

Free essay on the power of feminine in winesburg, ohio

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

After reading the story 'Mother', from Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson one, cannot agree with Rigsby's conclusion that Anderson is not able to comprehend the feminine. Even though Anderson " identifies the feminine with a pervasive presence of fragile, hidden, ' something' which belongs for both to the grotesques and the lost potential to the secret knowledge that is designed to expose" as Rigsby asserts, however, Anderson seems to be able to present the internal life of a woman as an ' other' in a world that is marked by a desire to suppress and dominate the women. Rigsby herself writes that " Through the character of Elizabeth Willard, Anderson shows that the urge for creative self-expression is an extension of the basic feminine instinct for intimacy. Restless and energetic, Elizabeth dreams of becoming an actress in a big city. Her fantasy is a symbolic expression of her need to develop the full range of her personality and to achieve the expression that would definitely bring her into the intimate communion with this world", which cannot seem to be the perfect picture of a women's existence, but is still a powerful depiction. Though later Anderson shows, and Rigsby rightly notices that " When she turns to marriage as the conventional solution to her restlessness, Elizabeth quickly discovers that the ' secret something' growing within her is killed by her insensitive husband" (ibid.) but such a ' secret something' also dies in her husband as she can see it dying in her son for whom she was really joyous and happy that even " the expression of happiness had become impossible to her. ' You are too much indoors,' 'I think you had better go out among the boys,'. she said. Then the son replied, ' I thought I would go for a little walk,' stepping awkwardly out of the room and closed the door", which was exactly the way her husband has

replied in a previous encounter. Therefore, rather than looking at it as Anderson's inefficiency to understand the feminine or that, "communication is blocked because of the devaluation of the feminine qualities of tenderness and vulnerability", it must be seen as his depiction of the alienated existence of both men and women.

Further, "the 'something' which Elizabeth Willard is looking is a more humane life in which her sexuality, her need for intimacy, her creativity, and her spirituality, can be fully realized, harmonized, and expressed: a life in which the wholeness of her selfhood might be recognized and appreciated by some another human being" (Rigsby 341), but this clearly does not mean that she is fragile or in any way less than the male. Recognition is important for both the male and a female but even though Elizabeth lacks recognition, she is no less strong in the times when she needs to be. She now realizes that her life has been like a chase she witnessed of a cat by a bearded man, and that she herself has been alienated, but she is also now acutely aware of the alienation of the two men present in her life. It would not be incorrect to say that, in the terms of personal strength, she is superior to both of them. It may seem that Anderson is a product of his times and that his characters are bound in the prevalent social restrictions. But, he also seems ahead of his times in those moments when a character decides to take a radical step, as did Elizabeth in her decision to kill her husband or in her support to her son. This is also visible when she gets angry with her husband, and Anderson writes, "The determination was the result of long years of rather ineffectual and quiet thinking. 'Now', she told herself, 'I will act. There is something threatening my boy, and I will ward it off'." Here one may also say that, in

her mature years, she is also able to realize and identify the personal and social reasons for which the 'secret something' died in her, and its realization itself is making her stand strong for her son.

Though there are gender roles that have been depicted in a stereotypical way, but there seems that these roles have come together in the later years of Elizabeth's life, when as the Jungian "anima in men and animus in women" come together for a healthy personality in both.

Finally, Anderson expresses the phenomenological reality of a diseased woman accurately and presents a clear image of an old woman in the initial lines itself by saying that. "Although she was but forty-five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure. Listlessly she went about the disorderly old hotel looking at the faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets and, when she was able to be about, doing the work of a chambermaid among beds soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men", which suggests that Rigsby's assertion of Anderson's ignorance of the feminine surely is a misinterpretation. Even though it may seem that Elizabeth's "existence is marked by depression and bitterness, symbolized by the unspecified illness that keeps her shut up in the boarding house and under the doctor's care", but when Rigsby writes that "Anderson associates the feminine with a quality of feeling that is delicate and intangible; it is a tender nuance, a transient moment of intimacy, a creative, secret something growing within the self, a slight quiver of insight that seems to hold great promise" (342) he is not making the women invisible, as Rigsby asserts, but, he shown that though these qualities belong to the experiences of both men and women, but quite often it is only a women who are acutely aware of them. Men seem

here even more bound by the social stereotypes and gender-roles that even their minds are not free, depicted in the similarity of the last response of her son who is not free from his father whom he has probably internalized.

Works Cited

Anderson, Sherwood. Winesburg, Ohio: A Group of Tales of Ohio Small Town Life. New York: The Modern Library, 1919.

Lawson, Thomas. Carl Jung: Darwin of the Mind. Trans. Richard Francis Carrington Hull. USA: Karnac Books, 2008.

Napierkowski, Marie Rose. " Winesburg, Ohio by Sherwood Anderson." Novels for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context and Criticism on Commonly Studied Novels. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 322-347.

Rigsby, Sally Adair. " The Feminine in Winesburg, Ohio (Excerpt)." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 339-343.