farms became towns and towns became cities, the peak of the industrial revolution signaled that small towns like Winesburg might not be able to keep up with the efficiency of machines. This narrative bears out within the novel as both Cowley & Son's General Store and Winney's Dry Good Store try to make a profit competing against the railroads and traveling salesmen. The shift from a sustainable farming community to a struggle with industrial progress serves as a metaphor and allegory for the horrors of the First World War where technology made it possible to wipe out more people, more quickly than was ever possible before. Gage reiterates how this new method of moral and social commentary inspired "Sherwood Anderson's modernist pastoral *Winesburg, Ohio* [to use] the short story cycle form to offer an illustration of the ambivalent future technology promises." The future of ecology, media, and economy as well as war was certainly fertile ground for Anderson, as "the text, published in 1919, features a town poised at a technological divide: its inhabitants look back to their agrarian past in which relationships were dependent on proximity and information was disseminated by storytelling" (2).

Indeed, Anderson used a new form of short story cycle that could be called a modernist reshaping of the pastoral mode of literature. The Oxford Press describes the traditional pastoral mode as tales of innocence, sorrow and romance among rustic characters such as shepherds and farmers which largely died out in the eighteenth-century. In *Winesburg, Ohio*, we again see a country setting that involves love and sadness, yet on a deeper and less superficially emotional level where innocence is replaced with the perversion of truths that bring about the novel's grotesques. The novel retains some elements of the pastoral mode while embracing the newer form of the short story cycle. Oxford Press require of short stories that they are narrative fiction with few characters and focus on a single event. Each story within the collection certainly fits

this description, and shows *Winesburg, Ohio* to be among the short story cycles popular in the twentieth-century that would draw upon the themes of the pastoral mode while incorporating the cultural woes of psychological and philosophical uncertainty and the threats of industrialization so pertinent during the time of the writing of the text.

Common to both this new form of short story writing and the older pastoral mode is the element of storytelling. The entire work is a collection of stories told by a single narrator, remembering a “dream that was not a dream”, unsure of how to interpret what he sees. The world was moving away from personal connectivity and towards long distance radios and transportation so fast that the small townsfolk of Winesburg seem to be perpetually trying to keep up. Even those like George Willard who eventually leave town do so without certain knowledge of what lies ahead, again serving as allegory for a nation rushing towards a future that was ambivalent toward technology that was too new to fully appreciate. Gage further suggests that the text was “considered by many of its early readers to be a distressing collection of interconnected but ill-assorted parts. Its modernist version of the short story cycle garnered unfavorable reviews claiming that it was disjointed, that it violated the pastoral it appeared to represent, and that it described too vividly the immoral lives of America’s provincials” (3). Critics of Anderson measured his text both by other contemporary modernists works and similar works produced only a few years prior: “According to these critics, Anderson’s text ushered in a new era for the short story via the new, or newly recycled, form of interrelated stories... the work offered ‘a new order of short story,’ something ‘*The Spoon River Anthology* aimed at, and missed by half a mile” (Gage 3). Anderson’s innovative approach to short story would continue to influence the work of later modernists like Hemingway, and broaden the scope of how a short story cycle could be connected.

The direct influence of Anderson's text on the modernism movement and allegory became more apparent throughout the early twentieth-century as "*Winesburg, Ohio* -the short story cycle came to be accepted as an appropriate means by which to chronicle the episodic and seemingly increasingly discontinuous lives of small-town America". (Gage 3) It is also worth mentioning that the pastoral folk tale and the use of allegory in literature were on the decline or stagnating by the time Anderson breathed life into the technique, therefore "*Winesburg, Ohio* deserves deeper and more complex contemporary interpretations because Anderson 'liberat[ed] the American short story from a petrifying technique'" (Gage 3). As the de-facto protagonist that links the stories, George Willard not only moves the overall progression of the text, but also focuses the larger point of the novel as a collection of stories about people dealing with a shift in lifestyle and movement from pastoral living to city life. George Willard exhibits his own grotesques of pride and hunger for power over others, and yet Gage points out that "Although critics have often considered Willard's maturation and departure from Winesburg a symbol of the development and subsequent liberation of the artist who unifies the text's poorly matching parts, he is actually only the collector and implicit circulator of the grotesques' stories" (6). This would suggest that rather than a simple satire of small town folks, everyone, including the protagonist has complex motivations that lead to the perversion of truths. Anderson therefore allows the reader to sympathize with the characters while bridging the gap between the psychological and cultural themes of the work. Gage argues that such a story cycle is best told through a modernist lens, as the confusion and uncertainty of both the text and society at the time are better understood as uncertain memory rather than told by an omnipotent storyteller and why "'The Book of the Grotesque', which enabled the narrator to 'understand many people and things', exists only in the narrators memory" (Gage 7). This modernist approach to narrative

adds another layer of complexity that neither the traditional the pastoral mode, nor contemporary short story collections could adequately approach.

Anderson himself did not serve in the First World War, yet his experience with armed conflict undoubtedly was a part of the writing of the novel. Mark Whalan shows that within the stories related to George Willard we can see how “Anderson oscillated in his opinion about the value and meaning of war, opinions undoubtedly affected by his own memories of military service during the Spanish –American war” (Whalan 232). Critics often speculate about why Anderson did not choose to include the war in the novel directly, and only symbolically. One possibility is a distaste for the atrocities that he experienced even outside of the larger global conflict. On the other hand, we do see George Willard fantasizing about the merits of military regulation and order, producing a grotesque of militarism out of the truth of discipline and order. Whalan goes on to clarify that Anderson chose not to include the war in the text, because it was itself a grotesque too large in scope to fit in the small confines of Winesburg town limits. The war was not an respite from the grotesqueness of human nature and “Rather than making a romantic escape from the mechanized modes of production of industrial capitalism, the soldiers now find themselves at the mercy of its military counterpart...Anderson calls the war ‘industrialism gone mad’” (234). The single instance of George Willard fantasizing about military order and power quickly becomes an obvious example of a truth become grotesque. The scene in which George is overcome with pride only to be overpowered by a bully offers an allegorical metaphor of the very human endeavor to fight and kill other people for glory and justice that become empty fantasies of the weak minded pawns in a military industry bent on conformity and domination. This notion only grew stronger with Anderson over time, and “In 1924 [Anderson] would complain that instead of the ‘democracy’ of that conflict, the Great War

involved the ‘standardization of men’ and the ethos that ‘everything must be made as machine-like as possible’ (Whalan 234).

Militarism was adequately addressed in the text by George, and should be read on an allegorical level, Whalan shows the link between Anderson’s personal feelings about war and “*Winesburg, Ohio*’s interest in militarism, the connections between social order, gender and narrative, and the ways in which the short story cycle form brings the reading dynamic of the text into contact with these issues, all suggest that The Great War is a crucial, but often overlooked, historical context for Anderson’s most famous work” (235). This example of a grotesque by the main character is one of the best and most obvious to analyze as evidence for the work as modernist allegory. Interpreting Winesburg in this way fits The Oxford Press’ parameters of allegory as stories with symbolic or metaphorical double meaning usually meant to suggest a greater truth or moral truisms. George Willard, along with all the residents of Winesburg, allow their personal truths, or personal beliefs and biases, to overcome their better judgment and metaphorically become “grotesque” as a perversion of truth. The outcome of these cases of human fallibility and limitation of human judgment serve as a modernist form of allegory, suggesting that moral beliefs have become immoral. Ultimately the novel as a whole comments on the impossibility of pure morality given the nature of man; a psychological and philosophical quandary that modernism would explore throughout the era.

George becomes so enamored with his sudden realization of the “truth” or militaristic might, that it almost instantly becomes a grotesque. George’s internal monologue in the alleyway demonstrates that “The absurdity of mechanizing humanity and the horrors of war that come from such disassociation are exactly what is being alluded to when Willard begins fantasizing about order and military purpose in ‘An Awakening’ (236). Indeed, George is swept away by the

feeling of certainty and purpose that is sorely lacking in his own life, and is thrilled by the comfort and confidence it gives him, “he pictured himself as an inspector, passing before a long line of men who stood at attention. He began to examine the accoutrements of the men. Before a tree he stopped and began to scold,” this break from rationality is George’s most obvious exhibition of the grotesque. (Anderson 110) Soon George is confident enough to move from authoritarian to prophetic and illustrates a truth become grotesque:

Hypnotized by his own words, the young man stumbled along the board sidewalk saying more words. ‘There is a law for armies and for men too,’ he muttered, lost in reflection. ‘The law begins with little things and spreads out until it covers everything. In every little thing there must be order, in the place where men work, in their clothes, in their thoughts. I myself must be orderly. I must learn that law. I must get myself into touch with something orderly and big that swings through the night like a star. In my little way I must begin to learn something, to give and swing and work with life, with the law.’
(Anderson 111)

The euphoria George experiences is short lived, as his fantasy world is shortly to come crashing down. George’s grotesqueness is fully realized the moment “he decided that Belle Carpenter was about to surrender herself to him. The new force that had manifested itself in him had, he felt, been at work upon her and had led to her conquest. The thought made him half-drunk with the sense of masculine power” (Anderson 113). Rather than succeeding in forcing himself on Belle Carpenter, “George’s self-aggrandizement and egoism is ridiculed when Ed Handby throws him into the bushes, grabs Belle Carpenter, and walks away” as the moral lesson becomes obvious (Whalan 237). Later, George begins to realize the error in judgment after the reader has already ironically come to know his grotesque nature. Although George is seen at his worst, the moral

lesson becomes more apparent as George “puzzled and stopping in the darkness listened, hoping to hear again the voice outside himself that had so short a time before put new courage into his heart”. We finally see George fully realize his own error “When his way homeward led him again into the street of frame houses he could not bear the sight and began to run, wanting to get quickly out of the neighborhood that now seemed to him utterly squalid and commonplace”, and George presumably learns from his experience the fallibility of his truth, something few other characters in the novel have a chance to do. (Anderson 114)

Probably the most apparent of the allegorical grotesques within the collection are those within the “Godliness” section of the text. Religion in America was rapidly developing in tandem with industry and global conflict, and was not ignored by Anderson in his collection of human grotesques. The clearest example of the perversion of religious truth into a human flaw revolves around the relationship between Jesse Bentley and his Grandson, David. Joseph Dewey points out Anderson’s connections Puritanism in his research and that Anderson was not opposed to Puritanism outright, but rather “The spiritual hunger felt by Puritans struck Anderson deeply. Although he emphatically rejected commercial misappropriation of Puritanism and its corruption into the Victorian ‘virtues’ of sexual repression, dry intellectuality, and material acquisition, he did find use for Puritanism in its expressive hunger for communion, a hunger that so many of his Winesburg characters feel” (252). The fact that Jesse Bentley is never rewarded or even answered in a way that he hoped he would be, despite an undeniable faith and conviction in his cause suggests Anderson was putting forth an allegorical point when in the Godliness stories “Absurdly, Jesse asserts his role as God’s chosen; fearfully in his fury of the assertion, he raises traditional questions of puritan self-insufficiency but to a universe fearfully silent or, worse, fearsomely empty” (Dewey 253). Anderson may have gone so far as to say that those who

practice faith impurely, whether intentionally or not, are actually practicing outside of the realm of true faith, and thus abandoned by the God they seek.

Anderson's treatment of Jesse Bentley as a religious fanatic is a perfect example of allegory borrowed from the biblical depiction of a character with the same name. This retelling of the cruel biblical character is also a break from the traditional pastoral mode stories that more transparently showed the sadness of joy that came from the actions of a main character. The irrational beliefs and actions of Jesse Bentley are the downfall for his entire family and the larger point is made allegorically about the grotesque nature of faith turned into fanaticism. More than simply an error in degree of devotion, Jesse's truth of good faith turned sour results from an impure selfish desire, rather than an over-exuberant selflessness. While Dewey correctly identifies the story as direct allusion to biblical figures and a grotesque of greed, he is incorrect in stating that "The story of Jesse Bentley, then, is not a parable against relentless acquisition or a lampoon of fanatical faith. It is the story of hunger. Jesse's dilemma is not that he is soulless but that his soul is lean and starved." (Dewey 253). It is precisely a parable of greed for wealth and recognition from his God that has overtaken the rationality of Jesse to form a grotesque. We begin to see Jesse's slide toward a similar self-aggrandizement that George felt after he begins to cultivate his family farm, as his greed begins to grow, so does his sense of his own judgment of others as absolute: "Jesse thought that as the true servant of God the entire stretch of country through which he had walked should come into his possession. He thought of his dead brothers and blamed them that they had not worked harder and achieved more" (Anderson 35). Instead of tempering his growing greed and judgment, he allows his truth of faith and service to God to become a grotesque display of cognitive dissonance and justification for whatever treatment his family and workers might receive by his hand. Jesse contemplates his own self-importance in the

presence of God, feeling “A fantastic impulse, half fear, half greediness took possession of Jesse Bentley...Into Jesse’s mind came the conviction that all of the Ohio farmers who owned land in the valley of Wine Creek were Philistines and enemies of God” (Anderson 35).

Just as Jesse’s self-delusion reaches a peak of self-importance, we see a curious shift of focus to someone else as Jesse pleads to God, “‘Send to me this night out of the womb of Katherine, a son. Let thy grace alight upon me. Send me a son to be called David who shall help me to pluck at last all these lands out of the hands of the Philistines and turn them to Thy service and to the building of Thy kingdom on earth” (Anderson 35). At first, it seems that Jesse may honestly want to serve the Lord through his request for a son, but it quickly becomes evident that the whole notion is based on his hope of recognition from God as a “chosen one”. Anderson does not let the narrative end without an allegorical allusion directly to the Bible from which both characters names are derived. Jesse, The biblical father of King David eventually attempts the sacrifice, spurring David to action in reference to the biblical David and Goliath tale. The story culminates with David’s victory over his delusional grandfather: “With all his strength he drew back the heavy rubber bands and the stone whistled through the air. It hit Jesse, who had entirely forgotten the boy and was pursuing the lamb, square in the head. With a groan he pitched forward and fell almost at the boy’s feet” (Anderson 55).

The allegory is more clearly played out in that Anderson’s Jesse survives only to learn the error of his way, and his grotesque nature is made clear in that “When his God does not touch his fulsome soul, it shrivels into a thin ego... Jesse's spirit haunts Anderson’s book of spirits” (Dewey 255). If the moral lesson were not clear enough from the biblical reference, Anderson’s narrator relates the aftermath of Jesse’s lesson learned: “Whenever David’s name was mentioned he looked vaguely at the sky and said that a messenger from God had taken the boy. ‘It happened

because I was too greedy for glory,' he declared, and would have no more to say in the matter" (Anderson 55). Any of the individual stories within the collection can be analyzed as allegorical in some fashion, which begs the larger question as to if the entire collection as a whole can be said to symbolically show a moral truth.

Anderson's small town serves as a setting to comment on the social, cultural, and ecological issues prevalent in his own time. This is accomplished through individual characters and analyzing their flaws as metaphor for human fallibility that can be found throughout literature and are timeless in humanity. The entire novel shows the human tendency to delude oneself into believing a truth, such that personal bias, instinct, and selfish motivation cloud the truth over time and eventually the truth becomes a lie. Donna Campbell argues that:

Anderson's theory of the grotesque not only explains the theme of *Winesburg, Ohio* but also reflects standard concepts of modernism, the impossibility of knowing a single truth, and the sometimes destructive-or comic- effects of placing one's faith in reason's ability to discover it; the failure of language to express such truths; and the transcendent power of the epiphany. (Campbell 1)

Human fallibility and the impossibility of pure, unfiltered truth is the ultimate moral lesson within *Winesburg, OH*, (Campbell 5). The impossibility of communicating such a truth however, is what modernism so eloquently dissected and refuted through its philosophy of Nietzsche, the poetry of T.S. Eliot, and here, the lack of any wholly redeeming characters in Anderson's novella. This is however a significant theme of the modernist movement, a movement away from the idealism of the 19th century in the face of a vastly different and uncertain world, the stories in *Winesburg, OH* "can be considered as commentary on, and critique of, the kind of absolute adherence to truth that modernism had shattered. The results for Wharton and Anderson is

modernist stories that end in manner that is sometimes comic, often ironic, and always appropriately unsatisfying”, and are also indicative of the modernist movement that first explored these concepts in in popular literature. (Campbell 5)

These themes are seen throughout the development of modernism in the early twentieth century, popular in the literary world until the end of World War II and the emergence of Post-modernism. But it is prudent here to mention Anderson’s effect on the movement and his contemporaries. Similar themes can be found in the work of later Modernists, “In early Hemingway, the modernist novel explicitly takes up the task of examining the existential dilemmas of the solitary individual in postwar modernity. Sherwood Anderson would then seem to offer an example of an author working more anachronistically along the lines of Leskov” (Solomon 125). In fact, Anderson’s older works did bare a stronger similarity to older styles of short story and offered a dilemma to solution narrative that was not yet emblematic of the modernistic, unanswerable and somewhat nihilistic sense that comes from later works such as *Winesburg, OH*. Robert Dunne examines the influence of the tradition styles of short story writing on Anderson’s work:

Although in the first story of the book Anderson defines the process by which people become grotesques, he cannot spell out the second half of that process – surmounting grotesqueness- because defining the rest of the formula would make it a purely rational concept, made solvable merely by the act of overlaying the static formula on the stories. In his earlier novels, Anderson had provided such explicit solutions, resulting in works that are unbelievable and didactic. (Dunne 191)

The central message of this text seems to reach beyond any level of satire or social commentary to make a moral statement on the improbability or impossibility of truly moral behavior or totally

rational thought. The moment a person grasps at truth it slips through their fingers, and the tighter they hold the grip, the more deformed becomes the original intention. In *Winesburg, OH*, Dunne explains that “By Truth, Anderson seems to imply variously held beliefs that are the sum of a ‘great many thoughts.’ As intellectual concepts, these truths are things of beauty, beautiful perhaps for their simplicity”, but the error in human judgment, or fallibility that creates the grotesque occurs “when people begin to ‘snatch up’ the truths as their own and start living their lives by them, the truths become perverted and have the effect of infecting those who tried to possess them” (Dunne 180 -181).

The moral lesson that Anderson conveys is that there does exist a particular point in time, in which the error in judgment occurs, and if any overarching solution to the allegory of human fallibility is to be derived, it may be found in recognizing the mistake that is made by each character when they think they know a truth intimately and that it is incorruptible. Dunne relates how “characters look back first at moments early in their lives when they began practicing their tightly held ideals and then when they reached a certain decisive moment when they could have adjusted their fixed plans but did not” (181). The subtle but powerful message of *Winesburg, OH* is clearly set out in the beginning of the book by the narrator:

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up some of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them. It was the truths that made people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. 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 (Anderson 3).

This declaration of human fallibility marks the clearest connection to the philosophical modernist notion of a free will that is doomed from the beginning, and the reasoning behind the largest artistic modernism moment against traditional religious, political, and social norms no longer relevant in a time of global war and uncertainty. Beyond exquisitely capturing the emotional and mental sentiment of modernists in Anderson's time, *Winesburg Ohio*'s ultimately foreshadows a coming postmodernism that would take concepts introduced by early modernists to express the sentiments of artists who experienced World War II, atomic threats, and global Industrialism.

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