SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S "GODLINESS": JESSE BENTLEY AND THE CURSE OF CAIN

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PREFACE

Winesburg, Ohio stands as one of the most influential works of fiction of the early part of this century. The longest story of that collection, "Godliness," has drawn little criticism, possibly because of its very puzzling nature. This study attempts to shed light on an aspect of the story as yet untouched upon: a parallel between the story's protagonist and the Biblical figure Cain. Such an interpretation has a direct bearing upon the theme of the work, which has, I believe, to this date been misunderstood.

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SHERWOOD ANDERSON'S "GODLINESS":

JESSE BENTLEY AND THE CURSE OF CAIN

The few commentaries on Sherwood Anderson's "Godliness" usually begin with a remark on the lack of critical attention paid to the story and also on its singularity in the collection _Winesburg, Ohio_.[1] Although with growing interest in the work of this influential writer the former becomes less valid, the latter consideration is unaltered. "Godliness" is a unique story. Of all the stories in what is probably the author's finest effort, "Godliness" is the longest, is the only one subdivided (into four parts), and is the only work in the collection believed to have been originally conceived as the nucleus of a novel.[2] Its distinctive style and greater complexity of plot also tend to set "Godliness" apart from its companion pieces. But more than any other consideration, the number of Biblical allusions encountered in the story's pages serves to draw attention to this unique and complex tale.

It is these Biblical allusions that have been most troublesome to readers and critics. The earlier critics tended to dismiss "Godliness" as a weak link in the chain of related stories. Carlos Baker, for instance, assessed the story thusly: "In seeking to combine the classical doctrine of

hubris with the Old Testament stories of Abraham and Isaac and David and Goliath, Anderson not only strains the reader's capacity for belief but also comes close to the edge of unintentional parody by invoking these heroic Biblical figures to serve as models for his bucolic midwesterners. . . . the experiment failed. . . ."[3] In a similar vein, Jarvis Thurston commented on "the 'Godliness' series, a self-contained unit which rests uneasily among the other stories," pointing out that "the heavy-handed preaching about industrialism there, the overt spiritual seeking, and the almost burlesque use of Biblical symbols and allusions in the Jesse Bentley parts are the more mystical Anderson of Many Marriages and Marching Men."[4]

The more recent critics, however, take a more favorable stance. Again, the Biblical references are central in the discussions. Rosemary laughlin, in her article "Godliness and the American Dream in Winesburg, Ohio,"[5] relates the story to the opening "Book of the Grotesque," which rather explicitly states Anderson's theme: that truth, in its pure, original form, is a beautiful thing, but when it is seized by a person, and that person tries to live his life by that truth, it becomes a falsehood and the person himself a "grotesque." Laughlin then explains the character of Jesse Bentley in these terms. Bentley sees himself as special in the eyes of God and desires a sign from his Creator. He has seized a Biblical truth, that of a chosen people who are separate to God, and has distorted it.

John O'Neill agrees with Laughlin and develops her ideas still further in what is probably the most thorough critical treatment of "Godliness": "Anderson Writ Large: 'Godliness' in Winesburg, Ohio."[6] O'Neill is most concerned with the social and economic dimensions of the account. Still, as with the others, the Biblical motif is crucial in his arguments, and he remarks on " . . . the Saul/David, the Jesse/David, and the David/Goliath Biblical parallels that the story makes explicit . . ." and how ". . . the denouement suggests Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac."[7]

What is most curious about the story, then, is the number of Biblical parallels, most of which are obvious. And although critics and scholars have treated these in terms of the story's theme, some of the interpretations seem unsatisfactory and none explain the relationship existing between the Old Testament references themselves. Laughlin says of the "David-Goliath" encounter which constitutes the climax of the four part episode: "I feel that Anderson, by including it, has made the only flaw in his tale. . . . it distracts and detracts from the central Abraham-Isaac myth and thereby undercuts its power. It is a qualitative fault, though, an excess in one aspect that fortunately does not ruin the tale itself."[8]

Indeed, the David/Goliath encounter does not "ruin the tale itself." I am of the opinion that Anderson intended just such an undercutting effect. Nor do I believe that the Abraham/Isaac myth is "central." Anderson seems to be working

on two levels in "Godliness." One is the overt, literal level on which he stresses certain well-known Old Testament stories. The nature of these parallels is generally not consistent with the protagonist's (Jesse Bentley's) nature and this discord has been troublesome to the story's readers (see Baker's remark, earlier). But there is another level of meaning in "Godliness," and it involves yet another Biblical parallel, one neglected in previous criticism. This parallel, unlike the others, is never expressly noted by Anderson, and exists in subtle but unmistakeable details and in symbolic action. On this level, as I will attempt to demonstrate, Jesse Bentley is a figure of the Biblical Cain; likewise, evidence in the story indicates that his family represents, symbolically, the descendants of this character of the Genesis account, a tribe associated with machinery and evil. The resultant irony, that between Jesse's self-perceptions, suggested by the obvious Biblical allusions, and his true condition, submerged but nonetheless developed by the author, reinforces the theme discussed earlier, that of the distortion of truth.

"Godliness" concerns itself with several generations of the Bentley family of Winesburg, Ohio. Jesse Bentley is the youngest of five sons of old Tom Bentley. A poor, hard-working family, they have existed on the same farm since pioneer days. Early in Part I Anderson describes how Enoch, the oldest son, "struck his father with the butt of

a teamsters whip, and the old man seemed likely to die" (p. 59). Yet the old man survives and the story immediately focuses on his youngest son. Jesse's four brothers go south to fight in the Civil War and all are killed. He is summoned from school, where he was studying to become a scholar and minister. He takes charge of the farm. The sensitive young man hardens with his new responsibility and becomes obsessed with the work of the farm, pushing himself, his workers, and his family to their physical limits. He exhibits a talent for working with machinery and even invents a device for the making of wire for fences. As the farm prospers, and as Jesse extends his landholdings, he starts to look to God for special recognition. He often walks in the fields during the evenings or paces in the solitude of his room while he voices his desires: "I am a new kind of man come into possession of these fields," he declares. "Look upon me, O God, and look Thou also upon my neighbors and all the men who have gone before me here! O God, Create in me another Jesse, like that of old, to rule over men and to be the father of sons who shall be rulers!" (p.70). And with these desires come frightening, paranoic fears: "Into Jesse's mind came the conviction that all of the farmers who owned land in the valley of Wine Creek were Philistines, and enemies of God. 'Suppose,' he whispered to himself, 'there should come from among them one who, like Goliath the Philistine of Gath, could defeat me and take from me my possessions.' In fancy he felt the sickening dread that he thought must have lain

heavy on the heart of Saul before the coming of David" (p.66).

Yet Bentley does not receive a sign from God. His fragile wife Katherine bears him a daughter, Louise, instead, and dies almost immediately afterward. It is only years later, when louise marries and presents him with a grandson, David, that Jesse begins to feel some divine encouragement:

> The man who had proclaimed himself the only true servant of God in all the valley of Wine Creek, and who had wanted God to send him a sign of approval by way of a son out of the womb of Katherine, began to think that at last his prayers had been answered. Although he was at that time only fifty-five years old he looked seventy and was worn out with much thinking and scheming. The effort he had made to extend his land holdings had been successful and there were few farms in the valley that did not belong to him, but until David came he was a very disappointed man (p. 72).

When the boy is twelve Jesse takes him into the woods for one of his supplications to God. Frightened by his grandfather's cries and twitching face (at moments of stress the older man suffered a facial tic), David flees. He falls

and cuts his head. Jesse tenderly returns him home.

Part III digresses into a character study of Louise and her earlier emotional problems, but the concluding Part IV returns to the old man and his grandson, now fifteen, three years later. David, in his daily excursion, has become proficient in the use of a slingshot. Jesse takes both the boy and a lamb to the same place to sacrifice the animal to God in the hope that the act will cause God to make himself manifest. Again the boy is frightened and flees. When Jesse, the knife ready in hand, pursues the boy and the escaped lamb, the boy acts out of terror. As he crosses a creek he takes a smooth stone and, with his slingshot, strikes his grandfather "squarely in the head." Mistakenly thinking he has killed the old man, the boy runs away, never to return again. The story ends with Jesse's revival and his conviction that a messenger of God had taken the boy "because I was too greedy for glory" (p. 93).

The Abraham/Isaac, Jesse/David, and David/Goliath elements of the above description should be evident. There is also a suggested comparison to Saul, the first anointed king of Israel. Closer inspection yields further parallels. Jesse Bentley remains in Ohio while his brothers go south to fight (and die) in the Civil War. The Philistines, evemies of the Old Testament Israelites, lived to the south of Israel. In I Samuel 17, 13-14[9] we read: "And the three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul to battle . . ./ And David was the youngest; and the three eldest followed

Saul." In this regard Jesse Bentley can be compared to David, remaining at home while his brothers fight.

The one inconsistency among these references is the giant Goliath. All the others belong among God's chosen. As was noted earlier, Goliath's symbolic appearance at the story's conclusion has been described as "a flaw." If one supposes, however, that such an effect was Anderson's intention, the story may be viewed in a different light. Goliath can be linked to Cain and hence to Cain's identification with industrialism, the central thematic consideration of the story.

Readers familiar with Sherwood Anderson's work have recognized his theme of the corruptive influence of technology on society. This message is encountered consistently in the Anderson canon and particularly in *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and his novel *Poor White* (1920), to be mentioned later. The story "Godliness," of all the stories of the *Winesburg* collection, affords the industrialization motif its most insistent expression. "It will perhaps be somewhat difficult for the men and women of a later day to understand Jesse Bentley," Anderson writes. "In the last fifty years a vast change has taken place in the lives of our people. A revolution has in fact taken place. The coming of industrialism, attended by all the war and rattle of affairs, . . . the going and coming of trains, the growth of cities, . . . has worked a tremendous change in the lives and in the habits of thought of our people of Mid-America. . . . Much of the

old brutal ignorance that had in it also a kind of beautiful childlike innocence is gone forever" (p. 64). Later we see a more forceful verbalizing of the impact of the machine age: "The beginning of the most materialistic age in the history of the world, when wars would be fought without partiotism, when men would forget God and only pay attention to moral standards, when the will to power would replace the will to serve and beauty would be well-nigh forgotten in the terrible headlong rush of mankind toward the acquiring of possessions, was telling its story to Jesse the man of God as it was to the men about him" (p. 73). Here we find the regret that later resurfaces in Poor White, his fine portrait of a small Ohio town drastically transformed by industrialization.

The theme of lost innocence treated here is not inconsistent with Winesburg on the whole. In the story "Paper Pills" Anderson introduces a Garden of Eden motif. After the harvest--the "Fall"--of the Winesburg orchards, all that remain are a "few gnarled apples that the pickers have rejected" (p. 33). These represent the isolated, grotesque townspeople who have not joined the urban migration. This fruit has a special sweetness known only to a few. The "good" apples have been "put in barrels and shipped to the cities where they will be eaten in apartments that are filled wth books, magazines, furniture, and people" (p. 33). In the context of the story, the awareness implied by the presence of books and magazines suggests a sterile society.

And, again, industry is the villain.

Thus it is that in "Godliness" we are shown a vision of civilization both before and after the "fall." The earlier generations of Bentleys are described as primitives, and into their lives "came little that was not coarse and brutal and outwardly they were themselves coarse and brutal" (p. 58). Still, Anderson assigns a quality of godliness to these simple folk. When the men drink beer after their trips into town their "naturally strong lusts" are released. "A kind of crude and animal-like poetic fervor took possession of them. On the road home they stood up on the wagon seats and shouted at the stars" (p. 59). It is at this point that a Cain image is first introduced. The prose of these early passages has a religious quality to it, as O'Neill has noted: "Anderson's farmers are made to move with a certain biblical solemnity, even when their actions are violent or destructive. For example, the crimes of the Bentley men are biblical in association . . ."[10] During one of these trips home from town the oldest son Enoch strikes his father with the butt of a whip. Old Tom Bentley almost dies. Now there are two Enochs to be found in the Bible. One "walked with God." The other was the firstborn of Cain. The near-homicidal action of the boy would tend to align him with this latter Enoch.

Although from this passage on could infer that Tom Bentley is associated with Cain, the story applies similar imagery to the entire family. In the opening of the story

the author describes the settlement somewhat like a "tribe." "It was in reality not one house but a cluster of houses joined together in a rather haphazard manner" (p. 57).

But Jesse Bentley, more so than any other character, is tied to the first murderer. He has the "mark of Cain" (Genesis 4, 15). We know from Bible history that the descendants of Cain were credited with the introduction of metal-working (Genesis 4, 22). The name Cain itself is translated as "smith," as in blacksmith, silversmith, etc. Jesse Bentley shares this aptitude: ". . . Like all men of his time he had been touched by the deep influences that were at work in the country during those years when modern industrialism was being born . . . He invented a machine for the making of fence out of wire" (p. 73). He exhibits further affinities for the trade: "He began to buy machines that would permit him to do the work of the farms while employing fewer men and he sometimes thought that if he were a younger man he would give up farming altogether and start a factory in Winesburg for the making of machinery" (p. 73). And in Part IV Anderson returns to this idea: "Jesse bought a great many new machines for cutting down the cost of labor and all of the remaining acres in the strip of black fertile swamp land" (pp. 88-89).

Another likeness stems from a physical manifestation--Jesse Bentley has a tendency to shake (Anderson reminds us on several occasions) and is afflicted by a facial twitch.

Although there is some mystery surrounding the nature of Cain's mark, for the Bible does not specify, many believe it to be such an identifying mark. The Church Fathers have commented upon this notion. Peter Comestor writes in *Historia Scholastica--Liber Genesis*, cap. XXVII (De Morte Abel), "*Et posuit Deus signum in Cain, tremorem capitis*." There appears to be a strong similarity in the afflictions. That Cain had a trembling head is only myth, but it is widespread myth, and it is reasonable to believe that Anderson was aware of it, especially in view of the amount of Biblical research that must have gone into the composition of "Godliness."

Further evidence of Anderson's association of Cain with industrialization can be found in his novel *Poor White*. Interestingly, in terms of theme and subject matter this work might be viewed as a renewal and culmination of the effort that "Godliness," if the latter is to be regarded as an abortive novelistic venture, initiated. The economy, values, and even the people of Bidwell, Ohio, the setting of *Poor White*, are transformed because a telegraph operator there uses his fertile imagination to design machinery. As the townspeople face their shifting lifestyles and environment, controversy arises. Some side with progress and others with the old way. At one point a gathering is discussing the pros and cons of a forthcoming factory that will produce a machine to plant cabbage. One old man, a cabbage farmer, ironically, speaks out against the impending change:

> . . . he fell back on the name of that God whose name had been so much upon his lips. The decrier of God became the defender of God. "The thing, you see, can't be done. It ain't all right. Something awful'll happen. The rains won't come and the plants'll dry up and die. It'll be like it was in Egypt in the Bible times," he declared. The old farmer with the twisted leg stood before the crowd in the drug-store and proclaimed God's word. "Don't it say in the Bible that men shall work and labor by the sweat of their brows?" he asked sharply. "Can a machine like that sweat? You know it can't. And it can't do the work either. No, siree. Men 've got to do it. That's the way it has been since Cain killed Abel in the Garden of Eden. God intended it so . . . It can't be done, and if it could be done it would be wicked and ungodly to try. . . ."[11]

Despite the misinformation (the first murder occurred <u>after</u> the banishment, and the curse here is Adam's, not Cain's), a strong indictment still exists against Adam's firstborn. And although the situation here is contrary to that in "Godliness," for here Cain is linked to the pre-industrial state,

nevertheless the Biblical figure is at least mentally associated by Anderson with the overall problem presented by industrialization.

Characteristically, in the literature of the Bible the opponents of the children of Abraham understand and employ metals. This distinction separates peoples such as the Egyptians and the Philistines from the Hebrews, who are a more primitive agrarian society. Moreover, the pagan nationalities exist outside of God's favors, and are regarded as evil and spiritually inferior to the chosen. For these reasons the enemies of the Israelites are generally regarded to be descended from Cain, while the Hebrew genealogy can be traced upward through Seth, Cain and Abel's younger brother. If such is the case, the Philistine Goliath can be recognized as a member of Cain's lingeage. The fact that he is a giant also points in this direction, for giants have historically been linked with Cain, as Oliver Emerson has pointed out:

> The Cain story of the fourth chapter of Genesis is followed by a chapter of genealogies. Chapter 6 begins with the apparently disconnected account of the giants who sprang from the union of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men." A modern reader would not closely connect the two, or puzzle himself to explain this singular progeny of a singular union. The medieval mind was not

> so easily satisfied. Here was a tale which excited wonder, and to which some explanation must be made. Both Jewish and Christian commentators, therefore, connected these giants with the preceding historical passages. When this was done it was easy to assume one of the partners in this union as descended from the wicked Cain.[12]

This myth, too, appears to be quite common. Again, it is possible, even likely, that Anderson was aware of it. The significance of this relationship to Cain lies in the fact that it underscores the parallel between the Bentley family and the Cain lineage. Therefore, the appearance, symbolically, of Jesse Bentley as Goliath in the story's conclusion is not, as has been supposed, a flaw. Rather, it is consistent with Anderson's symbolism and serves to heighten the irony of Jesse's misdirection. The man who sees himself as a great man of God, along the lines of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham and Isaac, and the kings Saul and David, is instead an outcast, corrupted by the "evil" presence of machinery, and is cursed. Bentley, at the story's end, has metamorphosed into the very Philistine giant that his own paranoia created.

Similar insights may be gained by observing parallels between the situations of the Bentleys and the Cain lineage. Each account traces the history of a family. Like Cain's, the Bentley family is introduced as farmers. The climax of

the story results when Jesse, like Cain, has enjoyed an abundant harvest and wishes to make a sacrifice to God to show his appreciation. As with Cain, the result is failure.

The curse that each family suffers is also similar. The irreversible fate of Cain's family is that they are without a home: "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Genesis 4, 11-12). Cain goes forth into the land of Nod. There has never been a geographic region of that name: the Hebrew word nôd means "wandering." That this curse was passed on to succeeding generations has been upheld by literature and legend through the ages. Such is also the ultimate plight of the Bentley fmaily, for at the story's end we see David, fearing he has inadvertently slain his grandfather, resort to flight: ". . . he decided suddenly that he would never go back to the Bentley farms or to the town of Winesburg. 'I have killed the man of God and now I will myself be a man and go out into the world . . .'" (p. 92). When Jesse Bentley became ambitious and took the path of industry, he brought a curse upon himself and his family.

The "homeless" quality shared here says something about Anderson's work and about American literature in general. "Homelessness" indicates a dominant theme that recurs through the bulk of our literature: nostalgia. Nostalgia, defined

as "a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one's home or country,"[13] takes on broader connotations when applied to literary works. In a sense, it entails any sort of longing for the past, or for a past condition. In the twentieth century's progressive, forward-minded, ever-more-complicated times, the past exists as a lost world, simpler, happier, and irretrievable. Purged of unpleasantness by the mind's tendency to retain the good and discard or de-emphasize the bad, it becomes a sort of paradise, like Eden before the Fall or the Winesburg orchards before harvest time. The past holds stability, youth, and cherished memories. American literature in particular exhibits strong nostalgic tendencies. Wright Morris wrote in The Territory Ahead: "Somewhere between Walden Pond and Boston--at some point of tension, where the dreams cross--the schizoid soul of the American is polarized."[14] This soul, torn between the restless and progressive nature of America on the one hand and the cry for the stability and familiarity of the past on the other, is a paradox.

Morris goes on to identify Winesburg, Ohio as one of the "classic examples of nostalgia." The same could be said for the individual tale "Godliness." Jesse Bentley is "a man born out of his time and place" (p. 61). The family, isolated from the mainstream of society and prodded unceasingly by the ambitious Jesse, becomes a lonely and purposeless lot. While the arrival of grandson David, an inquisitive 12-year-old, is received joyously by the entire house-

hold, for Jesse the emptiness nonetheless remains. "There were two influences at work in Jesse Bentley and all his life had been a battleground for these influences. First there was the old thing in him. He wanted to be a man of God and a leader of men of God" (p. 80). The second proves to be his desire for production and wealth. His polarization is evident. It is this dual nature that makes Jesse Bentley a grotesque. The opposing qualities that he exhibits are reflected in the two levels discussed earlier, the one representing the Jewish nation and "salvation" and the other Cain's disinherited tribe.

In a similar manner, nostalgia applies to the lineage of Cain. As a result of the curse, they are quite literally homeless. The idea of a curse implies that beforehand Cain existed in a favored state. Emerson emphasized the severity of the situation when he wrote "it is scarcely necessary to suggest any special source for the idea of everlasting punishment for Cain. It follows from the 'cursed art thou' of the Lord (Gen. 4,11), and from the heinousness of the crime."[15] Life apart from God and his blessings, without chance of redemption, would surely create a backward longing for an earlier, innocent state on the sufferer's part.

Thus, Anderson's association of the Bentley family with this Old Testament figure seems especially appropriate. With this relationship determined, the story takes on a new light. Anderson has explicitly condemned industrialization in "Godliness." Jesse Bentley does not conform to Anderson's ideals,

and hence is "cursed." Jesse's personal identification with the Biblical figure of the same name (and with the patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and kings Saul and David) is also misplaced. Jesse's driving ambition is to be found favorable in God's eyes and to have God made manifest to him. That God will not make his presence known to Jesse is evident from a parallel reading of Genesis 4,14: ". . . and from thy face shall I be hid . . ." Bentley's hopes are thwarted. The result is irony: he cannot see that he is his own enemy. The irony deepens when one realizes that the original David slew Goliath so ". . . that all the earth may know there is a God in Israel. . . ." (I Samuel 17, 46). In the same manner should the symbolic reenactment of the Abraham/Isaac sacrifice be viewed--as a contrast rather than a central myth.

The Cain myth, instead, is the central myth of "Godliness." Like Cain and his descendants, the technologically-minded are tainted. The sins of industry set them apart from the ways of the righteous. They are homeless, home being in this sense both a home in the early American tradition and a home with God. In Anderson's work this motivation toward industry is prompted by the sin of greed: "The greedy thing in him wanted to make money faster than it could be make by tilling the land" (p. 73). Bentley does come to recognize his fault, but only after his failure and the loss of his heir. "By the roadside he sate down on a log and began to talk about God. That is all they ever

got out of him. Whenever David's name was mentioned he looked vaguely at the sky and said that a messenger of God had taken the boy. 'It happened because I was too greedy for glory,' he declared" (p. 93).

Bentley's greed, however, does not arise without some outside force's working to create it. In the case of "Godliness," greed is a byproduct of knowledge. The young Jesse Bentley differs from his brothers in that he is a student. Moving from the city (Cleveland) to the country, he brings a measure of urban sophistication to rural innocence. His appearance, on his return from school, causes amusement among the bucolic types who inhabit the town. He is an "'odd sheep.'" This distinction serves both to isolate the young man and to elevate him above many of his fellows. "Jesse formed the habit of reading newspapers and magazines" (p. 73), Anderson writes. Jesse's mind fixes "upon things read in newspapers and magazines, on fortunes to be made almost without effort by shrewd men who bought and sold" (p. 74). In this respect he differs from his father and forefathers, who gave the appearance of being uneducated and for whom ". . . it was difficult . . . to talk." Similarly, his daughter Louis Bentley is ostracized from her peers because she performs well in school. Her skill in academics indirectly functions to bring about her emotional instability.

The Bentleys havetasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and their enlightenment exiles them from the Edenic

paradise offered by a pre-industrial Winesburg. Jesse Bentley's inventing a device for making fence wire signifies his separation. Essentially, he is fencing himself in and the past out. He fails to pattern his life after the models of a dim, unchanging past, for his is the world of the future. In Anderson's universe man forever casts a backward glance as time sweeps him relentlessly away. Ironically, "Godliness" is a story of the godless. When Jesse Bentley puts aside his training for the ministry he metaphorically does so for the people of his times. Anderson appears to be saying that technology has severed man's ties to his Creator. Like the runaway David of the story hurrying westward down a road that winds through trees and fields, man apart from God wanders confusedly through unfamiliar territory, his land of Nod, toward his setting sun. Homeless and bearing the mark of Cain, the mark of progress, he embarks on an odyssey that may be without end.

And yet, in spite of the story's negative message, never do we feel anything but sympathy for the wealthy, unfortunate Bentleys. Herein lies the virtue of the work and the true artistry of writer. Character portrayal is the strength of Anderson. Regardless of his mistakes, Jesse Bentley is driven by a sense of what is right, and he is ultimately penitent. The tragedy here is society's, not the individual's.

So it is the theme of nostalgia that gives "Godliness" its final expression. Anderson is attemption to underscore

the deracination of his fellow countrymen. As Wright Morris has observed, ". . . it is little wonder the American mind sometimes wonders where it is going, and what, indeed, it is to be an American. On the evidence we might say an American is a man who attempts to face both ways. . . . Nostalgia rules our hearts while a rhetoric of progress rules our words."[16] For Sherwood Anderson's grotesques, a "godliness" is inherited, just as one would inherit a farm, or industry, or guilt. As Goliath cannot prevail against David, or Cain undo his wrong, or Jesse Bentley become a patriarch, neither can any of them return "home."

NOTES

[1]Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (New York: The Viking Press, 1960). Page numbers of all subsequent quotations from this edition will appear parenthetically in the text.

[2]Jarvis Thurston, "Technique in Winesburg, Ohio," Winesburg, Ohio: Text and Criticism, ed. John H Ferres (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 341.

[3]Carlos Baker, "Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg: A Reprise," Virginia Quarterly Review, XLVII, 574.

[4]Thurston, p. 341.

[5]Rosemary Laughlin, "Godliness and the American Dream in Winesburg, Ohio," Twentieth Century Literature, 13 (1967), pp. 97-103.

[6]John O'Neill, "Anderson Writ Large: 'Godliness' in Winesburg, Ohio," Twentieth Century Literature, 23 (1977), pp. 67-83.

[7]O'Neill, p. 78.

[8]Laughlin, p. 103, n. 5.

[9]All quotations from the Bible are taken from the King

James Version.

[10]O'Neill, p. 71.

[11]Sherwood Anderson, Poor White (New York: The Modern Library, 1920), p. 122.

[12]Oliver Emerson, "Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English," Publications of the Modern Language Association, 21, 1906, pp. 888-889.

[13]Oxford English Dictionary.

[14]Wright Morris, The Territory Ahead: Critical Interpretations in American Literature (New York: Atheneum, 1957), p.44.

[15]Emerson, p. 869.

[16]Morris, pp. 24-25.

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