

MARIA HELENA NEGRÃO IWERSEN

**SHAPE AND FACE OF GOOD AND EVIL  
IN FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S  
"EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE"**

Dissertação para obtenção do Grau de Mestre, Área de Concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa, do Curso de Pós-Graduação em Letras. Setor de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes da Universidade Federal do Paraná.

CURITIBA

1980

PROFESSOR ORIENTADOR  
Doutor HERIBERTO ARNS

Titular de Literatura  
Norte-Americana da  
Universidade Federal  
do Paraná.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasure to acknowledge our debt to our tutor for his unceasing aid, encouragement and guidance during this research. Our special gratitude also goes to all those who have contributed to make this work possible:

Professors Dr. Otilia Arns

Dr. Sigrid Renaux

Dr. Guido Irineu Engel

Librarians Aymara F. Ribas

Vera Maria Pinto

To my husband RAUL

and my children RAUL Jr.

CRISTINA TERESA

CARLOS EDUARDO

GISELLE

RENATO

for their Patience...

Remain true to yourselves, but move ever upward toward greater consciousness and greater love! At the summit you will find yourselves united with all those who, from every direction, have made the same ascent. For everything that rises must converge.

--Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

CONTENTS

Resumo . . . . .	vii
Abstract . . . . .	viii
Introduction . . . . .	1
PART I. FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S LIFE AND WORK	
1. A Biographical Sketch . . . . .	5
2. Critical Response to Flannery O'Connor's Art and Thought . . . . .	27
PART II. GOOD AND EVIL IN A DESACRALIZED WORLD	
3. The Problem of Good and Evil . . . . .	76
4. The Desacralized World . . . . .	92
PART III. <u>EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE:</u> <u>A GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION</u>	
5. Introduction to the Stories . . . . .	106
6. "Everything That Rises Must Converge" . . . . .	118
7. "Greenleaf" . . . . .	126
8. "A View of the Woods" . . . . .	135
9. "The Enduring Chill" . . . . .	144
10. "The Comforts of Home" . . . . .	154
11. "The Lame Shall Enter First" . . . . .	164
12. "Revelation" . . . . .	176
13. "Parker's Back" . . . . .	186
14. "Judgement Day" . . . . .	195

PART IV. EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE:  
A DESCRIPTIVE AND GRAPHIC ANALYSIS  
OF THE MOTIFS

15.	The Depiction of Good and Evil . . . . .	206
16.	The Use of the Grotesque . . . . .	214
17.	The Offer of Redemptive Grace . . . . .	221

PART V. THE VISION BEYOND

18.	Cosmvision . . . . .	229
19.	Conclusion . . . . .	238
	Appendix . . . . .	246
	Bibliography . . . . .	249

## RESUMO

Everything That Rises Must Converge de Flannery O'Connor foi publicado em 1965, ano posterior à sua morte. Embora esta dissertação discuta como o título - extraído de uma afirmação de Teillard de Chardin - aplica-se às nove histórias da coleção, seu principal objetivo é mostrar, através de exemplos tirados do texto, como o bem e o mal se manifestam em cada história. Esta análise textual baseia-se num sistema gradativo das virtudes e dos vícios (os sete pecados capitais) desenvolvido pelo teólogo e erudito medieval Grosseteste.

A Parte I apresenta uma biografia, amplamente baseada nas cartas de Miss O'Connor publicadas recentemente, e uma perspectiva global da polêmica excessivamente acirrada à sua obra duradoura. As feições principais de sua arte são discutidas aqui: seu enfoque - como escritora católica - do sul protestante, o uso do grotesco, seu pendor para a violência, seu conceito de mal e de graça, sua falta de sentimento, e sua aparente falta de compaixão e de senso de beleza.

A Parte II considera o conceito de mal de Miss O'Connor (tanto quanto de Teillard) e sua máguia com uma sociedade tecnológica complacente que despreza os valores espirituais.

No âmago da dissertação, a Parte III oferece múltiplos exemplos das formas do bem e do mal, como também do imagismo, na sinopse de cada história, e a Parte IV examina os motivos - o mal, o grotesco e a graça redentora.

A Parte V discute a visão de Miss O'Connor e o modo com que ela empregou o choque e o riso para contrapor ao torpor espiritual e para conscientizar o leitor de que o demoníaco pode levar ao sagrado. Escritora admiravelmente talentosa, com humor selvagem, ela odiava o mal, escarnecia dos intelectuais bombásticos, acreditava nas possibilidades da salvação sempiterna - e conservou até o fim um maravilhoso sentido e respeito pelo mistério.



## ABSTRACT

Flannery O'Connor's Everything That Rises Must Converge was published in 1965, the year after she died. Although this dissertation discusses how the title--from a statement by Teilhard de Chardin--applies to the nine stories in the collection, its main aim is to show, through examples from the text, how good and evil manifest themselves in each story. This close analysis is based on a gradational scheme of the virtues and the vices (the seven deadly sins) developed by the medieval theologian and scholar Grosseteste.

Part I presents a biography, based largely on Miss O'Connor's recently published letters, and an overview of the exceedingly heavy critical response to her enduring work. The main features of her art are discussed here: her focus--as a Catholic writer--on the Protestant South, her use of the grotesque, her penchant for violence, her concept of evil and of grace, her lack of sentiment, and her seeming lack of compassion and of a sense of beauty.

Part II considers Miss O'Connor's concept of evil (as well as Teilhard's) and her distress over a complacent technological society that has largely discarded spiritual values.

In the core of the dissertation, Part III offers multiple examples of the forms of good and evil, as well as the imagery, in each synopsis story, and Part IV examines the motifs--evil, the grotesque, and redemptive grace.

Part V discusses Miss O'Connor's vision and the way she employed shock and laughter to counter spiritual torpor and to make the reader aware that the demonic can lead to the holy. A remarkably gifted writer, with a savage wit, she hated evil, derided intellectual bombast, believed the possibilities for salvation to be ever present--and retained to the end a marvelous sense of and respect for mystery.

## INTRODUCTION

The main theme of this dissertation--the faces and shapes of good and evil in Flannery O'Connor's Everything That Rises Must Converge--was chosen after a close reading of the nine stories in this posthumous collection. During the reading the different<sup>t</sup> manifestations of evil in the form of the seven deadly sins became apparent. And it gradually became evident, in the portrayal of the characters embodying good and evil, that good and evil came together. As Flannery O'Connor herself once pointed out:

Most of us have learned to be dispassionate about evil, to look it in the face and find, as often as not, our own grinning reflections with which we do not argue, but good is another matter. Few have stared at that long enough to accept the fact that its face too is grotesque, that in us the good is something under construction. The modes of evil usually receive worthy expression. The modes of good have to be satisfied with a cliché or a smoothing-down that will soften their real look.<sup>1</sup>

The posthumous collection was chosen also because a perusal of the appraisals of Flannery O'Connor's works showed that not one book or article (other than review articles) focused exclusively on this collection. Despite the immense variety of criticism, evaluations, and reevaluations of her literary output, no critics had studied these nine stories with an eye toward good and evil either in their different masks or in the context of grace or redemptive grace. One critic, Dorothy Walters, does refer to "the full spectrum of a defective humanity" revealed in Flannery O'Connor's fiction

in general,<sup>2</sup> but she does not see, or at least describe, a gradation of the seven deadly sins such as is offered in the present work.

The nine analytical chapters that form the nucleus of this dissertation demonstrate the essential aspects of good and evil in each of the nine stories according to a gradational scheme evolved by the medieval theologian and scholar Robert Grosseteste and elucidated in an article by Siegfried Wenzel.<sup>3</sup> By using the gradational method of analyzing the seven deadly sins represented in the stories and by applying the Aristotelian principle "that each 'virtue' is the mean between two 'vices,'"<sup>4</sup> it can be seen that each "virtue" is opposed to two "vices." The incidence of these "vices" in their different shapes or masks gives us Flannery O'Connor's vision of the world--a vision that is remarkably consistent and whose evocation has made her place in American literature unique and indelible.

Notes

1. Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners; Occasional Prose, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Noonday Press, 1969), p. 226.

2. Dorothy Walters, Flannery O'Connor, Twayne's United States Authors Series (New York: Twayne, 1973), p. 24. The full passage reads: "Ultimately, the various hostilities manifested on the human level derive from man's failure to conform to the dictates of divine intention. Again and again, we encounter the spectacle of pride indulging in willful disregard of obligations of humility, of a covetousness so bound to its commitment to things that it is deaf to the call of Christian charity. Pride, covetousness, rage, lust, gluttony, envy, sloth--the full spectrum of a defective humanity is cast before us. God is forgotten, denied, or ignored. However, the holy nexus cannot be so easily broken; the heavenly pursuer overtakes the heedless fugitive at the appropriate juncture. The disparity between divine intention and human act is bridged through dramatic reminders of the abiding covenant" (ibid.).

3. Siegfried Wenzel, "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research," Speculum 43 (January 1968):1-22.

It is, finally, the very interesting treatise on confession by Robert Grosseteste, "Deus est quo nihil melius cogitari potest,"<sup>4</sup> which may have been the bridge between the notion that man is a septenary and the identification of the seven parts with the Seven Deadly Sins.

Of special interest for us is the beginning of this enumeration, which we would expect to explain why Grosseteste adopts the order of the virtues for his treatise on confession. Grosseteste begins: According to the saints, by transgressing our first parents stained with sin the entire human nature; they polluted the whole soul and the whole body. The soul is a unity which can be logically separated into its parts, viz., the vegetative, the sensitive, and the rational. The human body is an integral unity [a compound?] whose parts are the four elemental properties. According to these parts human nature has been corrupted.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, Grosseteste concludes;

to these seven vices that corrupt human nature are opposed the seven virtues, to which it behooves us to cling if we want to cast off the old Adam and put on the new one [Eph. iv 22,24].

As the following table implies, all seven capital vices are meant to represent the lack (*diminutio*) of their respective virtue.

	vis animae:	virtus:	vitia:
"mens" = anima	{ apprehensiva	humiliatio	superbia
rationalis	{ passiva	exultatio	invidia
"cor" = anima	{ irascibilis	patientia	ira
sensibilis	{ concupiscibilis	largitas	cupiditas
	{ motiva	occupatio	accidia
"anima" =	{ attractiva	abstinentia	gula
anima vegetabilis	{ expulsiva	continentia	luxuria
			hypocrisis
			pusillanimitas
			negligentia
			prodigalitas
			curiositas
			evacuatio
			insensibilitas

4. Ibid., p. 11.

A little further on, he adds that "to these seven virtues are opposed seven vices" (ibid.), and lists actually fourteen, because of the Aristotelian principle that each "virtue" is the mean between two "vices."

PART I

FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S LIFE AND WORK

## CHAPTER I

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

When the English author Evelyn Waugh first read some of Flannery O'Connor's early stories, he was amazed: "If this," he commented, "is the unaided work of a young lady it is a remarkable product."<sup>1</sup> Indisputably, she was born with the talent to write. But what forces in her life shaped her seriocomic view of the world and her concept of good and evil and of redemption? This complex question will probably never be fully answered, but a look at the life she led and her reactions to her experiences provides some important clues.

Mary Flannery O'Connor was born in Savannah, Georgia, on 25 March 1925, the only child of Edward Francis and Regina Cline O'Connor. Both parents came from Roman Catholic families that had lived in the South for generations. Mrs. O'Connor's family was of some prominence in Georgia. Her father, Peter Cline, had for many years been mayor of Milledgeville, a town that still prided itself on having been the state's last Confederate capital. The town's first Mass had been celebrated in the apartment of Mrs. O'Connor's grandfather, Hugh Treanor; and his widow later donated the plot of ground for the small church that was built in 1874.

Mary Flannery spent her early years in Savannah, leading a rather solitary life until she started school, first

attending St. Vincent's and later the Sacred Heart. As a young child she manifested what was to become a lifelong love of pet fowl and a penchant for, or perhaps an obsession with, the eccentric, the incongruous, the bizarre. When Mary Flannery was five years old, an aunt gave her a bantam chicken that could walk either forward or backward. So unique was this phenomenon that a Pathé News cameraman recorded it, and the film of the O'Connor child and her unusual chicken was shown around the country. Flannery O'Connor is said to have regarded this event as the high point in her life, with everything after that coming as an anticlimax.<sup>2</sup> She once wrote that the experience "marked me for life." From that day on she began to collect various kinds of fowl, hoping to find other weird specimens: "I favored those with one green eye and one orange. . . . I wanted one with three legs or three wings but nothing in that line turned up." An initially mild interest had turned into "a passion, a quest," and it was not until many years later that that quest "ended with peacocks. Instinct, not knowledge, led me to them."<sup>3</sup> Endlessly delighted and fascinated with the peacock, she used that magnificent bird symbolically in her fiction as an emblem of Christ or of Christian plenitude.

In 1938 the O'Connor family moved to Milledgeville when Mr. O'Connor, a real estate businessman, fell ill with disseminated lupus erythematosus, a wasting disease that killed him by 1941 and was eventually to kill his daughter.<sup>4</sup> At Peabody High School, Mary Flannery, though shy and studious,

was clearly energetic. She continued collecting fowl, made masonite jewelry, rode horseback--and wrote. By the time she was sixteen she had written and illustrated three books (when a senior she gave her hobby in the yearbook as "collecting rejection slips").<sup>5</sup>

In 1942 Miss O'Connor entered Georgia State College for Women (now Georgia College at Milledgeville). She majored in English and social science and, apparently, in extracurricular activities. She became art editor of the college newspaper, editor of the literary quarterly, and feature editor of the yearbook; she wrote stories for the quarterly and did linoleum block cartoons for the paper, comic drawings for the 1945 yearbook, and a cartoon mural for the student union building. Her talent for cartooning was so pronounced that many of her friends thought she would become a professional cartoonist. Of course, as it turned out, she applied to her fiction that talent for caricature, for swift characterization, for exaggeration to delineate traits.<sup>6</sup> She completed her undergraduate studies in three years by attending summer school and in 1945 received a B.A. degree in social science. (Her educational exposure to this field may or may not account for her frequently caustic depiction of social workers and psychologists in her fiction.)

Because of the promise she had shown in college she was awarded a Rinehart scholarship for her Master's studies. The story of how she was accepted as a graduate student at the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa) is



somewhat confused. In one version, she was accepted on the strength of some stories that had been submitted for her by one of her English teachers to the University's School for Writers (Writer's Workshop) conducted by Paul Engle.<sup>7</sup> But another, and perhaps more reliable, version is that based on Engle's own recollection. In 1971 he wrote to Robert Giroux, who had been Flannery O'Connor's publisher, that when he first met her in his office he could not understand a word of her Georgian dialect. He recalled:

Embarrassed, I asked her to write down what she had just said on a pad. She wrote: "My name is Flannery O'Connor. I am not a journalist. Can I come to the Writer's Workshop?" . . . I told her to bring examples of her writing and we would consider her, late as it was. . . . Flannery spoke a dialect beyond instant comprehension but on the page her prose was imaginative, tough, alive: just like Flannery herself. . . . Flannery always had a flexible and objective view of her own writing, constantly revising, and in every case improving. The will to be a writer was adamant; nothing could resist it, not even her own sensibility about her own work.<sup>8</sup>

Before Flannery O'Connor went to Iowa, she and her mother decided that her full name was not quite suitable for an up-and-coming writer. She was bound for the Midwest, a region where her double name might be considered anomalous; and as for the simple name Mary O'Connor, that did not seem to hit the right tone either. They finally settled on the name under which she was to become famous.<sup>9</sup>

Flannery O'Connor enrolled at the university in 1945, and proceeded to write diligently and send out her stories. The first one she sold, "The Geranium," was published in Accent in 1946. From then on her work began to appear quite regularly, not only in the "little magazines" but also in

such widely circulated magazines as Harper's Bazaar and Made-moiselle. Her Master's thesis comprised six stories, some of which were published within two years.<sup>10</sup> In 1947 she received a Master of Fine Arts degree in literature. She then accepted an invitation to join the Yaddo artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, New York, and it was there that she started her first novel, Wise Blood.

After a brief residence at Yaddo, Flannery O'Connor, anxious to be on her own, moved to New York City. There she had the good fortune to meet two other Roman Catholic writers, Robert and Sally Fitzgerald, who not only encouraged her but also introduced her to members of the New York literary establishment. During that period she also met Robert Giroux, who later became her editor and eventually her publisher.

When, in 1949, the Fitzgerald family moved to a hilltop house in Ridgefield, Connecticut, Flannery O'Connor joined them as a "paying guest." The Fitzgeralds and their boarder led an apparently idyllic existence. After attending early Mass in Georgetown, about four miles away, Miss O'Connor spent most of the day working on her novel. During the evening she talked with her hosts about literature and religion and regaled them with stories about "down home."

But the idyll was not to last. In December 1950, just after having finished typing the first draft of her novel, Flannery O'Connor told the Fitzgeralds "with amusement of a heaviness in her typing arms."<sup>11</sup> The heaviness worsened,

and a doctor diagnosed it as possible rheumatoid arthritis. Shortly after this, en route to Georgia to spend Christmas at home, she became extremely ill on the train. For she did not have arthritis. She had the disease that had killed her father--disseminated lupus.<sup>12</sup>

Flannery O'Connor spent the remaining winter and the spring of 1951 mostly in Emory Hospital in Atlanta, terribly sick but helped by blood transfusions and injections of ACTH, a cortisone derivative that can have unpleasant side effects. Her hair fell out and her face ballooned, but she did get slowly better. When she finally was allowed to go home, she was unable to climb stairs. Her mother, who had a country place a few miles north of Milledgeville called Andalusia Farm, decided to take her there to recuperate. And it was at Andalusia, under her mother's care, that Flannery was to live out her remaining thirteen years, raising her beloved exotic fowl, painting, and above all, writing as much as she possibly could. During those years she also accumulated an extensive library that included a fine collection of theological works.<sup>13</sup>

In 1952 Wise Blood was published "to a chorus of praise and misunderstanding by some reviewers, outrage and misunderstanding by others."<sup>14</sup> At the end of that year Miss O'Connor learned that she had received a Kenyon Review Fellowship for 1953. In a letter to the Fitzgeralds at the end of 1952 she wrote in a characteristically chipper vein:

I reckon most of this money will go to blood and ACTH and books, with a few sideline researches into the ways of the vulgar. I would

like to go to California for about two minutes to further these researches, though at times I feel that a feeling for the vulgar is my natural talent and don't need any particular encouragement.<sup>15</sup>

And she wrote to the Fitzgeralds about a month later: "I am doing fairly well these days, though I am practically bald-headed on top and have a watermelon face. I think that this is going to be permanent."<sup>16</sup>

By 1953 she had "read just about everything [Joseph Conrad] wrote" and a great deal of Henry James's works. She remarked about both writers that she read them "thinking this may affect my writing for the better without my knowing how."<sup>17</sup>

In 1954 the Kenyon Fellowship was renewed and her story "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" won second prize in the O. Henry awards. In 1955 "A Circle in the Fire" won the same prize and her first collection of short stories, A Good Man Is Hard to Find, was published. But also that year, as a result either of the disease process or of the drug that was supposed to control it, the bones of her jaw and legs began to deteriorate. To Sally Fitzgerald she wrote,

I am walking with a cane these days which gives me a great air of distinction. The scientist tells me that this has nothing to do with the lupus but is rheumatism. . . . I now feel it makes very little difference what you call it. As the niggers say, I have the misery.<sup>18</sup>

A year later, she was on crutches.

About her writing and the reactions--hostile, ludicrous, or confused--to it, she could be both humorously detached and deeply serious. For example, she could write jokingly to the Fitzgeralds in late August 1955: "Most of the

reviews still regard me as the Sour Sage of Sugar Creek but I am minding my own bidnis down on the farm and in my spare time I multiply various numbers by .35 and entertain myself thataway."<sup>19</sup> But three days later she wrote to a friend that

if you live today you breathe in nihilism. In or out of the Church, it's the gas you breathe. If I hadn't had the Church to fight it with or to tell me the necessity of fighting it, I would be the stinkingest logical positivist you ever saw right now. With such a current to write against, the result almost has to be negative. It does well just to be.

Then another thing, what one has as a born Catholic is something given and accepted before it is experienced. I am only slowly coming to experience things that I have all along accepted. I suppose the fullest writing comes from what has been accepted and experienced both and that I have just not got that far yet all the time. Conviction without experience makes for harshness.<sup>20</sup>

By 1956, thanks to the crutches and a new "wonder drug" that allowed her to stop taking ACTH, Flannery O'Connor was able to accept invitations to give talks and readings at colleges and universities. During the next six or seven years she sporadically made many such lecture trips, and thereby gained a whole new range of acquaintances, friends, and admirers.

In 1957 she received a National Institute of Arts and Letters grant and won first prize in the O. Henry awards for her story "Greenleaf." When her story "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" was produced on television that year, the young author found it unnerving for two reasons: "I watched the TV play, disliking it heartily from first to last. However, that was not nearly as bad as having to sustain all manner of enthusiastic congratulations from the local citizens. They feel that I have arrived at last."<sup>21</sup>

Although the local people were proud to have such a talent in their midst, they tended to find Flannery O'Connor's depiction of their fundamentalist Georgian milieu and its inhabitants disconcerting and somewhat of an affront. As Robert Fitzgerald comments with regard to her "grisly" book Wise Blood: "One of the kin delighted her with a telling and memorable remark: 'I wish you could have found some other way to portray your talents.'"<sup>22</sup>

Toward the end of 1957 Flannery O'Connor's elderly Cousin Katie offered her and her mother a spring trip to Lourdes with a group of pilgrims from Savannah. Miss O'Connor's enthusiasm was decidedly tepid. As she wrote to a friend a few months before the journey:

I am going as a pilgrim, not a patient. I will not be taking any bath. I am one of those people who could die for his religion easier than take a bath for it. . . . I suspect that if you've seen one shrine you've seen them all. Aside from penance being a good thing for us, I'm sure religion can be served as well at home.<sup>23</sup>

Robert Fitzgerald notes that "Flannery dreaded the possibility of a miracle at Lourdes, and she forced herself to the piety of the bath for her mother's sake and Cousin Katie's."<sup>24</sup> But he does not explain the reason for her dread. Perhaps, as Dorothy Tuck McFarland has suggested,

she considered her illness . . . the means whereby she was coming to know herself, both as a Christian and as a writer. Her way of encountering mortality was not simply to learn to accept it--which implies a rather supine and long-suffering endurance of what cannot be changed--but . . . to meet it with a certain gusto. The particular life she was given to live was a hard one, but she met its challenge and, in so doing, was brought beyond herself--beyond the person she might have been had her life been more normal.<sup>25</sup>

Several years after her trip to Lourdes (and to Rome, where she had an audience with Pope Pius XII and received a

special blessing from him), Flannery O'Connor recalled:

I felt that being only on crutches I was probably the healthiest person there. I prayed there for the novel I was working on, not for my bones, which I care about less, but I guess my prayers were answered about the novel, inasmuch as I finished it.<sup>26</sup>

She finished the novel--her second and last--in October 1959. Called The Violent Bear It Away, it was published in 1960. The title comes from Matthew 11:12 ("From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent bear it away"), and Miss O'Connor must have felt that her generally sardonic attitude toward the reading public was at least partially vindicated by the way the title was mangled. Two variations were The Valiant Bear It Away and The Bear That Ran Away with It. She would not have been surprised, she said, if a new story she was working on, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," ended up being called "Every Rabbit That Rises Will Engage" or "Every Rabbit That Rises Is a Sage."<sup>27</sup>

In 1959, the year she completed her novel, Flannery O'Connor received a Ford Foundation grant and saw a French translation of Wise Blood published. (Most of her works have now been translated into French and many have also appeared in other languages.)

It was not until the end of 1959 that she discovered Teilhard de Chardin--"a great mystic" and "a very great man."<sup>28</sup> Her admiration for him grew as she continued to read his work; and eventually she reviewed some of them. His ideas were to have a gentle and lasting influence on her.

At least one critic has badly erred in concluding that she "must have viewed Chardin as another 'interleckchul.'"<sup>29</sup>

Much, incidentally, has been made of Flannery O'Connor's scorn of "interleckchuls." She did indeed make sneering remarks about them and attempted to pass herself off as a Georgia hick, seemingly ignoring the fact that, as her letters and personal library alone attest, she was not an inconsiderable intellectual herself. But the main target of her scoffing appears to have been self-conscious and tyrannical intellectualism. As she put it:

I doubt if your interests get less intellectual as you become more deeply involved in the Church, but what will happen is that the intellect will take its place in a larger context and will cease to be tyrannical, if it has been--and when there is nothing over the intellect it usually is tyrannical. Anyway, the mind serves best when it's anchored in the word of God. There is no danger then of becoming an intellectual without integrity.<sup>30</sup>

Flannery O'Connor's studied role as a country bumpkin can probably be traced, at least in part, to the fact that this reserved, soft-spoken woman had both intellectual integrity and humility. She did not, as a friend once attested, "bear fools gladly."<sup>31</sup> When once asked by a student, "Miss O'Connor, why do you write?," she replied, "Because I'm good at it."<sup>32</sup> She was, as Sally Fitzgerald remembers her, "calm, slow, funny, courteous, both modest and very sure of herself, intense, sharply penetrating, devout but never pietistic, downright, occasionally fierce, and honest in a way that restores honor to the word."<sup>33</sup> Yet, though "she was far from being as self-centered as either her genius or her invalidism might have made her, she was not without vanity, and her



tongue could take on an unsaintly edge."<sup>34</sup> As she herself once admitted, "I just don't have a highly developed sensibility and I don't know when I've hurt people until they tell me."<sup>35</sup>

"I hate," she once wrote, "to deliver opinions. On most things I don't deserve an opinion and on a lot of things I simply don't have an opinion."<sup>36</sup> "Smugness," she believed, "is the Great Catholic Sin. I find it in myself and don't dislike it any less."<sup>37</sup> Perhaps she sometimes noticed in herself the self-righteousness that she so savagely exposed in some of her characters, especially the women. She was gratified to read that "St. Thomas said that art didn't require rectitude of appetite. . . . St. Thomas's remark is plain enough: you don't have to be good to write well."<sup>38</sup>

She acknowledged:

The sins of pride & selfishness and reluctance to wrestle with the Spirit are certainly mine but I have been working at them a long time and will be still doing it when I am on my deathbed. I believe that God's love for us is so great that He does not wait until we are purified to such a great extent before He allows us to receive Him."<sup>39</sup>

The comic vitality that she exuded and that suffuses her work is absent in only one area--her religion. That she did not joke about. Though she often found fault with the Church, she saw in Catholicism her raison d'être:

I feel that if I were not a Catholic, I would have no reason to write, no reason to see, no reason ever to feel horrified or even to enjoy anything. . . . I have never had the sense that being a Catholic is a limit to the freedom of the writer, but just the reverse. . . . I feel myself that being a Catholic has saved me a couple of thousand years in learning to write.<sup>40</sup>

As she told a friend who was a discouraged writer, "You

do not write the best you can for the sake of art but for the sake of returning your talent increased to the invisible God to use or not to use as he sees fit."<sup>41</sup> To the same friend she had written several years earlier, "Perhaps you are able to see things in these stories that I can't see because if I did see I would be too frightened to write them."<sup>42</sup> Similarly, she thought "The Artificial Nigger" was "one of the best stories I've written, and this is because there is a good deal more in it than I understand myself."<sup>43</sup> Flannery O'Connor was, nevertheless, amused about things that readers tried to see in her fiction that definitely were not there. When a professor of English asked her the symbolic meaning of the name Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," she replied, "I must have named her that because I knew some English teacher would write and ask me why. I think you folks sometimes strain the soup too thin."<sup>44</sup>

Through the years, during remissions and flare-ups of her disease, she continued to write (and to revise or discard), trying to get in at least two to three hours a day. Although she once maintained, "The disease is of no consequence to my writing, since I use my head and not my feet,"<sup>45</sup> her straitened, precarious existence obviously limited her productivity. Yet when she referred to her illness at all, it was usually with casual irony. She seems to have exhibited an almost frenetic good cheer. In Robert Drake's view:

About her own afflictions she never seemed bitter; nor, for that matter, did she seem to be "looking on the bright side." She seemed merely to have accepted them as part of her lot--certainly not as a

cross or a thorn in the flesh, to be dramatized--and proceeded about her business. And that was that.<sup>46</sup>

After visiting her, Drake "went away convinced that he had seen beauty and gallantry in action, quiet but sure, and perhaps finally a great strength made perfect in weakness."<sup>47</sup>

Sally Fitzgerald probably best explains what underlay such an impression:

From Teilhard de Chardin she eventually learned a phrase for something she already knew about: "passive diminishment"--the serene acceptance of whatever affliction or loss cannot be changed by any means--and she must have reasoned that the eventual effect of such diminishment, accompanied by a perfecting of the will, is to bring increase, which is not to say that acceptance made matters easy.<sup>48</sup>

By contrast, Joesphine Hendin, a critic who probed none too gently beneath the surface gaiety and serenity, found in Flannery O'Connor a smoldering rage:

She agreeably became, for many readers, the Catholic who died cheerfully in her church. And in silence she wrote those quiet stories where violence so unexpectedly erupts, exploding all the values of obedience, politeness and faith.

The tension between O'Connor as Catholic daughter and Southern gentlewoman and O'Connor as writer bristles out of that stillness, the stillness in which she became a living contradiction: a woman who lived out a fiction and wrote down her life. Or at least her inmost life. O'Connor's silence thrives in the South, where women are taught from childhood to bury their passion or rage, to conceal inner turmoil behind a facade of feminine mildness.<sup>49</sup>

Yet Betty Boyd Love, a close friend of Flannery O'Connor's from college days, maintains, "I don't believe for a minute that the conventionality of her private life represented any repression of instinct on her part. It was a life in which she felt comfortable, and I see no inconsistency between her private life and her private vision."<sup>50</sup> But Miss O'Connor herself once made a rare acknowledgement that reinforces Mrs. Hendin's viewpoint to some extent:

I have never been anywhere but sick. In a sense sickness is a place, more instructive than a long trip to Europe, and it's always a place where there's no company, where nobody can follow. Sickness before death is a very appropriate thing and I think those who don't have it miss one of God's mercies. Success is almost as isolating and nothing points out vanity as well. But the surface hereabouts has always been very flat. I come from a family where the only emotion respectable to show is irritation. In some this tendency produces hives, in others literature, in me both.<sup>51</sup>

Josephine Hendin contends that Flannery O'Connor, from the start of her career,

seems to have been frightened by freedom, seems to have needed the peculiar isolation and comfort that comes from friendships maintained through letters or kept with married friends. This only child of a self-consciously aristocratic family, praised by her mother for not seeking out friends, seems never to have been deeply close to anyone.

. . . I do not think O'Connor's illness radically changed her life. Its very horror was that it prevented her life from changing at all. . . . Her illness seems only to have cemented an isolation that had always existed, a feeling of being "other" that she could at times accept with wry good humor.<sup>52</sup>

As to the alleged lack of deep closeness to anyone, some of her recently published letters suggest otherwise. Moreover, she was, according to Sally Fitzgerald, intensely close to and "clearly loved" her mother. She "had, in fact, only one great fear--that her mother would die before she did. 'I don't know,' she said, 'what I would do without her.'<sup>53</sup> And although she cherished solitude and was apt to be uncomfortable as a conversationalist, her letters

reveal her to have been anything but reclusive by inclination: to have been, on the contrary, notably gregarious. . . . Once her inviolable three-hour morning stint of writing was done, she looked for, and thrived on, companionship. When people couldn't come, she wrote to them, and looked forward to hearing from them in return. She participated in the lives of her friends, interested herself in their work, their children, their health, and their adventures. Anything but dour, she never ceased to be amused, even in extremis.<sup>54</sup>

Sometimes taken to task for the seeming lack of love people in her own life and in her stories, Flannery O'Connor

discerned that "children know by instinct that hell is an absence of love." And she maintained, "Love and understanding are one and the same only in God. . . . I love a lot of people, understand none of them."<sup>55</sup>

She obviously loved Andalusia, and perhaps she conceived that her seemingly evil disease was also good in that it brought her back to the South. In 1957 she remarked:

If you're a writer and the South is what you know, then it's what you'll write about and how you judge it will depend on how you judge yourself. . . . I stayed away from the time I was 20 until I was 25 with the notion that the life of my writing depended on my staying away. I would certainly have persisted in that delusion had I not got very ill and had to come home. The best of my writing has been done here.<sup>56</sup>

But by 1962 she admitted, "I've been writing for sixteen years and I have the sense of having exhausted my original potentiality and being now in need of the kind of grace that deepens perception, a new shot of life or something."<sup>57</sup>

Flannery O'Connor received an Honorary Doctor of Letters from St. Mary's, Notre Dame, in 1962, and the same degree from Smith College in 1963. Before going to Smith for the doctorate, she commented, "This is really sort of oppressive and I am going to think of some way to render myself ineligible in the future."<sup>58</sup>

In spring 1963, her sense of exhaustion had become intense: "I've reached the point where I can't do again what I know I can do well, and the larger things that I need to do now, I doubt my capacity for doing."<sup>59</sup> Toward the end of the year, her health deteriorated badly, and early in 1964 it was discovered that an anemic condition was caused by a benign

fibroid tumor. The tumor was removed but the lupus was re-activated, and her last struggle for life began. She asked her friends to pray for her, admitting, "I am sick of being sick."<sup>60</sup>

Despite being desperately ill, she continued, as ever, to pour out letters, most of them deceptively lighthearted, to her friends and to anyone else who wrote her--theologians, teachers, students, aspiring authors, established authors, cranks, it made no difference. Against all odds, she managed to complete her last two stories--"Judgement Day" and "Parker's Back." According to Caroline Gordon, her friend and mentor, Miss O'Connor kept a notebook under her pillow in the hospital and "was trying to finish a story which she hoped to include in the volume that we both knew would be published posthumously."<sup>61</sup> The story was "Parker's Back" and in July, while she was still puttering with the completed manuscript, she learned that her story "Revelation" had won first prize in the O. Henry awards.

In a letter to a friend in mid-June, she had quoted knowingly from a sonnet by Gerald Manley Hopkins:

Margaret, are you grieving  
Over Goldengrove unleaving?<sup>62</sup>

And on 3 August 1964, Flannery O'Connor died. She was thirty-nine, and as Warren Coffey has said, "She had done her work, I think, when she died and done it very well."<sup>63</sup> Seven years after her death, The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor won the National Book Award.

Martha Stephens, a no-nonsense critic, aptly remarks:

About O'Connor's private life there is still much to be puzzled over. Judging by the many conflicting attempts to evoke the true Flannery O'Connor, it seems that O'Connor biography will be a difficult chore, partly because of the style of southern life--where things are never what they seem to be--in the class in which she and her mother lived. One reads, on the one hand, that Miss O'Connor was a loving daughter, known for her warmth and friendliness--on the other, that she was strange and aloof, a trial to her family and friends. . . .

In spite of the many attempts of O'Connor friends both inside and outside Milledgeville to foster an image of the O'Connor household entirely different from [the households depicted in some of her stories]--an image of a loving and dutiful daughter, a selfless and understanding mother--it would not take a very shrewd observer to guess, even without benefit of the harsher O'Connor anecdotes that slip through the less guarded reminiscences, that O'Connor's widow stories do indeed reflect--though it is only fair to say they often burlesque--her own life at Andalusia.<sup>64</sup>

However true this may be and however much Flannery O'Connor remains an enigma, we now have, through the 1979 publication of many of her letters, a self-portrait that often, and winningly, shows up the flaws in other portraits of her. Because of her forced exile and a paucity of visitors, her letters, as Paul Gray recently observed, preserve what otherwise "might have been frittered away in conversation . . . and this accident of fate leads to a startling discovery: the most memorable character that O'Connor ever got down on paper was her own."<sup>65</sup>

Notes

1. Quoted in Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Two Ladies of the South," Sewanee Review 63 (Autumn 1955):677.

2. Walters, Flannery O'Connor, p. 14.

3. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 3, 4.

4. See note 12 below.

5. Sister Kathleen Feeley, Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 6; and Stanley Edgar Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 54 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 5.

6. Walters, Flannery O'Connor, p. 15.

7. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 6. See also Robert Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Noonday Press, 1965), p. xii; and Caroline Gordon, "Heresy in Dixie," Sewanee Review 76 (Spring 1968): 263.

8. Engle to Giroux, 13 July 1971, quoted in Robert Giroux, Introduction to The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971), pp. vii-viii. Giroux gives the date of Engle's first meeting with Miss O'Connor as 1946, which must be an error, for she enrolled in 1945.

9. Robert Drake, Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay, Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), p. 9.

10. The six stories appear in the posthumous collection of all her short stories, Complete Stories, pp. 3-62.

11. Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything, p. xvi.

12. In this circulatory disease, the body forms antibodies to its own tissues. The result is a chronic, generalized connective-tissue disorder, whose symptoms include skin eruptions, fever, arthralgia, deficiency of white cells, and visceral lesions. The acute phase is characterized by a butterfly-shaped rash over the cheeks and bridge of the nose, which gives the victim a wolflife appearance. When Flannery O'Connor's father had the disease it could not be arrested, but by the time she was stricken it had become controllable, but not curable, with steroid drugs. (In his Bright Book of Life: American Novelists and Storytellers from Hemingway to Mailer [Boston: Little, Brown, 1973], p. 58, Alfred Kazin mars an otherwise excellent critique by stating most erroneously that she "knew she had [the disease] from the time she began to write.")



13. "When I die," she wrote to Jane McKane on 30 June 1963, "I'm going to leave my library to the city library, a good Catholic collection for this good Protestant town" (Flannery O'Connor, The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Sally Fitzgerald [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979], p. 527). But when Sister Kathleen Feeley undertook prodigious research in this personal library some years later, it was still at Andalusia, just as Miss O'Connor had left it. Sister Kathleen, in writing her study Flannery O'Connor, used this library--especially noting passages marked in the books, marginal notes, and other jottings--as the cornerstone for tracing the development of Miss O'Connor's thought and art.

14. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 7.

15. Letter of 20 December 1952, Habit of Being, p. 49.

16. Letter of 25 January 1953, *ibid.*, p. 55.

17. O'Connor to Robie Macauley, 13 October 1953, and to Ben Griffith, 13 February 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 63, 68.

18. Letter of 13 January 1955, *ibid.*, p. 74.

19. Letter of 25 August 1955, *ibid.*, p. 96.

20. O'Connor to "A," 28 August 1955, *ibid.*, p. 97.

21. O'Connor to Denver Lindley, 6 March 1957, *ibid.*, p. 206.

22. Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything, p. xix.

23. O'Connor to "A," 14 December 1957, Habit of Being, p. 258.

24. Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything, p. xxiv.

25. Dorothy Tuck McFarland, Flannery O'Connor (New York: Ungar, 1976), p. 10.

26. O'Connor to Janet McKane, 25 February 1953, Habit of Being, p. 509.

27. Thomas A. Gossett, "Flannery O'Connor on Her Fiction," Southwest Review 59 (Winter 1974):40-41; and O'Connor to "A," 9 December 1961, Habit of Being, p. 458. See also O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 51.

28. O'Connor to "A," 4 February 1961, and to Janet McKane, 25 February 1963, Habit of Being, pp. 430, 509. Miss O'Connor's late introduction to Teilhard is confirmed by two letters. On 30 November 1959 she wrote to Dr. T. R. Spivey, "I haven't read Père Teilhard yet so I don't know whether I agree with you or not on The Phenomenon of Man." But by 2 January 1960 she was writing to her friend "A": "Teilhard's book . . . is hard to read if you don't know anything about chemistry and biology and I don't, but as you get on in it, it becomes very stimulating to the imagination" (*ibid.*, pp. 361, 368).

29. Webster Schott, "Flannery O'Connor: Faith's Stepchild," Nation, 13 September 1965, p. 143.
30. O'Connor to "A," 30 January 1956, Habit of Being, p. 134.
31. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 21.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
33. Sally Fitzgerald, Introduction to Habit of Being, p. xii.
34. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.
35. O'Connor to Maryat Lee, 8 October 1957, Habit of Being, p. xii.
36. O'Connor to Janet McKane, 19 June 1963, *ibid.*, p. 525.
37. O'Connor to "A," 17 January 1956, *ibid.*, p. 131.
38. O'Connor to "A," 15 September 1955, *ibid.*, p. 103.
39. O'Connor to Dr. T. R. Spivey, 9 April 1960, *ibid.*, p. 387.
40. O'Connor to John Lynch, 6 November 1955, *ibid.*, p. 114.
41. O'Connor to "A," 25 November 1960, *ibid.*, p. 419.
42. O'Connor to "A," 24 March 1956, *ibid.*, p. 149.
43. O'Connor to Father John McCown, 20 February 1956, *ibid.*, p. 140.
44. O'Connor to a professor of English, 6 June 1964, *ibid.*, p. 582.
45. Margaret Inman Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch,'" Colorado Quarterly 10 (Spring 1962):378.
46. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 12.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Fitzgerald, editorial comment, Habit of Being, p. 53. See also O'Connor to Janet McKane, 25 February 1963, *ibid.*, p. 509; and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), pp. 52-63.
49. Josephine Hendin, Vulnerable People: A View of American Fiction since 1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 147.
50. O'Connor to "A," 28 June 1956, Habit of Being, pp. 163-164.
51. Quoted in Fitzgerald, editorial comment, *ibid.*, p. 53.

52. Josephine Gattuso Hendin, "In Search of Flannery O'Connor," Columbia Forum 13 (Spring 1970):39.
53. Fitzgerald, Introduction to Habit of Being, p. xii.
54. Ibid., p. xiii.
55. O'Connor to "A," 5 October 1957, and 26 October 1963, Habit of Being, pp. 244, 543.
56. O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins, 16 July 1957, *ibid.*, p. 230.
57. O'Connor to Father John McCown, 4 March 1962, *ibid.*, p. 468.
58. O'Connor to "A," 11 May 1963, *ibid.*, p. 518.
59. O'Connor to Sister Mariella Gable, 4 May 1963, *ibid.*, p. 518.
60. O'Connor to Louise Abbott, 28 May 1964, *ibid.*, p. 581.
61. Caroline Gordon, "An American Girl," in The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, 2d ed., edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1977), p. 135.
62. O'Connor to Jane McKane, 19 June 1964, Habit of Being, p. 586.
63. Warren Coffey, "Flannery O'Connor," Commentary 40 (November 1965):94.
64. Martha Stephens, The Question of Flannery O'Connor (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 146, 150-151. Cited as an example of one of the "less guarded reminiscences" is Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor," pp. 377-386.
65. Paul Gray, "Letters of Flannery O'Connor," Time, 5 March 1979, p. 86.

## CHAPTER 2

### CRITICAL RESPONSE TO FLANNERY O'CONNOR'S ART AND THOUGHT

Flannery O'Connor was a spinner of tales who, years after her death, still has critics in a tailspin. Her contribution to American fiction is hardly voluminous--thirty-one short stories and two novels. Yet in recent years it has fomented an avalanche of critical opinion. Writing critiques of her fiction has developed into a veritable industry, which in turn has launched an interesting subsidiary industry--that of critics evaluating other critics' evaluations of her work.<sup>1</sup> Although this smacks of scholarly overkill, Flannery O'Connor's stories continue to entice and confound critics. She once called the act of criticism "the perplex business,"<sup>2</sup> and that adroitly describes the criticism directed at her own work. Her fiction continues to demand speculation, argument, close analysis, and reinterpretation.

Stuart Burns, John May, and Melvin Friedman have presented particularly useful overviews of Flannery O'Connor and her critics.<sup>3</sup> Burns astutely comments, "If one reads O'Connor's fiction, then turns to the criticism, one comes away with the vague feeling that the latter suffers the fallacy of imitative form: that the criticism, like its subject, is both rich and redundant."<sup>4</sup> He cites Robert Drake's Flannery

O'Connor, which emphasizes her Christian concerns, as the book that "has set the standard for the nature and thrust of most subsequent criticism of her work."<sup>5</sup> Burns divides post-Drake criticism into three categories: first, explications (books by Driskell and Brittain, Hyman, Martin, and Walters); second, "those books in which a particular thesis becomes, ostensibly, the organizing principle upon which the readings of individual works are based" (books by Eggenschwiler, Feeley, and Orvell); and third, "those studies whose central thesis is more important than interpretation of individual works" (books by Hendin, Muller, and Stephens).<sup>6</sup>

Burns singles out the works of Driskell and Brittain, Walters, Orvell, and Muller for discussion, and, with a few reservations, pronounces them all competent. In his analysis of Miles Orvell's book, he neatly sums up the primary problems encountered in reading Flannery O'Connor:

There are, [Orvell] says, limits beyond which the created reader will not go, points at which the reader who does not share O'Connor's absolutist vision will find his "ingrained assumptions about man's life . . . violated too deeply." According to Orvell, the three ideological violations which occur most frequently in O'Connor's fiction are: 1) that death may be a good thing; 2) that a character who does not believe in Christ cannot perform good deeds; 3) that the diabolic or anti-Christian character has a greater capacity for grace than the uncommitted Christian or the committed humanist. . . . I would, however, propose one more [major obstacle]: intellectuality is a hindrance to true perception of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

Burns concludes that a need exists "for a restoring of the critical balance which at present teeters precariously on the verge of servile adulation."<sup>8</sup>

"Buried within some of the most perceptive and engaging essays on O'Connor's fiction," Father John May observes, "are

dangerous critical presuppositions that are ultimately the enemies of understanding."<sup>9</sup> Pleading for more "objective" interpretation, he notes "four generic types of subjective response to Flannery O'Connor--the misinterpreters, the muddled faultfinders, the open adversaries, and the overenthusiastic supporters."<sup>10</sup> In discussing "new readings," he takes on Josephine Hendin, who, in effect, has dragged Miss O'Connor out of the church and flung her on the psychiatrist's couch.

Of Mrs. Hendin's The World of Flannery O'Connor he says:

Initially, it is most engaging because of its starkly divergent perspective. Hendin even appears to be building on the existing body of critical understanding when she asserts that "O'Connor told more than religious tales." Yet the serious reviews of Hendin's work have rejected altogether--and rightly so--its psychological assumptions and reductionist conclusions.<sup>11</sup>

Though Friedman, in his survey, states that Mrs. Hendin assumes a "rather unfortunate" tone, he considers her book a valuable one in that it "offers a necessary corrective to the insistently religious interpretations Flannery O'Connor's work has been subjected to."<sup>12</sup> Of similar interests are his remarks concerning The Question of Flannery O'Connor by Martha Stephens, who, though not quite as irreverent as Mrs. Hendin and obviously uncomfortable in her maverick role, "raises all the right questions and gently punctures holes in the theories of many of the earlier critics who refused to see the forbidding side of Flannery O'Connor."<sup>13</sup> Friedman also analyzes and is generally favorable toward the critical strategies of Feeley, Muller, Orvell, Walters, and Browning.<sup>14</sup>

Even her most ardent admirers would probably admit that Flannery O'Connor's range was narrow and her limitations

numerous. She created some cardboard characters and she overlooked or ignored much of human experience. But her characters are often etched in acid and even the stereotypes are salvaged by her marvelous ear for dialogue and her sharp eye for gesture. Further, she explored in devastating fashion the realm of human experience that she saw as her bailiwick. She had the strange knack of being at once acerbic and compassionate. Writing in an unpretentious, spare style (she described it as "one-cylinder syntax"<sup>15</sup>), she managed to blend the comic with the cosmic, hilarity with horror, and the holy with the demonic in a remarkable way. The comedy is astringent, the language clear and hard and epigrammatic.

It seems that, in general, those who most admire her work interpret it theologically, and do so willingly. Those with serious misgivings about it either do not see the theological underpinnings or acknowledge them but, while accepting her art, refuse to be so blinded by her virtuosity as to be bullied into accepting her beliefs.

In the hundreds of critiques on Flannery O'Connor's stories, certain matters crop up repeatedly: the effect of her work as a whole, her stand not only as a Catholic writer but as one who focused on the Protestant South, her use of the grotesque, her penchant for violence, her concept of evil and of grace, her lack of sentiment, and her purported lack of compassion and of a sense of beauty. The illustrative comments--both positive and negative--that follow seem particularly pertinent (those concerning her concept of evil

and of grace are treated more fully in Chapter 3). They are presented at some length in order to provide a sturdy framework for the graphic analyses in Chapters 6 through 17.

Most critics agree that Flannery O'Connor's short stories surpass her novels. "She was probably the greatest short-story writer of our time,"<sup>16</sup> writes A. L. Rowse, and Webster Schott finds her "the most imaginatively endowed Roman Catholic writer the United States has developed. . . . Artistically her fiction is the most extraordinary thing to happen to the American short story since Ernest Hemingway."<sup>17</sup> Warren Coffey sees her corpus as "work of an imaginative order and brilliance rare in the world at most times, perhaps always in American writing."<sup>18</sup> When Everything That Rises Must Converge appeared in 1965, Theodore Solotaroff declared it "the best collection of shorter fiction to have been published in America during the past 20 years."<sup>19</sup> Joyce Carol Oates regards the collection as Flannery O'Connor's greatest book.<sup>20</sup>

As Stanley Edgar Hyman has said, "Her early death may have deprived the world of unforeseeable marvels, but she left us . . . marvels enough."<sup>21</sup> Thomas Carlson compared her to Aeschylus,<sup>22</sup> and Thomas Merton offered perhaps the crowning accolade: "When I read Flannery, I don't think of Hemingway, or Katherine Anne Porter, or Sartre, but rather of someone like Sophocles. What more can you say of a writer? I write her name with honor, for all the truth and all the craft with which she shows man's fall and his dishonor."<sup>23</sup>



In the same vein, Caroline Gordon writes that Miss O'Connor ventured "past the 'personal unconscious' into those regions of the human spirit with which the Greek tragedians and the Hebrew prophets concerned themselves. It is the depth of her explorations, not their surface scope, which makes her unique among her contemporaries."<sup>24</sup>

Poet Elizabeth Bishop finds that Miss O'Connor's stories contain "more real poetry than a dozen books of poems"; and, chiding critics who accuse Miss O'Connor of exaggeration, she adds that, having herself lived next to a "Church of God" in Florida, "nothing Flannery O'Connor ever wrote could seem at all exaggerated to me."<sup>25</sup> To Philip Scharper, "Flannery O'Connor was one of those artists--rare in any age--who saw life sub specie aeternitatis."<sup>26</sup>

Robert Fitzgerald says that though T. S. Eliot "rarely read fiction I am told that a few years before he died he read her stories and exclaimed in admiration of them."<sup>27</sup> As Fitzgerald points out:

Christ the tiger, a phrase in Eliot, is a force felt in O'Connor. So is the impulse to renounce the blessed face, and to renounce the voice. In her work we are shown that vices are fathered by our heroism, virtues forced upon us by our impudent crimes, and that neither fear nor courage saves us (we are saved by grace, if at all, though courage may dispose us toward grace). Her best stories do the work that Eliot wished his plays to do, raising anagogical meaning over literal action.<sup>28</sup>

The essence of her art, in Jonathan Baumbach's view, is that

Miss O'Connor's world . . . admits the best and worst of us inside its borders. At its darkest we recognize her world as an intensification of our own, our shadow-world given shape and substance, our evil dreams objectified. . . . Like Wise Blood, her best stories

sere the consciousness with the acid of their vision, burn away the euphemisms and confront us with the strangulated nightmare of existence. . . . Whatever the limitations of her vision, she is important as a chronicler of the spiritual scrofula that plagues our time. We don't like to look at our moral sores; Flannery O'Connor rubs our noses in them.<sup>29</sup>

"When we begin to read a story . . . by Flannery O'Connor," writes Richard Pearce, "we find the characters flat, the satire obvious, the violence all out of proportion; yet almost every work remains hauntingly memorable."<sup>30</sup> Even her humor, Sister Jean Marie Kann points out, "carries within it deep, haunting tragedy. We shudder as we laugh. One critic said of her last book: 'Not many people really like Flannery O'Connor. She cuts too deeply.'"<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, early critical response to Miss O'Connor's work bore out her anticipation that she would face a hostile audience. Time magazine "in its inimitable alliterations labelled her 'Ferocious Flannery,' while William Esty placed her in 'a cult of the gratuitous Grotesque.' She was accused of nihilism and of determinism."<sup>32</sup> And "she . . . endured the vituperations of such malignant mandarins as John W. Aldridge and Robert O. Bowen. Even her professed friends often damned her with the faint praise of continuing the great modern tradition of 'Southern Gothic.'"<sup>33</sup>

But even her detractors are often ambivalent. Typical is Webster Schott, who contends that

she chose a small territory of soil and soul and treated it as though nothing else really existed.

. . . Flannery O'Connor's reality is destiny out of control, choices made after alternatives have been frozen. To begin one of her stories is to anticipate its end. The only questions are how the dreadful punishment for living will be delivered and in what manner her savage sense of humor will delay the agony.<sup>34</sup>

Yet Schott admits:

Reality is fantastic. Violence does bear life away. Sometimes. Myopic in her vision, Flannery O'Connor was among those few writers who raise the questions worth thinking about after the lights are out . . . : What is reality? What are the possibilities for hope? How much can man endure?<sup>35</sup>

Martha Stephens does not dispute that Flannery O'Connor was at times an "astonishingly good" writer, but feels that "she was possessed of so eccentric, at times so . . . repugnant a view of human life that the strain of trying to enter emotionally into her work is often very great indeed."<sup>36</sup>

Josephine Hendin concedes, "What we can know for sure is that Flannery O'Connor created a remarkable art, unique in its time," but says of this art:

Unlike any Southern writer before her, she wrote in praise of ice in the blood. She celebrated the emotional death that freed her psychic freaks from an agony of human needs, human ties, and human longings. . . . She helped them fulfill all their dreams of revenge or revolt. She let them live on the surface of life without pleasure or remorse.<sup>37</sup>

Claire Katz maintains that in Miss O'Connor's stories there is "a sadistic quality to the narrator, who acts as an archaic superego, a primitive internalized image of the parent forcing the characters through the triadic ritual of sin, humiliation, and redemption by wit as well as by plot structure."<sup>38</sup> (Yet Miss O'Connor herself contended, "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.")<sup>39</sup> André Bleikasten wonders "whether her Catholicism was not, to some extent, an alibi for misanthropy . . . whether so much black derision is compatible with Christian faith . . . and what distinguishes

the extreme bleakness of her vision from plain nihilism."<sup>40</sup> By contrast, Warren Coffey maintains, "She found the human heart a pretty dark place, as most writers have done who have cared to look very long. But she was not a hater, and she never trafficked in despair."<sup>41</sup>

Flannery O'Connor's role as a Catholic writer was of extreme concern to her, and it is this role that in large part has given critics such a field day. There is some evidence that she was a bit torn in her own mind about the extent of that role. A few of her remarks about her work are confusing rather than enlightening. (Josephine Hendin wisely cautions us to remember D. H. Lawrence's dictum: "Never trust the teller; trust the tale.")<sup>42</sup> On the one hand, "to one person who wrote to her concerning the relation between being a Catholic and being a writer, Miss O'Connor replied that she tended to keep the two words Catholic and writer separate in her mind. What she wanted was to be a better Catholic and a better writer."<sup>43</sup> She acknowledged, "I write with a solid belief in all the Christian dogmas,"<sup>44</sup> but contended:

I have heard it said that belief in Christian dogma is a hindrance to the writer, but I myself have found nothing further from the truth. Actually, it frees the storyteller to observe. It is not a set of rules which fixes what he sees in the world. It affects his writing primarily by guaranteeing his respect for mystery.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, if critics have tended to interpret Miss O'Connor's work theologically, they would certainly seem to have had her imprimatur. Dozens upon dozens of her statements about her work are signals. Perhaps the most often quoted are two passages from an essay originally published

in 1957. The first passage reads:

I am no disbeliever in spiritual purpose and no vague believer. I see from the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy. This means that for me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and 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.<sup>46</sup>

And the second:

The novelist with Christian concerns will find in modern life distortions which are repugnant to him, and his problem will be to make these appear as distortions to an audience which is used to seeing them as natural; and he may well be forced to take ever more violent means to get his vision across to this hostile audience. When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax a little and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock--to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.<sup>47</sup>

Martha Stephens likens Miss O'Connor to T. S. Eliot, who also struggled with, in his words, "the problem of poetic assent," and who concluded, "I cannot in practice wholly separate my poetic appreciation from my personal beliefs."<sup>48</sup>

In keeping with this, Martha Stephens points out:

Critics have been fond of indirectly reminding readers that they must not be prejudiced against O'Connor because she is a Catholic; they say, in effect: "It's her art that matters, not what she believed." But of course what she believed--the view of the world that her stories offer us--does matter very much.

Of course one does not wish to say, flatly, that the O'Connor view is "not convincing." Her reading, for instance, of the delusions, the weaknesses, the hypocrisy--in short, the bad--in human nature is, in itself, highly persuasive. But what is false in her work springs from her failure to see that though man is all the things herein implied, he is not only these things--and the total picture of human society that emerges from her work as a whole is one that is difficult to accept.<sup>49</sup>

What also rankles Martha Stephens is that "Miss O'Connor was inclined to define 'good fiction' as something that could only be written by religious-minded individuals, perhaps only by southerners fully attuned to the religious mind

of the Bible Belt."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, though, Miss O'Connor's view here should be taken as a purely subjective one, for we know she felt that only as a Catholic could she have been the writer that she was (see pages 16-17).

Irving Howe clearly would not agree with Martha Stephens. Writing of Everything That Rises Must Converge, he maintains, "Except for an occasional phrase, which serves partly as a rhetorical signal that more than ordinary verisimilitude is at stake, there are no unavoidable pressures to consider these stories in a religious context. They stand securely on their own, as renderings of human experience."<sup>51</sup>

André Bleikasten, in fact, insists, "The truth of O'Connor's work is the truth of her art, not that of her church."<sup>52</sup> He regards her as a Catholic and a writer but not as a Catholic writer, because her work

is by no means a reaffirmation of the Christian mystery of the Incarnation. O'Connor's divisive vision perpetuates the idealistic cleavage between spirit and body, eternity and time, God and man, and Christ is likewise split into two irreconcilable halves. . . . The mediating function associated with Jesus by the Christian and particularly the Catholic tradition is hardly acknowledged, and what characterizes O'Connor's fictional world is precisely the absence of all mediation, of all intercession. On the one hand, there is the utter darkness of evil, on the other, the white radiance of divine transcendence.<sup>53</sup>

It is interesting to contrast this view with Eggen-schwiler's:

In her essays and lectures she frequently opposed dualistic separation of nature and spirit, whether through Gnostic idealism or the radical Protestant's rejection of the world. [She emphasized] the Incarnation and sacramentalism [as] doctrinal centers for her more general belief that "this physical, sensible world is good because it proceeds from a divine source."<sup>54</sup>

Certainly, Eggen-schwiler's view also counters that of Stanley

Edgar Hyman, who judges Miss O'Connor to be "the most radical Christian dualist since Dostoevski."<sup>55</sup>

According to Kathleen Feeley, Flannery O'Connor "saw time in the context of eternity, man's struggle against evil as part of the plan for his salvation, the blind malignity of men toward one another as an opening for grace, and flawed and depraved man as the potential 'new man' in Christ."<sup>56</sup>

Caroline Gordon believes that "Miss O'Connor has wisely attempted to portray the operation of only one false doctrine: Docetism, which denied that Our Lord possessed corporeal substance, and made Him, in consequence, a phantasm."<sup>57</sup>

Robert Drake points out that "Jesus Christ is finally the principal character in all Miss O'Connor's fiction, whether offstage or, in the words and actions of her characters, very much on. And their encounter with Him is the one story she keeps telling over and over again."<sup>58</sup> And Drake fully understands what bothers critics like Martha Stephens:

What then about those readers who do not--or can not--share Miss O'Connor's "Christian concerns"? . . . There does seem a point beyond which such readers, even with the best will in the world, finally cannot go: they cannot honestly share the theological assumptions which are part of her donnée. . . .

And yet, as she herself once indicated, no really good story can be ultimately "accounted for" in terms of a right theology--even for the deeply committed Christian writer or reader. (Such a view as this would certainly set her apart from the programmatic writer with "Christian concerns.") If it's a good story, it's not the theology as such which makes it so, even for the reader who is a professing Christian. Presumably, then, what makes Miss O'Connor's stories good and at times brilliant is that, in her own way, she does seem to have man's number--and the world's. . . .

Many non-Christian readers would have finally to agree that Miss O'Connor's diagnosis of the human condition--or predicament--is substantially valid: man does seem "warped" away from something, and he does seem to need reconciling with that something somehow, perhaps even by violent force. . . . Miss O'Connor's Georgia, though often terrible and dark, is no foreign country, finally, for any of us; none of us, finally, is a stranger there.<sup>59</sup>

Martha Stephens would seem to go along with Drake's last point: "Of course a further explanation for the reader's dilemma in the highly ideological and evangelical O'Connor stories is that the judgments we are constantly pushed to make are really against ourselves."<sup>60</sup>

Flannery O'Connor once wrote to a friend, "Although I am a Catholic writer, I don't care to get labeled as such in the popular sense of it, as it is then assumed that you have some religious axe to grind."<sup>61</sup> And contrary to some critics, Drake emphasizes that Miss O'Connor was not trying to 'sell' Christianity; she was--as indeed any writer is--trying to 'sell' her particular perception of life in this world as valid."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Kathleen Feeley finds that "although her fiction communicates deeply spiritual entities, she is far from being a tractarian or a Catholic apologist."<sup>63</sup> Orwell concurs: "With O'Connor, as with other writers of firm belief (Dante, for example), the unassailable dramatic image is closer to the vision than any doctrinal equivalent."<sup>64</sup> And Preston Browning feels that much of her success derives from the way she "dramatizes religious themes in a fiction for the most part free of the taint of propagandistic motives."<sup>65</sup> Browning also tackles the thorny problem of choosing between a religious interpretation and a "non-religious" interpretation of Miss O'Connor's fiction:

Faced with such a situation, the reader is quite naturally prompted to ask, are these two extreme positions the only available critical options? My own answer is to suggest the wisdom of interpreting Flannery O'Connor's work in a more inclusive fashion, allowing for the partial truth of both positions, admitting the opposites



in her work and recognizing that it is exactly the coincidence of these opposites which gives to Miss O'Connor's fiction its peculiar flavor and power. Not only is it not necessary to exclude one view in order to espouse the other; it is positively detrimental to a just appreciation of her work to do so.<sup>66</sup>

Alfred Kazin finds Miss O'Connor "one of the few Catholic writers of fiction in our day . . . who managed to fuse a thorough orthodoxy with the greatest possible independence and sophistication as an artist."<sup>67</sup> Although she once commented that "my upbringing has smacked a little of Jansenism even if my convictions do not,"<sup>68</sup> several critics have remarked on "a kinship with Mauriac's Jansenism."<sup>69</sup> Warren Coffey insists that "as an American Catholic, Flannery O'Connor was of course a Jansenist," and believes that "Jansenism, more than anything else, explains both her very considerable power at the short story and her limitations. The pride of intellect, the corruption of the heart, the horror of sex--all these appear again and again in her books, and against them, the desperate assertion of faith."<sup>70</sup> Drake, on the other hand, finds such insistence on her Jansenism ridiculous.<sup>71</sup>

Orvell sees her orthodoxy "as socially conservative and culturally enlightened,"<sup>72</sup> but some critics regard it as positively medieval. Martha Stephens claims, "To find so bleak, so austere and rigid, so other-worldly a Christian view of life as hers, one is forced back into the distant past of English religious literature--into the dark side of medieval Christian thought with its constant injunction to renunciation of the world."<sup>73</sup> Likewise, Schott concludes, "Her Catholicism belongs, it seems to me, somewhere near

the time of the Inquisition."<sup>74</sup> And, pulling out all the stops, Bleikasten contends:

O'Connor is definitely on the darker fringe of Christianity, and to find antecedents one has to go back to the paradoxical theology of early church fathers like Tertullian, or to the negative theology of stern mystics like St. John of the Cross. Pitting the supernatural against the natural in fierce antagonism, her theology holds nothing but scorn for everything human, and it is significant that in her work satanic evildoers . . . are far less harshly dealt with than humanistic do-gooders.<sup>75</sup>

Hyman agrees that Flannery O'Connor's meanings "are Christian mainly in the mystic and ascetic tradition of St. John of the Cross ('Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings') rather than in the humanitarian tradition expressed in I John 4:20 ('If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar')."<sup>76</sup> In the same vein, Burns comments on her "uncompromising insistence that relative ethical values and/or humanist concerns are a perversion of the stern demands of Christian commitment."<sup>77</sup>

Not so, says Eggenchwiler. "Above all," he writes, "even above, because it includes, her preoccupations with original sin, grace, and freedom--she wrote about wholeness and incompleteness."<sup>78</sup> He regards Flannery O'Connor as a Christian humanist concerned with

man in his relationships to God, to himself, and to other men, and she reveals that all of these relationships are indivisible aspects of his being. Thus, even as she shows the many ways in which man tries to destroy his essential, whole self, she also shows that those attempts can never entirely succeed; the very interrelationships of his motives indicate that the whole self cannot be completely destroyed and that man remains free enough to be healed.<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, Eggenchwiler asserts, "Her humanism should largely disprove the charges that her view of life was

religiously, psychologically, and socially provincial, that, apart from her strictly religious allegory, her main concerns were peripheral and exotic."<sup>80</sup> Naomi Bliven, too, points out, "Miss O'Connor uses her native region as a concrete setting, but she is not a provincial writer. Or, if she is, her province is Christendom rather than the South."<sup>81</sup>

Martha Stephens views most of Flannery O'Connor's stories as "admonitory parables."<sup>82</sup> Though his reading of the stories is far more sanguine, Father May concurs:

The word-orientation . . . is basically scriptural in inspiration and parabolic in effect. The specific New Testament literary form that her art imitates is the parable, where religious meaning is structured in terms of human conflict symbolizing man's relationship with God. For what the parables of Jesus reveal to the listener is that life is gained or lost in the midst of everyday existence. . . . The reader has no choice but to hear the universal language of homo religiosus spoken by her contemporary parables, and no valid interpretation of them can avoid at least the literary analogues of their basic religious language--poverty, possibility, and judgment.<sup>83</sup>

Although Kathleen Feeley states that "Flannery O'Connor does not write allegory,"<sup>84</sup> other critics disagree. For instance, Eggenschwiler believes that in many of her stories "recurring types and relations of character, the common themes, the similarity of plot structures--all . . . suggest that the literal is being manipulated for allegorical ends."<sup>85</sup> According to Dorothy Walters, Miss O'Connor "shares with the medieval mind the insistence that reality reposes in abstract mysteries of being rather than in the concrete minutiae of daily experience; hence her fiction tends always toward allegory."<sup>86</sup> As George Lensing sees it, "A summation of Christianity necessarily includes an emphasis upon compassion and brotherhood. O'Connor, however, was creating a

milieu whereby that message would manifest itself in vitriolic violence and disorder. The gap between two these orders is bridged . . . by the use of allegory."<sup>87</sup> Thomas Lorch believes that by the time Miss O'Connor wrote the stories in Everything That Rises Must Converge she had turned from traditional Christian allegory to "the type of allegory defined by C. S. Lewis in The Allegory of Love, in which individual characters represent distinct inner forces and the conflicts between these characters on the literal level portray inner conflicts."<sup>88</sup> Lorch concludes:

"Symbolism is a mode of thought," C. S. Lewis said . . . , "but allegory is a mode of expression." For the most part, Miss O'Connor's fiction is comprised of profound symbolic thought, but when it expresses her own religious beliefs it ceases to be a means of analysis and becomes a mode of expression. The expression is skilled, but the same critical faculties are no longer operative. Miss O'Connor repeatedly insisted that her religious beliefs in no way restricted her freedom as a writer. . . . But what one sees and "what is" differ from observer to observer, and as the allegories in her works reveal, Flannery O'Connor underestimated the extent to which what was real for her was determined by her religious faith.<sup>89</sup>

A question that has perturbed some critics is why Flannery O'Connor, as a Roman Catholic writer, chose to focus on Protestant religious sects.<sup>90</sup> She was, in fact, "the first fiction writer of outstanding talent to look at the rural South through the eyes of Roman Catholic orthodoxy."<sup>91</sup> The striking religious activities of backwoods fundamentalists clearly provide excellent material for fiction, but, as Kathleen Feeley explains, Miss O'Connor "uses the local scene only as a starting place for the transcendent extensions of her thought"--that is, "as an entrance to Christian theology."<sup>92</sup>

Miss O'Connor herself insisted, "As a fiction writer who is a Southerner, I use the idiom and the manners of the country I know, but I don't consider that I write about the South."<sup>93</sup> As she once wrote to a friend, "Writers like myself who don't use Catholic settings or characters, good or bad, are trying to make it plain that personal loyalty to the person of Christ is imperative, is the structure of man's nature, his necessary direction, etc. The Church, as institution, doesn't come into it one way or another."<sup>94</sup> She further declared, "It becomes more and more difficult in America to make belief believable, but in this the Southern writer has the greatest possible advantage. He lives in the Bible Belt."<sup>95</sup>

Flannery O'Connor was well aware that "while the South is hardly Christ-centered, it is most certainly Christ-haunted."<sup>96</sup> As Louis Rubin emphasizes:

The ways of the fundamentalist South, especially in its more primitive levels of religious experience, are not those of the Roman Catholic Church. Primitive Protestantism in the South is puritanical . . . ; the struggle against Satan is individual, continuous and desperate, and salvation is a personal problem, which comes not through ritual and sacrament, but in the gripping fervor of immediate confrontation with eternity.<sup>97</sup>

Nonetheless, Miss O'Connor felt herself to be basically in tune with that South:

The religion of the South is a do-it-yourself religion, something which I as a Catholic find painful and touching and grimly comic. It's full of unconscious pride that lands [these people] in all sorts of ridiculous religious predicaments. They have nothing to correct their practical heresies and so they work them out dramatically. If this were merely comic to me, it would be no good, but I accept the same fundamental doctrines of sin and redemption and judgment that they do.<sup>98</sup>

Flannery O'Connor acknowledged that the Catholic writer

"in the South is forced to follow the spirit into strange places and to recognize it in many forms not totally congenial to him."<sup>99</sup> But in penetrating to the "human aspiration" underlying that kind of religion,

he sees not only what has been lost to the life he observes, but more, the terrible loss to us in the Church of human faith and passion. . . . His interest and sympathy may very well go--as I know my own does--directly to those aspects of Southern life where the religious feeling is most intense and where its outward forms are farthest from the Catholic, and most revealing of a need that only the Church can fill.<sup>100</sup>

She concludes that, in a secular world, the Catholic writer "is in a particular position to appreciate and cherish the Protestant South, to remind us of what we have and what we must keep."<sup>101</sup>

Marion Montgomery reinforces Miss O'Connor's stand:

When she chooses to present [the] fundamentalist position . . . , it is in order that by the shocking presentation of that supposedly "fanatical" position she may highlight the repulsive grotesqueness of the sentimentality which has rejected it. On the question of the Incarnation, she is herself at least 99 percent insistent. That is why, in looking at general tendencies among her fellow Catholics, she expresses the belief and the hope that they will themselves come once more to "read the Bible."<sup>102</sup>

In light of all this, it is not surprising that Flannery O'Connor has been regarded in some quarters as an outstanding writer of "ecumenical fiction." According to Sister Kathleen Feeley, "Flannery's stories describe overt religious activities which are signs--even if distorted ones--of the imminence of belief. In this way her stories are truly ecumenical--beyond sects and dogmas, and embracing all mankind."<sup>103</sup> Likewise, Sister, Mariella Gable maintains that literature has concretized the new ecumenical spirit because "it has spoken with power and originality in the fiction of

Flannery O'Connor," for "through her own intimate experience with the non-Catholic Christians of the South she has discovered firsthand . . . that her own people are perfect tools through which to communicate the Catholic truths about which she cares so much."<sup>104</sup> As Hyman expresses it, "Protestant Fundamentalism is . . . Miss O'Connor's metaphor, in literary terms, for Roman Catholic truth (in theological terms, this reflects ecumenicism)."<sup>105</sup>

But Heiney and Downs insist that such an interpretation (specifically, Hyman's) is wrong: "She is about as ecumenical as the masses of Dublin Catholics who have resisted strongly the efforts of Pope John and Pope Paul in this direction."<sup>106</sup> Equally unconvinced, Schott asserts that she no doubt considered "Vatican II an 'Eyetalian' conspiracy against the blood of Christ and the one true faith."<sup>107</sup>

Flannery O'Connor did admit that "one reason why I can write about Protestant believers better than Catholic believers [is] because they express their belief in diverse kinds of dramatic action which is obvious enough for me to catch. I can't write about anything subtle."<sup>108</sup> The variety of the South and the religion there, as she pointed out, give the writer "the widest range of possibilities imaginable," and the writer "is bound by the reasonable possibilities, not the probabilities of his culture."<sup>109</sup>

But Miss O'Connor also made this particularly revealing comment:

To know oneself is to know one's region. It is also to know the world, and it is also, paradoxically, a form of exile from that

world. The writer's value is lost, both to himself and to his country, as soon as he ceases to see that country as a part of himself, and to know oneself is, above all, to know what one lacks. The first product of self-knowledge is humility, and this is not a virtue conspicuous in any national character.<sup>110</sup>

Driskell and Brittain point out that

she did not sneer at the religious intensity of her part of the world, where the people she knew fell generally into two groups--the fanatics and the others. The critics who see her characters yielding before the madness of fanaticism and assume that the author deplores such madness know neither Miss O'Connor nor her region; she recognized the "incredible innocence" [to be found in] the Bible Belt.<sup>111</sup>

As for those "others," Irving Howe notes that Flannery O'Connor "can be slyly amusing in regard to the genteel segments of the Southern middle class, partly because she knows them with an assurance beyond sentimentality or hatred."<sup>112</sup> And Preston Browning points out that, unlike the average educated Protestant,

she felt no compunction . . . to dissociate herself from Southern Protestantism in its more aberrant and exotic forms; and, while she satirizes certain aspects of sectarian fundamentalism, she never satirizes the fervor of fundamentalist belief nor its passionate concern for salvation. . . . I think it was the Southern fundamentalist's belief in the mystery surrounding human existence which appealed to Flannery O'Connor and which, together with these other features of Southern folk religion, provided her with a ready-to-hand and indigenous frame of reference within which her own vision could be given artistic form.<sup>113</sup>

Nevertheless, as Rubin observes,

however much Miss O'Connor may admire certain aspects of Southern fundamentalism, . . . as a Roman Catholic [she] is both ill at ease with the messianic fervor of the direct prophetic revelation, and profoundly suspicious of its consequences.

Therefore, while her fundamentalists may retain the religious spirit in an otherwise secularized society, they are nonetheless and inevitably portrayed as grotesques.<sup>114</sup>

And that brings up another matter that has given critics of Miss O'Connor's fiction so much to ponder: her predilection for the grotesque. Indeed, "grotesque" has been



called "her favorite word."<sup>115</sup> She insisted that her work was the art of the grotesque, and she was disconcerted when some critics placed her in the School of Southern Degeneracy and was insulted when others placed her in the Southern Gothic School. "'Degeneracy,' she said, 'at least can be taken in a moral sense,' for it suggests a standard to degenerate from; but 'the Gothic is a degeneracy which is not recognized as such.'"<sup>116</sup>

Perhaps the critics who so perturbed her did not grasp the meaning of the word "grotesque." Philip Thomson describes it "as a fundamentally ambivalent thing, as a violent clash of opposites, and hence, in some of its forms at least, as an appropriate expression of the problematical nature of existence"--that is, it is "the unresolved clash of incompatibles in both work and effect."<sup>117</sup> Muller sees the grotesque character as "one who either exerts himself against the absurd or who is a part of the absurd. This character frequently assumes recognizable postures: guilt, obsession, and madness are among his peculiarities."<sup>118</sup> Thus, as Thomson observes, the grotesque "serves to bring the horrifying and disgusting aspects of existence to the surface, there to be rendered less harmful by the introduction of a comic perspective. . . . [Kayser's] notion about the grotesque 'exorcising the demonic' amounts essentially to the same thing."<sup>119</sup>

Miss O'Connor said her stories were grotesque "because that is the nature of my talent."<sup>120</sup> Yet when one of her stories was called grotesque, she said that she preferred it

to be called literal, "in the same sense that a child's drawing is literal"; that is, he is not trying to distort but to set down precisely what he sees, and just as "he sees lines that create motion," she, as a writer, was interested in creating "lines of spiritual motion."<sup>121</sup> But she maintained that in fiction that is intentionally grotesque, "the writer has made alive some experience which we are not accustomed to observe every day, or which the ordinary man may never experience in his ordinary life."<sup>122</sup> And though her grotesque characters may be comic, she pointed out that they are "not primarily so. They seem to carry an invisible burden; their fanaticism is a reproach, not merely an eccentricity."<sup>123</sup> Miss O'Connor realized, Muller says, "that the grotesque was the ideal vehicle for objectifying fears, obsessions, and compulsions."<sup>124</sup>

Flannery O'Connor viewed the writer as a prophet who is "a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque."<sup>125</sup> In defense of her use of grotesquerie, she made a statement that was later frequently quoted:

Whenever I'm asked why Southern writers particularly have a penchant for writing about freaks, I say it is because we are still able to recognize one. To be able to recognize a freak, you have to have some conception of the whole man, and in the South the general conception of man is still, in the main, theological.<sup>126</sup>

She therefore felt that "writers who see by the light of their Christian faith will have, in these times, the sharpest eyes for the grotesque, for the perverse, and for the unacceptable."<sup>127</sup>

Muller makes an excellent point when he observes that the eschatological themes of Hieronymus Bosch [1450?-1516], concerned with Heaven and Hell, the Last Judgment, and the Deadly Seven, are similar in many respects to the main literary preoccupations of Flannery O'Connor. In fact, Bosch's most famous painting, the Millennium triptych, provides a gloss on what Miss O'Connor termed her "stories of original sin." . . . Like Bosch, Flannery O'Connor creates a landscape wherein life is already hellish, and where men are possessed by demons and devils who completely control their souls and who subject them to excruciating torment. Her own Millennium canvas, dominated by the unexpected and disconnected, the malformed and the estranged, projects what is perhaps the most consistently grotesque body of work in our time. What both Bosch and Miss O'Connor present . . . is a violation of the limits which have been laid down by God for man. Thus, for these two artists, the grotesque does not function gratuitously, but in order to reveal underlying and essentially theological concepts.<sup>128</sup>

Flannery O'Connor insisted, "We're all grotesque and I don't think the Southerner is any more grotesque than anyone else."<sup>129</sup> Thus, "what most people consider to be normal is actually grotesque," Muller says, "whereas the grotesque itself, because of its pervasiveness, is merely reality."<sup>130</sup> Driskell and Brittain, who are themselves Georgians, claim that, to some Georgians, "the people who best understand Flannery O'Connor's work see nothing grotesque about it at all: they see only that she has captured important elements of life as it is and that her regional peculiarities are true of all regions in varying degrees."<sup>131</sup>

But Frederick Hoffman maintains that, in order to coerce the reader "into accepting the validity of religious states," Miss O'Connor had to exaggerate:

The spirit of evil abounds, and the premonition of disaster is almost invariably confirmed. Partly, this is because the scene is itself grotesquely exaggerated (though eminently plausible at the same time); partly it is because Christian sensibilities have been, not so much blunted as rendered bland and over-simple.<sup>132</sup>

Bleikasten, while granting that in Miss O'Connor's

fiction the grotesque is not "merely . . . the gratuitous play of a perverse imagination,"<sup>133</sup> is ambivalent about her use of it. He realizes that

in her eyes, the grotesque can no more be dissociated from the supernatural than evil can be separated from the mysteries of faith. The grotesque has the power of revelation; it manifests the irruption of the demonic in man and brings to light the terrifying face of a world literally dis-figured by evil. The derangement of minds and deformity of bodies point to a deeper sickness, invisible but more irremediably tragic, the sickness of the soul.<sup>134</sup>

Nevertheless, Bleikasten contends that

her vigorous denunciation of spiritual sickness is not devoid of ambiguity, and its ambiguity partly proceeds from the very rage with which she fustigates man's sins and follies. . . . With methodic thoroughness and almost sadistic glee, O'Connor exploits all the resources of her talent to reduce the human to the nonhuman. . . .

Hence a world both frozen and frantic, both ludicrous and threatening. O'Connor's landscapes--her fierce, fiery suns, her blank or blood-drenched skies, her ominous woods--are landscapes of nightmare. . . . Yet, even though O'Connor defended her use of the grotesque as a necessary strategy of her art, one is left with the impression that in her work it eventually became the means of a savage revilement of the whole of creation.<sup>135</sup>

Drake, by contrast, emphasizes that Miss O'Connor was not simply an exponent of the morbid: "In her view, physical or mental deformity of the outward and visible sort always suggests inner, spiritual deformity," so that man's "efforts to assert his will, to provide his own 'savior,'" turn him into something "non-human, sometimes even inhuman. Human beings are most human and their personalities as individuals are most nearly fulfilled, she implies, when they remember the Source of all Humanity."<sup>136</sup> As Irving Malin says, "The Christian writer believes that sin and the grotesque are joined because sin violates cosmic order. When a sinner is 'proud,' he disturbs 'the great chain of being'; he steps out of his spiritual domain and in the attempt to rise--to God's

loftiness?--falls into animalistic depths. He becomes freakish."<sup>137</sup> Thus, as James Farnham puts it, Flannery O'Connor "sees modern man as an often grotesque figure, a caricature of his true self, and in showing what man is she is showing what he could be."<sup>138</sup>

Browning, like Bleikasten, feels that Miss O'Connor "reveals a penchant for the twisted, the abnormal, and the grotesque which surpasses their usefulness as technical devices."<sup>139</sup> But this suggests to him that

she believed, with Thomas Mann, that "certain attainments of the soul and the intellect are impossible without disease, without insanity, without spiritual crime." Presumably for this reason so many of her protagonists are violent, neurotic, oftentimes criminal beings, and, without glorifying criminality per se, she more than once implies that the criminality and the spirituality (actual or potential) of these people are correlative qualities.<sup>140</sup>

It was, Browning believes, "by way of the grotesque [that] she discovered a means of projecting a Christian view of man which was at the same time a 'whole' view," for "the grotesque becomes (almost inevitably) the style" of those who recognize "man's existential estrangement from the ground of his being."<sup>141</sup>

In Rubin's opinion, "her true grotesques are those who are spiritually maimed and twisted, who cannot view the everyday life around them with the equanimity and complacency that ordinary, 'well-adjusted' people manage."<sup>142</sup> Yet, as Muller astutely observes, Miss O'Connor's "true cultural grotesques are the invariably well-mannered members of the community who ignore the spiritual foundation of their culture, . . . those who substitute sanctimoniousness for true Christian virtue."<sup>143</sup> But, as he also points out, she incisively

depicts "degeneracy at all social levels," and therefore the "defects in nature and spirit" in all her characters "are what estrange them from the community and from God."<sup>144</sup> As Henry Taylor notes, "Sometimes the characters who are physically whole turn out to be more spiritually flawed than their physically deformed counterparts."<sup>145</sup>

Mark Edelstein sees Flannery O'Connor as so infuriated by man's stupidity in trying "so hard to escape from his own salvation" that she was compelled to satirize "both man's perversity and his perversion; he is grotesque both in the act of turning away from God and as a result of that act," and Edelstein adds that "the more we read of O'Connor, the more we see the startling similarities between ourselves and her grotesque atheists and hypocrites."<sup>146</sup> Similarly, Dorothy Walters reminds us that "most of O'Connor's grotesques are both amusing and terrifying, for they imply our own potentially destructive involvement with evil, whether we be its victims or its agents."<sup>147</sup>

Miss O'Connor once jotted down the remark: "The grotesque is naturally the bearer of mystery; is dangerous."<sup>148</sup> And as Kathleen Feeley notes, "Her normal characters have no conception of Redemption; her freaks, on the other hand, are caught up in this mystery, usually in a distorted way."<sup>149</sup> Thus, "frequently the grotesque," writes Father May, "is the occasion of theophany."<sup>150</sup>

In essence, Miss O'Connor uses what Muller calls "the Catholic grotesque" as both "vision and technique." Though

her fiction manifests "the contradictory aspects of the universe, [it] nevertheless embodies a transcending principle of order," for "she maneuvers her characters through dark and impenetrable mazes which seemingly lead nowhere, but which unexpectedly reveal an exit into Christianity's backyard."<sup>151</sup>

Muller calls violence a natural corollary and reinforcement of the grotesque,<sup>152</sup> and certainly Miss O'Connor is lavish in depicting it. In fact, the violence in her fiction repels many readers who regard it as truly excessive. She was well aware of this problem and, as usual, eloquently defended herself:

I have found that violence is strangely capable of returning my characters to reality and preparing them to accept their moment of grace. Their heads are so hard that almost nothing else will do the work. . . .

. . . With the serious writer, violence is never an end in itself. It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially. . . . Violence is a force which can be used for good or evil, and among other things taken by it is the kingdom of heaven.<sup>153</sup>

Some critics remain unconvinced. For example, Claire Katz, while acknowledging that Miss O'Connor's arguments for using the literary shock treatment are well-reasoned, contends that

obviously violence is not just a rhetoric demanded by a secularized audience; it expresses the way O'Connor sees. . . . Her peculiar insistence on absolute powerlessness as a condition of salvation so that any assertion of autonomy elicits violence with a vengeance . . . suggests[s] that at the center of her work is a psychological demand which overshadows her religious intent, shaping plot, image and character as well as her distinctive narrative voice.<sup>154</sup>

Nor is Josephine Hendin swayed by Miss O'Connor's defense. She contends that the O'Connor world lacks "profound

human involvement" and that the violence has an "affectless, mechanical quality."<sup>155</sup> Mrs. Hendin apparently offers a left-handed compliment when she writes:

If she set out to make morals, to praise the old values, she ended by engulfing all of them in an icy violence. If she began by mocking or damning her murderous heroes, she ended by exalting them. She grew to celebrate the liberating power of destruction. O'Connor became more and more the pure poet of the Misfit, the oppressed, the psychic cripple, the freak--of all those who are martyred by silent fury and redeemed through violence.<sup>156</sup>

But those critics who find a discontinuity between Miss O'Connor's religious commitment and her artistic one seem to be outnumbered by those who take a benign view of her stated intentions. Hoffmann maintains that, because of what she calls "the Manichaeian spirit of the times," violence "assumes a religious meaning; it is, in effect, the sparks caused by the clash of religious desire and disbelief."<sup>157</sup> As Muller puts it, "The violence in Miss O'Connor's fiction is real, yet it has a metaphysical dimension arising from man's loss of theological identity."<sup>158</sup> If her characters are freaks, says Caroline Gordon, "it is because they have been deprived of the blood of Christ."<sup>159</sup> Thus, Flannery O'Connor believed, according to Jonathan Baumbach, that "in a corrupt world, . . . redemption is possible only through an extreme act, an act of absolute, irrevocable sacrifice."<sup>160</sup> As Sister Jean Marie Kann sees this act:

Exploding upwards into God is the action in all Miss O'Connor's stories. It is always an explosion of violence, generally physical violence, and always resulting from the violent agitation is a revelation, a striking disclosure, sometimes to the characters, always to the reader. This revelation is actually more devastating than the physical violence which preceded it. In the wake of the revelation a sense of mystery lives on--the mystery--the mystery of human nature, its context and complexities.



. . . The violence is born of the clash of illusion with reality. This reality is not only that of perceptible fact; it has a fourth dimension, a kind of space-time continuum, that reaches up to heaven and down to hell.<sup>161</sup>

Miss O'Connor uses violent shock, then, as John Desmond says, "to reawaken the existential sense of loss and human limitation" and to open "'the possibility' of being so that it may suffer penetration by the divine."<sup>162</sup>

Miss O'Connor once said that the Southerner is particularly aware of "man's capacity for destruction" and therefore "seldom underestimates his capacity for evil."<sup>163</sup> And that is the crux of the matter. For, in Muller's words:

Ultimately violence in Flannery O'Connor's fiction forces the reader to confront the problem of evil and to seek alternatives to it. Because Miss O'Connor uses violence to shock her characters (and readers), it becomes the most singular expression of sin within her grotesque landscape. Time and again in her stories violence intrudes suddenly upon the familiar and seemingly secure world and turns the landscape into a secular Hell. . . .

. . . In a world deprived of meaning, in a world which is ruthless and cruel, the only consolation which her characters have is an ability to exploit others through violence. . . . This pleasure in violence . . . deprives men of being. . . . As such, violence becomes a manifestation of the demonic. . . .

. . . The entire strategy of violence in Flannery O'Connor's stories of the grotesque is to reveal how complicity in destruction carries men away from God, away from . . . grace. This is why violent death is the one act of paramount importance in O'Connor's fiction: it serves to define evil in society.<sup>164</sup>

And yet Muller, like many other critics, finds that violence can also be a catharsis and a source of hope, for "at its highest level" it serves "as a means of mortification and purification, as a sign of revelation and election, and as a major vehicle of salvation."<sup>165</sup>

In effect, what Flannery O'Connor does, as Richard Pearce says, is "turn the world upside down" by shocking us "into a clear perception of a universe that is totally

negative and violently irrational. And then through another surprise and inversion she rediscovers and redefines old values and demonstrates the possibility of compassion and meaning."<sup>166</sup>

Indeed, Robert McCown believes that Miss O'Connor's "greatest strength lies in [a] quality which is at a premium among satirists: compassion for those whom she satirizes."<sup>167</sup> Some critics claim, however, that Miss O'Connor's stories are notably devoid of compassion. In fact, Heiney and Downs contend that "her chief flaw may well lie in an apparent lack of compassion . . .--this has been called her 'objectivity' and 'aesthetic distance,' God forbid."<sup>168</sup> Similarly, Martha Stephens charges that "it is often strict and passionless moral judgment that (even in the face of vivid human suffering and devastation) the O'Connor fiction demands--and often on terms that are very difficult to accept."<sup>169</sup> Though it apparently helped assuage the doubt of other critics, the following statement by Miss O'Connor did nothing to relieve Martha Stephens's uneasiness:

I believe that in this country, the general reader has managed to connect the grotesque with the sentimental, for whenever he speaks of it favorably, he seems to associate it with the writer's compassion.

It's considered an absolute necessity these days for writers to have compassion. Compassion is a word that sounds good in anybody's mouth and which no book jacket can do without. It is a quality which no one can put his finger on in any exact critical sense, so it is always safe for anybody to use. Usually I think what is meant by it is that the writer excuses all human weakness because human weakness is human. The kind of hazy compassion demanded of the writer now makes it difficult for him to anti-anything. Certainly when the grotesque is used in a legitimate way, the intellectual and moral judgments implicit in it will have the ascendancy over feeling.<sup>170</sup>

Robert Drake bolsters Miss O'Connor's defense:

Miss O'Connor is a "tough" writer, but she is not an inhumane one. Nor is she ever just plain bitchy. Her damned characters prepare their own ends: they do choose this day whom they will serve. And she refuses to let them off the hook by interfering with the consequences of their actions, which are inevitable. . . . But, for Miss O'Connor, the wages of sin is still death; and she is powerless to intervene in the Hellish consequences which overtake her prideful and self-justified villains.<sup>171</sup>

Miss O'Connor said of compassion that she did not "wish to defame the word," but thought there was a sense in which it could be used "but seldom is--the sense of being in travail with and for creation in its subjection to vanity. This is a sense which implies a recognition of sin; this is a suffering-with, but one which blunts no edges and makes no excuses."<sup>172</sup> Further, when tenderness is "cut off from the person of Christ [it] is wrapped in theory" and, thus "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."<sup>173</sup> This has led Drake to remark that, while Miss O'Connor eschews such tenderness, "she holds fast to charity and mercy; but these of course are, along with Christ, the last things the truly damned want. The gates of her Hell remain locked from the inside."<sup>174</sup>

Equating it with false compassion, Flannery O'Connor hated sentimentality. "In dealing with her characters' agonies, and in sustaining her own," as Muller observes, she "was sardonic rather than sentimental. She wielded a literary hatchet rather than a handkerchief; she realized that only a stern intellect, an adamant faith, and an accretion of humor . . . could confront suffering, violence, and evil in

this world."<sup>175</sup> Kathleen Feeley points out that Miss O'Connor saw sentimentality "as an attempted short cut to the grace of Redemption which overlooks its price."<sup>176</sup> It is in light of this that Father Harold C. Gardiner emphasizes:

Her vision of the grotesque in life (the grotesque in evil and in good, be it recalled) is rooted in the vision that was opened up for the world in the Beatitude . . . "Blessed are the merciful"--not . . . "blessed are the sentimental." Miss O'Connor pities, has mercy, in the only real sense. . . . For her pity--or mercy--is not condescension, it is redemptive.<sup>177</sup>

Miss O'Connor maintained that her stories were hard "because there is nothing harder or less sentimental than Christian realism" and that "to expect too much is to have a sentimental view of life and this is a softness that ends in bitterness. Charity is hard and endures."<sup>178</sup> And so, as McCown notes, "because of her genuine horror of sentimentality, at just the point where many writers would soften, Flannery O'Connor's wit appears to become more wry and her satire more scathing."<sup>179</sup>

Moreover, as Sister M. Bernetta Quinn points out, she "can and repeatedly does highlight the negative. . . . She looks at her world with wide-open eyes and speaks about both the crude and the ugly, as did Christ in His parables, and she avoids any sentimental, deus ex machina endings."<sup>180</sup> In fact, because she was so unsentimental, so ironic, so seemingly harsh, and because she occasionally presented people and things in such an unpalatable way, some critics have decided that she simply looked upon the world with revulsion and disgust.<sup>181</sup> For instance, in Josephine Hendin's opinion, "O'Connor not only destroys all transcendent qualities by

burying them in the body, she regards the body itself as repulsive. In her love for the material, her obsession with animal reality--perhaps best shown by the ubiquitous hogs that fill her world--she resembles the creators of what has been called the literature of disgust."<sup>182</sup> Similarly, Martha Stephens finds that

what is oppressive . . . , what is sometimes intolerable, is her stubborn refusal to see any good, any beauty or dignity or meaning, in ordinary human life on earth. A good indication of what must be called O'Connor's contempt for ordinary human life is the loathing with which she apparently contemplated the human body. She liked to describe faces--she hardly ever passed up an opportunity--and nearly all her faces are ugly.<sup>183</sup>

Webster Schott, on the whole, agrees: "Only the land, trees and sky possess beauty. Her adults look like mistakes; even her children are ugly. Love enters her stories as the comprehension of loss after death of a child or parent."<sup>184</sup>

As for the landscapes, Caroline Gordon also sees their beauty, but it is an "unearthly beauty" that "comes in flashes, like lightning, or, as Robert Fitzgerald has observed, like the action of grace in human affairs."<sup>185</sup> And Naomi Bliven cannot imagine, she says, what more a beauty lover could want, unless it is "descriptions of Tahitian sunsets. Miss O'Connor gives as beauty as it occurs: fleeting, as it proverbially is, or distractedly perceived, or, like the divine commands, rejected."<sup>186</sup>

But Dorothy Walters feels that usually

the atmosphere reflects the characters' dispositions--"sour," "dull," "sullen." The landscape--though it seldom reinforces our sense of the esthetic attractions of the surroundings--serves very well its intended purpose: to set the emotional tone of the narrations. Her characters--themselves so frequently marred inwardly or

outwardly by self-imposed spiritual deprivation--are for the most part oblivious to the beauties about them.<sup>187</sup>

And in Drake's view, the natural world often "seems ugly, if not downright sinister or hostile. . . . But more often it is not nature itself which is ugly here but, rather, what man has made of nature."<sup>188</sup>

As for her characters' lack of physical beauty, Flannery O'Connor apparently concurred with Mircea Eliade's view that "ugliness and deformities, while marking out those who possess them, at the same time make them sacred."<sup>189</sup>

Perhaps it is Dorothy Tuck McFarland who best puts the whole issue of Miss O'Connor's sense of beauty in proper focus:

She does not . . . hate the natural world. Rather, she sees it as a manifestation of divine power, and both its austere beauty and its indifference to the pragmatic concerns of men are signs of its relationship to the divine.

To see the beauty of O'Connor's work, one should consider the work as a whole: the economy and clarity of the imagery, the design and structure of the stories, and that indefinable quality Thomas Aquinas calls "radiance," which stems more from the perfection of the artist's work than from its evocation of what is conventionally understood to be beautiful. It seems clear that O'Connor felt that beauty--like the concept of good--had been sentimentalized into mere prettiness and social acceptability. Her own view of the matter, I would deduce, is that beauty is consubstantial with truth, and that truth, with all its depth and severity, is experienced as beautiful to the degree that it is accurately perceived and appreciated.<sup>190</sup>

Caroline Gordon reports that Flannery O'Connor "who once blithely remarked that she could wait fifty, indeed a hundred, years to have one of her own stories read right, was convinced that the fiction writer has a higher destiny than the one allotted him by the public."<sup>191</sup> Nevertheless, as Alice Walker concludes:

Whether one "understands" her stories or not, one knows her characters are new and wondrous creations in the world and that not one of her stories . . . could have been written by anyone else.

She destroyed the last vestiges of sentimentality in white Southern writing; she caused white women to look ridiculous on pedestals, and she approached her black characters--as a mature artist--with unusual humility and restraint. She also cast spells and worked magic with the written word.<sup>192</sup>

A. L. Rowse, a critic clearly under her spell, has written: "I do not often confess to being humble, but the combination of her genius and her spirit has ground me to humility. There are places in her work . . . into which I dare not venture."<sup>193</sup>

In concluding, one wonders what Flannery O'Connor would have thought about the plethora of criticism her work has elicited, especially in recent years. One wonders, but one can make a good guess, if only from two remarks she made the year before her death. And it is probably only fair to let her have the last word. In her perspicacious fashion, she said, "I hate the racket that's made over a book and all the reviews. The praise as well as the blame--it's all bad for your writing."<sup>194</sup> And, candid to the end, she claimed that "no matter how favorable all the critics in New York City may be, they are an unreliable lot, as incapable now as on the day they were born of interpreting Southern literature to the world."<sup>195</sup>

### Notes

1. By 1977 there were "eighteen books devoted exclusively to her fiction and sixty-five Ph.D dissertations that discuss her works" (Melvin Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, "Second Preface," in Added Dimension, p. xv, citing Robert Golden, in Robert Golden and Mary Sullivan, Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon: A Reference Guide [Boston: Hall, 1977]). In addition, some two hundred major articles had appeared. Five year earlier, in 1972, critical interest had spurred Georgia College at Milledgeville to begin publishing The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin. Father John May remarks that this "quantitatively staggering" critical reaction "may in itself suggest we have been dealing more with a crisis in literary criticism than simply with the phenomenon of an exciting mid-twentieth-century Southern writer" (John R. May, The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976], p. xiii).

2. Gilbert H. Muller, Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. vii.

3. Stuart L. Burns, "O'Connor and the Critics: An Overview," Mississippi Quarterly 27 (Fall 1974):483-495; John R. May, S.J., "Flannery O'Connor: Critical Consensus and the 'Objective' Interpretation," Renascence 27 (Summer 1975):179-192; and Melvin J. Friedman, "'The Perplex Business,'" Flannery O'Connor and Her Critics Enter the 1970s, in Added Dimension, pp. 207-234.

4. Burns, "O'Connor and the Critics," p. 483.

5. Ibid., p. 484. See also p. 24 above, note 9.

6. Ibid., pp. 485-486. See Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain, The Eternal Crossroads: The Art of Flannery O'Connor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971); Hyman, Flannery O'Connor; Carter W. Martin, The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968); Walters, Flannery O'Connor; David Eggenschwiler, The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1972); Feeley, Flannery O'Connor; Miles Orvell, Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972); Josephine Hendin, The World of Flannery O'Connor (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); Muller, Nightmares and Visions; and Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor.

7. Burns, "O'Connor and the Critics," p. 491.

8. Ibid., p. 495.

9. May, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 179.

10. Ibid., p. 185.

11. Ibid., p. 188.



12. Friedman, "'Perplex Business,'" p. 212.
13. Ibid., p. 231.
14. Ibid., pp. 215-234. The works discussed, in addition to those by Hendin and Stephens, are Feeley, Flannery O'Connor; Muller, Nightmares and Visions; Orvell, Invisible Parade; Walters, Flannery O'Connor; and Preston M., Browning, Jr., Flannery O'Connor (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974).
15. O'Connor to John Hawkes, 27 July 1958, Habit of Being, p. 292.
16. A. L. Rowse, "Flannery O'Connor--Genius of the South," Books and Bookmen, May 1972, p. 38.
17. Schott, "Flannery O'Connor," pp. 143, 146.
18. Coffey, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 94.
19. Theodore Solotaroff, "You Can Go Home Again," Book Week, 30 May 1965, p. 13.
20. Joyce Carol Oates, New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature (New York: Vanguard, 1974), p. 160.
21. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 46.
22. Thomas Carlson, "Flannery O'Connor: The Manichean Dilemma," Sewanee Review 77 (Spring 1969):274.
23. Thomas Merton, "Flannery O'Connor," Jubilee 12 (November 1964):53.
24. Gordon, "Heresy in Dixie," p. 269.
25. Elizabeth Bishop, "Flannery O'Connor, 1925-1964," New York Review of Books, 8 October 1964, p. 21.
26. Philip Scharper, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit 8 (Winter 1964):45.
27. Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything, p. xxx.
28. Ibid., pp. xxix-xxx.
29. Jonathan Baumbach, "The Acid of God's Grace: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Georgia Review 17 (Fall 1963):345.
30. Richard Pearce, Perspectives on Modern Fiction from Dostoyevsky to Beckett, Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 67.

31. Jean Marie Kann, O.S.F., "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Catholic World 204 (December 1966):159.
32. Thelma J. Shinn, "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," Contemporary Literature 9, no. 1 (1968):59.
33. Maurice Bassan, "Flannery O'Connor's Way: Shock, with Moral Intent," Renascence 15 (Summer 1963):195. For more on the Gothic style, see p. 48 above, and note 116 below.
34. Schott, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 142.
35. Ibid., p. 146.
36. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, p. 3.
37. Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 156-157.
38. Claire Katz, "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision," American Literature 46 (March 1974):57.
39. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 146.
40. André Bleikasten, "The Heresy of Flannery O'Connor," in Les Américanistes: New French Criticism on Modern American Fiction, ed. Ira D. Johnson and Christiane Johnson (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press Corp., 1978), p. 57.
41. Coffey, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 99.
42. Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 15-16.
43. Gossett, "Flannery O'Connor on Her Fiction," p. 34.
44. O'Connor to Shirley Abbott, 17 March 1956, Habit of Being, p. 147.
45. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 31.
46. Ibid., p. 32.
47. Ibid., pp. 33-34. The two passages first appeared in an essay that Miss O'Connor contributed to The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillan, 1957).
48. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, p. 13, citing T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (New York: Random House, 1950), p. 231.
49. Ibid., pp. 12-13, 14.
50. Ibid., p. 39. Martha Stephens's discomfiture was no doubt triggered by such assertions as "The Catholic sacramental view of life is one that sustains and supports at every turn the vision the storyteller must have if he is going to write fiction at any depth" (O'Connor,

Mystery and Manners, p. 152). For a description of the Bible Belt, see note 95 below.

51. Irving Howe, Celebrations and Attacks: Thirty Years of Literary and Cultural Commentary (New York: Horizon Press, 1979), p. 97.

52. Bleikasten, "Heresy of Flannery O'Connor," p. 70.

53. Ibid., p. 69.

54. Eggenschwiler, Christian Humanism, p. 17, citing O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 157.

55. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 37.

56. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 7.

57. Gordon, "Heresy in Dixie," p. 292.

58. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 17.

59. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

60. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, p. 38.

61. O'Connor to "A," 16 April 1960, Habit of Being, p. 390.

62. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, pp. 15-16.

63. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 6.

64. Orvell, Invisible Parade, p. 27.

65. Preston M. Browning, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," Modern Fiction Studies 19 (Spring 1973):29.

66. Ibid., p. 32.

67. Kazin, Bright Book of Life, p. 57.

68. O'Connor to "A," 25 November 1955, Habit of Being, p. 117.

69. Melvin J. Friedman, Introduction to Added Dimension, p. 10.

70. Coffey, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 96.

71. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 7.

72. Orvell, Invisible Parade, p. 19.

73. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, p. 4.

74. Schott, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 143.

75. Bleikasten, "Heresy of Flannery O'Connor," p. 70.
76. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 37.
77. Burns, "O'Connor and the Critics," p. 484.
78. Eggenschwiler, Christian Humanism, p. 16.
79. Ibid., p. 30. As Flannery O'Connor herself pointed out, "Great fiction involves the whole range of human judgment" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 156).
80. Eggenschwiler, Christian Humanism, p. 6.
81. Naomi Bliven, "Nothing But the Truth," New Yorker, 11 September 1965, p. 220.
82. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, p. 39.
83. May, Pruning Word, pp. xxiv-xxv.
84. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 173.
85. Eggenschwiler, Christian Humanism, p. 12.
86. Walters, Flannery O'Connor, p. 153.
87. George Lensing, "De Chardin's Ideas in Flannery O'Connor," Renascence 17 (Summer 1965):171. Lensing's article, incidentally, was apparently mistitled, for it has nothing whatever to do with Teilhard de Chardin's ideas but rather is mainly about Miss O'Connor's use of humor.
88. Thomas M. Lorch, "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Allegorist," Critique 10, no. 2 (1968):71.
89. Ibid., pp. 79-80, citing C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, (New York, 1958), p. 48.
90. See, for instance, William S. Doxey, "A Dissenting Opinion of Flannery O'Connor's A Good Man Is Hard to Find," Studies in Short Fiction 10 (Spring 1973):199-204, in which Doxey questions whether it is "kosher to confront fundamentalist Protestant characters with Catholic theology" and thereby to structure a story so that only "confirmed initiates" can understand it.
91. Caroline Gordon, Foreword to Flannery O'Connor, by Feeley, p. xii.
92. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 12.
93. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 133.

94. O'Connor to "A," 5 July 1958, Habit of Being, p. 290.

95. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 201. According to Miss O'Connor, "It was about 1919 that Mencken called the South the Bible Belt and the Sahara of the Bozarts" (ibid.). But other sources indicate that H. L. Mencken coined the term around 1925 to describe an area, largely in the South, where ardent religious fundamentalism prevails. See especially Milford M. Mathews, ed., A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 110. Louis Rubin describes the Bible Belt this way: "Beyond the Southern cities the religious sentiment is evangelical all the way--some low-Church Episcopalians and some Presbyterians, who generally constitute the cultural and financial elite, but especially Methodists and Baptists, the last-named ranging from the solid middle-class respectability of the large churches to all manner of Hard-Shell, Fundamentalist, Revivalist, Pentecostal, and other primitive offshoots of evangelical Protestantism. In the little wooden churches of the back-country South and in the unpainted tabernacles of the Southern urban slums, the Pope of Rome is a minion of Satan, and a Catholic priest a mysterious and dangerous man" (Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," in Added Dimension, p. 50).

96. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 44.

97. Rubin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," p. 50. Rubin points out that while there is agreement between Roman Catholicism and rural Southern fundamentalism "on the divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Redemptive Power, [and] the physical resurrection," a number of important differences also exist: "The Catholic Church emphatically does not believe in the direct and unaided revelation of prophecy that is so typical of fundamentalism; Catholicism is a liturgical faith, and the untutored and frenzied emotionalism, unchecked by dogma and unaided by reason, that characterizes primitive fundamentalism is foreign to Catholic religious experience. Catholicism does not dispense with reason; far from it. For the Catholic, reason is a valuable tool to be used within the larger experience of faith. It is the reason of the secular mind, unaided by dogma and faith, that the Catholic Church opposes" (ibid., p. 69). Yet Flannery O'Connor maintained that a Catholic writer living in a religious but non-Catholic society like the South can find "some very fine antidotes to his own worst tendencies. We too much enjoy indulging ourselves in the logic that kills, in making categories smaller and smaller, in prescribing attitudes and proscribing subjects" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 205).

98. O'Connor to John Hawkes, 13 September 1959, Habit of Being, p. 350.

99. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 206.

100. Ibid., pp. 206-207.

101. Ibid., p. 209.

102. Marion Montgomery, "Flannery O'Connor's Transformation of the Sentimental," Mississippi Quarterly 25 (Winter 1972):2-3. Miss O'Connor once told an interviewer: "The fact that Catholics don't see religion through the Bible is a deficiency in Catholics. . . . The biblical revival is going to mean a great deal to Catholic fiction in the future. . . . The Bible 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. The Catholic novelist can learn a great deal from the Protestant South" (Joel Wells, "Off the Cuff," Critic 21 [August-September 1962]:4).

103. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 13.

104. Sister Mariella Gable, O.S.B., "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," American Benedictine Review 15 (June 1964):127, 129. Sister Mariella outlines six key convictions that concretize the ecumenic core in Miss O'Connor's fiction: "1. Scripture is the history of salvation; it is true. 2. Christ redeemed all men and this is the core and center of the meaning of life. . . . 3. Redemptive grace is available to all men. 4. Men are free to use this grace or reject it. . . . 5. The devil exists. He tempts men to unbelief. But he is a fool who by overreaching himself contributes to man's salvation. . . . 6. Modern man has elected to choose, instead of redeeming grace, four kinds of fool's gold," and these are listed as rationalism, humanism ("The professional do-gooders are hollow tin Jesuses"), psychology, and quantifying (ibid., pp. 131-132).

105. Hyman, Flannery O'Connor, p. 39.

106. Donald Heiney and Lenthel H. Downs, Recent American Literature after 1930, Contemporary Literature of the Western World, vol. 4 (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1974), p. 255.

107. Schott, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 143.

108. O'Connor to Sister Mariella Gable, 4 May 1963, Habit of Being, p. 517.

109. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 164-165.

110. Ibid., p. 35.

111. Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, p. 3.

112. Howe, Celebrations and Attacks, p. 98.

113. Preston M. Browning, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," in Adversity and Grace: Studies in Recent American Literature, ed. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., Essays in Divinity, vol. 4 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 158.

114. Rubin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," pp. 69-70.

115. Friedman, Introduction to Added Dimension, p. 6.
116. Bob Dowell, "The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," College English 27 (December 1965):235. Gothic literature has been described as a style "characterized by gloomy settings, violent or grotesque action, and a mood of decay, degeneration, and decadence" (Harry Shaw, Dictionary of Literary Terms [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972], p. 175). Muller helpfully distinguishes the Gothic from the grotesque: "Gothic fiction . . . is a variety of romance which dwells upon imaginative terror in order to create a special atmosphere. Rather than comedy and terror, which are combined in the grotesque, we encounter suspense and terror in the Gothic. . . . Moreover, Gothic romance does not project a valid world vision as does the grotesque: it merely assaults the nerves by making us believe in the horror of the supernatural, whereas the grotesque forces metaphysical problems upon the intellect" (Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 12).
117. Philip Thomson, The Grotesque, The Critical Idiom, vol. 24 (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 11, 61. According to J. A. Cuddon, the word "grotesque" (from Italian grotte: "caves") technically "denotes a kind of decorative ornament consisting of medallions, sphinxes, foliage, rocks and pebbles. Because they were found in grottoes they were called grotteschi. The term came to be applied to paintings which depicted the intermingling of human, animal and vegetable themes and forms. . . . But it does not seem to have been used regularly in a literary context until the 18th c., when it was commonly employed to denote the ridiculous, bizarre, extravagant, freakish and unnatural; in short, aberrations from the desirable norms of harmony, balance and proportion. . . . In literature one is most likely to find grotesque elements in caricature, parody, satire, invective, burlesque, black comedy, the macabre and what is known as the Theatre of the Absurd" (J. A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977], p. 290).
118. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 6.
119. Thomson, The Grotesque, p. 59, citing Wolfgang Kayser, The Grotesque in Art and Literature, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963). Thomson also notes, on p. 63 of his own book, that the grotesque sometimes has "a harder message" than does tragi-comedy, which "points only to the fact that . . . the world is now a vale of tears, now a circus." For the grotesque reveals "that the vale of tears and the circus are one, that tragedy is in some ways comic and all comedy in some way tragic and pathetic. This is perhaps the most profound meaning of the grotesque [and is] characteristic . . . of such dissimilar writers as Kafka and Beckett"--and, one might add, Flannery O'Connor.
120. O'Connor to "A," 18 April 1959, Habit of Being, p. 328. See also James F. Farnham, "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," America 105 (13 May 1961):277.
121. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 113.
122. Ibid., p. 40.

123. Ibid., p. 44.
124. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 21.
125. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 44.
126. Ibid.
127. Ibid., p. 33.
128. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, pp. 3-4
129. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 233. Muller suggests that "Flannery O'Connor's grotesques--deformed in body and soul alike--wrangle with ultimate problems which also must have beset their creator" (Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 2).
130. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 7.
131. Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, p. 5. Flannery O'Connor once wrote to her editor, "Today I got a letter from a man who said he had spent his childhood among characters such as I had portrayed. Poor man. He said since he had seen them in print they burdened his conscience less" (O'Connor to Catharine Carver, 10 August 1955, Habit of Being, p. 95).
132. Frederick J. Hoffman, "The Search for Redemption: Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," in Added Dimension, p. 34.
133. Bleikasten, "Heresy of Flannery O'Connor," p. 56.
134. Ibid.
135. Ibid., pp. 56-57.
136. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 39.
137. Irving Malin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," in Added Dimension, p. 108.
138. Farnham, "Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," p. 277.
139. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," p. 159.
140. Ibid., pp. 159-160, citing Mann as quoted in Ihab Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 26.
141. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," pp. 36, 39.
142. Rubin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," p. 53.
143. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 46.



144. Ibid., p. 49.
145. Henry Taylor, "The Halt Shall Be Gathered Together: Physical Deformity in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Western Humanities Review 22 (Winter 1968):325.
146. Mark G. Edelstein, "Flannery O'Connor and the Problem of Modern Satire," Studies in Short Fiction 12 (Spring 1975):140, 141.
147. Walters, Flannery O'Connor, p. 31.
148. Quoted in Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 29, from a marginal note Miss O'Connor made in Mircea Eliade's Patterns of Comparative Religion, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958).
149. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 57.
150. John R. May, Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), p. 131.
151. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, pp. vii, 18.
152. Ibid., p. 78.
153. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 112, 113.
154. Katz, "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision," p. 56.
155. Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, p. 29.
156. Ibid., p. 42.
157. Hoffman, "Search for Redemption," pp. 45-46.
158. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 77.
159. Gordon, Foreword to Flannery O'Connor, by Feeley, p. x.
160. Baumbach, "Acid of God's Grace," p. 345.
161. Kann, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," p. 158.
162. John F. Desmond, "Flannery O'Connor's Sense of Place," Southern Humanities Review 10 (Summer 1976):256.
163. Quoted in Montgomery, "Flannery O'Connor's Transformation of the Sentimental," p. 18.
164. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, pp. 79, 84-85, 87.
165. Ibid., p. 92.
166. Pearce, Perspectives on Modern Fiction, p. 83.

167. Robert M. McCown, "Flannery O'Connor and the Reality of Sin," Catholic World 188 (January 1959):290.
168. Heiney and Downs, Recent American Literature, p. 255.
169. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, p. 37.
170. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 43.
171. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 36.
172. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 165-166.
173. Ibid., p. 227.
174. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 37.
175. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 2.
176. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 33.
177. Harold C. Gardiner, S. J., "Flannery O'Connor's Clarity of Vision," in Added Dimension, p. 189.
178. O'Connor to "A," 20 July 1955, and to Cecil Dawkins, 9 December 1958, Habit of Being, pp. 90, 308.
179. McCown, "Flannery O'Connor and the Reality of Sin," p. 290.
180. M. Bernetta Quinn, O.S.F., "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances," in Added Dimension, p. 163.
181. McFarland, Flannery O'Connor, p. 115.
182. Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 28-29.
183. Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 9-10.
184. Schott, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 142.
185. Gordon, "Heresy in Dixie," p. 268.
186. Bliven, "Nothing But the Truth," p. 220.
187. Walters, Flannery O'Connor, p. 147.
188. Drake, Flannery O'Connor, p. 39.
189. Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, p. 18, quoted in Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 24. Miss O'Connor, Sister Kathleen notes, marked this quotation in her copy of Eliade's book.
190. McFarland, Flannery O'Connor, pp. 116-117.

191. Gordon, Foreword to Flannery O'Connor, by Feeley, pp. xi-xii.
192. Alice Walker, "Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor," Ms., December 1975, p. 106.
193. Rowse, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 39.
194. O'Connor to Sister Mariella Gable, 4 May 1963, Habit of Being, p. 517.
195. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 55.

PART II

GOOD AND EVIL IN A DESACRALIZED WORLD

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PROBLEM OF GOOD AND EVIL

Like Dostoevsky, Conrad, and Hawthorne before her, Flannery O'Connor wanted to plunge into the depths of the human heart. Relentlessly, savagely, and not without a touch of black humor, she sought to rip the veil that obscures the ugly, the cruel, the corrupt, and the foul that exist in life. The demonic is real, she insisted, but the holy is not less real. Indeed, for her, the demonic and the holy coalesce. And the holy is, in the last analysis, what matters most. "The only concern, so far as I see it," she wrote to a friend who was also a Catholic writer, "is what Tillich calls the 'ultimate concern.' It is what makes the stories spare and what gives them any permanent quality they may have."<sup>1</sup> The relevant passage from Tillich reads: "The holy is the quality of that which concerns man ultimately. Only that which is holy can give man ultimate concern, and only that which gives man ultimate concern has the quality of holiness."<sup>2</sup>

To Miss O'Connor, sin was "part of the mystery of existence."<sup>3</sup> She saw evil as "the defective use of good," as "not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured."<sup>4</sup> She found that the writer who "believes that our life is and will remain essentially mysterious" is one who

"will be interested in characters who are forced out to meet evil and grace and who act on a trust beyond themselves-- whether they know very clearly what it is they act upon or not."<sup>5</sup> "The peculiar insignia of Flannery O'Connor's stories," Preston Browning suggests, is therefore the "shock of evil, by means of which an assault is made upon the psyche of the protagonist (and hence upon that of the reader), the intent being to tear away the protecting layers of moralism and rationalization, revealing thereby the spiritual malaise and corruption which infests the unconscious."<sup>6</sup>

Invoking the name of one of her favorite authors, Flannery O'Connor declared:

When Conrad said that his aim as an artist was to render the highest possible justice to the visible universe, he was speaking with the novelist's surest instinct. The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality. This in no way hinders his perception of evil but rather sharpens it, for only when the natural world is seen as good does evil become intelligible as a destructive force and a necessary result of our freedom.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, she asserted that the fiction writer who is concerned with the "world of things and human relationships" as reality and approaches "a contemplative knowledge of the mystery they embody" is concerned "not only . . . with the good in them, but with the evil, and not only with the evil, but also with that aspect which appears neither good nor evil, which is not yet Christianized."<sup>8</sup>

Even if a writer does not happen to think in theological terms, according to Miss O'Connor, drama almost always "bases itself on the bedrock of original sin."<sup>9</sup> But she distinguishes the Christian writer from "his pagan colleagues"

as one who recognizes "sin as sin. According to his heritage he sees it not as sickness or an accident of environment, but as a responsible choice of offense against God which involves his eternal future."<sup>10</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Ihab Hassan says of Miss O'Connor: "Few writers command a sharper sense of evil, a greater degree of control in the face of demonic willfulness or baleful passions."<sup>11</sup> She manifested her understanding of the need for such control when she warned against a writer's misuse of his talent: "We have plenty of examples in this world of poor things being used for good purposes. God can make any indifferent thing, as well as evil itself, an instrument for good; but I submit that to do this is the business of God and not of any human being."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, though she realized that "the good is the ultimate reality," she maintained that

the ultimate reality has been weakened in human beings as a result of the Fall, and it is this weakened life that we see. And it is wrong, moreover, to assume that the writer chooses what he will see and what he will not. What one sees is given by circumstances and by the nature of one's particular kind of perception.<sup>13</sup>

Among the things that Flannery O'Connor saw was that "in practice, the Southerner seldom underestimates his own capacity for evil."<sup>14</sup> But, beyond that, as she emphasized:

In the South where most people believe in original sin . . . , our sense of evil is still just strong enough to make us skeptical about most modern solutions, no matter how we long to embrace them. We are still held by a sense of mystery, however much against our will. The prophet-freaks of Southern literature are not images of the man in the street. They are images of the man forced out to meet the extremes of his own nature. . . . The writer owes a great debt to everything he sees around him, and in Georgia he is particularly blessed in having about him a collection of goods and evils which are intensely stimulating to the imagination.<sup>15</sup>

Of herself she said:

I am not a mystic and I do not lead a holy life. Not that I can claim any interesting or pleasurable sins (my sense of the devil is strong) but I know all about the garden variety, pride, gluttony, envy and sloth, and what is more to the point, my virtues are as timid as my vices. I think sin occasionally brings one closer to God, but not habitual sin and not this petty kind that blocks every small good. A working knowledge of the devil can be very well had from resisting him.<sup>16</sup>

The major role the devil plays in Miss O'Connor's fiction is thus well-nigh inevitable, and she made no bones about how extremely important she thought him:

To insure our sense of mystery, we need a sense of evil which sees the devil as a real spirit who must be made to name himself, and not simply to name himself as vague evil, but to name himself with his specific personality for every occasion. Literature, like virtue, does not thrive in an atmosphere where the devil is not recognized as existing both in himself and as a dramatic necessity for the writer.<sup>17</sup>

Browning was undoubtedly speaking for many critics when he commented that "no American author since Hawthorne has made such extensive use of the devil."<sup>18</sup>

To writer John Hawkes in particular, Miss O'Connor wrote about the devil, again and again hammering her point home: "I want to be certain that the Devil gets identified as the Devil and not simply taken for this or that psychological tendency"; "I suppose the Devil teaches most of the lessons that lead to self-knowledge"; "My Devil has a name, a history and a definite plan. His name is Lucifer, he's a fallen angel, his sin is pride, and his aim is the destruction of the Divine Plan."<sup>19</sup> Eventually, on the evidence of both her fiction and her letters to him, Hawkes wrote an article on "Flannery O'Connor's devil," in which he claimed that she was "on the devil's side," his argument being that



the creative process transforms the writer's objective Catholic knowledge of the devil into an authorial attitude in itself in some measure diabolical. This is to say that in Flannery O'Connor's most familiar stories and novels the "disbelief . . . that we breathe in with the air of the times" emerges fully as two-sided or complex as "attraction for the Holy."<sup>20</sup>

Preston Browning grants that "there is in her authorial voice a measure of the 'diabolical' and, in her stories and novels, a preoccupation with evil amounting almost to an obsession."<sup>21</sup> But, in defense of Miss O'Connor, he contends that Hawkes is wrong in his conclusions: "It is not disbelief in the Holy which emerges as two-sided and complex, but instead belief in the demonic--in its reality, its power, and its mystery. In this sense, and in this sense only, Flannery O'Connor was on the devil's side."<sup>22</sup> To those who feel that Miss O'Connor gave more emphasis to God's wrath than to his love, Browning suggests that

if the validity of her assessment of what Hawkes calls "our godless actuality" be granted, her depiction of the violence and apocalypticism of the encounter with the Holy is more easily understood. For, contemplating the moral and spiritual wasteland of our time, Flannery O'Connor was surely inclined to agree with T. S. Eliot that "[t]he worst that can be said of most of our malefactors, from statesmen to thieves, is that they are not men enough to be damned." . . . "It is better," Eliot says, "to do evil than to do nothing: at least we exist."<sup>23</sup>

Paul Tillich takes into account both "divine holiness" and "demonic holiness," because, in his view, "the divine embraces itself and the demonic."<sup>24</sup> Browning sees in this a clue to Miss O'Connor's purpose: that is, "to resuscitate the notion of demonic holiness in order to recover the idea of holiness itself; and through the affirmation of the reality of holiness (both divine and demonic), she posits Being where many of her contemporaries find nothingness."<sup>25</sup> He compares

her dialectic with that of Dostoevsky:

"The dialectic of good," Dostoevsky believed, "is set in motion through suffering--and often through sin"; the same, I think, can be said of Flannery O'Connor. . . . [For] just as Haze Motes [in Wise Blood] proclaims that "the only way to the truth is through blasphemy," Miss O'Connor seems to say that, in an age so well adjusted to its own tawdry norms that the very idea of God becomes precarious, the only way to the Holy is through evil.<sup>26</sup>

Sallie McFague TeSelle also is reminded of Dostoevsky in reading Flannery O'Connor's stories, in which evil is so pervasive. "Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment," she points out, "'had to' commit murder to start on the road to redemption. . . . God and Christ fight for the human soul."<sup>27</sup>

Marion Montgomery makes an important point of Miss O'Connor's insistence "that, unless one face the evil and recognize it as personal, he is doomed continually to that dark night. In other words, she denies the comfortable belief, prevalent among us, that by supposing ourselves personally unrelated to evil, we thereby become good."<sup>28</sup> We do not, says Montgomery, care to think that we each are "besotted by an incipient private evil we thought ourselves saved from through the removal of guilt complexes. Nor is this uncomfortable reaction our way of saying 'Get thee behind me Satan.' . . . It is rather another fact of our denial of the existence of Satan, and so is a substitute battle."<sup>29</sup> As Miss O'Connor herself expressed it, "The devil's greatest wile, Baudelaire has said, is to convince us that he does not exist."<sup>30</sup> And she cautioned, quoting 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 the dragon."<sup>31</sup> Montgomery concludes that even "in the most mundane circumstances," this dragon "must be confronted," and Miss O'Connor "insists upon that confrontation as a primary concern of her art."<sup>32</sup>

"Most frequently," says Naomi Bliven, "her characters sin against charity; they take without giving. They are, in Milton's phrase, 'blind mouths.'"<sup>33</sup> And Miss O'Connor refuses to be lenient with the offenders. As Dorothy Walters remarks:

They are totally culpable for their "sins of omission" and are left to expiate fully through suffering and awareness of guilt the burden of their misdeeds. Yet . . . the guilty, suffering spirit is a more likely recipient of grace than the apathetic soul smugly entrenched in notions of its own moral superiority. Thus violence--committed upon the human candidate or indirectly fostered (upon others) through failure to act--plays a major role in O'Connor's works as a drastic means of redemption.<sup>34</sup>

Flannery O'Connor freely admitted, "In my stories a reader will find that the devil accomplishes a good deal of groundwork that seems to be necessary before grace is effective."<sup>35</sup> She found that "Grace, to the Catholic way of thinking, can and does use as its medium the imperfect, purely human, and even hypocritical. Cutting yourself off from Grace is a very decided matter, requiring a real choice, act of will, and affecting the very ground of the soul."<sup>36</sup> She realized, however, that "all human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful."<sup>37</sup>

She indicated how clearly the attempt to incorporate grace in her fiction was tied to her concept of evil:

Catholics believe that all creation is good and that evil is the wrong use of good and that without Grace we use it wrong most of the time. It's almost impossible to write about supernatural Grace in fiction. We almost have to approach it negatively. As to natural Grace, we have to take that the way it comes--through nature. In any case, it operates surrounded by evil.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Sister Rose Alice sees as the "almost obsessive theme" in Miss O'Connor's stories "the subtle insistence on the tragedy of 'un-Redemption,' the warping evil of unaided human nature, the ineluctable paradox of grace working through and within the humanly repulsive."<sup>39</sup> Or, as James Farnham says, "The redemption of man is perverted, and without grace man finds suffering and injustice maddeningly incomprehensible. Miss O'Connor's most evil characters are acutely aware of Christ, making their pain more intense by their blasphemy of Him."<sup>40</sup>

Her characters are, however, given a chance to perceive their self-deception and thus to take, in Kathleen Feeley's words, "the first step toward truth, which is, in turn, the necessary condition of Redemption."<sup>41</sup> It was surely with a similar thought in mind that Bob Dowell capsulized what he regards as Flannery O'Connor's "view of ultimate reality":

Though willing to exploit his unwilling antics, Miss O'Connor never loses sight of man as a created being whose soul is precious to his Creator. Despite his ignorance, his rebelliousness, and his tendency toward evil, man still realizes his fullest potential by participating in a supernatural relation with his Creator. This depends upon his recognition of the existence of evil, of his own tendency toward evil, and his ability to triumph over evil through grace, a supernatural gift from God which comes only with man's full realization of his lost condition and his dependence on Christ. With this realization, . . . man's salvation is begun; he can then begin to fulfill the purpose of his existence, which is to reflect the goodness of his Creator and to share the happiness of heaven with Him.<sup>42</sup>

Because Flannery O'Connor so greatly admired Teilhard de Chardin and because she chose one of his statements as the title for her posthumous collection, Teilhard's concept of evil must be at least briefly compared with hers. For Teilhard did not believe in the devil as an entity, as she so obviously did. Moreover, many critics have charged him--wrongly, as it turns out--with either completely ignoring the problem of evil or dismissing it as insignificant.<sup>43</sup>

Though not condemning Teilhard's image of the world, Father Gustave Weigel has noted that "the problem of Original Sin, the role of the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ in the development of mankind, the distinction of natural and supernatural, are all theological preoccupations that find little solace in his phenomenology."<sup>44</sup> Marion Montgomery comments that Teilhard "rejects the concept of original sin as it touches willfulness, but this is the doctrine upon which [Flannery O'Connor] builds her fiction."<sup>45</sup> It was perhaps because of this apparent incompatibility of ideas that Miss O'Connor wrote to a friend concerning Teilhard, "Even if there were errors in his thought, there were none in his heart."<sup>46</sup>

Montgomery points out that, in Teilhard's accounting, evil is an evil in matter, in the flesh, and not a willfully elected diminishment of spirit as in orthodox theology. That is, hell is a structural element in the universe, not a state of spiritual denial. It is a burning up of the world through which and from which spirit is engendered toward a final oneness that ultimately consumes all multiplicity.<sup>47</sup>

In Teilhard's conception of the Second Coming, the question is that of, as he says, "'panchristizing' the

Universe," and in line with this, "Evil (no longer punishment for a fault, but a 'sign and effect' of Progress) and Matter (no longer a guilty and inferior element, but 'the stuff of the spirit') take on a meaning diametrically opposed to the meaning habitually considered as Christian."<sup>48</sup> This leads Montgomery to observe:

An obvious error here, as Maritain points out, is to mistake as a Christian conception of matter, rather than a gnostic error, that matter is "a guilty and inferior element." In the end, the philosophical antecedents of Teilhard the scientist turn out to be Zoroastrian and Platonic with a twist given each. Evil is a passive force, upon which good ultimately depends. Thus good does not ultimately triumph over evil, it becomes one in it, thereby rescuing, since the terms of evil are the terms of physics energy, the world of matter from Plato's rejection.<sup>49</sup>

Montgomery notes that Flannery O'Connor "never spoke in direct opposition to Teilhard," but contends that

it is abundantly evident that she agrees with Claude Tresmontant's doctrinal position which he expresses in rejecting Teilhard's vision, particularly attacking Teilhard's concept of original sin: "Sin is not such a thing, it is an act of freedom, and original sin is the deprivation of divine life. Neither matter nor the multiple have anything to do with it."<sup>50</sup>

Montgomery concludes with Maritain's reminder, "The history of the world progresses at the same time in the line of evil and in the line of good," and this, Montgomery adds, "is another way of saying that the basic human problem is a constant of history which history, even Teilhard's version of it, cannot resolve."<sup>51</sup>

The blind spot in Teilhard's thinking, as many critics see it, is that he does not pinpoint sin as a failure of love, but rather views evil as part of the growing pains involved in the cosmic process. Thus, in referring to his system of phenomenology, Teilhard says:

Taken together the three branches of the system (physics, apologetics and mysticism) suggest and readily lend themselves to forming an outline of a Metaphysics of Union, dominated by love, in which even the Problem of Evil is given an acceptable intellectual solution (the statistical necessity of disorders within a multitude in process of organization).<sup>52</sup>

Teilhard admits, "The problem of evil, that is to say the reconciling of our failures, even the purely physical ones, with creative goodness and creative power, will always remain one of the most disturbing mysteries of the universe for both our hearts and our minds."<sup>53</sup> To Teilhard there are four types of evil: the evil of "disorder and failure," of "decomposition," of "solitude and anxiety," and of growth."<sup>54</sup> And he points to

a particular type of cosmos in which evil appears necessarily and as abundantly as you like in the course of evolution--not by accident (which would not much matter) but through the very structure of the system. A universe which is involuted and interiorised, but at the same time and by the same token a universe which labours, which sins, and which suffers. Arrangement and centration: a doubly conjugated operation which . . . can only be effected objectively if it is rigorously paid for--for reasons and at charges which, if only we knew them, would enable us to penetrate the secret of the world around us.<sup>55</sup>

Yet though he believes that "the final victory of good over evil can only be completed in the total organisation of the world,"<sup>56</sup> Teilhard also maintains that God will make the fallen world good:

He will take His revenge, if one may use the expression--by making evil itself serve the higher good of His Faithful, the very evil which the present state of creation does not allow Him to suppress immediately. . . . God, without sparing us the partial deaths, nor the final death, which form an essential part of our lives, transfigures them by integrating them in a better plan--provided we trust lovingly in Him. Not only our unavoidable ills but our faults, even our most deliberate ones, can be embraced in that transformation, provided always we repent of them. Not everything is immediately good to those who seek God; but everything is capable of becoming good: omnia convertuntur in bonum.<sup>57</sup>

Such statements have moved some critics to view Teilhard's treatment of the problem of evil as far from reprehensible. For example, Michael Murray remarks, "Teilhard is not so much concerned with the judgment to be made upon obdurate individuals . . . , but with the objective effects of evil in history and with their subjective repercussions upon the Christian," and therefore "it is precisely because of man's natural resistance to grace that the perpetrator of evil, as well as his victims, has a role to play in creation."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, J. Edgar Bruns points out that

if the word "sin" does not often appear in [Teilhard's] pages, "every egoistic solution of life" (p. 263 [of The Phenomenon of Man]), a phrase covering everything from serious sin to imperfection, does, and as an attitude it is rejected. Be it noted, also, that the divergent effect of egoism is, ultimately, nothing less than a turning away from union with Omega, i.e., with Christ.<sup>59</sup>

And, finally, it hardly seems that Teilhard's theory of evil is irreconcilable with Flannery O'Connor's if only because of this one statement: "And now I realize that the fires of hell and the fires of heaven are not two different forces but are contrary manifestations of one and the same energy."<sup>60</sup>

Driskell and Brittain put Miss O'Connor's concept of evil--and, incidentally, Teilhard's too--in perspective when they write:

Not a denial of charity, not a negation of human love, but a recognition that these virtues serve only to illuminate some parts of the darkness rather than to light the whole--this is the meaning of Flannery O'Connor's insistence upon human imperfection, original sin, and man's grotesque state. Where time, eternity, and place conjoin, there is the communion of saints, and there Miss O'Connor's fanatics, her killers, her demented souls, and her selfish do-gooders rise out of their grotesqueness and converge in their awareness of themselves as sinners in a redeemed world. The message is hope.<sup>61</sup>



Notes

1. O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins, 19 May 1957, Habit of Being, p. 221.
2. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, 3 vols. in 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), I:215.
3. O'Connor to Eileen Hall, 10 March 1956, Habit of Being, p. 143.
4. O'Connor to "A," 13 January 1956, *ibid.*, p. 129; and O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 209.
5. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 41, 42.
6. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," p. 36.
7. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 157. Miss O'Connor did not underestimate the difficulties entailed in aspiring to Conrad's aim: "The Catholic novelist believes that you destroy your freedom by sin; the modern reader believes, I think, that you gain it in that way. There is not much possibility of understanding between the two. So I think that the more a writer wishes to make the supernatural apparent, the more real he has to be able to make the natural world, for if the readers don't accept the natural world, they'll certainly not accept anything else" (*ibid.*, p. 116).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 172.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 167. As Browning rightly points out, "There is no single 'O'Connor story' other than the drama of the fall of man which furnishes the background for everything she wrote" (Browning, Flannery O'Connor, p. 16).
10. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 167.
11. Hassan, Radical Innocence, p. 79.
12. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 174. In her view, the writer "who deliberately misuses his talent for some good purpose may be committing no sin, but he is certainly committing a grave inconsistency, for he is trying to reflect God with what amounts to a practical untruth" (*ibid.*).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 231. Rubin has noted that, to the Southern Protestant fundamentalist, "Satan is seemingly more real than God" (Rubin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," p. 70).
15. Quoted in Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 381. One critic remarks, "Miss O'Connor employs Calvinistic concepts in her presentation

of the Southern religious consciousness," and this suggests to him that possibly "the Pauline doctrines of original sin, innate depravity, and predestination provide a religious analogue to the visitation of the father's sin in historical, social, and ecological terms so obvious in the Southern experience" (Joseph R. Millichap, "The Pauline 'Old Man' in Flannery O'Connor's 'The Comforts of Home,'" Studies in Short Fiction 11 [Winter 1974]:96).

16. O'Connor to "A," 2 August 1955, Habit of Being, p. 92.
17. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 117.
18. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," p. 33. Significantly, Miss O'Connor said of Hawthorne, "I feel more of a kinship with him than with any other American" (O'Connor to John Hawkes, 28 November 1961, Habit of Being, p. 457).
19. Letters of 20 November 1959, 30 April 1961, and 28 November 1961, Habit of Being, pp. 360, 439, 456.
20. John Hawkes, "Flannery O'Connor's Devil," Sewanee Review 70 (Summer 1962):401. (The quotations are from Miss O'Connor's letter to Hawkes, 13 September 1959 [see Habit of Being, p. 349].) Several years before Hawkes (whose own works are packed with horror) made these statements, Flannery O'Connor had written to Father John McCown: "Even Milton is now thought of by some high-toned critics as being on the devil's side," so she did not know how someone like herself could "safely" say she wasn't, "even with the best intentions and the correct doctrine" (letter of 6 February 1956, Habit of Being, p. 134). And years later she wrote Sister Mariella Gable: "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" (letter of 4 May 1963, *ibid.*, p. 516).
21. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy." p. 161.
22. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," p. 39.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 40, citing T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays (1917-1932) (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), p. 344.
24. See Tillich, Systematic Theology, I:215-218.
25. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," p. 40.
26. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy, citing V. V. Zenkovsky, "Dostoevsky's Religious and Philosophical Views," in Dostoevsky, Twentieth Century Views, ed. René Wellek (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 136.
27. Sallie McFague TeSelle, "The Experience of Coming to Belief," Theology Today 32 (July 1975):164.

28. Marion Montgomery, "In Defense of Flannery O'Connor's Dragon," Georgia Review 25 (Fall 1971):313.

29. Ibid., p. 314.

30. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 112.

31. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 35.

32. Montgomery, "In Defense of Flannery O'Connor's Dragon," p. 315.

33. Bliven, "Nothing But the Truth," p. 220.

34. Walters, Flannery O'Connor, pp. 37-38. Miss O'Connor's stern requirement that her characters undergo suffering to obtain redemption tends, however, to obscure her own uncertainty about the means of redemption. The year before her death she wrote to Jane McKane that perhaps suffering is "a shared experience with Christ . . . , but then it should also be true of every experience that is not sinful. I mean that, say, joy may be a redemptive experience itself and not just the fruit of one. Perhaps however joy is the outgrowth of suffering in a special way." Further, she didn't think that suffering teaches "you much about redemption. You learn about the redemption simply from listening to what the Church teaches about it and following this to its logical conclusion. . . . I haven't suffered to speak of in my life and I don't know any more about the redemption than anybody else. All I do is follow it through literally in the lives of my characters" (letters of 30 June and 27 August 1963, Habit of Being, pp. 527, 536).

35. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 117.

36. O'Connor to John Hawkes, 14 April 1960, Habit of Being, p. 389.

37. O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins, 9 December 1958, *ibid.*, p. 307.

38. O'Connor to Eileen Hall, 10 March 1956, *ibid.*, p. 144.

39. Sister Rose Alice, S.S.J., "Flannery O'Connor: Poet to the Outcast," Renascence 16 (April 1964):127.

40. Farnham, "Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," p. 380.

41. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 23.

42. Dowell, "Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," p. 238.

43. Nicolas Corte (pseud.), for instance, has written, "Père Teilhard appears to forget evil par excellence, namely sin, the revolt of man against God under the impulse of Satan," and has called Teilhard's "theory of evil" a "glaring inadequacy" and the "most serious" of his "doctrinal" errors (Nicolas Corte, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: His Life and Spirit [New York: Macmillan, 1960], pp. 90, 93).

44. Gustave Weigel, S.J., "The Phenomenon of Teilhard de Chardin," in The World of Teilhard, ed. Robert T. Francoeur (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961), p. 163.

45. Marion Montgomery, "O'Connor and Teilhard de Chardin: The Problem of Evil," Renascence 22 (Autumn 1969):40.

46. O'Connor to "A," 4 February 1961, Habit of Being, p. 430.

47. Montgomery, "O'Connor and Teilhard," p. 36.

48. Teilhard de Chardin, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 37, as cited in Jacques Maritain, The Peasant of the Garvonne (New York, 1968).

49. Montgomery, "O'Connor and Teilhard," p. 37.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 41, quoting Claude Tresmontant, as cited in Maritain, Peasant of the Garvonne.

51. Montgomery, "O'Connor and Teilhard," p. 42.

52. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Heart of the Matter, trans. René Hague (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 144.

53. Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 57.

54. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, with an Introduction by Sir Julian Huxley (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 310.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

56. Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 57.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 58. Thus, Teilhard prays, "The more deeply and incurably the evil is encrusted in my flesh, the more it will be You that I am harbouring--You as a loving, active principle of purification and detachment" (*ibid.*, p. 62; original in italics). And again: "I know the powers of evil, considered in their deliberate and malign action, can do nothing to trouble the divine milieu around me. As they try to penetrate into my universe, their influence (if I have enough faith) suffers the lot common to all created energy; caught up and twisted round by Your irresistible energy, temptations and evils are converted into good and fan the fires of love" (*ibid.*, p. 130; original in italics).

58. Michael H. Murray, The Thought of Teilhard de Chardin: An Introduction (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), p. 99.

59. J. Edgar Bruns, "Cosmogogenesis and Theology," in World of Teilhard, pp. 182-183.

60. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 141. See also p. 1 above.

61. Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, p. 23.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DESACRALIZED WORLD

"God is dead," wrote Nietzsche toward the turn of the century, in Thus Spake Zarathustra. And by the mid-1950s the Western world was hearing a tremendous echo of this pronouncement.<sup>1</sup> In 1955, Flannery O'Connor lamented to a friend:

One of the awful things about writing when you are a Christian is that for you the ultimate reality is the Incarnation, the present reality is the Incarnation, and nobody believes in the Incarnation; that is, nobody in your audience. My audience are the people who think God is dead. . . .

. . . Leaving the Incarnation aside, the very notion of God's existence is not emotionally satisfactory anymore for great numbers of people, which does not mean that God ceases to exist. M. Sartre finds God emotionally unsatisfactory in the extreme, as do most of my friends of less stature than he. The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it emotionally. A higher paradox confounds emotion as well as reason and there are long periods in the lives of all of us, and of the saints, when the truth as revealed by faith is hideous, emotionally disturbing, downright repulsive. Witness the dark night of the soul in individual saints. Right now, the whole world seems to be going through a dark night of the soul.<sup>2</sup>

By 1963, Miss O'Connor, aware of a change in the religious climate, commented in a lecture:

I have said a great deal about the religious sense that the modern audience lacks, and by way of objection to this, you may point out to me that there is a real return of intellectuals in our time to an interest in and a respect for religion. I believe that this is true. What this interest in religion will result in for the future remains to be seen. It may, together with the new spirit of ecumenism that we see everywhere around us, herald a new religious age, or it may simply be that religion will suffer the ultimate degradation and become, for a little time, fashionable. Whatever it means for the future, I don't believe that our present society is one whose basic beliefs are religious, except in the South.<sup>3</sup>

She continued to maintain that "the Fall, the Redemption, and the Judgment," the basic theological truths of Catholicism, "are doctrines that the modern secular world does not believe in. It does not believe in sin, or in the value that suffering can have, or in eternal responsibility."<sup>4</sup>

Miss O'Connor saw a secularism that was "as virulent in the conventionally religious as in the atheistic," and she emphasized that contemporary man's real enemy was "the heedless nihilism of the multitude of faithless pilgrims."<sup>5</sup> In the manners of the fifties, as Browning notes, she discerned

an imperturbable smugness, a flatulent optimism, and a crass self-righteousness so deeply entrenched as to be movable only by the harshest kind of attack. She also perceived, at the root of this shallow complacency, what she felt to be an utterly fatuous belief in the omnipotence of a highly rationalized, technological society whose manipulation of human beings is calculated to turn out, as an end product, persons like a character in Wise Blood who is said to be "so well adjusted she no longer had to think."<sup>6</sup>

And whether her characters are positivists, like the social worker Sheppard in "The Lamé Shall Enter First," or positive thinkers, like the "shallow, self-sufficient, and generally optimistic mothers of the stories, terror alone appears sufficient to awaken these spiritual somnambulists from their own form of what Tillich has called 'dreaming innocence.'"<sup>7</sup>

Browning concludes that Miss O'Connor "took crime and evil seriously and gave them a positive valuation in her attempt to validate the reality of the sacred," for she seemed to perceive

that man is a creature of depth, and that modern secularism, in robbing man of that depth, deprives him of his capacity for genuine evil as well as for true good. Perhaps what she sensed finally was the absolute necessity of the recovery of depth if life is to have

any truly human meaning; and she seems also to have sensed the inevitability of this recovery involving a plunge into the radically profane as a way to the Holy.<sup>8</sup>

In this world of "our godless actuality,"<sup>9</sup> men worship materialism and themselves, failing "to see the truth that is always plain as a road sign before them."<sup>10</sup> The possibility (propitiatio) of redemption is always there, but man tries to ignore it or turn it down. This is what Flannery O'Connor satirizes: she shows that man is "grotesque because he tries so hard to escape from his own salvation," and she bases her satire not "on the kind of moral standard her readers might readily accept but on a religious perspective."<sup>11</sup>

As Edelstein notes, Northrop Frye has defined satire as "militant irony," and this Edelstein finds most applicable to Miss O'Connor's work, for she is indeed angry: "What O'Connor tells us over and over again is that man without God is nothing but meanness and perversion, that the only values he can have are materialistic or sensual ones, that the only beliefs he can have are prejudices and hypocrisies."<sup>12</sup> In her fury over "those stupid idiots," she "is compelled to expose their perversity, our perversity, in rejecting a god who is so obviously there, and also to expose what such a rejection makes us."<sup>13</sup>

To Flannery O'Connor, then, her mission was clear: "For my part, I shall have to remain within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. I shall have to speak, without apology, of the Church, even when the Church is absent; of Christ, even when Christ is not recognized."<sup>14</sup> She saw man living in

a desacralized world, where the materialistic aspects of life--the amount of money you get and the properties you possess--come first. It is a world of mediocrity and complacency, proud of its "progress" and "productivity" and "efficiency," mesmerized and corrupted by money and power, deformed by its disavowal of the sacred.

"Redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live," she said, "and for the last few centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no such cause."<sup>15</sup> But in his struggle between evil and good, man becomes distorted and grotesque, reflecting his inner conflict. This conflict causes a spiritual disease--angst, as Kierkegaard termed it. And this angst, this suffering and dread, is, in the final analysis, an absence of grace.<sup>16</sup>

Referring to the South, Flannery O'Connor asserted:

The anguish that most of us have observed for some time now has been caused not by the fact that the South is alienated from the rest of the country, but by the fact that it is not alienated enough, that every day we are getting more and more like the rest of the country, that we are being forced out not only of our many sins, but of our few virtues. This may be unholy anguish but it is anguish nevertheless.<sup>17</sup>

One of these virtues is, clearly, the manifestation of a true religious feeling among the fundamentalist Christians. As Rubin says:

The fanaticism and torment that characterize the emotion-torn, apocalyptic primitive Protestantism of the back-country South . . . become in her fiction the unlettered, naive search for spiritual existence in a world grown complacent and materialistic. Her sympathies lie not with the prosperous, well-adjusted, comfortable middle-class churches, but with those who stand outside the respectable community, refuse to accept its accommodations and compromises, and preach the fire and the plague. They, alone, she implies, are



willing to confront evil; they alone believe in redemption; only for them is the Devil a real and tangible presence.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, as Browning points out, "when compared with the conformism, the aimless pleasure seeking, and the spiritual somnolence which in her view characterized the general tenor of American life, the unflinching commitment to Christ of fundamentalist Christianity seemed far to outweigh the excesses to which it was prone."<sup>19</sup>

If her protagonists are sinful, sometimes horribly so, it is largely because "in a world in which God is ignored, those who cannot acquiesce in godlessness are forced to travel along strange paths, and in their ignorance to do evil deeds. A society which fails to instruct its members in righteousness drives them to hate."<sup>20</sup> But, as C. Hugh Holman has noted: "The human hunger for love cannot be satisfied with hatred; the human passion for order cannot willingly accept disorder as the principle of its universe; the ultimate dignity of man does not lie in his own hands, and when he tries to take violent hold of it, he destroys himself."<sup>21</sup>

Nathan Scott believes that

perhaps the surest sign of what Professor Eliade calls "desacralization" is the habit of taking things for granted, the habit of indifference to what is most primitively marvelous in man himself and in the world which constitutes the theatre of his living. And true wonder is not an indolent complacency or state of content with ignorance: it is not . . . a reverencing of the unknown. For mystery is not the unknown but, rather, that surplusage of meaning in what is known, that inexhaustible Ground of reality by which we are moved when we perform an act of true attention before the creatures of the earth. . . . It is . . . an ontological category, for it speaks not of anything foisted upon the world by the human imagination but of "a most powerful presence beyond the mind" which makes for "a fundamental norm of human consciousness."<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, when man has lost his sense of wonder, he has

"fallen" into the profane: for this is what "desacralization" most deeply entails--not merely the deadening ossification of creedal formularies of the great received traditions of religious orthodoxy but the death of all awareness of any animating power or presence amidst and within the familiar realities of nature and history, the loss of any radical amazement before the rich complexity and plenitude of the world. Thus it is that perhaps the extremest heresy which the human spirit can embrace is that which has, as it were, been codified by modern positivism, of supposing that man's only transaction is with those things which can be weighed and measured and handled in a calculating and deliberate way. . . .

. . . It was, one feels, in just such a velleity as this that Flannery O'Connor found what she took to be most characteristically defective in the life of our time: for her, the major sickness of the age was something like what medieval doctors of the soul called acedia, and it is to this condition that her art is principally responding.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, for instance, Mr. Fortune in "A View of the Woods" and the villainous, self-satisfied women in many of the other stories regard nature as just so much equipment, as a commodity to be conquered and exploited. Undeniably, in their spiritual deadlock, people all too often treat not only nature but also their fellow beings like equipment.

Flannery O'Connor feared "the false comforts of liberal compassion and urban civilization."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in her eyes, the city is destructive:

The city is almost a personification of Miss O'Connor's Devil--in it can be found all the creations of man which stand between him and salvation. Christ went into the wilderness to be tempted; modern man goes into the city. He comes to the city wanting to be converted to secularism--begging for relief from the necessity of suffering.<sup>25</sup>

Tanner's daughter and the black actor in "Judgement Day" are prime examples of what Miss O'Connor considered the godlessness of urban inhabitants.

But her negative purpose--her "stinging critique of the sterile banality of life-style that is bred by modern secularism"--was balanced by her constructive purpose, for she "wanted not only to exhibit what is banal and trivializing in the desacralized world of modern unbelief but also to portray its vacuity in such a way as to stir the imagination into some fresh awareness of what has been lost--and thus to 'baptize' it, to render it open and responsive once more to the dimension of the Sacred and the pressure of glory."<sup>26</sup> For, the typical short story by Miss O'Connor "is built on sacramental action: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist. At their best, these stories reveal the priesthood of the laity, sacred celebration of the secular world."<sup>27</sup>

In a world of secular values, man gets all he needs without God's assistance, he thinks. He flees from God's influence; he does not accept God. As he wanders from place to place, he is actually going in circles, going nowhere. Yet, Flannery O'Connor saw "an unbelieving age" that was nevertheless "markedly and lopsidedly spiritual," and in which she distinguished three types of modern man:

There is one type of modern man who recognizes spirit in himself but who fails to recognize a being outside himself whom he can adore as Creator and Lord; consequently he has become his own ultimate concern. . . .

There is another type . . . who recognizes a divine being not himself, but who does not believe that this being can be known analogically or defined dogmatically or received sacramentally. Spirit and matter are separated for him. Man wanders about, caught in a maze of guilt he can't identify, trying to reach a God he can't approach, a God powerless to approach him.

And there is another type . . . who can neither believe nor contain himself in unbelief and who searches desperately, feeling about in all experience for the lost God.

At its best our age is an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily.<sup>28</sup>

Most of Miss O'Connor's characters are embroiled in spiritual and psychological quests. In the dilemmas inherent in their "quest for human identity," she reveals "how the lack of an integrated society" (that is, a Christian society) thwarts "the possibility of an integrated personality," so that eventually all her grotesques come to realize "that they are aspiring toward illusory points in a secular world."<sup>29</sup>

As Muller puts it:

In an attempt to transcend their painful condition, to rise above that which is alienated and estranged, Miss O'Connor's protagonists invariably descend into the demonic. Obsessed with their own sins, with weakness, evil, and suffering, they turn inward upon themselves and act out their agonies in extraordinary ways. . . . It is one of the triumphs of Flannery O'Connor's art--and a mark of her vital faith--that she is willing to write about all types of malefactors who, utterly out of harmony with the world and with Creation, risk exile and damnation for their disbelief.<sup>30</sup>

In essence, man "hungers for redemption whether he knows it or not."<sup>31</sup> And sometimes, on his testing ground, he is faced with something so unexpected and totally right that he undergoes a transformation--through a violent blow that often reaches him from behind. Such an action or gesture, according to Flannery O'Connor, "would have to be on the analogical level, that is, the level which has to do with the Divine life and our participation in it. . . . It would be a gesture which somehow made contact with mystery."<sup>32</sup>

In all the stories of her posthumous collection there is a point at which such a gesture occurs, where the world and eternity come together, where the natural and the

supernatural meet. The main characters in the stories stand for Everyman, a creature neither wholly bad nor wholly good, who dislikes confronting unpleasant reality and who, in his flight from God, in his attempt to escape salvation, suddenly is brought to face redemption.

Notes

1. In ancient times a similar cry marked the end of the nature gods when it was proclaimed that Pan was dead. For a moving evocation of this and of its bearing on modern times, see D. H. Lawrence's "The Death of Pan," in The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds to Modern Literature, ed. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 416-423.

2. O'Connor to "A," 2 August and 6 September 1955, Habit of Being, pp. 92, 100.

3. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 166. Miss O'Connor would probably have been saddened, but hardly surprised, by the results of a 1979 Christianity Today-Gallup survey, which revealed that though 84 percent of Americans regard the Ten Commandments as still valid, over half were unable to identify even five of them ("American Preaching: A Dying Art?" Time, 31 December 1979, p. 64).

4. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 185.

5. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," p. 135; and idem, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," p. 40.

6. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," p. 135.

7. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic," p. 36. In regard to "dreaming innocence," Tillich wrote: "The essential nature of man is present in all stages of his development, although in existential distortion. In myth and dogma man's essential nature has been projected into the past as a history before history, symbolized as a golden age or paradise. In psychological terms one can interpret this state as that of 'dreaming innocence.' Both words point to something that precedes actual existence. It has potentiality, not actuality" (Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, p. 33).

8. Browning, "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy," p. 161.

9. Hawkes, "Flannery O'Connor's Devil," p. 396.

10. Edelstein, "Flannery O'Connor and the Problem of Modern Satire," p. 142. We live in a time that is apparently even more materialistic and narcissistic now than it was when Flannery O'Connor was writing, as indicated by the prevalent expressions "the me generation," "the me too generation," "the narcissistic age."

11. Ibid., p. 140. "You can't," Flannery O'Connor once said, "indicate moral values when morality changes with what is being done, because there is no accepted basis of judgment. And you cannot show the operation of grace when grace is cut off from nature or when the very

possibility of grace is denied, because no one will have the least idea of what you are about" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 166).

12. Edelstein, "Flannery O'Connor and the Problem of Modern Satire," p. 141, citing Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 223.

13. Ibid., p. 140.

14. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 155.

15. Ibid., p. 33.

16. As Tillich explains angst: "Man is not only finite, as is every creature; he is also aware of his finitude. And this awareness is 'anxiety.' [This term] 'anxiety' has become associated with the German and Danish word Angst, which itself is derived from the Latin anguistiae, 'narrows.' Through Søren Kierkegaard the word Angst has become a central concept of existentialism. It expresses the awareness of being finite, of being a mixture of being and non-being, or of being threatened by non-being. All creatures are driven by anxiety; for finitude and anxiety are the same" (Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, p. 34).

17. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 28-29.

18. Rubin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," p. 53.

19. Browning, Flannery O'Connor, pp. 8-9.

20. Rubin, "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," p. 55.

21. C. Hugh Holman, "Her Rue with a Difference: Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Literary Tradition," in Added Dimension, p. 86. Tillich refers to man's predicament as estrangement, for "the state of existence is the state of estrangement. Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from other beings, and from himself. The transition from essence to existence results in personal guilt and universal tragedy" (Tillich, Systematic Theology, II, pp. 44-45). Further, he says, "If one speaks of 'sins' and refers to special acts which are considered as sinful, one should always be conscious of the fact that 'sins' are the expression of 'sin.' It is not the disobedience to a law which makes an act sinful but the fact that it is an expression of man's estrangement from God, from men, from himself. Therefore, Paul calls everything sin which does not result from faith, from the unity with God. And in another context (following Jesus) all laws are summed up in the law of love by which estrangement is conquered. . . . The Augsburg Confession defines sin as the state of man in which he is 'without faith in God and with concupiscence.' . . . One could add to these two expressions of estrangement a third one, namely hubris . . . , the so-called spiritual sin of pride or self-elevation, which, according to Augustine and Luther, precedes the so-called sensual sin" (ibid., II, pp. 46-47). Elaborating on hubris, Tillich writes: "All men have the hidden desire to be like God, and they act accordingly in their self-evaluation and self-affirmation. No one is willing to acknowledge, in concrete terms, his finitude,

his weakness and his errors, his ignorance and his insecurity, his loneliness and his anxiety. And if he is ready to acknowledge them, he makes another instrument of hubris out of his readiness. A demonic structure drives man to confuse natural self-affirmation with a destructive self-elevation" (ibid., II, p. 51). As Tillich views it, then, every "expression of the estranged state contradicts man's essential being, his potency for goodness. It contradicts the created structure of himself and his world and their interdependence. And self-contradiction drives toward self-destruction" (ibid., II, pp. 59-60). Tillich sees evil as the structure of this self-destruction: "If one is asked how a loving and almighty God can permit evil, one cannot answer in the terms of the question as it was asked. One must first insist on an answer to the question How could he permit sin?--a question which is answered the moment it is asked. Not permitting sin would mean not permitting freedom; this would deny the very nature of man, his finite freedom. Only after this answer can one describe evil as the structure of self-destruction which is implicit in the nature of universal estrangement" (ibid., II, p. 61).

22. Nathan A. Scott, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor's Testimony: The Pressure of Glory," in Added Dimension, p. 141, citing Abraham J. Heschel, Between God and Man, ed. Fritz A. Rothschild (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 54.

23. Ibid., pp. 142, 143.

24. Richard H. Rupp, Celebration of Postwar American Fiction, 1945-1967 (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1972), p. 98.

25. Shinn, "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," pp. 68-69. D. H. Lawrence, too, eloquently points to the malignity of the urban milieu: "Gradually men moved into cities. And they loved the display of people better than the display of a tree. They liked the glory they got of overpowering one another in war. And, above all, they loved the vainglory of their own words, the pomp of argument and the vanity of ideas" (Lawrence, "Death of Pan," p. 417).

26. Scott, "Flannery O'Connor's Testimony," pp. 143, 144.

27. Rupp, Celebration of Postwar American Fiction, p. 77.

28. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 159.

29. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, pp. 49-50.

30. Ibid., p. 50. As Muller explains, Miss O'Connor uses "the metaphor of journey" to involve her protagonists in significant action: "More often than not O'Connor formulates grotesque characterization through a definite pattern of action designed to create and to enlarge clear lines of conflict. This variety of action, which is as old as the Odyssey, is the narrative of quest, a type which embraces such seemingly disparate forms as epic, allegory, the picaresque novel, and much of the grotesque. . . . This literature of quest . . . frequently constitutes



a narrative of extremes, wherein the possibilities of salvation and damnation, escape and entrapment, chaos and order exist in radical tension. Like Bunyan's Christian the typical protagonist embarks on a journey which in reality is a contest, a heightened exercise in consciousness, perception, and endurance whereby man is either conquered or triumphant in his battle with the forces of darkness" (ibid., pp. 51, 52).

31. Taylor, "The Halt Shall be Gathered Together," p. 338.
32. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 111.

PART III

EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE:

A GRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

AND INTERPRETATION

## CHAPTER 5

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STORIES

The posthumous collection Everything That Rises Must Converge contains nine stories, seven of which were published in various periodicals before Flannery O'Connor died.<sup>1</sup> The title is from a statement by Teilhard de Chardin,<sup>2</sup> whose thought, like Flannery O'Connor's, was unequivocally Christocentric:

In a pluralistic and static Nature, the universal domination of Christ could, strictly speaking, still be regarded as an extrinsic and super-imposed power. In a spiritually converging world this "Christic" energy acquires an urgency and intensity of another order altogether. If the world is convergent and if Christ occupies its centre, then the Christogenesis of St. Paul and St. John is nothing else and nothing less than the extension, both awaited and un hoped for, of that noogenesis in which cosmogenesis--as regards our experience--culminates.<sup>3</sup>

Teilhard believed that evolution has just about reached its limits in perfecting man physically. Therefore he saw as the next step a social evolution, now in progress, in which humanity converges toward a single society and in which love is the highest radial energy. But beyond this, Teilhard envisioned in organic evolution a concurrent, theological convergence toward an omega point. This cosmic convergence, as yet hypothetical, would be a final state, a genuine omega point--that is, the Parousia, or second coming of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Thus, through "psychic interaction," mankind will rise to a

higher consciousness, merging into a transcendent unity that can be called the phenomenon of mind.

Teilhard's comments on "the motives for the fervour and the impotence which accompany every egoistic solution of life" seem particularly pertinent in attempting to comprehend the true meaning of Flannery O'Connor's stories:

To be fully ourselves it is . . . in the direction of convergence with all the rest . . . that we must advance--towards the "other." The goal of ourselves, the acme of our originality, is not our individuality but our person; and according to the evolutionary structure of the world, we can only find our person by uniting together. There is no mind without synthesis. The same law holds good from top to bottom. The true ego grows in inverse proportion to "egoism."<sup>5</sup>

Though the title of the posthumous collection is obviously highly significant, some critics have paid it scant attention and others have concluded that she used it in a wholly ironic or sarcastic way or have warned against making Flannery O'Connor more Teilhardian than she actually is.<sup>6</sup> It hardly seems in keeping with Miss O'Connor's deep respect for Teilhard de Chardin that she would use anything from his work in a clearly disrespectful manner.<sup>7</sup> True, given her proclivities, there would almost have to be a touch of irony and perhaps even parody on a superficial level. It is, however, in a deeper, truly Teilhardian sense that she used Teilhard's statement not only as the title for one of the stories but as an umbrella for all the stories.<sup>8</sup>

Dorothy Tuck McFarland neatly explains the ambivalent use Miss O'Connor made of Teilhard's statement:

It is true that O'Connor deliberately plays off the meaning of the title against numerous metaphors of non-convergent rising, and especially against her characters' desire to rise without convergence;

for instance, [in the title story] the "rising" of Negroes is acceptable to Julian's mother only as long as there is no convergence: "they should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence." The thrust of most of the stories, however, is to bring the protagonist to a vision of himself as he really is, and thus to make possible a true rising toward Being [that is, God, the source of all life]. That this rising is inevitably painful does not discredit its validity; rather, it emphasizes (as Teilhard's conception does not) the tension between the evolutionary thrust toward Being and the human warp that resists it--the warp which O'Connor would have called original sin.<sup>9</sup>

Judging from Everything That Rises Must Converge, it seems that, as Friedman has noted, Miss O'Connor's work "assumed greater metaphysical awareness in the last years of her life."<sup>10</sup> The nightmarish quality of her earlier stories has now to some degree given way to a world of more ordinary experience. The most persistent theme seems to be that those who are cocooned in "rationality" and self-righteousness are incapable of comprehending either human nature at its depths or the futility of secularism in attempting to ease one's angst and sense of emptiness.

Flannery O'Connor's "medieval sense of correspondentia, or the ancient 'sympathy of all things,' forces her to severely restrict her subject matter, compressing it to one or two physical settings and a few hours' duration."<sup>11</sup> The settings of the stories are almost invariably Southern and rural. Miss O'Connor "deliberately" and indeed indifferently, almost defiantly, restricted her horizontal range; a pasture scene and a fortress wall of pine woods reappear like a signature in story after story."<sup>12</sup> And in "A View of the Woods" the sacredness of nature is strongly depicted, not only implied. "Judgement Day" is unusual in that the main setting

is New York City (with its air "the kind fit for cats and garbage"), but even in this story the rural South appears, if only in flashbacks.<sup>13</sup>

There is a typically generous use of imagery in these stories. Flannery O'Connor took figures of speech seriously and often wanted the reader to take the symbols in her fiction literally: rather than being simply suggestive, they are used to make a story more explicit.<sup>14</sup> When asked about her frequent use of sun imagery, she said of the sun: "It's there; it's so obvious. And from time immemorial it's been a god."<sup>15</sup>

As each story hurtles to its conclusion, the protagonist is brought to reflection (a Teilhardian theme)--that is, a reflecting on ~~oneself~~<sup>oneself</sup>--which often leads to the cauterizing recognition of one's own evil. The protagonist may be shocked back to life, having undergone a metaphorical death, or meet a violent end. In either case pride may have been purged. For example, in the title story, which serves as a paradigm for all the stories, Julian suddenly "sees" the eternal values of filial love and is humbled; and his dying mother returns "home," in humility, having "seen" anew.<sup>16</sup> The protagonist may, in a rise toward belief, be martyred either in life (as in "Parker's Back") or in death (as in "Judgement Day"). Death may be a resurrection (as in "Greenleaf") or it may be a function of the demonic rejection of belief (as in "A View of the Woods," the only story in which two deaths occur and in which there is no indication of regret or repentance).

Flannery O'Connor's world is one of angry, frustrated, self-intoxicated people. Warm and intimate adult interrelations, which might nurture a sense of identity, are absent. All the stories feature tormented familial situations and, except for "Parker's Back," the conflict between generations,<sup>17</sup> a conflict that recalls a passage from the Sermon on the Mount: "For I have come to set a man against his own father, a daughter against her own mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those who live in his own house" (Mt. 10:35-36).

The stories take place at a time when class and race distinctions are disintegrating. But the mutual antagonism of whites and blacks is tenacious and is revealed in all the stories except "Parker's Back," and is particularly evident in the title story, in "Revelation," and in "Judgement Day."

Concern with status is rampant: for instance, there is Julian's mother ("I care who I am") in the title story; Mrs. May, with her superior attitude toward the scrub Greenleafs; Mark Fortune, who despises his daughter's family, the Pittses (all "idiots except the youngest, Mary Fortune, who was a throwback to him"), in "A View of the Woods"; Thomas, with his animosity toward Sarah, a "slut," in "The Comforts of Home"; Mrs. Turpin, in whom an entire hierarchy of status-seeking is represented, in "Revelation"; and the Northern Negro who refuses to be treated as a Southern Negro, in "Judgement Day." And then there are the conceited, contemptuous intellectuals or would-be intellectuals, who know a lot

about a lot of things (secular things) but nothing about themselves: the protagonists Julian, Asbury ("The Enduring Chill"), and Thomas, and the antagonist Mary Grace ("Revelation"). As Father May points out:

Each of the protagonists has a clear idea of the way reality should be: it must conform to the restricted vision each has of the ideal shape of things. The macrocosm must conform to the microcosm of their own self-centered, intellectual, and isolated worlds. They are either obsessed with the imperfection--according to their own stands--that they see in others, or with the imperfection in themselves that the evil in others has caused. To a certain extent, they are all typical portraits of modern man.<sup>18</sup>

Here, too, with their façade of elaborate courtesy, are Flannery O'Connor's smug, moralistic women, the majority of them widows: Julian's mother, Mrs. May, Asbury's mother, Thomas's mother. The widows are, typically, "determined to make circumstances fit their needs" and "are repeatedly revealed to lack the power they think they have."<sup>19</sup> These exasperating women have "good" intentions and ineffectual sons.

The stories are replete with ignoramuses, misfits, displaced persons. Flannery O'Connor acknowledged that her fiction is about those "who are afflicted in both mind and body, who have little--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."<sup>20</sup> But, as Sister Bertrande Meyers observes, she created characters

that bring strongly to mind the poor, the lowly, the afflicted, the self-righteous, the stiff-necked, the suffering, the ignorant, the contentious that followed the steps of Christ wherever He went and that are with us today. In them we shall continue to see ourselves as we are, and if we are appalled at the revealing vision maybe we will try to do something about it.<sup>21</sup>



Flannery O'Connor believed that, because of the Fall, or original sin, man is prone to inner and outer evil tendencies. Although he may be redeemed of original sin through baptism, he still has to fight evil, or the devil, so as not to fall a second time, victim of the seven deadly sins.

Because the conflict between the forces of good and evil looms so large in Miss O'Connor's stories, it lends itself exceedingly well to an interesting scheme developed by the medieval theologian Robert Grosseteste. In his treatise on confession, "Deus est quo nihil melius cogitari potest," he enumerates at length the questions a priest must ask concerning every possible sin of his penitent.<sup>22</sup> Grosseteste begins this enumeration by stating:

According to the saints, by transgressing our first parents stained with sin the entire human nature; they polluted the whole soul and the whole body. The soul is a unity which can be logically separated into its parts, viz., the vegetative, the sensitive, and the rational. The human body is an integral unity [a compound?] whose parts are the four elemental properties. According to these parts human nature has been corrupted.<sup>23</sup>

As Siegfried Wenzel points out, "Grosseteste explains that in the Fall Eve corrupted the rational, sensitive, and vegetative parts by vices opposite to faith, hope, and charity, while Adam 'brought injury to the whole bodily substance' by falling into injustice, weakness, imprudence, and immoderation (i.e., the opposites of the four cardinal virtues)."<sup>24</sup> Grosseteste thus concludes that "to these seven vices that corrupt human nature are opposed the seven virtues, to which it behooves us to cling if we want to cast off the old Adam and put on the new one."<sup>25</sup> Grosseteste then establishes

his scheme of juxtaposing the virtues and the vices (see the appendix to the present study for Wenzel's excellent clarification of Grosseteste's system). It is this scheme that, in the following ten chapters, provides the foundation for graphically analyzing all the stories in Everything That Rises Must Converge.

## Notes

1. "Parker's Back" was published in 1965, the year after her death; only the last story, "Judgement Day," had never before appeared in print. "Greenleaf" was published as early as 1956. Originally, Miss O'Connor planned to include "The Partridge Festival," which had appeared in Critic (February-March 1961), but shortly before her death she decided she "didn't want it in the collection" (O'Connor to Elizabeth McKee, 12 May 1964, Habit of Being, p. 580). She had rather tepidly contemplated also including "You Can't Be Any Poorer Than Dead," which was an early version of the first chapter of The Violent Bear It Away, but was easily dissuaded by Robert Giroux, her publisher, from doing so (Fitzgerald, editorial comment, *ibid.*, p. 589). The only other story written in the period 1956-1964 that does not appear in the posthumous collection is "Why Do the Heathens Rage?" Published in Esquire (July 1963), it was an excerpt from a third novel she hoped to complete. As noted earlier, all her stories can be found in The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor.

2. See epigraph, p. iv, above; and note 8, below. Teilhard made the statement "Everything that rises must converge" several times in his writings. He applied the idea to all aspects of life, even to atheistic doctrines: "Take the two extremes confronting us at this moment, the Marxist and the Christian, each a convinced believer in his own particular doctrine, but each, we must suppose, fundamentally inspired with an equal faith in Man. . . . No doubt each in his own fashion, following his separate path, believes that he has once and for all solved the riddle of the world's future. But the divergence between them is in reality neither complete nor final. . . . Followed to their conclusion the two paths must certainly end by coming together: for in the nature of things everything that is faith must rise, and everything that rises must converge" (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, The Future of Man, trans. Norman Denny [New York: Harper & Row; Harper Torchbooks, 1964], p. 199).

3. Teilhard de Chardin, Phenomenon of Man, pp. 296-97. Teilhard defines "noogenesis" as "the engendering and subsequent development of all stages of the mind" (*ibid.*, p. 181).

4. As Teilhard explains the omega point: "All our difficulties and repulsions as regards the opposition between the All and the Person would be dissipated if only we understood that, by structure, the noosphere (and more generally the world) represent a whole that is not only closed but also centred. Because it contains and engenders consciousness, space-time is necessarily of a convergent nature. Accordingly its enormous layers, followed in the right direction, must somewhere ahead become involuted to a point which we might call Omega, which fuses and consumes them integrally in itself. However immense the sphere of the world may be, it only exists and is finally perceptible in the directions in which its radii meet--even if this were beyond time and space altogether" (*ibid.*, p. 259). The term "noosphere" denotes one vast thinking envelope: "We are faced with a harmonised collectivity of consciousnesses equivalent to a sort of super-consciousness. The idea is that of the earth not only becoming covered by myriads of grains of

thought, but becoming enclosed in a single thinking envelope so as to form, functionally, no more than a single vast grain of thought on the sidereal scale, the plurality of individual reflections grouping themselves together and reinforcing one another in the act of a single unanimous reflection" (ibid., p. 251).

5. Ibid., p. 263.

6. See, for instance, Marion Montgomery, "A Note on Flannery O'Connor's Terrible and Violent Prophecy of Mercy," Forum 9 (Summer 1969):4-7; idem, "O'Connor and Teilhard de Chardin," *passim*; Stephens, Question of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 6-9; and Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 97-98. Josephine Hendin asserts that "O'Connor takes from Teilhard what she likes," and that in the title story the only thing that rises is the blood pressure of Julian's mother, with the blood converging in a heart attack (Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, pp. 98, 102). The first assertion is undoubtedly true; the second is witty but hardly accurate, as Mrs. Hendin herself proves in her further analysis of the story. Robert Fitzgerald grants that the stories show "rising" and "convergence" in "classes, generations, and colors," but even he, strangely enough, apparently does not grasp the paramount theological meaning of rising and convergence in the stories (see Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything, pp. xxx-xxxii), as Father John Burke impressively demonstrates in his article "Convergence of Flannery O'Connor and Chardin," Renascence 19 (Fall 1966):46-47. As Sister Jean Marie Kann puts it, "Teilhard's evolutionary perspective, his world vision of the new heaven and earth toward which mankind and the world move, the concept of cosmic love, the spirit of the earth, the cosmic Christ--all are reflected in her stories. But here too, as in the philosopher's works, they are hard to understand" (Kann, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," p. 159).

7. In 1961, when Flannery O'Connor was among the distinguished writers, scholars, and critics invited by the editors of the American Scholar to single out what each regarded as one of the outstanding books of the preceding three decades, she wrote: "The Phenomenon of Man by P. Teilhard de Chardin is a work that demands the attention of scientist, theologian and poet. It is a search for human significance in the evolutionary process. Because Teilhard is both a man of science and a believer, the scientist and the theologian will require considerable time to sift and evaluate his thought, but the poet, whose sight is essentially prophetic, will at once recognize in Teilhard a kindred intelligence. His is a scientific expression of what the poet attempts to do: penetrate matter until spirit is revealed in it. Teilhard's vision sweeps forward without detaching itself at any point from the earth" ("Outstanding Books, 1931-1961," American Scholar 30 [Fall 1961]:618).

8. To her friend Roslyn Barnes, a scientist, she wrote in 1961: "I have . . . written & sold to New World Writing a story called 'Everything That Rises Must Converge,' which is a physical proposition that I found in Père Teilhard and am applying to a certain situation in the Southern states & indeed in all the world" (letter of 29 March 1961, Habit of Being, p. 438). Three months later she asked Miss Barnes: "Can you tell me if the statement: 'everything that rises must converge' is a

true proposition in physics? I can easily see its moral, historical and evolutionary significance, but I want to know if it is also a correct physical statement" (letter of 17 June 1961, *ibid.*, p. 443). Incidentally, her publisher, Robert Giroux, notes that he thought the title of the collection "seemed absolutely right and (though she never said so) may have dated from a few years earlier when I sent her a French anthology of the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, one section of which was entitled Tout Ce Qui Monte Converge" (Giroux, Introduction to Complete Stories, p. xv).

9. McFarland, Flannery O'Connor, p. 44.

10. Friedman, Introduction to Added Dimension, p. 18. As examples Friedman cites Mrs. Turpin's vision at the end of "Revelation," the reaction of Parker's wife to his tattoo in "Parker's Back," and the "purifying terror" that Asbury senses at the end of "The Enduring Chill" (*ibid.*). For relevant comments on this last story, see Sister Bertrande Meyers, "Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor," Thought 37 (September 1962): 419-422.

11. Oates, New Heaven, New Earth, p. 172. Muller points out that "the violent figure frequently becomes an extension of the world which he inhabits. His spiritual desolation is reflected in the very landscape through which he moves, for in this landscape images of violence and disorder prevail. Flannery O'Connor pays strict attention to scene, to landscape in disarray, because by being a reflection of the interior self of the character, it assumes a complicity, despite its supposedly inanimate nature, in the bizarre disjunctiveness of the universe. The potentially violent and hostile landscape is a mark of Miss O'Connor's fiction and serves as a vivid image of a worldly Inferno" (Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 81).

12. Gable, "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," p. 127.

13. In these stories, as compared with her earlier fiction, "she came closest to a synthesis of theme and matter, of making the regional material not merely a prop to a message but giving it an interest in its own right. It was a step towards more concreteness in her art" (Elmo Howell, "Flannery O'Connor and the Home Country," Renascence 24 [Summer 1962]:171).

14. She once commented, during a discussion of the Eucharist Symbol: "If it were only a symbol, I'd say the hell with it" (Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything, p. xiii).

15. Quoted in Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 41.

16. Flannery O'Connor once said, "We hear a great deal about humility being required to lower oneself, but it requires an equal humility and a real love of truth to raise oneself" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 189). Like Teilhard, she believed that without diminishment there can be no growth.

17. "O'Connor's characters," Josephine Hendin observes, "are often paralyzed by a mixture of hatred and guilt, by their yearning toward violent rebellion and their fear of losing their mother's protection or being punished in some other way. She deals with their mingled fear and guilt in a number of ways. In some stories she displaces their rage at their mothers onto other characters who are their mother's doubles. In other stories, she has her children's fantasies of revolt fulfilled by her children's more potent doubles. In still other stories, it is an impersonal force of nature that brings about the destruction her children are too weak or guilty to effect" (Hendin, World of Flannery O'Connor, p. 99).

18. John R. May, S. J., "The Pruning Word: Flannery O'Connor's Judgment of Intellectuals," Southern Humanities Review 4 (Fall 1970): 335.

19. Katz, "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision," p. 64. Miss O'Connor "strips away all pretension to power," including her own, for "if we look at the characters O'Connor chooses to pillory--children who rebel against parental control, women, intellectuals--what becomes startlingly clear is that she addresses rage and contempt to characters who at least partially represent herself" (ibid., p. 66).

20. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 32.

21. Meyers, "Four Stories," p. 425.

22. Wenzel, "Seven Deadly Sins," p. 9.

23. Quoted in ibid. (Bracketed query added by Wenzel.)

24. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

25. Quoted in ibid., p. 10.

## CHAPTER 6

### "EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE"

The three main characters in "Everything That Rises Must Converge"<sup>1</sup> are Julian, a "late adolescent" and "liberal" who is disgusted by the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic climate of the South and finds that climate symbolized by his mother; Mrs. Chestny, his widowed mother, who, though living in relative poverty, cannot forget her "aristocratic" heritage; and Carver's mother, a huge, hostile Negress who rages against what she sees as white condescension.

Julian reluctantly accompanies his mother on a bus to the downtown YWCA so that she can attend her weekly reducing class there. Eager to show his contempt for her prejudices and values, he unsuccessfully tries to befriend a Negro man on the bus. When a Negress, with her little son Carver, boards the bus, Julian is gleeful on noticing that she is wearing exactly the same hat as the one his mother has on. As Julian, his mother, the Negress, and Carver leave the bus together, Julian's mother offers Carver a penny, whereupon the infuriated Negress knocks her to the sidewalk. Reproving his mother, Julian is aghast to discover that she is dying. He cries out in despair and then flees for help, trying in vain to postpone the moment when he must start facing his sorrow and guilt.

Pride (superbia) appears in the shape of Mrs. Chestny's class consciousness. Twice she exclaims that, wearing her new hat, she at least "won't meet [herself] coming and going" (5).<sup>2</sup> She also makes much of the fact that "if you know who you are, you can go anywhere" (6). She is always reminding Julian that his ancestors, the Godhighs, even in reduced circumstances, "never forgot who they were" (7). Pride is also evident in Julian's selfishness: though his mother sacrificed everything so that he could attend college, he feels he is making a sacrifice in taking her to the Y class once a week.

Still another example of pride is Mrs. Chestny's sense of race superiority. Racial antagonism is displayed also in the attitude of the Negress toward whites. It is the Negro race symbolized in the Negress herself that refuses the penny Julian's mother offers Carver, for the Negress is as proud of her race as Mrs. Chestny is of hers. As Julian points out to his mother, after she has been hit by the Negress, "Don't think that that was just an uppity Negro woman. . . . That was the whole colored race which no longer will take your condescending pennies. That was your black double" (21).

As a counterpart to pride there is hypocrisy (hypocri-sis), baldly represented by Mrs. Chestny's assertion that the Negroes "should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence" (7). Seeing the integrated bus full of whites, she says, "I see we have the bus to ourselves" (10), whereas a



little earlier she could "remember the old darky who was my nurse, Caroline. There was no better person in the world. I've always had a great respect for my colored friends. . . . I'd do anything in the world for them" (8). Her pride and hypocrisy make Julian hate her--"There was in him an evil urge to break her spirit" (8)--and the Negress hit her.

Instances of wrath (ira), the third of the seven deadly sins, abound--in grudges, alienation, and hostility. Feeling very put upon and bracing himself to take his mother to the Y, Julian, "his hands behind him, appeared 'pinned' to the door frame, waiting like Saint Sebastian for the arrows to begin piercing him" (3-4). His rage and impatience are revealed in his gestures: "Julian raised his eyes to heaven" and "walked with his hands in his pockets, his head down and thrust forward and his eyes glazed with the determination to make himself completely numb during the time he would be sacrificed to her pleasure" (4). Feeling himself a martyr, he "walked along, saturated in depression, as if in the midst of his martyrdom he had lost his faith" (5). When Julian "got on a bus by himself, he made it a point to sit beside a Negro, in reparation as it were for his mother's sins" (8). On the bus with his mother, sitting beside a Negro to defy and discomfit her, he "stared at her, making his eyes the eyes of a stranger" (13). He "would have liked to teach her a lesson that would last her a while" (14).

So intense are Julian's malevolent feelings toward his

mother that he fantasizes odd situations in which he openly provokes her. Then he returns from his mental trip: "His eyes were narrowed and through the indignation he had generated, he saw his mother across the aisle, purple-faced, shrunken to the dwarf-like proportions of her moral nature, sitting like a mummy beneath the ridiculous banner of her hat" (15). When Julian sees that the Negress is wearing an ugly hat just like his mother's, "the vision of the two hats, identical, broke upon him with the radiance of a brilliant sunrise" (17).

The Negress, in her turn, is a personification of wrath. It is palpable, visible, as she steps on the bus. "Her bulging figure was encased in a green crepe dress and her feet overflowed in red shoes" (16), and her whole demeanor suggests belligerence: "She was a giant of a woman. Her face was set not only to meet opposition but to seek it out. The downward tilt of her large lower lip was like a warning sign: DON'T TAMPER WITH ME" (16). A grotesque figure, she bristles and growls like a cat: "The woman stood up and yanked the little boy off the seat as if she were snatching him from contagion" (18). In her rage she "seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much" (20).

After his mother is hit by the Negress, Julian scolds her as though she were a child and tells her, "You got exactly what you deserve" (20). As he continues to berate her, she looks at him unfamiliarly and starts off "in the wrong direction" (21).

The catharsis of seeing his mother die makes Julian undergo a complete metamorphosis: he becomes, a last a loving son.

A tide of darkness seemed to be sweeping her from him. "Mother!" he cried. "Darling, sweetheart, wait!" Crumpling, she fell to the pavement. He dashed forward and fell at her side, crying "Mamma, Mamma!" He 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 (22-23).

A number of symbols appear in this story. For instance, there is the circle: "She took [Julian's] hand and, breathing hard, pulled heavily up on it and then stood for a moment, swaying slightly as if the spots of light in the darkness were circling around her" (21).<sup>3</sup> Home, a symbol of the return to God, of heaven or the celestial home, occurs three times: when Julian, at the beginning of the story, "unloosened his tie and pulled it off and put it in his pocket," his mother thinks of going home (8-9); when she is struck by the Negress, all she wants is to go home (21, 22); and finally, she becomes a child, prepared to enter the Kingdom of Heaven-- "'Tell Caroline to come get me,' she said" (22).

In the last scene there is both an actual death and a metaphorical one. When his mother dies and goes "home," Julian, in his turn, becomes a "whole man," a new man in suffering. As the story begins, he is aimless, his existence is empty of purpose. He is grotesque in his gestures and actions: he sighs (6, 21), raises his eyes to heaven (4), rolls his eyes upward (9), groans (7), mutters (9), grits his teeth (20). On seeing his mother die, he is awakened

to life again: "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" (23).

TABLE 1: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD  
AND EVIL IN *EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S		
			Julian	Julian's Mother	Carver's Mother
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness		3,4,6,20	
		selfishness	4		
		color/race superiority		5,6,7	20
			23		
	HYPOCRISIS			7,8,10	
	IRA	pettiness/angst	3,4,5,8-9,10	7,8-9,16,18	
PATIENTIA					
	NEGLIGENTIA	alienation	5,6,14,17,21		

Setting: Urban

Symbols: Death: 22-23;

Circle: 21;

Alter-Ego: 21;

Grotesque: 3,4,6,8-9,21;

Home: 8,9,21,22.

Notes

1. Originally published in New World Writing in 1961, this story won first prize in the O. Henry awards.

2. In this chapter and hereinafter, numbers in parentheses are page references to the previously cited American edition of Everything That Rises Must Converge, published in 1965. The American paperback version has the same pagination as the hardcover book.

3. "The circle or disk is, very frequently, an emblem of the sun (and indisputably so when it is surrounded by rays). It also bears a certain relationship to the number ten (symbolizing the return to unity from multiplicity), when it comes to stand for heaven and perfection and sometimes eternity as well. There are profound psychological implications in this particular concept of perfection. As Jung observes, the square, representing the lowest of the composite and factorial numbers, symbolizes the pluralist state of man who has not achieved inner unity (perfection) whilst the circle would correspond to this ultimate state of Oneness" (Juan Eduardo Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage [New York: Philosophical Library, 1962], pp. 44-45. This could be interpreted as coinciding with Teilhard de Chardin's theory of the omega point (see above, pp. 106-107 and p. 114, note 4). George Ferguson states unequivocally, "The circle, or ring, has been universally accepted as the symbol of eternity and never-ending existence. As the monogram of God, it represents not only the perfection of God but the everlasting God" (George Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art [New York: Oxford University Press, 1959], p. 92).

## CHAPTER 7

### "GREENLEAF"

The main characters in "Greenleaf"<sup>1</sup> are Mrs. May, a widowed, self-sufficient farm owner; Wesley and Scofield, her semi-intellectual and slothful bachelor sons, who live with her and are callous and contemptuous toward her; and Mr. Greenleaf, the inefficient hired man. Mrs. May attempts to assert her power over Mr. Greenleaf (just as she has tried to assert it over her sons), is contemptuous of the primitive religious rituals of Mrs. Greenleaf, and is discomfited by the Greenleafs' married twin sons, E. T. and O. T., who are relatively successful, especially when compared with her own sons.

The long running battle between Mrs. May and Mr. Greenleaf reaches a high point when she becomes incensed over a stray scrub bull that she assumes belongs to the Greenleaf boys and that she fears will ruin her herd. After Mr. Greenleaf fails to pen the bull in as she demands, she insists that he shoot the animal. But when Mr. Greenleaf presumably goes after the bull, the bull charges Mrs. May and gores her to death, and then is himself killed by Mr. Greenleaf.

Mr. Greenleaf is an illiterate man who could barely write a letter of application for the post of hired man. His letter read: "i seen yor add and i will come have 2 boys"

(34). The Greenleaf boys, like their mother, represent good. As the Negro helper says, "They never quarls. . . . They like one man in two skins" (43). O. T. and E. T. are war veterans who achieved rank, married decent French girls, and now live with their families in comfortable homes near the farm. Mrs. Greenleaf believes in "prayer healing": "Every day she cut all the morbid stories out of the newspapers" (30), took them to the woods, dug a hole, buried them in it, and then fell on the ground above them and prayed for the victims. In opposition to the apparent goodness of Mrs. Greenleaf and her sons, Mr. Greenleaf and Mrs. May and her sons represent different aspects of evil.

Pride in the shape of class consciousness and race prejudice is exhibited by Mrs. May. She makes sure the Negro helper knows who she is: "'I'm Mrs. May,' she said as she wrote" (42). And when he asks her, "Is you my policy man's mother?," she replies, "I don't know who your policy man is" (43). In referring to the Greenleaf boys, she exclaims, "That's just the way some people are" (43). Seeing the bull grazing outside her house, she mutters, "Some nigger's scrub bull" (25), and she remarks at seeing him again, "That's a Greenleaf bull if I ever saw one" (39).

Tied to her pride is Mrs. May's hypocrisy. On hearing the humble Mrs. Greenleaf groan, "Jesus, Jesus," she winces, for she herself "was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion though she did not, of course, believe any of it was true" (31). She manages, in this regard, to bring



in an Aristotelian axiom: "'I'm afraid your wife has let religion warp her,' she once said tactfully to Mr. Greenleaf. 'Everything in moderation, you know'" (51).

Self-regard, another face of the sin of pride, is evident in Mrs. May's lament, "I've worked, I have not wallowed" (51). Envy (invidia), the second of the major vices, is also strong in Mrs. May. She is riled by the Greenleaf boys, who managed "to get sent overseas and there to marry French wives. They hadn't married French trash either. They had married nice girls who naturally couldn't tell that they murdered the king's English or that the Greenleafs were who they were. . . . If the war had made anyone, Mrs. May said, it had made the Greenleaf boys" (33). She compares the situation of the twins with that of her sons: "Wesley's heart condition had not permitted him to serve his country but Scofield had been in the army for two years . . . and was only a Private First Class" (33). She prognosticates, for her sons' benefit, what the Greenleaf sons will be in twenty years: "'Society,' she said blackly" (33). And as for their parents, she thinks to herself: "Over the years they had been on her place, Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf had aged hardly at all. . . . They lived like the lilies of the field, off the fat that she struggled to put into the land" (34). Mrs. May makes no bones about her feelings in this respect. Asked by Mr. Greenleaf about her buying a milking parlor, she replies, "I can barely makes ends meet as it is," for she is "not assisted hand and foot by the government" (41)--an open

allusion to his sons' privileged situation. For his part, Mr. Greenleaf "never lost an opportunity of letting her see, by his expression or simple gesture, that he held [her sons] in infinite contempt" (32).

For all her desire to appear powerful, Mrs. May actually reveals cowardice (pusillanimitas), a counterpart to envy. She often thinks of reproaching Mr. Greenleaf but rarely does so. "She had not fired him because she had always doubted she could do better" (26). Her weak character never allows her to reply to his allusions to her sons' callousness as she would like to: "'If your boys had any pride, Mr. Greenleaf,' she would like to say to him some day, 'there are many things that they would not allow their mother to do'" (27).

Wrath is revealed in many of Mrs. May's gestures and actions. For instance, she finally tells her hireling off: "I want that bull put up now, . . . and I'm going to drive over to O. T. and E. T.'s and tell them they'll have to come and get him today. I ought to charge for the time he's been here--then it wouldn't happen again" (38).

Her sons are also wrathful. Wesley, for instance, spits out, "I wouldn't milk a cow to save your soul from hell" (36).

Mr. Greenleaf shows his rage when, forced to take a gun and go after the bull, he retorts to Mrs. May's demand, "Ain't nobody ever ast me to shoot my boys' own bull!" (48). Mrs. May thinks, "He's like to shoot me instead of the bull" (48).

Negligence (negligentia), tied to wrath, is Mr. Greenleaf's chief flaw. For instance, "he never told her about a sick cow until it was too late to call the veterinarian and if her barn had caught on fire, he would have called his wife to see the flames before he began to put them out" (27).

Evil is masked as alienation or hostility in Mrs. May's sons. Wesley, for example, growls at her, "You're always yapping about when-you-die, . . . but you look pretty healthy to me" (37).

The sun is the most recurrent symbol in this story:<sup>2</sup>

The sun was beating down directly on the white roof of [the house] (39).

The light outside was not so bright but she was conscious that the sun was directly on top of her head, like a silver bullet ready to drop into her brain (42).

The sky was crossed with thin red and purple bars and behind them the sun was moving down slowly as if it were descending a ladder (45).

The sun had disappeared behind the tree line (46).

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 (47).

Through her closed eyes, she could feel the sun, red-hot overhead. She opened her eyes slightly but the white light forced her to close them again (51).

In addition to the sun, another prominent procreative symbol of nature in this story is the bull,<sup>3</sup> which appears so threatening to Mrs. May (she also obviously feels the sun to be a hostile force):

Mrs. May's bedroom window was low and faced on the east and the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood under it, his head raised as if he listened--like some patient god come down to woo her--for a stir inside the room (24).

He took a step backward and lowered his head as if to show the wreath across his horns (24).

The bull, gaunt and long-legged, was standing about four feet from her, chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor (25).

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 buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed (52).

The circle also appears frequently as a symbol:<sup>4</sup>

He walked on the perimeter of some invisible circle (26).

He was circling around to open the gate first. . . . Mr. Greenleaf opened the gate and then began circling back to approach him from the rear (49).

This pasture was smaller than the last, a green arena, encircled almost entirely by woods (50).

She saw him approaching on the outside of some invisible circle, the tree line gaping behind him and nothing under his feet (52-53).<sup>5</sup>

A metaphorical quest (picaro) is strongly evident, as Mrs. May wanders about on her farm, goes after the Greenleafs to have the bull penned in, and finally goes to the pasture to her death.

Throughout the story death is present in conversations (for example, when Mrs. May and her sons talk about marriage, the future of the farm, and Mr. Greenleaf). When death actually comes to Mrs. May, she has "the look of a person whose sight has suddenly been restored but who finds the light unbearable" (52).

TABLE 2: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *GREENLEAF*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S			
			Mrs. May	Scotfield	Wesley	Mr. Greenleaf
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	39,41,42			
		selfishness	51			
		color/race superiority	25,39			
	HYPOCRISIS		31,40			
EXULTATIO	INVIDIA		32,33,34			32
	PUSILLANIMITAS		25,26			
PATIENTIA	IRA		39,42			48
	NEGLIGENTIA	pettiness/angst	29,31-32,46	28,33,44	34-35	25
		alienation		28	28,36,44-45	27,38

Setting = Rural

Symbols = Sun: 37,39,42,45,46,51;

Circle: 26,48,49,50,52-53;

Picaro: 47;

Bull: 24-25,52;

Grotesque: 25,30,31,52.

Trees: 46, 47, 50, 52.

### Notes

1. This story originally appeared in Kenyon Review (Summer 1956) and received first prize in the O. Henry awards.

2. "An heroic and courageous force, creative and guiding--this is the core of solar symbolism; it may actually come to constitute a religion complete in itself. . . . [Jung made the] point that the Sun is, in truth, a symbol of the source of life and of the ultimate wholeness of man" (Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 302, 304). Bleikasten makes some provocative remarks about Flannery O'Connor's use of the eye, the sun, and fire as emblems--often in unity--of the sacred: "It is worth noting . . . how much of the action of her [fiction] is reflected in the continuous interplay of peeping or peering, prying or spying eyes, and how much importance is accorded throughout to the sheer act of seeing--or not seeing. . . . For O'Connor seeing is a measure of being: while the sinner gropes in utter darkness, the prophet . . . is above all a seer. In God the faculty of vision is carried to an infinite power of penetration: God is the All-seeing, the absolute Eye, encompassing the whole universe in its eternal gaze. The cosmic metaphor for the divine eye is the sun. Through one of those reversals of the imagination the sun, in O'Connor's fiction, is not simply the primal source of light that makes all things visible, it is itself capable of vision, it is an eye. . . . O'Connor's sun is both cosmic eye and heavenly fire. It thus condenses two of her most pregnant symbol patterns in a single image. For fire imagery is indeed as essential in her symbolic language as eye and sight imagery: incandescent suns, flaming skies, burning houses, woods, trees, and bushes--hers is an apocalyptic world forever ablaze. Fire is the visible manifestation of the principle of violence governing the universe, and the ordeal by fire is the rite de passage all of O'Connor's heroes are subjected to. A symbol of destruction and death, and a reminder of hell, it is also the favorite instrument of divine wrath. . . . Associated with purification and regeneration as well as evil, fire is the ambiguous sign of the elect and the damned, and its voracity is God's as much as Satan's. . . . In cosmic terms, her God is sun and fire. . . . Small wonder then that the spiritual errancy of O'Connor's heroes turns into a paranoid nightmare: aware of being watched and scrutinized by the relentless eye of the almighty Judge, they are unable ever to see their remote and silent persecutor. Not until grace descends to seize and possess their tormented souls is the infinite distance separating them abolished" (Bleikasten, "Heresy of Flannery O'Connor," pp. 66-68).

3. The bull "is a highly complex symbol, both from the historical and psychological point of view. . . . The basic dilemma lies between the interpretation of the bull as a symbol of the earth, of the mother, and of the 'wetness' principle; and the view that it represents heaven and the father. Mithraic ritual seems to have been founded on the former: the sacrifice of the bull was expressive of the penetration of the feminine principle by the masculine, of the humid by the igniferous (the rays of the sun, the origin and cause of all fecundity). . . . Eliade . . . suggests the bull does not represent any of the astral bodies but rather the fecundating sky. . . . In all palaeo-oriental cultures, it

was the bull which expressed the idea of power. . . . According to Frobenius, the black bull is linked with the lower heaven, that is, with death. . . . This interpretation is supported by Schneider's observation that, in so far as the bull corresponds to the intermediary zone between the Elements of Fire and Water, it seems to symbolize the communicating link between heaven and earth, a significance which could also apply to the bull of the royal tombs of Ur. . . . The ox symbolizes sacrifice, self-denial and chastity . . . , in other words, the symbolic antithesis of the bull, with its fecundating powers. If we accept that the bull is Uranian in implication, . . . the bull may be linked with the active, masculine principle, although only in so far as its maternal aspect has been superseded--supplanted, that is, by the son (the Sun or the lion). This, at least, is what Jung has suggested, together with the idea that the bull, like the he-goat, is a symbol for the father" (ibid., p. 33). Worthy of note is that Flannery O'Connor commented to a friend: "I thought Mrs. Greenleaf was a sympathetic character. She and the sun and the bull were connected and sympathetic" (O'Connor to "A," 24 March 1956, Habit of Being, p. 148).

4. See p. 125, note 3, above.

5. In the quotations involving both the sun and the circle, it is evident that the "tree line" is regarded by Mrs. May as a fortress. For the highly significant use of trees and woods as imagery, see Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 8

### "A VIEW OF THE WOODS"

The main characters in "A View of the Woods"<sup>1</sup> are Mr. Mark Fortune, a materialistic, tyrannical, self-centered landowner; Mary Fortune Pitts, his cherished granddaughter, who, though loving him and resembling him in many respects, nevertheless retains a certain innocence--a sense of wonder, a vision of nature as sacred; and Mr. Pitts, her father (Mr. Fortune's son-in-law), a stupid, embittered man.

Mr. Fortune owns the land on which he condescendingly allows Pitts and his family to live, but over the years he has been selling off lots, not only to further "progress" but to antagonize Pitts. Now he is negotiating to sell to Tilman, an entrepreneur, the lot directly in front of the Pittses' house. Tilman plans to build a gas station on this "lawn," on which Pitts grazes his calves and on which his children play. Mary Fortune has an edenic vision of the view of the woods across the road and is therefore horrified by the pending sale, for it means the view will be obscured. Mr. Fortune regards the view as something immaterial that can blithely be destroyed. His granddaughter sees it as something to be preserved at any cost. He is surprised and irritated by the attitude of the girl, whom he regards as his spitting image and who has heretofore championed his ideas of



progress. And thus begins the tragic clash and irrevocable estrangement between the two once-inseparable people. Oblivious of, and indeed inviting, the wrath of his family, Mr. Fortune sells the lot. He then tries to teach Mary Fortune a lesson by beating her for her intransigence. But she fights back violently, and in his rage he kills her. A few minutes later he himself dies of a heart attack beside his symbol of progress, the yellow monster, the bulldozer.

In this story love is killed by pride, wrath, and covetousness. With his sense of superiority, Mr. Fortune proudly sees himself as "a man of advanced vision, even if he was seventy-nine years old" (58). Mary Fortune not only looks like her grandfather but reveals herself to be just as stubborn and tough as he: "She was now nine, short and broad like himself, with his very light blue eyes, his wide prominent forehead, his steady penetrating scowl and his rich florid complexion," and she has "his intelligence, his strong will, and his push and drive" (55). Mr. Fortune is proud of all this: "No one was particularly glad that Mary Fortune looked like her grandfather except the old man himself. He thought it added greatly to her attractiveness. He thought she was the smartest and the prettiest child he had ever seen" (55). As events take their toll, he is therefore disgusted on suddenly seeing in Mary Fortune "the Pitts look, pure and simple, and he felt personally stained by it, as if it had been found on his own face" (75).

"The Pittses are the kind that would let a cow pasture

interfere with the future," the old man says to Mary Fortune, "but not you and me" (58). Gentleman that he is, he ignores the fact that she too is a Pitts, "as if it were an affliction the child was not responsible for. He liked to think of her as being thoroughly of his clay" (58). "The people like you and me with heads on their shoulders know you can't stop the marcher time for a cow," he tells her (59).

And indeed she has been fascinated by the bulldozer, "watching the big disembodied gullet gorge itself on the clay, then, with a sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion, turn and spit it out" (55). But for all his devotion to Mary Fortune, her grandfather has no compunction about lying to her when it comes to his deal with Tilman: "I thought you and me'd go into town and have us a look at the boats in the new boat store" (72), he tells her, when he is actually going into town to meet Tilman and sell him the lot in front of the Pittses' house.

Pitts and his wife are also proud and hypocritical: "Pitts was a thin, long-jawed, irascible, sullen, sulking individual and his wife was the duty-proud kind: It's my duty to stay here and take care of Papa. Who would do it if I didn't? I do it knowing full well I'll get no reward for it. I do it because it's my duty" (56-57). But Mr. Fortune is not at all fooled by such nonsense. He knows that Pitts and his wife are merely waiting impatiently for the day they can bury him, so that they can inherit or, if necessary, buy his property. The old man has therefore secretly "made his will

and left everything in trust to Mary Fortune, naming his lawyer and not Pitts as executor" (57).

When his father-in-law announces the sale of the lot, Pitts, in his cowardice, takes his anger out on Mary Fortune. Muttering to her, "You done this to us," he gets up and says to her, "Come with me" (65). He walks out, "loosening his belt," and, "to the old man's complete despair," Mary Fortune follows her father out the door almost at a run and they drive off in the truck. "This cowardice affected Mr. Fortune as if it were his own. It made him physically ill" (65-66).

From the very beginning, wrath consumes Mr. Fortune, Mr. Pitts, and Mary Fortune. An enraged Mr. Fortune asks, "Do you think I'll let a calf interfere with my bidnis? Do you think I give a damn hoot where that fool grazes his calves?" (64). "Judge not, . . . let ye be not judged!" he shouts in reply to Mary Fortune, who has said, "He who calls his brother a fool is subject to hell fire" (64).

Mr. Fortune has used his pride perversely by flaunting his perogatives as a landowner to thwart and affront Pitts. And sometimes Pitts, "abruptly, for no reason, with no explanation," would "jerk his head at Mary Fortune and say, 'Come with me,' and leave the room, unfastening his belt as he went" (60). He would then sadistically beat the girl, thus taking out on her his wrath over his father-in-law. Mr. Fortune, "disgusted and furious," is clearly aware of the real reason for Pitts's aggression: "This was Pitts's revenge on him. It was as if it were he that Pitts was driving down the

road to beat and it was as if he were the one submitting to it" (61-62).

Mary Fortune's wrath is clearly evident in her refusal to connive with her grandfather in his plans to sell the "lawn." She deserts him for the first time, rejecting offers of ice cream, money, and even a boat (73-74). And she then embarrasses him horribly with a fit of temper in Tilman's store (76).

As Mr. Fortune and the reptilian Tilman sign the deed of sale, it appears that Mr. Fortune is, in effect, signing a pact with the devil--and, as it turns out, signing his death warrant. In a metaphorical sense, both Mr. Fortune and Tilman commit the deadly sin of gluttony: as voracious as the bulldozer, they are willing mindlessly to devour anything that stands in the way of profit and their notion of progress.

Furious as she watches the sale transpire, Mary Fortune throws a bottle at Tilman and is about to hurl another one at her grandfather when he pounces on her and manages to dump her in the car. He has "never seen a child behave in such a way in his life" (77). It suddenly dawns on him that she probably respects her father just because he beats her, even if without just cause. So he decides to whip her, for "if he--with just cause--didn't beat her now he would have nobody to blame but himself if she turned out to be a hellion" (77). He doesn't care about the girl's reiterated (and prophetic) assertion "Nobody's ever beat me in my life . . . and if anybody did, I'd kill him" (61, 74).

He takes her to the same spot where her father has taken her to beat her. The animosity between the child and the grandfather is intense. He is barely able to manage an awkward slap at her ankles with his belt before she is upon him--pounding, clawing, kicking, biting (79). Finally she stops: "The old man looked up into his own image. It was triumphant and hostile. 'You been whipped,' it said, 'by me,' and then it added, bearing down on each word, 'and I'm PURE Pitts'" (80). Hopelessly enraged, and "with a sudden surge of strength," he hits her head three times against a rock. "He continued to stare at his conquered image until he perceived that though it was absolutely silent, there was no look of remorse on it" (80).

As Mr. Fortune's heart gives out and he collapses, he realizes--too late--the emptiness of his life and the fatal helplessness that has lain hidden behind his vast egotism and his scorn for the needs, rights, and feelings of others. The malignant yellow machine is his last vision, "gorging itself on clay" (81).

The paramount symbol in this story is the woods.<sup>2</sup> At first they appear innocuous to Mr. Fortune, but later he sees them--Mary Fortune's vision of the sacred--as a vision of hell:

Several times during the afternoon, he got up from his bed and looked out the window across the "lawn" to the line of woods she said they wouldn't be able to see any more. Every time he saw the same thing: woods--not a mountain, not a waterfall, not any kind of planted bush or flower, just woods. . . .

The third time he got up to look at the woods, . . . the gaunt trunks appeared to be raised in a pool of red light that gushed from

the almost hidden sun setting behind them. The old man stared for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught up out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood. . . . He returned to his bed and shut his eyes and against the closed lids hellish red trunks rose up in a black wood (70, 71).

On both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance (81).

The woods "have a rich prophetic significance. They represent those moments of grace, of inspiration, which come to all of us from time to time, but which are in many cases rejected, as by the grandfather."<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 3: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN A VIEW OF THE WOODS

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S		
			Mary Fortune Pitts	Mr. Pitts	Mr. Fortune
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness			59,75
		selfishness			57
		color/race superiority			58,59
	HYPOCRISIS				57,72
EXULTATIO	INVIDIA				
	PUSILLANIMITAS				
PATIENTIA	IRA		74,76,79-80	56,60,65	57,63,68,69,70
		pettiness/angst		56	
	NEGLIGENTIA	alienation	70,72		55-56,66,71

Setting: Rural

Symbols: Sun: 70;

Circle: 77;

Picaro: 54,68,73,77-78;

Trees: 71,81;

Death: 57,80-81.

Notes

1. This story was originally published in Partisan Review (Fall 1957) and received an O. Henry award.

2. The woods here are an example of what Eliade calls hierophany: "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred, we have proposed the term hierophany. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us. It could be said that the history of religions--from the most primitive to the most highly developed--is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities. From the most elementary hierophany--e.g., manifestation of the sacred in some ordinary object, a stone or a tree--to the supreme hierophany (which, for a Christian, is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ) there is no solution of continuity. In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act--the manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural 'profane' world" (Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. Willard R. Trask [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; Harvest/HBJ Book, 1959], p. 11). Apropos are D. H. Lawrence's remarks on what a tree means to him: "Our two lives meet and cross one another, unknowingly: the tree's life penetrates my life and my life the tree's. We cannot live near one another, as we do, without affecting one another. The tree gathers up earth-power from the dark bowels of the earth, and a roaming sky-glitter from above. And all unto itself, which is a tree, woody, enormous, slow but unyielding with life, bristling with acquisitive energy, obscurely radiating some of its great strength. . . . Of course, if I like to cut myself off, and say it is all bunk, a tree is merely so much lumber not yet sawn, then in a great measure I shall be cut off. So much depends on one's attitude. One can shut many, many doors of receptivity in oneself; or one can open many doors that are shut. . . . Because when all is said and done, life itself consists in a live relatedness between man and his universe . . . and not in a 'conquest' of anything by anything" (Lawrence, "Death of Pan," pp. 418, 419, 423).

3. Quinn, "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances," p. 168.



## CHAPTER 9

### "THE ENDURING CHILL"

"The Enduring Chill" is the only specifically Catholic story in the collection.<sup>1</sup> The main characters are Asbury Porter Fox, an arrogant, self-absorbed intellectual and would-be writer on the verge of a nervous breakdown; Mrs. Fox, his mother, an industrious widow who runs a dairy farm and is overly indulgent toward Asbury; and Dr. Block, a kindly, sagacious country physician. And playing a brief, but prophetic role is the half-blind, half-deaf Father Finn.

Asbury has been living in New York City, where he has tried in vain to become a writer, after abandoning his family, his Southern home, and his religious tradition, all of which he has perceived as constrictions to be defied for art's sake.<sup>2</sup> Now, afflicted with some mysterious malady--an "enduring chill"--he returns home to the cultural desert of Timberboro, where he is convinced he will soon die. He has written a Kafkaesque letter to his mother, which is to be opened after his death and which he pompously believes will shake her into reality and leave her with "an enduring chill." But he is robbed of the escape of death when Dr. Block discovers that Asbury's ailment is a nonfatal undulant fever (apparently contracted when Asbury, in defiance of his mother's prohibition, drank unpasteurized milk in the milk

house). Childishly egocentric, Asbury sees himself as a tragic figure, as an artist at odds with the philistines, when he is in fact at odds not only with his family but with everyone, including, above all, himself and God. Increasingly frantic, he searches for some final meaningful experience. He gains genuine self-knowledge only after the kick of a cow, ridicule from his sister, the disdain of the Negro helpers, the proddings of a country physician, and chastisement from an old Catholic priest. As the story ends, he has a vision of the Holy Ghost approaching, tearing away the last shreds of his illusion and subjecting him to an agonizing rebirth.

Evil in the shape of intellectual pride pervades Asbury's attitudes and thoughts. He had, for instance, "read some of [his father's] correspondence and had been appalled by its stupidity" (91). He blames his mother for his failure as a writer. In the letter to her that "would be the only thing of value he had to leave her" and that would show "that he forgave her for all she had done to him" (91), he has written: "I came here [to New York] to escape the slave's atmosphere at home, . . . to find freedom, to liberate my imagination, to take it like a hawk from its cage and set it 'whirling off into the widening gyre' (Yeats) and what did I find? It was incapable of flight. It was some bird you had domesticated, sitting huffy in its pen, refusing to come out" (91-92). Filled with angst and self-pity, he underscores his next words: "I have no imagination. I have no talent. I

can't create. I have nothing but the desire for these things. Why didn't you kill that too? Woman, why did you pinion me?" (92).

Strongly status-conscious, Asbury balks at being examined by Dr. Block, as his mother insists. "I am not . . . going to Doctor Block. . . . Don't you think if I'd wanted to go to a doctor I'd have gone up there where they have some good ones? Don't you know they have better doctors in New York?" (85). Twice he tells her, "What's wrong with me is way beyond Block" (85, 87); and twice he tells Dr. Block himself, "What's wrong with me is way beyond you" (95).

Though not a Catholic, Asbury asks to see a Catholic priest, because he would then presumably be able to "talk to a man of culture before he died--even in this desert!" (100-101).

The self-sufficient Mrs. Fox is not lacking in pride either. After her husband's death she had managed to get her two children "through college and beyond; but she had observed that the more education they got, the less they could do. Their father had gone to a one-room schoolhouse through the eighth grade and he could do anything" (87). Proud of her two-story farmhouse, she has told Asbury more than once, "You have a home here that half those people up there would give their eyeteeth for" (89).

Mrs. Fox has, moreover, a sense of race superiority. The previous year Asbury "had been writing a play about Negroes (why anybody would want to write a play about Negroes

was beyond her)" (87-88). Asbury had worked with the Negro helpers in the dairy to "find out what their interests were. Their interests were in doing as little as they could get by with, as she could have told him if anybody could have told him anything" (88). Asbury prides himself on his tolerance and has tried desperately to establish some rapport with the Negro helpers. Although he actually engenders their scorn, at one point he senses "one of those moments of communion when the difference between black and white is absorbed into nothing" (97).

Yet now, a year later, he cannot seem to connect with anyone. His alienation includes even his long-dead father: "Asbury's father had died twenty years ago and Asbury considered this a great blessing. The old man, he felt sure, had been one of the courthouse gang, a rural worthy with a dirty finger in every pie and he knew he would not have been able to stomach him" (91).

Asbury vents his wrath constantly. To his mother, who voices concern about his being properly dressed, he angrily retorts, "I'm old enough to know when I want to take my coat off!" (83). Though so childish himself, he regards his mother as the childish one, who, confronted with his "fatal" illness, "was going to be introduced to reality and he supposed that if the experience didn't kill her, it would assist her in the process of growing up" (83). Feeling demeaned by the ministrations of Dr. Block, he looks at the doctor's "asinine face" and mutters, "Get him out of here!" (94). And in his

discussion with Father Finn, he says furiously, "Certainly I've heard of the Holy Ghost, . . . and the Holy Ghost is the last thing I'm looking for!" (107).

Good is personified by both Dr. Block and Dr. Finn. Despite Asbury's vilifications, Dr. Block, exemplifying patientia as well as exultatio, calmly continues his work: Dr. Block "took a syringe and prepared to find the vein, humming a hymn as he pressed the needle in. . . . 'Slowly Lord but sure,' Block sang in a murmuring voice, 'Oh slowly Lord but sure'" (94, 95).

Father Finn, a grotesque figure of a man, is blunt, martial, un hypocritical. He tells Mrs. Fox, "The poor lad doesn't even know his catechism. . . . I should think you would have taught him to say his daily prayers. You have neglected your duty as his mother" (107-108). And he roars at Asbury: "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!" (107). Father Finn is in fact augmenting the words of Father Ignatius Vogle, whom Asbury had met in New York and who had said during a discussion of salvation: "'There is . . . a real probability of the New Man, assisted, of course,' he added brittlely, 'by the Third Person of the Trinity'" (86).

The unsavoriness of urban life is alluded to by both Father Finn and Mrs. Fox. Father Finn gives short shrift to the city to which Asbury had escaped to undertake his artistic endeavors: "I went up there once myself, . . . and saw

exactly how little they had and came straight on back home. Open your mouth" (94). To Mrs. Fox the city is simply vile: "She had been once to the terrible place he lived in New York. They had gone up five flights of dark stone steps, past open garbage cans on every landing, to arrive finally at two damp rooms and a closet with a toilet in it. 'You wouldn't live like this at home,' she had muttered" (89). And "with an ecstatic look," the deluded Asbury had replied, "No! . . . it wouldn't be possible!" (89).

In this story, as in the others, eyes are often referred to and sometimes undoubtedly have a symbolic meaning.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly apparent in the scene involving Father Finn:

He had a large red face, a stiff brush of gray hair and was blind in one eye, but the good eye, blue and clear, was focussed sharply on Asbury (105).

"And [the Holy Ghost] may be the last thing you get," the priest said, his one fierce eye inflamed (107).

Asbury moved his arms and legs helplessly as if he were pinned to the bed by the terrible eye (107).

And just before Asbury has his vision of the Holy Ghost (a vision that in this one story is unequivocal), his own eyes signal the salvation that is now inevitable:

He glanced across the room into the small oval-framed dresser mirror. The eyes that stared back at him were the same that had returned his gaze every day from that mirror but it seemed to him that they were paler. They looked shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him (113-114).

Symbolically significant as they set the stage for the story's primary symbol (the bird) are the sun and the trees:<sup>4</sup>

The sky was chill gray and a startling white-gold sun, like some strange potentate from the east, was rising beyond the black woods

that surrounded Timberboro. It cast a strange light over the single block of one-story brick and wooden shacks. Asbury felt that he was about to witness a majestic transformation, that the flat of roofs might at any moment turn into the mounting turrets of some exotic temple for a god he didn't know (82).

A blinding red-gold sun moved serenely from under a purple cloud. Below it the treeline was black against the crimson sky. It formed a brittle wall, standing as if it were the frail defense he had set up in his mind to protect him from what was coming (114).

And what was coming was a new sort of "enduring chill," induced by the Holy Ghost that appears in the guise of "a fierce bird,"<sup>5</sup> a bird that has haunted him since childhood but that he only now recognizes:

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 (93).

He even looked at the fierce bird with the icicle in its beak and felt that it was there for some purpose that he could not divine (108).

The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. Asbury blanched and the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. 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 (114).

TABLE 4: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *THE ENDURING CHILL*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S		
			Asbury Fox	Mrs. Fox	Dr. Block
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	91,94		
		selfishness	85,92		
		color/race superiority		88	
EXULTATIO	HYPOCRISIS				
		INVIDIA			
		PUSILLANIMITAS			94-95
PATIENTIA	IRA		83,84	93	
	NEGLIGENTIA	alienation	91,98-99		

Setting: Rural (a dairy farm)

Symbols: Sun: 82,114;  
 Angst: 93,104;  
 Death: 83,85,87,99-104,108,109,110,111;  
 Bird: 93, 104, 108, 114  
 Circle: 112,  
 City: 89,94;  
 Eyes: 105,107;  
 Trees: 82,114;



### Notes

1. This story originally appeared in Harper's Bazaar in July 1958.

2. Asbury's pretentious thoughts on Art and Life are comically, yet rather sympathetically, brought out by Miss O'Connor. Her attitude toward a deluded soul like Asbury is clear from a statement she once made: "There is no excuse for anyone to write fiction for public consumption unless he has been called to do so by the presence of a gift. It is the nature of fiction not to be good for much unless it is good in itself" (O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 81). Clearly, Asbury has neither the call nor the gift, yet he sees himself as a sort of Joycean hero. Miss O'Connor has satirically paralleled Asbury with James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus of Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Ulysses, exaggerating the characteristics of Dedalus to caricature the modern hero who sacrifices everything for art. Thus, in her story, "four explicit references to Joyce are only the most obvious of an elaborate series of correspondences between Asbury Porter Fox and . . . Stephen Dedalus . . . : correspondences involving not only major events and images but even details of diction and syntax and providing the basis for a sharply satiric portrait of the self-conscious artist-hero. . . . Asbury has used the modern role of the sensitive artist at odds with his materialistic and unknowing surroundings to justify his own egocentricity. But O'Connor's character of petty defiance is not who he thinks he is: he is not part of the intellectual and artistic vanguard of society; and he is not Stephen Dedalus. His adoration of exile is more a manifestation of his willful character than an artistic transcendence over a crass and squalid world; his non serviam defiance is mere petulance" (David Aiken, "Flannery O'Connor's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Failure," Arizona Quarterly 32 [Autumn 1976]:245, 255).

3. The reference to eyes in this story seems especially suited to Flannery O'Connor's purpose. As Ferguson notes, "Because of the many scriptural references to the eye of God, the eye has come to symbolize the all-knowing and ever-present God. 'The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers' (I Peter 3:12). In Proverbs 22:12, it is written: 'The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor'" (Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art, p. 27). And Cirlot points out, "Given that the sun is the source of light and that light is symbolic of the intelligence and of the spirit, then the process of seeing represents a spiritual act and symbolizes understanding" (Cirlot, Dictionary of Symbolism, p. 95). See also above, p. 133, note 2.

4. For the symbolism of the sun and the trees, see above, p. 133, note 2, and p. 143, note 2.

5. Regarding the spiritual significance of birds, Ferguson writes: "In the earliest days of Christian art, birds were used as symbols of the 'winged soul.' Long before any attempt was made by the artist to identify birds according to species, the bird form was employed to suggest the spiritual, as opposed to the material. The

representation of the soul by a bird goes back to the art of ancient Egypt. This symbolism may be implied in the pictures of the Christ Child holding a bird in His hand or holding one tied to a string. St. Francis of Assisi is represented preaching to the birds" (Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art, p. 2).

## CHAPTER 10

### "THE COMFORTS OF HOME"

The main characters in "The Comforts of Home"<sup>1</sup> are Thomas, a thirty-five-year-old historian, who is overbearing, overprotected, clings to the status quo, and relies on the comforts of his mother's home; his good-hearted widowed mother who complacently provides those comforts for her bachelor son, whose conversation is riddled with clichés, and whose general benevolence tends to slop over into sentimentality; and Sarah Ham, alias Star Drake, a rootless, unloved nineteen-year-old delinquent, whose arrogance is diluted by her innocence. A minor, but important character is the sardonic Sheriff Farebrother, a malignant man who is "another edition of Thomas's father" (131) and was his crony.

Thomas is enraged when his mother takes Sarah Ham into their home as a parolee after the girl has been jailed on a bad check charge. He regards the girl as a "slut," a "moral moron" (115, 117), and an outrageous threat to the peace of the house. But his mother, unable to comprehend how her charity can lead to anything but good, and "counting on his attachment to his electric blanket" (116), shelters the girl and hopes to rehabilitate her. The "hazy charity" (122) of Thomas's mother has so befogged her that she cannot discern the disastrous buildup of Thomas's wrath. When Thomas

discovers that the pistol that once belonged to his father is missing, he goes to the sheriff, urged on by the demonic voice of his dead father, to report that Star has stolen it. On returning home, he finds the pistol back in its place, but once again, his inner evil, his father's voice, governs his action. He tries to frame Star by planting the pistol in her purse, but she catches him in the act and tells his mother, who refuses to believe that her genteel son (and the president of the local Historical Society) could do such a thing. As Star, furious, lunges at Thomas's throat, his mother throws herself between her son and Star, trying to protect the girl. Thomas, again listening to the devil's voice, fires the gun, inadvertently killing his mother with the bullet meant for Star. As the sheriff surveys the scene, he first suspects that Thomas has killed his mother with the intent of pinning the murder on the girl. But then, knowing "a nasty bit" (142) when he sees it, he malevolently concludes otherwise as he sees that this intellectual and this slut are about to collapse over the corpse and embrace.

This is, above all, a story of wrath--Thomas's wrath, which sullies his love for his mother and leads to tragedy. In his selfishness, Thomas can see Star only as a stupid, dissolute girl who is violating his home, the home that is to him "workshop, church, as personal as the shell of a turtle and as necessary" (130). He is therefore hopelessly exasperated with his mother for her "daredevil charity" (116):

There was an observable tendency in all her actions. This was, with the best intentions in the world, to make a mockery of virtue, to

pursue it with such a mindless intensity that everyone involved was made a fool of and virtue itself became ridiculous. . . .

The devil for Thomas was only a manner of speaking, but it was a manner appropriate to the situations his mother got into. Had she been in any degree intellectual, he could have proved to her from early Christian history that no excess of virtue is justified, that a moderation of good produces likewise a moderation in evil, that if Antony of Egypt had stayed at home and attended to his sister, no devils would have plagued him.

Thomas was not cynical and so far from being opposed to virtue, he saw it as the principle of order and the only things that makes life bearable. His own life was made bearable by the fruits of his mother's saner virtues--by the well-regulated house she kept and the excellent meals she served. But when virtue got out of hand with her, as now, a sense of devils grew upon him, and these were not mental quirks in himself or the old lady, they were denizens with personalities, present though not visible, who might any moment be expected to shriek or rattle a pot (117, 118-119).

Thomas regards himself as a rational man, for he has "inherited his father's reason without his ruthlessness and his mother's love of good without her tendency to pursue it" (121). He is therefore disgusted with how illogical his mother is when she continues to try to help Star, even though she admits, "I know I'm nothing but an old bag of wind to her" (127). Thomas cannot but condemn his mother's excessive generosity. Taking a box of candy to newcomers, children, and the ill "was her favorite nice thing to do" (119). To his mind, his mother "proceeded always from the tritest considerations--it was the nice thing to do--into the most foolhardy engagements with the devil, whom, of course, she never recognized" (118).

Nonetheless, Thomas's mother has a definite sense of status and is not without considerable pride. "We don't know how the other half lives" (120), she says to Thomas, and she chides him: "Think of all you have. . . . All the comforts of home. And morals, Thomas. No bad inclinations, nothing

bad you were born with" (127). And again: "Think of the poor girl, Thomas, . . . with nothing. Nothing. And we have everything" (129).

Although she believes that Thomas has nothing bad he was born with, she knows that Star has been more unfortunate. "So awful, so awful," she says. The girl suffers from "something she can't help. Something she was born with" (117). Star is, as Thomas's mother finally manages to murmur, a "nimpermaniac," and thus is afflicted with a distorted form of original sin. Oblivious to the effect of her words, she says to Thomas, "I keep thinking it might be you. . . . If it were you, how do you think I'd feel if nobody took you in? What if you were a nimpermaniac and not a brilliant smart person and you did what you couldn't help and . . ." (118).

Thomas's mother is proud of the man her husband was, even going to the extent of telling Thomas, "You . . . are not like him" (127). Nevertheless, she has pride in Thomas as well as herself. As she says to Star, "'We are not the kind of people who hate,' . . . , as if this were an imperfection that had been bred out of them generations ago" (131).

Imbued with such godliness, Thomas's mother has room in her heart for Star, who, according to the lawyer the old lady consulted, is "a psychopathic personality, not insane enough for the asylum, not criminal enough for the jail, not stable enough for society. . . . The girl readily admitted that [she was] a congenital liar . . . because she was

insecure. She had passed through the hands of several psychiatrists who had put the finishing touches to her education" (121).

Star has, nevertheless, sufficient pride to be contemptuous and supercilious toward Thomas's mother and hypocritically fawning toward Thomas. She does not listen as Thomas's mother tells of her "several plans for the wholesome use of Star's spare time. Sarah Ham paid no more attention to this advice than if it came from a parrot" (124). "Her!" she scoffs, in speaking to Thomas. "She's just about seventy-five years behind the times!" (126). Told by Thomas's mother of his scholarly achievements, she "leaned forward and gave Thomas an even more pointed attention. 'Fabulous,' she said in a throaty voice" (123). Alone in the car with him, she eases near him and says, "Tomsee doesn't like me, . . . but I think he's fabulously cute" (125).

Alienation is Star's chief characteristic, but she knows how to use it to gain sympathy. Claiming that Thomas hates her, she says, "He doesn't want me here. Nobody wants me anywhere." She continues, "Oh, I know when I'm not wanted. . . . They didn't even want me in jail. If I killed myself I wonder would God want me?" And Thomas mutters, "Try it and see" (131). Then Star, laying it on even more thickly, wails, "The best thing to do . . . is to kill myself. Then I'll be out of everybody's way. I'll go to hell and be out of God's way. And even the devil won't want me. He'll kick me out of hell, not even in hell . . ." (132).

Shortly afterwards Star does cut her wrists (not, to Thomas's disappointment, her throat) in a feeble suicide attempt and later snatches Thomas's gun to indicate that she'll try again and make him sorry. Thomas had had several increasingly outrageous ideas about ways of getting rid of her but considered them "below his moral stature. . . . He had not the vaguest hope that the girl would get the gun and shoot herself" (134).

As the story unfolds, wrath rapidly conquers Thomas. He is incensed at the way the opportunistic "slut" is pulling the wool over his mother's eyes; he is jealous of the attention his mother gives her; and he is furious that his mother should put him on the same plane as this wanton intruder, this contemptuous, contemptible creature. "Thomas," she says, "suppose it were you?" (117). When he tells his mother to send Star back to jail, she replies, "I would not send you back to jail, Thomas" (118). She in fact "appeared to look on him with compassion, as if her hazy charity no longer made distinctions" (122).

As Thomas sees his mother arrive home with the girl, "rage gathered throughout [his] large frame with a silent ominous intensity, like a mob assembling" (115). When his mother insists on protecting the girl, "exasperation blocked his windpipe" (117). When introduced to the girl, he responds "in a tone of such loathing that he was shocked at the sound of it" (123). And when his mother asks him to take the girl home, he remains "furiously silent" (124). Delivering



his ultimatum, Thomas says in outrage, "I won't put up with this! I won't put up with it another day!" (117). "You can choose--her or me" (116, 135), he tells his mother.

Both Thomas and Sarah are enraged when events finally quench even the optimism of his mother:

His fury was directed not at the little slut but at his mother. Even though the doctor had found that she had barely damaged herself and had raised the girl's wrath by laughing at the tourniquet and putting only a streak of iodine on the cut, his mother could not get over the incident. Some new weight of sorrow seemed to have been thrown across her shoulders, and not only Thomas, but Sarah Ham was infuriated by this, for it appeared to be a general sorrow that would have found another object no matter what good fortune came to either of them. The experience of Sarah Ham had plunged the old lady into mourning for the world (133).

Thomas "damned not only the girl but the entire order of the universe that made her possible" (140). The blast of the gun as he fires it "was like the sound meant to bring an end to evil in the world. Thomas heard it as a sound that would shatter the laughter of sluts until all shrieks were stilled and nothing was left to disturb the peace of perfect order" (141). And the devilish sheriff is satisfied with the grotesque scene he finds: "He was accustomed to enter upon scenes that were not as bad as he had hoped to find them, but this one met his expectations" (142).

There is no clear evidence of redemption here. For some critics, however, an O'Connor story without a trace of redemptive grace is unthinkable.<sup>2</sup> This is understandable, given Flannery O'Connor's frequent reference to the importance of grace, or the possibility of grace.<sup>3</sup> The difficulty of interpreting a story by Flannery O'Connor according to her intentions is exemplified by her remarks on this story. A

revealing passage from one of her recently published letters now offers the guidance that was presumably not before available to her critics (or that they might have been reluctant to accept). In it she not only denies that "The Comforts of Home" ends in redemption but also shows that her reputed abhorrence of sentimentality does not necessarily preclude sympathy for a character that exudes sentimentality:

The sheriff's vision is not meant to be taken literally, but to be the Devil's eye view. And nobody is "redeemed." I am afraid that one of the great disadvantages of being known as a Catholic writer is that no one thinks you can lift the pen without trying to show somebody redeemed. To me, the old lady is the character whose position is right and the one who is right is usually the victim. If there is any question of a symbolic redemption, it would be through the old lady who brings Thomas face to face with his own evil--which is that of putting his own comfort before charity (however foolish). His doing that destroys the one person his comfort depended on, his mother. The sheriff's view is as the world will see it, not as it is. Sarah Ham is . . . the innocent character, always unpredictable and for whom the intelligent characters are in some measure responsible (responsible in the sense of looking after them). I am much interested in this sort of innocent person who sets the havoc in motion.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE 5: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *THE COMFORTS OF HOME*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S		
			Thomas	Thomas's Mother	Sarah Ham/Star Drake
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	117,118	120,127,129,131	
		selfishness	116		
	HYPOCRISIS		138	117,118,127	125,126
EXULTATIO	INVIDIA				
	PUSILLANIMITAS		115-116		
PATIENTIA	IRA		115,116,117-118,123, 124,130,133,134		
CONTINENTIA	NEGLIGENTIA LUXURIA (LUST)	alienation Lust	118,132	116	110,125,126,131-132 116,117

Setting: Rural (a small town)

Symbols: Circle: 140;  
Home: 127,129;  
Devil: 118-119,128,132;  
Original Sin: 117,127;  
Death: 141;  
Bull: 127.

Notes

1. This story originally appeared in Kenyon Review 22 (July 1958).

2. For instance, Sister Bertrande Meyers asserts: "The practical Christian, as distinguished from the academic, will find that the finale of this story allows for and implies the action of redemptive grace working for and in the three chief characters: eternal peace for the poor, bungling, well-meaning mother; salvation by way of protection for the congenitally deprived 'slut'; redemption through projected suffering for Thomas, the ease-enslaved son, who will never again know the comforts of home" (Meyers, "Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor," p. 419). Sister Kathleen Feeley disagrees, stating that "the story does not effectively compel the reader to accept the notion of grace offered and accepted. The whole story points, instead, to a shallowness of character which would, in the absence of any signs to the contrary, preclude an openness to grace" (Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 33). This story is, in fact, one of three in which no one appears to be redeemed (the other two are "A View of the Woods" and "Judgement Day").

3. See above, pp. 55-56, 82-83, 94, 95, 99-100, and Chapter 17.

4. O'Connor to John Hawkes, 3 March 1961, Habit of Being, p. 434.

## CHAPTER 11

### "THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST"

The main characters in "The Lame Shall Enter First"<sup>1</sup> are Sheppard, an atheistic, self-righteous, self-satisfied widower, who is the City Recreational Director and who also, though neglecting his own son, counsels without pay at a reformatory because "of the satisfaction of knowing he was helping boys no one else cared about" (145-146); Norton, his rather dim-witted ten-year-old son, who, deprived of his father's love and understanding, is joyless, is lost in loneliness, and grieves hopelessly for his dead mother; and Rufus Johnson, a fourteen-year-old clubfooted, incorrigible juvenile delinquent, who is a religious fanatic, has a high IQ, and smolders with contempt for Sheppard.

Sheppard takes Rufus into his home, believing that, by offering him affection and intelligent conversation and by getting him a corrective shoe for his deformed foot, the boy will be cured of his criminal proclivities. But Rufus, who has been raised by a fundamentalist grandfather, maintains that Satan makes him lie and steal and that only Jesus can save him. Sheppard persists in trying to "save" the boy and in defending him despite his further delinquency, his indifference, and his endless insults. When Rufus is

caught red-handed by the police in yet another crime, and then tells them the vicious lie that Sheppard has made homosexual advances to him, Sheppard, in complete despair, finally gives up. Realizing how he has misdirected his efforts to do good, he seeks Norton to assure him that he will make amends. But he is too late. Norton, believing that, as Rufus has told him, if he dies young enough he will go to heaven and join his mother, has committed suicide. And Sheppard finds him hanging from a beam in the attic, from which he has launched himself to fly to his mother.

This is primarily a story of alienation. Sheppard is alienated from his son and from God; but in a sense he is alienated from people in general, because, for all his psychological theories, he does not understand the human heart. Norton is alienated from his father. And Rufus is alienated from society. Although Sheppard is presumably meant to be the protagonist in this story, it is Rufus who steals the limelight. For he is both devil and angel, both prophet and bearer of grace. It is Rufus, the fanatic, the scoundrel, who brings down the "good" Sheppard, the pastor of a flock of wayward boys and of his son. Not believing in God, Sheppard plays God, certain he can salvage the misguided by applying psychology and his intellect. Sheppard is not just another do-gooder like Thomas's mother in "The Comforts of Home," because his good works, unlike hers, are calculated. Helping the underdog is his way not only of trying to fill his emptiness but of accumulating merit, there being no merit

points in showing simple lovingkindness toward one's own flesh and blood. He takes pity on outsiders but has none to spare for his son, and his actions are performed in a clinically detached manner.

The battle born of alienation builds up between Rufus, who is both physically deformed and evil but well aware--even perhaps proud--of it, and Sheppard, who is both spiritually deformed and evil but does not know it.

The alienation of Norton is apparent from the very beginning. In the opening scene, he "did not appear to notice his father. . . . The child looked at him with a kind of half attention, his eyes forward but not yet engaged" (143, 144). Sheppard cannot understand the boy's prolonged mourning for his mother: "This was not a normal grief. It was all part of his selfishness. She had been dead for over a year and a child's grief should not last so long" (146). He reproaches the boy for his grief, and later further alienates him when he asks Rufus, in Norton's presence, to help him teach his son to share things (159-160).

Rufus's father died before he was born, his mother is at the state penitentiary, and his poverty-stricken grandfather beats him daily when he is around. Now the grandfather, Rufus tells Sheppard, "has gone with a remnant to the hills. . . . They're going to bury some Bibles in a cave and take two different kinds of animals and all like that. Only this time it's going to be fire, not flood" (158).<sup>2</sup>

Rufus's alienation is revealed in his unbounded contempt for his benefactor. He tells Norton that Sheppard's

conversation is just a lot of "gas": "Yaketty yaketty yak, . . . and never says a thing" (155). Seeing the pink "can" in the pink-tiled guest bathroom, he tells Norton that Sheppard "ought to empty his head in it" (156).

Rufus blames his diabolical behavior on Satan: "He has me in his power" (15). Refusing to be "saved" by Sheppard, he hisses, "Save yourself. . . . Nobody can save me but Jesus" (180). With his teeth Rufus tears out a page from a Bible he "lifted from a ten cent store" and proceeds to chew it up and swallow it: "His eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him. 'I've eaten it!' he breathed. 'I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth!'" (183, 184-185). When Sheppard says that there is not "any reliable evidence there's a hell," Rufus replies darkly, "The Bible has give the evidence, . . . and if you die and go there you burn forever" (164). And Rufus warns Sheppard: "Satan has you in his power. . . . Not only me. You too" (184). And again, jubilantly: "The devil has you in his power" (185).

But for Sheppard, evil is really only a word; it is not so much a condition as a conditioned response to circumstances. Therefore, until his defeat, he refuses to acknowledge that Rufus can be evil, that an orthopedic shoe cannot help transform him; and he is incapable, certainly, of seeing evil in himself. Sheppard believes that, like himself, Rufus is too intelligent to believe that Satan has him in his power--and all the rest of that "rubbish." "Where there was



intelligence anything was possible," and he tells Rufus, "Maybe I can explain your devil to you" (151).

Sheppard's pride and class-consciousness are continually in evidence. Norton is a disappointment to him: "The boy's future was written on his face. He would be a banker. No, worse. He would operate a small loan company" (143). Sheppard wishes the boy could be like him: "All he wanted for the child was that he be good and unselfish and neither seemed likely" (143). Sheppard admonishes his son for his selfishness and compares the plight of Rufus, who sometimes eats out of garbage cans, with the good life of his son: "Think of everything you have that he doesn't! . . . You have a healthy body, . . . a good home. You've never been taught anything but the truth. Your daddy gives you everything you need and want" (146).

Sheppard feels himself "above and beyond simple pettiness" (161). He "was impervious to insult and . . . there were no cracks in his armor of kindness and patience where a successful shaft could be driven" (163). Practically driven up the wall by Rufus, he nevertheless insists that his "resolve isn't shaken. I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph" (180). Sheppard "knew without conceit that he was a good man, that he had nothing to reproach himself with" (182).

Rufus reveals his sense of race superiority on seeing Sheppard's Negro cook. He calls her "Aunt Jemima" and then says to Norton, "Come on, . . . let's see what all you got besides a nigger" (156).

Sheppard's wrath is relatively mild when he scolds his son for his selfishness and for longing for his mother (147). He thinks, "What was wasted on Norton would cause Johnson to flourish" (152). When he finds the miserable Norton in a closet, bundled up in an old winter coat of his mother's, "he winced as if he had seen the larva inside a cocoon" (159).<sup>3</sup>

Sheppard quite admirably controls his rage toward Rufus until his tardy realization of Rufus's recalcitrance and viciousness. When the boy tells him, "You ain't such a bad liar yourself," after Sheppard has assured the police that the boy was innocent of stealing, he feels "a rush of anger" (179). With Rufus mocking him, leering at him, "a chill of hatred shook him. He hated the shoe, hated the foot, hated the boy. His face paled. Hatred choked him. He was aghast at himself" (180).

Rufus is more disgusted with than enraged at Norton, telling Sheppard that "that kid is crazy. He don't want to do nothing but look through that stinking telescope" (179). Most of Rufus's wrath is reserved for Sheppard. For instance, when Sheppard lets the policeman take Rufus away despite his false protestations of innocence, "a gleam of pure hatred flashed toward Sheppard from the pits of his eyes" (169). When Sheppard insists that he is going to "save" him, "a look of such repulsion hardened on [Johnson's] face that Sheppard drew back. The boy's eyes were like distorting mirrors in which he saw himself made hideous and grotesque"

(180). And when Norton tries to defend his father, mumbling "He's good. . . . He helps people," Rufus replies savagely, "Good! . . . I don't care if he's good or not. He ain't right!" (155). (The word "right" apparently has a double meaning here; that is, in addition to being wrong, Sheppard is also not in his right mind--he is nuts.) Sheppard's conviction that he knows best so outrages Rufus that he asks Norton, "God, kid, . . . how do you stand it? . . . He thinks he's Jesus Christ!" (161).

Toward the end of the story, when the police arrest Johnson, a reporter asks the boy why he deliberately managed to get caught: "The question and the sight of Sheppard seemed to throw the boy into a fury. 'To show up that big tin Jesus!' he hissed and kicked his leg out at Sheppard. 'He thinks he's God. 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 . . . don't have as much sense as his crazy kid!'" And then, to wrap things up, he sweeps to "his fantastic conclusion" that Sheppard made "immor'l suggestions" to him (187-188).

Sheppard eventually shows cowardice: "Why not simply tell the boy to go? Admit defeat. The thought of facing Johnson again sickened him. The boy looked at him as if were the guilty one, as if he were a moral leper" (182).

Both Sheppard and Norton suffer from angst. Sheppard murmurs, "If he would only leave. . . . If he would only leave now of his own accord." He knows he is trapped, for

"there could be nothing now but a battle of nerves and . . . Johnson would win it. He wished he had never laid eyes on the boy. . . . He got out of the house as soon as he could and all day he dreaded to go home in the evening. He had a faint hope that the boy might be gone when he returned"

(181). Although still wanting to help Rufus, he "longed for the time when there would be no one but himself and Norton in the house, when the child's simple selfishness would be all he had to contend with, and his own loneliness" (182).

As for Norton, on listening to his father's harsh comparison between Rufus and Norton, the boy "pushed his plate away. . . . A knot of flesh appeared below the boy's suddenly distorted mouth. His face became a mass of lumps with slits for eyes. . . . Tears rolled down his face and the ketchup dribbled on his chin. . . . He abandoned himself and howled" (146). Later, his angst is combined with wrath when Rufus commits what Norton regards as sacrilege: "His face swelled with fury. 'He went in her [Norton's mother's] room and used her comb! he screamed, yanking Sheppard's arm. 'He put on her corset and danced with Leola [the Negro cook]'" (160).

But Norton warms to Rufus when Rufus tells him that, because the boy's mother believed in Jesus, she has been saved and is now "on high", in the sky somewhere, a place where one "can't go in no space ship" (165). Thus he consoles Norton, whose father, being too intelligent to believe in heaven or hell and refusing to instill any such nonsense

in Norton's head, has told him, "She doesn't exist" (165). Whereas Sheppard welcomes the exploration of outer space, and is all for putting men on the moon, Rufus looks at outer space and sees only heaven. Norton, girded with the new outlook Rufus has given him, takes to scanning the skies with a telescope in search of his dead mother. Rufus, for all his evil ways, has taught Norton to believe; Sheppard, for all his "goodness," has denied him faith.

It is Rufus who triumphs in the end. Led off by the police, he screams, "The lame shall enter first! The halt'll be gathered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me, not that lying stinking atheist" (188-189). And finally he screeches, "The lame'll carry off the prey!" (189). Sheppard, aghast, repeatedly tells himself, "I have nothing to reproach myself with," adding, "I did more for him than I did for my own child" (189). Then the revelation hits him:

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 (190).

The demarcation between good and evil, as this story shows, is sometimes hazy. Though Rufus is Satan-possessed, lies and steals, and at first torments the pitiful Norton, he later is perversely kind to the boy. Moreover, he constantly attempts, in his vile fashion, to get Sheppard, who basks in his own goodness, to see the evil of his ways.

And, finally, Rufus is the agent of Sheppard's tragic illumination.

There are more than two dozen references to eyes in this story, some of which appear to have symbolic significance.<sup>4</sup> For example:

Something had kindled in the boy's eyes, he was sure of it, some memory of the lost light (152).

The look of outrage had retreated from the hollow cheeks and was shored up now in the caves of his eyes, like a fugitive from Sheppard's kindness (163).

There was a narrow gleam in his eyes now like a beam holding steady on its target (165-166).

The boy's eyes were like distorting mirrors in which he saw himself made hideous and grotesque (180).

His eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him (185).

He saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts, leering at him from the eyes of Johnson (190).

Interestingly, Flannery O'Connor did not think that this story "worked." She wrote about this, and the reason for it, to a friend who had asked her, to her astonishment, if Sheppard represented Freud:

Freud never entered my mind. . . . The story is about a man who thought he was good and thought he was doing good when he wasn't. Freud was a great one, wasn't he, for bringing home to people the fact that they weren't what they thought they were, so if Freud were in this, which he is not, he would certainly be on the other side of the fence from Shepp. The story doesn't work because I don't know, don't sympathize, don't like Mr. Sheppard in the way that I know and like most of my other characters. This is a story, not a statement. . . . If Sheppard represents anything here, it is, as he realizes at the end of the story, the empty man who fills up his emptiness with good works. I just don't know such a man, don't have any felt-knowledge of him.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE 6: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *THE LAME SHALL ENTER FIRST*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S		
			Sheppard	Norton	Rufus Johnson
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	146,161,163		
		selfishness	190		
		color/race superiority	190		156
	HYPOCRISIS		147,164		
EXULTATIO	INVIDIA				
	PUSILLANIMITAS		171,181,182		
PATIENTIA	IRA		147,152,162,178,180	160	161,163,169,173,180, 187,188-189
	NEGLIGENTIA	allienation	143,146,152,159,166		155-156,169
		angst	181,182		146,160
fanaticism					150,164,184,185,187

Setting: Urban (A small town)

Symbols: Home: 146;  
 Circle: 180;  
 Larva: 159;  
 Devil: 150,164,185,187,189,190;  
 Death: 164,165,190.  
 Eyes: 143, 149 - 153 passim, 163, 166,  
 169, 170, 174 - 190 passim

## Notes

1. This story, the longest in the collection, originally appeared in Sewanee Review 70 (Summer 1962). The title is from the prophet Isaiah.

2. This is an allusion to James Baldwin's bitter The Fire Next Time (1963). Not that Flannery O'Connor was a Baldwin fan, but to the contrary, as the following passage (with its grating note of religious intolerance at the end) demonstrates: "About the Negroes, the kind I don't like is the philosophizing prophesying pontificating kind, the James Baldwin kind. Very ignorant but never silent. Baldwin can tell us what it feels like to be a Negro in Harlem but he tries to tell us everything else too. . . . My question is usually, would this person be endurable if white? If Baldwin were white nobody would stand him a minute. I prefer Cassius Clay . . . Cassius is too good for the Moslems" (O'Connor to Maryat Lee, 21 May 1964, Habit of Being, p. 580).

3. "Larva" may have a symbolic meaning here. In occultism, the etheric double is "the invisible vehicle of the soul, the manifestation of physical vitality," and larva is "a visible manifestation of the astral shell or etheric double" (Frank Gaynor, ed., Dictionary of Mysticism [New York: Philosophical Library, 1953], pp. 58, 98). In ancient Rome, larvae were considered to be "the evil souls, who are supposed to move hither and thither to frighten the living; therefore they have been given a name to signify the evil genii, which are also called Lemures; larva was also the name they gave to ghosts in general" (Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, 2nd, rev. ed. [Amsterdam and London: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1976], p. 292).

4. See above, p. 133, note 2, and p. 152, note 3.

5. O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins, 6 September 1962, Habit of Being, pp. 490-491.



## CHAPTER 12

### "REVELATION"

"Revelation"<sup>1</sup> has two main characters: Mrs. Ruby Turpin, a forty-seven-year-old, overweight, sanctimonious landowner, who is obsessed with class distinctions and considers it extremely fortunate that the Lord made her who she is; and Mary Grace, an ugly Wellesley student, who is epileptic, surly, and seemingly a bit deranged.

The story opens in a doctor's waiting room--which offers a microcosm of humanity, an array of people whose diseases are not only physical but mental and spiritual--and ends near a hogpen. Mrs. Turpin enters the waiting room with her husband, Claud, and proceeds to assess the social strata of the occupants. She then starts chatting, generously presenting nuggets from her vast store of wisdom. Remaining as aloof as possible from the white-trash, she focuses her attention on a stylish lady, the mother of Mary Grace. Unaccountably, Mary Grace registers nothing but loathing for Mrs. Turpin. The girl, who has been scowlingly reading a physiology textbook (significantly entitled Human Development), finally becomes so infuriated with Mrs. Turpin's pious and petty utterings that she throws her book at the woman, hitting her over the eye, and then attempts to strangle her. As a last blow, while churning on the floor she whispers

very clearly to Mrs. Turpin, "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog" (207). And thus Mary Grace becomes a bearer of grace, bringing to Mrs. Turpin her first revelation. Back home, Mrs. Turpin, her faith and her pride shaken, cannot sleep, snaps at her husband, and is distrustful of her Negroes. Mary Grace has called her egocentric existence into question and made her bitter toward God. Seeking to extricate herself from this terrible situation, she marches off to the pig parlor to challenge the Lord. And there her vision is purified. She has a major revelation as she sees the communion of saints in which the lame enter first. As dusk descends she has her answer to the questions she has flung at God: the last will be the first and the first the last.

Mrs. Turpin's pride in herself verges on narcissism: she is proud of her social status, her industriousness, her charity, her disposition, her complexion. Above all, she is incredibly class-conscious:

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; 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. . . . Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling 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 (195-196).

Mrs. Turpin muses, "If Jesus had said to her before he

made her, 'There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white-trash,'" and if she had then begged and pleaded in vain to wait until another place became available, in the end she would have told him, "All right, make me a nigger then--but that don't mean a trashy one" (195).

Sometimes the judgmental Mrs. Turpin could scarcely bear even to talk to white-trash: she gives the white-trash mother in the waiting room "the merest edge of her attention" (198). When this woman maintains that hogs are "nasty stinking things," Mrs. Turpin says to her, "Our hogs are not dirty and they don't stink," and then, ostensibly speaking to the stylish lady, continues insinuatingly, "They're cleaner than some children I've seen" (198). When the white-trash woman says of her son and the old woman with her, "Looks like I can't get nothing down them two but Co'Cola and candy," Mrs. Turpin thinks, "That's all you try to get down em. . . . Too lazy to light the fire" (203). Persisting in her attempt to engage Mrs. Turpin in conversation, the white-trash woman talks about sending the Negroes back to Africa, and Mrs. Turpin thinks, "If I was going to send anybody back to Africa, . . . it would be your kind, woman. 'Yes, indeed,' she said aloud, but looking up at the ceiling, 'it's a heap of things worse than a nigger.' And dirtier than a hog, she added to herself" (204).

Yet Mrs. Turpin pats herself on the back for being such a charitable soul: "To help anybody out that needed it was

her philosophy of life. She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she was most thankful that this was so" (202-203). In fact, had she had to make a choice, she would have told Jesus, "Make me a good woman and it don't matter what else, how fat or how ugly or how poor!" (203). But she is immensely grateful that Jesus "had not made her a nigger or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you thank you thank you!" (203).

Mrs. Turpin has good reason to be grateful for her color, considering the depth of her race prejudice. Although she feels that white-trash may be even worse than Negroes, when the white-trash woman says, "They ought to send all them niggers back to Africa," Mrs. Turpin asserts, "It wouldn't be a way in the world you could get all the niggers back over there," because "they're going to stay here where they can go to New York and marry white folks and improve their color. That's what they all want to do, every one of them, improve their color" (200, 201).

Hypocrisy as a concomitant of pride is especially evident in Mrs. Turpin's attitude toward Negroes. She complains to Mary Grace's mother, "We found enough niggers to pick our cotton this year but Claud he has to go after them and take them home again in the evening. They can't walk that half a mile. No they can't." And, laughing merrily, she continues,

"I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you. When they come in the morning, I run out and I say, 'Hi yawl this morning?' and when Claud drives them off to the field I just wave to beat the band and they just wave back" (199).

Of course, her Negroes are hypocritical toward her, too. When she tells them that a girl has said "something real ugly" to her, they insist that this just could not be possible, that they will kill the girl, because Mrs. Turpin is the "sweetest lady" they know, "pretty too," and, as one of them points out, "Jesus satisfied with her!" (213). But "Mrs. Turpin knew just exactly how much Negro flattery was worth and it added to her rage." She growls to herself, "Idiots! . . . You could never say anything intelligent to a nigger. You could talk at them but not with them" (213).

Wrath eventually gets the better of Mrs. Turpin, but the alienated Mary Grace displays nothing but wrath from the beginning. On first seeing Mrs. Turpin, she "raised her head and directed her scowl at Mrs. Turpin as if she did not like her looks" (194). Later she slams down her book and looks "straight in front of her, directly through Mrs. Turpin" (197). Still later, snapping her teeth together, she makes a face: "It was the ugliest face Mrs. Turpin had ever seen anyone make and for a moment she was certain that the girl had made it at her. She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life--all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just all the girl's life" (201).

Immediately after Mary Grace unleashes her fury by hurling her book at Mrs. Turpin, "the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling. The girl's fingers sank like clamps into the soft flesh of her neck" (206).

After the attack, Mrs. Turpin becomes wrathful and bitter toward God. When she goes off to the pig parlor to wage her battle with the Lord, she addresses Him much like someone in the Old Testament would:

"What do you send me a message like that for?" she said in a low fierce voice, barely above a whisper but with the force of a shout in its concentrated fury. "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?" . . .

"Why me?" she rumbled. "It's no trash around here, black or white, that I haven't given to. And break my back to the bone every day working. And do for the church."

She appeared to be the right size woman to command the arena before her. "How am I a hog?" she demanded. "Exactly how am I like them?" and she jabbed the stream of water at the shoats. "There was plenty of trash there. It didn't have to be me." . . .

A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, "Who do you think you are?" (215-216).

Shortly afterwards, rigid as a statue, she gazes at the pigs, "as if through the very heart of mystery. . . . A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life" (217). Humbled, she experiences a major revelation. On a "purple streak in the sky" she sees the communion of saints:

She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics. . . . And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. . . . They were marching behind the others with great dignity. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away (217-218).

When even the virtues of the respectable are burned away, the indication is, as Sister Kathleen Feeley points out, that "natural virtue does as much for fallen men as parlor treatment does for pigs: it does not change their intrinsic nature. Only one thing can change man: his participation in the grace of Redemption."<sup>2</sup>

The outstanding symbol in this tale is the hog. Mrs. Turpin clearly considers hogs as creatures from hell, for she interprets Mary Grace's message literally when the girl tells her, "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog" (207). She has been accused of being evil, and the swine imagery is vivid after this episode:<sup>3</sup>

The instant she was flat on her back, the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head (209-210).

The shoats were running about shaking themselves like idiot children, their little slit pig eyes searching the floor for anything left. She had read that pigs were the most intelligent animal. She doubted it. . . .

A-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin (214-215).

"Go on," she yelled [at the Lord], "call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell" (216).

Another prominent symbol in this tale is the eye:<sup>4</sup>

The girl's eyes seemed lit all of a sudden with a peculiar light, an unnatural light like night road signs give (197).

Directly across the table, the ugly girl's eyes were fixed on Mrs. Turpin as if she had some very special reason for disliking her (197).

But every time Mrs. Turpin exchanged a look with the lady, she was aware that the ugly girl's peculiar eyes were still on her, and she had trouble bringing her attention back to the conversation (199).

Her eyes were fixed like two drills on Mrs. Turpin. This time there was no mistaking that there was something urgent behind them (203).

The girl's eyes stopped rolling and focused on her. They seemed a much lighter blue than before, as if a door that had been tightly closed behind them was now open to admit light and air (207).

A visionary light settled in her eyes (217).

Also of symbolic significance are the sun and the trees:<sup>5</sup>

The sun was getting whiter and whiter, blanching the sky overhead so that the leaves of the hickory tree were black in the face of it (213).

The sun was a deep yellow now like a harvest moon and was riding westward very fast over the far tree line as if it meant to reach the hogs before she did (214).

The sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of trees like a farmer inspecting his own hogs (215).

Unequivocally, a revelation occurs as the awed Mrs. Turpin gazes at the procession on the purple streak of "highway" painted by the disappearing sun. As Miss O'Connor wrote to a friend, "She gets the vision. Wouldn't have been any point in that story if she hadn't. I like Mrs. Turpin as well as Mary Grace. You got to be a very big woman to shout at the Lord across a hogpen. She's a country female Jacob. And that vision is purgatorial."<sup>6</sup> As for Mary Grace, she is a unique character in that she is an intellectual whom Miss O'Connor, contrary to her wont, does not pillory but rather makes an agent of redemption. When one of Flannery O'Connor's friends was asked why the girl was made so ugly, she replied (correctly, in Miss O'Connor's view), "Because Flannery loves her."<sup>7</sup>



TABLE 7: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *REVELATION*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S	
			Ruby Turpin	Mary Grace
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	194,195-196,197-198	
		selfishness	216	
		color/race superiority	199,216 218	
	HYPOCRISIS		200-201,213	
PATIENTIA	IRA	conflicts - between North and South, between generations	213,215-216	194,197,207
	NEGLIGENTIA	alienation		201

Setting: Rural

Symbols: Grotesque: 194,195,200,201;

Circle: 216;

Original Sin: 212;

Sun: 213,214,215.

Eyes: 197, 199, 203, 207, 217;

Trees: 213, 214, 215 ;

Hog: 207, 209 - 210, 214, 215, 216, 217;

Notes

1. Originally published in Sewanee Review 72 (Spring 1964), this story received a posthumous first prize in the O. Henry awards. With "Revelation" and the next story, "Parker's Back," Flannery O'Connor, as Sally Fitzgerald remarks, "achieved her form as a writer, the realization of that potential body of work, uniquely her own, to which everything she had written before had contributed" (Fitzgerald, editorial comment, Habit of Being, pp. 559-560).

2. Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 153.

3. See also above, p. 181. In Christian belief, pigs, especially when black, have been identified with Satan (de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery, p. 264). In Christian art, the hog "is used to represent the demon of sensuality and gluttony" (Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art, p. 7).

4. See above, p. 133, note 2, and p. 152, note 3.

5. See above, p. 133, note 2, and p. 143, note 2.

6. O'Connor to Maryat Lee, 14 May 1964, Habit of Being, p. 577.

7. O'Connor to "A," 17 May 1964, ibid., p. 578.

## CHAPTER 13

### "PARKER'S BACK"

"Parker's Back, though not the last story in the collection, is the last story Flannery O'Connor ever wrote.<sup>1</sup> Quite different from any of her other tales, it is not only the most picaresque but also the most picturesque. The protagonist is O. E. Parker, a young ex-sailor (with a dishonorable discharge from the Navy) who is now a farm laborer and who, obsessed with tattoos, has them all over his body except, as the story opens, on his back. The other main character is Sarah Ruth, Parker's shrewish pregnant wife, a thin, ugly woman who is strongly fundamentalist (her father is a Straight Gospel preacher) and who, besides "her other bad qualities," is "forever sniffing up sin" (220).

Parker's obsession with tattoos began at a fair when, fourteen years old, he saw a man who was tattooed from head to toe. After this he felt a strange uneasiness: "It was as if a blind boy had been turned so gently in a different direction that he did not know his destination had been changed" (223). Trying to combat his uneasiness, he started having himself tattooed. But the satisfaction he got with each successive tattoo never lasted long, so he kept getting one after another. When he first met Sarah Ruth while selling apples, she was repelled by his tattoos, calling them

"vanity of vanities" (225), and she has not changed her opinion. To his regret he married this ugly girl, but only because it was the only way he could have his way with her. Never fond of her, he cannot understand why he does not leave her. It is "as if she had him conjured" (219), and this puzzles and shames him.

Because his dissatisfaction with his tattoos is overwhelming and because he believes it might improve his relationship with Sarah Ruth, he has a large, staring Byzantine Christ tattooed on his back. When the tattoo artist asks him mockingly if he has got religion, Parker replies, "I ain't got no use for none of that. A man can't save his self from whatever it is he don't deserve none of my sympathy" (238). But he finds that the tattoo transforms him with its mystical power and he feels that he must forever obey the eyes that are now permanently on his back. For the first time he is able to admit freely to his Old Testament names, Obadiah Elihue.<sup>2</sup> But his wife, who can see the tattoo only in a conventional way, regards him as an idolator. She proceeds to beat him with a broom, raising large welts on the face of the Christ tattoo. Subjected to this second purgation, the once-egotistical Parker is further humbled and, leaning against a tree, cries like a baby, a child of Christ.

Parker's pride is manifested in his conceitedness. It was, for instance, plain to him before he married Sarah Ruth that "she was crazy about him" after his third visit. He now believes that even a woman as old as his employer, who

is around seventy, could sometimes get "an interest in a young man, particularly if he was as attractive as Parker felt he was" (220). Trying to make his wife jealous, he tells her that his aged employer is "a hefty young blonde" (220). Embroidering on his lie, he says, "And you should have seen her face the first time she saw me without my shirt. . . . 'Mr. Parker,' she said, 'you're a walking panner-rammer!'" She had indeed said this, "but it had been delivered out of one side of her mouth" (231). Parker himself is guilty of the deadly sin of lust, since he married Sarah Ruth because "he couldn't have got her any other way," and now she is, to his regret, pregnant, "and pregnant women were not his favorite kind" (219).

Pride is evident in Sarah Ruth's self-righteousness. She obviously feels superior to Parker and appears to be hypocritical as well: "Sometimes he supposed that she married him because she meant to save him. At other times he had a suspicion that she actually liked everything she said she didn't" (220).

Parker's wrath is subdued and is primarily revealed in his blasphemies and his low-keyed exchanges with Sarah Ruth. When she tells him, "It's no reason you can't work for a man. It don't have to be a woman," he mutters, "Aw shut your mouth for a change" (220). About to show her his new tattoo, he says quietly, "Shut your mouth. . . . Look at this and then I don't want to hear no more out of you" (243).

Parker's tattoos are symbolic of his angst (which is subsumed under wrath). As his angst increases, he enlarges

his collection of tattoos, including some obscene ones on his abdomen, which he thinks is "the proper place for them" (224). His angst is evident, too, when after faking an injury he curses wildly, and is seemingly faced with a huge, "hawk-eyed angel" (who turns out to be Sarah Ruth):

He doubled over and held his hand close to his chest. "God dammit!" he hollered, "Jesus Christ in hell! Jesus God Almighty damm! God dammit to hell!" he went on, flinging out the same few oaths over and over as loud as he could.

Without warning a terrible bristly claw slammed the side of his face and he fell backwards on the hood of the truck. "You don't talk no filth here!" a voice close to him shrilled.

Parker's vision was so blurred that for an instant he thought he had been attacked by some creature from above, a giant, hawk-eyed angel wielding a hoary weapon. As his sight cleared, he saw before him a tall raw-boned girl with a broom (221).

Parker is anguished and "gloomier than ever" when he realizes that "marriage did not change Sarah Ruth a jot" (23). A vision of a tree of fire does nothing to alleviate his angst. While baling hay but preoccupied with thoughts about what kind of design he is going to have tattooed on his back, he crashes the tractor into a large old tree in the middle of an otherwise cleared field. The tractor bursts into flame.

The first thing Parker saw were his shoes, quickly eaten by the fire; one was caught under the tractor, the other was some distance away, burning by itself. He was not in them. He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face. He scrambled backwards, still sitting, his eyes cavernous, and if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it (232-233).<sup>3</sup>

Sarah Ruth's impatience and wrath are clearly evident in her nagging and her disgust with Parker's lies and tattoos. Referring to the "hefty blonde" he has fabricated as his employer, she says, "You're tempting sin and at the judgement seat of God you'll have to answer for that too."

You ought to go back to selling the fruits of the earth" (230). Hands on her hips, she later confronts him: "That was no hefty blonde woman you was working for and you'll have to pay her every penny on her tractor you busted up" (243). With her usual fanaticism, she tells Parker, "At the judgement seat of God, Jesus is going to say to you, 'What you been doing all your life besides have pictures drawn all over you?'" (230).

When Sarah Ruth first sees the Christ tattooed on Parker's back, she growls, "Another picture. . . . I might have known you was off after putting some more trash on yourself" (243). Initially, she denies that it can be a picture of God, for "God don't look like that!" (244). Incensed, she continues, "He don't look. . . . He's a spirit. No man shall see his face." When Parker groans that it is "just a picture of him," Sarah Ruth screams, "Idolatry! Idolatry! Emflaming 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 Parker, "too stunned to resist," lets her beat him--and the face of the tattoo--with a broom. Afterwards, she shakes the broom out "to get the taint of him off it" (244). And she contemptuously watches as he cries, leaning against a tree--in a posture suggesting the Crucifixion.

Parker has been open to mystery and open to grace, whereas the "religious" Sarah Ruth, in closing her heart, has closed herself also from the power of grace.

In this unusual story Parker, in his psychological and spiritual quest, is symbolic of Everyman. He is lost,

searching for his Holy Grail. He goes from job to job, from tattoo to tattoo. He makes circles, which have symbolic meaning:<sup>4</sup>

Once or twice he found himself turning around abruptly as if someone were trailing him (231).

Parker began at the outside of the field and made circles inward toward [the tree]. . . . As he circled the field his mind was on a suitable design for his back (232).

Eyes are notable for their symbolic significance in this story:<sup>5</sup>

On one of the pages a pair of eyes glanced at him swiftly (234).

Parker returned to the picture--the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes (235).

Her eyes appeared soft and dilatory compared with the eyes in the book, for even though he could not summon up the exact look of those eyes, he could still feel their penetration. He felt as though, under their gaze, he was as transparent as the wing of a fly (237).

The eyes in the reflected face continued to look at him--still, straight, all-demanding, enclosed in silence (239).

The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed (241).

The sun is not much in evidence but there is at least one obviously symbolic description:<sup>6</sup> "The sun, the size of a golf ball, began to switch regularly from in front to behind him, but he appeared to see it both places as if he had eyes in the back of his head" (232). The presence of the sun is implied in a doubly symbolic sentence: "Then as he stood there, a tree of light burst over the skyline" (242).

The symbolism of the tree is pronounced:<sup>7</sup>

All at once he saw the tree reaching out to grasp him (232).

He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face (233).



The tree reached out to grasp him again, then burst into flame (237).

"Obadiah," he whispered and 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 (243).

Still gripping [the broom], she looked toward the pecan tree and her eyes hardened still more. There he was--who called himself Obadiah Elihue--leaning against the tree, crying like a baby (244).

Last, but certainly not least, is the symbolism of the tattoo. The tattoo has a long history both in pre-Christian faiths and in the Christian religion as a manifestation of belief in God and of a covenant with Him.<sup>8</sup>

TABLE 8: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *PARKER'S BACK*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S	
			Obadiah Elihue Parker	Sarah Ruth
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	220,229,231	
		conceit		
			238	
	HYPOCRISIS			220
PATIENTIA	IRA	angst	230	243
	NEGLIGENCIA	alienation	243,244	
CONTINENTIA	LUXURIA	fanaticism Lust	219	230

Setting: Rural

Symbols: Circle: 231,232;

Sun: 232,242;

Devil: 221;

Tree: 232,233,237,244; 243;

Eyes; 234,236,241, 235, 237, 239;

Tattoo: passim

Notes

1. This story was published in Esquire in April 1965, the year after Flannery O'Connor's death.

2. Obadiah was a minor prophet; Elihue was one of Job's comforters.

3. Sister Kathleen Feeley points out: "One who is familiar with biblical symbolism will recognize the signs of God's call to Moses to be his spokesman: the burning bush and the baring of the feet. Parker does not hear the voice of God as Moses did; he knows only 'that there had been a great change in his life, a leap forward . . . into a worse unknown, and that there was nothing he could do about it'" (Feeley, Flannery O'Connor, p. 148, quoting, with an interpolation, from p. 233 of Everything).

4. See above, p. 125, note 3.

5. See above, p. 133, note 2, and p. 152, note 3.

6. See above, p. 133, note 2.

7. See above, p. 143, note 2.

8. As Theodore Gaster notes: "The custom of tattooing passed even into Christianity. In early centuries, baptism was known as 'sealing,' and this was also the ancient name for the rite of Confirmation, which originally followed immediately. Nor did the custom survive only in a figurative sense. To this day the Catholics of Central Bosnia tattoo themselves with religious symbols; while in the neighborhood of Loreto (Italy) it is common to do likewise in honor of the celebrated local Madonna, . . . and is recorded of the German mystic, Heinrich Seuse, that he impressed the name of Jesus over his heart" (Theodore Gaster, Customs and Folkways of Jewish Life [New York: Apollo Editions, 1955], pp. 51-52, quoted in Orvell, Invisible Parade, pp. 171-172).

## CHAPTER 13

### "JUDGEMENT DAY"

The final story in the collection, "Judgement Day" is the only story set in the North.<sup>1</sup> Its protagonist is T. C. Tanner, a displaced person who thinks and speaks in biblical language, lives with his daughter and son-in-law in a New York apartment, is partially incapacitated by a stroke, and longs to return--dead or alive--to his home in Corinth, Georgia. The two other main characters represent urban godlessness. One is Tanner's daughter, who tries to be solicitous of her father in her blunt, self-righteous way, but is irritated by his religious injunctions and his nostalgia and obviously regards him as expendable. The other is a short-tempered, atheistic Negro actor who lives in a nearby apartment, vehemently denies being from the South, and is infuriated when Tanner obtusely persists in calling him "Preacher."

Tanner lives a barren existence in the New York apartment, spending most of his time sitting by a window that looks out on a brick wall and a fetid alley. He had made friendly overtures to the Negro actor, only to be rebuffed. The actor had eventually become so enraged at what he regarded as Tanner's condescending attitude that he manhandled him and caused him to have a stroke. Knowing he is soon

going to die, Tanner desperately wants to be buried in Georgia clay. But though his daughter has promised he will get his wish, he finds out that she has no intention of fulfilling it. In a flashback Tanner recalls his days in Corinth, a place that, in contrast to New York, appears to him now as a kind of heaven. He thinks of his life with Coleman, a Negro. Though Coleman had initially been hostile to him when they first met some three decades ago, he became Tanner's staunch friend when Tanner whittled a pair of spectacles out of wood for him (the whittling being a nervous coverup for his fear of the insolent-looking man). Tanner and Coleman had lived in a squatter shack and operated a still until forced out by Dr. Foley, a part-white, part-Negro, part-Indian landowner who brought the property. Rather than working under Foley (whom Tanner regards as a "nigger" no matter how mixed his blood), Tanner decides, to his later regret, to live with his daughter in New York, as she has urged him to do after seeing his shameful living conditions. He now counts on Coleman to have him buried in Corinth. He even imagines journeying home in a coffin from which he will spring up, resurrecting himself before the eyes of Coleman and their friend Hooten, and crying "Judgement Day! Judgement Day.!" (265).

Now, after his daughter has left to go shopping, Tanner, determined to get home, leaves the apartment to start his journey. But his trembling legs give way and he falls, landing upside-down on the stairs. Again he fantasizes his reunion with Coleman. As he mutters Coleman's name, the

Negro actor, who has appeared on the scene, assumes the old man is contemptuously calling him "coal man." Tanner adds to the actor's rage with his last words, "Hep me up, Preacher, I'm on my home" (269). The actor responds by forcing Tanner's head between the banister rails and leaving him to die. And it is in this position that his daughter finds the dead man shortly afterwards. She buries him in New York, but then, conscience-stricken, has him disinterred and ships his body to Corinth. As a result, she now "rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned" (269).

Tanner's daughter suffers from the sin of pride in the form of class-consciousness and racial intolerance. Tanner regards her as "high and mighty" (258), thinks of her as "Mrs. Big" (249). When she found Tanner living as a squatter with Coleman, she reproached him: "If you don't want to live like decent people there's nothing I can do about it" (249). And then: "If you don't have any pride I have and I knew my duty and I was raised to do it. My mother raised me to do it if you didn't. She was from plain people but not the kind that likes to settle in with niggers" (250). For his part, Tanner reveals hypocrisy, a concomitant of pride. On first seeing the New York apartment, he tells her, knowing he is "a damned liar" when he says it, "You got a nice place here. It's a nice part of the country" (266).

In an argument with her husband, the daughter defends her father for sitting in the apartment all day with a black hat on, and again her pride surfaces:

"Well you don't even have you a hat," she said. "Nothing but that leather cap with flaps. People that are somebody wear hats. Other kinds wear those leather caps like you got on."

"People that are somebody!" he cried. "People that are somebody! That kills me! That really kills me!" The son-in-law had a stupid muscular face and a yankee voice to go with it.

"My daddy is here to stay," his daughter said. "He ain't going to last long. He was somebody when he was somebody. He never worked for nobody in his life but himself and had people--other people--working for him."

"Yah? Niggers is what he had working for him," the son-in-law said. "That's all. I've worked a nigger or two myself."

"Those were just nawthun niggers you worked," she said, her voice suddenly going lower so that Tanner had to lean forward to catch the words. "It takes brains to work a real nigger. You got to know how to handle them" (247).

Tanner's daughter reveals her selfishness when she tells her husband she is going to bury Tanner in New York, not in Georgia as Tanner has pleaded: "Im not taking that trip down there again with nobody" (248).

Tanner remembers defending Coleman in front of his daughter. When he first met him he "had an instant's sensation of seeing before him a negative image of himself, as if clownishness and captivity had been their common lot" (255). He had asked his daughter, "Who do you think cooks? Who do you think cuts my firewood and empties my slops? He's paroled to me. That no-good scoundrel has been on my hands for thirty years. He ain't a bad nigger" (250).

But Tanner nevertheless feels superior to Negroes and is proud of his way with them: "The secret of handling a nigger," he thinks to himself now, "was to show him his brains didn't have a chance against yours; then he would jump on your back and know he had a good thing there for life. He had had Coleman on his back for thirty years" (252). (It is, of course, Coleman Tanner calls to when in

extremis.) Thinking again of Coleman, he muses: "You make a monkey out of one of them and he jumps on your back and stays there for life, but let one make a monkey out of you and all you can do is kill him or disappear. And he was not going to hell for killing a nigger" (255-256). When Dr. Foley had told Tanner, "The day coming . . . when the white folks IS going to be working for the colored and you might well to git ahead of the crowd," Tanner had replied shortly, "That day ain't coming for me" (256).

Tanner's tragic last confrontation with the Negro actor occurs because he stubbornly equates the Northern Negro with the back-country Negroes he has bossed, outwitted, and befriended at home in Georgia.

All three of the main characters display wrath. Tanner is furious on overhearing his daughter tell her husband that she has no intention of burying him in Georgia. He tells her off and she replies in kind:

When she returned to the room, Tanner had both hands gripped on the chair arms. His eyes were trained on her like the eyes of an angry corpse. "You promised you'd bury me there," he said. "Your promise ain't any good. Your promise ain't any good. Your promise ain't any good." His voice was so dry it was barely audible. He began to shake, his hands, his head, his feet. "Bury me here and burn in hell!" he cried and fell back into his chair.

The daughter shuddered to attention. "You ain't dead yet!" She threw out a ponderous sigh. "You got a long time to be worrying about that. . . . I do every last living thing for you," she muttered, "and this is the way you carry on. . . . And don't throw hell at me. I don't believe in it. That's a lot of hardshell Baptist hooley" (248).

Accompanying his wrath is Tanner's angst:

With the energy he had conserved yesterday letting her dress him, he has written a note and pinned it in his pocket. IF FOUND DEAD SHIP EXPRESS COLLECT TO COLEMAN PARRUM, CORINTH, GEORGIA. Under this he had continued: COLEMAN SELL MY BELONGINGS AND PAY THE FREIGHT ON ME



& THE UNDERTAKER. ANYTHING LEFT OVER YOU CAN KEEP. YOURS TRULY  
T. C. TANNER. P.S. STAY WHERE YOU ARE. DON'T LET THEM TALK YOU  
INTO COMING UP HERE. ITS NO KIND OF PLACE (246).

In his estrangement and bewilderment, Tanner becomes cowardly toward the Negro actor's wife, a "high-yeller, high-stepping" red-haired woman: "She didn't look like any kind of woman, black or white, he had ever seen before and he remained pressed against the wall, frightened more than anything else, and feigning invisibility" (260, 262). Thirty years earlier he had shown cowardice in overseeing Negro mill workers. He had "managed them with a very sharp penknife" that he held in his quaking hands, "and he had taken to whittling to force that waste motion out of sight" (252).

From the beginning the Negro actor exhibits smoldering rage--which turns murderous. It is as if the fury he directs at Tanner is directed at whites in general. His pride is affronted by Tanner's patronizing manner, so that "some unfathomable dead-cold rage seemed to stiffen and shrink him" (262). His rage increases during his second meeting with Tanner:

The Negro stopped and gripped the banister rail. A tremor racked him from his head to his crotch. Then he began to come forward slowly. When he was close enough he lunged and grasped Tanner by both shoulders. "I don't take no crap," he whispered, "off no wool-hat red-neck son-of-a-bitch pickerwood old bastard like you." He caught his breath. And then his voice came out in the sound of an exasperation so profound that it rocked on the verge of a laugh. It was high and piercing and weak. "And I'm not no preacher! I'm not even no Christian. I don't believe that crap. There ain't no Jesus and there ain't no God."

The old man felt his heart inside him hard and tough as an oak knot. "And you ain't black," he said. "And I ain't white!"

The Negro slammed him against the wall. He yanked the black hat down over his eyes. Then he grabbed his shirt front and shoved him backwards to his open door and knocked him through it (263).

And in his last meeting with Tanner, his rage boils over, so that the daughter finds her father 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," and the police had to "cut him out with a saw" (269).<sup>2</sup>

The Negro actor has knowingly hastened Tanner's death by his refusal to help him and by his physical abuse, but Tanner's daughter too has contributed to his death by refusing to help him in his spiritual quest. As the self-exiled Tanner dies, however, his dream of returning home and shouting to Coleman "Judgement Day!" merges with the reality of the present. His last words are "I'm on my way home" (262), and in death he may find new life, a resurrection.

The symbolism in this story is frequently clear. A metaphorical journey (picaresque) is obvious in the flashbacks taking Tanner to Georgia, to New York, and back to Georgia. The Negro actor appears as a symbol of the devil, with his "small almost invisible goatee" (261) and his "seething noise" (262).

The city appears as a symbol of evil and the apartment as a prison:

The window looked out on a brick wall and down into an alley full of New York air, the kind fit for cats and garbage (245).

At home he had been living in a shack but there was at least air around it. He could put his feet on the ground. Here she didn't even live in a house. She lived in a pigeon-hutch of a building, with all stripes of foreigner, all of them twisted in the tongue. It was no place for a sane man (258).

As Flannery dramatizes and symbolizes repeatedly in her stories, only death can end the captivity of man. And in death there is a rising and converging:

Tanner equates "home," with all its particulars (Corinth, Coleman, Hooten), with heaven on the Day of Judgement, when the dead will be raised and the just will live eternally with God. Judgement Day is thus the equivalent of Teilhard's 'Omega point,' at which all created consciousness will be united with Being itself, with God.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 9: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN *JUDGEMENT DAY*

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	C H A R A C T E R S		
			Tanner	Tanner's Daughter	Negro Actor
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	249	249,250	
		selfishness		248	
		race/color superiority	247,250,251,260	247,250	262-263
	HYPOCRISIS		250-251,266	219 248,265	
EXULTATIO	INVIDIA				
	PUSILLANIMITAS		262,252-253		
PATIENTIA	IRA		250,252-253,248	247,248	
		pettiness/angst	246		
	NEGLIGENTIA	alienation	257-258,261-262		261,263

Setting: Urban (New York)

Symbols: Devil: 262;

Home: 246; 264, 269;

Alter-Ego: 255;

Death: 245,246,248,249;

City and Prison: 245.

Notes

1. This story had never previously been published before appearing in the collection. It is a reworking of Flannery O'Connor's first published story, "The Geranium," which appeared in Accent 6 (Summer 1946).

2. Driskell and Brittain point out that the "biblical emphases in 'Judgement Day' are an interesting combination of the Petrine and the Pauline. Tanner's home is in Corinth, Georgia. Peter is said to have established the church at Corinth, and Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians contains the convert's eloquent testimony of belief in the resurrection of Christ as a benefit conferred on all believers (I Cor. 15). Peter is known as the Apostle to the Gentiles because of his conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), and he was at the house of "one Simon a tanner" when he was summoned to testify to Cornelius; hence Miss O'Connor links national and racial differences to converge in faith with all other Christians. . . . Tanner's initial attitude toward the Negro Coleman is comparable to Saul's early persecution of the Christians, and his thrice-repeated refusal of Dr. Foley's offer of employment parallels Peter's denial of Christ. Coleman was paroled to Tanner and remained with him for thirty years, the number of years of Christ's preparation for his three-year ministry. Finally, Tanner's death--hit hat pulled down over his face and his head and arms thrust through the banister rails--is suggestive of both martyrs' deaths: Paul was beheaded and Peter was crucified upside down" (Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, pp. 109-110).

3. McFarland, Flannery O'Connor, p. 69. "One cannot neglect the possibility," writes Miles Orvell, "That Flannery O'Connor also knew, in her last year, that she too was on her way home. Placed at the end of her last collection of fiction, 'Judgement Day' stands unequivocally as a conclusion in which everything is concluded. . . . It is a kind of last testament of the author" (Orvell, Invisible Parade, p. 187).

PART IV

EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE:

A DESCRIPTIVE AND GRAPHIC ANALYSIS

OF THE MOTIFS

## CHAPTER 15

### THE DEPICTION OF GOOD AND EVIL

In the nine stories, the evil humans inflict upon one another is far more evident than the good they bestow. Miss O'Connor deftly depicts the incessant warring that goes on in everyday life, particularly the conflicts between generations, between classes, and between races, but also the further conflicts: atheists vs. believers, highbrows vs. lowbrows, wives vs. husbands, country people vs. city people, South vs. North, material values vs. spiritual ones.

Flannery O'Connor's view of man's liability to sin as unavoidable because of the First Fall, or original sin, is clearly brought out in all the stories. And there definitely appears to be, as Grosseteste and other medieval scholars believed, a gradation of the virtues and the vices, with each virtue as a mean between two vices and with each of the seven deadly sins representing a lack of the juxtaposed virtue (see Appendix).

In following Grosseteste's gradational scheme, one finds that, at least at the beginning of each story, all the main characters lack the first virtue, humility, and suffer from the opposing vice, pride, along with its concomitant, hypocrisy (as La Rochefoucauld wrote in his Maxims, "Hypocrisy is the homage which vice renders to virtue"). The

faces and shapes of pride are primarily those of class consciousness and a sense of race superiority. For example, Julian is proud and so are his mother and Carver's mother. Mrs. May feels superior to the Greenleafs. Mr. Fortune is proud of his accumulation of property and has such a superiority complex that he cannot stand the sight of the Pittses, except for his granddaughter, who is his spitting image. The intellectual Asbury can barely deign to talk to his mother and sister. Thomas appears to feel infinitely superior to everyone around him, and his grudge toward the "slut" Sarah Ham, who has invaded his privacy and unsettled his organized universe, approaches paranoia. Sheppard, like many of the other protagonists, is almost nauseatingly self-righteous and takes great pride in his charity and his psychological methods, while Rufus, in his demonic fashion, is proud too. Mrs. Turpin's overwhelming class consciousness allows her to see herself as second best in the social pyramid--very near the top. Parker is proud of his looks and his tattoos, and his fanatic wife is, in her own right, proud and unable to accept her husband's vanity and, above all, his idolatry. Tanner is proud of his way with Negroes, his daughter feels acutely superior to them, and the Negro actor is unbearably arrogant in his self-defensive pride.

Characters deprived of exultatio or jocunditas (which Grosseteste defines as one's sympathy with what happens to someone else) suffer from the sin of envy, the accompanying sin being what he calls pusillanimitas. Though pusillanimitas would seem to translate into "cowardice," it is defined



in Grosseteste's scheme as "the slack feeling . . . about what befalls another man, which is neither glad about good things nor sad about evil ones."<sup>1</sup> If the term is accepted in this sense, neither Mrs. Thomas nor even the self-deluded Sheppard can be said to be truly guilty of this vice, but, rather, to evidence the opposing virtue, exultatio. But it seems reasonable to translate the term pusillanimitas as simple cowardice, which looms as a natural accompaniment to envy. Manifesting the most acute envy, along with cowardice, are Mrs. May and Pitts.

Without exception all the main characters display wrath, which in Grosseteste's scheme is accompanied by negligence and is opposed by the virtue of patience. But it would not be fair to say that all the main characters lack patience. Certainly, Thomas's mother, Asbury's mother, and Sheppard exhibit a good bit of patience, however ill-founded.

The sin of covetousness is most stark in Mr. Fortune, who meets his unsavory end because of it. It is also figures in Mrs. Turpin's myopic view of the world. But this sin is a treacherous undercurrent in many of the stories.

Sloth is a vice that applies mostly to Mrs. May's sons. It is manifested to some extent by Thomas, who, though he apparently works diligently enough at his job as a historian, impresses one as being insufferably indolent as he basks in the comforts of home provided by his mother. Whatever other sins the landowning widows in the stories may be guilty of, these industrious women can hardly be accused of the sin of

sloth, but, instead, can be noted for its opposing virtue, occupatio.

Gluttony is not apparently a sin that interested Miss O'Connor to any great degree. But there is indirect reference to it: Julian's mother attends reducing classes at the Y (though the point is made that she is ~~a~~ among the slimmer ones in the class and that she goes partly for the pleasure of it) and Mrs. Turpin weighs a hefty 180 pounds.

The last of the seven deadly sins is lust (which, interestingly, is last in Grosseteste's scheme but is invariably higher up in modern lists of the deadly seven). Presumably guilty of this sin is Sarah Ham, the "nimpermaniac," and it seems to be latent in Thomas. The only other character exhibiting lust is Parker, who mindlessly married a girl because it was the only way he could have his way with her.

The line of demarcation between good and evil becomes just as diffuse in Flannery O'Connor's stories as it does in real life. As she once wrote, "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."<sup>2</sup> Evil-doers sometimes lead to good. For example, the diabolical Rufus not only turns out to be kind, though perversely so, to Norton but also sets Sheppard on the path to illumination; and the apparently loathsome Mary Grace is the agent of Mrs. Turpin's enlightenment. Do-gooders, like Thomas's mother and Sheppard, can, however unintentionally, bring about disaster.

In Flannery O'Connor's Christian view, God made a very orderly world, in which only virtues existed. With the Fall, the world lost its balance; it remains in disorder. Miss O'Connor sees this disorder plainly and portrays it in all the stories. She finds man distorted by angst and alienation (which are forms of wrath), and all her main characters exhibit angst in their turmoil, caught in the imbalance between evil and good. It is much easier to acquiesce to sin or sinful tendencies than to strive constantly for perfection. Plagued by original sin, man is a fragmentary being who, torn between the forces of good and evil, externalizes his inner conflicts, exploding with hate, anger, envy, pride, and other sins. In Flannery O'Connor's last stories, it is the sins of pride, wrath, and covetousness that are paramount as this fragmentary being seeks his own identity, usually fleeing from God's presence, yet, contrarily, hoping to enjoy God's presence.<sup>3</sup> It was through pride that Adam disobeyed God and mankind fell, encumbered ever after with original sin. And because of man's frailty when tempted by the devil, who constantly tries to conquer man--that is, to defeat God in man--the fight against evil goes on and on. But sometimes, at a most unpredictable moment, the person who has been blind to God's presence, suddenly awakens spiritually. As at the end of some of these stories, he sees beyond the actual events, beyond the natural phenomena around him, beyond the concrete and material: the supernatural is linked to the natural, and there is a transcendental movement upward--

toward God, or Oneness. He becomes a whole man by the power of grace and the mystery of the Holy Ghost.

Although Flannery O'Connor inevitably sees man as a sinner, as a Christian believer she allows the reader to detect hope in most of the stories. Not everything is lost through pride, envy, wrath, and the other vices. No matter what befalls man, the possibility of salvation always hovers in the background.

TABLE 10: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF SHAPES AND FACES OF GOOD AND EVIL IN ALL NINE STORIES

VIRTUES	VICES	SHAPES	ETRMC	GREENLEAF	A VIEW	E. CHILL	THE COMFORTS	THE LAME	REVELATION	PARKER'S BACK	JUDGMENT DAY	TOTAL
HUMILIATIO	SUPERBIA	class-consciousness	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
		selfishness	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
		race-color superiority	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	8
	HYPOCRISIS		+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	8
EXULTATIO	INVIDIA	covetousness	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
PATIENTIA	IRA	pettiness	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
		angst	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	8
	NEGLIGENTIA	alienation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	9
ABSTINENTIA		gluttony	+					+				
OCCUPATIO		sloth		+			+					
CONTINENTIA		lust					+			+		

Notes

1. Wenzel, "Seven Deadly Sins," p. 11, note 43.
2. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 226.
3. As Holman points out, "Flannery O'Connor's restless souls belong to people primitive in mind and Protestant in religion, who with all their difference, share a common, deep, and personal awareness of the awful and awesome presence and power of God in the world" (Holman, "Her Rue with a Difference," p. 86).

## CHAPTER 16

### THE USE OF THE GROTESQUE

In all the nine stories Flannery O'Connor bears out her view that "the Catholic, using his own eyes and the eyes of the Church (when he is inclined to open them) is in a most favorable position to recognize the grotesque."<sup>1</sup>

In reading the stories, one must in fact, as Marion Montgomery remarks, deal with two grotesques:

the one involves her deliberate distortions of the natural so as to make a comic appearance which the understanding shows as anything but comic. The other appears as an ordinary figuring of the natural, sharply heightened but not distorted. What she often does at the climax of a story is bring the two together: that which the general reader takes to be the grotesque (upon which she enlarges through her cartooning of action or situation); and that which she herself considers truly grotesque, the distortion of her visionary reality through which distortion mystery is denied.<sup>2</sup>

Muller stresses that

grotesque characterization does not necessarily make the characters in a story remote or improbable, since the sacrifice in psychological realism is more counterbalanced by the impact of the grotesque.

...  
In effect the grotesque character is "demonic," and as such he certainly embraces as wide a moral range as characters created through the techniques of psychological realism. Frequently the grotesque protagonist is fated, obsessed, driven by his demon. . . . With O'Connor . . . the grotesque character is never gratuitous; he speaks to us about our own experience, and he responds to a world that has recognizable attributes.<sup>3</sup>

As Pearce says, "It is just when her characters are most grotesque that we see them as most human."<sup>4</sup>

The nine stories generously reflect Muller's comments about cultural grotesques:

The true cultural grotesques are the invariably well-mannered members of the community who ignore the spiritual foundations of their culture. Miss O'Connor sees the South as struggling to preserve this spiritual identity, not only against . . . the Sheppards, but also against those numerous members of the community who substitute sanctimoniousness for true Christian virtue. This insight into human nature applies especially well to her earth mothers--to Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," . . . and to Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation."<sup>5</sup>

Flannery O'Connor's important use of the grotesque has already been treated at some length (see pages 47-54). The following depictions of grotesquerie in the nine stories reveal a wondrous talent at work.

At the outset we see Julian's mother, "the dumpy figure surmounted by the atrocious hat" (5). Toward the end of the story, after being struck by the Negress, she becomes unrecognizable: she lurches forward, "walking as if one leg were shorter than the other" (22). The Negress is herself grotesque, "a ponderous figure, rising from the red shoes upward over the solid hips, the mammoth bosom, the haughty face, to the green and purple hat" (17).

Mrs. May is also introduced as a grotesque figure, with "her nightgown hanging loosely from her narrow shoulders. Green rubber curlers sprouted neatly over her forehead and her face beneath them was smooth as concrete with an egg-white paste that drew the wrinkles out while she slept" (25). She is "a small woman with pale near-sighted eyes and grey hair that rose on top like the crest of some disturbed bird" (27). Mrs. Greenleaf and her children enlarge the gallery of grotesque characters: "Mrs. Greenleaf was large and loose. The yard around her house looked like a dump and her five girls were always filthy; even the youngest one dipped



snuff. Instead of making a garden or washing their clothes, her preoccupation was what she called 'prayer healing'" (30). But, as Muller points out, there is an enormous difference between the grotesqueness of Mrs. May and that of the Greenleaves. Mrs. May is like Mrs. Turpin:

These women traipse their fields, pastures, and woods with a single-minded sense of righteous proprietorship that prevents them from recognizing a fundamentally spiritual estrangement from their surroundings, an estrangement rooted in their inability to act charitably toward their neighbors. Unaware of their alienation, these ordinary individuals are extremely vulnerable to extraordinary events which test their harshness and rigidity of spirit.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand,

the Greenleaves, as their name implies, are in basic harmony with nature. More importantly Mrs. Greenleaf embraces a variety of worship which is reminiscent of early mystery religions based on vegetation and on earth. Her mortification and ecstasy, which are appalling to Mrs. May, are ways of experiencing the spiritual through nature; moreover, Mrs. Greenleaf thinks in terms of a primitive salvation for mankind. Mrs. May's failure to understand the rituals which Mrs. Greenleaf enacts before her eyes signifies the modern failure to integrate religious mystery with culture.<sup>7</sup>

Mr. Fortune is the grotesque prototype of the evil of "progress" and civilization. There is, as Muller notes, "a deliberate effort to link the obsessions of . . . Mr. Fortune with the landscape, which is frequently rendered through terse, unpleasant, and decidedly violent imagery."<sup>8</sup> Possibly the most grotesque scene in the collection is the one in which the old man and his granddaughter engage in a mortal struggle, a fight to the death in "an ugly red bald spot surrounded by long thin pines that appeared to be gathered there to witness anything that would take place in such a clearing" (78)--nature as God's eyes.

In "The Enduring Chill" the symbolic bird with its icicles is grotesque, as is the good Father Finn, a huge

old man, half-blind and half-deaf, "with a large red face" (104-105).

In "The Comforts of Home," Thomas is, of course, an example of the grotesque protagonist who is, as Muller noted above, obsessed and is propelled by his demon. And then there is another kind of grotesque in the form of Sarah Ham:

Sarah Ham was slumped spraddle-legged against the banister on the boarding house front-steps. Her tam was down on her forehead where the old woman had slammed it and her clothes were bulging out of her suitcase where the old woman had thrown them in. She was carrying on a drunken conversation with herself in a low personal tone. A streak of lipstick ran up one side of her face. She allowed herself to be guided by his mother to the car and put in the back seat without seeming to know who the rescuer was. "Nothing to talk to all day but a pack of goddamned parakeets," she said in a furious whisper (129).

The club-footed, sly Rufus Johnson incarnates the grotesque both in body and in soul. His foot is so deformed that "what was roughly the toe had been broken open again and he had patched it with a piece of canvas" (175). Again, Muller makes some trenchant comments, as he compares Rufus with the Misfit in one of Miss O'Connor's earlier stories, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find":

Both Rufus and the Misfit conceive of their criminality in strict theological terms. Both perform their criminal acts for the sake of evil and both consider themselves damned because of them. Yet these criminals do not regard themselves as complete losses because they realize that salvation is a simple matter of repentance, that Jesus is the only one who can save them.

These "criminals" are therefore grotesques of a very special sort. Deliberately cutting themselves off from transcendent values, they lapse into what is essentially an attitude of despair. And with the recession of belief which they experience comes the isolation, alienation, and sense of abandonment that most grotesque protagonists and antagonists feel.<sup>9</sup>

In "Revelation," the doctor's waiting-room is a gallery of grotesques. There is, for instance, Mary Grace, "a fat

girl of eighteen or nineteen," whose "face was blue with acne" (193, 194). Near this ugly girl Mrs. Turpin sees "a thin leathery old woman in a cotton print. She and Claud had three sacks of chicken feed in their pump house that was in the same print" (194). Both Mrs. Turpin and her husband are portrayed as piglike creatures. When Mrs. Turpin lies down at home after being assaulted by Mary Grace, "the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head. . . . 'I am not,' she said tearfully, 'a wart hog. From hell.' But the denial had no force" (209-210). After kissing his distraught wife, "Claud got up, groaning and growling, and limped off" (211). The way in which Mrs. Turpin vents her anger over Mary Grace is a fine example of grotesque action: "Her free fist was knotted and with the other she gripped the hose, blindly pointing the stream of water in and out of the eye of the old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear" (215).

And then there are the tattoos with which Parker illustrates his body: "He had stopped having lifeless ones like anchors and crossed rifles. He had a tiger and a 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" (224). As for Parker's wife, she is just as grotesque in her fanaticism as he is in his obsession.

Finally, the upside-down, distorted position of Tanner's body in death is almost obscene in its grotesqueness.

Clearly, grotesquerie is a hallmark of all the stories. Flannery O'Connor made no bones about the importance of the grotesque to her, and one of her statements concerning it bears repeating. To the writer whose concerns are predominantly those of mystery, she said, "prophecy is a matter of seeing near things with their extensions of meaning and thus of seeing far things close up. The prophet is a realist of distances, and it is this kind of realism that you find in the best modern instances of the grotesque."<sup>10</sup>

Notes

1. O'Connor to Cecil Dawkins, 19 June 1957, Habit of Being, p. 227.
2. Montgomery, "Flannery O'Connor's Transformation of the Sentimental," pp. 8-9.
3. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, pp. 22, 23.
4. Pearce, Stages of the Clown, p. 71.
5. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, p. 46.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p. 87.
8. Ibid., p. 22.
9. Ibid., p. 32.
10. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 44.

## CHAPTER 17

### THE OFFER OF REDEMPTIVE GRACE

"More than in the Devil," Flannery O'Connor once explained, "I am interested in the indication of Grace, the moment when you know that Grace has been offered and accepted. . . . These moments are prepared for (by me anyway) . . . by the intensity of the evil circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

Most of the protagonists in the stories have their moment of grace, but it comes always at great price. It comes at a moment of immense suffering, when all seems to be lost. That is its mystery. Yet there is a clue to why redemption in Miss O'Connor's stories always seems to be preceded by catastrophe, and it is found in her statement that "I keep thinking more and more about the presentation of love and charity, or better call it grace, as love suggests tenderness, whereas grace can be violent or would have to be to compete with the kind of evil I can make concrete."<sup>2</sup>

The fiction of the Catholic writer, Flannery O'Connor said, will see man

as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace. And it will see this grace as working through nature, but as entirely transcending it, so that a door is always open to possibility and the unexpected in the human soul. Its center of meaning will be Christ; its center of destruction will be the devil. No matter how this view of life may be fleshed out, these assumptions form its skeleton.<sup>3</sup>

As Julian's mother dies, stunned not only by the blow

delivered by the Negress but also by her new-found insight, she senses that she is going "home." And as Julian is about to enter "the world of guilt and sorrow" (23), his salvation is made possible.

Mrs. ~~May~~<sup>TURPIN</sup> has two revelations, thanks to the diabolical Mary Grace, and is prepared to recognize and accept the grace that is extended.

The macabre scene that concludes "A View of the Woods" gives no hint of redemptive grace. Nevertheless, Sister Bertrande Meyers insists that even in this story grace is there. She contends that all the main characters had hope--however different their hopes were:

Here the author goes to the very soul, indeed to the very meaning of redemptive grace--hope. Man can live, however barrenly, without charity. Man can live, however aimlessly, without faith. But the human heart cannot live without hope, for without hope the will to live, to struggle, to somehow survive, dies out. . . .

Hope must have a sign or symbol, spiritual or material. It was the view of the woods across from the land on which they were suffered to live that sustained the oppressed Pittses in their bondage to the tyrannical old man Fortune. . . . Some day the old man would die and the land that faced the woods would be theirs. To this hope the Pittses did and could cling fiercely if not lovingly.

For old Mark Fortune there was one burning hope: to make his granddaughter into his own image and likeness, leave her his entire fortune. . . .

For little Mary Fortune hope worked toward someday being herself "Pure Pitts" and thus accepted and loved by her family, and perhaps of help to them, even at the cost of her grandfather's favor and fortune.

The crux of the story is not in its bloody and seemingly pointless climax, but in this fact of hope, the symbol and seal of redemptive grace; here, natural and material symbols, to be sure, but the base on which grace must work to achieve even the slow beginnings of the supernatural.<sup>4</sup>

This theory, interesting as it is, seems to stretch things a bit far. As noted earlier, Flannery O'Connor herself once remarked, "I am afraid that one of the great

disadvantages of being known as a Catholic writer is that no one thinks you can lift the pen without trying to show somebody is redeemed."<sup>5</sup>

In "The Enduring Chill," by contrast, Asbury's vision of the Holy Ghost is a clear sign of redemptive grace. Lensing makes an excellent point when he writes:

According to the vision of Flannery O'Connor the world contains, not only the coexistence of imperfection and redemption, but the mutual dependence of each upon the other. Those who seek to escape the flawed order of existence and to live instead in an illusory world inevitably insulate themselves from the powers of redemption. This is the ultimate lesson learned by Asbury at the end of "The Enduring Chill," and by [Sheppard] in "The Lambe Shall Enter First." The cohabitation of good and evil, of salvation and frailty, provides a setting for some of O'Connor's most effective irony.<sup>6</sup>

As already discussed, Flannery O'Connor contended that "The Comforts of Home" does not end in redemption (see pages 160-161, above). Millichap takes the view that at least Thomas's catastrophe could "be a 'fortunate fall' that will free him from his smug isolation and provide a chance to make expiation for his pridefulness through suffering. . . . Certainly, Flannery O'Connor presents in 'The Comforts of Home' the discomfoting knowledge that there exists no easy path to salvation, either secular or spiritual."<sup>7</sup>

In "The Lambe Shall Enter First," Sheppard, already having experienced insight in his last encounter with Rufus, must now face the horror of his only son's suicide, but this, too, may hasten his salvation. As Thelma Shinn observes:

He is granted a revelation and a chance to suffer for his sins and thus to attain redemption and spiritual life. As he realizes he has neglected his son, he "saw the clear-eyed Devil, the sounder of hearts." To see the Devil is just one step removed from seeing God, and that vision can only be reached through redemptive suffering. But with his view of the Devil Sheppard enters the spiritual world. He recognizes his own sin and insignificance.<sup>8</sup>



As for Rufus Johnson:

Johnson's mischief wasn't, as the perverted vision of Sheppard saw it, "the compensation for the foot"; rather, the foot was his compensation for the mischief. Although the Devil was controlling his deeds, Johnson's burden of belief was still with him symbolized by the foot--it was his consciousness of possible redemption: "The lame shall enter first! The halt'll be gathered together. When I get ready to be saved, Jesus'll save me. . . ." That Johnson realized its redemptive promise is evident: "Johnson was as touchy about the foot as if it were a sacred object." The suffering it demands of him is his penance, his possible martyrdom.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of Mrs. Turpin, the offer of redemptive grace is clear. As Montgomery describes her final revelation: "The broad highway to Hell, which her pride has led her to suppose destined for most people, suddenly turns unreasonably into a general escalator to salvation. For such is the overwhelming possibility of Love over self-love."<sup>10</sup>

Parker, who all along has been struggling with religious dread, is finally shaken out of his pride and vanity. Humbled, he ends up weeping like a child. Leaning against a tree, in a semblance of the Crucifixion, he experiences a rebirth. As Eggenschwiler notes, "Miss O'Connor sometimes uses man's restlessness and desires, as she uses his anxiety, to show that he has not completely lost his essential self or his possibilities for salvation."<sup>11</sup>

Tanner may have attained his path to resurrection, but his daughter, having assuaged her guilty conscience by having him dug up and shipping his body back to Georgia, displays no sign of having suffered sufficiently to experience grace: "Now she rests well at night and her good looks have mostly returned" (269).

Flannery O'Connor stated that all her stories "are

about the action of grace on a character who is not very willing to support it, but most people think of these stories as hard, hopeless, brutal, etc."<sup>12</sup> She lamented that in order to get across "the reality of grace," the Catholic fiction writer first had to make "God believable" to "an audience not adequately equipped to believe anything."<sup>13</sup>

Miss O'Connor found that, in order to make her stories "work," she needed a wholly unexpected, but wholly credible action; and this always turned out to be "an action which indicates that grace has been offered" and often one "in which the devil has been an unwilling instrument of grace."<sup>14</sup> As she explained, "This is not a piece of knowledge that I consciously put into my stories; it is a discovery that I get out of them. I have found, in short, from reading my own writing, that my subject in fiction is the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil."<sup>15</sup>



Notes

1. O'Connor to John Hawkes, 26 December 1959, Habit of Being, pp. 367-368.
2. O'Connor to Andrew Lytle, 4 February 1960, *ibid.*, p. 373.
3. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 197.
4. Meyers, "Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor," pp. 423, 424.
5. O'Connor to John Hawkes, 3 March 1961, Habit of Being, p. 434.
6. Lensing, "De Chardin's Ideas in Flannery O'Connor," pp. 174-175.
7. Millichap, "Pauline 'Old Man' in Flannery O'Connor's 'The Comforts of Home,'" p. 99.
8. Shinn, "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," p. 73.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
10. Montgomery, "Flannery O'Connor's Transformation of the Sentimental," p. 13.
11. Eggenschwiler, Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor, p. 73.
12. O'Connor to "A," 4 April 1958, Habit of Being, p. 275.
13. O'Connor to "A," 5 July 1958, *ibid.*, p. 290.
14. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 118.

PART V

THE VISION BEYOND

## CHAPTER 18

### COSMOVISION

As a writer with deep "Christian concerns," Flannery O'Connor regarded with undisguised disfavor the complacency of those who revel in technological advances and cling to material values above all. She once said that

'the writer who emphasizes spiritual values is very likely to take the darkest view of all of what he sees in this country today. For him, the fact that we are the most powerful and the wealthiest nation in the world doesn't mean a thing in any positive sense. The sharper the light of faith, the more glaring are apt to be the distortions the writer sees in the life around him.<sup>1</sup>

Because she put so much emphasis on spiritual values, she has been regarded as a "revolutionary" in the American literary world. As Father May observes, "She has with considerable art and with no less determination reintroduced religious, more specifically Christian, concerns into contemporary American literature; and even her severest critics--invariably those who find her world-view abhorrent--acknowledge this."<sup>2</sup>

Well aware that the secular world does not believe in the basic "theological truths of the Faith . . . the Fall, the Redemption, and the Judgment," or "in sin, or in the value that suffering can have, or in eternal responsibility," Flannery O'Connor saw that "the Catholic writer often finds himself writing in and for a world that is unprepared and

unwilling to see the meaning of life as he sees it. This means frequently that he may resort to violent literary means to get his vision across to a hostile audience."<sup>3</sup> And so, with shock tactics, corrosive humor, and stern compassion, she attempted to show that the sinner--man plagued with original sin--tries to avoid his Creator but has not the power to escape God's Providence.

Frank N. Magill neatly sums up her guiding vision:

Flannery O'Connor is not telling us so much as she is reminding us that our "condition" is fourfold: we are sinners; we shall die; we are equal in the sight of God; and we cannot expect to understand God's mercy but must recognize it in whatever outrageous form it appears, which is the beginning of salvation. Her term for that recognition is the "revelation" of sin, or death, or equality, and the beginning of "redemption." She does not follow the process of redemption, only its initiation through whatever unlikely instrument God chooses. Both Flannery O'Connor and her God are ironists, and we and all her heroes are willful characters who must be humbled in learning that the will of God must prevail. This is the guiding vision in all her work.<sup>4</sup>

So it is that her protagonist often goes on a metaphorical pilgrimage, passionately seeking some meaning and order. He suffers, fights on his testing ground, and--defeated--returns home, to his Creator. Flannery O'Connor saw man as a fragmentary being, a kind of freak, who becomes whole and resumes his human identity only after undergoing a cathartic experience. Distortions then disappear; order is reinstated. The imbalance caused by the Fall is corrected through revelation and grace. Blind before, the humbled hero is now able to "see." His vision restored, he can be reached by grace. He is able to go "home"--and is willing to do so.

But before the catharsis, the violent action, Flannery O'Connor's protagonists are wracked by angst, which is

attributable to man's perverted nature. Heirs to original sin, they constantly manifest the conflict of being attracted to the holy and at the same time disbelieving it. As Malin says, "We recognize our 'fear and trembling'--and our sense that it is divinely inspired--in her enduring, chilly fiction."<sup>5</sup>

It was, as Thelma Shinn has noted, Biblical parables, more than medieval morality plays, that influenced Miss O'Connor:

Each of the parables, couched in the violence Miss O'Connor sees necessary to wake the "sleeping children of God," expresses a variation of her vision--a vision that demands that man look beyond the secular to the spiritual, that he turn away from the "comforts of home" to the pain of penance--to what Greene calls "the appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of God."<sup>6</sup>

After violent catharsis, man finds himself recognizing God, whom he had dismissed in the name of progress, scientism, and other "gods." This is vividly pictured, for instance, in "The Lame Shall Enter First," in which disaster overtakes Sheppard as he tries to substitute scientific inquiry for spiritual understanding.

Flannery O'Connor wanted constantly to demonstrate the grotesqueness of those who, stultified by their spiritless indulgences, deny God. Her method was to expose her protagonist to extreme evil and thus to disorient him. As Muller points out:

Flannery O'Connor was a visionary--admittedly a comic one--whose powers of perception made both secular and religious experience more meaningful. She hated evil with an intensity and clarity of insight unusual among modern writers, who are frequently seduced by the attractiveness and fascination of evil.<sup>7</sup>

Miss O'Connor's way of showing evil is distinctive.



She allows the reader to follow the interior monologue of a character--who more often than not embodies evil more than good--and to sympathize with his predicament, however much she cartoons him. Sometimes the reader is indeed almost convinced of the character's righteousness, when, all at once, a new, unpredictable situation occurs through an act of violence that opens the way to redemption and shows God's untiring forgiveness. This propitiation, through actual or metaphorical death, is preceded either by a vision or by a recognition of one's sins. Frequently the sinner dies or the "hollow man" repents, and a new life is open to him. He becomes a new man in Christ--a whole man--and the evil within him dies too. To achieve transcendental order or perfection, man must go through a terrible ordeal. He must purge his sins through humiliation and thereby realize that the last word is God's.

All this accounts for one of Flannery O'Connor's most revealing statements: "I'm a born Catholic and death has always been brother to my imagination. I can't imagine a story that doesn't properly end in it or its foreshadowing."<sup>8</sup> Death, judgment, the return to god, the eternal life--she used all these to convey her Catholic conviction of the frailty of humankind and its dependence on God. The return to Him is unavoidable. The vision beyond incorporates this belief: No matter how terrible a man's sins, God is always there to save him. For He created humans, with all their frailties, to follow His plan of eternal love, to live in

holy happiness; he left the way to salvation open for all. He will come again (Parousia) to bestow on all the gifts he once promised and that are awaited. As Father May remarks:

Anyone who has relinquished the facile optimism of imminent release from the agony of living can face the terror of history and accept the frighteningly slow process of growth into the future. Anyone with genuine hope can face the gloom of man's potential for destruction and yet work for the final city of man. Writers Hawthorne, O'Connor, and Faulkner know the tradition they are a part of; they are masters of their medium enough to use it creatively.<sup>9</sup>

It was obviously Miss O'Connor's belief that everything that befalls man can lead to his salvation. Yet the meaning of her fiction can be elusive on a superficial reading. On the one hand, her words can be taken as depicting ordinary reality. On the other, they often have an anagogical meaning, which leads into the supernatural, the transcendental or divine. As she explained it:

The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or one situation. The medieval commentators on Scripture found three kinds of meaning in the literal level of the sacred text: one they called allegorical, in which one fact pointed to another; one they called tropological, or moral, which had to do with what should be done; and one they called anagogical, which had to do with the Divine life and our participation in it. Although this was a method applied to biblical exegesis, it was also an attitude toward all of creation, and a way of reading nature which included most possibilities.<sup>10</sup>

To Flannery O'Connor the main difference between the fiction writer "who is an orthodox Christian" and the one "who is merely a naturalist" is that the former "lives in a larger universe. He believes that the natural world contains the supernatural. And this doesn't mean that his obligation to portray the natural is less; it means it is greater."<sup>11</sup> Although all her stories appear to deal with banal, everyday

situations, the perceptive reader will find, on a second or third reading, that apparently insignificant details reveal a vision beyond.<sup>12</sup>

The realism she uses is one that "does not hesitate to distort appearances to show a hidden truth."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, her use of the grotesque has theological underpinnings. She was much taken with Conrad's statement that "his aim as a fiction writer was to render the highest possible justice to the visible universe,"<sup>14</sup> and she elaborated by quoting him:

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see. That--and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there, according to your deserts, encouragement, consolation, fear, charm, all you demand--and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask.<sup>15</sup>

The Catholic fiction writer, in Miss O'Connor's view, has complete freedom simply to observe:

He feels no call to take on the duties of God or to create a new universe. He feels perfectly free to look at the one we already have and to show exactly what he sees. He feels no need to apologize for the ways of God to man or to avoid looking at the ways of man to God. For him, to "tidy up reality" is certainly to succumb to the sin of pride.<sup>16</sup>

As Rupp has said, "Miss O'Connor continues to celebrate the mystery of human freedom: heaven and hell begin on earth."<sup>17</sup>

Traditionally, because faith is "a walking in darkness," the poet, as Miss O'Connor said, is blind,

but the Christian poet, and storyteller as well, is like the blind man whom Christ touched, who looked then and saw men as if they were trees, but walking. This is the beginning of vision, and it is an invitation to deeper and stranger visions that we shall have to learn to accept if we want to realize a truly Christian literature.<sup>18</sup>

There are shades of Joyce in Miss O'Connor's suggestion that Catholic writers should give "strict attention to the

order, proportion, and radiance" of their work in order to keep the devil from taking it over.<sup>19</sup> But she did not limit her view to Catholic writers. Drama starts with the flaw in human nature, and this drama is almost always, according to her, based "on the bedrock of original sin, whether the writer thinks in theological terms or not. . . . For this reason the greatest dramas naturally involve the salvation or loss of the soul."<sup>20</sup>

In the nine stories of the posthumous collection, as in all her stories, Flannery O'Connor presents

mystery through manners, grace through nature, judgment joined to vision, reason linked with imagination. . . .

From the surface level of plot to the depths of anagogic richness, the realm of mystery, is the path pursued by a hermeneutical approach to her sacramental vision of modern man. The constant interaction of all four levels gives her fiction its coherent integrity, its dynamism, and its singular prophetic vision. Like Dante, she has shown us the depth and height of our human aspirations in the tragicomic vision of her fiction.<sup>21</sup>

Flannery O'Connor's vision was strong; it was vivid; it was consistent. And she was certain of its truth. Though she was not always satisfied with her work, she clearly felt that she had used her gift in the right way to try to put her vision across. It was St. Thomas Aquinas, as she pointed out, who said that

a work of art is a good in itself, and this is a truth that the modern world has largely forgotten. We are not content to stay within our limitations and make something that is simply a good in and by itself. Now we want to make something that will have come utilitarian value. Yet what is good in itself glorifies God because it reflects God.<sup>22</sup>

Notes

1. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 26 (footnote).
2. May, "Flannery O'Connor: Critical Consensus and the 'Objective' Interpretation," p. 179.
3. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 185.
4. Frank N. Magill, Masterpieces of World Literature in Digest Form, 4th Series (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 1136-1137.
5. Malin, "Flannery and the Grotesque," p. 122.
6. Shinn, "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace," p. 67.
7. Muller, Nightmares and Visions, pp. 113-114.
8. Quoted in C. Ross Mullins, "Flannery O'Connor: An Interview," Jubilee 11 (June 1963):35.
9. May, Toward a New Earth, p. 227.
10. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 72-73.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
12. Teilhard de Chardin shared this vision: "All around us, to right and left, in front and behind, above and below, we have only had to go a little beyond the frontier of sensible appearances in order to see the divine welling up and showing through. . . . By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers. . . . As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, the world, this palpable world, to which we brought the boredom and callousness reserved for profane places, is in truth a holy place, and we did not know it. Venite, adoremus" (Teilhard de Chardin, Divine Milieu, p. 89).
13. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 179.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
15. Quoted in *ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
17. Rupp, Celebration in Postwar American Fiction, p. 89.
18. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 184-185.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

20. Ibid., p. 167.
21. J. J. Quinn, "A Reading of Flannery O'Connor," Thought 48 (Winter 1973):529.
22. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 171.

## CHAPTER 19

### CONCLUSION

Flannery O'Connor had two great passions--her religion and her art--and the one was inextricably entwined with the other. But she knew that a writer has to write about what he sees and not to see only what he believes. She realized that the real fiction writer, "the one with an instinct for what he is about, knows that he cannot approach the infinite directly, that he must penetrate the natural human world as it is. The more sacramental his theology, the more encouragement he will get from it to do just that."<sup>1</sup> And she believed that "the Southern writer can outwrite anybody in the country because he has the Bible and a little history."<sup>2</sup>

All the distortions Miss O'Connor depicts in her stories reveal the frailty and corruptibility of human beings--that is, man plagued by original sin, torn between his penchant for evil and his longing for God. And the vision that animates all her fiction is "the infusion of divine grace into the lives of rustic, often grotesque characters who either do not recognize or cannot handle it. This plus talent and true grit guaranteed her status as an original."<sup>3</sup>

By 1961, when her last collection of stories was taking shape, she had started to read Teilhard de Chardin's works. It seems clear that his "omega point" was the same

goal that she, as both Christian and writer, was moving toward. As Driskell and Brittain point out:

In her own life the communion of saints helped her to prepare for the "good death in Christ." In her art she sought to provide a basis of communion, a community in time and space which shared the history of the South and of mankind, chiefly as recorded in the Old and New Testaments; furthermore, with no lessening of her faith in a personal redemption, she had found in Teilhard a richer vision. His work, arising from experimental science, affirmed her belief in an evolving universe--a universe in which the constant (even if slow) movement is upward toward a point of universal convergence. For both Teilhard and Miss O'Connor such a convergence coincides with another mystical transformation: the world made one and perfectly expressive of the risen Christ. . . .

As Catholics, Miss O'Connor and Teilhard shared a basically incarnational vision; for them, analogical truth was both naturalistic and mystical, for the creation continues to partake of God. Neither writer divided the world into idea and reality; both recognized the interpenetration of the real and the ideal.<sup>4</sup>

Flannery O'Connor, of course, presents the phenomenon of rising and converging in a manner all her own. In her stories it is manifested by an unexpected violent blow or tremendous suffering, which usually awakens a character's consciousness and directs him to his Creator--to the omega point, or Oneness.

The works of both Teilhard and Miss O'Connor have tended to discomfit their readers:

Teilhard disturbed his readers from the start by his deployment of scientifically impeccable data to serve metaphysical ends. Miss O'Connor disturbs through her refusal to equate physical suffering and death with evil; in her stories "rising" has little to do with our normal sense of improvement. Readers would be less disturbed if they recognized that, for both writers, the external is but a sign of the internal and that events have their meaning in individual consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

At the omega point, the point of convergence, cause and effect have no bearing; there is only unity. Neither Flannery O'Connor nor Teilhard sought "to resolve the basic human problem" or "to deny the fact of evil"; rather, they



both perceived "that man's sphere is the mundane and that it is adequate for the divine purpose."<sup>6</sup>

Whatever their sins, Flannery O'Connor makes no judgments on the characters in Everything That Rises Must Converge but merely shows, in her singular fashion, that the possibilities for redemptive grace exist. Thus, as Father Burke notes, "each story reveals a spiritually converging world where the universal domination of Christ, as an intrinsic energy, has acquired urgency and intensity."<sup>7</sup>

Flannery O'Connor knew all too well, however, that she was writing for an audience largely made up of unbelievers. As she said,

I have a very high opinion of the art of fiction and a very low opinion of what is called the "average" reader. I tell myself that I can't escape him, that this is the personality I am supposed to keep awake, but that at the same time, I am also supposed to provide the intelligent reader with the deeper experience that he looks for in fiction.<sup>8</sup>

To get her message across to an essentially hostile, resistant audience for whom a typical religious story would not do, she did not cajole her readers but instead chose to gain their attention through shock and through laughter. The shock may be terrible and the humor corrosive, but the reader is viscerally engaged.

"Much of my fiction," she said, "takes its character from the reasonable use of the unreasonable, though the reasonableness of my use of it may not always be apparent. The assumptions that underlie this use of it, however, are those of the central Christian mysteries."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Flannery O'Connor never lost her profound sense of and respect for

mystery. Mystery "is what is left over," she once said, "after everything explainable has been explained that makes a story worth writing and reading."<sup>10</sup> She was convinced that

if the writer believes that our life is and will remain essentially mysterious, if he looks upon us as beings existing in a created order to whose laws we freely respond, then what he sees on the surface will be of interest to him only as he can go through it into an experience of mystery itself. His kind of fiction will always be pushing its own limits outward toward the limits of mystery, because for this kind of writer, the meaning of a story does not begin except at a depth where adequate motivation and adequate psychology and the various determinations have been exhausted. Such a writer will be interested in what we don't understand rather than in what we do.<sup>11</sup>

All the stories in the posthumous collection bear out her credo: "The fiction writer presents mystery through manners, grace through nature, but when he finishes there always has to be left over that sense of Mystery which cannot be accounted for by any human formula."<sup>12</sup>

Flannery O'Connor derided what she regarded as intellectual pomposity and sociological claptrap. Seeing evil as "the defective use of good," as not merely "a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured,"<sup>13</sup> she depicted it especially in the forms of pride, wrath, and covetousness. She satirized the sanctimoniousness and smug complacency of those who blithely replace spiritual values with material ones and who are bereft of that awareness that is handmaiden to a sense of wonder. In the fundamentalism, however primitive, of the Protestant South she found the fervor of belief that she felt needed to be recaptured by a somnolent society. Hers was an art, says Scott,

that very much wanted to wake the spirit's sleep, to break that somnolence into which we flee from the exactions of the moral life; and

it consistently expresses a fierce kind of rage at the feckless, lacklustre slum to which the human world is reduced when, through indolence of spirit or failure of imagination, men have lost all sense of the pressure of glory upon the mundane realities of experience and have thus "fallen" into the profane.<sup>14</sup>

To fight what she saw as a virtual epidemic of spiritual torpor, or what medieval theologians terms acedia, she valiantly applied all her considerable talent and skill. Because her art indeed expresses "a kind of fierce rage," she was obviously guilty of at least one of the seven deadly sins. But it was by venting her wrath that she was able to produce her haunting stories.

The seeming paradox in these stories is, of course, that the demonic path can lead to the holy, an idea that revitalizes Tillich's concept of "demonic holiness."<sup>15</sup> Her strategy was to make the reality of the demonic as vivid as possible. To this end she employed, as Browning notes, "the shock of evil over and over again, in the hope that, finally, by plunging into those fearful psychic depths she might bring up some evidence that, in a time marked by moral chaos and ontological deprivation, it was yet being, not absurdity, which would have the last word."<sup>16</sup> Flannery O'Connor's world is, therefore, a world of physical and spiritual grotesques, all of them (through their legacy of original sin) highly susceptible to the seven deadly sins, and all of them seeking salvation, whether they are conscious of this or not.

In reading the nine stories in the collection, a reader unfamiliar with Flannery O'Connor's vision might find them either fascinating or repellant in their evocation of evil

and yet entirely miss their theological implications and the meaning of the imagery. To appreciate her as just a marvelous storyteller is, for some, enough. But to appreciate her on just this level is not only to deprive oneself of a deeper understanding but to shortchange her mightily. There are those, of course, who do comprehend to some degree what she was trying to do but are nonetheless unable or unwilling to accept her world-view, however much they acknowledge her gift for presenting it. Some readers love her stories; some hate them. But whatever attitude one takes toward her work, indifference is not one of them.

She stubbornly defended the horrors depicted in her stories as necessary to jolt the reader into an awareness of the repercussions of the Fall and of the possibilities for redemption. Totally uninterested in the reader's sentiment, she wanted to galvanize him. She wanted to make him uneasy, and she succeeded. Indeed, Flannery O'Connor comes across as an avenging angel. She might have denied that role; she might gladly have admitted to it. It is hard to tell.

Even those who cannot accept her world-view must acknowledge that, as Robert Kiely eloquently points out, she reminds us that

our most ordinary habits, prejudices, and small pieties eventually undergo the test of a searing light which penetrates everything and carries with it sufficient heat to burn through self-satisfaction and hypocrisy. . . . Her power as a writer is such that, whatever our own beliefs may be, we can hardly fail to take hers seriously. She pitches together some of the most common clichés in American life and quite simply allows their ugliness to emerge.<sup>17</sup>

Disenchanted by that ugliness, she nevertheless did

not despair. She never stopped trying to make her readers see that ugliness--and the reasons for it. In the last analysis, though she asked much of her readers, she asked far more of herself.

Notes

1. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 163.
2. O'Connor to Marion Montgomery, 9 July 1961, Habit of Being, p. 444.
3. Gray, "Letters of Flannery O'Connor," p. 86.
4. Driskell and Brittain, Eternal Crossroads, pp. 136-137, 138.
5. Ibid., p. 138.
6. Ibid., p. 140.
7. Burke, "Convergence of Flannery O'Connor and Chardin," p. 46.
8. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 95.
9. Ibid., p. 109.
10. Meaders, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 384.
11. O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 41-42.
12. Ibid., p. 153.
13. O'Connor to "A," 13 January 1956, Habit of Being, p. 129.
14. Scott, "Flannery O'Connor's Testimony," p. 143.
15. See Tillich, Systematic Theology, I:215-218.
16. Browning, Flannery O'Connor, p. 130.
17. Robert Kiely, Review of Everything That Rises Must Converge, Christian Science Monitor, 17 June 1965, p. 7.

## APPENDIX

### GROSSETESTE'S SCHEME OF JUXTAPOSING THE VIRTUES AND THE VICIES, AS CLARIFIED BY WENZEL\*

[A]ny examination of scholastic rationales for the Seven Deadly Sins must be aware of concurrent analyses of the virtues as well. As a matter of fact, the Schoolmen very often entertained the possibility of establishing a logical basis for the vice scheme by means of opposing them (in one way or another) to the "classical" scheme of virtues, and many theologians actually contented themselves with explaining the capital vices in just such a way.<sup>1</sup> . . . Grosseteste furnishes a good example, and we must [go to] his treatise to see how he eventually arrives at the chief vices.

In discussing the third theological virtue, caritas, Grosseteste distinguishes between love of God and love of one's neighbor (fol. 88v). Then he asks how God should be loved, and in answer refers to Matt. XXII 37: "with all thy soul, and with all thy heart, and with all thy mind." These three terms (anima, cor, mens), he continues, stand for the sum total of our soul, that is, for the vires vegetabiles, sensibiles, and rationales, of which he gives a longer subdivision. Now, the right use of these faculties constitutes virtuous action, and Grosseteste establishes a list of seven virtutes<sup>2</sup> which thus correspond to selected powers of the

---

\*This appendix, including the notes at the end, is excerpted in its entirety from Siegfried Wenzel, "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research," Speculum 43 (January 1968):10-12. Wenzel quotes from Grosseteste's treatise on confession, "Deus est quo nihil melius cogitari potest" (Brit. Mus. MS Royal 7.F.ii). For further information on Grosseteste's manuscripts, Wenzel cites S. H. Thomson, The Writings of Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, 1235-1253 (Cambridge, Eng., 1940).

soul (89r). A little further on, he adds that "to these seven virtues are opposed seven vices" (ibid.), and lists actually fourteen, because of the Aristotelian principle that each "virtue" is the mean between two "vices." As the following table implies, all seven capital vices are meant to represent the lack (diminutio) of their respective virtue.

	vis animae:	virtus:	vitia:	
"mens" = anima	(apprehensiva	humiliatio	superbia	hypocrisis
rationalis	(passiva	exultatio	invidia	pusillanimitas
"cor" = anima	(irascibilis	patientia	ira	negligentia
sensibilis	concupiscibilis	largitas	cupiditas	prodigalitas
	(motiva	occupatio	accidia	curiositas
"anima" = anima	(attractiva	abstinentia	gula	evacuatio
vegetabilis	(expulsiva	continentia	luxuria	insensibilitas

This system is not absolutely foolproof, as the vices opposed to exultatio show.<sup>3</sup> But it is an interesting case of the scholastic desire to apply Aristotelian psychology to Christian teaching. In Grosseteste's scheme two Aristotelian elements, his vires animae and his notion of the golden mean, are firmly fused with three traditional Christian elements, the series of "remedial" virtues, the series of capital vices, and the preference for the basic number seven (instead of five or eleven).<sup>4</sup> Though by no means as full-fledged an attempt to use Aristotle for Christian morals as that of his contemporary William of Auvergne, Grosseteste's scheme, in contrast to many theologians who only state the principle, at least applies the idea of the golden mean to all seven vices.



### Notes

1. In the twelfth century the capital vices were sometimes derived from, or at least related to, the four cardinal virtues [justice, fortitude, prudence, temperance], the latter being defined in terms borrowed from Cicero, Macrobius, Seneca, Apuleius' De Platone, and other "classical" authors. . . . These earlier "humanistic" attempts to explain the vices on the basis of the four cardinal virtues (instead of the Aristotelian virtues or faculties, as exemplified by Grosseteste in the following discussion) require further study in connection with the rationale of the chief vices and with the emergence of medieval moral philosophy.

2. These correspond to the second main series of chief virtues current in medieval thought: not the combination of cardinal and theological, but seven "remedial" virtues which replace in the soul the seven capital sins, or which must be practiced if one wants to overcome the capital vices.

3. Exultacio or jocunditas is defined as, "sympathy with what befalls another person" (in alterius successibus pia affectio: fol. 90r). Envy is "a feeling contrary to what befalls another person" and comes about when one experiences either joy at one's neighbor's evil fortune, or sadness at his good fortune (fol. 90v). Here the opposition between virtue and vice obviously consists in right vs. wrong reactions to one's neighbor's fortune. Pusillanimitas, then, is defined as, "the slack feeling (remissus affectus) about what befalls another man, which is neither glad about good things nor sad about evil ones." Thus the two vices opposed to exultacio are not lack and excess of a middle quality, but are "opposite" to it, one in kind, the other in degree. Actually, Grosseteste had mentioned that the vices may be opposed to the virtues in various fashions, of which the Aristotelian is only one (fol. 89r). The variety of "oppositions" was, of course, a much debated issue in scholastic discussions of this sort.

4. In contrast, William of Auvergne, who also derives a system of vices from the virtues, arrives at a total of 61 vices. . . . See De vitiis, 9, and De virtutibus, passim (Opera, Orléans and Paris, 1674).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Works by Flannery O'Connor

1. O'CONNOR, FLANNERY. The Complete Stories. Introduction by Robert Giroux. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971. 555 pp.
2. \_\_\_\_\_. Everything That Rises Must Converge. Introduction by Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Noonday Press, 1965. 269 pp.
3. \_\_\_\_\_. The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor. Edited by Sally Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979. 617 pp.
4. \_\_\_\_\_. Mystery and Manners; Occasional Prose. Edited by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Noonday Press, 1969. 237 pp.
5. \_\_\_\_\_. Review of The Phenomenon of Man. American Scholar 30 (Fall 1961):618.
6. \_\_\_\_\_. Three. New York: New American Library, Signet Books, 1964. 447 pp. (Contents: Wise Blood; A Good Man Is Hard to Find; and The Violent Bear It Away.)

### Works about Flannery O'Connor and Her Fiction

1. AIKEN, DAVID. "Flannery O'Connor's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Failure." Arizona Quarterly 32 (Autumn 1976):245-259
2. ALICE, SISTER ROSE, S.S.J. "Flannery O'Connor: Poet to the Outcast." Renascence 16 (Spring 1964):126-132.
3. BASSAN, MAURICE. "Flannery O'Connor's Way: Shock, with Moral Intent." Renascence 15 (Summer 1963):195-199, 211.
4. BAUMBACH, JONATHAN. "The Acid of God's Grace: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." Georgia Review 17 (Fall 1963):334-346.

5. BAUMBACH, JONATHAN. The Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. New York: New York University Press, 1965. ("The Acid of God's Grace: Wise Blood by Flannery O'Connor," pp. 87-100.)
6. BISHOP, ELIZABETH. "Flannery O'Connor, 1925-1964." New York Review of Books, 8 October 1964, p. 21. Reprinted in Esprit 8 (Winter 1964):14-16.
7. BLACKWELL, LOUISE. "Flannery O'Connor: An Introduction." Curitiba, 1975. 9 pp. Mimeographed.
8. BLEIKASTEN, ANDRE. "The Heresy of Flannery O'Connor." In Les Américanistes: New French Criticism on Modern American Fiction, edited by Ira D. Johnson and Christiane Johnson, pp. 53-70. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press Corp., 1978.
9. BLIVEN, NAOMI. "Nothing But the Truth." New Yorker, 11 September 1965, pp. 220-221.
10. BOWEN, ROBERT O. "Hope vs. Despair in the New Gothic Novel." Renascence 13 (Spring 1961):147-152.
11. BRITTAIN, JOAN. "The Fictional Family of Flannery O'Connor." Renascence 19 (Fall 1966):48-52.
12. BROWNING, PRESTON M., JR. Flannery O'Connor. Preface by Harry T. Moore. Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1974. 143 pp.
13. \_\_\_\_\_. "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic." Modern Fiction Studies 19 (Spring 1973):29-41.
14. \_\_\_\_\_. "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque Recovery of the Holy." In Adversity and Grace: Studies in Recent American Literature, edited by Nathan A. Scott, Jr., pp. 133-161. Essays in Divinity, vol. 4. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
15. BURKE, JOHN J., JR., S.J. "Convergence of Flannery O'Connor and Chardin." Renascence 19 (Winter 1967):41-47, 52.
16. BURNS, STUART L. "O'Connor and the Critics: An Overview." Mississippi Quarterly 27 (Fall 1974):483-495.
17. \_\_\_\_\_. "'Torn by the Lord's Eye': Flannery O'Connor's Use of Sun Imagery." Twentieth Century Literature 13 (October 1967):154-166.

18. CARLSON, THOMAS. "Flannery O'Connor: The Manichean Dilemma." Sewanee Review 77 (Spring 1969):254-276.
19. CHENEY, BRAINARD. "Flannery O'Connor's Campaign for Her Country." Sewanee Review 72 (Autumn 1964):555-559.
20. COFFEY, WARREN. "Flannery O'Connor." Commentary 40 (November 1965):93-99.
21. DESMOND, JOHN F. "Flannery O'Connor's Sense of Place." Southern Humanities Review 10 (Summer 1976):251-259.
22. DOWELL, BOB. "The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." College English 27 (December 1965):235-239.
23. DOXEY, WILLIAM S. "A Dissenting Opinion of Flannery O'Connor's A Good Man Is Hard to Find." Studies in Short Fiction 10 (Spring 1973):199-204.
24. DRAKE, ROBERT. Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay. Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966. 48 pp.
25. \_\_\_\_\_. "Miss O'Connor and the Scandal of Redemption." Modern Age 4 (Fall 1960):428-430.
26. DRISKELL, LEON V., and BRITTAIN, JOAN T. The Eternal Crossroads: The Art of Flannery O'Connor. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971. 175 pp.
27. EDELSTEIN, MARK G. "Flannery O'Connor and the Problem of Modern Satire." Studies in Short Fiction 12 (Spring 1975):139-144.
28. EGGENSCHWILER, DAVID. The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor. Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1972. 148 pp.
29. Esprit 8 (Winter 1964). Flannery O'Connor memorial issue.
30. ESTY, WILLIAM. "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters." Commonweal 67 (7 March 1958):586-588.
31. FARNHAM, JAMES F. "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor." America 105 (13 May 1961):277-281.
32. FEELEY, SISTER KATHLEEN. Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock. Foreward by Caroline Gordon. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1972. 198 pp.

33. FITZGERALD, ROBERT. "The Countryside and the True Country." Sewanee Review 70 (Summer 1962):380-394.
34. \_\_\_\_\_. Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge, by Flannery O'Connor, pp. vii-xxxiv. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Noonday Press, 1965.
35. FITZGERALD, SALLY. Introduction to The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O'Connor, by Flannery O'Connor, pp. xi-xvix. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979.
36. "Flannery O'Connor." In Contemporary Authors, vols. 1-4, 1st rev., edited by James M. Ethridge and Barbara Kopala, pp. 720-721. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1967.
37. "Flannery O'Connor." In Current Biography Yearbook, 1958, edited by Marjorie Dent Candee, pp. 317-318. New York: Wilson, 1958.
38. FRIEDMAN, MELVIN J. "Flannery O'Connor: Another Legend in Southern Fiction." In Recent American Fiction: Some Critical Views, edited by Joseph J. Waldmeir, pp. 231-245. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.
39. \_\_\_\_\_. Introduction to The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 1-31. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
40. \_\_\_\_\_. "'The Perplex Business': Flannery O'Connor and Her Critics Enter the 1970s." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 207-234. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
41. \_\_\_\_\_, and LAWSON, LEWIS A., eds. The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977. 263 pp.
42. GABLE, SISTER MARIELLA, O.S.B. "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." American Benedictine Review 15 (June 1964):127-143.
43. GARDINER, HAROLD C., S.J. "Flannery O'Connor's Clarity of Vision." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 184-206. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.

44. GIROUX, ROBERT. Introduction to The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor, pp. vii-xvii. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1971.
45. GORDON, CAROLINE. "An American Girl." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 123-137. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
46. \_\_\_\_\_. Foreword to Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock, by Kathleen Feeley, pp. ix-xii. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1972.
47. \_\_\_\_\_. "Heresy in Dixie." Sewanee Review 76 (Spring 1968):263-297.
48. GOSSETT, THOMAS F. "Flannery O'Connor on Her Fiction." Southwest Review 59 (Winter 1974):34-42.
49. \_\_\_\_\_. "No Vague Believer: Flannery O'Connor and Protestantism." Southwest Review 60 (Summer 1975): 256-263.
50. GRAY, PAUL. "Letters of Flannery O'Connor." Time, 5 March 1979, pp. 86-87.
51. GRIFFITH, ALBERT J. "Flannery O'Connor's Salvation Road." Studies in Short Fiction 3 (Spring 1966): 329-333.
52. HART, JANE. "Strange Earth: The Stories of Flannery O'Connor." Georgia Review 12 (Summer 1958):215-222.
53. HARTMAN, CARL. "Jesus without Christ: Wise Blood." Western Review 17 (Autumn 1952):76-80.
54. HAWKES, JOHN. "Flannery O'Connor's Devil." Sewanee Review 70 (Summer 1962):395-407.
55. HEINEY, DONALD, and DOWNS, LENTHIEL H. Recent American Literature after 1930. Contemporary Literature of the Western World, vol. 4. Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1974. ("Flannery O'Connor," pp. 251-264.)
56. HENDIN, JOSEPHINE GATTUSO. "In Search of Flannery O'Connor." Columbia Forum 13 (Spring 1970): 38-41.
57. \_\_\_\_\_. The World of Flannery O'Connor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970. 177 pp.
58. HOFFMAN, FREDERICK J. The Art of Southern Fiction: A Study of Some Modern Novelists. Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques. Carbondale: Southern Illinois

- University Press, 1967. ("James Agee and Flannery O'Connor: The Religious Consciousness," pp. 74-95.)
59. HOFFMAN, FREDERICK J. "The Search for Redemption: Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 32-48. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
  60. HOLMAN, C. HUGH. "Her Rue with a Difference: Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Literary Tradition." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 73-87. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
  61. HOWE, IRVING. Celebrations and Attacks: Thirty Years of Literary and Cultural Commentary. New York: Horizon Press, 1979. ("Flannery O'Connor's Stories," pp. 97-101.)
  62. HOWELL, ELMO. "Flannery O'Connor and the Home Country." Renascence 24 (Summer 1972):171-176.
  63. HYMAN, STANLEY EDGAR. Flannery O'Connor. University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 54. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966. 48 pp.
  64. JOSELYN, SISTER M., O.S.B. "Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person.'" Studies in Short Fiction 1 (Winter 1964):85-92.
  65. KANN, SISTER JEAN MARIE, O.S.F. "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Catholic World 204 (December 1966): 154-159.
  66. KATZ, CLAIRE. "Flannery O'Connor's Rage of Vision." American Literature 46 (March 1974):54-67.
  67. KIELY, ROBERT. Review of Everything That Rises Must Converge. Christian Science Monitor, 17 June 1965, p. 7.
  68. LAWSON, LEWIS A. "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque: Wise Blood." Renascence 17 (Spring 1965):137-147, 156.
  69. LENSING, GEORGE. "De Chardin's Ideas in Flannery O'Connor." Renascence 17 (Summer 1965):171-175.
  70. LEVINE, PAUL. "Flannery O'Connor: The Soul of the Grotesque." in Minor American Novelists, edited by

Charles Alva Hoyt, pp. 95-117. Crosscurrents/Modern Critiques. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970.

71. LITTLEFIELD, DANIEL F., JR. "Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood: 'Unparalleled Prosperity' and Spiritual Chaos." Mississippi Quarterly 23 (Spring 1970): 121-133.
72. LORCH, THOMAS M. "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Allegorist." Critique 10, no. 2 (1968):69-80.
73. McCOWN, ROBERT M. "Flannery O'Connor and the Reality of Sin." Catholic World 188 (January 1959):285-291.
74. McFARLAND, DOROTHY TUCK. Flannery O'Connor. Modern Literature Monographs. New York: Ungar, 1976. 132 pp.
75. MAGILL, FRANK N. Masterpieces of World Literature in Digest Form. 4th Series. New York: Harper & Row, 1969. ("The Short Stories of Flannery O'Connor," pp. 1136-1139.)
76. MAIDA, PATRICIA D. "Light and Enlightenment in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction." Studies in Short Fiction 13 (Winter 1976):31-36.
77. MALIN, IRVING. "Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 108-122. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
78. MARTIN, CARTER W. "Flannery O'Connor's Early Fiction." Southern Humanities Review 7 (Spring 1973):210-214.
79. \_\_\_\_\_. The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor. Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969. 253 pp.
80. MAY, JOHN R., S.J. "Flannery O'Connor: Critical Consensus and the 'Objective' Interpretation." Renaissance 27 (Summer 1975):179-192.
81. \_\_\_\_\_. "The Pruning Word: Flannery O'Connor's Judgment of Intellectuals." Southern Humanities Review 4 (Fall 1970):325-338.
82. \_\_\_\_\_. The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976. 178 pp.
83. MEADERS, MARGARET INMAN. "Flannery O'Connor: 'Literary Witch.'" Colorado Quarterly 10 (Spring 1962):377-385.



84. MERTON, THOMAS. "Flannery O'Connor." Jubilee 12 (November 1964):49-53.
85. MEYERS, SISTER BERTRANDE, D.C. "Four Stories of Flannery O'Connor." Thought 37 (September 1962):410-426.
86. MILDER, R. "The Protestantism of Flannery O'Connor." Southern Review 11 (October 1975):802-819.
87. MILLICHAP, JOSEPH R. "The Pauline 'Old Man' in Flannery O'Connor's 'The Comforts of Home.'" Studies in Short Fiction 11 (Winter 1974):96-99.
88. MONTGOMERY, MARION. "Beyond Symbol and Surface: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." Georgia Review 22 (Summer 1968):188-193.
89. \_\_\_\_\_. "Flannery O'Connor's Transformation of the Sentimental." Mississippi Quarterly 25 (Winter 1972):1-18.
90. \_\_\_\_\_. "In Defense of Flannery O'Connor's Dragon." Georgia Review 25 (Fall 1971):302-316.
91. \_\_\_\_\_. "A Note on Flannery O'Connor's Terrible and Violent Prophecy of Mercy." Forum 9 (Summer 1969):4-9.
92. \_\_\_\_\_. "O'Connor and Teilhard de Chardin: The Problem of Evil." Renascence 22 (Autumn 1969):34-42.
93. MULLER, GILBERT H. Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972. 125 pp.
94. MULLINS, C. ROSS, JR. "Flannery O'Connor: An Interview." Jubilee 11 (June 1963):32-35.
95. OATES, JOYCE CAROL. New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature. New York: Vanguard Press, 1974. ("The Visionary Art of Flannery O'Connor," pp. 141-176.)
96. ORVELL, MILES. Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972. 232 pp.
97. PEARCE, RICHARD. Review of Everything That Rises Must Converge. In Survey of Contemporary Literature, vol. 4, edited by Frank N. Magill, pp. 2346-2349. Rev. ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Salem Press, 1977.
98. \_\_\_\_\_. Stages of the Clown: Perspectives on Modern Fiction from Dostoyevsky to Beckett. Crosscurrents/

Modern Critiques. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970. ("The World Upside Down I: Flannery O'Connor" pp. 67-83.)

99. QUINN, J. J. "A Reading of Flannery O'Connor." Thought 48 (Winter 1973):520-531.
100. QUINN, SISTER M. BERNETTA, O.S.F. "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 157-183. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
101. RANK, HUGH. "O'Connor's Image of the Priest." New England Quarterly 41 (March 1968):3-29.
102. RINALDI, ANGELO. "O'Connor: Uma obra densa como a de Faulkner." L'Express o Estado de São Paulo, 16 November 1975, p. 30.
103. ROSENFELD, ISAAC. "To Win by Default." New Republic, 7 July 1952, pp. 19-20.
104. ROWSE, A. L. "Flannery O'Connor--Genius of the South." Books and Bookmen, May 1972, pp. 38-39.
105. RUBIN, LOUIS D., JR. "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt." in The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 49-72. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.
106. \_\_\_\_\_ . "Two Ladies from the South." Sewanee Review 63 (Autumn 1955):671-681.
107. RUPP, RICHARD H. Celebration of Postwar American Fiction: 1945-1967. Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami Press, 1972. ("Flannery O'Connor: A Hidden Celebration," pp. 77-98.)
108. SCHARPER, PHILIP. "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute." Esprit 8 (Winter 1964):45.
109. SCHOTT, WEBSTER. "Flannery O'Connor: Faith's Stepchild." Nation, 13 September 1965, pp. 142-146.
110. SCOTT, NATHAN A., JR. "Flannery O'Connor's Testimony: The Pressure of Glory." In The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, edited by Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, pp. 138-156. 2nd ed., rev. New York: Fordham University Press, 1977.

111. SHINN, THELMA J. "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace." Contemporary Literature 9, no. 1 (1968):58-73.
112. SNOW, OLLYE TINE. "The Functional Gothic of Flannery O'Connor." Southwest Review 50 (1965):286-299.
113. SOLOTAROFF, THEODORE. "You Can Go Home Again." Book Week, 30 May 1965, pp. 1, 13.
114. STELZMANN, RAINULF A. "Shock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories." Xavier University Studies 2 (March 1963):4-21.
115. STEPHENS, MARTHA. The Question of Flannery O'Connor. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973. 205 pp.
116. TAYLOR, HENRY. "The Halt Shall Be Gathered Together: Physical Deformity in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." Western Humanities Review 22 (Winter 1968):325-338.
117. TeSELLE, SALLIE McFAGUE. "The Experience of Coming to Belief." Theology Today 32 (July 1975):159-165.
118. TROWBRIDGE, CLINTON W. "The Symbolic Vision of Flannery O'Connor: Patterns of Imagery in The Violent Bear It Away." Sewanee Review 76 (Spring 1968):298-318.
119. WALKER, ALICE. "Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor." Ms., December 1975, pp. 77-79, 102, 104-106.
120. WALTERS, DOROTHY. Flannery O'Connor. Twayne's United States Authors Series. New York: Twayne, 1973. 172 pp.
121. WELLS, JOEL. "Off the Cuff." Critic 21 (August-September 1962):4-5, 71-72.
122. WYNNE, J. F. "The Sacramental Irony of Flannery O'Connor." Southern Literary Journal 7 (Spring 1975):33-49.

Works by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
and about His Thought

1. BRUNS, J. EDGAR. "Cosmogogenesis and Theology." In The World of Teilhard, edited by Robert T. Francoeur, pp. 167-185. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961.
2. CORTE, NICOLAS (pseud. of Leon Cristiani). Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: His Life and Spirit. New York: Macmillan, 1960. 120 pp.
3. FRANCOEUR, ROBERT T., ed. The World of Teilhard. Preface by John LaFarge, S.J. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961. 208 pp.
4. MURRAY, MICHAEL H. The Thought of Teilhard de Chardin: An Introduction. New York: Seabury Press, 1966. 177 pp.
5. TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, PIERRE. Building the Earth. Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: Dimension Books, 1965. 125 pp.
6. \_\_\_\_\_. The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life. New York: Harper & Row, 1960. 144 pp.
7. \_\_\_\_\_. The Future of Man. New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1969. 332 pp.
8. \_\_\_\_\_. The Heart of the Matter. Translated by René Hague. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978. 276 pp.
9. \_\_\_\_\_. Hymn of the Universe. New York: Harper & Row, 1965. 158 pp.
10. \_\_\_\_\_. Let Me Explain. Edited by Jean-Pierre Demoulin. Translated by René Hague and others. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. 189 pp.
11. \_\_\_\_\_. The Phenomenon of Man. Introduction by Sir Julian Huxley. New York: Harper, 1959. 318 pp.
12. WEIGEL, GUSTAVE, S.J. "The Phenomenon of Teilhard de Chardin." In The World of Teilhard, edited by Robert T. Francoeur, pp. 156-166. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961.

General Works

1. ABRAMS, M. H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970. 193 pp.
2. "American Preaching: A Dying Art?" Time, 31 December 1979, pp. 64-67.

3. CHADWICK, CHARLES. Symbolism. The Critical Idiom, no. 16. London: Methuen, 1971. 68 pp.
4. CIRLOT, JUAN EDUARDO. A Dictionary of Symbols. Translated by Jack Sage. New York: Philosophical Library, 1962. 400 p.
5. CUDDON, J. A. A Dictionary of Literary Terms. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977. 745 pp.
6. DE VRIES, AD. Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery. 2nd, rev. ed. Amsterdam and London: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1976. 515 pp.
7. ELIADE, MIRCEA. The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion. Translated by Willard R. Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Harvest/HBJ Book, 1959. 256 pp.
8. FERGUSON, GEORGE. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. 123 pp.
9. GAYNOR, FRANK, ed. Dictionary of Mysticism. New York: Philosophical Library, 1953. 210 pp.
10. GRAY, BENNISON. The Phenomenon of Literature. The Hague: Mouton, 1975. 594 pp.
11. GUAL, CARLOS GARCIA. Primeras Novelas Europeas. Madrid: Istmo, 1974. 309 pp.
12. HASSAN, IHAB. Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961. 362 pp.
13. HENDIN, JOSEPHINE. Vulnerable People: A View of American Fiction since 1945. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. 237 pp.
14. KAYSER, WOLFGANG. The Grotesque in Art and Literature. Translated by Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1963. 224 pp.
15. KAZIN, ALFRED. Bright Book of Life: American Novelists and Storytellers from Hemingway to Mailer. Boston: Little, Brown, 1973. 334 pp.
16. LAWRENCE, D. H. "The Death of Pan." In The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature, edited by Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr., pp. 416-423. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
17. MacQUEEN, J. Allegory. The Critical Idiom, no. 14. London: Methuen, 1978. 82 pp.

18. MATHEWS, MITFORD M., ed. A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. 1,946 pp.
19. MAY, JOHN R. Toward a New Earth: Apocalypse in the American Novel. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972. 254 pp.
20. "Outstanding Books, 1931-1961." American Scholar 30 (Fall 1961):600-630.
21. ROSE, ALAN HENRY. Demonic Vision: Racial Fantasy and Southern Fiction. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1976. 168 pp.
22. SHAW, HARRY. Dictionary of Literary Terms. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972. 405 pp.
23. SHIPLEY, JOSEPH T. Dictionary of World Literary Terms: Forms, Technique, Criticism. Completely rev. and enl. ed. Boston: The Writer, 1970. 466 pp.
24. TANNER, TONY. City of Words. New York: Harper & Row, 1971. 463 pp.
25. THOMSON, PHILIP. The Grotesque. The Critical Idiom; no. 24. London: Methuen, 1972. 76 pp.
26. TILLICH, PAUL. Systematic Theology. 3 vols. in 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1867. 289, 180, 442 pp.
27. VAN DEN BORN, A. Dicionário Enciclopédico de Bíblia. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1977. 1,599 pp.
28. WELLEK, RENE, and WARREN, AUSTIN. Theory of Literature. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1956. 374 pp.
29. WENZEL, SIEGFRIED. "The Seven Deadly Sins: Some Problems of Research." Speculum 43 (January 1968): 1-22.
30. WETHERILL, P. M. The Literary Text: An Examination of Critical Methods. Oxford: Blackwell, 1974. 331 pp.
31. WHITE, T. H., ed. The Book of Beasts; Being a Translation from a Latin Bestiary of the Twelfth Century. London: Cape, 1969. 296 pp.

ERRATA

		<u>FOR</u>	<u>READ</u>
p. 13	line1	peopole	people
p. 18	line5	Joesphine	Josephine
p. 18	line6	beanth	beneath
p. 29	line5	faultfiners	faultfinders
p. 63	note5	p.24 above note 9	p.23 above note 9
p. 84	line8	becuase	because
p. 148	line4	Dr. Finn	Father Finn
p.183	line5	relevation	revelation
p.197	line4	I'm on may home"	I'm on my way home"
p.210	line8	much easier	far easier
p.210	line8	acquiese	acquiesce
p.232	line3	with his	with him in his predicament
p.233	line1	he	He
p.239	line5	bascially	basically
p.249	line3	The Complete Stories	The complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor