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SHERWOOD ANDERSON, CHRISTOPHER SERGEL, AND WINESBURG, OHIO

BY

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A THESIS
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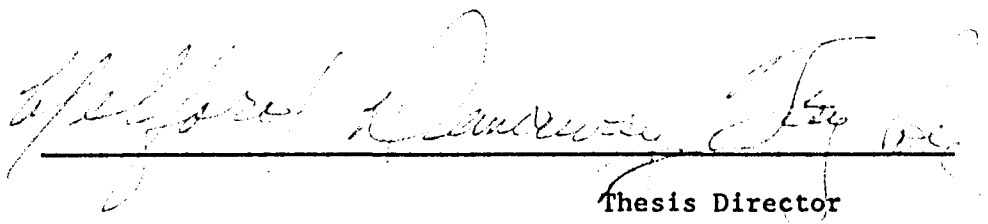

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Preface

In 1936, Sherwood Anderson read a stage version of Winesburg, Ohio to his friends Roger and Christopher Sergel. For Anderson the play marked the culmination of his efforts at playwriting. He had adapted his finest collection of stories for the stage, and it would now be the responsibility of the theatre and particularly of his producer, Jasper Deeter, to see that the play succeeded. Deeter produced the play at the Hedgerow Theatre in 1937. Anderson had no doubts concerning the merits of his play.

For Christopher Sergel, however, Sherwood Anderson's reading was only a beginning. Anderson's masterpiece, he felt, had not fared well in its transition to the stage. Anderson, he believed, had not understood the structural and thematic requirements of the drama and had not been able to give Winesburg, Ohio the dramatic focus which it must have to be a successful play. Lacking any centrally unifying theme or conflict, Anderson's play was reduced to a rambling narrative; it was at most a moving set of character portraits which could have no great dramatic impact.

In 1954, at the request of Eleanor Anderson (Sherwood Anderson's widow), Christopher Sergel began his own version of Winesburg, Ohio. In his version of the book, Sergel sought to introduce the unifying central theme which he thought was missing in the Anderson version. The Broadway production of Sergel's play was a financial and, he felt, an artistic failure; and over the next 19 years he intermittently revised the play in an effort to make it succeed.

In the following pages I shall attempt to evaluate the stage adaptations that have been written of Winesburg, Ohio. In my first chapter I explore Sherwood Anderson's involvement in the theatre which led him to dramatize Winesburg, Ohio and his friendship with the Sergels which was eventually to result in Christopher Sergel's Winesburg, Ohio (P). The second chapter involves a study of the stage history of Winesburg, Ohio (P) from 1935 to 1973. Winesburg, Ohio (P), we find, has had a history of stage failures. In my third and final chapter I have set about to examine the contrasting approaches of Anderson and Sergel in the adaptation of Winesburg, Ohio to the stage.

Chapter I

Sherwood Anderson, the Sergels and the Theater

The study of any piece of literature is usually initiated with a brief sketch of the author. In the case of Sherwood Anderson, it is necessary to say very little, as he has in the last two decades received a great deal of literary attention; in fact there has been a kind of renaissance in Anderson scholarship. Road to Winesburg is the latest addition to Anderson scholarship, and it is the closest that anyone has come to compiling an authoritative biography of Anderson.

Suffice it to say that Sherwood Anderson was born in Camden, Ohio in 1876 to Irwin and Emma Smith Anderson. In 1884 his parents moved to Clyde, Ohio, where Sherwood was to spend the rest of his childhood. He came to writing late, as he was engaged in business ventures for a number of years. He did not seriously think of himself as a writer until 1914, when he began to submit short stories to magazines for publication, and he was forty years old before he published his first novel, Windy McPherson's Son. He is best known for his short stories, among which is the collection, Winesburg, Ohio, his masterpiece. His novels, too, have received a great deal of attention but have never been considered as important as the short stories. The little bit of poetry and drama that he wrote are considered to be the least successful of his literary ventures.

Anderson summarized the bulk of his works in a letter to Adelaide Walker in 1933. The passage seems fairly accurate, although Anderson was never very concerned with accuracy or conciseness:

.....Now as for my books, my first novel, Windy McPherson's Son, appeared when I was well into the thirties. The early part of my life had been spent as farm hand, laborer, soldier, and factory hand. At the age of, say, twenty-six or seven, I got into business as an advertising man and for a few years was, I think, rather a typical American go-getter. I finally became a manufacturer and was, I believe, on the road to making a great deal of money when I began to write. Evidently the two things do not go together. As I got more and more absorbed in writing, I found myself slipping as a businessman. One day I walked out of the factory and never went back. I have told the story of that part of my life in a book of mine called A Story Teller's Story.

During the years I was in business I was writing constantly and wrote several novels before publishing, most of which were afterwards thrown away.

I wrote a labor novel called Marching Men that was published and a little book of verse called (Mid-) American Chants.

Then I went to Chicago and worked there for several years in offices and during the time wrote Winesburg, Ohio, a book of short stories, Poor White, a novel of the coming of industrialism, and two more books of short stories, The Triumph of the Egg, and Horses and Men.

Then I wrote a novel called Many Marriages and the semi-autobiographical book, A Story Teller's Story.

There followed another small book of verse called A New Testament and my only popular success, a novel called Dark Laughter. It was from the proceeds of this book that I got the Virginia farm (Ripshin), and I also used part of the fund to acquire a country newspaper in Virginia. I ran the newspaper for about two years, getting from the experience a book called Hello Towns, and then I turned the newspaper over to my son. During this time I also published a book called Sherwood Anderson's Notebook.

It was about this time that I got the notion that the real story of America should now be told from the inside of the factory...I have already got from this experience a little book called, Perhaps Women, and a novel, Beyond Desire.[1]

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[1] Howard Mumford Jones and Walter B. Rideout, eds. Letters of Sherwood Anderson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953),pp.281-282.

Anderson's description of his writing reveals two very interesting facts about his career. First, as I have already noted, Anderson waited for several years before settling on writing as his profession. He published his first book at an age when many authors have written their best works. Secondly, and more important to this thesis as a study of the dramatizations of Winesburg, Ohio, there is no mention of any efforts at playwriting.

We find, however, that Sherwood Anderson had been interested in the theatre for many years, and that he had thought of writing plays, but that he did not actually write a play until late in 1933 and that he did not have a play published until 1937, when Charles Scribner's Sons published his one collection of plays, Plays - Winesburg and Others. Anderson evinced an interest in the theatre as early as 1917. He went to the theatre frequently and among other theatre people he became acquainted with Jacques Copeau, a French producer and director whose company was in New York from 1917 until 1919. Anderson writes in his memoirs of a Copeau production of Moliere's The Doctor Inspite of Himself which he thought was particularly fine.[2]

Copeau read several of Anderson's books and was particularly enthusiastic about Winesburg, Ohio. He felt that Anderson's short stories were ideal material for the theatre. Of Copeau's desire to see Winesburg, Ohio on the stage, Anderson wrote - "My friend had it

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2 Ray Lewis White, ed., Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs: A Critical Edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1942), p.361.

in mind that he would make a dramatization of my Winesburg tales. We talked of it at length, made plans, even drew up outlines of the scenes. The dramatization at his hands, never came off.[3]"

Copeau did not follow through with his design to dramatize Winesburg, Ohio. He is important, however, because he was one of the first people to encourage Anderson to write plays, and in particular Copeau is the first person to see the possibility of Winesburg being adapted for the stage or, at least, he is the first person whom Anderson speaks of in connection with the possibility of dramatizing Winesburg.

Anderson was reluctant to attempt a play with what he felt was only a rudimentary grasp of the techniques of drama and the workings of the theatre. In a letter to Mary Austin in 1923 he wrote, "Jacques Copeau and several others have tried to get me interested in writing drama, but whenever I go to the theatre, I shudder at the notion. I've a fancy myself that anything I have to give can be given as a tale teller as well as any other way. God knows, I have yet enough to learn about that.[4]"

On November 19, 1925, Anderson wrote to his friend, Lawrence Stallings, concerning the possibility of making plays of one or more of his stories or books. Stallings was a dramatist and journalist whose opinion Anderson respected. Anderson wrote:

> My dear Lawrence Stallings: For some time now I have had in mind writing to you concerning a notion that I have had in my head, but have hesitated because it seems to me a little presumptuous.

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3 White, p. 362.

4 Jones, p. 107.

> Anyway, here it is - I am wondering, sometime, when you have a little leisure, if you ever do have, if you would look through my stuff with the idea in your mind of finding in it possible dramatic material. Jacques Copeau and several other men on the other side have written me from time to time saying that they thought there were any number of plays in my stories and books. I do not know whether it is true or not, but I have liked your work as a playwright so much that I am having the nerve to suggest the idea to your mind.[5]

We do not have Stallings' reply to Anderson's letter, and indeed we have no further correspondence between the two men until 1934. But from Sherwood's letter of June 14, 1934, it would seem that Stallings had agreed with Anderson's friends that there was drama in the novels and short stories and that he should try to write these plays himself. In this letter we see that Anderson has recently finished an adaptation of Winesburg, which he is not completely satisfied with, and that he has thought of adapting his best selling novel, Dark Laughter. He writes:

> Dear Mr. Stallings: I wonder how much in earnest you were in the little talk we had about our working together. I do think that there is a play in Dark Laughter, and I believe we could do it together, if you are interested. I will send you the Winesburg, Ohio play to read and let you judge whether or not it has dramatic qualities.
>
> I find my weakness in playwrighting to be the structure rather than the dialogue, and I believe that if you could bring up the structure of Dark Laughter.....[6]

Anderson received much encouragement from people who believed that there were plays in his books and that he could write them. However, from most of these people encouragement was all he received.

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[5] Jones, pp. 149-150

[6] Jones, p. 304

Copeau, Stallings, and others offered to collaborate, but nothing came out of their offers. Two men gave Anderson more than mere offers and encouragement. These were Jasper Deeter, who saw to it that Winesburg, Ohio (P) was produced, and Roger Sergel, who encouraged Anderson to have his plays published.

Anderson found that for the playwright writing the play is not always the most difficult task, and that especially with a new playwright the difficulty of finding a producer is often much greater. The year 1934 was probably the least profitable time for an American playwright to put forth a new play. In the wake of depression capital was scarce and experiments were viewed as being risky ventures. A New York production of Winesburg seemed unlikely.

However, at this time Jasper Deeter was producing some experimental plays at the Hedgerow Theatre, and when he read Anderson's play, he agreed to produce it there. The play opened on June 30, 1934, and although it received only a lukewarm response from the Philadelphia critics, it was kept in the Hedgerow repertoire for three years. During these years Deeter intermittently worked with Sherwood in an effort to improve the play. In a letter dated July 9, 1934, Anderson wrote to Deeter suggesting several changes in the production. Anderson was not completely satisfied with the acting of two of the leading characters in Winesburg (P), and he put forth several suggestions for their improvement.[7]

Another individual who encouraged Anderson with his playwrighting and particularly with his Winesburg adaptation was Roger Sergel.

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[7] Jones, pp. 304-306

Sergel belonged to a family which had long been involved in the theatre and in the publishing business. His uncle, Charles Sergel, had founded the Dramatic Publishing Co. in 1885 and was its president until his death in 1926; before his death Charles turned over the presidency of his company to his nephew, Roger.

Roger Sergel first was interested in being a writer. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh where he was teaching English when he wrote his first novel and met Sherwood Anderson. His novel, Arlie Gelston, which was published by Ben Huebsch, aroused the anger of the critics and the reading public by its mention of a taboo sexual subject. Although Sergel's book was fairly well received abroad, it was universally condemned in the United States, and one of the few people to defend Arlie Gelston was Sherwood Anderson. Sherwood was known for his unselfish help to other authors (among whom were such figures as Hemingway and Faulkner), and it is not surprising that he came to Sergel's defense.

Anderson studied Arlie Gelston thoroughly, and he felt that the book should be viewed as a novel rather than as a social study or as a statement of morality. If the critics could put aside their prejudices and view Sergel's novel dispassionately, Anderson was certain that they would see its merits and give its author the credit that he was due. In a letter Anderson wrote to Sergel of his book:

> Have been reading Arlie again and with growing admiration of the job you have done. It is very finely done...You have now Arlie as a sound piece of work to stand upon. It will be more and more as time goes on and as the immediate quibbling that comes, dies away, a foundation to yourself and a fort from which you can sally forth.[8]

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8 Jones, pp. 112-113

Anderson's encouragement could not help Sergel's literary fortunes, which had been irretrievably damaged by the scandal his novel had aroused. It is interesting and ironic that while Anderson was defending Sergel's disastrous venture that Sergel was propounding the merits of Anderson's similarly lackluster novel, Many Marriages.[9]

Anderson and Sergel were to become close friends over the next few years. It is a measure of Anderson's affection for Sergel that in the Jones and Rideout edition of Anderson's letters there are 38 letters from Anderson to Sergel, that Sherwood dedicated one of his novels to his friend, and that at his death Sherwood's widow chose two men to help her to compile and edit his Memoirs and that one of these was Sergel.

Anderson came to respect his friend's views on drama and on the publishing business, and it is not surprising that he would seek his advice with regard to the dramatization of Winesburg, Ohio. In 1932 Sergel published Raymond O'Neill's adaptation of Anderson's "Triumph of the Egg" (this had been produced by the Provincetown players in 1926.) Anderson was quite pleased with Sergel's edition and in 1936 when he began work on a collection of his plays for his publisher, he invited Sergel to Ripshin (his home in Marion, Virginia) to see his latest version of Winesburg, Ohio. Anderson read his play to Sergel and to his (Sergel's) oldest son, Christopher, and Sergel made suggestions for its improvement. In 1937 the book Plays - Winesburg and Others was published by Scribner's.

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9 Jones, p. 113

Roger Sergel in a sense willed his interest in Sherwood Anderson to his oldest son, Christopher, along with his involvement in the theatre and the publishing business. Christopher was born in Iowa City in 1919 and spent his childhood in Iowa. He was a playwright at an early age, and when he was a sophomore in high school, his first play was published; the play, a light comedy entitled Who Gets the Car Tonight, won him no literary prestige but has since been given 200,000 performances. Since then he has written fifty plays, most of which have been published by Dramatics Publishing Company. In 1940 he took over for his father as president of the company.

I have noted that Christopher Sergel was present when Anderson read his version of Winesburg, Ohio (P) to Roger Sergel. Although Christopher made no contributions to Anderson's play, his presence was in a sense important because it was to be for him the beginning of a long association with Anderson's writings and in particular with Winesburg, Ohio. It is also at this time that he began to take an interest in adapting books for the stage rather than in writing original plays. One of his earliest adaptations was of Anderson's short story, "I'm A Fool." This was published by Dramatic Publishing Company in 1944, and has since then been given many amateur productions.

In the mid-1940's, Sergel began to shift his company's emphasis from the publishing of original plays to adaptations. An article in the Saturday Review speaks of this change in direction which seemed to be part of a shift in the theatre in general:

> Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio is the latest outcropping of the book into play epidemic that has struck Broadway. Not that there is anything new about adaptations for the theatre, but 1957-58 will

> see some fifteen of these compared to a normal incidence of about five per New York season. This unusual state of affairs cannot really be explained by the assumption that producers think adaptations from books are fashionable. A talk with Winesburg, Ohio's adaptor, Christopher Sergel, brings out a more probable explanation. Namely, that there is a rapidly growing vacuum of original plays good enough to meet the increasingly high standards set by audiences paying sky high prices for tickets.
>
> The approach of this condition has been apparent to Sergel ever since World War II. At that time the young playwright's father's company, which specializes in publishing plays for amateurs, began to turn more and more to adaptations." We did a study of the original manuscripts being sent to us, he explained, and found that for every one good enough to rate fourth consideration, we were receiving eighty-two that we rejected immediately.[10]

Sergel's move from original plays to adaptations proved to be a lucrative one for him and for his company. Since the early 1950's Dramatic Publishing Company has published some fifty plays a year, including adaptations by Sergel of State Fair, Up The Down Staircase, The Mouse That Roared, and To Kill A Mockingbird.

In looking back on his career as a playwright and publisher, Christopher Sergel admits that the business of adapting books to the stage has been very profitable for him. He has picked books which he has believed could succeed as plays and staying close to their authors' styles and techniques has successfully adapted these to the stage. His main concern has been not to project himself as an accomplished playwright but to make the works of other authors come alive on the stage. In this respect he feels that he has succeeded in that he has never failed to please an author whose play he has adapted.

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[10] Henry Hewes, "Do Books Make the Best Theatre?" The Saturday Review, February 8, 1958, p. 26-27.

Winesburg, Ohio has proved an exceptional case for Sergel, for it has involved a work that he has believed in strongly. It has involved twenty years of his life (1953-1973). Throughout these years he has been determined to make Sherwood Anderson's book succeed as a drama. The adaptations that I shall explore in the next few pages are a measure of the success or failure that Christopher Sergel has achieved in his twenty year association with Winesburg, Ohio.

Chapter II

The Stage History of Winesburg, Ohio: 1934 - 1973

As a play, Winesburg, Ohio, seems to have been doomed from its very inception. Sherwood Anderson found the transition from the narrative to the dramatic to be extremely difficult, and in the case of Winesburg, Ohio he found the difficulty to be as extreme as any that he had experienced in his writing career. In an explanatory note to Plays - Winesburg and Others, he wrote of his many aborted attempts at adapting his masterpiece for the stage. "As for the play Winesburg," he noted, "the author tried, with several collaborators, to make a play of the Winesburg tales, but without much success. There were several versions made, but they all rather sharply violated the spirit of the play.[1]"

Anderson discarded his early drafts of Winesburg (P), gave up the idea of collaborating, and set out to write a play that would be completely his own. He intended for his play to capture the spirit of Winesburg, rather than simply to reproduce the book on the stage. In a note to Plays - Winesburg and Others he wrote:

> In the play I have not tried to follow exactly the theme of the tales. Many of the characters of the book do not appear in the play, while others are brought into new prominence. In the play I have merely tried to capture again the spirit of the tales, to make the play fit the spirit of the tales as regards to time and place.[2]

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1 Sherwood Anderson, Plays - Winesburg and Others (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1937), p. VII.

2 Anderson, p. VIII.

The first and only professional production of Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (P) was Jasper Deeter's Hedgerow Theatre production. The play remained a part of the theatre's repertoire for three years and was a moderate box office success. Winesburg (P) evidently had no great impact on the theatre as it was never produced in New York, although it appears that several New York producers considered it. In his Memoirs Anderson wrote:

> I made a play that was produced by Jasper Deeter in his Hedgerow Theatre in Pennsylvania but that although I did sell it to various New York producers was never performed in New York. Later, I put it into a book.[3]

Anderson appears to have made several efforts to earn a Broadway production for his play. In a letter dated July 9, 1934, he wrote to Jasper Deeter of his efforts to sell his play:

> In the confusion of getting away I asked someone there to be sure to send playing dates in July and August of the Winesburg play to George Jean Nathan, c/o The Spectator ... to Joseph Wood Krutch, c/o The Nation....I asked someone to do this, I think, but I am not sure. I wish you would also send programs to Stark Young, c/o New Republic, to Roger Sergel, The Dramatic Publishing Company, and also to Paul Rosenfeld.[4]

Sherwood's efforts were fruitless, as a Broadway production of Winesburg, Ohio was not to occur until 1958, and then it was to be of another man's play.

Winesburg, Ohio and Anderson's other plays seem to have received little attention after the last Hedgerow production and their 1937

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[3] White, p. 362.

[4] Jones, p. 307.

publishing. From 1937 until his death in 1941 Anderson does not seem to have written any other plays; indeed he seems to have lost interest in the theatre altogether, as he began to devote more and more time to the compiling of his memoirs. There can be no doubt that he was disappointed at the poor reception that had been given his plays and that he could never fully adjust himself to the requirements of writing for the theatre.

From Sherwood Anderson's death in 1941 until 1953 little attention seems to have been paid to his plays. No playwright showed any interest in adapting any of his works for the stage. In general this was a period in which few of Anderson's books received any attention, and so it is not difficult to understand why his plays, which received little enough attention at their productions or publication should now go unnoticed.

However, at least one person believed in Anderson as an author and a playwright and felt that his works deserved another chance on the stage. This was Eleanor Anderson (his widow), who never seemed to have any doubts about Sherwood's ability as a writer and who in 1953 convinced Christopher Sergel to re-adapt Winesburg, Ohio.

Sergel, who considered Winesburg, Ohio to be one of the finest works in American literature, went about its dramatization with the utmost respect for its author. As an adaptor he has always felt that he could only be successful if he believed strongly in the author he was adapting and in his writing. It was Sergel's first concern that Sherwood Anderson's book receive the respectful attention that it deserved on the stage. Thus, with Anderson's reputation as a writer in mind (or what he believed

Anderson's reputation should be) Sergel set out to rework Winesburg, Ohio (P).[5]

Sergel first examined Winesburg, Ohio and then Anderson's other collections of short stories, probing for their author's style and techniques, and searching for a theme which might be the center of a new Winesburg play. He read most of Anderson's novels and explored the Memoirs hoping to understand further what Anderson wanted to express in his play, but could not succeed in doing.

Having studied Anderson's writing, Sergel visited the author's boyhood home of Clyde, Ohio, where he believed he could view first hand the people and the place that had one time been Winesburg, Ohio, at least in the mind of Sherwood Anderson. Sergel completed his play in 1954, but like Anderson found that he faced a more difficult task in having the play produced that he had in writing it. The delays he would have to face in finding a director and actors for his play, not to mention the financial backing which he must drum up and the technical problems that must be solved, were to postpone the Broadway opening of the play until 1958.

Sergel's biggest headache came when he had to find a woman to play Elizabeth Willard (his leading lady) and a director with whom she would be able to work. He first went to Jessica Tandy and asked her if she would play the role opposite Hume Cronyn as Dr. Reefy. When Tandy and Cronyn agreed to play the roles, Sergel took the play to Joseph Anthony

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5 Frank Johns, "An Interview With Christopher Sergel", January 28, 1973. The following accounting of Sergel's connection with Winesburg is drawn from the above interview and selected reviews.

and asked him if he would direct Cronyn and Tandy in the leading roles. Anthony approved of Cronyn but objected to Jessica Tandy, who he felt was "too brittle and British for the role." Other actresses were considered and Katherine Cornell was next suggested and approached in connection with the role. Miss Cornell said that she would accept but only if her husband was the director. Since Joseph Anthony had already been contracted to direct, this was impossible.

Sergel's next idea was that Helen Hayes might be the ideal actress to portray Elizabeth, as she would certainly be an asset to any play she was a part of. Anthony, however, objected again. He felt that Hayes was simply too old to play a woman with a son George's age. Sergel pointed out that Miss Hayes actually did have a son who was George's age, but Anthony insisted that people would simply not believe this if they were to see it on the stage.

When Anthony rejected Helen Hayes, Sergel took the role to Dorothy McGuire, whom the director approved of. It was unfortunate that the central character of a play should be picked in such an illogical and unprofessional manner. Two fine actresses were rejected for the slightest of reasons, Jessica Tandy for her nationality and Helen Hayes for her age, while a third, Katherine Cornell, was lost for a director of questionable ability (Anthony). The result of the casting process was that the least qualified of the four actresses considered was given the role.

The problems that Sergel encountered in the initial stages of the production of Winesburg are examples of the difficulties that seemed to arise to plague those who were associated with the dramatization.

Sergel's play was in a sense doomed from the start, as it was saddled with a leading lady who would never be capable of playing her role. Indeed the weakness of Dorothy McGuire began to become apparent as the play went into rehearsal. It was apparent that she did not relish the idea of portraying a woman who was both physically and mentally disturbed. Because of her aversion to Elizabeth Willard, Dorothy McGuire only half-heartedly played her role, and as the play moved from its final rehearsals to its pre-Broadway openings, the prognosis of Winesburg's (P) future was grim.

Initially, rehearsals had gone well, but the other members of the cast had begun to realize that they would not be able to fill the vacuum that was being created by Dorothy McGuire. Sergel feels that Miss McGuire's inability to carry off the role of Elizabeth Willard was not completely her fault. Joseph Anthony, he notes, did not give her the direction that she needed, and he as the playwright also failed her because he could not convey to her the depths of emotion that Elizabeth Willard should reach.

In the first weeks of rehearsal, changes might have been made in the play itself to offset the weakness of its central character, but Joseph Anthony chose to make only minor revisions and directed the play as if he had Helen Hayes as a leading lady rather than Dorothy McGuire. In Baltimore the situation became so serious that James Whitmore (who was playing Tom Willard) commented that being on stage alone with Dorothy McGuire was like delivering a monologue. It was now that Sergel and Anthony began to realize the basic failure of their play, but with the Broadway opening a week away, it was too late to make any significant changes in the production.

Thus, Winesburg, Ohio (P) opened on Broadway on February 5, 1958 with the serious handicap of an ineffective leading actress. However, the New York reception was to indicate that Dorothy McGuire was not the only one who would have to bear the responsibility for the demise of Sergel's play and for yet another setback to a dramatization of Winesburg, Ohio. Winesburg, Ohio (P) was a catastrophe; it opened February fifth and closed on the fifteenth having played 13 performances.

Even more discouraging than the short run of the play was the reception that it was given by the critics. The reviews were uniformly deprecatory and at times curiously malicious. In panning Sergel's play the reviewer for Time magazine wrote that in Winesburg, Ohio (P), "Sergel turns Anderson's celebrated slim volume into all too slim a play."[6]

He went on to speak of Sergel's play as "a plotless set of fragments unified by little more than the author's tone of voice and a mood of isolated lives."[7]

The Time reviewer also took exception to Christopher Sergel's interpretation of Anderson's characters. Sergel, he felt, had failed to infuse into his play the fascination of Sherwood Anderson's "grotesques." According to the reviewer, "Sergel forfeits Anderson's rich multiplicity of characters to focus on the struggle of Elizabeth to free her sensitive son from the grasp of his crass father and let him go off to become

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6 "Winesburg, Ohio," Time Magazine, February 17, 1958, p. 86.

7 Time, p. 86.

a writer."[8] The result of Sergel's tact, he notes, "was a plot that was sufficient for a low key one act play."[9] The reviewer concluded by noting that the playwright's characterization and plotting were equally thin and that what Anderson had merely sketched in his short stories, Sergel had failed to fill in.[10]

The reviewer of Theatre Arts magazine carried his criticism of Winesburg (P) to the brink of insult. He wrote, "In a program note, Mr. Sergel assured the reader that he could hear Anderson's voice as he wrote the play. Whether it was a voice in protest is not specified."[11] Of Sergel's characterization he noted, "Sergel manages to make the people of Anderson's stories seem alternately humdrum and asinine."[12]

In what was probably the most unfair review, the New Yorker compared the Sergel adaptation of Winesburg, Ohio to Kette Fring's version of Look Homeward Angel and referred to Winesburg (P) as "a foolish and dull parody."[13]

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8 Time, p. 86.

9 Time, p. 86.

10 Time, p. 86.

11 Henry Hewes, "Do Books Make the Best Theatre?" Theatre Arts, April, 1958, p. 24.

12 Theatre Arts, p. 24.

13 Wolcott Gibbs, "Make Your Poison," New Yorker, February 15, 1958, pp. 55-56.

"George Willard," writes the reviewer, "shows no potential of becoming anything in particular. The other characters strike you less as being people than laborious oddities."[14] Finally, in what was the broadest criticism of the play and Sherwood Anderson's book, the New York Times drama critic wrote, "Winesburg is not theatre."[15]

In reading the reviews of Sergel's play we should take into account several factors. First of all, his adaptation was judged by critics who were generally harsh in their evaluation of Sherwood Anderson as a writer. The comments of the New Yorker were as much a criticism of Anderson's short stories as they were of Sergel's plays. Indeed the fifties were the nadir of Sherwood Anderson's critical reputation.

Secondly, as has already been noted, 1958 was a noteworthy year for book-to-play adaptations. There were fifteen such adaptations in the 1957-58 season as contrasted with the seasonal average of five. Among these adaptations was Kette Fring's Look Homeward Angel (P). While Sherwood Anderson was being rejected by the critics and the reading public, Thomas Wolfe was at the zenith of his critical reputation. Sergel's play could only be judged as second rate in comparison to Wolfe's premiere novel. One of the results of the Anderson-Wolfe match-up was that Look Homeward Angel (P) won both the Drama Critics Circle Award and the Pulitzer Prize and ran over 200 performances, while Winesburg, Ohio (P) was panned by the critics and played for only 13 performances. It seems ironic (now that the Thomas Wolfe euphoria of the 1950's is over) that Kette Frings' play is no longer judged as the

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[14] Gibbs, p. 55.

[15] "Winesburg, Ohio," New York Times, February 6, 1958, p. 22 .

masterpiece it was thought to be in 1958.

Then, too, whereas Winesburg, Ohio (P) failed because of the poor quality of its New York production, Look Homeward Angel (P) succeeded by virtue of its outstanding Broadway showing. Incisively directed by George Roy Hill and brilliantly acted by Anthony Perkins (who played Eugene Gant) and Arthur Hill and Rosemary Murphy (Eugene Gant's parents) Look Homeward Angel (P) was the tour de force that Winesburg, Ohio (P) could not be.

The debacle of Winesburg (P) on Broadway was a bitter experience for Sergel. He, who had wanted so much to see Anderson's book come to life on the stage, watched it die in thirteen performances in New York. The play that he had worked on since 1953 was a failure, and Sergel felt that much of the responsibility for this was his. In failing he believed that he had let down several people who had depended upon him to succeed, particularly Sherwood Anderson, who had left a masterpiece to be adapted, Eleanor Anderson, who had entrusted him with the adaptation of Sherwood's book, and his father, Roger Sergel, who had wanted so much for Winesburg to succeed on the stage.

In assessing the Broadway production of his play, Sergel notes several reasons for its failure. Casting, he admits, was a major factor in the play's demise. Sergel's and Anthony's choice of Dorothy McGuire instead of Helen Hayes undoubtedly weakened the impact of the play by depriving it of a strong central character. Sergel notes that, as director, Anthony shared in the failure of his leading lady because he failed to give her the proper guidance that she needed to interpret the part of Elizabeth Willard as Christopher Sergel had envisioned it.

Secondly, Sergel notes that Oliver Smith's set was also partly responsible for the Winesburg debacle. For a play which seemed to suggest a simple and intimate set -- a play which was centered around the innermost feelings and convictions of the three members of a family -- Smith designed an imposingly elaborate three story edifice which seemed to dwarf Sergel's characters. In a review of Winesburg, Ohio (P) for the Herald Tribune, Walter Kerr referred to Smith's set as "blood curdling," and noted that while Winesburg would not necessarily have succeeded with another set that its chances of success would certainly have been better.[16]

It is interesting to note here that Sherwood Anderson and Jasper Deeter had considered using an elaborate set for the Hedgerow Theatre production of Winesburg, Ohio (P), and they rejected this idea because of the very intimate nature of the Winesburg tales. In a note to the Hedgerow production Anderson wrote, "after a good deal of experimenting we have found that Winesburg, Ohio (P) seemed to gain a certain strength by great simplicity in stage settings....By extreme simplifications of the settings emphasis is all on the people." [17]

Finally, Sergel feels that he must bear much of the responsibility for his play's failure. He believes that he failed as a playwright in that he did not give the play a satisfactory ending. The affirmation of life that Elizabeth was attempting to give to her son with her death never really registered, as George seemed to leave Winesburg and the play totally oblivious to his mother's death and to her motivation for dying. Then, too, Sergel feels that he could have made George Willard

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16 Review quoted by Sergel; I could not locate.

17 Anderson, p. ix.

a more engaging character. George must be the kind of individual that we can believe may someday be Sherwood Anderson.

The Winesburg production was not simply a shattering artistic failure for its author; it was likewise a serious financial and emotional burden to him. Seeing that Winesburg, Ohio would lose money, the general manager withheld the funds that were needed to cover production expenses. When asked by Sergel for the money to pay for these expenses, the general manager presented him with what turned out to be a bad check, and then before that matter could be further investigated, he committed suicide. Sergel turned out to be the only one who was available when the bills had to be paid, and because of this he had to bear a heavy financial burden. In addition to production costs, Sergel had to pay a considerable amount of money to the Internal Revenue Service, when the box office manager of the National Theatre failed to pay the amusement tax on tickets to Winesburg (P). In the end Sergel found that he had become the chief financial backer of a disaster.

In light of the New York fiasco it would seem that no one, least of all Christopher Sergel, would even think of staging Winesburg, Ohio (P) again. Plays that fail dismally on Broadway are rarely given a second chance at success. Winesburg (P), however, has proved to be an exceptional play. Sergel felt that given proper script, direction, and casting that Sherwood Anderson's book could be effective on the stage. Since 1958 Sergel has sought to correct flaws which he believed weakened his 1958 version.

Christopher Sergel has not been alone in his effort to make Sherwood Anderson's book into an effective play. Jeffrey Hayden, a California director, has been involved with Winesburg, Ohio (P) since 1959, when

he acquired the rights to stage a professional production. Although Hayden did a considerable amount of rewriting, the play that he first directed in 1959 was basically Sergel's. This production, which featured Katherine Bond as Elizabeth and Charles Anderson as George, received favorable reviews but did not attract much attention. Winesburg (P) was given several college productions but was not to have a professional production again until 1971.

In 1971, Jack Nicknane chose Winesburg, Ohio (P) to be the grand opening production of the Performing Arts Center at Santa Barbara High School. This was to be no ordinary high school production, as Nicknane contracted Jeffrey Hayden as his director and Eva Marie Saint (Hayden's wife) to play the leading role (Elizabeth Willard). In a writeup of Nicknane's production in the Los Angeles Times Dan Sullivan wrote:

> Sometimes, all you have to do is ask. Jack Nicknane, head of the Santa Barbara High School Drama Department, knew that Eva Marie Saint and her husband, director Jeffrey Hayden, had a beach cottage here. Would they be interested in doing a show to help the high school dedicate its' new Performing Arts Center.
>
> They would. Hayden still had the rights to a dramatization of Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio that he produced in Los Angeles in the 1950's, and there was a fine role for Miss Saint, who was eager to do a play again after fifteen years. Nicknane's students, some local community actors, and a handful of fine Hollywood - New York actors like Lou Gosset and James Broderick would complete the case. Deal? Deal.[18]

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[18] Dan Sullivan, "Miss Saint Stars in 'Winesburg'." Los Angeles Times Part IV, p. 1.

Considering Hayden's experience with Winesburg (P), the skill of the leading actors, and the enthusiasm of the school and the community, Winesburg, Ohio (P) could only be a hit. It opened June 28 and was immediately both a financial and a critical success. Dan Sullivan referred to the play as "a sensitive and thoroughly realized production that would do any Los Angeles theatre proud." [19]

Sullivan's praise was not unqualified. He felt that Sergel's script, much revised as it was by Hayden, "failed to convey the queer stunted quality of Anderson's villagers, the various little madnesses that their lonely lives had organized themselves around....and the play that resulted was closer to Our Town than to Anderson's "Book of the Grotesque." [20] On its own terms, though, Sullivan felt that Winesburg, Ohio (P) was a solid play.

Miss Saint, he noted, was strong as the woman who had been drained of all hope for herself, but who was determined that her son would make a life that he could be proud of. James Broderick was her equal as the "classic all-American failure; all windup, no delivery." [21] Of Joseph Bottoms who played George, Sullivan wrote, "Joseph Bottoms has gentleness and strength just about in her (Miss Saint's) measure." [22]

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[19] Dan Sullivan, "Miss Saint Stars in 'Winesburg'," Los Angeles Times, Part IV, p.1.

[20] Sullivan, p. 1.

[21] Sullivan, P. 1.

[22] Sullivan, p. 1.

Hayden had remedied several of the weaknesses of the Broadway Winesburg. First, he gave the play a strong leading lady who was able to take the center of the stage and in so doing to make Elizabeth Willard both an attractive and sympathetic character. Secondly, he moved away from Oliver Smith's blood curdling and massively impersonal set to the simple and intimate kind of setting which both Anderson and Sergel had believed would work. He had not improved on Sergel's unsatisfactory ending, but he had achieved much with a play which thirteen years earlier had bombed in New York.

In 1972 Louis Friedman of Hollywood Television Theatre approached Christopher Sergel with the idea of doing a production of Winesburg, Ohio (P) for educational television. Sergel agreed to sell Friedman and Hollywood Television Theatre the television rights to Winesburg, if they would give him the final authority regarding any revisions which might be made in the script. Friedman agreed to Sergel's stipulation and requested that the playwright make a few minor revisions so that Winesburg might be adapted from the stage to television.

Without consulting Friedman, Norman Lloyd, an associate producer for Hollywood Television Theatre, requested Sergel to cut thirty minutes from the play. Sergel was reluctant to do this and referred the matter to Friedman who advised against any such extensive cutting. With Friedman's advice in mind Sergel made minor adjustments in his script and sent it to Hollywood Television Theatre.

After he had submitted his play, Sergel found out that several things had been going on which he was not aware of. First, Friedman had left Hollywood Television Theatre to work for the Columbia Broad-

casting System and had been replaced as producer by Norman Lloyd. Secondly, as producer, Lloyd had taken Winesburg, Ohio and revised it without consulting Sergel. Sergel found Lloyd's revisions of his (Sergel's) play to be unacceptable because they violated the contract with Hollywood Television Theatre, and more importantly because they were contradictory to the spirit of the play. Sergel offered to cut the thirty minutes of his play that Lloyd had originally requested, if Lloyd would honor the contract and use Sergel's revisions rather than his own. Lloyd agreed, and Sergel set to work and in three days completed a shortened version of the play which he sent to Hollywood Television Theatre.

However, instead of using Sergel's revised script, Lloyd filmed the play with his own revision of Winesburg (P). Sergel objected vigorously when he discovered what the producer had done and pointed out that Lloyd had treated him dishonestly, violated his contract, and that Hollywood Television Theatre should consequently give up the television rights to the play. Lloyd said that his company had invested too much money in the play to abandon it and that Sergel would have to take legal action if he wanted to have the play stopped. Sergel contemplated a suit but decided that it would not be worth the expense of a court action.

Hoping to mollify Sergel, Lloyd invited him to Hollywood to view the videotape of Winesburg, Ohio (P) and to point out anything which he might find objectionable in it. Sergel accepted Floyd's invitation and viewed the play which he found to be totally unacceptable. The script he noted was a travesty of his own play, the direction was insipid,

and the acting was second rate. Jean Peters, he posited, was simply inadequate in the role of Elizabeth Willard, and William Windom was the wrong kind of actor for the part of Dr. Reefy. Once again, Sergel pleaded with Friedman not to televise the play, and once more the producer of Hollywood Television Theatre denied this request. Then Sergel suggested a compromise. If Lloyd would agree to televise Winesburg only in the Los Angeles, California, area as a pilot showing for the play, he (Sergel) would make no objections to a later nationwide broadcasting, if its initial showing was a success. Lloyd agreed to Sergel's suggestion and promised to put it into effect.

Lloyd's revisions were not the only part of the Hollywood Television Theatre production which Christopher Sergel objected to. Jean Peter, he felt, was simply incapable of playing the role of Elizabeth Willard. As an actress who had been away from the stage for fifteen years, she was simply not prepared for such a demanding part. In the early stages of the television production Sergel had asked Hollywood Television Theatre if they belived Miss Peters could handle the part, and was told that her acting ability was not as crucial as the publicity that she would bring to the play as the former wife of Howard Hughes. William Windom, Sergel believed, was physically wrong to portray Dr. Reefy. Windom was too smooth and sophisticated to play the rough, awkward man whose arthritic hands Elizabeth compares to gnarled apples, whose sweetness gathers in the gnarls and which only she has fastened on after all the smooth and unblemished fruit has been picked over.

On March 5, 1973, in spite of protests raised by Christopher Sergel and Eleanor Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (P) was aired on television. The

play was not the travesty that Sergel had dubbed it, but it was disappointing. First, it had been grossly miscast. Interestingly enough, of all the actors in the Lloyd production, Jean Peters seemed to come the closest to a successful portrayal of her role. For a woman who had not acted in fifteen years her portrayal of Elizabeth was remarkable. Her interpretation of the sick and frustrated woman who seeks to express herself through her son was both thoughtful and moving.

William Windom had simply been miscast as Dr. Reefy being, as Sergel had feared, too sophisticated to play the clumsy, homespun philosopher. His portrayal as the doctor suggested a kind of self-assurance that Dr. Reefy was incapable of having. Windom's Reefy is far too fastidious to be the man who strews bits of paper about his room for Elizabeth to pick up and whose general appearance is one of nervous dishevelment. Windom's Reefy is instead a quiet, philosophic man who seems to have retired to a small country town to live out his life in relative serenity.

When Windom's Dr. Reefy advises Elizabeth Willard to leave Winesburg with her son and to go out west to recuperate from her illness and to escape the tyranny of her husband, he sounds too certain. Elizabeth, he knows, does not want to be cured and probably could not be cured in any event, as her illness is seemingly terminal. George will not and cannot make anything of himself until his mother dies. Thus, when Reefy speaks to Elizabeth of her leaving Winesburg to recover her health, it is with desperation and not with the self-assurance that Windom seems to have.

Lloyd's production suffers most from a lack of inspired direction.

Winesburg's (P) director seems to have set out to make the intimate seem remote, as he brings a sense of alienation to Winesburg's (P) most intimate scenes. As spectators we seem to be viewing Winesburg. (P) from a distance, and so we miss the full impact of Anderson's book. This quality of alienation is particularly evident in the second act in which three crucial events occur. First, George Willard is fired by his boss, George Henderson, the editor of the Winesburg Eagle. Second, Tom Willard decides that George's termination is providential, as he will now be able to help run the hotel. Third, Elizabeth believes that since there is no longer any reason for her son to stay in Winesburg that he can now go away and make something of himself. Thus, the central conflict of the play is introduced as the parents of the budding artist vie for control of his destiny.

Instead of bringing George Willard, his parents, and the other members of the community close together and in so doing give their conflicting emotions real force, the director is satisfied to view them from a distance. In the crucial scene described above Elizabeth stands alone at the top of the stairs, while George, his father, Will Henderson, Parcival and others are below in the lobby. The camera drifts back and forth from Elizabeth to the group in the lobby viewing each from a distance, and giving up the intimate closeness that we should feel in the scene for a kind of "back seat of the balcony" point of view. Throughout the play the camera continuously shifts from character to character, never really focusing on any particular individual long enough for us to get a close look at him.

Thus, Sergel's latest attempt to dramatize Winesburg, Ohio (P)

has failed for reasons beyond his control. He feels that his latest version of Anderson's book is the best that he can write and that given the proper direction, it can succeed. It appears doubtful now that Sergel's play will ever be seen on television in America, as Hollywood Television Theatre has the sole rights to any Winesburg television plays. So far no one has showed any interest in making a movie of Sergel's play, and a play which fails on Broadway is rarely revived. Sergel has hopes that his play may be shown on British television. as he has an agent who has approached the Masterpiece Theatre series; but so far nothing has come of this. The future of any dramatization of Winesburg or any other of Anderson's books now seems bleak and only a drastic occurrence can change what appears to be the final chapter for Anderson's drama.

Chapter III

The Two Winesburgs: A Study in Contrasting Styles of Playwriting

There is a great contrast between Sherwood Anderson's and Christopher Sergel's adaptations of Winesburg, Ohio. Anderson's play is primarily a character study; in a note to Plays: Winesburg and Others Anderson notes that with its simplicity of setting and its rapid change of scenery Winesburg, Ohio (P) is a play whose emphasis is on its characters. Sherwood Anderson presents us with an array of fascinating characters. His play lacks a strong central theme, and although we are presented with several interesting stories, there is nothing which we could call a plot. As there is no conflict that holds Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (P) together, the play is reduced to a series of interesting but vaguely related sketches.

Christopher Sergel's play, on the other hand, is rigidly structured. Sergel seems to have sacrificed Anderson's rich characterization to achieve structural and thematic unity. Sergel dropped Anderson's several stories to concentrate on the relationship of George Willard with his parents. The theme involves the conflict of Elizabeth and Tom Willard over the future of their son. Tom would have his son stay in Winesburg and make the Willard House succeed, while Elizabeth wishes the boy to go away and make something of himself as a writer.

Sergel's play is as limited in its scope as Anderson's is broad. He has retained a few of Anderson's grotesques, such as Parcival and Dr. Reefy, and even added one of his own, a character called Old Pete,

but these are only casually involved in the central conflict and so they can never really arouse our interest.

Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio (P) seems to take in all of Winesburg. Its opening scene is the funeral of one of Winesburg's most notorious citizens, Windpeter Winters. Windpeter, whose only distinction, besides being the town drunk seems to have been his war service, nevertheless has all of Winesburg's citizens turn out for his funeral. The funeral is a macabre scene in which the town's leading citizens are involved in various inappropriate activities as the funeral goes on.

Dr. Parcival, who seems to have been competing with Windpeter for the position of town drunk, offers drinks to Doctor Reefy, a semi-retired doctor and long-time lover of Elizabeth Willard, and to Tom Willard:

> Parcival - I brought you here, Doctor Reefy, hoping you would take a little nip with me.
>
> A funeral is a dry business. Think of it, that preacher at the church trying to talk old Windpeter Winters into heaven. It is going to be hot where he will go and where I'll go, too. It makes me want to refresh myself just thinking about it.[1]

Dr. Reefy, who we see is a refined, quiet man, politely declines his friend's offer, while the more ostentatious Tom Willard makes a great show of refusing a drink. Tom Willard, he says, is a man who can take it or leave it; actually Tom is desperate to have a drink, but he knows that his son will disapprove of this kind of behavior at a funeral.

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[1] Sherwood Anderson, Plays: Winesburg and Others (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), p. 7.

Windpeter's death, we find, was a gruesome form of suicide. When asked if his friend's death was an accident, Parcival is vehement in his denial:

> Parcival - Accident? No. He stands in the middle of the railroad track shaking his fist. "Get out of my way," he cried. The train whistles. It screeches. The people shout. "Go to hell! I'm Windpeter Winters, God Damn you." Thump. Sausage meat, gentlemen.[2]

In this first scene we meet all of Sherwood Anderson's characters, with the exception of Elizabeth Willard. There is the drunk, Dr. Parcival, who is also, we will find, a kind of philosopher. Doctor Reefy, the closest thing that Winesburg has to a physician, is an affable old man who can voice only weak objections to Parcival's public drunkenness. Then there is Tom Willard, the proprietor of the Willard House. Tom, we see, is a chronic failure who would have people believe that he is a man with a future but who is in reality an ineffective old fool.

George Willard is a more substantial character than his father. He has come to the funeral to gather information for the Winesburg Eagle, and we note immediately that he is a keenly observant young man; nothing seems to escape his detection. Like Sherwood Anderson, he seems to have a great fascination for the people around him.

There is Joe Welling, a nervous little man, who launches into a long dialogue on the advantages of cremation over interment, and Ed Hanby, a big man with a black moustache whom Anderson describes as the prize fighter type, who tends a local bar. Ed Hanby arrives in the

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[2] Anderson, p. 20.

middle of the funeral with a huge memorial wreath made of artificial flowers. With Ed is his girlfriend, Louise Trunion, a rather outspoken young girl who has the reputation of being something of a tart. She is a constant annoyance to Ed, who would have her reserve her affections for him alone. With Louise and Ed is Belle Trunion, a woman of about thirty years old whose sexual affairs have not escaped the eyes of Winesburg's gossips.

There are Banker White and his daughter, Helen, who arrive as the funeral service is ending. White is a rather pompous individual who disapproves of the majority of Winesburg's citizens, and who would prefer his daughter not to associate with them. The banker, we find has merely been walking with his daughter in the neighborhood of the cemetery and had not intended to attend Windpeter's funeral. He seems to have been persuaded by his daughter to inquire into the circumstances of Windpeter's death. He is treated to Parcival's graphic description of the suicide. Parcival notes cryptically: "Dignity of Death, eh gentlemen? Well, it's not as dignified when you are hit by a railroad engine. I don't believe they ever got more than two thirds of him.[3]" White is scandalized by Parcival's frankness and sends his daughter home admonishing her that this is no place for her.

Very little of any importance takes place in the first scene, as Anderson's characters appear briefly and reveal only a little of themselves by their reactions to a fellow citizen's death. Belle Carpenter tells Dr. Reefy that she is pregnant and that one of the boys in Winesburg is responsible. She points to George and his friends, Seth

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[3] Anderson, p. 20.

Richmond and Fred, as if to say the culprit is one of them, but is interrupted before she can say which. George fears he is guilty. He asks Seth for advice as a friend who knows someone who is in trouble, and Seth increases his (George's) fears.

George - Say, Seth, look here....There's a friend of mine - not me - someone else - I can't tell you who - he's got a woman in a fix maybe. What can he do? Do you know? Can you tell me, Seth?

Seth - Oh, I see. So, George....so, a friend of yours has got a woman into rouble, eh? Of course, it's not you. Maybe it's James Gordon Bennet*

Say, look here, George, suppose I told you I know who your friend is and who the lady is, too?

George - What do you mean, Seth?

Seth - Say, George, don't think I'm so green. What about Belle Carpenter? What about you and her, eh?

George (angrily) - What do you mean, Seth? Say, are you a friend of mine, or aren't you?

Seth - Friend? Sure, only, say, George, don't think you can put anything over on me. You thought I didn't know, eh? Well, the whole town'll know pretty soon.[4]

George is now more worried than ever, but we are not so certain because we have seen something that he has not. As Belle Carpenter is about to point out the father of her child to Dr. Reefy, Banker White enters. Belle is so disturbed by White's arrival that it is all Reefy can do to keep her from leaving the cemetery, and we are left to wonder if White might not be the father rather than George.

In the second scene we find Belle Carpenter in Doctor Reefy's

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* This is a name that Seth often calls George by, as George is the aspiring young writer.

[4] Anderson, pp. 26-27.

office. She has thought of telling George that he is responsible for her pregnancy, she tells the doctor, and that he must marry her. George, however, is not responsible, she admits, and she could never take advantage of him in such a cruel way. (George, we find, has had a brief affair with Belle, but it has only been a youthful fling.) Banker White, she admits, is the father of the child.

Belle is determined that she will not have her baby. If her pregnancy can not be aborted, she warns Reefy, she will commit suicide taking her life and the child's. ".....Nobody wants me," she says. I'm going to have a child nobody will want.....I can kill myself and the child at the same time....It's very simple."[5] Dr. Reefy seeks to convince Belle that she is the only one who must want the child. There is a new life growing inside of her, and it is her duty to see to it this life is brought into the world. She can no more destroy this new life that is in her than make George its father.

At this point we are aware of the fact that Elizabeth Willard has entered Dr. Reefy's office and is listening to his conversation with Belle. Struck by the absurdness of her idea of naming George as the father of her unborn child, Belle speaks bitterly, "George Willard..... he is the father of my child, my husband."[6] Hearing this but having missed the earlier part of Belle's conversation with Dr. Reefy, Elizabeth becomes hysterical and makes her presence known. "What's

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[5] Anderson, p. 29.

[6] Anderson, p. 34.

that.....what are you saying?" she demands, "George Willard, the father of your child.....your husband?"[7] Belle, who is totally unprepared for Elizabeth's barrage leaves protesting vehemently. As Belle leaves, Reefy tries to restore order by assuring Elizabeth that Belle has no intention of doing any injury to George.

Elizabeth Willard suffers from a serious heart condition which is aggravated by outbursts of emotion. Dr. Reefy warns her after her confrontation with Belle: "Elizabeth! Now, don't get excited. It was nothing - nothing I tell you. Now, be quiet. You know I've told you a dozen times - shocks your heart - I won't have it."[8] He explains to her that, although George has had a brief sexual encounter with Belle Carpenter, that he is not responsible for her pregnancy. Elizabeth is comforted by her friend's assurances, but she has grave doubts concerning her son's future.

Elizabeth has a dream that her son will make something of himself, but she fears that Winesburg and Tom will prevent him from realizing his potential. If George is to become the writer that Elizabeth believes he must, he will have to go against the wishes of his father; Tom would have his son stay in Winesburg and devote his life to the managing of the Willard House. In Winesburg George will never be able to be the artist that he can be, because Winesburg with its petty acquisitiveness has stifled the creative energy of its inhabitants.

Elizabeth tells Reefy that she has saved $800 (which her father had given her) and that she intends that this money be given to George.

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[7] Anderson, p. 35.

[8] Anderson, p. 37.

She has kept the money hidden since her father's death, fearing that her husband will find it and spend it frivolously. Now that she knows she is dying she wants to be certain that her son will receive the money even if she is not able to give it to him herself. Elizabeth tells Dr. Reefy that she has hidden the money in a hole in one of the walls of her bedroom, and she asks him to make sure that it is given to George.

Scene Three reveals yet another facet of Anderson's play. George Willard has been seeing a lot of Helen White, the banker's daughter. A kind of bond has developed between George and Helen who have been friends since they were very young. George feels that Helen is different from other girls that he has known; she is a refined and delicate girl who is removed from Winesburg's other inhabitants. It becomes evident, however, that the friendship of George and Helen can never evolve into love. Helen is a pragmatist who would like George to take a steady job, marry her, and settle down in Winesburg. George, who has no such definite plans for his life, is not intent on marriage, although he has considered becoming a writer. Helen disapproves of the people that George associates with, such as Dr. Parcival and Belle Carpenter. Speaking to George of Belle, Helen say accusingly, "She's going to have a child - that's what about her. And I know who the father is."[9]

In Scene Four Anderson moves to George's relationship with Louise Trunion, which is purely a matter of sex. Louise gave George a note during Windpeter's funeral which he has come to answer. It has been several weeks since the funeral and Louise is reluctant to give in to

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[9] Anderson, p. 56.

George who she feels will treat her as a passing whim. She demands that he treat her as he would any respectable girl. He should not be ashamed to be seen with her in public and to admit that she is his girl. George makes no promises but easily seduces Louise.

In the fifth scene we find George, the writer, composing a poem to his love. He admits to his friend Seth that the poem is to Helen White, who has refused to return his love. George and his friend are interrupted by Tom Willard who has come to lecture his son on responsibility. George must work with his father to make the Willard House a success. George should emulate his friend Seth, Tom suggests.

> Tom - Well, all right....I'll tell you George - there's a boy I see you with sometimes - young Seth Richmond. I want you and him to be friends.
>
> George - We are, I guess, father.
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> Tom - That's fine, George. Seth's a boy that's got his eye out for the main chance. You don't see him hanging around the streets with a lot of no-accounts, Dr. Parcival, Joe Welling, Windpeter Winters, Doctor Reefy - not Seth! Say - they all brag on him. And he saves his money, too. [10]

As the scene ends George tells his mother he would like to get away, look at people and think.

In Scene Six we find that Seth is also interested in Helen, but that she will have nothing to do with him. Belle Carpenter comes to speak to Helen's father and, seeing that he is not there, starts to leave. Helen asks Belle to come in and stay with her a while, but Belle refuses. She explains to Helen that the people of Winesburg have been saying things about her which are not true. Because of her

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[10] Anderson, p. 58.

reputation she can not come into Helen's house or be seen with her. Helen is very upset by Belle's situation. Banker White arrives and, finding that Belle has seen his daughter, fears that Helen has found out about his affair with Belle and that this has upset her (Helen). He is relieved when he finds out what Helen is really concerned about, namely Belle's reputation, and he assures her that George is not responsible for Belle's pregnancy.

In Scene Seven we find that Ed Hanby (the bartender of a Winesburg saloon) is determined that Louise Trunion be faithful to him. Louise laughs at her lover saying that she will do as she pleases. Ed storms out saying that he has business to attend to. George arrives as Ed is leaving, saying that he has come because Louise had asked to see him several days earlier. She reminds him that he has agreed to take her out with him in public. George says he will, but that he has to work tonight. Louise, who is not to be put off, says that she will walk with him to work. Ed Hanby returns, but only Louise is aware of his presence. Seeing Ed, Louise embraces George, who is unable to get away. Hanby, who is infuriated, clobbers George repeatedly, and then leaves with Louise who promises to behave. He is going to marry Louise and make a good woman out of her, he declares.

The eighth scene is the end of George's involvement in the play and in the life of Winesburg. Elizabeth tells Reefy where her father's money is hidden and demands that he give it to George in the event of her death. George enters bruised from his encounter with Ed Hanby but only stays briefly. Tom arrives furious about his son's lack of responsibility. Tom feels that he has been held back by his family long

of a strong central figure. Anderson presents us with several fascinating characters but none of these ever dominates the play. George Willard appears in every scene, but he rarely seems to make things happen. He is more of a commentator than anything else. Sergel's play, on the other hand, is dominated by three individuals, namely George and his parents. While Anderson's play lacks structural and thematic unity, Sergel's is rigidly structured. Sergel's Winesburg is wholly contained in the struggle between Tom and Elizabeth over the destiny of their son. Tom wants George to be a successful hotel manager and entrepreneur, while Elizabeth would have him get away from Winesburg to become a writer. The other issues of Winesburg life are subordinated. Thus, George's affair with Helen, Elizabeth's love for Dr. Reefy, and Parcival's drunken philososphizing are subordinated.

Sergel's play is simply plotted when compared to Anderson's multi-storied affair. George, we find, has been neglecting his job as a reporter for the Winesburg Eagle. Will Henderson, the editor, who has warned George on several occasions that he may have to relieve him of his job, finally fires the boy in a scene that takes place in the lobby of the Willard House. Here, early in the first act, the conflict of the play comes to the surface. Tom Willard is determined that since his son is no longer tied to his job for the newspaper that he will help his father to run the hotel. Elizabeth suggests that George can not get away from Winesburg to fulfill his real destiny as a writer. As the first act ends George is still vacillating about his future.

As the play progresses the Willards vie for the loyalty of their son. Tom continually stresses the point that it is George's responsibility to stay in Winesburg and help his father to make something of

the hotel. Elizabeth believes that George would leave Winesburg if he did not have her to worry about; as in Anderson's play, Elizabeth is saddled with a serious heart condition for which she is being treated by Doctor Reefy. Again, as in the Anderson play, Elizabeth has saved the $800 which her father had given her for her son. She reveals to Dr. Reefy the place that she has hidden her inheritance and demands that he give this money to George, who she feels may need it to live on when he moves away from Winesburg and does not yet have a new occupation.

As the second act ends Elizabeth suffers an attack similar to the fatal seizure in the Anderson play. This does not kill her, but leaves her more vulnerable than ever to any physical or emotional stresses. Dr. Reefy orders complete bed rest for his patient and warns her that the slightest exertion may kill her. Elizabeth decides at this time that she will sacrifice her own life for her son. She leaves her room and walks down to the lobby where George and Tom are discussing repairs which will have to be made on the hotel. Dr. Reefy has arrived at a new diagnosis concerning her illness, she tells them:

George (dumbfounded) - What are you doing on the stairs?

Tom - You have to stay in bed....

Elizabeth (drawing herself together) - It's what I have to tell you.

Elizabeth (smiling insistance) - If you'll just let me tell you - Dr. Reefy was to see me.

Tom (with a faint edge) - Yes?

Elizabeth (making a small shift to support herself a little better) - He was so surprised - he couldn't believe it! I don't have to stay in bed any more.

George - He said that?

Elizabeth (fumbling with the explanation) - Yes. Because of of the new examination. The reason I'm so happy - I wasn't really ill. Not the way we thought. It was tiredness - that's all.[11]

Now that she is well, Elizabeth reasons, George need no longer stay in Winesburg. Tom argues again that his son should stay at home and devote his full time to the hotel, but George determines to follow his mother's advice. "I'm going to do something about what we were saying," he tells her. "There's something to be understood - something about the need to be connected."[12] Sensing that she has fulfilled her obligation to her son, Elizabeth rushes from the hotel into a raging thunderstorm. She reaches the woods where she collapses and dies. As the play ends, Tom is left alone to run the Willard House.

There is little difference in the Winesburg, Ohio (P) that Christopher Sergel wrote for the theatre between 1953 and 1958 and the version that he wrote for television this year. Sergel cut four minor characters from the Broadway play, including Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, two residents of the hotel, Mary, the hotel cook, and Hop Higgins, a hired man. He also excised some of the less essential dialogue from his play so that it might be given in the ninety minutes allotted by his producer. His one major revision involved the conclusion of his play. In the 1973 version he sought to make it clear to the audience that George was indeed aware of his mother's death and of her reason for it.

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[11] Christopher Sergel, Winesburg, Ohio, (New York: unpublished, 1973), Act III, p. 21.

[12] Sergel, Act III, p. 27.

As I have noted earlier, Sergel felt that in his first version of Winesburg, Ohio (P) George Willard left Winesburg completely unaware of his mother's death.

enough and that he must now assert himself. Elizabeth can only laugh at her husband's assertion of his authority. He has made claims in the past, but he has never succeeded because he is a failure. She tells him that her father has left her money, but that she is giving this to her son rather than to him. At this point she takes a pair of scissors and moves toward Tom intent upon stabbing him. She is, however, halted by a seizure, evidently a heart attack, which instantly kills her.

The ninth and final scene is anti-climactic and only seems to exist because Anderson has not tied together all the loose ends of his plot. A year has passed since Elizabeth's death. George, we are told, has gone to Cleveland where he is now a successful newspaper reporter. Tom has hired a consultant to make suggestions for the revamping of the Willard House. He will "put Winesburg on the map." Tom and several of Winesburg's citizens are gathered in Ed Hanby's saloon, when word comes that the Willard House and the stables are on fire and that the hotel's guests are trapped. Ed Hanby runs out with a group of people to save the horses, but no mention is made of the guests in the Willard House. Dr. Parcival is left on stage alone where he notes that every man is Christ and that he will be crucified.

Christopher Sergel's Winesburg, Ohio (both in its Broadway version and in the 1973 television play) is a theme rather than a character play. Sergel's main concern is the relationship between George and his parents. Thus, Anderson's other characters have only a minor part in Sergel's play. Windpeter Winter's and Belle Carpenter's parts have been cut, and Louise Trunion is only mentioned by name.

One of the most glaring weaknesses of Anderson's play is its lack

Conclusion

It seems apparent by now that neither Anderson nor Sergel was successful in adapting Winesburg, Ohio from its book form to drama. Simply stated, Anderson's failure stemmed from excessive ambition; he attempted to put too much of his book on the stage. Consequently, his version amounted to a poorly plotted, disunified treatment of Winesburg, Ohio. The strength of Anderson's play lies in his characterization. The play is replete with fascinating and unusual people, like Windpeter Winters, Dr. Parcival, Joe Welling, Louise Trunion, and Ed Hanby. Indeed, Anderson's grotesques become the focal point of his play. Yet no one of these characters ever comes to the forefront. No single individual is ever allowed to dominate the action or to act as a focal point for the other characters.

Sergel's failure, in both his Broadway and television plays, is one of oversimplification. In choosing a rigidly structured and unified composition, he has sacrificed the very multiplicity of characterization that made Winesburg, Ohio a success. The conflict of Tom and Elizabeth Willard over the future of their son is simply not interesting enough to be the crux of the play. The story of Winesburg, Ohio is more than a study of the Willard family. Perhaps a successful play could be made with only the Willards, but it would not be Winesburg, Ohio.

It seems doubtful that an effective play will ever come out of Winesburg, Ohio. The very form that Sherwood Anderson chose for his book does not lend itself to a dramatic presentation. Winesburg is a diffuse work which is too structurally involved and thematically complex for a single dramatic work.

It is noteworthy that the critics have not been able to agree as to the structure of Winesburg, Ohio. Indeed for every reputable critic who posits that Anderson's book is a collection of short stories there is one who views it as a novel. Whether we view Winesburg as a loosely constructed novel or as a collection of short stories, it is apparent that it is structurally unsuited for a dramatic production. It is more than anything else a collection of fascinating but only vaguely related character studies. There are no predominant characters, no main plot or story line, and no central theme or thesis to give it unity.

Secondly, Winesburg is too thematically complex for a single play. Anderson's book takes in not merely George Willard and his family but all of Winesburg. In Winesburg, Ohio Sherwood Anderson has presented us with a microcosm of his life, of his boyhood, his family, and the various people that made his life (and his book) such an engaging study. On a larger scale, Winesburg is a portrait of life with all of its frustrations and elations. Life has its young men who like George Willard are seeking a direction for their lives and its chronic failures (as Tom Willard), but it also has its grotesques, as the alcoholic philosopher, Dr. Parcival, and the town drunk, Windpeter Winters, who in their limited roles express basic and crucial truths.

This is not to say that there is no stage worthy material in Winesburg, Ohio. Indeed, with its many stories and characters it is ideally suited for a serial presentation. When I last spoke with Christopher Sergel, he said that the Masterpiece Television Series was considering his play for a production similar to those that it has done for the British Broadcasting Corporation. Perhaps there is still a chance that Anderson's book may succeed as drama.

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Vita

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