1971

A study of reflectors and reflections in four stories by Flannery O'Connor

William Leo Maffini
University of the Pacific

A STUDY OF REFLECTORS AND REFLECTIONS IN FOUR STORIES BY FLANNERY O'CONNOR

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

University of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

---

by

William Leo Maffini

May 1971

This thesis is respectfully dedicated to my patient family and to the members of my committee, Doctors Louis Leiter, Charles Clerc, Arlen Hansen and Paul Witherington. I especially wish to thank professors Louis Leiter whose guidance and directions made this thesis possible and Charles Clerc for his encouragement and aid in the selection of my topic.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I. THE INSPIRATION

Throughout her fiction, Flannery O'Connor uses character reflections to present mirror analogues. The recurrence of these mirror analogues inspired me to look deeper into her fiction for analogues that might superficially appear to be unrelated and dissimilar. I found that in addition to her more obvious reflections there was another whole set of what I term reflectors that have the same function of pointing up traits or corresponding characteristics between characters by dwelling upon their dissimilarities. For the sake of convenience I have divided the mirror analogues in O'Connor's fiction into two categories: reflectors and reflections.

II. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN REFLECTORS AND REFLECTIONS

Reflections are the explicit mirror analogues Miss O'Connor uses to point up not only character but also theme in her stories. The reflections consist of meditations or specific actions in which the characters see themselves duplicated in the appearance of another character or in a plate glass window. Confronted with their reflection they

receive some insight into themselves or another person which elucidates O'Connor's main idea. On the other hand, O'Connor's reflectors become implicit mirror analogues. Her reflectors, "polished surfaces for reflecting light," metaphorically give insight into character and theme. Differentiated from her reflections, the author's reflectors do not give back an exact likeness that you would find in a mirror. The reflectors consist of titles, settings, names, colors, and characteristic traits or descriptions that are analogues to others in her stories.

III. THE TECHNIQUE OF REFLECTION

Flannery O'Connor's use of reflectors and reflections in her fiction extends beyond the enhancement of character and theme. She uses them stylistically. Her technique is one of reflection that is--"the production of an image by or as if by a mirror." To make her technique reflective, O'Connor employs the literary devices of puns, similes, and metaphors. As a result her writing takes on a highly visual quality. Through reflectors the author reflectorizes her fiction in words. Using her reflectors to point up the obliquity or differences between characters, O'Connor's style has the effect of nay-saying or the reaffirmation of her theme by negative inferences. Her reflectors become the signposts of her style and aid in the presentation of

her technique of reflection. All of Flannery O'Connor's fiction, I believe, has this visual quality which is demonstrated by a reliance upon mirror analogues. To illustrate this use of reflectors and reflections, I have selected four short stories from her two collected works: "The River," from A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories; "Revelation," "A View of the Woods," and "Parker's Back," from Everything That Rises Must Converge.

CHAPTER II

THE RIVER

I. MIRROR ANALOGUES

In "The River" Flannery O'Connor uses mirror analogues to point up her theme, lend credibility to character and conflict, create suspenseful action and suggest a consistent conclusion that implies an alternative way of life for her reader. The mirror analogues are carefully contrived metaphors, images, actions, situations, people, ideas, and settings that serve as reflected likenesses for O'Connor's world view. By the technique of distortion the author strives to answer the questions that have perplexed mankind for time immemorial--man's purpose on earth and his ultimate end in the hereafter. Her advantage in using reflections is manifold: they provide entertainment, become vehicles of social commentary with latent but vital answers by implication to the condition of modern man, and serve as aesthetic devices to create thematic ramifications.

II. THE THEME OF "THE RIVER"

"The River" reflects this world as it mirrors O'Connor's theme: a mature society that shirks responsibility and languishes in degeneracy offers little hope for

youth. It too will manifest the apathy, the uncaring, unfeeling, wasteful self-indulgence of the older generation unless it is inspired by the purpose of self-fulfilling example. For youth that is raised in an agnostic, directionless environment cannot help growing skeptical and wandering aimlessly. However, if youth is nurtured in body and spirit and given a set of religious beliefs, it will transform itself into dynamic action and selfless self-sacrifice. Youth will renounce the modern world and its standards of crass materialistic hedonism and wholeheartedly embrace the spirituality of a viable Christianity. Unfortunately, youth is left little choice, for contemporary institutions and their representatives are the remnants of a vague, antiquated and forgotten civilization. Torn between the threat of eternal damnation and modern hypocritical promises of redemption, youth is driven to seek its own salvation.

III. COLOR REFLECTORS FOR THE TWO RIVERS

The title of O'Connor's story, "The River," is a mirror analogue used by the author as a symbolic setting to encompass her theme and elucidate character. Mankind, represented in "The River" by Harry Ashfield and the Reverend Summers, must choose between the two rivers that Stanley Edgar Hyman describes: "the rich red river of Jesus' Blood"

and the "mundane river" of Mr. Paradise.[1] O'Connor juxtaposes her descriptions of the two rivers to show two ways of life: the way of Jesus leads one to the kingdom of heaven; the way of the devil leads one to the kingdom of hell. Flannery O'Connor uses the colors orange and red as reflectors for the two rivers. When Harry views the river from the highway, he sees a "broad orange stream where the reflection of the sun was set like a diamond [italics not in the original]."[2] The orange river becomes a symbol of the way to the life Harry wants. It is the beautiful diamond like sun in this passage that Harry "wanted to dash off and snatch." Summers later terms this same "orange stream" the "River of Faith...Life...Love." Opposing this view of the river are the orange images associated with Mr. Paradise. The "orange gas pump" in front of his store and the "orange drink" he holds when Harry passes him on the way to the river suggest that the stream of Mr. Paradise's life flows in so much orange colored gas. His river is the fake carbonated beverage he drinks; his words, the poisonously flammable gas he pumps. The orange images connected with

---

[1] Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Flannery O'Connor," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 54 (Minneapolis, 1966), p. 37.

[2] Flannery O'Connor, "The River," A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1953), p. 39.

Mr. Paradise combine to show the dissolution of the worldly paradise that is mirrored in the Ashfield home. The "brown oranges" in the Ashfield refrigerator are the rotten fruit of this garden of Eden. Alternates for the apples of the primeval garden,[3] the brown oranges are reflectors of the decay of the Ashfield home and the temptation and inducements to which man gives into in a Fallen state. It is away from this sterile stream of orange drink that Harry flees when he pursues the eternal paradise in the "rich red river."

The more positive polarity in the contrast between the two rivers is reflected by the author's use of the color red. Though red is also associated with the dissipated and polluted Ashfield world via Harry's mother's painted "red toenails," it is essentially the red "River of Pain," of "suffering," "of Jesus' Blood" that offers the way to eternal life. It is the way of faith which is shown by the Reverend Summers. His "red scarf" is a color reflector of the river and the choice he has made: to testify to the abiding presence of Jesus. Though Summers says the river water is "muddy," which suggests the ugly, dirty, contaminated condition of this river through the earthly paradise, he metaphorically transforms the red river into the ultimate way to find eternal beauty and peace in the promised land.

---

[3]George Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 18.

Symbolically the red river for the Reverend and Harry becomes the waterway to salvation through baptism. Harry's "red and blue flowered handkerchief" is like the Reverend's scarf and becomes a badge-like reflector of his choice. When the handkerchief is thrown down by Harry's mother, it is too late. Harry "count[s] now"; he can never be the same in the sight of God. He has chosen Christ and "the rich red river of Jesus' blood." O'Connor has used the colors orange and red to show the conflict of man in the modern world.

IV. METAPHORICAL DESCRIPTIONS BECOME REFLECTORS

Metaphorical descriptions of Harry Ashfield become reflectors of his situation and serve to initiate his struggle. The first sentence of O'Connor's story establishes Harry's helpless situation and indicates the kind of change he will undergo. With the aid of descriptive metaphors O'Connor impresses the reader with the indifference typical of Harry in the Ashfield atmosphere. As her story progresses, O'Connor alters the metaphors to show his metamorphosis. "The child stood glum and limp...while his father pulled him into a plaid coat...and pushed him forward...."[4] Harry passively accepts the ministrations of his father. Yet the words "pulled" and "pushed" point up his situation at home.

---

[4] O'Connor, p. 30.

He is the unwanted excess baggage who is sent off for a day with the babysitter Mrs. Connin, while his parents nurse hangovers. The Ashfields are carelessly remiss in their parental responsibility. They demonstrate an indifference to Harry's departure. The words "pushed" and "pulled" together with the father's first sentence directed to Mrs. Connin, "Well then for Christ's sake fix him,"[5] foreshadow Harry's future. The sentence ordains Mrs. Connin to be the minister of Harry's fate. At the same time it shows his father's disbelief in Christ except as a curse.

O'Connor characterizes Harry's phlegmatic attributes in the simile, "He seemed mute and patient, like an old sheep waiting to be let out."[6] "Mute and patient" like the words "glum and limp" are descriptive reflectors of Harry's inhibited condition. In the expression, "waiting to be let out" O'Connor adds to his situation the promise of eventual freedom not only from Harry's parents and home, but from his burden of sin and guilt in the river. Harry's ritualistic drowning becomes a sacrifice for his pig-headed parents. Their callous, indifference for his welfare shows a sick and corrupt society. In the words "old sheep" O'Connor incorporates the ideas of an innocent yet wise Harry, who emerges as

---

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 31.

sagacious beyond his four or five years when his father tells him "Good-by old man." Harry's wisdom is instinctive and non-intellectual--the innocent, uncomplicated wisdom that is found in the old and young alike. Through Harry's oblation he becomes the innocent victim of cruel misuse. His action parallels at once the symbolic slaughter of an innocent[7] and the liberating of the archetypal man from the fetters of agnostic materialism. The descriptive metaphors O'Connor associates with Harry are reflectors of mankind driven to freeing itself. Through Harry's behavior at the healing in the river, the author provides a mirror of man's metaphoric emancipation.

On the way to the river, Harry shows the first signs of animated enthusiasm. According to O'Connor, his actions reflect the way man should embrace Christian belief. He is not being pulled and pushed but begins "to make wild leaps and pull[s] forward on [Mrs. Connin's] hand as if he wanted to dash off and snatch the sun."[8] Harry becomes youthfully active, interested, and involved in the experience. He moves toward an ideal, which the simile suggests; but he

---

[7]Sister Rose Alice, S. S. F., "Flannery O'Connor: Poet to the Outcast," Renascence, VXVI (Spring, 1964) 126-131. Sister Rose Alice emphasized the idea of the symbolic slaughter of an innocent in connection with Bishop Rayber not Harry Ashfield. I see the two characters as paralleling one another.

[8]O'Connor, p. 39.

also moves away from all that his parents represent in the form of Mr. Paradise. Harry's reaction to Paradise shows his rejection of the immoral, degenerate, and slothful existence of his parents. Like Mr. Paradise, their garden of Eden is rooted in the covetous jealousy of material possessions. After the gas-station owner demands that they pass the hat for the Reverend Summers, Harry "moved into the folds of Mrs. Connin's coat and hid himself."[9] He hides from the corruption, moral dissoluteness, and agnosticism that Mr. Paradise manifests and embraces Mrs. Connin, the embodiment of the Christian concepts of faith, moral responsibility, and integrity. Through Harry's actions, O'Connor shows man's attraction to Jesus and repulsion for His adversary. Flannery O'Connor demonstrates that the self-generated transformation in Harry stems from a re-orientation of his values.

For O'Connor, Harry's change shows the necessary determination man must have if he is to be saved. At home the next morning Harry transforms himself from an apathetic, indolent youth into an avid and active one. The image of the "mute and patient" sheep has been replaced by one of a determined self-sustaining youth with a purpose. He takes the street-car token and retraces the previous day's route;

---

[9] Ibid., p. 42.

but more importantly, when he runs away from home, he makes good the promise he made himself at the healing--"I won't go back to the apartment then, I'll go under the river."[10] With newly found resolve Harry decides "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."[11] O'Connor achieves through a series of images and actions a composite picture of Harry, one that initially depicts his helplessness but which gradually shows his transformation of character. In the moral choice he has made, Harry embodies O'Connor's theme of man's search for his own salvation. But Harry's change is helped along by the influence of Mrs. Connin; for it was she who had mentioned the Reverend's first name and later taught Harry about Jesus. While Mrs. Connin's part in Harry's salvation may be shown by her actions, her character and role are further defined by O'Connor through a mirror analogue.

V. MRS. CONNIN'S MIRROR REFLECTION

Flannery O'Connor uses the mirror reflection of Mrs. Connin to lend contrast to her character and to provide exposition. The reflection shows polarities that advance the idea of characteristic disparities. At the same time

---

[10] Ibid., p. 44. [11] Ibid., p. 51.

the person reflected is given some insight, revelation, self-justification, or moral attitude. As employed by O'Connor, the mirror device becomes a prismatic reflection. The reflection Mrs. Connin sees in the coffee shop window reveals the difference between herself and the Ashfields. Contrasting their irresponsibility with her responsibility, it places her in a god-mother role to Harry. Mrs. Connin clearly sees the Ashfield home to be unfit for bringing up a child. She echoes her earlier disapproval of the Ashfields' home with its dead cigarette butts and modern watercolor that she "wouldn't have drew." Simultaneously, through her self-reflections, the cleaning woman depicts the Ashfields as careless parents who shirk their duty to Harry. "'Some people don't care how they send one off,' she murmured to her reflection in the coffee shop window. 'You pervide!'"[12] Mrs. Connin, not Harry's parents, fixes his arm in the coat sleeve, provides him with a handkerchief, nourishes his body with food, and nurtures his spirit by driving the pigs of ignorance from his mind. After Mrs. Connin takes Harry to the healing, she swings him to the Reverend to be baptized. Mrs. Connin's monologue advances the exposition. The key words are "send...off." The pun upon the words ominously portends the boy's future. They

---

[12] Ibid., p. 32.

have a grotesque significance if one remembers that Harry will be permanently fixed "for Christ's sake" after he is pushed, pulled and pursued to his baptismal drowning in the river. The mirror analogue thus prepares the reader for the flow of events and makes Mrs. Connin the providing mistress of Harry's fate. The handkerchief she "pervide[s]" defines her role in Harry's destiny and serves like another color reflector to link characters.

VI. ARTICLES OF CLOTHING USED TO LINK CHARACTERS

Through Mrs. Connin the red and blue handkerchief links Harry "Bevel" Ashfield to his namesake the Reverend Bevel Summers whom he somewhat resembles. The Reverend wears "a blue shirt and a red scarf." He has hollow cheeks and an "all bone" face,[13] while Harry, "not a fat boy" has "a long face and bulging chin."[14] O'Connor associates the two Bevels with colors, names and physical descriptions. By these similarities they are temporarily united. The pairing of the preacher and the boy is only transitory; Harry goes a step further in his actions. He takes the sermon to heart and lays down his life in "the River of Faith...Love... [and] Jesus' Blood." Simultaneously the Reverend Bevel

---

[13] Ibid., p. 40.

[14] Ibid., pp. 49, 31.

Summers continues to trek through the countryside preaching and being intimidated by non-believers. In the same manner that O'Connor pairs characters by means of an article of clothing, she sometimes joins them by means of an attitude or pose.

VII. CHARACTERS PAIRED BY MEANS OF A POSE

Flannery O'Connor duplicates a situation or action that reflects character by the use of descriptive metaphors. This mirror device not only elucidates character but also initiates future action and dramatizes theme. The "speckled skeleton" Mrs. Connin, who has a "skeleton's appearance of seeing everything," is compared to a "musical skeleton" with her eyes closed and her mouth open when she rides the car on her way home with Harry.[15] Illustrated as she is here, Mrs. Connin becomes the emissary of death, but a physical rather than a spiritual death for Harry "Bevel" Ashfield who sits contentedly on her lap looking at his handkerchief. Mrs. Connin's pose may be associated with Bevel's future, while it foreshadows the action at the healing and gives a clue

---

[15] Ibid., pp. 47, 33. It seems of interest that O'Connor related the skeleton appearance of Mrs. Connin on the car and later compares the Connin family on its way to the river healing to "the skeleton of an old boat with two pointed ends sailing slowly on the edge of the highway." p. 27. O'Connor seems to be underscoring the death journey idea! Bevel walks along following the route of the previous day's excursion to the river after his last car ride.

to Reverend Summers. The preacher assumes a similar attitude. "He was singing in a high twangy voice...and his head tilted back."[16] Like Mrs. Connin, the Reverend provides Bevel with spiritual nourishment but at the same time plants in the youthful mind the idea to "seek the Kingdom of Christ in the river." How else can Mrs. Connin and the Reverend Summers be taken except as the instruments in the death of Harry Ashfield? Their shared open-mouthed pose (for "bevel" in old French means "with open mouth"), their angular-slanted features ("angle" and "slant" being more modern meanings for "bevel"), and their preoccupation with Jesus all point to their roles in Harry's death and redemption.

VIII. THE NAME BEVEL

In its most obvious usage, Bevel is a baptismal name. But when Flannery O'Connor has Harry assume the name that links him to the Reverend, she also plays on words to indicate the choice that confronts Harry, to create an analogical symbol for the Ashfields, and to convey a message to the reader. Harry had lied about his first name to Mrs. Connin by substituting Bevel for Harry. The name comes to represent what he had learned at home. Harry has picked up a spontaneous habit of lying from his father who had lied

---

[16] Ibid., p. 40.

to Mrs. Connin about Mrs. Ashfield's illness. Lying becomes the expected mode of behavior for the youth. His mother asks him when he returns home, "What lies have you been telling today, Honey?"[17] In her mind it is a daily exercise, commonplace and acceptable for her son. If she knows he lies how can she accept his explanation that the handkerchief and book were gifts? By manifesting this attitude, she reveals a callous indifference to the moral upbringing of her son. When Harry pronounces the name at baptism it is phonetically drawn out "Bevvvuuuuul" to suggest the words "be evil." If a pun is intended by the author then the name here connotes evil. However, if the letters are transposed they read "B'leve" and the moral choice that confronts Harry is obvious. He must be evil or believe. In the preacher's words he must "Believe Jesus or the devil...Testify to one or the other!"[18] The name Bevel then becomes a reflector for a moral choice, an evil condition as well as a character analogue. The reader has the same moral choice. He must align himself with the preacher and Harry or the agnostic Mr. Paradise and the Connin boys who are characterized as pigs.

---

[17] Ibid., p. 48.

[18] Ibid., p. 42.

IX. THE PIG METAPHOR A REFLECTOR FOR CHARACTER

O'Connor uses the pig metaphor to reflect the modern world of which Mr. Paradise and the Connins are embodiments. Flannery O'Connor shows by their actions and descriptions their pig-like evil natures. The evil qualities attributable to pigs are most clearly illustrated in the spiritual lesson Mrs. Connin reads Harry from The Life of Jesus Christ for Readers Under Twelve. "It was full of pictures, one of the carpenter driving a crowd of pigs out of a man. They were real pigs, gray and sour looking, and Mrs. Connin said Jesus had driven them all out of this one man."[19] What happens in "The River" becomes a metaphorical inversion of this text. In the New Testament Christ drives the evil spirit out of a man called Legion and into a herd of swine that perished in the sea. In "The River," the pigs in the form of the Connin boys, Mr. Paradise, and Mr. and Mrs. Ashfield continue to thrive as replicas of evil, while Harry paradoxically perishes and is saved in the river. Harry's action illustrates the New Testament idea that one must lose temporal life in order to gain eternal life.

The Connin children, J. C., Spivey and Sinclair, duplicate the appearances and actions of pigs. Like pigs, they have "speckled faces," "gray eyes," and ears that

---

[19] Ibid., p. 38.

"twitched." By permitting the "hawg" to run over Harry, they manifest that malicious, incipient evil inherent in the nature of man. "Their faces didn't brighten any but they seemed to become less taut, as if some great need had been partly satisfied."[20] From the description of their faces they have experienced a catharsis; their evil has been driven from them into the pig. Even their names reflect a certain pig-like quality. If "J. C." ironically stands for "Jesus Christ," then because it was J. C.'s idea to let the hog run over Harry, he becomes the complete antithesis of Christ. "Spivey" taken in its literal sense means "one who lives by his wits." He is purely pragmatic and selfish in his concern that if Mrs. Connin found out they had let the hog out "She'd kill us." The third Connin boy is "Sinclair," suggestive of "sin" and "clear"--the sin of youth--spontaneous, unpremeditated, and innocent of evil consequences. Taken together, the pig-like Connin children make a composite picture of evil. As characters they are inseparable in speech and action. They display one another's fears of punishment yet together conspire to use Harry for their amusement.

The Connin boys' evil intentions are youthful and misdirected, but in Mr. Paradise that same evil becomes

---

[20] Ibid., p. 36.

vengeance with a purpose. More clearly than anyone else in the story he is associated with a pig. Mrs. Connin, looking at the "long-legged and humpbacked" hog with "part of one of his ears...bitten off," shouts to Harry, "'That one yonder favors Mr. Paradise that has the gas station'...'You'll see him today at the healing. He's got the cancer over his ear. He always comes to show he ain't been healed.'"[21] He comes to the healing to show his disbelief in the Reverend's message and to practice his own form of revivalism. For Mr. Paradise there is only one God and that is money:

> 'Pass the hat and give this kid his money. That's what he's here for.' The shout...came from a huge old man...He had on a gray hat that was turned down over one ear and up over the other to expose a purple bulge on his left temple. He sat bent forward with his hands hanging between his knees and his small eyes half closed.[22]

Mr. Paradise is captured here by the artist in an emblematic pose that resembles the pig with whom he is associated. At the end of the river scene, Mr. Paradise reveals his complete lack of faith in the Reverend's healing powers in spite of evidence of its success. In his agnosticism Mr. Paradise not only disbelieves but mocks those that do believe: "Haw! Cure the afflicted woman [Mrs. Ashfield] with the hangover," he shouted.[23] He seems to regard the gravity of the healing

---

[21] Ibid., p. 37. [22] Ibid., p. 42.

[23] Ibid., p. 45.

as a joke and has come to expose a fraudulent preacher with an unbelievable mission. Through Mr. Paradise's actions, posture, and appearance, he manifests pig-like qualities. At the end of "The River," O'Connor imparts the most memorable picture of Mr. Paradise. Not only is he an image of the "Bishop of Misrule,"[24] but as the "old man" he represents the fallen progeny of Adam.

X. THE PIG AND OLD MAN IMAGES COMBINED

Flannery O'Connor uses two similes that serve to reflect Mr. Paradise in her last scene. By Mr. Paradise's actions, the pig and the old man images combine to show him as a degenerate and monstrously corrupting influence that is thwarted yet survives "empty-handed." When Harry passes Mr. Paradise's gas station on his way to the river for the second time, the proprietor picks up a "peppermint stick" and follows the youth into the river. Harry "heard a shout and turned his head and saw something like a giant pig bounding after him, shaking a red and white club and shouting....Finally, far downstream, the old man rose like some ancient water monster and stood empty-handed."[25] Mr. Paradise manifests the evil of which he purges Harry;

---

[24] Hyman, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 27.

[25] O'Connor, p. 62.

Harry, who twice has been called "old man," is symbolically cleansed of the old man Adam present in the form of Mr. Paradise. Harry has performed the injunction of the New Testament "To put off,...the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind: And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth."[26] Harry demonstrates his belief in this New Testament parable by drowning in "the River of Faith," while his adversary, Mr. Paradise, "like some ancient water monster," Leviathan, Satan or Devil, emerges from the "muddy water" without his peppermint stick--the instrument of seduction. Harry is at first rejected by the river; thus he is like the old man Adam expelled from Paradise. But as the harried youth struggles to be free of the old man sea-monster and devil, (the paradise of candy and orange drink), the eternal paradise opens for him and he is no longer harried. The "Bishop of Misrule," Mr. Paradise fails to gain an apostle for his agnostic materialism. By losing the peppermint stick, Mr. Paradise, like Satan, loses the symbol of his power to reign over the earthly garden of Eden. O'Connor has used the peppermint stick as an emblem of the implements to which the devil in the form of Mr. Paradise may resort.

---

[26]Ephesians 4:22-24.

XI. SETTING AND CHARACTERIZATION REFLECTING THEME

Like the pepperment stick, setting may reflect an atmosphere which is thematic. The characterizations of the Ashfields, their home, and actions are used by Flannery O'Connor to create a pig-pen atmosphere in which the inhabitants are marked by the imprint of pigs. Through setting O'Connor depicts the Ashfields as the pigs of degeneracy. Because of Harry's parents swinish actions, the setting of the Ashfield home is a pig-pen. Notice, as Harry goes from home to the Connin's, then to the river, home again and finally to the river that pigs are present both literally and figuratively in every setting except the first. Manifestly they are here too in the form of Mr. and Mrs. Ashfield who by their actions are pig-like. Mrs. Ashfield demands an icepack for the hangover she nurses in the bedroom, while her husband pushes Harry into a plaid coat, mindlessly negligent that one of the boy's arms is not even in the sleeve. Their swinish disregard for Harry's welfare reflects the atmosphere and environment of their home. Its dishabille together with the "pork bone" in their refrigerator links Harry's parents to Mr. Paradise and the Connin boys. The disarray of the living room with the dirty "ashtrays," Harry's bedroom with its torn "books and blocks," the "crowded bureau" in his parents' room, and the almost

barren refrigerator with its "shriveled vegetables" and "brown oranges" create a picture of a dismal, disordered, pig-pen of a home. The evidence for Mr. and Mrs. Ashfield's pig-like characteristics, however, stems not only from their habitat and way of life but from their careless irresponsible attitude toward their son.

The Ashfields have manifestly neglected Harry's physical and spiritual needs. They provide only the scraps and slops of their parties for him to eat. They permit Harry to lie and steal. They neglect his spiritual training by bringing him up thinking Jesus Christ was a joke or "'a word like "oh" or "damn" or "God," or maybe somebody who had cheated them out of something sometime.'"[27] They are so rooted in their self-indulgent dissoluteness they cannot believe in anything but hedonism. Jesus is a "hoax." His preachers are "dolts." As O'Connor sees the situation, the affliction which hangs over their lives is the same cancerous disease that infects the modern world: apathetic indifference to moral or spiritual values. The setting of the Ashfield home becomes a symbol of the spiritually dead and physically decaying ash-strewn graveyard world with its two remaining occupants "out cold" in the bedroom when Harry empties the ashtrays on the floor and rubs "the ashes care-

---

[27] O'Connor, p. 38.

fully into the rug with his finger" and leaves.

XII. THE MANY BAPTISMS OF HARRY BEVEL ASHFIELD

All of O'Connor's mirror analogues may be grouped together under the rubric, "The Many Baptisms of Harry Bevel Ashfield." The first is by the cleaning woman, the "speckled skeleton" Mrs. Connin. She purifies Harry's mind of evil and re-educates him in the word of the gospel. Mrs. Connin becomes the reflection of the religiosity mankind must manifest if he is to be saved. O'Connor uses her as a mirror message and example to the reader of the manner in which anyone must be sent out of this world. The second baptism of Harry is by the Reverend Bevel Summers with whom the boy is linked through an article of clothing, a name, and a dedication. Using the reflections of the two Bevels, O'Connor portrays a character analogue of religious conviction that points the way to salvation. The artist achieves a doubling of their characters through their actions and descriptions. Together they comprise a prototype that serves to guide all men's actions. The third baptism of Harry is by his mother's "bitter breath." Here the "sour" pig image is manifestly repeated. What the reader immediately conjures up is the pig metaphor that associates the Ashfields with Mr. Paradise and Connin boys. O'Connor again duplicates by an action, situation and

description a reflection of pig-like qualities. When this baptism occurs in Harry's bedroom, the pig-pen setting is recreated for the reader and O'Connor artfully succeeds in portraying the indolent, apathetic, selfish atmosphere of his upbringing. Harry's fourth and final baptism is performed by himself. It serves to recapitulate all of the others that O'Connor has presented. When he chooses the red and orange rivers that lead to the Kingdom of Christ, he purges himself of evil. His ritualistic act shows a metamorphosis of character and reflects the change he has undergone.

CHAPTER III

REVELATION

I. STRANGERS AS REFLECTORS

The mirror analogues in "Revelation" as they did in "The River" point up theme, character and conflict. Flannery O'Connor's reflectors remain a series of contrived settings, images, metaphors, situations and actions that lend credibility and create suspense in her stories. In "Revelation" the author uses total strangers to reflect the disparities among her characters. Strangers to themselves and those around them, they are revealed by their actions, thoughts, and words to be different from what they seem. Through the technique of contrast, O'Connor combines character analogues with groups of images and picturesque settings to point up her main ideas. Through reflectors she focuses on theme and advances her world view.

II. THE THEME OF "REVELATION"

O'Connor's view is reflected in her theme: in today's society some men have substituted a pseudo-spirituality for a real one. Hypocritically they pay verbal homage to Christ while essentially believing only in themselves. They practice a discriminatory Christian charity. In the guise

of good works, they would achieve their own salvation. They collect virtues like collecting green chip stamps. Rooting in the hog wallow of egotism, they assume a self-righteous importance and imagine a heirarchy of creation with themselves at the top. Above the commonality of life, they become disdainful of their fellow man and ungrateful and presumptive of God. Becoming paragons of virtue they assume god-like roles. As O'Connor sees the situation, some men have deluded themselves into believing that material values can be equated with spiritual ones. Using material values they have sought to re-organize an essentially spiritual universe. Their delusion forms the basis for their malady which they manifest in being complacent and self-righteous. Satisfied with themselves, they judge others. They come to believe they have a license on life, salvation, and Jesus. Through self-aggrandizement they seek their own justification. In their actions they become like Lucifer, the hell hog who presumed against God in order to glorify and deify himself. When they would be gods by challenging the Almighty with their self-importance, they become the nonpariels of vice. In God's sight their egotism has made them fatuous. Like Lucifer, their signs of spirituality, their virtues and good works, will be burned away. Their true ugliness will be revealed to them by God. Purged of their idiocy and mistaken self-concepts, they will no longer be

able to pursue their self-righteous paths. Made aware of the universal divine order, they will see that all life is sacred in God's sight and has its place in heaven. Spiritually purged, these men will be transformed by a new awareness of the Christian Paradox: the first shall be last and the last first to enter the kingdom of heaven. Forced to reassess their values, they will inevitably be led toward a truer spirituality.

III. THE TWO REVELATIONS

The title of Flannery O'Connor's story, "Revelation," becomes a mirror analogue for her main character, Ruby Turpin, and points up O'Connor's theme: man will be spiritually rejuvenated when he sees his arrogance and bigotry, his presumption and egotism, when he is truly grateful to Jesus for the "little of everything" that he has. From Ruby's two revelations O'Connor shows the two stages through which man returns to God spiritually rejuvenated: the first involves the revelation of what he has become in the sight of God; the second reveals to him his place in the divine ordination. Both stages are incapsulated in the definition of a "revelation": "the act of revealing or communicating a divine truth." In the first stage Ruby is made aware of what she has become by Mary Grace. This is the revelation by communication. "Go back to hell where

you came from, you old wart hog," Mary Grace tells Ruby.[1] Mary Grace's revelation is a reflection of a side of Ruby's character which she has not seen. For Ruby envisions herself to be the epitome of the upright, responsible, charitable, neighborly, and religious Christian. But to Mary Grace Ruby is the epitome of evil; Ruby is hypocritical, nasty, uncharitable and ugly. Ruby, a moral hog, has become morally fat with her own self-importance and goodness. Ruby has been deluded by her own worthiness. She was convinced she was saved until she saw the souls "rumbling toward heaven." This is the revelation by vision. In this second stage the divine truth revealed to Ruby is her place in the divine ordination. If she enters heaven at all, she will not be first but last. Ruby sees that the hopeless and helpless "freaks and lunatics," whom she had deprecated, are leading her "tribe" of people into heaven. She realizes by the appearance of her "tribe[']s]...socked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away." Like Ruby's, their "virtues," their "great dignity," "common sense" and "respectable behavior" will not count on Doomsday. For in the guise of these "virtues" Ruby and her "tribe" rationalize true virtue. True virtue consists not

---

[1]Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 207.

[2]Ibid., p. 218.

in Ruby's pragmatic charity, nor in her egotistical presumption of God and her election to heaven, but in an honest, faith, love, and gratitude in Jesus as well as in the least of his children. Thus Ruby's two revelations: first, when she is called a "wart hog from hell" by Mary Grace; and the second, when Ruby has the vision of the souls "rumbling toward heaven" become mirror analogues for her realization and transformation.

IV. THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE AS REFLECTOR

If O'Connor uses the title to reflect theme and character, she imaginatively uses the first setting of "Revelation" as a reflector for her main character, Ruby Turpin.

> The doctor's waiting room, which was very small, was almost full when the Turpins entered and Mrs. Turpin, who was very large, made it look even smaller by her presence. She stood looming at the head of the magazine table set in the center of it, a living demonstration that the room was inadequate and ridiculous.[3]

The setting, located in the doctor's waiting room, suggests Ruby's sickness. Though ostensibly she is accompanying her husband Claud, who has an ulcer on his leg, it is Ruby who suffers from the corruption of spiritual disease. "Waiting" and "entered" connote some threshold experience is in store for Ruby. O'Connor has subtly implanted in the reader the

---

[3] Ibid., p. 191.

prospect of character metamorphosis. The author's use of the words "large" and "small" to juxtapose Ruby with the room reflect her plump condition. These words hint that because it is a doctor's office Ruby enters, she needs reducing from her self-inflated egotism. For Ruby, inflated with self-righteousness, is big in her own sight. "A living demonstration that the room was inadequate and ridiculous" purport that Ruby is a deficient absurdity; ironically, she thinks she is above and beyond any possible illness. Ruby's appearance as she makes the room "look even smaller by her presence" is a prognosis for the two revelations, the two earth-shaking experiences that will reduce her. Ruby's self-centered and complacent view of life must be reversed so that the "small room" will appear "smaller" as though she were "looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope...and then...large instead of small."[4]

A visual reflector for Ruby Turpin, the waiting room setting is also a mirror analogue for the universal sickness that infects O'Connor's world. Inhabited by the antiseptic and clean, the diseased and dirty, the young and old, the beautiful and ugly, the black and white, the waiting room becomes a reflector for a macroscosmic universe suffering from physical and mental illness. The waiting room assumes

---

[4] Ibid., p. 206.

other meanings by reason of Ruby's mental associations. Because of its dishabille and its background music, the waiting room reflects the atmosphere of a pig-parlor and a church. Its disheveled appearance indicates what is normally associated with a pig pen, while the actual pig pen is an hygenic parlor. Ruby observes that "the table was cluttered with limplooking magazines and at one end of it there was a big green glass ash tray full of cigaret butts and cotton wads with little blood spots on them."[5] The waiting room becomes a church when Ruby mentally sings along with "the radio [that] was softly playing gospel music." Her separation from the source of music suggests that she is not yet saved; yet from the last line Ruby supplies to the song: "And wona these days I know I'll we-eara crown,"[6] she manifests her presumptuous conviction that she is saved. Egotistically Ruby has elected herself to salvation through what she conceives of as her "virtues"--that she is "a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman." With these two impressions of the waiting room, O'Connor builds her sets for the final scene at the Turpin farm and gives the reader an insight into Ruby's attitudes and disposition. The waiting room setting thus becomes a reflector for O'Connor's world and her main character, Ruby Turpin.

---

[5] Ibid., p. 193. [6] Ibid., p. 194.

V. RUBY'S SELF-REFLECTIONS

O'Connor uses the self-reflections of Ruby to reveal and expose her by the way Ruby thinks about others. While Ruby thinks everyone else has something the matter with him, it is she who is sick. She describes others as "nasty," "ugly," and "dirty," but Ruby herself manifests these qualities. Though she thinks she has "a good disposition," Ruby displays a nasty one. Her judgments of others are ugly and dirty and reveal a spiritual sickness in Ruby stemming from an exaggerated opinion of herself. She imagines that the "trash...lounge about the sidewalks all day drinking root beer. Dip snuff and spit in every puddle...."[7] Ruby believes she is truly compassionate because she pities the "ugly fat" Mary Grace and the "poor nasty" blond child. Instead Ruby manifests her lack of Christian charity by the labels with which she dubs them. In her own exaggerated self-esteem, Ruby reveals that she thinks she is better than anyone else. Her mind is habitually preoccupied in naming the classes of people in which she and Claud are at the top and everyone else is at the bottom.

While Flannery O'Connor reveals Ruby through her

---

[7] Ibid., p. 216.

self-reflections, it is primarily through strangers that Ruby achieves her revelation. O'Connor's characters show that they are strangers to one another and to Ruby even though the author links them by surname, family characteristic, similarity of opinion, physical illness, pose, age, race or class. Two groups of people become reflectors for Ruby--children and adults. Using children as reflectors for Ruby, O'Connor stresses this biblical theme: "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[8] With the adult reflectors for Ruby, O'Connor stresses this biblical corallary to the first: "He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, he is true, and there is no injustice in him."[9]

VI. ADULTS BECOME REFLECTORS

The adult characters become reflectors for Ruby when they mirror Mrs. Turpin's prejudicial attitudes and nasty disposition. Their actions, conversations, thoughts, and descriptions reveal their spiritual sickness and Ruby's. They are manifestly ill with ulcers, malnutrition, and obesity. But the spiritual sickness the adults exhibit is

---

[8]Matthew 18:3. [9]John 7:18.

far more damaging to them that their physical illness. Given to idleness, ignorance, and idiocy, they reflect a willing subjection to flattery and manifest a super-egotism. Their distorted, righteous judgments exclude any concept of Christian charity. They do not love their neighbors; they love only themselves. The adults are ungrateful, nasty, selfish, highly critical, and pseudo-compassionate. Sure of themselves and self-indulgent in their own concepts, they reveal an intolerance of others. "A-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin," they are glory hogs seeking their own justification and self-aggrandizement. Strangers to themselves, they reflect aspects of Ruby's character while she mirrors them.

Through the adult characters O'Connor portrays a trait of Ruby's which is unknown to her. For example, Ruby's view of Negroes and "white trash" is replete with her hypocritical double standard. It is a standard rooted in pragmatic charity behind which Ruby hides her prejudice. She says, "I'm sure tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you."[10] For the "white trash" Ruby believes: "Help them you must, but help them you couldn't....If I was going to send anybody back to Africa, Mrs. Turpin thought, it would be your

---

[10] O'Connor, p. 199.

kind, woman."[11] Another of Ruby's traits, her willing subjection to flattery, she displays when she converses with her Negro helpers. Sporting a lump on her forehead from where Mary Grace hit her with the book, Ruby solicits her helpers' sympathy even though "she knew just exactly how much Negro flattery was worth."[12] Similarly, when the doctor "jollies" Ruby, her reaction shows that she conceals an irrascible and nasty disposition. "Quit your pattin me, Mrs. Turpin growled to herself."[13] Through Mrs. Grace is reflected Ruby's snobbish superiority and shallow distorted ugliness. It is the ugliness of appearances, smugness and self-satisfaction.

VII. MRS. GRACE AND MRS. TURPIN

In Mrs. Grace Ruby sees duplicate of herself. What Ruby sees, however, is a fraudulent and hypocritical picture. O'Connor shows that although these women think, speak and even dress alike, they are the opposite of what they seem. They are not the "stylish," "pleasant," "well-dressed" ladies they think they are. Beneath their masks of pleasantness, self-sacrifice, Christian charity, and good dispositions, lurk malevolent feelings of ill-will which

---

[11] Ibid., pp. 203-204. [12] Ibid., p. 213.

[13] Ibid., p. 208.

they manifest toward their neighbors. Mrs. Grace is not above publicly embarrassing her daughter, Mary Grace, in front of the people gathered in the doctor's office. Speaking in this thinly veiled analogy to her daughter,

> 'I think the worst thing in the world,' she said 'is an ungrateful person. To have everything and not appreciate it. I know a girl,' she said, 'who has parents who would give her anything, a little brother who loves her dearly, who is getting a good education, who wears the best clothes, but who can never say a kind word to anyone, who never smiles, who just criticizes and complains all day long.'[14]

Mrs. Grace reveals that it is she who is complaining, criticizing and ungrateful for everything she has--a nice home, family, and financial security. Ruby Turpin is equally uncharitable to her neighbor. Explaining to Mrs. Grace that the Turpin hogs are "cleaner than some children I've seen," Ruby alludes to the dirty blond child, the son of the "white trash" woman; Ruby maliciously adds to herself, "Cleaner by far than that child right there."[15] Her middle class standard becomes obvious--that cleanliness is next to godliness. In their discussion of the green chip stamps, both Mrs. Turpin and Mrs. Grace manifest their preoccupation with this standard. When the "white trash" woman admits that she got "'some joo'ry' [with her stamps], Ought to have got you a wash rag and some soap,

---

[14] Ibid., p. 205. [15] Ibid., p. 198.

Mrs. Turpin thought. 'I get contour sheets with mine,'" Mrs. Grace added.[16] Both women reveal that their code of courtesy and sociability is a superficial and selfish one. When the conversation turns to Negroes, Mrs. Turpin and Mrs. Grace manifest their hypocritical utilitarian standards. The "white trash" woman has advocated sending all Negroes back to Africa. "'Oh, I couldn't do without my good colored friends,' the pleasant lady said. 'There's a heap of things worse than a nigger,' Mrs. Turpin agreed."[17] Her remarks show that Ruby thinks of Negroes as "a heap of things" only made worse by such persons as the "white trash" woman. Earlier in the discussion of Negroes, the "white trash" woman had provoked a reaction in Mrs. Turpin and Mrs. Grace which shows their discriminatory snobbishness and materialistic orientation. When the "white trash" woman insisted that she wouldn't "'love no niggers or scoot down no hog'....The look that Mrs. Turpin and the pleasant lady exchanged indicated they both understood that you had to <u>have</u> certain things before you could <u>know</u> certain things [italics in the original]."[18] Here, the pleasant ladies demonstrate the superficiality of their judgments. They have reversed values--ones that emphasize

---

[16] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 197. [17] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 200.

[18] <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 199.

having certain things before being able to know certain things; ones that place material values before spiritual ones. Because they have misplaced their values, Mrs. Grace and Mrs. Turpin reveal that they are grotesque distortions of the ugliness of appearances. They emerge as self-seeking, self-righteous, judgmental and complacent women. O'Connor has shown that their fatuous egotism has blinded these two women from seeing one another as they are. Through the character of the eighteen year old Mary Grace, the author presents a child reflector who sees both her mother and Ruby Turpin for the frauds they are.

VIII. MARY GRACE A CHILD REFLECTOR

Seen through Ruby's eyes O'Connor's description of Mary Grace makes the girl a reflector for her mother. "She was obviously the lady's daughter because, although they didn't look anything alike as to disposition, they both had the same shape face and the same blue eyes. On the lady they sparkled pleasantly but in the girl's seared face they appeared alternately to smolder and to blaze.[19] Mary Grace's congenital connection of the "same shape face" and "the same blue eyes" not only links mother and daughter but also divides them in Ruby's mind. Ruby's

---

[19] Ibid., p. 196.

description further separates them by "disposition"; it pits "ugly" daughter against "pleasant" mother. We see the reverse of what Ruby sees in Mrs. Grace and her daughter. Quite possibly the girl's spirit is pleasant while the mother's is ugly and ungrateful.

From O'Connor's description of Mary Grace's looks at Ruby Turpin, the author shows the girl to be a reflector for Ruby. "She was looking at [Ruby] as if she had known and disliked her all her life--all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just all the girl's life."[20] The first implication is that Mary Grace has known Ruby as intimately as a daughter knows a mother "all her life" and this fact makes her dislike of Ruby understandable. For Ruby manifests the same double standards, the same preoccupation with appearances, and the same fatuous egotism as Mary Grace's mother. In O'Connor's phrase, "disliked her all her life," the author suggests that Mary Grace conceives of Ruby Turpin as a surrogate reflector for mother. Because Ruby evokes dislike in Mary Grace, the girl's mother does also. The second implication is that Mary Grace has "known and disliked" Ruby all of Ruby's life with some instinctive aversion that gives Mary Grace an insight into Ruby's capacity to be nasty, selfish, and

---

[20] Ibid., p. 201.

highly critical. What Mary Grace dislikes in her own makeup, she can readily recognize in Ruby Turpin because Mary Grace herself, according to her mother, is outwardly ungrateful, complaining, and critical. O'Connor, using Ruby's description of the girl's looks, make Mary Grace a reflector for Mrs. Turpin, bringing Ruby the divine message. Ruby's description of Mary Grace's eyes that "seemed lit all of a sudden with a peculiar light, an unnatural light like road signs give,"[21] together with Ruby's certainty that "the girl did know her, knew her in some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition"[22] suggest to Ruby and the reader that Mary Grace is a divine messenger. O'Connor, who believes that God often chooses the most unlikely vessels for prophecy, revelations, and messages, points to this function of Mary Grace through her name. For "grace" is an "unmerited divine assistance given man for his regeneration or sanctification." Having left the doctor's office and gone home, Ruby demonstrates that she fully accepts Mary Grace as the harbinger of the divine word.

> 'I am not,' she said tearfully, 'a wart hog. From hell.' But the denial had no force. 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

---

[21] Ibid., p. 197. [22] Ibid., p. 207.

> out for the message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied... The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman.[23]

In this passage Ruby not only acknowledges Mary Grace as messenger but also manifests the spiritual piggishness that had caused Mary Grace to dislike her in the Doctor's office. Ruby, uncharitably self-righteous and judgmental of her neighbors, thinks that Mary Grace's message should have been given to the "white trash." Mary's prophecy, according to Sister Quinn, brings out O'Connor's "insistence on true charity"--the very quality Ruby Turpin demonstrates she lacks.[24] Through her description of Mary Grace's looks at Ruby Turpin, O'Connor has made the girl a reflector for Ruby's spiritual piggishness.

IX. THE HOG METAPHOR

In "Revelation" O'Connor employs the animal images of pigs to serve as metaphorical reflectors for character. All of O'Connor's people become pig-like reflectors when they do their share of "a-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin." But because Ruby receives the message from Mary

---

[23] Ibid., p. 210.

[24] Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, O. S. F., "Flannery O'Connor, A realist of Distances," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 177.

Grace, "Go back to hell where you came from you old wart hog," it is primarily Ruby with whom the pig-image is associated. To mirror Mrs. Turpin's spiritual piggishness O'Connor uses the description of Mary Grace's reaction to Ruby. In each instance where the girl's actions suggest those of a pig, the contemptuous dislike she manifests for Ruby is a signal to the reader that he should be similarly displeased. Shortly after Ruby says, "There's a heap of things worse than a nigger," Mary Grace's facial expression resembles that of a pig snout. "Her lower lip turned downwards and inside out, revealing the pale pink inside of her mouth."[25] What disgusts Mary Grace is Ruby's thinly veiled prejudice against the "white trash" who to Mrs. Turpin "were worse than niggers any day." Mary Grace repeats the action when she telepathically perceives Ruby's uncharitable thoughts about sending all of the "white trash" back to Africa. The final instance in which the girl shows her disapproval of Ruby is when Mary Grace "made a loud ugly [pig-like] noise through her teeth."[26] Here the girl's dislike is prompted by Ruby's laughter at Claud. "Mrs. Turpin's stomach shook. 'He's such a caution,' she said, 'that I can't help but laugh at him!'" Besides the latent condescension for her

---

[25] Ibid., p. 201. [26] Ibid., p. 205.

husband inherent in the remark, there is a reflection of Ruby herself. Mary Grace's sound is a choral commentary on Ruby, cautioning the reader that it is Ruby at whom he should be laughing. For it is Mrs. Turpin who reveals in her thoughts and opinions of others that she is a "living demonstration" of all that is "inadequate and ridiculous."

O'Connor makes the girl into a wart hog from heaven who combats the "wart hog from hell," Ruby Turpin, by revealing her for the fraud Ruby is. Ironically they are descriptively juxtaposed by O'Connor as reflectors for opposing characteristics. For Ruby, who is physically fat, is morally fat also. Ruby manifests her spiritual obesity with her prejudice and egotism. After Mary Grace hits Ruby with the book, Ruby develops a wart-like greenish-blue lump over her eye. Mary Grace, whom Ruby says is "fat" and "ugly" has an acne condition--hence the idea of warts. Unlike Ruby's, Mary's spiritual fatness is one of moral perfectability. For Mary, a student at Wellesley college, who is studying English, Math, History, Psychology, and Social Studies, spends all of her spare time reading a book. Mary Grace manifests that she is not complacent; she would combat the ignorance, idleness, and idiocy--the true spiritual sickness--that infects O'Connor's world. When Mary Grace hits Ruby with the book on Human Development, the girl is reacting to Ruby's spiritual sickness--

her complacently self-righteous and egotistical bigotry.

> 'If it's one thing I am,' Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, 'it's grateful. When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, "Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!" It could have been different!...Oh thank you, Jesus, Jesus, thank you!'
>
> The book struck her directly over her left eye.[27]

To Mary Grace Ruby's words are denegations of others and elevations of herself. Mary Grace sees in Ruby's self-satisfaction with what she is, a "neat," "clean," "respectable," and "good woman," that Ruby has elevated herself above all others; she is truly "grateful" that she is not "white trash," "ugly," or a "nigger." In Ruby's gratitude for the "little of everything" she has, Mary Grace perceives that Ruby uncharitably discriminates against others because they have not. Ruby's thankfulness for a good disposition, (with pun upon "good disposition"), reveals to Mary Grace that Ruby's materialistic and egocentric preoccupations are complacently exclusive of any concept of others and even of the idea of Jesus. For as Ruby "counted her blessings" she showed the girl that she has made herself her religion--that in Christ's name, Ruby lists her own "virtues" and glorifies herself. Thus when Mary Grace, the wart hog from heaven,

---

[27] Ibid., p. 206.

hits Ruby Turpin, the "wart hog from hell." with the book on Human Development, Mary Grace is hitting Ruby with the truth. Ruby's egotism has made her foolish in the sight of God. The moral perfectability Ruby thinks she manifests becomes instead a demonstration of her own ignorance and idiocy.

Duplicating Mary Grace's pig-like sound and facial expressions, Ruby Turpin's actions become reflectors for her spiritual piggishness when she returns home. O'Connor shows that Ruby, a stranger to herself, has been metamorphosed into the pig she epitomizes. "Her lower lip protruded dangerously"[28] when Ruby girds herself for battle in the pig-parlor. Arriving at the pen, Ruby demonstrates that she is torn between trying to see herself as a "hog from hell" and as a good Christian. "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell too?"[29] Hog-like Ruby begins her "gruntin" and "groanin" to her hogs in a low rumbling voice that becomes a yell. Defying God to repeat the message, Ruby says, "Go on...call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put the bottom rail on the top. There'll still be a top and a bottom!"[30] Ruby's pig-like squealing and outraged indignation at the comparison God has made through

---

[28] Ibid., p. 214. [29] Ibid., p. 215.

[30] Ibid., p. 216.

his messenger Mary Grace, shows that Ruby has become an egotistical presumptuous pig. Ruby's charge to God reveals that Ruby, who has professed to believe in all of the Christian tenets and especially in the divine will has reversed herself. In questioning God's will, Ruby has made herself God's equal. Like Lucifer, she violates the First Commandment. Ruby's false god is herself. Through her spiritual piggishness, Ruby has succumbed to the temptations of the devil (who figuratively appears in this sequence momentarily as a "watery snake") and becomes his hog-like emissary. Ruby challenges God, like another Lucifer, in the ultimate blasphemy: "A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, 'Who do you think you are?'" as though addressing "white trash" or "niggers."[31] Through swinish Mrs. Turpin's denunciation of God, Flannery O'Connor creates a mirror analogue of what man can become if he manifests the prideful, self-satisfied egotism of a Ruby Turpin. Through Ruby's challenge, "Put the bottom rail on the top. There'll still be a top and a bottom!" O'Connor points to the reversal of Ruby's understanding of herself--to the new self-awareness she will achieve in her vision of the souls "rumbling toward heaven." In the words of Robert Drake:

---

[31] Ibid.

> [Christ] 'puts the bottom rail on top'; He makes the first last and the last first. In short, He revolutionizes the whole Creation and turns the whole world upside down, to the scandal of those who believe that two plus two equals four (and, with craft, possibly five) or those who believe that they don't need any outside help (a savior) because they're doing all right by themselves. And this Christ comes not lamb-like and meek, as a rule, but in terrifying glory, riding the whirlwind: He is more like Eliot's "Christ the tiger" than gentle Jesus meek and mild. There is nothing sweet or sentimental about Him, and He terrifies before He can bless.[32]

Through her gratitude for her child-like husband, Claud, Ruby experiences her second revelation.

X. ADULTS AND CHILDREN REFLECTORS FOR ONE ANOTHER

Through her story O'Connor has used children as reflectors for adults and has then metaphorically reversed the image so that adults become reflectors for children. Switching as she does from children to adults and back again, O'Connor re-emphasizes her theme: there is a sanctity about man that in God's sight makes all men His children. For example, the blond child in the doctor's office becomes a reflector for his mother. Though they are similar in appearance, blond, dirty, and "kind of vacant and white trashy," they are different as to their dis-

---

[32]Robert Drake, "Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay," Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective, Roderick Jellema, editor (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 17.

positions. The "white trash" woman demonstrates that she has a nasty disposition, while her son, she says, "took sick and turned good." If the child is a reflector for his mother, he is also one for Claud. Because both Claud and the blond child share good dispositions and ulcerous conditions, they become reflectors for one another. After Mary Grace has kicked Claud because he, like Ruby, manifests complacency and racial prejudice, O'Connor notes that "Claud was doubled up in the corner on the floor, pale as paper, holding his leg," while his reflector, the blond child, "had not moved during the disturbance except to draw one leg up under him."[33] Caught in a similar attitude or pose by the author, it's as if O'Connor were saying that the child and man are one; their roles are interchangeable; they share the same foibles and yet the same sanctity. O'Connor applies the metaphor of children to adults when Ruby, who has been explaining her relationship to her Negro helpers to Mrs. Grace, addresses the pleasant lady: "'Child, yes,' Mrs. Turpin said." But if Ruby applies the child metaphor to Mrs. Grace, in Ruby's mind, it is essentially her husband Claud who is child-like.

At the beginning of her story, O'Connor establishes that Claud represents an obedient and non-thinking child to

---

[33] O'Connor, pp. 207, 209.

Ruby. He is another emblem of the "little of everything" Ruby has and Claud justifies her opinion of him by obeying her like a child. When they entered the doctor's office together, Ruby orders him: "'Claud you sit in that chair there'....he sat down as if he were accustomed to doing what she told him to."[34] Through child-like Claud Ruby experiences her first gratitude. Just before Mary Grace hit her with the book, Ruby had been thinking, "For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her."[35] It is this same "gratitude," one founded on true love, devotion, and concern for another that is devoid of any selfish or egotistical consideration, which Ruby experiences when she is down at the pig-parlor.

> A tiny truck, Claud's, appeared on the highway, heading rapidly out of sight. Its gears scraped thinly. It looked like a child's toy. At any moment a bigger truck might smash into it and scatter Claud's and the niggers' brains all over the road.
>
> Mrs. Turpin stood there, her gaze fixed on the highway, all her muscles rigid, until in five or six minutes the truck reappeared, returning. She waited until it had had time to turn into their own road. Then like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, 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.[36]

---

[34] Ibid., p. 192. [35] Ibid., p. 206.

[36] Ibid., p. 217.

For the second time in the story, Ruby becomes truly grateful and her child-like Claud becomes the instrument for Ruby's second "unmerited divine assistance," her "grace." For after she sees Claud's truck's safe return, it is then she perceives the mystery. In the author's description of the pigs, she has contrived to use them as reflectors for part of Ruby's answer to her question "Who do you think you are?" and her revelation. "A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life." O'Connor's description of their "red glow" suggests that they are embodiments of the secret of life.

XI. COLOR REFLECTORS IN FINAL SETTING OF "REVELATION"

Color reflectors are the mirror devices the author provides to make the final scene in "Revelation" a composite picture of the universe. It is a picture that embraces all of life and nature. O'Connor's characters, who may be associated with certain colored articles of clothing, are represented in the color description of the setting. Animals and plants and the colors they reflect are included. Even material objects find their way into this last setting.

> The freshly cut pasture sloped down to the highway. Across it was their cotton field and beyond that a dark green dusty wood, which they owned as well. The sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of trees like a farmer inspecting his hogs....In the deepening light everything was taking on a mysterious hue. The pasture was growing a peculiar glassy green

> and the streak of highway had turned lavender...The color of everything, field and crimson sky, burned for a moment with transparent intensity....There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire [italics not in the original].[37]

The simile of the "sun...farmer" suggests that he is God inspecting all of creation. At the same time the sun's redness reduces all creatures to the commonality of the pigs that were suffused with a "red glow." If the reader recalls that the "common lady" and Mary Grace's mother had on "red...shoes," and that the "white trash" woman's hair is bound with a "red...ribbon," then figuratively they are present at the pig parlor and share in Ruby's ritualistic communion with her Creator. The dark green wood and glassy green pasture become reflectors for the green worn by the Negro women and the delivery boy, the "green glass ash tray," the plastic fern in the doctor's office, and even Ruby's "greenish-blue" protuberance over her eye. Through character and object O'Connor repeats the normal yellow associated with the sun. The blond child, his mother, and the nurse have "yellow hair"; together with the hay that Claud and the Negro boy put out for the white-face cattle, they serve as repeated reflectors in the final setting. The brown of the dusty wood is the color of Ruby's "brown

---

[37] Ibid., pp. 215-217.

oxfords" and probably Mary Grace's Girl Scout shoes. Symbolically the clock in the doctor's office with its "face encased in a brass sunburst" has foreshadowed the "sun... farmer" as a reflector at the end of the story. In the doctor's office as here at the pig parlor, the sun is Father Time "right on the dot too" calling forth a reckoning from Ruby Turpin. Ruby gets the answer to her presumptuous questioning of God when the "crimson sky, burned for a moment with transparent intensity" and Ruby's echo "returned to her clearly like an answer from beyond the wood."[38] O'Connor contrives to use the change of the color of the sky to reflect the Almighty's purgation by fire of Ruby's fatuous egotism. Having been purged, Ruby is now ready for her revelation. Through O'Connor's use of the colors purple and crimson, the author points to Ruby's vision of the souls. For purple and crimson are liturgical colors for penance and abnegation.[39] From Ruby's vision she ironically learns that "freaks and lunatics" will precede her "tribe" of people into heaven and that only through penance and contrition will she be saved. True virtue, which is symbolized in the cotton field and the souls' "white robes," is what Ruby must manifest--true faith, love and devotion to Jesus and to even the least of his children.

---

[38] Ibid., p. 217.

[39] George Ferguson, Signs & Symbols in Christian Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 91.

CHAPTER IV

A VIEW OF THE WOODS

I. FAMILY REFLECTORS

In "A View of the Woods" Flannery O'Connor uses the multiple reflectors of title, image, and name to reveal character, plot and theme. These mirror analogues function not only as aesthetic devices of style but become the embodiments of O'Connor's theme. They are clues to the point she is making and they are her signature. By perceiving her reflectors the reader unravels her stories. He notes that the persons or objects mirrored are always larger than the image they project. To him they may seem grotesque, exaggerated, even monstrous extensions of the original image, but in each case the reflectors point up an idea, trait, or act that is noteworthy and bears directly on the theme of O'Connor's story. For example, in "A View of the Woods" Flannery O'Connor uses family reflectors to duplicate character through speech and action, temperament and description. The character reflector in this story acts as a mirror analogue revealing in all that the main character does and says O'Connor's world view.

II. THE THEME OF "A VIEW OF THE WOODS"

In "A View of the Woods" the world view of Flannery O'Connor is her theme: contemporary, highly mechanized society is the sick by-product of three generations of material progress. Society's growth has been so rapid that it has over-emphasized technological advancement and disproportionately under-emphasized human development. The result has been a gap in understanding between generations founded on misunderstanding and misplaced values. Obsessed with the acquisition of fame and fortune made easy by modern methods of mechanization, the first of three generations would impose a materialistic orientation on its progeny. The third generation revolts against the mechanical, callous, heartless unconcern for the individual the first manifests, while the first generation in its preoccupation to perpetuate its heritage of progress would foist upon its descendants its attitudes and convictions. The older generation worships progress for its own sake as the outward manifestation of human development. But ironically human nature remains unchanged for all of man's innovation. What O'Connor sees is that both generations of the contemporary world are as rapacious, bestial, savage, and self-seeking as all the generations of mankind before them. To feed the vision of itself, the first generation would force on its

progeny the greed for power and prestige. By its avarice the first will devour itself, and even if it skips the second generation, it will devour the third generation. Mesmerized by the signs of progress and envisioning their only purpose on earth to further its advance, the first generation becomes the victim of its own wheels of progress and perishes under its mechanized revolutions. Meanwhile, the third generation is disenfranchised of its right to participate in the mysterious wonders of physical nature; it finds it impossible to express its human nature. Linked by an accident of birth to their ancestors, the descendants are unwilling to accept the megalomania of their forebears. They perceive that they would become mere mechanical extensions or marionettes to be manipulated by the older generation. Unwilling to be seduced or intimidated by the bribes of progress, the new order would by violence preserve its individual human dignity founded upon respect for oneself, one's immediate family, and one's name.

III. THREE VIEWS OF THE WOODS

Flannery O'Connor uses the title of her story as a multiple reflector to show the disparity of convictions and goals of her characters. There are three views in "A View of the Woods": the Fortune's view, the Pitts' view, and the "mystery" view. Conflicting viewpoints of the woods arise

between Mr. Fortune and his granddaughter, Mary Fortune Pitts, when the old man announces his intention to sell the lot in front of the family home to the developer Tilman. Mary Fortune opposes the sale because she wishes to preserve the view of the woods which would be obscured by Tilman's gas station. Mr. Fortune goes ahead and sells the meadow. To Mr. Fortune "A pine trunk is a pine trunk...." His view is pragmatic and utilitarian. He sees the woods as an opportunity for land speculation that will eventually materialize into his dream town of the future. He doesn't want a monument to his own egotism; he egotistically wants a monument to himself. In place of the cow pasture and dirt road in front of his home, Mr. Fortune envisioned "a paved highway with plenty of new model cars on it...a supermarket store across the road...a gas station, a motel, a drive-in picture-show within easy distance...an eventual town....He thought this should be called Fortune, Georgia."[1] Ironically, had Mr. Fortune lived, his view would have been of an enterprise similar to the one owned by Tilman five miles down the road--"a combination country store, filling station, scrap metal dump, used car lot and dance hall...and farther back from the road...[which would have been almost

---

[1]Flannery O'Connor, "A View of the Woods," Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), pp. 57-58.

in Mr. Fortune's front yard] a line of tombstones and monuments,"[2] in short a view of modern life, as O'Connor understands it. Unlike her grandfather, Mary Fortune Pitts cannot view the woods impersonally and indifferently. In her view it has an ineluctable magnetism affording her a mysterious spiritual experience. As spokesman for the other members of her family, Mary reveals that they share the intangible appreciation of the view. "We won't be able to see the woods across the road...We won't be able to see the view...."[3] The Pitts' view of the woods is as romantic and sentimental, individual and personal as their varied objections to the sale of the lot. Mary Fortune sums up their view: "You mean...the lawn?...that's where we play... My daddy grazes his calves on that lot." In these finite and concrete terms, then, the Pitts' view represents that sort of spiritual satisfaction that each of the members of the family derives from the view. Voiced by Mary, their reasons for opposing the sale of the lot are as spiritual as the third view of the wood is metaphysical.

By personifying the woods O'Connor shrouds them with mystery. The author suggests some divine personage like a Christ-figure lurking in the shadows of the woods. According to Sister Quinn, the woods "represent those moments of

---

[2] Ibid., p. 67. [3] Ibid., p. 63.

grace, of inspiration, which come to all of us from time to time."[4] The mysterious view affords Mr. Fortune the opportunity of change. When he rejects this view of the woods, the chance passes from him and he is left abandoned and alone without anyone to help him. In her first description of the mysterious view, Flannery O'Connor suggests the personified presence of a mystical embodiment in the woods that would seem to be leading Mr. Fortune to some perception of a natural phenomenon transcending his own narrow scope of a future town. The lake was bordered "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."[5] The metaphor with its images and language of the "line" which appeared "to walk across the water" is reminiscent of the biblical parable of Christ walking across the sea of Gallilee to continue his preaching in Bethsaida. In addition to suggesting the mystical Christ by the personification of the woods, the description serves to explain the view Mary has of the woods from the front porch of the family home. This simile adds "a person" to the first, for

---

[4]Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, O. S. F., "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 168.

[5]O'Connor, p. 54.

Mary Fortune and her grandfather are look-alikes. Mary "looked into this scene as if it were a person that she preferred to [Mr. Fortune]."[6] To Mary Fortune "this scene" is more spiritually satisfying than the image of herself--Mr. Fortune. Not until Mr. Fortune hallucinates is he given an insight into the mysterious view his granddaughter perceives. Mr. Fortune's view transforms the first and second personifications by relating them as reflectors to Christ and Mary Fortune Pitts. "The old man stared for some time...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."[7] The simile functions as a reflector not only of Mary, who is literally the "someone" wounded by the beating her father gives her in the woods, but again as the mystical person, probably Christ, suffering for the sins of mankind. The biblical suggestion that this "someone" is Christ comes from Christ's words on his way to Calvary, "For if in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?"[8] Rejecting this "uncomfortable mystery," Mr. Fortune refuses the momentary grace of understanding and perception revealed to him in this view of the woods. Seeing the woods for the last time, Mr. Fortune

---

[6] Ibid., p. 70. [7] Ibid., p. 71. [8] Luke 23:31.

finds himself utterly alone. In this final vision the third personification of the trees is metamorphosed by the fourth. No longer is Mr. Fortune in their "midst"; they move not toward him but away from him. "The gaunt trees had thickened into mysterious dark files that were marching across the water and away into the distance."[9] The mysterious personification recurs. The image is repeated with a slight modification as the "line...walking" has become the "files...marching." The language of the metaphor shows the limitations of Mr. Fortune's regimented and progressive view of values--his perception. At the same time the image ironically purports that he has been the victim of his own sagacity. "You can't stop the marcher time for a cow." Like the title, which reveals not one but three views of the woods, this last scene depicts the mechanical nature of Mr. Fortune that Flannery O'Connor dramatizes from the first paragragh in her story. Looking "around desperately for someone to help him," Mr. Fortune finds the place deserted except for the bulldozer, the mechanical image of himself--the solitary "huge yellow monster gorging itself on clay."[10]

IV. A MECHANICAL METAPHOR FOR MR. FORTUNE

With a series of images O'Connor contrives to reveal

---

[9] O'Connor, p. 81. [10] Ibid.,

Mr. Fortune's mechanical characteristics. The first sentence links the old man and the machine by his preoccupation with it and serves to forecast the events of the story. "The week before Mary Fortune and the old man had spent every morning watching the machine that lifted out dirt and threw it in a pile."[11] Ironically, Mr. Fortune endeavors by his mechanistically oriented ideas of progress to educate and lift his granddaughter Mary out of the agrarian Pitts' way of life, but succeeds only in throwing her like so much dirt on the pile of progress. O'Connor shows Mr. Fortune's mechanical qualities by his preoccupations with the machine and in two similes: In this first scene Mary's feet are on his shoulders "as if he were no more than part of the automobile";[12] and, in the next to last scene, Mr. Fortune reflects that "His heart felt as if it were the size of the car and was racing forward, carrying him to some inevitable destination...."[13] The second simile identifies which part of Mr. Fortune is most clearly associated with the automobile--"his heart." He manifests his mechanical heartlessness through his disregard for Mr. Pitts and his machine-like pursuit of his dream to the "inevitable destination"--the destruction of his own image in the form of Mary Fortune

---

[11] Ibid., p. 54. [12] Ibid., p. 60.

[13] Ibid., p. 77.

Pitts. Like "the big disembodied gullet [that] gorge [s] itself on the clay," Mr. Fortune pridefully gluts himself upon his own image and likeness, Mary Fortune, whom he thought was "thoroughly of his clay."[14] With a play on words, O'Connor shows how Mr. Fortune parallels the machine. Like the bulldozer that "with the sound of a deep sustained nausea and a slow mechanical revulsion turn [s] and spit [s] "[15] up the clay, Mr. Fortune, in nauseous revulsion that Mary is more Pitts than Fortune turns and spits her up. He turns away from her spiritually when he chastises her: "You act more like a Pitts than a Fortune."[16] Like the machine spitting up its own clay, Mr. Fortune in the last scene utters a final rebuke to the dead battered body that was once his image: "There's not an ounce of Pitts in me."[17] As he lays dying, Mr. Fortune sees his counterpart in the mechanical "monster gorging itself on clay." It's as though he has so gorged himself on his own insatiable appetite for fame and fortune that ironically he has given himself the stroke. The very progress he championed has consumed him.

Mary Fortune Pitts and her grandfather, Mark Fortune, are family reflectors that are linked by name, traits, actions and speech so that at first glance they appear to be char-

---

[14] Ibid., pp. 55, 58. [15] Ibid., p. 55.

acter counterparts. In reality they are as different as black and white--night and day. O'Connor uses the reflection of Mary as an aesthetic device to reveal her grandfather Mr. Fortune and to contrast two views in apparently the same person. Mary becomes the mirror of Mr. Fortune's vanity, pride, prejudice, and self-righteousness.

V. NAME SELECTION

The actual selection of Mary's name is significant as a reflector for Mr. Fortune's attitudes, while at the same time it reveals his conflict. When Mary's parents had wanted to name their seventh child Mark Fortune Pitts after the grandfather-to-be, Mr. Fortune had threatened to evict them telling them "that if they coupled his name with the name Pitts he would put them off the place."[18] By his irrascible unmitigating attitude he demonstrates the heartless unconcern for the well-being of his family, disrespect for his son-in-law Pitts, and a fierce pride in his family name. The latter causes his conflict. When a girl was born he "relented." He reveals a vanity and singularity of self-concept which is easily subject to the flattery of appearances. Mr. Fortune saw in the baby only one day old that "she bore his unmistakable likeness...and suggested

---

[18] Ibid., p. 57.

himself that they name her Mary Fortune, after his beloved mother."[19] After nine years Mary's last name Pitts still rankles deep in Mr. Fortune's heart. "The fact that Mary Fortune was a Pitts too was something he ignored, as if it were an affliction the child was not responsible for."[20] Mr. Fortune's mental inability to accept the Pitts' name for his granddaughter is the source of his own affliction and generates the conflict that arises within himself and between him and Mary.

VI. THE MEANINGS OF NAMES

Flannery O'Connor juxtaposes their last names, Fortune and Pitts, and their first names, Mark and Mary, to characterize them and to draw the conflict between them. They become irreconcilably divided as the meanings of their names suggest. Significantly "Pitts" suggests that O'Connor "pits" the girl against her grandfather. She does in fact oppose him over the sale of the "lawn," "an open space between woods." If one considers that the final scene in which grandfather and granddaughter fight is in a clearing surrounded by pines, the significance of the name Pitts takes on another ominous meaning, for a "pit" is "an enclosure in which animals are made to fight each other." Similarly, if "fortune" is defined as "a hypothetical force

---

[19] Ibid., p. 20. [20] Ibid., p. 58.

or personified power that unpredictably determines events and issues favorably or unfavorably," then Mary's birth and the contest that is waged between Mr. Fortune and Mary Fortune Pitts resulting in their deaths, is a mere "accident or incident"--two other meanings of "fortune." From their first names, Mark and Mary, comes a different significance. "Mary," taken to mean "bitter grace," becomes the vehicle for the momentary spiritual insight Mr. Fortune is afforded in his hallucination of the woods. It is a bitter grace because of the intense animosity that arises between them over the lot. "Mark," on the other hand, is "a boundary" or a "limit." Using these meanings of Mr. Fortune's first name, it can be demonstrated that he goes beyond the "stob," the marker, when he exceeds the limits of his authority with Mary. He disregards her individual rights and uses her as a "goal or object," two other meanings of "mark," to perpetuate his image in a nearly perfect simulation of himself.

VII. THE NAME PITTS AS A MULTIPLE REFLECTOR

Pitts, Mary Fortune's last name, is used by Flannery O'Connor as a multiple reflector. The name becomes associated with the look and temperament of the girl's father; it represents a moral choice; it becomes a mark of independence and yet a stain of cowardly servitude. When Mr. Fortune accuses Mary, "You act more like a Pitts than a Fortune,"

the name Pitts becomes associated through Mary with her father's temperament. He is depicted by Mr. Fortune as an "irascible, sullen, sulking individual." Yet these are the very characteristics Mary manifests after she has left her grandfather selling the lot at Tilman's and ridden home in her father's truck. Sitting in the porch swing looking "glum faced," Mary irrascibly explains her disappearance to Mr. Fortune and curtly dismisses him. What she is sulking about is the sale of the lot. This dispute together with Mr. Fortune's often repeated accusation that Mr. Pitts beats her and Mary's denial leads to the choice Mr. Fortune gives her. Here the name Pitts becomes associated with the moral choice that confronts the girl. "'Are you a Fortune,' he said, 'or are you a Pitts? Make up your mind.'"[21] The grandfather insists she choose between her father and himself. More than this Mr. Fortune demonstrates an inability to understand her blind filial allegiance to her father. In asking her to choose between them, Mr. Fortune transgresses upon Pitts' right as a father and Mary's own right to be free. Her responses shows her own brand of individuality that is marked by her refusal to take sides against her father and determined strong-willed assertion to remain independent of her grandfather. "Her voice was loud and

---

[21] Ibid., p. 74.

positive and belligerant. 'I'm Mary--Fortune--Pitts,'" she said.[22] The name becomes associated with the "Pitts look" in this same passage when Mr. Fortune retorts: "'Well I... and PURE Fortune!...For an instant she looked completely defeated, and the old man saw with a disturbing clearness that this was the Pitts look. What he saw was the Pitts look, pure and simple, and he felt personally stained by it, as if it had been found on his own face." It was the same "foreign" and undefinable look Mr. Fortune noted on her face every time her father beat her. "It infuriated him. It was a look that was part terror and part respect and part something else, something very like cooperation."[23] The look is indicative of the one flaw Mr. Fortune finds in her character; she won't stand up to her father as she does to him. What Mr. Fortune thinks is a look of fear is resignation; it is not cowardly compliance, but instead a controlled, strong-willed determination to accept the beating. At the same time the "Pitts look" marks Mr. Fortune with the mysterious guilt he feels when he thinks that it is himself Mr. Pitts is whipping not Mary Fortune. Mr. Fortune's reflection shows that through his granddaughter he suffers the stain that marks the "Pitts look." In Mr. Fortune it is the stain of cowardice which he manifests by

---

[22] Ibid., pp. 74-75. [23] Ibid., p. 60.

not trying to stop Pitts and further as he purposely tries to give Pitts a stroke.

To present a composite picture of Mr. Fortune, O'Connor shows through Mary Fortune Pitts' looks, temperament, action, and speech the seeming similarity that links them inseparably as character counterparts in Mr. Fortune's mind. By other descriptions, however, the author reveals a disparity between the grandfather and granddaughter so that the reflection Mary Fortune presents is a distorted projection of her grandfather's idea of her. Mary Fortune manifests she is not the "throwback" to him he believes she is. Instead, she emerges as a monstrous extension of himself. All of the traits Mr. Fortune had carefully instilled in her, Mary Fortune employs to master, dominate, and defeat him.

VIII. MR. FORTUNE'S REVEALING SELF-PORTRAIT

Through Mr. Fortune's description of his granddaughter's looks and disposition, O'Connor reveals the physical and spiritual similarity that unites Mary Fortune Pitts and her grandfather as character doubles in the old man's eyes. In Mr. Fortune's description of her, he reveals that he sees in Mary not an unflattering "replica" of himself.

> [Because] Mary Fortune looked like her grandfather... he thought it added greatly to her attractiveness. He thought she was the smartest and the prettiest child he

> had ever seen. She was now nine, short and broad like himself, with his very light blue eyes, his wide prominent forehead, his steady penetrating scowl and his rich florid complexion; but she was like him on the inside too. She had, to a singular degree, his intelligence, his strong will, and his push and drive. Though there was seventy years' difference in their ages, the spiritual distance between them was slight.[24]

Mr. Fortune's reflections upon his granddaughter function aesthetically as a self-portrait revealing how he sees her and himself simultaneously. In the terms in which he describes her, he manifests a prejudice toward her desirable attributes which are repeatedly compared to his while he neglects to mention her shortcomings. The resulting picture of Mary and himself is not a composite but rather a romanticized projection of his imagination. His fantasy enables Mr. Fortune to reminisce about his own youthful appearance. "She had thick, very fine sand colored hair--the exact kind he had had when he had any."[25] At the same time the hair points up a significant dissimilarity in their looks. It suggests a youthful vitality and fecundity in Mary that is absent in Mr. Fortune. Through his description of her "hair" and the way it is cut to form "a kind of door opening onto the central part of her face," O'Connor provides a reflection that will be a key to the spiritual disparity between them. By the looks Mary assumes in response to her grandfather, she reveals a polarity of feeling and opinion dissimilar to

---

[24] Ibid., p. 55. [25] Ibid., p. 59.

his own. The metaphor of the "door opening..." serves as symbolic of the threshold experience for Mr. Fortune that will be manifested in Mary Fortune's expression.

IX. REFLECTIONS FOUND IN FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

The different looks on Mary Fortune's face depict the changes the girl undergoes in her reaction to her grandfather. The girl's face shows "displeasure" when Mr. Fortune announces the sale of the lot. Her feeling is antithetical to his own. "There in the little rectangular opening of hair was his face looking back at him, but it was a reflection not of his present expression but of the darker one that indicated his displeasure."[26] When their argument over the lot becomes heated, the expression on her "red-face" and his are "exactly reflecting" one another's. What has prompted his reaction is Mary's opposition to his plan, while she has become incensed because of the disrespect Mr. Fortune manifests for her father by calling Mr. Pitts a "fool." Their argument divides them irreconcilably and acts as a turning point in the story. O'Connor shows their division in all of the subsequent descriptions of Mary's facial expressions. Reflecting emotions different from Mr. Fortune's, her facial

---

[26] Ibid., p. 63.

expressions indicate the great "spiritual distance" between them. When Mr. Fortune announces to the Pitts family he intends to sell the lot, he notices that Mary "had a mulish reserved look as if she were planning some business of her own."[27] The look on her face is "reserved" suggesting a purposeful and private reflection that excludes Mr. Fortune from her confidence. After Mr. Fortune gets the deed from the courthouse, he notices that the expression on Mary's face "was foreboding and withdrawn." O'Connor here parallels Mary Fortune's look with "the sky [that] had darkened also."[28] The comparison is an ominous forecast of the "tornado" of passions and emotions Mary will display at Tilman's where "red-faced and wild-looking" she throws anything she can lay her hands on. When Mr. Fortune is going to whip her in reprisal for her outburst, Mary's facial expression is the exact reflection of the emotional turmoil that Mr. Fortune had undergone since the episode in Tilman's store. Unable to think at first, Mr. Fortune had been embarassed and confused by her actions. Then with "delayed recognition" he has a vision in which he sees his mistake and determines to beat her. "Gradually her confused expression began to clear. Where a few seconds before her face had been red and distorted and unorganized, it drained now

---

[27] Ibid., p. 65. [28] Ibid., p. 75.

of every vague line until nothing was left on it but positiveness, a look that went slowly past determination and reached certainty."[29] In the expression of "positiveness" and "determination" on Mary's face, O'Connor has provided a reflection that is devoid of the earlier Pitts stain. The look suggests Mary has mastered herself. She is unwilling to be intimidated or whipped by her grandfather. Suiting look to action she attacks Mr. Fortune at the first blow of his belt. "He seemed to see his own face coming to bite him from several sides at once."[30] Ironically, the metaphor suggests that he is being devoured by himself, by the "strong will," the "push and drive," he had instilled in Mary Fortune--the most prideful extension of himself and his image.

X. SPEECH AS REFLECTOR

Mary Fortune's speech and actions, like her looks and disposition, become reflectors for her grandfather and are employed by O'Connor to point up the ironic disparity that exists between them. While Mary's manner of speech is abrupt and irascible like Mr. Fortune's, her conversation reveals a self-determined independence that initially reflects his training but inherently manifests her separation from him. He takes pride in her quick retorts and

---

[29] Ibid., p. 78. [30] Ibid., p. 79.

even engages her in "little verbal tilts...this was a sport like putting a mirror up in front of a rooster and watching him fight his reflection. 'I don't want no bonus,' Mary Fortune said. 'I ain't never seen you refuse one,'" Mr. Fortune replied.[31] Here the language connects grandfather and granddaughter, while at the same time it shows Mary's independence in her refusal of the "bonus." Her determined stance on this point is the first in a series of negative reactions to his attempts to bribe her--all of which are marked by curt answers. "'I don't want no ice-cream cone,' she said...'I ain't got nothing to do in no ten-cent store.... I don't want no quester of yours.'"[32] Mr. Fortune believes he can make up to Mary for her displeasure over the sale of the lot by buying her something. She obstinately refuses his "little bonuses" for the same reason that Mr. Fortune won't let Pitts drill a well or pay rent; she doesn't want to be obligated to her grandfather for anything so that it couldn't be thrown up at her later. Like Mr. Fortune, Mary manifests her control of the situation by giving him "a practical lesson" in her independence. Mary conceals her assets from Mr. Fortune in the same manner the old man would sell off a lot to how he "control[led] the greater interest" of his property. To Mr. Fortune's queries, "How much have you laid by?" Mary retorts, "Noner yer bidnis."[33]

---

[31] Ibid., p. 62. [32] Ibid., p. 74. [33] Ibid., p. 62.

Four times Mary refuses to admit to Mr. Fortune that her father beats her, and asserts that if anyone tries, she would kill them.[34] In Stanley Edgar Hyman's view, "These lying denials are a higher truth, the truth of the spirit that contradicts the weakness of the flesh."[35] Each of Mary's four denials evokes a slightly different response from Mr. Fortune. His metaphorical answers show the polarities between them. The first time she lies he has witnessed her beating. Mr. Fortune says, "Do you call me a liar or a blindman!" Ironically he is both. He is "blind" to her stubborn pride--the very essence of his own personality that he had instilled in her--a pride that wouldn't let her or himself admit to being whipped. He proves he's "a liar" later on when he tells Mary he's only going to town to look at the boats, whereas he's really going to arrange for the sale of the lot. After Mary repeats the lie Mr. Fortune roars, "And I'm a china poland pig and black is white!" In the metaphor for himself, he unconsciously reveals his separation from Mary is as great as the difference between "black" and "white," truth and lie, right and wrong. When Mary denies for the third time that her father beats her, Mr. Fortune adds this refrain to his earlier sentiments:

---

[34] Ibid., pp. 61, 64, 74, 78.

[35] Standley Edgar Hyman, "Flannery O'Connor," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 54 (Minneapolis, 1966), p. 37.

"'And black is white,' the old man piped, 'and night is day!'" The image, besides suggesting their conflicting division in values, connotes that the world is turned around and the natural sequence of "night" and "day" is reversed when truth becomes lie and lie truth. In consequence of Mary's persistently lying he calls her a "Jezebel" to which she responds that Mr. Fortune is the "Whore of Babylon." The name calling unites them in mutual guilt, yet separates them as one betrays and the other prostitutes. In accepting bonuses from Mr. Fortune every time he sells a lot, Mary betrays her father and the money she receives becomes the price of her allegiance to her grandfather. She is an "impudent, shameless or abondoned woman," the meaning of a "Jezebel," while her grandfather, fortune's "whore," pursues a "faithless, unworthy, and idolatrous desire" in her obsession with the future town named after him. He not only bribes Mary but in his meanness relishes the idea of giving Pitts a stroke. Mary's fourth and final denial of her beatings evokes a response in Mr. Fortune that emphasizes his determination and sums up their disparity in the choice he gives Mary, "'Are you a Fortune,' he said, 'or are you a Pitts? Make up your mind!'" The choice suggests the irreconcilable difference between them as do the previous images he has used. They are as different and "black" and "white," "night" and "day," a "Jezebel" or the "Whore of Babylon."

Mary's speech becomes a reflector for Mr. Fortune's lack of understanding. The three objections she raises to the sale of the lot are enigmas to Mr. Fortune. He can only respond logically; that the children can play elsewhere, that Mr. Pitts can graze his cattle elsewhere, and that "There's not a thing over there but the woods."[36] Mr. Fortune is devoid of the mysterious, unreasonable, spiritual attachment Mary Fortune has for the woods. Though in his hallucination he perceived a vision of what Mary sees in the woods, Mr. Fortune is incapable of identifying with the beauty and uncomfortable mystery of his perception. Reverting to rationalism, which paradoxically is based on his "patriotic sense," Mr. Fortune sells the lot "to insure the future." Mary's and Mr. Fortune's speeches show that the conflict between them and their convictions is the conflict between rationalism and spiritualism; the belief that everything must have a reasonable explanation and the belief in some mysterious revelation that one experiences which defies logical explanation.

XI. ACTION AS REFLECTOR POINTING TO STORY'S CONCLUSION

Initially reflecting Mr. Fortune's abruptness, Mary's actions, like her speech, are marked by the relatives'

---

[36] O'Connor, p. 70.

mutually shared headstrong attitude. Mr. Fortune notes that "she even walked the way he did, stomach forward, with a careful abrupt gait, something between a rock and a shuffle."[37] Walking dangerously close to the edge of the construction site, Mary pretends she doesn't hear Mr. Fortune's warning--"a little trick he had taught her himself." O'Connor shows through Mary's actions their separation as the conflict grows between grandfather and granddaughter. She "stalk[s]" away from him after they quarrel over the lot, and later leaves him at Tilman's to ride home with her father explaining, "I told you I was going and I went." But if Mary's overt actions show her defiance of her grandfather, through the dominant position of her body on three occasions, O'Connor suggests her triumph over him at the end of the story.

By placing Mary on top of Mr. Fortune, O'Connor presents a reflection of grandfather and granddaughter that creates a mental picture of them as doubles and purports to Mary Fortune's victory. The first of these three occasions is when she sits with her feet on him shoulder straddling the hood of the cadillac, while Mr. Fortune sits on the bumper; the second, when she sits astride his chest in the bedroom; and the third, when she is on "top of him" during their fight. The juxtaposition of their heads in each of

---

[37] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

these instances is like the double image they project in their duplicated appearance, irascible dispositions, and quarrelsome speeches. The mental image suggests a double headedness or the two-sided aspects of their natures that is dramatized in the conflict between them as Fortune or Pitts.

Through Mary's actions during the violent ending of "A View of the Woods," O'Connor illustrates her theme. In the words of Louise Y. Gosset:

> Grandfather as the past cannot alienate the girl from her family--and the present. In their conflict the old man and the granddaughter finally kill one another, thus enacting a violent parable of the viciousness of a pride in the past which is nothing more than self-seeking, greed, and envy.[38]

O'Connor suggests this theme when Mary takes off her glasses, which were "silver rimmed like him," and drops them behind a rock ordering him to do likewise. The action, a prelude to their battle, suggests a moment of truth and clairvoyant vision or a moment of relative blindness. Mary's courage and determination in the oath she has sworn to kill anyone who tries to whip her are put to the test. She manifests she will fight to the death to prove she is a Pitts. Mr. Fortune's glasses are knocked off in the struggle and he is forced to see her as a Pitts.

---

[38]Louise Y. Gosset, Violence In Recent Southern Fiction (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), p. 83.

The old man looked up into his own image. It was triumphant and hostile. 'You been whipped,' it said, 'by me,' and then it added, bearing down on each word, 'and I'm PURE Pitts.'[39]

---

[39] O'Connor, p. 80.

CHAPTER V

PARKER'S BACK

I. CONTRASTING REFLECTIONS

Flannery O'Connor in "A View of the Woods" uses the reflector device of family likenesses to mirror character and theme. In "Parker's Back" O'Connor contrasts the reflections of Parker and his wife Sarah Ruth to reveal their disparity and illustrate polarities of theme. O'Connor adds to her catalogue of reflectors the body symbolism of her protagonist Parker. To enrich theme she employs title, image, and name to fulfill the function of reflectors. Every action, thought, object, situation, and experience of her characters becomes an aesthetic reflector device; they are mirror analogues of each other. Vehicles for theme, O'Connor's reflectors are the means by which she transports her characters and her readers from a natural and material world to a supernatural and spiritual one. In the seemingly fragmented and ridiculous distortions of her characters and especially in her technique of reflection, the reader is forced to comprehend ideas and feelings that may provoke his own self-reflection. Using multiple reflectors for character to elucidate her theme, O'Connor projects her cosmic religious view and in doing so transports her reader

into a special realm that is credible within the confines of her fictional world.

II. THE THEME OF "PARKER'S BACK"

In "Parker's Back" modern man, the descendent of Adam, wanders aimlessly in search of the reasons for his existence. Unable to find the answers he seeks by turning to fanatical, nihilistic, or indifferent modern religions, man turns away from spiritual matters. He substitutes for meaningless religion a religion centered in himself. Instinctively feeling that he is something special, he blindly pursues an erratic life believing that he is the end of creation and the means of his own salvation. Believing that there is nothing to save himself from, he revels in lustful self-indulgence, vanity, foolishness, and savagery. He collects the signs and symbols of nature--the marks of distinction to give himself an identity. He becomes so enamored with his own image and acquisitions that when he wishes spiritual comfort he experiences dissatisfaction with himself that verges on madness. Man's religion of self-glorification ironically does not afford him the solace he had anticipated. Miserable and lonely, he becomes preoccupied with the idea that there must be something more to life--perhaps something he has not collected. At every turn he has been beaten, pushed, and flung back on his own resourcefulness which he

finds sadly inadequate. While he has sought to master everything, he only succeeds in breaking it. He is dissatisfied with himself as mere flesh. He is left empty, anxious, and questing. The instincts which have brought him to such a pass are ironically the keys to lead him out of his misery. He must return to the spiritual world that emanates from within. To return he must undergo a purgation of self. He must reassess and purify his selfish motives to effect a complete transformation. Compelled to see himself for the first time in an unrelenting and ruthless light, man is repelled by his inflated egotism. Looking back over his past life, he sees a spider web of facts and lies that seem necessary to the great spiritual change he undergoes. Forceably made aware of his transgressions against God, his fellow man, and himself, man turns back to the spiritual. Spiritually restored and resurrected, he is ordained by divine commission to witness for Jesus. Designated to be a prophet of the Lord, he sallies forth into a non-Christian world where ironically only the non-believers recognize that he has Christ on his back. The would-be Christians, the by-products of centuries of institutionalized religion, are unable to recognize him in his reborn state. Callously they reject his demonstration of faith. The purged and purified man must suffer the curse of Adam. He must pay retribution for his many disobediences. Though finding himself in Christ,

he will know no peace on earth. For his salvation lies in the hereafter. In his temporal state man alone must bear suffering--the plight of every individual. God has ordained it so. The Omniscient God, therefore, is the only One who knows the answer to man's quest. Man is forced to put his faith in the divine Ordinator. Man must accept suffering for his commitment to Jesus.

III. THE TITLE SYMBOLICALLY REFLECTS THEME

Flannery O'Connor uses the title "Parker's Back" symbolically to reflect her theme. Man is transformed through purgation from an egocentric and selfish individual into one whose primary concern is with others. O'Connor illustrates her theme in three ways: graphically through the picture of the Byzantine Christ Parker has tattooed on his back; through a play upon the title--"Parker is back"; and through the image of Parker with his back turned. According to Caroline Gordon, the tattoo of the Byzantine Christ Parker has on his back is emblematic of the ritualistic purgation Parker undergoes in coming to the knowledge of the hypostatic union.[1] In acquiring the tattoo Parker experiences a spiritual death and rebirth. Cleansed of his sins of blasphemy against God, selfishness toward his wife,

---

[1]Caroline Gordon, "Hersy in Dixie," Sewanee Review, LXXVI (Spring, 1968), 297.

and vanity in himself, he returns home as one ordained to be the Lord's prophet. In the words of William Fahey, Flannery O'Connor's title "fuses the physical particularity of an anatomical detail with a 'return.'"[2] If in getting the tattoo, Parker demonstrates his faith in Christ, then in returning home he shows his obedience to the Byzantine Christ's eyes that had commanded him to "GO BACK." The tattooed eyes "that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed."[3] They show his transformation from a person who believed that "it wasn't anything in particular to save him from"[4] to one who recognizes a higher ordination than his own. When the tattooed Parker returns home stating, "I'm back," he is then literally, as Stanley Edgar Hyman notes, the christophoros, the Christ-bearing witness for Jesus.[5] He has returned to himself and to Sarah Ruth a new man with new found conviction. No longer is he a hungry fool concerned only with pleasing himself by satisfying his

---

[2]William A. Fahey, "Flannery O'Connor's 'Parker's Back,'" Renascence, XX (Spring, 1968), 164.

[3]Flannery O'Connor, "Parker's Back," Everything That Rises Must Converge (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956), p. 241.

[4]Ibid., p. 229.

[5]Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Flannery O'Connor," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 54, (Minneapolis, 1966), pp. 25-26.

appetite with tattoos. Parker wanted to please his strictly religious wife. "She would know what he had to do. She would clear up the rest of it, and she would at least be pleased."[6] By using the title to give symbolic meaning to Parker's back, the author suggests his rejection of his former merely carnal self. Parker is seen turning his back upon his old self and his old way of life; they led him to "tempting sin" by lies, drunkenness and dissolution; now he turns back toward Christ and salvation. The image shows Parker bearing the Byzantine Christ, the symbol of his new found faith, turning from evil, bearing the image of his God in the flesh to the doubters.

IV. PARKER'S SELF-REFLECTION

Flannery O'Connor commences with a view of Parker that reveals his situation and himself. He does not understand. He is unable to accept responsibility, and as a result experiences loneliness and isolation. Finding himself saddled with the responsibility of marriage and a pregnant wife, Parker reveals a longing for the freedom of his youth. He revolts at the prospect of his present predicament. By the distance separating Parker and Sarah Ruth in this first scene, O'Connor suggests Parker's dislocation

---

[6] O'Connor, p. 241.

and conflict. Spiritually and physically removed from his wife, Parker sits "some distance away, watching her sullenly [italics not in the original]."[7] He is "gloomily or resentfully silent" in the presence of Sarah Ruth "who is not only plain but pregnant." "Ashamed of himself" for resenting her because of her ugliness and swollen condition, he is "puzzled even more" by the fact "that he stayed with her now." Through her portrayal O'Connor shows a diachotomy exists within Parker. He is torn and unable to explain his present conflict between action and feeling.

What O'Connor has done in the first paragraph of her story is to show carefully the state of mind of her main character. Parker reveals that he has generated his own bewilderment by creating the perplexing situation in which he finds himself. Parker's self-reflection, his looking backward upon himself and his wife, suggests that he will resolve the difficulty by his own self-awareness.

Parker is lost in his search for self-understanding. His present confusion is the outgrowth of his misunderstanding of his past actions; this can be validated by his motives for marrying Sarah Ruth. "Parker understood why he had married her--he couldn't have got her any other way--."[8] What Parker does not understand is that he was motivated

---

[7] Ibid., p. 219. [8] Ibid.

not by a selfless, self-sacrificing love but by an instinctive and willfull self-indulgence. He reveals not only a pragmatic amorality but an exaggerated egotism which is rooted in his vanity. Parker had decided to court Sarah Ruth because "he was not going to be outdone by anything that looked like her."[9] Parker's vanity is at the bottom of his present bewilderment and explains the fact that "he couldn't understand why he stayed with her now." Just as his pride formerly wouldn't let him be "outdone" by her, Parker's pride keeps him with her "now." Later on pride is the motivation for the tattoo--"the right one to bring Sarah Ruth to heel."[10] Though Parker does not seem to be motivated to stay with her because of responsibility, love, or duty, these are the very grounds for his shame and bewilderment; they are the reasons he does stay "as if she had him conjured."

Though "it was himself he could not understand," Parker thought he understood his wife. Ironically, his ideas concerning Sarah Ruth become manifestations of his own dilemma. O'Connor shows Parker's conflict through the negative ideas Parker has about Sarah Ruth and her motives for marrying him. To Parker Sarah Ruth is the antithesis of himself. He is at once attracted to yet repelled by her.

---

[9] Ibid., p. 226. [10] Ibid., p. 232.

To him Sarah Ruth represents what he would be. Parker's plain and pregnant wife "was forever sniffing up sin... [and] did not drink whiskey, use bad language or paint her face."[11] Parker gets drunk, blasphemes God, and paints not his face but his whole body with tattoos. Sarah Ruth's preoccupations with "sin" and "what the judgment seat of God would be like for him" are her attractions to Parker.[12] Unlike him, Sarah Ruth's fixation with sin and abstention from self-indulgence shows her self-disciplined, spiritually oriented, and ascetic way of life. Parker's fascination with pleasure, his undisciplined obedience to his instincts and all the things his wife disdains, shows his material orientation. She is modest and unpretentious in not painting her face. He is vain and ostentatious in decorating his body with tattoos. In her abstinence from whiskey and curses, Sarah Ruth demonstrates her belief that these are the wages of sin. Parker, who instinctively indulges in them, shows his disregard for any such concept. In his understanding of her motives for marrying him, Parker reveals his own dichotomy. Her two motivations ironically reflect his own dilemma: "Sometimes he supposed that she had married him because she meant to save him. At other times he had a suspicion that she actually liked everything she said she

---

[11] Ibid., p. 220. [12] Ibid., p. 231.

didn't."[13] Parker himself is torn between desiring salvation and liking sin.

Parker demonstrates his conflict by his puzzlement and shame in his feelings for Sarah Ruth and in his misunderstanding of himself. The conflict involves the choice between two opposing ideologies. While inevitably drawn to the numinous in Sarah Ruth, Parker seeks to escape his destiny by resorting to his own instinctive materialism represented by the tattoos which cover his body.

V. TATTOOS AS REFLECTORS

Parker's tattoos become reflectors of his conflict and his eventual change. In themselves they are metaphors. They reflect his duality, the conflict between the material and spiritual worlds. While Parker's tattoos are material extensions of himself, in a sense they generate the spiritual "dissatisfaction" Parker feels. "His dissatisfaction, from being chronic and latent, had suddenly become acute and raged in him. It was as if the panther and the lion and the serpents and the eagles and the hawks had penetrated his skin and lived inside him in a raging warfare."[14] The simile suggests that "liv[ing] inside him" the animals he had tattooed on his body have become the

---

[13] Ibid., p. 220. [14] Ibid., p. 225.

embodiments of his instinctive animalism at war with his spirit. Outwardly they are signs of his pride and vanity; inwardly they have caused him to be torn between the "chronic" and the "latent." Parker's tattoos almost become a parable that the things of this earth though rooted in matter cannot provide one with spiritual satisfaction. By the simile of their "raging warfare," they manifest his mistaken conception of them. When he first sees the tattooed man in the circus, "Parker was filled with emotion, lifted up as some people are when the flag passes."[15] He vainly tries to reduplicate his emotional and spiritual experience by getting more tattoos. Parker's preoccupation with tattoos is his need to be inspired and spiritually elated, his need to satisfy a spiritual hunger. Instead of analyzing the feeling of a beauty and awe in a spiritual context, Parker fools himself in trying to duplicate the "rapture" by decorating his body. His obsession with tattoos has led him to a primitive religion rooted in narcissism. Hedonistically oriented he becomes progressively irresponsible. In his obsession he turns his back on school, home, family, government, and religion. Because Parker's spiritual hunger is his motivation, the tattoos become reflectors for his dissolution and cause him to be dis-

---

[15] Ibid., p. 223.

satisfied and always at war with himself.

The tattoos on the front of Parker are reflectors of his instinctive immorality. Robert Drake humorously notes that so far they have been his only "savior."[16] Because Parker feels the same way about the absence of tattoos on his back, it suggests an undefined or uncommitted morality. He is morally uncommitted until he has the tattoo of the Byzantine Christ. Parker's prideful motive for having tattoos put on the front of his body is the same motive for not having one on his back. He does not wish to make himself appear ridiculous. "To see a tattoo on his own back he would have to get two mirrors and stand between them in just the correct position and this seemed to Parker a good way to make an idiot of himself."[17] O'Connor ironically plays upon the word "idiot" when Sarah Ruth tells Parker that his having tattoos "is no better than what a fool [italics not in the original] Indian would do. It's a heap of vanity."[18] Parker has already made a fool of himself by covering the front of his body with tattoos. When he gets the Byzantine Christ he makes himself into another kind of idiot. Parker reveals that he is both vain and foolish.

---

[16]Robert Drake, "Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay," Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective, Roderick Jellema, editor (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), p. 21.

[17]O'Connor, p. 230. [18]Ibid., p. 225.

He has fooled himself into believing in a substitute for genuine spirituality. In the light of his own reasoning, it is ironic that he makes himself ridiculous for Sarah Ruth when he acquires the tattoo of the Byzantine Christ. His moral commitment becomes a selfless act of love not only of Sarah Ruth but of God.

Because the tattoo of the Byzantine Christ is the means through which Parker is inspired to change, it reflects Parker's transformation. Through it Parker undergoes a purgation of motives that change him from a vain person into a humble one. Originally he had intended "having a tattoo put there that Sarah Ruth would not be able to resist"; however, when he goes to the Haven of Light Christian Mission he changes his mind. Sarah Ruth's "sharp tongue and icepick eyes were the only comfort he could bring to mind."[19] Parker prefers her look to the penetrating look of the Byzantine Christ's eyes which made him feel "as transparent as the wing of a fly." Ironically when he left the tattoo parlor for the Mission, he had mistakenly imagined, from the uncompleted figure of the Christ, that "the artist had tricked him and done the Physician's Friend [italics not in the original]."[20] Through this image O'Connor demonstrates what begins happening to Parker while

---

[19] Ibid., pp. 231, 237. [20] Ibid., p. 236.

at the Mission. During a sleepless night, he begins to be healed of vanity and self-love. His motives are not completely altered by the next day, when he tells the tattooist, "It's a surprise of her...She can't say she don't like the looks of God."[21] For the first time Parker reveals a motive that is not purely selfish. He is gradually purged of his preoccupation while the tattooist is working over him "Imagining how Sarah Ruth would be struck speechless by the face on his back...every now and then this would be interrupted by a vision of the tree of fire and his empty shoe burning beneath it." O'Connor suggests Parker's purgation by linking his "imagining" of a speechless Sarah with the "vision" which reminds him of his collision with the fiery tree. Parker's transformation is complete when he reflects that "It seemed to him, all along, that was what he wanted, to please her."[22] With this realization, his motives become purified and the "dissatisfaction was gone." He is cured of the illness of self-love and vanity and has substituted in its place a selfless love.

The tattoo, besides being emblematic of the metamorphosis of character that Parker undergoes, manifests his spiritual commitment. Once committed, Parker is changed into a prophet. He discovers his spiritual self, and though

---

[21] Ibid., p. 238. [22] Ibid., p. 241.

initially he is unwilling to accept this office, he eventually is driven to his fate when he returns home with the tattoo on his back. In finding himself through the Byzantine Christ, Parker finds that his mission of "witnessing for Jesus" is as inescapable as its Ordainer.

VI. PUNS UPON THE WORDS ORDINARY AND ORDAINED

Throughout her story O'Connor uses a series of puns upon the words "ordinary" and "ordained" to reflect and point to Parker's symbolic ordination which is completed when the tattoo is finished. O'Connor describes Parker at the age of fourteen: "He was heavy and earnest, as ordinary as a loaf of bread...[and though] it did not enter his head that there was anything out of the ordinary about the fact that he existed...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."[23] O'Connor, playing with the word "ordinary" in these contexts, immediately sets Parker above the "common ranks"--one meaning of "ordinary." The word suggests his eventual election to prophecy by another play on the word: "a prelate" or "a clergyman." The denotations of "ordinary," together with the idea that Parker's direction is changed without his control, become reflectors that hint at his eventual ordination. His fate

---

[23] Ibid., p. 223.

is "ordained" in the sense of "destined" or "predestined." In a visual play upon the word "ordained" to suggest Parker's predestination, O'Connor depicts her main character on three occasions changing direction without volition. The first occurs when he goes to the "County Ordinary's office" to be married to Sarah Ruth; ironically, this is just after he had "made up his mind...to have nothing further to do with her."[24] Here the sacramental ritual of marriage is performed by an irreligious ordinary. It is a direct foreshadowing of Parker's sacramental ordination performed by the tattooist--another irreligious ordinary. The second episode that shows Parker's predestination occurs after he runs into the tree which bursts into flames. "He only knew that there had been a great change in his life, a leap forward into a worse unknown and that there was nothing he could do about it. It was for all intents accomplished."[25] And the third and major imagistic use O'Connor makes of the word "ordained" takes place when Parker is looking for the appropriate tattoo. "He flipped the pages quickly, feeling that when he reached the one ordained, a sign would come."[26] Here O'Connor shows that Parker's faith in predestination is instinctive. She also suggests that the Byzantine Christ, the Divine Ordinary, will ordain Parker. Through the

---

[24] Ibid., p. 229. [25] Ibid., p. 233. [26] Ibid., p. 234.

author's manipulation of the words "ordinary" and "ordained," she points to the completion of the ritualistic ordination of Parker.

In getting the tattoo Parker is ordained and transformed into Christ's prophet. He becomes a Christ bearer. His change involves a purgation of his sin of blasphemy which leaves him free to testify for Christ. He is purged by fire, water, and word in a sequence of actions that have biblical overtones.

VII. WORDS AND DESCRIPTION AS REFLECTORS

Parker's purgation begins when he crashes into the tree and experiences the cleansing by fire.

> A ferocious thud propelled him into the air, and he heard himself yelling in an unbelievably loud voice, 'GOD ABOVE!'
> He landed on his back while the tractor crashed upside down into a tree and burst into flame. The first thing Parker saw were his shoes, quickly being eaten by the fire....He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face. He scrambled backwards, still sitting, his eyes cavernous, and if he had known how to cross himself he would have done it.[27]

O'Connor uses Parker's words and description, the burning tree and the shoes to suggest his purgation. At the same time she inverts the biblical parable of Moses and the burning bush to point to Parker's eventual mission. Parker's cleansing may be demonstrated by his words. They

---

[27] Ibid., pp. 232-233.

are not the blasphemous deprecations of God, the "filth" he had earlier "hollered" to attract Sarah Ruth's attention: "Jesus Christ in hell, Jesus God Almighty Damn, God Dammit to hell."[28] By contrasting Parker's words on these two occasions, O'Connor shows that Parker's associations of hell and damnation with Christ and God have been forceably changed by his accident. "GOD ABOVE!" shows us that Parker has unwittingly testified to the mythologically necessary descent. O'Connor portrays the depths of Parker's purgation from his description. First, from the supine position "on his back," she suggests his utter helplessness. Parker, like Saul, is struck down by God and finds his divine commission inescapable. Then from his movements, "scrambl[ing] backwards, still sitting," she depicts the fear and trepidation Parker is experiencing. Finally from the description of his eyes as "cavernous," O'Connor shows that Parker has been spiritually annihilated.

VIII. A BIBLICAL INVERSION OF MOSES

Parker's purgation by fire is made obvious by O'Connor through his words and her description of him. Not so obviously manifested is the significance of Parker's experience as an inversion of the biblical parable of Moses.

---

[28] Ibid., p. 221.

When Moses turned aside to see the miracle of the burning bush that was not consumed by fire, God directed him to put off his shoes because it was holy ground. God then ordered Moses to free the Israelites from Egypt. Parker, on the other hand, turns away from the burning tree which is miraculously personified in the words: "He could feel the hot breath of the burning tree on his face." Parker is flung out of his shoes and does not converse directly with the Lord. Nevertheless he receives a divine commission in the form of an inspiration. "He only knew that there had been a great change in his life"; he goes off to the tattooist. Through this biblical parable of Moses which closely resembles Parker's experience, O'Connor foreshadows what his eventual mission will be--to testify to the Lord and perform His commission. Parker does both when he returns home to Sarah Ruth. With her "hide-bound religion of suspicion and hypocrisy,"[29] Sarah Ruth is like the Israelites who had fallen into false religious practices and needed Moses to straighten them out.

IX. RITUAL AS REFLECTOR

If Parker is metaphorically cleansed and commissioned at the tree of fire, he is literally purged and ordained

---

[29]Fahey, "Flannery O'Connor," 164.

when he goes to the artist's for the tattoo. O'Connor shows that the ritual itself becomes a reflector through her main character's actions, thoughts and words. Upon arriving at the artist's, Parker demands to see the book with the "'pictures of God....Just God,' Parker said impatiently. 'Christ. I don't care. Just so its God.'"[30] In his impatience Parker manifests the degree and depth of his obsession, preoccupation, and dissatisfaction. Ironically the artist initially rejects Parker's request saying, "I don't put no tattoos on drunks." Parker, who has not yet had a drop of alcohol, is only metaphorically drunk--that is with Jesus. Parker shows his God-intoxication when he is looking through the book for the picture of the proper Christ: "He kept turning rapidly backwards...Parker's heart began to beat faster and faster until it appeared to be roaring in him like a giant generator."[31] Finding the Byzantine Christ, Parker undergoes a physical and spiritual death and rebirth. His faith is demonstrated by the feeling he has; his symbolic ordination is shown by his obedience to the eyes which told him to "GO BACK."

> He flipped the pages quickly, feeling that when he reached the one ordained a sign would come...On one of the pages a pair of eyes glanced at him swiftly. Parker sped on, then stopped. His heart too appeared to cut off; there was absolute silence. It said as plainly

---

[30] O'Connor, pp. 233-234. [31] Ibid., p. 234.

> as if silence were a language itself, GO BACK.
> Parker returned to the picture....his heart began slowly to beat again as if it were being brought to life by a subtle power.[32]

In the metaphor that "his heart too appeared to cut off" and then "began slowly to beat again" when he returns to the picture, O'Connor shows Parker experiencing a physical death and rebirth. Yet because it is a "silen[t]...language" of the Byzantine Christ's eyes that command him to "GO BACK," it is a spiritual rejuvenation too. That his heart is "being brought to life by a subtle power" shows metaphorically the mystical experience of purgation and rebirth Parker undergoes and recapitulates the earlier occasion when Sarah Ruth touched his hand and "Parker felt himself jolted back to life."[33] From his first metaphorical rebirth came his marriage to Sarah Ruth; from his second will come his ordination. Parker's "feeling that when he reached the one ordained a sign would come" is more than a sensation; it is a conviction and demonstration of faith in divine ordination. Through his obedience to the sign, he exhibits that he is ordained and elected to perform the divine commission. When Parker washes his back at the sink with special soap, his actions demonstrate that he is preparing himself for Christ. His ritualistic cleansing continues as the artist "swabbed

---

[32] Ibid., pp. 254-255. [33] Ibid., p. 222.

his back with ethyl chloride and then began to outline the head on it with his iodine pencil."[34] Parker is here symbolically purified in body; his spirit is not cleansed until much later.

Through O'Connor's description of Parker's conversation with the artist, Parker's words become reflectors for his gradual purification. The next day, when the artist asks Parker:

> 'Why do you want this on you. Have you gone and got religion? Are you saved?'...'Naw,' he said, 'I ain't got no use for that. A man can't save his self from whatever it is he don't deserve none of my sympathy.' These words seemed to leave his mouth like wraiths and to evaporate at once as if he had never uttered them.[35]

From the simile "these words...like wraiths...evaporate...," O'Connor shows another of Parker's spiritual deaths and rebirths. For "wraith" means "an apparition of a living person in his exact likeness seen usually just before death: a ghost or specter." Ironically Parker's words evaporate like wraiths, ghosts, or specters, suggesting that he has given up the ghost of his former philosophy and is purged. At the pool hall Parker avows for the last time that he hasn't got religion. He is forced to give up the ghost of his former dissolute way of life. "'Maybe he's gone and got religion,' some one yelled. 'Not on your life,' Parker

---

[34] Ibid., p. 236. [35] Ibid., p. 238.

said. 'O. E.'s got religion and is witnessing for Jesus, ain't you, O. E.?'"[36] Ironically this word "exchange" discloses the truth. Though he doesn't realize it, Parker has been purged. Not until he is sitting on the ground in back of the pool hall "examining his soul" does Parker experience his own spiritual purgation. "He saw [his soul] 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."[37] In Parker's realization of his spiritual depravity, he had undergone a soul cleansing, while in his awareness of the "eyes to be obeyed" he shows that he has accepted his divine ordination.

X. A BIBLICAL INVERSION OF JONAH

O'Connor uses the ritual of the tattoo to demonstrate Parker's ordination and the biblical inversion of the story of Jonah to explain Parker's mission. After Parker is thrown from the pool hall, O'Connor says "a calm descended on the pool hall as nerve shattering as if the long barn-like room were the ship from which Jonah had been cast into the sea."[38] Because Jonah disobeyed the Lord's command to preach in Nineveh and sough refuge on a ship bound for Tarshish, the Lord sent a great wind and storm. Confessing

---

[36] Ibid., p. 240. [37] Ibid., p. 241. [38] Ibid.

his disobedience to the sailors, Jonah told them to throw him overboard after which a calm descended on the sea. After three days of spiritual horror in the belly of a whale, Jonah was vomited up on land and returned to Nineveh to complete his mission. Like Jonah, Parker seeks to escape his commission to testify for Jesus. He takes refuge in the "pool hall...ship." But unlike Jonah, who commanded the sailors to throw him overboard, Parker "lunged into their midst like a whirlwind" and was forceably thrown out the door. Parker, like Jonah, examines his soul and is spiritually transformed and reconciled to his mission. While Jonah returns to the city of Nineveh to preach the word of God, Parker returns home to Sarah Ruth and testifies. Unlike Jonah, who had successfully saved the people of Nineveh, Parker is unsuccessful in converting Sarah Ruth by his demonstration of faith. The tattoo for Sarah Ruth is just another extension of Parker's egoism. According to Sister Quinn, Parker's wife"scorns the one thing that nourishes his ego"[39] and in doing so commits the greatest "heresy" of all. When she labels the Byzantine Christ "Idolatry!", Caroline Gordon

---

[39]Sister M. Bernetta Quinn, O. S. F., "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors (New York: Fordham University Press, 1966), p. 165. Though Sister Quinn is referring here to Parker's "collection of tattoos," her phrase seems applicable to the tattoo of the Byzantime Christ, for this is how Sarah Ruth sees it.

notes that Sarah Ruth "denies Our Lord corporeal substance."[40] Like Jonah, who lived outside Nineveh under a green bush, Parker, in this final scene, is outside his metaphorical Nineveh weeping under a "green tree." Sarah Ruth has beaten him with a broom. "Still gripping it, she looked toward the pecan tree and her eyes hardened still more. There he was--who called himself Obadiah Elihue--leaning against the tree, crying like a baby."[41] Unlike Jonah, who out of pride had wished for the wrath of God to descend on Nineveh, Parker undergoes a symbolic crucifixion.

XI. OBADIAH ELIHUE PARKER

O'Connor uses the biblical inversion of the story of Jonah to show Parker's ordination as the Lord's prophet. Parker's first and middle names, Obadiah Elihue, become reflectors for the same thing. Stanley Edgar Hyman remarks that "while Parker...is transformed by the tattoo...he needs a baptismal name change from O. E. to Obadiah Elihue to be fully transformed."[42] Parker's first telling Sarah Ruth his names constitutes a self-purgation. Admitting to her that he is Obadiah Elihue, Parker shows that he has the

---

[40]Caroline Gordon, "An American Girl," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, p. 136.

[41]O'Connor, p. 244.

[42]Hymna, "Flannery O'Connor," p. 33.

requisite self-knowledge and awareness for the acceptance of his mission. In the second instance, his inspiration to say his name to his wife comes to him when he sees the "tree of light burst over the skyline."[43] Through the metaphor of the "tree of light...," O'Connor shows that Parker is spiritually inspired and transformed when he whispers: "'Obadiah.' All at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts."[44] First, by confessing his name to Sarah Ruth, Parker is in effect proclaiming his mission. Second, from the literal meanings of Parker's first and middle names, Obadiah and Elihue, his commission becomes apparent; they designate him as prophet. In the Old Testament Obadiah and Elihu were the Lord's prophets. "Obadiah" means "servant of the Lord" while "Elihu" means "God the Lord." Parker's first name suggests his ordination; the second suggests the Byzantine Christ Parker has on his back which metamorphoses him.

XII. EYES USED AS REFLECTORS

In addition to her use of names to reflect character, Flannery O'Connor uses the description of eyes to define, link and portray change in her characters. When Parker first

---

[43] O'Connor, p. 242. [44] Ibid., p. 243.

meets Sarah Ruth she hits him with a broom. Sarah's eyes, O'Connor tells us, are those of a "giant hawk-eyed angel." This "angel" metaphor reflects Sarah's role in the story. She is the ruthless avenging "messenger" of the Lord beating Parker for his blasphemy. The image of "hawk-eyed" suggests the sharpness of perception with which she sees Parker's vanity. Besides defining Sarah Ruth's role, the description of her eyes indicates a certain insensitive blindness. For in the simile that Sarah Ruth's eyes were "grey and sharp like the points of two icepicks,"[45] O'Connor combines the idea of a penetrating, perceptive, and steely coldness with a blind relentlessness which is characteristic of Sarah Ruth's preoccupation with sin and temptation. This blinding obsession makes her unable to accept the Byzantine Christ Parker has tattooed on his back and to label his demonstration of faith "Idolatry!"

Besides portraying the character of Sarah Ruth, O'Connor, through the description of the color of Sarah Ruth's eyes, suggests that her mission and preoccupation will become Parker's. Sarah Ruth's eyes are "grey." Parker's eyes are "the same pale slate-color as the ocean and reflected the immense spaces around him as if they were a microcosm of the mysterious sea."[46] The idea of the

---

[45] Ibid., p. 219. [46] Ibid., p. 224.

similarity of their eyes comes from the definition of "slate" as a color--"a dark purplish gray." In contrast with Sarah's eyes which are "grey and sharp," O'Connor suggests by Parker's "slate-color[ed]" eyes a breadth and depth of potential understanding--one that will surpass his wife's in dedication and preoccupation with religion. Through O'Connor's description of Parker's eyes, he becomes the embodiment of all mankind which is suggested by the word "microcosm." Though at this time in Parker's life, he represents the unsaved hedonistic man, the description of his eyes foreshadows his mission to testify to Jesus and become the Lord's prophet. Twice in the story he is metaphorically cast into "the mysterious sea" of mankind: the first time when he receives a dishonorable discharge from the navy and then meets his angel; and the second when he is expelled from the pool hall and is compared to Jonah.

Besides defining Parker and suggesting his future, Flannery O'Connor's description of his eyes indicates the metamorphosis of her main character. From the youthful description of his eyes, O'Connor suggests an ill-defined "mysterious" quality about Parker. However, when she notes the "hollow preoccupied expression" of them, Parker has begun to change.[47] O'Connor's use of the word "hollow," meaning

---

[47] Ibid., p. 232.

"sunken or having a cavity within," foreshadows the description that shows the depths of his purgation when he is confronted by the burning tree. "His eyes cavernous," meaning "having caverns or cavities," become reflectors to suggest his change and also because of the pun upon "hollow" and "cavernous," meaning "cavity," to show his spiritual emptiness and want of fulfillment. Parker is only partially fulfilled when he is confronted with the eyes of the Byzantine Christ in the form of the finished tattoo.

From her description of the eyes which are "still, straight, all-demanding, enclosed in silence,"[48] O'Connor points toward the goal Parker has all along sought. They become reflectors for his mission for they are "all-demanding." They offer Parker the peaceful deliverance from being chronic and latent, dissatisfied and preoccupied for they are "still." They direct his way for they are "straight" while his course has been zigzagging. Finally, they become reflectors which recapitulate the sign and divine mandate to "GO BACK," when O'Connor describes them as being "enclosed in silence."

---

[48] Ibid., p. 239.

XIII. SETTINGS REFLECTING CHARACTER

O'Connor also uses the backgrounds of her story to reflect her main character. They show Parker at a "distance or removed from a central area"--one meaning of the word "back." Even when the word "back" is not specifically mentioned in the settings, Parker is separated by some barrier he must cross to reach a goal central to his wishes. He experiences a dislocation, an uncertainty, because he is unaware of his purpose in life until the last scene of the story. The setting at the County Ordinary's office reflects Parker's isolation and imprisonment. Because the service is performed from the inner office that separates him and Sarah Ruth from the Ordinary by an iron grill, it suggests that the idea of marriage emanates from within. Ironically, the iron grill recapitulates Parker's experiences in the brig, and the fact that the artist asks him if he's been in jail, and Parker answers "Married," suggest that Parker has been imprisoned by his own vanity and preoccupation with tattoos.

Parker's journey to get more tattoos always involves a trip to some city such as to Birmingham or to a port of call. The cities Parker visits become reflectors for his vanity--the places in which he indulges in sin by becoming drunk and getting into fights. His last sortee into town takes him to the artist's that was "on a back street." Its

location is not only removed and out of the way, but suggests by the pun upon "back" Parker's return or his way back to Jesus. The artist's two rooms containing the cabinet, sink, and table become the setting for Parker's ritualistic purgation. The cabinet containing the art books is "at the back of the room." Its location is removed from the main portion of the office and it contains the book of Christs which conceivably could make it a tabernacle of sorts. The sink at which Parker washes his back and is purified by water is also at a distance from the central object in the office--the table. Upon the table Parker receives the tattoo of the Byzantine Christ. The table becomes a symbol of an operating table and an altar table. Parker's back is swabbed or cleansed with ethyl chloride and then the artist with an iodine pencil begins to trace the outline of the Byzantine Christ. The artist's implements in this setting become the instruments of Parker's purgation and because of his choice of tattoo mark him as a sacrifice to Christ on the altar of mankind.

Part of Parker's spiritual rebirth is accomplished in the "Haven of Light Christian Mission [italics not in the original]." This setting because of its name suggests a "harbor" or "port," a place of "safety" or "asylum" for Parker in his journey. Yet the only "light" that comes "from a phosphorescent cross glowing at the end of the room"

causes him to relive his horrific experience of the day. Ironically, this setting becomes an "asylum" for Parker who thinks he's losing his mind while at the same time provides him with his "mission" in a visual pun upon the word--to return to Sarah Ruth bearing the Byzantine Christ.

The story opens and closes at Parker's house which "sat alone save for a single tall pecan tree on a high embankment overlooking a highway."[49] The picture one conjures up from the meanings of "alone" is that the house is "isolated" and yet "unique." Both meanings describe Parker who feeling alienated and isolated has separated himself from his wife and is miserably discontent. At the same time "alone" suggests that Parker is incomparably special. Parker's uniqueness stems from his preoccupation for tattoos. "Save for a single tall pecan tree" hints at the last scene in the story in which Parker, who has been saved, experiences a kind of martyrdom beneath its branches. The house rests "on a high embankment overlooking a highway." Through its elevated position, it metaphorically becomes an altar upon which Parker is sacrificed for the sins of all mankind. The highway in front of the house is comparable to the highway of life. For it is on this road that Parker zigzagges to the city and returns home a changed man. From

---

[49] Ibid., p. 219.

this setting and those at the Cates' residence, Parker is seen either on the front porch or in the front yard. This suggests that Parker has a threshold experience when in the last scene he enters his house and has made his voluntary commitment to his wife and to Jesus.

O'Connor duplicates the first and last settings of her story at Parker's place of work. Here the house is set apart from the hay field with "one enormous old tree" in the center of it. Toward this tree Parker circles until he collides with it. O'Connor personifies the tree in this metaphor: "the hot breath of the burning tree...."[50] It is reminiscent of the biblical parable of Moses and the burning bush. But the "tree" is more than this. It is metaphorically the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. Adam, like Parker, was ruined by sampling its fruit. For his disobedience Adam was informed that he was banished from Paradise but could be saved. Parker, who distributed apples to the Cates children to get rid of them so that he could court Sarah Ruth, has similarly experienced evil. Like a latter-day Adam, Parker is banished from the old woman's farm and must make reparation for the tractor he "busted up." In the last scene of "Parker's Back," O'Connor brings all of the trees in her

---

[50] Ibid., p. 233.

story together in the "tree of light" Parker sees reflected in the sky. It inspires him to answer Sarah Ruth's querie "Who's there?" with "Obadiah Elihue" and in doing so Parker proclaims his mission as the Lord's prophet.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

Ferguson, George. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1959.

Gossett, Louise Y. Violence in Recent Southern Fiction. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1965.

O'Connor, Flannery. A Good Man is Hard to Find and Other Stories. New York, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955.

_____. Everything That Rises Must Converge. New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1956.

The New English Bible. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

B. PERIODICALS

Alice, Sister Rose, S. S. J. "Flannery O'Connor: Poet to the Outcast," Renascence, VXVI (Spring, 1964), pp. 126-131.

Fahey, William A. "Flannery O'Connor's 'Parker's Back,'" Renascence, XX (Spring, 1968), pp. 162-167.

Gordon, Caroline. "Heresy in Dixie," Sewanee Review, IXXVI (Spring, 1968), pp. 287-304.

C. ESSAYS AND ARTICLES IN COLLECTIONS

Gordon, Caroline. "An American Girl," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966.

Quinn, Sister M. Bernetta, O. S. F. "Flannery O'Connor, a Realist of Distances," The Added Dimension: The Art and Mind of Flannery O'Connor, Melvin J. Friedman and Lewis A. Lawson, editors. New York: Fordham University Press, 1966.

D. ESSAYS AND PAMPHLETS: PARTS OF SERIES

Drake, Robert. "Flannery O'Connor: A Critical Essay," Contemporary Writers in Christian Perspective, Roderick Jellema, editor. 6 vols. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966.

Hyman, Stanley Edgar. "Flannery O'Connor," University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, no. 54. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966.