Peacocks, Pigs, And Prophets: Ironic Iconography In The Short Fiction Of Flannery O'connor.

PEACOCKS, PIGS, AND PROPHETS: IRONIC ICONOGRAPHY IN THE SHORT FICTION OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR

by

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ABSTRACT

Peacocks, Pigs, and Prophets:
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Most modern American literature envisions its age as one of constant questioning and little faith. Yet man has apparently not lost the need to believe in truths beyond himself, and his problematical search for ideas and structures that will offer a constant, transcendent, ordering meaning for his life pervades the literature of this century. Clearly reflecting this dilemma is the iconography of modern American life and its fictional echoes. Because an icon is mediate to the sacred and the perception of the sacred, it is a compact means of simultaneously examining the validity of both and defining the relationship between them. An examination of iconography in modern American fiction reveals the constant attempts of modern man to compensate for the absence of authentically transcendent values by elevating isolated objects and structures to the level of the sacred. The result is an ironic inversion of the authentic process in which genuine icons derive their significance from transcendent truths: the new icon is worshiped in the hope that it will provide transcendent meaning, while at the same time the "fabricated" nature of the icon ironically serves to focus the absence of such meaning.

Most writers of this period use ironic iconography to point up the absence of transcendent and stable truths. A conspicuous exception, Flannery O'Connor shares with other modern writers the vision of a lost, chaotic society but departs from them in her affirmation of the traditional values of Catholicism as the solution. Her stories, like other modern works, are filled with characters who attempt to make profane objects and structures sacred, but this kind of ironic icon is complemented by a second kind, the genuinely sacred icon that is treated as merely profane. Both dramatic texture and generation of theme in O'Connor's stories derive in large part from various kinds of iconic dialectic: between kinds of icons, between icons and characters, between icons and reader.

O'Connor has found iconic objects, structures, and character roles in nature, material objects, modern society, primitive myth, and Catholicism. Involving both fictional character and reader in varying kinds of dialectic with these icons, she has explored both man's relationship to the sacred and the nature of the sacred itself. Instead of attempting the usual dialectical synthesis, however, she has consistently resolved conflicts in iconic value at the Christian pole, and the means to resolution is not rational inquiry but the harsh light of revelation illuminating the icons.

By its very nature, the iconic is fully appropriate to O'Connor's purposes as a writer: it allows her to demonstrate the immanence of the divine in the concrete, to show man as a creature in need of the

divine, and to compel the reader's participation in the moral experience. In the ironic mode, the iconic has also given O'Connor a way to recognize the modern dilemma, analyze its nature and root, and assert her traditionalist answers while keeping her fiction primarily concrete and dramatic.

. . . they all make haste toward some trivial objective that seems of more immediate interest than God.

Albert Camus, The Plague

. . . they have made no distinction between the holy and the common. . .

Ezekiel 22: 26

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The plethora of religions, philosophies, and social codes that make up so significant a part of the history of human development indicates man's persistent need to believe that there are truths and patterns of behavior with significance beyond his own individual limits. The creative and controlling power of a god or gods, the organizing structure of a religion or philosophy, and the ordering patterns of social codes all serve to remind man of possible or actual realities that transcend his individual existence while at the same time defining and structuring those realities so that he can comprehend them and relate his own ideas and/or behavior to them. When man accepts such truths or patterns as essential to his psychological and/or spiritual well-being and does them the reverence of submitting himself to their authority and guidance, he is according them the stature of the sacred in his life.

Because many of these truths, values, and patterns are likely to be abstract or broad and because many of the experiences that were the original sources or models of meaning are part of the past, some way must be found to embody them in forms that can be readily grasped and easily transmitted. For this purpose, man has invented icons--objects, structures, or roles that are initially

given value by their connection with sacred truths or patterns and that serve in turn to evoke those ideas or values.[1] Icons are thus keys to individual and cultural values and beliefs, and an individual's attitude toward his own icons or toward those of the surrounding culture is revelatory both of his own beliefs and of his relationship to the values and beliefs with which he is surrounded.

As even the most basic historical and anthropological surveys would show, few structuring philosophies or social codes could be called universal, and few have attained permanence even within a single culture. But though the truths themselves are relative and shifting, the need to see them as ultimate seems constant. When examination or practice of one set of beliefs reveals inadequacies, another system that seems more satisfactory is substituted, and human history becomes a series of epochs marked by general changes in religion, philosophy, and social codes. But such changes are never total. The systems of thought and action that dominate a given epoch need be only a kind of majority opinion; the seeds of new systems or the survivals of older ones may exist within a society they do not as yet dominate, providing criticisms of or alternatives to the prevailing codes and exposing the individual to varied and often conflicting views of what is sacred.

The dominance, variety, and conflict of values within a given period will be reflected in its iconography. Since icons

link transcendent values and ideas with individual perceptions and actions, the icons themselves may be individual or communal, born of personal experience with the sacred or accepted as already existing symbols of the sacred that are accessible and meaningful to a community of believers. And since icons depend on transcendent ideas and values for their existence, every system of such ideas and values will generate its own icons or will challenge the significance of icons embodying conflicting systems. Consequently, at any given time in a society, it is possible to have a large number of icons and it is possible for them to exist in a variety of relationships to their own transcendent referents, to each other, and to individual perceivers. And, since iconic value is, at base, a function of perception rather than an absolute, it is possible for a single object or structure to be both iconic and non-iconic, depending on the values of the perceiver. A national flag may be only a colorful object in the eyes of someone who has had no experience of flags; it may be a simple symbol[2] to someone who understands what it represents but places no particular value on that country; it may be a positive icon to someone who sees it as the symbol of values essential to a meaningful life; and it may be a negative icon to someone whose own primary values are threatened by those the flag symbolizes. The same range of reactions can apply to countless objects and structures: a car, a rose, the Eucharist, an idol, a legend, the initiation experience, and the

quest have, for example, all carried such a range of valuations. The importance lies not in the thing itself but in what it means to the person confronting it.

Genuine icons are valuable because they evoke transcendent meaning; contact with the icon is a means of touching and affirming ideals or patterns that can provide psychological/spiritual security and behavioral guidance. As long as these ideals continue to satisfy as sources of meaning and guidance, the icons remain clearly defined and valuated. The icons themselves may proliferate as individuals or groups experience in their own ways the basic truths, and the proliferation itself can become an affirmation of the continuing, broadening validity of those truths. However, if the ideals themselves begin to fail as sources of meaning, the search for new icons will be part of the larger search for new truths, and the icons related to the old ideals will suffer a reduction, either directly, through devaluation, or indirectly, through a continuing valuation that is in fact a hollow inflation. (Certainly many religious and patriotic objects and rituals have, in the course of history, suffered both kinds of reduction.) In undergoing either of these kinds of reduction, the icon is likely to become, at least temporarily, ironic. If the failure of the ideals is the fault of flawed perception and not of inadequacy in the ideals themselves, the devaluation of the icons will be ironic, a treating of the sacred as profane. If the ideals have actually

failed and the icons continue to be valued in the absence of genuine meaning, the icons will, obviously, also be ironic.

The retention of such icons might be simply the inertia of habitual patterns outlasting their own raison d'etre, but the very fact of such inertia suggests that the icons can come to function as substitutes for the larger concerns they ought simply to represent. And as an extreme extension of this kind of substitution, a second kind of ironic icon becomes possible, one that is created as a substitute for the ideal it should embody, because the ideal itself cannot be found. This attempt to force transcendence out of fragments of the immediate suggests that man's need for larger truths persists even in the face of his inability to find them,[3] but the failure that generates these pseudo-icons also dooms them: the icon is worshiped in the hope that it will provide meaning, while at the same time the very nature of the icon is evidence that such meaning doesn't exist. The icon ironically serves to focus more sharply the failure it sought to hide.[4]

Probably all historical periods provide some examples of all the kinds of icons, genuine and ironic, defined to this point, but some periods seem to suffer more than others from the kind of confusion of or alienation from sources of adequate spiritual and psychological meaning and guidance. Though certainly not without doubt and dissent, the Medieval period had a strong value-center in the Catholic Church. Chaucer's Pardoner might abuse iconic

relics by falsifying both their authenticity and their purpose, but not even the Pardoner himself was in doubt about the moral valence of his actions, and Chaucer's presentation of the Pardoner was in little danger of being seen as an exemplum of model business practices. Modern America, by contrast, lacks such a strong center of ideals and values, and its iconography reflects its predicament. Among other forces, the collision/fusion of widely varied cultures, the rapidity of change in life-style, the repeated destruction of assumptions about man and reality, and a general tendency toward what Nathan Scott, Jr., calls "desacralization"[5] have combined to deprive American society of the kind of truths and values that might legitimately be treated as sacred. While some members of the society are able to insulate themselves against paralyzing uncertainties by clinging to older value systems or by shutting out confusing contradictions, a great many others are caught up in the whirl of confusion and the hollow of meaninglessness at its center. Faced with this dilemma, a significant portion of the society has impressed temporal or profane objects and concepts into sacred service and worshiped tall buildings, fast cars, and other examples of the power and technology that are the only apparent sources of social stability and coherence. But all these things imply their own obsolescence and thus their own instability, and new icons must constantly be found to preserve even an illusory sense of the ultimate.

Reflecting this dominant sense of confusion, most significant modern American literature seems grounded in a vision of the modern social fabric as simply a thin layer of illusory order covering changing and conflicting standards and philosophies, and many individual writers articulate the nature and consequences of the resulting instability through a dialectic between characters and icons or iconic structures. Fitzgerald's Gatsby worships a woman and, secondarily, the manifestations of wealth by which he thinks he can gain access to the center of her existence. Faulkner's Sutpen devotes his life to constructing an estate, the iconic emblem of a place in the Southern aristocracy. Mailer's Rojack initially pursues and adopts the icons of "the American Dream" (good marriage, good political and social images, political and economic power) until he in effect becomes an iconic echo of the values his society sanctifies. Updike's Harry Angstrom venerates the pattern and experience of the basketball game and assigns iconic value to objects and experiences, such as roads and running, that partake of or recapitulate the emotions and actions of playing basketball, seeking through them to touch transcendent reality.[6] Pynchon's Stencil, in searching for "V," pursues an object of significance that gradually takes on the mystery, illusiveness, and ambivalence that are the qualities of reality, and the more nearly its dimensions become iconic, the less it serves to fulfill the iconic functions of articulating meaning and connecting man

with meaning. These and countless other characters in modern American fiction share a need, born of pain, loss, or estrangement, for icons or iconic structures as keys to meaning and sources of direction, and they share as well the experience of the failed icon, an experience that leaves them not only as destitute of meaning as before, but destroys them physically, emotionally, or philosophically.

Within these common outlines, however, there are, as one might expect in a relativistic and individualistic society, significant differences in authorial visions, expressed in particularities of character and theme. Sometimes the characters are trying to reach the seemingly sacred, martyring themselves and all around them in blind dedication to the icons that, once possessed, are assumed to carry the sacred with them. Because Daisy is sacred to Gatsby and wealth sacred to Daisy, Gatsby adopts the icons of wealth as his, compromising all other values in the process. Because the sacredness of Daisy resides not in Daisy but in Gatsby's distorted perception of her, the disillusioning reality of a relationship with her combines with the consequences of other perverted values to doom the whole structure of Gatsby's life and to destroy him. Sutpen, too, destroys himself in an attempt to reach the sacred through the icon because he ignores or subverts all other human values in the process. But Sutpen's design is even more radically flawed than Gatsby's; Sutpen attempts to

substitute the surface (grand mansion, large estate, male heir) for the reality (an inherited place in the Southern aristocracy). Gatsby sees the external trappings of material success as sacred only in that they will elevate him to a position from which he can reach the truly sacred, Daisy. (The distortion in Gatsby's conception of Daisy is also a source of irony, but she is not herself iconic since she is the ultimate being sought.) Both Gatsby and Sutpen are victims of their innocence, their substitution of the sacred symbol for the sacred itself or their misinterpretation of the real relationship between the symbol and the sacred. Gatsby's innocence is psychological/emotional, Sutpen's cultural, but both are reflections of man alienated from clear, stable, and valid sources of guidance and meaning.

The result of the encounter with false icons for both Gatsby and Sutpen is destruction without much comprehension of the reasons for the failure of the sacred. In Mailer's An American Dream, Updike's Rabbit, Run, and Pynchon's "V", however, the dialectic of the sacred illusion and profane reality implicit in the ironic icon plays itself out less drastically for the central characters, leaving them alive to confront and analyze their failures (a result that is less drastic only in a physical sense). In his war heroism, his socially proper marriage, and his connections with political, economic, and social power, Rojack has adopted the icons of his society and marked the stations of the cross leading

to the promised salvation of the American Dream, but the way proves a via dolorosa and the salvation a travesty of the individual fulfillment it purports to offer. The iconic structure of the American Dream as an image of perfect realization of self has revealed its radical irony--it is an illusion and not an ideal--and Rojack smashes it in anger and frustration. Rabbit, disillusioned by the hollow pattern of modern adult life, attempts to find the sacred within himself and makes of the games and freedom of his adolescence iconic structures. But he is progressively forced to recognize their inadequacy as sources of guidance or as substitute realities, since they neither lessen nor eliminate the problems of present existence. Stencil, too, adopts a personal icon, a mystery (the mystery of "V," who is apparently his mother), and a life structured like a religious quest for the solution to the mystery. But he finds that this attempt to touch and define a reality of central importance ironically compels ultimate acceptance of the lack of any clear, objective, and tangible definition for any reality. Instead of touching a stable and ultimate value that will help him define his humanity and order his relationships with others, Stencil finds reality broadening and shifting, while at the same time he is narrowing psychologically through his obsessive search for this single truth.

Rojack pursues the sacred in the tangible, culturally sanctified successes of the present; Rabbit tries to retrieve from the

golden past a spirit and structure that will transcend time; and Stencil seeks the identity and nature of an original mystery that will provide an ordering point for both past and present. All are disappointed, but Rojack acts with greater purpose and direction than the others in the face of the dilemma. Confronted with the failure of the pseudo-sacred, he smashes its icons, plunges into the murky depths of the demonic, finding there, in the girl Cherry, a lone, buried, yet potentially fruitful vestige of the sacred, but finding, too, that he is powerless to save it from the surrounding evil. Having exhausted his culture without discovering the sacred, he turns his back and heads for the pre-civilized world of the jungle. The movement is potentially affirmative, but Mailer offers no certainties for Rojack. The jungle may offer another failure of meaning as grave as those Rabbit and Stencil continue to face in their disintegrating or diffusing icons.

Although modern American literature provides numerous other variations on this dialectic of fictional characters and their icons, the controlling vision seems to remain a somewhat pessimistic assessment of the possibility of finding usable truths that are transcendent and stable. A writer who looks at the same realities and does find such a core of truth becomes, then, a somewhat conspicuous

point of contrast. Such a writer is Flannery O'Connor, a modern who sees clearly the sickness and chaos of society, and a traditionalist (a Roman Catholic) who sees the revitalization of old values, and the icons that configure them, as the key to cultural renewal. For O'Connor, as Dorothy Walters points out, religion is in many ways a public commitment to a set of universally assumed beliefs that provides a needed and valid sense of social cohesion, and the fading of this sense from the modern consciousness is a danger to which modern man must be awakened and for which he must be made to assume responsibility.[7]

Central to O'Connor's vision is her dualism: she accepts as equally real, if not equally valuable, the world of the spirit and the world of the flesh. But she is not a Manichaean; she sees these worlds as essentially interrelated as well as existentially at odds. As a result, her fiction is characterized by mystery (the immanence of the spiritual in the concrete) and tension (the opposition of the finite and the infinite and of good and evil).[8] Both the iconic and the ironic are natural devices for expressing such a vision, devices of which O'Connor makes extensive and varied use.

Some part of O'Connor's dualism may be linked to her Southern background. Robert Heilman describes the "Southern temper" as ". . . marked by the coincidence of a sense of the concrete, a sense of the elemental, a sense of the ornamental, a sense of the representative . . . ." These individual qualities he sees existing

in complementary relationships, yielding a sense of totality, of the unity of world and spirit, that leads to a questioning of pure humanism, pure scientism, pure "presentism," and to the affirmation of a "high sense of reality" of which the search for gods is a mark.[9] O'Connor herself saw the South as having emerged from the Civil War ". . . with an inburnt knowledge of human limitations and with a sense of mystery" that could never have been a part of its "first state of innocence."[10] Such perceptions of the ordered, integrated totality that encompasses both body and spirit, and the sense of mystery that is a result of the intangible spirit inhering in the tangible body, are, as Louis Rubin points out, in essential tension with the modern spirit, and the Southerner experiences the predicament of a modern in a traditionalist society.[11] More concretely, O'Connor's particular location in the Bible Belt kept continuously in her sight men and women who perceived reality as religiously dual and who constantly struggled to find God and evade the devil, to reconcile the flesh and the spirit.[12]

It would be misleading, however, to see the South as a constricting influence on O'Connor's fiction; she is, as many critics have pointed out, concerned with a much larger, more profound view, and her South is one in which all men from all areas are spiritual participants. The substance and spirit of the South are simply harmonious with her more general vision of reality.[13]

More central to O'Connor's dualism than her Southern background

is her Catholicism. Her view of life as a conflict of world and spirit, of the devil and God, of order and chaos is directly rooted in her faith: ". . . [F]or me the meaning of life is centered in our Redemption by Christ and what I see in the world I see in its relation to that."[14] Equally a product of her faith is her assessment of what is wrong with the world: "Redemption is meaningless unless there is cause for it in the actual life we live, and for the last few centuries there has been operating in our culture the secular belief that there is no such cause."[15] These convictions give to her art a definite moral framework and a sense of mission--to make people see spiritually, and the specifics of her faith provide much of the imagery and many of the iconic objects and structures with which this study will concern itself.[16]

In addition to suggesting subject matter and thematic orientation, O'Connor's cultural and religious dualism provided her with her fictional technique. She is sure that man needs to connect with God and the world of the spirit; she is equally sure that he must start where he is, with the world and the flesh. She describes the writer as searching for ". . . one image that will connect or combine or embody two points; one is a point in the concrete, and the other is a point not visible to the naked eye, but . . . just as real . . . as the one that everybody sees."[17] When, however, the concrete points and the spiritual referents have been twisted apart by the intrusions and perversions of the temporal world, establishing

the connection becomes problematical. As Scott points out, O'Connor assertedly did not see the pieties of Christian belief as characteristic of our culture and thus could not make them the direct subject matter of her art. What she did see was a way to use the profane to stimulate a sense of the existence of and need for the sacred:

> . . . she wanted not only to exhibit what is banal and trivializing in the desacralized world of modern unbelief but also to portray its vacuity in such a way as to stir the imagination into some fresh awareness of what has been lost--and thus to "baptize" it, to render it open and responsive once more to the dimension of the Sacred and the pressure of glory.[18]

Scott's description suggests two approaches to the problem of divisive duality, approaches that give rise to two of O'Connor's dominant fictional perceptions, the grotesque and the mysterious. The grotesque, as O'Connor and many of her critics have pointed out, is a reflection of the distortion of modern life resulting from the bifurcation and separation of the sacred and the secular, and it manifests itself in spiritually and/or physically deformed people and in unnaturally valued objects and ideas. The mysterious is, by contrast, a reflection of the unity of world and spirit, and our ability to perceive it is an indicator of our spiritual and psychological health. Its manifestations are mystical, usually sudden, and overwhelming in their force, offering healing to those who can or will accept and absorb the vision.

Because the balance of the world is heavily on the side of error, and because the mystery of spiritual truth is infrequently

perceived, the grotesque dominates the surface of O'Connor's fiction. Frederick Hoffman finds O'Connor's preoccupation with the grotesque a natural consequence of her perception of the Manichaean spirit of the times, ". . . in which the religious metaphors retain their power but cannot be precisely delineated by persons driven by the necessities they see in them." The resulting clash produces distortion and violence,[19] and, it might be added, a radical irony of perception. Gilbert Muller, in his thorough study of O'Connor's use of the grotesque, sees the roots of the perception both in the basic myths of Christianity, with its emphasis on sin, suffering, and infirmity as consequences of the Fall, and in the ethos of modern society, where the fusion of the animate and the inanimate places characters "in a world where the laws of symmetry and proportion no longer obtain, where normal actions and reactions break down."[20] David Eggenschwiler finds the grotesque a reflection of O'Connor's insistence on the proper wholeness of things and on the tension between this ideal wholeness and the incompleteness that actually exists. She sees man as mediate in creation, ". . . on the one hand, the image of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost, an infinite and divine being; on the other hand, a defaced image, a ruined temple, a grotesque freak, continuously mutilating the divine image through his pride and feelings of self-sufficiency." The wholeness of O'Connor's own perception is evidenced in her treatment of freaks as deformed and her correlative Christian acceptance

of them.[21]

Eggenschwiler's theory of the grotesque as a means of simultaneously pointing up wholesness and incompleteness brings us back to the element of mystery. Men who ignore the existence of mystery and their need for it are grotesques, the nature of whose incompleteness implies the nature of the completeness they lack. Thus, these characters exist in a state of radical irony. Sometimes they simply attempt to ignore the mysterious and live in one dimension, becoming, as a result, objects. More often, however, they try to substitute for the sacred by elevating the finite to the level of the ultimate, thus affirming their need for the sacred while denying its existence. Both types tend to reveal their incompleteness and failure through their relationship to iconic objects and situations. Objects and rituals undeservedly invested with highly positive significance usually fail to support that significance, and those invested with evil significance (negative icons) prove, in Eggenschwiler's words, ". . . merely counters for a more existential dread, and their rituals . . . compulsive holding actions against a reality from which they cannot indefinitely hide."[22] And as a result of their partial existence or obsessive actions, the characters themselves become symbolic or iconic.[23]

The elements we have briefly surveyed--a dualistic view of reality, a belief in the pervasive dimension of mystery deriving from the immanence of the spiritual in the concrete, and a perception

of modern man made one-dimensional and grotesque by his separation from sources of genuine meaning--combine within the context of O'Connor's Catholic belief in the ancient, eternal patterns of redemption and grace as essential to man's well-being to produce a fiction ironic in spirit and iconic in texture. The variety of the individual elements summarized above and the complexity and number of their possible combinations are echoed in a corresponding variety and number of icons and iconic structures. The dimension of mystery and man's tendency to make sacred the finite both find natural expression in iconic objects. The frequent one-dimensionality of characters, as well as the modern tendency to worship men rather than God, can turn people into icons. The tendency of man confronting chaos to try to impose ultimately meaningful order on his life can lead to iconic structures. And belief in the eternal validity of Christian truths in modern life means the continued viability of the standard Biblical and ecclesiastical icons.

The functions of the icons are as varied as the kinds. Occasionally an icon functions authentically for a character, but most of the icons exist in some kind of ironic relationship, either to the idea of the sacred or to the perceiver. The icon itself may be a false one worshiped as true, or it may be a true one treated as simply a profane object; in both cases, however, the irony provides commentary on the flawed spiritual condition of the perceiver.

In addition to this dialectic between fictional characters and

icons, there is a second, less major, kind of iconography in O'Connor's works, one born of her didactic impulses. Because the works exist to guide the reader, involvement with the material is of more than academic concern, and O'Connor provides what seem intended to be icons for the reader alone, objects and structures not perceived as sacred by the characters themselves but carrying iconic values within the work. Occasionally these are recognizable cultural icons valued beyond their genuine capacity to sustain meaning, but more often they are objects or structures of authentic value clothed in somewhat tattered modern dress. These icons, too, point up the blindness or degeneration of the characters, but the irony is broader, surrounding a character rather than proceeding from him.

O'Connor's multiform iconography is best approached through an examination of two distinct groups of short stories. Most commonly, an O'Connor story focuses on a single icon to which other elements of the story are related in an interaction that generates event and theme. A few stories, however, make use of multiple icons, and here the interaction between icon and character is complemented by the interaction among icons. The resulting texture is as complex as that of O'Connor's novels. Because the single-icon stories are both the simplest and most representative examples of O'Connor's iconographic technique, this study will begin with them, building a subsequent discussion of the more iconically complex stories on this foundation.[24]

CHAPTER TWO
Single-Icon Stories

I. Iconic Objects

Of the three major types of iconography O'Connor uses--objects, people, and structures--objects are the most common. This would seem to reflect the basic nature of both the icon itself and O'Connor's view of reality: the icon exists to serve as a tangible sign of the mysterious and transcendent; O'Connor sees the concreteness of reality as pervaded by the spiritual and thus as potentially iconic, and she sees man as irresistibly and centrally in need of the sacred and thus as turning instinctively to icons. Consequently, nearly all of O'Connor's short stories make some use of iconic objects.

It is important to emphasize briefly here that not all objects of significance in O'Connor's stories are icons. She makes much use of the purely symbolic and sometimes of the near-iconic, approaching an area of gray where the critic in search of distinctions between icon and symbol is drawn as surely into the mysterious as the characters in search of their certainties. It does seem possible, however, to make some distinctions.

Some of O'Connor's "charged" objects seem to function as nonce symbols. In "The Crop," the title object symbolizes to

Miss Willerton the creative union and striving toward a goal that she shares with her fantasy lover. In "The Artificial Nigger," the railroad tracks, which ". . . were double and did not converge again until they were hidden behind the bends at either end of the clearing,"[1] prefigure the initial separation of Nelson and his grandfather and their coming union in the mystery of a common experience. In "Revelation," the title of the book (Human Development) with which Mary Grace wounds Ruby Turpin seems to symbolize what both are lacking, in different ways, and what Ruby will gain from her revelation. But none of these objects becomes truly iconic. Miss Willerton's crop, although potentially iconic, remains simply one of a series of literary subjects, insufficiently charged or developed to be iconic to the reader and insufficiently important to be iconic to Miss Willerton. The tracks in "The Artificial Nigger" and the book in "Revelation" remain simply analogous to or suggestive of the patterns of experience in their respective stories, without the qualities of central participation and explicit valuation characteristic of icons.

Other symbolic objects appear repeatedly in O'Connor's fiction, and it is with these objects that we find the symbolic approaching the iconic. A representative though not exhaustive list would include hats, shirts embossed with horses, cowboys, and destroyers, spectacles, guns, pastures bounded by trees or mountains, and the sun, some of which gain added symbolic significance

from the sheer fact of their repetition.

The hats O'Connor's characters wear are often used emblematically. In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the grandmother wears a hat to demonstrate that she is a lady, and when the hat is damaged in the accident that results from her willfulness, there seems an unavoidable parallel to the smashing of her image of herself as a good woman. In the same story, the black hat worn by The Misfit is symbolically appropriate to his role as an evil destroyer. In "The Artificial Nigger," Nelson's new hat, bought a size large in expectation that his head will grow, is emblematic of the initiation journey he is undertaking, and as the events of the journey batter Nelson psychologically, the hat becomes similarly battered. In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," Julian's mother buys as a luxury a hat she believes will reflect the social distinction to which her aristocratic ancestry entitles her. When she sees a Black woman wearing the same hat, Julian's mother reacts to the threatened equality by retreating into the old role of white condescending to Black, and when she acts out of this role, the consequences are fatal to her.[2] Because the hats are linked to social or behavioral codes that the grandmother, Nelson, and Julian's mother regard as transcendently meaningful, the function of the hats is potentially iconic, but in none of the stories does the hat become of sufficient importance to the action or the character to realize fully that iconic potential.

The shirts, usually faded, appear on characters who are in some way partial, cut off from sources of strength. In "The Lame Shall Enter First," Norton grieves for his dead mother and tries to touch his cold father; his faded shirt pictures a purposeful cowboy without a horse. In "Good Country People," Hulga-Joy tries to turn physical and spiritual deformity into sources of power by sanctifying her wooden leg and her strong intellect; her shirt, also faded, shows a cowboy on a horse, man turning natural strength to his own purpose. In "A Good Man," Bobby Lee becomes the arm through which The Misfit can articulate his denial of Christ in violence to others; Bobby Lee's stolen shirt carries the image of a stallion, with its connotations of pure, unreasoning, amoral force. In "A Circle in the Fire," Powell, a boy alienated from his family and one of a seemingly unholy trio, returns to the farm on which he grew up as the son of a tenant farmer and turns to vandalism when he is denied the welcome he seeks; his shirt bears the image of a destroyer. In none of these stories, however, does the shirt seem of more than casual symbolic significance either to character or reader.

Spectacles, too, seem primarily symbolic, and symbolic primarily to the reader. John Wesley and The Misfit ("A Good Man"), Powell ("A Circle in the Fire"), Mr. Guizac ("The Displaced Person"), Hulga-Joy ("Good Country People"), Mary Fortune and her grandfather ("A View of the Woods"), Mary Elizabeth ("The Partridge

Festival")--all seem to be looking for something, trying to see beyond surfaces, and to be themselves somewhat inscrutable, and all wear glasses that serve both as an aid to vision and a protection against being seen through. In all these cases, however, the glasses themselves are not highly valued and do not function centrally in the climactic experience (though they are involved in these experiences in "The Partridge Festival" and "Good Country People").[3]

Guns carry the rather natural symbolism of destructive power used to control threatening reality, taking on shadings of significance consonant with the principal issues in their respective stories. Old Dudley ("The Geranium") and Ruller ("The Turkey") both feel the need for a gun to bring order and power into their lives. Thomas ("The Comforts of Home"), Mrs. May ("Greenleaf"), and The Misfit all use or force others to use guns to support their blind or evil views of reality. Ruby Hill ("A Stroke of Good Fortune") reacts to a toy gun with the same fear and irritation she feels when she becomes aware of her pregnancy, thus clearly suggesting that the gun is an indicator both of phallic power and of her childish innocence of it.

The fear of pregnancy is central to Ruby's whole view of life, and thus an iconic symbol is possible, but the gun itself exists only on the periphery of her experience and so remains more symbolic than iconic. Dudley's gun seems nearly to approach the dimension of

the iconic because it is part of an entire way of life (back home in the South) that is sacred to him and that seems even more so by contrast to the hell of the North in which he's presently living. The gun is not particularized; it is essential gun, to which are attached memories of the past as well as clear and dependable social structures in which hunting was a carefully defined ritual carried out within carefully defined social roles and in which the white man's possession and understanding of the gun were evidences of his superiority to the Blacks. When a Black not only moves in to the next-door apartment but proves to know more about guns in general than does Old Dudley, Old Dudley acts out fantasies of his old life centered in the gun in order to restore internally the kind of social structure in which he needs to believe. Ironically, he only suffers further humiliation when he is discovered in mid-fantasy by the very Black whose position he seeks to exorcise and is subjected to this man's kindly but amused help. The gun is thus a valued, significant, and symbolic object connecting Old Dudley with what he sees as the right and wrong of life, and as such it approaches the iconic. But it seems inadequately central to the pattern to be fully an icon. It can suggest the pattern, and it does participate, but its participation is more peripheral than inclusive, and it seems to remain on the symbolic side of the line.

Another frequent symbolic image in O'Connor's stories is more

a structure than an object. Nearly all of the farm houses that are home to O'Connor's characters seem to offer a view of a field bounded by trees (or, occasionally, by mountains), and characters are frequently seen looking across the field to its boundaries. For Mrs. Cope ("A Circle in the Fire") the trees symbolize both the control suggested by enclosure and the protection of providence while at the same time implying the potential loss of both, a potential that the daughter recognizes directly as the sky "pushing against the fortress wall, trying to break through" (CS, p. 176) but that the more literal Mrs. Cope can articulate only as an overriding fear of fire. When Mrs. MacIntyre ("The Displaced Person") comes to deliver an ultimatum to the Pole she's hired to work for her, he occupies the center of the field and she stands in the trees at the edge, indicating that, while she maintains the illusion of control, he is really central to the success of the farm. Hulga's pre-seduction vision of the fields bounded by hills and dark woods is her last "clear" view of reality before her seducer removes her glasses, literally and metaphorically, blurring the nature of the boundary and all the area between it and her. Mr. Fortune's ignorance of the necessity for keeping a clear view of the woods (as boundary and inspiration, to keep man aware of both his limits and his potential) brings down on him the wrath of his more clear-sighted granddaughter.

Mr. Fortune's story is, like the others mentioned, symbolic

insofar as the woods simply stand for nature in the conflict with material progress. But the sacredness of the woods to his granddaughter, the life-and-death struggle they precipitate, and Mr. Fortune's own final vision of them make them more than symbolic. They are ultimately valued in a definite and crucial way, they are central, and they are imbued with and suggestive of a larger reality, the rejection of which seemingly costs Mr. Fortune his life. That the same visionary quality attaches to the field-woods configuration at the very end of "A Circle in the Fire" suggests an iconic function there, and the involvement of this same configuration in the final visions of Ruby Turpin in "Revelation" and the child in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost" suggests that it may be part of a larger iconic structure in each story.

There is yet another consideration involved in evaluating the place of the field-woods structure in O'Connor's iconography, and that is her tendency to structure temporal situations in such a way as to make them analogous to iconic structures from biblical and theological history. By making a microcosm of a farm with a clearly defined perimeter, in the midst of which man confronts both sin and mercy, she suggests the pattern of Eden as well as, in a more abstract way, the pastures watched over by Christ as shepherd and bordered by symbols of his sacrifice.

The sun plays another such all-encompassing role in O'Connor's iconography, a role the near-inevitability of which O'Connor indicated

in her reply to a question about its frequency in her works: "It's there. It's so obvious. And from time immemorial it's been a god."[4] The characters themselves seem aware in varying degrees of the presence of the sun. Some, like the grandmother in "A Good Man," Mr. Head and Nelson in "The Artificial Nigger," Calhoun in "The Partridge Festival," and Parker in "Parker's Back," merely note the sun, without attaching particular significance to it. Shiftlet, early in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," celebrates the sunset, but the pattern of his later actions suggests that the experience is not directly meaningful, at least not in the redemptive sense. And his final vision of the sun, though it seems potentially iconic to him, is merely presented, with the resolution of the ambiguity seemingly left to the reader. More common, however, is the involvement of the sun in some kind of visionary experience. For Bevel in "The River," Asbury in "The Enduring Chill," General Sash in "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," Mrs. Cope in "A Circle in the Fire," and Mr. Fortune in "A View of the Woods," the sun is an element in visionary experiences of which they take insufficient note but which are, for the reader, clearly symbolic. Only in "A View from the Woods," however, does the sun seem part of an iconic structure for the character.

Visionary experiences that do seem iconic to both character and reader occur for the child in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," Mrs. Shortley in "The Displaced Person," Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," and Mrs.

Turpin in "Revelation." When the child in "A Temple" sees the sun as "a huge red ball like an elevated Host drenched in blood" (CS, p. 248), she is simply finding her newly awakened religious awareness reflected in the mystery-suffused world of nature; the new vision is the result of a new capacity for seeing. The same is true of the other visionaries, but because their lives have taken them so far astray of divine mystery, their visions more frequently involve ironic reversals in which the sun illuminates simultaneously the new truth and the old falsity in the same object or structure. Mrs. Shortley has an Ezekiel-like vision of wheels surrounding a figure the color of the sun, following whose instructions she prophesies, closing her eyes and configuring the butchering and dismemberment of the children of wicked nations. Because her blind prophecy seems born more of her own fear of foreigners as wicked than of God as a just and merciful spirit whose concern for men is a unifying force, she opens her eyes to "pieces of the sun" being washed in the opposite direction from the obviously symbolic fish-shaped clouds (CS, p. 210). Mrs. Shortley's religion and hatred of foreigners are central to her life, and this vision ironically prefigures the manner of her own death as she and her family flee into the rising of a "dark yellow sun" (CS, p. 213). Mrs. May and Ruby Turpin are alike in that their stories culminate in visions dominated by the sun. For Mrs. May, the sun's heat and diffused light pervade the visionary experience of being gored by a bull, which is

associated with the sun earlier in the story. For Mrs. Turpin, the sun, which has already illuminated the epiphanic pigs, sinks behind the ever-significant line of trees, providing in the last ray of its setting an apocalyptic vision of a bridge of light over which "a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven" (CS, p. 508). Both Mrs. May and Mrs. Turpin are forced to accept as sacred what they earlier regarded as profane, and the sun-dominated visions are the instruments of ironic awareness.

The sun, then, is often involved in regenerative visions that illuminate the irony of a character's icons. But there is little evidence in any of the stories that the characters see the sun itself as icon. Even for the child in "A Temple," the sun becomes an icon only by transformation, appearing as the Host. Yet the image of the sun is, both by declaration and practice, more than an occasional symbol in O'Connor's fiction. The significance generated by repetition combines with the reader's own culture-born awareness of sun as both pagan and Christian icon and with the placement of the sun in icon-dominated situations in the stories themselves to make the sun a "reader icon," a pervasive force in itself, a constant reminder of the divine mystery and power of which it is itself a product, and an agent of revelation for fallen man.[5]

The use of both the symbolic and the iconic, individually, in

combination, and in near-fusion, demonstrates, I think, that O'Connor was working from a sense of mystery that generated situations of naturally varying levels of symbolic significance, not from a preconceived pattern of strictly equivalent symbols.[6] The purely symbolic and the symbolic-iconic fusion have thus been briefly explored in order to give a sense of the levels and to provide descriptive contrast to the more purely iconic objects and structures that are the subject of this study.

A broad range of natural and manufactured objects do iconic service in O'Connor's fiction. On the whole, they seem of more limited significance than iconic persons and structures, but they are of importance and provide perhaps the sharpest focus for the iconic method itself.

The use of animals as icons is certainly consonant with the traditions of Christian scripture and homiletic exempla, and in four of her stories, O'Connor centers on characters for whom animals focus iconic experiences. For Old Gabriel in the early story "The Wildcat," the icon and his experience of it are relatively straightforward, with only a shadow of the irony that marks, with increasing complexity, the iconic experiences of Ruller in "The Turkey," Mrs. May in "Greenleaf," and Mrs. Turpin in "Revelation."

Old Gabriel's story begins with the young men of his community hunting a wildcat. Immediately Gabriel is set apart from the hunt in two ways: he is too old to join the hunters, and he senses the

cat differently than they do. To them, the cat is in the woods, just looking for cows; to him, "'It comin' out the woods for mo' than cows. It gonna git itssef som folks' blood . . . . An' yawl goin' off huntin' it ain't gonna do no good. It goin' huntin' itssef'" (CS, p. 27). For Gabriel, the cat is something to be known through wisdom and mystery, and what it represents to him is a kind of total life experience. Etched in his mind is the memory of a youthful experience in which a wildcat becomes a symbol of both his own innocence (he is forced to stay inside with the women in spite of his insistence that he could have accompanied the hunters without fear) and of the fearful things that happen once the protection of that innocence is lost and one is facing life on his own (the cat tears open a man's throat). The cat seems at this point to objectify the challenge of achieving manhood, as the bear does for Faulkner's Ike McCaslin, and Gabriel's vision of it, like Ike's, is enlarged to the quasi-apocalyptic:

> It was the shape of a reg'lar cat only bigger, his mother said. An' where you felt the sharp points on a house cat's foot, you felt big knife claws in a wildcat's, an' knife teeth, too; an' it breathed heat an' spit wet lime. Gabriel could feel its claws in his shoulders and its teeth in his throat. But he wouldn't let 'em stay there. He'd lock his arms 'round its body an' feel up for its neck an' jerk its head back an' go down wit it on the floor until its claws dropped away from his shoulders. Beat, beat, beat its head, beat, beat, beat . . . . (CS, p. 28)

But this vision occurs before he hears that the cat has killed "ol' Hezuh," and Old Gabriel is distinguished from his

younger self primarily in his awareness of his own limitations. He still insists that he can "smell" the cat, but the smelling now connotes understanding of the thing itself. His vision is still apocalyptic, but with altered emphasis:

> The teeth would be hot an' the claws cold. The claws would sink in soft, an' the teeth would cut sharp an' scrape his bones inside . . . . "Lord waitin' on me," he whispered. "He don't want me with my face tore open. Why don't you go on, Wildcat, why you want me?" . . . He was moving toward the cat hole. Across on the river bank the Lord was waiting on him with a troupe of angels and golden vestments for him to put on and when he came, he'd put on the vestments and stand there with the Lord and the angels judging life. Won't no nigger for fifty miles fitter to judge than him. (CS, pp. 30-31)

The young vision of physical strength has been replaced by an older vision of moral triumph, the present by the hereafter, but in both cases the wildcat, representing as it does a force beyond man's control and therefore mysterious, threatens Gabriel's image of himself, his pride in his control over life. As a boy, he is sure he can handle the cat, until he hears about the speed and force with which it killed ol' Hezuh; as a man, he is equally sure that the cat is going to get him, until he hears that the cat has indeed seized a cow and will not be coming for him, at least not this night.

Gabriel's insistence that the cat will come for him, his final feeling of sitting in hollow darkness through which "animal cries wailed and mingled with the beats pounding in his throat" (CS, p. 32), emphasize the inevitability of the forces that the cat represents, but it is not clear that Gabriel fully understands his icon. Its

mystery has commanded his awareness and led him to knowledge of human limitation and place in creation, but it may require the final confrontation, the blow of death, for Gabriel to realize his limitations as a judge of life.[7] He has not, then, misvalued his icon so much as he has failed to penetrate the fullness of its mystery, and there is only the shadow of irony.

Ruller's animal icon is the turkey that gives title to his story.[8] Here O'Connor is less concerned with the broad domination an icon can give an entire life than with the development and complexity of a single iconic experience that implies values of potential significance to an entire life. Consequently, the boy, the icon, and the experience all receive more detailed treatment here than in "Wildcat." The boy's relationship to the icon is more clearly ironic, and the irony is made more fully a part of the dialectic of ideas within the story.

That Ruller is a boy who thinks of himself in images, who covets and rehearses the role of cultural strong man, is indicated by the opening lines of the story:

> His guns glinted sun steel in the ribs of the tree and, half aloud through a crack in his mouth he growled, "all right, Mason, this is as far as you go. The jig's up." The six-shooters in Mason's belt stuck out like waiting rattlers but he flipped them into the air and, when they fell at his feet, kicked them behind him like so many dried steer skulls. "You varmit," he muttered, drawing his rope tight around the captures man's ankles, "this is the last rustlin' you'll do." He took three steps backward and leveled one gun to his eye. "Okay," he said with cold, slow precision, "this is . . . ." (CS, p. 42)

Ruller assumes the archetypal role of avenging angel, in the cultural dress of the man of law hunting down the criminal. But the clichéd ultimatum that is meant to spell the end of the bold and arrogant outlaw is completed visually by the appearance of a wounded and trembling turkey. Several ironies are thus immediately introduced by the opening scene. Ruller is engaging ultimate and eternal values on the level of a child's game, image without understanding. The idea of the holy itself is somewhat ironic, as suggested in the facts that the guns of righteousness are imaginary and that, in the gesture of leveling gun to eye, vision is dominated by the instrument of vengeance. And, finally, the image of evil, when it actually appears, is the equivocal, sympathetic shape of a wounded bird.

Ruller's initial response is to absorb the turkey into his fantasy by fusing two culturally iconic images, the successful hunter of food and the successful hunter of men. He continues to direct an imaginary posse while envisioning his homecoming as entering his family's front door with the bird slung over his shoulder and hearing their screams of adulation. And the hunt itself assumes the character of a mythic quest: a variety of trials force Ruller to use both strength and ingenuity and mark him with the wounds of struggle (his arms are scratched; his shirt is ripped). The turkey in effect becomes the grail, the attainment of which will prove he has grasped the primary values of his society and earn him the position of

eminence that attends successful initiation.

Ruller, like many men, confuses the possession of the goal with the attainment of it, and because O'Connor's primary concern is the process through which man touches the eternal, Ruller is forced to confront and experience the implications of his iconic search.[9] Fittingly, this process begins when Ruller has his eyes so firmly fixed on the turkey that he fails to see a tree directly in front of him. His reaction, evasion of his own responsibility through rationalizing that "somebody had played a dirty trick on him" (CS, p. 45), is certainly a sign of his own folly, but, ironically, it is at the same time the beginning of wisdom because it broadens his view and forces his attention beyond his own desires. His first reaction is blasphemy: he amuses himself by mimicking the language of his "bad" brother, Hane, and by imagining the shocked reactions of his family to his new vocabulary and to some crimes he considers committing. But in the process of affronting their morality, he is forced to consider it, and this leads him to God:

> God could go around sticking things in your face and making you chase them all afternoon for nothing.
> You shouldn't think that way about God, though.
> But that was the way he felt. (CS, p. 48)

Immediately upon the heels of this heresy, Ruller finds the turkey lying in a thicket, and in this second confrontation with the icon we see the progress in his awareness. He is more cautious

about pursuit, and he looks more carefully at the turkey itself, discerning that what he noted earlier as simple lameness is actually the result of a gunshot wound. Again, he is tempted by the vision of returning home the conqueror, but his present feeling that the turkey has been "presented" to him forces him to wonder why he has been chosen. Thinking about his bad brother and his constantly quarreling parents, he suddenly feels set apart: "He guessed he was one of the most unusual children ever. Maybe that was why the turkey was there. . . . Maybe it was to keep him from going bad . . . ." By an easy emotional and logical jump, the turkey becomes a sign of election: "[Ruller] wondered if God could think he was a very unusual child. He must . . . . Maybe finding the turkey was a sign. Maybe God wanted him to be a preacher" (CS, p. 49). The icon has enlarged the dimensions of Ruller's reality, but it has not freed him from artificial fantasies. His conception of election is facile, his image of a preacher is Bing Crosby/Spencer Tracy, and his relationship to God is still subordinated to his earlier fantasies:

> Come on boys, he said, we will take this turkey back for our dinner. We certainly are much obliged to You, he said to God. . . .
>
> That's okay, God said. And listen, we ought to have a talk about these boys. They're entirely in your hands, see? I'm leaving the job strictly up to you. (CS, pp. 49-50)

The communion food is still the prize of the hunt, and the disciple is still the sheriff.

Elated by his new partnership with the divine, Ruller decides he wants to do something for God and concludes he will give his last dime to a beggar. This sense of mission guides him through the town and the praise of the townsfolk, which he earlier envisioned as the ultimate triumph but which now is only one element in his more complex sense of well-being. The turkey as emblem of individual power and earned worth to society has become the turkey as sign of individual dependence on and responsibility to divine power, impelling Ruller beyond ego-gratification to service. But the pattern still lacks depth, and Ruller is still plagued by his images; his search for a beggar is for someone selling pencils or playing the accordion in the downtown streets. Pointing up Ruller's blindness are several country boys who follow Ruller as he searches. He is aware of them, but totally unaware of any link between them and the beggar he seeks. He fantasizes briefly about founding a home for tenant children such as these and then immediately prays "Lord, send me a beggar . . . . Send me one before I get home" (CS, p. 51).

Ruller meets his beggar, an old woman in a black cloak, whose face ("the color of a dead chicken's skin") is in grotesque parallel to the turkey he carries, and he thinks God has once again provided. In his happiness he offers the trailing country boys a look at the icon of his new life. They steal it.

Ruller stands transfixed long after he has lost sight of the thief's back with the turkey's head "swinging slowly in a circle

against it"; then, as he moves slowly toward home, he notices the darkness and begins to run faster and faster, "certain that Something Awful was tearing behind him with its arms rigid and its fingers ready to clutch" (CS, p. 53).[10] Ironically, the iconic assurance of God's favor becomes, by its absence, a truer emblem of the mystery and pain of man's coming to salvation. Confusing the icon with the larger reality it symbolizes has led Ruller closer to a sense of that reality. Ruller's feeling of pursuit by demons may be yet another evidence of his over-active imagination, but he is less innocent of the ways of heaven than he was initially and thus potentially closer to a valid response to the divine.

In "Greenleaf," O'Connor again works with the basic structure of a "fallen" character, an iconic animal, and a movement toward redemption. In this later story, however, all three elements are more complex: the central character is an adult with an established view of reality; the animal is initially iconic in a negative, naturalistic sense for the character and a complex pagan-Christian sense for the reader; and the movement toward redemption is more fully worked out.

Like many of O'Connor's women, Mrs. May carries alone the responsibility of running a farm. Her way of handling this, to her, enormous task has been to impose the kind of absolute order that insures mechanical predictability, both in herself and on her farm. She sees her life as a constant war with the forces of disorder,

incarnated in stray animals that root up her crops and breed her cows, and she regards her salvation as her steady attention to duty, her constant hard work. To achieve this concentration on order, she has separated flesh and spirit and denied both through mind; she has made the natural mechanical. Her sons are reflections of this destructive over-balance of mind: Wesley is a disaffected, sickly intellectual, and Scofield is a greedy, conniving "policy man" selling "nigger-insurance."

Polar to Mrs. May and her ordered existence are the Greenleafs. Mr. Greenleaf has been Mrs. May's hired-man for the fifteen years of her pastoral war, but she has kept him only "because she had always doubted she could do better" (CS, p. 313). The Greenleafs are everything she abhors: Mr. Greenleaf is shiftless, evasive, and unconcerned with the sanctity of property; Mrs. Greenleaf is a "large and loose" religious fanatic who spends her time practicing a kind of prayer-healing in the woods while her house and daughters go dirty; the twin Greenleaf sons are impolite, grasping, and mostly a product of government-aid programs, though their success as dairy farmers evokes Mrs. May's grudging admiration.[11]

In spite of these polar life-styles, however, the Greenleafs and Mrs. May have avoided any ultimate clash of values. This is irrevocably changed by the advent of the bull, in which are focused a combination and tension of mythic and naturalistic values that give to the bull both established and developing iconic values.

Viewed naturalistically, through Mrs. May's eyes, the unpenned scrub bull is a threat to the purity and timing (i.e., to the order) of her breeding schedule. But because order is the basic, all-embracing value in Mrs. May's world, a challenge to order becomes not just a limited problem but an attack on the sacred, and the bull becomes not just a literal destroyer but the embodiment of the natural freedom that is the satanic force undermining her Eden. The bull becomes, in effect, a negative icon, and its mysterious dimensions are emphasized in the visionary ways in which it appears to Mrs. May.

Beyond Mrs. May's perception, to be considered shortly, the story offers two other views of the bull, each of which focuses on one of the dimensions of Mrs. May's perception. Mr. Greenleaf sees the bull as simply a normal creature behaving naturally, and admires his vitality and urge to freedom: "'He likes to bust loose,' Mr. Greenleaf said, looking with approval at the bull's rump. 'This gentleman is a sport'" (CS, p. 323). The reader, by apparent contrast, is invited to view the bull as a mythic echo of pagan and Christian divinity. The story begins with an almost visionary presentation of the bull:

> Mrs. May's bedroom window was low and faced on the east and the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood under it, his head raised as if he listened--like some patient god come down to woo her--for a stir inside the room . . . . Clouds crossing the moon blackened him and in the dark he began to tear at the hedge. Presently they passed and he appeared again in the same spot, chewing steadily,

> with a hedge-wreath that he had ripped loose for himself caught in the tips of his horns. (CS, p. 311)

Mrs. May, awakened by a nightmarish amplification of the chewing, looks out of her window and orders the bull away. He eventually leaves, but before moving off, he "lowered his head and shook it and the wreath slipped down to the base of his horns where it looked like a menacing prickly crown" (CS, p. 312). The bull is thus presented clearly on both naturalistic and symbolic levels as a dual force, creator-savior and destroyer. But Mrs. May's repression of the natural and vital in herself allows her to see only the destructive, and the iconic value she assigns the bull is only an image of her failure to perceive the truth signed by the true icon.

The bull appears twice more to Mrs. May; each experience is visionary, and each enlarges the dimension of the one before. Like Peter, she is allowed three chances to affirm salvation, and like Peter, she ironically perceives her salvation as dependent on denial. The parallel is broken, however, in the final vision, when the iconic object forces Mrs. May to revelation, providing one of the most distinctive and satisfying examples of naturalistic and iconographic interaction in O'Connor's short fiction.

The bull's second appearance to Mrs. May is preceded by a dream:

> Half the night in her sleep she heard a sound as if some large stone were grinding a hole on the outside wall of her brain. She was walking on the inside, over a succession of beautiful rolling hills, planting her stick

> in front of each step. She became aware after a time that the noise was the sun trying to burn through the tree line and she stopped to watch, safe in the knowledge that it couldn't, that it had to sink the way it always did outside of her property. When she first stopped it was a swollen red ball, but as she stood watching it began to narrow and pale until it looked like a bullet. Then suddenly it burst through the tree line and raced down the hill toward her. She woke up with her hand over her mouth and the same noise, diminished but distinct, in her ear. It was the bull munching under her window. (CS, p. 329)

Earlier, Mrs. May had had a fleeting illusion of the bull as the shadow of the sun moving among her cattle. The bull, like the sun, is a primal, procreative force, and the magnitude of Mrs. May's rejection of the bull is signified by the connection of bull with sun;[12] one icon is being used to illuminate another, and the combination increases the irony of Mrs. May's blindness in confusing the creative with the destructive. (Because the sun is here primarily a reader icon and the bull a character icon, the interaction of the two forces the kind of interaction of reader with story that would be gratifying to O'Connor's didactic impulse.)

Determined to destroy the destroyer, Mrs. May forces Mr. Greenleaf to hunt down the bull and shoot it, and in so doing, she precipitates her own destruction and rebirth in a final, apocalyptic encounter with the bull. Sitting on the bumper of her car in the center of a pasture surrounded by trees (a spot identical to the one from which Greenleaf has just chased the bull, making her position there a visual emblem of her attempt to supplant the vigor of nature with her own mechanical will), she drowses in the white-

hot sun, thinking back over her life, satisfied that she will be able to argue well for herself at the Last Judgment. She is waiting for Greenleaf to return with the report that he has killed the bull; she sees instead the bull emerging like a shadow from the tree line, and meets him in a final visionary experience that is the incarnation of her earlier dream:

> She looked back and saw that the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her. She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in a freezing unbelief. She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was, and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip. She continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front of her had changed--the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky--and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable. (CS, p. 333)

Mr. Greenleaf shoots the bull, and Mrs. May and her iconic enemy lie in an embrace of death; as the bull sinks, it pulls her forward until she seems to be "bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal's ear" (CS, p. 334).

Because this story so clearly ascribes iconic significance to the bull, most critics who consider it attempt to identify those values or structures touched to remembrance by his image. Asals is reminded of Dionysus discovering, waking, and wedding Ariadne, as well as of the sacred bulls of spring fertility rites and of the erotic allegory of the animal bridegroom in the second chapter of

The Song of Songs. Burns, Van de Kieft, Carlson, Eggenschwiler, and Driskell and Brittain also emphasize the blending of pagan fertility rites and the Passion of Christ, though they vary somewhat in their perceptions of how the elements are balanced. Muller, somewhat more narrowly, sees the sacred forces of nature imaged in the bull, finding in the last scene "a penetration that is explicitly sexual" and that pictures a reconciliation of the opposition of male and female forces.[13]

The variety of identifiable referents suggests the iconic richness of the bull, and the variations in emphasis suggest the degree to which the iconic often defies the kind of precise definition possible with simple symbols. What is firm, however, is the transcendent value of natural wholeness of body and spirit affirmed by paganism and Christianity and denied by Mrs. May with such strong defenses that the action of grace must destroy her to destroy them.[14] And the configuration of the destruction combines the patterns of classical tragedy and Christian redemption in a kind of reverberating irony: Mrs. May is made the instrument of her own destruction, and at the same time she becomes her own Christ, wounded for her own transgressions. As icon, the bull sets in relief the fatal flaw of pride that separates Mrs. May and all like her from the natural and the divine, serves as the instrument of divine retribution, and becomes itself fully realized as savior, dying for her sins and thus assuming the fused pagan-Christian role of scapegoat/Christ.[15] The initial irony, seeking salvation of the farm through destruction

of the bull, is resolved in the more radical irony of Christianity itself, that fallen man must lose his life to save it.

Accompanying the full development of the iconic object in "Greenleaf" are suggestions of the iconic structures that O'Connor develops more fully in other short fiction and in the novels. The use of the pasture surrounded by trees, in the midst of which Mrs. May awaits the triumph of her fallen nature and experiences instead its regeneration, suggests Eden and the universal pattern of original sin and salvation (a point discussed earlier in this chapter). The echoes of Peter's denial and of Christ's crucifixion are fragments of the iconic structure of the Passion. And the attacks on Mrs. May's kingdom by the "heathen" suggest the Old Testament pattern of Israel's suffering at the hands of her enemies, a pattern that becomes iconic in its repeated demonstration of the working-out of divine retribution or salvation through natural means. None of these is fully enough developed to constitute a genuine iconic structure within the story, but their fragmented flashes contribute effectively to the dimension of mystery in which the meaning lies.

In "Greenleaf," O'Connor chose an object already endowed with positive iconic significance in a pre-Christian form, and used that prior significance as a ready-made referent against which to measure Mrs. May's attitudes. In "Revelation," something of the opposite happens. The iconic animal here is the pig, an animal the Old

Testament designates as unclean and the New Testament selects to receive devils exorcised from a possessed man, but one the Turpins see as evidence of the clean, productive, ordered existence they lead. The pigs do not dominate "Revelation" in the comprehensive way the bull does "Greenleaf," nor are they the primary stimulus to awareness, but they do function in a central and even more purely iconic (i.e., less naturalistic) way than does the bull.

Mrs. Turpin believes she lives in an absolutely ordered world, one in which values are clear and her own position superior, and one through which she moves according to clearly defined formulas of action and conversation. She prides herself on her cheerful disposition (a sign of superiority) and often reflects on her good fortune, giving pharisaic thanks to God that he did not choose to make her as other men.[16] As she sits in the doctor's waiting room among a broad range of social types, we are treated to a demonstration of this kind of self-congratulatory humility:

> Her heart rose. [Jesus] had not made her a nigger or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you thank you thank you! Whenever she counted her blessings she felt as buoyant as if she weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds instead of one hundred and eighty. (CS, p. 497)

Mrs. Turpin's compactly ordered view of the world is pointed up in her attitude toward the hogs on their farm, and O'Connor begins early in the story to develop and criticize Mrs. Turpin's character through expanding the significance of the image of the hog. There is

no indication that Mrs. Turpin sees the hogs themselves as sacred, but her description of them does center on the values that her earlier conversation makes clear are basic to her existence: cleanliness and order. When the white-trash woman in the waiting room describes hogs as "[n]asty stinking things, a-gruntin and a-rootin all over the place,'" Mrs. Turpin feels impelled to insist that her hogs exist on a higher plane:

> "Our hogs are not dirty and they don't stink," she said. "They're cleaner than some children I've seen. Their feet never touch the ground. We have a pig-parlor--that's where you raise them on concrete," she explained. . ., "and Claud scoots them down with the hose every afternoon and washes off the floor." Cleaner by far than that child right there, she thought. Poor nasty little thing. (CS, p. 493)

Because the hogs are cleaner than the white-trash child, to Mrs. Turpin they are somehow also better; she speaks of them in a tone of approval that contrasts sharply with the catalogue of inferiorities she has just compiled on the other people in the waiting room. Mrs. Turpin is not without charity; she would clean up dirty people as her Claud cleans up pigs, but people have shown themselves persistently unregenerate in their resistance to cleansing:

> . . . it was not just that they didn't have anything. Because if you gave them everything, in two weeks it would all be broken or filthy or they would have chopped it up for lightwood. She knew all this from her own experience. Help them you must, but help them you couldn't. (CS, p. 497)

One of the non-elect in the waiting-room society is Mary Grace, a fat, ugly, intellectual girl reading a book entitled Human Development. Compounding Mary Grace's physical misfortunes, in Mrs. Turpin's

eyes, is a surly disposition; the girl rudely resists Mrs. Turpin's formulaic kindnesses and indicates clearly her disgust at Mrs. Turpin's mindless, self-congratulating conversation. Mary Grace is, in short, not someone from whom Mrs. Turpin would expect to learn anything, but when the girl's irritation breaks into violence and she attacks Mrs. Turpin, she becomes the impetus to revelation. With Mary Grace's fingers at her throat, Mrs. Turpin's

> . . . vision narrowed and she saw everything as if it were happening in a small room far away, or as if she were looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope. . . . The girl fell with a thud and Mrs. Turpin's vision suddenly reversed itself and she saw everything large instead of small. (CS, p. 499)

Appalled as she is, Mrs. Turpin is also drawn toward Mary Grace:

> There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, knew her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting, as for a revelation.
>
> The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked with Mrs. Turpin's. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," she whispered. (CS, p. 500)

The good woman and cleanser of hogs has been branded an evil and grotesque kind of hog by a hog-like girl to whom she had considered herself superior, and the reversal in vision continues to haunt her long after she has returned to the ordered world of the farm. When she lies down to rest, ". . . the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snort[s] into her head." Her protest that she is not this kind of creature

merely brings as response the memory of the girl's eyes and voice:

> The girl's eyes and her words, even the tone of her voice, low but clear, directed only to her, brooked no repudiation. She had been singled out for the message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now. There was a woman there who was neglecting her own child but she had been over-looked. The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman. (CS, p. 502)

Unable to exorcise the memory, Mrs. Turpin squares her shoulders and heads for the pig parlor with "the look of a woman going single-handed, weaponless, into battle" (CS, p. 505). Taking the hose from Claud, she begins to wash the pigs, but she is so preoccupied with the message that she handles the hose blindly, now hitting an old sow in the eye, now shaking the hose so that "a watery snake appeared momentarily in the air" (CS, p. 507). At the same time, with better aim but equal blindness she directs at God a rising frenzy of questions and assertions, beginning with "Why me?" and culminating in a final furious "Who do you think you are?" The question carries over the crimson-suffused landscape and returns to her "clearly like an answer from beyond the wood" (CS, p. 508), and she stands for some minutes speechless. Then she bends her head slowly and looks

> . . . as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life.
>
> Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree-line,

> Mrs. Turpin remained there with her gaze bent to them as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. (CS, p. 508)

And when she lifts her eyes from their narrowed focus on the pigs, she sees on the last ray of the setting sun a vast horde of souls moving toward heaven:

> There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right . . . . They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away. (CS, p. 508)

The iconography here is simple in form but somewhat complex in usage. In choosing pigs as the animals around which a religious experience is to build, O'Connor is certainly aware, as are her readers, of the already-existing Biblical associations noted earlier in this discussion. Mrs. Turpin's image of her pigs as embodiments of the cleanliness and order that characterize her life combines, then, with pre-existent connotations in the image itself to emphasize her partial view, her confusion of surface with substance and her belief that man can order and purify his own existence. At this point, however, Mrs. Turpin doesn't attach very central importance to the hogs, and they are not consciously iconic for her, though their Biblical connotations make them more nearly so

for the reader. And Mrs. Turpin's conscious ranking of the white trash below her hogs insures that the final vision of white trash marching before her to heaven will be traumatic.

Mary Grace's verbal branding of Mrs. Turpin as an old wart hog from hell forces into Mrs. Turpin's consciousness a negative inversion of clean pigs in a concrete "parlor," ironically pushing the image of the pig closer to the iconic and devaluing it at the same time. When Mrs. Turpin goes to the pig parlor, it is for the purpose of revelation, of confronting the object in the hope of penetrating the mystery it has come to represent. She is, however, still blind, as her handling of the cleansing hose suggests, and it is not until the final question turns on the questioner--until she realizes it is her place in the scheme of life that needs examining--that she is able to see the hogs not as objects to be cleansed but as living things, sufficient to themselves, acceptable as they are, covered like all nature in the red glow of the divine sun that earlier seemed to look over the trees "like a farmer inspecting his own hogs" (CS, p. 507). Once Mrs. Turpin has understood the lesson on the most basic level, she is ready for the larger vision of the company of human souls.

Through a confluence of Biblical suggestion, natural characteristics, and metaphor, the significance of Mrs. Turpin's hogs expands from literal through symbolic to iconic, carrying her from separation to the awareness of union with other men and with God.

Although O'Connor seems to have found the sun and animals the most richly iconic natural objects, in "The River" and "A View of the Woods" she uses other natural objects to carry iconic values and provide ironic commentary. In each of the stories, the two characters view the icon differently and the tension or dialectic between the views contributes to the irony and thus to the meaning.

"The River" is about the salvation of Bevel (Harry) Ashfield, a five-year-old child who seeks a true home in the river of life and finds salvation through drowning. His parents are, as their name suggests, wasteland figures who divide their time between parties and hangovers, leaving their son either alone or with sitters. It is one of these sitters, Mrs. Connin, who leads Bevel to his salvation when she takes him to see and hear a revivalist preacher who is baptizing in the river. Mrs. Connin herself is, like many of O'Connor's guides, somewhat rigid and unaware of the full import of her actions, but she leads Bevel on something of a mythic journey, at the end of which he does find salvation. She gathers him from his home in the early morning, carries him far away through a changing landscape to a very different world, in which he is tricked by other children, sees an iconic picture of a haloed man practicing carpentry as children watch, is chased by hogs, learns that he was made not by a fat doctor but by a carpenter named Christ, is given a book of Bible stories, and is baptized in the river. When Mrs. Connin returns him to his parents at night, the encounter serves

only to emphasize his alienation, and the next morning, after symbolically rubbing ashes into the rug, he leaves the wasteland of home, goes to the river, and walks in.

Bevel's fascination with the river comes from the preacher's incantative evocation of the river as the road to the kingdom of God, where one can find love, security, and release from pain. To the preacher himself, the river is clearly only symbolic:

> "If it's this river of Life you want to lay your pain in, then come up," the preacher said, "and lay your sorrow here. But don't be thinking this is the last of it because this old red river don't end here. This old red suffering stream goes on, you people, slow to the Kingdom of Christ. This old red river is good to Baptize in, good to lay your faith in, but it ain't this muddy water here that saves you." (CS, p. 166)

For those who do touch God through it, the river becomes, at most, actively iconic. To Bevel, however, the river is the real road to a promised land, and he decides to travel it: "He intended not to fool with preachers any more but to Baptize himself and to keep on going this time until he found the Kingdom of Christ in the river" (CS, p. 173). At first, his natural reflexes keep him from drowning and he reacts with bitter disappointment, splashing and kicking "the filthy river." But he hears a shout and sees "something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting" (CS, p. 174). This apparition is really Mr. Paradise, a man who was also present as a Satanic heckler at the earlier revival service, his cancerous face a kind of platonic emblem of his diseased

soul. He alone has seen Bevel heading toward the river and seeks to tempt him back with a candy cane; when Bevel sees and rejects this worldly salvation, when his flight to the security of God becomes clearly a rejection of evil as well, the river accepts him, catching him gently and pulling him swiftly forward and down. The clear suggestion here is that Bevel is better drowned in a movement toward God than saved by a return to the world, flesh, and devil.[18]

For the adults on the periphery of Bevel's experience, the river is an icon, meaningful to those whose faith can carry them into the River of divine mercy and allow them to receive healing through the symbolic waters of the actual river, ironic to those like Mr. Paradise who see in its failure to heal through its own power evidence of its basic inadequacy. The real irony of the icon for these latter, however, is that their perception of its failure is a reflection of their own. Bevel's perception of the icon is also ironic, but in a different sense. He fails to distinguish between the icon and its referent, and the failure costs him his life. But this irony is canceled out by that radical Christian irony that often one may save his spiritual life only by losing his earthly; and since Bevel is not yet of an age where he can be conscious of suicide as sin, his drowning can be seen as the happy triumph of his instinct toward salvation.[19] More fully even than Mrs. May, Bevel penetrates the surface of the iconic and grasps the mystery it symbolizes.

In "A View from the Woods" the iconic object is closer to the sacred principle itself, but the relationship of the central character to the icon remains more distanced, more finally ironic, than does Bevel's to the river. O'Connor once again works with the structure of a field bordered by woods, but here the woods themselves are of more than peripheral significance, and a reading of this story explores fully the significance of this configuration implied by its use in other stories. As in "The River," understanding of the nature and dimensions of the icon is generated through the contrasting views characters hold of it, but understanding remains on this level; there is no physical interaction with the icon as there was in "Greenleaf" and "The River."

The two central characters who struggle to define the icon, and thus the sacred, are closely linked, and the conflict itself becomes a kind of psychomachia. Mr. Fortune and his nine-year-old granddaughter, Mary Fortune Pitts, resemble one another in physical appearance, temperament, and (seemingly) interests. It was he who suggested her name (the name of his mother, who had died at his birth), and it is to her he plans to leave his estate, scorning the rest of the Pitts family as unworthy. Both Mary and her grandfather have been spending their mornings watching an earth-mover gouge out a pasture Mr. Fortune sold to a developer to make a lakeside fishing club. (The lake itself is the result of flooding caused by a new power-company dam, and the redness of the water makes the lake seem

as much of a wound in the land as the hole being dug beside it.) Bordering the pasture are woods, but Mr. Fortune seems barely conscious of them; his god is progress and he sees land solely in terms of its potential for development. The reader, however, is immediately alerted to the significance of the woods by authorial description:

> The red corrugated lake eased up to within fifty feet of the construction and was bordered on the other side by a black line of woods which appeared at both ends of the view to walk across the water and continue along the edge of the fields. (CS, p. 355)

And the progression of the story shows that Mary, who seems as fascinated as her grandfather by the mechanical monster that is eating away the earth, is actually more concerned with guarding from destruction the land that remains. What seems to her grandfather to be evidence of Mary's hard business sense, her anger at the bulldozer for getting too close to their land, is placed in a different light by her later reactions to the woods themselves, and she is shown to be less a child of progress than a child of the earth.

The open conflict between Mary and her grandfather is precipitated by his sale of the "lawn" directly in front of their house to a man who intends to build a gas station on it. For Mr. Fortune, this promises the fulfillment of a dream; he has long wanted a gas station nearby, both for convenience and as a tangible, visible sign of his god, progress. He is both unsurprised by and unconcerned with

the reaction of his daughter and her husband, since they are predictably ignorant and intractable, but he is shocked and dismayed when Mary fails to share his enthusiasm. She objects that the lawn is the family's source of recreation ("'That's where we play'") and livelihood ("'My daddy grazes his calves on that lot'"), and that, even more importantly, the open lawn allows them a view of the woods. The breadth of the implications of Mr. Fortune's decision is thus made explicit, and, as though to reinforce and expand the dimensions, Mary and Mr. Fortune begin to argue in Biblically allusive terms:

> "He who calls his brother a fool is subject to hell fire," she said.
>
> "Jedge not," he shouted, "lest ye be not jedged!"
>
> . . .
>
> Then the old man said, "Walk home by yourself. I refuse to ride a Jezebel!"
>
> "And I refuse to ride with the Whore of Babylon," she said . . . . (CS, pp. 342-343)

Though their language suggests a subconscious perception of the real dimensions of their struggle, Mr. Fortune chooses to see the issue as one of conflict between Pitts and Fortune genes and consoles himself with the vision that ". . . in five years, instead of woods, there would be houses and stores and parking places, and that the credit for it could go largely to him" (CS, p. 343).

Through a confluence of details, O'Connor is clearly suggesting here the iconic nature of the woods and indicting Mr. Fortune for his failure to perceive that nature. The Biblical phrases, all apocalyptic

in implication, the earlier image of the woods marching Christ-like across the lake, the clear suggestion of Mr. Fortune's excessive pride in destroying the woods to create a "new earth" for which he will receive the credit, and the rejection of him by a child who has seemed an extension of himself combine to make clear that in violating the woods he is violating in some way the whole order of existence. But because Mr. Fortune is blind to his proper place in that order, to man's need for an awareness of nature both in itself and as a reminder of man's own limits, beyond which is the immeasurable, unfathomable sky, he cannot perceive the iconic. Ironically, he makes of the holy simply a trivial obstacle to be removed, elevating in its place the monuments of progress that will bring the horizon under his control and blot out man's view of his own natural limits and the mystery beyond. On the afternoon of his death, he is given an opportunity to see the significance of the woods. Looking out of the window of his room, he has a vision of the woods

> . . . raised in a pool of red light that gushed from the almost hidden sun setting behind them. The old man stared for some time, as if for a prolonged instant he were caught up out of the rattle of everything that led to the future and were held there in the midst of an uncomfortable mystery that he had not apprehended before. He saw it, in his hallucination, as if someone were wounded behind the woods and the trees were bathed in blood. (CS, p. 348)

But he fails to understand the vision, seeing it as hellish, and rejects the warning, along with its implicit suggestion of the way to salvation.[20]

The struggle between the two adversaries is elemental in its

source, its persistence, and its fury, and it culminates apocalyptically. Intent on enforcing Mary's submission, Mr. Fortune decides to whip her, even though the practice, and Mary's submission to it, is something Mr. Fortune has deplored as a sign of Pitts's depravity. He takes her to the woods, to "an ugly red bald spot surrounded by long, thin pines that appeared to be gathered there to witness anything that would take place in such a clearing" (CS, p. 355), and orders her to stand next to an unavoidably symbolic tree to receive the beating. But what Mary has accepted from her father (while steadily denying that it ever happens) she refuses from her grandfather, and she attacks, seeming to come from everywhere at once, like "a pack of small demons," animal-like, but bearing Mr. Fortune's own likeness ("He seemed to see his own face coming to bite him from several sides at once . . ." [CS, p. 355]). She wins momentarily, but when she pauses to assert the triumph of Pitts over Fortune, he reverses their positions and smashes her head three times against a rock, killing her. As he rolls over, exhausted, he looks up into the trees and feels his heart expand

> so fast that [he] felt as if he were being pulled after it into the woods, felt as if he were running as fast as he could with the ugly pines toward the lake. He perceived that there would be a little opening there, a little place where he could escape and leave the woods behind him. He could see it in the distance already, a little opening where the white sky was reflected in the water. It grew as he ran toward it until suddenly the whole lake opened up before him, riding majestically in little corrugated folds toward his feet. He realized suddenly that he could not swim and that he had not bought the boat. On

> both sides of him he saw that the gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance. He looked around desperately for someone to help him but the place was deserted except for one huge yellow monster which sat to the side, as stationary as he was, gorging itself on clay. (CS, p. 356)

Mr. Fortune has tried to possess the sky by ignoring the woods; he has tried to substitute his own design for the divinely ordained plan of which nature is the iconic representation and in so doing has become his own destroyer, as the murder of his look-alike granddaughter dramatizes.[21] Following an iconic design of the sort we will presently examine more fully, he has become the crucifier and denier of Christ. Like the Jews and Romans, he has killed what threatened the prevailing values and practices of society, and like Peter, he has denied his personal commitment to the very person whose vision offered him salvation. And the woods, in their naturally and Biblically iconic dimensions, have served both literally and symbolically as the focus for the irony of his confusion of self-betrayal with salvation. He has, in that classic Christian pattern of many of O'Connor's characters, been forced through his own actions to the revelation of his own depravity and, implicit in the vision of destruction, an image of potential redemption, bought at great cost.

Because nature, in O'Connor's theology, was so immediate and universal a form of God's power made tangible to man, it served her as an especially rich source of icons around which to play the ironies of fallen man. But she also saw and understood man's

tendency to make icons out of his own created objects and thus to deceive himself through the irony of inflating the trivial as well as that of deflating the truly sacred. In general, these icons are used in more restricted ways, but many are still of central significance to their respective stories, and their uses are as varied as those of natural icons.

In both "The Comforts of Home" and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," houses are seen as iconic, but the significance to total action is less central in "A Good Man" than in "The Comforts of Home." In "A Good Man," to be discussed more fully in terms of its use of people as icons, the grandmother leads her family astray looking for an antebellum Southern mansion. Having visited it as a young lady, she remembers it as a kind of paradise, stately, surrounded with gardens, and filled with a life of old elegance. In the context of her earlier insistence on dressing like a lady and observing proper forms of behavior, and on her fond memories of courtship and of the gentleman she might have married, her urge to visit the house must be seen as more than simple curiosity. But her family does not share her interest, and her son refuses to turn back and leave the main highway to find the house. In order to get her way, then, she perverts the image of the house, consciously appealing to the greed of her two grand-children with the lie that there are secret panels behind which the family silver was hidden from Sherman. She is a "lady," but she will use her obnoxious

grand-children to get a view of the house, and her descriptions of the beauty of the house are counterpointeg by her grandson's talk of plunder.

Throughout this story there is an undercurrent of commentary on Southern history and mores that is seen only infrequently in O'Connor,[22] and the grandmother's memory-mansion functions as a kind of cultural icon. In her willingness to subordinate the values of grace, beauty, and dignity supposedly represented by the mansion to simply get to it, she suggests a larger pattern of hypocrisy in which the way of life epitomized by those mansions was built on greed and intimidation. The way of life the mansion seemed to epitomize could in fact be subverted to gain the mansion, and the South's homage to its traditional past was essentially a blind commitment to surfaces. The grandmother's behavior is ironic in its violation of the very values symbolized by the icon it seeks to possess, but this irony is compounded by the further irony that what seems a denial of the truly sacred is actually a revelation of the radical irony in the sacred itself. It is fitting that the mansion is a mental mirage (it's in another state), that the search for it has led the family astray, and that the accident that results from the grandmother's sudden awareness of her mistake leads them all to a fatal encounter with the criminal product of a distorted society. It is also fitting that the romantic past (the mansion) and the decayed present (Red Sammy's/The Tower) be confronted in their

emptiness before the question of what a good man really is can be confronted. The icon of the falsely sacred is explored dialectically and then shown to be simply not there.

"The Comforts of Home" offers a house as a purely personal icon with implications of universality on a psychological rather than a cultural level. Thomas has made of his home a kind of sacred place, and when his mother charitably brings home a young nymphomaniac who has run afoul of the authorities, Thomas is outraged: "His home was to him home, workshop, church, as personal as the shell of a turtle and as necessary. He could not believe that it could be violated in this way. His flushed face had a constant look of stunned outrage" (CS, p. 395). When he finds that the girl, Sarah Ham, has been in his study and stolen a gun, he is appalled:

> He cared nothing about the gun, but the thought of Sarah Ham's hands sliding among his papers infuriated him. Now even his study was contaminated. The only place left untouched was his bedroom.
>
> That night she entered it. (CS, p. 398)

The values Thomas's home has preserved for him are the values by which he runs his life. The rooms parallel the organized, orderly boundaries of a life that is controlled and non-threatening because it has defined and classified everything; the shelter of the house itself, run for him as it is by his mother, is a protective womb that allows him to indulge the passivity born of the inherited blend of ". . . his father's reason without his ruthlessness and his

mother's love of good without her tendency to pursue it" (CS, p. 388). But the very guardian of his peace is also its destroyer; his mother's excess of virtue has brought into his home, and therefore into his ordered world, a quantity that defies classification and forces him to cope with the inadequacy of classification as a means of controlling human intercourse. The girl has two names, one out of Hollywood (Star Drake) and one out of the Bible (Sarah Ham), refuses to stay in her own territory, and seemingly earns the sympathy of the virtuous by departing from virtue. And in his anger at her, Thomas finds himself confronting aspects of his own nature that trouble him; a liberal intellectual, he is drawn more and more toward the deceitful and ruthless qualities of his father, finally sinking to the moral depths of enlisting the help of the corrupt sheriff in trying to frame the girl. But the plan goes awry, and when Thomas fires the gun, hoping the sound would ". . . shatter the laughter of sluts until all shrieks were stilled and nothing was left to disturb the peace of perfect order" (CS, pp. 403-404), he kills instead his mother, leaving the entering sheriff with an image of ". . . the killer and the slut . . . about to collapse into each other's arms" (CS, p. 404).

In making his home an image of the sacred, Thomas has sought to extend the temporary protection the house offers a child until he is strong enough to confront life into a permanent substitute for life. By enlarging the significance of the house too greatly, he has revealed

its weakness; in seeking too avidly to preserve purity, he has walked into the corruption within himself and destroyed the temple he wished to cleanse. In an irony prefigured in the name Sarah Ham, Thomas has tried to kill the outcast violater of social taboos and finds that he has killed his mother.[23]

Equally misled, but less brutally enlightened, is Shiftlet in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own." His iconic subject is a car, and like Mr. Fortune, he sacrifices all to gain and keep it. An itinerant who seems to have tried everything, Shiftlet epitomizes his values in his icon: "'The body, lady, is like a house: it don't go anywhere; but the spirit, lady, is like a automobile: always on the move, always . . .'" (CS, p. 152). From the first minute of his arrival on the Crater farm, Shiftlet's attention has been focused on the rusted back of an automobile he seeks sticking out of a shed, and his stay on the farm becomes a game between him and Mrs. Crater in which the car defines and is defined by the intentions of the two. O'Connor is again using double focus on an icon to articulate her fictional vision.

For Mrs. Crater, the car seems to be a male symbol ("'The day my husband died it quit running'" [CS, p. 146]), and she uses her control over it to try to tie Shiftlet to the farm and to her retarded daughter, Lucynell. She doles out money and permission for repairs in return for commitments on Shiftlet's part, and the painting of the car and the marriage of Shiftlet and Lucynell

occur almost simultaneously.

With the marriage, Mrs. Crater believes she has won twice over, finding a man for the farm and a husband for her daughter, but she is deceived through her ignorance of the iconic value of the car to Shiftlet. She has not really understood the import of his analogy between the car and man's restless spirit; she has not comprehended the significance of Shiftlet's "resurrection" of the car or his use of it as a home while on the farm; she has failed to realize that once she has "rewarded" his commitment by giving him the car, she has ironically eliminated the necessity of the commitment and given him the means of escaping it. To Shiftlet, the car is a mechanical means of facilitating man's freedom of spirit, and since "'a man's spirit means more to him than anything else'" (CS, p. 153), the car is worth any sacrifice. The initial irony, then, lies in Mrs. Crater's using as a means to an end something that is actually greater than the end itself; what she thinks she controls actually controls her.

In one of O'Connor's compounding ironies, however, the icon proves ironic for Shiftlet as well. His failure seems to stem from a confusion of physical mobility with spiritual freedom. He has turned a negative pattern of escape from disappointing situations into a positive principle for finding meaning, a principle that has been unnaturally heightened through the subordination of all other values to it. He feels, for example, that "a man with a car had a responsibility to others" (CS, p. 155, my italics). The principle

itself is given concrete reference in the car and Shiftlet's response to it; the hollowness and implicit irony of the principle are given their own referent in Lucynell. Her golden hair and simple, innocent expression move a restaurant counter-man to murmur "'She looks like an angel of Gawd'" (CS, p. 154), and throughout the story, her actions and postures are tinged with religious symbolism (she looks at Shiftlet through a triangular space in her hair, learns the word "bird," sits on a rock watching Shiftlet resurrect the car). After he abandons her in a diner on their wedding afternoon, the reddening ball of the sun begins to set directly in front of the car, as if in warning.

In substitute communion and with a sense of human responsibility ironically born of the very car he has just used Lucynell to buy, he picks up a young boy. To make conversation, he begins to talk about his mother, describing her, in an echo of the counter-man, as "'a angel of Gawd,'" and repenting of having run away from her. His passenger snarls "'My old woman is a flea bag and yours is a stinking pole cat!'" and flings himself from the car. Shiftlet is shocked, but the devaluation in the boy's language is no greater than the devaluation in Shiftlet's behavior. The sense of human responsibility engendered by the car has ironically brought awareness of the very absence of such responsibility: the image of Lucynell, the "price" of the car and freedom, has fused with the image of his mother to demonstrate that he has been "escaping" in a circle and

that the most tangible "evidence" of freedom has been the most persistent assertion of entrapment.

Both Mrs. Crater and Shiftlet have seen in the car some key to the nature of man, and the irony of the icon, as well as the interaction of the visions, has revealed the inadequacy of both. We do not see Mrs. Crater confront her revelation, and it is difficult to tell whether Shiftlet fully comprehends his, but it is possible that Shiftlet will not outrun the cleansing shower that threatens in the story's closing scene and that he will instead find himself included in the answer to his own prayer: "'O Lord! . . . Break forth and wash the slime from this earth!'" (CS, p. 156).[24]

Judgment comes more certainly to the intellectual Hulga-Joy in "Good Country People," and O'Connor advances her fictional design through the same kind of interaction between two icons and dual views of each icon. Hulga-Joy is a PhD in philosophy, with a wooden leg, and she has managed to make her principles a deformity and her deformity a principle. She is one of those O'Connor intellectuals who have elevated their own brilliance into a substitute for true knowledge of divine truth and have thus made of themselves complete fools. Her alienation from the sources of genuine life is symbolized in her weak heart and articulated in her contempt for the blind acceptance of old views of reality held by the "good country people" who surround her. In her contempt for the smiling view of life as meaningful, she has changed her name from Joy to

Hulga, chosen because of its ugly sound but retained and cherished because it conjures visions of "the ugly sweating Vulcan who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called" (CS, p. 275). The changing of Joy into this grotesque image is, to Hulga, her highest creative act.

In physical correspondence to this perversion of identity, she has made of her wooden leg (the result of a hunting accident when she was ten) a sacred object: "she was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away" (CS, p. 288). She uses her icon to advance her philosophy, emphasizing the absence implied by its presence as a way of asserting that she doesn't "'have illusions'" but is one of those clear-sighted people who have looked through reality and "'see[n] that there's nothing to see'" (CS, pp. 287-288). Already, however, she has betrayed her own philosophy by assigning sacred value to something while insisting there is nothing to hold on to. She sees only the surface of her icon, and in failing to penetrate that surface to see the radical irony beneath, she is as blind in her way as the good country simpletons she scorns. The very form of her denial is testimony to her need for the sacred, for its transcendent yet tangible truths.

Revelation comes through another character bearing his own ironic icon, a young country boy selling Bibles, with the ominous

name of Manley Pointer. As the avenging arm of the nihilistic, Hulga sees the boy's innocence as the epitome of all she regards as blindness, and, with a missionary zeal that is also ironic in a disciple of the meaningless, she envisions "saving" him through conversations that would reach "to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of" (CS, p. 283) and through seduction, after which she would take his inevitable remorse and "change[] it into a deeper understanding of life" (CS, p. 284). The seduction does indeed take place, but Hulga's false sense of superiority blinds her to the real direction of the seduction. With persistent innocence, Pointer seduces Hulga into yielding her kisses, her glasses, and her wooden leg, and in so doing, he symbolically crosses physical, philosophical, and spiritual boundaries to penetrate the very center of her existence. When she surrenders the leg (her soul), she feels lost, totally dependent on him and out of touch with her own source of strength, her mind.

Having received Hulga's offerings, Pointer presents some of his own. Opening his sample case, which he has strangely insisted on bringing into the hayloft with them, he reveals only two Bibles. One is apparently genuine, but the other is hollow; its contents, which he lays in front of Hulga "like one presenting offerings at the shrine of a goddess" (CS, p. 289), are a bottle of whiskey, a deck of pornographic cards, and a box of condoms, the last of which he places directly in Hulga's hand. Objects symbolic of escape,

perversion, and sterility are offered in tribute to the goddess of nothingness, and Hulga finds her desire, in surrendering her leg, to "los[e] her own life and find[] it again . . . in his" (CS, p. 289) has been ironically fulfilled. Manley Pointer is, as John May has suggested, a magus, presenting gifts the degradation of which is a tribute to the heinousness of her pretensions.[25]

When the seduction thus threatens to become real and not a game played to demonstrate a philosophical thesis, Hulga attacks Pointer for not being the very thing she sought to destroy, a Christian. Finding that his goddess of the nihilistic is a false idol, he steals her leg (as he had earlier stolen a woman's glass eye). Hulga has a final momentary vision of it "slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends" (CS, p. 290), and moments later she has a blurred vision of Pointer's figure "struggling successfully" over what seems to be a "green speckled lake" (CS, p. 291). As her final image suggests, Pointer has served as a kind of parodic Christ, showing Hulga the truth of her existence. He is the only kind of savior possible under her philosophy, and that is clearly no savior at all. Pointer's use of the Bible as sacred cover for perverted behavior is an exact, if inverted, parallel to Hulga's making of her leg an icon to the sanctity of nothingness; but Pointer, the supposed innocent, is wiser than Hulga, the intellectual, for he sees the heart of his own vision and she is deceived by surfaces. Hulga's leg, as the suitcase-vision

suggests, touches two possibilities: as a symbol of her wounded partial nature, it is an indicator of her need for the completion of God's grace and love, symbolized by the real Bible; as an unnaturally elevated icon of pseudo-sacred denial of meaning, it reasserts the empty pretense of sanctity symbolized by the hollow Bible. And in removing the leg and opening the hollow Bible, Pointer has, as his name suggests, shown Hulga the truth from the only kind of inverted perspective she can presently understand. In one of O'Connor's favorite patterns, the devil has served the ends of providence.

II. Iconic Character Roles

Although objects constitute the largest and most varied group of icons in O'Connor's fiction, iconic character roles and iconic structures are perhaps ultimately of greater significance. These fictional devices reflect the nature of the icon itself: it is a tangible embodiment of an abstract truth, but its purpose is to link man with mystery, and its domain is thus most properly man himself and the totality and complexity of his existence. And given O'Connor's religious orientation, we can expect to find, and do, that most of these iconic character roles and structures are drawn from the history and myths of Christianity.

An apparent exception to this generalization has already been

noted in the discussion of "Greenleaf," in which mythological/pagan iconography plays a central role. Even there, however, the pagan is closely connected to the Christian, and the story becomes an assertion of the immanence of the divine in the natural world. More clearly an exception to the strictly religious sphere of reference is O'Connor's occasional use of iconic characters drawn from the secular community/society. In "The Comforts of Home" and "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," we find such characters used in minor and major ways respectively. "Judgment Day," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "The Life You Save," "A Good Man," and "The Partridge Festival" also involve socially iconic characters, but in each case some degree of religious significance is blended with the other elements, and the dimension of the characters extends beyond the purely social.

As Thomas in "The Comforts of Home" fails repeatedly in his attempts to preserve his sacred retreat from infringement by his mother's nymphomaniacal charity ward, he finds his consciousness invaded by the image of the local sheriff. The image initially enters his consciousness in tandem with the memory of his father, who is a consciously suppressed embodiment of ruthless manipulation. Thomas is aware that his father would not have tolerated the girl: "Untouched by useless compassion, he would (behind her back) have pulled the necessary strings with his crony, the sheriff, and the girl would have been packed off to the state penitentiary to serve her time" (CS, p. 387). As the situation worsens for Thomas, he

finds his father has "squatted" in his mind and is repeatedly advising him to seek out the sheriff, "another edition of Thomas's father" (CS, p. 395). When Thomas succumbs to temptation and goes to the sheriff, it is to use him in a sordid plan to betray Sarah Ham by allowing her to be found in possession of the gun she has removed from Thomas's study. In using both the sheriff and the gun to destroy Sarah, Thomas is accepting as his own the images of his father's corruption, thus acknowledging that he is the son and inheritor of evil.

The sheriff, whose war on evil is less a moral concern than a reflection of his own delight in finding corruption and inflicting punishment, mockingly consents to Thomas's request. But through the over-simplifications Thomas's obsession has allowed him to make, the plan goes wrong, and having given his soul over to the corrupt guardian of a corrupt society, Thomas finds he has betrayed himself. When the sheriff enters and witnesses the killing of Thomas's mother, he immediately reads the evidence by the light of his own distorted values:

> He saw the facts as if they were already in print: the fellow had intended all along to kill his mother and pin it on the girl. But Farebrother had been too quick for him. They were not yet aware of his head in the door. As he scrutinized the scene, further insights were flashed to him. Over her body, the killer and the slut were about to collapse into each other's arms. The sheriff knew a nasty bit when he saw it. He was accustomed to enter upon scenes that were not as bad as he had hoped to find them, but this one met his expectations. (CS, p. 404)

Because the sheriff appears to Thomas as an image, because he is presented as a kind of disciple of Thomas's father, himself the iconic embodiment of a corrupt principle, and because Thomas's solicitation of the sheriff is an attempt to use for a destructive purpose the power and sanction of the forces of social preservation, the sheriff emerges as an ironically iconic figure. Because Thomas is, to a degree, aware the icon is perverted, the irony here is somewhat complex. Thomas has not mistaken the profane for the sacred; he has, in fact, tried to preserve himself from the paternal influence of both his father and the sheriff. But Thomas has been sheltered by his home and his job, and when the depravity of external life invades his sanctuary, he is easily led by the father's son in him to use one kind of corruption against another. He over-estimates his ability to touch pitch without being defiled, and even though the sheriff is wrong in his "reading" of Thomas's actions, his identification of Thomas as a criminal is basically correct. The salvation seemingly offered by the sheriff has, ironically, become destruction, but in the reversal, the falseness of Thomas's pretense to virtue and the truth of his own evil impulses have been revealed. In forcing this first step toward understanding, the ironic icon has pointed the way to the real salvation it could never offer in itself.

In "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," the socially iconic figure is the central character, General Tennessee Flintrock Sash. Because of this centrality, the dialectic between icon and worshiper can be

fully explored; we see into the mind of the iconic character as well as into the relationship between him and the society that venerates him.

General Sash is a one-hundred-four-year-old human icon who has come to live entirely in the dimension to which his culture has elevated him. As a survivor of the Civil War, he had been picked up twelve years earlier by the film industry to appear at a movie premiere. In the persistent style of Hollywood, with all it says about our culture, he had been given a grand but unauthentic uniform, a sword, and a "promotion" from foot soldier to General, and he had been presented on stage, flanked by beautiful girls, while "usherettes in Confederate caps and short skirts held a Confederate and a Union flag crossed behind them" (CS, p. 138) and the orchestra played the Confederate Battle Hymn. Since that time he has been displayed every Confederate Memorial Day from one to four in the Capitol City Museum, and, just as regularly, every spring he has been "invited to wear his uniform and sit in some conspicuous spot and lend atmosphere to the scene" when the old homes are opened to public display (CS, p. 139).[26]

Even his family sees him as an object. To his granddaughter, Sally Poker Sash, he is a treasure to be displayed at her graduation from the state teacher's college:

> She wanted the General at her graduation because she wanted to show what she stood for, or, as she said, "what all was behind her," and was not behind them. This them was not anybody in particular. It was just all the upstarts who

had turned the world on its head and unsettled the ways of decent living.

She meant to stand on that platform in August with the General sitting in his wheel chair on the stage behind her and she meant to hold her head very high as if she were saying, "See him! See him! My kin, all you upstarts! Glorious upright old man standing for the old traditions! Dignity! Honor! Courage! See him!" (CS, p. 135)

To his grand-nephew, John Wesley, General Sash is an object too, but one that can be left in the blazing sun while the boy refreshes himself at a Coke machine in the shade. General Sash is clearly an icon of the Old South, revered by those who wish to touch or hold on to its traditional values and ignored by those who are committed to the new world of Boy Scouts and Coca-Cola.

Obviously General Sash is a manufactured icon, and those who revere him see him strictly as an image without life of his own, a limited vision that allows them to ignore the degree to which the tradition he represents is old and sick and superficial. They fail to examine the icon, while the reader is forced to do so; were they to share the reader's view, they would notice that "[the General's] feet were completely dead now, his knees worked like old hinges, his kidneys functioned when they would . . ." (CS, p. 139); they would also see that this living embodiment of their traditions has been consciously dating his life and drawing his identity not from the origin of the traditions themselves, but from a movie premiere, and that he is living for "pretty guls" and parades, having no use for history "because he never expected to meet it again" (CS, pp. 135-136). As icon, General Sash suggests two possible views of the higher truth

he embodies: either the tradition itself is hollow or the icon is false to the tradition. And either way, his own elevation to the stature of icon is ironic.

Like the society that spawned him, the General has substituted illusion for reality. He sees his real self as the image created by Hollywood, and he has rejected everything in his own natural past:

> He had forgotten history and he didn't intend to remember it again. He had forgotten the name and face of his wife and the names and faces of his children or even if he had a wife and children, and he had forgotten the names of places and the places themselves and what had happened at them. (CS, p. 142)

Consequently, he is a victim of his own ironic iconography: dependent on public appearances to reinforce the publicly created identity he has adopted, he is able to feel alive only on those rare occasions when his iconic presence is needed by the public.

It is at one of these appearances that the iconic image connects with its real sources, and General Sash is himself ironically brought to life by the life-denying role he has accepted. The link is the tradition General Sash has tacitly agreed to represent. The men who became heroes through battle did so precisely because the war itself was such a horrible thing, testing men to or beyond their limits. In repressing history and accepting the elevated rank, Sash has distorted in two ways the truth he is supposed to represent, separating the glory from the suffering and thus detaching the iconic image of hero from any meaningful source of value. But history, both the

General's and the South's, has a reality of its own, and the iconic seeks and finds its truth in an apocalyptic experience that ironically restores validity to the icon by destroying the General. Weakened by sunstroke resulting from John Wesley's (i.e., the modern South's) leaving him so long without shade, the General sinks into a kind of hallucinatory state. He feels "a little hole beginning to widen in the top of his head" (CS, p. 141), and through the hole the "black music" of the graduation procession probes "the dark places of his brain," carrying with it the speaker's references to battles and heroes of the Civil War. The General fights the words, but in vain; they are everywhere, inside and outside his head:

> He felt that he was running backwards and the words were coming at him like musket fire, just escaping him but getting nearer and nearer. He turned around and began to run as fast as he could but he found himself running toward the words. He was running into a regular volley of them and meeting them with quick curses. As the music swelled toward him, the entire past opened up on him out of nowhere and he felt his body riddled in a hundred places with sharp stabs of pain and he fell down, returning a curse for every hit. He saw his wife's narrow face looking at him critically through her round gold-rimmed glasses; he saw one of his squinting bald-headed sons; and his mother ran toward him with an anxious look; then a succession of places--Chickamauga, Shiloh, Marthasville--rushed at him as if the past were the only future now and he had to endure it. Then suddenly he saw that the black procession was almost on him. He recognized it, for it had been dogging all his days. He made such a desperate effort to see over it and find out what comes after the past that his hand clenched the sword until the blade touched bone. (CS, p. 143)

When the sword of reality penetrates to the core of his being, General Sash at least becomes a true icon, and in his fate

is a potential lesson for his society. The South, in erecting icons to the Civil War, has actually venerated pain, destruction, and defeat in the guise of heroism; and in seeking to obliterate the memory of pain and live only with the partial image of glory, it has, like the General, obliterated its own humanity. Like man as a child of God, man as a child of society must acknowledge the destructive/creative mixture of his own nature; persistent blindness will, in both realms, lead to destruction.

General Sash is afforded a realization of the truth, but, in the story's final irony, the consequences of that realization go unnoticed by those who have made him their icon. As Sally Poker comes forward for her diploma, she looks at the General; misinterpreting his death posture for a position of defiant pride, she lifts her head proudly and accepts the scroll. The ceremonies ended, John Wesley wheels the General out the back and stands, in the story's final tableau, waiting in line at the Coke machine. Because the General was connected to the reality he was falsifying, he was connected with the source of truth. But his function as an icon of the partial has effectively cut off those who derive their entire sense of the past from him, offering them a dead reality. Only his form is important to them, and the conclusion of the story leaves us with the grim vision of a society trapped in a permanent irony by an icon of the false whose own escape into truth is unrecognizable to them.

The obvious analogy in "A Late Encounter" between the fallen culture, divided from its roots, and fallen man, divided from his spiritual sustenance, is made a more explicit fusion in other stories by O'Connor. In "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," an iconic figure of negative social value becomes a religiously positive icon for another character; in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" and "Judgment Day," characters whose primary concerns are social are set in relief by their identification with religiously iconic images; and in "The Life You Save," "A Good Man," and "The Partridge Festival," a figure embodying socially negative values is simultaneously imaged wholly or partially in the likeness of Christ. In O'Connor's vision, a natural kind of irony derives from the paradoxical fact that the worldly and the religious are at once opposed and fused; in these stories, she works from within this natural irony to illuminate both the irony itself and the elements that generate it.

In "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," the secular concern is sex, its icon is a circus freak, and the character in whom it all comes to focus is a twelve-year-old girl who is becoming aware of the mysteries of adulthood. When her visiting cousins return from an evening at the carnival, she bribes them (with pretended knowledge of how rabbits have babies) to describe to her a side-show freak they had seen. The freak, an hermaphrodite, had exhibited its unusual qualities to the accompaniment of a religious self-justification: "'God made me thisaway and if you laugh He may strike you

the same way. This is the way He wanted me to be and I ain't disputing His way'" (CS, p. 245). To the cousins, the experience has been merely unpleasant, but to the child, it becomes the focus for a kind of awe and provides impetus for a religious experience.

From the moment she learns about the freak, the child builds around it an imaginative structure distinctly religious in tone. She visualizes the people watching as "more solemn than they were in church . . ., standing as if they were waiting for the first note of the piano to begin the hymn," and she hears them responding "'Amen'" to the freak's words. Mixed with these fantasies is the idea that a person's body is "a temple of the Holy Ghost," a phrase a nun has advised the cousins to use if a boy should "'behave in an ungentlemanly manner with them . . .'" (CS, p. 238). The child imagines the hermaphrodite, everyone else's image of sexual perversion, saying "'A temple of God is a holy thing . . . . I am a temple of the Holy Ghost'" (CS, p. 246).

The next time she attends Mass, the child's vision of the freak attains a fully mystical dimension when, as the priest raises the monstrance containing the Host, she thinks of the tent housing the freak. Traveling home afterwards, she hears the pig-like (i.e., satanic) driver say that some preachers have gotten the police to close the fair, but by that time she seems to have exorcised the image of the hermaphrodite; her final vision is of the sun in the image of a blood-drenched Host sinking behind the trees.[29]

In a somewhat unusual use of ironic iconography, O'Connor has here taken a culturally de-valued being and allowed a child's innocence to find in it an affirmation of God's mercy. The hermaphrodite may, as Eggenschwiler has suggested, be capitalizing on his fallen condition and escaping his own guilt by shifting the blame to God,[28] but the child's transforming response to its image and her literal acceptance of the validity of its asserted relationship to God free her from the captivity of sin and allow her to find a transcendent experience in what society, in its own fallen state, can view only secretly in shame or try to suppress.[29] In her innocence, she is more direct than other O'Connor characters in their confrontations with social or religious icons, and the irony in "A Temple" is correspondingly simpler than that in many of the other stories.

A somewhat more complex use of iconic patterns is apparent in "Everything That Rises Must Converge." The central character, Julian, is a young, socially conscious intellectual whose life revolves ambivalently around his mother. She has sacrificed continuously for his welfare and takes great pride in what he has become; he regards her and her efforts as small-minded and conventional and takes equally great pride in having become what he is in spite of her.

Because he is so enlightened and she so benighted, he feels martyred by his responsibilities as a son, visualizing himself early in the story as "pinned to the door frame, waiting like Saint

Sebastian for the arrows to begin piercing him" (CS, p. 405). Bearing his own affliction in a less Christian way, he craves revenge, and when he sees that his mother's prejudice against Blacks is about to result in her being attacked, he secretly rejoices and avoids any serious attempt to save her. In fact, he has often fantasized about using friendship with or marriage to a Black to punish and enlighten his mother. But in his self-centeredness he has underestimated the effect on his mother of such an affront to her social and racial position; when the Black woman assaults her, Julian's mother suffers a fatal stroke that leaves her effectively a martyr to Julian's blindness and reverse bigotry. Although he is also wounded and forsaken by her when, in her last moments, she becomes totally unaware of him, his suffering is in no sense that of the innocent. The martyrdom he has conceived for himself has been a false one, based on denial and subjectivity rather than on the affirmation and transcendent truth that would have made it purposeful and inspiring. But martyrdom has ironically served to expose its own falsity; Julian is shown the cost of his isolated, vengeful superiority and made painfully aware of the need for communion, understanding, and humility. In effect, his image of himself as persecuted has led him into communion with his persecutor.[30]

"Judgement Day" offers a secular figure who develops into a secular icon; the icon, in turn, becomes responsible for an experience that carries the story into the dimension of the religious.[31]

To Tanner, a native Southerner, the vision of things as they ought to be is centered in Negroes as social inferiors who provide service and companionship without demanding recognition of their own individual identities and needs. Tanner's whole life has been lived in this structure, and a good part of his stature as a man has, in his own eyes and those of others, derived from his ability to handle Blacks. When he discovers that the land on which he has been squatting is now the property of a mulatto doctor (whose mixed blood itself is a violation of order), Tanner flees North seeking security with his daughter. He finds instead the further trauma of Blacks living on equal or better terms in the very next apartment.

Tanner's daughter has coped by ignoring what she can't accept, but he attempts to enforce his view of reality by treating the Black man as an inferior, addressing him as "John" and "preacher," stereotyped terms by which the South has sought to deny the Black man any individuality while pretending to accord him an identity. But this Black man, an actor, plays roles only consciously and by choice, and he rejects all of Tanner's overtures, first by silence, then by denial, and finally by violence.

In a final apocalyptic scene, Tanner, very ill, is attempting to begin the journey back to the South, where he wants to be buried. But he is so weak that he collapses on the stairway, and he is discovered there by the Black couple. In his delirium, Tanner's vision of the couple blends with his fantasy of arriving home in a coffin

and being met by Coleman, his Negro servant. Tanner's own feeling is one of joy, but to the Black man bending over him, Tanner's "coal man" sounds like one more insult and his announcement of "'Judgement Day!'" like the final arrogance. When Tanner's daughter returns, she finds him "crucified" in the stairwell: "His hat had been pulled down over his face and his head and arms thrust between the spokes of the banister; his feet dangled over the stairwell like those of a man in the stocks" (CS, p. 549).[32]

The most obvious reading here is that Tanner's crucifixion is ironic. He suffers at the hands of an alien people who see him as a threat to their ways, but because he has tried to deny them life (individuality and equality), his punishment seems just. Like General Sash, he has rigidly perverted the truth, and it strikes back at him; his crucifixion is both the result and the symbol of his bigotry. But the icon itself is only partially realized: the element of redemption seems to be mission, and we are left with the final irony of an icon that should symbolize the union of sin and salvation symbolizing instead the persistence of sin.

It is possible to see, as Driskell and Brittain have, a complicating irony here, one that qualifies the assertion that the icon remains only partially realized. These critics suggest that in recognizing his need for Coleman and in wishing to return to their friendship, Tanner has experienced a convergence with Blacks and come to a recognition of their humanity.[33] In this reading, the

crucifixion becomes a criticism of the Northern Black who refuses Tanner aid and communion and an affirmation of Tanner's recognition of meaningful values. Such a reading depends heavily on the questionable interpretation of Tanner's relationship with Coleman as non-exploitative, but perhaps it is possible to maintain that Tanner's external behavior and internal impulses are at odds and that his saving recognition is more felt than articulated. Acceptance of either of these interpretations makes the irony of the crucifixion pattern complex but also theologically complete; it is a sign both of Tanner's depravity (here manifested in social terms) and of his salvation. It is, then, perhaps impossible to say that Tanner is or is not redeemed by his final experience, but the ambivalence itself is evidence of the potential of a single iconic structure to convey complex meaning.

In spite of his crucifixion, Tanner does not emerge as a Christ figure. Other O'Connor stories do, however, link socially objectionable characters with aspects of Christ, using these iconic qualities in ironic combinations to penetrate the surface of reality and explore its obverse side.

In the earlier discussion of the iconic car in "The Life You Save," Shiftlet was characterized as a manipulator whose entire pattern of behavior is a denial of life and communion in favor of the mechanical and escapist. But fragments of images in the text complicate this view of Shiftlet by linking him with Christ. As he

enters the Craters' yard, he turns to look at the sunset, raising "both his whole and his short arm up slowly so that they indicated an expanse of sky and his figure formed a crooked cross" (CS, p. 146). Further details reinforce this initial image: the tools he carries are those of a carpenter; he revitalizes the farm and "resurrects" the old car, driving it out of the shed with "an expression of serious modesty on his face as if he had just raised the dead" (CS, p. 151); he teaches the deaf Lucynell to say "bird"; and he insists often on the mystery of existence and the need for wholeness, attacking science for its attempt to understand the heart as simply a physical object. Yet all of this seems undercut by his worship of the car and his desertion of Lucynell.

Clearly Shiftlet is not a pure Christ figure, but the iconic imagery does serve to point up the ironies and complexities in any human situation. In at least two respects Shiftlet is Christlike, and both are essential to the generation of meaning in the story. On the literal level, Shiftlet does appear as the "savior" of the farm. Living minimally, he spends all his energy and time ministering to the farm, "healing" its brokenness. Mrs. Crater, seeing only this surface and trusting too much in her own craftiness, accepts Shiftlet as a secular Christ and seeks to possess him. Because her motives are materialistic and selfish, she chooses a Christ who is the same; when her idol deserts her, he is simply reflecting to her her own values. In her ironic defeat lies the truth about her nature.

More broadly, Shiftlet is, as a human being, made in the image of Christ, and the iconic points of his characterization are reminders of this. Although at present he is, as Muller has pointed out, only a negative image of Christ, the very negativity of his existence ironically suggests the positive.[34] As long as he is a living human being, he has the potential to become a true image of Christ; the life he saves can be his own, and this power to find his own salvation means that he can become Christ-like in both the process and the end of his salvation. The iconic dimensions of his figure are, then, both presently ironic (in that he looks outside for the salvation he already has within him) and potentially true. The blindness of the characters themselves confines them to some form of the first vision; only the reader is permitted the fullness of the second.

The Misfit, in "A Good Man," is, like Shiftlet, an embodiment of the degeneration of modern society, but his evil is clearer and more extreme, going beyond materialism and the treatment of people as objects. He is a total outcast, both philosophically and socially; his spiritual nihilism achieves physical expression in a life of crime. Like Shiftlet, The Misfit has earned a kind of iconic Every-man stature through the range and variety of social roles he has played. When the grandmother first sees him, she has "the peculiar feeling that the bespectacled figure was someone she knew" (CS, p. 126), and when The Misfit recounts for her his past, his description suggests he is many men in one:

> "I was a gospel singer for a while," The Misfit said. "I been most everything. Been in the arm service, both land and sea, at home and abroad, been twict married, been an undertaker, been with the railroads, plowed Mother Earth, been in a tornado, seen a man burnt alive oncet," . . . "I even seen a woman flogged," he said. (CS, pp. 129-130)

He has surveyed the range of human possibilities for meaning and, finding all wanting, rejected his society wholly. The penitentiary psychiatrist's charge that The Misfit murdered his father, conflicting as it does with The Misfit's own recollection of his father's death in a flu epidemic, can be seen as a symbolic identification of the rejection of society as either authoritative or protective.[35] In addition, it prefigures his shooting of the grandmother when she tries to claim him as one of her own "babies." For The Misfit, both human communion and transcendent spiritual meaning are illusions, and his killing of an entire three-generation family seems a symbolic rejection of both the concept of human interdependence and the principle of life.

As with Shiftlet, however, iconic fragments are attached to The Misfit from his very first appearance. From the ditch where the family have landed after their automobile accident, they can just see the tops of the trees on the other side of the road above them. Into their view comes the hearse-like car carrying The Misfit and his henchmen, and as they alight from the car, they form a crucifixion tableau against the trees. Like Christ, The Misfit stands in the center, flanked by two criminals. And he seems, initially, to promise salvation to the lost, wounded, helpless family. But the irony

of this promise is quickly evident when the grandmother, in her mindless, know-it-all fashion, recognizes him aloud and sets in motion the slaughter of her family and herself.

Counterpointing the shots that mark the executions going on in the woods behind is the philosophical apologia The Misfit delivers to the grandmother. It is as if the murders are born of the interchange between The Misfit's and the grandmother's philosophies, an impression that will shortly be examined more fully. In this conversation, the iconic suggestions of Christ are given correlative and conscious philosophical expression. The Misfit feels he has been punished out of proportion to his crimes (another parallel to Christ, as The Misfit himself recognizes), and he blames Christ for destroying the balance, both in his own death (punishment in excess of crime, accepted willingly) and in his raising of the dead (disruption of natural law). As a result, the rational mind, the questioner who, like The Misfit, "'has to know why it is'" (CS, p. 129), is met with the agony of uncertainty:

> "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." . . . "I wisht I had of been there [when Jesus raised the dead]," he said, hitting the ground with his fist. "It ain't right I wasn't there because if I had of been there I would of known. Listen lady," he said in a high voice, "if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now." (CS, p. 132)

The grandmother tries to defend herself against this threatening

nihilism by invoking the conventional social and religious "certainties." She tries to persuade him that he is "a good man" with "good blood" and that Jesus will help him if he will just pray. But as the progressive destruction of her family brings her own death closer, she begins to lose control, and as the last two are led away, she temporarily loses her voice. When it returns, her neat prescriptions to The Misfit begin to become confused: "she found herself saying, 'Jesus, Jesus,' meaning, Jesus will help you, but the way she was saying it, it sounded as if she might be cursing" (CS, p. 131). The sound of a shot produces even more confusion and all her previous arguments flow together in one garbled synthesis: "'Jesus!' the old lady cried. 'You've got good blood! I know you wouldn't shoot a lady! I know you come from nice people! Pray! Jesus, you ought not to shoot a lady. I'll give you all the money I've got!'" In her fear, she even begins to deny the truths she has so glibly mouthed before, mumbling "'Maybe He didn't raise the dead'" (CS, p. 132). But when The Misfit responds out of his own painful uncertainty, her head clears momentarily and she acknowledges him: "'Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder. The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest" (CS, p. 132).

The problem of interpreting this climactic scene is, in its complexity, a reflection of O'Connor's rich use of the icon in

this story. The ambiguities in the grandmother's "'Jesus!'" focus some of the complexities; if she is using the term as an oath, she is profaning Jesus; if she is addressing The Misfit as Jesus, she is acknowledging his power to save or condemn her; and if she is appealing to Jesus himself, she is, however insincerely, pointing to a power that transcends the horrors of the immediate situation. She is also reinforcing the earlier iconic echoes of Christ surrounding The Misfit.

If the grandmother is sincere in adopting The Misfit as her own, he has, in an ironic way, fulfilled the function of a Christ figure; he has led the grandmother to accept her own fallen condition (her spiritual kinship with this alienated and destructive man) and to set aside her own selfishness in the interests of another. But The Misfit himself is not redeemed; his shooting of the grandmother reflects his inverted perception of good as evil, of love and acceptance as the primal image of evil. He is not, then, a legitimate Christ but an Antichrist who is seemingly being used in the service of good by a power beyond himself.

The grandmother's violent death serves the design of Christian salvation, carrying to its literal extreme the axiom that redemption requires the death of the previous life. But her execution by The Misfit may also be appropriate on the level of social and moral justice. It is unlikely that a thinking individual could find the meaning he needs in the conventional society represented by the

grandmother. Her observance of social conventions and her mouthing of moral and religious platitudes are empty acts, and she uses them to manipulate others in the service of her own will. She really has no more understanding of sacred truths than does The Misfit, and in twisting them to her own purposes, she is denying them as surely as he is. Though externally opposite, the grandmother and The Misfit are both manifestations of a society alienated from God. Marion Montgomery sees this relationship in familial terms, recalling the primal iconic structure of Eden: in her blind pride, the grandmother is Eve, tainted by the serpent's evil, and The Misfit is her son Cain, questioning God's will and seeking to place his own will above it.[36] (One need not insist on this particular iconic structure, but the narrator's image of the grandmother as serpent and her acknowledgment of The Misfit as her child do suggest the relevance of the Eden myth.) The execution of the fallen mother by the evil child may, then, be seen on one level as a dramatization of evil begetting its own destruction; and a character who is the antithesis of Christ is made to serve in a Christ-like way, as an instrument of divine redemption and divine justice. The iconic images of Christ that surround The Misfit are not, then, evidences of his own character but signs of his belonging to the very power he seeks to deny. Through the story's iconography, naturalistic events are revealed as servants of the spiritual.

In terms of ascending iconic complexity, discussion of "The

Partridge Festival" should precede that of "A Good Man," but in terms of pure irony of icons, it is an epitome in O'Connor's short fiction. In the works just considered, the characters themselves are only dimly, if at all, aware of the full implications of the iconic; those implications, and the ironies they generate, are dependent for their existence on the reader's perception and acknowledgement of them. In "The Partridge Festival," a man is elevated to the iconic level of Christ (and his pagan counterpart, the scapegoat), and we see the fragments of a new religion beginning around his image.

Calhoun, the central character, is one of those self-sufficient intellectuals O'Connor so loves to strip to their fallen souls. He has returned to the town of Partridge, where his family is old blood, for the Azalea Festival, an annual demonstration of modern man's ability to make the natural a servant of the material. The town motto, "Beauty Is Our Money Crop," has made a principle of this practice, and Calhoun's old essence-of-the-South aunts confront him proudly with an iconic miniature of the man who coined the motto, his own great-grandfather. But Calhoun, like Julian, prides himself on having seen through the shabby surface of bourgeois materialism; he has come not to celebrate the festival but to find out more about Singleton, a man whose refusal to wear a festival badge has led to a confrontation with the citizens of Partridge and left six of them dead at his hands. To the socially progressive

Calhoun, Singleton's defiance of a provincial and materialistic society has made him a hero.

From Calhoun's first sight of Singleton's picture in the paper, the face has "burn[ed] in his imagination like a dark reproachful liberating star" (CS, p. 425). And, like a magus (an image he would certainly applaud), he has journeyed to Partridge to find out about this man whose expression is "the tortured look of the man who becomes maddened finally by the madness around him," a man "who is willing to suffer for the right to be himself" (CS, p. 423). Passing from one to another of the citizens of Partridge in his search for information about Singleton, Calhoun becomes increasingly sure that they are fools and bigots and that Singleton's only crime was being an Outsider. In his rising fury, Calhoun begins to preach the sacredness of Singleton, astounding the barber by proclaiming Singleton a figure of transcendent communal importance:

> "He's the scapegoat. He's laden with the sins of the community. Sacrificed for the guilt of others." . . .
>
> "He was an individualist," Calhoun said. "A man who would not allow himself to be pressed into the mold of his inferiors. A non-conformist. He was a man of depth living among caricatures and they finally drove him mad, unleashed all his violence on themselves."
>
> (CS, p. 431)

Identifying increasingly with Singleton, Calhoun decides that he alone can and must write a novel to show the ignorant world its own injustice and Singleton's suffering. He is, then, amazed and distrustful when his aunts' choice of a blind date turns out to be a girl who shares his scorn of Partridge and who sees Singleton as

a Christ figure. When Mary Elizabeth declares her intention to treat Singleton in a non-fiction study, Calhoun immediately challenges the abstractness of such an approach, and the ensuing debate over the proper way to articulate the Singleton myth leads to a mutual agreement to go see Singleton at the asylum to which he has been committed.

The conscious identification of Singleton as a Christ figure is just as consciously expanded in the thoughts Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth have as they prepare to meet him. Calhoun dreads the confrontation with Singleton, but he feels it may purge him of the commercial instincts that tie him to Partridge in spite of his intellectually conceived scorn of materialism: "It would be a torturing experience, but it might be his salvation. The sight of Singleton in his misery might cause him suffering sufficient to raise him once and for all from his commercial instincts" (CS, p. 437). Mary Elizabeth is also looking to Singleton for a purifying experience: "'You have to prove to yourself that you can stand there and watch a man be crucified,' she said. 'You have to go through it with him'" (CS, p. 438). They are both prepared for regeneration through suffering, but not for the form it takes.

Although the asylum sits, with iconic appropriateness, on a hill, the gates, the buildings, the people, and the sounds are grim reminders that the path to redemption is purgatorial. Sitting in the waiting room, with its funereal black furniture and empty white

vase, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth hear in the cacophony around them a voice steadily cursing. It is Singleton, their Christ; the revelation has begun. But he is not the noble martyr they have created in their imaginations; he is a lunatic, just as the people of Partridge had said he was. His reptilian eyes and his bad-guy black hat suggest a combination of animalism and human degeneracy that is reinforced in his crazed attempt to seduce Mary Elizabeth:

> "It's not every girl gets a chance at me," Singleton said. "Listen here, sister, I'm well-fixed. There's nobody in Partridge I can't skin. I own the place--as well as this hotel." His hand grasped toward her knee . . . . As Mary Elizabeth crouched against Calhoun, the old man jumped nimbly over the sofa and began to speed around the room. The attendants . . . tried to close in on him from either side. They almost had him when he kicked off his shoes and leaped between them onto the table, sending the empty vase shattering to the floor. "Look girl!" he shrilled and began to pull the hospital gown over his head. (CS, p. 443)

Fleeing in blind panic from the horror of this revelation, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth drive until exhaustion forces them to stop. Once stopped, they must face each other, and as Calhoun leans toward Mary Elizabeth, he sees mirrored in her glasses the face of his great-grandfather: "Like a master salesman, it seemed to have been waiting there from all time to claim him" (CS, p. 444).

Clearly, Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth have tried to make Christ in their own image, assigning to him values bred of their own humanistic philosophy and building around him a communion and a mission that will embrace those values. Then they have tried to use this icon to purge themselves of those parts of their own nature

that they find unacceptable. Ironically, however, when they attempt to celebrate and confirm the full wonder of the icon by confronting the reality behind it, the icon is destroyed rather than enriched, and the "redeeming revelation" becomes Calhoun's image, in his grandfather's likeness, reflected from the eyes of his co-worshiper.

In creating a theoretical Christ and then trying to become like him, Calhoun has, in effect, tried to save himself and to do so by evading his fallen nature rather than by acknowledging it as an integral part of himself. He has, like others of the fallen in O'Connor's fiction, tried to separate evil from good and flesh from spirit, and when he tries to join the image of Singleton to his physical self, the revelation is inevitably iconoclastic. In a second irony, however, Calhoun's attempt to be like Singleton, his pretense of being Singleton's relative in order to gain admission to the asylum, has brought him a vision of the truth. Singleton's antagonism to society has been bred entirely of selfishness; Calhoun's has been the same. But perhaps Calhoun's crime is the greater; he has tried to use Singleton to purge the rottenness he sees in himself, and he has made a scapegoat of Partridge, castigating its people for the same sins he sees in himself.

In the predominant pattern of O'Connor's stories, cataclysmic revelation breaks down the wall of defenses and misconceptions that separates man from the divine, leaving him open to the action of grace. If we can see that Calhoun's revelation has turned him toward

the truth, we can say that the ironic icon has, in a final complex irony, saved through its failure to save. But Calhoun's sense of being claimed by the "master salesman" is unaccompanied by any balancing awareness of a divine claim. In this variation from her more usual pattern, O'Connor may be pointing up the danger of erecting a false philosophy as greater than the danger of worshiping a false object; when an entire philosophy fails, as, in her view, it must, the believer may be thrust into despair, as incapable of seeking a new ultimate as a committed Christian would be of espousing a false one. "The Partridge Festival," then, becomes one of the grimmest of O'Connor's stories, using ironic iconography to articulate a vision that, in its pessimism, approaches the purely "modern."[37]

As has been noted elsewhere in this study, the iconography of individual stories is often enriched by the contrasts or correlations between stories. The varied uses to which O'Connor puts the Christ figure in the stories just examined provide insight into her world view and suggest a boundary between her modernism and her traditionalism. The most instructive contrast is between The Misfit and Calhoun, and the contrast is articulated through their varying relationships to the Christ icon.

Both characters have consciously articulated total philosophies, and although The Misfit's is nihilistic and Calhoun's is humanistically affirmative, neither is built on the recognition of a divinely ordered universe, and both reflect man's making reality an extension

of his own image. Neither of these characters seems to experience the redemption that other O'Connor characters find, or turn to face, in their revelatory experiences, and this difference seems to derive from the fact that the other characters have not carried their sinful visions to the point of abstract totality that characterizes the philosophies of The Misfit and, as already noted, Calhoun. Because of their incomplete theories and their trust in the appearances of things, these other characters can be surprised by the action of grace entering through a gap in their perceptions or altering the shape of what they see and thus forcing them to accept the possibility of another truth. But Calhoun's and The Misfit's visions are so philosophically inclusive that they either refuse to admit any new concepts, as The Misfit does, or sink into the despair of seeing the destruction of the "holy" as the triumph of negation, as Calhoun does.

Even if the grandmother can be seen as achieving, and perhaps offering, a kind of redemption, she does not manage to confound The Misfit's philosophy, because he puts no conscious faith in her. Nor do the iconic echoes of Christ in The Misfit's own character affect him positively, since they echo events and images the truth of which is irrelevant because undemonstrable. Conversely, because Calhoun erects a Christ figure to incarnate his philosophy, the failure of the Christ figure is the failure of the philosophy, a failure that annihilates Calhoun's power to see and affirm any values other than

negative ones. O'Connor seems to suggest the real threat in modern values is not that they will lead people into occasional error but that such values will themselves become a pseudo-religion that will fall with the inevitable destruction of its icons, stripping man not only of his belief but of his ability to believe.

It is thus clearly possible, within O'Connor's vision, for the modern world to escape permanently the healing awareness of divine order, but it is equally clear that this escape is fatal. Order and fulfillment can be had only by turning to traditional structures that have both transcended time and been proven by it; the reflections of this principle in O'Connor's fiction are iconic abstractions, configurations, and structures that often surround or complement iconic objects and characters.

III. Iconic Structures

Occasionally O'Connor drawn her iconic configurations from the realm of secular society, presenting us with Old Dudley's ritualization of hunting ("The Geranium"), Mr. Fortune's deification of progress and its iconic processes ("A View of the Woods"), General Sash's acceptance of a falsely iconic social role as his real identity ("A Late Encounter"), and Calhoun's sanctification of the gesture of social protest ("The Partridge Festival"). But these are fully

ironic, valued beyond their capacity to sustain meaning, and the worship of them is always ultimately disillusioning, destructive, or both. Those contrasting iconic structures that are genuinely sacred but that are ironically treated by the characters as profane are nearly always Biblical. (The sacred quest and the fertility rite are not fully Biblical, but they are religiously iconic in themselves and always associated fictionally with Christian themes.) Sister Kathleen Feeley traces this aspect of O'Connor's vision to Eric Voeglin's Order and History, with which O'Connor was familiar and which advances the concept of history as paradigmatic. Under this interpretation, the narrative portions of the Bible become

> a historical record of events, some of which would be unimportant in themselves, which shows them to be paradigms of God's way with men. In other words, the sacred history of God's dealings with his Chosen People and of Christ's life on earth delineates an order of existence which gives subsequent events a shape and significance they would not otherwise have.[38]

The iconic figure of Christ, discussed above, is the nexus of one of the richest groups of iconic structures in the Bible, and O'Connor makes significant use of them. The existence outside society, the betrayal by friends, the worship by small groups of dedicated disciples, the preaching of special, redemptive truths, the suffering at society's hands, and the existence as an influence beyond death are all examples of iconic structures related to Christ's life and death. When O'Connor recreates them in the dress of present-day naturalism, she is asserting the mystery in manners and suggesting

that the configurations of truth are omnipresent; one need only know how to recognize them. Even man's attempt to see such structures where they do not exist, as in some of the situations involving false Christs, is an affirmation of his perceived need for those structures.

In addition to Christ-related structures, there are other iconic configurations that carry echoes of Biblical narrative into O'Connor's fiction. Some, like the Tower of Babel, the Garden of Eden, and Pentecost, are focused individually; others, like the occurrence of visions and the echoing of the sacraments are frequent. Few, if any, of these structures are recognized by the characters, but the characters are always illuminated for the reader through contact with the structures, and the reader is kept aware of the relevance of ultimate truths to people and events that might otherwise seem minor.

This kind of amplification surrounds The Tower in "A Good Man." Advertised as a kind of apotheosis of barbecue stands, it is in reality dark, deserted, and run-down, a fitting symbol for the emptiness and degeneration of contemporary society. But its name carries it beyond the simply symbolic to suggest the Biblical Tower of Babel, and the naturalistic details support the iconic identification. As an emblem of the inability to communicate, a human division that follows division from God, The Tower provides a significant context for the non-communicative babel going on among the grandmother and her family and Red Sammy and his wife. The grandmother and Red Sammy exchange clichés, the children show off and make snide comments

about the restaurant, the mother plays the juke box, Red Sammy's wife complains about the unreliability of everyone, and the father simply tries to cope. No one really hears or respects anyone else, and the confusion and alienation are a preparation for the encounter with The Misfit that will draw out in the image of the last days the consequences of the sins represented by the Tower of Babel.[39]

In adopting this particular icon to her purposes, O'Connor had ready-made iconic irony, and she alters it very little. The radical irony of a pattern of behavior in which man uses his God-given creativity and aspiration to deny God is the paradigm of the condition O'Connor is exploring through her ironic iconography in general. What is different in her treatment reflects modern culture: the original builders of the tower claimed a desire to reach heaven, but modern society has lost even that sense of direction, and its monuments are raised to its own appetites.[40]

In her vision of man's sin, O'Connor has her eye on its origins as well as on its later manifestations, and she is led naturally to the iconic image and structure of the Garden of Eden. Earlier in this chapter, the configuration of a field bounded by trees was discussed as potentially Edenic, and the discussions of "Greenleaf" and "Parker's Back" note the use of the configuration to support other icons in the overall mythic design of the story. But "A Circle in the Fire" is the only story, with the possible exception of "The Displaced Person," in which the use of the Edenic icon is

major. In this story, Eden is not simply an image but a structure. The physical configuration encloses a narrative that echoes the pattern of the Fall. Like the Tower of Babel, the Garden of Eden carries its own internal irony: in seeking to perfect paradise, man loses it. In "A Circle in the Fire," O'Connor is using this irony but complicating it with a resolution that makes Eden a paradise lost, not as a punishment for other sins, but because it has been improperly valued in itself.

Mrs. Cope runs her farm as if it were a sacred place, attacking weeds ". . . as if they were an evil sent directly by the devil to destroy the place" (CS, p. 175), worrying about fires in the surrounding woods, and watching carefully servants, visitors, and anyone else who comes on to her land. The farm itself is, like Eden, a fruitful place, with "rich pastures and hills heavy with timber," but when Mrs. Cope looks around at it, she does so "as if it might all be a burden she was trying to shake off her back" (CS, p. 177). She has accepted the charge to care for creation, but in so doing, she has raised the duty and the image of the farm to the level of the sacred, sacrificing everything else to it. There is only servitude in her worship, and as a result, she is a mechanical, obsessive, fearful woman and a partial human being.

Mrs. Cope's worst fears are realized when her paradise is invaded by three young boys. The leader, Powell, had lived on the farm when his father worked for Mrs. Cope, and remembering it as a

paradise, he has run away from home to return to the farm. One of the boys with him tells Mrs. Cope about Powell's vision of the farm:

> . . . "all the time we been knowing him he's been telling us about this here place. Said it was everything here. . . . Said he had the best time of his entire life right here on this here place. Talks about it all the time." . . . "He said when he died he wanted to come here!" (CS, p. 180)

But because Powell's Eden is ruled by Mrs. Cope, he is unable to realize his dream of fulfillment. Regarded with suspicion by her, he becomes the realization of that suspicion, loosing the bull, letting the oil out of the tractors, and remaining generally annoying. But this doesn't ease his disappointment, and finally he is driven to destroy the farm totally. "'If this place was not here any more,' he sa[ys], 'you would never have to think of it again'" (CS, p. 192), and he sets fire to the surrounding woods. As the trees burn, the boys shriek with joy "as if the prophets were dancing in the fiery furnace, in the circle the angel had cleared for them" (CS, p. 192).

The flaming sword set at the gates to keep fallen man out of Eden has been translated into a burning of the boundaries themselves, because here the falseness is inside Eden. Man continually re-enacts the Fall, and the consequences of this will be the destruction of the earth by fire; Eden merges with the Last Judgment, and the cycle is complete. The circular perfection of God's plan can enclose man to destroy him, as it threatens to do with Mrs. Cope, or to save him, as it did the three young Jews cast into Nebuchadnessar's fiery furnace.[41] And the ironic use of the iconic structure emphasizes

that the destroying evil is internal; Powell is not a serpent until Mrs. Cope's image of him pushes him into the role. She is the real destroyer of paradise, and he is the instrument. He is also a spokesman for truth when he asserts that she doesn't own creation. Satan, Eve , and the pattern of the Fall are all made more complex than their mythic counterparts, but the complexity serves ultimately as a more accurate demonstration of the human significance of the iconic pattern of Eden.

A contrasting kind of iconic structure, one that images man being imbued with the divine spirit, is that of Pentecost, and O'Connor uses it for a suitably contrastive purpose in "The Enduring Chill." Asbury, a young intellectual, returns to his country home convinced that he is dying. With the customary surly arrogance of an O'Connor intellectual, he rejects the attempts of others to help him and makes his illness a symbol of his own uniqueness and a proof of the lack of meaning in reality.

Asbury's assurance that he knows how life is provides him a kind of armor, but that armor is subjected to a series of shocks that finally smash it, leaving Asbury vulnerable to divine grace. The shattering begins with Asbury's feeling that before he dies he must have "some last significant culminating experience that he must make for himself . . . out of his own intelligence" (CS, p. 378). Remembering an intellectual and world-weary Jesuit he had once met and hoping to share a last communion with a man of culture, Asbury

demands that his mother send for a Jesuit. When the priest arrives, however, he is an old traditionalist who berates Asbury for his sins and his ignorance of things religious, and Asbury's hope of a communion of minds is shattered. When he sends for the Black farm-hands with whom he had shared cigarettes in an illusion of barrier-breaking social communion, their behavior is as traditionally that of Black servants as the priest's was of religious guardians.

With his illusions destroyed, Asbury has only the certainty of death left, and he prepares himself for it. But even this certainty is snatched away when the doctor comes to report that the mysterious disease is really undulant fever, "'the same as Bang's in a cow,'" and that Asbury is going to recover. Purged of his final illusion of self-control, he is too weak to resist the vision that comes. Since his childhood, the ceiling of his room has been marked with water stains that converge into the figure of a bird with spread wings and icicles hanging from its wings and tail. Lying in bed, drained of physical and psychological strength, Asbury feels a chill and sees the bird begin to move:

> . . . the last film of illusion was torn as if by a whirlwind from his eyes. He saw that for the rest of his days, frail, racked, but enduring, he would live in the face of a purifying terror. A feeble cry, a last impossible protest escaped him. But the Holy Ghost, emblazoned in ice instead of fire, continued, implacable, to descend.
> (CS, p. 382)

The image of the Holy Ghost has been suspended over his entire life, but its power to move him has been kept firmly at a distance

by the wall of his intellect. Ironically, however, the very thing his intellect has tried to grasp--the mystery of existence and the order and fullness of experience--has been denied by that intellect. His pride and the world it has created in its image must be destroyed before he can fully realize himself. When he tells the old priest "'the Holy Ghost is the last thing I'm looking for!'" (CS, p. 376), he is speaking a truth he is at that point incapable of understanding.

The mystical nature of Asbury's Pentecostal experience marks it as one of the major kinds of iconic structures in O'Connor's fiction, the visionary experience. Because a vision is by its very nature a revelation to this world of something otherworldly, and because throughout Judao-Christian history it has been God's way of revealing his presence and will to his followers, it is the quintessence of the iconic. Like Saint John the Divine, O'Connor's characters experience apocalyptic visions, but because most of these characters are further from grace than was St. John, their visions are directed toward revelation of their own spiritual failures and blindnesses.

Since visions have already been discussed as integral parts of "Greenleaf," "The River," "Revelation," "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "The Enduring Chill," and "Judgement Day," it seems sufficient here merely to re-emphasize their climactic significance in their respective stories and to point out that, in general, this iconic structure usually serves to focus, resolve, and contain the

ironic pattern developed by the story. And often the visions contribute to that pattern an assertion of the radical irony of Christianity itself, salvation born of destruction. As if to articulate that truth formally, the visions themselves are usually shocking, traumatic experiences, subjecting the characters to psychological and sometimes physical violence, and leaving them drained of resistance.

Complementing these Biblical icons are iconic structures that echo the sacraments. A thorough study of O'Connor's sacramental vision would extend beyond the limits of this study,[42] but it is possible to suggest briefly how several of the sacraments function as iconic structures. Although all the sacraments were supposedly instituted by Christ as rituals through which man could grasp and imitate a portion of divine order, Baptism and the Eucharist have the added distinction of being echoes of events in Christ's own life, and thus they are more fully iconic than the rest. They are, coincidentally, the most frequently used in O'Connor's short fiction.

When Bevel is baptized by the faith-healer in "The River," it is mostly a game to him. But when he makes his childish equation between the preacher's description of Heaven as a resting place and the river as a way leading to it, he is able to achieve a full and literal realization of baptism. That his baptismal water drowns him is, O'Connor has insisted, a paradox only to the literalist. As noted in the earlier discussion of this story, in seeking heaven

the way he does, Bevel penetrates the surface of the icon and participates directly in the union with God that the ritual itself symbolizes.

Other uses of this sacramental icon are more metaphorical, less fully realized, and more clearly ironic. Before Powell and his friends set fire to Mrs. Cope's woods, they wash and play in the cow trough, a symbolic cleansing externally at odds with their destructive act but internally consonant with their function as instruments of divine vengeance. In a more complex irony, when Shiftlet races the shower into Mobile, his stump protruding from the window of his car, he is about to feel the baptismal showers falling on the symbol of his incompleteness, and the entire configuration suggests that his prayer that God will wash the slime from the earth is about to result in his own baptism. Out of what has seemed to Asbury the death of his understanding and the near-death of his body comes the beginning of true wisdom and new life. In all of these situations, there is irony stemming from the division between man and God, and in all instances the healing of the separation is articulated through the iconic image of baptism, alone or in combination with other elements.[43]

The sacramental icon that O'Connor uses most frequently and with greatest variety is, appropriately, the one most central to the entire sacramental vision of life, the Eucharist. The ideal of the union of all men in God and the reality of men divided from themselves and from each other find their natural expression in the ironic Eucharist, the sharing of food and drink in an atmosphere that reveals

only hollowness and alienation. In "Greenleaf," "A View of the Woods," and "The Comforts of Home," the dinner table is the locus of family arguments that reveal conflicting values born of selfishness and blindness, and in "The Comforts of Home," Thomas reveals the full measure of his hostility by carrying his supper to the den and continuing to take his meals there alone. In "A Good Man," the refreshment stop at The Tower is a means of revealing the lack of communication among a broad spectrum of ages and psychological types, and in "A Circle in the Fire," Mrs. Cope's serving of refreshments to the three boys is a way of substituting her interpretation of their needs (physical hunger) for a genuine understanding of those needs (hunger for the freedom, beauty, and life of the Edenic farm).

More symbolically, in "The Artificial Nigger," when the single lunch that is to serve both Mr. Head and Nelson is left behind on the train, their coming separation is prefigured. Each is too busy with his own feelings to be concerned for mutual nourishment, and the discovery of the loss of the lunch parallels the progressive revelation of their ignorance and alienation from one another. After Mr. Head's denial of him, Nelson uses the iconic structure of the Eucharist to deny Mr. Head in turn, refusing to share water, even though his thirst is enormous.

Nelson's use of this iconic structure does not seems a conscious one; he is too naive for that. Asbury, however, does attempt a communion with his mother's Black farm hands that is deliberately ironic.

By smoking with them and attempting to make them drink fresh milk against his mother's orders, Asbury thinks he is smashing both the color barrier and his mother's firm rule in order to liberate himself and the Blacks. But the Blacks refuse the milk, and Asbury contracts undulant fever as the reward for his selfish and proud attempt to run the world his way.

These sacramental icons can be seen as the completion of a pervasive iconic vision that ranges from the concreteness of natural objects through characters and events from mythology, Biblical history, and contemporary society to structures that convey directly the mysteries of divine interaction with man's world. In every dimension, O'Connor's fiction is charged with significance deriving from the infusion of the spiritual in the concrete and expressed through the vehicle of the iconic.

The stories to be considered in the next chapter participate in the same vision and are articulated through the same basic technique, but they are more complex in their iconic combinations and thematic structuring.

CHAPTER THREE
Iconic Combinations

We have already seen how O'Connor uses single icons in multi-leveled and multi-dimensional ways to create a richness of meaning beyond the merely naturalistic, and we have also looked briefly at how the significance of a story's central icon can be enriched by the introduction of complementary iconic objects or structures. In the stories to be considered in this chapter, O'Connor makes fuller use of icons in combination, increasing the complexity of the presentation and intensifying the sense of the spiritual immanent in the concrete. Two of these stories, "Parker's Back" and "The Artificial Nigger," use their multiple-icon structures primarily to advance her consistent religious theme of man's inescapable confrontation of his fallen condition and his need for grace. "The Lame Shall Enter First" and "The Displaced Person" are also concerned with this theme, but through a broader range of icons, they blend the religious with more general psychological and social concerns.

Of these complex stories, "Parker's Back" is both the most obvious and the most restricted in its iconography. The thematic intrusion of grace into the secular world and the progressive deepening of profane into sacred are centered in an iconography of tattoos. Social symbols of worldliness and physical courage often linked to the image of manliness, tattoos are naturalistic, seldom associated with the spiritual. In using them as icons, O'Connor stressed both the gulf between spirit and matter and the unlikely ways in which that gulf may be bridged.

O. E. Parker is a beer-drinking, woman-chasing ex-sailor whose only unifying, guiding principle is his desire for tattoos. His wife is a religious fanatic whom he seems to have married only because he could possess her no other way. Together, they present the rigid extremes of profanity and fundamentalist sanctity, and the hostility and alienation within their marriage are paradigmatic of the division between matter and spirit that is so central a concern in the story.

In spite of Parker's insistent profanity, however, there is a religious quality in his pursuit of the tattoos: he seeks in them a permanent, unifying pattern, and his search dominates his life. The iconic nature of the tattoos is clearly established by a second icon, one preceding them in time. As a boy of fourteen, Parker had seen at a fair a man entirely covered with tattoos:

> Except for his loins which were girded with a panther hide, the man's skin was patterned in what seemed from Parker's distance--he was near the back of the tent, standing on a bench--a single intricate design of brilliant

> color. The man, who was small and sturdy, moved about on the platform, flexing his muscles so that the arabesque of men and beasts and flowers on his skin appeared to have a subtle motion of its own. Parker was filled with emotion, lifted up as some people are when the flag passes. . . . Until he saw the man at the fair, it did not enter his head that there was anything out of the ordinary about the fact that he existed. Even then it did not enter his head, but a peculiar unease settled in him. It was as if a blind boy had been turned so gently in a different direction that he did not know his destination had been changed. (CS, pp. 512-513)

Inspired by what he has seen, Parker has attempted to make himself an image of this god-like being who has made of his skin a complex but unified, living creation. In the process of re-creating himself, Parker has etched into his flesh images of animals, kings and queens, and emblems (all of which have at some time served men as icons); he has also included a few obscenities, in keeping with the symbolic profanity of his effort. But the results are persistently disappointing: "The effect was not of one intricate arabesque of colors but of something haphazard and botched. A huge dissatisfaction would come over him and he would go off and find another tattooist and have another space filled up" (CS, p. 514). The dissatisfaction eventually becomes so acute that the tattoos themselves seem to "live[] inside him in a raging warfare" (CS, p. 514), and he goes AWOL, is dishonorably discharged from the Navy, and becomes an itinerant laborer.

In his wanderings, Parker meets the grim Sarah Ruth, and for reasons he can't fully explain to himself he marries her. But the marriage proves no more satisfying than the tattoos; the relationship is, in fact, similar to the warfare he felt metaphorically

resulting from the conflicting tattoos on his skin. Desperate, Parker tries again to force the icon to meaning; he will have another tattoo on a hitherto untouched part of his body: "It had to be his back . . . . He visualized having a tattoo put there that Sarah Ruth would not be able to resist--a religious subject" (CS, p. 519). But the proper subject remains elusive, and not until a flaming encounter between his tractor and a tree does he sense clearly what he must have--a picture of God. It will be the ultimate tattoo and a subject that Sarah Ruth will have to like; it will, in theory, heal all the divisiveness of his life.

Possessed by his vision, Parker goes straight to the city, straight to the tattoo parlor, and straight to the pictures of Christ (the nearest the tattooist can come to God and a substitution that Parker considers irrelevant). Beginning with the "up-to-date" smiling Christs, Parker leafs through the book backwards, "feeling that when he reached the one ordained, a sign would come" (CS, p. 522). Come it does, not from a smiling Jesus but from the eyes of "a flat stern Byzantine Christ," and it is this image Parker has transferred to his back in a night and a day of constant work. But once the tattoo is finished, Parker is afraid to confront it, and when the artist forces him to look, he is irrevocably changed.

Attempting to ignore the vision and pick up his old life, Parker buys a bottle of whiskey and visits a pool hall where he has been a regular. But when his tattoo is discovered, he is scorned,

responds with violence, and is ejected. As he sits in the alley behind the hall, Parker looks for the first time at his soul, seeing it as "a spider web of facts and lies that was not at all important to him but which appeared to be necessary in spite of his opinion" (CS, p. 527). As he leaves the city, carrying his icon to Sarah, he observes that his dissatisfaction is gone, and he feels "a stranger to himself, driving into a new country though everything he saw was familiar to him" (CS, p. 527).

But the final rejection is yet to come. The door of Parker's house is locked, and he is forced to identify himself by his full Biblical name, Obadiah Elihue, before Sarah Ruth will let him in. Once inside, Parker experiences the ultimate rejection: he offers Sarah Ruth a vision of the tattoo, and she scorns it as idolatry, beating Parker nearly senseless with her broom. He is left "leaning against [a] tree, crying like a baby" (CS, p. 530).

Like Christ and the prophets, Parker is without honor in his own country, but like Christ and the prophets too, he is finally in touch with transcendent meaning, the kind he has been simultaneously seeking and rejecting. This irony of communion through alienation is articulated for the reader through the story's iconography. Parker's adoption of the tattooed man as his idol is ironic because he sees perfection in a surface and tries to forge a meaningful, satisfying life by simply re-creating the surface. He attempts to become his own God, his own creator, but the inevitable futility of

his effort is reflected in the fact that the more tattoos he acquires in his search for perfection, the more unsatisfied he is.[1] His icon proves purely ironic, up to the point of the final tattoo.

With the tattooed Christ, however, Parker's iconography enters a new dimension. Although the need for this icon grows in part from the old search for satisfaction, other factors set this image apart: it is a picture of the supreme being, and thus the ultimate attempt at incarnating spirit in matter; it is for someone else (Sarah Ruth), and thus directed for the first time toward a kind of communion; it is mysterious in its advent, prefigured by a mystical experience and determined by a sign from the pictured Christ himself; and its presence on Parker's body changes his soul, thus healing the division of flesh from spirit that characterized Parker's earlier perception of the icon. Most of these distinctions are imperfectly sensed by Parker himself, and some of them are even perversely interpreted. When his tractor collides with the tree, catapaulting him into the air and setting the tree on fire, Parker's "'GOD ABOVE! '" is an instinctive expletive; his subsequent flight to the city is an equally unthinking and uncontrollable leap forward into the unknown. But the tatto and the events that follow because of it do imply a divine force operating in Parker's life; the image intended as the coup de grâce to a consciously and radically ironic iconography, its thirty-dollar price connoting betrayal, has instead been turned by the action of mystery into a true icon. Its action has separated Parker

from his old life and plunged him into a new condition.

To the iconography of the tattoos that focus Parker's life are added other iconic objects and iconic character roles that fuse with Parker's own. His full name, which he tries to avoid by using initials, is Obadiah Elihue. Combining as it does the name of the friend of Job who took the side of God against the profane comforters and the name of a Hebrew prophet who was sent to warn the enemies of Israel against their idolatries and indulgences, Parker's given name is a sign of his election and his refusal to use it is a sign of his alienation from the divine. When he does use it to identify himself on his return home, he feels "the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts" (CS, p. 528). Acceptance of the servant-of-God role imaged in the prophet icon has enabled Parker to realize internally the kind of living, integrated vision of creation and paradise he sought so long and so futilely in an external form. Soul and body are unified through divine transformation.

The iconic prophet figure is reinforced by a second parallel, that of Parker to Moses, and this parallel is signaled by the iconic image of the burning bush. When Parker, his mind on a design for his back, runs his tractor into the one large tree in the field he is harvesting, he unconsciously shouts God's name, notices that the tree is on fire, and sees that he has lost his shoes and that they

too are burning. Like Moses, Parker is called against his will to a greater fulfillment than he could have achieved on his own. Unlike Moses, however, Parker is blind to the implications of what is happening, and he ironically takes the sign of his own election as a suggestion for perfecting his own secular icon.

The culmination of the iconic figures fused with Parker's is, of course, that of Christ. The tattoo, which suggests in the night and day of its application the night and day of Christ's suffering, makes Parker forever an image of Christ, and the treatment to which he is subjected, after the tattoo makes him a living embodiment of the icon, parallels the rejection, persecution, and destruction of Christ at the hands of his own people. Sarah Ruth's beating of Parker is an echo of the scourging of Christ, and, as Carlson has pointed out, to Sarah Ruth, Parker is a scapegoat on whom she can heap the sins of the world and exorcise them.[2] But her exorcism is ironic, a manifestation of her own blindness to the Incarnation, her own heretical insistence on the division of flesh and spirit.[3] The welts she raises on Parker's back disfigure the face of Christ.

The irony of Sarah Ruth's perception of the icon complements the irony of Parker's earlier vision: she perceives the sacred as profane; he tried to make the profane sacred and use the sacred for profane purposes. The crucial difference here is that the action of mystery has offered Parker the resolution of his ironic misunderstanding of reality, while Sarah remains in self-deceived ignorance,

separating the image of salvation from its reality and driving the prophet from her house.[4]

The tree against which Parker leans, crying in the agony of his birth into the role of prophet scorned, recalls the burning tree of his calling, and the iconic implications of this fusion suggest the entire pattern of Christianity from the Fall in Eden through the crucifixion. Facing the tree of redemption requires turning one's back on the world, and Parker's posture at the end images the basic paradox of Christianity. As Burns has pointed out, Parker witnesses to the world by turning away from it,[5] and in so doing, he fuses all the iconic elements of the story, presenting to the world the image of Christ and all the prophet images that anticipate and echo that primary pattern. Through an attempt to embrace false gods, he has ironically come to embody the truth of Christianity.

In "The Artificial Nigger," O'Connor also draws naturalistic detail into an iconographic dimension, but the iconography remains less blatantly religious, and the origins and implications of the redemptive experience are broader, touching the psychological and social as well as the religious. In addition, there are a more complex integration of various iconographic objects and structures and a fuller use of the latter. The iconic ritual of the initiation journey, used in briefer but similarly ironic form in "The Turkey," is here fully developed and used to support and integrate the iconography of objects and characters.

Like Hawthorne's Robin Molineux, young Nelson Head comes out of the innocence of the country to undergo a series of experiences in the city that constitute an initiation into life.[6] Unlike Robin, however, Nelson has a guide throughout his experiences, and in this respect, the pattern of the story more clearly parallels the standard iconic structure of the guided initiation, embraced by many ages and cultures, in which an innocent is led to wisdom by one already wise. Under the iconic mode of O'Connor's vision, however, the teacher is made learner and the lesson is less one of meaningful guides to independent behavior (as Robin's seems) than one of the need for human and divine community.

In the pre-dawn moonlight, as the story begins, Nelson's grandfather, Mr. Head, seems clearly the iconic guide figure, both in his own eyes and (for lack of sufficient information) in ours. The moon itself appears immersed in self-contemplation, "with the look of a young man who sees his old age before him," and Mr. Head is thinking correlatively that "age was a choice blessing and that only with years does a man enter into that calm understanding of life that makes him a suitable guide for the young" (CS, p. 249). Reinforcing Mr. Head's own impression of his suitability is the ironic authorial description of his appearance:

> . . . in the miraculous moonlight [his eyes] had a look of composure and of ancient wisdom as if they belonged to one of the great guides of men. He might have been Vergil summoned in the middle of the night to go to Dante, or better, Raphael, awakened by a blast of God's light to fly to the side of Tobias. (CS, pp. 249-250)

Even Mr. Head's trousers, hanging on the back of a chair, have "an almost noble air, like the garment some great man had just flung to his servant" (CS, p. 249). And in polar contrast to the image of Mr. Head as sage is the conspicuously fetal figure of Nelson, "hunched over on his side, his knees under his chin and his heels under his bottom," on a pallet that lies in "[t]he only dark spot in the room" (CS, p. 250). O'Connor is combining iconic structure and symbolic imagery to indicate immediately the mythic nature of the events to follow.

Reinforcing and complicating the iconic initiation structure is the early suggestion of a second iconic structure, that of the psychomachia. A strong element of conflict exists between Nelson and his grandfather, with each trying to prove that he is the wiser or better and that the other is really ignorant; each tries to be the first one up, and each insists the city is his territory, Nelson because he was born there, Mr. Head because he has been there twice before. There is, in effect, an opposition between instinctive and experiential knowledge, between youthful confidence and aging pride, suggesting a single divided psyche. This concept of Mr. Head and Nelson as a single individual divided against himself is supported visually:

> They were grandfather and grandson but they looked enough alike to be brothers and brothers not too far apart in age, for Mr. Head had a youthful expression by daylight, while the boy's look was ancient, as if he knew everything already and would be pleased to forget it. (CS, p. 251)

The fullness of the iconic and symbolic structures at this point seems evident primarily to the reader, though Mr. Head's feeling that he is by virtue of age "a suitable guide for the young" suggests an almost iconic perception of his own role, and Nelson seems to pick up the same image soon after the journey begins when he realizes "the old man would be his only support in the strange place they were approaching" (CS, p. 257). Their experiences serve to realize the interconnecting structures from within, and the story becomes a dramatization of the iconic in which the surface pattern of the experience is set in ironic opposition to its true meaning and irony itself becomes the vehicle of education.

The journey itself begins in a heavily symbolic setting. The sun is rising behind the eastern mountains, but the two travelers are facing away from it, toward "a gray transparent moon, hardly stronger than a thumbprint and completely without light" (CS, p. 252). The configuration of the tracks, considered elsewhere in this study, is equally symbolic: the double line of rails "that did not converge again until they were hidden behind the bends at either end of the clearing" (CS, p. 252) provides an image that suggests the present separation and pending union in mystery of Nelson and his grandfather. And when the train does stop for them, the conductor who meets them has "the face of an ancient bloated bulldog" (CS, p. 253), connecting the impending trip with a journey to the underworld. These three symbols--the sun, the tracks, and the conductor--prefigure the

three interrelated dimensions of the coming experience: the sun, in O'Connor's symbology/iconography, suggests the immanent and observing presence of the divine, on which the two have presently turned their backs; the image of separated yet converging rails suggests the temporal (physical/psychological) split that will be healed; and the conductor identifies the coming experience as following a mythic pattern of discovery of the eternal consequences of one's temporal behavior. The symbolic/iconic blend, sometimes confusingly indefinite in O'Connor's works, is here used effectively, the symbols serving as indicators of the larger iconic structures that are the substance of the story.

Following the archetypal pattern of the initiation or quest journey, the trip to the city becomes a series of experiences through which awareness is generated by stages. Mr. Head initially preserves his sense of superiority in Nelson's eyes, if not the reader's, on the train ride, where his past experience and Nelson's ignorance combine with a limited terrain to allow the "guide" an unchallenged superiority. But once in the city, Mr. Head's limited knowledge rapidly proves inadequate. Once out of sight of the terminal's putty-colored dome, Mr. Head quickly loses his way, first going in circles and then wandering aimlessly. Nelson is quickly undeceived, and his reactions alternate between triumph at his grandfather's humiliation and fear at his own predicament. Both Nelson and Mr. Head have trusted too much in too little, and their experiences force them

progressively to an awareness of this groundless faith, leading them ultimately to deny each other in a necessary exorcising of old images to make way for new truths.

To focus this growing awareness, O'Connor uses, in addition to a number of incidental symbols, two reiterated objects. The two elements of city life that Mr. Head considers particularly sordid, and thus particularly representative of the nature of the city itself, are the sewers and the Negroes. These objects thus serve as appropriate indices of the changes in attitude and relationship with which the story is concerned.

To Mr. Head, who sees this trip as a moral mission to show Nelson "that he had no cause for pride merely because he had been born in a city" (CS, p. 251), Nelson's delight in what he's seeing calls for immediate correction. Taking Nelson to a sewer opening, Mr. Head explains

> . . . how the entire city was underlined with [the sewer system], how it contained all the drainage and was full of rats and how a man could slide into it and be sucked along down endless pitchblack tunnels. At any minute any man in the city might be sucked into the sewer and never heard from again. He described it so well that Nelson was for some seconds shaken. He connected the sewer passages with the entrance to hell and understood for the first time how the world was put together in its lower parts. (CS, p. 259)

The sewers themselves are not physically confronted again, but the image of teeming, corrupt life below the surface of things, suggesting through the analogy to hell the fallen nature of man, reappears at the end of the story. When Nelson, who has run into and possibly

injured a woman, runs to his "guide" for help, Mr. Head denies any relationship to or knowledge of the boy. When Nelson, in return, rejects his grandfather, refusing the symbolic communion of a proffered drink of water, Mr. Head feels he has wandered into

> . . . a black strange place where nothing was like it had ever been before, a long old age without respect and an end that would be welcome because it would be the end. . . . [He] felt that if he saw a sewer entrance he would drop down into it and let himself be carried away; and he could imagine the boy standing by, watching with only a slight interest, while he disappeared. (CS, p. 267)

The endless, unpleasant darkness of the sewer tunnels, a quality Mr. Head used so glibly to intimidate Nelson, has rebounded spiritually on Mr. Head himself, and the psycho-spiritual progression from superficial to profound awareness is paralleled in the elevation of the image from physical to metaphorical. As Eggenschwiler suggests, the pattern in "The Artificial Nigger" is that of symbolic death and rebirth, with a central agon that involves a descent into the dark labyrinth of the demonic.[7] The sewers as spiritual experience thus become a part of the overall iconic structure, echoing Dante and suggesting a descent into the psyche, where man encounters his fallen nature.

The second of the reiterated images, that of the Negro, is used more fully, and in its progression from literal object to symbol to icon, it, like the sewer image, frames the spiritual development of the two central figures. It is, however, even more fully a part of the educating irony of the story because the characters themselves

are conscious of the progression, if not of all its implications.

Before the journey actually begins, the subject of Negroes is a focus for the conflict between Mr. Head and Nelson. "Niggers" are presented by Mr. Head as a sign of both the city's undesirability and Nelson's ignorance:

> "You may not like it a bit," Mr. Head continued. It'll be full of niggers."
> The boy made a face as if he could handle a nigger.
> "All right," Mr. Head said. "You ain't ever seen a nigger."
>
> . . .
>
> "How you know I never saw a nigger when I lived there before?" Nelson asked. "I probably saw a lot of niggers."
> "If you seen one you didn't know what he was," Mr. Head said, completely exasperated. "A six-month-old child don't know a nigger from anybody else."
> "I reckon I'll know a nigger if I see one," the boy said . . . . (CS, p. 252)

But when they do see a Negro on the train, Nelson fails to recognize him as such, and the first victory goes to Mr. Head. Both Nelson and his grandfather, however, are dwarfed by the huge figure of the Negro himself, parading ostentatiously down the aisle in the superiority of his affluence. Mr. Head recovers a sense of his own superiority, however, when he has the last word in an altercation with the Black waiters in the dining car, and once in the city, he is able to reinforce this illusion of superiority by showing Nelson a shoe-shine parlor and emphasizing the servile role Negroes occupy there.

Negro figures continue to serve as referents for the stages of disintegration that mark the journey through the city. It is the second sight of the shoe-shine parlor that alerts Nelson to the

circular path they have been traveling, and Mr. Head's blind attempt to prove this only a temporary lapse of memory ironically leads him directly into the heart of the Negro district. Here, the situation in the train is reversed and Nelson and Mr. Head are the objects of curiosity, the outsiders. Clearly aware by now that his guide is nearly useless, Nelson begins to separate himself from Mr. Head, and Negroes again focus the opposition. Mr. Head insists "'We didn't come to look at niggers . . .'" (CS, p. 260), but Nelson feels drawn to them and to one woman in particular. Like the man in the train, she seems larger than life, but where he was the epitome of civilized, flamboyant elegance, she is purely natural, haloed by her own hair and minimally covered in "a pink dress that showed her exact shape" (CS, p. 261). Nelson reacts to her as a suppliant to a goddess:

> He stood drinking in every detail of her. His eyes traveled up from her great knees to her forehead and then made a triangular path from the glistening sweat on her neck down and across her tremendous bosom and over her bare arm back to where her fingers lay hidden in her hair. He suddenly wanted her to reach down and pick him up and draw him against her and then he wanted to feel her breath on his face. He wanted to look down and down into her eyes while she held him tighter and tighter. He had never had such a feeling before. He felt as if he were reeling down through a pitch-black tunnel. (CS, p. 262)

The feeling of being drawn into the mysterious and the clear linking with the image of the sewer tunnels prefigure the final shattering revelation, implying that the confrontation of darkness is the road to light; but here Nelson remains alone in his perception, divided from his grandfather, who scorns him for asking directions from "'a

nigger'" woman. Communal revelation is still far away.

The division between guide and initiate increases from this point, resulting finally in the mutual rejections discussed earlier. Contrastingly, the landscape steadily improves, in superficial terms, from the Black slums to the elegant suburbs, but the movement toward external "perfection" is accompanied by a dehumanization, culminating in an area full of mansions, but entirely deserted, and configured like a surface version of Dante's lower circles: "The big white houses were like partially submerged icebergs in the distance. There were no sidewalks, only drives, and these wound around and around in endless ridiculous circles" (CS, p. 267). In the midst of this cleanly ordered chaos, Mr. Head, confronting the knowledge of his own depravity and the fact of Nelson's persistent rejection, is suddenly confronted with the last "nigger"--the artificial one:

> The Negro was about Nelson's size and he was pitched forward at an unsteady angle because the putty that held him to the wall had cracked. One of his eyes was entirely white and he held a piece of brown watermelon . . . . It was not possible to tell if the artificial Negro were meant to be young or old; he looked too miserable to be either. He was meant to look happy because his mouth was stretched up at the corners but the chipped eye and the angle he was cocked at gave him a wild look of misery instead. (CS, p. 268)

In their shock and surprise, Mr. Head and Nelson are drawn together:

> The two of them stood there with their necks forward at almost the same angle and their shoulders curved in almost exactly the same way and their hands trembling identically in their pockets. Mr. Head looked like an ancient child and Nelson like a miniature old man. They stood

> gazing at the artificial Negro as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat. They could both feel it dissolving their differences like an action of mercy. (CS, pp. 268-269)

Physically, the precarious mooring and miserable expression of the statue suggest the predicament of Nelson and his grandfather, and the indefinite age draws man and boy into a single image. In the religious dimension of the story, the icon is of potentially multiple significance, fusing images of depravity and salvation. By its position in the frozen hell of suburbia, the statue is, as Peter Hays has suggested, parallel to Satan, and the human oppression it symbolizes is satanic.[8] But in its chipped and miserable condition it is also, as Eggenschwiler argues, all men and Christ (who became man), and as such, it serves Mr. Head and Nelson as a symbol of incomplete man and redeeming God.[9]

Coming at the end of their quest, the statue is coerced by the mythic pattern into serving as grail (ultimate knowledge being the equivalent of the grail in the initiation experience), and as such it is iconic. It is also, however, iconic in its own right: in using the image of a "happy slave" to decorate property, the society both objectifies and prettifies the principle of human exploitation upon which the social and economic structure rests. Society has reduced men to objects and then displayed them smiling in their debasement, but the very display of the icon had led to the revelatory weathering that strips the smile from its hidden truth.

There is, then, a double irony here: the icon itself is ironic, independent of Mr. Head and Nelson's perceptions, and their preconceptions and previous experiences make their vision of the icon privately ironic. They seem to misunderstand the purpose of the statue; Mr. Head takes it as a kind of tribute by whites to Blacks ("'They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one'" [CS, p. 269]), and he sees in it evidence of other people's folly. He seems unaware that this statue is an accurate symbol of his own reduction of Negroes to flawed objects worthy only of scorn.[10] The revelation here does not open Mr. Head's eyes to his own bigotry; rather, it awakens a communal feeling derived from a shared sense of personal limitation and mutual need. The iconic sign of a culture's blind depravity has ironically led Mr. Head to conclude that his own depravity can be forgiven and that through the suffering of hell he has earned a vision of paradise. A physical object has generated a psychological shock that has, in turn, led to an apparent religious revelation, and this final combination of forces has been prefigured by the earlier appearances of Negroes at crucial stages in the initiation experience. An iconic object blending both internal and external significance has converged ironically with an iconic structure to generate what Mr. Head himself sees as a redemptive experience.

However, the nature of the redemptive vision here is problematical. If the reader can accept such a strong outpouring of grace

from such an unlikely object, then he can also accept Quinn's view that both man and boy are "advanced in wisdom and rooted in charity."[11] But the persistence of Mr. Head's bigotry and Nelson's final "'I'm glad I've went once, but I'll never go back again!'" (CS, p. 270) may also lead one to conclude with Malin that the conversion itself is ironic, leading man and boy to further entrapment and retreat, and that O'Connor herself is standing "on the line between the grotesque and Christian epiphany, not fully committing herself."[12] The text of the story insists on Mr. Head's conscious and Nelson's instinctive affirmation of the feeling of grace, but Mr. Head's response to the redemptive experience is another foolish attempt "to show [Nelson] that he was still wise," and the "action of mercy" provides Mr. Head with an inverse kind of ego-gratification (appalled at his sins, he proceeds to "judge himself with the thoroughness of God" [CS, p. 269]).[13] Since the story concludes without evidence of changed behavior, the possibility of grace as illusion remains. And with it remains the possibility of one more ironic twist to the iconic structures and objects.

The roles of teacher and learner are used again in "The Lame Shall Enter First," and here the role-reversal is even more fully ironic than in "The Artificial Nigger." In "The Artificial Nigger" both teacher and learner are reduced to the level of learner; in "The Lame" the roles are simply reversed, with the teacher learning the final truths from the boy he expected to save. Here, the journey

toward truth covers limited terrain and is almost entirely internal; the progress toward awareness is generated less by the confrontation of new experiences than by a dialectic between existing theories and the realities that give them concrete form. Corresponding to the less mythic narrative structure is an increased emphasis on the social and physical dimensions of events; they complement the religious and psychological dimensions to make "The Lame" more humanly realistic than "The Artificial Nigger."

In articulating this broad vision, O'Connor uses iconic objects, characters, and structures from all the dimensions with which she is concerned: a club foot, a telescope, a mother, a priest, Christ, Satan, Ezekiel, and the psychomachia all become iconic and interact with each other to generate a lesson on the pursuit of false gods. The three major characters are defined individually and in relationship to each other through their adoption of and response to iconic roles, objects, and structures.

Sheppard is an intellectual who sees himself as a kind of humanist savior. He has dedicated himself in particular to saving Rufus Johnson, a reform-school boy whose history is a classic case of individual potential distorted by environment: his father died before he was born; his mother is in the penitentiary; he lives in a primitive shack with his fundamentalist grandfather, who beats him every day; and he has a club foot. Confronted with so obvious an explanation for Johnson's anti-social behavior, Sheppard finds the solution

equally obvious: he will give Johnson physical security, trust, and guidance, and thus free the boy to realize his full potential.

The third member of the triangle is Sheppard's son, Norton. Unlike his father, Norton is impulsive, emotional, immersed in himself, and Sheppard has already written him off as "selfish, unresponsive, greedy." The irony here is immediately apparent: Johnson is a tough, defiant, destructive boy, and Norton is simply a lonely, average child; yet Sheppard devotes all his saving attention to Johnson and either criticizes or ignores Norton.

The disparity in Sheppard's treatment of the two boys focuses the iconic images in his character and reveals the ironic relationship between those images and the realities of his character. Consciously, Sheppard sees himself as a priest and his office at the reformatory as a confessional, but with the difference that, "he explained, he did not absolve" and that "[h]is credentials were less dubious than a priest's; he had been trained for what he was doing" (CS, p. 449). Unconsciously, Sheppard seems to conceive his priestly role in the more extreme image of Christ. He devotes his free time to "helping boys no one else cared about" (CS, p. 447); he constantly preaches ethical behavior; he endures Johnson's insults and defiances, refusing to let his own emotions interfere with helping Johnson; and he tries to "heal" Johnson's deformity by purchasing for him a corrective shoe. And most extremely, Sheppard sees himself as the embodiment of "the good," a characterization that draws into conjunction

with the Christ figure the iconic structure of the psychomachia.

Early in his relationship with Sheppard, Johnson has declared himself to be in Satan's power. As a Christ of humanism, Sheppard objects doubly to this assertion: it is wrong to think that one is bound to evil, and it is wrong to believe in the irrational concept of an active, mysterious evil force. Under Sheppard's religion of humanism, the idea of Satan is simply the sign of an intellect in bondage to superstition; Johnson's "mischief [is] compensation for the foot" (CS, p. 450), and thus his devil can be easily explained to him. Further, the erroneous belief in mysterious forces can be eradicated totally through science, and to advance Johnson's education in this area, Sheppard plans to buy a telescope through which Johnson will be able to "see the universe, to see that the darkest parts of it could be penetrated" (CS, p. 451). But even after Johnson has been subjected to kindness, explanations, and the telescope, he continues to reject Sheppard's salvation, and the conflict takes on the psychomachic structure noted earlier. Angered but firm in the face of Johnson's persistent defiance, Sheppard insists,

> "I'm stronger than you are and I'm going to save you. The good will triumph."
> "Not when it ain't true," the boy said. "Not when it ain't right."
> "My resolve isn't shaken," Sheppard repeated. "I'm going to save you." . . .
> Johnson thrust his head forward. "Save yourself," he hissed. "Nobody can save me but Jesus." (CS, p. 474)

The ironies here are multiple. The Christ figure is, as expected, being defied by the Satanic, but in the process, the Christ

is being shown his own limitations through Satanic insistence on the identity and power of the real savior. Further, the belief in the mysterious that Sheppard has deemed so crippling is being asserted and proven stronger than his own power and resistant to his existence-explaining formulas. In this ironic inversion of the soul-debate, truth is in the mouth of the devil and falsity in the mouth of the (pseudo-) Christ.

These ironies point up the complexity in the character of Johnson, a complexity that is itself communicated iconically. As a destructive, anti-social human being whose evil is conscious and deliberate, Johnson is a kind of Satan. But he is also a speaker of truth who introduces Norton to Christianity and who forces Sheppard to confront the hollowness of his false faith and accept his own imperfections. This part of Johnson's character is given dramatic expression in a scene that casts him as prophet. When Johnson brings a Bible into Sheppard's house (one he has, with characteristic ambivalence, stolen) and begins to teach Norton from it, Sheppard's tolerance snaps and he orders Johnson to put it away. In a defiant act of faith, Johnson tears out a page and eats it:

> Johnson swallowed what was in his mouth. His eyes widened as if a vision of splendor were opening up before him. "I've eaten it!" he breathed. "I've eaten it like Ezekiel and it was honey to my mouth!" . . .
> "I've eaten it like Ezekiel and I don't want none of your food after it nor no more ever." (CS, p. 477)

There are two originals of this iconic act, one in Ezekiel 3: 1-4, and another in Revelation 10: 8-11. In the first instance, the one

to which Johnson refers, Ezekiel has a vision in which he is ordered to eat a scroll containing words of lamentation and woe and then to go prophesy to Israel the consequences of its sin. In the second instance, John is visited in his apocalyptic vision by an angel who gives him a scroll to eat. The taste is, as it was for Ezekiel, like that of honey, and the eating is to be followed by prophecy, but here the prophecy is of the last days. Those who do not heed Ezekiel's warnings will suffer the punishment described in John's, and this boy who sees himself as Ezekiel is also, by name, "John's son." He fulfills his role by delivering a warning to Sheppard: "At the door he paused, a small black figure on the threshold of some dark apocalypse. 'The devil has you in his power,' he said in a jubilant voice and disappeared" (CS, p. 478).

The ironic dimension of the prophet image here is the reflection of a society in which good and evil have become confused because people follow Sheppard's religion, putting their trust only in what can be seen. In the ironic design of the story, Johnson is the genuine prophet because his evil behavior is, in its twisted way, a result of his perception of the truth. Ted Spivey accurately describes the thematic function of Johnson's ambivalence: "Miss O'Connor shows that the world will have to be saved by those who, like Rufus Johnson, have the keenness of mind to perceive theological truth amidst evil and who have suffered long at the hands of the devil . . . . What is required is the acceptance of the reality that the truth points

toward."[14] The question of truth is, in a sense, the crux of the psychomachic struggle between Johnson and Shepphard, and each of the two views of truth has its objectifying icon. The Bible has iconic dimensions outside of this story, and it is Johnson's recognition of those dimensions that helps to mark him as speaking the truth. When he brings the Bible into Sheppard's house and Sheppard orders him to put it away, the result is a debate on belief and truth:

> "That book is something for you to hide behind," Sheppard said. It's for cowards, people who are afraid to stand on their own feet and figure things out for themselves." . . .
>
> "You don't believe in that book and you know you don't believe in it!"
>
> "I believe it!" Johnson said. "You don't know what I believe and what I don't."
>
> Sheppard shook his head. "You don't believe it. You're too intelligent."
>
> "I ain't too intelligent," the boy muttered. "You don't know nothing about me. Even if I didn't believe it, it would still be true." (CS, p. 477)

The distinction Johnson makes between belief and truth points up the central weakness in Sheppard's philosophy. Sheppard will accept as true only what he can believe, and he will believe only what he can grasp rationally. His iconic counterpart to Johnson's Bible is the telescope (and its complement, the microscope); through it he attempts to present the universe as a structure that can be intellectually grasped and controlled through understanding. The irony of the icon's inadequacy is immediately apparent. Obviously it is only a tool for looking at something much more vast, but in his human pride, Sheppard worships the process itself. In emphasizing that

the universe "[can] be penetrated," Sheppard is glorifying the act of penetration, not the universe itself, just as in dealing with Johnson he focuses primarily on the power of psychology to redeem Johnson, not on Johnson himself.

Compounding the irony of Sheppard's mis-valuation of the telescope is Norton's transformation of the same object into a means by which a mystical vision is achieved. Unable to accept his mother's death, Norton has conceived of her as a kind of deity, embodying love, and he has made of her room a shrine. When Johnson ransacks the room on his first visit to the house, he destroys Norton's temple, but in doing so, he frees Norton for the larger and final vision of union with his mother. When Johnson introduces Norton to the idea of heaven, Norton convinces himself that his mother is there, and he spends hours in front of the telescope searching the heavens for her. Finally, on the very night that Johnson destroys Sheppard's image as savior by revealing that his criminal activities have continued throughout his stay at Sheppard's, Norton is striking at Sheppard from another direction by finding his mother through the telescope. He tries to share his vision with Sheppard, but Sheppard refuses and orders Norton to bed.

After the police leave with Johnson, Sheppard confronts the facts in bewilderment, and as he seeks to justify himself, his words, like Ruby Turpin's, turn to accuse him:

> "I have nothing to reproach myself with," he began again. "I did more for him than I did for my own child."

> He heard his voice as if it were the voice of his accuser. He repeated the sentence silently.
>
> . . . His heart constricted with a repulsion for himself so clear and intense that he gasped for breath. He had stuffed his own emptiness with good works like a glutton. He had ignored his own child to feed his vision of himself. (CS, p. 481)

Able for the first time to see beyond the telescope, Sheppard feels love for Norton "rush[] over him like a transfusion of life," and Norton's face appears "transformed; the image of his salvation; all light" (CS, p. 482). But the vision is too late. Norton has hanged himself in the attic in an apparent attempt to launch himself into space to find his mother. On one level, instead of saving through rational truth, the telescope has destroyed through mystical vision. On another level, however, there is a healing irony in the fact that Norton has lost his life in the pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling vision. The final failure rests squarely on Sheppard and his inability to respond spiritually to Norton's love and God's mystery.

Responding to human love and divine mystery requires an ability to accept what cannot be explained or controlled. Sheppard's inability to do this and Johnson's insistence on it are set in relief by what is probably the most obviously iconic object in the story, Johnson's clubfoot. Johnson is "as touchy about the foot as if it were a sacred object" (CS, p. 459), and he uses it both as a defense and an assertion of his identity. In his interview with Sheppard, Johnson sits "with the clubfoot raised always to his knee like a weapon ready

for use" (CS, p. 451), and when he first enters Sheppard's house, he threatens to kick Norton with it if Norton fails to obey him. At no time does Johnson attempt to hide or apologize for the foot.

Sheppard, however, sees the foot as a deformity that has contributed to Johnson's anti-social behavior, and his iconic object is not the foot but the orthopedic shoe he is going to buy. He is sure this new shoe will "make the greatest difference in the boy's attitude" (CS, p. 459), and he forces Johnson, against his will, to have a fitting. Even the brace shop is a kind of grotesque temple, its walls covered with deformity-correcting objects, and its customers served by a tonsured clerk with a bright pink bald head who feels defiled by the touch of Johnson's battered old shoe. As is often the case in O'Connor's fiction, physical deformity here suggests spiritual deformity: Johnson's defiant acceptance of his foot parallels his defiant acceptance of his own evil, and Sheppard's desire to mask the deformity parallels his attempt to change Johnson's nature by changing his behavior. Both are doomed to failure, and that failure is itself conveyed through the iconic image of the foot. Determined to convince Johnson of his trust, Sheppard has just defended him to the police. When Johnson commends Sheppard for lying, Sheppard recognizes that he is caught in a circular trap: he must show trust to encourage Johnson in responsible behavior, and yet trust is impossible because Johnson's behavior is not yet responsible. Stunned by the realization, Sheppard stares at the floor:

> The boy's clubfoot was set within the circle of his vision. The pieced-together shoe appeared to grin at him with Johnson's own face . . . . A chill of hatred shook him. He hated the shoe, hated the foot, hated the boy. His face paled. Hatred choked him. He was aghast at himself. (CS, p. 473)

The grotesque foot that Johnson refuses to let Sheppard cover becomes a stimulus forcing Sheppard to see the imperfection he has attempted to cover in himself. It is the first serious blow to his rational philosophy, and it prepares for the final redemptive vision, excising the satanic Johnson and making room for the saintly Norton. The deformed icon of a satanic figure has contributed to the genuine salvation of a pseudo-Christ.

Because "The Lame" emphasizes the psychological and social implications of its still centrally religious experience, the iconography it employs is less exclusively mythic than that in "Parker's Back" and "The Artificial Nigger." In addition, the modernity of Sheppard's rational approach to reality dictates the dialectical way in which the icons themselves are handled. There are suggestions of this approach in the contrasting reactions of Parker, the tattooist, and Sarah Ruth to the tattoo of Christ on Parker's back, but the opposition is simply established, not carefully or lengthily explored. There is also, for the reader, a kind of dialectic surrounding the figure of the Negro in "The Artificial Nigger," but the characters themselves do not participate very consciously in it. In "The Lame," however, it is through the dialectical interaction of the characters that the varying significances of the icons are presented and explored and the

ironies revealed. Although none of O'Connor's fiction can be placed very squarely in the mainstream of literary realism, "The Lame comes closer than most other O'Connor stories to being a realistic presentation of the iconic vision.

Sharing these claims to realism is one of O'Connor's most ambitious stories, "The Displaced Person." Like "The Lame," this story weaves together the psychological, the social, and the religious, but here the social concerns extend from conflict within a culture to conflict between cultures. Affecting the outcome of the events is a mixture of such forces as history, economics, cultural identity, individual psychology, and religious beliefs, all focused on the microcosm of a single farm and on the small number of people who live there. It is largely through the story's iconography that this compression is achieved and that such a small microcosm becomes so fully an image of the macrocosm.

Contrary to what one might expect in a story of this suggestive intensity, there is little explicit linking of the farm to Eden. There is, however, a kind of mythic stature assigned to it by the symbolic objects and events that come within its boundaries. In addition, it functions as a kind of touchstone: characters are defined psychologically and morally by their attitudes toward it. Both of these functions are restricted here to a kind of background role, so that while a variety of icons are defined or echoed within its context, and while it may suggest Eden to the reader, the farm does not itself become

iconic to any of the characters on it.

The human forces dominating the farm do, however, include the iconic. Physically, the farm is in the firm control of Mrs. McIntyre; spiritually, it is dominated by the Judge, Mrs. McIntyre's first husband and the one from whom she had gained the farm. Like some kind of ironic deity, he was a famous rich man who seemed to have taken it with him, a figure whose "prehistoric-looking" face made him appear to belong to the beginning of time, a practical philosopher whose "sayings" could be and were quoted often by all those who belonged to the farm; his desk is the sacred core of the house, and his wife is a living embodiment of his principles. He is, then, an iconic figure, and his ideas and the objects he valued have been accorded like stature.

Of particular significance to the story are three icons associated with the Judge, all of which function ironically. The first of these is compounded of two interrelated objects. The Judge's desk, kept by his wife as a "kind of memorial to him, sacred because he had conducted his business [there]" (CS, p. 221), is dust-covered and crammed with useless papers, and the safe that sits "like a tabernacle in the center of it" (CS, p. 221) is empty. The activity and affluence suggested by the papers and the safe are simply surface images; the core is emptiness and death. The entire icon leads Mrs. McIntyre to look at her poverty as a kind of ultimate reality, and she deals with life as if it were a business with money its sacred center.

The second icon linked to the Judge is the angel he had purchased "partly because its face reminded him of his wife and partly because he wanted a genuine work of art over his grave" (CS, p. 221). This initial reduction of the majesty, mystery, and divinity of an angel is ironically carried to its logical conclusion when one of the hired men steals it for his wife after they have been fired from the farm. The loss of the angel works with the image of the desk to remind Mrs. McIntyre of her present situation: it shows how beleaguered she is by the forces outside her control, and it emphasizes the poverty in which the Judge left her (she can't afford to have the angel replaced). And the motives for its purchase and theft signal the degree to which the sacred has been subverted by modern values with their materialistic and self-serving emphasis.

The third of the icons linked to the Judge is one of his maxims: "'The devil you know is better than the devil you don't'" (CS, p. 208). Through repeated use by a variety of characters in the course of the story, this assertion becomes a conservative defense by means of which the people on the farm perpetuate their own myopic views of reality. Through inversion, the idea that the unknown may hold worse evils than the known is turned into the certainty that what is unknown is diabolical, and the Judge's maxim becomes a defense for the righteousness of persecution.

For the world of the farm, then, the Judge is a presiding spirit incarnated in a decaying shrine, in the memory of a lost icon,

and in distorted theories. There are suggestions that the Judge himself might have seen beyond surfaces: he looked forward to "'the day when he['d] be too poor to pay a nigger to work'" (CS, p. 215); he avoided building his wealth into a permanent estate that would have become more important than the man who gained it; and he found pleasure, even if primarily for the wrong reasons, in peacocks and in the figure of an angel that reminded him of his wife. But if there were intimations of eternal values in the Judge's philosophy, he left no clear guides to them; those who have remained after him on the farm have picked up his primary image and worshiped it, ignoring the implications of truth that form a kind of secondary image shadowing the false icon with the more genuine values its literal surface tries to deny.

The iconic figure of the dead Judge is challenged and complemented by the figure of Guizac, the Displaced Person Mrs. McIntyre hires to work on the farm. From the moment his arrival is certain, he becomes a major force on the life of the farm, and because his foreignness allows the other characters to view him as an object, he is easily cast in iconic roles. Because these roles are simply projections of the viewer's values onto the figure of Guizac, they are intrinsically ironic, and their subjectivity is revealed in the polarity of values assigned to the icon. For Mrs. Shortley, the wife of Mrs. McIntyre's dairy man, Guizac becomes a devil. For Mrs. McIntyre he becomes a Christ.

Mrs. Shortley's suspicion of Guizac probably derives primarily from the threat he poses to her husband's (and her) position on the farm, but through a realistic kind of psychological displacement, she transforms these fears into faults in Guizac himself. In a line of reasoning that might please The Misfit, Mrs. Shortley sees the foreignness of the Guizacs as an indication of their potential for evil:

> [She] recalled a newsreel she had seen once of a small room piled high with bodies of dead naked people all in a heap, their arms and legs tangled together, a head thrust in here, a head there, a foot, a knee, a part that should have been covered up sticking out, a hand raised clutching nothing . . . . This was the kind of thing that was happening every day in Europe where they had not advanced as in this country, and . . . Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblehooks [Guizacs], like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others? (CS, p. 196)

And as Guizac proves increasingly successful, Mrs. Shortley, who "had never given much thought to the devil" (CS, p. 203), grows increasingly sure that she is in the presence of one. Europe looms in Guizac's smile, "mysterious, evil, the devil's experiment station" (CS, p. 205), its history testifying to its diabolical nature: "'They're full of crooked ways. They never have advanced or reformed. They got the same religion as a thousand years ago. It could only be the devil responsible for that'" (CS, p. 206). And, finally, she brings the vision of evil to a direct focus in Guizac himself, using the Judge's words, "' the devil you know is better than the devil you don't'" (CS, p. 208), to warn Mrs. McIntyre against the Pole.

Once the identification is made and the opposition between herself and Guizac established, Mrs. Shortley's vision enlarges rapidly to apocalyptic dimensions. The priest who has brought Guizac to the farm becomes a servant of evil, "leading foreigners over in hordes to places that were not theirs, to cause disputes, to uproot niggers, to plant the Whore of Babylon in the midst of the righteous!" (CS, p. 209). And Mrs. Shortley knows from her newly inspired reading in the Apocalypse and the Prophets that she is called to a special part in God's plan, the first stage of which is keeping watch on the priest. Her conviction of her calling is quickly confirmed by the occurrence of a prophetic vision:

> Suddenly while she watched, the sky folded back in two pieces like the curtain to a stage and a gigantic figure stood facing her. It was the color of the sun in the early afternoon, white-gold. It was of no definite shape but there were fiery wheels with fierce dark eyes in them, spinning rapidly all around it. She was not able to tell if the figure was going forward or backward because its magnificence was so great. She shut her eyes in order to look at it . . . . A voice, very resonant, said the one word, "Prophesy!"
>
> She stood there, tottering slightly but still upright, her eyes shut tight and her fists clenched . . . . "The children of wicked nations will be butchered," she said in a loud voice. "Legs where arms should be, foot to face, ear in the palm of hand. Who will remain whole? Who will remain whole? Who?" (CS, p. 210)

Like Ezekiel, with whom the wheels in her vision link her, Mrs. Shortley prophesies mass destruction of the wicked. But the iconic vision is full of ironies that reveal both Mrs. Shortley's falseness as a prophet[15] and the equivocal nature of God as destroyer. Her "prophecy" is clearly drawn from the concentration-camp image she

has so consistently associated with evil, and, as Eggenschwiler points out, she ignores the fish-like symbols of Christ's mercy that appear in the sky before and after her vision.[16] She also ignores the suggestions of salvation present in the image of the sky's folding back in two pieces, a clear echo of the parting of the Red Sea and a parallel to the rending of the temple veil at the moment of Christ's death.

In addition, the parallels to Ezekiel, which probably grow out of Mrs. Shortley's reading in the Prophets, reveal further ironies. The destruction Ezekiel prophesies is that of his <u>own</u> people at the hands of foreigners; the Israelites will suffer and be driven from their land as punishment for their failure to follow God's laws. In addition, Ezekiel is ordered to condemn female prophets who have been prophesying out of their own minds, telling lies in indifference to moral values. No description could more accurately fit Mrs. Shortley as prophet.[17]

The full realization of the irony of Mrs. Shortley's vision is, however, reserved for a final apocalyptic experience that is also linked to Guizac. In a continuation of his vision, Ezekiel is told to bring out his baggage in the sight of the people and then to carry it out in darkness, as a sign of the coming exile.[18] When Mrs. Shortley overhears Mrs. McIntyre tell the priest she is going to fire Mr. Shortley in order to keep Guizac, Mrs. Shortley has the family pack their belongings and leave the farm in the darkness of early morning. But the physical and emotional effort are too great, and

Mrs. Shortley suffers a stroke, dying in a grotesquely ironic realization of her own prophecy:

> She suddenly grabbed Mr. Shortley's elbow and Sarah Mae's foot at the same time and began to tug and pull on them as if she were trying to fit the two extra limbs onto herself.
>
> . . . She thrashed forward and backward, clutching at everything she could get her hands on and hugging it to herself, Mr. Shortley's head, Sarah Mae's leg, the cat, a wad of white bedding, her own big moon-like knee; then all at once her fierce expression faded into a look of astonishment and her grip on what she had loosened. One of her eyes drew near to the other and seemed to collapse quietly and she was still. (CS, pp. 213-214)

Once again, falsehood has been turned to truth through the operation of a rectifying irony.

The crux of the conflict between the Shortleys and Guizac is work, the measurement of worth on the farm. Devoted as she is to the practical and the material, Mrs. McIntyre has felt herself constantly victimized by the sloth and dishonesty of the people who work for her. But Guizac is a new kind of man. He can run any kind of farm machine; he is an expert carpenter, mason, and mechanic; he is scrupulously clean; he has no vices; and he works with energy, speed, persistence, and dedication. He frees Mrs. McIntyre of money worries for the first time in her life and presents her with an active alternative to the defensive, passive philosophy of the Judge's maxims. "'That man is my salvation!'" she tells Mrs. Shortley (CS, p. 203); awed by his powers, she finds him "not very real . . ., a kind of miracle that she had seen happen and that she talked about but that she still didn't believe" (CS, p. 219). In effect, he has become her Christ.

Superficially, Mrs. McIntyre's acceptance and praise of Guizac make her superior to Mrs. Shortley, but their separate visions prove to be rooted in the same evil: both regard Guizac as an object, and each makes of him an icon embodying her own false values. The inadequacy of Mrs. McIntyre's vision is forced to the surface when she discovers that Guizac plans to get his cousin out of the camp in which she's confined by bringing her to this country and marrying her to one of the farm's Negroes. Here is practicality carried to a logical extreme, but Mrs. McIntyre cannot accept the full extension of her own "religion." Guizac is inadvertently attacking the social structure and revealing its hypocrisies; so, like Christ, he must be eliminated.

In spite of her firm intentions, however, Mrs. McIntyre cannot bring herself to crucify her ex-Christ. Like Pilate, she wishes to be rid of the problem without soiling her hands. The priest who has brought Guizac to the farm refuses, however, to play the role of the Hebrew priesthood in betraying one of their own. He continues to stand for charity and tries to educate Mrs. McIntyre in the truths of the Church. The crucifixion does occur, however, and the impetus comes, as in the case of Christ himself, from the common people. Mr. Shortley returns to the farm in the role of disciple and avenger of his wife, whom he calls "'God's own angel'" (CS, p. 227). Seeking revenge on this alien who has dared to challenge the sloth and dishonesty of the existing order, Shortley stirs up the townsfolk against Guizac. Enlarging himself into a kind of icon for his own culture,

Shortley images the opposition between himself and Guizac as a matter of cultural right and wrong:

> . . . "a man that's fought and bled and died in the service of his native land don't get the consideration of one of them like them he was fighting. I ast you: is that right?"
>
> . . .
>
> "All men was created free and equal, . . . and I risked my life and limb to prove it. Gone over there and fought and bled and died and come back on over here and find out who's got my job--just exactly who I been fighting. It was a hand-grenade come that near to killing me, and I seen who throwed it--little man with eye-glasses just like his." (CS, pp. 228, 232)

Within a very short time, Mrs. McIntyre becomes Shortley's echo, arguing to the priest that her obligation "'is to the people who've done something for their country, not to the ones who've just come over to take advantage of what they can get'" (CS, p. 229). As Shortley spreads his gospel through the town, Mrs. McIntyre becomes aware that people are criticizing her, and she "[begins] to understand that she ha[s] a moral obligation to fire the Pole and that she [is] shirking it because she [finds] it hard to do" (CS, p. 233). Like Pilate, she accepts the people's verdict, denying in the process both traditional religious values and her own pseudo-religion of practicality.

The actual crucifixion is a communal act, one in which both active and passive forces cooperate. Mrs. McIntyre goes out to fire Guizac, but he is already at work. As he lies on the frozen ground beneath the tractor he is repairing, his posture suggests clearly that he is about to become a victim. When the brakes slip on the tractor

Mr. Shortley has parked on an incline above Guizac, all those watching recognize and accept the coming destruction: checking her impulse to shout a warning, Mrs. McIntyre feels "her eyes and Mr. Shortley's eyes and the Negro's eyes come together in one look that [freezes] them in collusion forever" (CS, p. 234). The false god has been destroyed, but the result is not the restoration of order. Instead, the society that sought to preserve itself falls apart: Mr. Shortley and both Negroes wander off in separate directions, and Mrs. McIntyre, unable to run the farm alone, sells her stock and spends the rest of her life in declining health, attended only by the priest, who comes to feed the peacocks and talk to her about the Church. In rejecting the Displaced Person, these people have demonstrated their own displacement from the human community, and their punishment is a literal echo of their sin and an ironic echo of the "sin" of their victim.

Guizac is not literally a Christ; he is simply a man trying to use his talents to save his life. But his view of other people is more authentically moral and democratic than that of any of the people who picture themselves the guardians of morality and democracy. His treatment of Negroes points up this purity of attitude: if they shirk their jobs or steal, they are doing wrong and he criticizes them, but if one wishes to marry his cousin, no crime is being committed, his cousin is being saved from the unpleasant life in a camp, and the Negro is accepted simply as one human being helping another. When the society destroys Guizac, it is ironically attacking the

principles it purports to hold sacred and ironically striking down a true icon for his "falseness."[19]

The only salvation possible in such a society is displacement from it, and when Mrs. McIntyre says "'As far as I'm concerned, . . . Christ was just another D. P.'" (CS, p. 229), she is fusing culturally negative and religiously positive icons in revelation of both her own blindness and an ironic truth. In the interaction between the abstract parallels of Guizac's situation with Christ's and the attitudes of the farm society toward Guizac the iconic dimension of the story is generated; Guizac himself begins and ends as a simple human being. By sustaining this duality, O'Connor achieves a consistently iconic dimension without sacrificing the realism of personality and event, and she ties the mystery of the religious firmly to the actualities of the social and the psychological, criticizing the totality of man's fallen nature.[20]

In this successful blending of the natural and the iconic, "The Displaced Person" is like "The Lame," though broader in its social vision. But the filtering of the religious through the temporal is complemented in "The Displaced Person" by an almost purely iconic object, the peacock.[21] A traditional Christian icon, the peacock symbolizes resurrection and immortality and, because of the "eyes" in its tail, is associated with the healing of blindness.[22] Like Guizac, the peacock is an iconic center for the story, but its dimension is more purely symbolic than Guizac's: the spiritual blindness

of both Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre is emphasized in their scorn for the bird, and the closeness of the priest to the divine is reflected in his fascination with the bird.

The peacock's tail, with its magnificent colors and its symbolic markings, can be repeatedly elevated in an action that becomes both a transfiguration and a resurrection. Like divine mystery, the peacock's tail is always there, but its full vision is offered only rarely and randomly, at the will of the bird himself. In "The Displaced Person," both Mrs. Shortley and Mrs. McIntyre see the peacock constantly, but Mrs. Shortley ignores it, and Mrs. McIntyre regards it as a nuisance that she tolerates out of respect to the Judge's liking for it. Its night screams, associated in bestiaries with the calls of Christians in fear of losing grace,[23] annoy her, and she is letting the flock of peachickens die out. To neither of these women individually does the peacock unfold its tail, but it does offer a full vision to the priest, and the point at which it does so is also the point at which O'Connor brings the story's two iconic centers together. Mrs. McIntyre is trying to convince the priest that Guizac doesn't fit in, and the priest is trying to prevail on her to be charitable. Suddenly, in the midst of the lawn, the peacock raises and spreads its tail, and the priest stands transfixed:

> "Christ will come like that!" he said in a loud gay voice
> . . . .
> Mrs. McIntyre's face assumed a set puritanical expression and she reddened. Christ in the conversation embarrassed her the way sex had her mother. "It is not my responsibility that Mr. Guizac has nowhere to go, she said. . . .

> The old man didn't seem to hear her. His attention was fixed on the cock who was taking minute steps backward, his head against the spread tail. "The Transfiguration," he murmured.
>
> She had no idea what he was talking about. "Mr. Guizac didn't have to come here in the first place," she said, giving him a hard look.
>
> The cock lowered his tail and began to pick grass.
>
> "He didn't have to come in the first place," she repeated, emphasizing each word.
>
> The old man smiled absently. "He came to redeem us," he said . . . . (CS, p. 226)

Against the beauty of the peacock and the priest's sense of wonder, Mrs. McIntyre's narrowness and inhumanity stand out grimly, and the ambiguous fusion of references to Guizac and to Christ effectively makes her denials of the peacock, of Guizac, and of Christ all facets of the same blindness. Could she accept Guizac's strangeness and minister to his need, he would "redeem" her, but she is ignoring that need as she ignores the peacock and the priest, and in the process, she is displacing herself from the communion of understanding and wonder.

Consonant with her technique in the story as a whole, O'Connor creates no direct relationship between Guizac and the peacock; each is allowed to exist naturally and independently, and the iconic values are generated by the other characters' psychologies and philosophies. But the certainty with which those psychologies and philosophies come to rest, either in denial or in affirmation, on spiritual concerns is stronger than symbolism in conveying the persistence of mystery in manners.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

In ironic iconography, Flannery O'Connor found a way to focus and integrate the potentially conflicting elements of her fictional vision: her own traditional Catholic philosophy and the realities of a confused and profane world. By their very nature, icons demonstrate the interrelationship of the spiritual and the concrete, and in the ironic mode they can articulate an improper relationship between the spiritual and the natural. Both O'Connor's Catholic background and the world she could see around her provided her with iconic objects, character roles, and structures, and she had only to borrow from these or invent in kind to suit the demands of an individual story. Fictionally as well as philosophically effective, iconography allowed O'Connor to render theological and psychological truths in concrete form, to let the natural speak for the supernatural. Because the icon involves both the sacred and the perception of it, it is a compact means of defining the relationship of the two and of indicating whether a failure of the sacred lies in its own inadequacy or in the inadequacy of the perceiver. Iconography is thus a vehicle for simultaneously revealing and analyzing man's spiritual state, and

given the steadiness of O'Connor's moral vision, the revelation and analysis of a problem usually imply the nature of its solution.

As this study has indicated, ironic iconography pervades O'Connor's short fiction; nearly every story has at least one significant iconic object, and many stories use multiple icons, side by side or fused in nexi that serve to reveal both the complex dimensions of the fictional subject and the relationships among icons. The overall effect of O'Connor's iconography is, then, dual: it reveals both man's relationship to the sacred and the nature of the sacred itself. Individual men, floundering in ignorance or willful evil, tend to struggle with single icons; the icons themselves, however, combine to affirm the persistence and variety with which the spiritual manifests itself in the concrete.

O'Connor achieves her iconic variety by drawing on a broad range of sources: nature, material objects, modern society, myth, and, of course, Catholicism. As we have seen, animals are iconically central to "The Turkey," "Greenleaf," and "Revelation," natural objects to "The River" and "A View of the Woods"; houses carry iconic significance in "A Good Man" and "The Comforts of Home," a car in "The Life You Save," an artificial leg and an orthopedic boot in "Good Country People" and "The Lame," respectively, tattoos in "Parker's Back," a desk in "The Displaced Person." Socially defined roles function iconically in "A Temple of the Holy Ghost," "The Displaced Person" (in both of which the iconic figures are social

outcasts), "The Comforts of Home," and "A Late Encounter" (in both of which the characters function in socially acceptable roles). Mythic icons appear in "The Turkey" and "The Artificial Nigger," both of which use the archetypal structure of the quest or initiation journey, and in "Greenleaf," where the bull is linked to ancient fertility rites. And, in a preponderance of religious iconography, saints and prophets appear in "Everything That Rises," "Parker's Back," and "The Displaced Person," Christ figures in "The Life You Save," "A Good Man," "The Partridge Festival," and "Parker's Back," Edenic structures in "A Circle in the Fire," "Greenleaf," and "The Displaced Person," Pentecost in "The Enduring Chill," baptism in "The River" and "A Circle," the Eucharist in "The Comforts of Home," "The Lame," and "A Circle."

Complementing this variety of sources is the multiplicity of what might be called the dimensions or modes of the icons. Some of the icons within the stories transcend or escape the conscious awareness of the characters, functioning primarily as reader-icons. Few, if any, of O'Connor's characters are, for example, aware of the sun's sometimes iconic function, though they are often explicitly conscious of its presence or absence and of its warmth and illumination at moments of revelation. Similarly, the characters who participate in parodic Eucharists are conscious of eating only as a physical and social act. And neither Ruller nor Nelson is aware of the mythic pattern of the quest or initiation journey underlying his experiences. These characters are affected by the iconic dimensions of these objects

or acts, but the consciousness of the icons and of their fictional roles is reserved to the reader, and the resulting irony is fully dramatic.

A much larger number of icons are, however, acknowledged by the characters as in some way significant, and the irony in these situations derives from the contradictions of the true and false values the individual icons hold. The icons that are under-valued are primarily those drawn from Christianity, nature, and myth (the "eternals"), and the failure to perceive their significance and value is symptomatic of modern man's separation from the divine. The icons that are over-valued are primarily those drawn from the material and social world that defines man's temporal existence, and the attempt to endow elements of this world with qualities of the sacred is symptomatic of man's attempt to substitute false faith for true.

When Mrs. May makes of the renegade bull a negative, naturalistic icon, she is ignoring its more genuine value as a natural and mythic icon, and the consequences are both revelatory and fatal. Both Mr. Fortune and Mrs. Cope make similar mistakes: Mr. Fortune views his woods as a simple piece of real estate rather than as a natural icon reminding man of the sanctity of life and of the limits of his own power over it; Mrs. Cope fails to understand that her farm is an Eden in trust to her, not a property to be worshiped and served in a religion of possession.

Mrs. Cope's attitude toward the farm is a less simple kind of under-valuation that Mrs. May's and Mr. Fortune's: Mrs. Cope complicates her under-valuing of the farm's Edenic dimension by falsely elevating to the level of the sacred aspects of the farm that are purely profane. She enslaves herself to cultivating and guarding its physical existence but ignores and denies to others the experience of its beauty and vitality. A similar duality marks iconic valuation in "Wildcat" and "Parker's Back." In both, a legitimate iconic object is mis-valued: Gabriel sees the wildcat as symbolic of the power and mystery of life, but he consistently misinterprets his own relationship to that power; Parker seeks out the image of Christ to perfect his existence, but he values the image while ignoring the sacred reality it should evoke.

"A Temple of the Holy Ghost" offers a variation on this kind of iconic duality: a hermaphrodite, regarded by society as a freak, becomes for a child a temple of the Holy Ghost and the vehicle for a mystical experience of the divine. The difference between the iconic experience of this child and the experiences of Mrs. Cope, Mr. Fortune, Gabriel, and Parker focuses clearly the philosophy O'Connor's fiction is articulating. Those characters who fail to see the sacredness of true icons suffer in some way for their mis-valuation, and the suffering involves a confrontation of iconic truth. But the child, who sees beyond society's preoccupation with surfaces to the divine truth that all men are God's creatures, is rewarded for her innocence and faith

with a vision that transcends the icon and allows her a more direct experience of the holy. The other characters in question here are the objects of irony; the child is the instrument through which irony is directed at others.

More frequent than missed visions of the sacred are attempts to impose sacred value inappropriately on temporal objects and characters. Thomas's home, the grandmother's memory-mansion, Shiftlet's car, Joy-Hulga's artificial leg, and Parker's tattoos are all given ultimate values that collapse when challenged. Calhoun and Mary Elizabeth cooperate in the single shattering mistake of making a lecherous and materialistic old lunatic into a Christ figure. General Sash cooperates in allowing himself to be falsified into a social icon and then attempts to define his entire existence in iconic terms. And Mr. Head sees himself as an archetype, the wisdom of age ready and able to guide the young. For all of these characters, the active pursuit or use of icons ultimately leads to a traumatic confrontation that exposes the irony in their supposed sanctity.

Although most of the icons in O'Connor's fiction involve an ironic disparity between genuine and perceived values, in a few cases the irony derives from a somewhat different handling of the icons. The sheriff in "The Comforts of Home" is clearly a negatively iconic character; there is no confusion for either Thomas or the reader about the values here. But Thomas foolishly attempts to use the sheriff to achieve a positive result, and the irony generated is even more

damning than usual because the character involved lacks even the weak excuse of his own blindness. In a contrasting example of the same "confused clarity" of vision, Ruller correctly senses the action of the divine influencing his life through the gift of the turkey, but he interprets the nature and implications of that action according to his own desires rather than leaving himself open to a genuine understanding of divine purpose. For both Thomas and Ruller, an essentially clear view of the icon is ironically undercut by the distortion of related perceptions or actions, and the implication for O'Connor's overall vision is that the simple recognition of the genuinely sacred (or its absence) is inadequate without an equally valid philosophy to guide its use.

The articulation of a full, integrated philosophical vision through elements as discrete as iconic objects, roles, and structures requires the establishment of a context that can bring into play the significance of the icons to individual men and to society. Through the dialectic between icon and icon, icon and perceiver, icon and reader, meaning is generated, usually indirectly and dramatically through irony. The dialectical process in all these forms occurs within the consistent frame of O'Connor's Catholic values, but the elements and structures of the dialectic vary from story to story. As this discussion has shown, most of the stories make use of one major icon, occasionally supported by the suggestion of other iconic elements (e.g., the quest pattern combining with the central iconic

object in "The Turkey," the suggestion of Christ in the character of Shiftlet, whose own icon is a car, and the frequent presence of the sun [a reader-icon] as an element in experiences focused on other icons). In these stories, meaning is generated in the dialectical relationship between character and icon. As this discussion has also shown, however, in a few stories several icons work in combination, and here the dialectic is more complex; in addition to the increased number of relationships between characters and icons, there are relationships among the icons themselves. In all the stories, the theme is some variation of the always central idea that the divine grace essential to man's spiritual and psychological health is everywhere around him, working mysteriously and often forcefully to reclaim him. What individualizes the stories is the variety of forms taken by incarnation and revelation, most of which involve some form of iconic dialectic.

In such single-icon stories as "Greenleaf," "A Circle in the Fire," and "Everything That Rises," the iconic dialectic is relatively simple: the character values his icon falsely, the reader sees it accurately, and the movement of the story pulls the character toward a culminating revelatory experience that resolves the irony by merging character's perception with reader's. In stories such as "The Life You Save," "A Good Man," "The Turkey," "Revelation," "A Late Encounter," "The River," and "A Temple," the initial dialectic between character and reader is progressively drawn into the action

of the story itself, resulting in debates between characters (as in the first two) or within the mind of a single character (as in the latter five). Although such debates do not always lead to a full awareness of the truth, they do involve characters in conscious examination of their icons, with the result that the final revelatory experiences are sometimes less abruptly shocking, if not less fatal. (Since "The River" and "A Temple" reverse the more common pattern of uncovering the falseness of what was believed genuinely iconic, the final experiences in these stories are not revelations of error but consummations of already positive responses to genuine icons.)

In an interesting combination of these two main types of iconic dialectic, "The Partridge Festival" is structured from the beginning as a debate on the iconic value of Singleton, making it an apparent example of the second type of story. But the conclusion is the kind of sudden revelation experienced by those characters in the first type of story: blindness persists until the final shattering revelation, and the entire dialectical process becomes an ironic criticism of itself.

O'Connor's more iconically complex stories repeat the same patterns as the simpler ones, but more factors are involved in the process. "Parker's Back" takes both sacred and profane responses to a single icon (a tattoo of Christ) and plays them against each other, enlarging the significance of the debate through the iconic character

roles of Old Testament prophets and developing from the two an integrating dialectic between image and action (Christ as image, prophets as active agents of divine will). "The Lame" employs essentially the same pattern but extends its scope more fully into the social and natural world by playing against religious icons (Christ, Satan, Ezekiel, the Bible, the Eucharist) iconic objects from the temporal world (telescope, clubfoot, mother, orthopedic shoe). And here even the dialectical process itself is given iconic stature in the archetypal structure of the psychomachia. "The Artificial Nigger" and "The Displaced Person" use as many or more icons in similar yet distinctive combinations of object and structure, spiritual and temporal, and "The Displaced Person" integrates the separate revelatory experiences of two major characters, each dealing with multiple icons, to provide a complexity of iconic texture equal to that of the novels.

By constantly setting values in opposition and relating characters to each other and to their icons in such a way as to generate a kind of fictional debate, O'Connor uses the processes of dialectic to create meaning. It is important to note, however, that while the process is dialectical, the results are not. O'Connor is not interested in the resolution of opposites through synthesis, and her dialectic is always resolved at the Christian pole. Genuine iconic value is ultimately established by authorial (or narrator's) assertion, not demonstration, and characters arrive at the truth in spite of, not because of, their ability to reason. Their pursuit of the false

ironically leads them to the truth, and faith is forced on them by annihilating revelations that leave them powerless to resist divine action.

Although occasionally O'Connor's stories betray the sense of strain involved in attempting to confirm an absolute through the dialectical process, her overall vision is firm. Most of the irony in the inversion of true and false is resolved not by rational synthesis but by the healing effect of radical Christian irony: one must hold in spiritual sight both the true and the false, for he can fully affirm the true only by understanding and renouncing the false. And because iconic value is a matter of subjective, spiritual truth rather than of scientifically demonstrable fact, icons allow O'Connor to explore, question, and deny or affirm spiritual truth at a point of single focus. The ironic icon allows her to recognize the modern dilemma, analyze its nature and root, and assert her traditionalist answers. It also allows her to recognize the dual yet integrated nature of reality, to assert the power of the divine to work through the concrete world, to insist that life and art are inescapably moral, and to compel the reader's participation in the moral experience by forcing him to judge and evaluate. It would be hard to conceive of a more perfect device for the incarnation of O'Connor's religious and literary ideals.

NOTES

Chapter One

[1]John Crowe Ransom describes icons as symbols of wholes: ". . . [U]nder the iconic sign the abstract item is restored to the body from which it was taken" (The New Criticism [Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941], p. 285). Although Ransom is dealing with aesthetics, his description is relevant to the more general concept of the icon being used here.

The nature of the iconic is further clarified by Mircea Eliade's description of hierophanic objects: "By manifesting the sacred, any object becomes something else, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu" (quoted in Melvin Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, ed. Melvin Friedman and Lewis Lawson [New York: Fordham University Press, 1966], p. 199). This existence under two species is one of the qualities that distinguish icon from symbol and is perhaps the distinction O'Connor herself intended in her legendary comment on the Eucharistic Symbol: "If it were only a symbol, I'd say to hell with it" (quoted in Robert Fitzgerald's "Introduction" to Everything That Rises Must Converge [New York: New American Library, Inc., 1956], p. xi).

[2]To eliminate confusion it should be noted here that all icons are symbols in that they represent something beyond themselves. Not all symbols, however, are icons. A genuine icon cannot simply point to something else; it must receive its value from the truths or patterns it then comes to symbolize, and those values must have major significance to an individual or group in order for him or them to regard the symbol as iconic. A religious painting from the Renaissance or the huge stone sculptures on Easter Island are icons only to those who can touch the transcendent through them; to the rest of us they are merely someone else's icons, symbolizing religious beliefs that are not essential to our own psychological and spiritual security and fulfillment.

[3]Kurt Vonnegut provides a full and intriguing fictional

treatment, in his Cat's Cradle, of this psychological imperative: in the face of the realization that all sacred truths are fictions, the religion of Bokononism is created to supply man with those very fictions, because he cannot live without them. The religion itself is thus an assertion that it is both impossible and necessary to lie about reality and that a sense of the sacred is so essential to man's well-being that he will live with the irony of a lie rather than face the shattering meaninglessness of the truth.

[4]Ihab Hassan applies the term "radical irony" to any statement that contains its own ironic denial (The Literature of Silence, [New York: Knopf, 1967], p. 12). He sees this quality in a strain of modern literature that seeks to use words to deny the value of words; the definition would seem to apply equally well to much of contemporary iconography. In a recent dissertation, Rhonda Johnson explores this concept of silence in O'Connor's works, focusing in part on how fallen man uses language, which is itself tainted by the Fall, as a shield against knowledge of his own folly or degenerate nature ("A Translation of Silence: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," DAI, 34 [1973], 3403A).

In his broad treatment of the ironic vision in modern literature and philosophy, Charles Glicksberg discusses radical irony as fundamental to the modern age: men cannot affirm, and yet they cannot live without affirmation. In literature, this irony manifests itself as the persistence of religious motifs in nihilistic works (The Ironic Vision in Modern Literature [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969], p. 75).

D. C. Muecke also finds perception of the disparity between man's needs and cosmic provisions for those needs as a characteristic of recent times, pointing out that such general irony doesn't appear in Church-dominated eras, prior to the sixteenth century, since Christianity denies any such radical conflict between man and nature (Irony [London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1970], p. 70).

[5]Scott defines desacralization as the habit of taking things for granted and dealing only with surfaces, a habit he finds O'Connor firmly recognizing and firmly opposing ("Flannery O'Connor's Testimony: The Pressure of Glory," in The Added Dimension, pp. 138-156).

Paul Tillich, in The Courage to Be, has described the same process from another angle of vision: "The man-created world of objects has drawn into itself Him who created it and who now loses His subjectivity in it" (quoted in Melvin Friedman, "Flannery O'Connor's Sacred Objects," p. 200).

Glicksberg also focuses on the failure of the sacred in modern life, ascribing it to the impossible burden placed on faith by skepticism and scientific questioning: "The Ground of Being cannot

be objectified. To do so is to transform God into a thing. And yet this unconditioned transcendent must somehow be symbolized and that can be done only by investing it with qualities as an object. . ." (pp. 70-71).

[6]Tony Tanner finds Harry, like other Updike characters, engaged in an essentially "religious" search, ". . . reaching for a dimension or realm beyond or behind the visible edges of the given, the compromised environment . . . ." But the transcendent must be reached through the edges of the concrete, and Updike's characters often find that the sacred objects that seem to glow with transcendence are really reflecting only the gleam of the will-to-meaning in the speaker's eye. Both perceiver and perceived are compromised, and affirmation is ironically undercut (City of Words [New York: Harper and Row, 1971], pp. 273-294).

[7]Dorothy Walters, Flannery O'Connor (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 35.

O'Connor saw the novelist as reflecting both this disorientation and this responsibility: "Instead of reflecting a balance from the world around him, the novelist now has to achieve one from a felt balance inside himself." The writer must not simply mirror his age; he must, like a prophet, see the extension of meaning in the "near things" by which others are blinded, his problem being to decide how much he can shock people into attention without destroying them (Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969], pp. 46-50).

[8]Many critics have noted the pervasive quality of tension in O'Connor's work. Stanley Edgar Hyman finds this tension a device for dialectic (Flannery O'Connor [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1963]). Dorothy Walters sees the "tension of contrariety" evidenced in the conflicts within self and between individuals, generations, races, and classes that pervade O'Connor's work. Louise Gossett considers the violence of O'Connor's characters as a result of the tension between their needs and the norms of behavior in a corrupt society (Violence in Recent Southern Fiction [Durham: Duke University Press, 1965]). Miles Orvell sees the tension as related to O'Connor's particular brand of symbolism, in which objects are pressed into the dimension of the spiritual without undergoing allegorical transformation, so that it remains at once literal and transcendent (Invisible Parade: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972]). David Eggenschwiler sees wholeness and incompleteness as the poles of tension in O'Connor's work, with communion and estrangement providing a corollary tension (The Christian Humanism of Flannery O'Connor [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972]).

The quality of mystery is so frequently noted (beginning with O'Connor's own statement that it was her intention to reveal "mystery through manners") that any survey of criticism here is unnecessary. Of particular value, though, is Thomas Carlson's "Flannery O'Connor and The Manichaean Dilemma," Sewanee Review, 77 (1969), 254-276. Carlson denies O'Connor's dualism, drawing on her works to show that she criticizes both Puritanism and materialism for their separation of Word and flesh, that she is concerned with fallen man in his world, not with saints, that she uses as a reference point nature informed by spirit, and that she stresses in her comedy the resemblances rather than the grotesque incongruities between man and man, man and nature, and man and God.

A second, more standard, approach to mystery as both philosophy and technique is David R. Mayer's dissertation, "The Hermaphrodite and the Host: Incarnation as Vision and Method in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor," DAI, 34 (1973), 3415-3416A. Mayer argues that the centrality of the Incarnation to the Catholic sacramental view of life has made the "method of immanence" O'Connor's primary fictional approach.

[9]Robert B. Heilman, "The Southern Temper," in Southern Renascence, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953), pp. 3, 10, 11. Heilman sees Southern writers placed by their temperament in the classical American tradition of protest, a tradition in which Robert Drake also places O'Connor, by virtue of her outspoken Christian orientation ("Flannery O'Connor and American Literature," The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin, 3 [1974], 3-11). [The Flannery O'Connor Bulletin will hereafter be cited as FOB.]

[10]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 59.

[11]Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt," in The Added Dimension, pp. 49-51.

[12]For a full discussion of the nature of Bible Belt fundamentalism and its relationship to O'Connor's work, see C. Hugh Holman, "Her Rue with a Difference: Flannery O'Connor and the Southern Literary Tradition," in The Added Dimension, pp. 73-87. See also Walter Sullivan, "The Continuing Renascence: Southern Fiction in the Fifties," in South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961).

[13]This position is argued, with full illustration from O'Connor's works, in Marion Montgomery's "Flannery O'Connor: Prophetic Poet," FOB, 3 (1974), 79-94, and his "Miss O'Connor and The Christ-Haunted," Southern Review, 4 (1968), 665-672. He sees O'Connor as writing a

kind of Dantean comedy in which the "Christ-Haunted" Southerners are simply battlegrounds for the larger forces of good and evil that make up reality. Robert Drake defends O'Connor on similar grounds while acknowledging that her subject matter is limited ("The Paradigm of Flannery O'Connor's True Country," Studies in Short Fiction, 6 [1969], 433-442).

Ted R. Spivey denies any influence of the South, seeing O'Connor's people as Quixote figures, estranged from their societies by their alien truths, rather than as authentic Southern types ("Flannery's South: Don Quixote Rides Again," FOB, 1 [1972], 46-53). Elmo Howell also sees little of the authentic South in O'Connor's early works but finds her moving from her early artificial/stylized approach to things Southern into a more natural and genuine attachment to the home country. This change parallels, in his view, her movement away from her early penchant for the artificiality of the Gothic and the allegorical into a more genuine interest in the real world and a tendency to link love of home with spiritual regeneration ("Flannery O'Connor and the Home Country," Renascence, 24 [1972], 171-176).

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

[15]Ibid., p. 33.

[16]The centrality of Catholic theology in O'Connor's work has been extensively discussed, with varying points of emphasis. Frederick J. Hoffman's "The Search for Redemption" (The Added Dimension, pp. 32-48) focuses on original sin, redemption, prophecy, and the search for Jesus; Sister M. Bernetta Quinn's "View from a Rock: The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor and J. F. Powers" (Critique, 2, no. 2 [1958], 19-27) and Carter Martin's The True Country: Themes in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969) also emphasize the centrality of Redemption and the use of the sacraments as structuring visions for O'Connor's short fiction; Caroline Gordon's "Flannery O'Connor's Wise Blood" (Critique, 2, no. 2 [1958], 3-10) emphasizes O'Connor's implicitly Catholic vision and contrasts her with other moderns who use the Christ figure without understanding theology. Brainard Cheney's "Miss O'Connor Creates Unusual Humor out of Ordinary Sin" (Sewanee Review, 70 [1962], 644-652) invokes O'Connor's steadily Catholic perspective to refute John Hawkes's assertion ("Flannery O'Connor's Devil," (Sewanee Review, 70 [1962], 395-407) that there are elements of the demonic in O'Connor's own authorial voice as well as in her characters; Preston Browning's "Flannery O'Connor and the Demonic" (Modern Fiction Studies, 19 [1973], 29-41) synthesizes the views of Hawkes and Cheney, finding in O'Connor's Catholicism the source of her recognition that the demonic is as real as the holy and that in both life and literature, the two exist in constant tension; Ruth Van de Kieft's "Judgment in the Fiction of Flannery O'Connor"

(Sewanee Review, 76 [1968], 337-356) relates O'Connor's Catholicism to the fanatical psychologies of her major characters, to the apocalyptic dimensions of her stories, and to the persistent view of death as a redemptive experience; Gilbert Muller's Nightmare and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972) explores the relationship between the Catholic spirit and grotesque surface in O'Connor's work; Leon V. Driskell and Joan T. Brittain's The Eternal Crossroads (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971) interprets the whole of O'Connor's canon as a search for the "crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet"; and David Mayer's recent dissertation argues the centrality of the Incarnation in O'Connor's personal and fictional vision and technique (see note 8).

Not all critics, however, find O'Connor so solidly and comfortably within the matrix of Catholicism. Some find her philosophy itself ambiguous or self-contradictory. Hawkes, as noted above, sees O'Connor's religious philosophy sometimes undercut by the demonic in her creative impulse, with the result that the devil sometimes speaks more convincingly than the saint, and the religious symbols themselves appear ludicrous. Irving Malin shares this feeling in part, calling O'Connor "pre-Christian" in her perception of the grotesque as stemming partly from her sense of the irreconcilable conflict between the necessary Christian commitment to free will and the feeling/idea that reality does not support the concept of choice and control as meaningful ("Flannery O'Connor and the Grotesque," in The Added Dimension, pp. 108-122). Josephine Hendin finds O'Connor's insistence on orthodox religion inadequate to account for her art, which seems colored primarily by her rage at the world she sees (The World of Flannery O'Connor [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970]). Louis Rubin ("Flannery O'Connor and the Bible Belt") sees O'Connor's Catholic philosophy and Protestant fundamentalist materials as presenting her with fictional problems: she recognizes an authentic spiritual life that she wants to applaud, but she also sees in it elements of waste and horror as men agonize in personal and emotional ways (Protestant) over what O'Connor sees as more rightly a matter of reason, ritual, and sacrament.

Other critics suggest that O'Connor's Catholicism may limit the effectiveness of her work. W. S. Marks sees her as an enemy of humanism, and liberalism whose preoccupation with the obscure question of sin and over-emphasis on man's ability to control life present a dangerously obscure and weakened view of reality ("Advertisements for Grace: Flannery O'Connor's 'Good Man,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 4 [1966], 19-27). Thomas Lorch finds her assumption that man's religious drive is as strong as that for sex or food difficult to accept and accuses her of scrutinizing everything but her own religious assumptions, an omission that prevents her from achieving a fully analytic vision and leads her to choose the closed technique of allegory over the open one

of symbolism ("Flannery O'Connor, Christian Allegorist," Critique, 10, no. 3 [1968], 69-80). Martha Stephens, though less condemnatory, also considers in an admirably objective and balanced way the strain O'Connor's orthodoxy puts on her works and her readers in what is primarily a non-didactic age (The Question of Flannery O'Connor [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973]). See also Robert Drake, Flannery O'Connor (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's, 1966).

Yet another group of critics see O'Connor's fiction as transcending the narrowness of theology, as well as the narrowness of the South, to become generally humanistic. Significant among such treatments are the earlier-noted studies of Josephine Hendin and David Eggenschwiler, as well as a recent dissertation by Donald Short, "The Concrete Is Her Medium," DAI, 30 [1970], 3476-3477A.

[17]O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, p. 42. Elsewhere O'Connor describes her vision as anagogical: "The kind of vision the fiction writer needs to have, or to develop, in order to increase the meaning of his story is called anagogical vision, and that is the kind of vision that is able to see different levels of reality in one image or situation" (Mystery and Manners, p. 72).

[18]Scott, p. 144. See also Walters, p. 35, and Marion Montgomery, "Miss Flannery's 'Good Man,'" Denver Quarterly, 3 [1968], 4-6.

Brainard Cheney describes the effect of this technique on the reader's awareness: "[O'Connor] begins with familiar surfaces, in an action that seems secular at the outset, and in a secular tone of satire or humor. Before you know it, the naturalistic situation has become metaphysical, and the action appropriate to it comes with a surprise, an unaccountability that is humorous, grimly humorous, however shocking. It is a paradox . . . , but it rests on a theology and a Christian perception more penetrating than most people in this world are blest with" (p. 650). That this principle, which by now seems axiomatic, was not always so obvious is witnessed by Oscar Cargill's legitimately maligned view of O'Connor as simply a naturalist who "reported" with high accuracy the sparse, decaying life she saw around her (Esprit, 8, no 1 [1964], 17).

[19]Hoffman, p. 94.

In interesting parallel to O'Connor's sense of the grotesque is Glicksberg's evaluation of the techniques of absurdist dramatists: in protest against the exclusively biological view of man, these dramatists ". . . utilized the arts of the circus . . . , surrealistic devices, and dream techniques in an effort to shadow forth a reality that is mysterious, ineffable, and non-rational" (p. 228). The difference between these dramatists and O'Connor is, clearly, only but entirely in the identification of the nature and power of the mysterious.

[20]Muller, pp. 17, 10.

[21]Eggenschwiler, pp. 21-22.

For a consideration of types of the grotesque in O'Connor's fiction, see Stuart Burns, "Freaks in a Circus Tent: Flannery O'Connor's Christ-Haunted Characters," FOB, 1 (1972), 3-23.

[22]Eggenschwiler, p. 34.

[23]I have been anticipated in this point by Muller, who describes O'Connor's characters as psychologically valid but not psychologically realistic and her characterization as tending toward the symbolic, ". . . where distillation of character into a basic set of preoccupations serves to crystallize attitudes toward the ethical circumstances being erected" (p. 22).

[24]My discussion of the short stories will exclude those stories included as chapters in novels and "Why Do the Heathen Rage?," the fragment of what was purportedly to be O'Connor's third novel.

I have similarly excluded two early stories that seem to me primarily naturalistic and not marked by the iconography characteristic of O'Connor's work in general. "The Barber" (before June, 1947) focuses on Rayber, a figure we see later in The Violent Bear It Away, as he becomes involved in a political debate with the local rednecks, and since Rayber is an apostle of the rational secular, there is little room for the elements of sanctity and mystery that generate icons. "The Crop" (before February, 1946) does center in visionary fabrications of the major character, but these fantasies seem more symbolic than iconic, indicating psychological states of emotional emptiness and detachment from reality more than the failure of man's relationship to the sacred. Both stories are interesting, however, as indicators of the kinds of reality from which O'Connor's later works spin their visions of the sacred.

O'Connor's two novels have been excepted from this study because, although they make interesting and central use of ironic iconography, they do so in ways technically like those demonstrated by the stories. Consequently, a consideration of the novels would not further the examination of iconographic technique that is the purpose of this discussion.

Chapter Two

[1]Flannery O'Connor, "The Artificial Nigger," in The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux,

1971), p. 252. All subsequent citations from O'Connor's stories will be from this volume and will be noted as CS, followed by the page number, parenthetically within the text.

[2]The same kind of emblematic value attaches to hats in O'Connor's two novels. Both Haze Motes and Francis Marion Tarwater wear hats as signs of their prophet/preacher roles, and stages or changes in the roles are often paralleled by changes in the color or condition of the hats.

[3]In Wise Blood, O'Connor will assign both value and centrality to the glasses belonging to Haze Motes's mother. This enlargement of symbolism into iconography seems, in general, to parallel O'Connor's development as a writer (an assertion this study implicitly demonstrates).

[4]Katherine Fugin et al., "An Interview with Flannery O'Connor," Censer (Fall, 1960), p. 30.

For a good introductory treatment of sun imagery in O'Connor's fiction see Stuart Burns, "'Torn by the Lord's Eye': Flannery O'Connor's Use of Sun Imagery," Twentieth Century Literature, 13 (1967), 154-166.

[5]In The Violent Bear It Away, the sun carries all these values and carries them even more insistently. The power of the sun to burn one clean and prepare him for divine work is experienced by both old Tarwater and his apostolic grandson.

[6]This description of O'Connor's approach is echoed by Miles Orvell (see Chapter One, note 8). For the opposing view, that O'Connor attempts strict allegory, see Thomas Lorch (cited in Chapter One, note 16).

[7]Implicit here is an idea given dramatic expression in many of O'Connor's later works, that only one's own death can provide the power of a cleansing vision.

For an overview of this aspect of O'Connor's fictional vision, see Ruth Van de Kieft (cited in Chapter One, note 16).

[8]This story appeared both in O'Connor's thesis and in Mademoiselle (November, 1948) as "The Capture." The subsequent change in the title suggests that the significance of the experience with the turkey goes beyond the capture itself.

[9]In considering the author's beliefs as an element of dramatic tension, I am crossing the boundaries of modern formalist criticism to follow Wayne Booth's theory that the perception of "stable irony"

(irony based on stable, clearly defined values) involves making a decision about the author's knowledge or beliefs. Such a decision does not, as Booth makes clear, involve calling the author on the telephone to ask the intended meaning of an individual line, but it does involve a conception of the values basic to the author's vision (A Rhetoric of Irony [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974], pp. 3-11).

[10]The few critics who have commented on this story see the ending as a problem. Orvell finds it a "not quite explicable nemesis" that seems to demonstrate both God's presence and his absence (p. 71); Driskell and Brittain find it "an enormity for which the reader is not fully prepared," an event that O'Connor seems to intend as intensely and broadly significant but that the reader can take only as one more childish fantasy (p. 35). It could be argued (as O'Connor has done) that the ways of God are not limited to the credible and that contemporary vision is too blurred to recognize truth, but O'Connor's later works seem more successful than this one at achieving a controlled integration of naturalistic and mysterious dimensions (often simply by making the characters more strange at the outset, so that unusual behavior or experiences remain consonant with character throughout).

[11]Frederick Asals, in his thorough, intriguing study of this story, notes that in ancient tradition, twins were believed closely related to the supernatural and thought to possess extraordinary powers connected with fertility; he suggests further that the Greenleaf sons have combined the natural and the practical and achieved the very goals Mrs. May has sought, with less success, through shutting off the natural as threatening ("The Mythic Dimensions of Flannery O'Connor's 'Greenleaf,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 5 [1968], 324-326).

[12]Muller explores this sun-bull connection briefly, emphasizing its use as an indicator of the hostility between Mrs. May and nature that pervades the story (pp. 83-84).
See also Burns, "'Torn by the Lord's Eye,'" p. 162.

[13]Burns focuses on the linking of the figure of the bull (pagan) and the image of the sun (religious) ("'Torn by the Lord's Eye,'" p. 162). Van de Kieft notes the imagery of the sacrificial bull combined with the prickly crown of Christ (p. 350). Carlson sees a similarity between Mrs. May's pursuit of the bull and ancient fertility rites, but with the ironic Christian twist that here "[t]he victim, like Christ, becomes not only the object but the agent of sacrifice" (pp. 268-269). Eggenschwiler sees the bull as predominantly

pagan, with Christian overtones (Christ as the bridegroom and as the crowned sacrifice), but finds polar symbolisms within the pagan itself. The bull-god suggests both Zeus (the god figure) and the sacred bull of Dionysian worship, providing a resulting contrast of distanced awe and ecstatic frenzy; the experience of the second is Mrs. May's way back to an understanding of the first (pp. 63-64). Driskell and Brittain see in the bull an allusion to Racine's Phaedra that shades the symbolism of this potentially pagan image toward an emphasis on original sin and its relationship to carnality; the bull is thus both threat and (once successfully confronted) guide to salvation (p. 125).

[14]Eggenschwiler sees a natural psychological principle in evidence here, operating in conjunction with the religious: "Since Mrs. May has so rigidly repressed her sexual and animal being, she experiences sexuality as erotic destruction; since she has so intently ignored God, she is racked by an unendurable light of revelation and by a purifying love that must destroy the old self. The violent experience is necessary to help break the defenses, but it is not therefore to be seen as an ideal state in itself. Because she has been so partial and extreme, her awakening comes through opposite extremes, which are also partial" (p. 64).

[15]More narrowly, Martin sees the bull's dual function as entirely Christian: as destroyer it symbolizes God's justice, and as savior it symbolizes Christ's love (p. 148).

[16]The biblical citation is Luke 18:11; the parallel itself has also been noted by Walters (p. 110).

[17]Mrs. Turpin is here subjected to what John R. May identifies as "the pruning word" of revelation (see John 15: 2-3) that opens the door to salvation. Such words, like judgment, always come from outside, and their consequences are often violent. The recipients are characters, usually intellectuals, who have attempted to live by their own ideas of truth and who must be shocked into awareness of real truth ("The Pruning Word: Flannery O'Connor's Judgment of Intellectuals," Southern Humanities Review, 4 [1970], 325-328).

[18]See Driskell and Brittain for a discussion of the way in which O'Connor's idea of sacramental drowning as an escape from the world may have been influenced by Mauriac's The Weakling (pp. 24-25).

[19]O'Connor herself insisted on this theological point: "Bevel hasn't reached the age of reason, therefore he can't commit suicide. He comes to a good end. He's saved from those nutty parents, a fate worse than death. He's been baptized and so he goes to his Maker; this is a good end" (quoted in Lewis Lawson's "A Collection of Statements," in The Added Dimension, p. 257).

Tonally, O'Connor reinforces the idea of death as salvation by making of the drowning a pleasant experience:

> He plunged under once and this time, the waiting current caught him like a long gentle hand and pulled him swiftly forward and down. For an instant he was overcome with surprise; then since he was moving quickly and knew that he was getting somewhere, all his fury and fear left him. (CS, p. 174)

(For a brief discussion of the same technique in "Greenleaf," see Orvell, p. 26.) In spite of editorial commentary and tonal manipulation, however, the conclusion puts a strain on credulity and is, I think, one of those cases in which the success of the story depends too fully on outside knowledge of the author's biases.

[20]Quinn also makes this point (see The Added Dimension, p. 168).

[21]Lorch sees O'Connor working allegorically here, with the characters and their conflicts serving as externalizations of internal forces, primarily of "the efforts of the hard, greedy, selfish, power-hungry aspects of the person to eliminate all love and fellow-feeling . . ." (p. 72).

[22]D. R. Kropf argues for the historical-social theme of Old South vs. New as of at least equivalent importance to the religious in this story ("Theme and Setting in 'A Good Man Is Hard to Find,'" Renascence, 24 [1972], 177-180, 206).

[23]For a discussion of the clearly-suggested elements of sexual repression, role-confusions, and revelation in the action and imagery of this story, see Hendin, pp. 115-118.

It is possible to see the story, in sexual terms, as an opposition of home-womb and gun-penis symbols (or icons--although only the home seems to be consciously iconic to Thomas, so full has been his repression of the active, creative male principle), and because the home is unnaturally valued and the gun insufficiently understood and controlled, there is destruction rather than creative synthesis. This dimension of the icon is, however, less clearly articulated because Thomas himself lacks nearly all consciousness of his own sexuality.

Sexual symbolism/iconography in O'Connor's works is deserving of a fuller treatment than it has yet received, but because it seems to have been less conscious on O'Connor's part and thus less clearly delineated than the cultural and religious iconography in her works, it often falls in that gray area of symbol/icon that is in general outside the scope of this study.

[24]The problem of clear understanding of the resolution here is evidenced in three divergent readings by as many critics: Quinn argues that Shiftlet's prayer may be one of genuine repentance (in The Added Dimension, p. 170); Walters sees Shiftlet racing along in self-righteous blindness, waiting for God to wipe out the rottenness of others, unaware that his own spiritual life is in danger (pp. 83-84); Hendin sees a kind of ultimate existential escape in Shiftlet's destination (Mobile), "the only city in the state looking out on the open sea, . . . motion unlimited by clay" (pp. 68-69).

A now-infamous television version of this story resolved these uncertainties, to O'Connor's dismay, by having a regenerate Shiftlet return for Lucynell.

[25]May, p. 239.

See also Kenneth Scouten, "The Mythological Dimensions of Five of O'Connor's Works," FOB, 2 (1973), 69-70, and Orvell, pp. 138-140.

[26]Walters finds the attitudes of the various Southern groups suggestive of the transformations history, or man's view of it, has undergone in its gradual retreat from reality to illusion (pp. 87-88).

[27]Burns sees in this final image a linking of the blood of Christ with menstruation ("Freaks in a Circus Tent," p. 18). Viewed this way, the final image becomes a full integration of the sexual and religious rather than a passage through the sexual to the religious.

[28]Eggenschwiler, pp. 22-23.

[29]Quinn finds the child's experience less completely affirmative, arguing that she is being initiated but that her perception of evil is as yet dim ("View from a Rock," pp. 19-27). Such an observation may be both theologically and psychologically sound, but it is, I think, a matter of personal response and not of the implications of the text itself.

[30]Hendin sees this communion in cultural terms: Julian and his mother are two kinds of Southern relics, and both crumble before the Black woman's violence and the future it suggests (p. 108).

Hendin's entire discussion of this story is a valuable consideration of theme and technique. Of relevance to ironic iconography in the story is her discussion of the fatal hat that is to Julian's mother a sign of her individuality and superiority, a just reward for all her sacrifice, and, ultimately, the symbol of her humiliation when its double appears on the head of a Black woman. The significance given the hat makes it almost iconic, but because the climactic quarrel between the two women is caused more directly by a condescending

act of charity, the hat never quite achieves the centrality of an icon (pp. 102-108).

[31]A comparison of this story to an earlier version, "The Geranium" (1946), reveals an intensification of the social concerns and the addition of the theological dimension under discussion here.

[32]The iconic structure of this scene has been noted by numerous critics, among them Muller, who describes Tanner's death as "a grotesque crucifixion" (p. 17), and Driskell and Brittain, who see here images of the deaths of both Peter (crucified upside down) and Paul (beheaded), part of a general pattern of similarities between Tanner's life and those of Peter and Paul (pp. 109-110).

[33]Driskell and Brittain, pp. 110, 136.

[34]Muller, p. 34. This negative image of Christ is, in Muller's view, representative of "the dominant experience of our time as interpreted from the viewpoint of the grotesque, insisting as it does upon a fragmentation of man from the world and from common bodies of belief" (p. 34). By extension, O'Connor's conception and treatment of Shiftlet reflect her modernism and traditionalism, respectively.

[35]Eggenschwiler's discussion of the disparity between The Misfit's memory and the psychiatrist's analysis provides a thorough overview of the more partial observations of other critics on this problem. In strictly psychological terms, The Misfit may be a classical psychotic who kills and then dissociates himself from the crime. In allegorical terms, the patricide images the Fall, and the inability to accept responsibility for the crimes is a refusal to acknowledge sin and the need for grace. Because of O'Connor's view of physical/psychological and spiritual realities as interdependent, however, neither of these views is adequate in itself; the spiritual is manifested through the psychological and the clinical symptoms are simply the behavioral reflections of The Misfit's rejection of God (pp. 46-51).

Eggenschwiler's argument for the spiritual/psychological synthesis is convincing, but his suggestion of a psychotic distancing from evil is less persuasive. The Misfit openly admits that doing meanness is a significant act, and he makes no particular effort to hide from the grandmother the murder of her family. He does not, in sum, seem distanced from the facts of his crimes; rather, he seems fully aware of his own actions and the reasons for them. As an independent and responsible agent, he is adequate to the fictional weight placed on him by the dialectic between the Christian and the anti-Christian; as a victim of mental illness, he is not. Our attempts to deny the rationality of his challenge to traditional values by

calling it a psychosis are, I think, born of a desire to restrict the normal to the acceptable. It is not, obviously, a vision that O'Connor shares.

[36]Montgomery, "Miss Flannery's 'Good Man,'" p. 15.

Dr. Louis Thompson, in his unpublished notes on this story, offers a similar suggestion, adding that The Misfit's shooting of the grandmother is an appropriate response to the evil he sees (though his own motives may be more questionable).

[37]Driskell and Brittain see a total lack of redemption in the story and argue that O'Connor deleted it from the last collection (Everything That Rises Must Converge) because it violated the redemptive emphasis of those stories (p. 114). Although most of the stories in this collection do conclude with a redemptive experience, it is difficult to argue that "The Comforts of Home" and "Judgement Day" offer more affirmation than "The Partridge Festival." In "The Comforts," Thomas is left with the realization that he has killed his mother and left the nymphomaniac alive. In "Judgement Day," Tanner dies imagining his triumphant return to the South as a kind of prophet of the last days. In neither story do we see clear evidence of redemption, and it seems unlikely that a rigorous insistence on regeneration as the concluding experience in a story would have militated the exclusion of both stories. In the absence of O'Connor's own testimony, it seems futile to speculate on her editorial decisions.

[38]Sister Kathleen Feeley, S. S. N. D., Flannery O'Connor: Voice of the Peacock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 99.

[39]Montgomery makes the highly ingenious but not impossible suggestion that the location of The Tower "outside of Timothy" (CS, p. 120) is significant; in II Timothy 3: 1-5, there is a description of the last days that parallels the story's present, and the characters here are in their last day ("Miss O'Connor's 'Good Man,'" p. 9).

[40]Malin points out that Red Sammy's was initially a place of pleasure and that its present grimness and atmosphere of suspicion are the inevitable result of the kind of indulgence it symbolizes (p. 114). (On this point see also Driskell and Brittain, p. 68).

Marks identifies The Tower more broadly as the hell of materialism (p. 23).

[41]Quinn identifies the title image as coming from the Old Testament Benedictus, in which it symbolizes Eternal Love (in The Added Dimension, p. 173). The Song of the Three Young Men, the

source of the Benedictus, is a song of praise reputedly by the young men delivered from the fiery furnace, and it invokes all of Creation to bless and bow down before the Creator. Thus, the Edenic structure is linked with the image of the prophets in a single source.

[42]For references to general critical commentary on O'Connor's use of the sacraments in her fiction, see Chapter One, note 16.

[43]Baptism also figures centrally in The Violent Bear It Away. Resisting the call to baptize Bishop, his young idiot nephew, is central to young Tarwater's resistance to becoming a prophet, but when he chooses instead to drown Bishop, Tarwater ironically finds he has baptized him. Acknowledging the implications of what he has done, Tarwater accepts the role of prophet, and the drowning-baptism of Bishop becomes the baptism of Tarwater himself.

Chapter Three

[1]Preston Browning sees Parker's attempt to find a pattern in random elements as paradigmatic of the dilemma of modern man. As the tattoos refuse to cohere, so this kind of enforced patterning fails to offer guidance, direction, and support ("'Parker's Back': Flannery O'Connor's Iconography of Salvation by Profanity," Studies in Short Fiction, 6 [1969], 527).

[2]Carlson, p. 271.
See also Driskell and Brittain, p. 123.

[3]Caroline Gordon finds O'Connor's work as a whole concerned with a single heresy, man's failure to believe in the hypostatic union, and she sees in Sarah Ruth's denial of God's corporeal substance an explicit statement of this heresy ("Heresy in Dixie," Sewanee Review, 76 [1968], 263-297).
Muller approaches the same question as a conflict between the rational and the mysterious; when the mystic symbol, under rational scrutiny, is reduced to a mere sign, it becomes conventional and ridiculous (p. 37).
Carlson argues that such a one-dimensional approach violates not only theology but the artistic qualities of the icon itself:

Byzantine art does not reject the natural world but views

it only in relation to the supernatural world, thereby rejecting vague realistic curves for the vigorous yet sharply defined line and angle. Its premise is that art never imitates the natural world but instead discovers form within matter. (pp. 272-273)

[4]Eggenschwiler sees a more modified polarity here, with some justice in Sarah's charge of idolatry and some limitation in Parker's triumph: "Even when he confronts the all-demanding eyes of Christ, he tries to hide behind his old idolatry and his wife, pretending that he is having this tattoo entirely to please her." Thus, the object that potentially opens the way to faith can also become an obstacle to it (p. 78). The problem, as usual in O'Connor, is in interpreting as conclusions what are really only beginnings and in evaluating by rational, naturalistic criteria actions that by their very nature elude definition by those criteria.

[5]Burns, "Freaks in a Circus Tent," p. 14.

[6]O'Connor's admitted affinity for Hawthorne seems especially clear in the parallels between "The Artificial Nigger" and "My Kinsman, Major Molineux." The kinds of experiences, the progressively changing physical landscape, and the visionary and reductive final experience in O'Connor's story are strong echoes of Hawthorne's story, and the parallels are interesting both in their similarities and in their differences.

For a full and perceptive discussion of O'Connor's use of the quest/journey motif throughout her fiction, see Muller, Chapter 3.

[7]Eggenschwiler, p. 84.

[8]Peter L. Hays, "Dante, Tobit, and 'The Artificial Nigger,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 5 (1968), 267-268.

[9]Eggenschwiler, p. 89.

[10]As suggested earlier in this study, O'Connor uses Negroes to focus a similar blindness in the intellectual protagonist of "Everything That Rises Must Converge." Though Julian is opposite Mr. Head in his liberal attitude toward Negroes, he is just as guilty of flattening and de-humanizing them through elevation as Mr. Head is of reducing them to sub-human objects. In both stories, too, Negroes are instrumental in moving characters out of isolation and toward convergence, but in "Everything That Rises," one of the convergences is white with Negro, and the social issue that is merely auxiliary in "The Artificial Nigger" occupies the thematic foreground. (For general discussion of the motif of convergence in this story and in O'Connor's fiction in general, see Patricia Maida, "Convergence in

Flannery O'Connor's 'Everything That Rises Must Converge,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 7 [1970], 549-555, Forrest L. Ingram, "O'Connor's Seven-Story Cycle," FOB, 3 [1973], 19-28, and Driskell and Brittain, Chapter 6.)

[11]Quinn, in The Added Dimension, p. 160.

[12]Malin, pp. 115-116. Malin sees this as one aspect of a larger problem; O'Connor's commitment to presenting characters as odd creates problems for the acceptance of their transformation as anything more than another oddity.

[13]I am indebted to Professors James R. Frakes and E. Anthony James for pointing out the limiting effect of Mr. Head's pride on the authenticity of his "redemptive experience."

[14]Ted Spivey, "Flannery O'Connor's View of God and Man," Studies in Short Fiction, 1 (1964), 203.

Both Burns ("Freaks in a Circus Tent," p. 11) and Frederick Asals ("Flannery O'Connor's 'The Lame Shall Enter First,'" Mississippi Quarterly, 23 [1970], 203-220) agree that O'Connor intends Johnson as a force for good, but they find the dichotomy less acceptable and convincing than does Spivey. For Asals, Johnson is too partial and for Burns he is too Protean to succeed as anything more than a symbol, and both agree that the symbology is itself vague. The problem is reminiscent of critical difficulties with The Misfit and suggests also the problem of Bevel's accidental drowning. Under the pressure of divine power, O'Connor seems to suggest, behavior may become strange by realistic standards and yet still be genuinely human. As a testing of Sheppard or a rebellion against corrupt society, Johnson's evil behavior makes sense, and his understanding of Sheppard, Norton, the police, Satan, the Bible, and the nature of truth itself is accurate. It seems dangerous to deny that these qualities can be found combined in a single individual or that the combination is necessarily unnatural.

[15]Quinn sees Mrs. Shortley's closed eyes as evidence of the blindness of her prophecy (in The Added Dimension, p. 170), but it would be equally possible to see closed eyes as an emphasis on the internal, spiritual qualities of the vision. This detail seems at best supportive of the irony generated by the details of the vision itself.

[16]Eggenschwiler, p. 97.

[17]The prophecy of the destruction and the diaspora is found in Chapter 11 of Ezekiel, and the condemnation of the female prophets in Chapter 13.

[18]Ezekiel, Chapter 12.

[19]Robert Fitzgerald offers the interesting suggestion that Mrs. McIntyre is confronted with a classically tragic situation: as ruler of the farm, she is responsible for preserving the social order, and when Guizac attempts to marry his cousin to a Negro, alienates the other workers with his industry, and usurps the place of a man who "belongs," the result is an intolerable imperiling of the whole social order. She must do as she does. The problem, of course, is that the social order itself is corrupt, and the methods used to preserve it must also be corrupt ("The Countryside and the True Country," Sewanee Review, 70 [1962], 380-394).

[20]For a brief consideration of Guizac's fate as a cultural paradigm, see Muller, p. 36.

[21]Not a significant element in the original version of the story (Sewanee Review, 1954), the peacock was added to the revised version (published in A Good Man Is Hard to Find, 1955). For a comparison/contrast of the two, see Roy R. Male, "The Two Versions of 'The Displaced Person,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 7 (1970), 450-457.

[22]See Gertrude Schiller, Iconography of Christian Art: Volume I (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society Limited, 1972 [originally published in Germany, 1968]), p. 172, and Sister M. Joselyn, O. S. B., "Thematic Centers in 'The Displaced Person,'" Studies in Short Fiction, 1 (1964), 88.

[23]Joselyn, p. 88.

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