The Grotesque and Its Relation to the Subject’s Ontological Status in Sherwood Anderson’s \textit{Winesburg, Ohio}

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Jang, Seon Young. “The Grotesque and Its Relation to the Subject’s Ontological Status in Sherwood Anderson’s \textit{Winesburg, Ohio}.” Modern Studies in English Language & Literature 57.1 (2013): 327–52. This paper aims to explore the significance of the grotesque in \textit{Winesburg, Ohio} in two ways. First, it intends to examine the correlation between the grotesque and the humanity or the subjectivity with the belief that the grotesque has to do with illuminating the subject’s ontological status. If the grotesque is about the distinctive trait of the characters that the Muse in “The Book of the Grotesque” of \textit{Winesburg} arrays before the old man’s eyes, the grotesqueness of those who will be main personas in the ensuing stories needs to be speculated in terms of the humanity or the subjectivity. Second, it attempts to investigate the affiliation that the grotesque has with the female characters in \textit{Winesburg}, that is, what the feminine subjectivity of the woman demonstrates on the grotesqueness of beings, put another way, how the grotesqueness of subjects develops in relation with the feminine subjectivity of the woman. (Kongju National University)

Key Words: the grotesque, the humanity, the subjectivity, the woman.

\section{I. Introduction}

It is not that difficult to find the source of the grotesque in Sherwood Anderson’s \textit{Winesburg, Ohio}.\footnote{Hereafter, \textit{Winesburg, Ohio} will be abbreviated as \textit{Winesburg}.} It is traced initially in “The
Book of the Grotesque” that exhibits, this book is about the grotesque people. The old man thought to represent the writer, perhaps Anderson, lies on the bed which was unsuccessfully renovated by the carpenter he shared some talk with right before sleeping. He, though old, unafraid of his imminent death, is portrayed like a pregnant woman that carries not the baby but “a woman . . . wearing a coat of mail like a knight” (5). This woman, then, like the Muse to the old man, drives a long procession of the grotesque figures before the old man’s eyes when he is in a subconscious state of the dream. “The Book of the Grotesque” that functions like the introduction to Winesburg, Ohio does not merely open onto the seeming complex meaning of the grotesque—“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” (7). It provokes further the reader’s curiosity into the implication of the grotesque itself not settled but rather becomes more vague with Anderson’s opening explication, and into the relation between the grotesque and the characters that will appear in the next each short story, and what this relation will purport more about the special feature of the grotesque people. Besides, this introductory part to Winesburg indicates the crucial status of the woman in deepening the signification of the grotesque by bridging between the old man, that is, the writer and the grotesque characters. Just as the woman works like the Muse for the old man in leading the writing of the story about the grotesque, so does she influence much on the development of the life of the grotesque as actually unfolded between the female characters and the grotesque males in the coming short stories.

Thus, this paper, as already drawn from the above implications of