Winesburg, Ohio Essay, Research Paper

In the Novel Winesburg, Ohio the issue of how Sherwood Anderson presents the female characters is often raised. Of all the grotesques, the female characters seem even more grotesque. Care Coloquitt states, “Anderson never allows a women a means of escape” “For all the sensitive attention Anderson can pay to his female characters, he does not, create a female character who wants, and able to form her own life. (94) Louise Bentley, Elizabeth Willard, and Alice Hindman are female characters that have brief instances, if any at all, of happiness. But more so a life with the urge to find happiness in any way. Elizabeth her desire for change, definite movement to her life and a time for a released and happy. (46) Alice Hindman whispering words over, “why doesn’t something happen? She no longer depended on Ned Currie return; she wanted to be loved, to have something answer the call that was growing louder within her. (119) Lousie Bentley born of a delicate and overworked mother, an impulsive, hard imaginative father, who was not enthusiastic with her coming into the world. (87) A silent, moody child, wanting love more than anything in the world and not getting it. (87) All these female characters ask not much but they will continue to live in Winesburg in a lonely, unfulfilled existence with no hope for escape except death.

Elizabeth Willard death becomes her means of escape. Unable to “get something of her passion expressed,” Elizabeth transfers her new ghostly dreams to her son. Despite her strength and desire reaches it’s climax when she imagines herself stalking her husband like “a tigress,” “I will act ” There is something threatening my boy and I will ward it off.” (45) Elizabeth for years hated her husband; her hatred had been a quite impersonal thing. “I will stab him,” he has chosen to be the voice of evil and I will kill him. When I have killed him something will snap within him and I will die also. It will be a release for us.”(45) The most poignant of the mother and son encounters is when George tells his mother that he will soon “get out”(90) Elizabeth “waits and trembles as she challenges George to wake up “I suppose you had better wake up You will go to the city and make money, It will be better for you, you think, to be a businessman, to brisk and smart and alive. (47-48) Death of Elizabeth is the turning point in George’s life. George’s experience of her death bears little resemblance to the emotions Elizabeth herself experiences in the period before she dies. “Death” reveals is the distance between Elizabeth and her son. In her last year of her life Elizabeth came close to achieving the passionate release she longed in her relationship with Doctor Reefy. Even before the doctor becomes the object of her “love” she visit’s him for the chance to voice her thoughts about herself, her marriage, and her “passionate longing for adventure”(222)

Elizabeth dies on a Friday afternoon at three o’clock. It had been cold and rainy in the morning. Most of the tales end with the characters going off into total darkness. (43) The release that after all came to her but twice in her life, in the moments when her lovers Death and Doctor Reefy held her in their arms.

Louise Bentley early years was on Bentley farm at 15 Louise went to live in Winesburg with the family of Albert Hardy. In Winesburg as on the farm Lousie was not happy. Years she dreamed of the time when she could go forth into the world, and she looked upon the move into the Hardy household as a great step in the direction of freedom (88) In the Hardy household Lousie might have got something of the thing for which she so hungered but for a mistake she made when she had just come to town.

Lousie’s mind became filled with the idea of drawing close to John Hardy. She thought that in him might be found the quality she had all her life been seeking in people. To her she felt a wall had been built up and that she was living just on the edge of some warm inner circle of life that must be quite open and understandable to others. She became obsessed with the thought that it wanted but a courageous act, to pass into an a new life as one opens a door and goes in. She wanted so earnestly to be very warm and close. (91) Her mind had only alighted upon the person of John Hardy because he was at hand and unlike his sisters had not been unfriendly to her. Lousie wrote a note to John Hardy “I want someone to love me and I want to love someone so if you are the one meet me at the Orchard.”(94) For some time Lousie didn’t know what would be the outcome. She didn’t know whether or not she wanted him to come. Sometimes it seemed to her that to be secret of life. (94) After 3 weeks of writing the note Lousie gave up the thought of John Hardy coming. On Fridays Lousie would go home for the weekend. On her way back to the farm her mind filled with thoughts of John Hardy. She began to review her loneliness of her childhood and the new loneliness that had just come to her. In a violent motion another form of a expressionist scream (45) “I hate everyone.” I hate father and old man Hardy” and “I hate taken lessons in school.” (95) Lousie speeds the streets driven her horse and carriage breakneck speed after throwing the boy from the buggy.

Lousie took John Hardy to be her lover. It was not what she wanted but it was so the anxious so she could achieve something else that she made no resistance. Later when her son David was born she could not nurse him and did not know whether she wanted him. John Hardy reproached her of her cruelty, and she laughed “it is a man child and will get what it wants anyway,” “Had it been a women child there is nothing in the world I would not have done for it.”(95) Lousie will continue to live in Winesburg in a lonely, unfulfilled existence within no hope for escape, except death.

Alice Hindman at 16 had a relationship with a young man, named Ned Currie. Together the two walked under the trees through the streets of the town and talked of what they would do with their lives. Alice, betrayed by her desire to have something beautiful come into her rather narrow life, also grew excited. (112) She gave herself over to the emotions of love.

Ned Currie went away to Cleveland. Alice told him she would wait for him until he returns to get her. “I am his wife and shall remain his wife whether he comes back or not”(115) She would always whisper to herself when other young men tired to attract her attention. Alice worked many hours in the dry goods store. As time passed and she became more and more lonely. At times when her employer had gone out and she was alone in the store she put her head on the counter and wept “Oh, Ned, I am waiting,” she whispered over and over, and all the time the creeping feat that he would never come back grew stronger within her. (116) Alice stood looking over the land, the thought of never ceasing life as it expresses itself in the flow of the seasons, fixed her mind on passing years. For the first time she felt that she had been cheated. Sadness swept over her. Dropping to her knees, she tried to pray, but instead words of protest came to her lips. “It is not going to come to me. I will never find happiness. Why do I tell myself lies?” That was her first attempt to face the fear that had become a part of her everyday life (117)

One night when it rained Alice had an adventure. It frightened and confused her. It was a moment of passion (44-45). She had a mad desire to run naked through the streets. She thought that the rain would have some creative and wonderful effect on her body. She wanted to leap and run, to cry out, to find some other lonely human and embrace him. Alice started to run. She had seen a man and she called to him. The man on the sidewalk stopped and stood listening and then left. She fell to the ground and lay trembling. Frightened of what she did. She crawled back to her home. After her attempt to having an adventure Alice Hindman concludes not to try again but to accept what she sees as inevitable, “What is the matter with me?” I will do something dreadful if I am not careful (120). Instead, Alice will continue to live in Winesburg in a lonely, unfulfilled existence with no hope for escape, except death.

All the female characters have brief encounters of happiness but loneliness always overcomes the happiness. Where Alice and Lousie end up to live in Winesburg in a lonely, unfulfilled existence with no hope for escape, except death. Elizabeth means of her escape was death and she was released of Winesburg.