Hands Essay, Research Paper

Wineburg, Ohio

Winesburg, Ohio, also known as the Book of Grotesque is a modern American classic by Sherwood Anderson. He came to be known as the ?Father of Realism?, as he left his mark on literature, being the first one to portray authentic moments in American life. He tells the stories of many ?faces? he saw in his dreams, describing their deeply moving lives filled with secrets. The twenty-one stories in the novel are united through the setting, Winesburg, and the main character, George Willard. The novel is character driven, and the stories have very weak plots. Winesburg is a small town, full of lonely characters whom Anderson calls ?grotesques? because of their inability to express themselves and communicate with others. The readers notice immediately that the stories have a visible pattern. Each begins with a short introduction and continues with a flash-back, in which the author explains the cause of their trauma (inability to communicate). After recognizing their unspoken truth, the main character has an ?adventure?, in which he or she experiences a moment of revelation. Sadly, however, the characters then return to their original ineffective state.

?Hands? is a very beautiful and one of the most acclaimed pieces by Anderson. This story revolves around a character called Wing Biddlebaum, who lives a solitary life in Winesburg after a tragedy in Pennsylvania. At one time, he was a charismatic teacher, who taught the students to dream. However, one day he is mistakenly believed to have harassed his students and was never able to teach again. He becomes a grotesque because of the confusion and fear caused by the incident. As many other characters, he reaches out to George Willard in an attempt to express himself. At the beginning Wing Biddlebaum is seen as a reclusive old man. Then, the story reveals his gift of being perceptive and passionate. In the end, he is woven into a fragile character, aching from his unfulfilled passion.

One of the adjectives that best describes Wing Biddlebaum is reclusive. Anderson often uses description of the character?s houses to provide insight into their personality. In this story, Wing Biddlebaum lives in a ?small framed house? with a ?half-decayed veranda?, thus revealing his isolation and ?destroyed? (10) spirit. Small-framed houses have scarcity of light, hence suggesting that Biddlebaum is closed and has a lack of communication. Even though he has lived in Winesburg for twenty years, he ?did not think of himself as in any way a part of the life of the town? (12). During the long years of his residence, he never considers himself as a part of the community. The only person with whom he develops a kind of friendship was George Willard. During a conversation with him, Biddlebaum leaves saying, ?I can?t talk no more with you,? (15) because the anguish from the tragic memory overtook him. However, he ?still hungered for the presence of the boy, who was the medium through which he expressed his love of man? (15). He runs away from George, but he still wishes his company; this manifestation makes him lonelier and more isolated.

Wing Biddlebaum is gifted with a quality that cannot be seen in most of (us) the people. During the flash-back, when the story goes back to the past and looks at the days when he used to be a teacher at Pennsylvania, Biddlbaum ?was one of those rare, little-understood men who rule by a power so gentle that it passes as a lovable weakness? (14). These fragment reveals that he was one of the few people who can not only perceive other people?s feelings, but can also teach them how to dream. Biddlbaum?s ?voice and hands, the stroking of the shoulders and the touching of the hair were a part of the [his] effort to carry a dream into the young minds.? He understood his students? doubts and disbelief. Knowing that the only way to start dreaming is by forgetting all negative thoughts, he was able to get rid of their worries and allow them to dream. He expressed himself ?by the caress that was in his fingers… He was one of those men in whom the force that creates life is diffused, not centralized? (14). Wing captured the thoughts and feelings of others so well, that they got dilated as a part of him. Through his hands, he unveiled his passion, and he shared his gift allowing people to follow their vision and carry through their goals.

After the tragic days in Pennsylvania, Biddlebaum gives up his passion, which causes an indescribable aching in him. Submerged in a sea of doubts and apprehension, he is unable to express himself and the words get ?accumulated in his mind during long years of silence,? resulting in a sad desolation. The story of Wing Biddlebaum is a story about hands. His hands, with its ?restless activity, like unto the beating of the wings of an imprisoned bird? (14) symbolize many things. The movement of the wings of an imprisoned bird shows his yen to realize his unfulfilled desire comparable to a bird?s desire to escape and fly away. Biddlebaum?s hands contain the ?essence? of his being; they are the means of expression, which later become the source of his fear and confusion. While inspiring George Willard to begin dreaming, Biddlebaum passionately him, ?You must begin to dream. From this time on you must shut your ears to the roaring of the voices? (15). Then, after an attempt to caress the boy Biddlebaum leaves with dismay, remembering about his distressing hands, and is unable to fulfill his passion. The story ends with Wing Biddlebaum eating a piece of bread with an incredible rapidity. The figure ?looked like a priest engaged in some service of his church,? and his fingers ?might well have been mistaken for the fingers of the devotee going swiftly through decade after decade of his rosary” (16). Just like a priest who is born to serve the church, Biddlebaum is an innate teacher. He is like a priest who goes (prays?) through his rosary over and over again, so fast that he does not see where he is leading. Blinded, he loses the meaning of his existence, hence arousing an unexplainable aching in his soul.

Wing Biddlebaum, is an old man with a special quality who unfortunately carries out a reclusive life in Winesburg. Because of a tragic incident, he resigns on his passion of teaching people to dream. He suffers from this forfeited yearning, thus becoming spiritually alienated. At the moment of its publication, Winesburg, Ohio was seen as morally offensive. Many saw a bunch of mentally crippled individuals, rather than Anderson?s true message. The book is an attempt of the author to make society apprehend the harm caused by living out of one?s heart. In every one of Anderson?s characters, there are moments of an emotional truth; truth of passion, truth of fortune, truth of devotion, and so on… These truths might be a bit exaggerated, but only to make a lasting impact on readers to persuade reflection. There are many people who suffer from repressed emotions and if we get rid of them and be true to ourselves, we might be able to pursue greater happiness.