

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of a rooster and a chicken. The rooster is shown in profile, facing right, with its comb and wattle. The chicken is shown from a three-quarter view, facing left. They are positioned on a grid of squares that alternate between light and dark gray, creating a checkerboard effect. The rooster and chicken are white with black outlines and are centered within their respective squares.

Winesburg, Ohio

Sherwood Anderson

WINESBURG, OHIO

SHERWOOD ANDERSON

Introduction by Jeffrey Meyers



BANTAM CLASSIC

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To the memory of my mother,

Emma Smith Anderson,

*Whose keen observations on the life about her first awoke in me the
hunger to see beneath the surface of lives, this book is dedicated.*

INTRODUCTION

Jeffrey Meyers

I

THE FICTIONAL town of Winesburg, Ohio, in Sherwood Anderson's masterpiece of 1919, was based on Clyde, Ohio, a town eighteen miles south of Lake Erie, between Cleveland and Toledo, where he grew up. In the book the town is surrounded by fruit and berry farms, and has a population of 1,800 people (all of whom know one another), including a number of aged veterans of the Civil War. The stories take place in the time of oil lamps and candles, of horses and buggies. Though the railroad exists, and its daily arrivals are major events in the town, this is a relatively quiet period that precedes "the beginning of the most materialistic age in the history of the world, when wars would be fought [for greed and] without patriotism." The conversation in New Willard House about the friendship between William McKinley and the financier Mark Hanna, who helped McKinley become governor of Ohio and then president of the United States, places the events of the book in the 1890s.

In a letter of November 1916 to his novelist friend Waldo Frank, Anderson mentions that he had already written the stories several years before they appeared in book form and had revealed in them the seamy and sometimes tragic side of small-town life: "I have made last year a series of intensive studies of people of my home town. . . . Some of the studies you may think pretty raw, and there is a sad note running through them. One or two of them get pretty closely down to ugly things in life." Opposing the traditionally idyllic portrayal of small-town life, Anderson boldly depicts the destructive passions that swirl beneath the apparently calm surface as the younger generation attempts to revolt against an oppressive Puritan morality. In his opening chapter, "The Book of the Grotesque" (the original title of the work until his publisher persuaded him to change it), Anderson suggests that the grotesques in the village have been spiritually and psychologically warped by emotional and sexual frustration.

Writing about Anderson in a penetrating letter of June 1942, the critic Edmund Wilson expressed his high opinion of Anderson's work, personality, and wit: "For him the inhabitants of a little Ohio town were just as important and on just the same level as the people with names that he afterwards met in Chicago and New York. He and Dreiser were, in my opinion, the only really first-rate men who came out of the Middle West in that period. I liked him very much. . . . He was not irritating at all personally, but one of the most agreeable men I have ever known. It is only in his writing that he is sometimes irritating. He had a humorous racy quality that was very Southwestern and that hardly ever got into what he wrote. He had a kind of reverence for literature which made him a little stilted in a peculiar way when he 'took pen in hand,' in the old phrase that is very appropriate to his attitude." Wilson's friend Scott Fitzgerald shared his enthusiasm for Anderson and in June 1925 told his editor Max Perkins: "*He is one of the very best and finest writers in the English language today. God, he can write!*"

Reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic were equally generous in their appreciation of *Winesburg, Ohio*. The usually severe critic H. L. Mencken, writing in the August 1919 issue of *Smart Set*, called it "a truly extraordinary book, by a man of such palpably unusual talent that it seems almost an impertinence to welcome him." The English novelist Rebecca West, who had equally high standards

wrote three years later in the *New Statesman* that the book “contains two of the half dozen most remarkable short stories written in this century. It is an extraordinarily good book.” And Edmund Wilson, in an earlier estimate of June 1926, mentioned the vagueness and repetitiousness of Anderson’s novels, but concluded that he had fully realized his creative talent in his shorter fiction: “in the best of his stories, [he] has shown an almost perfect instinct that fashions, from what seems a more intimate stratum of feeling and imagination than our novelists usually explore, visions at once fresh and naive and of a slightly discomfiting strangeness.”

II

Though cagey about disclosing his literary models, Anderson acknowledged the influence of Ivan Turgenev’s *A Sportsman’s Sketches*, which offers lyrical accounts of hunting in the Russian wilderness. Anderson’s admission led Irving Howe, in his generally perceptive chapter on *Winesburg, Ohio*, to offer an elaborate comparison of these quite disparate works: “both are episodic novels containing loosely bound but closely related sketches, both depend for impact less on dramatic action than on a climactic lyrical insight, and in both the individual sketches frequently end with bland understatements that form an ironic coda to the body of the writing.” But Anderson, I believe, was deliberately misleading. The real models for his work were collections of stories that were written in English and published in his lifetime. Like Rudyard Kipling’s *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888), and especially Katherine Mansfield’s *In a German Pension* (1911) and James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), *Winesburg, Ohio* is unified by a single setting, recurrent characters, a pervasive mood, and a dominant theme.

In Anderson’s small midwestern town the characters who drift in and out of the stories are repeatedly drawn to the eighteen-year-old George Willard, a reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle*, whose unhappily married parents own a rather run-down hotel. Innocent, young, and curious, energetic, sensitive, and sympathetic, George is the perfect confidant. People feel George “belonged to the town; typified the town, represented in his person the spirit of the town.”

The prevailing mood—expressed in a colloquial and lyrical style—is one of misunderstanding and loneliness, restlessness, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment. There is no real sense of community in this town; all its inhabitants, though contiguous, are essentially isolated and dream of release. The boys want to run away from home, the men want to flee to the big cities: Cleveland, Chicago, or New York. But the possibility of attaining freedom in an impersonal metropolis is just as illusory as the chance of finding pastoral harmony in a rustic village, and nearly all the escapees are forced to return to their stifling bondage.

There is a great deal of heavy drinking and scarcely suppressed violence in the town; even the innocent George Willard is beaten, first by the jealous Ed Handby and then by the crazed Elmer Cowley. When George is unable to fulfill his passionate desire for the rich and attractive banker’s daughter, Helen White (whose names suggest beauty and purity), he, too, must finally leave *Winesburg* (without the \$800 inheritance his mother had hidden and intended to give him) and inevitably turn into one of its grotesque inhabitants.

Most characters in *Winesburg, Ohio* are portrayed in a moment of crisis. They are repeatedly driven by sudden impulses and overwhelmed by strange compulsions that can be neither mastered nor understood. “Under the influence of drink,” Anderson writes of the Bentley brothers, “the natural strong lusts of their natures, kept suppressed by the heroic labor of breaking up new ground, were

released.” “The passionate burning thing in [Jesse Bentley’s] nature flamed up and his eyes became hard.” Jesse’s daughter, Louise, “tried to make her husband understand [her] vague and intangible hunger.” The schoolteacher Kate Swift, who embraces her former pupil George Willard, has the quintessentially “passionate desire to be loved by a man.” The milliner Belle Carpenter also lets George “kiss her to relieve a longing that was very insistent in her nature.” And the virginal George, like these three women and “all the women in the world [who] wanted a real lover,” is tormented by “vague hungers and secret unnameable desires.”

Though Anderson links these human desires to the basic elements of nature—“Love is like a wind stirring the grass beneath trees on a black night”—no one, despite desperate and dangerous efforts, is able to break out of isolation and achieve intuitive intimacy and meaningful understanding of another person; no man can “come close to [a woman], to hold her in his arms, to tell her of his thoughts and dreams.” In “Godliness” Louise Bentley starkly and impulsively writes to John Hardy: “I want someone to love me and I want to love someone.” When he at first fails to respond, “she was half beside herself with grief and decided that for her there was no way to break through the wall that had shut her off from the joy of life.” The tragic theme of these deceptively folksy and apparently transparent stories echoes the resonant pronouncement of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899): “We live, as we dream—alone.” For at the end of “Loneliness” Enoch Robinson characteristically laments: “I’m alone; all alone here. . . . Now I’m all alone.”

III

The main influence on *Winesburg, Ohio* was undoubtedly that of D. H. Lawrence, who had published *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and *The Rainbow* (1915) just as Anderson began to write his stories. Like Sigmund Freud, Lawrence thought men and women were frustrated by trying to repress the natural sexual desires that were struggling to find expression. Lawrence believed that through the salvation of touch and the power of nakedness men and women could break out of their isolation and finally achieve communion. Lawrence, and through him Anderson, adopted the theory of physical love that the Greek philosopher Plato had expounded in *The Symposium*. In that work Plato explains love by supposing that the original human being was physically very different from people in his own and our time. That primeval being “was round, his back and sides forming a circle; he had four hands and four feet, one head with two faces”—and was subsequently divided in two. After the division, the two separate parts, each desiring the other half, came together and threw their arms around each other eager to grow into one. Plato’s theory is immensely appealing because it explains the power of sexual attraction and convincingly suggests that the union of masculine and feminine complements represents the return of broken fragments to an original wholeness.

Adopting the vital theme first expressed in William Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1796)—“the nakedness of woman is the work of God”—Lawrence explained that he hoped to regenerate England, which he believed had grown sexless, by recapturing “the warm blood-sex that establishes the living and revitalizing connection between man and woman.” Linking, as Anderson does, the innate sexual drives with the cycles of the natural world, Lawrence insists: “The greatest need of man is the renewal forever of the complete rhythm of life and death, the rhythm of the sun’s year, the body year.”

It is fascinating to see how Lawrence’s ideas are portrayed in the best tales of *Winesburg, Ohio*. Most of Anderson’s stories first sketch the family background of the main character, mention his wo-

and social status, and note how he is regarded by other people in the town. The narrator, with some cunning digressions, tells us what is going to happen in the story and announces that the events will be momentous. Instead of having traditional conversations, the characters indulge in emotional monologues that express their psychological and sexual frustrations.

“Hands,” the first story in the book, is an ironic parody of Lawrence’s belief in the salvation of touch. Wing Biddlebaum, a former schoolteacher who cannot control his restless, fluttering, birdlike “nervous little hands,” had been unjustly accused of molesting his pupils, almost hanged, and driven out of his Pennsylvania town. When he was lost in a kind of dream (now tragically shattered) his hands had spontaneously and perhaps innocently caressed the heads and shoulders of the schoolboy. But a half-witted lad who had fallen in love with the teacher imagined unspeakable things, made hideous accusations, and described his fantasies as facts. Wing was nearly lynched (as Doctor Parcival, in “The Philosopher,” was nearly lynched for refusing to attend a child who had been killed in an accident), changed his name, fled to Winesburg, and spent the rest of his ruined life trying to conceal his dangerously expressive hands. In this story hands express emotions that cannot be controlled, are easily misconstrued, and must therefore be suppressed.

Hands and touch are mentioned more positively in many of these stories, most notably “Sophistication” when George Willard, longing for Helen White, “wants to come close to some other human, touch someone with his hands, be touched by the hand of another.” Anderson’s use of hands later influenced Ernest Hemingway. In Hemingway’s story “Up in Michigan” (1923), Jim’s automaton-like hands seem to take on a life of their own as he seduces his girl: “One of Jim’s hands went inside her dress and stroked over her breast and the other hand was in her lap. . . . ‘You mustn’t touch Jim. You mustn’t.’ Neither Jim nor Jim’s big hand paid any attention to her.” In a similar fashion Anderson’s and Hemingway’s symbolic use of hands reappears in Nathanael West’s description of the uncontrollable hands of Homer Simpson, who murders the repulsive child-star, Adore, in *The Day after the Locust* (1939).

In “Terror,” the fourth part of “Godliness,” Anderson—as Lawrence had so often done—draws on the Bible for inspiration. Earlier in “Godliness,” the rich, overbearing farmer Jesse Bentley, who is praying for a son, “remembered how in the old Bible story [I Samuel 17:19] the Lord had appeared to that other Jesse and told him to send his son David to where Saul and the men of Israel were fighting the Philistines in the Valley of Elah.” Later on, when his grandson David is fifteen, the half-crazed Jesse, who frequently prays for a sign from God, decides to reenact symbolically Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:2–13. Jesse catches and binds a young lamb, and plans to offer it to God, who would, he thinks, “appear to him and give him a message.” David, already frightened, becomes terrified when Jesse takes out a long knife to “put the blood of the lamb on the head of the boy.” As David rushes away and Jesse pursues him with the knife, David hits him (instead of, in the Bible, the Philistine Goliath) with a stone from his sling. Thinking he has killed his grandfather, he panics and runs away from town. In Genesis, God, convinced that Abraham loves him enough to sacrifice his beloved son, sends an angel to stop the sacrificial knife. In Anderson’s story David, who is not intended to be the sacrificial victim, nearly kills Jesse.

“Adventure” and “Respectability” both portray the power of nakedness, which reveals not only the body but also the desperate desires within it. In the former, Alice Hindman sleeps with Ned Currier and then offers to live with him in Cleveland without getting married. But he will not allow her to compromise herself in this way and swears he will return for her as soon as he gets a good job. She waits several years for him and then lapses into her old constricted existence. Unbearably lonely, she idealizes his new life: “I am becoming old and queer,” she thinks. “If Ned comes he will not want me

In the city where he is living men are perpetually young.”

Waiting hopelessly for something to happen, her deepest desires suddenly break out. She undresses in the darkness and—as Lawrence’s Lady Chatterley would do—impulsively “ran downstairs through the dark house and out into the rain. As she stood on the little grass plot before the house and felt the cold rain on her body a mad desire to run naked through the streets took possession of her. She thought that the rain would have some creative and wonderful effect on her body.” She attempts to offer herself to a deaf and bewildered old man, and then, after crawling back home through the protective grass, must accept the grim truth of Anderson’s book: “turning her face to the wall, [she] began trying to force herself to face bravely the fact that many people must live and die alone, even in Winesburg.”

“Respectability”—the following and complementary story—explains how Wash Williams, the dirt telegraph operator (“even the whites of his eyes looked soiled”) came to loathe women and hate life. He had fallen in love with an attractive girl, married her, bought a small house, and settled down to domestic life in Columbus, Ohio. On a dusky spring evening, he had crawled along the black ground (as Alice crawled through the grass) and, after a moment of self-abasement, discovered that his wife had betrayed him: “[I] groveled before her. I kissed her shoes and the ankles above her shoes. When the hem of her garment touched my face I trembled. . . . After two years of that life I found she had managed to acquire three other lovers who came regularly to our house when I was away at work.”

Horribly disillusioned, Wash refuses to discuss her infidelity, gives her money, and sends her back to her mother. Realizing that Wash has blamed the lovers rather than his wife, that he still loves her and wants her to return, the mother summons him to her home, undresses his wife and—to tempt him—pushes her into the room naked: “The girl was ashamed and stood perfectly still staring at the floor.” Wash, horrified by such humiliating behavior (the equivalent of his groveling), strikes the mother, abandons the wife, and flees to Winesburg to cultivate his bitter misogyny.

The most powerful story in the book, “The Strength of God,” portrays the bizarre connection between religious and sexual mania. The respectable Presbyterian minister Curtis Hartman retires to his study in the church bell tower and prays for strength to do the work of the Lord. But he is shocked to see, when opening the narrow stained glass window, that Kate Swift is lying in bed, reading a book and smoking a cigarette (a sure sign of dissolution). Hartman struggles in vain against his voyeuristic compulsion, then knocks a hole in the corner of the stained glass window to get a secret view of Kate. In doing so, he nips off “the bare heel of the boy standing motionless and looking with rapt eyes in the face of Christ”—just as he has looked rapturously into the face of Kate. The bare heel of the boy may symbolize the minister’s vulnerable Achilles’ heel; the stained glass, the stain on his soul.

Unable to stay away from the window, Hartman becomes obsessed with the tempting Kate and begins to hate his wife, who “has always been ashamed of passion” and has cheated him out of sensual life. Finally, his fantasies are fulfilled. As he stares through the hole in the window, Kate appears, undresses, and throws herself naked on the bed. And he is astonished to discover that her passions are as violent as his own: “Lying face downward she wept and beat with her fists upon the pillow.” She then begins to pray and “in the lamplight her figure, slim and strong, looked like the figure of the boy in the presence of the Christ on the leaded window.” Still refusing to recognize the truth of his own feelings (which Lawrence would call “blood consciousness”), Hartman sees Kate as “an instrument of God, bearing the message of truth.” He smashes the stained glass window with his fist (revealing his sexual repression), and believes he has been delivered from temptation when he has, in fact, been overwhelmed by it. “The Strength of God,” more than any other story, synthesizes Anderson’s major themes: shattered dreams, loss of love, the un-lived life, spiritual isolation, and desiccating loneliness. Anderson’s “sad note,” in the end, is more pessimistic than even Lawrence’s.

view of the world.

THE TALES AND THE PERSONS

THE BOOK OF THE GROTESQUE

THE WRITER, an old man with a white mustache, had some difficulty in getting into bed. The windows of the house in which he lived were high and he wanted to look at the trees when he awoke the morning. A carpenter came to fix the bed so that it would be on a level with the window.

Quite a fuss was made about the matter. The carpenter, who had been a soldier in the Civil War, came into the writer's room and sat down to talk of building a platform for the purpose of raising the bed. The writer had cigars lying about and the carpenter smoked.

For a time the two men talked of the raising of the bed and then they talked of other things. The soldier got on the subject of the war. The writer, in fact, led him to that subject. The carpenter had once been a prisoner in Andersonville prison and had lost a brother. The brother had died of starvation, and whenever the carpenter got upon that subject he cried. He, like the old writer, had a white mustache, and when he cried he puckered up his lips and the mustache bobbed up and down. The weeping old man with the cigar in his mouth was ludicrous. The plan the writer had for the raising of his bed was forgotten and later the carpenter did it in his own way and the writer, who was past sixty, had to help himself with a chair when he went to bed at night.

In his bed the writer rolled over on his side and lay quite still. For years he had been beset with notions concerning his heart. He was a hard smoker and his heart fluttered. The idea had got into his mind that he would some time die unexpectedly and always when he got into bed he thought of that. It did not alarm him. The effect in fact was quite a special thing and not easily explained. It made him more alive, there in bed, than at any other time. Perfectly still he lay and his body was old and not of much use any more, but something inside him was altogether young. He was like a pregnant woman, only that the thing inside him was not a baby but a youth. No, it wasn't a youth, it was a woman, young, and wearing a coat of mail like a knight. It is absurd, you see, to try to tell what was inside the old writer as he lay on his high bed and listened to the fluttering of his heart. The thing to get at was what the writer, or the young thing within the writer, was thinking about.

The old writer, like all of the people in the world, had got, during his long life, a great many notions in his head. He had once been quite handsome and a number of women had been in love with him. And then, of course, he had known people, many people, known them in a peculiarly intimate way that was different from the way in which you and I know people. At least that is what the writer thought and the thought pleased him. Why quarrel with an old man concerning his thoughts?

In the bed the writer had a dream that was not a dream. 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.

You see the interest in all this lies in the figures that went before the eyes of the writer. They were all grotesques. All of the men and women the writer had ever known had become grotesques.

The grotesques were not all horrible. Some were amusing, some almost beautiful, and one, a woman, all drawn out of shape, hurt the old man by her grotesqueness. When she passed he made a noise like

small dog whimpering. Had you come into the room you might have supposed the old man had unpleasant dreams or perhaps indigestion.

For an hour the procession of grotesques passed before the eyes of the old man, and then, although it was a painful thing to do, he 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.

At his desk the writer worked for an hour. In the end he wrote a book which he called "The Book of the Grotesque." It was never published, but I saw it once and it made an indelible impression on my mind. The book had one central thought that is very strange and has always remained with me. Ever remembering it I have been able to understand many people and things that I was never able to understand before. The thought was involved but a simple statement of it would be something like this:

That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as a truth. Man made the truths himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful.

The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his book. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. Hundreds and hundreds were the truths and they were all beautiful.

And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up one of the truths and some who were quite strong snatched up a dozen of them.

It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and tried to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.

You can see for yourself how the old man, who had spent all of his life writing and was filled with words, would write hundreds of pages concerning this matter. The subject would become so big in his mind that he himself would be in danger of becoming a grotesque. He didn't, I suppose, for the same reason that he never published the book. It was the young thing inside him that saved the old man.

Concerning the old carpenter who fixed the bed for the writer, I only mentioned him because he, like many of what are called very common people, became the nearest thing to what is understandable and lovable of all the grotesques in the writer's book.



Legend

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 Office, <i>Winesburg Eagle</i> | 5 Railroad Station |
| 2 Hern's Grocery | 6 New Willard House |
| 3 Sinnings' Hardware Store | 7 Fair Ground |
| 4 Bill Carter's Lunch Room | 8 Waterworks Pond |

HANDS

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 but that had 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. The berry pickers, youths and maidens, laughed and shouted boisterously. A boy clad in a blue shirt leaped from the wagon and attempted to drag after him one of the maidens, who screamed and protested shrilly. The feet of the boy in the road kicked up a cloud of dust that floated across the face of the departing sun. Over the long field came a thin girlish voice. "Oh, you Wing Biddlebaum, comb your hair, it's falling into your eyes," commanded the voice to the man, who was bald and whose nervous little hands fiddled about the bare white forehead as though arranging a mass of tangled locks.

Wing Biddlebaum, forever frightened and beset by a ghostly band of doubts, did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town where he had lived for twenty years. Among all the people of Winesburg but one had come close to him. With George Willard, son of Tom Willard, the proprietor of the New Willard House, he had formed something like a friendship. George Willard was the reporter on the *Winesburg Eagle* and sometimes in the evenings he walked out along the highway to Wing Biddlebaum's house. Now as the old man walked up and down on the veranda, his hands moving nervously about, he was hoping that George Willard would come and spend the evening with him. After the wagon containing the berry pickers had passed, he went across the field through the tall mustard weeds and climbing a rail fence peered anxiously along the road to the town. For a moment he stood thus, rubbing his hands together and looking up and down the road, and then, fear overcoming him, ran back to walk again upon the porch on his own house.

In the presence of George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum, who for twenty years had been the town's mystery, lost something of his timidity, and his shadowy personality, submerged in a sea of doubt, came forth to look at the world. With the young reporter at his side, he ventured in the light of day into Main Street or strode up and down on the rickety front porch of his own house, talking excitedly. The voice that had been low and trembling became shrill and loud. The bent figure straightened. With a kind of wriggle, like a fish returned to the brook by the fisherman, Biddlebaum the silent began to talk, striving to put into words the ideas that had been accumulated by his mind during long years of silence.

Wing Biddlebaum talked much with his hands. The slender expressive fingers, forever active and forever striving to conceal themselves in his pockets or behind his back, came forth and became the piston rods of his machinery of expression.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story of hands. Their restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird, had given him his name. Some obscure poet of the town had thought of it. The hands alarmed their owner. He wanted to keep them hidden away and looked with amazement at the quiet inexpressive hands of other men who worked beside him in the fields, passing, driving sleepy teams on country roads.

When he talked to George Willard, Wing Biddlebaum closed his fists and beat with them upon

table or on the walls of his house. The action made him more comfortable. If the desire to talk came him when the two were walking in the fields, he sought out a stump or the top board of a fence and with his hands pounding busily talked with renewed ease.

The story of Wing Biddlebaum's hands is worth a book in itself. Sympathetically set forth it would tap many strange, beautiful qualities in obscure men. It is a job for a poet. In Winesburg the hands had attracted attention merely because of their activity. With them Wing Biddlebaum had picked as high as a hundred and forty quarts of strawberries in a day. They became his distinguishing feature, the source of his fame. Also they made more grotesque an already grotesque and elusive individuality. Winesburg was proud of the hands of Wing Biddlebaum in the same spirit in which it was proud of Banker White's new stone house and Wesley Moyer's bay stallion, Tony Tip, that had won the two-year fifteen trot at the fall races in Cleveland.

As for George Willard, he had many times wanted to ask about the hands. At times an almost overwhelming curiosity had taken hold of him. He felt that there must be a reason for their strange activity and their inclination to keep hidden away and only a growing respect for Wing Biddlebaum kept him from blurting out the questions that were often in his mind.

Once he had been on the point of asking. The two were walking in the fields on a summer afternoon and had stopped to sit upon a grassy bank. All afternoon Wing Biddlebaum had talked as one inspired. By a fence he had stopped and beating like a giant woodpecker upon the top board had shouted at George Willard, condemning his tendency to be too much influenced by the people about him. "You are destroying yourself," he cried. "You have the inclination to be alone and to dream and you are afraid of dreams. You want to be like others in town here. You hear them talk and you try to imitate them."

On the grassy bank Wing Biddlebaum had tried again to drive his point home. His voice became soft and reminiscent, and with a sigh of contentment he launched into a long rambling talk, speaking as one lost in a dream.

Out of the dream Wing Biddlebaum made a picture for George Willard. In the picture men lived again in a kind of pastoral golden age. Across a green open country came clean-limbed young men, some afoot, some mounted upon horses. In crowds the young men came to gather about the feet of an old man who sat beneath a tree in a tiny garden and who talked to them.

Wing Biddlebaum became wholly inspired. For once he forgot the hands. Slowly they stole forward and lay upon George Willard's shoulders. Something new and bold came into the voice that talked. "You must try to forget all you have learned," said the old man. "You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices."

Pausing in his speech, Wing Biddlebaum looked long and earnestly at George Willard. His eyes glowed. Again he raised the hands to caress the boy and then a look of horror swept over his face.

With a convulsive movement of his body, Wing Biddlebaum sprang to his feet and thrust his hands deep into his trousers pockets. Tears came to his eyes. "I must be getting along home. I can talk no more with you," he said nervously.

Without looking back, the old man had hurried down the hillside and across a meadow, leaving George Willard perplexed and frightened upon the grassy slope. With a shiver of dread the boy arose and went along the road toward town. "I'll not ask him about his hands," he thought, touched by the memory of the terror he had seen in the man's eyes. "There's something wrong, but I don't want to know what it is. His hands have something to do with his fear of me and of everyone."

And George Willard was right. Let us look briefly into the story of the hands. Perhaps our talking of them will arouse the poet who will tell the hidden wonder story of the influence for which the hands

were but fluttering pennants of promise.

In his youth Wing Biddlebaum had been a school teacher in a town in Pennsylvania. He was then known as Wing Biddlebaum, but went by the less euphonic name of Adolph Myers. As Adolph Myers he was much loved by the boys of his school.

Adolph Myers was meant by nature to be a teacher of youth. He was one of those rare, little understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness. In their feeling for the boys under their charge such men are not unlike the finer sort of women in their love of men.

And yet that is but crudely stated. It needs the poet there. With the boys of his school, Adolph Myers had walked in the evening or had sat talking until dusk upon the schoolhouse steps lost in a kind of dream. Here and there went his hands, caressing the shoulders of the boys, playing about their tousled heads. As he talked his voice became soft and musical. There was a caress in that also. In any way the voice and the hands, the 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. He was one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized. Under the caress of his hands doubt and disbelief went out of the minds of the boys and they began also to dream.

And then the tragedy. A half-witted boy of the school became enamored of the young master. In his bed at night he imagined unspeakable things and in the morning went forth to tell his dreams as facts. 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.

One afternoon a man of the town, Henry Bradford, who kept a saloon, came to the schoolhouse door. Calling Adolph Myers into the school yard he began to beat him with his fists. As his hard knuckles beat down into the frightened face of the schoolmaster, his wrath became more and more terrible. Screaming with dismay, the children ran here and there like disturbed insects. "I'll teach you to put your hands on my boy, you beast," roared the saloon keeper, who, tired of beating the master, had begun to kick him about the yard.

Adolph Myers was driven from the Pennsylvania town in the night. With lanterns in their hands a dozen men came to the door of the house where he lived alone and commanded that he dress and come forth. It was raining and one of the men had a rope in his hands. They had intended to hang the schoolmaster, but something in his figure, so small, white, and pitiful, touched their hearts and they let him escape. As he ran away into the darkness they repented of their weakness and ran after him, swearing and throwing sticks and great balls of soft mud at the figure that screamed and ran faster and faster into the darkness.

For twenty years Adolph Myers had lived alone in Winesburg. He was but forty but looked sixty-five. The name of Biddlebaum he got from a box of goods seen at a freight station as he hurried through an eastern Ohio town. He had an aunt in Winesburg, a black-toothed old woman who raised chickens, and with her he lived until she died. He had been ill for a year after the experience in Pennsylvania, and after his recovery worked as a day laborer in the fields, going timidly about and striving to conceal his hands. Although he did not understand what had happened he felt that the hands must be to blame. 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.

Upon the veranda of his house by the ravine, Wing Biddlebaum continued to walk up and down

until the sun had disappeared and the road beyond the field was lost in the grey shadows. Going in his house he cut slices of bread and spread honey upon them. When the rumble of the evening train that took away the express cars loaded with the day's harvest of berries had passed and restored the silence of the summer night, he went again to walk upon the veranda. In the darkness he could not see the hands and they became quiet. Although he still hungered for the presence of the boy, who was the medium through which he expressed his love of man, the hunger became again a part of his loneliness and his waiting. Lighting a lamp, Wing Biddlebaum washed the few dishes soiled by his simple meal and, setting up a folding cot by the screen door that led to the porch, prepared to undress for the night. A few stray white bread crumbs lay on the cleanly washed floor by the table; putting the lamp upon a low stool he began to pick up the crumbs, carrying them to his mouth one by one with unbelievable rapidity. In the dense blotch of light beneath the table, the kneeling figure looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church. The nervous expressive fingers, flashing in and out of the light, might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary.

PAPER PILLS

HE WAS an old man with a white beard and huge nose and hands. Long before the time during which we will know him, he was a doctor and drove a jaded white horse from house to house through the streets of Winesburg. Later he married a girl who had money. She had been left a large fertile farm when her father died. The girl was quiet, tall, and dark, and to many people she seemed very beautiful. Everyone in Winesburg wondered why she married the doctor. Within a year after the marriage she died.

The knuckles of the doctor's 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. 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 with cobwebs. He never opened the window. Once on a hot day in August he tried but found himself stuck fast and after that he forgot all about it.

Winesburg had forgotten the old man, but in Doctor Reefy there were the seeds of something very fine. Alone in his musty office in the Heffner Block above the Paris Dry Goods Company's store, he worked ceaselessly, building up something that he himself destroyed. Little pyramids of truth were erected and after erecting knocked them down again that he might have the truths to erect other pyramids.

Doctor Reefy was a tall man who had worn one suit of clothes for ten years. It was frayed at the sleeves and little holes had appeared at the knees and elbows. In the office he wore also a linen dust coat with huge pockets into which he continually stuffed scraps of paper. After some weeks the scraps of paper became little hard round balls, and when the pockets were filled he dumped them out upon the floor. For ten years he had but one friend, another old man named John Spaniard who owned a tree nursery. Sometimes, in a playful mood, old Doctor Reefy took from his pockets a handful of the paper balls and threw them at the nursery man. "That is to confound you, you blithering old sentimentalist," he cried, shaking with laughter.

The story of Doctor Reefy and his courtship of the tall dark girl who became his wife and left her money to him is a very curious story. It is delicious, like the twisted little apples that grow in the orchards of Winesburg. In the fall one walks in the orchards and the ground is hard with frost underfoot. 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, magazine 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. One nibbles at them and they are delicious. Into a little round place at the side of the apple has been gathered all of its sweetness. One runs from tree to tree over the frosted ground picking the gnarled, twisted apples and filling his pockets with them. Only the few know the sweetness of the twisted apples.

The girl and Doctor Reefy began their courtship on a summer afternoon. He was forty-five then and already he had begun the practice of filling his pockets with the scraps of paper that became hard balls and were thrown away. The habit had been formed as he sat in his buggy behind the jaded white horse and went slowly along country roads. On the papers were written thoughts, ends of thoughts

beginnings of thoughts.

One by one the mind of Doctor Reefy had made the thoughts. Out of many of them he formed truth that arose gigantic in his mind. The truth clouded the world. It became terrible and then faded away and the little thoughts began again.

The tall dark girl came to see Doctor Reefy because she was in the family way and had become frightened. She was in that condition because of a series of circumstances also curious.

The death of her father and mother and the rich acres of land that had come down to her had set a train of suitors on her heels. For two years she saw suitors almost every evening. Except two they were all alike. They talked to her of passion and there was a strained eager quality in their voices and in their eyes when they looked at her. The two who were different were much unlike each other. One of them, a slender young man with white hands, the son of a jeweler in Winesburg, talked continually of virginity. When he was with her he was never off the subject. The other, a black-haired boy with large ears, said nothing at all but always managed to get her into the darkness, where he began to kiss her.

For a time the tall dark girl thought she would marry the jeweler's son. For hours she sat in silence listening as he talked to her and then she began to be afraid of something. Beneath his talk of virginity she began to think there was a lust greater than in all the others. At times it seemed to her that as he talked he was holding her body in his hands. She imagined him turning it slowly about in the white hands and staring at it. At night she dreamed that he had bitten into her body and that his jaws were dripping. She had the dream three times, then she became in the family way to the one who said nothing at all but who in the moment of his passion actually did bite her shoulder so that for days the marks of his teeth showed.

After the tall dark girl came to know Doctor Reefy it seemed to her that she never wanted to leave him again. She went into his office one morning and without her saying anything he seemed to know what had happened to her.

In the office of the doctor there was a woman, the wife of the man who kept the bookstore in Winesburg. Like all old-fashioned country practitioners, Doctor Reefy pulled teeth, and the woman who waited held a handkerchief to her teeth and groaned. Her husband was with her and when the tooth was taken out they both screamed and blood ran down on the woman's white dress. The tall dark girl did not pay any attention. When the woman and the man had gone the doctor smiled. "I will take you driving into the country with me," he said.

For several weeks the tall dark girl and the doctor were together almost every day. The condition that had brought her to him passed in an illness, but she was like one who has discovered the sweetness of the twisted apples, she could not get her mind fixed again upon the round perfect fruit that is eaten in the city apartments. In the fall after the beginning of her acquaintanceship with him she married Doctor Reefy and in the following spring she died. During the winter he read to her all the odds and ends of thoughts he had scribbled on the bits of paper. After he had read them he laughed and stuffed them away in his pockets to become round hard balls.

MOTHER

ELIZABETH WILLARD, the mother of George Willard, was tall and gaunt and her face was marked with smallpox scars. Although she was but forty-five, some obscure disease had taken the fire out of her figure. Listlessly she went about the disorderly old hotel looking at the faded wall-paper and the ragged carpets and, when she was able to be about, doing the work of a chambermaid among beds soiled by the slumbers of fat traveling men. Her husband, Tom Willard, a slender, graceful man with square shoulders, a quick military step, and a black mustache trained to turn sharply up at the end, tried to put the wife out of his mind. The presence of the tall ghostly figure, moving slowly through the halls, he took as a reproach to himself. When he thought of her he grew angry and swore. The hotel was unprofitable and forever on the edge of failure and he wished himself out of it. He thought of the old house and the woman who lived there with him as things defeated and done for. The hotel in which he had begun life so hopefully was now a mere ghost of what a hotel should be. As he went spruce and businesslike through the streets of Winesburg, he sometimes stopped and turned quickly about, though fearing that the spirit of the hotel and of the woman would follow him even into the street. "Damn such a life, damn it!" he sputtered aimlessly.

Tom Willard had a passion for village politics and for years had been the leading Democrat in a strongly Republican community. Some day, he told himself, the tide of things political will turn in his favor and the years of ineffectual service count big in the bestowal of rewards. He dreamed of going to Congress and even of becoming governor. Once when a younger member of the party arose at a political conference and began to boast of his faithful service, Tom Willard grew white with fury. "Shut up, you," he roared, glaring about. "What do you know of service? What are you but a boy! Look at what I've done here! I was a Democrat here in Winesburg when it was a crime to be a Democrat. In the old days they fairly hunted us with guns."

Between Elizabeth and her one son George there was a deep unexpressed bond of sympathy, based on a girlhood dream that had long ago died. In the son's presence she was timid and reserved, but sometimes while he hurried about town intent upon his duties as a reporter, she went into his room and closing the door knelt by a little desk, made of a kitchen table, that sat near a window. In the room by the desk she went through a ceremony that was half a prayer, half a demand, addressed to the skies. In the boyish figure she yearned to see something half forgotten that had once been a part of herself re-created. The prayer concerned that. "Even though I die, I will in some way keep defeat from you," she cried, and so deep was her determination that her whole body shook. Her eyes glowed and she clenched her fists. "If I am dead and see him becoming a meaningless drab figure like myself, I will come back," she declared. "I ask God now to give me that privilege. I demand it. I will pay for it. God may beat me with his fists. I will take any blow that may befall if but this my boy be allowed to express something for us both." Pausing uncertainly, the woman stared about the boy's room. "And do not let him become smart and successful either," she added vaguely.

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 Ma-

Street. By turning their heads they could see through another window, along an alleyway that ran behind the Main Street stores and into the back door of Abner Groff's bakery. Sometimes as they sat thus a picture of village life presented itself to them. At the back door of his shop appeared Abner Groff with a stick or an empty milk bottle in his hand. For a long time there was a feud between the baker and a grey cat that belonged to Sylvester West, the druggist. The boy and his mother saw the cat creep into the door of the bakery and presently emerge followed by the baker, who swore and waved his arms about. The baker's eyes were small and red and his black hair and beard were filled with flour dust. Sometimes he was so angry that, although the cat had disappeared, he hurled sticks, bits of broken glass, and even some of the tools of his trade about. Once he broke a window at the back of Sinnings' Hardware Store. In the alley the grey cat crouched behind barrels filled with torn paper and broken bottles above which flew a black swarm of flies. Once when she was alone, and after watching a prolonged and ineffectual outburst on the part of the baker, Elizabeth Willard put her head down on her long white hands and wept. After that she did not look along the alleyway any more, but tried to forget the contest between the bearded man and the cat. It seemed like a rehearsal of her own life, terrible in its vividness.

In the evening when the son sat in the room with his mother, the silence made them both feel awkward. Darkness came on and the evening train came in at the station. In the street below feet tramped up and down upon a board sidewalk. In the station yard, after the evening train had gone, there was a heavy silence. Perhaps Skinner Leason, the express agent, moved a truck the length of the station platform. Over on Main Street sounded a man's voice, laughing. The door of the express office banged. George Willard arose and crossing the room fumbled for the doorknob. Sometimes he knocked against 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 on 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.

One evening in July, when the transient guests who made the New Willard House their temporary home had become scarce, and the hallways, lighted only by kerosene lamps turned low, were plunged in gloom, Elizabeth Willard had an adventure. She had been ill in bed for several days and her son had not come to visit her. She was alarmed. The feeble blaze of life that remained in her body was blown into a flame by her anxiety and she crept out of bed, dressed and hurried along the hallway toward her son's room, shaking with exaggerated fears. As she went along she steadied herself with her hands, slipped along the papered walls of the hall and breathed with difficulty. The air whistled through her teeth. As she hurried forward she thought how foolish she was. "He is concerned with boyish affairs," she told herself. "Perhaps he has now begun to walk about in the evening with girls."

Elizabeth Willard had a dread of being seen by guests in the hotel that had once belonged to her father and the ownership of which still stood recorded in her name in the county courthouse. The hotel was continually losing patronage because of its shabbiness and she thought of herself as also shabby. Her own room was in an obscure corner and when she felt able to work she voluntarily worked among the beds, preferring the labor that could be done when the guests were abroad seeking trade among the merchants of Winesburg.

By the door of her son's room the mother knelt upon the floor and listened for some sound from within. When she heard the boy moving about and talking in low tones a smile came to her lips. George Willard had a habit of talking aloud to himself and to hear him doing so had always given his mother a peculiar pleasure. The habit in him, she felt, strengthened the secret bond that existed

between them. A thousand times she had whispered to herself of the matter. "He is groping about trying to find himself," she thought. "He is not a dull clod, all words and smartness. Within him there is a secret something that is striving to grow. It is the thing I let be killed in myself."

In the darkness in the hallway by the door the sick woman arose and started again toward her own room. She was afraid that the door would open and the boy come upon her. When she had reached a safe distance and was about to turn a corner into a second hallway she stopped and bracing herself with her hands waited, thinking to shake off a trembling fit of weakness that had come upon her. The presence of the boy in the room had made her happy. In her bed, during the long hours alone, the little fears that had visited her had become giants. Now they were all gone. "When I get back to my room I shall sleep," she murmured gratefully.

But Elizabeth Willard was not to return to her bed and to sleep. As she stood trembling in the darkness the door of her son's room opened and the boy's father, Tom Willard, stepped out. In the light that streamed out at the door he stood with the knob in his hand and talked. What he said infuriated the woman.

Tom Willard was ambitious for his son. He had always thought of himself as a successful man although nothing he had ever done had turned out successfully. However, when he was out of sight of the New Willard House and had no fear of coming upon his wife, he swaggered and began to dramatize himself as one of the chief men of the town. He wanted his son to succeed. He had secured for the boy the position on the *Winesburg Eagle*. Now, with a ring of earnestness in his voice, he was advising concerning some course of conduct. "I tell you what, George, you've got to wake up," he said sharply. "Will Henderson has spoken to me three times concerning the matter. He says you go along for hours not hearing when you are spoken to and acting like a gawky girl. What are you?" Tom Willard laughed good-naturedly. "Well, I guess you'll get over it," he said. "I told Willard that. You're not a fool and you're not a woman. You're Tom Willard's son and you'll wake up. I'm not afraid. What you say clears things up. If being a newspaper man had put the notion of becoming a writer into your mind that's all right. Only I guess you'll have to wake up to do that too, eh?"

Tom Willard went briskly along the hallway and down a flight of stairs to the office. The woman in the darkness could hear him laughing and talking with a guest who was striving to wear away a dull evening by dozing in a chair by the office door. She returned to the door of her son's room. The weakness had passed from her body as by a miracle and she stepped boldly along. A thousand ideas raced through her head. When she heard the scraping of a chair and the sound of a pen scratching upon paper, she again turned and went back along the hallway to her own room.

A definite determination had come into the mind of the defeated wife of the Winesburg hotel-keeper. The determination was the result of long years of quiet and rather ineffectual thinking. "Now," she told herself, "I will act. There is something threatening my boy and I will ward it off." The fact that the conversation between Tom Willard and his son had been rather quiet and natural, as though a mutual understanding existed between them, maddened her. Although for years she had hated her husband her hatred had always before been a quite impersonal thing. He had been merely a part of something else that she hated. Now, and by the few words at the door, he had become the thing personified. In the darkness of her own room she clenched her fists and glared about. Going to a cloth bag that hung on a nail by the wall she took out a long pair of sewing scissors and held them in her hand like a dagger. "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."

In her girlhood and before her marriage with Tom Willard, Elizabeth had borne a somewhat shaky reputation in Winesburg. For years she had been what is called "stage-struck" and had paraded

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