

ANALYSIS

“Nobody Knows” (1919)

from *Winesburg, Ohio*

Sherwood Anderson

(1876-1941)

“Three stories—‘Nobody Knows,’ ‘An Awakening,’ and ‘Sophistication’—have a special relationship. They all center on George’s dealings with a woman, a different one in each case; they contain very similar motifs; they are arranged in an ascending order of progression. The fact that one comes near the beginning of the book, one about two-thirds of the way through, and one at the end suggests that Anderson was not without his own subtle sense of design.

The first story, ‘Nobody Knows,’ is in all ways the simplest. In it George Willard enters traditional manhood by having with Louise Trunnion his first sex experience. In relation to the other two tales in the sequence, the most significant elements of the story, besides the fact of actual sexual conquest, are George’s lack of self-assurance at the outset of the affair, his bursting forth with a ‘flood of words,’ his consequent aggressiveness and failure to sympathize with his partner, and his action at the end of the story when he stands ‘perfectly still in the darkness, attentive, listening as though for a voice calling his name.’ The sexual encounter with Louise has been simply that. It has brought him physical satisfaction and a feeling of entirely self-centered masculine pride. His expectation of hearing a voice, however, would seem to be a projection of guilt feeling at having violated the over moral code of the community even though ‘nobody knows’.”

Walter B. Rideout
“The Simplicity of *Winesburg, Ohio*”
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