

GOD'S PURSUIT OF MAN IN THE FICTION
OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
F. Eugene Warren
May, 1967

Approved for the Major Department

Approved for the Graduate Council

PREFACE

I was introduced to Flannery O'Connor's fiction several years ago by a friend, William Teed. Since my initial reading of her work, I have found a source of awe and delight in both her vision and the technique with which she embodies it. In doing research for this study, I found that, while her work has received much critical attention, there is no sustained study of her basic theme. Robert Drake's monograph, published by Eerdmans, is perhaps the most inclusive study, but it is too brief and general to give a comprehensive view of her work. It is my hope that such a comprehensive view of O'Connor's fiction is provided in this thesis.

I wish to thank Dr. Green D. Wyrick for the perceptive guidance and the lucid criticism which he made of this study from its inception to its completion. I am also most grateful to Dr. Charles E. Walton for providing suggestions that improved its over-all structure and readability. Finally, my wife, Rose, gave of her time and spirit, not only in typing the final draft, but also in sustaining me as I worked.

May, 1967
Emporia, Kansas

FEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A REALIST OF DISTANCES	1
II. TIME AND WILL	26
III. THE PEACOCK'S TAIL: CHARACTER AS PLACE . .	38
IV. "THE ROOTS OF THE EYE ARE IN THE HEART." . .	59
V. SYZYGY: THE DOUBLED SELF	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY	121

CHAPTER I

A REALIST OF DISTANCES

The prophet is a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque.

Flannery O'Connor,
"A Lecture"

A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.

C. S. Lewis,
The Abolition of Man

O'Connor's basic theme, God's pursuit of man, has posed a number of problems for her critics. For example, some find that her Christian orthodoxy is unacceptable, but, in rejecting it, they are forced to misread her work, causing them to conclude that her fiction is existentialistic. However, it is necessary for one to discern, first, where the existentialist reading of her work fails, and also why it fails. Others find her use of violence meaningless, in spite of the fact that her fiction clearly shows a definite meaning at all times, encompassed in her view of the confrontation of God with man which, when understood, reveals itself to be an orthodox Christian view.

Flannery O'Connor lived, wrote, and died in the South, and this region was the setting for her fiction. She was, certainly, more than a regional writer, although critics differ as to the import and meaning of her work. Drake, one of her most sympathetic critics, writes,

Miss O'Connor's work, though narrow in scope and limited in appeal, is unique; and it has an urgent intensity, even an ordered ferocity, that may ultimately give her a place in our fiction comparable . . . to that of Donne or Hopkins in English poetry.¹

O'Connor may certainly be compared to Donne or Hopkins at least as far as theme: "Her concern was solely with the vulgarities of this world and the perfections of the other" ² She was an orthodox Christian, and her faith gave to her work that "ordered ferocity" of which Drake speaks. This aspect of her work was, and is, perhaps, the most controversial. Esty attacked her work as a specimen of the "gratuitous grotesque," ³ and she is sometimes characterized as being a member of the Southern Gothic school of fiction. Some critics, however, defend her use of grotesquery and protest her

¹Robert Drake, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 20.

²Walter Sullivan, "Flannery O'Connor, Sin and Grace: Everything That Rises Must Converge," The Hollins Critic, II (September, 1965), 2.

³William Esty, "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," Commonweal, LXVII (March 7, 1958), 586-88.

alignment with the Southern Gothics. Davenport, for instance, writes,

It is wrong to place Miss O'Connor . . . in the Gothic School, however freskish and shocking her themes. The astounding surface of her stories, as wildly grotesque as the best Gothic, is but the visual equivalent of the outrage she feels before a world stupid with selfishness.⁴

Davenport connects O'Connor's fictional violence with her vision of the world, which, as has been noted, is Christian; this connection implies that she may intend for violence and grotesquery to carry a theme larger than the fashionable one of the world's absurdity.

O'Connor made statements about the intention of her work on many occasions, of which one of the most comprehensive is to be found in her essay, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," illuminating her use of violence:

My own feeling is that writers who see by the light of their Christian faith will have, in these times, the sharpest eyes for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable.⁵

In other words, O'Connor's fiction is violent and grotesque, because, seen in the light of Christian faith, the times are violent and grotesque. In a lecture given

⁴Guy Davenport, "The Top is a New Bottom," National Review, XVII (July 27, 1965), 659.

⁵Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel: A Symposium, p. 162.

at Wesleyan College, she said, "To be able to recognize a freak you have to have some conception of the whole man" ⁶ Thus, measured by the Christian standard, modern man is violently warped, and it is as such that O'Connor portrays him in her fiction.

The orthodox Christianity which underlies her work has given rise to another critical difficulty: some critics like her style and technique very much, but express regrets over her theme. For example, in a review of Everything That Rises Must Converge, Schott states:

As patterns of thought her work suggests the absolute theological dead end enlightened Catholicism is struggling to escape. Artistically her fiction is the most extraordinary thing to happen to the American short story since Ernest Hemingway. ⁷

Schott begrudges O'Connor her faith and theme, while admiring her abilities as a writer. Drake, who considers this critical attitude toward O'Connor in some detail, points out that ". . . this may be what does limit her audience: she makes a crucial problem of belief." ⁸ It may be suggested that ultimately it is

⁶Flannery O'Connor, "A Lecture," in The Added Dimension, p. 276.

⁷Webster Schott, "Flannery O'Connor: Faith's Stepchild," Nation, CCI (September 13, 1965), 146.

⁸Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 15.

impossible to separate O'Connor's vision of the world from her representation of that vision in her fiction. In "The Art of Fiction," Henry James wrote, "We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his donnée: our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it."⁹ In this study, the present author will follow James' precept and grant O'Connor the donnée of Christian orthodoxy, and will endeavor to demonstrate the means by which O'Connor embodies her vision in her fictional world. O'Connor's Christianity has misled several critics, notably Rechnitz and Hassan, into reading her work as if she were an existentialist. In an article, "The Existential Novel," Hassan includes O'Connor in a list of widely differing authors. He admits that the article is over-simplified,¹⁰ but states that

. . . a kind of universal mendacity prevails, or, if you wish, a kind of organized chaos, and that whatever values man creates, he goes so in isolation, and starting from scratch.¹¹

The assertion that man creates value seems entirely unrelated to O'Connor's work. The basic conflict in O'Connor's fiction is not that of man's confronting a

⁹Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in The Portable Henry James, pp. 406-7.

¹⁰Ihab Hassan, "The Existential Novel," Massachusetts Review, III (Summer, 1962), 797.

¹¹Ibid., p. 756.

jealous God. Ethical values are subordinate to man's relationship to God. Dowell remarks that commitment to either good or evil is not of ultimate importance, because if there is no commitment to Christ, only evil is possible.¹² In the same article, Hassan states: "The world of the existential novel is largely devoid of any presuppositions--I repeat, presuppositions--about values, traditions, or beliefs."¹³ He also speaks of the view of life as absurd which is found in the existential novel.¹⁴ But Cheney states that he has never found the view of the human condition as absurd in O'Connor's fiction.¹⁵ The question of whether or not O'Connor is an existentialist arises from the fact that her basic theme involves the necessity of the individual's choosing or rejecting Christ. Not accepting her presuppositions (donnée), the existentialist critics then read the agony of choice which her characters suffer as the existential agony of choice which creates value. Hassan states that the function of the

¹²Bob Dowell, "Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," CE, XXVII (December, 1965), 236.

¹³Hassan, op. cit., p. 795.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 797.

¹⁵Brainard Cheney, "Miss O'Connor Creates Unusual Humor Out of Ordinary Sin," SewR, LXXI (Fall, 1963), 647.

existential hero is to create meaning, being, and dignity out of the absurd world in which he finds himself.¹⁶ Gossett points out that O'Connor's stories are based on conflicts which are moral in nature,¹⁷ and this foundation or moral choice undoubtedly gives rise to confusion on the part of existentialist critics. Hassan writes of the existentialist hero who has obtained the courage to be and is then faced with the problem of action.¹⁸ Tarwater, in The Violent Bear It Away, addresses himself to this problem: "You can't just say NO," he said, "You got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it."¹⁹ This activist attitude seems to refer more to the idea that faith without works is dead more than it refers to an existential creation of value. Tarwater might have been thinking of the epistle of James: "But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22.) Drake is rather blunt about what he sees to be O'Connor's relationship to existentialism: ". . . she has no truck with fashionable

¹⁶Hassan, op. cit., p. 796.

¹⁷Louise Y. Gossett, Violence in Recent Southern Fiction, p. 78.

¹⁸Hassan, op. cit., p. 796.

¹⁹O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 397.

existentialist Angst--Christian or otherwise. She apprehends man's predicament in terms of classical Christian theology"20 But in the expression of her vision of the human predicament, O'Connor is obliged to use expressions and incidents which might have an existentialist tone because of the Christian emphasis on the necessity for the individual to make a choice and act upon it.

Cheney reads O'Connor's first novel, Wise Blood, as a satire on existentialism.²¹ While this view is valid, it over-simplifies the theme. Wise Blood is certainly more than a satire on existentialism; the book traces a contemporary "dark night of the soul" in which the protagonist, Hazel Motes, evades confrontation with Christ, immerses himself in sin, and is finally destroyed by a sudden awareness of his sin. Duhamel points out that one of the dangers to which O'Connor's characters are subject is reason isolated from the wisdom of the heart.²² Hazel Motes attempts throughout the course of Wise Blood to avoid the wisdom of his

²⁰ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 15.

²¹ Brainard Cheney, "Flannery O'Connor's Campaign for Her Country," SewR, LXXII (Autumn, 1964), 556.

²² P. Albert Duhamel, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 22.

heart, which in Christian terms might be conceived of as the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Rechnitz recognizes that Haze is a humorous figure at the beginning of the book, but is by the end a serious and perhaps noble character.²³ Haze goes to a shocking extreme in his avoidance of grace; he preaches "The Church Without Christ," blasphemes, and fornicates. Lawson sees Haze as an inverted St. Anthony, that is, as an atheist saint heroically resisting the temptation to faith.²⁴ Lawson's view is paralleled by Macauley's suggestion that O'Connor's "great subject was the anti-christ--the fierce and bestial side of the human mind."²⁵ Finally, Walter says that although Haze is not a believer, his life suggests that of Jesus.²⁶

²³Robert M. Rechnitz, "Passionate Pilgrim: Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood," Georgia Review, XIX (Fall, 1965), 144-147.

²⁴Lewis A. Lawson, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque: Wise Blood," Renascence, XVII (Spring, 1965), 315.

²⁵Robie Macauley, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII, (Winter, 1964), 34.

²⁶Sarah Walter, "Strange Prophets of Flannery O'Connor," Censer, (Spring, 1960), 6-7; see also, Irving Malin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," in The Added Dimension, p. 109; Ted R. Spivey, "Flannery O'Connor's View of God and Man," SSF, I (Spring, 1964), 202; and Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor's Testimony," in The Added Dimension, p. 150.

There is another aspect of the book which bears upon Miss O'Connor's attitude toward current intellectual trends. If Haze is an atheistic existentialist, some of the people he meets embody other errors. One of these people is Onnie Jay Holy, who attempts to commercialize Haze's "Church Without Christ." Onnie Jay (also known as Hoover Shoats) sums up what he attempts to do when he says, "If you want to get anywheres in religion, you got to keep it sweet."²⁷ Haze, of course, is not trying to ". . . get anywheres in religion"; he is trying to preach the truth as he sees it, and that truth is by no means sweet. Onnie Jay comes to represent the sweetened, commercialized religion that preaches comfort, not the stern demands of the spirit. The daughter of the phony evangelist, Asa Hawks, provides a comment on a different aspect of contemporary society. Riding with Haze, Sabbath tells of the time she wrote to an advice columnist, Mary Brittle. Sabbath wrote of herself that she was a bastard and knew that she could not enter the kingdom of heaven. But what really bothered her was the question of whether or not she should "neck." Mary Brittle answers,

²⁷O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 87.

"Dear Sabbath, Light necking is acceptable, but I think your real problem is one of adjustment to the modern world. Perhaps you ought to re-examine your religious values to see if they meet your needs in life. A religious experience can be a beautiful addition to living if you put it in the proper perspective and do not let it wear you. Read some books on Ethical Culture."²⁸

This advice reflects the same self-reliant, secular attitude that is held by Asbury Fox in "The Enduring Chill," or by Joy-Hulga in "Good Country People." Mary Brittle's advice recalls the advice of Hoover Shoats to "keep it sweet." Actually, Sabbath's problem is that she is too well adjusted to the world. She writes a second letter to Mary Brittle, saying, "What I really want to know is should I go the whole hog or not? . . . I'm adjusted okay to the modern world."²⁹ Adjustment to the world is not one of the demands God makes on man: "And be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2) The conflict basic to all of O'Connor's characters is between their adjustment to the world and the demands of God.

At this point, one should consider in detail the exact stance which O'Connor takes toward her fictional world and the people who inhabit it. As McCown relates,

²⁸Ibid., p. 67.

²⁹Loc. cit.

Her stories, the characters that live in them, the excellencies of her style, are not ends in themselves but rigorously subordinated means of showing us reality, the quality of goodness and the subtle malice of sin, either of which has power to determine our destiny.³⁰

For O'Connor, then, reality lies in the relationship and power of good and evil, and the effects of this reality upon her characters. This point leads back to her use of violence and the grotesque, for, as Rubin observes, ". . . her true grotesques are those who are spiritually maimed and twisted" ³¹ Her characters are grotesque because she sees the world from a Christian standpoint, from which the world is sinful and in need of grace. Kevin writes,

The variety of physical and moral sufferings found in the works of Flannery O'Connor often cause one to label her work repulsive, grotesque, and cruel The "grotesqueness" of her characters lie in the fact that they have intentionally severed themselves from the benefits of Christ's passion and redemption.³²

Her theme, then, becomes the workings of grace on these characters who deny and resist it; and the basic conflict in her fiction arises from the denial or rejection

³⁰Robert M. McCown, "Flannery O'Connor and the Reality of Sin," The Catholic World, CLXXXVIII (January, 1959), 286.

³¹Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," in The Added Dimension, p. 53.

³²Sister Mary Kevin, O. S. B., "Flannery O'Connor: In Memory of a Vision Unlimited," Censer (Winter, 1965), p. 42.

of grace by one or more of her characters. Dowell writes,

The conflict between grace and evil in the lives of her characters reflects for the author the most significant drama in the realm of human experience.³³

If the assertions which Christianity makes about the nature and destiny of the human soul are true, then the drama of salvation is all-important. There are, however, further ramifications of O'Connor's fictional use of Christian orthodoxy. Drake points out one of her major assumptions:

It is that the Christian religion is a very shocking, indeed a scandalous business . . . and that its Savior is an offense and a stumbling block, even as "bleeding stinking mad" grotesque to many.³⁴

The view of Christianity as shocking is comparable to the New Testament statement that Jesus is "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence," to those "which be disobedient." (I Peter 2:7-8.) It, then, appears that O'Connor's basic theme is God's confrontation of man with claims of judgment and redemption. As Gossett writes,

³³Dowell, op. cit., p. 239.

³⁴Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 17.

Sin, guilt, mercy, and redemption are the realities of human life for her, and the lives of her characters are violent, mean, frustrated, twisted, and fragmented because man is a sinner.³⁵

One proposes O'Connor presents and dramatizes this confrontation between man and Christ; it will be seen that she uses several devices to show the reader how man is met by God's claims. But before these can be even briefly considered, it is necessary to characterize her vision of man more thoroughly, and also to investigate the nature of the Christ with which her characters are confronted.

Her view of man may be explicated from some of her non-fiction writing, and also from a short story, "The Enduring Chill." The sin with which O'Connor deals most scathingly is the sin of pride, the attempt to become completely self-sufficient and independent of God. Dowell writes that O'Connor's fiction deals primarily with man's struggle for spiritual life or death.³⁶ In this struggle, any attempt by man to replace God through "progress" results in damnation. In reference to the statistical method, she wrote,

The storyteller is concerned with what is; but if what is, is what can be determined by survey, then the disciples of Dr. Kinsey and Dr. Gallup are

³⁵Gossett, op. cit., p. 75.

³⁶Dowell, op. cit., p. 236.

sufficient for the day thereof.³⁷

O'Connor clearly indicates that she distrusts methods of gathering "truth" by poll and interview, and suggests further that she would distrust the bias of much contemporary sociology. Gossett notes that the violence in which O'Connor's characters are immersed shows contempt for the "'life-adjustment' philosophy of the twentieth century."³⁸ Elsewhere, Gossett points out that O'Connor uses violent characters and action to uncover the reality which is ignored by the materialism of secular culture.³⁹ In her essay, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," O'Connor criticizes an editorial in Life magazine which calls for a fiction praising life in the United States.⁴⁰ O'Connor points out her view of the reality underlying current material prosperity when she writes,

[The Christian writer] may at least be permitted to ask if [Life's] screams for joy would be quite so piercing if joy were⁴¹ really more abundant in our prosperous society.

³⁷O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," p. 161.

³⁸Gossett, op. cit., p. 96.

³⁹Ibid., p. 160.

⁴⁰O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," pp. 157-60.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 160.

This scepticism about the possibility of joy in this society is based on O'Connor's belief that this world is one which is constantly rejecting grace and turning from the claims of Christ. Gardiner quotes O'Connor to the effect that, in modern times, tenderness and pity have replaced faith as a guide to action, and that tenderness cut off from its source in Christ culminates in terror such as has been so abundant in the twentieth century.⁴² But O'Connor's vision goes deeper than a simple negative reaction to the terrors and violence of this time: "In projecting the facts of her own time, the freaks and monstrous distortions, she has recorded the mystery of eternity."⁴³ In other words, she uses the grotesque happenings of her time to portray the mystery which, as a Christian, she perceives at the base of reality. Rayber, in The Violent Bear It Away, attempts to use statistical psychology to reduce the old prophet, Mason Tarwater, to something in "his head"; in "The Lame Shall Enter First," Sheppard, a social worker, attempts to redeem the juvenile delinquent, Rufus Johnson, by getting him to look through a

⁴²Harold C. Gardiner, S. J., "Flannery O'Connor's Clarity of Vision," in The Added Dimension, p. 188.

⁴³Richard H. Rupp, "Fact and Mystery: Flannery O'Connor," Commonweal, LXXIX (December 6, 1963), 307.

telescope. In each case, the attempt at self-sufficiency ends in defeat. Each of these characters has nothing but the best intentions, yet, as Spivey writes, a man without Jesus can only do evil, no matter how respectable he is.⁴⁴ Both Sheppard and Rayber have a little boy; at the end of each story the child is dead, at least in part, because of the obstinacy of their guardians in refusing grace. Peden remarks of this basic aspect of O'Connor's characters,

Through arrogance, 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 they have committed the cardinal sin of rejecting the redemptive function of Christianity.⁴⁵

Thus, the basic sin of O'Connor's characters is their attempt to save themselves, rather than to accept the grace with which they are confronted. However, one of the basic facts in O'Connor's world is that "Human beings cannot impose their terms upon God."⁴⁶ None of these people is successful in his attempt to redeem himself, and these attempts end in death or submission to grace--and sometimes both. Not all of O'Connor's

⁴⁴Spivey, op. cit., p. 201.

⁴⁵William H. Peden, The American Short Story, p. 130.

⁴⁶Gossett, op. cit., p. 93.

characters meet with ultimate damnation; however, those that are saved are not necessarily spared the rigors of conversion. As Cheney observes, O'Connor's Christian fiction is realistic because her characters who have received grace retain human weaknesses.⁴⁷ A character possessing both grace and weakness is the priest in her story, "The Enduring Chill." Father Finn is called to the bedside of Asbury Fox, an atheist intellectual who feels that a Jesuit will be able to carry on a cultural conversation. Asbury begins by asking the priest his opinion of James Joyce and finds the results disappointing:

"I wonder what you think of Joyce, Father?"
 The priest lifted his chair and pushed closer.
 "You'll have to shout," he said. "Blind in one
 eye and deaf in one ear."⁴⁸

When Asbury succeeds in making himself heard, Finn informs him that he has not met Joyce, and asks, "Do you say your morning and night prayers?"⁴⁹ Finn (one of O'Connor's rare Catholic characters) is as human as could be wished, and his single-minded insistence on

⁴⁷Brainard Cheney, "Miss O'Connor Creates Unusual Humor Out of Ordinary Sin," SewR, LXXI (Fall, 1963), 651.

⁴⁸Flannery O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 105.

⁴⁹Loc. cit.

Asbury's prayer life is both humorous and a sign of his priestly vocation. Drake observes that

She does not oversimplify either her characters or the dilemmas which confront them, or the conflicts in which they are involved. And she certainly does not offer Christianity as the simple solution or pat answer to their anguish; if anything, it is quite the reverse--as indeed it is in the Gospels themselves.⁵⁰

An example of the effect which the acceptance of grace may have on O'Connor's characters is to be found in the ending of "The Enduring Chill." Asbury has thought himself dying of some rare disease; in actuality, he has contracted undulant fever while drinking raw milk in an attempt at inter-racial amity with his mother's Negro help. Asbury's plight is an ironic comment on the efforts of man to solve his problems by his own efforts. Facing the collapse of his narcissistic reveries of death, Asbury surrenders: "A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend."⁵¹ O'Connor's portrayal of the operation of grace is far from pleasant or appealing to natural, sinful man; Asbury finds salvation unpleasant,

⁵⁰ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 15.

⁵¹ O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 114.

because it destroys the illusions with which he has insulated himself from the "implacable" movement of the Spirit. There is irony in the fact that his posturing has been over Bang's disease rather than over some incurable, exotically fatal malady. Many critics find a grim humor in O'Connor's fiction; this humor appears to be the result of the disparity between the illusions which her characters cherish and the reality which overwhelms them. Jacobson writes,

She is unwilling to separate tragedy from a terrible and complete comedy; . . . she is conscious, in every rickety chairleg, bizarre garment and clay road, of omnipresent mystery.⁵²

The comedy is terrible, because it unmaskes every human self-deception; it is inseparable from tragedy, because human self-deception leads to destruction. Finally, the mystery is omnipresent, because God confronts man at every turn, and "For Miss O'Connor the mystery of mercy is at the center of . . . existence."⁵³

Because O'Connor's basic theme is man's attempt at evading the claims of grace, her view of Christ, who brings the grace, is important to an understanding of her fiction. Drake goes so far as to say that "Jesus

⁵²Josephine Jacobsen, "A Catholic Quartet," Christian Scholar, XLVII (Summer, 1964), 152.

⁵³Loc. cit.

is finally the principal character in all Miss O'Connor's fiction, whether offstage or, in the words and actions of her characters, very much on."⁵⁴ The portrait of Christ which emerges from O'Connor's fiction scarcely resembles popular religious pictures of Him, but rather more the work of such an artist as Matthias Grünewald of the sixteenth century. In this connection, Gossett states that prettiness and respectability are irrelevant to man's need for grace.⁵⁵ The Christ who pursues Tarwater, in The Violent Bear It Away, is "bleeding stinking mad,"⁵⁶ and certainly, as Drake says of O'Connor's Jesus, "There is nothing sweet or sentimental about Him and He terrifies before He can bless."⁵⁷

The fact that terror (purgation) must precede redemption has caused some critics to misread O'Connor as presenting solely a "God of wrath." Rubin writes, "The only alternative to a God of Wrath is a God of Love . . .,"⁵⁸ and in so saying, Rubin overlooks the possibility that love and wrath may be complementary aspects of one God. In this same passage, Rubin admits

⁵⁴Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p.17.

⁵⁵Gossett, op. cit., p..89.

⁵⁶O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 434-35.

⁵⁷Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p.17.

⁵⁸Louis D. Rubin, Jr., op. cit., p..68.

that the ". . . barrier which [is] erected against the wrath, keeps out the God of Love as well."⁵⁹ Love and wrath are attributes of the same God, and corrective love is often shown in God's wrath.⁶⁰ This motif of purifying love is often embodied by O'Connor in images of flame and burning. God's mercy, symbolized by fire, may be a "holy wrath" insofar as it necessarily purifies the human being of sin. O'Connor's God may embody two seemingly contradictory aspects: purification through mercy, and destruction by wrath.

If Jesus is the implicit main character of O'Connor's fiction, there is another character who also plays an important role--Satan. In O'Connor's world, the tempter and father of lies is sometimes more obvious than the Redeemer. She has said that in her fiction the devil's work is a necessary prelude to grace.⁶¹ The devil is often implicit in a human character: in the story, "Good Country People," the salesman is, as Walsh says, a "'devil-double' or Huiga--"⁶² The central character of this story is a young woman who

⁵⁹Loc. cit.

⁶⁰Gossett, op. cit., p. 76.

⁶¹Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 229.

⁶²Thomas F. Walsh, "The Devils of Hawthorne and Flannery O'Connor," Xavier University Studies, V (June, 1966), 121.

has a Ph. D. in philosophy and lives on her mother's farm. This young lady is extremely bitter and self-assured. Originally her name was Joy, but she changed it to Hulga in order to spite her mother: "Mrs. Hopewell was certain that she [Joy] had thought and thought until she had hit upon the ugliest name in any language."⁶³ Hulga stays at home, because she has a weak heart which prevents her from teaching at the university. Hopewell, her mother, as her name suggests, is inclined to optimism and a firm belief in "good country people," who in her view are the backbone of the country. Joy-Hulga has a wooden leg which she flaunts in the same manner as she does her name. But Joy-Hulga is undone by a Bible salesman (whom Joy's mother considers "good country people"). Joy-Hulga decides that the Bible salesman gives her the chance to prove the superiority of her atheism to Christianity, and she sets out to seduce him. But the salesman turns out to be worse than she is. Joy-Hulga is, at least, honest about her atheism; the salesman hides behind a mask of hypocrisy. As he is stealing her wooden leg, she asks him if he is not good country people, and he replies, "Yeah, . . . but it ain't held me back none. I'm as good as you any day of

⁶³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 246.

the week."⁶⁴ Tate writes that such characters as the Bible salesman move all of O'Connor's stories,⁶⁵

for although the surface action is naturalistic, it is impossible to determine why the action starts, unless one posits a non-rational (not-rational) principle of supernatural disorder underlying the movement towards the destruction of the central characters.⁶⁶

The salesman represents the supernatural which Joy-Hulga's rationalism rejects. Because he represents a power (supernatural evil) which Joy-Hulga does not recognize, the salesman is stronger than she is and mocks her. While the story appears to end with Joy-Hulga's defeat, there may be an indication that she now is receptive to divine grace; after the salesman has talked her into taking off her artificial leg, Joy-Hulga's attitude changes: "Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him. Her brain seemed to have stopped functioning altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good at."⁶⁷ Joy-Hulga's self-sufficiency has been wrecked by the salesman's theft of her leg, and there is the suggestion, not pursued, that now she will be open to divine grace.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 260.

⁶⁵Allen Tate, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 48.

⁶⁶Loc. cit.

⁶⁷O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 260.

Hence it is that those who insist that O'Connor's fiction is either meaninglessly Gothic or existentially absurd are incorrect. It has been seen that O'Connor uses elements of violence and grotesquery in dramatizing her Christian view of man as a sinner, rather than employing these elements for their own sake, or for the sake of expressing an existentialist view of the world. It becomes clear, then, that the basic conflict in her fiction is grounded in her concept of Christianity; and the violence of her fiction arises from her view of man's rejection of God Who pursues man with grace.

CHAPTER II

TIME AND WILL

My view of free will follows traditional Catholic teaching. I don't think any genuine novelist is interested in writing about a world of people who are strictly determined. Even if he writes about characters who are mostly unfree, it is the sudden free action, the open possibility, which he knows is the only thing capable of illuminating the picture and giving it life. So that while predictable predetermined actions have a comic interest for me, it is the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly, that I always have my eye on as the thing which will make the story work.

Flannery O'Connor,
"A Collection of Statements"

O'Connor's fiction exhibits two aspects by which God's pursuit of man is embodied; these are her attitude toward free-will, and her use of time and history as the means by which God confronts her characters. The emphasis which is made upon the necessity to choose or reject Christ has been commented upon earlier in this investigation. Nevertheless, one discusses again the theme of choice, or use of will, at this point, because it relates to O'Connor's use of time, as seen in Wise Blood. As the novel begins, Haze, recently discharged from the army, is on a train to Taulkinham, the city.

He has found his real home, the hamlet of Eastrod, Tennessee, completely deserted. O'Connor points out that in the army, he was "converted to nothing instead of to evil."⁶⁸ That is, he thinks he has found a way to avoid Jesus and sin at the same time:

"... 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."⁶⁹

Haze summarizes the modern secular case against Christianity in this sermon. But Haze had a grandfather who was a preacher who, as part of his sermon, would point to the boy and say that Jesus would never relent in His pursuit of the boy.⁷⁰ This pursuit is exactly what Haze is afraid of: that he will not be able to evade Jesus. Haze's preaching comes to an end when a policeman pushes Haze's old Essex over an embankment because he did not have a license. The loss of the automobile is, for him, the loss of the church:

Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees bent under him and he sat

⁶⁸O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 17.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 16.

down on the edge of the embankment with his feet hanging over.⁷¹

After being deprived of his automobile, Haze ceases blaspheming and sinning and mortifies his flesh, wearing barbed wire around his chest, rocks and broken glass in his shoes, and blinding himself with lime. His ascetic penance is a more strictly Catholic theme than is usually found in O'Connor's fiction. Gossett writes that Haze in his blindness faces God.⁷² Rechnitz observes that Haze is at last captured by Jesus, ". . . just as his grandfather prophesied he would be, years before."⁷³ In this way, will, or Haze's attempt to deny Christ, is linked to time manifest in the grandfather's prophecy. O'Connor says, in an introductory note to Wise Blood, that, for her, Haze's integrity lies in his inability to avoid Jesus.⁷⁴ In this novel, one sees, first, O'Connor's prophetic view of history in the grandfather's preaching that the boy would be unable to avoid Christ, and, secondly, O'Connor's view of freewill. In her note to Wise Blood, she writes, ". . . free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 113-114.

⁷²Gossett, op. cit., p. 90.

⁷³Rechnitz, op. cit., p. 316.

⁷⁴O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 8.

one man."⁷⁵ Hazel Motes has conflicting wills toward and away from Christ; and, for most of the novel, his will away from Christ dominates. At the end, however, his will toward Christ triumphs, and he takes up the penances which culminate in his death. Self-mutilation might not impress one as being particularly laudable; however, Gardiner quotes a statement of O'Connor's on the relationship of good and evil:

Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil, to look it in the face and find, as often as not, our own grinning reflections with which we do not argue, but good is another matter. Few have stared at that long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction.⁷⁶

In other words, in this fallen world, good appears grotesque and distorted, and, thus, what Haze does to himself, while it is assuredly violent, is not necessarily evil. In O'Connor's world, it may be the only way in which Haze can prepare himself for death. Some critics have misread this final section of the novel, particularly Haze's self-blinding, but Stelzmann points out that this act is a visible sign of Haze's acceptance of grace, not an indication of his further commitment to

⁷⁵Loc. cit.

⁷⁶Gardiner, op. cit., p. 188.

nihilism.⁷⁷

Another character in Wise Blood, Enoch Emery, hearing Haze call for a "new Jesus," supplies Haze with the "new Jesus," by stealing a mummy from the museum. In great anger, Haze hurls the mummy against the wall where its head bursts open and the "trash inside" sprays out.⁷⁸ The obvious suggestion is that Haze's preaching of the "Church without Christ" emanates from "trash" in the head. Rechnitz states that in the "new Jesus" Haze is confronted with the fact that the Church without Christ is based upon the worship of nothing.⁷⁹ Rechnitz further explains, however, that Haze's commitment has resulted in the creation of God in the "new Jesus."⁸⁰ But surely this observation is a misreading of the mummy's significance, which Rechnitz rightly observes and Haze rejects. The point would seem to be that man on his own can create nothing better than a dried up mummy, not that Haze has somehow "created God." Rechnitz is reading O'Connor as an existentialist, which approach

⁷⁷Rainulf A. Steltzmann, "Shock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories," Xavier University Studies, II (March, 1963), 14. See also, Sullivan, op. cit., p. 3; and Dowell, op. cit., p. 239.

⁷⁸O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 102.

⁷⁹Rechnitz, op. cit., p. 315.

⁸⁰Loc. cit.

is inappropriate, because as a Christian O'Connor is committed to an objective order created by God, not man. Rehnitz's maxim, "Sufficiently committed man can create God,"⁸¹ is really a reflection of the "adjustment to the modern world" which O'Connor scorned. Rehnitz reads Haze's self-blinding as an affirmation of humanity.⁸² But Steltzmann's view is surely just as reasonable: Haze's self-blinding is the visible sign of his acceptance (not creation) of grace.⁸³ As Hoffman observes, Haze cannot control his own destiny.⁸⁴ It is the attempt to control his own fate, to rely on his own efforts solely, that is, for Christianity, man's basic sin.

As a Christian, O'Connor viewed God as the Lord of history. Tarwater, in The Violent Bear It Away, has been taught about

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 Judgement.⁸⁵

⁸¹Loc. cit.

⁸²Loc. cit.

⁸³Cf. ante, note 40.

⁸⁴Frederick Hoffman, "The Search for Redemption," in The Added Dimension, p. 39.

⁸⁵O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 305.

Hence, both the Second Coming and Judgment Day exert their presence on O'Connor's fictional world. The concept of history presented to Tarwater definitely conceives of history as having been planned and ruled by God, and so, in O'Connor's fiction, history becomes one of the means by which God confronts man with judgment and redemption. One way in which she achieves this view is through her presentation of the conflict of one generation with another. A case in point is the story in her first collection, "A Late Encounter with the Enemy." Here, the effect of history on the protagonist is so strong that it is almost personified. The hero is General Tennessee Flintrock Sash, who lives with his granddaughter, Sally Poker Sash. Sally, who has been going to college for years, is finally ready to graduate. She wants her grandfather to be seated on the stage at her commencement and dreams of saying to the audience, "'See him! See him! My kin, all you upstarts! Glorious upright old man standing for all the old traditions!'"⁸⁶ Of course, General Sash is neither glorious nor upright—in fact, he does not remember the Civil War in which he was supposed to be, but probably was not, a general. The General ". . . didn't have any use for history

⁸⁶O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 234.

because he never expected to meet it again."⁸⁷ The General has been in parades and processions before and likes the attention which they afford him. Being the center of attention is the only reason that he will consent to appear at Sally's graduation. Because of his age (one hundred and four) he has to be taken onto the stage in a wheel-chair. Sally's nephew, John Wesley Poker Sash, who is to wheel the old man, is a Boy Scout and will wear his uniform, just as the old man will wear a Confederate general's uniform. As the long line of graduates winds into the auditorium under the hot sun, Sally spots John Wesley and the General at a coke machine and hurries them back stage. Once the ceremonies begin, there is some oration about the past: "'If we forget our past,' the speaker was saying, 'we won't remember our future and it will be as well for we won't have one.'"⁸⁸ This pseudo-rhetoric is the verbal equivalent of the old General's sitting in his wheel-chair mumbling to himself. He is irritated by the oration and the music that follows. He discovers that there is a hole in his head:

It was the slow black music that had put it there and though most of the music had stopped outside,

⁸⁷Loc. cit.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 240.

there was still a little of it in the hole . . .
letting the words he heard into the dark places of
his brain.⁸⁹

In other words, the "slow black music" has breached the old man's defenses against his past. As the graduates file onto the stage to receive their diplomas, the "black procession" becomes for him the past which he has avoided:

As the music swelled out toward him, the entire past opened up on him out of nowhere and he felt his body riddled in a hundred places with sharp stabs of pain Then suddenly he saw that the black procession was almost on him He made such a desperate effort to see over it and find out what comes after the past that his hand clenched the sword until the blade touched bone.⁹⁰

General Sash's attempt to forget and avoid the past, however, is futile and ends in his death. The General had not realized that something ". . . comes after the past," and it is this something, divine judgment, that makes his death more horrible. General Sash could not forget the past, because it was impossible for him not "to meet it again." The story ends with John Wesley, unaware that the old man is dead, "waiting now, with the corpse, in the long line at the Coca-Cola machine."⁹¹ Evidently, the Boy Scout will fare no better than

⁸⁹Loc. cit.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 241.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 242.

General Tennessee Blintrock Sash; John Wesley is interested only in his own comfort and does not pay enough attention to the old man even to realize that he is dead.

In an essay on the necessity of teaching fiction as a subject that has a history, O'Connor wrote, in answer to the argument that modern novels present the student with the realities of his own time and therefore are of more interest to him,

The fact that these works [non-modern novels] do not present him [the student] with the realities of his own time is all to the good. He is surrounded by the realities of his own time and he has no perspective whatever from which to view them.⁹²

O'Connor implies that true knowledge is based upon historical perspective, and she certainly discourages that idolization of the contemporaneous which is at the root of so many of her characters' sinfulness.

An example of her use of historical perspective as a means of knowledge, and, indeed, confrontation, occurs in her story, "Parker's Back," which appeared in the post-humous collection, Everything That Rises Must Converge. In the story, C. E. Parker has married a girl, Sarah Ruth, who does not approve of his tatoos. She insists that these are "vanity of vanities."⁹³

⁹²Flannery O'Connor, "A Subject with a History," in The Added Dimension, p. 266.

⁹³O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 229.

Things become worse and worse for Parker, and finally he decides to obtain another tatoo--this time, one which will please his wife. The tatoo artist gives Parker a book of reproductions from which he is to choose the picture of God for his new tatoo. The tatoo artist tells Parker that the up-to-date pictures are in the back of the book. Parker starts with them and works his way back into time. The first pictures are "reassuring," but the further back he goes, the less so the pictures become:

One showed a gaunt green dead face streaked with blood. One was yellow with sagging purple eyes. Parker's heart beat faster and faster until it appeared to be roaring inside him like a great generator.⁹⁴

In leafing backwards through the book, Parker leaves the modern, secular world in which he is insulated by custom and habit from the realities of judgment and redemption and is brought face to face with representations of these realities. Finally, he chooses a Byzantine Christ with "stern all-demanding eyes." Sarah Ruth considers the tatoo to be not only vanity but blasphemy, and drives him out of the house with a broom. But Parker has had his confrontation with the claims of divinity and ends up leaning against a tree,

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 234.

sobbing. The relationship of history to O'Connor's fictional world is perhaps best summarized by Drake:

Indeed, the world of Miss O'Connor's fiction seems to wait hourly for Judgment Day--or some new revelation or perhaps a transfiguration, in any case, some sign that the Almighty is still "in charge here."⁹⁵

This statement is clearly related to the Christian concept of God as the Lord and Judge of history, and, in each of O'Connor's stories, there is "some new revelation or . . . transfiguration" which affects one or more of the characters: history is a medium through which God confronts man.

O'Connor's view of free-will and her use of history having been investigated, it may be seen that she considers the problem of free-will to be a conflict between many wills in one man. In her fiction, the characters are under the necessity of deciding for or against Christ, and this necessity provides the conflict in her fiction. History is one of the means by which God confronts man; it has been shown that the attempt to deny the past leads to destruction. Also, her characters must have historical perspective to understand the human condition.

⁹⁵Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 18.

CHAPTER III

THE PEACOCK'S TAIL; CHARACTER AS PLACE

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

T. S. Eliot,
"The Hollow Men"

The corn was orient and immortal wheat,
which never should be reaped, nor was ever
sown. I thought it had stood from ever-
lasting to everlasting. The dust and stones
of the street were as precious gold; the gates
were at first the end of the world
Eternity was manifest in the light of the day,
and something infinite behind everything
appeared:

Thomas Traherne,
"Centuries of Meditations," III. 3.

In O'Connor's fiction, setting and place are very important: she used descriptions of place to show spiritual and psychological realities and to show the conflicts and changes in personality undergone by her characters as they react to God's pursuit. Two attitudes about the Christian view may be seen in her fiction: the Christian's attitude toward the world is double: first, the world was created by God and is, therefore, good and testifies to Him; secondly, this

world is fallen from grace and has come under the power of evil and is, therefore, in enmity to God. Furthermore, she makes a deliberate use of place--setting and objects--both to illuminate the inner states of her characters and to confront them with God. Quinn points out that her "country" is, explicitly or implicitly, sacramental.⁹⁶ In a book review, she wrote that the poet's attempt is to ". . . penetrate matter until spirit is revealed in it."⁹⁷ If spirit is to be revealed in matter, this certainly indicates that she did not intend for the country of her fiction to be purely naturalistic. Scott describes her use of mystery as an over-abundance of meaning, rather than an unknown quality.⁹⁸ This view of mystery means that O'Connor's use of the world as sign or symbol is the result of her thorough attention to reality. Gossett points out that O'Connor builds from "literal facts at the natural level."⁹⁹ O'Connor herself thinks,

the writer's vision is literal and not naturalistic. It is literal in the same sense that a child's

⁹⁶Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, "View from a Rock: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and J. F. Powers," Critique, II (Fall, 1958), 24.

⁹⁷Flannery O'Connor, "Review of The Phenomenon of Man," American Scholar, XXX (Fall, 1961), 618.

⁹⁸Scott, op. cit., p. 141.

⁹⁹Gossett, op. cit., p. 78.

drawing is literal. When a child draws he doesn't try to be grotesque but to set down exactly what he sees, and as his gaze is direct, he sees the lines that create motion. I am interested in the lines that create spiritual motion.¹⁰⁰

O'Connor obviously intends that the vision in her fiction be focused on spiritual events. One way in which she achieves this focus is to use a physical fact as the carrier of a spiritual fact. An obvious instance is the waterstain in "The Enduring Chill" which becomes the Holy Ghost descending on Asbury. Duhamel writes that in O'Connor's metaphors the ". . . specific contains under tension an analogous universal."¹⁰¹ Gossett points out that O'Connor uses natural objects and events to show man's inner tensions. Thus, any close reading of O'Connor's work should take its bearings from "the lines that create spiritual motion." There are several kinds of physical fact used by her in drawing these lines: physical deformity of the characters, objects associated with the characters, landscape as an analogue for spiritual reality, and, finally, "country" used to indicate a character's spiritual state. "Country" in O'Connor's fiction finally means something beyond locale,

¹⁰⁰Quoted in Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 79.

¹⁰¹P. Albert Duhamel, "The Novelist as Prophet," in The Added Dimension, p. 92.

setting, emblematic objects, or even a perception of the mystery of nature; in her fiction, all men are away from the "true country" which they enter only by faith.¹⁰²

Many of O'Connor's characters have some physical deformity. Joy-Hulga, in "Good Country People," discussed earlier, has a wooden leg which fascinates the Bible salesman. When he steals it from her, he deprives her of the self-assurance she has exhibited throughout the story. Thus, the leg suggests the artificiality of the ideas upon which she has based her life. Asbury's undulant fever, in "The Enduring Chill," is clearly related to his spiritual malady of artistic sterility. Rufus Johnson, the juvenile-delinquent protagonist of "The Lime Shell Enter First," has a club-foot. He is counseled by Sheppard, who is City Recreational Director and also counselor at the reformatory. Sheppard feels that Rufus' ". . . mischief was compensation for the foot."¹⁰³ Sheppard thinks that, if he can convince Rufus that the clubfoot is not a thing to be ashamed of, Rufus will not commit any more crimes. Rufus knows better; to Sheppard's statement, "You don't

¹⁰²Robert Fitzgerald, "The Countryside and the True Country," SewR, LXX (Summer, 1962), 394.

¹⁰³O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 149.

have to make up for that foot," he replies,

"Listen at him!" he screamed. "I lie and steal because I'm good at 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, not that"104

Rufus' deformity, then, is not an emblem of something which can be set right by human effort, but rather the spiritual deformity to which human nature is subject as a result of the fall. Sister Rose Alice says that O'Connor uses physical and mental deformity to symbolize her view of the human situation.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps, the most extreme example of physical deformity in O'Connor's work is the hermaphrodite in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost." It is interesting to note, particularly since this is one of her few stories dealing with Catholic characters, that this most extreme example of deformity is the occasion for complete acceptance of the deformity. The protagonist is a twelve year old girl whose family is visited by two fourteen-year-old girl cousins. This pair has been told at convent school that their bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. They think this statement extremely funny and call each other Temple One

¹⁰⁴Ibid., pp. 188-9.

¹⁰⁵Sister Rose Alice, "Flannery O'Connor: Poet to the Outcast," Renascence, XVI (Spring, 1964), 127. See also, Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 39.

and Temple Two. But the phrase pleases the little girl when she hears it, and she feels as though she has been given a present.¹⁰⁶ The two older girls go to a fair where one of the sideshows is a hermaphrodite who states, "God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you the same way."¹⁰⁷ The child does not understand her cousins' account of this, but she associates the freak's acceptance of deformity with the description of her body as a temple of the Holy Ghost, and this association prepares the way for her new spiritual insight. During Mass, when the priest elevates the host, she remembers the hermaphrodite's phrase and, thus, connects acceptance of God's will with the passion of Christ.¹⁰⁸ The motif is brought to completion in the last sentence of the story:

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.¹⁰⁹

As Hoffman points out, this image heightens the hermaphrodite's acceptance of deformity.¹¹⁰ But, even more,

¹⁰⁶O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 185.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 194.

¹¹⁰Hoffman, op. cit., p. 37.

it shows how the world has become sanctified for the child through the acceptance learned from the freak's example; for her, as for Traherne, "Eternity was manifest in the light of the day" The world points beyond itself; the "red clay road hanging over the trees" is the path to the presence of God.

Friedman discusses O'Connor's use of objects associated with a character to portray psychological actions.¹¹¹ He points out Hazel Motes, in Wise Blood, as the best example.¹¹² Haze's dependence on the old Essex from which he preaches is clearly an analogue for his spiritual state. When his car is destroyed, he is no longer able to preach his anti-gospel, but turns to mortification and penitence. Rufus Johnson, in "The Lame Shall Enter First," clings to his old prosthetic shoe and rejects the new one which Sheppard buys in hopes of changing Rufus's attitude. Rufus obviously identifies his old, wornout shoe with his spiritual state, and the new shoe with the state to which Sheppard attempts to convert him. In The Violent Bear It Away, Rayber, the materialist uncle, wears a hearing aid.

¹¹¹Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," in The Added Dimension, pp. 196-206. See also, Irvin Malin, op. cit., p. 114; Gossett, op. cit., pp. 84;85.

¹¹²Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," in The Added Dimension, p. 200.

Tarwater, the boy prophet, pours his scorn on this device: "What you wired for?" he drawled, "Does your head light up?"¹¹³ Tarwater is implying that Rayber is already less than human, the result to be expected from Rayber's materialistic philosophy.

O'Connor's use of place extended to her concept of region. The present author will next investigate this concept. As she wrote, "To know one's self is to know one's region."¹¹⁴ Her region was the American South, which is embodied in her writings in all of its peculiar rhythms of speech, thought and action. Ihab Hassan characterizes the South as opposites held in tension:

The South, of course, is a place where the dialectic of innocence and guilt, communion and estrangement, primitivism and ceremony, can be clearly observed; it is a place where the Protestant mind and the folk spirit have not succumbed entirely to business ethics or urban impersonality.¹¹⁵

This "dialectic" often is used in O'Connor's work as a means of establishing a tension between city and country, although, as Drake shows, there is no "Eden-Sodom"

¹¹³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 366.

¹¹⁴Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel, p. 163.

¹¹⁵Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 79. See also, Duhamel, "Flannery O'Connor's Violent View of Reality," The Catholic World, CXC (February, 1960), 281.

dichotomy of country and city in her work.¹¹⁶ What often happens in O'Connor's fiction is that the "good country people" go to the city and are confronted with alienation and impersonality. Enoch Emory in Wise Blood, for instance, goes to Maulkinham and makes no friends and finds no fulfillment until he attaches himself to the fanatic Hazel Motes. Enoch steals a gorilla suit, and after he has donned it,

No gorilla in existence, whether in the jungles of Africa or California, or in New York City in the finest apartment in the world, was happier at that moment than this one, whose god had finally rewarded it.¹¹⁷

This donning of a gorilla suit may be intended to suggest the Christian concept of having "put on the new man" (Col. 3:10.) Enoch has succumbed to urban impersonality and undergoes a kind of reverse evolution. The god which has rewarded Enoch is the dessicated mummy stolen from the museum and presented to Haze. Also, in this scene, California and "the finest apartment" are equated with Africa as likely haunts of gorillas, suggesting that even in the heart of a city, man has not escaped his essential nature, no matter how many layers of civilization there are on the old Adam,

¹¹⁶ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 108.

who is disobedient to God.¹¹⁸

O'Connor's use of region involves another dialectic of opposites in tension. Drake comments on how certain O'Connor characters look upon nature as something to be exploited: "To them, it may be just one more commodity; it certainly holds no particular mystery for them."¹¹⁹ So that, as well as the urban-rural tension, there is in her work a tension between nature as commodity and nature as mystery. O'Connor writes,

"country" suggests everything from the actual countryside that the novelist describes on, to, and through the particular characteristics of his region and his nation, and on, through, and under all of these to his true country, which the writer with Christian convictions will consider to be what is eternal and absolute.¹²⁰

These levels of meaning are present for the "country" in any of O'Connor's fiction. Beginning with the "actual countryside," she constructs her stories in such a way that at last the "true country" of the characters is made plain. Of course, they do not all enter their true country, but most of them apprehend it, at least

¹¹⁸ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 19. See also, Gossett, op. cit., p. 79.

¹¹⁹ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 40.

¹²⁰ O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel, p. 158.

negatively. A story which illustrates this, as well as what has just been said about the double view of nature as mystery and commodity, is "A View of the Woods." This story deals with old Mr. Fortune and his granddaughter, Mary Fortune Pitts. The old man owns a great deal of land on which Mary Fortune and her family live at his mercy. Mr. Fortune despises the Pitts, but he thinks that the child has his blood and will follow in his footsteps. Mr. Fortune is slowly selling his land, to the discomfort of all the Pitts, except Mary Fortune. The old man says of his son-in-law, "'Any fool that would let a cow pasture interfere with progress is not on my books."¹²¹ Of course, progress includes more wealth for Mr. Fortune. The one disturbing element in his granddaughter is the fact that she allows her father to beat her without resisting, and, in fact, she will never admit to the old man that her father has beat her. He can not understand this submission, because, "It was as if it were he that Pitts was driving down the road to beat and it was as if he were the one submitting to it."¹²² The crisis of the story occurs when Mr. Fortune decides to sell the lot in front of the house as a site

¹²¹O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 55.

¹²²Ibid., pp. 61-62.

for a gas station. All the Pitts, including Mary Fortune, oppose this:

"We won't be able to see the woods across the road," she said.

The old man stared at her. "The woods across the road?" he repeated.

"We won't be able to see the view," she said.

"The view?" he repeated.

"The woods," she said; "we won't be able to see the woods from the porch."

"The woods from the porch?" he repeated.¹²³

The old man does not understand, because he can not perceive the mystery inherent in the woods across the road; all he can see in nature is something to be bought and sold for a profit. Mr. Fortune attempts to bribe Mary Fortune, but he does not succeed. At last, on the way home from town, he decides to beat her after she has thrown a pop bottle at him for selling the lot. But Mary Fortune fights back, which is not what he expected, and in the struggle, Mr. Fortune kills her.¹²⁴ The old man sinks back against the trunk of one of the pines which run down to the lake shore, and his heart expands so that he feels it is pulling him toward the water:

. . . suddenly the whole lake opened up before him, riding majestically in little corrugated folds toward his feet. He realized suddenly that he could not swim and that he had not bought the

¹²³Ibid., p. 63.

¹²⁴Loc. cit.

boat.¹²⁵

Water (the lake) may be taken in this context to suggest not only the transitional element between life and death,¹²⁶ but also that mystery¹²⁷ to which the old man has been blind all his life. As he faces the crossing of the waters of death, Mr. Fortune realizes that he can not swim, that is, that he can not overcome death by himself; and he realizes further that he has not bought the boat, that is, he has not found the grace which would enable him to cross over the waters to a new life. Mr. Fortune's final state is likened to a bulldozer:

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.¹²⁸

Mr. Fortune has become in death like the machines to which he sacrificed nature. If, as seems likely, Mr. Fortune's "true country" is a Dantean Inferno, perhaps his eternal occupation will be gorging himself on red clay and spitting it up with "a deep sustained

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 81.

¹²⁶J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 236.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 345.

¹²⁸O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 81.

nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion"129

O'Connor has commented that,

Art requires a delicate adjustment of the outer and inner worlds in such a way that, without changing their nature, they can be seen through each other.¹³⁰

This adjustment is precisely what occurs in a passage such as the one just quoted from "A View of the Woods." It involves what she has elsewhere called "a descent through the darkness of the familiar . . . ,"¹³¹ that is, a passage into the mystery which she felt behind the world at every point.

The fullest development of the "country" motif is the concept of man as a displaced person who can only return home by God's grace.¹³² A long story in O'Connor's first collection is entitled "The Displaced Person." Here, Mrs. McIntyre is a widow running a farm by herself. She is one of the people who see nature as a commodity, not a mystery. Her hired help are the Shortleys and two Negroes, but she is convinced by a priest that she must add a Polish refugee, the displaced

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 55.

¹³⁰O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel, p. 163.

¹³¹O'Connor, "A Lecture," in The Added Dimension, p. 279.

¹³²Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 28.

person, to the number. The Pole, Mr. Guizac, turns out to be a very hard and efficient laborer, putting both the Negroes and the Shortleys to shame. Mrs. Shortley collects her family and flees, dying enroute. Then, Mrs. McIntyre discovers that Guizac has arranged for the young Negro, a halfwit, to marry his cousin in Poland. This is an attempt to enable the girls to enter the United States. Mrs. McIntyre, of course, is shocked. Guizac is killed accidentally, and after that the farm goes to pieces, and Mrs. McIntyre, in poor health, is left with no one but the priest who is attempting to convert her. This brief summary of the plot does not suggest any idea of the theme or meaning of the story, however. Fitzgerald has written an article in answer to a Time reviewer who thought the story was somehow about the degeneracy of the South, or a satire on farm conditions.¹³³ Fitzgerald, nevertheless, points out that most of O'Connor's characters are displaced, not regionally, but spiritually.¹³⁴ One major element in the story is the unfolding portrayal of the characters as being displaced from their "true country." The story is divided into two sections, the first dealing

¹³³Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 381.

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 394.

with Mrs. Shortley, and the second with Mrs. McIntyre. Sister Joselyn, points out that the story deals with divine charity and the Incarnation,¹³⁵ and she sees the halves of the story united by Mr. Guizac and the peacock as analogues of Christ.¹³⁶ The main point of Joselyn's article is twofold: First, Guizac and the peacock form centers of definition for the other characters.¹³⁷ She writes,

As each major character defines himself in relationship to Mr. Guizac, so that character defines himself in relation to Christ. "As long as you did not do it for one of these least ones"¹³⁸

Thus, both Guizac and the peacock become means by which Christ confronts man. Secondly, the peacock becomes a particularly definite emblem of Christ. Sister Joselyn develops this point thoroughly, but most particularly in reference to a scene involving the priest.¹³⁹ This particular peacock is the last of those owned by Mrs. McIntyre's late husband, "the Judge." She detests the birds and has let them die off. The priest, however,

¹³⁵Sister M. Joselyn, "Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person,'" Studies in Short Fiction, I (Winter, 1964), 85.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 87.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 86.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 87.

¹³⁹Loc. cit.

is fascinated by it. Mrs. McIntyre and the priest are conversing when the peacock spreads his tail:

Tiers of small pregnant suns floated in a green-gold haze over his head. The priest stood transfixed, his jaw slack . . . "Christ will come like that!" he said in a loud gay voice and wiped his hand over his mouth and stood there, gaping.¹⁴⁰

The action has quite the opposite effect on Mrs.

McIntyre: "Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother."¹⁴¹ Mrs. McIntyre does not feel a need for supernaturalism: "That man is my salvation!"¹⁴² She feels that she can rely on the hired help.

The priest breaks a modern taboo by mentioning Christ in a conversation about Mr. Guizac. Mrs. McIntyre continues the conversation from that point, "'Mr. Guizac didn't have to come here in the first place,'"¹⁴³ but the priest seems not to hear:

"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.¹⁴⁴

The peacock has set the priest's mind on Christ, and he

¹⁴⁰O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 291.

¹⁴¹Loc. cit.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁴⁴Loc. cit.

misunderstands Mrs. McIntyre's reference to Guizac. Later, Mrs. McIntyre makes her attitude toward Christ absolutely clear, "'As far as I'm concerned,' she said and glared at him fiercely, 'Christ was just another D. P.'"¹⁴⁵ Mrs. McIntyre finally realizes that she, too, is displaced. At the end of the story, Guizac has been accidentally killed:

She felt 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 the ambulance.¹⁴⁶

The last paragraph tells of her subsequent loss of the farm and her health until at the end there is only the priest who comes to talk to her. But her realization of her displacement, her estrangement, may be the beginning of her wisdom. She loses all her worldly goods but has a chance to obtain something better.

Mrs. Shortley also comes to an awareness that she has been displaced. The first section of the story is concerned with Mrs. Shortley, who is introduced as "the giant wife of the countryside, . . ."¹⁴⁷ She is followed by the peacock, whose "reed-like neck was

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 262.

drawn back as if his attention were fixed in the distance on something no one else could see."¹⁴⁸ The peacock has been shown as an analogue of Christ by Joselyn, and Fitzgerald writes,

An unpredictable splendor, a map of the universe, doted upon by the priest, barely seen by everyone else: this is a metaphor, surely, for God's order and God's grace.¹⁴⁹

In other words, the peacock is a sort of map of the country of God's grace from which all of the characters, whether or not they are aware of it, are displaced. The peacock is described in these terms when he has jumped into a tree before Mrs. Shortley:

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.¹⁵⁰

Mrs. Shortley, that is, does not perceive God's grace because of her preoccupation with herself. She dislikes and suspects Mr. Guizac from the moment he arrives. After all, she reasons, the Pole is from Europe, where "They never have advanced or reformed."¹⁵¹ At last, because of Guizac's efficiency, Mrs. McIntyre decides

¹⁴⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁹ Fitzgerald, op. cit., p. 388.

¹⁵⁰ O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 267.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 273.

to let the Shortley's go. Mrs. Shortley discovers this and forces her husband and two daughters to pack to leave overnight in order to escape the disgrace of being fired. They leave the farm just at sunrise. Her daughters and husband ask her where they are going, but she does not answer; she is undergoing a new experience:

Fierce heat seemed to be swelling slowly and fully into her face as if it were welling up now for a final assault. She was sitting in an erect way in spite of the fact that one leg was twisted under her and one knee was almost into her neck, but 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.¹⁵²

Mrs. Shortley then is convulsed and becomes still. Her family does not know what is wrong with her, for "They didn't know that she had had a great experience or ever been displaced in the world from all that belonged to her."¹⁵³ But Mrs. Shortley does realize her displacement now, as she lies dying: ". . . her eyes like blue-painted glass, seemed to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country."¹⁵⁴ So, the displaced person of the title is not just Guizac, but, in a deep sense, Everyman. Some of her characters reach, as Mrs. Shortley does, a realization of their

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 279.

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 280.

¹⁵⁴Loc. cit.

displacement, but all of O'Connor's characters are displaced, as Jacobson points out.¹⁵⁵ O'Connor uses a very concrete type of symbolism in which the universal theme of the story arises from a close attention to details of time and place.¹⁵⁶ God, in her fiction, confronts man through place; in this way, then, O'Connor is able to use place, country, to portray the souls of her characters, and at last to show the country of God's grace from which all men are displaced.

¹⁵⁵Jacobsen, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁵⁶Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor: A Note on Literary Fashions," Critique, II (Fall, 1958), 18.

CHAPTER IV

"THE ROOTS OF THE EYE ARE IN THE HEART."

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints

Ephesians 1:18.

The Christian novelist's 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 to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind, you draw large and startling figures.

Flannery O'Connor,

"The Fiction Writer and His Country"

The spiritual sight of O'Connor's characters is often portrayed through their physical sight. By descriptions of the characters' eyes and what they see, she dramatizes the spiritual conflict which arises from God's pursuit of man. It is necessary to look at the techniques which she used to embody her theme. O'Connor's Christian vision, as has been pointed out, determines her fictional vision; she has said, "True prophecy in the novelist's case is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meanings and thus

of seeing far things close up."¹⁵⁷ Her fictional intent, then, goes beyond a naturalistic or realistic attempt to portray a world that might be recorded by camera and tape recorder. O'Connor points out, that as a Christian in twentieth-century America, she cannot assume that her audience shares her beliefs, and concludes that she must make her ". . . vision apparent by shock--to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures."¹⁵⁸ This statement goes far to explain her use of distorted and violent characters. Friedman thinks that "she transposes rather than reproduces reality."¹⁵⁹ In this transposition, however, she does not resort to "experimental" syntax or form, and, indeed, she has said, "So-called experimental fiction always bores me. If it looks peculiar I don't read it."¹⁶⁰ Gossett, commenting on O'Connor's tone, writes,

The flat tone reflects a finely balanced objectivity which is never blurred by the woes of the

¹⁵⁷ Flannery O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 252.

¹⁵⁸ O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel, p. 163.

¹⁵⁹ Milton J. Friedman, "Introduction," in The Added Dimension, p. 11.

¹⁶⁰ O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 259.

characters. They ask for sympathy and receive justice.¹⁶¹

The "flat tone" helps engender irony, such as that observed in the passage cited above from "The Enduring Chill." Asbury had asked for sympathy, from his mother, sister, the Negroes, and the priest; what Asbury gets is both justice and mercy as a result of the ironic undulant fever and the descent of the "implacable" spirit. One should not construe the comment on transposition of reality, however, to mean that her work is disconnected from reality. Hart writes,

The outstanding virtue of Flannery O'Connor's work, the one which shows her real promise to the literary world . . . is the strong sense of red clay reality underlying and reinforcing all her work.¹⁶²

One has attempted so far to show how O'Connor's "red clay reality," her use of location and place, is turned to the task of portraying the spiritual movements of her characters. It has been shown that her theme is God's confrontation of man; one contends, therefore, that one way in which she shows this confrontation is through the locales of her fiction.

It has been said that the form of O'Connor's

¹⁶¹Gossett, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁶²Jane Hart, "Strange Earth, the Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Georgia Review, XII (Summer, 1958), 216.

fiction is neither naturalistic realism nor experimentalism. Actually, her genre seems to be a special type of allegory. She said, "The South is still the Bible Belt. The Bible makes the absolute concrete; the story writer also tries to make something concrete."¹⁶³

What she tries to make concrete is spiritual drama.

Gordon says that her principle of fiction is

. . . the fact that any good story, no matter when it was written or in what language, or what its ostensible subject matter, shows both natural and supernatural grace operating in the lives of human beings.¹⁶⁴

Gordon's view indicates that, for O'Connor, the aim of fiction is more than the reproduction of a social reality. Peden writes,

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 as 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.¹⁶⁵

This statement points out two linked facets of O'Connor's fiction: first, her allegorical and moral intent; secondly, her ability to create a solid location

¹⁶³O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 240.

¹⁶⁴Caroline Gordon, "An American Girl," in The Added Dimension, p. 128.

¹⁶⁵Peden, op. cit., p. 129.

for the action of her stories. In "The Enduring Chill," alluded to above, the walls of Asbury's room have been discolored by water stains. Some of these are "long icicle shapes," but "another leak had made a fierce bird with spread wings He had often had the illusion that it was in motion and about to descend mysteriously" ¹⁶⁶ It is this water stain which becomes the vehicle for her depiction of the descent of the Holy Spirit which climaxes the story:

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. ¹⁶⁷

The stain becomes the physical analogy for the Spirit's descent upon the "frail, racked, but enduring" Asbury. As Duhamel says, "Her metaphors are constantly of a kind wherein the vehicle sustains the interest in the particular whereas the tenor suggests the universal." ¹⁶⁸ Concerning O'Connor's over-all technique, Hart has written,

Flannery O'Connor follows rather closely Edgar Allen Poe's definition and dictates on the short

¹⁶⁶ O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 93.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁶⁸ Duhamel, "The Novelist as Prophet," in The Added Dimension, p. 102.

story. There is unification of plot, setting, and time, and one mood does seem to prevail throughout a story.¹⁶⁹

Many of her stories occur in a twenty-four hour period or less; for example, "The Artificial Nigger," "Judgment Day," "Revelation," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge." In others she takes longer, but her chronological progression is almost always uniformly straightforward, with some use of flash-back, as in "The Enduring Chill." Another aspect of her form is commented on by Tate:

Her stories exhibit, either in the title or in the situation out of which the action begins, a moral platitude: . . . the climax of the story explodes the platitude. The characters speak nothing but platitudes, and when evil has done its work with the platitudes the result is a powerful irony which, though credely violent, is inherent in the situation, not laid on as commentary by the author.¹⁷⁰

This view may be amply illustrated; its interest at this point is the remark about the "powerful irony" which results from the explosion of the platitude at the story's climax. The change, or conversion, undergone by O'Connor's characters is ironically humorous because of the distance, noted in the case of "The Enduring Chill," which has been discovered between the

¹⁶⁹Hart, op. cit., p. 221.

¹⁷⁰Tate, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

characters' illusions and reality. Gossett writes, of these perverse characters,

They cannot be turned into order by mere reversal but must undergo transformation Thus the irony which she practices is that of paradox rather than simple contradiction.¹⁷¹

O'Connor's characters, then, are involved in situations that involve more than just the illumination of their absurdity. Her people are laid open to the innermost core of their being: Asbury realizes not only the ridiculousness of his posturing, but is purged by the "enduring chill" of the Spirit's descent, and he will be remade during the length of the "frail, racked, but enduring . . ." existence left to him. These paradoxes and ironies are the culmination of O'Connor's use of the particular, of character or setting, to suggest the universal. This is the basis of her allegory.

McCown comments,

The precise difficulty lies in the fact that, although Miss O'Connor's characters fulfill complex allegorical functions, they are in their own right so passionately alive . . . that their allegorical or symbolic meaning is lost sight of.¹⁷²

This study contends, on the contrary, that in the bulk of her work, O'Connor fuses her symbolic intentions

¹⁷¹Gossett, op. cit., p. 80.

¹⁷²Robert M. McCown, "The Education of a Prophet: A Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine, (1962), p. 73.

with the passionate portrayal of her characters in such a way that they can not be separated, and that failure to see her symbolic intent will make the action seem gratuitous. Peden states,

Like Dickens and Faulkner, the best "New Gothic" writers tend to employ physical abnormality, exaggeration, and caricature to suggest the inner nature of a character or to indicate the essence of an individual who embodies universal traits and qualities.¹⁷³

This is the use, already commented upon, of the particular as a vehicle for the universal. In "The Enduring Chill," the priest whom Asbury has sent for is half blind and half deaf. The priest's frailty serves simply to make him more terrible to Asbury. When the priest is talking to Asbury, "his one fierce eye inflamed," and Asbury squirms "as if he were pinned to the bed by the terrible eye."¹⁷⁴ In this confrontation, the priest's one eye suddenly focuses on Asbury with much more than the displeasure of the old priest; Asbury is confronted by Jesus Whom he has been evading, but Who will have him in the end.

The visual sense is very important in O'Connor's fiction. Many of her characters reach the climax of

¹⁷³Peden, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁷⁴O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 107.

their avoidance of Christ, as does Asbury, through some sight or vision. As Drake states, that in O'Connor's fiction physical sight often symbolizes spiritual vision.¹⁷⁵ This motif is proper to O'Connor's theme, the confrontation of man and Christ in the world.¹⁷⁶ Duhamel points out that the novelist's vision must be double, keeping in simultaneous focus the particular and the universal.¹⁷⁷ In her fiction, O'Connor has several types of vision. First of all, there is her (the writer's) vision, which forms and underlies the whole story. This vision becomes embodied in her narrator, who is almost invariably one of the selective omniscient type. Secondly, there are the visions which her characters see, or, the spiritual sight which they exercise. Thirdly, there is O'Connor's concentration on the characters' eyes as a means of description and dramatization. Mayhew has pointed out that, in O'Connor's fiction, the characters' eyes symbolize their "fearful vision,"¹⁷⁸ a use which touches on the question of

¹⁷⁵ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 28.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ Duhamel, "The Novelist as Prophet," in The Added Dimension, p. 90.

¹⁷⁸ Rev. Leonard F. X. Mayhew, "Flannery O'Connor-- A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 34-36.

technique. O'Connor's stories are told in a straightforward style, the violence and grotesquery of her work being all on the level of plot, character and setting, rather than on a syntactical level. Her remark that experimental fiction bored her¹⁷⁹ makes it easy to see that the peculiar qualities of fiction are engendered more on the level of theme and plot than that of style. To show the operation of vision in her work at a technical level, it is necessary to recall the vision which underlies and informs her work at the thematic level. Drake points out that behind her grotesquery lies a concept of straightness, that is, her Christian faith,¹⁸⁰ so that her characters are haunted by a vision of underlying "straightness" which is negatively shown in the violence of the events and scene of their lives.

Hawkes writes,

The constructed vision, the excitement of the undersea life of the inner man, a language appropriate to the delicate malicious knowledge of us all as poor, forked, corruptible, the feeling of pleasure and pain that comes when something pure and contemptible lodges in the imagination--I believe in the "singular and terrible" attraction of all this.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹See note 160 above.

¹⁸⁰Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 23.

¹⁸¹John Hawkes, "Notes on the Wild Goose Chase," Massachusetts Review, III (Summer, 1962), 788.

Much of the beauty of O'Connor's fiction is precisely to portray "the undersea life of the inner man," and she does this portrayal through "objective" means, that is, through action and setting, rather than through "stream-of-consciousness" technique. As Friedman shows, her one "twentieth-century" technique is her indirect interior monologue which preserves objectivity in its syntax.¹⁸² This technique may be illustrated in any of the fiction so far presented in this study, but perhaps the best example is from "A Late Encounter With the Enemy," for much of this story is told in indirect interior monologue, particularly the last scene, in which the black procession of the past overwhelms the old general on the commencement stage. To convey an extended idea of the effect which O'Connor obtains with this technique, one must reproduce an entire paragraph:

He was considerably irked by the hole in his head. He had not expected to have a hole in his head at this event. It was the slow black music that had put it there and though most of the music had stopped outside, there was still a little of it in the hole, going deeper and moving around in his thoughts, letting the words he heard into the dark places of his brain. He heard the words, Chickamauga, Shiloh, Johnston, Lee, and he knew he was inspiring all these words that meant nothing to him. He wondered if he had been a general at Chickamauga or at Lee. Then he tried to see himself and the horse mounted in the middle of a float

¹⁸² Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," in The Added Dimension, p. 196.

full of pretty girls, being driven slowly through downtown Atlanta. Instead, the old words began to stir in his head as if they were trying to wrench themselves out of place and come to life.¹⁸³

This "constructed vision" allows the reader to observe the spiritual drama which the old man is suffering, but the third person narration preserves a sense of objectivity which encourages the reader to consider the description as authoritative. The spiritual experience is communicated through common language: the "hole in his head" is not a literal hole, but a breach in the general's self-will which has been somehow effected by the "slow black music" The music and words stir him, stir his memories and do not allow him to focus his thoughts on the fallacies with which he has corrupted himself; the pretty girls and the attention which the old man desires are no match for a reviving past. The basis of this technique, as O'Connor uses it, is the treatment of intangibles as though they were concrete matters, enabling her to render a concept of spiritual experience very directly and clearly. Her bare, sparse syntax underscores the objectivity which she seeks to obtain, and thus leads to a method of understatement in portraying the inner life of her characters. Duhamel observes, ". . . she wants to make

¹⁸³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 240-41.

her readers see to the essence of things, not to stop at the outside."¹⁸⁴ To accomplish this penetration, she uses metaphors which combine the universal and the particular, the concrete and the spiritual. General Sash's experience is presented in the kinesthetic image of having an opening made in his head by the music which then enters and revives the past in the words which "wrench themselves out of place and come to life." In this way, O'Connor is able to dramatize the crumbling of the old man's defenses against anything other than himself--which are, ultimately, his defences against God.

In another of the stories in her first collection, O'Connor makes extensive use of visual motifs, relying on what the characters see to show the reader what they feel. This story, "The Artificial Nigger," begins with a scene in which the reader is introduced to the theme of artifice and naturalness, reality and illusion, through the scene that Mr. Head sees as he wakes before daybreak. The moon is reflected in the old man's shaving mirror, and from this position, the reflection observes the reality:

¹⁸⁴Duhamel, "Flannery O'Connor's Violent View of Reality," The Catholic world, CXC (February, 1960), 282.

It gazed across the room and out the window where it floated over the horse stall and appeared to contemplate itself with the look of a young man who sees his old age before him.¹⁸⁵

This reversal, in which the illusion becomes the reality, sets the tone for the story involving a denial of reality by Mr. Head, and a subsequent deeper apprehension of it. O'Connor uses the motif of visual confrontation to state the theme of illusion and reality. As the moon is like a young man "seeing his old age before him," so is the story itself to be concerned with the relationships between youth and age. Mr. Head lives with his young grandson, Nelson, and the story deals with their relations as elder and younger, as guide and traveller. They are, in fact, compared to Vergil and Dante, or Raphael and Tobias. Mr. Head suffers from a spiritual malady which torments many of O'Connor's characters: ". . . his physical reactions, like his moral ones, were guided by his will and strong character, and these could be seen plainly in his features."¹⁸⁶ Mr. Head is self-sufficient; but the course of the story brings him to a realization of his insufficiency. He and Nelson make a trip to the city where Nelson was born, although he has lived in the country ever since

¹⁸⁵O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 195.

¹⁸⁶Loc. cit.

he was an infant. Nelson's main interest in the trip is the fact that he has never seen a Negro. On the train to the city, a Negro walks through their car, but Nelson does not recognize him as a Negro. Asked what kind of man that was;

"A fat man," Nelson said. He was beginning to feel that he had better be cautious.

"You don't know what kind?" Mr. Head said in a final tone.

"An old man," the boy said and had a sudden foreboding that he was not going to enjoy the day.

"That was a nigger," Mr. head said and sat back.¹⁸⁷

Nelson is put out by his inability to recognize a Negro, and accuses Mr. Head of misleading him by telling him that Negroes are black, when this man was tan. But on the journey, Nelson becomes aware that he is dependent on his grandfather, who keeps him from getting off at the wrong stop and knows many other things necessary to survival in the city. After reaching the city, the old man and the boy meander through it, and Nelson is now horrified, rather than proud, of having been born here. Mr. Head explains the sewer system to Nelson, and to Nelson it seems "the entrance to hell . . ." and he knows "for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts."¹⁸⁸ Finally, the two get lost in

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 204.

the Negro district, and it is a frightened Nelson who asks directions. After they get out of the Negro district, Nelson goes to sleep on the pavement, and Mr. Head hides from him. Waking up, Nelson thinks he has been abandoned and dashes down the street, running into a woman, knocking her down. In the argument and accusations which follow, Mr. Head disowns Nelson, "'This is not my boy,' he said. 'I never seen him before.'"¹⁸⁹ The denial outrages Nelson, shames Mr. Head, and prepares them for the climax. Mr. Head's "will and strong character" have failed him, and he is now open to the workings of grace, which occurs through a visual confrontation: the two see a plaster Negro on one of the lawns which they pass. Mr. Head's state at this point is summed up by Gossett,

Mr. Head shudders at the black future which faces him. His alienation from Nelson is an analogy for the abandoned condition of man and provides the occasion for an act of mercy.¹⁹⁰

The artificial Negro, which Mr. Head and Nelson confront, is a sort of emblem for the human condition:

It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either. He was meant to look happy because his mouth was stretched up at the

¹⁸⁹Ibid., p. 209.

¹⁹⁰Gossett, op. cit., p. 88.

corners but the chipped eye and the angle he was cocked at gave him a wild look of misery instead.¹⁹¹

Confrontation with this plaster emblem of human misery draws Nelson and Mr. Head once more together; the plaster Negro's "wild look of misery" is a reflection of their own condition, whether they are young or old: "Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man."¹⁹² Misery binds all men, and their unity is reflected, also, in the image of the moon that sees its reflection "with the look of a young man who sees his old age before him." Nelson and Mr. Head now find their train home and escape the city, which, confronting them with a vision of hell, has brought them closer together, and has given Mr. Head a vision of mercy which he lacked before. As Duhamel writes, there is no vision without passion,¹⁹³ and this connection of suffering with vision has made it necessary for Mr. Head and Nelson to suffer in the city; as the New Testament shows, "whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it." (Luke 9:24.) Friedman quotes Mircea Eliade as follows:

¹⁹¹O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 212.

¹⁹²Loc. cit.

¹⁹³Duhamel, "The Novelist as Prophet," in The Added Dimension, p. 103.

In other words, for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.¹⁹⁴

According to this view, then, Nelson's and Mr. Head's confrontation with the artificial Negro leads to a confrontation with the sacred, which is only possible through the fact of Mr. Head's self-reliance having been broken down in his experience in the city. What has happened in the city also gives a sort of renewal to Mr. Head's home: The two arrive at their home stop,

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 protecting walls of a garden, were darker than the sky which was hung with gigantic white clouds illuminated like lanterns.¹⁹⁵

In view of the extensive use which O'Connor makes of violence and the grotesque to convey her vision, and in view of the critical emphasis which she places upon these elements, it is necessary at least to point out that such moments as the one cited do occur, however rarely, in her fiction. The world, here, as evidently undergone a restoration parallel to Mr. Head's. It

¹⁹⁴Quoted in Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," in The Added Dimension, pp. 199-200.

¹⁹⁵O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 213.

will be remembered that there is some parallel drawn between Mr. Head and the moon in the first of the story wherein the moon observes its reflection in the old man's shaving mirror, and that this image is repeated when Mr. Head and Nelson confront the artificial Negro. Drake has called this type of description O'Connor's "thoroughly sacramental" view of man and nature.¹⁹⁶ But it needs to be said that not only is this a sacramental vision of a restored nature into which Mr. Head steps, but so is the confrontation of grace in such objects as the "artificial nigger," because by this confrontation grace is administered. Another example is when Asbury Fox receives a vision of grace through the waterstain on his ceiling, thus making the stain sacramental.

O'Connor's use of eyes as a method of characterization may best be approached by a brief consideration of a story already discussed. "Parker's Back," as one recalls, this story in her last collection, deals with a man who has married a woman who considers his many tattoos idolatrous. To placate her, he has a new tattoo applied to his back, one of a Byzantine head of Christ. It is the eyes that attract Parker to this particular

¹⁹⁶ Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p. 42.

head:

He flipped the pages quickly, feeling that when he reached the one ordained, a sign would come. he continued to flip through until he had almost reached the front of the book. On one of the pages a pair of eyes glanced at him swiftly.¹⁹⁷

It is characteristic of O'Connor's fiction that Parker receives his sign from the eyes. Parker flips past this picture, but turns back to it and finds it is "the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes."¹⁹⁸ This is, truly, the Christ, who demands that his followers take up their cross and follow him, the Christ who, as Drake relates, "is finally the principal character in all Miss O'Connor's fiction."¹⁹⁹ The effect on Parker is immediate: his heart begins "slowly to beat again as if it were being brought to life by a subtle power."²⁰⁰ Parker has confronted, and accepted, Christ. This is the point wherein O'Connor most obviously departs from the writers of "religious" fiction: Parker's acceptance of the "subtle power" simply makes his life more painful and difficult. This pain begins with the process of

¹⁹⁷O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 234.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁹⁹Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, p.17.

²⁰⁰O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 235.

having the tatoo applied. The tatoo artist tells Parker that he does not want all the mosaic blocks reproduced, "just the outline and some better features." Parker immediately replies, "just like it is or nothing."²⁰¹ The obvious implication, here, is that the tatoo artist is suggesting that the pain and difficulty of confronting Christ can be removed, but Parker insists on having it just as he received it, with no modifications to suit the weakness of human flesh. O'Connor, elsewhere, points out that few people have stared at good

. . . long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction. The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliché or a smoothing down that will soften their real look.²⁰²

O'Connor does not tone down the reality of good in her fiction. Parker obtains his tatoo and, then, is subjected to ridicule and persecution by his drinking buddies and his wife; and he comes to realize that "The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed."²⁰³ The story ends with his wife's beating

²⁰¹Loc. cit.

²⁰²O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 228.

²⁰³O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 241.

Parker with a broom, because she considers the tattooed Jesus, which was to please her, the final idolatry.

Parker accepts the beating without resistance:

Parker was too stunned to resist. He sat there and let her beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ.²⁰⁴

Thus, the wife's persecution of Parker becomes a persecution of Christ, because of Parker's submission to Christ as symbolized in the tattoo. Gordon states the basic theme of the story regarding Parker's wife:

In this story in which there are no theological references other than those which might be found on the lips of "good country people," the author has embodied that particular heresy which denies Our Lord corporeal substance.²⁰⁵

Parker's wife insists that God is spirit and no one shall see His face; her view denies the Incarnation, as Gordon points out. By his acceptance of the "all-demanding Byzantine eyes," Parker has put himself forever beyond the borders of this earth. This story illustrates the optimum meaning which eyes take in O'Connor's fiction: they become one means by which God confronts man. A contrasting use of eyes to indicate spiritual state occurs at the end of "Good Country

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 244.

²⁰⁵Gordon, op. cit., p. 136.

People." After Joy-Hulga's attempted seduction of the Bible salesman has resulted in the theft of her artificial leg, she turns her "churning face" to look out of the barn door and see ". . . his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake."²⁰⁶ The confusion into which Joy-Hulga is plunged by the theft of her leg is imaged in the soft focus of her eyesight. The suggestion is that, despite her cynicism and her Ph. D., Joy-Hulga can not see clearly.

In the title story of her last collection, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," both the visual confrontation motif and the use of eyes as characterization are prominent. This story particularly fits the statement that Meeker makes about O'Connor's fictional intent, "Miss O'Connor has made it plain that like Faulkner, she is often writing an inverted moral allegory."²⁰⁷ In this story, O'Connor deals with a secularized intellectual, much like Asbury in "The Enduring Chill," or Rayber or Sheppard in The Violent Bear It Away and "The Lame Shall Enter First." In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Julian lives with his mother in a Southern city. Julian appears to

²⁰⁶O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 261.

²⁰⁷Richard K. Meeker, "The Youngest Generation of Southern Fiction Writers," in Southern Writers, p. 187.

love, but not understand, his mother. Every Wednesday Julian escorts his mother to reducing classes. On the Wednesday evening, that the story takes place, the mother wears a particularly ugly hat. On the bus there is a Negro woman wearing an identical hat; Julian finds this amusing because of his mother's condescending attitude toward Negroes. When they leave the bus, Julian's mother attempts to give the Negro's little boy a penny, and the woman, infuriated, deals her a fatal blow. Julian, not realizing that his mother is dying, takes advantage of this opportunity to deliver his mother a sermon on proper racial attitudes:

"Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman," he said. "That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black couple."²⁰⁸

Julian is entirely unaware of the nature of the experience which his mother has undergone. The reader is shown this experience through progressive descriptions of the mother's eyes. At the beginning, they are "sky-blue . . . as innocent and untouched by experience as they must have been when she was ten."²⁰⁹ The mother's spiritual state, that is, is one of child-like

²⁰⁸O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 21.

²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 4.

innocence; but in the course of the story her innocence is rebuffed and destroyed. On the bus Julian attempts to irritate his mother and to show his enlightenment by trying to strike up a conversation with an elegant Negro man who ignores him. Julian's actions give his mother's eyes a "battered look."²¹⁰ Then, when Julian's mother sees the Negro woman wearing an identical hat, and when she first, on the bus, attempts to befriend the little Negro boy, and is rebuffed, the blue in her eyes seems to become "a bruised purple."²¹¹ Finally, as she collapses after the Negro woman's angry blow she is seen thus:

Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed.²¹²

Julian's mother experiences evil for what is evidently the first time, and it destroys her. This progression is shown through the technique of describing the effect of each crisis on the appearance of her eyes. The last description of her eyes at her death also contains an ironic commentary on Julian, for his mother's last

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 17.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 22-23.

sight of him "found nothing and closed." Parallel to the exposure of his mother's innocence, this story also exposes Julian's emptiness, but at the end there is, perhaps, a bit of hope held out for him as he awaits his "entry into the world of guilt and sorrow."²¹³ For, in the Christian terms of O'Connor's world, an awareness of guilt and sorrow is the first step to an awareness and acceptance of truth. Thus, it is seen how God's pursuit of man is portrayed through use of sight and vision.

²¹³Ibid., p. 23.

CHAPTER V

SYZYGY: THE DOUBLED SELF

The heart of man is the place the devill
dwells in; . . .

Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an
invisible Sun within us.

Sir Thomas Browne, Urne Buriall

The most subtle of O'Connor's fictional devices is the employment of minor characters to embody conflicting elements within the personalities of the major characters. This device of paired characters will form the basis for a detailed study of The Violent Bear It Away. There are several reasons why this novel is the best of her works to use for a detailed study. First, in this novel the theme of Christ's pursuit and man's flight is treated in great detail. Secondly, the various devices which she uses in her other works are brought into a fuller play in The Violent Bear It Away with its fuller exploitation of her basic theme. Thirdly, its plot is much more cohesive than that of Wise Blood, her first novel, and the length of this second novel allows her to make a much clearer, more

positive statement of her vision of the world than she did in her short stories. The plot of The Violent Bear It Away is boldly simple in its outlines: Francis Mason Tarwater has been reared by his great-uncle, Mason Tarwater. The great-uncle took the boy from his maternal uncle, Rayber, a materialistic and atheistic schoolteacher who, also, has an idiot son, Bishop. The great-uncle has commissioned Tarwater to do two things: give him (Old Tarwater) a decent burial, and baptize Bishop. The novel opens on the day that the great-uncle dies. Tarwater does not bury him but sets fire to the house (the old man was horrified of cremation) and sets out for the city to see his uncle Rayber. Tarwater is determined not to baptize Bishop and Rayber is determined to convert Tarwater from the fundamentalism instilled in him by the old man. Tarwater resists Rayber, and finally decides that the only way he can avoid the urge to baptize Bishop is to drown him. In the act of drowning, Tarwater pronounces the baptismal words despite himself. He, then, flees for Powderhead, the place where his great-uncle brought him up. On the way, he is sexually assaulted by a man who has given him a ride. On arrival at Powderhead Tarwater sees a vision of his great-uncle among the blessed multitude, purifies Powderhead with fire and starts back to the

city to begin his life as a prophet. This synopsis, of course, does not do any sort of justice to the complexity of theme and device which constitute the book's value. But it is well to have a clear idea of the novel's outline before any analysis of its various parts is undertaken.

Central to the book is O'Connor's use of characters in paired opposites. In O'Connor's fiction the characters suffer from conflicting wills, from the attraction of good and the contrary attraction of evil. These spiritual conflicts are externalized by doubles of the protagonist. Voss writes, "The split in these characters is delineated by the use of minor characters representing different aspects of the dychotomy."²¹⁴ This may be illustrated in Wise Blood: when Haze refuses to help Onnie Jay Holy, he gets a man who is Haze's double to preach. Haze follows the double into the country and kills him. Sullivan comments that in this act, Haze ". . . murders his double, the false prophet of his own false religion and therefore kills that part of himself."²¹⁵

In astronomy, the term, syzygy, refers to the

²¹⁴Victor Voss, "A Study in Sin," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), p. 61.

²¹⁵Sullivan, op. cit., p. 239.

points opposite one another on a planet's orbit. In this study this term will be used to refer to the characters which represent opposite tendencies in the main characters of O'Connor's fiction. In Jungian psychology, this concept is also called the shadow. While this study will in no way attempt to apply Jungian canons to O'Connor's fiction, it will be helpful at this point to quote a Jungian's definition of shadow, or syzygy: ". . . the function of the shadow is to represent the opposite side of the ego and to embody just those qualities that one dislikes most in other people."²¹⁶ In The Violent Bear It Away, Tarwater is accompanied by a shadow or syzygy throughout. This figure is a personification of Tarwater's rebellion against what his great-uncle has taught him. O'Connor wrote in her preface to Wise Blood that "free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man."²¹⁷ It will be seen that Tarwater's dilemma is that he has several wills which conflict; his uncle Kayber also suffers from a conflict of wills, and he and Tarwater are, in one way, syzygies of each other. Before taking up this theme, however, it will be

²¹⁶M.-L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in Man and His Symbols, p. 173.

²¹⁷Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 8.

necessary to show Tarwater's relationship to his main syzygy, the "friend," who appears to him after the great-uncle's death. Most of the critics consider this figure, as Steltzmann writes, to be a voice within Tarwater.²¹⁸ Gossett states this most clearly: "The split within young Tarwater's personality between the godly and the satanic is voiced as an internal debate between the boy and a stranger."²¹⁹ The debate starts immediately after old Tarwater's death at the breakfast table. The old man has commanded Tarwater to bury him correctly, and the voice of the "stranger" comes in as Tarwater faces this necessity. At first, the voice is Tarwater's own, but as the novel progresses, the stranger becomes more and more distinct from Tarwater. Old Tarwater had told the boy many times how lucky he was to have been rescued from Rayber:

"You were born into bondage and baptized into freedom, into the death of the Lord, into the death of the Lord Jesus Christ" . . . "Jesus is the bread of life," the old man said.²²⁰

But Tarwater was never wholly convinced by the old prophet's rhetoric, and has always had,

²¹⁸Steltzmann, op. cit., p. 11. See also, Friedman, "Introduction," in The Added Dimension, p. 27; Duhamel, "The Novelist as Prophet," in The Added Dimension, p. 95; Walter, op. cit., p. 9.

²¹⁹Gossett, op. cit., p. 91.

²²⁰O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 315.

In the darkest, most private part of his soul, hanging upside down like a sleeping bat, . . . the certain, undeniable knowledge that he was not hungry for the bread of life.²²¹

This knowledge soon takes shape in the stranger, who is, at first, Tarwater talking to himself: "'The dead are poor,' he said in the voice of the stranger."²²² But soon the stranger is speaking in rather long monologues, and is "digging the grave along with him now. . . ."²²³ As a matter of fact, the stranger soon takes a visible form:

Tarwater didn't answer. He 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. Only every now and then it sounded like a stranger's voice to him. He began to feel that he was only just now meeting himself, as if as long as his uncle had lived, he had been deprived of his own acquaintance.²²⁴

The function the stranger immediately takes is that of an iconoclast. The boy is becoming aware, after the old man's death, of all the doubts and misgivings he has had about the prophetic role for which the old man has trained him. The stranger takes these doubts up

²²¹Loc. cit.

²²²Ibid., p. 317.

²²³Ibid., p. 323.

²²⁴Ibid., p. 324.

and in speaking them objectifies them. Many critics treat this stranger as a devil figure. Walsh writes that O'Connor's devils are embodiments of evil that lies within the character.²²⁵ Tarwater, now making "his own acquaintance," is beginning to contact evil within himself which has been previously suppressed.

The stranger heckles Tarwater:

Look at the big prophet, the stranger jeered, and watched him from the shade of the speckled tree shadows. Lemme hear you prophesy something. The truth is the Lord ain't studying about you.²²⁶

All of Tarwater's doubts about his mission are surfacing, and Tarwater is undergoing temptation from a devil that has risen from within his own mind. Of her devil, O'Connor writes:

In my stories a reader will find that the devil accomplishes a good deal of ground work that seems to be necessary before grace is effective. Tarwater's final vision could not have been brought off if he hadn't met the man in the lavender and cream-colored car.²²⁷

The "man in the lavender and cream-colored car" is the person who sexually assaults Tarwater as he is making his way back to Powderhead after the drowning-baptism of Bishop. This figure is related to the stranger who harangues Tarwater throughout the novel. As Voss

²²⁵Walsh, op. cit., p. 120.

²²⁶O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 325.

²²⁷O'Connor, "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 229.

writes, "Tarwater's 'friend' is incarnated in a 'familiar-looking' homosexual who assaults the boy."²²⁸ This same figure is present when Tarwater drowns Bishop. The boy and Tarwater are in a boat, but they are not alone:

By his side, standing like a guide in the boat, was his faithful friend, lean, shadow-like, who had counseled him in both country and city.

Make haste, he said. Time is like money and money is like blood and time turns blood to dust.²²⁹

Tarwater's syzygy urges him on toward the drowning of Bishop. In his first encounter with his syzygy he was unable to see the color of his eyes, because they were hidden by the shadow of the syzygy's "stiff broad-brimmed panama hat." Now, he reaches the climax of his relationship with Bishop, and the syzygy is more fully revealed. Tarwater sees the figure's eyes, and is "startled to see that in the peculiar darkness, they were violet-colored, . . . and fixed on him with a peculiar look of hunger and attraction."²³⁰ Here, Tarwater is face to face with the devil that dwells in men's hearts, the devil which is urging him to drown Bishop in order to escape the compulsion to baptize him.

²²⁸Victor Voss, "A Study in Sin," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 61.

²²⁹O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 431.

²³⁰Loc. cit.

However, Tarwater involuntarily speaks the words of baptism as he drowns Bishop, and so the boy is baptized after all. This is reminiscent of O'Connor's statement in the preface to Wise Blood to the effect that Hazel Motes was Christian in spite of himself and that his integrity lies in his inability to avoid Christ.²³¹ Similarly, it is conceivable that Tarwater's integrity lies in his inability to refrain from baptizing Bishop, even as he is drowning him at the behest of an inward devil.

Tarwater is not rid of his syzygy after the drowning, however. As indicated,²³² he meets his devil "in the flesh" as he is returning to Powderhead. He first rides in a truck, but the driver puts the boy out, because he can not understand his ramblings. Then, Tarwater continues the journey on foot, and, as he walks along, O'Connor uses her third person internal monologue technique to present the spiritual conflict which the boy is experiencing, rendered in terms of the concept of spiritual "country." Thus, as Tarwater walks along the road, he sees the "clear gray borders of the country

²³¹ibid., p. 8.

²³²See note 227.

he had saved himself from crossing into."²³³ This country is "hidden from his daily sight but present to his inner eye that remained rigidly open, . . ."²³⁴ Here again, Tarwater is confronted by the spiritual world in spite of himself; just as he was unable to keep from baptizing Bishop, he is unable to close his inward sight against the spiritual country of Christ. This is a country under the "bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, . . ." where he would be "lost forever to his own inclinations."²³⁵ Tarwater's attitude seems to be that which is embodied, as well, in George MacDonald's statement: "The one principle of hell is-- 'I am my own!'"²³⁶ The argument of his syzygy always centers upon this retention of "his own inclinations." On this walk back to Powderhead, Tarwater becomes aware of another syzygy:

Beyond the glare, he was aware of another figure, a gaunt stranger, the ghost who had been born in the wreck and who had fancied himself destined at that moment to the torture of prophecy. It was apparent to the boy that this person, who paid him no attention, was mad.²³⁷

²³³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 434.

²³⁴Loc. cit.

²³⁵Ibid., pp. 434-435.

²³⁶C. S. Lewis (ed.), George MacDonald: An Anthology, p. 105.

²³⁷O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 435.

Tarwater was born in an auto wreck which resulted in the death of his unmarried mother, and up to the time of his temptation by his syzygy, Tarwater believed his great-uncle's claim that he would grow up to be a prophet. Now, thinking that he has saved himself from entering the country of belief and prophecy, Tarwater perceives another syzygy, an externalization of his will toward belief. Tarwater has accepted enough of what his devil and his uncle Rayber have taught him to be able to consider any tendency toward belief to be insane, but he has not won the total victory over belief which he thinks he has. As St. Paul wrote, "the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness" (I Cor. 1:18.) And Tarwater has not completely escaped the cross, though he considers it foolishness. Eventually, he reaches a roadside store close to his home. The woman who works there knows him and has heard that he burned the house at Powderhead. As she reprimands him for this arson, Tarwater replies: "He opened his mouth to overwhelm the woman and to his horror what rushed from his lips, like the shriek of a bat, was an obscenity he had overheard once at a fair."²³⁸ Tarwater has come under the influence of his syzygy so

²³⁸O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 437.

much that he is capable of shocking himself with the evil which is within him. After he leaves the store, Tarwater obtains a ride with the "stranger" who has been following him throughout the novel. In the car there is "a sweet stale odor . . ." and there does "not seem enough air to breathe freely."²³⁹ The "stranger" gives him drugged whiskey and a cigaret. After he has passed out, the young man pulls the car onto the side road that leads to Powderhead and assaults him.

Tarwater's uncle Rayber has earlier made him a present of a combination corkscrew and bottleopener, an item which apparently represents, as a rather low-keyed symbol, the devices by which man attempts to fortify himself by his own efforts. At the very least, the corkscrew-bottleopener stands as a token from the atheist Rayber. Tarwater's seducer steals this:

In about an hour, the stranger emerged alone and looked furtively about him. He was carrying the boy's hat for a souvenir and also the corkscrew-bottleopener. His delicate skin had acquired a faint pink tint as if he had refreshed himself on blood. He got quickly into his car and sped away.²⁴⁰

The obvious allusion to vampirism indicates that the stranger fed on Tarwater's very substance, that the

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 439.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 441.

as if while he was asleep, they had been lifted out, scorched, and dropped back into his head."²⁴⁴ Tarwater's sight has been purified, and as he walks through the burning woods to Powderhead, he finds that, "It was the road home, ground that had been familiar to him since his infancy but now it looked like strange and alien country."²⁴⁵ He has suffered what Gossett refers to as the violence which by proving that evil exists implies the existence of good.²⁴⁶ Thus, the country in which he has been brought up seems "strange and alien" to Tarwater, because he has accepted citizenship in that other country; he has crossed the "clear gray borders" of the country under the shadow of Jesus. Tarwater's syzygy had early denied the reality of evil. In the debate about burying the great-uncle, the stranger tries to convince him to be self-sufficient, and Tarwater replies: "Jesus or the devil, the boy said."²⁴⁷ The stranger's reply is based on what MacDonald said is the first principle of hell:

No no no, the stranger said, there ain't no such thing as a devil. I can tell you that from my own

²⁴⁴Ibid., p. 441.

²⁴⁵Ibid., p. 442.

²⁴⁶Gossett, op. cit., p. 92.

²⁴⁷O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 526.

assault was really spiritual, as well as sexual.

Steltzmann states the significance of this event:

. . . for the first time in his life Tarwater recognizes the nature of this stranger whose sweet smell is identical with that of the evil driver Satan himself is the author of the tempting inner voice.²⁴¹

This experience shocks and purifies Tarwater. Ferris points out that the assault on Tarwater is "an image of what he has done to himself, . . ."²⁴² That is, by his evasion of Christ, Tarwater has brutalized himself spiritually, and this physical assault snocks him with a realization of the depths to which he has sunk. After he emerges from his drugged state, he sets fire to the woods as an act of purification. Old Tarwater told Rayber that "THE PROPHET I RAISE UP OUT OF THIS BOY WILL BURN YOUR EYES CLEAN."²⁴³ Rayber's problem is that he is spiritually blind; the great-uncle intended Tarwater to be a prophet to purify Rayber's sight. First, however, Tarwater's sight had to be purified. When he wakes up in the woods, his eyes look "small and seedlike

²⁴¹Steltzmann, op. cit., p. 13.

²⁴²Sumner J. Ferris, "The Outside and the Inside: Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Critique, III (Winter, Spring, 1960), 18. See also, Voss, op. cit., p. 62.

²⁴³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 391-392.

self-experience. I know that for a fact. It ain't Jesus or the devil. It's Jesus or you.²⁴⁸

Here, one sees that the stranger is attempting to convince Tarwater that "he is his own." Of further import is the fact that this devil tries to convince him that devils do not exist, and adds, "where is the voice of the Lord? I haven't heard it."²⁴⁹ The reasoning is that, if evil spirits do not exist, neither do good ones, and the voice of the Lord is an hallucination. But the devil goes too far, and in assaulting Tarwater, convinces him of the reality of evil. This conviction pushes him back within earsnot of the voice of the Lord. There is, yet, a final vision for Tarwater which concludes the novel, but one must first clarify Tarwater's relationship to his uncles, the one a propnet and the other an atheist.

Tarwater and Rayber appear to be syzygies of each other: Tarwater has within him the strain of scepticism incarnated in the "stranger," and Rayber has within him an irrational love for his idiot son, Bishop. Friedman recognizes this, suggesting that Tarwater and Rayber may be as opposing parts of one personality.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸Loc. cit.

²⁴⁹Ibid., p. 327.

²⁵⁰Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," in The Added Dimension, p. 202.

While the main conflict of the novel centers around Tarwater's resistance of the old man's order to baptize Bishop, the problem of love is very important, particularly for Rayber. Rayber has also been under the influence of old Tarwater, as the old man kidnapped him when he was seven years old, took him to Powderhead in the woods, baptized him and began to rear him as a prophet. Rayber's parents retrieved him and later he turned against old Tarwater's teachings, at last becoming a complete materialist. At one point, his great-uncle had stayed with the adult Rayber, but left in disgust when he found that Rayber was only interested in him as a sociological phenomenon. It was at this time when his great-uncle took Tarwater to "raise him up" to be a prophet to burn Rayber's eyes clean. After old Tarwater died, the younger Tarwater set fire to the house, thinking the old man's body to be in it, and set out for the city and Rayber. Rayber is overjoyed to see him, thinking he can talk him out of what the old man taught him and make him a useful citizen. But Rayber has not completely eradicated the teachings of old Tarwater; as McCown writes, "there were still in him the twisted roots of faith."²⁵¹ This remnant of

²⁵¹Robert M. McCown, "The Education of a Prophet: A Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine, 1962, p. 74.

faith is, perhaps, made most explicit in Rayber's attitude toward his retarded son. Rayber is very well aware of the dualism of his personality: "Rayber felt afflicted with a peculiar chilling clarity of mind in which he saw himself divided in two--a violent and a rational self."²⁵² The violent self is the one related to his son. In a park reminiscent of Powderhead, Rayber is overcome with emotion: "Without warning his hated love gripped him and held him in a vice. He should have known better than to let the child onto his lap."²⁵³ The reason that Rayber resists this love for Bishop is that it is an irrational and powerful feeling, the implications of which would overturn his carefully built materialism. This upsurge in the park reminds Rayber of an incident in which he tried to drown Bishop in the ocean, but was unable to go through with it when ". . . he had a moment of complete terror in which he envisioned his life without the child."²⁵⁴ Ironically, what Rayber has done is to perform a baptismal rite with the exception of the words. His posture was even appropriate to baptism: as he immerses the child face up, Rayber does not look down, ". . . but up, at an

²⁵²O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 387.

²⁵³Ibid., p. 388.

²⁵⁴Ibid., p. 389.

imperturbably witnessing sky, not quite blue, not quite white."²⁵⁵ That is, heaven witnesses this baptism which is as unintentional as the one that takes place when Tarwater succeeds in drowning Bishop. Tarwater's act is really a completion of Rayber's, for Tarwater is successful at both the drowning and the baptism.

Later, Rayber takes both Tarwater and Bishop to a lakeside resort, and it is here that Tarwater drowns Bishop. While at this resort, Rayber goes for a drive with Bishop and suddenly finds himself on the road to Powderhead. In this scene, O'Connor applies the third person internal monologue technique to Rayber and lays bare his love:

He had known by that time that his own stability depended on the little boy's presence. 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.²⁵⁶

Rayber was unable to drown him, because Bishop gives him a means of containing the love which would otherwise overwhelm both him and his materialism. Rayber has practiced a form of asceticism throughout his life, denying the love which threatens him by focusing it entirely on Bishop. Old Tarwater threatened to make

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 388.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 410.

Tarwater into a prophet which would "burn Rayber's eyes clean." Rayber is last seen as he realizes that Bishop has been drowned, and he braces himself for the pain which he expects:

He knew with an instinct as sure as the dull mechanical beat of his heart that he had baptized the child even as he 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.²⁵⁷

Rayber understands, even though he has not actually witnessed the drowning but has only heard Bishop bellow, because he contains within himself Tarwater's same urge toward prophecy. The difference is that Rayber has been successful in suppressing his urge. Rayber braces himself for the pain which he expects, now that the focus of his love, Bishop, has been removed, but it does not come: "He stood lightheaded at the window and it was not until he realized there would be no pain that he collapsed."²⁵⁸ Rayber's final spiritual state is not depicted, but as McCown observes, his eyes have been "burned clean," and he must either accept or reject grace because he is no longer able to avoid it through Bishop.²⁵⁹ In the long short story which is a later

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 423.

²⁵⁸ Loc. cit.

²⁵⁹ McCown, "The Education of a Prophet: A Study in Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine, 1962, p. 77.

reworking of this theme ("The Lame Shall Enter First"), Sheppard, who plays the same role as Rayber, comes to a fuller realization of grace:

He [Sheppard] had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself A rush of agonizing love for the child rushed over him like a transfusion of life.²⁶⁰

This is a much clearer reception of grace than that accorded Rayber. The effect, naturally, is to focus on Sheppard, rather than on Rufus, who plays the Tarwater role in this story. Thus, in The Violent Bear It Away, O'Connor's emphasis is on the prophet, and in "The Lame Shall Enter First," it is on the materialist. Sheppard's redemption is the promise of the possibility of redemption to a secular world, whereas Tarwater's redemption is that of one brought up in a prophetic tradition.

The thematic center of The Violent Bear It Away is a sermon preached by a girl evangelist. Both Rayber and Tarwater hear this sermon, Tarwater from the audience, and Rayber from a window. This child evangelist may be seen as a pure embodiment of the love which torments both Rayber and Tarwater, and so she is a sort of syzygy for each of them. Clarke finds that the core of the novel is a struggle for Tarwater's soul

²⁶⁰O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 190.

between the teachings of Rayber and old Tarwater.²⁶¹
 The child's sermon is a condensed and powerful version of the gospel which haunts not only Tarwater, but Rayber, as well. Jeremy analyzes the book in terms of the language used by Rayber, Tarwater and old Tarwater, and finds,

Actually what the boy achieves in his language is a kind of synthesis of the methods of the rival uncles. He puts the abstract, philosophical ideas that Rayber enshrines in vague and generalized language into the concrete idiom of the old uncle's dialect.²⁶²

But at the end of the novel, Tarwater succumbs completely to the old man's values, and actually throughout the book holds Rayber in the greatest scorn. At one point, when Rayber in his desperate attempt to reform the boy, offers Tarwater an airplane ride, Tarwater informs Rayber that he and the old man went up in a plane at a fair, and adds, "I wouldn't give you nothing for no airplane. A buzzard can fly."²⁶³ And when Tarwater is going back to Powderhead, he uses an obscenity "like a bat," to revile the woman who has verbally attacked him. Tarwater's language has been

²⁶¹John J. Clarke, "The Achievement of Flannery O'Connor," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 7.

²⁶²Sister Jeremy, "The Violent Bear It Away: A Linguistic Education," Renaissance, XVII (Fall, 1964), 15.

²⁶³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 406.

affected by the "stranger" and not by his uncle Rayber. However, the description which Jeremy makes of Rayber's language is helpful, and this approach may be extended in order to unlock the significance of the child's sermon in the overall structure of the novel.²⁶⁴

While at the lake, Rayber takes Tarwater fishing in a boat and makes a concentrated verbal assault on Tarwater. In an internal monologue, O'Connor illuminates Tarwater's spiritual state as he struggles with his impulse to baptize Bishop:

It was a strange waiting silence. It seemed to lie all around him like an invisible country whose borders he was always on the edge of, always in danger of crossing.²⁶⁵

Tarwater feels in continuous danger of crossing into the country of God's will, with which he is confronted at every turn,

From time to time as they had walked in the city, he had looked to the side and seen his own form alongside him in a store window, transparent as a snakeskin.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴Richard Weaver, in the first chapter of The Ethics of Rhetoric, divides rhetoricians into three categories: The "noble lover" who persuades for good ends, the "base lover" who persuades for bad ends, and the "non-lover" who attempts to be objective. Old Tarwater would fit the first category, the "stranger" the second, and Rayber the last. Rayber's problem arises in that, as Weaver puts it, "neuter discourse is a false idol . . . ," p. 24.

²⁶⁵O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 398.

²⁶⁶Loc. cit.

That is, Tarwater sees a syzygy, or shadow, of himself already in that other country ruled by the "bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus." Tarwater can not even look at Bishop, ". . . for the silent country appeared to be reflected again in the center of his eyes. It stretched out there, limitless and clear."²⁶⁷ The country is "silent," because once Tarwater enters it, there will be for him an end to debate, as he will then be a prophet of the Lord. The fact that the country is reflected in Bishop's eyes reinforces the fact that the directive to baptize him has emanated from that "silent country," and, once Tarwater has performed the baptism, he will have irrevocably crossed those borders. Tarwater has been kept free from this crossing by the voice of his syzygy: "He would have fallen but for the wise voice that sustained him--the stranger who had kept him company while he dug his uncle's grave."²⁶⁸ The syzygy has kept Tarwater from following old Tarwater's orders by urging him not to act on his feelings, but to demand a sign from the Lord. And then he tells Tarwater, further, that the strange hunger which Tarwater has been feeling is not a sign, but only worms. This hunger is

²⁶⁷Loc. cit.

²⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 398-399.

partially due to the unnourishing and unappetizing food which Rayber has given him, but there is a larger significance to it:

Since the breakfast he had finished sitting in the presence of his uncle's corpse, he had not been satisfied by food, and his hunger had become like an insistent silent force inside him, a silence inside skin to the silence outside, as if the grand trap left him barely an inch to move in, barely an inch in which to keep himself inviolate.²⁶⁹

So, the unsatisfiable hunger which Tarwater feels is the inner counterpart of the country which he sees in reflections and in Bishop's eyes; and, as shown earlier, place becomes an image of the soul. The words of Jesus apply here: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6) Tarwater is filled, as will be seen in the consideration of the final pages of the book. But, before he can satisfy his hunger, Tarwater must deny his urge to "keep himself inviolate." Montgomery states Tarwater's dilemma clearly,

. . . to baptize the child is to be enslaved to his great Uncle and the terrible Christ that haunts him for Adam's sin; to drown the child is to become enslaved to his immediate uncle, an environmental determinist, and to that more terrible devil whose name is Nada who art in Nada, as a famous Northern writer has put it.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹Ibid., p. 399.

²⁷⁰Marion Montgomery, "The Sense of Violation: Notes toward a Definition of 'Southern' Fiction," Georgia Review, XIX (Fall, 1965), 281.

Prior to going upon the lake, Tarwater and Rayber eat lunch. Tarwater eats six barbecued sandwiches and drinks three cans of beer, as though he were "preparing himself for a long journey or for some action that would take all his strength."²⁷¹ Once in the boat, with Bishop left ashore, Rayber confesses to Tarwater that he once tried to drown Bishop. Tarwater replies, "'You didn't have the guts, . . . ' He always told me you couldn't do nothing, couldn't act.'"²⁷² The "he" is old Tarwater, the prophet who has shaped the lives of both Rayber and Tarwater. Rayber continues his assault on Tarwater by attempting to explain to the boy that he might be influenced by unconscious motives, and receives this reply:

"I never came for no school lesson," the boy said rudely. "I come to fish. I ain't worried what my underhead 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."²⁷³

Tarwater, here, states a doctrine of action, not of scientific knowledge. He has just accused Rayber of not having enough guts to drown Bishop and is here implying that, unlike Rayber, he does have the courage

²⁷¹O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 402.

²⁷²Ibid., p. 403.

²⁷³Ibid., p. 405.

to act. Rayber continues to attack superstition and state his humanistic creed, finishing, "'My guts . . . are in my head.'"²⁷⁴ In other words, Rayber places all his faith in reason and in the operations of the intellect. As Jeremy points out, Rayber fears incoherence, because it will force him to recognize the mystery which lies beyond the province of reason.²⁷⁵ Lewis discusses the false idol of neuter discourse:

The head rules the belly through the chest--the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnamity, . . . It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.²⁷⁶

Lewis designates those who deny the chest, that is the heart that rules both passions and intellect, as "Men without Chests," and it is in this company that Rayber must be counted. His guts, as he says, are in his head. Tarwater does not accept at all what Rayber says. As McCown observes, "A deep-seated antagonism develops between these two spiritual children of the old prophet; each, so to speak, sees through the other."²⁷⁷ The

²⁷⁴ Loc. cit.

²⁷⁵ Jeremy, op. cit., p. 14.

²⁷⁶ C. S. Lewis, The Abolition of Man, p. 34.

²⁷⁷ McCown, "The Education of a Prophet: A Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine, 1962, p. 76.

antagonism comes from the impulse implanted in each of them by the great-uncle. The difference is that in Tarwater the seed has taken root, whereas Rayber has kept it from germinating in himself. In the confrontation in the boat, Rayber finally reaches his real point:

"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."²⁷⁸

This, then, is Rayber's anti-gospel: that man may redeem himself. This open statement disgusts Tarwater so much that he strips off his clothes and swims to shore. Rayber throws Tarwater's old clothes overboard, which he has been trying to persuade the boy to abandon, and when Rayber returns to the hotel, he finds Tarwater dressed in new clothes. Rayber interprets this change as a sign of hope in his campaign against Tarwater's faith, but the reality is that Tarwater has finally decided to drown Bishop and, true to his code, will waste no more time in argument but proceed to act as soon as possible.

The thematic center of The Violent Bear It Away is, as noted above, the sermon given by the girl evangelist. Both Tarwater and Rayber hear this sermon, which is a clear exposition of the gospel. Tarwater

²⁷⁸ O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 406.

leaves Rayber's house in the evening and goes to the "tabernacle" where the child is preaching. Rayber follows him and observes the sermon through a window at the side of the building. The reader hears and sees through a third person internal monologue centered in Rayber's mind. Rayber sees the girl as an object of exploitation by her parents and the congregation:

"Rayber cringed. Simply by the sight of her he could tell that she was not a fraud, that she was only exploited."²⁷⁹ Rayber feels a fury towards those who, he feels, have exploited the child, and he longs to rescue her from them. The girl sees him through the window and turns to walk towards it, and Rayber sees himself as the savior of her and other children:

"Rayber saw himself fleeing with the child to some enclosed garden where he would teach her the truth, . . ."²⁸⁰ As she approaches him, Rayber feels that there is some mysterious bond between him and this child; but she confronts him with exactly that which he is trying to avoid, and which he dreams of saving her from,

"Listen you people," she shrieked, "I see a damned soul before my eye! I see a dead man Jesus hasn't

²⁷⁹ ibid., p. 382.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 384.

raised. His head is in the window but his ear is deaf to the Holy Word!"²⁸¹

Rayber immediately switches off the hearing aid upon which he depends. This bold accusation unsettles him completely, since, because of the instruction he has received from old Tarwater, his "head is in the window;" that is, Rayber knows the truth, but unlike Tarwater, he is unable to do it; Rayber can not act upon his knowledge. His ear is deaf, because he refuses to hear the child's entirely accurate depiction of his situation. This sermon represents the madness from which Rayber has spent his life running.

The sermon which the child delivers is of interest in itself, because it appears to be a direct statement of O'Connor's positive beliefs. Its purpose is to prepare the people to recognize the Lord Jesus when He returns. The girl identifies Jesus,

"Do you know who Jesus is?" she cried. "Jesus is the word of God and Jesus is love. The Word of God is love and do you know what love is, you people? If you don't know what love is you won't know Jesus when He comes."²⁸²

The girl's doctrine of the nature of Jesus is obviously grounded in the New Testament: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," (John 1:14.) And,

²⁸¹Ibid., p. 385.

²⁸²Ibid., p. 382.

"He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."
 (I John 4:8.) It is the seed of this love which the
 old prophet planted in both Rayber and Tarwater, and
 confrontation with it is what Rayber has been avoiding
 all his life. It is this seed which has given Tarwater
 his insatiable hunger, for which there is only one
 remedy. It is supplied by the child in her sermon, "If
 you don't know Him now, you won't know Him then. Listen
 to me, world, listen to this warning. The Holy Word is
 in my mouth!"²⁸³ All that will satisfy Tarwater's
 hunger is the Holy Word in his mouth; as Duhamel says,
 "Tarwater's hunger is a symbol of that insatiable
 element in human nature which finds here no lasting
 home."²⁸⁴ This is the same insight that is embodied in
 George Herbert's poem, "The Pulley," in which God gives
 man every good but rest, so that "If goodness lead him
 not, yet weariness / May toss him to my breast."²⁸⁵ A
 parallel to this is the traditional American gospel
 hymn, "I Can't Feel at Home in This World Anymore:"
 This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through,
 My treasures and my hopes are all beyond the blue,

²⁸³O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 384.

²⁸⁴Duhamel, "The Education of a Prophet," in The Added Dimension, p. 100.

²⁸⁵George Herbert, "The Pulley," in English Poetry of the XVII Century, p. 257.

Where many Christian children have gone on before,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.²⁸⁶

Tarwater knows, as does Rayber, that, once he crosses the borders of that "silent country," he will not "feel at home in this world any more." Tarwater resists the attraction he feels for that country, and it is certainly not goodness that at last draws him across, but, rather, weariness. Until the time when he is worn down, Tarwater has his syzygy to keep him from crossing over. This figure does not miss the opportunity to comment on Tarwater's visit to the "tabernacle" where the child preached,

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, . . . 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.²⁸⁷

Thus, the devil syzygy attempts to counteract the girl's preaching. This figure who attempts to persuade Tarwater that he has no prophetic mission is the same figure that assaults Tarwater. As for "that strangeness" in Tarwater's gut, it is not worms, but a hunger

²⁸⁶Irwin Silber. (ed.), "Reprints from Sing Out," II, 1960, 29.

²⁸⁷O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 399.

for righteousness, as the last chapter of the book shows. Here, the word which the child had in her mouth is accepted by Tarwater, and he moves off to fulfill at last his prophetic destiny.

After setting fire to the woods in which he was assaulted, Tarwater walks on to Powderhead. At the edge of the clearing he encounters, again, his syzygy who tells him, "You're not ever going to be alone again."²⁸⁸ But Tarwater gets his matches and releases purifying fire on Powderhead: "He glared through the flames and his spirits rose as he saw that his adversary would soon be consumed in a roaring blaze."²⁸⁹ Tarwater has purged himself of the element of selfish pride which kept him from his destiny. As he moves toward the house at Powderhead, he suffers new attacks of hunger and sees ". . . stretching out before him, . . . the clear gray spaces of that country where he had vowed never to set foot."²⁹⁰ He now enters that country, where he sees a vision of the multitude of the blessed, fed from a single basket. As he watches, he sees old Tarwater impatiently waiting for his turn. Then, he is

²⁸⁸Ibid., p. 444.

²⁸⁹Loc. cit.

²⁹⁰Ibid., p. 445.

". . . 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."²⁹¹ Now, Tarwater's hunger becomes a tide which connects him with all the prophets of the past, and he hears his commission: "GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY."²⁹² For O'Connor, the speed of mercy was truly terrible in that it demanded purgation of everything that might obstruct the satisfaction of the holy hunger. Not all of her characters are able to survive the terror of mercy, but Tarwater does, and he is last seen, "His singed eyes, black in their deep sockets, . . . his face set toward the dark city, where the children of God lay sleeping."²⁹³ Tarwater has experienced the girl evangelist's message: "'The Word of God is a burning Word to burn you clean!'"²⁹⁴ And, because he has experienced it, because he has irrevocably crossed the border, he is fitted to bear the message himself.

In conclusion, it may be reiterated that the basic theme of Flannery O'Connor's fiction is God's

²⁹¹Ibid., p. 446.

²⁹²Ibid., p. 447.

²⁹³Loc. cit.

²⁹⁴Ibid., p. 384.

pursuit of man with the claims of sin and redemption. Because of the violence she uses to embody this theme, some critics feel that her work is "gratuitously grotesque." Others reject her Christianity and think that she is really an existentialist. Her first novel, Wise Blood, has been misread in this manner, notably by Rechnitz and Hassan. In Wise Blood, Hazel Motes seeks a "new Jesus" for his "Church without Christ," but what Hazel finds is the traditional Christian God Who demands repentance. O'Connor's characters exercise free will in that they must either accept or reject Christ. Their basic sin is that they attempt to save themselves rather than accept the salvation offered by God. Christ in her fiction is "bleeding stinking mad," and embodies two seemingly contradictory aspects: purification through mercy, and destruction by wrath.

As a Christian, O'Connor viewed God as the ruler of history, and thus her characters' attitude toward history is important. In "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," General Sash is confronted by the past which he has denied and rejected, and in his moment of death, realizes that there is a reality beyond the past. In "Parker's Back," O. E. Parker leafs backward through an art book, and this action is in effect a trip in to the past. O. E. is confronted by a Byzantine Christ with

"stern all demanding eyes" to which he surrenders. Concomitant with this Christian view of history is O'Connor's view of will. She considers that the problem of free will is the problem of "many wills conflicting in one man." Hazel Motes, in Wise Blood, has conflicting wills toward and away from Christ, as do most of her characters.

In O'Connor's fiction, description of landscape and setting are often used to portray character. Her technique is not naturalistic because, to use her words, she was "interested in the lines that create spiritual motion." The final meaning of "country" in her fiction is that country which is man's spiritual home. In "A View of the Woods," Mr. Fortune is identified with the countryside which his greed has ravished, and the implication is that he has really ravished himself. Mrs. Shortley, in "The Displaced Person," dies as her eyes seem ". . . to contemplate for the first time the tremendous frontiers of her true country." So, in O'Connor's view, all men are "displaced" from their true country, Heaven.

O'Connor's fiction is not experimental in form. Her most common narrative device is an indirect third person monologue which enables her to achieve an objective tone in portraying spiritual events. The

visual sense is very important in her fiction. Asbury Fox, in "The Enduring Chill," is confronted with a water stain as an emblem of the Holy Ghost. O. E. Parker is captured by the eyes of the Byzantine Christ. She also used descriptions of the characters' eyes to portray their spiritual state.

In her second novel, The Violent Bear It Away, God's pursuit of man is treated more fully than in her other works. Francis Mason Tarwater has been confronted with God's claim through his great-uncle. Tarwater's conflicting wills are dramatized through minor characters which represent these aspects of his personality. There is a devil-figure who tempts Tarwater to scepticism, a girl evangelist who repeats the claims of faith, and Tarwater's uncle Rayber, who tempts Tarwater with scientific materialism. Tarwater is raped by the devil-figure which brings him to a realization of his own evil. He then has a vision of the feeding of the multitude, his great-uncle among them, and accepts the claims of grace.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alice, Sister Rose. "Flannery O'Connor: Poet to the Outcase," Renascence, XVI (Spring, 1964), 126-32.
- Brinkley, Roberta F. English Poetry of the XVII Century. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1942.
- Cheney, Brainard. "Flannery O'Connor's Campaign for Her Country," SewR, LXXII (Autumn, 1964), 555-58.
- Cheney, Brainard. "Miss O'Connor Creates Unusual Humor Out of Ordinary Sin," SewR, LXXI (October-December, 1963), 644-652.
- Cirlot, J. E. A Dictionary of Symbols. New York: Philosophical Library, 1962.
- Clarke, John J. "The Achievement of Flannery O'Connor," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 6-9.
- Davenport, Guy. "The Top is a New Bottom," National Review, XVII (July 27, 1965), 658-9.
- Dowell, Bob. "Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," College English, XXVII (December, 1965), 235-240.
- Drake, Robert. Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1966.
- Drake, Robert. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 19-22. Reprinted from The Christian Century, (September 30), 1964.
- Duhamel, P. Albert. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 22-23.
- Duhamel, P. Albert. "Flannery O'Connor's Violent View of Reality," The Catholic World, CXG (February, 1960), 280-285.

- Duhamel, P. Albert. "The Novelist as Prophet," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 88-107.
- Esty, William. "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," Commonweal, LXVII (March 7, 1958), 586-88.
- Ferris, Sumner J. "The Outside and the Inside: Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Critique, III (Winter, Spring, 1960), 11-19.
- Fitzgerald, Robert. "The Countryside and the True Country," SewR, LXX (Summer, 1962), 380-395.
- Friedman, Melvin J. "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 196-206.
- Friedman, Melvin J. "Introduction," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 1-31.
- Gardiner, Harold C. "Flannery O'Connor's Clarity of Vision," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 184-195.
- Gordon, Caroline. "An American Girl," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 123-137.
- Gossett, Louise Y. Violence in Recent Southern Fiction. Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1965.
- Hart, Jane. "Strange Earth, the Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Georgia Review, XII (Summer, 1958), 215-222.
- Hassan, Ihab. "The Existential Novel," Massachusetts Review, III (Summer, 1962), 795-97.
- Hassan, Ihab. Radical Innocence. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- Hawkes, John. "Notes on the Wild Goose Chase," Massachusetts Review, III (Summer, 1962), 784-88.

- Hoffman, Frederick J. "The Search for Redemption," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 32-48.
- Jacobsen, Josephine. "A Catholic Quartet," Christian Scholar, XLVII (Summer, 1964), 139-155.
- James, Henry. "The Art of Fiction," in The Portable Henry James, Morton Dauwen Zabel, editor. New York: The Viking Press, 1956.
- Jeremy, Sister. "The Violent Bear It Away: A Linguistic Education," Renaissance, XVII (Fall, 1964), 11-16.
- Joselyn, Sister M. "Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person,'" Studies in Short Fiction, I (Winter, 1964), 85-93.
- Kevin, Sister Mary. "Flannery O'Connor: In Memory of a Vision Unlimited," Censer, (Winter, 1965), Pp. 37-42.
- Lawson, Lewis A. "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque: Wise Blood," Renaissance, XVII (Spring, 1965), 137-47, 156.
- Lewis, C. S. The Abolition of Man. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1965.
- Lewis, C. S. (ed.). George MacDonald: An Anthology. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1962.
- Macauley, Robie. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 34.
- Malin, Irving. "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 108-122.
- Mayhew, Rev. Leonard F. X. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 34-36. Reprinted from Commonweal, 1964.
- McCown, Robert M. "The Education of a Prophet: A Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine, 1962, Pp. 73-78.

- McCown, Robert M. "Flannery O'Connor and the Reality of Sin," The Catholic World, CLXXXVIII (January, 1959), 285-91.
- Meeker, Richard K. "The Youngest Generation of Southern Fiction Writers," in Southern Writers, Rinaldo C. Simonini, editor. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964. Pp. 186-87.
- Montgomery, Marion. "The Sense of Violation: Notes Toward a Definition of 'Southern' Fiction," Georgia Review, XIX (Fall, 1965), 278-87.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 226-263.
- O'Connor, Flannery. Everything That Rises Must Converge. New York: Noonday Press, 1966.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "Fiction Is a Subject with a History--It Should Be Taught That Way," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 264-268.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel, Granville Hicks, editor. New York: Macmillan, 1957.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "A Lecture," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 269-279.
- O'Connor, Flannery. "Review of The Phenomenon of Man," American Scholar, XXX (Fall, 1961), 618.
- O'Connor, Flannery. Three by Flannery O'Connor. New York: New American Library, 1962.
- Peden, William H. The American Short Story. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964.
- Quinn, Sister M Bernetta. "View from a Rock: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and J. F. Powers," Critique, II (Fall, 1958), 19-27.

- Rechnitz, Robert M. "Passionate Pilgrim: Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood," Georgia Review, XIX (Fall, 1965), 310-316.
- Rubin, Louis D. Jr. "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 49-72.
- Rubin, Louis D. Jr. "Flannery O'Connor: A Note on Literary Fashions," Critique, II (Fall, 1958), 11-18.
- Rupp, Richard H. "Fact and Mystery: Flannery O'Connor," Commonweal, LXXIX (December 6, 1963), 304-307.
- Schott, Webster. "Flannery O'Connor: Faith's Stepchild," Nation, CCI (September 13, 1965), 142-46.
- Scott, Nathan A. Jr. "Flannery O'Connor's Testimony," in The Added Dimension, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966. Pp. 138-156.
- Silber, Irwin. "Reprints from Sing Out," II, New York: Oak Publications, 1960. P. 29.
- Spivey, Ted R. "Flannery O'Connor's View of God and Man," Studies in Short Fiction, I (Spring, 1964), 200-206.
- Stelzmann, Rainulf A. "Schock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories," Xavier University Studies, II (March, 1963), 4-21.
- Sullivan, Walter. "Flannery O'Connor, Sin, and Grace: Everything That Rises Must Converge," The Hollins Critic, II (September, 1965), 1-8, 10.
- Tate, Allen. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 48-49.
- von Franz, M.-L. "The Process of Individuation," in Men and His Symbols, Carl G. Jung, editor. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1964. Pp. 158-229.
- Voss, Victor. "A Study in Sin," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 60-62.

Walsh, Thomas F. "The Devils of Hawthorne and Flannery O'Connor," Xavier University Studies, V (June, 1966), 117-122.

Walter, Sarah. "Strange Prophets of Flannery O'Connor," Censer, (Spring, 1960), Pp. 5-12.

Weaver, Richard. The Ethics of Rhetoric. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953.

Wells, Joel. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 49.