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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE IN THE FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

by
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1969

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I. PERSONAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

The most dominant image in Flannery O'Connor's two collections of short stories and two novels is the natural image. Varied representatives from the animal, plant, and mineral worlds, natural forces such as the sun and moon, and natural elements like fire and water appear with striking and effective regularity in her work. Indeed, nature may be said to serve as a vital and nearly universal element which binds the entire body of her fiction together.

It should be noted at the beginning of this thesis that Miss O'Connor manipulates her various natural representatives on both the physical and the metaphysical levels, and these two uses are by no means mutually exclusive. In other words, a representative figure of the natural world, for example, the sun or a bull, may simultaneously function on both the material and the spiritual levels; the figure may simultaneously be important as a physical image and as a metaphysical symbol. Moreover, on the physical level alone, a particular natural element may serve several functions; for example, it may be an integral feature of the environmental setting and may also contribute to the development of a certain characterization. In essence, Flannery O'Connor's treatment of the natural world is varied, rich, and com-
plex, and it is precisely this skilled manipulation which marks her as a unique craftsman and creatively resourceful representative of the school of modern Southern literature.

The specific setting of Miss O'Connor's stories is the rural countryside of Georgia and eastern Tennessee:

Geographically, hers was a special South, remote from the moss-draped melancholy great oaks and the stable social order of the Atlantic seaboard and equally distant from the tropical lushness and fecundity of the gulf-coast Deep South. She knew and wrote of piedmont Georgia and eastern Tennessee—a rolling, sparsely wooded land where both the spring freshets and the ravishing plow pierce its surface to leave gaping wounds of dark red clay. It is cotton country, made up of small farms, small towns, and widely-spaced small cities—a country at the mercy of capricious weather and the vicissitudes of the cotton market, which has been in a fluctuating state but one that has always remained depressed since the 1920's. It is a land wracked by disease peculiar to poverty, by a vicious sharecropper system, by little education, and a superstitious, intense, pietistic but non-theological religious passion.1

It is only appropriate that Miss O'Connor concentrates on the geography of this particular region because she was, in essence, a life-long resident of Georgia, although she did not suffer from the depression of the area. She was a first-hand observer of the poverty, ignorance, and

superstitions of the rural Georgians, but her own family belonged to the aristocratic class. Generations of her family had established deep roots in Georgia and made their own contributions to its history and tradition. The writer herself was born Mary Flannery O'Connor on March 25, 1925, in Savannah, Georgia, where the O'Connor family had lived for some years. Flannery's father, Edward, was in the real estate business there at the time of his daughter's birth. At about the end of the 1930's, however, Mr. O'Connor became ill with a fatal disease called lupus for which no effective treatment was known at that time. As a consequence of this illness, the O'Connors moved to the family home of Flannery's mother, Regina Cline O'Connor, in the small town of Milledgeville, Georgia. Milledgeville lacked the modern Southern sophistication of Savannah, but it possessed a peculiar ante-bellum charm of its own. During the Civil War it had been the capital of Georgia, and during Miss O'Connor's lifetime it still retained what Robert Fitzgerald has called "the strict amenity of the older South... [with] its many pillared white houses."²

The Cline house and family history in Milledgeville have thus been recorded by Mr. Fitzgerald:

At the Cline house...I have been out on the front porch, hatless and coatless in the sun, between the solid handcarved columns, fluted and two stories high, that were hoisted in place when the house was built in 1820 and the slaves, they say, were making by hand the bricks for the house and the openwork walls around the garden. Peter Cline acquired this place in 1886. He was a prominent man, in our American phrase, for many years mayor of the town, and he married successively two sisters, Kate L. and Margaret Ida Treanor.... By the latter sister he had nine children, of whom Regina, Flannery's mother, was the seventh. All of these people were old Georgia Catholics. The first Mass in Milledgeville had been celebrated in the apartment of Hugh Treanor, father of Kate and Ida, in the Newell Hotel in 1842. Mrs. Hugh Treanor gave the plot of ground for the little church that was built in 1884.  

The Clines also owned a farm called Andalusia about five miles in the country from Milledgeville. With only two long-term exceptions of two years spent at the University of Iowa, where she earned her M.A. in 1947, and almost two years in New York, where she lived with the Fitzgerald family and worked on her fiction, Flannery O'Connor spent her life at the Milledgeville home and nearby farm. She spent the last thirteen years of her life in semi-retirement at Andalusia where she fought the same disease which had claimed her father and which finally killed her on August 3, 1964.

But during her short lifetime, Flannery O'Connor more than just "resided" in this rural tradition-steeped

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environment. She developed an intimate and self-satisfying interest in it which she was able to incorporate in her fiction. She and her mother, aided by hired help, managed Andalusia as a dairy farm. The author also raised various kinds of fowl, particularly peacocks. An article she wrote for *Holiday* magazine, entitled "Living With a Peacock," records her experiences with this bird. Aside from its wit and polished prose, the article demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the peacock's appearance and behavior—a knowledge that would seem likely to satisfy even a student of zoology.

The cock's plumage requires two years to attain its pattern....During his first year he has a buff breast, a speckled back, a green neck like his mother's and a short gray tail. During his second year he has a black breast, his sire's blue neck, a back which is slowly turning the green and gold it will remain; but still no long tail. In his third year he reaches his majority and acquires his tail. For the rest of his life—and a peachicken may live to be thirty-five—he will have nothing better to do than manicure it, furl and unfurl it, dance forward and backward with it spread, scream when it is stepped upon and arch it carefully when he steps through a puddle.  

In this same article, Miss O'Connor speaks of her own "awe" and appreciation of the peacock. She records similar reactions provoked by her birds in visitors to the farm. Disdainfully, she also notes the responses of people who cannot appreciate the bird. "Once or twice

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I have been asked what the peacock is 'good for' — a question which gets no answer from me because it deserves none" (p. 111). Obviously, she felt that the bird's beauty was sufficient reason for its existence. In essence, her attachment to the peacock is representative of her general acceptance of the natural world on its own terms.

Other biographical writings also reveal Miss O'Connor's strong attachment to her various farm animals. Her letters to Richard Stern, for example, published in Shenandoah after her death, are equally filled with news of her writing and her farm. On April 14, 1964, she wrote Stern: "Our spring's done come and gone. It is summer here. My muscovy duck is setting under the back steps. I have two new swans who sit in the grass and converse with each other in low tones while the peacocks scream and holler." The letters repeatedly twit Stern about leaving his teaching post in Chicago, "that cold place among them interlockohuls," and coming to live in the comfortable Milledgeville countryside. Her own experiences in the North caused her to vow: "I am never going to Chicago or New York again but am going to spend the rest of my life in Milledgeville (June 2, 1960)." Spending her life in such close day-to-day contact with nature, Flannery O'Connor was thus able to

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study and enjoy it.

Correspondingly, as a writer, she was also able to draw upon her familiarity with the rural South as a rich resource of physical imagery and metaphysical symbol. Indeed, Miss O'Connor's keen and objective appreciation for nature did not stop at the physical level. A deeply religious woman, she believed that visible reality is inextricably connected with—a manifestation of—a spiritual reality which is governed by a supreme being. In essence, she looked upon all creation as the special work of God. In a critical article entitled "The Fiction Writer and His Country," she expresses the opinion that each writer must sharply observe and familiarize himself with his own "country" or region and, by logical extension, he will intuitively incorporate this knowledge into his fiction. At the same time, however, she defines a writer's "country" as something more than geographical terrain; it is, in brief, an extension of an invisible world of eternal and absolute verity. In Miss O'Connor's own words:

What is...a writer going to take his 'country' to be? The word usually used by literary folk in this connection would be 'world,' but the word 'country' will do; in fact, being homely, it will do better, for it suggests more. It suggests everything from the actual countryside that the novelist describes, on, to, and through, and under all of these to his true country, which the writer with Christian convictions will consider to be what is eternal and absolute....

When we talk about the writer's country we
are liable to forget that no matter what particular country it is, it is inside as well as outside him. Art requires delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other. To know oneself is to know one's region. It is also to know the world, and it is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that world. The writer's value is lost, both to himself and to his country as soon as he ceases to see that country as a part of himself, and to know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks. It is to measure oneself against Truth, and not the other way around.  

Flannery O'Connor's insistence that a writer immerse himself in his geographical region in order to be able to know himself and the metaphysical verities is perhaps a somewhat limited view. While this approach seems to be the only one that is successful—or even possible—for her, it is not a universal critical theory. Other writers, such as Fitzgerald and Salinger, who have concentrated on sociological background or psychological make-up of characters have been equally successful in identifying and expressing the metaphysical verities and values in life which they consider important.

A Roman Catholic, Flannery O'Connor was also concerned about the relationship between her religious beliefs and her writing career. Her concern about this matter, expressed in the critical essay, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," further explains the incorporation

of her own rural country in her tales. In this article, Miss O'Connor rejects the thesis that a Catholic author cannot honestly function in modern secular society, that he is necessarily a victim of "a parochial esthetic and a cultural insularity." To the contrary, she maintains that the Catholic who writes fiction "will discover, if he discovers anything at all...that he himself cannot move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth. The writer learns...to be humble in the face of what is. What is is all he has to do with; the concrete is his medium...." She goes on by explaining that the writer must first limit himself to an objective observation and recording of "nature," "reality," "what is." In so doing, he may—and should—achieve the realization that the supernatural manifests itself only through the natural; the writer will acquire "the added dimension" of sight that allows him to see "the presence of grace as it appears in nature." Miss O'Connor explains: "When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality." "If the Catholic writer hopes to reveal 'supernatural mysteries,' he will have to do it by describing truthfully what he sees from where he is."  

"What he sees from where he is" is, for Flannery O'Connor, precisely that Southern landscape which so strongly colors her tales. Thus, the writer's critical essays define the rationale for her own fiction. She explains the necessity for an honest writer to station himself as a keen and humble observer in the "country" or reality that immediately surrounds him. And he must use what he observes as the foundation of his work. Even the writer who is concerned about illuminating supernatural mysteries must learn that such mysteries are intrinsically grounded in observable reality.

Flannery O'Connor lived her short life in the rural South and, during her thirty-eight years, was a sharp and joyful student of the natural world. And, in keeping with her own critical credo, she intricately wove her rural environment into her fiction in a complex, rich pattern of physical and metaphysical verities.
I. PERSONAL AND LITERARY BACKGROUND

LITERARY BACKGROUND

In her use of nature—particularly the natural features of the South—how does Flannery O'Connor fit into the body of Southern literature and how does she compare with other Southern writers? It is not possible to answer this question by offering simple equations and categorical variances. It is immediately obvious to the casual reader that Miss O'Connor holds membership in the school of Southern regional writers. She also shares the Agrarians' interest in the social and cultural patterns of the rural South. More significantly, she, like the Agrarians and later writers, examines the physical and moral meaning that nature may have. But Miss O'Connor's most distinctive achievement is her treatment of natural features and forces to reveal and analyze possible relationships between God and his creature, man.

In The Art of Southern Fiction, Frederick J. Hoffman contends that the idea of the South as a special, concretely identifiable geographical locale, a "land-as-a-whole," has always dominated the minds of Southern writers. This has been so because the region, from its original colonization and throughout its history, has been largely

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agricultural. And in an agricultural society, people live in "close physical and moral dependency" on the land and are most consciously aware of it. The conviction thus arises among its inhabitants that the land is sacred, that "the really moral life is one lived in relationship to it." The South's defeat in the Civil War and its consequent movements towards partial industrialization threatened to destroy this popular concept of the land as sacred. As Hoffman explains it, this threat only made the concept more precious to Southerners. In effect, therefore, both the historical and contemporary literary records of the South aggrandize the land and the agricultural society and cultural patterns which evolved from a dependency on the land.

Hoffman elaborates upon the important geographical, social, and cultural distinctions of the South:

It is rich in natural detail; its pace is slow and close to the rhythms of natural sequences; it tends to develop historically in a slow accession of patterns which accommodate to the atmospheric and biological qualities of setting; it generates loyalties to place that are much more highly emotionally charged than is any dedication to ideas which dedication, says the author, predominates in the North and in Northern writers; finally, its rhythm of social motion is passive rather than active. All these characteristics tend to encourage a...belief, that human processes and natural rhythms are closely associated...
Hoffman's explanation of the important role of geographical place in Southern literature offers valuable insight into Flannery O'Connor's fiction and her position as a Southern authoress. Miss O'Connor's fiction is laid in this region; its setting is the Georgia backwoods and countryside. The few pieces that do use a city in their background show the city as corrupt and/or sterile in comparison with the neighboring country. However, the stories do not present the rural South as a geographical map; there is no precisely identifiable real-life landmark in them. More importantly, they do present the essential distinctions of the South which Hoffman describes. In acknowledgement of the region's rich natural detail, the stories use the rural scene as an integral backdrop for the plot's action. Description and dialogue are strongly flavored with natural images. Often enough, too, the rural setting has structural significance in plot development.

As Hoffman suggests, the cultural and social patterns which evolve in an agricultural region closely depend on the land itself and the natives' close economic ties to the land. Miss O'Connor's fiction also bears testimony to the truth of this thesis. The characters of her plots reflect their ties to the land in their speech, their actions, and their beliefs. They are aware of both the physical and metaphysical significance of the land that
surrounds them. For example, many of her characters are farmers whose whole life is dominated by the land they work, the animals and crops they raise, and the forces of nature which determine the productivity of their farms. These same characters may also practice a fundamentalist religion which regards a river as a vehicle for baptism and the sun as a special sign of God's intent for them.

In the best tradition, therefore, Flannery O'Connor may be classified as a regional writer. While she does not offer her reader a true-life geographical map of backwoods Georgia and Tennessee, she does present her reader with something more vitally characteristic of the region. While using specific details and vivid images of the countryside, she illustrates the patterns of life that exist there. The natural ingredient is important in her fiction, but not for the sole purpose of providing a colorful background for the plot action. She is not interested in giving her audience a penny postcard picture of the South. On the contrary, she describes—in many ways and on several levels—the significance of nature as a vital force in the South.

In her interest and concern for the cultural and social patterns of the rural South, Flannery O'Connor may also be linked to the Agrarians. The Agrarians' collection of essays, *I'll Take My Stand*, is introduced
by a "Statement of Principles" which defines the twelve contributors’ image of the Southern agrarian tradition. Three paragraphs at the heart of this "Statement of Principles" serve as an explicit philosophy for the book as a whole.¹⁰

Religion can hardly expect to flourish in an industrial society. Religion is our submission to the general intention of a nature that is fairly inscrutable; it is the sense of our role as creatures within it. But nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose the sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent. The God of nature under these conditions is merely an amiable expression, a superfluity, and the philosophical understanding ordinarily carried in the religious experience is not there for us to have.

Nor do the arts have a proper life under industrialization, with the general decay of sensibility which attends it. Art depends in general, like religion, on a right attitude to nature; and in particular on a free and disinterested observation of nature that occurs only in leisure.

The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of a strictly business or industrial civilization. They consist in such practices as manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love—in the social exchanges which reveal and develop in human affairs. If religion and the arts are founded on right relations of man-to-nature, these are founded on right relations of man-to-man.¹¹

In essence, the Agrarians indict industrialism—


¹¹ Donald Davidson et al., I’ll Take My Stand (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), pp. xxiv-xxv.
particularly the industrialism which was foisted on the South after and since the Civil War--as an enemy of man's most basic culture patterns. On the contrary, they promote nature and man's close communion with nature as the most beneficial and most stabilizing phenomenon in human life. Man's submission to the natural universe ensures the proper continuity and flourishing of religion, art, even "the amenities of life." Without examining the deeper ramifications of the "Statement of Principles" or further discussing the philosophical rationale of Agrarianism, it is possible to maintain that Flannery O'Connor is sympathetic to these core tenets of the movement. Her fiction implies her dislike and mistrust of the city as the center of industrialization. The city, whenever it does appear in her stories, is always described as an "ugly wart" on the earth, a place of sin and corruption, of artificiality, of loneliness. The city dweller or pilgrim is a man cut adrift from his God, from himself, and from the nature which should--or had previously--securely maintained such bonds.

The rural life, on the other hand, is celebrated. Flannery O'Connor herself, as previously noted, seemed to prefer the slow pace of the farm community with its close dependence on and enjoyment of the natural world. She consistently chose this region and its inhabitants as the material for her fiction. The characters of her stories likewise express their own awareness of the
nature that surrounds them. A few of the characters, such as the various farmers, are aware that they must work in harmony with nature in order to make their fields and animals prosper. Other characters regard the countryside as a haven from suspected urban evils, a haven where they can continue the "amenities of life." And still other characters consider nature as a source of religious inspiration. In essence, therefore, Flannery O'Connor, by virtue of her own life and the many fictionalized lives she created, echoes the same philosophical sentiments towards nature which the Agrarians proposed in their basic manifesto.

Often other contemporary Southern writers, while accepting the Agrarians' thesis of the close connection between man and nature in a rural society, have examined this connection in a different light; ignoring the Agrarian idyll of nature's contribution to social, religious, and esthetic stability, these writers present nature as a harmful or destructive force which man cannot or will not escape. William Faulkner sometimes expresses this viewpoint. His fiction has a strong sense of the Southern locale. Often, however, a feature of this locale assumes the role of a violent protagonist. In "Dry September," Faulkner "brings the head-splitting heat into the story as an unnamed character which helps to press others into lynching Will Mayes."\(^{12}\) The Bundren

family in *As I Lay Dying* are beset by a series of natural disasters and accidents; probably the most important is the flooding river which carries away the bridge and overturns the wagon carrying Addie Bundren's corpse. However, Faulkner does share the Agrarians' dislike for modern industrialization in the South.

The stories in *Go Down, Moses* express Faulkner's regrets about the destruction of the land as a result of man's misuse of that land. The experiences of young Ike McCaslin, a principal figure in these same stories, illustrate how man should live in proper respect and communion with nature. Ike achieves maturity as he learns and appreciates the secrets of the natural world surrounding him through the long ritual of the hunt for a bear.

Nature also appears as a violent protagonist of social and psychological significance in some of the work of Shirley Ann Grau and Eudora Welty. In *The Hard Blue Sky*, Miss Grau treats "the environment...as another opponent to be outmaneuvered or defeated."\(^{13}\) The locale of *The Hard Blue Sky* is a scarcely habitable island, Isle aux Chiens, which is overrun by wild dogs, beaten by winds and storms, and threatened by a marsh infested with alligators, sharp-toothed eels, and poisonous snakes. The inhabitants of Isle aux Chiens are in constant conflict with their environment, and this conflict propels

\(^{13}\)Gossett, p. 180.
the action of the novel's plot. Louise Y. Gossett has remarked that Eudora Welty occasionally "underscores the separateness of human beings by violence in nature ....when beset by storm or flood....[her land] subjects its occupants to primeval violence and emphasizes the tenuousness of their presence." In "At the Landing," the flooding Mississippi River cuts the characters off from their home roots and sets them afloat in a new environment where old patterns of relationships can no longer be maintained. In "The Winds" an equinoctial storm mirrors the sudden shattering insight about herself which Josie achieves.

Like Faulkner, Miss Grau, and Miss Welty, Flannery O'Connor can also expose the less idyllic aspects of the connection between man and nature. Miss O'Connor's "Greenleaf" introduces a wild scrub bull who disastrously complicates the shallow life of the heroine-farm owner. The element of fire helps propel characters to insight about themselves in "Parker's Back" and The Violent Bear It Away. Miss O'Connor's use of nature in the protagonist role (as well as in more passive roles) has a deeper significance than the social or psychological importance attached to it by some other Southern writers. Faulkner may treat nature in a moralistic sense—like McCaslin achieves a certain maturity, perhaps becomes a whole man.

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\[14\] Gossett, p. 103.
in the Hemingway tradition, through his hunting experiences in the woods. But McCaslin's achievement is earth-bound; his maturity is measured by the ideal natural and social order of his particular environment. Miss O'Connor goes further than Faulkner and some other Southern writers by giving nature definite meanings in terms of Christian theology and metaphysics.

It has already been noted that Flannery O'Connor is a regional writer who paints for her reader a picture of the piedmont Georgia countryside. However, Miss O'Connor considers this regional picture "in the light of an ultimate concern." 15 She has said of her own religious convictions: "I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and that what I see in the world I see in its relation to that." 16 Thus, the touchstones of Flannery O'Connor's theology is the crucifixion suffered by Christ for man and his earth. She looks at the world around her in its connection with or manifestation of this Redemption. She believes that the world has definite religious significance, and this significance is strongly affirmative in tone.


Speaking of her philosophy of writing, Miss O'Connor remarked: "Part of the complexity--for the Catholic fiction-writer will be the presence of grace as it appears in nature, and what matters for him here is that his faith not become detached from his dramatic sense and from his vision of what is....When fiction is made...it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality." Flannery O'Connor, as pointed out above, believes that the fiction writer, as an intrinsic part of the practice of his profession, should well familiarize himself with the details of that reality which surrounds him. And he should ground his fiction in this concrete reality. She voices this same concern in the preceding quotation. However, she also notes that the observable world is not divorced--or divorceable--from the supernatural world. On the contrary, the observable world is a necessary extension of the supernatural world in the logical line of God's creation, and one can only attain the supernatural through knowledge and appreciation of the natural. With her faith in Christ's Redemption of the earth, Miss O'Connor thus holds that nature really does manifest the grace of salvation. Exactly how nature does so is a "mystery," a "problem" for the Catholic fiction-writer to wrestle

with; nevertheless, it is "Truth" which he must accept and weave into the fabric of his art. And this is precisely what Miss O'Connor seeks to do.

The most distinctive accomplishment of Flannery O'Connor's short stories and novels is the way in which she manipulates the natural features of an environment to communicate the mystery of the truth of the Redemption and its consequences for man. Miss O'Connor's presentation of religious concepts is not Catholic, however; she is not concerned with rational explanations of theological credos which may be offered by a hierarchy of ordained ministers in an established church. She takes her cue from the backwoods Baptists of rural Georgia and Tennessee who zealously read the Bible and even nature itself as a special sort of liaison between themselves and God. They look for God's messages in the face of the sun, in the flames of a fire; they seek salvation through baptism by total immersion in a river. And even when characters reject God or are blind to him, various natural elements stubbornly continue in the plot as a testimony of the Redemption and a witness of man's misguided wanderings. Sometimes the characters relent in their opposition and welcome the Grace of salvation; sometimes they do not. In either case, the religious message persists through the vehicle of nature and is there for the reader's apprehension.

An analysis of Flannery O'Connor's position in con-
temporary literature thus reveals that she is a regional writer in her portrayal of the Georgia landscape and its inhabitants. She also shares the Agrarians' philosophy concerning the intrinsic benefits of life spent in communion with nature. Even more than other Southern writers, she capitalizes on nature's domination of the rural South. She uses nature as plot protagonist, as a main source of imagery, and as structural guide. In so doing, she often admits to the less idyllic features of the man-nature relationship. Like Faulkner, she acknowledges the moral lesson offered by nature. Most significantly, she makes nature the voice of her own belief in Christ's Redemption and the redemptive grace offered to man by Christ.
PART II: THE PHYSICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S FICTION

The most fundamental and obvious use of nature in Flannery O'Connor's short stories and two novels is in the establishment of a physical setting. Miss O'Connor takes great care to develop her plots within a specific and concrete environmental framework. And, with notably few exceptions, her environment is the rural Southern countryside of Georgia and Tennessee, the countryside with which she was most familiar. However, Flannery O'Connor paints her rural settings with scrupulous economy; she draws these scenes precisely, but with a minimum of words. The natural environment itself thus does not compete with or cripple the development of characterization or plot.

"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" initially presents a short but vivid description of the Georgia countryside through which the family of central characters is traveling. "Stone Mountain; the blue granite that in some places came up to both sides of the highway; the brilliant red clay banks slightly streaked with purple; and the various crops that made rows of green lace-work on the ground. The trees were full of silver-white sunlight and the meanest of them sparkled."\(^{18}\) These few sentences establish a scene that is colorfully and

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emphatically representative of the Georgia countryside. The imposing blue granite mountainside gives way to red-purple clay banks which border fields of green crops and sun-dazzled silver-white trees. The visual metaphors and images combine to paint a scene which speaks for the writer's keen awareness of and appreciation for nature.

"The River" includes another concise geographical description. "The slow circles of two silent birds were revolving high in the air. Across the river there was a low red and gold grove of sassafras with hills of dark blue trees behind it and an occasional pine jutting over the skyline. Behind, in the distance, the city rose like a cluster of warts on the side of the mountain. The birds revolved downward and dropped lightly in the top of the highest pine and sat hunch-shouldered as if they were supporting the sky" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 41). This passage again reveals Miss O'Connor's keen perception of the exact colors and juxtaposing features of the rural countryside. The added image of the buzzards in this scene illustrates the subtle unspoken communion among different forms of life in nature; even though they are birds of prey, the buzzards revolve in the air and, when perched in the pine trees, give the appearance of "supporting" the sky. In sharp contrast to this brightly colored picture, the city appears--
distinctly and distantly separated from the countryside—like an ugly, undifferentiated "cluster of warts." The city has none of the balanced harmony of the natural scene. By this and other such contrasting descriptions of country and city in her fiction, Flannery O'Connor reveals her explicit preference for the former.

The volume *Everything That Rises Must Converge* contains a short story entitled "Revelation" which focuses on a truck farmer's wife. The story development includes this brief picture of the truck farm: "This land sloped gracefully down through a field dotted with lavender weeds and at the start of the rise their [the farmers'] small yellow frame house, with its little flower buds spread out around it like a fancy apron, sat primly in its accustomed place between two giant hickory trees." 19 This scene is also painted in definite colors; even weeds are graced with the soft, appealing shade of lavender. The yellow house is personified in quaint and "prissy," yet lightly pleasant and original images; the fancy apron of the flowers decorates the small house, and the "two giant hickory trees" on either side of the structure, it may be implied, serve as protecting sentinels.

The crucial location in the novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, is the Tarwater land in the backwoods of Powderhead,

19 Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, p. 209. All subsequent references to short stories in this collection will be cited in the text.
Tennessee. The outstanding details of this location are vividly presented to the reader in various passages. The Tarwaters, grandfather and grandson, live in a two-story shack which stands in the middle of a small clearing. This clearing is surrounded by a tall corn patch which, in turn, is surrounded by a dark mile-long "woods that ran in grey and purple folds." The woods is also thick with thornbushes and blackberry bushes.

"Powderhead was not simply off the dirt road but off the wagon track and footpath, and the nearest neighbors, colored not white, still had to walk through the woods, pushing plum branches out of their way to get to it." 20

This picture of Powderhead is one of an isolated, almost inpenetrable wilderness. Yet, at the same time, Powderhead is presented in positive terms as a sanctuary for the Tarwaters. The old man and his grandson live there in comparative peace with hound dogs and birds and "black game roosters" for company. The old man enjoys his acre corn patch which he plants "almost up to the house" on one side. The thick woods act as a "light blue fortress line of trees" for the Tarwaters' protection against the corrupt civilization of the outside world, against which the old man frequently rages.

Besides using nature to establish the locale of her

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stories, Flannery O'Connor generously sprinkles her stories with various other general nature references. Nature is a strongly noticeable ingredient in her basic imagery and diction. "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" may be considered as a battle between two individuals, Lucynell Crater, Sr., a hard, crafty old woman with a retarded daughter, and Tom Shiftlet, an itinerant wanderer, who try to use each other for their personal advantage.

In this story, Miss O'Connor aptly incorporates several similes which fit both the predatory theme and predatory personalities of these two main figures. "The ugly words spoken by Lucynell, Sr. settled in Mr. Shiftlet's head like a group of buzzards in the top of a tree" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 62). This brief simile of the buzzards dramatically emphasizes the intense dislike which the wanderer feels for Mrs. Crater. When Shiftlet thinks that he has triumphed over the old woman, "his smile stretched like a weary snake waking up by a fire." This simile of the snake is similarly telling.

In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Miss O'Connor uses conventional similes to describe the anger of a Negro woman who feels that she has been insulted by a patronizing white woman. The white woman herself acts unwittingly, but her son Julian perceives the Negress's anger: "He was conscious of a kind of bustling next to him, a muted growling like that of an angry cat....The
woman was rumbling like a volcano about to become active" 
(*Everything That Rises Must Converge*, p. 17). The 
bristling cat and rumbling volcano are common images of 
anger; they achieve a certain effectiveness in this story, 
however, only because the white woman is so totally ob-
livious of the Negress's fury. "A View of the Woods" 
describes a father beating his daughter "as methodically 
as if he were whacking a bush with a sling blade." This 
punishment of the daughter occurs with ritualistic fre-
quency in the same spot and in the same manner. Thus, 
in a sense, the father delivers the beating in an almost 
unaware and impersonal manner—as though he were doing 
nothing more than mechanically "whacking a bush." This 
bush image, therefore, appropriately communicates the 
significance—or non-significance—of the action. The 
girl's response to her father's punishment is described 
in explicit, yet conventional and similarly undistinguished 
terms: "All she had done was jump up and down as if she 
were standing on a hot stove and make a whimpering noise 
like a dog that was being peppered" (*Everything That Rises 
Must Converge*, p. 61). The dog reference is a common 
enough image; in this context, it seems to contribute 
to the sense that this ritualistic punishment is completed 
without any real human feeling or personal involvement 
by either father or child.

The author plays upon the snake's connotation of
evil repulsiveness in "Parker's Back." Sarah Ruth Cates (Parker) is so horrified by her future husband's abrupt display of his vividly tattooed arm that she drops his hand "as if she had accidentally grasped a poisonous snake." A sense of fear and foreboding is metaphorically communicated in this passage from "The Comforts of Home": "Thomas felt as if he had seen a tornado pass a hundred yards away and had an intimation that it would turn again and head directly for him" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 128).

Both of Flannery O'Connor's novels also capitalize on nature for their imagery and diction. In Wise Blood, the countrified Hazel Notes, while eating in the dining car of a train, is seated at the table of "three youngish women dressed like parrots." One member of this trio stares at Hazel "with a told game-hen expression."
The flamboyance and open flirtatiousness of the women is thus described in succinct but meaningfully appropriate bird images. Enoch Emery, another central character in Wise Blood, initially appears in the novel wearing a tie that "was the color of green peas." The pea reference here connotes a bright color, but also suggests the ludicrousness of such a color. Comparing the tie's color to a pea is certainly more effective than simply describing the tie as "bright green." Minor figures who appear in the plot are described as having a "jutting shale-textured
face," a "little bit of carrot-colored hair," eyes
"like quicksand which ... took everything in whole," the
general appearance of "a dried-up spider." An individual's
anger is described in terms of a "nasty-dog look" and a
"disposition of a yellow jacket." Generally speaking,
Miss O'Connor uses a variety of natural images, both animal
and inanimate elements, to give her character descriptions
certain concreteness and visual appeal. The Violent Bear
It Away, the writer's second novel, similarly includes
figures "with an eagle's nose," "scot-colored eyes," and
"bull-like" appearance. An angry woman "ruffles like a
peahen upset on the nest." Empty speech is tagged as
"parrot-mouthing." A man's stubbornness is quaintly de-
scribed in this analogy: "The truth would no more soak
into it his brain than rain would penetrate tin."
Another man's deceitful offer of help is simply labelled
"fox-like" without any further elaboration; the author
expects her readers to make the obvious connection that
a fox is an animal well known for his wily deceitfulness.

In a Dali-like surrealistic technique, Flannery
O'Connor's diction and images paint natural elements with
human traits and characteristics. This technique is
evident in the entire body of her work. "A View of the
Woods" includes a motif of the existing struggle between
the progressive and mechanized commercial civilization
and the simple and peaceful natural countryside. The
story opens with an undefined "machine" "systematically ...eating... a square red hole in what had once been a cow pasture... the only pasture that Pitts had succeeded in getting the bitterweed off...." "The big disembodied gullet of the machine gorged itself on the clay, then with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turned and spit it up" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, pp. 54-55). The steam shovel in this passage is personified as a disgustingly gluttonous creature who mindlessly disembowels a cow pasture that has been carefully tended by a farmer (Mr. Pitts). The machine transforms the useful land into a pit of raw ugliness.

"A Circle in the Fire" describes an uncontrollable forest fire in terms of a ravenous person eating food: "It... the fire... reached up from the brush, snatching and biting at the lowest branches of the trees" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 153). The ending paragraph of "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" presents a most surrealistic picture: "A cloud, the exact color of the boy's gray hat and shaped like a turnip, had descended over the sun, and another, worse looking, crouched behind the car ....The turnip continued to descend. After a few minutes there was a guffawing peal of thunder from behind and fantastic raindrops, like tin-can tops, crashed over the rear of Mr. Shiftlet's car" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find,
pp. 67-68). In this scene, one form of nature assumes the characteristics of another form of nature or of human beings or even of inanimate metallic objects.

*Wise Blood* contains a sub-plot concerning the de-humanization of man (represented by Enoch Emery) and the corresponding humanization of nature, particularly of animals. In developing this sub-plot, the novel presents many images of personified natural elements. In a soda shop scene, the brown stools in front of the counter are described as a line of "toad stools." And, "On the wall facing the door there was a large advertisement for ice cream, showing a cow dressed up like a housewife."21 Animals in the zoo are personified in ridiculous descriptions: "Two black bears sat in the first one cage, facing each other like two matrons having tea, their faces polite and self-absorbed" (p. 93). Trees whose trunks have been painted white look "as if they had on ankle-socks." Stuffed birds in a museum observe the visitors with "piquant expressions." In another, later scene, Enoch Emery goes to a movie picture called "Lonnie Comes Home Again." "It was about a baboon named Lonnie who rescued attractive children from a burning orphanage.... In the end a nice-looking girl gave him a medal" (p. 139).

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All of these images of personified nature contribute to the development of the action of the sub-plot; they unify the sub-plot pattern and help maintain the reader's interest in it. Moreover, these images show Flannery O'Connor at her comic best. The bear-matrons, for example, subtly reveal the foibles of the human tea-and-bridge set. The ice cream advertisement reminds one of Elsie, the personable, talking cow who has advertised dairy products to generations of Americans. And Lonnie the baboon definitely recalls the exploits of Rin-Tin-Tin, the hero dog of American movies and television. The way in which Miss O'Connor burlesques these animals, however, may reveal her personal feeling that men sometimes overly humanize animals at the expense of their own human dignity and, sometimes, overly care for animals while treating fellow-humans in a callous, brutish way. At any rate, the personification of these various animals does indicate that the distinction between reasoning man and dumb creature in the modern world has become regretfully blurred.

In addition to using nature in fiction, imagery, and personification, Miss O'Connor capitalizes on nature to help develop characterization. Miss O'Connor frequently describes her characters' physical appearance in terms of their resemblance to particular natural elements which, in turn, seem to communicate or represent essential personality traits of these characters. Bailey's nameless
wife in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is briefly introduced as "a young woman in slacks, 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's ears" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 9). The cabbage and rabbit references are quite suited to this woman whose few actions and words in the story's progression reveal her as a bland, passive, and timid woman.

Ruby Hill, the central figure in "A Stroke of Good Fortune," is a vain, self-preoccupied woman whose main wish in life is to disassociate herself from and rise above her poor rural Southern background. Miss O'Connor introduces Ruby with this description:

Her head balanced like a big florid vegetable at the top of the [grocery] sack,... against her right cheek was a gritty collard leaf that had been stuck there half the way home. She gave it a vicious swipe with her arm and straightened up, muttering, 'Collards, collards,' in a voice of sultry subdued wrath. Standing up straight, she was a short woman, shaped nearly like a funeral urn. She had mulberry-colored hair stacked in sausage rolls around her head but some of these had come loose with the heat and the long walk from the grocery store and pointed frantically in various directions (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 59).

The florid vegetable, collard leaf, mulberry-colored hair (in addition to the funeral urn) quaintly contribute to present an extremely ridiculous picture of Ruby Hill. Tongue-in-cheek, Flannery O'Connor thus takes an effective swipe at Ruby's vanity and superiority complex. The collard leaf (which she had only bought to please her
younger brother who has just been discharged from the
army) sticking on her cheek subtly implies that she
cannot escape her background, and, indeed, the basic
plot of the story develops this same idea.

Sarah Ruth, C.E. Parker's wife in the short story,
"Parker's Back," is given a similar introduction into
the plot: "She was plain, plain. The skin on her face
was thin and drawn as tight as the skin on an onion and
her eyes were grey and sharp like the points of two
icepicks" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 219).
Sarah Ruth's tight onion skin and cold icepick eyes not
only indicate an unpleasant physical appearance, but
also an unpleasant personality. She is emotionally
sterile and cold; she does not try—or even seem con-
cerned about—developing any warm or loving relationship
with her husband. Her only concern in life seems to
be the avoidance of sin.

"A View of the Woods" includes a brief character
sketch of a general store operator, Tilman, who is evil
personified. Tilman's appearance and actions are those
of a snake, the traditional figure of evil: "Tilman was
a man of quick action and few words. He sat habitually
with his arms folded on the counter and his insignificant
head weaving snake-fashion....He had a triangular-shaped
face with the point at the bottom and the top of his
skull was covered with a cap of freckles. His eyes were
green and very narrow and his tongue was always exposed in his partly opened mouth. He had his checkbook handy ...and got down to business at once" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 77). The details of the description are distinctively reptilian. And Tilman's role in the story is that of a "snake of evil." Rarely, however, is Miss O'Connor so flat in her character development or her use of nature.

In addition to using nature to indicate an individual's physical appearance and, by implication, his personality, Flannery O'Connor may also describe the metaphorical reaction or personified response of various natural elements to a character in order to indicate the character's personality. Miss O'Connor effectively uses this technique in "The Artificial Nigger." Mr. Head, the central figure in this short story, is a vain old man who is puffed up with his feelings of self-importance, righteousness, and presumed knowledge about the facts of life. "The Artificial Nigger" begins with this subtle revelation of Mr. Head's character: "Mr. Head awakened to discover that the room was full of moonlight....he saw half of the moon five feet away in his shaving mirror, paused as if it were waiting for his permission to enter. It rolled forward and cast a dignifying light on everything...but the face of the moon was a grave one. It gazed across the room and out of the window where it floated over the horse stall....The slop jar
room, out of the shadow and made snow-white in the moonlight, appeared to stand guard over him like a small personal angel" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, pp. 102-03). The moon's actions in this opening passage introduce the aggrandized conception of himself which Mr. Head has and which the rest of the story reinforces. The moon is very obsequious and subservient in its attention to the old man. More openly humorous, the moon, while "dignifying" the room, gravely lights up a most undignified horse stall at the same time. Moreover, it incongruously and laughably serves Mr. Head by making his slop jar appear like a snow-white protective angel to the old man. The moon's actions thus help to indicate Head's personality and, at the same time, reveal Flannery O'Connor's quiet laugh at the ridiculousness of the old man.

A similar technique in Miss O'Connor's character portrayal is to indicate an individual's response and reactions to the natural elements to his environment to reveal that individual's personality. The writer uses this technique to reveal Mrs. Cope's personality in the short story, "A Circle in the Fire." These passages are most pertinent: "'Well, well,' Mrs. Cope muttered and threw a large clump of nut grass behind her. She worked at the weeds and nut grass as if they were an evil sent directly by the devil to destroy the place" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, pp. 130-31). "'Everyday
I say a prayer of thanksgiving," Mrs. Cope said."
"Think of all we have. Lord," she said and sighed, 'we have everything,' and she looked around at her rich pastures and hills heavy with timber and shook her head as if it might all be a burden she was trying to shake off her back" (p. 133). "Mrs. Cope pointed the trowel up at Mrs. Pritchard and said, 'I have the best kept place in the country and do you know why? Because I work. I've had to work to save this place her farm and work to keep it....I don't let anything get ahead of me and I'm not always looking for trouble. I take it as it comes'" (p. 134). "The season was changing. Even a small change in the weather made Mrs. Cope thankful, but when the seasons changed, she seemed almost frightened at her good fortune in escaping whatever it was that pursued her" (p. 150).

In essence, Mrs. Cope is a small and petty woman who does not enjoy the various wonders of nature, her rich farm, the beauty of the changing seasons. She can only see her farm as a heavy overwhelming responsibility, a responsibility that she alone is capable of bearing. Her speech about thanking God for his blessing is merely a mouthing of meaningless words; she probably considers her speech of thanksgiving as necessary and proper for the good Christian woman that she wants to appear to be. In actuality, she feels that it is only she who can and
does manage the farm; God has little to do with it. Moreover, she is so obsessed with the potential dangers which she feels nature constantly poses for her and her farm that she almost completely ignores her daughter, her only living relative. And the Negroes who work for her are regarded as if they "were as destructive and impersonal as the nut grass." In truth, Mrs. Cope's constant militant battle against nature reveals her personality.

More importantly than establishing the rural Southern setting of her stories and developing characterization and diction and image patterns, nature plays an integral part in the structural design of Flannery O'Connor's work. Structure, for the limited purposes of this analysis, refers only to catalytic forces which contribute to plot involvement and to a technique of plot foreshadowing and development. Miss O'Connor's use of natural forces as a catalytic agent is not an original achievement in plot construction. Most notably, William Faulkner, in "The Bear," allocates this catalytic function to Old Ben, who has reigned supreme in the Yoknapatawpha wilderness for years as a constant challenge and threat to generations of hunters. Like Faulkner, Miss O'Connor simply capitalizes on the forces of her rural Southern environment. The scrub bull is an integral part of the action in the short story entitled "Greenleaf." The
story opens with a late evening scene in which the bull is tearing and chawing at some hedges beneath Mrs. May's bedroom window. Mrs. May is one of those familiar woman figures in Flannery O'Connor's work who looks upon her own farm and nature as constant threats to her ability to support herself financially by working the land. A completely self-reliant and self-centered woman, Mrs. May stubbornly accepts the challenge and the responsibility of her farm; her failure, however, is that she is so short-sighted that she cannot enjoy the beauty of nature (always a cardinal sin in Flannery O'Connor's work), and she does not acknowledge the work of a supreme creator who is also responsible for the farm's success. In essence, Mrs. May regards the scrub bull as a personal threat. She is afraid that he will tear apart her farm, eat up her grazing pastures, and ruin her herd of milking cows. She becomes obsessed with the desire to get rid of him.

The bull's presence on the May farm dominates the plot of "Greenleaf." His initial appearance beneath Mrs. May's bedroom window is the first of several nocturnal visits. He is described as standing beneath her window "as if he listened--like some patient god come down to woo her--for a stir inside the room" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 24). During the daytime, the bull roams the farm at will; he defies any attempt to limit his free roaming over the farm by breaking down fences or turning the chase against his pursuers. Mr.
Greenleaf, Mrs. May's hired hand, appreciates the bull's antics: "'He likes to bust loose,' Mr. Greenleaf said, looking with approval at the bull's rump. 'This gentleman is a sport.'" Mrs. May sourly counters, "'That's the awfulest looking bull I ever saw'" (p. 39).

The bull's "omnipresence" threatens not only the harmonious running of the farm, but, more importantly, Mrs. May's sense of security and self-esteem. Frantically, she makes several attempts to force the bull's owners to remove him from her property, but they show no concern or interest in doing so. And the bull continues to make Mrs. May look like a fool—to the delight of everyone else in the story, including her hired help and her two adult sons. In final desperation to rid herself of this brute threat, Mrs. May decides to shoot the bull. But the bull emerges as victorious in this battle; he gores Mrs. May to death.

The bull was crossing the pasture toward her at a slow gallop, a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again.... Mrs. May looked...and saw that the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her. She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in a freezing unbelief. She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was, and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart, and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip (p. 52).

Thematically, the bull's killing of Mrs. May is im-
important. This passage describes the killing, not in terms of two foes clashing, but in terms of a lovers' reunion. As the bull had patiently courted and "wooed" Mrs. May under her bedroom window (as described in the first scene), so in this climax, like a joyful lover, he rushed to be united with his beloved. The irony of the situation is this: the small-minded Mrs. May fears and distrusts all of nature, and the bull has been a particularly acute threat to her. The bull, a vigorous representative of nature, "loves" her and by uniting her with himself in the act of death figuratively—and literally, since she dies and will decay into the earth—unites her with the same nature she dreads and dislikes. This situation between Mrs. May and the bull may also be read as a satire of the Europa myth. The bull certainly does not win Mrs. Cope's affections voluntarily by gentle persuasion as does Zeus in the myth. And Mrs. May is a perfect antithesis of Europa, the Cretan goddess of fertility.

The bull as a catalytic agent is central to the plot. His appearance beneath Mrs. May's window initiates the action of the plot. His continued presence and antics on the farm propel the plot forward as the widow, feeling increasingly more threatened, frantically but vainly tries to rid herself of him. Finally, the bull brings the story to a startling dramatic climax by goring Mrs. May
through the heart. Thus, Flannery O'Connor has effectively cast the bull as the hero-villain of an unusual short story.

The last chapters of the Enoch Emery sub-plot in *Wise Blood* introduce a movie star gorilla, Gongza, who is essential in bringing the sub-plot to its climax. As stated above, the sub-plot develops the paradoxical theme of the dehumanization of man (Emery) and the humanization of nature, particularly of animals. Towards the end of the novel, Enoch Emery's alienation from the human world and his own animal-like characterization have been well established. It is at this point (chapter eleven) that Gongza makes his appearance in the plot. This "Giant Jungle Monarch and Great Star" makes a personal appearance at a children's matinee. A phonograph plays "Tarara Boom Di Aye" while Gongza stands on a small platform in front of the theatre, and the brave boys and girls are encouraged to "step up and shake his hand." He has a "raincoat buttoned up to his chin and the collar turned up. There [is]...an iron chain hanging from around his neck" (p. 180). He growls at his audience. Enoch is magnetically drawn towards the gorilla, and he gets in line to shake the ape's hand. Miss O'Connor writes: "It was the first hand that had been extended to Enoch since he had come to the city. It was warm and soft" (p. 181). The man is so touched by the ape's "friendly" gesture that he immedi-
ately starts to blurt out his life story. The ape
responds by jerking its hand away and saying, "'You
go to hell!"' Gonga is a man in disguise.

Again, Enoch has suffered humiliation from a man,
and this experience intensifies his fanatic desire to
be recognized, to "be something" important and admired--
as Gonga apparently is by his movie audiences. This
desire compels Enoch to return to Gonga's truck late at
night in order to kill the man inside the ape suit and
to steal the ape suit for himself. Happy with this ac-
complishment, Enoch flees to the countryside to effect
his final transformation into Gonga. Miss O'Connor
carefully elaborates upon this transformation so that
its significance will be obvious to the reader. She
describes Enoch carefully taking off his own clothes and
neatly stacking them into a pile. He buries these clothes
in a foot-deep trench and climbs into the gorilla
costume:

In the uncertain light, one of his lean
white legs could be seen to disappear and then
the other, one arm and then the other: a black
heavier shaggier figure replaced his. For an
instant, it had two heads, one light and one
dark, but after a second, it pulled the dark
head back over the other and corrected this.
It busied itself with certain hidden fastenings
and what appeared to be minor adjustments of
its hide....Then it began to growl and beat
its chest; it jumped up and down and flung
its arms and thrust its head forward....The
figure extended its hand, clutched nothing and
shook its arm vigorously....it repeated this
four or five times. Then it picked up the
pointed stick and placed it at a cocky angle
under its arm and left the woods for the highway (p. 197).

Enoch's ludicrous transformation into an animal is complete; the "he" has truly become an "it." The novel ends several pages later with no indication that Enoch will shed the gorilla hide.

The sub-plot of Wise Blood slowly and carefully builds towards this climax. Enoch Emery, a lonely, pathetic creature at the beginning of the story, becomes increasingly more alienated from the human world whose members ignore, belittle, and reject him. Enoch is purposely developed as a sub-human figure; he does not rationalize or reason, for example, but acts from the instincts of his "wise blood," instinctive action that is characteristic of brute beasts. And, at the same time, Enoch's fascination for and associations with the animal world are developed. Gonga's appearance in the plot is important in that it forges the final link between Enoch and animal; his appearance precipitates—and makes possible—the climactic transformation. Gonga is a powerful awe-inspiring gorilla who has made the grade of movie star. Music heralds his arrival on a scene, and eager fans stand in long lines just to be able to shake his hand. The gorilla has all of the recognition and popularity that Enoch so desperately desires, and so Enoch becomes the gorilla. Thus, Miss O'Connor uses the gorilla figure at a pivotal point in her plot to achieve a hilarious but dramatic climax and to cement
her theme in the reader's mind.

Pitty Sing, the cat, plays a minor but significant role in the plot of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." This short story concentrates on a family of six who are ruthlessly and systematically murdered by a band of three psychopathic killers. The murders are made possible because the family has wrecked their car on a deserted country back road where they are easy bait for the killers. The grandmother is basically responsible for this tragedy because it is she who insists that her son drive down the deserted road to find a plantation mansion that she remembered from her youth. Moreover, she has secreted her pet cat, Pitty Sing, whom her son Bailey despises, into the car by putting it into a basket with a newspaper over it. It is the cat who actually precipitates the car accident. As they are bumping down the rutted road, the cat leaps from the basket and suddenly springs onto Bailey's shoulder. Bailey is so stunned that he momentarily loses control of the automobile: "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" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 19). A
few minutes later, the murderers swoop down upon the
dazed and helpless group. Thus, the cat, although only
in a minor role, is an important catalytic agent in the
story's plot.

In another mode, the landscape itself is significant
to the action in "A View of the Woods." The particular
landscape is a weed-covered lot in front of the Fortune-
Pitts family home, but the Fortune children are greatly
attached to this lot, which they graciously term "the
lawn." They stake it out as their special playground,
and they enjoy the stretch of "pink and yellow and purple
weeds" which reach to a black pine woods. The children's
father grazes his calves on the plot. In essence, "the
lawn" represents the one source of pleasure and dignity
in the otherwise poor and unhappy lives of the family.

When Mr. Fortune, the clan patriarch and owner of
the property, decides to sell "the lawn" so that a
gas station can be built on it, a bitter feud erupts in
the family. Mary Fortune Pitts, the old man's granddaughter
with whom he has always enjoyed a strong alliance, becomes
furious at her grandfather's decision. She alternately
pleads with him and storms at him to change his mind
about the sale. But he persistently refuses because the
land has no special significance for him, and he simply
cannot understand the attitude of Mary Fortune and his
other relatives. "Several times during the afternoon,
he got up from his bed and looked out the window across the 'lawn' to the line of woods she said they wouldn't be able to see any more. Every time he saw the same thing: woods—not a mountain, not a waterfall, not any kind of planted bush or flower, just woods. Every time he got up and looked out, he was reconfirmed of his wisdom in selling the lot" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, pp. 70-71). The lot and the woods mean nothing to Fortune; on the contrary, the gas station means cified progress and modernization and money, and these are his ideals.

Unfortunately, because of her former alliance with her grandfather, Mary Fortune's family suspect her of encouraging the old man to sell the land. Her father cruelly beats her for this, and her mother, brothers, and sisters stoneily reject her. Mary Fortune is too proud to explain that she shares her family's unhappiness over the sale. However, she takes out her bitter frustrations on her grandfather who remains at a loss about how he can placate her and resume their close relationship. Finally, he decides to beat her into submission, as he has seen her father attempt to do. Mary Fortune furiously resists his attack, and in the ensuing brutal struggle between grandfather and granddaughter, the girl is killed. Fortune, stunned by this outcome, succumbs to a fatal heart attack on the same spot.

Thus, "the lawn" is the pivotal key to "A View of
the woods." It feeds the familial controversy of the story's plot. The Fortune-Pitts family regard the lot as the one source of pleasure and dignity in their bleak lives. The patriarch Fortune is blind to the enjoyment which his own land can offer him; he can only regard it as a potential source of income. The development of these antithetical attitudes towards this piece of land comprise the story's action. And "the lawn" finally provokes the tragic climax of the plot.

In addition to using natural representatives as catalytic plot agents, Flannery O'Connor capitalizes on nature to give her stories a structure of plot foreshadowing and plot development. Many of the natural references in these stories act as indications or hints of the forthcoming plot action much in the same way that various clues in a mystery story subtly point to the eventual solution of the plot. Likewise, they may indicate the significance of the story's climax. In order to best explain how the writer uses this technique, this analysis will be limited to several of her short stories in which the structural foreshadowing and development are most extensively and clearly presented through natural references; however, this technique is evident to some extent in the majority of Miss O'Connor's short stories and in her two novels.

"The Artificial Nigger" has a great deal of natural foreshadowing. In essence, this story centers on two backwoods characters, the pompous Mr. Head and his grandson
Nelson, and the day's journey which these two take to the "big" city of Atlanta, Georgia. Mr. Head intends that this trip will prove to Nelson how superior and knowledgeable he is about life and, in particular, the evils of the metropolis. Mr. Head hopes that Nelson will, as a consequence of this experience, unquestionably accept his domination. The grandson, on the other hand, hopes that this trip will help him to build his own self-reliance and assert his independence from his grandfather. The pair's journey and varied experiences in the city eventually climax in mutual understanding and harmonious reconciliation.

When Mr. Head and Nelson go to the rural train junction at dawn in order to start their Atlanta trip, they are described in this setting:

A coarse-looking orange-colored sun coming up behind the east range of mountains was making the sky a dull red behind them, but in front of them it was still gray and they faced a gray transparent moon, hardly stronger than a thumbprint and completely without light....Trains passing appeared to emerge from a tunnel of trees and, hit for a second by the cold sky, vanish terrified into the woods again. Mr. Head had to make special arrangements with the ticket agent to have this train stop and he was secretly afraid it would not, in which case Nelson would say, 'I never thought no train was going to stop for you.' Under the useless morning moon the tracks looked white and fragile. Both the old man and the child stared ahead as if they were awaiting an apparition (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 106).

 Appropriately, the pair begin their pilgrimage at the beginning of day. The moon, which a few pages earlier
in the story was most capriciously active in illuminating and "dignifying" Mr. Head and his room, is now "useless" and almost devoid of light. In a sense, as the moon wanes, so do Mr. Head's dignity and self-assurance. The gray moon also makes the tracks, on which the Atlanta train will arrive, look similarly "fragile." A few lines later, the Atlanta train announces its arrival with a "deep warning bleat." The train "bleats" like a frightened sheep to warn—or forewarn—the old man and young boy of the trying experiences which they must face in the city. In the passage cited above, the sun also appears as an indicator of forewarning: its harsh red and orange colors and its ascendancy into the sky behind the pair make the sun appear as a present but insensitive witness of the pair's actions. The moon, sun, and sheep-train thus combine to subtly foreshadow the plot's development.

The sun continues its appearance in the story—to mark the passage of time as dawn evolves into full day and to continue as a witness of the pair's trials in Atlanta. Miss O'Connor describes the Atlanta sun as "dull" and "dry"; its red-orange color connotes heat rather than light. This heat becomes stifling to the old man and his grandson and intensifies the small miseries and misfortunes which afflict them as they wander around the unfamiliar streets among uncaring strangers.

Mr. Head's and Nelson's purgatory and mutual alienation end as dusk approaches. They see a statue, an "artificial
"nigger," and in their mutual naive astonishment that such a monument could be, their differences dissolve, and they become completely reconciled. Mr. Head's mental reflections at this point are thus described: "He felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and what man would be like without salvation" (p. 127). The sun in this story has served as red-orange coarse "heat without light."

In these words, Flannery O'Connor seems to offer an explanation for the sun's foreshadowing role in the story. The sun has served as a witness of the old man's and young boy's experiences prior to their "salvation"—or, in terms of the story, their reconciliation.

The re-united pair leave Atlanta by train at dusk and arrive at home "just as the moon, restored to its full splendor, sprang from a cloud and flooded the clearing with light. As they stepped off the train, the sage grass was shivering gently in shades of silver and the clinkers under their feet glittered with a fresh black light. The treetops, fencing the junction like the protecting walls of a garden, were darker than the sky which was hung with gigantic white clouds illuminated like lanterns" (p. 128). Just as the sun and moon images foreshadow the couple's trials at the beginning of the story, so, at the end of the story, the restored moon and its light serve as natural testimonials of the pair's reconciliation. The moon has returned from its exile.
by the hot, coarse sun and now floods the same country
junction with the rejuvenated, protecting light of "sal-
vation."

To complete the natural significance of the story,
the author now describes the train, which had initially
appeared in the plot as a warning, bleating sheep, as
"gliding...past them the couple and disappearing...
like a frightened serpent into the woods...." The train
isa gain depicted as an animal, but this time it does
not warn; rather, it hurries away from the moonlit
junction. The train-serpent, the traditional animal
representative of evil, has been defeated by the pair's
salvation and so must disappear to its own dark refuge.
In general, however, the heat of the sun and the light
of the moon thus serve both as natural foreshadowing
and witness of Mr. Head's and Nelson's estrangement and
reconciliation. The sun as a kind of menacing force and
the moon as a healing force are somewhat unconventional
since these roles are more commonly reversed in literature.
Flannery O'Connor's use of these elements thus has an
originality which makes the story of estrangement-recon-
ciliation more dramatically effective. Therefore, the
sun and moon do prove structurally significant in the
construction of "The Artificial Nigger."

"A Circle in the Fire" capitalizes on the natural
elements of the sky, the woods, and fire. The plot of
this short story, as explained in part above (pages
concerns a widow, Mrs. Cope, who owns a farm but does not appreciate its natural beauties. She considers nature as only a threat, a responsibility which she must bear alone. She believes that the success of the farm depends solely on her efforts; she does not acknowledge the hand of any supreme creator in the working of the farm or in nature. At the end of the story, Mrs. Cope receives her "comeuppance," when several boys, who are malicious, but do realize that "'Cawd owns them woods and her too,'" set fire to her farm.

"A Circle in the Fire" opens with this description: "Sometimes the last line of trees was a solid gray blue wall a little darker than the sky but this afternoon it was almost black and behind it the sky was a livid glaring white" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 130). This description of the setting is an ominous foreshadowing of what is to come. The trees appear blackened, almost as though they have been charred by fire, and the sky itself appears as a white-hot frame of fire behind the woods. General references to impending destruction and specific references to fire and/or the sky as threatening Mrs. Cope's woods and farm continually appear throughout the story. The widow's daughter occasionally taunts her mother, "'It looks like a fire. You better get up and smell around and see if the woods ain't on fire'" (p. 131). Mrs. Pritchard, the wife of Mrs. Cope's hired hand, becomes
irritated with her husband's employer and peevishly contemplates the destruction of the farm: "Mrs. Pritchard folded her arms and gazed down the road as if she could easily enough see all these fine hills flattened to nothing" (p. 134).

The three boys invade her farm and stubbornly refuse to leave. Mrs. Cope becomes increasingly apprehensive about the trio as they make themselves at home on her farm by riding her horses, milking her cows, and camping out in her fields. The boys smoke and carelessly toss their cigarette butts around the property. Miss O'Connor capitalizes on the boys' smoking to incorporate still another foreshadowing of the story's climax. "Garfield spit it the cigarette stub out in an arc just as Mrs. Cope came around the corner of the house... She stopped instantly as if a snake had been slung in her path. 'Ashfield!' she said. 'Please pick that up. I'm afraid of fires!'" (p. 138). The widow's pessimistic brooding about her farm and its potential destruction, particularly by fire, is again revealed by this incident. It is even ironically appropriate that Mrs. Cope mistakenly refers to Garfield as "Ashfield." She also warns the boys about smoking and camping out in her woods. "'In the woods!' she said. 'Oh no! The woods are very dry now, I can't have people smoking in my woods. You'll have to camp out in the field, in this field here next
to the house, where there aren't any trees'" (p. 142). Another of the boys tells Mrs. Cope that Powell, a member of their trio, "'locked his little brother in a box and set it on fire.'" Flannery O'Connor builds up the boys' connection with fire throughout the plot.

While making this association between the boys and fire, the author also continues to pile up many natural references to destruction. She describes a sunset scene in which Mrs. Cope is feeding the ravenous boys some thin sandwiches: "Mrs. Cope picked it up and stood holding it, looking at the sun which was going down in front of them, almost on top of the tree line. It was swollen and flame-colored and hung in a net of ragged cloud as if it might burn through any second and fall into the woods" (p. 142). And a few lines later, the author writes: "The sun burned so fast that it seemed to be trying to set everything in sight on fire." The next morning, however, there is no sight of the boys, and there even seems to be a natural reprieve on hand for the widow. "The fortress line of trees was a hard granite blue, the wind had risen overnight and the sun had come up a pale gold. The season was changing. Even a small change in the weather made Mrs. Cope thankful, but when the seasons changed she seemed almost frightened at her good fortune in escaping whatever it was that pursued her" (p. 150).
The trees which have been threatened by the fiery sun now seem secure as an impenetrable granite fortress, and the paleness of the sun seems to indicate that its threat has diminished.

The natural reprieve is only transitory, however. As mid-day approaches, the sun again becomes a harsh white "glare" set against "black" tree tops. This hot sun beats down on the boys as they swim in the small farm lake. The connection between the boys and the sun is enforced by such references to "the sun glinting on their long wet bodies" and "the sun making two white spots on Powell's glasses and blotting...out his eyes." This connection finally realizes its fullest potential as the boys become the human agents of the sun and set fire to the woods: "The column of smoke...rose and widened...unchecked inside the granite line of trees" (p. 154). The sun finally overcomes the tree fortress and, by implication and association, the widow herself.

The plot structure of "A Circle in the Fire" thus depends very heavily on the many natural references to fire, sun, woods, and sky. These natural references are liberally sprinkled throughout the story to foreshadow and prepare for its climax, the burning of the woods. The images consist of scene descriptions in which the sky-fire-sun threatens the impregnability of the woods and farm. The images of fire and sun are also connected with the three boys and their actions on the farm; this
connection finally becomes a unification as the trio act as human agents—or personal extensions of the fire-sun.

"The River" is a third short story which utilizes natural images to foreshadow its plot development. This tale centers on a four or five year old boy, Harry Ashfield, who lives a lonely, neglected life in a city apartment with his virtually alcoholic parents. Through the interest and concern of his babysitter, Mrs. Connin, Harry is introduced to religion—most significantly, to Christ's great all-encompassing love for his human flock and to the ritual of baptism by immersion in a river to elect a person to membership in Christ's flock. Almost inevitably, the lonely naive child drowns himself in the river to find security and happiness with Christ. But this drowning is the story's climax, and there are many natural references in the structure of the plot which prepare for this climax. The basic images are those of the river and pigs; however, there are also secondary reinforcing images of sheep, the sun, and the country landscape.

The author describes Harry at the beginning of the story in pathetic terms: "he had a long face and bulging chin and half-shut eyes set far apart. He seemed mute and patient, like an old sheep waiting to be let out" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 31). The last sentence in this description of the boy is significant on two
counts: "Waiting to be let out" implies that something will happen to the boy in the future—he will be released from his present situation in some way; the allusion to "sheep" in this passage seems to convey the Biblical association of lambs or sheep of God or followers in Christ's flock, which, indeed, Harry becomes in the story's climax.

Mrs. Connin takes Harry to her farm in the country before the entire Connin family go to the riverbank to hear their evangelist preach and baptize the converted. While at the farm, Mrs. Connin's three mischievous sons let an ugly, gray sour hog loose from its pen in order to chase and frighten Harry. Mrs. Connin rescues the child from the shoat and remarks that the animal resembles Mr. Paradise, a locally notorious skeptic and sinner who attends revivals only to heckle the preacher. The frightened Harry emphatically states: "'I don't want to see him [Mr. Paradise]!" (p. 37). This incident in the plot foreshadows later developments. The structural significance of this incident is that Harry has been chased and frightened by a hog who resembles a Mr. Paradise, and both the hog and the man are described in ugly terms of contagion. The association of pigs with evil is reinforced when Mrs. Connin shows Harry a child's prayer book: "It was full of pictures, one of the carpenter driving a crowd of pigs out of a man. They were real pigs, gray and sour-looking, and Mrs. Connin
said Jesus had driven them all out of this one man" (p. 38). Christ's driving the pigs out of the man symbolizes his purging man of the foulness or evil of the world.

Harry's trip to the river with the Connin family is presented in terms of a strange but pleasant pilgrimage:

They walked on the dirt road for a while and then they crossed a field stippled with purple weeds and entered the shadows of a wood where the ground was covered with thick pine needles. He had never been in the woods before and he walked carefully, looking from side to side as if he were entering a strange country. They moved along a bridle path that twisted down hill through crackling red leaves, and once, catching at a branch to keep himself from slipping, he looked into two frozen green-gold eyes enclosed in the darkness of a tree hole. At the bottom of the hill, the woods opened suddenly onto a pasture dotted here and there with black and white cows and sloping down, tier after tier, to a broad orange stream where the reflection of the sun was set like a diamond (p. 39).

This description also foreshadows the plot climax, for Harry will be entering a new country, in a sense, when he becomes baptized and when he drowns. The details of the surroundings indicate that this new country is a pleasant one. The natural images of the scene appeal both to sight ("purple weeds," "a pasture dotted...with black and white cows," the sunset "like a diamond" in an "orange stream") and touch ("thick pine needles" and "crackling red leaves" covering the ground). Even the green-gold eyes of the animal peering at him from the darkness do not frighten the boy.
When Harry and the Connin family reach the river, they see the evangelist, standing in the water, already preaching. The young man's musical, hypnotic voice calls the people on the banks to confess their sins and seek their salvation in the river. "'If it's this River of Life you want to lay your pain in, then come up,' the preacher said, 'and lay your sorrow here. But don't be thinking this is the last of it because this old red river don't end here. This old red suffering stream goes on, you people, slow to the Kingdom of Christ. This old red river is good to Baptize in, good to lay your faith in, good to lay your pain in..."" (pp. 41-42). The preacher's words foreshadow what will happen to Harry, who interprets the message in its most literal meaning. The evangelist's call hypnotizes the child, and he agrees to be baptized in the water. Harry believes that after the baptism, he "won't go back to the apartment...he'll go under the river."

The boy is very disappointed when he is not taken by the river during the sacramental ritual. Even when he returns to his parents' apartment, he yearns for the elusive happiness of the river that the evangelist promised to the converted. When the boy's mother questions him about his activities with the Connins, "he shut his eye and heard her voice from a long way away, as if he were under the river and she on top of it" (p. 48).
All of these foreshadowing references about the river point to the climax of the short story when Harry truly does succeed in immersing himself permanently in the river. Miss O'Connell, maintaining the same tone of the foreshadowing references to the river and the surrounding countryside, describes the boy's suicide as both a triumph for him and an escape into happiness. "The sky was a clear pale blue...and fringed around the bottom with treetops. His coat floated to the surface and surrounded him like a strange gay lily pad and he stood grinning in the sun. He intended not to fool with preachers any more but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river....He plunged under once and....the waiting current caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him swiftly forward and down" (pp. 51-52). And as the boy escapes into the river, he also escapes from the clutches of Mr. Paradise who, suddenly appearing at the riverbank with the intention of rescuing Harry, pursues the boy "like a great pig." The earlier connections established in the plot between pigs, evil, and Mr. Paradise make this conclusion relevant; they naturally imply that Harry has eluded evil (the pig, the ironically named Mr. Paradise) and has found salvation in the river (the Kingdom of Christ). At any event, Miss O'Connell carefully builds the foreshadowing references of the river and the pig both to prepare for the story's climax
and to explain the significance of this climax. "The River" thus uses natural images to the fullest structural advantage.

In summary, Flannery O'Connor gives nature a physical significance in her short stories and novels. This physical significance is established in many ways. Most basically, Miss O'Connor uses nature to provide the physical geographical setting of her stories which, almost always, is the backwoods country of Georgia and Tennessee. Miss O'Connor also draws heavily from nature in her general diction and imagery. In a surrealistic fashion, natural representatives may be humanized and inanimate objects may be naturally personified. The writer manipulates nature in her character development; natural images may both describe characters' physical appearance and reveal their personality traits. And, most significantly, she uses nature in the plot structure of her work. Some stories rely upon animals or other natural representatives as catalytic plot agents. And other stories use nature to foreshadow the action of the plot and to comment upon the thematic significance of the plot action.
PART III: THE METAPHYSICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF NATURE IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S FICTION

More important than the many and varied physical treatments of nature in her fiction is the metaphysical value which Flannery O'Connor assigns to nature. Essentially, the writer has an anagogical view of creation that allows her to give nature a spiritual interpretation. This interpretation itself is informed by the theological theme of all her work. Her theme is the reality of God's existence in the three persons of the Trinity, the actuality of Christ's personal Redemption of mankind by his death on the cross, and, by further extension, the unavoidable necessity of each man's acceptance of God and of salvation through means of the redemptive grace which Christ's sacrifice made possible. As Flannery O'Connor puts it, "The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is....an attitude toward all of creation, and a way of reading nature....which has... to do with the Divine life and our participation in it."\(^{22}\)

Miss O'Connor gives her theme of the reality of God's existence and its consequences for humanity particularized treatment in various works through the use of different character types, plot situations, and, significantly, natural images and symbols. The theme development itself

usually involves a single individual's acceptance of the divinity as a direct result of a sudden and violent religious vision. The total accomplishment of the conversion is not a simple process, however, because, prior to his vision, the individual has usually wrapped himself in a tightly spun cocoon of egoistic superiority and self-sufficiency. He is oblivious of his sins and shortcomings. If he recognizes the possibility of a God at all, he merely pays lip service to religious dogmas and religious institutions as an unavoidable act of social conformism. The religious vision demands an entire re-evaluation and re-structuring of the individual's behavior and beliefs. These experiences happen to many of the short story heroines.

Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person" are two examples of Miss O'Connor's callous heroines. The Shortley family work as hired hands on Mrs. McIntyre's farm, but Mrs. Shortley does not feel subservient to anyone. She is a completely self-contained, self-sufficient woman. The natural images which the writer uses to describe Mrs. Shortley make her iron character immediately clear: "[Mrs. Shortley's] arms were folded and as she mounted the prominence, she might have been the giant wife of the countryside, come out at some sign of danger to see what the trouble was. She stood on two tremendous legs, with the grand self-confidence of a mountain, and rose, up narrowing bulges
of granite, to two icy blue points of light that pierced forward, surveying everything" (A Good Man Is Hard to Find, p. 197). The mountain analogy reveals Mrs. Shortley as physically large and emotionally hard and cold. Mrs. McIntyre has the same emotional make-up, but, instead of characterizing her extensively in natural images, the writer ironically describes her appearance as "cherub-like." A telling natural paradox is added to this irony when the story recounts that Mrs. McIntyre's late husband, the Judge, bought a granite cherub for his headstone because it reminded him so much of his wife. And in another scene, Mrs. McIntyre's eyes are described as "granite." The image of the hard rock fits the woman's personality.

Their emotional sterility does not allow either Mrs. Shortley or Mrs. McIntyre to feel any real charity for their fellow human beings. This handicap is the basis for one level of the plot which concentrates on the women's calculatingly cruel treatment of the Guizacs, the family of displaced persons who may be representative of the human race in this story. (At one point, Mrs. McIntyre counters Mr. Guizac's protests of family hardship by affirming: "I am not responsible for the world's misery" p. 235.) A corresponding but deeper plot level concentrates on the two women's serious lack of love for Christ. Mr. Guizac himself functions as a Christ figure
in the pair's spiritual testing. The peacock and the sun also serve as Christ symbols in the story to demonstrate the women's spiritual blindness.

The peacock has been used as a symbol of Christ's divinity and the Resurrection since early Christian times: "Le paon, qui est sans contestation, le plus somptueux des oiseaux domestiques de nos climats, offrait un type accompli au symbolisme. Sa chair incorruptible, sa parure reprenant au printemps, permettaient d'en faire une image du Saveur qui avait échappé à la corruption du tombeau et qui remaisait chaque année au printemps dans un éblouissement de splendeur."\(^{23}\)

The peacock is a central figure or "thematic center\(^{24}\) representing Christ in "The Displaced Person." It makes its first appearance in the very first sentence of the story, persists in practically every major scene, and exits only in the last sentence. In a sense, this "omnipresence" seems to signify the unavoidably true reality of Christ and his redemption of mankind. Father Flynn, who frequently visits the farm in an attempt to convert Mrs. McIntyre, recognizes the bird's association with the redemptive divinity. When the cock spreads his tail, the priest becomes transfixed and joyfully cries, "'Christ


\(^{24}\)Sister M. Joselyn, p. 86.
will come like that....the Transfiguration" (p. 239).

Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre, however, do not respond to the peacock. The former hardly recognizes his presence (even though the cock dutifully follows her around the farm in the first scene). And certainly Mrs. Shortley is so spiritually blind that she grants him no significance. Even when the bird spreads his brilliant tail directly in front of her, she ignores him: "She might have been looking at a map of the universe but she didn't notice it any more than she did the spots of sky that cracked the dull green of the tree" (pp. 204-205). Mrs. McIntyre's feelings towards the bird are intolerant and miserly; she sees it as only "another mouth to feed." She keeps the peacock "only out of a superstitious fear of annoying [the Judge] her husband in his grave" (p. 228). She also complains to Father Flynn that the peacock screams in the middle of the night and disturbs her sleep. Sister M. Joselyn comments on this complaint: "Mrs. McIntyre's annoyance at the nocturnal crying of the peacock provides an ironic commentary on her spiritual state, for according to the bestiaries, the night cry of the peacock resembles the call of the Christian in fear of losing grace in the darkness of life."²⁵

"The Displaced Person" emphasizes the peacock's association with the sun which is also a traditional symbol

²⁵Sister M. Joselyn, p. 89.
for the divinity dating back even to pagan times. When asked by student reviewers during her 1960 stay in Winona, Minnesota, why the sun is such a common image in her stories, Miss O'Connor answered: "It's there. It's so obvious. And from time immemorial it's been a god." Each time that the peacock is described, it is in terms of a colorful sun. "The peacock had jumped into the tree and his tail hung in front of her Mrs. Shortley, full of fierce planets with eyes that were ringed in green and set against a sun that was golden in one second's light and salmon-colored in the next" (p. 204). "The cock stopped suddenly and curving his neck backwards, he raised his tail and spread it with a shimmering timbrous noise. Tiers of small pregnant suns floated in a green-gold haze over his head" (pp. 238-239). The suns are described as "pregnant" perhaps because they are meaningful; they bring the meaning of God to the farm inhabitants. "So beautiful," the priest said. "A tail full of suns," and he crept forward on tiptoe and looked down on the bird's back where the polished green and gold design began. The peacock stood still as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all" (p. 202). This passage is evocative of the Biblical description

of Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments from God. Like Moses, the peacock appears to be transfigured by the radiant glory of God, and, like Moses', its transfiguration is a visible testimonial of the divine essence itself. But, as has been stated, the two farm women are impervious to any beauty or significance that the peacock may have.

Aside from its connection with the peacock, the sun functions by itself as a religious symbol in the story. As such, its function is to serve both as a visible extension of God in the sense-bound world of human beings and as a "light" which can so cure human blindness that a person will be made able to "see" God. The sun symbol is principally developed in the first half of the story which concentrates on Mrs. Shortley's religious experiences. As she is blind to the peacock, so Mrs. Shortley is oblivious to the sun. When she stalks the farm, "She ignores...the white afternoon sun which was creeping behind a ragged wall of cloud as if it pretended to be an intruder..." (p. 197). The sun only pretends to be an intruder; this is the one role that has been allotted to it by the self-sufficient Mrs. Shortley. Moreover, it can only pretend to be an intruder when it is actually fulfilling its created purpose as a source of physical—and, by extension, spiritual—light.
The sun takes a very active role in Mrs. Shortley's later "vision." "Suddenly while she watched, the sky folded back in two pieces like the curtain to a stage and a gigantic figure stood facing her. It was the color of the sun in the early afternoon, white-gold. It was of no definite shape but there were fiery wheels with fierce dark eyes in them, spinning rapidly all around it. She was not able to tell if the figure was going forward or backward because its magnificence was so great. She shut her eyes in order to look at it and it turned blood-red and the wheels turned white. A voice, very resonant, said the one word, 'Prophesy!'" (p. 218). Flannery O'Connor assumes great liberty in presenting such an unrealistic scene. However, this scene is dramatically and grotesquely effective; it is also thematically relevant. The fierce sun figure appears, like another transfigured Moses, as a seemingly inescapable representative of God. Mrs. Shortley, however, does escape it; she perverts the vision in a violently horrible prophecy which sees "the children of wicked nations" mutilated and butchered: "'Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand!" (p. 219). The reference of "the children" is to the Guizac family and any other foreign immigrants who, by forcing themselves on America, threaten her economic security. Flannery O'Connor makes it clear that Mrs. Shortley has perverted this experience. The motion of the sun figure could not
be definitely ascertained during the vision; the woman could not tell whether it was moving towards or away from her. After the prophecy, Miss O'Connor states that "pieces of the sun" were being "washed" away in "the opposite direction" from Mrs. Shortley. In other words, she has not heeded this violent call from God.

Mrs. Shortley has a final violent religious experience as she dies. Her death occurs when she and her family, with all their household goods crammed into their car, are leaving the McIntyre farm. The fierce heat of a dark yellow sun swells "slowly and fully into her face as if it were welling up...for a final assault" (p. 222). The assault takes the form of the woman's earlier prophecy. In a death-agonizing frenzy, she involuntarily works at a simulated mutilation of herself and her family: "She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortley's elbow and Sarah Mae's foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself" (pp. 222-223). This second violent experience is more effective than the first. Flannery O'Connor concludes the scene by indicating that the woman's vision has turned in on herself so that she can see (and not remain blind to) her sins. As a result of this new sight, she can "contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her new country" (p. 223). Mrs. Shortley has thus progressed from an insulated state of spiritual blindness at the beginning of the story,
to one violent vision which she heedlessly distorted, to a final self-illuminating salvation. And in each of these experiences, the sun has worked as the symbol of spiritual light or Christ reaching out to humanity. The sun and the peacock are thus both natural representatives and metaphysical symbols which dramatize Flannery O'Connor's theme of the human necessity for acceptance and love of God.

"The Enduring Chill" succeeds as both a devastatingly funny and morally serious short story. Its main character, a pretentious young man named Asbury Fox, has the same spiritual make-up as Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre. The object of Asbury's love and admiration is himself. Affecting a Byronic pose, he feels estranged from a world which does not appreciate his worth. The story opens as Asbury comes home from New York City to die from some undiagnosed but presumably fatal disease. The young man is "entirely accustomed to the thought of death," but he does bemoan the fact that he is going to die on his family's small backwoods farm surrounded by an oversolicitous mother, a sarcastic sister, and a complacently hillbilly doctor. In a sense, Asbury's physically poor condition is indicative of his spiritual affliction.

The theme of "The Enduring Chill" involves Asbury's religious awakening and acceptance, and Miss O'Connor uses several natural figures to develop it. The first
important natural image is the sun. Flannery O'Connor describes the scene as Asbury's train arrives at his home junction: "The sky was a chill gray and a startling white-gold sun, like some strange potentate from the east, was rising beyond the black woods that surrounded Timberboro. It cast a strange light over the single block of one-story brick and wooden shacks. Asbury felt that he was about to witness a majestic transformation, that the flat of roofs might at any moment turn into the mounting turrets of some exotic temple for a god he didn't know" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 82). The description of the sun as a strange potentate and an unknown god identifies it as a God symbol. The fact that the sun is "a god he didn't know" emphasizes Asbury's spiritual ignorance.

When Asbury arrives home and his mother realizes how gaunt and feeble her son is, she blames his condition on his life in the cold and unhealthful city. She remarks to herself, "'If you would get out in the sunshine... you'd be a different person!"' (p. 87). She believes that the sun would restore his physical health. Given that the sun is a God symbol, her remark may also carry a deeper meaning. If Asbury spent time in willing communion with the sun (God), allowed its light (God's grace) to shine on him, his spiritual health would be improved. The sun reappears once more, at the story's climax when Asbury experiences a violent spiritual con-
version. In this last scene, the sun is described as "red-gold...moving ...serenely from under a purple cloud" (p. 114). Red and purple are the liturgical colors associated with Christ's passion and martyrdom. Gold symbolizes Christ's majesty. In the process of his enlightenment, Asbury undergoes a very real passion: "Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror" (p. 114). And the young man's subsequent life will be one of purified religious submission—of a certain Christian majesty, in other words. Thus, the sun symbolism in the last scene is appropriate. It not only testifies to the presence of the divinity, but to the qualities of the divinity which the young man will share by virtue of his conversion.

"The Enduring Chill" also makes good comic use of the cow image. Although the cow does not have a special divine analogue, it is an effective instrument in Asbury's religious conversion. Asbury's mother's farm is a dairy farm, and, as he looks down upon everything associated with the countryside and the farm, Asbury particularly despises the cows. Flannery O'Connor plays upon this revulsion to chop down Asbury's illusions of superiority. Whenever he affects a pose, a cow makes its laughable appearance on the scene. As the young man returns home
from the train station, he feels particularly despondent about being trapped with his mother in the country. "Asbury turned his head abruptly in the opposite direction away from the milk herd, but there a small, walleyed Guernsey was watching him steadily as if she sensed some bond between them. 'Good God!' he cried in an agonized voice, 'can't we go on?!'" (p. 88). The young man cannot escape his ties with the farm, however superior to it he feels. Moreover, as the Guernsey's physical vision is distorted, so is Asbury's spiritual vision; the bond between the pair does exist.

As Asbury's mysterious condition worsens, he spends his time contemplating what a tragedy his death will be. His homespun practical mother, while she is genuinely concerned for her son, cannot appreciate his desire to wallow in his romantic conception of death. While she nurses him, she forces him to listen to "the kind of talk...that was largely about cows with names like Daisy and Bessie Button and their intimate functions—their mastitis and their screwworms and their abortions" (p. 95). Asbury's dreams of a tragic death are hilariously spoiled by his mother's inane ramblings on the lowly cow. In a subsequent similar scene, Asbury envisions his lonely burial. He believes that no one will realize what a solemn occasion his death is, and they will desert his shallowly dug grave as soon as he is laid in it. However, because he has "been a faithful servant" to Art (he made
abortive attempts to write fiction in New York), he believes that Art will resurrect him from his tomb. Asbury thus dreams of his burial and resurrection: "The moon came up and Asbury was aware of a presence bending over him and a gentle warmth on his cold face. He knew that this was Art come to wake him and he sat up and opened his eyes... it was one large white cow, ... violently spotted... softly licking his head as if it were a block of salt. He awoke with a shudder..." (p. 104). The cow perfectly squelches the young man's grand artistic pretensions.

The cow delivers one more climactic blow to Asbury. The outspoken country doctor, whom the man feels is totally ignorant and incapable, correctly diagnoses the "fatal disease" as undulant fever—which he contracted from drinking unpasteurized cow's milk. It is completely curable. As Doctor Block unperturbably drawls: "'Undulant fever ain't so bad, Azzbery....It's the same as Bong's in a cow'"(p. 11). The cow totally devastates Asbury's dreams and aspirations. Its constant presence ties him to the hated farm; it mocks his superiority and conceit; and, finally, it even robs him of a tragic death. Flannery O'Connor's use of the animal is brilliantly funny and meaningful.

The most important and prevalent natural figure in "The Enduring Chill" is a bird. The bird or dove is a traditional symbol for the Holy Spirit, the third person
of the Trinity. The special theological function of the Holy Spirit is to infuse man's soul with God's grace and thus make his salvation possible. This is precisely the function which the bird of Holy Spirit performs for Asbury. Flannery O'Connor introduces the concept and purpose of the Holy Spirit early in the story during a flashback scene in which Asbury meets a Jesuit priest at a theology lecture in New York City. The Jesuit tells the young man that "there is...a real probability of the New Man [of salvation,] assisted, of course...by the Third Person of the Trinity" (p. 86).

The writer introduces the bird figure itself in a later scene which describes Asbury's reluctant return to his home and his family. "Asbury lay for some time staring at the water stains on the gray walls. Descending from the top molding, long icicle shapes had been etched by leaks and, directly over his bed on the ceiling, another leak had made a fierce bird with spread wings. It had an icicle crosswise in its beak and there were smaller icicles depending from its wings and tail. It had been there since his childhood and had always irritated him and frightened him. He had often had the illusion that it was in motion and about to descend mysteriously and set the icicle on his head" (p. 93). In this passage, Flannery O'Connor does not connect the bird with the Holy Spirit. She only poses the fierce icy figure as an ominous threat to the sick man.
Thinking about the intellectual attractiveness of the Jesuit in New York City, Asbury persuades his mother to invite the local country pastor to visit him. As he waits for the priest in his room, Asbury looks up at the ceiling "where the bird with the icicle in its beak seemed poised and waiting too" (p. 104). This second reference to the "waiting" bird gives the reader a definite clue that it must have some plot significance. This clue is expanded when Father Finn arrives. Instead of sympathizing with the young man about his death or exchanging intellectual theories with him, the blustery old priest chastizes Asbury about the ignorant and neglected state of his soul. He warns Asbury several times that God will not send the Holy Ghost to him—that is, provide him with the necessary grace for salvation—because he has not recognized his religious duty to God. "'How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash?' the priest roared. 'The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are—a lazy ignorant conceited youth!' he said, pounding his fist on the little bedside table" (p. 107). Father Finn's long and adamant harangue about Asbury's spiritual neglect and his need for the Holy Ghost clarifies the significance of the fierce "waiting" bird on Asbury's bedroom ceiling. This symbolic bird will be the instrument of his conversion. Even Asbury begins to feel vaguely that it is there "for
some purpose that he could not divine" (p. 108).

When Dr. Block complacently tells Asbury that he has the most undignified but curable undulant fever, he is completely stricken. His superiority, smugness, and conceit are riddled. The shock of this news forces him to face himself as "the lazy ignorant conceited youth" that Father Finn had said he must face before he could receive the Holy Spirit. Asbury's purification climaxes the story: "The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of the new...His breath came short. The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes....A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend" (p. 114).

The connection between the fierce bird and the Holy Spirit is made most explicit. The Holy Spirit symbolized by this bird has been waiting since Asbury's childhood to awaken his soul to God's grace. The despised cow, by flattening Asbury's pretensions, has provided the necessary shock of self-illumination which precedes the Holy Spirit's entrance into Asbury's soul. The red-purple sun, acting as a symbol of Christ, is present to oversee and share in the dramatic conversion. Flannery O'Connor
thus uses three natural representatives to develop her theme of spiritual awakening in "The Enduring Chill." She weaves each of the three into the progression of the plot. Each time that they appear, particularly in the case of the cow and the bird, the natural images acquire more meaning and more relevance until they naturally achieve the writer's intended thematic symbolism. The religious symbolism of the sun and the bird (or, more precisely, the dove) is conventional, even though Miss O'Connor does offer some special originality in her use of them. The cow, however, is the most effectively original image in "The Enduring Chill." Its inclusion in the plot shows Miss O'Connor putting the common features of her countryside to a most creative use. The cow image is also effective because it simultaneously operates on two levels—one blatantly hilarious and one metaphysically serious.

Tree and fire symbolism contribute to the theme of religious awakening in "Parker's Back." C. E. Parker, the hero of this short story, is a young veteran who seems to be in a persistent state of vague dissatisfaction with life. Although he has traveled the world during five years service in the Navy and experimented with women and liquor, he has not found happiness in any of his experiences. His only source of comfort and ego-nourishment is a collection of tattoos which covers his entire body except for his back (where he could not see
them). Ironically enough, these tattoos (mostly of wild animals) lose their ability to appease him and so intensify his distress: "It was as if the panther and the lion and the serpents and the eagles and the hawks had penetrated his skin and lived inside him in a raging warfare" (Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 225). Parker subsequently escapes to the country in search of some kind of peace. Here he meets and marries a plain-looking but fiercely religious woman, Sarah Ruth Cates, who scorns his tattoos and forever threatens him with God's wrathful judgment.

"Parker's Back" opens with a description of Sarah Ruth and her relationship with her husband. This description also includes a remark about the couple's home: "The house they rented sat alone save for a single tall pecan tree on a high embankment overlooking a highway" (p. 219). This is the only sentence which defines the immediate locale. Since the tree is the only feature specified—and it is given an imposing, almost majestic appearance—it assumes some significance. Flannery O'Connor gradually specifies the nature of this significance as she develops the tree image in the plot.

O.E. becomes obsessed with the idea of squelching the righteous Sarah Ruth and forcing her to admit admiration for his tattoos. He believes that the only way to accomplish this feat is to get another tattoo—a tattoo of an irresistible religious subject. He con-
stantly broods about the perfect choice for this religious subject, even while he does field work for an old woman:

He was baling hay with the old woman's sorry baler and her broken down tractor in a large field, cleared save for one enormous old tree standing in the middle of it. The old woman was the kind who would not cut down a large old tree because it was a large old tree. She had pointed it out to Parker as if he didn't have eyes and told him to be careful not to hit it as the machine picked up hay near it. Parker began at the outside of the field and made circles inward toward it... As he circled the field his mind was on a suitable design for his back. The sun, the size of a golf ball, began to switch regularly from in front to behind him, but he had eyes in the back of his head. All at once he saw the tree reaching out to grasp him. A ferocious thud propelled him into the air, and he heard himself yelling in an unbelievably loud voice, 'GLD ABCDE!'

He landed on his back while the tractor crashed upside-down into the tree and burst into flame. The first thing Parker saw were his shoes, quickly being eaten by the fire; one was caught under the tractor, the other was some distance away, burning by itself. He was not in them. He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face. He scrambled backwards, still sitting, his eyes cavernous, and if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it (pp. 232-233).

Just as "the single tall pecan tree" dominates the first scene, so "the one enormous old tree" dominates this scene. By elaborating on the old woman's evident feeling for the tree and her instructions concerning it to O.E., Flannery O'Connor again points out the importance of the tree to her readers. This importance becomes obvious when the tree unexpectedly and violently jerks Parker from his tractor. There is a rational explanation for this unrealistic phenomenon: Parker, distraught and
distracted about his wife and his planned tattoo, absentmindedly mishandles the old tractor and is thrown from it into the tree. Miss O'Connor, however, exercises poetic license and avoids the rational explanation to emphasize her point of religious mystery. This is the moment of 0.E. Parker's spiritual conversion. He has deliberately rejected and ignored God and religion all of his life. The tree symbolizes God forcefully imposing an awareness of himself upon Parker. As she does so frequently in her stories, Flannery O'Connor here demonstrates that such spiritual conversion can only be accomplished through sudden violent means. Parker himself inadvertently recognizes the tree's significance when he screams, "GOD ABOVS!" And several lines later, the author adds that 0.E. would have crossed himself if he had known how to (making the sign of the cross is a traditional act expressing one's belief in the existence of the three persons of God).

Fire combines with the tree image in this scene. Miss O'Connor frequently uses fire as a violent tool in religious conversions. As it is used in "Parker's Back," it symbolizes the hand of God forcefully changing man's life. The burning tree in this scene resembles the Biblical description of the burning bush through which God revealed himself to Moses. In this context, the fire may also serve as God personally warning Parker to accept him. His body could have been destroyed by this same fire, or,
more seriously, his soul may someday be tortured by the eternally tormenting fires of hell. The first thing that Parker does notice after the impact is the fire fiercely consuming his shoes: "He was not in them [the shoes,]" but, it is possible to assume, he could have been. The tree and fire thus combine as violent and dramatic symbols of the Creator reaching out to his wayward son.

Haunted by recurrent visions of the "tree of fire" and his burning shoes, O.E. finally elects to have the face of the Byzantine Christ tattooed on his back. This tattoo makes him "literally Christophos, Christ-bearing, 'witnessing for Jesus.'" 27 Under the influence of this staring Christ, Parker "examines...his soul [which is] ....a spider web of facts" and takes another forward step toward his spiritual conversion: "The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed. He was as certain of it as he had ever been of anything" (p. 241).

Later that same night, Parker drives home to show Sarah Ruth his newest tattoo. He is confident that she will be pleased with it, and consequently he will become redeemed in her eyes. The intractable Sarah Ruth completely crushes his hopes. When he arrives, she refuses to open the door to him. She insists several times that she does not know anyone named "O.E." and demands to know

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who is really there. As Parker ponders the appropriate answer, another vision of "the tree of light" appears before him and inspires him to respond with his full name, Obadiah Elihue, which he had always concealed by using only his initials. Parker's response signifies his acceptance of his identification with the Old Testament prophets Obadiah and Elihue—and, ultimately, God. As he admits this identification, Parker's conversion becomes complete: "All at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts" (p. 243). This natural-metaphysical conceit of the soul indicates that Parker has accepted salvation and will enjoy the "garden" of paradise.

The story's climax indicates that the reward of paradise will not be an immediate one. When Sarah Ruth opens the door to Obadiah Elihue and discovers the Christ tattoo, she becomes enraged at what she feels is the worst sin that her husband has ever committed: "'Idolatry!' Sarah Ruth screamed. 'Idolatry! Enflaming yourself with idols under every green tree. I can put up with lies and vanity but I don't want no idolator in this house!' and she grabbed up the broom and began to thrash him across the shoulders with it" (p. 244). Sarah Ruth's accusation is a complete perversion of the truth. The Christ-bearing Parker is far from being an idolator. And rather than enflaming himself under a green tree,
the symbolically divine tree of fire has enflamed Parker with a true realization of God's own existence.

As a Christ-bearer, Parker suffers his own "passion" and "crucifixion" at Sarah Ruth's hands. She verbally denounces and humiliates her husband. When she beats him across the shoulders with the broom, large welts form on the face of the tattooed Christ. This scene parallels Christ's humiliation and scourging at the hands of the Roman soldiers. Shortly after Sarah Ruth beats Parker from the house, she looks out the window to see what he is doing: "Still gripping [the broom,]...she looked toward the pecan tree and her eyes hardened still more. There he was—who called himself Obadiah Elihue—leaning against the tree, crying like a baby" (p. 244). This final picture of Parker against the tree suggests Christ's crucifixion on the cross of wood (or "tree of life" as it is referred to in Catholic theology). The "baby" reference may also suggest that Parker has ended his old life and begun a new life as a result of his conversion. Thus, the process of Parker's redemption has been a particularly difficult one, for, like the Christ he has accepted, he has suffered his own special metaphoric martyrdom. In essence, his redemption is an uncanny irony.

In "Parker's Back," Flannery O'Connor accomplishes a perfect story of spiritual conversion. In a sense, she writes a modern version of the life of Saint Paul
who, like Parker, lived a life of careless sin and emphatic rejection of Christ until his own dramatic conversion. Christ appeared to Paul, too, in an unusual accident involving a tree (Paul's horse suddenly bolted and left him hanging by his hair from a tree limb when Christ's voice called to him from heaven). And Paul, like Parker, achieved his martyrdom by being scourged and crucified. As a symbol of divinity, Miss O'Connor incorporates the tree into every part of her story. "Parker's Back" opens with the foreshadowing image of the pecan tree. (The tree is probably identified as a pecan simply because pecan trees are most plentiful in the Georgia countryside.) The tree achieves its special significance in a dramatically surrealistic scene in which it is combined with the symbol of divinely purifying fire. The image of the "tree of fire" or "light" frequently appears thereafter in the plot progression as a persistently haunting vision in Parker's mind. The tree is finally woven into the climax as an ironic parallel to the tree upon which Christ was martyred. Miss O'Connor's use of the tree again reveals how well she can capitalize upon the common features of the landscape.

Fire is the dominant image and symbol in Miss O'Connor's second novel, The Violent Bear It Away. The plot of this novel is a fierce war for the soul of young Francis Marion Tarwater waged between his backwoods prophet great-uncle, Mason Tarwater, and his uncle
Rayber, who has discarded God for dependence on rational psychology and modern technology. The principal battle concerns Rayber's mentally retarded son, Bishop, and the great-uncle's admonition to Tarwater to baptize the child. If Tarwater heeds his great-uncle's teachings and baptizes Bishop, he will indicate his acceptance of his own vocation as a prophet of God. If Tarwater accepts his uncle's explanation that Bishop is just a "mistake of nature" and neither he nor any man needs baptism or salvation because there is no God, Tarwater will become an atheist.

The two Tarwaters, at the outset of the book, live together in a completely isolated shack in the backwoods of Powderhead, Tennessee (a name which hints of the forthcoming fires and explosive violence). The old man tells the boy about his own experiences as a prophet. Mason says that the Lord had originally purified him and subsequently corrected him many times over with fire. He tells Tarwater about the trials which "come from the Lord and burn the prophet clean; for he himself had been burned clean and burned clean again. He had learned by fire" (The Violent Bear It Away, p. 5). The old man instructs Tarwater that he will also be a prophet and he must carry on the great-uncle's work after he dies. Tarwater's first mission will be to baptize Bishop and thus save him from the evil influence of the unbelieving Rayber. The old man has even warned Rayber that "the
prophet I raise up out of this boy] will burn your eyes clean" (p. 76). These references to fire indicate that is is used in the novel as a symbolic extension of God purifying man and preparing him for a vocation as a prophet. Likewise, the prophet, as a representative of God, is able to purify or "burn clean" the souls of other men.

When Mason dies, Tarwater becomes acutely disappointed that God does not personally appear to him in some burning bush and explain his vocation. He begins to doubt both God and his great-uncle, and he easily falls under the influence of the voice of an invisible "stranger" or "friend" who is a fairly obvious representation of the devil. The stranger persuades the boy that the devil does not really exist and that the old man's apostolic charge was therefore needless and ridiculous. To purge himself of his great-uncle and his teachings, the boy sets fire to the shack in which he thinks Mason's corpse is still lying.

It is fitting that the boy denies his uncle and his apostolate in this manner. His fire is a complete ironic perversion of the previously developed divine symbol; it becomes the devil's instrument of physical and spiritual rejection and destruction. Later, when Tarwater is approaching the city where Rayber lives, he is convinced that the glow from the city lights is the fire he has left behind him. In a sense, he is right, for he will
continue to live for some time in a metaphoric fire of perversion and corruption. Frederick J. Hoffman believes that Flannery O'Connor's use of fire as both God-inspired and Satan-inspired is conflicting and makes the image "especially ambiguous."28 But to have Satan pervertedly use the fire (through Tarwater) seems to be a masterful stroke of irony on Miss O'Connor's part. She could not have expressed their diametrically opposed purposes in a more perfect way.

When Tarwater subsequently moves in with his uncle, Rayber sets out to destroy completely Mason's influence on the boy. He wants the boy to be his own saviour, to be free of the superstitions of God and the Gospèl. Yet Rayber himself has not completely freed himself from his childhood belief in God and his great-uncle. When he surreptitiously follows Tarwater to a revivelist meeting and overhears the sermonizing chant of Lucette, a child prophet, he loses his carefully maintained rationalistic equilibrium for a short but painful interval. Lucette echoes the fierce words of Mason Tarwater: "'I've seen the Lord in a tree of fire! The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean....Are you deaf to the Lord's word? The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean, burns man and child, man and child...

the same, you people! Be saved in the Lord's fire or perish in your own!" (pp. 134-135). Lucette's impassioned speech is also built on the image of God's purifying fire, the same fire which the great-uncle said had burned him clean and made him a prophet of the Lord.

After this jolting experience, Rayber renews his determination to "cure" Tarwater. "The words the old man had scrawled on the back of the [psychology] journal rose before him: THE PROPHET I RAISE UP OUT OF THIS BOY WILL BURN YOUR EYES CLEAN. The sentence was like a challenge renewed" (p. 147). The rationalist grimly accepts this challenge, but the warning continues to haunt him. And Tarwater finally thwarts Rayber's careful plans for him with his own plans for avoiding his call to prophecy. He mocks his uncle: "'You can't just say NO... You got to do NO.'" Tarwater's plan of "doing NO" is to drown Bishop, thereby avoiding the given mission to baptize him. But in the very act of drowning the child, Tarwater inadvertently pronounces the words of baptism. This violent act of murder signals the beginning of the boy's capitulation to his vocation.

After the drowning, Tarwater returns to the Powderhead clearing; he is somewhat confused about the meaning of the baptism but still tries to convince himself that the drowning has proved that he has overcome his great-uncle: "'I'm going back there [Powderhead]. I ain't going to leave it again. I'm in full charge there. No
voice will be uplifted. I shouldn't never have left it except I had to prove I wasn't no prophet and I've proved it....I proved it by drowning him. Even if I did baptize him that was only an accident. Now all I have to do is mind my own bidnis until I die. I don't have to baptize or prophesy" (p. 210). Tarwater feels that he is returning "tried in the fire of his refusal, with all the old man's fancies burnt out of him..." (p. 220). The fire image in this remark is another ironic perversion of the symbol of God's purifying fire.

Tarwater's soul finally does become purged when he is raped by a stranger (another representation of the devil) who gives him a ride to Powderhead. When the drug the stranger gave him wears off and the boy realizes what has happened to him, he sets a match to his clothes and the bushes and shrubs around him: "The fire was eating greedily at the evil ground, burning every spot the stranger could have touched" (p. 232). Tarwater cleanses himself of the "evil" that has befallen him and is now ready to accept his vocation.

The voice of the stranger-devil comes to him one last time when he arrives at the clearing. The voice congratulates the boy on his assumed victory over his great-uncle and promises to stay with him in the clearing forever. Tarwater fiercely shakes himself free of this tempting voice, lights a "burning brand," and sets fire to the woods around the clearing: "He walked backwards...
pushing the torch into all the bushes he was moving away from, until he had made a rising wall of fire between him and the grinning presence. He glared through the flames and his spirits rose as he saw that his adversary would soon be consumed in a roaring blaze" (p. 238). Tarwater finally divorces the devil and all his evil influences (as Rayber may have been). The destructiveness of the flames emphasizes that the temporary pact between the boy and the devil has been irrevocably wiped out. Satan has been thrown back behind his own "wall of fire" in hell.

The boy feels a red-gold tree from this fire advance to touch him. His "breath went out to meet it. He knew that this was the fire that had encircled Daniel, that had raised Elijah from the earth, that had spoken to Moses and would in the instant speak to him" (p. 242). The fire commands Tarwater to accept his apostolate and preach God's terrible swift mercy to his children. The novel concludes as Tarwater goes back to the "dark city where the children of God lay sleeping." The Biblical fire of the prophets has purified and elected Tarwater and given him his own special mission.

Thus, the fire imagery and symbolism give The Violent Bear It Away a clearly defined circular structure. The book ends where it began—with a discussion of God's purifying fire burning clean the eyes of his chosen
prophets. As a symbol of the inescapable God or a perverted symbol of Satan, fire dominates the entire plot of the novel. Flannery O'Connor capitalizes on the Biblical associations of fire, but also invents her own grotesque and violent descriptions of it. Fire plays a large part in the speech idiom, character portrayal, scene description, and plot action of the novel. Such extensive and artistic manipulation of the element definitely etches Miss O'Connor's theme of the unavoidable necessity of accepting God and his offered vocations on the minds of her readers.

"The Displaced Person," "The Enduring Chill," "Parker's Back," and The Violent Bear It Away are four of Flannery O'Connor's most successful theological works. They are successful, in large part, because of the way in which the writer dramatizes a spiritually significant theme in grotesque plots and characters. Miss O'Connor also achieves a special effectiveness by using various natural representatives as metaphysical images and symbols in her theme development. Some of these representatives, such as fire and the peacock, have a traditional theological association and an inherent dramatic appeal. The writer purposely manipulates other figures like the cow in an original and startling way.

Although this paper has been limited to a discussion of three short stories and one novel, it must be noted that Miss O'Connor capitalizes on natural images and
symbols to develop her theme in all of her fiction. The bull is a symbol of Christ and the instrument of Mrs. May's conversion in "Greenleaf." "A Circle of Fire" climaxes with the recreation of an actual circle of fire, symbol of Divine Eternal Love, to thrust salvation upon its blindly self-sufficient heroine, Mrs. Cope. Pigs and hogs are given similar religious significance in "Revelation." A red muddy river becomes the River of Salvation leading to Christ for young Harry Ashfield in "The River." Miss O'Connor's first novel, Wise Blood, organically works images of rocks, stones, and boulders into the entire plot. By the end of the novel, the reader recognizes that these various rocks symbolize the Rock, Peter's Church, which Hazel Motes finally, penitently, accepts his salvation in.

In conclusion, Flannery O'Connor's most vital use of nature in her fiction is as religious image and symbol in the development of her theme of God's existence and man's salvation. Critics have chastized Miss O'Connor for depending exclusively on this one theme in all of her fiction and for unrealistically distorting the rational psychology of human behavior and the natural laws of the universe (for example, the tree reaching out

29 Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, p. 173.
30 Stanley Edgar Hyman, p. 12.
to grab O. E. in "Parker's Pack"). This criticism does not seem justified if the writer's own intentions concerning her fiction are examined.

Flannery O'Connor considered herself, above all, a "theological writer" and purposely restricted her stories to their religious theme. From various essays she wrote and lectures she gave, it becomes clear that she was concerned about the spiritually atrophied state that the modern materialistic world has fallen into. She considered it her responsibility, as a Christian fiction writer, to shout out the existence of God and the necessity for individual salvation to an unconcerned civilization. In a very real sense, the spiritually blinded characters of her fiction represent all of humanity.

This sense of Christian responsibility led her to restrict her theme as she did: she felt that such an important message is worthy of repetition, needs repetition to fully penetrate readers' minds. Likewise, her grotesque distortion of human behavior and natural laws has the same logical rationale behind it; she distorts to achieve emphasis, to shock and wake up sluggish readers to the spiritual verities. She feels that such distortion has literary justification, and she is not at all concerned about writing a realistic story or novel. She once said that it was her intention
to write as Nathaniel Hawthorne did—romantic tales
which took similar liberties with the accepted or most
plausible norms and events of human life. In one essay,
she explained:

The writer has no rights at all except those he forges for himself inside his own
work. We have become so flooded with sorry
fiction based on unearned liberties, or on the notion that fiction must represent the
typical, that in the public mind the deeper kinds of realism are less and less under-
standable.
The writer who writes within what may be called the modern romantic tradition may not be writing novels which in all respects par-
take of a novelistic orthodoxy; but as long as these works have vitality, as long as they present something that is alive, however eccentric its life may seem to the general reader, then they have to be dealt with; and they have to be dealt with on their own terms.31

J. Cates Smith has remarked on her writing technique:

"Not meant to be realistic or naturalistic, her fiction
should be read as a series of parables. Like the meta-
physical poets...she yokes together sacred and secular
images by violence; it is the artistic arrangement of
these images, in themselves grotesque, that leads to the
construction of a vision that is not grotesque but harshly
and defiantly spiritual."32

Flannery O'Connor plainly stated the intended rationale

and methodology of her fiction. She performed within the limits of this rationale and methodology. And, as this study hopefully has shown, she has done so in an artistic manner that is sometimes original, but nearly always effective. Her successful conformance to her own literary ideals is, in the final analysis, the only justifiable measure for criticism.
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