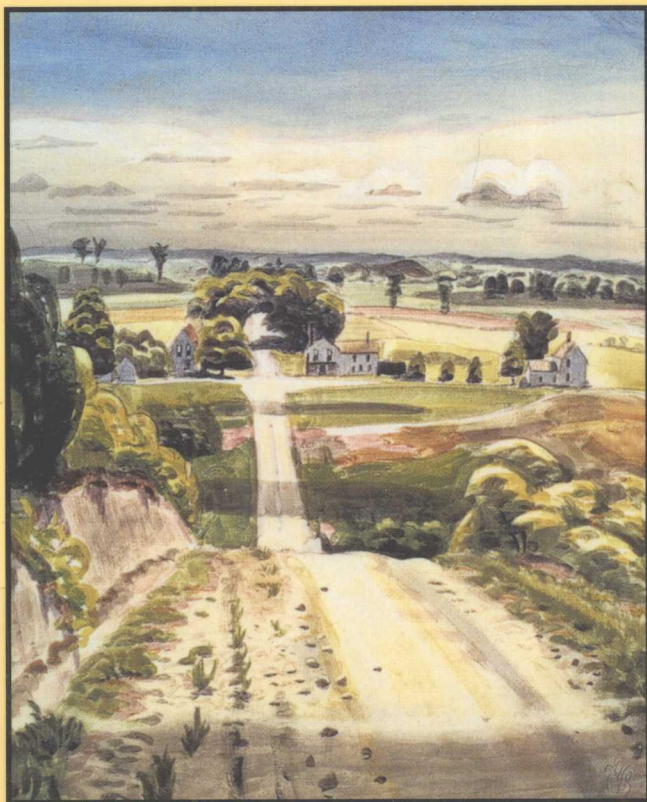


# WINESBURG, OHIO

SHERWOOD ANDERSON



EDITED BY  
CHARLES E. MODLIN AND RAY LEWIS WHITE

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Sherwood Anderson  
WINESBURG, OHIO



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AUTHORITATIVE TEXT  
BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS  
CRITICISM

*Edited by*

CHARLES E. MODLIN  
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE  
AND STATE UNIVERSITY

and

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## Preface

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Our intent in this Norton Critical Edition is to provide the reader with an accurate text of *Winesburg, Ohio* along with some of the best materials for understanding its origins, artistry, and place in American literary history. The map of Winesburg on p. 2 was drawn by Harald Toksvig for the first edition in 1919. The text is edited and annotated by Ray Lewis White from that edition. In "Backgrounds and Contexts" we have included selections from Anderson's letters and memoirs, which provide revealing glimpses into his writing of the stories and his own ideas about them, and a sampling of reviews (including a previously undiscovered one in the *New York Evening Post*) representing the mixed reactions to the book. In "Criticism" we have collected some of the most illuminating studies of *Winesburg* published in the last three decades. We have also included a chronology of Anderson's life, which lists his major publications, and a selected bibliography as a guide to further studies.

We are indebted to a host of Anderson scholars, especially David Anderson, Hilbert H. Campbell, Walter B. Rideout, Judy Jo Small, Welford D. Taylor, Kim Townsend, and Kenny J. Williams; also to Diana Haskell, Margaret Kulis and their staff at the Newberry Library, Jenny Bay, Patricia Powell, Marjorie Modlin, and our editor, Carol Bemis of W. W. Norton & Company.

## Note on the Text

This Norton Critical Edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* is the first fully collated text of Sherwood Anderson's masterpiece to be published since the story cycle first appeared in print, on May 8, 1919. Having since 1915 written and (contrary to received opinion) *rewritten* his stories about Ohio village life in the 1890s, Anderson in 1918 submitted the probably untitled collection to B. W. Huebsch, a small-scale New York City publisher willing to encourage and accept unconventional and innovative fiction. Huebsch liked the author and the stories and, he claimed, himself entitled the work *Winesburg, Ohio*, with the subtitle (his or Anderson's) becoming *A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life*.

Because no production materials such as the publisher's typescript or galley or page proofs have survived the editing and publishing process that Anderson's tales underwent in the Huebsch offices, the 1919 first edition of *Winesburg, Ohio* must serve as the basis for this bibliographically sound text. From this 1919 text the editor must determine the author's intentions for his words, a determination based on collation of the (rarely found) first printing (that of May 8, 1919) with the six (even more rarely found) reprintings of this text from the same plates through 1931 published by Huebsch and by his successor in 1925, the Viking Press. Collation reveals only a very few emendations made to the printing plates as the years passed, changes including removal of an obtrusive preposition and correction of some verb-agreement errors. In sum, no actual rewriting by Anderson took place after his book first appeared. Thus the present text of *Winesburg, Ohio* is the seventh (1931) reprinting of the 1919 first edition, a text supplemented by occasional editorial corrections of grammar, punctuation, and contradictory spelling.

Minimal annotation is needed, for Anderson's story cycle is practically hermetic, a world almost separate from the political, economic, military, industrial, and even literary contexts of its setting in the Ohio of the 1890s or the environment of its creator in the Chicago of the 1910s. Thus basic notes are required to identify such persons as William McKinley, Mark Hanna, Charles Lamb, and Benvenuto Cellini; such an entity as the Epworth League; and (rarely) such customs and artifacts as may be unfamiliar to the present-day reader.

RAY LEWIS WHITE

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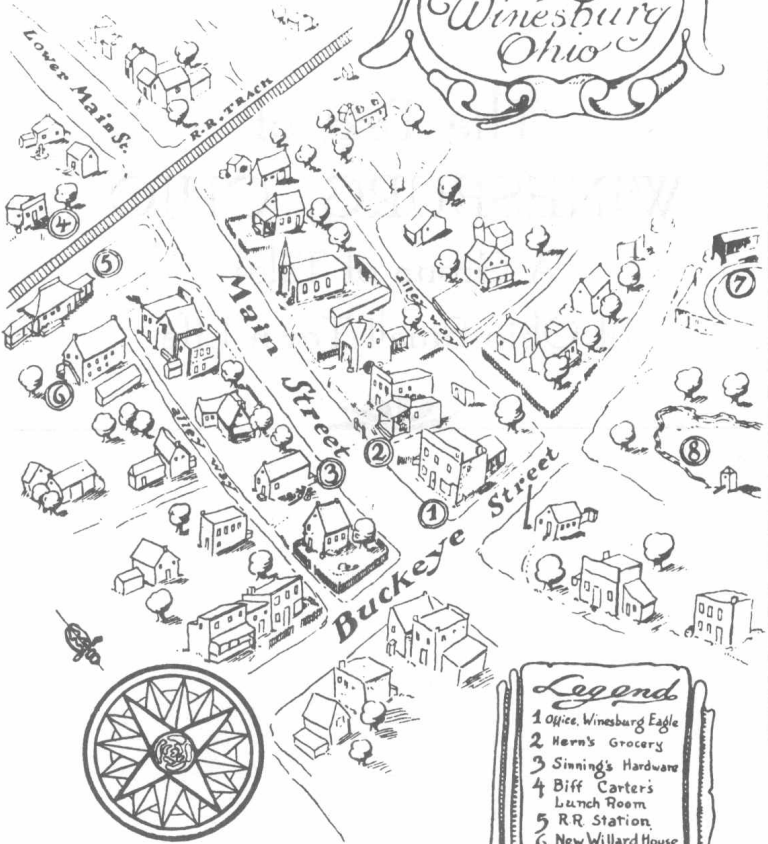
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The Text of  
WINESBURG, OHIO  
A Group of Tales  
of Ohio Small Town Life





# Map of Winesburg Ohio



## Legend

- 1 Office, Winesburg Eagle
- 2 Kern's Grocery
- 3 Sinning's Hardware
- 4 Biff Carter's Lunch Room
- 5 R.R. Station
- 6 New Willard House
- 7 Fair Grounds
- 8 Water Works Pond

Harold F. Lewis

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## The Book of the Grotesque

The writer, an old man with a white mustache, had some difficulty in getting into bed. The windows of the house in which he lived were high and he wanted to look at the trees when he awoke in the morning. A carpenter came to fix the bed so that it would be on a level with the window.

Quite a fuss was made about the matter. The carpenter, who had been a soldier in the Civil War, came into the writer's room and sat down to talk of building a platform for the purpose of raising the bed. The writer had cigars lying about and the carpenter smoked.

For a time the two men talked of the raising of the bed and then they talked of other things. The soldier got on the subject of the war. The writer, in fact, led him to that subject. The carpenter had once been a prisoner in Andersonville prison and had lost a brother.<sup>1</sup> The brother had died of starvation, and whenever the carpenter got upon that subject he cried. He, like the old writer, had a white mustache, and when he cried he puckered up his lips and the mustache bobbed up and down. The weeping old man with the cigar in his mouth was ludicrous. The plan the writer had for the raising of his bed was forgotten and later the carpenter did it in his own way and the writer, who was past sixty, had to help himself with a chair when he went to bed at night.

In his bed the writer rolled over on his side and lay quite still. For years he had been beset with notions concerning his heart. He was a hard smoker and his heart fluttered. The idea had got into his mind that he would some time die unexpectedly and always when he got into bed he thought of that. It did not alarm him. The effect in fact was quite a special thing and not easily explained. It made him more alive, there in bed, than at any other time. Perfectly still he lay and his body was old and not of much use any more, but something inside him was altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight. It is absurd, you see, to try to tell what was inside the old writer as he lay on his high bed and listened to the fluttering of his heart. The thing to get at is what the writer, or the young thing within the writer, was thinking about.

The old writer, like all of the people in the world, had got, during his long life, a great many notions in his head. He had once been quite handsome and a number of women had been in love with him. And then, of course, he had known people, many people, known them in a

1. During the American Civil War (1861-65), Confederate military forces imprisoned thousands of Union soldiers near Andersonville, Georgia. In 1864-65, over 13,000 of these prisoners died from starvation and brutality; upon the war's end, the camp commander was hanged by the Union powers.

peculiarly intimate way that was different from the way in which you and I know people. At least that is what the writer thought and the thought pleased him. Why quarrel with an old man concerning his thoughts?

In the bed the writer had a dream that was not a dream. As he grew somewhat sleepy but was still conscious, figures began to appear before his eyes. He imagined the young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes.

You see the interest in all this lies in the figures that went before the eyes of the writer. They were all grotesques. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques.<sup>2</sup>

The grotesques were not all horrible. Some were amusing, some almost beautiful, and one, a woman all drawn out of shape, hurt the old man by her grotesqueness. When she passed he made a noise like a small dog whimpering. Had you come into the room you might have supposed the old man had unpleasant dreams or perhaps indigestion.

For an hour the procession of grotesques passed before the eyes of the old man, and then, although it was a painful thing to do, he crept out of bed and began to write. Some one of the grotesques had made a deep impression on his mind and he wanted to describe it.

At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called "The Book of the Grotesque."<sup>3</sup> It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. The book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. By remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:

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

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

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

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had

2. *Grotesque* derives from *grotto*, because on the walls of grottos (or caves) ancient artists sometimes drew human figures that were distorted, exaggerated, or ugly, at least by later standards of beauty.
3. No such writer or book ever existed to impress Anderson, who invents them here to serve as the implied inspiration for his theory of human character and imaginative writing.

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.

You can see for yourself how the old man, who had spent all of his life writing and was filled with words, would write hundreds of pages concerning this matter. The subject would become so big in his mind that he himself would be in danger of becoming a grotesque. He didn't, I suppose, for the same reason that he never published the book. It was the young thing inside him that saved the old man.

Concerning the old carpenter who fixed the bed for the writer, I only mentioned him because he, like many of what are called very common people, became the nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of all the grotesques in the writer's book.

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# Winesburg, Ohio

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## Hands

Upon the half decayed veranda of a small frame house that stood near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg, Ohio, a fat little old man walked nervously up and down. Across a long field that had been seeded for clover but that had produced only a dense crop of yellow mustard weeds, he could see the public highway along which went a wagon filled with berry pickers returning from the fields. The berry pickers, youths and maidens, laughed and shouted boisterously. A boy clad in a blue shirt leaped from the wagon and attempted to drag after him one of the maidens who screamed and protested shrilly. The feet of the boy in the road kicked up a cloud of dust that floated across the face of the departing sun. Over the long field came a thin girlish voice. "Oh, you Wing Biddlebaum, comb your hair, it's falling into your eyes," commanded the voice to the man, who was bald and whose nervous little hands fiddled about the bare white forehead as though arranging a mass of tangled locks.

Wing Biddlebaum, forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years. Among all the people of Winesburg but one had come close to him. With George Willard, son of Tom Willard, the proprietor of the New Willard House, he had formed something like a friendship. George Willard was the reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle* and sometimes in the evenings he walked out along the highway to Wing Biddlebaum's house. Now as the old man walked up and down on the veranda, his hands moving nervously about, he was hoping that George Willard would come and spend the evening with him. After the wagon containing the berry pickers had passed, he went across the field through the tall mustard weeds and climbing a rail fence peered anxiously along the road to the town. For a moment he stood thus, rubbing his hands together and looking up and down the road, and then, fear overcoming him, ran back to walk again upon the porch on his own house.

In the presence of George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum, who for twenty years had been the town mystery, lost something of his timidity,



and his shadowy personality, submerged in a sea of doubts, came forth to look at the world. With the young reporter at his side, he ventured in the light of day into Main Street or strode up and down on the rickety front porch of his own house, talking excitedly. The voice that had been low and trembling became shrill and loud. The bent figure straightened. With a kind of wriggle, like a fish returned to the brook by the fisherman, Biddlebaum the silent began to talk, striving to put into words the ideas that had been accumulated by his mind during long years of silence.

Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active, forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name. Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it. The hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, or passed, driving sleepy teams on country roads.

When he talked to George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum closed his fists and beat with them upon a table or on the walls of his house. The action made him more comfortable. If the desire to talk came to him when the two were walking in the fields, he sought out a stump or the top board of a fence and with his hands pounding busily talked with renewed ease.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum's hands is worth a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men. It is a job for a poet. In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day. They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality. Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland.

As for George Willard, he had many times wanted to ask about the hands. At times an almost overwhelming curiosity had taken hold of him. He felt that there must be a reason for their strange activity and their inclination to keep hidden away and only a growing respect for Wing Biddlebaum kept him from blurting out the questions that were often in his mind.

Once he had been on the point of asking. The two were walking in the fields on a summer afternoon and had stopped to sit upon a grassy bank. All afternoon Wing Biddlebaum had talked as one inspired. By a