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CONVERGENCES:
TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND FLANNERY O'CONNOR

BY

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A THESIS

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Jesuit-scientist-philosopher-theologian, begins his preface to The Phenomenon of Man:

If this book is to be properly understood, it must be read . . . purely and simply as a scientific treatise . . . This book deals with man solely as a phenomenon; but it also deals with the whole phenomenon of man.1

After a preliminary chapter on "The Stuff of the Universe," Teilhard de Chardin devotes his second chapter to "The Within of Things." "The whole phenomenon of man" demands a kind of phenomenology or generalized physic in which the internal aspect of things as well as the external aspect of the world will be taken into account. Otherwise . . . it is impossible to cover the totality of the cosmic phenomenon by one coherent explanation such as science must try to construct.2

Just as Teilhard de Chardin, Christian and scientist, spent his life in the study of the whole man, so Flannery O'Connor, Catholic-Southern-writer, insisted that the work of the fiction writer who is

1New York, 1959, p. 29.
2Ibid., p. 53.
also a Catholic is the whole man. As a fiction writer he must render the highest possible justice to the created universe. This is the way the fiction writer works for God -- by making us see God's creation; and not just the beautiful or pretty things. 3

This "seeing," though, must go to the "within of things"; this "seeing must give rise to a kind of prophetic vision:

In the novelist's case, it is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus seeing far things close up ... When the novelist has this as part of his vision, he has a powerful extension of sight. 4

Despite some apparent similarity of interests, Teilhard de Chardin took the whole universe for his study; Flannery O'Connor restricted her outlook to the red-clay country of her native Georgia. Teilhard de Chardin spoke of paleontological periods of at least eighty million years each; Flannery O'Connor counted the individual minutes of the single day of her characters. Teilhard de Chardin spoke to the learned of the world in thrilling but most difficult language; Flannery O'Connor spoke to "the


tired reader" because "a writer, without softening his vision, is obliged to capture or conjure readers and this means any kind of reader."\(^5\)

One is tempted to ask: How is any real convergence of interests possible between such a French-scientist and such an American-writer? It is the purpose of this thesis to answer this question in as realistic a way as possible. Before considering the positive aspects of this question, it will be well to indicate briefly three things this thesis will not attempt to do.

In the first place, no attempt will be made to pinpoint the beginning of any possible convergence of interests. Robert Fitzgerald, in his exceptionally perceptive introduction to Flannery O'Connor's last volume of short stories, Everything That Rises Must Converge, says, "The title of the present book comes from Teilhard de Chardin, whose works Flannery O'Connor had been reading at least since early 1961 when she recommended them to me."\(^6\) In an article which she wrote for Jubilee, May 1961, Miss O'Connor,


in speaking of the value of a life of suffering, says:

The creative action of the Christian's life is to prepare his death in Christ. It is a continuous action in which this world's goods are utilized to the fullest, both positive gifts and what Pere Teilhard de Chardin calls "passive diminishments."  

The title story of her last volume of short stories was not published anywhere until after Miss O'Connor's death, when it was published first in *Esquire*, April 1965. However, in a letter to Sr. Mariella Gable, O.S.B., dated May 4, 1963, Miss O'Connor writes, "I probably have enough stories for a collection but I want to wait." Sr. Mariella Gable continues:

As everyone knows by now, she had completed plans before she died for a collection of her stories to be published in February 1965 under the magnificent title, *All That Rises Must Converge*, a quotation from her favorite philosopher, Teilhard de Chardin.

It is sufficient to say that during the last three or four years of her life, Miss O'Connor was

8"Everything That Rises Must Converge," *Esquire*, LXIII (April, 1965), 76-78.
10Ibid.
conversant with at least two of Teilhard de Chardin's works: The Phenomenon of Man, in which Teilhard de Chardin develops the idea of convergence, and The Divine Milieu, the second part of which treats of "The Divinisation of our Passivities" of growth and of diminishment.\textsuperscript{11} No further beginnings of influence will be sought.

Secondly, no attempt will be made to state or to prove the extent of the influence of Teilhard de Chardin on Miss O'Connor -- the person or the writer. When one speaks of an original writer of the calibre of Miss O'Connor, it is somewhat rash to talk about influence. Miss O'Connor herself spoke of being influenced by Hawthorne. In a letter to John Hawkes, Miss O'Connor said:

\begin{quote}
I think I would admit to writing what Hawthorne called 'romances' . . . I feel more of a kinship with Hawthorne than with any other American writer . . .\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

In an interview with Gerard Sherry she admitted, "I write 'tales' in the sense Hawthorne wrote tales -- I

\textsuperscript{11}New York, 1960, pp. 45-68.

hope with less reliance on allegory."\textsuperscript{13}

Beyond this, angels should fear to tread. The fact that her writing has been compared to that of Caldwell, Welty, Faulkner, McCullers, Tennessee Williams, Capote, Sherwood Anderson, Bierce, Irving, Crane, Hemingway, Poe, Nathanael West, Golding, Evelyn Waugh, Greene, Mauriac, Bloy, Bernanos, Kafka, Mann, Dostoevsky, Turgenev and dozens of other modern and classical authors shows the almost impossible task of tracing influence. Perhaps Granville Hicks most aptly expressed the truth when he said, "Her quality as a writer cannot be defined in terms of any two or two hundred influences."\textsuperscript{14}

As shall be seen in Chapter II, Miss O'Connor was most explicit in admitting extra-personal influences while maintaining that any writing "worth the effort is the writer's personal encounter with the particular circumstances of his own imagination."\textsuperscript{15}

With this in mind no attempt will be made here to prove the influence of Teilhard de Chardin on Miss

\textsuperscript{13}"An Interview with Flannery O'Connor," \textit{Critic}, XXXI (July, 1963), 29.


\textsuperscript{15}"The Role of the Catholic Novelist," p. 7.
O'Connor during the last three or four years of her life.

Lastly, although the interest shown in fallen-redeemed man by Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor is remarkably similar, no attempt will be made to show a total similarity of interest or of methods. In *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard de Chardin speaks about the various intellectual disciplines (science, philosophy, religion) and about how they are bound to converge as they draw nearer to the whole. I say 'converge' advisedly, but without merging, and without ceasing, to the very end, to assail the real from different angles and on different planes. 16

Miss O'Connor supports this view of the impossibility of a complete merging of interests when she speaks about vocation as "a limiting factor which extends even to the kind of material that the writer is able to apprehend imaginatively."17

In summary, then, this thesis will not attempt to say when a possible convergence of interests between Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor took

16 P. 30.

place, nor to prove the extent of the influence of Teilhard de Chardin on Flannery O'Connor, nor to show a total similarity of interests or methods.

Positively, this thesis will attempt to show the convergence of the Teilhardian and the O'Connor view of man and the world in which man lives by pointing out Teilhard de Chardin's and Flannery O'Connor's common interest in the incarnational view of man, in man's growth through vision, and in man's convergence in Christ -- the Omega Point. With this accomplished the question asked earlier in this thesis: "Is any real convergence of interests possible between Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor?" will have been answered and the way will be open to a consideration of Flannery O'Connor in herself and in her works, as those works reflect a Teilhardian point of view.

Bernard Wall, the editor of the English edition of the works of Teilhard de Chardin observes, at the end of The Divine Milieu:

No work of this great believer can be understood except in relation to this 'fundamental vision' . . . the vision (always implicit, even when not stated) of Christ as All-in-everything; of the universe moved and compartmented by God in the totality of its evolution.  

18p. 139.
Only someone of the grandeur and size of Teilhard de Chardin could hope to adequately put this 'fundamental vision' in words worthy of the French mystic-poet-scientist. It will, however, be instructive to choose a handful of sentences from the basic works of Teilhard de Chardin, sentences which seem to express something of his totally Christian view of man and the universe. He starts with the assumption that "the most traditional christianity, expressed in Baptism, the Cross and the Eucharist, can be translated so as to embrace all that is best in the aspirations peculiar to our times."¹⁹

"Christ . . . has not ceased to be the 'first' within mankind."²⁰ In the epilogue written to The Phenomenon of Man, Teilhard de Chardin explicitly equates Christ and the Omega Point toward which all creation necessarily evolves and so re-enforces the dynamism inherent in Christ -- and Christianity.

Here surely is the ray of sunshine striking through the clouds, the reflection onto what is ascending of that which is already on high, the rupture of our solitude. The palpable influence on our world of an other and supreme Someone . . . Is not the Christian phenomenon, which rises upwards

¹⁹ The Divine Milieu, p. 11.
²⁰ Ibid., p. 12.
at the heart of the social phenomenon, precisely
that?\textsuperscript{1}

Teilhard de Chardin's incarnational view of
man and his universe does not build a wall of separa-
tion between God and His universe. Teilhard de Chardin
maintains in his poetically-cutting language:

God . . . is not withdrawn from us beyond the
tangible sphere; He is waiting for us at every
moment in our action, in our work of the moment.
He is in some sort at the tip of my pen, my spade,
my brush, my needle -- of my heart and of my
thought. By pressing the stroke, the line, or
the stitch, on which I am engaged, to its ultimate
natural finish, I shall arrive at the ultimate aim
towards which my innermost will tends . . . It
sur-animates; hence it neither disturbs anything
nor stifles anything. It sur-animates; hence it
introduces a higher principle of unity into our
spiritual life, the specific effect of which is
-- depending upon the point of view one adopts --
either to sanctify human endeavor or to humanise
the Christian life.\textsuperscript{22}

This, in a most sketchy way, is the Teilhardian
view of man in God's universe. In like manner,
Flannery O'Connor speaks of her "true country," on,
through, and under which "the writer with Christian
convictions will consider to be what is eternal and
absolute."\textsuperscript{23} She continues:

I am . . . no vague believer. I see from the

\textsuperscript{21}P. 298.

\textsuperscript{22}The Divine Milieu, pp. 33-34.

\textsuperscript{23}"The Fiction Writer and His Country," p. 158.
standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and that what I see in the world I see in its relation to that. 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.\textsuperscript{24}

In another place she says of the Catholic writer that "in so far as he has the mind of the Church, he will feel life from the standpoint of the central Christian mystery; that it has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for."\textsuperscript{25} The writer of fiction who is also a Catholic will know that "We lost our innocence in the fall of our first parents, and our return to it is through the redemption which was brought about by Christ's death and by our slow participation in it."\textsuperscript{26} In her mention of "slow participation" in Christ's death, Flannery O'Connor is echoing Teilhard de Chardin when he says that "the Christian movement . . . exhibits the characteristics of a phylum . . . in its trend towards a synthesis based on love and which implies essentially the consciousness of finding itself in actual relationship

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., p. 162.

\textsuperscript{25}"The Church and the Fiction Writer," America, XCVI (March 30, 1957), 733.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 734.
with a spiritual and transcendent pole of universal convergence."\(^{27}\)

In summary: for Teilhard de Chardin salvation is an "assimilation by an 'Other'"; it is the result of a "death in union."\(^{28}\) For Flannery O'Connor salvation is the "mysterious passage" past the dragon spoken of by St. Cyril of Jerusalem:

The dragon sits by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by this dragon.\(^{29}\)

To both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor salvation is seen in the words of St. Paul: "No man lives or dies to himself. But whether through our life or through our death we belong to Christ."\(^{30}\) For both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor sin is essentially an isolation of self: for Teilhard de Chardin it is a refusal to go along with the process of evolution; for Flannery O'Connor it is a refusal to go with the Spirit in the Son to the Father. This

\(^{27}\)The Phenomenon of Man, p. 298.

\(^{28}\)The Divine Milieu, p. 96.

\(^{29}\)"Some Aspects of Contemporary Fiction," an unpublished address given at the University of Michigan, December, 1962.

\(^{30}\)Quoted by Teilhard de Chardin as the heading for Part III of The Divine Milieu, p. 89.
The possibility of growth through vision will be more fully developed in Chapter II when Flannery O'Connor, the seer, is looked at more carefully. The purpose now is to set the stage for latter discussion and to show the possibility of convergence even here.

At the very beginning of his most important work, Teilhard de Chardin has a special Forward entitled "Seeing." He says there:

Seeing. We might say that the whole of life lies in that verb -- if not in end, at least in essence. Fuller being is closer union; . . . union can only increase through an increase . . . in vision . . . The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen. . . To see or to perish is the very condition laid upon everything that makes up our universe . . . This in superior measure, is man's condition.31

For Teilhard de Chardin, this seeing is the necessary condition for knowledge, and is not human unless it does lead to knowledge. "It is peculiar to man to occupy a position in nature at which the convergent lines are not only visual but structural."32

He goes on to say "to see more is really to become

31 The Phenomenon of Man, p. 31.
32 Ibid., p. 33.
more . . . deeper vision is really fuller being."³³ Teilhard de Chardin then goes on to demand seven types of vision: the vision of spatial immensity, of depth, of number, of proportion, of quality, of movement, and, lastly, of "the organic, discovering physical links and structural unity under the superficial juxtaposition of successions and collectivities."³⁴ Teilhard de Chardin sums up his thoughts on the importance of "seeing" in these words:

In fact I doubt whether there is a more decisive moment for a thinking being than when the scales fall from his eyes and he discovers that he is not an isolated unit lost in the cosmic solitudes, and realises that a universal will to live converges and is hominised in him. In such a vision man is seen not as a static centre of the world -- as he for long believed himself to be -- but as the axis and leading shoot of evolution, which is something much finer. ³⁵

Flannery O'Connor, likewise, in the defense of herself as a Southern writer, as a Catholic writer, as a writer who used almost exclusively her native Georgia for the setting of her stories, as a writer who used the mental, the moral, the physical cripples -- the grotesques -- as the chief characters

³³Ibid.
³⁴Ibid., p. 34.
³⁵Ibid., p. 36.
in her stories constantly referred to her "vision" as something given to her. "This is first of all a matter of vocation, and a vocation is a limiting factor which extends even to the kind of material that the writer is able to apprehend imaginatively."36

In the article which she wrote for America in 1957, Miss O'Connor said:

For the writer of fiction everything has its testing point in the eye, an organ which eventually involves the whole personality and as much of the world as can be got into it. Msgr. Romano Guardini has written that the roots of the eye are in the heart. In any case, for the Catholic those roots stretch far into those depths of mystery about which the modern world is divided. . . 37

Miss O'Connor continues in this article in violent opposition both to Mr. Philip Wylie who maintains that Catholics "cannot, by the nature of things, see straight"38 and to those "Catholics who are victims of the parochial esthetic and cultural insularity who declare that whatever the Catholic writer can see, there are certain things that he should not see, straight or otherwise."39

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
In her speech to the members of the Newman Club of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Miss O'Connor complained that "No one . . . seems to remember that the eye sees what it has been given to see by concrete circumstances, and that the imagination reproduces what, by some related gift, it is able to make real." She continues, in this same speech:

The things we see, hear, smell, and touch affect us long before we believe anything at all . . . This discovery of having his senses respond to a particular society and a particular history, the particular sounds and the particular idiom, is for the . . . writer the beginning of a recognition that first puts his work in real human perspective for him. When the Catholic writer descends within his imagination . . . what he finds is not often Catholic life, but the life of a region in which he is both native and alien . . . You cannot proceed at all if you cut yourself off from the sights and sounds that have built up a life of their own in your senses, and which carry a culture in them.41

As for Teilhard de Chardin, so for Flannery O'Connor the "vision" which the senses reveal -- the sights and sounds of man's universe -- are the sine qua non for knowledge, whether this knowledge be the integrated and unified view of cosmic risings to the Omega Point or whether this knowledge be the sum and substance of the writer's imaginative world.

40"The Catholic Novelist in the South."

41Ibid.
Miss O'Connor, too, demands "engagement" with the world of sense. Speaking of the Southern writer, she says, "The image of the South . . . is a force which has to be encountered and engaged, and it is when this is a true engagement that its meaning will lead outward to universal human interest."^42 This "engagement" will, at times, demand a view of man which the world will label as "grotesque"; it will, almost always, demand a concern with mystery, with the fact that "grace cuts with the sword Christ said he came to bring."^43 Judgment cannot "be separated from vision, nature from grace, and reason from imagination."^44

Miss O'Connor concludes her remarks on this matter of vision by saying:

The poet is traditionally a blind man; but the Christian poet, and the storyteller as well, is like the blind man Christ touched, who looked then and saw men as if they were trees, but walking. Christ touched him again, and he saw clearly. We will not see clearly until Christ touches us in death; but this first touch is the beginning of vision, and it is an invitation to deeper and stranger visions that we will have to accept if we want to realize a Catholic literature.^45

^42 Ibid.
^43 Ibid.
^44 Ibid.
^45 Ibid.
From these few paragraphs, it can be seen what an important role both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor assigned to "vision" -- meaning all that the senses can give man of the world in which he lives and wins his salvation. It is also clear how they are in agreement about the fact that "vision" is only the first step toward that "personalization" which makes man the centre of the universe created by and converging on the Omega Point.

Flannery O'Connor's artistic vision continued to grow even up to her premature death in August 1964. In a very practical way she seemed to understand ever more clearly that God not only writes with crooked lines, He jokes with straight ones. Because this convergence in Christ is one of the main themes of Chapter III, and must form the core of the analysis of the nine stories in her last volume, *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, this section will be truly short.

Bud Johnson, reviewing this last volume of Flannery O'Connor's stories says, "Miss O'Connor's world is in transit from the alpha to the omega point of the cosmos according to Teilhard de Chardin."46

The review of *Everything That Rises Must Converge* in *Newsweek* seems to catch the idea of forces ready to emerge and converge:

> While the surface of the stories delineates the sound and feel of life with absolute fidelity, the tensions gather underneath, like the 'rage' that gathers, in one of her perfect similes, 'with a silent ominous intensity, like a mob assembling.' The tensions build naturally out of character and situation. 47

The discriminating reader is justified in asking himself why he feels, while floating along on the surface level of everyday action, that beneath him in the murky depths dark patterns are forming, evolving, converging, rising upwards in tension? Miss O'Connor herself hinted at the depths surrounding the simplest actions of her grotesque characters when she said:

> Our present grotesque heroes are comic, but not primarily so. They seem to carry an invisible burden and fix us with eyes that remind us that we all bear some heavy responsibility whose nature we have forgotten. But they are prophetic figures. In the novelist's case, prophecy is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meanings, and thus of seeing far things close up. 48

To follow this strange gathering of tensions is, ultimately, to come into the heart of Miss


48 "The Catholic Novelist in the South."
O'Connor's vision: the central Christian mystery of our solidarity in Christ's dying and rising, seen in its Teilhardian dimensions. This is to say that on the anagogical level Miss O'Connor's stories are caught up in the Teilhardian movement -- the steady converging flow of love and knowledge to Person, the process of seeing more and more.

In the world of Miss O'Connor's dual movement one must be prepared to adjust his eyesight and become used to looking for small, converging movements. Robert Fitzgerald, in his introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, warned the reader that the movements are almost calibrated. It is as if one were to enter the world of Teilhard de Chardin and gear his eyes to see movement the way the paleontologist sees it: to see "beneath the immobility of the Immense, movement of extra slowness." Perhaps this calibrated movement in her stories and characters is less startling and less heroic than the movements of the world of the paleontologist; it could also be that these movements are more inspiring because they are more universal in their dimensions and reality.

49 Page xxxi.

CHAPTER II

FLANNERY O'CONNOR THE LITERARY ARTIST

Because so much of one's understanding of Flannery O'Connor as a literary artist depends upon one's knowing something about the circumstances of her life, it seems best to preface this chapter with a short biographical note.¹ Mary Flannery O'Connor,² the only child of Lieutenant Edward F. O'Connor³ and Regina Cline, was born on March 25, 1925 in Savannah, Georgia. From 1937-1941 Miss O'Connor attended Peabody High School in Savannah. After the death of the father the family moved to the Cline house in Milledgeville, Georgia, where Mary Flannery O'Connor continued her education at Woman's College of Georgia, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in social science in 1945.

Miss O'Connor continued her education under

¹Most of the material for this biographical pre-note comes from Robert Fitzgerald's introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, pp. vii-xxv.

²Miss O'Connor never used her first name in publication, although she continued to be known at home and to her close friends as "Mary" or "Mary Flannery."

³He died in 1941 of lupus erythematosus, the same disease that would be fatal to his daughter.
the guidance of Paul Engel at the Writer's Workshop, University of Iowa, and had a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1947. Her first story, "The Geranium," had been published in Accent during the summer of 1946. After graduation she continued to work on her writing at Yaddo⁴ and in New York. During the spring of 1948 the Sewanee Review printed her second published short story, "The Train," which later became the first chapter of her novel Wise Blood.

In early 1949 she met the Fitzgeralds at their apartment in New York and a lifelong friendship with the Boyleston Professor of Poetry at Harvard was formed. Robert Fitzgerald says of that first meeting, "We saw a shy Georgia girl, her face heart-shaped and pale and glum, with fine eyes that could stop frowning and open brilliantly, upon everything."⁵ Later, during that year of 1949, Flannery O'Connor went to live with the Fitzgeralds in their newly-acquired country home in Connecticut. When she was not busy working on her first novel, Miss O'Connor helped with

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⁴ Yaddo is at Saratoga Springs, New York, about thirty-two miles north of Albany. It is the former Spencer Trask estate, now used as an artists' colony.

⁵ Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. xii-xiii.
the work around the house and, at times, was valuable as a baby sitter.

While she was typing the final script of *Wise Blood* during the fall of 1950 she spoke "with amusement of a heaviness in her typing arms." The doctor at Wilton Corners, Connecticut, said that Miss O'Connor probably had rheumatoid arthritis, but advised her to have a complete physical check-up in Atlanta, Georgia, when she went home for Christmas. Before she got home she became desperately ill and it was rather easy for the doctors in Atlanta to tell her that "she did not have arthritis but a related disease, lupus, the disease that had killed her father." The rest of Miss O'Connor's life is a story of quiet heroism in her losing fight against an auto-immune, fatal disease for which there is no known cure. After she was released from the hospital in Atlanta she once more made the trip north to live with the Fitzgeralds in Connecticut. She could stay only six months; the rest of her life was spent at Andalusia Farm, a half-dozen miles outside

\(^{6}\text{Ibid.}, p. xvi.\)

\(^{7}\text{Ibid.}, p. xvii.\)
Milledgeville, on the road to Atlanta.  

During the waning months of 1951, Robert Giroux accepted the manuscript of *Wise Blood* on behalf of Harcourt, Brace & Company. The book was published in the spring of 1952. In 1953 a short story, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," won first prize in the O. Henry Awards competition and was published in *Prize Stories*. During this same year Miss O'Connor began work on her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, which was finally published in 1960. During 1954 a second story, "A Circle of Fire," won first prize in the O. Henry Awards competition. She was also awarded a fellowship in fiction by the Kenyon Review for the year 1954-1955. By 1955 she had collected enough short stories for a complete volume, *A Good Man Is Hard To Find*.

In 1957 Miss O'Connor was given a grant from the National Academy of Arts and Letters to help her continue her work -- and to help her pay for the ever increasing hospital and medical bills. In 1959 the Ford Foundation gave her a grant of $10,000.00 and

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8 Regina Cline, Miss O'Connor's mother, had inherited both the city house and the farm upon the death of her father. She and Flannery moved to the farm in 1951 for the sake of Miss O'Connor's health.
she was enabled to devote full time (three hours a day) to the writing of The Violent Bear It Away. This second novel was accepted by Robert Giroux on behalf of Farrar, Straus and Cudahy. In 1963 her short story "Everything That Rises Must Converge" was given first place by both Prize Stories and by the judges of the O. Henry Awards. At the same time she began a third novel, Why Do The Heathen Rage?, from which a selection was published in Esquire in July, 1963. With the coming of 1964 her health took a sharp turn for the worse, and she was forced to spend most of her time in the hospital in Atlanta. She died peacefully on August 3, 1964. Her last collection of short stories, Everything That Rises Must Converge, was published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in the spring of 1965.

When the editors of Esprit decided to devote an issue of their magazine (Winter, 1964) to tributes to Flannery O'Connor, they asked Katherine Ann Porter to help them. Miss Porter phoned her reminiscences from her sick bed in Washington, D.C. Miss Porter chose to speak only of Miss O'Connor, the person. Among other things she said:

Now and again there hovers on the margin of the future a presence that one feels as imminent — if I may use stylish vocabulary. She came up among us like a presence, a carrier of a
gift not to be disputed but welcomed. She lived among us like a presence and went away early, leaving her harvest perhaps not yet all together gathered, though like so many geniuses who have small time in this world, I think she had her warning and accepted it and did her work even if we all would like to have had her stay on forever and do more.9

Miss Porter concludes, "I loved and valued her dearly, her work and her strange unworldly radiance of spirit in a human being so intelligent and so undeceived by the appearance of things."10

Miss O'Connor was, geographically speaking, a Southerner; there are those who say that being a Southerner hampers the literary artist. Theodore Solotaroff, reviewing *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, says of Miss O'Connor, "Her residence in the south was not a choice, but a fate -- not a fate that she accepted easily."11 John Simons calls Miss O'Connor's writing "a case of possession," "an addition to the grotesque literature of Southern decadence."12 Webster Schott talks about Miss

10Ibid., p. 58.
12"A Case of Possession," *Commonweal*, LVI (June 27, 1952), 297.
O'Connor's characters who "act out the Gothic rituals of defeat and destruction in the nightmare which is the American South." Schott goes on to maintain that Miss O'Connor's characters are "Southern Neanderthal," "pre-Darwinian," and "post-Christian." Algene Ballif finds that the fundamentalist Protestantism, the religion of the Southern Bible-belt, so warped Miss O'Connor's viewpoint that her characters, subconsciously, are more often than not involved in a kind of homosexual incest -- the result of belief in direct, private, intimate connection with God. "Her characters are strangers from a foreign land without an emissary to translate their story into the language of the kind of experience we understand." William Esty, in an article which discusses the political sympathies of modern authors, says, "There is the Paul Bowles-Flannery O'Connor cult of the Gratuitous Grotesque . . . When the very real and cruel grotesquerie of our world is converted into clever gimmicks for Partisan Review, we may be forgiven for reacting with the self-same disgust as the little old lady from

Dubuque. 

One must admit that the opinions expressed in the above statements are heard less and less frequently; but, even when they are not made explicitly, one senses the underlying assumption that if Miss O'Connor had been born and lived in some clean, well-lighted place like New Haven, Hartford, or Boston her short stories and novels would have a more universal interest and she would not have had to rely so heavily on the grotesque to make her point. It will be of profit, therefore, to hear Miss O'Connor herself on the very real advantages afforded to a modern American writer by the South.

It is interesting, at the very outset, to note how very much Miss O'Connor gloried in the fact that she was a Southern writer -- and even more that she was a Georgia writer. Speaking to the Georgia Writer's Association in 1963, Miss O'Connor said:

Unless the novelist has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication and communication suggests talking inside a community . . . To call yourself a Georgia writer is certainly to declare a limitation, but one which, like all limitations, is a gateway to reality. It is a great blessing, perhaps the greatest blessing a writer can have, to find at

home what others have to go elsewhere seeking.

... We are sustained in our writing by the local and the particular and the familiar without loss to our principles or our reason. 16

She goes on to say that "the serious Southern writer is no longer some one who leaves and can't come home again." 17 He is "some one who is a part of what he writes about and is recognized as such." 18

In her address to the students of the University of Southwestern Louisiana, Miss O'Connor emphasized the fact that

The South impresses its image on the Southern writer from the moment he is able to distinguish one sound from another. He takes it in through his ears, and hears it again in his own voice, and by the time he is able to use his imagination for fiction, he finds that his senses respond irrevocably to a certain reality, and particularly to the sound of a certain reality. The Southern writer's greatest tie with the South is through his ear, which is usually sharp, but not too versatile. 19

She delighted in telling about a friend of hers who went to Japan during the second World War and came back telling reasonably good stories about the Japanese. "If I went to Japan and tried to write

17 Ibid., p. 33.
18 Ibid.
19 "The Catholic Novelist in the South."
credible stories about Japanese, all my Japanese would sound like Herman Talmadge."^{20}

Miss O'Connor often spoke about the discovery that every writer must make "of being bound through the senses to a particular society and a particular history to particular sounds and a particular idiom."^{21} This is "the beginning of a recognition that first puts his work in real, human perspective for him. He begins to learn that the imagination is not free, but bound."^{22} If the writer is to be successful he cannot afford to cut himself off "from the sights and sounds that have developed a life of their own in his senses."^{23} All good fiction writing must be a reflection of "the writer's personal encounter with the particular circumstances of his own imagination."^{24} In an interview with Gerard Sherry for the Critic, Miss O'Connor said: "I'm pleased to be a member of my particular family and to live in Baldwin County in the sovereign State of Georgia, and to see what I can

^{20}Ibid.
^{22}Ibid.
^{23}Ibid.
^{24}Ibid.
Miss O'Connor's residence in the South was not a choice; it can hardly be labeled a "fate", as Mr. Solotaroff would have it. The key question, "What real advantages did Miss O'Connor enjoy by living in the South?", still remains to be answered. Granville Hicks, writing in the *Saturday Review*, selects two advantages for consideration: the South still has a knowledge of the Bible, and the South still has a sense of history.  

It will be of profit to consider, in turn, each of the advantages selected by Mr. Hicks. The first pointed out is that the South still has a knowledge of the Bible. This is a knowledge, according to Miss O'Connor, that has conditioned the whole way of thinking of the Southerner. "The ancient Hebrew genius for making the absolute concrete has conditioned the Southerner's way of looking at things." Faith, for the Southerner is to "have trembled with Abraham as he held the knife over Isaac"; the philosophical

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27"The Catholic Novelist in the South."
understanding of faith held by the typical non-Southern Christian impoverishes "our imaginations and our capacity for prophetic insight."  

This bias for the concrete and the particular ("We don't discuss problems; we tell stories"), this knowledge of the Bible held even by the poor and the ignorant of the South "is most valuable to the fiction writer, because it is the least common denominator of good." Biblical knowledge enables the Southerner to heighten the meaning of each of his actions and to see them sub specie aeternitatis.

Even further, great story tellers

... need something to measure themselves against, and this is what we conspicuously lack in this age. Men judge themselves now by what they find themselves doing. The Catholic has the teachings of the Church to serve him in this regard, but for the writing of fiction, something more is necessary. For the purpose of fiction these guides have to exist in a concrete form, known and held sacred by the whole community. They have to exist in the form of stories which affect our image and our judgement of ourselves. Abstractions, formulas, laws, will not do here; we have to have stories. It takes a story to make a story. It takes a story of mythic dimensions, one which belongs to everybody, one in which everybody is able to recognize the hand of God

28 Ibid.

29 O'Connor in a letter quoted by Granville Hicks, "A Writer at Home With Her Heritage," 23.

30 "The Catholic Novelist in the South."
and imagine its descent upon himself. In the Protestant South, the Scriptures fill this role. Miss O'Connor believes that this intimate acquaintance-ship with the Bible is one of the big reasons why the South has become the story-telling region of the country.

The fundamental Christianity which has given the South her identity "has been those most Catholic characteristics of her Protestantism: the Bible, a sense of primal guilt, and human dependence on the grace of God." Because the Southerner understands these "most Catholic characteristics" he tends to look at man a bit more realistically. He knows the possibility of "man's perverse reaction to these gifts and graces . . . A man is so free that with his last breath he can say No." This is the mystery of evil which is found throughout the entire Scriptures from the "primal guilt" of Adam and Eve to the traitorous guilt of Judas. An encounter with and a confronting of this mystery gives a writer the vision he needs to present modern life to modern man.

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
on a level beyond the literal. The South, with its knowledge of the Bible, forces the writer to immerse himself in the mainstream of life.

The second advantage owned by the Southern writer, according to Mr. Hicks, is that the South still has a sense of history. Any true understanding of the Bible will be, to a great extent, an historical thing. The salvation history narrated there, detailing God's dealings with His chosen people and their leaders and His chosen people's cooperation or lack of cooperation with the grace and gifts of God, predisposes one (an individual or a community) to a true appreciation of history. Going beyond the sense of history that one who knows the Bible must have, Miss O'Connor speaks of the value of the orthodox and the traditional which the South supplies:

The Southern writer has apparently inherited from his culture a way of looking at the world which has remained more or less orthodox and traditional. He has not tried generally to force a new pattern of order on society but to discover the patterns which already exist in it. . . . As a Southerner, I am intensely aware of the value for fiction writers of a tradition and a pattern of manners, of a body of social custom from which they can draw life and texture for their work.34

34 "Some Aspects of Contemporary Fiction."
This respect for the "orthodox and traditional" which the Southern writer has inherited from his milieu is shown particularly in Southern manners.

Miss O'Connor wrote in *The Living Novel*:

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 are losing our customary manners we are probably overly conscious of them; this seems to be a condition that produces writers.35

She later told Mr. Sherry, "Manners are the next best thing to Christian charity."36 She hinted at the importance of manners when she spoke to the students at the University of Michigan, "Fiction embodies mystery through manners and for this reason it can be very disturbing."37

While talking to the Georgia Writers' Association, Miss O'Connor had occasion to say that "The best American fiction has always been regional."38 The regional ascendancy in fiction

... has passed to and stayed longest wherever there has been a shared past, a sense of alike-

37"Some Aspects of Contemporary Fiction."
38"The Regional Writer," p. 35.
ness, and the possibility of reading a small history in a universal light. In these things the South still has a degree of advantage.\textsuperscript{39}

This degree of advantage comes, partly at least, from the South's part in the Civil War:

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 developed sufficiently in the rest of our country . . . . In the South we have, in however attenuated a form, a vision of Moses' face as he pulverized our idols.\textsuperscript{40}

To sum up the advantage that a sense of history gives the Southern writer, Miss O'Connor remarks:

In the South some fairly modest talents can come up with some fairly respectable fiction, simply because society and history come more than half way to meet them. The South is still broad enough in significant history and regional self-consciousness, and in social conflict and in cultural unity and exploitable evil to support for a good many years to come any writer who approaches life with his eyes open.\textsuperscript{41}

There doesn't seem to be any doubt in Miss O'Connor's mind about the very real advantages enjoyed by the Southern writer -- advantages which

\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{41}"The Catholic Novelist in the South."
her New England-New York critics could not possibly understand. "No matter how favorable all the critics in New York City may be, they are an unreliable lot, as incapable as the day they were born of interpreting the Southern literature to the world."  

While it was comparatively easy to find those who maintain that Miss O'Connor would have been a more powerful force in American fiction if she had not been a Southerner, it is literally impossible to find anyone who is willing to say her Catholicism, or even her Christianity, did anything but give her work an "extra dimension." The mention of disadvantages suffered by Miss O'Connor from her being a Catholic would have to end here, if it were not for Miss O'Connor herself. She mentions, in her article in America, Mr. Philip Wylie. She mentions, almost everytime she has the occasion, the general assumption so many have "that belief in Christian dogma is a hindrance to the writer."  

Before considering the real advantages given her by her Catholicism, it will be well to look briefly at the alleged disadvantages

Miss O'Connor herself mentions. The contrast will do much to bring out the truth.

Although Mr. Philip Wylie was talking about fiction writing by Catholics in general, and not specifically about hers, Miss O'Connor quotes him because he represents the modern mind which maintains that any writer who "will feel life from the standpoint of the Central Christian mystery" suffers, thereby, from a warped vision which "bears little or no relation to the truth as it is known today . . . .

A Catholic, if he is devout, i.e., sold on the authority of the Church, is also brain-washed, whether he realizes it or not."  

Miss O'Connor seems to be more bothered by those who, without putting their thoughts into words, implicitly assume "that belief in Christian dogma is a hindrance to the writer." She discusses this vague assumption in her talk to the students of the University of Michigan, in her talk to the students at the University of Notre Dame, and in the speech


45Philip Wylie as quoted by Miss O'Connor in "The Church and the Fiction Writer," p. 733.

46O'Connor as quoted by Robert Fitzgerald in his introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. xxiv.
manuscript published in Greyfriar, as well as in the America article already mentioned.

Miss O'Connor's most complete answer to these alleged disadvantages is found in her article in America, where she formally treats the problem. She admits in the first place that there may be some Catholic writers who attempt to use their fiction "to prove the truth of their faith or, at least, to prove the existence of the supernatural." In her eyes, such fiction writers have defeated their own purpose even before they start. On the contrary:

What the fiction writer will discover, if he discovers anything at all, is that he himself cannot move or mold reality in the interests of abstract truth. The writer learns, perhaps more quickly than the reader, to be humble in the face of what is. What is is all he has to do with; the concrete is his medium; and he will realize eventually that fiction can transcend its limitations only by staying within them.

She continues:

The Catholic who does not write for a limited circle of fellow Catholics will in all probability consider that since this is his vision, he is writing for a hostile audience, and he will be more than ever concerned to have his work stand on its own feet and be

47"The Role of the Catholic Novelist," passim.
49Ibid.
complete and self-sufficient and impregnable in its own right. When people have told me that because I am a Catholic, I cannot be an artist, I have had to reply, ruefully, that because I am a Catholic I cannot afford to be less than an artist . . . . Part of the complexity of the problem for the Catholic fiction-writer will be the presence of grace as it appears in nature, and what matters for him here is that his faith not become detached from his dramatic sense and from his vision of what is.50

Miss O'Connor grieves over the fact that there are some Catholics who attempt to minimize the importance of life here and now in favor of life in the next world or in favor of miraculous manifestations of grace. When fiction is made according to its nature, it should reinforce our sense of the supernatural by grounding it in concrete observable reality.51

Mr. Wylie notwithstanding, a belief in fixed dogma . . . will . . . add to the writer's observation a dimension which many cannot, in conscience, acknowledge; but as long as what they can acknowledge is present in the work, they cannot claim that any freedom has been denied the artist. A dimension taken away is one thing; a dimension added is another, and what the Catholic writer and reader will have to remember is that the reality of the added dimension will be judged in a work of fiction by the truthfulness and wholeness of the literal level of the natural events presented. If the Catholic writer hopes to reveal mysteries, he will have to do it by

50 Ibid., pp. 733-734.
51 Ibid., p. 734.
describing truthfully what he sees from where he is.\textsuperscript{52}

Miss O'Connor concludes her article in America:

It is when the individual's faith is weak, not when it is strong, that he will be afraid of an honest fictional representation of life, and when there is a tendency to compartmentalize the spiritual and make it resident in a certain type of life only, the sense of the supernatural is apt gradually to be lost. Fiction, made according to its own laws, is an antidote to such a tendency, for it renews our knowledge that we live in mystery from which we draw our abstractions.\textsuperscript{53}

Miss O'Connor says all of this in a summary fashion in The Living Novel by observing that belief in Christian dogma "actually frees the story teller to observe. It affects his writing primarily by guaranteeing his respect for mystery."\textsuperscript{54}

In her speech at the University of Michigan, Miss O'Connor adds a further point: Dogmatic belief, for the genuine Christian story teller, "must simply be one with his own vision; it must be so much everything to him that it exists in him as passion."\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., p. 736.


\textsuperscript{55}"Some Aspects of Contemporary Fiction."
In the Greyfriar article, Miss O'Connor observes that the Catholic fiction writer has all of the problems common to a fiction writer and a few more besides, which come about because of the larger stretch of reality he has to make plain . . . . Belief, since it simply includes more reality for him to deal with, does nothing but enlarge his problems; it does not dictate his direction. 56

Much more is implied in Miss O'Connor's total commitment to a vocation as a Catholic fiction writer; this much more will be studied in the next section of this thesis where Miss O'Connor, the seer and the oracle, is discussed. It is necessary here to note, with Sr. M. Bernetta Quinn,57 that Miss O'Connor, as a Catholic writer, is one who is humble before reality, who never manipulates it, who never turns her eyes away from the ugly and the unpleasant, and who recognizes the limitations of her own art and power. The Catholic writer reveals reality not to assure others that all is well but to portray life as it is. If the grotesque is part of reality today, the


Catholic writer portrays it as grotesque, not as the normal.

Catholicism, still thinking with Sr. Bernetta, helps the writer by giving him a vantage point in the universe -- a "view from the rock" -- from which he can create a microcosm. Thus the Catholic writer does not mistake statistics for reality; he uses the absolute, not the relative, as his criterion for measuring reality.

The Catholic writer knows that history leads up to and away from Good Friday; history's very center is Redemption. However mean or miserable or degraded life seems to the natural gaze, God considered it valuable enough to send His only Son to reclaim it. The Catholic writer will be convinced of modern man's need for redemption; when necessary he will expose the leprous sores and the blinded eyes and the withered hands. When it is possible, the Catholic writer will show the Divine Dove descending; above all, though, he will refuse to falsify instances when this miracle does occur. The Catholic writer, worthy of his vocation, will have nothing to do with sentimentality because he knows that grace must work gradually or not at all. Man, fallen, redeemed, free to say Yes
or to say No (even to the end) to Divine Grace is the Catholic fiction writer's true country; it is par excellence Miss O'Connor's country.

Sr. Mariella Gable says, "She [Flannery O'Connor] maintained that in her lifetime the Catholic faith taught her more about writing than she could have otherwise learned in a thousand years." Miss O'Connor spoke to the students of the University of Notre Dame in these words:

The Catholic sacramental view of life is one that maintains and supports at every turn the vision that the story teller must have if he is going to write fiction of any depth...

The Church, far from restricting the Catholic writer, generally provides him with more advantages than he is able or willing to turn to account; and usually, his sorry productions are a result, not of restrictions that the Church has imposed, but of restrictions that he has failed to impose on himself. Freedom is of no use without taste and without the ordinary competence to follow the particular laws of what we have been given to do...

Two more facets of Miss O'Connor as a literary artist still remain to be discussed in this chapter. She must be considered as the "seer" and the "oracle."

58 "But First It Must Rise," Critic, XXIII (June, 1965), 58.

59 Quoted by Robert Fitzgerald in his introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, p. xxiv.
Before proceeding, however, a word about the meaning of the words "seer" and "oracle" is in order. The word "seer" is used here in its radical meaning as "a person who sees." As will be seen, this "seeing" starts with the physical seeing of the world that is the writer's country and extends itself beyond the literal, surface, sight to the mystery and ambivalence not strictly seen with human eyes. The word "oracle" is to be understood in its widest possible sense as meaning "someone who has exceptional insight and, by some happy combination of powers, is able to communicate that insight to others." This section of the thesis, therefore, will scan two faces of Flannery O'Connor, the artist: her concept of the artist as a seer and her concept of the artist as an oracle (or prophet). Her use of the grotesque will be discussed in relation to both of these roles; in both roles she will be acting both as a Southerner and as a Catholic who is very much involved in the vocation of fiction writing.

When discussing the possibility of convergence between the thought of Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor, in the first chapter of this thesis, we considered the fact that a writer of worth
must see both the "without" and the "within" of things. A literary artist must have a kind of prophetic vision which will enable him to see the concrete facts with which he deals in their proper perspective. Much has been said about the incarnational, or redemptive, view upon which Miss O'Connor insisted so vehemently. We were reminded of the fact that for the writer of fiction the eye is all important, particularly because the roots of the eye "stretch far into those depths of mystery about which the modern world is divided."\(^{60}\) The question that still needs an answer is this: How does Miss O'Connor discover and make manifest the mystery of man, part angel and part devil that he is, to twentieth century Americans?

Negatively, Miss O'Connor will have nothing to do with those who point to the various reports and polls to prove that as American standards of living rise, so Americans grow in the joy of living. It could be that this is another case of the woman protesting too much. "We might ask if these cries of joy would be so piercing if joy were more abundant in our society."\(^{61}\) Neither will she have anything to do

\(^{60}\) O'Connor, "The Church and the Fiction Writer," p. 733.

\(^{61}\) O'Connor, "Some Aspects of Contemporary Fiction."
with those who say that the function of the novelist is to attach himself to the ideal, to renounce the right to negative seeing, and to "create a new, affirmative pattern for society." She, on the contrary, does support the statement "Regardless what his pretensions may be, the story teller must render what he sees and not what he thinks he ought to see."  

Because the story teller is a being endowed with moral judgment, his vision must be colored by that judgment, unless "we are asked to form our consciences in the light of statistics, which is to establish the relative as absolute." A writer of worth cannot simply renounce statistics to embrace "the manners and customs, the tradition and turmoil" of his region for his field of vision. If he does that these things "become ends and not means for the writer" and "he has fallen into the trap of mere regionalism .... The only way of escape is inward, as it has always been, through self-knowledge."  

62 Ibid.  
63 Ibid.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Ibid.
This "inwardness" will lead to action and will give the writer the power to see the inner and outer worlds through each other.

This vision of the inner and outer worlds through each other is peculiarly the vision of the literary seer; it is also, especially for the Southern-Catholic writer, an alienation from any undue love for one's region in so far as it causes him to measure this love against the truth. "His sense of belonging to the South is great, but his sense of belonging to the Church is greater and more mysterious...This condition promotes considerable objectivity on the writer's part." 

This dual allegiance of the Southern-Catholic writer will force him to follow the spirit into strange places and to recognize it in many forms not totally congenial to him...His interest will in all likelihood go immediately to those aspects of Southern life where the religious feeling is most intense and where its outward forms are furthest from the Catholic. This is...because...descending within himself to find his region, he discovers that it is with these aspects of Southern life that he has a feeling of kinship strong enough to spur creation.

The result of this will be a strange and, to many, a perverse fiction -- one

66 O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the South."
which . . . gives us no picture of the ordinary
daily life we live or the religious experience that
is usually with us.°7

This dual allegiance, these two sets of eyes,
the Southern and the Catholic must of necessity,
conflict. This is a conflict that cannot be avoided,
that must be continued in "until, like Jacob, we are
marked irrevocably."°8

The tensions set up by region and religion
will never be balanced for the fiction writer until
both become so much a part of his personality that he
can forget about them.

This is the condition we aim for; but it is
one that is seldom achieved in this life,
particularly by novelists. The Lord doesn't
speak to the novelist as He did to His
servant Moses, mouth to mouth. He speaks to
him as He did to those two complainers,
Aaron and Aaron's sister Mary: through
dreams and visions, in fits and starts, and
by all the lesser and limited ways of the
imagination.°9

There is a further problem that the Catholic
writer has today -- "the problem of transmitting an
enlarged view of reality to a reader who not only does

°7 O'Connor, "The Role of the Catholic
°8 Ibid., p. 10.
°9 Ibid.
The Catholic writer sees moral, allegorical, and anagogical levels of meaning in the literal level of his work. The modern reader confuses morality with compassion; the modern reader has no common belief on which to found the allegorical; the modern reader either doesn't know what an anagogical level of meaning is or he thinks it is reducible to sensation.

The modern reader wants the happy ending; he wants to be lifted up; he wants the redemptive act, or at least the chance of redemption,

... but what he has forgotten is the cost of it. His sense of evil is diluted or lacking altogether, and so he has forgotten the price of restoration ... He wants to be transported instantly either to mock damnation or to mock innocence.\footnote{71}

An age which doubts both fact and value, which is swept this way and that by momentary convictions cannot supply the balance needed by the Catholic writer. That balance will have to be found by resolving the tensions inside oneself. This "felt balance" will often enough be expressed in rather drastic, seemingly bizarre, perverted, and grotesque action. This expression is no longer the work of

\footnote{70}{Ibid.}
\footnote{71}{Ibid., p. 11.}
the "seer"; it is the province of the "oracle."

To descend into oneself, into that region of stress and strife, and to find the terms of one's appeal is no small thing. But it is only a beginning. How does someone who has this vision of the Truth communicate it to an unknowing and hostile world? This, in a word, is the problem of the Catholic writer as "oracle."

In her article for Hicks's book, Miss O'Connor said:

... when I look at stories I have written I find that they are, for the most part, about people who are poor, who are afflicted in both body and mind, who have little -- or at best a distorted -- sense of spiritual purpose, and whose actions do not apparently give the reader a great assurance of the joy of life.72

She goes on to ask if her off-center characters are that way because she is from an eccentric region of the country. She admits that there may be something in the Southern character that inclines toward the grotesque, but

... there is a more fundamental reason why these stories are the way they are. The reason is that the writer's vision is literal and not naturalistic. It is literal in the same sense that a child's

drawing is literal. When a child draws he doesn't try to be grotesque but to set down exactly what he sees, and as his gaze is direct, he sees the lines that create motion. I am interested in the lines that create spiritual motion.73

In other words, the Christian writer in comparing his own inner vision of reality with the vision of reality held by the modern world around him will be forced to express his world in terms of the grotesque, the perverse, the unacceptable.

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience . . . . 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.74

There may be more truth than fancy in saying about Miss O'Connor, "She is a John the Baptist crying in the wilderness of an unbelieving world."75


the Baptist made very valid use of the grotesque to impress the people of his day with the importance of sorrow and penance for sin. Just so, Miss O'Connor has said:

> When I write a novel in which the central action is baptism, I know that for the larger percentage of my readers, baptism is a meaningless rite; therefore I have to imbue this action with an awe and terror which will suggest its awful mystery. I have to distort the look of the thing in order to represent as I see them both the mystery and the fact.\(^7\)

In an age of case histories, such a passionate concern for the expression of one's own inner vision is "as startling, as disconcerting as a blast from a furnace which one had thought stone cold but which is still red hot."\(^7\)

As Robert Fitzgerald observes, Miss O'Connor . . . sees the South . . . as populated by displaced persons. Almost all her people are displaced and some are either aware of it or become so. But it is not a sectional or regional condition; it is a religious condition, common to North and South alike, common indeed to the world we live in.\(^8\)

\(^7\)"The Role of the Catholic Novelist," p. 11.


Miss O'Connor's concern is that of man's relationship to grace through his avoidance of sin and evil. "Her particular talent is externalized by giving life to the grotesquerie of evil, but hers is not the 'cult of the Gratuitous Grotesque.'"79

It is interesting to note, with Thomas Merton,

... that her moral evaluations seem to be strangely scrambled. The good people are bad and the bad people tend to be less bad than they seem... her crazy people, while remaining as crazy as they can possibly be, turn out to be governed by a strange kind of sanity. In the end, it is the sane ones who are incurable lunatics. The "good," the "right" and the "kind" do all the harm. "Love" is a force for destruction, and "truth" is the best way to tell a lie.80

The "good," the "bad," the "crazy," the "sane," the "right," the "kind," are, of course, so designated by the "evil secular character of her hero's environment."81 P. Albert Duhamel says many aspects of her writing which have puzzled critics... can now be understood


as the direct consequence of the application to art of what might be called a "violent" view of reality. It is violent to those accustomed to taking ambiguous or rationalizing positions.  

Miss O'Connor, the oracle, seems to be saying that the best guarantee of remaining mediocre is to remain content to see only the surface of things and to try to change what one cannot account for to suit oneself. The best way to avoid mediocrity is to accept the violent consequences of the prophetic view of reality as it is. Duhamel concludes:

The prophetic vision will not allow the shadow to fall
"Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response."  

If there are enough of the violent to bear it away, then there is hope that the way the world ends is not with a whimper -- nor a bang.  

Three very brief notes will end this rather long chapter on the literary artist, Miss O'Connor.

Because she insists on the reality of divine grace, Miss O'Connor insists also on the reality of

84 Ibid., p. 285.
the devil. In a letter to John Hawkes she says, "I want to be certain that the devil gets identified as the devil and not simply taken for this or that psychological tendency." As will be seen in the next chapter of this thesis, her devil is the one who goes about "piercing pretensions, not the devil who goes about seeking whom he may devour." 

As will be seen at more length in the discussion of the fifth story in Everything That Rises Must Converge, "The Lame Shall Enter First," the terrible sinner who keeps the Christian faith is infinitely preferable to the "good" pagan. And yet it often happens that it is the "good" pagan, the devil, who announces Christ. This may tend to shock but Miss O'Connor explains:

> 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 the same thing in modern dress only because we have this defensive attitude toward the faith.  

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86 Ibid., p. 406.

Lastly, Miss O'Connor very happily discovered that her own people, the Southerners, were perfect instruments through which to communicate the Catholic truths about which she cares so much. They are this "because these people have grown up with Scripture, lived with it, breathed its maxims and its stories until they are marinated in the words of God." From them she learned respect and reverence for Scripture. She realized that her Scripture-founded fiction might seem strange to Catholics, and she commented on this problem to Joel Wells:

The fact that Catholics don't see religion through the Bible is a deficiency in Catholics. And I don't think the novelist can discard the instruments he has to plumb meaning just because Catholics are not used to them. You don't write only for now. The biblical revival is going to mean a great deal to Catholic fiction in the future. Maybe in fifty years or a hundred Catholics will be reading the Bible the way they should have been reading it all along. I can wait that long to have my fiction understood. The Bible is what we share with all Christians, and the Old Testament we share with all Jews. This is sacred history and our mythic background. If we are going to discard this we had better quit writing at all. The fact that the South is the Bible Belt is in great measure responsible for its literary pre-eminence now.

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Catholic novelist can learn a great deal from the Protestant South.89

A summary of this rather involved chapter will be of value to help the reader see the essential Flannery O'Connor.90

"'Yes'M,' the Misfit said as if he agreed.
'Jesus thrown everything off balance.'"91 Into this taut sentence from the title story of her first volume of short stories, Flannery O'Connor packs her major concerns as a writer of fiction. Here is her feel for the South -- especially through the South's most powerful instrument, the ear -- with its resistance to change and its apocalyptic, fundamentalist religion. Here is her hearty sense of irony. Here is, above all else, Miss O'Connor's "preoccupation" with Divine Grace Himself, Christ, and man's slow participation with that grace in an eccentric world. In a note to the second edition of Wise Blood, 1962, Miss O'Connor

89"Off the Cuff," Critic, XXI (September, 1962), 4.


gently chides those readers and critics who, for whatever reason, want to ignore her purpose as a writer: "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." 92

Her understanding of the inner reality of the very particular persons who people her country led her to draw them as they literally are; to modern, twisted man they sometimes seem grotesque. Speaking about her first published novel she wrote to Ihab Hassan, "It never occurred to me that my novel was grotesque until I read it in the papers." 93 That which makes her stories and her people authentic and universal is not the realistic description (although that is most assuredly there) but, rather, the ruthless (sometimes violent) piercing of the outer shell to lay bare the common core of human need, pain, and expectation.

The working out of Flannery O'Connor's vision is dependent upon the actuality of human free will. To her, free will is no univocal thing; it is at once

92P. 5.

93Quoted by Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary Novel, p. 79.
and totally a struggle for identity and a conflict with the turmoil that has made itself at home in an off-center world and, above all, in that part of the inner core of man which stubbornly resists redemption.

"Free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel . . . can only be asked to deepen." 94 She says further, "The writer does not write about general beliefs but about men with free will . . . . There is nothing in our Faith that implies a foregone optimism for man so free that with his last breath he can say No. All Catholic literature will be positive in the sense that we hold this freedom to exist . . . " 95

Miss O'Connor compared her approach to reality and fiction to what the Medieval doctors called the anagogical sense of Scripture, the real and intended significance embedded beneath the literal and empirical sense. She succeeded in combining the inner and outer worlds with the most delicate subtlety. Without a word of warning -- and with no explicit reference to the theological insights which

94 Note introducing the second edition of Wise Blood, p. 5.

determine her thought — she draws her readers away from the everyday world and they neither avert to nor resist the strenuous demands of this transfer. Under their facade of normalcy, she unveils the structure and relationships of daily experience as off-center, grotesque, and violence-breeding. Caroline Gordon wrote of Miss O'Connor's characters: "They 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 for man when he sets up as God."96

With all this (proper) emphasis on the grotesquesness of evil, one must not forget that good, too, can be grotesque.

Few have stared at good long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction. The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliche or a smoothing down that will soften their real look. When we look into the face of good, we are liable to see a face like Mary Ann's, full of promise.97


97O'Connor, "Mary Ann: The Story of a Little Girl," Jubilee, IX (May, 1961), 30. Mary Ann was a little girl who died of cancer of the face in an Atlanta hospital at the age of twelve. The whole right side of her face was one mass of sore, and horribly disfigured.
Miss O'Connor's writing is profoundly marked by a highly individual synthesis of her Catholic philosophy with sympathy for the sometimes bizarre evangelism of the rural South. The religious mentality of free-wheeling preachers, self-anointed prophets and crucified lambs\textsuperscript{98} contained for her a kind of truncated sacramentalism. It saw the presence of the divine -- of grace, if you will -- immediately beyond the empirical and prosaic. Sunday supplements have made serpent handling, rolling, shouting, and the mass hysteria of river baptism familiar. In this world the very experience of religious exaltation and ecstasy becomes a sacrament. Flannery O'Connor saw the people of this mentality as spiritual emigres of the Old Testament, furiously digging and searching for real

\textsuperscript{98}In "The Catholic Novelist in the South," Miss O'Connor says: "A few years ago a preacher in Tennessee attracted considerable attention when he sacrificed a live lamb chained to a cross at his Lenten revival service. It's possible that this was simple showmanship, but I doubt it. I presume that this was as close to the Mass as that man could come. The Catholic writer may feel at first that the kind of religious enthusiasm that has influenced Southern life has run hand in hand with extreme individualism for so long that there is nothing left of it that he can recognize. But when he penetrates to the human aspirations beneath it, he sees not only what has been lost to the life he observed, but more, the terrible loss to us in the Church, of human faith and passion."
and operative sacraments. The outward signs they have at hand are recalcitrant and must be forced to reveal the salvation they contain. Only the violent may bear it away. Such souls are fertile ground, in her view, for divine mercy.

The vision and mission of the seer and the oracle are a staple of Flannery O'Connor'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"; 99 Hazel Motes, vanquished, burns out his eyes.100 Truth -- the living God -- is a terrifying vision, to be faced only by the stout of heart. Flannery O'Connor was such a seer, of stout heart and hope.

CHAPTER III

CONVERGENCES:

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND FLANNERY O'CONNOR

It must be remembered, as was pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis that no attempt is being made to say when Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's influence on Flannery O'Connor began. Miss O'Connor's very close friend and literary executor, Robert Fitzgerald, said in his introduction to *Everything That Rises Must Converge* that Flannery O'Connor had been reading Teilhard de Chardin "at least since early 1961."¹ In a letter dated March 24, 1966, he says further, "I do not know when Flannery O'Connor began reading the work of Teilhard nor precisely what she read."² Neither is any attempt being made to say that where Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor do seem to converge the convergence is due to a positive influence of Teilhard de Chardin on Miss O'Connor.

It would seem better to say that the very

¹P. xxx.

²A letter to Robert Fitzgerald, S.J., St. Mary's College, St. Marys, Kansas.
keen interest in the concrete and the particular, in the total phenomenon of man -- which includes the "within" as well as the "without" of man --, in the slow, but positive, freely-willed participation of man in the death-resurrection of Christ, in the incorporation and glorification of the individual into Christ -- the Omega Point for Teilhard de Chardin -- necessarily brought the thought of these two genuinely Christian souls very close together.

As has been seen at some length both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor were almost violently in love with the world in which they lived and with those who peopled their world. They both considered the God-given power of vision as one of their prize possessions. Both insisted that this vision go beyond the literal to the anagogical level. One of Flannery O'Connor's key, life-long concerns was to make her vision ever more intelligent to her readers and critics. For this reason, although she professed "to know little theory," she took valuable time away from her writing and used precious reserves of physical energy to write articles for Granville Hicks\(^3\) and for

and to write an introduction to the biography of a girl who had died of cancer. She was always willing, when able, to travel the length of the country to talk to the faculty and students of the University of Notre Dame, of the University of Michigan, of the College of St. Teresa, of the University of Scranton, of the University of Minnesota, of the University of Southwestern Louisiana. She was most gracious in talking to editors of magazines and to reporters and potential writers of magazine articles. Only God Himself knows how extensive her correspondence was with those who had questions to be answered or literary problems to be discussed; she was even willing to help young writers who wanted to get their feet wet.

While Flannery O'Connor could be devastatingly blunt


6 E.g., to Joel Wells, editor of *Critic*.

7 E.g., to Ross C. Mullins, Jr. from *Jubilee*.

8 We know, e.g., of such letters to Sr. Mariella Gable, to John Hawkes, to Ihab Hassan, to James Farnham, to Allen Tate, and to others.

9 E.g., Sr. Mary-Alice, O.P. and the Sisters who wrote the life of Mary Ann.
in saying what she thought of some of her readers, critics, and reviewers, at the same time she showed herself genuinely grateful to those who understood what she was doing. Because of her very real humility and desire to grow through fuller understanding of her own vocation, one cannot help but feel that an interpretation of her work in and through the insights offered by Teilhard de Chardin would be gratefully accepted. It is certainly true that the expression of her thought was never that of Teilhard de Chardin; the ideas expressed are, as will be seen, remarkably convergent.

10 See, e.g., her comments to the students of the College of St. Teresa: "Some old lady said that my book left a bad taste in her mouth. I wrote back to her and said, 'You weren't supposed to eat it.'" Or again, "Don't be subtle until the fourth page. . . . You have to realize the genuine stupidity of the reader . . . his average mental age is thirteen years." Katherine Fugine et al., "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor," The Censer (Fall, 1960), 30.

11 She told Joel Wells about an article on The Violent Bear It Away written "by a Jesuit Scholastic, Robert McCown . . . He seemed to understand everything I did about the book." (The article she is referring to is "The Education of a Prophet: A Study of Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Kansas Magazine (1962), 73-78). Joel Wells, "Off the Cuff," Critic, XXI (Summer, 1962), 5. Her praise of Sr. M. Bernetta Quinn's article in Critique is noted in Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 43. Her praise of Sr. Mariella Gable's article in The American Benedictine Review is noted in Esprit, VIII (Winter, 1964), 26.
With the understanding that no one is trying to say that Flannery O'Connor planned it this way, with the understanding that this is only one of many possible interpretations of these nine stories, it will be proper, in the first place, to look at the over-all pattern of convergence of thought between Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor in _Everything That Rises Must Converge_.

The first two stories in the volume, "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Greenleaf," bring the reader into the world of Teilhard de Chardin, a world in which generations, social classes, and races are slowly rising and converging in greater knowledge and love for one another. Teilhard de Chardin would say that they are becoming more and more "person." The next five stories in this volume ("A View of the Woods," "The Enduring Chill," "The Lame Shall Enter First," "The Comforts of Home," and "Revelation") show the threats to becoming "person": the refusal to enter into the process of love in the universe; the option for stability (the real sin for both Teilhard de Chardin and Miss O'Connor) in hate, in materialism, in flight to a world of false identity where the false security of the world of
the past (plantation caste-system) or the ivory tower of callow intellectualism and self-sufficiency will freeze the person to death. The last two stories face up to the dilemma of convergence: will man, with genuine humility, choose knowledge and love by putting on the person of Christ ("Parker's Back"), or will he choose a materialism as his final goal and attempt to rise in hate by kicking those beneath him ("Judgement")?

With this schematic outline, it is time to go to work on the individual stories. The method will be to examine each story on both levels: on the level of fact (the literal level), and on the level of mystery (the anagogical level). Ultimately, one should come to see that full growth is possible only through a reasonably perfect balance of both worlds.

Miss O'Connor's first story in this volume, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," stands on its own merits on the literal level. It describes a bus trip during which a very immature, dependent young man (Julian), an "intellectual," "saturated in depression . . . in the midst of his martyrdom,"\textsuperscript{12} P. 5.
escorts his domineering, self-assured, over-weight mother to her reducing class at the YWCA. Mother and son are safely on the bus when a Negro mother and her little son enter. The Negro mother sits next to Julian; her son sits next to Julian's mother. It gradually dawns upon the two mothers that they are wearing identical "less comical than jaunty and pathetic" hats ("Each [had] a purple velvet flap [which] 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.") Furthermore, they have, as it were, exchanged sons for the moment. Julian's mother prides herself on the fact that "how you do things is because of who you are," and says, "I can be gracious to anybody, I know who I am." As a consequence, she tries to make the best of a bad situation and when Julian and his mother and the Negro mother and her son all get off the bus at the same "stop," Julian's mother condescendingly tries to give the Negro boy a shiny penny. "All at once she [the

13 Ibid., p. 4.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., p. 9.
16 Ibid., p. 6.
Negro mother] seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 20.} She shouted, "He don't take nobody's pennies!"\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} and swung her heavy red pocketbook at Julian's mother. Finally, Julian's mother rose slowly from the sidewalk and "started off with a headlong movement in the wrong direction."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.} After going for a block or two, Julian's mother crumpled and fell to the pavement.

He \footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 22-23.} turned her over. Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 23.}

Julian tried to run for help but the lights toward which he ran drifted farther away the faster he ran and his feet moved numbly as if they carried him nowhere. The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 23.}
On the level of mystery, the anagogical level, this story is a classic example of the person who chooses to hold out for stability and who is thereby destroyed. Julian's mother continued to live in her anti-bellum Southern world of hats and white gloves and gentility (she is not selfish, does not raise her voice in anger, and she does not drink). She had provided her son with the education suitable for a "gentleman." This option for stability is a very deliberate thing. She says:

> With the world in the mess it's in . . . it's a wonder we can enjoy anything. I tell you, the bottom rail is on the top. . . . Most of them are not our kind of people . . . but I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am.  

As she had "lived according to the laws of her own fantasy world, outside of which she had never set her foot" so she sat "like a mummy beneath the ridiculous banner of her hat" and the lessons she should have

\[22\text{Ibid., p. 6. It is instructive to note that these words of Julian’s mother are echoed almost word-for-word by Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation." Mrs. Turpin is also destroyed.}
\[23\text{Ibid., p. 11.}
\[24\text{Ibid., p. 15.}
learned "rolled off her like rain on a roof."\textsuperscript{25}

After she has been knocked to the sidewalk and is literally falling apart, Julian tries to make her understand what has happened:

Don't think that was just an uppity Negro woman . . . . That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double . . . . What all this means . . . is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn . . . . You aren't who you think you are . . . . From now on you've got to live in a new world and face a few realities for a change. Buck up . . . it won't kill you.\textsuperscript{26}

Julian's mother has come to realize that classes are in motion, not just passing each other on up-and-down escalators, but converging in that which is most unique and personal to each, the power to know and choose and love, with the rest of the noosphere. She realized in a practical way that growth and convergence in knowledge implies violence to those branches of the phylum which will not grow with the rest of the stem. Her choice, though, has been made and so she died calling for her "home," her "Grandpa," and her "Caroline," who had once been her

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 21-22.
Negro mammy.

Miss O'Connor does not say that there is no hope for Julian; she implies, though, that there is real doubt about his ability to rise. His long-time subjection and dependence (physical, moral, intellectual) upon his mother seems, at the end of the story, to be stronger than the lights which beckon to him from the distance. At least this is true: Julian's leaving of the world of mock innocence and entrance into "the world of guilt and sorrow"\(^27\) is still not accomplished. One should not wonder at this. Miss O'Connor spoke about the Christian's slow participation in the death-resurrection of Christ;\(^28\) Teilhard de Chardin reminded his readers to see "beneath the immobility of the Immense, movement of extra slowness."\(^29\)

The surface action of the second story, "Greenleaf," also stands on its own merits. Mrs. May, in her subconscious world of dreams, hears and sees a bull eating away at the very foundations of her farm home. She awakens to find a scrub bull,

\(^{27}\)Ibid., p. 23.

\(^{28}\)"The Catholic Novelist in the South."

not one of her thorough-breds, loose in the flower bed beneath her bedroom window. She dresses hurriedly and tells her hired man, Greenleaf, to get that bull off her property immediately because "he'll ruin the breeding schedule." Greenleaf mentions that the bull has been on her property for three days already; he promises, though, that when he has time he will do something about it. At breakfast, her two sons tell Mrs. May that the bull belongs to Greenleaf's two sons, who live down the road "a piece." The next morning Mrs. May is again awakened by the slow munching of the bull, "gaunt and long-legged . . . chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor." Since Greenleaf, obviously, is not going to do anything about the bull, Mrs. May makes up her mind to go over to see Greenleaf's sons, O.T. and E.T.

She, later in the morning, goes over and tells the Greenleaf boys that they are to remove their bull that very day or she will have him shot tomorrow! While she is at the Greenleafs she, despite her will, is much impressed by the way the boys have come up in society. She waits in vain for O.T. and E.T. to come

30P. 28.

31Ibid., p. 25.
to get their bull.

That night,
in her sleep she heard a sound as if some large stone were grinding a hole on the outside wall of her brain. She was walking on the inside, over a succession of beautiful rolling hills, planting her stick in front of each step. She became aware after a time that the noise was the sun trying to burn through the tree line and she stopped to watch, safe in the knowledge that it couldn't, that it had to sink the way it always did outside of her property. When she first stopped it was a swollen red ball, but as she stood watching it began to narrow and pale until it looked like a bullet. Then suddenly it burst through the tree line and raced down the hill toward her. She woke up with her hand over her mouth and the same noise, diminished but distinct, in her ear. It was the bull munching under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had let him out.32

At exactly eleven o'clock on the third morning Mrs. May got into the truck and went down to the barn to get Greenleaf. He was to go with her to shoot the bull. After much grumbling ("Ain't nobody ever ast me to shoot my boys' own bull!")33 and delay and slamming of doors Greenleaf went with Mrs. May in the truck. Mrs. May spotted the bull in a pasture, "a green arena, encircled almost entirely by woods,"34

32 Ibid., p. 47.
33 Ibid., p. 48.
34 Ibid., p. 50.
and Greenleaf slowly walked toward the bull. When the bull galloped for the woods Greenleaf followed at his leisure. After better than ten minutes of waiting during which nothing happened, Mrs. May "reached inside the car window and gave three sustained honks and two or three shorter ones to let him know she was getting impatient. Then she went back and sat down on the bumper again."\(^{35}\)

After a few minutes Mrs. May saw a black, heavy shadow emerge from the woods and come toward her. In a few seconds she saw that it was the bull coming across the pasture. She turned to call Greenleaf to tell him where the bull was, but he was not in sight.

She looked back and saw that the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her. She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in a freezing unbelief. She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was, and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip. She continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front of her had changed -- the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky -- and she had the

\(^{35}\)Ibid., p. 52.
look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable.

Mr. Greenleaf was running toward her from the side with his gun raised and she saw him coming though she was not looking in his direction. She saw him approaching on the outside of some invisible circle, the tree line gaping behind him and nothing under his feet. He shot the bull four times through the eye. She did not hear the shots but she felt the quake in the huge body as it sank, pulling her forward on its head, so that she seemed, when Mr. Greenleaf reached her, to be bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal's ear.36

The simple action of this story begins to take on strange depths of meaning almost from the beginning -- despite Miss O'Connor's advice to the students of the College of St. Teresa not to get subtle until the fourth page.37 In the third line of the story the reader is told that the bull stood with "head raised as if he listened -- like some patient god come down to woo her."38 Mrs. May's discovery of the bull outside her farmhouse window is worth quoting in full. This paragraph is, perhaps, the best single example of how Miss O'Connor can put a simple movement

36 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
38 P. 24.
in all its dimensions; she even includes in the rhythm of the sentences, the larger rhythms of cultural evolution.

She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing as if something were eating one wall of the house. 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, on and on, eating everything until nothing was left but the Greenleafs on a little island all their own in the middle of what had been her place. When the munching reached her elbow, she jumped up and found herself, fully awake, standing in the middle of her room. She identified the sound at once: a cow was tearing at the shrubbery under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had left the lane gate open and she didn't doubt the entire herd was on her lawn. She turned on the dim pink table lamp and then went to the window and slit the blind. The bull, gaunt and long-legged, was standing about four feet from her, chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor.39

The rhythm of this paragraph, as slow and as strong as the bull's own digestive process, increases as the story progresses, until at the end, in one last burst of speed, a "violent black streak,"40 the

39 Ibid., p. 25.
40 Ibid., p. 52.
lover-god bull, bringer of life and death, buries
his head in Mrs. May's lap, "like a wild tormented
lover." The final scene is that of death bent over
death "whispering some last discovery." 

It would seem that if this discovery is
anything at all, it is the discovery that one cannot
rely on "class" in the face of the mobility of life —
the evolution of the Greenleafs whose vitality,
gained by going away to the Army and bringing back
French wives to their new government-financed dairy
farm, is symbolized by their stray bull. "The light
unbearable" is the fact that there is a force, an
energy in the universe, that must move. Add to the
rhythm of the story and to the vision that Mrs. May
has, the strange, contradicting constellation of
symbols connected with the bull. The bull is associa-
ted with the sun, with a god, with an "uncouth
Country suitor," with a bullet, and finally with

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 53.
43 Ibid., p. 47.
44 Ibid., p. 24.
46 Ibid., p. 47.
the Greenleafs' vitality. This strange grouping of images is just that murky, rising pattern forming, evolving under the surface level. All of this forces the question: "Why?"

Perhaps the answer to this question is found in Teilhard de Chardin's use of the same images to describe growth and evolution within the human phylum. Teilhard de Chardin, in pointing out that no part of the human family can remain separate and stable, says, "The human verticil as it spreads out remains entire, like a gigantic leaf whose veins, however distinct, remain always joined in a common tissue." To reach the sun nothing less is required than the combined growth of the entire foliage. Teilhard de Chardin's leaf imagery, his emphasis on the energy of love causing the world to converge -- these open up the deeper dimensions surrounding the life-death movement of the bull.

The first two stories of this volume take the reader into the Teilhardian word, the world of evolution, of convergence, where small movements of

47 Ibid., p. 25.
48 The Phenomenon of Man, p. 241.
49 Ibid., p. 244.
seeing or living have infinite dimensions. Pere Teilhard de Chardin reminds modern man of the need for patience in this matter:

After all half a million years, perhaps a million, were required for life to pass from the prehominids to modern man. Should we now start wringing our hands because, less than two centuries after glimpsing a higher state, modern man is still at loggerheads with himself? Once again we have got things out of focus. . . . . Planetary movement involves planetary majesty. . . . . We cannot expect to see the earth transform itself under our eyes in the space of a generation. Let us keep calm and take heart.50

The next five stories in this greatest volume of Miss O'Connor will manifest another dimension -- the depth of dangers to be surmounted if one is to become a person. These dangers come from the tendency to remain stable in the false identity of a past social structure or in the ivory tower of pseudo-intellectualism of the present. There is also the danger of trying to remain stable by rooting oneself in self-sufficiency or materialism. All must learn that to live is to love; it is to be caught up in the force of personalization in the universe, the force which causes all classes, generations, and races to converge.

50Ibid., p. 255.
In the first of these "middle five" stories, "A View of the Woods," a small girl is torn between loyalty to her family, Pitts, and loyalty to her grandfather, Fortune. The surface action is again quite simple: the selling of a lot from a farm in the midst of a new housing development. For the Pitts family the selling of this lot means the loss of something quite personal. Sr. Bertrande, in an article written for Thought, points out that to the Pitts children this lot is a "play place"; to Mrs. Pitts, it is a "lawn"; to Mr. Pitts it is a "calf pasture"; to the entire Pitts family it is "the view of the woods." Yet the grandfather, who owns the land upon which they live, seems to think that the sale of the lot will be progress. He is quickly identified with images that show that he is concerned only with tinny, materialistic progress. The large, yellow steam shovel becomes his model for progress as he watches "the big disembodied gullet gorge itself on the clay, then, with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turn and spit it up."

51 "Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Thought, XXXVII (Fall, 1962), 423.

52 P. 55.
The fact that the grandfather proposes to sell the view of the woods to Tilman is most fitting. Tilman is "an up-and-coming man . . . who was never just in line with progress but always a little ahead of it so that he could be there to meet it when it arrived." The real movement of this story, then, will be the choice of the child: will she opt to be Pitts, person, or will she opt for her grandfather Fortune, materialism?

In that awful death scene Mary Fortune Pitts chooses: "I'm PURE Pitts." In her own death and in the death of her grandfather the reader sees how she made the option for the personalizing force at work in her family and in the universe, and how she rejected the danger coming from heredity, impersonalization, and materiality. Mary Fortune Pitts' death is a redemptive grace both in the sense in which Miss O'Connor would use that phrase and in the Teilhardian sense.

The fourth story in this volume is "The Enduring Chill." It is interesting to note that in

\[53\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 67.}\]
\[54\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 80.}\]
the twenty short stories and the two novels which form the canon of Miss O'Connor's writing, there are only three Catholic priests. Two of them are in this story\textsuperscript{55} -- and they are both Jesuits who, in a most blundering fashion, accidentally say the right thing at the right time. One must agree with Sr. Bertrande when she says, "This is the only one of Miss O'Connor's stories that can be identified as Catholic"\textsuperscript{56} -- if one takes by "Catholic" here the use of specifically Catholic characters, symbols, and terminology.

"The Enduring Chill" highlights another danger in the depths of the evolution to person: the apparent security that comes with putting on the mask of false identity. Asbury Fox has returned to his Southern home from New York where he failed as a writer. "This visit," he said, "will be permanent."\textsuperscript{57} Ashbury's only desire is that his mother and sister close the blinds and let him sleep, until death finds him in some wonderful Byronic pose. But this is not to be; on a deeper level this is a story of the disturbing,

\textsuperscript{55}The third priest is Fr. Flynn in "The Displaced Person."

\textsuperscript{56}"Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor," p. 422.

\textsuperscript{57}P. 93.
divisive action of the Holy Spirit. This action is hinted at early in the story when Fr. Vogle, S.J.\textsuperscript{58} tells Ashbury, after a lecture on Indian philosophy, "There is . . . a real probability of the New Man, assisted, of course, . . . by the Third Person of the Trinity."\textsuperscript{59}

Now that Ashbury is at home and in his own bed

he lay for some time staring at the water stains on the gray walls. Descending from the top molding, long icicle shapes had been etched by leaks and, directly over his bed on the ceiling, another leak had made a fierce bird with spread wings. It had an icicle crosswise in its beak and there were smaller icicles depending from its wings and tail. It had been there since his childhood and had always irritated him and sometimes had frightened him. He had often had the illusion that it was in motion and about to descend mysteriously and set the icicle on his head. He closed his eyes and thought: I won't have to look at it for many more days.\textsuperscript{60}

Ashbury longed for one last "meaningful experience" before he died. At his insistence, Ashbury's mother called a Jesuit and asked him to visit her son. Ashbury wanted to match wits with the Jesuit; he wanted to discuss Joyce, the myth of the dying god,

\textsuperscript{58} The name "vogle" is suspiciously like the French word "aigle" meaning "eagle" (bird).

\textsuperscript{59} P. 86.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 93.
and the cost of the artistic expression of creativity. Fr. Finn, S.J. ("blind in one eye and deaf in one ear")\(^1\) will have nothing to do with conversation of this sort and he brutally punctured the mask of Ashbury's false identity. The priest roared, "How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash? . . . . The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are -- a lazy ignorant conceited youth."\(^2\) As the priest left he told Ashbury's mother, "He's a good lad at heart but very ignorant."\(^3\)

Ashbury was finally told by Dr. Block\(^4\) that

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 105.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 107.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 108.
\(^4\)Miss O'Connor's description of Dr. Block is something to behold! He has "a pink open-mouthed face" with "two large familiar ears." He makes "a face like a Chinaman," "rolls his eyes almost out of his head" and wiggles his ears. All in all, his "round face is as senseless as a baby's. Nothing about him indicated intelligence except two cold clinical nickel-colored eyes that hung with a motionless curiosity over whatever he looked at." Dr. Block's bedside manner is ideal: "You sho do look bad, Azzberry. I don't know when I've seen anybody your age look as sorry as you do." And yet "Block was irresistible to children. For miles around they vomited and went into fevers to have a visit from him." Mrs. Fox brought him in to her son, "'Here's Doctor Block!' she said as if she had captured this angel on the roof top and brought him in for her little boy." Oh the ways of a genius with a language! Ibid., pp. 93-94.
he simply has undulant fever ("It's the same as Bang's in a cow")\textsuperscript{65} which he caught by disobeying his mother in drinking fresh, unpasteurized milk in the barn. There is no romantic mortal disease; there will be no big heroic death. With this understanding, Ashbury gradually comes to see himself as he is; his eyes are shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him . . . . As the blinding red-gold sun moved serenely under a purple cloud . . . the boy fell back on his pillow and stared at the ceiling. His limbs that had been racked for so many weeks by fever and chill were numb now. The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of new.

It was then that he felt the beginning of a chill, a chill so peculiar, so light, that it was like a warm ripple across a deeper sea of cold. His breath came short. The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Ashbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend.\textsuperscript{66}

This birth of the New Man in Ashbury, this rebirth in Christ's suffering and rising through the

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., p. 113.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., p. 114.
gift of the Father and the Son, points to the ultimate convergence in both Teilhard de Chardin and Christian­ity in the Person of Christ who is able to catch man up in His ways of knowing and loving, in His ways of being Son to the Father. What is only hinted at in this story is explicitly developed in the eighth story, "Parker's Back."

In the next story, "The Comforts of Home," Miss O'Connor once again uses native clay to mold a story with cosmic vision. This is the fifth story in this volume and the third to feature a would-be writer as the "hero."

Thomas is a dedicated lethargist whose God is the Status Quo, whose profession of faith is Don't Disturb. He has already found his heaven in "the comforts of home" -- anything that would disturb or deprive him of these he sees as hell.°7

There is a definite family resemblance between Thomas in this story and Julian in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and Ashbury in "The Enduring Chill" -- with this exception: Thomas is one-hundred percent committed to his lethargy, to being neither hot nor cold, to his lukewarmness. Perhaps this

explains the violence with which he is vomited forth at the end of the story. The Lord simply cannot stomach a son "who had inherited his father's reason without his ruthlessness and his mother's love of good without her tendency to pursue it."\(^{68}\)

Thomas' very way of life, his comfortable den with its books, his typewriter which is not portable, his electric blanket, his well-cooked meals served to him on time, his quiet privacy -- all of this is threatened when Thomas' mother brings a nineteen-year old nymphomaniac (Star Drake) home from the city jail. The fact that the girl desperately needs the help that only an understanding person can give her makes not the slightest impression on Thomas. She is a threat and he must act, even though action is most distasteful to him.

It is very doubtful whether or not Thomas would ever have acted if it had not been for the growing figure of his dead father. As Thomas' father squats\(^{69}\) in Thomas' mind, as he expresses his blunt and sometimes unjust opinions, as he issues commands

\(^{68}\)P. 121.

\(^{69}\)This was the father's usual position during life in an effort to make the townspeople feel he was one of them. "By gesture he had lived his lie." P. 128.
to Thomas action becomes more and more imminent. Finally, still under the power of his dead father, Thomas calls in the sheriff to catch Star Drake in the theft of Thomas' gun. Before the sheriff can come, though, Thomas is discovered trying to "plant" the gun in Star's purse. A man of action might have worked his way out of a situation like this, but Thomas is anything but a man of action. He turns to his dead father for orders; "Fire! the old man yelled." Thomas fired and killed his mother who had placed herself between her son and the "slut." While the shot was still re-echoing through the house, the sheriff walked in. "He was accustomed to enter upon scenes that were not as bad as he hoped to find them, but this one met his expectations." Just as Thomas' danger was greater than Ashbury's, so the removal of the danger had to be more violent. Without something as jarring as the death of his mother it is quite possible that Thomas would have continued to live his life of false identity, of utter selfishness, of mock innocence. Now that there is hope for Thomas through projected

70 P. 141.
71 Ibid., p. 142.
suffering and through never again knowing the comforts
of home, there is the possibility of growth into the
fullness of person. This bringing of good out of evil
has been commented upon by one critic in this fashion:
"One of the most elusive and fascinating aspects of
O'Connor is her ability to reflect one face of evil
off another until you are brought to a vision of the
limited but real good of each, and of the possibility
of redemption for all."^2

Someone somewhere observed that it is particu­
larly difficult to do justice to a summary of Miss
O'Connor's short stories. This is especially true of
the next story, "The Lame Shall Enter First." This
story, which develops the same theme as her novel The
Violent Bear It Away, emphasizes that that essential
idea in all Miss O'Connor's stories that Robert
Fitzgerald points out when he says, "The stories not
only imply, they as good as state again and again,
that estrangement from Christian plenitude is
 estrangement from the true country of man."^3 William

^2Anon., "God Breaks Through," America, CXII
(June 5, 1965), 821.

Peden puts this same idea in another way: "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."

Two things, therefore, follow. The ultimate fault in Miss O'Connor's characters is their own perverse use of their own free will; it is not in the stars. She maintains that a Christian believer, no matter how sinful, how mistaken, how irrational is infinitely to be preferred to a do-gooder atheist who is unable or unwilling to perceive the grand design of existence manifested in the plan of redemption.

Sheppard (and the name is ironical) is a do-gooder atheist father who is trying to teach his son to be unselfish. The boy, Norton, who has just recently lost his mother, spends his time gorging himself with rich food and hoarding his pennies, nickels, and dimes. The father suggests that his

son could give some of his superfluity to those less fortunate than himself, especially to a boy (Rufus Johnson) who has just been released from the reform school where the father spends his weekends in counseling work. The boy, Rufus, who has been brought up by a Bible-belt grandfather, finally comes into their home. When Sheppard asks Rufus, "Suppose you tell me what's made you do the things you've done?" the boy replies without hesitation, "Satan . . . he has me in his power." It isn't long before Rufus starts to see through Sheppard. "He don't know his left hand from his right . . . . He ain't right!" After a few days Rufus says, "He [Sheppard] thinks he's Jesus Christ!"

While Rufus comes to see Sheppard for what he is, Sheppard is telling his son that science has proved that there is no God and no afterlife. He tells him that the mother who has died is not in heaven or in hell -- she is nowhere! Rufus, in his crude Bible-belt fashion, now begins to take the boy under his wing and to teach him a few of the truths

75P. 150.
76Ibid., p. 155.
77Ibid., p. 161.
about God from the Bible. Rufus teaches Norton that his mother is somewhere and that there are other worlds than those that can be seen from the telescope in the attic.

"To show up that big tin Jesus!" Rufus returns again to his destructive role and deliberately gets caught vandalizing a house in the neighborhood. He says, "I'd rather be in the reformatory than in his house, I'd rather be in the pen! The Devil has him in his power . . . . He made suggestions to me!" These "immor't'l suggestions" Sheppard made are listed by Rufus:

He's a dirty atheist . . . . He said there wasn't no hell . . . . I lie and steal because I'm good at it! . . . . The lame shall enter first! The halt'11 be gathered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist, not that . . . .

As Rufus is taken away by the police, Sheppard keeps repeating to himself, "I have nothing to reproach myself with." Slowly Sheppard's face

78 Ibid., p. 187.
79 Ibid., pp. 187-188.
80 Ibid., pp. 188-189.
81 Ibid., p. 189. This sentence is repeated four times on this page.
drained of color.

It became almost grey beneath the white halo of his hair. The sentence echoed in his mind, each syllable like a dull blow. His mouth twisted and he closed his eyes against the revelation. Norton's face rose before him, empty, forlorn, his left eye listing almost imperceptibly toward the outer rim as if it could not bear a full view of grief. His heart constricted with a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath. 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. He sat there paralyzed, aghast. 82

As Sheppard finally sees himself for what he is, he begins to love his son for the first time in his life. He rushed to the boy's room to find it empty.

He turned and dashed up the attic stairs and at the top reeled back like a man on the edge of a pit. The tripod had fallen and the telescope lay on the floor. A few feet over it, the child hung in the jungle of shadows, just below the beam from which he had launched his flight into space. 83

The personalization and convergence here is that small but heroic movement of seeing the true

82 Ibid., pp. 189-190.
83 Ibid., p. 190.
The last of the dangers to personalization before the option of the last two stories is in the story, "Revelation." Here again the action of the story is a possible everyday occurrence. Ruby Turpin and her husband, Claud, who own a small farm, go to a doctor's office. While they wait in the office, Ruby decides to, once again, classify the various people in her world -- according to her own fixed vision. But she has discovered that there is something that will not let this vision be fixed and stable; even in her dreams something has happened to her categories.

Sometimes Mrs. Turpin occupied herself at night naming the classes of people. On the bottom of the heap were most colored people, not the kind she would have been if she had been one, but most of them;

Father Jean Danielou points out in his God and the Ways of Knowing (Cleveland, 1960), p. 91, the necessity for a created being to accept his contingency, as Sheppard must and does in "The Lame Shall Enter First." "Thus created being is not dispossessed of existence, as Sartre claims, but the appropriation of existence. What I am dispossessed of is my will to self-sufficiency. From the beginning, I am drawn into the cycle of love, of grace and the action of grace. It is impossible for me to separate myself. I enter, then, into the region of "dissemblance," according to the phrase of St. Bernard -- i.e., of non-being. By a remarkable paradox, it is in my will to sufficiency that I find destruction, while when I acknowledge my insufficiency, I assert my true self."
then next to them -- not above, just away from -- were the white-trash; then above them were the home-owners, and above them the home-and-land owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. But here the complexity of it would begin to bear in on her, for some of the people with a lot of money were common and ought to be below she and Claud and some of the people who had good blood had lost their money and had to rent and then there were colored people who owned their homes and land as well. There was a colored dentist in town who had two red Lincolns and a swimming pool and a farm with registered white-face cattle on it. Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and rolling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven.85

In other words, there is some deep movement in the world that will not permit her to permanently peg people as top or bottom rail. At the end of the story, after the insult and attack from Mary Grace of Wellesley College, Mrs. Turpin finally has the courage to unblinkly face up to the final, the true, revelation:

There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk . . . . A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a

85P. 196.
field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away.  

What follows is one of those very small but beautiful movements of seeing and personalization: "She lowered her hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead."  

Now that she has begun to see her true self, she can begin to love. There is reason to think that Mrs. Turpin will cease treating her husband as a small child, as someone to support her own importance.  

Bud Johnson says about "Revelation":  

In this story, more than in any other, there is a direct comparison with Teilhard's vision: "The sense of the
earth opening and exploding upwards into God: and the sense of God taking root and finding nourishment downwards into Earth. 86

These middle five stories ("A View of the Woods," "The Enduring Chill," "The Comforts of Home," "The Lame Shall Enter First," and "Revelation") show the threats to personalization and at the same time show small movements of convergence to person through seeing. The question that the last two stories ask is both inspiring and threatening. It is the same question Teilhard de Chardin has asked in the book Phenomenon of Man: Which way, ultimately, is the convergence going? to person? or to matter? Teilhard de Chardin answers "to person"; Flannery O'Connor says, given man's free will, "to either."

In the first of the last two stories, Miss O'Connor offers the option of convergence to Person. Here, in "Parker's Back," the surface movement seems quite ordinary. A confused "redneck" has all his life found some security in getting a new tattoo. This strange manner of seeking security started when, one evening, Obadiah Elihue Parker had seen, at a circus, a man tattooed from head to foot who "moved about on

the platform, flexing his muscles so that the arabesque of men and beasts and flowers on his skin appeared to have a subtle motion of its own."89 This vision of wholeness haunted Parker so that in moments of confusion he would get a new tattoo, until he had his whole body except his back covered. Some of the tattoos were lifeless ones -- anchors and crossed rifles. Others, his favorites, had more life. "He had a tiger and panther on each shoulder, a cobra coiled about a torch on his chest, hawks on his thighs, Elizabeth II and Philip over where his stomach and liver were respectively."90

When he again feels confusion caused by the coldness of his very plain, pregnant, Puritanical wife creeping into his soul he smashes a tractor against a tree and knows that he must go to town for a new tattoo. Feeling that this is the way to please his wife, he asks for a tattoo of God. After rejecting "The Good Shepherd, Forbid Them Not, The Smiling Jesus, Jesus the Physician's Friend,"91 Parker chose "the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with

89P. 223.
90Ibid., p. 224.
91Ibid., p. 234.
all-demanding eyes." Once the Christ was on his back, Parker finally and reluctantly looked at it only to feel "as transparent as the wing of a fly" before the stern, demanding gaze of the eyes. Then Parker went to the pool hall where the boys insisted on seeing his new tattoo. Once they have seen the image, the boys beat it until welts were raised on the face of Christ; they then threw Parker outside.

On the way home Parker did not feel "quite like himself. It was as if he were but a stranger to himself, driving into a new country though everything he saw was familiar to him, even at night." When Parker told his wife that the new tattoo is God, she answered:

"God? God don't look like that!"
"What do you know how he looks?" Parker moaned. "You ain't seen him."
"He don't look," Sarah Ruth said. "He's a spirit. No man shall see his face."
"Aw listen," Parker groaned, "This is just a picture of him."
"Idolatry!" Sarah Ruth screamed. "Idolatry! Enflaming yourself with idols under every green tree! I can put up with lies and vanity but I don't want no idolator in this house!" and she grabbed up the broom and began to thrash him across the shoulders with it.

92 Ibid., p. 235.
93 Ibid., p. 237.
94 Ibid., p. 241.
Parker was too stunned to resist. He sat there and let her beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ. Then he staggered up and made for the door.

She stamped the broom two or three times on the floor and went to the window and shook it out to get the taint of him off it. Still gripping it, she looked toward the pecan tree and her eyes hardened still more. There he was -- who called himself Obadiah Elihue -- leaning against the tree, crying like a baby.95

In summary this last action of Obadiah Elihue Parker may look somewhat hasty; in reality the whole of the last section of this story is nothing more than this journey to a tree, to wholeness, to obedience, to a life ordered by the stern, demanding eyes of a fierce God. While Parker was spending the night at the Haven of Light Christian Mission between the first and second day of the tattooing process, the light from a phosphorescent cross at the end of the dormitory seemed to be a tree reaching "out to grasp him."96 After Parker has been thrown out of the pool hall, he sits for a long time on the ground in the alley, examining his soul. "He saw it as a spider web of facts and lies."97 In this way he came to the

95Ibid., p. 245.
96Ibid., p. 237.
97Ibid., p. 241.
central point, to his "getting religion." He understood, "The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed." After Parker has come home, and before his wife has let him into the house, he saw "a tree of light burst over the skyline. Parker fell back against the door as if he had been pinned there by a lance." Finally, when his wife forced Parker to answer to his true first name, Obadiah, he felt for the first time wholeness of person. "All at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts." "

Because Parker has put on Christ he must both die and rise with Christ. St. Paul, after calling upon the Colossians to "put on Christ," reminded them further that they must also collaborare, compati, commori, et conresuscitare cum Christo. It is

98Ibid.

99Ibid., p. 242.

100Ibid., p. 243.

101"to labor, to suffer, to die, and to rise with Christ." St. Paul in Col. 3:10-11 combines both the reality of putting on Christ and the reality of the world's convergence in Christ. You have "put on the new, which is being progressively remolded after
only to be expected, therefore, that once Parker has put on Christ, he will be beaten by the pool hall gang and by his wife -- beaten precisely on the back -- and then hurled against a tree. As he is seen against the tree one cannot forget the tattoo of the Byzantine Christ, the Christ in glory, the Christ of the icons surrounded (a very interesting point) by the Greek letters Alpha and Omega. Parker has begun to rise with Christ, to find himself by putting on Christ. His own sufferings in Christ take on meaning as he converges to that Person who is Alpha and Omega, the Christ in glory. He lives out in his own body the law of the Cross in his dying and rising in Christ.

Miss O'Connor herself, in commenting on the death of a young girl, Mary Ann, noted this law of the cross in its Teilhardian dimensions:

The creative action of the Christian's life is to prepare his death in Christ. It is a continuous action in which this world's goods are utilized to the fullest, both positive gifts and what Pere Teilhard de Chardin calls "passive diminishments."102

\[105\]

the image of its Creator and brought to deep knowledge. Here there is no Gentile, no Jew, no circumcised, no uncircumcised, no barbarian, no Scythian, no slave, no free man, but Christ is everything in each of us." (The Kleist-Lilly translation published by Bruce, Milwaukee).

Here, in "Parker's Back," she comments through the symbolism of the Byzantine Christ of the Alpha and Omega on Parker's dying and rising; this is not only the central Christian mystery, it is also seen in its Teilhardian dimensions -- as converging through suffering and seeing to point Omega, Christ in glory.

This rather strange action of putting on a tattoo and moving to a tree, when seen in its full dimensions of mystery, becomes a positive vision of what man can converge to, the phylum of hyper-person, Christ in glory. The last story, "Judgement," poses the other possibility, the vision of what happens if man rises without seeing, if man chooses matter instead of Person.

In this last story the action, again, is very simple. It is the movement of a faded Southern gentleman, a man who once was "somebody," down a staircase in a New York apartment building to which his daughter took him after he and his Negro friend, Coleman, were evicted from land on which they had been squatting. In the flashbacks that take the reader deeper and deeper into Tanner's past and personality, it becomes clear that before Tanner came to New York from the South he had been in charge of a large gang
of Negroes in a logging operation. Tanner had also made a fool of Coleman, who then stuck to him like a monkey on his back. Both Tanner and Coleman had been evicted from their shack by a man named Foley (part Negro, part Indian, part white) who had become a successful small time operator in the neighborhood.

Tanner's daughter has accepted her father into her apartment in New York out of a sense of duty. At times she seems still to share his values when she argues with her Yankee, truck-driver husband about the value of wearing a hat, of being a somebody, instead of wearing only a cap. But when her father requests that at his death his body be returned to Corinth, Georgia, she refuses to listen to him. He retorts, "Bury me here and burn in hell!" Since the daughter has lost most of the values of the Bible-belt she doesn't seem to be bothered by this threat. "And don't throw hell at me. I don't believe in it. That's a lot of hardshell Baptist hooey." The deeper action of the story is stressed when a Negro actor and his wife, "a young tan-skinned

\[103\] P. 248.

\[104\] Ibid.
woman with bright copper-colored hair," move into the apartment next door. In the old man's attempts to make friends with this couple, it is clear that the stable class and race categories of the past are no longer fixed; the Negro will not respond to the common stimuli of the Bible-belt and resents being called "Preacher."

The most vivid picture of the movement in the class system is found in the old man's fall down the stairs. In spite of his age and in spite of the fact that he was quite paralyzed, Tanner decided to return to Corinth, on his own. "Nobody was going to bury him here . . . . He was as confident as if the woods of home lay at the bottom of the stairs." By the time he was out into the hall, he felt as if he was half way there when all at once his legs disappeared, or felt as if they had . . . . He fell forward and grasped the banister post with both hands. Hanging there, he gazed for what seemed the longest time he had ever looked at anything down the steep unlighted steps; then he closed his eyes and pitched forward. He landed upside down in the middle of the flight.  

\[^{105}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 260.}\]
\[^{106}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 267.}\]
\[^{107}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 267-268.}\]
In this position on the staircase, Tanner dreamed that he was now at Corinth in his coffin. With all his cronies looking on he pushed his head through the top of the coffin and shouted, "Judgement Day! Judgement Day! You idiots didn't know it was Judgement Day, did you?" The only persons he surprised were the Negro couple. The Negro actor leaned close to Tanner, grasped him by the front of his shirt, and said in a mocking voice, "Ain't no judgement day old man. Cept this. Maybe this here judgement day for you."

Tanner's daughter finally found him with his hat "pulled down over his face and his head and arms thrust between the spokes of the banister; his feet dangled over the stairwell like those of a man in the stocks." He had been dead about an hour. Tanner had come full circle; he who had "handled" Negroes by making fools of them, had fallen into the stocks to face his final position in an evolving society, in a society in which the Negro was rising up the stairs. If this final scene is judgement for the faded

108Ibid., p. 268.
109Ibid.
110Ibid., p. 269.
Southern gentleman, it is a judgement that cuts both ways. It is a terrible sign that the rising of the new class is taking place without the values of the "hat," without the values of the Bible-belt. It must have taken a great deal of courage on the part of Miss O'Connor to write this story; in it, she faced unblinkingly the fact that integration in the South will mean the disintegration of the South she loved -- the world with a sense of honor, culture, and belief.

In these last two stories Miss O'Connor has been in a very special way "a realist of distances." She looked forward into the future with a clear eye and saw that the convergence of races, classes, and generations can meet in Person or in matter. Everything that rises must converge either in love or in violence.

Because she is pre-eminently a "realist of distances" and prophet who sees "near things with their extensions of meaning" and "far things close up" it might be more accurate to talk of one action, with

It is interesting to note how often Miss O'Connor shows convergence of race in the person himself. Foley in this story is part Negro, part Indian, and part white while the wife of the Negro actor is "hi yeller."
multiple faces, in her stories. Perhaps we are not watching, in her stories, the antics of the comic tramp with the tragic music as background; rather, we may be watching the actions of the tramp who is bound down with an "invisible burden" -- the burden of all time and all mystery. To put this in Teilhardian terms: the real action of these stories is found in the peeling away, "one after another, all the coverings of apparent stability in the world" to disclose "beneath the immobility of the infinitely small, movement of extra rapidity, and beneath the mobility of the Immense, movement of extra slowness."[112]

For both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor this movement is the movement to Person, the movement of seeing. Both see that isolation is death; convergence is life. Teilhard de Chardin seems to be quite confident that the movement will end in Person, in the day when Christ will be all in all. Miss O'Connor, on the other hand, is more bound down to the concrete and the particular and so stresses the mystery of man's free will which has the power to choose Person or matter.

No matter how Teilhard de Chardin and Miss

O'Connor might differ in how man might, finally, reach Omega Point, their starting position is the same; the evil of disunity and hostility in the universe. Miss O'Connor points to this evil of disunity time and time again, pointing to the hatred even with a family (e.g., the May family) or between families (e.g., the Pitts versus the Fortunes). Twice she shows the evil of hatred of son for mother in the strange love-hate ambivalence of a Thomas' or a Julian's over dependency on his mother. Teilhard de Chardin described this same hostility of man, his being closed to others, in the following image:

Like a powder whose particles, however compressed, refuse to enter into molecular contact, deep down men exclude and repel one another with all their might: unless (and this is worse still) their mass forms in such a way that, instead of the expected mind, a new wave of determinism surges up -- that is to say, of materiality.\(^3\)

For both Teilhard de Chardin and Miss O'Connor the power of seeing, of growth in knowing and loving offers salvation, offers the hope of becoming Person. For both the highest degree of knowing and loving, the highest personalization, is through faith and charity in the Person of Christ. Here, in the law of the

\(^{113}\) The Phenomenon of Man, p. 256.
cross, in his living out in his own life His dying and rising, man will find some meaning to all the hostility and violence in his world. Both saw salvation in the acting out of the ideas in the quotation of St. Paul used by Teilhard de Chardin to introduce Part III of The Divine Milieu: "No man lives or dies to himself. But whether through our life or through our death, we belong to Christ."

Both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor lived in their own persons this law of the cross -- this central Christian mystery. The one lived it in not being allowed to publish or to publicly defend his works; the other lived it in the pain arising from the living death that she housed in her body for the last twelve years of her life.

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114 P. 89.

115 Miss O'Connor, too, traces her own solution to the problem of evil to the Person of Christ in her "Mary Ann: The Story of a Little Girl," pp. 31-32.

One of the tendencies of our age is to use the suffering of children to discredit the goodness of God, and once you have discredited His goodness, you are done with Him. The Alymers whom Hawthorne saw as a menace have multiplied. Busy cutting down human imperfection, they are making headway also on the raw material of good. Ivan Karamazov cannot believe as long as one child is in torment; Camus' hero cannot accept the divinity of Christ because of the massacre of the innocents. In this popular pity, we mark our gain
For both Teilhard de Chardin and Flannery O'Connor the ultimate saving action on the psychological level is love; on the theological level it is charity -- a going with the action of Love in the universe through Christ to the Father. Psychology seems to confirm this view; Karl Menninger says:

To live, we say, is to love, and vice versa. If a patient is not frozen in his primary narcissism, or drowned from his previous failures in attempting to establish and maintain love objects, he will continuously strive to find and touch persons and things about him.116

The Teilhardian and the O'Connor viewpoint is confirmed also on the theological level. John in sensibility and loss in vision. If other ages felt less, they saw more, even though they saw with the blind, prophetical, unsentimental eye of acceptance, which is to say, of faith. In the absence of this faith now, we govern by tenderness. It is a tenderness which, long since cut off from the person of Christ, is wrapped in theory. When tenderness is detached from the source of tenderness, its logical outcome is terror. It ends in forced labor camps and in the fumes of the gas chamber.

A fuller explanation of how Teilhard de Chardin, too, sees the mystery of evil answered in the Person of Christ can be found in Father C. F. Mooney's article: "Teilhard de Chardin on Suffering and Death," Journal of Religion and Health, IV (October, 1965), 429-440.

Courtney Murray has pointed out a truth that seems to be the same as both Teilhard de Chardin's and Miss O'Connor's emphasis on seeing as salvation. He says:

The biblical knowledge of God, like the biblical existence of God, is historical-existential. To know God is to recognize that he is here, in the situation of the moment; it is to recognize his action in the situation whether it be a deed of rescue or of wrath, and it is to respond to his action by a turning to the Lord, a "going with" him. 117

Because both Teilhard de Chardin and Miss O'Connor believed so fiercely in the Christian mystery, sin really is the same for both of them, a refusal to see, a refusal to go with the Spirit in the Son to the Father. Salvation, on the other hand, will be to go with the action of Love in the Son to the Father, a real passover, leaving the false security and self-sufficiency of the past to accept new being and new personal identity in terms of the gradually dawning reality of Christ's resurrection.

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