This dissertation has been microfilmed exactly as received 68–8828

GREGORY, Donald Lee, 1938–
AN INTERNAL ANALYSIS OF THE FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR,

The Ohio State University, Ph.D., 1967
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
AN INTERNAL ANALYSIS OF THE FICTION OF
FLANNERY O'CONNOR

DISSERTATION
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
Donald Lee Gregory, B.A., M.A.

* * * * * *

The Ohio State University
1967

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
Department of English
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My greatest debt is to Professor Gordon K. Grigsby, who provided for many months a finely balanced combination of generous encouragement and incisive criticism— and who has provided for many years an ideal. I would also like to thank Dr. Alden E. Stilson, Jr. and the late I.O. MacCrimmon for a diversion when work bogged down. Finally, I would like to thank my wife: she endured.

D.L.G.
VITA

January 20, 1938........................ Born - Newark, Ohio

1960................................. B.A., Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania

1960-1962......................... Graduate Assistant, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1962................................. M.A., The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1963-1965......................... Teaching Assistant, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1966-1967......................... Teaching Associate, Department of English, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: American Literature


Studies in the American Renaissance. Professor Claude Simpson.

Studies in Twentieth Century Literature. Professor Claude Simpson.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. WISE BLOOD</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In a perceptive study of Flannery O'Connor's first novel, Wise Blood, Jonathan Baumbach observed that her fiction has been "overpraised and overdamned, without . . . being properly understood." Although the critical damming of O'Connor on the basis of the violence and grotesquerie in her works has virtually ceased, the praise continues, at times justifiably, but, unfortunately, often rather blindly. Certainly O'Connor deserves very high praise indeed for her craftsmanship—her use of startlingly vivid imagery, her selection of finely descriptive details, and her evocation of the accents of common speech and hillbilly dialect. Similarly, her devastatingly acute satiric sense has produced a gallery of portraits of vacuous old ladies, phoney salesmen of all sorts (including bogus preachers), and intense young intellectuals which are authentic masterpieces.

The bulk of the criticism and commentary on O'Connor's work, however, has been centered on content rather than form, specifically the Catholic point of view which O'Connor herself consistently claims as the basis of her fiction:

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.2

Given this assertion of her Catholic view of the world, critics have, I think, been too hasty—and, at times, too un-critical—in celebrating
O'Connor as Catholic writer *par excellence*. Indeed, there has developed from the pages of such journals as *Renaissance*, Catholic World, Xavier University Studies, Commonweal, Christian Century, and Thought a sort of standardized party line which praises O'Connor again and again for the pervasiveness—and the excellence—of her religious point of view. This party line has been generally accepted without serious question by non-Catholic (or even non-Christian) critics as well and has been enunciated most clearly and consistently in a volume entitled *The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor*, published in 1966 by Fordham University, and in a special memorial issue of *Esprit*, a journal published by the University of Scranton. The praise in the pages of both works is exaggerated; O'Connor is called "the most important writer America has produced since World War II" and "the most gifted writer of the mid-century"; she is bracketed with such names as Flaubert and James as well as Faulkner and Hemingway.6

O'Connor's own view of her writing was quite clear, in terms of both her object and her means:

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling pictures.7

While this statement is in some ways quite clear and straightforward, it nevertheless poses some serious problems for the reader of O'Connor's
work. My own first reaction to O'Connor's comments of this sort was to invoke D.H. Lawrence's warning concerning a writer's observations about his own work, for it seemed to me from my initial reading of O'Connor's stories and novels that although some of them were explicitly religious in both content and theme, many were not; indeed, some seemed anti-religious. Thus I began to reread the fiction, assuming that in describing its "Catholicity" O'Connor had overstated her case, and believing that this overstatement had in turn been taken too seriously by over-zealous Catholic critics who were delighted to find an author who claimed to be one of their own. I was thus in turn delighted to find an ally in John Hawkes, who, like myself, was caught up by the power of O'Connor's work and, like myself, was either unwilling or unable to accept the pervasiveness of the Catholic view which she claimed. Indeed, in an article entitled "Flannery O'Connor's Devil," Hawkes asserted his belief that "the creative process threatens the Holy throughout Flannery O'Connor's fiction" and that "throughout this fiction [this] creative process transforms the writer's objective Catholic knowledge of the devil into an authorial attitude in itself in some measure diabolical." In short, Hawkes believed as I did that at times O'Connor's fiction succeeded in spite of her faith rather than because of it.

As I continued to read the fiction itself, however, I became increasingly aware that O'Connor's statements concerning her religious point of view and her works were to be taken quite seriously, and that the theory of Mr. Hawkes which I had so eagerly embraced was inadequate; whether the stories are explicitly religious or not, they reflect O'Connor's own Catholic view with great consistency. But in discovering
this consistency, I also discovered another problem—a very serious problem which was either overlooked or ignored in the many critical essays on O'Connor. As I have suggested, most of these essays praise O'Connor for the Catholic doctrine that controls her fiction; but it is never suggested that such a doctrine may be a limitation of her art rather than an "added dimension." Nor is it ever suggested that to write fiction is one thing, and to attempt "to get [one's] vision across to [a] hostile audience" might well be something else indeed, preaching, for example, or religious propaganda. Thus I arrived at what seems to me to be the central problem in reading the fiction of Flannery O'Connor—the problem of determining as precisely as possible the degree to which her fiction does succeed, not only as an expression of a particular religious point of view, but as convincing and enduring literature. The following internal analysis of the stories and novels—beginning with the fiction itself, apart from O'Connor's comments about it—is an attempt to make this determination.
Footnotes—General Introduction


6 Melvin J. Friedman, Introduction to The Added Dimension, p. 31.


9 Ibid., 401.
CHAPTER I

Wise Blood

Introduction

Wise Blood is undoubtedly the strangest, the most violent, and the most grotesque of O'Connor's works. It is filled with characters who seem mad, obsessed, or idiotic. Its action includes two murders, one shocking in its complete brutality, the other grotesque in both its location and its victim. And the setting for most of the action is a nightmarish city in which objects, animals, and human beings seem virtually indistinguishable from each other.

But in addition to being violent and grotesque, Wise Blood is also terribly comic in many ways. In her brief note to the second edition, O'Connor calls it "a comic novel about a Christian malgré lui," referring, I think, to Hazel Motes' final redemption and thus evoking the Christian tradition of The Divine Comedy. As we shall discover, O'Connor also sees the novel as comic because, to a very large extent, most of its characters are caught in a deterministic world, and, as she once observed, "predictable, predetermined actions have a comic interest for me." But even more convincingly, Wise Blood is also comic in the more common sense of the term. Certainly the pathos of Enoch Emery and the obsessive integrity of Hazel Motes are to be recognized and taken seriously; indeed, in her note O'Connor writes that the book is "very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must
be about matters of life and death." But we should also recognize
that, for all of this underlying seriousness, these characters are
also at times quite funny: Enoch enacts a daily ritual of insulting
the zoo animals—"Look at that ape . . . . If I had an ass like that
I'd sit on it!"; Haze, in his glare-blue suit and white preacher's hat,
descends from the nose of his rat-colored Essex to plan the seduction
of Sabbath Hawks, who comes to him with "a bunch of dandelions in her
hair and a wide red mouth on her pale face." And in this combination
of the serious and the comic Wise Blood looks forward to much of
O'Connor's later work, although her theological bias is not always so
pronounced. The novel also foreshadows much of O'Connor's later fiction
in its pervasive irony, which, although not particularly subtle, is
dramatically and, at times, satirically effective. Thus, in Wise Blood
Hazel Notes rejects Christianity and establishes his Church Without
Christ but in doing so becomes almost a Christ-figure whose life ends
in a sort of grotesque martyrdom; "Christian" preachers are fakes, more
interested in financial profit than the salvation of men's souls; a
preacher's daughter named Sabbath exults in being "pure filthy right down
to the guts"; and Enoch Emery, virtually an idiot, celebrates the power
and vision of his "wise blood." The reason for O'Connor's constant use
of irony is similarly rather unsubtle. As she so vividly illustrates
in her imagery, the world is out of joint; human beings are utterly
isolated--spiritually, physically, and psychologically--and in their
blindness and self-centeredness they frequently become "grotesque" in
Sherwood Anderson's sense of the term.

In his own obsessive flight from Christ and sin, however, Hazel
Notes becomes much more destructive than any of Anderson's characters.
Caught up in his own narrow vision, he refuses to give the friendship
and sympathy which Enoch Emery needs and pleads for so pathetically; he murders Solace Layfield with incredible deliberation and brutality; and he finally turns to self-mutilation and virtual suicide, defining by his extreme actions O'Connor's own view of the anguish and possible destructiveness of an individual who is estranged and isolated, not only from mankind, but from God. This is a view which is crucial in O'Connor's later fiction, particularly in such short stories as "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "The River," "The Artificial Nigger," "The Displaced Person," "Good Country People," "The Lame Shall Enter First," and "The Enduring Chill" as well as in her second novel, The Violent Bear It Away, just as Haze Motes' gaunt appearance, his obsession with sin and redemption, his living (if on his own terms) of the "examined life," and his destructiveness also appear in varying combinations in such characters as The Misfit, Boyd Powell, Bevel Summers, and (ironically) in Tom T. Shiftlet and Manley Pointer.

_Wise Blood_ also exhibits some of the complications of point of view which appear in many of O'Connor's later works primarily because of her Catholic bias which often leads her to suggest that a character deeply concerned with religious and metaphysical problems is, no matter what he does, somehow automatically superior to characters who are complacent and unquestioning in their beliefs, which are often rather bland varieties of "the power of positive thinking." Thus, on one hand, O'Connor seems to admire Haze Motes greatly, as she indicates clearly in her introductory note, referring to him as "a Christian _malgré lui_" and praising him for his great integrity. Given this view, Haze is a sort of avenging angel and Redeemer to Solace Layfield when he runs him down and hears his confession. Further, Haze himself seems to be
redeemed when he recognizes his sins, undergoes extreme penance, and
dies peacefully, in the process transforming Mrs. Flood from a greedy
old vulture into a compassionate human being.

But O'Connor's view is also anomalous, as she clearly indicates
by her somewhat heavy-handed choice of names for her hero: certainly
his obsession causes him to see the world through a distorting "haze"
of disbelief; and this same obsession places him perilously close to
the sin of hypocrisy, illustrated by Christ in terms of a "mote" in a
man's eye (see comments below on themes and imagery based on sight).
As we shall discover, throughout the book O'Connor also presents
virtually all of her characters—including Haze—in imagery which
suggests strongly that they are inescapably trapped in their roles,
indeed, that they resemble animals in this entrapment. Finally, the
title of the novel, while obvious and ironic in terms of Enoch Emery,
is even more significant for Haze, who is a "Christian malgré lui"
precisely because of his blood. He is admirable to O'Connor, as she
indicates in her introduction, because he is unable to rid himself of
the figure of Christ, the figure handed down to him, if against his
will, by his grandfather and his mother. In O'Connor's view, Haze has
"wise blood" as Enoch Emery never does; his tragedy is that he can
never surrender completely to it.

If O'Connor's view of Haze is anomalous, however, it is still
also a bit too narrowly defined by her religious bias, primarily
because, in her involvement with her mixed attitudes concerning his
praiseworthy integrity and his spiritual confusion, she seems to lose
sight of the objective reality of Haze as a lunatic, a murderer, and a
virtual suicide. Within the context of the novel, Hazel Motes is
tremendously moving in his terrible isolation and his obsessive integrity, but the context itself must be recognized as narrow. To doubt or to disbelieve, even with great intensity, is not necessarily to become insane or to commit murder and suicide. And when O'Connor seems to be setting up exactly these alternatives to the acceptance of Christ and redemption, she is, if understandably so, falsifying reality. And it is this same narrow view which undercuts the effectiveness of many of her short stories as well as her novel, The Violent Bear It Away.

_Wise Blood_ may be seen, in short, not only as a separate novel important in its own right, but as a revealing precursor of much of O'Connor's later work, with both its strengths and weaknesses.

1

Certainly Hazel Motes is one of the most completely isolated characters in fiction. He is first seen sitting "at a forward angle" on a train seat as he begins his quest for some sort of defense against this total isolation in his life; he has no friends, no family, and no home. Indeed, he is a sort of backwoods Ahab, attempting to find meaning in a chaotic world which mocks him or, worse, does not recognize his existence; and, like Ahab, he becomes completely obsessed with his quest, pursuing it to the point of madness and, finally, virtual self-destruction. His new religion—his new faith "in nothing"—is, as Stanley Edgar Hyman has suggested, "a private monastic order" which can provide only martyrdom. But Haze's actions, grotesque and violent as they are, are not, as critics have suggested, without adequate motivation; and Haze himself is not merely a caricature in a parable. Indeed, throughout the novel O'Connor provides a rather elaborate basis for virtually every feature of Haze's obsession.
Haze's quest is, of course, his search for a religious belief outside his family's Christianity by which he can give a center of meaning to his life—a life of utter isolation which has created in him the "feeling that everything he saw was a broken-off piece of some giant blank thing that he had forgotten had happened to him."* And it is within the context of this spiritual and psychological isolation that we first see Haze on his way to Taulkinham, a city he has never seen before—a city to which he is going with only the vaguest sense of purpose: "Going to Taulkinham . . . . Don't know nobody there, but I'm going to do some things. I'm going to do some things I have never done before" (11). As he rides, Haze's sense of isolation is reflected in his restlessness; he gazes out the window "as if he might want to jump out of it" (9) and glances up and down the length of the coach at other passengers almost as if both seeking and avoiding any kind of recognition. This vacillation is characteristic of Haze early in the novel. Although he is dimly aware that he is going to do something in the city, he has not really defined his quest, and he is wandering about in his isolation just as he runs back and forth on a railroad platform when, characteristically, he misses the train as it leaves a junction stop (20). Similarly, after arriving in Taulkinham, "He walked the length of the station and then he walked back . . . No one observing him would have known that he had no place to go. He walked up and

down the crowded waiting room two or three times, but he did not sit on the benches there. He wanted a private place to go to" (20).

Although he is "not much over twenty," Haze has been demobilized, both physically, by his discharge from the army, and spiritually, by his return to his home town, Eastrod, only to find it deserted and in ruins. Indeed, the reader gets this important background information in a grotesque dream which Haze has while attempting to sleep in an upper berth to which he has hurried to escape his vision of loneliness—"[to] lie there and look out the window and watch how the country went by a train at night" (14). In his dream, which includes visions of the deaths of his grandfather, his two brothers, his father and his mother, and, finally, the loss of his home, Haze remembers how, when he left the army, "all he wanted to do was to get back to Eastrod, Tennessee" (18). But when he does return to Eastrod (which, Mr. Hyman suggests, might be read as "the rood in the east" 4) and finds only a "skeleton" of his family house, he can only make one angry and frustrated attempt to assert his ownership and a link with his past by tying a scrawled sign to the single remaining piece of his mother's furniture: "'THIS SHIFFER-ROBE BELONGS TO HAZEL MOTES. DO NOT STEAL IT OR YOU WILL BE HUNTED DOWN AND KILLED,'" he writes, in a foreshadowing of his later reaction to Solace Layfield, who, in a sense, also attempts to steal his identity. Another, less violent, reaction to his loss of home is his attempt to force the Negro porter to share that loss. After asserting four times that he (Haze) is, indeed, from Eastrod, Haze accuses the porter of being one of the "Parrum niggers" of the same town. The porter ignores him, and Haze begins to talk to Mrs. Hitchcock again, repeating once more that he is going to Taulkinham
but that he isn't from that city. Then, in a desperate attempt to ignore what is so obviously his loss, he remarks, "'You might as well go to one place as another'" (11). But Haze cannot forget his own pain, and once more he tries to inflict it upon the porter by telling him with gratuitous cruelty: "'Your father was a nigger named Cash Parrum. You can't go back there, nor anybody else, not if they wanted to . . . . Cash is dead. He got cholera from a pig'" (14). Haze is, in short, homeless, rootless, and aware of his isolation, and it is within this context that we can see perhaps most clearly his later attachment for his "rat-colored Essex," which he equips with a pillow, a blanket, a sterno stove, and a coffee pot. At one point, Haze boasts to a mechanic, "'This is a good car. I knew when first I saw it that it was the car for me, and since I've had it, I've had a place to be that I can always get away in'" (65; italics mine). Haze's new substitute home is one that allows him both refuge and escape.

In Haze's dream, we also see the bases for both his claustrophobia (which actually causes the dream which, in turn, defines it) and for the spiritual isolation from his family which preceded his physical displacement. The predominant image in the dream is that of the coffins in which the members of Haze's family were buried. First, "In his half sleep he thought where he was lying was like a coffin. The first coffin he had seen with someone in it was his grandfather's" (15). And Haze, intimidated by his grandfather's power as a circuit preacher, could not accept the old man's death and, one suspects, his own release from that evangelical grasp: "Haze had watched from a distance thinking: he ain't going to let them shut it on him; when the time comes his elbow is going to shoot into the crack" (15). He then dreams of his brothers'
deaths and of reopening one of their coffins: "... because he
thought, what if he had been in it and they had shut it on him" (15).

His vision of his father's burial is more grotesque (and comic):

He saw him humped over on his hands and knees
in his coffin, being carried that way to the grave-
yard. "If I keep my can in the air," he heard the
old man say, "nobody can shut nothing on me," but
when they got his box to the hole, they let it
drop down with a thud and his father flattened
out like everybody else. (15)

But if O'Connor and the reader can appreciate the comic elements of
this dream, for Haze these are the deaths not only of his family but
of his whole existence in Eastrod:

The train jolted and stirred him half awake again
and he thought, there must have been twenty-five
people in Eastrod then, three Motes. Now there
were no more Motes, no more Ashfields, no more
Ehasengames, Feys, Jacksons... or Parrums--
even niggers wouldn't have it. (15)

In his dream Haze also relives two crucial periods in his life
and is reminded of a third. Seeing his grandfather's coffin, he
remembers his mixed fear and hatred of the "waspish old man who had
ridden over three counties with Jesus hidden in his head like a
stinger" (15). When Haze was very young the old man used him as an
exemplum for his black, terrifying sermons, reinforcing in Haze an
image in which his mother believed fanatically—the image of a soul
pursued by Christ:

Did they [his audience] know that even for that
boy there, for that mean, sinful, unthinking
boy standing there with his dirty hands clenching
and unclenching at his sides, Jesus would die ten
million deaths before He would let him lose his
soul? ... The boy had been redeemed and Jesus
wasn't going to leave him ever. Jesus would never
let him forget he was redeemed. ... Jesus would
have him in the end. (16)
As a result of these sermons and his mother's fanaticism Haze knew by the age of twelve that he would become a preacher, but he had also begun to search for a way of avoiding the redemption which was so prominent in his family's religion. Both his grandfather and his mother had made Jesus such a terrible figure of divine pursuit that Haze decided that "the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin" (16), and that to accomplish this escape he would have to remain forever in Eastrod, "with his two eyes open, and his hands always handling the familiar thing, his feet on the known track, and his tongue not too loose" (16). But when the army took him away from Eastrod, Haze could not sustain his sinlessness, even with the help of his black Bible and his mother's spectacles, which, symbolically, he took with him although, again symbolically, they hurt his eyes. Isolated from his physical and spiritual home, a home in which he was daily reminded of his sin and concomitant redemption, Haze failed in his attempt to live without sin. One night his Eastrod litany failed him as he attempted to recite it to fellow soldiers who had invited him to accompany them to a brothel:

He took his mother's glasses out of his pocket and put them on. Then he told them he wouldn't go with them for a million dollars and a feather bed to lie on; he said he was from Eastrod, Tennessee, and that he was not going to have his soul damned by the government or any foreign place they . . . but his voice cracked and he didn't finish. (17)

The soldiers told Haze that he had no soul, and their taunts brought him to a realization of how strongly he really wanted to escape his religious heritage:

He took a long time to believe them because he wanted to believe them. All he wanted was to believe them and get rid of it [his soul] once
and for all, and he saw the opportunity here to get rid of it without corruption, to be converted to nothing instead of to evil. (17)

But if Haze hoped he could, and did, escape from his soul, and thus his family tradition of Christian redemption, the very dream in which he relives this "escape" refutes his hope. The climactic vision of his dream, the vision which awakens him screaming "I'm sick! . . . I can't be closed up in this thing!" (19) is that of his mother, and the image in which she appears defines Haze's failure to escape the guilt and fear which she had created in him:

He saw her in his sleep, terrible, like a huge bat, dart from the closing [coffin], fly out of there, but it was falling dark on top of her, closing down all the time. From inside he saw it closing, coming closer closer down and cutting off the light and the room. (19)

Haze's mother, rather than his grandfather, emerges as the most terrifying figure in his dream because he associates her with his earliest and most traumatic rejection of his religious heritage. Haze's whole association of darkness, coffins, guilt, and sex are based upon his experience at a carnival when he was ten years old, an experience which he remembers, significantly enough, as he goes to bed in the dark with Mrs. Leora Watts:

... a lowered place where something white was lying, squirming a little, in a box lined with black cloth. For a second he thought it was a skinned animal and then he saw it was a woman. She was fat and she had a face like an ordinary woman except there was a mole on the corner of her lip, that moved when she grinned, and one on her side. (38)

And the next time Haze sees his mother, his guilt, his disillusionment in hearing his father chuckling at the nude woman, and his fear of his mother with her stern, unyielding emphasis on sin and redemption—all of these coalesce into a grotesque vision which superimposes his image
of his mother (who frightens him) upon that of the carnival nude (who attracts him). As Irving Malin has observed, "Sex and Jesus are associated; he is trapped by both."\textsuperscript{5}

He saw the lowered place and the casket again and a thin woman in the casket who was too long for it. Her head stuck up at one end and her knees were raised to make her fit. She had a crossed-shaped face and hair pulled close to her head.

(39; italics mine)

O'Connor reinforces this double image when, without any shift in scene, she writes: "She left the washpot and came toward him with a stick. She said, 'What you seen?"' (39). In Haze's mind, "she" is both women, his mother and the sideshow nude, and it is this personification of his guilt and fear who strikes him across the legs with a stick and says, "'Jesus died to redeem you!'" (39), to which Haze replies in his first blasphemy, "'I never ast him!'" (39). But his own reply shocks Haze so profoundly that his guilt over seeing the sideshow is obliterated by a new "nameless unplaced guilt that was in him" (39), and it is this new guilt of blasphemy that leads Haze to his first act of penance, walking in shoes (which were worn only in winter or to revival meetings) filled with small stones. He cannot deny the lessons learned from his grandfather; indeed, he wants a sign from God that He does exist, either to redeem Haze or to damn him: "He thought, that ought to satisfy Him. Nothing happened. If a stone had fallen he would have taken it as a sign" (39). Haze wears the shoes as he walks another half mile, but still he receives no "sign." And, although his later decision to be "converted to nothing" is at least eight years in the future, it is prefigured here, in Haze's quiet removal of his shoes. Similarly, just as his failure to receive a sign from God isolates him from his family
and its religious tradition, his justification of his conversion—
"The misery he had was a longing for home. It had nothing to do with
Jesus" (18)—only emphasizes the disaster of his later return to
Eastrod, where his isolation becomes complete.

Ironically, although as he rides toward Taulkinham Haze is not
yet committed to his organization of the Church Without Christ, he
already looks like a preacher with "a stiff broad-brimmed hat on his
lap, a hat that an elderly preacher would wear" (9). And when he arrives
in the city and, having seen it written on a men’s room wall, gives
the address of Mrs. Leora Watts to a taxi driver, the cabbie refuses to
believe that Haze is not a preacher: "'You look like a preacher... That hat looks like a preacher's hat... It ain't only the hat... It's the look on your face somewheres!'" (21). Haze denies the accusation
repeatedly, but the cabbie insists, offering the sort of rationalized
brand of easy Christianity that O'Connor satirizes throughout the novel:

"It ain't anybody perfect on this green earth of
God's, preachers nor nobody else. And you can
tell people better how terrible sin is if you
know from your own personal experience." (21)

When Haze continues to refuse the label of preacher and assert his
belief in nothing, the cabbie becomes angry, declares that "'That's
the trouble with you preachers... You've all got too good to believe
in anything,'" and drives off "with a look of disgust and righteousness"
(22). But his words have had their effect, and, as Haze approaches
"the friendliest bed in town," he feels the necessity of declaring that
he is "'no goddam preacher'" (23). Mrs. Watts' reply only reinforces
Haze's old obsession with sin and guilt when she says, "'That's all
right, son... Momma don't mind if you ain't a preacher!'" (23;
italics mine). Jonathan Baumbach has commented upon the irony of
Haze's relationship with Mrs. Watts: "In a city in which human communication is limited to expedience, deception, murder, and violation, the prostitute's bed is the friendliest in town; it is at any event the most honest." And Haze's subconscious realization of the mother/re redemption association with his prostitute might also give an added ironic dimension to his later assertion to Asa Hawks: "'I don't need Jesus, ... What do I need with Jesus? I got Leora Watts'" (34).

However, if by the time he enters Leora Watts' bedroom Haze is still denying his role as preacher, already he has twice begun to sermonize, first to Mrs. Molly Bee Hitchcock, another of O'Connor's parodies of bland, complacent Christians. Without any immediate provocation, Haze challenges Mrs. Hitchcock: "'I reckon you think you been redeemed'" (12). When he repeats his challenge, the good lady, who has to this point already distinguished herself with such profundities as "there's no place like home" and "well, time flies," replies, blushing, that "yes, life was an inspiration and that she was hungry" (12). Haze's second sermonette is in reaction to a woman who is blowing cigarette smoke in his face: "'If you've been redeemed, .. I wouldn't want to be. .. Do you think I believe in Jesus? .. . Well I wouldn't even if He existed. Even if He was on this train'" (13). The woman's reaction is to ignore Haze, and this reaction is a grim foreshadowing of the reception which Haze will receive consistently in Taulkinham.

When Haze arrives in Taulkinham he is, as I have suggested, utterly lost—without family, home, or religion. A family he can do without; his own had never meant much to him in terms of human warmth, and so he can reject whatever companionship is offered to him by either
Enoch Emery or Sabbath Hawks. His home—his sense of place—is important to him, but he solves this problem when he purchases his rat-colored Essex. Haze's deepest need is, of course, for a religious belief which will fill the void left by his conversion to nothing. And virtually all his actions in Taulkinham are directed toward filling that need.

The first time we see Haze wandering about the city, he looks as if he is searching for something, "His neck thrust forward as if he were trying to smell something that was always being drawn away" (24). And, almost immediately, his isolation is underlined by the potato peeler salesman whose question, "Well, you've got a dear old mother, ain't you?" (25) opens all of Haze's old psychological wounds. At this opportune moment (a bit too opportune, one is tempted to suggest), Asa Hawks and his daughter appear, the former begging and the latter distributing tracts. These Hawkses are the first false prophets (the second and third if we think of the potato peeler salesman and his suggestion that Haze needs a peeler "just to keep him company") whom Haze meets, and their names are not accidental. Both Asa (an "ace" of a confidence man?) and Sabbath are predators; he wants money—"'Wouldn't you rather have me beg than preach? Come on and give a nickel if you won't repent!'"—and she wants sexual satisfaction. And, in rather obvious juxtaposition to the salesman of potato peelers, Asa is also moving about the city hawking cheap wares. But Haze is taken—by all three. He buys a peeler to give to Sabbath so he can, he hopes, be redeemed by Asa. As usual, Haze cannot act without a sort of spastic vacillation, mirroring his old attraction/rejection toward redemption. He first refuses a peeler and tears up one of Sabbath's
tracts, but then he stands "jerking his hands in and out of his pockets as if he were trying to move forward and backward at the same time" (27), buys a peeler, and hurries in pursuit of the Hawkses. In this frantic chase, Haze, possessed by the new prospect of redemption, is almost killed as he crosses a street against the light ("'I didn't see it", he says to the policeman), but when he catches up with Hawks he denies following him and asserts instead that he was following Sabbath because she had given him "the fast eye."

Throughout this section, indeed, throughout the entire book, one of the most crucial themes is that of sight and blindness, both physical and spiritual: on the train to Taulkinham it was Haze's eyes, "almost like passages leading somewhere," that fascinated Mrs. Hitchcock; Haze's traumatic experience with his mother centered on her question "What you seen?" and he took her glasses to the army with him; he had wanted to remain in Eastrod "with his two eyes open"; and, again, while following Hawks he is almost killed when he doesn't see a traffic light. The implications of this attention to sight and seeing are made explicit by Hawks himself when he taunts Haze for his denial of sin and his refusal to distribute tracts:

"I'll take them up there and throw them over into the bushes!" Haze shouted. "You be watching and see can you see."

"I can see more than you!" the blind man yelled, laughing. "You got eyes and see not, ears and hear not, but you'll have to see some time." (33)

As Lewis A. Lawson has noted, Hawks is echoing the words of Christ:8 "Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?" (Mark, viii, 18), and the theme of defective spiritual sight is based upon Christ's declaration that "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind"
The lines from Mark, of course, define almost exactly Haze’s later actions, and it is both ironic and appropriate that the allusion to the Bible should be shouted by Hawks—ironic because his own blindness is a fraud, and appropriate because his spiritual vision is also distorted. And Hawks is not merely greedy; he is also vicious in his treatment of Haze. He is perceptive enough to see that Haze needs him and cruel enough to mock that need and to toy with Haze sadistically, almost like another Chillingworth with his new Dimmesdale:

"I come a long way," Haze said, "since I would believe anything. I come halfway around the world."

"You ain't come so far that you could keep from following me," the blind man said. He reached out suddenly and his hands covered Haze's face. "Some preacher has left his mark on you," the blind man said with a kind of a snicker. "Did you follow for me to take it off or give you another one?" (32; italics mine)

"Jesus loves you," the blind man said in a flat mocking voice, "Jesus loves you, Jesus loves you..." (33; italics mine)

"Hawks, Hawks, my name is Asa Hawks when you try to follow me again!... Repent!" he shouted and laughed and ran forward a little way pretending he was going to come after Haze and grab him. (35; italics mine)

Hawks is even more brutal when Haze, almost pathetic in his unconfessed desire for redemption, comes to his apartment expecting a "secret welcome" since he has begun to preach in the streets. Instead of welcoming him, Hawks first taunts him: "'You can't let me alone, can you?'" (62) and then when Haze asks him what kind of preacher he is "'not to see if you can save my soul?'" Hawks slams the door in his face. After Haze leaves, Hawks refers to him as a "'Goddam Jesus-hog'" and then, reacting to Sabbath's coaxing and his own nervousness, he decides, laughing bitterly, to help her seduce Haze—also realizing that
such a seduction would free him of both his daughter and her suitor. In short, Hawks is, as Sabbath says, "'just a crook. He ain't even a big crook, just a little one'" (92). But in his mockery of Haze, Hawks is more than just a little crook, and his extreme reaction to Haze's need for salvation is undoubtedly based upon his own failure to blind himself, a failure which, in its flight from an image of Christ, parallels Haze's own conversion to nothing: "He fancied Jesus, Who had expelled him, was standing there too beckoning to him; and he had fled out of the tent into the alley and disappeared" (65). Thus it is perhaps a recognition of a similarity between his own experience and Haze's that leads Hawks to react almost with relief when Haze discovers that he is not really blind: "'Now you can leave me alone'" (89). The false seer cannot bear the gaze of the true.

Certainly the longest section of sustained comedy in *Wise Blood* is O'Connor's presentation of Haze and Sabbath planning to seduce each other. Their motives and plans are exactly opposite: Haze wants to use seduction for the purpose of religious searching, either to seduce Sabbath and then be saved by her father or to seduce her as part of his own rejection of the concept of sin "since he practiced what was called it" (63). Sabbath, however, wants to use religion for the purpose of seduction; she knows that Haze is drawn to her father as a preacher, and she enlists Hawks' aid in her campaign.

The first words Haze hears from Sabbath are "'Jesus calls you,'" and, as Sabbath and her father move on, Haze purchases the peeler and follows. But Sabbath's reaction to Haze is, at first, a parody of the blushing maiden's responses to any suitor. She refuses the peeler (and then accepts it, at the threat of violence from her greedy father) and
later asserts that what Haze had called the "fast eye" was really "a looker indignation." But, attracted, she has already begun her campaign by telling him a gruesome story of lovers murdering a child and, by implication, rationalizing her own plainness: "'She [the murderess] didn't have nothing but good looks, ... That ain't enough. No siree. ... It ain't enough!'" (32).

After their first encounter, both Haze and Sabbath begin to prepare their campaigns in earnest. Haze's actions in Taulkinham are usually unsubtle and direct, but in following Sabbath and her father, he becomes devious for the first time, following them discreetly in his car. And Sabbath successfully coaxes her father to help her by promising Haze redemption with a smile (64) and by showing him his newspaper clipping. Both of the unlikely lovers succeed in their initial foray. Haze is so impressed by the clipping that he takes it, although he does so proclaiming that "'Nobody with a good car needs to be justified,'" and Sabbath receives a love note: "'BABE, I NEVER SAW ANYBODY THAT LOOKED AS GOOD AS YOU BEFORE IS WHY I CAME HERE.'"

When Sabbath appears suddenly in Haze's car the next day, she is at her physical best, with a "bunch of dandelions in her hair and a wide red mouth on her pale face." But she mentions that she is a bastard, and her romantic dreams are blasted rather quickly by Haze's reaction of shock and disbelief: "'A bastard?' he murmured. He couldn't see how a preacher who had blinded himself for Jesus could be the father of a bastard" (66). And, while Sabbath prattles on, Haze tries to cope with her information, almost driving into the ditch and, in various forms, repeating his question six more times. He then tries to learn more about Hawks' life before he became a preacher, but, still
shocked, returns to his original question and finally decides that
"There wouldn't be any sense to the word, bastard, in the Church
Without Christ" (69). As it usually does, his Church Without Christ
allows him at least a temporary respite from his problem, and he lets
it drop. During the discussion, however, O'Connor has introduced
another of the city's false prophets, this time in the person of the
newspaper columnist, transparently named "Mary Brittle," who has
answered Sabbath's plea for advice with the trite clichés of "a
state of mind which values temporizing as the chief virtue":

"... I think your real problem is one of
adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you
ought to re-examine your religious values to
see if they meet your needs in Life. A religious
experience can be a beautiful addition to living
if you put it in the right perspective and don't
let it warp you. Read some books on Ethical
Culture." (67)

Except for his perplexity over the religious problems raised
by bastardy, Haze is hilariously disinterested in seducing Sabbath.
When he first sees her in his car, he forgets his earlier decision to
seduce her and has to remind himself in mid-sentence: "'I don't have
time for foolishness. ... Yeah sure ... glad to see you'"; but "his
sense of pleasure in the car and in the afternoon was gone" (66).
Besides, in his naivete and, one suspects, his unadmitted guilt, he
decides that "considering her innocence," seducing Sabbath "was too hard
a job to be done in the afternoon" (68). Had he been listening to her
at all, of course, he would have heard her asking him to go with her to
sit under a tree "'where we could get better acquainted'" or praising
the beauty of her feet or even promising, "'I can save you. ... I got
a church in my heart where Jesus is King'"--Sabbath will try any
approach she thinks might be successful. But when she tries to play
with Haze by moving her face close to his and saying "I see you!" (69), 
Haze does hear her—as well as her father ("I can see more than you!") 
and his mother ("What you seen?") and he's off and running for the 
refuge of his Essex, which refuses to start. After getting gasoline and 
a push from a one-armed mechanic, Haze drives off, boasting: "It 
[the car] ain't been built by a bunch of foreigners or niggers or 
one-arm men. . . . It was built by people with their eyes open that 
knew where they were at!" (71; italics mine). Sabbath Lily is still 
trying: "'It's a grand auto. . . . It goes as smooth as honey."

Sabbath finally succeeds in seducing Haze when she appeals to 
him, if unknowingly, in terms of his own decision to have a woman, 
"not for the sake of the pleasure in her, but to prove that he didn't 
believe in sin since he practiced what was called it." Abandoned by her 
father, she propositions Haze bluntly, appealing to this desire to sin: 

"... I said to myself, ... That innocent look 
don't hide a thing, he's just pure filthy down to 
the guts like me. The only difference is I like 
being that way, and I can teach you to like it. 
Don't you want to learn to like it?" (92)

And when Haze agrees to this new education, Sabbath reacts in a 
veritable symphony of incongruity, from a melodramatic, perhaps even 
Biblical "'Make haste!" while knocking his back with her knee, to a 
joyously bawdy "'Take off your hat, king of the beasts,'" while snatch-
ing off his preacher's hat and throwing it across the room. 

After her first night with Haze, however, Sabbath is really 
rather pathetic in her attempts to assert her link with him by the 
only phrases she knows—the tired clichés of popular romance. When 
Enoch Emery stops at the apartment, Sabbath refers to Haze as "my man" 
and remarks further that "'He couldn't leave off following me. . . . 
Sometimes it's that away with them!" (99). But her pathos is mixed
with mad grotesquerie when she unwraps the mummy, cradles it in her arms, and, in a parody of the Madonna and Child, approaches Haze with this dried offspring of their marriage of sin and evangelism and says, "'Call me Momma now'" (102). And when Haze shatters the "new jesus" and throws it into an alley, Sabbath becomes both a crying child ("'You've broken him! . . . and he was mine!'") and a perceptive observer of Haze's dilemma within his Church Without Christ: "'I seen you wouldn't never have no fun or let anybody else because you don't want nothing but Jesus'" (102). After this outburst, there is little possibility of Sabbath's enjoying her "king of the beasts" further, and when Haze blinds himself, the girl who had liked him for his eyes disappears.

In comparison to the frequent attempts at cunning (whether religious or sexual) of Asa and Sabbath Hawks, Onnie Jay Holy's attempt to capitalize on Haze's religious obsession is, at least at first, merely a rather obvious if amusing opportunity for O'Connor to indulge in further satire of another of the false prophets of the city. From his Tennessee-foppish clothes and the "honest look that fitted his face like a set of false teeth" (81), the reader immediately recognizes the commercial evangelist who is—and here O'Connor is satirizing the people as well as the preacher—much more effective in drawing and holding a crowd than Haze is. Holy's brand of liberal Protestantism—his "vision"—is exactly the sort of comfortable view that complacent, sentimental, self-satisfied "Christians" like to share (and which good Catholics like O'Connor necessarily detest):

"Every person that comes onto this earth," he said, stretching out his arms, "is born sweet and full of love. A little child loves ever'body, friends, and
its nature is sweetness—until something happens. Something happens, friends, I don't need to tell people like you that can think for themselves."

. . . He said it in a sad nasal voice but he was smiling all the time so that they could tell he had been through what he was talking about and had come out on top. (83)

As Holy continues on and on, promising the listening people some vague, undefined help if they join Haze's church, Haze himself rejects this false view: "This man is not true"; but O'Connor reinforces her satiric point: "The man ignored this and so did the people" (84; italics mine). As Holy preaches on, promising "no jokers in the deck, . . . You can sit at home and interpit your own Bible however you feel in your hearts it ought to be interpited, . . . " work as a contrapuntal statement of a darker but perhaps more vital view which no one wants to accept. And O'Connor's juxtaposition of Holy's flim-flam and Haze's anguish provides one of the most moving exchanges in the novel:

"

. . . I want ever' one of you people to join the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ. It'll cost you each a dollar but what is a dollar? A few dimes! Not too much to unlock that little rose of sweetness inside you!"

"Listen" Haze shouted. "It don't cost you any money to know the truth! You can't know it for money!" (85)

"You ain't true," says Haze to Onnie Joy Holy, "real preacher" and radio star of a program that gives "real religious experiences to the whole family . . . Soulease, a quarter hour of Mood, Melody, and Mentality." And Haze demands three times that Holy leave him; the true, if confused prophet will have nothing to do with "keep[ing] it sweet" or "a little promotion." In Holy's reaction to Haze's categorical rejection of all his commercialized schemes of a religious confidence game, O'Connor satirizes two more common reactions to men who are not
involved in "getting and spending": "That's the trouble with you interleekchuls, . . . you never have anything to show for what you're saying. . . . I'm going to run you out of business!" (88).

When Onnie Jay Holy (alias Hoover Shoats) returns with Solace Layfield and his own rat-colored Essex, his action does have an immediate effect. No one has ever before stopped Haze from preaching; he has continued in the face of heckling, abuse, and apathy, but when he sees his double on the nose of a car which duplicates his own, Haze is "so struck with how gaunt and thin he looked in the illusion that he stop[s] preaching" (91). Haze's immediate reaction—"If you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you!"—is predictable. Although he is physically weak, even frail, Haze is nonetheless consistently portrayed by O'Connor as a man capable of real violence when his religious quest or his personal sense of identity is threatened. But the spectacle of his own double is so shocking to Haze that, at first, he is moved beyond violence; when he returns to his room only to learn that Sabbath has moved into it, he is so stunned that "He didn't look as if he were going to hit anything; he looked as if he were going to sit there until he died" (92). And by the next morning Haze's physical decline has begun:

Earlier that morning, when he had waked up for the first time, he had felt as if he were about to be caught by a complete consumption in his chest; it had seemed to be growing hollow all night and yawning underneath him, and he kept hearing his coughs as if they came from a distance. After a while he had been sucked down into a strengthless sleep, but he had waked up with this plan, and with the energy to carry it out right away. (101)

Haze's "plan" is to leave Taulekinham in his Essex, to drive to another city, to find another woman to sleep with, and to begin preaching
the Church Without Christ again "with nothing on his mind." But something is on his mind. And although his conscious reason for leaving the city is that he must find a congregation that will not be taken in by Hoover Shoats and Solace Layfield, he is also fleeing from a much older vision—"People gathered around his [Haze's grandfather's] Ford because he dared them to. He would climb up on the nose of it an preach from there . . . " (16). Jonathan Baumbach suggests that Asa Hawks is Haze's spiritual father, 10 but I think such a view is an oversimplification. One of the definitions of Haze's isolation is that in his most public acts of religious commitment he is imitative: he climbs to the nose of his Essex just as his grandfather climbed to the nose of his Ford; he blinds himself with quicklime just as Hawks failed to do earlier; and even his consumption, which duplicates that of Layfield, would seem to have a psychosomatic basis. And, just as Haze's grandfather hated him because the grandfather's "face was repeated almost exactly in the child's and seemed to mock him" (16), Haze hates his own double because of both the mockery and the sight of himself as preacher in his grandfather's image. In this objectification of his own preaching in the form of Layfield, Haze sees that he has not really escaped from his grandfather, that he is the spiritual descendant of the old man—and that he must continue to flee the redemption which his grandfather preached. It is this sudden reappearance of all of his old fear and guilt which drives Haze back to his army duffel bag and his mother's glasses for the first time in years:

He put them on and the wall that he was facing moved up closer and wavered. There was a small white-framed mirror hung on the back of the door, and he made his way to it and looked at himself. His blurred face was dark with excitement and the lines in it were deep and crooked. The little silver-rimmed glasses gave him a
look of deflected sharpness, as if they were hiding some dishonest plan that would show in his naked eyes. His fingers began to snap nervously and he forgot what he had been going to do. He saw his mother's face in his, looking at the face in the mirror. (101; italics mine)

All of the elements of Haze's old traumas are here: the walls moving in like the sides and the tops of all the coffins of his family; the whole constellation of associations with seeing and being seen; the aimlessness and his accusing mother. For the first time since beginning to preach, Haze forgets his mission. And when, at this point, Sabbath enters calling herself "Mommy," Haze is finally moved beyond the point of control—his fears and frustrations vent themselves against the mummy, the grotesque child of his association with Sabbath (whose name is about as subtle as Faith's in "Young Goodman Brown"), and, after throwing the shattered mummy into the alley, Haze, once again aware of his guilt, re-assumes the position of the ten year old boy with stones in his shoes waiting for God's judgment: "The rain blew in his face and he jumped back and stood, with a cautious look, as if he were bracing himself for a blow" (102; italics mine). But, again, nothing happens; the blow does not come. And, as he tried and failed to sustain his Eastrod litany while he was in the army, Haze tries, and fails, to sustain his creed of the Church Without Christ:

"I've seen the only truth there is!" he shouted.
"Where were you going to run off to?" [Sabbath asks]
"To some other city," he said in a loud hoarse voice, "to preach the truth, The Church Without Christ! And I got a car to get there in, I got . . . " but he was stopped by a cough—it sounded like a little yell for help at the bottom of a canyon—but the color and the expression drained out of his face until it was as straight and blank as the rain falling down behind him. (103)
Haze sees that his flight from his grandfather and from redemption is failing. He will still wreak his righteous revenge on Layfield, but this murder will be his last act before he attempts to flee the city only to find that "once he had gone a few miles, he had the sense that he was not gaining ground. . . . He had known all along that there was no more country [i.e., no more rural Eastrod] but he didn't know that there was not another city" (112). Paradoxically, the act of murder itself becomes almost a religious ritual. After demanding that Layfield strip himself of what amount to the vestments of his calling, the preacher's hat and the glare-blue suit, Haze kills him by running him down with the Essex, the physical manifestation of his own flight and refuge. Haze's charge to the dying Layfield is his usual accusation against false prophets:

"You ain't true. . . . What do you get up on top of a car and say you don't believe in what you believe in for? That's what I asked you. . . . You ain't true. . . . Two things I can't stand, . . . --a man that ain't true and one that mocks what is. You shouldn't ever have tampered with me if you didn't want what you got." (110)

But Haze is still searching for what is true, and, as usual, when it approaches anything associated specifically with Christ, his search is a reluctant one. When the dying Layfield tries to speak, Haze tells him "'You shut up,' leaning his head closer to hear the confession" (111; italics mine). After confessing his sins against his family, Layfield murmurs, "'Jesus hep me,'" and dies when Haze gives him "a hard slap on the back."

Certainly the most crucial problem of Wise Blood is whether or not Haze is redeemed at the end of the novel. He does, as various critics have suggested, move from a state of discontent to one of
relative peacefulness. And there is, I think, some validity in

Baumbach's view that

... Haze moves from guilt to mortification to
redemption. As Haze is Solace's unwitting redeemer
(his punishes Solace and hears his confession) Solace's
confession makes possible Haze's redemption. Having
killed his alter ego and redeemed him into innocence,
Haze is prepared to start a new life, though its
direction is still unclear to him.\textsuperscript{11}

However, the direction of Haze's life is clear to him, at least to
the extent that he is finally convinced, as he tells Mrs. Flood, that
he is "not clean," and that he must punish himself "to pay" for what he
now sees as his sins of "fornication, blasphemy, murder, and, by
implication, suicide."\textsuperscript{12} But I think that we must also recognize that
this "redemption" is in Haze's own commitment "to pay," and not in a
search for "reconciliation with God"\textsuperscript{13} or in blinding himself to
"manifest his new faith in supernatural grace and salvation."\textsuperscript{14} The
vision which Haze sees when he looks at the wreckage of his Essex is
not a vision of God:

His face seemed to reflect the entire surface across
the clearing and beyond, the entire distance that
extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that
went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees
bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the
embankment with his feet hanging over. (113)

And when the policeman asks him if he had been going anywhere, Haze,
with the weight of his new awareness, answers simply, "'no.' ... His
face didn't change and he didn't turn it toward the policeman. It
seemed concentrated on space" (114). Haze sees only blankness--the
"no place" about which he had preached. His escape from guilt and
redemption has failed; but the emptiness which lies behind that flight
has not been filled by a vision of God. In short, even with his escape
gone, Haze does not fall back upon the Christian belief of his mother and grandfather. He can now accept his guilt, but he cannot and, with awful integrity, will not, accept Jesus as his Redeemer. Indeed, he rejects Jesus specifically in one of his last conversations with Mrs. Flood:

"I'm as good, Mr. Notes," she said, "not believing in Jesus as many a one that does."
"You're better," he said leaning forward suddenly. "If you believed in Jesus you wouldn't be so good." (170)

Haze's response is, in effect, his final rejection of the basic assumptions of Christianity which he has consistently attacked—that Man is guilty of Original Sin and that he must be redeemed by Jesus lest he be condemned in the Last Judgment to everlasting torment. As we shall see in his sermons, Haze's whole purpose in the Church Without Christ is to deny the need for redemption by denying the existence of Original Sin. Mrs. Flood is "better" than those who believe in Jesus because, in Haze's view, in denying Jesus, she has also denied her sinfulness.

Haze himself clings to his own rejection of Jesus to his death; thus, his last words are not, like those of Layfield, a plea to Christ for salvation, but a statement of dogged insistence on his own quest for redemption for his own sins through his own suffering: "'I want to go where I'm going!' (126).

Having explored the psychological basis and the development of Haze's paradoxical search for and flight from redemption, we ought to
examine the sermons which he preaches in the name of the Church Without Christ in order to clarify more fully the expression of his new doctrine which is to offer some sort of escape from the "hound of heaven" which seems to pursue him so frighteningly. Predictably enough, in his first, extemporaneous sermon, Haze simply rejects Christ as Redeemer and promises non-believers that they may be "clean" in their refusal to believe:

"I want to tell you people something. Maybe you think you're not clean because you don't believe. Well, you are clean, let me tell you that. Every one of you people are clean and let me tell you why if you think it's because of Jesus Christ Crucified you're wrong. I don't say he wasn't crucified but I say it wasn't for you." (34)

Haze cannot yet fully reject the existence of Jesus, but he can reject Him as Redeemer and believe that he can still be "clean."

The next time Haze appears, he is a full-fledged minister for the Church Without Christ, complete with Essex pulpit and more fully developed argument:

"I'm member and preacher to the church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and the dead stays that way. Ask me about that church and I'll tell you that it's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption. . . . I'm going to preach that there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar." (60)

The message is essentially the same—the denial of Original sin—and, again, if Haze could really believe it, it would free him from all his guilt: from the earliest days with his grandfather, from his experience at the carnival, from his conversion to nothing in the army, from his fornication and blasphemy in Taulkinham. In short, as Haze himself says, he can thus save himself: "'That's what I already done, . . . Without the repenting!'" (64).
Haze's third sermon offers one of his most forceful attacks against Christianity in his assertion that belief in redemption offers no peace or respite from sin, implicitly because the concept of redemption is based on one's awareness of sin and guilt—precisely the sort of guilt which Haze has been attempting to destroy since first experiencing it as a boy:

"If you had been redeemed, . . . you would care about redemption but you don't. Look inside yourself and see if you hadn't rather it wasn't if it was. There's no peace for the redeemed, . . . and I preach peace, I preach the Church Without Christ, the church peaceful and satisfied!" (78; italics mine)

In Haze's view, a belief in Christ produces either this guilt and therefore the need for redemption or merely apathy and lip-service—a meaningless belief:

"If Jesus redeemed you, what difference would it make to you? You wouldn't do nothing about it. Your faces wouldn't move, neither this way nor that, and if it was three crosses there and Him hung on the middle one, that one wouldn't mean no more to you or me than the other two." (78)

Realizing, however, that even his Church Without Christ will be more attractive to people with an object for worship, Haze calls for a "new Jesus":

"It needs one that's all man, without blood to waste, and it needs one that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him. . . . Give me such a new Jesus and you'll see how far the Church Without Christ can Go! . . . Show me where this new Jesus is, . . . and I'll set him up in the Church Without Christ and then you'll see the truth. Then you'll know once and for all that you haven't been redeemed. Give me this new Jesus, somebody, so we'll all be saved by the sight of him!" (78-79)

Thus, Haze once more denies the reality of sin and redemption, this time by calling, in effect, for a redeemer from redemption, a figure of worship without sacred meaning.
In O'Connor's view, if Haze is almost heroic in his role of "Christian malgré lui," he is also mistaken in his rejection of Christ, and to illustrate her point she introduces one of the few Biblical allusions of the novel:

"Look at me!" Hazel Motes cried, with a tare in his throat, "and you look at a peaceful man! Peaceful because my blood has set me free." (79)

Commenting upon this passage, Lewis A. Lawson has suggested that, "as Miss O'Connor well knew, in the parable of the tares (Matthew, xiii, 39), Christ defines the tares as 'the children of the wicked one.'"15

In short, O'Connor's description of his action underlines her view that he is mistaken in his disbelief (just as Haze's last name, in a similar Biblical allusion echoes the imagery in Christ's clarification of his warning: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" [Matthew vii, 1-5] and undercuts his new Church Without Christ). Further, Haze's statement that he is "peaceful" because his blood has set him free is overwhelmingly ironic when we remember that it is precisely his blood (from his mother and grandfather) that condemns him to his obsession. This sermon also works quite well in both its satiric comments upon Christians who are not changed by their beliefs and in its seemingly precise instructions to the listening Enoch Emery, who takes Haze literally, from his rhetorical call ("'Give me a new Jesus!'") to his description of his new savior ("... without blood to waste, ... that don't look like any other man ... '").

Paradoxically, given O'Connor's view of his mistaken belief, it is Haze's bleakest sermon that is his most impressive and most convincing evocation of his loneliness and isolation:

"I preach that there are all kinds of truth, your truth and my truth and somebody else's but behind
them all there's only one truth and that is that
there's no truth. . . . No truth behind all truths
is what I and this church preach! Where you come
from is gone, and where you thought you were going to
never was, and where you are is no place unless you can
get away from it. Where is there a place for you to
be? No place. . . . In yourself right now is all the
place you've got. If there was any Fall, look there,
if there was any Redemption, look there, and if you
expect any Judgment, look there, because they all three
will have to be in your time and in your body and where
in your time and your body can they be? . . . Show me
where because I don't see the place." (90)

Here Haze is certainly projecting (a word which O'Connor would
fulminate against) his own utter alienation upon mankind in general.
And, again, the sermon works effectively in terms of his obsession.
In suggesting that this sermon (and Wise Blood in general) is O'Connor's
"satire . . . [and] bitter parody on atheistic Existentialism,"16
Brainard Cheney is seeing it from the wrong side, i.e. from O'Connor's
overall point of view rather than from within the novel itself. For
the sermon is entirely consistent with Haze's sense of isolation and
of his commitment to spread the "truth" of the "nothing" to which he
has been converted. If O'Connor meant the passage to be read as a
parody—a bit of satiric commentary—she included no evidence to
support such a reading, probably because she realized that in so doing
she would run the considerable risk of destroying the consistency of
her presentation of Haze. One suspects that her omission of this
satiric "pointing" might well be at least one example of what John
Hawkes has called " . . . the creative process threaten[ing] the
Holy throughout Flannery O'Connor's fiction."17

Haze is, as the pervasive imagery of sight and seeing suggests,
a seer. If he cannot bring himself to see Christ as his redeemer, he
can at least search for redemption, even on his own terms, with much
more integrity than anyone else in the book. Thus, when Haze sees the eyes of Hawks, O'Connor emphasizes the depth of his perception and revulsion at the falseness of this preacher:

The two sets of eyes looked at each other as long as the match lasted; Haze's expression seemed to open into deeper blackness and reflect something then close again. (89)

Similarly, when Mrs. Flood asks him why he has blinded himself, he answers, "'If there's no bottom in your eyes they hold more'" (121). Haze's eyes do hold more; they hold a vision of a world without God—a world in which the concept of God is used by non-believers for their own selfish purposes. And, if Haze does not finally redeem himself in any traditional sense, in O'Connor's view he redeems two others—Layfield, as we have seen, and Mrs. Flood, who is so moved by the spectacle of Haze's self-mortification that she is transformed from another cold, meddling, quintessentially greedy exploiter of men's misery, to a very human person, concerned for the first time in her life for someone else, pleading with Haze not to leave her, in short, loving him and, in doing so, beginning a new life:

...lying in her bed, awake at midnight, Mrs. Flood, the landlady, began to weep. She wanted to run out into the rain and cold and hunt him and find him in some half-sheltered place and bring him back and say, Mr. Motes, Mr. Motes, you can stay here forever, or two of us will go where you're going, the two of us will go. She had had a hard life, without pain and without pleasure, and she thought that now that she was coming to the last part of it, she deserved a friend. (125)

When Haze's body is returned to her, Mrs. Flood, unaware that he is dead, welcomes him "home" and places his hand on her heart. Trying to discover how he has "disappeared," she closes her eyes
("that those who do not see might see") and catches the glimmer of a
"pinpoint of light":

She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes,
and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning
of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him
moving farther and farther away, farther and farther
into the darkness until he was the pinpoint of light.

Certainly "the beginning of something she couldn't begin" is both
the new beginning in her own life as well as, perhaps, the beginning
of a recognition of the light of Haze's integrity in a world that so
obviously needs it.

2

O'Connor once wrote that "predictable predetermined actions
have a comic interest for me,"18 and it is within this context that we
may understand most clearly the function of Enoch Emery, whose actions
are utterly predetermined by the blind, ungovernable impulse which he
so proudly (if ironically) calls his "wise blood." As we have seen,
Haze Motes' struggles, first for a life without sin, later for conversion
"to nothing," and, finally, for redemption through suffering, are the
conscious acts of a man who is obsessively concerned with the "examined
life." In sharp contrast, Enoch Emery is always driven by his "wise
blood." He never acts consciously; he reacts blindly and unthinkingly--
in short, comically. And although, like Haze, Enoch embarks upon a
quest, he is easily sidetracked; indeed, he finally abandons his
vision of the "new Jesus" when he is distracted by a sneeze. O'Connor's
purpose for including this completely comic figure in the book is, I
think, twofold: first, by doubling her presentation of Haze in her
portrayal of Enoch, she indicates clearly her belief that the isolation
which moves both characters to violence and murder is not really
unique, even if their reactions may be; and, secondly, this same
doubling of virtually all the important circumstances and events of
Haze's life provides a sort of comic counterpoint which heightens the
reader's awareness of the tragic dimensions of Haze's quest.

When Enoch first meets Haze, he has been in Taulkinham for two
months, Haze for two days. And just as Haze earlier asserted desperately
again and again that he was from Eastrod, Enoch repeats over and over
his own pathetic statement of identification with the city:

"I been here two months. . . . I work for the city.
. . . I work for the city. . . . I'm eighteen years
old and I ain't been here but two months and I
already work for the city." (28)

Just as Haze was alienated from his parents by their strong
religiosity, the young Enoch hated his own religious training:

"I went to thisyer Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy for
four weeks. Thisyer woman that traded me from my
daddy she sent me. She was a Welfare Woman. Jesus,
four weeks and I thought I was going to be sanctified
crazy." (28)

As Haze rebelled from his father's Christianity, Enoch fought against
his placement in the Academy, and, just as Haze never really escaped
the image of being trapped in the coffins (and religion) of his family,
Enoch is never able to forget his "Welfare Woman" (analogous to Haze's
mother) who threatened him with imprisonment in the penitentiary if he
didn't behave. As we have seen, Haze's first break with his mother's
religion was prompted by a sexual experience. Similarly, Enoch escapes
from the Academy through a sexual act:

"I scared hell out of that woman, that's how. I
studied on it and studied on it. I even prayed.
I said 'Jesus, show me a way to get out of here
without killing thisyer woman and getting sent to
the penitentiary,' and durn if He didn't. I got
up one morning at daylight and I went to her room without my pants on and given a heart attack. Then I went back to my daddy and we ain't seen hide of her since." (30)

A basic difference between Haze and Enoch, however, is in their reactions to their loneliness. While Haze retreats into himself, with his brooding, even tragic, quest for redemption, Enoch scurries about, continually whining and crying:

"This is one hard place to make friends in. I been here two months and I don't know nobody. Look like all they want to do is knock you down." (30)

"I been here two months, . . . and I don't know nobody. People ain't friendly here. I got me a room and there ain't never nobody in it but me. My daddy said I had to come." (35)

"My daddy made me come," he said in a cracked voice. Haze looked at him and saw he was crying, his face seam and wet and a purple color. "I ain't but eighteen year old," he cried, "an' he made me come and I don't know nobody, nobody here'll have nothing to do with nobody else. They ain't friendly." (35)

Of course, Enoch is right, and Haze, like the rest of the people in the city, rejects him, ignoring the boy's obvious and pathetic attempts to flatter him, to help him (Enoch says to the policeman, "I'll look after him"), and to be his friend. And Enoch's frustrated reaction to Haze's indifference is almost the same as Sabbath's:

"You ain't from here but you ain't friendly neither. . . . You don't know nobody neither. . . . You ain't got no woman nor nothing to do. I knew when I first seen you you didn't have nobody nor nothing but Jesus. I seen you and I knew it." (36)

Enoch establishes his own rituals in an attempt to give some pattern to his life, just as Haze fornicates and preaches in his own formalized existence. As Haze climbs nightly to the nose of the Essex, "Every day when he got off duty, [Enoch] went into the park, and every day when he went in, he did the same things" (46). His rituals include
hiding in the bushes around the pool to watch women swimming, visiting the FROSTY BOTTLE for a daily milkshake, and taunting the animals in the zoo. But, again, these actions have little meaning in themselves; they exist only as elements of Enoch's "mystery" at the center of the park: "Enoch never went immediately to the dark secret center of the park. That was the peak of the afternoon. The other things he did built up to it" (47). Indeed, Enoch becomes so completely trapped within these rituals that he cannot escape from them even when he is trying to take Haze to see the mummy, the embodiment of his "mystery":

"Usually he stopped at every cage and made an obscene comment aloud to himself, but today the animals were only a form he had to get through. (54; italics mine)"

Throughout her portrayal of Enoch, O'Connor presents him as a pathetic parody of Haze and his religious quest. For Haze, blasphemy becomes a ritual; for Enoch, the ritual is, again, only obscenity. The single work at the center of Haze's quest is redemption; the mystic word for Enoch is the misspelled, mispronounced, finally meaningless "Muvseevum." Haze's obsession is based upon a vision of a Savior who is so compelling that He must be fought and resisted consciously and continuously; Enoch's "savior" is a dried, shrunken figure whose significance Enoch can only sense dimly through his "wise blood." And when Haze pushes Enoch away from him and then hits him with a rock in his impatience to learn the Hawks' address, O'Connor presents Enoch's reaction as a parody of a mystic experience:

... he fell backward and landed against one of the white-socked trees. He rolled over and lay stretched out on the ground, with an exalted look on his face. He thought he was floating... When he came to, Hazel Motes was gone... Very faintly he could hear his blood beating, his secret blood, in the center of the city."
Then he knew that whatever was expected of him was only just beginning. (5708)

The key to all of Enoch's acts is, of course, his "wise blood," a term which he associates with a feeling of power. And it is thus appropriate that he first mentions his "gift" when he taunts Haze for not knowing the address of Asa and Sabbath Hawks: "'You act like you think you got wiser blood than anybody else, . . . but you ain't! I'm the one has it. Not you. Me'" (36). O'Connor repeatedly emphasizes Enoch's complete subservience to his blood, and at one point seems almost to be echoing in it the preacher's heritage of Haze's family:

"That morning Enoch Emery knew when he woke up that today the person he could show it [the mummy] to was going to come. He knew by his blood. He had wise blood like his daddy" (46; italics mine).

O'Connor also analyzes Enoch's faith quite explicitly, and we see in her presentation of it more parody, this time of the traditional unshaking conviction of prophets (and of generations of Noteseses):

He could not show the mystery to just anybody; but he had to show it to somebody. Who he had to show it to was a special person. This person could not be from within the city but he didn't know why. He knew that he would know him when he saw him and he knew that he would have to see him soon or the nerve inside him would grow so big that he would be forced to steal a car or rob a bank or jump out of a dark alley onto a woman. His blood all morning had been saying the person would come today. (46)

Like Haze, Enoch associates religion with sex ("... jump out ... onto a woman") and, just as Haze can attack Layfield in the name of his faith, Enoch can at least think of attacking Haze:

Enoch's blood was beating fast. He knew he had to go to the FROSTY BOTTLE and the zoo before there [the museum], and he foresaw a terrible struggle with Hazel Notes. He would have to get him there, even if he had to hit him over the head with a rock and carry him on his back up to it. (50-51)
But Enoch is still moving automatically, and he can never begin to understand the messages from his blood: "The part [of his brain] in communication with his blood did the figuring but it never said anything in words" (51). Still, he follows the irresistible commands with the constant refrain of "I got to . . . I got to":

"We got to cross this road and go down this hill. We got to go on foot."
"Why?" Haze muttered.
"I don't know," Enoch said. He knew something was going to happen to him. (55)

And when he thinks that the mummy makes a sound while he and Haze look at it, Enoch "knows" with prophetic certainty that his destiny is upon him. O'Connor's description of Enoch's mental and emotional state is rather long, but it portrays vividly the three most important themes which O'Connor associates with Enoch: his similarity to Haze, the religious nature of his compulsion, and his unthinking acceptance of his intuitive wisdom:

Enoch Emery knew that his life would never be the same again, because the thing that was going to happen had started to happen. He had always known that something was going to happen but he hadn't known what. If he had been given much to thought, he might have thought that now was the time to justify his daddy's blood [cf. Haze], but he didn't think in broad sweeps like that, he thought what he would do next. Sometimes he didn't think; he only wondered; then before long he would find himself doing this or that, like a bird finds itself building a nest when it hasn't actually planned to.

What was going to happen had started to happen when he showed what was in the glass case to Hazel Motes. That was a mystery beyond his understanding, but he knew that what was going to be expected of him was something awful. His blood was more sensitive than any other part of him; it wrote doom all through him, except possibly in his brain, and the result was that his tongue, which edged out every few minutes to test his fever blister, knew more than he did. (72)

Enoch's first quest, his preparation and deliverance of the "new jesus" to Haze, mirrors Haze's own quest repeatedly. Just as Haze
equips the Essex as a home and refuge with religious overtones (his pulpit as well as his escape), Enoch cleans his room and prepares a place (the details of which echo Haze's coffin images) for his savior. And just as Haze carried his mother's glasses, Enoch carries an object which is almost sacred to him because of its connection with his father:

His purse was a long gray leather pouch, tied at the top with a drawstring. It was one he had stolen from his daddy and he treasured it because it was the only thing he owned that his daddy had touched. (76)

But again, Enoch's actions are not conscious; indeed, they are the opposite of his conscious wishes:

As soon as the second-shift guard came, Enoch headed for town. Town was the last place he wanted to be... (75)

I don't want to do it, he was saying to himself. Whatever it is, I don't want to do it. I'm going home... I ain't going to no picture show like that, he said, giving it a nervous look. I ain't going to wait around in no picture... I ain't even going to count this yer change. . . . It ain't but forty-three cent here, he said, that ain't enough. . . . I ain't going to sit in no balcony, he said, buying a thirty-five cent [i.e. balcony] ticket. I ain't going in, he said.

Two doors flew open and he found himself moving down a long red foyer... I ain't going to look at it. (76-7)

But he does look, and just as Haze's view in the mirror of himself in his mother's glasses summons up all his old fears, Enoch's experience in the theater reflects his own problems. One picture is about a mad scientist called "The Eye" (O'Connor's basic image again) who influences people by remote control; the second is about a penitentiary; and the third, called "Lonnie Comes Home Again," recalls to Enoch his own loneliness, his hatred (and perhaps envy) of the zoo animals, and his desire to be admired by the people around him. And, as Haze's view in
the mirror drove him to violence, Enoch's movies (fittingly more mechanical) drive him violently out of the theater—only to hear Haze calling for the "new jesus" and thus compelling him onward to steal the mummy, realizing that he already "had a place in his room prepared to keep it in until Haze was ready to take it" (79). Just as Haze was almost killed in traffic as he followed the Hawkses, Enoch is almost run down by a taxi as he moves backward (appropriately enough) on his way to fulfill his quest. Finally Haze's deviousness in following the Hawkses to their rooming house is also mirrored and extended in Enoch's theft of the mummy; first he disguises himself as a Negro, and then he dons a false beard and dark glasses.

Although Enoch's first quest ends with a sneeze rather than with a vision, O'Connor again reinforces the comparison with Haze's quest with religious imagery. As he sits in his room waiting for something to happen, Enoch seems to anticipate vaguely a new life, a rebirth:

He pictured himself, after it was over, as an entirely new man, with an even better personality than he had now. He sat there for about fifteen minutes and nothing happened. (95)

After another five minutes, Enoch approaches the cabinet and puts "his head in the tabernacle" (95). Although he has had no clear vision, Enoch does have a vague sense of "a deep unpleasant knowledge [that] was breaking on him slowly" (95). Enoch realizes that he, not the mummy, has sneezed, and he also realizes that it was not the mummy that made the sound when Haze first saw it; in short, for the first time he sees that, in his own words, the mummy is merely "a dead shrunken-up part-nigger dwarf that had never done anything but get himself embalmed and then lain stinking in a museum the rest of his life" (96). At this
point the quest of delivering the new Jesus is over; Enoch merely wants to get rid of it before he is arrested. And O'Connor repeatedly describes Enoch's mood as sullen, paralleling his disappointment with Haze's when, as a boy, he also failed to receive any validation of his belief in Jesus.

Enoch's first meeting with Gonga parallels Haze's experience in the army in that at first he sees it as evidence of "the hand of Providence." Just as Haze was able to convince himself that his life in the army could strengthen his faith, Enoch regains "all his reverence for the new Jesus. He saw that he was going to be rewarded after all and have the supreme moment he had expected" (97). But when Enoch's hand is clasped by the "first hand that had been extended to [him] since he had come to the city" (98), he is attracted to the gorilla which he had only moments before feared, just as Haze had been attracted to the soldiers' taunts that he had no soul, and, as Haze's Eastrod recital failed, Enoch's Taulkinham refrain cannot sustain him:

... he began to stammer, "My name is Enoch Emery," he mumbled. "I attended the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy. I work at the city zoo. I seen two of your pictures. I'm only eighteen years old but I already work for the city. My daddy made me com ... " and his voice cracked. (99)

When a voice from behind Gonga's celluloid eyes tells Enoch to "go to hell," the boy is overwhelmed with all of his ever-threatening feelings of rejection, and he tries first to escape by running away, but then he falls back on his belief in the "new Jesus." O'Connor's analysis of Enoch's reaction is quite explicit; and, as always, Enoch's dilemma of attraction/rejection is strikingly similar to that of Haze:

In spite of himself, Enoch couldn't get over the expectation that the new Jesus was going to do something for him in return for his services. This
was the virtue of Hope, which was made up, in Enoch, of two parts suspicion and one part lust. He had only a vague idea of how he wanted to be rewarded, but he was not a boy without ambition; he wanted to become something. He wanted to better his condition until it was the best. He wanted to be THE young man of the future, like the ones in the insurance ads. He wanted, some day, to see a line of people waiting to shake his hand. (104)

Enoch's new quest is, of course, selfish as well as foolish, and again he serves O'Connor's purpose as a comic foil for her reinforcement of the tragic Haze and his metaphysical struggle.

As Enoch is led by his blood to his final act of violence, he is still involved in his usual rituals, visiting a restaurant and looking at the comic section of the newspaper: "He read it every evening like an office. . . . he read and felt himself surge with kindness and courage and strength" (105). Similarly, the announcement in the paper of another appearance of Gonga is for Enoch a spiritual visitation:

If anyone had watched Enoch read this, he would have seen a certain transformation in his countenance. It still shone with the inspiration he had absorbed from the comic strips, but something else had come over it: a look of awakening. (105; italics mine)

With a characteristic melodramatic attempt to give himself tragic dignity, Enoch tells the waitress that "'You may not see me again--. . . the way I am'" (106), but his comment, like Haze's sermons, is not taken seriously.

Enoch's murder of the fake Gonga is a rather obvious foreshadowing and parody of Haze's murder of Solace Layfield, the fake preacher, and Enoch's act is also based upon his faith, "a mystic faith in the wisdom of his blood." As Jonathan Baumbach has suggested, "Enoch, through the 'new jesus' and through the murder of his alter ego,
is reborn into seeming innocence—his redemption a joke on itself. . . .
[but] In a sense Enoch does, as he has dreamed, better his condition.
He achieves at last identity and status. The comic ritual of his rebirth
is a parody of redemption."21 And if his rebirth is a parody of redemp-
tion, Enoch's actual appearance is, as Louise Gossett has observed, "a
common parody of his origin."22 In becoming a gorilla, Enoch has become
completely comic, both in his patent ridiculousness and in his guise of
an unthinking beast: "Instead of being merely subhuman, Enoch reverts
to a prehuman state. All of the gears of evolution seem thrown into
reverse by such bizarre behavior. The grotesqueness suggests not merely
that man may be dehumanized by his instincts but that unaltered wildness
lies at his center."23 And, as we have seen, the wildness in Enoch, his
"wise blood," is never really understood by the bewildered boy, either
during his actions in Taulkinham or as he sits in his new identity, his
gorilla suit, staring "over the valley at the uneven skyline of the
city" (108) in an ironic foreshadowing of Haze's stunned reaction to the
destruction of his car. Enoch moves from a state of violence to one
of peacefulness, as does Haze,24 but this peacefulness, like the rest
of his life, has no meaning. He is bewildered and lost, and in his
empty and hopeless pathos O'Connor underlines once more the real
intensity of Haze's actions after he returns from his own epiphanic
experience outside the city.

In a discussion of O'Connor's fiction, Jane Hart has commented
upon what she has called "the strange earth" of Wise Blood, noting
further, however, that " . . . it is never entirely so, for both
elements are closely woven: the impact of strangeness with the honest authenticity of the rhythms of her people. And it is, I think, this combination of the very strange and the very real that gives Wise Blood, in Jonathan Baumbach's term, "its own claustrophobic reality." O'Connor's most impressive basis for the "honest authenticity" in her fiction is what Louis D. Rubin has called her "outrageously keen ear for country talk." In her representation of the dialect of her characters, O'Connor does not, however, attempt to reproduce exactly every nuance of colloquial speech, but instead, with a high degree of selectivity, includes those words and expressions which establish the tone of dialects. Thus, by using such expressions of "lookerhere," "sommers" (for somewhere), "theter," and the delightfully ubiquitous "thisyer," O'Connor allows the reader to hear the tone of her characters' speech without immersing him in a welter of apostrophes, contractions, and phonetic reproductions of actual sounds, although she is certainly capable of providing the latter with devastating effect as when, in an article in Holiday, she once recounted a Georgian teenager's reaction to seeing one of her peacocks: "'What is that thing?'"

Another technique by which O'Connor suggests rather than reproduces colloquial speech is her use of a sort of dialectic indirect discourse, in which a character's speech is reported rather than quoted directly:

Then he told them he wouldn't go with them for a million dollars and a feather bed to lie on; he said he was from Eastrod, Tennessee, and he was not going to have his soul damned by the government or any foreign place they . . . His friends told him that nobody was interested in his goddam soul unless it was the priest and he answered that no priest taking orders from no pope was going to tamper with his soul. (17)
With the exception of the misuse of the negative, this passage is grammatically correct, and yet through her use of a sort of continuous, conversational sequence of assertions without formal punctuation, O'Connor produces an illusion of highly colloquial speech.

Another element of the "authentic" is produced by the vivid and exact images which O'Connor frequently uses to describe physical objects, such as "a thin cardboard-smelling drygoods store" (18), belching popcorn into a cauldron of butter and salt" (75). Such imagery demonstrates throughout the novel that O'Connor has an "outrageously keen" eye for realistic detail as well as for country speech. But it is also through her imagery that O'Connor moves most obviously and, at times, most self-consciously, into the realm of the strange and grotesque.

It has become something of a commonplace to observe that one element of grotesque fiction is "the description of human beings in non-human terms," and, as Lewis Lawson has observed, O'Connor explored the possibilities of this technique widely in Wise Blood: "Objects are like humans and animals, human beings are like animals and insects, and animals are like human beings." Thus, Haze's Essex makes a sound "like a person gargling without water" (86); its windshield wipers make "a great clatter like two idiots clapping in church" (44); a cloud has "curls and a beard" (61); and trees seem to be wearing ankle socks (55). Enoch's chair "squats," and his washstand has bird legs with clawed feet. A theater corridor seems to be the maw of a whale, and Haze's Essex has a tic and a horn with "a sound like a goat's laugh cut off with a buzz saw" (88).
In this strange world of nightmare, almost every human being is seen, sooner or later, as an animal. Haze is described variously as being or having the qualities of: a shrike, a frog, a fish, a bird, and a lion; Asa Hawks, in addition to his surname, has the expression of a mandrill, and Sabbath is described by Mrs. Flood as being a harpy with the disposition of a yellow jacket; Hoover Shoats' surname is self-explanatory, although at least one critic has suggested that it might have theological as well as bestial implications; similarly, Haze's mother is seen as a bat; his grandfather carries Jesus in his head like a stinger; and Mrs. Flood herself has race-horse legs and a voice like the singing of mosquitoes. Throughout the book men and women in general are described variously as foxes, parrots, gamehens, dogs, fleas, skinned animals, eagles, and spiders. Enoch Emery receives particular attention. Underlining his unthinking, fawning desire to be loved, O'Connor describes Enoch most frequently in canine terms. He is first seen with a "fox-shaped face," and then portrayed as "panting" at Haze's elbow and smiling, looking like "a friendly hound dog with light mange" (27). When he is jostled in a crowd Enoch "snarls," and while creeping about on all fours in the zoo park he says twice "'Well I'll be dog!'" (48). Even the woman he is watching becomes, under his gaze, a dog:

... she was out [of the pool], squatting there, panting. She stood up loosely and shook herself, and stamped in the water dripping off her. ... she padded over to a spot of sun ... (49)

And when Enoch walks from the theater toward Haze and his Essex, he moves "as if he were led by a silent melody or by one of those whistles that only dogs hear" (78). Finally, in a wildly comic scene, O'Connor describes Enoch's emotional problems with his moose picture roommate;
and, of course, his assumption of Gonga's identity is itself a sort of animalistic apotheosis, in terms of both Enoch's ambition and O'Connor's imagery.

Again, as Lawson noted, O'Connor also inverted her animal/human imagery. Thus, we see two bears in the zoo "facing each other like two matrons having tea, their faces polite and self-absorbed" (54). In this same context, Daisey, the familiar housewife-cow of Borden milk advertisements, is a characteristic member of this grotesque world. Gonga seems to epitomize the whole unreal nightmarish tone of the novel as he stands under an umbrella, bored, shaking hands, with a raincoat buttoned up to his chin.

Mr. Lawson's analysis is not complete, however, for O'Connor goes even further than he indicated by presenting both human beings and animals in terms of inanimate objects. Thus, a woman and her two children are seen in the following view: "The little boys' faces were like pans set on either side [of their mother] to catch the grins that overflowed from her" (57). At one point, Sabbath Hawks seems "at once to have to balance her face so that her expression would be the same on both sides" (61), and her eyes look like "two chips of green bottle glass." Haze's grandfather sees people as stones with stone souls; and at one point Haze himself looks "as if his face might have been cut out of the side of a rock" (51). But at times O'Connor overworks her images:

His face behind the windshield was sour and frog-like; it looked like one of those closet doors in a gangster picture where someone is tied to a chair behind it with a towel in his mouth. (50)

And when Haze strains to see the Hawks' rooming house, O'Connor again
strains a bit to describe his intensity: "His face was so close to the glass that it looked like a paper face pasted there" (59).

But at times this imagery of dehumanization works extremely well. Twice during the novel, Haze is completely stunned by something he sees, and each time O'Connor defines his profound shock by presenting his reaction in the image of a human being fragmented into, in one instance, a disembodied face, and, in the other, a separated hand.

When Hawks sees Haze looking at his eyes, he jabs at him, specifically at his face, which seems to react on its own, as if Haze is paralyzed by what he has seen: "It moved back expressionless under the white hat, and was gone in a second" (89). Similarly, when Haze sees in his mirror the reflection of Sabbath and the mummy, he is again unmanned--dehumanized--and it is only his hand that reacts:

The hand that had been arrested in the air moved forward and plucked at the squinting face without touching it; it reached again, slowly, and plucked at nothing and then it lunged and snatched the shriveled body and threw it against the wall. (102)

At least twice animals are seen as objects: as Haze looks out of the railroad coach on his way to Taulkinham, "the few hogs nosing in the furrows looked like large spotted stones" (9); and when he sees an owl at the zoo he is at first terrified by what seems to be merely an eye:

The eye was in the middle of something that looked like a piece of mop sitting on an old rag. He squinted close to the wire and saw that the piece of mop was an owl with one eye open. (55)

And even this mode of imagery offers for O'Connor its inversion as yet another means by which she can define the "strange world" of her novel. Thus, a threatening sky is an "unpredictable surly gray, like the back
of an old goat" (94), and Enoch, who carries an umbrella stick with a terrier's head on its handle, at one point becomes aware of "an angry growl in the sky behind him" (94). When Haze kills Solace Layfield with the Essex, the car itself becomes a sort of triumphant beast: "The Essex stood half over the other Prophet as if it were pleased to guard what it had finally brought down" (111).

Lewis Lawson has described quite perceptively the effect of these various images of animals/human beings/inanimate objects:

[such imagery is] . . . not an embellishment pasted upon a basically conventional view of the world. It is indeed a warped world, one which has been likened to a Chagall painting, and the comparison of the novel to the modern painting seems especially apt for Miss O'Connor often appears to share modern painting's preoccupations. Her world is frequently that of a dream . . . with characters who transpose themselves with endless action endlessly performed, with bizarre mixtures of the known and the unfamiliar.32

But if characters transpose themselves, O'Connor also takes some care to illustrate her view that they are, in many ways, victims rather than creators of their own situations. They often seem to be controlled from outside themselves, virtually victims of an implacable power which O'Connor never really clarifies. Thus, as he rides toward Taulkinham, Haze looks "as if he were held by a rope caught in the middle of his back and attached to the train ceiling" (11). Similarly, at the zoo park, Haze "had the look of being held there, as if by an invisible hand, as if, if the hand lifted up, the figure would spring across the pool in one leap without the expression on the face changing once" (48-9). The mummy looks "as if a giant block of steel were falling down on top of him" (57); Sabbath Hawks' head seems to move "as if it worked on a screw" (59), and Mrs. Flood thinks of her own head as "a switchbox" (119). Even Gonga shakes hands "with an automatic motion"
(98), and when Enoch puts his head into the washstand "the universe might have been shut off" (95). Certainly in terms of their own freedom of action, the universe of these characters has been shut off; generally, they can only react. Only Haze seems to be able to escape the limiting powers of this strange world, and, as we have seen, his "escape" is only partial.

Certainly one of the problems of O'Connor's imagery is that, although her use of animals, objects, and human beings in a sort of nightmarish chiaroscuro is frequently effective, at time she does seem to indulge in what William Esty has termed the "gratuitous grotesque."33 When she describes the hair of various women as looking like "dark toadstools," "grapes," and "ham gravy trickling over her skull," the result seems to be more novel than strikingly perceptive. And when attempting to describe the turmoil in Enoch Emery's blood, she again seems to move beyond effectiveness into overworked self-consciousness:

*his blood was rushing around like a woman who cleans house after company has come. . . . All morning his mind was not on the gate he was supposed to guard but was chasing around after his blood, like a boy with a mop and a bucket, beating something here and sloshing down something there, without a second's rest. (75)*

At times her images succeed because of their vividness. For example, the following work rather well: "An honest look [that] fitted his face like a set of false teeth," or "a blast of rain came down with a shriek and stabbed him in the back of the neck"; but, again, one is very much aware of the obvious contrivance involved. Similarly, when O'Connor writes of a "wet glary day," her image succeeds well in evoking exactly and convincingly the sense of unreality so important to the tone of her book—and it also provides a very realistic basis
for this mood. However, when she expands the description more fully, she again crosses the line which separates art from artifice: "The sky was like a piece of thin polished silver with a sour-looking sun in one corner of it" (40). Certainly a basic reason for one's frequent awareness of O'Connor's imagery as literary device is that she characteristically chooses rather mechanical similes rather than metaphors, and the "yoke" between her startlingly heterogeneous elements is too obvious--thus, "wet glary day" works more effectively than "like a piece of thin polished silver" because one is not so aware of the scaffolding. O'Connor does have a gift for creating arresting imagery, but quite frequently in Wise Blood her gift is not tempered with sufficient restraint and the results, as Robert Bowen has noted, at times are "quirkish and . . . bungled."³⁴

Finally, O'Connor's use of religious metaphor in Wise Blood to underline her religious themes is, at times, a bit heavy-handed. When Haze first arrives in Taulkinham, he goes to the restroom in the railroad station, and the door of the stall which he enters--the stall in which he finds Leora Watts' name and address—is decorated in crayon with "the large word WELCOME, followed by three exclamation points and something that looked like a snake" (20). When the policeman mocks Haze for not obeying the traffic signal, he exhorts him to "'go tell all your friends!'" in a parody of the gospel tradition. When Enoch hides in the bushes watching the women in the park pool, he looks like "a devil," and, as we have seen, Enoch's entrance into the theater is described in terms of Jonah and the whale (77). When we remember the movies which Enoch sees ("The Eye," the penitentiary story, and the tale of the heroic ape) and his emergence from the whale/theater only
to hear Haze calling for the "new jesus," we are struck, not by the image's effectiveness, but by its rather gratuitous artificiality. 

And, given the fact that Mrs. Flood is, by her own admission, not a Christian, the images in which her thoughts are consistently presented seem a bit forced:

He [Haze] might as well be one of them monks, she thought, he might as well be in a monastery. (119)

She had to imagine the pin point of light; she couldn't think of it [the inside of Haze's head] without that. She saw it as some kind of star, like the star on Christmas cards. She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh. (119)

She had had a hard life, without pain and without pleasure, and she thought that now that she was coming to the last part of it, she deserved a friend. If she was going to be blind when she was dead, who better to guide her than a blind man? Who better to lead the blind than the blind, who knew what it was like? (125)

No one in the entire novel swears even once without violating the Third Commandment. Given his attraction/rejection of Christ, Haze's constant repetition of such phrases as "'Jesus, my Jesus,'" and "'Sweet Jesus Christ crucified'" is quite believable, but when everyone around him sends blasphemy cascading down about his (and the reader's) ears, the pattern simply becomes too obvious: for example, the son of the used car dealer answers Haze's first question about the Essex with "'Jesus on the cross, . . . Christ nailed'" (41), and as Haze, Slade, and the boy ride about in the Essex, the boy's curses are interrupted at least once by Slade's own "'Goddam you!" (43). As he puts gas into the tank, "All the time he [the boy] kept saying 'Sweet Jesus, sweet Jesus, sweet Jesus'" (43). Similarly, when Enoch sees a woman lower the straps of her bathing suit, his verbal reaction is "'King Jesus!'" (49); the FROSTY BOTTLE waitress reacts to Enoch's
conversation with "'Jesus ... God for my witness ... God ... Why should I give a goddam ... '"; Leora Watts tosses away Haze's "'Jesus-seeing hat'" as she goes to bed with him; and his landlady observes to herself that she had never expected "an honest-to-Jesus blind man" (117). Certainly O'Connor's use of these epithets is not wholly unrealistic; people do swear in this fashion. But when she selects blasphemy as the only mode of cursing in the book, she has again exercised too little artistic restraint in her attempts to make a theological point.

_Wise Blood_ is, finally, a flawed book, both in its somewhat narrow perspective and in O'Connor's frequent lack of artistic restraint --either in creating her images or in underlining her theological view (not to mention some of her more astounding coincidences). As we shall see, this uneasy tension between her art and her theology is a very serious problem throughout her fiction, particularly in many of her short stories. But, again, we must also recognize the stylistic brilliance which creates so vividly what Mr. Baumbach has called the "claustrophobic reality" of the book as well as the tight coherence of O'Connor's themes and imagery. _Wise Blood_ is a flawed book, technically, but it is also a tremendously moving expression of isolation and man's ambivalent reactions to the concept of God.
Footnotes


4 Hyman, p. 9.


8 Lawson, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," 140.


10 Baumbach, p. 90.

11 Ibid., p. 95.

12 Ibid.


Footnotes (contd.)


18 Quoted in The Added Dimension, p. 229.

19 Baumbach, p. 93.

20 Ibid., p. 94.

21 Ibid., pp. 93-4.

22 Louise Y. Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction (Durham, 1965), p. 95.

23 Ibid.

24 Snow, p. 299.


26 Baumbach, p. 99.


28 Flannery O'Connor, "Living with a Peacock," Holiday, XXX (September, 1961), 111.


30 Lawson, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," 144.

31 Ibid., 146-47.

32 Ibid., 143-44.


CHAPTER II

A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

Introduction

O'Connor's first collection of short stories, A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories, was published in 1955 and included ten of the sixteen pieces which had appeared separately in magazines and reviews. Of the six stories omitted from the collection, four ("Train," "The Heart of the Park," "The Peeler," and "Enoch and the Gorilla") had been included as episodes in Wise Blood, and one, "The Geranium," was later reworked, retitled "Judgement Day," and included in the posthumous collection, Everything that Rises Must Converge. "The Capture," published in the November, 1948, issue of Mademoiselle, is the only story from this early period which has never been included in either a later novel or collection, and, for purposes of analysis, I shall consider it along with the other stories of this first collection.

In at least some of its characters and themes A Good Man Is Hard to Find resembles Wise Blood. Indeed, in two stories, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" and the title story of the collection, the leading characters are quite similar to Haze Motes' hypocritical counterpart, Hoover Shoats, and to Haze himself. Except for his missing arm, Tom T. Shiftlet looks like Haze, and he acts like Hoover, spouting the cliches of popular religion and bilking an old woman out of her
car and savings with the studied expertness of an experienced confidence man, although Shiftlet, unlike Shoats, believes his own line completely—even to the point of reacting to a boy's cynicism with shocked outrage. In sharp contrast to this uncritical acceptance of lies and bromides, The Misfit, like Haze (whom he resembles in his gaunt, bespectacled appearance), is another of O'Connor's "seekers," leading the "examined life," brooding obsessively—and murdering—as a result of his mixed attraction to and rejection of Christ. Another theme which O'Connor explores in at least four of her stories is also reminiscent of some of the early scenes of Wise Blood. In "The Capture,"* "The River," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," and "The Artificial Nigger" she portrays the mixed reactions of young children to their initiation into an awareness of God. Finally, O'Connor seems to have combined and developed two of her minor figures of Wise Blood to create a new type which appears in "Good Country People," "A Circle in the Fire," and "The Displaced Person," the leading characters of which reflect the shallow self-centeredness of Mrs. Molly Bee Hitchcock and the greedy self-righteousness of Mrs. Flood.

Just as O'Connor's religious point of view is a mixed blessing in terms of the artistic effectiveness of Wise Blood, A Good Man Is Hard to Find also both benefits and suffers from it. Her portrayal of the religious initiation of young children is usually quite moving and convincing, but it is also, in at least one instance, as biased in its perspective as her portrayal of Haze Motes' redemption/murder of Solace Layfield. Thus when the five year old Harry Ashfield celebrates his new-found faith by baptizing/drowning himself in a river, the reader is

*Because of its early date this story may well be a precursor of the scenes in Wise Blood.
once more only too aware of O'Connor's Catholic assumptions which value redemption far above human life, assumptions which similarly lie behind the ritualistic murder of an entire family by The Misfit, whom O'Connor seems to admire for his commitment to an obsessed examination of the meaning of the existence of Christ. At times, as in "The Artificial Nigger" and "A Circle in the Fire," O'Connor seems almost to preach openly, threatening in the process the artistic integrity of her stories, and at least once, in "A Stroke of Good Fortune," she produces a piece which is so one-dimensional and schematic in its presentation of a woman's rejection of her pregnancy that it becomes, as Stanley Edgar Hyman has suggested, "a leaden tract against complacency and contraception."^1

Indeed, O'Connor's overall perspective throughout the collection is stiflingly consistent in her unsympathetic, even loaded, presentation of characters who do not measure up to her religious ideals. Certainly her treatment of Hulga Hopewell in "Good Country People" is utterly merciless--primarily, one suspects, because Hulga is simply not a good, obedient Catholic intellectual. All of the proud old ladies are similarly deprived of their wealth, their confidence, and their sinful pride with clocklike precision and regularity, just as her one obvious satanic figure, Mr. Paradise, is made to seem completely monstrous in his defeat by the combined forces of God's Grace and the faith of a child. In like manner, characters who are converted either specifically to Christianity or at least to an essentially Christian acceptance of their own humility are rewarded: with a vision (in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"), new sympathy and understanding ("The Artificial Nigger"), or death (that peculiarly Christian reward in "The River").
In short, the stories are thematically predicated almost without exception on O'Connor's religious point of view—a point of view which too frequently lends a certain predictability to her plots in that the reader comes to expect some sort of ironic violence to satisfy the demands of a doctrinal view of life.

For all its thematic narrowness, however, *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* is nevertheless a collection which exhibits considerable narrative skill as well as O'Connor's masterful use of incredibly vivid imagery. Further, it is frequently distinguished by moments of overwhelming dramatic power, the intensity of which, one must recognize, is paradoxically a direct result of O'Connor's own intensely religious view.

1

"The Life You Save May Be Your Own" is certainly not one of O'Connor's more complex stories; indeed, at times it seems almost to be merely an exercise based upon a single set of circumstances, in this instance the successful attempts of a one-armed confidence man to cheat an old woman out of her car and some money by marrying her half-wit daughter. The story is much more than an exercise, however, in its presentation of complete and vicious hypocrisy, unqualified by even the faintest tinge of human sympathy or introspection. Throughout the story Tom T. Shiftlet's statements are those, not only of a confidence man, but of a self-righteous, generally complacent observer who believes that "'Nothing is like it used to be, . . . The world is almost rotten!'" (161). For Shiftlet, of course, this rottenness excludes himself and allows him, in his self-defined virtue, to indulge in the sort of cracker-barrel philosophizing that he knows is most likely to ingratiate himself with his listener.
"There's one of these doctors in Atlanta that's taken a knife and cut out the human heart—the human heart, ... out of a man's chest and held it in his hand, ... and studied it like a day-old chicken, and lady, ... he didn't know no more about it than you or me." (162)

Shiftlet poses as a man of great honesty, further convincing his intended victim, Mrs. Lucynell Crater, that she is facing a good man, "good country people," as Mrs. Hopewell would have called him (and Shiftlet and Manley Pointer are obviously of the same breed):

"Lady, ... nowadays people'll do anything anyways. I can tell you my name is Tom T. Shiftlet and I come from Tarwater, Tennessee, but you never have seen me before: how you know I ain't lying? How you know my name ain't Aaron Sparks, lady, and I come from Singleberry, Georgia, or how you know it's not George Speeds and I come from Lucy, Alabama, or how you know I ain't Thompson Bright from Toolafalls, Mississippi?" (162)

Shiftlet also convinces Mrs. Crater of his goodness by observing that he has "'a moral intelligence!'" (164), and, even more effectively, by teaching her halfwit daughter to say "'ddbirrrtttct!'" (bird). He also repairs her car, an act he sees in an almost religious light as he sits behind the wheel with "an expression of serious modesty on his face as if he had just raised the dead" (166); indeed, in his summation of his philosophy concerning the body and the soul, he asserts that "'the spirit, lady, is like a automobile: always on the move!'" (166). This "philosopher" is also a shrewd businessman, and his dickering with Mrs. Crater over the money she will give him for a honeymoon constitutes one of the most amusing exchanges of the story:

"I'll give you fifteen dollars for a week-end trip, ... That's the best I can do."
"That wouldn't pay for more than gas and the hotel, ... It wouldn't feed her."
"Seventeen-fifty, ... That's all I got . . . ." (167)
Shiftlet's thorough bilking of Mrs. Crater is, I think, generally obvious and predictable. However, it has a bit of justice to it, given the old lady's own campaign to buy a husband for her daughter. But O'Connor seems to be attempting, as she so often does, to move this story into the realm of the metaphysical, particularly when she portrays the reaction of a restaurant counter-boy to the sleeping Lucynell: "'She looks like an angel of Gawd,' he murmured" (169). Predictably, Sister M. Bernetta Quinn has suggested that Lucynell is "a true prophet," but such a view is not, as far as I can see, supported by any evidence from within the story. It seems more likely that O'Connor is attempting to underline the girl's complete innocence—perhaps even her spiritual innocence—which deters Shiftlet not in the least from his trip to Mobile in his new car, for he is, as O'Connor implies in one brief description, almost satanic in his commitment to his own utterly selfish purposes: "In the darkness, Mr. Shiftlet's smile stretched like a weary snake waking up by a fire" (167).

Indeed, neither Shiftlet's composure nor his own belief in himself as virtuous benefactor of mankind is shaken in the slightest by his abandonment of Lucynell Crater. Thus, he picks up a hitchhiker because he feels "that a man with a car [has] responsibilities to others" (169) and immediately begins to give the boy the benefit of his enlightened wisdom:

"Son, ... I got the best mother in the world, so I reckon you only got the second best. ... It's nothing so sweet, ... as a boy's mother. She taught him his first prayers at her knee, she give him love when no other would, she told him what was right and what wasn't, and she seen that he done the right thing. Son, ... I never rued a day in my life like the one I rued when I left that old mother of mine. ... My mother was an
angel of Gawd, . . . He took her from heaven and
giver to me and I left her." (169-70)
The crowning irony of Shiftlet's sermon is that, in his fantastic
hypocrisy, he believes it. The runaway hitch-hiker's reaction—"'You
go to the devil! . . . My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a
stinking polecat!"—shocks Shiftlet so completely that he drives on
with his car door open after the boy jumps out, feeling, in his own
self-righteous terms, that "the rottenness of the world [is] going to
engulf him" and praying (1), "'Oh Lord! . . . Break forth and wash the
slime from this earth!'" (170). But to Shiftlet the "slime" is, of
course, other people, and he remains utterly blind to the monstrousness
of his own desertion of the idiot Lucynell.

"The Life You Save May Be Your Own" thus describes Shiftlet's
single concern completely. His own life is the only one in which he
has the least interest, and the story, if rather simple in its straight-
forward presentation of his vicious hypocrisy and unmitigated evil, is
also quite coherent in both its theme and structure. In its portrayal
of Shiftlet's completely blind involvement in his own life of deception
and bland religiosity, this story also provides a stark background
against which the introspection and complexity of The Misfit of "A Good
Man Is Hard to Find" may be defined.

The title story of A Good Man Is Hard to Find is certainly
O'Connor's most widely known and frequently anthologized work. And it
is also largely the basis of the prevailing opinion among those with
slight acquaintance with her work that it is filled with gratuitous
violence and grotesquerie. Such a view is, of course, inaccurate, not
only in its exaggeration and distortion of some of the elements of the
story, but in its ignorance of others, primarily O'Connor's social satire and the theological implications of the actions of both The Misfit and his victims.

O'Connor's presentation of the family in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" must be read as a scathingly satiric portrayal of an infinitely tasteless, mediocre group, best defined by Bailey's yellow shirt with bright blue parrots on it, June Star's tap dance routine, and the appearance of Bailey's wife: "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 top like rabbit's ears" (129). Their mediocrity is further defined by their domination by the prim, talkative, and basically selfish old grandmother who still thinks of the balding Bailey as "her only boy." Indeed, in O'Connor's view, it is the grandmother, this family leader who is, because of her terrible pride and complacent self-righteousness, the most culpable villain of the story, and she presents the old lady's sins in great detail.

First, the grandmother refuses to allow her son to run his own life and that of his family without arguing and trying to change his mind. She wants to go to Tennessee rather than Florida, and she nags continually against the planned trip. But when Bailey does manage to ignore her protests, the grandmother makes sure that she is "the first one in the car, ready to go" (130); and, as June Star observes, this is not the first time the old lady has invited herself along: "'She wouldn't stay home for a million bucks... She has to go everywhere we go!'" (129). Similarly, all of her preparations for the trip are self-centered, predicated upon her own high opinion of herself.
[she] had on a navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print. Her collars and cuffs were white organdy trimmed with lace and at her neckline she had pinned a purple spray of cloth violets containing a sachet. In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady.

(130)

In addition to providing an ironic foreshadowing of her fate, this description also defines quite clearly the basis of the grandmother's high self-esteem: she thinks of herself as "a lady" in the grand old Southern tradition. Thus, she scolds Bailey's children, reminding them that "'In my time, . . . children were more respectful of their native states and their parents and everything else. People did right then!'" (131). But this definition of "rightness" rings false when she follows it with a condescending, "'Oh look at the cute little pickaninny! . . . Wouldn't that make a picture now?!'" (131).

From within her vision of the Old South (in which she sees herself, of course, as part of the Old Aristocracy) she points out an "old family burying ground" and jokes that the plantations are "'Gone With the Wind'" (131). Similarly, when she tells the children a story, it is one in which a "nigger boy" is ridiculed, and the grandmother herself, "a maiden lady," is courted by "a Mr. Edgar Atkins Teagarden from Jasper, Georgia. . . . a very good-looking man and a gentleman" (132). At the Tower Restaurant, she asks Bailey to waltz with her, and then, agreeing with Red Sam, reasserts that "'People are certainly not as they used to be!'" (133). To Red Sam himself, however, she says flatteringly, "'you're a good man!'" (133) with a sort of automatic, bland bit of pleasantry (she undoubtedly considers it part of her southern gentility) which foreshadows her later reaction to The Misfit.
When she awakens after a nap and remembers an old plantation which she thinks is nearby, however, the grandmother displays her selfishness quite clearly, repeating again and again her descriptions of the place and her desire to visit it, never scrupling, the dear old lady, to stretch the truth a bit for effect: "'There was a secret panel in this house,' she said craftily, not telling the truth . . ." (134). When she realizes that the house she has been lying about is in Tennessee rather than Georgia, her shocked reaction causes the accident by driving the cat to Bailey's shoulder; and once more her thoughts are completely self-centered: "[she] was curled up under the dashboard, hoping she was injured so that Bailey's wrath would not come down on her all at once" (136). "'I believe I have injured an organ,'" she whines (136).

O'Connor leaves no doubt about the grandmother's part in the approaching catastrophe: the old lady has directed Bailey to the deserted back road; she has caused the accident; when The Misfit's car approaches in the distance, it is the grandmother who "stood up and waved both arms dramatically to attract their attention" (136); and, of course, it is she who suddenly cries out in a characteristic mixture of fear and pride: "'You're The Misfit! . . . I recognized you at once!'" (138), thus necessitating, from the killer's point of view, the destruction of herself and the rest of the family as well. From this point to the end of the story, the grandmother's statements and actions depict again and again her utter selfishness. First she tries to assert what she believes to be the power of her exalted social station: "'You wouldn't shoot a lady, would you?"' (138), she asks, with an appropriate bit of pseudo-aristocratic business: "[she] removed
a clean handkerchief from her cuff and began to slap at her eyes with it" (138). Next she tries flattery, repeating over and over the tried-
and-true formulas she has obviously used for years:

"Listen, . . . I know you're a good man. You don't
look a bit like you have common blood. I know you
must come from nice people. . . . Listen, you shouldn't
call yourself The Misfit because I know you're a good
man at heart. I can just look at you and tell. . . . I
just know you're a good man, . . . you're not a bit
common, . . . " (138-9)

And when she sees that this approach is not working, the grandmother
turns to her religion, which is similarly formulized in cliche-ridden
commonplaces:

"You could be honest too if you'd only try, . . .
Think how wonderful it would be to settle down and
live a comfortable life and not have to think about
somebody chasing you all the time. . . . Do you ever
pray? . . . Pray, pray . . . pray, pray. . . . If
you would pray Jesus would help you." (140-41)

But when Hiram and Bobby Lee, the killers accompanying The Misfit, return
from the woods with Bailey's shirt and then move back toward the trees
with his wife and daughter, and baby, the grandmother's religion of
peace and comfort begins to disintegrate: "She wanted to tell him that
he must pray. She opened and closed her mouth several times before
anything came out. Finally she found herself saying 'Jesus, Jesus,' mean-
ing Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if
she might have been cursing" (141-42). And, at the sound of the pistol
shots which indicate the deaths of her daughter, her granddaughter, and
the infant, the grandmother, thoroughly terrified, reiterates all her
pleas of flattery, pride, and religion, and even adds bribery to the
list: "'Jesus! . . . You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot
a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not
to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!'" (142). The
Misfit is unmoved, however, and even the old lady's comfortable religious belief crumbles into confusion: "'Maybe He [Jesus] didn't raise the dead,' the old lady mumbled, not knowing what she was saying . . . " (142). But when The Misfit does make his pathetic assertion of ignorance concerning the Crucifixion, the grandmother, in her spiritual nakedness, finally sees clearly for the first time this weakness and vulnerability: "His voice seemed to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why, you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder" (143). As Richard H. Rupp has suggested, the grandmother reaches out to The Misfit with love, seeing that he is lost, that he is, indeed, a misfit; thus she transcends for a moment her own selfishness with a gesture to which the Misfit, touched psychologically as well as physically, responds with three bullets. And The Misfit himself has recognized her perception, her final clear-sighted view: "'She would have been a good woman, . . . if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life'" (143).

But if The Misfit understands the grandmother's failure with great clarity, he is himself inextricably caught within his own religious dilemma--a dilemma which, appropriately enough, arises from his lifelong refusal to live within the complacent self-satisfaction of the old lady. As his father once told him, "'You know, . . . it's some men that can live their whole life out asking about it and it's others has to know why it is, and this boy is one of the latters. He's going to be into everything'"

And, by his own account, The
Misfit does seem to have been into everything, including gospel singing, railroading, undertaking, soldiering, and farming. He has also been in a penitentiary where he felt he was "'buried alive . . . Turn to the right, it was a wall, . . . Turn to the left it was a wall. Look up it was a ceiling, look down it was a floor'" (140). But he has forgotten what he was being punished for, and over the years he has become obsessed with the concept of a life of punishment without clear-cut reason; he has also begun to blur all distinctions between various types of crimes: "'I found out the crime don't matter. You can do one thing or you can do another, kill a man or take a tire off his car, because sooner or later you're going to forget what it was you done and just be punished for it'" (141).

Certainly The Misfit's analysis of his crimes and his punishments is somewhat muddled, but he is questioning the meaning of his life as such characters as Tom T. Shiftlet and the old grandmother never do. As Sister M. Bernetta Quinn has observed, "despite his crimes or abnormalities, [The Misfit is] trying to lead the 'examined life,' . . . whereas the 'average' family satirized by Miss O'Connor couldn't care less for the examined life." Once again we must realize O'Connor's essentially Catholic view of her characters: the grandmother is more culpable than The Misfit because of her pride and her self-righteousness; she is also, in Catholic terms, a Laodicean, for, her pious rhetoric notwithstanding, she has obviously never really committed herself to a Christian view. The Misfit, however, is trying very hard—even obsessively—to determine what he can believe and, given such a belief, how to live according to it. O'Connor believes that he is mistaken in his conclusions, certainly when he rejects prayer, saying, "'I don't want to hep, . . . I'm doing all right by myself,'" but she also admires
him for his struggles. In the third edition of this collection, O'Connor added to the story the following epigraph from St. Cyril of Jerusalem:

THE DRAGON IS BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, WATCHING THOSE WHO PASS. BEWARE LEST HE DEVOUR YOU. WE GO TO THE FATHER OF SOULS, BUT IT IS NECESSARY TO PASS BY THE DRAGON.

The epigraph would seem to be a warning that untried faith is merely empty, that the man of true faith is one whose belief has been tested by doubt (the dragon), and that without faith strong enough to withstand the test, man is lost. In short, the quotation which O'Connor chose to clarify the story seems to be concerned with precisely the difference between the Misfit, who is struggling with the dragon of doubt and uncertainty, and the grandmother, who has never before faced either.

The Misfit's struggles—and his confusion—center on his attempts to interpret the implications for him of the Crucifixion. "'Jesus thrown everything off balance,'" he says, but his basis for this assertion is not really clear to him. First he asserts that "'Jesus was the only one that ever raised the dead, ... and He shouldn't have done it'" (142); at this point The Misfit exhibits no doubt at all that Christ raised the dead. And yet his next statement undercuts this conviction:

"'If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can--by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness ... '" (142; italics mine)

Thus, his actions, if defined by this statement, are his living testimony that he has opted for the belief that Jesus did not "do what He said," although his final comment further undercuts this rejection
of Christ: "'It's no real pleasure in life,'" he says. The real
tragedy of The Misfit is like that of Young Goodman Brown: he simply
doesn't know what to think; he has no firm evidence upon which he can
base his life; and thus he is spiritually lost—a Misfit, as he has
chosen to call himself:

"I wisht I had been there," he said, hitting the
ground with his fist. "It aint right I wasn't there
because if I had been there I would of known. Listen,
lady," he said in a high voice, "if I had of been
there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am
now." His voice seemed about to crack ... (142-43)

Thomas H. Carter is, I think, correct in his observation that "The
Misfit, like the hero of Miss O'Connor's novel Wise Blood, demands a
religious absolute; if he can't have God on his own terms, then he must
somehow destroy Him." To react to the loss of an ideal by attempting
to destroy it is, as O'Connor demonstrates in "A Circle in the Fire,"
all too human. But Haze's choice of action does not "differ from the
common [choice] of mankind only in the lucidity with which it has been
made and the steadiness with which it has been followed," as Louise
Gossett has suggested. Certainly no one can deny the "steadiness"
with which The Misfit has acted out his commitment to "meanness," nor
would we disagree with Bob Dowell's observation that The Misfit's
meanness is "the result of his inability to believe." But The Misfit's
postulation that mass murder is the only alternative to a Christian life
is insane rather than lucid, and if O'Connor is implying— and I think
she is—that The Misfit is nevertheless still a tragic and admirable
figure because he is suffering from what Miss Gossett has called "a
restlessness, a divine madness, which can be satisfied only with God,"
then she is shouting too loudly, even for those who are, in her view,
hard of hearing. As Red Sammy, "THE FAT BOY WITH THE HAPPY LAUGH," morosely remarks, "'A Good man is hard to find'" (134). The Misfit, in his obsession with Jesus, even in his "divine madness," is not that man—unless one is willing to accept meanness and murder as somehow "good."

The generally high reputation of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" is based primarily on the story's considerable and successful shock effect as well as O'Connor's spare understatement of macabre events which are themselves skillfully foreshadowed by her imagery of the burying ground, the monkey destroying fleas, the desolate landscape, and the town called Toombsboro. In this essentially stylistic context, the reputation is justified. Further the story is, particularly when contrasted with "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," a rather complex examination of belief and obsession; even in his confusion The Misfit is a much more fully rounded and convincing character than the one-dimensional Tom T. Shiftlet. However, the theme of the story is also both stridently overstated and, at the same time, rather muddled: The Misfit's alternatives are too extreme, and O'Connor's own assumptions are too parochial. In terms of O'Connor's treatment of its theme, the story is, I think, overrated.

Four of O'Connor's stories are explicitly concerned with what she calls, at one point, "... the action of mercy ... which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children" (213). In "The Capture" this "action of mercy" is perhaps a bit ominous to the child who is exposed to it, but surely in O'Connor's view (as always) this new awareness of God is far superior to blissful ignorance.
Indeed, it is, I think, a measure of O'Connor's interest in this theme that of the three stories in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* which deal with it, two, "The River" and "The Artificial Nigger," are really first rate. The third, "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," is only a bit less successful, primarily because of a rather cluttered plot which deprives that story of the powerful and simple directness of the other two.

"The Capture" is O'Connor's first published work, and it is, in many ways, a successful exploration of some of the themes and stylistic devices which she was to use throughout her later fiction. Characteristically, the title of the story is quite ironic: Rudder, the boy-hero, captures a wild turkey but through foolish pride loses the bird to a bully and, through his own blasphemy and ensuing guilt, is himself captured by a new and frightening awareness of a demanding God. Similarly, the humor, the dialect, and the flashbacks typical of O'Connor's later fiction may be seen in this story.

As "The Capture" opens, we see a young, highly imaginative boy, Rudder, playing cowboy in a scene which is characteristic of what Brainard Cheney has called the "dramatic strategy" of all of O'Connor's fiction: "She begins with familiar surfaces, in an action that seems secular at the outset, and in a secular tone of satire or humor."

While arresting a make-believe cattle rustler, Rudder sees a wild turkey whose dragging wing seems to promise easy capture, and the boy's determination is couched in the typical hyperbole of an eleven year old: "He was going to get it. He was going to get it if he had to chase it out of the county."* Indeed, he forgets his "rustlers" to

---

*O'Connor, Flannery, "The Capture," *Mademoiselle*, XXVIII (November, 1948), 148-49, 195-6, 198-201. All subsequent references to this text will be included in parentheses along with the designation "m".
lose himself in a dream of success which must ring a very familiar note for anyone who can remember the heroic visions of his own early adolescence:

He saw himself going in the front door with [the turkey] slung over his shoulder and them all screaming, "Look at Ruller with that wild turkey! Ruller! Where did you get that wild turkey?" (ml49)

Similarly, when the turkey disappears in the underbrush, Ruller's reaction is still consistent with his self-defined role as young hero:

"Bill, you take a posse and go down South Canyon; Joe, you cut around by the gorge and cut him off," he shouted to his men. "I'll follow him this way." (ml49)

In addition to this vivid evocation of a young boy's games, O'Connor also recaptures the quiet, secret moments of childhood--of sitting up in bed in the middle of the night to listen intently to parents talking about their children and hearing that "Hane [Ruller's older brother] had always been an unusual boy. . . . He would grow up to be an unusual man too. . . . Once his father had asked [Ruller's mother] why Ruller played by himself so much and his mother said, how was she to know" (ml49). Reacting to this conversation, Ruller begins to see himself, as countless other eleven year old boys have pictured themselves, as the tragic young outcast who at times walks "sort of like he had a limp [and] . . . guessed his father had looked pretty worried" (ml49). He is, thus, the lonely outsider who must vindicate his vision of himself by undergoing a great test (" . . . he heard his shirt rip and felt streaks on his arms where they were getting scratched" [ml49]) and by returning from the adventure as a conquering hero, finally eclipsing his older brother: "Hane hadn't ever got a turkey. Hane hadn't ever caught anything" (ml49).
When O'Connor begins to work out the second part of her typical "dramatic strategy," moving beyond the physical towards a metaphysical point, she does so with great effectiveness—indeed, much less obtusely than in many of her later stories. When the turkey seems to have escaped, Ruller, now bruised and dazed, a sort of unhorsed knight, feels victimized and wonders "... why he had seen [the turkey] in the first place if he wasn't going to be able to get it. It was like somebody had played a dirty trick on him" (m195). "'Nuts,'" mutters Ruller in his dejection and disappointment, and then, suffering from a rising bump on the forehead, he thinks "Oh hell," and then says the phrase aloud cautiously and repeats it, emulating his older "unusual" brother with the reluctant admiration of Huck Finn for the respectable Tom Sawyer: "Then he said it like Hane said it, pulling the e-ull out and trying to get the look in his eyes that Hane got" (m195). Remembering his mother's invocation of the Second Commandment to a swearing Hane, Ruller hesitantly embarks upon an excusation into boyish blasphemy which is probably the funniest passage in all of O'Connor's fiction:

"God," he said.
He looked studiedly at the ground, making circles in the dust with his finger. "God," he repeated.
"God dammit," he said softly. He could feel his face getting hot and his chest thumping all of a sudden inside. "God dammit to hell," he said almost inaudibly. He looked over his shoulder but no one was there.
"God dammit to hell, good Lord from Jerusalem," he said. His uncle said "good Lord from Jerusalem."
"Good Father, good God, sweep the chickens out of the yard," he said and began to giggle. His face was very red. "Our Father Who art in heaven, shoot 'em in six and roll 'em in seven," he said, giggling again. Boy, his mother'd smack his head if she could hear him. God dammit, she'd smack his goddam head in. He rolled over in a fit of laughter. God dammit, she'd
dress him off and wring his goddam neck like a god-dam chicken. The laughing out his side and he tried
to hold it in but everytime he thought of his goddam
neck, he shook again. (ml96)

But his laughter is followed by the remembrance of his frustration,
and Ruller decides to lie about his torn shirt, asking himself, "What
difference would it make? Yeah, God, what difference would it make?"
(ml96). Now that his frustration and his new-found blasphemy have
combined, however, Ruller is terribly shocked and guilt ridden--just
as Haze Motes was shocked by his own first blasphemy--and the cursing
suddenly becomes something of an effort:

He almost stopped. He had never heard himself think
that tone before. He wondered should he take the
thought back. He guessed it was pretty bad: but
heck ... hell, it was the way he felt. He guessed
he couldn't help that. (ml96)

Indeed, as Ruller begins to consider seriously whether or not he is
"going bad," he first dramatizes his own "fall," thinking, "I guess
it's worse in me" (m196), and then he reacts against his grandmother's
religious blandishments just as Haze had reacted against those of his
mother:

Their grandmother had talked to Hane and told him the
only way to conquer the devil was to fight him. If
he didn't, he couldn't be her boy any more. ... She
said she'd give him one more chance, did he want it,
and he yelled at her, no! and would she leave him
alone. And she told him, well, she loved him even if
he didn't love her and he was her boy anyway, and so
was Ruller. Oh no I ain't, Ruller thought quickly.
Oh no, she's not pinning any of that stuff on me. (ml96)

Defiantly, Ruller determines to blaspheme further, and, given the
frustration of his fruitless chase of the turkey, he feels justified
in deciding melodramatically to become a jewel thief "with all Scotland
Yard on his tail" (m198). But beneath all the bravado, he still feels
guilty for his earlier thoughts, and he vacillates between further
blasphemy ("Get out her goddam cards and he'd show her a few") and
tremulousness ("the minister had said . . . There would be weeping and
gnashing of teeth . . . How do you gnash your teeth, [Ruller] wondered.
He grated his teeth together. . . . He did it several times"); and,

again like Haze, he looks for retribution:

You shouldn't think about God that way. . . . But
that was the way he felt. If that was the way he
felt could he help it. He took a few steps and
looked around as if someone might be hiding in the
bushes. Then suddenly he started. (m198; italics
mine)

Ruller is startled by the sight of the dead turkey lying on the
ground, but he is more startled by the implications of the religious
point of view by which he has been rationalizing his seeming failure:

He reckoned he was more unusual than Hane. Maybe
that was why the turkey was there. . . . Maybe it was
to keep him from going bad. Maybe God wanted to keep
him from that. Maybe God had knocked it out right
there where he'd see it when he got up. Maybe God
was in the bush now, waiting for him to make up his
mind. . . . Maybe finding the turkey was a sign.
Maybe God wanted him to be a preacher. He thought
of Bing Crosby and Spencer Tracy. He might found a
place to stay for boys who were going bad. (m198-9)

In this new conviction of what seems to be God's special interest in
him, Ruller indulges his pride by deciding to "go home the long way,
through town," (m199) where, obviously, he and his trophy will be
noticed by a great number of people, and, after remembering his
blasphemous comments and thinking of them as "pretty bad," he begins
an imaginary conversation with his new Friend, re-establishing himself
at least in his own eyes as God's Favorite:

Thank you. . . . We certainly are much obliged to
You, he said to God.

That's okay, God said. And listen, we ought
to have a talk about these boys. They're strictly
in your hands, see. I'm leaving the job up to you.
I have confidence in you, McFarney.
You can trust me, Ruller said. I'll come through with the goods. (m199)

Ruller's passage through the city is, as he expects, a triumphal march, and he is the center of much attention. Indeed, he feels so exhilarated, so "warm all over and nice as if something very fine were going to be or had been" (m200) that he again wants to do something for God; he even prays for a beggar and decides that if one appears, "it would mean God had gone out of His way to get one. It would mean that God was really interested" (m200). Thus, when a beggar does appear while Ruller is praying a second time a bit fearfully ("Maybe God didn't have confidence in him . . . " [m200]), the boy gives up his dime joyfully, although the beggar herself seems to see through his gesture to the self-satisfaction which lies behind it: "When she saw him, she looked as if she suddenly smelled something bad" (m201). Ruller, oblivious to anyone but his own heroic self, is simply suffused with "a new feeling, like being happy and embarrassed at the same time" (m201).

Once again, however, Ruller's pride betrays him, and he turns to some country boys who have been following him and asks "graciously, 'You all wanta see this turkey?'" (m201; italics mine). One of the boys who has been spitting tobacco juice asks to look at the bird and takes it, sauntering away with his friends. Sister M. Bernetta Quinn has suggested that Ruller's "belief in God is endangered by what has happened,"¹¹ but such an interpretation seems to miss the implications of Ruller's reactions to the loss of the turkey. At first he can only stand motionless, staring after the departing boys until finally, "noticing that it was dark, he began to run. He ran faster and faster, and as he turned up the road to his house, his heart was running as fast
as his legs" (m201). But Ruller runs, not because of the loss of belief, but because he has himself been "captured" by his self-centered interpretation of the day's events, for according to his scheme of things, if God led him to the turkey and killed it for him and provided the beggar to receive the dime, then God has also provided the "spitter" who has carried off the turkey. In short, God is still paying attention to Ruller, but in terms of punishment rather than reward. The boy who has blasphemed for the first time and has egotistically assumed the role of the Chosen One of God must now be punished for his presumption. And, just as he had earlier seen himself about to capture the turkey "with his arms rigid and his fingers ready to clutch" (m148), now he sees that he is the prey of a wrathful God: "he was certain that Something Awful was tearing after him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch" (m201). Ruller is, in short, the first of O'Connor's many sinners pursued by a relentless God.

As I have suggested above, "The Capture" includes some of the stylistic devices of O'Connor's later work as well as such crucial themes as the initiation of the innocent and the anomalous reactions of characters to an awareness of God. Thus, while Ruller stalks the turkey, O'Connor provides flashbacks which enable the reader to see many of the psychological reasons for the boy's reactions: his loneliness and desire for recognition, his rivalry with his brother, his fascination with "going bad." And, as in her later works, O'Connor provides at least a colloquial tone to her characters' speech through her use of common cliches and a sort of stream of conversation which gives the reader the sense of common speech from the mouths of very common people.
His father would say, finally, how are the boys doing. And their mother would say, Lord, they were wearing her to a frazzle. ... Once his father asked why Ruller played by himself so much and his mother said, how was she to know. If he wanted to play by himself, she didn't see any reason why he shouldn't. And his father said that worried him and she said, well, if that was all he had to worry about he'd do well to stop; someone told her, she said, that they had seen Hane at the Four Corners; hadn't they told him he couldn't go there. (m149)

The tone of this overheard conversation is exactly right—a combination of interest, of boredom, of non-sequiturs and clichés—in short the tone of colloquial everyday speech.

"The Capture" is most significant, however, not in its stylistic elements, but in the success with which it combines O'Connor's most important concerns: the evocation of the common experiences of everyday life combined with the suggestion of what she has called "the sense of the supernatural." From the beginning of the story, Ruller is consistently portrayed as an imaginative, lonely, somewhat introspective adolescent. Thus his highly romantic fantasies as well as his heights and depths of ecstasy and despair are exactly what we might expect from such an eleven year old. As a result, his experience—and thus the story—is entirely convincing and effective within its own framework of characterization, without the sort of authorial exegesis and even distortion of character which at times mar O'Connor's later work.

"The River" is, if a simple story, also a very moving expression of a young boy's discovery of a religious belief which gives him serenity and a feeling of dignity for the first time in his life. The boy, Harry Ashfield (whose last name reflects both the spiritual and the physical waste land of his home life—O'Connor is frequently as
heavy-handed in her choice of names as was Hawthorne) is the "four or five" year old son of drunken parents whose lives consist largely of squalid parties with their vulgar friends. Young Harry is seen for the first time as "glum and limp in the middle of a dark living room" (144) as his hungover parents try to get him ready for Mrs. Connin, the baby sitter who will take Harry for the day. Accustomed to his life of stale drinks and soggy cigarette butts, the boy seems almost lifeless, "like an old sheep waiting to be let out" (145). But, like so many of O'Connor's children, he does want to escape from the prison in which he is trapped, and when Mrs. Connin asks his name, he replies with the first name of the preacher, Bevel Summers, whom he had heard her mention to his parents. Harry/Bevel's reply is not at all premeditated, however—it is instead the spontaneous act of a child who has, through the sound of a strange new name, glimpsed briefly a new life beyond his accustomed squalor. Similarly, he seems to sense vaguely that there is something wrong with his life: "'Will he heal me?" he asks Mrs. Connin, but without being able to suggest any ailment except hunger—a significant choice, given both his daily neglect by his parents and what O'Connor obviously (and somewhat romantically) believes is his spiritual hunger.

Bevel also demonstrates a love of beauty in his theft, first of Mrs. Connin's flowered handkerchief, and, later, of her old copy of The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers under Twelve, and this particular fascination again contrasts sharply with the filth and stench of his home, as well as preparing him for his spiritual experience in a river which is consistently described as a place of shimmering beauty. Predictably enough, Bevel also loves any physical escape from his home;
thus, he considers himself lucky that he is being taken away for the
day by Mrs. Connin instead of being kept by "an ordinary sitter who
only sat where you lived or went to the park" (149). And he mirrors
the experiences of many of O'Connor's characters (Haze Motes, Nelson
and Mr. Head, and young Tarwater, to name a few) when he thinks
enthusiastically, "You found out more when you left where you lived"
(149); indeed, "he has found out already this morning that he had been
made by a carpenter named Jesus Christ" (149), and this information
impresses him because it seems so different from his experiences at
home where everyone "joked a lot" (149). Thus, as he walks toward the
river where Summers is to preach, "His mind was dreamy and serene"
(150), already contrasting with his earlier and more customary glumness.
Indeed, as he walks along a road lined with honeysuckle he begins "to
make wild leaps and pull forward on [Mrs. Connin's] hand as if he
wanted to dash off and snatch the sun which was rolling ahead of them
now" (150). Similarly, the beauty of the sun's reflection "set like a
diamond" in the river draws the fascinated Bevel toward his namesake,
whose last name, "Summers," also reinforces the impression of a beautiful
scene--the "strange country" (150) which Bevel feels he has entered. In
describing the boy's reaction to the preacher's sermon, O'Connor under-
lines his view of the river as a place of refuge and escape from the
city:

While he preached, Bevel's eyes followed drowsily the
slow circles of two silent birds revolving high in the
air. Across the river there was a low green 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. (151-52)

When Mrs. Connin takes young Bevel to the minister, the boy's first
reaction is to grin, comically and happily—until he sees the difference between this man and his parents:

The grin had suddenly disappeared from his face. He had the sudden feeling that this was not a joke. Where he lived everything was a joke. From the preacher's face, he knew immediately that nothing the preacher said or did was a joke. (153)

And, significantly, if predictably, when Summers asks him if he wants to be baptized, Bevel's reaction is couched in terms which indicate clearly that he sees the river and Baptism as a means of escape from his present life as well as a positive refuge:

"You'll be washed in the river of suffering, son, and you'll go by the deep river of life. Do you want that?"

"Yes," the child said, and thought, I won't go back to the apartment then, I'll go under the river. (154)

Just before he is submerged in the river Bevel sees "the pieces of the white sun, scattered in the river," almost as a promise of the refuge which he seeks, and this same image seems to be his only comforting and familiar companion when he tells the minister of his mother's hangover: "The air was so quiet that he could hear the broken pieces of the sun knocking the water" (154).

His return home is, of course, also his departure from the river; thus, when his mother, with her "long black satin breeches and barefoot sandals and red toenails," enters his room to ask about "that dolt of a preacher," Bevel, trying to escape to his new refuge, "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" (156). His mother's actions become a sort of reversal of Bevel's Baptism: "She pulled him into a sitting position and he felt as if he had been drawn up from under the river" (156). At this point, one may anticipate rather easily the climax of
the story, and when Bevel repeats the minister's message that he now "counts" because of his experience at the river, the conclusion of the story becomes virtually inevitable.

But the recognition of the inevitability of the boy's action in no way detracts from O'Connor's presentation of the action itself. Indeed, O'Connor's repeated description of Bevel's apartment underlines once more the tawdriness of the world from which he is about to escape, in a way preparing the reader for the imagery of transcendent beauty in which his death is described. When he gets up in the morning of his last day, all the elements of his dull, unhappy life are spread out before him: raisin bread heels, shriveled vegetables, brown oranges, and the ever-present cigarette butts. Even his companion from the river is dulled in the apartment: "The sun came in palely, stained gray by the glass" (156). After a breakfast of two crackers spread with anchovy paste and a raisin bread and peanut butter sandwich, Bevel is reminded by his wet shoes of the river, and he sees again, dimly at first, his vision of escape:

Very slowly, his expression changed as if he were very gradually seeing appear what he didn't know he had been looking for. Then all of a sudden he knew what he wanted to do. (157)

As he leaves the city and walks past Mrs. Connin's house, the sun regains its power, becoming "pale yellow and hot" (158), and when he reaches the river Bevel sees that it is again the lovely vision which he has remembered and returned to; he enters it joyfully:

He only saw the river, shimmering reddish yellow, and bounded into it with his shoes on and coat on and took a gulp. ... The sky was a clear pale blue, all in one piece—except for the hole the sun made—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 at the sun. (158-59)

The boy's joyous reaction to his plunge into the river is, from O'Connor's point of view, exactly appropriate for a child who is suffused with the Grace of God. Her lyric description underlines the complete beauty of such a moment. Bevel is obviously one of her "seekers," and unlike such confused non-believers as Haze Motes and The Misfit, he is trying to find Christ, in whom he has unquestioning faith:

He intended not to fool with preachers anymore but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the River. (159)

But, like most seekers, Bevel must be tested, and for a moment he doubts his vision:

The river wouldn't have him. He tried again and came up choking. . . . He stopped and thought suddenly: it's another joke, it's just another joke! He thought how far he had come for nothing and he began to hit and splash and kick the filthy river. . . . He gave one low cry of pain and indignation. (159)

At this point O'Connor introduces a bit of religious allegory which is somewhat clumsy in its obviousness: Mr. Paradise, the man who has taunted the Rev. Bevel Summers, dashes into the water waving a large peppermint stick, thus offering the boy life and pleasure. But of course in the Christian faith redemption is much more precious than life, and the river gently saves Bevel from what is this merely physical salvation:

Then [Bevel] heard a shout and turned his head and saw something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting. He plunged under once and this time, the waiting current caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him
swiftly forward and down. For an instant he was overcome by surprise; then since he was moving quickly and knew that he was getting somewhere, all his fury and fear left him. (159)

The appearance of Mr. Paradise as "giant pig" also works symbolically, associating him with the "real pigs, gray and sour looking" (150) which Jesus is pictured driving out of a man in The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers Under Twelve as well as with the pig which terrifies Bevel at Mrs. Connin's house and, in O'Connor's fiction, with Hoover Shoats, another doubter and false prophet. Indeed, the Rev. Summers recognizes Mr. Paradise (whose name suggests that of "Mr. Smooth-it-away" in Hawthorne's "Celestial Railroad") as a satanic figure and exhorts his congregation to choose—"Believe in Jesus or the Devil!" (152). Mr. Paradise is also, as Mr. Hyman has observed, "a curious ritual figure, the ceremonial scoffer, the Bishop of Misrule, and his shepherd's crook as mock-pastor is the giant peppermint stock with which he tries to save Harry from his death." It is thus ironic that it is Mr. Paradise who finally moves Bevel to surrender to the "long gentle hand of the river." His final appearance clarifies his satanic role beyond doubt: "... the old man rose like some ancient water monster and stood empty-handed, staring with his dull eyes as far down the river line as he could see" (159). Satan has been defeated, and Bevel has escaped from the dullness of the city which is reflected in the old monster's eyes; he is at peace in his shimmering sunlit river.

"The River" is one of O'Connor's most explicitly religious stories, and it is thus particularly significant that the preacher, the Reverend Bevel Summers, is really the only convincingly Christian preacher in all of her fiction: although he is an evangelist, he is
not insanely obsessed with man's sins, as Haze Motes' grandfather was, nor is he a fake. And, most importantly, he does not promise the rich rewards and easy life that are so comforting to so many of O'Connor's complacent, self-satisfied "Christians." Summers preaches comfort for pain, but not escape from it:

"If you ain't come for Jesus, you ain't come for me. If you just come to see can you leave your pain in the river, you ain't come for Jesus. You can't leave your pain in the river, . . . I never told anybody that. . . . All the rivers come from that one river [of Jesus' blood] and go back to it like it was the ocean sea and if you believe, you can lay your pain in that River and get rid of it because that's the River that was made to carry sin. It's a River full of pain itself, pain itself, moving toward the Kingdom of Christ, to be washed away, slow, you people, slow as this here old red river round my feet. . . . If it's this River of Life you want to lay your pain in, then come up, . . . 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." (151-52)

Just as Summers is the true evangelist who leads Bevel to a new belief, Mrs. Connin herself is portrayed by O'Connor as a true believer, whose vision, if hopeful, is not blandly optimistic and complacent. Mrs. Connin first appears as "a speckled skeleton in a long pea-green coat and felt helmet" (144), and this image is reinforced when she falls asleep on the trolley and begins "to whistle and blow like a musical skeleton" (146). Similarly, as Bevel and the Connin family walk toward the river, they look like "the skeleton of an old boat with two pointed ends, sailing slowly on the edge of the highway" (149), and, when she takes Bevel back to his home, Mrs. Connin stands "staring into the room, with a skeleton's appearance of seeing everything" (155). This imagery of the old woman as skeleton is important in its foreshadowing of Bevel's death in the river as he seeks the
Saviour to whom she has indirectly introduced him. She is also, as Brainard Cheney has suggested, a type of the "nakedness before God" which is so necessary for redemption. Obviously, she and Summers are the true believers juxtaposed with Bevel's family, his parents' friends, and Mr. Paradise, all of whom, like so many of O'Connor's non-believers, are slothful or materialistic, either in their actions (the parents' drunkenness and carelessness), their reactions (their assumption that Bevel steals the book because it is "'valuable, ... a collector's item'" [156]) or their taunts ("'Pass the hat and give this kid his money. That's what he's here for'" [152]).

In many ways "The River" works extremely well; Bevel's progress from glum misery to awakened faith is direct and quite moving, and O'Connor's descriptions at times exhibit great lyric intensity. Unfortunately, however, this story, like so many others, depends heavily upon an acceptance of O'Connor's Catholic view valuing redemption much more than human life. O'Connor once observed of "The River":

Bevel hasn't reached the age of reason; therefore he can't commit suicide. He comes to a good end. He's saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He's been baptized and so he goes to his Maker; this is a good end.15

But this comment smacks of sheer sophistry; redemption does not necessitate suicide, and, O'Connor's apologia notwithstanding, Bevel drowns himself. In short, even in this story, one of the best of O'Connor's shorter pieces, her theme is overstated and her perspective is depressingly narrow.

In "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" O'Connor strikes another note in her theme of the action of God's Grace. The unnamed child who is the
herione of the tale is neither a darkly obsessed fanatic like The Misfit nor a religious innocent like Harry Ashfield. She resembles Ruller of "The Capture" in her age (she is twelve) and in her highly
dramatic and romantic imagination. But, unlike these other characters who either reject God or discover Him for the first time, this child is at the beginning of the story quite religious; thus, when her two vulgar cousins ridicule Sister Perpetua, "the oldest nun at the Sisters of Mercy in Mayville" (a humorous bit of word-play which was obviously too tempting for O'Connor to resist), and her statement that the human body is "a Temple of the Holy Ghost," the child doesn't see "anything funny in this. . . . I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost, she said to herself, and was pleased with the phrase. It made her feel as if somebody had given her a new present" (135).

Like Ruller, this child is also terribly imaginative in a self-
dramatizing way, and her fantasies, like his, provide further evidence of O'Connor's delightfully acute memory of childhood dreams. As she thinks of two country boys, Wendell and Cory (another of O'Connor's un resisted temptations) she dreams:

We fought in the world war together. They were under me and I saved them five times from Japanese suicide divers and Wendell said I am going to marry that kid and the other said Oh no you ain't I am and I said neither one of you is because I will court marshall you all before you can bat an eye. (186)

When she is left behind as the girls and their dates leave for the fair, the child retreats to her room in the inimitable tragic glory of a disappointed twelve year old " . . . with her head thrust forward and an expression, fierce and dreamy both, on her face. She didn't turn on the electric light but let the darkness collect and make the room smaller
and more private" (188). Her vivid imagination conjures up the images of "the diamond ring of the ferris wheel going around and around up in the air and down again and the screeeking merry-go-round going around and around on the ground" (189). And when her romantic streak and her religiosity combine, she conjures up another vision of herself surrounded by glory—although this vision is tempered by what Maurice Bassan has perceptively called her "shattering honesty [which] enables her to pierce the ludicrous shams surrounding her,"16 including, one might add, some of her own visions. Thus, her fantasy of sainthood is interspersed with her satire of a preacher and her impressively clear-sighted estimation of her own sins:

She would have to be a saint because that was the occupation that included everything you could know; and yet she knew she would never be a saint. She did not steal or murder but she was a born liar and slothful and she sassed her mother and was deliberately ugly to almost everybody. She was eaten up also with the sin of Pride, the worst one. She made fun of the Baptist preacher who came to the school at commencement to give the devotional. She would pull down her mouth and hold her forehead as if she were in agony and groan, "Faither, we thank Thee," exactly the way he did and she had been told many times not to do it. She could never be a saint, but she thought she could be a martyr if they killed her quick. (189)

As usual, O'Connor's humor and satire are both right on target, from the preacher's affected pronunciation to the child's qualified view of martyrdom, a martyrdom which provides her with glorious visions of herself "in a pair of tights in a great arena, lit by the early Christians hanging in cages of fire, making a gold dusty light that fell on her and the lions" (189). In her dream, however, she converts "a whole series of lions" and, to the dismay of the Romans, turns out to be non-inflammable. Finally, her fondest hope is realized:

... they finally cut off her head very quickly with a sword and she went immediately to heaven. She
rehearsed this several times, returning each time at the entrance of Paradise to the lions. (190)

But this young martyr-to-be still has trouble with her prayers: "She took a running start and went through to the other side of the Apostle's Creed and then hung by her chin on the side of the bed, empty-minded" (190). Indeed, given her imagination, her flightiness, and her pride, the girl's prayers are, by traditional Christian standards, fascinating failures:

...sometimes when she had done something wrong or heard music or lost something, or sometimes for no reason at all, she would be moved to fervor and would think of Christ on the long journey to Calvary, crushed three times under the rough cross. Her mind would stay on this a while and then get empty and when something roused her, she would find that she was thinking of a different thing entirely, of some dog or some girl or something she was going to do some day. Tonight, remembering Wendell and Cory, she was filled with thanksgiving and almost weeping with delight, she said, "Lord, Lord, thank You that I'm not in the Church of God, thank You Lord, thank you!" and got back in bed repeating it until she went to sleep. (190)

Her pride and her wildly ironic thankfulness to God that she is not in the Church of God are primarily based upon her snobbishness in being a Catholic and enjoying what must certainly be for her the exotic and romantic Latin of "Tantum ergo Sacramentum." And this snobbery and inflated pride surely account for her disgust at the hillbilly song of Wendell and Cory--the song which "sounded half like a love song and half like a hymn" (186)--as well as for her enraged reaction to the boys' dazed and ignorant suggestion that the Latin verses "must be Jew singing" (189). O'Connor's juxtaposition of the Latin liturgy and the Church of God hymns allows her a further bit of rather subtle irony in the lines of "Tantum ergo Sacramentum":

Et antiquum documentum
Novo cedat ritui
(And let the ancient liturgy
Yield to this new rite)

Given the young girl's snobbery, particularly in its violent
reaction to the hillbilly music and manners of the Wilkins boys, it is
ironically fitting that she should receive her most moving awareness of
God through the hillbilly accents of a side-show hermaphrodite seen and
described by her cousins. In the speech to the side-show patrons, the
hermaphrodite avows her complete acceptance of her condition as God's
will:

"I'm going to show you this and if you laugh, God
may strike you the same way. . . . God made me
thisaway and if you laugh He might strike you the
same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I
ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I
got to make the best of it. I expect you to act like
ladies and gentlemen. I never done it to myself nor
had a thing to do with it but I'm making the best of
it. I don't dispute hit." (191)

The girl's reaction to this reported monologue is, predictably enough,
fascination, and, in her usual manner, she lies in bed constructing a
religious fantasy about her new information, setting up an antiphonal
response to the freak's statements:

She could hear the freak saying, "God made me
thisaway and I don't dispute hit," and the people
saying "Amen. Amen."
"God done this to me and I praise Him."
"Amen. Amen."
"He could strike you thisaway."
"Amen. Amen."
"But he has not."
"Amen."
"Raise yourself up. A temple of the Holy
Ghost. You! You are God's Temple, don't you know?
Don't you know? God's spirit has a dwelling in you,
don't you know?"
"Amen. Amen."
"If anybody desecrates the temple of God, God
will bring him to ruin and if you laugh, He may strike you
"I am a Temple of the Holy Ghost."
"Amen."
The people began to slap their hands without making a loud noise and with a regular beat between the Amens, more and more softly, as if they knew there was a child near, half asleep. (192)

A measure of her somewhat chastened view of her own sectarian pride may be seen in the tone of her fantasy—the tone of the Church of God revival rather than a Catholic Mass.

When she arrives at the Mount St. Scholastica school the next day, however, her more secular critical self is in command again as she thinks to herself upon being invited by a nun to the chapel, "You put your foot in their [the nuns'] door and they got you praying" (193). And her rebellious attitude is still with her as she follows the hurrying nun: "'You'd think she had to catch a train" (193). But during the "Tantum Ergo," the same music sung by her cousins in reaction to the Church of God songs of the Wilkins boys, the child is suddenly moved more deeply than ever before—even in her fantasies—and she responds, not in Latin, but in the dialect of the sideshow freak who has indirectly inspired her vision:

... her ugly thoughts stopped and she began to realize that she was in the presence of God. *Hep me not to be so mean,* she began mechanically. *Hep me not to give her so much sass. Hep me not to talk like I do.* Her mind began to get quiet and empty but when the priest raised the monstrance with the Host shining ivory-colored in the center of it, she was thinking of the tent at the fair that had the freak in it. The freak was saying, "I don't dispute hit. This is the way He wanted me to be." (193; italics mine)

Characteristically, O'Connor does not allow this vision to be extended to approach even remotely any sort of sentimentalizing. She undercuts it immediately by describing the nun who "swooped down on [the child] mischievously and nearly smothered her in the black habit,
mashing the side of her face into the crucifix hitched onto her belt and then holding her off and looking at her with little periwinkle eyes" (193).

But the experience of the Mass and the renewed vision of the freak have had their effect on the child, and when she hears that the fair has been shut down, ironically if predictably enough, on the insistence of some preachers, she experiences her vision again, but this time even more powerfully, in the sense that it comes to her neither in a dream in the dark nor in a moment of the mystic religiosity of the Mass, but in the bright daylight and familiar surroundings of her own pasture:

... the child's round face was lost in thought. She turned it toward the window and looked out over a stretch of pasture land that rose and fell with a gathering greenness until it touched the dark woods. The sun was a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood and when it sank out of sight, it left a line in the sky like a red clay road hanging over the trees. (194)

The vision, with its "elevated Host" is, I think the manifestation of the girl's new understanding and tolerance of the imperfections of others which she has learned from the sideshow freak. Just as the freak says, "'I don't dispute hit,'" the child is no longer as critical of those around her; indeed, she seems to have had her prayers ("Hep me not to be so mean, ... Hep me not to talk like I do") answered. Thus although she still sees that the boy, Alonzo, has "three folds of fat in the back of his neck and ... ears ... pointed almost like a pig's," (194), she says nothing even to herself, although she has previously ridiculed virtually everyone around her, from Catholic nuns to Church of God boys. Although she had earlier mocked a preacher simply for his pronunciation, she has no comment at all in response to
the information that "'Some of the preachers from town gone out and inspected [the sideshow] and got the police to shut it down!'" (194). She is, in short, chastened in her critical, rather self-centered view; just as the world is, in her vision, bathed with the light of the Host, her outlook generally shares the same acceptance of God's will exhibited by the freak.

"A Temple of the Holy Ghost" is not one of O'Connor's most successful stories. The scenes in which the hillbilly boys appear seem a bit forced, and they deprive the process of the child's transformation of the uncluttered simplicity and directness of the initiations of Ruller and Harry Ashfield. O'Connor also seems to exhibit another blind spot when she sets up the hermaphrodite as a sort of spokesman for the Christian life, ignoring the fact that this freak is also using its condition (and possibly its piety as well) as a source of income. Still, as is so frequently the case, when one grants O'Connor the validity of her religious view, the scenes in which the child experiences her new knowledge are dramatically moving and effective.

"The Artificial Nigger" is generally considered to be one of O'Connor's finest stories, and with good reason, for, as Robert Canzoneri has suggested, it is "an unusually successful fusion of allegory and realism."18 The fact that O'Connor herself claims this story as her own favorite19 is, I think, another indication of her confessed love for Hawthorne. Indeed, "The Artificial Nigger" resembles both "Young Goodman Brown" and "My Kinsman Major Kolineux" in its presentation of "the dark night of the soul" in which characters are initiated through a nightmarish experience into a realization of their
own inclusion within a world of sin and responsibility. O'Connor modifies and expands this traditional theme by including not only the innocent child (Nelson) who must be initiated into a world of experience, but also Mr. Head, who, as his name suggests, is the proud and self-satisfied sinner who must be initiated into a new life of humility.

Throughout the early pages of the story, O'Connor repeatedly underlines Mr. Head's inflated sense of dignity and pride. Thus, when he awakens early in the morning, Mr. Head sees the moon in his shaving mirror "as if it were waiting for his permission to enter" (195). Similarly, his straight chair "looked stiff and attentive as if it were awaiting an order and Mr. Head's trousers, hanging on the back of it, had an almost noble air, like the garment some great man had flung to his servant" (195). All of these articles take on this impressive appearance to Mr. Head because of the "dignifying light" (195) of the moon shining in through the window, and, as Mr. Canzoneri has observed, "... shows things in a state of merciful light, unlike the sun by which one sees things as they are, in worldly terms."20 This glimmering moonlight gives Mr. Head the confidence that "... age was a choice blessing and that only with years does a man enter into that calm understanding of life that makes him a suitable guide for the young" (195). Like so many of O'Connor's characters, Mr. Head is a dreamer of self-ennobling dreams. Thus he believes that he can awaken in the morning without any "mechanical means" because "... his physical reactions, like his moral ones, were guided by his will and strong character, and these could be plainly seen in his features" (195). Further,
His eyes were alert but quiet, and in the miraculous
moonlight they had a look of composure and ancient wis-
dom as if they belonged to one of the great guides of
men. He might have been Virgil summoned in the middle
of the night to go to Dante, or better, Raphael, awakened
by a blast of God's light to fly to the side of Tobias.

(195)

With this description O'Connor emphasizes the religious nature of the
journey to be traveled by Mr. Head and Nelson; and she also provides an
ironic foreshadowing of the fate of Mr. Head himself, for, as Robert
McCown has observed, "Mr. Head's journey through the streets of
Atlanta for the purpose of educating his grandson is similar to Dante's
trip through the Inferno, except that ironically it is the guide who
is enlightened . . . "21

Nelson is also to be initiated, however, and O'Connor provides
very clear indications of the boy's innocence. While Mr. Head is bathed
in the deceptive light of his own pride and smugness, "The only dark
spot in the room was Nelson's pallet, underneath the shadow of the
window" (195). Nelson is very much the child, still sleeping in the
classic fetal position, "his knees under his chin and his heels under
his bottom" (196). But he is also an impudent child, and his relation-
ship with Mr. Head is one which is to be seen repeatedly in O'Connor's
fiction. As Louise Gossett has noted, "Violence . . . is most likely
to erupt when past and present collide,"22 and O'Connor recounts this
"eruption" in many of her stories as well as in both of her novels.
Thus, in "The Artificial Nigger" Mr. Head is not really sympathetic to
his grandson in his coming initiation into the mysteries of the city.
Indeed, he attacks repeatedly the boy's view that it will be his second
trip to Atlanta since he had been born there: "Mr. Head had tried to
point out to him that when he was born he didn't have the intelligence
to determine his whereabouts . . . " (196). In his turn, the boy, resenting his grandfather's chiding, accuses him, appropriately enough, of not knowing enough about the city to avoid getting lost. The battle has begun, and Mr. Head's thoughts reveal both his complacence and his gloating, almost sadistic feelings toward Nelson:

"The day is going to come," Mr. Head prophesied, "when you'll find you ain't as smart as you think you are." He had been thinking about this trip for several months but it was for the most part in moral terms that he conceived it. It was to be a lesson that the boy would never forget. He was to find out from it that he had no cause for pride merely because he had been born in the city. He was to find out that the city was not a great place. Mr. Head meant him to see everything there is to see in a city so he would be content to stay at home for the rest of his life. He fell asleep thinking how the boy would at last find out that he was not as smart as he thought he was. (196)

This entire passage is, of course, beautifully ironic in that it predicts almost exactly Mr. Head's own experience as well as Nelson's. And it is no accident that Nelson wins the first skirmish of the day, getting up before the old man and relishing his victory: "He didn't say anything but his entire figure suggested satisfaction at having arisen before Mr. Head" (197).

If Mr. Head and Nelson are separated by their ages and their reactions to each other's assertions, however, they are united in their appearance: " . . . they looked enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age, for Mr. Head had a youthful expression by daylight, and the boy's look was ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be pleased to forget it" (197). If we remember Mr. Canzoneri's comment on the moonlight's reflection of Mr. Head's blind pride, the description of his youthful appearance by daylight is another significant foreshadowing of his own unsuspected innocence of the complexities of the city. Similarly, Nelson's "ancient" appearance
foreshadows his own loss of innocence and youth when faced with fear and betrayal in Atlanta. Neither Mr. Head nor Nelson is really confident that the city-bound train will stop for them, and, significantly, the moment of this very serious, if still secret, doubt comes at dawn, when the moon is "gray . . . hardly stronger than a thumbprint and completely without light" (198). Thus, Mr. Head stands "secretly afraid" that the train will not stop, and "Under the useless morning moon the tracks looked white and fragile" (198). But Nelson is also worried about the same thing. In short, at the beginning of their trip to the city, grandfather and grandson share a common fear: "Both he and Nelson . . . were prepared to ignore the train as it passed them" (198). And the secrecy of this mutual fear defines the chasm of hostility between the proud old man and the assertive young boy.

Once on the train, Mr. Head, secure within familiar surroundings, begins again to mock Nelson's inexperience, thus bolstering his own image as guide and protector. He instructs the boy to pocket his half of his ticket and comments to another traveler:

"First time this boy has ever been on a train . . .
He's never seen anything before. . . . Ignorant as the day he was born, but I mean for him to get his fill once and for all." (199)

Nelson's reaction is the predictable counter-attack: "'I was born in the city, . . . I was born there. This is my second trip!'" (199).

In the next skirmish between Mr. Head and Nelson, the old man is, at least in his own terms, clearly the victor. When a "huge coffee-colored man" walks past, Mr. Head asks Nelson what he has seen. The boy answers, "'A man,'" and then "'a fat man,'" and finally "'an old man!'" (200), demonstrating an appealing innocence which his grandfather delights in mocking: "'That was a nigger. . . . I'd of thought you'd
know a nigger since you seen so many when you was in the city on your first visit. . . . That's his first nigger,' he said to the man across the aisle" (201). Nelson's first reaction is one of betrayal: "'You said they were black. . . . You never said they were tan. How do you expect me to know anything when you don't tell me right?'" (201). And Mr. Head's repeated taunts, "'You're just ignorant is all,'" turns the boy's indignation to hatred, but, still early in his initiation, he directs the hatred toward the Negro who he believed "had deliberately walked down the aisle in order to make a fool of him" (201). He is not yet ready to hate his grandfather; indeed, he begins to doubt his own confidence, suspecting that "he might be inadequate to the day's exactions" (201). And after Mr. Head demonstrates the water cooler "as if he had invented it" and mocks the Negro cooks in the dining car by referring to them as cockroaches, Nelson looks to him for protection and, unknowingly, defines his approaching disaster:

Mr. Head was known at home for his quick wit and Nelson felt a sudden keen pride in him. He realized the old man would be his only support in the strange place they were approaching. He would be entirely alone in the world if he were ever lost from his grandfather. A terrible excitement shook him and he wanted to take hold of Mr. Head's coat and hold on like a child. (202)

When Mr. Head gets off the train at the appropriate stop (having failed to do so on his first trip to the city), Nelson "For the first time in his life . . . understood that his grandfather was indispensable to him" (203). But, once again, Mr. Head's position is undercut by his own innocence in this unfamiliar, daylight world; as excited as Nelson, he, like the boy, fails to notice their lunch on the seat as they leave the train. And his own fear and insecurity in the city are underlined by his careful attempts to avoid getting lost: "He thought that if he could keep the [railway terminal] dome always in sight, he would be
able to get back in the afternoon to catch the train again" (203). Thus, Mr. Head's "guidance" of Nelson is, from the beginning, something of a sham; indeed, his tour in which he has planned "to show [Nelson] all it is to show" (200) is incomplete from the beginning because of the old man's fear: "Mr. Head was determined not to go into any city store because on his first trip he had got lost in a large one and had found his way out only after many people had insulted him" (203). In short, his own initiation into the city on an earlier trip has had only negative results; from it Mr. Head has learned only fear. And the old man's blindness and pride are again underlined when he pays a penny for his weight and fortune. His weight is listed incorrectly, but he is "surprised that the machine should have his character correct" (204), specifically that "'You are upright and brave and all your friends admire you.'" He ignores Nelson's "Character": "'You have a great destiny ahead of you but beware of dark women.'"

Mr. Head also continues to take his role as guide very seriously, and when Nelson boasts again that "'I was born here!'" (204), the old man, "appalled," decides that "the moment had come for drastic action," and he orders Nelson to put his head into a sewer entrance while he explains the underground system, "... how it contained all the drainage and was full of rats and how a man could slide into it and be sucked into the sewer and never heard from again" (204). This description, which again recalls both Dante and Hawthorne (particularly "Young Goodman Brown"), has the expected effect on Nelson who "connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts" (205). However, just as Goodman Brown refuses to accept fully the first evidence of
evil in the forest, Nelson, at an early stage of his own initiation, asserts that "... you can stay away from the holes!" and repeats his boast that "This [city] is where I come from" (204).

Similarly, it is Nelson who discovers that Mr. Head has been leading him in a circle, and his attack on the old man is strident and immediate: "We done been here!" he shouted. 'I don't believe you know where you're at!' (205), a charge which simply drives Mr. Head back into the maze of streets and buildings, where his own initiation begins with a scene which again reminds one of Hawthorne, in this case, of one of Robin Molineux's confrontations: "Mr. Head, glancing through one window, saw a woman lying on an iron bed, looking out, with a sheet pulled over her. Her knowing expression shook him" (205). But when the appearance of the houses changes noticeably, Mr. Head taunts Nelson again: "Niggers live in these houses, ... this is where you were born--right here with all these niggers!" (205), and Nelson is somewhat afraid: "[his] skin began to prickle and they stepped along at a faster pace in order to leave the neighborhood as soon as possible. ... Black eyes in black faces were watching them from every direction" (205). But the boy is still defiant, and he channels his fear into his usual attack on Mr. Head ("I think you done got us lost!") who offers his usual denial. Both are unsure and afraid, however, and their tension explodes in a sharp little exchange over the forgotten lunch; as usual, Nelson accuses and Mr. Head threatens:

"You were the one holding the sack," Nelson said. "I would have kepaholt of it."
"If you want to direct this trip, I'll go on by myself and leave you right here," Mr. Head said and was pleased to see the boy turn white. (205-6)
When, after another bitter exchange, Mr. Head taunts Nelson about asking a Negro woman for directions, O'Connor's description of both the woman and the boy's reaction to her again summons up the image of Robin Molineux similarly lost and tempted with sexual knowledge:

Her hair stood straight out from her head for about four inches all around and she was resting on bare brown feet that turned pink at the sides. She had on a pink dress that showed her exact shape. . . . Nelson stopped. He felt his breath drawn up by the woman's dark eyes. "How do you get back to town."

After a minute she said, "You in town now," in a rich low tone that made Nelson feel as if a cool spray had been turned on him. . . . He understood she was making fun of him but he was too paralyzed even to scowl. He stood drinking in every detail of her. His eyes traveled up from her great knees to her forehead and made a triangular path from the glistening sweat on her neck down and across her tremendous bosom and over her bare arm back to where her fingers lay hidden in her hair. He suddenly wanted her to reach down and pick him up and draw him against her and then he wanted to feel her breath on his face. He wanted to look down and down into her eyes while she held him tighter and tighter. He had never had such a feeling before. He felt as if he were reeling down through a pitchblack tunnel. (206-7).

At this point, Nelson's initiation into an awareness of sin is quite obvious, even to the imagery of his entrance into one of the tunnels to hell which he had earlier visualized. Chastened, he remembers that his card from the scales had warned him of dark women and that Mr. Head's card had described the old man as upright and brave, and thus Nelson "... took hold of the old man's hand, a sign of dependence that he seldom showed" (207).

When the danger symbolized by the Negroes begins to subside, however, Nelson's confidence returns, and, now in a neighborhood in which "they began to see white people again," he decides to rest, telling Mr. Head: "You lost the sack and the direction. You can just wait on me to rest myself!" (207). Predictably, Mr. Head renews his counter-attack.
"This is where you were born. This is your old home town. This is your second trip. You ought to know how to do. . . . And standing there grinning like a chim-pan-zee while a nigger woman gives you direction. Great Gawd!" (207)

This reminder of his experience with the woman does undermine Nelson's confidence in himself again, further defining the process of his initiation: "'I never said I was nothing but born here,' the boy said in a shaky voice. 'I never said I would or wouldn't like it. I only said I was born here and I never had nothing to do with that. I want to go home. I never wanted to come in the first place. It was all your big idea.'" (208). Exhausted, Nelson falls asleep, and the grandfather, in his pride and cruelty, refuses to recognize the boy's new chastened attitude and decides to hide so that the boy will awaken to find him gone:

He justified what he was going to do on the grounds that it is sometimes necessary to teach a child a lesson he won't forget, particularly when the child is always reasserting his position with some new impudence. He walked without a sound to a corner about twenty feet away and sat down on a covered garbage can in the alley where he could look out and watch Nelson wake up alone. (208)

O'Connor emphasizes the grotesqueness of Mr. Head's action by portraying him as "hunched like an old monkey on the garbage can lid," and Nelson is also dehumanized by this gratuitously cruel act; he awakens, whirls about, and dashes down the street "like a wild maddened pony" (209). When he collides with an old woman, knocking her down and spilling her groceries, Nelson is immediately surrounded by "a crowd of women," a terrifying reminder of his earlier experience with the Negro woman. Mr. Head approaches cautiously and, faced by the women and the threat of police, he denies Nelson: "'That is not my boy. . . . I never seen him before!'" (210), although the resemblance between him and the boy gives
the lie to his denial and shocks even the women. At this point, Mr. Head's initiation into humility begins, and, just as Nelson had turned away from the Negro woman feeling "as if he were reeling down through a pitchblack tunnel" (207), now Mr. Head turns away from the crowd of women seeing "nothing but a hollow tunnel that had once been the street" (210); like Nelson, he has entered the hell which he himself described earlier. As before, Nelson is dehumanized by shock; this time he walks "mechanically" (210) behind his grandfather without making any attempt to catch up with him. But now the old man has sunk to a level beneath that of the boy, and Nelson rejects his bribe of a Coke "with a dignity he had never shown before [and] turned and stood with his back to his grandfather" (210). Nelson's gesture is effective; Mr. Head begins "to feel the depth of his denial" of the boy, and for the first time he thinks of him unselfishly:

He knew that if dark overtook them in the city, they would be beaten and robbed. The speed of God's justice was only what he expected for himself, but he could not stand to think that his sins would be visited upon Nelson and that even now, he was leading the boy to his doom. (210)

When he sees a water spigot, Mr. Head, although he is thirsty, believes that he doesn't deserve to drink: "Then he thought that Nelson would be thirsty and they would both drink and be brought together" (210). Nelson refuses this gesture of reconciliation, and Mr. Head finds himself, no long proud, wandering about in the blackness of despair:

... he lost all hope. His face in the waning afternoon light looked ravaged and abandoned. He could feel the boy's steady hate, traveling at an even pace behind him and he knew that... it would continue that way for the rest of his life. He knew that now he was wandering into a black strange place where nothing was like it had ever been before, a long old age without respect and an end that would be welcome because it would be the end. (211)
He believes that he is, indeed, a lost soul, one of those unfortunates who might as well "drop down into [a sewer entrance] and let himself be carried away" (211), and when he sees a man approaching with two bulldogs (perhaps the Cerberus of this new hell), he cries out in supplication:

"I'm lost! . . . I'm lost and I can't find my way and me and this boy have got to catch this train and I can't find the station. Oh Gawd I'm lost! Oh hep me Gawd I'm lost!" (211)

Receiving directions from the stranger, Mr. Head is, in a sense, reborn in his new humility, and he looks "as if he were slowly returning from the dead" (212). However, although he believes that "'We're going to get home!'" (212), even with this assurance he does not re-assume his former gloating sense of superiority; his new-found humility remains, and he realizes that, although he is going to get home again, he is still lost in his estrangement from his grandson and, implicitly, from God:

He felt he knew now what time would be without seasons and what heat would be without light and what man would be without salvation. (212)

 Appropriately enough, when he hears the train it seems to him to sound "like a cry out of the gathering dusk" (212).

At this crucial point—when Nelson is wrapped up in his hatred of the old man and Mr. Head himself is enshrouded in his own melodramatic (if no less real) despair—they see the "artificial nigger," which is "about Nelson's size." They cannot tell if the figure is meant "to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either" (212), and this misery which obliterates the signs of age in the artificial Negro also annihilates the differences between Nelson and Mr. Head:

The two of them stood there with their necks forward at almost exactly the same angle and their
shoulders curved in **almost exactly the same way**, and their hands trembling **identically** in their pockets. (212; italics mine)

Just as they looked alike at the beginning of the story, they again seem to resemble each other by changing places: "Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man" (212). But they are not the same grandfather and grandson they were earlier; they have been changed by their experience, and in O'Connor's description of their reactions one is reminded of Hawthorne's fascination with **felix culpa**, the fortunate fall:

They stood gazing at the Artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. They could both feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy. Mr. Head had never known before what mercy felt like because he had been too good to deserve any, but he felt he knew now. He looked at Nelson and understood that he must say something to the child to show that he was still wise and in the look the boy returned he saw a hungry need for that assurance. Nelson's eyes seemed to implore him to explain once and for all the mystery of existence. (212-13)

Mr. Head's "lofty statement" again reinforces his new, more acute perception. In sharp contrast to his earlier attitude toward the Negroes on the train and in the city, he now seems to recognize both their misery and the need of whites for such victims: "They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one!" (213). Indeed, Mr. Head also recognizes that this "monument" symbolizes his own defeat as well as Nelson's—like the Negroes he and Nelson have been reduced by the city to a state of abject misery. It is this recognition—this new sympathy—which, in O'Connor's view, saves the old man and the boy. As Robert McCown has suggested, "The old man learns humility through his chastisement, the boy in his turn learns forgiveness."
It is quite obvious that the abyss between them has closed when Nelson says to the old man, "Let's go home before we get ourselves lost again" (213; italics mine), and O'Connor reinforces this new spirit of union between the two when she reintroduces the soft moonlight which, if it was illusory, was also protective at the beginning of the story:

[the train stopped] just as the moon, restored to its full splendor, sprang from a cloud and flooded the clearing with light. As they stepped off, 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 protective walls of a garden, were darker than the sky which was hung with gigantic white clouds illuminated like lanterns. (213)

Mr. Head and his grandson have returned to their relatively safe countryside, but it is no longer their Garden of Innocence, and if the moonlight again seems protective, neither Mr. Head nor Nelson is likely to be deluded again by its soft light. As Nelson observes, now from knowledge rather than untried innocence: "I'm glad I went once, but I'll never go back again" (214). And both his new knowledge and his decision not to go out into the outside world again are summed up in the image of the train disappearing "like a frightened serpent into the woods" (214).

"The Artificial Nigger" is a fine story indeed; its portrayal of the classic initiation from innocence to experience works extremely well through O'Connor's imagery and dialogue, and the actions of Nelson and Mr. Head are both vivid and very moving. But the story, fine as it is, also suffers from what seems to be O'Connor's primary weakness as writer: the events, the settings, the confrontations, even the characters all seem a bit too pat, a bit too neatly contrived to prove
the author's moral point. And the penultimate paragraph slips into rather obvious preaching, laying out for the reader precisely what the moral point of the story is, almost as if O'Connor was, indeed, more concerned with her story as *exemplum* or moral fable than as an artistic creation. The predictable result of this sort of sermonizing is, again, that even in this story—one of O'Connor's best—her view seems narrow and her fiction correspondingly limited.

3

As we have seen, one of the corollaries of the initiation theme in "The Artificial Nigger" is the downfall of the proud, most obviously the plummeting of Mr. Head from a view of himself as "a suitable guide for the young" to the realization that he is lost, both physically and spiritually. This theme is one in which O'Connor takes great interest, and, although in much of her fiction this attention to the sin of pride is basically Christian, its presentation in at least three of the stories of *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* is couched in terms which are more explicitly psychological than religious. Thus, in "Good Country People," "A Circle in the Fire," and "The Displaced Person," her emphasis is upon the "shock of recognition" of proud and self-centered characters when they are forced to see the destruction—and the emptiness—of their frequently elaborate monuments to their own intelligence, guile, or "good hard work."

Certainly "Good Country People" is the most famous of O'Connor's tales of fallen pride. Joy Hopewell, the thirty-two year old girl with an artificial leg and a Ph.D. in philosophy, revels in her belief in her own intellectual superiority to all those about her, particularly her mother, her mother's friend, Mrs. Freeman, and Mrs. Freeman's
daughters, Glynese and Carramae, whom Joy derisively calls Glycerine and Caramel, just as she refers to herself as Hulga, a name which she has chosen "purely on the basis of its ugly sound" (246). Indeed, she thinks of her choice of this particular name as "her highest creative act," a gesture of defiance of her mother which becomes, in Hulga's mind, "One of her major triumphs" for "her mother had [thus] not been able to turn her dust into Joy" (246), and more importantly, she [Joy] had been able to turn herself into Hulga" (246). To this awkward, ugly, and sullen young woman in her "yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it" (247), her mother is simply a naive foolish gossip whose optimistic clichés seem unbearably vacuous.

Mrs. Hopewell herself, however, exhibits virtually as much pride as does Hulga. Her pride, if it is less intense, is equally self-centered, for she is a classic example of a type which appears repeatedly in O'Connor's stories, a type which Robert Drake has described as:

... the widow or divorcee who considers herself to be as independent of God or the cosmic force (those dark powers Hemingway referred to as "they") as she apparently is of sex. This woman usually lives with one or two children on a Georgia farm which she is determined to make pay off: the cows are going to give milk, the Negro hands are not going to cheat her or get by with slacking. The gospel imperative to choose never affects this woman except as a source of embarrassment—a circumstance to which she gives a kind of genteel lip service...

Thus, although she is cunning enough to put her tenant, Mrs. Freeman, in charge of everything, thereby effectively depriving her of the opportunity to "be into everything" surreptitiously, Mrs. Hopewell (whose name rather mechanically defines her complacent outlook) is a vapid, silly, non-thinking, self-satisfied busybody who seeks— and
finds—almost complete security in her own clichés of noncommitment.
She rattles on and on with a studious and successful evasion of
originality and personal opinion:

Nothing is perfect. That was one of Mrs. Hopewell's
favorite sayings. Another was: that is life! And
still another, the most important, was: well, other
people have their opinions too. (244)

Predictably enough, Mrs. Hopewell's attitude toward Joy is one
of perplexity and uncomprehending sadness. She doesn't like her
daughter's new name, which conjures up the thought of "the broad blank
hull of a battleship" (246); she doesn't understand why the girl will
not try to be more pleasant—"Mrs. Hopewell said that people who
looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they
were not" (247); and she cannot take any pride in Hulga's academic
accomplishments, which leave her "at a complete loss" (248):

You could say "My daughter is a nurse," or "My
daughter is a school teacher," or even "My daughter
is a chemical engineer." You could not say, "My
daughter is a philosopher." That was something that
ended with the Greeks and Romans. (248)

In short, as Stanley Edgar Hyman has observed,

This mother and daughter are complementary in a
curious fashion: each is caricatured as seen by
the other, the resourceful widow as smug and empty,
the arty child as useless and affected.25

In a sort of middleground between Hulga and her mother stands
Mrs. Freeman, the tenant who, with her husband, Mrs. Hopewell considers
"a godsend" and "good country people" (244). And when the rather cunning
Mrs. Freeman "converses" with Mrs. Hopewell, she adjusts her view to
reflect that lady's blandness:

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life
was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always
said so" . . .

"Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.
"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said. 
"It takes all kinds to make a world."
"I always said it did myself." (244-45)

Although Mrs. Hopewell may be, as she says, "quicker than Mrs. Freeman" (245) she is also much less devious and hypocritical, and, in her bland naiveté, she is unaware that behind her back Mrs. Freeman refers to Hulga by her self-chosen name. Similarly, Mrs. Hopewell has no idea that Mrs. Freeman, like the Bible salesman who appears later in the story, has "a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children [and that] of diseases she preferred the lingering or incurable" (246). O'Connor's imagery at the end of the story describing Mrs. Freeman's reaction to the sight of the departing Bible salesman also reinforces the reader's impression of this old lady as a person convinced that she always knows just a bit more than anyone else around her:

Mrs. Freeman's gaze drove forward and just touched [the Bible salesman] before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. "Some can't be that simple" [Mrs. Hopewell has blandly praised Pointer for his simplicity], . . . "I know I never could." (261)

The irony of Mrs. Freeman's comment lies in the fact that she really has no firm basis for her statement other than her constant desire to pose as being more knowledgeable than Mrs. Hopewell, whom she considers her inferior. Her statement, seen in the context of Mrs. Hopewell's bland confidence and Hulga's blind pride, simply represents O'Connor's last glance in the story at this unholy threesome of "good country people."

Like Mr. Head and Nelson in "The Artificial Nigger," Mrs. Hopewell and Hulga wage their own battle between generations, the daughter demonstrating her "constant outrage" by ignoring her mother's
insipidities by staring "just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it" (244). Although Mrs. Hopewell is much less openly belligerent than her daughter, she does refuse to accede completely to the girl's moods; thus, she can, from time to time, deliver her own little ultimatum: "'If you can't come [walking] pleasantly, I don't want you at all!'" (245), to which Hulga counter-attacks with a vengeance: "'If you want me, here I am--LIKE I AM!'" (245). Similarly, when Hulga stumps about in the kitchen "(she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it--Mrs. Hopewell was certain--because it was ugly-sounding)" (247), her mother insists on making such comments as "people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not" (247), and one suspects that she is not unaware of the further irritation which such little speeches produce in her sullen daughter.

Certainly, O'Connor satirizes both antagonists effectively although neither is particularly complex. Mrs. Hopewell is so consistently cliche-bound that she is simply ridiculous, from her blind faith in her pet theory summed up by her term "good country people" to her enunciation of one of the most tattered and bedraggled charges ever leveled at anyone exhibiting any tinges of intellectuality: "She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense" (247). Similarly, Hulga herself is shown to be something of a rationalizer in her reluctance to live within the intellectual university world which she ostensibly loves:

She had a weak heart. Joy made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She
would be in a university lecturing to people who
knew what she was talking about. (247)

Her charge to her mother—"'Woman do you ever look inside?'"—if it is
justified by Mrs. Hopewell's appalling superficiality, is also a bit
ridiculous when Hulga takes up her own jargon and mutters allusions over
and over to herself: "'Do you ever look inside and see what you are
not? God! . . . Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We
are not our own light!'" (248). Given her assertion of atheism, Hulga's
citation of Malebranche is particularly ironic. And the passage which
she underlines in one of her books is as full of meaningless words as
any of Mrs. Hopewell's less pretentious clichés:

"Science, on the other hand, has to assert its
soberness afresh and declare that it is concerned
solely with what-is. Nothing—how can it be for
science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If
science is right, then one thing stands firm: science
wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all
the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know
it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing." (248)

To Mrs. Hopewell, the passage seems to be "an incantation in gibberish"
(248); and this is certainly O'Connor's view. Hulga is the first of her
misguided rationalists who believe they can order their own lives
perfectly.

When the young Bible salesman, another tall, gaunt, Haze Motes/
Bevel Summers/Misfit type (at least physically; spiritually he is more
closely akin to Omni Jay Holy) appears, the reactions of Mrs. Hopewell
and Hulga follow predictable lines. Mrs. Hopewell the shrewd property
owner is irritated at the intrusion, although she is proudly convinced
that "he had never been in a room as elegant as this" (249). But because
she "never liked to be taken for a fool," she is suspicious: "'What are
you selling?'" (249). Still, she is intimidated by this smiling young
man who asserts that he knows that she believes in "'Christian service'" (249) and she lies to him, saying that her Bible is by her bedside instead of admitting that "It was in the attic somewhere!" (249). When the salesman, who calls himself "Manley Pointer" (1), believes that he is not going to make a sale, he begins the recital of just the sort of sentimental formulas which are most likely to arouse Mrs. Hopewell's sympathy, and he quickly realizes that he has chosen his words correctly:

"Well, lady, I'll tell you the truth--not many people want to buy one [Bible] nowadays and besides, I know I'm real simple. I don't know how to say a thing but to say it. I'm just a country boy. . . . People like you don't like to fool with country people like me."

"Why!" she cried, "good country people are the salt of the earth! Besides we have different ways of doing, it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!" (250)

Hulga's reaction is more pithy: "'Get rid of the salt of the earth . . . and let's eat." But Manley Pointer seems to have done his homework well, probably learning from Mrs. Hopewell's neighbors of her daughter's heart condition, and he puts this bit of information to good use when, justifying his own "Christian service," he remarks: "'See, . . . I got this heart condition. I may not live long. When you know it's something wrong with you and you may not live long, well then, lady . . . .'" (250-52). Thus, the confidence man gets his dinner set before him by a melting Mrs. Hopewell.

During a discussion of Mrs. Freeman's daughters the following day, Mrs. Hopewell, praising, predictably enough, "Glynese's common sense," speaks of the Bible salesman and unknowingly indicates all too clearly how completely she has been taken in: "'Lord, . . . he bored me to death but he was so sincere and genuine I couldn't be rude to
him. He was just good country people, you know, . . . just the salt of the earth" (253). The devious Mrs. Freeman, however, has seen Hulga walking with the Bible salesman, and she gloats maliciously on her own suspicions, looking at the girl "as if they had a secret together" and observing, more perceptively than she knows that "'Some people are more alike than others'" (253).

Hulga's decision to seduce the Bible salesman defines in many ways her own inflated view of herself as well as illustrating a streak of innocence and naiveté worthy of her mother. At first she sees her meeting with Pointer as "a great joke," but immediately she also begins to see "profound implications in it" (254), probably a vision of her initiation of the naive Christian into her world of bitterness and philosophic awareness. Thus, thinking of her own superiority, Hulga lies in her bed "imagining dialogues that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of" (254). Similarly, she constructs a fantasy of seduction which, in her assumption of her own moral and intellectual superiority as well as Pointer's own utter innocence, is both ironic and a bit pathetic, particularly when we remember that Hulga is an ugly, crippled thirty-two year old woman who is herself a sexual innocent. She is also both naive and pathetic in her dreams of improving Pointer:

During the night she had imagined that she had seduced him. . . . she very easily seduced him and . . . then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.

(255)

When she actually meets Pointer, Hulga, the intellectual and philosopher, is armed with all the wrong assumptions concerning both
her knowledge and his innocence. Thus, when he greets her by saying
"I knew you'd come!" (256), Hulga "wondered acidly how he had known
this" (256). Indeed, she generally believes that she has both herself
and Pointer firmly under control. She is convinced that she has
shocked him profoundly with her assertion of atheism, and when he kisses
her she is very much pleased and satisfied at her own reaction: "Even
before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway,
was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement but with pity.
She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that
it was an unexceptional experience and all under the mind's control"
(256). Further, to her the boy seems utterly and helplessly entranced:

Nothing seemed to destroy the boy's look of
admiration. He gazed at her now as if the
fantastic animal at the zoo had put its paw
through the bars and given him a loving poke.
She thought he looked as if he wanted to kiss
her again . . . (257)

Hulga demonstrates her physical strength (which she undoubtedly
considers analogous to her intellectual power) by climbing into the
loft of the barn, and, at least for a time, she does seem much stronger
than Pointer, who, when attempting to make love, becomes quite
tenderness;

His breath was clear and sweet like a child's and
the kisses were sticky like a child's. He mumbled
about loving her and about knowing when he first
saw her that he loved her, but the mumbling was like
the sleepy fretting of a child being put to sleep by
his mother. (258)

When he begins to insist upon his own adolescent formula for seduction,
"You got to say it, . . . You got to say you love me!" Hulga, whose
mind has so far "never stopped or lost itself for a second to her
feelings" (258), attempts to begin the deep philosophical dialogue she
has envisioned. She answers that she loves him "'in a sense,',' but that she has no illusions and that she has seen "'through to nothing!'" (258). But her dialogue is really one of non-communication, for Pointer merely reiterates his plea for the declaration of love which his formula demands. Hulga, predictably enough, tries to patronize him, calling him "'You poor baby,'" and holding him against her while she espouses her pet theory of existentialism (and this time O'Connor's satire is quite clear from the context of Hulga's obvious smugness and the physical detail of her near blindness as a result of Pointer's removal of her glasses): "'We are all damned, . . . but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation!'" (258). Pointer's reply is one of fine incomprehension: "'Okay, . . . but do you love me or don'tcher?'' and Hulga, still trying to impress him with her intellectuality, boasts that she has "'a number of degrees'" (258). Pointer's continued kisses and his demand that Hulga prove her "'love" for him merely reinforce her feeling of superiority: "'She smiled, looking dreamily out on the shifty landscape. She had seduced him without even making up her mind to try'" (259).

But all of Hulga's confident dreams of intellectual superiority and control are blasted away by the depravity of Pointer, who wants to see where her artificial leg "'joins on.'" Indeed, when he accuses her of "'playing me for a sucker,'" she "does lose her control, crying, "'Oh no no! . . . It joins on at the knee. Only at the knee!'" (259).

Further, when the boy tells her that she "'ain't like anybody else,'" Hulga is deeply moved, and, in her real naivety, she mistakes his motives completely and loses herself in an emotional surrender which
is itself a sort of parody of rebirth into new love (and, even more
ironically, a rebirth in Christ):

... she felt as if her heart had stopped and left
her mind to pump her blood. She decided that for
the first time in her life she was face to face with
real innocence. The boy, with an instinct that came
from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her.
When, after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice,
"All right," it was like surrendering to him com-
pletely. It was like losing her own life and finding
it again, miraculously, in his. (259)

Hulga's emotions overcome her completely, and after taking her leg off
and showing the "reverent" boy how to put it back on, she begins
thinking "that she would run away with him and that every night he
would take the leg off and every morning put it back on again" (159-60).
When Pointer begins to kiss her again she feels "entirely dependent on
him. Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be
about some other function that it was not very good at" (260). Signi-
ficantly, she does not notice "his eyes like two steel spikes" which
keep glancing at her wooden leg standing by itself. And when he opens
his fake Bibles to produce the obscene playing cards, a pocket flask,
and a box of prophylactics, her shock is so complete that she can only
question him in her mother's cliche'-ridden terms: "'Aren't you . . .
aren't you just good country people?'" (260). His cynical answer,
"'Yeah, . . . but it ain't held me back none'" (260), undercuts what
little self-confidence she has left, and, in her new weakness, she
begins to scream for him to return her leg. When he replies to her
charge of being a false Christian by saying "'I hope you don't think
... that I believe in that crap!'" she begins to "screech" for her leg
with the new knowledge that she has misjudged and underestimated her
adversary/lover completely, knowledge which Pointer reinforces by
boasting of all his past conquests, including the theft of a lady's
glass eye, and, finally, by mocking her name as well as her self-
centered pride and smugness which he has obviously recognized from the
first:

"And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said,
using the name as if he didn't think much of it,
"you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing
ever since I was born!" (261)

As he leaves Hulga, all we see of her is her "churning face," a face
which has obviously lost its earlier "look of someone who has achieved
blindness by an act of will and means to keep it" (244).

The ironies of "Good Country People" are both obvious and a
bit complex. The title phrase itself never appears except ironically,
applied either to Mrs. Freeman or to the Bible salesman. Similarly,
virtually all of Hulga's arrogant assumptions about Manley Pointer
(both of whose names are significant, the first also ironic, given his
childlike lovemaking) are inaccurate; indeed, in every case the reality
of his religious views, his "goodness," and his innocence is exactly
the opposite of her confident presuppositions. And, of course, her
reaction to his lovemaking is not what she expects at all. Most
interesting, however, is the point which O'Connor makes about Hulga's
disbelief. When this angry young atheist invokes the name of a
philosopher, she cites Malebranche, a quintessentially theistic thinker;
when she tries to philosophize to Pointer her terms ("We are all
damned, . . . It's a kind of salvation") are Christian, if her context
is not; when she is moved by Pointer's assertion that she is different
(an assertion not unlike Bevel Summer's statement to Harry Ashfield
that "'You count now'"), her emotional reaction is couched in terms of
redemption: "It was like losing her own life and finding it again, in
his"; and her reaction to Pointer's fake Bibles is one of indignation comparable to that of Haze Motes:

"You're a Christian!" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian! You're just like them all—say one thing and do another. You're a perfect Christian, you're . . ." (261)

In short, O'Connor draws Hulga as another lost soul, yearning for God and redemption but unable to give up her intellectual pride and philosophical pretension to allow herself to believe fully. The portrait is both touching and esthetically convincing, and it provides a model against which a story such as "A Circle in the Fire," with its rather clumsy religious point, suffers by comparison.

"A Circle in the Fire" offers one of O'Connor's clearest portrayals of the smug, self-satisfied farm owner whom Robert Drake has summed up so effectively. For Mrs. Cope is of the same breed as Mrs. Hopewell of "Good Country People." She is proud, shallow, and generally optimistic; thus, when her sadistic tenant, Mrs. Pritchard (almost a duplicate of Mrs. Freeman in her morbid love of deformity as well as her quiet enjoyment of her landlady's problems) tries to discuss the latest funerals, Mrs. Cope always changes the subject "to something cheerful" (215). Indeed, Mrs. Cope tries very hard to live in a state of continual cheerfulness in an attempt to forget her fear that her woods might catch fire, and, when this cheerfulness seems to work, she turns to a sort of overblown, even Pharisaic thankfulness to express her relief: "We have a lot to be thankful for, . . . Every day you should say a prayer of thanksgiving" (217). At times even the feeling of mere relief from the threat seems too shallow for her, and she extends it until she fairly bursts with gratitude to the benevolent
God Who, she is convinced, has made a special effort to shower her with abundance:

"Every day 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 be all a burden she was trying to shake off her back.

Mrs. Pritchard studied the woods, "All I got is four abscess teeth," she remarked.

"Well be thankful you haven't got five," Mrs. Cope snapped. . . . "We might all be destroyed by a hurricane. I can always find something to be thankful for. . . . Why, think of all those poor Europeans . . . that they put in boxcars like cattle and rode them to Siberia. Lord . . . we ought to spend half our time on our knees." (217)

But, of course, the Good Lord only helps those who help themselves, and, given this view, Mrs. Cope believes that she richly deserves the gifts which she has received:

"I have the best kept place in the county and do you know why? Because I work. I've had to work to save this place and work to keep it." She emphasized each word with the trowel. "I don't let anything get ahead of me and I'm not always looking for trouble. I take it as it comes." (217-18)

Thus, Mrs. Cope is accustomed to some of her minor everyday troubles. She is, for example, more than equal to the implied challenge to her authority which she sees in the failure of one of her Negro hired hands to open a gate. She will not allow him to drive around a fence "at her expense" instead of opening a gate, and she forces him to do her bidding, convinced, as she is, that "her Negroes were as destructive and impersonal as nut grass" (216). But, when questioned by Mrs. Pritchard about what she would do if all her troubles should ever come at once, Mrs. Cope, unknowingly predicting her later reaction to the sight of her burning woods, exclaims, "It wouldn't be nothing you could do but throw up your hands" (218).
As she speaks, Mrs. Pritchard sees three boys approaching.

The boys' reason for visiting Mrs. Cope's farm seems at first to be rather touching. One of them reports that Powell Boyd has remembered her place since the time his father had been one of her tenants:

"Listen here, . . . all the time we been knowing him he's been telling us about this here place. Said it was everything here. Said it was horses here. Said he had the best time of his entire life right here on this here place. Talks about it all the time. . . . Always talking about them horses he rid here, . . . and said he would let us ride them too. Said it was one named Gene." (219)

Mrs. Cope, who has already produced her standard greeting for little boys ("'Well, well, . . . It's nice of you to stop and see me. I think that was real sweet of you'"), immediately refocuses her thoughts upon her possessions and begins to worry that ". . . someone would get hurt on her place and sue her for everything she had" (219). And when the smallest boy tells her that Powell once said that "' . . . when he died he wanted to come here'" (220), Mrs. Cope seems to miss the point completely, and, assuming that the children stand watching her because they are hungry, she offers them something to eat, never realizing that their hunger is for a carefree life on her farm rather than merely for food. When she talks with Mrs. Pritchard, however, she speaks in a "dead voice," as if she may have some dim understanding of the boys' desires.

While she feeds the boys and listens to their complaints about their homes in a city development ("'The only way you can tell your own is by the smell'") as well as to Powell's almost reverent reminiscences about the horse named Gene, Mrs. Cope also contributes to the boys'
growing resentment by forbidding them to ride the horses or sleep in the barn or camp in the woods. Instead she demands that they sleep in the field where there are no trees and thus no danger of fire from their cigarettes. The largest boy merely mocks her possessiveness: "'Her woods!'" (222).

As the boys stay, the tension between them and Mrs. Cope builds, and the coming catastrophe is foreshadowed in O'Connor's imagery of the sun, which at dusk is "almost on top of the tree line . . . swollen and flame colored . . . in a net of ragged clouds as if it might burn through any second and fall into the woods" (223). Mrs. Cope, however, tries to impress upon the boys her view of God: "'We have so much to be thankful for,' she said suddenly in a mournful marveling tone, 'Do you boys ever thank God every night for all He's done for you? Do you thank Him for everything? . . . Do you? . . . Well, I know I do'" (223). The boys continue to reject her patronizing kindnesses ("'You boys know I'm glad to have you, . . . but I expect you to behave. I expect you to act like gentlemen'" [224]), and when she finally falls back on her authoritarian assertion that "'After all, . . . this is my place'" (224), they walk away. O'Connor underlines the crucial effect of her statement upon the boys, noting that Mrs. Cope is left "with a shocked look as if she had had a searchlight thrown on her in the middle of the night" (225). This metaphorical "searchlight" exposes her Pharisaical pride in her ownership of the woods, and this ownership is precisely what the boys reject categorically: "'She don't own them woods, . . . Man, Gawd owns them woods and her too,'" they tell Hollis, one of her farm hands, mocking her further: "'I reckon she owns the sky over
this place too,' and . . . [the] littlest one says, 'Owns the sky and can't no airplane go over her without she says so'" (225).

Certainly the verbal assault on Mrs. Cope's self-centeredness and inflexible proprietorship of the land is most obviously the result of the boys' bitterly disappointed reaction to their exclusion from the paradise about which Powell has been telling them for so long. Instead of a joyous place of innocent horseback riding and fun, they have found only self-righteous hostility and a repeated demand for respect of property rights which, in their dreams, they have never imagined and which they now find impossible to recognize. Thus, they abandon their polite facade and declare open war on Mrs. Cope; having ridden her horses, they let out the bull, drain oil from the tractors, and throw rocks at her mailbox. Mrs. Cope's reaction, predictably enough, is yet another burst of self-righteous indignation: "I've tried to be nice to you boys. Haven't I been nice to you boys? . . . I think I have been very nice to you boys. I've fed you twice" (227). What the foolishly proud old lady still fails to realize, however, is that the boys believe that the farm is theirs by virtue of their dreams, that, in short, she has no basis on which to be either kind or patronizing—and their reaction to her own repeated assertions of ownership and indignation is best defined by the disembodied laugh which Mrs. Pritchard reports hearing from the bushes near the hog pen: "It was an evil laugh, full of calculated meanness" (228).

In her monstrous conceit, however, Mrs. Cope believes that she has coped with the boys successfully, just as she has "prided herself on the way that she handled the type of mind Mrs. Pritchard had" (228),
and, when she believes that the boys are gone, she begins again to recite what O'Connor scathingly calls "the litany of her blessings":

"They've gone, . . . poor things," and she began to tell the child how much they had to be thankful for, for she said they might have had to live in a development themselves or that they might have been Negroes or they might have been in iron lungs or they might have been Europeans ridden in boxcars like cattle . . . (228)

While Mrs. Cope revels in her blessings, however, her daughter, the nameless child who has watched the boys' actions sourly and from a distance, stumbles upon the three bathing in a cow trough, running about naked like pagan creatures, discussing Mrs. Cope's farm, and mingling their continuing wistful desire and their implacable hatred:

"I wish I lived here!" the little boy shouted . . .
"I'm goddam glad I don't," the big boy panted . . .
Powell sat without moving, without seeming to know that the other two were behind him, and looked straight ahead like a ghost sprung upright in his coffin. "If this place was not here any more," he said, "you would never have to think of it again." (230)

Certainly young Powell is closely related to two of O'Connor's other tortured souls, Haze Motes and The Misfit (he also wears glasses). Like them he will destroy what he can't have; and the "big boy" echoes his sentiment, suggesting what seems to him to be an ultimate form of destruction: "'I'd build a big parking lot on it [the farm]'" (231). The pathetically naive assertion of the little boy that "'It's ours'" is rejected, and Powell begins to set fire to the woods in what becomes a wild, pagan ritual of destruction:

They began to whoop and holler and beat their hands and in a few seconds there was a narrow line of fire widening before her [the watching girl] and them. While she watched, it reached up from the brush, snatch­ing and biting at the lowest branches of the trees. The
wind carried rags of it higher and the boys
disappeared shrieking behind it. (231)

Mrs. Cope's reaction to the fire is, in the face of her old
fears and the deliberately slow reactions of her Negro farmhands,
essentially what she had earlier predicted: she can only "fling up
[her] hands" and watch the flames. The child's reaction, however, is
much different and, I think, quite inconsistent with her actions and
reactions throughout the story, which have generally been stolid and
unimaginative. She flees the woods "weighted down with some new
unplaced misery that she had never felt before and looks up at her
mother's face" as if she had never seen it before. It was the face of
the new misery she felt, but on her mother it looked old and it looked
as if it might have belonged to anybody, a Negro or a European or to
Powell himself" (232). O'Connor's point is obvious enough: both the
mother and the daughter are being initiated into a new awareness of
misery which must surely destroy Mrs. Cope's complacency and self-
satisfaction as well as the girl's surly conviction that she can
"handle" the boys (or, one suspects, anything else). Thus the girl
sees both the boys and the fire in a new light when she hears their
"shrieks of joy as if prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in
the circle the angel had cleared for them" (232). The connection
between Powell and his friends with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
is not particularly obscure. The boys have attacked Mrs. Cope's
emphasis upon her ownership of her property—they have refused to accept
the validity of this golden image and are immune to the property-
destroying fire which they set in an act of righteous revenge.

But Caroline Gordon's objection to this heavily symbolic
conclusion is, I think, valid: "The transition from the natural world
to the supernatural seems to me too abrupt." Mrs. Cope has fallen from her former position of insufferable pride, just as the cruel and sadistic Mrs. Pritchard, who "required the taste of blood from time to time to keep her equilibrium" (228), has possibly foreseen (and probably hoped for), but when O'Connor gives a sudden Biblical vision to the child who throughout the story has been markedly unperceptive, she flaws her story with the same sort of Hawthornian "moralistic thump" that mars the ending of "The Artificial Nigger."

O'Connor's fullest and most complex presentation of her "proud landowner" type appears in "The Displaced Person," a long piece which, in its examination of the fall from pride as well as the various implications of cultural, spiritual, and psychological dislocation, is one of her finest stories, although many of its characters are familiar O'Connor types. Thus, the heroine, Mrs. McIntyre (whose Scottish name reflects her extreme frugality), is an old widow who, from a position of self-defined and self-satisfied moral and spiritual superiority, is determined to preserve the dimensions of her carefully kept universe. And, as in both "Good Country People" and "A Circle in the Fire," this lady's assumptions and actions are both reinforced and, at times, undermined by the wife of her tenant farmer, a Mrs. Shortley. "The Displaced Person" is, however, much more complex—and more successful—than either of these shorter stories because of O'Connor's fuller development of her characters, her themes, and her symbolism.

The first character to be introduced in the story, indeed the central character of Part I, is Mrs. Shortley, Mrs. McIntyre's tenant and companion, who sees herself as the guardian of her landlady's realm. Thus Mrs. Shortley (whose name is ironic in the context of her own view
of her "wisdom," but appropriate in the reader's view of her spiritual
smugness) appears first as a great noble creature on a hilltop:

. . . 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 tre-
mendous legs, with the grand self-confidence of
a mountain, and rose, up narrowing bulges of gran-
ite, to two icy blue points of light that pierced
forward, surveying everything. She ignored the
white afternoon sun which was creeping behind a
ragged wall of cloud as if it pretended to be an
intruder and cast her gaze down the red clay road
that turned off from the highway. (262)

Mrs. Shortley is indeed an impressive figure, but certainly her
attitude—her arrogance and overwhelming self-confidence—undercuts
her impressiveness, for, to any perceptive reader of O'Connor, this
woman is obviously another of the "proud ones." Indeed, the peacock
which has been following Mrs. Shortley detracts from her spiritual
stature, both in its traditional connotation of vanity and in its more
specific Christian significance as a symbol of the divinity of Christ,
the Resurrection, and the vigilant Church,\(^27\) for while Mrs. Shortley
has been "surveying everything," the bird has been standing "as if
his attention were fixed in the distance on something which no one
else [including Mrs. Shortley] could see" (262). The "sign of danger"
which she does see, however, is real enough; it is the sight of Mrs.
McIntyre "wearing her best clothes and a string of beads" just to meet
a new hired hand, a "Displaced Person" being brought out to the farm by
a Catholic priest. For Mrs. Shortley, herself a sort of apotheosis of
Southern poor white, red-necked chauvinism, both the D.P. and the priest
are foreigners of the worst sort, to be watched with great caution and
distrust. Indeed, as she watches, the D.P., who doesn't look at all as
Mrs. Shortley had imagined—i.e. with wooden shoes and a sailor hat—
confirms her worst suspicions by kissing Mrs. McIntyre's hand. Mrs. Shortley's shocked reaction of moral indignation is described by O'Connor at her humorous best:

Mrs. Shortley jerked her hand up toward her mouth and then after a second brought it down and rubbed it vigorously on her seat. If Mr. Shortley had tried to kiss her hand, Mrs. McIntyre would have knocked him into the middle of next week, but then Mr. Shortley wouldn't have kissed her hand anyway. He didn't have time to mess around. (263)

Similarly, the names of the D.P. and his daughter are offensively mysterious to Mrs. Shortley, who thinks that the girl's name, Sledgewig, is as strange "as if you would name a boy Bollweevil" (263), while the family name is simply unknown to her, although she has become accustomed to thinking of it as "Gobblehook." The real source of her distrust and discomfort, however, is that she blindly associates the D.P. and his family with all the horrible stories she has heard about Europe, and she assumes that they will bring these foreign ways with them:

Mrs. Shortley recalled a newsreel she had seen once of a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing... This was the kind of thing that was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in this country, and watching from her vantage point, Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblehooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others? (264)

Thus, when Mrs. Shortley finally moves down to meet the D.P.'s "her look grazed the tops of [their] ... heads and then revolved downwards slowly, the way a buzzard glides and drops in the air until it alights on the carcass" (265). And if she is surprised that the D.P.'s daughter is prettier than her own, Mrs. Shortley sees the Catholic priest as a
reinforcement of her view: "[she] was reminded that these people did not have an advanced religion. . . . Again she saw the room piled high with bodies" (265).

While Mrs. Shortley stares at the D.P. and his family, the priest makes inarticulate sounds of admiration as he looks at the peacock, finally exclaiming "What a beauti-ful bird! . . . So beautiful, . . . A tail full of suns!" (265) as the peacock stands "as if he had just come down from some sun-drenched height to be a vision for them all" (166). Certainly, O'Connor is using the bird in the context of the traditional Christian symbols, and, as Mr. Hyman has so perceptively noted,

In her story [the peacock] functions as a kind of spiritual test; Mrs. McIntyre sees him as only "another mouth to feed"; her husband the late judge had kept peacocks because "they made him feel rich; the priest is overwhelmed by the peacock's beauty, and says of the spread tail, "Christ will come like that!"28

And Mrs. Shortley herself refers to the bird as "'Nothing but a pea-chicken'" (266). Similarly, while musing over the dire threats she sees implicit in the arrival of the D.P. as well as of her own heroic role as prophetess, she is blind to the bird's transcendent beauty:

. . . his tail hung in front of her, full of fierce planets with eyes that were each ringed in green and set against a sun that was gold in one second's light and salmon-colored in the next. 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. She was having an inner vision instead. She was seeing ten billion of them pushing their way into new places over her and herself, a giant angel with wings wide as a house, telling the Negroes that they would have to find another place. She turned herself in the direction of the barn, musing on this, her expression lofty and satisfied. (267)

Mrs. McIntyre's reactions to Mr. Guizac, however, are quite different from Mrs. Shortley's. A quintessentially selfish person, she
constantlly thinks of the D.P., as she does of most matters, in terms
of money. Thus, she is delighted to think that he "would save her
twenty dollars a month on repair bills alone," (269), quite unlike the
"Poor white trash and niggers" who have "drained me dry. . . . not a
one of them left without taking something off this place that didn't
belong to them. Not a one!" (270). Her pride in her management of
the farm as well as her current problems are seen by Mrs. McIntyre in
monetary terms:

"I've been running this place for thirty years
. . . and always just barely making it. People
think you're made of money. I have taxes to pay.
I have the insurance to keep up. I have the re-
pair bills. I have the feed bills. . . . Ever since
the Judge died, . . . I've barely been making ends
meet and they all take something when they leave.
The niggers don't leave--they stay and steal. A
nigger thinks anybody is rich he can steal from and
that white trash thinks anybody is rich who can
afford to hire people as sorry as they are. And all
I've got is the dirt under my feet!" (270)

However Mrs. McIntyre protests too much, for, although she complains
about her "niggers" stealing from her, such thefts are part of a way of
life to which she is accustomed, and she enjoys the sense of moral as
well as financial superiority she gets from being robbed. Thus, at one
point, she has to tell Guizac through his son/interpreter that "all
Negroes steal" and that one really ought not to interfere with this
traditional operation (269).

Her general reaction to Guizac, however, is one of great
satisfaction, and the terms of her praise are (given Guizac's later
effect on her) appropriately religious: "But at last I'm saved! . . .
One fellow's misery is another fellow's gain. . . . That man is my
salvation!" (270). Predictably enough, Mrs. Shortley is suspicious
of such enthusiasm, and she attempts to fulfill her role (as she sees
it) as prophetess: "[she] looked straight ahead as if her vision penetrated the cane and the hill and pierced through to the other side. 'I would suspicion salvation got from the devil,' she said in a slow detached way" (270). But once again O'Connor undermines the effect of Mrs. Shortley's declaration by emphasizing her smugness and complete self-confidence, particularly in terms of religious belief:

She had never given much thought to the devil for she felt that religion was essentially for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without it. For people like herself, for people of gumption it was a social occasion providing the opportunity to sing; but had she ever given it much thought, she would have considered the devil the head of it and God the hanger-on. (270)

As Mrs. Shortley observes the success of Guizac on the farm, however, she begins to suspect that he may be a more immediate threat than she has realized, because, as a foreigner who is "all eyes and no understanding," he may fail to recognize certain traditional customs, specifically that of Mr. Shortley's running a still on a neglected part of Mrs. McIntyre's farm. Moreover, she defines this lack of "understanding" as a result of Guizac's having come from "a place . . . where the religion had not been reformed" (271), and to counteract it she begins to assert her role as defender of the Protestant faith and the Southern way of life even more strenuously, praising her husband to Mrs. McIntyre on the grounds that "'it is no man . . . that is more of a Christian'" (272). In short, her antipathy toward Guizac becomes the basis in her mind of a religious crusade: "Every time Mr. Guizac smiled, Europe stretched out in Mrs. Shortley's imagination, mysterious and evil, the devil's experiment station" (272). And every time she thinks of "that priest" she reminds herself that "In Europe . . . they
never have advanced or reformed. They got the same religion as a thousand years ago. It could only be the devil responsible for that" (273). Thus, Mrs. Shortley visualizes the destruction by the priest and the D.P. of the society she has always known, and she warns Astor and Sulk that they will become useless as mules. She also sees the priest as a sort of "very slick" religious confidence man who is working Mrs. McIntyre with a particular plan in mind: "First he would get her into his Church and then he would get his hand in her pocket book" (274). Finally, she convinces herself that the priest is also trying "to persuade [Mrs. McIntyre] to bring another Polish family onto the place" (275), with a war as a result—a strange war in which Mrs. Shortley visualizes English and Polish words locked in battle:

She begins...to see the Polish words and the English words coming at each other, stalking forward, not sentences, just words, gabble gabble gabble, flung out high and shrill and stalking forward and then grappling with each other. She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty. She saw them all piled up in a room, all the dead dirty words, theirs and hers too, piled up like the naked bodies in the newreel. (275-6)

Reacting violently to this vision she cries silently, "God save me!" and begins to read her Bible regularly, particularly the Apocalypse, quoting the prophets and, in her own view, arriving at "a deeper understanding of her existence" (276). Predictably enough, Mrs. Shortley's new awareness convinces her not only that "the meaning of the world was a mystery that had been planned," but that "she had a special part in the plan because she was so strong" (276). The crowning irony of her conception of her role in God's universe, in addition to her essentially egotistic view, is that in her emphasis upon strength
her new conviction places her in exactly the same context as the
"European murderers" she has hated so--those who filled the small rooms
with all the grotesque bodies:

She saw that the Lord God Almighty had created a
strong people to do what had to be done and she felt
that she would be ready when she was called. (276)

And when she is called--when she has "her vision,"--although the
symbols of fiery wheels, the white fish, a "gigantic figure," and the
indefinable but magnificent figure from which a resonant voice issues
are all Biblical, her reaction to the single word "'Prophesy'" is, in
her own earlier defined terms, completely "European" (i.e. Nazi) in
both content and imagery:

She stood there, tottering slightly but still up-
right, her eyes shut tight and her fists clenched
and her straw hat low on her forehead. "'The
children of the wicked nations will be butchered,'" she
said in a loud voice. "'Legs where arms should
be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand.'" (277)

Thus when she sees the priest's car again, her reaction is
necessarily negative: "'here again, . . . Come to destroy'" (277).

Her earlier, rather unfocused antipathy toward the priest has now
become integrated within her vision of herself as the true prophetess
of God standing against all satanic foreigners, and, with her mind
"on nothing but the dangerous presence of the priest" (277), she is
completely stunned to hear that Mrs. McIntyre plans to dismiss her
husband. But her complete shock, if it at first causes her to look
"ahead as if she saw nothing whatsoever" (278), also forces her to look
inwardly for the first time: "there was a peculiar lack of light in
her icy blue eyes. All the vision in them might have been turned
around, looking inside her" (279). In her last convulsive gestures,
however, she is, as always, self-centered and possessive, "clutching
at everything she could get her hands on and hugging it to herself" (280). O'Connor also clarifies Mrs. Shortley's last acts further; the prophetess—"the giant wife of the countryside"—has been "displaced in the world from all that belonged to her" (280; italics mine). Thus, it is as a displaced person that the dead Mrs. Shortley seems "to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontier of her true country" (280)—a country of rejection, of dislocation, and of, for the first time, humility.

In Part II of "The Displaced Person," Mrs. McIntyre begins to assume much greater prominence than in Part I, for, as Robert Fitzgerald has noted, "After Mrs. Shortley's death, her role as giant wife of the countryside devolved upon Mrs. McIntyre, who being still more formidable will engage in a harder struggle," although her religion is not Mrs. Shortley's rural evangelism but "a managerial religion, the one by which daily business in a realm gets done." Thus, her reaction to the departure of the Shortley's is a succinct and confident "'Well, ... we can get along without them!'" (280); indeed, she is "delighted" to have been spared the fuss of firing Mr. Shortley, and she believes that she can now be quietly and securely "satisfied." In her newfound sense of security, Mrs. McIntyre, like Mrs. Shortley before her, begins to seem even more smug, glorying in her own superiority and quoting old bromides with self-righteous zeal:

"I've spent my life fooling with worthless people, ... but now I'm through. ... I am through," she repeated and gave her dark smock that she had thrown over her shoulders like a cape a quick snatch at the neck. ... "Money is the root of all evil," she said. "The Judge said so every day. He said he deplored money." (281)
But her hypocrisy is transparent, particularly since she is quoting "the judge," whom she had married "when she was thirty and he was seventy-five, thinking she would be rich as soon as he died" (275). Nevertheless, Mrs. McIntyre's confidence in herself is supreme, and she restates it repeatedly:

"I don't have to put up with foolishness anymore. . . . Times are changing, . . . Do you know what's happening in the world? It's swelling up. It's getting so full of people that only the smart thrifty energetic ones are going to survive," and she tapped the words smart, thrifty, and energetic out on the palm of her hand. . . . "I've had enough trashy people on this place to last me a lifetime . . . What you colored people don't realize . . . is that I'm the one around here who holds all the strings together. If you don't work, I don't make money and I can't pay you. You're all dependent on me . . . " (281-82)

When one of her Negro hands quotes the Judge—"'Judge say the devil he know is better than the devil he don't'"—to warn her about relying too much on Guizac and ignoring her more familiar Negro workers, Mrs. McIntyre's rejection of this view is in typically financial terms:

"'The Judge has long since ceased to pay the bills around here'" (283). Still, she remembers the old man who had had "a peculiar odor about him of sweaty fondled bills" as the husband who had given her three years which were "the happiest and the most prosperous" (284) of her life. Indeed, the fact that he died bankrupt seemed, after a few hard years, merely to have provided her with the test by which her strength and endurance were proved. And at one point she stands, as Mrs. Shortley had earlier stood, "slightly reared back with her arms folded under her smock and a satisfied look on her face," watching the D.P. and congratulating herself on her success and generosity:

She was sorry that the poor man had been chased out of Poland and run across Europe and had had to take up in a tenant shack in a strange country, but she
had not been responsible for any of this. She had had a hard time herself. She knew what it was to struggle. Mr. Guizac had probably had everything given to him all the way across Europe and over here. He had probably not had to struggle enough. She had given him a job. (284)

But Mrs. McIntyre's complacency is suddenly obliterated by the information that Guizac has arranged for her Negro worker Sulk to marry his sixteen year old cousin in order to get her out of a D.P. camp. As usual the old lady's first reaction is couched in terms of money: "I'll see that you get every cent of your money back" (285). But Mrs. McIntyre is "shaken" for exactly the same reason that Mrs. Shortley had been so violently opposed to Guizac—he is threatening the traditional order of things, and, just as Mrs. Shortley had become "an exponent of the countryside's religion" in her return to evangelistic prophecy, Mrs. McIntyre prepares herself for a similar, if more materialistic, role by returning for inspiration and strength to the judge's study, virtually a shrine to money, the center of Mrs. McIntyre's faith:

[Mrs. McIntyre] went into the back hall, a closet-like space that was dark and quiet like a chapel and sat down on the edge of the judge's black mechanical chair with her elbow on his desk... Old bankbooks and ledgers were stacked in the half-open drawers and there was a small safe, empty but locked, set like a tabernacle in the center of it. She had left this part of the house unchanged since the old man's time. It was a kind of memorial to him, sacred because he had conducted his business there... It had been his first principle to talk as if he were the poorest man in the world and she followed it, not only because he had but because it was true. When she sat with her intense constricted face turned toward the empty safe, she knew there was nobody poorer in the world than she was. (286-87; italics mine)

Certainly Mrs. McIntyre is indulging in self-pity, believing that she is poor because her "salvation," Mr. Guizac, seems to be another disappointment for her: "They're all the same. It's always been like this" (286). And O'Connor clarifies the old lady's situation further through
the imagery of the empty safe. Mrs. McIntyre does have money, but in her worship of it and the safes constructed to hold it, she also displays her spiritual impoverishment.

Nevertheless, Mrs. McIntyre's visit to her shrine rekindles her zeal, and, as the inheritor of Mrs. Shortley's mantle as defender of the old ways, she can attack Guizac brutally, calling him "'a monster!'" who would marry his cousin to "'a half-witted thieving black stinking nigger!'" (287). Although she argues at first in terms of her culture—"'It can't be done. Maybe it can be done in Poland but it can't be done here...'", she finally reverts, as she always does, to her own comfort and her own management of the farm: "'Mr. Guizac, ... I will not have my niggers upset. I cannot run this place without my niggers. I can run it without you but not without them and if you mention this girl to Sulk again, you won't have a job with me!'" (288). Mrs. McIntyre also remembers Mrs. Shortley's views and begins to attack Guizac in religious terms: "'I cannot understand how a man who calls himself a Christian ... could bring a poor innocent girl over here and marry her to something like that!'" (288). But her final argument is, again, based on her role as landowner trying to keep her farm running:

"'This is my place, ... I say who will come here and who won't. ... I am not responsible for the world's misery, ... You should be grateful to be here ...'" (288-89)

At the end of Part II of the story, Mrs. McIntyre assumes even the physical position of Mrs. Shortley, standing on the hill looking down on the farm; she has, in short, become the "giant wife of the countryside," comfortable and proud:

... she climbed to the top of the slope and stood with her arms folded and looked grimly over the field. "'They're all the same," she muttered, "whether they come from Poland or Tennessee. I've handled Herrins
and Ringfields and Shortleys and I can handle a Guizac." . . . All her life she had been fighting the world's overflow and now she had it in the form of a Pole. "You're just like all the rest of them," she said, "--only smart and thrifty and energetic but so am I. And this is my place," and she stood there, a small black-hatted figure with an aging cherubic face, and folded her arms as if she were equal to anything. (289)

As we have seen, however, Mrs. McIntyre, unlike Mrs. Shortley, is not at all religious, and O'Connor re-emphasizes this important point at the beginning of Part III of the story in her presentation of a humorous and grotesque conversation of non-communication between Mrs. McIntyre and the Catholic priest. The old lady tries to ignore the priest's attempt to discuss Purgatory, and failing, finally interrupts him declaring, "I'm not theological. I'm practical! . . . Mr. Guizac is not satisfactory . . . He's extra. . . . He doesn't fit in. I have to have somebody who fits in!" (290). Similarly, the priest ignores her protests, searching instead for "'that beautiful birrrd of yours!'" (290), and when he finds the peacock, tail outspread, he stands "transfixed." In their mutual lack of communication he and Mrs. McIntyre begin a sort of fugal dialogue which is one of O'Connor's ironic masterpieces:

"Christ will come like that!" he said in a loud gay voice and wiped his hand over his mouth and stood there, gaping.

Mrs. McIntyre's face assumed a set puritanical expression and she reddened. Christ in conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother. "It's not my responsibility that Mr. Guizac has nowhere to go," she said. "I don't find myself responsible for all the extra people in the world."

The old man didn't seem to hear her. His attention was fixed on the cock who was taking minute steps backward, his head against the spread tail.

"The Transfiguration," he murmured.

She had no idea what he was talking about. "Mr. Guizac didn't have to come here in the first place," she said, giving him a hard look.
The cock lowered his tail and began to pick grass.
"He didn't have to come in the first place," she repeated, emphasizing each word.
The old man smiled absently. "He came to redeem us," he said and blandly reached for her hand and shook it and said he must go. (291)

Certainly the mutual incomprehension of the two speakers is humorous, and, in strictly realistic terms, the priest's reaction to the peacock is ludicrous, a reading which O'Connor reinforces a bit when she sets up the juxtaposition of "The Transfiguration" picking grass. But her point is also theologically effective, for the priest is moved by beauty and the symbolic significance of the bird, while Mrs. McIntyre reiterates Cain's question: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Similarly, the priest's seeming confusion of Christ and the D.P. foreshadows Mrs. McIntyre's later statement, "'As far as I'm concerned, . . . Christ was just another D.P.'" (294). As Robert Drake suggests,

[Mrs. McIntyre] has spoken more wisely than she knows. Christ, as the New Testament teaches and as Miss O'Connor insists again and again, is a displaced person who is himself the great Displacer, perpetually an offense, an embarrassment and finally a scandal to the righteous, the genteel and the enlightened; . . . In a sense, he is the great Grotesque who, as Mrs. McIntyre charges, ostensibly of the D.P., has "upset the balance around here."32

Earlier, Mrs. Shortley had also thought more wisely than she knew when she observed to herself that "With the coming of these displaced people, she was obliged to give new thought to a good many things" (270-71).

But neither she nor Mrs. McIntyre could rise above her own selfish interests to assume any sort of moral responsibility for the D.P., and when Mr. Shortley returns to the farm, he and Mrs. McIntyre begin to reinforce each other's desires to get rid of Guizac, adding patriotism to their arsenal of religion, farm management, and the preservation of traditional standards: "[Mr. Shortley] said he recalled the face of
one man who had thrown a hand-grenade at him [in World War I] and

that the man had little round eye-glasses exactly like Mr. Guizac's"  

(292). And Mrs. McIntyre takes up this view in preparation for Father

Flynn's assertion of her moral responsibility:

She meant to tell him that her moral obligation

was to her own people, to Mr. Shortley, who had

fought in the world war for his country and not

to Mr. Guizac who had merely arrived here to take

advantage of whatever he could. (292-93)

Thus, when the priest returns to the farm she repeats this argument along

with her standard recital of all her financial problems:

She told him how people who looked rich were the

poorest of all because they had the most to keep

up. She asked him how he thought she paid her

feed bills. She told him she would like to have

her house done over but she couldn't afford it.

She couldn't even afford to have the monument

restored over her husband's grave. She asked him

if he would like to guess what her insurance

amounted to for the year. Finally she asked him

if he thought she was made of money and the old

man suddenly let out a great ugly bellow as if

this were a comical question. (294; italics mine)

Although Mrs. McIntyre believes that she has "clearly triumphed over

him," the priest's reaction has clearly undercut her view by implicitly

ridiculing her self-centered materialism. The passage also dispels to

some extent the impression that Father Flynn is merely a senile old

man fascinated by exotic birds.

For Mrs. McIntyre the pressure continues to mount; she has

nightmares of the Guizacs moving into her house; she is constantly

badgered by Mr. Shortley with his religious/patriotic arguments; and

finally she learns that "everybody in town knew Mr. Shortley's version

of her business and that everyone was critical of her conduct" (297).

But even when she finally becomes convinced (largely by this public

pressure rather than by any moral sense of her own) that she has "a
moral obligation to fire the Pole" (297), her decision to act immediately is still qualified by her greed, for she "hoped to get the fields turned over while he still had thirty days to work for her" (298).

This last dream is destroyed, however, by the murder of Guizac in which all the members of Mrs. McIntyre's little world conspire: a Negro jumps aside from the path of the runaway tractor; Mr. Shortley, who had earlier said "'Revenge is mine, saith the Lord!" and who has undoubtedly allowed the tractor to begin moving, turns his head to watch "with incredible slowness"; and Mrs. McIntyre herself "had started to shout to the Displaced Person but . . . she had not" (298). She and Mr. Shortley and the Negro are all, suddenly and irrevocably, their brother's keepers: "She had felt her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that froze them in collusion forever . . . " (298).

The result of this collusion is beautifully and ironically just (indeed, one suspects, a bit too much so); all of the participants—all those who fought so hard against the Displaced Person in order to save their world—are themselves displaced. Mrs. McIntyre's immediate reaction is to lose consciousness and to awaken "running somewhere, perhaps into the house and out again but she could not remember what for" (299). Her next reaction is to feel that she "was in some foreign country where the people bent over the body were natives, and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in an ambulance" (299; italics mine). Similarly, Mr. Shortley leaves the farm almost immediately, and Sulk departs for "a southern part of the state" (299).
Finally, Mrs. McIntyre's physical decline begins, and she suffers what she earlier would have called one of her greatest calamities; she is forced to sell her dairy herd—at a loss. She is finally left, weak, almost sightless, completely voiceless, with only an occasional visitor, the priest who "explains the doctrines of the Church" to her after he has fed breadcrumbs to her peacock.

Because Mrs. McIntyre is so completely destroyed by her experience, both physically and spiritually, Mr. Hyman's suggestion that Guizac's death is "redemptive for her insofar as it abases her pride and prepares her to accept the burden of the world's misery," is I think, somewhat optimistic. Louis D. Rubin also misses O'Connor's point rather badly:

The farm folk of "The Displaced Person" are insulated from the sick desperation of the world, and in their insularity have lived easily and without woe. But the world comes in. They are in Eden, but the evil of our time impinges. When it comes, they are helpless, unprepared, and would deny it to reaffirm their innocence. They cannot do so, and they are destroyed.

Mr. Rubin seems to have forgotten or ignored the fact that the "sick desperation" in this story is not introduced by Guizac, O'Connor's Christ figure; it already exists in Mrs. Shortley and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in Mrs. McIntyre in their readiness to defend by any means their own comfortable materialistic world. To assert, then, that Mrs. McIntyre et al. are innocent and that her farm is Eden is simply to misread the story.

Perhaps Mrs. McIntyre is redeemed, if we read "redemption" in a somewhat Hawthomian sense of redemption from untried innocence, and, given such a reading, the Displaced Person's similarities to Christ may gain significance. In addition to being displaced, persecuted, and
finally killed—all in the name of expediency for one culture or another—Guizac has also made Mrs. McIntyre aware of their sins; he has, like Christ, "upset the balance" (295). But O'Connor refuses to push the parallel much further, and at the end of the story she provides no evidence that Father Flynn's instructions to Mrs. McIntyre are being received any more willingly than before, although her new condition of weakness and dependence may one day lead her to this acceptance. The last scene in the story is, however, devoted to a final evocation of the priest and the peacock, and once more O'Connor seems to be setting up a rather pat religious lesson: Mrs. Shortley is dead, Mrs. McIntyre is a physical and spiritual wreck, and Mr. Shortley and the Negroes have fled—in short, all the Protestants and materialists have either been destroyed or driven off in guilty desperation; the Catholics, however, have found peace—Guizac in martyrdom and Father Flynn in his communion with all of the beauty and symbolic richness of the peacock. It's all very neat.

The two remaining stories of A Good Man Is Hard to Find, "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" and "A Stroke of Good Fortune," are generally inferior to the other tales in the collection, primarily because each is rather simply predicated upon a set of circumstances which, once defined, seems both obvious and mechanically developed—almost as one-dimensional exercises rather than fully developed stories.

"A Late Encounter with the Enemy" is O'Connor's only explicit excursion into rather obvious social satire, and, although many of the satiric points are valid enough, they are also depressingly hackneyed.
Thus, her "heroine," one Sally Poker Sash, is a sixty-two year old school teacher who has been teaching for about forty-six years and attending summer school for twenty in order to get a degree which will qualify her to teach. Furthermore, the old girl is determined to continue "in the exact way she had been taught not to teach" as "a mild form of revenge" (233). And her crowning ambition is to have her grandfather attend her graduation as a guest of honor in order to wreak further revenge upon those who have required her to attend college during the summer instead of allowing her what she considers to be her well-earned rest; for she is convinced that the old man's presence will symbolize her sense of the past, "what she stood for, or, as she said, 'what all was behind her'" (233), in short, The Old South. Thus he will be a living (she devoutly hopes) symbol of past glory to "all the upstarts who had turned the world on its head and unsettled the ways of decent living" (234). To her he symbolizes "'the old traditions! Dignity! Honor! Courage!'" (234).

The rather simple ironic point of the story is, of course, that "General Tennessee Flintrock Sash of the Confederacy" is a fake, a creation of Hollywood press agents for the premier in Atlanta of, one assumes, Gone With The Wind or some similar extravaganza. The old man's real name is simply George Poker Sash; "he had not actually been a general in that [Civil] war. He had probably been a foot soldier" (234)—but he doesn't really remember. Indeed, he doesn't even remember his own feet. His whole existence revolves about his memories of "'that preeny they had in Atlanta'" when he was surrounded by "beautiful guls" and repeatedly photographed. And even the premier itself was, in terms of Sash's participation, a ludicrous escapade: the "general" was
led forcibly from the stage croaking delightedly of his enjoyment of "all the pretty guls" (237) and his granddaughter discovered too late that her evening ensemble consisted of a black crepe dinner dress with a rhinestone buckle complemented by her brown Girl Scout oxford shoes which she had forgotten to change. Still, this gala evening of press-agentry, flashbulbs, and "usherettes in Confederate caps and short skirts" was the high point in the lives of both Sally Sash and her grandfather, who, from that time on, declined physically and mentally until he became just another relic:

Every year on Confederate Memorial Day, he was bundled up and lent to the Capitol City Museum where he was displayed from one to four in a musty room, full of old photographs, old uniforms, old artillery, and historic documents. (237)

For the "General," Sally Sash's commencement is only faintly reminiscent of the Atlanta premier, and he is irritated that it lacks "floats with beautiful guls on them" (240). Like so many of the events he has attended, the graduation ceremony seems to be "something connected with history like they were always having" (240), but for the "General" history has lost its meaning: "The past and the future were the same thing to him, one forgotten and the other not remembered" (237) and in this context the commencement speaker's words predict Sash's death: "'If we forget our past, . . . we won't remember our future and it will be as well for we won't have one'" (240). Thus, the old man's "past" is a fake; his present is an empty exercise in irritation ("'God damn every goddam thing to hell,'" he mutters); and his future is defined by the black procession which, in a final moment of dim recognition, the old man suspects to be the approach of death:

Then suddenly he saw that the black procession was almost on him. He recognized it, for it had been
dogging all his days. He made such a desperate
effort to see over it and find out what comes
after the past that his hand clutched the sword
until the blade touched bone. (241)

"A Late Encounter with the Enemy" makes some nice ironic
points, particularly in the title itself, in which the "enemy" may be
seen as both the sentimental public which created the "General" (and
which he seems generally to hate) and the coldly unsentimental death
which comes to Sash while he sits on stage representing a way of life
which is also both sentimental and essentially defunct. O'Connor's
writing is similarly effective in its understatement ("He had not
expected to have a hole in his head at this event" [240]), and its
grotesquerie ("The crafty scout had bumped him out the back way and
rolled him at high speed down a flagstone path and was waiting now,
with the corpse, in the long line at the Coca-Cola machine" [242]).
But, the story as a whole is too pat and too mechanical to be much more
than a kind of exercise in irony.

Stanley Edgar Hyman has referred to "A Stroke of Good Fortune"
as a "markedly unsuccessful story . . . a leaden tract against com­
placency and contraception,"35 and his judgement is, I think, generally
valid. Even more than "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" this story
hangs upon a single thread, the mixed terror and repulsion of one Ruby
Hill toward the fact of her own pregnancy. Again O'Connor's irony is
both effective and obvious: the title is entirely ironic, and Ruby's
ascension of the stairs is an inverse indication of her spiritual decline.
The story is also peopled with familiar O'Connor types, but here they
seem to appear gratuitously to act as members of a chorus for Ruby's
woes. Thus, Madame Zoleeda, the fortune teller, is another of the false
prophets of the city, and Laverne Watts, who sings "'Put them together they spell MOTHER! MOTHER!'" to Ruby reminds one of such other gloat- ing "friends" as Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Pritchard of "Good Country People" and "A Circle in the Fire." The story also includes a few humorous incidents, some of the funniest centering around Ruby's problems with Hartley Gilfeet's toy pistol, and at least one of O'Connor's metaphors is devastatingly vivid when she describes the odor surrounding an old man: "She . . . got a whiff of him that was like putting her nose under a buzzard's wing" (176). Generally, however, Mr. Hyman is right; the whole structure of the story is controlled by O'Connor's desire to make a moral point about Ruby's obvious selfish pride and her un-Christian conviction that she has generally been able to run her life efficiently. The story is, indeed, a tract, and in its failure it defines some of the basic limitations of O'Connor's art.

In his study of the American short story William Peden has offered a perceptive analysis of O'Connor's fiction:

Miss O'Connor, in short, is basically an allegorist or fantasist rather than a realist, although her stories are so securely rooted in specific time and place as to seem real as rain. She is in the highest sense a moralist working out of a preconceived dogma, not a journalist or a scavenger fumbling with Gothic horrors and monstrosities for their own sakes. Again, like Hawthorne, who at his best shared Miss O'Connor's fondness for the abnormal and the diseased and the bizarre, her eye is both upon this world and the next. The fault of her characters, she suggests, is primarily in themselves, precipitated by societal and hereditary flaws, not solely in their stars. Through ignorance, self-sufficiency, stupidity, or worst of all pride, her people have attempted to find their own salvation—even their groping inchoate search for love is primarily narcissistic . . . --and in so doing have committed the sin of rejecting the redemp- tive function of Christianity.
Although much of Mr. Peden's statement is perceptive, he is really a bit generous in comparing O'Connor with Hawthorne and a bit fuzzy in his terminology. Certainly Hawthorne is "in the highest sense a moralist," but he is so precisely because he is not "writing out of a preconceived dogma." Hawthorne's best stories are characterized by a richness and a complexity which O'Connor's tales, in their moral dogmatism, frequently lack, and her constant and Catholic awareness of "this world and the next" narrows her vision rather than broadening it.

Where O'Connor does share characteristics with Hawthorne, she also seems, by comparison, rather heavy-handed. She obviously demands that her characters be initiated from untried innocence into experience. Thus, the grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" finds at the point of a gun the sympathy which she has lost during countless years of selfishness; Hulga Hopewell discovers the pitfalls of intellectual pride; Lucynell Crater (Sr.) learns the hazards of attempting to outwit a confidence man; Ruby Hill finds herself pregnant, in spite of the fact that she has avoided such a calamity "all these years . . . all by herself" (174); and Mrs. Cope and Mrs. McIntyre become devastatingly aware of the fragility of their own complacency and self-satisfaction. But whereas Hawthorne's emphasis is usually upon the psychological aspects of the initiation and thus is rather open, leaning variously toward the religious ("Young Goodman Brown"), the philosophical ("The Birthmark"), or, even more broadly, the human condition in general ("My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "The May-pole of Merry Mount"), O'Connor's attention is invariably upon the religious, specifically Catholic, implications of her characters' actions and reactions.
Hawthorne is similarly much less mechanical in his treatment of characters; in his best stories he generally avoids (with the notable exception of Young Goodman Brown and his Faith) the sort of obvious choice of names in which O'Connor indulges so freely. And if he repeats some character types (as does O'Connor) he manages to avoid merely inserting such pasteboard clichés as O'Connor's lazy Negro farm hands named Sulk and Astor or her Catholic priest complete with Irish name and rolling r's.

Hawthorne also avoids the sort of excessive tidiness of so many of O'Connor's stories, specifically the neatness by which the death of Guizac displaces all of his displacers, or the manner in which all those who think they know what is happening are deceived in "Good Country People," or even in the repeated reversal of the psychological positions of Mr. Head and Nelson in "The Artificial Nigger."

Finally, O'Connor lacks the essential sympathy for human weakness which is so important in Hawthorne's fiction. Rather than viewing her characters, as Hawthorne does, as fallible human beings, pathetically—even tragically—lost in isolated doubt or self deceiving pride, O'Connor the Christian satirist sees them (when they are not innocent children) as sinners, estranged from God and the true Church and damned in that separation.

All this is not to say, however, that A Good Man Is Hard to Find does not have its own limited kind of excellence. It suffers from thematic narrowness, but, as we have seen, O'Connor's imagery, her eye for realistic detail—of both character and situation—and her uncanny sense of drama combine to produce a very powerful collection.
Footnotes


4 Quinn, p. 175.


8 Gossett, p. 90.


11 Quinn, p. 160.


13 Hyman, p. 35.

14 Cheney, 646.


Footnotes (contd.)

18 Robert Canzoneri, in an unpublished manuscript to be included in an introduction to fiction (with Page Stegner) to be released by Scott, Foresman and Company in 1968, p. 1.


20 Canzoneri, p. 3.


22 Gossett, p. 136.

23 McCown, 288.


25 Hyman, p. 18.


28 Hyman, p. 18.


30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Drake, 1201.

33 Hyman, p. 18.


35 Hyman, p. 19.

CHAPTER III

-- THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY

Introduction

The Violent Bear It Away, O'Connor's second and last novel, was published in 1960 and shares quite a few characteristics, both thematic and structural, with her earlier novel, Wise Blood. In the later book, O'Connor's young hero, Francis Marion Tarwater, is, like Hazel Motes, engaged in an obsessive flight from what he sees as "the bleeding stinking shadow of Jesus,"* a vision implanted by a violent and insane great-uncle who is reminiscent of Haze's own raving evangelistic grandfather. Like Haze, young Tarwater encounters what O'Connor considers to be false prophets, including a copper flue salesman who declares sanctimoniously that "you couldn't sell a copper flue to a man you didn't love" (333) and his own uncle, Rayber, who is himself obsessed with the view that "Baptism is only an empty act. . . . If there's any way to be born again, it's a way that you accomplish yourself, an understanding about yourself that you reach after a long time, perhaps a long effort" (417-18). In fact, the title, Wise Blood, which is largely ironic in the earlier novel, describes exactly the instinct for religious prophecy which both Tarwater and Rayber deny so obsessively and, in O'Connor's view, so foolishly. O'Connor also uses

*All references are to the Signet paperback edition entitled Three (New York, 1964), 434-35. All further citations will be incorporated in the text.

160
the same sort of unifying symbolism in *The Violent Bear It Away* as she did in *Wise Blood*, mirroring a character's spiritual state in his physical needs; thus, where she had earlier represented faulty spiritual vision through fake blindness and the need for glasses, in her second novel she refers repeatedly to Tarwater's constant hunger (most often associated with bread) and thirst, obviously representing what she views as the boy's unacknowledged spiritual hunger for the traditional body and blood of Christ. Similarly, Rayber's spiritual poverty is reflected in his physical weaknesses—his dependence upon a hearing aid and spectacles. Finally, as in *Wise Blood*, O'Connor sets up the large city as the center of religious disbelief; just as Haze Motes experiences the revelation of his sinfulness only after he has left Taulkinham, Tarwater finally acknowledges his prophetic vocation in the primitive backwoods, far from the modern city in which the psychologist Rayber lives with his scientific treatises and his intelligence tests.

*The Violent Bear It Away* is, however, much more tightly constructed than *Wise Blood*. By defining Tarwater's flight from the vocation demanded of him by his great-uncle in terms of a specific, if negative, goal—to avoid obeying the old man's command to baptize Rayber's idiot child, Bishop—O'Connor gives to her second novel the same sort of unifying central quest that Faulkner achieves in the grotesque burial procession of *As I Lay Dying*. This unity of theme is underlined further by what Ollye T. Snow has called the book's "circular" structure; the novel begins with the death of old Tarwater in his shack at Powderhead, his backwoods farm, and closes as young Tarwater sets out from the same farm having been reborn as the young prophet which his great-uncle had called for. And, unlike *Wise Blood*,
in which there are few flashbacks and thus little information about the past, *The Violent Bear It Away*, particularly the first two parts (out of three) is filled with flashbacks and reminiscences which relate the early lives of young Tarwater and Rayber, as well as describing the violent past of old Tarwater. These flashbacks provide the novel with very tight coherence, underlining repeatedly the violent conflict between the primitive old man and his rationalist nephew, Rayber, as well as forcing the reader to see virtually all of young Tarwater's actions as responses to his great-uncle's demand that he baptize Bishop and become a prophet. As Sister Jeremy has demonstrated in a fine article, O'Connor has also lavished particular care on her use of dialect in this novel, giving old Tarwater an essentially Biblical rhetoric which illustrates forcefully that he "is not afraid of inconsistency and dis-dains logic," while giving the intellectual Rayber highly sophisticated habits of speech:

Rayber is as capable of rhetoric as old Tarwater, but his imagery is almost entirely made up of abstractions. . . . He appears to reject the whole sacramental system linguistically as well as philosophically and religiously. He refuses to come close to concrete expressions as if afraid he might once more become involved in that world of things in which sacramental action takes place. He has come to prefer the orderly world of abstractions--"the real world," as he chooses to call it. It is the only world in which the violence of love, like the love he has for his idiot child, can be explained away and thus brought under control.3

In addition to her presentation of young Tarwater's struggle with the prophetic spirit of his great-uncle, O'Connor also introduces the parallel struggle of Rayber, who is not, as he at first seems to be, merely an impotent abstractionist firmly ensconced in an unemotional rationalist world in which sense impressions are received through the
polished lenses and insulated wires of eyeglasses and a hearing aid.

Quite the contrary. As he admits to himself at one point, Rayber is a psychologist—a scientist—not because he is coldly rational, but because he is not:

... the moments would still come when ... he would experience a love for the child [Bishop] so outrageous that he would be left shocked and depressed for days, and trembling for his sanity. It was only a touch of the curse that lay in his blood. ... The affliction was in the family. ... He had kept it from gaining control over him by what amounted to a rigid ascetic discipline. ... He knew that he was the stuff of which fanatics and madmen are made and that he had turned his destiny as if with his bare will. He kept himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance, he intended to lurch toward emptiness and fall on the side of his choice. (372-73)

Rayber's struggle to maintain this balance is, at times, fully as compelling as young Tarwater's own mixed attraction and repulsion for his own projected role as prophet.

Unfortunately, however, even though O'Connor creates great intensity in her presentation of the struggles of Tarwater and Rayber, she never really leaves much doubt in the reader's mind concerning the outcome of these struggles. As we shall discover, young Tarwater vacillates in his reaction to his great-uncle's charge of prophecy, at times accepting it, at times rejecting it—but from the first page, any reader with any familiarity with O'Connor's fiction recognizes young Tarwater as another Christian, or at least prophet, malgré lui.

Similarly, Rayber is, in many ways, a straw man whom O'Connor allows very little sympathy; despite his inward streak of emotionalism which he tries so hard to control, Rayber is something of a type (and the type becomes even more obvious as such as O'Connor re-uses it repeatedly in such stories as "The Lame Shall Enter First," "Everything That Rises
Must Converge," "The Enduring Chill," "The Partridge Festival," "The Comforts of Home," and "Greenleaf"). In short, Rayber, young Tarwater, and old Tarwater as well, seem, because of the predictability of their fates, almost to be allegorical figures—embodiments of abstractions—in a sort of grotesque morality play rather than fully developed characters. Violent Prophecy contends with Sterile Rationalism over the soul of Youth; old Tarwater calls for his great-nephew to become a prophet, while Rayber counsels the boy to "'avoid extremes . . . They are for violent people'" (390).

But these alternatives are terribly extreme; there is a very broad middleground between sterile, artificial rationalism and insane, homicidal fanaticism, as millions of people (O'Connor included) have demonstrated in their own lives. And in setting up such alternatives, O'Connor is falsifying reality, producing, as a result, an exemplum rather than a novel. Two of her comments about The Violent Bear It Away clarify her own view:

The old man is very obviously not a Southern Baptist, but an independent, a prophet in the true sense. The true prophet is inspired by the Holy Ghost, not necessarily by the dominant religion of his region. . . . A character has to be true to his own nature and I think the old man is that. He was a prophet, not a church member.4

I'm not interested in sects as sects; I'm concerned with the religious individual, the backwoods prophet. Old Tarwater is the hero of "The Violent Bear It Away," and I'm right behind him 100 percent.5

This anti-Laodicean emphasis also clarifies the meaning of the title of the book and the epigraph from which it was taken: "From the time of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Matthew 11:12). Catholic exegesis of this passage defines the "violence" primarily as the "earnest effort"
by which the Kingdom of Heaven is to be won; and, given O'Connor's comments upon old Tarwater as well as her sympathetic portrayal of both him and his great-nephew, she obviously shares this orthodox view.

Nevertheless, as J. Cates Smith has observed, O'Connor's oversimplification of alternatives weakens both her portrayal of old Tarwater and the "Catholicity" which she considers so much a part of her fiction:

One might wish, perhaps, that in her zeal to correct misunderstandings she had not so drastically simplified her marvelously complex novel. For old Tarwater, though a man of God, is at the same time responsible for the child's perversion; unless religious feeling must be absolutely linked with insanity, it is difficult to believe that the old uncle is a positive character. . . .

There is no room in O'Connor for systematic, refined, rational acceptance of God. The experience of religious faith must be devastating and terrible, life must be changed, the will must surrender itself completely. . . . [O'Connor] has spoken of herself as a "born Catholic," but it is difficult to understand precisely what she means by "Catholic," for her conception of man's relationship to God suggests that of the American Calvinists more than that of the Roman Catholics; the absolute denial of free will, the insistence upon the brutal, even bloody, and always catastrophic experience of faith, and the eclipsing of the New Testament affirmation by the Old Testament wrath.

At times this "Old Testament wrath" can be terrifyingly compelling stuff. Unfortunately, however, one is never really able to escape the awareness that O'Connor has set things up too neatly—too schematically—that, in short, she has fictionalized a problem for which she has a very ready answer rather than telling a convincing and artistically satisfying story.

1

As we have seen in such works as "The Artificial Nigger," "The River," and, to an extent, Wise Blood, one of O'Connor's favorite
methods of initiating a character into experience and, frequently, religious insight, is to move him out of his accustomed surroundings into an alien or at least different world in which he must make his new discovery about himself. As Melvin Friedman has observed, "[The Violent Bear It Away] is the best example in Flannery O'Connor's work of the transplantation-prophecy-return motif; in fact the novel is divided into three parts which correspond neatly to the three phases." The unity of this motif is itself reinforced by O'Connor's skillful and rather complex use of flashbacks (particularly in parts one and two), which, although they shift quickly from one time period to another, consistently (if predictably) emphasize the intense power of old Tarwater's commitment and the emptiness of Rayber's rationalism.

Indeed, the complexity of O'Connor's use of repeated flashbacks is such that the chronology of events preceding the action of the novel might best be clarified by the following list:

1) Rayber's mother (old Tarwater's sister) leaves Powderhead at the age of eighteen.

2) Rayber's mother places old Tarwater in an asylum, where he remains for four years.

3) After being released from the asylum, old Tarwater kidnaps Rayber (at the age of seven) and takes him to Powderhead for four days, where he preaches to him and baptizes him.

4) Seven years later Rayber makes his way back to Powderhead and shouts his rejection of old Tarwater's beliefs.

5) Rayber's parents are killed in an automobile accident, as is his unmarried pregnant sister, who gives birth to young Tarwater at the accident scene; soon afterward, her lover commits suicide.

*See Appendix A for Tarwater genealogy.
6) Old Tarwater (age sixty-nine) moves in with Rayber (now twenty-four), baptizes Tarwater in his crib, is psychoanalyzed by Rayber for his scholarly article.

7) Old Tarwater leaves Rayber's house after three months to return to Powderhead, taking young Tarwater with him.

8) Accompanied by a "welfare woman" named Bernice Bishop, Rayber goes to Powderhead to "rescue" young Tarwater; old Tarwater drives him away with two blasts from a shotgun.

9) Rayber marries his welfare woman and they have an idiot son, Bishop; shortly thereafter Rayber's wife deserts him.

10) At some unspecified time after the desertion of his wife, Rayber attempts to drown Bishop.

11) Old Tarwater fails in his attempts to baptize Bishop and charges young Tarwater with performing the ritual.

12) Old Tarwater takes young Tarwater to the city where he shows Bishop to him.

13) Old Tarwater instructs young Tarwater on the details for his (the old man's) burial.

Virtually all of these events are presented through flashbacks, particularly in chapters one and two of Part I of the novel, in which there are at least twenty-one breaks in the narrative, varying from a few lines to as much as five pages (the journey of the two Tarwaters to the city, pp. 318-23) and including all of the incidents listed above except the description of Rayber's attempt to drown Bishop, which appears in Part II (chapter six). Three periods are given particular attention: old Tarwater's stay with Rayber; the events surrounding the accident which killed Rayber's parents, his sister (young Tarwater's mother) and, ultimately, her lover (young Tarwater's father); and the visit of the two Tarwaters to the city. In each case, O'Connor's emphasis is significant: the events which occurred during old
Tarwater's stay with Rayber (Rayber's intellectual experiment, the baptism of Tarwater, and his kidnapping by old Tarwater) set forth the basic conflict between the intellectual and the prophet, as well as suggesting the secondary but important theme of sterile verbalization versus physical action; the accident out of which young Tarwater was born foreshadows the later violence in his life and, perhaps, his later rebirth after another sort of automotive disaster, his ride with the homosexual; and the visit of the two Tarwaters to the city offers young Tarwater his first glimpse of the idiot whom he will one day baptize/drown, while also providing him with a psychological basis for his hatred of Rayber by exposing him to a place which fascinates him but which he cannot enjoy because Rayber lacks the courage to steal him from Powderhead.

Throughout Part I of the novel, O'Connor also includes repeated references to young Tarwater's life during his fourteen years at Powderhead and in this manner paints the vivid background of Old Testament prophecy against which virtually all of the boy's actions are seen--by both the reader and by young Tarwater himself. The boy's sense of old Tarwater's own role is terribly acute, for he has listened again and again to the old man's inflated description of his own "calling":

Then one morning [old Tarwater] saw to his joy a finger of fire coming out of [the sun] and before he could turn, before he could shout, the finger had touched him and the destruction he had been waiting for had fallen in his own brain and his own body. His blood had been burned dry. . . . (306)

To young Tarwater, the most appealing aspect of the old man's prophecy is that the life the old man has led seems to be one of impressive action, and one of the statements which he likes best to hear (and, much
later, to repeat for himself) is "'It was me could act'" (349). Thus, he listens enthusiastically to old Tarwater's stories of how he baptized Rayber when he was a boy of seven and baptized young Tarwater himself as a baby in his crib, hearing the "voice of the Lord . . . [saying]

... HERE IS THE PROPHET TO TAKE YOUR PLACE. BAPTIZE HIM" (346). Tarwater is also impressed by the tale of his own kidnapping from Rayber's house, an act summed up by the old man's note to his intellectual nephew: "'THE PROPHET I RAISE UP OUT OF THIS BOY WILL BURN YOUR EYES CLEAN!" (348). Even the failures of old Tarwater fascinate his great-nephew, and he loves to hear of the confrontation between the old man and Rayber when the prophet tries to baptize the idiot child Bishop:

"I'm going in there and baptize him." [to Rayber]
"The Lord Jesus Christ sent me to baptize that boy!"
he shouted. "Stand aside. I mean to do it! . . .
That boy cries out for his baptism. . . . Precious
in the sight of the Lord even an idiot!" (322)

These visions of prophetic action seem to young Tarwater to reinforce his great-uncle's similarity to the old testament prophets with whom the old man identifies himself. When old Tarwater speaks of his imprisonment in an insane asylum, he says "'Ezekiel was in the pit
for forty days, . . . but I was in it for four years!'" (340). Similar imagery is also used by O'Connor to describe the old man's reaction to Rayber's scholarly article:

His eyeballs swerved from side to side as if he
were pinned in a strait jacket again. Jonah,
Ezekiel, Daniel, he was at that moment all of
them—the swallowed, the lowered, the enclosed. (348)

At times, the old man's recitations of the burdens of his calling depress young Tarwater, particularly the reference to "the sweat and stink of the cross, of being born again to die, and of spending eternity eating the bread of life" (308) and the assertion that "'even the mercy
of the Lord burns" (314). Generally, however, the tale of prophecy appeals to the boy, and he listens to it, with only brief moments of irritation:

"Well go on," Tarwater would say irritably, "get on with the rest of it." The story always had to be taken to completion. It was like a road that the boy had travelled on so often that half the time he didn't look where they were going, and when at certain points he would become aware where they were, he would be surprised to see that the old man had not got further with it. Sometimes his uncle would lag at one point as if he didn't want to face what was coming and then when he finally came to it, he would try to get past it in a rush. At such points Tarwater plagued him for details. (342)

In addition to being generally impressed by all the tales of his great-uncle, Tarwater has also been carefully educated by the old man:

His uncle had taught him Figures, Reading, Writing, and History beginning with Adam expelled from the Garden and going on down through the presidents to Herbert Hoover and on in speculation toward the Second Coming and the Day of Judgment. (305)

More specifically, the old man sees young Tarwater and himself as analogous to Elisha and Elijah, because, in old Tarwater's view, "the Lord had meant [young Tarwater] to be trained for a prophet, even though he was a bastard, and to take his great-uncle's place when he died" (327). The training, at least in terms of the old man's sermons, is both insistent and, to the boy, rather frightening:

The old man, who said he was a prophet, had raised the boy to expect the Lord's call himself and to be prepared for the day he would hear it. He had schooled him in the evils that befall prophets; in those that come from the Lord and burn a prophet clean; for he himself had been burned clean again. He had learned by fire. (306)

Just as old Tarwater sometimes cries out about the burdens of prophecy, he promises the same burdens to the boy: "I brought you out here to
raise you a Christian, and more than a Christian, a prophet!" he hollered, "'and the burden of it will be on you!'" (312). And, at times, all of the training seems to be successful:

While other children his age were herded together in a room to cut out paper pumpkins under the direction of a woman, he was left free for the pursuit of wisdom, the companions of his spirit Abel and Enoch and Noah and Job, Abraham and Moses, King David and Solomon, and all the prophets, from Elijah who escaped death, to John whose severed head struck terror from a dish. The boy knew that escaping school was the surest sign of his election. (313; italics mine)

In addition to this sort of generalized education as prophet, young Tarwater also receives three specific prophetic charges from his great-uncle: to bury him properly—"'get me in the ground where the dead belong and set up a cross over me to show I'm there!'" (311); to go to the city at some unspecified future time to ""'Warn the children of God ... of the terrible speed of justice!"'" (339); and to baptize the idiot boy Bishop—"'It'll be the first mission the Lord sends you!'" (308). He rejects the first command, deciding instead (largely on the promptings of a mysterious stranger—obviously Satan) merely to burn his great-uncle's body instead of wasting time and effort burying it: ""'You don't owe the dead anything,'" he tells the copper flue salesman (333). The second of old Tarwater's commands is rather easy for the boy to ignore, primarily because he has not, at this point, fully committed himself to a life of prophecy. The third command, however, gives young Tarwater some trouble; it is quite explicit, and the boy's reactions to it mirror his struggle with the "call" which his great-uncle had once found so irresistible.

In many ways, young Tarwater finds the prospect of becoming a prophet rather attractive, particularly in what seems to be its high
drama (one is reminded of both Haze Motes in his demand for a dramatic "sign" from God and of the young girl's visions of martyrdom in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost"). Thus, after the birth of Bishop, Tarwater had urged his great-uncle to obey his "message" from the Lord and baptize the child because he (young Tarwater) "had wanted something to happen, wanted to see the old man in action" (317). Indeed, when, in the city, the old man fails to act as Tarwater wishes him to, the boy taunts him:

"Call yourself a prophet! . . . You always said you were a prophet, . . . Now I see what kind of prophet you are. Elijah would think a heap of you." (319)

When the old man rejects this challenge, saying "'I know what times I'm called and what times I ain't'" (319), Tarwater imagines how he would act as prophet in the great sinful city:

When he was called, on that day when he returned, he would set the city astir, he would return with fire in his eyes. You have to do something particular here to make them look at you, he thought. They ain't going to look at you just because you're here. He considered his uncle with renewed disgust. When I come for good, he said to himself, I'll do something to make every eye stick on me . . . (319)

And this romantic desire for high drama is one of the primary reasons for Tarwater's conscious reservations about the charge to baptize Bishop; such an act lacks the flaming glory which the boy wants:

The boy doubted very much that his first mission would be to baptize a dim-witted child. "Oh no it won't be," he said. "He [the Lord] don't mean for me to finish up your leavings. He has other things in mind for me."

And he thought of Moses who struck water from a rock, of Joshua who made the sun stand still, of Daniel who stared down lions in the pit. (308)

Again, like Haze Motes, Tarwater wants a clear, unmistakable, overwhelmingly dramatic sign of his calling:

The boy was very proud that he had been born in a wreck. He always felt that it set his existence
apart from the ordinary one and he had understood
from it that the plans of God for him were special,
even though nothing of consequence had happened so
far. Often when he walked in the woods and came
upon some bush a little removed from the rest, his
breath would catch in his throat and he would stop
and wait for the bush to burst into flame. It had
not done it yet. (327)

Thus, in many ways, young Tarwater accepts his great-uncle's
declaration that he will be a prophet, even to the point of becoming
irritated with the old man "with an impatient conviction that he would
not make any mistakes himself when [not if] the time came and the Lord
called him" (306). Further, O'Connor's presentation of young Tarwater's
words and actions after the death of his great-uncle reinforce this
view of his destiny as prophet. When the Negro Buford approaches him,
Tarwater's reaction is the command: "'Nigger, . . . take your hand
off me'" (331), reflecting the traditional isolation of the prophet
(the noli-me-tangere of Christ: John 20:17); and when Buford's wife
asks Tarwater what he plans to do, the boy answers, "'Mind my bidnis'"
(328), certainly an echo of Jesus' reply to his parents in the temple
that he must be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49). Finally, as
he travels towards the city with Meeks, the copper flue salesman,
Tarwater assumes for himself what he had always considered his great-
uncle's most praiseworthy characteristic as prophet: "'I can act,'" he
tells the salesman (351).

As I have suggested, however, Tarwater's commitment is not
unreserved from the very beginning. He frequently has some doubts about
his "calling." Thus, when he watches his great-uncle die he feels the
old man's final tremor "transfer itself and run lightly over him" (309),
almost like the current of an unwanted force flowing into him. And his
indecision about burying the old man is prolonged by the boy's belief
that "he would have to bury the old man before anything would begin"
and, more importantly, by the fact that this delay seems "to give him
respite from something that pressed on him" (310). Earlier, Tarwater
has thought about his great-uncle's insistence upon the importance of
Jesus as "the bread of life," and tried to reject this unexciting
belief:

In the darkest, most private part of his soul, hanging upside down like a sleeping bat, was the certain, undeniable knowledge that he was not hungry for the bread of life. Had the bush flamed for Moses, the sun stood still for Joshua, the lions turned aside before Daniel only to prophesy the bread of life? Jesus? He felt a terrible disappointment in that conclusion, a dread that it was true . . .

Young Tarwater also fears the responsibility which the old man has
taught him that prophecy demands. After the old man's death, the boy
is afraid to look at anything for very long because he wants to avoid
the prophetic obligation to name what he sees, to "name it justly and
be judged for the name he gave it. He did all he could to avoid this
threatened intimacy with creation." (316). He runs "like something
hunted" (329) away from Old Tarwater's cabin to the still, and, later
staggers drunkenly about setting fire to the cabin and, he hopes, to
the old man's body, attempting once more to rid his mind of "a hideous
vision of himself sitting forever with his great-uncle on a green
bank, full and sick, staring at a broken fish and a multiplied loaf"
(340).

Thus, when he reaches Rayber's house in the city, Tarwater's
first claim is that he has escaped from his great-uncle without obeying
the old man's command to bury him properly:

"He's dead. . . . You can't be any deader than he is.
He's reduced to ashes. He don't even have a cross set
up over him. If it's anything left of him, the buzzards
wouldn't have it and the bones the dogs'll carry off. That's how dead he is." (356)

But this speech itself has been preceded by a fearful suspicion in Tarwater's mind that he is indeed fulfilling his great-uncle's wishes by going to Rayber's house in the first place. As he knocked on the door he experienced a sort of revelation:

A mysterious dread filled him. His whole body felt hollow as if he had been lifted like Habakkuk by the hair of his head, borne swiftly through the night and set down in the place of his mission. He had a sudden foreboding that he was about to step into a trap laid for him by the old man. He half turned to run. (345)

This is not the first time Tarwater has had such a feeling. Much earlier in his life, when he had visited the city with Old Tarwater, he had approached this same house and had felt "some obscure instinct that the door was going to open and reveal his destiny" (321); when the door opened he had seen the idiot boy, Bishop, the same boy whose voice over the telephone makes "a kind of bubbling noise, the kind of noise someone would make who was struggling to breathe in water [a clear foreshadowing of his later fate]" (352) and causes him to stand "blankly as if he had received a revelation he could not yet decipher . . . some deep internal blow that had not yet made its way to the surface of his mind" (352). Finally, when his "call" does come--when he sees Bishop standing before him "dim and ancient"--although this "call" is terribly clear, it is not what Tarwater wants and he tries to reject it:

Tarwater clenched his fists. He stood like one condemned, waiting at the spot of execution. Then the revelation came, silent, implacable, direct as a bullet. He did not look into the eyes of any fiery beast or see a burning bush. He only knew, with a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for. He knew that he was called to be a prophet and that the ways of his prophecy would not be remarkable. His black pupils, glassy and still,
reflected depth on depth his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at last he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf. The Lord out of dust had created him, had made him blood and nerve and mind, had made him to bleed and weep and think, and set him in the world of loss and fire all to baptize one idiot child that He needed not to have created in the first place . . . He tried to shout "NO!" but it was like trying to shout in his sleep. The sound was saturated in silence, lost. (357-8)

Tarwater's outward reaction to Bishop is to scream "'Git!" and knock him aside because he (Tarwater) believes that the idiot has "recognized him, that the old man himself had primed him from on high that here was the forced servant of God come to see that he was born again." (358).

And, at the end of Part I, Tarwater continues to shout his defiance of his role as prophet and baptizer of Bishop:

"I won't get used to him! I won't have anything to do with him!" He clenched his fist and lifted it. "I won't have anything to do with him!" he shouted and the words were clear and positive and defiant like a challenge hurled in the face of his silent adversary. (359)

Whatever its strength, however, this "challenge" is not one which Tarwater will be able to assert easily, and O'Connor's use of the numerous flashbacks to underline the boy's past "training" and education forces the reader to realize that the "silent adversary" is not only the idiot Bishop, but the will of God. For Tarwater is already on the way to prophecy. He has traveled to the city and to Rayber's door, moved by a compulsion which he cannot resist. He has also undergone the traditional test of the prophet—the temptation by Satan in the wilderness, for the gothic, disembodied voice which he hears is obviously meant by O'Connor to be that of the devil.

This "stranger" (Twain's "Mysterious Stranger"?) first counsels young Tarwater to "Bury him [old Tarwater] first and get it over with"
(310), but his instructions soon shift to the more traditional temptations of Satan. He taunts Tarwater for his decision to follow his great-uncle's direction concerning his burial, attempting to undermine the boy's obedience to the old prophet as well as his religious belief in general:

... the stranger's voice took on a kind of restrained fury and kept repeating, you got to bury him whole and completely by hand and that schoolteacher [Rayber] would burn him in a minute. ... The dead are a heap more trouble than the living, the stranger said. That schoolteacher wouldn't consider for a minute that on the last day all the bodies marked by crosses will be gathered. In the rest of the world they do things different than what you been taught. (318)

The stranger also seems to Tarwater to be helping him, "digging the grave along with him now" (323); his message is the familiar attack on religious belief as archaic and unrealistic, and his manner includes the traditional combination of Satanic guile and flattery:

[Young Tarwater] didn't search out the stranger's face but he knew by now that it was sharp and friendly and wise, shadowed under a stiff broad-brimmed panama hat that obscured the color of his eyes. He had lost his dislike for the thought of the voice. ... I ain't denying the old man was a good one, his new friend said, but like you said: you can't be any poorer than dead. ... His soul is off this mortal earth now and his body is not going to feel the pinch, of fire or anything else. ... Well now, the stranger said, don't you think any cross you set up in 1952 would be rotted out by the year the Day of Judgement comes in? ... I ain't buttin into your bidnis, the stranger said. It don't mean a thing to me. You're left by yourself in this empty place with just as much light as that dwarf sun wants to let in. You don't mean a thing to a soul as far as I can see.

(324)

According to this stranger, Rayber's baptism by old Tarwater "don't mean a thing to him one way or the other" (325), and young Tarwater's belief in prophecy is a foolish idea which deserves only mockery:

Look at the big prophet, the stranger jeered, ... Lemme hear you prophesy something. The truth is the
Lord ain’t studying about you. You ain’t entered
His head. (325)

The boy’s reaction is, again, quite traditional: "Tarwater turned
around abruptly and worked from the other side" (Cf. Christ’s rejection
of the Devil: "Get thee behind me, Satan"; Luke: 4:8), but the
stranger continues his mockery, choosing exactly the most appropriate
point of attack:

Anybody that’s a prophet has got to have somebody
to prophesy to. Unless you're just going to prophesy
to yourself, he amended—or go baptize that dim-witted
child, he added in a tone of high sarcasm. (325)

In the stranger’s eyes, Old Tarwater was merely crazy, "a one-notion
man. Jesus. Jesus this and Jesus that" (326), and the boy ought to
be "fed up and sick to the roof of [his] mouth with Jesus" (326). The
most crucial argument of the stranger, however, is his assertion that
the devil (i.e. evil) does not exist—"there ain’t no such thing as a
devil" (326)—and that young Tarwater’s choice is not, as the boy thinks,
between "Jesus or the devil" (326), but between Jesus and himself.

According to the stranger, Tarwater ought to choose a life devoted to
his own concerns rather than one committed to Christ because he has had
no clear "call" from God: "Where is the voice of the Lord? I haven’t
heard it. Who’s called you this morning? Or any morning? Have you
been told what to do? You ain’t even heard the sound of natural thunder
this morning" (327-28). This stranger also shares a common characteris-
tic trait with most of O’Connor’s worst villains: he voices the Lao-
dicean creed; "Moderation never hurt no one." Similarly, he advises
Tarwater that "I wouldn’t pay too much attention to my Redemption if I
were you. Some people take everthing too hard" (330). Finally, having
"hissed" (329) once more his belief in old Tarwater’s insanity, the
mysterious stranger closes his arguments with an ironic benediction to God for "releasing" Tarwater from his "bondage," adding, of course, that there is only a final act of rejection for the boy to perform:

"[God] has given you your release. That old man was stone before your door and the Lord has rolled it away. He ain't rolled it quite far enough, of course. You got to finish up yourself but He's done the main part. Praise Him" (330). Tarwater continues to drink his great-uncle's whiskey, drowses, wakes up briefly to speak with Buford (who reinforces once more O'Connor's anti-Laodicean view by answering Tarwater's assertion that no one will bother him with the comment: "That's going to be your trouble!" [331]), sleeps again, and awakens to the cry of a night bird. His first act is, significantly, to stumble "into the middle of the stream bed" (332) in what seems almost to be another baptism; he then wanders back toward his great-uncle's cabin while the night sky about him reverberates with "distant thunder" and is lit up by "a continuous flicker of pale lightning" (332). Thus although Tarwater does emerge from the woods to set fire to his great-uncle's shack, believing that he is escaping from his great-uncle, his actions and O'Connor's imagery underline the truths of the old man's prophecy:

"Ignore the Lord Jesus as long as you can! Spit out the bread of life and sicken on honey. Whom work beckons, to work! Whom blood to blood! Whom lust to lust! Make haste, make haste. Fly faster and faster. Spin yourselves in a frenzy, the time is short! The Lord is preparing a prophet. The Lord is preparing a prophet with fire in his hand and eye and the prophet is moving toward the city with his warning. The prophet is coming with the Lord's message. "Go warn the children of God," saith the Lord, "of the terrible speed of justice." (339)

And, reinforcing her belief in old Tarwater's prophecy, O'Connor gives him more than one of these prophetic perceptions. He sees Rayber's
underlying similarity to himself, and he analyzes accurately the sort of problems Rayber has with this similarity: "'Good blood flows in his veins, ... And good blood knows the Lord and there ain't a thing he can do about having it. There ain't a way in the world he can get rid of it'" (338). The old man also asserts his direct influence on Rayber—'I planted the seed in him and it was there for good. ... It fell in deep'" (343)—influence which is borne out by Rayber's later reaction to Lucette Carmody, the child-preacher. More strikingly, the old man predicts Tarwater's own fate with great accuracy: "'You are the kind of boy ... that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give you a smoke or a drink or a ride, and to ask you your bidnis. You had better mind how you take up with strangers. And keep your bidnis to yourself'" (338-39). Old Tarwater is, as we have seen, a true prophet in O'Connor's view, and she sees to it that he acts out his role quite effectively.

Largely through flashbacks and old Tarwater's reminiscences, Part I of The Violent Bear It Away also provides the basis for the violent conflict between the old man's religion, as carried forward (albeit reluctantly and, at times, unknowingly) by young Tarwater, and Rayber's commitment to an academic, rationalist point of view. The central event in the initial conflict is, of course, Rayber's analysis of his uncle for an article in a scholarly journal in which, after questioning the old man "at length" about his background and his beliefs, the young psychologist summed up old Tarwater's actions in the following statement: "'His fixation of being called by the Lord had its origin in insecurity. He needed the assurance of a call, and so he called himself'" (314). Rayber even mocked the old man to his face: "'Uncle, you're a type that's almost extinct! Almost extinct!'" (320). Old
Tarwater's reaction to the article was, as we have seen, to identify himself even more strongly with the old prophets, Jonah, Ezekiel, and Daniel (348), and to reassert his own power—a supra-intellectual power:

"Where he wanted me was inside that schoolteacher magazine. He thought once he got me in there, I'd be as good as inside his head and done for and that would be that, that would be the end of it. Well, that wasn't the end of it! Here I sit. And you sit. In freedom. Not inside anybody's head!" (315)

"It was me could act, . . . not him. He could never take action. He could only get everything in his head and grind it to nothing. But I acted. And because I acted, you sit here in freedom, you sit here a rich man, knowing the Truth, in the freedom of the Lord Jesus Christ." (349)

Young Tarwater's "freedom" is perhaps debatable, given the overwhelming effect of the old man's indoctrination, but the matter of his great-uncle's ability to act is never open to serious question, as Rayber's shotgun pellet scars attest. And Rayber's own attempts to act have, in the past, ended either in disaster (the suicide of the lover whom he had procured for his sister to "contribute to her self-confidence" [337] or failure (his inability to "rescue" young Tarwater from the old man). In O'Connor's view, old Tarwater's attitude towards Bishop is also much superior to Rayber's. The rationalist wants to know a reason for his son's idiocy—"'Ask the Lord why He made him an idiot in the first place, uncle. Tell him I want to know why!'" (323)—while the old man never questions what he sees as God's will—"'That boy cries out for his baptism, . . . Precious in the sight of the Lord even an idiot!'" (322).

Rayber's basic problem, in both old Tarwater's and O'Connor's view, is simply that "'He don't know it's anything he can't know!'" (336),
that is, he will not recognize the existence of the unknowable—of God. Thus, the two adversaries battle continuously, the prophet demanding the baptism of Bishop, the rationalist denying that ritual "with a kind of subdued intensity, a passion equal and opposite to the old man's" (323) and asserting that his denial is "a gesture of human dignity" (323). However, Rayber is also fighting a very personal battle which began when he was a boy of seven and was himself taken to Powderhead and baptized by old Tarwater. As rationalist he is convinced that he would have been better off if the old man had never exposed him to his prophecy:

"You're too blind to see what you did to me. A child can't defend himself. Children are cursed with believing. You pushed me out of the real world and I stayed out of it until I didn't know which was which. You infected me with your idiot hopes, your foolish violence. I'm not always myself. I'm not al..." but he stopped. He wouldn't admit what the old man knew. "There's nothing wrong with me," he said. "I've straightened the tangle you made. Straightened it by pure will power. I've made myself straight." (346)

But Rayber has not "straightened the tangle" which he believes the old man has made of his life; he has never been able to subdue completely his emotions—the emotions which left him, as a boy of seven, "in despair" at having to leave Powderhead and the intensity of old Tarwater's prophecy. His rationalism is the wall behind which he hides from the religious fanaticism of his own Tarwater blood, and it is his determination to "make himself straight"—to overcome through the exertion of his "pure will power" this inheritance in both himself and young Tarwater that marks Rayber as one of O'Connor's most presumptuous and, in her religious terms, most culpable villains.
Although Part II of *The Violent Bear It Away* includes at least the partial fulfillment of young Tarwater's own prophecy—his baptism of Bishop—it also provides a detailed examination of Rayber, who is himself almost a prophet *malgré lui*. At first glance, Rayber seems to be a man of science, a carefully self-controlled psychologist who uses the jargon of his chosen profession to attack the religious beliefs and obsessions of his uncle (old Tarwater) and his nephew (young Tarwater). Thus, he rejects the old man's charge that young Tarwater's mother was a whore by asserting that she was "... a good healthy American girl, just beginning to find herself ..." (369). He dismisses the rite of baptism as "'a fixation'" (389) of young Tarwater and attacks the boy's urge to baptize Bishop as "a kind of sickness" (393) and "a morbid impulse" (394). In Rayber's view, young Tarwater is "warped" by his great-uncle's fanaticism and "'eaten up with false guilt'" (406). Confident that he can read Tarwater's mind "'like a book'" (406), Rayber believes that he can also "cure" the boy of his "compulsion" to baptize Bishop: "he would lift the compulsion from his mind, expose it to the light, and let him have a good look at it" (413).

In O'Connor's view, this sort of analysis is only glib intellectualizing and is, of course, dangerously mechanical and artificial. She mirrors these qualities in her descriptions of Rayber's appearance, his thoughts, and his actions. His appearance is defined by the artificial aids without which he is virtually helpless, his spectacles and his hearing aid (ironically, O'Connor's use of this imagery is itself quite mechanical). Tarwater's reactions to the
hearing aid are particularly sharp and amusing:

"What are you wired for? . . . Does your head light up?" . . . The boy continued to study the machine. His uncle's face might have been only an appendage to it. . . . "Do you think in the box," he asked, "or do you think in your head?" (367)

The lady at the desk at the Cherokee Lodge sees Rayber in the same mechanical terms: " . . . his eyes had a peculiar look—like something human trapped in a switch box" (396), and, looking at the glass in a store window, even Rayber sees himself as a "bloodless wired reflection" (378). Similarly, his eyes look "protected and precise behind his glasses" (398).

In addition to looking somewhat like a mechanical man, Rayber really is mechanical in many ways, most obviously in his use of his hearing aid as a way of escape, as when he turns it off to shut out the voice of the young girl-preacher, Lucette Carmody:

He was groping fiercely about him, slapping at his coat pockets, his head, his chest, not able to find the switch that would cut off the voice. Then his hand touched the button and he snapped it. A silent dark relief enclosed him like a shelter after a tormenting wind. (385)

Although young Tarwater does not see this particular incident, he does seem to recognize Rayber's selective use of his machinery, and, at one point in a burst of anger, he says, "'Why don't you pull that plug out of your ear and turn yourself off?'" (407). Finally, in one instance, O'Connor comes up with an almost Hawthornian conceit (one thinks of "The Bosom Serpent") in her description of Rayber's sudden realization that Tarwater is drowning Bishop: " . . . an instant before the cataclysm he grabbed the metal box of his hearing aid as if he were clawing his heart" (422).
Rayber also thinks in mechanical terms. He sees young Tarwater as "a wreck" which calls for "a monumental job of reconstruction" (363); when he believed that his sister needed a lover to help her self-confidence, he "engineered" her meeting with a young divinity student; and after the departure of his wife, Rayber learned to live with Bishop "in a quiet automatic fashion" (371). When he wants to elicit some sort of enthusiasm from Tarwater, Rayber suggests a plane ride because "'Flying is the greatest engineering achievement of man'" (406). Finally, he even goes to sleep artificially, "trying to relax one muscle at a time as the books recommended, beginning with those in the back of his neck" (374). Rayber tries, in short, to be the complete scientist, controlling (or at least attempting to control) his life with mechanical precision. But, as in Hawthorne, the scientist as manipulator is an inhuman aberration, and O'Connor definitely sees Rayber in this same light, particularly in his use of his uncle for a scholarly article and his "engineering" of a love affair for his sister. These are not isolated instances, either, for Rayber planned to make young Tarwater another of his psychological experiments, intending "to keep notes on him and write up his most important observations" (370) as well as preparing a battery of tests for the boy to take.

Rayber's view of love is also, when he can control it, coldly scientific: "He was not afraid of love in general. He knew the value of it and how it could be used. He had seen it transform in cases where nothing else had worked, such as with his poor sister (372). And his view of idiocy is chillingly scientific: "'Nothing ever happens to that kind of child. . . . In a hundred years people may have learned enough to put them asleep when they're born'" (403).
If Rayber is guilty of Hawthorne's "unpardonable sin," he is also guilty of the Christian sin of pride, specifically the self-confident pride of the expert who thinks he has all the answers for the problems of those around him. Thus, when he first sees young Tarwater in his house, Rayber looks at the boy with "his eyes shining, like a man who sits before a treasure he is not yet convinced is real" (363). He immediately decides that he can--and will--"help" the boy to recover from the influence of old Tarwater:

Rayber's conscience smote him that all these years he had left him to his fate, that he had not gone back and saved him. . . . He had vowed to make it up to him now, to lavish on him everything he would have lavished on his own child if he had had one who would have known the difference. (364)

So Rayber turns on his professional psychologist's charm, giving Tarwater "such a smile of welcome and good will as he thought had possibly never been turned on him before" and suggesting that "'Now we can have a real talk, . . . It's high time we got to know each other!'" (356). Rayber's self-righteous pledge to Tarwater is that he wants "'to make up for all these years. . . . [to] make up for all the time we've lost'" (367), and he begins immediately his attempt to eradicate old Tarwater's influence on the boy by suggesting that "'I can help correct what he's done to you, help you to correct it yourself'" (367). When Tarwater mocks his hearing-aid, Rayber answers, in his role as martyr, "'It's because once I tried to help you!'" (367). Indeed, this role is one which holds great attraction for Rayber, and one of the commands which he repeatedly gives himself is that "I must have infinite patience, I must have infinite patience" (387). One of his most offensive statements fairly drips with his belief in his own self-sacrifice: "What I
can see and do for myself and my fellowman in this life is all of
my portion and I'm content with it"
(405). But throughout her
presentation of Rayber, O'Connor makes it quite clear that he does
believe too smugly that he can solve Tarwater's problems. At one
point, Rayber explains his view of Tarwater's situation in some detail:

"Listen, Frank," he said, "I'll grant that you went [to
the revival meeting] to spit on it. I've never for a
second doubted your intelligence. Everthing you've done,
your very presence here proves that you're above your
background, that you've broken through the ceiling the
old man set for you. After all, you escaped from Powder­
head. You had the courage to attend to him the quickest
way and then get out of there. And once out, you came
directly to the right place." . . . Rayber continued to
speak, his voice detached, as if he had no particular
interest in the matter, and his were merely the voice
of truth, as impersonal as air. . . . "The old man used
to enrage me until I learned better. He wasn't worth
my hate and he's not worth yours. He's only worth our
pity. . . . You want to avoid extremes. They are for
violent people and you don't want . . . "--he broke off
abruptly. . . . (390; all italics mine)

The resemblance of Rayber's voice to that of the "stranger" who earlier
talked with Tarwater is particularly significant. Rayber is, in
O'Connor's view, another satanic false prophet, counseling what amounts
to the Laodicean noncommitment, preaching the avoidance of violence
and either ignoring or disregarding the fact that as the book's title
indicates, it is the violent who will bear away the Kingdom of God.
Thus, in O'Connor's view, Rayber's analysis is wrong from beginning to
die, both in its assumption that Tarwater has broken away from his
great-uncle's influence and, more seriously, in its assumption that he
should. Rayber is also simply too glib in his belief that he can offer
Tarwater an acceptable alternative to old Tarwater's fanaticism as well
as in his belief that, under his guidance Tarwater's "irrational fears
and impulses would burst out, and his uncle--sympathetic, knowing,
uniquely able to understand—would be there to explain them to him" (393). His psychological promise of salvation is also merely an empty parody to both O'Connor and Tarwater:

"God, boy," he said, "you need help. You need to be saved right here and now from the old man and everything he stands for. And I'm the one who can save you... I know what your problem is... I know and I can help you. Something's eating you on the inside and I can tell you what it is."

The boy looked at him fiercely. "Why don't you shut your big mouth?" he said. "Why don't you pull that plug out of your ear and turn yourself off?"

When Tarwater rejects this argument, Rayber's "infinite patience" exhausts itself, and he recognizes his defeat: "He no longer felt any challenge to rehabilitate him" (420). The intellectual has quite obviously been overpowered by the force of his uncle's fanatic violence as it is embodied in Tarwater, who asserts, as old Tarwater had asserted earlier, "'I ain't like you... I can act'" (418).

Much of the most powerful drama of Part II, however, surrounds, not Rayber's struggle with Tarwater, but his struggle with himself and "the curse that lay in his blood" (372). The "curse" is, of course, old Tarwater's religious fanaticism, and throughout this section Rayber contends with it with varying degrees of success. At times, the Tarwater streak is subdued at least to the extent that it appears as a somewhat generalized emotional trait, for example, the "almost uncontrollable fury" (364-65), the "familiar fantastic anger" (366) which Rayber sometimes feels towards his uncle without realizing that he is mirroring the old man's violence in his own feelings. At other times Rayber is moved to remember clearly his experiences with old Tarwater at Powderhead: how as a child of seven he took "the offered hand and walking out of his own yard, innocently walking into six or seven years
of unreality [i.e. acceptance of the old man's beliefs]" (379); how he saw his father coming to Powderhead to get him and "had one impulse to dart up and run through his uncle's house and tear out the back to the woods" (380) to escape being taken home; how he screamed to his father that the "'real world!' was old Tarwater, "'Him! Him and not you! And I've been born again and there's not a thing you can do about it!" (381).

Rayber's most disturbing moments, however, occur when he feels an irresistible, overwhelming, and, in his view, irrational love for Bishop, a surge of love that is "powerful enough to throw him to the ground in an act of idiot praise" (372). And in his own thinking about this "horrifying love" Rayber associates it specifically with the influence of old Tarwater:

It was love without reason, love for something future-less, love that appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all demanding, the kind that would cause him to make a fool of himself in an instant. And it only began with Bishop. It began with Bishop and then like an avalanche covered everything his reason hated. He always felt with it a rush of longing to have the old man's eyes--insane fish-colored, violent with their impossible vision of a world transfigured--turned on him once again. The longing was like an undertow in his blood dragging him backwards to what he knew to be madness.

The affliction was in the family. It lay hidden in the line of blood that touched them, flowing from some ancient source, some desert prophet or polesitter, until, its power unabated, it appeared in the old man and him and, he surmised, in the boy. Those it touched were condemned to fight it constantly or be ruled by it. The old man had been ruled by it. He, at the cost of a full life, staved it off. (372-73)

This is terribly romantic speculation for a professional psychologist, and as such it defines further the tenuous quality of his science (unless it is merely an example of O'Connor slipping into a gothic convention while stacking her deck against Rayber). Nevertheless, somehow
believing that "he was the stuff of which fanatics and madmen are made" (373), Rayber commits himself to a rationalist "rigid ascetic discipline" (373), determining that a life of emptiness would be better than a life of prophecy. Rayber's choice "to lurch toward emptiness" (373) rather than toward prophecy is significant in terms of O'Connor's familiar attack on Laodicean lack of religious commitment. Young Tarwater was right, in O'Connor's view, when he told his mysterious stranger that his choice was between "'Jesus or the devil'' (326). But Rayber refuses not only to make this particular choice, but to acknowledge its existence; he does choose, but he chooses his own alternative, thus remaining, in religious terms, a trimmer to the end, and eventually receiving the traditional punishment of the trimmer--emptiness.

The close link between Rayber's fear of his terrible feeling of love and his fears of religious fanaticism may also be seen in his reaction to Lucette Carmody, the little girl who preaches that "'The world said, 'Love cuts like the cold wind and the will of God is plain as the winter''" (383). Watching her, Rayber is terribly moved: "A deep shock went through him. He was certain that this child had looked directly into his heart and seen his pity. He felt that some mysterious connection was established between them" (383). And when the child speaks of Herod's slaughter of children and Christ's raising of the dead, Rayber is extremely excited by his own interpretation of her words, an interpretation which gives him a heroic role as a kind of savior:

Rayber felt his spirit borne aloft. But not those dead! he cried, not the innocent children, not you, not me when I was a child, not Bishop, not Frank! And he had a vision of himself moving like an avenging angel through the world, gathering up all the children that the Lord, not Herod, had slain. (383-84)
Rayber thus sees the girl as just another child exploited in her child's willingness to believe, "like one of those birds blinded to make it sing more sweetly" (383), and the psychologist, as always, believes that he can correct the situation:

Rayber saw himself fleeing with the child to some enclosed garden where he would teach her the truth, where he would gather all the exploited children of the world and let sunshine flood their minds. . . . Come away with me, he silently implored, and I'll teach you the truth, I'll save you, beautiful child! (384)

As he looks at the child through the window, Rayber virtually ignores what she is saying—"I've seen the Lord in a tree of fire! The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean! . . . none can escape!" (384)—and fits her into his own emotional view: "Rayber's heart began to race. He felt some miraculous communication between them. The child alone in the world was meant to understand him. . . . He felt that in the space between them, their spirits had broken the bonds of age and innocence and were mingling in some unheard knowledge of each other" (384-85). Lost in this romantic—even sexual—vision, Rayber is completely shocked to discover that the child does not share it at all; indeed, she points to him and shrieks: "'Listen you people, . . . I see a damned soul before my eye! I see a dead man Jesus hasn't raised. His head is in the window but his ear is deaf to the Holy Word'" (385). And, like the faked blindness of Asa Hawks, Rayber's deafness becomes a symbol of his spiritual crippling, for, unable even to hear God "by the hearing of the ear" (Job 42:5), he will never be able to see God directly. Instead, like Sheppard, the psychologist in "The Lame Shall Enter First," Rayber tries to be God and becomes, as Rufus Johnson says of Sheppard, a "'big tin Jesus'": "'I' . . . I'm the one who can save you.'" With his hat turned down all around he looked like a fanatical
country preacher" (406-07). But, again, the supreme irony of this chosen role as secular Christ is that it is actually a reflection of the inner need which Rayber recognizes but rejects:

He could control his terrifying love as long as it had its focus in Bishop, but if anything happened to the child, he would have to face it in itself. Then the whole world would become his idiot child. . . . He would have to anesthetize his life. . . . He felt a sinister pull on his consciousness, the familiar undertow of expectation, as if he were still a child waiting on Christ. (410-11)

And when he returns briefly to Powderhead, Rayber, seeing "the forked tree [the Cross?]" near the clearing thinks of old Tarwater, but as the object of his rejection when he (Rayber) was fourteen and went to Powderhead to scream his defiance at the old man: "'You're crazy, you're a liar, you have a head full of crap, you belong in a nut house!'" (413); to his dismay, however he also remembers the look on the old man's face, "the sudden drop into some mysterious misery, which afterwards he had never been able to get out of his mind" (413). It is exactly this inability to escape completely the power of old Tarwater that young Tarwater recognizes and names in one of his last exchanges with Rayber:

"'It's you the seed fell in. . . . It ain't a thing you can do about it. It fell on bad ground but it fell in deep'" (416). Rayber's reply defines once more both his recognition and his defiance of the "seed": "'Goddam you! . . . It fell in us both alike. The difference is that I know it's in me and I keep it under control'" (416). He believes that this "control" can provide him with great dignity:

All he would be was an observer. He waited with serenity. . . . He told himself that he was indifferent even to his own dissolution. It seemed to him that this indifference was the most that human dignity could achieve, and for the moment forgetting his lapses, . . . he felt he had achieved it. To feel nothing was peace. (421)
To his final horror, however, Rayber realizes, with the recognition that Tarwater has drowned Bishop, that to feel nothing gives him not dignity, but an overwhelming and terrifying emptiness which he cannot endure:

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

(423)

The joy of martyrdom is given only to those who are committed to a vision, and, as O'Connor has emphasized throughout the book, Rayber is actually committed, quite literally, to nothing.

Tarwater's own battle with his great-uncle's prophecy is more violent than Rayber's, defining from the outset O'Connor's view that the boy, unlike his uncle, is worthy of the prophetic vocation old Tarwater has predicted for him. To be worthy, however, is not necessarily to accept, and throughout Part II Tarwater consciously and repeatedly rejects the role of prophet, referring to a revival meeting as "'horse manure'" (370), remarking that he would "'as soon baptize a dog'" (389) as Bishop, and looking at the waters of a lake "with a peculiar undisguised hostility" (394). But if all of these gestures represent Tarwater's conscious attempts to reject his vocation, their very nature merely reaffirms his unspoken commitment. He professes to hate Rayber and Bishop, yet he travels immediately to the city to find them when old Tarwater dies; he scoffs at the revival meeting, but he attends it and comes out looking "submissive" (385) for the first time; his comment about baptizing Bishop is prompted, not by a discussion of baptism, but by Rayber's question, "'And where would your business be?'" (389); and although he looks at the lake with
hostility, he also sees it as if "only the moment before [it had] been set down by four strapping angels for him to baptize the child in" (402). Rayber is right in seeing Tarwater as having "the distinct look of being pursued" (394).

Quite often Tarwater seems to assume the role called for by his great-uncle. When Rayber asks him what he will do if nothing happens to let him (in his own words) "'find out a few things'" (368), Tarwater answers "'Then I'll make it happen!'" (369), assuming the prophet's ability to act which he so admired in old Tarwater. Thus, the boy moves through the city restlessly, "searching for whatever it was that appeared just beyond his vision" (369), boasting of his violent beginning "as if he were declaring a royal birth" (368), and wearing the traditional isolation of a prophet "like a mantle, wrapped... around himself as if it were a garment signifying the elect" (370). He paraphrases Christ in the Temple again--"'I'm going on about my bidnis'" (389)--and, at one point, almost baptizes Bishop in a fountain in a park:

The boy [Tarwater] stood arrested in the middle of a step. His eyes were on the child in the pool but they burned as if he beheld some terrible compelling vision. The sun shone brightly on Bishop's white head and the little boy stood there with a look of attention. Tarwater began to move toward him.

He seemed to be drawn toward the child in the water but to be pulling back, exerting an almost equal pressure away from what attracted him... Rayber had the sense that [Tarwater] was moving blindly, that where Bishop was he saw only a spot of light. He felt that something was being enacted before him that if he could understand it, he would have the key to the boy's future... In an instant of illumination he understood. Tarwater was moving toward Bishop to Baptize him. (391)

But Tarwater is resisting his "call" rather strongly at this point, just as he tries, paradoxically, to combine old Tarwater's action with his
own denial when he speaks to the proprietress of the Cherokee Lodge:

"You can't just say NO," he said. "You got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean by doing it. You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it. One way or another." (397)

And herein lies the difference between Rayber's flight from old Tarwater—seeking nothingness—and Tarwater's; the boy will act; he will assert his rejection and drown Bishop rather than merely withdrawing into a sterile sort of safety. Realizing this, Tarwater can also hurl his triumph of action at Rayber:

"I can do something. I ain't like you. All you can do is think what you would have done if you had done it. Not me. I can do it. I can act. . . . It's nothing about me like you." (418)

In spite of his denials, however, Tarwater does feel at times trapped in his prophetic role. When he sees the lake he remarks, "'I never ast to come here, . . . I never ast for that lake to be set down in front of me'" (397). Like Haze Motes, Tarwater is being pursued by his spiritual fate, and from the first night in the city his mind is "engaged in a continual struggle with that silence that confronted him, that demanded that he baptize the child and begin at once the life the old man had prepared him for" (398). Indeed, wherever he looks as he walks through the city he is reminded of the old man's prophecy: if he looks in a store window he sees his own reflection "transparent as snakeskin," moving along "beside him like some violent ghost"; if he looks to the other side, he sees Bishop with "a judging sternness about his forehead" and eyes which seem to reflect "the silent invisible country whose borders he was always on the edge of, always in danger of crossing" (398).
As in Powderhead, Tarwater is tempted in the city by the disembodied voice of his "friend--no longer a stranger" (399), who continues to argue against the boy's prophecy on the grounds that he hasn't been properly "called":

What you want is a sign, a real sign, suitable to a prophet. If you are a prophet, it's only right you should be treated like one. When Jonah dallied, he was cast three days in a belly of darkness and vomited up in the place of his mission. . . . It takes all my time to set you straight. Look at you, he said--going to that fancy-house of God, sitting there like an ape, letting that girl-child bend your ear. What did you expect to see there? What did you expect to hear? The Lord speaks to prophets personally and He's never spoke to you, never lifted a finger, never dropped a gesture. And as for that strangeness in your gut, that comes from you, not the Lord. When you were a child you had worms. As likely as not you have them again. (399)

This "friend's" reference to Tarwater's "strangeness in the gut" alludes to the boy's constant feeling of unsatisfied hunger, a "peculiar hunger" which began when he left Powderhead and came to Rayber's place, where "The city food only weakened him" (399). This theme of Tarwater's hunger becomes a sort of leitmotif which O'Connor sustains to the end of the book, with references to the boy's low opinion of Rayber's food (366), to the fact that he is "a finicky eater" (373-74), and to his appearance as that "of someone starving who sees a meal he can't reach laid out before him" (377) while he stands before a bakery window which is "empty except for a loaf of bread" (378).

All of these expressions of Tarwater's hunger contrast sharply with his life at Powderhead, where, "If the old man had done nothing else for him, he had heaped his plate" (399). And O'Connor makes the connection between the old man's spiritual offering of "the bread of life" (308) and Tarwater's own discomfit quite clear: "Since the breakfast he had finished sitting in the presence of his [great-]
uncle's corpse, he had not been satisfied by food, and his hunger had become like an insistent silent force inside him" (399); whether he likes it or not, Tarwater is suffering from exactly the "symptom" of prophecy which he has feared:

The boy sensed that this was the heart of his great-uncle's madness, this hunger, and what he was secretly afraid of was that it might be passed down, might be hidden in the blood and might strike some day in him and then he would be torn by hunger like the old man, the bottom split out of his stomach so that nothing would heal or fill it but the bread of life.

As we have seen, Tarwater's darkest vision of himself as prophet is one in which he sees himself "sitting forever with his great-uncle on a green bank, full and sick, staring at a broken fish and a multiplied loaf" (340).

His terrible hunger continues until he reaches the lake, that large body of water which seems almost supernaturally appropriate for the baptism of Bishop; at the Cherokee Lodge, Tarwater eats "voraciously... six buns filled with barbecue and... three cans of beer. He might have been preparing for... some action that would take all his strength" (402). Tarwater does, of course, perform the crucial act of baptism at the lake, but, because he determines desperately to view it primarily as the drowning of Bishop rather than as his baptism, his hunger does not abate. Thus, in Part III of the novel, while he rides with the truckdriver, Tarwater denies his hunger while attempting again to deny his prophecy: "'There are them that can act and them that can't, and them that are hungry and them that ain't. That's all. I can act. And I ain't hungry'" (428). Almost immediately, however, he says, "'I'm hungry'" (429), and questioned by the driver, outlines
his problem, unwittingly defining again the hunger of old Tarwater:

"I ain't hungry for the bread of life, . . . I'm hungry for something to eat here and now. I threw up my dinner and I didn't eat no supper. . . . When I come to eat, I ain't hungry, . . . It's like being empty is a thing in my stomach and it don't allow nothing else to come down in there." (429; italics mine)

This recitation is repeated when Tarwater once more says, "'I'm hungry but I ain't'" (430), only to receive the same sort of response that his great-uncle's hunger elicited: "'You belong in a booby hatch!'" (430). Nevertheless, the driver gives him a sandwich; but Tarwater cannot eat it: "His stomach alone rejected it; his face looked violently hungry and disappointed" (434). When he leaves the trucker and approaches Powderhead, his hunger and thirst combine, and O'Connor's imagery once more reinforces the religious implications of these desires; they are symbolic of his cross of prophecy: "... he became more and more thirsty and his hunger and thirst combined in a pain that shot up and down him and across from 'shoulder to shoulder'' (435). His physical condition continues to decline as a woman in a store refuses to sell him a bottle of pop and scolds him for "'scorn[ing] the Resurrection and the Life'' (437). By this time, Tarwater's voice is "cracked for dryness" (438), and his throat feels "as if it were coated with burning sand" [again one is reminded of the traditional purification of the prophet in the wilderness]. Finally, in his last act of defiance, Tarwater drinks the liquor of the "stranger" in the lavender and cream-colored car (surely this is the physical embodiment of Tarwater's earlier "stranger," in his role of tempter and perverter; Tarwater himself feels that "There was something familiar in the look of the stranger but he could not place where he had seen him before"
[439]), saying "'It's better than the Bread of Life!'" (440). But when he returns to Powderhead and sees the grave and cross of old Tarwater, Tarwater finally accepts his prophetic vocation, and his acceptance, like his rejection, is described in terms of his hunger:

[The field] seemed to him no longer empty but peopled with a multitude. Everywhere, he saw dim figures seated on the slope and as he gazed he saw that from a single basket the throng was being fed. . . . The boy too leaned forward, aware at last of the object of his hunger, aware that it was the same as the old man's and that nothing on earth would fill him. His hunger was so great that he could have eaten all the loaves and fishes after they were multiplied. . . . He felt his hunger no longer as a pain but as a tide. He felt it rising in himself through time and darkness, rising through the centuries, and he knew that it rose in a line of men whose lives were chosen to sustain it, who would wander in the world, strangers from that violent country where the silence is never broken except to shout the truth. He felt it building in him from the blood of Abel to his own, rising and engulfing him. (446-47)

There is much more to O'Connor's presentation of Tarwater's struggle with his vocation than her food imagery, however. Specifically, the boy's strange "friend" challenges him repeatedly, not only in terms of his hunger pangs, but in reference to his desire for a dramatic, Old Testament sign from God indicating his election:

His friend suggested he demand an unmistakable sign, not a pang of hunger or a reflection of himself in a store window, but an unmistakable sign, clear and suitable—water bursting from a rock, for instance, fire sweeping down at his command and destroying some site he would point to, such as the tabernacle he had gone to spit on. (400)

Following this advice, Tarwater, on his fourth day in the city, sits on the bed of Rayber's absent wife, raises "his folded hat as if he were threatening the silence, [and demands] an unmistakable sign from the Lord" (400). He seems to get it, for the next day, walking in the park, he begins to feel "the approach of mystery" (400), he almost
baptizes Bishop in the fountain, and then, looking into the water, he sees his face, "distinct and still, gaunt and cross-shaped" (401). Still, he is unwilling to accept this "sign," and he mutters to himself: "I wasn't going to baptize him, . . . I'd drown him first," at which a voice seems to say "Drown him then," and Tarwater's "friend," who had been silent, "as if in the felt presence, he dared not raise his voice" (401), urges the boy once more to reject his calling, mirroring, as usual, Tarwater's own worst suspicions:

Well, that's your sign, his friend said—the sun coming out from under a cloud and falling on the head of a dimwit. . . . Listen, he said, you have to quit confusing a madness with a mission. You can't spend your life fooling yourself this way. You have to take hold and put temptation behind you. If you baptize once, you'll be doing it the rest of your life. . . . Save yourself while the hour of salvation is at hand. (401; italics mine)

Given this challenge and Tarwater's initial thoughts about drowning Bishop as a way to escape baptizing him, it is only appropriate that he should be supported in this evasion (if unknowingly) by Rayber, whose admission of his own earlier failure to drown the idiot-child merely reinforces Tarwater's decision: "'It was a failure of nerve,' Rayber said. . . . 'You didn't have the guts,' Tarwater said. . . . 'He [old Tarwater] always told me you couldn't do nothing, couldn't act!" (403). Indeed, while on a boat ride, after attempting briefly to ignore Rayber by telling him, in suspiciously Biblical accents, "'I come to fish'" (404), Tarwater once more asserts his ability to act rather than to analyze: "'I ain't worried what my underhead [his substitution for Rayber's word "subconscious"] is doing. I know what I think when I do it, and when I get ready to do it, I don't talk no words, I do it!" (405). When Rayber rejects the ritual of baptism again, asserting that
"My guts . . . are in my head!" (405) and telling Tarwater that he is "warped!" and suffering from "false guilt!" (406), the boy merely vomits.

In Part II, the actual drowning/baptizing of Bishop is not described explicitly; we see only the ominously touching scene of Tarwater guiding the idiot-boy out of the lodge with "his hand on Bishop's neck just under his hat" (419) and telling Rayber, "I'll look after him!" (420). In a way O'Connor also reverses this image of Tarwater leading Bishop away to his fate, for as the two boys walk down the dock it seems almost as if "it was Bishop who was doing the leading, that the child had made the capture" (419; cf. O'Connor's first story, "The Capture"). Our last view of Tarwater is that which Rayber imagines, of "The boy . . . moving off . . . to meet his appalling destiny.

Rayber] knew with an instinct as sure as the dull mechanical beat of his heart that [Tarwater] had baptized the child even as he had drowned him, that he was headed for everything the old man had prepared him for, that he moved off now through the black forest toward a violent encounter with his fate" (422-23).

We must not forget, however, that the violence of Tarwater's fate has also encompassed another person, Bishop, in much the same manner that the violence of Haze Motes kills Solace Layfield. O'Connor's treatment of Bishop is generally rather simple and straightforward; he is the innocent who must be slaughtered at the altar of the Lord, and she reinforces this view by describing him repeatedly in essentially religious terms. Thus, he looks like old Tarwater "grown backwards to the lowest form of innocence" (371), and he has "pale silver eyes like the old man's" (322). His favorite toy is a trashbasket in which he
keeps a rock (both Tarwaters are described at least once in terms of rocks; St. Peter certainly stands behind them all, in O'Connor's view), and, when he stands in the fountain in the park, waiting almost consciously to be baptized, O'Connor mentions his "white head" (390), associating him, one suspects, with the Lamb of God. Indeed, the proprietress of the Cherokee Lodge objects to young Tarwater's treatment of Bishop and looks at him "fiercely as if he had profaned the holy" (396). Finally, Bishop's acquiescence to his fate at the hands of Tarwater is in sharp contrast to his reaction to Rayber's attempt to drown him, when the child fought his death with "primeval rage" (388). For, although he cries out briefly when Tarwater drowns him, Bishop also seems to cooperate, almost to the point of initiating his own death: "While [Tarwater] stood there gazing, for the moment lost, the child in the boat stood up, caught him around the neck and climbed onto his back" (432). Bishop is, in O'Connor's view, the innocent child who must be slaughtered so that a new prophet might be given life, just as the children were "'wasted'" by Herod (383) after the birth of Christ. Unfortunately, he also represents the recurrence of O'Connor's almost characteristic lapse into melodrama when underlining her religious view.

Part III of The Violent Bear It Away includes, as I have suggested, the final stage of Tarwater's spiritual journey which has taken him away from Powderhead to the city and lake where he has attempted to assert his freedom from his prophetic vocation; in this section, he returns to Powderhead, trying desperately to believe,
in spite of what he has done, that he is free of old Tarwater's influence:

"I'm going back there. I ain't going to leave it again. . . . I shouldn't never have left it except I had to prove I wasn't no prophet and I've proved . . . 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." (428)

But this assertion is based more on bravado than confidence, for Tarwater's voice seems to have "queer ups and downs in [it] as if he were using it after some momentous failure" (427; italics mine), and, although he boasts of his action—"'I always done something'" (427)—he feels compelled to try to rationalize his baptism of Bishop:

"I baptized him. . . . It was an accident. I didn't mean to, . . . The words just come out of themselves but it don't mean nothing. You can't be born again. . . . I only meant to drown him. . . . You're only born once. They were just some words that run out of my mouth and spilled in the water." (428)

He also boasts about his superiority over Rayber, once more paradoxically celebrating what he considers his prophetic attribute while denying his own prophetic vocation: "'I know everything he knows, only I can do something about it. I did'" (429).

All of this rationalization is of limited usefulness, however, for as Tarwater sits in the speeding truck, his mind begins working and destroying his dream of escape: "He sat rigidly upright, . . . as if under the closed lids an inner eye were watching, piercing out the truth in the distortion of his dream" (431). As he relives the drowning and baptism of Bishop, Tarwater becomes terribly disturbed, until finally he seems to lose control of himself and experiences a kind of fit—another traditional affliction of the prophet—and O'Connor's imagery
echoes the earlier comment of Tarwater's "friend" that true prophets like Jonah were called dramatically by God (399):

... his muscles began to jerk, his arms flailed, his mouth opened to make way for cries that would not come. His pale face twitched and grimaced. He might have been Jonah clinging wildly to the whale's tongue. (432)

Finally, out of this fine religious madness, Tarwater, "the defeated boy" (432), cries out the words of baptism again "in a high raw voice." Nevertheless, he makes one more attempt to assert his defiance, getting out of the truck and beginning to walk toward Powderhead where he plans "to live his life as he had elected it, and where, for the rest of his days, he would make good his refusal" (433). For a time, this refusal seems to be successful, and Tarwater is once more able to think of his "triumph," the fact that "He had not said NO [like Rayber], he had done it" (435). He even borrows his great-uncle's imagery of purifying fire (imagery which O'Connor sustains throughout the novel in her descriptions of both Tarwaters as prophets) to express what he thinks is his own rebirth beyond the reach of the old man's prophecy: "He returned tried in the fire of his refusal, with all the old man's fancies burnt out of him" (434), but this choice of imagery once more merely underlines the extent to which he is still caught by those very fancies.

When he is confronted with this sin against his great-uncle's memory--his failure to bury him--Tarwater finds himself virtually unable to control his speech: he cannot "answer for his freedom" (437), and when an obscenity rushes "from his lips, like the shriek of a bat" (437), Tarwater feels frustrated and even ashamed. But he regains his composure just long enough to perform his final acts of rejection, all
of which are directed, in his mind, at the spectre of his great-
uncle:

The boy grasped the bottle and began to pull at the
cork, and simultaneously there came into his head all
his great-uncle's warnings about poisonous liquor,
all his idiot restrictions about riding with strangers.
The essence of all the old man's foolishness flooded
his mind like a rising tide of irritation. (440)

Tarwater's violation by "his friend" marks the initial point of
his conversion to acceptance of his prophetic vocation. As O'Connor
points out, even before this incident, "The boy was intolerant of
unspiritual evils and with those of the flesh he had never truckled"
(438). Thus, this perverse violation moves him to "some point beyond
rage or pain" (441). The boy who much earlier had said, "'Nigger, . . .
Take your hand off me!" (331) has now been made only too aware of the
repulsiveness of evil—that force which his great-uncle had always
fought with such fanaticism—and, even before he reaches Powderhead,
he has the look and the commitment of a prophet destroying with
purifying fire "the evil ground, . . . every spot the stranger could
have touched" (442):

He stood clenching the blackened burnt-out pine
bough. Then after a moment he began to move for­
ward again slowly. He knew that he could not turn
back now. He knew that his destiny forced him on
to a final revelation. His scorched eyes no longer
looked hollow or as if they were meant only to guide
forward. They looked as if, touched with the coal
like the lips of the prophet, they would be used for
ordinary sights again. (442)

When Tarwater approaches Powderhead, O'Connor's rather heavy­
handed imagery reinforces our view of him as prophet: The sun is "red
and mammoth" (443) as, unfortunately, it invariably is when she wants
to present a religious vision; Tarwater himself first looks like
"Moses glimpsing the promised land" (443) and then like Christ—
standing next to the forked tree, "with a hand on either trunk" (443). When he hears the voice of his "friend," his reaction is quite different than it was earlier. This time he rejects the devil completely, starting another blaze and making "a rising wall of fire between him and the grinning presence" (444). He then reaches Powderhead, sees the grave and cross of old Tarwater and loses whatever remaining reservations he has about his prophecy: "The boy's hands opened stiffly as if he were dropping something he had been clutching all his life" (446). His vision comes to him, first, as we have seen, in terms of old Tarwater and the loaves and fishes, and then in the searing tongues of flame he had earlier visualized:

He whirled toward the treeline. There, rising and spreading in the night, a red-gold tree of fire ascended as if it would consume the darkness in one tremendous burst of flame. The boy's breath went out to meet it. He knew that this was the fire that had encircled David, that had raised Elijah from the earth, that had spoken to Moses and would in the instant speak to him. He threw himself to the ground and with his face against the dirt of the grave, he heard [the] command. GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY. (447)

O'Connor's substitution of the word "mercy" for "justice" in old Tarwater's expression of this command (339) is somewhat puzzling. Certainly the "call" to prophesy in the city is unchanged. Perhaps O'Connor is implying that Tarwater, having rejected his prophetic role and having found it again as a result of God's mercy (one remembers the lake set down by angels and the seemingly religious nature of Bishop), is better suited than even old Tarwater for bringing back "THE CHILDREN OF GOD" to a belief in their Maker. The difference between the two words may also be so fine as to defy clear definition; just after proclaiming this call for the first time (and using "justice") old
Tarwater shouts, "Who will be left? Who will be left when the Lord's mercy strikes?" (339).

Whatever the exact meaning of the call, Tarwater answers it without hesitation, setting out toward the city just as his great-uncle had set out years before:

His singed eyes, black in their deep sockets, seemed already to envision the fate that awaited him, but he moved steadily on, his face set toward the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping. (447)

His life, like that of old Tarwater, promises only violence and fanatic commitment, but, as we have seen, these are, in O'Connor's view, exactly the qualities which are necessary to gain the Kingdom of Heaven.

4

A reader who does not share O'Connor's Catholic point of view (even, I suspect, one who does) may well question the sort of extreme statement which she makes about religious commitment in The Violent Bear It Away. Surely, as I have suggested, there must be a middle-ground between old Tarwater and Rayber, and I suspect that this is the sort of reservation which William Sessions communicated to O'Connor in 1960. Her reply, if not completely satisfying, does at least make an important point about her attitude toward her fiction: "The lack of realism would be crucial if this were a realistic novel . . . Hawthorne said he didn't write novels, he wrote romances; I am one of his descendants. . . ." 11 Certainly Hawthorne's influence may be seen clearly in such scenes as the night journey of young Tarwater through the darkened city, the dialogues with a satanic presence, and the death of old Tarwater (Cf. the death of Judge Pyncheon in The House of Seven Gables). As is so frequently the case, O'Connor's choice of names is
also quite Hawthornian: "Powderhead" implies the fulminating power of old Tarwater's fanaticism; "Tarwater" itself suggests, as P. Albert Duhamel has noted, characters who have been "tarred by the brush of original sin and redeemed by the waters of baptism" as well as being the name of "a discredited folk cureall"; and Rayber's substitution of the Catholic "Francis" with the overly familiar "Frankie" defines his secular view quite clearly, just as "Bishop" underlines O'Connor's view of the idiot "'Blessed in the eyes of the Lord.'"

By minimizing the importance of realism in her book and invoking Hawthorne's terms "romance," O'Connor is, I think, suggesting that The Violent Bear It Away is to be read as much for its allegorical statements as for its story and that in this context she may be allowed her characteristic exaggeration for effect just as Hawthorne hopes to be allowed "a certain latitude, both as to . . . fashion and material" in his romances. But in this book her exaggeration—her oversimplification of life—is too extreme and schematic. To suggest that the only spiritual choice open to man is that between violent fanaticism and sterile rationalism is to demonstrate what is at best a very narrow view indeed.

This is not to say, however, that The Violent Bear It Away is a total failure. The book frequently works well as a result of its rather complex structure, its intense drama, and its finely woven fabric of metaphor. But it is, I think, essentially a Christian fable—a modern morality play—rather than either a realistic novel or a Hawthornian romance.
Footnotes


3Ibid., 13.


5Ibid., p. 258.


7J. Oates Smith, "Ritual and Violence in Flannery O'Connor," Thought, XII, 555, 559-60.

8Melvin Friedman, "Introduction" to The Added Dimension, p. 26.


O'Connor's posthumous collection of nine stories, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, published in 1965, is in some ways a rather perplexing work. There are no really serious failures, as in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*, although at least two pieces, "A View of the Woods" and "The Comforts of Home," are marred by melodramatic conclusions. Indeed, some of the stories, such as "Parker's Back," "The Enduring Chill," and "The Lame Shall Enter First," must be included in the list of O'Connor's best. As a whole, however, the collection is less successful than many of its parts, primarily because of O'Connor's greatest weakness, her constant repetition of character and theme. Virtually all of her familiar character types appear again and again, and frequently in familiar situations: the battle of generations of "Good Country People" between a bland, somewhat scatterbrained mother and her intense intellectual offspring is re-enacted variously in "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "The Comforts of Home," "The Enduring Chill," and, to a lesser extent, in "The Partridge Festival."* The conflict between the rational and the

*"The Partridge Festival" is not included in *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, but, as it was published during the same period as the other stories of the collection, I have included it in this discussion.
prophetic of *The Violent Bear It Away* reappears in "The Lame Shall Enter First," and the battle between the very old and the very young of "The Artificial Nigger" is presented again in "A View of the Woods." Similarly, the destruction of pride in such stories as "A Circle in the Fire" and "The Displaced Person" is chronicled again in "Revelation," "Greenleaf," "Parker's Back" (which also includes a character similar, in many ways, to Haze Notes), and "Judgement Day."

O'Connor's initiation theme is also repeated throughout these stories, adding significance to the title of the collection, a quotation from Teilhard de Chardin, the French scientist-philosopher "whose major effort as a scientist was to explain how the natural world, including, of course, the human beings who live in it, are in a process of continual evolution toward God."

This "evolution towards God" demands, of course, the destruction of pride and selfish delusion, and throughout this collection, as in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories*, those characters who are, by O'Connor's religious standards, too proud or overly confident of their own rational control of their destinies must be forced to an awareness of their sins. Because she is so skillful a writer, O'Connor is able to portray these initiations with great dramatic force. But as the same process is repeated in story after story, the drama begins to weaken, and even one of O'Connor's most useful and important stylistic devices, her irony, begins to fail. As Irving Howe has so perceptively observed,

... there can be, as in much contemporary writing, there is, a deep failure of ironic perception in a writer's unequivocal commitment to irony. Mustered with the regularity of battalions on parade, complex ironies have a way of crystalizing into simple and even smug conclusions.
The oversimplification, once again, seems to be that of O'Connor's religious view: "Caring almost nothing for secular destinies, which are altogether more varied than religious ones, she propels her characters toward the cataclysms where alone they can have a tortured glimpse of the need and chance of redemption." O'Connor's presentation of these cataclysms in *Everything That Rises Must Converge* is, almost without exception, powerful and effective, but even her considerable artistic skill cannot overcome the essential weakness of her thematic repetition, which is itself the consequence of a limited view of life.

In the stories "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "The Enduring Chill," "The Partridge Festival," and "The Comforts of Home" O'Connor explores the themes suggested in her earlier story, "Good Country People," specifically the initiation into new humility and (perhaps) religious insight of her young, intense, generally impotent intellectuals and, in one instance, of one of her bland old ladies. In the title story of the collection, Julian, who has proudly believed that "instead of being blinded by his love for [his mother] as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally free from her" (13),* is, at the end of the story, only too aware of that love and is thus about to enter a new "world of guilt and sorrow" (23). The recognition of Asbury in "The Enduring Chill" is more explicitly religious: having learned that he must face a life of protracted suffering rather than a satisfyingly tragic death as unfulfilled artist, he becomes frighteningly aware of God for the first time in his life. In "The Partridge Festival," two young self-styled intellectuals see their abstract

---

*Flannery O'Connor, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Noonday Press paperback (New York, 1965); unless otherwise noted, all references in this chapter are to this edition.
theories blasted into nothingness by the reality of evil and depravity. And in "The Comforts of Home" both Thomas and his mother are initiated into the reality of a complete, unalloyed depravity which neither fully realized was possible.

In all four stories, however, O'Connor's characterization is essentially the same as in her earlier collection. Her intellectuals are proud, self-consciously intense, and, while rationalizing their own impotence, fiercely intolerant of the shortcomings which they see in those around them. The old ladies are complacent, sometimes naively kind (as in "The Comforts of Home"), generally optimistic, and bewildered by the antics of their intellectual "children." In short, the members of what one critic has called "The Fictional Family of Flannery O'Connor" are, in this collection, essentially unchanged.

As she appears in the opening scene of "Everything That Rises Must Converge" Julian's mother is a sort of combination of Mrs. Hopewell of "Good Country People" and the grandmother of "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." She is a vain old lady attempting to cling to the old traditions in spite of the irritated reactions of her son, who tries to force her to see what he considers to be the stupidity of her backward-looking view. She is, like Mrs. McIntyre (of "The Displaced Person"), quite materialistic in her concern over the price of her new hat and in her delight that the reducing class at the Y is "free," but she is also a terribly naive person, who is, as O'Connor points out repeatedly through her imagery, essentially childish: "her eyes, sky-blue, were as innocent and untouched by experience as they must have been when she was ten" (4). This lady's naiveté is centered on her attempts to cling to a rosy vision of the Old South. Thus, she believes that since hers
"had been a fashionable neighborhood forty years ago, . . . [she and her son] did well to have an apartment in it" (4). Ignoring the reality of her "dumpy figure," she arrays herself for her trip to the Y in hat-and gloves, believing that in her stylishness she "won't meet [herself] coming and going" (5). Similarly, she ignores the reality of her neighborhood in which "Each house had a narrow collar of dirt around it in which it sat" and dwells on the beauty of her family's past, in which she pictures her grandfather's plantation and two hundred slaves who were "better off than they are now" (6). She models her own behavior on that of her parents who, although they "were in reduced circumstances, . . . never forgot who they were" (7). She also speaks in constant clichés, offering such gems of hackneyed wisdom as "'you only live once,'" "'With the world in the mess it's in, . . . It's a wonder we can enjoy anything,'" "'If you know who you are, you can go anywhere,'" and "'I've always had a great respect for my colored friends.'"

Julian's reaction to his mother's naive pretensions is predictable; he is thoroughly, if quietly, enraged, seeing himself in his role of listener "waiting like Saint Sebastian for the arrows to begin piercing him" (4). Indeed, he consistently visualizes himself as a martyr to her trivialities; he raises his eyes to heaven and walks with "his head down and thrust forward and his eyes glazed with the determination to make himself completely numb during the time he would be sacrificed for her pleasure" (4). His martyrdom is also constant because "Everything that gave her pleasure was small and depressed him" (4). This pose is usually successful, and he manages to walk along, "saturated in depression as if in the midst of his martyrdom he had lost his
faith" (5), but at times he cannot resist attacking his mother's views.

Thus, when she avows her determination to be "gracious" to people, Julian unleashes an assault which summarizes the attitude of virtually all of O'Connor's intellectual rebels:

"They don't give a damn for your graciousness.

... Knowing who you are is good for one generation only. You haven't the foggiest notion where you stand now or who you are." (6)

To Julian his mother's arguments against the "rise of the Negro" are utterly predictable, and O'Connor's description of his awareness provides one of her more humorous extended metaphors:

He groaned to see that she was off on that topic. She rolled into it every few days like a train on an open track. He knew every stop, every junction, every swamp along the way, and knew the exact point at which her conclusion would roll majestically into the station. "It's ridiculous. It's simply not realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence." (7)

Given the title of the story, this comment is, of course, supremely ironic. If, according to Teilhard de Chardin, everything that rises does converge, then Julian's mother, by her stern qualification of "rising," is obviously one of those sinners who must be chastened.

Thus, O'Connor's inclusion of this statement is a bit too neatly contrived, just as the old lady's earlier observation that, wearing her hat, she won't meet herself coming and going, is a depressingly obvious ironic foreshadowing of her encounter with the Negro woman wearing an identical hat.

Julian's own thoughts concerning his mother's dream of the good old days are also quite ironic. Instead of rejecting the vision of the old plantation categorically, as one with his "liberal" ideas should,
regularly:

He would stand on the wide porch, listening to the rustle of oak leaves, then wander through the high-ceilinged hall into the parlor that opened onto it and gaze at the worn rugs and faded draperies. It occurred to him that it was he, not she, who could have appreciated it. He preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him. (8)

Julian is, in short, completely self-centered, and all of his actions and reactions are predicated upon this selfishness. Even when he vows to himself to sit beside a Negro on a bus "in reparation as it were for his mother's sins" (8), his thoughts are directed towards himself as martyr rather than to any real commitment to an ideal of equality, just as his sudden urge "to break [his mother's] spirit" (8) is primarily a reaction to his own egotistical "frustration of having to wait on the bus as well as ride on it" (8). In short, when he celebrates his own intellectuality, asserting that "True culture is in the mind, the mind, . . . the mind" (9), he is being something of a hypocrite, ignoring rather studiously the essentially emotional basis for most of his actions.

His mother's reaction to his assertion of the existence of culture in the mind is, predictably, to reply that "It's in the heart, . . . and in how you do things and how you do things is because of who you are" (9). In her own rather pathetic way, the old lady does try to act out her vision of herself, entering the bus "with a little smile, as if she were going into a drawing room where everyone had been waiting for her" (9) and removing from her purse "a folding fan, black with a Japanese scene on it, which she began to flutter before her" (9). Even her conversation with another passenger follows her
prescribed pattern as she observes that "... we have the bus to ourselves" and that "Training tells [in the actions of young men]"
(10).

Just as she satirized both Hulga Hopewell and her mother in "Good Country People," O'Connor satirizes both Julian and his mother rather explicitly. Although Julian takes great pride in his rationalism and intellectuality, he is essentially an escapist:

Behind the newspaper Julian was withdrawing into the inner compartment of his mind where he spent most of his time. This was a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him. From it he could see out and judge but in it he was safe from any kind of penetration from without. It was the only place where he felt free of the general idiocy of his fellows. His mother had never entered it but from it he could see her with absolute clarity. (11)

Julian does see his mother's unrealistic world:

The old lady was clever enough and he thought that if she had started from any of the right premises, more might have been expected from her. She lived according to the laws of her own fantasy world, outside of which he had never seen her set foot. The law of it was to sacrifice herself for him after she first created the necessity to do so by making a mess of things. (11)

But he fails to see that he is his mother's son; he observes her "fantasy world" from a fantasy world of his own, charging her with sacrificing herself for him while consistently thinking of himself as a martyr to her inane happiness and accusing her of making a mess of things while rationalizing his own failure as a writer by thinking "He was too intelligent to be a success" (11). His own mental summation of his accomplishments is a veritable symphony of self-satisfaction:

In spite of going to only a third-rate college, he had, on his own initiative, come out with a first-rate education; in spite of growing up
dominated by a small mind, he had ended up with a large one; in spite of all her foolish views, he was free of prejudice and unafraid to face facts. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally free of her and could see her with complete objectivity. He was not dominated by his mother. (12)

The irony of Julian's belief in his own excellence is obvious, particularly in his assertion that he is not dominated by his mother while he accompanies her to the Y. But he is, as always, too involved in considering his own superiority to engage in any serious self-criticism; even his reaction to a Negro's entrance in the bus is centered upon himself: "It gave him a certain satisfaction to see injustice in daily operation. It confirmed his view that with a few exceptions there was no one worth knowing within a radius of three hundred miles" (12). Similarly, he makes a special effort to sit next to the Negro, not primarily as a gesture of equality but in order to shock and insult his mother: "he felt his tension suddenly lift as if he had openly declared war on her!" (13). O'Connor further underlines Julian's hypocrisy by describing his pretentious desire to talk with the Negro "about art or politics or any subject that would be above the comprehension of those around them" (13) and his foolish request for a match, both impulses based almost solely upon his desire "to teach her a lesson that would last her a while" (14). When the Negro he has chosen to fraternize with does not accept the gift of his attention, however, Julian, like Mr. Head in "The Artificial Nigger," decides to try to humble his mother by making her believe he has abandoned her and then retreats again into his mental sanctuary, "the high-ceilinged room sparsely settled with large pieces of antique furniture" (14), from which he condescendingly views his mother as
"a particularly obnoxious child" (14).

The tenuous bases of Julian's attitudes toward both his mother and Negroes are undercut by his new fantasy. He wants to torture his mother, but he does not want to torture her too much: "He could not push her to the extent of making her have a stroke" (15). More seriously, in terms of his professed belief in racial equality, his choice of ideal Negro acquaintances is terribly narrow, including only "some distinguished Negro professor or lawyer" (14) or "some of the better types... that looked like professors or ministers or lawyers" (15). Unable (and rightly so) to imagine himself participating in a sit-in demonstration, he then comes up with a cliche' worthy of his mother--"a beautiful suspiciously Negroid woman," who is, as any acceptable Negro must be for the highly selective (and prejudiced) Julian, "intelligent, dignified, even good" (15; italics mine). As usual, Julian views his noble act in terms of his own selfish love of martyrdom--"Now persecute us, go ahead and persecute us." (15)--while seeing his mother's views as stupid and ridiculous in contrast to his own moral stature:

He saw his mother across the aisle, purple-faced, shrunken like a mummy beneath the ridiculous banner of her hat. (15)

Significantly, when an un-intellectual, unsophisticated looking Negro woman boards the bus with her son, Julian is annoyed when she sits next to him--annoyed at least until he realizes "with satisfaction that this was more objectionable to her [his mother] than it was to him" (16). In his reaction to seeing that his mother has "met herself coming and going" in the Negro lady who is wearing a hat identical to her own, Julian has only the most fleeting bit of sympathy--"For a
moment he had an uncomfortable sense of her innocence"—which dis-appears immediately before his "principle rescued him. Justice entitled him to laugh. His grin hardened until it said to her as plainly as if he were saying it aloud: Your punishment fits your pettiness. This should teach you a permanent lesson" (17). But his mother's fantasy-world is not destroyed; she recovers her composure with two clichés, one an attitude—"an amused smile came over her face as if the woman were a monkey that had stolen her hat" (18)—the other a phrase—"'Isn't he [the Negro child] cute? . . . I think he likes me'" (18).

When Julian's mother offers the Negro child a penny, only to be knocked down by the boy's mother, Julian's own reaction is one of satisfaction; his carefully nurtured pose as unemotional intellectual does not slip, and he continues to treat his mother like a child, scolding her and preaching to her: "'I told you not to do that! . . . You got exactly what you deserved. Now get up'" (20). His mother, however, has been shattered by the event: her eyes are "shadowed and confused"; she seems not to recognize Julian, the rebellious son who has attacked her traditional beliefs; she loses her aristocratic poise, not noticing either her disarranged hair or dropped pocketbook; and she murmurs "'Home'" when Julian asks her where she is going. Julian continues to preach, stridently and with unrelieved cruelty:

"Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman, . . . That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double. She can wear the same hat as you and be sure," he added gratuitously (because he thought it was funny), "it looked better on her than it did on you. What all this means . . . is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn." (21)
But even as he preaches, he is thinking, not of "the whole colored race," but of himself and "of the house that had been lost for him" (21-22; italics mine). However, as he continues to berate her, calling her "'a child,'" he suddenly sees that she is changed, that her face is "a face he had never seen before" (22), and when he hears her plea for "'Grampa to come and get me!'" (22), he stares "stricken," finally realizing that her stroke has indeed come and that she is in the process of making one final attempt to return to the fantasy of her past which she loves so much: "'Tell Caroline to come get me!'" (22). Julian's pretensions are annihilated by the shock of seeing his mother's condition, and his actions refute his earlier smug thoughts of rational control of his emotions: "'Mother! . . . Darling, sweetheart, wait! . . . Mama, Mama!'" (22). Just as his assumption about his own lack of love for his mother has proved to be untrue, his assumption of her love is virtually destroyed by her last agonized gaze, in which one eye "remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed" (23; italics mine). Julian is left, helpless and irrational, crying pathetically, "'Wait here! Wait here . . . Help help!'" surrounded with darkness, "postponing from moment to moment his entry into a world of guilt and sorrow" (23).

As usual in O'Connor's fiction, this is a powerful climax indeed, beautifully consistent with the movement of the story and dramatically convincing. As John J. Burke, Jr. has pointed out, the conclusion of "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is also appropriate in terms of Teilhard de Chardin's view that one indication of man's gradual evolution toward God is his "ability to reflect," to see beyond the limits of his own ego and thus to experience love. Still
we are left with a sense of the overly neat structure which we have seen to be one of O'Connor's characteristic weaknesses, and, as Mr. Hyman has observed, her characters are themselves almost pasteboard, "a travesty segregationist mother and travesty integrationist son." Fr. Burke has suggested that "Everything That Rises Must Converge" is "of special importance ... because, by reason of its position as the first story, it establishes the theme and tone for the collection as a whole." He is generally right in his evaluation; unfortunately, however, the theme and tone—and the characters as well—are merely repeated in many of the other stories rather than developed.

"The Enduring Chill" is, I think, a better story than "Everything That Rises Must Converge," primarily because of its sharper focus. Rather than dividing her attention evenly between the boy and his mother, O'Connor concentrates upon her young intellectual, producing a much less wooden and more fully rounded character. Certainly Asbury (whose Methodist name is hardly a subtle choice) is, like Julian, something of a type; rather than the liberal integrationist, however, he is an "intellectual" out of an older mold—that of the writer, the tragic, intensely sensitive, dying Byronic romantic. But O'Connor goes a step further in this characterization in at least two ways. Underlining what is, in her view, the ridiculousness of Asbury's intellectual and religious weaknesses, she presents him with a kind of unrelenting humor which, while it is at times savagely satirical, is also tinged with some sympathy for this hopelessly romantic and egotistical boy. Further, by demonstrating in the first scene through his mother's reaction to his appearance that Asbury is actually ill, she elicits at least a modicum of sympathy for him from the reader.
He is obviously ill; he may actually be dying; and even his posturing and morbid bitterness cannot dispel what O'Connor presents as the seriousness of his condition. By this strategy O'Connor avoids, at least in part, the rather predictable sort of development from which so many of her stories suffer. She has also created in Asbury, as she had earlier created in Hulker (of "The Capture") and the child of "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," a character whose overly-dramatized thoughts and actions are exactly and convincingly appropriate to both her dramatic and religious purposes.

If he is a dying boy of twenty-five, however, Asbury is also another of O'Connor's rebellious intellectual snobs, quite similar to Hulga Hopewell and Julian (of "Everything That Rises Must Converge"), particularly in his grim hope that his death might open his mother's eyes to the "reality" which Asbury believes she has been too simple and too naive to see for herself:

... she looked aghast. He was pleased that she should see death in his face at once. His mother, at the age of sixty, was going to be introduced to reality and he supposed that if the experience didn't kill her, it would assist her in the process of growing up. (83)

Asbury is also a cultural and geographical snob of a very familiar type; to him any place other than New York City is a complete waste land: "He had become accustomed to the thought of death, but he had not become accustomed to the thought of death here [in Timberboro, his home town]" (83). His life in the City has, of course, been a starving non-author's delight, complete with a "freezing flat," an overcoat for a blanket, and the ever-present, gloriously sophisticated and cosmopolitan New York Times as a source of both physical and intellectual comfort. Indeed, when he has visited Timberboro in the past, he has always merely "endured" the place with "a wooden resigned
expression" (84) for exactly two weeks at a time. Thus, his reaction to the town, to his mother, and to his homecoming in general is one of terribly bruised sensibilities—a sort of final defeat.

A particularly effective part of O'Connor's presentation of Asbury is the manner in which she underlines the bogus quality of his intellectualism. As a writer, he is, as he himself realizes in isolated moments of perception, a failure. His total output, even in New York, consists of "two lifeless novels, . . . [a] half dozen stationary plays, . . . prosy poems, and sketchy short stories" (92), and his reaction to a modish "lecture on Vedanta" in New York was that it was "a waste of money" (86). Asbury's reaction to his illness, however, is refreshingly human. He cannot "as his [New York] friend Goetz has recommended," see his own death as merely an illusion, to be faced "with calm indifference" (86), and as he rejects his mother's confidence in Dr. Block, her hometown physician, his composure slips a bit to reveal his fear as well as his self-pity: "'What's wrong with me is way beyond Block,' and his voice trailed off into a frayed sound, almost a sob" (85). Still, he does take a great deal of perverse pleasure in his approaching martyrdom, and he continually asserts his misery, pleading that he doesn't feel like talking because he has "'had a bad trip'" (83), and declaring to his mother, "'I'm ill. I have fever and chills and I'm dizzy and all I want you to do is leave me alone'" (88).

Asbury's mother reacts to her son's appearance with a mixture of shock and optimistic confidence, first suggesting that he simply has a cold and that Dr. Block can help him, primarily because this local doctor will "'take a personal interest'" in him, thus providing
better treatment than could be possible among New York specialists. She also takes what she considers to be a "no-nonsense attitude" toward Asbury's intellectuality, believing that he is on the verge of a nervous breakdown because of his intelligence and his temperament:

She did not say a word. She did not say that this was precisely what she could have told him would happen. When people think they are smart—even when they are smart—there is nothing anybody else can say to make them see straight, and with Asbury, the trouble was that in addition to being smart, he had an artistic temperament. She did not know where he had got it from because his father, . . . had certainly had his feet on the ground; and she had certainly always had hers on it. . . . but she had observed that the more education they got, the less they could do. (87)

The old lady is, of course, quite simple-minded in her assumption that if Asbury could do some work on the farm, "—real work, not writing—" he could "avoid this nervous breakdown" (88). However, her attitude does mirror, at least to some extent, O'Connor's own distrust for any sort of literary poseurs, "interlekchuls," as she once termed them, a distrust which is reflected in varying degrees in most of her characters of this type.

The third member of this dreary little family is Asbury's older sister, Mary George, a plain, unattractive thirty-five year old elementary school principal who has obviously been battling with her brother for years, accusing him of being an untalented non-artist and being attacked in turn as a fake intellectual with an I.Q. of seventy-five. Her first words to Asbury define her attitude completely, "What's that cry of deadly pain? . . . Well, well, we have the artist with us again. How utterly utterly!" (89). And O'Connor sums up the family's mixed feelings of naive optimism, enraged frustration, and bitter sarcasm in an exquisite little exchange as the three arrive home:
"Home again, home again jiggity jig!" . . .  
"Oh God," Asbury groaned.  
"The artist arrives at the gas chamber,"  
Mary George said in her nasal voice. (90)

Asbury's final major ambition—to "educate" his mother—is the basis for his last literary production, two notebooks full of "such a letter as Kafka addressed to his father" (91). One of the boy's favorite assumptions is that "his mother would not understand [the letter] at once. . . . but he thought she would be able to see that he forgave her for all she had done to him . . . [that] she might experience a painful realization and this would be the only thing of value he had to leave her" (91). The letter itself is predictably pretentious and self-pitying:

"I came here [New York] to escape the slave's atmosphere at home, . . . to find freedom, to liberate my imagination, to take it like a hawk from its cage and set it 'whirling off into the widening gyre' (Yeats) and what did I find? It was incapable of flight. It was some bird you had domesticated, sitting huffy in its pen, refusing to come out! . . . I have no imagination. I have no talent. I can't create. I have nothing but the desire for these things. Why didn't you kill that too? Woman, why did you pinion me?" (91-92)

His final hope is, given his own later fate, supremely ironic, for he believes that when his mother finally understands the letter it will "leave her with an enduring chill and perhaps in time lead her to see herself as she was" (91). Unaware that he is predicting his own coming revelation rather than his mother's, he has sealed the letter and given it its supremely tragic inscription: "'To be opened only after the death of Asbury Porter Fox'" (99).

Another of the ironies of Asbury's life is that he has tried in the past, albeit foolishly, to get some sort of spiritual revelation,
particularly in terms of his relationship with Morgan and Randall, the Negro farmhands who work for his mother. But, as always, his attempts have been essentially selfish; he wanted to "establish rapport" with the men because he was writing a play "and he had wanted to be around them for a while to see how they really felt about their condition" (96). The Negroes themselves, however, are typical O'Connor Old South types, stupid and inarticulate, and Asbury's attempts fail, although he is romantically convinced as he and the Negroes smoke in Mrs. Fox's milk house that "It was one of those moments of communion when the difference between black and white is absorbed into nothing" (97). And when he tries to create another of these "moments of communion" by drinking warm milk in the milkhouse his own language betrays him: "'Here boy, have a drink of this!'" (98; italics mine), and he gains, not communion, but undulant fever, the depressingly non-fatal disease from which he later suffers.

Asbury also tries to recapture another of his ideals, that of the Jesuit priest, Ignatius Vogle, S.J., whom he had briefly met in New York and whom he had considered to be a fellow intellectual, "a man of the world, someone who would have understood the unique tragedy of his death, a death whose meaning had been far beyond the twittering group around them" (87). Thus at home in Timberboro, one of his "last requests" before his death is that his mother send for a priest, specifically, a Jesuit, so that Asbury can, he thinks, "talk to a man of culture before he died—even in this desert" (100-101). However, the priest who responds to his call is not what he wants—"A lean dark figure in a Roman collar . . . [with a] mysteriously saturnine
face in which there was a subtle blend of asceticism and corruption" (103)—but a sort of Catholic embodiment of the fundamentalist spirit of old Tarwater of The Violent Bear It Away, a violent old man half blind, half deaf, but consumed with the vision of Christ. The opening exchange between "'Fahther Finn—from Purratory'" and Asbury is another of O'Connor's comic masterpieces:

"What do you think of Joyce?" Asbury asked louder.
"Joyce? Joyce who?" asked the priest.
"James Joyce," Asbury said and laughed. The priest brushed his huge hand in the air as it he were bothered by gnats. "I haven't met him," he said. "Now, Do you say your morning and night prayers?" (105)

For a while, Asbury, unable to comprehend this new sort of priest, tries to continue his intellectual discussion, attempting to talk about Christ in terms of "The myth of the dying god" and determining to reduce the priest's exhortations to challenging forays in semantics: "'God is an idea created by man,' Asbury said, feeling that he was getting into stride, that two could play at this" (106). But the priest will not be put aside, and continues "in a battering voice." When Asbury says that he's not a Catholic, the priest snorts,"'A poor excuse for not saying your prayers!'"; when he pleads that he's dying, the old man answers "'But you're not dead yet!'"; and when he cries out in exasperation that "'The Holy Ghost is the last thing I'm looking for,'" Father Finn answers, "'His one fierce eye inflamed, ... 'And He may be the last thing you get!'" (107). Finally, as Asbury subsides into frustrated silence, the priest delivers a last powerful indictment:

"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
The last thing Asbury heard him say was, "He's a good lad at heart but very ignorant." (107-08)

With the departure of the priest, Asbury's thoughts shift from his earlier romantic musings, his belief that: "He had failed his god, Art, but he had been a faithful servant and Art was sending him Death. He had seen this from the first with a kind of mystical clarity" (103). The priest has affected him, and he sits in bed, "pale and drawn and ravaged, . . . staring in front of him with large childish shocked eyes" (108), and begins to think of his "useless life" and to feel "as if he were a shell that had to be filled with something but he did not know what" (108). Obviously, in O'Connor's view the void must be filled by an awareness of God; thus she re-introduces the image of the bird-shaped stain on the ceiling above Asbury's bed: "He even looked at the fierce bird with the icicle in its beak and felt that it was there for some purpose that he could not divine" (108). But Asbury is not looking for a religious experience, and, at this point, he will not abandon himself to one:

There was something he was searching for, something that he felt he must have, some last significant culminating experience that he must make for himself before he died--make for himself out of his own intelligence. He had always relied on himself and had never been a sniveler after the ineffable. (108-09; italics mine)

As time passes and he grows "more and more frantic for fear he [will] die without making some last meaningful experience for himself" (109; italics mine), Asbury finally turns again to one of his old ideals and asks "'to tell the Negroes good-bye,'" thus indulging himself in one more ludicrously romantic cliché. The result of this final farewell is, of course, a fiasco in which, unfortunately, O'Connor also indulges
herself in a cliche-ridden portrayal of "grinning and shuffling" Negroes (110). After they leave, Asbury first wallows in his self-pity, thinking that "now there would be no significant experience before he died" (112), but then, hearing the arrival of Dr. Block's car, the boy has "a sudden terrible foreboding that the fate awaiting him [is] going to be more shattering than any he could have reckoned on" (112).

Dr. Block is, of course, another of O'Connor's rough-hewn heroes, full of common sense—"'Blood don't lie'" he tells Asbury—and appropriately humble: "'Most things are beyond me, ... I ain't found anything yet that I thoroughly understood'" (95). He has worked seriously with this challenge to his role as enemy of death and has fought "as if he knew he was battling the real thing" (101), lacking, in every sense, Asbury's own pride. Asbury himself is utterly stunned by the news of his impending survival, news which comes to him in the most exacerbating manner he could ever have imagined—through his mother's shrill "'Guess what you've got, Sugarpie'" (112) and the doctor's hillbilly words and gestures:

"'Found theter ol' bug, did ol' Block,' . . . He raised his hands over his head in the gesture of a victorious prizefighter and let them collapse in his lap as if the effort had exhausted him. (113)

Seeing his dream of tragic death dwindling before him, Asbury can only lie quietly and receive the final words of degradation from Dr. Block:

"'Undulant fever ain't so bad, Azzberry, ... it's the same as bangs in a cow'" (113).

O'Connor's closing paragraph makes Asbury's new initiation quite explicit. His eyes look "shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him" (114), and he is
about to be reborn: "The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the
coming of new" (114). When this new life comes, it comes as he had
hoped an "introduction into reality" would come to his mother who, he
believed, needed assistance "in the process of growing up"; but it is
Asbury, not his mother, who becomes aware of an enduring chill of new
knowledge, knowledge of what O'Connor sees as true reality:

It was then that he felt the beginning of a chill, a
chill so peculiar, so light, that it was like a warm
ripple across a deeper sea of cold. . . . 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 illu-
sion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He
saw that for the rest of his days, frail, wracked but
enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying
horror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest
escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice
instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend.

This concluding paragraph is surely as explicit in its religious
statement as anything in O'Connor's fiction, including the penultimate
paragraph of "The Artificial Nigger." But here the vision is entirely
successful; it doesn't seem at all forced, because it is exactly the
sort of dramatic vision a very ill, despairing romantic might see
hovering over him. In her creation of this character for this vision
O'Connor has achieved a balance of art and religion which makes "The
Enduring Chill" one of her finest stories.

"The Partridge Festival" was published in The Critic in 1961
and is not included in Everything That Rises Must Converge—with good
reason. It is a dreary, predictable tale in which O'Connor leads two
more young intellectuals from self-righteous pride to humility. In
the Southern town of Partridge an irascible old man named Singleton
shoots and kills five leading citizens and a bystander (he misses the mayor) in revenge for being put into a mock jail with a goat for not purchasing a badge celebrating the annual Azalea Festival. O'Connor describes the reactions of the young intellectual, Calhoun, who returns to Partridge, his home town, to write an expose about the incarceration of Singleton in the insane asylum. Calhoun naively and romantically believes that Singleton has simply become "maddened finally by the madness around him"* and that the town must be brought to realize its collective guilt for the deaths and Singleton's imprisonment.

But, like most of O'Connor's intellectuals, Calhoun has his own selfish purpose for writing his novel:

He expected to write something that would vindicate the madman and he expected the writing of it to mitigate his own guilt, for his doubleness, his shadow, was cast before him more darkly than usual in the light of Singleton's purity. (C21)

This "doubleness" which Calhoun is so ashamed of is that during the summer months he sells air conditioners, boats and refrigerators so that he can earn enough money to live the rest of the year "in an unheated walk-up" as "his real self—the rebel-artist-mystic" (C21). In this latter role, Calhoun, of course, tells his parents that he despises them and their values, and he refuses "for the sake of his independence" the allowance which they offer him. But the real source of his despair is that he enjoys selling:

In the face of a customer, he was carried outside himself. His face began to beam and sweat and all complexity left him; he was in the grip of a drive

*O'Connor, Flannery, "The Partridge Festival," The Critic, XIX (February-March, 1961), 21; further references to this text will be included in parentheses with the letter C.
as strong as the drive of some men for liquor or a woman; and he was horribly good at it. (C21)

Calhoun doesn't want to be a salesman; he wants to be a rebel-artist-mystic, and he believes he can use Singleton as inspiration and springboard into print.

Thus he wanders about the town, trying to defend Singleton to everyone he meets, asserting that "'Partridge itself is guilty'" (C22), and developing his vision of the old lunatic as heroic individualist:

"You people persecuted him and finally drove him mad... He wouldn't buy a badge. Was that a crime? He was the Outsider here and you couldn't stand that. One of the fundamental rights of man... is the right not to behave like a fool. The right to be different... My God. The right to be yourself." (C22)

Enamored of this vision, Calhoun decides predictably that he shares a spiritual kinship with Singleton, and, in a barbershop mirror he searches his face "desperately for its hidden likeness to the man. Slowly he saw it appear, a secret message brought to light by the heat of his feelings" (C23). And the boy continues to declaim the virtues of the old man, using all the typical clichés of the rebel-artist-mystic, calling Singleton, variously, "the scapegoat... Sacrificed for the guilt of others," "an individualist," "a non-conformist," "a man of depth," and a man of "essential innocence."

To his surprise (and dismay—he wants to be the only rebel-artist-mystic in town), Calhoun meets a kindred spirit, Mary Elizabeth, another intense young intellectual who hates her home town: "'this whole place is rotten to the core'" (C82). His first impulse is to try to intimidate her: "'It takes no great mind to come to that conclusion... What requires insight is finding a way to transcend it'" (C82).
When this fails, he waxes sarcastic, agreeing to accompany her to the
square in order "'to observe a great female writer taking notes'" (C82). Mary Elizabeth's view of Singleton is essentially the same as
Calhoun's, although she uses a different set of clichés: "'He's a
Christ figure, ... I mean a myth, ... I'm not a Christian'" (C82-
83). Generally, however, Mary Elizabeth dislikes Calhoun as much as
he dislikes her, and probably for the same reason. They argue over the
relative merits of fiction (he wants to write a novel) and the essay
(hers choice of form) and finally, by accident, challenge each other to
go to the asylum at Quincy to see the old man himself. Mary Elizabeth
expects to experience some sort of spiritual crucifixion in sympathy
with Singleton, and Calhoun anticipates that "some strange tranquility
he had not before conceived of would be his" (C84). As they sit in a
waiting room before Singleton comes in, Mary Elizabeth holding her
gift copies of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, *Revolt of the Masses*, and "a
thin decorated volume of Housman," (C85) they seem, in O'Connor's
words, "already joined in a predestined convergence" (C85).

This convergence is, however, ironic, at least in terms of the
expectations of the two waiting intellectuals. When Singleton enters
with two attendants he first barks "'Whadaya want with me? ... Speak
up! My time is valuable'" (C85). Mary Elizabeth whispers out her
intellectual commitment—"'We came to say we understand'"—and Single-
ton responds, but not as she had expected and hoped: "'Lemme sit with
her ... She knows what she wants'" (C85). He then begins to make
"suggestive noises through his teeth," declaring that "'It's not every
girl that gets a chance at me'" (C85). Finally, he jumps at Mary
Elizabeth and then runs about the room, shouting "'Look girl!'" and
pulling his hospital smock over his head.
Both Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth are completely shaken by this annihilation of their spiritual dreams, and after fleeing the asylum, they sit stunned in Calhoun's car, gazing at each other. Mary Elizabeth is stripped of all her pretensions: her face "seemed to mirror the nakedness of the sky" (C85). Calhoun sees his own reflection in the girl's glasses, and realizes that he is not, after all, the rebel-artist-mystic he has tried to be; the face he sees is "Round, innocent, undistinguished as an iron link, . . . the face whose gift of life has pushed straight forward to the future to raise festival after festival. Like a master salesman, it seemed to have been waiting there from all time to claim him" (C85).

The intellectuals are humbled and cast down; pretension is gone; and Calhoun will go on to his true calling as a salesman, making the best of the "Talent" which God has given him. "The Partridge Festival" represents O'Connor at her schematic worst; its exclusion from _Everything That Rises Must Converge_ is deserved.

In "The Comforts of Home" O'Connor offers yet another examination of the battle of generations fought between another naive mother and her terribly intellectual son, but in this story she adds to the parent/child family another element which Mr. Hyman has termed the "wolf cub,"

In "The Comforts of Home" O'Connor also complicates her old lady type somewhat; Thomas' mother is not merely proud, like Mrs. May (of "Greenleaf), nor is she merely vacuous, like Julian's mother (in "Everything That Rises Must Converge"). She has a "love of good" (121), and she is trying, if naively, to perform a moral act in helping
Sarah Ham who, for all her animal cunning, is in many ways helpless. Further, after the girl's attempted suicide, the old lady is "plunged ... into mourning for the world" (133) demonstrating at least the beginnings of a kind of moral awareness. Her son, however, is just another in the long line of O'Connor's impotent intellectuals, rationalizing his inaction:

Several ideas for getting rid of [Sarah] had entered his head but each of these had been suggestions whose moral tone indicated that they had come from a mind akin to his father's, and Thomas had rejected them. (134)

Thomas acts only once in the story, and this single action is blind, mistaken and disastrous.

As a whole, "The Comforts of Home" is one of the weaker stories of this collection and for familiar reasons. O'Connor simply sets up her basic situation too neatly: the mother is too naively good; the girl is too obviously evil; and Thomas is too predictably impotent. Further, the climax of the story is much too melodramatic. The device of using the ghost of Thomas' father shouting in his ear--"Fire! the old man yelled"--is terribly forced and mechanical, and the description of the shot itself, even given Thomas' self-dramatization, is much too pompous and overstated:

The blast was like a sound meant to bring an end to evil in the world. Thomas heard it as a sound that would shatter the laughter of sluts until all shrieks were stilled and nothing was left to disturb the peace of perfect order. (141)

Finally, the death of Thomas' mother is also much too pat and (characteristically) predictable.

As I have suggested, however, O'Connor's introduction of Sarah Ham (alias Star Drake) is a significant addition to the list of
characters in her short stories; she is, with young Tarwater, a precursor of the demonic Rufus Johnson of "The Lame Shall Enter First" (which originally appeared almost two years later than this story). This young girl, this "'nimpermaniac,'" as Thomas' mother calls her, represents one of O'Connor's attempts to portray the existence of evil in the world. On one hand, Sarah Ham is something of an innocent; indeed, at one point, Thomas, in a moment of perception, recognizes the girl as,

the very stuff of corruption, but blameless corruption because there was no responsible faculty behind it. He was looking at the most unendurable form of innocence. (124)

Sarah is, as Thomas says, "'a moral moron, ... born without the moral faculty--like somebody else would be born without a kidney or a leg'" (117-18). But if she is in some ways innocent, indeed, childlike, as in her enjoyment of Thomas' dog, she is also a "congenital liar" and, as Thomas has seen from his first glimpse of her picture in the newspaper, "a shrewd ragamuffin" (119). Her analysis of Thomas in terms of a movie policeman for example, is quite perceptive--"'He would look like he couldn't stand it a minute longer or he would blow up'" (123), as is her mocking assertion that "'Tomsee doesn't like me'" (131).

Generally, however, the girl is, in O'Connor's view, a manifestation of the power of blind, destructive, inescapable evil in the world. And the almost supernatural quality of the girl's combined innocence and corruption are underlined repeatedly: her hair is "cut like a dog's or an elf's" (122); she has "feline empty eyes" (116); and seems spiritually blind with a "blindness of those who don't know that they cannot see" (126).
If Thomas' mother is represented as having at very least a
tendency toward good, and the girl is a manifestation of evil, Thomas
himself is, as Sister Bertrand Meyers has observed, "outraged only
when his personal comfort is threatened"; thus, from a religious
point of view, he is another of O'Connor's Laodiceans whose sin is
indeed "the most loathsome form of inert guilt." Throughout the
story, O'Connor chronicles Thomas' impotence; two brief descriptions
summarize her view of his escapism and inability to act:

His home was to him, home, workshop, church, as
personal as the shell of a turtle and as necessary.
(130)

Standing in the center of his room now, realizing
that he had reached the point where action was
inevitable, that he must pack, that he must leave,
that he must go, Thomas remained immovable. (132-33)

The complete intellectual, in O'Connor's view, Thomas spends his time
reading journals and reviews and evading any sort of responsibility.
He pays brief lip-service to God, but only in terms of his own pride—
"Absently he asked himself what the attitude of God was toward this
[Sarah's "unendurable innocence"], meaning if possible to adopt it"
(124)—and, when his comfortable world of books, typewriter, good meals
and electric blanket is threatened, he is moved, if not to action, at
least to blasphemy: "... Thomas damned not only the girl but the
entire order of the universe that made her possible" (140). Finally,
as I have suggested, his one act is just another botched job, and
O'Connor does not provide Thomas with the sort of illumination experi-
enced by Julian in "Everything That Rises Must Converge": "His eyes
were clear as glass, reflecting the scene" (141).

Sister Meyers has suggested the following interpretation of
the conclusion of "The Comforts of Home":
Some readers of "The Comforts of Home" will see in the story's ending only a tragic miscarriage of justice. Such readers would seem to have a habitually secular outlook on life; an outlook that views the affairs of men without thought of the designs of God in them. They constitute, then, that "hostile audience" for whom Miss O'Connor claims she must use violence to interpret her meaning; they are the hard of hearing for whom she must shout; they are the near-blind for whom she must draw large and startling figures. They are the people who can behold an airplane crash and never think to remember that "not a sparrow falls without the knowledge of a compassionate Father[1]"

The secular sees what happens to man, but with no reference to God's plans, nor to the supernatural elements which flow from them: suffering, expiation, regeneration, redemption. The practical Christian, as distinguished from the academic, will find that the finale of this story allows for and implies the action of redemptive grace working for and in the three chief characters: eternal peace for the poor bungling, well-meaning mother; salvation by way of protection for the congenitally deprived "slut"; redemption through projected suffering for Thomas, the ease-enslaved son, who will never again know the comforts of home.12

This interpretation is, to put it kindly, overstated, particularly in its assumptions concerning the redemptive nature of a pistol bullet and the sort of "protection" which Sarah Ham is likely to receive. Obviously, Thomas has deprived himself of "the comforts of home," but O'Connor offers no evidence that even the disaster of killing his mother can change Thomas' inner life at all.

We must also remember that O'Connor gives the closing scene of her story to the sheriff, Farebrother (1), who "was accustomed to enter upon scenes that were not as bad as he had hoped to find them" (142). O'Connor's primary point is, I think, not nearly as sanguine as Sister Bertrand has suggested, although it is no less religious. The reason for the defeat and destruction of Thomas and his mother is that neither has been able to recognize and face squarely the existence of evil. Thomas' rationalism is impotent—"The girl had caused a
disturbance in the depths of his being, somewhere out of reach of
his power of analysis" (120)—and his mother is simply too simple-
minded and optimistic; even her "mourning for the world" remains
a sort of simplistic and vague feeling rather than a clear recognition
of the evil which she has seen. Farebrother himself is far from the
ideal man; he is lazy and probably dishonest. But he also has a great
respect for the sort of forces epitomized by Sarah Ham; he has often
seen them at work, and he knows, for example, that Thomas' mother has
"'bit off more than she can chew, I reckon'" (137). Farebrother is no
saint, but he is also neither studiously ignorant of evil nor naively
optimistic, and these are the qualities which O'Connor views as most
dangerous in a world in which evil must be recognized and combatted
with Christian faith.

2

In two of her stories from this collection, O'Connor combines
two of her favorite themes, the battle between generations, and the
destruction of pride, the latter an important theme, as we have seen,
in A Good Man Is Hard to Find and Other Stories. Paradoxically, of
these two stories, one, "A View of the Woods," is one of the worst of
Everything That Rises Must Converge and the other, "The Lame Shall
Enter First," is one of the best. The difference between the two
stories lies, as is so frequently the case, in the degree to which their
conclusions are predictable and in the restraint with which O'Connor
presents those conclusions. In "A View from the Woods" O'Connor's
characters are essentially one-dimensional, defined almost entirely by
that most unpardonable of sins, pride, and the story concludes melo-
dramatically with the predictable punishment of that pride. Conversely,
the two main characters of "The Lame Shall Enter First" are somewhat complex. If Sheppard is something of a proud and befuddled intellectual, he is also a pathetically misguided man, trying with all his power to help Rufus Johnson, who is himself a sort of walking paradox, combining the qualities of prophet and demon. Similarly, the conclusion of the story, while dramatic, is not melodramatic; and its grim inevitability is not to be confused with the more shallow predictability of "A View of The Woods."

The basic conflict in "A View of The Woods" is quite simple. Mr. Fortune hates his daughter, his son-in-law, and their entire family, with the exception of their youngest daughter, Mary Fortune Pitts, a girl of nine who shares her grandfather's appearance and personality as well as his name:

She was . . . short and broad like himself, with his very light blue eyes, his wide prominent forehead, his steady penetrating scowl and his rich florid complexion; but she was like him on the inside too. She had, to a singular degree, his intelligence, his strong will, and his push and drive. Though there was seventy years' difference in their ages, the spiritual distance between them was slight. She was the only member of the family he had any respect for. (55)

Thus, old man Fortune admires only his own image duplicated in the young girl, and throughout the story he uses her, along with the sale of his land, as a weapon with which he can make life miserable for her (Pitts) family. Obviously enough, in his pride, his selfishness, his cruelty, and even his greedy belief in "progress" Fortune is one of O'Connor's villains, in both psychological and religious terms. And, to the extent that she shares his inner qualities, Mary Fortune Pitts shares his sins; significantly, given her frequent use of the physical/
spiritual sight motif, O'Connor notes at one point that the little
girl's glasses were silver-rimmed like [Fortune's]" (59).

The only defense "the elder Pitts," Mary's father, has against
the old man's threats (to sell his land and thus deprive the Pitts
family of a home) and his actions (actually selling pieces, including
"the only pasture that Pitts had succeeded in getting the bitterweed
off" [55]), is to whip Mary Fortune, an act which he performs regularly
and with somewhat enigmatic reactions from her: "It was a look that
was part terror and part respect and part something else, something
very like cooperation" (60). Indeed, when Fortune accuses her of
allowing her father to beat her (he has seen it happen) Mary Fortune re-
plies, with tiresome regularity, "'Nobody ever beat me in my life and
if anybody did, I'd kill him,'" thus providing, again and again, a
depressingly obvious foreshadowing of the climax of the story.

Fortune's cruelest act, his sale of the land in front of the
Pitts/Fortune house, "the lawn" as the Pittses call it, triggers the
explosion between the young girl and the old man—a conflict reminis-
cent to some extent of that between Nelson and Mr. Head in "The
Artificial Nigger." When her father leads her out of the house for
one of her ritual beatings, Mary Fortune "followed him, almost ran
after him" (66), and, when asked by the old man if she is a Fortune
or a Pitts, "Her voice was loud and positive and belligerent. 'I'm
Mary--Fortune--Pitts!'" (74), and she gives him a look which he recog-
nizes, "the Pitts look, pure and simple" (75). The rather obvious
irony of the girl's reaction is, of course, that she is exactly what
her grandfather wants her to be—stubborn and bull-headed, like him;
but she is a Pitts, and the old man finds himself battling his own
creation, his own reflected personality.
This is all very pat, and the story suffers from this familiar defect of neatness. But O'Connor weakens her tale further by slipping into melodrama repeatedly, usually in describing thoughts and experiences of Fortune, who, unlike Asbury Fox or the girl of "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," for example, is not likely to be at all dramatic, except perhaps in his egotistical visions of a town called Fortune. Thus, when O'Connor gives Fortune a spiritual vision, it rings false, in spite of what is perhaps her attempt to qualify it with the term hallucination:

The old man stared [at the woods] for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood. After a few minutes this unpleasant vision was broken by the presence of Pitt's pick-up truck grinding to a halt below the window. He returned to his bed and shut his eyes and against the closed lids hellish red trunks rose up in a black wood. (71)

Further, in addition to being inappropriate to old man Fortune, the vision is also vague; the "uncomfortable mystery" is possibly centered on his sense of guilt in selling the land, just as the "wounded" may symbolize the Pittses as well as foreshadowing the old man's death as a result of this sale. But we cannot really be sure what O'Connor's point is, particularly when we read a few pages later of another "sudden vision" of Fortune—a vision which is foolishly blind:

She respected Pitts because, even with no just cause, he beat her; and if he [Fortune]—with his just cause—did not beat her now, he would have nobody to blame but himself if she turned out a hellion. He saw that the time had come, that he could no longer avoid whipping her . . . (77)

O'Connor seems to be granting the old man perception and then denying
it to him in rapid succession. She is perhaps attempting to emphasize the destructive effect of Fortune's pride in refusing to admit the power of the sense of "mystery" he felt while looking at the woods, but her overall effect is, I think, one of confusion.

The final battle between Fortune and his granddaughter is terribly melodramatic, both in conception and in description. O'Connor overworks the resemblance between the combatants:

Then with horror he saw her face rise up in front of his, teeth exposed, and he roared like a bull as she bit the side of his jaw. He seemed to see his own face coming to bite him from several sides at once but he could not attend to it ... She paused, her face exactly on top of his. Pale identical eye looked into pale identical eye. (79)

Even the old man's diction is mirrored in Mary Fortune's verbal attack: "I'm PURE Pitts" (80), and O'Connor underlines once more her obvious point about these two proud twins as she describes Fortune's murder of his granddaughter:

With a sudden surge of strength, he managed to roll over and reverse their positions so that he was looking down into the face that was his own but had dared to call itself Pitts. ... [after killing her] He continued to stare at his conquered image until he perceived that though it was absolutely silent, there was no look of remorse on it. The eyes had rolled back down and were set in a fixed glare that did not take him in. (80)

Finally, Fortune, having gotten up and looked again at the dead girl, has a heart attack and finds himself duplicating her position: "He fell on his back and looked up helplessly" (80). As he dies he has a final vision which is, like his earlier "hallucination" both vague and melodramatic:

On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance. He looked around desperately for someone to help him but
The place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay. (81)

The last thing he sees is, appropriately enough, one of the tools of his own greed, and his voracious desire for "progress" and for victimization of the Pitts family is mirrored in the machine's position, but, again, the vision—indeed, the whole conclusion of the story—seems quite forced and artificial.

"The Lame Shall Enter First" is O'Connor's most ambitious story in Everything That Rises Must Converge and one of her most impressive successes. Certainly her characters are not new: as Sister Rose Alice has observed, "Rayber [of The Violent Bear It Away] becomes Sheppard; Tarwater becomes Rufus; Bishop becomes Norton." Nor is the basic theme of the story essentially different from that of The Violent Bear It Away: self-consciously modern rationalism finds itself in direct conflict with Old Testament belief (Rufus may be something of a demon, but he believes the Bible with a vengeance). Within the story, however, O'Connor's portrayal of her types, particularly her intellectual, is more complex than in her other short stories. Sheppard (even in her best tales O'Connor cannot resist ironic and/or symbolic names) is satirized throughout for his pretentious self-justification, his rationalist posturing, and, ironically enough, his essential naïveté. But he is also virtually the only intellectual in O'Connor's works whose actions, even given his unacknowledged egotistical motives, are altruistic; when he fails, as in his mistreatment of his own son, his failure is unintentional, and he is unique in O'Connor's fiction in his recognition of his failure before that recognition is forced upon him by violence. Similarly, Rufus is not merely the unthinking demon that
Sarah Ham is; indeed, he is quite intelligent, and his recognition of both Sheppard's unadmitted hypocrisy and Norton's spiritual isolation is devastatingly acute. Finally, the reader of "The Lame Shall Enter First" is never really sure whether or not Rufus has committed the acts of which he is accused, and this added element of suspense is truly a refreshing innovation.

Sheppard is, in many ways, another classic O'Connor intellectual, intense, sensitive, and blind to his own selfishness. Although he is a "City Recreational Director" and a counselor at a reformatory on Saturdays and thus, in his own mind, quite altruistic, his attitude is not really as self-effacing as it seems; he enjoys "the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about" (145-46), and he is not above gloating over his good works: "'I'm not sitting around moping. I'm busy helping other people. When do you see me just sitting around thinking about my troubles?" (147). More seriously, Sheppard is supremely confident of his own intellectual ability to analyze other people's actions and motives, and this confidence slips quite easily into a feeling of smug superiority which is one of his most offensive traits. He believes completely in the "potential" of Rufus Johnson which he (Sheppard) "had seen from the time the boy limped in for his first interview" (148), just as he accepts unquestioningly his initial analysis of Rufus' record of violence: "The case was clear to Sheppard instantly. His mischief was compensation for the [club] foot" (149). Indeed, Sheppard's confidence in his role as counselor is overwhelming; comparing his small office to a confessional, he thinks of himself as far superior to a priest: "His credentials were less dubious than a priest's; he had been trained for what he was doing" (149).
But Sheppard is less pleased with his son, Norton, a selfish, unhappy boy of ten who, after a year, cannot resign himself to his mother's death and spends his time "Always selling something" in an attempt, one suspects, to fill the void in his life with money, the "quart jars full of nickels and dimes [which] . . . he took . . . out of his closet every few days and counted" (147). Sheppard the rationalist is, of course, offended and perplexed by his son's behavior. He believes that "It was all part of [Norton's] selfishness [and that] . . . a child's grief should not last so long" (146). In short, in his own egotistical—and selfish—way, he denies the boy the sort of intense sympathy which he is only too willing to lavish on Rufus, who has not had what Sheppard considers to be Norton's wonderful advantages in life:

"You have a healthy body, . . . a good home. You've never been taught anything but the truth. Your daddy gives you everything you need and want. You don't have a grandfather who beats you. And your mother is not in the state penitentiary." (146; italics mine)

Rufus, however, represents a challenge. He has an I.Q. of 140, and in Sheppard's rationalist view that is enough recommendation:

"Where there was intelligence anything was possible" (151). What he does not anticipate, however, is that streak of fanatic religiosity which marks Rufus as one more of O'Connor's religiously committed characters. When Sheppard turns on his professional dictation and suggests that "'There are a lot of things about yourself that I think I can explain to you!'" (150), Rufus answers, "'I already know why I do what I do. . . . Satan, . . . He has me in his power!'" (150). Sheppard's reaction is a predictable rejection of any such religious belief:

Sheppard's eyes hardened. He felt a momentary dull despair as if he were faced with some elemental warping
of nature that had happened too long ago to be corrected now. This boy's questions about life had been answered by signs nailed on pine trees: DOES SATAN HAVE YOU IN HIS POWER? REPENT OR BURN IN HELL. JESUS SAVES. He would know the Bible without reading it. His despair gave way to outrage. "Rubbish!" he snorted. "We're living in the space age! You're too smart to give me an answer like that." (151)

Sheppard's basic error, in O'Connor's view, is that he cannot, because of his intellectual pretensions, face the "elemental warping of nature" by Satan which Rufus claims; he must instead suggest to the boy that "Maybe there's an explanation for your explanation. Maybe I can explain your devil to you!" (151). And this assumption that he can explain away the devil is as foolish and self-centered, in O'Connor's view, as the patently ridiculous and foolish manner in which Sheppard tries to become friendly with Rufus:

He smiled. They had so few friends, saw so few pleasant faces, that half his effectiveness came from nothing more than smiling. (150)

He smiled again, a smile that was like an invitation to the boy to come into a school room with all its windows thrown open to the light. (151)

Another element of Sheppard's intellectual blindness is his steadfast refusal to accept at face value any comment or reaction from Rufus which does not demonstrate the boy's acquiescence to his counselor's attention. When Rufus rejects his analytical generalizations, Sheppard is "not deceived. He watched his eyes and every week he saw something in them crumble" (151); when Rufus is released from the reformatory, Sheppard sees him once in an alley and is completely convinced that "Something had kindled in the boy's eyes, he was sure of it" (152). And when Rufus comes to Sheppard's house, the intellectual rationalizes the cripple's reaction to him, fitting it, as usual, into
his preconceived pattern: "Johnson pretended not to like him. That was only to uphold his pride" (159); when he hears from his son of the insults Rufus has directed at him, Sheppard is confident that they are "a part of the boy's defensive mechanism" (160). Thus, Sheppard, secure in his intellectual terminology and practiced rationalizing, is thoroughly convinced, at least in Part I of the story, that he and his psychological approach are invincible. He fails to see, however, that, like Rayber in The Violent Bear It Away, he has already begun to victimize his own son, declaring that "What was wasted on Norton would cause Rufus to flourish" (152), and reacting to Norton's pathetic retreat into a closet with a brusque "'Get out of there!'" (159), denying him any sympathy at all. Further, he even uses his son as a means to an end (O'Connor was surely aware of the "unpardonable sin" of Hawthorne's tales) when he asks Rufus to help him teach the boy to share.

Rufus himself is not taken in by Sheppard's unctuous concern for him, however. He speaks of him to Norton with open contempt, saying that Norton must be Sheppard's son because he has "'the same stupid face'" (155), and dismissing all of the counseling as "'Gas'" (155). More importantly, Rufus sees through Sheppard's actions to his essentially selfish motives; when Norton says that his father is "'Good'" because "'He helps people,'" Rufus answers, "'Good! . . . I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't right!'" (155). In Rufus' clear view, Sheppard's actions are those of an egotist, acting out of an exaggerated sense of his own goodness rather than for altruistic reasons. And when Sheppard once more gushes out his speech of self-sacrifice and service to mankind, Rufus' reaction is explosive—and justified:
"Rufus is going to help me out and I'm going to help him out and we're both going to help you [Norton] out. I'd simply be foolish if I let what Rufus thinks of me interfere with what I can do for Rufus. If I can help a person, all I want is to do it. I'm above and beyond simple pettiness."

When he was gone, Johnson raised his head and looked at Norton. . . . "God, kid," Johnson said in a cracked voice, "how do you stand it?" His voice was stiff with outrage. "He thinks he's Jesus Christ!" (161)

As we learn in Part II of the story, Rufus' "outrage" is essentially religious; he believes in Christ, although he is convinced that he is under Satan's power, and he cannot accept Sheppard's Christlike posing. But one of the impressive aspects of O'Connor's presentation of Sheppard is also the manner in which she makes him tremendously offensive on non-religious grounds. He is a pseudo-scientific ass, and by presenting him as such she enlists the sympathies of the reader for Rufus in his battle against this sort of stupid pretension, thus effectively laying the groundwork for her later emphasis upon the more religious implications of Sheppard's shortcoming.

In Part II of the story, Sheppard's foolish and self-centered pride over his "success" with Rufus continues. When he watches Rufus look through the telescope which he has set up in the attic, Sheppard's face is "flushed with pleasure. Within a week he had made it possible for this boy's vision to pass through a slender channel to the stars" (162); Sheppard ignores, however, the fact that within this same week he has whipped Norton for objecting to Rufus' sleeping in his mother's bed. Generally, Sheppard's smugness is untouched, and he relishes his imperviousness quite consciously, even self-consciously:

Sheppard was amused by these sudden turns of perversity. [Rufus] resisted whatever he suspected was meant for his improvement and contrived when
he was vitally interested in something to leave the impression he was bored. Sheppard was not deceived. Secretly Johnson was learning what he wanted him to learn—that his benefactor was impervious to insult and that there were no cracks in his armor of kindness and patience where a successful shaft could be driven. (164)

Rufus reacts to Sheppard's assertion that "'it's perfectly possible that you, Rufus Johnson, will go to the moon!'" (164) with an assertion of his own which denies the relevance of such confidence in science: "'I ain't going to the moon and get there alive, ... and when I die I'm going to hell!" (164). The conflict between these two adversaries is, once more, the battle between the committed believer in Christ and the Laodicean, the uncommitted. Thus Sheppard rejects Rufus' belief in hell on intellectual grounds—"'Nobody has given any reliable evidence there's a hell!'" (164)—and answers Norton's questions about his mother with the pose of a rationalist martyr to truth: "'Do you understand? ... She doesn't exist. ... That's all I have to give you, ... the truth!" (165). Mirroring O'Connor's view, Norton is unimpressed by his father's statements and turns instead back to Rufus, who assures him that his mother is saved and that she in "on high" (165). Asked to define this term, Rufus presents Norton with the basis for his later suicide: "'It's in the sky somewhere, ... but you got to be dead to get there. You can't go in no space ship!'" (165). For the first time, Norton seems to come alive; when Sheppard sees him with Rufus the next day, the older boy is talking to him, and "on the child's face there was a look of complete confidence of dawning light" (166). Norton's reaction to the Bible is similarly quite positive:

The child's face was bright and there was an excited sheen to his eyes. The change that had come over the boy struck [Sheppard] for the first time. He had on a blue plaid shirt and his eyes were a brighter blue
than he had ever seen them before. There was a strange new life in him, the sign of new and more rugged vices. (183)

O'Connor's point is obviously that a life of commitment—even to evil—is better than the intellectual non-commitment of Sheppard. But once more she has avoided the merely schematic imposition of her religious view by portraying Norton as a character who, having lost his mother to death and his father to rationalism, needs desperately some new point on which he can focus his life. When Rufus provides that point, Norton is reborn, and his rebirth is quite convincing.

Rufus' role as Biblical tutor to Norton is, perhaps, a bit perplexing, given his violence, his constant rage, and his destructiveness. He is Satanic, but he has chosen his role consciously, and he has not rejected belief in Christ or the Bible. Thus, when Sheppard asserts his intellectual power, Rufus counterattacks with what is, in O'Connor's view, a much greater power, that of prophecy:

[Sheppard says] "I'm stronger than you are. I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph."
"Not when it ain't true," the boy said.
"Not when it ain't right."
"My resolve isn't shaken," Sheppard repeated, "I'm going to save you... I'm not going to tell you to leave... I'm going to save you."
Johnson thrust his head forward. "Save yourself," he hissed. "Nobody can save me but Jesus."

(180)

Significantly, Sheppard is overpowered by this elemental force in Rufus and he wants to be rid of him, just as Rayber wants to be rid of young Tarwater in The Violent Bear It Away: "'If he would only leave,' he murmured. 'If he would only leave now of his own accord'" (181); and he sees that Rufus looks at him as if he were "the guilty one, as if he were a moral leper" (182). But Sheppard still believes that "he was a
good man" (182), and this conviction is what so offends Rufus (and O'Connor). The boy admits his sinfulness freely, but also asserts the possibility of repenting, even of salvation: "'If I do repent, I'll be a preacher. ... If you're going to do it, it's no sense in doing it half way'" (183). Thus, he rejects Sheppard's view, including the space ships that Sheppard celebrates as one of man's finest and most progressive creations (cf. Rayber's celebration of the airplane as "'the greatest engineering achievement of man'" and Tarwater's reaction "'A buzzard can fly.'" [406]): "'Those space ships ain't going to do you any good unless you believe in Jesus. ... '" (183).

Finally, because he doesn't believe in the Bible or Jesus, because he tries to be Jesus himself, Sheppard is attacked by Rufus as being in the power of Satan:

"Satan has you in his power," he said. "Not only me. You too."

Sheppard laughed. "You don't believe in that book [the Bible] and you know you don't believe in it!"

"I believe it!" Johnson said. "You don't know what I believe and what I don't."

Sheppard shook his head. "You don't believe it. You're too intelligent."

"I ain't too intelligent," the boy muttered. "You don't know nothing about me. Even if I didn't believe it, it would still be true." (184)

Rufus tears out a page of the Bible and eats it, proclaiming "'I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth!'" (185). His belief also prompts him to allow himself to be caught by the police during one of his destructive escapades. Sheppard has, mistakenly, defended him in the past, but Rufus decides to be caught in the act "'To show up that big tin Jesus! ... He thinks he's God. I'd rather be in a reformatory than in his house, I'd rather be in the pen! The devil has him in his power. He don't know his left hand from his right, he
don't have as much sense as his crazy kid!" (188). And when Sheppard attempts once more to offer a bit of psychological analysis for Rufus' actions, the enraged boy sums up his charge against what he considers to be a completely false prophet:

"Tell the truth, Rufus, ... You're not evil, you're mortally confused. You don't have to make up for that foot, you don't have to."

"Listen at him! ... I lie and I steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a thing to do with it! The lame shall enter first! The halt'll be gathered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist. ..." (188-89)

Throughout Rufus' attacks, however, Sheppard still clings to his belief in his own goodness. To the police he says, "I did everything I knew how for him. I did more for him than I did for my own child. I hoped to save him and I failed, but it was an honorable failure. I have nothing to reproach myself with." (188). But he has obviously forgotten, perhaps intentionally, the night when Norton motioned for him to come into his bedroom, only to be ignored and left sitting "for some time looking at the spot where his father had stood" (147); he has forgotten leaving Norton at home alone when he took Rufus to the shoe shop; and he has forgotten his unsympathetic rejection of Norton's excited cries that he has seen his mother in the night sky:

"Norton," Sheppard said, "you don't see anything in the telescope but star clusters ..."

"She's there!" he cried, not turning around from the telescope. "She waved at me!"

"I want you in bed in fifteen minutes," Sheppard said. After a moment he said, "Do you hear me, Norton?"

The child began to wave frantically.

"I mean what I say ... I'm going to call in fifteen minutes and see if you're in bed." (186)

Sheppard has forgotten all of these abuses of his son—until he begins to think once more about his failure to "save" Rufus:
"I have nothing to reproach myself with," he murmured. His every action had been selfless, his one aim had been to save Johnson for some decent kind of service, he had done more for Johnson than he had done for his own child.

. . . "I have nothing to reproach myself with," he repeated. His voice sounded dry and harsh. "I did more for him than I did for my own child." He was swept with a sudden panic. He heard the boy's jubilant voice. Satan has you in his power. "I have nothing to reproach myself with," he began again. "I did more for him than I did for my own child." He heard his voice as if it were the voice of his accuser. (189)

At this point he has his "revelation" (O'Connor's word), and he sees the monstrousness of his treatment of Norton as well as his own terrible selfishness:

He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled until everything was black before him. (190)

But Sheppard's revelation has come to him too late. While he is promising himself to "run to [Norton's] room, to kiss him, to tell him that he loved him, that he would never fail him again" (190), his son is already hanging from the beam "from which he had launched his flight into space" (190).

"The Lame Shall Enter First" is one of O'Connor's finest stories, although even it is marred somewhat by two of her characteristic weaknesses. Norton's death seems both gratuitous and melodramatic; and, although Sheppard is a bit more complex than her other intellectuals, in her repeated presentation of his statements of self-justification and pretentious jargon, O'Connor does move perilously close to mere caricature. But this story also exhibits one of the most successful combinations of O'Connor's narrative and dramatic skill with her religious view. With the exception of her description of "the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts," she resists the familiar temptation of stating her religious point too explicitly; Rufus accomplishes this task admirably and convincingly. Finally, as I have suggested, her introduction to the element of suspense is a particularly welcome break from the predictability of too many of her stories.
Of the four remaining stories, two include a very familiar theme—the destruction of pride—within a rather conventional framework. In "Revelation" another woman of the Mrs. Hopewell/Mrs. McIntyre type is brought to the realization that self-righteousness and a white skin are not necessarily the keys to the Kingdom of God. And in "Judgment Day" an old man learns of the pitfalls of racial pride. In "Greenleaf," however, although O'Connor's themes—the destruction of pride and the battle between generations—are quite familiar, her structure is not, for in this story she sets up a kind of elaborate conceit by which the reader is to see a scrub bull as the messenger of judgement and Grace of God. O'Connor also uses this technique with extraordinary success in "Parker's Back."

"Revelation" is only a moderately successful story, primarily because, from her first utterance, Mrs. Turpin, the heroine of the piece, is too obviously another of O'Connor's proud old ladies who must be humbled. In spite of this predictability, however, the story does succeed to the extent that Mrs. Turpin is a believable receptor for the apocalyptic vision with which the story closes. Throughout her life she has always thought in religious, albeit pharisaic, terms, although, unlike so many of O'Connor's other hypocrites, she has not always insisted upon moderation in her religious life. Similarly, the reaction of the ugly Wellesley girl is quite convincing, given her disposition and the unending series of glib, offensively self-righteous statements Mrs. Turpin makes while sitting in the doctor's waiting room, although the girl's name, Mary Grace, is one more example of O'Connor's terribly obvious naming of characters. O'Connor's secondary characters,
all brilliantly defined by their dialects and their reactions to each other, also give this story a more richly varied texture than such pieces as "A View of the Woods" and "The Comforts of Home."

The primary sin of Mrs. Turpin, the heroine of "Revelation" is that she sees herself as God's chosen creature; when she hears the gospel hymn "When I Looked up and He Looked Down" over the radio in a doctor's office, she supplies the "last line mentally, 'And wona these days I know I'll we-eara crown!'" (194)—and she believes it. Even when she dreams that Jesus allows her to choose between being what she calls "white-trashy" or Negro, Mrs. Turpin is convinced that, having chosen the latter, she would be "a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black" (195; italics mine). And she constructs an elaborate hierarchy of social classes, a hierarchy which puts her, if not in the highest, at least in the best, class:

On the bottom of the heap were most colored people, but most of them; then next to them—not above, just away—were the white-trash; then above them were the home-owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. But here the complexity of it would begin to bear in on her, for some of the people with a lot of money were common and ought to be below she and Claude. . . . (196; italics mine)

Looking at an ugly fat girl of eighteen or nineteen across the room, Mrs. Turpin also congratulates herself on her appearance: "... she had always had good skin, and, though she was forty-seven years old, there was not a wrinkle in her face except around her eyes from laughing too much" (194). Her view of her own superiority encompasses virtually every person and object which might come up in conversation. She has a clock as good as the doctor's; although tired of "'buttering up niggers,'" she's convinced that she's terribly good at it; and she
is sure that she is infinitely superior to the white-trashy woman in
the waiting room, particularly in what she considers to be her atti-
tude of racial tolerance: "There's a heap of things worse than a
nigger, ... It's all kinds of them just like it's all kinds of us"
(200-01). In short, she is convinced that she is the best of all
possible women in her kindness and generosity:

To help anybody out that needed it was her philosophy
of life. She never spared herself when she found some-
body in need, whether they were white or black, trash
or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she
was most thankful that this was so. If Jesus had said
"You can be high society and have all the money you
want and be svelt-like, but you can't be a good woman
with it," she would have had to say, "Well, don't make
me that then. Make me a good woman and it don't matter
what else, how fat or how ugly or how poor!" Her heart
rose. He had not made her a nigger or white-trash or
ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of
everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you
thank you thank you! (203)

At one point, Mrs. Turpin tries to engage in small talk with
the ugly fat girl who has been glaring at her continuously during all
her self-congratulatory statements, but the girl doesn't answer. And
when her mother criticizes her ingratitude, Mrs. Turpin launches into
one of her own joyous recitations of her own gratitude:

"If it's one thing I am, ... it's grateful. When
I think of all I could have been besides myself and
what I got, a little of everything, and a good dis-
position besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank
you Jesus, for making everything the way it is!' It
could have been different. ... Oh thank you, Jesus,
Jesus thank you!" (205-06)

The young girl reacts to this symphony of self-satisfaction explosively,
hitting Mrs. Turpin in the face with her book and then clawing at her
throat until she is pulled off by her mother and a nurse.

O'Connor's point is, as usual, religious, and she clarifies it
in the confrontation between Mrs. Turpin and the struggling girl, whose
name is significantly (and obviously) Mary Grace:

There was no doubt in [Mrs. Turpin's] mind that the girl did know her, knew her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting, as for a revelation. (207; italics mine)

The "revelation" which Mary Grace gives Mrs. Turpin is the venomous whisper, "'Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog!" (207), a message which stuns the old lady to the extent that she can't really begin to think about it until she has left the doctor's office and returned to her home. At first, her thoughts are fully as smug and complacent as they were before; then they give way to righteous indignation:

She had been singled out for a message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. . . . The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman. The tears dried. Her eyes began to burn instead with wrath. (210)

Still wondering over her "revelation," she takes water out to her Negro workers and angrily rejects their flattery, wandering to the side of the hog pen where she carries on a one-sided, furious dialogue with God, asserting again and again her own goodness:

"What do you send me a message like that for? . . . How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from Hell too? . . . Why me? . . . It's no trash around here, black or white, that I haven't given to. And break my back to the bone every day working. And do for the church. . . . If you like trash better, go get yourself some trash then. If trash is what you wanted why didn't you make me trash? . . . Or you could have made me a nigger. . . . Go on, . . . call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put the bottom rail on top. There'll still be a top and a bottom!" . . . A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, "Who do you think you are?" (216)
The answer to Mrs. Turpin's question comes in "a red glow" which seems to surround the pigs in the pen, the pen into which the old lady gazes "as if through the very heart of mystery . . . as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge" (217), and she experiences a vision:

. . . a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right . . . They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.

Mrs. Turpin's vision is indeed a startling one, but since, as she walks away from the pig pen, she hears "the voices of souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah" (219), we are, I suspect, to believe that she has indeed been saved by this latest revelation; she has seen, as Rufus Johnson saw, that "the lame shall enter first," and that her own proud view of her salvation is empty, that her sense of virtue must be burned away before she can enter heaven as a humble soul, contrite and aware of its sins. The vision is a powerful one, but the story, for all its dramatic effectiveness is, as Bob Dowell has suggested, "somewhat pointed." 14

"Greenleaf" is another story which is weakened by its schematic structure and its dependence upon O'Connor's spiritual message for its effect. Indeed, one suspects that the tale is quite opaque unless one
is aware of O'Connor's assumptions, specifically, as one critic has noted,

... that parents who are docile to grace and God-fearing, no matter how ignorant and shiftless, will generally produce children psychologically and morally healthy. But the children of the proud and contemptuous, regardless of what natural gifts they may possess, are likely to grow up in some way warped. Biblical in its roots, this was precisely the central motif of "Greenleaf." 15

Mr. Davis' statement is quite inaccurate as a general observation about O'Connor's fiction, particularly if one remembers Haze Motes, but his comment concerning "the central motif" of "Greenleaf" is quite perceptive. Indeed, there is little to be gained in analyzing in detail Mrs. May and her various general comments about her life and struggles on her farm, for she is virtually a duplicate of Mrs. McIntyre of "The Displaced Person" in her pride in her accomplishments: "I do you see that if I hadn't kept my foot on [Mr. Greenleaf's] neck all these years you boys might be milking cows...?" (36)—her philosophical smugness—"I'll die when I get good and ready!" (37)—and worst of all, her lack of religious commitment:

She thought the word, Jesus, should be kept inside the church building like other words inside the bedroom. She was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion, though she did not of course, believe any of it was true. (31)

"I'm afraid your wife has let religion warp her," she said once tactfully to Mr. Greenleaf. "Everything in moderation..." Poor souls, she thought now, so simple. (51)

Thus, Mrs. May is another of O'Connor's unholy combinations of the Pharisee and the Laodicean; she pays lip service to Christ, but she is not in the least committed to Him. Her punishment for this failure to choose is, in this parable, to be cursed with the worst sort of
children O'Connor can imagine: a get-rich-quick businessman and, usual horror of horrors, an intellectual.

The businessman, Scofield, is a source of constant embarrassment to the socially smug Mrs. May because he is a "policy man" who sells insurance to Negroes; he is, however, the less noticeable thorn in her side: "Scofield only exasperated her beyond endurance, but Wesley [Pie once more on the Methodists!] caused her real anxiety" (34). His problem is, of course, that he is an intellectual, probably, Mrs. May believes, because he "had had rheumatic fever when he was seven" (28). He is, like all of O'Connor's intellectuals, unhappy and impotent:

He was thin and nervous and bald and being an intellectual was a terrible strain on his disposition. . . .
He drove twenty miles every day to the university where he taught and twenty miles back every night, but he said he hated the twenty-mile drive and he hated the second-rate university and he hated the morons who attended it. He hated the country and he hated the life he lived; he hated living with his mother and his idiot brother and he hated hearing about the damn dairy and the damn help and the damn broken machinery. But in spite of all he said, he never made any move to leave. He talked about Paris and Rome but he never went even to Atlanta. (34-35)

Predictably, Wesley and his brother quarrel continuously, resorting to violence occasionally, and mocking their mother unmercifully:

"You ought to start praying, Sweetheart," [Wesley] said. . . . (34)

"I wouldn't milk a cow to save your soul from hell," [Wesley] (36)

"Why Mama, I'm not going to marry until you're dead and gone and then I'm going to marry me some nice fat farm girl that can take over this place! . . .--some nice lady like Mrs. Greenleaf." (29)

This constant fighting between her own sons leads Mrs. May to assume that the Greenleaf boys, O.T. and E.T., also quarrel:
"Which is boss, Mr. O.T. or Mr. E.T.?" [Mrs. May] had always suspected that they fought between themselves secretly. "They never quarrels," the boy said, "They like one man in two skins." "Hmp. I expect you just never heard them quarrel." "Nor nobody else heard them neither." (43)

The "long-legged and raw boned and red-skinned" Greenleaf boys don't fight, they don't mock their parents, they don't hate everything and everyone, and they are neither salesmen nor intellectuals; rather, they are "energetic and hard-working," and they run a dairy farm which Mrs. May envies. Indeed, in a moment of sheer exasperation, she cries out to Scofield and Wesley that "'O.T. and E.T. are fine boys. . . . They ought to have been my sons!" (36). The Greenleaf boys are, in short, everything that the bickering, lazy, self-centered May boys are not.

As Louise Gossett has suggested, "Behind [the bull] stand his owners, the Greenleaf sons--and the host of those with animal energy who will devour the effete and unproductive like Mrs. May's sons." It is more than animal energy which allows these boys to be so successful, however, and O'Connor underlines her religious point with a Biblical allusion, clarifying her view that it is the energy of faith which moves the Greenleafs:

Over the years they had been on her place, Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf had aged hardly at all. They had no worries, no responsibilities. They lived like the lilies of the field, off the fat that she struggled to put into the land. When she was dead and gone from overwork and worry, the Greenleaf's, healthy and thriving, would be just ready to begin draining Scofield and Wesley. (34)

For Mrs. May, Mrs. Greenleaf (who is, as I have suggested above, virtually a duplicate of Mrs. Shortley of "The Displaced Person") is the epitome of stupidly evangelistic or, as Mrs. May refers to her once, "scrub-human" (32) white trash. Mrs. Greenleaf's primary aberration
in Mrs. May's eyes is what Mrs. Greenleaf calls her "'prayer healing,'"
which O'Connor describes in some detail:

Every day she cut all the morbid stories out of the newspaper—the accounts of women who had been raped and criminals who had escaped and children who had been burned and of train wrecks and plane crashes and the divorces of movie stars. She took these to the woods and dug a hole and buried them and then she fell on the ground over them and mumbled and groaned for an hour or so, moving her huge arms back and forth under her and out again until finally just lying down flat. . . . (30)

In O'Connor's view, however, Mrs. Greenleaf, although she may be grotesque in her commitment, has made that commitment to Jesus, and she is therefore immeasurably superior to Mrs. May. Thus, the sound of Mrs. Greenleaf's cries of '"Jesus! Jesus!" are "so piercing that [Mrs. May] felt as if some violent unleashed force had broken out of the ground and was charging toward her" (31). O'Connor's imagery also expresses her faith in the unlimited power of God, as well as fore-shadowing the charge of the bull toward Mrs. May and clarifying the meaning of the description of Mrs. May on the bull's horn: "... she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable" (52). That "light," as O'Connor implies in this earlier passage, is the light of God and His judgment.

Through the story, the bull is frequently described in terms of either Christian or pagan religion. When we first see him, he is standing outside Mrs. May's window, "silvered in the moonlight . . . like some patient god come down to woo her" (24). This pagan imagery, suggesting, perhaps, the white bull Jupiter, is reinforced when a piece of the hedge gets tangled in the bull's horns to form what O'Connor refers to as a "wreath" (24). But, as O'Connor points out, the wreath
also resembles something else, and it is a "crowned head" which the bull raises when Mrs. May scolds at him from her window. O'Connor carries this image one crucial step further when she describes the same piece of foliage as having "slipped down to the base of his horns where it looked like a menacing prickly crown" (26). Obviously, she is suggesting the bull as a symbol of the powerful Christ which Mrs. May has always tried to avoid; and the old lady will become, at the end of the story, a sort of reluctant "bride of Christ," the pursuing savior. Indeed, in the first scene the bull is also described as an "uncouth country suitor" (25) and Mr. Greenleaf, the religious man who at one point says "'I thank Gawd for ever-thang'" (41) constantly refers to the bull as a "gentleman." Mrs. May, however, rejects this threat to her ordered existence; although she does, ironically, address him as "'Sir,'" she tells him to "'Get away from here,'" and tries to dismiss him as merely "'Some nigger's scrub bull'" (just as she refers to the religious Greenleafs as "scrub people"). At one point, O'Connor also associates the bull rather specifically with the red sunlight which serves as the lighting for her characters' religious visions in both "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" and "The Enduring Chill":

[in her dream] When she first stopped [the sun] was a swollen red ball, but as she stood watching it began to narrow and pale until it looked like a bullet. Then suddenly it burst through the tree line and raced down the hill toward her. She woke up with her hand over her mouth and the same noise, diminished but distinct, in her ear. It was the bull lunching under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had let him out. (47)

Certainly, this dream is a vivid foreshadowing of Mrs. May's death on the horns of the bull, and the death itself is described in terms which are an explicit combination of the religious and the sexual, producing
what Stanley Edgar Hyman has called "a rather Freudian Dionysian mystery" (28). When the bull sees Mrs. May he crosses the field toward her "at a slow gallop, a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again"; she falls victim to him because of her "freezing unbelief," staring at the approaching beast "as if she had no sense of distance" (52; significantly, the first time in the story that she heard the munching under her window, she thought of it, in her sleep, as "a cow" [25], subconsciously denying its masculine sex).

When the bull reaches Mrs. May, O'Connor's imagery underlines the Dionysian nature of their union, although, implicitly, in Christian terms—the "hound of heaven" has metamorphosed into a charging bull seeking his bride:

... the bull 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. She continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front of her had changed—the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky—and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable. (52; all italics mine)

When Mr. Greenleaf kills the bull and looks at Mrs. May, she is lying across the animal's head as if "bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal's ear" (53). In O'Connor's view, this secret is obviously Mrs. May's final recognition of the power of God which is not limited to the church on Sunday, and which, indeed, has been pursuing her for quite some time and has now finally captured her forever.

"Greenleaf" is, I think, essentially a sort of grotesque Christian parable, and, artistically, it suffers from the sort of schematic design which is implicit in the parable form. O'Connor's use
of the startling metaphor of a scrub bull as a messenger of God is an innovation in her fiction, a precursor, perhaps, of her fine metaphysical conceit of the all-demanding tattoo in "Parker's Back," but generally in its extremely predictable development "Greenleaf" falls far short of the high standard of artistic excellence in her best work.

In "Parker's Back," the last complete story which she wrote before her death, O'Connor returns to one of her earliest characters, Haze Motes, her "Christian malgré lui," although in this story she burdens him, not with his own church, but with an actual representation of God, "the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes" (235). Obadiah Elihue Parker has shared throughout his life the same sort of restlessness which Haze felt. It has taken, at times, the form of the desire for a new tattoo; and it has led Parker, virtually against his will, to take a wife who is "forever sniffing up sin" and who does "not smoke or dip, drink whiskey, use bad language or paint her face" (220).

Parker, in spite of his Biblical names, does not consider himself to be a Christian by any stretch of the imagination. Indeed, he meets his wife-to-be as a result of his eloquent blasphemy, "'God dammit! ... Jesus Christ in Hell! Jesus God Almighty damn! God dammit to hell!'" (221), and the meeting itself is hardly conducive to tender love: "Without warning a terrible bristly claw slammed into the side of his face ... he thought he had been attacked from above, [by] a giant hawk-eyed angel wielding a hoary weapon" (221). And Parker's courtship of this "tall rawboned girl" is a kind of ballet of reluctance. His first thought is "'I don't want nothing to do with this one'" (222), yet he returns to her house repeatedly, bringing fruit to her family
and trying to show off his tattoos which the girl rejects, in her fundamentalist way, as "'Vanity of vanities'" (225). He doesn't like her appearance—"He liked women with meat on them, so you didn't feel their muscles, much less their old bones" (226)—and he doesn't like the way she looks out across the mountains: "'You look out into space like that and you begin to feel as if someone were after you, the navy or the government or religion'" (227; italics mine). Wondering "'Who in God's name would marry her?'" Parker decides not to see her again. He returns with peaches, admits his Biblical name to her, learns, to his dismay, that her father is a "Straight Gospel preacher, ... spreading it in Florida [1]" and tries to seduce Sarah Ruth, who is proud of her own Biblical names. When she knocks him out of the truck, he makes "up his mind ... to have nothing further to do with her" (229). Shortly thereafter, he marries her "in the County Ordinary's office because Sarah Ruth thought churches were idolatrous" (229).

Marriage fails to change Parker's views, and "Every morning he decided he had had enough and would not return that night; every night he returned" (230). Sarah Ruth still hates his tattoos, and Parker's dissatisfaction continues to grow, fed by his wife's constant reminders of "what the judgement seat of God would be like for him if he didn't change his ways" (231) and by his awareness of the great untattooed expanse of his own back. As these two ideas merge, he becomes gradually aware of "A dim half-formed inspiration" (231; italics mine), the thought of a "religious subject" tattooed on his back to please his wife and, one suspects, to fulfill some vague yearning of his own. Obsessed by this thought, Parker begins to look like a religious ascetic, losing
sleep and losing weight, his eyes taking on "a hollow preoccupied expression" (232). Finally, he has his vision while working for an old woman and driving her tractor. Thinking about a tattoo for his back, he wrecks the tractor, yelling, as he is catapulted to the ground, "GOD ABOVE" (232). As he watches fire consume the tractor, the tree he hit with it, and his own shoes, his reaction is one of holy terror:

"... if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it" (233). He believes that he has been changed completely by his experience, and he runs to his truck and drives toward the city for his tattoo of God:

Parker did not allow himself to think on the way to the city. He only knew that there had been a great change in his life, a leap forward into a worse unknown, and that there was nothing he could do about it. It was for all intents accomplished. (233)

Similarly, his choice of the particular tattoo seems not to be his own: "He flipped the pages [of the tattoo artist's book] quickly, feeling that when he reached the one ordained, a sign would come" (234). The sign comes—"It said as plainly as if silence were a language itself, "GO BACK" (235), and he returns to the picture of the Byzantine Christ and makes exactly the demand of total commitment to this new vision of himself made by Haze Motes, The Misfit, or Rufus Johnson:

"Just like it is, ... just like it is or nothing!" (235). And his experience that night in the city while he lies on a cot in "the Haven of Light Christian Mission" is another vision in which he is, again, the Christian malgré lui, undergoing his lonely initiation in the wilderness:

The tree reached out to grasp him again, then burst into flame; the shoe burned quietly by itself; the eyes in the book said to him distinctly GO BACK and
at the same time did not utter a sound.
He wished that he were not in this city, not
in this Haven of Light Mission, not in a bed
by himself. He longed miserably for Sarah Ruth.
... He felt as though, under their gaze [the
eyes in the book], he was as transparent as the
wing of a fly (237)

Parker continues to deny his religious commitment, however,
replying to the tattoo artist's question as to whether he had been
"saved": "'Naw, ... I ain't got no use for none of that. A man can't
save himself from whatever it is he don't deserve none of my sympathy"
(238). Nevertheless, as he tries to sleep on the tattoo parlor table,
he sees again the eyes, "still, straight, all-demanding," and flees to
a bar, where he once more denies that he has been saved. Thrown out
of the bar into an alley, Parker sits and thinks— and assumes the
responsibility demanded by the eyes on his back:

Parker sat for a long time ... examining his
soul. ... The eyes that were now forever on
his back were eyes to be obeyed. He was as cer­
tain of it as he had ever been of anything.
Throughout his life, grumbling and sometimes
cursing, often afraid, once in rapture, Parker
had obeyed whatever instinct of this kind had
come to him. (241)

He gets up and determines to go home to Sarah Ruth, who, he is con­
vinced, will be pleased, and "would know what he had to do" (241); he
is, in short, prepared to "obey" the eyes and listen to his fundamen­
alist Christian wife, and he feels reborn:

His head was almost clear of liquor and he ob­
erved that his dissatisfaction was gone, but he
felt not quite like himself. It was as if he
were himself but a stranger to himself, driving
into a new country though everything he saw was
familiar to him, even at night. (241)

When he arrives home, however, Sarah Ruth rejects his new
tattoo, the manifestation of his new vision, beating him with a broom
and driving him out of the house, screaming that "God is a spirit.
No man shall see his face. . . . Idolatry! . . . 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!" (244). Parker is
left, finally, "leaning against a tree, crying like a baby" (244).
Like Haze Motes, he seems almost to have become a new embodiment of
the Redeemer he has for so long resisted.

In O'Connor's view, Parker is, I think, redeemed, primarily in
his recognition that the eyes on his back must be obeyed, and the last
view of him leaning against the tree (the Cross) seems to support this
view. During most of his life he has, like Haze Motes, obviously been
searching for some source of spiritual satisfaction, first through his
various tattoos, and later in his courtship of the fanatically
Christian but otherwise unattractive Sarah Ruth. In demanding his
final tattoo of Christ, he has combined these two earlier quests,
along with a new religious commitment which, although it cannot—indeed,
in O'Connor's view, must not—give him final peace, quite obviously does
raise him far above his earlier spiritual emptiness.

"Judgement Day" is O'Connor's final examination of the sin
of pride. Old man Tanner, the "hero" of the tale, is quite pathetic
in his near-complete physical paralysis and his fervent wish to return
from New York City to Georgia, dead or alive: "It was being there
that mattered; the dead or alive did not" (246), and his daughter, in
her lack of sympathy and her rejection of Tanner's religious beliefs—
"'That's a lot of hardshell Baptist hooey!'" (248)—seems to be cast
rather obviously in the role of villain, like the young Negro actor,
who roughs up the dying Tanner after rejecting the old man's Christian
God: "I'm not even no Christian. I don't believe that crap. There ain't no Jesus and there ain't no God!" (263); "Ain't no judgement day, old man. Cept this. Maybe this here judgement day for you!" (268). These last words that Tanner hears are, I think, the key to this otherwise perplexing story.

Throughout the tale, Tanner has shown himself to be a Christian, damning those around him in Biblical terms--"'Bury me here and burn in hell!" (248)--and proclaiming the coming Judgement when his view will be vindicated:

"The Judgement is coming, ... The sheep'll be separated from the goats. Them that kept their promises from them that didn't. Them that honored their father and their mother from them that cursed them." (258)

In O'Connor's view, Tanner is right in proclaiming the approaching Judgement, but he is also like Mrs. Turpin in his complete failure even to consider the possibility that when the sheep are separated from the goats he might be one of the latter. When he praises "'them that did the best they could with what they had"' he forgets that the reason he is in New York rather than in Georgia is that he fled what he had--an illegal still--out of pride:

"The day is coming," the [Negro] doctor said, "when the white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you mights well to git ahead of the crowd."

"That day ain't coming for me," Tanner said shortly. (256)

Tanner seems to have learned his lesson of humility; sitting in New York he thinks that rather than wasting away in the city he would, if he had the choice to make again, be "a nigger's white nigger any day" (257). But he really hasn't changed. His greatest source of pride throughout his life has been his conviction that he is a master
of "The secret of handling a nigger" (252), and he thinks of his companion of thirty years, Coleman Parrum, as living proof of this mastery, forgetting the brief vision he had while facing Coleman for the first time, a vision which, significantly, he never fully understood:

\[ \ldots \] he had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot. The vision failed him before he could decipher it. (255)

In New York, however, when, himself captive in a strange city, Tanner attempts to reassert what he considers to be his talent with "niggers," he does become clownish, and his pride is such that he cannot understand the mistake he is making when he assumes that his new neighbor is "A South Alabama nigger if I ever saw one!" who will appreciate the attention and flattery of an old white man who calls him "preacher."

Thus, when he tries himself to preach to the Negro, rejecting the man's denial of God with the angry attack, "'And you ain't black, \ldots \ And I ain't white!'" Tanner is himself attacked physically, and as a result of the ensuing stroke, entrapped even more securely in his daughter's New York apartment.

His first reaction to this new situation is to withdraw into his dream of being shipped home to Georgia in a pine box, from which he would leap crying, "'Judgement Day! Judgement Day! \ldots \ Don't you two fools know its Judgement Day?'" (265) to Coleman and Hooten, the railway station master. This dream becomes his ambition, and finally, muttering the 23rd Psalm (267) he makes his way to the stairs, planning to leave the apartment, take a cab to the freight yards, and get into a refrigerated boxcar with a note pinned in his pocket:
He collapses on the stairs, however, and awakens, thinking that he is in the station in Georgia. He cries out his jubilant—and condescending—claim, "'Judgement Day! Judgement Day! You idiots didn't know it was Judgement Day, did you?" and is picked up by the young Negro actor and pinioned between the spokes of the bannister. As he is lifted, he cries out, "in his jauntiest voice, 'Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!'" (269). This last cry is, of course, nicely paradoxical. Literally, it is Tanner's last blindly condescending order to a "nigger"; but metaphorically, it is his statement of faith that he is going to his Maker, as well as to his beloved state of Georgia. Given his faith, it is probable that in O'Connor's view Tanner is saved, in spite of his pride. He certainly gets back to Georgia, and his daughter is able to regain her complacency as well as "her good looks" (269).

Generally, "Judgement Day" works rather well, in spite of O'Connor's usual cardboard Negroes. Her flashbacks into Tanner's earlier life in Georgia are particularly effective in their evocation of an old dream enjoyed by a dying man. Indeed, the overall tone of the story is one of its strengths; the oppressiveness of the city is vividly drawn in contrast with the rural Georgia of Tanner's dreams, and the sense of approaching death underlines Tanner's pained actions with real poignance. This tone is perhaps heightened for the reader by the realization that O'Connor completed her work on this story
The weaknesses in O'Connor's short stories are generally obvious: the repetition of themes, characters (or, in some cases, caricatures), and even descriptive details (black woods, red skies, and girl scout shoes, for example); the schematic presentation of her religious point of view; and the lapses into melodrama, particularly in her use of death as the climax of so many of her stories, growing out of her conviction that "I'm a born Catholic and death has always been a brother to my imagination. . . . I can't imagine a story that doesn't properly end with it or in its foreshadowings."20

But to emphasize only these weaknesses is to ignore the truly impressive talent which so many of O'Connor's stories exhibit. Her dialogue is consistently brilliant, whether the accents are Tennessee hillbilly or New York pseudo-intellectual, and her choice of even the most minor details (Julian's mother's Japanese fan or Asbury Fox's New York Times bedsheet) is devastatingly precise. Even her religious demand for a sort of terrible justice in the stories of Everything That Rises Must Converge is, because of her gift of sharp satiric characterization, quite effective; the reader coming to these stories for the first time, unaware of her religious bias, is quickly convinced that the majority of O'Connor's characters get exactly what's coming to them. And to the degree that her stories can arouse this sort of reaction—even outside of her particular context—they simply cannot be dismissed as mere tracts or artistic failures. Commenting upon her

(revising her earlier piece entitled "Geranium") only a few weeks before her own death.¹⁹

4
fictional "grotesques," O'Connor once remarked:

Essentially the reason my characters are grotesque is because it is my talent to make them so. To some extent the writer can choose his subject; but he can never choose what he is able to make live. It is characters like The Misfit and the Bible salesman that I can make live.21

It is exactly O'Connor's considerable talent which does allow such creations to live; and, if her vision is somewhat narrow, her presentation of it has, as Robert Drake has suggested, "an urgent intensity, even an ordered ferocity in it"22 which raises it to a very high level of achievement.
Footnotes

1 Robert Kiely, review of *Everything That Rises Must Converge* in *Christian Science Monitor* (June 17, 1965), 7.


7 Burke, 41.


9 Hyman, p. 23.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 419.


Footnotes (contd.)

17 Hyman, p. 28.

18 Ibid., p. 25.


20 Quoted by Hyman, p. 45.


CONCLUSION

Discovering the fiction of Flannery O'Connor for the first time, particularly such stories as "The Enduring Chill," "The Lame Shall Enter First," or "The Displaced Person," one might be tempted to praise her, as many have, as a first-rate author of major importance. Unfortunately, she is neither. When she is at her best, O'Connor is able to combine her considerable talents for realistic description, bitingly humorous satire, colloquial dialogue, and vivid characterization into stories which are as effective as any in the language. A close and, more importantly, a continuous reading of her works, however, produces the realization that, striking as her talent is, it is also severely limited in its range: her fiction presents only a small number of themes, a small number of character types, and very restricted methods of treatment.

We have seen O'Connor's themes repeated again and again in both the novels and the stories. The obsessed flight from God of a Christ-haunted individual appears centrally in Wise Blood, The Violent Bear It Away, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," and "Parker's Back," and in lesser degrees in many of her other stories. Young children are introduced into either a new or a heightened awareness of God in "The River," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," and "The Capture." And in virtually all of O'Connor's other stories (sixteen of them), characters
who are guilty of the sin of pride are inevitably—and predictably—either destroyed or brought to a stunning sense of their own spiritual blindness and foolishness. Thus, while we may become justifiably enthusiastic after reading one or two of O'Connor's works, we must admit the repetition and predictability of her fiction as a whole.

O'Connor once made the following comment in an essay entitled "The Church and the Fiction Writer":

It is generally supposed, and not least by Catholics, that the Catholic who writes fiction is out to use fiction to prove the truth of his faith or, at the least, to prove the existence of the supernatural. He may be. No one can be sure of his motives except as they suggest themselves in his finished work, but when the finished work suggests that pertinent actions have been fraudulently manipulated or smothered, whatever purposes the writer started out with will have already been defeated. What the fiction writer will discover, if he discovers anything at all, is that he cannot move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth.¹

Unfortunately, after reading through all of O'Connor's fiction, one can only conclude that while writing it she could not hold to the high principles of creative art which she proclaimed in her essay. For the consistency with which her un-Christian and anti-Christian characters are brought to destruction and humiliation attests only too clearly to the fact that, for all its stylistic excellence, her fiction is essentially schematic—it is indeed written "to prove the truth of [her] faith." And when O'Connor speaks of "the added dimension" which she believes that fiction can gain from "a belief in fixed dogma," she seems, again, to be overlooking the essential weakness of her own work:

... what the Catholic writer and reader will have to remember is that the reality of the added dimension will be judged in a work of fiction by the
truthfulness and wholeness of the literal level of the natural events presented. If a Catholic writer hopes to reveal mysteries, he will have to do it by describing truthfully what he sees from where he is.

These are valid principles, but, given the evidence of O'Connor's work, either her vision or her fiction based upon that vision is faulty, for the alternatives which she so often sets up are so extreme—so oversimplified in terms of believable action—that one has very little sense of their being "natural events" at all: belief in Christ vs mass murder ("A Good Man Is Hard to Find"); redemption through murder vs spiritual emptiness (Wise Blood); salvation through suicide vs depressive loneliness ("The River"); baptism through drowning vs sterile rationalism (The Violent Bear It Away). Similarly, after one or two stories O'Connor's plots become predictable, and at times, as with Rayber in The Violent Bear It Away, her characterization slips into mere caricature. In short, O'Connor's own comments and protestations notwithstanding, her dogma does affect her fiction, and that fiction is less convincing—less successful in an artistic sense—because of these imposed religious demands.

As we have seen, O'Connor has expressed a desire that her works be read, not as realistic fiction, but as literature more nearly like Hawthorne's romances. William Peden has suggested that O'Connor is "basically an allegorist or fantasist rather than a realist although her stories are so securely rooted in specific time and place as to seem as real as rain." It is, I think, exactly this combination of the very real and the allegorical which causes the reader of O'Connor's fiction so much trouble. Derek Roper has written of allegorical fiction:
What is essential both for the allegorical novel and the allegorical romance is that the fiction should convince our imaginations, by whatever mode: for it cannot body forth meanings while itself remaining bodiless, nor intensify our awareness of large truths without bringing an intensity of its own.4

The trouble with O'Connor's fiction is that, in one respect, one cannot simply dismiss it easily as totally unsuccessful allegorical writing, because, in spite her narrow and schematic view, in spite of even her frequent predictability, her work is far from "bodiless" in Roper's sense of the term; indeed, it quite often does convince the reader's imagination—it has a ferocious intensity which can be quite effective in moving his emotions, even if he is steadfastly unwilling to yield to the "large truths" which O'Connor uses as the bases of her tales. Perhaps, as James Gindin has suggested in another context, the problem with reading any literature of this sort is that it makes extra-literary demands upon its readers: "... the fable is a special instance, one in which the form itself, the connection of the particular human experience to a reality beyond human experience, demands both the acceptance of that connection and an intellectual adherence to the idea that an entity, a reality, exists somewhere beyond human experience."5 By writing Christian fables based upon a very specific set of dogmatic assumptions, O'Connor necessarily divides her audience into two groups, Christian and non-Christian, each of which has at least two alternatives in reading her novels and stories. The Christian reader may either accept her work as valid religious art, or he may reject it on purely esthetic grounds as overly schematic religious propaganda. The alternatives open to the non-Christian are both
negative: like the Christian, he may reject the fiction out of hand as thinly disguised polemic, or he may accept the fictional embodiment of O'Connor's view while rejecting the view itself. Whatever the choice, however, the fact that this distinction between form and content is so easily made defines one of the severe limitations of O'Connor's art.

Because of her intense Catholic bias, O'Connor occupies a unique position in twentieth century American literature. Her consistent use of a Southern setting for her stories and novels (only "Judgement Day" is set outside the South, and its hero is a displaced Southerner) has led to her frequent inclusion in that group of writers whose work has been given the rubric "Southern Gothic," a label which has been applied to, among others, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Eudora Welty, and Carson McCullers. O'Connor once commented with both humor and perception on the problem of being bracketed with Faulkner: "The presence alone of Faulkner in our midst makes a great difference in what a writer can and cannot do. Nobody wants his mule and wagon stalled on the tracks the Dixie Limited is roaring down." But if O'Connor recognized the necessity of avoiding the mythic grounds of another Yoknapatawpha County, she was certainly able to carry on, in her own religious fashion, the sort of vivid grotesquerie of, for example, "A Rose for Emily" and, as I have suggested, As I Lay Dying. Similarly, some of the outrageously grotesque humor of Caldwell may be reflected in O'Connor's wry view of Hulga Hopewell and Tom T. Shiftlet. The hazy, magnolia-scented world of a book like Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding, however, has no attraction for O'Connor, whose only venture
into the political "culture" of the Old South is her scathingly satiric "A Late Encounter with the Enemy." The fiction of Carson McCullers may well have influenced O'Connor, although she has not, as far as I know, ever mentioned it. Certainly the eerie, nightmarish tone of *Wise Blood* is similar to the dark, fantastic mood of *The Ballad of the Sad Cafe*, and the loneliness of so many of McCullers' characters seems in some ways similar to that of O'Connor's own displaced persons (I can never think of Pvt. Williams of *Reflections of a Golden Eye* without remembering Enoch Emery, but this may be a personal aberration). But, again, O'Connor's religious point of view gives her fiction a particular basis for her use of grotesquerie, of humor, and even of human isolation, which is not shared by any of these "Southern" writers. Similarly, her uniquely religious definition of some aspects of Southern life also separates her from these writers;

Whenever I am asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one. To be able to recognize a freak you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still in the main theological.

... I think it is safe to say that while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted... Ghosts can be very fierce and instructive. They cast strange shadows, particularly in our literature.

Another favorite critical ploy is to speak of O'Connor as a Catholic writer in the sense that Graham Greene and J.F. Powers are Catholic writers. But even in this association O'Connor remains unique. For, although, like Greene, she is at times guilty of pinning neat little religious tags to the conclusions of her stories, she does not share his interest, at least in her fiction, in specific theological questions of Church dogma. Her stories also exhibit much less variety
than Greene's. Similarly, although her rare portrayals of Catholics (one thinks immediately of Father Flynn of "The Displaced Person" and "'Father Finn—from Purgatory'" of "The Enduring Chill") resemble Powers' *Morte d'Urban* in the rather gentle satire of priests (and the basic respect for priesthood as an institution), O'Connor's intense insistence that any religious commitment—even one based on madness and manifested in murder—is better than none, moves her outside of Powers' much more sophisticated and urbane view of the Church.

In his introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, Robert Fitzgerald observes that although he was a rather close friend of O'Connor, he can only remember her recommending two works of fiction to him, Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*. Certainly there are rather clear echoes of the latter book in *Wise Blood*, from the particular letters exchanged between Sabbath Hawks and Mary Brittle to the general satiric intensity with which the characters surrounding the hero are portrayed. One suspects that O'Connor's basic concern in the book (and, as we have seen, in *The Violent Bear It Away* as well as in other stories)—her examination of the mixed attraction toward and rejection of God for her lonely, isolated Christian *malgré lui*—may also be derived from her reading of West's masterpieces.

However, only the name of Hawthorne is mentioned consistently and repeatedly in O'Connor's letters and other comments. As I have suggested, her links with this New England writer of romances are probably stronger than those with any other American literary figure. Of course, this influence is not all to the good; witness O'Connor's obvious and mechanical naming of characters and her occasional moralizing at the conclusions of some of her stories. As we have seen, her
point of view is much more narrowly limited than that of Hawthorne, and, as a result, her fiction is, on the whole, neither as convincing nor as important as his. Hawthorne's complex treatment of such characters as the Rev. Mr. Hooper of "The Minister's Black Veil" or Hester Prynne of The Scarlet Letter, for example, attest to the absence in his fiction of the sort of dogmatic view by which O'Connor so often and so predictably condemns erring characters to physical or spiritual destruction. Hawthorne's more tolerant view of human frailty allows him to view characters who are, in Christian terms, sinful, with a mixture of sympathy and objectivity which is simply not possible in O'Connor's work, given her stated purpose of getting her vision across to a hostile audience. And, most obviously, when reading Hawthorne's novels and stories, one can never anticipate his conclusions after reading only a page or so; unfortunately, such is rarely the case in reading much of O'Connor's fiction. Nevertheless, her intense and probing examination of man's moral nature is at times as dramatic and as moving as any of Hawthorne's fictional excursions into "the dark night of the soul," and this drama and intensity, along with what is frequently stylistic virtuosity, assure O'Connor of a secure, if secondary, place in modern fiction.
Footnotes


2 Ibid., 734.


7 Ibid.

APPENDIX A

The Tarwater Family

Old Tarwater — his unnamed sister m. unnamed insurance salesman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>divinity student &amp; Rayber's sister</th>
<th>Rayber m. &quot;welfare woman&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tarwater</td>
<td>Bishop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Old Tarwater's sister, her husband, and Rayber's sister are all killed in an automobile accident; the divinity student commits suicide; and the "welfare woman" deserts Rayber and goes to Japan.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works by Flannery O'Connor

Fiction


Essays


"Living With a Peacock," Holiday, XXX (September, 1961), 52, 110-12.

Criticism

Books


Periodicals


---


Stelzmann, Rainulf, "Shock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories," *Xavier University Studies*, II, 4-21.