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THE FICTION AND THE AESTHETIC PRINCIPLES
OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR:
A STUDY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

BY
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A THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

Flannery O'Connor, a recent Southern writer, gives evidence in her fiction and in her statements on aesthetics that she has a message vital to modern man. This message, a faith-oriented interpretation of the meaning of man, is conveyed through three basic concepts: Reality, Redemption, and Shock. An understanding of Miss O'Connor's work must focus around this Southern writer's perspective on these key concepts and their treatment in her works. It is the purpose of this paper to clarify and to explain the meaning of these concepts and to show how they function in her work in order that Miss O'Connor's intuition of Reality, Redemption, and Shock may stand revealed. Reality and Redemption are the what or matter of her fiction, while Shock is the how or method of her writing.

The what and the how can be significantly related through a brief examination of Miss O'Connor's purpose. She states that her basic purpose is the interpretation for the modern nominal Christian of existing Reality in terms of Redemption. Excerpts from two

Intuition is the artist's unique and creative apprehension and relation of any set of existents.
of her essays illustrate this statement. 2

When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality.

If the Catholic writer hopes to reveal mysteries, he will have to do it by describing truthfully what he sees from where he is. A purely affirmative vision cannot be demanded of him without limiting his freedom to observe what man has done with the things of God. 3

The writer whose position is Christian, and probably also the writer whose position is not, will begin to wonder at this point if there could not be some ugly correlation between our unparalleled prosperity and the stridency of the demands for a literature that shows the joy of life. He may at least be permitted to ask if these screams for joy would be quite so piercing if joy were really more abundant in our prosperous society. 4

In the first statement Miss O'Connor declares that truthful rendering of what is observed is necessary to reveal mysteries. For this reason the author cannot be expected to render an idyllic portrait of the world. Furthermore, in the second quotation she

2 These statements drawn from Miss O'Connor's theory which is expressed in her essays have been chosen not because they are her rules but because they best express in fact what her stories dramatize in fiction.


points out that what the Christian writer sees is not
the joyous vision which people clamor to have portrayed,
but the sobering spectacle of a prosperous people lack­
ing in joy. These quotes reveal clearly Miss O'Conner's
unique and masterly intuition of the tension existing
between what man accepts as real and what is real. For
her, man's faulty apprehension of reality, "what man
has done with the things of God," accounts for his de­
pendence on the material "literature that shows us the
joy of life" and prevents or lessens the possibility
of his understanding the Redemptive "mysteries." To
make her intuition clear, she chooses to use shock be­
cause "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 this manner,
Miss O'Conner's purpose in writing focuses these three
angles of concentration. The tension between Reality
and Redemption constitutes the what or matter of her
intuition. Her how or means of expressing this intui­
tion is Shock. With this as focus, interpretative def­
initions of Reality, Redemption, and Shock can be
worked out in order that one can see more clearly the

5Ibid., p. 162.
interplay of these key concepts in Miss O'Connor's work. To work out the definitions is the task of Chapter I; succeeding chapters will point out and interpret these key concepts in action.
Definitions of the terms Reality, Redemption, and Shock, to be of real value in understanding Miss O'Connor's method and work, must be made from her point of view. Using excerpts from her essays which best express what her fiction dramatizes, it is possible to arrive at satisfactory definitions which can be used as bases for interpreting her stories. The stories are always to be regarded as the definitive sources, but they yield examples and illustrations rather than technically expressed ideas, thus it is necessary in the matter of definition to quote from the essays rather than from the stories.

Reality, the first key to Miss O'Connor's work, is the essential context of human existence and of human action; therefore, it deserves primary consideration. Under reality I will consider her intuitive grasp of the mental and physical world outside herself as she interprets it in her aesthetic and in her work. Primarily, she sees the roots of reality stretching "far into those depths of mystery about which the modern world is divided -- one part of it trying to eliminate mystery, while another part tries to rediscover
it in disciplines less personally demanding than reli-
gion."¹ This quotation shows that Miss O'Connor sees
modern man trying either (a) to destroy mystery or (b)
to compromise it.

She finds this tampering with mystery unac­
ceptable on theological, psychological, and aesthetic
grounds. Theologically, this procedure is unsound be­
cause faith or belief in what cannot be scientifically
known — mystery — is necessary to an acceptance of a
correct fictional portrayal of man's existence, "and
when there is a tendency to compartmentalize the spir­
itual and make it resident in a certain type of life
only, the sense of the supernatural is apt gradually
to be lost."² To deny or to compromise mystery, she
says, is to limit man in such a way that the truth
about him cannot be fictionally portrayed. On the psy­
chological level, Miss O'Connor finds mystery essential
to man's discovery of his identity. She says: "An
identity is not to be found on the surface; it is not
accessible to the poll-taker; . . . . It is not made
from the mean average or the typical, but from the hid­
den and often the most extreme. It is not made from
what passes, but from those qualities that endure, . . .

¹Flannery O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction

²Ibid., p. 735. Italics mine.
because they are related to truth. It lies very deep. In its entirety, it is known only to God, but of those who look for it, none gets so close as the artist. In her mind, identity is essentially a mystery, an unknown, accessible in its fullness only to God. To deny or compromise mystery, in this context, destroys something of the nature of man as Miss O'Connor understands this nature. Further, she finds that the artist, in her case the writer, gets closer than any other person to the nature of identity. Aesthetically then, for her to deny or compromise mystery would be to deny or compromise her art. In another essay she states:

When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality. If the writer uses his eyes in the real security of faith, he will be obliged to use them honestly and his sense of mystery and his acceptance of it will be increased.

Fiction, dealing as it does with men and things, she believes, strengthens adherence to the supernatural and this strengthened belief forces the writer to use what he sees with integrity yet enables him to achieve a


more full acceptance of the mystery surrounding and
going beyond created things.

Her championing of mystery on the theological, psychological, and aesthetic planes is a profoundly Christian concept, influencing her understanding of reality as a relationship of understood-to be understood-non-understood existents. Those who see reality as only understood-to be understood existents violate, she would say, God on the theological level, man on the psychological level, and art on the aesthetic level. Further, this view is false and fundamentally un-Christian either by reason of direct denial of faith or by compromising faith. Proponents of this distorted view of reality, lacking a sense of mystery, would have man explain away this phenomenon so as never to commit himself to what he cannot see since this demands too much of him personally. Commitment to Faith requires a risk he will not take. A man who denies the existence of an absolute is almost bound to mediocrity. His failure or inability to risk all for some unknown ideal holds him fast bound to the ordinary, the humdrum. This attitude is the reality of mind which Miss O'Connor finds man using as a basis for life.
In order to illustrate this predominating attitude in all its error, Miss O'Connor had to choose a setting or milieu, a physical reality with which to clothe it. Of her Reality, Sr. Bertrande says she sees Reality in relationship to Redemption and can never compromise this vision. Since a writer's milieu is always determined by his needs, his knowledge, and his creative ability, Miss O'Connor's realm of the rural, small-city South is rather more than a picturesque background. Instead it is a vehicle carrying the Christian writer's vision of un-Christian mediocre man. About her choice of the South, Miss O'Connor says her country suggests everything from the actual countryside that the novelist describes, on, to, and through the peculiar 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.

In her country, observable and personal reality are intricably mixed. She sees an observable reality which is unaware of Redemption, yet accepts for herself a

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personal reality centered around Redemption. The tension resulting from her intuitive grasp of both is the essence of her genius. Miss O'Connor suggests that her country in toto is somewhat synonymous with her vision of man and things. Her thought is more fully clarified in the following quotations.

It is the peculiar burden of the fiction writer that he has to make one country do for all and that he has to evoke that one country through the concrete particulars of a life that he can make believable.7

The writer can choose what he writes about but he cannot choose what he is able to make live, and so far as he is concerned a living deformed character is acceptable and a dead whole one is not.8

The limitations that any writer imposes on his work will grow out of the necessities that lie in the material itself.9

Manners are of such great consequence to the novelist that any kind will do. Bad manners are better than no manners at all, and because we [Southerners] are losing our customary manners we are probably overly conscious of them.10

Her "country" then, besides being congenial to

7Ibid.

8Ibid.


her intuition of reality, is also determined by her abilities as an artist; she must be able to make it believable through concrete particulars, character portrayal, and a set of mores or customs even though, as the last quote indicates, these may be prejudiced or extreme. The reason behind some of her grotesqueness may well lie here. Since Miss O'Connor's writing witnesses her choice of the rural, small-town South, it must have been her choice of observable reality because she felt this was what she could make live vividly for an audience while using it as a natural milieu for her mental reality or vision of man. Elsewhere, in her remarks on the occasion of receiving the Georgia Writers' Association Scroll, she speaks of the positive asset her Southern environment has been. Her remarks are drawn from Walker Percy's reply to newsmen when he was asked why there were so many good Southern writers.\footnote{Percy's answer to this question was: "Because we lost the war." This answer is quoted by Miss O'Connor in the address.} "He didn't mean by that simply that a lost war makes good subject matter. What he was saying was that we have had our Fall. We have gone into the modern world with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery which could not have
developed in our first state of innocence — as it has not sufficiently developed in the rest of the country." Her environment, then, enables her both to perceive and to portray the un-Christian, mediocre mentality of modern man. Man's false concept of himself she chooses to reveal through characters, mannerisms, and setting common to the South but adapted and determined by her Christian intuitions of these realities. In this way "... the Christianity, which was the source of her deepest thematic compulsions, always poises on the needle point of violent paradox." Her reality on her "country" includes all these aspects.

12 From the major portion of Miss O'Connor's remarks as recorded in "The Regional Writer," p. 35.

13 Charles A. Brady, Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 17. The violent paradox mentioned in this quote is evident in "The Displaced Person." In this story, the Displaced Person is both Satan and Savior. He is Savior in the material sense when he gives diligently of his time and strength to build up the farm. But he is more than this. To save his employer, Mrs. McIntyre, from her selfish and narrow way of life he must destroy her security. When he unconsciously does this in the racial incident, he becomes a Satan figure to her. Thus the story is posed on the Christian paradox that to save one's life one must lose it. In another aspect of the same paradox, Mrs. McIntyre, at the death of the Displaced Person, finds herself in "a foreign country in which the people [the Displaced Person's wife and children and a priest] bent over the body were natives and she watched like a stranger while the dead man was carried away in the ambulance." Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor (New York, 1964), p. 299.
the concept of Redemption affects radically her understanding of observable Reality defined above. Her connotation of Redemption is clarified in several comments in her essays.

This [Redemption] means for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and that what I see in the world I see in its relation to that. I don't think that this is a position that can be taken halfway or one that is particularly easy in these times to make transparent in fiction.  

The Catholic writer, in so far as he has the mind of the Church, will feel life from the standpoint of the central Christian mystery [the redemption]; that it has for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for.

Miss O'Connor views this saving action of Christ as the central Christian mystery and the one which should influence and determine a life more than any other fact. This position, that life with all its ugliness is something God died for, is a position which cannot, she believes, be taken halfway. Both rejection and acceptance of this fact imply a relation to Christ, the doer of the Redeeming deed; it is only the halfway who never establish any real relation. Miss O'Connor finds this mystery and its significance difficult to portray as such.


in today's world\textsuperscript{16} thus she resorts to the drama of un-redemption; she lets us, the halfway men, see the negation of redemption in a soul with the hope we will recognize the necessity of accepting redemption. "She sees modern man as an often grotesque figure, a caricature of his true self, and in showing what man is, she is showing what he could be."\textsuperscript{17}

Her apprehension of this tension in man led to the discovery of a means appropriate to communicate her vision of existing reality while making all its implications apparent in full force. The reality she addresses is the un-Christian mediocre mentality. To this, she must make clear her vision of mankind's conflict and of his wrong answers to the problem of mystery, of faith. Miss O'Connor comments on her portrayal of this tension through the medium of shock and her difficulties in finding a way to shock the man without commitment or convictions:

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.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16}Meyers, p. 411.


When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock — to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures.\(^{19}\)

To achieve shock, Miss O'Connor employs violence and the grotesque in action, character, and metaphor. It is through this SHOCK that she hopes to make her audience aware of the sacrilege of denying the redemption and the horror of life without redemption. Affirming the relevance of shock to her work, Clarke says: "The rock bed of her belief was that the perspective on life of most of mankind had become so warped that it could be depicted only through grotesque symbols."\(^{20}\) Miss O'Connor gives one other reason for using this particular brand of shock. In a letter to James Farnham, she says: "Essentially the reason my characters are grotesque is because it is the nature of my talent to make them so. To some extent, the writer can choose his subject; but he can never choose what he is able to make live. It is characters like The Misfit and the

\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 163.

Bible salesman that I can make live." Miss O'Connor has said above that the grotesque or shocking is what she sees and this is, as she says here, what she has the ability to portray. Her vision and her portrayal include in this concept of shock both the violent and the grotesque, techniques used by the author to accomplish her purpose which is to represent to itself in all its horror and error the world as it looks from her redemption-centered focus. Her choice of the grotesque, says Drake, points "to a conception of 'straightness' and 'oughtness' without which the imperfect and the grotesque are ultimately meaningless." Thus, violence and the grotesque are integral to the negative view of Redemption which Miss O'Connor generally chooses to use. To one who scorns mystery, stories built on holiness and belief are laughable; simple agnosticism is realism. Thus, neither of these routes is capable of carrying her intuition and each has to be set aside. To shock man into recognition of his agnostic self and of the beauty of redemption, Miss O'Connor chooses to portray the drama of Unredemption,


synonymous with deliberately chosen damnation, at various levels of its existence.

Dramatizing Unredemption in terms which are violent and grotesque makes her intuition clear. Violence displays itself most clearly in the actions of her characters, especially in the desperate struggles of men to avoid or deny Christ by murder, self-inflicted blindness, suicide or other almost maniacal acts. This violence is often indicative of an attempt to get away from Christ through ignoring Him. Eventually, during a time of critical mental agony, ignoring Christ becomes impossible and the character seems driven in desperation to deny Him — to relate negatively.

Correlatively, many of her characters through their conflict with Christ show themselves grotesque and deformed in mind. This interior grotesqueness frequently externalizes itself in physical strangeness or deformity. Miss O'Connor's use of the grotesque is never extraneous or sensational; it is essential to the illustration of her intuition; it is how she sees the man living in unnatural separation from Redemption, depending on his petty pride and finite knowledge.

Stelzmann says: "Modern man does not lose his faith innocently, but he rejects God deliberately and prides
himself on his atheistic or agnostic superiority.  

Man is then, a creature deformed by his own intellect and will glorying in the misery of his deformity, wondering why he is not happy, yet seeking to find himself in a violence resulting in further deformity. This deformity is the tragedy of man which her vision, firmly grounded in reality-redeemed and in her personal commitment to redemption, was able to grasp and to portray. From her point of view, her creatures are natural, are real; and all their violence and grotesqueness are really observable to her in all their horror.

John F. Judge affirms

The grotesqueness in Miss O'Connor's work has meaning; it is not gratuitous grotesqueness. Miss O'Connor is trying to point out that distortions and incongruities in life are, like any evil, an absence of some good. For Miss O'Connor's work the missing good is grace. She shows the effects of Redemption (i.e., grace) in a negative manner. Miss O'Connor's works are enumerations of the very causes for Redemption: the causes which give Redemption meaning.

What Miss O'Connor is doing concerns the first two of these three terms, Reality and Redemption. How she is doing it focuses attention upon the term, Shock.


These three terms are the three corners of her aesthetic, determining and shaping her work. To investigate her success or failure in what and how, these terms may easily be used as reference points. I believe these terms as defined in this paper to be the literary keys to Miss O'Connor's work. Using these keys, I propose to investigate the evolution of Miss O'Connor's fiction and to attempt some overall evaluation of that fiction. From this point, we shall let the fiction speak for itself and trace these concepts: Reality, Redemption, and Shock, within the work, seeing how they are manifested and testing these definitions in theory against their manifestations in practice. This paper will show the use of these concepts, their effectiveness, and their evolution so that a more comprehensive judgment of the body of Miss O'Connor's work can be made.

That the evolution of Miss O'Connor's art in practice may be more logically expressed, her works of fiction will be studied chronologically as they were finally published. This places her fiction in the following order: Wise Blood, 1952; A Good Man is Hard to Find, 1955; The Violent Bear It Away, 1960; and
Everything That Rises Must Converge, 1965. Of these works Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away are short novels each numbering under one hundred fifty pages. A Good Man is Hard to Find contains ten short stories and Everything That Rises Must Converge contains nine. These writings, two novels and nineteen short stories, constitute the body of Miss O'Connor's fictional work.

A CONSIDERATION OF WISE BLOOD

Wise Blood, a short novel published in 1952 centering on man's acceptance or rejection of redemption, grew out of previous short stories. The novel was accepted variously by a host of critics, many of whom expressed their views in pungent language. Overall impressions of the novel ranged from outright condemnation to laudatory recognition. The New Yorker, in a two sentence review, declared the book a drudgery which makes the "reader wonder if the struggle to get from one sentence to the next is worthwhile." Even though he understood the atheistic character of the doctrine presented, John La Farge, writing in Saturday Review, was unable to see either the negative redemption or the positive application of the novel; he called it monotonous, savage, unmeaningful, lacking in both satire and humor. Joe Lee Davis in The Kenyon Review condemned the story as nihilistic, lacking in

1Robert Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. xv.

2Review of Wise Blood in New Yorker, XXVIII (June 14, 1953), 118.

compassion, and expressive of obscenity and violence. To him, the attempt of the novel to explore the modern world's rejection of belief is responsible for its ugliness. Mr. Davis evidently understands what Miss O'Connor is portraying but he does not apprehend the redemptive context or perhaps he does not wish to admit the ugliness of man's rejection of belief. In either case, only one half of the novel is being reviewed.

Melvin Friedman, who feels that Miss O'Connor's talents lie in the realm of the short story, remarks that her "first attempt at the longer form" is "episodic and fragmentary." Time also calls attention to the style of the novel declaring the book to be artful, odd, fitful in its satire, but having the merit of "occasional passages of crisp writing and sly humor." John Connolly, writing in Esprit, seems to see the book more as a whole. He says: "Christ becomes more easily recognizable in Wise Blood. The marvelous effect which Miss O'Connor has achieved is that by emphasizing the

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4Joe Lee Davis, "Outraged or Embarrassed," KR, XV (September 1953), 320-321.
5Melvin Friedman, "Another Beginning in Short Fiction," EJ, LI (April 1962), 240.
negative she makes one think positively.\textsuperscript{7} It seems to me Mr. John Connolly expresses here a view cognizant of the redemptive as well as of the realistic aspects of the novel. To consider only the realistic side as the first-mentioned critics have done is to consider only half the novel, and the least important half at that. Mr. Connolly is not alone in his praise of Miss O'Connor nor in his acknowledgment of the novel's redemptive theme. "When I read \textit{Wise Blood} I felt, without being able to formulate it, the spiritual thrust of Miss O'Connor's theme,"\textsuperscript{8} says Francis X. Connolly in the same issue of \textit{Esprit}. While Caroline Gordon admits that Miss O'Connor shares things in common with other writers of the grotesque, she insists on a quality which makes Miss O'Connor different from these writers and possibly one of the most important writers of our age. The difference lies in the nature and causes of her characters' freakishness.\textsuperscript{9} They are "off center, out of place, because they are victims of a rejection


\textsuperscript{8}Francis X. Connolly, untitled article in \textit{Esprit}, VIII (Winter 1964), 18.

of the Scheme of Redemption." Miss Gordon also states that this religious-oriented framework is never overt in the novel. Seeing this off-centeredness and the religious orientation of the work, Miss Gordon seems to understand the reality-redemption conflict which underlies Miss O'Connor's work while she also explains the reason for the use of the grotesque or other shock elements. But it is John Connolly who best summarizes the laudatory view of the novel. He says:

_Wise Blood_ is a great novel by a great artist. It is a novel permeated with Miss O'Connor's "grotesque" characters, shocking incidents and comedy, all artistically knit together by her theme of Redemption and her effective use of theological and biblical allusions.

In this statement, Mr. Connolly distinctly points out the three angles of Miss O'Connor's aesthetic: reality in the form of characters and incidents, redemption in theme and allusion, shock in incident. In this story, the attitude of each character toward reality and redemption furthers the redemption theme which takes the

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10 Ibid., p. 9.
11 Ibid., pp. 3-10.
12 John Connolly, p. 66.
form of unredemption. Jonathan Baumbach states the theme in this manner: "though the world is encrusted with evil, if one man is willing to sacrifice himself in Jesus' image, redemption is still possible." Such a statement of the theme emphasizes the positive aspect of the novel while it minimizes the negative or unredemptive aspect. To this statement of the redemptive

13The novel's plot, evolving from an active tension between reality and redemption, is very simple. A young man, Haze Motes, who has received a medical discharge from the service returns home only to find the town has disappeared. Since he cannot remain where there is no town, he goes, armed with his uncorrupted nature and his peculiar religious convictions "to do some things I never have done before" in order to prove the truth of his convictions about the nature of reality. He holds that there is no Christ, no sin, no redemption. He takes up first with the town prostitute Leora Watts and is later involved through varying circumstances with Enoch Emery, with the blind preacher, and with the preacher's daughter Sabbath Lily. To escape the insistent thought of Christ and of sin, he establishes the Church Without Christ, a religion of unredemption, of which he is preacher and congregation. As a preacher Haze speaks publicly, refuses commercialization by professional religious promoter Hoover Shoats, unmasks the pretenses of conventional religion, accepts Sabbath as his mistress, and kills the false prophet Solace Layfield whom Shoats promoted in Haze's own image. His preaching career comes to an abrupt halt when organized law pushes his pulpit-car over a cliff. On the evening of this day, Haze blinds himself so that he can see and undertakes a life of violent asceticism "to pay." The book ends with his being rejected by all men and killed by a blow from a policeman's billy. Quotes from: Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 11, 121.

theme should be added a contrary yet complementary note concerning Miss O'Connor's method of presenting it. This John Connolly does when he says: "The marvelous effect which Miss O'Connor has achieved is that by emphasizing the negative she makes one think positively." Since the major character in this novel is Hazel Motes, it is in and through him that the theme of unredemption is most fully revealed and dramatized. About Haze there are varying views regarding his place and his meaning for reality and redemption. Father La Farge believes that the idea of a negative Christ has possibilities but that these "are not realized ... because the individual is so repulsive that one cannot become interested in him." In agreement with La Farge is Davis who declares Haze a character "too horrible to be derided," both a carrier and a victim of Miss O'Connor's fury at modern man. Newsweek views Haze as antisocial, a non-conformist street preacher who is driven by furious and frustrated

15 John Connolly, p. 68.
16 La Farge, p. 22.
17 Davis, p. 322.
18 Ibid., p. 322.
religious impulses. It appears these critics insist on equating the whole Haze with impulses, frustrations, or other psychological nomers. Understood in this manner, such a character cannot be expected to make sense. Psychological terminology, the voice of modern reality, does not have the tools with which to understand Haze. Haze is a man of negative faith; in him are reality and redemption, both of which must be considered.

Haze Motes, with his stiff black preacher's hat, his piercing eyes, and his ascetic face revealing the outline of his skull is immediately marked as unusual. But his separation from the ordinary human is deeper than appears on the surface. His name implies that he sees mistily, hazily; motes or specks of dust impair his vision. This sight-blindness theme runs throughout and becomes a major carrier of shock in the novel. Haze, a product of Southern Fundamentalism, is further concerned with guilt (reality) and justice (redemption); accordingly, in Haze, reality and redemption cross paths giving us, as an example of their crossing, a

19 "Frustrated Preacher" (anon. rev.), Newsweek, XXXIX (May 19, 1952), 114.
unique creature. Haze's position as example is made explicit in the scene where his grandfather, a wandering preacher, points to the boy as an example of the sinner who, because of his sin, would be unable to escape the hand of Christ. Both Lawson and Connolly call attention to this oxymoronic quality of Haze's character. While admitting his uniqueness, Lawson adds that Haze is an "exemplum" rather than a character.

John Connolly underscores this when he says:

... while Haze's story is primarily a search for himself and Christ, it is at the same time the story of a determined flight from himself and Christ... Haze's story is every man's story. It is the story of man's search for himself and ultimately for Christ. The hidden difficulty lies in the fact that man must first find himself before he can possibly find Christ.

To see Haze as exemplum rather than as a freakish or entirely unique and separate character adds to the meaningfulness of the novel because it projects into the grotesque situations a certain amount of universal-ity. The participation of this "exemplum" in the universal search-flight theme or story pattern further strengthens the reality-redemption tension on which the

22 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 16.
23 Lawson, p. 137.
24 John Connolly, p. 66.
novel is based for it brings together in one person reality or flight from God and redemption or search for God.

How does Haze react to his grandfather's pointing him out to the world? As a child his reaction was "a deep black wordless conviction . . . that the way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin. He knew by the time he was twelve years old that he was going to be a preacher."25 A grotesque Christ parallel is now built out of Haze Motes, the christ of the rejection of Christ. This is further clarified by examining Haze's origin and early actions. Haze comes from an unknown ghost town, Eastrod, Tennessee. It was prophesied of Christ that He would be the Orient [East]26 and a flower sprung from the rod [root] of Jesse,27 and that when He came no one would know where He was from.28 Further, Haze has served his army term in a foreign country; Christ dwelt in Egypt. Again, it is at the age of


27Is. 11:1-3.

28John 7:37.
twelve that one first hears of Christ's being aware of his mission; the same holds true for Haze. Christ dies the death of the cross before rising to establish His Church; Haze dies the analogous death of the coffin-dreams on the train before he comes into Taulkingham with his good news. Haze's preaching, his rejection of commercialization, his being rejected, all complete the Christ image which in Haze is the christ of Unredemption. Farnham summarizes well the contrary christ image which Haze exemplifies. He says:

Hazel Motes in Miss O'Connor's first novel, Wise Blood, is an almost metaphysical perversion of the Saviour. Haze envisions himself as a new redeemer. . . . Haze cannot ignore redemption and cannot escape it. His only salvation lies in a new dispensation of the utter perversion of grace.

The most important factor in the shaping of Haze as a person is his perception that to avoid Christ he must avoid guilt. Christ was, to him, "a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing."

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29 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 15.


31 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 16.
To put it plainly, Haze sees Christ as a tempter encouraging man to sin so that He might save him and have claim to him. This gives the reader the bizarre motive for Haze's early penances and avoidance of sin in order that he might not need redemption. Caroline Gordon pierces this situation when she says, in her review of Wise Blood, that Miss O'Connor's characters are "off center, out of place, because they are victims of a rejection of the scheme of Redemption. They are lost in that abyss which opens up for man when he sets up as God."  

Haze's first formal acquaintance with sin is at the "SENSATIONAL" side show where he sees his father and hears his suggestive comments about the squirming, nude, white woman's body fastened in the coffin-like box. Haze walks one and one-half miles with rocks in his shoes to expiate so Christ will have no claim on him. Throughout his service career, too, one finds Haze eager to avoid sin. Accordingly, in the latter part of his service days, Haze convinces himself that sin does not exist, thus he is, as the story opens, on

32 Gordon, p. 9.

his way to the city [the place of sin] to prove this. 34 Haze's deliberate pursuit of sin in the city becomes, says Baumbach, "a kind of ritual declaration of freedom from God the Father's authority. Ironically, the more Haze sins, the more committed he becomes to the import of His judgment." 35

Haze's sexual indulgence with Mrs. Watts is one of these proofs. His later intentions to seduce Sabbath Lily, although they are soon reversed on him, are aimed at a direct sacrilege of the Church of the Christ of organized religion as he knows it and intended to be another means of proving sin a delusion. Further, Haze's doctrine summarized from the beginning of Chapter 10 supports the nonreality of sin. Doctrinally, Haze proposes these statements as true: (1) There is no truth. (2) There is no place for man outside his own body and his own time. (3) The Fall, the Redemption, and the Judgment of man are confined to his body and his time. (4) There is no place in man's body nor in his time where he has been redeemed. (5) Therefore, man has no purpose, place, or fixed mode of existence. Man is, as Miss Gordon has said, "displaced."

34 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
35 Baumbach, p. 335.
out of any place or time to belong in and in a place or time where he does not belong. Since neither man nor Jesus makes sense, life is a nasty mockery. Further, Haze declares, "Your conscience is a trick, ... it don't exist though you may think it does, and if you think it does, you had best get it out in the open and hunt it down and kill it. ..." Solace Layfield, a man who doubles as Haze, draws from him these same words and is finally hunted down and killed by him. Solace is a visible conscience which Haze in his rejection of sin must violently get rid of. Baumbach looks at Solace as more than a mere conscience; rather he sees Solace as the key to Haze's final conversion to positive faith. Says Baumbach,

Haze kills his double not for mimicking him but for saying that he doesn't believe in Jesus when he really does. That is, Haze runs over the imitation preacher for committing Haze's own heresy. ("You ain't true," Haze said, "You believe in Jesus.")

Baumbach views Haze's denial of redemption as insincere from the first, a position which is in direct contrast to the open denial of Christ and sin portrayed in Haze's

36 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 90.

37 John Connolly, p. 68.

38 Baumbach, p. 341.
life and doctrine. Lawson, while he credits Haze with positive faith near the end of his life, insists that he is first the true seeker of no divinity and obsessed with his quest, although this quest is never successful. 39

That he was unable to sustain his denial of sin is evident in his succeeding penances and his self-inflicted blindness. The question is: Are his penances and blindness truly penitential acts acknowledging his submission to and belief in Christ or are they, as his youthful penance was, a direct attempt to even himself out with Christ so that he can still remain outside the need for redemption and therefore of the need for or responsibility to Christ. Much critical controversy revolves around this question because its answer provides the key to the interpretation of the Reality-Redemption tension in the novel. Earlier critics of the novel seem to feel Haze is not redeemed, while later critics affirm his final redemption. The viewpoint of the early critics such as James Farnham in Esprit, Jane Hart in The Georgia Review, Father La Farge in Saturday Review, Carl Hartman in the Western Review, and William Goyen

39Lawson, p. 142.
of the New York Times\textsuperscript{40} is best summarized by John Simons writing in \textit{Commonweal}. Simons says:

Nobody here is redeemed because there is no one to redeem. It is doubtful, for all my own high-minded scansion of symbol, that even Motes is redeemed.\textsuperscript{41}

Carl Hartman further elaborates on this interpretation:

Haze buys some quicklime and blinds himself. His only explanation for this, and for the fact that he wraps barbed wire around his chest and puts broken glass in his shoes, is that he has done it "To pay." But it is not an act of repentance; dying, in a ditch, where he is found by two policemen, he says only "I want to go on where I'm going."... At any rate -- and here is the theme of the book -- in the process of denying the validity of all martyrdom and its accompanying mysticism and perversions, Haze has ended up placing himself in a position which is susceptible of a similar interpretation; the only forms he can find for his denial are those traditional ones [death and asceticism] which, because of the very nature of their place in society, can only serve to trap rather than free him.\textsuperscript{42}

This interpretation seems to capitalize on the Christ image in Haze. In his asceticism, final rejection, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41}John Simons, "A Case of Possession," \textit{Commonweal}, LVI (June 27, 1952), 298.
\item \textsuperscript{42}Hartman, p. 79.
\end{itemize}
death, Haze must relate to Christ; he cannot escape him even though he chooses the affinity of negation. This view is compatible, also, with the circular structure of the novel. The opening description finds Haze sitting on a train near a woman who is trying to see into his eyes looking for an unknown something; the story closes the same way, and although Haze becomes the pinpoint of light at the end, he is never explained. A circular movement is also indicated in the skull image which opens and closes the novel. Such an interpretation leaves Haze's reality in complete tension with Christian redemptive-reality and emphasizes Haze as the negative Christ, a man who would give his life to prove there is no redemption.

On the other hand, those who consider Haze redeemed at the end build their case on a positive interpretation of the murder of Solace, the destruction of the car, and the pinpoint of light image. Using these from an affirmative point of view they conclude Haze's penance and martyrdom are marks of his acknowledging Christ. Says Baumbach, "The frantic insistence with which Haze preaches against Jesus suggests the depth of religiosity, his inescapable involvement with the
Baumbach earlier interprets the total story as a reversal of the *rite de passage*, a literary convention in which a character leaves or falls from a society, goes through a purgative pilgrimage, and passes to a better or higher state. Rather than fall from innocence, he says, O'Connor heroes "are fallen from the outset and move, doomed, through an infested world proliferating its evil until at the heart of darkness they discover light (or God) and through renunciation and extreme penance achieve redemption for themselves and, in extension, for all of us." Echoing Baumbach, Stelzmann declares Miss O'Connor's heroes "sinners of the spirit" and sees in the pinpoint of light Haze's redemption in so far as his dark despair is overcome by light. To prove their interpretation, these affirmative critics go back to the killing of Solace Layfield. In this murder, the passing away of the hypocrite is the turning point after which Haze is able to see himself for what he is. Following the death of Layfield, Haze's car is pushed over the cliff. This, Stelzmann

43Baumbach, p. 335.
44Ibid., p. 334.
46Baumbach, p. 341.
and Baumbach interpret as the moment of vision or awakening during which Haze realizes his debt to Christ and what must be done. Steizmann cites the car as a "mechanical bride" and the foundation on which Haze's faith is built. Interpreting the novel in terms of these events, Friedman generalizes,

In accustomed fashion for Flannery O'Connor's characters, Hazel Motes has had his moments of religious feeling and violence. He has experienced a series of surrealistic horrors and has worked out his destiny in terms of the rigid transplantation-prophecy-return (death) pattern.

It appears the rite de passage and the transplantation-prophecy-return motif are essentially the same because both involve a pilgrimage view of the novel. These men stress the pilgrimage motif rather than the circle motif pointed out in the negative aspect. John Connolly sums up the positive case in these words:

In this search, Hazel Motes had experienced a devastating spiritual struggle. He was initially spiritually maimed. And yet, he finally emerged from this struggle physically maimed but with the embattled scars of spiritual victory. It was not until he was blind that he could see the blood of redemption.

Such a view recognizes the initial reality-redemption

47Stelzmann, p. 12.
48Friedman, p. 241.
49John Connolly, p. 68.
tension, but believes this tension is resolved in the end, that reality is redeemed and no longer in tension with redemption at the close of the book.

The crux of the argument lies, I believe, in the pinpoint of light image. Light usually connotes goodness or rightness. To equate Haze with light would be to equate him with goodness or rightness in this context. Twice, Mrs. Flood closes her eyes to see a pinpoint of light, a pinpoint which she cannot see while her eyes are open. On the first occasion she is imagining the effects of blindness:

She had to imagine the pinpoint of light; she couldn't think of it at all without that. She saw it as some kind of a star, like the star on Christmas cards. She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh.50 (Italics mine.)

On the second occasion she is staring, eyes shut, into Haze's death-closed eyes.

[She] felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pinpoint of light.51

On this basis the affirmative argument, that Haze is redeemed, maintains its ascendance. This argument's


51Ibid., p. 126.
major weakness is the rite de passage structure which it imposes upon a novel seemingly circular in its opening and closing passages.

Redeemed or unredeemed, Haze does not function within a vacuum. He is surrounded by people, all of whom affect his interpretation of life. Lawson believes that these minor characters appear in the book only long enough to serve the purpose of foil, enlightenment, or temptation, and then are dropped; thus the author's concern is not with the interaction of man and man, but of man and God. If this is true, then any attempt to understand the story on a purely natural or psychological level of simple reality defeats itself; the story and all its characters must be interpreted in terms of redemption. Seen in this light, Enoch Emery appears to be the most important of the minor characters. Enoch is marked throughout the story by two traits: his "wise blood" and his desire to be wanted, both of which color his perception of reality. Enoch never thinks; he merely acts exactly as the emotional pulsations of his wise blood direct him. He attaches himself to Haze after Haze's arrival. Of the relationship between the two, Baumbach says:

52Lawson, p. 143.
There are two central characters in *Wise Blood*, Hazel Motes and Enoch Emery, whose careers are parallel, the life of one prefiguring that of the other. . . .

Enoch is a comic figure; Hazel, a tragic. They are each in a special sense redeemers: Enoch, a mock redeemer; Hazel, a real one.

Describing Enoch's garish appearance, Miss O'Connor writes:

Enoch had on a yellowish white suit and a pinkish white shirt and his tie was the color of green peas. He was smiling. He looked like a friendly hound dog with light mange.

Enoch follows Hazel through the streets, hoping to find a friend in him, and suggesting things they could do together. Forcefully dismissed by Hazel, Enoch does not give up; instead he offers Hazel his knowledge of the Hawks' address in return for friendship. From here, Enoch's ruling blood runs his life and causes him to perform bizarre actions for little apparent reason.

Enoch is the epitome of the man who places complete trust in his feelings, making them his god. "For some time," says Baumbach, "Enoch has kept secret his religious intuition about the mummy, waiting in readiness

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53Baumbach, p. 337.
54Ibid., p. 338.
for the right occasion." One day his blood tells him the secret is to be revealed to Haze Motes, but Enoch cannot just reveal the secret; he must complete the ritual approach -- visit the pool, drink a milkshake, visit the animals in a particular order, approach on foot through the trees, then enter the museum-temple and reveal the secret -- a shrunken man in a glass case. Next, Enoch's overpowering emotions lead him to clean his room in a precise, ritualistic order from least to most important items as his blood directs. The most important item is his unused slop jar cabinet which for some unknown reason he reveres and gilds like a grotesque mock tabernacle. Although Enoch and Haze do not meet again to speak, Enoch overhears Haze preaching about the need for a Jesus who is "all man, without blood to waste, . . . that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him." This sets Enoch's blood to speaking, forcing him to steal the new Jesus -- the shrunken man -- and place him in the gilt tabernacle. The following day

56Baumbach, p. 338.

57Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 50-57.

58Ibid., p. 78.
he starts out for Haze's place carrying the new jesus and wondering what reward his blood will give him. His blood urges him to stop and to shake hands with Gongga, the movie star gorilla.\(^5\) He does so and in his desire for personal contact, he tells Gongga his life story. Of this incident, Baumbach says, "Enoch's confession leaks out like the gasoline from Haze's holy (the pun is Miss O'Connor's) automobile."\(^6\) Having poured himself out, Enoch is rejected discourteously by a human voice from inside the ape suit and, humiliated, flees.\(^6\) Arrived at Haze's house, Enoch is greeted by Sabbath Lily who takes the bundle from his arms and forces him to leave. Again, Enoch is rejected. In this context, Baumbach says of the shrunken man that he "is for Enoch an objectification of his deformed spirit and in offering it to Hazel, Enoch is, in effect, offering himself."\(^6\) Haze's consequent destruction of the mummy parallels Enoch's destruction of himself when he steals and puts on the ape suit becoming the ape. "His dream

\(^5\)Ibid., pp. 97-98.

\(^6\)Baumbach, p. 340.


\(^6\)Baumbach, p. 339.
goal is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the American success myth: he wants to be 'the young man of the future,' that is, a gorilla man.63

The grotesqueness of Enoch's actions: the ritual of approach, the ritual of room cleaning, the gilding of the tabernacle, the theft of the mummy, the scenes with Gonga, and the final deformation of a man into an ape enable this character to shock the reader. Enoch undergoes a progressive degradation of himself and separation from humanity because of his extreme emotionalism. The rituals of approach and room cleaning remind one of the elaborate mystiques enacted by primitives for establishing rapport with gods, known and unknown. The meaning is attached not to the object of worship but rather to the superstitious unknown. The mock tabernacle holding the shrunken mummy is a horrible parody of the Christian and more specifically Roman Catholic custom of retaining the Eucharist in a golden tabernacle. Pages 79 and 95 confirm this interpretation of the action. Enoch's transformation into the ape heralds his complete dissolution as a person and his disappearance from the story. He is lost, gone, cut off from the race of men by his own wise blood, his

reigning passions. This picture, as it is designed to do, shocks the man who believes his life and actions are subordinated to his reason.

In contrast to this perversion of reality, Asa Hawks, Sabbath Lily, Hoover Shoats, and Solace Layfield are perversions of organized religion; therefore, they are each a perversion of redemption and an aspect of existing accepted attitudes toward reality. Ultimately, they are the perversions underlying Haze's rejection of Redemption. He sees in organized religion only Christ the tempter to evil. As Newsweek comments, these characters are satirizations of modern secularity. As direct satires of organized religion, Asa and Sabbath Lily Hawks are most outstanding. Even their names give them away. The pair is introduced hawking the Christian religion, their wares competing with those of a man hawking potato peelers. Baumbach calls attention to this situation saying:

That the preacher's name is Hawks and that he is introduced competing for disciples with a salesman hawking potato peelers suggests the essential likeness between the two -- the shared corruption. The blind preacher and the girl are not what they seem: the man is neither blind nor a man of God; the girl is not a child but an ugly and parasitic slut.

64"Frustrated Preacher," p. 115.

65Baumbach, p. 336.
Dramatizing the mockery he is, Asa Hawks, the false blind man, arouses Haze's curiosity and Haze feels compelled to follow him until he sees if he is real in his religion. Haze's discovery that Asa can see frees Haze from the threat of Christianity's truth. Similarly, Haze first sees in Sabbath Lily the purity of Christianity and this is why he determines to seduce the girl. When she turns up in his bed to seduce him and declares her intention to stay, the ugliness of organized religion is revealed to him and to the reader. The element of shock is contained in these realities masking as redeemed but really as evil as Satan himself.

Another minor character, Hoover Shoats, offers to set Haze up in business and notes as references how well he has done promoting Christian preachers. His evil greed, his desire to use others, is reflected in his name also. Hoover is a commercial or trade name for a vacuum cleaner, an instrument designed to pick up dust and similar household waste, while a shoat is a pig. The two together give one a commercialized pig, determined to outdo all other brands. Having been

refused by Haze, Shoats, true to his non-discriminatory greed, later returns promoting Solace Layfield, a false god made in the image of Haze and symbolic of the false gods of evangelistic Christianity. The integrity of Haze's refusal stands in open contrast to the dishonesty of a Christianity which accepted this man. The sincerity and frankness of Haze's integrity is remarked by several critics. Francis Connolly mentions the "negative integrity which was demonstrated not in what Haze Motes . . . did, or willed, but in what he was unable to do.67 In this same vein, Miss O'Connor adds in her preface to Wise Blood, 1962, That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to.68 Haze's integrity, then, lies in his inability to give in to evil even though he pursues it. Accordingly, Sr. Mariella Gable notes that in spite of his poverty and ignorance, Hazel Motes possesses to a high degree "an

67Francis Connolly, p. 18

absolute integrity of spirit." It is Haze alone who sees these people for the hypocrites they are; what society considers trivia -- fake blind preachers, commercialized religion, impure dedicated persons -- is to him monstrous. Through his eyes the reader shares his vision and becomes aware of the tension existing between reality and redemption both within and without Haze Motes. Further, Miss O'Connor shows us these aberrations of Christianity, not in approval of Haze, for she portrays him also as an aberration, but in order that we can understand what makes Haze what he is and be properly shocked by our own aberrations.

During the course of the story and toward the end of his preaching career, Haze shocks the reader by committing two violent and bizarre actions: (1) he kills Solace Layfield, (2) he blinds himself with lye. The significance of the first of these has been discussed somewhat in connection with the meaning of Haze. Solace, since he is Haze's double, is not to be considered outside of Haze but only in connection with him. As such, Solace is seen as a conscience figure and one whose

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70 Lawson, p. 142.
actions and life greatly influence the reactions of Haze. Baumbach goes so far as to say that Solace's "confession is the turning point in the novel for Hazel." On the first night that Haze sees his image, he realizes "if you don't hunt it down and kill it, it'll hunt you down and kill you." The second night, Haze follows Layfield, knocks his car off the road and accosts him, demanding that Solace remove his clothes. As soon as Solace is stripped, Haze runs him down and backs the Essex over him. His reason for the murder: "Two things I can't stand, ... a man that ain't true (Solace was pretending not to believe in Christ) and one that mocks what is." In this statement, the depth of Haze's integrity as well as the extent of his aberration both stand revealed. Baumbach further explains that, in Layfield, Haze really sees himself and his own mockery of truth for the first time. This is why this scene is the turning point for Haze. When the dying Solace confirms Haze's accusations by confessing his

71 Baumbach, p. 341.
72 Flannery O'Connell, Three by Flannery O'Connell, p. 91.
73 Ibid., p. 111.
74 Baumbach, p. 341.
guilt [a Christian action] and by calling upon the name of Jesus, Haze slaps him once on the back, into silence and into death.75 Here again, as Baumbach clearly shows, the aberration and integrity of Haze are both revealed, for the slap which brings death and culminates murder also permits Solace to cross over into eternal life.76 By an action meant to kill, Haze has unwittingly given life.

After this, Haze returns to Faulkinhham to get his car repaired before leaving for another city to preach the church without Christ. Miss O'Connor records the gist of his conversation with the station boy: "He said he had only a few days ago believed in blasphemy as the way to salvation, but that you couldn't even believe in that because then you were believing in something to blaspheme."77 Haze admits here the reality of sin. His proposed journey is to be a flight from sin in the form of Sabbath Lily. His plans are thwarted by a policeman who pushes his car over a cliff. According to Baumbach and others who advocate

75Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 111.
76Baumbach, p. 341.
77Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 112.
a positive interpretation of the novel the aftermath of this incident, during which Haze stares into the gorge below and sees the destruction of his "mechanical bride," is the moment of vision for Haze, the moment of conversion to belief in redemption and, ultimately, the moment of his redemption. Upon his return to Faulkinham, Haze deliberately blinds himself and takes up ascetical practices such as wearing rocks in his shoes and barbed wire encircling his chest. Stelzmann says Haze's self-blinding is his way of showing his faith in salvation by visible action and is not meant, as some have said, to "confess his nihilistic religion of the denial of Christ and of grace." He adds it is to make up for Hawks who could not blind himself. If we accept the positive interpretation of the novel, that Haze is redeemed, an interpretation in accord with the 1963 preface to Wise Blood quoted earlier and with the majority of later critics, then the penitential rites at the end fall into the context of Christian asceticism as practiced by monks of the early Christian era. Although his landlady questions the relevance of

79 Baumbach, p. 342.
these practices, Haze considers them not only relevant but necessary for him to be clean. Haze does not find this revelation in those he meets. Rather he finds it only when he recognizes himself for what he is, a sinner. Of Haze's final situation, Jane Hart says:

... by the end of the story we see Haze completely circled by a mass of jubilantly evil and shamelessly blasphemous and sinful people [reality], and eventually led by his search for truth [redemption] to a weird and reasonless sort of martyrdom.52

Haze's martyrdom, whether taken negatively or positively, is not logical because it is out of step with the reality around him. It does not fit what today's world expects of a man because it is not for anything -- it is an act of faith, an act of negative faith according to early critics, an act of positive faith according to later critics and Miss O'Connor's preface to the novel.

From a consideration of the Reality-Redemption tension and its resultant shock as found in character and situation, let us now consider shock as it is found in the symbol and metaphor of the novel. The sight-

82Hart, p. 318.
blindness theme referred to earlier as a major carrier of shock holds a prominent place in WB. Lawson recognizes the sight-blindness theme in Haze's glasses, in his obsession with the blind street preacher, in Layfield whom he kills that he may not see, in his self-blinding. He notes also the concern of others for Haze's eyes. To elaborate, Haze's eyes are first described on page 10 as they held the attention of his train companion, Mrs. Wally Bee Hitchlock for a long time. "They were so deep that they seemed, to her, almost like passages leading somewhere and she leaned halfway across the space that separated the two seats, trying to see into them." Also, "she found herself squinting instead at his eyes, trying almost to look into them. They were the color of pecan shells and set in deep sockets. The outline of a skull under his skin was plain and insistent." This sight-blindness theme, says Lawson, enables the book to fulfill its purpose which is "to warn against defective spiritual

83Lawson, p. 140.
84Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 10.
85Ibid., p. 9.
As if to point out the significance of this theme, the story closes almost as it opened. The dead Haze is placed on the landlady's bed.

The outline of a skull was plain under his skin and the deep burned eye sockets seemed to lead into the dark tunnel where he had disappeared. . . . She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pinpoint of light.  

In view of this theme, the circular motion of the negative interpretation becomes the spiral motion of the positive one, the difference centering around the pinpoint of light image pointed out earlier.

Hazel Motes' name also carries this sight-blindness theme as shown earlier. This sight-blindness symbol is carried again in his mother's glasses which Haze kept after her death. Haze wears the glasses to read the Bible and during moments of temptation so that he can avoid sin and redemption. These glasses tire his eyes so much that he can wear them only a

86Lawson, p. 140.
87Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 126.
88Ibid., p. 17.
short while; they seem further to impair rather than to increase his ability to see. As such, they represent a further distortion of his spiritual vision. When Haze makes up his mind to leave Sabbath\textsuperscript{89} (avoid temptation) he puts the glasses on and looks at himself in the mirror. "His blurred face was dark with excitement and the lines in it were deep and crooked."\textsuperscript{90} Suddenly two other blurred figures, Sabbath carrying the shrunken man, come into view; Sabbath is cooing to the man like a mother to her child. In this scene, says Baumbach, Haze receives "his first recognition of objectified evil and he sees it as the manifest offspring of his sins, mocking him."\textsuperscript{91} In this further distortion of his vision, then, Haze is brought to recognize the reality of the evil he denies. Obviously, this scene would seem to preface the moment of full vision given Haze at the destruction of his car. Having viewed the blurred image, Haze dashes it to the floor, a gesture, says Baumbach, prophetic of the murder of his double, Solace Layfield.\textsuperscript{92} At this point in Haze's

\textsuperscript{89}Ibid., p. 101.
\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., pp. 101-102. Italics mine.
\textsuperscript{91}Baumbach, p. 339.
\textsuperscript{92}Ibid.
situation, the oxymoronic character of the sight-blindness theme is apparent — sight leads to blindness and blindness leads to sight; in such a manner then, is the reader prepared for the blinding episode which follows. Still bespectacled, Haze exclaims in response to Sabbath's query concerning his departure, "I don't want nothing but the truth! . . . and what you see is the truth and I've seen it." Here, Haze admits his vision is blurred; this sin is real — he and Sabbath have seen this. But Haze does not yet see to the truth of Christ; his glasses and his natural vision are both blurred. In agony, he throws the glasses out the door and seeks refuge in sleep, a state in which the eyes are blind.

This sight-blindness theme recurs more shockingly in Haze's blinding of himself. His landlady's short meditation on blindness which precedes the introduction of the blind Haze adds horrible emphasis to his action. Says Friedman:

One notices how this passage shifts from objective narrative to the landlady's idiom. The change probably occurs in the third sentence. The irony of the second sentence is the one didactic attempt

93 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 103.

94 Ibid., p. 114.
on the part of the narrator to ridicule the landlady. From then on Flannery O'Connor allows the landlady herself to complete the caricatured portrait of Bible Belt morality.

Into this background and moral code, neither Haze nor his action fits, yet from the first, Haze never tries to hide his blindness; rather he makes it serve as a means of separating him from others and as something positive and essential to his own mode of being. Haze's blindness is an act witnessing the truth shown him in the moment of vision and which his natural sight never showed him. In this manner, his self-blinding, says Stelzmann, is to make up for Hawks.

On the other hand, the landlady's preoccupation with her blind boarder's eyes makes clear her lack of total conviction about anything, even aberration, her greed in wanting to possess without cost, and her total materialistic approach to life. "She couldn't look at anything steadily without wanting it, and what provoked her most was the thought that there might be something valuable hidden near her, something she couldn't see." 

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95 Friedman, p. 241.
Her desire to possess whatever Haze had gained in his blindness led to her infatuated plan to marry him and, upon its revelation, drive him from her house.

Haze’s eyes are what attract Sabbath Lily to him also. “I said look at those pee-can eyes and go crazy, girl! That innocent look don’t hide a thing, he’s just pure filthy right down to the guts, like me. The only difference is I like being that way and he don’t.” In light of the reality-redemption tension, Sabbath’s analysis of Haze is shrewd. She sees through his innocent look to the rottenness within, and she admits its presence, something which at this point in the novel, Haze cannot do because he doesn’t like the rottenness called sin since it gives Christ claim on him. On the other hand, Haze glories in a deeper rottenness, an intellectual rejection of redemption for which he pours out his energy during most of the novel. This very commitment to nothing is the shocking aspect of Haze’s search for truth.

The fourth person connected to Haze by this theme is Asa Hawks. Hawks, an evangelistic preacher, youthfully proposed to blind himself to witness his belief. He was unable to do this but he roamed the

Ibid., p. 92.
streets as a pseudo-blind man preaching a Christianity of his own, begging, and distributing tracts to men on the street. Sabbath shows Haze the clipping containing Asa's proposal. From then on, Haze is fascinated by Hawks' eyes for he has to know if Hawks' witness is real. Shining a light in Hawks' eyes one night dispels all pretenses and Hawks and Christian truth and witness are reduced to nil as far as Haze is concerned.

In summary, Haze never sees clearly either with or without glasses. Approaching the novel negatively, one would say that even in his blindness, his truth is an absence of truth. What he sees with his natural vision betrays him; what he sees with his mother's glasses is blurred and deformed. He is thus driven to blindness to witness his own truth -- the truth of Unredemption which is the greatest blindness of all. From a positive interpretation which seems to fit in more fully with later critics and Miss O'Connor's Preface, one arrives at a moment of vision which results in Haze's blinding himself so that he can see. This act enables him to become the pinpoint of light who will direct others through the darkness. True to the oxymoronic character of the novel what was dark Redemption has become light, and what was light
early has become dark. Reality and redemption cross during the moment of vision to produce the shock of Haze's choice and witness to that choice.

In this novel as in most of her work, Miss O'Connor does not confine her shock to characters and situations, rather it is woven deeply into the suggestive metaphor of her story where it prepares for, explains, and deepens the shock of situation and character. Much of her metaphor is used to reduce the individual to his lowest terms, those of animal, vegetable, or simply inanimate nature. This type of metaphor, I term reductive metaphor, developing this term from John Hawkes discussion of her metaphor in the article "Flannery O'Connor's Devil." In Wise Blood, Miss O'Connor uses reductive metaphor to sketch out for the reader the ugliness resulting from the degeneracy of man. Food is one channel of reductive motif. The plump woman on the train had "pear-shaped legs." Enoch's guardian had hair like "ham-gravy trickling over her skull." The reader is disgusted with the


102 Ibid., p. 29.
oozy, strong smelling stuff, which is the reaction Miss O'Connor confirms as she relates the hypocritical piety of the woman and her unloving relationship with Enoch. Later, when Haze goes to sleep in his car after ridding himself of Shoats, three women with paper sacks came by and each looks at him critically, "as if he were something — a piece of fish — they might buy."\textsuperscript{103} In this instance, the shopper's curiosity is substituted for personal or human interest.

The dining car scene constituting Haze's first public embarrassment instead of his first public appearance affords several examples of reductive metaphor using the animal motif. The steward darting from table to table is compared to a sniny, slicked-up crow,\textsuperscript{104} while the women Haze is seated with are described as "dressed like parrots."\textsuperscript{105} Their gaudy dress underscores their mawkish manners and lack of consideration for Haze. Together with the waiter who refuses to give Haze his bill, they make Haze's meal such a nightmare that Haze blurts at the woman with the "game-hen

\textsuperscript{103}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 88.  
\textsuperscript{104}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.  
\textsuperscript{105}\textit{Ibid.}
expression,"106 "If you've been redeemed, I wouldn't want to be."107 Later, after Haze has arrived in Taulkinham, Enoch discovers him. Miss O'Connor describes Enoch's garish appearance closing with the following reductive line: "He looked like a friendly hound dog with light mange."108 There is nothing attractive about this portrayal; rather any sympathy the reader may have had is turned into disgust at the word mange.

Inanimate nature is another phase of reduction used to underscore the active shock. At the zoo, the dirt and stench of the restaurant is made visible through the waitress' "old white uniform clotted with brown stains."109 The word clotted causes the reader to veritably gag in distaste. Later, the concealed dishonesty of Shoats is made more apparent in a simile describing him, "there was an honest look that fitted into his face like a set of false teeth."110 Shoats is no more genuine than the teeth.

106 Ibid., p. 13.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., p. 27.
109 Ibid., p. 51.
110 Ibid., p. 81.
Commenting on Miss O'Connor's use of symbol and metaphor, Lawson says that these are used to join content and form. Connolly seconds this in his statement that

More often, Miss O'Connor presents her theme in metaphors, or in a rhythm of action reflected in the rhythms of her language. Hazel Motes' haunted imagination of death in life lives itself out in his memory of his dead mother, as he had seen her through a crack in her coffin.

With the novel based as it is on paradox, such statements seem not only logical but helpful in understanding the work. Since these symbols and metaphors represent the Reality-Redemption paradox, they are to be interpreted in light of both levels and help to hold together a story dealing with the unconventional theme of man and God.

In this, as in any work of art, the author's style is a means intended to clarify and to present her vision -- a vision which depicts the reality of Christ and man. This vision is paradoxical and subject to many interpretations by critics, thus it is no wonder that the style should likewise be

111Lawson, p. 140.
112Francis X. Connolly, p. 18.
113Lawson, p. 137.
paradoxical, at times to the point of illogicality and absurdity.\textsuperscript{114} Davis feels that Miss O'Connor, in spite of a good try, lacked the consistency necessary to make her combination of "farce, satire, and allegory"\textsuperscript{115} succeed. Lawson believes that the novel succeeds, that the bizarre, the ludicrous, and the paradoxical are necessary in order for Miss O'Connor to array her vision in suitable shock. These elements of the grotesque, he continues, are probably "a form of religious hyperbole" and, although grotesque, necessary to the author because the world appears that way to her since it does not recognize "the normative value of faith."\textsuperscript{116} This apology seems sound but I would extend it with the idea that the grotesque is necessary if Miss O'Connor is to make the grotesques in her audience see themselves for what they are. This point has been elaborated both in the definitions and in this chapter on \textit{Wise Blood}. This preoccupation of the novel with the grotesque is mentioned, too, by Francis Connolly as the theory behind her metaphor\textsuperscript{117} and by Jane Hart as part

\textsuperscript{114}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{115}Davis, p. 325.

\textsuperscript{116}Lawson, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{117}Francis X. Connolly, p. 18.
of the presentation of the theme.\textsuperscript{118}

Having viewed the critics' opinions about the novel and having interpreted these in light of the Reality-Redemption tension which is the basis for Miss O'Connor's work, the value of the novel seems more clear. This value is considerable but only fully apparent when it is judged in terms of the novelist's vision of the man-God relationship, not when judged in terms of conventional criticism which bases itself around the man-man relationship. Lawson elaborates on the unconventionality of this novel when he states that other than being a long piece of prose fiction, the work contains no other characteristics usually associated with the novel. It has neither character development nor interaction, no plot development in the usual sense, and no resemblance to reality; yet, he maintains that the novel succeeds.\textsuperscript{119} Jane Hart and John Connolly both see Miss O'Connor's vision of the Reality-Redemption tension as the secret of its success. Miss Hart comments:

\begin{quote}
This then is the secret skill that gives her stories the edge they have -- the artful com-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{118}Hart, p. 221.

\textsuperscript{119}Lawson, p. 137.
bination of reality and unreality, a combination striking and most delicately balanced in her novel, *Wise Blood.*

John Connolly seconds this when he says that it "is in the very nature of man to search out Christ. This is specifically Miss O'Connor's point, and her success, it would seem, lies in the fact that she can subtly draw this point out by exaggerating its opposite." Judged in this light of her purpose, Miss O'Connor's crossing of reality and redemption which achieves a kind of grotesque shock is seen as an effective means of communicating with her audience. The oddness, the grotesque characters and situations, the harsh sentences and grotesque metaphors reveal to man the strained relations between God and man resulting from the Reality-Redemption tension with which he is so familiar but which he has not recognized before. Reality, Redemption, Shock -- the three interrelated aspects of this novel form both its method and its message. All this is summed up in the words "Wise Blood" which title the novel, characterize a semi-principal character, and find themselves disproved by the end of the novel. The story might be epitomized this way:

120 Hart, p. 217.

121 John Connolly, p. 68.
he who has wise blood shall perish; he who has faith shall live.
CHAPTER III

A CONSIDERATION OF A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND

The publication of Miss O'Connor's first book of short stories, A Good Man is Hard to Find, elicited from reviewers strong opinions both positive and negative. Among those with negative reactions were Friedman and the New Yorker. Friedman declares: "the ten stories in this volume have fairly similar southern settings and exploit the problems of violence, redemption, and grotesquerie which have always obsessed her. A Good Man is Hard to Find, however, lacks the essential unity and organization of another book of stories which it occasionally resembles, Winesburg, Ohio."1 Friedman, while he understands the Redemptive focus of the book and the other means of its unification such as setting and technique, still feels the book does not have that unity of being which would make it noteworthy. The New Yorker goes yet further assuring us "the macabre air that hangs over Miss O'Connor's stories, heightening their effect without concealing their lack of depth, is intensified by her particular

1Friedman, p. 239.
use" of southern dialect and cultural milieu. This same reviewer declares Miss O'Connor's plot pattern to be an unsubstantial one in which a handicapped person flutters around a trap and then falls in. He says further that the trapsetter and the victim are both mindless floaters on the author's disinterested compassion. These reviewers, I believe, have missed the unifying principle of A Good Man is Hard to Find — original sin — which is the theme of each story and of the book as a whole. In a letter to Mrs. Robert Fitzgerald, Miss O'Connor speaks of dedicating A Good Man is Hard to Find to the Fitzgeralds and describes the stories in these words: "... Nine stories about original sin, with my compliments ... " In these ten stories, then, Miss O'Connor investigates man's personal and continuing rejection of God, a rejection begun by the first man to set his will in opposition to God's and a rejection continuing to some degree in all men. Her handling of this material, says Drake, reveals a new insight, one which shows she has achieved a greater compassion for her "damned, deluded

Review of A Good Man is Hard to Find, in NY, XXXI (June 18, 1955), 105.

Ibid.

Quoted by Robert Fitzgerald in his introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. xxii.
characters, and once or twice she even allowed them to have a shattering insight into the error of their ways that did not destroy them in the very process. . . .

Richard Rupp, who seems to apprehend Miss O'Connor's intentions rather clearly, admits the violent and repulsive first impression made by these stories as they illustrate Miss O'Connor's vision but he is quick to add that this vision is fixed on the Kingdom of God.

Continuing his apology, he says: "[In her stories] only the materially and spiritually destitute shall see God; only the freaks and the ignorant, the crazed and the innocent. They are modern instances of the Christian paradox, the Sermon on the Mount."

To study Reality, Redemption, and Shock in this book, it proves useful to separate the characters as Rupp suggests by their degrees of rejection or acceptance of redemption. Since it is people who experience and react to the Reality-Redemption tension, a division by character types is a logical one which will not

5Drake, Esprit, pp. 21-23.


7Ibid.

8It is not within the scope of this paper to treat each story extensively and by itself.
minimize their individuality but point up their universality. Miss O'Connor's characters, sharing as they do the human condition, share also in the universal imperfection of humanity. Original sin serves as the Christian source for this imperfection, while redemption is viewed as the act and process of remedying imperfection. Because reality such as that described and defined in Chapter I rejects redemption, it must substitute another explanation and remedy for imperfection. In these stories, it is man's reaction to his own imperfection and to the redeeming promise of perfection that concerns Miss O'Connor because this is the crux of original sin as it faces man today. In relation to this premise, her characters fall into five distinct but broad categories:

1) the man of intellectual rejection
2) the man of practical rejection
3) the man of tepid indecision
4) the man of earnest search
5) the deformed in mind who cannot will.

Shock is used in action and situation as a means of dramatizing the Reality-Redemption tension expressed in these various reactions to imperfection. As in Wise Blood, shock in A Good Man is Hard to Find is never the reason for its own existence. In A Good Man is Hard to Find, shock is openly apparent in plot, deformed
characters, and irony of situation. Events seem to have a way of turning out as they most appropriately and bitterly should. The tragedy often is that what should reveal, only more deeply conceals from man, the perfection he seeks.

Perhaps the most shocking surface reaction to the Reality-Redemption tension is that made by the intellectual rejecter who denies the existence of original sin and also the need for redemption. His denial is one made primarily in theory. This intellectual rejecter is present in such characters as The Misfit in the title story, in Hulga and the Bible salesman of "Good Country People," and in Nelson of "The Artificial Nigger." Underlying their rejection is the hypothesis that religious faith throws things off balance and that living by visible reality, while it doesn't afford much meaning, does afford conquest of a sort. This view of life controls the mind of each of these three characters.

The title story featuring the misanthropic Misfit has occasioned the most controversy, and rightly so, as this is a violent and shocking lead story. John Clarke says the story is in keeping with Miss O'Connor's vision of contemporary life which she looked upon as
"horrifying and grotesque" and expressive of her conviction that "modern man has lost contact with the essential scheme of Redemption." About Christ and the Redemption, The Misfit has this to say:

[Jesus] thown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but thow away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can -- by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him.10

In The Misfit's interpretation of Christ as unbalancer, Mayhew discerns Miss O'Connor's major fictional preoccupations: the South, irony, and concern for Christ.11 Why is The Misfit the kind of man he is? He gives us the answer in his response to the old lady's doubts about Jesus' miracles. "I wasn't there so I can't say He didn't," . . . "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now."12 Ted Spivey explains The Misfit as "a protagonist who passionately desires the certainty of belief

9Clarke, p. 7.

10Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 143.

11Leonard F. X. Mayhew, untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 34, 36.

12Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, pp. 142-143.
in Jesus; not finding it, he turns to murder . . . as his only consolation, stating in effect one of the basic ideas in Miss O'Connor's work: whether one is a criminal or a respectable citizen, without Jesus he can only commit evil."13 The Misfit, in spite of his desire for Christ, is unable to find Him in the civilization in which he lives. A product of his civilization, The Misfit by his very existence condemns it as having no sense of faith, sin, good, or justice. The family which encounter The Misfit and are killed by him exemplify the mediocrity from which The Misfit has come. It is this milieu, seen especially in the Grandmother, of smug self-satisfaction, watered-down religion, and economic measuring rods that gave such a distorted being birth. The events of the story are trivial, pica-yune, as is the family, until they encounter The Misfit, a Hyde of their own creation. In a shockingly brief sequence of terror, each member of the family is killed. None put up any defense except the Grandmother who talks religion to her assailant. This woman sees his terrible inner conflict, then recognizes him with the ironic words, "You're one of my own children."14

At these words, "The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest." Explaining The Misfit's inner conflict, Farnham says that man has perverted the grace of God and in Miss O'Connor's work he suffers because of this — suffers without meaning and with growing intensity proportioned to his blasphemy. This blasphemy, The Misfit's denial of Christ and of the civilization which presented Him, is clearly expressed in the deliberate murder of the Grandmother. In spite of his perverted moral intelligence which has substituted evil for grace, The Misfit must be given credit for a certain kind of integrity. He has made an "honest choice, even if the wrong one. He had knowingly and willingly decided against Christ." Because of this decision, The Misfit's reality is what he can see and hurt for his own pleasure because only this is. From this explanation, it should be clear that the conception of Reality portrayed in the story "A Good Man is Hard to Find," is a materialistic, non-Christian one.

15 Ibid.
17 Drake, Esprit, p. 19.
Redemption, on the other hand, is treated negatively as the implied opposite of The Misfit's way of life.

Even though we may protest, as Jane Hart does, "the brutal ending with the cold tingling of every hair on our heads,"\textsuperscript{18} we must not mistake the violence of the tale for "sensationalism which glosses the surface" of Miss O'Connor's art.\textsuperscript{19} The violence is much deeper than sensationalism. The Misfit's remarks about Jesus throwing things off balance indicate the full implications of Redemption, implications which The Misfit could not find fulfilled in the society around him. Instead he saw a reality separate from or, at most, distorted in its relation to Redemption. This perversion of reality is evident in the Grandmother's protective piety and in her exclamation that this perverted personality is her son. Both the Grandmother and The Misfit have rejected Redemption, each in his own way.

Perhaps the most grotesque example of intellectual rejection occurs in the story "Good Country People." In this story two persons, one a Ph.D. and the other a Bible salesman, have rejected Redemption reasonably and willfully. From this action, the

\textsuperscript{18}Hart, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{19}Clarke, p. 7.
distortion of their beings takes its root and shapes itself into a worship of ugliness. The one-legged Ph.D., Hulga, is portrayed as one "whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from her face," and who "would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of the will and means to keep it." The irony and satire which critics generally attribute to this story makes itself evident in the crisis where Hulga receives an opportunity to look at and see her blindness to truth. To explain the reasons behind Hulga's blindness, the story presents the aphoristic non-meaning clichés used by Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman. In response to her mother's faith that proverbs or set formulas provide all the answers, Hulga exclaims, her mouth half full of food, "Woman! . . . Do you ever look inside and see what you are not? God! . . . Malebranche was right: we are not our own light." Hulga is an atheist essentially because her mother is a pat-answer Christian. The

20 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 244.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., p. 248.
women's practical rejection of redemption is obvious, I believe, simply because they are sure they have the answers to all questions. Even though they profess Christianity, they do not experience the need for redemption, since they do not acknowledge that they lack anything. Friedman, when he speaks of their grossness and insensitivity,²³ and Jane Hart, when she calls attention to the satire surrounding the "trite maxims"²⁴ uttered by these women, substantiates such an interpretation of them. Friedman goes on to show how the women clash with the deep sensitivity of Hulga, the lonely intellectual.²⁵ He further notes, as do others, the recurring motifs surrounding Hulga -- the artificial leg, the name change, and the Ph.D.²⁶

It seems evident from the context of the story that the Ph.D. in Philosophy and the name-change from her given name, Joy, to the chosen name, Hulga, witness Hulga's search for truth outside her mother's false Christianity. The Ph.D. shows the depth of her search among all the great minds of men, while her

²³Friedman, p. 240.
²⁴Hart, p. 220.
²⁵Friedman, p. 240.
²⁶Ibid.
failure to use this degree or to live maturely indicates the inability of philosophy to satisfy her. The name-change she regards as her one creative act.  

About this she says, "One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust [child] into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga." The name is fit because it is ugly, a symbol of her ugly one-legged person, and of her ugly manner and ways, ultimately a symbol of a complete and successful rebellion against her mother who intended for her to be a Joy. As in so much modern fiction, the physical deformity and other external oddities indicate a displaced or deformed spirit.

Into this tension between intellectual rejection and pat-answer Christianity steps a ray of hope -- the Bible salesman. Mrs. Hopewell, Hulga's mother, is delighted with the boy and ironically puts him in a class with herself -- the sterling class of "good country people." Although Hulga detests the salesman, she resolves to see him alone for the sole purpose


28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., p. 250.
of arranging to seduce him in order to destroy his religious notions and change his remorse into "a deeper understanding of life."30 Miss Hart speaks of Hulga's priding "herself on her atheism;"31 this decision on Hulga's part and the superiority with which she initially conducts herself dramatically point this out. For her, to "enlighten" the boy would be her second creative act. They meet the next day and start for the barn where Hulga's revelations to the boy are to be made. Shockingly, to her and to the reader, the revelation is reversed. The boy proves to be a hypocrite, an atheist rather than a Christian, a neurotic who glories in other people's deformities, a person of whom William Van O'Connor can say: he is a character "who loves his own viciousness with a gleeful, satanic intensity," and who, by his apparent innocence excites a moment of generosity in the girl, a moment of which he takes advantage for her final humiliation.32 This moment of generosity is brought about, when through caresses and cajolings he convinces Hulga to

30Ibid., p. 255.
31Hart, p. 220.
surrender to him her wooden leg, a symbol of her most intimate self. The "innocent" is revealed when he will not return the leg and opens his valise laying out its contents "like one presenting offerings at the shrine of a goddess." In the case he carries not Bibles but whiskey, obscene cards, and a mysterious product for the prevention of disease. Faced by this revealed "innocent," Hulga is overcome and granted an opportunity for insight. She was not all wise, nor could her faith in the Real sustain her as the example of "good country people" was transformed into incar­nate evil only later to reveal himself an atheist and, as such, of the same breed as Hulga. The connection established here between atheism and evil threatens the wisdom and goodness of Hulga's choice. In order to rationalize and save her own atheistic creed, she even demands that he be a Christian according to her stereotype of Christian. "You're just like them all -- say one thing and do another." Her reality has been threatened by this insight, redemptive in its import,

34Ibid., p. 260.
35Ibid.
into evil and she is trying desperately to save what she has chosen for herself.

The Bible salesman again denies his Christianity, picks up the leg and begins to leave.

As he passes through the loft hatch, he says:

I've gotten a lot of interesting things... One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house I call at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga, ... you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born.

Humiliated but not wiser, Hulga looks after the departing figure who, unaware, has "pointed" a way for her.

[The pun is mine, but reflective of the use Miss O'Connor makes of names.] Her mother and Mrs. Freeman see him cross the field and stop to comment on his simplicity and guilelessness. This pause provided a fittingly ironic conclusion which reveals the shallowness of pat-answer Christianity.

In summary, Hulga's reality is learned rejection of redemption and willful choice of deformity or sin. The Bible salesman is a living original sin which has never known redemption or desired it. Because of this he can possibly show Hulga the evil of

36Ibid., p. 261.
her choice, a task which her mother’s pat-answer
Christianity cannot perform. Redemption, as such, is
absent from the story except by implication and by its
mysterious negative, Unredemption, which the major
characters, Hulga and the Bible salesman, represent.
Shock is developed through Hulga’s name, manners, and
way of life laid in direct contrast to her mother’s
mode of life. The seduction scene which reverses it-
self on Hulga utilizes the double shock of Hulga’s in-
tentions versus the boy’s intentions. The duplicity
of man in the story is brought to a fitting conclusion
in the unwitting irony of the closing comments made by
Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Hopewell. The combination of
these elements results in a stripping of sham from
reality revealing to Allen Tate Miss O’Connor’s “deep
Christian concern”37 and to William Esty a world “con-
verted into clever gimmicks for Partisan Review.”38

The final intellectual rejecter is Nelson, the
grandson in “The Artificial Nigger.” Nelson, in his
ignorance, has rejected knowledge and has substituted

37Quoted by William Esty in "In America,
Intellectual Bomb Shelters," Commonweal, LXVII (March
7, 1958), 588.

38Ibid.
his ignorance for knowledge. It is his grandfather’s purpose in taking him to the city, which serves, as it does in Wise Blood, as a symbol of evil, to exchange the boy’s ignorance for knowledge, especially knowledge of evil. The grandfather sees himself as fully understanding the young and the city [evil]. During the journey, when the two are lost in the city, two revelations are made: the boy recognizes and admits his ignorance and Mr. Head, the grandfather, realizes his own personal store of evil, a facet of his being which he had not admitted before.

The boy’s transformation is effected when Mr. Head leaves him alone and napping. He wakes the boy by overturning a garbage can further down the street. Scared, the boy bolts, knocks over a woman and finds himself caught in an encounter with the police. He sees here the evil of the city, its lack of understanding of him, and his own inability to cope with the environment. His need for guidance causes him to submit himself to Mr. Head who has come up to view the

40 Ibid., p. 195.
Mr. Head's reaction is a denial of the boy and ultimately of truth as he will not admit the boy is his. Upon his release, the boy resentfully begins to follow Mr. Head back to the station. Both are lost, not only geographically but spiritually as the bond between them has been broken. Mr. Head realizes the depth of the wound he has inflicted when he looks back over his shoulder and sees "two small eyes piercing into his back like pitchfork prongs." During the rest of the walk, Mr. Head contemplates his betrayal of one who trusted him and begins to realize the rift he has caused. "He felt he knew now what time would be like without seasons and what heat would be like without light and what man would be like without salvation." Like his grandson, Mr. Head is face to face with the whole of reality for the first time and his confidence and assurance fail him. A moment of mercy, in the form of a plaster statue of a Negro, follows. Seeing the statue, Mr. Head remarks "an artificial nigger!" After

41 Ibid., pp. 208-209.
42 Ibid.
44 Ibid., p. 212.
a moment, Nelson repeats the phrase in an identical manner thereby re-establishing the lost identity. Mr. Head contemplates this moment of mercy [he had been too good to deserve any before] during the return trip. Perceiving the oddness of both characters and situation, Kunkel declares the story "ranges from the ludicrous and howlingly funny to the grim and quietly ironic."46

The story is, however, far from simply humorous or odd. As the boy and his grandfather leave the train to re-enter their solitary world, Mr. Head "knew that there were no words in the world that could name it [Mercy]. He understood that it grew out of agony, which is not denied to any man and which is given in strange ways to children. He understood it was all a man could carry into death to give his Maker, and he suddenly burned with shame that he had so little of it to take with him."47 He sees the kinship of all sin with his denial of Nelson and accepts all sin as his own in the belief that God will love him more in

45Ibid.

46Francis L. Kunkel, untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 33.

47Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 213.
proportion as he has forgiven him much. Of the old man's actions and reactions, William Van O'Connor says that this story, like "The River," dramatizes the nature and function of grace in such a manner that "an old man simultaneously sees his own monstrousness and feels the mercy of God." 48

Looking deeper into this idea, the reader sees that in this story reality reveals each character's ignorance of his self and of the world outside the self. In discovering the truth about himself and about the world each character is shown a third more powerful world, the world of Guilt, of Mercy, of Loving Forgiveness. Each experiences redemption. This experience is afforded by the shock each receives, the shock of finding himself inadequate in a crisis. That the experiences are intended to be parallel is brought out by the physical likeness between man and boy; . . . "they looked enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age, for Mr. Head had a youthful expression by daylight, while the boy's look was ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be pleased to forget

Another parallelism is evident in the way the boy follows in the man's footsteps and repeats exactly what the man says at times.

In our previous study of the intellectual rejecter, it was clear that for any understanding of the human condition, Miss O'Connor believes it necessary that original sin and the need for redemption be considered primary factors. The intellectual rejecters were such because they could neither understand nor accept these things as they saw them. Similarly, the practical rejecter while he accepts the theory of original sin and acknowledges the need for redemption, lives as though these aspects of the human condition apply to all persons except himself.

Let us look at this first in the case of Mr. Shiftlet and Lucynell's mother from the story "The Life You Save May be Your Own." As the title indicates, the story centers around two characters, each of whom wishes to succeed at the expense of the other. As for ends to be attained, Mr. Shiftlet wants money and a car; Lucynell's mother desires a handyman and a husband for her retarded daughter. That Shiftlet makes a pre-

49 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 197.
tense of religion is evident in such phrases as "he wished he lived in a desolate place like this where he could see the sun go down every evening like God made it to do."50 Shiftlet also makes much ado concerning his "moral intelligence,"51 his knowledge of the monks of old,52 and his theological bent seen in a phrase such as "Lady, a man is divided into two parts, body and spirit."53

The mother's creed, while it allows for all the religious ideas proposed by Shiftlet, since she never indicates otherwise, is focused on the need to secure a keeper for her daughter and thereby free herself from an odious duty. In Shiftlet, she sees release from this burden; thus she courts him for this purpose with promises of a house, money, a car if he will marry Lucynell and stay around the place. She plays Lucynell up as an "innocent woman"54 pretty as a baby doll.55

50 Ibid., p. 163.
51 Ibid., p. 164.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., p. 166.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., p. 167.
While the reader is aware of the hypocrisy of both these persons, neither person is aware of the full intentions of the other. It is after the marriage that the reader fully understands the dependence of these persons upon themselves and no other to set the world straight for them. Shiftlet and Lucynell leave on their honeymoon stopping at the first restaurant a safe distance away. Here Shiftlet leaves Lucynell asleep at a restaurant counter and runs off with the money and the car, having, practically speaking, attained his ends and saved his life. The mother, too, has saved her life but at the expense of leaving her daughter lost and friendless, unable to ask for help due to her retardation. Along the way, Shiftlet picks up a young hitchhiker and begins to preach to him the goodness and love of a mother, a concept directly and ironically opposed to the mother image seen in the story. The boy curses him and jumps from the car. "Mr. Shiftlet felt that the rottenness of the world was about to engulf him. . . . 'Oh Lord!' he prayed. 'Break forth and wash the slime from this earth!'

The irony of this statement breaks forth upon the reader as a "guffawing" thunderclap crashes overhead and raindrops hit the car.

56Ibid., p. 170.
Shiftlet recognizes the evil in men, but he cannot avoid this due to his own perverted moral intelligence. 57 Professor Duhamel says further that this knowledge of man is emotional and intuitive; perhaps this explains why these characters feel and say one thing but do another. 58

In their self-interested hypocrisy, the mother and Shiftlet destroy the innocent Lucynell and perpetuate as it were their own duplicity and practical rejection of Redemption in their rejection of what is good. Reality in this story is self-interest as set forth in the title. Redemption is a fact accepted in theory but not in practice and revealed in the negative by the hypocrisy of the characters. It is effective only in Lucynell, referred to as "innocent" and "an angel of Gawd." 59 The shock of the story is in the action of Shiftlet and his lack of conscience regarding this act. It is also shown in the mother's genuine desire to get rid of her daughter at any lengths. Shock is capped by the sermon and ironic "guffaw" of thunder

57 Farnham, Esprit, p. 34.
58 P. Albert Duhamel, untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 22.
In "A Stroke of Good Fortune" we meet another character who is convinced of her ability and right to completely control her own life with no outside help. She is Ruby, Bill Hill's wife, who with the help of Bill has so far avoided having any children in order to preserve her youthful figure. She has figured things out this way so she can beat the ills of the human condition. In this manner, she will avoid contact with original sin and with redemption by living outside of them. Ruby considers herself "the only one in her family who . . . had any get," which elucidates her unique position in the human race. Emphasizing her intelligence and her control of her life she recalls her mother:

All those children were what did her mother in -- eight of them: two born dead, one died the first year, one crushed under a mowing machine. Her mother had got deader with every one of them. And all of for what? Because she hadn't known any better. Pure ignorance. The purest of downright ignorance!  

Ruby's crisis involves a certain sickness which comes over her when she climbs stairs. Her girlfriend on the third floor supplies a first diagnosis -- Ruby is pregnant. To Ruby, such a statement is unthinkable.

60 Ibid., p. 172.
61 Ibid., p. 173.
is the rural widow, a woman in her forties left with a farm to manage and perhaps one small child. Her constant theme is her ability to control and manage her property in spite of thieving, uninterested, and destructive help, usually negro or poor white. Among the representatives of this group are Mrs. Cope of "A Circle in the Fire," Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, already mentioned in connection with "Good Country People," the Grandmother discussed in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," and Mrs. McIntyre of "The Displaced Person."

Mrs. Cope's view of reality is wrapped up in her farm about which she declares,

I have the best kept place in the county and do you know why? Because I work. I've had to work to save this place and work to keep it. . . . I don't let anything get ahead of me and I'm not always looking for trouble. I take it as it comes.64

Obviously Mrs. Cope regards herself as the center and controller of reality; she is sure she can handle all challenges to her authority. Lip-service is paid to God, though, and to His action in the world. This pseudo-redemptive note is sounded in such remarks as "We have a lot to be thankful for, . . . . Every day

64 Ibid., pp. 217-218.
you should say a prayer of thanksgiving. Do you do that?  

A crisis in the form of three vagabond Negro boys challenges Mrs. Cope's control of herself and her farm. They arrive and take over the farm as if they owned it, riding the horses, drinking from the milk cans, loosing the bull, and finally setting fire to the woods, the thing Mrs. Cope wished most not to happen. Their destructive actions are redemptive in that they can serve to free Mrs. Cope from herself and her burden of care in order that she can see a Divine plan beyond all human plan. Intuitively, the boys express this theological concept when they refer to the land and the sky as belonging to God and not to Mrs. Cope. Again, the revealing mission of the boys is pointed up at the end when Mrs. Cope hears their joyous shrieks and imagines them dancing in a circle of fire as did the prophets in the fiery furnace.

The shock of the story lies in the children's seemingly unjust, deliberate, and joyously wanton destruction of Mrs. Cope's hard-won success. They show

65Ibid., p. 217.
66Ibid., p. 225.
67Daniel 3:17-34.
no thanks for Mrs. Cope's little favors such as a meal and polite consideration in speech or for her offers to give them things they might need. Her generosity offends because it would substantiate her omnipotence and shackle the boys in a network of reciprocations. They must remain free in order to accomplish the mission of trying to free her through destroying all that ties her to self and to the land. The rampaging and the fire accomplish this in a ruthless and shocking manner. Such, says Miss O'Connor in this story, are the ways of God with men.

Next to be considered among the rural widow type is Mrs. McIntyre of "The Displaced Person." "The Displaced Person," along with the title story and at times in preference to it, is considered the most perfect of the stories in this book. In the story appear two major practical rejecters, Mrs. McIntyre and Mrs. Shortley, and one man of earnest search, the displaced person who with his family comes to live on the farm. Only Time, which fails to see the religious focus of the story, calls attention to the racial incident.68

All other critics fail to mention this incident to any

68 "Such Nice People" (anon. rev.), Time, LXV (June 6, 1955), 114.
extent being engrossed in the true irony of the story. This thematic irony is developed by Judge who says:

The irony of this story is that it is not about a Displaced Person but about Displaced Persons: Here we find Miss O'Connor's theme and also her individual. Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre are not isolated cases. They are just the magnified examples, developing Miss O'Connor's theme. Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre represent the world and the Pole represents Christ. By his Redemption of man, He has thrown the world off balance. Those who estrange themselves from Him find themselves in a displaced state. 69

Mrs. McIntyre's knowledge, a scant and unreliable store, bounds and directs her view of reality; the displaced Guizacs constitute the threat to that reality and ultimately the road to freedom from herself and from her prejudices -- her redemption. This same opportunity is available to Mrs. Shortley. About the Guizacs, Mrs. McIntyre had said "that after what those people had been through, they should be grateful for anything they could get. She said to think how lucky they were to escape from over there and come to a place like this.70

Mrs. Shortley replies by retelling the gist of a news-reel which pictured Europe as a room piled high with dead bodies. The reel had been accompanied by a

69 Judge, p. 65.
70 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 264.
commentary declaring that this was daily routine in Europe. Mrs. Shortley's and Mrs. McIntyre's concept of reality allows for only this idea of a foreign land. Protestant, Southern, rural America, seen from the comfort of their own farm and plenty, constitutes reality for these women. That people think and act differently in other parts of the world is to them a firm proof that they are right in their beliefs while all others are wrong to the point of being inhuman.

They have all the answers. Drake comes closer to naming this practical rejection of redemption when he says Mrs. McIntyre is the best example of the widow-divorced type who intends to bring the world in line with her will, that is, to make the farm produce.

He says elsewhere, "The Gospel imperative to choose never affects this woman except as a source of embarrassment -- a circumstance to which she has to give a kind of genteel lip service."

71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
74 Drake, Esprit, p. 19.
Mrs. McIntyre first regards the Pole as her savior because of his diligence: "One fellow's misery is the other fellow's gain. . . . That man is my salvation!" She regards him as her salvation because he can make her plan of a successful farm come true.

To Mrs. Shortley, a subordinate on the farm, the displaced person is always a threat which she equates with Satan. Of displaced persons, she says:

"They're full of crooked ways. They never have advanced or reformed. They got the same religion as a thousand years ago. It could only be the devil responsible for that."76

A few pages later, the narrator adds: "She saw the Polish words, dirty and all-knowing and unreformed, flinging mud on the clean English words until everything was equally dirty."77 In the same category as unreformed Europe, Mrs. Shortley also places the priest, Catholicism, and religion in general. She says . . . "she had never given much thought to the devil for she felt that religion was essentially for those people who didn't have the brains to avoid evil without

75Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 270.
76Ibid., p. 273.
77Ibid., p. 275.
it . . . but if she had ever given it much thought, she would have considered the devil the head of it and God the hanger-on."78 Later she says, "But with foreigners on the place, with people who were all eyes and no understanding, who had come from a place continually fighting, where the religion had not been reformed -- with this kind of people, you had to be on the lookout every minute."79 Applicable to this attitude is Sr. M. Joselyn's statement that in this story "evil is not defined in a person nor in an action but in an absence of love, the 'displacement' in the 'displacer.'"80 Sr. Joselyn also says the theme is the nature of Christian love -- "Charity, which in turn reflects its source in . . . the Incarnation."81 In this context, the displaced person can be seen as Satan and as Savior. As Satan, he causes the Shortleys to leave the farm, which strain brings about Mrs. Shortley's death. As Savior, he causes the farm to prosper. This Satan-Savior figure is apart from the other characters in his

78Ibid., p. 370.

79Ibid., p. 371.

80Sr. M. Joselyn, "Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person,'" SSF, I (1964), 86.

81Ibid., p. 85.
background, his inability to communicate, and his different ways of thought. Not understanding the Southern traditions, he tries to follow his own. Finally, he proposes that one of the Negroes marry his cousin and bring her to America. Here, he changes in Mrs. McIntyre's eyes to a Satan character, and she desires to get rid of him but lacks the nerve to dismiss him. Mr. Shortley, who has returned, keeps reminding her of the presence of this Satan, but Mrs. McIntyre is unwilling to sacrifice the needs of the farm for traditions. Finally she makes ready to do so, but before she gets the chance to give the man his notice, a parked tractor slips its brake and crushes the displaced person. Mrs. McIntyre, Mr. Shortley and the Negroes were all present and saw the oncoming tractor in time to warn the man. None warned him. In this crisis, they sacrifice a human life to their own interests and ways of life. Upon the death of the displaced person, the old way is for them torn apart and it is in this sense that the displaced person is most surely a Savior type, although the witnesses possibly have not been saved.

That the Pole is a Christ figure and a displacer is brought out by Drake and Fitzgerald.
Fitzgerald says the theme of the story concerns persons displaced from the fullness of Christianity which is the real country of every man. In this story, the two women are displaced both physically and metaphysically. The actions leading up to the death reveal the women's metaphysical displacement, their separation from the fullness of Christianity which is Charity; while the death and the actions subsequent to it reveal this displacement to Mrs. McIntyre and the farmhands causing them to become displaced physically. The farmhands leave the farm and Mrs. McIntyre suffers a nervous collapse which forces her to sell at a loss the farm she had selfishly pampered these many years. The characters then are all displaced from their worlds, as the narrator says about Mrs. McIntyre: "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." At the end, it is the displaced person who is revealed as belonging somewhere and the other characters who


83 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 299.
felt so secure have nowhere to be. Judge sums up the success of this story when he says that it underscores Miss O'Connor's literary artistry because only an artist could treat the same theme, "to bring man to an understanding of his Redemption," over and over again, each time in a singular and different manner.34

The last practical rejecter is Sally Poker Sash of "A Late Encounter With the Enemy." Sally, at the age of 62, is about to graduate from college. Her one desire and the center of her reality and of her prayer is that her 104 year old grandfather will be on the stage to bear witness to the glorious traditions of the South preserved in him and in her. It is in this selfish, vicarious claim to fame that Sally Poker's unredemption, her sin, is realized. In her grandfather, she and the traditions she stands for are embodied. Her appearance with him at the premiere, her insistence that the story of the memorable happening be told according to her account attest to this fact.85 At the premiere, it was her awareness that she was wearing Girl Scout shoes with an evening gown which caused her

34Judge, p. 65.
to deprive the old man of his full time on stage and rush off to save face. During her graduation, the neglectful nephew, a Boy Scout, nearly forgets to put the old man on stage, and by leaving him in the sun, possibly hastens his death, which occurs during the graduation. Also, Sally Poker's reality is an unreal world, a lie built around a fake General and a corsage of gilded gladiola petals "put back together to look like a rose." Neither the General nor the corsage is what it pretends to be; Sally Poker, in so far as she builds her reality on untruth, is also false. Her fanciful reality is confirmed by the General's living long enough to be present on stage even though he is dead before she receives her diploma. Unknowing, she glances at his corpse when she receives the scroll and her glance attests her pride in a dead tradition, from which she will not be redeemed.

The men of tepid indecision constitute the third category of persons in Miss O'Connor's first book of short stories. These persons stand for nothing in

86Ibid.

87The persons in this and the next two categories are seldom major active figures in the stories, therefore little mention is made of them by the critics. For most of my information, I have had to rely on the context of the stories themselves.
the line of tradition or principles but take the usual, convenient, or pleasant way out of any crisis. Their attitude toward reality and redemption is one of live and let live. They refuse to see any contradiction between what they profess and what they do; nor do they get sufficiently involved to see any. Unlike the intellectual rejecter, they do not think or make deliberate decisions; unlike the practical rejecter, they are unable to set themselves and their worlds up as supreme. Among these characters are the four teenagers in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," John Wesley in "A Late Encounter With the Enemy," and Mr. Shortley from "The Displaced Person." These last two have been somewhat discussed in connection with the practical rejecters in these same stories.

John Wesley, unaware of his dignity as a Scout representing the new tradition and negligent in his duty to protect his great-grandfather who represents the old tradition, shows himself uninvolved with the reality or duty given him. His treatment of the old man, (1) his leaving him in the sun during a Coke break, (2) his bumping him up the ramp and into place, (3) his

post-ceremony return to the Coke machine unaware he is wheeling a corpse, reveals the boy's lack of commitment to any single vision of reality. John Wesley's lack of involvement is his original sin which prevents his apprehending either reality or redemption and the tension between them. He is simply a blind character.

In "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," four of these tepid characters are found. These are the girls Joanne and Susan who spend the weekend calling each other Temple One and Temple Two, shaking with laughter and getting so red and hot that they were positively ugly . . . " and the boys Wendell and Cory Wilkinson who "were going to be Church of God preachers because you don't have to know nothing to be one." Neither group is committed to either denying or professing God, thus they stand uninvolved in either reality or redemption as defined in this paper. Their outlook is determined by the ways they must adopt to have a good time. For

89Ibid., pp. 239-242.
90This is in mockery of a religious instruction which teaches that the human person is the Temple of the Spirit of God and should be respected and treated as such.
92Ibid., p. 186.
these young adults, the redemptive crisis occurs at the Fair when they visit the tent containing the hermaphrodite, a grotesque instrument of God who declares:

God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I got to make the best of it. . . . I never done it to myself nor had a thing to do with it but I'm making the best of it. I don't dispute hit.93

As the boys are dropped from the story after their return from the fair, it is only the girls' reaction we can judge. They see in the freak solely a means of shocking their twelve-year-old cousin and of asserting their superior sophistication. The freak does not enable them to contact reality or redemption. On the next day, they resume their brown convent uniforms which had been shed for the weekend and adapt uncomplainingly to the routine they had decried all weekend. They go in to Benediction to sing before the enthroned Christ the same hymn they had used the day before to entertain the boys. Again, they have adapted to the situation at hand in the way which is most safe and which requires the least thought and conviction.

Though few in number, Flannery O'Connor's men of earnest search are among the most powerful and the

93Ibid., p. 191.
most grotesque of her characters. These characters in­
clude the boy and the preacher Bevel from "The River,"  
the little girl and the hermaphrodite in "A Temple of  
the Holy Ghost," Mr. Guizado from "The Displaced Person,"  
and the three Negro boys from "A Circle in the Fire."  
These are people committed to Redemption who find mean­
ing in the communication and emptying of self and who  
seek a remedy for the imperfections they meet in them­
selves and in others.

It might be well to discuss the little girl  
and the hermaphrodite at this point since these char­
acters occur in the story we have just examined for its  
tepid characters. The little girl hears the older  
girls giggling about Temple One and Temple Two. When  
the girls explain the meaning of the joke, the child  
thinks "I am a temple of the Holy Ghost."\textsuperscript{94} She was  
pleased with the phrase. It made her feel as if some­
body had given her a present.\textsuperscript{95} From this point, the  
child sees others as temples of the Holy Ghost also.  
When the girls confront her with the story of the her­
maphrodite, she weaves a dream story in which she hears  
the freak say:

\textsuperscript{94}Ibid., p. 185.

\textsuperscript{95}Ibid.
If anybody desecrates the temple of God, God will bring him to ruin and if you laugh, He may strike you thisaway. A temple of God is a holy thing. Amen. Amen. . . . I am a temple of the Holy Ghost.96

Both Bassan and Duhamel point out the deep knowledge, emotional and intuitive, given to certain of O'Connor's characters, especially children.97 Bassan cites this story and "A Circle in the Fire" as particularly good examples.98 For the child the freak is an encounter with redemption. Neither her encounter with the affectionate nun nor her attendance at Benediction afford her this same awareness of God's presence.99 Her commitment to redemption is shown in her habitual type of prayer100 and in her knowledge that "She would have to be a saint because that was the occupation that included everything you could know; and yet she knew she would never be a saint."101 Of the effectiveness of redemption in this child, William Van O'Connor says

96Ibid., p. 192.
97Duhamel, Esprit, p. 22.
100Ibid., p. 190.
101Ibid., p. 189.
that "Miss O'Connor sees Christian grace as ameliorating perversity. 'A Temple of the Holy Ghost' has in it a self-centered sassy child who tries to overcome her faults. The incident of the hermaphrodite enables the girl to further her discovery of the meaning and forms of God's existence in His Creation and furthers for her an understanding of redemption while it makes reality without Christ more obscure.

In the context of the story, the hermaphrodite is the Christ figure who provides the crisis to be faced by the other characters. Because of his dual sexuality, this person is outstanding among men. He is also set apart by the way he performs his mission of submitting to the will of God; "This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way. I'm showing you because I got to make the best of it." In making manifest himself, he manifests the will of God. It is only in the mind of the child that the redemptive efforts of the hermaphrodite take root; on the others his mission is wasted because they are too weighed down with their own pleasures, seeing him not

as a temple of the Holy Ghost but as a freak.

Two characters from "The River," Bevel and the child Harry, fall into the class of men of earnest search. Bevel is a young evangelist of the John the Baptist stamp who insists people accept his message on its value as the word of God and not on any miraculous happenings which might accompany his preaching.104 Harry, on the other hand, is the neglected child of parents who consider all of life a joke and live for the satisfaction of their own pleasures.105 The child is surprised at the seriousness of Bevel and reacts with a depth new to him for he sees in the preacher a means of release, a redemption from his present state. The child thought, "I won't go back to the apartment then, I'll go under the river."106 Bevel baptizes the child telling him, "You count now," . . . "You didn't even count before."107

In this story, reality is the apartment where the child's parents lie drunk; redemption is in the river and it is opened to the child by Bevel, an

104Ibid., pp. 151-152.
105Ibid., p. 153.
106Ibid., p. 154.
107Ibid.
instrument of God among men. The story achieves its shock when the child deliberately drowns himself in order to achieve the meaning he was given at his baptism by Bevel. The story is a dramatization of the biblical saying "He who loses his life will save it." The tension lies between a reality of nothing illustrated by the child's always referring to his parents as "him," "her," "them" and a redemption which promises everything, "You count now." A solution to the tension occurs when the child achieves union with the promise of redemption and drowns.

The Displaced Person, Bill Hill, and the three Negro boys have already been spoken of as Christ figures committed to redemption. All three function as crisis instigators in the life of some practical rejecter, as instruments of redemption. None are aware of their Christ function and only one, the Displaced Person, lays down his life as part of his mission. All are in some way separated from the reality which surrounds them; it is their separation, their difference, which


ignites the crisis in the lives of others.

Two characters, Lucynell from "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" and General Sash from "A Late Encounter With the Enemy" fall into the fifth category, the deformed in mind who cannot will. These characters are victims of the self-seeking persons around them and are incapable of changing their situations. Both are sacrificed to the pleasures or "prudence" of others and in this sense both are Christ figures. Neither effects any change in others and neither is capable of effecting change as neither can perform a deliberate action. It is on these characters that the venom of reality vents itself in the story concerned, and in relation to these characters that the shock of the story shows itself strongest -- in the abandonment of Lucynell and in the death of General Sash.

In this collection of stories as in her novel, Wise Blood, Miss O'Connor does not rely wholly on character and situation for her artistic effect, rather this effect is woven integrally into the metaphor of each story. Again, Miss O'Connor deals with reductive metaphor. In nearly all these stories, the degeneracy of man is brought out by describing him as something less than himself and doing this in a manner meant to
degrade the person presented. In this way, Miss O'Connor is able to clarify the Reality-Redemption tension in a way not directly connected with the plot. I wish to quote here a sampling of these passages and discuss briefly the reductive effectiveness of each passage as it clarifies its subject's relationship to the Reality-Redemption tension.

In the title story, pains seem to have been taken to make the characters convincingly disgusting. For example, Red Sam emerges from the following description a revolting but vivid character:

His khaki trousers reached just to his hip bones and his stomach hung over them like a sack of meal swaying under his shirt.\footnote{Ibid., p. 133.}

Sam is roughly sloppy and over-stuffed; his stomach is an unwieldy appendage rather than a part of him. When Sam is then connected with the term restauranteur (he does own the little place they lunch at), the figure of disgust is complete. In this same story, there is another outstanding example of reductive metaphor. It occurs when the talkative, aggressive grandmother hears the pistol reports that mean the death of the last of her family.

There were two more pistol reports and the
grandmother raised her head like a parched old
turkey hen crying for water . . .\textsuperscript{113}

Her cry is not the cry of human sorrow but that of a fowl desiring water. Perhaps Miss O'Connor is saying that as water is the life of the turkey hen so a family is the life of the grandmother and she has lost it. Her cry is one without hope and it seems to me that to lose hope is to cease to be human.

In "The River," Mr. Paradise, the agnostic, is described as "a giant pig bounding after him [Harry], shaking a red and white club and shouting."\textsuperscript{113} Mr. Paradise is the exponent of unredeemed reality in the story, an ironic contrast to his name, and perhaps this semi-human description of him makes more clear Miss O'Connor's vision of such a person. Similarly, in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," both self-interested characters are described through reductive metaphor.

Several critics have noted the singularity with which Mrs. Crater and Mr. Sniftlet are described. Mrs. Crater is "about the size of a cedar fence post"\textsuperscript{114} while the conversation about the marriage "settled in Mr. Shiftlet's head like a group of buzzards in the top

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. 142.
\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., p. 159.
\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., p. 160.
of a tree." 115 Both persons are compared to inanimate nature, one a fence post, the other a tree showing their basic likeness and the solidarity and sturdiness with which they pursue their ends. Lucynell, on the other hand, is raised, not reduced as she is the symbol of innocence, "an angel of Gawd." 116 This motif is continued in "A Stroke of Good Fortune" where the proponent of self-controlled reality without faith, Ruby, "was too tired to take her arms from around it [a grocery sack] or to straighten up and she hung there collapsed from the hips, her head balanced like a florid vegetable at the top of the sack." 117 Ruby is just another vegetable in the sack of groceries, and to further reduce her in importance Miss O'Connor ascribes to her "mulberry-colored hair stacked in sausage rolls around her head..." 118 She is seen not as the controller but as the completely controlled.

Animal nature is also used as reductive motif in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" and in "The Artificial Nigger." In the first, Wendell and Corey sit "like

115 Ibid., p. 166.
116 Ibid., p. 169.
117 Ibid., p. 171.
118 Ibid.
monkeys, their knees on a level with their shoulders and their arms hanging down between.\textsuperscript{119} The stupidity of the boys is here seen at its reductive worst. In the second story, the conductor has the face "of an ancient bloated bulldog."\textsuperscript{120} His age, his disagreeable weight, his surly appearance are made clear to the reader. Later, Mr. Head's cowardice in disclaiming kin with the boy expresses itself reductively in these words: "The old man's head had lowered itself into his collar like a turtle's; his eyes were glazed with fear and caution."\textsuperscript{121} Further use of the animal motif occurs in "Good Country People" and "The Displaced Person."

As Hulga regards the Bible salesman, she sees "he was gazing at her with open curiosity, with fascination, like a child watching a new fantastic animal at the zoo."\textsuperscript{122} Hulga is the unredeemed and was dealt with as such in the treatment of the story. She is the fantastic animal lately added to the zoo of other animals [maimed people the salesman has conquered or perhaps the company of atheists]; but while she is fantastic,
she still remains one among many unusual species. The comparison does her no favor. On the other hand, the Bible salesman while making love to her "began methodically kissing her face, making little noises, like a fish."\(^{123}\) It can be said here that Miss O'Connor probably intends the Bible salesman to be another species in the zoo and thus she reduces him to an animal. Also, the coldness generally associated with fish increases the repulsiveness of the person described. In "The Displaced Person," Mrs. McIntyre is described in her anger as having eyebrows, "thin and fierce as a spider's leg."\(^{134}\) The fury and venom of the woman are brought out here as she goes to close the trap on the Displaced Person.

Reductive motif involving inanimate objects is not absent from these stories. It shows up prominently in "A Late Encounter With the Enemy" and in "The Displaced Person." In the former story, it is used to show the unreality of General Sash. He is not described as a human being, active and living, but as a museum piece.

Every year on Confederate Memorial Day, he was

\(^{123}\text{Ibid., p. 257.}\)

\(^{134}\text{Ibid., p. 287.}\)
bundled up and lent to the Capitol City Museum where he was displayed from one to four in a musty room full of old photographs, old uniforms, old artillery, and historic documents.\textsuperscript{125}

This type of description of the old man as a thing like other museum pieces only not so well cared for [the others are protected by glass\textsuperscript{126}] is renewed several times during the story so that the reader gradually loses sympathy for this old man who has lost all contact with what is living, but who fits in among what has no life. In "The Displaced Person," Mrs. Shortley receives the brunt of inanimate analogy pointing up the stolidness and set of her mind. "She stood on two tremendous legs, with the grand self-confidence of a mountain, and rose, up harrowing bulges of granite, to two icy blue points of light that pierced forward, surveying everything."\textsuperscript{127} In this context, John F. Judge refers to her as the "giant wife of the countryside" whose dominion is threatened.\textsuperscript{128} When she hears that her husband is to be fired, her face becomes "an almost

\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., p. 237.
\textsuperscript{126}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127}Ibid., p. 262.
\textsuperscript{128}Judge, p. 65.
volcanic red. This continuation of the mountain motif enforces the impression of un-reasoning dominance which one forms of Mrs. Shortley from her prejudicial notions and actions.

It is easily seen from these examples that animal and inanimate reductive motif are used to underscore the Reality-Redemption tension. These metaphors are subtle means of weaning the reader's sympathies away from the characters and of preparing him for the shock which occurs when this type of reality meets redemption in some crisis action. Metaphorically, these stories begin and end on the same note. The Misfit in the title story accuses Jesus of throwing things off balance and the Displaced Person in the last story "doesn't fit in" and he displaces those who do fit in. The eight intervening stories simply assist in the exploration of this idea.

In summary, these ten stories illustrate several facets of reality as it appears in man's rejection of God which is man's original and continuing sin. They illustrate especially the rejections of mind, will, and

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

130 Ibid., p. 290.
inactivity as shown in the discussions of the characters. In tension with reality appears redemption in the forms of the earnest man and the victim man or in the form of a crisis threatening the truth of one's reality. The results of such tension produce a series of shocking situations and actions in which the incompatibility of Reality and Redemption are shown. All the stories are religiously oriented in this manner, some more overt than others but none are preachy or pious because the height of the tension and the potency of the shock preclude such faults. The characters are flat, standing for a view of reality or redemption. Within the crisis or shock of the story lies concealed Miss O'Connor's vision of the world and of man and of God, the same vision which each of her stories dramatizes in some aspect.

The violent brevity of these stories focuses the emphasis clearly upon the situation of man and avoids the impulse to digress which at times distracts the reader of *Wise Blood*. The characters seem to reflect greater concentration of vision and the quick, shocking crisis underscores this in the reader's mind while the several crises of *Wise Blood* are at times construed as disparate elements somewhat difficult to
unite into a coherent whole. I do believe Wise Blood to be coherent and very much a whole, but I find the short stories of A Good Man is Hard to Find more fully wholes in themselves and skillful variations on a single theme — man's relation to God, either negative or positive. Again, this is analogous to the theme of Wise Blood; it is the theme which seems to be Miss O'Connor's only theme.
CHAPTER IV

A CONSIDERATION OF THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY

More than either of her preceding books, The Violent Bear It Away seems to have drawn upon itself the praise of its reviewers. While the book was variously understood, most critics seem to have recognized, if only in a minute degree, the Redemptive import of the novel and the soundness of theory underlying the grotesqueness of its action. Among the negative critics, Orville Prescott is perhaps one of the strongest in his dissatisfaction. He admits the power of the language in the novel, the smoothness of the action, but finds that these virtues "are insufficient to atone for a grotesque and bizarre central situation that never seems real. One can pity Miss O'Connor's doomed characters as caricatured types of human misery; but one can't believe in them, or care about them."

Another cautious critic, Warren Coffey speaks out against the "violence of conception" in Miss O'Connor's novels but adds that The Violent Bear It Away "has sections of which it is impossible to deny the power and

the strange beauty." On a more general note and indicating her lack of understanding, Elizabeth Hardwick says:

This novel ends in an unbearable immolation scene and is one of the strangest productions in recent American fiction. It is grotesque, painful, again "funny" and entirely original in spirit and theme. Miss Hardwick does not seem to apprehend any real meaning in the novel; she confines her criticism to a safe generalization unconnected essentially with the heart of the story.

The Violent Bear It Away, a novel of heavy Biblical orientation in both the old and new testaments, is a dramatization of the Christian and more specifically, Catholic, concept of call or vocation. This theme is evident even in the title of the story which John J. Quinn notes is taken from Matthew 11:13, a section of Scripture in which Christ commends the work of John the Baptist as a successful carrying out of the Baptist's call from God. The Baptist had

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2Warren Coffey, untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 18.
3Elizabeth Hardwick, untitled article in Esprit, VII (Winter 1964), 30.
severely condemned the people of his day for their lack of holiness. In this same context, Clarke sees *The Violent Bear It Away* as a "shocking indictment of the present world for its lack of true spirituality." Three characters, Mason Tarwater, Francis Marion Tarwater his nephew whom he has raised, and George Rayber dominate this violent novel of extremes. In the conflict of these three characters, Sumner Ferris recognizes the struggle of man to reject God. This is essentially the Reality-Redemption conflict. The violence of the story, from which one recognizes the third element Shock is, says Ferris, "ultimately spiritual, inflicted by the characters themselves. ... God neither saves nor damns any of the characters who have free will; ... He does no more than give Rayber and Tarwater the opportunity to work out their own salvation or damnation." On Mason Tarwater, prophet of the Lord, the foundation of the story is built because Mason has formed, in some way, both Francis Marion and Rayber. To oversimplify, Mason is the man of faith, while Rayber is the man of no faith. Each pursues a

5Clarke, p. 8.

course according to his understanding of life. Francis Marion, young Tarwater, a boy who meets both of their worlds is the one whose vocation is in question.

This episodic novel opens with the death of old Tarwater in the backwoods of Powderhead, Tennessee, a no place. Young Tarwater, the old man's great nephew, has received two commands: (1) to bury his great-uncle and raise a cross over his grave, (2) to baptize the idiot child born to Rayber and his deceased wife. He has also been told that the Lord wishes him to follow in his prophet great-uncle's footsteps. This call he does not wish to hear. As Tarwater digs the grave in order to fulfill the first command, a stranger who is to be identified as evil, the Devil, or Satan appears, first in an interior and second in an exterior form. This stranger causes Tarwater to question the old man's wisdom and finally to set fire to the house with the defiant intention of cremating the old man. After this, the boy goes to the city, not so much to seek out Rayber as to question and test the old man's truth. In ensuing incidents, Rayber attempts first to lure the boy into atheism and then to interpret the boy's intractability in psychological terms; in both

Quinn, p. 29.
attempts he fails. A final effort on the part of Tarwater to flee his vocation results in the drowning and accidental baptism of the idiot son and the fulfillment of the second command. Still unwilling to accept his call, Tarwater returns to Powderhead where he finds, along with the charred remains of the house, the grave of Mason. Mason had been buried by a neighboring Negro; thus the first command has vicariously been fulfilled. In a vision, Tarwater sees the old man sharing heavenly glory, and in the sky a fiery tree beckons him. He falls to the ground, hears his call, and turns his face toward the city in a gesture of acceptance. In a story of such extremes reality and redemption clash brilliantly.

Reality in this story resides in the character and actions of George Rayber, atheist and man for this world, and in the Satan figure who is an extension of and yet apart from Tarwater. Rayber is a man of violent passions whose fear of his passionate nature has led him to slowly extinguish passion in himself for the strict rule of reason and the narrow horizons to which this confines him. "The great dignity of man," Rayber said, "is his ability to say: I am born once and no more. What I can see and do for myself and my fellow
man in this life is all of my portion and I'm content with it. It's enough to be a man. 8

Though Rayber purports humanitarian interest, his real approach to people is statistical as borne out in his own life in his belief that "there are certain laws that determine every man's conduct" 9 and that a man is born again through his intelligence and his own efforts. 10 To illustrate the mechanistic and passionless life ideal of Rayber, Miss O'Connor has chosen the hearing aid which Rayber wears and to which he seems subject. Tarwater frequently refers to the hearing aid as the box in which his uncle thinks or again, as his principle of life. The following quotations illustrate Tarwater's understanding of the hearing aid:

For an instant, the boy had the thought that his head ran by electricity. 11

What you wired for? ... Does your head light up? 12

8 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 405.
9 Ibid., p. 418.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 355.
12 Ibid., p. 366.
Do you think in the box, . . . or do you think in your head?  

The narrator adds: "His uncle's face might have been only an appendage to it [the machine]."  

Sr. Mary Simon views the mechanical images surrounding Rayber as a means of characterizing "the mask he presents to himself and to the world." Rayber's belief only in what he can see and in the mechanistic approach to life represented by the machine imagery has resulted from sheer force on Rayber's part. An understanding of this deliberate warping of his own existence is given to the reader in the narration surrounding Rayber who insists that the old man warped him, ruined his life and that he, by virtue of pure will power has set things straight.  

In insisting that he has fashioned himself, Rayber reveals his materialistic and mechanistic bent, qualities which attest to his non-spiritual reality. His judging others by prefabricated ideas, his

13Ibid., p. 367.  
14Ibid.  
insistence on indifference,¹⁷ and his affinity for
tests as a measure of man further attest this slant of
life focused on observable reality and ignoring the
existence of mystery. Both the old man and Tarwater
speak of Rayber as putting people inside his head, an
invasion of privacy which destroys their freedom¹⁸ by
destroying, in some degree at least, their mystery.
Old Tarwater says of Rayber that his trouble is: "He
thinks if it's something he can't know then somebody
smarter than him can tell him about it and he can know
it just the same."¹⁹ This trouble of Rayber's, his de­
sire to remove mystery from the world illustrates the
definition of reality tentatively arrived at in Chapter
I. Tampering with mystery is Rayber's sin; this has
led him to profess the fallacy: "What we understand,
we can control."²⁰ On the other hand, his very in­
ability to control his love for Bishop, even though he
understands its root, gives the lie to his conception
of reality. As a result of his rationalistic life
ideal, Rayber lives a strictly ascetic life but ascetic

¹⁷Ibid., p. 373.
¹⁹Ibid., p. 337.
²⁰Ibid., p. 417.
in the way of self protection — an assured mediocrity which prevents him from ever acting. Rayber recognized his passionate nature and "at the cost of a full life, staved it off." His rejection, then, of mystery and of faith, has been accompanied by a rejection, as far as possible, of love. Both Sr. Mary Simon and Sr. Mariella note this quality of Rayber's chosen Reality. In refusing to love, Rayber refused to commit himself to life and as a result "all his professional decisions were prefabricated and did not involve his participation." He kept himself upright on a very narrow line between madness and emptiness, and when the time came for him to lose his balance, he intended to lurch toward emptiness and fall on the side of his choice. Rayber's ultimate passivity, remaining on the narrow line, is understood by Tarwater who says of his uncle, "All you can do is think what you would have done if you had done it. Not me. I can do it. I can act."
Rayber's passivity is, as Sr. M. Simon points out, fully realized at the crisis when, realizing Tarwater's intent, he waits to hear his son's death cries. He thinks to himself:

All he would be was an observer. He waited with serenity. Life had never been good enough to him for him to wince at its destruction. . . . It seemed to him that this indifference was the most that human dignity could achieve, and . . . he had achieved it. To feel nothing was peace.36

In his unfeeling passivity, as he waits to be motivated from outside himself, Rayber approaches close to the automatism of a machine -- he sees not mysteries but only reactions; no life involvement, only patterns to be followed out. There are no risks and no rewards; dignity lies in perfect indifference. Sr. M. Simon interprets Rayber's attitude of waiting in these terms: "a travesty of Christ in the pain of his love (his forehead becomes 'beady with sweat' and he looks as though he might be 'nailed to the bench'), Rayber intends to conquer love by refusing to feel. Final anesthetization occurs when the ominous silence, which fills him with a 'peculiar sense of an approaching cataclysm,' is broken by the sound of Bishop's cry coming across the waters."37 The death of Bishop, then,

36Ibid., p. 431.
37Molde, p. 189.
solidifies Rayber in his automated way of life, in his redemptionless reality, because it kills passion in him completely. Symbolic of Rayber's leaving human for an automated life is his grabbing the "metal box of the hearing aid as if he were clawing his heart." After he heard the scream, he "remained absolutely still, wooden, expressionless. . . . The machine made the sounds seem to come from inside him as if something in him were tearing itself free. . . . The one thing he was certain of was that no cry must escape him." The beat of his heart is "dull mechanical" as he considers the fate of Tarwater and waits for the pain that he should feel "so that he could ignore it . . . it was not until he realized there would be no pain that he collapsed." Brainard Cheney finds Miss O'Connor's treatment of Rayber strong but compassionate. He feels that Rayber at this time knows the prophecy of Old Tarwater has been fulfilled and the child baptized while he faces for the first time the

28 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 422.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 423.
horror of his own emptiness.\textsuperscript{32} Faced with his empty and mechanized self-chosen reality, it is to be noted that Rayber finds no support from this reality, rather he collapses and disappears from the story at this point.

The other major spokesman for Reality, in this context, is the Satan figure seen as both integral to and separate from the character of Tarwater. This figure is more subtle than Rayber and less vulnerable. He does not preach complete denial of faith or belief in reality as such; rather he presses Tarwater to doubt, in particular, those parts of the old man's teaching which are repugnant to him. The stranger first appears on page 309 as a distortion of Tarwater's own voice. It is a quarrelsome voice directed at the corpse causing Tarwater to wonder if it has been he and not the old man who has been changed by the old man's death. The reader learns later, by means of flashback, that the old man has always watched Tarwater warily, aware of Satan's interest in him.

The old man said that with the devil having such a heavy role in his beginning, it was little wonder that he should have an eye on the boy

and keep him under close surveillance during his
time on earth. . . . It was to foil the devil's
plans for him that the Lord had seen to his up-
bringing. 33

The voice suggests to the boy his freedom to do as he
pleases and the folly of burying the dead man when cre-
mation would be easier. 34 Next he contrasts the school-
teacher's good sense with old Tarwater's fanaticism. 35

As the stranger suggests each doubt, Tarwater connects
it with events of the past so that by means of flash-
backs the reader gradually sees the informing influence
the old man, spokesman for Redemption, has been on
Tarwater and Rayber. It is not until later 36 that the
stranger takes on an external shape and is given a
pleasant face even though his connection with Tarwater's
person is not yet severed. Tarwater "began to feel as
if he was only just now meeting himself, as if as long
as his uncle had lived, he had been deprived of his own
acquaintance." 37 Having undermined the old man, Satan,
Tarwater's other self, undermines Tarwater's own

33 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor,
pp. 337-338.

34 Ibid., p. 317.

35 Ibid., p. 325.

36 Ibid., p. 324.

37 Ibid.
a call which Tarwater would rather avoid anyway as is evident on page 316. "Lemme hear you prophesy something," the voice says. "The truth is the Lord ain't studying about you. You ain't entered His head." Eventually, Tarwater is led to deny the old man, first by getting drunk, and second by burning up the house with the intention of cremating the old man. Having led Tarwater to doubt the old man's prophetic gift and the old man's truth, the Satan figure suggests that Tarwater substitute self for Jesus, that he accept the natural working-out-of-things as Judgment, and that the old man's death was a blessing from the Lord. After he sets fire to the place, Tarwater sets out for the city, the place of evil. On his one earlier visit to the city, Tarwater realized "almost without warning, that this place was evil -- the ducked heads, the muttered words, the hastening away. . . . He was here enjoying what should have

38 Ibid., p. 325.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 326.
41 Ibid., p. 330.
42 Ibid.
repelled him. Since Satan is incarnate in the city, there is no reason for him to appear as the stranger figure in this part of the book. On page 432, the reader learns that the stranger was present at Bishop's death during the boat ride in the country but that he disappeared when Tarwater uttered the words of Baptism. He returns again in the third episode of the story when the boy is returning to Powderhead. Here he is incarnate evil in the person of the homosexual who picks Tarwater up, gives him a drink and then assaults him. That Satan and the homosexual are to be identified is evident from two earlier statements: (1) the old man's warning to Tarwater that he is the kind of boy "that the devil is always going to be offering to assist, to give you a smoke or a drink or a ride, and to ask you your bidnis." The homosexual does these things separately and in this exact order. (2) Satan is referred to in the story as having violet eyes. The homosexual, besides having violet eyes, has a lavender

43 Ibid., pp. 318-319.
44 Ibid., pp. 440-441.
46 Ibid., p. 431.
shirt on his back and lavender paint on his car. 47

Disgusted with Satan's violation of him, the boy burns the area in a gesture of purification 48 and goes on his way to Powderhead. Satan joins him on the road, declares he will never leave the boy, but sickens him with a sweet, pervasive odor. 49 The boy recognizes the odor as the same that surrounded the pervert, and by firing the area, attempts to purify the place putting a wall of fire between himself and the stranger. 50 Satan leaves the story at this point; his violation of him has enabled Tarwater to see Satan for what he is and prepared the way for the rejection of the tempter. In these two actions, says Sr. M. Simon, Satan oversteps himself giving away his true nature. 51

Satan, then, is a figure integral with and yet apart from Tarwater. His methods are those of suggestion and deceit and his design is to violate, as he does in the guise of the homosexual, the very nature of

48 Ferris, p. 12.
49 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, 60
50 Ibid.
51 Nolde, p. 192.
a man. Once recognized, he can no longer hold man sub-
ject to him but can be burned away by the liberating
fires of purification. This Satan urges man to ques-
tion truth and mystery and to substitute for the free-
dom of faith, the license of self which is slavery to
Satan. Satan proposes the same norms as Rayber, but
he does this in a more subtle, less easily recognized
manner since he chooses to undermine rather than deny
redemptive truth.

Having seen that the Reality in the story cor-
relates with the concept presented in Chapter I, let
us go on to look at Redemption as it manifests itself
in The Violent Bear It Away. The spokesman for faith
and the redemption-focus of the world is Mason Tarwater.
Mason is the builder as his name suggests, the layer of
foundations: (1) in Rayber, (2) in Tarwater. He is a
prophet-builder out to fill up the valleys and level
the hills in order to prepare an acceptable people for
the Lord.52 Says Mayhew, "The vision and mission of
the prophet and seer are a staple of Flannery O'Connell's
writing. Her characters' eyes are the symbol of that
fearful vision: Tarwater's great uncle has 'silver
protruding eyes . . . like two fish straining to get

out of a net of red threads. . . . Truth — the living God — is a terrifying vision, to be faced only by the stout of heart.” The old man’s stoutness dominates the novel, for although his death is recorded on the fifth page, his story and words dominate and illuminate the entire story. The basic struggle of the story, the attempts of Rayber and Tarwater to establish Reality in the place of the old man’s Redemption, are expressions of rebellion against the old man even as they are expressions of rebellion against God. Miss Meaders further says the “prophet-freaks of Southern literature are not images of the man in the street. They are images of the man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature.” By this is understood that the prophet, as he appears in Mason and later in Tarwater, is the man who seeks meaning — ultimate meaning. He finds this, as has been pointed out in this paper, in total commitment to mystery, to an unknown which he does not understand and which is not reasonable in Rayber’s sense of the term. Mason may be

54Nolde, p. 181.
55Margaret Inman Meaders, "Flannery O’Connor: Literary Witch," CQ, X (1962), 381.
called a prophet or he may be called a madman as Rayber terms him; the mystery which he lives and preaches may be denied, but it cannot be ignored.

Rayber on page 314 and the stranger on page 325 dismiss the old man as one who called himself. Rayber insists the old man was a victim of insecurity and used prophecy as a crutch. The old man retorts that the Lord's way is too hard and torturous for such an absurdity as a self-call. The difficulties he has endured assure him both of the validity of his call and of the inanity of Rayber's diagnosis. Besides focusing the explanation of his call in God, the old man sees all the happenings of his life as being focused in the same center -- God and Redemption. When the boy recalls mentally the things old Tarwater told him, it is evident that all are related to the Redemption. Foremost in the old man's mind is the idea that he should be buried with a cross over his grave. Deliberate cremation he associates with atheism. In the whore who was his sister and the whore who was Tarwater's mother,

57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., p. 312.
59 Ibid.
he sees the idiocy of sin; in the violent deaths of both the women and their lovers, he sees the justice of God. He recognizes the hand of God in his kidnapping Rayber and Tarwater, in his committal to an insane asylum, and in the identity of Bishop whom he declares precious in the sight of the Lord. Unlike Tarwater, the old man pays no attention to the boy's natural birth but only to his rebirth in baptism and to his mission as successor to himself. Tarwater remarks, "His uncle had never seemed to be aware of the importance of the way he had been born, only of how he had been born again." The whole meaning of Tarwater's life is tied up with this idea of successor in the office of prophet.

The old man's life has been one of witnessing to the Redemption and of understanding this witness in all the persons and events which shaped his life. It may be argued here that in assigning all events to the

60 Ibid., p. 337.
61 Ibid., p. 341.
62 Ibid., p. 348.
63 Ibid., p. 340.
64 Ibid., p. 322.
65 Ibid., p. 327.
66 Ibid.
will of the Lord, the old man is doing essentially the same thing Rayber does when he assigns them to various psychological or mechanical causes. This is not true because there is an essential difference in the attitudes of the two men. Rayber assumes that all reasons can be known and all things perfectly ordered and subjected to the mind of the knower. In this assumption, Rayber would destroy the mystery of things by presuming to assimilate them to himself through knowledge of their identity. The old man, on the other hand, presumes to know only what the Lord tells him; he does not ask why, for instance, he was put in the asylum; he accepts it as a part of his redemptive truth. In other words, the old man preserves the mystery and fullness of identity of all he comes into contact with. It is worth noting here that both men are teachers. Rayber is a school-teacher [by his own admission a purveyor of facts which he has conquered]; the old man a prophet who teaches the mystery of life and Redemption. To Rayber, the old man's teaching is insanity; to the old man Rayber's doctrine is worse than insanity.

It is in Tarwater that the forces of Reality and Redemption, seen respectively in the teachings of Rayber and Mason, clash actively in the novel. "What
is involved at the heart of the novel," says Clarke, "is a contest for the boy's soul, torn by the teachings of the old, mad and now dead great-uncle and those of his atheistic schoolteacher-uncle. Both combatants are essentially grotesques in Miss O'Connor's view, but she regarded the godless outlook of the scientifically-oriented schoolteacher as the more impaired." 67

A close examination of the story enables the reader to see the conflict as it develops in Tarwater. Early clashes between the old man and Rayber, Rayber's mother, or the law are recalled by means of flashbacks in order to make the novel more clear. Even during his years of life with the old man, Tarwater is repulsed by his great-uncle's insistence that he is to be a prophet. He does not want to have his great-uncle's insatiable hunger for the bread of life 68 and he finds himself enjoying a trip to the city which should have repelled him. 69 He desires reality but he has been given redemption. Even the Satan figure is first revealed as an interior voice, an other side. These two sides of

67Clarke, p. 8.
69Ibid., p. 319.
Tarwater are evident in his name, says Ferris, seeing in it dirt or evil and a cure-all or Redemptive import. 70 In Tarwater, then, the conflict of Reality and Redemption is evident before he meets his school-teacher-uncle. For this reason, though Rayber is the obvious example of and spokesman for reality in the story, he does not initiate the anti-redemption feelings in Tarwater; these are of his nature. The resultant fear and repugnance he feels for his call to redemption are normal reactions, in a sense, and most clearly expressed on page 316.

It was as if he were afraid that if he let his eye rest for an instant longer than was needed to place something . . . that the thing would suddenly stand before him, strange and terrifying, demanding that he name it and name it justly and be judged for the name he gave it. He did all he could to avoid this threatened intimacy of creation. 71

But Tarwater does encourage the more glamorous aspects of vocation — the idea of a call by trumpet or fiery chariot. 72 Throughout his early life, the idea of vocation both plagues and intrigues him. At his uncle's death, vocation ceases to be an idea and becomes a

70Ferris, p. 12.
71Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 316.
72Ibid.
reality which he must deny or accept. It is over this concept of vocation, an inner conflict and choice, that Reality and Redemption take issue in the novel. Every incident and action in which Tarwater is involved has a meaning for his vocation. This clash between Reality and Redemption both in himself and between Rayber and old Tarwater provides the shock of the novel, a shock through which the crisis of vocation works itself out according to the mind of God. To trace the development of the crisis is the most logical way to bring together the elements of Reality and Redemption.

The first real awareness Tarwater has that his is to be the prophetic vocation as delineated by his great-uncle is when he attempts to call Rayber but receives the "revelation" of the idiot's breathing on the other end of the line.73 His arrival at his uncle's house provides the second revelation as a "mysterious dread filled him" and "his whole body felt hollow as if he had been lifted like Habakkuk by the hair of his head, borne swiftly through the night and set down in the place of his mission."74 To the boy who "doubted very much that his first mission would be to baptize a

73Ibid., p. 352.
74Ibid., p. 354.
dim-witted child," Tarwater's first meeting with Bishop is more than disconcerting. He realizes immediately that Rayber "was no more than a decoy the old man had set up to lure him to the city to do his unfinished business." Voss says he pierces immediately to the core of his uncle's emptiness and rejects it.\textsuperscript{75} 

Sr. M. Simon interprets this rejection as confirmation of Tarwater's belief in the supernatural.\textsuperscript{76} Tarwater's interpretation of his internal reaction to the first sight of the child supports Sister's statement. Tarwater's first glimpse of the child brings to him the knowledge "as a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for."\textsuperscript{77} This glimpse is to Tarwater his official call and is interpreted in a supernatural way. Tarwater's response is an open and violent refusal to look at or come near Bishop, a challenge to God and a determination to refuse his call.\textsuperscript{78} It is only the next day that Rayber realizes the


\textsuperscript{76}Nolde, p. 181.

\textsuperscript{77}Flannery O'Connor, \textit{Three by Flannery O'Connor,} p. 357.

\textsuperscript{78}Voss, p. 62.
terrible struggle going on within the boy. Ultimately, Rayber sees in Tarwater, himself, his own face but the student's (i.e., the suicide who was the illicit lover of Tarwater's mother and the father of Tarwater) eyes. It is always the eyes that Rayber cannot understand yet it is the himself in Tarwater that he would convert from the old man's ways. He offers to befriend and help him but the boy has already understood that Rayber is a decoy and unable to help him. He cannot help because he has nothing to offer; his life is empty and indifferent as was pointed out earlier. He can neither understand nor alleviate the boy's problem but only wait as a bystander for things to work out. The hurried walks through the city, the night stroll to the Tabernacle representative of the traditional quest motif handled extensively by Friedman and Sr. H. Simon are indicative of the boy's search for an  

79 Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor, p. 368.  
80 Ibid., p. 364.  
81 Nolde, p. 190. Friedman, p. 242. Sr. M. Simon Nolde finds this quest motif in Tarwater's wanderings and interprets this as the prophet's passing into a foreign country. Friedman, using a slightly different focus, interprets the quest theme in terms of the transplantaion-prophecy-return motif. "In fact," he says, "the novel is divided into three parts which correspond neatly to the three phases."
answer. During a walk in the park Tarwater unconsciously is drawn to Bishop who has crawled into the park fountain and he is about to baptize him when Rayber snatches the child away. In this instance, says Allen, Miss O'Connor shows that the world of reality is not so far away as one would think from the world of redemption. "... the world outside the God-intoxicated scarcely exists at all, and the atheist Rayber, for instance, for all his repudiation of God, is shown as really as much intoxicated by God as Francis Marion." Rayber's relationship to God is negative; it is denial, but yet his denial is not so pure that he can surrender his son who incarnates it. Rather, he needs Bishop and he needs him unbaptized as a sign of his negative relationship to God. Shaken, Tarwater moves away, encounters a drunk who tells him to beware of fools. This is seconded by the mysterious Satan voice who assures him "There ain't any trap [laid by the Lord]. There ain't anything except what you've laid for your-


self."\textsuperscript{84} In essence, the schoolteacher tells Tarwater the same thing when he accuses him of having a compulsion to baptize Bishop.\textsuperscript{85} The answer is found in the irrevocable set of Tarwater's eyes.\textsuperscript{86} Forced to choose, Tarwater mocks his uncle's passivity\textsuperscript{87} and takes Bishop for a boat ride. He intends to act as is well brought out by Connolly and Duhamel.\textsuperscript{88} Rather than baptize Bishop, he intends to drown him, to submerge him in the water of death not life. During the drowning, a moment of intense shock in which Tarwater intends to make good his refusal by action, the words of baptism slip out accomplishing the mission he was sent to do, yet Tarwater does not give in. He returns to Powderhead with the intention of passing his days there. Asleep in the truck he has hitched a ride on, Tarwater relives the drowning of Bishop, awakens, and "resolves to make

\textsuperscript{84}Flannery O'Connor, \textit{Three by Flannery O'Connor}, p. 403.

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., p. 417.

\textsuperscript{86}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., p. 418.

\textsuperscript{88}Francis X. Connolly, p. 18. P. Albert Duhamel, \textit{Esprit}, p. 22.
good his refusal" at Powderhead.\textsuperscript{89} It is his encounter with the homosexual, an encounter shocking by its overt irrelevance to prior action but a meeting prepared for earlier, that enables Tarwater to realize that his refusal to serve God as prophet is as unnatural as the sexual assault performed upon him. As Tarwater burned up the place of the assault, so too, he burns up the place where the stranger next accosts him and moves on to the acceptance of his call. He knows from the time he awakens after the assault that "his destiny forced him on to a final revelation."\textsuperscript{90} This final revelation has three parts: (1) his discovery of the grave, (2) his vision of the old man eating loaves in glory, and (3) the red-gold tree of fire flaming in the night. Then, God speaks his command in the boy's heart and he turns back to the dark city "where the children of God lay sleeping."\textsuperscript{91} Reality and Redemption have clashed and the voice of Redemption has raised up another prophet, purified and cleansed by his very refusal to serve.

\textsuperscript{89}Flannery O'Connor, \textit{Three by Flannery O'Connor}, p. 433.

\textsuperscript{90}Ibid., p. 442.

\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., p. 447.
The forces of Reality and Redemption are focused as far as the active story is concerned around the character of Bishop, whom each force wishes to claim for itself. Old Tarwater has sworn to baptize the child while Rayber maintains that "as a gesture of human dignity, he'll never be baptized." Thus it is Rayber and the old man rather than Rayber and Tarwater who clash on this level. Tarwater is simply the old man's instrument, an unwilling one at that.

To Rayber, Bishop is the incarnation of his view of the world and God.

His normal way of looking on Bishop was as an \( \times \) signifying the general hideousness of fate. He did not believe that he himself was formed in the image and likeness of God but that Bishop was he had no doubt. The little boy was part of a simple equation that required no further solution, except at the moments when with little or no warning he would feel himself overwhelmed by the horrifying love. Bishop is an \( \times \) [unknown quantity] whose meaning is equivalent with an unexplicable determination of life known as fate. This fate is the image of God, a God who is an unknown power as senseless and meaningless as the idiot child. Such is Rayber's reality -- essentially atheistic and meaningless. The whole is part of a

\(^{92}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 323.\)

\(^{93}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 372.\)
simple equation which requires no further solution than the admission that fate settles all and that man must bear up under it. Only one thing can mar this reality and that thing is love which overcomes him at unexpected moments. For this reason, Rayber feels it is necessary for him to kill all feeling and establish in himself a mode of indifference. To understand his deadening of feeling, it is necessary to examine Rayber's love relationship with the idiot child. Further down on page 372, Rayber discusses love. Ordinary love, which he defines as love which can be used, he does not fear but "love without reason, love for something futureless, love that appeared to exist only to be itself, imperious and all demanding," this kind of love only begins with Bishop and then goes back to the old man and "his impossible vision of a world transfigured." This love seize Rayber whenever he places the child on his lap or close to him, and it is the ability of this love to remain uncontrolled which threatens Rayber. Of this love, Quinn says that Rayber cannot love Bishop because such a love "is senseless and takes away from

94 Ibid., p. 388.

his human dignity." Similarly he must reject Chris­

tianity "because it means loving and sanctifying what is

intellectually valueless." Ballif interprets this

same struggle as Rayber's identity crisis wherein there

is conflict between the rational and irrational ele­

ments in Rayber's nature. He is desperately trying

to project the rational forces as predominant but the

irrational or senseless-love forces keep forcing them­
selves up. Rayber has sublimated this force by focus­
ing it in the child and then controlling it with his

natural contempt for the "mistake of nature." But he

realizes, also, that should the child be destroyed he

would have to face this in himself and that the whole

world would become his idiot child lacking in meaning

or purpose. Therefore, he resolved early to anesthe­
tize his life in order to avoid this crisis. His suc­

cess is evident in his anesthetized reaction to his

son's death.

On the other hand, the old man views the child's

Quinn, p. 30.

Algere Ballif, "A Southern Allegory -- The

Violent Bear It Away," Commentary, XXX (October 1960),

358-362.

Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor,

p. 410.
idiocy as the Lord's way of preventing Rayber from corrupting another human being, a gift from God, and "precious in the sight of the Lord." He tells Rayber that the boy is a sign that one does not question the mind of the Lord, a rebuke for Rayber's tampering with mystery, and a cry for Baptism which would give the child meaning. In the idiot, the old man recognizes the Lord's unique way of protecting his universe from those who would know all mysteries and, by declaring man natural, would emancipate him from the need for redemption. Rayber's desire to love the child unselfishly, a tendency he suffocates because it is inexplicable and unreasonable, seconds this interpretation.

In Tarwater, both views of the child are present. He does not wish to see the child as anything special and is repulsed by the very idea of baptizing him, yet he is driven with the desire to do so and so confirm the redemptive import of the boy. It is in the meaning of Bishop that Mason and Rayber clash. In the death-baptism of the boy, Rayber achieves his life-goal of indifference and Mason accomplishes his prophetic mission by proxy. In the death-baptism Tarwater realizes

Ibid., p. 308.

Ibid., p. 323.
the strength of the One he opposes and the way is prepared for his submission to the call.

Metaphorically, this same struggle is carried out in the bread-hunger motif and in the freedom-slavery motif. These two motifs unify the three episodes of the novel, and provide a metaphor common to both the Bible and psychology. In so doing these motifs express the Reality-Redemption tension and underscore the active shock of the novel. Sr. M. Simon traces the first of these motifs but does not mention the second. The bread-hunger motif is introduced on the fifteenth page of the novel and remains active until the last. It is introduced by the old man who says "Jesus is the bread of life." He continues using both Old and New Testament allusions to the bread of life which is the bread of the elect in heaven. Tarwater senses that this hunger for the bread of life is at the heart of the old man's ways and he sincerely hopes that he can stave off this hunger should he himself be attached by it. The boy's lack of desire

101 Nolde, p. 190.
103 Ibid.
for the loaves and fishes resulting from his all too literal interpretation, besides being humorous, is an indication that he desires to avoid his promised prophetic vocation if at all possible. The bread is a symbol of his vocation and his redemption; it remains this throughout the story. Later, when the boy recognizes his call at his first sight of Bishop, he does so in a loaves and fishes context in which is typified all the suffering which will be his until "he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf." After his arrival at Rayber's the boy's loss of appetite becomes noticeable and he eats but one full meal [which he later vomits] before his return to Powderhead. The bread of the city does not seem to satisfy him, yet he is pursued by a consuming hunger. During his wanderings in the city, the only place the boy stops willingly is in front of a bakery that has one loaf of bread in the window. Rayber interprets his countenance: "It looked to him like the face of someone starving who sees a meal he can't reach laid out before him." Rayber is unable, though, to understand the meaning of

104 Ibid., p. 357.
105 Ibid., p. 374.
106 Ibid., p. 377.
the boy's look, rather he decides it is a false alarm and says that if the boy had eaten his dinner, he wouldn't be hungry. On page 382, the image is applied to Rayber who sees his childhood pain "laid again on his tongue like a bitter wafer." His pain is the memory of the struggle between his parents and old Tarwater for his heart and will; the wafer recalls the Eucharistic or manna image which Rayber must have gotten from old Tarwater whom he blames for ruining his life. This bread-hunger image occupies nearly a whole page at the opening of Chapter 8. Here, the stranger voice tries to convince Tarwater that his hunger is natural, a case of worms. The boy senses differently: "The first day in the city he had become conscious of the strangeness in his stomach, a peculiar hunger. The city food only weakened him." And again he thinks:

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 akin to the silence outside, as if the grand trap left him barely an inch to move in, barely an inch in which to keep

107 Ibid., p. 378.
108 Ibid., p. 399.
109 Ibid.
himself inviolate. Hie stranger voice tries to point out that the Lord fed his prophets; he did not starve them, therefore this hunger cannot be the sign Tarwater is inclined to think it is. After the stranger suggests that the boy make up his mind to act, Tarwater eats his one full meal, which is later described as intruding upon his hunger. The indication here is that Tarwater's hunger is not to be satisfied by the food he receives at the hands of Rayber; it begins to be defined as a hunger to be satisfied by something other than natural food and is reminiscent of the old man's hunger. On the next page, the boy vomits and "a ravenous emptiness raged in his stomach as if it had reestablished its rightful tenure." Three times between pages 405-406 the boy states: "I come to fish." This alludes to the Biblical broken fish image referred to earlier and also to the boy's ultimate prepossession — the baptism of Bishop and his own commission to be a fisher of men. On page 418, Rayber uses the language of eating to make Tarwater

110Ibid.
111Ibid., p. 402.
112Ibid., p. 405.
113Ibid., p. 406.
face his psychological trauma. He says: "You can't eat because something is eating you." Rayber goes on to explain Tarwater's hunger as something arising from an inner compulsion that must be subjected to his control. This argument does not satisfy Tarwater but drives him to act and to drown Bishop. As he returns to Powderhead, Tarwater's hunger becomes more insistent. First, he takes the truck driver's sandwich but cannot eat it; later he asks for a purple drink but is not sold it. Last, in the final vision of the story, he sees the great-uncle eating the loaves and admits that only these will satisfy him. His hunger then becomes a tide welling within him assuring him of his election as a prophet. Hunger, though he did not wish to admit it, has served as God's sign.

This hunger motif which goes through the story stresses the theme of vocation. Redemption, not Reality, will satisfy Tarwater. He cannot eat the city food and when he does, he literally is not able to

114 I bid., p. 417.
115 Ibid., p. 429.
116 Ibid., p. 438.
117 I bid., p. 446.
stomach it. Hunger for something beyond Reality invades his stomach as though it has a right to be there; and this hunger is left with the boy as the promise of his election and his reward. Similarly the freedom-slavery motif runs throughout the story carrying the same Reality-Redemption conflict. Toward the end, these two motifs are interwoven unifying even more closely the conflict faced by Tarwater.

This motif is first seen on page 315 which is the same page on which the bread-hunger motif makes its first appearance. Slavery is associated from the first with being inside the schoolteacher's head. The schoolteacher personifies the epitome of Reality. Freedom is associated with baptism into the death of the Lord. Jesus, as the Bread of Life, is also associated with the hunger image uniting these two motifs intimately from the beginning. On page 337, Rayber's desire to be omniscient is again cited as a threat to the boy's freedom, as are school, books, tests, anything which would put part of the boy into Rayber's head. Old Tarwater felt he had lost his freedom once when the schoolteacher wrote his case up for a

\[118\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 315.}\]

\[119\text{Ibid.}\]
As a consequence he is zealous to prove to Tarwater the horrors of this slavery and the freedom Tarwater has by being raised in God's truth rather than in the false truth of Rayber. The effects of old Tarwater's lessons on preserving freedom bear fruit each time Tarwater refuses to let Rayber get inside his head and influence his thinking. Rayber's freedom is to control or restrain, as was pointed out earlier, and this is what makes him a passive character. Tarwater's freedom is to act and this is what makes him resist exterior or interior control as a threat to his ability to act. Tarwater equates passivity with slavery and activity with freedom. Rayber's passivity is underscored by his dependence on Bishop as a life center. He freely admits 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 himself. Then the whole world would become his idiot child." Here Rayber shows his own
slavery to Bishop and, upon his loss, to a world which makes no sense. It is evident to the reader that Rayber's control offers not real freedom, but only a disguised self-inflicted slavery.

At the bottom of page 428, both motifs are drawn together again. Tarwater says to the truck driver: "There are them that can act and them that can't, and them that are hungry and them that ain't. That's all. I can act. And I ain't hungry." Although Tarwater has confirmed his ability to act by drowning Bishop, he still will not admit his hunger. It has not left him, however, for he speaks of it in his next speech.\(^1\) When the truck driver offers him a sandwich he takes it but cannot eat it; his hunger is of a different type. Several pages later, Tarwater again confirms his ability to act declaring he would "live his life as he had elected it, and where, for the rest of his days, he would make good his refusal [to be a prophet]."\(^2\)

His refusal becomes consent only after he sees the vision of the old man and recognizes the source of his hunger. This vision is confirmed by the blazing

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 429.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 433.
tree which "the boy's breath went out to meet." Tarwater accepts the sign himself by going to meet it. He is not forced and he realizes the difficulties which lie before him due to the struggle he has been through and which is recalled in these two motifs — bread-hunger and freedom-slavery. The two motifs begin and end at the same places in the text although they diverge during the account of the story. Both motifs express the Reality-Redemption orientation of the story and underscore the vocation theme. They are incorporated into the more violent or unreasonable action of the story acting as a link between and an explanation of these actions. Both the redemptive or faith-oriented mind of Mason and the reality or material-oriented mind of Rayber use these motifs. They are brought to their most illustrative point in the struggle of young Tarwater to avoid his vocation and yet to satisfy his hunger and maintain his freedom. Finally, he accepts his call and in his acceptance, the motifs find their fulfillment.

Besides the thematic metaphor, Miss O'Connor uses reductive metaphor to help stress the shock of the novel. This is shown primarily in the psychological

126Ibid., p. 447.
metaphor of putting people into his head which is associated with Rayber and in the symbolism of the hearing aid as a sign of Rayber's mechanical mind. It also occurs in the snake image used to describe both Rayber and the welfare woman. The boy imagines Rayber's eyes: "He saw them dark gray, shadowed with knowledge, and the knowledge moved like tree reflections in a pond where far below the surface shadows a snake may glide and disappear."

Similarly, the welfare woman is pictured as leaving the farm in the manner of one "who had scuttled off, making a disappearing rattle in the corn." The words disappearing, rattle, and scuttle illustrate the way a snake would leave. Another character described reductively is the lawyer, "a tall dome-headed man with an eagle's nose, kept repeating in a restrained shriek . . . ."

The lawyer is reduced to a thing and an animal by means of a relatively unattractive combination of parts.

Reductive metaphor is also used to remove the beauty from things and make them less than they are. The extent of the heat is shown when the sun is drawn

127 Ibid., p. 336.
128 Ibid., p. 308.
129 Ibid., p. 319.
as "a furious white blister." Here, the sun is bulbous, unnatural, and ugly, a threat to those it sends its rays upon. Rayber's civilized home is later described as the inside of a bird's nest in an effort to portray its disorder and the heterogeneity of its furnishings. To show the unpleasantness of Tarwater's arrival at Rayber's, Miss O'Connor describes the boy as being burnt by the metallic coldness of the knocker, a sensation which repels boy and reader.

Reductive metaphor is not as prominent in this story as is the thematic metaphor, a device integral to the shock of the story. Used to clarify the personalities and conditions of characters and setting, the reductive metaphor is usually associated with Rayber or some other of the reality figures, but seldom is it used in connection with either Tarwater or the old man. Its sole appearance here is in the description of Mason's fish-like eyes, an epithet appearing frequently in the novel. Sumner Ferris notes that the eyes reveal purpose and in this context, fish-like is an appropriate epithet for the eyes of a prophet come to fish for men.

130 Ibid., p. 318.
131 Ferris, p. 12.
Metaphor, both thematic and reductive is essential to the Reality-Redemption tension of the novel as well as to the Shock of this tension in conflict. The plot of the story with its roots in the Rayber-Mason Tarwater clash about life is dramatically worked out in young Tarwater who solves the problem in the death-baptism of Bishop enabling each of the men to accomplish his stated ends. Tarwater, however, still free to make a choice, chooses an end similar to his great-uncle's. Miss O'Connor has clarified the story skillfully by means of the flashbacks inserted to explain background or to interpret present action in terms of past. Sr. M. Simon declares that "while the flashback is the novel's most important structural device, its structural and thematic unity depends to a great extent upon Miss O'Connor's effective use of imagery." Unity is provided by the dominating influence of Mason, the centralizing character of Bishop, the single idea ruling Tarwater, and the thematic metaphor which runs through these three plot forces. Shock is seen in the extreme opposition of characters and in the actions which bring them into conflict such as Mason's preaching and kidnapping, Tarwater's killing of

133Nolde, p. 182.
Bishop, Rayber's forced indifference, Satan's assault upon Tarwater, and Tarwater's final vision and acceptance of his call. Of this action, Quinn says: "Thus, her unyielding vision of reality sees everything and everybody in relation to the revitalizing, historical fact -- Man's redemption by Christ. . . . In her latest novel, as in all her fiction, Miss O'Connor's literary technique is to 'shock' her reader into reality. She must do this because the modern reader is, unfortunately, spiritually hard of hearing and myopic."133

Sr. M. Simon, Quinn, and other critics cited in this chapter agree that the novel supports a redemptive and vocation-oriented interpretation. The novel, I believe, draws a clear and effective picture of man, grotesque in his rejection of redemption because he is empty, grotesque in his acceptance because it is difficult to understand what would require of him such violent submission to what he cannot comprehend. The novel succeeds in its attempt to handle within the Reality-Redemption conflict the topic of Vocation.

133Quinn, p. 29.
CHAPTER V

A CONSIDERATION OF EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE

This book of nine short stories has drawn rather lengthy but general criticism from several critics. W. Schott of Nation finds neither happiness, nor salvation, nor hope in these stories.¹ On the other hand and in more abundance are those critics who praise at least some of the stories. Granville Hicks declares Miss O'Connor is saying hopefully in these stories, "You may indeed rise and you may indeed converge, but only at the cost of the agony of your own humiliation before the reality of God."² Similarly, these critics disagree about Miss O'Connor's view of reality as it is manifested in these stories. Schott finds that:

Flannery O'Connor's reality is destiny out of control, choices made after alternatives have been frozen. To begin one of her stories is to anticipate its end. The only questions are how the dreadful punishment for living will be delivered and in what manner her savage sense of humor will delay the agony.³

¹W. Schott, "Flannery O'Connor: Faith's Stepchild," Nation, CCl (September 13, 1965), 144.

²Granville Hicks, "God Breaks Through," America, CXII (June 5, 1965), 821-822.

³Schott, p. 142.
Agreeing totally, it seems, with the blackness of Schott's picture, Hicks yet maintains Miss O'Connor's attitude in these stories is not pessimistic. "The evil of unredeemed human nature was part of her dogma, and she saw plenty of evidence of it. She was not a pessimist, of course, because she believed there was a way of salvation, but I know of no pessimist who has painted a darker picture of the world we live in." Thomas Hoobler maintains that a point of hope exists in each story. He declares all the stories have an epitaphy or manifestation where the character sees himself for what he is. Miss O'Connor, he believes, portrays the essential man with his "superficial virtue" burned away. Hoobler and Schott express slightly variant opinions on the theme Miss O'Connor treats in these stories. Hoobler notes that she deals with the themes of the conflict between young and old, and the conflict between man and a relentless God who embraces and crushes the weak and petty. Schott expresses her theme in a broader way that envelops what Hoobler has:

6 Ibid.
said. Miss O'Connor deals, he says, with pride which "is the queen and mother of all vices. . . . The loss of Paradise was the price Adam and Eve paid for their pride. In every story, Flannery O'Connor's characters aspire beyond their capabilities." Hicks' classification of the various types of characters appearing in the book sustains Schott's choice of theme. He finds Miss O'Connor preoccupied with three basic types of character: the weak, selfish, confused child, the pompous, self-satisfied middle class, and the weak intellectual including the rationalistic reformer and the do-gooder. All these persons seek control over self or others in some way which is beyond their potential and therefore prideful. Miss O'Connor's prideful people are not static, though; rather her characters are active in their own self-deception. Miss O'Connor uses them to reflect various faces of evil until the reader sees the finite but real good of each one and the hope of redemption for all. The people begin to find light at the end of the crisis. The instrument

7Schott, p. 144.
9Schott, p. 144.
10Hicks, "God Breaks Through," p. 822.
of this crisis is usually a strong character whose views oppose the protagonist's and force him to choose between his perverted and his true reality as shown in the crisis. There follows a shocking convergence of opposing forces [Reality-Redemption tension] which results in pain, agony, and a forced, yet often unheeded, moment of recognized truth. Four basic classes of characters are involved in the Reality-Redemption tension as it is found in this book: the impotent man, the controller of destiny, the active rebel, and the mouthpiece for reality. To understand these general types in relation to the Reality-Redemption tension it is necessary to examine the stories in which these general types individualize themselves.

The title story, setting as it does, the tone for the collection, presents a glaring, easily understood example of the convergence of opposing realities. Julian's mother is the controller in this story. Of her type of character, Drake notes that Miss O'Connor often chooses for a crisis character a widow/divorced, one "who considers herself to be as independent of God or the cosmic forces as she apparently is of sex. The gospel imperative to choose never affects this woman except as a source of embarrassment -- a circumstance
to which she has to give a kind of lip service."11 The descendant of Southern plantation owners and living in "reduced circumstances" in a formerly fashionable but now rundown section of town, she declares, "If you know who you are, you can go anywhere. . . . I know who I am."12 Her view of reality derives from her understanding of her identity; she sees herself only as living graciously in the glory of illustrious family plantation traditions.

On the other hand, her son, Julian, is an inactive character; he thinks but does little about his thoughts. He desires to be a writer but is selling typewriters till he gets started and is living off his mother who pays the bills.13 Secretly, he recognizes his mother's faults and dreams up plans to reveal them to her.14 On his mother he places the blame for his weaknesses, but his strengths — his education, his broad and unprejudiced mind, his emotional detachment from his mother — are evidence that, "in spite of her,

11Drake, Esprit, p. 19.
13Ibid., p. 11.
he has turned out well. Julian's actions, his sitting by the Negro, his comments on the bus, the hat, the trip, are all designed to show his strengths and to irk his mother but yet to keep the peace.

To both of these characters, the crisis of identity comes in the form of a large Negress wearing a hat the same as the one Julian's mother is wearing and who happens to leave the bus at the same stop as Julian and his mother. She is the same size as his mother but without her veneer of gracious superiority; rather "her face was set not only to meet opposition but to seek it out." Having characterized the woman in this manner, the narrator goes on to identify her as a counterpart or foil to Julian's mother. The description of the Negress' hat serves this purpose as exactly the same words are used as were used to describe Julian's mother's hat on page 4. When they leave the bus at the same stop, the crisis of identity is reached. Julian's mother tries to assert her gracious superiority by giving the Negress' little boy a penny. The Negress, the causal figure in the crisis, a representative of

15Ibid., p. 13.
16Ibid., p. 16.
17Ibid.
reality and a rebel against the traditions for which Julian's mother, the receiver, stands, slugs her once and knocks her down. Julian attempts to explain to his mother the justice of her desserts but she does not know him.

She leaned forward and her eyes raked his face. She seemed trying to determine his identity. Then, as if she found nothing familiar about him, she started off with a headlong movement in the wrong direction. Catching up with her, he presses the point:

"What all this means, . . . is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn."18

The mutual reaction of mother and son shows not only the mother's loss of identity but also division within the family, a circumstance Miss O'Connor uses to advantage in this book of stories.20 As identity rises against identity, mother and son discover they no longer know one another even as they no longer know themselves. Continuing to move down the street, Julian's mother shows signs of a heart attack and finally collapses even as her identity has collapsed. She dies true to the lie of her life for at the point

18Ibid., p. 21.
19Ibid.
of death she asks for grandpa [a figure from her past] to come to get her. This same crisis serves to reveal to Julian the falsity of his life. His mother dies following this physical and spiritual shock, and Julian's dependence on her and his lack of objectivity in regard to her are revealed. He is seen to be a cowardly weakling who can't find help for a dying woman, a boy so tied up in his mother that he has thus far avoided entering the world of "guilt and sorrow."\textsuperscript{21}

The active shock of the story is underscored by the grotesquerie of the hat and of the setting. Describing the hat, the narrator says: "A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the other; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion with the stuffing out."\textsuperscript{22} Since Julian's mother prides herself on retaining the gracious customs and tastes of her forebears, the atrocious hat is at once recognized as the X of her true identity. It remains for the story to work this identity out. The woman's naiveté is again shown in the description of the immediate setting: "The sky was a dying violet and the

\textsuperscript{21}Flannery O'Connor, \textit{Everything That Rises Must Converge}, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 4.
houses stood out darkly against it, bulbous liver-colored monstrosities of a uniform ugliness though no two were alike. . . . Each house had a narrow collar of dirt around it in which sat, usually, a grubby child."23 Nothing about the area is attractive, yet the mother feels they do well to live there and in her mind's eye sees their present home as reminiscent of the old plantation pictured in its height of luxury.24 These descriptions attest to the woman's lack of sensitivity or true graciousness and show that she is hiding reality from herself. On the other hand, Julian's very awareness of these things and his objectivity in admitting their existence hide from him the emotional involvement which he wishes to deny. In facilitating the convergence of these false identities with a facet of reality, the author prepares the way for the critical shock which neither character survives; one dies, the other withdraws into a protective darkness.

The next story, "Greenleaf," concentrates its pride in Mrs. May, self-made farm success and controller of her destiny, a character in many ways reminiscent of Mrs. McIntyre in "The Displaced Person." The

23Ibid.
24Ibid., p. 7.
whole plot of her story is summed up in the second paragraph:

She had been aware that whatever it was had been eating as long as she had had the place and had eaten everything from the beginning of her fence line up to the house and now was eating the house and calmly with the same steady rhythm would continue through the house, eating her and the boys, and then on, eating everything but the Greenleafs.25

The story, then, concerns the destruction of Mrs. May, of her plans, and of her work. This destruction comes about in spite of her careful planning and her stringent watchfulness over help and farm, and in spite of who she is and who her boys are. Besides controlling the present, she intends to control the future. "... she had gone to her lawyer and had had the property entailed so that if they married, they could not leave it to their wives."26 Later she maintains: "I'll die when I get good and ready."27 Of an opposite character are her sons, impotent, passive rebels against their mother.

The other active character in the conflict is Mr. Greenleaf. He is of white-trash stock according to

25Ibid., p. 25.
26Ibid., p. 29.
27Ibid., p. 37.
Mrs. May and it is she who has helped him rise by putting up with him and his family, all parasites on her charity.

The crisis of the story is brought about by a loose, scrappy bull which has wandered on to the place. Greenleaf is ordered to kill it even though it is discovered that the bull belongs to his sons who live nearby. To be sure that the job is quickly and properly done, Mrs. May accompanies Greenleaf to the pasture. Leaning against the hood of the car, she takes up vigil, unafraid because Greenleaf has the gun and she has life insurance. Suddenly the bull appears; her own control over reality is gone, because the bull is a reality she cannot control. "She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in freezing unbelief."\(^28\) The bull pierces her with one horn and embraces her with the other as if the pain he causes is a mark of love. Mrs. May responds with the "look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable,"\(^29\) and falls forward over the animal's body as if speaking to it of some recent discovery. That the bull is meant to be seen as a lover is

\(^{28}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 52.}\)

\(^{29}\text{Ibid.}\)
obvious from the Europa and Jove image which the metaphor of the story uses. On the first page, the bull is spoken of as "like some patient god come down to woo her." Soon after, he is seen "chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor." In the crisis scene the narrator says "the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover." Whether or not she realizes the truth of this moment of crisis and is brought to a knowledge of what she is remains indefinite and, for the reader, of little consequence. The story is clear. In a violent yet simple and loving climax, the falseness of pride is stripped away by the cleansing and redeeming power of truth, the essence of the Reality-Redemption tension.

In "A View of the Woods," the identity aspect of this crisis of pride is most fully revealed. Mr. Fortune is the controller of reality, one who orders all things for the satisfaction of his pride and for the unhappiness of others in his care so that he might better keep them in their places beneath his heel. The narrator says of Fortune:

31 Ibid., p. 25.
32 Ibid., p. 52.
Anyone over sixty years of age is in an uneasy position unless he controls the greater interest and every now and then he gave the Pittses a practical lesson by selling off a lot.33

Secretly he had made his will and left everything in trust to Mary Fortune, naming his lawyer and not Pitts as executor. When he died Mary Fortune could make the rest of them jump; and he didn't doubt for a minute that she would be able to do it.34

There was talk of an eventual town. He thought this should be called Fortune, Georgia. He was a man of advanced vision, even if he was seventy-nine years old.35

The crisis of the story, a showdown between Fortune and his granddaughter Mary Fortune Pitts, shows to him the error of his "advanced vision." In an attempt to more fully frustrate his son-in-law Pitts, Fortune sells off the front lot or lawn, a sale which promises to permit progress to usurp the family lawn, grazing ground, and view of the woods. This sale provokes not only Pitts but also Mary Fortune who objects strongly and openly. Mary Fortune is a duplicate of fortune in both features and personality. "Though

33Ibid., p. 56.
34Ibid., p. 57.
35Ibid., p. 58.
there was seventy years' difference in their ages, the
spiritual difference between them was slight.\textsuperscript{36} In an
unsuccessful attempt to reconcile himself with her, he
forces the question of identity and asks her to choose.
She says haltingly, "I am Mary Fortune Pitts." He re-
torts, "I am PURE Fortune."\textsuperscript{37} Later he takes her to
town with him and stops off to sign the bill of sale.
As soon as his signature is affixed to the deed, Mary
Fortune rebels and begins throwing bottles at him. He
removes her forcibly and decides it is time to show his
control; he must beat her.

She respected Pitts because, even with no just
cause, he beat her; and if he — with his just
cause — did not beat her now, he would have
nobody to blame but himself if she turned out
a hellion.\textsuperscript{38}

Accordingly, he drives down the road, gets out of the
car with the child and informs her of his intentions.
Her reply is, "Take off your glasses."\textsuperscript{39} As soon as
he strikes her with the belt, she attacks him and does
not let up until he admits he has been whipped. Her
next action is to voice her self identity, her position
as a rebel. "You been whipped," . . . "by me," . . .

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{37}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 78.
"and I'm PURE Pitts." Since the old man sees himself and all his hopes in her, this declaration arouses his deepest anger because it threatens and denies his own identity. He summons his failing strength, reverses their positions and bashes the child's head against a rock killing her. He then says, "There's not an ounce of Pitts in me," as if in killing her he had killed the Pitts that threatened to be in him. He falls on the ground in the convulsions of death. It is Mary Fortune who as cause reveals to Fortune, the receiver, that he is not the maker of destiny and who offers him release from the pride which says he is. He does not accept the truth but kills the image of himself which would deny him his interpretation of himself. In this manner, the Reality-Redemption tension erupts into an action both shocking and grotesque.

As if to underscore the grotesqueness of the action, Miss O'Connor's language in this story is stark and stripped of joy and graciousness. The glaring yellow bulldozer and the stark line of trees provide the thematic metaphor standing as they do for the opposing wills of Fortune and Pitts. The story begins and ends with references to both these things while the tree

40 Ibid., p. 80.
theme is also carried throughout. In trees is embodied the reason for Mary Fortune’s rebellion and the sign of the old man’s control. After he has decided to sell the woods, the trees foreshadow the violence to come: "the gaunt trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from the almost hidden sun setting behind them.... He saw it [the woods], in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood."41 It is to the woods that he takes Mary Fortune and it is in the woods that the crisis of identity occurs. As he dies he looks again at the woods and sees "that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance."42

"The Enduring Chill" which follows "A View of the Woods" is built around characters much like those of the title story, the domineering mother and the impotent, cowardly son who dreams great dreams. While the focus in the title story is on the mother, the focus in "The Enduring Chill" is on the son. Contact with reality is maintained through the comments of his

41 Ibid., p. 71.
42 Ibid., p. 81.
old maid sister, Mary George. Asbury has come home to
die and in his death he will open his mother's eyes to
all that she has done to him. 43 This pseudo-artist's
dying "letter to his mother" is designed to reveal the
truth of his lack of talent and to place the blame upon
his mother who, he says, has domesticated beyond use
his imagination and talent, leaving him only the "de­
sire for these things." 44 After his arrival, Asbury
concentrates on dying; he refuses to see a doctor and
takes great pride in his wasting appearance. He says,
"Death was coming to him legitimately, as a justifica­
tion, as a gift from life. That was his greatest tri­
umph." 45 Only his intelligence grows more clear and
luminous.

... his mind functioned with a terrible clar­
ity. On the point of death, he found himself
existing in a state of illumination that was
totally out of keeping with the kind of talk
he had to listen to from his mother. This was
largely about cows with names like Daisy and
Bessie Button and their intimate functions —
their mastitis and their screwworms and their
abortions. 46

At the insistence of his mother, he sees the

43 Ibid., p. 92.
44 Ibid., pp. 91-92.
46 Ibid., p. 95.
doctor who confirms his oncoming death. Mary George thinks differently. "All he's going to be around here for the next fifty years is a decoration." As his dying wish, Asbury asks for a Jesuit to talk to because a Jesuit whom he had met at a philosophical discussion had impressed him. The Jesuit is brought after Asbury has arranged his room to present a cell-like ascetic appearance for the dramatic purpose of heightening his martyrdom in this intellectual morass. To his chagrin and mockery, instead of a polished, sophisticated man of the world, he finds the Jesuit to be Irish, partially blind and deaf, and totally unacquainted with literary artists. He thunders to the boy the message of salvation and ultimately the truth of himself. "The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are — a lazy ignorant conceited youth!" He adds a culminating indictment upon leaving, "He's a good lad at heart but very ignorant." The reality of the priest has converged upon the illusions of the boy.

This convergence is borne out by the boy's search for some last meaningful experience. He

47 Ibid., p. 103.
48 Ibid., p. 107.
49 Ibid., p. 108.
impresses upon himself all in the room, even the peculiar water-stain above his head. Nothing, not even a parting scene with the Negro hands, who will not admit he is dying, supplies this experience. At this critical, yet ludicrous moment, Dr. Block arrives triumphant and the words of the priest are borne out fully in the boy's life. He is not going to die because he has only undulant fever which is "the same as Bang's in a cow." The effect of this second convergence is seen in his eyes which "looked shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him." 

Exhausted by his old life, he awaits the new which rises within him like a chill which is a "warm ripple across a deeper sea of cold." Then he imagines the water-stain bird in motion descending upon him as "a purifying terror . . . emblazoned in ice instead of fire." Evidently, Asbury profits from this crisis between illusion and truth. Truth crosses his illusions

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 113.
52 Ibid., p. 114.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
physically in the diagnosis of the doctor and spiritually in the diagnosis of the priest. In the moment of convergence, truth destroys pride and permits Asbury to see himself for what he is in such a manner that he is separated from the lie that had been his life.

Two images, that of the title which runs through the story and that of God which begins and ends the story serve to further express and unify the plot. "The enduring chill" is first mentioned on page 92 as Asbury reminisces about the contents of his death letter. "... the letter would leave her with an enduring chill and perhaps in time lead her to see herself as she was." The purpose of the chill -- to reveal true identity -- is made clear here. Further, as Asbury lies in bed contemplating the water-stain bird on the ceiling, it reminds him of icicles and frightens him because he is afraid it will descend upon him.55 Chills are also among the symptoms he cites as prognostics of his death.56 The last mention of the enduring chill is on page 114 where his new life is compared to a chill and where the Holy Ghost, symbolized by the water-stain bird with ice in its beak, descends upon

55ibid., p. 93.
56ibid., p. 103.
him in ice instead of fire. In the bird, the God image is merged with the enduring chill image. The first mention of the God image is on page 83 when Asbury pictures the town as resembling a temple for some unknown god. Metaphor then supports the meeting of reality with redemption and through the chill image allows the shock of the story to grow slowly until it culminates in the boy's identity crisis.

Two stories, "The Comforts of Home" and "The Lame Shall Enter First" are sufficiently similar in structure and story pattern to be treated together. In both stories, a self-satisfied do-gooder seeks to recreate some intruder into his family in a new image of his own fashioning. In the process of doing this, he neglects the one to whom he is bound by family ties and brings about the destruction of himself and his child. In both cases, the intruder is a type of incarnate evil who survives the crisis unchanged. It might be said the intruder is a catalyst necessary for the action but untouched by it.

"The Comforts of Home" revolves around Thomas, his mother, and Star, a nymphomaniac his mother's misled charity has deigned to take in. The irony of self-satisfied blindness, says Friedman, is evident especial-
ly in the title, the character relationships and even the style of "The Comforts of Home." Thomas is weak, ruled by his mother who counts on "his attachment to his electric blanket" to keep him from complaining about her charity. The mother, who judges all things in terms of what would be "nice" rather than in terms of what is good or just, has had the girl paroled to her and she feels it would not be nice to send her back even though her job and living quarters are lost so Star comes to live with them. Thomas, of course, does nothing to get rid of the girl; he complains and threatens but does not act. Eventually, Thomas delivers his ultimatum, "You can choose her or me," and leaves to find the sheriff whom he asks to find the gun Star has stolen from his desk and arrest her. Diabolically, Star returns the gun to his drawer, a fact which completely distracts him. He goes to plant the gun in her purse, is discovered, and shoots, intending to hit Star, just as the Sheriff enters. It is the mother who is hit and the Sheriff interprets the crisis in the worst possible manner when he sees the killer and the slut "about to collapse into each other's

57 Friedman, p. 239.
Neither Thomas' peace nor his mother's generosity is able to survive a meeting with evil for neither are genuine, his peace being founded on convenience while his mother's generosity rests on a false compassion, a being "nice!" His mother sacrifices herself for evil bearing out what Thomas said of her earlier, "She proceeded always from the tritest of considerations -- it was the nice thing to do -- into the most foolhardy engagements with the devil, whom, of course, she never recognized." Thomas, on the other hand, recognizes the girl as evil, but is anesthetized by his own superiority.

He needed nothing to tell him he was in the presence of the very stuff of corruption, but blameless corruption because there was no responsible faculty behind it. He was looking at the most unendurable form of innocence. Absently he asked himself what the attitude of God was to this, meaning if possible to adopt it.

In order to regain this peace which Star upset, he sets out to rid himself of Star only to rid himself of his mother who is the instrument of his peace. Accordingly,


59 Ibid., p. 118.

60 Ibid., p. 124.
he destroys his mother actually, himself spiritually, and Star goes free.

In the companion story, evil again remains unaffected by what it causes. Here, evil in the person of club-footed genius Rufus Johnson enters, at his invitation, the home of Sheppard and his child, the dull, greedy, motherless Norton. Sheppard is an atheistic, self-centered do-gooder who works on Saturdays at the reformatory as a counselor-psychologist "receiving nothing for it but the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about." Rufus Johnson is the boy who has most appealed to him and whom he contrasts with his own son until he is led to reject Norton. Rufus' mentality is opposed to Sheppard's. Rufus believes in God, in Hell, and in Satan. He is sure that he is possessed by the devil and Sheppard's psychological interpretations of his actions are worthless. Dismissed from the reformatory, it is not long until Rufus finds himself in such extreme poverty that he is forced to let himself into Sheppard's house with a key Sheppard had given him as a sign of his trust.

61 Ibid., pp. 145-146.
62 Ibid., p. 148.
63 Ibid., p. 150.
He meets Norton whom he identifies as a miniature Sheppard, "You got the same stupid face." He forces Norton to serve him a lunch and then invades the family sanctuary — the dead mother's room where he disturbs her things and even prances around in her girdle. Finding Rufus has come to his home, Sheppard uses his best psychological approach, asking Rufus to stay and help him to teach Norton unselfishness. After he has agreed, the boys learn to get along and Rufus buries himself in volumes of the Encyclopedia. Sheppard continues to counsel, strengthening, so he thinks, his virtue image to the point of Godlikeness.

Secretly Johnson was learning what he wanted him to learn — that his benefactor was impervious to insult and that there were no cracks in his armor of kindness and patience where a successful shaft could be driven.

To wean Johnson away from his ideas of heaven and hell, Sheppard buys a telescope. With this, Sheppard believes, the boy can see what the universe is. The three talk about moon voyages and other adventures, but Johnson says he isn't going to the moon.

64 Ibid., p. 155.
65 Ibid., p. 159.
66 Ibid., p. 163.
alive and "when I die I'm going to hell." From here the crisis develops in which the evil Johnson shows truth to Sheppard and Norton. We will consider Sheppard first. Johnson deliberately rejects Sheppard and his substitution of psychology for truth going so far as to break in and pillage for the sole purpose of proving to Sheppard that he lacks trust and that he has not helped him. He wants to get caught in order "to show up that big tin Jesus Sheppard": Facing Sheppard and handcuffed between two policemen, Rufus makes Sheppard face himself and the emptiness of his psychological approach.

I lie and steal because I'm good at it! My foot don't have a thing to do with it! The lame shall enter first. . . . When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'11 save me, not that lying stinking atheist, not that . . .

Reacting like a man who has been shot, Sheppard returns to his house pondering what this will do to his reputation and consoling himself with the thought "I have nothing to reproach myself with, . . . I did more for him than I did for my own child." Suddenly Sheppard sees his real

67 Ibid., p. 164.
68 Ibid., p. 187.
69 Ibid., pp. 188-189.
70 Ibid.
failure — his own son — and the depth of his selfishness. 71 "He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts leering at him from the eyes of Johnson. His image of himself shrivelled until everything was black before him." 72 Stripped of his self-satisfied virtue by this convergence with evil, he stands before himself and the reader as he is — empty.

His son, also, is affected by his relationship with Johnson who introduces the boy to the Bible and to what it says about good and evil. He offers Norton the one thing he desires and that Sheppard cannot give, an explanation of the dead mother's present existence. Since she was good, Johnson attributes to her a place in heaven which he declares is "in the sky somewhere, . . . but you got to be dead to get there." 73 After this, Norton takes much interest in the telescope as an instrument for finding his mother and listens frequently to Johnson's talk. At the very end of the

71 Gable, p. 140.
72 Flannery O'Connor, Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. 190.
73 Ibid., p. 165.
story, after Sheppard realizes his emptiness and failure, he goes to the attic to find Norton and give him the love he has so long withheld. Arriving at the top of the stairs, he finds the telescope on the floor and the child dead by hanging. The child has gone to be with his mother and Sheppard is left alone, presumably unsaved.

In both these stories, "The Comforts of Home," and "The Lame Shall Enter First," the Reality-Redemption crisis is built around a convergence of illusion and truth resulting in a final painful triumph of truth. The moment of convergence is brought on by the presence of evil, in the face of which, illusion cannot survive. The next story, "Revelation," is perhaps the clearest statement of the redemptive nature of this convergence between illusion and truth. Ruby Turpin, a member of the self-satisfied middle class and a controller of her destiny, is made to face the emptiness of her virtue by an ugly girl who speaks only one sentence to her. "In the conversation in the waiting room the loquacious Mrs. Turpin unwittingly reveals her one flaw: a feeling of self-sufficiency, or in theological

74Ibid., p. 190.
Upon entering the doctor's office, she says to her husband, "Claud, you sit in that chair there," and he obeyed "as if he were accustomed to doing what she told him to." In between comments about the weather and the doctor, she notes and classifies in relation to her superior self all the other occupants of the room, most of whom are white-trash. After this, she compliments the Lord on having made herself and considers mentally what she would have chosen to be had the Lord desired to make her someone else. During these silent mental considerations, the ugly girl watches her and makes ugly faces and noises which indicate her dislike. Mrs. Turpin's image of herself is first threatened by the white-trash lady who insists she would never deign to raise pigs or carry water to Negroes. Mrs. Turpin relies for answer on her obvious social superiority: "You had to have certain things before you could know certain things."
Mrs. Turpin goes on to secure her position and instructs the Negro delivery boy in the proper manner of attracting the receptionist's attention. This leads her to reflect on her own charity; "She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent." Charity, she feels, is her crowning virtue and she thanks Jesus because "He had made her herself and given her a little of everything." Turning her charity upon the ugly girl, who has been making constant noises while staring at her, Mrs. Turpin begins to talk to her but receives no answer. The girl's mother tries to apologize for her daughter's conduct; in return Mrs. Turpin thanks God vocally for her virtues and her status. This provokes the crisis. The ugly girl attacks her and, at Mrs. Turpin's request, gives her a message, a new identity. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," whispers the girl and Mrs. Turpin receives this as a revelation even though she cannot understand why it is directed at her.

80 Ibid., p. 203.
81 Ibid., p. 206.
82 Ibid., p. 207.
rather than at the trashy people in the room.83

Her meditations follow her home and through the usual routine of watering the Negroes and scooting down the hogs. She wonders, "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?"84 Her considerations cause her to question God's taste in people and finally she cries out at Him indignantly, "Who do you think you are?"85 Here Mrs. Turpin is revealed for what she has set herself up as -- her own God, a god in conflict with the true God. It is here that the girl's revelation converges with Mrs. Turpin's illusions. In this convergence is seen the Reality-Redemption tension. Having exposed the depth of her pride by questioning God, she witnesses a vision of her true place which is below the white-trash, the niggers, and the freaks and lunatics she has disdained. At the end of the visionary procession of the elect, she sees "those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right."86 On their shocked and changed faces she sees "that even

84Ibid., p. 215.
85Ibid., p. 216.
86Ibid., p. 218.
their virtues were being burned away." 87

In "Revelation," Miss O'Connor portrays the insignificance of self before God; in the next story, "Parker's Back," she illustrates what happens to those who dare to put on Christ. "Parker's Back" is a compassionate story which revolves quite literally around Parker's back. Parker is O. E. Parker, supposed man-of-the-world who is married and faithful to his strict Gospel-Christian wife, Sarah Ruth. Parker is soon dissatisfied and, while he has no intention of being unfaithful, he attempts to tantalize her into jealousy. Failing, he decides a new tattoo is the only way to contain his dissatisfaction but it will have to be just the right tattoo, one which she cannot resist. 88 He seeks a tattoo artist, finds just the right tattoo — a Byzantine Christ — and has it put upon his back.

When the Christ is finished and Parker undergoes humiliation at the hands of his friends, the convergence between illusion and truth takes place. He looks unwillingly at the finished tattoo: "The eyes in the reflected face continued to look at him -- still,

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p. 231.
straight, all-demanding, enclosed in silence." The look causes him to think about his life and he "saw it as a spider web of facts and lies that was not at all important to him but which appeared to be necessary in spite of his opinion. The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed. He was certain of it as he had ever been of anything." With this convergence of redemptive truth upon the lies of his life, he determines to ask Sarah Ruth what to do and returns home, no longer dissatisfied but filled with a feeling of newness.  

Upon his arrival, Sarah Ruth will not admit him until he admits to his full name, Obadiah Elihue, which he abhors. It was by telling her his name soon after they met that he first surrendered his identity to her. At home he shows her the tattoo but it makes no impression, then he tells her it is Christ. "Idolatry," cried Sarah Ruth, and she picked up a broom and "beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ." She forces him to leave the house, forbid-
ding him, and ultimately the Christ he bears, to re-enter. She does not share or understand the convergence which has affected her husband and in rejecting him, she rejects the Christ he bears. She cannot help him nor react in any manner except in accord with a set of rigid, unloving principles. His tattoo was an act designed to win her love, an act which ultimately revealed to him Christ's claim on him. The woman who should have helped him, he finds cannot help him and at the close of the story, the reader finds him leaning against a tree weeping. The shock of this convergence leads him to Christ even as it destroys his whole former way of life. The welts on the face of the tattooed Christ are the welts on the face of Obadiah Elihue the redeemed O. E.; in some sense, they have become one.

The last story, "Judgment Day," provides a fitting conclusion to a book concerned with man's pride
for in it three types of pride converge in the character of Tanner. Proud of his Southern manners, Tanner is an old man who has gone north to live with his daughter in order to save that pride. The old man prides himself highly on his ability to handle Negroes yet it is a Negro he could not handle who caused him to accept his daughter's offer of a home. In New York, he tries, in spite of his daughter's warnings, to strike up an acquaintance with the Negro next door. He insists the "nigger would like to talk to someone who understood him." After several feints, Tanner gets the Negro to talk to him and forces the question of color in his reply to the Negro's denial of God. "And you ain't black, and I ain't white." The two wills, Southern and Northern, converge at this instant resulting in a blow which causes the old man to suffer a paralytic stroke that robs him of any claim to usefulness or superiority. The old man now realizes he is out of place, and to save his illusions, he determines to return to the South where Coleman will care

94 Ibid., p. 253.
95 Ibid., p. 257.
96 Ibid., p. 261.
97 Ibid., p. 263.
for him as Negroes should care for whites.

Using all his energy, he leaves the room and attempts to make his way down the stairs, but falls helpless in the middle of the flight. Following his fall, the second and ultimate convergence takes place. The Negro tenant, unrecognized by the old man, finds him on the stairs. Tanner mistakes him for Coleman, greets him as Coleman, and talks about Judgment Day. Tanner, addresses the Negro as "Preacher." "Hep me up, Preacher. I'm on my way home!"98 As the human will [his desire to return South] converges with the Divine [through the Negro's evil] he is helped — right into Eternity. The Negro entangles the old man in the banister sending him to Judgment Day. The daughter has him buried in the city. Later, in a corresponding convergence, the daughter's illusions about the triviality of her promise to bury the old man in the South converge implicitly with his earlier curse on her should she fail to do so. "Very definite lines began to appear in her face."99 The conclusion which follows is a masterpiece of understatement and irony: "so she had him dug up and shipped the body to Corinth. Now she

98 Ibid., p. 269.
99 Ibid.
rests well at night and her good looks have mostly re-
turned.\textsuperscript{100}

Judging the stories as a whole, Richard Poirier sees their major virtue to be a sudden quality of depth which the crisis reveals in an otherwise flat character and in the perfect sense of timing which enables the reader to accept the religious direction the stories take. Their major defect he declares to be a similarity of plot progress in all the stories, a similarity which he found extremely bothersome in this collection.\textsuperscript{101} I agree the pattern is similar, a pattern indicated in the title and carried out in each story. Opposing wills, one illusory, one true or real, converge in a moment of crisis which destroys or changes drastically the illusory will. It seems to me, however, that this pattern is part of the design of the book helping Miss O'Connor to focus on various aspects of pride which have been pointed out in the analyses and yet keep the stories linked as parts of a single theme which she builds to a climax in the last story.

Similarly, Hoobler's evaluation declares these

\textsuperscript{100}\textit{Ibid.}

nine stories to be a greater perfection of her art than her earlier work. Similarly, Granville Hicks describes the stories as "superb and terrible. She took a cold, hard look at human beings, and she set down with marvelous precision what she saw." Pride is what she has set down, pride centered in the characters who live illusory lives. This pride is always broken by a truth it will not admit exists. It seems to me the Reality-Redemption tension portrayed here is left implicit in the early stories, becoming obvious first in "The Enduring Chill" and dominating the last three stories of the book.

In these stories, Miss O'Connor does not seem to rely so heavily on external appearance or supernatural happenings to make her dramatization clear although these are not absent from the stories. She seems more able to externalize naturally her characters' identities and crises of soul. The violence of these stories, while it retains external manifestations is more an interior violence -- a revelation of identity, a ripping out of pride -- with the result that

102 Hoobler, p. 18.

man sees himself for what he is. Just as she does not rely on external appearance, the author seems, in these stories to use less description and metaphor. Her lines are bare, stripped of comparison and often of color. For me, the book is a successful culmination of her treatment of sin, a topic carried through all of her work, yet treated in a new and different manner in each work.

TOWARD A CONCLUSION

Having attempted in this treatment of Miss O'Connor's body of work to understand her three keys: Reality, Redemption, and Shock, it seems possible to make some judgment of her success in communicating her intuition of life to her reader. This intuition as I have shown in each work centers upon the Reality-Redemption crisis as dramatized in a manner designed to shock the reader to awareness. I believe Miss O'Connor's achievement to be considerable and with the help of critics hope to substantiate this claim. Miss O'Connor is important, Rubin claims, "because her fiction affords us a perception of an aspect of the human situation that seems to me crucial just now, and into the nature of which she has provided some terrifying insights." Rather than center on topical interest as Rubin does, Elizabeth Bishop regards Miss O'Connor's work as universal. Her books, she declares, "are narrow, possibly, but they are clear, hard, vivid, and full of bits of description, phrases, and an odd insight that contains more real poetry than a dozen books

of poems. Critics who accuse her of exaggeration are quite wrong. . . ."^2

Generally, critics attribute the highest merit to her short stories rather than to her novels. Says Rubin:

Perhaps it is because she is so very intense a writer that only her short stories can bear the weight of that concentration of form and meaning she brought to the craft of fiction.3

Jane Hart seconds this claim and acknowledges Miss O'Connor's sense of unity.

Miss O'Connor's stories, on first impression, may seem too insubstantial -- the second impression is that they are actually highly unified, and it is often only the strange ending and the bizarre incidents leading to the climax that give one the feeling of insubstantiality.4

It seems clear enough to me that Miss O'Connor's stories are, as Miss Hart declares, very tightly unified. They are unified around a theme and a crisis prepared for from the initial incident of each story. Any apparent lack of unity results, I believe, from a failure on the reader's part to read the story in a redemptive context. Certainly, her stories lose the essence of

^2Elizabeth Bishop, untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 16.

^3Louis D. Rubin, untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 44.

^4Hart, p. 230.
what they are intended to dramatize if they are viewed outside of this context.

Summing up Miss O'Connor's achievement of form, Miss Hart calls attention to her portrayal of our rich and familiar reality as suddenly grotesque, disjointed because of its inner evil. The impact of this redrawn reality is intense, she says, whether or not the critic believes the work has merit. 5

It is my belief that Miss O'Connor is able to portray this tension in a way which carries the import of her vision but which, generally, avoids preachy or dogmatic statement. This tension, I have shown to be integral to all of her stories and indeed, to be the point of focus and thematic unity within each of her works. "The intellectual basis of Miss O'Connor's work is theology," says Ted Spivey. 6 This means that "she assumes God and grace; they are among the givens in her work, and hence she has not need — as lesser religious writers do — to argue their presence or violently to introduce them." 7 With such givens, tension must


6 Ted R. Spivey, untitled article in *Esprit*, VIII (Winter 1964), 46.

7 Philip Scharper, untitled article in *Esprit*, VIII (Winter 1964), 45.
result, for Miss O'Connor's viewpoint is not in line with that of reality as defined here in the context of Miss O'Connor's essays. Thus, we see in Miss O'Connor an "apocalyptic" viewpoint "piercing through the outward manifestations of life to an inner, spiritual turmoil." Since Miss O'Connor is concerned with seeing through reality to redemption, it might be said that:

... her basic subject matter is the "mystery" which remains in everything, beyond scientific explanation, which when we confront it honestly and deeply compels man to be religious or at least to make the one decisive choice -- for God or for the Devil.

In fine, we can understand Miss O'Connor's work only if it is approached through the pattern of salvation. It seems to be Miss O'Connor's basic subject matter, the pattern or mystery of salvation, which explains her unique apprehension of the reality-redemption conflict and which necessitates and even normalizes her use of the shocking or grotesque. "Flannery O'Connor, ... writes," says William Van O'Connor, "with the assurance that the Christian doctrines of grace, mercy, and redemption are true. Her dramatizations of these

8Clarke, p. 7.
9Meaders, p. 384.
doctrines seem incongruous in the context of the society she is describing . . ."11

Her basic subject matter, defined above, is expressed by way of theme and pattern in her works. In the analysis of her stories, these basic patterns and themes were pointed out and it seems that they can be reduced to one major plan pervading all her work. Her choice of plot pattern is one which is out of kilter with that recognized by modern man. Rather, in her "fiction some person is trying to fulfill a mission in unfamiliar surroundings."12 Although this would apply mainly to her stories built around prophet-type characters, it does not exclude her non-prophetic stories for, in all her stories, the major characters are in unfamiliar surroundings, be they exterior or interior, at the moment of crisis. For all the stories it can be said

The theme of Flannery O'Connor's fiction is free will. To her, this meant a struggle for identity, a conflict with the turmoil that has made itself at home in an unredeemed world and above all, in the part of ourselves that has stubbornly resisted redemption.13


12Friedman, pp. 236–237.

13Mayhew, p. 34.
It has been pointed out in Miss O'Connor's work but particularly in her last book of short stories that the crisis of identity is central and focused ultimately around the breaking down of a false or prideful identity. This identity, as the quotation indicates, is the identity of a man seen in the light of redemption. About her manner of dramatizing this theme, Scharper says "it is her sense of complexity, her realization that life is a crucible in which souls are made or broken, that gives to Miss O'Connor's work the quality of compassion." 14

No matter how lofty or noble the theme and basic conception of pattern, the test of the story is in the action of the characters, in the persuasiveness of the dramatization. In this sense Miss O'Connor had to recast faith in relation to the individual. She had to "relate religious faith to the struggle to find God." 15 Miss O'Connor's characters are not to be viewed, therefore, as psychological but as theological in accord with her theological intuition of life. 16

"The South is," she has said, "hardly Christ-centered,

14Scharper, p. 45.

15Spivey, Esprit, p. 46.

16Dowell, pp. 235-239.
but it is most certainly Christ-haunted. Since her conflict is between belief and unbelief, between submission and pride,

The ultimate fault of her characters, . . . is primarily in themselves, not in their stars. Through arrogance, stupidity, or pride — and influenced, of course, by hereditary, environmental, and societal flaws — her people attempt to find their own salvation. By so doing they commit the cardinal sin of rejecting the redemptive function of Christianity; because of this rejection they wander through a dark world, lost, alone, or eventually destroyed.

In the context of the redemptive plot pattern and theme on which Miss O'Connor chose to base her work her people appear to be trash, but "... trash able to mix inanity with poetry, with exuberant nonsense, and with the most profound and systematic contempt for reality." In this distorted reality, "her beings are always raising the question of worth. Who is 'a good man?' Where is he? He is 'hard to find.' Meanwhile you will have to make out with a bad one who is so respectable that he is horrible, so horrible that he is funny, so funny that he is pathetic, but so pathetic

17Ibid., p. 236.
that it would be gruesome to pity him."20

In the redemptive stripping necessary to find the good man, her characters are seen in the stark light of redemption which displays grotesquely their blackness and their weakness. Miss O'Connor shows us the real evil of her characters implying that "Satan's greatest triumph . . . lies in the fact that he has convinced the world he does not exist."21 Her Satanic characters, Hazel Motes, Hulga, the Misfit, the Bible salesman, Sheppard, Johnson, and many others declare Christ by their very denial of Him. Miss O'Connor evidently considered this satisfactory proof. In a letter to Sr. Mariella Gable, she says,

In the Gospels it was the devils who first recognized Christ, and the evangelists didn't censor this information. They apparently thought it was pretty good witness. It scandalizes us when we see this same thing in modern dress only because we have this defensive attitude toward the faith.22

Accordingly, the very violence and grotesqueness of her characters is understood to speak of Christ and to serve to illustrate her vision of the world. Says

20Ibid.
21Dowell, p. 239.
Rupp, "The characters react to one another with unpressed hostility." This is the expression of their Satanism, their rejection of Christ and of love.

In this grotesque world of distorted people, Miss O'Connor clearly draws the lines of battle aligning herself with "the mistaken Truth-Seekers, the ragging, irrational." Perhaps this is because redemptive truth is not clear-cut and reasonable; rather it is mysterious and demanding of faith. Only those willing to take a chance on, in a sense, an unsure thing will dare accept this truth. Those who accept will then appear grotesque to those who do not. "On the other hand, Miss O'Connor's utmost scorn was showered upon the secularists, bogged in their material world and unable or unwilling to perceive the grand design of existence, the plan of Redemption." From Miss O'Connor's redemptive point of view, these last are the real grotesques because they refuse to see the truth of redemption. In these two extremes of character, each declaring the other grotesque, Miss O'Connor dramatizes the reality-redemption tension.

23 Rupp, p. 305.
24 Clarke, p. 7.
25 Ibid.
It is clear that Miss O'Connor's basic subject, her theme, her over-all story pattern, and her characters are focused upon the Reality-Redemption tension. This is easily discerned both in her work and in her theory as has been pointed out. What can be said toward a final word on the use and meaning of this tension as a valuable way of expressing something about man's meaning? Her use of shock or violence as a means of depicting this tension is praised more often than it is condemned. Says Walter Allen, "Flannery O'Connor was unique among American Catholic writers in that she did not deflect from the problem of violence that is the central preoccupation of our literature."26 It is her use of contradiction, the contradiction between reality and redemption which makes shock a necessary tool for her theme. Farnham explains the use of this tool when he says:

The central theme found in Flannery O'Connor's writing is the redemption of man; but, since her talent inclines her toward the portrayal of sin, she shows the effects of redemption in a negative manner. She reflects the beauty of virtue by showing the ugliness of its absence.27

26 Allen, p. 12.

Concerning her use of contradiction, Miss O'Connor states that this crossing of usual boundaries is necessary for the writer. She says:

The writer operates at a peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet. His problem is to find that location.\(^{38}\)

For her, this location was found in a vision of reality "strangely out of harmony with our materialistic, essentially non-religious society."\(^{39}\) Of her location, the point of Reality-Redemption tension, West says:

Flannery O'Connor saw the world as something that to most eyes would appear a distorted, even grotesque image. What it represented was, in truth, a fresh vision — a penetration into the heart of the human condition of our time.\(^{40}\)

Her use of this tension and of the shock which makes this tension visible to men is justified then, by the truth it enables her to portray. Her very understanding of a dual view of man [viewed according to reality and according to redemption] gave birth to the grotesques for in such a conflict both sides must appear distorted. Her physical and mental location in an area where these two categories were forced to cross.


\(^{39}\)Clarke, p. 6.

\(^{40}\)Ray B. West, Jr., untitled article in Esprit, VIII (Winter 1964), 49.
only shows more clearly the grotesqueness of the situation and the ultimate dis-location of man. Thomas Merton sums up the pride of reality which produced this dis-location from redemption, as Miss O'Connor portrayed it, in the word respect.

The key to Flannery's books is probably that word "respect." She never gave up examining its ambiguities and its decay. And in this bitter dialectic of half-truths that have become endemic in our system, she probed our very life, and its conflicts, its falsities, its vanities. Have we become an enormous complex structure of spurious reverences?

Her books were written in and out of the anatomy of a word that became genteel, then self-conscious, then obsessive, and finally died of contempt. But it kept calling itself "respect." Contempt for the child, for the stranger, for the woman, for the Negro . . . for reality itself. Contempt, contempt, so that in the end the gestures of respect they kept making to themselves and to each other and to God became incredibly and desperately obscene. Respect, pride -- here the two words are ultimately synonymous. All of Miss O'Connor's work is based around them. Her basic subject is the pattern of salvation which would rework the meaning of these words. Her themes and her story pattern enable this reworking to take place while her characters participate violently in the rewrenching of man shown in that distortion

31 Merton, p. 51.
which is the Reality-Redemption tension. In this light, Miss O'Connor's theory is put into practice consistently in her works.

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