CERTAIN PREOCCUPATIONS: THE PROGRESSION TOWARD CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY IN THE WORK OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to consider Flannery O'Connor's presentation of free will and grace in her two novels from the standpoint of the orthodox Roman Catholic teaching to which she claimed to adhere. To this end, a brief treatment of the teaching has been included in the body of this essay.

Despite O'Connor's professed stance, there are elements in her first novel, Wise Blood, which show a closer affinity to Jansenism than to Roman Catholicism, particularly in her depiction of characters without free will. Influenced by the large amount of Scriptural and theological reading she did in the years following Wise Blood, however, O'Connor moved toward a more orthodox presentation of free will and grace, particularly in The Violent Bear It Away, where she dramatizes the mystery of the freedom of the will in her portrayal of two characters who react in different ways to the redemptive grace offered to them.

SOMMAIRE

Cette étude se propose d'examiner du point de vue de l'orthodoxie Catholique, a laquelle elle déclairait se conformer, la façon dont Flannery O'Connor présente la doctrine du libre arbitre et de la grâce, dans ses deux romans. A cette fin, la présente thèse inclut une présentation de cette doctrine.

Malgré la position avouée de O'Connor, son premier roman, Wise Blood, contient des traits qui montrent une plus grande affinité pour le Jansénisme que pour le Catholicisme véritable, particulièrement dans sa façon de répresenter des personnages privés de libre arbitre. Sous l'influence des copieuses lectures scripturales et théologiques, faites au cours des années qui ont suivi la publication de Wise Blood, O'Connor a évolué vers une presentation plus orthodoxe du libre arbitre et de la grâce. Ceci apparaît clairement dans The Violent Bear It Away, où elle dramatise le mystère du libre arbitre dans son portrait de deux personnages qui réagissent de façon different devant la grâce rédemptrice qui leur est offerte.

PREFACE

In an interview with C. Ross Mullins one year before her death, Flannery O'Connor described herself as a writer with "certain preoccupations" which she felt resulted from her Catholicism. Included in her list of preoccupations was "grace," and this theological concern, coupled with the related issue of free will, has been a source of preoccupation for O'Connor's critics as well.

The central position which O'Connor claimed to give to Catholic dogma in her fiction has been a simultaneous blessing and curse to O'Connor's critics. There are those critics who uphold her orthodoxy to such a degree that they are tempted to ignore anything in her work which may be termed unorthodox. On the other hand, there are critics who are so puzzled by the apparent lack of orthodoxy in O'Connor's earliest works that they conclude that the entire body of her work is not Catholic in any doctrinal sense. The theological issue which has most clearly divided her critics is her portrayal of free will and grace, a most natural focus in that it is one of the principal doctrines upon which Catholic and Protestants do not agree.

In this study, I intend to examine O'Connor's presentation of free will and grace as embodied in her novels, Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away, in light of the orthodox Roman Catholic teaching on the subject. To this end, a brief treatment of the teaching has been included in the body of the essay. In many cases the theologically

based analyses of O'Connor's work are conducted by those whose understanding of the doctrine is not as exact as it might be, so that her later work is often judged unorthodox when it is in fact well within the bounds of Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

In addition, it is frequently assumed, both by those who uphold and by those who deny O'Connor's orthodoxy, that her work is theologically static and that the theological implications embodied in Wise Blood are exactly the same as those found in her second novel The Violent Bear It Away. It is my opinion that her fictional development was subject to a more gradual development. It should be noted that while I do cite O'Connor's increase in theological and spiritual reading in the years following Wise Blood as a probable influence upon her movement toward orthodoxy in The Violent Bear It Away, I do not intend to show a direct correlation between any particular theological work and her fiction, as Kathleen Feeley has already done to some extent in Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock.

I would like to thank Rev. J. J. Quinn, S.J. of the University of Scranton, both for introducing me to the work of Flannery O'Connor and for encouraging me in this endeavor. I should also like to thank Rev. Edward Gannon, S.J. and Rev. Robert J. Barone, S.T.D., who generously provided constructive criticism of my treatment of free will and grace. I am particularly grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Lorris Elliott, for his interest, encouragement, patience and guidance throughout this project. I should be remiss were I to neglect mentioning the invaluable contribution of my typist, Mrs. Clare Best, who spent long

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THE QUESTION OF FREEDOM

When Eudora Welty was teaching a course on the writings of Flannery O'Connor more than a decade ago, she did not think to question the presence of Catholic orthodoxy in O'Connor's work. According to one student, whenever Welty was confronted with a "particularly dense and symbolic passage of one of O'Connor's stories she would sigh very loudly and ask desperately, 'Is there a Catholic in the class?'"[1] This rather solid assumption that any random Catholic could unravel the "dense and symbolic" work of Flannery O'Connor was an opinion that did not always find support among O'Connor's critics, many of whom were Roman Catholic.

The earliest reviews of O'Connor's first novel, Wise Blood, betray the general confusion of the critics who were confronted with the work. Most assigned O'Connor to the school of "Southern Gothic" which included Carson McCullers, Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams. Among those who acknowledged the novel's concern with religion, there was a feeling that O'Connor had written a satire of evangelism,[2] and

[1] Alice Walker, "The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor," Ms. Magazine, December 1975, p. 106.

[2] Both Melwyn Breen in "Satanic Satire," Saturday Night, 19 July 1952, pp. 22-23, and an anonymous reviewer in "Frustrated Preacher," Newsweek, 19 May 1952, pp. 114-15, came to this conclusion about Wise Blood.

even those who recognized that O'Connor's intent was entirely the opposite criticized her for blurring the "extremely important distinction between religious striving and mania."[3]

Despite Eudora Welty's conviction about the privileged vantage point of Catholics, Wise Blood did not fare too much better in reviews printed in Catholic publications. A review in Commonweal, entitled "A Case of Possession," described the characters as "mindless," the world in which they moved as "animalistic," and the redemption to which the novel seemed to point as "highly unlikely."[4]

Most of the reviews of A Good Man is Hard to Find, O'Connor's collection of short stories, published in 1955, again stressed her affinities with the "Southern Gothic" and "Grotesque" schools of literature. A small number of reviewers, however, did mention her religious outlook. Caroline Gordon, in a review entitled "With a Glitter of Evil," noted that "the rural South is, for the first time, viewed by a writer whose orthodoxy matches her talent."[5] Granville Hicks saw the collection as a judgment of life by an orthodox Christian who found it "mean and brutish."[6] Critics reviewing in Catholic magazines, however, still tended to stress the influence of

[3]Isaac Rosenfield, "To Win by Default," New Republic, 7 July 1952, pp. 19-20.

[4]John W. Simons, "A Case of Possession," Commonweal, 27 July 1952, pp. 297-98.

[5]"With a Glitter of Evil," New York Times Book Review, 12 June 1955, p. 5.

[6]"Living with Books," New Leader, 15 August 1955, p. 17.

the South,[7] or even her "gratuitous" use of the grotesque.[8]

In a memorial tribute to O'Connor, Sr. Bertrande Meyers recalled the critical uncertainty which had surrounded O'Connor's work. Meyers remarked that "both friend and foe missed the purpose of Flannery O'Connor's 'message' until she herself supplied the key."[9] The key to which Meyers referred was O'Connor's own statement, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," which appeared in The Living Novel[10] in the spring of 1957. In this article on her own work O'Connor made her religious concerns very clear: ". . . 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 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 terms to make transparent in fiction."[11]

[7]James Green, "The Comic and the Sad," Commonweal, 22 July 1955, p. 404.

[8]William Esty, "In America, Intellectual Bomb Shelters," Commonweal, 7 March 1958, pp. 586-88.

[9]Meyers, "Flannery O'Connor—A Tribute," Esprit [University of Scranton], 8 (Winter 1964), 13.

[10]"The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957), pp. 157-64. [This article is reprinted in its entirety in Flannery O'Connor's Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 25-35. The citations in the text are taken from the latter printing, hereafter called Mystery and Manners.]

[11]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 32.

Another article by O'Connor which contributed to the new critical outlook on her work appeared in America in 1957. Entitled "The Church and the Fiction Writer,"[12] this second article was primarily concerned with the poor reception of the work of Catholic authors by the Catholic reading public, but it implicitly contained both O'Connor's avowal of Catholicism and the statement of her feeling about the relationship of Catholicism to her art. It was here she declared that the "Catholic writer, in so far as he has the mind of the Church, will feel life from the standpoint of the central Christian mystery: that it has, for all its horror, been found by God to be worth dying for."[13]

Bertrande Meyers also noted with regret that "the key" O'Connor provided to her work in these two articles became a "Rosetta Stone" for some critics when the statements were taken at face value without being accompanied by suitable analysis.[14] It was generally accepted that O'Connor represented the Catholic point of view in every one of her short stories and novels. Eudora Welty's somewhat resigned attitude toward O'Connor's work testifies to the general feeling that the mysteries of Flannery O'Connor resided in the mysteries of Catholicism.

[12]"The Church and the Fiction Writer," America, 30 March 1957, pp. 733-35. [This article is reprinted in Mystery and Manners, pp. 143-151, and the citations in the text are taken from the latter printing.]

[13]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 146.

[14]Myers, p. 14.

The reviews of The Violent Bear It Away, published in 1960, reflected, to some degree, the critical view of O'Connor as the literary spokesperson for Catholicism. Phrases like "theologically orthodox" and "a reliance on theology" were now the norm rather than the exception. Even the Catholic press was sympathetic to O'Connor at this time. James Greene, who had been oblivious to O'Connor's Catholicism in his review of A Good Man is Hard to Find, found O'Connor's second novel "comparable to the best in French Catholic writing" in style and theme.[15] But, while almost every review found The Violent Bear It Away to be a "religious," or more specifically, a "Catholic" novel, there was very little agreement upon what exactly the novel was saying about religion. Was Young Tarwater's choice between fanaticism and rationalism,[16] a "sterile atheism and a destructive and mad religiousness"[17] or "God" and "nothing"?[18] Had Young Tarwater escaped "both the 'fiery brimstone patch' of his

[15]Greene, "The Redemptive Tradition in Southern Rural Life," Commonweal, 15 April 1960, pp. 67-68.

[16]Granville Hicks, "Southern Gothic with a Vengeance," Saturday Review, 27 Feb. 1960, p. 18.

[17]Frank J. Warnke, "A Vision Deep and Narrow," New Republic, 14 March 1960, pp. 18-19.

[18]Sr. Bede Sullivan, "Flannery O'Connor and the Dialog Decade," Catholic Library World, 31 (1960), 521.

great-uncle's religion and the forces of evil,"[19] or had he "found redemption in evil"?[20]

These varied reactions to The Violent Bear It Away betrayed a critical response as confused, in its own way, as that which had met Wise Blood eight years earlier. O'Connor's views on the Christian, and more specifically, Catholic outlook which informed her work had their effect in a spate of reviews in which the words "theological" and "orthodox" replaced the words "Southern" and "grotesque" as convenient ways to categorize anything written by Flannery O'Connor.

In 1961 Robert O. Bowen remonstrated against what he saw as a critical reflex movement in his review of The Violent Bear It Away. Bowen contended that Tarwater's will was not his own during the baptism, and that all the characters in the novel seemed to move in "an absolutely relentless deterministic pattern."[21] Bowen was especially critical of the use of the word "Catholic" in describing O'Connor's work:

> After even a casual perusal of The Violent Bear It Away, the only reason one might refer to Flannery O'Connor as a "Catholic" author is a personal one. Since this novel has been widely spoken of as "Catholic," it seems imperative that one point out that like so much current negative writing, this book is not Catholic in any doctrinal sense. Neither

[19] John J. Traynor, "A Review of The Violent Bear It Away," Extension (July 1960), p. 26.

[20] James J. Farnham, "The Grotesque in Flannery O'Connor," America, 13 May 1961, p. 281.

[21] Bowen, "Hope vs. Despair in the New Gothic Novel," Renascence, 13 (1961), 149-50.

> its content, nor its significance is Catholic. Beyond not being Catholic, this novel is distinctly anti-Catholic in being a thorough, point-by-point dramatic argument against Free Will, Redemption, and Divine Justice, among other aspects of Catholic thought.[22]

Bowen's somewhat emotional review, in which he ended by calling Flannery O'Connor "an enemy of literature and life,"[23] was challenged, but never systematically answered in terms of the doctrinal question he posed. Although both Mariella Gable and Barnabas Davis did address Bowen's objection, they insisted that O'Connor stressed the gratuity of redemptive grace, rather than freedom of the will.[24] This shifting of the emphasis from free will to the gratuity of grace did not lay Bowen's charge to rest, however. Other critics insisted that O'Connor's works betrayed a closer affinity with Calvinism than with Roman Catholicism, particularly in the depiction of characters deprived of free will.

J. Oates Smith echoes Bowen in his insistence that both Hazel Motes of Wise Blood and Young Tarwater of The Violent Bear It Away are denied "the possibility of a systematic, refined, rational acceptance of God."[25] Smith concluded that although O'Connor consistently

[22]Bowen, p. 150

[23]Bowen, p. 152.

[24]Both Sr. Mariella Gable in "The Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," American Benedictine Review, 15 (1964), 133, and Barnabas Davis in "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Belief in Recent Fiction," Listening (1965), p. 18, defended O'Connor against Bowen's charges by insisting that her emphasis lay in the gratuity of redemptive grace.

[25]Smith, "Ritual and Violence in Flannery O'Connor," Thought, 41 (1966), 559.

described herself as a "born Catholic," it is "difficult to understand precisely what she means by 'Catholic,' for her conception of man's relationship to God suggests that of the American Calvinists more than that of the Roman Catholics: the absolute denial of free will, the insistence upon the brutal, even bloody, and always catastrophic experience of faith, and the eclipsing of New Testament affirmation by Old Testament wrath."[26]

Ruth M. Vande Kieft also found O'Connor more Calvinist than Catholic in her analysis entitled "Judgment in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor." Vande Kieft argued that O'Connor depicted grace as a "powerful but hidden force entirely separate from human will and intention" as if God were "out to accomplish his salvation in spite of the sinner's willful drive against him."[27]

Appearing simultaneously with this insistence that O'Connor's works were Calvinistic was an attempt to place O'Connor's stark vision within the historical development of Catholicism. Many critics began to cite elements of Jansenism in O'Connor's work.

Jansenism was a movement within Roman Catholicism which originated in the seventeenth century. Although it derives its name from Cornelius Jansen, whose work Augustinus was published in 1640, many of the tendencies and teachings associated with Jansenism actually originated in the French convent of Port-Royal as early as

[26]Smith, p. 560.

[27]"Judgment in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Sewanee Review, 76 (1968), 351.

1609.[28] Appealing to the authoritative teachings of St. Augustine on free will and grace, Jansenism stressed the devastating effect of Adam's Fall which left human nature so depraved that it was only capable of evil unless it was aided by the irresistible grace of God. Due to Adam's sin, all men were condemned to eternal damnation, but Christ's redemptive death had opened the possibility of salvation to those few singled out by God in His mercy,[29] and only those so singled out were "capable of exercising free will in regard to salvation."[30]

The particular piety which resulted from these teachings was colored by the belief that all mankind, even the elect, was chained in a concupiscence which had to be restrained by a constant and severe ascetic discipline.[31] The Jansenists were also characterized by an absolute disdain for all worldly endeavors, and an elitist attitude which resulted in an extremely individualistic concern with one's own salvation.[32] Although the tenets of Jansenism were condemned by Pope Innocent X in 1653, the disposition in French piety was not so easily eradicated.

Historically, these attitudes are believed to have passed to American Catholics through two sources. Many of the first priests in

[28]Alexander Sedgwick, Jansenism in Seventeenth Century France: Voices in the Wilderness (Charlottsville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), p. 44.

[29]Sedgwick, p. 32.

[30]Henri Daniel-Rops, The Church in the Seventeenth Century, trans. J. J. Buckingham (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965), II, 153.

[31]Sedgwick, p. 32.

[32]Sedgwick, p. 206.

America were French immigrants, and St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, the first American seminary, was staffed by French priests. In addition there was the later inheritance of Jansenistic tendencies from Irish Catholicism. Many of the exiled priests of the ancien regime emigrated to Ireland during the French Revolution and taught in the first Irish seminary at Maynooth.[33] The disorders of earlier years in Ireland had resulted in a laxness in moral standards; adulterous alliances and common-law marriages were not unusual. The French priests met this situation with horror and quickly inaugurated a religious reform, the focus of which was the eradication of these sexual transgressions. They placed a great stress on the weakness of man due to Original Sin, and saw sex as one of the most dangerous temptations. In this form Jansenism reached America with the immigrant Irish clergy who dominated the American church hierarchy until very recently. It is thought that these Jansenist-influenced teachings which stressed "man's natural sinfulness, the dangers of sex, the weakness and infirmity of man's flawed will and the need for God's grace" were reinforced by contact with similar Calvinist teachings already prevalent in America.[34]

Allen Tate was the first to cite what he interpreted as Jansenist tendencies in Wise Blood. In a memorial tribute to O'Connor, Tate recalled his confusion when, as a visiting professor to the

[33]Gene Kellogg, The Vital Tradition: The Catholic Novel in a Period of Convergence (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), p. 161.

[34]Kellogg, pp. 162-63.

University of Iowa in 1947, he was faced with the task of evaluating the early chapters of O'Connor's novel-in-progress:

> I hadn't the vaguest idea of what she was up to; I offered to correct the grammar; I even told her her style was dull. No doubt what I told her was true; but it was irrelevant. The flat style, the cranky grammar, the monotonous sentence structure were necessary vehicles of her vision of man. It was a narrow vision, but deep; unworldly, but aware of human depravity as only a good Jansenist can be--by "good Jansenist" I mean only that Flannery took a gloomy view of the human condition and that all her characters, like Mauriac's, are possibly damned. Her characters resist grace, there is no free will, etc. She was not doctrinally, but temperamentally, a Jansenist.[35]

Warren Coffey also saw Jansenism as a promising thematic approach to Flannery O'Connor's work. Stating with a bit of tongue-in-cheek certainty that as an American Catholic, O'Connor was "of course, a Jansenist,"[36] Coffey concentrated on the elements in her work which he felt were indicative of this influence: "I think that Jansenism, more than anything else, explains both her very considerable power . . . 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."[37]

Coffey suggested the suitability of examining O'Connor's works along the lines developed by Donat O'Donnell in his study of European Catholic writers entitled Maria Cross. Coffey felt that O'Connor's

[35]Allen Tate, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit [University of Scranton], 8 (Winter 1964), 48.

[36]Coffey, "Flannery O'Connor," Commentary, Nov. 1965, p. 96.

[37]Ibid.

depiction of the "intense and incommunicable pain arising from sex and transformed by religion into art"[38] had a parallel in the work of the writers in O'Donnell's study.

Both James C. McCullagh and Gene Kellogg employed Jansenism as an approach to O'Connor's work. McCullagh, drawing from Coffey's suggestion, analyzed O'Connor's treatment of "demoniac" sexuality[39] according to O'Donnell's pattern in Maria Cross, while Kellogg concentrated less on O'Connor's treatment of sexuality and more on what he saw as her vision of "true depravity" and her denial of "free will," which he felt resulted from a form of Jansenism influenced by both French and Irish sources and reinforced by contact with the vestiges of American Puritanism which surrounded her in the South.[40]

Kellogg was the first to note that Enoch Emery, Haze Motes's disciple in Wise Blood, seems completely immune to God's grace.[41] He also argued that neither Haze of Wise Blood nor Young Tarwater of The Violent Bear It Away freely chooses: "If one believes in free will, one must certainly quarrel with the sudden transformation of Haze as he sits on the edge of the cliff, but if one inherits Jansenist and Calvinist Puritan ideas as so many American Catholics do, may it not seem a true enough depiction of what freedom man has, as grace is

[38]Coffey, p. 98.

[39]McCullagh, "Aspects of Jansenism in Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood," Studies in the Humanities, 3 (1972), 13.

[40]Kellogg, p. 183.

[41]Kellogg, p. 188.

accepted by the rebellious murderer who was in spite of everything a seeker of truth?"[42] Although Kellogg conceded that Tarwater's conversion is more explicit than Haze's, it is still "as much the result of the sudden and overwhelming action of God's grace"[43] as Haze's conversion is.

The Jansenist label did not satisfy the objections of all those who felt ill at ease with O'Connor's stark vision, however. John T. O'Brien found her work not only contrary to the teachings of Catholicism, but to the tenets of Christianity itself. O'Brien found her denial of free will "contrary to the Catholicism which Miss O'Connor privately professed and anathema to the spirit of the Gospels that is the heart of all Christian belief."[44]

O'Brien's extreme view was mitigated somewhat by Robert Milder in an article entitled "The Protestantism of Flannery O'Connor." Milder did not find the absence of free will which he saw in O'Connor's work to be so much anti-Christian as anti-Catholic. Arguing that O'Connor's work was entirely "Calvinist or Puritan"[45] in its essence, Milder questioned the validity of evaluating her fiction on the basis of her claim that she adhered to Catholic doctrine:

> Had Miss O'Connor described her art as Christian rather than Catholic, the congruence between its

[42]Kellogg, p. 192. [43]Kellogg, p. 202.

[44]"The Un-Christianity of Flannery O'Connor," Listening, 6 (1977), 77.

[45]"The Protestantism of Flannery O'Connor," Southern Review, 11 (1975), 806.

> theory and practice might have been almost complete. But she did not. The longest section in Mystery and Manners consists of four essays dealing with the Catholic writer and his audience, in each of which Miss O'Connor makes a strong case, implicitly or explicitly, for the nature of her fiction. . . . By insisting upon "Catholic," Miss O'Connor sought to emphasize the literalness with which she took the traditional doctrines of the Church and to separate herself from "those politer elements for whom the supernatural is an embarrassment and for whom religion has become a department of sociology or culture or personality development." The paradox is that in repudiating what she regarded as the predominantly ethical mainstream of American Christianity, Flannery O'Connor was returning not to the Catholic tradition but to the evangelical Protestantism of the Reformation and the seventeenth century, a Protestantism whose lineal, if shrunken, descendents were the backwoods prophets of the modern South.[46]

Citing what he termed as the "absence of anything resembling free will"[47] in O'Connor's work, Milder found this absence to be particularly significant because "the insistence on the free acceptance of grace is one of the few remaining doctrinal points which links her to the Catholic tradition."[48] While he acknowledged that in some of O'Connor's stories there is a free choice, as the grandmother's gesture toward the Misfit in "A Good Man is Hard to Find," he found such moments the exception in her fiction. He pointed to Ruby Turpin of "Revelation" and Asbury Fox of "The Enduring Chill" as examples of characters who are "singled out" with "no apparent regard for penitence of faith." In both these cases Milder insisted that grace proceeded "from the sovereign pleasure of an arbitrary,

[46]Milder, pp. 803-04. [47]Ibid., p. 807.

[48]Ibid., p. 817.

inscrutable God who saves whom He will, when He will, and whose offer of salvation can neither be declined nor withstood."[49]

Milder found the issues of predestination and irresistible grace most acute in Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away whose heroes, Haze Motes and Tarwater, he sees laboring "under an inescapable burden of prophecy."[50]

He held O'Connor's attempt to reconcile freedom with religious calling through an appeal to mystery[51] a form of reasoning "common enough in Protestant theology, where predestination coexists harmoniously with moral responsibility, but largely alien to Catholicism."[52] From this evidence, Milder concluded that on "the questions of free will and spiritual election which have divided Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation, Miss O'Connor's fiction plants itself firmly on the Protestant side."[53]

The criticism here outlined, whether upholding, mitigating, or denying O'Connor's theological orthodoxy, is unsatisfactory in two ways. First, there is the failure of any of these critics to include in their criticism even the briefest statement on what exactly the Catholic Church teaches on free will, grace, and predestination. Too often a critic will accuse O'Connor of portraying an heretical

[49]Milder, p. 817. [50]Milder, p. 818.

[51]Milder refers here to O'Connor's statement: "Tarwater is certainly free and meant to be; if he appears to have a compulsion to be a prophet, I can only insist that in this compulsion is the mystery of God's will for him" (Mystery and Manners, p. 116).

[52]Milder, p. 818. [53]Ibid.

doctrine when minimal theological research would reveal that the supposed "heresy" is well within the bounds of Roman Catholic dogma. Robert Milder is the only critic who attempts to back his theologically based criticism with theological research, but he outlines only Calvinist beliefs while neglecting to do the same with the Roman Catholic teachings.

The second area of deficiency in the criticism of O'Connor's work is the assumption that her work is theologically static; that the theological implications embodied in Wise Blood, written early in her career, are exactly the same as those embodied in her later works, particularly The Violent Bear It Away. It is my contention that O'Connor made significant changes in her theological understanding in the eighteen years in which she wrote, and it is the purpose of this essay to trace her movement toward a more orthodox depiction of free will and grace in O'Connor's work.

This study will be limited in scope to O'Connor's two novels, Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away, although her short stories will be considered briefly. This decision to concentrate upon the novels was not made arbitrarily; the novels have been cited more often than any particular story for deviating from Catholic doctrine.

The first chapter of this essay, entitled Flannery O'Connor, Freedom and Free Will, will be an examination of both the Catholic teaching on free will and O'Connor's own statements on the subject which appeared in her essays and lectures. In too many cases, critics assume that free will is synonymous with absolute freedom.

It is not. I will examine the difference between the two, as well as the differences among the Roman Catholic, Calvinist and Jansenist teachings on free will, grace and predestination. This chapter will form the theoretical basis of the critical analysis of O'Connor's work in the chapters which follow.

Chapter Two, entitled Wise Blood and O'Connor's Theoretical Innocence, is an examination of the theological implications embodied in O'Connor's first novel. It is my feeling that when O'Connor wrote Wise Blood, she was still in the process of developing her art and her theological understanding. While I agree with the assessment of Wise Blood as a work with Jansenistic tendencies, I see this less in O'Connor's depiction of sexuality, as has been stressed by other critics, than in her depiction of human beings as depraved creatures driven to evil against their wills. The prior critical emphasis has been on Haze Motes, the protagonist, to the exclusion of Enoch Emery and Mrs. Flood, his "disciples" and foils. Enoch is a disturbing character who is too often dismissed by critics on the basis of O'Connor's comment that he is "basically a moron and a comic character" whose "compulsion" is not worth serious consideration,[54] while Mrs. Flood is usually seen as a character of minor significance. I hold that the difference between Hazel Motes and these two characters is a reflection of an authorial attitude which sees human nature condemned to do evil unless rescued by God's grace,

[54] O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, pp. 116-17.

The third chapter, entitled The Violent Bear It Away and the Mystery of Freedom, is an analysis of the theological implications embodied in the separate struggles against the grace of God on the part of Tarwater and his atheistic uncle, Rayber. While it is thematically similar to Wise Blood in its concern with Redemption, The Violent Bear It Away differs markedly in the presentation of its major characters. Unlike Enoch and Mrs. Flood, who seem entirely barred from supernatural grace, Rayber actively combats the grace which is freely offered to him. This important difference in the representation of grace and free will is indicative of Flannery O'Connor's increasingly orthodox understanding of the complex nature of Christian freedom.

CHAPTER ONE

FLANNERY O'CONNOR, FREEDOM AND FREE WILL

Many of the critical arguments which find O'Connor's depiction of free will unorthodox arise either from a confusion of the Roman Catholic teaching with the concept of absolute freedom, or from the misunderstandings wrought by the facile distinctions frequently, but incorrectly, drawn between the Catholic and Protestant teachings on free will. In this chapter, I wish to stress the difference between absolute freedom and the Roman Catholic teaching on free will, as well as the difference between the Roman Catholic teaching and the Calvinist and Jansenist teachings on free will and grace. While a complete treatment of the Roman Catholic position is beyond the scope of this essay, it will be treated in so far as it pertains to the critical objections to Flannery O'Connor's portrayal of free will in her work.

Despite the critical tendency to see O'Connor's work denying man's free will, there have always been some critics who have held the opposite view. Leonard Mayhew asserted that "the theme of Flannery O'Connor's fiction is free will,"[1] while Sumner Ferris judged her second novel to be a true Christian tragedy, for in it man freely chooses to accept or resist grace rather than having fate and doom conspire against him.[2] Sr. Mariella Gable agreed with Ferris' assessment

[1]Mayhew, "Flannery O'Connor--A Tribute," Esprit [University of Scranton], 8 (Winter 1964), 34.

[2]Ferris, "The Outside and Inside in Flannery O'Connor's The Violent Bear It Away," Critique, 3 (1960), 19.

of The Violent Bear It Away and further insisted that "the central place given to free will"[3] accounted for the greatness of O'Connor's fiction.

Flannery O'Connor certainly upheld the importance of free will in her own work. She once wrote that "the free act, the acceptance of grace particularly" was what she always strove for in order to make a story "work."[4] In response to the average Catholic reader's demand for a more "positive" outlook in Catholic literature, O'Connor insisted that the Roman Catholic belief in free will was a positive attitude in itself: "[The reader] forgets that the novelist does not write about general beliefs but about men with free will, and that there is nothing in our faith that implies a foregone optimism for man so free that with his last breath he can say No. All Catholic literature will be positive in the same sense that we hold this freedom to exist . . . ."[5]

Although O'Connor preferred to avoid the term "Catholic novel,"[6] the scant definition she did provide for it held the freedom of the

[3]Gable, "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," American Benedictine Review, 15 (1964), 131.

[4]O'Connor, "The Novelist and Free Will," Fresco, 1, No. 2 (Feb. 1961). [This article is reprinted in Flannery O'Connor's Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 115-17. The citations in the text are taken from the latter printing, hereafter called Mystery and Manners.]

[5]O'Connor, "Catholic Novelists and Their Readers," in Mystery and Manners, p. 182. [This is drawn from a lecture O'Connor delivered at the College of St. Teresa, Winona, Minnesota.]

[6]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 172. [O'Connor's exact statement was: "The very term 'Catholic novel' is, of course, suspect and people who are conscious of its complications don't like it except in quotation marks."]

will as an essential component. In a lecture delivered at Georgetown University in 1963, O'Connor said "the Catholic novel can't be categorized by subject matter but only by what it assumes about human and divine reality. It cannot see man as determined; it cannot see him as totally depraved. It will see him as incomplete in himself, as prone to evil, but as redeemable when his own efforts are assisted by grace."[7]

Concerned about the critical clamor surrounding the question of Haze Motes's freedom, O'Connor addressed the issue of free will in her preface to the second edition of Wise Blood:

> That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it is a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' [sic] integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to. Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that it usually does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.[8]

In "The Novelist and Free Will," O'Connor was even more explicit on the subject. Regarding the hero of The Violent Bear It Away she wrote, "Tarwater is certainly free and meant to be; if he appears to have a compulsion to be a prophet, I can only insist that in this

[7]O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," in Mystery and Manners, pp. 196-97.

[8]This entire preface has been reprinted in Mystery and Manners, pp. 114-15.

compulsion there is the mystery of God's will for him, and that it is not a compulsion in the clinical sense."[9] In the same article O'Connor declared that her view of free will followed the "traditional Catholic teaching."[10]

What, then, is the "traditional Catholic teaching" on free will to which O'Connor claimed to adhere and from which her critics claimed she strayed?

Before outlining the complex Roman Catholic teaching of free will and grace, it might be useful to establish at the outset what it is not.

The Roman Catholic teaching on the freedom of the will should not be confused with absolute freedom or complete autonomy. The belief in an omnipotent and omniscient Creator would, quite logically, preclude the possibility of such unlimited freedom on the part of the creature. In Freedom, Grace and Destiny, Romano Guardini makes clear the difference between the absolute freedom of God and the creaturely freedom of humanity: "Modern ethics argue that when man obeys God's commandments he becomes heteronomous, belonging to someone outside himself, whereas freedom fundamentally consists in autonomy, in perfect self-dependence. But this argument understands freedom as absolute freedom and this equates human freedom with Divine freedom. Were that the case, obedience to God would certainly take away human liberty."[11]

[9] O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 116.

[10] O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 115.

[11] Freedom, Grace and Destiny, trans. John Murray, S.J. (1961; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 81.

Although few critics have completely blurred the distinction between free will and absolute freedom in their analyses of O'Connor, Robert Bowen does seem to equate free will with absolute freedom when he cites the ultimate inability of Tarwater to adopt rationalism as evidence of O'Connor's denial of free will. With this understanding of freedom, Bowen finds the rational atheism of Tarwater's uncle Rayber to be the truer vision: "Rayber, the evangelical atheist, offers as an alternative [to Tarwater] 'a world where there's no savior but yourself. . . . The great dignity of man,' [Rayber] said, 'is his ability to say: I am born once and no more. What I can do for myself and my fellowman in this life is all my portion and I'm content with it. It's enough to be a man.' Barren or not, such rationalism is dignified and if it allows no Other World, man is free to enjoy this one."[12]

A related, but more subtle, misconception which should be dispelled about free will is one which arises from a facile understanding of the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism. The Reformers' stress on the necessity of grace for salvation, and their denial of the effectiveness of man's free will after the Fall of Adam was countered by the Council of Trent's affirmation that the will, though weakened by the fall of Adam, was still capable of freely accepting or resisting grace.[13]

[12]Bowen, "Hope vs. Despair in the New Gothic Novel," Renascence, 13 (1961), 150.

[13]Heinrich Joseph Dominik Denzinger, The Sources of Catholic Dogma, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 258 (Denz 814).

As a result of these doctrinal differences, a convenient parallelism arose to "explain" the differences between Catholics and Protestants on the issue of free will: Catholics believe they are saved by "faith and good works" while Protestants believe they are saved "by faith alone"; Catholics are "free" to choose the good or evil which leads them to heaven or hell, while Protestants are "saved" by God's gratuitous grace; Protestants, therefore, believe that men are predestined to heaven or hell from all eternity; Catholics, it is assumed, do not believe in any sort of predestination since they freely choose their fates.[14]

Although these oversimplified distinctions serve only to misrepresent both systems of belief, they often serve as the basis for the criticism of O'Connor's treatment of free will. Given this perception, free will is incorrectly interpreted as the power given to every human being by which he can either achieve salvation or discard the opportunity. It is further assumed that Catholicism teaches that this choice for or against salvation is in no way motivated by the Creator, but that man himself is fully capable of making such a decision.

John O'Brien assumes this erroneous conception of free will to be Catholic doctrine when he notes with dismay that "the act of salvation in Miss O'Connor's stories is utterly gratuitous and

[14]Louis Bouyer, The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism, trans. A. V. Littledale (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1956), p. 9.

without a corresponding willingness or acceptance on man's part."[15] He thinks it heretical that the salvation of Mrs. Turpin, the protagonist of "Revelation," is achieved "not by good works but by the inscrutable will of a God whose mercy she bears witness to without being able to comprehend."[16] O'Brien also sees Tarwater's conversion as the result of his recognition of "the inevitable fulfillment of God's design for him"[17] rather than the exercise of his free will.

A misunderstanding of the Roman Catholic teaching of free will also underlies the critical analyses of J. Oates Smith in "Ritual and Violence in Flannery O'Connor" and Gene Kellogg in The Vital Tradition. Smith interprets Haze and Tarwater's revelations as evidence of O'Connor's belief in the "ultimate powerlessness of man before God,"[18] and he insists that the apparent absence of the possibility of a "systematic, refined, rational acceptance of God"[19] within her work implies the "absolute denial of free will."[20] Kellogg argues that although in Wise Blood "freedom exists and can create resistance," it is "limited by God's plan for each soul."[21] He also finds it contrary to orthodox Catholicism that "supernatural forces, not

[15]O'Brien, "The Un-Christianity of Flannery O'Connor," Listening, 6 (1971), 72.

[16]O'Brien, p. 75. [17]O'Brien, p. 72.

[18]"Ritual and Violence in Flannery O'Connor," Thought, 41 (1966), 559.

[19]Ibid. [20]Smith, p. 560.

[21]Kellogg, The Vital Tradition (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), p. 193.

Tarwater's will, have determined Tarwater's redemption"[22] in The Violent Bear It Away: "Tarwater's aim was to live his life as he 'elected it.' The biblical verb is significant. In Flannery O'Connor's world we cannot elect our lives, they are elected for us by God. Tarwater, like Haze, could not in the end fight his vocation."[23]

Robert Milder insists that O'Connor deviates from Roman Catholic orthodoxy in her portrayal of characters "singled out" for grace.[24] He finds her attempt to reconcile Tarwater's freedom with "the mystery of God's grace for him"[25] to be a "logic common enough in Protestant theology, where predestination coexists harmoniously with moral responsibility, but largely alien to Catholicism."[26]

In all these critical objections to O'Connor's depiction of God's "plan" or "design" which seems to involve a "singling out," there is contained the assumption that any hint of predestination in the work of a writer who claims to follow the teachings of Catholicism necessarily precludes the possibility of free will and implies an affinity with Calvinism. In fact, Roman Catholic doctrine holds predestination to be in accord with other revealed and naturally known truths,[27] and

[22]Kellogg, p. 202. [23]Kellogg, p. 203.

[24]Milder, "The Protestantism of Flannery O'Connor," Southern Review, 11 (1975), 817.

[25]Milder refers to O'Connor's statement, Mystery and Manners, p. 116.

[26]Milder, p. 818.

[27]Dom M. Farrelly, O.S.B., Predestination, Grace and Free Will (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1964), p. 1.

contrary to Robert Milder's statement, the logic wherein "predestination coexists with moral responsibility" is not alien, but integral to Catholicism. A closer examination will show that many of the critical objections raised to indicate O'Connor's departure from Catholic orthodoxy are actually based on a misunderstanding of this complex Catholic doctrine.

The Roman Catholic teaching on predestination is drawn from Scripture[28] and traditional teaching, and upholds not only the general understanding of predestination as "that whereby God disposes within Himself what He intends to accomplish"[29] but the more specific understanding as "a kind of type of the ordering of some persons toward eternal salvation, existing in the divine mind."[30]

Moreover, the factors which determine the worthiness of a person's predestination to eternal salvation are not "good works" nor even an initial "corresponding willingness or acceptance," as John O'Brien insists. According to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, predestination to eternal salvation is, in fact, gratuitous.

[28]One of the most important scriptural bases of predestination is Ephesians 1:11-12, "In him we were chosen; for in the decree of God, who administers everything according to his will and counsel, we were predestined to praise his glory by being the first to hope in Christ."

[29]Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Saint Augustine's Anti-Pelagian Writings, trans. Peter Holmes and Rev. Ernest Wallis (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1887), p. 542.

[30]Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., Inc., 1947), p. 126 (1a; 23.2). [Specific scriptural references used as a foundation for this understanding of predestination include: Eph. 1:12; Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 2:7; and Jn. 6:44.]

The absolute gratuity of salvation was affirmed by the Roman Catholic Church in the Council of Orange in 531.[31] The Council further insisted that even one's initial willingness to accept grace was produced by God.[32] Even the Council of Trent, which sought to counter the Reformers' virtual denial of free will, did not alter the Council of Orange's teaching that salvation derives from God's predisposing grace which is given anterior to any consideration of merit.[33]

The Catholic teaching on predestination must be made distinct from the Calvinist or Jansenist teaching which Smith, Kellogg and Milder see underlying O'Connor's work.[34] The Catholic objection to John Calvin's teaching on predestination was not in his statement that God "had determined by his eternal and unchanging plan those whom he long before determined once and for all to receive into salvation" but in his teaching of the positive predestination of "those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction."[35] The Jansenists taught

[31]Denzinger, The Sources of Catholic Dogma, p. 80 (Denz 199). [Canon 25, the summary canon of the Council of Orange is unambiguous on this matter: "Even after the coming of the Lord, we know and likewise believe that this grace was not held in the free will of all who desired to be baptized, but was bestowed by the bounty of Christ . . . ."]

[32]Denzinger, p. 76 (Denz 177). [33]Ibid., p. 252 (Denz 801).

[34]The possible validity of some of these observations will be considered in the chapter on Wise Blood.

[35]Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 2nd ed., ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 950 (III:23).

that Adam's choice of evil, and not God's immutable decree, had resulted in the condemnation of all men to eternal damnation, and that only those few who were chosen to benefit from Christ's redemptive death could enter heaven.

The objections of the Catholic Church to the positive predestination to damnation taught by Calvinism and the limited Redemption taught by Jansenism are drawn from Scripture. The Church points not only to the expression of a universal salvific will in the New Testament,[36] but the constant stress throughout the Bible on individual freedom and responsibility.[37]

The somewhat ambiguous teaching which results is one which the Roman Catholic Church holds to be a reflection of the ambiguity inherent in Scripture itself. The teaching is that while God predestines no one to evil and wills the salvation of all, not all are, in fact, saved. Those who are saved, however, are held to be saved by the grace of God alone, while those who perish, perish not through God's fault, but through their own fault. The Catholic teaching on free will is particularly pertinent in this context, since man is held responsible for his sins.

[36]See I Tim. 2:3-6, "Prayer of this kind is good, and God our Savior is pleased with it, for he wants all men to be saved and come to this: God is one. One also the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

[37]Among the many sources in Scripture, Roman Catholicism particularly stresses Ezech. 18 and Phil. 2:12.

It is this ambiguity within the Roman Catholic doctrine upon which the critics of O'Connor have touched in their objections to O'Connor's presentation of the doctrine of free will. Given the seeming contradiction of the Catholic Church's own statements, it is not surprising that the critics have seen a contradiction between O'Connor's forthright statements on free will and the presentation of freedom within her work.

The problem of how a man who has been predestined to salvation before the creation of the world by God's freely given grace can also be called a free agent who is responsible for his own actions is certainly one of the most difficult doctrinal paradoxes in the whole history of the Catholic Church.[38]

The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally taught both the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of free will, but it also teaches that the exact nature of the balance between them is a supernatural mystery.[39] Throughout the ages, however, explanations have been developed with the intention of explaining that balance logically. While the Church has never given dogmatic weight to any of these explanations, they are traditionally taught as ways of approaching, by analogy, an understanding of the mystery.[40]

[38]Bouyer, Spirit and Forms of Protestantism, p. 53.

[39]According to Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler in the Theological Dictionary (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), a mystery in this sense of the word is one "which concern[s] truths about God whose existence and import we can know because of the analogical character of the terms employed but which remain[s] obscure."

[40]Farrelly, Predestination, Grace and Free Will, p. 37.

The explanations are instructive because they help to refute the theological criticism raised by Ruth M. Vande Kieft and Robert Milder who are disturbed by the ultimate lack of effectiveness of the will in resisting God's saving grace. Vande Kieft finds O'Connor stating that "God is out to accomplish his salvation in spite of the sinner's willful drive against him."[41] Milder also sees O'Connor implying that God's offer of salvation can "neither be declined nor withstood."[42] If, as they assume, the Church taught that one is so free that he can "escape" God's mercy and predestination to eternal salvation, then O'Connor's depictions of the conversions of Haze Motes and Tarwater would certainly be outside Catholic orthodoxy. It is not true, however, that characters who are ultimately converted after strenuous resistance are the embodiment of a denial of the freedom of the will as taught by the Catholic Church.

The classic answer given by Saint Thomas Aquinas on the matter of the freedom of the will to resist salvation is one which presents a view of freedom significantly more limited than that which Vande Kieft and Milder assume to be Catholic doctrine. For a creature to be called free, he need only be the secondary cause of his actions of which God is the primary cause.[43]

[41]Ruth M. Vande Kieft, "Judgment in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Sewanee Review, 76 (1968), 351.

[42]Milder, "The Protestantism of Flannery O'Connor," p. 817.

[43]Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, p. 418 (83.1, adj. 3).

The issue became even more philosophically complex when theologians felt the need to further elucidate the compatibility between free will and grace in light of the Reformers' teaching that the will was so damaged by the fall of Adam that it was virtually powerless before grace. To this end, two opposing explanations were developed.

Although it is not necessary here to give a fully detailed treatment of the intricacies of these theories, it should be noted that the differences between them derived from the differences in their original emphases. Louis Molina began with the defense of the freedom of the will against the teachings of the Reformers, while Dominic Bañez sought to stress the primacy of God. From these different points of departure, Molina posited a middle knowledge or scientia media by which God knew what the created free will would do in any possible situation, while Bañez elaborated on Saint Thomas Aquinas' theory of secondary causality and insisted that man's actions were free with reference to the human will, but necessary on the supposition that God willed them. It is interesting to note that despite these different emphases, both Molina and Bañez ultimately agreed that predestination is "an absolute divine intention that an individual gain heaven in such a way that it is impossible for him to fail to reach heaven."[44] Both sides of the controversy held grace to be infallibly efficacious, although Bañez felt that this was so because grace had intrinsic power to move the will, while Molina felt that grace was

[44]Farrelly, p. 33.

infallibly efficacious because, before God gives any specific grace, he knows what the result will be in the free will of the creature by his scientia media.[45]

In light of these explanations, Gene Kellogg's statement quoted earlier that O'Connor presents a "view of freedom that indeed exists and can create resistance, but is limited by God's plan for each soul" seems very much in harmony with Catholicism's traditional teaching on the subject.

Ultimately, Vandé Kieft and Milder's question of how powerful the will is before God's merciful initiative can be answered by a consideration of the difference between free will and absolute freedom. Romano Guardini's distinction is instructive: ". . . God alone is God; man conversely is his creature. Man's freedom is a created freedom and it therefore develops essentially before God and in subordination to Him--all the more since God is not only creator of being but also ground of truth and source of good. In consequence, obedience to God does not signify objection to superior power, but the fulfillment of what is good or right."[46]

These theological intricacies may seem far removed from the writer who modestly claimed that the mystery of free will and grace was a "complicated subject" which required elucidation by someone with more learning than she.[47]

[45]Farrelly, p. 25.

[46]Guardini, p. 81.

[47]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 116.

But this statement, for all its humble overtones, surely betrays a measure of O'Connor's legendary "penetration and scornful humor,"[48] for she was very well read on the subject of free will and grace[49] and well aware of the many conflicting theories and controversies. In her preface to Wise Blood she insisted that freedom was a mystery which could not be conceived simply,[50] for she held, as does the Roman Catholic teaching, that the balance of free will and grace is ultimately beyond the grasp of human comprehension.

O'Connor, no doubt, found the various theories and controversies of Bañez and Molina, with their dependence on the finest logical distinctions another manifestation of Catholicism's post-Reformation tendency to overemphasize the "legal and logical" aspects of the faith while neglecting "the Church's broader tradition."[51] For O'Connor, the Church's broader tradition was the Bible, a knowledge of which she felt would "restore Catholic life to its proper fullness."[52] It is in

[48]Robert Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything that Rises Must Converge by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. xiii.

[49]A list of the books in O'Connor's library known to have been read by her is given by Kathleen Feeley in Flannery O'Connor: The Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), pp. 189-91. The books O'Connor reviewed for The Bulletin and The Southern Cross are listed in Miles Orvell's Invisible Parade (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), pp. 195-99. Both lists attest to O'Connor's interest in such classical Christian theologians as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, and in modern theologians, including Karl Barth, Romano Guardini, Henri de Lubac, Jacques Mauritain, Louis Bouyer, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. No one with this background in theology could have been ignorant of the controversy surrounding the issue of free will and grace.

[50]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 115.

[51]Ibid., p. 205. [52]Ibid.

the Bible where one finds the source of the ambiguity of the presentation of free will and grace which affects not only the Catholic doctrine but O'Connor's artistic presentation of the mystery as well. A critical analysis of O'Connor's treatment of free will must begin with a respect for the issue which, she insisted, does not lend itself to a simplistic presentation.

Not all the critical questions raised on this issue, however, can be neatly answered by the suggestion that the critics simply misunderstood the orthodox Catholic doctrine, as well as the ambiguity within the Bible itself concerning free will. Some of the objections raised concerning the seeming absence of free will or the outright absence of grace in some characters are extremely pertinent when applied to the novel Wise Blood. It is only when these same statements are applied with equal weight to The Violent Bear It Away that their validity is questionable. There is much in Wise Blood which one might find troubling in light of Catholic doctrine and O'Connor's later statements on free will. It should be kept in mind, however, that O'Connor's understanding of the mystery of free will and grace developed gradually. For just as O'Connor developed artistically in the years she wrote, she also developed theologically. Her later novel embodies the fruits of this dual development, resulting in a more successful artistic interpretation of the supernatural mystery which O'Connor held to be the basis of every successful story--the "moment . . . in which the presence of grace can be felt as it waits to be accepted or rejected."[53]

[53]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 118.

CHAPTER TWO

WISE BLOOD AND O'CONNOR'S "THEORETICAL INNOCENCE"

To cite the influence of Jansenism in Wise Blood is by no means a completely new approach to the work. As has already been outlined in the introduction to this essay, O'Connor has frequently been described as a Catholic writer with Jansenist tendencies, particularly in her portrayal of sexuality.[1] I will concentrate less on this aspect of O'Connor's work, however, and more on her depiction of free will. Although Gene Kellogg has already done this to some degree in The Vital Tradition, he finds evidence of O'Connor's Jansenistic "denial of free will"[2] in Haze Motes's ultimate conversion. I find that O'Connor's Jansenist vision is more subtly revealed in her depiction of man as a creature so innately depraved by Original Sin that his will is bound to do evil unless aided by God's grace. I see evidence of this less in her portrayal of Haze Motes, however, whose "moment of grace" is really quite orthodox, than in her portrayal of Haze's foils, Enoch Emery and Mrs. Flood, who appear to be without the free will necessary to resist evil. O'Connor's depiction of Haze's extremely individualistic and

[1]James C. McCullagh has treated this subject in depth in his article entitled "Aspects of Jansenism in Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood," in Studies in the Humanities, 3 (1972), 12-16. Warren Coffey also treats her Jansenist view of sexuality in his article entitled "Flannery O'Connor" in Commentary, November 1965, pp. 93-99.

[2]Kellogg, The Vital Tradition: The Catholic Novel in a Period of Convergence (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970). [Chapter XI of this work is devoted to the works of Flannery O'Connor.]

rigorously ascetic piety after his conversion also points to a Jansenist influence on her Catholicism.

Flannery O'Connor began her first novel at the age of twenty-two while she was still a graduate student in the creative writing program at the University of Iowa. Her formal writing experience prior to Wise Blood was limited to the five short stories of her master's thesis and a sixth story entitled "The Capture" which was published in Mademoiselle in 1948. "The Train," the final story of her thesis, was later revised and expanded to become the first chapter of Wise Blood.

Almost everyone who was familiar with O'Connor's earliest stories was astonished at the writer she revealed herself to be in Wise Blood. Although her talent was evident in her first stories, the intensity of vision which accompanied her remarkable use of language was largely unprecedented.

Robert Giroux, her first editor and later publisher, remarked: "In the five years between 1947, when a draft of the first chapter of Wise Blood was written, and 1952 [when Wise Blood was completed] Flannery's development was amazing."[3] Most critics attribute this development to the crystallization of her religious themes which lent her work a particularly sharp focus. In an evaluative analysis of O'Connor's first six short stories, Frederick Asals found that they contained her "first gropings toward a subject and technique which

[3]Giroux, Introduction to The Complete Stories (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), p. xii.

were to fuse so successfully in Wise Blood."[4] In a similar analysis, Carter W. Martin maintained that O'Connor's "improvement as an artist was in rough proportion to her movement toward a violent expression of her Christian themes."[5]

O'Connor's "Christian themes," however, were not always so apparent to early reviewers of Wise Blood. Most tended to see Wise Blood as a cruel satire of Southern evangelism or as a paean to nihilism. Some critics saw Haze's "problem" primarily as an Oedipal attraction to his mother and his obsession with Christianity was considered a further manifestation of his psychological imbalance.

O'Connor was aware of this criticism and largely exasperated by it. When Wise Blood was re-issued ten years after its original publication, O'Connor composed a terse preface with the intention of stemming some of the "far-out interpretations"[6] often arrived at by her readers:

> Wise Blood has reached the age of ten and is still alive. My critical powers are just sufficient to determine this, and I am gratified to be able to say it. The book was written with zest and, if possible, it should be read that way. It is a novel about a Christian malgre lui, and as such, very serious, for all comic novels that are any good must be about matters of life and death. Wise Blood was written by an author congenitally innocent of theory, but one with certain preoccupations. That belief in Christ is to some a matter of life and death has been a

[4]Frederick Asals, "The Road to Wise Blood," Renascence, 21 (1969), 192.

[5]Martin, "Flannery O'Connor's Early Fiction," Southern Humanities Review, 7 (1973), 212.

[6]Flannery O'Connor, Letters of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 473. [Hereafter cited as Letters.]

> stumbling block for readers who would prefer to think it a matter of no great consequence. For them Hazel Motes' [sic] integrity lies in his trying with such vigor to get rid of the ragged figure who moves from tree to tree in the back of his mind. For the author Hazel's integrity lies in his not being able to. Does one's integrity ever lie in what he is not able to do? I think that usually it does, for free will does not mean one will, but many wills conflicting in one man. Freedom cannot be conceived simply. It is a mystery and one which a novel, even a comic novel, can only be asked to deepen.[7]

The brevity of this preface is somewhat deceiving. Into a very few words O'Connor packed not only her slightly amused, retrospective evaluation of her first novel and an apology for her "congenital innocence" of literary theory, but also a clarification of the major concern of Wise Blood. O'Connor stressed that before a reader could begin to understand the novel he must be prepared to recognize her belief that Redemption is a serious matter. O'Connor also hoped that by stressing Haze's freedom she would lay to rest the criticism that his ultimate inability to turn from Christ was a departure from the doctrine of free will.

Despite O'Connor's overt statement in the preface to Wise Blood on the nature of freedom, many critics are still dissatisfied with what they see as Hazel Motes's lack of free will. O'Connor is usually cited as having "Calvinist" tendencies in her depiction of a God who seems "out to accomplish his salvation in spite of the sinner's willful

[7]Flannery O'Connor, Preface to Three (New York: The New American Library, 1963). [This edition, which includes Wise Blood, A Good Man is Hard to Find and The Violent Bear It Away, is cited throughout as Three with page notations given in the text.]

drive against him."[8] Much of this criticism, as has already been discussed in Chapter One, has its foundation in a confusion of the Roman Catholic doctrine of free will with the conception of absolute freedom. In the Roman Catholic conception of freedom, man is held to be free if he is the secondary cause of the actions of which God is the primary cause. With this understanding of the mystery of freedom, a rather convincing argument for orthodoxy in O'Connor's depiction of free will can be made if one looks at Hazel Motes to the exclusion of the other characters in Wise Blood.

As the grandson of a circuit preacher who had "Jesus hidden in his head like a stinger" (Three, p. 15), and the son of an austerely pious woman, Hazel Motes is saturated at an early age in a knowledge of the menacingly merciful, "soul-hungry" Jesus preached by his grandfather. An incident at a lascivious carnival sideshow, followed by his mother's scolding reminder that Jesus died to redeem him, instills in Haze a perception of man's sinful state which manifests itself in him as a "nameless, unplaced guilt" (Three, p. 39). In an attempt to escape this guilt Haze sets out to repay the debt of Redemption he owes to Jesus by walking a mile with rocks in his shoes, but he is glumly disappointed when he receives no sign that this quid pro quo mortification has restored him to his supposed pre-carnivalian independence of Jesus. After this episode, Haze tries strenuously to avoid sin in an attempt to avoid Jesus, until his

[8]Ruth M. Vande Kieft, "Judgment in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," Sewanee Review, 76 (1968), 351.

experience in the army provides him with an even more satisfying method of avoiding Jesus. Assured by his brothel-bound bunkmates that the soul he fears losing does not even exist, Haze accepts this "good news" as an opportunity "to be converted to nothing instead of evil" (Three, p. 17). With neither family nor home to which he might return after he is discharged, Haze sets out for the city of Taulkingham with his new conviction of soullessness and the vague but suggestive plans to "do some things [he'd] never done before" (Three, p. 11). On his second night in the city, Haze encounters the "blind" evangelist Asa Hawks, to whose fraudulence Haze is blind. Roused by Hawks's preaching of sin and repentence, Haze begins his career as the spirited preacher of the Church Without Christ: "Sweet Jesus Christ Crucified," he said, "I want to tell you people something. Maybe you think you're not clean because you don't believe. Well you are clean, let me tell you that. Everyone of you people are clean and let me tell you why if you think it's because of Jesus Christ Crucified you're wrong. I don't say he wasn't crucified but I say it wasn't for you" (Three, p. 34). Haze's continued attempts to "free" the people of Taulkingham from a dependence on Jesus' Redemption are met with total apathy. It becomes increasingly clear that Haze is virtually the only person in Taulkingham who is disturbed by the thought that if Jesus had to die to redeem man, then man must be a sinner. In his "sermons" Haze concentrates on denying the conception of Original Sin which had haunted him since his experience at the sideshow. "I'm going to preach there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption because

there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two. Nothing matters but that Jesus was a liar" (Three, p. 60).

Haze's preaching fails to shock the people of Taulkingham for they seem to have long ago accepted the idea that they are sinless. In fact, it is not his message, but his hortatory manner of delivery which offends the pleasure-bound citizens. When Hoover Shoats, alias Onnie Jay Holy, sweetens Haze's doctrine by assuring his listeners that rather than being sinners, they are "little buds of sweetness" (Three, p. 83), he draws money-paying crowds.

In contrast to the complacency of the people of Taulkingham, Haze is obsessed with the truth as he sees it. His agonized quest for the truth is depicted as admirable when presented against the dishonesty of the religious shams and profiteers who attempt to manipulate him. His personal integrity is such that he shuns Hoover Shoats, whose money-making schemes for the Holy Church of Christ Without Christ disgust him. In his steadfast commitment to truth, he is deeply disillusioned by the deception of Asa Hawks, whom he had considered to be a committed Christian, and moved to a murderous rage by Solace Layfield's denial of his Christian beliefs in his role as the hired "prophet" in Hoover Shoats's rival church.

In an attempt to replace his need for Jesus, Haze turns to the two notable twentieth century substitutes—sex and technology. His rather dismal sexual alliances with Leora Watts and Sabbath Lily Hawks are motivated less by any desire for pleasure than by his commitment to

his lack of belief in sin: "He felt that he should have a woman, not for the sake of pleasure in her, but to prove that he didn't believe in sin since he practiced what was called it" (Three, p. 63). Technology fails for him when his leaking, creaking Essex, which he uses as pulpit and home, is destroyed by a policeman who justifiably judges it to be a traffic hazard.

The ultimate failure of his car to fulfill his need is the final disillusionment for Haze. Having been disappointed by everyone and everything around him in his brief ministry in the Church Without Christ, he is now ready to acknowledge his need for the grace of Redemption.[9] Despite critical objections which see Haze's conversion at this time as the result of an "irresistible" or "overwhelming action of grace," his decision to turn to God, as he surveys the wasteland of "washed-out red clay" and the "partly burnt pasture" into which his car has been pushed, seems entirely plausible: "Haze stood for a few minutes, looking over at the scene. His face seemed to reflect the entire distance across the clearing and on beyond, the entire distance that extended from his eyes to the blank gray sky that went on, depth after depth, into space. His knees bent under him and he sat down on the edge of the embankment with his feet under him" (Three, pp. 113-14). In a very concrete form, Haze finally sees the abyss of nothingness which he claimed to desire--the abyss from which only God's grace could save him. Recognizing his desperate need for Redemption at last, he

[9]Sr. Mariella Gable, "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," American Benedictine Review, 15 (1964), 136.

violently embraces Jesus in extreme acts of penance.

To those who seek to fit Wise Blood entirely into a scheme of Roman Catholic orthodoxy, this interpretation which concentrates exclusively on Haze's conversion is highly satisfying.[10] A closer examination of the novel, however, uncovers elements which are clearly outside the orthodox Catholic teachings on predestination, free will and grace. It is my belief that at the time O'Connor wrote Wise Blood, she was still influenced by the traces of the post-Reformation heresy of Jansenism which affected the faith of American Catholics well into the twentieth century.[11]

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the focal point of the Jansenist teaching was the Original Sin of Adam which left his descendents so depraved that they were no longer able to choose between good and evil. Man without grace was considered so corrupt that he would infallibly choose evil. This was contrary to the Roman Catholic teaching that Jesus' redemptive death had endowed each man with sufficient grace to choose a good act over an evil act. The orthodox Catholic teaching, however, was countered by the Jansenist belief that Adam's sin had resulted in the just condemnation of all to eternal damnation and that Christ's redemptive action was directed toward the salva-

[10]In addition to Gable's work, both Rainulf Stelzmann in "Shock and Orthodoxy: An Interpretation of Flannery O'Connor's Novels and Short Stories," Xavier University Studies, 2 (1963), 4-21, and Bob Dowell in "The Moment of Grace in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," College English, 27 (1965), 235-39, hold that Wise Blood conforms to Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

[11]Kellogg, p. 163.

tion of a small number of Adam's descendents.[12] The particular piety which grew from these theological tenets was characterized by an absolute disdain for worldly endeavors and a belief in the necessity of controlling one's concupiscent desires with rigorous penances and mortifications. Most striking was the elitist attitude which resulted from the belief in a limited Redemption. Contrary to the Roman Catholic stress on evangelism, the Jansenists believed that since very few were in the elect, proselytical activities were largely futile; consequently, one's primary concern should be one's own spiritual growth and well-being.[13]

To some degree, the basic elements of Jansenism can be seen in Wise Blood. The "theoretical innocence" to which O'Connor confessed in the preface of Wise Blood does not seem to have been limited to literary theory; a certain theological innocence seems to be at work as well. In fact, Wise Blood does not always meet the criteria that O'Connor herself later demanded a "Catholic" novel fulfill. Contrary to her feeling that a Catholic novel "cannot see man as determined" or "totally depraved,"[14] there are two major characters in Wise Blood who surely fall into this category. Both Enoch Emery and Mrs. Flood are often ignored or lightly treated in critical analyses which stress

[12]Alexander Sedgwick, Jansenism in Seventeenth-Century France (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), p. 32.

[13]Sedgwick, p. 197.

[14]Flannery O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," in Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 196. [Hereafter cited as Mystery and Manners.]

O'Connor's congruence with Roman Catholic orthodoxy, perhaps because neither character can be reconciled with the orthodox teaching that "redemptive grace is available to all men."[15] Although both characters are primarily meant to serve as comic foils to Haze, a closer examination of the reality behind O'Connor's humor reveals that both characters are curiously and arbitrarily barred from redemptive grace. In the economy of Wise Blood, Christ did not die for all mankind, but only for the elect.

Enoch Emery is a particularly disturbing character. His actions seem so absurd that it is difficult at first to give him any serious consideration, yet he is hardly a minor character. The very title of the novel reflects Enoch's boast to have a special intuitive sense which he calls his "wise blood," and at least one-fourth of the book's point of view is rendered through him.[16] As the bearer of the "new jesus" of the Church Without Christ, he is also crucial to the dramatic development of the plot. Enoch's two most outstanding traits seem to be his talent to inspire revulsion in everyone he meets and his submission to his "blood" which eventually leads him into a bestial state. It is this latter quality of Enoch's which has caused most problems for critics who uphold an orthodox Roman Catholic interpretation of Wise Blood. Ten years after Wise Blood was written, O'Connor was asked about Enoch's apparent lack of "free will." At that time she would only reply:

[15]Gable, p. 151.

[16]Stuart L. Burns, "The Evolution of Wise Blood," Modern Fiction Studies, 16 (1970), 156.

"As for Enoch, he is a moron and chiefly a comic character, I don't think it is important whether his compulsion is clinical or not."[17] This answer has been taken by many as the last word on Enoch. Moreover, he is usually categorized as an outright flaw in the novel.[18]

Critics with no particular theological interest in Wise Blood, however, have seen Enoch as playing the very major role of Haze's "comic counterpart" or "ironic double." Enoch's backward movement from the human to the bestial state is thought "to define by contrast, the sense in which Haze is a Christian hero."[19]

One of the most interesting analyses of the "ironic doubling" of Haze and Enoch is that written by Donald Gregory, who sees the contrast between them "most clearly drawn in terms of each character's volitional power over his actions."[20] Although Gregory does not concern himself with the theological implications of Enoch's apparent lack of volitional power, the implications would be quite disconcerting to anyone upholding Roman Catholic orthodoxy in Wise Blood. Kathleen Feeley, who had earlier noted Enoch's openness to a "diabolical spiritual reality"[21] makes an attempt to fit his seemingly helpless submission into

[17]Mystery and Manners, pp. 116-17. [18]Burns, p. 156.

[19]Miles Orvell, Invisible Parade (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), p. 86.

[20]Gregory, "Enoch Emery: Ironic Doubling in Wise Blood," Flannery O'Connor Bulletin, 4 (1975), 52.

[21]Feeley, Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 59.

a more orthodox scheme. Feeley posits that Enoch's actions are the result of his conscious rejection of Jesus: " Enoch becomes a foil for Hazel; each is subject to an influence beyond his ken. His descent into animality shows--in caricature--the alternative Haze could have taken. In Enoch's life, as in Haze's, childhood influence is strong. Enoch's four weeks at the Rodemill Boys' Bible Academy taught him all about Jesus; he rejected Him and in the novel seeks another god, someone who communicates in turn through his wise blood. The origin of Enoch's wise blood seems diabolical; it is a negative counterpart of the blood of Redemption."[22]

It is tempting to accept this interpretation of Enoch as someone who knew Christ, but freely and consciously rejected Him in favor of another god. Enoch's brief and entirely coercive religious education can not seriously be compared to Haze's all-enveloping religious upbringing which affected him to the very core. Enoch Emery is sent to the Bible Academy by a "Welfare woman" who had "the papers" on him. In other words, his choice was between the academy or the penitentiary. Although Enoch seems impressed enough with his educational experience to tell everyone he meets about it, there is not the slightest hint that he regarded the subject matter of his education as anything more than a nuisance. As he tells Haze, "Jesus, four weeks and I thought I was going to be sanctified crazy" (Three, p. 28).

Enoch's claim to have learned "anything you want to know about Jesus" in four week's time is surely meant to be understood ironically,

[22]Feeley, p. 66.

for four weeks is hardly enough time to learn "anything you want to know" about any subject. It is a fair measure of the depth of Enoch's perception of Christianity that he prays to Jesus for a way to escape the Welfare woman that will not involve killing her and being sent to the penitentiary. The answer which he believes to have come in response to this prayer was his sudden idea to feign a sexual attack on his benefactress which results in her heart attack.

Rather than having rejected Christ, Enoch seems always to have been immune to any spiritual reality but the strangely demonic influence which communicates with him through his vaunted wise blood. Early in the novel Enoch's wise blood is contrasted with Haze's urge for Jesus by Enoch himself. On the night of their first meeting, Enoch is so angered and hurt by Haze's refusal to accompany him to a brothel that he taunts Haze by saying that he had "nobody nor nothing but Jesus." With tears in his eyes and "his face stretched into an evil crooked grin" he continues: "You act like you think you got wiser blood than anybody else," he said, "but you ain't! I'm the one has it. Not you. Me" (Three, p. 36).

Further comparisons are drawn by the narrator between Haze and Enoch which seem to emphasize their movement in opposite spiritual directions. On the same morning upon which Haze awakens with the unprecedented but fully formed desire to buy a car, Enoch awakens with his blood telling him that the person to whom he had to show the "mystery" would appear on that day.

Enoch's blood is always accurate in its prediction and Haze, the person to whom he must show the mysterious mummy, arrives as if on schedule in his newly purchased Essex in search of Asa Hawks's address, which Enoch had earlier claimed to know.

En route to the mummy, Haze and Enoch stop at the Frosty Bottle for Enoch's obligatory malted milk. It is this episode which brings out most clearly a frequently drawn difference between Enoch and Haze. The waitress at the counter is appalled that an apparently "clean boy" like Haze would even associate with Enoch, whom she blatantly despises: "Yes sir," she said, "there ain't anything sweeter than a clean boy. God for my witness. And I know a clean one when I see him and I know a son a bitch when I see him and there's a heap of difference and that pus-marked bastard zlurping through that straw is a goddamned son a bitch and you a clean boy had better mind how you keep him company" (Three, pp. 52-53).

Although this abusive, foul-mouthed and whiskey-guzzling waitress hardly seems in a position to judge either Enoch or Haze, her opinion seems to reflect the authorial attitude toward the two. Haze is constantly being recognized by people in terms of what he will become--a committed Christian. A taxi driver is convinced that he is a preacher, not only because of his stiff black hat, which Leora Watts calls his "Jesus-seeing hat" (Three, p. 37), but also because of a "look in [his] face somewheres" (Three, p. 21). Asa Hawks tells Haze at their first meeting that "he can hear the urge for Jesus in [his] voice" (Three, p. 31); later, he calls him a "Goddam Jesus-Hog" (Three, p. 62).

Sabbath Lily Hawks, who is continually frustrated in her attempts to make Haze enjoy being "pure filthy down to the guts" (Three, p. 92), finally cries in defeat, "I seen you wouldn't never have no fun or let anybody else because you didn't want nothing but Jesus" (Three, p. 102).

Enoch, on the other hand, is depicted as so repulsive that even his own father avoids him. When objectively considered, the plight of this abandoned and friendless boy in a city full of heartless people is pathetic, but O'Connor never lets the reader feel anything stronger than amusement at Enoch's predicament. More often the reader shares the revulsion for Enoch which Haze and the other characters in the novel constantly express. This is accomplished by the narrator's unvarying rendering of Enoch in animal imagery, which also foreshadows his eventual transformation into a beast. Like Haze, Enoch is constantly described in terms of what he will become. He has a "fox-shaped" face, and "the look of a friendly hound dog with light mange" (Three, p. 27). When jostled by passersby in the busy streets of Taulkingham he growls. It is not insignificant that while Haze and Asa Hawks argue about Jesus on the steps of the Library, Enoch ignores them and mounts a stone lion's back. When Enoch sees Haze in the park he proclaims in surprise, "Well, I'll be a dog." The expression is at least partially fulfilled when Enoch appears "on all fours" at the end of the bushes (Three, p. 48).

In addition to preparing the reader for Enoch's ultimate devolution, the use of animal imagery frequently underlines Enoch's lack of volitional control over his actions. When he spontaneously

begins brightening his room and refurbishing the slop-jar cabinet in his washstand, he is described as a bird who "finds itself building a nest when it hasn't actually been planning to" (Three, p. 72). When he finally resigns himself to his "duty," he is described as moving as if to "one of those whistles that only dogs hear" (Three, p. 78). These comparisons of Enoch to insentient beasts are entirely apt, for he is led by a force which, like the call of an instinct, has him in its total power.

Unlike Haze, who rather vigorously resists his call to serve Jesus, Enoch seems unable to register any genuine resistance to his call to serve the "new jesus." When he realizes, through the beating of his blood, that the day for the fulfillment of his "vocation" has arrived, he decides to stay in bed because "he didn't want to be always having to do something that something else wanted him to do, that he didn't know what it was and that was always dangerous" (Three, p. 75). His protest, however, was in vain for "his blood was not going to put up with any attitude like this" (Three, p. 75). When his wise blood demands that he enter a movie theatre, his total passivity before this power is made very apparent:

> "I ain't going to no picture show like that . . .
> I ain't going in," he said. Two doors flew open
> and he found himself moving down a long red foyer
> and then up a darker tunnel. In a few minutes he was
> up in a high part of the maw, feeling around, like
> Jonah, for a seat. "I ain't going to look at it,"
> he said furiously. (Three, p. 77)

Of course, he must and he will look at the picture, though like Jonah, to whom he is ironically compared, he is still the unwilling servant of

his god. His final resignation to his call is prompted by a film about an heroic baboon who gallantly saves children from burning orphanages. His envy of this successful ape drives him from the theatre in disgust, and he passes out when the warm air hits him. When he recovers, he is not "thinking anymore about escaping his duty" (Three, p. 77). Unlike Haze, who makes a conscious decision to turn to Jesus as he reflects on the abyss-like embankment, Enoch's limited resistance is altered while he is in an unconscious state. He obeys the impulse which leads him directly to Hazel Motes, who is preaching from atop the nose of his Essex to the "stones" of Taulkingham in a rhetorical style reminiscent of Haze's grandfather who stood on the nose of his Ford and delivered impassioned sermons to the "stones of Eastrod." Angered by their lack of concern with either Christianity or the Church Without Christ, Haze shouts:

> The truth don't matter to you. . . . If Jesus had redeemed you, what difference would it make to you? You wouldn't do nothing about it. Your faces wouldn't move neither this way nor that and if it was three crosses there and Him hung on the middle one, that one wouldn't mean no more to you and me than the other two. Listen here. What you need is something to take the place of Jesus, something that would speak plain. The Church Without Christ don't have a Jesus but it needs one! It needs a new jesus! It needs one that's all man without blood to waste, and it needs one that don't look like any other man so you'll look at him. . . . Take counsel from your blood and come into the Church Without Christ and maybe somebody will bring us a new jesus and we'll all be saved by the sight of him.
> (Three, pp. 78-79)

Realizing at last exactly what is required of him, Enoch steals the mummy from the museum to represent the new jesus. The different spiritual ends which Haze and Enoch finally reach are presaged in their

opposite reactions to the new jesus. In fulfillment of his sermon, the "sight" of the new jesus, which so accurately and grotesquely fills his specifications, proves to be an impetus toward Haze's ultimate salvation. He first sees the new jesus while wearing his mother's spectacles, and he is so reviled by the vision of his words made dry and shrivelled flesh that he forcibly rejects this mockery of the Incarnation.

Enoch, by contrast, is so awed by the mummy that he becomes the unwitting priest in a black mass honoring the new jesus. The slop-jar cabinet which he so carefully refurbished at the bidding of his blood becomes the tabernacle for the body of the new jesus. The "certain rites and mysteries" (Three, p. 73) of which Enoch had dreamed are actualized when he places his head in the tabernacle with the new jesus. He experiences a mystical moment which is certainly meant to suggest the moment of transubstantiation[23] in a Roman Catholic mass--the moment when the bread and wine are believed to be transformed into the body and blood of Christ. "The room was absolutely silent; there was not even a sound from the street; the Universe itself might have been shut off" (Three, p. 95). Characteristically Enoch's mystical moment is rudely curtailed when he sneezes and comically thumps his head on the cabinet.

Enoch's suspicion that after his experience with the new jesus "he would be an entirely new man, with an even better personality"

[23]Gregory, p. 61.

(Three, p. 95), will have its dark fulfillment in his transformation into an ape. Once again O'Connor employs imagery drawn from the sacerdotal and mystical traditions to parody the nature of Enoch's "conversion." While reading the comic strips which he read in priestly fashion "every evening like an office" (Three, p. 105), Enoch sees an advertisement for the appearance at a nearby theatre of Gonga, the mock-gorilla who had previously humiliated him. His sudden idea to murder Gonga in order to attain the pelt and popularity of the "ape" is described in terms of a religious enlightenment: "If anyone had watched Enoch read this, he would have seen a certain transformation on his countenance. It still shone with the inspiration he had absorbed from the comic strips, but something else had come over it: a look of awakening" (Three, p. 105).

Enoch's awakening leads him to a transformation which is a bizarre inversion of the transformation of the Biblical Enoch who is taken up by God.[24] O'Connor seems to imply that this change is permanent in the alteration of his gender from masculine to neuter: "In the uncertain light, one of his lean white legs could be seen to disappear and then the other, one arm and then the other: a black shaggier figure replaced his. For an instant, it had two heads, one light and one dark, but after a second, it pulled its dark black head over the other and corrected this. . . . No gorilla . . . was happier at that moment than this one, whose god had finally rewarded

[24]See Gen. 5:24: "Then Enoch walked with God and he was no longer here, for God took him."

it" (Three, pp. 107-08).

Haze will also become an unwitting priest, a murderer, and an "entirely new man," but all of these actions will lead him toward God. His reason for murder is not his envy of another, but his outrage at the violation of truth. In his admirable adherence to his own beliefs, Haze is appalled that Solace Layfield, Shoats's hired "prophet," will "get up on top of a car and say things he don't believe in" (Three, p. 110). While the dying Layfield gasps his last confession, Haze leans closer in priestly fashion to hear his sins. Although commanding that Layfield desist, Haze does not finally silence him until he has wheezed out "Jesus hep me" in a last profession of faith. Unlike Enoch's "mass," this confession is a valid sacrament and Haze, in this hieratic role, has been the instrument of the salvation of the only other Christian in Wise Blood.

Haze's "awakening" as he stands overlooking the embankment is also fulfilled in his transformation into an "entirely new man," but unlike Enoch's ironic transformation from man to ape, Haze is transformed into the "new man created in God's image whose justice and holiness are born of truth."[25]

Enoch's function as Haze's ironic double raises interesting theological questions. Why is Enoch barred from God's grace? Why is he spontaneously moved toward evil? It is doubtful that Enoch is intended to be an embodiment of Satan, as is "The Stranger" in The Violent Bear It Away. Although Enoch is once described as having a

[25]See Eph. 4:24.

face so red against the white abelia sprigs that anyone "would think he saw a devil" (Three, p. 47), he seems far too moronic to be understood as anything more than a pawn of Satan. It seems that O'Connor intends Enoch to be the embodiment of natural man--as one with a Jansenist vision might see natural man. He is one of the many descendents of Adam whose will is so weakened by Original Sin that he can do only evil. The difference between Enoch and Haze is a reflection of an authorial attitude which sees man as bound to do evil unless rescued by God's grace. Enoch, as Kellogg has noted, "is as he is. God's grace simply does not shine upon him."[26] Finding her Jansenist vision so "vitally alive" in her portrait of Enoch, Kellogg asserts that an "orthodox Catholic who persists in looking beyond the cloak of Flannery O'Connor's delightful humor" will be "apt to experience a bit of uneasiness."[27]

Although Enoch is effectively dispatched to the animal world in the twelfth chapter of Wise Blood, O'Connor's Jansenist vision does not end with his disappearance. In the final chapter, the intensity of Haze's religious conversion is measured against the selfish pragmatism and spiritual blindness of his landlady, Mrs. Flood. While Haze lives out the rest of his brief life performing extreme penances which include blinding himself, walking with stones and glass in his shoes and wrapping barbed wire around his chest, Mrs. Flood finds herself more and more intrigued by his behavior. As with Enoch, O'Connor has

[26]Kellogg, p. 189. [27]Ibid.

intended Mrs. Flood to be a comic foil to Haze, but a closer analysis reveals a disturbing spiritual difference between them. Although Mrs. Flood does seem to move from a state of complete spiritual apathy to a state of incipient spiritual awareness and willingness, she seems, as did Enoch, to be finally and arbitrarily barred from redemptive grace. She does not reject God, but rather attempts, in her way, to seek Him. It is she who is rejected. There is really no choice for her, given O'Connor's Jansenist vision of a limited Redemption.

Mrs. Flood does not emerge as an important character until very late in Wise Blood. She does not even appear until the sixth chapter. Even then she is not named, but only briefly described as "a tall bony woman, resembling the mop she carried upside down" (Three, p. 61). There is no indication, at this point, that she would take on any greater significance later in the novel. It is altogether probable that when O'Connor was confronted with the difficulty of convincing the reader of the serious nature of Haze's conversion, she found it more feasible to show the effect of such a conversion on a typical citizen of Taulkingham. It is significant that the greater part of the last chapter of Wise Blood is rendered through Mrs. Flood's point of view.

Mrs. Flood who "thanks her stars every day" that she is not "religious or morbid" (Three, p. 115) and who can't "look at anything steadily without wanting it" (Three, p. 116), seems to embody the overriding tendencies of complacency and acquisitiveness in the people of Taulkingham. What most provokes her is "the thought that there

might be something valuable hidden near her, something she couldn't see" (Three, p. 116). When she discovers that Haze has an army pension she asserts her "right" as a taxpayer and immediately raises his rent in order to recover some of "her" money. "She felt justified in getting anything at all that she could, money or anything else, as if she had once owned the earth and been dispossessed of it" (Three, p. 116). She feels sure that Haze is cheating her somehow, and she is unable to conceive of why he would want to blind himself except in terms of the profit-and-gain philosophy by which she lives. She concludes that he must be getting something out of it, "something he couldn't get without being blind to everything else" (Three, p. 118); yet she cannot perceive that he gets more pleasure out of life than "one of them monks . . . in a monkery" (Three, p. 119).

Mrs. Flood gradually moves from her concern with Haze's motives to her wonder at what he sees with his burned-out eyes:

> She could not make up her mind what would be inside his head and what out. She thought of her own head as a switchbox where she controlled from; but with him, she could only imagine the outside in, the whole black world in his head and his head bigger than the world, his head big enough to include the sky and the planets and whatever was or had been or would be. How would he know if time was going backwards or forwards or if he was going with it? She imagined it was like you were walking in a tunnel and all you could see was a pinpoint of light; she couldn't think of it without that. She saw it as some kind of star, like the star on Christmas cards. She saw him going backwards to Bethlehem and she had to laugh. (Three, p. 119)

Although Mrs. Flood's various attempts to decipher Haze's behavior are humorous, her words consistently operate on a dual level. On all counts, she reasons more rightly than she knows. Her feeling of having

once owned the earth and then having been dispossessed of it is a very orthodox description of the condition of man since the Fall of Adam, for according to Roman Catholic doctrine the world was created for man and lost by him forever through the Original Sin. This sense of loss, which Mrs. Flood experiences most keenly and concretely in regard to money and material goods, is actually the common lot of mankind. She is also quite correct in her assessment that Haze must have blinded himself to get "something he couldn't get without being blind to everything else." With monastic fervor, Haze has withdrawn from the world to a single-minded pursuit of salvation--the "something valuable hidden near" which Mrs. Flood cannot see. Her speculation as to the immense quality Haze's head must contain is also quite apt, as is her amusement in imagining him moving "backwards to Bethlehem." Haze's head is indeed holding "whatever was or had been or would be" for he is now concerned with God, who was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be; in his search for God through Christ he is indeed going "backwards to Bethlehem."

This extraordinary penetration of Haze's spiritual state enlightens only the reader, however, for Mrs. Flood is not aware of the truth to which she points. She continues to encourage Haze to have contact with the "real world" again and she is appalled by his various mortifications. Morally, she seems quite satisfied with her own rather confused version of relativism: "'I believe that what's right today is wrong tomorrow and that the time to enjoy yourself is now so long as you let others do the same. I'm as good, Mr. Motes,'

she said, 'not believing in Jesus as many a one that does'" (Three, p. 120).

"You're better," Haze replies. "If you believed in Jesus you wouldn't be so good" (Three, p. 120). This rather cryptic response, which Mrs. Flood considers a compliment, is typical of all of Haze's reactions to Mrs. Flood's comments and questions. With true Jansenist individualism, Haze is completely involved with his own spiritual well-being and feels little, if any, responsibility for the enlightenment of any soul but his own.[28] Moreover, he constantly deflects her direct questions and refuses to explain the religious motivation of his actions. When she asks why he walks with rocks in his shoes, his harsh answer is, "To pay" (Three, p. 121). When she presses him to explain why he is paying, he grows even less communicative:

> "It don't make any difference for what," he said. "I'm paying."
> "But what have you got to show that you're paying for?" she persisted.
> "Mind your business," he said rudely. "You can't see." (Three, p. 121)

Although it is quite true that she can't "see," Haze makes no attempt to amend this situation. As the ex-preacher of the Church Without Christ had earlier explained, he just doesn't have "time" to preach anymore. Salvation, it seems, is strictly one's own business and the dictum to "Go forth into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation"[29] is observed only in the breach by Haze. "I ain't treatin' with you," he tells her angrily when she deduces that he must

[28] Orvell, p. 22. [29] See Mk. 16:15.

believe in Jesus (Three, p. 123); indeed he is not "treating" with her for these are his final words to her in Wise Blood.

Despite Haze's silence, Mrs. Flood's continued contemplation of his mysterious behavior seems to effect some spiritual change in her. "Every now and then she had an intimation of something hidden near but out of her reach" (Three, p. 121). The woman who once "cleared her mind immediately" of the disturbing phrase "eternal death" with "no more change of expression than the cat" (Three, p. 115), is now consumed with the thought of death as she wonders if one is blind when one is dead (Three, p. 125). In her observation of Haze, she begins neglecting everything which had once concerned her. Abandoning her original selfish plan to marry him for his money and then commit him to an insane asylum, she decides she would rather keep him with her so that she could "penetrate the darkness behind [his face] and see for herself what was there" (Three, p. 123). In a primitive sense, she has begun to seek the truth.

When Mrs. Flood proposes marriage, Haze flees in horror, preferring the "driving icy rain" to her advances. Lying in bed that night, Mrs. Flood shows herself to be genuinely and unselfishly concerned for his welfare: "She wanted to run out into the rain and cold and hunt him and find him huddled in some half-sheltered place and bring him back and say, 'Mr. Motes, Mr. Motes, you can stay here forever, or the two of us will go where you're going, the two of us will go'" (Three, p. 125).

She now wants Haze to help her prepare for death. "If she was

going to be blind when she was dead, who better to guide the blind than a blind man" (Three, p. 125).

Mrs. Flood has advanced considerably from the greedy, materialistic and conniving woman she was at the outset. The generous and loving offer which she makes to Haze's corpse is a measure of the spiritual distance she has come: "'I knew you'd come back,' she said. 'And I've been waiting for you. And you needn't to pay any more rent but have it free here. . . . Just however you want it and with me to wait on you, or if you want to go on somewhere we'll both go'" (Three, p. 126).

Despite this willingness to "go on somewhere" further, Mrs. Flood will not be allowed to follow Haze to where he has gone for he is already dead. For Mrs. Haze, as for Enoch, there is no choice in the matter. She is apparently one of the unlucky descendents of Adam who will not benefit from Christ's redemptive death: "She shut her eyes and saw the pin point of light but so far away that she could not hold it steady in her mind. She felt as if she were blocked at the entrance of something. She sat staring with her eyes shut, into his eyes, and felt as if she had finally got to the beginning of something she couldn't begin, and she saw him moving farther and farther away, farther and farther into the darkness until he was the pin point of light" (Three, p. 126). Although Mrs. Flood has been given an intimation of a deeper spiritual reality, she is simply and finally "blocked at the entrance." In the Jansenist scheme of salvation, few are called and fewer still are chosen.

It is really not surprising that some Jansenistic tendencies should be evident in O'Connor's first major work when one considers the typical Irish-American Catholic influence to which she was exposed early in life. Kellogg found that a Jansenist strain which stressed man's natural sinfulness and flawed will was being preached "in typical missions and parishes around the country well into the years after the Second World War."[30] O'Connor later admitted to a friend who found her fictional depiction of sex somewhat clumsy that her upbringing had "smacked a little of Jansenism."[31] Moreover, she once observed that the Irish were most notably affected by a Jansenist leaning which she felt bred less a "love of God than a love of asceticism."[32]

O'Connor's knowledge of theology was surely limited at the time she wrote Wise Blood. Not only had she studied no theology in college, but she studied almost no theology in graduate school except what she learned while reading "all the Catholic novelists."[33] Her intensive reading of Mauriac, Bernanos, Bloy, Greene and Waugh may well have reinforced, rather than discouraged, her Jansenist vision. Although Robert Fitzgerald mentioned that O'Connor had read some of the works of Cardinal Newman and Lord Acton while she had boarded with him and his family in Connecticut,[34] her real theological education did

[30]Kellogg, p. 35.

[31]Letters, p. 117.

[32]Letters, p. 304.

[33]Letters, p. 98.

[34]Fitzgerald, Introduction to Everything That Rises Must Converge by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), p. xv.

not begin until she completed Wise Blood. When confined by her illness to her mother's farm in Milledgeville, she had a great deal of free time which she used to pursue her interest in theology. It was in these post-Wise Blood years that she came to know St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas as well as more modern theologians like Louis Bouyer, Romano Guardini, Henri de Lubac, and Teilhard de Chardin.

Perhaps an even greater factor in the progression toward orthodoxy in her work was her intensive reading of the Bible in the years following Wise Blood. Although Wise Blood contains some ironic allusions to the patriarch Enoch and the prophet Jonah of the Old Testament, it is not a novel deeply informed by the Bible. In fact, it is frequently in contradiction to both the evangelical spirit and the universal promise of salvation[35] in the New Testament. As the fate of Mrs. Flood clearly shows, those who seek do not always find[36] in Wise Blood.

As late as 1956, O'Connor complained of her ignorance of the Old Testament[37] and even later she lamented the average Catholic's lack of familiarity with the Bible.[38] Her eventual concentration on theology and Scripture would play a great part in her movement toward a more orthodox depiction of free will and grace in her later works, most particularly The Violent Bear It Away.

[35] See I Tim. 2:4-6.

[36] See Mt. 7:7.

[37] Letters, p. 144.

[38] Mystery and Manners, p. 203.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VIOLENT BEAR IT AWAY AND THE MYSTERY OF FREEDOM

In 1959, after seven consecutive years of painstaking revision, Flannery O'Connor finished her second novel, The Violent Bear It Away. "I wish the book were better," she wrote to a friend, "but I'm glad it isn't another Wise Blood."[1]

While no one would quite agree with O'Connor's deprecation of her first novel, even Wise Blood's most ardent defenders do not claim that it is her best work.[2] Many critics have been disturbed by the overly-convenient disappearances of Sabbath Lily and Asa Hawks, as well as the eleventh-hour significance of Mrs. Flood.[3] Others have found Haze to be too wooden to sustain the reader's interest in him.[4] Moreover, the book has been generally criticized as having an uncertain authorial point of view,[5] as well as an "episodic and fragmentary" plot[6] "buried

[1]Flannery O'Connor, Letters of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 371. [Hereafter cited as Letters.]

[2]Frederick Asals, "Flannery O'Connor as Novelist: A Defense," Flannery O'Connor Bulletin, 3 (1974), 31.

[3]David Eggenschwiler, The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), p. 112.

[4]Letters, pp. 111 and 116.

[5]Eggenschwiler, p. 114.

[6]Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 24.

in a welter of extraneous activity."[7]

By contrast, The Violent Bear It Away[8] is a tightly structured novel,[9] and O'Connor's use of the technique of multiple viewpoints[10] has been highly praised. The critical objections to The Violent . . . have centered upon O'Connor's rendering of the theological mystery of free will and grace. More than any other work by O'Connor, The Violent . . . has been called Jansenist, or even more frequently, Calvinist, in that Tarwater's freedom to resist the grace of God is thought to be compromised by his ultimate capitulation to his vocation.

A strong case, however, can be made for O'Connor's adherence to Roman Catholic orthodoxy, not only in her depiction of Tarwater's exercise of free will but also in her depiction of Rayber's resistance to grace. Unlike Enoch Emery and Mrs. Flood of Wise Blood, who seem arbitrarily barred from redemptive grace, Rayber wrestles to escape the very insistent grace offered to him. In The Violent . . . no one is deprived of grace and no one is driven to evil against his will. Moreover, in the contrast O'Connor draws between Tarwater's ultimate acceptance of grace and Rayber's steadfast refusal of grace, she has succeeded in doing justice to the inherent ambiguity of the Roman

[7]Friedman and Lawson, p. 59.

[8]For the sake of brevity, this novel will be referred to hereafter as The Violent . . . throughout the text.

[9]Martha Stephans, The Question of Flannery O'Connor (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 110.

[10]Miles Orvell, Invisible Parade (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), p. 101.

Catholic doctrine which teaches, on the one hand, that certain men are gratuitously predestined to eternal salvation, and, paradoxically, that all men are free to dissent before the universally accorded grace of God.

O'Connor makes clear the Biblical influence on her presentation of free will and grace in The Violent . . . by unfolding the struggles to resist grace on the part of Tarwater and Rayber against the similar struggles on the part of the prophets of the Old Testament and the Pharisees of the New Testament. In her constant allusions to the prophets from "Elijah who escaped death, to John whose severed head struck terror from a dish,"[11] O'Connor presents Tarwater's ultimate freedom to accept or reject his vocation in the light of the Bible's depiction of the freedom of the often rebellious, but eventually obedient, prophets of the Lord.[12] In the comparison she makes between the refusal of the Pharisees to accept the teaching of Christ, and the choice made by Rayber to remain "blind" and "deaf" to the Word of God, she emphasizes the individual's freedom to turn from God.

The Violent . . . opens with Young Tarwater preparing a grave for his great-uncle, Old Tarwater, one of the violent apostles of the Lord to which the novel's title refers. Tarwater had been kidnapped

[11]Flannery O'Connor, Three by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Signet, 1963), p. 313. [This edition, which includes Wise Blood, A Good Man is Hard to Find and The Violent Bear It Away, is cited throughout with page notations given in the text.]

[12]Kathleen Feeley, Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 154. Frederick Asals also treats the Biblical prototype in "Flannery O'Connor as Novelist: A Defense," Flannery O'Connor Bulletin, 3 (1974), 35.

from the home of his atheistic uncle Rayber by this forceful great-uncle "who said he was a prophet" and who "had raised the boy to expect the Lord's call himself" (Three, p. 306).

"The old man compared their situation to that of Elijah and Elisha" (Three, p. 327), and as Elisha was left with two tasks to fulfill by Elijah,[13] Tarwater was instructed by Old Tarwater to bury him properly in anticipation of the Last Day and to baptize Rayber's mentally defective son, Bishop.

While the boy holds both assignments in contempt, he regards the baptism of Bishop as particularly unworthy of a prophet of his stature: "The boy very much doubted that his first mission would be to baptize a dim-witted child. . . . And he thought of Moses who struck water from a rock, of Joshua who made the sun stand still, of Daniel who stared down lions in the pit" (Three, p. 308).

Tarwater's entire conception of the prophet's role is colored by his excitement in imagining himself imitating the dramatic feats of the Old Testament prophets, and born of his pride in imagining himself in direct contact with God. To him a prophet is not so much the Lord's servant, as the Lord's powerful and intimate companion.

Having expected to hear "a voice from out of a clear and empty sky, the trumpet of the Lord God Almighty" as soon as his great-uncle dies (Three, p. 316), Tarwater's pride is so wounded when he fails to hear anything more unusual than a "hen scratching beneath him

[13]See I Kings, 15:17. Elisha carried out two of the three commissions entrusted to Elijah by the Lord.

under the porch" that he soon falls prey to the temptations of a mysterious stranger. Originating in an alteration of Tarwater's own voice (Three, p. 319), the stranger gradually evolves into a separate personality with a "sharp and friendly" face "shadowed under a stiff-brimmed Panama hat" (Three, p. 324).

Although he was repeatedly warned by Old Tarwater to avoid strangers since, as a prophet-in-training, he was the kind of boy that the devil would always try to sway to evil, Tarwater heartily accepts the stranger; moreover, he is convinced that, through the stranger, "he was only just now meeting himself, as if as long as his uncle had lived he had been deprived of his own acquaintance" (Three, p. 324).

The stranger subtly brings Tarwater to doubt everything Old Tarwater had taught him while he encourages him to respect the intelligence of his uncle Rayber. After successfully leading Tarwater to regard the old man's Christian beliefs as the mere ravings of a lunatic, the stranger introduces a new concept of freedom to Tarwater which directly opposes the old man's teaching that freedom was found only in the Lord Jesus:

> "The way I see it," he said, "you can do one of two things. One of them, not both. Nobody can do both of two things without straining themselves. You can do one thing or you can do the opposite." "Jesus or the devil," the boy said. "No, No, No," the stranger said, "there ain't no such thing as a devil. I can tell you that from my own self-experience. I know that for a fact. It ain't Jesus or the devil. It's Jesus or you." "Jesus or me," Tarwater repeated. (Three, p. 326)

Fortified by the liquor he takes at the stranger's urging, Tarwater carries out his first act of rebellion. In opposition to his

great-uncle's directions that he be given a Christian burial, he sets fire to the house in which he believes the corpse is sitting.

His next act of rebellion is to go to the home of his uncle Rayber where he intends "to make himself known to the school teacher at once, to tell him what he had done and why" and "to be congratulated by him" (Three, p. 354). Yet he experiences the uncomfortable intimation that "he is about to step into a trap laid for him by the old man" the moment he arrives at Rayber's doorstep: "A mysterious dread filled him. His whole body felt hollow as if he had been lifted like Habakkuk by the hair of his head, borne swiftly through the night and set down in the place of his mission" (Three, p. 354).

As soon as Tarwater sees the "wedge-shaped gash" in Rayber's ear, a souvenir of Rayber's unsuccessful attempt to recover the infant Tarwater from the gun-wielding old man, he realizes that his uncle "was no more than a decoy the old man had set up to lure him to the city to do his unfinished business" of baptizing Bishop (Three, p. 356).

While Rayber declares the optimistic prognosis that it is not too late for Tarwater to become "a man," the boy ignores him in order to strengthen himself for an interior struggle which he realizes will begin momentarily. He receives his call to serve the Lord, but rather than hearing a "voice from out of a clear and empty sky," he hears the shambling footsteps of Rayber's son whom Old Tarwater had enjoined him to baptize. When he sees the child, he receives a "revelation" as "silent, implacable and direct as a bullet" which makes clear that he must fulfill the mission he most disdained and, in doing so, commit

himself to the strenuous service of Jesus:

> He did not look into the eyes of any fiery beast or see a burning bush. He only knew, with a certainty sunk in despair, that he was expected to baptize the child he saw and begin the life his great-uncle had prepared him for. He knew that he was called to be a prophet and that the ways of his prophecy would not be remarkable. His black pupils, glassy and still, reflected depth on depth, his own stricken image of himself, trudging into the distance in the bleeding stinking mad shadow of Jesus, until at last he received his reward, a broken fish, a multiplied loaf. (Three, p. 357)

Although Tarwater's immediate urge to cry "NO!" is "saturated in silence," his resolve to reject his mission is bolstered by his feeling that the staring child "recognized him" as the "forced servant of the Lord come to see that he was born again" (Three, p. 358). When Rayber tries to assure him that Bishop "stares at everyone that way" and that he'll "get used to him," Tarwater shouts, "I won't get used to him! I won't have anything to do with him!" While on one level the boy is answering his uncle, he is also, on a deeper level, refusing his vocation: "He clenched his fist and lifted it. 'I won't have anything to do with him,' he shouted and his words were clear and positive and defiant like a challenge hurled in the face of his silent adversary" (Three, p. 359).

Critics objecting to O'Connor's presentation of Tarwater's free will are disturbed that Tarwater seems predestined to salvation against his will. They cite as evidence of this the fact that Tarwater does eventually embrace his vocation to prophecy despite his defiant rejection of it at this point in the story.

As has already been discussed in the first chapter of this essay, much of this criticism has its foundation in a misunderstanding of the Roman Catholic teaching on free will and grace. The depiction of a character who ultimately accepts his vocation after strenuous resistance is not a denial of free will on O'Connor's part, for the Roman Catholic Church teaches that if God has indeed predestined a man to eternal salvation, it is impossible for him to fail to reach heaven.[14] While the problem of how a man who is predestined to salvation from all eternity can also be said to have free will is assigned by the Church to the realm of supernatural mystery, attempts have been made by theologians throughout the centuries to explain, by analogy, the balance between the predestination of God and the free will of man. The most enduring explanation is that of St. Thomas Aquinas which proposes that a man may be called free if he is at least the secondary cause of actions of which God, as the creator of all things, is the primary cause.[15]

From his refusal to bury his great-uncle, to his decision to go to his uncle Rayber, to his initial rejection of his mission to baptize Bishop, Tarwater seems to be the secondary cause of his actions in that he does not seem compelled to commit any of these actions against his will. Moreover, he frequently seems free to say "No" even "in the teeth

[14]Dom M. Farrelly, Predestination, Grace and Free Will (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1964), p. 33.

[15]St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., Inc., 1947), p. 418 [83.1, adj. 3].

of divine displeasure."[16] The sun, which operates as a symbol of divine presence in The Violent Bear It Away, is described as a "furious white" when Tarwater drinks liquor at the stranger's suggestion on the day of his great-uncle's death. His concentrated resistance to the many opportunities to baptize Bishop which are placed before him is a further example of Tarwater's exercise of his freedom to carry out his own will.

Convinced that by submitting to the silent force which demands "that he baptize the child and begin at once the life the old man had prepared him for" he would be "lost forever," Tarwater decides to seal his refusal by performing a definitive negative action. To this end, he conceives the plan to drown Bishop in defiance of the call he has received to baptize him: "'You just can't say NO,' he said, 'you got to do NO. You got to show it. You got to show you mean it by doing it. You got to show you're not going to do one thing by doing another. You got to make an end of it one way or another'" (Three, p. 397).

The next day Tarwater succeeds in doing NO, but to his horror he also says YES, for he baptizes Bishop as he drowns him. As he distractedly relates the incident to the uninterested truckdriver with whom he hitches a ride back to Powderhead, he insists that the baptism was "an accident": "'The words just come out of themselves but it don't mean nothing. You can't be born again. . . . I only meant to

[16] Flannery O'Connor, "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South," in Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 192.

drown him,' the boy said. 'You're only born once. They were just some words that run out of my mouth and spilled in the water. . . . I had to prove I wasn't no prophet and I proved it by drowning him. Even if I did baptize him that was only an accident'" (Three, p. 428).

It is this baptism-drowning of Bishop which has most often been at the center of the controversy concerning O'Connor's treatment of free will. Tarwater's apparent inability to resist baptizing Bishop would seem to deny the freedom of his will for he does not appear to have been even the secondary cause of this action. Rather, it appears that he has been physically compelled by God to fulfill his mission against his own will, and if such is truly the case one might well agree with Robert O. Bowen's vehement conclusion that The Violent . . . is a "dramatic argument against Free Will":

> In spite of himself, Tarwater does baptize the idiot and so is driven to his prophetic task. He does not choose. He is also forced to acknowledge that in meaningful actions his will does not function to serve his ends, being negated either by a failure of intellect--acting on the wrong object--or an inability to control his actions at the critical moment of applying the intention he wished. Probably the most telling single event is that in which he drowns the idiot only to hear the words of baptism "coming out of himself" without his volition. Clearly his will is not his own.[17]

Bowen's observation has been echoed by many critics since, and, even among the critics who essentially disagree with the argument that Tarwater is completely without free will, there are some who agree that the baptism of Bishop is not a free act on the boy's part. Although

[17]Bowen, "Hope vs. Despair in the New Gothic Novel," Renascence, 13 (1961), pp. 149 and 150.

both John R. May and Sr. M. Simon Nolde insist that Tarwater's final acceptance of his vocation is a free act, they agree with Bowen's assessment of the baptism-drowning as a "compulsive" act.[18] To concede that such a momentous action in Tarwater's life was merely a subconscious impulse, however, would seem to weaken any argument that he can ultimately be called a free agent in the orthodox sense of the word.

Before O'Connor's depiction of Tarwater's freedom in the baptism-drowning can be seriously analyzed, however, a closer examination of the description of the actual incident is necessary. Too often critics on both sides of the free will controversy have been willing to take Tarwater's testimony to the truckdriver that the "words [of baptism] just come out of themselves" as an accurate and completely unbiased report of what actually happened at the time of the baptism. Tarwater's verbal account of the incident is at least partially suspect since he is still, as he speaks to the truckdriver, struggling to maintain the freedom he believes is held in his successful resistance to Christ. It is through the revelation contained within the dream of the "inner eye," which "pierces out the truth in the distortion of his dream" (Three, p. 431), that one must evaluate the baptism-drowning.

When faced with the reality of "doing one thing to prove he

[18]Both John R. May in The Pruning Word: The Parables of Flannery O'Connor (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1976), p. 147, and Sr. M. Simon Nolde in "The Violent Bear It Away: A Study in Imagery," Xavier University Studies, 1 (Spring 1961-62), 190, agree that the baptism was a compulsive act on Tarwater's part, but argue that his ultimate capitulation to his vocation was a free act.

wasn't going to do another" (Three, p. 402), Tarwater realizes that it is not as simple a plan as he had thought. In fact, Tarwater is initially quite reluctant to murder the child and must be urged on by the stranger (now called his "friend") who gazes at him with a peculiar look of "hunger and attraction." "No finaler act than this," his friend said. "In dealing with the dead you have to act. There's no mere word sufficient to say NO" (Three, p. 431).

Despite this steady encouragement, Tarwater still doubts his ability to act: "He felt bodiless as if he were nothing but a head full of air, about to tackle all the dead" (Three, p. 431). It is Bishop, whose serene gray eyes seem to wait "for a struggle already determined," who initiates the action: "While he stood there gazing, for the moment lost, the child in the boat stood up, caught him around the neck and climbed onto his back. He clung there like a large crab to a twig and the startled boy felt himself sinking backwards into the water as if the whole bank were pulling him down" (Three, p. 432).

As he relives the drowning in his dream, his arms flail and his face twitches and grimaces so that he "might have been Jonah clinging wildly to the whale's tongue" (Three, p. 432). When at the last moment he cries out the words of baptism, he hears "the sibilant oaths of his friend fading away on the darkness" (Three, p. 432).

As the "inner eye that had witnessed the dream" discloses, the simultaneous action of the baptism-drowning was far more complex than Tarwater's defensive account of it to the truckdriver. It appears that, rather than being frustrated in the assertion of his will,

Tarwater is experiencing an interior struggle of two equally strong wills, for at the time of testing he seems as reluctant to drown the child as he had ever been to baptize him. Like Jonah, the archetypal reluctant prophet to whom he is compared, Tarwater is fleeing a God in whom he still very much believes and into whose power he still very much fears his freedom to be himself will be absorbed. Against such an awesome potentate, Tarwater is as hesitant to make any conclusive act of denial as he is to make the absolute act of submission being demanded. He is, after the baptism-drowning, in a suspended state as uncomfortable as the belly of a whale, for he has neither totally refused nor totally accepted.

As Tarwater sets out for Powderhead, however, he strengthens his resolve to maintain his freedom to be himself which he fears he may have compromised with the baptismal act. Gradually he is able to convince himself that the baptism was truly "an accident and nothing more" (Three, p. 435) and he consciously ignores the significance of his unabated hunger and the peculiar cruciform pain that "shot up and down him and across from shoulder to shoulder" (Three, p. 435).

Revelling in the "freedom" his refusal won him from the "torture of prophecy" (Three, p. 435), Tarwater fails to recognize its demonic origins until he takes a ride with the violet-eyed, panama hatted "old looking young man" who seems to be his friend and adviser sprung eerily to life. His preference for the stranger's drugged liquor to "the Bread of Life" leads him deeper into an evil which soils his own person and violates the freedom he had thought secure. It is from

this experience that Tarwater begins to comprehend the repercussions of the decision he has made to separate himself from the grace of God. When he awakens to the discovery that he has been sexually assaulted by the stranger, he purifies the "evil ground" with fire.

While he has still not accepted his vocation at the time of the purification of the ground, this action is clearly a turning point for Tarwater, for he is at last prepared to face his "final revelation": "His scorched eyes no longer looked hollow or as if they were meant only to guide him forward. They looked as if, touched with the coal of the prophet, they would never be used for ordinary sights again" (Three, p. 442). Under a "red and mammoth" sun, Tarwater observes the clearing at Powderhead. Without a cross "to say that this was ground the Lord still held," it is seemingly "burned free of all that had ever oppressed him" (Three, p. 444). It is at this moment, however, that the true identity of his "friend," the stranger, is revealed as he urges Tarwater to "go down and take" the land they had won together: "Ever since you first began to dig the grave, I've stood by you, never left your side and now we can take it over together, just you and me. You're not ever going to be alone again" (Three, p. 444).

Realizing suddenly that the "warm sweet body of air" which encircles him is the same as the "sweet stale odor" in his assailant's car, Tarwater understands at last that the stranger is Satan and that the "freedom" which he promises is truly a form of oppression. It is not until this moment of revelation that Tarwater clearly perceives his choice. He decisively turns his back on Satan by setting a "rising wall

of fire between him and the grinning presence": "He glared through the flames and his spirits rose as he saw that his adversary would soon be consumed in a roaring blaze" (Three, p. 444). When he sees the "dark rough cross" (Three, p. 446) on his uncle's grave which was prepared by a faithful neighbor, he realizes that the Lord had not broken trust with the old man. Opening his hands stiffly "as if he were dropping something he had been clutching all his life," Tarwater finally accepts his call. As he does so, the object of his unceasing hunger is revealed to be Christ, the Bread of Life: "He felt his hunger no longer as a pain but as a tide. He felt it rising in himself through time and darkness, rising through the centuries and he knew that it rose in a line of men whose lives were chosen to sustain it, who would wander in the world, strangers from that violent country where the silence is never broken except to shout the truth" (Three, p. 446-47).

The supernatural vision he had desired from early childhood appears to him, but he receives it in humility rather than pride: "He knew that this was the fire that had encircled Daniel, that had raised Elijah from the earth, that had spoken to Moses and would in the instant speak to him. He threw himself on the ground and with his face against the dirt of the grave he heard the command: "GO WARN THE CHILDREN OF GOD OF THE TERRIBLE SPEED OF MERCY" (Three, p. 447). Marking his forehead with a handful of dirt from his uncle's grave, Tarwater moved off "without looking back" to begin his mission "where the children of God lay sleeping" (Three, p. 447).

In the total context of the story, Tarwater's actions reflect an orthodox understanding of the freedom of the will on O'Connor's part. Those who insist that Tarwater's free will is violated because he is finally and dramatically converted rarely acknowledge that at the time Tarwater made his initial refusal he was an impudent and spiritually ambitious adolescent, angered by the Lord's failure to elevate him immediately to mystical heights, and unwilling to relinquish his egocentric ideals of prophecy for the unremarkable call he received to baptize Bishop. Tarwater does not surrender to God's plan for him as if by exhaustion or defeat; he accepts a calling which he has only gradually come to understand through "a series of revelations."[19]

The question of Tarwater's freedom lives on, however. Although conceding that "no fictional character truly has free will" because he is necessarily controlled by the imagination of the author who created him, Miles Orvell feels that, in addition, "Tarwater does not seem to have free will.[20] Thomas Lorch holds that Tarwater is not free in "any existential sense,"[21] while Gene Kellogg contends that Tarwater's freedom is at best a limited freedom amounting to "a choice between alternative services in 'the trap' of the Lord or at the beck of the stranger."[22]

[19]Eggenschwiler, The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor, p. 132.

[20]Orvell, p. 23.

[21]Lorch, "Flannery O'Connor: Christian Allegorist," Critique, 10 (1968), 78.

[22]Kellogg, The Vital Tradition (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), p. 200.

The problem ultimately rests in these critics' misunderstanding, rather than O'Connor's presentation, of the mystery of free will and grace. For O'Connor, as for Old Tarwater, there is only one kind of freedom--freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ.[23] That one's freedom lies in one's acceptance of Jesus may well seem limited in the existential sense, but nothing could be more orthodox. One might as well complain that the prophets Jonah and Habakkuk, to whom Tarwater is compared, do not seem free because they were "corrected" by the Lord and brought to the place of their missions,[24] or that Jeremiah's freedom was limited because God told him, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you."[25]

In St. Augustine's view of predestination, a man is not capable of making "the free choice of salvation" until God has prepared him spiritually by "many involuntary constraints and punishments as God dealt with his wayward children of the Old Testament."[26] Such is the orthodox view of freedom as presented by O'Connor in the story of Tarwater.

While allowing that O'Connor rendered the conversion of Tarwater

[23]Mystery and Manners, p. 116.

[24]Eggenschwiler, "Flannery O'Connor's True and False Prophets," Renascence, 21 (1969), 157.

[25]See Jer. 1:5.

[26]Thomas Bokenkotter, A Concise History of the Catholic Church (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1977), p. 77.

"understandable,"[27] many critics still argue that in her depiction of characters such as Haze and Tarwater who eventually capitulate to grace, she implicitly reflects the Calvinist or Jansenist belief that grace is irresistible,[28] rather than the Roman Catholic belief that the will is free to resist the grace of God.[29] Gene Kellogg objects that even though O'Connor speaks of a "man so free that with his last breath he can say NO" the "fact remains that neither of her heroes does say NO."[30]

While it is true that both Haze and Tarwater do finally accept the grace offered to them, it is not true that all of O'Connor's characters eventually say YES. There is a major character who struggles, and apparently succeeds, in his efforts to resist grace. George Rayber, Tarwater's uncle, is a man who makes almost heroic efforts to deny any spiritual reality and who does finally say NO, although at great cost.

Baptized and "instructed in his Redemption" at the age of seven, Rayber followed Old Tarwater's instructions to lead "a secret life in Jesus" (Three, p. 341), an expanse of time he retrospectively regards as his "six or seven years of unreality." Embittered that the city did

[27]Kellogg, p. 202.

[28]Heinrich Joseph Dominik Denzinger, The Sources of Catholic Dogma, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), p. 316 (Denz 1093).

[29]Denzinger, p. 258 (Denz 814).

[30]Kellogg, p. 247.

not "blossom into an eternal Powderhead" (Three, p. 421) as he had anticipated, Rayber gradually comes to believe his parents' judgment that Old Tarwater "belonged in a nut house."

In early adolescence, the traditional age of the formal confirmation of one's faith,[31] Rayber returned to Powderhead to denounce everything the old man had taught him. Despite Rayber's vehement rejection of Jesus at the time, Old Tarwater felt that even though Rayber's parents kept him from believing in Jesus, he had at least kept him from believing his parents: "They kept him from believing me but I kept him from believing them and he never took on none of their ways though he took on worse ones" (Three, p. 342).

One of the "worse ways" Rayber adopted was a transfer of his absolute faith in Christ to an absolute faith in a secular salvation rooted in psychology: "If there's any way to be born again, it's a way that you accomplish yourself, an understanding about yourself that you reach after a long time, perhaps a long effort" (Three, pp. 416-17).

In his reliance upon psychological solutions to life's miseries and mysteries, Rayber was indirectly responsible for the birth of Tarwater. Attempting to give his withdrawn younger sister "confidence," Rayber engineered a relationship between her and a brilliant divinity student who abandoned his theological studies in favor of atheism at Rayber's urging. Tarwater, the illegitimate child of the lovers Rayber brought together, was left in his uncle's custody when his mother was

[31] Carter W. Martin, The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), p. 57.

killed in an automobile accident.

Having intended to raise the child in accordance with his belief that every man should "be his own saviour," he was outraged when Old Tarwater baptized the infant. In retaliation, Rayber wrote and published a psychological study of his uncle in which he attributed his "fixation of being called by the Lord" to insecurity: "He needed the assurance of a call so he called himself" (Three, p. 348). Enraged by his nephew's public betrayal, Old Tarwater departed for Powderhead with the infant in order to save him "from being brought up by a fool" (Three, p. 347). In the infant's crib Old Tarwater left the journal with a prophetic message scrawled on the back: "The prophet I raise out of this boy will burn your eyes clean" (Three, p. 348).

Despite Rayber's beliefs and actions, which directly oppose his Christian training, Old Tarwater still maintains in his weekly recitation of the "history of the schoolteacher" that the "seed" he planted in him "was there for good" (Three, p. 343). With Tarwater's rejoinder that in Rayber the seed "fell amongst cockles," O'Connor draws Rayber's story into Biblical perspective by alluding to one of the best known New Testament parables, the Parable of the Sower.[32] In the same way O'Connor set the drama of Tarwater's choice against the backdrop of the stories of the prophets, O'Connor employs this parable of the varying receptions of the Word of God to underline Rayber's freedom to accept or resist the grace being offered to him.

[32]The Parable of the Sower appears in slightly varied forms in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. The longest version, which is in Matthew 13:4-23, has been used as the basis for the analysis given in the text.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus compares the Word of God to seed scattered by a farmer sowing his field. The seed which lands on the footpath and is carried away by birds symbolizes the man who hears the message without understanding it because "the evil one approaches him to steal away what was sown in his mind" (Mt. 13:19). The seed which falls upon patches of rock is compared to the man who receives the message with joy but having no roots "lasts only for a time" (Mt. 13:20). "When some setback or persecution involving the message occurs, he soon falters." The seed among thorns is analogous to the man who hears the message, but allows "worldly anxiety and the lure of money to choke it off" (Mt. 13:22). The seed in good soil is like the "man who hears the message and takes it in," benefitting from it (Mt. 13:23).

In answer to his disciples, who asked why he used such obscure parables as that of the Sower in his teaching, Christ explained that he did so to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy:

> Listen as you will, you shall not understand,
> look intently as you will, you shall not see.
> Sluggish indeed is this people's heart.
> They have scarcely heard with their ears,
> they have firmly closed their eyes;
> otherwise they might see with their eyes,
> and hear with their ears,
> and understand with their hearts,
> and turn back to me,
> and I should heal them. (Mt. 13:14-15)

By portraying Rayber as a man dependent on thick eyeglasses and a clumsy hearing aid, O'Connor has brought life to the metaphoric prophecy of Isaiah quoted by Christ in the Parable of the Sower. The extent to

which Rayber refuses to "see," "hear," or "understand" Christ's offer of healing grace is revealed in his attempts to assist Tarwater, whom he sees as engaged in "a desperate struggle to free himself from the old man's ghostly grasp" (Three, p. 369).

Rayber's attempts to "cure" Tarwater with psychology are consistently frustrated by the boy's refusal to be tested by the uncle whom he considers "an insult to his intelligence" (Three, p. 398). In almost every confrontation in which he tries to manipulate Tarwater to reveal his "irrational fears and impulses" (Three, p. 393), it is Rayber who is driven to self-revelation. Overcome with anger by Tarwater's insistent denial that he is in any way affected by Old Tarwater, Rayber admits to the power that Old Tarwater's teaching still has over him in the terms of the Parable of the Sower:

> "The old man still has you in his grip. Don't think he hasn't. . . ."
> "It's you the seed fell in," [Tarwater] said. "It ain't a thing you can do about it. It fell on bad ground but it fell in deep. With me," he said proudly, "it fell on rock and the wind carried it away. . . ."
> "Goddam you,"[Rayber]said in a breathless harsh voice. "It fell in us both alike. The difference is that I know it's in me and I keep it under control."
> (Three, p. 416)

The "seed" which Rayber finds necessary to control manifests itself most potently in what he terms "the problem of Bishop." While usually regarding his retarded child with cold detachment as "an x signifying the general hideousness of fate" (Three, p. 372), he is at times taken unawares by an overwhelming and inexplicable love for the child which cannot be accounted for in his neatly organized and thoroughly rational concept of reality. While he was not afraid of

love in general and concedes that it has utility in psychological cases "where nothing else had worked," such as with his sister, he is frightened by this love of a "different order entirely," a "love without reason," a "love for something futureless" (Three, p. 392).

Having once tried to drown Bishop in the same way one might put to sleep a diseased animal, Rayber learned that this "terrifying love," while engendered by the child, could only be controlled as long as it had its focus in the child: "Anything he looked at too long could bring it on. Bishop did not have to be around. It could be a stick, the line of a shadow, the absurd old man's walk of a starling crossing the sidewalk. If, without thinking, he lent himself to it, he would feel suddenly a morbid surge of the love that terrified him--powerful enough to throw himself to the ground in an act of idiot praise. It was completely abnormal and irrational" (Three, p. 372).

After the drowning incident, Rayber fears that if Bishop dies he would be so subject to this love that "the whole world would become his idiot child." Believing that if he could just once conquer this pain, he would be a "free man," he resolves to "lurch toward emptiness" rather than this mad love when the time comes for him to choose.

Despite the mysterious nature of this love which "appeared to exist only to be itself" (Three, p. 327), Rayber refuses to regard it as anything more than an inherited psychological weakness, an "affliction" which "lay hidden in the line of blood flowing from some ancient source, some desert prophet or polesitter until, its power unabated, it appeared in the old man and him and, he surmised, in the

boy" (Three, pp. 372-73). Convinced that if he once capitulated to this love he would be "ruled by it" as Old Tarwater was, Rayber "at the cost of a full life" staved it off (Three, p. 373).

In his daily attempts to control this love, Rayber adheres to a "rigid ascetic discipline" with a diligence worthy of any "desert prophet or polesitter": "He did not look at anything too long, he denied his senses unnecessary satisfactions. He slept in a narrow iron bed, worked sitting in a straight-backed chair, ate frugally, spoke little, and cultivated the dullest for friends" (Three, p. 373). When the "hated love" does surface in him, his concentrated resistance to it ironically transforms him into a parody of the crucified Christ. Steeling himself against the sudden surge of love, he is "beady with sweat," and his rigid body appears to be "nailed" to the bench (Three, p. 388).

In contradistinction to Rayber's feeling that he is subject to a form of madness which he must control, O'Connor reveals the connection between the "imperious and all-demanding" love (Three, p. 372) he experiences and the burning, yet merciful love of the "imperious and all-demanding" God preached by Lucette Carmody, the child-evangelist.

After clandestinely following Tarwater to the pentecostal tabernacle at which Lucette is preaching, Rayber places himself on a window ledge with the intention of calling the boy from the "atrocious temple." Before he can do this, his attention is captured by the appearance of the child preacher who reminds him of his own "childhood seduction" (Three, p. 382) by Old Tarwater. Infuriated by the sight of

yet another child "led away from reality," Rayber imagines "some miraculous communication" between himself and Lucette and he dreams of "fleeing with the child to some enclosed garden where he would teach her the truth" (Three, p. 384). Lost in his pity for "all exploited children," Rayber ignores the message she preaches--a message which contains both an explanation of the origin of the love he feels, and a warning against his continued denial of this love:

> "Do you know who Jesus is?" she cried. "Jesus is the word of God and Jesus is love. The Word of God is love and do you know what love is, you people? If you don't know what love is you won't know Jesus when he comes. You won't be ready. I want to tell you people the story of the world, how it never known when love come, so when love comes again, you'll be ready." (Three, p. 382)

As Lucette continues to describe the Word of God as "a burning word to burn you clean" (Three, p. 384), Rayber becomes more convinced that in a strange way his and Lucette's spirits were mingling and that this child "alone in the world was meant to understand him" (Three, p. 384). His reverie is abruptly curtailed when Lucette points to him and shrieks "Listen, you people, ...I see a damned soul before my eye! I see a dead man Jesus hasn't raised. His head is in the window but his ear is deaf to the Holy Word!" (Three, p. 385).

Dropping quickly from the window ledge, Rayber frantically gropes for his hearing aid switch to close out her voice which warns, "Be saved in the Lord's fire or perish in your own." Like those who heard the Parable of the Sower but "scarcely heard with their ears" and "firmly closed their eyes," Rayber literally deafens himself to the Word of God, preferring to be enclosed in "silent dark relief" (Three, p. 385).

Tarwater's attraction to the tabernacle, and his attempt to baptize Bishop the next day in a park fountain make Rayber more determined than ever to "cure" the boy through psychology and reason. He plans to take Tarwater back to Powderhead, hoping that in "seeing and feeling the place again," the boy's "trauma might suddenly be revealed." The only thing that is revealed, however, is Rayber's own "secret affliction"--his irrational love for Bishop.

While fishing at a small lake where he took Tarwater as a prelude to his therapeutic trip to Powderhead, Rayber unveils his desperate need for Bishop through his confession that he once tried to drown the child. With his admission that his inability to do so was caused by a "failure of nerve," he strengthens Tarwater's resolve to drown Bishop, for the boy is further convinced that only in doing so can he finally and forcefully say NO to the insistent silent force demanding the baptism.

By thus insuring Bishop's death at the hands of Tarwater, Rayber brings upon himself the disaster he most dreaded. As he listens to the "unmistakable bellow" of his dying child, he makes good his intention to "lurch toward emptiness" by refusing to feel anything at all:

> He did not move. He remained absolutely still, wooden expressionless, as the machine picked up the sounds of some fierce sustained struggle in the distance. The bellow stopped and came again, then it began steadily, swelling. The machine made the sounds seem to come from inside him as if something in him were tearing itself free. He clenched his teeth. The muscles in his face contracted and revealed lines of pain beneath harder than bone. He set his jaw. No cry must escape

> him. The one thing he knew, the one thing he was certain of was that no cry must escape him.
> (Three, p. 422)

Waiting for the "raging pain, the intolerable hurt" to begin so that he could ignore it, Rayber collapses only when he realizes that there "would be no pain" (Three, p. 423). He has succeeded, at the moment of testing, in choosing the emptiness he had thought would bring peace. The result, however, is more dreadful than the powerful love in which he feared losing himself. With terrifying accuracy, Old Tarwater's prophecy scrawled on the back of the magazine is fulfilled.[33] Tarwater's action does "burn Rayber's eyes clean" for he realizes that the freedom from love which he pursued so steadfastly in fact yields only a most horrifying enslavement to his own sterile conception of freedom. Like the man in the Parable of the Sower who refuses to receive,[34] he has "lost what little he had" (Mt. 13:12). In his resistance to the grace offered to him through Bishop, he loses his ability to feel anything at all.

Rayber's ability to say NO would seem to support the argument that The Violent . . ., rather than embodying a denial of the freedom of the will, is actually a dramatization of free will.[35] Rayber's refusal to accept the grace of God fulfills even Robert O. Bowen's criterion for a

[33]Sr. Bernice Bergup, "Themes of Redemptive Grace in the Works of Flannery O'Connor," American Benedictine Review, 21 (1970), 179.

[34]Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds., The Jerome Biblical Commentary (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 87.

[35]Feeley, p. 170.

free act for "at the critical moment [Bishop's death] he applies the intention he wishes"[36] to feel nothing.

Unlike Wise Blood, where Enoch Emery moved against his will to the demands of a strange demonic force, and Mrs. Flood sought, but did not find,[37] The Violent . . . reflects the teaching that "redemptive grace is truly available to all men."[38] Moreover, in the dual presentation of Tarwater who is "chosen" to be a prophet, and Rayber, who "deliberately, clearly and with the most patent exercise of free will"[39] spurns Redemption, O'Connor does justice to the ambiguity inherent in both the Roman Catholic teaching and the Bible's depiction of free will and grace.

[36] Bowen, p. 149.

[37] See Mt. 7:7.

[38] Sr. Mariella Gable, "Ecumenic Core in Flannery O'Connor's Fiction," American Benedictine Review, 15 (1964), 131.

[39] Ibid., p. 134.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a lecture given at Sweetbriar College, Virginia in 1963, Flannery O'Connor remarked that it, indeed, made a great difference to the "look of a novel" whether the author believed that "our wills are free or bound, like those of other animals."[1] A great part of the "different look" between Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away is the latter novel's presentation of the will as free. O'Connor's earlier novel tends toward an affinity with the tenets of Jansenism, particularly in its depiction of two major characters, Enoch and Mrs. Flood, who seem arbitrarily barred from grace regardless of the desire of their wills. In The Violent Bear It Away, O'Connor dramatizes the individual's freedom to accept or reject grace in her parallel presentation of Tarwater and Rayber who react in opposite ways to the offer of Redemption.

When, after the publication of Wise Blood, O'Connor was incorrectly judged to be a nihilist and satirist of Southern evangelism, she sought to clarify her intentions in her forthright statements that as a Roman Catholic she wrote from "the standpoint of Christian orthodoxy."[2] The criticism which was written in reaction to this

[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Novelist and Believer," in Mystery and Manners, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 157.

[2]Flannery O'Connor, "The Fiction Writer and His Country," in The Living Novel: A Symposium, ed. Granville Hicks (New York: Macmillan Co., 1957). [This article is reprinted in Mystery and Manners, pp. 25-35.]

professed stance was roughly divided between those who upheld the absolute orthodoxy of every work written by O'Connor and those who denied that she sufficiently reflected Roman Catholic doctrine, particularly the doctrine of free will and grace, in her fiction. Both sides of the controversy fail to account for the possibility of a progression toward a more orthodox depiction of free will and grace in her work.

The theological differences between Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away cited in this essay might well be judged coincidental had O'Connor produced only these two novels. An examination of some of her short stories written between 1952 and 1959, however, lends support to the observation that O'Connor moved toward orthodoxy in the years after Wise Blood.

Many of O'Connor's post-Wise Blood stories contain reworkings of characters from Wise Blood. Mrs. Flood, Haze's complacent and grasping landlady in Wise Blood has many descendents in O'Connor's cliché-prone and money-minded matrons, a group which includes Mrs. Cope of "A Circle in the Fire," Mrs. McIntyre of "The Displaced Person," Mrs. May of "Greenleaf," and the Grandmother of "A Good Man is Hard to Find." All of these women seem to fare better spiritually than Mrs. Flood, however, as each in turn is made aware of her weakness and her need for God's grace. While O'Connor often leaves the final choices made by these characters somewhat ambiguous, she is very explicit in regard to the Grandmother's acceptance of grace in "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

The Grandmother, whose major concern before her vacation trip had been a proper attire so that "[i]n case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once she was a lady,"[3] is forced through her meeting with the Misfit to consider the possibility of her own death a bit more seriously.

With his strict adherence to an either/or interpretation of Christ's message, the Misfit is what Haze Motes might have become had his car not been destroyed. Like Haze, he is troubled by the implication of Jesus' existence, but he is far more steeped in the evil life to which his rejection of Jesus has brought him. He explains his dilemma to the Grandmother:

> "Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead," The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can--by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said and his voice had become almost a snarl.
> (CS, p. 132)

In an attempt to cajole him out of murder she at first assures him that he didn't "look a bit like he had common blood" (CS, p. 127), and when this social flattery fails, she attempts to use Jesus as the trump card in her battle to stay alive. "'If you would pray,' the old lady said, 'Jesus would help you,'" (CS, p. 130), but as her son and his family are taken off one by one for execution she finds herself saying the name of Jesus almost as if she were swearing (CS, p. 131).

[3]Flannery O'Connor, The Complete Stories (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), p. 118. [This edition of the short stories is cited throughout with notations given in the text.]

Terrified by the reality that she will die momentarily, she grasps at any straw and finds herself saying, "Maybe he didn't raise the dead" (CS, p. 132), in an attempt to appease the Misfit. But unlike Mrs. Flood who, at the end of Wise Blood, is held "at the beginning of something she couldn't begin,"[4] the grandmother is given an illuminating grace which enables her to make "the right gesture"[5] as the agonized Misfit tells her that if he only knew for sure Christ raised the dead he wouldn't be like he was: "His voice seemed about to crack and the grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to hers as if he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why you're one of my own babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached and touched him on the shoulder." (CS, p. 132).

No longer concerned only with her own survival, the grandmother comprehends, at least in part, the meaning of Christian love to which she had only ever given lip service. She sees that she and the Misfit are connected by a bond much stronger than the "good blood" upon which she had formerly prided herself. Although her spontaneous and unselfish action hastens her death, it is clear that it is in her death that she triumphs: "Hiram and Bobby Lee [the Misfit's henchmen] returned from the woods and stood over the ditch, looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky" (CS, p. 132).

[4]Flannery O'Connor, Three (New York: Signet, 1963), p. 126.

[5]Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 112.

Perhaps even more significant than the Grandmother's enlightenment is the effect of her death on the Misfit for her last gesture seems to initiate a change of heart in her murderer. Having professed only moments earlier that there was "no pleasure but meanness" he now announces, "It's no real pleasure in life" (CS, p. 133). This remark suggests that the Misfit, too, may move toward the redemptive grace being offered to him.

In addition to further developing material first fashioned in Wise Blood, many of the stories written between the novels provided a groundwork for O'Connor's treatment of free will and grace in The Violent Bear It Away. "Good Country People," written in 1955, is O'Connor's first depiction of the proud, self-sufficient intellectual who is a forerunner of Rayber.

Joy-Hulga, the cynical doctor of philosophy, who had the look of someone who had "achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it"(CS, p. 273), plans to enlighten a young Bible salesman by simultaneously introducing him to sexuality and atheism. Priding herself on her lack of illusions and her courage to "see through to nothing" (CS, p. 287), she is ill-prepared for the revelation that the seemingly innocent and unschooled Bible salesman is far more advanced in a belief in nothing than she is. As in Rayber's abortive attempts to "free" Tarwater, her encounter with the Bible salesman enlightens Joy-Hulga to a realization of her own vulnerability to evil. After securing her wooden leg to which he had a perverted attraction, the Bible salesman assures her that he'd been "believing in nothing" since

he was born and leaves her stranded "on a pile of straw" in a barn loft.

While O'Connor leaves Joy-Hulga's possible spiritual awakening as a result of this humiliating reversal to the reader's imagination, she develops more fully the spiritual progress made by another of her pompous intellectuals in "The Enduring Chill."

Asbury Fox, a failed and ailing artist, returns to the South from New York City with the hope that his death, which he is convinced is imminent, will assist his mother "in the process of growing up" (CS, p. 357). To hasten this process, Asbury has written her a bombastic letter to be read posthumously in which he blames her entirely for his lack of talent and imagination. Quite naturally frightened by the thought of death and unable, as advised by his friend Goetz, to "see it all as an illusion" (CS, p. 359), Asbury becomes a somewhat reluctant seeker of some deeper meaning. He regrets that he missed the opportunity while still in New York to speak with Ignatius Vogle, S.J. whom he had met at a lecture on Hindu philosophy. Having identified with the priest's "polite but strictly reserved interest" (CS, p. 360) in the subject, Asbury felt that Fr. Vogle was the only person he knew who "would have understood the unique tragedy of his death" (CS, p. 360).

Ostensibly to seek intellectual companionship, and at least partially to annoy his Methodist mother, Asbury requests that she call a priest, preferably a Jesuit. Remembering Ignatius Vogle, S.J., he pictures the one who will visit him as a "trifle more worldly, perhaps

a trifle more cynical" (CS, p. 371). Instead he receives the very elderly and unintentionally comical Fr. Finn who ignores Asbury's comments on artistic matters and leads him through a no-nonsense, systematic examination of his conscience. While the urbane Ignatius Vögle, S.J. had attested to "a real probability of the New Man assisted, of course, by the Third Person of the Trinity" (CS, p. 360), Fr. Finn is even more strident in his insistence that only the Holy Ghost can fill Asbury's need:

> "God does not send the Holy Ghost to those who don't ask for Him. Ask Him to send the Holy Ghost."
>
> "The Holy Ghost?" Asbury said.
>
> "Are you so ignorant you've never heard of the Holy Ghost?" the priest asked.
>
> "Certainly I've heard of the Holy Ghost," Asbury said furiously, "and the Holy Ghost is the last thing I'm looking for!"
>
> "And He may be the last thing you get," the priest said, his one eye inflamed. . . . "How can the Holy Ghost fill your soul when it's full of trash?" the priest roared. "The Holy Ghost will not come until you see yourself as you are--a lazy ignorant conceited youth!" he said, pounding his fist on the little bedside table. (CS, pp. 376-77)

Although Asbury is clearly affected by the priest's words, he determines that if he is to have some "last significant culminating experience" he would make it for himself "out of his own intelligence" (CS, p. 378). He decides to relive an earlier "moment of communion" he had experienced while smoking a cigarette in the dairy with his mother's two laborers and he prepared himself for the encounter "as a religious man might prepare himself for the last sacrament" (CS, p. 379). When the much-awaited incident descends into a hopeless farce with the

dairy workers insisting that he looks well, Asbury dismisses them in disappointment that "there would be no significant experience before he died" (CS, p. 380).

Though frightened of death, he also considers it to be a romantic escape from his failure as a writer: "He had failed his god, Art, but he had been a faithful servant and Art was sending him Death" (CS, p. 373). After a "sudden terrible foreboding that the fate awaiting him was going to be more shattering than any he could have reckoned on" (CS, p. 381), he receives the dreadful news that he is merely suffering from undulent fever and will live to face his artistic failure. With eyes "shocked clean as if they had been prepared for some awful vision about to come down on him" (CS, p. 382), he falls back and stares at the peculiar bird-shaped stain on the ceiling:

> The old life in him was exhausted. He awaited the coming of new. It was then that he felt the beginning of a chill, a chill so peculiar, so light, that it was like a warm ripple across a deeper sea of cold. His breath became short. The fierce bird which through the years of his childhood and the days of his illness had been poised over his head, waiting mysteriously, appeared all at once to be in motion. 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. (CS, p. 382)

Like Rayber, Asbury was self-reliant and "no sniveler after the ineffable" (CS, p. 378), but like Tarwater he has been led to a comprehension of the Holy Ghost which he had been unconsciously seeking. Through a series of revelations he gradually saw himself as he really was and was at last humble enough to receive the grace of the Spirit.

Written at the time O'Connor was also writing The Violent Bear It Away, "The Enduring Chill" is similarly criticized for embodying a denial of the freedom of the will to resist grace. Robert Milder argues that since the Holy Ghost continues to descend despite Asbury's "feeble cry" of protest, he is "singled out" with "no apparent regard for penitence or even for faith."[6]

Contrary to Milder's assumption that one must be "worthy" of grace, the Roman Catholic teaching does not hold that grace is accorded to the faithful or penitent, but that faith itself is a freely given grace of God. That Asbury is "singled out" for God's mercy is hardly heretical on O'Connor's part since the Roman Catholic Church teaches a predestination to salvation. Milder's criticism and similar criticism which insists that O'Connor violates the freedom of the will are based on the faulty understanding of the orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine of free will and grace mentioned earlier. Rather than being the absolute power of the individual to resist grace, the freedom of the will is in fact a "created freedom"[7] which operates in subordination to God's plan for each soul. Limited as this conception of freedom may seem, it is nevertheless orthodox. O'Connor reflects this teaching most clearly in her depiction of characters such as Tarwater, Asbury, O. E. Parker of "Parker's Back" and Ruby Turpin of "Revelation"; these characters accept the grace which seems to pursue them when they are

[6]Milder, "The Protestantism of Flannery O'Connor," Southern Review, 11 (1975), 817.

[7]Romano Guardini, Freedom, Grace and Destiny, trans. John Murray, S.J. (1961; rpt. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1975), p. 81.

brought to a recognition of their need for this grace.

O'Connor does not deny the freedom of the will to resist grace, however. Milder's observation that grace in O'Connor's fiction "can neither be denied nor withstood"[8] is undermined by the existence of characters such as Rayber or Mark Fortune in "A View of the Wood," both of whom choose to reject the grace offered to them in order to pursue the false gods of Rationalism and Progress, respectively.

In the seven years between the publication of Wise Blood and The Violent Bear It Away, O'Connor took advantage of the virtual isolation which her illness made necessary by undertaking the intensive reading and studying of the classic works of Roman Catholic theology and the Bible.[9] There can be little doubt that this reading, most particularly her reading of the Bible, played a part in her movement from a Jansenist-influenced to a more orthodox presentation of the mystery of free will and grace in her short stories and her second novel. It is in The Violent Bear It Away that she most fully reflects the ambiguity inherent in the Roman Catholic teaching and the Bible itself, both of which hold that certain men are predestined to eternal salvation before all time, and conversely, that men are free to turn away from God's grace.

[8]Milder, p. 817.

[9]A list of the books in O'Connor's library that she is known to have read is given by Kathleen Feeley in Flannery O'Connor: The Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), pp. 189-91. The books O'Connor reviewed for The Bulletin and The Southern Cross are listed in Miles Orvell's Invisible Parade (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972), pp. 195-99. Both lists attest to her extensive interest in Scripture and theology.

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