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A MODE OF GOOD:

FORM AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

by
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of the requirements for the degree of
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A MODE OF GOOD:
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CHAPTER I

Fourteen years have passed since John W. Aldridge dismissed Flannery O'Connor as "definitely a minor young novelist," and left his readers with the sense that she would fade from our view as the popularity of Southern writers and quarterly magazines waned.[1] Aldridge did not indicate whether he had read more than Wise Blood (1952); presumably he had not, since he mentions her only as a novelist, though most of her best short stories had been published by 1955, the year before he wrote. Other readers, perhaps because they knew the stories (the novel is difficult and unarguably has rough edges), did not share his view, and O'Connor's writing succeeded in engendering very considerable interest here and abroad. Wise Blood was issued for the third time in America the same year Aldridge published his unfavorable opinion (1956), was translated into French in 1959, and published in England in 1960; a second American edition appeared in 1962 and was reprinted in 1964 (in the volume titled Three, which includes A Good Man Is Hard to Find and The Violent Bear It Away). Her works continue to appear on the paperback racks; they have been translated into German and Greek as well as into French; they are anthologized with increasing frequency. The critical interest in England has been substantial as it

has been in France, and in this country the still-growing body of commentary upon her work begins to be staggering. With the proliferation, as if by definition, controversy has erupted, and if controversy alone were to be taken as a measure of magnitude, Flannery O'Connor's star would be one of the brightest in the skies.

Though a blurb writer for L'express blithely called her "un grand écrivain américain" and "sans doute un des écrivains américains les plus représentatifs, les plus affirmés de l'actuelle génération, par sa violence, son humour, son sens de l'horreur,"[2] critics generally have found it rather more difficult to place her with relation to other writers. The crux of their problem perhaps is embodied in the interpretive analysis of Wise Blood done by Jonathan Baumbach.[3] Perceptive though his essay is, Baumbach finds O'Connor's methods conflicting with the message she sought to convey:

> That her most potent scenes rely on the impact, comic and pathetic, inherent in the nightmare reality of her situations suggests that the nature of her talent often distorted the explicitly theological concerns that inform her work.[4]

Thus, while Baumbach acknowledges O'Connor's own announced intention that her writings should be prophetically Christian, and understands the main thrust of the religious arguments of her fiction, he fails to find vital and dynamic relation between the specifics of her vision and the particulars of her theology ("The ending of Wise Blood, despite its thematic justification, is not convincing as experience"). For him, O'Connor is in the tradition of American gothic--he

cites Hawthorne and Faulkner--but her world remains "exclusive." His attempt to reconcile her humor and her theology with her methods and her vision of horror ends in failure to recognize that the key to their relations lies in understanding the pervasive irony of O'Connor's total vision. The problem is to explain how a fictional world populated almost entirely by ugly, violent people seemingly bent upon destroying each other can be seen as offering an affirmation of Christian truth. The answer has to lie in recognizing that the twentieth-century writer who wishes to persuade his readers to the viability of Christianity in a world increasingly cruel and chaotic in appearance must express his faith in terms that fully recognize all that ugliness and the insecurity it engenders. It is impossible to conceive how this can be accomplished unless the author achieves an articulate ironic tension between his meaning and his artistic method. As O'Connor herself argued, there was no mode open to her but the grotesque.

The problem is rendered especially subtle by Flannery O'Connor's scrupulosity in avoiding the 'unrealistic' and in steadfastly refusing to explicitly invoke God or Christian dogma or even the idea of an ordered universe. This scrupulosity has made it difficult for her interpreters to get very far beyond her incisively rendered details, so that in varying ways her art has been seen as imperfectly realizing her intentions. The problem has been compounded by vague and unsatisfactory definitions of the grotesque mode. At least one

critic has found in those details justification for the notion that O'Connor's fiction constitutes an intentional rebellion against, and a denial of, a Christian faith that the author only professed elsewhere in order to calm her Catholic relatives and friends. It is necessary to look briefly at representative interpretations if we are to understand the critical problem at all fully.

Jean-Marie G. Le Clezio, O'Connor's chief French advocate, responds excitedly to the immediacy of impact her details lend to the fiction:

> . . . la réalité du monde qui nous entoure n'est pas à mettre en doute. Ce dont il nous faut nous méfier, c'est du sens que nous lui accordons. Nous interprétons mal. Nous créons des images en notre faveur, des images qui nous font plaisir et nous grandissent. Derrière chacune de nos paroles, derrière chacun de nos actes, il y a la vanité. Si l'univers que nous présente Flannery O'Connor nous choque, c'est bien moins parce qu'il est confus et brutal que parce qu'il est vrai.[5]

It is very much to Le Clezio's credit that he can perceive such force in the works of a writer whose terms are distinctively those of the rural, fundamentalist southern United States. But a problem arises when he undertakes to examine those terms closely, because he finds them working toward a goal that is compatible with the ends of art as they are defined by objectivism, the aesthetic of Alain Robbe-Grillet, for whom it is imperative that:

> Instead of this universe of "signification" [which he finds to be the major failing of the traditional novel] (psychological, social, functional), we must try . . . to construct a world more solid and more immediate. Let it be first of all by their presence that objects and gestures establish themselves, and let this presence continue to prevail

> over whatever explanatory theory that may try to enclose them in a system of references, whether emotional, sociological, Freudian, or metaphysical.[6]

It is in trying to hold O'Connor to this standard that Le Clezio goes astray, because she has a system of references that she uses to enclose the objects and gestures of her fiction. For him it is a bit as if The Violent Bear It Away were a kind of imperfect Last Year at Marienbad, in which the struggle between the old Tarwater (of whom O'Connor said, "He lacks the visible Church, but Christ is the center of his life,"[7] and "Old Tarwater is the hero of 'The Violent Bear It Away,' and I'm right behind him 100 percent"[8]) and his nephew, Rayber, is not a conflict between faith and scientism but a fight between two men with different ways of fending off their fear that the universe is a void. Thus they are simply asserting themselves in their quarrel over the baptism of the young idiot Rayber:

> Pour lutter contre ce climat funeste, les hommes se tournent vers la jeunesse, vers l'enfance, vers la naissance. Il s'agit de se les approprier. Blasphématoire ou bien sacramental, le baptême est l'acte le plus important. C'est l'acte de propriété par excellence, celui qui extirpe du néant, qui signe qui fait naître une deuxième fois.[9]

O'Connor herself, however, said that she "wanted to get across the fact that the great Uncle (Old Tarwater) is the Christian --a sort of crypto-Catholic--and that the schoolteacher (Rayber) is the typical modern man. The boy (young Tarwater) has to choose which one, which way, he wants to follow. It's a matter of vocation."[10] While Le Clezio does not see the novel as fulfilling the conditions of the objectivist credo, neither does he capture the specific nor the large sense of what

O'Connor wanted to do--an intention we will come to see she was remarkably successful in realizing.

While Le Clezio does not succeed in satisfying all the questions O'Connor raises for the critic, he is perhaps more successful than most of her American commentators precisely because he does attempt to come to terms with her methods, and because he is less troubled by her brand of Catholicism than the mystified Protestants or the many nuns busily apologizing for her in the various professional journals. The question of her Catholicism has preoccupied most of the American commentators, who either discount it and end up unable to explain coherently what is going on in the two novels and the stories, or assume it without sufficient examination and try to explain her methods--also inadequately and certainly unsystematically scrutinized--in its terms. In 1958, a special issue of Critique was devoted to the writing of O'Connor and J. F. Powers, and will serve to give some sense of the early confusion--worth noting because it continues to prevail.

In that magazine, Caroline Gordon (an intimate of O'Connor) places her both in and out of the Southern school, finding strong resemblances to Capote, McCullers, and T. Williams but recognizing a separation borne of O'Connor's religious vision; she comes up wondering whether Haze Motes (of Wise Blood) might be "in his way, an Existentialist?"[11] Louis D. Rubin is downright anxious to demonstrate O'Connor's merits and has to locate them in her artistry because he

finds weakness precisely where Miss Gordon finds strength; yet he doesn't manage to describe the terms of that artistry very clearly, and further compromises his position by finding her too obviously allegorical.[12] While Sister M. Bernetta Quinn doesn't join with Rubin on this latter point, she does contrive to find most of the stories representative of sacramental truths.[13] And so on, to the student's confusion. Miss Gordon is perceptive (Haze is indeed an existentialist) and Rubin's specific comparisons of O'Connor to Erskine Caldwell are useful, but they don't work toward a comprehensive approach to the myriad problems presented in the small canon O'Connor bequeathed.

There have been some quite helpful comments. Baumbach's treatment of Wise Blood is certainly one of them, and several articles by Rubin, P. Albert Duhamel, Stuart L. Burns, Irving Malin, Nathan A. Scott, Jr., C. Hugh Holman, and Melvin J. Friedman are enlightening on specific matters or in pinpointing important questions. The systematic discussion of O'Connor's themes that Carter W. Martin provides in The True Country[14] is useful and often perceptive, although it doesn't come to satisfactory terms with the problems of O'Connor's style and its relation to her themes. Josephine Hendin's recent The World of Flannery O'Connor,[15] often incoherent and often undeniably wrong (not only because Hendin's inattention to specifics of the texts causes her to make serious misstatements of fact from which she then extrapolates in arriving at interpretations, but because she holds

that O'Connor wasn't really Catholic) is useful for its fulsome job of pointing up the pitfalls to which criticism can be susceptible.[16] Fuller definition of the problems O'Connor presents requires attention here to Martin's work, along with Irving Malin's "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque" and Lewis A. Lawson's excellent "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque: Wise Blood"; others will be called upon where they will serve best, and Hendin's book will be discussed in Appendix I.

In The True Country, Martin comes to the conclusion that:

> The difficulties that the typical Flannery O'Connor story presents are like those encountered in much modern poetry; both contain techniques that are oblique rather than direct; both seek to convey the total complexity of the subject without sacrificing the author's moral intent; and both employ a principle of economy which generates such density that only the serious reader can respond adequately to the work of art before him. To the literary dilettante, to the morally neutral reader, and to those who are squeamish or sentimental, Flannery O'Connor's fiction will generate a startling range of misconceptions and preposterous analytical abuses. But to the reader with a sound background in modern literature and an orthodox understanding of Christocentric religion, Miss O'Connor's work will be understood for what it is--a unique and forceful body of fiction based upon the profound and yet simple verities that have been the focal point of Western thought for almost two thousand years. (TC, 241-42)

In attempting to define O'Connor's relation with "orthodox Christocentric religion," Martin turns naturally enough to her remarks upon the subject, remarks made primarily in two essays: "The Church and the Fiction Writer" and "The Fiction Writer and His Country." He finds that her "When People have

told me that because I am Catholic, I cannot be an artist, I have had to reply, ruefully, that because I am a Catholic I cannot afford to be less than an artist" means essentially two things: "what she does best must be done for God," and that "as a Catholic her vision is directed by a sacramental view of life." This is taken to explain what she meant when she said "that fiction 'should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality'," and also to explain certain technical qualities of her work:

> She schieves this combination of the supernatural and the concrete in a great variety of ways; at one extreme she uses the traditional symbols of the sun, light and dark, and such animals as the peacock to link the rural landscape of her stories with the eternal landscape, "the true country." The same bridge is made, however, when her images are drawn from the ordinary features of commonplace lives . . .

However,

> The sacramental view is, of course, more than the transformation of an object into a sign of the mystery that resides in the created universe; as the term itself says, it is a vision of reality focused through the seven sacraments which constitute the means of recognizing and accepting divine grace. The sacramental view thus provides for man's discovery of his place in the divine scheme of salvation--the recognition and acceptance of grace . . . "We lost our innocence in the fall of our first parents," she remarks in "The Church and the Fiction Writer," "and our return to it is through the redemption which was brought about by Christ's death and by our slow participation in it." (TC, 12-15)

It is in keeping with such an understanding of O'Connor's Catholicism that he has sorted her fiction according to the presence in particular works of themes defined in orthodox Catholic terms: "Corruptions of the Spirit," "The Presence

of Grace," "Manifestations of God's Grace." On the other hand, while he seems to be describing a unified vision, his discussion of stylistic particularities is quite separate from his discussion of the themes, and as it is with the themes, the particularities are separated one from another. All this would be acceptable had he found a way to suggest organic and vital bonds among them rather than ending with the suggestion that only the very knowledgeable and serious-minded could hope to cope with O'Connor.[17]

The significance of the problem Martin focuses for us can be specified by examining a single passage from his final chapter, "Technique as Theme: Satire and Irony":

> The early portions of ["A Good Man Is Hard to Find"] function to characterize both the grandmother and the Misfit unsympathetically, the grandmother by dramatic means, the Misfit indirectly by frequent reference to him by others. Both of them are unpleasant, destructive characters, sharing in the responsibility for the multiple killing, but the positive Christian theme is expressed through them: the grandmother becomes worthy by recognizing her participation in evil as the Misfit's symbolic mother, and the Misfit is revealed as an outrageous, shocking representative of mankind suffering and protesting against a world of injustice. The Misfit's suffering is intense because he fails to understand it in the context of Christianity; his highly charged colloquial dialogue with the grandmother demonstrates that he is engaged with moral questions, and his answers, even though wrong, evoke sympathy. His yearning for absolute authority to impose order upon the world is indicated by his remark that the grandmother would have been a good woman "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" . . . He rebukes Bobby Lee for making light of his comment and tells him, "It's no real pleasure in life" . . . The Misfit, then, in juxtaposition to a similarly destructive figure who has recognized the reality of grace at the last minute, is a tragic figure who struggles vainly against his own convictions. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," like "The Partridge Festival," must be understood in terms of its highly ironic

> pattern: the author enlists the reader's conventional sympathies in one direction and then turns them the opposite way. (TC, 229-30)

Marked as the passage is by a typical astuteness of insight, it nonetheless raises questions Martin leaves unanswered. Clearly he is right in finding the story's irony not mere device but a thematic concern in its own right. But what are the sources of the irony, and what are its precise operations? If The Misfit is a tragic figure, he certainly is no Oedipus; though he has a measure of our sympathies, those sympathies are not commingled with a sense of the inevitability of his plight or the fitness of his decision. Indeed, if we are to understand that the grandmother "has recognized the reality of grace at the last minute," then we are obliged as well to recognize that in that same minute The Misfit could have saved himself:

> "Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead," The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can--by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said and his voice had become almost a snarl.
>
> "Maybe He didn't raise the dead," the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying and feeling so dizzy that she sank down in the ditch with her legs twisted under her.
>
> "I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't," The Misfit said. "I wisht I had of been there," he said, hitting the ground with his fist. "It ain't right I wasn't there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady," he said in a high voice, "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." His voice seemed about to crack

> and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, "Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!" She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest. Then he put his gun down on the ground and took off his glasses and began to clean them.[18]

The Misfit's reaction to the grandmother's touch is clear indication that he is afraid of its meaning; that he is aware he has missed something is demonstrated when, after he has her body thrown with those of her family, his earlier "No pleasure but meanness" becomes "It's no real pleasure in life." Still, as Martin says, we sympathize with him despite his wrong choice, and it has to be because O'Connor wants us to recognize something of ourselves in him or in his plight.

Further, O'Connor once said of the story that "It is naturalistic writing,"[19] and it must be noted that, as Martin says, the grandmother hasn't deserved the benefit of divine grace, she is justified neither through faith nor through works, and she never engages our sympathies in the same way or even, I would posit, to the same extent that The Misfit does. The only ways we know that grace has come are through our recognition of the passion of her murmured recognition of herself in The Misfit and his response to it. This latter is the point upon which the irony ultimately turns, and seeing that doesn't explain it. It is not surprising, then, that Martin does not undertake to explain it in terms of any conventional understanding of the operations

of Christ in our lives. However it is disappointing that he doesn't undertake to explain it at all; certainly it isn't handled by his earlier quotation from Richard Poirier to the effect that "it is her particular genius to make us believe that there are Christian mysteries in things irreduceably /sic/ banal" (TC, 14).

At least two external clues to the nature of O'Connor's Christianity were offered Martin by Robert Fitzgerald's introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge. There Fitzgerald indirectly points to O'Connor's lack of conventional Catholic attitudes when he tells of her trip to Lourdes, where her mother and cousin hoped she would find a cure for the disseminated lupus that eventually took her life:

> Flannery dreaded the possibility of a miracle at Lourdes, and she forced herself to the piety of the bath for her mother's sake and Cousin Katie's; she also accompanied the pilgrims to Rome for an audience with Pope Pius XII, who received her with interest and gave her a special blessing. On May 11, home again, she wrote: "I enjoyed most seeing you all and the Pope . . ."[20]

That such attitudes were intellectually as well as emotionally strong in her O'Connor made clear herself in "The Church and the Fiction Writer":

> A belief in fixed dogma cannot fix what goes on in life or bind the believer to it. It will, of course, add to the writer's observation a dimension which many cannot, in conscience, acknowledge; but as long as what they can acknowledge is present in the work, they cannot claim that any freedom has been denied the artist. A dimension taken away is one thing; a dimension added is another, and what the Catholic writer and reader will have to remember is that the reality of the added dimension will be judged in a work of fiction by the truthfulness and wholeness of

> the literal level of the natural events presented. If the Catholic writer hopes to reveal mysteries, he will have to do it by describing truthfully what he sees from where he is. A purely affirmative vision cannot be demanded of him without limiting his freedom to observe what man has done with the things of God.[21]

Martin acknowledges but discounts the second clue provided by Fitzgerald's introduction. This clue looks in the same direction as the first, perhaps even more relevantly; Fitzgerald points out that the title, Everything That Rises Must Converge, "comes from Teilhard de Chardin, whose works Flannery O'Connor had been reading at least since 1961 when she recommended them to me."[22] This clue is one of profound import. As a fellow Jesuit has pointed out, Teilhard de Chardin's fundamental preoccupation was

> the discontinuity he experienced between love of God and love of the world, between human achievement and the kingdom of Christ, between Christian detachment and personal development, between the data of revelation and scientific research.[23]

What troubled Teilhard, then, is what troubled Saint Paul and Saint Augustine, to say nothing of conventional Christians at the height of the Darwinian controversy; it put him among those who believe in the concept of the felix culpa; it associated him with heterodoxy in the eyes of his Jesuitical superiors, who forbade him to publish and would not allow him to stand for a professorship at the Sorbonne when he was called upon to do so; it made of him a Christian existentialist. That Flannery O'Connor was responsive to him must be understood to shed some light upon the guarded reception she accorded the established dogmas, which are essentially

statements of Thomistic cosmology that seek authority in metaphysical systems and thus run counter to the Augustinian emphases on ontology and phenomenology. If nothing else were to support this idea, the Augustinian austerity of her view of reality would suffice.

Fitzgerald acknowledges that Teilhard's vision and O'Connor's are similarly stern but he otherwise discounts the influence. Martin follows his lead; although he does state that Teilhard's "ideas are highly relevant to the particular meaning of Flannery O'Connor's sacramental view," he adds that "there is no systematic, allegorical representation of Teilhard's ideas in her fiction." The relevance, as he sees it, derives from Teilhard's formulation of an "Omega" point, a "oneness" towards synthesis in which all processes of the universe are seen as ascending, including the self-conscious souls of men; at the Omega point, "the convergent nature of the universe is achieved." And:

> Just as Teilhard's system encompasses the slow time of prehistory leading to the emergence of man, Flannery O'Connor's fiction gives dramatic, concrete form to the humble and often banal insight that enables the individual man to move toward grace by rising only slightly. It is <u>this</u> movement that she means when she speaks of our <u>slow</u> participation in redemption. Flannery O'Connor's recognition of this very real phenomenon of rising and converging is at the heart of her own sacramental view.

Beyond that Martin's investigation of Twilhard's relevance does not go, and he suggests to us that we should not attempt to compare O'Connor's stories closely with either Teilhard's ideas or "predetermined Catholic theology" (<u>TC</u>, 16-17). He builds a respectable case for such a position in the remain-

der of the chapter, but it is the book's first chapter, and the chapters that follow do look to standard Catholic theology for interpretive authority. More to the point, Martin misses the relevance of Teilhard's phenomenological philosophy to O'Connor's method of describing the truth of what she sees. Teilhard de Chardin belongs to the tradition of radical empiricism established by Kierkegaard that shaped the thinking of such eminent Christian existentialists as Marcel, Unamuno, and Berdyaev as well as of the major atheistic existentialists. An understanding of that thinking makes it possible to provide a fuller explanation of the thematic function of irony in O'Connor's story. Without it, The Misfit remains ambiguous.

The problem is most forceful in Martin's chapter dealing with O'Connor's use of the grotesque. There we find him saying:

> The following letter specifically indicates that Miss O'Connor's use of grotesque elements is deeply rooted in the wish to portray spiritual conditions:
>
> > But whatever Southern life may contribute to this impression of grotesquery, there is a more fundamental reason why these stories are the way they are. The reason is that the writer's vision is literal and not naturalistic. It is literal in the same sense that a child's drawing is literal. When a child draws he doesn't try to be grotesque but to set down exactly what he sees, and as his gaze is direct, he sees the lines that create motion. I am interested in the lines that create spiritual motion. (TC, 156)

O'Connor is understood to "justify" her "grotesque method" for treating religious subjects in her remark that "to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw

large and startling figures" (TC, 163). This comes to mean, during the course of the chapter, only the depiction of ugly reality--startling comparisons and absurd images; the grotesque in O'Connor's fiction emerges as comprised of additive elements used for emphasis. Thus it is unclear how the grotesque offers us depictions of "the lines that create spiritual motion." The question of how grotesque is to be defined is begged.[24]

Martin points the question for us himself. Noting that "Miss O'Connor was not sympathetic toward broad generalizations," he cites her disapproval of the terms "Southern School of Writers" and "Southern Gothic," and points to Sumner J. Ferris' having refused to use such terms in treating O'Connor. He finds, however, that the qualities of decadence and gothicism are so prevalent in her work that one must deal with them:

> Reluctance to apply the terms Gothic and grotesque, or careless misapplication of them, results from several misunderstandings. First, it is often erroneously assumed that "Gothic" identifies only that literature which seeks to shock readers gratuitously, to frighten and terrify them only for the purpose of titillation. As a matter of fact, the best Gothic fiction conveys themes which are congruent with the method of terror, striking a balance between manner and thematic intent. A secon mistaken notion is that grotesqueness is the equivalent of Gothicism; it is not. Grotesqueness is some deviation from an explicit or implicit norm and may reside in physical attributes, actions, or situations. It may be simply verisimilitude or rhetorical overstatement; but when its intention is to promote a feeling of revulsion or terror, it is a textual necessity in Gothic fiction, serving there as an indispensible adjunct to other characteristics promoting the same end. Many modern writers--Flannery O'Connor among them--have employed grotesqueness in

> the Gothic mode without using other Gothic features and without purposefully creating a totally terrifying atmosphere. While some of the recent fiction of Flannery O'Connor and others like her does achieve truly Gothic proportions, a larger amount of their work reveals what may be termed the Gothic impulse--the use of grotesqueness for the purpose of arousing terror but not sustaining this atmosphere throughout nor using it as an end in itself. Thus when the ugly and distorted are not used as literary adornment, the grotesque becomes a thematic contribution to the narrative, whether or not the story is Gothic. (TC, 152-54)

There are three major points to be made about this definition. First, from it the only clear distinction between the Gothic and the grotesque that emerges is that the grotesque has no autonomous purpose, though Martin insists upon one, and certainly nothing is clarified regarding the operations of the grotesque; this is particularly hard to understand in light of Ulrich Weisstein's translation of Wolfgang Kayser's theoretical treatise on the subject, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, which had appeared in print six years before the publication of The True Country. Second, we have already seen that the grotesque in O'Connor's work comes to be seen by Martin as telescopic or microscopic distortions that function ultimately as emphatic adornments to her themes. Thus her use of the grotesque won't, as he explains it, satisfy his own definition. The third point is that his definition does not explain how the grotesque can function to develop themes. Thus Martin points us to the need for a careful definition of the grotesque. As Lewis A. Lawson has put it:

> Miss O'Connor several times commented upon her vocation: her mission, as she saw it, was to depict

> the reality of Christianity to an audience for whom nothing transempirical is real. She wrote, "I don't think you should write something as long as a novel around anything that is not of the gravest concern to you and everybody else and for me this is always the conflict between an attraction for the Holy and the disbelief in it that we breathe in with the air of the times." Her style, it follows, is effective only if it serves her intention.[25]

Martin's genuine and intelligent struggle to resist the temptation of reducing O'Connor to formulaic interpretation is laudable both because it bespeaks correct intuition and because it is carefully and thoughtfully done. The responsibility for the failure of his attempt rests as much with Flannery O'Connor as it does with Martin. Her terse comments upon her own writing--both upon her ideas and upon her craft--have a way of seeming complete unto themselves, and too often Martin has been willing to take them at face value. Further, as he has well demonstrated, her methods do rely upon the use of standard Christian symbols, Sophoclean irony, structures if not borrowed from Biblical tales then suggested by them, techniques of description and depiction that make the living voice of O'Connor herself ever-present in her writing, and characterizations that render even her most exaggerated and distorted people credibly lifelike at some level of our consciousness. This last feature of her style is perhaps the most misleading; as many critics have recognized (albeit from a variety of points of view and in varying ways), O'Connor's interest in "the lines that create spiritual motion" means that she is not interested in the characters as individual humans. They are to be understood

as metaphors for human conditions. Similarly, when she indicates that she wants to write so as to shout to the hard of hearing and draw pictures large enough to be seen by the nearly blind, she is clearly speaking metaphorically and means more than that they have to be made to recognize the ugliness present around them--she speaks to us all, the spiritually blind and deaf, and wants to engender spiritual motion within us by making us recognize the ugliness within ourselves:

> The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock--to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.[26]

For Flannery O'Connor, then, grotesqueness is an explicit rendering of our physical surroundings and the actions of human intercourse, and while it is implicit in the human condition, it is repugnant to the Christian vision of what ought to be.

Nevertheless, Martin's recognition of the Christian content of O'Connor's stories rescues him from falling so disastrously prey to the problems presented by her style as do such critics as Irving Malin and Josephine Hendin, both of whom, despite their recognition of the essential flatness of the characters, take those characters quite literally and

move from there to finding the stories' meaning residing ultimately in the form alone. For Malin this comes to mean that O'Connor fails to achieve her Christian purposes: Hendin disvalues the purposes.[27]

In "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque,"[28] Malin undertakes to "explore the grotesque as theme and image in /Flannery O'Connor's/ fiction, emphasizing her psychological awareness, not her Christian faith, which, I think, often conflicts with this awareness." By the grotesque he means "the 'poetry of disorder'--to use Richard Chase's term," which results from the disintegration of traditional categories and produces "pre-Christian" poetry "which is dreamlike and unconscious." (It is noteworthy that once again we are given a nonfunctional definition; this problem is compounded by two facts: in his book, New American Gothic, Malin uses Chase's phrase in defining the Gothic independently of any mention of the grotesque;[29] and, in doing so, he rather glibly allows that Chase uses the term not with reference to the Gothic or the grotesque but as a description of "the strong element of 'romance' in the American 'novel'."[30]) Thus:

> In "The Fiction Writer and His Country" Flannery O'Connor states: "My own feeling is that writers who see the light of their Christian faith will have, in these times, the sharpest eyes for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable." Although she believes that Christian faith can help her recognize the grotesque, she does not completely explain the reasons for this belief. It would be risky to rebel against her formulation--to imply that it is not responsible for her startling fiction--but I think we can say that her grotesquerie is related to that of Capote, Hawkes, Carson McCullers, and Purdy. It is, in many ways, "pre-Christian." (FOG, 108)

As is common with psychological critics, Malin gives us no means by which we can understand the level at which the literature of his concern is to be seen as unconscious, but as his argument proceeds we are able to infer how it is to be understood as pre-Christian and dreamlike,[31] which terms do describe conscious modes of existence. Malin's argument, though he does not mention Sherwood Anderson (as he does in New American Gothic), seems at least to start from Anderson's theory of the grotesque. The central characters of O'Connor's fiction are understood initially to become grotesque when they commit themselves to and accordingly shape their lives by a single ruinously misapprehended truth that sums up their understanding of life and the world. They thereby are, for Malin, "pre-Christian" in that they are like Oedipus or Clytemnestra, whom Malin sees as narcissistically hybristic. Because their vision is the result of this pride (or "self-love," in Malin's term), it is perverted, and it distorts the world around them so that as they move through it the distortion is reflected in the scenes and situations wherein they are met:

> Not only does Miss O'Connor fill the world with severely limited characters--it is hard to call them human beings--she reinforces their plight, which they themselves do not understand, with many grotesque images. When we consider the objects around us--rooms, grass, animals, and cars--we accept them as part of our lives; they do not dominate us. But in Wise Blood these objects have won; they are more "alive" than the flat characters who, by adopting one truth, have become "objective." Miss O'Connor's images capture the spiritual condition of Hazel and his followers. (FOG, 110)

Haze is seen as trapped by incidents that occurred in his childhood, and he is continually reminded of these incidents by images and events in his adult life. These events of his mind serve to affirm his "narcissistic" truth, which is his belief in the nonexistence of Jesus. The grotesque is seen as making Haze's "spiritual plight more horrifying," particularly through the reflections of Haze that the other characters are all seen to be. Even Enoch Emory is explained only as a reflection of Haze, though he is the center of developments clearly different from O'Connor's specific concerns in her treatment of Haze Motes. However:

> Wise Blood is not a mere exercise because of Miss O'Connor's irony. She can laugh bitterly at Enoch and the mummy-jesus, the battered car, the madness of Hazel, and her laughter, paradoxically enough, creates our occasional sympathy. We sense mysteriously /italics mine/ the traditional beliefs--the Grand Design--by which Hazel and his disciples fall short. Irony, in other words, asserts the light of faith.
>
> Unfortunately, Miss O'Connor does not stop here. She is unsure about her ability to "convert" us by means of black humor--in the way Nathanael West does --and she begins to preach. Hazel sees the light--no longer does he have distorted vision--after he kills Solace Layfield and hears his last words. Suddenly he becomes human--the "pin point of light." We are not prepared for this transformation, unless we take it ironically as another act of grotesque narcissism. Perhaps the conflict we feel arises from the fact that Miss O'Connor herself is torn by the "needs" of the grotesque and Christian faith. She gives up one for the other, unable to hold both at the end of her novel . . . Miss O'Connor's ability to render the grotesque--her worship of the pre-Christian?--is greater than her ability to capture Hazel's conversion. Wise Blood runs erratically. (FOG, 112-13)

For Malin, then, O'Connor's ability to make us laugh saves the novel from being but an exercise in irony,

though it is only irony that makes it work--and though it is an irony whose terms and operations are not examined. It is very difficult to understand how Haze's blinding himself, binding his chest in barbed wire, and walking in shoes full of rocks and broken glass can be understood as acts of self-love--even ironically.[32] The essay ends:

> When Miss O'Connor shakes us in this paradoxical way--working out her artistic salvation?--she affirms that she understands the meaning of things. Her vision is crooked and violent; but this very fact demonstrates her kinship to us--even if we are not Catholics. We recognize our "fear and trembling"--and our sense that it is divinely inspired--in her enduring, chilly fiction. (FOG, 122)

Most of O'Connor's readers wouldn't disagree with a word of this closing; Malin's readers, however, have to go away unsatisfied because he has not attempted to answer the central questions he raised only three short paragraphs earlier:

> Does Miss O'Connor claim that these characters are grotesque because they choose to be flat, self-haunted, and mechanical? Or does she affirm that reality itself is grotesque? She must believe as a Christian in free will and spiritual design. But as a writer she reinforces the grotesquerie of existence. The conflict is powerful. It burns /The Violent Bear It Away/ clean. (FOG, 121)

He has not listened to O'Connor's explanation of her uses of the grotesque, and he fails to recognize that her seeing the "grotesquerie of existence" contradicts her faith in free will no more than the same recognition contradicted that faith for Saint Augustine or Pascal or Gabriel Marcel or Fyodor Dostoevsky or Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. One must assume that Malin would not greatly improve our fundamental understanding of King Lear, however helpful he might be in picking out

meaningful patterns.

One man comes very close to solving the problem. Lewis A. Lawson, in "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque: Wise Blood," demonstrates very handsomely that O'Connor was making the grotesque a suitable mode for religious expression and that she should be listened to when she tells us what she is doing:

> Miss O'Connor was fully conscious that her work lay within a "school of the grotesque." She made several remarks about the presence of the grotesque in her art. Though she felt that modern life has made grotesque [sic] of us all, still, she thought that too often her work was termed "grotesque" when she had no intention of achieving that response. She justified her use of it as the only mode of illusion through which she could reach her audience. I doubt that she would have attempted a rigid definition for "grotesque"; she had used the term in too many contexts. I do believe, however, that her purpose in using it can be safely stated: the grotesque for her was a form of religious hyperbole. There is always the danger that an audience not attuned to the form will misunderstand such hyperbole. That is the chance that Miss O'Connor must have felt she had to take. Certainly she was deadly serious when she used the grotesque, and its use was not merely gratuitous. Just as certainly she was not merely celebrating Southern degeneracy. (FOGWB, 66)

Had O'Connor been alive when Lawson published those remarks, she would have applauded him as happily as she would have rejected Malin's suggestion that her literature was in any way a function of her unconscious or Hendin's that she was deceitful:

> I try to satisfy those necessities that make themselves felt in the work itself. When I write, I am a maker. I think about what I am making. Saint Thomas called that reason in the making. When I write I feel I am engaged in the reasonable use of the unreasonable. In art the reason goes wherever the imagination goes. We have reduced the uses of reason terribly. You say a thing is reasonable and

> people think you mean it's safe. What's reasonable is seldom safe and always exciting.[33]

It would seem that just as it might have been the characters that led Martin, Malin, and others variously off the track, so it is the characters that led Lawson to his understanding of what O'Connor wanted to do. She had said "The prophet freaks of Southern literature are not images of the man in the street. They are images of the man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature,"[34] and Lawson says this of Haze Motes:

> . . . [Haze] is an example of the complete artistic freedom which Miss O'Connor allowed herself. Uninterested in creating a rounded character, she concentrated instead upon constructing a caricature whose flatness continually reminds us that he is unreal. To the charge that such a technique weakened her fiction, Miss O'Connor would have replied that any other technique would weaken her vision. She had no interest in Haze Motes as a human being; he was conceived, and his creator would have insisted that he remain, as an exemplum, as a vehicle whose attitudes and actions would personify a spiritual view which she wished to reveal. To make sure that we view Haze properly, she twice describes him as a puppet: "He looked as if he were held by a rope caught in the middle of his back and attached to the train ceiling." "He had the look of being held there, as if by an invisible hand, as if, if the hand lifted up, the figure would spring across the pool in one leap without the expression on his face changing once." (FOGWB, 52)

He compares the structural principle involved in such characterization to that of the parables of Christ, wherein abstract ideas are introduced and them made concrete.

> Haze Motes was, in his creator's eyes, an exemplification of the deadly effect that Southern fundamentalism could have on the soul, warping and terrorizing it so completely with its perversion of Christian doctrine that the soul in rebellion rejects entirely the idea of orthodox Christianity. Since the creation of a character whose premise lay in normality and logical-

> ity would encourage us to identify with him and thus blunt the effectiveness of her attack, Miss O'Connor wisely felt free to make her foil as bizarre, as distasteful, as ridiculous, as she thought necessary. In a day when she saw such actions and attitudes as Haze Motes represents taken for normal behavior, she felt that only by extreme departure from what is expected in both content and style could her characterization achieve its goal. (FOGWB, 52)

This does much to open up the operations of O'Connor's irony, to which Malin responded but which he could not explain, and Lawson carries us even farther in his closely reasoned argument. Pointing to the scanty treatment O'Connor accords Haze's background, Lawson shows that it serves to present Haze's mother and grandfather (a fundamentalist preacher) as guilt-obsessed inculcators of guilt, so that the child Haze walked with stones in his shoes after his mother punished him because she sensed he had seen at the carnival something she thought he should not have looked at. By this means, the argument runs, is established a sense of the rural fundamentalist South, "where Calvin, though probably unknown to most of its members, is more influential than Christ, guilt overshadows love as the quintessential aspect of Christianity, and Christianity has more an Old Testament flavor than a New" (FOGWB, 53), and it is possible for us to understand both why Haze chooses to become a preacher and to avoid Christ. But "to Miss O'Connor the reality of Christ was the idea underlying all preaching; the idea of what is to be preached is implicit in the idea of preaching."

In Haze Motes, then, Miss O'Connor deliberately

> constructed an oxymoron as a character. In this manner she escaped the danger inherent in using a caricature: that it will become predictable once its mannerisms are known. Since by nature there is an unavoidable tension between the mutually contradictory elements of an oxymoron, Haze Motes has a vitality that will last either until one element overcomes the other or until the tension destroys him. (FOGWB, 54)

Pointing out that in a published early draft of part of the novel Haze's surname was Weaver, Lawson suggests the change to Haze Motes was made to underscore the paradox at the center of his character, suggestive as it is of the Sermon on the Mount.[35] "Haze," of course, is seen as suggesting "one of cloudy vision who nevertheless insolently attempts to guide others," but not to make a simple attack upon his belief:

> At another point she undercuts him with irony when he pleads for his belief: "'Look at me!' Haze Motes cried, with a tare in his throat, 'and you look at a peaceful man! Peaceful because my flood has set me free. Take counsel from your blood and come into the Church Without Christ and maybe somebody will bring us a new jesus and we'll all be saved by the sight of him!'" As Miss O'Connor well knew, in the parable of the tares (Matthew xiii), Christ defines the tares as the "children of the wicked one." In fact, the enemy that sowed the tares is said to be the devil (Matthew xiii, 39). (FOGWB, 56)

Lawson traces the development of the novel's thematic concern with defective spiritual vision, pointing out the thematic paradox established when Haze meets Asa Hawks, which turns on Christ's words in John ix, 39: "I am come into the world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind." The paradox takes complicated turns when the "blind" Asa Hawks [redacted] that his own vision is superior to Haze's but that Haze eventually will have to

see, echoing Christ in Mark viii, 18: "Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not?" The irony turns on the physical ability to see shared by both men but working against Haze's spiritual blindness while he has that ability; the passage ironically foreshadows Haze's blinding when Haze preaches against Christ to the crowd to whom Hawks wanted him to distribute fundamentalist literature:

> "Listen here, I'm a preacher myself and I preach the truth . . . Don't I have eyes in my head? Am I a blind man?" Again as Miss O'Connor well knew, in terms of Christ's words to the Pharisees (John ix, 41), who were also denying His reality, Haze is not blind: "if ye were blind ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." (FOGWB, 56)

In such fashion Lawson closely examines the novel to show that relations among the characters are essentially without meaning and that Haze really is its only character, the rest being used as exempla and then disappearing. The reason for this is clear to Lawson; it is because well-rounded characters involved in meaningful conflict would make the novel emphasize man's relation to man, "whereas in Miss O'Connor's view, the only reason for writing a novel is to explore man's dependence upon Christ" (FOGWB, 60)

He sees a problem remaining, however, which is the need to explain why the novel had to take the form it took:

> Extremely incongruous images, oxymorons, and synesthesia convince us that here indeed is a strange new world. Objects are like humans and animals, human beings are like animals and insects, and animals are like human beings. But the unconventional rhetoric is not an embellishment pasted upon a basically conventional view of the world. It is indeed a warped world, one which has been likened to a Chagall painting, and the comparison of the novel to the modern painting

> seems especially apt for Miss O'Connor often appears to share modern painting's preoccupations. (FOGWB, 60-61)

He thinks the novel is not far-fetched, and that, wanting to communicate, O'Connor "would not have departed from the conventional structure and treatment of the novel if she had thought innovations in style or absurdities in content would detract from her vision." In keeping with this, he posits that there is a motif serving first ironically and then seriously "as a coagulant" for the divergencies within the story:

> If one cannot create the perfect form perhaps the next best thing is to create the perfect deformity. Satirists have always chosen the latter course, and that seems to have been Miss O'Connor's choice. In her view, the only conflict that would sustain . . . a novel was that of belief versus disbelief. She could have, then, chosen to narrate the story of a modern saint. But such a story would have had the quality of sentimental and intrusive moralism, of preaching, about it which would have alienated the very audience which she wanted to reach. She could have, then, chosen to analyze the rather normal man's attempt to establish a meaningful spiritual relationship in a world where disbelief, especially in the guise of belief, is rampant. But . . . the character might be so like his audience that it would not have perceived his problem. That leaves, then, the opposite of the saint: the active disbeliever. Here a demonic figure could have been constructed, but a demonic figure would be without the desire to believe in the first place, and so there would have been no conflict. The ideal figure, it seems, would be a saint who disbelieved, that is, one who was actively searching for religious meaning (as opposed to the majority who passively accept the traditional view, although they secretly regard it as nonsense) but who did not find it in the established beliefs.
>
> What would be better, then, than to posit the form first and then let the character grow to fit it? In this manner the possibility of ironical treatment is available at first, when he does the right thing for the wrong reason. Then, as the character is inevitably forced into the form, it receives straight-forward treatment; rather than work by opposites the author can then work by similarities, thus effecting the supreme irony: the only possibility of actively rejecting an

> idea to which the majority pays lip-service is through the same behavior as that of actively accepting the idea, that is, both disbeliever and believer are "outsiders," in that they seriously think about their spiritual life, whereas most people are so immersed in a materialistic life that they neither accept nor reject religion. (FOGWB, 62-63)

There follows a keenly perceptive analysis of the way in which the legend of Saint Anthony might fruitfully be seen as the form posited for Haze to depart from. The two are found to be alike up to the point at which Haze, the opposite of Saint Anthony, finds a substitute for God in the desert where he was sent by the army; this marks the departure from the form, and "once the tension between the form . . . and the departure from it . . . has been established" it is not constantly emphasized but the novel becomes a "series of events, or panels of a painting as it were, showing Haze being tormented by the symbolically-different weird beasts." The motif is reintroduced when Haze recognizes that there is no escaping Christ, at which point "the departure from the form becomes the form" because "the point of view is shifted to the eyes of Haze's horsy, love-sick landlady" (FOGWB, 63-65).

Now, clearly, in terms of what happens in the novel, this analysis of the theoretical problems of structure that O'Connor faced up to is beautiful, and it is very helpful in furthering our understanding of the character, the novel's structure, and the relations of these two concerns to major thematic developments. But it doesn't explain why Haze should be so altogether incongruous as he is, why people

are like animals, why there are so many incongruous images--indeed, Lawson at least twice says that a lot of what goes on in the novel is extraneous. The Chagall-like vision remains unexplained, perhaps because Lawson does not examine the beliefs expressed in the fiction--he assumes they are conventional Thomistic attitudes, even though he says in closing his essay that O'Connor's world had no place for norms--"from her vantage point the entire world did look grotesque" (FOGWB, 67)--which implies that she held a notion about the condition of man which he has not explored, despite his having insisted upon the need to believe her when she asserted that her vision relied upon the grotesque.

One possibility that none of the commentators has considered--though Hendin stumbled close to it before she wandered beyond it--is that the ugliness O'Connor portrays has always to do with erring humans becoming good and hence is in itself a positive good. She has given us the hint in her "Introduction to A Memoir of Mary Ann" where she tells of having spent an afternoon with a group of the nuns in whose care the little girl had lived and died. She decided, she says, that "they had had about everything and flinched before nothing." One of the nuns asked her "why the grotesque (of all things) was my vocation," and O'Connor felt herself on a hook until another guest replied to the nun. "'It's your vocation too,' he said to her."

> This opened up for me also a new perspective on the grotesque. Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil, to look it in the face and find, as often as not, our own grinning reflections with

> which we do not argue, but good is another matter. Few have stared at that long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction. The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliché or a smoothing-down that will soften their real look. When we look into the face of good, we are liable to see a face like Mary Ann's, full of promise.[36]

The nuns were from Our Lady of Perpetual Help Free Cancer Home in Atlanta. Mary Ann had lived with them for nine years. Half her face was "straight and bright." The other half was covered with tumors and lacked an eye.

In the pages that follow, we are going to explore the implications of that vision of "the modes of good" in an attempt to find a key that will make Flannery O'Connor's work more accessible than has any explanation so far offered. The proposition is that the grotesque mode was the only route available to her for expressing her religious ideas, which were at least akin to those of the Christian existentialists, particularly to the thinking of the Catholic Gabriel Marcel. The two--Christian existentialism and the grotesque--have much in common but perhaps their most fundamental convergence is in their recognition that a fundamental fact of life is death,[37] which renders it impossible for the thinking man to avoid anguish because he is forced to acknowledge that the world is absurd when it is held to the test of the senses and the unaided reason, that it is somehow contingent upon being. The Christian existentialist is concerned to remind us of that absurdity in order to keep us conscious that free will implies the necessity of choosing whether to say yes to faith

in God and His revelation in Jesus or to choose instead those distortions and negations of the good which are, in Old Testament imagery, "false gods," and which, in Christian mythology, are identified with demons. The practitioner of the grotesque in art is concerned to summon up the demons that haunt us because their evocation is the only way to conquer them.

Thus a secondary proposition will be that while unquestionably one of the springs of Flannery O'Connor's artistic genius was the literary tradition of Southern regionalism, she more properly is to be understood as having profited by its characteristic techniques while remaining apart from it both emotionally and intellectually: she is more its sister than its daughter. There are two bases for this assertion. Miss O'Connor was a devout Catholic whose thinking seems pretty clearly to have been markedly influenced by the Christian existentialists, particularly Teilhard de Chardin and possibly Marcel; this means that while she may share many of the characteristic preoccupations of Southern writers she responds to them quite differently even when those writers are Anglicans, or existentialists, or both. Implicit in this is the second base: aside from the fact that almost all her stories center in the rural South (for obvious reasons, since she was a rural Southerner), what she has most in common with the Southern tradition is the technique of the grotesque, which perhaps means that the accurate thing to say is that she and the Southern school are both to be classed

as belonging to the tradition of the grotesque. That such a tradition must be recognized has been handsomely demonstrated by Wolfgang Kayser in The Grotesque in Art and Literature, and American writers' concern with the grotesque at least since Dreiser has been established by William Van O'Connor (The Grotesque: An American Genre and Other Essays), whose remarks on Nathanael West are as justly applicable to Flannery O'Connor.[38]

Webster Schott has said that Flannery O'Connor had "a medieval religious attraction to the manifestations of evil";[39] Kayser writes "The grotesque is a structure . . . /whose/ nature could be summed up in a phrase . . . THE GROTESQUE IS THE ESTRANGED WORLD."[40] Flannery O'Connor grew up a Catholic in the predominantly fundamentalist rural South (a fact of which she was very aware, as two essays and many of her random comments affirm), with an ailing father who died while she was still in school, and most of her adult years she suffered from a rare hereditary disease (disseminated lupus) whose strange, intermittent manifestations could only be called absurd. "The grotesque instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (GAL, 185), says Kayser, and there isn't much reason to suppose that Flannery O'Connor, always more an onlooker than a participant, saw life as other than unreasonable and grotesque--and it is not ironic that her experience should so function as to shore up the basic Catholic attitude toward death. When her characters die, they are always released from an agony at once particu-

lar and representative of the modern plight, but their dying is always an affirmation; their lives have been treated satirically because of the absurdity they made of the truths (the Andersonian grotesque) by which they lived. Schott relates the medieval quality he finds in O'Connor's fascination with evil to her emphasis on visual experience--an indeed the total impact of her fiction is not unlike that of paintings by the elder Breughel or Bosch, where Christianity and humor come together within the framework of the unfathomable. The grotesque leaves us uncertain how to respond; it is our business here to attempt an answer.

Chapter II will outline the tenets of Christian existentialism and suggest their relationship to Catholic theology, with particular attention to the theory of divine grace, and will attempt to define the way these concerns may be seen to converge with the grotesque mode in art as that mode has been defined by Kayser. The theoretical discussion will appeal for illustration to the fiction of O'Connor. Chapter III will examine the way these concerns operate in the early works--Wise Blood and the stories contained in A Good Man Is Hard to Find; Chapter IV will trace their development and refinement in the later fiction--The Violent Bear It Away and the stories in Everything That Rises Must Converge. The final chapter will present a summary and conclusions.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. John W. Aldridge, *In Search of Heresy* (New York, 1956), 58-59.

2. *L'express*, 750 (November, 1965), 74.

3. Jonathan Baumbach, "The Acid of God's Grace," in *The Landscape of Nightmare* (New York, 1965), 87-100.

4. *Ibid.*, 99.

5. Jean-Marie G. Le Clezio, "*La terre est peuplée de prophètes*," *L'express*, 750 (November, 1965), 74.

6. Alain Robbe-Grillet, "A Future for the Novel," in *For A New Novel*, trans. Raymond Howard (New York, 1965), 19.

7. Flannery O'Connor, quoted in Lewis A. Lawson, "A Collection of Statements," in *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor*, eds. Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson (New York, 1966), 57. Future references to this work will designate it simply *AD*, and when the reference is to the collected statements the designation will be *CS,AD*.

8. *Ibid.*, 258.

9. Jean-Marie G. Le Clezio, "*L'univers de* Flannery O'Connor," *Nouvelle revue française*, XIII (September, 1964), 491.

10. O'Connor, quoted in *CS,AD*, 258.

11. Caroline Gordon, "Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*," *Critique*, II (Fall, 1958), 3-10.

12. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor: A Note on Literary Fashions," *Critique*, II (Fall, 1958), 11-18.

13. Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, O.S.F., "View from a Rock: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and J. F. Powers," *Critique*, II (Fall, 1958), 19-27.

14. Carter W. Martin, *The True Country* (Nashville, 1969). Hereafter designated *TC*, appearing, with the numbers of the pages cited, within parentheses in the text.

15. Josephine Hendin, *The World of Flannery O'Connor* (Bloomington, 1970). Hereafter designated *WFOC*, appearing, with the numbers of the pages cited, within parentheses in the text.

16. Mrs. Hendin has to be mentioned, and it is regrettable that the tone of such mention must seem condescending and rude. The simple fact is that she has written one of the two full-length studies of O'Connor that have been published, and it can neither be ignored nor respected; I have chosen to discuss it briefly in Appendix I. While I do not wish to appear to excuse what some may see as my transgression of propriety by pointing to what might be taken as a similar transgression by another, it does seem to the point that in a review of Mrs. Hendin's book published after I wrote my views of it, Walter Sullivan has dealt with her even more unkindly than I. He has gone so far as to label her interpretations "idiocy," and ends by saying, "by her willful misrepresentations of Miss O'Connor's statements of belief and intention, Mrs. Hendin abridges the forms of free discussion, the destruction of which will diminish us all" (American Literature, XLIII, March, 1971, 146-47).

17. As Leon V. Driskell has put it,

> Martin is quite correct when he writes that Miss O'Connor committed "herself as a writer to the Christian theme," but the observation is neither new nor particularly instructive. How she committed herself is more to the point, and, though Martin discusses her "sacramental view" and devotes chapters to her "gothic impulse," to "comic and grim laughter," and to "satire and irony," he pretty much misses the way in which her stories deal with mystery, and specifically the Christian mystery.

("Flannery O'Connor: Property of Specialists?" in "The World of Books," The Louisville Courier-Journal and Times, June 15, 1969, G5.)

18. Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," in A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories (New York, 1955), 28-29.

19. O'Connor, quoted in CS,AD, 258.

20. Robert Fitzgerald, "Introduction," Flannery O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York, 1965), xxiv. Hereafter designated Fitzgerald, "Introduction."

21. O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," reprinted in Mystery and Manners, eds. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York, 1969), 150-51.

22. Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xxx.

23. Christopher F. Mooney, S.J., Teilhard de Chardin and the Mystery of Christ (New York, 1966), 13.

24. Sounding at one point like Le Clezio, Martin assumes a definition of the grotesque:

> This is the ludicrous world as Flannery O'Connor sees it; her selection of detail is not the caricaturist's method of distortion, but she sees the actual horror and ugliness of the world. Its grotesqueness results from her technique of drawing large, of seeing reality as if examining nearby phenomena through a telescope or as if directing her readers' eyes through a microscope to show them what should be visible to the naked eye. Whether grotesqueness in her work is a part of the Gothic impulse, whether it is in the distorted vision of spiritually myopic characters, whether it is in the spectacle of grotesque behavior brought about by the characters' lack of knowledge of themselves and their true country, or whether grotesqueness is simply the everyday ugliness that exists as a testament /sic/ the disparity between this world and that of the ideal, Flannery O'Connor's purpose is always the same: to see actuality without undue sentimental or romantic regret that paradise is not of this world, and to demonstrate that, for all its horror, life here is merely passage by the dragon as one goes to the Father of Souls. This passage, she believes, is the concern of any story of depth and demands courage on the part of the reader. The storyteller too must have considerable courage to present the horror of the passage as he sees it. (TC, 188)

Martin has failed to appreciate fully the implications of a suggestion offered him by another commentator; when he quoted Richard Poirier on the genius of O'Connor's treatment of the banal, he included a second sentence: "And in this too there is an aspect of Catholicism, most beautifully exemplified in the penultimate stanza of the 'Paradiso,' where Dante likens his poetic efforts in fashioning a vision of God to the work of a 'good tailor'" (TC, 14). In fairness, it should be acknowledged that Poirier didn't pick up on it either ("If You Know Who You Are You Can Go Anywhere," New York Times Book Review, May 30, 1965, 5).

25. Lewis A. Lawson, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque: Wise Blood," reprinted in Flannery O'Connor, ed. Robert E. Reiter (St. Louis, n.d.), 51. Hereafter designated FOGWB, appearing, with the numbers of the pages cited, within parentheses in the text.

26. O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," 33-34.

27. Mrs. Hendin's book is discussed in Appendix I.

28. Irving Malin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," in AD, 108-22. Hereafter designated FOG, appearing, with the numbers of the pages cited, within parentheses in the text.

29. Irving Malin, New American Gothic (Carbondale, 1962), 3-5.

30. "The American novel tends to rest in contradictions and among extreme ranges of experience. When it attempts to resolve contradictions, it does so in oblique, morally equivocal ways. As a general rule it does so either in melodramatic actions or in pastoral idylls, although intermixed with both one may find the stirring instabilities of 'American humor.' These qualities constitute the unicueness of that branch of the novelistic tradition which has flourished in this country. They help to account for the strong element of 'romance' in the American 'novel.'

"By contrast, the English novel has followed a middle way . . . Oddity, distortion of personality, dislocations of normal life, recklessness of behavior, malignancy of motives --these the English novel has included. Yet the profound poetry of disorder we find in the American novel is missing, with rare exceptions, from the English." Richard Chase, The American Novel and Its Tradition (New York, 1957), 1-2.

31. From which I suppose those who are willing can go in any of several directions, by inference, to understand the relevance of thinking of literature as unconscious; let me make clear here that I am not among the willing, because I can find no way in which such a concept is susceptible to logical discourse, turning as it does upon the unprovable and leading usually to the commentator's reading his understanding of his own psyche into that of the poet of whom he speaks.

32. Malin goes on to find evidence elsewhere of "Miss O'Connor's preoccupation with self-love . . . which destroys all 'communities'"; The Misfit, taken to be the central character of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," has as his dominating truth his conviction that he will be "the new Jesus of self-love"; Mr. Head, of "The Artificial Nigger," sees himself as the true moral guide for his grandson; Mrs. Shortley, of "The Displaced Person," "is so narcissistic that she considers herself the ruler of the community" despite her being the wife of a tenant farmer, while Mrs. McIntyre believes herself entire, complete in herself; Old Tarwater and Rayber are narcissistic defenders of their notions (as, remember, Le Clezio would also have it) while the young Tarwater also becomes a new Jesus, and the point becomes "The violent narcissists bear humanity away; in Bishop's murder they confirm their own death." "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is understood to establish "the impossible task of redemption," through the ironical juxtaposition of The Misfit and the grandmother--"the criminal to the good

citizen"--both of whom are trapped in their self-love (the grandmother's love offered just before she is shot is "false love"). The epiphany experienced by Mr. Head and his grandson is a function of their odd views. Mrs. Shortley's death isn't explained at all, and the validity of Mrs. McIntyre's conversion is thought doubtful because she is but a reflection of Mrs. Shortley. The ugly scenes are admirable because our recognition of their ugliness and our understanding of the comic inversions they involve demonstrate our own freedom from narcissism; "We thus affirm our humanity" (FOG, 113-22).

33. O'Connor, quoted in CS,AD, 257.

34. Ibid., 243-44.

35. Matthew vii, 3-5:

> And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?
>
> Or how wilt thous say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold a beam is in thine own eye?
>
> Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote of thy brother's eye.

36. O'Connor, "Introduction to A Memoir of Mary Ann," in Mystery and Manners, 225-26.

37. "I'm a born Catholic and death has always been a brother to my imagination. I can't imagine a story that doesn't properly end in it or in its foreshadowings." O'Connor, quoted in CS,AD, 228.

38. It is worth noting that both Flannery O'Connor and John Hawkes profess admiration for West's writing as well as for each other's.

39. Webster Schott, "Flannery O'Connor: Faith's Stepchild," The Nation, XX (September 13, 1965), 142-46.

40. Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, 1963), 184. Hereafter designated GAL, appearing, along with the numbers of the pages cited, in parentheses within the text.

CHAPTER II

Regina Cline O'Connor permits only Robert Fitzgerald, her daughter's literary executor, access to the books and papers that would reveal the specific possible sources of the author's thinking. We know that O'Connor was recommending Teilhard to Fitzgerald in 1961 and that from that source came her title "Everything That Rises Must Converge"; we find her occasionally alluding to the Church Fathers. But it simply is not possible to ascertain the nature and extent of her readings in theology and philosophy. We know that she admired the writing of Caroline Gordon, Nathanael West, and John Hawkes, and we can safely assume that she read all the writers her generation thought important. It is reasonable to assume that she recognized a necessity to grapple with the ideas and attitudes that characterize the mainstream of American literary production since the First World War. By and large, this means that she was used to encountering hopelessness and ugliness in a literature commonly presenting the breakdown of old authorities in the midst of a world of degenerating conditions and increasing incomprehensibility. As Fitzgerald puts it, "A catchword when Flannery O'Connor began to write was the German angst, and it seemed that Auden had hit it off in one of his titles as the 'Age of Anxiety.'"

Certain items from her rather sketchily known biography

suggest, rather persuasively, that her own experience was such as to make the human reasons underlying that gloomy ethos meaningful to her in an intensely personal way while at the same time providing her with the ability to remain undaunted.

The only child of proudly patrician, Roman Catholic parents, O'Connor was born in Savannah in March of 1925. A solitary girl until she entered parochial school, she was all her life fond of pets, and, Hyman tells us, at five she became briefly famous because Pathé News released nationally a film of her with her bantam chicken that walked backwards. When she was thirteen her father, Edward O'Connor, a real-estate man, became ill with the incurable disseminated lupus (in which the body forms antibodies to its own tissues) and the family moved to the white-porticoed Cline house in the center of Milledgeville, from which the Clines had exercised local and some statewide influence for more than a hundred years. The teen-aged girl kept pets (mostly fowl), rode horses, and was a good student who wrote books for which she did illustrations; she witnessed the visible and ugly symptoms of her father's strange illness until his death in 1941. In 1942 she matriculated at Georgia State College for Women (now the Women's College of Georgia) and took several editorial posts as well as writing stories for the school's literary magazine; her ambition was to be a cartoonist and it was encouraged by the New Yorker (who complimented her but did not buy), and there is one revealing cartoon in

which a bespectacled young lady sits a wallflower at a prom over the caption, "Well, I can always be a Ph.D." She took her A.B. in social science--as Robert Drake puts it, "a fact which somewhat startles when one recalls the distaste with which she treated psychologists and social workers in her fiction"--and went on as a Rinehart Fellow to Paul Engle's Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, where she received a Master of Fine Arts in Literature in 1947. Before she went to Iowa, she dropped her first name, Mary. After an extra year at Iowa beyond her degree, she went to Yaddo and then on to an apartment hotel in New York. In the summer of 1949 she left the city to become the boarder of her friends Sally and Robert Fitzgerald at their home in Ridgefield, Connecticut. In 1947 and 1948 she published four stories that were later to be incorporated into Wise Blood, which she had begun at Yaddo and upon which she continued to work in New York and at the Fitzgeralds'.

Late in the fall of 1950 she complained to the Fitzgeralds of "a heaviness in her typing arms," which was diagnosed as rheumatoid arthritis; she became desperately ill, and it was diagnosed at Atlanta's Emory Hospital as disseminated lupus. From then on she spent much time in the hospital as the disease took its weird course, weakening her bones and causing recurrent high fevers as well as such other temporary symptoms as complete loss of hair and great discolored blotches on her face and body. When she wasn't in the hospital she lived with her protective mother at their country

home, Andalusia Farm, just out of Milledgeville, writing, painting, raising pets--particularly peacocks--and receiving friends and admirers. She received Kenyon and Guggenheim fellowships, and made several lecture appearances when she was well enough. Through it all, as excerpts from her letters to the Fitzgeralds make clear, she maintained great good cheer, speaking of her disease with a kind of distanced bemusement. She died August 3, 1964, after an abdominal operation caused a virulent recurrence of the lupus from which she was unable to recover.

Such details as these don't necessarily tell us much, though the image of a little girl becoming famous because of a freak chicken haunts us, and we cannot imagine that O'Connor at 13 could fail to see arbitrariness and absurdity in her father's illness or in her own at 25. The cartoon of the wallflower seems to suggest that one must make the best of what one can't help, as well as strongly suggesting a saving sense of humor. And though her mother insists upon O'Connor's lifelong dutifulness and cooperativeness, there were some outright rebellions; she claimed to have replied to an old lady who wrote that O'Connor's book had left a bad taste in her mouth, "You weren't supposed to eat it."[2] Hendin reports the memory of a Milledgeville matron who claims that at nineteen or twenty O'Connor attended a wedding shower at which she remained "standing, her back pressed against the wall, scowling at the group of women who had sat down to lunch." Hendin also picks out O'Connor's fascination with peacocks, the beautiful birds with the horrible cry (to

O'Connor, "cheers for an invisible parade") that defecated all over the lawn and ate all her mother's flowers. And however apparently comfortable her younger life might have been, she nonetheless bore the double burden of birth into an austere environment of Jansenist Catholicism and self-conscious Southern aristocracy, a burden hard to bear for a lively and sensitive girl of keen intelligence. As Hendin vividly and perceptively demonstrates, the burden was increased by the code of genteel southern womanhood, "the code that forbids confession," requiring a young lady to be nice to everyone and to keep her concerns to herself. Hendin is right in affirming that this has to have been isolating, obliging O'Connor to seem to accept the world in which she lived all the while that, consciously and within, she writhed under the weight of its contradictions, its vacuity, its inability to see itself more as she saw it.[3] What it must also mean is that life was altogether a thing to contend with, particularly given a strong Catholic faith that would always have to be justified in the face of every new contrary fact of one's life, and that in the midst of the fundamentalist South with its streetcorner prophets and its perversions of Christianity. What is remarkable is that O'Connor emerged with a sense of the comic grotesque and its inherent ironies; the other possibilities were morbidity and neurosis, both of which she escaped.

That she could so triumphantly survive while looking unflinchingly at the contradictions and absurdities filling the world meant that she had to develop an affirmative personal

philosophy that would accommodate those elements of human existence. The answer to the ontological question had to be found in actuality. O'Connor studied the world around her carefully and reported what she saw with accuracy; she found her argument for the existence of God in the desire she observed in every man to transcend the knowable world. If every one has this desire, the desire itself must be natural, which in turn argues that the universe must contain something towards which the human spirit aspires. Grotesque and misguided though he may be, the streetcorner prophet figures forth that aspiration at the same time that he is the constant reminder of man's fallibility; he is at once truth and its denial. The reductio ad absurdum of man's propensity to formulate systems based in the hybristic sense that God's nature and will are wholly knowable, he points to the doubtful value of cosmological systems that seek to interpret the Divine Will as if it were not ultimately unknowable. "The prophet freaks of Southern literature are not images of the man in the street. They are images of man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature."[4]

There are problems inherent in such a formulation for a practicing Catholic, who will be accustomed to the neo-Thomistic doctrines of the modern Church, or to reconciliations of Saints Thomas and Augustine achieved by careful selection of texts. But such religion tends to gloss over the significance of the Fall, and to find man capable of achieving a harmonious life of the happy and the good; the conditions of modern life shed doubt upon such faith, and certainly for

persons like Flannery O'Connor who must find viable values in the face of suffering and the imminence of death (it is very much to the point that most of her writing was done after the onset of the disease she knew would be fatal), Saint Augustine offers the surer guide.

For Saint Augustine man is utterly helpless unless he enjoys the grace of God; for him, the Fall made a very real difference and is the source of meaning for the concept of free will. A reading of the Confessions certainly gives one the sense that it is the best man who suffers most. This is the dramatic source of Saint Augustine's appeal for the Christian existentialists; Berdyaev (Eastern Orthodox) suggests that the intensity of a man's suffering is the index of his depth, and that sensitivity to both spiritual and physical pain vary in direct ratio with the refinement of intellect and soul, so that it is our susceptibility to suffering that raises us above the animal in our natures.[5] Even Sartre agrees with this, adding that only suffering enables man to feel free; in Saint Genet he suggests that only a god can be happy without the cooperation of the universe whereas unhappiness recuires but oneself. For Unamuno, it is suffering that "tells us that we exist."[6] It seems arguable that O'Connor agrees, inasmuch as those of her characters who have to be understood as winning through to salvation do so only by way of intense inner struggles.

The prominent existentialist philosopher with whom O'Connor seems to have most in common is Gabriel Marcel, a French Catholic-by-conversion who has given us a remarkably

vivid account of the struggles by which he came to join the church, and an even more revealing sense of the proccupation with suicide, despair, and anxiety engendered by those struggles and the conversion. As he sees it, an inner necessity--what he calls an "exigence"--impelled him to Catholicism, a direction in which his thinking was moving before he realized it (it was pointed out to him in a quiet question put by Mauriac). His conversion came when he was forty (1929), and his philosophical pursuits up until that time had produced in him what the existentialists call "the feeling of dread."

This feeling is distinguishable--must be distinguished--from that of fear. "Fears are derived and debased forms of anxiety" which have as their object definable dangers that are threatening to us in particular ways and that commonly may be forestalled or avoided. As defined by Kierkegaard, with disciplined analysis supplied by Heidegger, dread has an indefinite object and becomes a concern for the meaning of one's "whole being-in-the-world" that leaves one feeling lost and meaningless in the factual world of objects and the identity one has established with relation to factuality. It "touches the whole structure of my being in the world, but with a poignant emphasis on those real possibilities which I really am, though they lie ahead of me. It is for them that I dread."[7] This feeling awakens one to decision and action leading towards breaking with the everyday world and its generally understandable operations in order to realize one's best possibilities.

For the existentialist, the conditions producing the sense of dread represent the fallen state of man and the feeling of lostness is present in all men, but most men are unable to face up to it and retreat into the 'safer' world of factuality, denying themselves the opportunity to find their real selves. The grueling experience of dread offers hope because it reveals one's best possibilities; thus awe and exhilaration win through terror and revulsion in the experience of dread:

> In this respect the experience of Job before God, in which indignation over the arbitrary existence of divine power is transmuted into a sense of awe and respect for divine majesty, approximates fairly well to the contemporary experience of existential anguish.

Dread, which is sometimes called "the anguish of being," differs from the fear of death, although thoughts of death can bring it to mind, because it arises from a recognition that nothingness is as possible as being. Its strength in Western culture has a basis in the traditions of both Judaism and Christianity, in their belief that the world was created ex nihilo, and in the Christian eschatology of the Last Judgment. The Christian traditionally has been obliged to take the creation as a mysterious matter that must be accepted on faith alone because a world created from nothing logically can be neither eternal nor necessary and the immutability of God renders the motion of creation incomprehensible. Thus creation is "contingent" (which is what the existentialist means by "absurd"), and the Christian philosopher has been obliged traditionally to prove that contingency is necessary precisely because both being and nothingness are

logically possible and reason cannot explain being. For the existentialist the [illegible] (or absurdity) of being is again a matter of intuition, something of which we are all more or less aware whether or not we have experienced dread but which becomes explicit through dread.

The "ontological wonder sickness" and "cosmic fear" experienced by the pragmatists William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein point to the need of all men to come to terms with the contingency of existence, and the Thomist agrees with the existentialist that every man must face it. But while the Thomist accepts grace as the sole necessary condition for the soul's salvation, he adheres to a belief in obedience to moral law as an avenue to it. For the Christian existentialist, on the other hand, contingency is radical, and while one may believe in the existence of God for whom being has meaning, man and God are incommensurable and man cannot know what ultimate meaning may be. The Fall exiled man from the world, making his reason unable to fathom God and incapable of devising a moral system that can lead to salvation. Mrs. Turpin, of O'Connor's "Revelation," has pursued the moral law and it has not produced moral perfection in her; she has been troubled in the night by intimations of its failure, and the attack upon her by the horrible, ironically named Mary Grace forces her to the experience of dread and destroys her self-righteousness.

For Marcel, all life is a trial menacing to the individual man's wholeness and faith ("the power of adherence to being") and tempting him to possimism and nihilism but also

providing him the opportunity to take his own measure in the face of urgent necessity and achieve the authentic life by triumphing over the contradictions and perversities the world continuously presents. "To be, means to withstand the test, this progressive dissolution. To deny being would be to claim that nothing can withstand the test." Each man's trial is his own, although every man is tried; the individual soul has authentic being only upon condition of its salvation's having been achieved, and what can be objectively verified by everyone is not relevant to the salvation of the individual. Each of us can know only what he can sense himself--and it is important in this regard that Marcel rejects the mind-body dualism as well as all systems that would reduce existence to objective thought; things exist for him through the same immediate participation by which his body is present to him. Marcel "proceeds on the assumption that experience 'intends' reality--a reality that transcends the mind of the experiencer--and that the intention can be revealed by sensitive, participative interpretation."[9]

The existentialist distinguishes between the world of things existing in themselves and the world of things reshaped by the human mind. The phenomenal world of things in themselves constantly threatens to explode the individual world shaped by each man's mind and to deter him from the authentic being of which we are all said to have a "pre-ontological comprehension"; the latter comes clear if thought of in terms of Mrs. Turpin's nagging doubts, and the former

if thought of in terms of the successful explosion of her individual world by those doubts. The phenomenal world thus is an absurd or "contingent being of which we are constantly aware, be it only dimly, and which poisons our existence, as Sartre's choice of the word 'nausea' to designate the anguish of being sufficiently indicates" (IE, 39). As a thinking and a feeling being, man is anguished by the recognition of his limitations in time and space. He can know only what his experience can teach him, and cannot he helped by knowledge of man in the abstract; as Marcel sees it, among the things experience teaches man are the inability of secondary reflection to establish his existence and the presence in his life of aspects of human experience that objective thought will not verify. Marcel sees man as a wayfarer, homo viator, alienated from the world at the Fall and ever in the process of striving for authentic existence and obliged to exercise his free will because his future is undetermined (for Marcel "nothing can be absolutely pre-established and inevitable for God"[10]). Man cannot know things sub specie aeternitas, but must find his own identity and make his own history.

Thus free will itself becomes a source of anguish because it implies the necessity of choosing. A man must make choices to make the world around him meaningful, and his consciousness of freedom renders the natural and social environment inscrutable and brutal. This makes a man conscious of his own consciousness and concerned with his own purposes; he recognizes that he must overcome the conditions of his factual being if he is to achieve authentic existence.

The world is as absurd for the Christian existentialist as it is for the atheistic, but he believes in a God who is beyond human comprehension. Hence the absurdity rises out of the limitations of human intelligence. Profoundly aware of the inaccessible 'otherness' of God, he is more concerned with the implications of that fact for man as it bears upon the relationship between God and man than he is with the divine nature itself, and his interest doesn't rest much in resolving paradoxes:

> . . . The Christian existentialists . . . strenuously insist that Christian dogma, notably the dogma of creation, of the Man-God, and of the Trinity, do contradict reason. It is logically impossible that God be a creator, that he be both wholly divine and wholly human, that he be simultaneously one and three persons. Thus faith becomes belief in the logically impossible. . . . Since, however, faith defined as belief in the logically impossible is a human impossibility, Kierkegaard . . . used a different definition of faith. Faith became simply the desire to believe, intense care or concern for one's fate. (IE, 98-99)

The freedom of the will is not only a value but the implied basis for faith, and the existentialist's heightened sense of being's radical contingency sharpens the personal concern in the will to believe, making it more poignantly explicit. As existence calls forth thought, in Marcel's terms, and experience "intends" meaning, so we find that man's basic situation is his engagement in being and his spiritual task is to affirm that being. And being is a "mystery" to be "recognized and realized," belonging to the realm of the "meta-problematic":

> A problem is something which is encountered, which bars the way. It lies entirely before me. Mystery, on the contrary, is something in which I find myself

> engaged, whose essence it is, consequently, not to be entirely before me. It is as if in this zone the distinction of "in me" and "before me" loses its meaning.

Thus the self must raise the question of being before it can recognize the ontological mystery, and this is a matter requiring prior recognitions, including that of the uncertainty of one's own identity:

> I who inquire about being do not know firstly whether I am, nor a fortiori what I am--nor even quite clearly what this question 'What am I?' means, though it still obsesses me. Thus we see the problem of being encroaching on its own data; it is pursued inside the subject who propounds it. It is therewith denied (or transcended) as problem and transformed into mystery.

"'I' and 'am' are inseparable," and to affirm the wholeness of one's being requires affirming the wholeness of being as a participant in being rather than as one speaking of it from without. The great difficulty comes from our condition as members of the phenomenal world, which requires us to shut off the mystery in and around us--"it may be the essence of objects, of mere things, to shut off the mystery"; this must be transcended. We regain our personal unity in the act of recollection, which acknowledges that "there is something in me which is not identical with my life, something which I grasp or open myself to at the moment of recollection, but it is not to myself, in the limited sense, that I withdraw in recollection, but to my being with being." This act of recollection points to man's ability to confront and judge his own life, affirming or destroying it. If recollection leads us toward the abyss, fidelity, hope, and love can help us to transcend our condition, and the "elucidation of these spiritual data" offer the "concrete approaches to the onto-

logical mystery."

> . . . the ontological order can be recognized personally only by the whole of a being engaged in a drama which is his own, while yet surpassing him infinitely in every sense; a being to whom has been imparted the singular power of affirming or denying himself, inasmuch as he affirms being and opens himself to it--or as he denies it and thereby closes himself; for it is in this dilemma that there lies the very essence of freedom.[11]

Until a man has passed through that private drama he is what Marcel calls "indisposable," that is, he has not exercised his freedom and hence must see objects, other men, and even God as "its"; he is unable to enter into an "I-thou" relationship with others or an "I-Thou" relationship with God because he has not freed himself and hence denies freedom to the world. The private drama, if it leads him to affirmation of being, frees him, renders him "disposable"; he has entered into communion with existence. This notion is very like the orthodox notion of grace.

For the orthodox Catholic, free will is the highest perfection of man, and it can be defined as "the inclination towards what the intellect judges to be good."[12] The idea implies its own limitations, since the intellect is imperfect and the will not perfectly stable, but to the extent that man is capable of understanding his options and their potential consequences, he is free to choose from among them and responsible for the choices he makes. The orthodox view does diverge from that of the existentialists by assuming that there are good and bad, right and wrong decisions whose absolute standard is God. That is, there is "moral conduct" which is defined interiorly and consists of action voluntari-

ly taken and "freely directed to our true welfare of which that welfare is the decisive motive on which we have decided after rejecting all contrary motives" (TG, 36). That "true welfare" is the life of God within man, so that an act of free will is one freely and responsibly undertaken in the belief that it will serve our welfare where that welfare is conceived as having God as its object.

For the orthodox, man relates to God through faith, with faith defined as the will to believe. Faith is not mere "religious feeling," an attempt to sense the reality of God, but neither can it be founded upon reason; it transcends, by a free act of the will, the limits of the senses and the mind. Both free will and faith are made possible by the presence within man of the capacity for divine life, and that divine life is grace, momentary intimations of God's nature. Grace is the free gift of God which cannot be merited or achieved. In Daujat's words, grace is "a holiness which sinful man can neither have by any means of his own, nor merit by his works and his virtues, but which is given, or freely imparted to him, as a pure gift of God, who, at the same time, both cleanses and sanctifies him" (TG, 15). All men have the capacity for grace as well as the freedom to accept or reject it. It is the capacity for grace which helps the fallible human will to incline toward its true welfare by rendering it susceptible to the pull exerted by grace and therefore permits it to transcend the intellect. The capacity is given to all men, so that God

becomes "himself . . . both the motive and the object of faith" (TG, 80). Grace is the manifestation of God's superabundant love and mercy, given that men might partake of the divine nature and be saved. The vehicles customarily are the sacraments, available even to those not instructed or wrongly instructed in Christian belief if they "have not been able to reject /grace/ out of malice" (TG, 152).

The Christian existentialist, on the other hand, while relying upon faith in grace as the means of salvation, cannot accept the notion of knowable standards of good and bad, nor can he place much credence in the sacraments; for Marcel, prayer and religious ritual are symbolic affirmations of the "I-Thou" relationship. Characteristically the existentialist is concerned with the quality of the individual man's response to the absurdity of the phenomenal world and the ontological mystery. Just as his preoccupation with absurdity has strengthened his "desire to believe" in a God who is the ultimate, if incomprehensible, source of meaning, so his conviction that God's meaning cannot be known with certainty forces him to seek to define certain values within the frame of the very contingency of existence. Since his perception of human life in its relation to God is that it is marked by absurdity and that its inescapable conditions are frustration and pain, it follows that his concern is that man must experience ontological dread in an extremely intense personal drama combining terror and exhilaration. The concept seems close to the orthodox awe of God, but it involves a more pro-

foundly personal intellectual and emotional involvement than adherence to the moral teachings of the church or the sacraments will provide.

The centrality of anguish in the values of the Christian existentialist makes the intensity of experience the only means by which it can be evaluated, a position he shares with his atheistic counterpart. This quite transforms the quality of his Christian belief. The most truly "authentic" and hence most truly Christian life is for him a life lived for the integrity of experience in terms of confronting the conditions producing anguish and the truths revealed by the experience of that anguish. Free will is the highest human possibility because it creates a constant tension of anguish between the exhilaration of or attraction to the absolute freedom of choice, and the fear of, or suffering under, the absolute necessity of choice--when even <u>not</u> to choose is one's free choice and responsibility. Finally, faith itself, the will to believe, must surmount by an act of free choice the fear and uncertainty before the unknown that a view of the world and all existence as radically contingent vivifies:

> . . . the faith of the Christian existentialist is a tortured faith in which the will to believe is constantly undermined by doubt and disbelief. Where what passes for a serene and confident faith is not a mere habitual babbling of empty verbal formulae, it is the will to believe, the energy of unremitting concern about one's personal fate, mistakenly interpreted as steadfast adherence to doctrine. What attracts the existentialists, be they atheistic or Christian, to Augustine and Pascal is the vitality of their religious concern . . . Even the militant atheist who

> vigorously denies God fares better at the hands of the Christian existentialist than the 'serene believer'; for the energy of his despair is more akin to faith than the calm of the man who recites a creed by rote, and he is more honest than the fanatic who has allowed the energy of his hope to blind him to the tragic contradictions of the human condition. In sum, the Christian existentialist does not regard faith in the afterlife as a comforting illusion born of bad faith, but he does regard as illusory and morally valueless a faith which is not perpetually sharpened and daily recreated in and through despair. (IE, 194-95)

The Christian existentialist, then, does not so much depart from orthodox belief as bring to it a new orientation and intensity--an orientation toward confrontation with the absurdity in human existence, which in turn intensifies his free determination to believe in the ultimate meaning of God's saving grace. Certainly this describes what happens to Haze Motes and young Tarwater, and in O'Connor's treatment of Christian themes in all her stories the emphasis is clearly upon the need of each focal character to come face-to-face with the inauthenticity of his own existence. And it is in this concern with the need to affirm life through an intense confrontation with absurdity in order to transcend absurdity that Christian existentialism finds its basic affinity with the grotesque mode in art.

Kayser surveys the concept of the grotesque philologically, starting from its coinage in fifteenth-century Italy (la grottesca and grottesco, which describe an ornamental style discovered in newly excavated Roman ruins) and following the developments in its meaning through various users of the term, examining the literature and art they used it to describe. By this method he finds that as early as the six-

teenth century the term "meant a creative attitude which has been regarded as typical of the grotesque until the present" and that certain of its motifs have remained constant. He notes that A. W. Schlegel, perhaps influenced by Diderot, had gone so far as to designate the grotesque a genre in its own right and that Goethe saw some validity in that notion, but avoids that mistake himself while siding with Mann in contending that the grotesque is a special and legitimate esthetic category:

> That the word "grotesque" applies to three different realms--the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception--is significant and appropriate as an indication that it has the makings of a basic esthetic category. This threefold aspect is characteristic of the work of art in general which, in direct contrast to all other forms of production, is literally "created." Its unique structure enables the work of art to preserve its identity however much of its "cause" it may have absorbed. It has the strength to rise above this "occasion." And finally, in contradistinction to other and different kinds of use, the work of art is "received." It can only be experienced in the act of reception, regardless of any modifications arising from it. (GAL, 180)

Accepting the possibility of inadequate understanding of the grotesque ("the individual forms and detachable contents are ambiguous and suffused with the most diverse meanins"), Kayser works from the necessary predication that "there are certain specific forms and motifs which are predisposed toward certain contents." On the basis of repetitions of forms, motifs, subjects, and themes in the literature and graphic arts he has studied, he concludes that the grotesque is a structure whose nature is summed up in the sentence,

"The grotesque is the estranged world." In keeping with this, it is a "play with the absurd" that attempts to "invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world."

Among the repeated motifs and themes are included all so-called monsters, including the fabulous creatures Sir Walter Scott listed in his definition of the grotesque and the "monstrosities" of Cellini:

> This trait prevailed from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries in the "Temptation of St. Anthony," by which the artists of subsequent ages were inspired. Another pictorial source was provided by the biblical Apocalypse since, like the demons around St. Anthony, the animals rising from the abyss obviously bear their own meaning. But real animals also frequently recur in the grotesques. Even in animals that are familiar to him, modern man may experience the strangeness of something totally different from himself and suggestive of abysmal ominousness. (GAL, 182)

Motifs frequently come from the plant world, from the "inextricable tangle of the jungle with its ominous vitality, in which nature itself seems to have erased the difference between plants and animals," which can be used without exaggeration. Still others come from the enlarging microscope or from glances into "otherwise hidden organic realms"; but the characteristic motifs are not always derived from organic sources and may include "all the tools which unfold a dangerour life of their own," particularly motor vehicles, with airplanes and dragonflies switching roles and tanks moving like large animals in modern paintings:

> This technical outlook is so familiar to modern man that he has no difficulties in devising a "technical" grotesque in which the instruments are demonically destructive and overpower their makers.
>
> The mechanical object is alienated by being brought to life, the human being by being deprived of it. A-

> mong the most persistent motifs of the grotesque we find human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes, and automata, and their faces frozen into masks. From the interspersed masks of the ornamental grotesque to the present age the theme has been a popular one, although in the course of time it underwent characteristic changes. Even in Bonaventura's Nachtwachen the mask, instead of covering a living and breathing face, had taken over the role of the face itself. If one were to tear the mask off, the grinning image of the bare skull would come to light. Ensor's and Paul Weber's figures are born with masks. Even the grinning skull and the moving skeleton are motifs the macabre content of which structurally aligns them with the grotesque. Again and again, I have mentioned the influence exerted by the Dance of Death, which had only to slough off its didactic skin to enrich the vocabulary of grotesque forms. (GAL, 183-84)

Particularly important in the grotesque art of the Romantics and moderns is the role of human nature as a source of motifs and themes. Dreams, quasi-insanity, and insanity are rich in ominous possibilities and have been exploited. Their appeal to the maker of grotesques comes from their inherent suggestion that "it is as if an impersonal force, an alien and inhuman spirit, had entered the soul. The encounter with madness is one of the basic experiences of the grotesque which life forces upon us."

It is important to understand that all these motifs are shaped--and received--in accord with a sense of ominous possibilities lurking with the familiar matter of our world; our world is transformed in a way that differentiates the grotesque from the benign fairy tale, whose familiar and natural elements are not estranged because they do not become suddenly ominous. Suddenness and surprise are required by the grotesque--working as we see it work when, in "Reve-

lation," Mary Grace throws the book at Mrs. Turpin and the estrangement is figured forth in a scene that takes on the qualities of an animated tableau, the characteristic literary appearance of the grotesque.

The representations of the grotesque refer to action, a "'pregnant moment' (Ensor), or at least--in the case of Kafka--a situation that is filled with ominous tension." The strength of their effect comes from the denial of reliability to our world and from the denial of applicability to the categories that normally function in our world view; the grotesque "instills fear of life rather than fear of death" (GAL, 184-85). It depends upon a profound horror that derives from our inability to know the effective agent of the world's estrangement; "One could . . . characterize the grotesque as the objectivation of the "It," the ghostly "It"--in contrast to the psychological "It" (es freut mich - I am glad) and the cosmic "It" (es regnet - it rains)--the "It" which Amman defined as the third meaning of the impersonal pronoun" (GAL, 185).

The estranged world is an absurd world, and thus tragedy is impossible for the grotesque:

> Initially the tragic also harbored the absurd. We can see this in the tragic nuclei of Greek tragedy. It is absurd for a mother to kill her children, for a son to murder his father or a father his son, and for a man to eat the flesh of his sons. The Atrides myth is full of absurdities. But, first of all, these are individual deeds. Furthermore, they are deeds which endanger the principles of the moral order of the world. The grotesque is not concerned with individual actions or the destruction of the moral order (although both factors may be partly involved). It is primarily the expres-

> sion of our failure to orient ourselves in the physical universe. Finally, the tragic does not remain within the sphere of incomprehensibility. As an artistic genre, tragedy opens precisely within the sphere of the meaningless and the absurd the possibility of a deeper meaning--in fate, which is ordained by the gods, and in the greatness of the tragic hero, which is only revealed through suffering. The creator of grotesques, however, must not and cannot suggest a meaning. Nor must he distract our attention from the absurd. If Keller in his Kammacher had described with compassion his protagonists' progress and their race toward destruction, the ensuing emotional perspective would have weakened the effect of the grotesque.[13] (GAL, 185-86)

Obviously this part of Kayser's definition is problematic; it is regrettable that he does not elaborate on how the "factors" of "individual actions" and "the destruction of the moral order" "may be partly involved in the grotesque," and that he doesn't make clear what he means when he says that the tragic "does not remain within the sphere of incomprehensibility." Certainly we comprehend the terms of a particular tragedy, that is, we know how the hero comes to catastrophe, but the lesson always includes the idea of the fallibility of the best of men or the way in which the human condition betrays mankind, and the reasons why that is so remains something less than scrutable. He seems here to be confusing devices with meaning so that he fails to see beyond artistic techniques to their larger implications. Certainly this seems to be the case later, when he finds in the "satiric" grotesques of Hogarth and Kafka and E. T. A. Hoffmann "an unimpassioned view" of the world as either a "meaningless puppet play" or a "caricatural marionette theater." The signs of the grotesque have sometimes obscured for him its significance, as Mark Spilka has demonstrated in apply-

ing Kayser's formulation to Kafka and finding there all its elements used to express a very real concern for the moral order of the world.[14] The same obtains for Flannery O'Connor's fiction, which at times is almost overloaded with the motifs Kayser singles out while presenting an estranged world in a play with the absurd that seeks to evoke and subdue our besetting demons in an attempt to fulfill a prophetic function.

Perhaps it is also his immersion in the motifs of the grotesque that causes him to be troubled by the role of laughter in the grotesque. Recognizing that "traces of /the/ playful frivolity of the capriccio" are present when the grotesque work is successful, he explains it as a "somewhat involuntary and forced attempt to shake off fear," involuntary and nervous because the grotesque is a play with the absurd that may begin gaily enough but whose language or image carries the player--artist or audience--away to realms where there are no comforting guides, making the smile unavoidable:

> In spite of all the helplessness and horror inspired by the dark forces which lurk in and behind our world and have power to estrange it, the truly artistic portrayal effects a secret liberation. The darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, the incomprehensible forces challenged. (GAL, 188)

Certainly this suggests a meaningful function for the grotesque, and clearly it allows for the possibility of moral concern.

Emended to allow the grotesque to express moral concern, Kayser's definition gives the term itself a usably concise

meaning and makes it easy to see the grotesque mode as a particularly suitable vehicle for the expression of existentialist ideas. The operational sympathy between the two conceptual systems rests in their mutual desire to invoke and subdue demons.

"Revelation" makes the point. The story is replete with the motifs and themes of the grotesque as they have been defined by Kayser, and it does all the things he says the grotesque should do. Unable to withstand the pull of either of two contradictory sets of values that traditionally have torn man, Mrs. Turpin has aspired both toward the goods of this world and toward a serene detachment from them which she thinks her worldly success should guarantee her--she takes her success as proof of her salvation. But there are others who seem to her less worthy who have succeeded more, which fact is a source of frustrating insecurity to her. Still she manages to protect herself against her nagging doubts until she encounters Mary Grace and is obliged to see herself as a wart hog from hell. Her values have failed her, the existentialist would say, because of her self-righteous failure to see that the conditions of existence are the same for all men. Forced to meet the extremes of her nature, she comes to communion with the world.

Marcel considers it the philosopher's job to turn men's minds to the study of the distinctive character of their own existence, and while rejecting the traditional arguments for the existence of God, he thinks analysis of moral feel-

ing and moral action can show men "that their own best acts presuppose a faith in something transcendent."[15] He has often presented his own ideas in dramatic form--many existentialists, probably because of the exacting demands of their phenomenology, have turned to the stage and to fiction for demonstrating their ideas--and would wholly approve of O'Connor's fiction and what she saw as her prophetic mission in her art.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xxvi-xxvii.

2. O'Connor, quoted in CS,AD, 260.

3. These biographical details are compiled from three sources: Stanley Edgar Hyman, Flannery O'Connor (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, 1966), 5-8; Robert Drake, Flannery O'Connor (Grand Rapids, Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective Series, 1966), 8-10; and Fitzgerald's "Introduction." An interesting perspective on O'Connor's life is provided in the particularly spirited account Josephine Hendin gives of her visit to Milledgeville after O'Connor's death; it is to be found in the opening pages of her previously cited The World of Flannery O'Connor. She came away with the sense that in patrician Milledgeville O'Connor has achieved the same condition of esteem an antique Hepplewhite chest might enjoy there.

4. O'Connor, CS,AD, 243-44.

5. Nicholas Berdyaev, Dialectique existentielle du divin et de l'humain (Paris, 1947), 96-97.

6. Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo, Tragic Sense of Life, trans. J. E. Crawford Flitch (New York, 1947), 96-97.

7. John Wild, The Challenge of Existentialism (Bloomington, 1959), 98-100.

8. Robert G. Olson, An Introduction to Existentialism (New York, 1962), 30. Hereafter designated IE, appearing in parentheses within the text, along with the numbers of the pages cited.

9. Seymour Cain, Gabriel Marcel (New York, 1963), 44-48.

10. Ibid., 43.

11. Ibid., 56-59. The quotations from Marcel are his translations.

12. Jean Daujat, The Theology of Grace, trans. a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey (New York, 1959), 34. Hereafter designated TG, appearing in parentheses within the text, along with the numbers of the pages cited.

13. This passage might give difficulty; it is important to understand that the problem arises from a weakness in the English language, which uses the word meaning to cover a multitude of concepts. The sense that it has in this pas-

sage would seem to suggest that the original word used in varying forms was bedeutung, which would not square with the logic of the argument, and which happens not to be the case. The root word is sinn, and implies that the grotesque image or object should not be so presented as to suggest a meaningfulness beyond itself--it cannot be symbolic. I have checked my understanding of this with my friend and colleague at Indiana, Professor Weisstein, the translator, who has given me an undated note indicating his concurrence with my understanding (the note is in my files). The original reads as follows (italics mine):

> . . . Die Tragödie als Kunstform eröffnet nun gerade im Sinnlos-Absurden die Ahnung einer Sinnmöglichkeit . . . Der Gestalter des Grotesken darf und kann keine Sinngebung versuchen. . .

14. Mark Spilka, Dickens and Kafka (Bloomington, 1963).

15. Cain, 173.

CHAPTER III

Fitzgerald has spoken of O'Connor's attitude toward the existentialism that had become popular by the time she began to write:

> The last word in attitudes was the Existentialist one, resting on the perception that beyond any immediate situation there is possibly nothing--nothing beyond, nothing behind, nada. Now our country family in 1949 and 1950 believed on excellent grounds that beyond the immediate there was practically everything, like the stars over Taulkinham--the past, the future, and the Creator thereof. But the horror of recent human predicaments had not been lost on us. Flannery felt that an artist who was a Catholic should face all the truth down to the worst of it. If she worried about the side effects of the ungenteel imagination, she took heart that year from Mauriac's dictum about "purifying the source"--the creative spirit--rather than damming or diverting the stream.
>
> In Wise Blood she did parody the Existentialist point of view, as Bernard Cheney has said (in the Sewanee Review for Autumn, 1964), but the parody was very serious. In this and in most of her later writing she gave to the godless a force proportionate to the force it actually has: in episode after episode, as in the world, as in ourselves, it wins. We can all hear our disbelief, picked out of the air we breathe, when Hazel Motes says, "I'm goint to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar." And in whom is angst so dead that he never feels, as Haze puts it: "Where you came from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it."[1]

He does not pursue the matter, and it isn't quite clear how the parody is to be understood to work, how it is that godlessness does not win out in the end. The answer is that, sharing the existentialist's concern with seeing the whole ugly truth of things as a means of purifying the source, O'Connor parodies the popularized philosophy, with its nihilistic emphasis, from a point of view that is characterized

by remarkable affinities with Marcel's. Her treatment of the easy popularization has its analog in her treatment of the social worker (as in The Violent Bear It Away) and in her treatment of conventional, hollow religiosity in the body of her fiction. She does not reject existentialism any more than she rejects religion or the human desire to do good works; an examination of Wise Blood reveals how fully she felt the angst and expresses it in her novel, while studying the subsequent fiction shows her growth to a full sense of the compatibility between the vision of the Christian existentialist and the stringent demands of significant religious experience.

In her "Author's Note to the Second Edition" of Wise Blood, O'Connor wrote:

> Wise Blood has reached the age of ten and is still alive. My critical powers are just sufficient to determine this, and I am gratified to be able to say it. The book was written with zest and, if possible, it should be read that way. It is a comic novel about a Christian malgré lui, and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death. Wise Blood was written by an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one with certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to. Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.[4]

She is telling us that the comic novel should be no less pene-

trating and concerned than the tragic, and the author's serious preoccupations must be understood if those comic possibilities are to be fully experienced. In this particular instance, this means that the nonbelieving reader confronts a stumbling block because he must find values other than the author's upon which to base his response, and consequently he misconstrues the novel by rendering, necessarily, Hazel Motes at least a modern anti-hero if not a tragic figure who is intensely concerned to reject all values but the self-generated and who is destroyed in the process, beaten down by a cruel world. And the point is that the reverse is true; Haze's wrong choice is defeated by its very nature. His need to believe makes belief in nothing impossible, and it is akin to Marcel's belief that the very nature of thought obliges us to recognize an absolute being beyond ourselves--experience intends meaning. O'Connor finds Haze's need the expression of man's inborn capacity for grace, and hence evidence for the existence of God.

The quality of belief that makes a comic figure of Haze, by his intense struggle to find faith <u>malgré lui</u> and his anguished, paradoxical triumph in that struggle, affords a perspective that partakes fully of the dignity and integrity of the existentialist's need for intense personal experience to provide meaning in life. Haze is called upon by O'Connor to experience anguish, to see <u>through</u> the absurdity in existence. This is what O'Connor means, I suspect, when she calls herself a "realist of distances": that the core of

meaning in human life must be seen at a vast distance--the distance between the natures of man and God--and, as it were, through the world darkly. The only way this is possible is with the eyes of faith and by the light of grace; faith, in our time, is not easy to achieve, and grace may not arrive.

Haze struggles with the world's absurdity to catch sight of "real" meaning. In these terms one can recognize the current of irony that runs so strongly through the novel both structurally and thematically. In the course of Wise Blood, Haze must move toward that intense personal experience of anguish that is so important to the Christian existentialist; he comes to grace, but it is by a circuitous and difficult path necessitated by the conditions of our world. His capacity for grace--the presence in him of the freedom to will belief in God and His revelation in Jesus Christ--is shown accomplishing its task of preparation and guidance through the tension that arises between absurd forms of belief and equally absurd unbelief.

The novel focuses on Haze's struggle against faith, showing us with economical efficiency how he came to reject it so emphatically, and helping us to comprehend why the struggle is so intense. Haze's strong spirituality--easily understandable as the pull exerted by man's need to transcend himself--becomes apparent in our first glimpse of him, sitting stiffly in his preacher's hat as he stares out a train window alternatively with looking down the aisle toward the opposite end of the car, as if choosing between

death and life. O'Connor uses her characteristic technique of heightening natural detail in order to vivify the strange and supernatural. Thus the silly conversation of Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchcock, and indeed her entire characterization, make her familiar and set her off against Haze as he sits there in his garish blue suit with the price tag on it and his mask-like face:

> She wanted to get close enough to see what the suit had cost him but she found herself squinting instead at his eyes, trying almost to look into them. They were the color of pecan shells and set in deep sockets. The outline of a skull under his skin was plain and insistent.
>
> She felt irked and wrenched her attention loose and squinted at the price tag. The suit had cost him $11.98. She felt that that placed him and looked at his face again as if she were fortified against it now. He had a nose like a shrike's bill and a long vertical crease on either side of his mouth; his hair looked as if it had been permanently flattened under the heavy hat, but his eyes were what held her attention longest. Their settings were so deep that they seemed, to her, almost like passages leading somewhere and she leaned halfway across the space that separated the two seats, trying to see into them. He turned toward the window suddenly and then almost as quickly turned back again to where his stare had been fixed. (WB, 10-11)

The face is unreal but the powerful eyes seem somehow more than real; they are what hold her while they emphasize, in seeming to be passages to somewhere, his spirituality. His gaze out the window suggests that his is a troubled spirit --a sense that is reinforced by his trying to force the porter to admit that he, too, is from the vanished Eastrod and hence as homeless as Haze. But the exact nature of his spirituality doesn't begin to come clear until he responds to Mrs. Hitchcock's prying by telling her he is going to Taulkinham, where he knows nobody but is "going to do some

things I never have done before," and leers at her with a sidelong glance; there follows some dialogue marked by his ominous perversity and her triviality. He finally interrupts the latter:

> "I reckon you think you been redeemed," he said.
> Mrs. Hitchcock snatched at her collar.
> "I reckon you think you been redeemed," he repeated. (WB, 14)

The spirituality begins to take on the cast of the demonic, and this emerges more fully later when Haze has lurched through the dining car, bumping into tables and sticking his hand in someone's coffee, to be seated among three women "dressed like parrots." While waiting for his dinner,

> He sat and looked in front of him, glum and intense, at the neck of the woman across from him. At intervals her hand holding the cigarette would pass the spot on her neck; it would go out of his sight and then it would pass again, going back down to the table; in a second a straight line of smoke would blow across his face. After it had blown at him three or four times, he looked at her. She had a bold game-hen expression and small eyes pointed directly on him.
> "If you've been redeemed," he said, "I wouldn't want to be." Then he turned his head to the window. He saw his pale reflection with the dark empty space outside coming through it. A boxcar roared past, chopping the empty space in two, and one of the women laughed.
> "Do you think I believe in Jesus?" he said, leaning toward her and speaking almost as if he were breathless. "Well I wouldn't even if He existed. Even if He was on this train."
> "Who said you had to?" she asked in a poisonous Eastern voice. (WB, 16)

What we see here we see through Haze's eyes, and it is disorienting because he is disoriented--a pale reflection through which black emptiness comes, cut in half by a passing train and threatened by a laugh. Unable to place himself

in a world of bird-like women who are so unlike his dead mother they can ask him who told him he should believe in Jesus, he is not helped by running into a pink-wrappered, squint-eyed Mrs. Hitchcock, her hair in knots "like dark toadstools," as he makes his way to find the porter to let him into his upper berth. The porter's refusal to admit that he's the son of Cash Parrum of Eastrod, who died when he caught cholera from a pig, brings a laugh from Haze, but it is clear that he is troubled by his inability to return to Eastrod (a name suggestive of Easter and rood); his homelessness metaphorically figures his existential aloneness, and is offered to us in a context of ominous animal and plant images suggestive of the motifs Kayser finds to characterize the grotesque mode. The feeling of ominousness grows as Haze's berth seems to him to take on the character of a closing coffin, and he wants it dark, which proves impossible. He lies there thinking of the coffins he has seen and relating them to the disappearance of Eastrod, where everyone has died. Half asleep, Haze is led by these thoughts to two memories that become very important because they explain the impulse directing his spirit.

He remembers his terrifyingly religious grandfather, who "had been a circuit preacher, a waspish old man who had ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger," and who preached from atop the nose of his Ford. Every fourth Saturday he treated Eastrod to his fiery sermons, and with his finger pointed at Haze would scream that

"Jesus would have in the end!"

> The boy didn't need to hear it. There was already a deep black wordless conviction in him that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin. He knew by the time he was twelve years old that he was going to be a preacher. Later he saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on the water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown. Where he wanted to stay was in Eastrod with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing, his feet on the known track, and his tongue not too loose. (WB, 20-22)

The recollection of his grandfather, whose perverted Christianity had frightened him, leads Haze to his memories of the army, which had taken him away from Eastrod for four years although he'd planned to allow them only four months, after which he would return uncorrupted; "He had a strong confidence in his power to resist evil; it was something he had inherited, like his face, from his grandfather." He had, when he went to the army, thought he would be able to stave off invitations to sin by insisting he was returning to Eastrod to preach. When the invitation came, he put on his mother's glasses (which he had taken with him, along with the family Bible that was still in his duffel bag because "it came from home") and stated his convictions, but his voice cracked; "His friends told him that nobody was interested in his goddam soul unless it was the priest and he managed to answer that no priest taking orders from no pope was going to tamper with his soul. They told him he didn't have any soul and left for their brothel" (WB, 24).

He took a long time to believe them because he wanted

> to believe them. All he wanted was to believe them and get rid of it once and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of to evil.

The army sent him off to fight, forgetting him until he was wounded. Then they took the shrapnel out of his chest and showed it to him, though he still felt it inside himself, "rusted, and poisoning him," and then sent him to a desert where again he was alone. There he had ample time to "study his soul . . . and assure himself it wasn't there. When he was thoroughly convinced, he saw that this was something he had always known. The misery he had was a longing for home; it had nothing to do with Jesus." Out of the army and in his new preacher-like attire, he had returned to Eastrod to find everything decayed except the chifforobe his mother had cherished.

He had tied the chifforobe to the floor and put up a sign announcing that it was his property and anyone who stole it would be "HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED." In his half-sleep, the chifforobe evokes an image of his mother coming at night to see that her treasured object was guarded:

> She would come with that look on her face, unrested and looking; the same look he had seen through the crack of her coffin. He had seen her face through the crack when they were shutting the top on her. He was sixteen then. He had seen the shadow that came down over her face and pulled her mouth down as if she were going to spring up and shove the lid back and fly out and satisfy herself: but they shut it. She might have been going to fly out of there, she might have been going to spring. He saw her in his sleep, terrible, like a huge bat, dart from the closing, fly out of there, but it was falling dark on top of her, closing down all the time. From inside he saw it closing, coming closer

> down and cutting off the light and the room. He opened his eyes and saw it closing and he sprang up between the crack and wedged his head and shoulders through it and hung there, dizzy, with the dim light of the train slowly showing the rug below. He hung there over the top of the berth curtain and saw the porter at the other end of the car, a white shape in the darkness, standing there watching him and not moving.
>
> "I'm sick!" he called. "I can't be closed up in this thing. Get me out!"
>
> The porter stood watching him and didn't move.
>
> "Jesus," Haze said, "Jesus."
>
> The porter didn't move. "Jesus been a long time gone," he said in a sour triumphant voice. (WB, 26-27)

Even the rhythms of these sentences make it impossible to read them as parody; they are too powerful, too strongly felt. And the stage for it has been too carefully set for parody; eveything has built up to this moment when Haze finds himself totally alienated. Even the Negro who is the only living creature he can associate with Eastrod appears white against the darkness as he reinforces the words of the soldiers with whom Haze had refused to whore. For him the war was a trick aimed at corrupting him, at causing him to sin and thereby to fall into the hands of Jesus; the government that called him to war and the foreign places to which he had to go were agents of evil--functioning for him as the demonic forces in the world that the grotesque mode seeks to evoke. The coffin-like upper berth caused him to have thoughts of death, not just of those near to him but of everyone in his familiar world, and those thoughts have been given special shape and meaning by the grotesque women, the woman's hand with the cigarette, the image of himself through which the landscape is seen and through which a train cuts, the image of his dead mother as a bat--the quintessential

animal in the lexicon of the grotesque. The absurd Haze Motes has been brought face to face with the Absurd; thoughts of death have produced anguish, and Haze is overcome with sickness--we want here to remember that Sartre used nausea to describe anguish.

The terms of the conflict with Haze are set. Having learned to read but that it was better not to, except for the Bible, Haze has been shaped by his grandfather and his mother, who "wore black all the time and . . . had a cross-shaped face and hair close to her head" (WB, 63). Their harsh and perverse fundamentalism made him fearful and literal-minded, especially toward Jesus. The very depth of his desire to believe, combined with the essential shallowness of the form he is offered for his belief, leads him to hope vaguely for visible evidence of the redemptive power his grandfather and mother threatened him with. Hence he did penance as a child by walking a mile in shoes filled with rocks for having seen a naked woman in a coffin in a carnival sideshow, and when "Nothing happened" he felt disillusioned--he has been betrayed by the literalism of a distortion of Christianity. His mother, he believes, could tell at a glance what he had seen at the carnival; feeling no less guilty after her punishment, he performed his penance to remove the guilt, and it was the failure of the penance that later enabled him to think he had always lacked a soul. Similarly it was the literalism he had been taught that made him prey to the atheism of the soldiers, the hen-faced lady, and the porter; he was accustomed to believing what he was told, and had no faculty for

countering evil counsel in the absence of any concrete evidence to support opposition. Yet the energy of conviction that dominated his grandfather and his mother released in him the force of necessity to choose between faith in the unknowable and the skepticism of his father. The conflict may be seen as existing between the will to believe and the pull of the knowable world. In Haze the conflict is powerful, in a sense all the more so because of the extreme limitation of his intellect, and it leads to the intense struggle in which O'Connor told us she found his integrity to consist. He embodies the fundamental quality of irony, which is that ideas and qualities not only imply but contain their opposites, and it was not very surprising to learn from Fitzgerald that O'Connor had trouble pulling the novel together until she read the Oedipus plays.[3] And in this way we come to understand that his mask-like face and the stark, simple lines with which he is drawn are to make us see him as an image of suffering mankind.

Haze's dream tells us that he had in some vague way hoped to find upon his return to Eastrod that his family had somehow managed to overcome death and inhabit his home, giving him literal evidence of an afterlife, just as he sought certain evidence that his childhood penance had been received by God. He has found no such evidence, and the terrible claustrophobic fear of death that wrenches him awake confirms his determination to believe in nothing. Thus while it may be helpful to conceive of Haze, as Lawson does,

as a reversal of Saint Anthony, it is perhaps more helpful to see his story following the general outlines of the history of Oedipus. This would ask us to understand that the army experiences are like the banquet at which Oedipus acquires doubt of his parentage, and Haze's experiences upon returning home and on the train are like Oedipus' visit to the oracle that leads him to a wrong choice. The two are alike in that their wrong choices are the only ones their unaided and fallible human reason could allow them; they are unlike in that Oedipus has led his life in pursuit of truth and the morally sound, whereas Haze, the comic figure, opposes himself to those things, though he comes to them.

Such an understanding of the novel will also permit us to see that Enoch is needed to provide the contrast that throws Haze's moral worth into necessary relief, and is not simply Haze's comic counterpart. Enoch Emory, a "damp-haired pimpled boy," who, like Haze, is a recent arrival in the city and who works in the zoo, was reared in part by a pious lady --a welfare worker "that traded me from my daddy"--who had nearly "sanctified /him/ crazy" both at home and by sending him to "Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy." "She had a brick house," Enoch wistfully recalls, "but it was Jesus all day long" (WB, 46). And so Enoch, too, had sought relief from religiosity:

> "I studied on it and studied on it. I even prayed. I said, 'Jesus, show me the way to get out of here without killing thisyer woman and getting sent to the penitentiary,' and durn if He didn't. I got up one morning

> at just daylight and I went in her room without my pants on and pulled the sheet off her and giver a heart attact. Then I went back to my daddy and we ain't seen hide of her since." (WB, 48)

Christianity for Enoch was but a convention, despite his saying that Jesus gave him the way out of the social worker's house, and he sees his rescue from her as his own act, resulting from the wisdom of his blood in which he has come to put faith. His "wise blood" is what he counts upon to protect him in Taulkinham, where "there's too many people on the streets . . . Look like all they want to do is knock you down"; he offers Haze the opportunity to profit from his wise blood by allowing Enoch to be his guide in the city. From the time of their encounter on Haze's second night in Taulkinham, Enoch provides much of the novel's comedy that places Haze's struggle in its proper perspective. In this way he becomes a central figure. The more grotesque of the two characters, he functions like Sarah Ruth Cates, of "Parker's Back," in serving as the measure of the grotesquerie and absurdity of the phenomenal world against which the protagonist must search for meaning.

Haze and Enoch meet on a streetcorner where a vendor of potato peelers is making a pitch that sounds like many of the profane streetcorner religious preachments that figure prominently in the novel. True to his character, Enoch is eagerly taken in and wants to buy a peeler but cannot afford it; he is particularly attracted by the vendor's joke that Haze "needs one theseyer just to keep him company" (WB, 40). The remark is ironically applicable to the

lonely Enoch himself, whose overriding concern in the novel is to get to know somebody friendly--a reduction of Haze's spiritual yearning. When Haze fails to see a stop light and is given trouble by a policeman, Enoch assures the officer that he's lived all his life in Taulkinham and will take care of Haze; he then claims to have saved Haze from trouble and tries to make friends. Panting after Haze "like a friendly hound dog with light mange," Enoch is responding to the vague message of his blood (at once the embodiment of his own spiritual weakness and a parody of Haze's spiritual strength) that Haze is a person to be followed. The two encounter a second time the blind preacher whose fascination for Haze had caused him to miss the light, and Haze first proclaims his belief in nothing; the preacher calls out to Haze to repent and Enoch suggests they should go to a brothel. Haze rejects the suggestion and Enoch as well. His reason is painful for Enoch--it is Mrs. Leora Watts, with whom he had spent his first night in town after finding her name on a lavatory wall ("the friendliest bed in town"). Enoch, snivelling, lashes out; he points out that the blind preacher's daughter had given him a box of the potato peelers her father had taken from the vendor, and, thinking Haze had only wanted to follow after the preacher because of an interest in the daughter, tells him that the girl had given him her address so he could bring Haze to her house.

> His eyes glinted through his tears and his face stretched out in an evil crooked grin. "You act like you think you got wiser blood than anybody else," he

said, "but you ain't! I'm the one has it. Not you. Me." (WB, 59)

Haze throws at Enoch the stack of tracts the blind preacher had given him and returns to Leora Watts (of whom he had said earlier, "What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts"). He is less confident about it than he made it seem to Enoch, however, because the night before had been his first time with a woman and his less-than-successful performance had elicited obscene comments from Mrs. Watts. But Mrs. Watts "was so well-adjusted that she didn't have to think any more," and when Haze comes in she mocks that "Jesus-seeing hat!", which, having removed her nightgown, she puts on, sitting on the bed with her hands on her hips and "walling her eyes in a comical way." Haze "made three quick noises that were laughs," jumps to turn out the light, and strips. It is then that we learn of the naked woman at the carnival and the punishment and penance that had followed it (WB, 60-61). This is the point at which that information is most pointedly relevant to the thematic developments, and it is also the moment at which the particular memory is working forcibly in Haze's mind; his laughter bespeaks his new commitment, but his turning out the light bespeaks his sense of guilt before a naked woman. The structural device is recognizably Faulknerian, and it accentuates our sense of Enoch's mistake in assuming that Haze followed the preacher because of the daughter.

Chapter five provides the comic key to the contrast between Haze and Enoch. In it, the nature of Enoch's "wise blood" and its goals are clarified, and it becomes increasingly apparent that Enoch is a man perversely fascinated by the very forms of belief which have disillusioned Haze. His life in the city has taken on the configuration of an absurd religious ritual centering around the "mystery" he takes to be the "heart of the city"--the mummified body of a man enshrined in a "MVSEVM" (the name he scarcely dared pronounce) in the park wherein is located the zoo that employs him. For O'Connor the mummy is the image of what man believes in if he resists the call to transcendence, and Enoch is the image of such a man, entrapped in his own animality. His ritual actions are a parody of religious practices, and center on the urge to know man, not God. Enoch is preoccupied with ritual itself; for him there is no distinction between a problem and a mystery, and his ritualistic approach to the mummy reflects his concern to find solace among the citizenry of Taulkinham, in which his frustration makes the city itself mysterious to him. His ritual is a series of comically absurd secular activities: every day after work he goes first to lie under abelia bushes topping a mound from which he can watch the women sunbathing around the pool; then he goes to a hotdog stand to eat and make suggestive remarks to the waitress (always they are rudely received); then he goes to see the caged animals; "Then he went <u>there</u>." He goes

through these rituals piously, and of course can no more see the ritualistic nature of his actions than he can comprehend the irony that they lead him but to a shrunken and mummified, glass-encased, long-dead man. When chapter five opens, the wise blood he got from his daddy (as Haze got his spirituality from his grandfather) tells him that "the person he could show it to was going to come" that day, and it is with great eagerness that he welcomes Haze--who has come to find out where the blind preacher lives. Haze is impatient, but Enoch refuses to give him the information unless Haze goes through the ritual with him. His ridiculous way of life figures the lowest possible denominator of sterile belief, as well as imaging the religious quality that preoccupation with human affairs often takes on, and his foolish ritual is used here to heighten the integrity of Haze's struggle.

At the hotdog stand the waitress tells Haze she can see that he is a nice boy and warns him that he shouldn't go around with the dirty-minded Enoch. Enoch is unperturbed, but Haze is determined to reject the waitress' values. His response to her "you got a clean nose" astonishes and outrages her:

> "I AM clean," he said again, without any expression on his face or in his voice, just looking at the woman as if he were looking at a wall. "If Jesus existed, I wouldn't be clean," he said. (WB, 91)

Haze clearly has thought a great deal about his choice of unbelief, and the very insistence of his assertion signals that he is not yet comfortable--it is half statement, half

plea, a sense of it that is reinforced later, in the zoo, when he repeats it to the one open and unblinking eye of an owl. Both instances are comic, to be sure, but we don't laugh comfortably--the apparent grotesquerie does not diminish the anguish of Haze Motes, and in his suffering we see reflected the painful struggles the problems of belief present to us all.

When they arrive at the mummy's case, Enoch proudly shows Haze the naked yellow thing, drawing his attention (in "a church whisper") to the typed card that "says he was once as tall as you or me. Some A-rabs did it to him in six months."

> All he could tell was that Hazel Motes's eyes were on the shrunken man. He was bent forward so that his face was reflected on the glass top of the case. The reflection was pale and the eyes were like two clean bullet holes. Enoch waited, rigid. He heard footsteps in the hall. Oh Jesus, Jesus, he prayed, let him hurry up and do whatever he's going to do! The woman with two little boys came in the door. She had one by each hand, and she was grinning. Hazel Motes had not raised his eyes once from the shrunken man. The woman came toward them. She stopped on the other side of the case and looked down into it and the reflection of her face appeared grinning on the glass, over Hazel Motes's.
>
> She snickered and put two fingers in front of her teeth. The little boys' faces were like pans set on either side to catch the grins that overflowed from her. When Haze saw her face on the glass, his neck jerked back and he made a noise. It might have come from the man inside the case. In a second Enoch knew it had. "Wait!" he screamed, and tore out of the room after Hazel Motes. (WB, 98-99)

At first entranced by the mummy, Haze is made suddenly aware of what it means by the leering woman; his noise comes from the mummy because it is a cry for the plight of humankind.

When Enoch catches Haze, he is exalted because he has

again misunderstood what moved Haze, and is unable to stand on his own power. Haze shakes him to learn the blind preacher's address, which Enoch in his excitement cannot remember. Haze drops him to the ground and knocks him unconscious with a rock. It is a matter of days before he sees Haze again, but the experience has so excited him that while Haze is preaching the gospel of his new anti-church church, Enoch undergoes his own comic version of Haze's struggle. Almost wholly without volition, directed solely by his "wise blood," he prepares his room, and particularly a small "tabernacle-like" washstand, to receive some "mystery." For a time, he, like Haze, resists the urging of the inner force--chiefly because "he didn't want to be always having to do something that something else wanted him to do, that he didn't know what it was and that was always dangerous" (WB, 135). Answering only to his sense of the wisdom of his blood when he does respond to anything intangible, Enoch cannot find his authentic being, in Marcel's terms; he is alienated from his true self, and when his emotional rebellion is quelled, his pathway leads him deeper into error. As is appropriate for someone who is acting almost completely by instinct, Enoch is increasingly described in terms of the animal imagery which from the beginning has been associated with him. Hence, "he would find himself doing this or that, like a bird finds itself building a nest when it hasn't actually been planning to" (WB, 129), and later, he walked down the street "as if he were led . . . by one of those whistles that only

dogs hear" (WB, 139).

The silent whistle leads him to Haze preaching from the nose of his Essex, and Enoch's "heart began to slam from side to side like a wild bell clapper." Haze's speech rings with irony:

> "If you had been redeemed," Hazel Motes was shouting, "you would care about redemption but you don't. Look inside yourselves and see if you hadn't rather it wasn't if it was. There's no peace for the redeemed," he shouted, "and I preach peace. I preach the Church without Christ, the church peaceful and satisfied!" (WB, 140)

> "Look at me!" Hazel Motes cried, with a tare in his throat, "and you look at a peaceful man! Peaceful because my blood has set me free. Take counsel from your blood and come into the Church Without Christ and maybe somebody will bring us a new jesus and we'll all be saved by the sight of him!" (WB, 141)

He is of course basing his position upon his own dim awareness of the need for intense experience--his own experience brought him to reject Christ, and the unconcern of the 'redeemed' troubles him because it bespeaks a lack of such proof. But also ironically, his doctrines aimed at releasing man from uncertainty about man's relationship with God are preached with such vehement energy that it is clear that he is still wrestling, and is far from being the peaceful man he claims to be. His concern suggests that those who pass idly by are indeed less concerned--an ironic proof of his point. His appeal to the blood represents his own answer to the call of the phenomenal world; his blood is that of his faithless father, who would have been eager to enter his coffin had it contained a naked woman as did the coffin at the carnival. But that he has to speak at all shows his concern,

and his doing it from the top of his car as his grandfather had done figures his spiritual heritage. Thus a multiplicity of paradoxes gives us the image of his intense inner struggle, which is of the spirit against the blood. We see in him, ironically, the image of man endeavoring to transcend the absurd in the world, and, at another level, he captures the whole force of the human suffering inflicted by Southern fundamentalism's perversion of Christianity. He is human, Enoch is animal.

Enoch's blood, the "wise blood" that he must justify, is the criminal and irresponsible blood of his father, whom he fears and idolizes. If he feels awe, it is for the workings of this instinctual force, and encountering the preaching Haze resolves all his doubts concerning the latest project of his blood. At least as literal-minded as Haze, and preoccupied with forms rather than ideas, he hears Haze's words as appeal which his blood has appointed him to answer; he brings Haze the mummy, stolen from the MVSEVM, to be the "new jesus."

He doesn't bring it right away. First he places it in his washstand "ark," and awaits what he expects to be "one of the supreme moments in his life." The mummy makes him sneeze. Disillusioned, he takes the mummy to Haze; "So far as he was now concerned, one jesus was as bad as another" (WB, 176). On the way, a poster advertising the appearance, in person, of "GONGA! Giant Jungle Monarch and a Great Star!" arrests him. As his own animality has been thrown into re-

lief in the past by the awe and hatred he feels for animals like those in the zoo and the moose in the picture on his wall, so now "To his mind, an opportunity to insult a successful ape came from the hand of Providence. He suddenly regained all his reverence for the new jesus. He saw that he was going to be rewarded after all and have the supreme moment he had expected" (WB, 178). What ensues ironically reverses Haze's waiting for a sign when he performed his youthful penance; looking only to the things of this world for a response, Enoch gets it, and the response is very much of this world. He does not insult the gorilla, but grasps the creature's extended hand--the first "warm and soft" hand offered him since his arrival in Taulkinham--and begins to stammer his life story, thinking he has found the object of his long search. But:

> The star leaned slightly forward and a change came in his eyes: an ugly pair of human ones moved closer and squinted at Enoch from behind the celluloid pair. "You go to hell," a surly voice inside the ape suit said, low but distinctly, and the hand was jerked away. (WB, 182)

What he had expected to be a sublime moment turns to one of supreme humiliation, and he runs to complete his mission.

Enoch hands the mummy to Sabbath Lily Hawks, the blind preacher's ugly daughter with whom Haze is staying and who cannot restrain her childlike curiosity. She opens the parcel before taking it to Haze. Haze, who has developed during the night a "hard hollow cough"--suggestive of his spiritual consumption--had been sleeping, but was awakened by the door slamming after Enoch to the decision that he would move to

another city to escape the conflict mounting within him. Starting to pack, he finds the long-forgotten glasses that had belonged to his mother. They are the counterpart of the "gray leather pouch" (suggestive of a scrotum) that Enoch treasures as the only possession of his father's that he owns, except that these glasses evoke the mother's religious vision that Haze has been trying to repudiate. He puts them on and sees dimly in the mirror his mother's face in his own image; as he moves to take them off, his mother's face is replaced by the grotesque image of motherhood presented by Sabbath Lily cradling the "new jesus" in her arms. She calls herself "Momma," and addresses the mummy about his "daddy," --Haze--evoking her own sterility and horrifying Haze, who grabs the mummy and throws both it and the glasses out a door giving onto a nonexistent fire escape. Rain, falling, like grace, on good and bad alike, splatters him as he furiously denies Sabbath Lily's accusation that he wants "nothing but Jesus!" As he shouts his plan to go elsewhere to "preach the truth. The Church Without Christ!", he is interrupted by a cough--"not much of a cough--it sounded like a little yell for help at the bottom of a canyon--but the color and the expression drained out of his face until it was as straight and blank as the rain falling down behind him" (WB, 188-89). The tugging of his spiritual heritage will not be ignored, and becomes a more potent motivating force when Haze is faced by the animality of Enoch and Sabbath Lily.

Enoch's last appearance in the novel prefigures the crisis in Haze's struggle. Because his has been an essentially one-dimensional search for a mysterious fulfillment, guided only by instinct and feeling and without appreciable tension, Enoch's progress has been the regressive parallel to Haze's. He is still trying to better his condition--his human condition, as opposed to his spiritual, and in the process falls inevitably to bestiality. He still expects a literal reward from the "new jesus," an "honor" that he fears "he might have to snatch . . . instead of receive" (WB, 192); "This was the virtue of Hope, which was made up, in Enoch, of two parts suspicion and one part lust" (WB, 191); Enoch is the figure of man dependent upon his unaided reason and his physical senses. The comic strips that he "read . . . every morning like an office" lead him to his inspiration. Seeing an announcement of the appearance of Gonga at another theater, he says with "a look of awakening . . . 'I know what I want,'" and strides forth to take over the gorilla suit, thereby finding the friendship he has been seeking. Comically he finishes off his own grotesquely reversed evolution by violently stealing the suit, donning it happily, growling and extending his paw in parody of the gesture of friendliness. "No gorilla in existence . . . was happier at that moment than this one, whose god had finally rewarded it" (WB, 197-98). But the reward is expectably empty; when the first people "it"--for the diction of the passage reflect's Enoch's regression--attempts to shake hands

with retreat in fear, Enoch-turned-ape is left staring across the valley at the skyline of the city which had been the sterile source of "its" meaning and "its" ruin.

The pattern of these events and the significance that has been attached to them will show how Enoch's story is not an unresolved subplot but central to the action if Enoch is understood to be a reduction and inversion of Haze. Having never had an Eastrod, Enoch has never had a spiritual home; he denied himself the opportunity to have one when he wrongly chose to flee his foster mother's house. Enoch and Haze embody the same qualities, but the emphases are reversed, and it is because of this that Enoch serves effectively as the measure of Haze's magnitude as well as providing a propellant force in Haze's movement toward redemption. Enoch always trusts himself, his "wise blood," which Haze is never fully able to do, and his attempt to lead Haze by the light of those promptings of his own animalistic and suspicious nature is a reduction of Haze's attempt to persuade himself that Jesus does not merit belief. Enoch's denial of the opportunity for spiritual betterment (for which, as a man, he had the capacity, because that is the gift of free will; his spiritual promptings are clearly manifested in his rituals and in his attraction to Haze) when he left his foster home leads inevitably to his ruin. Thus his regression to the ape in man results from his choice of the body over spirit, or perhaps more precisely from his preferring the things of this world. So it is that he goes off to become a gorilla,

a spiritual suicide, deprived of the benefit of free will--alive as an animal, he is dead as a man.

When Sabbath Lily Hawks receives the mummy from Enoch's hands she also assumes his function in moving Haze towards the resolution of his conflict, having shared the role with Enoch for some time. The words she flings at Haze, that he "wants nothing but Jesus," are like Enoch's offering of the mummy in that they are another way of thwarting his realization of his authentic self. Sabbath Lily, however, is an intensification of the temptation Enoch represents. Whereas Enoch's "new jesus" may be seen as a misguided way of bringing spiritual yearning into harmony with the knowable world, Sabbath Lily's efforts are malicious. The unmitigated voice of evil, she is throughout the novel a conscious temptress, intuiting the truth about Haze and trying to use it against him. It is chiefly through her failures and the nature of what happens when she succeeds in seducing Haze that she has come to sense the truth that Jesus is all Haze wants. Thus at the time that we see her function merging with Enoch's we have to see it also merging with that of her father, Asa Hawks, the not-really-blind preacher Haze had encountered on the night he met Enoch. Asa is of course the comic grotesque of the traditional blind seer, here become the sighted but masked streetcorner prophet, the honest man who knows the truth become the dishonest huckster of cheapened religion, whose only honest words in the novel are those in which he pronounces the truth he sees in Haze Motes. When his per-

verse daughter takes over his role as well as that of Enoch, she becomes the means of figuring forth the conflict of reason-seen-as-physical and spirit-seen-as-religion that is tearing Haze apart, and the merger of roles heightens the tension to such a point that Haze is driven away--to his salvation.

Haze first saw Asa and Sabbath Lily when the preacher interrupted the potato-peeler vendor's spiel with the suggestion that those around might buy relief from his preaching:

> . . . "Help a blind preacher. If you won't repent, give up a nickel. I can use it as good as you. Help a blind unemployed preacher. Wouldn't you rather hear me beg than preach? Come on and give me a nickel if you won't repent." (WB, 40)

Of course his "wouldn't you rather hear me beg than preach" is a play on the same theme as Haze's pointing to the unconcern of the redeemed in his later sidewalk preachments. Haze is fascinated by him, especially by the lines of scars on his face, and accepts from the girl a pamphlet reminding him by its title that "Jesus Calls You." He systematically tears up the pamphlet, but staring after their retreating figures, he stands "jerking his hands in and out of his pockets as if he were trying to move forward and backward at the same time" (WB, 43); though Haze rejects the truths Asa is supposed to represent he is pulled by his yearning towards the possibility of genuine spirituality he senses in the preacher (there is at work, of course, the ancient superstition about the blind man's special ability to see through things). He senses intensity in Asa Hawks that he does not see in the

houndlike Enoch who stands at his side, and he is correspondingly as attracted to Asa as he is repelled by Enoch.

When Haze and Enoch catch up to the old man and his daughter, after they were stopped for missing the light, Haze vehemently asserts his belief in nothing, even as the preacher's fascination takes hold of him with a grip as strong as the old man's on his arm. Asa tells Haze to repent and hand out tracts, and when Haze jerks his arm to get away, "he only pulled the blind man nearer." Insisting upon his cleanliness while the blind man accuses him of fornication, blasphemy, "and what else?", Haze tries to pry Asa's fingers away while asserting that "If I was in sin I was in it before I ever committed any. There's no change come in me . . . I don't believe in sin." Flatly, mockingly, Asa repeats over and over, "Jesus loves you" (WB, 53), and there follows the argument in which Asa asserts that he sees more than Haze does. Ironically, he does; Haze is unable to escape the categories of his Christian upbringing, and his thoughts "intend meaning," as Marcel would say, which leads him ineluctably to belief in Jesus as the revelation of God.

But Haze is not immediately ready to deny his understanding of his own experience, and his angry response to the preacher's mockery crystalizes the form of his resistance to the "urge for Jesus" within him. His public denial of any connection with the old man evolves into his first pronouncement on the subject of the "church without Jesus Christ Crucified." Insensibly he has been spurred by the strange

fascination of Asa Hawks to counter its influence by public avowal of disbelief; characteristically, the opposite meaning of his words is contained in them--the very urgency of his denial measures the depth of his preparedness to believe and foreshadows the ugly intensity with which it will crash in upon him in the end.

The next morning, after his second night with Mrs. Leora Watts, Haze acquires the "high rat-colored car" that is to be his pulpit and the symbol of his struggle to avoid faith. Typically he expresses in the form of a denial the very heart of his need for the car: "I don't have to run from anything because I don't believe in anything" (WB, 76), which looks forward to his decision to leave Taulkinham to escape what's happening to him there. The car is the barrier that he comes to hold up between himself and the possibility of grace, and having forged himself a shield he sallies forth to do battle with his own insistent desire to believe. But it is amid foreshadowings of his failure to stave off his confrontation with the limits of his own nature; when he test-drives the car, the lot owner's son sits hunched like a gargoyle on the board that does for a back seat muttering over and over, "Sweet Jesus," and comes pitching forward at the heads of his father and Haze when the brakes are hit too hard. Later, when Haze is driving on the highway he sees a boulder on which white letters say, "WOE TO THE BLASPHEMER AND WHOREMONGER: WILL HELL SWALLOW YOU UP?" Haze stops in the middle of the road, his eyes fixed

on the bottom words, "Jesus saves." He has an argument with an angry truck driver who can't pass the Essex, after which he drives off, leaving the driver standing in front of the sign on the boulder (WB, 76). Haze is going to find Enoch at the zoo, but on the way he has given us a foreshadowing of his becoming a prophet of the saving grace of Jesus.

Fleeing the MVSEVM, Haze drives until he sees Asa and the girl in front of their rooming house. He notes the address before going to start preaching for his new church, standing on the nose of the Essex before movie houses. Rejected by Mrs. Watts, who "cut the top of his hat into an obscene shape," he still is fascinated by Hawks, and moves into the same rooming house. He goes immediately to tell the Hawkses of his presence and the initiation of the new church, only to be surprised by Asa's sourness:

> Haze had expected a secret welcome. He waited, trying to think of something to say. "What kind of a preacher are you?" he heard himself murmur, "not to see if you can save my soul?" The blind man pushed the door shut in his face. (WB, 108)

Because he assumes Hawks has some special source of power which is connected to the intriguing scars and which he cannot understand, Haze is confused by the old preacher's changed attitude, and his unconcern if not hostility toward the idea of trying to convert Haze from his godlessness. Haze of course does not know that the man is not blind and that he doesn't believe in anything either.

The source of Hawks's hostility is his awareness that he lacks the spiritual strength Haze assumes him to have. He

sees something of himself in Haze, but not enough of Haze in himself. His bitter epithet for Haze--"Goddam Jesus-hog"--is his acknowledgment of the force of Haze's spirituality, the quality immediately apparent to almost everyone but Haze himself. That this is an inner force in Haze, and not a trick of clothing, is graphically confirmed by his new hat--a stylish white panama, purchased to replace the preacher's hat Leora Watts had ruined, that looks just as "fierce" and preacher-like as soon as Haze dons it. Asa Hawks has to contrast this force with his own inner weakness, manifested first by his inability to blind himself to show the strength of his faith, and then by his inability to publicly acknowledge that failure, which has trapped him in a lie that means a life intolerable to him. He and Haze stand to each other as paradoxical <u>doppelgänger</u>.

Even before Hawks has shown Haze the first of his two clippings about his youthful attempt to justify his belief in redemption by blinding himself, Haze has determined to seduce Sabbath Lily, in the belief that by destroying her 'innocence' he can persuade the preacher of the seriousness of his rejection of Christ. It has become a matter of great import to him that this man he imagines to be a bastion of religious conviction should be brought down--at least to acknowledgment of Haze's stand against Christ. The capacity for grace creates an attraction that moves the possessor toward religious confrontation; "Nobody with a good car needs to be justified," Haze insists,

but Hawks's clipping sends him to a garage to have his spiritual armor tuned up, as soon as he has made a crude overture by note to Sabbath Lily.

The next day he is almost seduced by Sabbath Lily, a character of pure degeneracy, in a comic scene presided over by what has to be taken as suggesting the watchful presence of God--the one cloud in a blue sky, "a large blinding white one with curls and a beard" (WB, 117). The preacher's daughter, a stowaway in the car, tries persistently to attract Haze, while he is as persistent in trying to learn what really interests him--how Hawks achieved the faith Haze thinks he has.

Disregarding Haze's questions, Sabbath gives an account of her own effort to get advice from a newspaper columnist named "Mary Brittle." The reply she received (a reminder that O'Connor was a fan of Nathanael West) and quotes to Haze introduces a telling note:

> . . . "'Dear Sabbath, Light necking is acceptable, but I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you ought to re-examine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it warf you. Read some books on Ethical Culture.'" (WB, 119)

The patness of this reply is even more absurd than Sabbath's letter that evoked it. It bespeaks a complete unawareness of the realities of life for such as Haze Motes and Sabbath Lily Hawks. And again we are forced to acknowledge, whatever our convictions or inclinations, that "religious experience" can-

not be simply an "addition" to life, especially if it is reduced to the bookish abstractions of "Ethical Culture." The letter makes the life of a man like Haze seem far less "warfed" than the lives--whose details are much less apparently absurd than the details of his--of those to whom this letter might speak. If grace and the grotesque are both capable of producing sudden awe-inspiring intimations of the nature of divinity, so does the satiric grotesque force upon us equally unexpected and eye-opening intimations of the absurd and and demonic lurking about us unrecognized.

Sabbath Lily fails to seduce Haze, but not before she has forced upon him his first problem in doctrinal interpretation--the question of her status within his new church, since she is a bastard child. Much of the humor of the scene lies in the unsubtle ways in which both characters try to accomplish their aims, and, of course, in the reversal of roles. There is great subtlety in another kind of role reversal in the scene, however. After they have been in the field for a time, Haze suddenly remembers the Essex and wants to return to it. Sabbath has momentarily hidden behind a tree:

> "I see you," a voice said from behind the tree. He walked off quickly in the opposite direction toward the car. The jubilant expression on the face that looked from around the tree, flattened. (WB, 123-24)

On the literal level this is of course only Sabbath Lily in a coy effort to attract Haze. We are reminded, however, by the image and the attribution of the speech and gesture to

"a voice" and "the face" instead of the girl, of that ragged figure moving from tree to tree in the back of Haze's mind. Sabbath Lily Hawks calls Haze to sin, but the figure of Jesus in his mind calls him away--just as his spoken answer to her doctrinal question had been that a bastard was the same as anyone else in his church, but "The thing in his mind said that the truth didn't contradict itself and that a bastard couldn't be saved in the Church Without Christ" (WB, 122). He has made the Essex his spiritual armor--a typical projection in the grotesque mode--and his concern for it is too strong a distraction to allow Sabbath Lily to attract him. There's a chink in the armor, however; the car won't start. Nonetheless, it is still sufficient unto the need thereof--though Haze and Sabbath Lily drive off to a repairman's dour (and ironically prophetic) "Some things'll get some folks somewheres" (WB, 127), they do get away before Haze is seduced by the figure of evil, and "The blinding white cloud had turned into a bird with long thin wings and was disappearing in the opposite direction"--the Holy Spirit has prevailed.

Haze returns to the business of his new church, troubled by the growing tension among the influences acting upon him and the failure of his new doctrines to attract any followers except, briefly, a "lapsed Catholic" who wanted an experienced guide for his first visit to a whorehouse--Haze thinks of himself as wasting half an evening sinning for the sake of proving that he did not believe in sin. Then a

"disciple" appears in the person of "Onnie Jay Holy," a man with "an honest look that fitted into his face like a set of false teeth" (WB, 148). "Holy," whose name is really Hoover Shoats (yet another name suggestive of animality), provides another glimpse of the demonic absurd. A con man, he has for three years conducted a radio program called "Soulsease, a quarter hour of Mood, Melody, and Mentality" (WB, 156). He is attracted to Haze's doctrines, not because of their intensity but because they suggest to him a basis for a clever racket. Like Enoch but unlike Asa, Shoats assumes that the "new jesus" is a literal being, one who would be "more up-to-date"; he offers his services as an "artist-type" to give the idea "a little promotion." All this is absurd enough at the surface level, but it serves the purposes of the grotesque by summoning up a demon in its forceful demonstration that "keeping it sweet" does indeed attract converts--or customers--the unthinking Molly Bee Hitchcocks and misguided and narrow Mrs. Turpins of this world. Shoats offers the customer what he wants--nothing of mystery or power of fascination, nothing to confront, but only what is comforting and comprehensible and down-to-earth, even if it does cost a dollar "to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside you!" (WB, 153). He draws a crowd.

Haze is quick to recognize that Shoats "ain't true," but his impassioned protests cannot prevail before the con man's "winning smile" (WB, 152). Haze's efforts to leave are foiled by the car, which will not start properly, but

only jerks back and forth as did Haze's hands in his pockets after his first encounter with Hawks. He wastes no time in dismissing Shoats, however, assuring him that the "new jesus" is not literal but metaphoric: "It wasn't nothing but a way to say a thing." Shoats classes Haze with "innerleckchuls," who "don't never have nothing to show for what you're saying" (WB, 158-59).

Afraid to leave the recalcitrant Essex, Haze spends the night in it and has another dream. In it,

> . . . he dreamed he was not dead but only buried. He was not waiting on the Judgment because there was no Judgment, he was waiting on nothing. Various eyes looked through the back oval window at his situation, some with considerable reverence, like the boy from the zoo, and some only to see what they could see. There were three women with paper sacks who looked at him critically as if he were something--a piece of fish--they might buy, but they passed on after a minute. A man in a canvas hat looked in and put his thumb to his nose and wiggled his fingers. Then a woman with two little boys on either side of her stopped and looked in, grinning. After a second, she pushed the boys out of view and indicated that she would climb in and keep him company for a while, but she couldn't get through the glass and finally she went off. All this time Haze was bent on getting out but since there was no use to try, he didn't make any move one way or the other. He kept expecting Hawks to appear at the oval window with a wrench, but the blind man didn't come. (WB, 160-61)

Hoover Shoats has produced this dream by invoking Haze's private demon--his fear that there is nothing after death and no meaning in the world. Ironically, Haze the grotesque character has been functioning like the creator of grotesques; in creating his Church Without Christ as an affirmation of his belief in nothing, he has been calling forth his demon to subdue its power over him. Shoats's

forcing him to see his new religion as a hollow device that requires no conviction and that his "new jesus" was only "a way to say a thing" has made him aware in the dim reaches of his mind that the thing it says is nothing. The Essex, like the sleeping-car berth, takes on demonic power and becomes his coffin, making him identify himself not only with his dead in Eastrod but with the mummy in the glass case (his most profound motivation for throwing the mummy away later) --and the woman who looked over his shoulder at the MVSEVM becomes a Sabbath Lily who cannot get to him. Wanting meaning, he expects to be rescued by his image of religious strength, Hawks, who doesn't come but leaves him there like a piece of fish.

Shoats is gone when Haze wakes up at midnight, and the moral armor works--the Essex starts right up and rolls quietly home, where Haze picks the lock on the door of Hawks's room and approaches the sleeping preacher's bed. By the light of a match, the wakened Hawks stares into his eyes, and Haze, who had missed the significance of Sabbath's bastardy and degeneracy, has found out Asa Hawks. Hawks's eyes pierce his moral armor; Haze's will to believe had been brought to a high tide by the ugly dream and it had carried him to Hawks's bedside where he finds a "deeper blankness" instead of the meaning he had expected. The next morning he is back in front of the Odeon, but there's no "new jesus" in his sermon. His speech is an explicit parody of atheistic

existentialism:

> "I preach there are all kinds of truth, your truth and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth," he called. "No truth behind all truths is what I and this church preach! Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is there a place for you to be? No place.
>
> "Nothing outside you can give you any place," he said. "You needn't to look at the sky because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it. You needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else. You can't go neither forwards nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you have them. In yourself right now is all the place you've got. If there was any Fall, look there, if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three will have to be in your time and your body and where in your time and your body can they be?
>
> "Where in your time and your body has Jesus redeemed you? . . . Show me where because I don't see the place. If there was a place where Jesus had redeemed you that would be the place for you to be, but which of you can find it?" (WB, 165-66)

It's a kind of poor man's summary of Sartre's Being and Nothingness and Nausea together, including even the view of history and science as well as the assertion of the primacy of the self. The parody is ironic, because the sermon tells us exactly what it is that Haze has to see through to become a "realist of distances"; he must come to know God without empirical evidence for His existence. As Marcel puts it, the evidence for God is to be found within.

The sermon is the nadir in Haze's struggle, and just as Hoover Shoats led him to it, now he appears to lead him away. He arrives in a high rat-colored car and has with him a man in a white hat and a glare-blue suit who is Haze's exact

double. Haze thinks the man an illusion, and was so struck with how gaunt and thin he looked in the illusion that he stopped preaching. The disgruntled huckster, Shoats, had found the double and set up in business preaching the "Holy Church of Christ Without Christ," with himself as guitar-playing front man. The last words of Haze's sermon had been "Your conscience is a trick . . . it don't exist . . . and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it, because it's no more than your face in the mirror is or your shadow behind you" (WB, 166); now he is shocked to see himself committing yesterday's sin --preaching the Church Without Christ. Amazed by the embodiment of his conscience in Solace Layfield, the "True Prophet," Haze retreats to his room.

Sabbath Lily is there, abandoned by her father after Haze's intrusion of the night before. She offers him a repulsive invitation to sin:

> "Listen . . . from the minute I set eyes on you I said to myself, that's what I got to have, just give me some of him! I said look at those pee-can eyes and go crazy girl! That innocent look don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy right down to the guts, like me. The only difference is I like being that way and he don't. Yes sir!" she said. "I like being that way, and I can teach you how to like it. Don't you want to learn how to like it?" (WB, 169)

Haze looks at her "homely little face with bright green eyes and a grin" before he replies: "Yeah," he said with no change in his stony expression, "I want to." With her urging him to haste, he removes all but his pants and hat and slides under the cover, to sit there "as if he were waiting

to remember one more thing":

> She was breathing very quickly. "Take off your hat, king of the beasts," she said gruffly and her hand came up behind his head and snatched the hat off and sent it flying across the room in the dark. (WB, 170)

But the devil incarnate in Sabbath Lily hasn't won; it is during the night that he develops the little cough and makes the decision to go elsewhere to preach. He packs without touching the Bible in his bag--moving back up through sin toward his salvation, he offers at this point only his keeping the Bible as evidence of his will to believe. He finds, while packing, his mother's glasses, and things begin to move very rapidly, with the arrival of the mummy. After he throws the mummy out, he tells Sabbath he's leaving as soon as he gets some sleep, to which she responds, "You ain't going to get none" (WB, 189).

It is at this point that Enoch's ruin comes and sets us up for what happens to Haze. While Enoch, who represents the wrong choice in the exercise of free will, is reduced to the condition of an animal, Haze Motes, in his "backward trek toward Bethlehem," steadily approaches salvation. He is of course fleeing that, and as a part of the flight he must make the final gesture of rejection of the conscience that had been formed by the religious vision of his mother--as he had said in his last sermon, he had to kill it. So he sets out to find his double, Solace Layfield. Layfield, the "True Prophet," as Shoats calls him, is another paradoxical dop-

pelgänger to Haze, and has taken over the seer's role from Asa Hawks. Having followed Layfield out of town, Haze stops him on a lonely road and reveals that he sees in Layfield what others have seen in Haze himself: "You ain't true," Haze said. "You believe in Jesus" (_WB_, 203). Forcing Layfield to strip off the blue suit while running in front of the Essex, Haze runs him over and then gets out of the car to go up to the dying man, who forces him to hear his confession. Layfield, no less than Mrs. Leora Watts or the Hawkses, recognizes Haze's true vocation. Haze's murder of Solace Layfield is the culmination of a series of acts--such as his progressively more forceful rejection of his counterpart, Enoch--which are the inverse of Christian charity. On the other hand, it also embodies that charity, albeit unwillingly. The ability to reject grace increases as the need to accept it is strengthened; hence this act conveys the tension that is so important in both Christian existentialism and the grotesque. Haze's response to Layfield's dying cry, "Jesus hep me," is to slap him on the back, finishing the prophet off and expressing his ultimate rejection of Jesus. The total despair embodied in the gesture is what opens up the way to ultimate acceptance of Christian truth, as it would for the Christian existentialist, for authentic faith can only result from the intense personal struggle between the felt inner need to believe and the will to reject belief, and grace can only be recognized and accepted by

those who must fight it to know its worth. At the same time, this act of murder is an alienating and terrifying one, yet we are forced to recognize in it a charitable quality; unwittingly, Haze has forced his double to confront his own sins, to expressly acknowledge them, and to utter a final prayer for mercy through the intercession of Jesus. Haze has enabled Solace's salvation; his slap is not the death blow but the slap at birth; it brings the breath of eternal life to Solace, reborn into God's grace. The world--the knowable world--is absurd, and the influence of the divine is manifested in strange and incomprehensible ways.

To Haze's mind, however, the murder of his Prophet-conscience is simply the last act he must accomplish before leaving Taulkinham. Having completed this act of rejection and seen to another tune-up for his badly run-down car, Haze leaves Sabbath Lily and Taulkinham behind him and sets out the next morning to find a new city in which to preach. After a while, however, "He had the sense that he was not gaining ground . . . that the road was really slipping back under him. He had known all along that there was no more country but he didn't know that there was not another city" (WB, 207). The sense of spiritual mobility for which he had depended upon the car is betraying itself. He is stopped by a patrolman, who, upon learning that Haze is unlicensed to drive the unsafe old junkheap, has him drive it up over the crest of a hill, maneuver it around, and get out "so he can see better." Then the patrolman pushes the car over the em-

bankment. For the first time since he began his crusade, Haze is without his means of escape from the confrontation that has been catching up with him.

> Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank sky that went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over. (WB, 209)

This is Haze's moment of grace. Not the "uneven skyline" of the city that Enoch saw and that embodies all the absurdity of human life, but the reality of distance, a vision of the infinite that extends through earthly absurdity to the awe-inspiring recognition of something beyond the self, something that reveals itself with cosmic irony through the vista of gray nothingness. Haze has finally met with the source of true meaning, which is mysterious, and he accepts its presence in his life. There is now no need to run away, no place to run to--the prophetic irony of his last sermon!--and Haze returns home to do the thing he had thought his one-time image of spiritual strength had done. He purchases a bucket and a sack of quicklime and blinds himself. Like Oedipus, he blinds himself that he might see--and bear always the mark of his former blindness, which mark Oedipus expected to strike fear and awe into the minds of men. Such is the effect of Haze's blindness on Mrs. Flood, his landlady.

The grotesque forces us to confront the relative nature of absurdity, and in the conclusion of Wise Blood O'Connor

accomplishes this with Mrs. Flood. She is a figure of apalling self-satisfaction and hypocrisy. The horror of Haze's acts of penance--blinding himself, wearing barbed wire around his chest, and again walking on rocks and bits of glass in his shoes--seems to pale before her complacency and avarice, which underscores Haze's elevation. Uncomprehending, she is suspicious. Like almost every other character in the story, she becomes fascinated with his eyes, which now are lime-ravaged sockets, but because of the sense that he was "cheating her in some secret way":

> . . . She felt justified in getting anything at all back that she could, money or anything else, as if she had once owned the earth and been dispossessed of it. She couldn't look at anything steadily without wanting it, and what provoked her most was the thought that there might be something valuable hidden near her, something she couldn't see. (WB, 213-14)

Like all the characters but Layfield at his death and Haze from the time of his anguished moment of grace, she cannot see what it is that is valuable in her own house. Haze is a problem for her instead of a mystery; she initially copes with it by appropriating his disability check from the government.

A relationship grows between them. That is, she begins to look to Haze for more and more, and we see again the inscrutable working of the capacity for grace accomplishing its task of creating receptivity through the paradoxical tension of spirituality and its opposite: it is the very lack of spirituality in Mrs. Flood, her greed and lack of charity, that gradually creates and sustains in her a sense of

awe before the mysteriousness of his strange existence. Increasingly, he preoccupies her. Her ability to understand falls far short of its object, however; she is limited and literal-minded, inquiring what Haze has to show for "paying" by walking on rocks, and assuming when he expresses the heart of his new vision--"I am not clean"--that he refers to the blood he leaves on the sheets.

She comes to value him because of her growing sense of his communion with mysterious forces. "Watching his face had become a habit with her; she wanted to penetrate the darkness behind it and see for herself what was there" (WB, 225); she has become the ironic reversal of Haze himself earlier in the story--trying to see through blind eyes to meaning: where he saw from spirituality and wanted to penetrate Asa's false blindness because of it, she sees from spiritual emptiness and wants to penetrate a true blindness because of it. Where once she had thought to marry him and have him committed for insanity, now she wants to marry him and keep him.

Mrs. Flood begins to move toward charity. When Haze disappears, she weeps for him and for herself deprived of him; even though it defies her comprehension, she recognizes that he has significance, and she shows the beginnings of intuitive understanding in her concern that he be there to lead her in the blindness of her own death:

> . . . She wanted to run out into the rain and cold and hunt him and find him huddled in some half-sheltered place and bring him back and say, Mr. Motes, Mr. Motes,

> you can stay here forever, or the two of us will go where you're going, the two of us will go. She had had a hard life, without pain and without pleasure, and she had thought that now that she was coming to the last part of it, she deserved a friend. If she was going to be blind when she was dead, who better to guide her than a blind man? Who better to lead the blind than the blind, who knew what it was like? (WB, 228-29)

After a life devoid of intensity, she has been brought to a sense of anguish by Haze. Her fascination with his mysteriousness has forced her to confront the thought of death, and she senses that Haze will protect her from dread.

Her recognition is not only incomplete but too late. Haze is found and returned by two patrolmen who hasten his death by hitting him with a billy. Patrolmen have, unwittingly, helped Haze out of death in life and now into life in death. As she sits beside his "stern and tranquil" face, Mrs. Flood expresses charity that is no less significant in its import for having come too late to its object. His composed expression reveals none of the dissatisfaction that had so terrified Haze when he saw it in the faces of his dead family; his knowledge of grace is genuine, not the result of perverted Christianity; he accepted the mysterious nature of God. He had walked out to his death because Mrs. Flood had said she couldn't keep climbing to his room and that they should marry; he cannot remain where his meaning is misunderstood, and his walk to death will help her by bringing a measure of anguish. When Haze dies, Mrs. Flood holds his hand next her heart and looks into his eye sockets with her eyes closed, trying to see what he sees:

> The outline of a skull was plain under his skin and

> the deep burned eye sockets seemed to lead into the dark tunnel where he had disappeared. She leaned closer and closer to his face, looking deep into them, trying to see how she had been cheated or what had cheated her, but she couldn't see anything. She shut her eyes and saw the pin point of light but so far away that she could not hold it steady in her mind. She felt as if she were blocked at the entrance of something. She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light. (WB, 232)

At the beginning Mrs. Hitchcock had looked at Haze's pecan-like eyes and seen the demonically disturbed spirit; at the end, Mrs. Flood looks into their gruesome sockets and sees the peace that we are asked to believe comes with the recognition and acceptance of mystery in the world. Haze is not assumed into the heavens from an Athenian grove, but he dies as did Oedipus in a resounding affirmation of the necessity for the intense life lived with integrity as well as of the existence of God, and his story is a vivid dramatization of the need for anguish before the individual man in the phenomenal world can accept the divine mystery.

It is clear from this analysis that Wise Blood is a less than perfect example of a Christian existentialist's vision communicated neatly through the grotesque mode. The novel represents the culmination of several years' struggle with material and style, so that there is a confusion of modes--Stuart L. Burns may be right in suggesting that the novel was published before it was ready[4]--and sometimes the symbolism is too heavy (witness the cloud at the beginning and ending of Sabbath Lily's attempted seduction of Haze),

which is a quality that does not obtain in the later fiction. It might be argued that the novel verges on allegory, that the lines intended to create spiritual motion are too sharply drawn and exaggerated, so that Haze is too much the mask and his humility at the end seems more like masochism. Certainly it is true that the grotesque is hard to sustain for the length of a novel, as Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away testify in one way and the unfinished novels of Kafka in another, but here the problem seems chiefly to be uncertainty, as if O'Connor were not yet fully sure of her "true country," of what her Southern rural experience could be made to bear. The personal memoir that constitutes Fitzgerald's introduction to the posthumous Everything That Rises Must Converge gives us some sense of the difficult struggle she had with the novel, and Burns (in the article previously cited) provides a careful analysis of the kinds of change the early stories taken into the novel underwent in the process; the changes frequently are dramatically substantial, and suggest that early concerns with social satire and a basically Freudian concept of psychological guilt had to be overcome before she found her way to the pronouncedly moral and religious subjects and themes best suited to her vision. The novel's ending suggests also that she had not yet found a way to suggest very clearly the way a man could continue to function in this world after a meaningful religious experience of the intensity she clearly believed necessary. However imperfect Wise Blood may be, it is where she found

herself, as if the tension of its creation provided the intense experience needed to bring her to comprehension of her art.

After Wise Blood she made few mistakes, and one judges she recognized them as such: "The Partridge Festival" and "Why Do the Heathens Rage"[5] were not included in Everything That Rises Must Converge; her dissatisfaction with The Violent Bear It Away seems to be registered in her rewriting it as "The Lame Shall Enter First." What she learned was that her vision itself was her overriding subject. Given her vision, the lesson carried two corollaries--her necessary theme was man's need to accept the presence of mystery in the world (certainly Martin's The True Country demonstrates the omnipresence of this theme in her fiction), and her vision implied its own structures. Thus she could structurally allude to the Job story in "Revelation" because the import of that story accords with her own vision, carrying the same essential burden of meaning (and one need not catch the allusion to arrive at a fully satisfactory understanding of "Revelation").

The very first story to appear after the novel and "Enoch and the Gorilla" makes the point. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is a very simple story with no significant debt to anything but the cliché itself, as if O'Connor had decided to accept the saying at its face value and explore the reason behind its truth. The only condition she imposes is that "man" is to be taken generically. Then she posits

a reason--people are self-centered, which makes them unkind judges of each other and dissatisfied; unable to see themselves clearly, they are vague about the reasons for their dissatisfaction, though they are smug because they <u>think</u> they know their own natures and everyone else's as well. The contradiction presents an impasse that implies disaster. When a man is brought by events to face that impasse, he confronts the mysterious, the existence of which he has difficulty accepting because the mysterious is not susceptible to logic. But because it is the nature of the mysterious to assert its pulling power men are ineluctably drawn toward it and efforts to deny its existence are ludicrous, even painfully so. A man's response to it when he is faced with the necessity to accept or reject it will determine his ruination or salvation. This logic describes a basic view of man and his condition. It also describes the structure of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."[6]

The story begins with O'Connor's characteristic economy. The grandmother is dissatisfied because her son, Bailey, is taking the family to Florida for a vacation, whereas she wants to go to east Tennessee. Her certainty of her own superiority comes through very clearly from the start; she says it would be immoral to take the risk of exposing the family to an encounter with an escaped convict, The Misfit, thought to be heading toward Florida. Bailey makes no response, so she turns to his wife ("whose face was as broad and innocent as a cabbage and was tied around with a green

head-kerchief that had two points on the top like rabbit ears") and appeals to her sense of responsibility for educating the children, who have been to Florida and so should go to east Tennessee "and be broad." Her daughter-in-law ignores her. Only the two children communicate with anyone, and they only with each other. They join in attacking the grandmother rudely. In short, everyone in the family is smug and isolated.

The grandmother, who, as the children say, is too afraid to miss anything not to go to Florida with them, is the first one ready the next morning, dressed so that should there be an accident, "anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady"; but she deliberately--albeit with mixed motives--disobeys an instruction of Bailey's: she hides the cat, Pitty Sing, in a basket at her feet although her son "didn't like to arrive at a motel with a cat." Though she is determined to have her own way whenever she can, her affection for the cat is genuine--indeed, it bespeaks yearnings within her that naturally would arise with great poignancy within this family. She has a certain sense of mystery that expresses itself in her opinions, which are largely concerned with opposing forces larger than herself and defiant to her understanding. She subdues those forces by labeling them and convincing herself that her answers are right. Thus she reminds Bailey that he must not exceed the speed limit because patrolmen lurk behind billboards, and when Red Sammy, proprietor of the roadside res-

taurant-and-garage combination where they take lunch, says that "A good man is hard to find," she quickly concurs:

> He and the grandmother discussed better times. The old lady said that in her opinion Europe was entirely to blame for the way things were now. She said the way Europe acted you would think we were made of money and Red Sam said it was no use talking about it, she was exactly right. The children ran outside into the white sunlight and looked at the monkey in the lacy chinaberry tree. He was busy catching fleas on himself and biting each one carefully between his teeth as if it were a delicacy. ("AGM," 16)

This same general dissatisfaction underlies her desire to visit east Tennessee, and perhaps is most directly expressed when a graveyard they pass reminds her of her youthful visit to a grand Tennessee plantation and of a Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden who had courted her with watermelons in which he had carved his initials; she hadn't accepted him and he had died rich because he bought Coca-Cola stock when it was first issued. All this preys on her mind, and at lunch her eyes are very bright when her daughter-in-law plays "The Tennessee Waltz" on the jukebox. She dances in her chair, but falls asleep when they are back in the car, awakening "outside of Toomsboro" to recall aloud her early visit to the plantation.

Now the children are not bored by her triviality as they were before lunch. Her excitement catches them, and their desire to visit the old house grows as she talks about it. She capitalizes on their interest by telling them a romantic tale of a secret panel in the house, and when Bailey insists they cannot go see it, there ensues a scene of minor

horror in which the children unleash demonic energy, producing a victory for the grandmother. From the beginning of the story, the grandmother's perversity makes us certain she will bring about an ugly meeting with The Misfit, despite her insistence upon the necessity to avoid such an event. A sense of terror is gradually but unremittingly built up against the comic background, and as the grandmother's wishes take charge of the action the atmosphere becomes increasingly grotesque, nightmarishly so.

She leads them down an unpaved road, and pink dust swirls about them. They seem to be on a roller coaster to disaster:

> The dirt road was hilly and there were sudden washes in it and sharp curves on dangerous embankments. All at once they would be on a hill, looking down over the blue tops of trees for miles around, then the next minute, they would be in a red depression with the dust-coated trees looking down on them. ("AGM," 18)

Bailey threatens to turn around if they don't soom come to the house, which precipitates the sudden onset of full-scale horror:

> "It's not much farther," the grandmother said and just as she said it, a horrible thought came to her. The thought was so embarrassing that she turned red in the face and her eyes dilated and her feet jumped up, upsetting her valise in the corner. The instant the valise moved, the newspaper top she had over the basket under it rose with a snarl and Pitty Sing, the cat, sprang onto Bailey's shoulder.
>
> The children were thrown to the floor and their mother, clutching the baby, was thrown out the door onto the ground; the old lady was thrown into the front seat. The car turned over once and landed right-side-up in a gulch off the side of the road. Bailey remained in the driver's seat with the cat--gray striped with a broad white face and an orange nose--clinging to his neck like a caterpillar. ("AGM," 18-19)

While the mother sits against a tree with a cut head and a broken shoulder and a screaming baby in her arms, the father throws the cat against a tree. The grandmother curls up under the dashboard, hoping she is hurt so Bailey will have to delay his wrath, and remembering that the house she was leading them to was in Tennessee rather than in Georgia. The children jump around and scream "'We've had an ACCIDENT!' . . . in a frenzy of delight." The little girl notes with disappointment that nobody has been killed as her grandmother limps from the car looking absurd in her broken hat.

Disaster approaches with grim deliberation:

> The road was about ten feet above and they could see only the tops of the trees on the other side of it. Behind the ditch they were sitting in there were more woods, tall and dark and deep. In a few minutes they saw a car some distance away on top of a hill, coming slowly as if the occupants were watching them. The grandmother stood up and waved both arms dramatically to attract their attention. The car continued to come on slowly, disappeared around a bend and appeared again, moving even slower, on top of the hill they had gone over. It was a big black battered hearse-like automobile. There were three men in it. ("AGM," 20)

One of the men grins loosely and wears a red sweatshirt with a silver stallion embossed on it, and one wears a hat that completely hides his face. The third, about whom the grandmother "had the peculiar feeling that . . . she had known him all her life but she could not recall who he was," is a particularly grim spectacle:

> He was an older man than the other two. His hair was just beginning to gray and he wore silver-rimmed spectacles that gave him a scholarly look. He had a long creased face and didn't have on any shirt or undershirt. He had on blue jeans that were too tight for him and was holding a black hat and a gun. The two boys also

had guns. ("AGM," 21)

The man calmly orders people around, while "Behind them the line of woods gaped like a dark open mouth," and the grandmother suddenly recognizes him as The Misfit. The Misfit is pleased to be known, but says it would be better for them "if you hadn't of reckernized me." The grandmother tries to assuage him by assuring him that she knows he is a good man; The Misfit is polite but implacable, and orders his cohorts to take Bailey and the boy into the woods. Bailey pleads, his eyes "as blue and intense as the parrots in his shirt," and the grandmother's hat brim comes off in her hand as Bailey is led off. Bailey turns, supporting himself "against a gray naked pine trunk," and shouts to his mother that he will return in a minute.

She orders him to return that instant, but that is not to be. As Bailey had said a few moments before, "Nobody realizes what this is." The grandmother has led her family, herself, and us straight into an absurd and nightmarish situation that makes the world seem an alien place. Our sense of alienation grows as The Misfit talks of his life and of his penitentiary service where "a head doctor . . . said what I had done was kill my daddy but I known that for a lie. My daddy died in nineteen ought nineteen of the epidemic flu and I never had a thing to do with it" ("AGM," 26), and in the background ring out the shots that kill Bailey and his son. The Misfit's companions return with Bailey's shirt, and The Misfit puts it on--"The grandmother couldn't

name what the shirt reminded her of"--and the daughter-in-law says, "Yes, thank you," when he asks her if she and the little girl would like to join her husband. He is polite, and insists that his companions be helpful to the woman and girl.

Alone with The Misfit, the grandmother, terrified, has difficulty speaking, and when at last she can speak, she says only "'Jesus, Jesus,' meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing":

> "Yes'm," The Misfit said as if he agreed. "Jesus thrown everything off balance. It was the same case with Him as with me except He hadn't committed any crime and they could prove I had committed one because they had the papers on me. Of course," he said, "they never shown me my papers. That's why I sign myself now. I said long ago, you get you a signature and sign everything you do and keep a copy of it. Then you'll know what you done and can hold up the crime to the punishment and see do they match and in the end you'll have something to prove you ain't been treated right. I call myself The Misfit," he said, "because I can't make what all I done wrong fit what all I gone through in punishment."
>
> There was a piercing scream from the woods, followed by a pistol report. "Does it seem right to you, lady, that one is punished a heap and another ain't punished at all?" ("AGM," 27-28)

The old lady pleads for her life against the sound of two more shots, but as we noted in chapter one, the perspective has shifted--terrifyingly we recognize something real about the human condition that is implicit in his anguish. He offers us no comfort when, in the passage that includes the shooting of the grandmother, he poses the central problem of Christian belief, our inability to <u>know</u> whether Christ gave

us truth. He brings the grandmother face to face with absurdity, forcing her to recognize her limitations, which is what gives meaning and value to her acceptance of kinship with him, which is an acknowledgement of kinship with the fallible human race. She enters into what Marcel describes as an "I-thou" relationship with him and with us, illuminated by divine grace.

Thus The Misfit, functioning as the agent of prophecy by which the grandmother is prepared to receive the gift of grace, is very like the face of Mary Ann, at once absurdly ugly and full of promise. The Misfit displays ironic integrity in pursuing the course he adopted because he could not accept the presence of mystery in the world, which is why he recoils from the grandmother's gesture and shoots her--he is still struggling, which makes him better than she has been, and it is his intense struggle that forces her to accept the mysterious, which gives her an intimation of the nature of divine love. He in turn recognizes what has happened, which is why his "It's no pleasure in life but meanness" changes to "It's no real pleasure in life"; he has articulated the problem that mystery offers us but cannot himself accept its presence. He cannot rise above faith in his own logic. He is like Enoch Emory in choosing the knowable world, which is the wrong choice, and leaves him no pleasure because it denies him authentic being--that is the significance of his "signature."

The story is funny--very funny at first, unnervingly

funny as we are carried deeper and deeper into an alien world and find ourselves faced with what Martin calls "the theme of man's triviality when he appears against the background of the universe" (TC, 214). We end up squirming; students reading O'Connor for the first time handle it by accusing her of a lack of compassion for her characters, of disliking people. Characteristically O'Connor herself has provided a direct answer to the charge. She has no patience with compassion in the sense in which the students use it, finding it associated in literature with the sentimental:

> It's considered an absolute necessity these days for writers to have compassion. Compassion is a word that sounds good in anybody's mouth and which no book jacket can do without. It is a quality which no one can put his finger on in any exact critical sense, so it is always safe for anybody to use. Usually I think what is meant by it is that the writer excuses all human weakness because human weakness is human. The kind of hazy compassion demanded of the writer now makes it difficult for him to be anti-anything. Certainly when the grotesque is used in a legitimate way, the intellectual and moral judgments implicit in it will have the ascendancy over feeling.[7]

Certainly to sympathize with her characters on their own terms would not blend well with O'Connor's grotesque vision nor with the particular nature of her sense of herself as a prophet in fiction. Hers was not a concern with economic or social necessities weighing upon man to make his lot miserable, but with finding a way through the misery of his lot to a truth she saw lying beyond it:

> Henry James said that Conrad in his fiction did things in the way that took the most doing. I think the writer of grotesque fiction does them in the way that takes the least, because in his work distances are so great. He's looking for one image that will connect

> or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but believed in by him firmly, just as real to him, really, as the one that everybody sees.
>
> It's not necessary to point out that the look of this fiction is going to be wild, that it is almost of necessity going to be violent and comic, because of the discrepancies that it seems to combine. ("GSF," 42-43)

Hers is the larger compassion that bespeaks faith in the best of human possibilities, and her prophetic mission is to affirm that faith.

Finding her concrete points in ideas that are so much a part of our lives they scarcely come to our conscious awareness, O'Connor makes us uncomfortable with them by connecting them to the invisible distant point through the mode of the grotesque, playing upon our recognition of ourselves in a world at once familiar and alien. The usual psychological explanation for such humor would agree with the charge the students raise, claiming that it is a method for expressing hatred and contempt. Certainly O'Connor hated the conditions that placed painful and horrible limitations upon her life, and, being human, she suffered. But like the existentialist she saw through the ugly conditions, recognizing them as at once the signs pointing to the necessary contingency of human existence and the evidence of meaning--precisely because, as for the Christian existentialist, to say that a thing is a sign of another thing is to say that there is underlying meaning. Thus she scrutinizes the absurd to show how it reveals an order beyond, and to show that authentic being, the acceptance of our true identity, depends upon the acceptance

of mystery. To dramatize the process is an effort to help man transcend the ugliness of this world, and not only does what Marcel sees it the philosopher's job to do but does it in a way akin to one of his chief methods. Demons must be invoked to draw out the anxieties present in the minds of every adult, that they may be subdued while we recognize that the systems we construct to explain our world fail precisely because they do not allow for the presence of the humanly inexplicable. We have to be shocked into that recognition because we are so complacent in our errors, but the shock must come within a comic context both because the recognition requires us to see the absurdities of our presumptuous posturings and because the violence must be sufficiently mollified that we can survive it and keep the desired perspective.[8]

Certain values begin to emerge from the fiction. It is clear that every man must learn for himself the nature of human limitation, and come to recognize that it is in his own nature to yearn for something beyond the ugliness of the knowable world. Following the promptings of that yearning with integrity and an intensity of commitment that bespeaks genuine concern about the meaning of this life is honorable even when the nature of the pursuit in itself is unhallowed, because the pursuit will necessarily bring a man to the point at which he must make a decision that will decide his fate. More valuable of course is the right decision, the

decision that acknowledges God and frees man to participate in God's world. Faith, hope, and charity will guide the man who has made this decision, and grow out of the humility he must have acquired in making the right choice. He will not presume to prescribe for others, nor will he presume to know who will be saved and who damned, though he will oppose himself to evil. Every man must come in his own way to his own recognition, and with the gift of free will every man was provided the potential to make the right choice, but because of original sin every man will be drawn away from that choice toward the phenomenal world and faith in his own reason. Thus the moment of decision will be violent, and must produce an intensity of concern and involvement. The position finds its greatest philosophical affinity in the ideas of the Catholic Marcel, and while, like him, O'Connor has not worked it out systematically, it gives shape to every story she wrote. Even her method has an affinity with the phenomonology of the Christian existentialist, in giving careful scrutiny to what man knows with certainty, which inevitably teaches him what he does not know.

The religious vision is austere, and some of the stories in A Good Man Is Hard to Find perhaps, if left to themselves, would make it difficult to see the hopeful affirmation the vision implies. "A Circle in the Fire," for example, begins with a depiction of self-righteousness and morbidity and ends with despair; what has to be understood is that the attitudes and actions are being presented so that they can

be understood as the types of despair, and the prophecy the story offers is that those who think like Mrs. Cope and her daughter will end up with a misery like theirs. Unable to see that the rich abundance of her farm should give her faith in God's love, Mrs. Cope is obsessessed by her notion that she alone has made it successful, and by morbid fears of fire and changes in the weather, and even of people--she has a sense that something is pursuing her. Something is, and it arrives embodied in young Powell Boyd and his two friends from Atlanta, whose spiritual hunger for the life-giving potential of the farm is clear to us but not to Mrs. Cope or the daughter who takes after her. She sees its signs as indicators of physical hunger, and makes the stingiest of attempts to satisfy it. Fearful that the boys will destroy something, she won't even let them ride the horses, and she doesn't even want them in the barn for fear they will smoke and set a fire. As her meanness to the boys increases, so do their efforts to antagonize her, and the little girl offers the full expression of her mother's impulses in wanting first to beat them up and then to shoot them. When the girl sees the boys naked, bathing in a trough and romping joyfully in a clearing in the woods, she is beset by a misery that comes in part from her recognizing a physical difference between herself and them and in larger part from the spiritual difference expressed in the boys' exuberance, a difference with which her mother has not prepared her to cope. The

boys believe that the farm belongs to God and everybody, and they undertake to punish Mrs. Cope for her fierce protectiveness by setting fire to the woods. Mrs. Cope can only look on, her face revealing a misery that the daughter recognizes as like her own, as her demonic fear is realized. Justice is visited upon her, called down by her inability to participate in life; unable to love, she can neither hope nor be charitable.

Similarly, in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," the aged General Sash and his grand niece, Sally Poker Sash, have no authentic identities because they have never cared about the meaning of anything. The 104-year-old man lives only as what the world has asked him to be, a representative of the glory of the Confederate army, a role foisted on him when a movie received its world premiere in Atlanta (one cannot escape the idea that the movie was Gone With the Wind) and its makers wanted a veteran of the Civil War among the dignitaries present. Though he cannot recall the war and probably was no more than a private, he allows them to make him into General Tennessee Flintrock Sash, and basking in the worldly joys attendant upon that occasion, he lives the rest of his days a museum exhibit. Sally Poker, 62, shares his limelight, and her only desire is that he live to distinguish her by his presence on the stage at her college graduation. He makes it onto the stage, where he becomes aware that things aren't right--his nephew has to bow for him--but he can't set things right; the lie that he has been

will not sustain him, and he dies on stage, his hand gripping his sword so tightly he is cut to the bone. After the ceremony he sits dead in his wheelchair in front of a coke machine while his uncaring nephew waits to have his turn and Sally Poker exults in the success of her big day. Since he was not concerned about his life, it was meaningless.

In "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Mr. Shiftlet is offered as the example of the hypocrite who must face up to the necessity of examining one's life and changing to meet the requirements the examination produces. He works his way into the good graces of old Lucynell Crater, whose old car he puts into running order and whose idiot daughter he marries in order to get possession of the car and as much as he can of the old lady's nest egg. On what was supposed to be their honeymoon, he abandons his idiot bride at a lunch counter. He picks up a hitch-hiker who has run away from home. Mr. Shiftlet begins to talk of his mother with tearful sentimentality, which makes the boy angry:

> "You go to the devil!" he cried. "My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!" and with that he flung the door open and jumped out with his suitcase into the ditch. (AGM, 67)

Feeling the encroachment of the world's rottenness, Shiftlet calls upon the Lord to "Break forth and wash the slime from this earth!" The Lord complies; a cyclone funnel chases Mr. Shiftlet into Mobile, pelted by "fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops."

Ruby Hill, of "A Stroke of Good Fortune," thinks she can stay youthful and even defeat death if she does not have

a baby; as she understands it, her mother's unhappiness and early death resulted from having too many children, and babies are waiting "out there" ready to take a woman's life before they are even born. Having moved to the city with a trucker husband who makes good money, she thinks herself superior to her sisters who "married from around" their rural home. Her brother Rufus, recently home from the army, is staying with the Hills, and his insistence upon having collard greens, which she no longer eats, points to her denial of her human heritage at the same time that it presents the occasion for her being obliged to accept it. Coming back from buying the greens, she has difficulty getting up the many flights of stairs to her apartment, and blames it upon an imagined heart condition. At the same time, she is concerned about her growing portliness, but contents herself with the idea that her husband likes her plump and it has nothing to do with her problem on the stairs. She can't make it to the top, and is obliged to recognize that Bill Hill's contraceptive measures had failed some months before. Man must accept the conditions of human life and participate in it.

In "The River," young Harry is taken by a country woman babysitter from the city home of his very worldly and uncaring parents to a fundamentalist revival meeting and river baptism ceremony. There he is baptized by the name of Bevel, and is told by the preacher that now he counts. Entranced by an old book of Bible stories he takes from the babysit-

ter's house, he is dismayed to discover at home that it matters more to his parents and their partying guests than does he; the book is taken from him as a valuable antique, and nobody is interested in what happened to him that day. The next morning he finds his way back to the river and innocently drowns himself, in a renewal of his baptism, while the ironically named Mr. Paradise, a man who scoffs at religion because it had not healed his cancer, watches helplessly. In his desire to "count" Harry-Bevel is the touching embodiment of man's yearning for meaning, for God, which the unfeeling kiss of his wordly mother will not satisfy.

"The Artificial Nigger" demonstrates the value of fidelity in overcoming the sin of pride. The self-righteous Mr. Head and his equally self-righteous grandson, Nelson, live together in a continuous competition with each other, each claiming superiority over the other. When they go into the city so that the old man can show the boy that the city is ugly and degenerate and having been born there confers no merit upon the boy, they become lost. Mr. Head is too proud to admit that he cannot find his way back to the train station, but the boy knows it and, in the beginnings of humility, asks a negress for directions. Mr. Head refuses to speak to him after this, and when the boy runs into a lady carrying groceries, plays the Judas figure, denying kinship with the boy. He feels guilty but tries to win the boy back by frightening him rather than by admitting his guilt; his attempt fails. They have an epiphany when they

suddenly come upon a hitching post in the form of a cracked and peeling negro. That such a thing should stand before a very fine house in a white neighborhood fills them with awe, and they respond to their need for each other, returning home chastened and humbled.

The child protagonist of "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" is offended by the vacuity of her two cousins, Susan and Joanne, who are visiting for the weekend from Mt. Saint Scholastica, and who are interested only in boys. She makes unkind jokes about two older men who might be asked to date the girls, offending the timid schoolteacher who boards in the house, but finally suggests to her mother that she call the Wilkins boys, who were "both going to be Church of God preachers because you don't have to know nothing to be one." The boys come armed with musical instruments with which they accompany themselves while they sing fundamentalist hymns to the girls on the front porch. The two girls respond with the "Tantum ergo" from the Catholic benediction service, and the boys outrage the child by mistaking it for Jewish music. She refuses to eat at the same table with them, believing her truth to be all the truth there is. However, that night her two cousins tell her of an hermaphrodite they had viewed at the fair to which the boys had taken them. They tell her what the hermaphrodite's spiel had been:

> "I'm going to show you this and if you laugh, God may strike you the same way . . . God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I got to make the best

> of it . . . I never done it to myself nor had a thing to do with it but I'm making the best of it. I don't dispute hit." (AGM, 97)

The girl is overwhelmed, but the effect of the story is not immediate. It is only the next day, when she learns that the fair has been closed because some of the town's preachers had been upset by the sideshow, that she understands she should not have been outraged by the Wilkins boys and that indeed the body is "a temple of the holy ghost" as the nun at Mt. Saint Scholastica had told the girls:

> She . . . looked out over a stretch of pasture land that rose and fell with a gathering greenness until it touched the dark woods. The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood and when it sank out of sight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay road hanging over the trees. (AGM, 101)

She is thoughtful, not yet having achieved an age at which her awareness is sufficiently full that she might fully comprehend the significance of mystery, but she is aware of its presence in her life, she accepts that presence, and she has learned the first lesson in humility. Further, she is for us the embodiment of that yearning to know, and O'Connor makes her a character implicitly hopeful, not simply because she is young and uncorrupted but because she has from those qualities a fullness of potential to learn the essential lessons; she has a good chance of answering the call of the blood red host and following the red clay road.

Perhaps the best story in the collection is "Good Country People," a perfect jewel of the grotesque at its most convolutedly subtle--it invokes demons without resorting to bats or gorillas or dreams of death; at least as fun-

ny as any of O'Connor's stories, it is certainly as unsettling, particularly given our sense that there is a lot of Flannery O'Connor herself in it, of Flannery invoking her private demons so as to subdue them. It is a recasting of the story of the fall, and centers around Hulga Joy Hopewell, who went from her Southern farm home to acquire a Ph.D. and returned to clomp around in it wearing an old skirt and a sweatshirt with a cowboy on his horse embossed upon it. Unconcerned with femininity, she has, as her mother sees it, never had "a normal good time." She embodies fallen man, and the role of the serpent Satan is played by Manley Pointer (O'Connor's characters are always suggestively named, but not usually so obscenely). This recasting of the fall makes it the felix culpa: Hulga's winning through to knowledge has as much saving power as the grandmother's sudden recognition of kinship with The Misfit. The story of Hulga is the story of what the Christian existentialist says must happen to every man--he must undergo his own experience of the fall. It is typical of O'Connor that in the middle of the story she parodies, as she did in Wise Blood, the easy existentialism of lazy minds.

The story is told against a background provided by Hulga's mother, Mrs. Hopewell, and Mrs. Freeman, the wife of Mrs. Hopewell's tenant farmer. Mrs. Hopewell is a satire on genteel Southern ladies; she always hopes things will be better than they are and is polite when she doesn't mean it, and she is much given to telling little lies, having a very high

opinion of herself. Mrs. Freeman is similarly opinionated, one of O'Connor's "good country people," and fascinated by life's uglier facts, particularly the details of physical sickness. Both ladies deal in trite trivialities. Both ladies represent perversions of free will; they are two different ways of refusing to make a choice to which they can commit themselves with integrity and intensity. Hulga hates them both, but it is because she has made an intense commitment to a wrong choice. Having a wooden leg and a bad heart, she knows she is ugly and that she is going to die. She has refused to see beyond the ugly conditions of her life; her name at baptism was Joy, but at twenty-one she changed it to Hulga:

> She had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound and then the full genius of its fitness had struck her. She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called. She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga. ("GCP," 174)

Hulga is the type of the cynical intellectual, and becomes the metaphor for the hybrisitic denial of the limitations of one's own nature. She reads all day and dislikes animals, flowers, nature, and young men. She screams at her mother:

> . . . "Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are <u>not</u>? God!" she had cried . . . "Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!" ("GCP," 176)

Malebranche claimed not only that we are not our own light but also that the body has no influence over the mind; Hulga

has failed to understand either message, so that she has allowed her body to shape her mind and she sees only by her own lights. It is not surprising to discover that she has been dabbling in existentialism. Her mother finds the following passage underlined in a book:

> . . . "Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing--how can it be for science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing." ("GCP," 176)

What O'Connor sees in this is the existentialism that Fitzgerald spoke of as being "in the air"; it is cant and gibberish, nonrigorous philosophizing that constitutes the same cheapening of the core of existentialist thought that O'Connor sees in easy adherence to dogmatic religion. It is religiosity, and Hulga is as blind to that fact as she is to Malebranche or as her mother is to the truth behind her genteel values. Hulga is as self-protective as her mother; she has "gone through," as her mother describes the girl's education, but she went through to nothingness, accepting it without scrutiny, so that she does not understand she has denied herself authentic being. She has chosen to live on the farm where careful handling might see her through to age forty-five, instead of living the intense life that the academic career open to her offered; her self-assertion is self-denial and deprives her of dignity, as does her one act of creation --a negative act that embodies her inability to love life,

herself, or anyone else. The story is devoted to taking Hulga, ironically and tragi-comically, through to her most intense and violent confrontation with the absurd, making her aware of the limits of the human mind and the mystery that offers life.

Manley Pointer, Bible salesman and incarnation of the devil, is dressed like Haze Motes, except that he wears no hat, has on bright yellow socks, and his hair isn't pasted down. He traps Mrs. Hopewell into a lie about why she has no Bible in the living room, then plays on her sense of guilt so that she tries to discourage him. Thereupon he poses as a bashful country boy, dedicated to Christian service, and evokes her sense of noblesse oblige and an invitation to dinner. In the process he claims a fatal heart condition, and Hulga, lurking behind a door, is fascinated that anyone knowing he's going to die would give himself over to Christian service; she follows him out after dinner and they make a date for a picnic on Saturday--significantly, the day he doesn't work. That night she thinks of seducing him, not realizing how he has already begun to seduce her.

When they meet for the picnic, he is described for a second time as snake-like, and he continues his business of breaking down her defenses while she thinks her superior mind has her firmly in control of things; the scene is played out against a background of elements from the countryside selected to isolate the ominous and make orientation difficult. With satanic cleverness he leads her

to the hayloft in a backfield barn. His kisses excite her, but she continues to think herself in control until he makes her feel threatened by insisting he must hear her say she loves him, which evokes a fearful demon for her. He has taken her glasses, and the landscape has upon her the effect the desert has upon Haze--seeing nothing there, she is deluded into thinking that she knows all there is to know; the landscape thus helps to produce action like Haze's in that her hesitancy to respond to his demand signals an unconscious yearning for meaning. Telling him "I'm one of those people who see <u>through</u> to nothing," which she claims is "a kind of salvation," she sets herself up for Pointer's purposes. He is going to bring her to the full force of cosmic dread when he destroys her self-righteousness, but that can't come before she commits herself to him. He must force her to say she loves him--and we must understand that in this Satan vies with God in Hulga, whose reluctance measures her capacity for grace.

When his kisses bring her to say yes, he demands that she prove her love by showing him where her artificial leg "joins on." As "sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail," she at first refuses, but finally concedes, and "it was like surrendering her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his" ("GCP," 192). Having taken possession of her soul, he takes possession of her leg with a great show of reverence. But he refuses to reattach it when asked, offering instead a grotesque

apple from out of a hollowed Bible--a flask of whiskey, a deck of obscene playing cards, and a condum--"like one presenting offers at the shrine of a goddess."

> Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. "Aren't you," she murmured, "aren't you just good country people?" ("GCP," 193-94)

He replies that he is, but that it hasn't held him back.

Irony compounds irony in what follows, as Pointer slithers through the ladder hole like a snake going backwards and she is left to look after him through her weak eyes (again, true sight comes with the impairment of physical sight):

> "Give me my leg!" she screeched. He jumped up so quickly that she barely saw him sweep the cards and the blue box back into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposing ends. He slammed the lid shut and snatched up the valise and swung it down the hole and then stepped through himself.
>
> When all of him had passed but his head, he turned and regarded her with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things," he said. "One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house I call at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" and then the toast-colored hat disappeared down the hole and the girl was left, sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight. When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake. ("GCP," 195)

The ironic peripeteia is subtle because of Hulga's extreme consciousness, and the force is therefore the grimmer. Satan has come again in disguise, and the effect is to make Hulga not simply another person who suffers through to re-

cognition of her own limitations but the image of man reminded of the lesson of the fall--he knows not the limitations of his intellect until he is violently confronted with it. And it operates on every level here; Hulga's intellect is betrayed by her emotions working through her wooden leg, which has become the embodiment of her spirit through the workings of her own mind, through which she has denied the existence of mystery even while it worked within her. Thus, horribly trapped in the loft of a barn, unable to see clearly the physical world or to walk through it, she faces the abyss spiritually, intellectually, and physically; she is face to face with what Yeats called "the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.". But in her presence there she is also the ironic image of the saving power of free will.

O'Connor's vision did indeed provide its own subject, and although in "Good Country People" we find certain images alluding to Wise Blood, pointing to the grotesque's weakness for feeding upon itself, O'Connor has developed a considerable maturity in this story, so that there is less involution than in the novel. The characters here are not uncomfortably fitted into masks but are much more fully rounded, and the lexicon of the grotesque is much subtler, suggestive rather than blunt as it is to some extent even in "A Good Man is Hard to Find." The development is within terms of a unified vision, nonetheless, and the philosophical import gains in its affinity with Christian existentialism. We shall see these developments at full maturity in the later works, which are discussed in the next chapter.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xxvi-xxvii.

2. O'Connor, Wise Blood, 2nd ed. (New York, 1962). All references are to this edition, and hereafter it will be designated WB, appearing within the text in parentheses, along with the numbers of the pages cited.

3. Fitzgerald, "Introduction," xv-xvi:

> Meanwhile the typescript of yellow second sheets piled up in the room over the garage. Her first hero, Hazel Motes, had been imagined for a story that she published in the Sewanee, and this story, thinned out and toned down, was the opening of the novel she worked on now. The central episodes with Enoch Emory and Hoover Shoats (a name we all celebrated) were written in the winter and spring. In the summer of 1950, when she had reached an impasse with Haze and didn't know how to finish him off, she read for the first time the Oedipus plays. She went on then to end her story with the self-blinding of Motes, and she had to rework the body of the novel to prepare for it.

4. Stuart L. Burns, "The Evolution of Wise Blood," Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Summer, 1970), 147-162.

Burns, in comparing the novel with the five early stories that were intended to be parts of it ("The Train"; "The Heart of the Park"; "The Peeler"; "Woman on the Stairs," which became not a part of the novel but the story "A Stroke of Good Fortune"; and "Enoch and the Gorilla") begins by agreeing with Hyman's sense of the pervasive sexuality of the novel, and then takes note of Fitzgerald's anecdote concerning O'Connor's reading the Oedipus plays, pointing out--without doubt correctly--that she seems to have been working long before 1950 from a vicarious interpretation of the myth. He demonstrates that the early stories dealt, in more or less confused ways, with alienation and sublimation of Freudian Oedipal guilt, which he finds subordinated in the novel to the religious concern, or higher moral thrust. Thus he sees the Freudian concern supporting the Sophoclean, but not in a thorough intertwining, so that the novel remains confused. He offers convincing evidence that the novel was originally intended to have dual protagonists, but finds that Enoch became only one of several alter egos to Haze and essentially indistinguishable from the others, with "the extent to which Enoch appears to be more central" giving us the measure of the failure of the structure to be balanced (162). He ignores the grotesque element and does not examine the nature of the Christianity expressed in the novel, which is perhaps why he doesn't see the pervasive irony that I find. Just as his explanation--of which many particulars would strengthen

my argument, as does his central point concerning the novel's growth to a higher moral concern--fails to justify the presence of Enoch (who, he thinks, should have been left out along with "The Woman on the Stairs"), so he finds it impossible to give a clear interpretation of the title. I think I have justified the presence of Enoch, and I think I can justify the title in the same terms: as Enoch is Haze's doppelgänger, he is something rather more specific than an alter ego, he is basically the opposite. The dichotomy here is between flesh and spirit, and it is important that while Haze clearly associates flesh with sin, as Burns points out, the spiritual dominates him even in copulation. It is ironic that it is the physical world that calls him away from the spiritual but never wholly successfully--he is rejecting the physical, embodied in Enoch, at the same time that he performs badly in Mrs. Watts's bed, and even more forcefully while he asserts the physical in his preachments of nothingness. The wisdom of the blood is the capacity for grace, present as we have seen in varying degree in both characters, because for both orthodox and existentialist Christian it is present in everybody--for the existentialist it is specifically the response to the mystery the world contains. Enoch, for reasons that should be clear from my analysis of the novel, is employed with Sophoclean irony--his assertion of the wisdom of his blood is the evidence that it is not there (like Oedipus' vehement assertion of his innocence) whereas Haze's acceptance of mystery makes his the wiser blood--he responds to the capacity for grace positively. Hence the great irony in Enoch's insisting his blood is wiser than Haze's whatever Haze may think--though Haze has made no claims for his blood. And in this connection it should be pointed out that it would be oversimple to see Haze's rejection of Mrs. Flood's offer of marriage as rejection of sin--sex within marriage is not sinful to a Christian, even when he's been touched by grace. He recognizes that her attraction to the mystery he represents misleads her; she cannot possess it by possessing him. It is tempting but I think misleading to make much of the Freudian interpretation of the Oedipus myth in trying to come to terms with this novel.

5. "The Partridge Festival," Critic, XIX (February-March, 1961), 20-23, 82-85. "Why Do the Heathens Rage?", Esquire, LX (July, 1963), 60-61. In the first of these stories O'Connor's irony leads the reader away from her theme, a device she often employed successfully (as in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"), but she does not manage the necessary peripeteia; in both these stories she is concerned to satirize social protestors, and this topicality has her outside her artistic "true country."

6. "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," in A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories (New York, 1955), 9-29. Hereafter designated "AGM," appearing in the text within parentheses,

along with the numbers of the pages cited. Other stories from this volume will carry parenthetical references to AGM, except "Good Country People," which will be designated "GCP."

7. O'Connor, "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction," in Mystery and Manners, 43. Hereafter designated "GSF," appearing in the text within parentheses, along with the numbers of the pages cited.

8. It is interesting that in a very illuminating essay defending the humor of the controversial Lenny Bruce, Albert Goldman discusses him as functioning on the stage as a kind of latter-day shaman in terms that deal specifically neither with the grotesque nor with existentialism, but that do suggest that his comedy functioned quite as O'Connor wanted hers to, and Goldman shows its operations in terms easily translatable into those employed here. "The Comedy of Lenny Bruce," Commentary, XXXVI (October 1963), 312-17.

CHAPTER IV

"From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."
Matthew 11:12

This is the epigraph to O'Connor's second novel, The Violent Bear It Away. The novel is much easier to understand, in many ways, than is Wise Blood, not because it wants subtlety, but because it is a more mature and polished effort, and cleanly structured.

There are four major characters. Old Mason Tarwater has been dead for half a day when the story begins, but he is nonetheless a vital force throughout the novel; he was a fundamentalist fanatic who clearly believed in the Resurrection and the Life. Francis Marion Tarwater is his grandnephew, and the novel tells the story of his vain struggle against the realization of his granduncle's prophecy that he, too, should be a prophet of the Lord. Rayber, a teacher, is old Tarwater's nephew and young Tarwater's uncle; he has rejected the teachings of his uncle, preferring logic and psychology to religion and its mysteries; he wants to win young Tarwater to his position. Bishop Rayber is his idiot son (whose social-worker mother fled to Japan to escape him); he is the focus of the conflict between Rayber and young Tarwater.

Each of these characters fulfills a symbolic function. Old Tarwater symbolizes authentic being achieved by the ac-

ceptance of Christian truth; Rayber, inauthentic being resulting from denial of that truth; young Tarwater, man obliged to choose between the two possibilities; and Bishop, innocence marred only by original sin. In addition, visions and premonitions, a voice from within young Tarwater, the sacrament of baptism, weakness of sight and hearing, gestures, and images of hunger, bread, and fire take on symbolic values that have unifying force in the novel.

The novel begins in a fashion characteristic of O'Connor:

> Francis Marion Tarwater's uncle had been dead for only half a day when the boy got too drunk to finish digging his grave and a Negro named Buford Munson, who had come to get a jug filled, had to finish it and drag the body from the breakfast table where it was still sitting and bury it in a decent and Christian way, with the sign of its Saviour at the head of the grave and enough dirt on top to keep the dogs from digging it up. Buford had come along about noon and when he left at sundown, the boy, Tarwater, had never returned from the still.[1]

When the boy does return from the still it is after dark, and he has decided not to see to the old man's burial --he is unaware that the Negro had taken care of it--but to burn down the shack with the body in it and then go off to the city, to his uncle Rayber. The decision was not one easily taken; he is conscious that he is breaking his promise to his grandfather (though he had told the old man he would not bother with "trifles" like crosses).

The boy is fourteen, and there has been a conflict raging within him for as long as he can remember. It is a conflict his granduncle has helped to create, unwittingly and contrary to his own purposes, by assuming the boy understood

more of what he told him than a young boy could. He had stolen the boy from Rayber's house when the boy was an infant, taking him to his primitive Tennesse farm, Powderhead, where he baptised him and taught him

> . . . Figures, Reading, Writing, and History beginning with Adam expelled from the Garden and going on down through the presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation toward the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment. Besides giving him a good education, he had rescued him from his only other connection . . . who had no child of his own at the time and wanted this one of his dead sister's to raise according to his own ideas. (VBA, 4)

His idea had been to prepare the boy for the call to become a prophet, and the boy thinks the surest sign of his election is that he hasn't had to go to school; his uncle has described the things he would be required to do under the direction of a woman schoolteacher and always has made the point that his education at Powderhead freed him for wisdom and gave him the Old Testament heroes and prophets as spiritual companions. Young Tarwater is to be Elisha to the old man's Elijah. "I saved you to be free, your own self!" the granduncle screamed.

Young Tarwater's other possibility, according to the old man, was to become a piece of information in Rayber's mind, and it was in explaining the meaning of this possibility to the boy that old Tarwater most encouraged the rebellion in him with which the novel opens. The old man had kidnapped his drunken and irreligious sister's son, Rayber, and taken him to Powderhead for baptism and preparation for the call to prophecy, but after the father retrieved him

Rayber had come under the influence of his life in the city and turned against God. The old man, remembering how the young Rayber had cared for him while they were together, had gone to the city upon the death of Rayber's parents and sister (Tarwater's mother) in the automobile wreck in which Tarwater was born. There, thinking his nephew was taking him in as an act of Christian charity, the old man had stayed until he learned that Rayber had used him as the subject of an article. The article's contention that the old man had called himself to prophecy out of a sense of insecurity angered him, and he had stolen the infant Tarwater and returned to Powderhead; when Rayber and Bernice Bishop, the social worker Rayber later married, came to get Tarwater, the old man shot Rayber in the leg and with a second bullet took off a part of one of his ears. Always outraged when he told young Tarwater this story, the old man made it clear that his call had come in a tongue of fire from Heaven and that often since he had been "burned clean" of his mistakes; "even the mercy of the Lord burns," he said. That thought was a "thorn bed" for the boy, and his willingness to become a prophet was further diminished by the old man's hunger for the afterlife, which young Tarwater understood as physical hunger because the old man expressed it graphically:

> "Jesus is the bread of life," the old man said.
> The boy, disconcerted, would look off into the distance over the dark blue treeline where the world stretched out, hidden and at its ease. In the darkest, most private part of his soul, hanging upside down like a sleeping bat, was the certain, undeniable knowledge that he was not hungry for the bread of life. Had the bush flamed for Moses, the sun stood still for Joshua,

> the lions turned aside before Daniel only to prophesy the bread of life? Jesus? He felt a terrible disappointment in that conclusion, a dread that it was true. The old man said that as soon as he died, he would hasten to the banks of the Lake of Galilee to eat the loaves and fishes that the Lord had multiplied.
>
> "Forever?" the horrified boy asked.
>
> "Forever," the old man said.
>
> The boy sensed that this was the heart of his great-uncle's madness, this hunger, and what he was secretly afraid of was that it might be passed down, might be hidden in the blood and might strike some day in him and then he would be torn by hunger like the old man, the bottom split out of his stomach so that nothing would heal or fill it but the bread of life. (VBA, 21)

When the old man dies, the fear that is hanging upside down like a sleeping bat in Tarwater's mind becomes the satanic voice from within the boy that calls him to the world of Rayber, reminding him that his uncle had been in an asylum while Rayber "has everything," and pointing out that there has been no sign from above calling Tarwater to prophecy. Tarwater argues with the voice, pressing his granduncle's arguments, but the hard logic of the voice is too much for him, and Tarwater falls into drunken sleep. When he wakes up and burns the shack, he is doing what old Tarwater had said Rayber would do--he is cremating the old man's remains in a denial of the afterlife. Tarwater hitches a ride into the city with a cynical salesman of copper flues.

On the way in, the argument with the voice continues--Tarwater's conscience is bothering him, and he is terrified when the distant nighttime glow of the city makes him think the salesman has driven him back to Powderhead and the fire Tarwater thinks is consuming the old man's body. But the boy again gives in to the voice, and determines to go into

the city in search of specific knowledge--whose is the real truth, his granduncle's or his uncle's? When the salesman makes him call Rayber's house from a gas station, the telephone is answered by the idiot Bishop, who only breathes heavily into the mouthpiece. Shaken, Tarwater screams "I want to speak with my uncle. Not you!", symbolically denying the basic condition of fallen man. The salesman is impatient, and insists upon taking Tarwater to Rayber's address despite the boy's wish to delay his arrival there until morning.

The perspective shifts when Rayber, fumbling with his hearing aid, answers the door, and his perspective mingles with Tarwater's. He is shaken by the arrival of his nephew, thinking the old man is hiding in the bushes waiting to seize Bishop for baptizing, or that Tarwater is himself going to perform that rite; he feels his privacy imperilled. The old man, of course, had told Tarwater that his first mission as a prophet would be to baptize the idiot, but Tarwater does not want to. However, the old man's presence is felt strongly by them both, and we see the workings of his prophecy beginning. Just as the boy evokes Rayber's fear of the old man, the nick in Rayber's ear brings old Tarwater so close to his grandnephew "that the boy thought he could hear him laugh. With a terrible clarity he saw that the schoolteacher was no more than a decoy the old man had set up to lure him to the city to do his unfinished business" (VBA, 89). Fighting that vision, he uses ugly images to

assure Rayber that the old man is dead, and makes a point of affirming that he had cremated the old man just as Rayber himself would have done. Rayber winces--revealingly--at the images, but quickly begins to smile at what he sees as the ironic justice of the cremation. He is delighted that he is to have the opportunity "to make a man of" Tarwater.

Bishop appears, and Tarwater hears "a faint familiar sound of heavy breathing . . . closer to him than the beating of his own heart. His eyes widened and an inner door in them opened in preparation for some inevitable vision." The child, white-haired, stood before him, "dim and ancient, like a child who had been a child for centuries."

> Tarwater clenched his fists. He stood like one condemned, waiting at the spot of execution. Then the revelation came, silent, implacable, direct as a bullet. He did not look into the eyes of any fiery beast or see a burning bush. He only knew, with a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for. He knew that he was called to be a prophet and that the ways of his prophecy would not be remarkable. His black pupils, glassy and still, reflected depth on depth his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at last he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf. The Lord out of dust had created him, had made him blood and nerve and mind, had made him to bleed and weep and think, and set him in a world of loss and fire all to baptize one idiot child that He need not have created in the first place and to cry out a gospel just as foolish. He tried to shout, "NO!" but it was like trying to shout in his sleep. The sound was saturated in silence, lost. (VBA, 92)

Sensing that the child had been primed from on high by old Tarwater to recognize him and know him as God's servant come to bring rebirth, Tarwater slaps away the child's proffered hand. The crying child climbs on his father's back, and

Tarwater has a vision of the two inseparably joined, as if the idiot was a deformed part of the schoolteacher "accidentally revealed" (which the child is, being the product of a marriage Rayber made not for love but to beget a child whom he can raise according to his lights, as old Tarwater had wanted to raise first Rayber and then Tarwater according to his; as such, Bishop embodies the original sin, man's hybristic assertion of his own intellect). Tarwater shouts that he will have nothing to do with the child, and his shout is like "a challenge hurled in the face of his silent adversary" (VBA, 93).

Tarwater's visions are special insights intimating truth, as are all such events in the novel, including Rayber's visions of Tarwater baptizing Bishop and his insight that Tarwater is impelled to stay with them by his attraction to Bishop. Such events in the mind of Tarwater operate always as testaments to the truth his granduncle represents, and he is hybristic in trying to fight them. For Rayber, who has bad eyesight and must wear a hearing aid, the source of insight is the same but his hybris consists in his self-righteous conviction that it comes from his understanding of psychology, his superior intellect. For O'Connor such mental events bespeak God working within us, pulling us toward him; it is her way of saying what Marcel says when he contends that experience "intends" meaning.

There is another important point to be made about the operations of these visions in the novel. They are all given

their specific shape by the influence of old Tarwater on the minds of Tarwater and Rayber. His image in their minds is violently wrenching to their emotions: Rayber feels remorse for his total denial of the old man, which remorse he has to struggle to quell, and it becomes stronger as the novel approaches its climax. It is this remorse, working ironically, that makes it impossible for him to throw Tarwater out when he sees that the influence of the old man is too strong for him to overcome, and it helps to produce the violence that dominates the last half of the novel. Similarly, the terms by which the old man instructed Tarwater were violent and begot the violence of Tarwater's rejection of the old man and his Christian truth. Thus the old man's effect upon his two nephews has been to remove them from participation in the fullness of God's truth, which is the opposite effect from the one he wished to achieve. Though the force of his intentions is stronger in Tarwater than in Rayber, it works in both; there is enough of truth in what he says to them that it reinforces their yearning for meaning and the power of the necessity to choose that is implicit in free will. But the form of his preachments is a perversion of Christianity that brings Rayber and Tarwater to their moral nadirs; fundamentalism is not a path to salvation. His fanaticism led him to an asylum and then to a retreat into the woods. That his house there was in a clearing figures the truth in his thinking, but the woods around were dark and hid the still from which he made his living and where he found his

solace when he was obliged to recognize the failures of his religion. There is truth in his prophecy that Tarwater will become a prophet, but the form in which he offered the truth produces the destruction of Rayber. And the violence in that form begets a concomitant violence in Tarwater's rejection that only ironically frees him to respond to the central truth. It is important that, at the end of the novel, Tarwater goes into the world to prophesy. He has survived his first trial, to use Marcel's term, and must participate in life in terms of what he has learned about himself thereby. He knows, and we know, that his future is one of continuing trial, but for the Christian existentialist trial is the nature of life, and authentic being is maintained only so long as one continues to face the trial of life with integrity to his true identity, discovered in the triumph over anguish. O'Connor interprets the epigraph from Matthew ironically: violence bears the Kingdom of Heaven away from Rayber, and violence bears Tarwater to the Kingdom of Heaven.

The child Rayber had understood old Tarwater's concern to be love, and responded to it out of the depth of a human need that was reinforced by the lovelessness of his godless home. When Rayber's father came to take him from the old man, he said that he was taking Rayber back to "Reality," and at fourteen Rayber had discovered that "Reality" to be as loveless and ugly as it had been before his uncle baptized him. Having found no evidence in the world of his rebirth and salvation through baptism, he returned to Powderhead and cursed his uncle for lying to him. From then on, love for him

was a sign of insanity. Sexual love he trusted because he knew how to use it, as he had used it to give his sister self-confidence and to rescue a student of divinity by bringing them together in the illicit union that produced the bastard Tarwater; but the feeling that caused the divinity student to shoot himself after the accident in which Tarwater was born as his mother was dying Rayber ascribed to madness. This attitude shaped his relations with Bishop, with whom he lived "without being painfully aware of his presence":

> . . . but the moments would still come when, rushing from some inexplicable part of himself, he would experience a love for the child so outrageous that he would be left shocked and depressed for days, and trembling for his sanity. It was only a touch of the curse that lay in his blood.
>
> His normal way of looking at Rayber was as an x signifying the general hideousness of fate. He did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God but that Bishop was he had no doubt. (VBA, 113)

Still, the pull toward God is in us all, and anything Rayber looked at for a length of time could bring on what he saw as a "morbid" feeling of "horrifying love," He saw it as his burden, to be repressed, but it persisted:

> It began with Bishop and then like an avalanche covered everything his reason hated. He always felt with it a rush of longing to have the old man's eyes--insane, fish-coloured, violent with their impossible vision of a world transfigured--turned on him once again. The longing was an undertow in his blood dragging him backwards to what he knew to be madness.
>
> The affliction was in the family. It lay hidden in the line of blood that touched them, flowing from some ancient source, some desert prophet or polesitter, until, its power unabated, it appeared in the old man and him and, he surmised, in the boy. The old man had been ruled by it. He, at the cost of a full life,

> staved it off. What the boy would do hung in the balance. (VBA, 114)

The rationalist Rayber fails to perceive the irony in his mystical belief in a madness of the blood (and of course does not recognize O'Connor's comic irony in having him equate love with God). Accordingly he is heartened that Tarwater looks enough like him to be his son; he thinks he can do for him what he cannot do for his real son, Bishop, who looks like old Tarwater. But his handling of Tarwater, for all that he thinks himself ruled by the best principles of psychology, is dictated by his denial of love (having the same character as his professional decisions, which "were prefabricated and did not involve his participation"). He is put on his guard by the sound of old Tarwater that he hears in the boy, and by his eyes, which look like the old man's. This denial of love defeats him in his efforts with Tarwater; "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20).

Tarwater's journey to the city was undertaken to seek out truth, and it is a search for identity. He always walks ahead of his uncle as Rayber shows him the city (Rayber, significantly, lags behind), looking for a sign that will show him whether Rayber's way or his granduncle's is the path he should follow. Rayber does not understand the boy's readiness to follow him, misinterpreting what the boy says to him in their conversations as proof that the boy's mind is still gripped by old Tarwater. Actually Rayber is being tested by Tarwater, who speaks to him in the same way he

addressed the inner voice: he presses the old man's points in order to learn Rayber's answers; Rayber, of course, embodies the force within Tarwater that the voice represented, and thus the voice is silent when Tarwater is with Rayber. The result of this misunderstanding is that Rayber loses enthusiasm in his effort to convert Tarwater, and three days of touring the city exhaust him to the point that he is nearing readiness to give up entirely. On the third night he refuses to go out again; Tarwater goes out alone after Rayber has gone to bed.

Rayber follows him. Tarwater leads him by a labyrinthine route, past a bakery window at which the boy pauses to gaze at a loaf of bread, to a revival meeting. The boy enters; Rayber peers in through a window that looks directly upon the stage where an eleven- or twelve-year-old girl preaches on the text "Suffer little children to come unto me," and Rayber is moved to pity all the world's exploited children and to hate the religion that could exploit little cripples like Lucette Carmody. Lucette spies him, and gradually shaping her sermon to aim it in his direction as she moves toward the window herself, she finally tells her audience, "I see a damned soul before my eye! I see a dead man Jesus hasn't raised. His head is in the window but his ear is deaf to the Holy Word!" (VBA, 134). Embarrassed and enraged, Rayber runs away, encountering Tarwater, who is leaving the meeting after being persuaded by it away from revealed religion. In his blind fury, Rayber does not see

the friendliness in Tarwater's wave of greeting, and, as he goes home in silent rage that the boy had led him to such embarrassment, he fails to recognize that the touch of his hand on Tarwater's shoulder would win the boy to him.

The next morning Rayber senses the missed opportunity, and "felt afflicted with a peculiar chilling clarity of mind in which he saw himself divided in two--a violent and a rational self":

> The violent self inclined him to see the boy as an enemy and he knew that nothing would hinder his progress with the case so much as giving in to such an inclination. (VBA, 139)

Just as Rayber fails to recognize that he wants to love the boy, he fails to see that it was perverted passion that cost him his chance the night before. He tries again, taking Tarwater to a park to introduce him "to his ancestor, the fish, and to all the great wastes of unexplored time." But as they make their way toward the natural history museum in the middle of the park, Bishop runs into a pool and stands there, wailing and bathed in sunlight. Rayber sees that Tarwater is drawn toward the idiot child as if impelled by a vision, and darts forward to save his son from baptism.

The following day he takes the boys to a country resort thirty miles from Powderhead. His idea is to relax Tarwater for a visit to Powderhead, which he hopes will be a shock to the boy that might suddenly reveal his "trauma" and make it possible to reach him psychologically. When they check in at the lodge, Rayber is irritated by the lady at the desk, and goes up ahead of the boys. The lady

hears Tarwater being rude to Bishop, and hisses at him, "Mind how you talk to one of them there, you boy!" Tarwater looks at Bishop as if mesmerized, and follows after him "as if attached by a tow-line." When Bishop sits on the stairs and extends his feet for Tarwater to tie his shoes, Tarwater hesitates and then surprises the lady by tying the shoes. The woman calls to him, but the words she intended to speak vanish before the strange stare he casts on her. Summoning her voice, she mutters, "Whatever devil's work you mean to do, don't do it here."

> He continued to look down at her. "You can't just say NO," he said. "You got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it. You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it. One way or another." (VBA, 157)

On the card on which Rayber had registered them as "George F. Rayber, Frank and Bishop Rayber," Tarwater had scratched out the "Frank" and written "Francis Marion Tarwater, Powderhead, Tennessee. NOT HIS SON."

After lunch, at which Tarwater had eaten six sandwiches (his hunger is rapidly growing through the novel, symbolically, and he has been unsatisfied by the food Rayber has provided), Rayber takes Tarwater out in a boat. Tarwater is preoccupied with the problem of a trap that he sees building around him:

> Ever since his first night in the city when he had seen once and for all that the schoolteacher was of no significance--nothing but a piece of bait, an insult to his intelligence--his mind had been engaged in a continual struggle with the silence that confronted him, that demanded he baptize the child and begin

> at once the life the old man had prepared him for. (VBA, 159-60)

For a time there is no conversation between the man and the boy, and again Tarwater's inner voice speaks, telling him that the hunger he has felt is not a sign from the Lord calling him to become a prophet but a return of the worms from which he had suffered as a child. Elijah, said the voice, had been fed by an angel of the Lord. Tarwater remembers the trip to the park, and the whole episode is recounted for us from his perspective rather than Rayber's. We learn that after Tarwater walked away from his uncle following Rayber's rescue of Bishop from the pool, the voice had spoken to him. What he said was that the sign had come when the sun came from behind a cloud to brighten Bishop's head, and it was a call not to a baptizing but a drowning. Again, Rayber had mistaken Tarwater's motives, but he had not been completely wrong. The struggle within Tarwater had been raging as Bishop stood in the pool, and a view between two trees had made Tarwater envision the two blackened chimneys at Powderhead, the burned out bed he and the old man had shared standing between them. It was that struggle Tarwater expressed to the lady at the lodge when he said "You got to do NO."

Now, in the boat, the inner struggle wells up again. Rayber starts to speak. He tells Tarwater that he once had tried to drown Bishop, but his nerve failed him (what actually happened was that Bishop had put up a tremendous battle to live, and Rayber had a sudden vision of the emptiness of his life without the child). Tarwater responds that his grand-

uncle had always claimed Rayber "couldn't do nothing, couldn't act." Angered, Rayber says that his guts are in his head, and he begins to speak against the old man as the boy feels a growing nausea. When Rayber has denied the validity of baptism and claimed that old Tarwater ruined both their lives, so that now Tarwater is eaten up by false guilt, the boy vomits his huge lunch into the lake. In a gesture of sympathy, Rayber tells Tarwater, "Something's eating you on the inside and I can tell you what it is"; the boy tells him to shut up, and Rayber threatens him with a future like the old man's. Removing his shoes and trousers, Tarwater dives from the boat and swims ashore, where he looks back to see Rayber throwing the trousers into the water.

For the first time, Tarwater puts on the clothes his uncle had bought for him, and there is a new hard glint in his eye. That night at dinner he cannot eat, and he and Rayber again set each other off. Rayber insists upon telling the boy that what's eating him inside is the mission he has from the old man, the instruction to baptize Rayber. Pushing his water glass toward Tarwater, he tells him to go ahead, because baptism is a meaningless ritual. Ironically, he explains things in a way that offers Tarwater the choice that was open to Adam and Eve, with Rayber speaking as the devil's advocate. Tarwater must choose, he asserts, but he must understand that the choice is between meaningless acts on the one hand and, on the other, "being born again the natural way--through your own efforts. Your intelligence"

(VBA, 196). Asserting that, unlike his uncle, he can act, Tarwater gains permission to take Bishop in the boat while Rayber goes to rest. As the two boys leave, Bishop seems to be leading--he has throughout the novel been attracted to water; he has not been cleansed of original sin.

Rayber falls asleep. It is after dark when he awakens, and he goes to the window amidst a vast silence. Suddenly he hears Bishop bellow, and as the sound dies away he knows that Tarwater has drowned the child, baptizing him at the same time, and that Tarwater has gone off to a violent encounter with his destiny:

> He stood waiting for the raging pain, the intolerable hurt that was his due, to begin, so that he could ignore it, but he continued to feel nothing. He stood light-headed at the window and it was not until he realized there would be no pain that he collapsed. (VBA, 203)

Having denied God, Rayber denied life; there is nothing to sustain him now that Bishop, his only hold on life, is gone.

Tarwater understood his action to be "doing NO" to his granduncle, and is troubled that the words of baptism slipped out as he was drowning the idiot. He discounts the words as accidental and insignificant in the face of the drowning, but the fact of the baptism will not leave his mind, and his hunger tears at him. He tells the truck driver who picks him up that he is hungry, but "not for the bread of life"; still he cannot eat the sandwich the man gives him, and his incoherent accounting of himself convinces the truck driver that the boy is mad. In a foreshadowing of what is to be Tarwater's destiny as a prophet, the trucker makes him get

out of the truck. The morning sun is hot and Tarwater develops a great thirst that is not slaked by generous quantities of water two Negro boys allow him to draw from their well. With his one nickel he stops to buy a soda from a lady with whom his granduncle had traded, but she refuses him, and reviles him for his failure to bury his uncle and affirm the Resurrection and the Life. Expecting to defend his actions, Tarwater instead is shocked to hear himself utter an obscene reply. More deeply troubled than ever, he moves on toward Powderhead, where "I'm in charge now," as he says to the homosexual who offers him a ride, gives him a marijuana cigarette and doped whiskey, and then rapes the unconscious boy in a clearing in the woods.

When Tarwater comes to, he is outraged, and sets fire to the surrounding bushes and trees, and then moves on to what he knows is to be a final revelation. His eyes looked "as if, touched with a coal like the lips of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sights again" (VBA, 233). As he nears Powderhead, he looks through a forked tree at the clearing where the house had stood, and sees the two blackened chimneys, "the sign of a broken covenant." His friend, the voice, has returned, urging him to take possession of the place, because together they've won it:

> The place was forsaken and his own. As he looked, his dry lips parted. They seemed to be forced open by a hunger too great to be contained inside him. He stood there open-mouthed, as if he had no further power to move. (VBA, 237)

He moves into the clearing, where he finds that the field has been freshly tended, and he confronts Buford Munson over the mound of his granduncle's grave. Buford tells him that he had buried the old man and put the cross over his head while Tarwater had lain drunk. The field suddenly seemed to Tarwater to be peopled with a multitude:

> Everywhere, he saw dim figures seated on the slope and as he gazed he saw that from a single basket the throng was being fed. His eyes searched the crowd for a long time as if he could not find the one he was looking for. Then he saw him. The old man was lowering himself to the ground. When he was down and his bulk had settled, he leaned forward, his face turned toward the basket, impatiently following its progress toward him. The boy too leaned forward, aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man's and that nothing on earth would fill him. His hunger was so great that he could have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied. (VBA, 241)

He feels his hunger now not as a pain but as a tide rising in him as he knew it to have risen "in a line of men whose lives were chosen to sustain it, who would wander in the world, strangers from that violent country where the silence is never broken except to shout the truth." The flames from the fire he had set in the woods appear to him "a red-gold tree of fire" that "would consume the darkness in one tremendous burst of flame." It is for him the fire that had purified and commanded the Old Testament prophets, and he throws himself upon his granduncle's grave, hearing himself commanded to "GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY." Smearing dirt from the grave on his forehead, he sets forth.

Both Tarwater and Rayber have learned that "all our

righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6), to different ends. Rayber, who cursed his grandfather, maliciously denied God and cannot know the saving power of grace. Tarwater comes to know the saving power of His grace though he, too, had denied God. The difference derives from concern, which operates powerfully in Tarwater and which does not function in Rayber, whose only interest is in protecting himself--it is telling that O'Connor chooses to say that his professional decisions did not involve participation. That term is important in the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel, who uses it to describe involvement in the trial of life growing out of the continuing concern for meaning in life, which concern takes its force from the discovery of one's true identity. That true identity is, as we have seen, discovered in the recognition of one's limitations at the anguished moment when one accepts the mystery that lies beyond the knowable world and towards which all thought looks. For Rayber things have no meaning beyond themselves, and to think they do is madness; for Tarwater, the meaning must come from beyond--even when he was looking for a way to escape his granduncle's God, he expected direction from a sign.

The novel advances the values of faith, hope, and charity, and posits that these are only possible if one loves, which is the avenue to knowledge of God's love and to authentic being. To love is to affirm God and to participate in life with vital concern for authentic meaning.

Pride and self-righteousness are the chief traps set by the devil, and it takes a violent event to free a man from them. All men can be warned, but each must learn for himself--each must re-enact the sin of Adam. Hence the violence done to prophets, which is the destiny of Tarwater at the end of the novel. And hence the enduring power of John's severed head upon the platter.

Polished as the novel is, it is not O'Connor at her best. She is best in her short stories, and it is not simply because it is difficult to sustain a grotesque novel. It seems to go beyond that; her missionary purpose takes dominance over the basic clarity of her vision when she works in the longer form, and her hand becomes heavy. While The Violent Bear It Away does not come as perilously close to allegory as does Wise Blood, the contrivances of plot show through rather too clearly and her symbols tend to become too baldly symbolic, as with Rayber and his continual jumping into pools and crying out for baptism. The result is that her apocalyptic vision is compromised; her sharp visual images are as successful as ever in providing ironic humor, but the necessary suspense is never established and the inevitability of the outcome is too clear from the beginning for the ending to have its intended force.

O'Connor recognized that the novel was not wholly successful, apparently. She recast its materials in "The Lame Shall Enter First,"[2] and it is interesting to notice how she simplified them there. Rayber becomes Sheppard, the

widowed City Recreational Director who works on Saturdays as a counselor in a boys' reformatory, "receiving nothing for it but the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about." Bishop becomes Norton, Sheppard's son about whom he doesn't care; he is a child of about average intelligence who spends his lonely days yearning for his dead mother, selling seeds, and counting the money he saves. Francis Marion Tarwater becomes Rufus Johnson, club-footed and the smartest boy in the reformatory, whom it is Sheppard's ambition to rescue from his fanatical fundamentalist grandfather in order that he, Sheppard, might "make something" of the boy. All that remains of old Tarwater is Rufus' grandfather, who has gone "with a remnant" to the hills "to bury some Bibles in a cave and take two of different kinds of animals and all . . . like Noah. Only this time it's going to be fire, not flood" (ERC, 158). The grandfather never appears.

Rufus is the incarnation of evil and functions to destroy the self-righteousness of Sheppard, which he does by forcing the man to recognize his failure to love, and again one is reminded of I John 4: 12 and 20 ("If we love one another, God dwelleth in us," and "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"). Sheppard pities him because he is crippled, beaten by his grandfather, eats from garbage cans, and had disreputable parents. But Sheppard cannot see the pitiable condition of his own son, who disappoints him and by whom

he is occasionally repelled. He takes Rufus in, and tries to remake him by the light of reason; he meets with hatred, recalcitrance, and defeat. Thinking Norton selfish, he hopes that having to share with Rufus will cure that ill, not realizing he gives nothing important to share with anybody. He wants to rescue Rufus from crime and the Bible.

Rufus announces that he is in Satan's control, and he believes it. The product of perverse fundamentalism, he believes in predestination, and the conditions of his life make it clear to him that he is not among the elect. The symbolic image of his distorted nature is his club foot, which he treats always as if he recognizes it as the embodiment of his identity, and he refuses to wear the new special shoe Sheppard has made for him, praferring instead the old tattered shoe he has always worn.

Rufus thinks that Sheppard is dumb and knows that the tests Sheppard administers to boys at the reformatory do not reveal what is inside the boys. He tells Norton that Sheppard "ain't <u>right</u>," and it is clear to the reader that what is wrong with the man is his deficiency of love, which is incapacitating before man and denies access to God. Demonically, Rufus plays on Sheppard's weakness. When Rufus is arrested for a crime he did not commit, Sheppard disbelieves the boy's protestations of innocence and lets him spend the night in jail. The next morning Rufus, his innocence established, aggravates Sheppard's sense of guilt for that lack of fate. Sheppard debases himself before the boy,

and redoubles his efforts to convince the boy of his confidence in him. When the police come for Rufus a second time, he boldly sends them away; but when he goes to Rufus' room to tell him of this expression of his confidence, his lack of confidence is what shows through as he tries to assure himself that Rufus is not in fact guilty of this second crime. The boy cleverly reassures him, and has Sheppard fully in his satanic trap--Sheppard, pleased to have won the boy's confidence, chooses to ignore the beckoning Norton so as not to destroy that confidence; we know that Norton is beckoning his father to truth, and that Rufus is guilty.

Meanwhile, Sheppard has thrown the two boys together everyday, and Rufus is using Norton as another means of expressing his hatred for Sheppard. Rufus tells Norton that perhaps he can see his mother in heaven, if she was a good woman and believed in God as Norton claims, by looking through a telescope Sheppard has bought to interest Rufus in science. Sheppard is upset, and tells Norton his mother is nowhere, but simply in peace. Norton eagerly responds to the possibility that he might see the mother he mourns, and Rufus begins reading to him from the Bible to encourage the boy in the belief in the afterlife. Sheppard orders him to get rid of the Bible; Rufus defiantly eats the pages from which he has been reading, and stomps out to commit another crime. Norton goes to the attic telescope and believes he sees his mother, to whom he waves; typically, Sheppard tells him that all he sees is a bunch of stars and that he must

go to bed in fifteen minutes. Having handled Norton with the insensitivity characteristic of his treatment of the child, he returns downstairs to ponder his problems with the case of Rufus, forgetting his son. He is interrupted by the arrival of two policemen with Rufus handcuffed between them. Rufus only wanted Sheppard to see him, to know that he was guilty, and underscoring the nature of Sheppard's failure, he tells the policemen that Sheppard had made "Immor'l suggestions" to him--that there was no hell.

Defeated, Sheppard returns alone into the house, trying to convince himself that he has nothing to reproach himself with. His pride wounded, he applies the salve of the tritest of pious self-reassurances on the theme of his having done more for Rufus than he had for his own child. Suddenly the full truth of this is borne in on him, and he runs to the attic to find Norton, before his eyes a vision:

> He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled until everything before him was black. (ERC, 190)

The speed of God's mercy is terrible. Norton has hanged himself, hoping to join his mother in heaven.

Not only does the retelling of the story make all the points of the novel, but it does so with greater persuasiveness and force. No symbol is overloaded, the characters are truer to life, the situation is plausible. This kind of artistic maturity marks the stories of Everything That Rises

Must Converge. In this collection, O'Connor continues to inveigh against the sin of pride and self-righteousness, but there is an emphasis given that concern that differentiates these stories from Wise Blood and the first collection of stories, and that seems to have taken shape in The Violent Bear It Away. While her texts might still have been those from Isaiah and the Apocalypse that warn against pride, she expresses a stronger sense of I John 4:12, "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us," as if she has come to see that pride is only the symptom of a disease--the failure of love, which separates man from man because it bespeaks his willful separation of himself from God. If we love one another, we can come to know God, to participation in his world--further, love makes us accessible to the direct intimation of God that is His grace: "Everything that rises must converge."

In the title story, the character Julian fails to love his mother. Bored and irritated by her, he condescends to her and hates her continual chatter about the glories of her ruined aristocratic family. In his pride, he always lectures her about her own, reminding her, ironically, "You aren't who you think you are." When his mother enters into a game of peek-a-boo with a Negro child on the bus on which they are riding, he sees it as condescension--as does the child's mother--and tries to stop her. When they get off the bus, so do the Negro mother and child, and against his admonitions, Julian's mother calls the child back to receive a penny. The Negro woman, enraged, knocks her down with her

bright red purse. Julian, typically ignoring his knowledge that his mother has never been shrewish or ungenerous, tells her she got exactly what she deserved, and that the gracious world she hangs onto in her mind is obsolete. Stricken, the woman needs his support, but he lets go and she falls:

> A tide of darkness seemed to be sweeping her from him. "Mother!" he cried. "Darling, sweetheart, wait!" . . . He dashed forward and fell at her side, crying "Mamma, Mamma!" He turned her over. Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed. (ERC, 22-23)

Calling to her to wait for him, he runs screaming for help, but "The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow."

In "Greenleaf," Mrs. May is a grasping, self-righteous woman whose failure of love causes her to see the whole world --even her sons--as her enemies. Thinking she has made her farm successful by her "iron hand"--her hand is, significantly, small, delicate, and blue-veined--she hovers over it like a dark angel ready to do violence to any threatening specter. Fearing that her sons, who are the unhappy, unloving offspring such a woman could only produce, will marry "trash" after her death (though they are in their thirties and established in their careers, they continue to live at home), she has the property entailed in her will so that they cannot leave it to their wives. She is awakened one night by a rambunctious bull outside her window, his horns wreathed in leaves from her shrubbery. Learning that the bull has been allowed to escape from the farm belonging to the sons

of her hired man, Greenleaf, she becomes all the more enraged. Greenleaf has been with her fifty years, but she despises him because he never does exactly what she wants at the exact time she wants it done, and because his wife is a religious fanatic whose house is dirty. She resents the success of his two sons, who are veterans of the Second World War and have availed themselves of every benefit possible from the government--her enemy--to build a more up-to-date dairy farm than hers. Thus she sets a deadline by which time they must retrieve the bull--which threatens to upset her breeding schedule--before she makes Greenleaf shoot it. The Greenleaf boys do not want the uncontrollable animal, and ignore her ultimatum. Taking particular pleasure in making Greenleaf shoot a bull belonging to his own sons, she drives him out to the back pasture and waits while the man goes into the woods to kill the bull. She dozes on the bumper of her car while she waits; when she awakes, it is past the time limit she had set for the operation and she can see nothing of either Greenleaf or the bull. Suddenly the bull emerges from the woods, bounding toward her with "a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed at finding her again" (ERC, 52). One of his horns pierces her heart, the other encircles her in a binding grip, and she is pulled forward on its head in a posture suggesting that she is "whispering some last discovery in the animal's ear." In playing the unloving god, she has denied the true force of life, and that force has taken just vengeance.

Asbury, of "The Enduring Chill," is another of O'Connor's characters who warn against the trap of intellectualism. Sent north to be educated, he came to see himself as comprehending all there is to know. He remained in the north to become a writer, but his sense of superior knowledge induces an ennui; he finds he has nothing to say, and the only thing he writes is a long letter to his mother, to be opened after his death, in which he details the way her Christian values have ruined his life. Typically, even the letter is unfinished, symbolizing the failure of his understanding. He becomes convinced that he is mortally ill, and returns home to die. He resents his mother's genuine concern, despises his skeptical sister (who claims his problem is psychosomatic; an educator, she is a reflection of Asbury), and is enraged that his mother calls in the local doctor (Asbury scoffs at the doctor's ability--he's been to the best in the north, who found nothing wrong, so how could a clowning country doctor?). He has his mother call in the two Negroes with whom he thinks he once established a bond by encouraging them to smoke in the dairy against his mother's orders and by drinking the unpasteurized milk they refuse to touch because she absolutely forbade it. An illusion is stripped away; the Negroes offer him only conventional reassurances and seem more interested in his gifts of cigarettes. Then Asbury has his mother, to her horror, call in a priest--he was once impressed by the cynical intellect of a Jesuit in New York--so that he can have the

final solace of an intellectual conversation. But the country priest who comes is blind in one eye and only admonishes Asbury to learn his catechism and pray daily for the touch of the Holy Ghost. Asbury sends the priest away and convinces himself that he has been right about the world; he works himself into a condition in which he is sure death is coming rapidly. Just as he thinks it is upon him, the country doctor comes in with the announcement that Asbury's illness is undulant fever. Asbury knows that he got it from drinking the unpasteurized milk, an act he knows to have been undertaken as a gesture of his superior understanding of, and attitude toward, the two Negroes. His self-love had made him deny the value of life; now he is humbled:

> He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend. (ERC, 114)

In "A View of the Woods," Mark Fortune is another man who is confident of his own wisdom as a sufficient guide, and outside himself the only thing he can love is what he sees as the image of himself embodied in his granddaughter, Mary Fortune Pitts. The only thing about her that troubles him is his sense that she is almost eager for the whippings her father administers when her behavior is most like her grandfather's, and then her denial that the beatings take place. She says she would kill any man who tried to beat her, and in this reflects her grandfather most fully. The old man fails to see that what he loves is an ugly image, the false god of his own pride. When the girl strongly

opposes his projected sale of a piece of land that she wants him to keep because it alone guarantees the family a view into the distance, he decides that he must beat her as her father does, in order to beat the "Pitts" out of her. She is demonic in her attack upon him, bringing him to death's door. When she gets him onto the ground and tries to make him concede defeat, he manages to overcome her, saying that he is "pure Fortune," and hits her head against a rock. Discovering that he has killed her, he dies of a heart attack partly induced by the excitement of the girl's attack upon him. His perverted love of a graven image has brought him to death and damnation.

In "The Comforts of Home," Thomas is beguiled by another kind of false god, the narrow standards of his middle-class society. These standards have been deeply inculcated in him by his dead father, who had been a lawyer and whose voice in Thomas' mind throughout the story prompts him to acts of evil that will ensure the family's good name and tells Thomas how to cover up the true nature of those acts. Thomas' sense of propriety is outraged and his security threatened when his charitable mother rescues from the county jail a slut, Sarah Ham, who is down on her luck. The mother brings the girl home in an act of genuine charity, hoping that the influence of a good family will retrieve the girl from error. Thomas is unsuccessful in playing upon his mother's sense of the proprieties, and the girl remains in the house, ever more threatening because of the

temptations she offers Thomas. The father's voice urges Thomas to try various means of getting rid of the girl, all futile. Finally the voice and Thomas come up with a plan to put a gun in the girl's purse and persuade the sheriff to search her room. Overcoming his embarrassment at revealing his mother's weakness to Sheriff Farebrother, Thomas goes to him and tells him his problem, saying he knows the girl has a gun. Farebrother encourages him, invoking the image of the father as a man who knew how to accomplish what he wanted done. But the girl finds the gun and accuses Thomas of putting it in her purse. Thomas, at the voice's prompting, claims he found it there, and grabs the gun away from her. His father's voice tells him to pull the trigger, and as he does, his mother physically intervenes. When the sheriff opens the door, Thomas and the slut are about to collapse into each other's arms over the dead body of his mother. The values Thomas upheld will obtain against him.

Two of the most effectively moving stories in the collection are also two of the most apocalyptic: "Parker's Back" and "Revelation."

"Parker's Back" is the story of Obadiah Elihue Parker, a militant atheist who at his moral nadir hears the call to grace and accepts it with an act of love that realizes the hopefulness signalled in his having been named for prophets. His ironic foil in the story is Sarah Ruth Cates, a victim of fundamentalism who lacks the qualities suggested by her eponyms. Briefly, Parker is attracted to Sarah Ruth because

she is the first girl to reject his sexual advances. His spiritual potential is revealed in his attraction to her religion, which he fails to see as sin-sniffing piety, and also in his wish to escape her--he is attracted unconsciously to God and equally unconsciously repelled by false religion. The very moment after he decides he will not ask her to marry him, he does so, and lives with her a life of growing dissatisfaction. But his fascination with religion grows at the same time that he rails against the way it works in his life through the agency of his wife. Then one day while he is struggling mentally with the problem his wife presents, he runs his tractor into a tree. The tractor bursts into flame, as do the shoes that were ripped from his feet, and he is amazed that he has emerged unscathed; it troubles his spirit. Before he was married he had gone to have a new tattoo each time his spirit was troubled, and although Sarah Ruth hates the tattoos, he goes now for a new one on his back--the only part of his body not already covered. At the tattoo parlor a grotesque image of a Byzantine Christ calls out to him from the pages of the catalog of designs. Fascinated, awed, and mystified, he chooses that image, which takes two days to be reproduced on his back. Between sessions, he drinks to escape his troubled spirit, but he cannot get away from it, and when the tattoo is finished, he gets drunk, fights with men in a pool hall who laugh nervously at the raw tattoo, and spends the night in a dark alley, anguished. He emerges from the alley triumphantly convinced that the eyes of the

Byzantine Christ have pulled him to God. He returns home joyful in a feeling that his soul is as full of light and as lively and colorful as his gaily decorated body.

When he arrives home, however, he faces a trial. The voice of Sarah Ruth from behind the locked door is unfeeling; she won't let him in so long as he identifies himself by his initials instead of the prophet's names he hates. Lovingly he whispers the names, and she lets him in. But she has only wanted to bring him to heel by making him acknowledge the names, and her perverted Christianity disables her from understanding the love in his act; in her self-righteousness she does not see that her faith in those names is the worship of forms, of a kind of graven image. Hence when Parker removes his shirt to show her the sign of his new religion, she tells him "you ain't going to have none of me this near morning," and when she sees the Byzantine Christ she does not recognize it as a depiction of Christ. When he explains it to her, she accuses him of idolatry and beats him out of the house with a broom, leaving him "leaning against the tree, crying like a baby" (ERC, 244).

It is of course Sarah Ruth's religion that follows the narrow dictates of men and presumes to know the will and ways of God. Parker, on the other hand, has won through to the abyss, and understands that his tattoo of the demanding Byzantine Christ is, as Haze Motes put it, "just a way to say a thing"; in his tears he transcends Sarah Ruth's moralistic certainty, and faces the prophet's destiny.

The protagonist of "Revelation," too, is one of O'Connor's "images of man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature." To a fundamentalist's view, Mrs. Turpin is a good woman, and that is the view Mrs. Turpin self-righteously holds. She makes that clear to the people assembled in a doctor's waiting room, in a declaration of her gratitude to God for having favored her:

> "If it's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful. When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!' It could have been different." For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her. "Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!" she cried aloud. (ERC, 205-06)

Instantly the scene becomes surrealistic as we see through Mrs. Turpin's consciousness distorted by a blow from a book that a Wellesley girl, ironically named Mary Grace, has thrown at the woman. The girl has become so enraged by Mrs. Turpin's righteousness that she has to be pinned to the floor to be given a calming shot; when Mrs. Turpin leans toward her, mystified, the girl calls her a wart hog, and tells her to "Go back to hell where you came from" (ERC, 208).

Returning home, Mrs. Turpin is too troubled to nap as she lays beside her sleeping husband; she cannot understand how she can be herself and saved at the same time she can be a wart hog from hell.

> She scowled at the ceiling. Occasionally she raised her fist and made a small stabbing motion over her

> chest as if she was defending her innocence to invisible guests who were like the comforters of Job, reasonable-seeming but wrong. (ERC, 209-10)

Reminding us of Apocalypse 3: 17-19--"Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and blind and naked"--Mrs. Turpin is rather less than a Job. But like him she challenges God, Whom by now it is clear she understands to have spoken through Mary Grace:

> "What do you send me a message like that for?" she said in a low fierce voice, barely above a whisper but with the force of a shout in its concentrated fury. . . "Why me?" she rumbled. "It's no trash around here, black or white, that I haven't given to. And break my back to the bone every day working. And do for the church . . . If you like trash better, go get yourself some trash then . . . Or you could have made me a nigger . . ." (ERC, 215-16)

The surrounding silence enrages her further, heightening her frustration at having lost her orientation in the world. Her angry voice rolls out over the pasture:

> "Go on," she yelled, "call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put that bottom rail on top. There'll still be a top and a bottom!"
>
> A garbled echo returned to her.
>
> A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, "Who do you think you are?"
>
> The color of everything, field and crimson sky, burned for a moment with a transparent intensity. The question carried over the pasture and across the highway and the cotton field and returned to her clearly like an answer from beyond the wood.
>
> She opened her mouth but no sound came out of it. (ERC, 216)

Her answer has come, and it has come from her own mouth, though the sunset and the echo suggest a divine response. Only her own voice confronts her with the hybristic

enormity of her own question, and it silences her with the consciousness that she does not enjoy the special protection of God. Overcome by the sense of the fragility of human powers and of human susceptibility to arbitrary possibilities, Mrs. Turpin is rendered immobile for a time. Then she turns to look numbly at the hogs she has been fiercely hosing through all this, and she has a vision that is reminiscent of the vision of Antoine Roquentin in Sartre's La nausée[3]:

> . . . like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life.
>
> Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree line, Mrs. Turpin remained there with her gaze bent to them as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. At last she lifted her head. There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk. She raised her hands from the side of the pen in a gesture hieratic and profound. A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away. She lowered her hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. (ERC, 217)

Ironically the graceless Mary Grace has been the agent of divine grace. Burned clean of her self-righteousness, Mrs. Turpin hears "the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah" in the sound of invisible cricket choruses.

In every story, then, man confronts the abyss; in some stories it is deeper, wider, darker than in others, but it is always there. The vision of the abyss, however, is wholly affirmative, however austerely. The final story in Everything That Rises Must Converge, "Judgement Day," guards against our missing that point. In the opening story, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Julian's mother's stroke is redemptive for him, but the story ends with him facing the grimness of his future as a humbled man. In "Judgement Day," the grotesque position in which Tanner's daugh er finds his body shoved through the stair bannister redeems and revivifies her, because it leads her to an act of love and fidelity that loosens the worldly bonds on her spirit.

Tanner's great eagerness to return to his beloved home in the South, of which he had been dispossessed before his daughter took him into her northern city home, where he can die among his friends, is his expression of spiritual longing to return to the "true country," the kingdom of Heaven. His daughter is insensitive to that, just as Tanner's way of expressing his friendliness to the Negroes in the next apartment is misunderstood as condescension from a foolish old man. But Tanner's yearning is great, and he seizes the first

opportunity for escape after he learns his daughter plans not to bury his remains in the South. Too feeble to negotiate the stairs, he falls as the Negro neighbors are coming up. His call to them is misunderstood, and the Negro man brutally kicks him and then shoves his head through the railing, where the old man dies.

The daughter buries him in New York City, but:

> . . . after she had done it she could not sleep at night. Night after night she turned and tossed and very definite lines began to appear in her face, so she had him dug up and shipped the body to Corinth. Now she rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned. (ERC, 269)

O'Connor calls us to love one another that we may love God and live in peace with ourselves as participants in God's world. The humility of the "I-thou" relationship in this world makes us accessible to the "I-Thou" relationship with God, but it can only be achieved after one has made a firm choice against the miles of snares laid by the devil in this world, the wrench away from which must be violent and must be private because only the confrontation with one's own limitations can lead to the authentic being humility implies. O'Connor saw her role as artist as the role of the prophet, and as such she has offered us images of man confronting his limitations to warn us of our own need for such self-appraisal. And her use of the grotesque seeks to prepare us for the pain of that occasion when it occurs.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. The Violent Bear It Away (New York, 1960), 4. Hereafter designated VBA, appearing in the text within parentheses, along with the numbers of the pages cited.

2. "The Lame Shall Enter First," in Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York, 1965). References to this and other stories from this volume will carry the parenthetical designation ERC, appearing in the text along with numbers of pages cited.

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, La nausée (Paris, 1938), 179-89. Lloyd Alexander (New York, 1959) translates the passage as follows:

> It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of "existence." I was like the others, like the ones walking along the seashore, all dressed in their spring finery. I said, like them, "The ocean is green; that white speck up there is a seagull," but I didn't feel that it existed or that the seagull was an "existing seagull"; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is us, you can't say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it. When I believed I was thinking about it, I must believe that I was thinking nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word "to be." Or else I was thinking . . .how can I explain it? I was thinking of belonging, I was telling myself that the sea belonged to the class of green objects, or that the green was a part of the quality of the sea. Even when I looked at things, I was miles from dreaming that they existed: they looked like scenery to me. I picked them up in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But that all happened on the surface. If anyone had asked me what existence was, I would have answered, in good faith, that it was nothing, simply an empty form which was added to external things without changing anything in their nature. And then all of a sudden, there it was, clear as day: existence had suddenly unveiled itself. It had lost the harmless look of an abstract category: it was the very paste of things, this root was kneaded into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass, all that had vanished: the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, all in disorder--naked, in a frightful, obscene nakedness. (171-72)

Sartre of course is not affirming anything like Christian truth, but he does affirm life itself as real and, in itself, meaningful, something to which one must give oneself.

CHAPTER V

> /Flannery O'Connor/ carried the memento mori in her very bones, and the result was a vision essentially apocalyptic. It is she herself who, looking through a glass darkly, was the prophet. By the urgency of her vision she forces and bends our own seeing face-to-face with these same mysteries. This is perhaps the truest mark of her having been a Christian writer.[1]

O'Connor herself said that death was a brother to her imagination because she was born Catholic, and that it was therefore impossible for her to imagine a story that did not end in death or in its foreshadowings. There is not a work in her canon that fails to support her claim. Even Tarwater, going off to realize his prophetic vocation at the end of The Violent Bear It Away, is doing so because his own close brush with death has been the final propellant in his headlong drive toward the abyss that enforces upon the consciousness an inescapable awareness of the contingency of our lives. Mr. Head and Norton, of "The Artificial Nigger," perhaps have no such direct intimation of death per se, but the unifying force of their encounter with the lopsided, cracked, and peeling hitching post cast in the image of negro, because of its complete absurdity to their understandings, is the force of mystery, a particularly ominous foreshadowing of death. Asbury, at the end of "The Enduring Chill," is not going to die but to live "in the face of a purifying terror" induced by the success of his own imagination in making the imminence of death real.

With death as the brother to her imagination, it is only natural that O'Connor's vision of reality should be austere, and that she should be concerned to find values that offer some promise of meaning in this life. The hollowness of the false gods she saw dominating the modern world could not provide anything of lasting meaning in the life of an individual man or bring men together in harmony, and certainly the gods of materialism, rendering life trivial, offer no justification for man's necessity to face the anguish of death. The problem O'Connor faced as a Christian writer was the problem she faced as a person, which was to find evidence of meaning in human life within that life itself. The distant point of truth must offer sign of its existence in the concrete immediate facts of human life or the human mind cannot accept the truth. For a devout Christian, the absence of such evidence would be intolerable; man cannot have freedom of will if there are no alternative choices. It is in her urgent recognition of the need to find transcendent meaning within the terms of the knowable world that O'Connor has her basic affinity with the "new realists," the existentialist phenomenologists.

Casting a penetrating eye upon the world of men, O'Connor found men's dissatisfaction with their lives to be the basic evidence that there is meaning beyond ourselves--if all men aspire to something beyond and difficult of attainment, it has to be because there <u>is</u> something towards which they aspire, and the aspiration itself bespeaks the pulling force of that larger meaning, and suggests that there is in

us all a lingering intimation of the existence of such meaning, as if man had known it directly and then lost clear view of it. Thus the story of the fall becomes believable without resort to pious and illogical superstition. Man knew God and lost sight of Him through hybristic denial of His superior knowledge. The price of that hybris is great, but fair. Man was cast out of the immediate presence of God into pain, blinded by worldly temptations, but endowed with the memory of God's transcendence and the bliss He offers man. As the conditions of worldly existence become increasingly ugly and chaotic, stronger in their suggestion that life is absurd, the inner urge toward transcendent meaning becomes correspondingly insistent and offers man the potential to return to grace. Man thus has a real choice to make, and is constantly reminded of the possibilities between which he must choose. To choose meaning defined by the phenomenal world is to deny the inner urge towards transcendence of the physical world and hence to deprive oneself of one's true identity--it is an ironic betrayal of oneself because the materialistic choice responds to one's sense of the need to rise above his known condition but is perverted by faith in the false god of human reason. As Marcel believes, experience "intends" meaning and the objective appraisal of the experience of thought reveals the urge to spiritual transcendence.

Thus in O'Connor we find the spiritual longing for God that proves His existence figured forth in many ways: Haze Motes has the insistent ragged figure moving from

tree to tree in the back of his mind and is unable to conceive of a way to deny Christ except by following the modes of religious thought and action; Enoch Emory yearns for love and its elusiveness encourages in him a susceptibility to the presence of mystery in the world that might, had he not rejected it, have brought him to grace--and his search for love and meaning also follows the patterns of religious ritual. Young Tarwater is pulled toward God in his search for identity, and in him the sign of the urge toward transcendent meaning is his concern to discover truth. In Mrs. Turpin, the everpresent intimations of mysterious truth are given shape in her mind at night when she is troubled by recognizing that persons less worthy than she is seem to have more of the world's goods. The grandmother recognizes herself in The Misfit's description of his inability to comprehend the world; Mrs. McIntyre, of "The Displaced Person," reveals that the same force is operative within her through her impatience with self-righteous persons like herself and her instant recognition of the enormity of her guilt in the murder of Guizac. O. E. Parker is drawn to Sarah Ruth and the demanding eyes of a tattooist's image of a Byzantine Christ. The list could go on, but the point is clear--the pull of God is present in all O'Connor's characters, albeit differently manifested from figure to figure.

The differences among these manifestations point to another affinity between O'Connor and Catholic existentialism. Each man must accept his own limitations before he can know the grace of God; it is only in humility that one can

have faith in anything beyond himself, can love anything or anyone other than himself, can be merciful in his judgments and charitable in his actions. These qualities are the signs of salvation, of a man's having found his authentic identity not in terms of the problems of this world but in terms of the mystery that exists beyond; they signal his readiness for participation in the life God wants for us. But men differ, and the devil's many snares operate accordingly, so that the workings of God within individual humans vary to meet the need. The original sin was hybris, and from it all sins flow, producing the painful conditions of human life. Pride is a personal thing, and it must be overcome within oneself, which can only happen for any man if he is brought to confrontation with his own limitations--each must undergo his own version of the fall and the anguish attendant upon it or he cannot exercise the freedom of his will. Only a violent inner upheaval will strip a man of his pride, and only that violence will provide the strength to fend off resurgent pride if the experience of anguish leads to a right moral choice. The speed of God's mercy is terrible, the way to His gate is narrow and the gate itself is strait. As The Misfit put it in speaking of the grandmother, "She would of been a good woman . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

Thus each of O'Connor's protagonists must face up to his own experience of the fall and that must be in terms that correspond to his own life. Those two "temples of the Holy Ghost," Joanne and Susan, are not led to Christian hu-

mility by the teachings of the nuns. The protestant self-righteousness of all the Mrs. Turpins, Mrs. Shortleys, Mrs. McIntyres, Mrs. Hopewells, Julians and Thomases of O'Connor's fiction is envisioned by O'Connor as the embodiment of the failure of easy adherence to dogmatic religion, and Southern fundamentalism is offered as the type of perverted Christianity that is as surely one of the devil's snares as is Rufus Johnson's despair borne of his perverted belief in the Bible. The Jesuit in New York who impressed Asbury with his intellectuality reflects at one level an attitude many Catholics have towards Jesuitical reasoning but at another he is in his cynicism another image of the failure of that religion that is supported solely by the humanly proud sense that man can define and explain the will of God; the priest who comes to Asbury's bedside shares with the priest who visits Mrs. McIntyre a bumbling foolishness that grows out of their well-intentioned denial of the realities of this world in which they should try to make their religion viable; ironically, these priests are agents of the divine will only in spite of their religion, and thus have functional commonality with Enoch Emory and The Misfit.

It is not surprising, then, that O'Connor's fiction has a quality of timelessness that is suggestive of myth. Her stories are told in a vaguely defined present, and hovering behind them we recognize Biblical stories and Greek tragedy. Her characters are types of fallen man, their situations reflect the modes of evil, the necessity that impells them to anguished recognition of human limitation is the image of

the basic human need for meaning, value, and order. The truth that each man must undergo violent inner turmoil to satisfy that basic need is the truth taught in the Confessions of Augustine and in the images of Oedipus and Job; it is formulated by Marcel, in rejecting Descartes, in the statement, "I feel, therefore I am," and O'Connor's stories give dramatic vitality to that truth. Her orthodoxy is the tradition of Saints Paul and Augustine, Pascal, and Gabriel Marcel. In her work, the face of Mary Ann stands forever before us, equally divided between the ugly and the beautiful, the grotesquely ironic reminder of the value and mystery of life.

The "lines of spiritual motion" are drawn violently, then, not simply because violent action is needed to get the attention of a complacent and unbelieving age, but more fundamentally because they reflect the violence within that is required by the kind of intense personal experience that will shatter the easy values and categories of the material world and free the individual man. Their portrayal is prophetic because of the postulation that every man has within himself a pull towards the transcendent meaning God embodies; man cannot be unconcerned about his fate (a position strongly argued by Marcel), and O'Connor is saying to each reader that he has in store for him the anguish that will oblige him to choose either the way of the world or the way of God. Hence her sense that her religion obliged her to be a writer; the intensity of her concern enforced upon her the need to express it, and to do so in a way that made clear the concern

is for the fates of all men. As Marcel sees it, the right choice brings the individual man to authentic being and that includes "participation" in God's will--the achievement of an "I-Thou" relationship with God brings one to an "I-thou" relationship with other men, and the Christian values become operative in one's life. Haze can provide Mrs. Flood with an intimation of God's mystery, but cannot provide her a formulation that will lead to her salvation, which she must achieve within. Tarwater will suffer the rejection of his granduncle and all prophets, but he is unable not to prophesy. No more could O'Connor resist the call.

Her prophecy understands that within the apparent absurdities of the phenomenal world must be recognized the signs of a truth that exists beyond. O'Connor's vision seems to see the apparent absurdity as itself an argument for the existence of a larger order; without it the gift of free will would be meaningless. Indeed, it would be as if man were infallible. But human fallibility is abundantly clear to our reason and our senses, and in her world is seen to produce the absurd and the grotesque against which man must then struggle. From that struggle comes each man's sense of meaningfulness in life, so that the struggle itself, undertaken with integrity and concern, justifies the anguish it entails. O'Connor shares with Marcel a conviction that one must be intensely concerned with his fate, because that leads to recognition of the contingency of our lives and of ineffable mystery, which is humbling and frees us to make choices that lead to our betterment. The distant truth must

be connected to the absurd reality we create in our pride; the Hulga Hopewells, Raybers, Sheppards, Asburys, and Julians must be made to see that cultivation of the intellect will not lead to complete comprehension of the world any more than will religious emotionalism. Thus O'Connor's necessary mode for prophecy has to be the grotesque; man at his moral nadir may hear the call of grace, and that call must come to him in unpredictable ways because he has given his world an absurd shape. A murderer can bring a righteous old lady to a condition in which she is ready for the gift of grace; evil incarnate in Rufus Johnson is the agent of redemption for the self-satisfied Sheppard. It is a kind of object lesson in humility--man cannot know who is saved or what will produce the conditions whereby an individual man will come to salvation. Even in an ugly world there is basis for hope.

O'Connor's Christian affirmation is born of strong conviction, aggressively held and aggressively offered. She makes no compromises, and it is the astringency of her vision that is the most distinctive quality of her art. Her grotesques are not ornamental motifs supporting her themes, though she uses the devices traditional in the grotesque; rather, they are expressions of matter that is central to her view of reality and hence to her themes. Thus she draws the world in familiar terms but ones that emphasize the ways in which men have become estranged from their "true country," their authentic identity in God's world.

The phenomenal world thus depicted becomes uncomfortable for us as we see familiar categories demolished and the easy values with which we are complacently satisfied vanish. Man is seen as a grotesque diminution of his true self, and the terrifying specter of the absurd looms until the protagonists are obliged to confront it and triumph over it or fall into despair and damnation. The "realist of distances," O'Connor shares Marcel's sense of the necessity to see through absurdity to underlying meaning.

It might be helpful to compare her use of the grotesque to Katherine Anne Porter's, whose writings have a strong flavor of existentialism but not the hopeful quality of O'Connor's. In "Flowering Judas" the lecherous and garishly dressed Braggioni is a grotesque Christ figure: he is seen by the devoted followers of his cause as a kind of messiah, his wife humbly washes his feet after he has wronged her, and Laura and Eugenio (the suicide prisoner) have a Judas-like ambivalence toward him and his cause. As the story develops we watch Laura become a Judas against a background of obvious Christian symbolism; she struggles to choose between her Catholic heritage and the religion of the revolution, but does not make the choice in the story. There is over it all a certain haze of nostalgia, as if Porter wished it were possible for such a choice to be made; we are compelled to compassion for Laura in the face of Porter's sense of absurdity while Laura herself is never made to come to terms with the problem. The story ends in her dream of

death, which brings her to a fuller awareness of herself and makes the story an exploration of her psychic state; thus Laura may be seen as a metaphor for man faced with uncertainty, but uncertainty is only contemplated, not defined and not offered as a condition man can transcend:

> The tolling of the midnight bell is a signal, but what does it mean? Get up Laura, and follow me: come out of your sleep, out of your bed, out of this strange house. What are you doing in this house? Without a word, without fear she rose and reached for Eugenio's hand, but he eluded her with a sharp, sly smile and drifted away. This is not all, you shall see--Murderer, he said, follow me, I will show you a new country, but it is far away and we must hurry. No, said Laura, not unless you take my hand, no; and she clung first to the stair rail, and then to the topmost branch of the Judas tree that bent slowly down and set her upon the earth, and then to the rocky ledge of a cliff, and then to the jagged wave of a sea that was not water but a desert of crumbling stone. Where are you taking me, she asked in wonder but without fear. To death, and it is a long way off, and we must hurry, said Eugenio. No, said Laura, not unless you take my hand. Then eat these flowers, poor prisoner, said Eugenio in a voice of pity, take and eat: and from the Judas tree he stripped the warm bleeding flowers, and held them to her lips. She saw that his hand was fleshless, a cluster of small white petrified branches, and his eye sockets were without light, but she ate the flowers greedily for they satisfied both hunger and thirst. Murder! said Eugenio, and Cannibal! This is my body and my blood. Laura cried No! and at the sound of her own voice, she awoke trembling, and was afraid to sleep again.

The vision is negative. Like Judas, Eugenio, whose suicide constitutes his denial of the revolutionary cause, turns into the bouganvillea and Laura sees herself entering into unholy communion with his denial by eating the blossoms that are his body and blood. The choice is hers, yes, but she ends fearing death rather than life at the same time that she is unhappy in life, torn between her intellectual

commitment to the revolutionists' cause and the emotional pull of her religious upbringing. There is no sense of her being forced to make a choice, but only that the choice is impossible to make because life is an absurd trap. The grotesque elements in the story are uncertain, "a way to say a thing" that is not absolutely essential to the writer's vision.

Similarly, Carson McCullers, to whose writing O'Connor's is often compared, and who also lived with the memento mori in her own body, employs the grotesqe as a means of exploring the psychic conditions of her characters. Her most thoroughly grotesque story, "The Ballad of the Sad Cafe," stays quite outside the minds of the characters, but the actions are all ones that reveal what is going on inside them. And the story ends with the chain gang singing its hopeful song--an ending peculiarly hopeless in its picture of man against the darkness of the abyss through which no light penetrates.

O'Connor's grotesque art has rather more the hard-driving energy of Nathanael West's, without his immature cynicism; indeed, West's influence is a strong presence in Wise Blood, even to the point of numerous allusions to Miss Lonelyhearts. But her vision is more like Kafka's and Dostoevsky's than like other American writers', except that Mark Twain may have influenced her methods of achieving comic effects.

She is, however, not easily placed. If one can see the traits of Southern literature in her work

it is because of her awareness of the special devastation of humans that is wrought by Southern fundamentalism and because of the details of language and place and not because of her attitudes. As she pointed out, the essential meaning of her Southern materials does not depend upon regional sources but is as Catholic and Midwestern as it is protestant and Southern. The preoccupation with death may be seen as Southern, for example, but for her it is not an historical question--rather, it is a question of theology and philosophy. Her keen and steady vision and the straightforward and hard-headed way in which she expresses it make her as much like West, John Hawkes, or Robert Coover as she is like the Southern writers, and the special way in which she uses the grotesque to communicate ideas that have great affinity with Catholic existentialism make her art as European as it is American.

In summary, then, Kayser's definition of the grotesque mode in art helps to open up O'Connor's work for us, if that definition is emended to allow the creator of grotesques to create a play with the absurd in order to affirm the existence of a larger meaning beyond our world. In the grotesque mode's recognition of the absurd in the world and in its concern to summon up the demons that evoke awareness of absurdity in order that those demons might be pursued and subdued, the technical mode has a natural affinity with the philosophical mode of the Christian existentialist. Thus it is the natural mode for expressing Flannery O'Connor's

vision, which, by whatever means, is remarkably like that of such thinkers as Gabriel Marcel. The ideas that emerge from careful analysis of her fiction strongly resemble his, and the moral basis is nearly identical. Thus she dramatizes an idea of the nature of the human plight that is like Marcel's philosophical description of that plight, and the exacting depiction she accords it seems to correspond equally well with the painstaking method of the existentialists' phenomenological method. The same necessities are seen to operate in human life, and in very similar terms; every man must confront the extremes of his own limitations and through that confrontation can achieve authentic being in harmony with the will of God. The values upheld are those of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and of integrity and concern in pursuit of those values. The man who accepts God is a man who has knowledge of his true identity; humbled, he can transcend the absurdity and ugliness of the phenomenal world. The face of Mary Ann is the face of truth.

NOTE TO CHAPTER V

1. Ruth M. Vande Kieft, "Judgment in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," The Sewanee Review, LXXVI, No. 2 (Spring 1968), 356.

APPENDIX I

Josephine Hendin's The World of Flannery O'Connor is one of the two published full-length studies of O'Connor's fiction. It must be discussed because its somewhat incoherent methods and attitudes do violence to the fiction and will mislead students, but also because Mrs. Hendin does effectively argue that the circumstances of O'Connor's life must be considered in any analysis of the author's vision.

Fond of telling us in her footnotes where to go for Christian interpretations of O'Connor's stories, Mrs. Hendin takes inspiration from Le Clezio, Robbe-Grillet, and Susan Sontag, and flies in the face of the bulk of the commentary on O'Connor as well as in the face of O'Connor's own remarks upon her art. To her the questions Malin raises are irrelevant, at least in the form in which he offers them. For her, the words on O'Connor's pages give us all that is there, and it is a depiction of the ugliness of a reality which, because of the terms of its depiction, has to be seen as lethal to the possibility of human emotional involvement with the surrounding world or anyone in it. The vision is nonetheless seen as affirmative in that it celebrates our release from "an agony of human needs, human ties, and human longings." Thus:

> If [O'Connor] set out to make morals, to praise old values, she ended by engulfing all of them in an icy violence. If she began by mocking or damning her

> murderous heroes, she ended by exalting them. She grew to celebrate the liberating power of destruction. O'Connor became more and more the pure poet of the Misfit, the oppressed, the psychic cripple, the freak--of all of those who are martyred by silent fury and redeemed through violence. (WFOC, 42)

"The only crucifixion that is real to O'Connor is the one a freak lives out daily for a lifetime" (WFOC, 35), so that The Misfit is the product of all the oppressive forces of social convention, tradition, and family, and his shooting the grandmother, who embodies all these forces, is a necessary and beautiful act because it is a liberating of his entrapped spirit.

Though Hendin mentions Genet nowhere in her book, this reading is suggestive of the central idea running through his fiction and is basic to Sartre's canonization of Genet. The idea might also be interestingly compared to one of the themes of the Oresteia. Certainly it is more useful to apply the notion to understanding Nôtre dame des fleurs, the motivation of Clytemnestra, or the uncontrollable forces impelling Orestes than it is to use it in interpreting O'Connor's fiction. It might explain the motivation of The Misfit--though it will not tell us why he is deeper into grimness at the end--but it won't explain the grandmother, who exists for Hendin only as a necessary device in the story.

Hendin justifies her position on the grounds that O'Connor was herself something of a freak, a bright girl obliged to suffer the empty conventional politeness impcsed upon Southern girls of good family, and that within the context of oppressively authoritarian Catholicism; the inner rebel-

lion thus engendered, according to Hendin, grew in virulence with the passage of time and with the onset and development of a grotesque disease. Such affirmations of Christian orthodoxy as those in "The Fiction Writer and His Country" Hendin sees as reflections of the submissiveness the oppressive forces inculcated in O'Connor, and the result has been general misreading of the fiction. As Hendin reads the fiction, it expresses the rise and progress of the inner rebellion:

> Although I do not question the faith of Flannery O'Connor, it seems to me odd that she would so freely admit she had the conscience of a Catholic, and do so much to deny she had the impulses of a sinner. I do not think her faith can be divorced from the context of her life, a life where outward compliance and external order seem to have been achieved only through detachment from inner turmoil. It is at least a possibility that her religion provided a legitimate sanction for violent and destructive impulses, impulses which became acceptable when they were called righteous and directed at the "godless." Religion could have been an effective way to both express and contain fury of a very irreligious kind. In any event, O'Connor's assertions of Christian orthodoxy do not accurately describe her art. They are belied by the human experience in her work. Nevertheless, encouraged by O'Connor's declamations of faith, critics so diverse as the indefatigable Sister M. Bernetta Quinn and Stanley Edgar Hyman explained her work as so much new exegesis on traditional Christian theology. (WFOC, 16)

The publicist at the Indiana University Press who wrote the dust jacket for Hendin's book describes it as a "brilliant study," and in a sense it is, but what glitters is not gold. Hendin might have done well to consider O'Connor's pronouncements upon her thought and craft with the kind of care she claims to have given the fiction. Had she done so, as we have seen, she would have seen that by Christian orthodoxy O'Connor did not necessarily mean the received Thomistic

conventions, but the sterner Augustinian tradition, an orthodoxy as responsive to human experience as any rejection of authoritarian conventions and very much in keeping with O'Connor's vision. Or, had Hendin applied herself really closely to the texts, she would have come up with the questions Malin raises, and she might have applied herself to resolving the conflict he finds. She would have paid more attention to all the questions of style--which, however she may see it, is not adequately covered by her statement: "O'Connor's development of what could be called the affectless grotesque [what that term might mean is never made clear] makes her work remarkably new" (WFOC, 29). The simple fact is that she did not apply herself very closely to the fiction; her very disjointed interpretations are marked by glaring omissions, and for almost every work she treats there is at least one mistatement that makes a material difference for her thesis, as when she is dealing with "The River":

> . . . "The River" opens with Mrs. Connin and child "going to the river to a healing," where they will be among the baptized, members of the visible Church of Christ. The river, as the preacher says, is the baptismal place where sin is washed away and heaven is seen. Taking the mataphor of baptism as admission to the visible church of Christ literally, the child "intended . . . to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river." What he finds there is death. The story closes with the preacher's realization that the child has drowned himself and the awareness that all his metaphors of Christ's healing river have their source in the ultimate concretion, mortality. (WFOC, 28)

We can assume that Hendin understands herself to be aiming at an audience who has read the story, so that it is permissible for her to have suggested inadvertently that the

child belongs to Mrs. Connin, to have omitted the conditions of his home life, to have ignored his parents and his reasons for wanting "to keep on going," to have suggested that his drowning occurs on the same trip as the one he made to the healing with Mrs. Connin. But this same assumption works against her when she ends by pointing to the preacher's realization. When Harry/Bevel drowns, the preacher is nowhere near, and there is no indication in the story that he ever learns of the drowning. Only Mr. Paradise is there. He is the man whose ugly purple tumor was not cured at a healing, so that he goes to such rites to scoff at them. He was at the healing attended by Harry/Bevel and Mrs. Connin, where he acted as the cynical heckler, and he is the only one present when the child returns to the river:

> Mr. Paradise's head appeared from time to time on the surface of the water. Finally, far downstream, the old man rose like some ancient water monster and stood empty-handed, staring with his dull eyes as far down the river line as he could see. (AGM, 52)

As O'Connor puts it:

> Bevel hasn't reached the age of reason; therefore he can't commit suicide. He comes to a good end. He's saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He's been baptized and so he goes to his Maker; this is a good end.[1]

The story does not suggest that the preacher discovers the hollowness of his preaching (though O'Connor recognizes that hollowness, as do we). Our dismay at what happens to the innocent child derives from our recognition that once again O'Connor has shown us the ugly things man does with what God made; it is indeed a rebellion against perverted forms of Christianity, but that does not make it a rejection of the

fundamental core of Christian thought.

Hendin's chief contribution to the study of O'Connor is her recognition that the conditions of the writer's own life quite obviously influence the shape of O'Connor's world view and oblige us to look very carefully at the thought underlying the fiction.

NOTE TO APPENDIX I

1. O'Connor, quoted in CS,AD, 257.

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