The Grotesque and Elusive Individuality: Disability in Winesburg, Ohio and Motherless Brooklyn

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Abstract

In my thesis I have attempted to present the presence of disability within Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio as well as the ramifications and presence of disability within Jonathan Lethem's Motherless Brooklyn. Within Winesburg, Ohio, Anderson constructs characters that he calls "Grotesques" and I examine the ways in which these "Grotesques" remain disabled. In my first chapter, through the three contexts of physical disability, social disability and environmental disability, Anderson's characters emerge as fictionally disable characters. Jonathan Lethem's main character is a Tourettic male who becomes the focus of my second chapter. I attempt to construct both the connection between Winesburg's "Grotesques" and Lethem's fictionally constructed disability and the environmental influences on Tourette's as a disabling disease. Through linguistic disabilities, an influx and lack of language in each text, societal disabilities, disjunction between characters' family, friends and lovers, and environmental disability, both the urban environment of Brooklyn and the suburban environment of Winesburg, I explicate the various aspects of disability within both novels.

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Introduction: How is this Disability?

Fiction can be heroic and dramatic; it can be hilarious and dream-like. There is, at times, a sense of a colorful disability in writing, a sense of written characters whose names, bodies and language are essentially fictional representations of disabilities. They hold exaggerated features; ballooning hands and wide-open mouths amidst magnified and embellished environments. Within this cartooned world, Jonathan Lethem and Sherwood Anderson appear to meet, in a storm of fictionally disabled characterizations.

When I began this thesis, my initial intention was to write about the genre of Lethem and Anderson's novels. Their literary worlds seemed to collide with exaggerated characters whose language was silly and who were physically farcical. Their writing was so similar that I felt there had to be a connection between the authors in the literary world. Lethem has said about his writing: "[It] contains some version of a finite artificial world, a potted world, a cartoon world, a prison or arena, carved out of the real world."[1] In a sense, Lethem's lampooned characters represented the "real world" and they seem to remain in his writing primarily as symbols of something else. Anderson's characterizations have been described in a similar way: "The American was neither tragic nor humble; he was an object of amusement, a figure out of caricature whose struggles for culture were vain, whose heroes were absurd, and whose sufferings were drool."[2] Anderson's "American" protagonist is amusing and comical; the American character is a cartoon. The "absurd" here emerges in both authors' writing and characterizations as a representation of a fictionalized disability. I believed there had to be a symbolic

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[1] Fiona Kelleghan, Private Hells and Radical Doubts: An Interview with Jonathan Lethem, (Science Fiction Studies, Vol.25, Part 2. July 1998) 232.
[2] Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (Doubleday & Company, Inc. New York, 1956) 158.

connection between the disabled and the real, between a distortion of the real world and what it meant to distort it.

How did Anderson construct his disabled characters? Why was he choosing to present a physical deterioration of men and women as a form of disability? What did it mean to play with their language or, in opposition, their lack of language? Why was Lethem constructing a fictionalized Tourettic main character? What was the importance of that character's corrupted language and reworked words? What began to emerge at the center of my questions was a conception of disability. I began to understand that Anderson's characters in Winesburg, Ohio, characters he refers to as Grotesques, were physically altered and linguistically distinguished, because of their disabilities. Lethem had constructed an entire novel, Motherless Brooklyn, around the disability of a single character. The study of the different facets of each character's disability became the most productive for me to read and understand the writing of both authors.

Jonathan Lethem's Tourettic character is fictionally represented as disabled through multiple contexts: the physical aspect of disability, the socially isolated aspect of disability and the environmental context that surrounds Lethem's fictionalized disability. In order to establish a context for the Tourettic disability in Motherless Brooklyn, I began to explore the connections between Brooklyn's singular urban movements and disability studies. Lethem writes:

> "...names are just to make me laugh, or just to make the characters seem special and to help create the atmosphere of oddity. Unrealistically strange character names are an easy way to make sure the reader feels, at the deepest level, they're

entering a propositional space where they have to suspend disbelief and make leaps. It makes people ready for leaps."

This "atmosphere of oddity" is important in my chapter about Motherless Brooklyn, the atmosphere being provided by the city of Brooklyn. Brooklyn's chaotic undercurrent alters and influences the language that Lethem uses and becomes the reason for "strange character names" and the "suspended disbelief" of the metropolitan area. The city becomes the inclusive environment for the entire novel; it acts as a molding environment for the physical and social aspects of Tourette's. Brooklyn becomes the space of embodiment for a Tourettic language, physicality and society.

Anderson's Grotesques have never been perceived as disabled prior to my thesis; as my summery of previous authors' theories in chapter one will show. The Grotesques have been classified and distinguished in many different ways:

> Up until the late nineteenth century, the concept of the grotesques in the arts and literature had focused predominantly on the fantastic, the macabre or the supernatural. The grotesque subject bore some resemblance to the 'ordinary' but typically in a distorted way so that often the physical features of the subject were frightful or even comically absurd...Rather consistently, though, the grotesque subject was objectified as a thing or person deviant from the social norm. It was a freak in a normal world.[3]

I wanted to think of a new way to explain Anderson's characters and incorporate interpretations with which I agreed into my explanation. While I understood that

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[3] Robert Dunne, The New Book of the Grotesques, Contemporary Approaches to Sherwood Anderson's Early Fiction (Kent State University Press, Kent and London, 2005) 1.

Anderson's characters are isolated from the society around them, like Lethem, no critic seemed to offer a satisfying explanation for isolation. I agreed that these characters are distinguished by their physically "frightful" features, I began to understand that each character has a disability that both causes their physical malformations and in turn their social isolation. Disability became the center of each character's Grotesqueness and their bodies incapacitate normal social interaction. They are not, as Robert Dunne argues, "freaks in a normal world;" their world is anything but normal. While the environment of Brooklyn acts as a catalyst for Tourette's as well as a way of understanding that disability, the environment of Winesburg is in itself disabled. Caught between a modern state of industrialization and a dissipating natural environment, the town of Winesburg only offers more confusion for physically and socially disabled characters. In my chapter on Sherwood Anderson, there are three main contexts for disability within Anderson's "Grotesques." I show that the inhabitants of Winesburg are physically disabled, through their bodies and the language that emanates from their disabilities. This in turn leads to social isolation and a debilitating relationship with other characters. In the third context of disability, I explain how the environment of Winesburg only serves to isolate more of Anderson's characters, encapsulating them within their own restricting disabilities.

Lethem's novel, which is comprised of explorations of disability, allowed me to construct this essential understanding of Anderson's novel. Lethem's exploration of a disabled individual, who is both the main character and the narrator, places the disability right in front of the reader. Lethem has admitted to allowing disability to direct his novel:

> In Motherless Brooklyn, by coming up with Lionel Essrog, this character with Tourette's, I suddenly had my excuse to let a wordplay character run amok. Give him the book. What would happen if he wasn't only a minor character but the major character, and also the narrator? What if I just handed the reigns to this instinct in myself? It was a liberating, lucky choice to come up with: a very rational excuse for irrationality.[4]

Lethem's approach to disability writing was new and exciting, and I wanted to present Anderson in a context that would connect old critical approaches with newer literary techniques and thereby present the old in a different way. And because of my initial attempts to connect the novels on the level of the absurd, I was able to understand how disability is manifested in each text: through the purposeful distortion of characters and their bodies, societies and environments.

Now, having written the thesis, I understand both texts better than ever before. I have come to recognize the wisdom of these authors within their writing. And I now understanding how each author's own writing is recognized by both the critic and the reader. Jonathan Lethem once described his initial understanding of authorship in an interview he gave with Paul Auster:

> I thought, quite foolishly, that the world of writing was divided between, let's say, the Philip Roths on one side, who work from thinly concealed personal experience and are present in everything they write, whether and autobiographical narrative or an unmistakably personal voice or both, and on the other side, those writers who use their imagination, who are story tellers and inventors, who offer a

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[4] James Schiff, A Conversation with Jonathan Lethem (The Missouri Review, Vol. 29, Issue, 1, 2006, pp.116-134) 8.

> generosity of invention. They present concepts and images—in that sense they might be seen as being more like visual artists or cartoonists. They say, 'Here, look at this!' They're not interested in presenting themselves.[5]

Here Lethem presents his belief in a novel that covers both the personal and the imaginative. And he, as an author, presents "concepts and images". Lethem, a writer who grew up in Brooklyn, is writing what he knows, partially autobiographically, while conceiving of disabled characters. He is a "story teller" in the context of Brooklyn. This is what makes the novel so wise and exciting, an important tale of melding literary techniques.

Anderson's novel emerges in a similar way. As an author who grew up in a small town in Ohio, the environment of Winesburg seems reminiscent of his childhood. The novel has emerged as a beautiful and subtle interpretation of the American landscape and a "thinly concealed personal experience."[6] Winesburg becomes a directory to the American way of life: an American people and their potential for imperfect and unsound lives.

And while both these authors use incredibly artistic and thoughtful characterizations and descriptions, I want to prove that their fictional interpretations always return to disability. Disability becomes the medium through which these authors create their "cartoons." Lethem has been quoted as saying, "It seems to me one of the novel's defining strengths: that it can swallow a song, a poem or a film..."[7] I want the reader to understand that a novel can "swallow" the notion of disability, like a film or a

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[5] A Conversation with Jonathan Lethem, 3.
[6] A Conversation with Jonathan Lethem, 3.
[7] Jonathan Lethem talks with Paul Auster (The Believer, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2005) 55.

song. Disability emerges as the art of Winesburg, Ohio and Motherless Brooklyn, encapsulating every character and environment.

Winesburg's Disability: the Nature of the Grotesque within Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio

Chapter 1

To begin, I would like to discuss a theory widely accepted within the critical texts that explore Anderson's mode of characterization. I think it is important to survey this commonly held theory because its principles do not coincide with my analysis of Winesburg's characters or my ideas about the nature of the Grotesque. It is often simply concluded that the opening narrative of Winesburg, "The Book of the Grotesque," offers a comprehensive reading of the characters and situations within the stories that follow. The Grotesques are assigned a "truth" in this story that ultimately proves false; "...he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood."[8] Each Grotesque is inherently in possession of a universal and unifying truth. In an attempt to configure my own theory of the Grotesque, I will explain how multiple authors attribute the first story in Winesburg, Ohio as a key narrative. in which Anderson offers a very strong and compelling analysis for the rest of the novel.

"The Book of the Grotesque" is a short vignette that opens Winesburg, Ohio. Within the chapter is a description of an old man's subconscious that materializes as a description of the Grotesques:

> As he grew somewhat sleepy but was still conscious, figures began to appear before his eyes. He imagined the young indescribable thing within himself was driving a long procession of figures before his eyes...They were all grotesques. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques...he

[8] Sherwood Anderson, Winesburg, Ohio (Penguin Books, New York, 1919) 24.

crept out of bed and began to write. Some one of the grotesques had made a deep impression on his mind and he wanted to describe it.[9]

These Grotesques are presumed to carry meaning within them: after the old man records each person in his book, he is depicted as writing a list of "truths" in conjunction with each "grotesque," who "snatches" a distinctive truth and makes it his own. Anderson explains in his narrative that "It was the truths that made the people grotesque," as if to say that behind every Grotesque lies a personal validity, a personal creed that emerges, unattractive and irreversible, to the community and the people around that character. The reader is meant to understand that each character is retaining truths, clutching to them as livelihoods throughout their stories.

When I state that previous authors have discussed Anderson's novel in the above interpretation, I am including recent authors, such as David Stouck and older essayists, such as Brom Weber. In his essay "Sherwood Anderson and the Postmodern Novel," Stouck states, "The central insight in the book concerning human relationships is that each man lives according to his own 'truth' and that no one can understand and express fully that truth for someone else."[10] These "truths" are so personal, and so specific to each character that they emerge as metaphors for each character's life. For example, it is only after the Reverend Curtis Hartman designates the teacher Kate Swift as "an instrument of God, bearing the message of truth" that he can live life as a pious man. [11] But this theory takes the "truth" explanation for granted, naming each character solely on their unifying truths. The truths themselves are what make each person in Winesburg

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[9] Winesburg, 22-23.
[10] David Stouck, "Sherwood Anderson and the Postmodern Novel" Contemporary Literature, Vol. 26, No. 3, (Autumn, 1985), pp. 302-316, 312.
[11] Winesburg, 155.

ugly, unfit for interaction and isolated, but I attribute this "disjunction" between characters and their physical disabilities to their individualized fictionalized disabilities. Brom Weber's analysis of Anderson's "truths" may help to shed some light on the most common scrutiny that exists for Winesburg.

> "At some distant time in the past, man had created and believed many satisfying, contradictory truths...Then the healthy wholeness of a multiplicity of truths was lost; man picked out on particular truth, based his life upon it, and became a Grotesque, his exclusive truth 'a falsehood.'"[12]

Much like Stouck's interpretation of Anderson's meaning for the Grotesque, Weber's reading understands the "truths" as the sole reason for personal validity, a particular sense of self. Ultimately, in his reading, each character is paired with a "truth" and then molded around that specific "truth."

I believe that there are very palpable factors that contribute to the makeup of the Grotesques beside the interpretation offered within "The Book of the Grotesque": first a distinct connection to disability, both socially and physically. What makes Grotesques so "grotesque" is not necessarily any "truth" they themselves possess, but actually what they lack: a distinct disconnection from family, friends and romantic partners, a separation from their physical bodies and mental capacity and an inability to interact with their environment. The nature of the Grotesque, in other words, is not determined by the character's "truth" but more complexly by a number of influences.

To move beyond this reading of the Grotesques' personal "truths," I want to explore the Grotesques in relation to the notion of disability. Throughout Winesburg,

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[12] Brom Weber, "Sherwood Anderson" Pamphlets on American Writers, Number 43. (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1964.) 23.

Ohio, Anderson's protagonists are positioned within a very complex and multifaceted definition of the word "disabled." The Grotesques emerge as "disabled" in multiple ways. They are "Grotesques" with an upper-case because this makes their individual disabilities the cause of their Grotesqueness. A "Grotesque" is a disabled character who is fictionally constructed to present a group of individuals in various contexts. The word disability is also important to define both in terms of Anderson and the word itself. Disability can literally mean "Want of ability [to discharge any office or function]; inability, incapacity [inability to manage one's affairs or inability to perform various acts], impotence [helpless, powerless, unable to perform sexually]."[13] The word "disease" or more specifically the verb "diseased" is also an important word to define in the context of Winesburg and disability. I think this definition is helpful for understanding exactly what Anderson meant when he distinguished his characters as diseased: "In a disordered or depraved condition (of mind, of affairs, etc.); pertaining to such a condition, morbid."[14] It is important because often this condition of being "disordered" is one that fits the often chaotic and jumbled lives of many Grotesques. I will use this definition in the context of the social, historical, physical and experiential aspects of each character in order to explain what the interpretation of Grotesque means. Specific notions such as "want of ability, inability, incapacity, impotence, inconvenience, discomfort, depraved, disordered and incommode" are very important to define the Grotesques as disabled. These words connote suggestively the embodiment of what it means to be a Grotesque, socially and physically. I believe these are the terms that can most richly define Anderson's characters in their distinct contexts.

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[13] The Oxford English Dictionary, http://dictionary.oed.com
[14] The Oxford English Dictionary

In order to distinguish the Grotesques in their individual contexts and thus help to describe their connections to each other, we might start with the historical relevance of Anderson's writing. As I have previously stated, Andersons' element of autobiography is present in Winesburg and this historical context helps to illuminate the presence of disability within the text. Anderson writes about the nature of disability during a moment in American history when it must have appeared as though America would continually be at war: Anderson had fought in the Spanish American War in1898 and disabled soldiers were returning home from Europe after combat in World War I from 1914-1918. The historical moments Anderson is commenting on become important reference points for his writing; a raised awareness of the presence of disability must have influenced the construction of Winesburg's characters as well as their positions within the community of the town.

While Anderson may not have been writing Winesburg during the rise of disability awareness in America, there were at that time movements towards understanding disability. When the American Red Cross was founded in 1881, it was an organization meant to prevent the proliferation of disability caused by war. It was created only a few decades before America would enter into a war that utilized the organization to its fullest extent, World War II. "The number of [Red Cross] chapters jumped from 107 in 1914 to 3,864 in 1918 and membership grew from 17,000 to more than 20 millions adults..."[15] While the Red Cross was growing in members and thus recognizing a need for more disability understanding, the Institute for Crippled and Disabled Men was founded in 1917, only two years before the publication of Winesburg.

[15] www.redcross.org/museum/history/brief.asp

This jump in health and disability awareness must have filtered into Anderson's literary world as he was conceiving of Winesburg. Along with the expansion of the Red Cross and the end of the World War, the Polio Epidemic of 1916 also infiltrated American popular consciousness. In addition "The onset of the twentieth century was marked by a dramatic expansion of residential institutions for persons with mental disabilities...developments for persons with physical disabilities, independent living, and the emergence of family, community and consumer advocacy..."[16] The number of characters in Winesburg who appear to have physical disabilities is proof enough that Anderson's historical understanding of both World War I and an overall American recognition of civilian and soldier disabilities is pertinent to his writing. This autobiographical element of Winesburg's creation helps to present the weight of my disability argument. Anderson's exposure to disability awareness adds a background for my idea that the Grotesques are fundamentally disabled.

While Anderson may have been influenced by the creation of disability studies, his reaction to World War II was extremely negative. Alfred Kazin writes, "If the younger generation had emerged from the war, as F. Scott Fitzgerald said, 'to find all gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken,'...all the deceptions were out, and only the free creative sense remained."[17] In this way, Anderson may have been motivated by a desire to create a book based on real America, America before the war. In both reacting to the recent conflict and wanting to remain based in his own creative

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[16] David L. Braddock and Susan L. Parish, "An Institutional History of Disability," (University of Illinois at Chicago, Department of Disability and Human Development, July 26, 2000) 5.
[17] Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (Doubleday & Company, Inc. New York, 1956) 150.

background of the Midwest, Anderson created an incentive for the Grotesques and with them definitions of disability. If Anderson was aware of the nature of disability because of these circumstances, his personal opinions about the nature of war also influence his creation of Winesburg itself. Anderson's creative ideas about the nature of disability and the Grotesques may have emerged from his personal defiance of World War I.

Sometimes it is enlightening to include biographical background in order to understand certain decisions about characterization or in this case the makeup of Grotesques. Before serving in the Spanish American War, Anderson was living in Ohio, working on farms and living a very similar life to many of the characters in Winesburg. He wrote in his memoirs about leaving to go to war:

> We had been boys and we were at the edge of manhood. We wanted adventure. In the small interior towns, when I was a lad there, half the town went down to the railroad station to see the evening passenger train come and go. It came out of the east and into the west and we boys followed it with hungry eyes. There was something out there, beyond the horizon, we all wanted. Then the war came. It was our chance.[18]

The idealism about the opportunities of war is heavily magnified in Anderson's own youth; he writes "It was our chance," in a way that emphasizes the possible openings the war could have afforded a young man from Ohio. But when Anderson returns from war, his visionary ideals are lost and his reaction to World War I is embittered and somewhat reactionary:

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[18]ed. Lewis White. Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs, a Critical Edition (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1969) 182.

> Hatred of America and its success at money accumulation having begun to grow before the World War, intensified during the war, more and more intense later, that very America that was once the hope of Europe, one of humanity's greatest dreams betrayed...Damn little realization in Europe of the nameless masses down below in America as yet unknown. The masses in American as yet being shaped, educated only by advertising billboards, newspapers run for profits, educational institutions as yet all being controlled from up above, by business.[19]

Here, Anderson's hatred of war becomes manifested as anti-industrialism, his horror at Europe after World War I becoming translated into a disgust at an America made powerful by killing. The mechanized aspect of America's role in World War I was terrible to Anderson and when the war ended, the picture of America that offered itself was that of a conservative United States: "...newspapers run for profits, educational institutions as yet all being controlled from up above, by business." Anderson speaks strongly about his anti-war ideas, criticizing the "modern war" and its instantaneous effect on the pronouncement of death.

> Slickness. It is the curse of the world, this slickness...It has grown stronger, the cry, since the First World War. How could it be different? How can any man value life, after being in a modern war? Why lives are thrown away like worn out shows. Killing becomes something glorified. It is any wonder that so much of present day writing of story telling, is concerned with deaths? Death in the

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[19] Memoirs, 272.

morning, death at night, death to animals, death to men, death in poetry, death in prose.[20]

This statement projects anger and despair, sadness at an America taken over by war and afterwards ignoring its ramifications. Anderson seems disgusted by a country that could become inured to "death in the morning, death at night, death to animals, death to men, death in poetry, death in prose" over "life." His representation of this "modern war" implies Anderson's contempt for World War I, his rejection of the belief that America should contribute to the conflict. Anderson emerges as a potential conscientious objector, opposed to war because of his personal exposure to it. Anderson's deep aversion to war coupled with the historic events occurring in America, explain the logic of physical deterioration in Winesburg.

Anderson's own exposure to war is a new context in which to place the Grotesques; in fact there is one passage in Winesburg, Ohio in which Anderson makes a direct reference to his time as a soldier. There is a short moment in the story "An Awakening" in which the town reporter George Willard becomes the subject of a brief but powerful descriptions while he is walking home:

> [He] imagined himself a soldier clad in shining boots that reached to the knees and wearing a sword that jingled as he walked. As a soldier he pictured himself as an inspector, passing before a long line of men who stood at attention... 'There is a law for armies and for men too,' he muttered, lost in reflection. 'The law begins with little things and spreads out until it covers everything. In every little thing there must be order, in the place where men work, in their clothes, in their

[20] Memoirs, 14.

thoughts. I myself must be orderly. I must learn the law. I must get myself into touch with something orderly and big that swings through the nights like a star.'[21] Repetition of the word "law" acts as a metaphor for the overall regimented military environment. The reader can only assume that Anderson is judging the army through his interpretation of military precision when he repeats this word. It is a "law" which requires that everything be in order forcing soldiers to comply with order to an obsessive degree. George says "I *must* get myself into touch with something orderly," as if to say that messy, imperfect actions are unworthy. Here, a militaristic life becomes a metaphor for the status quo. In mocking a soldier's life through George's character, Anderson broadcasts his aversion to war in his literature. Ultimately Anderson's resistance to World War I, coupled with a growing American understanding of the nature of disability due to the results of the war, both contribute to the presence and even prevalence of characters who are "discomforted" or "incapacitated."[22]

Physical Disability in Grotesques

A main facet of Winesburg, Ohio, a concept that is constantly replicated, is the peculiar physical makeup of the inhabitants of the town. The appearance of physically disabled peoples is a major part of the Grotesque. I use the word "depraved" and others from the Oxford English Dictionary to present my own definition of Anderson's characters, as an attachment to his own fictitious "truths." Part of Anderson's creation of the Grotesque becomes his representation of the bodies of townspeople. With their physiques distorted, often the characters are thought of as "incapacitated" in some way. Previous authors have commented on the "disordered" nature that I am trying to present.

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[21] Winesburg, 183.
[22] Oxford English Dictionary

Brom Weber states: "The characters are deluded and solipsistic; they misunderstand themselves and others; they speak jerkily, explosively, mumbling, or are inarticulate; their bodies are deformed or subject to muscular twitches, sometimes remain rigid while parts such as hands or feet move about independently. Frustrated, distorted, violent or passive, aggressive or self-destructive, the citizens of Winesburg are the living dead..."[23] Grotesques are often seen with "muscular twitches" and with hands that "move about independently." Weber's mention of bodies in explosive and mumbling states melds well with my presentation of physical disabilities.

Anderson emphasizes the disabilities of his characters throughout the novel; ironically, the reader is introduced to two doctors' with body "abnormalities." Doctor Reefy is a man whose hands "were extraordinarily large." When the hands were closed they looked like clusters of unpainted wooden balls as large as walnuts fastened together by steel rods."[24] And Doctor Parcival is a character whose "teeth were black and irregular and there was something strange about his eyes. The lid of the left eye twitched; it fell down and snapped up; it was exactly as though the lid of the eye were a window shade and someone stood inside the doctor's head playing the cord."[25] Both doctors within the town are bestowed with small, physical idiosyncrasies that dominate the narrator's descriptions of them in his attempt to portray them as deficient in a bodily way. The character Elizabeth Willard is described this way as well; she is a figure "tall and gaunt and her face was marked with smallpox scars. Although she was but forty-

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[23] Pamphlets on American Writers, 24.
[24] Winesburg, 35.
[25] Winesburg, 49.

five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure."[26] Such abnormalities define or mark all of these characters; they are the heart of the narrator's debilitating descriptions. The teacher Kate Swift is also a character whose physical makeup is somewhat abnormal. "Her complexion was not good and her face was covered with blotches that indicated ill health."[27] This brief but weighted description is enough to designate Kate as one of the multiple characters who live with physical disabilities. And although their bodily conditions may seem minor, together these characters represent the majority of townspeople in Winesburg. Thus, at a basic level, Anderson fundamentally constructs characters who are "incapacitated" and disabled.

As we try to analyze the ramifications of disability, the specific physical exteriors of characters will illuminate the make-up of Anderson's Grotesques. Most often, the physical characterizations of each person become their personal confines; their bodies become cages against themselves. In this way, the corporal disabilities of characters only allow them to "...make frustrated attempts to move beyond their conditions."[28] Anderson constructs these "conditions" with reference to animals. One of the most prominent instances of this is the story "Hands." The character Wing Biddlebaum is described with a bird-like metaphor in conjunction with his hands, a bodily extremity: "The story of Wing Biddlebaum is the story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name."[29] In this way, the bird-like features Anderson assigns to Wing's hands become the representation of his body. And

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[26] Winesburg, 39.
[27] Winesburg, 160.
[28] Robert Dunne, A New Book of the Grotesques, Contemporary Approaches to Sherwood Anderson's Early Fiction (Kent State University Press. Kent, Ohio, 2005) 26.
[29] Winesburg, 28.

because of this, Wing becomes something un-human and ultimately Grotesque: "They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality."[30] Here, Anderson uses the word "grotesque" in relation to Wing's hands. The hands take over his character and because of this the reader understands that his character possesses Grotesque features, such as "restless activity," that accentuate his physical disability.

Another example of this type of animalistic description is in the story "Respectability," which opens with a repellent description of a man ironically named Wash Williams. The chapter begins with a long description of a caged monkey, which is meant to represent Wash's character. Again, Anderson uses an animal body to parallel a character's physical makeup.

> If you have lived in cities and have walked in the park on a summer afternoon, you have perhaps seen, blinking in a corner of his iron cage, a huge, grotesque kind of monkey, a creature with ugly sagging, hairless skin below his eyes and a bright purple underbody. This monkey is a true monster. In the completeness of his ugliness he achieved a kind of perverted beauty. Children stopping before the cage are fascinated, men turn away with an air of disgust, and women linger for a moment, trying perhaps to remember which one of their male acquaintances the thing in some faint way resembles.[31]

The "male acquaintance" whom the women are trying to place is obvious to the reader: "…there would have been for you no mystery in regard to the beast in his cage. 'It is like

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[30] Winesburg, 29.
[31] Winesburg, 121.

Wash Williams'..."[32] And in this passage, Anderson again uses the word "grotesque" to describe the animal Wash is most like. Wash's bestial representation helps to create a character that is removed from his human body and by meshing the human and the animal; Wash's body is further emphasized as Grotesque.

While Anderson stresses the connection between the body, the animal and the Grotesque, how these characters are affected by their appearance is important. Wash and Wing's animalistic physiques serve to estrange and distance them from the people of Winesburg. Because of Wash's bodily makeup and his filthy appearance he becomes separated from the populace of Winesburg. This diminishes any physical bond with other people that occur within the stories. This is certainly true of Wash, whose separation from others, incorporated with his animal-like body, mark him "disordered" because of his abnormal body structure and thus he becomes a Grotesque. "In Winesburg no attention was paid to Wash Williams and his hatred of his fellows. Once Mrs. White, the banker's wife, complained to the telegraphy company, saying that the office in Winesburg was dirty and smelled abominably..." [33] And while Wash retains a job as "...the telegraph operator of Winesburg, [he is] the ugliest thing in town." Throughout his chapter, Wash's dirty body is continually mentioned in an attempt to divorce his character from the town around him, creating a disability that isolates as well as physically changes the body.

In the description of Wing's animalistic features, the distance between Wing and the townspeople of Winesburg is emphasized and often dramatized. Because of Wing's animalistic features, which are manifested in the movement of his hands, he stands apart

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[32] Winesburg, 121.
[33] Winesburg, 122.

from his the other townspeople of Winesburg. And Wing's hands scare even himself: "The hands alarmed their owner;"[34] they also serve as a reason that he "...did not think of himself as in any way part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years...[The hands] became his distinguishing feature...they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality."[35] Like Wash's body, Wing's hands are directly referred to as "grotesque" physical parts. Wing's hands "incapacitate" and "inconvenience" him, all words in keeping with the definition of disability. And because Wing is disabled by definition, he is labeled a Grotesque. These physical manifestations add to the idea of both the Grotesque as a literal bodily rearrangement and an accelerator of alienation from family and friends. The Grotesques in Winesburg emerge as characters whose manifestations of physical disability cut them off from real connections with other characters.

There are other ways in which Anderson defines the physical characteristics of his townspeople as Grotesque. The malformed physical characteristics of the everyday inhabitants of Winesburg are presented in Anderson's writing in multiple ways, one of which is a silencing of dialogue. David Stouck discusses Anderson's word usage in Winesburg in his essay "Sherwood Anderson and the Postmodern Novel," and its relation to characteristics that make him a "postmodern" writer. For Stouck, part of what makes Anderson "postmodern," and at the same time emphasizes the physical disabilities of his characters, is his scant use of actual conversation between characters: "the failure of satisfying communication is reflected in the lack of dialogue. Anderson's Grotesques

[34] Winesburg, 27.
[35] Winesburg, 27-29

speak in short, impassioned outbursts, failing to articulate their pent up feelings."[36] The physical makeup of Winesburg's characters silences them from forming coherent phrases and thus their speech patterns are stunted. This leaves them further alienated from their peers in moments of outburst and quiet, truly never melding within other characters in dialogue. And because part of the classification of a disabled person is their "want of ability" or "inability," the townspeople's lack of communication or inability to communicate designates them as disabled.

The reader can examine many passages in which Anderson's use of silence serves only to accentuate alienation, but there are only a few that seem truly appropriate to accentuate disability. These are passages in which a character's speech is quelled for so long that their true passions, their true emotions are revealed in a disjointed attempt to release themselves from their detachment with others.

The story "Adventure" is one that reflects Anderson's use of silence in order to portray a physical disability within a character and thus their social isolation. The main character within the story is a young woman named Alice Hindman who, after a brief and vibrant love affair at the age of sixteen, remains solemnly at work in Winney's Dry Goods Store. This passionate affair serves to haunt the young woman, who was promised a different life away from the confines of Winesburg when Ned Currie returned to Winesburg to marry her, which never happened. The only dialogue throughout most of this story is truly not dialogue at all but simply Alice speaking to herself about Ned: "Some day when we are married and I can save both his money and my own, we will be

[36]Sherwood Anderson and the Postmodern Novel, 131.

rich. Then we can travel the world."[37] Anderson's deliberate framing of Alice's muteness and her preoccupation with a character whose physical presence she cannot enjoy adds to her flagging social ability. Dunne writes: "[Alice's] idealized vision of having a real lover also contributes to her growing isolation, for she is so entrenched in her rigid pattern of behavior that she seems unmindful of any other viable alternatives in her life."[38] Her final demolition of this silence or "rigid pattern of behavior" comes in the form of an unrelenting need to run naked through the rainy streets of Winesburg. Breaking her muted behavior, Alice tries to connect with a stranger she sees on the road.

> "Alice started to run. A wild, desperate mood took possession of her. 'What do I care who it is. He is alone, and I will go to him,' she thought; and then without stopping to consider the possible result of her madness, called softly. 'Wait!' she cried. 'Don't go away. Whoever you are, you must wait.'"[39]

In an attempt to break from the confines of her own silence, Alice is forced to blurt out her innermost desires: to be with someone.

The writer Robert Dunne attempts to explain Alice's actions. In "A New Book of Grotesques; Contemporary Approaches to Sherwood Anderson's Fiction," he writes: "So confined is she in practicing the 'devices of lonely people' that it takes some unidentifiable urging from outside herself to cause thus sudden release, which effectively, though temporarily, serves a purgative effect for her."[40] While the statement that Alice's brief burst of vocal bravery acts in some way towards her character's emotional release, Alice's "incapacity" to speak is also a cyclical character trait that socially disables her.

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[37] Winesburg, 116.
[38] A New Book of the Grotesques, 87.
[39] Winesburg, 99.
[40] A New Book of the Grotesques, 87.

Even after she calls out to the unknown man on the street she "dropped to the ground and lay trembling. She was so frightened at the thought of what she had done that when the man had gone on his way she did not dare get to her feet, but crawled on hands and knees through the grass to the house."[41] Even though she tries briefly to touch other persons by calling out to them, she ultimately does not make human contact; she shies away from her own attempts in fear. She is socially debilitated and in this way will never allow herself to have a relationship with another person. She has become a Grotesque figure.

The second way Anderson presents disabled characters is within the very stunted, harsher diction used by Winesburg inhabitants. In order to underscore the disjointed nature of Winesburg's characters, Anderson uses wording that seems to mimic the physical tics of his characters, staccato movements paired with jerky wording. The dialogue itself is disjointed and chaotic and Robert Dunne writes a great deal about Anderson's vocabulary: "Anderson through monosyllabic, nonliterary words creates the experience itself happening with all its physical immediacy."[42] In this way, the physical abnormalities stand out to the reader through Anderson's writing and the characters are then formed by the "monosyllabic, nonliterary words."

The best example of Anderson's use of short, explosive language comes from the story "A Man of Ideas," a tale that chronicles the life of the character Joe Welling. A man whose "Words rolled and tumbled from his mouth"[43]; he is a character whose physical disability mimics his language. Joe's character is described in an epileptic-like state that disables him from connecting with society.

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[41] Winesburg, 120.
[42] A New Book of the Grotesques, 310.
[43] Winesburg, 103.

> Joe himself was small of body and in his character unlike anyone else in town. He was like a tiny little volcano that lies silent for days and then suddenly spouts fire...he was like a man who is subject to fits, one who walks among his fellow men inspiring fear because a fit may come upon him suddenly and blow him away into a strange uncanny physical state in which his eyes roll and his legs and arms jerk...For the bystander there was no escape. The excited man breathed into his face, peered into his eyes, pounded upon his chest with a shaking forefinger, demanded, compelled attention.[44]

In this way, Joe molests the people he tries to connect with, inspiring fear among the townspeople of Winesburg. This character is one who is truly disabled, in the sense that his physical body inhibits his ability to connect socially.

In order to truly define Joe's disability and social isolation, I have referred to books that discuss non-fictionalized disability and its place modern day societies. Susan Wendell, whose book "The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability," helps to illuminate the nature of Joe's isolation in defining disability and its relation to community and society. She states that a "handicap" is "the primary causes of a disabled person's inability to do certain things...social."[45] In this way, the reader is able to define Joe's physical handicap in the context of his social interactions, his abnormal fits are defined as abnormal because they are placed within the context of other townspeople.

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[44] Winesburg, 103.
[45] Susan Wendell, The Rejected Body; Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability. (Routledge, New York. 1996) 13.

It is the physical manifestation of Joe's disability that makes him Grotesque but it is also the language that his character uses that promotes the idea that he is disabled. When Joe organizes the Winesburg Baseball Club, his position as coach causes his verbal disability to become more prominent. In a scene where the Club is playing a game, Joe's character verbally explodes: "'Now! Now! Now! Now!' shouted the excited man. 'Watch me! Watch me! Watch my fingers! Watch my hands! Watch my feet! Watch my eyes! Let's work together here! Watch me! In me you see all the movements of the game! Work with me! Work with me! Watch me! Watch me! Watch me!'"[46] Here, in a Tourette-like, fitful state, Joe spews words at his teammates. The physical irregularities in Joe's body become imprinted on his language and disjointed movements come out in his speech. Anderson's stilted and awkward writing stands in for Joe's physical disability and accentuates his inability to be normal. Because of this Joe is Grotesque, his body incapacitating his normal social interaction.

Societal Disability in Grotesques

Anderson's Grotesques are beings who contain characters' physical structure "in disordered or depraved conditions." Their bodies become unusable or repressed, untouchable and isolated. While discussing the physical manifestations of the Grotesques inevitably their interactions with the society of Winesburg emerge. The two aspects of the Grotesque overlap: the physical disorders of the characters are the cause of their social isolation. I will present the characters as Grotesques, people outside of the normal restrictions of society, somewhat unhinged from the people around them. And it also helps to present the Grotesques as characters who do not form themselves but let the

[46] Winesburg, 107.

society around them manufacture their personalities. In this way the Grotesque is used to portray disabled characters affected by their social surroundings. Basic social interactions that should occur within the small town of Winesburg are destroyed: Anderson presents a doctor with no patients, mother's disconnected from their sons and a shop clerk that cannot interact with her customers.

Wendell's book *The Rejected Body* has been extremely helpful in defining an outline for the disabled nature of the Grotesques. Part of the book works to define who is disabled and how society affects the distinctions of disabled citizens. Many of the definitions Wendell constructs are pertinent to Winesburg and in understanding Anderson's construction of Winesburg around his characters. Often very important characters in Winesburg are isolated from their community, family, friends and lovers because of their abnormalities or physical "incapacities," which I have outlined above. Wendell states:

> Recognition of a person's disability by the people s/he is closest to is important not only for receiving their help and understanding when it is needed, but for receiving the acknowledgement and confirmation of her/his reality, so essential for keeping a person socially and psychologically anchored in a community. It is not uncommon for friends and even family members to desert a person who has debilitating symptoms that remain undiagnosed.[47]

This last sentence is very pertinent to Winesburg; often the character who is an "inconvenience" to those around him or her is isolated from their family and friends.

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[47] The Rejected Body, 12.

And because the disabled Grotesques are not given the help they need from their families, they cannot confirm "her/his reality;" they become unhinged in some way, apart from society. I will construct the Grotesques in the context of Wendell's ideas on the nature of disability paired with the dictionary definitions of disability I have stated previously. I believe the combination of the two will compose and frame the social structure that occurs around the Grotesques in Winesburg.

The most prominent example of a character who has become "deserted by" her family and friends is the mother of George Willard, Elizabeth Willard. In the story "Mother," Anderson depicts Elizabeth as a wasted character, a woman deflated by her body's inability to function. The reader must understand Anderson's literary construction of her body in order to assemble Elizabeth's character marginalization by her family and herself. The first description of Elizabeth Willard is debilitating, a direct slight to her physical makeup. She "was tall and gaunt and her face was marked with smallpox scars. Although she was by forty-five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure."[48] Here, in the first sentence of her chapter, Elizabeth is seen as a physically and emotionally withered character. The theme of physical collapse continues as Elizabeth is described within the hotel: "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. The hotel...was now a mere ghost of what a hotel should be.[49]" Here, Elizabeth is marked by her "listlessness," the "faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets," seem to only act as an addition to her physical deformities because of their proximity to her body. The "beds

[48] Winesburg, 38.
[49] Winesburg, 38.

soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men" seem also to only mock her position as caretaker as if these men were taking advantage of her non-ability to maintain the hotel. And just as the hotel remains "a mere ghost of what a hotel should be" Elizabeth remains an outline of her former youth, marred by "smallpox scars and "some obscure disease." Once maintaining a "fire," she now relinquishes it to the old hotel and she remains another in the list of physically deformed characters. Elizabeth is an exhausted character; complexly constructed through her physical form in order to present her distance from her family and her own self.

Elizabeth's decay becomes a point of embarrassment for herself and her family later on in the story and thus acts to further isolate her from her family. At first, Anderson presents Elizabeth's relationship with her son, George, as a rigid or "formal" one, they seem to interact on a very ceremonious and conventional plain. "The communion between George Willard and his mother was outwardly a formal thing without meaning. When she was ill and sat by the window in her room he sometimes went in the evening to make her a visit. They sat by a window that looked over the roof of a small frame building into Main Street."[50] Elizabeth and George are simple here; the only reference to their relationship is made during this scene where they are soberly sitting. But as the story continues, the dynamics between mother and son are altered and Anderson creates a distinct separation within the Willard family because of Elizabeth's disabilities:

> In the evening when the sons at in the room with his mother, the silence mad them both feel awkward. Darkness came on and the evening train came in at the

[50] Winesburg, 41.

station...George Willard arose and crossing the room fumbled for the doorknob. Sometimes he knocked again a chair, making it scrape along the floor. By the window sat the sick woman, perfectly still, listless. Her long hands, white and bloodless, could be seen drooping over the ends of the arms of the chair. 'I think you had better be out among the boys. You are too much indoors,' she said, striving to relieve the embarrassment of the departure. 'I thought I would take a walk,' replied George Willard, who felt awkward and confused.[51]

Anderson does not refer to Elizabeth by her name but only as "the sick woman," as if her identity has been replaced by her physical disabilities. George's stumble to the door in an abrupt, almost abrasive ending to his time with his mother serves to create a tension between Elizabeth and her son, which is even more accentuated by the description of her physical "impotence." She is "perfectly still, listless;" a character who remains unmoving even in the presence of her son. And both Elizabeth and George are relieved when George leaves the room, the "awkward" silence that brings them together ending when George "stumbles."

While Elizabeth's relationship with her son may seem strained, her romantic relationship with her husband, Tom Willard, is exponentially more forced. Elizabeth's relationship with her husband is an unwritten misadventure, a marriage that occurred long ago in Winesburg history but is now twisted into silence and anger. Part of Elizabeth's anger with her husband stems from his ignorance of her silent misery; his inability to recognize her illnesses becoming the force behind their non-verbal marriage. But unlike the awkward silence that haunts her relationship with her son, the only moment where

[51] Winesburg, 41-42.

Elizabeth seems to emerge from her illnesses is when she vows to kill her husband. Anderson essentially creates two Elizabeths: one a very sickly, disabled, aged woman and the other a Grotesque who wishes to break out of her silence to kill her husband and end her own disabled life.

> No ghostly worn-out figure should confront Tom Willard, but something quite unexpected and startling. Tall and with dusky cheeks and hair that fell in a mass from her shoulders...The figure would be silent-it would be swift and terrible...coming out of the shadows, stealing noiselessly along and holding the long wicked scissors in her hand...'I will stab him,' she said aloud. 'He has chosen to be the voice of evil and I will kill him. When I have killed him something will snap within myself and I will die also. It will be a release for all of us.'[52]

After thinking about killing her husband, Elizabeth hopes to disengage herself from her husband. Her role as an "incapacitated" woman escalates into a vengeful wife in a way that portrays to the reader her "fleeting moment of 'release.'"[53] But Elizabeth's attempt to redeem herself to a point past her disabilities is ruined by her physical inabilities and her strength fades: "The strength that had been as a miracle in her body left and she half reeled across the floor, clutching at the back of the chair in which she had spent so many long days staring out over the tin roofs into the main street of Winesburg."[54] Ultimately the reader can find a cyclical rhetoric within Anderson's writing when the last vision of

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[52] Winesburg, 45-46.
[53] A New Book of the Grotesques, 83.
[54] Winesburg, 47.

Elizabeth's doomed attempt to kill her husband is the antiquated chair that she will forever be confined to.

Elizabeth's attempt to kill a family member is linked with Alice's story "Adventure." Both are female characters whose stories revolve around their fight against their disabilities. Alice's life as a Grotesque revolves around her inability to let go of the past and her disability revolves around the silence that this causes. Elizabeth is the same way, alienating herself within her old hotel, left only to think about the decay of her marriage and her relationship with her son. Elizabeth remains, like Alice, a character who "evolve[s] over time into a physical and psychological Grotesque, someone who would continually return in her mind to that period in her life when she might have found a more viable outlet than the static conventions of marriage."[55]

While both women are disabled, they also both try to move past their disabilities through bursts of energized release. She momentarily breaks from her disability to try to engage another person but ultimately returns to it when she shies away from the responsive stranger. Elizabeth exhibits the same characteristic disabilities and in attempting to break from her silence and release herself from her routines declares, "...I will kill him. When I have killed him something will snap within myself and I will die also. It be a release for all of us."[56] But, like Alice, Elizabeth must back down from her attempt to break free from her disability and she collapses in a physical breakdown. She ultimately cannot free herself from her family, a social institution that does not recognize nor help her in her disabilities.

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[55] A New Book of the Grotesques, 83.
[56] Winesburg, 45.

I have previously mentioned Grotesques as characters who are socially incapacitated because of their disabilities; they remain disengaged throughout their interactions with friends, family and lovers. It is these romantic interactions that exemplify the word "impotent" to portray disability. When the word impotent is applied to the Grotesque it can mean both sexual inability and powerlessness or a kind of weakness. The most conspicuous way that the word "impotent" can be recognized within Winesburg's characters is through male characters' interactions (or lack of interactions) with women. In this way, this aspect of disability, the "powerlessness" or sexual inability of men becomes part the definition of the Grotesques. And it is this impotence that begins to isolate the Grotesques socially from the town of Winesburg.

The first example of a male Grotesque lost within his own sexual form of impotence is Wing Biddlebaum, a character already established as physically caged or trapped. The reason for Wing's social isolation is multi-tiered. Wing's physical disability is his ever-moving hands, extremities that are never quiet or calm. It is because of this physical "incapacity" that Wing become sexually abnormal, touching and caressing the young boys he teaches. Wing's sexual history is what sets him apart from the town of Winesburg.

Wing is a man whose romantic history marks him as a character who is sexually abnormal; he is a character who shies away from women and instead is linked sexually to his young male pupils. Wing was a teacher in Pennsylvania before coming to Winesburg and he was fired from that position when he was accused of abusing his students. He was forced to change his name from Adolph Myers to the somewhat softer sounding Wing

Biddlebaum. This establishes his position as abnormal and distant even before his appearance in Winesburg:

> And then the tragedy. A half-witted boy of the school became enamored of the young master...Strange, hideous accusations fell from his loose-hung lips. Through the Pennsylvania town went a shiver. Hidden, shadowy doubts that had been in men's minds concerning Adolph Myers were galvanized into beliefs. The tragedy did not linger. Trembling lads were jerked out of bed and questioned. 'He put his arms about me,' said one. 'His fingers were always playing in my hair,' said another...Again and again the fathers of the boys had talked of the hands. 'Keep your hands to yourself,' the saloon keeper had roared, dancing with fury in the schoolhouse yard.[57]

Wing's "tragedy" becomes his sexual desire for his students and their parents' belief that he is molesting their children. Anderson portrays this aspect of Wing ambiguously, leaving the deciding vote on his abuse in the hands of "a half-witted boy." Wing is neither an overt homosexual nor an overt pedophile: "He still hunger[s] for the presence of the boy, [because the boy has become] the medium through which he expressed his love of man..."[58] Yet, Anderson portrays an abnormal sexual experience through Wing's history. "Wing Biddlebaum is not ugly, but misshapen, without and within, misinformed, his form wrongly taken...from those who label him 'homosexual.'"[59] It's exactly the word "misshapen" that should be used to describe Wing, he is in some way socially disfigured: Grotesque. This leads the reader to define Wing's "impotence" as simply

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[57] Winesburg, 33.
[58] Winesburg, 33.
[59] Kim Townsend, Sherwood Anderson (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1987) 111.

powerlessness against his own disfigurement in society; he relinquishes his restraint against sexual relations that are not deemed acceptable in society. Here Anderson's narrative shows a clear intention to portray social pressures and societal labels as characteristics of the Grotesque. Robert Dunne reiterates this point when he writes: "For [Wing], who [associates] intimacy or sexuality with genuine fulfillment, understanding is forever out of reach, because their overt words...regarding sexuality are always being gauged by this 'rule of law,' whether they themselves or others measure their behavior this way."[60]

The reader must understand though that while Wing's sexual behavior falls under the category of "impotent" it is not only because of his powerlessness in the classroom but also his physically disabilities. Wing remains a character controlled by his convulsive hands and his inability to restrain them is his disability and what makes him a Grotesque. Anderson describes Wing's hands in his classroom: "Here and there went his hands, caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about the tousled heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also. In a way the voice and the hands, the stroking of the shoulders and the touching of the hair...By the caress that was in his fingers he expressed himself."[61] Wing's hands and the disability that they carry with them become the target of his abusive accusations. Ultimately, it is his physical disability that becomes the reason for Wing's "impotence" which then become the accelerator of Wing's social ostracism. These are all the reasons why Wing can be categorized as a Grotesque.

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[60] A New Book of the Grotesques, 78.
[61] Winesburg, 32.

The next character that is disabled by his "impotence" is the Reverend Curtis Hartman, a man who appears in the story "The Strength of God." In this story Anderson creates a devoutly religious character who is tempted by the female form, the teacher Kate Swift. As in "Hands," the word impotence can be read as a powerlessness or vulnerability in that the Reverend remains tempted by a figure he cannot socially possess because he is married and a man of God. It is the Reverend's closeness with his religion that makes him impotent and ultimately "incapacitated" by Kate.

The Reverend is described as being quiet, devout and withdrawn: "He was forty years old, and by his nature very silent and reticent."[62] Initially the Reverend is both disturbed and disgusted by Kate Swift's body: "...the minister was shocked to see, in the upper room of the house next door, a woman lying in her bed and smoking a cigarette while she read a book...He was horror stricken at the thought of a woman smoking and trembled also to think that his eyes, just raised from the pages of the book of God, had looked upon the bare shoulders and white throat of a woman."[63] Here, Anderson forces the reader to recognize the Reverend's conservatism and his initial repulsion of Kate Swift's body. But as the story progresses the Reverend wants to look more upon Kate's body, to observe a female other than his wife. "...he began to want also to look again at the figure lying white and quiet in the bed...the carnal desire to 'peep'...When thoughts of Kate Swift came into his head, he smiled and raised his eyes to the skies. 'Intercede for me, Master,' he muttered, 'keep me in the narrow path intent on Thy work.'"[64] Here,

[62] Winesburg, 147,
[63] Winesburg, 148.
[64] Winesburg, 150-151.

it is his religion that keeps the Reverend from his sexual deviance, his zealotry becoming his impotence.

But if it is his firm conviction in God that makes him disabled, it is his vision of Kate Swift as God that causes him to become unbalanced and disabled by his religious beliefs. In an outburst similar to those of Alice and Elizabeth, the Reverend runs to George Willard in a break from his silence:

> 'The ways of God are beyond human understanding,'...He began to advance upon the young man, his eyes glowing and his voice ringing with fervor. 'I have found the light,' he cried. 'After ten years in this town, God has manifested himself to me in the body of a woman...God has appeared to me in the person of Kate Swift, the school teacher, kneeling naked on a bed.'...At the door he stopped and after looking up and down the deserted street, turned again to George Willard. 'I am delivered. Have no fear.'[65]

In order to subdue his sexual desires, the Reverend must translate Kate into a religious icon and in some way this makes his lust almost acceptable. The writer Robert Dunne comments on the Reverend's role as a Grotesque in relation to Kate Swift:

> ...when [the Reverend] is drawn out of his safe existence by passion-something difficult to neatly regulate – he tries to understand it by objectifying Kate Swift into a religious emblem and transforming his lustful voyeurism into a religious test...However, the only way he can deal with his unregulated feelings is by

[65] Winesburg, 155-156.

sublimating them under his rigid orthodoxy, and as a result he remains a grotesque figure who reconfirms his static condition by the end of the tale.[66]

In a way, Dunne is suggesting that because the Reverend returns to his original impotence, his original suppression of sexual desires, he is Grotesque. It is the inability to break free from his cyclical religious enthusiasm that makes his character a disabled Grotesque. And he must mold Kate Swift into a "religious emblem" in order to remain within the bindings of his Grotesque nature. Ultimately, like Alice and Elizabeth, the Reverend's burst of momentary clarification only fails to break the bond of Grotesque disability momentarily, but ultimately he must remain within the confines of his religious fanaticism.

Environmental Disability in Grotesques

Thus far, the Grotesque has been explicated in two different contexts: the physical and the social. But Sherwood Anderson envisioned another aspect of the disabled and the Grotesque for his characters. Anderson is an author known for his place within the genre of Realism, closely related to Naturalism. In keeping with this genre, Anderson emerges an author who was dismayed by America's path toward industrialism. His anti-industrial stance is personally close to him, "growing up in small Ohio villages...at a time when men could still watch and wait for the new industrial world to come in...the luxury of dreaming away on the last margin of the old pre-factory freedom, of being suspended between two worlds."[67] In a union meeting he once described mechanization as "...this beautiful new majestic thing in the world, the machine, now crushing millions of people under its iron heel, this thing that sprang out of the brain of men, out from

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[66] A New Book of the Grotesques, 76-77.
[67] On Native Grounds, 167.

under the cunning fingers of men."[68] Given that this strong admonition of industrialism is one of many described in his memoirs, it is only natural that the inhumane force of industrialism is present in the town of Winesburg. Anderson creates Winesburg as a deeply industrialized setting encompassed by a strictly nature-based surrounding. Winesburg becomes a town that holds all the characteristics of America's "erosion of close human relationships,"[69] erosion often found in the acceleration of industrialism. While each character is living in disjointed social alienation, the town of Winesburg itself remains a remote industrialized state amidst acres of cornfields.

Winesburg, Ohio is a novel focused on a small town and thus it is often categorized as "one more installment in the tradition of American small-town literature."[70] But this definition is too narrow a "tradition" to place Winesburg within; Winesburg is a complex and stimulating dialogue about the American Midwest and so it becomes a microcosm for American social and industrial change. Winesburg emerges as a place for America's industrialism to take form, a town that accentuates the ramifications of industrialism and dramatizes a debate between the natural and the mechanical. Winesburg is Anderson's creation of a place that does not fit in the natural environment of its surrounding. While Anderson is commenting on an a rise of American industry with the formation of an overtly robotic Winesburg, his portrayal of the unrefined world becomes distorted by a modern view of the natural, creating an environment outside of Winesburg that is somehow corrupted by newer more modern commercialization. In a literary battle of a newly industrialized town and the slowly

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[68] Sherwood Anderson, Kim Townesend, 272.
[69] Welford Dunaway Taylor, Sherwood Anderson (Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. New York, 1977) 1.
[70] Sherwood Anderson, Taylor, 35.

inorganic world outside of Winesburg, Anderson portrays the American struggle between a mechanized inside and a grassy outside slowly becoming corrupted by the urban and the pull of the commercial.

The environment of Winesburg serves to paint the Grotesques in a new way. While they are physically disabled and socially detached, they are also disabled by their surroundings in the town and struggle with the isolation that comes with Winesburg's own industrialized separation from the natural. Each character, trapped within his disabled self, is faced with the natural outdoors, unable to replace the longing for one with the abandonment of the other. There seems to be an emphatic divide between the characters in their choice of environment; a male character may choose the outdoors and a female may choose the confines of a home. This serves to present a further socially divided Winesburg based solely on environment, a most isolated group of Grotesques. The bisected Winesburg acts as a force to move characters farther from each other as they become encompassed by the struggle between the natural and the commercialized town.

Anderson fears the deterioration of a country world, an organic place that once used to harbor lucrative farms and beautiful vegetation. Urban life and the modern machine become encroaching entities in Winesburg. Anderson presents these ideas primarily through Joe Welling's character, a man whose words and gesticulations continually stream forth. The reader should understand that through Joe's words emerges Anderson's industrial nightmare, an environment deadened in an extreme deterioration.

> Suppose this- suppose all of the wheat, the corn, the oats, the peas, the potatoes, were all by some miracle swept away. Now here we are, you see, in this country. There is a high fence built all over us. We'll suppose that. No one can get over

> the fence and all the fruits of the earth are destroyed, nothing left but these wild things, these grasses. Would we be done for? I ask you that. Would we be done for?[71]

Here, Joe depicts a "country," in both senses, so isolated and destroyed that no living inhabitant has access to the natural and the organic. This vision is one of a decimated world: "all the fruits of the earth are destroyed," and the land has isolated itself from all pure beauty; "No one can get over the fence." Anderson's strong aversion to the industrial is manifested in this passage, the possible outcome of America outlined here in the likeness of a war zone.

Anderson presents his opinions about the industrial through his Grotesques as they become entangled in the two environments of Winesburg. The story of Dr. Reefy, the doctor who never sees a patient, is one that highlights the struggle between the enclosed, infrastructure of Winesburg and the decaying outdoors. As he does with all Grotesques, Anderson creates physical abnormalities for Dr. Reefy which make his body stand out to the reader. Much like Wing, Dr. Reefy's hands become his point of inability, the defining characteristic for his position as a Grotesque. Anderson writes: "When the hands were closed they looked like clusters of unpainted wooden balls as large as walnuts fastened together by steel rods."[72] This quote establishes Dr. Reefy's connection to balls or round objects, this shape will define his character and it's relation to the natural environment outside of Winesburg.

Dr. Reefy's hands become the disconnection between Anderson natural and industrial environments. Anderson makes a comparison between Dr. Reefy's hands and

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[71] Winesburg, 110.
[72] Winesburg, 35.

the apples that grow in the orchards outside of Winesburg. In establishing a character's connection to the natural, outside of the town, Anderson creates a parallel with an organic environment. This becomes one aspect of Dr. Reefy's character, one aspect of disability that is strung between the natural and the industrial.

> The apples have been taken from the trees by the pickers. They have been put in barrels and shipped to the cities where they will be eaten in apartments that are filled with books, magazines, furniture and people. On the trees are only a few gnarled apples that the pickers have rejected. They look like the knuckles of Doctor Reefy's hands...Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples.[73]

All at once, Dr. Reefy becomes connected through his physical abnormality to the natural environment, while Anderson is also commenting on the nature of modern industrialism. The best apples go to the industrial enclaves (cities), where people live in congestion and become defined by their "books, magazines, furniture." The leftover deformed apples are for the country people and "only the few" know about their "sweetness." Anderson builds a metaphor around the country apples and the city apples; by presenting beautifully tasting country apples, he is presenting a rural beauty now forgotten by modern America. In this way, Anderson also creates a natural environment that has somewhat already been destroyed; trees that are utilized only for their aesthetic value. The wholesome and unrefined position of the orchard has been destroyed by the wants and needs of the city.

While Dr. Reefy's partially represents a naturalized characterization, when Anderson describes the Doctor's office in town, the claustrophobic and dehumanizing

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[73] Winesburg, 36.

nature of the town becomes apparent to the reader. "He smoked a cob pipe and after his wife's death sat all day in his empty office close by a window that was covered in cobwebs. He never opened the window. Once on a hot day in August he tried but found it stuck fast and after that he forgot all about it."[74] Dr. Reefy's office is restricting and uneasy. Anderson's writing lingers on the fact that Dr. Reefy cannot ever alleviate his discomfort even when he attempts to because he is within the confines of Winesburg's overly constructed environment. Also, Dr. Reefy is completely alone, the description of his office serves to emphasize the isolation he experiences within the mechanized town. Ultimately, Anderson makes the reader imagine a situation in which Dr. Reefy is constrained by the two environments and must continually straddle both. This inability to be comfortable in either situation is what makes Dr. Reefy a Grotesque, fully isolated from others amongst an orchard and an office.

The character Wing Biddlebaum is another Grotesque who remains isolated and somehow caged by his connection with both the natural and industrial within Winesburg. Wing, a Grotesque who already possesses an estrangement from the society of the town, is introduced within the confines of the fields that surround Winesburg and the man made highway that leads to the town. He is caught between a newly present industrialization of Winesburg and the remaining agriculture of the country. Wing's place amongst a segregated Winesburg continues to accentuate his isolation from the town.

> Upon the half decayed veranda of a small frame house that stood near the edge of a ravine near the town of Winesburg, Ohio, a fat little old man walked nervously up and down. Across a long field that had been seeded for clover by that had

[74] Winesburg, 35.

> produced only a dense crop of yellow mustard weeds, he could see the public highway along which went a wagon filled with berry pickers returning from the fields.[75]

Here, Anderson creates a dichotomy between the "long field" and the "public highway." The natural environment is also slightly disabled in its own way, the field had been "seeded for clover but that had produced only a dense crop of yellow mustard weeds," and in this way it appears to have rebelled against the industrial act of "seeding." Anderson's language used here, also serves to italicize the isolation Wing experiences within the Winesburg environment. "...Wing Biddlebaum is literally and figuratively isolated from the town, and he is fully conscious that his isolation is equated to punishment for his past transgressions. Living a crumbling house that 'stood *near* the edge of a ravine *near* the town of Winesburg, Ohio,'...that is also separated from the 'public highway' by a 'long field,' Wing is totally ostracized from society."[76] Wing's isolation is in part due to the strong separation between the natural and industrial, the highway cutting an incision within the field. As Robert Dunne has pointed out, the word "near" is exaggerated by its double usage and this only serves to accentuate both Wings' proximity to the town and his inability to connect with it. Again, the natural and the industrial seem to harness the Grotesques into isolation. This isolation continually brings Anderson's desperate futuristic vision into the forefront of his novel, creating an environment that is both disparaging of the industrial and hopeful for the natural.

Winesburg, Ohio is a catalogued novel, readers have remembered and interpreted its meaning for decades. While the novel most basically chronicles a small town in the

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[75] Winesburg, 27.
[76] A New Book of the Grotesques, 46-47.

Midwest, Anderson's work represents a beginning, the beginning of an exploration into the American west. The Grotesques are very real human examinations; they represent a collective body that remains disabled only when investigated in the context of their physical, social and environmental surroundings. "Anderson was fascinated by the undersurface of that life and became the voice of its terrors and exultations..."[77] These "terrors and exultations" are both beautiful and "incapacitating." They represent a "depraved" community, a place of "discomfort" and "disorder," to quote the distinguishing definitions of disability.

Alfred Kazin describes Anderson's work as a fiction of dreams:

> There was always an image in Anderson's books- an image of life as a house of doors, of human beings knocking at them and stealing through one door only to be stopped short before another as if in a dream. Life was a dream to him, and he and his characters seemed always to be walking along its corridors. Who owned the house of life? How did one escape after all?[78]

This image that Kazin describes, the image of a wandering, restless characterization, is a description of the Grotesques. How do they escape their disabled existence? I believe Anderson's answer would rest in the idea that they never escape. Trapped within their isolating disabilities, their physical bodies and their enclosed environment, the Grotesques have shifted into Anderson's life as a nightmare.

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[77] On Native Grounds, 166.
[78] On Native Grounds, 167.

Structured Disability in Jonathan Lethem's *Motherless Brooklyn*

Chapter 2

Tourette's is a knotty and difficult disease; its manifestations remain completely different in each patient. Tourette's wavers from an unquenchable display of tics and gesticulations to less noticeable mannerisms and compulsions. The disease can become severe or mild, is it measured in "the degree to which they cause impairment or disruption of the patient's ongoing activities and daily life."[79] Tourette's Syndrome "is 'characterized, above all, by convulsive tics, by involuntary mimicry or repetition of others' words or actions (echolalia and ecopraxia), and by the involuntary or compulsive utterances of curses and obscenities (coprolalia),' leading some to 'strange, often witty' associations, others to 'a constant, restless reacting to the environment, a lunging at and sniffing of everything or a sudden flinging of objects.'"[80] In medical terms, Tourette's is a combination of all these physical disabilities, often coupled with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

The ramifications of Tourette's have been chronicled by Oliver Sacks, the author of The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat. He describes Tourette's as a blessing and a curse, a disability that heightens aspects of human life and in doing so disintegrates others: "[Tourette's] is the simultaneous gift, the delight, the anguish, conferred by excess. And it is felt, by insightful patients, as questionable and paradoxical: 'I have too much energy,' one Tourette patient said. 'Everything is too bright, too powerful, too

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[79] Tourette Syndrome Information Support Site, http://www.Tourette's-disorder.com/symptoms/symptoms.html

[80] Ronald Shliefer, The Poetics of Tourette Syndrome: Language, Neurobiology and Poetry (New Literary History, 2001, 32, 563-584) 565.

much. It is a feverish energy, a morbid brilliance.'"[81] This affliction, a disease that creates an exaggerated experience of the world, can lead to a patient turning inward and focusing on the minute. The "too bright, too powerful" creates an instinct within a patient to latch onto the smallest image or detail: "Though the tendency to tic is innate in Tourette's, the particular form of tics often has a personal or historical origin. Thus a name, a sound, a visual image, a gesture, perhaps seen years before and forgotten, may first be unconsciously echoed or imitated and then preserved in the stereotype form of a tic."[82] It is this essential component of Tourette's that is most often used in Lethem's fictional representation of the disease.

While Tourette's become rhythmic circle of a single image, Lethem presents his own fictional representation of his own Tourette's. There is one single paragraph in Motherless Brooklyn that places Lionel's disability in the most concrete explanation. Early in the novel, Lethem stops all narration to show the presence of disability within his main character.

> Have you noticed yet that I relate everything to my Tourette's? Yup, you guessed it, it's a tic. Counting is a symptom, but counting symptoms is also a symptom, a tic *plus extra.* I've got meta-Tourette's. Thinking about ticcing, my mind racing, thoughts reaching to touch every possible symptom. Touching touching. Counting counting. Thinking thinking. Mentioning mentioning Tourette's. It's sort of like talking about telephones over the telephone, or mailing letters

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[81] Oliver Sacks, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat (Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, 1987) 90.
[82] The Poetics of Tourette Syndrome, 566.

describing the location of various mailboxes. Or like a tugboater whose favorites anecdote concerns actual tugboats.[83]

This is how Lethem presents Tourette's in his novel, both outside of the medical definitions and within their confines at the same time. This "meta-Tourette's" echoes what Sacks' patients call "too bright, too powerful, too much." And the continual "counting, touching and mentioning" becomes the fictional representation of the ticcing and repetition found in most Tourette's patients. This passage represents Lethem's Tourette's in a way that is neither completely a medical term nor unrepresentative of a distinct medical history.

Lethem utilizes the physical aspects of Tourette's in his novel and he discusses the disease in conjunction with the environment. The novel takes place in Brooklyn, a monumental city of constant movement and migration. Brooklyn, much like Tourette's itself, is constantly ticcing, forever tweaking and touching its inhabitants. In such a large and convoluted place, often individuals can feel alone and at a loss in their surroundings. Brooklyn then becomes an environment for sequestered peoples, in this way, directly relatable to Tourette's and used by Lethem as a space that leads to the exacerbation or creation of the disability. I believe one of Lethem's main fictional ideas is that behind each tic and bark there is an environmental factor as well as physical, Brooklyn as a Tourettic city. As Bennett Kravitz writes, "...in the postmodern world, we can take the relationship between culture and disease to a more complex level—that is, that culture is either the origin or catalyst of certain diseases...The more medical and educational personnel are trained to spot Tourette's Syndrome, the more cases appear in the literature,

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[83] Jonathan Lethem, Motherless Brooklyn (Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, New York, 1999) 192.

so that this phenomenon can also be called cultural."[84] Tourette's emerges as a disability controlled by Lethem's fictional representation and the culture of Brooklyn becomes the "origin or catalyst" for Lionel's disability. In this way, Lethem's view of disability, in the context of Brooklyn, becomes a comment on Tourette's within a society or the culture within that society.

When I asked Lethem about the social affects of disability on an individual and what this meant in the context of Brooklyn, his answer encompassed an overarching understanding of isolation as a disability. "The combination of Tourette's and Brooklyn's street language, which occurred to me early on, seemed extremely fortuitous and became one of the predominant themes of the book. I often describe the comparison as a kind of 'deliberate mistake' – by acting as if I thought Tourette's was a condition that was native and peculiar to Brooklyn, I discovered my material."[85] In this way, I want the reader to understand that the context of Brooklyn is perfectly mirrored in the manifestation of Tourette's within the novel. This is true of Winesburg as well, when the culture of both industrialism and naturalism engage and penetrate the Grotesque's disabilities. The overall culture of Brooklyn, like the overall township of Winesburg, is what makes Tourette's part of the Grotesque and surrounds the presence of the disease within the context of the physical and the social. The "street language" that Lethem mentions becomes the verbal inter-workings of Tourette's. And from the physical

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[84] Bennet Kravitz, The Culture of Disease of the Dis-ease of Culture in Motherless Brooklyn and Eve's Apple (The Journal of American Culture, Vol.26, Number 2, June 2003) 172.

[85] This quote came from a series of answers Jonathan Lethem was kind enough to give after presenting him with some questions for this thesis.

disabilities that appear through Tourette's, there is an overarching understanding of the main character's isolation and estrangement from the society around him.

Just as I have constructed the Grotesques in the previous chapter, I will set up an understanding of what makes the main character, Lionel Essrog, disabled. In the context of the environment of Brooklyn, the society around Lionel and the physical manifestations of his disability, Lionel will emerge both as a disabled character but also as a character who seems to remember the Grotesques in *Winesburg*.

Lionel's physical demonstrations of Tourette's are clearly stated in the novel. They become the main construction of the novel, remaining the only context for the book. While the Grotesques remained physically and verbally disabled; Wing's ever-moving hands, Wash's unclean, animalistic body, Alice's silent body, Joe's overly verbal characterization, Elizabeth's quiet disintegration and the Reverend and Wing's overly sexualized bodies, most of their disabilities are fictionally manifested within Lionel as well. Lionel's fictional Tourette's floats between the overflowing verbal life of Joe, the ebullient and active body of Wing and then crosses over to the withdrawn, repressed language of Alice and Elizabeth. In this way, all of the disabilities of Anderson's characters are represented by Lionel and his struggle with Tourette's. I will examine the passages in which Lionel's physical body becomes both a manifestation of his disability and at the same time remains reminiscent of Anderson's Grotesques.

On the very first page of Motherless Brooklyn, Lethem quickly presents Lionel's physical manifestation of his Tourette's. The disability is explained in a few short bursts:

> I've got Tourette's. My mouth won't quit, though mostly I whisper or subvocalize like I'm reading aloud, my Adam's apple bobbing, jaw muscle

beating like a miniature heart under my cheek, the noise suppressed, the words escaping silently, mere ghosts of themselves, husks empty of breath and tone.[86]

Here, the dichotomy between noise and silence, words "suppressed" and words detonated so powerfully that they cannot be stopped. The important part of this passage is the oppositional explanation of Tourette's, the silence and the noise. Lethem himself has stated that he "saw the design of the book as taking partly the form of a series of opposites: verbal noise versus silence..."[87] And in this way, the overall form of Lionel's Tourette's resembles Anderson's characters as they struggle with their own silence or their own inability to quell their words.

Next, still remaining on the first page, Lethem continues to describe the physical displays of Tourette's on Lionel's body. In this passage, the "words" that escape unsuppressed begin to emerge as a parallel to Lionel's forever moving body.

> In this diminished form the words rush out of the cornucopia of my brain to course over the surface of the world, tickling reality like fingers on piano keys. Caressing, nudging...They placate, interpret, massage. Everywhere they're smoothing down imperfections, putting hairs in place, putting ducks in a row, replacing divots. Counting and polishing the silver. Patting old ladies gently on the behind, eliciting a giggle...It's an itch at first. Inconsequential. But that itch is soon a torrent behind a straining dam. Noah's flood. That itch is my whole life. Here is comes now. Cover your ears. Build an ark. 'Eat me!' I scream.[88]

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[86] Motherless Brooklyn, 1.
[87] This is another answer from a series of questions Lethem answered regarding this thesis.
[88] Motherless Brooklyn, 2.

Like Wing's ever present hands that "fiddled about the bare white forehead as though arranging a mass of tangled locks,"[89] Lionel's words work in the same jumping way. The constant "smoothing down" and "putting ducks in a row," is distinctly Wing-esque. Wing's "stroking of the shoulders and the touching of the hair were a part of the schoolmaster's effort to carry a dream into the young minds. By the caress that was in his fingers he expressed himself."[90]

And just as Lionel's words fondle and embrace those around him in conjunction with his Tourette's disability, Wing's hands touch and retouch those around him because of his disability. The physicality of Lionel's disability is close to Wing's; the two characters experience the same final bursting forth of their worst fears: Lionel's screams and Wing's molestations. Both characters are controlled by their intermittent disabilities, their uncontrollable movements, either physical or verbal.

There is another passage in which Lionel's Tourette's seems to mimic or echo Anderson's Wing Biddelbaum and his disability. Lethem explains Lionel's Tourette's in a more in-depth format, creating the character's history with the disability.

> ...I had begun to overflow with reaching, tapping, grabbing and kissing urges- those compulsions emerged first, while language for me was still trapped like a roiling ocean under the calm floe of ice...I'd begun reaching for doorframes, kneeling to grab at skittering loosened sneaker laces...incessantly tapping the metal-pipe legs of the schoolroom desks and chairs in search of certain ringing tones, and worst, grabbing and kissing my fellow Boys.[91]

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[89] Winesburg, 27.
[90] Winesburg, 31.
[91] Motherless Brooklyn, 45.

Much like Wing's inappropriate touching and caressing, Lionel's uncontrollable kissing becomes part of his disability. This manifestation of Tourette's is similar to Wing's disability; the two are constantly circling their environments with their rapping and touching. Lethem's use of various verbs in this passage serves to emphasize the constant action that runs Lionel's disability: the words "reaching, tapping, grabbing and kissing" all frame the passage in the context of Lionel's Tourette's.

Lethem also works to frame disability in a physical way through the verbal manifestations of Tourette's. Although this may seem like an oxymoron, the repetition of words found in Tourette's patients can become a metaphor for the bodily manifestation of the disability. In this way, Lionel's words become material themselves; they become metaphors for the physicality of the disability. "Tourette Syndrome, then, situated 'partway between meaningless jerks or noises and meaningful acts' at the 'interface of mind and body,' seems to take up the very materiality of language and underlines its materiality even as it also preserves it as language." Here, Lionel's seemingly "meaningless jerks or noises" become connected with his language, trapping him within his Tourette's as Joe Welling, Wash Williams or Wing are trapped in their disabilities.

Just as Anderson's characters were trapped within the confines of their body by their disability, Lionel is continually trapped by his involuntary word play. The figure of the "imprisoned bird"[92] in Wing's character or the "beast in his cage"[93] that comes to describe Wash becomes manifested in Lethem's character Lionel as well.

> 'Dickweed,' I said. I tried to mask it in another sneeze, which made something in my neck pop. I twitched and spoke again. 'Dickeyweed! Dicketyweed!' I was

[92] Winesburg, 28.
[93] Winesburg, 121.

trapped in a loop of self…' Restrictaweed, detectorwood, vindictaphone,' said I, prisoner of my syndrome. I grabbed Toney back, my hands exploring his collar, fingers running inside it like an anxious, fumbling lover.[94]

Lionel is "trapped in a loop of self," continually recreating new forms of words that circle and change around his disability. Lethem uses the word "prisoner" to characterize Lionel within his "syndrome." Here, Lionel's Tourettic words become the means by which his disability morphs into a way of reading the world, the way in which his Tourette's grows and embraces this idea of the "materiality of language." In the "interface of mind and body," Lionel's words become his bodily disability and the reader can see this as his hands explore collars, "fingers running inside of it like an anxious, fumbling lover." Caged within his language and his disability, Lionel becomes connected to Anderson's characters, becomes a disabled figure not unlike those of Winesburg.

The phrase "trapped in a loop of self" resonates even more in a passage where Lethem presents Lionel's name for the first time in the novel. His "self," represented in the form of his name, becomes an incessant form of Tourette's. His name becomes his disability:

Lionel, my name. Frank and the Minna Men pronounced it to rhyme with *vinyl*.

Lionel Essrog. *Line-all.*

Liable Guesscog.

Final Escrow.

Ironic Pissclam.

And so on.

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[94] Motherless Brooklyn, 78.

> My own name was the original verbal taffy, by now stretched to filament-thin threads that lay all over the floor of my echo-chamber skull. Slack, the flavor all chewed out of it.[95]

Lionel becomes a word to add to a Tourettic vocabulary, the characters own self becomes his disability in the form of the word that names him. And, like the "caged bird" of Wing's character, Lionel is caged within his Tourette's.

In a perfect melding of silence and barks, Lethem seems to fictionally construct Lionel's language like all of Anderson's Grotesques, the suppressed and exaggerated. Some remain silent in their disability and others remain unable to stop talking. Tourette's is the epitome of both, creating restrained silence and loud flashes of talking. "'Echolalia,' Sacks goes on, 'freezes sounds, arrests time, preserves stimuli as 'foreign bodies' or echoes in the mind, maintaining an alien existence, like implants. It is only the sound of the words, their 'melody,' as Bennett says, that implants them in his mind; their origins and meanings and associations are irrelevant.'"[96] Echolalia, or the meaningless repetition of words, is an often occurrence within Tourette's. And while it implies the circuitous, rolling of words in a Tourette mind, it also "freezes sounds," and incurs silence.

In a passage where Lethem constructs Lionel's initial understanding of Tourette's, his character is seen struggling with the push and pull of silence and noise. Although Lionel tries to remain quiet, Tourette's forces him into wordplay.

> Meantime, beneath that frozen shell a sea of language was reaching full boil. It became harder and harder not to notice that when a television pitchman said *to last the rest of a lifetime* my brain went to rest the lust of a loaftomb, that when I

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[95] Motherless Brooklyn, 7.
[96] The Poetics of Tourette Syndrome, 567.

> heard 'Alfred Hitchcock,' I silently replied 'Altered Houseclock' or 'Ilford Hotchkiss'…that an invisible companion named Billy or Bailey was begging for insults I found it harder and harder to withhold.[97]

Lionel must maintain his "frozen shell" in order to restrain the language that "was reaching full boil." The ironically "Altered" names of Alfred Hitchcock are manifestations of Echolalia, the words "origins and meanings and associations" becoming inconsequential. The words "Billy" and "Bailey" also become continuous names that reoccur throughout the novel. They become Lionel's verbal excitement, his reason for constantly screaming, "Eat me, Baily!" In the struggle to reject the disability of Tourette's, Lionel becomes both Alice and Elizabeth-like. Both Anderson's characters continually reject their disabilities until they break forth in a stream of speech, much like Lionel.

I believe the previous passages to be the most important physical manifestations of Tourette's in Motherless Brooklyn. They represent a connection to Anderson's Winesburg but they also support the idea the behind each tic and bark there is an environmental factor as well as physical. The presence of Brooklyn as a backdrop for the novel only enhances the representation of the disability. As previously stated, Brooklyn's culture can act as a catalyst for Tourettic impulses and enhance an already present disability.

Anderson's Grotesques deal with their natural environment and surroundings very differently from Lionel. Anderson's Winesburg is a town torn between industrialism and naturalism in the American Midwest. Often the struggle between the industrial and the

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[97] Motherless Brooklyn, 46.

natural leaves the characters even more disabled and isolated. This is not completely similar to Motherless Brooklyn; Lionel's home is Brooklyn and there seems to be no conflict with this environment of chaos and consistent movement. As Lionel states comfortingly, "Court Street will know you when it sees you."[98] It seems that Brooklyn knows its inhabitants and welcomes them into its city. In this way then, it makes sense that Lethem would construct Brooklyn to mimic Lionel's Tourette's, as a comfort and a catalyst. Again, when Lethem states, "...by acting as if I thought Tourette's was a condition that was native and peculiar to Brooklyn, I discovered my material,"[99] he is reiterating the importance of Brooklyn to the "condition" of Tourette's.

Having established that Lionel's Tourette's is a commotion and a physical disruption in his speech and his body, I want to explain a passage that represents this disability within the culture of Brooklyn.

> And Court Street, where it passed through Carroll Gardens and Cobble Hill, was the only Brooklyn, really- north was Brooklyn Heights, secretly a part of Manhattan, south was the harbor, and the rest, everything east of the Gowanus Canal (the only body of water in the world, Minna would crack each and every time we drove over it, that was 90 percent guns), apart from the small outposts of civilization in Park Slope and Windsor Terrace, was an unspeakable barbarian tumult.[100]

While Lionel is only exposed to a small portion of the borough, he still references its "unspeakable barbarian tumult." And in what I believe is a reference to Tourette's, the

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[98] Motherless Brooklyn, 306.
[99] This is another answer from a series of questions Lethem answered regarding this thesis.
[100] Motherless Brooklyn, 56.

language is constantly rolling, naming neighborhood after neighborhood in a cloud of language. Frank Minna states to Lionel, "You're a freak show, that's why. Human freak show, and it's free. Free to the public," and this seems to imply that in a "public" of chaos and confusion, Lionel's disability fits within the "human freak show" of Brooklyn. "The text makes numerous cultural references to the disease, even implicating geography in the malady's formation. Therefore, it is appropriate to describe [Brooklyn], the setting of the novel and Lionel's whole world, as a Tourettic city, thus suggesting a symbiotic relationship between the city's dis-ease and Lionel's symptoms."[101] The connection between Tourette's and a bumping, lurching city cannot be ignored. In this passage, the "tumult" of Brooklyn echoes Lionel's disability.

Lethem presents another vision of Brooklyn in the first part of the novel: an emergency room in Park Slope. This comes to represent a microcosm of the underbelly of the city. While the descriptions do not mention Tourette's, the language is tumultuous and the commotion of Brooklyn is optimized.

> The waiting area was jammed with a sort of egalitarian cross-section on genuine misery can provide; Hispanics and blacks and Russians and various indeterminate red-eyed teenage girls with children you prayed were siblings; junkie veterans petitioning for painkillers they wouldn't get; a tired housewife comforting her brother as he carped in an unceasing stream about his blocked digestion, the bowl movement he hadn't enjoyed for weeks; a terrified lover denied attendance as I'd

[101] The Culture of Disease of the Dis-ease of Culture in Motherless Brooklyn and Eve's Apple, 174.

been glaring viciously at the unimpressible triage nurse and mute doors behind her...[102]

Lethem's never-ending sentence recalls a stream of Tourrettic words. The descriptions of the people represent the vision of a Tourette's disability, a constant meshing together of descriptions. In this way, the environment that surrounds Lionel seems to make his disability appropriate in Brooklyn. As the different races and details emerge, the mixed up culture of Brooklyn as well as the mixed up nature of Lionel become one.

Besides the environmental context that surrounds the physical disabilities of Lionel, other facets of Tourette's appear in Lethem's fictional characterization. Disabilities are not only defined by a person's physical makeup but also by their social surroundings. Often peoples' disability is defined by the society around them. "The mapping of disability is an imparting of some version of what disability is and, thus, contains implicit directions for how to move around, through or with it. Disability is mapped differently by various societal institutions and cultural practices and these representations influence one's relation to disability."[103] In this way the distinction of a disability comes from social environment. Within Lionel's life, "societal institutions" become his non-family: his surrogate father, Frank Minna. Understanding Frank's relationship to Tourette's is what defines Lionel's understanding of his own disease.

Lionel's relationship to a very real body of society is very different from his relationship to his surrogate family. Brooklyn, while remaining a sympathetic environment for Lionel, continues to be a city whose inhabitants do not accept disability.

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[102] Motherless Brooklyn, 31.
[103] Tanya Titchkosky, "Cultural Map: Which Way to Disability?" Disability/Postmodernity ed. Marian Corker and Tom Shakespeare. (Cotinuum, New York, London, 2002) 10.

Susan Wendell comments on the affect a society can have on disability: "When the pace of life in a society increases, there is a tendency for more people to become disabled, not only because physically damaging consequences of efforts to go faster, but also because fewer people can meet expectations of 'normal' performance; the physical (and mental) limitations of those who cannot meet the new pace become conspicuous and disabling…"[104] Brooklyn "pace of life" is indeed modern and quick, which may only accelerate and enhance Lionel's Tourette's. The "expectations of 'normal'" become apparent in Lethem construction of Brooklyn's environment. In a scene where Lionel is described eating four hot dogs, the man next to him comments, "Fucking people talking to themselves in a public place like they got some kind of illness!"[105] This type of reaction to Lionel's Tourette's continues throughout the novel. In a short paragraph, Lethem constructs Lionel's interaction with multiple characters in the society of Brooklyn.

> My life story to this point:
>
> The teacher looked at me like I was crazy.
>
> The social-services worker looked at me like I was crazy.
>
> The boy looked at me like I was crazy and then hit me.
>
> The girl looked at me like I was crazy.
>
> The woman looked at me like I was crazy.
>
> The black homicide detective looked at me like I was crazy.[106]

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[104] Susan Wendell, The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability (Routledge, New York, 1996) 37.
[105] Motherless Brooklyn, 163.
[106] Motherless Brooklyn, 107.

This paragraph points out the commonalities within the social environment of Brooklyn and their narrow-minded response to disability. Lionel's Tourette's continues to persist unrecognizable to these various strangers. He endures abuse and misunderstanding because of his disability. And when Lionel is placed next to the supporting, familial society of Frank Minna, Lethem constructs a social stigma that only exists in Brooklyn and not within Lionel's closest relatives.

Frank Minna begins his relationship with Lionel by saving him from an orphanage; he employs Lionel for his muscles and eventually gives him a home after high school. This makes Lionel feel useful, not so harshly unwanted amidst a misunderstanding public. While Anderson's Grotesque's were "unhinged" by their non-relationship with their families and friends, Lionel's relationship begins with the acceptance of Lionel's disability. And, instead of the societal estrangement felt by Winesburg's inhabitants, Lionel is trusted and nurtured by Frank Minna.

> And I was an extra set of eyes and ears and opinions. Minna would drag me along to back rooms and offices and barbershop negotiations, then debrief me afterward. What did I think of that guy? Shitting or not? A moron or retard? A shark or a mook? Minna encouraged me to have a take on everything, and to spit it out, as thought he thought my verbal disgorgings were only commentary not yet anchored to subject matter. And he adored my echolalia. He thought I was doing impressions.[107]

The word "adored" does not appear in Winesburg in the context of family or society, Anderson makes a point to exclude familial bonds instead using only the word

[107] Motherless Brooklyn, 57.

"awkward" to describe the relationship between such characters as Elizabeth and George. This sign of affection is one that establishes Lionel's relationship with Frank. By valuing Lionel's opinion, despite his Tourette's, he understands disability by giving Lionel responsibility.

Later on in the novel, in the wake of Frank's death, a client of Frank's discusses him with Lionel, confirming Frank's very affectionate bond with the orphan. Here, the word "love" is used to define their relationship.

> 'Frank loved you, Lionel,' said Rockaforte.
>
> 'I, uh, I know."...
>
> 'He loved you though he considered you a freak.'
>
> 'He used that very word.'
>
> 'You helped him build, you were one of his boys, and now you are a man and you stand before us in this hour of pain and misunderstanding.'[108]

Here, Rockaforte's comments confirm the attachment between Frank and Lionel. He states clearly "Frank loved you, Lionel," despite Lionel's position as a "freak." Rockaforte recalls fondly that Lionel "...helped him build," he was "one of his boys..." and this comment only reinforces Frank's position as a caring and nurturing familial figure. The bond between Frank and Lionel disconnects Lethem and Anderson in a fundamental way. While Lionel remains an orphan and socially isolated because of his disability, Frank remains a helpful and loving father figure. Anderson's families are disconnected and the disabled characters are unwanted in their familial societies. Both

[108] Motherless Brooklyn, 173.

texts remain coupled in their physically disabled subjects but they split when Lionel's family remains strong in the wake of Tourette's.

This is not to imply that Frank's love and acceptance of Lionel is perfect or completely whole. The reader must remember that Lionel's character is orphaned, left alone and unwanted for most of his childhood before being rescued by Frank. Lionel, on a very simple and wholesome level, remains without a real family of blood relation. This leaves Lionel isolated within his disability, unwanted by an original familial society. Throughout the novel, Lionel, in a halfhearted attempt to reach his real family, calls all the Essrogs in the Brooklyn phonebook, desperate for a connection with an Essrog.

> Then I memorized the numbers, all three of them. In the years that followed I would never...show up at their homes, never accuse them of being related to a *free human freak show*, never even properly introduce myself- but I made a ritual out of dialing their numbers and hanging up after a tic or two, of listening, just long enough to hear another Essrog breathe.[109]

Lionel's very real and basic need to belong to his family emerges here within his character. The need to "hear another Essrog breathe" is emotive and poignant. While Lionel remains accepted and loved by Frank, part of his character is simply alone and unwanted by a distant Essrog at the end of the telephone line. While Lethem creates Frank as a character who touches Lionel in a familial way, Lionel remains an orphan with an isolating disability. The dichotomy between Lionel's self-made society of Frank Minna and the universal and comprehensive environment of Brooklyn creates a disjointed environment around Lionel. In this way, the construction of a societal

[109] Motherless Brooklyn, 69.

environment, fits into Lethem's over arching theme within Motherless Brooklyn; that the book was based around a set of dichotomies, around a set of opposites which come together to create Lionel's disability and his struggle within a different set of peoples and places.

Lionel's lack of a real family seems to haunt his character throughout the novel. The title Motherless Brooklyn is a testament to the abandonment Lionel experiences as a character literally left "motherless" in a society that does not accept his disability. This circumstance leaves Lionel's interaction with women in a search for a maternal figure, necessitating a mothering relationship with the opposite sex. Jonathan Lethem has commented on Lionel's interaction with the women in the novel, "I saw Lionel in terms of his almost total estrangement from all things female, and his hopeless yearning for that kind of contact encompasses and, necessarily, confuses, all the different possible kinds of female interaction and nurture."[110] Each woman he encounters throughout the novel, whether in a romantic situation or not, remains an interaction striving for the maternal, as if Lionel's character were in desperate need of this "nurture" and "yearning." Lionel's Tourette's also seems to heighten around the female sex, as if he were reaching out through his disability to find comfort and sensibility. His "confusion" regarding women acts as an accelerator for his disability. In a scene where Frank takes the Minna Men to his house for Christmas dinner, Lethem accentuates Frank's relationship to his birth mother in opposition to Lionel's orphaned character.

> ...Carlotta hovered over us as we devoured her meatballs, running her floury fingers over the backs of our chairs, then gently touching our heads, the napes of

[110] This is another answer from a series of questions Lethem answered regarding this thesis.

> our necks. We pretended not to notice, ashamed in front of one another and ourselves to show that we drank in her nurturance as eagerly as her meat sauce. But we drank it. It was Christmas, after all...Privately, I polished the handle of my spoon, quietly aping the motions of her finger on my nape, and fought not to twist on my seat and jump at her...All the while she went on caressing, with hands that would have horrified us if we'd looked close.
>
> Minna spotted her and said, 'This is exciting for you, Ma? I got all of motherless Brooklyn up here for you. Merry Christmas.'[111]

Within this scene, the presence of a mother figure makes Lionel both secure and uncomfortable. The physical touch of Frank's mother, as a female figure, makes Lionel convulsive, but he also feels "ashamed" at wanting "her nurturance." The woman in the scene seems to amplify Lionel's Tourette's, making him fight not "to twist" or "jump." The whole scene ends with the culminating term "motherless Brooklyn," meant to describe the Minna Men and their orphaned state on Christmas. The coupling of this term and Lionel's confrontation with a mother figure makes this scene an important example of how Lionel's disability becomes manifested within a female society.

Later on in the novel, Lionel meets a young woman, Kimmery, who remains his romantic interest throughout the story. Kimmery's role as an attractive female becomes a conflicting element for Lionel. Because his disability and his need for both comfort and a sense of normalcy draws him to her, a motherly figure; she remains a sexual, female character. Lionel's Tourette's becomes a frenetic emotion, a disturbance within their interaction. But, in opposition to Anderson's impotent characters, the sexual relationship

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[111] Motherless Brooklyn, 71

between Lionel and Kimmery brings a relief from disability. Lionel's Tourette's becomes unperturbed, untroubled by tics and barks.

> If I kept one eye on Kimmery I was mostly calm, though. It was like having a bag of White Castles beside me on the car seat. I wondered how deep her influence over my syndrome could run if given the chance, how much of that influence I could hope to import. How close I could get.[112]

As if to assimilate her normalcy, Lionel tries to understand how she could "influence" his Tourettic impulses. But, as he looks at her, he feels a "calm," a sign of sexual influence and an impulse to make her presence maternal.

The sexual aspect of Lionel's Tourette's becomes present in a scene where they sleep together. Lethem presents a situation where Kimmery's feminine influence on Lionel leads to an almost complete loss of disability.

> 'You do everything I do,' she whispered in my mouth.
>
> 'I don't really need to.' I said again. 'Not if we're this close.' It was the truth. I was never less ticcish than this: aroused, pressing toward another's body, moving out of my own. But just as Kimmery had somehow spared me ticcing aloud in conversation, now I felt free to incorporate an element of Tourette's into our groping, as though she were negotiating a new understanding between my two disgruntled brains.[113]

I believe Lethem wants the reader to understand that sex with Kimmery is the facilitator of this "negotiation" between a Tourettic brain and a smooth quiet brain. Lionel states "I was never less ticcish than this," reinforcing the effect of Kimmery's composed and

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[112] 197-198, Motherless Brooklyn.
[113] P.220, Motherless Brooklyn.

placid character. Lethem makes Lionel closer to normalcy than ever before by equating his performance with a character who does not possess disabilities.

Lionel's physical and social disabilities should be understood in the context of Brooklyn. Lionel's interaction with a society is, naturally, within the space of Brooklyn and it only surrounded his Tourette's with more stimulus and excitement. Lethem writes:

> On second thought, this is a vaguely Tourettic aspect of the New York City subway, especially late at night- that dance of attention, of stray gazes, in which every rider must engage. And there's a lot of stuff you shouldn't touch in the subway, particularly in a certain order: this pole and then your lips, for instance. And the tunnel walls are layered, like those of my brain, with expulsive and incoherent language...[114]

The New York City subway becomes an apparent metaphor here, a train running amidst a mess of electric impulses and "incoherent language." The city here is perpetually in a rush of machinery and noises, a physical being that moves quickly throughout the borough, hitting checkpoints, squealing through tunnels where the sounds disappear as quickly as they emerged.

But I find my final understanding of the direct importance of Tourette's in conjunction with Brooklyn is slightly flawed, or disconnected. There are passages from the novel and from Lethem's interviews that have led me to understand that the world outside of Brooklyn is privatized and untroubled. Why emphasize an environment that would only serve to accentuate a debilitating disability? Lethem has stated:

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[114] Motherless Brooklyn, 237.

I also thought that the neurological questions that Tourette's presents for Lionel have partly to do with issues of nature versus nurture – and so the idea of a return to something 'pure' and untouched by language, civilization, or urban development might be seen as a parallel to the fantasies in American cultural history having to do with a return to an idealized pre-industrialized society.[115]

By saying this, Lethem is creating a dichotomy between a nurtured Tourettic life, based upon environmental surroundings and a natural innate Tourette's. Within this debate, Lethem raises the idea of the "blank slate" or an environment that remains an "idealized pre-industrialized society." Wouldn't this be the environment to emphasize in the context of Tourette's? The "language, civilization, or urban development" that Lethem describes in Brooklyn only make Lionel's character trapped within this description. Did Lethem create Brooklyn solely as "a parallel to the fantasies in American cultural history?"

Frank Minna's wife asks Lionel "Have you ever been out of Brooklyn, Lionel?...New York City, Lionel. Have you every been out of New York City?"[116] And in Lionel's inability to answer emerges her character's interpretation of the environment outside of Brooklyn: "Because if you had, you'd know that anywhere else is a place of peace. So that's where I'm going."[117] And regardless of Lionel's statement "I'm from Brooklyn and I don't like wide-open spaces, I guess.,"[118] perhaps the environment of "wide-open spaces" would be a healthy destination. Would Anderson's environment be

[115] This is another answer from a series of questions Lethem answered regarding this thesis.
[116] Motherless Brooklyn, 105.
[117] Motherless Brooklyn, 105.
[118] Motherless Brooklyn, 205.

more calming for disabilities? I am moved to ask these questions in the final moments of the chapter. And was Anderson's approach to disability more understanding? Was it more real in that is presented struggles in multiple environments? Lethem leaves the reader with the understanding that Brooklyn acts as a metaphor for Tourettic impulses, for a Tourettic lifestyle. Lethem leaves the reader with a solid understanding of the make-up of Tourette's, but never outside the environment of Brooklyn. This is what makes Lethem an urban writer and Anderson a convincing naturalistic author.

Conclusion: Brooklyn and the Midwest

I think literature should come from the home, from what you know and idolize. There should be adoration for what you read; there should be a boldness of devotion and a recognition of the altruism that comes from recognizing a literary body that you understand. Literature should come from a place that is dear to you and for me that place is my home, New York. This place, or more importantly, Brooklyn, is a borough that I have traveled and I have, unknowingly succumbed to its beauty and presence. This literature of the home, this literature that I know, was my inspiration for my English thesis. An homage to my world of concrete, glass and metal, to the isthmus of my childhood.

There have been many writers who have interpreted New York, well known and rousing writers. While most authors isolate single boroughs in their narration, Walt Whitman includes Manhattan and Brooklyn within his poetry. Manhattan and Brooklyn are my life as well, my burden in New York. Whitman writes in his poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

> I loved well those cities;
>
> I loved well that stately and rapid river;
>
> The men and the women I saw were all near to me...
>
> I too lived- Brooklyn, of ample hills, was mine;
>
> I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan Island, and bathed in the waters around it...[119]

[119] Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, The 'Death-Bed' Edition, (The Modern Library, New York, 1955) 202.

I too have lived Brooklyn, have lived Manhattan. In an effort to understanding where I have lived and walked, I began my thesis's focus on a number of Brooklyn authors; Paul Auster, Hubert Selby Jr., Henry Roth and Jonathan Lethem. I wanted to examine who lived in Brooklyn, what made the city such a unique and boisterous city. How did it pulsate and thrive? Yet amongst these authors, I found certain stereotypes hard to work with. Was Brooklyn simply a corrupt Irish Cop? Was it a Hispanic prostitute? Was it a lost Jewish immigrant amidst a community of African Americans? The burdens of these characters were too conservative, too squared for a city I found I couldn't truly recognize in this literature. Jonathan Lethem's novel Motherless Brooklyn was abnormal in its narrative of a Tourettic orphan. There were traditional aspects of the city within the book but Lethem had approached the urban environment differently from all others. The nature of the main character's disability seemed to parallel Brooklyn in a contemporary representation. Motherless Brooklyn came to represent an unorthodox approach to my favorite environment.

And while I had "lived Brooklyn," I had also lived Michigan. Four years to seventeen, but I was still a citizen, a companion to Ann Arbor. The environment had changed but my connection to a place of activity had not. Why disregard the Midwest, why heed one and not the other? I began to concentrate on literature about the Midwest that had touched me in a similar way to Brooklyn's books. Sherwood Anderson's dark and penetrating narratives in Winesburg, Ohio were appealing to me; I wanted to understand the meaning behind the Grotesques and their daily routines. Was it similar to the Irish cop? Was it removed from the community of Brooklyn or were there

similarities? Just as Brooklyn's citizens were products of their environments, citizens of Winesburg had to reflect their surroundings in some way.

My next step was to find a bridge between the two novels; these two authors who were trying to accomplish ideas and theories that appeared completely differently had a connection. Their interpretations of disability were both unrelated and comparable, smoothing out the tweaks from each book was possible through the other. It was interesting that each novel could fulfill so much about the nature of disability without an apparent connection. I established a relationship between Anderson's disability and Lethem's disability. And together I thought they were elegant and beautiful, two novels creating the same disabilities decades apart.

When I asked Jonathan Lethem if he had ever been influenced by Sherwood Anderson's writing he answered no, but with a few idiosyncrasies:

> ...Though I did know Anderson's work slightly before writing [Motherless Brooklyn] (and then come to know it much better a short time after, when I was asked to read one of the Winesburg, Ohio stories aloud for a book-on-tape). Anderson never (consciously) crossed my mind. I certainly do respond to the tendencies of verbal inhibition and linguistic distortion in Anderson...

And this "verbal inhibition and linguistic distortion" is what created my thesis, is what made it a value to my connection. There is a lingering of remembrance in Lethem's comments; Anderson's ghost leaves a trail of unconsciousness.

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